

Nursing in the Reports of the Poor Law Commission.

(Concluded from page 290.)

We now pass on to the Minority Report, in the introduction to which we read: "We find ourselves unable to agree with the Report of the majority of our colleagues. *Our reasons will be plain when we have stated the facts as they have been revealed to us by the investigations.*"

Page 858: "We have had it brought to our notice by the Medical Inspectors of the Local Government Board" (oh, Dr. Downes!), "by accredited representatives of the medical profession, by philanthropists acquainted with the Workhouses in the rural Unions and the smaller towns, as well as by Poor Law Guardians and their officers, that two-thirds of the sick now receiving institutional treatment at the hands of the Destitution Authority—amounting, as we have reason to believe, in England and Wales alone, to something like 60,000 persons—are still in the general mixed Workhouse. . . . We were informed that they were, in many cases, receiving treatment inadequate to their needs and inappropriate to their diseases. . . . We regret to have to report, after considering all the evidence, that the continued retention in the general mixed Workhouses of a large number of sick persons requiring curative treatment amounts at the present time to a grave public scandal."

Pages 858 and 859 should be read in their entirety for a description of these Workhouse buildings in which the sick are treated. The minority visited these "hospitals" themselves and give us their first-hand impressions. Incidentally, they give us also those of the *British Medical Journal*: "The buildings match the service; we read of no bathrooms, no supply of hot and cold water, but such as is carried from a distance; sanitary arrangements deficient or absent; no proper provision for the comfort or privacy of lying-in women; no surgical supplies; no screens for decency; overcrowding in wards where the helpless sick live, sleep, and eat all the year round; miserable, dark rooms for the use of the coarsely-termed 'dirty cases'; no classification; no means of isolation; dreary airing courts; indeed, an absence of all intelligent appreciation of the needs of the sick."

The Minority Report continues: "The worst defects of the rural Workhouse sick wards of the present day . . . centre round the medical attendance and nursing."

Page 860, one of the general Local Govern-

ment Board Inspectors says: "I said to the nurse: 'Have you any bedsores?' She said: 'There is not a bedsore in the place.' I saw one man looking very miserable. I said to the nurse: 'Is that man all right?' She said: 'Yes.' I said: 'Let me see his back.' She turned him over. He had a bad bedsore. I looked at several other cases and found many bedsores. I sent for the doctor . . . he took nurse's word for it, because he was receiving an inadequate salary, and did as much work as he thought the money was worth."

Page 861: "The inadequacy of the medical attendance in the small rural Workhouses is rendered more disastrous by defective nursing. . . . There are still many rural Workhouses without even one trained nurse; there are still scores in which there is absolutely no nurse, trained or untrained, available for night duty; there are even some, so far as we can ascertain, in which there is no sort of salaried nurse at all. Everywhere the Master and Matron have still to employ pauper assistants to help in attending to the sick. . . . The reports of the Local Government Board Inspector . . . show very clearly that this deplorable system of pauper assistants is far from decreasing in as rapid a manner as may have been hoped after the issue of the Nursing Order of 1897."

Ibid: "In fourteen Workhouses it has not been found possible to provide a night nurse." This is in one district only.

Ibid: "One Inspector actually reports in his district an increase in the number of pauper attendants in the sick wards. On January 1st, 1905, there were 159, and on January 1st, 1908, there were 175."

Ibid: "The phthisis cases, of which there are many hundreds, seem to be given up as hopeless, there being usually no sort of special provision for them. The acute cases needing prompt treatment, constant nursing, or expensive remedies, appear sometimes to fare almost as badly. 'When I came to this Workhouse, I was told,' said a nurse, 'the pneumonia cases generally die with us.'"

Speaking of urban, as distinct from rural, Workhouses, the Report says:—

Page 862: "Some of these general mixed Workhouses are as old, as ill-adapted for use in the 'hospital branch of the Poor Law,' as badly equipped, and furnished with as inadequate a medical and nursing staff as the worst of the small rural Workhouses that we have seen."

Ibid: "In one Inspector's district alone there were in 1906 . . . a dozen Workhouses in which there were more than 50 patients to

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