

Nursing Echoes.



Nurses who are brought into contact with patients suffering from incipient mental disease are aware of the difficulty of obtaining adequate treatment for many of these cases until the disease has progressed so far as to deprive the patient of the best chance of recovery. The friends of patients naturally shrink from their certification as insane until the last moment, and doctor and magistrates are also rightly unwilling, except on the clearest possible ground, to issue such certificates. We are glad, therefore, to note that the Lunacy Commissioners in their annual report advocate the relaxation of the law regarding certification in cases of incipient insanity, and that a medical man should be empowered to give a certificate enabling a patient to be placed under care for six months without all the formalities necessary in the case of a full certificate. They are also in full sympathy with the recommendation of the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble Minded that observation wards, reception houses, and mental hospitals should be provided in which the insane could be received on the first manifestation of derangement. Such wards and hospitals would provide valuable training ground for nurses in this branch.

Dr. F. S. Toogood, Medical Superintendent of the Lewisham Infirmary, in an interesting paper on "The Genesis of the Modern Infirmary," read before the Annual Meeting of the Poor Law Medical Officers' Association of England and Wales, says that the poor law has ever been the Cinderella of the services, and the immense improvements which have taken place in the last fifty years have been effected by the medical officers themselves fighting, usually singlehanded, against a hostile authority, and with superior officialdom unable to extend any effective support.

Speaking of the old days before the separation of the infirmary from the workhouse, Dr. Toogood said there was abundant scope for improvement in the treatment of the sick, but "it must not be forgotten that even then things were little better in the general hospitals. There were no trained nurses. There were a certain number of poorly educated women who had drifted into sick nursing generally because they had failed in other walks of life.

There was no regular service of nursing as we understand it to-day. The higher female officials who held positions corresponding to the Matrons, Assistant Matrons, and Nursing Superintendents of to-day were usually the inadequately provided-for widows of defunct local professional men or superior tradesmen. I have had it," he said, "from an eye-witness that the night nurses of one of the most renowned hospitals in the United Kingdom habitually had wash tubs in the ward and were responsible for the cleansing of a considerable portion of the hospital linen. With such a condition in the institutions which set the tone, what was to be expected of less favoured establishments?"

"The nursing arrangements were to our present notions deplorable. There were a few paid female attendants devoid of any trained knowledge of nursing and always too old and too engrooved to be capable of assimilating more than a rule of thumb method of instruction. As each of these women often had 100 sick persons under her care she neither could nor did perform any of the actual offices of nursing which were entrusted to old pauper women often imbecile, usually senile, and always worthless. Invariably a very heavy toll was levied upon any stimulant or delicacy ordered, while both patients and pauper nurses would save their brandy or whisky until visiting day and then have a grand carousal with their friends. So little real attention or inspection was bestowed upon patients that one woman successfully simulated paralysis for years; her affectation of piety rendered her an object of great interest to many benevolent visiting ladies, who showed their sympathy by giving her presents of sugar, tea, and snuff. These she hid in her flock bed. A freshly appointed medical officer, whose new broom was sweeping cleanly, earned an unsympathetic notoriety by insisting upon getting her out of bed, when many pounds of dry goods were found as well as several nests of mice. The patient recovered the use of her legs, which the nurses knew she had never lost, as she was often seen walking about at night, but such was the local belief in her sanctity that they were afraid to hint at the imposture."

The Hon. Gerald Walsh, Local Government Board Inspector, has been holding an inquiry into charges of a serious character alleged by the nurses against the Master of the Bakewell Workhouse, and denied by him as "false and slanderous." We await the report of the Inspector.

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