

Scrapping the Poor Law.

An article on the Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission from the lucid and well-informed pen of Mr. Sidney Webb, LL.B., L.C.C., is to be found in the quarterly number of *Progress*, and well repays study by all those interested in this stupendous question.

Mr. Sidney Webb is for "scrapping" the existing Poor Law, and states that the Minority Commissioners assert that if we want to stop the present overlapping and duplication and waste, as we cannot abolish the separate services that have grown up, we must not only abolish the Board of Guardians but also wind up the whole business of the Poor Law, which has become, in its very essence, obsolete.

"What, then," he asks, "is the scheme of the Minority Report?"

"We must," he answers, "at all costs, put a stop to the wasteful and demoralising duplication and overlapping that is now going on, under which a single family may be getting help simultaneously from as many as seven different public authorities without any of them necessarily knowing what the others are doing. We must at the same time concentrate the whole responsibility for public assistance in each locality in the hands of the directly elected representatives of the people of that locality. What the Minority Report proposes is to take advantage of the fact that it is the County or Borough Council which is doing all the work that is now superseding the Poor Law with regard to all the different classes of paupers. Make the County or Borough Council itself responsible, (a) through its Education Committee, for the prevention of all forms of child neglect, and for all the public provision for children of school age (including continuation schooling up to 18); (b) through its Health Committee, for the prevention of all preventable sickness, and for all the public provision that is made for the treatment of maternity, infancy, sickness, and infirmity; (c) through its Asylums Committee, for bringing under proper care and control all the mentally defective (including feeble-minded); and (d) through its Pensions Committee, for granting Old Age Pensions out of local funds to the healthy and reputedly living aged (whatever limit of age may be fixed) not eligible for the national pensions. There remains only the whole class of the able-bodied (including both vagrants and the unemployed), for whom, it is suggested, provision should be made by a National Authority, which should set itself actually to prevent unemployment (in ways which the Report indicates), and to maintain under suitable physical and other training those sporadic cases of men thrown out of work from causes which could not be prevented. This is the scheme of the Minority Report, which is now attracting to its support so large a proportion of the experienced administrators on the one hand, and of the philanthropists on the other."

As to how it is to be worked out in detail, Mr. Webb refers the serious inquirer to the Report itself.

Legal Matters.

The cases in which nurses, or women described as such, appear in the Law Courts, in some instances as plaintiffs, in others to answer to various criminal charges against them, are now so numerous that it is quite impossible to deal fully with them in this Journal. Quite recently the following cases have been heard:—

In the King's Bench Division, Dublin, before the Lord Chief Baron, Mr. Justice Gibson, and Mr. Justice Boyd, Miss Alice Courtenay Clarke, hospital Matron, brought an action against a hospital Matron for alleged slander and conspiracy to injure her. The Bench came to the conclusion that the action could not be sustained or maintained.

Ethel Moody, a woman dressed as a nurse, and posing as coming from the Bromhead Nursing Institute, Lincoln, with which it was proved she had no connection, has been sentenced to imprisonment with hard labour for obtaining a fountain pen, value 23s., which she subsequently tried to pawn for 4s. 3d., on false pretences.

At the Manchester County Police Court, Ellen Stevens (48), described as a nurse, was committed to the Assizes for obtaining board and lodging on false pretences to the value of £5 15s. from Mrs. Jane Wilson, boarding-house keeper, 518, Stretford Road, Old Trafford. The prosecuting solicitor alleged that the prisoner's tale was that she was the wife of Captain de Howard, of the s.s. Jarnac, who was expected to arrive in a few days; also that she had come from Glasgow to draw a legacy of from £2,000 to £3,000 from Messrs. Cobbett, Wheeler, and Cobbett, solicitors, but they would not pay it over until a relative, who would be home in a few days, returned from South Africa. When eventually apprehended by the police Mrs. Stevens admitted her guilt.

Miss Jessie Winfield, a nurse at the Bridlington Sanatorium, was convicted at the Bridlington Police Court of stealing the sum of £4 9s. belonging to Miss Clara Page, Matron of the Sanatorium. On Wednesday, January 12th, the Matron went out for the night, leaving her keys in the left hand drawer of her dressing table in the nurse's presence. In the second drawer was money, papers, etc., which should have amounted to £3 2s. 6d. On her return the following morning the prisoner informed her there had been a fire in her bedroom. She did not know how it had originated, but she thought a burglar must have been in the room, as all the drawers were open and it was in a state of disorder. Eventually the nurse admitted to Inspector Robinson that she had taken the money.

The Matron said the nurse had worked well.

The Chairman of the Bench, Colonel Y. G. Lloyd-Graeme, stated that the Bench did not wish to send Miss Winfield to prison, but to give her a chance to find employment and earn an honest living. She was bound over in the sum of £10 to come up for judgment if called upon.

We badly need a Nurses' Registration Act, under which a case of this kind could be dealt with, and the public protected.

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