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## Editorial.

### THE CARE OF PRISONERS.

A more forcible example of the need for the appointment of trained Matrons and nurses in prisons could hardly be advanced than that afforded by the death of a woman prisoner in the Oxford Prison, which was recently the subject of an inquest, followed by a question in Parliament. Sir Francis Channing asked the Home Secretary whether, having regard to the fact that it was proved that the death was caused by a wardress having applied to the prisoner undiluted carbolic acid, and that the wardress stated that she was ignorant that carbolic acid was harmful and corrosive, he would either direct a formal prosecution for manslaughter or take such steps as would protect prisoners from such treatment, and ensure that prison authorities should not allow wholly unfit and ignorant persons to be in positions of trust on the prison staff. Mr. Churchill replied that the accident was due not to the ignorance of the wardress but to the unfortunate misunderstanding of a message, which led to her being supplied with pure carbolic acid in mistake for carbolic lotion. It was clearly an accident, and there could be no prosecution for manslaughter. The Prison Commissioners were giving instructions which would make the recurrence of such a lamentable event impossible.

Two comments seem inevitably to follow on the Home Secretary's explanation. First, that pure carbolic is a solid substance in the form of crystals, needing to be subjected to heat in order to liquefy it; and, secondly, that the arrangements in the prison concerned must need revision if a deadly and corrosive poison, such as pure carbolic, is supplied to an untrained person on the receipt of a verbal message. We have from time to time urged the appointment of

specially trained nurses as Matrons of prisons, and that warders and wardresses should receive training in nursing to fit them for their responsible duties. The present instance proves the justice of this plea.

Further, conclusive proof of this is afforded by the presidential address, delivered by Dr. John Lyell at the annual meeting of the Perth Branch of the British Medical Association, and reported in the Supplement to the *British Medical Journal*. Dr. Lyell, who has had to make a physical examination of every prisoner who has entered the Perth Penitentiary during the last six years—over 15,000 men and women—states that a large number of the true criminal class as met with in prison, are weakly and deformed and diseased, with constitutions undermined by debauchery and privation. He enumerates the following diseases as usual in the Perth Penitentiary: "Deformities of all descriptions, the result of accident and disease; tuberculous glands and sores; venereal disease in all its disgusting varieties; weaknesses of the heart and lungs; impaired digestion; different forms of malnutrition, such as anæmia and alcoholic cachexia; tumours; hernias of the most aggravated degree; disfiguring skin diseases, and so on, which mark out this motley crowd as the dregs and waste products of humanity, and prove the close alliance between gross physical disability and crime."

Surely these poor people need the care and supervision of trained nurses. There is urgent need for the formation of a Nursing Department at the Home Office, as at the War Office and Local Government Board Office, to provide and inspect trained nursing in prisons.

Referring to the conclusions arrived at by Dr. Thomson, first Resident Medical Officer of the Perth Prison, Dr. Lyell stated

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