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Editorial.

THE FUTURE OF THE POOR LAW.

A question in which trained nurses are intimately concerned is the future of the Poor Law, for many thousands of them work in Poor Law infirmaries, and asylums for insane, and thus a change in the authorities locally responsible for its administration would mean a change in the authorities under which they work. Further, in the present uncertain position Guardians are not unnaturally averse to undertaking new building operations, and therefore the provision of adequate accommodation for nurses, where such is urgently required, is apt to be postponed until some settlement of the question is arrived at.

An interesting proposition for transferring the responsibility of the administration of the Poor Law in rural areas to County Councils, has been put forward by the Executive Committee of the County Councils Association, a body representative of every County Council in England and Wales with the exception of the London County Council and a few of the Welsh Councils. The scheme is approved by both Lord George Hamilton, Chairman of the Royal Commission on the Poor Law, who, of course, endorses the recommendations of the Majority Report of that Commission, and by Mrs. Sidney Webb, who has so ably voiced the views of the Minority; it seems therefore hopeful as a basis of agreement.

The Sub-Committee of the County Councils Associations, which has been considering the question, reported that they had considered only the specific point of whether, and if so, in what way, the present duties of Boards of Guardians could be discharged on the basis of larger areas than the existing Unions, if Parliament should think it desirable to make any such change without

(1) placing an undue burden on the work of County Councillors, or (2) adversely affecting county administration. They had come to the conclusion that the system of Poor Law administration should be reorganised, that the present unit of area was too small, and that the most convenient unit would be the administrative county and county borough, and that there should be only one elected authority with rating powers in each area. They propose, further, that all grades of mentally defective persons should be removed out of the Poor Law altogether, and with the present County Council lunatic asylums transferred to a Government Department.

The proposition of the County Councils Association, therefore, is (1) that the Poor Law Areas should be (a) the County or County Borough, (b) Urban and Rural Districts, both of which, where small, might be grouped; and (2) that the Poor Law Authorities should be—

(A) A County Poor Law Committee constituted by a scheme prepared and adopted by the County or County Borough Council, and approved by the Local Government Board. It is proposed that this Committee should be composed of (1) members of County Councils and of District Councils, and (2) other persons, to be appointed by the County Council, experienced in charitable work, including a fair proportion of women; a clear majority of the Committee to consist of members of the County Council, unless the County Council do otherwise determine, and in any case a majority of the Committee to be members of the County Councils or of the District Councils.

(B) District Poor Law Boards, consisting of (1) all the members of the County Council resident in the district who consent to serve, (2) District Councillors as arranged by the

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