

SOCIAL SERVICE.

TRAINED NURSING IN PRISONS.

Criminality and trained nurses—is there any connection? I fancy I hear an indignant negative from a chorus of professional voices! Let me put it another way: "Prisons and Trained Nursing." Should there not be some relation? A chorus of international voices answers—yes! One reform leads to another; this is the law of progress.

The Philanthropist—Elizabeth Fry—in her work of prison reform, soon discovered that insanitary conditions of home life, the lack of all comforts, and many necessities, were some of the obvious causes of crime. This led her to establish the pioneer Nursing Institution for District Nursing in Devonshire Square, Bishopsgate. Here we trace the connection between prisons and the Nursing Profession. Her practical mind grasped the truth that prevention is better than cure. That great truth is the gospel of the modern nurse, who enjoys so many greater facilities for the practical demonstration of it in her social work.

THE WOMEN'S PRISON IN COLOGNE.

It can scarcely be doubted by thoughtful people that the nurse as a Health Missioner—otherwise a District Nurse—is a factor in the prevention of crime in some degree, but we must go further. The place for the trained nurse is inside the Infirmary Wards of our prisons. As a proof that nurses are interested in prison conditions, some two or three hundred of the Congress visitors went to inspect the Women's Prison in Cologne. Our numbers being large, and the passages small, made it extremely difficult to approach, and question the harassed Matron who kindly conducted us through the building. I endeavoured, however, to keep my eyes and ears as wide open as possible, and I should like to recall and record the results of my observations.

The prison is for women undergoing short sentences only, usually not exceeding three months. Being my first visit to a prison of any sort, I am unable to make any comparisons from personal knowledge. It would appear, however, that this one is built on the structural principle of other prisons. Several long galleries of cells, with a narrow passage running along outside, just wide enough for the wardress to pass on her tour of inspection. A small aperture in the door, which can be closed from the outside, enables the wardress to watch the prisoner without being seen by her. The bolts and bars on the door were of sufficient size and strength for the cage of a wild beast. Inside, the prisoner walked up and down restlessly. No work appeared to be given to her to relieve the torture of *solitary confinement*. I was amazed to hear that this was the punishment for all who entered here—a prison for short sentences!—therefore, obviously for small offences! They were never allowed out except for a little exercise each day. Associated labour for the relief of the

mind was not permitted here. These poor creatures were not even allowed the undoubted human right of going to the lavatory. Very objectionable arrangements were made to obviate this necessity. The cells were of a fair size, and the window appeared to be low enough to enable the prisoner to look out. Three meals in the day are provided, and the food, consisting of wholesome rye bread, soup, coffee and occasionally meat and fish, seemed to be plentiful and nourishing. I tasted the bread and found it quite palatable. The domestic work of the prison is done by the prisoners who are serving the end of their sentences. With this exception—and this number would constitute only a small proportion of the whole—none are released, as I have explained, from solitary confinement.

There did not appear to be any Infirmary Wards for the sick prisoners, but merely *solitary* cells, somewhat larger and better than the rest; others contained cots for confinement cases. Upon enquiry I learnt that there were no trained nurses for the sick, who were tended by women who had some knowledge of sickness. What this precisely meant I cannot say, but it would probably be some course of instruction corresponding with our St. John's Ambulance lectures.

My visit to this prison at once interested and depressed me.

In the midst of all the splendid philanthropy of the civilized world we still have barbarism! A strange paradox! Prison reform is urgently needed, and with it must come the entrance of the trained nurse into the sick room of prisoners, who are humanly entitled to her ministrations. Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, in her beautiful "Watchword," reminded us that "*high aspirations are the best incentives to high endeavours.*" May this inspire us with tender pity "for all prisoners and captives" and lead us to associate ourselves with the Prison Reform Movement, so that when the International Nursing Council next holds its Congress at San Francisco we shall be able to report upon the work of our respective Leagues of Prison Nurses, with Elizabeth Fry as the Patron Saint.

BEATRICE KENT.

THE PROGRESS OF STATE REGISTRATION.

The Council of the Queensland Branch of the Australasian Trained Nurses' Association have unanimously approved of Miss E. L. Hunter and Miss Florence Chatfield (joint hon. secretaries), as desirable representatives of the nursing profession on the Nurses' Registration Board, called into existence by the Act providing for State Registration of Nurses; and the members are urged to vote for these two ladies.

Now that Queensland has granted legal status to its nurses, there is little doubt that if there is to be reciprocity between the nurses in the Commonwealth—other States must do likewise.

previous page

next page