

midwife, so it was difficult to know how the midwifery cases could receive adequate attention. Worst of all, acting on the advice of medical officers and Lady Inspectors, it was held that in the small infirmaries it was not practicable to employ trained nurses. That meeting would understand that the chronic sick needed constant attention, and it seemed, said the speaker, a deplorable thing for a large Government Department to hold that because they might be few, therefore proper care could not be provided.

The next point was that it was indefensible to employ pauper attendants. It was contrary to Local Government Board regulations, but still went gaily on. It was held by some that pauper nursing was extremely good for paupers. The question was, was it good for the sick? It must further be remembered that many sick persons found their way into workhouse wards not because they were derelicts, but because of the conditions under which they lived and the starvation wages at which they were employed.

At present we were faced by the fact that there were not enough nurses to go round. The remedy was to make the conditions fit. Poor law work was monotonous and dull in the smaller institutions, and the pay bad. All nurses were abominably paid, many overworked and sweated. Their labour was worth much more than was paid for it.

It was high time that a large Government Department like the Local Government Board took the nursing of the sick poor, which it controlled, into its own hands, and created a Nursing Department to deal with it.

The large workhouse infirmaries were turning out numbers of nurses, and Miss Gibson suggested that if nurses were trained for three years, and under contract for four, the fourth year might be spent in a small union infirmary in the same way that many hospitals gave three years' training in the wards and bound their pupils for a fourth year's private nursing. It was only a question of organization.

The speaker considered that there should be an Advisory Nursing Committee at the Local Government Board Office. She understood that the present draft Order was drawn up by a Clerk to a Board of Guardians and three officials at the Local Government Board, and the result was disastrous. By that Order there was no rule making it necessary for the poor in small workhouse wards to be nursed at all. The Local Government Board was bound to find a practical solution; it was wrong and wicked to let them suffer, and patients who had nothing beyond the workhouse ward to look forward to for the rest of their lives, suffered absolute agony from wrong nursing by inexperienced attendants.

In reply to those who said that it would be much too expensive to raise the salaries of the nurses, Miss Gibson thought it a better policy to pay £5 more to the trained nurse than to spend large sums in advertising.

Poor Law nursing needed co-ordination, conference between authorities to draw up the best plan that could be made, the sympathy of the Local Government Board, and lastly effort to see that the present draft Order was not carried out in its present form.

One other part of the Order was terrible—the arrangements for the children when not in the sick wards. Moreover, it was quite a common occurrence when the children were ill with whooping cough, measles and other diseases, to nurse them in the same ward as old people, which was most unfair and undesirable.

At the present moment it was important that public opinion and the interest of the nursing profession should be aroused. The Local Government Board had been impressed with the stubbornness of some of those who opposed the Order; and with further adverse opinion its enforcement in its present form might be averted.

The Chairman said even more was required at the Local Government Board than an Advisory Committee—what was needed was a Nursing Department, supervised by a Matron-in-Chief, from whom expert advice on all details of nursing organisation would be available; at present, Poor Law Nursing was entirely in the hands of men, who were not experts in any sense of the word. Legal status for the nurses was also necessary, and this should be urged upon the Local Government Board.

As the new Order does not come into force until February, 1914, the Chairman hoped the members of the Council would interest themselves in the question.

DEPUTATION TO MR. BURNS.

The Right Hon. John Burns, President of the Local Government Board, received, privately, a deputation from the Workhouse Nursing Association in regard to the changes in the Poor Law Nursing Order now under the consideration of the President, which the Association urgently recommends in order to insure the appointment of only fully-trained nurses in the rural Workhouse sick wards where there is no resident medical officer and only one or two nurses. The draft Order only insists upon the Superintendent Nurse and the Head Nurse in the larger infirmaries being fully trained, and the Association is of opinion that it is of the utmost importance that in the sick wards of rural Workhouses where there is no resident medical officer and no trained supervision that the nurse or nurses appointed should be thoroughly trained to meet any emergency.

The members of the Deputation were: Mr. J. Arthur Dawes, M.P. (Mayor of Southwark), who introduced the Deputation, Miss Gibson (late Matron of Birmingham Infirmary), Miss Haldane, LL.D., Miss James (Guardian of Bethnal Green Union), Miss Stephenson (Wiltshire Nursing Association), Mrs. Fabian Ware, and Miss Gill, Secretary to the Association.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)