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EDITORIAL.

A PERNICIOUS SYSTEM.

"I have never had control of the Nurses; the Master has that."

We quote these significant words from a letter, which appears in full in another column, where in all its sadness is reported the inquest on the late Miss Charlotte Phipps, Superintendent Nurse at the Barnet Workhouse—a tragedy the lesson of which cannot in justice to its Nursing Service be ignored by the Local Government Board. For the whole of the evidence tends to prove that it was the intolerable system enforced by Local Government Board Orders—which place the administration of the highly special department of Nursing in Workhouses, not under the authority of the trained Superintendent Nurse, but under the authority of the usually ill-educated Master—a man whose social experience in no way fits him for the unbridled authority he is often permitted by male Guardians to wield, even in the general management of a public institution; and whose interference with educated professional women's work, and the personal control of women nurses, is as intolerable to individuals as it is disastrous to discipline.

We have no hesitation in stating that in our opinion it was the result of this pernicious system, imposed on a sensitive, conscientious, and capable nursing official by autocratic and ignorant men, which is responsible for the ill-timed death of Charlotte Phipps.

Forced by constant injustice to resign her appointment, she deliberately took her own life, and left on record—"I am not afraid; I expect more mercy shown me by God than the Barnet Board of Guardians has shown me"; and "I have just had all the nerve and spirit crushed out of me." She was

careful to record her gratitude to the lady Guardians and "those gentlemen who have fought for fair dealing and justice"; a cry from the grave which inspired both the Coroner and the Jury in their verdict, to express in strong terms, their indignation at the manner this victim of a senseless and unjust system of Infirmary management, had been driven to her death.

In her evidence at the inquest, Miss H. Hawkins, one of the Guardians, placed the nursing profession under a debt of gratitude, by condemning the system whereby the Master has power to interfere unduly in nursing matters—such for instance as engaging temporary nurses without consulting the superintendent nurse, who in consequence knew nothing of the qualifications of the nurses engaged, over whom she had little control. Miss Hawkins said the Poor Law system in this particular was decidedly wrong, and humiliating to a Superintendent Nurse of experience, and the whole infirmary nursing world will support this contention. She asked that a recommendation should go from the jury to the Local Government Board to free the office of Superintendent Nurse from the heel of the Master.

Other witnesses also attested to the friction between the Master of Barnet Workhouse and the deceased woman, and so we are driven back to the old and inevitable trouble—so injurious to the well-being of an institution, the friction which is certain to arise when a trained nurse is placed under the absolute control in everything (except only the directions of the Medical Officer) of the Master of the Workhouse, so pathetically set forth by the dead woman in her letter to the Chairman of the Board in which she wrote: "I do beg to point out that I have never had the control of the Nurses; the Master has that."

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