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EDITORIAL.

THE CONTROL OF THE DOMESTIC DEPARTMENT.

The recommendation at a recent meeting of the Metropolitan Asylums Board, from the Asylums Committee, that, with the appointment of a new Matron, the control of the kitchen at the Caterham Asylum should be transferred from the Matron to the steward, involves an important question of management.

We have no hesitation in saying that the control of the domestic department should always be in the hands of the Matron, and that the best interests of any institution will be conserved thereby.

The Asylums Committee consider that at Tooting Bec Asylum, where the provision of certain mechanical appliances in the kitchen was authorized two years ago, and where they are under the steward's control, greater use has been made of them than at Caterham and other institutions where they were subsequently installed. It seems to them also desirable that this expensive machinery should be in the hands of a male, rather than a female, officer. They, therefore, have suggested that, subject to the assent of the Local Government Board, the control of the kitchen be transferred from the Matron to the steward.

The proposition was opposed by Miss M. J. Wilde, who said it was a retrograde movement. In all the other Services there was no question on this point, the Matron controlled the kitchen as a matter of course. As far as she knew the same arrangement prevailed in hospitals and poor law infirmaries. Stress was laid in the report on the fact that there was now a good deal of machinery in the Asylum kitchens. This did not seem to be a good argument, as there was a large amount of elaborate machinery in the laundries of which the Matrons were in control. The whole question of the position of Asylum

Matrons was one of very great interest, and she would like to see the Metropolitan Asylums Board, and their Asylum Superintendents, lead the way to reforms in this direction, and not step backward as suggested in this motion. The Local Government Board was in favour of the Matrons being in control, and their opinion, seeing their very large experience of institutions, should surely carry weight.

We entirely agree with the views put forward by Miss Wilde, and, as the matter is still under consideration, we hope that the Board will not put this recommendation into force.

In relation to the control of machinery whether the Matron, or steward is responsible for its careful handling, and for a general knowledge of its method of use, its ultimate care must be in the hands of an expert engineer.

The strongest points in favour of the control of the kitchen being in the hands of the Matron, are that both discipline and economy demand it.

The large female staff in the kitchen should be under the control of a woman officer, and that officer the Matron, for the discipline of a female staff can never be maintained by a male official, as it can be by the Matron of the institution. Moreover, the wards, the Home and the kitchen are so interdependent that the introduction of dual control must tend to produce friction.

Again, on the score of economy, it is obvious that the Matron can exercise a closer supervision, and therefore check waste with greater facility, than a steward, and we have known of instances in which the management of the domestic department has been transferred from the steward of a large hospital to the Matron with great advantage both on the score of economy, and of an improved and more varied dietary.

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