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EDITORIAL.

THE M.A.B. AMBULANCE SERVICE.

As the War proceeds we are feeling more acutely the removal of men from civilian employment to fill the ranks of the combatant forces. The requirements of the Navy and Army are, of course, the paramount need. But if the supply of skilled workers is insufficient in certain skilled callings, the consequences to the community at large may be extremely serious.

Amongst these is the maintenance of the Motor Ambulance Service of the Metropolitan Asylums Board, the duty of which is to remove patients in the metropolitan area who are suffering from infectious diseases, and who cannot be effectively isolated in their own homes, to the Board's hospitals. Any failure in this Service will certainly result in an increase of patients suffering from infectious disease. It is therefore disquieting to learn that the Ambulance Service of the M.A.B. has been placed in a very serious position owing to the depletion of the staff of motor mechanics and motor drivers, and that the Board's fleet of vehicles can no longer be maintained in working condition, that its efforts to obtain mechanics who are ineligible for Army service or have been discharged from the Army have been unsuccessful, and the same result has attended its attempts to secure the services of driver-mechanics, either male or female. The trouble is not only that 37 per cent. of the ambulances are awaiting repair, and that the staff cannot overtake the arrears of work, so that the position must grow worse, but also, as no new chassis can be purchased at the present time, the running of those in use must become more faulty as time goes on and less suitable for the transport of sick persons. The Ambulance Committee has therefore reported to the

Metropolitan Asylums Board that it is probable that within a few months' time the Ambulance Service will no longer be able to remove fever and diphtheria patients from their homes to the hospitals, and the retention in their own homes of hundreds of infectious cases must have disastrous effects.

The Committee, which has petitioned the Local Government Board to endeavour to obtain the additional skilled motor mechanics and driver mechanics necessary for the maintenance of the fleet of ambulances, disclaims responsibility should such a position arise. It considers that the Board has a right to expect the assistance of the Government in carrying on its work in the treatment of infectious disease in London, work which, it points out, is not only of vast importance to the Metropolis, but which, if neglected, may have far-reaching effects on the public health of a much greater area, especially should small-pox or any other of the serious infectious diseases assume an epidemic form.

The Committee consider that the Government Departments concerned have not fully realized the serious effects which will follow the stoppage of the work of the Board's Ambulance Service, and finally that the authorities should note that the Service is required always to hold twelve ambulances at the disposal of the War Office for the use of sick or wounded soldiers, and that the whole fleet is under orders to stand by in case of an air raid, and that these military duties will become impossible. Let us hope that the Local Government Board, which has been approached, will be able to draft into the M.A.B.'s Ambulance Service the number of skilled men required, for the cessation of the Service would be a disaster. Incidentally it would mean an increased demand on the services of nurses which, at the present time, would be difficult to meet.

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