

During the past year there has been much hospital-building and talk of building. Latterly I have been pleased to note a desire on the part of Hospital Boards and Trustees to seek the advice of the Department in planning and constructing new hospitals, and when making alterations to old. In the past this was the exception—the Act does not specifically demand it, and the local bodies no doubt considered themselves self-sufficient—with the result that many of our hospitals are ill planned and defective in materials and workmanship. Of course, the submission for approval of the central authority should be statutory.

CHARITABLE AID.

The following separate institutions are in the same anomalous state as the hospitals before mentioned—that is, they are administered by Trustees independent of the Charitable Aid Boards who represent the taxpayer, the source of a considerable proportion of their income. In the following table I show the proportions of their income from different sources during the year under review :—

	Government.	Rates.	Voluntary Contributions.
	Per Cent.	Per Cent.	Per Cent.
Wellington Benevolent Institution	50·1	48·1	1·8
North Wairarapa Benevolent Society	60·9	38·4	0·7
Greymouth Benevolent Society	50·0	50·0	..
Hokitika Benevolent Society	53·6	25·0	21·3
Samaritan Home, Christchurch	50·4	31·6	18·0
North Otago Benevolent-Society	31·8	65·9	3·3
Otago Benevolent Institution	51·5	46·6	1·9
Percentage of the aggregate	56·3	40·5	3·2

These figures are a sufficient indication of where the preponderating influence should lie, yet the Department representing the Government, and the Charitable Aid Boards representing the ratepayer, are, in the existing condition of the law, practically in the hands of the Trustees of such bodies.

In illustration I would quote a portion of a report made by me on the 7th June to the Hon. W. Hall-Jones.

"I have to draw your attention to the very disquieting state of matters suggested by the Audit Inspector's examination of the books of the Wellington Benevolent Trust.

"Upon the evidence it would seem that the Secretary, Mr. A. W. Purvis, occupies a position in which, if it is not one of his seeking, he has to be sympathized with. Mr. Purvis is Master of the Ohiro Home, and his wife Matron. He is Secretary to the Trustees, and, though not Storekeeper, is responsible for the stock in the store from which the recipients of charitable aid are supplied. Last year the Treasurer, Mr. Powles, resigned, and I understand it was agreed that the Chairman of the Trustees would act as Treasurer. The balance-sheet of the Trust is, however, signed by Mr. Purvis as Acting-Treasurer. The minutes of the Trustees' meetings are apparently meagre and imperfect, and show a want of capacity and government on their part.

"I would take this opportunity to draw your attention to another matter—namely, the position of the Trustees with regard to destitute maternity cases. The Ohiro Home was visited shortly before the official opening of the additions, and the maternity ward, with nurses' quarters, &c., was pointed out by the Matron, situate next to the quarters occupied by herself and her husband. In spite of this the Trustees have declared publicly that they never intended to provide for maternity cases at the Ohiro Home, and even approached the Government for aid to meet the urgent need for some place for destitute lying-in cases. Now, as to the above declaration the Trustees are in this dilemma: Either they have a place for urgent cases at the Ohiro Home (which they say they have not) or it seems that they have obtained money from the Charitable Aid Board under false pretences.

"Further, the Audit Inspector reports that items of unusual, or what should be unusual, expenditure have not been minuted, but have been passed in a lump sum with other accounts; that the details of accounts passed for payment are not given in the minutes, nor by reference to schedule; that back vouchers for £845-odd, not signed by the Chairman as having been passed for payment, were so signed by the Acting-Chairman during the audit; and other unsatisfactory details. These matters would seem to indicate that the Trustees are incapable of carrying on the work properly, or that, possessing the capacity, they are not exercising it. When one reflects that such things can be, that there may be more which are unknown, that the Charitable Aid Board which supplies the money has no voice in the spending of it by the Trustees, it is evident that an incorrigible state of affairs exists under the present Act."

Further comment is needless.

The Board was asked for any explanation they desired to submit.

NURSES.

In the procession which makes for the town from the country is to be found the sick-nurse. Unless promoted to be a sister or Matron, she leaves her hospital (be the hospital in town or country) soon after being registered, to take up private nursing where employment is at hand and the remuneration sure. This is a serious matter for the larger hospitals, where the retention of a proportion of staff nurses makes for the better working of the institution and the training of probationers, but it is still more serious for the outlying country districts. This is a question for Hospital Boards to give most earnest consideration.