

The Register.

ADELAIDE: TUESDAY, JUNE 30, 1896.

THE ADELAIDE HOSPITAL.

The troubles of the present Board of Management of the Adelaide Hospital are gathering thick around them. So long as the members were content to play the part of Ministerial puppets, and to practically delegate their duties to a committee of their number acting in conjunction with the Government, things went smoothly with them. They were relieved alike of worry and responsibility, and were able to congratulate themselves on their good luck. The course of events has proved to them that these "piping times of peace" could not last. At their meeting on Friday they had under consideration no less than three communications, each of which brought prominently before them the fact that—apart from the adoption by them of a policy of self-effacement—the task they have undertaken is by no means a light one. The least important, but by no means the least irritating, of these was a missive from the Superintendent of Public Buildings notifying that the wishes of the Board with regard to the small matter of the construction of a gate could not be complied with. It is not to be wondered at that the somewhat lordly style of this epistle should have aroused the anger of those to whom it was addressed, and that the autocratic official should have been called upon to vouchsafe reasons for his decision. Another communication, which must have been decidedly unpalatable to its recipients, was a letter from the Council of the Adelaide University on the subject of the Medical School. In a jaunty way the Board had replied to the request that provision should be made in the Hospital for six medical men, by intimating their willingness to give facilities for the regular attendance of three clinical lecturers, and to acquiesce in the

appointment of the Resident Surgeon and Resident Physician, now on their way from England, to positions on the staff of the School. This offhand method of settling the matter failed to find favour with the Council, and in its rejoinder read on Friday it took occasion to point out that, whilst grateful for the notification that the services of the medical men secured for the Hospital would be available, the scheme it had submitted contemplated the nomination by it of the whole of the lecturers. The

Board was evidently taken aback at this reception of their proposals, but deemed it prudent to take refuge in delay. Meanwhile the work of the Medical School has been seriously interrupted, and an institution which had reached a state of the highest efficiency bids fair to become completely disorganized.

But the severest shock of all to the Board was the receipt of a memorandum from the Minister respectfully asking to be informed on what grounds it had been deemed necessary to recommend the appointment of two additional probationary nurses. The members made no secret of their amazement that such a presumptuous request should have been made. One or two of those who have not hesitated to condemn in unmeasured terms the former Board and the late Medical Staff for daring to oppose the Executive in matters affecting the management of a State institution were foremost in their expressions of indignation, "It is enough for the Minister to know that we, upon whom the control of the Hospital devolves, have recommended the increase." This was the burden of their remarks, and although an attempt was made in one or two quarters to stem the tide of their resentment their view of the situation prevailed, and it was decided to send a reply which, had it emanated from the old Board, the susceptible Premier would unquestionably have regarded as a snub. For ourselves, strongly as we have upheld the view that Government interference in the details of Hospital administration is to be reprobated, we cannot help feeling that there is some excuse for Mr. O'Loughlin's minute. There is no disguising the fact that the number of inmates in the Hospital has been steadily decreasing. True, the reports which have reached us that some of the wards are almost empty, and that others have not anything like so many patients in them as formerly, have been persistently that there must be a great deal of truth in them. According to the latest return the patients under treatment only numbered 178, a total far below the

average for many months past. If this is the case, surely the Chief Secretary, knowing as he does that in other directions the cost of the institution is being heavily and most unnecessarily increased, has a reasonable pretext for mildly enquiring why at the present juncture the nursing staff should be augmented.

We forbear for the present entering at large into other and more serious matters which are calculated to give the Board, with its recently awakened sense of responsibility, the gravest anxiety. The statement has been made both in the Assembly and in the Legislative Council that matters are proceeding as satisfactorily in the Hospital as they were before the Honorary Medical Staff was driven from the institution. One member in the latter Chamber had even the temerity to declare that things are in a better condition than formerly. We have no hesitation in saying that such representations are absolutely false. We say this on the authority of unsolicited testimony which is constantly reaching us from unbiased persons who are in a position to know the facts. It is all very well for the Board to try to throw dust in the eyes of the public by publishing testimonials from grateful patients. No doubt the nurses are kind and attentive, and the attenuated Medical Staff does the best it can to meet the heavy demands upon it, but it is none the less undeniable that the institution is suffering and suffering severely through the enforced secession of the medical men through whose efforts it was brought into so high a state of efficiency. The Board may be ignorant of all this, but if such is the case it is because it has not taken the trouble to make itself acquainted with what is occurring and with what is patent to the eyes of those who have opportunities of judging of the position of affairs. If the members of the Board would devote less time to the Star Chamber proceedings which seem to have become a part of their ordinary routine of business and more into an investigation of the way in which

matters are being conducted in certain departments of Hospital work they would cease to mislead members of Parliament and the public by asserting that things are in a satisfactory state when the very reverse is the fact.
