

Christchurch Hospital

In the latter month of last year, shortly before the Armistice, a very regrettable step was taken by the above hospital in regard to the matron, Miss Thurston, then on leave for active service. As we do not consider it in the interests of nurses or of hospitals to ventilate differences in the press, we have so far not alluded to this matter in our pages, hoping that some adjustment might have been arrived at. However, in a recent Christchurch paper the whole correspondence between Miss Thurston and the Board appeared from the paper's London correspondent, and as nurses, and especially matrons, are very much interested and sympathise warmly with Miss Thurston, we republish it:

(From our own correspondent).

LONDON, April 17.

I am in a position to say that there is no truth whatever in the rumour that Miss M. Thurston, R.R.C., Matron-in-Chief of the N.Z.E.F., intends to remain in England after the termination of her military duties. Miss Thurston has never altered her intention of going back to New Zealand as soon as she is free.

With reference to the proceedings of the North Canterbury Hospital and Charitable Aid Board regarding the matronship of the Christchurch Hospital, it was said in the "Press" that the chairman (Mr. F. Horrell) had declined to give Miss Thurston's letter for publication. The following reproduction of the whole correspondence in the matter, including Miss Thurston's letter, will, therefore, be of interest.

LEAVE GRANTED.

The Board's letter granting Miss Thurston leave is dated March 29th, 1916, and is as follows:—

"I have to inform you that the Board has granted the leave of absence applied for by you, to enable you to take a position during the period of the war at the Walton-on-Thames Military Hospital; at the same time the members wish to express their hearty appreciation of the services that you have rendered to the Christchurch Hospital, and wish you a speedy and safe return to New Zealand."

More than two years passed. Meanwhile, Miss Thurston had been promoted from the matronship of the No. 2 New Zealand General Hospital to the position of Matron-in-Chief, N.Z.E.F., which she has occupied for more than two years past. In August last, although the war was still on, and the terms of the foregoing letter continued valid, there was a discussion at the Board, and the following letter was sent to Miss Thurston, dated August 29th:—

"I have been requested by the Board to write and ask if you can give any indication as to your intentions with regard to the position you hold as head of the Board's nursing staff.

"As you may imagine, when the leave of absence was granted until the termination of the war, the Board, like many others, did not anticipate that it would run into a fifth year without any sign of the termination being near.

"The Board's attention has been called to the fact that Miss Muir is being asked to make undue sacrifice in temporarily filling the position of Lady Superintendent at this hospital. There have been opportunities of advancement, but she has steadfastly turned from them in order to fulfil her undertaking to remain here and fill the vacancy caused by your absence.

"The Board feels that it is not in the best interests of the institution to have a temporary officer filling a highly important position in the Board's service for an indefinite period, and, further, that the continuation of the present uncertainty is seriously prejudicial to Miss Muir, who, in her loyalty to yourself and the Hospital, is undoubtedly damaging her own future.

"It is recognised that the war may go on for one, two, or even three years yet, and it is because of this uncertainty that the Board will be pleased if you can see your way to state what your future intentions are.

"The position is being still further aggravated by the fact that the responsibilities of the Lady Superintendent will now be very materially increased owing to the Orthopaedic Unit being established here, which will mean from 200 to 250 more beds.

"In writing to you thus, the Board has no desire to convey a wrong impression regarding Miss Muir, whose work has been good without exception, and this is saying much when the very junior staff is taken into consideration. Nor is there any desire to give you the impression that this question has been raised by that lady, who has never, by word or deed, signified any unwillingness to continue as at present.

"The Board feels that you will not misunderstand the purpose of this letter, and I can assure you that members are pleased to know that you have been so successful in the work you have undertaken, and they trust, whether you decide to come back to take up your duties at an early date or not, that the same well-deserved success may attend your future efforts."

Miss Thurston's reply, dated October 31st—still a fortnight before the fighting ended—is as follows:—

"I desire to acknowledge receipt of your letter of August 29th, which has just reached me. It was certainly a surprise to find the Board, which has granted me leave of absence from the position of Matron for the duration of the war, should now seek to repudiate their action. The reason assigned, namely, the injustice caused to Miss Muir by continuing as my deputy, does not satisfactorily explain the motive, for the appointment offers exceptional opportunity which so many nurses would gladly embrace of acquiring valuable administrative experience. Moreover, Miss Muir assured me that for private reasons, she could not offer for active service.