THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISTRICT NURSING IN DOUGLAS, ISLE OF MAN

In 1725 the number of people in the Isle of Man was fourteen thousand. Castletown was the seat of government, Ramsey the nearest port to Whitehaven, Douglas with a population of about eight hundred was a tiny village.

David Robertson, after a visit to the Island in 1794, said that there was

> "... no public establishment for sheltering the destitute, protecting the insane, restoring the sick, yet in this country private charity was liberal. In the herring season the benevolence of the fishermen feeds the poor".(1)

It was the custom of the people in the villages to look after the less fortunate among them. The few beggars who wandered around the country were sure of getting a meal, a seat by the fire and a bed for the night.(2)

During the eighteenth century Douglas had become the main centre of the smuggling trade, and the passing of the Debtors Act in 1736, by which no liability existed in the Island for debts contracted elsewhere, rendered Man a sanctuary for debtors from the surrounding countries.(3) After Waterloo Royal Navy and Army men came to live on the Island, most choosing to live in and around Douglas. Many new houses were built and improvements to the harbour encouraged an influx of people seeking work. Now there were beggars in the streets, people without homes or living in cellars and garrets.

An act of Tynwald passed in 1742 stated that no beggar or vagabond should be permitted into the Island. This law was amended in 1748, stating that:

> "The Master of any vessel should he bring over such persons with no visible means of making a livelihood has to maintain them himself until he carries them back, and every parish to maintain its own poor, not to suffer them to beg in any other parish. Those who infringe this law shall be whipped in their own parishes."(4)

The Ministers and Wardens of the parish churches were the receivers of money given for the benefit of the poor and were responsible for its distribution. There was no poor law.

The Ministers and Wardens of St Mathew's Church were responsible for the poor in Douglas. This did not solve the problem of the 'strangers' - the immigrants who had come from the surrounding countries. They were left destitute as well as some of the Manx people themselves, including, for example, the mother of an illegitimate child who had not been able to satisfy the Ecclesistical courts of the father's identity.(5)

One consequence of these conditions for the destitute was that the better-off people gave generously to the many charitable organisations that were being