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Editorial.

MURDER FARMS.

Within a fortnight there have been recorded the conviction of four so-called nurse criminals—one for thefts, in connection with which a criminal record of nearly twenty years was proved; the second, the proprietress of a Nursing Home, for abandoning infants under circumstances which pointed to deliberate and callous heartlessness; and in connection with the third and fourth convictions, two women, one the proprietress of a Nursing Home, and the other her confederate, are now lying under sentence of death for the wilful murder of infants.

The above facts impel us to point out once again, as we have pointed out on previous occasions, the public danger of the present lack of supervision and control of Nursing Homes.

Public hospitals are managed by committees composed of men of repute, and are open to visits from the public. Private Nursing Homes, on the other hand, are almost invariably run as financial speculations, and while, in efficient hands, they certainly confer a boon on the public, in the hands of the unscrupulous grave abuses may and, it is well known, do exist.

The case under consideration at present, the details of which we report in another column, proves conclusively that single women who enter lying-in homes of a certain class are prepared to abandon their infants under circumstances of the utmost indifference. While, no doubt, the cruel attitude of public opinion towards the mothers of illegitimate children is partly responsible for this ready desertion—for almost every means of self-support is denied to the woman if "burdened" by her child, while the father is welcomed in every class of society—yet the existence in our midst of what we may call flourishing "baby murder farms" points not only to the heartless irresponsibility of the mothers, which stimulates the cupidity, and acts as an incentive to crime

on the part of avaricious and unprincipled proprietors of Nursing Homes, but emphasises the need of public supervision of these institutions.

Surely the conviction within a week of the owners of two Nursing Homes, one on the capital charge and the other on one only a degree less serious, will arouse the community as a whole, as well as the medical profession, to a sense of responsibility with regard to the need for supervision, and impress on nurses the duty they owe to the public in enforcing discipline and control in their own ranks, and in the adequate protection of their professional good name. The remedy, both for the protection of the public and of reputable nurses, lies to our hand in the State Registration of Trained Nurses. By means of a Register of Nurses published under the authority of the State, and carefully supervised by professional persons, the public could ascertain whether any woman is, or is not, what she professes to be, just as they can do in the case of the medical profession by consulting the Medical Register. And, in the case of certificated nurses, while we are of opinion that those who publicly disgrace their profession are few and far between, yet in the event of a nurse whose name was on the Register proving herself unworthy of professional confidence, the State-appointed Nursing Council would undoubtedly have power to remove her name from its pages, after due inquiry. Those who oppose the State Registration of Trained Nurses must, consequently, be prepared to accept part of the responsibility for the continuance of the evils above referred to. In regard to the women recently convicted, we have so far failed to discover whether they are or are not what they are widely described to be on posters and sensational headlines—nurses. A member of the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard points out that the question is not one into which the Department would enter in detail, as "it is no crime for a person to call herself a trained nurse."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)