

State Registration for Nurses.

THE NEEDS OF THE PROVINCES.

The advisability or otherwise of State Registration continues the burning question of the day in nursing politics. The recent discussion in the *British Medical Journal* upon the subject shows clearly that thoughtful men and women realise how extremely unsatisfactory is the present condition of things, and that there is a universal feeling that some remedy must be sought if the profession of nursing is to be saved from losing its premier position among honourable occupations for women.

In talking over State Registration with many different types of nurses I have been struck by the fact that, although the measure is perhaps chiefly needed by those trained provincially, they are but lukewarm in their support, because there is a great fear among them that their interests may not be adequately protected in the proposed legislation.

There is a very real feeling abroad that the measure, being drafted by the heads of the great training-schools, may fail to take into account the exigencies of the smaller institutions and the conditions under which nurses work in them. I wish, therefore, very briefly to touch upon the existing state of affairs as regards the training, real and so-called, carried out in the provincial hospitals.

There are at present in the provinces four classes of hospitals for general as distinguished from special work:—

- (a) The larger county hospitals, containing more than 100 beds, and in many cases having a medical school attached. These are few in number, and, for training purposes, may be ranked with the large metropolitan schools.
- (b) The lesser county hospital, of 80 to 100 beds. This is also a *bona fide* training-school for nurses, and, as a rule, grants a three years' certificate. Although doing most excellent work, this class of institution, generally of old foundation, does not advertise itself extensively, and so is little known outside its immediate neighbourhood as a training-school.
- (c) The pseudo-county hospital, having from twenty to sixty beds. This has generally evolved recently from a cottage hospital, and has arrogated to itself some imposing title, such as the east or north—shire hospital. Its committee of management are energetic, and, for financial reasons, do their best to keep it as much as possible before the public eye. This type, in order to save expense, attracts probationers by advertising "one year's training, certificate given"; and it may be regarded as the source from whence come the greater part of the enormous

number of unskilled workers who at present cannot be prevented legally from terming themselves "trained nurses."

- (d) The cottage hospital, which in too many cases also "takes probationers"; and although by its very nature it is incapable of giving any training worthy of the name, allows the women who have worked in it to pose as nurses before the public gaze.

Those who suffer the most injustice from the present order of things are the nurses trained in the small county hospitals; at very many of these schools the work is in no way inferior to that in the larger institutions. True, the number of beds not being so great, there is not such a variety of cases; but the effect of this is equalised by the details, which in the medical schools are performed by the students, here falling to the share of the nurse.

In competition for appointments, however, these nurses not only meet the graduates of the more celebrated schools, but also women who have only worked in institutions of the classes *c* and *d*. As, unfortunately, appointments in the nursing world depend largely upon private influence, committees, having no hall-mark such as Registration to guide them, frequently allow the second-rate product of *c* and *d* to carry the day.

Again, the work done in hospitals group *c* may be, and very often is, most excellent, *as far as it goes*, but it cannot afford a sufficient variety of cases for educational purposes. It seems, however, unjust and unfair that the hard work done in them and the time so spent should not be allowed to count at all in the training of a nurse. As a matter of fact, it is frequently a serious handicap, for many hospital authorities refuse to take as probationer a girl who has worked elsewhere. In arranging the details of Registration some provision must be made for affiliating the institutions in group *c* with those for fever and special work in the same district; by this means alone can justice be done to many hard-working women, and encouragement given them to qualify in all branches of their profession.

Consider the following case, one of many such:—A young girl for family reasons is compelled to begin work at an early age; she simply cannot afford to wait idly until old enough (at least twenty-three years) for the general hospital. Her heart is in her work, and she enters the local hospital at the age of nineteen or twenty. Do you wonder that after three or four years' work she is sorely tempted to call herself "a three years' nurse," and as such to obtain employment from the nearest nursing association, which only too often will engage her, paying the same salary as it offers to the properly-trained nurse?

Side by side with the girl who is obliged to enter the small hospital because of her youth we may

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