

The Select Committee on Nursing.

The Select Committee of the House of Commons to inquire into the expediency of providing for the Registration of Nurses met on Thursday, April 13th, at 11.30. Mr. H. J. Tennant was in the chair, and there were present Lord Morpeth, Sir John Stirling Maxwell, Mr. Pierpoint, Sir John Batty Tuke, Major Balfour, Mr. C. Douglas, Mr. C. Hobhouse, Dr. Hutchinson, and Mr. Mount.

Miss Lückes, Matron of the London Hospital, was called as a witness, and in her opening remarks described the system of training of probationers in that hospital, also the method of certification. The certificate given to probationers was signed by herself, the chairman, a physician and a surgeon, and by the examiners. The period of training adhered to, for which they were so much abused, was two years, and in that time each probationer had experience in men's, women's, and children's medical and surgical wards. It had been said by a previous witness that a prolonged experience was necessary because you cannot hurry the course of illnesses, you must nurse through those illnesses to gain the necessary experience, but in the wards of the London Hospital nurses had many cases of the same kind of illness before them, in various stages at the same time. The test of the efficiency of the training given to the nurses at the London was, the witness considered, to be found in the accounts they received of them as private nurses. Of fifty-seven newly-certificated nurses added to the staff, the accounts received could not possibly be better. It was often necessary to place a nurse on the private staff at the end of two years out of consideration for her health. The private nurses at the London returned to the wards between their cases, after sufficient rest, at the rate of one day a fortnight for the time they had been at work, so that their knowledge was kept up-to-date.

In reply to the Chairman, the witness said she considered uniformity was to be deprecated. Nurses were needed for every variety of work; you would not, for instance, get highly-trained nurses to do the work generally involved in district nursing.

The Chairman said it was an imperfect world, but inquired if some definition of a standard and uniform method of certification would not be of use.

Miss Lückes was of opinion that it was a mistake to aim at uniformity. In regard to a question as to a uniform certificate at the London Hospital, the witness said the form of certificate was the same, but it was filled in very differently. She considered two years a sufficient period of training. A quick, clever girl could get on quicker than a slow one, and might not need so long, but the average had to be considered. She thought it demoralising to pupils to keep them in training when they were competent, for the sake of putting in time. It was such a pity to make nurses learn more. In her opinion the effect would be to bring them into conflict with doctors. The witness continued that it was not necessary for a nurse during her training to combine specialism with general training, or for every nurse to have experience as a midwife, a masseuse, or in mental nursing.

The Chairman inquired why a nurse should not be competent to nurse every kind of case. The witness replied the necessary experience could not be included

in her term of training. The Chairman said he was suggesting that the three years' term might be sufficient in which to see the necessary variety of cases. A nurse might be sent to a hapless patient without sufficient knowledge.

The witness replied that nearly all the time it was against the woman herself, not against her ignorance, that the cry was raised. Cases of inefficiency were soon eliminated. The demand for the three years' standard was doing a great deal of harm.

In regard to the supply of nurses, St. Thomas's Hospital, which began to train in 1860 and trained for one year, had at the end of 1903 certificated only 1,097 nurses.* Miss Lückes also stated that at the London Hospital in the last twenty years only 1,283 nurses had been certificated. Thus the output of certificated nurses of these two great training-schools in a period covering forty-three years was quite remarkably small. If the length of the training period were increased, the supply would be still further restricted, and even of those certificated, many did not continue nursing.

The Chairman inquired whether it was not a fact that many Poor Law Infirmarys trained probationers, and thus contributed to the supply of nurses. The witness believed it was so.

The Chairman said the system at the London sounded efficient, but he supposed the witness would agree that there were bad nurses about. She agreed, but said "not so many as are represented." She had heard of undesirable nurses in hotels abroad, but she knew that the various tales referred to the same nurse. In reply to a further question, she did not think the bad nurses were limited to hotels abroad.

What was of importance was the personal characteristics of the nurse, and these were exceedingly difficult to define. A nurse might be careless, silly, bad tempered. The hospitals did not get perfect people to train, and they had to make the best of the material at their disposal.

The Chairman suggested that a woman might be kind and good and at the same time stupid. The witness replied "she would send her to a chronic case!" A former witness had, she said, given figures to prove that there was an abundance of candidates, but she considered the choice possible in selection was exaggerated, because the same candidate wrote to five or six hospitals. Then the applicant might be too old or too young, or not strong enough. Last year the witness saw 516 candidates to get half that number. Of the nurses produced at the London Hospital in the last ten years, 619 left the hospital certificated, 136 never meant to go on with the work, so that the number added to those available for the public was 483. The witness asserted that she got quite as many requests for uncertificated as for certificated nurses. She was constantly told: "I don't mind who you send me, if she is a nice woman."

The witness continued that you could not get rid of the bad till you could replace them with the best, and in lengthening the term of training you were cutting short the source of the supply. A State certificate would hall mark mediocrity and be an injustice to the best trained nurses. It would be impos-

* St. Thomas' Hospital has only given a certificate of training for the last few years, and it has adopted the three years' standard. The London Hospital is the only hospital of importance which maintains the now obsolete two years' standard.

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