

The Select Committee on Nursing.

The Select Committee of the House of Commons on Nursing met to take evidence on Tuesday, June 6th. There were present Mr. Tennant (in the chair), Sir John Batty Tuke, Sir John Stirling Maxwell, Mr. Pierpoint, Major Balfour, Mr. Mount, Dr. Hutchinson, and Mr. Charles Hobhouse.

LADY HELEN MUNRO FERGUSON'S EVIDENCE.

The first witness called was Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, who said she was a Vice-President of the Association for Promoting the State Registration of Nurses, and was also connected with the Colonial Nursing Association in Scotland. She offered her evidence as a member of the employing public to whom the present condition of nursing affairs was not satisfactory; certificates varied in value, and the public, not knowing the institutions concerned, could not distinguish as to their merits. The standards set by different hospitals varied not only as to training, but also as to examinations. The witness considered that as at present arranged, hospital certificates do not give protection to the public. The certificate given by a Central Board would afford evidence that such a Board had satisfied itself of the efficiency of the candidate, and that she had been registered after passing satisfactorily through a course of training under proper conditions.

The witness further stated that many hospitals keep no records. When Miss Louisa Stevenson and Miss Haldane were asked to select nurses for work in the Concentration Camps in South Africa, they found in many cases that the Matrons of the hospitals where applicants were trained had changed, or perhaps died, and as some training-schools kept no records, many were disqualified. Possibly, excellent candidates were rejected in favour of those less excellent, because the ladies charged with the important duty of selection were determined to accept only those concerning whom the necessary information was forthcoming.

The witness pointed out that in the case of nurses a State guarantee of efficiency was especially necessary, because they were generally wanted in an emergency, and there was no time to make inquiries into character, as in the case of teachers and domestic servants.

The Committee had had one instance given them in which the Matron of a hospital carried on a correspondence in nearly 1,000 cases, but the average Matron would, she thought, be unable to undertake this work in addition to all her other duties. Under a scheme of Registration, therefore, there should be some guarantee of character and moral fitness, so that the public would have the assurance that at the time of her registration the Central Board, after making all inquiries of the training-school, considered the nurse a suitable person to register.

Another advantage of State Registration would be to make the smaller hospitals level up to a higher standard.

In regard to examination, some witnesses had objected to examination as a test of proficiency, but as a matter of fact the system was already accepted and adopted by hospitals. In an examination set by a Central Board there would be the advantages that a definite standard would be maintained, and the examination would be conducted by an impartial authority. At present, in two hospitals in the same town the standard maintained might be quite different. The effect of Regis-

tration would be to distinguish between the different types of nursing. It was essential that the public should know what type of nurse they were engaging.

In regard to the nursing of the poor in their own homes, the witness considered it a great mistake to make a distinction between the nurses for the poor and the rich. Sickness was the same in all classes. Under a system of Registration, instead of untrained women competing as they do at present for the best class of cases, more would be available for mild cases.

The witness was emphatically of opinion that the highly-qualified nurse was suitable and desirable in the rural districts. In Scotland, Queen's Nurses were nursing in the rural districts; there were twenty-seven in Argyllshire. Doctors with large districts to cover said that they were very glad of the fully-trained nurse. The nurses needed a thorough training to meet the responsibilities and emergencies with which they had to deal.

Those nurses known as "cottage nurses" were, as a rule, certificated midwives. They were trained principally in midwifery, and it by no means followed that they had received any training in a general hospital. Many of them, as a matter of fact, received their training on a district.

In Fife there were two Nursing Associations employing Queen's Nurses. As a rule, Queen's Nurses were not engaged by those who employed them; it was therefore an interesting point that in three instances in Fife the miners themselves paid for and engaged the nurses. They always engaged those who were fully-trained.

The question of recognising two classes of nurses should, the witness considered, be referred to an expert Committee. No lay person could decide it. Personally, she would be against it. Cottage nurses being, as a rule, midwives, had the status conferred by their own Register—i.e., that maintained by the Central Midwives' Board. If once various classes of nurses were registered it would be difficult to know where to stop. The Church Army trained for three months. The course included instruction in the knowledge of the Bible and Prayer Book, visiting, singing at meetings, and nursing. This could scarcely be regarded as systematic training in nursing, but these women were dressed as nurses, and there was a picture extant in which these uniformed women were dealing with medicine bottles.

It would be difficult to define a minimum for a second class, because, what we were at present asking for was that a Central Board of experts should be asked to define the minimum standard necessary for a professional nurse.

In regard to the possibility of unsuitable women holding the certificate of the Central Board, the witness said nurses who misconducted themselves could, on the representation of doctors and employers, be removed from the Register by the Central Board for serious offences. As to a woman becoming incompetent, she thought it was impossible for any woman to forget what she had been thoroughly taught.

The witness drew attention to the fact that a Departmental Committee had proposed that the standard laid down for nurses under the Scottish Local Government Board should be three years' training, after which the nurses should be required to pass an examination at Edinburgh or Glasgow, the expense to be defrayed either by a grant from the Local

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)