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Editorial.

NURSES AND THE WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION ACT.

The Workmen's Compensation Act, which comes into force on July 1st next, is one which must directly affect many nurses, and also hospital committees and employers of nurses. While it is right that provision should be made for the insurance of workers against accident, we are of opinion that the present Act goes too far in this direction, but we are glad that nurses, a class of workers very moderately paid as a rule, and exposed to special risks, should come within its scope. The term "workman" means "any person who has entered into or works under a contract of service or apprenticeship with an employer, whether by way of manual labour, clerical work, or otherwise, and whether the contract is expressed, or implied, is oral or in writing."

The Act does not include any person employed otherwise than by way of manual labour whose remuneration exceeds £250 a year, or a person whose employment is of a casual nature, or a member of the police force, or an outworker, or a member of the employer's family dwelling in his house.

With these exceptions the great army of workers, male and female, throughout the country come under its provisions, and nurses who are employed by committees or individuals amongst them.

The first effect of the Act must be to make business brisk for insurance societies, for all employers will desire to guard themselves from the possibility of having to keep, perhaps for life, employees who may be incapacitated while in their service, by paying a small sum annually as an insurance

premium. But small sums when multiplied soon mount up, and in the case of a hospital of any size, the premiums payable for insuring the nursing staff, servants, porters, scrubbers, and all employees whose remuneration is under £250 per annum, will amount to a considerable sum.

The same applies to nursing institutions where the nurses are the servants of a Committee, or proprietor, and take a fixed salary. An indirect consequence of the Act may therefore be to stimulate the formation of private nursing societies on a self-governing basis, in which the nurses, as members of the Society, taking their own fees, and participating in its government, do not come under the provisions of the Act.

Another point which will probably arise in connection with the working of the Act is whether the medical practitioner is—as, in somewhat inaccurate terms he is often stated to be—the employer of the nurse. If he is, then he cannot avoid the liabilities and responsibilities of an employer. But as we have from time to time pointed out, the employer of a nurse is either the hospital or institution which pays her a salary, or the person who undertakes to pay her fee when she enters the service of a private family. Private nurses, it is true, receive much of their work through the good offices of the profession of medicine, but no one can stand in the relation of an employer to a person for whose salary he is not responsible.

When the Act comes into operation the working of its provisions will be watched with much interest. It is not improbable that some of them may give rise to litigation before their meaning is finally defined.

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