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Editorial.

NURSES AND EMPLOYERS' LIABILITY.

Probably all our readers are aware that on July 1st a new Act of Parliament came into force which must, to some extent, affect every household in the United Kingdom. It is generally admitted that the new Workmen's Compensation Act is so carelessly drafted that it will furnish scope for immense litigation, and that it may be some years before the full force of its provisions are realised. For the moment, it is certain that whereas previous legislation defined precisely the class of workers who were entitled to receive, and, therefore, the class of employers who were liable to pay, compensation for accidents, this Workmen's Compensation Act extends the benefit and the liability to nearly every class in the country, especially as domestic servants and casual workers are now included within its scope. It may, therefore, be taken for granted that Nurses will come under the Act, and this raises questions of the utmost importance both to our profession and to the public. We are advised that, so far as Nurses are concerned, it is possible that the Act may be construed by the judges to cover liability of their employers to them if whilst engaged in their vocation they are attacked by any infectious illness such as scarlet fever or diphtheria, from which their patients may have suffered, or if they suffer from any septic infection, say of a cut or scratch on the hand, similarly conveyed from their patients. Knowing well, as we do, the many dangers which Nurses run in the discharge of their daily duties, and the very distressing consequences, personal suffering and pecuniary loss which are thereby frequently incurred, we cannot but welcome the probability that in future fair compensation will be paid to them for such serious professional accidents.

But there is another side to this question, the importance of which to the Nursing profession cannot be exaggerated, and the ultimate effects of which it would be impossible to predict. How will this new liability to the employers of Nurses affect in future the conditions of their employment? So far as Hospital probationers and Nurses are concerned, it may be taken for granted that the authorities of every Institution will insure against their liability to every member of their Nursing, as well as of their clerical, and of their domestic, staff. In like manner, it may be presumed that the proprietors of Nursing Homes and Private Nursing Institutions who pay their employées a fixed salary and thus directly employ them—whether they send their Nurses out to attend on the sick in other houses, or keep them for that purpose in the Home—will also insure their whole staff. In like manner, again, the Committees which in every part of the country directly employ and pay Private or District Nurses or Midwives will, probably, be wise enough to insure themselves against their serious liabilities. But, when all those Nurses who are thus paid a regular fixed salary, and who are, therefore, in regular employment, are provided for under the Act, there remain some thousands whose position will be very difficult. The great body of Nurses, and the even larger number of Midwives, who work on their own account—who are employed, so to speak, by the public at large—how will the Act affect them? They go from patient to patient for longer or shorter periods, according to the nature of the case. They obtain, as a rule, the ordinary weekly remuneration, board, and lodging, and when their fees have been paid, the patient's liability to them has hitherto ended. But now we are advised that in the case of these independent Nurses, and in the case of those many hun.

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