

## The School Nurse.

The following group of papers on the School Nurse were presented to the International Nursing Conference at Paris.

### THE PLACE OF THE SCHOOL NURSE.

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In the first place, I must explain that although the work of a nurse in the National Schools of London for children has been going on for five or six years, I have only been connected with it a very short time, that is, since March, 1907.

The few nurses appointed by the County Council, when it took over the management of the schools, attended the schools and gave their time to a variety of duties, in fact, became a sort of first-aid to the children for cut fingers, sore eyes, etc. This was not altogether satisfactory, and it could only be done in a very perfunctory manner, and then the County Council Medical Officer restrained them from giving their time to useless work, and required that they looked after the general condition of the scholars with regard specially to cleanliness, and to the cases of contagious skin diseases, such as ringworm, scabies, etc.

This work was then found to be so extensive that the number of nurses had to be increased, and then, again increased, until now we have thirty-two.

Last March I was appointed to take over the superintendence of these nurses, and if I could, draw the units together, and make an organised whole.

You will see that my own appointment is so recent that I cannot speak definitely at present of what we hope to arrive at, and will, therefore, go on now to tell you what we are doing, and then what we hope to do, and lastly the kind of nurse best adapted to do it.

As to what we are doing:

The School Nurse has a varying number of schools to attend, according to the character of the district they are in; but the least number is 24, and the largest 48. I may say here that I am afraid even 24 is too large a number to be attended often enough to get a good result, and we hope in time to considerably increase our number of nurses.

The nurse goes to the school, and, with the help of the heads of the school, goes through the children, with a view to finding out how many are infected with vermin, either in their hair or in their clothes, and if any have any form of skin disease.

If any of the children are found dirty and

verminous, or with ringworm or scabies, they are excluded from attending school, and if, after many warnings, they still continue to be in an unfit state to associate with the others, the case is taken up by the divisional superintendent, who summons the parents at the police court to explain why their children are not in school. When the magistrate hears from the nurse that she was obliged to send the children out of school on account of their dirty condition, he usually imposes a fine, which is made very heavy for a second offence.

Such a course of proceeding is already making a very considerable difference in the condition of the children in school, and it is curious to see the surprise of the parents when they begin to realise the difference between our estimate of uncleanness and their own.

They are often very indignant, and give the nurse a very bad time, in fact, during the first years of the work, one nurse was obliged to be escorted away from a school by the police, as enraged parents announced their intention of waiting to give her two black eyes. They are not so bad now, but are still often very abusive and rude.

How often I wish that we could enforce short hair among all infants, and oblige the girls to plait or tie their hair back; as far as the nurse is concerned it would save no end of trouble, and be most helpful.

What I have been saying as to prosecuting the parents, does not, of course, apply to cases of skin disease, such as ringworm, and these are more troublesome to the nurse than anything else; the difficulty of getting proper treatment for it, the want of agreement as to what is a cure, the certificates given by medical men without microscopic examination, and, therefore, a difference of opinion with the Council's medical officer—all are difficulties. Then, as the parents are very apathetic, often the child is out of school for months, sometimes even over a year. Naturally the teachers are anxious to get the child back in school as soon as they can, and sometimes they take the children in and fail to let the nurse know, and the next thing is another case of ringworm and more trouble all round.

I feel I must not fail to speak of a new and most important branch of the nurse's work, that is, in urging the use of the cleansing stations, where free baths are provided for children, and during their bath their clothes are disinfected by heat. Until the last few days there were but few only of these baths available, but I am glad to say the Medical Officers of Health are now co-operating with the County Council, and placing baths and an

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