

THE
BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING
WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD
EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 1,075.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 1908.

Vol. XLI.

Editorial.

NURSES AS PUBLIC OFFICIALS.

The position accorded to nurses in the Children's Bill, in which they have been placed on the same footing as medical practitioners in regard to sanctioning the administration of stimulants to children under five years of age, raises some very important points. We have always advocated the full recognition of the work of the trained nurse, but we have never desired, nor do the best trained nurses desire, that they should be regarded as possessing inferior medical qualifications. In their work, nurses are closely associated with medical practitioners, but the duties of each, and thus the education of each for the performance of these duties, differ essentially. We therefore regret that nurses should be regarded as in any way qualified to assume a position of special responsibility in relation to the administration of stimulants in the Children's Bill, as they receive no instruction in the course of their professional training, to qualify them for such a position. The second point is:—who is to be regarded as "a nurse" in connection with the Children's Bill? The term at present has no definite meaning, and there is apparently nothing to prevent a woman, with a few weeks' training, assuming the authority given to "a nurse" under the Act, to prescribe stimulants for infants with the same confidence as a medical practitioner whose professional education has extended over five years.

Another duty which it has been suggested should be imposed upon nurses is the certification of the inability of school children in country districts who are unable to attend school.

In the House of Commons Mr. Arnold Herbert recently asked the President of the

Local Government Board whether he could see his way by regulation to authorise the acceptance of a certificate by a district nurse as to the inability of a child to attend school in country districts owing to the difficulty often experienced of obtaining the certificate of a medical practitioner. Mr. Runciman said, in reply, that the matter was not dealt with by the Board's regulations. It was for the local education authority in each area to say, in the first instance, what evidence they would accept under the law of school attendance as sufficient to excuse a child from attending school, and in cases of prosecution for non-attendance it was for the magistrates to decide as to the sufficiency of the evidence and excuse.

This certification, in isolated country districts, might, we think, usefully be deputed to thoroughly trained nurses, for it is not suggested that they shall either diagnose or prescribe, but merely certify to the inexpediency of children attending school.

But these recent instances of the present tendency to recognise nurses as competent to be entrusted with important public duties, and even to be accorded special privileges by Act of Parliament, afford the best possible demonstration of the need for a definite standard of nursing education, which must be attained by nurses before they are recognised as qualified to undertake such duties. It cannot be too strongly insisted that, at the present time, the term "trained nurse" has no definite meaning; and if nurses are to be regarded as experts, and on that ground to be held qualified to discharge duties requiring special knowledge and skill, it is evident that means should be forthcoming of ascertaining the extent of this knowledge. Such a means is ready to hand in the Nurses' Registration Bill, and it has become imperative that this Bill should speedily pass into law.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)