

"The examination consists of written and oral parts. The paper for the written part is set by examiners appointed by the Medico-Psychological Association; the *vivâ voce* part is conducted by the superintendent of the particular asylum in which the attendants are engaged, with the help of an assessor, who is generally a friendly superintendent; they also mark the papers. As the number of successful candidates redounds to the credit of the superintendent, this part of the examination can scarcely be an impartial one.

"As to the standard of work required. If the official text-book is perused, it will be seen that it contains a very superficial smattering of anatomy and physiology, with thirteen pages devoted to symptoms of disease and disorder, fifteen to mind and its disorder, nineteen to sick nursing, and thirteen to mental nursing. Taking the standard of work required from the official handbook, together with the method of examination, one cannot but think that the value of the certificate is not what its high-sounding name leads one to expect.

"The rarity of unsuccessful candidates is a curious phenomenon about this examination. In all examinations, which have any pretensions to any standard at all, there is always a percentage of failures; yet in this examination, it is no uncommon thing for batches of attendants in various asylums to all present themselves successfully.

"A guide to the standard and value of the examination may be taken from the examination of the St. John Ambulance Association in first aid. It frequently happens that candidates for the Medico-Psychological Association's Examination are prepared simultaneously for the First Aid Examinations of the St. John Ambulance Association, and, whereas the successful candidates for the former examination are often one hundred per cent., yet the same candidates for the latter supply a fair amount of failures, although it is an examination which is easily passed by policemen and railway porters of average intelligence.

"I do not wish to decry in any sense the systematic training of asylum attendants by means of lectures and examinations, but, when the Medico-Psychological Association takes upon itself the business of launching into the world certificated individuals, surely the general medical world, and the public, may expect that such certificates should indicate that the holders possess that sound knowledge, and ability, which has enabled them to pass an examination which should be thorough and impartial.

"No objection can be urged against superintendents of asylums training and examining their own attendants and nurses, and using their own certificates, as is the practice in hospitals; but it is certainly harmful for a public body to organize a system of training and examination of an exceedingly low standard, and, after delegating the functions of examiners to individuals who cannot be impartial, and who are perhaps even unconnected with them, to issue certificates which are really no guarantee of knowledge or proficiency. I may say that I speak from personal experience, having for some years prepared candidates for the above examinations, with what must have been flattering success, were not the real facts of the case known to me.

"I am, etc.,
"M. P. C."

The *British Medical Journal*, of September 4th, contains a reply to "M. P. C." from Mr. Charles

Mercier, Hon. Sec. of the Educational Committee, Medico-Psychological Association. The first two statements made by "M. P. C." Mr. Mercier disposes of by denying, but we must draw attention to the fact that to deny is not to disprove, and that in order effectually to meet these statements the only course to adopt is to refute them. With regard to the statement that the "Handbook for Attendants on the Insane" "contains a very superficial smattering of anatomy and physiology," we are told "it contains as much anatomy and physiology as, in the opinion of competent judges, it is essential for an attendant on the insane to know." Mr. Mercier contends that, though the system of examination by the Medico-Psychological Association may not be perfect:—

"It is an advance upon any system, elsewhere in practice, for ensuring the proficiency of nurses. It is true that superintendents examine their own nurses, but in this examination they are subject to the check of the observation and participation of an outsider, who may be, as 'M. P. C.' suggests, a personal friend of the examining superintendent, but who is, at any rate, a stranger to the examinees. The certificates given to hospital nurses are subject to no such checks. The amount of training, the system of training, the stringency of the examination, are entirely at the discretion of the authorities of the hospital, who are also the examiners."

We are entirely of opinion that, provided the standard of examination be a satisfactory one, a public examination for hospital nurses is much to be desired, and we may here point out, that the fact that this has not been established long since, is not the fault of the leaders of the nursing profession, who have pleaded for it for years. They have been hotly opposed by certain medical men and hospital committees, presumably because they are afraid that their nurses would not come up to the required standard, or because they at present certificate nurses without any examination whatsoever, as well as because they do not desire the professional advancement of the trained nurse. As an illustration of "M. P. C.'s" contention that the standard of knowledge required of candidates for the Medico-Psychological Society's examination is not a high one, at all events as to *practical* knowledge, we quote the following letter, which appeared in the last issue of *Asylum News*:—

"Sir,—As you invite correspondence, may I mention a subject which may interest both the medical superintendents, and the staff, of all asylums? Recently, a medical gentleman applied to us for an attendant, for a patient of his, living in a very remote district, and several miles from a town. He required a man who could use the feeding tube three, or four times a day, as the distance was so great, and he was too busy a man to be able to attend more than once a day. We had five men disengaged, all in possession of the Medico-Psychological Association certificates, and not one of them had ever used the feeding tube or

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)