

The Work of Midwives and Maternity Nurses.—Its Need and Organization in Rural Districts.*

BY LADY LAURA RIDDING.

(Continued from page 352.)

BEFORE launching the scheme it is well to ascertain where maternity or other trained nurses are already working in the county. Representatives from each of these localities, the leading medical men, officers of health, the Chairman and committee of the County Hospital, the leading men and women of influence in the county, and representatives of the press, should then be invited to join in bringing the matter before the County Council, and, with their co-operation, to call a public meeting at which the scheme should be propounded. Trouble must be taken to secure good reports of the meeting, and favourable leading articles in every local paper. These will bring the question before the news readers in the county. It is most desirable to secure insertion of the reports in the weekly papers, as they are the ones most read in villages. Happily nursing is not concerned with religious or political differences. It affords a platform on which all may meet in friendly co-operation.

In forming the General Committee for managing the County Federation, it is desirable that every rural district maintaining a nurse should be invited to send one or more representatives on to it, and that the leading medical men should be ex-officio members. The federation fees should be merely nominal, as it is a great object to induce every District Association to join. The General Committee must formulate its constitution and elect an executive.

I will now pass on from the County Federation to the formation of village or district associations. If it be necessary to prepare the ground carefully before launching the county scheme, it is quite as much so with regard to overcoming local objections and gradually infusing a friendly desire for a nurse into cautious, conservative villages. Opposition usually comes from the vested interests of existing Gamps; from medical men where they are too numerous for the population; and from stubborn prejudice against new ideas. Patience and tact frequently turn the first objectors into friendly assistants to the nurse; where that is impossible, age, infirmity and death silence them as time goes on. The second set of objectors are rare. As a rule, the medical men welcome our maternity nurses more warmly than any one. And experience of benefits received is the best transformer of the prejudiced critic into a grateful patient. But, knowing that opposition will

lurk in every village, it is well to expect it and to disarm it with patient explanations.

The first step therefore before consulting the Parish Council, or calling a public meeting, is to secure the approval of the village mothers; else (as experience has taught me) the whole scheme may be wrecked for want of home-rule influence having been brought to bear upon the husbands and fathers previous to the public meeting called to discuss it.

At that meeting, when the proposal is formally laid before the meeting, the whole business should be ready in shape for immediate action. Some one (such as the secretary of the County Association with large experience of successful district nursing in various villages) should be ready to describe the scheme and answer objections. An outline of professional rules, a scale of suggested payments, a list of selected names for a provisional committee, should be ready to bring before the meeting. A resolution should be passed that it is desirable to form such an association for the village or group of villages, and an invitation should at once be given to those present to enrol themselves as members.

The rules, scale of payment, and arrangements must be made by the committee. It is impossible to pass them satisfactorily at the public meeting; but the general approval of the meeting should be obtained. The parish doctor and other medical men should be ex-officio members of the committee, and each village should have a secretary or referee to whom the nurse refers for direction. The committee must be elected by a meeting of members. This is done after the list of members (*i.e.* subscribers) is filled; and a house-to-house canvas to enlist subscribers is useful, as it gives opportunities for explanations and persuasion.

The duties of the committee are to make the rules, determine scale of payment, obtain funds, help with sick cookery, and show general interest in the work.

The duty of the secretary is to receive the nurse's report, to direct her work, to decide between conflicting claims on her services, to protect her from overwork, and to investigate when there are complaints; and, when she also undertakes the duty of treasurer, to receive fees and subscriptions.

The rules should be printed on a card, and a copy given to each subscriber. They should be as simple and as few as possible; but they are necessary to define the nurse's duties, and to guard her from having unfair duties thrust upon her. It is sometimes forgotten that she is parish nurse, but not parish charwoman.

The scale of payment usual in villages is an annual one of 2s. a year for householders of the labouring class, 3s. for cottagers, 5s. for farmers, tradespeople, etc. All subscribers subscribing more than 5s. a year become honorary members

* A paper read before the Conference of the National Union of Women Workers, 1898.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)