

A Conference on the Qualified Nurse.

A well-attended Conference, to discuss the Report of the Departmental Committee on Nursing, appointed by the President of the Local Government Board, was held on Monday at 10, Great George Street, Westminster, by kind permission of the Hon. Mrs. J. G. Talbot. The chair was taken by the Right Hon. J. G. Talbot, M.P., who said that he was pleased to preside for two reasons—first, to support whatever means could give encouragement to the better nursing of the sick in infirmaries; and, secondly, to learn rather than to teach. The fact that the Conference was taking place was encouraging, for he well remembered the time when, as Chairman of the Board of Guardians of the parishes of St. Margaret's and St. John's, those members who desired to employ a paid nurse were regarded as almost radical revolutionaries. Now all this was changed, and the duty now before us was to see that the progress made was maintained. The danger apprehended was that the recognition of an inferior order of nurses would retard instead of advancing nursing progress. If this were realised by the President of the Local Government Board, the Board would not commit themselves to this bad policy.

Miss Jane Wilson, Treasurer of the Workhouse Nursing Association, first read resolutions from the Chairman of the Sheffield Board of Guardians, the Bath Guardians, and the Paddington Guardians objecting to the sanctioning by authority of a lower grade of nurses.

Referring to the Report, Miss Wilson said the Departmental Committee had not been appointed without reason or without pressure being brought to bear. While some of the recommendations made were excellent, as, for instance, in relation to salaries, comfort, and recreations, on some of the most important points, there appeared to be a serious error of judgment, and views contrary to those commonly held by experts were expressed. The questions dealt with were three-fold. For Guardians they resolved themselves into (1) how to obtain good nurses, and (2) how to keep them. In her view, if the Government laid down that the sick were to be properly nursed, it should take steps to create a supply of efficient nurses. After discussing the opportunities for instruction afforded by "minor" training-schools, and showing they were altogether inadequate, Miss Wilson said that many Guardians were of opinion that less highly-skilled nurses were sufficient to nurse the usual cases in rural infirmaries, but chronic and paralysed cases required nursing second to none, and while the death of one victim of bad nursing occurred she held it was a national disgrace. That skill was not always appreciated by Guardians was evident from the evidence of Mr. Preston Thomas, one of the inspectors under the Board, who related that one Guardian had said of candidates for nursing appointments: "Well, the less they know the better; then us can get them into our ways all the quicker."

The third question beyond that of obtaining and keeping good nurses was that of defining the spheres of duty of the various officials in workhouses, or what is known as the dual control of the Matron and the Superintendent Nurse. The Committee recommend improvements in the position of the Superintendent

Nurse, where she is appointed, but they would make it optional to appoint one in infirmaries of from 60 to 100 beds, whereas at present wherever three nurses are appointed one must hold the position of Superintendent. The effect of this recommendation would be to place 500 infirmaries under the supervision of untrained Matrons.

Miss Wilson advocated the organisation of Poor Law nurses, in a national service in which they would have a defined position and corresponding prestige, with pensions before they became decrepit—*i.e.*, at the age of fifty-five.

Mr. H. Bonham Carter, Secretary of the Nightingale Fund, showed what a trained nurse is, and how her efficiency consists not only in the length of training she receives, but on the personal qualities she brings to the work, and on the instruction she receives from skilled teachers who have been taught to train, so that she does her work not mechanically merely, but in an intelligent manner. These conditions would be wanting in the wards of rural workhouses. He hoped the recommendation as to the qualified nurse would be withdrawn. He believed, if carried out, it would have the effect Miss Wilson feared, of damaging other nurses, introducing a lower grade of nurses, and of injuring the sick public.

Miss Brodie Hall (Eastbourne) spoke from the point of view of the Guardian, and said that between the point of view of this official and of the trained nurse there was often a wide chasm. She thought Metropolitan Guardians and Associations had little conception of the difficulties of rural ones. She thought the supply of nurses could best be maintained through a central organisation; chance advertising was not a satisfactory method. Country Guardians were apt to be impressed by a pleasant appearance and powers of conversation on the part of a candidate. She thought that one difficulty in training a sufficient supply of nurses might be met by making a school depend for recognition not merely on the fact that it maintains a resident medical officer and has a certain number of beds, but on its merits, in producing evidence of efficiency in training.

Mr. Heywood Johnstone, M.P., who had been specially deputed to speak of the qualified nurse, said he frankly admitted that, as suggested, she was not an acceptable person. He observed that hardly one of the previous speakers had been able to keep away from her. The description of women who had received one year's training in minor training-schools as qualified was misleading. There was justifiable objection to the proposal, and he saw no reason why it should be adhered to. He thought some other name could be found without describing a woman practically without training as qualified.

Miss Louisa Twining, a veteran in the cause of Poor Law nursing reform, said that fifty years ago she was saying the same things that she said to-day. It was of the highest importance that there should be women inspectors of country workhouses; there was only one and she worked in the metropolitan area, where she was least wanted. Mr. Asquith had recently been asked to consider the expediency of increasing the female branch of factory inspectors, and if women inspectors were found necessary in this connection, how much more where nursing was concerned. There were at present only two non-medical male inspectors, one for the metropolis and one for all England.

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