

The Select Committee on Nursing.

The Select Committee of the House of Commons on Nursing met to take evidence on Tuesday, June 27th. Mr. H. J. Tennant was in the chair, and there were present Lord Morpeth, Sir John Batty Tuke, Dr. Hutchinson, Major Balfour, Mr. Pierpoint, and Sir John Stirling Maxwell.

PROFESSOR WHITE'S EVIDENCE.

The first witness called was Dr. E. W. White, Superintendent of the City of London Asylum, Dartford, Professor of Psychological Medicine at King's College, and a Vice-President of the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses. Dr. White said he considered a system of registration desirable for nurses for the insane, and described the method of systematic instruction, followed by a test examination and registration, instituted and carried out in connection with the Medico-Psychological Association for such nurses. The period of training required extended over three years, and must be passed in not more than two institutions.

Under exceptional circumstances the Registrar might sanction the admission of a candidate to examination who had had less than the training ordinarily required. To be eligible for examination, candidates must have attended systematic courses of lectures given by members of the medical staff of an Asylum, and have received clinical instruction from the staff, and practical instruction from the charge nurses; they must also have studied the Handbook published by the Society. They were examined in the principles of first aid, in the features of mental disorder, and in the nursing of the sick. The examination was conducted twice yearly in the various asylums; the uniform written paper was set by the Society, the *vice-voce* examination was conducted by the Superintendent of the Asylum with an independent assessor, approved by the President, usually the Superintendent of a neighbouring asylum. The Register was kept by the Registrar of the Association. The names of those entered upon it were liable to be erased for sufficient cause shown.

The examination had proved so successful that the certificate of the Society was now practically essential to promotion for asylum nurses, and also those who held it were usually able to command £2 extra pay. It was not claimed that all those holding this certificate were born nurses, but its possession showed that they had attained a uniform standard of efficiency, which had been tested by examination, and that they were of good character.

The mental nurses of to-day were frequently persons of education and refinement, and possessed the tact and sympathy which were so essential in the treatment of patients. In conclusion, the witness said that his Association hoped that male and female mental nurses would be recognised under any Act which might be passed, and that representation on the Nursing Council created under the Act would be accorded to them.

From his knowledge of Nursing Homes he had formed the opinion that all Nursing Homes should be registered and officially inspected.

Replying to questions, the witness said that the system instituted by his Association was in microcosm, what was suggested should be done by the State for the whole country. It had undoubtedly been successful, and a system having the pomp and circumstance of the State behind it would be more so.

In any scheme suggested the written paper should certainly be set by a Central Council, or uniformity of standard could not be secured.

In regard to the argument that a registered nurse might become incompetent, and that "once registered" was "always registered," the witness saw no substance in this objection. Once competent a nurse remained competent. The Medical Register was not revised, and he did not see why a Nursing Register should be. He was opposed to allowing the hospitals to set their own examinations. It would not in this case be possible to maintain a standard, and the examination could not be considered unbiassed if carried on by the school.

DR. SHUTTLEWORTH'S EVIDENCE.

Dr. Shuttleworth, Hon. Secretary of the Asylum Workers' Association, said he agreed with Dr. White's evidence. As representing that Association, he said that the members were encouraged to obtain the certificate of the Medico-Psychological Association, which they regarded in the light of a qualifying body. He would like to emphasise the importance of providing ample opportunities of nursing the sick for male nurses. At present they did not have the same chance as female nurses. The only hospital in London giving training to male nurses was the National Hospital for Epilepsy, Queen Square, which was a special, not a general hospital. The Asylum Workers' Association had endeavoured to obtain training for them in Poor Law Infirmarys, but so far it had not been successful.

MR. J. PATTEN MACDOUGALL'S EVIDENCE.

Mr. J. Patten MacDougall, Vice-President of the Scottish Local Government Board, described the system by which the employment of trained nurses is encouraged in Scotch Poor Houses, where pauper nursing is not prohibited by law as it is in England and Ireland, and also the system of Registration in existence under the Local Government Board.

In 1889 the Regulations then existing were stereotyped. The Board was tied by those Regulations, under which it was compelled to recognise the two years' standard of training. Until they got an Act of Parliament giving them powers to alter these Regulations they were bound by them. There was a Government Bill now before the House with this object. A Departmental Committee of the Scottish Local Government Board had meanwhile been taking evidence to show what it was proposed to do, and had reported that the enforcement of the three years' standard of training was desirable. The Scottish system of Poor Law relief was worked mainly on the outdoor plan. He considered that outdoor paupers should be nursed by trained women. Untrained nursing was not sufficient. In some instances, the Parish Councils contributed to the cost of the Queen's nurses in the district, and so secured their care for pauper cases.

The evidence of Professor White and Mr. MacDougall was valuable as showing that both in the case of the Scottish Local Government Board and in regard to mental nurses, the need of uniformity as to standard and subsequent registration of nurses has been felt, and, pending State action, both the above Board and the Medico-Psychological Association have instituted and maintain Registers of their own.

The Select Committee have decided to take no further evidence, and will now prepare their Report.

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