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Editorial.

NURSE OR MIDWIFE.

The word nurse is so frequently used as a description of women who are only certified midwives that it becomes necessary to define the two terms. A trained nurse is understood to be a person who has received practical and theoretical instruction in a hospital in the care of the sick, and who, when trained, undertakes this under the direction of a qualified medical practitioner.

A midwife in this country is a woman who is registered under the Midwives' Act, and whose fitness for acting in this capacity in normal cases is thus recognised by law. She is concerned therefore in the care of women in an ordinary state of health, passing through an ordinary and natural process. So far and no further she is held by the law to be competent, and may take the full responsibility of attendance on a case without the supervision of a medical practitioner. It is to fulfil this function that she receives her training, and not that she may act as a nurse. Indeed, she may qualify as a midwife without having once seen a sick person. The law recognises no capacity on her part in connection with the sick, and the Midwives' Act expressly enjoins that her certificate as a midwife does not confer upon her any right to undertake the charge of cases of abnormality or disease in connection with parturition.

Immediately any abnormality occurs in connection with the process, or any disease is present, the authority of the midwife to deal with the case ceases, she must decline to attend alone and advise that a medical practitioner be sent for. It is thus clear that a midwife has no qualifications for the care of sick persons, though it happens not

infrequently that a certified midwife is also a trained nurse. Nevertheless, the distinction between the two is clearly defined and should constantly be borne in mind.

Another point is of importance in this connection. The use of the title of "midwife" is protected by law, and any person now using it in England who is not certified under the Act is liable on conviction to a fine of £5. The term trained nurse is unfortunately not similarly protected, and, pending legislation, it is freely used by many persons, midwives included, who would have no right to the title were the profession of nursing regulated by the State.

A proof that the terms are considered interchangeable may be found in the remarks of the President of the Executive Committee of the Essex County Cottage Nursing Association, at its recent annual meeting. She said that "the demand for nurses was so great that they considered the County Council should provide training instruction in nursing at the county technical schools. This had become the more necessary since the law was forbidding untrained people to act as nurses, a serious matter in the country, where hundreds of villages were entirely without nurses."

These remarks apply obviously to midwives not nurses. There is no law forbidding untrained persons to act as nurses, and those nurses who are working for legislation are not seeking to limit the practice of nursing to registered nurses. The Bill, introduced into the House of Commons by Mr. Munro-Ferguson, expressly provides that the Act shall "not apply to any person attending the sick for hire who does not assume to be a registered nurse under this Act." It is distinctly detrimental to nurses, therefore, that such a statement as the foregoing should be made.

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