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Editorial.

THE PROTECTION OF THE INSANE

One of the points which needs the attention of the Commissioners in Lunacy, who have the oversight of asylums both public and private, and are therefore responsible for the efficient care of the patients, is the quality of the nursing in private asylums. We have previously alluded to the importance of the nursing of border-line cases in which skilled or unskilled nursing may make all the difference between recovery and permanent impairment of the mental condition. Of equal importance is the nursing care of mental patients, in which firmness of will power, as well as kindness and gentleness, and comprehension of the condition of the patient are so important in those who have the responsibility of attending on them day and night.

The Visitors in Lunacy when they visit an institution are able to judge of the mental condition of the patients, and to give an expert scientific opinion as to their condition and the line of medical treatment to be adopted.

But what do they know of the nursing care which patients receive? Very little. There is no standard required by the Commissioners in Lunacy to be attained by those put in responsible nursing charge of the patients, and consequently none is maintained. Private asylums are usually for the private profit of individuals whose profits are proportionate to the cheapness of the nurses they employ. We think that the Commissioners should at least require that the attendants employed in private asylums must hold the certificate of the Medico-Psychological Association, which is at present the recognised standard for mental nurses, or its equivalent; that is to say, the certificate of an asylum like Berrywood which has always maintained a high standard and given its own.

At present there is no guarantee that the persons who act as nurses in these institutions, and who appear in nursing uniform when the Visitors in Lunacy pay official visits, have ever spent a day either in a hospital or in an asylum, or have had any training whatever to qualify them for the work they undertake. It will be remembered that Sir Victor Horsley informed the Select Committee on Nursing that on visiting a private nursing home his suspicions were aroused as to the nurse in attendance on his patient, and on making inquiries he discovered that she was a housemaid put into nursing uniform. Much the same thing, has within our own knowledge, been known to happen in private asylums, and it is of the utmost importance, for the sake of a most helpless class of patients, that a standard of nursing efficiency should be enforced in licensed private asylums. We would suggest that the Commissioners in Lunacy should ask for an annual return of the nurses employed in licensed houses, and the training each has received, and that additional Visitors in Lunacy, who have held appointments as matrons of hospitals or asylums, should also be appointed whose duty it should be to investigate and report upon the efficiency of the nursing arrangements in private asylums.

In an even more helpless position are the nervous and border-line cases, placed in houses under the superintendence of untrained persons who are not competent to judge of the qualifications of the nurses they employ, and which often only receive a brief daily visit from the medical attendant. We have known well-trained nurses who know what is due to patients, most distressed at the lack of efficient care they receive, and who have been placed in most unpleasant circumstances in their efforts to secure the well being of their charges.

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