

Women's Work in Public Health Departments.

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During recent years the usefulness of women as inspectors or visitors to assist in the administration of the Public Health Acts has been more and more recognised. Many of the large manufacturing towns have for some years employed female workshop inspectors to look after the interests of women workers, and more recently the Midwives' Act of 1902 has practically created a new class of inspectors. The experiment of having women as Sanitary Inspectors or "Health Visitors," as they are often called, has been tried in both town and country districts, and has almost invariably proved extremely successful. Now that the new Notification of Births Act, by which all births must be notified to the Medical Officer of Health within 36 hours, and the Education (Administrative Provisions) Act, which provides for the medical inspection of the children attending the Elementary Schools, have become law, it seems probable that the field for women's work will be largely extended, and that many new appointments will be made. In view of this, it may be interesting to know a little of the conditions of Public Health work and the necessary qualifications for it.

The official qualification for all inspectors working in Public Health Departments is that of "Inspector of Nuisances under the Public Health Act of 1875," and this applies to women as well as men. To obtain this qualification it is necessary to pass the examination of the Royal Sanitary Institute, or (for work in London) of the London Examination Board. In addition to this, training as a nurse is practically *indispensable*, except in the case of a Workshop Inspector, where it is not so necessary. This training should, if possible, have included fever work, and experience with children; while Out-Patient work will prove to be especially valuable. For the post of Inspector of Midwives a certificate of midwifery should, of course, be held. In some places, what may be called a "Holt-Ockley" system of health visiting has been adopted, where women with a little training in nursing and hygiene have been employed at salaries of 17s. 6d. or £1 weekly, but the Medical Officers of Health are now almost unanimously in favour of the woman of good education and thorough training.

Training in a good hospital is also useful

because some of the subjects for the inspectors' examination (*e.g.*, hygiene, infectious diseases and disinfection) are already familiar to the trained nurse from her hospital lectures. The work for the Sanitary Institute examination is very interesting; besides the subjects just mentioned, it includes knowledge of building construction and materials, drainage and sewage disposal, characteristics of good and bad food, and methods of inspection of special premises and trades. Knowledge of the Public Health Acts and of Sanitary Law is also required, and this is to many the most difficult part of the work, on account of its unfamiliarity. Before taking the examination candidates must show that they have either attended approved courses of lectures and demonstrations, or received some instruction in a Public Health Department, and so gained a practical insight into sanitary work.

The salaries vary considerably in different districts, but for fully qualified women seem generally to commence at from £80 to £100. Uniform is sometimes provided, but not often; nor, as a rule, is it considered desirable that it should be worn. The hours are usually about seven a day, but depend a good deal on stress of work. Holidays are from two to four weeks yearly, with the addition of the Bank Holidays and a half-day on Saturday.

It is quite impossible in a short article to give an account of all the work which may be done by the women inspectors. The duties of a Midwives' Inspector are, perhaps, most clearly defined, and are explained in the title, but these duties may also include the visiting of newly-born babies, and giving advice to the mothers, and this work will probably be much increased in those places where the Notification of Births Act is adopted. The sphere of the Health Visitor is perhaps more varied, as new developments of the work are constantly occurring, and the Medical Officer of Health may from time to time require her assistance in different inquiries on which he may be engaged. Much may be done in connection with the question of Infant Mortality, while again in some towns cases of phthisis are notified to the Medical Officer of Health, and are then visited and advised as to the necessary precautions to be taken, and similar visiting may be done in the summer where cases of epidemic diarrhoea are notified. In other places the schools are made the starting-point, special attention being given to the cleanliness and sanitation of the school premises, while in cases of minor infectious diseases, want of cleanliness, defective sight, or any unhealthy condition of the children, their

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