

A Defenceless Public.

The following letter appeared in a recent issue of the *Lancet*. How defenceless the public are in relation to private nurses this letter demonstrates emphatically:—

A LURID STORY.

To the Editor of "*The Lancet*."

SIR,—The following story has several morals, the most obvious, perhaps, being the need for a proper system of nurses' registration and for the inspection of nursing homes and institutions.

Early this year a lady applied for admission as a nurse at a general hospital, but as she was thirty-four years of age she was considered too old to be engaged for the full period of four years' training. As in all other respects she seemed very suitable, the matron consented to take her on trial for three months as a paying probationer. She obtained a medical certificate stating that she was in good health, and gave two references, one from a lady who said she had known her for about twelve years, and in whose family she had at different times done some nursing; the other from the superintendent of a suburban nursing home, under whom she had worked for the previous three months. Both ladies spoke very highly of her. Both the applicant and her referees had to answer printed inquiries about her previous health and the diseases from which she had suffered, and said nothing whatever about any mental disorder. For about two months she did her work quite satisfactorily as a junior probationer in the hospital, when suddenly she developed symptoms of acute mania, addressed a postcard to the King, became incoherent, and had all kinds of delusions, religious, sexual, etc. Her nearest relation, a married sister living many miles away, was at once informed of the circumstances. She evidently telegraphed to a private asylum, from which a nurse was promptly sent, provided with an Urgency Order under the Lunacy Act, and as soon as this had been filled up at the hospital the patient was removed to the asylum. From this nurse it was ascertained that the patient had been under treatment in the same asylum on either four or five previous occasions, and that the last attack had been a very severe one, so that she had been detained about twelve months, and had only been discharged about a year ago.

Inquiries were now made from the matron of the nursing home, who had been one of the patient's referees. She acknowledged that when she engaged her, being rather pressed at the time for nurses, and satisfied with the applicant's appearance and address, she had accepted her without any references whatever, that she had nursed some patients in the institution and others in their own homes, and had given complete satisfaction. Thus we have an instance of a woman being taken on to the staff of a nursing home without having had any hospital training whatsoever, and without any inquiries being made. She is then placed in charge of patients, sometimes at their own homes, presumably as a fully-trained nurse, yet she had not long been discharged for the fourth or fifth time from an

asylum, and was liable at any moment to a fresh attack of acute mania.

As it happened, when the recurrence did occur, no particular harm was caused, but had the nurse been in a private house in sole charge of a patient seriously ill, instead of being merely a junior probationer in a hospital, the consequences might have been very different.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

F.R.C.P.

The reply of the Superintendent is subjoined.

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S REPLY.

To the Editor of "*The Lancet*."

SIR,—Will you please be good enough to allow me to reply to the letter you published in *The Lancet* to which you supply the title "A Lurid Story." I am the Superintendent of that nursing home. I most heartily agree with the writer's views as to the urgent need for "a proper system of nurses' registration." No one knows better than "A Trained Nurse" the terrible disadvantages we have to work under in private nursing. Although not at all in favour of the "militant" suffragette, I am looking forward hopefully to the present Government giving us our legal rights, and then we shall expect women's questions—of which State registration for nurses is, in my opinion, most pressing—to get their share of attention and legislation. All nursing homes and institutions should be open for inspection and I should be pleased to show any member of the profession over my small home at any time. Reading "F.R.C.P.'s" letter I at once saw the nurse had suppressed the fact that she had received some previous training. She had been a "paying probationer" for a year in one of our largest London hospitals and also for three years in a large surgical home in the North of England, where she was given a three years' certificate. I saw a copy of this, as also of two good testimonials, before admitting her to my staff. I was very busy at the time, so did not take her references up personally. That will not occur again. I have seen the Matron of the hospital where this sad occurrence took place and must express my sorrow that through any reference of mine—though absolutely accurate so far as I knew—the hospital should have had so much trouble and anxiety. Of course, I had not the least idea of lack of mental balance on the nurse's part, or for her own as well as our profession's sake I should have refused to recommend her for nursing.

I substantiate all the facts given as not being at all understated, but my conscience acquits me of disloyalty to my profession and to the public when I knew that nurse had four years of some sort of training (although the Matron will not allow that such training is worth anything). I have never sent the nurse in question to an outside case without the doctor being told that she was only partially trained. In justice to the nurse I must say that in the two private cases she took for me she received excellent reports.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

A TRAINED NURSE.

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