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Editorial.

OUR DUTY TO THE PUBLIC.

In looking forward into the New Year the one question of supreme importance with which nurses are confronted is that of their legal registration by the State—a question which indeed concerns not only ourselves, but is pre-eminently one for the public. A special responsibility, however, rests upon us as a profession, because we are in a position to understand the dangers with which the public are beset, so long as no standard of nursing education is defined and enforced and no standard of conduct afterwards maintained, and therefore upon us rests the chief burden of applying the remedy and of securing the legislation of which the public is in conscious need, but which it has not the expert knowledge to initiate. We know that every political dodge will be employed by persons maintaining inferior standards to prevent the passing of a Nurses' Registration Act; but the reform is a vital one which interested persons must no longer be permitted to delay. The protection and safety of the public are involved, and this is the point which must be pressed home in our campaign during the coming Session, during which, if we are sufficiently insistent and forcible, we ought to secure the legislation which we desire. We must rally all the forces in favour of the movement, and, combining on essential points, must press home upon the Government the public danger which exists so long as ignorant women are allowed to pose as skilled nurses, and, as such, are entrusted with responsible duties which can only be efficiently performed by the thoroughly trained.

We have only to point to the case which we recorded last week, in which a nurse sent out to a private case by a provincial nursing institution, administered, upon her

own responsibility, a dose of morphia to a healthy infant of five weeks old, with the result that the child died in the course of the following day of morphia poisoning, to emphasise this point. No evidence was offered at the inquest as to the training this nurse had received, but the fact that the medical man summoned to attend the baby testified that the dose of morphia was eighty times too large for a child three months old, proves that her assurance was only equalled by her ignorance, and the dangers to which the public are subjected when they employ women as trained nurses whose qualifications are an unknown quantity, and whose knowledge has never been tested by an independent expert authority.

We could wish that the hapless infant who was done to death through this nurse's culpable ignorance had been the heir to some historic title, when no doubt the press would have given much wider publicity to the case, and the public, in consequence, would have been alarmed at the complete irresponsibility of persons undertaking the serious care of the sick.

It is certain that many cases occur in which suffering and even loss of life are caused by ignorant nurses, the circumstances of which are never realised by the public, and which are hushed up without any scruple.

Is it not time that this national danger was fully realised and that the public demanded a standard of efficiency for its nurses as well as for doctors, chemists and midwives?

Nurses have many exceptional opportunities of informing the public on this important question, and they should never lose one such opportunity, until, by the force of public opinion, laws are enacted providing for the organisation of nursing under the authority of the State.

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