

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 1,105.

SATURDAY, JUNE 5, 1909.

XLII.

Editorial.

THE NURSE AS A FACTOR IN THE PREVENTION OF DISEASE.

The services of the trained nurse are in these days requisitioned in many directions, but in none are they of more value than in the prevention of disease.

Consider the devastation wrought by one disease, ophthalmia neonatorum, by which it is estimated that 7,000 cases of blindness are caused in Great Britain alone, costing the State £350,000 annually. But the cost in hard cash is secondary to the deprivation of sight of these 7,000 people, blinded for ever by a cruel and preventable disease before they have ever known the blessings of sight.

Nurses and midwives can do much to prevent this disease. By vigilance at the time of the child's birth, by close observation afterwards, the saving of a child's sight depends largely upon them. For it is their report which first draws attention to the disease in an incipient stage, and enables treatment to be prescribed and rigorously carried out at a time when it can be successful. Again, in their hands rests, night and day, the application of the prescribed remedies; and, thus, on their faithful carrying out of medical directions ultimate success depends, for it is on the constant cleansing of the eyes and on thorough treatment constantly applied that the medical attendant relies for success, and this duty is carried out by the trained nurse who can devote her whole time to its performance, for it is obvious the doctor cannot carry out the treatment which he knows to be of vital importance; as he has many other cases on his hands it is left to the trained nurse.

The infant suffering from ophthalmia neonatorum may be treated either in hospital or at home, and amongst the

poorer classes the latter plan is certainly the most satisfactory. The city of Liverpool has already, in a small way, made provision for these cases, at St. Paul's Hospital for Diseases of the Eye and Ear, where there is a ward where both mother and infant can be received. The scheme only came into operation eighteen months ago, and out of the seventy-five cases of ophthalmia removed to the hospital fifty-seven babies recovered the sight of both eyes. At the recent annual meeting the committee announced that they had decided to appeal for funds to build a new hospital, to be known as St. Paul's Eye Hospital, in which there would be an ophthalmic ward of ten beds and ten cots, and two wards (including isolation rooms) of ten beds each for boys and girls respectively.

Another notable direction in which nurses are concerned in the prevention of disease is in their visits to the schools, and the school nurse is thus a valuable worker in the cause of public health. By temporarily excluding and at once reporting to the medical officer suspicious cases coming under her observation, she may check at the outset an epidemic of such serious diseases as diphtheria and scarlet fever, which would otherwise cause trouble and desolation in many homes.

Indeed, the opportunities of the nurse to aid in the prevention of disease are so numerous that her power for good seems limited only by her own capacity. Tuberculosis work is another direction in which her services are of great value at the present day. She is a trusted and welcome visitor in many homes, and having the confidence of the people is able to inculcate lessons in hygiene. It remains for her, therefore, to equip herself as thoroughly as possible, so that she may adequately fill the many important openings which lie before her.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)