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EDITORIAL.

THE SHORTAGE OF NURSES.

One of the most serious facts brought before the Prime Minister by the Deputation from the Central Committee for the State Registration of Nurses on Monday last, was the shortage of nurses throughout the country; a fact emphasized by Miss Cox Davies, who mentioned that at a recent meeting of the Metropolitan Asylums Board, in reply to a question as to why cases of measles and whooping cough were not being received from certain districts in London, the Chairman of the Hospitals Committee (Canon Sprankling), said there was no help for it, and further, that it might be necessary in the future to exclude patients from other districts. There was a general deficiency of nurses throughout the country.

It is one of the most cruel phases of the opposition to the organization of the nursing profession that the poor, as is always the case, are the first to suffer, and employers of nurses who desire to keep them unorganized are assuming a very heavy responsibility in obstructing legislation.

When we consider the infectious nature of measles, and the fact that in epidemics the child population affected is decimated by the disease, we realize that the segregation of cases in infectious hospitals is of the utmost importance to the community.

Again, in the smaller poor law infirmaries and workhouse wards throughout the country, the shortage of nurses is a most urgent problem, and one which calls for immediate action. Then in the homes of the poor much of the nursing, instead of being performed by skilled nurses, is undertaken by women who have never had any general hospital training, and who are certified midwives with a short and quite insufficient experience in district nursing.

And this is undoubtedly having its effect upon the class of probationers entering the general hospitals for training, and drying up the most desirable source of supply. Twenty years ago there was a steady stream of applications for admission to our general hospitals from the daughters of the clergy and professional men, farmers, and upper class tradespeople. But when, throughout the rural districts, parents have practical demonstration of the uneducated, badly paid woman who is practising nursing, is it likely that those who aspire to place their daughters well will entertain the idea of their adopting a vocation whose members are daily in evidence before them as some of the most illiterate, and worst paid persons in the community?

It is impossible to prophecy that the granting of legal status to nurses would result in a large influx of well-educated women into our training schools; but it is certain that the lack of it is keeping them out, and we have clear demonstration of the value placed by trained nurses upon a legal qualification in the way in which many hundreds yearly spend time and money (from £20 to £40) in obtaining the certificate of the Central Midwives Board. Midwifery has still to prove that it can offer a living wage to educated women, before they adopt it in large numbers as their life's work, and many, perhaps, the majority of those who "take their C. M. B." do so, not because the Act prohibits their practising as midwives otherwise, for they have no intention of doing so, but because it affords an opportunity of which they have hastened to avail themselves, of giving the public a guarantee that in one branch at least their work and professional knowledge has been tested and approved. There is every reason to believe that they would show the same appreciation of a State qualification in Nursing, and there is urgent reason that this should be established.

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