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EDITORIAL.

NURSES IN THE LAW COURTS.

The fact that twice within the last fourteen months trained nurses, or women assuming to be trained nurses, have been tried at the Old Bailey on a charge of murder affords evidence to the public, if evidence is needed, of the peril to which it is subjected through the lack of any system of State Registration of Nurses.

In the first of the cases referred to the capital charge was withdrawn by the Crown, but the women were sentenced to terms of imprisonment for offences committed under circumstances which demonstrated their unfitness for the responsibilities of trained nurses. In the most recent case, that of Eva Grace Thompson, indicted on September 13th, before Mr. Justice Darling, for the murder of two children at the Sydenham Welfare Centre, and with causing grievous bodily harm to two others, the prisoner was found guilty, but insane at the time, so as not to be accountable for her act. She was therefore ordered to be detained until his Majesty's pleasure be known, which, the Judge pointed out, meant detention as a criminal lunatic, and added that there was not the slightest doubt that she had brought herself to that pass by the continued taking of drugs, or that she had fractured the skull of one baby and killed the second. One of the best results of that inquiry would be to show a large number of people the state and the position to which they could bring themselves by drug-taking.

The case is specially important, because the victims of this drug maniac were helpless infants, and in view of the fact of the great increase in the number of institutions for the treatment and care of infants, a number which will certainly be augmented

when a Ministry of Health is set up, it is most essential that the records of nurses to whom their care is entrusted should be readily available. Had an efficient system of State Registration of Nurses been in force, is it credible that a drug-maniac, with homicidal impulses, would have been able, with ease, to obtain employment in sole and responsible charge at night of a ward of sick babies?

So far as the published reports of the trial go, the police did not produce evidence of the professional training of the prisoner, but a police officer did state that he had received a report that from 1909 to 1912 she was in a home suffering from the result of drug taking. In the case of a registered nurse such an episode in her career would certainly be known. Moreover, the State Register, and the Official Directory based upon that Register, would be available to employers, and would also be at the disposal of every police court in the Kingdom as are the Medical Register and the Midwives Roll. We wonder how many sick people have been victimised by this criminal before her murderous mania brought her within the arm of the law. We understand that she was trained at a provincial fever hospital, and also for two years in a London hospital, the certificate of which she does not hold.

If public authorities in the near future are, as seems likely, to be increasingly responsible for the treatment and care of helpless infants and young children, public safeguards must be provided as to the competence and trustworthiness of the nurses in whose care, and at whose mercy, they are placed, and the foundation of such safeguards is the passage of the Nurses' Bill for their State Registration—opposed so bitterly and long by the Governors of Training Schools for Nurses.

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