

THE NEED FOR PROPERLY QUALIFIED WOMEN IN ALL BRANCHES OF PUBLIC HEALTH WORK.

A very interesting and well-attended Conference on the above subject was held at the offices of the Royal British Nurses' Association, 10, Orchard Street, London, W., on Saturday, January 11th. Miss K. Atherton, Medallist of the Royal Sanitary Institute, and Educational Organizer, Hampstead Council of Social Welfare, was in the Chair.

In her introductory remarks Miss Atherton defined the necessary training for a Public Health Worker as three or four years' hospital training, the certificate of a Central Midwives Board, and a recognized certificate in health work. Some training in Sociology was also valuable. There was still much room for education of the public and others. Thus in a film shown in Baby Week a prize baby was actually depicted with a comforter in its mouth, and a picture in the Carnegie reports, which were supposed to be standard works, showed each towel touching the next.

She thought that all present would be agreed that none but the best qualifications were good enough for work of this kind.

Miss Atherton then called on Miss Wise to read the first paper.

TRAINING FOR INFANT WELFARE AND PUBLIC HEALTH WORK.

Miss Wise, in responding, spoke as follows :

Before I read my Paper, I should like to take this opportunity of thanking Miss Macdonald for the trouble she has taken in arranging this meeting, and making it possible for us to discuss the subject of training for Infant Welfare Work and other branches of work connected with Public Health ; but I earnestly hope that discussion is to be only the preliminary to strong action, for grave dangers lie ahead, and I feel it is essential if the work is to attain its end of preventing disease and educating the community in the laws of health, that nurses should face the question and not only talk about it, but see that a scheme is put on foot for maintaining a supply of workers with qualifications adequate for the work they undertake.

I suppose everybody here knows how haphazard has been the method for years past of filling the ranks of infant welfare workers from any and sundry who happen to desire a change of occupation, or whose professional attainments are, like the private governess of old time, such, that they are not well enough educated for anything else. There are the people who consider they are fitted for the work because they are, as they express it, "keen on babies." There is the midwife who, tired of an ill-paid and exacting practice, thinks she might, by taking up infant welfare

work, " anyway, get her nights in bed." There is, I grieve to say it, the nurse who, almost worn out with years of arduous toil, imagines this form of employment might be a sort of remunerative rest cure.

These are facts, and they are bad enough ; but there is a still more serious condition of things threatened than the rule of King Log which has prevailed for so long. King Stork has made his appearance in the field, and the semi-demi-trained, or not trained, worker, whose enthusiasm and patriotism have made such an indelible mark upon the public notice, is to be rapidly prepared, free of cost to herself, for the highly skilled and very technical work of the prevention of disease and the instruction of the people in the laws of health and hygiene. I say all honour to those women who, in the hour of their country's dire peril, were ready, even though in many cases it was with the readiness of sheer ignorance, to give themselves to the cause of freedom, but while honouring them let us not forget those others who gave time, health, professional advancement in the same cause, fully realising, but never grudging the cost. Why should not they be among those who share in this—shall we call it—" Reward for Meritorious Service," and have the advantage of free training in what should be a branch of their own profession ? I, for one, do not think the community at large would suffer in consequence of the exchange.

We must face the fact that there are large numbers of people who conscientiously believe and firmly assert that those whose training has been in the caring for the sick are not the best fitted for Public Health Work ! I do not know the attitude of mind of these good people with regard to other Public Health Officers—whether they think that an architect, for instance, would be better fitted to carry out the duties of Medical Officer of Health, than a man or woman who has spent long years in the study of disease, its prevention and cure ; or whether they think that a woman who has successfully nursed patients through attacks of bronchitis is incapable of learning how bronchitis may be avoided.

I fear it is inevitable that while the Government leaves the bulk of the expense of infant welfare work to voluntary enterprise a large proportion of the work will be in the hands of voluntary workers ; nor is it to be expected that those who provide the sinews of war will be content with subordinate and unimportant parts of the work. This, perhaps, is beside the subject we are discussing, so I will not enlarge upon it now ; rather let us consider the V.A.D.—I repeat, let us render honour to her. She has nursed wounded soldiers for four years ; but has this given her knowledge of, say, marasmus ? She has tended shell shocked patients ; has this taught her how to advise an overworked and irritable mother, so that her irritability shall not react upon her children ? She has, maybe, applied bandages with marvellous correctness ; does she, therefore, know how to safeguard the health of the mother so that she

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