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EDITORIAL.

NURSES AND THE PARLIAMENTARY FRANCHISE.

We hope that nurses trained and in training have noted the important decision given on September 15th by the Southwark Registration Officer, Mr. P. H. Gray, the Town Clerk, at the Southwark Registration Court, relating to the granting of the Local Government and Parliamentary franchise to nurses. *The Times* report states:— "The decision concerned a considerable number of nurses and other members of the staff of Guy's Hospital, the Evelina Hospital, the Royal Eye Hospital, and Bethlem Hospital. An objection to the nurses being placed on the register of electors had been lodged by the Unionist Agent on the ground that in certain technical respects the condition of their residence and terms of their appointment were such as to disentitle them to exercise the franchise. The objection to a probationer nurse was taken as a test case. The Registration Officer said that as far back as 1870 it had been laid down that in construing the Statutes relating to the franchise the widest interpretation must be given to a description contained therein. Mr. Justice Darling said that a person who inhabited a dwelling-house by virtue of any office, service, or employment, was to be deemed an inhabitant occupier of that dwelling-house for the purpose of the Representation of the People Acts. The Town Clerk held that a contract of service had been entered into by the probationer nurse with the Governors of Guy's Hospital, and that the relationship of master and servant existed between them . . . there was sufficient occupation of a dwelling-house by virtue within section three of the Representation of the People Act, 1918, to confer the local government franchise upon the nurse in question, and also (she being over 30 years of age) the Parliamentary franchise."

The case selected as a test case was that of Miss Mary Baker-Jones, a probationer at Guy's Hospital. The Registration Officer ruled that by her agreement with the Governors of Guy's Hospital it was an essential condition of service that she occupied the bedroom allocated to her by the Matron on behalf of the Governors, and allowed her claim.

He added that the decision would apply to all the objections in respect of probationer nurses and others whose cases were identical with that of the respondent in the case which he had reviewed.

Mr. A. R. Blackford, before the Court rose, representing the Liberal interest, publicly expressed his appreciation of the lucidity with which Mr. Gray had dealt with a difficult problem.

THE PREVENTION OF INSANITY.

In these days we hear on all sides of the ideal condition at which the medical faculty, assisted always by its loyal ally the profession of nursing, is aiming, *i.e.* prevention rather than cure; for the fact that cure is necessary indicates that disease exists, and that is an evidence of failure.

In the treatment of physical diseases, and abnormal conditions, the aim of the doctor is to get the patient under his care at the earliest possible stage of the disease, for he knows that his chance of eventual cure is immeasurably increased thereby.

Yet, in the case of deviation from the normal in mental conditions, there is little hope of skilled treatment for the majority of cases as the law now stands. Dr. Graham, Medical Superintendent of the Belfast Mental Hospital, writes in his annual report for the year 1923, just published:—

"In my annual report of last year I commented on the urgent need of fresh lunacy legislation. I stated that the existing statutes did not sufficiently guarantee the proper treatment of the mentally afflicted. It is very evident that the Lunacy Acts require recasting to deal effectively with prevention and the incipient stages of mental diseases, as insanity in this country is not decreasing. Early treatment in insanity is just as important as in other forms of disease, if not more so. For many years those specially interested in lunacy affairs have frequently advocated reforms, but without success. It seems pitiable that one of the worst forms of disease should be denied skilled early treatment, and that it is not until the mental symptoms have developed so far as to render the individual unfit to be at large, that treatment commences following certification and its present-day attendant stigma. It is hoped that the Northern Government will take the earliest possible opportunity for revision of the existing Lunacy Acts, so that the mentally afflicted may have the advantage of modern methods of treatment."

The pitiable condition of the patient's condition when the disease has progressed so far that it is hopeless when it has come under treatment needs, no emphasis to trained nurses.

Yet of all illnesses that of the brain is likely to be hidden as long as possible, because, under our present laws, relatives dread certification and incarceration in mental hospitals for those who show symptoms of mental disease. Every endeavour should be directed to bringing such persons under treatment at the earliest possible moment.

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