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EDITORIAL.

THE SHORTAGE OF NURSES.

The question of the shortage of suitable probationers is one which from time to time provokes discussion in an endeavour to discover the cause, and provide a remedy, and such a discussion has been proceeding in the *Times* in which Matrons, and a medical man, have participated. But, in our opinion, they do not touch the real issue, which is that when there is so widespread a distaste for adopting nursing as a profession, there must be something repugnant in the conditions of training. Both material conditions, and material prospects, have changed enormously for the better of recent years. Although the incomes of many, perhaps the majority of people have shrunk since the war, the incomes of nurses have considerably increased, and also the standard of comfort.

Compare the standard of living enjoyed by a probationer in training in the majority of our hospitals to-day, with that of medical students, and it will not suffer in comparison, indeed, the advantage will probably be on the side of the probationer. Yet the medical student pays a substantial sum for his training, or rather, it is paid for by his father, who reckons the appropriate preparation of his son for a business, or profession, an obligation of parenthood, and is prepared to maintain him, and to give him the necessary personal allowance while he is qualifying himself for his life's work.

Many parents, probably the majority, feel no such obligation in regard to their daughters, although there was never a time when it was more essential for a girl to adopt a profession or calling in which she can look forward to at least a modest competence, through an occupation in which she can be usefully and happily employed. The prospects in both these respects are good for nurses, and still our training school authorities complain of the difficulty of attracting probationers, though they have set their houses in order, and offer residence in a well-equipped nurses' home, and board, lodging, washing, and salary while nurses are learning their business, things for which the medical student has to pay handsomely. We are thus forced to the conclusion that the disinclination of many a modern young woman to adopt nursing as a profession is not concerned with material things alone. We believe, indeed, that it is largely with the attitude adopted towards her mentality that those who desire to attract her into the nursing profession, have to reckon. While the conditions under which she works are enormously improved, the attitude assumed towards her mentality by training school authorities, is frequently unsatisfying, productive of resentment, chafes

and irritates her. She comes into contact with it, perhaps, through a friend, while her choice of her profession is in the balance, or through nurses whom she has met, so she looks elsewhere for her life's work, and thus, perhaps, a vocation is lost, and the dearth of probationers increased.

One thing is certain that the modern girl will not give up her individuality, and in hospitals individuality is largely suppressed. In the past numbers of women have found enormous happiness by giving their lives to the sick, and, incidentally, in the developing of their individuality. Present day conditions tend to discount this, and nursing nowadays is a much more materialistic occupation than formerly, and does not satisfy the spiritual side of girl's life as it did earlier in the developmental stage.

It is to the free development of body, soul and spirit to which we must look if we wish to attract sufficient numbers of suitable young women into the nursing profession to-day.

POOR LAW REFORM.

In the House of Commons on Wednesday Mr. Webb (Lab.-Soc., Seaham) moved:—

"That, in view of the costly overlapping of services and duplication of establishments in the various branches of public provision for the children, the sick, the aged and the unemployed able-bodied, and as a necessary preliminary to the much-needed revision of the grants in aid in relief of the burdens now pressing so heavily on local authorities and on industry, it is essential that any measure dealing with the Poor Law should be framed, generally, on the lines of the Report of the Committee of 1917 on the Transfer of Functions of Poor Law Authorities in England and Wales; and this House accordingly urges that the bill which it is intended to prepare and circulate to the local authorities this autumn should at least provide for a complete absorption of the existing Poor Law authorities and their functions in the County, Borough, and District Councils."

Replying on behalf of the Government, the Minister of Health said it was the intention of the Government to take up the question seriously at the first possible opportunity. He proposed to follow the course which was followed in the case of the Rating and Valuation Bill, which was sent out in draft in order to secure the benefit of the criticism of people who had local knowledge. When he had had that he would be able to put something before the House of Commons which he hoped would help to bring this long-needed reform to a happy and successful conclusion.

The resolution was agreed to.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)