

It was held, however, that, the Institution being a co-operative one, the Nurse was individually bound to render the full service for which she had been paid, and that, therefore, the contract really lay between her and the employer. Consequently, she was told that it was her duty to remain with her patient, at any rate, for the week agreed upon, and paid for; and, as she disputed this, the question has been submitted to us for our decision.

On the simple common-sense ground that the Nurse had promised to undertake certain duties, and had, through another party, received the stipulated payment for her services for a week, we entirely endorse the opinion which had been expressed, that she was in honour bound to fulfil her share of the contract. She had clearly entered into it of her own free will, and must accept the responsibility she had incurred. But, besides the purely technical argument, there is the higher professional reason, that the patient's interests are the first consideration. Private Nurses undoubtedly have much to put up with, in many ways; but, if they do not like the work, there is no compulsion upon them to undertake it. If they work with first-class agencies, such as the Registered Nurses' Society, the Nurses' Co-operation, the London Association of Nurses, and others, they obtain excellent remuneration for their work—payment, in fact, which is on a higher scale than that obtained by many clergymen of the Church of England. And they must, therefore, put the good results against the drawbacks of their special work, and certainly must determine to ignore, as far as possible, all the disadvantages and difficulties which they may encounter. On the broad general principle, there can be no doubt that they must fulfil, both to the letter and the spirit, the engagement into which they have entered, at whatever cost it may entail to themselves, and that they must remember that the welfare of their patients must always take precedence of their own comfort and pleasure.

The same principle, of course, is applicable in every branch of Nursing, and it is, we fear, from all that we have heard recently, one which is not thoroughly understood by some who are entering the profession. We hear, for example, from various Matrons, that Probationers are in the habit of joining their Hospitals, of signing agreements to remain for a certain specified time in the service of the Institution, and then, for any cause however slight—and sometimes for no cause at all—they seek to break their contract and to leave the Hospital. We would point out that such a breach of agreement is not only of great injury to the individual Nurse, but does harm to the *morale* of the whole profession. A promise should be held sacred, whether it be couched in the shape of a formal signed agreement, or given by word of

mouth, and it should be especially binding upon women who have undertaken such responsible and honourable work as that which devolves upon trained Nurses. It is, however, no question of persons but entirely one of principle. It is no less disgraceful and dishonest to evade the fulfilment of a promise because it has been made, perhaps, to a Hospital Committee and not to an individual. And it must have a detrimental effect upon the tone of Hospital workers generally, if the impression becomes at all general, that Nurses are privileged to break their promises whenever it may suit them not to fulfil the conditions which they have engaged themselves to perform, merely because these promises were made to an impersonal Institution.

#### NATIONAL DEFENCE.

The question which should come before all others, at present, is not so much the unity of the Empire as its efficient protection. The *Pall Mall Gazette* has therefore done a great work, and deserves well of the country in calling attention to the very serious need which exists for strengthening our first line of defence—the Navy. Our contemporary has shown that we must depend, both for defence against attack, and even for our very existence as a nation, upon our naval strength; that foreign nations are now provided with cruisers of extreme speed and power, which are evidently intended to harass, if not to destroy, our commerce, and to prevent the entrance of food supplies into these islands in the case of war. It is known that there is not in the country, at any moment, sufficient food to feed the population for more than three months, and that any interference, therefore, with the carrying trade of the country means, within a measurable distance of time, a rise in the price of bread to famine prices, and then the extreme probability of national starvation. There can be no doubt that England is far from popular with other nations. Its immense wealth, its wide-spread Empire, its prosperous colonies, all tend to make it an object of international jealousy. As in the olden days, so in the future, England must trust to its own right hand alone for its successful defence; and our contemporary has shown that, at present, we are lamentably weak both in ships, in guns, and in men. It has initiated, therefore, in the shape of a Naval Defence League, a movement which we cannot but think may prove to become one of immense importance. The object of those who join the League is to bring pressure to bear upon Members of Parliament, without distinction of party, to place before all other questions the proper defence of the country. Money has never yet been grudged for strengthening the Navy, and never will be grudged; and the suggestion of our contemporary that the defensive forces of the Kingdom should be organized, as are those of other countries, upon a rational and scientific basis, altogether above and independent of Party, will be welcomed by all who have the real interests of their Fatherland at heart. The *Pall Mall Gazette* will find it hard work to arouse the country to a sense of its danger—but if our contemporary will “peg away,” it is certain to gain both the success and the credit which it thoroughly deserves.

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