longer time than, when added to the time worked in the Institution, would exceed eight hours on the whole"; and that the principal paid Managing Officer should be liable to a penalty for any infringement of these provisions of the Act. Power was given to the Minister to suspend such of these conditions as might appear requisite in particular cases. The discussion which took place upon this clause was short, but very interesting. It was first proposed and agreed that its provisions should not prevent any Nurse from attending to any case of emergency. Considerable attention was drawn to the conditions under which Nurses work in England, and it was held to be most desirable that such hours as were described "should not be permitted in an Australian Colony." It was, however, pointed out that the clauses might unduly hamper the conduct of Charitable Institutions, and it was finally arranged that the hours of work should be 168 in any period of twenty-one days—that is to say, 56 hours in the week, or eight hours a day. The proposal as to the interval for meals was rejected. It was stated in Parliament that in some Institutions the Nurses on night duty were supposed to go without food unless they provided it for themselves, and that their position was such that legislation was necessary in order "to secure their treatment like human beings." Finally the Clause, as amended, was passed, and was sent to the Legislative Council. The latter body, however, appear to have regarded the provisions as of doubtful expediency, and, by our latest advices, the question was still unsettled.

It is a most significant fact, however, that such a new departure should have been made in a Bill dealing with the regulation of industrial labour. Concerning the principle upon which the Clause was drafted—that the work of Nurses is so laborious and responsible that legislative enactment is necessary for their protection—there is perhaps much which could be said. But on the other hand, we feel confident that Nurses in Australia, as in this country, would decline to have their hours of duty unduly limited, if such a limitation were shown to be injurious to the patients under their charge. We know that it would be difficult if not impossible, to secure complete efficiency in the working of a Hospital, if the hours of Nurses' work were strictly limited to eight per day—it would almost of necessity involve the employment of three shifts of workers—that is to say, that each patient should be under the care of three instead of two Nurses in the twenty-four hours. In a small Hospital, this would raise practical difficulties of considerable importance; in a large Institution the additional expense involved would be perhaps almost insupportable; in either case, efficiency would suffer. And, after all, it must be remembered that the work of Nursing is no light thing, and that the benefit of the patients is the first matter to be considered. While, on the one hand, therefore, we fully recognise the importance of restricting the hours of Nurses' work to a reasonable length; on the other hand, we are aware of the practical difficulties which would ensue if those hours were restricted beyond ten, or say, at most, nine and a half, *per diem*. We await with much interest the final decision of the Parliament in Victoria upon this question; and meanwhile draw attention, once more, to the growing importance and interest which is being attached to Nursing questions in every part of the world.

Lectures on Elementary Physiology in relation to Medical Nursing.

By Bedford Fenwick, M.D.
Physician to The Hospital for Women, Soho Square.

Lecture III.—Digestion and Indigestion.

(*Continued from page* 47.)

Gastric juice has the power of changing proteids into a soluble form, and those proteids, such as albumin and globulin, into soluble materials called *Peptones*, which are very easily absorbed by the blood. Rennin has the special power of clotting milk, and thus of turning the *casein* of of the milk into a sort of jelly. The material which is commonly called *Rennet*, which is used in the making of cheese, and is obtained from the stomach of the calf, is largely composed of this particular ferment.

When the food, mixed with the saliva, leaves the mouth, it is usually alkaline, but when it has been for a short time in the stomach, the flow of gastric juice renders the whole mass acid. This at once prevents any further action of the saliva upon the starch, because the saliva ferment *Ptyalin* is destroyed by acids. You will once more, therefore, understand the

previous page next page