

## "A Charter of Liberty for Nurses."

### HOURS OF HOSPITAL NURSES.

UNDER the above sub-heading, we opened our columns a few weeks ago to a discussion on this important subject, and from the tone of the letters received, we gathered that on the whole both Matrons and Nurses were of opinion that a twelve hours' day of actual work in the wards of a Hospital was excessive.

The question suggested by the majority of our correspondents, and definitely answered by none, was—How are the hours to be reduced, consistent with the best care of the patients, and taking into consideration the lack of accommodation provided in most Hospitals for the Nursing Staff?

Yet a very general consensus of opinion was expressed that during the last decade the work of the Nursing Staff has been greatly increased, notwithstanding the instalment of ward-maids, to whom the greater part of the routine ward cleaning has been deputed.

Our correspondents also generally recognised the fact that the "brain strain" of training has of late become much more severe, owing to the great increase of active medical treatment in disease, and the rapid strides made by surgical science, which necessitates the more careful training of the Nurses in the minutiae of practical Nursing, and in the detail of aseptic surgery, and which naturally entails the most conscientious attention to duty upon their part, so that the scientific directions of the Medical Staff may be efficiently carried out.

Recognising the significance of these changes, we are of opinion that it is the duty of our Matrons to bring the details of the work of those under their direction *very forcibly* before the notice of the managers of the Institutions over which they preside, and that the majority of those gentlemen must be aroused to take a more personal interest in the evolution of Nursing education, which is gradually and surely taking place, and to acknowledge the value of the skilled, and therefore exhausting, work which is being more and more demanded from the efficient Hospital Sister and Nurse.

Again we would ask these gentlemen to recognise the fact, that in accepting seats on Hospital Boards of Management, that their duty does not begin, and often end, by an occasional attendance at a committee meeting; but that unless they are prepared to take a keen personal interest in the details of the management of the Institution, and to acquaint themselves with the best methods of organisation necessary for progressive, and therefore for efficient management, it would be well to

stand aside, and make room for those who conscientiously desire to devote time and trouble to the performance of their duties.

Having noticed that the Hon. Sydney Holland, the Chairman of the Poplar and Tilbury Hospitals, and a member of the London Hospital Committee, has put forward a "Charter of Liberty" for Nurses, as he calls it, we have taken the opportunity during the week of having a personal interview with Mr. Holland, and we willingly testify to his anxiety to obtain for Nurses reasonable hours in a reasonable manner. We do not think that anybody can say that his "Charter of Liberty," from which we will presently quote, is extravagant or unreasonable. On the contrary, we agree with it cordially, and everybody we have consulted is of the same opinion. Mr. Holland is practising what he preaches. His "Charter" has been in force some years at the Poplar Hospital. Very much the same hours exist at St. Thomas's, and better still at King's.

Mr. Holland prefaced his remarks to us by emphasising the fact that the arrangements of every Hospital must differ from many causes, and that what would therefore succeed in one Hospital, might need alteration in another. But that an equal amount of off-time duty ought to be given to Nurses in all, though often not arranged as in the "Charter of Liberty." He believed this would be done if Hospital committee men once realised the hours now worked by their Nurses.

Briefly he suggests—and hopes his fellow-Chairmen will see the force of his argument—that a Nurse's working day should be reduced to ten hours actually in the wards; their hours on duty to be from 7.30 a.m. to 9 p.m.—that is, 13½ hours—one hour and a half to be allowed off for dressing and meals, and two hours during the daylight for recreation and rest. On three Sundays in the month an extra hour and a half off duty is allowed. Then three times a month the Nurses get eight consecutive hours off duty, and once a month they get 32 hours, enabling them to stay a night with their relatives or friends. Thus in a month of four weeks the Nurses get 60½ hours' leave of absence. Four weeks' holiday is also granted in the year.

For Nurses on night duty a day and a night once a fortnight is allowed, together with two and a half hours exclusive of meals every day. In fact, Mr. Holland pleads for a ten hours' day, and also for that priceless boon—a single bedroom. And in his own convincing manner he expresses his intention of "taking every opportunity of bringing before the public the absolute and immediate need for improving the condition of Hospital Nurses."

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