

**The Women's Liberal Federation, and
the Question of Nursing.**

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"There are 57,000 members of the Women's Liberal Federation, and 800 of these are to descend upon Birmingham to-morrow in order to settle the affairs of the nation." So ran the opening sentence of a leader in one of the Birmingham daily papers on May 7th. The rest of the article was in that vein of cheap cynicism with which we are too familiar in certain newspapers, whenever a woman's conference is under review, but perhaps we may extract a grain of truth from the chaff. The multiplicity and wide range of the resolutions proposed on the agenda of this conference made adequate consideration of the subjects out of the question; and resolutions were passed with a facility which forced the conviction many times during the hearing that it was well that these debates and resolutions were only of an academic character. For with reference to problems of so complex a nature as were many of those presented, we may well hold our judgment in suspense, and trust to that of experts. My business, however, is not to criticise the conference as a whole, but to report by request upon the discussion, *re* nursing, in the section devoted to "Dangerous Trades," on the afternoon of Thursday, May 9th. And the foregoing reflections were only suggested by the fact that on this very question of nursing, simply because it came home to me more than any other, I felt most the need of treatment by experts. Other nurses who were present besides myself very much regretted that no nurse had been found to speak before the conference on this subject.

The resolution moved by Mrs. Charles McLaren originally stood thus: "That this Council desires to direct the attention of hospital and infirmary authorities to the injury sustained by nurses during the long hours of work, urges that no nurse should be on duty for a period exceeding eight hours, and that the regulations respecting night duty and hours of sleep and recreation for nurses be re-considered." Fortunately (I think) the clause relating to the eight hours duty was withdrawn, and the resolution in its amended form was carried without dissent. The eight hours day for nurses may come, or it may not. If it does I believe that it will not prove an unmitigated boon even to nurses, while for patients the disadvantages of being tended by so many different hands, seem obvious. As a nurse, I should not care to work under such a system, and all who have practical acquaintance with hospital

work will acknowledge, at least, that the time is not ripe now even for an attempt at such reform. It would be interesting to have the opinions of readers of the NURSING RECORD on the eight hours system (*i.e.*, three changes in the twenty-four hours). Such a discussion would have more significance than that of the Liberal Federationists, inasmuch as it would proceed from "those who know."

The eight hours clause being withdrawn, few could take exception to the amended resolution, for, notwithstanding the immense advance which has been made in the system of nursing and the treatment of nurses, there is still room for improvement in many hospitals, especially in the smaller workhouse infirmaries. But while in sympathy with the resolution I take exception to the form in which it was urged. With all respect to Mrs. McLaren, whose disinterested zeal on behalf of nurses I desire to acknowledge, I must record my decided opinion (and not mine only), that her paper was couched in an exaggerated and sensational strain, despite her strenuous assertion which was supported by other speakers, that there was not a word of exaggeration therein. Many of her statements might be literally true, but literal truth is often not the whole truth. Mr. Arthur Morison has painted some ghastly word pictures of East End life, which bear the stamp of literal truth, and are calculated to make the heart of the reader sink within him. (See "Tales of Mean Streets," and "The Child of the Jago.") And yet, workers in the East End, of whom I have been one, feel an instinctive recoil from such representations, saying: "This is true, and yet it is not true. It is not the whole truth. Life in the East End, even in the lowest strata, is not such an inferno, or no one could live amongst it. All the darkest shadows are massed together here, and the lights left out." And if the life of a nurse is represented as a martyrdom, such a picture is false, even though the incidents selected may be strictly true.

Mrs. McLaren gave a description of a nurse's night work, and in conclusion said, dramatically, "And this goes on night after night for three months! But it would be possible to take a single day or night in the lives of many busy workers, and paint in such colours that the hearer might exclaim: "This is Egyptian slavery, too heavy to be borne!" Moreover, nearly every sentence revealed the amateur. For instance, in beginning, she spoke of the night nurse coming on duty at 9.20 p.m. in a ward of twenty beds, and having as her first work to feed and settle all the patients for the night. Oh! nurses, in what hospital does a night nurse come on duty at 9.20, or even earlier, where such work has not

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)