

SHOULD NURSES STRIKE?

In reply to the question, Do you consider any conditions justify a strike of nurses? we reply "No." But offer the following expression of opinion for what it is worth.

This is supposed—we only say supposed—to be a free country, and if every worker were loyal to her cloth and to her *soul* there would be no need for strikes. People usually find themselves in unendurable positions because they have acquiesced in wrong-doing and have failed in moral courage. Nurses in hospitals are often extraordinarily cowardly. Why? Because their sense of self-interest, as apart from a sense of justice, is so strong. We can imagine no conditions which can excuse a woman for submitting to injustice and indignity—at the worst in protesting she may suffer personally, then take the risk.

Our experience of life leads us to the conclusion that human beings are reasonable animals, however ignorant and wanting in sensibility, and that even the most selfish are greatly influenced by right if a fellow human declines to endure a wrong. In nine cases out of ten in which nurses complain to us of unjust methods of control, and bad conditions of institutional life, they are themselves to blame. Grumble—yes, but how many will go straight to the Matron, or the Committee (if the Matron herself is a weak woman), and just quietly place the case before them?

That is what we did in every hospital in which we ever worked in the good (or bad) old days, and *never once did we fail to have the wrong rectified*. Nottingham, Manchester, the London, Barts—we could a tale unfold. Some day when we have time we will recall a few interesting incidents in this connection. And in no instance were we penalised. A Pro. at the Children's, Nottingham, 1st April, 1878. (Mother, who hated careers for girls, pronounced it a very suitable date to enter for training.) Matron, Barts, 1st April, 1881. Three years' combat, but no lack of promotion. Then six years' strenuous reform work, yet perfect concord and happiness all the time. No necessity for a strike on any issue, but no wrong condoned, and every issue satisfactorily attained. Often on duty sixteen hours out of twenty-four—that, of course, would be unpardonable in these enlightened times. Even so long ago as 1879 we remember being taken to task by an old Sister at the "London" for "never sitting down, and exposing the older Sisters, who looked to remove their cap-tails for a nap in the afternoon, to odious comparison."

NURSING ECHOES.

We have received from the General Infirmary, Leeds, a most interesting and important Report of a Sub-Committee appointed on July 5th last to examine the conditions under which the nursing of the Infirmary is carried on, to formulate any improvements which they deem necessary, to estimate the extra cost involved in such improvements, and to report to the Board. The inquiry was undertaken in consequence of a report from the Lady Superintendent of Nurses that the Infirmary was understaffed with Nurses, and that the individual Nurses were underpaid.

The special importance of the Report is that it intimates that the Committee further requested the Sisters and Nurses to formulate any recommendations which they might be able to make for the improvement of their condition, and to appoint four Sisters and eight Nurses to meet the Committee and discuss their recommendations. Individual Matrons have done wonders with the material at their disposal, but, knowing the need for economy, it is not surprising that they hesitate to recommend a large increase in the way of expenditure in regard to salaries. In this connection it is quite the right thing that, as the preliminary to considering the revision of salaries, the views of those chiefly concerned should receive consideration.

The shortage of private nurses has resulted in the death of many civilians, especially the stricken children, during the pneumonia epidemic, and we hear of no offer of help from V.A.D.'s or other "patriotic" laywomen for these sufferers, whilst we learn that the officers' hospitals in London have a very full complement of trained and untrained nurses.

There is no doubt that in this country drastic reforms as to salaries and hours of work will have to be made at an early date. And if parents are unable to pay for their daughters' nursing education, as they pay for medical education, then the State must step in and subsidize our nursing schools. At present many are schools only in name. Thorough education is costly, and the present lack of standards can no longer pertain. Women of culture and education paid for their training in the 'seventies and 'eighties. What is to hinder them from doing so now? But the *quid pro quo* must be worth their while.

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