

## Should Nurses Pay for their Training?\*

BY MISS MARY BURR.

THOSE nurses who follow closely the deliberations of the leaders of the nursing profession, will undoubtedly have noticed that from time to time an opinion has been expressed and has not been challenged that, in the future, all those who wish to enter the nursing profession should pay for the privilege of so doing.

We are told, "That their brothers pay who enter the medical and other professions; and why should nurses receive an education, which is to bring them in a livelihood, for nothing?" That nurses in the future will have to pay, I have no doubt; but *when* they pay, much more will be expected for them than obtains at present.

I maintain that, under existing circumstances, no just-minded individual could ask nurses to pay for their training.

Let us take the average rules for probationers, and try to compare what the nurses receive and what they give.

They enter hospital for a period of probation of from 4 to 1 month, they must provide uniform of cotton dresses, caps, collars and cuffs, etc., generally of the official material and pattern, to be worn during their probation. This means an outlay of money which, should the "pro" be rejected, is dead loss.

When they have been passed and become members of the staff, they are entitled to receive, as the rules go, 3 cotton dresses, 6 aprons, 6 collars, 6 pairs of cuffs, 3 or 6 caps per annum, and where outdoor uniform is given, a bonnet yearly and a cloak every three years. This, of course, sounds well, but when one finds that the three dresses means really only just the bare material, the nurses having to find not only making, but all the accessories, the value is much reduced. The quantity of the other articles is not nearly enough for the requirements of the modern nurse.

Therefore, when one hears such stress laid upon the value of the uniform given to nurses; one can truthfully think of it at about one-half of the real worth of the uniform a nurse needs. Then comes the question of the salary paid to probationers. The first year it is generally at the rate of £8, the second year £12 to £15, and the third year £20. They are also supplied with lodging, board, and a limited amount of washing; and in addition to all this, they receive instruction, not only in the practical, but theoretical part of their work.

It does sound a great deal truly, and one cer-

tainly feels that the hospital authorities are more than generous.

Now take the other things a nurse receives—food. What is the almost universal cry of the nurse? Either bad food or food spoiled in the cooking, and invariably badly served and often insufficient.

The sleeping accommodation has, it is true, been improved, and a good nurses' home is now becoming a recognised part of all hospital improvement schemes.

The washing, too, is generally limited to a certain number of articles, or must not exceed a certain sum per week, and yet a nurse is expected to be always clean.

But the nurse receives instruction in the art of nursing. How is this given? The practical part is generally picked up by the method—that what you want to know you must find out. Questioners are not, as a rule, looked upon favourably in the busy wards of hospitals. That there are Sisters and nurses who will teach the raw "pro" I do not deny, but I'm afraid they are the exception and not the rule.

Wards in the same hospital often differ as much in their method of work and management as different hospitals do. Besides this practical knowledge gained, there is generally one lecture per week, given either by the Matron or a Sister appointed by her. The value of the instruction, of course, depends upon the capacity of the Matron or Sister as a teacher.

Now let us see what the probationer gives in return for all this generosity, what are her hours and duties, etc.

She is called at 6 a.m., on duty at 7 a.m. until 8 p.m., save 15 or 20 minutes off to dress about 9.30 or 10 a.m., half an hour for dinner, and whatever time she can manage to get for tea—occasionally  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour when the ward is light, but when heavy 5 to 10 minutes, perhaps.

Therefore the working day is practically  $12\frac{1}{2}$  hours. During the week she is entitled to a certain number of hours off duty (about 10), once a fortnight she gets half a day instead off from 2 to 5, once a month she gets a whole day instead of the half-day. Taking an average month of 4 weeks, a "pro" works at least 75 hours per week. Occasionally some of this off-duty time is stopped because of the heavy ward or another nurse is off duty. The average working man works 54 hours per week.

What does the work consist of? Bed-making, medicine-giving, washing patients, but the greater part of the time is spent in "charing"—i.e., window cleaning, locker paint, brass and tin cleaning. I would not for a moment disparage the necessity of a nurse knowing how all these

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