

Annotations.

THE MONETARY VALUE OF WOMEN'S WORK.

As we stated in our article last week, one of the first acts of the new Army Council has been to grant increased rates of pay to the members of Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service. We have the more satisfaction in recording this increase because when the standard of salaries arranged by the Nursing Board was first made public we pointed out that they were insufficient to attract the class of nurse which the Board desires to secure, and which it is essential should be secured if the prestige of the Service is to be maintained. We are glad, therefore, that the scale has been revised, and placed on a liberal basis, for it must be remembered that the salaries given do not represent the whole of the emoluments received, but that pensions are awarded to those members who serve for a certain term of years. In the future this Service is likely to be popular amongst nurses, and those who desire to enter it would be well-advised to make application at once, for we understand that there are some vacancies at present, and they will probably be of increasing rarity as time goes on.

The decision of the Army Council, whilst welcome from the individual standpoint, is chiefly of importance as demonstrating that a Government Department has realised that what is worth having is worth paying for. The Nursing Board is rightly desirous of securing the best type of nurse both in regard to general education and nursing efficiency, and it has publicly demonstrated that it places an adequate value on the skilled services of those who come up to the required standard.

In these days, when increasing competition, and lack of organisation and of representation in Parliament, have the result of cheapening all branches of women's labour, the object-lesson given by the Military Nursing Service is a valuable one, which we hope will not be lost on other public Services and Hospital Committees which employ trained nurses.

NIGHT NURSING.

No greater change for the better has taken place in the organisation, of nursing in public institutions during the last quarter of a century than in relation to night duty. It used to be supposed that the sick needed less attention by night than by day, and they frequently had none. Then came a period when women of

the charwoman class were paid half-a-crown a night for sleeping in the wards! Later again, still maintaining the principle that less experienced nursing is needed by night than by day, one-year probationer nurses were placed in charge of one or more wards on night duty, a strain on the nervous organisation of a conscientious woman, who realised the gravity of her charge, and the inexperience which she brought to cope with it, which will not soon be forgotten by those who passed through it. Now in our most advanced training-schools only certificated nurses are put in charge of wards at night, and they have to assist their probationers in training, a luxury which their less experienced predecessors rarely enjoyed. For it is now realised that the most critical hours of the twenty-four for a sick person are the night hours; that more deaths take place in the early morning than at any other time; and that experience and vigilance are necessary in order to note unexpected changes in patients, and to forestall danger of collapse in the hours when the vitality is lowest, by the application of suitable remedies.

To be at her best, a night nurse must be alert in body and mind. It is therefore important that her term of night duty should be limited, and experience proves that a two months' shift is the most popular with nurses. It must be remembered that the life of a night nurse is an unnatural one, and a longer time is often not only injurious to health, but also generates slackness in the worker. Thus the custom which obtained for many years at the Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh, of putting nurses on continuous night duty for a year was to be deprecated. We are glad that this has recently been reduced to six months, and we hope that it may in future be curtailed still further. The practice of putting nurses on permanent night duty, year in, year out, is quite indefensible. It is usually employed to utilise the services of women who are not up to modern standards, and whose lack of knowledge would be apparent in the day-time when the medical staff are in the wards. It involves, almost inevitably, the deterioration of the worker, and the shortening of her life. The office of permanent night nurse, which is still a recognised appointment—for the most part in workhouse infirmaries—should be entirely abolished. The time must come when employers of nurses will regard the practice not only as undesirable in the interests of the sick, but as wanting in common humanity.

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