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Editorial.

NURSES' BEER MONEY.

At the meeting of the Metropolitan Asylums Board on Saturday last Mr. J. G. White suggested that ale, stout, and porter should be removed from the rations scales of those in the employment of the Board. At present such allowances were, he said, £3 a year in the case of men, and £2 a year in the case of women. He gave figures proving that at the present time out of a staff numbering 2,788 officers the number taking stimulants was only ninety-nine. In Tooting Bec, Leavesden, and Caterham Asylums there was not a single official taking beer, and the Matrons said they would be thankful to see beer money abolished. Mr. White was of opinion that it was disgraceful that respectable girls, many of them ladies, acting as nurses in the hospitals, should be offered beer money.

We quite agree with Mr. White that "beer money" should be abolished, at least as far as nurses are concerned. It is a perquisite which belongs to the pre-historic times of bombazine dresses, black alpaca aprons, and black chenille caps; to the times when nursing was looked upon as a suitable employment for women to whom other employments were closed, and who expected, in addition to their regular and liberal allowance, extra rations of beer or spirits if a case were particularly trying.

Now all this is changed. Thanks to the pioneer women workers of a quarter of a century ago, the career of a nurse is recognised as an honourable one which any young woman, of whatever rank of life, may be proud to adopt, and the modern nurse would certainly scorn the suggestion, were it supposed that the care she bestowed on a critical case could be intensified were she served with extra rations of spirituous liquors. The very suggestion is outrageous.

In regard to "beer money," we are of opinion that its equivalent should be added on to the salary of the nurse, and that the allowance

should be abolished. It must be remembered that the probationers who enter our hospitals for training are not the middle-aged women who formerly were considered the only suitable attendants for the sick, but are drawn from the ranks of young girls who have only recently attained their majority, and who have not been accustomed in their own homes to drink half a pint of beer twice a day. Those responsible for the government of nurse training-schools therefore incur a certain responsibility if they instil into the minds of successive generations of probationers the idea that the regular use of stimulants is conducive to their well-being.

Within the last quarter of a century the opinion of the medical profession in regard to the nutritive value of alcohol has undergone a radical change, as may be estimated by the amount of stimulants prescribed in hospital wards twenty-five years ago and at the present time. Even for the sick they are now comparatively rarely prescribed. It may be that as we advance to middle age the occasional use of alcohol as a stimulant, not as a food, may be beneficial, but it must be remembered that hospital probationers are chosen when they are in the flower of youth, and after rigorous medical examination which eliminates from the list of candidates those who are in any way physically unsound. A primary qualification for the work is that they are strong and healthy. What do these probationers need with stimulants? If they are overdone, stimulants give them a temporary and fictitious sense of strength, which in itself is an element of danger, as they may resort with increasing frequency to this source to help them over the periods of overstrain, through which every nurse has at times to pass. The lesson of our hospitals while a nurse is undergoing her training should be, unquestionably, that stimulants are not a necessity, or desirable as a part of the ordinary diet of the young and healthy.

Another point is that a nurse who, in the course of her work has to share the life of many

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