

# THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED  
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 1,204.

SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 1911.

XLVI.

## Editorial.

### THE ASYLUM OFFICERS' BILL.

Viscount Wolmer, M.P., who secured the second reading of the Asylum Officers' Bill in the House of Commons, on Friday last, is to be congratulated on obtaining the sympathy of the House with a hard working, and in many instances over-worked, class of public officials. In moving its second reading Lord Wolmer explained that the first clause of the Bill, which is the important one, proposes to limit the hours of employment of asylums' officers and nurses to sixty in the week, and Lord Wolmer pointed out that it rested on the principle of the limitation of the hours of labour which had received recognition in the Shop Hours' Bill, and in our social system generally. There was no argument put forward in favour of that Bill which could not with greater force be used in support of the claim of the men and women, for whose benefit his Bill was intended.

He emphasised the importance of securing the best class of nurses and attendants for the insane, and pointed out that anything which could be done to mitigate the arduous conditions of life of these classes, whose task was often very disagreeable and attended with danger, would conduce to the efficiency of the asylum system. The Bill also established a right to a pension after 25 years' service. He did not think this would increase the rates, as the pension part was a contributory scheme, but Clause I, which reduced the hours of labour of attendants would lead to a slight increase in the county rates. He held, however, that we had no right to practise economy at the expense of the health—the flesh and blood—of our *employés*, and urged that the Government who had initiated so much legislation for the limitation of hours of

labour ought to give this measure their active assistance and co-operation.

Mr. Ormesby-Gore, who seconded the motion for the second reading, said that this Bill had been urgently requested by all the asylum attendants throughout the country.

Mr. C. Roberts, proposed that the Bill should be referred to a Select Committee.

Mr. Masterman said that Lord Wolmer had made out a case for investigation, and if he saw his way to accept a Select Committee, the Government would support the second reading. The report of the Lunacy Commissioners showed that asylum attendants, when on day duty worked fourteen hours, and when on night duty ten hours, but, by the Bill, the House was asked to impose upon the local authorities an indefinite amount of expenditure without their having been first heard concerning the proposal.

Mr. Swift, pointed out that the comfort and safety of over 130,000 persons who were unable to protest and look after themselves depended on these attendants, and for their benefit, primarily, the State should limit the hours of labour.

Dr. Addison thought that the omission of attendants in licensed houses from the Bill was a very serious one.

We are of opinion that the hours of asylum attendants and nurses are far too long, and welcome Lord Wolmer's Bill, and its reference to a Select Committee.

The women mental nurses are the gainers by the fact that they are associated with men in the care of the insane, as the importance of considering the interests of these citizens is recognised by Parliament, but there appears to be no time available to consider legislation for hospital nurses which is urgently necessary and long overdue, but which almost entirely affects women who have no votes.

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