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## Editorial.

### NURSES AND NATIONAL INSURANCE.

As the National Insurance Bill closely affects nurses, many of whom by its provisions will become compulsory contributors under the Bill, if it becomes law in its present form, it is important that they should understand their position, and we have much pleasure in announcing that Mr. D. F. Pennant, Hon. Secretary and Member of Council of Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute, will address a public meeting of nurses at the Medical Society's Rooms, 11, Chandos Street, Cavendish Square, W., on Monday, July 10th, at 8 p.m., when we hope many nurses will show an intelligent interest in their economic condition by being present.

The position of nurses now is that if they fall ill in the employment of a hospital committee, or a Board of Guardians, they receive the best of medical and nursing care, with board and lodging gratis, and, except in the case of an exceptionally long illness, are usually paid their full salary during this time. These are assets not always realised at full value by nurses.

The fear of illness, and consequent incapacity for wage earning is one which haunts most women workers throughout the whole of their career, for the modest salaries usually earned by them leaves little opportunity for saving when payment for the necessities of life has been made, indeed, the problem of making ends meet is one which constantly confronts most wage earning women. Therefore, if they fall ill, and wages or salaries immediately cease, they are within a few weeks reduced to absolute penury, just at a time when extra money is needed for doctors' bills,

and good food and nursing. The lot of the ordinary woman worker thus stands out in sharp contrast to that of the nurses in institutions who have no anxiety about illness, and no need to provide against it.

What will happen if hospital nurses are brought under the provisions of the Bill by which they will have to pay 3d. a week for insurance purposes, their employers 3d., and the State 2d.? A probationer in her first year, earning a salary of £8 or 13s. 4d. a month, would have to pay in insurance fees 1s. 1d. a month, or 13s. 1d. a year, practically a whole month's salary, which she can very ill afford to spare.

The benefits which she would receive for this payment are apparently *nil*, and indeed, it is quite possible that she may find herself in a much worse position than if she were uninsured. In the first place, if she is treated when ill, as heretofore, in the hospital, and at the expense of the institution, she is disqualified from receiving the State benefit, and there remains the question whether committees will contribute to the insurance scheme, and also give their nurses free care when ill. If this practice is discontinued, the sum of 7s. 6d. a week, even with medical attendance in addition, will be poor compensation for the free board and lodging, medical attendance and nursing which they have hitherto received.

In an admirable letter in the *Times* on "The case of hospital nurses," Mr. Herbert J. Paterson, F.R.C.S. says, "were the insurance optional it would be quite another matter, but that hard worked, underpaid women (who have no votes, and who are following a vocation which benefits the community) should be compelled to contribute to a scheme the value of which is problematical to them, but which confers

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)