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EDITORIAL.

THE HOURS AND PENSIONS OF ASYLUM ATTENDANTS.

The Select Committee of the House of Commons, to which Lord Wolmer's Asylums Officers' (Employment, Pensions and Superannuation) Bill was referred, have reported to the House of Commons that they "have gone through the Bill and made amendments thereunto." In a Special Report they further state their opinion that the Bill as amended by them should be proceeded with in order that it may pass into law.

They point out that the Bill (1) restricts the hours of duty of Nurses and attendants in asylums to 60 hours per week, and (2) amends the provisions of the Asylums Officers' Superannuation Act, 1909, with a view to securing better terms of pension for the staff in asylums.

In regard to the hours of work in asylums the Committee say that general statements are not easy to make. There is no uniformity, and each institution frames its own scheme, but the common features of the prevailing system may be stated as follows:—The continuous service, necessary in the asylum, is based on a double shift, from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. for the Day Nurses, and 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. for the Night Nurses. Thus, over a period of 14 hours a day, or 98 per week, a day staff has to be provided, and for the remaining 10 hours, or 70 hours per week, a night staff is necessary. From this the time allowed for meals and recreation must be deducted.

Dr. Cooke, of the Lunacy Commission, thinks the average number of hours of work in asylums is about 84 per week. The lowest hours of duty are found under the Asylums Committee of the London County Council, a body distinguished for its liberal

policy in this respect, where they average 66 for male attendants and 72 for Nurses on the day staff, while on the night staff the male attendants work 63 hours and the Nurses 65 per week. Against this the Nurses have a week's extra annual holiday as compared with the male attendants.

The Committee draw attention to the special stress and strain of asylum service, and proceed:—

"Your Committee are of opinion that in a number of cases the hours of attendants and Nurses in asylums are excessive, and ought to be diminished. Eighty hours and more of such work in a week cannot be defended; and such length of service is not, in fact, defended, even by those who dislike the idea of Parliamentary interference.

"It has been suggested that restriction of hours might interfere with the 'nursing spirit' in asylums, and a communication from one Visiting Committee urges that with extra leave Nurses and attendants might 'find the time hang heavy on their hands.' It is hard to believe that excessive hours are required to maintain that nursing spirit which is much to be encouraged in asylum service, or that attendants would be less likely than other classes to make proper use of reasonable leisure."

The Committee consider that the statutory reduction to 60 hours a week in all asylums is in most cases too great a departure from existing customs, and does not appear at present practicable. They think that Parliament should content itself with fixing a statutory maximum of hours not to be exceeded, and suggest that this should be 70 hours a week for the day staff, and 60 for the night staff. They guard themselves, however, against the possible misconception that they wish to fix on the figure of 70 hours as an ideal system to be

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