

training she observed that the hospital system which worked to relieve one class of invalids, was creating another, and that, amongst the nurses who were the greatest help in relieving the first. Invalidity was caused by the long hours, such as no class of labourer would tolerate, the hurried meals, and the strain of the care of so many acutely sick people. She might, she said, speak not only of illness, but of death due to these causes, for she had known many deaths among her fellow nurses in hospital.

It might be said that a percentage of illness and death was a necessity in a large body of workers in the space of four years, but the majority of hospital probationers were not more than 23 years of age, they had to pass a very stiff medical examination before being accepted on probation, and the services of those who showed any signs of weakness were dispensed with during the first three months.

A society for the prevention of cruelty to nurses was badly needed, not because hospital governors were necessarily cruel men, but because they were in most cases ignorant of the conditions under which the nurses worked.

BURDENS WHICH NEARLY BROKE HER.

She was no longer the member of a hospital staff, but, as a human being, she was shocked at so much preventable misery, and felt impelled to speak out, in the hope of helping those now bearing burdens which, in her own case, nearly broke her.

THE HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE.

Miss O'Dwyer emphasised the fact that the greatest asset of any State is not its wealth, but the health and well-being, moral, mental and physical, of its citizens. In regard to health work, she characterised the care of the health of the present generation, and their education in the best means of preserving the health of future generations, as the greatest of all work, which should only be entrusted to the fully trained.

Nurses were looking with great hope to the Ministry of Health, not to hand over this work to inexperienced workers. If it did so, it would start on absolutely wrong lines, but the fact that it consulted the British Red Cross Society and had passed over the trained nurses gave cause for anxiety. She had nothing against the V.A.D.s, but they were not efficient for this work. The time had gone by for muddling, and we owed more to the soldier than to ask him to allow his wife to be cared for by people who were not thoroughly trained. She further expressed the opinion that the large sums subscribed during the war to Red Cross Funds should be spent on disabled sailors and soldiers, this money should not be allocated to the education of V.A.D.s.

She concluded by saying that she thought a strong Trade Union, with great fighting power behind it, was needed to meet all the dangers of which every nurse is sensible to-day. They required it not only for the sake of the nurses, but for that of the patients and the public.

WHY THE UNION IS NECESSARY.

The Chairman then enumerated a few of the reasons why a Trade Union is necessary, including the long hours, the trying conditions of night duty, the status and treatment of Trained Nurses, the sweated labour, and the right of the nurses to decide their own business. She gave some interesting examples illustrating these points, which we regret lack of space prevents our elaborating.

DISCUSSION.

A LIVELY INTERLUDE.

The meeting was then thrown open for discussion.

MISS FERRIER (College of Nursing, Ltd.) said that during the transition stage there was bound to be some difficulty, such as had been mentioned, and it was by the nurses themselves that these difficulties would be overcome. She did not know if those present had read in their morning paper that the Second Reading of the Nurses' Registration Bill would come on very shortly.

She would like to state that fifteen of the Articles read out by Mr. Goddard at the last meeting called to form a Trade Union for Nurses, had already been put forward by the College of Nursing. (Hisses.) There was a loan to be arranged, so that nurses could borrow at a small percentage (A voice: "What percentage?") so that they could carry on their training.

Everything that had been done for the good of nurses had been accomplished by the College of Nursing in the last two or three years. (Cries of "that's a lie," Hisses.)

The Salaries Committee that sat for three months at the beginning of this year on the salaries, conditions of nurses, and shorter hours, had, Miss Ferrier said, issued their report about six months ago, in which it improved in every case, the salaries of the nurses, and of the matrons. (A voice: "A pious expression of opinion on paper.") It must be remembered that matrons were not employers. A Matron was employed by a Hospital Committee to whom she was responsible. If the staff did not come up to the Committee's ideas of what it should be the Matron suffered not the staff. (Laughter.)

Should a Trade Union be formed, and should strikes occur, then the lines would be opened to the V.A.D.s to come in and do the work. ("No.") In the meantime, they are training (A voice: "Then they will be trained nurses") and the public will say "These women are always fighting, always quarrelling, let us have in the women who did such good work during the war, and have since become trained."

Then, why not have united efforts? Why can't you all join the College? (Voices: "No" and "We won't sign the Serf Clause.")

Miss Ferrier asserted that the College had done in four years what it had taken other people thirty years to think about, and the other people had collected £22,000 and done nothing. (Cries of "Shame," "It is not true.")

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)