

forty-eight, the nurses shall have a fifty-six hours' week.

It is doubtful if large numbers of the nurses themselves have thought very seriously of the proposals of the Bill, of what curtailment of the hours of work means in the life of the individual or of the responsibilities which curtailment involves. New times and the new social order which is arising are the outward expression of the unconscious striving in the souls of the men and women of to-day towards some form of organisation which will set in their proper place the spiritual life, the political (or equity life if we may so express it) and the economic life. Before going further it might be well to make our meaning clear as to what is meant by the word spiritual. In the past it has been narrowed down as referring to religion only, or, sometimes, to matters connected with psychical research. Actually it has a far broader meaning as covering the whole sphere of religion, literature, the sciences, everything, in fact, which has to do with intellect. In nursing, largely because the profession has never taken care of itself, the spiritual life of the nurses has been made subservient to the economic convenience of the community at large. Sentimentality has to a great extent been made the lever to force upon one class a greater burden of responsibility than was fair. Thereby the nurses became the slaves of sentiment, a sentiment indeed which camouflaged a multitude of sins of omission, on the part of the nation to its sick. Again and again we hear it reiterated, by those who are opposing a forty-eight hours' week for nurses, that it is the privilege of the nurses to serve, that they must be continually under the sacrifice, &c., &c. Almost one would be led to believe that the nurses are born slaves, that it is in the natural order of things that they should surrender their individuality and repudiate both responsibility and self-development.

Again, it is believed by some, that if nurses get increased leisure they will be less fit to uphold the ideals of the profession. Let such pessimists wait and see. Is it not conceivable that greater leisure may awaken the understanding to the treasures of mind and spirit just as readily as to the treasures of the shop window or dancing hall? The nurses have a double mission in life, just as others have; they must contribute, in their own sphere, to the maintenance and evolution of national life, but not to such extent as to stultify the development of their own spiritual life; again we use the word in the sense of its original meaning. Pure murder has been done on this spiritual plane by the extent to which the economic convenience of the hospitals has pressed itself into the lives of the nurses in the past. The result of this pressure has tended to deprave rather than to elevate the nurses, and many who entered the profession with the highest hopes and ideals have become soured, sad, soul-less, broken things.

Again, talks with those opposed to the curtailment of the nurses' hours of work have sometimes led us to believe that they regard such a step as tending towards Socialism. It does nothing of the

sort. Socialism, as it is at present understood, is a mere quack remedy as applied either to a community or a nation. But we do claim that, if the nurses' hours of work are brought more into line with those of other women workers, we shall attract better women to the profession and its quality of work will be infinitely higher than when the hours of work are pushed beyond hygienic limits.

We ask our readers, therefore, to think most seriously on the point of whether or not nurses should remain in the Bill. It is true that some already work only a forty-eight or fifty hours week, but even if this is so, they must look beyond their own to other hospitals and beyond the hospitals to the profession at large. They are all ready to admit that in the past the hours have been scandalously long, and the problem is how far we are justified in bringing about the destruction of the opportunity, which the Bill offers, for preventing the continuance of abuses which have thrown many a nurse on the scrap heap at middle age.

We have not touched upon the economic side of the question, of the effect on the nurses' salaries, of the increased demand for their services which a curtailment of their hours of work would give rise to; but this aspect also claims some consideration.

We hope that our members will, each one of them, think over the subject of this article with all seriousness, and that each will help us by communicating to us at an early date her views on the whole question.

As we stated in a previous issue, the Council of the R.B.N.A. decided that nurses in Hospitals and Institutions should have a forty-eight hours' week, but held that it would be prejudicial to the interests of private nurses if restrictive legislation were introduced in connection with their hours of work.

#### APPOINTMENT.

Miss Jessie Holmes has been appointed Matron of the Manor House School, Brackley, Northants. Miss Holmes has been an active member of the Royal British Nurses' Association for many years and held various important appointments during the war; her fellow workers wish her every success in her new work. We are glad to see that so many trained nurses are now obtaining posts as Matrons of Schools. It must be a very great advantage to the children and must add very considerably to the confidence of the parents to know that their children's welfare will at all times receive adequate attention and that fully-trained nurses are available whenever illness arises. From the nurses' point of view, such work must prove very interesting and affords enormous opportunities for the study of child life—a study which in many branches of nursing work proves of the highest value.

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