

THE EDITOR'S LETTER-BOX.

[Correspondence on all subjects is invited, but we cannot in any way be responsible for the opinions expressed by our correspondents, who must give their name and address as a guarantee of good faith, but not necessarily for publication. Correspondents are reminded that brevity of style and conciseness of statement greatly facilitate early insertion.]

The Victimization of V.A.D.s.

To the Editor of THE HOSPITAL.

SIR,—It is a great pleasure to see that THE HOSPITAL has taken up the question of the unjust treatment of a section of the V.A.D.s. I have served both at home and abroad since September 1914, and it seems to me almost unbelievable that while the nursing V.A.D.s get a full gratuity, the general service section—cooks, clerks, etc.—get nothing. Their work abroad was especially good, and at one hospital, the 43rd General, Salonica, I know that they almost entirely took over from the men, doing all the roughest work.

Till I went abroad, in August, 1916, I worked at a military hospital at Exeter. There many of the cooks came from domestic service, where they had been draw-

ing good salaries from £40 to £50 a year. They gave up all this and were given by the War Office £26 a year. Surely these women are entitled to something after from four to five years' work?

Perhaps an even harder case is one of a V.A.D. who, at the beginning of the war, wished to be a nurse, but was requested by her Headquarters to become a clerk, owing to a great shortage in the last-named. Consequently, she can now draw no gratuity, although she has done a steady five years' work.

I am sure I am speaking for the majority of nursing V.A.D.s when I say that they consider the injustice done to their fellow-workers a grave one.—I am, yours truly,
J. E. GREEN, V.A.D.

QUEEN CHARLOTTE'S HOSPITAL AND ITS NURSING STAFF.

Nursing Hours—Question of Cleanliness—Cleaning Materials not Provided by Hospital—Defective Food Supply—Working Hours, 6.30 a.m. to 9.30 p.m.—Can Recreation have a Place in the Curriculum of the Pupil-midwife?

To the Editor of THE HOSPITAL.

SIR,—The appeal of Queen Charlotte's Hospital for additional funds to meet increased expenditure includes also a sum estimated at £40,000 for schemes of extension and improvement. It is hoped and expected by those who for many years have materially assisted and watched the affairs of this hospital that among the improvements to be evolved some may be directed toward the general working conditions and the working hours of the nursing staff and the nurse-pupils. The physical and mental exhaustion which follows a normal day of work in the wards of this hospital—a day beginning at 6.30 A.M. and ending at 9.30 P.M., with a bare two hours off duty during that time for the pupils—is contrary to the common laws of humanity and in direct contrast to modern ideas governing women's labour in whatever direction it may lie. The existing thirteen hours of almost continuous duty might with advantage be reduced to a more moderate nine or even ten hours a day, and the working conditions so materially improved as to afford the pupils a better opportunity of theoretical study, so as to attend their class lectures with a lessened sense of physical oppression, and to have, what is of equal importance, greater opportunity of breathing the air of heaven. Recreation is neither

asked nor expected for them: as all sensible students know, there can be no place for such in the curriculum of midwifery.

It is reported that at Queen Charlotte's Hospital the duty of surgically cleaning the lying-in wards to which they are attached is imposed upon the pupil-midwives. This consists of cleaning down the walls and furniture with antiseptic water and polishing the brass taps and various fittings, ward maids being responsible for the floor only. Cleaning materials are not well supplied by this hospital, and it is the general custom for the pupils to supply such cleaning materials as "Monkey Brand," "Vim," and "Brasso" from money out of their own pockets for the purpose of bringing their work up to the standard required by inspection.

The food supplied to the nursing staff leaves much to be desired, considering the arduous and tiring nature of their duties, and has to be supplemented by the pupils at near-by restaurants in off-duty times. Pupils sometimes spend from 10s. to 15s. per week upon supplementary subsistence, bread and marmalade on certain mornings being all that is supplied for breakfast. Add to this the high rate of laundry expenses by reason of always requiring two, and frequently three, dresses a week—the burden of this also borne by the pupils—and the fact that she pays down forty guineas on entering the hospital, a career at Queen Charlotte's Hospital becomes an expensive luxury.—Yours faithfully,

"INTERESTED."

The Secretary's Statements.

To the Editor of THE HOSPITAL.

SIR,—With reference to the statements made by your correspondent as to the hours of duty of pupils at this hospital, I am directed by the House Committee to state that this matter has been under consideration recently, and it is hoped to be able to arrange for some diminution. The hours on duty are not so long as stated by your correspondent. The hours for day nurses are 7 A.M. to 9 P.M., with two hours off duty each day, and, of course, meal-times, which total 1½ hours. Pupils get two (separate) days off duty each month. The chief difficulty in the way of a reduction of the hours of duty is that of increased accommodation for the consequent additional staff, and which we had hoped to provide in connection

with the extension of the hospital which was about to be undertaken when war broke out, and had to be postponed. The Committee are anxious to proceed with this enlargement, and they are appealing for £40,000 for the purpose; they will then have additional accommodation for nurses which will make it possible to reduce the hours of duty for the pupils.

In considering the question of hours of duty in a lying-in hospital it is important to bear in mind the fact that nearly all the pupils are preparing for the Central Midwives Board Examination, and that for this purpose they must each personally deliver twenty cases and nurse twenty patients during their period of training. If the hours of duty were materially shortened it would mean that the

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period of training would have to be extended. Another difficulty which is perhaps not fully appreciated is the considerable fluctuation in the number of cases in the hospital from time to time.

The amount of cleaning in the wards is only what is customary elsewhere. Nurses have to cleanse the bowls and other ward utensils used for their patients, and when their patients are discharged the ward is turned out and cleaned, the floor, grate and hearth being done by the wardmaid. The nurse has to clean and boil up all ward utensils, wash and carbolise the furniture, and wash the dado of the ward. The walls and ceilings of the lying-in wards are washed down every three months, and of the labour wards every month by a man employed for this purpose. An ample supply of cleaning materials is

A Small Independent Inquiry Commission Called For.

The present position of affairs in this hospital as recorded to us, and the letter of the Secretary we publish above, demonstrate the paramount necessity there is for the appointment of a small independent, authoritative commission to investigate the actual state of affairs at Queen Charlotte's Hospital as it exists throughout. This hospital was founded in 1752, and, though incorporated in 1885, there is evidence to fear that the old traditions and conditions have found a permanent place within its walls. "The Committee hope for some diminution in the hours of duty of pupils." As they stand at present it causes wonder that women can be found in considerable numbers to pay £40 for six months' training, submit to the conditions reported, and board and lodging. We have before us an example of the dietary supplied to the night duty staff on Wednesday, September 10. "Breakfast 7.30 P.M., had-dock, from which the freshness had disappeared some time previously; it was left uneaten; tea and bread and butter. Four and a half hours later, *i.e.*, at midnight, pieces of bread and cheese with coffee. Four and a half hours later, *i.e.*, at 4.30 A.M., a piece of bread and dripping. Some five hours later, *i.e.*, at 9.20 A.M., roast mutton and vegetables, the mutton so badly cooked that much of it was wasted." It is a pleasant irony, we understand, to speak of cooking where the food supplied to the pupils of this hospital is concerned. This is not the worst type of domestic service imposed on the night staff. An unfortunate pupil nurse has to prepare these meals and wash up, in addition to attending to the needs of three lying-in mothers and their babies.

The condition of single bedrooms may be judged—(a) "to open a window black filth comes on to the hands"; (b) the old converted houses have living creatures known as "Norfolk Howards" in their crevices; samples of the live stock have been supplied to the night sister. The service and crockery are shameless. The Secretary admits the day nurses' hours are fourteen, with two hours off duty each day, subject to fluctuations we understand. This hospital has the unenviable notoriety of providing that every nurse within its walls shall pay to the hospital heavy fees or give free service for a whole year. The account of the cleaning of the wards and the rough work imposed on the nurses given by the Secretary is not inviting if it is even justifiable. If an ample supply of inviting, if it is even justifiable. If an ample supply of We have evidence that cleaning materials, if supplied by the hospital, do not reach the pupil nurses. Indeed, a request from a new pupil to the staff nurse for brass polish received the reply that she must supply her own. It

provided, and there is no necessity for any nurse to purchase such materials. The amount of brass work is very small—in the lying-in wards there are no brass taps.

Special arrangements are made for laundry work for pupils, and the average amount paid by them is 2s. 6d. per week only, which covers all necessary laundry, and is certainly not excessive in these days of high prices.

With regard to food, every institution has experienced difficulties, both during the war and since; but the supply has been ample, and has for some time past been almost as varied as before the war. There is no need for nurses to go elsewhere for additional food, but it is not unusual for nurses of any hospital to take a meal out with friends for the sake of the greater variety obtainable at a restaurant.—Yours faithfully,

(Signed) ARTHUR WATTS, Secretary.
Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital, September 10, 1919.

would appear therefore that the authorities are unaware of the internal working and practices within their institution. For "the pupils, it is avowed, have to purchase such commodities with their own money and the practice is well-known and countenanced."

Another remarkable practice is that the pupil nurse who has had the courage to stand ten days of these recorded conditions can escape by resignation after ten days' service and take with her £30 of the full fee, the hospital retaining £10 of the pupil's small savings. The mystery is why the whole of the pupil nurses do not go to the hospital office, draw their £30, and depart in a body. What are the leaders of the Labour Party about that they allow such treatment of women workers to continue without protest or redress? Two representatives of the Labour Party, one a man and one a woman, might properly form members of a small commission of five charged with the duty of thoroughly investigating the conditions which have and do prevail at Queen Charlotte's Hospital. The institution would seem to be conducted on the principle that what has been good enough in the long past is good enough now. Have the administration yet heard of The War or the League of Nations, or better days for working men and women, to say nothing of *working midwives and those who work them presumably at a profit?*

There remains off-duty time. At this hospital it is stated that "two days off a month sound well," but it has proved in practice a continual uncertainty. Sometimes two and even three of the off days have been entirely lost by the nurses "owing to circumstances intervening." The two hours daily are declared to be often withheld, curtailed or reduced, sometimes "owing to circumstances or the whims of the immediate superior in rank."

It is certified that the absence of better working conditions and facilities of study and attendance at class lectures is gravely compromising to the conductors of this hospital and those responsible for its affairs. It is our clear duty to ask Viscount Portman as the President, Sir Samuel Scott, Bart., M.P., Chairman, with the responsible managers, to justify the continual treatment of ninety cases a day within this hospital when it is only equipped and staffed for sixty. That is a grave question affecting the interest and welfare of large numbers of poor people, mothers and children, and we must press for an immediate answer. The best managed lying-in hospitals properly publish the sums received from nurses and probationers' fees. Queen Charlotte's Hospital avoids taking this proper course, and it is a grave omission.

THE ED. OF THE HOSPITAL.