

which cause so many to continue in a course they would prefer to abandon. But we shall say a great deal, and that strongly, upon the want of thoughtfulness in those who have the management of Hospitals in their hands, for these young and self-denying women who desire to devote their lives to the amelioration of human suffering. We do this in the hope that every committee and governing body will issue stringent regulations to relieve their Nurses from some of the distresses to which they are subjected, and might most easily be removed. If a committee desire to make an inquiry into the work of their Nursing Staff, they must not anticipate they will hear the whole truth from the Matron, for a confession on her part that over-work exists is condemnatory of her system; neither must they trust to the Nurses themselves, for they would rather suffer than complain, and complaint often means dismissal. If they inquire from their visiting Medical Officers they will get a peculiar opinion, neither right nor wrong, being based upon the Matron's report and their own ideas of what should be. We do not blame these gentlemen, who spend at the most an hour or so a day in their Wards, for knowing so little about what are the practical details of Hospital management. They think they know a great deal, and lay down the most absurd rules in the fond belief that a person can be in two places at once; that Nurses can keep well under regulations which, if occurring in the lives of their private patients, they would be the first to condemn and declare unhealthy. The person in a Hospital who knows most, sees most, and can advise best is the House Surgeon, who, if he has his head screwed on in the right way, gains the confidence of all those with whom he works. Don't expect that he will tell you *all*, for there are many things which cannot be proved though they be true. He knows this, and will be careful; but you may rely upon this, that whatever he says he has himself observed.

"What is the routine of a Nurse's life? This. Up, dressed, and in the Wards at seven in the morning; make the beds, scrub the lockers, give the medicines, take the temperatures of all cases (this is done in each not less than twice a day, often every hour), all of which are entered in a book and charted neatly (if a single blot is made the whole chart has to be copied afresh), count the pulse, wash the patients, distribute the breakfasts, dust and clean everything, receive the report of the night Nurses, running innumerable messages to the House Surgeon about the condition of this, that, or the other sufferer, go round with the House Surgeon when he makes his visit in the morning, and, when he has left, carry out any instructions he has given. Then they bear huge

medicine baskets down to the dispensary, after which half an hour is allowed them for their dinner—the menu of which is often very poor. Sometimes, through their having been detained in their Ward, they are obliged to eat their meal in a quarter of an hour, and occasionally to go without it altogether. They hurry back to their duties without a moment's pause, and give the patients their dinner, having to feed some and attend to all. The Ward is again tidied up, and the patients generally and specially looked after preparatory to the visit of the Honorary Physician and Surgeon, and, if the beds are mixed and belong to Drs. Jones and Brown, and Mr. Williams and Mr. Wallis, these gentlemen will arrive upon the scene at different times in the afternoon, and the whole Staff of the Ward will dance attendance upon them, standing silent, respectful, wearied to death, from one until, it may be, four o'clock. They have to take their chance about getting their tea, which is again cramped into half an hour, after which they convey to the Wards the now replenished medicine baskets. The patients' teas have then to be given, and various small duties performed—reports written, temperatures again taken, entered in books and charted. Lastly, the patients have their supper, are prepared for the night, and by nine o'clock the Nurses may sit down to a meagre meal; in the very midst chapel bell is rung and they attend prayers, after which they are hurried off to bed in a large dormitory with the barest accommodation, and in the winter so cold that they cast their cloaks and their day clothes upon the bed for the purposes of warmth. From seven in the morning until nine at night! Hurry scurry—no rest, no relaxation, almost always upon their feet, breathing the exhalations from diseased humanity, dressing foul and ulcerating wounds, bending over a fever-stricken bed, at the beck and call of every sick one in the Ward, subjected to many insults, obliged to hear oaths and coarse language, to be patient with the most exacting and querulous invalid, expected to be always the same, always sympathetic and never weary—never ill—to work, work, work, until at last the overwrought machine breaks down, and their short life of usefulness is over. And all this happens in a civilized country, in Hospitals devoted to the purposes of charity, and dedicated to the relief of suffering! What a misnomer! That an institution created to heal the sick should originate disease in the minds and bodies of those who work within its walls is a fact demanding the attention of the governors. A committee will enlarge a Hospital, add an extra Ward, increase their Medical Staff, but Nurses—are they not women?—and if they break down are they not easily replaced? Men are always ready to air

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)