

light it throws on the duties of the Hospital Nurse nearly three and a half centuries ago. I therefore give the charges to the Matron and the Sisters, respectively, in full:—

"The Matron:—Your office is to receive of the Hospiteler of this house all such sick and diseased persons as he by his warrant signed from the Almoners of this house shall present unto you, and the same persons to bestow in such convenient places within this house as you shall think meet.

"You have also the charge, governance and order of all the Sisters of this house, to see from time to time that every of them in the wards committed to their charge, do their duty unto the poor, as well in making of their beds, and keeping their wards, as also in washing and purging their unclean clothes, and other things. And that the same sisters every night after the hour of seven of the clock, in the winter, and nine of the clock in the summer, come not out of the woman's ward, except some great and special cause (as the present danger of death or needful succour of some poor person). And yet at such a special time it shall not be lawful for every sister to go forth to any person or person or persons (no though it be in her ward), but only for such as you think virtuous, Godly, and discreet. And the same sister to remain no longer with the same sick person than needful cause shall require.

"Also at such time as the Sisters shall not be occupied about the poor, ye shall set them to spinning, or doing of some other manner of work, that may avoid idleness, and be profitable to the poor of this house.

"Also ye shall receive the flax provided by the governors of this house, and the same being spun by the Sisters, ye shall commit to the said governors, that they may both put order for the weighing of the same to the weaver and for the measuring of it at the returning thereof.

"You shall also, as the chief governess and worthy Matron of this house, have special regard to the good ordering and keeping of all the sheets, coverlets, blankets, beds, and other implements, committed to your charge, that now do or hereafter shall appertain unto the poor.

"Also ye shall suffer no poor person of this house to sit and drink within your house at no time, neither shall ye so send them drink into their wards, that thereby drunkenness might be used and continued among them, but as much as in you shall be, ye shall exhort them to virtue and temperance, declaring this house to be appointed for the harbour and succour of the dear members of Christ's body, and not of drunkards and unthankful persons.

"Herewith ye are charged and not with any other thing. But if there shall be anything done by any officer, or other person of this house, that shall be unprofitable thereunto, or that may be occasion of any disorder, or shall engender slander to the same, that ye then declare it to some, one or two of the governors of this house, and to none other person, nor no further to meddle therein.

"The Sisters:—Your charge is in all things to show and declare yourselves gentle, diligent and obedient to the Matron of this house who is appointed and authorised to be your chief governess and ruler.

"Ye shall also faithfully and charitably serve and

help the poor, in all their grieves and diseases, as well by keeping them sweet and clean, as in giving them their meats and drinks after the most honest and comfortable manner. Also ye shall use unto them good and honest talk, such as may comfort and amend them and utterly to avoid all light, wanton, and foolish words, gestures and manners, using yourselves unto them with all sobriety and discretion. And above all things see that ye avoid, abhor, and detest scolding, and drunkenness, as most pestilent and filthy vices.

"Ye shall not haunt or resort to any manner of person out of this house except ye be licensed by the matron, neither shall ye suffer any light person to haunt or use unto you, neither any dishonest person, either man or woman, and so much as in you shall lie, ye shall avoid and shun the conversation and company of all men.

"Ye shall not be out of the woman's ward after the hour of seven of the clock in the night, of the winter time, nor after nine of the clock at night, in the summer: except ye shall be appointed and commanded by the Matron so to be for some great and special cause that shall concern the poor (as the present danger of death or extreme sickness) and yet being so commanded, ye shall remain no longer with such diseased person, than just cause shall require.

"Also if any just cause of grief shall fortune unto any of you, or that ye shall see lewdness in any officer or other person of this house, which may sound or grow to the hurt or slander thereof, ye shall declare the same to the Matron, or unto one or two of the governors of this house, that speedy remedy therein may be had, and to none other person, neither shall you talk or meddle therein any further. This is your charge, and with any other thing you are not charged."

Here, then, we have in outline a 16th century conception of Hospital administration. I leave it to those with more knowledge of the subject than I possess to form their opinion of its merits; but even to an "outsider" it is obvious that St. Bartholomew's Hospital was then, as happily now, governed and ordered in a thoroughly systematic manner, and was no more afraid, than it is at the present day, to give the public any information they might wish for regarding the details of the management. The governors did not scout the idea of reform where reasonable grounds for it were pointed out, a tradition which has evidently been handed down to the present century, and might well be taken to heart by certain Institutions of more modern growth. It would have been interesting to have had further details concerning the Nurses, the hours they kept, their training, their diet, and their uniform. Nurses certainly wore uniforms in far earlier days, for there is a document extant relating to a hospital of the thirteenth century where the uniform is particularly mentioned. However, the qualifications deemed necessary, setting aside the question of technical knowledge, do not surely fall short of those which to-day would soon place a woman in the highest ranks of her profession. Gentleness, diligence, and obedience, faithful and charitable service to the poor, punctuality, cleanliness, temperance, and discretion—all these things were looked for in the sixteenth century Nurse. Is it not true, too, that in what degree the modern Hospital Nurse possesses these qualities must be measured her fitness for her profession?

L.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)