

As We See Others.

WE have received several letters during the past week commenting upon our little pars. headed "As others see us," and take the first opportunity of printing extracts therefrom, hoping that others may be encouraged to express their views on this important subject.

"A Private Nurse" says: "There is no doubt that, on the great Private Nursing question, there are faults on both sides—both Nurses and the public often expecting too much from one another under the circumstances. It is no use any woman attempting to do Private Nursing with success unless she is a thoroughly unselfish woman, and without making up her mind from the first, that into whatever house she goes, she will have to accommodate herself to some distasteful circumstances. The patient is usually the least of her trials, and were Nurse and patient dependent upon one another only, all might be well. But consider the difficulties. First of all there are the doting relations, then friends, acquaintances and servants, all to consider and *manage*. A Nurse must deal with each of these persons with tact, patience, and unflinching consideration; as a stranger she is always, more or less of an interloper in the family circle, and (unpardonable sin) she makes 'extra work' for the domestics. Consider in how many houses the proprietor is in absolute bondage to these self-same domestics. In few houses is he absolute master—no one can be independent when he depends upon his fellow men and women for every detail of daily life, from the mending of his socks to the flavour of his soups, and where personal comfort is concerned, what are the leisured classes not ready to sacrifice? The butler, parlour-maid, maid and cook are required for life, the trained Nurse is merely an inconvenient episode and, it is to be hoped, will pass away with the 'flue'; it is not necessary, therefore, to consider her over much. A noisy bedroom (preparatory to night duty), cold food, irregularly served on a tray, sixteen hours on duty at a stretch, are more often than not the conditions under which she is required to perform her responsible and exhausting duty. In the house of a patient 'It is only for a time, Nurse must not disturb the routine of the house.' To the Nurse, this disregard of her personal comfort becomes monotonous and at last unbearable, and she often returns gladly to the long hours of work and low salary in a hospital, where she can, at least, enjoy a regular routine of work and the society of sympathising colleagues."

"Registered Nurse" writes: "I was much interested in your remarks on private Nurses. There is no doubt that we are a never-ending source of discussion and that we are very imperfect; it is, indeed, very difficult to live up to the ideal of perfection which medical men and the public have laid down as the normal characteristics of the private Nurse, and disappointment in that we are merely human is proportionately great. Do not let us encourage the public to imagine we are saints; we have no desire to be canonised and, in consequence, live the life of martyrs; we only wish to be considered as healthy-minded women, trying, as far as we are able, to perform our duty to the sick and, in return, to be treated as such. We must sleep (the Creator has ordained it,

so why rebel against Nature?), therefore, we cannot be expected to remain awake for 48 hours as a rule; many of us have good, healthy appetites and need good, nourishing food, even when on night duty, and cannot support nature on bread and butter and a cup of tea between the hours of nine p.m. and nine a.m. Why should the general public demolish four square meals between nine a.m. and nine p.m., if the Nurse can exist without one during the same number of hours during the night? These, of course, are minor details, but what we private Nurses have to do is to impress the public with the fact that we are commonplace human beings, and if we are treated as such they will find us very useful, reasonable creatures. Let us divest our work (it is very real) of cant."

"Nurse Jane Heathcote" says:—"There will be no comfort or peace for us Nurses until we have by some unknown specific become changed from human beings (and therefore somewhat imperfect creatures) into a less faulty and yet unknown animal, or perhaps we had better aim at becoming angels at once. Because a woman nurses the sick, is she never again to succumb to any temptation, never to sigh if weary, never to resent and hate things, never to indulge in the luxury of being natural, always to assume a mask, to smile when she is sad, and stand when she is tired? It is all this falseness (perfect self-control in scientific nomenclature) that makes the life of a private Nurse a sham and a delusion."

"A tired little Nurse" writes:—"The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Private Nurses should have been constituted upon an approved pattern, after the ingenious construction of Messrs. Hyde and Jekyll; one could always then have retired to bed for a certain portion of the four-and-twenty hours like average humanity."

"Nurse Somers" writes:—"Of course there is no doubt that in many particulars the professional conduct of private Nurses might be improved. But how many difficulties they have to overcome. All private Nurses know that they are sent into numbers of houses where they are expected to conform to conditions of life which are unbearable, although I confess this is counterbalanced by the utmost kindness and consideration upon the part of some patients. Medical men little know the terrible strain under which private Nurses often carry on their duties. It is no uncommon thing for a Nurse to remain on duty with an operation for several days and nights without going to bed or removing her clothing; indeed in cases of abdominal operation, she does so by the *express order of the surgeon*. For how many inebriates and morphia maniacs are these unreasonable orders responsible? After a time the nerve strain becomes insupportable, and chronic ill-health for the Nurse is the result."

It appears to us that the discussion of this demand for long, exhausting, and unreasonable hours on duty for the Nurse upon the part of any operating surgeon might well receive notice in the medical press, as we know for a fact that it is exacted not only in private houses, but in some of our hospitals. We cannot believe that the generous and humane persons who contribute to support these institutions, do so with the knowledge that the regulations for the work of the Nurses is contrary to the laws of nature and humanity, and we feel sure that many of the benevolent members of the public would strongly disapprove of such an arrangement if they knew it.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)