

ates to the Matron of the Infirmary while making her fully responsible for their conduct and efficiency. It is apparently necessary to inform the persons who are Guardians of the Poor in Rotherhithe that unless the Matron holds such a position of authority over, and of responsibility for, her Nursing staff, discipline cannot possibly be maintained, nor can the Nursing of the sick be properly carried out. Perhaps even these gentlemen can, however, understand that a want of discipline would inevitably be followed by disorganisation in the working of their Infirmary. The first essential, then, to the establishment and the continuance of due authority on the part of any Matron is that she should be empowered to select, for the approval of the governing body, those women whom she considers to be suitable for admission as Probationers. This is the accepted rule at all general Hospitals and even at the best managed Poor Law Infirmaries. The committees of these institutions consider that if they make their Matron responsible for her subordinates, they must accord her the right to select the persons for whom she can consent to be responsible. If the Guardians of St. Olave's do not entrust their Matron with authority, why do they waste the money of the ratepayers in having such an official at all? From the remarks made by various members of the board, it is evident that they consider themselves admirably qualified to perform the duties of the Matron, and far be it from us to question the high esteem in which they hold themselves. But, as they do maintain the Matron's office, we contend that they are not fulfilling the trust confided in them by the ratepayers of Rotherhithe if they do not give to their Matron the power and authority which general experience has shown to be necessary if such an official is to perform her duties to the benefit of all concerned in her work. Trusting to the saving sense which, some, at least, of the Guardians of Rotherhithe must possess, we would put it to them, whether it is altogether fair to place any official in such a responsible position and treat her in the manner in which the Matron of St. Olave's Infirmary is now being treated. If any misconduct occurred amongst the female staff, it is the first principle of good Hospital government that she should be held responsible. But if the Board of Guardians appoint as a Probationer a person whom their Matron considers to be unsuitable for the position, they are making her responsible for the conduct and efficiency of a woman in whose suitability she does not believe—a course the justice of which cannot for one moment be defended.

And how would such a proceeding work out in practice? Let us assume, for the sake of argu-

ment, that a Nurse so appointed by any Board of Guardians—against the expressed judgment of their Matron—committed one of those mistakes which not infrequently occur amongst untrained Nurses, and that this resulted in the death of a patient, and a coroner's inquest. The Matron would then only have to produce her protest against the appointment of the Probationer in question, and to say: "With my professional experience I judged this woman would not be fit to be entrusted with duties involving the lives and deaths of a large number of patients. The Guardians—although unacquainted with medical and Nursing matters—over-ruled me, and in their discretion declared this woman was likely to be discreet, trustworthy, obedient, and careful. I disclaim any responsibility for the mistake this Probationer has made: the moral responsibility for the death of this patient is on the shoulders of those who, against professional advice, confided to her the lives of sick people." What would happen? Would not the public fully exonerate the Matron from all responsibility? The ignorant Nurse would not be blamed. But there would be an outburst of indignation from one end of the country to the other against those men who, in their conceited ignorance, had wilfully ignored skilled advice, and so had indirectly brought about the death of a fellow-creature. This is no fancy case, be it remembered. A month rarely passes without some serious mistake being made in some Hospital or Infirmary.

We hold, therefore, that when the Matron of St. Olave's Infirmary was informed that a person whom she considered unsuitable had been appointed by the Guardians to the responsible post of a Probationer Nurse, she would have failed in her duty if she had not immediately entered her protest against the election of such a subordinate. We can only marvel at the peculiar Christianity of a Roman Catholic priest who considered such a conscientious protest "most disgraceful"; and pity the abysmal ignorance of another person to whom it appeared "the most impudent thing he had ever heard of."

We do not enter into the merits of this particular case, and express no opinion upon matters of which no one outside the Infirmary can form a judgment. But that the Matron, who is responsible for discipline amongst her subordinates, and for the efficient care of the sick in the wards of her Infirmary, should have a voice in the selection of the Nurses for whom she is responsible, is a principle which is acknowledged and pursued in every Hospital throughout the United Kingdom. As it apparently is not pursued at St. Olave's Infirmary, we can only conclude that it is a very badly-managed Infirmary.

Furthermore, we would say that the letter

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)