

Further, that Matron is not doing her duty to her profession who does not combat those false notions of economy, held by some Committees, where efficiency in nursing is sacrificed to cheapness. Where wards are left unattended at night, and without proper supervision in the day, where patients wait on one another and do work that should be performed for them, where over-worked nurses are kept on duty without proper times off and without proper holidays, and become slatternly in their work from sheer tiredness; there the Matron is not doing her duty to her profession. It may be a hard fight, but it is a legitimate one, and she must agitate until she obtains a proper staff, proper leave, and proper assistance for manual labour.

And no Matron is doing her duty to her profession who does not take care that the future nurses, sisters, and Matrons who are under her special charge, are really being trained in the wards, not merely acting as assistant nurses, but regarded as pupils and probationers. For without systematic training, supervision, and discipline, they are liable to deteriorate into what Florence Nightingale calls "conceited ward-drudges," with no standard of appreciation but their own half-knowledge.

With the celebrated MacGubbins, they are inclined to think that there is only one thing more wicked than giving an order, and that is obeying it, if it runs counter to your own view of the matter.

There is hardly any duty whose fulfilment is more important to the Matron, who is the head of a training school, than this supervision of the training of the future nurses of England, none that is so far-reaching in its results, and none that, if she chooses, is so greatly in her own hands. Training, to quote Florence Nightingale again, enables a nurse to carry out her orders, not as a machine, but as a nurse; not like Cornelius Agrippa's broomstick, which went on carrying water till it half drowned its master, but like an intelligent being; training makes her, not servile, but loyal to medical men.

Lastly, perhaps I need hardly mention the duty of a Matron to do all she can for the personal and bodily comfort and welfare of her nursing staff. Men can rough it without much harm, but it is not good for women. It is, in the long run, actually deteriorating for them to have to live in squalid and crowded discomfort. It is not always easy to persuade a committee, with a small income and a holy horror of debt that the arrangements for the nurses—when off duty and in their own rooms—are really very important. I do not advocate superfluous luxury, because that is always out of place in a working institution, most of all in a charitable institution, but cleanliness, refinement, and cubic space are absolutely essential.

I think these are some of the principal duties a hospital Matron owes to her profession in her daily work, others will no doubt occur to you all; they are quite commonplace, we all know them well, have fought for them, gained the day, or been worsted as the fortune of war was with us or against us; but those of us who have the welfare of our profession at heart, have never rested until our professional pride and ambition has anyhow been partly satisfied by the position our nursing staff has held and deserved; in our own particular hospital.

But there are some amongst us who are not yet satisfied with the position that nurses hold generally, and who are determined that the uncertainty and ambiguity of their position shall ultimately cease, and that a trained nurse shall be a definite quantity. We are fully determined that, in the future, the public shall know as precisely what is meant by a trained nurse, as what is meant by a qualified medical man; and the nurse's right, to her title, free from the intrusion of unqualified women, shall be as unquestioned as his. If we hold our profession together there is no doubt but that we shall succeed, and the unity and good fellowship of the profession depend largely upon the interest and unselfish example set by the Matrons. Some people have said that there is no professional good feeling or camaraderie amongst us, but that is not so, nurses are very clannish and very ready to stand shoulder to shoulder. They think highly of their profession and have a great deal of professional pride, however much they may sometimes differ personally. To take an example, some time ago a book was published containing descriptions of hospital nursing as cruel and misleading as they were vulgar and absurd. Every nurse arose in wrath and condemned them, not from personal motives but because they cast a slur on the profession generally.

We are not wanting, I repeat, in professional pride, and are ready and mean to resent any slight on our professional honour or position; it only remains for us all, Matrons, Sisters, and Nurses to be equally keen in upholding that professional honour both by our private and public conduct, and by proving ourselves worthy of our position in the nursing profession. And, in the future, the position of our profession will undoubtedly be more stable, more fully recognised, more thoroughly understood, than is the case now. But our progress must be slow and sure. The volcanic islands that are thrown up in a night, sink in a day; but the coral islands that are the growth of centuries, last for untold centuries. And I do not hesitate to say that the majority of Matrons will be found in the future, as now, striving to the best of their abilities, and according to the dictates of their conscience, to do their duty by their profession.

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