

## The Work of Women on Hospital and other Boards.\*

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It is a remarkable sign of the times that the public are gradually waking up to a sense of the value of organised and official, as compared with amateurish and dilettante service from the women of this country. The old-fashioned sentiment that the deeper a woman buried any talent she might possess, and the more closely she wrapped it up in a napkin, the better she fulfilled her destiny, and the more womanly she was, is fast dying out, and the warning against allowing *any* talent to lie unused is more generally accepted as applying equally to women and to men. It is well that it is so, for the world has need of every ounce of talent it contains. Is there amongst men such a superabundance of public spirit, of devotion to the public service, of willingness to sacrifice private interests to public, coupled with general organising power and ability, that the State and the public Boards can afford to do without any that are possessed by women? . . . The general qualifications of women to serve on Hospital or other Boards are precisely the same as those of men, although each has valuable special experience which the other has not, and which would be lost without the services of both. Many thoughtful people recognise this. Full recognition cannot be hoped for till the citizenship of women is put on a sure basis by the bestowal upon them of their just right to a Parliamentary vote, the want of which is at the root of a vast waste of accumulated power.

Without experience and training neither men nor women can give of their best. As a guide to preliminary training, may I commend to the notice of those who have not already read it, a careful study of that wonderful little book of Baden Powell's on "Scouting," which contains texts for many sermons. Read the book and you will recognise what I mean. Carry out its precepts in your daily life, and your usefulness for all time coming, in both public and private life, will be sensibly increased.

I think I may most profitably spend the few minutes which the Committee of the National Union of Women Workers have honoured me by putting at my disposal by calling attention to some of the matters which might, in my opinion, with advantage claim the attention of women members of Hospital Boards. The efficient ordering of the domestic arrangements of a hospital, large or small, requires the same kind

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of knowledge, experience and organising power required for a well-ordered private house. I have, therefore, no sympathy with a frequently expressed idea that women members are wanted in the interests of women and children only. Men need their services also. The ideal household has a woman as well as a man at the head of it—those of widowers not being specially distinguished for comfort.

The dietary of hospital patients must naturally be fixed by the physicians and surgeons in charge, but they cannot be expected—except in cases of *very* serious illness—to pay attention to the quality of the food, and the manner of cooking and serving it. Variety of food is important for the officials, nurses, and general staff of a hospital, and this cannot be secured without much thought and care. In all such matters competent women managers should accept a full share of responsibility. The kitchen employees will do their work all the better if they know that some of the authorities are taking an intelligent interest in its results. The same thing applies to the laundry, the linenry, and the clothing departments. The officials connected with them are entitled to all the help which the knowledge and experience of women members are able to supply. Every worker, every one of us, is none the worse of a little criticism of our work from some one who thoroughly understands, although not actually engaged in doing it. It has been said that such matters may fittingly be left in the hands of an outside Ladies' Committee. Of this I most strongly disapprove, as I deprecate the assumption of responsibility without power. No one knows better than I do that in order to the efficient working of a hospital, the Lady Superintendent or Matron must have concentrated power in her own department. That power, however, ought not to be autocratic. No human being—man or woman—is fit to be an autocrat. Her rule should be monarchical, but it should be a limited monarchy—all important decisions and appointments being reported to a Committee of the Board of Management, on which the women members would naturally have a seat.

Nursing, and the training of nurses, have been so much in the public mind of late in connection with our sick and wounded soldiers, that I think this a fitting opportunity to urge all women members of Hospital Boards to make diligent study of the whole question. Although since the days of Mrs. Gamp what may be called a revolution has taken place in nursing matters, I have no hesitation in saying that a great deal of chaos still exists which *must* be reduced to order if the public generally are to derive the utmost attainable benefit from the services of

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