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Editorial.

NOISES IN HOSPITALS.

Are hospital noises prejudicial to the welfare of the patients? For that noises, both outside and in, abound there can be no question. More than one general hospital in London is built on a main thoroughfare, and the jingle of tram bells, the rumble of market carts, the ceaseless traffic begins at 3.30 a.m. and only subsides after 12.30. As for inside, well all nurses are familiar enough with the sounds, the difficulty is to know where to begin to describe them. In a well-conducted hospital breakfasts are not round until 6 a.m. Night Sisters can tell the difficulty of enforcing this rule, and for many months of the year the first stroke of six is the signal for which the night nurses impatiently wait to turn the gas full up, but in some hospitals many patients have been washed before that hour. Breakfast over, work is in full swing, water is taken round and the washing of the more able-bodied patients got over, and bed making is well on the way before the day Nurses come on at 7 a.m. Sweeping, scrubbing, polishing, dusting, temperature taking, and the washing of helpless patients, the filling of coal-boxes, then begin in good earnest. Up and down the wards go the Nurses, and it is fortunate if the Matron is a martinet as to heels, otherwise the tap, tap of high heels will be heard with painful regularity. At nine o'clock lunch is brought round, ten finds fomentations changed, beds straightened, four-hourly medicines administered and the nurses spick and span awaiting the event of the morning, the round of the house staff. Can the patient who breakfasted at six now get a short sleep? Perhaps, if the doctor is late on his

rounds, but probably the door will soon open, and in comes the house surgeon with a troop of students at his heels and the ward is at once as alive and busy as a hive of bees. By the time they are gone dinner comes round, and then the nurses go off in batches for their own meals when, of course, there is more opening and shutting of doors. Dinner is cleared away by the nurses on duty and the clatter in the kitchen proclaims that washing up is in progress, sweeping and dusting go on apace, and then comes the round of the visiting surgeon or physician with clinical lectures at many of the beds. Or it is visiting afternoon and visitors troop in and out. Then there is tea, after which evening work begins and continues without intermission till 8 p.m.

With the advent of the night nurses there is a lull, during which snatches of conversation and (let us hope) subdued laughter proceed from the kitchen as the latest news is exchanged between the two sets of nurses. The night has noises of its own, though the soft footfall of the night nurses cannot be reckoned as one of them. It is not unlikely that the rattle of a stretcher set down outside the door, followed by the tramp of porters, certainly not possessed of nerves, and the bustle attendant on the admission of a critical case, will banish sleep for the majority of patients. A contemporary holds that healthy people are not disturbed by noise, "it is the neurotic, whether child or adult who is intolerant of noises who complains of church-bells, cock-crowing, and street music." Perhaps, but then in this strenuous age the majority of people are more or less neurotic, and, further, hospitals are not designed for the

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