

THE SCARCITY OF NURSES.

Judging from various articles entitled "The Scarcity of Nurses," in the papers and journals lately, one is led to suppose that the public are slowly waking up to the fact that nursing is not one of the most lucrative professions in the world; and it is to be hoped that the hospital authorities and nursing journals will strike while the iron is hot, and take up the matter in order that the rising generation of nurses may obtain some redress.

Personally, I cannot speak of the financial outlook of private or district nursing, but of hospital I can—with the experience of a ward sister of six years' standing, and that for the most part in London hospitals.

Taking first the case of a nurse while she is undergoing her training, her salary is generally about £8 the first year, rising gradually to perhaps £20 in her third or fourth year; and taking into consideration that she is young and inexperienced, is learning a profession, and also receiving board, lodging and part uniform, that is on the whole a just remuneration—and one I think few girls would object to with a view of good prospects ahead.

The prospects ahead! There is the rub!

Let us now consider the financial prospects of a nurse who decides to apply for a post of ward sister. What is a ward sister expected to be, and what is expected of her? She must, of course, hold a certificate of three or four years' general training in a recognised training school, and stands a chance of a better appointment if she has taken her C.M.B., and has a certificate for massage, or if she takes up children's work it is usually necessary to hold certificates for the double training. She must hold all the necessary qualifications for the making of a good ward sister, she must be a good nurse, able to train and instruct probationers, maintain discipline, be a good manager, capable of keeping her linen, ward and all that belongs to it in good order, and must possess infinite patience and tact in dealing with the doctors, nurses, patients, and patients' friends; she should have good health, good education, and a good influence; and for these things she will receive a salary varying from £30 to £35 a year, rising to £40 if she retains her post for several years. Now let us roughly consider what has to be done out of, say, £35 a year:

First, there are clothes; and in these days of abuse of uniform, mufti is almost a necessity and even compulsory in some hospitals, so we may say:

Clothes	£15
Holidays	5
Old Age	5
Pocket Money	10
Total	£35

£5 only provides for a very modest holiday, if one has no home.

£5 only provides for a very small pension in our old age, even if paid into the Royal National Pension Fund for Nurses.

£10 has to do great things! Xmas presents, our church collections, BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING, the *Daily Mail*, numerous hospital subscriptions, tea parties, theatres and week-ends, &c., &c.; and speaking from experience, you don't get a gay time on £10 a year! Then there are the ills the flesh is heir to—such as a dentist's bill, or an extra holiday through ill-health—and they usually spell debt.

Some ward sisters, after a few years' experience, wish to get to the top of the tree, and become matrons, and so first have to obtain posts as home sisters or assistant matrons; in order to do this, it is often necessary to take a course of practical housekeeping for a few months, during which time they receive a nominal salary and often none at all.

A home sister's or assistant matron's work is usually hard, very responsible, and the off duty time not so good as a ward sister's. The duties consist of catering for the staff and patients, giving out stores, superintending maids, taking meals, keeping the books, lecturing to the nurses, &c. (according to the size of the hospital), and the salary for this is usually £40 or £50 a year. The next step is a matron's post, and if one is lucky enough to be appointed to a large hospital, the salary gives a good margin for saving—but that is for the few; and in smaller hospitals the salary for the matron is seldom more than £50 or £60 a year, and she is expected to be a very competent person. I hope I have not mis-stated these facts in any way, and in putting them together it seems to me we can hardly wonder at the practical girl of to-day not being anxious to embark on a career in which with herculean efforts she can only lay by a mere pittance for her old age.

Some argue that in improving the financial side of nursing, the high ideal will be lowered; but is that really so? The pillow-soother, the love-sick, and those "who don't get on at home," are ever with us, and will not be deterred by small or large salaries; while there are heaps of desirable women who, though they are obliged to earn their own living and think of their old age, will, and do bring to their profession the best of their intelligence—and, in fact, give the best of their lives for the good of their fellow-creatures and for the honour of their hospital; in short, why should we become sordid, even if we receive adequate salaries?

Let no one think I am running down hospital life, nor do I consider our lot wants brightening as I saw suggested the other day! To my mind, there is no life so full, happy and interesting, as in a well-regulated hospital; and with the burden of saving made a little easier, it would be perfect indeed.

M. A. F.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)