

in conformity with the terms of this Order and regulations prescribed by the Guardians, and from time to time to inform the Visiting Committee and the Guardians of the state of the Infirmary in every department, and to report, when he deems it necessary, in writing, to the Guardians, any negligence or other misconduct on the part of any of the officers, assistants or servants which shall come to his knowledge, etc."

Article 49, on the duties of the Matron, says her duties are, "to aid the medical officer and steward in enforcing order, punctuality, cleanliness, and the due observance of all regulations for the government of the Infirmary, by the inmates, the subordinate officers, assistants, and servants therein, and to report to the medical officer any negligence or other misconduct on the part of any of the female officers, assistants, or servants."

Another of her rules runs:—

"The Matron is empowered to grant, subject to the control of the Medical Officer, three hours' leave of absence to any house or domestic servant, provided such leave do not extend beyond 10 p.m.; any leave of absence for a longer period (with the exception of the regular fortnightly and Sunday leave) or beyond the hour of 10 p.m., to receive the express sanction of the Medical Officer."

The meaning of these orders is perfectly clear and unequivocal—the Matron and the female staff stand absolutely on every point under the direct personal control of the Medical Superintendent; as to that there is no shadow of doubt possible.

In no part of the Matron's orders is it stated that she has the control of the management of the female staff; she aids the medical officer and steward to keep order, and reports to the former. In the strict letter of the law she is an absolute nonentity as far as government is concerned.

To some people this may seem an excellent arrangement; it is simple and, until tried, easy. They say, a little mutual tact, a little personal consideration, and all will work smoothly. They do not understand the endless unnecessary friction and exasperation that is caused on both sides by a mutually false position. It is undeniable that there is not one woman in a thousand who would make a good colonel to a regiment of men, and it is equally true that there is, I am happy to say, not one man in two thousand who would make a suitable head for a girls' boarding school. Yet that is very much what the Medical Superintendent, if he keeps to the strict letter of the law, is expected to become. When a medical man receives his training, he is taught, and taught very thoroughly, his scientific work; years are given to learning medicine and surgery with an exactness and a minuteness, with a care and thoroughness, that leave, I have been told, little or nothing to be desired. The ideal medicine man, when he has completed his training,

should be a very finished scientific instrument, practically and theoretically perfect. But during the years that he is being shaped and fashioned he is not taught domestic work; he may take a chemical interest in cookery, but he is not usually introduced to the pots and pans in the kitchen. The Hospital scrubbers do not receive his close attention, and in his intercourse with the Nurses he is, or should be, restricted to giving orders as to the treatment of his patients and receiving their reports on the same. With their management, their arrangement and control, he is no further concerned; he has, perhaps, a general kind of idea that the Matron and Sisters are rather hard on the Probationers, and if he is of an advanced turn of mind, he considers it rather hard lines that they should not have more late passes, and are generally debarred from the perfect freedom allowed to his dressers.

A Nurse's education is different. All Hospital authorities are agreed that to leave out the domestic training and discipline of a Probationer would not only be disastrous from the Nurse's point of view, but impossible from that of the Hospital. A Probationer is from the first brought into direct contact with the machinery of her own management. She learns to look for all orders controlling her life to the Matron; she receives her nursing orders from the Sister; she hears the Sister receive her orders from the Doctor; she learns obedience to a properly constituted and organised authority. Little by little, as she rises in her profession, the mysteries of linen cupboards, laundries, scrubbers and wardmaids become clear to her. First as a Staff Nurse, then as Sister of a Ward, then, perhaps, as Matron, she learns the management of Nurses, Probationers, and Hospital servants—the wisdom or necessity for certain arrangements, the management of wards, the influence of personal contact, the endless trifles by which work is furthered or hindered. She learns to obey and respect the Matron who controls her, and she learns to obey and respect the medical man who controls her work—and her respect for him will always be in proportion as he confines himself to his proper sphere, which is, one should think, wide enough to satisfy the ambition and talents of the most exacting.

We will suppose that a woman trained in a general Hospital, having served her time as a Probationer, Staff Sister, and either as Assistant Matron or Matron of a small Hospital is appointed to a Poor Law Infirmary. She has been warned, but thinks there is much exaggeration; she has not a cantankerous disposition, has no desire to interfere in other people's departments, only wishes to keep what she supposes to be her own. At once she finds herself in a whirl of incongruities. She sends for a Nurse to whom she wishes to speak—

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)