

One of the most important and necessary qualities for a Matron of a large or small Institution, is the faculty of organisation and of arrangement. She should be methodical, and give adequate attention to details, without making the absurd attempt—which nervous, energetic women are so apt to make—of doing all the work herself. She should have the power of *directing* the efforts of others, the faculty so important in government of being able readily to gauge the fitness of an individual for any post, of being able to fill every office with the right occupant, not allowing her personal predilections to blind her as to the unsuitable qualities of otherwise good Nurses for any given position. She should be able so to arrange all work that it can be readily understood and very easily carried out. Then she should always exact the most rigid obedience to these arrangements, for only so can she ensure that the wheels of the whole machinery shall run smoothly. But while she must enforce strict adherence to rules, and perfect and sure regularity in the routine of Ward work, she must guard against the tyranny of discipline which eradicates all individuality, and leads to a constant state of soreness and bitterness against herself on the part of her Nurses. However firm a disciplinarian, both on and off duty, she should never be a mere task-mistress. The Nurses should feel that her conscience will not permit her to overlook their faults, but they should be equally confident that their health and comfort are matters close to her heart. While she is always more ready to reprove than to praise—for praise spoils its own value, and tends to make us, in the pride of our hearts, slacken our efforts—yet she should not walk round the Wards dispensing injudicious blame on all sides. The Matron must be careful not to confound a personal feeling of irritation and dislike to anyone with whom she comes in constant contact, with legitimate and righteous indignation at their faults—a mistake to which women are only too liable; nor should she ever reprove a Nurse for what is really a Sister's error, but be ever careful to see that the *responsible* person really receives the blame for any shortcomings, or want of management and order.

Far be it from me to inculcate pride or self-consciousness upon the part of any woman who holds a Matron's post, for I believe that no one can properly fill the position who is not truly humble at the knowledge of her own weakness, and of her great responsibilities. But inasmuch as an ounce of example is ever worth a pound of precept, it appears to me that the Matron must be all that I have described and more, if she is worthily to fill her office.

But to carry out her work efficiently

she must hold no half-position. The limits and scope of her responsibility—that is to say of her authority—must be most clearly defined. I would venture to lay much stress upon this point, and upon its logical conclusions, because one cannot but believe that most of the storms which now and then unfortunately arise in Hospitals, if traced to their origin, would be found to spring from the absence of this exact knowledge upon the part of some worker as to his or her precise duties. On the one hand, therefore, much misunderstanding would, I believe, be prevented, if the Matron ever remembered that she is a public official, and that her works and her very words are liable to be regarded by the public as representative, not only of her office, but also of the Institution with which she is connected. And on the other hand, this surely implies the accurate delimitation of her sphere of work, so that there should be no possible doubt as to whether this detail, or that, falls within the range of her duties. I venture to think that these could be easily defined; and then it appears to me that it is the duty of the Governing Body of the Hospital to satisfy itself that they are properly performed. But the items of administration, the manner and times when they are carried out, should be left entirely to the individual Matron. Some women are more quick, some are more methodical, than others; no two, probably, would do the same work in the same way or the same time. Consequently, it seems to me that two principles should be clearly affirmed: (1) the broad outlines of the Matron's duties should always be exactly defined, and she should be held most strictly responsible to the Governing Body for their efficient performance; (2) the manner in which the work is done must—if she is to work successfully and freely—always be settled by each Matron for herself.

To come, then, to the powers with which a Matron should be entrusted. These must necessarily vary much with the size and the requirements of the Institution; but one thing is, beyond all dispute, essential, if she is to have the smallest chance of success or comfort in her work. One would almost say it is a self-evident necessity, were it not a strange fact that at some Hospitals it is not recognised as a paramount principle. Whatever else her powers are, whatever else her duties do, or do not include, there can be no reasonable doubt that she should be entrusted with the absolute control of the entire female staff of the Institution, not only for the maintenance of discipline, but for the equally important prevention of friction and discord. Upon this point I cannot refrain from giving the following extract from an article by Sir Douglas Galtón, in "Quain's

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)