

Standing the Test.

DEAR MADAM,—The importance of the subject discussed in Miss Mary Gardner's admirable article entitled "Standing the Test," must be apparent to all who have had any experience in hospital management. But alas! it is a matter in which many Matrons, at the present time, are prevented from exercising their judgment and authority, as they desire to do, by the difficulties placed in their way by—

(a) The superior authority claimed and exercised by medical officers, Boards of Guardians, and Committees of ladies or gentlemen; and by

(b) The absolute necessity of maintaining the nursing staff at its proper numerical strength.

A.—There is no doubt that a Matron who studies her nurses' characters and dispositions, and concerns herself in their individual well-being, is competent to decide whether a probationer is, or is not, physically fitted (apart from actual disease) to perform the duties required of her in the hospital ward, and to go through the curriculum of study laid down for her. But in many hospitals and infirmaries, notably the Poor Law Institutions, the Matron is only permitted to recommend the probationers on trial for approval or non-approval by the Board and Medical Superintendent; the consequence of this arrangement being that a conflict of opinion as to the suitability of a probationer, physically or morally, may arise, with the result that the Matron is obliged to yield her judgment to higher authority, and is frequently obliged to retain on her staff a disloyal and inefficient worker. Where this division of authority exists it is not possible to secure the highest form of work from the nursing staff, who should feel assured, each one for herself, that her interests are safe in the hands of her Matron, to whom she should be able to look up with perfect confidence and loyalty, and whose approval she should aspire to win by faithful and diligent work in wards and class-room. Under such rule by a wise and kindly Matron, no probationer could feel herself aggrieved if pronounced insufficiently strong to bear the pressure and strain of a three or four years' course of hospital training; and, at the same time, the nursing staff of a hospital would be carefully selected for the work, and would be physically capable of discharging their duties. Boards of Guardians and Hospital Committees would, in my opinion, be well-advised if, having selected as Matron a lady of sound judgment who, combining tact and kindness with the highest nursing qualifications, was fully competent to undertake the responsible duties of a Matronship, they then left in her hands the

selection of subordinates, placing full confidence in her judgment, and accepting her recommendations for staff appointments.

B.—The absolute necessity of maintaining the numerical standard of the nursing staff, especially in a general hospital, is a frequent cause of delicate women being retained as probationers, although it may be apparent that they are not sufficiently strong to bear the heavy strain of ward work. Owing to the great changes made in recent years in the conditions of nursing, and especially the shortening of nurses' hours of work, a very large increase has been made in the number of probationers and nurses in most hospitals. But although there appears to be an almost unlimited supply of women desirous of being trained as nurses, yet a very small percentage of the applicants are really fitted for the work. It frequently happens, in the smaller provincial hospitals especially, that vacancies unexpectedly arising through illness or other causes, must be filled up as soon as possible; for the staff of a small hospital is usually perilously small, and one probationer's absence frequently means the disorganization of the work of several wards. The Matron is, therefore, obliged to take the best of her available candidates without waiting for more suitable ones to apply. And when once the probationer has been initiated into the elementary and routine portion of her duties, she becomes of some little use in the ward, and the Sister, or Charge-Nurse, deprecates a constant succession of raw material when her regular staff is, perhaps, very small, and the new probationer must begin at once to take her share (by no means a small one) of the regular ward work. This difficulty does not apply to the large hospitals and training-schools, but in the provincial hospitals of various size it is often a very acute problem for the Matron to solve.

In returning to the main subject under discussion—namely, the non-ability of the modern probationer, as a class, to stand the test of hospital training, it is greatly to be feared that much of the old spirit of steadfastness, obedience, and self-control which was the main characteristic of our immediate predecessors in the nursing profession, is not to be found in the nurse of to-day. But, while deploring the fact, it is the truest wisdom to seek a remedy for the evil, and this will most surely be found in the selection of the Matrons who are destined to train the nurses of the twentieth century. And surely it will not be difficult to discover, among the members of our great and noble profession, women possessing that power and grandeur of character, that high principle and sound judgment, that courtesy and refinement, which would distinguish them as leaders

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