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Editorial.

A POINT OF ETIQUETTE.

The question raised by a correspondent last week as to the reason of the custom which prevails in some nurse training schools of separating Sisters, Staff Nurses, and probationers when off duty is one which has on several occasions been brought to our notice.

Our own experience is against the enforcement of a rule of this description. Within the hospital there must, of course, be a due regard of regulations. For the maintenance of discipline, etiquette must be observed in the wards, and the relations of the various members of the nursing staff be conducted on a purely official basis. The new probationer, whatever her social position or her personal relations to the Sister or Staff Nurse, must regard them solely as her official chiefs, and accord them the respect due to them as such. This is not difficult of comprehension if we remember the strict etiquette observed in the Army and Navy. Whatever may be the rank of a subaltern or lieutenant, he takes strictly that of his position in the Service. There is no room for doubt on this point. In the nursing world the same rule holds good. In practice we believe it will be found that the well-educated women who are now entering the nursing ranks readily appreciate and observe the necessary etiquette in their relation to their official superiors, and to one another, in the wards; and in the Nurses' Home we certainly think it conducive to the maintenance of discipline if the Sisters take their meals and have a recreation room apart from the Staff Nurses and probationers.

With regard to the latter it seems to us unadvisable that a line of demarcation should be observed. Probationers, as a rule, naturally find their friends amongst those who enter the training-school at the same time as themselves, just as we find that men and women undergraduates "chum" with others of their own year.

Their common interests and studies all tend in this direction. At the same time, the presence of their seniors in their sitting-room is a valuable factor in the education of the probationers. The second and third year nurses may do much in maintaining a desirable tone throughout the school, if they are present in the sitting-room with their juniors. The newcomers thus quickly find their level, and obtain much the same kind of drilling that makes public school life so desirable an influence in the education of both boys and girls.

Outside the hospital we see no valid reason why etiquette should not be dropped and Sisters and nurses, or Sisters and probationers take up the friendships they have previously formed on the original basis, and mix on terms of social equality. We believe the time has gone by, if it ever existed, for the enforcement of official relations outside hospital walls. We know that in some institutions regulations are laid down by which the different grades on the nursing staff are prohibited from meeting on terms of equality outside the hospital walls. It is urged by those who advocate this procedure that it is essential in the interests of discipline. But we have no hesitation in assuring those Matrons who lay down regulations of this nature that they are broken, and in our opinion there is nothing so subversive of discipline as an attempt to enforce regulations which are disregarded or evaded. What happens in such a case is that a Sister connives with a probationer in breaking rules which the probationer knows she is expected to observe. Could anything possibly be worse from the point of view of the disciplinarian? In our opinion it is far better to recognise the existence of friendships of this kind, which will then proceed on a natural and wholesome basis. After all, what is the disadvantage in permitting them? The advice of an experienced Sister, if she is a wise woman, must be of great value to her friend, who is entering upon a new and difficult life.

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