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**Editorial.**

**THE ROOT OF OUR PROFESSIONAL  
DIFFICULTIES.**

We hear not on one side, but on many, from Matrons of important training-schools, that the maintenance of efficient discipline in the ranks of the nursing staffs which they superintend is a matter of constant difficulty and anxiety at the present time. The reasons for this are various. In the first place, there is undoubtedly a lack of restraint in many of the homes from which probationers are drawn. Girls grow up unrestrained and lawless, with the consequence that when they enter a hospital where the proprieties and wholesome discipline are enforced the regulations seem to them irksome and little short of tyrannous; nor is it easy to eradicate the habits of a lifetime, and a training-school is often unjustly blamed for this want of early teaching.

To give one illustration of our meaning. In the majority of hospitals there is a regulation against the Sisters receiving male visitors in their sitting-rooms, which, be it noted, are frequently their bedrooms also. Yet how often a Matron encounters defiance in the enforcement of this rule. Nevertheless, it is one which obtains in our women's colleges, and in her father's house a young unmarried woman would certainly not consider a bed-sitting-room a suitable reception room for a *tête-à-tête* with a young man, however harmless the interview, or however intimate the friend. Still less is the custom desirable when the acquaintance is one which has been formed in the course of professional intercourse in hospital wards. The reception of the junior medical staff in her room by a Ward Sister is to be deprecated, first because the resulting familiarity tends to break down the barriers of reserve which are ordinarily and properly maintained between the medical and nursing staffs, with the consequence that there is a tendency on the part of the latter to relax the respect which is due from

it to its professional superiors; and, secondly, if the Ward Sister entertains the house staff in her own room, she can say but little when the staff nurses and probationers follow suit and offer a friendly cup of tea to lesser luminaries in the ward kitchen.

Another regrettable tendency of the present day is for Sisters to be on far too free and easy a footing with staff nurses and probationers. What kind of discipline could an officer in the army keep if he discussed and adversely criticised the directions of the Commander-in-Chief with the subordinates amongst whom it was his duty to enforce them? Yet it is unfortunately not unknown for Sisters thus to discuss orders emanating from the Matron's office with probationers, an action not only disloyal to their chief, but derogatory to their own position. We cannot, however, blame women alone for the lack of discipline amongst them of which there are complaints on all sides. It has its root in far deeper causes than appear on the surface. Women at the present day find themselves in positions where they have considerable liberty of action, and liberty without corresponding responsibility is apt to degenerate into licence. In the position to which women are relegated by the State we shall find, if we seek for it, the true reason for the irresponsibility which, unfortunately, characterises their behaviour too often. While they are placed by the law in the same category with idiots and criminals, while they are required to obey laws which they have no part in framing, and to submit to taxation without representation, is it wonderful that in many instances they fail to attain to a high level of ethics? We were glad to note at the Conference at the Holborn Town Hall last week, in defence of the civic rights of women—to which we allude in another column—that there was a sprinkling of nurses present. We should have liked to see every Matron of a training-school there. The disfranchisement of women politically is at the root of most of the difficulties encountered by nurses as a profession.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)