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## Editorial.

### THE SWEATING OF NURSES IN COTTAGE HOSPITALS.

The British working man demands his eight hours' working day, and being able to bring the pressure of the vote to bear upon his demand, he gets it. The woman worker with an eight-hours' day would scarcely count herself a worker at all, but, if her hours are long, bed time comes at last, and she can at least sleep undisturbed until it is time to begin another day's work.

What of the nurses in charge of cottage hospitals? When the working day ends too often the working night begins. Philanthropy at the expense of the worker is easy, but the over-worked nurse suffers in broken rest, and later in broken health. Night after night she is deprived of sleep, and day after day of needful recreation, so that the public may do its philanthropy on the cheap. It is by no means unusual when a cottage hospital is founded, providing beds or cots for four or five patients, for a Committee to advertise for a Matron at a salary of £25 per annum; that is to say, her expert care of the acutely ill, per week, is valued at less than the wages readily paid to a cook of average attainments for her services.

But what is expected of the Matron—with the help of a general servant—for this miserable sum? She is "Matron" by courtesy only. True she must superintend the institution, see that it is sweet and clean, that the books are correctly kept, the food well served, the linen mended, and the funds economically administered. She must be ready at all times to welcome members of the committee and other visitors, and to reply to their questions pleasantly, however busy and overworked she may be. But this is a small part of her duty. Besides being

Matron, she is day nurse to four or five patients, several of whom are probably acutely ill and needing constant attention, and, incredible though it may appear, she is responsible for the patients at night also. It is unnecessary to explain to trained nurses that the most anxious part of her work is still before her. And so, for the 24 hours round, Sunday and week-day—for the sick need the same attention on Sunday as on any other day—the Cottage Hospital Matron toils on. Perhaps as the work increases, and the hospital becomes more and more popular under her management, the Committee, in a generous mood, give her a probationer. Some member more observant than the rest—or perhaps a member of the medical staff—notes black rings under the tired eyes, and that Matron is getting quite irritable, and, at times, stupid. It is a pity her health is so poor, but she is a valuable official whom it would be inconvenient to spare; and so a raw probationer is engaged—at no salary—and the committee are easy in their minds, having done a generous thing. That an untrained probationer cannot relieve the Matron of the responsibility of bad cases at night does not occur to them, and when the inevitable breakdown comes, they part with their Matron with expressions of regret, and wish her well in a lighter sphere of work, and not one of them sleeps the worse at night for the fact that she has been overworked and underpaid—in short, sweated—and that now her health is so broken that she will find it difficult to obtain work of any kind.

This is no overdrawn picture, but a statement of facts, and it behoves the public to understand that to make one woman responsible for the care of sick people by night as well as by day, is to condemn her to a life of slavery, and eventually to ruin her health. No nurse should undertake such a position.

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