

patient and theatre, but that lies within her sphere as Superintendent, and it should be an understood thing that she is perfectly in her place if she is present at an operation, though without actively doing Theatre Sister's work. It is often a very desirable thing for the Superintendent to observe the Nurses' way of working, or, how can the Matron who has an indifferent cook (Hospital cooks are seldom of the *Cordon-bleu*), and the responsibility of an anxious case on her mind, bring to the nursing of her patient a cheerful heart and undivided attention, when she feels sure, that but for her being tied to the ward, she could check extravagance and secure a well-cooked dinner for her Nurses by a timely visit to the kitchen? Or, again, with Nurse's duties on her hands, how can she be free to be the real Matron of her Probationers, and prepare careful instruction for them? or receive, with a pleasant courtesy, the visitors on whose favourable impressions depend so much of the growth of interest in the Institution. Surely, of all people, the Matron who has no Assistant should be able to be ubiquitous. Everyone in the Hospital should feel that she may be with them at any moment.

If there is a Ladies' Committee, the Matron has in it a constant source of worry. With the best intentions they waste her time and try her temper. It is extraordinary the judicial air some good ladies put on when they visit the Hospital. They belong to the Committee; therefore no corner in the building is safe or sacred from their invasion and inspection, from the Matron's bedroom to the mortuary. They condemn boldly, and suggest generously. Seeing the Nurses' dining-room being scrubbed, a lady will say, "I never allow my housemaid to be seen so late in the day;" and though the Matron may try to make her understand the difference between a Hospital housemaid's work and one in a private house, she goes away with an impression of bad management, to which sooner or later she will give expression. Or, in fervour of delight over everything, she longs to do something to complete the general comfort and perfection. Struck by the chill of the mortuary, she has an inspiration, "Oh! Miss ———, it feels quite damp; you should have a fire here. No fire-place in a mortuary! But a gas-stove; that is the very thing. I will give a gas-stove." And Miss ——— has some difficulty in persuading her that heating apparatus is not required in a mortuary.*

There are ardent supporters of an eight hours day for Nurses. But I have not as yet heard any one suggest a limit to the work of the Matron. As a matter of fact, there can be none.

Even if a head Nurse presides at the Probationers' breakfast on some days, it is only to allow the Matron to have another hour's sleep, after having

been up in the small hours of the morning acting as Night Superintendent. All the forenoon, one duty treads on the heels of another; probably she is called away from the Nurses' dinner-table to receive a visitor, and must wait to get her meal as best she can. In the afternoon, if she goes out, it is to interview tradespeople and order stores; she hurries back to find visitors whom she must take round the wards; patients' friends to be interviewed; cutting out to be directed in the work-room; and, before she can get a cup of tea, it is time for the Probationers' class. The wards have to be visited, and the day Nurses' reports taken; the supper-bell rings before she has got round the house and calls her to carving (an important Hospital duty from the point of view of economy). The cook has to get her orders for the morning. Prayers are read, and the Matron sits down for a brief time in her own room, often interrupted by Nurses who may wish to talk to her quietly, seeking advice or needing it; and this, if a Matron is really the "house-mother" she may be, is a valuable part of her work, though not one that any Committee will recognise. Then she begins her Night Superintendent work. She goes round to see that all doors are locked, gas out, and the day household safely retired. The night Nurses have to be visited, and often helped and instructed. By 11.30 p.m. she may get to her room, and sit down without fear of interruption; but more often she can only go to bed with the frequent certainty that in three or four hours she must be in the wards again; for, in a small Hospital, where there is no Night Sister, there are often cases which should not be left entirely to the Nurse. So that the Matron's hours are eighteen out of the twenty-four, and her salary £50 with board and laundry.

Do Committees realise this tale of work? Do they know how often they are, in addition, requiring bricks without straw, by refusing a sufficient staff of Nurses? If not, how are they to be taught? Devoted women, willing to spend and be spent in the service of the sick, and very capable of inspiring others working under their superintendence, are not wanting; but what Hospital Committees must learn is, that it is criminal on their part to trade as they do on that devotion. Only when a valued and economical Matron breaks down entirely do they reluctantly consent to a Night Sister or Assistant; and not always then. Alas! the "breaking down" of the proverbial "willing horse," means a useful life—a life the world would have been better for—maimed, if not lost. What Boards of Management need to understand, is how to remove difficulties from their Matron's path, or how to give their support that these may be overcome. No doubt Matrons, young in experience, often make mistakes, and are apt to compromise their position from the very first. For such there

* A fact.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)