

On the Position and Work of a Matron in a Small Provincial Hospital.

By E. J. R. LANDALE.

IN the discussion which took place at one of the first meetings of the Matrons' Council, a lady made the very pertinent remark that "education was much needed by Hospital Committees and Boards of Management in *their* sphere of work." No doubt the whole Hospital fabric suffers from their ignorance of the subjects on which they are called to legislate; and, on the part of many, from the great want of thought and earnestness in discharge of the responsible duties they undertake so lightly. The Matron of a large Hospital is often painfully aware of this, but it is the Matron of the small provincial Hospital who suffers most at the hands of its Managers. Occasionally, the resident medical officer has also a bad time of it, but his term of office is only for six or twelve months, and for that length of time he is generally well enough able to endure, besides he has the visiting medical staff on his side.

Few Nurses, when they receive with jubilation the announcement of their appointment as Matron to some Hospital of 80 to 100 beds, have any idea what really lies before them. Probably the Ladies' Committee has laid some stress on the desirability of a housekeeping qualification, and the applicant has managed to satisfy them with the tale of her exploits in the domestic field, thinking, honestly enough, that it will present no difficulty to her. She knows the diet of a Hospital by heart. Roast on Monday, boiled on Tuesday, stew on Wednesday, pie on Thursday, fish on Friday, &c. Which of us did not know the day of the week by our dinner? As Matron she intends to act on more enlightened methods. She remembers how the monotony of food has tried her, and she will consider her new Nurses. So she gives her orders to the cook, who makes a mental note, "New broom," and, for the first week or two, the usual sequence of food is successfully upset. The meat, however, is sent in by contract. Ever on a Tuesday comes the inevitable half-sheep. Now, the ordinary Nurse may learn a little cooking, but she is seldom instructed in the South Kensington fine art of sending up cold mutton in nine different ways, far less mutton for ninety in five or six different ways! So, intend what you may, in the end, monotony is apt to prevail, for it takes a very great deal of invention and time, and patience with the cook, to make the best out of the material supplied for Nurses and patients. How is she to give to it the time needed? She finds economy exercised in wrong directions, and has to meet the objections of

the Committee Visitors—men who have not much idea of diet. "You seem to have a larger number of fowls for your extra diets, Matron. We have never had so many before." Matron explains that she found the custom had been to give as "chicken diet," the boiled-out flesh of fowls used in making soup; but the Matron's reason seldom commends itself either to the Visitor, because it increases expense, or to the cook, because it entails extra work.

The laundry is a department few Nurses have any practical knowledge of, but the Matron of a small Hospital has to know the whole detail of it, and what is more, supervise most closely, or she will find it become an extravagant department. The amount of soap used will always be on the increase, and chloride of lime and washing powders will soon reduce her linen to shreds.

Then there is her store work. Daily stimulants and extras to the wards. On one morning in the week, the servants' stores; on another, the Nurses. Think what this entails—the checking of all the books of the different departments, the entering up the requisition lists, the watching that all necessaries are kept in stock. Think of the time it takes. Tea comes in by the chest, and so many $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. and $\frac{1}{4}$ lbs. have to be weighed out; sugar and butter ditto, for, probably, the Matron has been told by the Secretary that buying these things in bulk saves an eighth of a penny on every two lbs., and of course, the Management do not see any object in saving the Matron a half-hour in the 36.

When you add to all this the direction required in the sewing room (if she is fortunate enough to have one), you have not by any means exhausted the list of the Matron's domestic duties. She presides at the Nurses' meals, inspects their dormitories, makes a raid now and again into the servants' quarters to see that they are all present and orderly at their 6.30 a.m. breakfast, &c., &c. In themselves such duties present no difficulty to a methodical person who knows her work, but it is in cases where the Matron, instead of being Superintendent, is expected to combine the work of Head Nurse and Housekeeper, that difficulties arise. In some Hospitals it is clearly set down in the Matron's rules that she is required to attend all operations, and take charge of the nursing of special cases; in others, it is tacitly understood that she shall do so. This seems to me a fatal mistake. If the Matron is shut up for hours, as often may happen, in the operating theatre, what becomes of the supervision of the house and household? And if the Matron takes charge in the theatre what interest will the Nurse take in the case handed to her at the ward door, compared with what she would have felt had she been an assistant at the operation? Of course it is generally desirable that the Matron should supervise the preparation of

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)