

## CORRESPONDENCE

(Notes, Queries, &amp;c.)

\*.\* *We do not hold ourselves responsible for opinions expressed by Correspondents. Brevity and conciseness will have first consideration. See Notices.*

\*.\* *British Nurses' Association.—We are requested to state that Miss Wood (Secretary) will be at 20, Upper Wimpole Street, W., daily, from 10.30 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.), to see Nurses or others who may wish to make inquiries. Also that at present the Annual Subscription for Nurses is only half-a-crown, but that in a short time an entrance fee of five shillings will be charged. All Nurses desiring to join are therefore advised to write at once to the Secretary for an Application Form, enclosing a stamped and addressed envelope for the reply.*

## "THE MATRON."

To the Editor of "The Nursing Record."

Sir,—I did not respond to the invitation to speak on the subject of the Matron on the 15th ult., because, on the question of what a Matron should be and do, I felt with Miss Mollett, that Mrs. Bedford Fenwick had exhausted the subject; and as I entirely agreed with her on every point, I could only have echoed Miss Mollett's words. And on some matters that I am now going to mention in the hope of raising a discussion on these important questions, I feel so strongly that I was afraid of saying too much. In Mrs. Fenwick's very valuable paper she says, "But to carry out her work efficiently, she must hold no half position." Now that is what she exactly does hold in many provincial Hospitals; her responsibilities have no limit, and her authority is not defined at all. Mrs. Fenwick mentioned, in her reply to Miss Mollett, the difficulty of working under the Local Government Board, but from my own experience, the committee of a small provincial Hospital is a great deal worse. She says justly, "that there can be no reasonable doubt that she should be entrusted with the absolute control of the entire female staff of the Institution, not only for the maintenance of discipline, but for the equally important prevention of friction and discord"; and adds, "if the Matron or Lady Superintendent does not exercise the authority entrusted to her with judgment and discretion, it is then the legitimate province of the governing body to interfere and remove her;" but this is another thing that they do not do. I know from my own experience they retain her, and content themselves with making a number of rules undermining her authority; and when she finally departs, her unfortunate successor has to re-organise a disorganised Institution, with all these rules to hinder her work.

To quote an instance. In one of these Hospitals there was a change of Matrons, and the fresh one was not liked by some of the old Nurses, so they objected to her taking the head of their table at meals, which it was one of the rules that she should do. They appealed to the Committee, with the result that the Committee decided in favour of the Nurses, and ordered that the Matron should not personally superintend their dinner and other meals.

Now, it seems to me that after such a course of action as that, the Matron could not be expected to hold a proper position in that Institution, and that if her want

of tact and judgment were so great as to render such a course of action necessary, that she should have been asked to resign, and not have her authority undermined and her services retained.

It has been my lot to deal with committees such as I have above quoted, and to be the Matron of a Hospital where, because all kinds of abuses had gone on for fifty years, they should go on for ever and aye. In this Institution there were eighty-four beds—mostly full—and the Nursing Staff consisted of three Nurses of a very low class, and one old woman from the town for night duty. The oldest, who had been there over thirty years, and was in charge of the Male Surgical and Accident Wards, could neither read nor write, and was certainly not trained. The dirt was indescribable; no patient, however filthy when brought in, was ever washed. All utensils were kept at the side of the bed on the floor, and not emptied nor cleansed till they would hold no more. The Nurses' dress was most untidy, not to say dirty, as this particular one of the three took snuff, with which her clothes were besprinkled. Her language was vulgar in the extreme, and she kept the good word of her patients by allowing them to smuggle in, and keep in their beds, bottles of spirits. The patients that were ordered beer or stimulants by the Medical Staff kept these by their bedside in bottles, and drank them from the bottles as they liked, or passed them on from one bed to another.

When I reported this, and suggested that glasses and mugs should be provided, and the beer or stimulants administered by the Nurses in proper quantities and at stated times, I was at first told that it could not be done, as the Committee themselves had made the rule that they should keep it in the manner I have described, because some of the patients had complained that the Nurses drank their beer, &c. It took me twelve months to get rid of these very desirable Nurses, and four years to get a really efficient staff of Trained Nurses.

Mrs. Fenwick says again, "Last, but not least, the Matron should carefully consider her own health. Over work of body and mind, incessant anxiety lead many Matrons to deny themselves needful rest and change, proper hours of sleep." Now will you tell me how any Matron with the least spark of human feeling, let alone a conscience, could refrain from incessant anxiety whilst obliged to retain such a staff with sick and dying people all round her? You will say naturally, Why not get rid of them? That is just the question. It was the rule at this Hospital, that no Nurse could be dismissed except by the Committee; and as the Committee had kept these Nurses for thirty years, and they were no worse then than they had always been, they did not like to dismiss them. But continual dropping will wear away a stone, so at last they gave them three months' notice. I leave you to guess what those three months were to the Matron, who is not to worry, with even the Medical Staff against her, because things always had been so, and no one had complained till she came.

Of course, after they had tried the new order of things and worked with the Trained Nurses, they felt the benefit to themselves and their patients, and would not now go back to the old style of things if they could.

And now about the proper hours of sleep. As there was only one House Surgeon, and no properly responsible Night Nurse, but only an old woman on

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