



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

(Notes, Queries, &amp;c.)

*Whilst cordially inviting communications upon all subjects for these columns, we wish it to be distinctly understood that we do not IN ANY WAY hold ourselves responsible for the opinions expressed by our correspondents.*

## SERVANTS OF THE SUFFERING POOR.

To the Editor of "The Nursing Record."

Sir,—William Cobbett says: "It is the duty, and ought to be the pleasure, of age and experience to instruct youth, and to come to the aid of inexperience." I am, therefore, exceedingly obliged to you for directing the attention of your readers to the subject of Nursing in the homes of the poor, and I shall be still more beholden to you if you will allow me to supplement briefly the remarks already made upon it.

First, let me heartily endorse the pithy remarks made respecting the necessity of a better preliminary training for our District Nurses. "Knowledge is power." I would also remind you that the Master said, "The poor ye have always with you." Quite recently we have had an opportunity of showing our appreciation of what is meant by these words. The goodwill of which the angels attuned their song above the fields of Bethlehem has found once more an echo in the majority of the lives which go to make up the rank and file of our Nursing army all over Christendom. And the happy train of pleasing associations which follow in the wake of Christmastide seem to again and again most strongly remind one of the truism, oftentimes overlooked altogether in the "rush" of daily life—viz., that the source of final happiness is inherent in the heart; he is a fool who seeks it elsewhere; he is like the shepherd who searched for the sheep which was in his bosom. But there! I am digressing.

In returning to my point I find that in closing a somewhat extensive inquiry and research in District Nursing concerning the why and wherefore of failure therein, the results are such as to warrant me in asserting, with the firmest confidence, that hitherto the self-same prejudice and ignorance which prevails in connection with Nursing matters generally has found, in certain quarters, a noticeably congenial outlet here also. True this hath been directed, as a rule, somewhat obliquely at District Nursing in general, yet it hath invariably struck sure aim at the door of the District Nurse in particular. But I have gone still further, and have noticed, moreover, that the men in question have been, again and again, all unconsciously belabouring a Man of Straw, who naturally is as submissive under assault as a Guy Fawkes on the fifth of November.

It pains me to write a word against bodies of men who, from their position, should be entitled to receive from their fellows the greatest respect. There are many now worthy of man's admiration, for their intelligence, purity of life, and moral courage; and hold worthily an exalted position. I hope to see them all deserve it.

I must frankly own that I do not like the attitude of these men. But this reminds me that the ideal time when all hatred and bitterness will have vanished is not yet come. We are gradually learning to know each other; to treat each other humanely; and we all feel that we are not the less, but the more Christian for doing so. We rejoice to think that this process will go a good deal further in society at large, as it has done in many of our individual souls. We hope history will be studied with this object. We would not have the crimes which the fifth of November recalls forgotten, but rather written with a pen of iron on the rock for ever. We

need these beacon-lights to warn us—not to warn us against persons, but against principles and passions which still exist and, if we are not on our guard, will assuredly curse to-day, though under somewhat different forms.

There is, after all, a real dignity in work; all nature to-day is busy. Duty makes life sweet. Before inclinations, selfish passions, heart yearning often, stands duty, especially our allegiance to truth. The pleasant smile of approval in our inward consciousness is a lasting recompense for present evil, hard though it be to bear.

The Nursing profession (as you will agree) has for its primary object the alleviation of pain and suffering, regardless alike of age, sex, religious opinions, and position in life. At the same time I would take the opportunity of stating that *real* District Nursing is far more arduous and trying to the constitution than most people seem to imagine. Hard by the growing responsibilities and individual claim of the sick and bruised under her care, I would place the prejudice and ignorance which meet the District Nurse at almost every turn, the constant war of elements through the changing seasons of the year, the far from remunerative pay in kind which is given unto her, the markedly increasing press of work which attends her daily rounds, the oftentimes isolated and imperfect home accommodation and surroundings, together with the depressing atmosphere wherein she must needs spend the greater portion of her life—daily visitation in the midst of sheer poverty and its accompaniments—and I would ask you to carefully analyse and accurately weigh the whole, and then to honestly answer me, is it any wonder that poor human nature should have shrunk betimes in despair from a task so gigantic? Would you, similarly situated, have done better or even as well? Honour to whom honour is due.

Happily for our successors, there is a turn in the tide of public opinion; and I am pleased to learn that there are already indications that the day draws on apace when this heroic band of women, members of the gentle Sisterhood, will be, as a class, better housed and cared for than the majority of them have been in the days gone by. God speed the full time!

By the way, it should be distinctly understood that in the foregoing remarks I have been alluding only to the particular band of District Nurses who have borne so meekly the burden and heat of the day, and who have sustained, humanly speaking, the loss of all things for conscience and their work's sake. Earthly honours are not for these women; they pass away, one by one, and their names fade from memory.

Permit me a passing word to my junior Nursing sisters. To all those of them who have been sent from time to time into a district on supply, and who have hereafter returned to their fellows on our Hospitals and Private Nursing Staff, stating in glowing phraseology how very charming is the life of the District Nurse, and that they should, all of them, aspire after such a position, let me say, in compassion, "Pause and consider ere you attempt to essay an opinion thereon, in the face of the accumulative practical experience of to-day. 'All that glitters is not gold,' and the sooner you each realise this important truth for yourselves, and hasten to retire from so untenable a position, the better for all concerned. Keep right away from the borders of the Slough of Despond! Remember that the time is at hand when all should take sides. We want good Hospital Nurses, we want good Private Nurses, we want *thoroughly* experienced District Nurses, and we want capable Midwives. Which side will you take? It is much, much easier to find fault with others than to mend our own faults. But which is the best to do?"

Referring to my co-workers, the remarkably growing interest and confidence of the public in District Nursing is to me a very pleasing and cheering feature; and the self-same public will, I feel sure, concede ultimately the claim of the District Nurse to a fair and reasonable measure of its

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