

The Registered Nurses' Society.



MADAM,—An accusation which is constantly being brought against Nurses—and which is, unfortunately, only too true—is that “we receive all the efforts made on our behalf as a matter of course, and that we seem to regard ourselves as special objects of consideration and kindness without thinking it at all necessary to express or to feel any gratitude

towards those who work disinterestedly for us.”

I have had this said to me on several separate occasions by people occupying widely different positions and I am afraid I must confess that there is a good deal of truth behind. People say “Private Nurses are well paid on the whole, and treated fairly well, and yet we are constantly being asked to give them sympathy and practical aid.”

This preamble is an introduction to what I wish to say of gratitude and thanks to the promoters of the Registered Nurses' Society, of which I have the privilege to be a member. I think there are very few Nurses belonging to it who could read the report of the first fourteen months of the working of our Society without realising in what “pleasant lines our lot is cast,” and how little we, as individuals, have done towards carving out our secure present and future.

Perhaps I have more reason than some others to be very anxious to express my sentiments of appreciation, because my lot, before I joined the Registered Nurses' Society, was the very reverse of happy. In spite of my training and connections I seemed to be pursued by a particularly unlucky fate. I was a kind of “flotsam and jetsam” as a worker on my own account. The uncertainties and fluctuations of a private Nurse in London who is unconnected with a Hospital or Institution, always appear to me to constitute more or less of a “hand to mouth” existence. And I believe that it is the anxiety for the future, the waiting and the hope of “getting a case,” alternating with the fear that we shall not hear of anything, which makes private Nursing so proverbially exhausting. For some time I lived under these harassing conditions, going from one lodging to another, according to the amount I had in my purse, often finding that the earnings of a fairly busy season were completely absorbed by a slack time. And, during those years, had it not been for the kindness and consideration of former patients and of friends, I should not have been able to enjoy the necessary term of rest and recreation without which the health of a private Nurse must soon fail. And here again comes in the kindness of patients and friends towards “the Nurse” in affording me a holiday which my scanty purse could not supply. At last I had almost made up my mind that I must “settle” to some work—less paid but more secure—and was even contemplating joining an Institution where for £25 a year and uniform I should work fifty weeks per annum, or to put it plainly, for someone else's profit I should give my whole labour for the bare necessities of life.

And then a friend said to me, “Why do you not try to join the Registered Nurses' Society?” I made application, was a fortunate candidate and

have been for a year one of the happiest Nurses in London. The load of care and anxiety as to cases has been lifted off my shoulders; I have been fully employed, well-paid, well-treated and shown every consideration. And, moreover, from my earnings I have put by a sum which to me, who was for three years a most impecunious individual, appears as a very mine of Golconda.

The point I wish specially to draw attention to is the fact that, whereas it has been the custom for the employed to work for the benefit of the employers, *we who belong to the Registered Nurses' Society are, on the other hand, reaping very largely of the fruits of our employers' labours.* That is to say, we, and we entirely, are gaining the benefits of all the organisation, the responsibility and the daily labour of our Hon. Superintendent, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, and of the committee with whom she has worked.

I think this will be somewhat of a new point of view to many of the Nurses, but it is none the less true. Formerly we as individuals had to look for work, we had all the responsibilities, all the daily cares and anxieties. *Now* that is taken from us, and our livelihood is assured, the routine of the business is done for us, messages are sent when we are wanted, terms are arranged, and our fees collected for us. So that the positions are reversed. Where we used to find our earnings absorbed by Institutions conducted for the benefit of individuals, we now find that individuals are working hard in order that we shall labour less and have the full benefits of our own earnings. And this is called co-operation. But it appears to me that we Nurses have *all* the benefits and that the only way in which the co-operation affects our committee is that they take upon themselves a great many of our responsibilities, and that they share only the hard labour with no result to themselves, beyond the consciousness of well-doing.

Now it appears to me that we Nurses for whom so much is done ought to do something in return, and that we should make our Society a real co-operation by taking upon ourselves the responsibility of keeping up our status, our standard and our honour to the very highest pitch. The Committee for whom we work ask nothing, expect nothing, beyond that we shall do our part in keeping up the dignity of our calling. We are the first body of Registered Nurses working in professional co-operation. Then let us see to it that we show the medical and Nursing professions that Registration means more enthusiasm, more zeal and more dignity in our daily lives. We have entered into an unwritten contract—which is all the more binding because unwritten—of earnestness of aim and faith in the high potentialities of our profession; therefore let us show our appreciation in a practical way of all that has been done for us, all the efforts that have been made on our behalf, by the determination of each individual member of the Registered Nurses' Society to show that “Registration” carries with it the stamp of honourable dealing and of work well done.

AN APPRECIATIVE MEMBER OF THE
REGISTERED NURSES' SOCIETY.

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