

Letters to the Editor.

NOTES, QUERIES, &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.

THE OPEN QUESTION?

To the Editor of the "Nursing Record."

We have received the following communication from Dr. Wigglesworth, in reply to the letter of Miss Mary Gardner, on the above subject. We print it, though its length makes heavy demands upon our space, and entails our holding over some important correspondence, both as his answer to our correspondent, and also as explaining better than any words of our own could have done, the honest convictions of a medical man, who believes that his views are shared by the majority of his professional brethren, on the "woman question."

When I entered a protest against the dictum of the Editorial Department of the *British Medical Journal*, that the appointment of a female medical practitioner to an Irish Dispensary was a "progressive step," I had no idea that it would entail a discussion on the subject, and should not have entered upon it had not the *NURSING RECORD* taken up, what I considered to be, an untenable position. But in the last number of this publication I am requested to give my reasons for the position I assumed, and to this I somewhat reluctantly acquiesce, firstly, because I shall have to state the matter somewhat forcibly and may give offence, and secondly, from experience in somewhat similar matters, I fear my observation will not bear fruit on ground that is occupied already to the full by views of a contrary character.

Before entering on the subject, I wish to object to a mistaken application of my words concerning dogmatism, by your latest correspondent. When I wrote my original letter I was expressing my views upon the subject in question, views that I had good reason to believe were shared by the majority of my professional brethren. I did not dogmatise, which, in these days, is understood to mean to assert a position that cannot be assailed. I did not assume this position. But on the other hand, the annotator did dogmatise, by laying it down as a law, beyond controversy, that the "position" had been won and "unquestionably maintained" and asserting, that any one who did not agree to this assumption "must indeed be behind the times," which is another way of saying, that they had no opinion on the matter worth considering, or implying that their mental power was too low to grasp the situation. It was against this dogmatism that I entered a protest.

Again, the statement that I overlooked the words "unquestionably maintained," is somewhat contrary to fact, considering that I maintained that the entrance of women into the medical profession was a very debatable ground, and as I thought, proved that it did not follow that because a position had been won it

was therefore tenable for all posterity. Further, I wish also to point out another matter. It is concerning a remark attributed to a doctor, and to which I take a decided objection. The remark is that a doctor has stated, "That it is a well known and undeniable fact that a great number of women are sickly for life, and die, simply because they shrink from speaking of their ailments to a man." I traverse most forcibly that statement, and I challenge the production of authentic cases supporting it. For instance, persons having died without medical aid necessitates coroners' inquests, the reports of which I have never seen or heard of, though I have been in the active discharge of my profession forty years, and live in a city with three-quarters of a million of inhabitants and read the daily papers. If there are cases of a "great number of women" which could be "indefinitely extended," it will be easy enough to find records of them. I challenge their production. It is quite true that both men and women do occasionally—very occasionally—remain sickly, and from fear do not consult a doctor till too late for the application of remedial measures, not because the women "shrink from speaking of their ailments to a man," but because they both fear they have some fatal ailments, and this fear will be confirmed by a medical examination, and they have not the moral courage to face the truth. This is especially the case when cancer is the fear in their minds, and they often apply for a medical examination only when it is too late to apply remedial agents.

Every practitioner, who, like myself, practises chiefly amongst females, can supply evidence of such cases. This is totally different from the reason advanced.

Answering, then, the invitation given to state my reasons why the entrance of women into the medical profession is unnecessary, unwise, and not politic, I will give them seriatim.

For a thing to be necessary, our dictionaries tell us that it is "imperative," that it "must be;" that it is "not to be avoided," that it is "inevitable." Can the most ardent supporters of female practitioners say these conditions apply to the case in question? Does not their contention for admission rest solely on sentiment? But has their admission been followed by such undoubted success as even to demonstrate that if not necessary, it was at least desirable? I doubt it, for there has never been expressed a desire on the part of the public for their admission, it is a subject, treated by them with indifference. But the law of supply and demand? The supply is considerably—very considerably—in excess of the demand. In the largest cities and towns only about two, or, at most, three can find room for a living, whilst in smaller towns, which easily support 20 to 100 male practitioners, they are conspicuously absent. Only a short time ago a painful case was brought before me of one, qualified in every way for success, being on the verge of starvation for want of employment. The driving about of a few "insmart carriages" proves nothing. The most arrant of quacks do this. Are they necessary or desirable? Further, there is a large preponderance of females over males, and the former suffer from ailments requiring medical attention in much greater proportion than men. Consequently, female practitioners ought, by this time, to be greatly in evidence if their services were so urgently needed. "That an infinity of women prefer death," because they cannot obtain them, to consulting male practitioners. Surely in the space of some thirty years there should be a terrible cry

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)