

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.

SISTER FRIVOL.

BLOEMFONTEIN CLUB,

February 8th, 1902.

To the Editor of the "Nursing Record."

MADAM,—Having seen your remarks on the Nursing Staff now in South Africa, I should like to give you my experience. For the past eight months I have been on the medical staff of No. 8 General Hospital, and I have had ample opportunity of seeing and hearing all that transpires among the nursing staff of the other Hospital in this neighbourhood. During this time I have formed a very high opinion of the nurses out here, who, under exceptional circumstances, do their work in the most creditable manner. I most strongly deny that they frivol away their time, or that they are flighty. It is in my opinion very wrong that a large class of devoted and hard working ladies should suffer because there has apparently been some scandal with regard to one of them. All that I have seen have acted in the most ladylike manner, and have been most discreet in their behaviour. Why should they not like reasonable exercise on horseback, or play tennis or golf? Surely it is not a crime to keep themselves in health by taking exercise. I have no hesitation in saying that the nurses in South Africa are a credit to their profession, they are devoted to their work, and do it cheerfully and willingly at all times. If you desire to get the true characters of the South African nursing staff ask any of the Tommies who come home after they have been in hospital. I trust for the credit of the nurses out here now you will publish this denial.

Yours truly,

SEPTIMUS FARMER, C. Surg.,

No. 8 General Hospital, Bloemfontein,
O.R.C., South Africa.

[We are pleased to give publicity to this letter, but as Mr. Farmer fails to specify to which of our remarks he takes exception, we presume they appeared in the "Echoes" in our issue of January 4th, 1902, which we will quote verbatim:—

"As Sisters with worthy experience of Army Nursing are now coming home from South Africa, we have made a point of consulting some of them on various contested questions.

'How about the Discipline?' we asked.

'Discipline, as a well trained nurse understands it, is impossible,' is the gist of the replies, 'because the power of a Superintendent Sister is strictly limited under military law, the authority over the nurses filtering through the Army Medical Officer, to the civil military authorities. What is needed are experienced and responsible Matrons at the head of each Divisional Hospital—the Army Nursing Sisters have never had much authority, and many of them are quite incapable of enforcing discipline amongst the

nurses who have been sent out, many of them quite unsuited both by temperament and previous experience to act as military nurses. It is sad but true that numbers of nurses sent out have quite lost their heads when placed in positions where good common sense was indispensable. These women are known as 'frivols,' and have brought no end of discredit upon the nursing profession as a whole. Gadding, junketing, riding, driving, racing, dancing, picnicing, 'a high old time,' is the unblushing aim of the 'frivol,' and until she is 'sent down' she has managed to have it. At the front it is realised that the 'frivol' has spurred on the War Office to take drastic measures in formulating the new Army Nursing Scheme, and she detests its wise provisions. It is doubtful, however, if any regulations can be formulated which will control the flirtatious 'frivol.' In South Africa she has been much in evidence, the society woman setting a most evil example in Cape Town at the beginning of the war.'

We have before us facts which convince us that the above remarks are far from covering the whole sad truth. We are anxiously awaiting the selection by the War Office of the Matron-in-Chief for the New Army Nursing Service. A strong woman, and, moreover, a woman of the world alone can cope with the situation—it is to be hoped that a 'plastic mediocrity' will not be tolerated by the Secretary of State for War. The reorganisation of the Army Nursing Service is a question of national importance, and cannot be accomplished in kid gloves. We have got beyond the date of the 'dear sweet saint.' Army nurses want a woman with gumption as their Chief.'

We never speak without "our book," and we have ample evidence before us that "Sister Frivol" is well known at the War Office—we have therefore asked for the returns from the War Office of women engaged as nurses in South Africa, who have been "sent down," and discharged from service in military hospitals, and the faults for which they have been condemned as unsuitable, and if the official information is forthcoming, will publish it with pleasure. We must take exception to Mr. Farmer's assumption that exposing and condemning the wrongdoers reflects discredit on the hundreds of devoted Army Sisters at work in South Africa; the danger from which their reputation suffers, is being classed with the flighty and vulgar. We have never condemned the "Nursing Staff," as a whole, quite on the contrary, during the past two years numerous expressions of appreciation of their work have appeared in our columns. The present system of Army Nursing Organization we have and shall continue to condemn root and branch—it is rotten to the core. ED.]

STATE REGISTRATION OF NURSES.

The editor, who is acting as Secretary *pro tem* of the Society for State Registration of Nurses, has received so many letters both of congratulation and enquiry during the past week, that she has been quite unable to reply to them all, upwards of 150 applications for membership were received in a few days, these have been acknowledged with very great pleasure. The editor begs to thank the readers of the Record for their prompt reply to the notice inserted in last week's issue, and to express the opinion that under the Presidency of Miss Louisa Stevenson, the ultimate success of the new Society is assured.

The form of application will be found on Page v. amongst the advertisements, and will appear weekly for some time to come.

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