



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 MATRONS' COUNCIL AND THE "PRINCIPLE OF FREEDOM."

To the Editor of the "British Journal of Nursing."

DEAR MADAM,—In reference to your able editorial remarks of last week with regard to Sir Henry Burdett's attack in his newspaper upon the Matrons' Council, may I be permitted to point out that from its inception in 1894 the Council has had to run the gauntlet of criticism from those who deny to women, and more especially to nurses, the right of independent action.

I may remind your readers that the objects of the Matrons' Council are threefold:—

1. To enable members to take counsel together upon matters affecting their profession.
2. To bring about a uniform system of education, examination, certification, and State Registration for Nurses in British hospitals.
3. To hold Conferences to discuss subjects of professional and also of general interest.

To all reasonable people the furtherance of these objects must appear legitimate enough, yet in 1896 a London physician described the Matrons' Council as "a body uncertified and undirected by medical men, and whose views, therefore, demand very searching criticism by the latter before they are submitted for general adoption." It is inconceivable, but it is true, that such denial to Superintendents of Nurses and Nursing to associate themselves together for professional purposes was actually expressed by a medical man at the close of the nineteenth century. The amazement at, and the antagonism against any self-governing association of women for any purpose whatever, felt by some men, has not yet died out.

In their view, it is amazing presumption that we should form opinions as to our own affairs which are not "certified and directed" by someone else.

With regard to Sir Henry Burdett's assertion that the Matrons' Council is a "clique," those who know anything of its policy know that from its foundation this attitude is the last of which it can be justly accused. It has uniformly extended courtesy and hospitality to Matrons outside its own membership, as those who have accepted invitations to its Conferences and public gatherings can testify, and while the fact that it has a definite policy no doubt deters some Matrons who have not yet made up their minds to give public support to that policy from applying for its membership, it is undoubtedly a policy which commends itself to the judgment of an increasing number of Matrons and nurses alike, and one which, in accordance with the law of evolution, must win all along the line. Evidence, indeed, is not wanting to show that it is doing so already.

It is helpful sometimes to see ourselves as others

see us, and I therefore quote the words of that wise and far-seeing member of our profession, Miss L. L. Dock, Hon. Secretary of the American Society of Superintendents of Training-Schools for Nurses, after she had visited this country in 1899 and acquainted herself with the nursing situation:—"The Matrons' Council believes in and advocates the things which American nurses believe in and advocate. It stands for the clearing of the ground around the Matron or Superintendent of Nurses, that she should in her own province hold her own right and full share of authority; that the discipline and management of the nurses should be hers, not some man's prerogative—and this, be it ever remembered, is the principle laid down by Florence Nightingale herself in her classical notes on hospital management." And again:—"The Matrons' Council stands for the organisation and self-government of the graduate nurse, and for her ascent into varied positions of influence and dignity. It wants to see her on training-school boards, helping to direct the education of future generations of nurses. It is not insular and exclusive. . . . It is cosmopolitan, and believes in affiliating nurses with other progressive women who are busy with practical reforms. . . . These things considered, the criticisms against the Matrons' Council seem to be of small account. Ideas out-value size, and the principle of freedom is worth more than numbers."

The Matrons' Council is "a clique," says Sir Henry Burdett. "It is not insular and exclusive," says Miss Dock. Let unprejudiced persons judge between them. I am quite content to abide by the issue.

I have quoted the opinion of a leading American nurse—leading inasmuch as she is a force in the splendid Association which has done so much to improve the status of nursing and nurses in the United States. For in these days no isolated person can lay claim to leadership; it is the complement of association. I will now briefly give the views of a leading medical man, Dr. D. MacGregor, Government Inspector of Hospitals in New Zealand, whose name will ever be associated with the Registration of Nurses in that country. In his official report, addressed to the Hon. the Minister of Education, and presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by command of his Excellency the Governor, Dr. MacGregor wrote in 1901:—

"The Matrons' Council has now become the most effective nursing organisation in England, and, hand in hand with America, is making strenuous efforts to secure State Registration of properly-trained nurses after independent examination. Thus, inevitably the intelligent and earnest reformers have been driven to the same goal as ourselves. Nothing short of this will ever secure for any country efficient and trustworthy nurses."

If Sir Henry Burdett will persuade the ladies whom he enumerates to leave their splendid isolation, and come out and "lead," the Matrons' Council will, I am sure, sincerely rejoice. But it is unreasonable to expect the whole nursing world to stand still because four of its members have not yet realised the value of co-operation. Apologising for the length of this letter,

I am, dear Madam,

Yours faithfully,

MARGARET BREAY,

Hon. Secretary Matrons' Council,

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