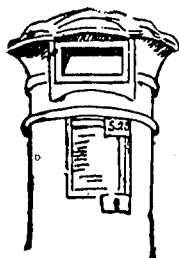


Letters to the Editor.

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 TRAGEDY AND COMEDY OF WAR HOSPITALS.

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

DEAR MADAM.—Your article on "The Tragedy and Comedy of War Hospitals," has interested me greatly, but has also aroused in me a feeling of regret.

It does seem a pity, that after a lapse of several years, a woman should deliberately set to work to stir up past scandals, thereby inevitably re-opening many a wound, and harrowing the feelings of those who lost their nearest and dearest through war and pestilence.

No one denies that many incidents in that campaign were deplorable and heartbreaking, but again, no one who served through it will deny that many of the evils were largely non-preventable.

Take the question of milk alone. Milk for the Hospitals had to be supplied, and in enormous quantities. In many towns it was only possible to obtain it by sending to collect from farms around, over a radius of 20 miles or so, and after a jolting journey over rough veldt and blazing sun for several hours, is it remarkable if it frequently turned sour almost immediately after distribution?

The old Army Nursing Service may have been as you describe it, "rotten to the core" in moments of irritation at its limitations I can recall using similar words myself, but, after some years of work under both the old system and the new, I feel myself constrained to ask for justice for the old; not because the system was not faulty to a degree and largely unworkable, but because in the zeal of a newly-awakened public conscience, and the loud demand for Army nursing reform, gross injustice has been done to those who did most excellent work in former days under almost overwhelming difficulties. I would draw attention to the fact that Sister X, as a volunteer, was probably too unused to the ways of the Service to take advantage of the possibilities or make the most of the opportunities at her disposal; also it appears to me that to have had such varied experiences, she must have been one of those who sampled many hospitals in a short time, without leaving a lengthy record at any of them, and I think you will agree with me that the evidence of temporary workers cannot be ranked very highly. A "Service Sister" would speedily have been equal to the settling of most of the minor difficulties she enumerates, for if one had not much power in the old days, one had (as a senior medical officer once reminded me) "enormous influence."

Personally I should think little of a Sister who

allowed the milk for her patients to be put into dirty basins. If she herself did not look into these details, no one else would, and the same remark holds good in the present day. No nurse worthy of the name, should be able to say she found "nothing to do" in military wards. She never needed to look far, and my experience has been that a Sister keen on her work might do most things for her patients. Her medical officers might not, did not, understand her difficulties, but they were the last to stand in her way if she voluntarily took an increased share of nursing duties upon herself. Her own conscience would be her only reward, but no opposition would be offered to her.

I feel, too, I must put in one word for the "crude, ignorant, and untrained Tommie." There were black sheep in plenty, 'tis true, crowds who brought horrible disrepute upon their corps; granted, too, that they were rough and untrained, and not always willing to be trained. Still, my thoughts turn to men who helped me manfully to grapple with times of stress and difficulty and without whom I would have been sorely put to it. It should not be forgotten, too, that the most unpleasant and dangerous duty, e.g., the disposal of the excreta, fell largely to the orderly's share, and when one turns to the death roll of the corps in South Africa and realises that these men fell in the fight against disease, it hurts one that *all* should be tarred with the same brush.

Once more I contend that a woman should have been the last to do this. With apologies for troubling you, I am, Dear Madam,

Faithfully yours,

X. Y. Z.

[The point which Sister X wished to bring out was that the members of the old Army Nursing Service encountered needless and "overwhelming difficulties" which were prejudicial to the welfare of the patients, and which arose from defective organisation. Individuals did excellent work, but the system was rotten to the core. X. Y. Z. puts her finger on one of the greatest defects when she shows that the Sisters working under it had to rely on their personal influence, in the control of subordinates. Authority should always be given with responsibility.—Ed.]

NURSING FRIGHT.

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

DEAR MADAM,—My attention has been called to a paragraph under the heading of "Nursing Echoes," in your issue of December 1st, in which it is stated that the Matron of this Hospital suggested to the Coroner that "nursing fright" was the probable reason for the suicide of Miss Tillet, who occupied the position of a probationer nurse here for less than thirty-six hours—viz., from 9 a.m. on November 16th, to 2 p.m. on November 18th.

Will you kindly allow me to say that Miss Cave is in no way responsible for the phrase "nursing fright," which was probably invented by one of the half-penny evening journals, but it was given in evidence at the inquest that Miss Tillet entered Guy's Hospital early in the year 1904, and that, having passed successfully through the six weeks'

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