

poor insane and imbecile persons who are physically as well as mentally ill, and an ideal, moreover, to which we could have hoped Miss Scott, as a Nightingale Nurse, would have been the first to aspire.

We think the letter *misleading*, because to quote one provision of the Royal Charter, in dealing with the Purposes and Powers of the Corporation, as an argument in favour of placing any person who is not a Trained Nurse on the Register of Trained Nurses, without quoting the fundamental principle embodied in the Royal Charter, and for which the Association was originally founded, is apt to mislead the ignorant and those persons who are unable to study the provisions of the Charter and Bye-Laws as a whole. We can but regret that a lady of Miss Scott's experience should have been found to advocate a suggestion altogether retrograde in its effects upon the education of Nurses and the welfare of the sick and insane. And we hope that the free discussion to which this important matter is to be subjected will ultimately result in unanimous action upon the part of all members of the Royal British Nurses' Association for the public good.

#### DR. BIERNACKI'S VIEWS.

We now turn, with a sense of relief, to the consideration of the following letter addressed by Dr. John Biernacki to last week's *British Medical Journal*, as it expresses the views which we hold, in most convincing words. And we reprint it, with a deep sense of gratitude to the writer:—

#### THE REGISTRATION OF ASYLUM ATTENDANTS AS NURSES.

SIR,—In replying to the letters of Drs. Wood and Strahan on the admission of Asylum Attendants to the Royal British Nurses' Association, it is necessary, at the outset, to remove a misconception which has arisen with regard to the last paragraph of my previous communication. It is treated by the above correspondents as though it were part—indeed, the chief part—of my general argument against the scheme. In other words, they presuppose, and then attack, the proposition that, the status of asylum attendants being lower than that of hospital nurses, it is an injustice to the latter to admit them to an association which will place them on the same footing. I do not say this proposition is bad, but it had no place in my letter. In so far as the question of injustice resulting to the nurses was considered, my argument was that the training of asylum attendants is incomplete, and consequently that it is an injustice to fully-trained nurses to admit them to an association the membership of which is regarded as evidence of a complete training. The recognition of the difference between these two propositions is of the utmost importance, since arguments going to prove that asylum training is thorough in no way invalidate the second one; for the specialised training of asylum attendants, however thorough, must of necessity be incomplete. Now, Dr. Strahan devotes himself entirely, and Dr. Wood mainly, to vindicating the thoroughness of asylum training, and in so far as they do so, it fol-

lows that they meet no objection appearing in my letter.

The misinterpreted paragraph was written under the belief that the promoters of the scheme desired to raise the status of the asylum attendants, utilising the Royal British Nurses' Association for that purpose. It is now contended that no such reform is necessary; but, even taking Dr. Strahan's optimistic letter literally, I am not prepared to admit—having regard for the fact that status is not wholly a question of curriculum—that asylums attendants are already on the same footing as hospital nurses. Here, however, as in my previous letter, I refrain from using this justifiable argument against their admission to the Association. It will suffice to emphasise the fact that, under present conditions, the question of prestige is of more than sentimental importance to the fully-trained Nurse.

Dr. Outterson Wood's moderate letter I read with pleasure, but without finding in it a justification of the scheme which, I understand, he is fathering. He divides his argument under five heads. The first deals with the specialised training of the asylum attendant, and is, therefore, as explained, irrelevant. In the same section, it is pointed out that the newcomers are to be entitled M.N.R.B.N.A., as contrasted with M.R.B.N.A., that their names are to appear in a separate section of the register, and that a distinct badge is to be used. These "paper" precautions indicate the danger of confusion between the hospital nurses and the asylum attendants. The danger is real, and is alone sufficient to negative the adoption of the scheme. Under the second head it is argued that some mental cases require a Nurse having special experience. The bearing of this fact on Dr. Wood's case is not made evident. To me it seems unfavourable, since it is a plea for the better definition of the Nurse specialist rather than for her amalgamation with the general Nurse. The third section once more raises the question of curriculum, and in it reference is made to the existence of male attendants as though this fact were favourable to the scheme, and not one of the chief counts against it. The argument appearing under the fourth head is, properly interpreted, self-contradictory; for, if "the Royal British Nurses' Association was founded for the purpose of affording information and protection to the public by publishing in a register the qualification of its nurses," it cannot be its duty "in a greater degree"—or, in fact, in any degree—to make others who are not generally recognised as trained nurses free of the register. I regret to note that, in the last section, Dr. Wood drops into the *argumentum ad populum*. Finally, he states that the admission of asylum attendants to the Royal British Nurses' Association "will add immensely to its strength and stability, and widely extend its large and increasing sphere of usefulness," thus begging the whole question by using as a clinching argument in favour of the scheme the very thing which it is necessary to prove in order to justify its adoption.

On the whole, Mr. Wood's letter, in contrast with that of Dr. Strahan, is an admission that asylum attendants require further organisation and a register which will command the attention of the public. To achieve this, it is not necessary to disturb the position which the fully-trained nurse has gradually attained—a position the maintenance of which is not only of primary importance to the nurse herself, but, as was shown in my last letter, to the medical profession and the public.—I am, &c., JOHN BIERNACKI.

Plaistow Hospital, West Ham, E., December 22nd.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)