

## CORRESPONDENCE

(Notes, Queries, &amp;c.)

- \* \* \* We do not hold ourselves responsible for opinions expressed by Correspondents. Brevity and conciseness will have first consideration. See Notices.
- \* \* \* British Nurses' Association.—The offices of the Association are now situated at 8, Oxford Circus Avenue, W., where all communications should in future be addressed. Office hours, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.). Wednesdays, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., to meet the convenience of Nurses who may desire information or advice.—C. J. Wood, Secretary.

## THE MATRON.

To the Editor of "The Nursing Record."

Sir,—I have read with interest "M.R.'s" letter in a recent issue, and only regret that she did not sign her name, as a signed letter always carries with it more conviction than an anonymous one; but when one's daily bread depends upon one's reticence, as in my own case, the proud privilege of independent speech is a luxury denied to one. From personal experience I can endorse much said by "M.R.," and I can only say that I, the Matron, oftentimes envy the Ward-maid, whose duties are defined, and who knows what her work is and can do it; who, when blamed unjustly for neglect of duty, can reply with great self-assertion and truth, "It ain't my fault; that ain't my work." I feel I could with real pleasure "wire in" to my work, however arduous, if I only knew what it was, as I see her doing, her face glowing with satisfaction over the exquisite cleanliness and brightness of the Ward furniture, stoves, and brasses. "M.R." speaks the truth when she says, "In many provincial Hospitals the Matron's responsibilities have no limit, and her authority is not defined at all." She might have added that the latter power is null and void in many instances. For instance, I am the Matron of a country Hospital. I was engaged to superintend the "Nursing and domestic departments." I entered upon my duties full of hope and energy, but was speedily brought to my bearings; my first month of residence was one long succession of petty humiliations and snubs. In the Wards (from which I was expected to vanish upon the entrance of the Medical men), any suggestion on my part for improvement was met by the answer, "It is according to the Doctors' orders." So that, contrary to many years' experience, I was to conclude that Medical men preferred a wound exposed at the time of dressing to the stimulating influence of a keen east wind, dancing playfully in through open windows on uncovered wounds, and that the subsequent attack of erysipelas was a charming and necessary result of a lacerated scalp, or compound fracture; that because a patient was suffering from bronchitis or pneumonia, we should therefore try to expedite his recovery just in the most draughty position in the ward; that a poultice retained its heat for eight hours at a stretch; that to make the bed of a case of typhoid, a temporary seat on his locker was necessary and invigorating; that the clock stopped at eight p.m., as far as an order for medicine to be given every four hours was concerned; and that

the atmosphere of a Medical Ward underwent a miraculous process of self-purification minus ventilation, despite the effluvia of excretions retained therein for at least twelve hours at a time, the accumulated carbonic acid exhaled by twenty-four diseased persons, whose ablutions were of the most superficial nature, and a collection of fusty food and garments tightly packed in air-excluded lockers.

To object to dirt, dust, damp sheets, over-crowding, badly cooked and roughly served food for Nurses and servants, was the signal for indignant protests, and accusations of a rabid desire on my part to squander the public funds, on the part of the Housekeeper, whose economical management was a theme of perennial praise on the part of the authorities.

If I answered a letter, it must be overlooked and endorsed by the Secretary, whose secretarial duties included the inspection of food, stores, linen, Nurses and their quarters, Wards, lavatories, and the pleasing occupation of "keeping an eye" on his fellow-workers from the boot boy to the Chairman, one most interesting and self-inflicted duty consisting of a daily personal interview with my assistant, who was required to answer *in writing* daily a list of questions for his inspection, amongst which was printed, "How much of the Matron's duties have you performed to day? ! ! !" I was not permitted to make any report of my own department, either *viva voce* or in writing, to the Committee, the Secretary delivering to them an appetising little *rechauffé* of my affairs weekly, which though touched by a master hand, was not apparently always easy of digestion, to judge from the expostulations to which I was afterwards exposed. "Tact, tact, tact, dear Madam, is what is wanted on your part, to oil the wheels of your department. Believe me, you will come to a deadlock without it," has been the often repeated advice of the Chairman and Committee; and when I ask bluntly, "What is my department?" "answer there comes none." Mrs. Bedford Fenwick has, however, answered that question for us definitely, and now for moral courage to follow her example and advice!—Yours, &c., JUSTICE.

To the Editor of "The Nursing Record."

Sir,—As "Nonentity" courts opinion concerning her false position, I hope she will forgive me if she considers that I express mine too freely; but by her own evidence she proves beyond a doubt that she is a person totally unfitted to occupy a responsible position she now holds, unless she makes an effort to do her duty. My advice to her would be, either to resign, or remember that she is in honour bound to combat and reform abuses. Let her begin by representing quietly to the committee in authority what she considers to be her just grievances, and give them the opportunity of improving matters; this, if right-minded men, they will probably be anxious to do. Whatever she does, let it be done in a spirit of firmness and moderation, and from no feeling of personal pique; let it be done because it is right, and in the end she must prevail. If each woman placed in the difficult position of being "set to make bricks without straw" would strike, instead of attempting to do impossibilities, straw would be forthcoming.—Yours truly,

A COUNTRY MATRON.

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