

section is only in the hands of a faction. The Matrons' Council is not representative." Of course, this sounds impressive; yet that word "representative" is a little bit vague. I want to ask: representative of what,—of conservatism? I am not sure that the Matrons' Council cares so much to be representative as to be progressive. I know that it does care to be progressive.

The trouble with this argument is that so few of the world's improvements have been initiated by the "right people." It has always been the "wrong people" who began movements toward emancipation. The curious thing is that when they have accomplished their purpose and have turned their backs in death they are seen to be reformers. It always seemed to me it would be so much more sensible and satisfactory, and would also speak better for our own penetration, if we could recognize the reformers before they are dead; and the thought does occur to me sometimes, when I hear the criticisms made upon this person and that person for what they are doing: "Why, that sounds remarkably like what was said of So-and-So and So-and-So," thinking back over the list. "Perhaps, now, here is a reformer." Ultimately we will all decide for ourselves who the right people are in accordance with our own ethical and professional standards.

If we sincerely and truly believe that it is best for nurses to be controlled all their lives long by an order or by the management of a training school, then we will believe those to be the right people who are working along this line. If, on the contrary, we believe that there is no more reason why nurses should be so bound and controlled than there is why medical men should remain under the direction of their colleges, but that rather should they receive the best possible teaching and then stand by one another in the best interests of their work, helping each other to work out the further problems of their wider world education, and learning to advance in innumerable directions of social usefulness,—then we will think those are the right people whose ideas we find congenial and stimulating.

In England one may take one's choice, for both are to be found there; and this is the disunity, this is the strife in English nursing affairs. 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. The Matrons' Council stands for the abolition of private duty by undergraduates, of all wrong systems the one against which American superintendents have most set their faces and which is now in America fast disappearing. It stands, further, for the abolition of what may be termed the "sweating" of nurses, viz., that system which keeps graduates doing private duty in the control of the hospital, paying them wages and taking their earnings. Be it here, again, ever borne in mind that the mere financial aspect of this system is not its worst feature, but is, rather, of absolutely the least importance. The nurses are paid good wages and, like the German "sisters," they do not need to take thought for the morrow.

The real grievance, the real injury done these women in all kindness by good and loving friends and managers, is that they are prevented from developing; they are forbidden to have a life of their own; they are not allowed that sweetest of all pleasures, the pleasure of giving oneself voluntarily and freely to the work of one's choice. Their loving and conscientious managers are like the old-fashioned father we have all met, whose daughters, tenderly cherished, never had a cent of spending money and had to ask permission every time they went to town. Then, as a natural result of this system, comes the Pension Fund.

The English Pension Fund is not at all like the German pension system. It has not the dignity of being a government affair, but is rather on the charitable basis. Those who founded it do not like to hear it called a charity, knowing that charity is an unpopular virtue. They claim that it is no more a charity than an endowed university or public library. This reasoning, however, runs off the track; for an endowed university or library is not aimed at one class, but is meant for all people.

The Pension Fund assumes that nurses are poor things and must always remain so: that they do not know how to manage their money and never can learn. (A large part of the endowment fund, by the way, was given by an American man, probably in one of those bursts of international affection to which men seem prone.) The payments required of the nurses seem to us large and the returns little, if any, superior to the German pensions. I see no advantage in the Pension Fund arrangements over those of a good life insurance company or a savings bank and school bonds. The nurses who join the Pension Fund are immensely patronized by royalty (with the best intentions), invited to eat strawberries, and decorated with badges. The accounts of these functions in the Pension Fund organ make us squirm in our chairs; because

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)