

Matrons in Council.

"THE NECESSITY FOR A NURSING DEPARTMENT IN ALL GOVERNMENT OFFICES DEALING WITH THE NURSING OF THE SICK."*

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As the present century draws to its close, or, as some people would say, as the new century opens, it is not unnatural that the minds of all



thinking people should be specially occupied in considering the changes which have occurred during the last hundred years. It has been peculiarly a women's century, and, to quote Miss Nightingale, in a letter lately addressed to all Nightingale Nurses, she says, "There was a tradition that this was to be a century for women. How true that legendary prophecy has been; woman was the home drudge, now she is the teacher."

That it has been a century peculiarly marked by mental activity and keenness in work and life generally is, I think, indisputable, and consequently great progress has been made in many directions, and many reforms and changes instituted. In none more than in the hospital world, in the medical, surgical, and nursing departments. Hospital gangrene, erysipelas, pyemia, and tetanus were common, and suppuration was considered the normal result of an operation or wound. Now-a-days, young surgeons never see hospital gangrene, and the other conditions are as rare as they were common.

And nursing—well, nurses were not libelled by the famous pictures of Dickens and Charlotte Brontë. But fascinating as is the study of the way we have come, I must not linger in it; it is not my business to look back, but rather to suggest ways in which some of the experience gained in the past may be best utilised, to confirm past progress, to rectify present errors, and to facilitate the progress of the future.

One of the lessons thus learnt, but seldom carried into effect, is *that women must, in their work, be subordinate to women.* Women have a much quicker grasp of the details of work, and surely they must be better judges of the

capabilities of their own sex, and better able to arrange the conditions under which the work is carried out than men. They are more alive to the special faults and temptations which assail women as a class, and therefore more competent in their organizations to guard against any special difficulty. This has been well instanced by the improvement which has taken place since the introduction of women inspectors into the factories.

Then, again, *professional women must be governed by professional women.* This holds good in all branches of work, and not the least in the one to which we belong.

It is incredible to suppose that a woman who has spent several years of her life in thoroughly acquainting herself with all the details of her profession, should be content to be at the beck and call of one, who, however estimable, is completely ignorant of the rudiments of the work under her control. It is a false position for both; cruel responsibility to place on the shoulders of the ignorant, untrained woman, whose very ignorance precludes her from realising that responsibility; and humiliating and unjust to the trained nurse, whose loyalty to her superior officer must constantly conflict with her knowledge of her duty to the patients under her charge.

Granted the propriety of *women being governed by women,* and that *professional women are most efficiently and satisfactorily governed by professional women,* we must look at the conditions at present existing in the Government departments, with whom lie the responsibility of nursing the sick, be they soldiers, sailors, or paupers. The Poor Law Nursing Service has already been ably dealt with; my remarks will, therefore, be confined to those organizations which deal with our sick soldiers and sailors.

In the Army and Navy, the Head Sister is entirely under the authority of the Medical Head of the Hospital, not only as to carrying out the orders of the Physician and Surgeon with regard to the patients, *which is as it should be,* but also in domestic details, and the discipline of her staff of nurses. She has no real control over the Orderlies, although they work under the Sister in the ward; they are taken off duty, changed, drilled, and given leave of absence, without any consideration as to its convenience in the ward in which they are working. All reports pass from the Head Sister to the Medical Officer in charge, then from one head of department to another, till it reaches the *Director-General,* and he, knowing "*nothing practically of nursing,*" decides to accept or reject it as his, no doubt, trained intelligence, dictates. Now the *point is this,*

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