



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 ANNUAL BUTTER PARTY.

To the Editor of the "Nursing Record."

DEAR MADAM,—Having been present at the Annual Meeting of the Royal British Nurses' Association, and the Matrons' Council Conference, it is interesting and instructive to compare the tone of the two gatherings, and to seek the cause.

At the Matrons' Council one was struck by the camaraderie, the simple and straightforward manner in which the business was conducted, the freedom of speech encouraged from all, the keen professional tone of the matrons present, their respectful reference to the medical profession, their good humour and sisterliness, if one may use the word. There was an entire lack of anything like patronage, no official preening, no fulsome reference to royalties and titles, and votes of thanks were accorded where they were due in hearty good faith in a few courteous words and nothing more. All this was at it should be in a meeting of self-respecting working women.

But how different was everything at the R. B. N. A. meeting where, to a mere onlooker, it seemed as if the whole show was got up to toady royalty, for the mutual "buttering" of the hon. officers, and for proving to the nurses their absolute superfluity and inferiority; indeed, the fact that it was a meeting of a Nurses' Association never once entered one's mind.

Mr. Fardon—the medical Hon. Secretary—seated on the platform, well above the common herd, one leg cocked jauntily over the other, his thumbs stuck into his waistcoat armholes, controlled and dictated the course of business; he it was who nominated the scrutineers, read reports, patronised the paid officials, and acted for all the world as if the R. B. N. A. was his own particular preserve, as indeed it is.

The Hon. Treasurer, Mr. Langton, dealt with the finances, and proved, no doubt quite unintentionally, that less than 1170 members out of a boasted membership of 3000 had paid their subscriptions for the past year. But his announcement that a real live Duchess (if only the relict of a divorced Duke) had instructed him to make it known to the "royal President" that she would subscribe £100 a year to help support the R. B. N. A. was no doubt considered ample compensation for the lack of the members' financial support.

Then we had more references to royalty from Mrs. Dacre Craven and Sir Dyce Duckworth, more about Duchesses, more sickening patronage, more mutual admiration of hon. officers, more of everything in fact than consideration of nurses and their professional affairs.

And yet the saddest part is to be told—and this was the acquiescence of the majority of those nurses present with all this vulgar folly; they appeared quite oblivious of the fact that the whole thing was grievously degrading.

To an old member of the Association there was a gleam of hope. The sharp rap over the knuckles recently administered by the *British Medical Journal*, in stating that "the affairs of the Association are largely in the hands of the medical members," and "the nurses are practically silent," has surely had its effect. Very few of the rank and file of the medical members were present, as in times past, to support the official autocrats, and a nurse might have ventured to speak without the gallant Dr. William Duncan immediately moving that "she be no further heard," sure of the support of his Middlesex confrères. Indeed, apology for the marked absence of the medical members was considered necessary from the platform, and we were informed "that medical men were so busy on Monday morning," which elicited a whispered question from one nurse to another: "Can it be the family washing?" Knowing in the past the cheerful manner in which these gentlemen assumed the entire control of the women's affairs, the suggestion was not so wide of the mark as at first appears, and it also shows the estimation in which a woman holds "Betty Maria."

The radical difference in tone at the two nurses' meetings mentioned is deeply significant. At the Matrons' Council we have a body of experienced, self-respecting, professional women dealing with their own affairs, and proving that they are quite capable of conducting them. At the R. B. N. A. meeting we find a body of nurses absolutely submerged by the medical officers, and the few matrons ranged on the side of the employer as against the employed, with the inevitable result that the employed are cowed into silence, or personally bribed by employment (as in the case of the Chartered Nurses' Society—a totally illegal title by the bye—as all members of the R. B. N. A. are chartered nurses), and thus utilised to stultify the benefits granted to the whole profession of nursing by the Royal Charter.

This is the plain unvarnished truth about the R. B. N. A., and the sooner the medical profession as a whole realises the disgraceful condition of affairs under the intolerant government of the Middlesex clique, and through their organisations and Press, set about restoring justice to the nurse members of the Association, the better. The unconstitutional methods by which the present official autocracy has been established are condemned by every Nurses' Association in our Colonies and the United States, and are cited as a warning in nurses' organisations all the world over. It has been the means of British nurses in New Zealand, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, and South Africa declining to associate themselves with the parent Society, and, more significant still, of forcing the nurses of Canada for all practical purposes to combine and associate themselves with their progressive self-governing colleagues in the United States, the result being that the most harmonious and kindly relations exist between the associated professions of medicine and nursing in every Colony and the United States of America. The history of the R. B. N. A. for the past eight years has been discreditable in the extreme, and the fact that the hon. officers annually congratulate themselves upon the dumb submission of the women nominated on to the Executive and Council by themselves is the most discreditable part of all.

Yours truly, ONLOOKER.

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