



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.

IS THE NURSING PROFESSION AS A WHOLE RETROGRADING?

To the Editor of the "British Journal of Nursing"

DEAR MADAM,—For us, matrons and nurses alike, this is the question of primary importance at the present moment, and we may be allowed to plead for a suspension of the public judgment until both sides can argue the matter fairly. An honourable feeling closes the lips of many a nurse and superintendent who could compile page upon page of records of health broken down and lives of nurses risked through the selfishness or carelessness of the private employer, who will grudge the nurse her seven hours for rest out of the twenty-four, will take no trouble to see whether she gets her food in such a condition as will tempt her to eat it, or that she can leave the sick-room during daylight hours to get fresh air and exercise.

But it has been said, and justly, that in order to form a due estimate of great historical events or personages as well as of great pictures, the spectator must take his stand at a distance from them; the same principle applies, I think, to the consideration of this question. Seen from a near standpoint, the strongest characteristics, the higher lights, the darker shades will be most clearly seen and the general effects will be missed. The onlooker must place himself fairly apart so that prejudice for or against may not mar his judgment, and, taking into consideration the changed conditions of the sick in our hospitals (whether civil or military) which exist now when compared with fifty years ago, I am sure he will confess himself surprised at the marvellous progress made both in the work itself and also in the consideration shown to the patients.

Perhaps if we could transplant our nurses of to-day back to the time of the Crimean War many of them might prove themselves no mean rivals in devotion, and possibly superiors in skill, of the noble band of women whom Miss Nightingale gathered round her. We should also bear in mind that with the lapse of time the failures of the past generation have been lost sight of; thus Miss Nightingale, writing of the year 1858, says: "A good nurse is more difficult to find than a good soldier," and "the loss of a well-trained nurse is a greater loss than that of a good soldier"; evidently all nurses then were not good nurses any more than is the case to-day.

Consider for a moment another point. I believe that the increase in the numbers of those who train now must be at least five to one as compared with those who trained fifty years ago. I have before me Miss Nightingale's notes on hospitals, in which, writing of the year 1858, she gives a return of the staffs of fifteen of the largest hospitals in London—the total

number (matrons, sisters, and nurses) is 521; the combined number on the staffs of these same hospitals is now 1,767. If we admit equal capacity or incapacity on the part of those training, we must be prepared for a proportionate increase in the number of failures, but I believe the failures are not in proportion and that immense progress has been made in what we might term hospital ethics. I remember years ago, when a probationer at St. Bartholomew's, having half-a-crown pressed on me by the mother, who said, "A long time ago, when I was a patient in—Hospital, I should have been badly done for only he gave half-a-crown every week to the nurse to look after me, and I always said if he were ill I would do the same." Where is the probationer who would not feel herself degraded if suspected of such practices now?

The modern critic finds it easy, no doubt, to prove that nurses have faults; we admit it, sadly, but those faults are shared at least in an equal degree by those who sit in judgment. The daughter or the sister who has not the time to bestow on the sick relative, or who possibly is too highly organised to look on at suffering, or more probably has no patience or tenderness for an invalid's whims, finds it easier to blame her deputy than to do the work herself. It is difficult to refrain from expressing one's contempt for such persons.

My experience goes to prove that the best class of nurses prefer the lower pay and the harder work done in hospital wards, or in the lanes and slums of our cities, to nursing in the homes of the wealthier classes. If this be the outcome of selfishness, it takes a strange form.

I am well aware that we all have our shortcomings, nurses as well as patients, but I do deny emphatically that training and skill acquired in our hospitals tend to harden or render probationers selfish; it would be a sad day for our sick poor were this the case. Training will not make a selfish person unselfish, but surely higher lessons are learnt in our schools than will be taught at the card-table or in the ball-room or the theatre. We ask for workers of the best kind; society has few such to offer; but, taking courage from what has been already achieved, I feel we need not be ashamed of the past or hopeless for the future, but may leave the improvement in the work done by nurses all over the world to be a standing proof to those who come after that our motives have been disinterested, and that we have tried to rule our conduct, whether as matrons or nurses, by higher principles than those of selfishness and greed.

Apologising for the length of my letter,

I am, dear Madam,

Yours faithfully,

H. C. POOLE,

Matron, Blackburn and East Lancashire Infirmary.

PENSIONS FOR IRISH NURSES.

To the Editor of the "British Journal of Nursing."

DEAR MADAM,—Would it be convenient to insert in your paper the following? A couple of weeks ago I saw a paragraph in one of our nursing papers speaking of a fund established in this country known as "King Edward's Coronation Fund for Sick and Disabled Nurses in Ireland," which, in my opinion, is a most desirable fund indeed, and it would be well if a similar

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