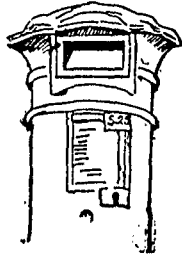


Letters to the Editor.



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.

OUR GUINEA PRIZE.

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

DEAR MADAM,—I was delighted to find myself the winner of the Guinea Prize, also to receive cheque this morning. Thanking you for the same, I remain, yours truly,

AGNES A. MANSER.

Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast.

MORALITY IN RELATION TO HEALTH.

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

DEAR MADAM,—It is with great satisfaction I learn from the BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING that a session at the Congress of Nurses is to be devoted to Morality in Relation to Health. I think it is quite time some such steps were taken to stir up public opinion in regard to a subject which so closely affects the moral and physical welfare of the nation. I am convinced that many nurses view with horror and dismay the number of cases which occur of criminal assault upon young girls, and how seldom the perpetrators of such crimes are brought to justice. Is it possible that there is one law for the man and another for the woman? It appears to be so sometimes.

As this point will doubtless be touched upon during the Congress Meeting, would it not be both interesting and instructive if a few statistics of these cases were gathered during the next few months?

I should be very pleased to tabulate and arrange such statistics if anyone interested in this subject would kindly forward to me reports, newspaper cuttings, or any authentic data of such cases which may come under their notice. Of course, the names of those sending such matter would not be published.

I remain,

Yours faithfully,

MARY BURR.

The Chestnuts, Ebford, Topsham, S. Devon.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE WORKHOUSE BABIES.

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

MADAM,—The Local Government Board has taken an unusual step. It has published as a Parliamentary paper a defence of the Workhouse nurseries, seeking to show that their condition is satisfactory, and that there is no greater mortality among the babies born than may properly be expected. The careless reader, like the complacent Guardian of the Poor, may easily suppose that the things which the Commissioners have themselves personally seen in the Workhouse nur-

series, like the damaging evidence of the official reports themselves, are all a delusion, and that the Workhouse nursery is—like the rest of the sphere of the L.G.B.—the best of all possible worlds.

But let us look a little closer at this "white-washing" Report. Notwithstanding the appeal that we made for official statistics of the ten or twelve thousand babies annually born in the Workhouses, the only figures now vouchsafed relate to London alone. So far as they go, these are actually confirmatory of the statistics of the Minority Report. We stated that out of 8,483 babies born in 1907 in 450 Workhouses, 1,050 died on the premises within that year, being 12.4 per cent. of the whole (all readmissions being, by the way, excluded); and that the deaths during the first week were from 40 to 45 per 1,000 births. The figures which Mr. Burns has been persuaded to publish show that out of 2,653 children born in Metropolitan Workhouses during 1907, 312 died on the premises within twelve months of birth, including readmissions, being 11.7 per cent. of the whole; and that the mortality during the first week was 42.2 per 1,000 births—admittedly "nearly double the corresponding rate obtaining among the general population." If this is the case in the Metropolitan Infirmaries, what is it likely to be in the rest of the Kingdom, where (with some conspicuous exceptions) the general mixed Workhouses are older, less well-equipped, less well-staffed than the London Infirmaries? Moreover, what is the use of publishing testimonies to the excellence of the lying-in wards, when what is in question is the state of the infant nurseries? I challenge Mr. Burns to publish exact statistics of all the births in the Poor Law institutions of England and Wales for the past five years, together with the corresponding infantile deaths on the premises at each period of life in such a way as to be comparable with the Registrar General's figures for the general population.

But the Local Government Board is apparently quite satisfied that the babies in the Workhouse nurseries—with ample food and nursing, and constant attendance—should die at twice the rate of the babies of the general population, exposed to all the risks and hazards of the average household. The excess is apparently to be fully accounted for by "pre-natal and maternal conditions." This argument would have sounded equally valid if four-fifths of the babies had died! Unfortunately, however, it does not account for the startling differences in infantile mortality between adjoining Unions in the same town (not, by the way, as is disingenuously suggested, between urban and rural populations). It may be difficult to keep down the infantile mortality of a London Workhouse lying-in ward (average 42.2 per 1,000 for the first week) to the rate of the Rotunda Hospital, at Dublin, where it is less than a quarter of this figure. But how is it that (as the officers of the Local Government Board know quite well), one Workhouse nursery has ten times as many babies die per 1,000 births as another? Can there be all this difference between the "pre-natal and maternal conditions" of the women coming in to

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