

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.

WORK AMONGST THE INSANE.

To the Editor of THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING.

DEAR MADAM,—I have read a paragraph under the above heading in one of our daily papers, and by your courtesy I should like to make a few remarks on this important subject, gathered from considerable personal knowledge. A complaint is made that the attendants have a specially hard lot, with but little amusement or recreation to enliven its dreary monotony.

The day's work is as follows in our County Asylum, and may be taken as a fair sample of the routine elsewhere. Rise at 6 a.m., help to superintend the washing and dressing of patients, the breakfasts and bed making—the actual work is done by the patients and is over by 10 o'clock, when both attendants and patients troop into the garden, or court, as it is called. *There are no amusements of any kind.*

Dinner is taken by the attendants apart from the insane, and afterwards they proceed to the court again; tea follows, and bed. The work is over by 8 o'clock and the attendants off duty. If not attendants at asylums these girls would be in service or barmaids. Their wages are £16, with board, washing, and uniform. As regards off time, they have one whole day every three weeks, one half day every week, and two hours another day. (This is for newcomers, the others have more time off duty.) The food is very good, and the young women, as a rule, are anxious to remain.

Of course, this is not an ideal life, but the same might be said of other callings in which men and women have to earn their daily bread—say, for example, those of the ordinary hospital nurse; the warders in the dreary monotony of prison life, and the vast army of our mining population. But whilst by no means unsympathetic with any movement in the direction indicated, as a means of attracting a good class of nurse or attendant, may I venture to suggest that it should take a still wider scope, and include the poor creatures under their charge, whose very misfortunes seem to preclude their bearing any testimony or, at any rate, seriously discounts its value.

In the very necessary matter of securing cleanliness is there nothing revolting to one's sense of decency in such a method of procedure as this?

About 50 women are forced to divest themselves of clothing, and while *nude* wait their turn to be washed in the eight baths provided: some of the poor creatures are most horribly deformed.

Again, those who are described as "acutely ill, dangerous, suicidal, or troublesome," are simply fed, shut up in dark cells, and left to recover or die. These cells are euphoniously called "side

rooms," and when the Committee go round the shutters are opened, a nightdress put on the patient, bedding taken in, and an attendant told off to minister to the patients' wants. Nothing could be more effective from a scenic point of view, and we can hear the words of ready approval on the part of the Committee (who scarcely glance into the cells!) "Most admirable, what patience must be required to nurse these poor creatures." But after these gentlemen have gone, the bedding is moved, the shutters again shut, and the attendant retires and the patient is left *alone*.

At night, if well enough, they are compelled to walk upstairs to a similar cell at the top of the building. In the case of a young lady who became insane from overwork at a leading Ladies' College she died ten minutes after being carried up one night in a sheet, when her back was found to be black from bruises probably caused by the difficulty of getting her up the narrow spiral stone staircase. It cannot, of course, be denied that the treatment of the insane in these our days makes, in point of humanity, a vast advance on the revolting methods of former times, but yet, with due allowance for this, I much fear that if the veil of obscurity which hides the daily life of the unfortunate inmates of our asylums (private as well as public) were lifted, we should indeed be startled at many disclosures which would then come to light, and would go far to confirm my contention that any reform for the betterment of the condition of the attendants in these institutions should also embrace, within its sympathetic scope, that for the far more kindly treatment of the unfortunate people committed to their charge. Here, if we only knew it, is an urgent call for reform, but the unfortunate thing is that, as a rule, we are never aroused to the need of any reform until the evil is so glaring that we cannot fail to notice its presence.

Yours faithfully,

CATH. MARY TURNER.

COMMENTS AND REPLIES.

Matron, Midlands.—Watch the advertisement columns of this journal. You can rely upon the firms whose notices appear in it, as only high-class advertisements are admitted to the journal.

NOTICES.

THE MATRONS' COUNCIL.

Information respecting the Matrons' Council and forms of application for membership may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, Miss M. Mollett, Rose Cottage, Three Cross, Wimborne.

STATE REGISTRATION OF TRAINED NURSES.

Full information as to the movement for the State Registration of Trained Nurses can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary of the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses, 431, Oxford Street, London, W.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)