

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.

THE PROPOSED NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF NURSES.

To the Editor of THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING.

MADAM,—Your correspondent, "Member of Bart's League," can hardly mean all she says; but the whole tone of her letter is an eloquent appeal for an association, and I beg her to do all she can to help on the attempt to form one.

Would you be so kind as to announce that replies may now be sent to me on post-cards; and that "Yes" or "No," with name and address, will be all that is now required; and that at present all communications will be treated as private and confidential?

Seeing that the Nurses' Insurance Society numbers 38,500 members, we are hoping for a big response; and hope it will contain at least 10,000 favourable ones.

Yours truly,
County Bank House, J. S. POLLITT.
Blackburn.

[We feel sure "Member of Bart's League" speaks from sad experience. The Nurses' Insurance Society includes a very large number of persons who have no right whatever to the title of "Nurse," in the trained sense of the word. Thus its name is most misleading.—ED.]

MIDWIVES IN IRELAND.

To the Editor of THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING.

DEAR MADAM,—A correspondent in a letter which recently appeared in the *Irish Times* protests against the apathy of Guardians in taking up the scheme submitted by the Women's National Health Association of Ireland for dealing with the very important question of dispensary nursing in Ireland.

The pathetic plea put forward on behalf of the Irish midwife should appeal to every nurse, and I think that all will agree that midwives, who are a responsible and expert body of workers, should receive better recognition and a more generous appreciation than has hitherto been given to them, especially when the country is so much in need of their services.

Midwifery is undoubtedly women's work, and surely as such it cannot be contended that the Women's National Health Association of Ireland in taking up this are working for any gain other than to prevent the daily slaughter of innocents they see around them. A preservative measure to save the nation, the mother and her infant, to diminish the heavy annual mortality

is the whole basis of the scheme, and also to secure better terms for the midwife so that she may be able to carry it out. To employ the whole time of such a person is to the advantage of her patients, and who can deny that this is not a matter of national urgency in Ireland as elsewhere.

Ever since the circular first appeared the feeling from a nursing standpoint was opposed to it, on the ground that the sum made up per week was insufficient. But some collected statistics go to show that £1 per week with uniform and bicycle are good terms when the present condition of district midwives is considered, and they would be well advised to accept them.

In some districts it may be possible to earn more. In any such case it would be unwise to join the Association; but the vast majority of district midwives are wretchedly paid, and should cry out aggrieved and refuse appointments until such time as their wants are acceded to in joining the Association.

A midwife who takes up work in a district in which another nurse after persistent and unceasing endeavour fails to obtain a living wage from the Guardians without insisting on higher remuneration, is unworthy of the name, unfit to be ranked with the members of an honourable profession.

At this small rate of pay she forgets the amount of time and money expended in learning to qualify herself for her work. I think there is no greater enemy to the sweated midwife than the woman who succeeds her, and is content to accept work at such a low figure. After all, is it any wonder that those in authority in many places are coming to the conclusion that a midwife should not be paid at all?

I am, dear Madam,
Yours faithfully,
B. V. HEDDERMAN.

[The position is more complicated than appears on the surface. It is true that £1 a week with uniform and bicycle is more than is offered by many Boards of Guardians in Ireland, but the midwives so appointed are paid fixed salaries out of Union funds, on the clear understanding that provided midwifery cases amongst the poor receive the priority, the midwife can engage in private practice, and in many cases she receives the bulk of whatever private practice there is. The conditions imposed by the scheme of the W.N.H.A. of I. are that she takes no private practice except by attending on insured mothers, and that during the time she is not required for her special duties she shall carry on such work for mothers and infants as may be directed by the local Committee of the Association. This at once introduces two undesirable elements, viz. :—(1) dual control; and (2) the control of the work of a professional person by a self-constituted unprofessional body. Further, while a midwife may be glad of a retaining fee from Guardians, which will enable her in the first instance to build up a private practice, a salary of £52 per annum cannot be considered

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