

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 ANOMALOUS POSITION OF THE SUPERINTENDENT NURSE.

To the Editor of THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING.

MADAM,—While deprecating as much as anyone the anomalous position of the Superintendent Nurse in Poor Law infirmaries, and fully realising the need for reform in the whole conditions of its nursing service, I feel there is a danger lest the tragedy at Barnet should lead us to do an injustice to the Workhouse Master, whose position is, after all, determined for him. Neither is it quite fair to attribute "education" and culture to nurses as a class, and "ignorance and social inexperience" to the Masters. Would that these positions were always filled by highly educated men and women. In practice—especially in the smaller country workhouses—the Master and Matron of a workhouse and the nursing staff are usually found to be drawn from the same social strata, and often a greater knowledge of the world weighs down the scales on the side of the Master. It is not by any means a universal rule that it is an "educated professional woman" who is under the authority of "an ill-educated Master." I fully admit, however, that their relative positions are such as naturally lend themselves to friction, and the fact that in many institutions harmonious relations are maintained says much for both the Master and the Superintendent Nurse. I venture to think that the nursing profession sometimes do scant justice to a body of men, of whom very much is expected, and who increasingly endeavour to discharge the multifarious duties of their office with sympathy, tact and justice. There are good and bad, wise and foolish, in every department of life, and the Poor Law service is no exception to the rule!

Neither should it be stated as a generalisation that responsible nurses have to suffer severely at the hands of "overbearing coarse male Guardians." Unfortunately, Guardians, as a whole, are not very enlightened people, and their qualities of "heart" are usually in excess of those of "head"; but "overbearingness" and "coarseness" are not the prerogative of one sex—and few indeed are the Boards nowadays where there are not a certain number of wise, kindly men or women, or both, who will take an intelligent and helpful interest in the difficulties of the nurse. I feel sure that many Workhouse nurses—while condemning the present system—will bear out what I say; and that your Journal would be the first to warn its readers against injuring their plea for reform by exaggeration and injustice.

I am, yours faithfully,
F. C. JOSEPH,
Poor Law Guardian and Certified Nurse.

[When a system, upheld by a Government Department, drives conscientious women to commit suicide, the only thing to do is to abolish it. If women entrusted with the supervision of the nursing of the sick under such a system are not educated women, they ought to be. Our correspondents are not blaming all Workhouse Masters, but the system which supports them in their contention that, as "fountain heads" in workhouses, they are permitted to swamp the authority of professional women, of whose skilled work they know nothing. As to there existing "overbearing coarse male Guardians" on many country Boards, who can deny it? That there are also a number of wise and kindly men on them no one denies. We cannot agree that one word which has appeared in this Journal on the "Martyrdom of Charlotte Phipps" has been either an exaggeration or unjust. We know how the poor woman was constantly insulted and her influence for good undermined—and we know "the system" as in force at Barnet is rampant elsewhere. Moreover, if giving publicity to the wrongs of Superintendent Nurses and others trying to do their duty to the sick poor in Workhouse wards, will help to right some Poor Law abuses, they may have all the publicity they require in this Journal. We know that in the commercial nursing press they will not get a hearing, because it would decrease, in some instances, the profits from advertisements.—ED.]

REPLIES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

L. IV. N.—In reply to your questions: (1) Nurses proceeding on active service have in many instances taken a cabin trunk and a handbag. No bicycle. (2) It is wise to wear the soft handkerchief Army caps. These are easily washed, and in case of necessity can be brought round and pinned under the chin, making the wearer quite tidy if collars cannot be starched. (3) A nurse in an enemy's country found with a revolver in her possession would be very liable to be shot; moreover, setting aside the ethical question, to most nurses a revolver would be a greater danger than protection, as few are sufficiently expert shots to be sure of firing at the right moment. (4) We have given details of the probable cost to a nurse from this country attending the International Nursing Congress at San Francisco in this journal. We estimate it at £80 to £100. We shall refer to this trip again in the near future.

D. J. N. (Leicester).—We regret the answer to your question is crowded out. It will appear next week.

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

QUESTIONS.

October 17th.—Say what you know about Dysentery and how it is treated.

October 21st.—Describe a course of procedure if secondary hemorrhage should follow the removal of tonsils.

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