

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.

A MANURE CART FOR MIDWIVES.

To the Editor of THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING.

DEAR MADAM.—Your correspondent, Mrs. M. Mortishead, illustrates her statement as to the lack of courtesy extended to a Poor-Law midwife, by a member of the public authority employing her, by the case of a Poor-Law Guardian in the Co. Meath who sent a farm manure cart to take her to attend the wife of one of his labourers. While it is quite true that the Guardian's opinion of the status of the midwife is sufficiently evident, the lesson is a far deeper one than lack of courtesy, and proves that the Guardian in question entirely failed to safeguard the interests of this expectant mother, and his dangerous ignorance of what constitutes an efficient attendant in maternity cases.

It is not without good reason that the rules issued to midwives by the respective Central Midwives Boards for the three kingdoms enjoin upon them scrupulous cleanliness the wearing of clean dresses of washable material that can be boiled, the disinfection, preferably by boiling, of all instruments and other appliances, for any deviation from the observance of the principle of strict surgical cleanliness may mean that, instead of life, the midwife may bring death into the house.

We know how susceptible a parturient woman is to infection through germs in not only visible, but invisible, dirt. We know how readily infection is conveyed to an infant through the stump of the newly cut cord. The historic instance of the holocaust of infants in the island of St. Kilda is a case in point: Baby after baby died of tetanus, and it was only when it was realised that this was due to infection of the cord, by attendants who did not understand the principles of asepsis, that the plague was stayed.

The germ of tetanus flourishes in manure and if the County Meath midwife had used the conveyance provided for her there might have been two deaths—one from puerperal fever, the other from tetanus; and they would have been primarily due to the ignorance of a member of a public authority who ought to have known better.

Yours faithfully,

CERTIFIED MIDWIFE.

NURSES ON STRIKE.

To the Editor of THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING.

DEAR MADAM.—The letters from Mrs. M. Mortishead and Miss McGrath both raise questions of great interest and importance. It is the discussion of such matters which is needed to give nurses confidence to organise.

My own view is as follows:—

Strikes have served a real purpose, without

them the nation would have been ill-fed and have deteriorated and become weak and poor.

This does not mean that a strike should take place without regard to the amount of harm and bad feeling it produces. To be successful a trade union must retain a sense of proportion and have good feeling towards the community.

A cruel strike will not improve the understanding of stupid persons on governing bodies, nor destroy their callousness, it will only draw sympathy away from the real grievances of nurses.

For those who fear strikes, may I add that organisation leads to consideration before action and to knowledge of affairs. I have witnessed a strike in a munition factory in which the women were not trade unionists. This strike was sudden, it was quite unjustified, it was at the most critical moment of the war.

I have also witnessed a girl, white with rage because of real injustice, calmed down by a trade union organiser. The injustice was later on righted by peaceful trade union action.

The organisation of the nursing profession seems to me the only road to justice and peace, as well as to the development of the science and art of nursing.

The profession requires a self-governing society, with rules which bring it within the "Trade Union Act," so that it can interfere between employer and employed without fear of being accused of conspiracy. The name of the association does not matter.

The constitutions of both the Royal British Nurses' Association and the College of Nursing prevent these societies from coming within this Act.

The nursing profession can only secure the fruit of victory by organising. Even the General Council of Nursing can do little for nurses, unless the Council has an organised profession behind it.

Nurses must use the General Council of Nursing, but they will degenerate as soon as they lean upon it.

If nurses are dependent they will be treated as dependent, if they have initiative it will be used.

If women are human beings they will be treated as human beings, if they like to be machines they will be treated as machines.

A nurses' trade union should be a strong moral force in the country, for there is no doubt that nursing brings out the very finest human qualities.

Yours faithfully,

HELEN G. KLAASSEN.

OUR PRIZE COMPETITIONS.

QUESTIONS.

March 20th.—How would you prevent foot-drop, acute thirst, constipation and vomiting after an operation?

March 27th.—(a) Describe fully the varieties of Uterine Inertia; (b) What treatment would you adopt in each case?

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