



Letters to the Editor.

(Notes, Queries, &c.)

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 WOMEN OF INDIA."

To the Editor of "The Nursing Record."

The article in the NURSING RECORD of November 24th, 1894, under the heading of "The Women of India," is one which offers ample scope for thought; and while there are many points in it which call for marked consideration, there is one which I think specially merits this; and that is the emphasis laid on the great need of caution in the inauguration of any great national reform in that country. It is here where the action of the Society, known as "The Indian Female Normal School and Instruction Society"—now abbreviated into the "Zenana Bible and Medical Mission," which inaugurated the great changes in the condition of Indian women which are now bearing such abundant fruit, among which may be named "The National Association for supplying Medical Aid to the Women of India"—showed that wisdom and intimate knowledge of Zenana life and manners in recognising from the first the fact, that the medical treatment of women in India, by fully qualified lady doctors, must be the top-stone of that grand structure, designed for the elevation of Indian women, morally and physically, and summed up in the long name of the Society. This Society began its labours some forty years ago by the instruction of girls in the Zenanas, by means of normal school teachers, and by the visits of the ladies to these secluded homes. This line of action led spontaneously to the need of medical and surgical treatment, in specially designed and equipped Hospitals, with, of course, special Nursing for the serious surgical cases operated on. Gradually the desire of profiting by these Hospitals, in which no man would be seen, dawned upon these poor secluded ones, whose only idea of treatment was patient and uncomplaining submission to the tortures inseparable from the ignorant and superstitious barbarities of the female Nurses called "Dhaies,"—for the term medical or surgical practice could never be applied to the horrors of the treatment of the lying-in patient, for instance. It was not long before the success of these lady doctors in medicine and surgery convinced many, not only that their case was not hopeless, but that kind and successful treatment was quite possible in Hospitals, where their seclusion would be rigidly respected, and where they would neither see nor be seen by a man; where the Nursing would be all that sympathising and devoted women could render, and where the treatment would be, not only that of thoroughly and specially qualified lady doctors, but be aided by surgical and other appliances of the latest and most approved designs. This is, indeed, the crowning success of a work as remarkable as it has been suited to the crying wants of that land of women's degradation. The success of Miss Cornelia Sorabjee is an illustration of what can be attained in the short space of two generations; and, once the start has been made, India's women will rise from the generations of a degradation, which may be summed up in one word, which, perhaps, must be made—*untrustfulness*. As life in the Zenana, though primarily in India, at all events, was mainly for purposes of protection, has ended, there is too much reason to fear, in a state of seclusion, which is the outcome of want of trust in the enjoyment of the privilege of

liberty, such as the women of the West enjoy and know how to appreciate. So complete is this seclusion among the upper classes in India, in Zenanas, where Western ideas have not entered, that the effect of liberty to these secluded ones, in their present condition, would be similar to placing a bird, that had known nothing of freedom, and whose cage-flight had been limited to the nine inches between the perches, on the green turf, where, after two or three ineffectual attempts at flight, it settles down and longs for the perch in the little cage. Liberty, and the blessedness of being trusted with this liberty, are plants which require not only a special soil, but a special culture, and one of the greatest difficulties which the Zenana worker has to overcome, is the sense of contentment, or rather resignation, to a condition which is little else but existence, with a view to ministering to the wants of man, and the obligations of maternity. The special subject of this Journal is one which is pre-eminently *the* want of India. To see a married woman of the upper classes, almost a girl, brought up till then in a life of indolence and luxury, taken, at the time of woman's greatest need, from all former comforts and removed to practically an out-house, where, attended by those of the lowest caste, whose very duties are evidences of their religious impurity; denied the sympathy, nay, even the company of those she has known and loved; to see all this, and to know what the awful treatment which awaits her, is to realise the needs of Nursing in a manner which those alone can fully comprehend who have witnessed the surroundings of the poor mother, and the treatment she has undergone, and the terrible condition in which she is, under certain circumstances, too often left. Well did the President of the Section describe this treatment, when I read a paper on the subject at the meeting of the British Medical Association at Bournemouth, as "obstetric varicosities." As one who has, during his thirty years' service in India, seen as much native practice as most medical officers out of the Presidency towns, I write of what I have seen and known, and feel that pleading for these poor women, in the pages of the NURSING RECORD, has a fitness which is quite peculiar to that Journal.

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Brigade-Surgeon Lieut.-Col. H.M.'s Bengal Army.
Blackheath, S.E., Dec. 29th, 1894.

"THE MIDWIFE QUESTION."

To the Editor of "The Nursing Record."

MADAM,—It is quite refreshing to find a person, like Miss Jane Wilson, who has the hardihood to assert that the report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons is of any value whatever. The obvious bias of the Committee can be very well shown by the summary of evidence handed in by Mr. Rathbone, a member of the Committee, and printed as evidence. A more misleading and partisan document it would be difficult to imagine; evidence against legislation which could not be answered is minimised, for instance, that of my own is ingeniously dealt with in a footnote:—

"The evidence of this witness was to a great extent directed to prove the efficient practice of the medical profession in midwifery, a fact not disputed nor largely material to the present inquiry."

The evidence of this witness was not at all so directed; but, putting aside for the present what points I really did raise in my evidence, I will assert that the official analysis is in obvious disagreement with that note. Now, either Mr. Rathbone is correct, or the official analysis is correct; and, in view of the fact that the gentleman who drew up the latter is almost certainly no partisan, and Mr. Rathbone is, it is

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