

## THE BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION AND THE MEDICAL PROFESSION.

BY MISS L. E. MACKENZIE.

THE *British Medical Journal* of July 18th, 1914 contains a critical review of the relations of the British Medical Association and the Medical Profession. I venture to send a résumé of it for our *Journal* because it puts very clearly the value of an Association to its individual members; a fact which the nursing profession in India is not unanimous in recognizing. To quote the opening sentence,—“Commonly associated with a right conception of ethical principles and an instinct for their application is the quality known as *esprit-de-corps* and the catholicity in this respect of the British Medical Association is well exemplified by the work that it has done on behalf of the Medical Departments of the Royal Navy, the Army, the Indian Medical Service, the West African Medical Service, and the Colonial Medical Service as a whole.

On many occasions the Association has proved itself in no wise less anxious to promote the interests of medical men in all the services than those of the independent practitioners who form the majority of its members.”

About 1850 the Association bestirred itself in the interests of Army Medical Men, representing to the War Office, and to the Admiralty, the disabilities and grievances of the conditions of service of both Army and Navy Medical Departments. In 1857 it renewed its efforts in this direction, impelled thereto by the occurrences during the Crimean Campaign and the Indian Mutiny. The claim made was that the medical departments of both services should be thoroughly reorganized, and the conditions attaching to the employment of medical men in these services entirely altered. This resulted in 1858 in a slight improvement in the conditions of service, at any rate on paper. In 1864 the Association started a vigorous and definite campaign with the object of securing the spirit as well as the letter of these reforms. Repeated representations were made, but it was not till the end of the seventies that any permanent improvement was effected. It was not till 1898, however, that the Royal Army Medical Corps was created by Government. Some four years after the South African war the conditions of the Royal Army Medical Corps were materially improved and made attractive, such improvements being carried out on the lines originally suggested by the British Medical Association. An extract from a letter written by a medical man in the Naval service will suffice to point a moral as to the value of associated effort. Referring to the vast improvements in the conditions of the service, the writer says, “One word in conclusion as to the part played by the Association and your *Journal* throughout the struggle. We all feel that had it not been for the powerful assistance we derived from our professional brethren who so kindly espoused our cause and made their voices heard, we might long have remained unemancipated, and it is to be hoped that Naval

Medical Officers will never forget what is due to the British Medical Association for what it has done during the eventful years of 1874-1875."

Referring to the Indian Medical Services and the drawbacks recently creeping into the service, the Association has presented a memorandum and tendered evidence to the Royal Commission on Public Services, lately sitting in India. I quote in full the concluding sentences of that section of the review which is connected with my subject. "To sum up, the existence of the Association and its readiness to expend labour, time and money in the interest of all medical men alike, have undoubtedly been of much value to all those who belong to the various services. Apart from the fact that individuals and isolated bodies of medical men are always handicapped when attempting to defend their own interests unsupported by their fellows, it is commonly difficult, if not dangerous, for those serving any of the great Government departments to take any overt action at all. This consideration underlay a communication made last year by a distinguished member of one of the services which contained the following passage: 'The younger members of the profession do not, perhaps, entirely realize the very great importance of supporting an institution which may prove in emergencies their only practical and reliable safeguard against injuries, if not absolute ruin. Without it many would be helpless and powerless, as want of money, want of time, or the peculiar constitution of their work, may forbid the invocation of the law. It was for instance owing chiefly to the action of the Association that the Army Medical Service attained its present honourable and useful position. There are numerous similar instances. No one can see the blows that fate may have in store, and the wise man is he who endeavours to protect himself. There are few forms of insurance more reliable than the British Medical Association.'

The article concludes with a reference to the British Medical Journal, to the immense amount of information contained in its pages, and to the work it does in keeping its readers abreast of the times, and in touch with the most modern science of the day. Reference is also made to the inauguration of the Royal Benevolent Medical Fund, and the Medical Sickness Society by the Association. With such evidence before us of what a Medical Association can do for medical men, the nurses of India should see the value of supporting the 'Trained Nurses' Association of India as the official organization of their profession. By giving it their hearty support they strengthen it to help them collectively and individually. As the correspondent quoted above truly says, "No one can see the blows that fate may have in store, and the wise man is he who endeavours to protect himself."

---