

Royal British Nurses' Association.

(Incorporated by Royal Charter.)

To the Editor of "The Nursing Record."



MADAM,

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to
fortune ;

Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows, and in miseries."

The life of an Association is very like the life of an individual. In each the infantile stage, with its gropings, its ignorances, and its mistakes have to be passed through. Then comes the stage of youth, with perhaps a little waywardness and want of caution—a few steps in the dark,—and then the adult life, sobered somewhat by experience and the lessons learnt by the mistakes of earlier periods. But whether in the growth of an Association or the growth of an individual there must come deciding crises—and the course taken at these crises, for they occur and recur—must alike shape the future of the Man and the Movement.

The Royal British Nurses' Association is on the brink of a crisis at this present moment—"The tide in the affairs of men," is reached and we several members of the Body Corporate are called upon to decide whether we shall take the tide at the flood, and so go on to fortune and good repute, or whether by omitting our duty, we shall allow the Association, into which so much good faith and good work has been put, "to be bound in shallows and miseries." In the abstract, if one were asked what would be the effect on the character and career of a young man, who on the threshold of life and in an important crisis, allowed himself to be guilty of treachery and dishonour to those who had toiled and slaved to put him in easy and prosperous circumstances, we should unhesitatingly express condemnation of the man who would so act. Now I maintain this is just the danger which at present threatens our Association. To take advantage of an ambiguous bye-law in order to *expel* from our ranks the Founders of the Royal British Nurses' Association, the women whose honourable records and hard work have put us in the progressive circumstances in which our Corporation stands, is, in itself a dishonour to the whole Association. And I would impress on my fellow-workers that, if this step be taken, we must each one bear the brunt and the shame, unless we enter our protest both in writing and at the Annual Meeting.

A member of the Council recently said to me, "I bitterly feel the humiliation I am sharing in not protesting against the injustice of removing names so honoured in the Nursing world from the General Council ; but I cannot do much in the way of writing to protest."

My answer was that this is not the time to think of well-turned literary sentences—this is too important a crisis in the history of our Association for us to stop to consider our powers of English composition. If I were unable to write or to spell, I would still get out some kind of protest to which I would add the cross—the "his mark," which allows the elector to register his vote in a popular election.

In sending in my voting paper to the Chairman of the Executive, I have filled in the names of our noble pioneers in the cause of Nursing reform, and I have written above my signature these words—"I have re-entered the names of the founders of the Royal British Nurses' Association, against whose removal from the General Council I strenuously protest."

Again, in speaking to others on the question of the position we are in honour bound to take at the annual meeting, some say, "I will come and vote, but I do not like to speak in public."

My answer, fellow-nurses, is that we must—in the cause of right—do that which we do not like. Small honour is it to do that which we do like. History shows us that all the great movements of the world have gone forward through the impetus of self-sacrifice. This is not the time to think of "what we choose." This is the time with one accord to follow conscience and lift up our voices in an honourable revolt against the shame which is in danger of falling on our Association.

Some others say, "But what will people think?" My answer to this is that "A man's own conscience is his sole tribunal," and he should no more care for that phantom "opinion" than he should fear meeting a ghost if he cross the churchyard at dark. I have thought the matter out from every point of view—from the logical and the honourable and from the point of "sentiment," taken in the best sense of the word. And my conclusion on all these points is, that if this shameful expulsion from our ranks of the women "who have fought the fight" and won the battle for us becomes an accomplished fact, then indeed the Association will enter upon troublous times. Mistrust and doubt will enter where hitherto we have felt confidence. We have been content with the prospects of our army so long as we knew our Generals. We could rest satisfied that everything would be done for our best interests so long as we knew our leaders. And I would remind the members of the Association that we were induced to join because these women were our Leaders. When a Joint-stock Company is formed, the public is induced to take shares because it has confidence in the Directors. And *we* had confidence in the honour and the judgment of those Directors whom it is now proposed to *expel* in the most ignominious manner ; and one of the worst features in the transaction is the want of straightforwardness shown in this matter. I think we members of the Council have a right to ask why no explanation of this innovation was given when the voting papers were sent out. It would appear as if it had been hoped that none would discover what had been done *till too late*. That is to say, till their papers had been signed and sent in.

In conclusion, I would suggest that every member of the General Council who cares for our honour as an Association, and for the union of womanhood, should join the protest we are making in our letters, and that in addition the members should come up in their hundreds to the Annual Meeting, and show their determination to see justice done to these our leaders, whose cause is our cause.

Sincerely yours,

ANNESLEY KENEALY,
Member of General Council,
R.B.N.A.

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