

Nursing Politics.

THE PRESS AND THE ROYAL BRITISH NURSES' ASSOCIATION.

CRITICISING the present crisis in the affairs of the Royal British Nurses' Association, the *Medical Press and Circular* makes the following Editorial remarks which are most noteworthy :

"A fortnight ago we commented upon a storm that was breaking with ominous violence over the heads of the management of the above institution. In the course of those remarks we pointed out that it was a matter of regret that the Council found themselves unable to make statements upon what appeared to be simple matters of fact. The charges brought against the management were briefly summed up as follows :— It was asserted, in effect, that a small knot of medical men have gained control of the Nurses' Association ; that the Executive Council has been packed with nurses from Middlesex Hospital and Chelsea Workhouse Infirmary ; that the funds of the Association have been badly administered ; and that the criticism of members is stifled. Now, all the foregoing are extremely clear and definite issues, and the public might reasonably have expected a full and immediate answer from the Council of the Society so gravely impeached, more especially in view of the fact that it poses before the world in all the bravery of a Royal Charter. So far from any such justification, however, the secretary, in the presence of Sir Crichton Browne, is reported to have said at a Council meeting on the 10th instant, that they were unable to answer the charges raised because of certain pending legal cases. At the same time, they invited free criticism at the annual meeting to be held on the 22nd instant at the Imperial Institute. We must confess that at the time it was not clear to us why matters of fact could not have been at once stated by the officials. If, for instance, the majority of the acting General Council were not unfairly packed by nurses drawn from two institutions, why should they not have said so at once ? A lie of that kind, supposing it to be such, could be nailed to the counter in the face of fifty lawsuits. But the annual meeting has come and gone, and we are bound to confess that, instead of the triumphant vindication of the Council we were led to expect, their attitude has been one to foster rather than to allay suspicion. Instead of a well-digested official answer from the Council the Medical Honorary Secretary was put up to read a long written statement, which he was obliged to admit had not been before the Council. We submit that to allow a subordinate officer to make an irresponsible personal statement upon such an occasion was, in itself, a high-handed proceeding that serves to stamp the attitude of the governing body towards its members. It is impossible to discuss at length the facts of the case, obscured as they are with the mists of heated personality. Nevertheless, the defence read by the secretary appears to us to be an altogether unconvincing document, and unworthy of the Council he represented. At the same time a few comments may be made upon the accounts of the Association as set out in the balance-sheet published in the *Nurses' Journal* of May, 1897. From that statement it appears that the reliable income from members amounts to

£544 11s. 5d., against an expenditure upon office expenses (rent, rates, postage, &c.) of £348 19s. 11d., and of salaries, £173 16s. The total of these two sums, £522 15s. 11d., certainly seems out of proportion to the regular income from members, and necessitates the additional support of a number of donations. This Association was founded primarily for the benefit of nurses, and to enable them to help themselves. It now remains for the Council to prove that they have acted in the interests of members, and have managed the resources of the Association in a proper manner. Otherwise, the only course open to them is to resign. The smiles of royalty have been freely bestowed upon the Association, but it will require a vast amount of patronage to restore a wrecked membership and to unite a divided camp. The only way to restore the public confidence is to hold a full inquiry by a committee whose constitution will ensure a sifting of the facts without fear and without favour."

The following report has appeared in the *Northern Whig*, and goes directly to the root of the evils, the economic dependence of, and therefore the unworthy support given by, nurses to the present official autocracy, and which was alluded to by an impartial member in our last week's issue :—

"The annual meeting of the Royal British Nurses' Association came off last week, and was anything but an harmonious gathering. I attended as a perfectly impartial and disinterested listener, and after hearing all that was to be said on both sides, I was more firmly convinced than ever that there has been grave mismanagement and breach of faith on the part of the Council. Spite of all plausible statements given by that body, the uncomfortable facts remain, first, that the income derived from the subscriptions of the members formed but a fraction of the income necessary to work the Association, and the balance has been made up by donations, sales of work, dramatic entertainments, and other sources employed to raise funds for charitable institutions ; secondly, that one-third of the nurses are so dissatisfied with the existing state of affairs that they will not pay their subscriptions ; thirdly, that whereas proper training and registration were vital principles of the Association, a movement is now on foot, backed by the Council, to admit untrained persons as members of the Association in order to increase its funds ; and, fourthly, that although 68 members demanded an extraordinary general meeting to remedy certain abuses, that demand was ignored by the Council, and the founders of the Association put off the governing body through some obscure wording of the Bye-law by which they were said to be life members. The opposition—which are of course in a minority—demand a public inquiry into the management of the Association, and, as that body is now admittedly depending, not on the subscriptions of its members, but on outsiders, for existence, I think the public have a right to know whether every care is taken to work it on the best possible lines. At the commencement of the movement, it was nurses who united to found the Association for their mutual benefit and comfort, and for five years they had financial success. Then, owing to the weakness of the nurses themselves, their affairs were managed by a few medical men, who "introduced the element of dicta-

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