

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 Times* says:—

"Some three weeks ago, we referred to the extraordinary proceedings adopted by the officials of this Association towards the Incorporated Medical Practitioners' Association; and our readers have doubtless noticed that those proceedings were evidently only part of a settled plan to prevent any strong professional body, or even any influential hospital matrons from disturbing the autocratic position assumed by those officials. During the last week, the London and provincial press have contained full reports of the proceedings at the annual meeting of the Nurses' Association. It was expected that the officials would have been able, at any rate, to make some reply to the very grave charges of mismanagement made against them, but the only answer that was even attempted was a personal statement made by Mr. Edward A. Fardon, of the Middlesex Hospital. This statement we publish in another column, as we have already published the charges made against the officials, as a mere matter of justice to the latter. But we have no hesitation in saying that Sir James Crichton Browne, Mr. John Langton, and Dr. Bezly Thorne would have acted more wisely if they had not left their defence entirely in hands which have undoubtedly proved in that respect to be most inefficient to bear the burden. The allegations against the officials appear to most people to be singularly clear, and most temperately stated. Yet Mr. Fardon attempts to shirk a reply to those charges by terming them "vague and intemperate," and pretending that he is unable, therefore, to grasp their meaning. Amongst our lay contemporaries, two such influential organs of public opinion as the *Daily Chronicle* and the *Morning Post* have expressed the opinion that the sooner a public inquiry is held into the matter, the better it will be for everyone concerned, and we are entirely in agreement with them. Practically, the chief charge is that some half dozen men have been attempting to tyrannise over women in a women's association, and, for purposes of their own, have striven to wrest from these women the management of their own affairs. Such a charge has already aroused keen indignation amongst all sections of the public, of which the officials appear to be unaware, because they seem to be adopting the policy proverbially ascribed to the ostrich. We are naturally most desirous that they should have every opportunity of defending themselves. But they must clearly understand that if they do not do so—if they attempt to shirk the inquiry into their conduct, which is demanded, and which is being echoed by the public—only one conclusion will be drawn from their silence, and they will be condemned by their profession, as well as by the public. Even now, their failure to refute the charges made against them is arousing the strongest comments in professional circles. It is generally felt that the officials were, at least, given fair play by their critics. They were not named in the public protest, and their objectors did not ask to have their charges believed; they only demanded that a public inquiry should be made into the truth or

falsity of those charges. That was an attitude which strongly appealed to all reasonable people, but it is impossible to dispute that the officials of the Nurses' Association have, so far, met the attack in a manner which has already alienated public sympathy from them. At the General Council meeting of the Association, held on the 9th inst., they announced, and even sent the announcement broadcast to the press, that they did not regard it as advisable then to answer those charges. A fortnight later, at the annual meeting of the Association, they had a complete opportunity to disprove the charges, to demand for their own sakes, and to clear their own characters, the public inquiry asked for by their critics. But they did not even draw up and publish a united and clear answer to the charges brought against them. They deputed one of their number, a resident medical officer of the Middlesex Hospital, to make a reply to the collective statements against them. And this statement, it is not too much to say, is as feeble as the charges against the officials are strong. It only attempts to answer eight of those charges; with regard to one of the most important—the charge of threatening to ruin a nurse who had complained of the official mismanagement—it calmly expresses the opinion that this matter need not be re-opened. Concerning the serious questions of financial mismanagement, the reply states that inasmuch as a lawsuit is pending against a member of the Association, in which the question of the financial management may be inquired into, it would be "improper to discuss" this question! Another charge, that of using the organ of the Association to publish attacks upon members and preventing the members from defending themselves when attacked, is simply dismissed as groundless—a contradiction which is unsupported by facts, and which, therefore, cannot be expected to carry conviction. With regard to the alleged packing of the governing body of the Association with Middlesex Hospital nurses, it is significant that the reply misquotes and disputes the charge, and then, finally, admits that the facts are correct. We cannot but feel, therefore, that the officials have placed themselves in a most untenable position by their ill-considered proceedings. They had the choice of two clear alternatives—either to have resigned their present positions, or to have demanded a public inquiry to disprove the charges of mismanagement. Either course would have been intelligible. But we frankly tell them that to cling to office and yet to shirk an inquiry into the grave charges made against them, is arousing on the part, both of the medical profession and the public, the uneasy conviction that they are unable to disprove those charges. This conviction was undoubtedly strengthened by the extraordinary attempt which was made at the termination of the meeting to move a vote of confidence in the officials in a manner contrary to the Bye-laws of the Corporation, and therefore illegal, and which the Chairman only ruled out of order when the greatest indignation and uproar had been caused by the evidently premeditated attempt. We join with our lay contemporaries in demanding that a public inquiry should be held into the matter, and in sincerely regretting that the medical men who are implicated should not have realised that the honour of the Association, as well as their personal credit, alike demand that the charges of mismanagement brought against them should be publicly and fully investigated."

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