

staff. Without such authority the condition of affairs would revert to that which disgraced these institutions forty years ago, and which still causes the gravest discredit in some Poor Law Infirmaries, and so admirably do most Matrons fulfil their duties, that they command the cordial respect as well as the ready obedience of their subordinates, and it has hitherto been generally acknowledged that they are the natural leaders and representatives of their nurses.

In the constitution of the Royal British Nurses' Association, as framed at its foundation in 1888, this fact was recognised by giving to the Matrons of the chief Nurse-Training Schools permanent *ex-officio* seats upon the Executive Committee and General Council of that body. In 1895, Dr. Bezly Thorne succeeded, by methods which have been frequently explained, in depriving the ladies in question of those promised permanent seats on the General Council. But, as their seats on the Executive Committee were confirmed by bye-laws having the force of law, it was essential to alter the latter if these ladies were to be ousted from those seats and deprived of the power and authority they had been so wisely given, and which they had so successfully employed. When we have pointed out that this was the deliberate plot, it has been again and again denied. But now the mask is thrown off, and everyone knows that, for the last three years, a few medical men, who for the most part are connected with the Middlesex Hospital, aided, we regret to say, by Miss Thorold, Matron of that Hospital—by Miss Wedgewood, Matron of the Royal Free Hospital, Mrs. Coster, late Matron of St. George's Hospital, and Mrs. Dacre Craven, all three of whom did not join the association, or afford it the slightest assistance until after the Charter had been granted—and by Miss De Pledge, Matron of the Chelsea Workhouse Infirmary, have been steadily engaged in attempting to alter the bye-laws. Now, assisted by the nurses of the institutions we have mentioned, and especially of the Middlesex Hospital, the bye-laws have been changed by a general meeting of the Association. The alterations have been protested against by eighty Matrons of British hospitals, and by several hundreds of the best nurse members of the Association, so that the preponderance of nursing opinion in the Association is greatly against the change.

But the change has been effected, and the plot can no longer be denied, concealed, or explained away. The new bye-laws turn the Matrons of the leading hospitals out of the permanent seats which they were promised on the Executive Committee, and place on that body, instead, ten Matrons, ten sisters or nurses, and ten medical men, the nomination of all these, of course, resting for all practical purposes, in the hands of the officials. In other words, all direct representation has been taken from the nursing profession; and its leaders can only sit upon the governing bodies as the nominees of the Middlesex Hospital officials; while the nurses will be able to hold the balance of power between the medical men and the Matrons, but events have already shown that they will use their votes at the dictation of the medical members, and if necessary against the Matrons.

These facts are undeniable; they stand in black and white in the bye-laws. Owing to the apathy of the Matrons, those who are jealous of their authority in the nursing world, have now completely destroyed their influence in the Royal British Nurses' Association. Having thus proved to be absolutely correct in the predictions which we have for three years made on this subject, we now deem our duty, as the recognised organ of the Nursing Profession, to ask every Hospital Matron, individually, to reflect for one moment upon the results to herself. The Royal Corporation of Nurses has been handed over by a few interested nurses, against the protests of the matrons, into the hands of a small clique of medical men. The Matrons have been deprived of every shadow of authority or influence in their own professional body. Can they imagine, for one moment, that the process will stop there? Everywhere, the proceedings of the Royal British Nurses' Association will be quoted as arguments for depriving Matrons of the authority and prestige they now possess. The trouble will spread into every hospital in the Kingdom, and will inevitably result in frequent disputes, dissensions and difficulties.

We understand that, as soon as the new bye-laws receive the sanction of the Privy Council, a large number of the Matron members of the Association will take the first course open to honourable and self-respecting women who have been so deliberately insulted, and that they will resign their membership of the Association. It is equally certain that there are

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)