

points alluded to by the Chairman. He desired, then, to call attention to the fact that there existed a most important precedent with regard to this particular application for the licence of the Board of Trade. In February, 1891, the Royal British Nurses' Association applied to the Board for their licence, under the 23rd Section of the Companies Act of 1867. The Association was composed of more than 3,000 leading medical men and nurses. It only desired incorporation in order to be able to take over and administer important trust funds. It did not seek nor desire any such wide powers of interference with hospitals and control over nurses as this proposed Society desired. Moreover, her late Majesty, Queen Victoria, had conferred upon the Association the title of "Royal," and it was legally advised, therefore, that it could not add the word "Limited" to its name. It not only complied in every particular with the provisions of the special section, but it certainly appeared to have very special claims to be accorded the licence of the Board. But the Association had for some years been carrying on a voluntary Register of Nurses, and on this ground, and this alone, a number of hospitals objected to the licence of the Board of Trade being given to it. The Association was called upon to advertise its application, and did so on April 16th, 1891, notice being given that any objections to the application must be sent in to the Board of Trade on or before May 16th. On May 6th, that is to say ten days before the allotted period expired, the Board of Trade wrote as follows:—

"The Board of Trade have received a large number of communications from bodies of persons whose interest in hospital nursing is unquestionable, and whose experience entitles them to speak with authority, strongly objecting to the issue of a licence. After careful consideration of the objects of the Association, and of the representations made in opposition thereto, the Board of Trade are unable to satisfy themselves that the means which the Association propose to adopt are either adequate to carry out their objects satisfactorily, or so free from objection as to warrant the Board of Trade in the issue of a licence; and under these circumstances they are unable to accede to the application."

That decision of the Board was widely published, and it has been frequently quoted since. Probably the real reason why this new Society has applied to the Board for its licence was because, if granted, it would be held to confer a great prestige and authority upon the Society, and it would certainly be strongly urged "that the licence had been granted because the Board had been able to satisfy themselves that the means which the Society proposed to adopt were adequate to carry out their objects satisfactorily, and so free from objection as to warrant the Board of Trade in the issue of a licence." It was earnestly hoped, however, that what had been said that day would convince the Board that such a statement could not be upheld, and therefore, that the Board would refuse its licence. But there was another point in connection with the same matter of which Dr. Fenwick desired to remind the Board. When the Royal British Nurses' Association was refused its licence questions were asked in Parliament on the matter, and the then President of the Board of Trade, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, consented to have an interview with three members of the Association, the late Sir William Savory, Mr. Brudenell Carter, and Dr. Bedford Fenwick. He discussed the whole matter with them, and finally said that he must define his own position in the matter, which he did as follows:—

"The invariable custom of the Board in these matters was to direct the application for a licence to be advertised, and then, if there were any serious opposition, to decline the application. In a matter like this, the Board was not competent to judge between the two parties, and did not profess to judge, which was right; but if there were any influential opposition, the Board simply declined to give the licence." Dr. Fenwick was quite content to leave this matter to be settled according to the "invariable custom of the Board," because the Chairman himself had informed them as to the "immense opposition" which had been expressed to the objects of the new Society.

As representing the British Gynæcological Society it was his duty to state that that Society had felt itself compelled, by the great and growing need for increased efficiency on the part of nurses engaged in monthly nursing, or in attendance upon women suffering from diseases peculiar to the sex, to institute examinations for nurses in those subjects. Those examinations had been very successful, had greatly increased the interest taken by nurses in these subjects, and would undoubtedly tend to improve the conditions of such special training. The Medico-Psychological Association had started similar examinations for nurses engaged in attendance on the insane, and with remarkably beneficial results. The new Society proposed to commence similar courses of examination on special subjects, and on behalf of the British Gynæcological Society he entered the most serious protest against any sanction being given by a great Government department to such proposals on the part of entirely unprofessional people. Order was now being slowly evolved out of chaos in the nursing world, and Dr. Fenwick expressed his firm conviction from an intimate knowledge of the subject that the proposals of the new Society were retrograde and dangerous to every interest concerned, would materially interfere with and injure the reforms which were now being made, and would tend to create great confusion in educational matters in which, for the sake of the sick and of nurses themselves, it was essential that the improvements now being made should continue and extend.

IRISH NURSES' ASSOCIATION.

Miss Huxley, representing the Irish Nurses' Association, said that she entirely agreed with the previous speakers. She pointed out that although the scheme was supposed to apply to Ireland the Irish nurses had not in any way been consulted, nor, so far as she was aware, had notice of the application been inserted in any Irish daily paper or in any nursing paper.

THE REPLY.

Mr. Cosmo Bonsor, who showed great good humour throughout the proceedings, and on whom rested the onus of defending the Financiers' Scheme, made a good-natured but not very forcible reply to the objections which had been raised. He thanked the Board of Trade for the hearing accorded to those present.

Dealing with the first objection, that the scheme was promoted by seven gentlemen of the City of London who knew nothing of nursing, he said that as hospital managers these gentlemen took the greatest interest in nurses. Taking that interest, they had been approached by trained ladies and asked to undertake the formation of a company. As business men they were competent in one particular. They know how to mind their own business, and not to interfere.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)