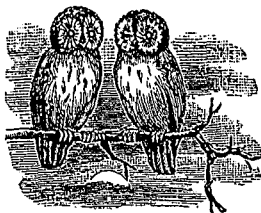


The Matrons' Council.

PROCEDURE AT MEETINGS.



MADAM,—One of the proposed Bye-Laws of the Matrons' Council is—"To encourage Hospital Matrons to understand the methods of procedure at Meetings," and a very good and necessary object it is at a time when it is becoming more and more necessary that women should express their wishes and views, whether it be in protest against the doubtful character of a variety entertainment, or in discussing who shall be the recipient of parochial charity, or as to the purity of the sources of the parish pump. But Nurses especially need this training, as many of them are called upon to hold responsible public official positions, and they have had little or no previous experience of business methods.

With your permission, then, I should like very strongly to advise all Nurses who desire to become students of the Procedure of public Business, to read, mark, and learn "The Chairman's Handbook," by Sir Reginald F. D. Palgrave, K.C.B. (late Clerk of the House of Commons). Published first in 1877, it has run into ten editions, and so useful, concise, and clear is it that it certainly deserves to have obtained even wider publicity and to have reached the twentieth or even the thirtieth edition.

Within the small space of 110 pages, including the index, every point, every move, every difficulty which may arise at a meeting is explained with a master knowledge. In this book the writer has undertaken to popularise the business methods of Parliament, and to show how "a chairman is chosen, discussion guided, and motions put to the vote." Nor is this parliamentary usage the outcome of the wisdom of some individual whose methods were adopted; they are the result of English common-sense acting with precision and uniformity for at least three centuries "in our House of Commons."

Chapter I. is devoted to the Election of Chairmen. Chapter II. is occupied with his duties in regard to order, and his privilege to give the casting vote. Chapter III. deals with a variety of subjects such as the Quorum of a Meeting, the Confirmation of Minutes, Motions made without notice, Rules regarding the Revocation of Resolutions, Relevancy of Amendments, Abstention of Members from Voting, Obstruction to Business, the Responsibility and Protection of Chairmen. Chapter IV. deals with the Order to be observed in Debate, that is who may or may not speak. In Chapter V. we are told how questions are put to the Vote. Chapters VI., VII., VIII., and IX. bring out the various rules to be observed in regard to Amendments and An Amendment to an Amendment. Chapter X gives the procedure on Motions for Adjournment. Chapter XI. is devoted to the Withdrawal of Motions and Amendments. Chapter XII. with the Procedure of a Committee.

Then there follows, on page 97, a summing up of the whole book. The Rules of procedure are simple

enough for anyone to understand. To begin, the Chair must be addressed standing, and there should be no interruption of a speaker unless he has to be called to order. Rule V. should, in my opinion, be learnt by heart, till every word has become part and parcel of would-be speakers. This is it:—"Each Member who rises to speak must direct his speech to the Motion proposed as the Question for discussion, or to a Motion or Amendment to be proposed by himself, or to a Question of Order." And Rule VI. should likewise be learnt:—"No member may speak twice to a question, except in explanation or reply." And Rule XXII. should never, by any chance whatever, be lost sight of for a moment; it deals with Irrelevance or Repetition in debate:—"The Chairman may call the attention of the Meeting to continued irrelevance or tedious repetition on the part of a member, and may direct the member to discontinue his speech."

It would, indeed, be an advantage if every person who speaks in public would observe faithfully and conscientiously these primarily important rules. Then would the life of a reporter be a comparatively happy one. Through lack of knowledge, women especially are guilty of the sin of irrelevancy and repetition.

It has been the writer's fate to attend a Conference of Women, extending over several days, when nearly all, with perhaps two or three praiseworthy exceptions, never by any chance touched upon the subject of the paper supposed to be read for the purpose of discussion and criticism. No, the one subject uppermost was the everlasting Ego. And again, there are Meetings where woman after woman "rises to say a few words," which words are a faithful repetition of what six or seven preceding speakers have uttered. Two things must be observed by a speaker who does not wish to intrude upon the time of hard-worked fellow-creatures. Have something relevant to say; say it without verbiage; and then sit down *at once*. If she does not sit down then, my experience of public meetings is that, as sure as fate, she will repeat what she has already said.

But enormous responsibilities rest with the Chairman. If she knows her business well, she will insist upon the speakers knowing their business also. There is no need for amateur speakers to be discouraged; they have been told of the pit-falls, it is for them to avoid these. To be able to speak in public is a most useful accomplishment; and those who can do it with ability and force feel in it the keenest fascination, which, perhaps, accounts for the fact that even the best and most eloquent of our public speakers are carried away, and forget that if they could only acquire the art of making five-minute speeches they would gain an enviable reputation, and earn the grateful thanks of the tribe of speakers that are to follow.

To be able to express themselves in fluent and well chosen words should, for the future, be an essential part of every woman's education, and an art which a trained Nurse would find invaluable in giving her official reports to her superior officer; and if Debating Clubs were started in every Nurse Training School, the experience gained would be found of great educational value. And to all who are called upon to speak in public, whether man or woman, I could not suggest a better work for careful study and reference than "The Chairman's Handbook."—Yours faithfully,

"A REPORTER."

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