

to retrieve our laurels. I am strongly in sympathy with the views expressed by your correspondents last week, and agree with Miss Homersham that this vital change in the constitution of our Association should have been most plainly brought to our notice by the Executive Committee, as it would have been, had not that Committee most illegally ignored the requisition of 69 members, that a Special General Meeting should be summoned *three months ago*, and in ample time to alter the Bye-laws, subject to the approval of the Privy Council, before the list was issued for the vote of the members. As one member pointed out at the April General Council, this action on the part of the Committee rendered it impossible to bring the matter before a full Meeting of the Corporation in time to alter the Bye-laws with the consent of the Privy Council, and left upon all our minds the conviction that an attempt was being made to prevent us expressing our opinion upon the matter until it was too late.

We country members, from the evidence before us, cannot but feel that the whole method of dealing with this important question has been most reprehensible and unconstitutional, and it is inevitable that even should we, by united effort, prevent this great wrong being done, that our confidence in the present management of our Association will have been rudely shaken.

But, as Miss Homersham points out, *acts* are more significant than *words*, and I hope her suggestion to replace the names of our Founders on the voting lists at the bottom of the Matrons' column, *duly signed*, will be widely adopted by all those members who have not innocently returned the discreditable document to the office. But by far the most important recommendation thrown out by your able correspondents of last week is that we should, at the earliest possible date, alter the Bye-law forming the General Council, and make it conform to the Charter, and the Bye-law forming the Executive Committee, as it is not difficult to surmise that the removal of the *ex-officio* Matrons from the Council list—and the consequent breach of faith with these ladies, and the large Nurse Training Schools—is only the precursor of more drastic measures for our professional depreciation and discomfiture.

But to suggest a remedy: we certificated members of the large training schools, resenting, as I feel sure we all do, this attempted insult to our Matrons, must refuse at all costs to allow them to be sacrificed to the unworthy personal feeling so openly expressed at the General Council Meeting, and which every line in the Nurses' Journal exposes—a journal which we members repudiate as *our* voice, and the last issue of which we consider an outrage.

Let the members, therefore, of each School join themselves into a united body, and deal with this question with a united voice. We St. Bartholomew's Nurses have a double battle to fight—to retain the services of my own dear Matron, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, pioneer of professional status for trained Nurses, and Miss Isla Stewart, without whose loyalty to the cause of the Royal British Nurses' Association during its troublous, attacked, unchartered days, *the Charter would never have been won*; and as we are upwards of 200 strong on the Register, let us make it a *point of Honour* to attend the Annual General Meeting in July, having previously taken such measures to organise and consider the whole question as seems necessary. To the members of the fellow Schools of

Middlesex, St. George's, St. Mary's, and the Royal Free, I would urge that they should do likewise, and thus maintain the motto of our Association, "Steadfast and True."

I am, dear Madam,

Yours faithfully,

LAURA LAKIN,

Member of the General Council, R.B.N.A.

"MAY" OR "SHALL."

To the Editor of "The Nursing Record."

MADAM,—I am pleased to see in the RECORD a "word" of disapproval of the vexatious quibbles over petty legal points that fritter away so much time at the General Council Meetings. I don't profess to know much more about law than my colleagues, but I know enough to be aware that the discussions we hear are, except for the absence of humour, like a Gilbert-and-Sullivan farce. Having a fraternal feeling for the legal profession I feel almost sorry for "our learned lawyer" who, when present, has to stand up and give a reluctant acquiescence in the magisterial opinions allowed to stand. But I suppose he gets his fees and a little amusement, and that is more consolation for him than for us.

"I grant indeed, says learned Degree
That he who can may also may,
But he who can both 'may' and 'can'
Is surely more than mortal man."

Now, I don't pretend to fathom the meaning of those sapient lines, which are supposed to conceal something worth investigating, but they remind me of one of the quibbles that wasted a good part of our time at one General Council Meeting.

It arose in this way. When the quibble was started that the laws of the Corporation required that the founder and chief supporters of the Royal British Nurses' Association should be compelled to retire from the General Council, as soon as they heard of it, sixty-nine members of the Corporation signed a requisition calling a meeting to decide whether that reading should or should not be accepted and acted on.

When this requisition was received at the office reference was made to the bye-laws, and it was found that fifty members wishing to call a General Council "*may*" do so. Here was a poser for the non-legal mind. Lawyers were sent for, counsel were consulted, musty old books were hunted up, and finally a precedent was found in which a judge stated as his opinion, that under certain conditions the word "*may*" is not to be understood as having the legal power of "*shall*."

The knotty point was settled—the decision conclusive—the wishes of sixty-nine leading members of the Corporation were disregarded, and their requisition relegated presumably to the waste-paper basket.

But the learned lawyer had an uncomfortable *quart d'heure* over the matter, as we all felt aggrieved and insulted at such a proceeding.

The Royal British Nurses' Association is not a dead Society with a parchment document to express its intentions. We are alive and able to speak, and we have the right to meet together and say what we mean. The General Council is the *governing body* of the Royal British Nurses' Association, and we object to being treated as idiots who don't know the difference between "*may*" and "*shall*."

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