

to all who are acquainted with the history of this nation since the days of Charles I. In order to make the matter perfectly clear to our readers, we must remind them that in 1893, Her Majesty the Queen in Council, granted a Royal Charter to the Royal British Nurses' Association, and by a subsequent ordinance of the Privy Council, the Bye-Laws passed by the members of the Association were approved, and thus received the force of law. These Bye-laws are, therefore, legally binding upon every member of the Association, and the strict observance of them is naturally incumbent upon both the Executive Committee and the General Council. If either of these bodies infringe or pervert the ordinances of the Corporation, they are rendering of none effect the powers conferred by the Crown, and are thereby bringing those powers into disrepute—a course of action both disloyal, and also possibly fraught with serious responsibility.

Last February, it was proposed by Dr. Bezly Thorne that a number of the ladies by whose efforts the Association was founded, and who at the time of its foundation had been promised, and had accepted, permanent seats upon the General Council or governing body of the Association, should retire, like other members, in rotation, from the Council. It was found that the Bye-laws, when altered after the granting of the Charter, had been so framed as to bear this interpretation; and it was therefore, at once, proposed by many members of the Association, who desired to keep faith with the founders of the Corporation, that a Special General Meeting of Members should be immediately held in order to make the Bye-laws conform both in letter and spirit to the previously existing arrangement. The same course was advised by eminent Counsel who were consulted by the Executive Committee, and a Requisition for a Special General Meeting signed by sixty-nine members of the Corporation was therefore sent to the Secretary. The wording of the Charter and Bye-laws is beyond dispute, and this gives the right to any fifty members to requisition such a meeting. The Requisition was brought before the Executive Committee, and the Chairman, Sir James Crichton-Browne, on the *ipse dixit* of Mr. Randolph (the Solicitor of the Corporation) ruled that the Executive Committee had the right to "postpone" the holding of such a meeting beyond the date for which it had been re-

quisitioned. In consequence, directions were given to the Secretary not to comply with the Requisition, and Sir James Crichton-Browne has since attempted to excuse his conduct by stating that the Meeting was not "refused" by the Executive Committee, but was only "postponed." Inasmuch as it has never yet been held, and as its whole usefulness depended upon its being held last March, Sir J. Crichton-Browne will find considerable difficulty in justifying this proceeding to the public. In the face of the clear wording of the Bye-laws on the matter, eminent Counsel who have been consulted have given it as their opinion that the neglect to summon the General Meeting in accordance with the Requisition was a direct "violation of the rights of the members," and was therefore distinctly wrong. They hold that Sir James Crichton-Browne and those who supported him in the Executive Committee took upon themselves a most serious responsibility in thus rendering null and void the authority exercised by the Crown, in the grant of this and other rights and privileges to the members of the Corporation.

But the first and direct consequence of the action thus taken was that the members were prevented from holding their Meeting, and were thus prevented from altering the Bye-laws as they wished; so that the proposal of Dr. Bezly Thorne—that the ladies who had been promised permanent seats on the General Council should be removed from that list—was rendered possible of fulfilment under the then wording of the Bye-laws. And this step was, of necessity, taken at the Annual Meeting last July.

When the members found that they had thus been deprived of their legal rights of Meeting, many of them determined to vote on the balloting papers for the General Council, for the retention of those *ex-officio* members whom it was desired to remove. It, therefore, became of the utmost importance that every member should receive the voting paper to which she was entitled under the Bye-laws. When the voting papers were issued, however, a number of members complained that, by some reprehensible neglect, their voting papers were not sent to them; and we have kept the names of a number of ladies who were thus again deprived of a legal right and privilege conferred upon them by the Charter and Bye-laws. Considerable indignation was felt when this fact became known and

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)