

at a late meeting. It was resolved, on the motion of Mr. Kimbel, to increase the salary of Miss Sisley, the first Assistant Matron, from £40 to £45; and to raise it by annual increments of £2, until it attains the maximum of £60.

## Royal British Nurses' Association.

(Incorporated by Royal Charter.)



WE are pleased to observe that Mrs. Fenwick Miller, the editor of the *Woman's Signal*—a paper which has the courage to speak out concerning questions of real interest to women, and which is gradually, yet surely, filling a long-felt want in the Press—the want of a voice to express the

opinions of women on public questions—has the following editorial notes in last week's issue:

"It is true there are occasions when noise and violent interference with the order of a public assembly seems necessitated, as the only available means of preventing improper and tyrannical rulings from a chair. The substance of law and order can only be gained by sacrificing the shadow. Such a case seems to have been that of the annual meeting of the Royal British Nurses' Association, as to which Miss Breay has addressed us a calm and temperate, but justly indignant, letter, which will be found on p. 84.

Here is an Executive Committee conducting matters in a way not approved of by a portion of the members. The constitution of the Society provides that in such an event a notice of motion to improve matters shall be in order at the annual meeting if sent a certain time beforehand, by registered letter. Miss Breay sent the notice of motion, and she now produces the Postmaster-General's letter confirming her statement that it was sent as a registered letter, and that its receipt was duly acknowledged by being signed for by the under-secretary. Yet the chairman at the meeting refused to admit the resolution to discussion, on the ground that it had not been sent in a registered letter, and though Miss Breay then and there produced the certificate of registration the chairman refused to accept that as evidence. Hence the Executive Committee secure another year unchallenged.

What in such a case ought to be done? Assuming Miss Breay's statement to be exact and unchallenged, I have no hesitation in saying that the meeting ought not to have been allowed to proceed calmly. If the formalities required by law and order have been duly fulfilled, and still a chairman interposes his personal ruling to prevent the motion being carried to a hearing, he ought to be resisted. His ruling should be challenged, and, despite his probable orders to 'sit down,' a motion for changing the chairman should be put to the meeting. If this were not a lawful and proper proceeding, any individual nominated by a small majority to act as chairman would have power to suppress and 'burke' any exposure of abuses.

But sometimes to resist a chairman is lawful, and in such a case as Miss Breay's statement sets out, a 'row' was distinctly 'in order.'

But why had 'the Royal British Nurses' a man in the chair? When will our women generally learn the fundamental lesson that they are capable of ruling themselves, and will not do well unless they exercise this power? The great meetings of the British Women's Temperance Association, the Women's Liberal Federation, and others, show that congresses and meetings of women *presided over by women* are the best conducted, the most orderly, and the most Parliamentary in method. The presence of even one man in a position of importance makes for mischief, because he, as a rule, cannot divest himself of the sex vanity and arrogance that is so foolishly prevalent amongst men, and he therefore puts his own lordly personality in place of established law and proper order, with fatal results.

In this particular instance the chairman was actually a man who has repeatedly expressed his contempt for women, and his strong dislike of those who render his contempt nugatory by showing their abilities. Of all men, why is Sir James Crichton Browne chosen by the Nurses to be their chairman?"

The truth is that the Nurses have little or no voice in the government of their own Association, as Miss Breay's complaint proves, and have also been, of late, deprived even of any real power in the choice of their Honorary Officers, who, for the past two years, have been "nominated" for them.

We have no doubt that women of the world reading the *Woman's Signal* will not exonerate the Nursing profession from want both of courage and principle in having permitted, for the last two years, an absolute autocracy upon the part of the six Honorary Officers to be established; but, when it is taken into consideration that the large majority of Nurses, including the Matrons, are paid officers of public institutions, or, as private Nurses, absolutely dependent upon medical men for work and, in consequence, for food, it will be recognised that we are again face to face with the everlasting Labour question; and that until it is recognised that the views, opinions, and wishes of Nurses are entitled to respect in the Nurses' Association, the members can have neither freedom of conscience or of speech.

Righteous indignation has been aroused amongst those members of the Royal British Nurses' Association who possess a sense of personal and professional responsibility, and who are determined to maintain their claim to these inalienable rights at any cost—members, be it remembered, who initiated the Association, and have worked for its incorporation with devotion and success. Such members must rejoice that the editor of the *Woman's Signal* is in sympathy with their determination to defend the privileges granted to them in the Charter.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)