

To the Editor of the "Nursing Record."

MADAM,—The Central Council of the Incorporated Medical Practitioners' Association, with the greatest reluctance and regret, feel compelled to publicly protest against the methods adopted by the officials of a body with which the Association is officially connected—namely, the Royal British Nurses' Association.

That Society was founded in 1887, by nurses, for the benefit of nurses, and for the protection of the public. It was strongly opposed on account of the reforms it advocated, but after an inquiry, held by the Privy Council, its public and professional usefulness were recognised, in 1893, by the grant of a Royal Charter. Until then, it had been chiefly managed by leading hospital matrons, and so successfully and economically that it had carried out several valuable schemes and had saved some £900 to pay for the costs involved in the Privy Council proceedings.

As soon as success had been gained, half-a-dozen medical men commenced, what is now proved to be a deliberate plan, to take all power and authority in the Nurses' Association out of the hands of the nurses. The following typical examples of their proceedings are quoted in order to prove the grounds for this protest, and it is not expected that the accuracy of these particulars will be challenged :—

(1) Having gained official positions, these gentlemen pointed out a flaw in the Bye-laws of the Association which implied that the matrons who founded the Association and who had been promised, and for six years had held, permanent seats on the General Council, or governing body, of the Association should retire in rotation from that body. Some 70 members immediately requisitioned for a general meeting of the Corporation to be held in order to amend the Bye-law in question—and so enable the pledges of the Association to its founders to be maintained. The officials prevented that meeting being held, although this violated a definite right conferred on the members. The Bye-law could, therefore, not be corrected, and the officials succeeded in 1895 in excluding the founders of the Association from the General Council.

(2) Many Members proposed to protest publicly against this breach of faith at the Annual Meeting of the Association in 1895. Just before the meeting, some officials persuaded some leading matrons to meet them in "friendly conference." They then gave their words of honour to these ladies that, if no protest was made at the Annual Meeting, all their wishes should be carried out. The ladies consented. No protest was made at the Annual Meeting; but after it was over every promise was repudiated.

(3) The leading nurses having been removed from the governing body, an attempt was made to intimidate the rank and file. A nurse who had publicly complained of being refused a voting paper, to which she was entitled, was threatened by three of the officials that steps would be taken to strike her name off the Register of Nurses—a penalty reserved for cases of extreme delinquency, and equivalent to professional ruin. The nurse appealed to the Courts for protection. The Executive Committee pleaded that the threat meant nothing. The Judge awarded the nurse her costs, and her Association was saddled with these. The officials then summoned a meeting, and declared a resolution carried, condemning the nurse for having defended herself—the Chairman refusing either to count hands, or to allow the names of those who voted for this extraordinary resolution to be taken down.

(4) In 1896, the officials, having now secured a majority on the Executive Committee, succeeded in packing the General Council with nurses from the Middlesex Hospital and the Chelsea Workhouse Infirmary, with which Institutions three of the then officials were connected—the nurses being, therefore, dependent in large measure upon them. This year, this procedure has been carried still further, and no less than 34 Members of the General Council for the forthcoming year are connected with these two small institutions. The officials have thus prepared for themselves a majority at any ordinary Meeting of the Council, which is practically compelled to adopt any proposals they choose to make. Such an employment of the paid servants of a public institution, by their superior officers, for the fulfilment of private ends, and for the enforcement of an autocracy in an outside body, is believed to be unprecedented.

(5) The Association has, for the last three years, been extremely mismanaged. The expenditure has been allowed to exceed its reliable income by several hundreds of pounds each year. Nothing is being done for the nurses for whose benefit the Association was founded. The schemes of the Association are failing, one after another. The best class of nurses are refusing to join it, and the leading members, who have been so unjustly treated, decline to be associated any longer with the present management. In brief, a national work which was eminently successful and most useful is being rapidly ruined.

(6) All criticism and opposition to the present mismanagement is stifled at the meetings. Any attempt to object is usually met by one of the officials or one of their subordinates at the Middlesex Hospital proposing that the objector be not heard. Personal attacks are made at the meetings on members who differ from the officials, and if such members rise to defend themselves they are immediately shouted down. At the last Annual Meeting, a Resolution condemning the officials was duly placed on the Agenda Paper, but the Chairman refused to permit it to be proposed, on the pretence that it had not been sent to the Secretary in a registered envelope. In brief, the tyranny and injustice to which the members are exposed is almost incredible.

(7) The Association publishes a *Nurses' Journal*, and this is now used by the officials for the publication of bitter personal attacks upon the members who object to their policy. If the members, so attacked, write to the Journal defending themselves their letters are suppressed.

Our Council are confident that neither the medical profession nor the public will approve of the proceedings to which reference has been made, nor of the manner in which nurses are being treated by the few persons who are preventing them from managing their own affairs, and seriously injuring their Association. All efforts to obtain even a hearing in the Association itself having failed, it is felt that a public inquiry is necessary in order to obtain the necessary reforms in the management.

Signed on behalf of the Council

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