

thirty or forty eminent medical men—and also the matrons of the largest hospitals of the United Kingdom—"the general hospitals of the Metropolis to which recognized medical schools are attached." Besides these *ex-officio* or permanent members, there were to be one hundred medical men, one hundred hospital matrons, and one hundred sisters or nurses, as temporary members—elected on the Council by the whole Association.

The object sought for was, of course, to make the General Council as representative and influential a body as possible, and therefore partly permanent and partly elective. This principle has been well established in the constitution of important public bodies in this country for hundreds of years; and is illustrated at the present day by the Houses of Parliament; one body—the House of Lords—being composed of *ex-officio* members, that is to say, noblemen who hold their seats for life, by virtue of some hereditary title; and the other—the House of Commons—comprising members who are elected by the citizens of the United Kingdoms. The inestimable value of a Second Chamber of Parliament, as a safeguard to the liberties of the people, is recognized throughout the world; and it is an accepted fact that a certain number of permanent or *ex-officio* members affords a stability and permanence to the procedure and policy of any public body which is never attained when the whole membership of that body may be altered at any moment, at the changeable will of a popular constituency. This wise principle, therefore, was definitely and deliberately accepted in framing the constitution of the General Council of the Royal British Nurses' Association; and we desire to emphasize this fact, because so long as it was respected and adhered to, so long did the Association flourish.

But, inasmuch as the General Council, composed of some 360 members, was obviously too large a body to accomplish any active work, the constitution of the Association provided that there should be a smaller body—the Executive Committee—the duties of which should be to bring before the General Council, each quarter, all matters affecting the Association which required deliberation and sanction, and also to carry into effect such schemes as the General Council might consider to be for the welfare of the Association. Once more, we have in this arrangement an analogy in the establishment of a Government or Cabinet, composed of a small number of

members responsible to, and dependent upon, the larger body, or Parliament. In short, then, the Association was founded upon principles which have proved to be invaluable for hundreds of years in the history of this country. And we desire to point out that, for seven years, this system proved, in practical working, to be most satisfactory, and beneficial to the Association.

The Executive Committee was also constituted on the principle of some permanent—that is to say, *ex-officio*—members, and of others who were elected each year by the General Council. The *ex-officio* members of the Executive Committee, it was arranged, should be the matrons of the great Nurse Training Schools of the Metropolis, and the heads of the Army and Navy Nursing Services. And, as a token of gratitude to the founder of the Association, the name of Mrs. Bedford Fenwick was separately placed in the Bye-Laws as a permanent member of the Executive Committee. Then it was arranged that a certain number of medical men and Hospital Matrons should be elected by the General Council to serve on the Executive Committee. And, finally, in order to prevent stagnation and cliquism, and constantly introduce new blood and interest, it was provided that one-third of the *elected* members of the General Council, and also of the Executive Committee, should retire each year in rotation, and that the retiring members should not be eligible for re-election until the following year. It is important that these facts should be remembered, because, as we shall show next week, Dr. Bezly Thorne—through whose proceedings the whole trouble in the Royal British Nurses' Association has arisen—is now attempting to excuse himself by misrepresenting the facts of the case. In the first Bye-Laws of the Association, it was provided that the General Council should always "include the members of the Executive Committee," it being an obvious advantage that those who carried out the directions of the Council should be able to be present at its meetings, and give any explanations or advice which might seem necessary. Until the Charter was granted, therefore, there was never the slightest question raised, nor could there be the slightest doubt, that the permanent *ex-officio* matrons on the Executive Committee, also held permanent *ex-officio* seats on the General Council. In 1892, a Regulation was made providing that one-third of the

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)