

permanent seats they held under that Bye-Law. He knows very well that the Regulation merely settled for the first time how the OTHER matrons and the other sisters and nurses were to retire from the General Council in rotation every three years; he knows that the Regulation did not effect the *ex-officio* matrons, and that not one of them retired under it. He has kept that fact very carefully from this Meeting. The Meeting can judge why he has attempted to mislead it by detailing at great length a totally irrelevant matter. As Miss Breay has very properly pointed out, when the Association was founded we worked it on definite honourable principles, and we made definite promises. We said to the leaders of the nursing profession, we said to the matrons of the large general hospitals—"we want your aid and assistance. (Hear, hear.) You hold the leading positions in your profession, you have hundreds and thousands of nurses under your charge who believe in you, who look up to you, who are guided and advised by you. If you will come and help us, if if you will bring your hundreds and thousands of nurses to join our Association, we will gladly recognize your high official positions, and give you permanent seats on the ruling bodies of the Association. We will put our promises in black and white in the fixed Bye-Laws of the Association." (Applause.) Dr. Bezly Thorne, perhaps, will rise and tell us that was only a mere paltry promise embodied in a mere pitiful Bye-Law, and that it was not made in a legal stamped agreement. (Loud applause.) Will you accept such an argument as that? (No! No!)

I am always thankful to remember that our first Bye-Laws were drawn up by men of such eminent honour as the late Sir William Savory (hear), the Hon. W. H. Cross, and his namesake at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and others whose names are household words in the medical and nursing professions. They never imagined that it would ever be suggested that the word of the Association should be deliberately broken. They thought that the word of this Association was as good as its bond, and that the pledges embodied in our Bye-Laws were promises made by honourable people to honourable people. What do these new Bye-Laws ask you to do? In effect they say to all the world: "We have got all we can out of these ladies; now we will break faith with them." A number of them joined the Association. They actually believed that this Association was to be trusted. They took their permanent seats on the Council and Executive Committee, and held those seats for seven years, until they were shuffled off the General Council; and now you are asked to shuffle them off the Executive Committee. I think the officials are correct in thinking we have got all we can get out of these ladies. We got the Royal Charter; they all worked hard for it. (Hear, hear.) In the first year we got over two thousand Nurse members. How? Not from the doctors! I could not have brought in five nurses. (Oh!) I doubt if Dr. Bezly Thorne brought one! I could not, and no medical member of the Association could have had the influence over the nurses that the leading matrons have. And the two thousand joined because their matrons believed us. Yes! they believed our promises. Dr. Bezly Thorne doubts it now. (A voice, "He denied it," and hisses.) But after the Charter was granted, and it was desired to get rid of a very powerful element in the Association, then these ladies were turned off the

General Council. And once more, Dr. Bezly Thorne has not told this Meeting the whole truth. There was an omission of several words, and I have always taken discredit to myself for that fact in drawing up the new Bye-Laws, it was not made definitely plain in the new Bye-Laws, as it was in the old Bye-Laws, that the *ex-officio* members of the Executive Committee should have permanent seats also upon the General Council. It was a little omission, and evidently only an omission that could have been and should have been corrected at once. After the Charter was granted we had to hurriedly recast our Bye-Laws, to bring them before a special meeting of the Association, to discuss them in Committees, to settle them with Counsel, to hurry them through in order to obtain the sanction of the Privy Council to them before the summer vacation. And as to that omission—it was not discovered by Dr. Thorne for eighteen months after—and then, when he brought it forward, and demanded that the matrons should be turned out of their permanent seats, as he again wishes you to do to-day, there was, of course, a very strong feeling aroused, and a number of people said, "We will not break our pledged word and promise; we demand a Special General Meeting to make the Bye-Laws conform to our promises," and so that meeting was requisitioned under the Bye-Laws, legally and properly demanded, for March 22nd, 1895. That meeting has never yet been held. (Shame, hisses, and some laughter.) There are nurses who actually laugh at the honour and good faith of their Association being degraded into the mud. (Loud applause.)

The CHAIRMAN: Her Royal Highness, the President, offered a meeting for the purpose of discussion.

Miss BREAY: I ask, Sir, why that offer was not communicated to the signatories of the requisition? (Applause.)

Dr. BEDFORD FENWICK: Has the meeting offered by Her Royal Highness ever been summoned? (Loud applause.)

The Chairman made no reply.

Dr. FENWICK: The meeting was illegally denied the Members. The Bye-Law was not altered. The matrons were taken off the permanent seats on the General Council promised to them, and to-day you are asked to complete the breach of faith by removing those ladies from their permanent seats on the Executive Council. The breach of faith which was committed in 1895 has disgraced the Association all over the world. Nurses in the United States, in Canada, in Africa, and in Australia, are all taking warning by the Royal British Nurses' Association what to avoid. And what has been the ultimate result to this Association? The ladies with whom the faith of the Association has been broken, despise it, and decline to have anything more to do with it. How has the Association prospered since then? How can any association prosper when it acts with deliberate dishonour? It has gone down, down, down; and it will continue to retrograde and to fail so long as it acts dishonourably. (Loud applause.)

Mr. FARDON said as it was impossible for him to support the amendment which Dr. Bezly Thorne had so ably brought forward, it was only just to himself and to the Association that he should state his reasons for not doing so. He had always maintained, privately and publicly, that the Association should have the hearty co-operation of the leaders of the nursing

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)