

must be explained that, in accordance with all precedents, women who had been for three years engaged in nursing the sick—whether trained in hospitals or not—were for the first six months held to be eligible for Registration. At the end of that 'period of grace' three years' hospital service was made an essential condition, and will henceforth be the rule.

"The Registration Board, therefore, issues to the public the first Annual Register of Trained Nurses as the commencement only of a system which it believes will in the future be fraught with great advantages both to the sick and to the medical profession, as well as to nurses themselves.

"The Register tacitly asserts two great principles:—

"1. That the public should be protected from ignorant and untrustworthy women terming themselves Trained Nurses.

"2. That the control of the nursing profession should be vested solely in professional hands.

"March, 1891."

All went well until after the Royal Charter was granted to the Association in 1893, when certain medical members, realising the powers granted by it, determined to get this power into their own hands and to oust the Matrons who founded it, and whose work and policy had resulted in so successful an issue.

No one, however, ventured to tamper with the principle of Registration until 1896, when a Conference was summoned by the Parliamentary Bills Committee of the British Medical Association with representatives of Nursing Societies and Organisations to consider the question.

The Executive Committee of the R.B.N.A. appointed as delegates to this Conference Mr. John Langton, the Treasurer, and Miss Wedgwood, Matron of the Royal Free Hospital, without the sanction of the Governing Body. Miss Wedgwood attended the Conference, and Mr. Edward Fardon, the Medical Hon. Secretary of the Association, was also present.

It is scarcely credible, but it is, nevertheless, a fact, that both the delegate of the Executive Committee of the Association and its Medical Hon. Secretary voted *for* a resolution—

"That a legal system of Registration of Nurses is inexpedient in principle, and injurious to the best interests of nurses and of doubtful public benefit."

These two votes turned the scale in favour of the resolution *against* Registration.

The action of Miss Wedgwood and Mr. Fardon naturally aroused a deep sense of indignation amongst the members of the R.B.N.A. who were present, and who, of course, voted against the resolution.

Miss Margaret Breay, one of the members who was present at the Conference, representing St. John's House, subsequently wrote to the Executive Committee of the Royal British Nurses' Association as follows:—

"I was present, on the invitation of the British Medical Association, at the Conference between the Parliamentary Bills Committee and representatives of the Nursing Profession.

"On that occasion, Miss Wedgwood, as the *representative of the R.B.N.A.*, voted against State Registration. I should much like to know if Miss Wedgwood was authorised by the Association so to vote, on its behalf, or if she exceeded the powers committed to her in so doing?

"It appears to me that after the public representation of the Association by Miss Wedgwood in this way it is highly desirable that the Association should in the next Journal state quite definitely and precisely what is its present attitude towards State Registration. In common with the *Lancet* for as far back as 1889 I have always held that the 'primary object of the Association was the Registration of Trained Nurses by legal authority.' If this is not so I really fail to see why we exist at all, for the benevolent schemes of the Association, however excellent, can scarcely be said to be important enough to engage all the valuable time and thought spent upon the Association by many leaders both of the medical and nursing professions. It would therefore be a satisfaction to myself, and I am sure to many others also, to have the views of the Association on this subject quite plainly stated in the Journal."

The following entry stands on record in the Minute Books of the Association:—

"At a meeting of the Executive Committee, held on March 6th, 1896, Miss Breay's letter *re* the recent Conference on State Registration, read at the Executive Committee on February 7th, was discussed, the Medical Honorary Secretary (Mr. Fardon) supporting Miss Wedgwood's action on that occasion and moving that a vote of thanks be conveyed to Miss Wedgwood for attending the Conference on behalf of the R.B.N.A. Dr. Calvert seconded the motion, which was carried."

At this meeting all the hon. officers who were present, and voted, supported Mr. Fardon's resolution, thus ranging themselves on the side of the anti-registrationists, a betrayal of the nurses' interests which was protested against by Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, then a member of the Executive Committee.

It is needless to add that no mention of Miss Breay's letter was made in the Journal, though a non-committal article as to Registration subsequently appeared.

At the request of a number of the Matron members of the Association, after a conference summoned to consider the matter, Miss Breay gave notice that she would bring a motion before the following annual meeting of the Association upon which the policy of the Executive in relation to the Registration question would have been discussed. It is now a matter of history how Sir James Crichton-Browne refused to allow the resolution to be proposed—although it had been inserted on the agenda—on the flimsy pretext that it was not sent in a registered letter, and this in spite of Miss

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)