

International Council of Nurses.

The following able editorial article, by Miss Isla Stewart, President of the League of St. Bartholomew's Hospital Nurses, dealing with the question of national representation in the International Council of Nurses, appears in the current issue of the *League News*, and will be read with interest by many nurses outside the limits of the League. It merits, indeed—beyond interest—deep thoughtfulness, thought which must surely bear fruit in action. Miss Stewart writes:—

The letter from Miss Lavinia Dock, Secretary of the International Council of Nurses, which will be found *in extenso* on another page, brings a very important matter before the League, and one on which some decision must be made. The letter was read at the business meeting, which was held in the Committee Room of the Hospital on July 27th. It was felt by all present to be much too important a question to be settled hurriedly, and all discussion and decision were postponed until the winter gathering, when a business meeting will be called to consider the suggestions in the letter. This arrangement will give all our members ample time for deliberation.

The writer of the letter, Miss Lavinia Dock, is a very excellent representative of all that is best and most progressive among American nurses; she is a bright, intelligent, "brainless" woman, who, thoroughly believing in progress, sees in combination its most powerful ally. She puts her suggestion and the reason for it in a very terse and telling way. She asks if we have considered the advisability of further organisation among nurses, and if not she asks us to do so now. She suggests as a first step affiliation between the various Leagues in Britain, that their power may find some expression, and, as some encouragement, she states that their national organisation has been of great moral assistance to American nurses. She has sent a copy of this letter to all existing Leagues in this country—*i.e.*, those of St. John's House, South Hants Royal Hospital, Leicester Infirmary, Chelsea Infirmary, and Guy's Hospital. The last, I fear, is compulsory and not self-governing.

Miss Dock practically suggests that each of those Leagues should send delegates to a central body, thus forming a National Council. This council would in its turn send delegates to the International Council, and so all nurses could, and would in time, be in touch with each other to some extent. This letter has been brought before the League of St. John's House Nurses. Their action, as will be seen by the motion carried, which we print in another page, was much the same as the conclusion we came to—*viz.*, that the subject was too important for immediate discussion, and that it must be postponed to give the members time for consideration, and

they added a suggestion that it should be brought before a general meeting of the various Leagues.

Now, it seems to me that there are three courses open to us. The first is that of progress. If we join hands with existing Leagues, with American, and in time with Continental nurses, we shall form an alliance which will first be national and later international. Our League is at once the oldest and largest of the self-governing Leagues of Nurses in this country. Among its members are very many deep-thinking, wide-minded, cultured women, well qualified to help to set a high standard of conduct and achievement among nurses. The future of our profession depends largely on the kind of people who will govern it. It seems to me that if we hang back now we shall have little hope of having a hand in its future guidance. If we join the party of progress now we bring to its aid a very important reinforcement—a reinforcement which must help to bear down opposition by the only force which has a right to do so, the declared opinion of many nurses.

The second course is to decline this suggestion of Miss Dock, refuse to join hands with other Leagues, and throw the whole weight of our declared opinion on to the reactionary side. We may say we do not want affiliation, nor moral support, nor progress, nor the strength that comes from combination. We are very well as we are. Let us meet twice a year, and eat and drink, gossiping pleasantly with each other, and leaving the things belonging to our profession alone. In fact, let us enact the part of the clog on the wheel, a part not absolutely useless, but very unornamental, and one that can be undertaken and understood by the least intelligent. But we must remember that, however powerful the "clog," the cart always gets to the bottom of the hill at last; the clog has its uses, but it never succeeds in quite stopping the cart. The Leagues will affiliate; we may be sure of that, for this is an age that fully recognises the importance and power of combination. Registration will come. It will then be the combining Leagues that will be in the van. Those who have held back will be in the rear among the governed.

There is indeed a third way. We need neither join in the stress of the progressive movement, nor lend our influence entirely to that of the reactionary party. Between those two parties there is a fence; we might sit on it until the battle be waged and won; we could then slip down on the winning side. To do this we have merely to put off coming to a decision, having no definite policy and no distinct voice on any matter. The position of a "trimmer," however, has never appeared to be estimable, nor desirable, evidencing, as it does, either a weak will, with no convictions, or a determination to be on the winning side regardless of honour or honesty.

I have laid the three courses open to us before

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)