

Metropolitan Asylums Board against the new regulation, and I very much deplore the fact that it was passed.

It would be a perfectly fair proposal to ask the Local Government Board to allow us to have the power to appoint and dismiss all our officers at our own free will. But it is highly invidious to pick out the matrons, and to place them in a definitely subordinate position to the principal male officers, including the clerk, treasurer, accountant, engineer-in-chief, chaplains of asylums, and medical superintendents. (See Article 29 in New Orders.)

In a certain sense, of course, no matron would ask to be "principal officer" in a hospital. She will always leave the medical headship to the medical man. But, in the same way, a medical man, if he is wise, will leave the disciplinary control of the nursing staff to the matron. That control will, I think, be seriously weakened if it once be clearly understood by the nurses that the matron is a subordinate officer.

The case seems to me even worse in our Children's Homes, which are practically entirely now in the hands of the matrons. There the matrons will now, it would appear from the Article, be subordinate to the chaplains.

Yours faithfully,

HAROLD SPENDER,
Member of the Metropolitan
Asylums Board.

The President, in opening the meeting, said it had been summoned to deal with an injustice to the Nursing Profession. It was not the first time the Matrons' Council had had to take action for the protection of nurses, and she hoped it might be as successful on the present occasion as on the last. The Metropolitan Asylums Board was a large and important body, which controlled all the fever hospitals in London, and anything which lowered the status of the Matron was bound to act prejudicially on the nursing in these hospitals, neither would it end there. She had herself been a Matron under the Board, and was, therefore, able to speak with a knowledge of the facts.

RESOLUTION I.

Miss Stewart then asked Mrs. Bedford Fenwick to take the chair, while she moved the first resolution, as follows:—

"That this meeting of the Matrons' Council of Great Britain and Ireland, specially convened to consider the proposed change in the position of Matrons of the Metropolitan Asylums Board Hospitals and Asylums from that of first class and second class officials, feels compelled to call the attention of the Public, of the Local Government Board, and of the Nursing Profession to the very serious effects which must follow such depreciation of the position and influence of the Matrons. It will prevent in future the best trained nurses from applying for work under the Asylums Board, and will, therefore, reduce the efficiency now maintained in the Nursing Departments of Fever Hospitals.

The Matrons' Council, therefore, protests most earnestly against the above proposal, and trusts that the Local Government Board will refuse to sanction this most retrograde suggestion.

The Matrons' Council would, in the event of the confirmation of the alteration of the Local Government Board Orders, feel compelled to point out to trained nurses the inadvisability of entering the service of the Metropolitan Asylums Board."

MISS STEWART, in proposing the resolution, said that the Matrons of the Metropolitan Asylums Board Hospitals were face to face with a serious danger. Their position was in no case easy, because it was not very clearly defined. If the proposition of the Asylums Board were sanctioned by the Local Government Board, it would be very much lower than at present. They would no longer rank as principal, but as subordinate officers. It was specially important to remember in connection with this that the tenure of office of the principal officers was secure, and could only be determined after three months' notice by the Local Government Board. As a subordinate officer, the Matron could be dismissed at a month's notice by the Metropolitan Asylums Board. Then, while she had much responsibility, she would not have the authority which should always go with responsibility. It was in the more intangible things, which, after all, mattered most, that the immediate effect of the alteration of status would be felt. She had already referred to security of tenure—that would go. The Matron's authority also would go, and when you touched that you touched a vital point. It could not be depreciated without injuring the whole nursing staff, and lowering its efficiency. Too much importance could not be given to this point, for it was the efficiency of the nursing which was at stake. As the Matron of a large hospital, Miss Stewart said, she had the status of nurses keenly at heart. An extraordinary progress had taken place in the last thirty years, and the proposal now under consideration was almost the first retrograde step. It did not touch the Asylums Board Matrons alone, but, by lowering the status of nursing in Metropolitan Asylums Board Hospitals, would prejudicially and insidiously affect that in other institutions also. She hoped Matrons and nurses, as a body, would rise and oppose it with all their might.

MISS MOLLETT, Matron of the Royal South Hants Hospital, who seconded the resolution, said that she spoke for the Nursing Profession as a whole. It was many years since she had worked under the Local Government Board, her principal remembrance being that her rations were far in excess of her appetite, but she could not fail to appreciate the harm which must ensue if the matrons of these great Metropolitan Hospitals were placed in a subordinate position, and classed with porters and laundry maids. The question was not one which concerned the Matrons of the Asylums Board Hospitals alone, but the whole nursing profession. With the position of the

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)