

The Royal British Nurses' Association Petition for a Charter.

The hearing of the Petition of the Royal British Nurses' Association, seeking for incorporation by Royal Charter, was resumed on Monday before the Privy Council, in the Council Chamber, Whitehall. The members present were the Marquis of RIPON, Lord HOBHOUSE, Lord HANNEN, and Lord OXENBRIDGE.

Sir HORACE DAVEY, Q.C., Mr. MUIR MACKENZIE, and the Hon. W. H. CROSS, M.P., represented the petitioners; and Sir RICHARD WEBSTER, Q.C., M.P., and Mr. L. S. BRISTOWE, appeared for the opponents. The solicitor for the petitioners was Mr. F. S. RANDOLPH, of No. 3, Old Serjeants' Inn.

The Court was crowded throughout the day by persons interested in the application, many of whom were ladies.

Sir RICHARD WEBSTER, resuming his address on behalf of the respondents said: On Monday last, when I was addressing your Lordships, I put forward some general observations as to the use that is to be made of the Register by the general undiscerning public, and I now desire to make my observations somewhat more concrete, and to call attention to the specific objections to this Register, and to the specific objections to the Society which proposes to manage this Register according to the powers sought to be obtained in connection with the rules by the present Charter. Before I proceed to that, however, I should like to make one or two observations with reference to the full line of argument pursued by my learned friend Sir Horace Davey in answer to the objections made by us to the Council, and which were perfectly justifiable from his own point of view. He said that all he asked was that provision should be made for a directory of Nurses. Now if all they really desired was to make a directory of Nurses we should not be here to oppose them. Further than that I would say—with great deference to your lordships' better judgment and to your lordships' greater knowledge—that I know of no case, and no precedent, of a chartered register of any body being granted. It is absolutely new, and it is open to objections to which I shall call attention later on, and I have to urge that a Charter cannot give the power which it is necessary should be given in order to make it an effective register. Perhaps, however, it is more important that I should put the case upon its true ground, that without statutory assistance, such a register would be, and must be, misleading to the public and would be dangerous, and there is no precedent for giving such a register sanction, or the *imprimatur* of being a chartered register. We now come to the objections to the register as it appears at the present time, and as it would appear under the charter. I would ask your lordships to be good enough to take the red book—the 1892 register. Now, my lords, this purports to be, as the heading shows a register of trained nurses for 1892, not merely a list of the members of the Association, but a register of trained nurses; and I shall have to show your Lordships later on that one of two consequences must follow—either the nurses desiring to get the full opportunity of employment must join this Association's Register, or else that it will not in any way effect the purpose which the promoters of the Chartered Register desire. Now, my Lords, it was stated, I am sure by inadvertence on the authority of instructions, that the number of nurses on the Register was 2,777. Well, my Lords,

it is a mistake; it is 1,777. But I am not going to deal with the mere question of numbers. My observations will be directed to far more important considerations than this. There are 1,777 nurses on the list out of about, as has been stated, 5,000 trained nurses, and many, many more whose number has been variously estimated at from 5,000 to 15,000 who must to a certain extent and under certain restrictions of the rules be allowed to go upon the register. But now, my lords, your lordships will kindly remember that the case made by my learned friend, Sir Horace Davey, was this:—"We desire to enable the public to judge as to who are qualified and who are not qualified. We desire to guard the public"—to quote his own words—"against the danger of having unqualified Nurses posing as qualified Nurses, and putting themselves upon the public as competent to fulfil the duties of qualified and trained Nurses." Well, my lords, your lordships will be surprised when I tell you that upwards of 600 of those Nurses have no hospital qualification at all, and I shall show your lordships when I come to analyse this register that so far from the Nurses fulfilling the minimum of qualification, which was put forward by my learned friend, Sir Horace Davey, as being the main object and aim of this Institution, a still larger number, my lords, have nothing like that qualification which was supposed to be necessary in order that the public might not be misled.

The Marquis of RIPON: That is to say the three years' qualification?

Sir R. WEBSTER: Yes, my lord, Your lordships were good enough upon the last day to intimate that you would read my observations. You will remember that I ventured to point out that in the Charter, as it is now framed, there is no limit, no qualification imposed. Any Nurses may be entered upon the register subject to whatever regulations the Association may choose to make. It was in that spirit that Sir Horace Davey opened his case. I call your lordships attention to the regulations as they are now in force, and printed in the red book at page 8—in the roman letters—"Applicants for registration must produce proof that they have been engaged for three years in work in hospitals or infirmaries, of which not less than twelve months must have been spent in a recognised general hospital containing at least forty "beds." A note states that the question as to the number of beds may be waived by the Board. Now I pointed out when I was dealing with the constitution of the Association which sought to obtain this charter, that there was nothing to restrict or to limit the minimum of qualification, and that it was open to the Association to please themselves in reference to that matter. It occurred to me that they would be perfectly free to please themselves in reference to the matter of qualification. But it may be said that the charter could be modified. That will not now get over the difficulty. How is it that out of the 1,777 on the list a large number of unqualified nurses are included? Because, on the 30th of June, 1890, the Association intended at that time, as I shall show your lordships, that the register should have the effect of a medical register, and that persons after a certain date should not be allowed to join it without certain qualifications. That was their case when they went before the Board of Trade. Their case then was "We desire to be a certified body; we desire to be the body which shall lay down what shall be the minimum of fitness to qualify a nurse." Consistently with that, they said "you are now in the year of grace 1890, and after the 30th of June, 1890, you would be allowed to join." To Nurses the register was put forward as a chartered register—as a chartered register

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