

The Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses.

431, Oxford Street, London, W.

January 25th, 1913.

SIR,—I beg to acknowledge your letter of the 23rd ult, in reply to one addressed by me, on behalf of the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses, to the Clerk to the Governors of St. Bartholomew's Hospital.

I understand from your reply that, while the Committee of the Hospital realise that they have no control over the members of the nursing staff outside the Hospital, within the institution they are prohibited by the resolution passed by the Committee on the 5th ultimo from holding a meeting to discuss the subject of State Registration of Nurses, although, on a number of occasions in the past such meetings have been permitted in the Nurses' Home, and the privilege has always been used with the greatest circumspection and discretion.

I enclose for your information the copy of a Resolution which is being sent officially to the Committee of Treasurer and Almoners.

I am, Sir,

Yours faithfully,

MARGARET BREAY,
Hon. Secretary,

G. Acton Davis, Esq.,
Acting Treasurer,
St. Bartholomew's Hospital, E.C.

The letter from the Acting Treasurer is, in our opinion, both contradictory and calculated to convey a wrong impression. We must not allow any ambiguity of words to divert our attention from the fundamental question in dispute—*i.e.*, the deprivation of the nursing staff of St. Bartholomew's Hospital of the long-established privilege of considering, within the gates, the question of their registration by the State—legislation which proposes to deal with their educational, economic, and social conditions.

The refusal of the Committee to grant permission for the nurses to hold a meeting to discuss this question classes it, in their estimation, as "controversial," and, however it may be denied, does, both in "intention and effect," deprive the nursing staff of freedom of speech.

We have received a very large number of letters from medical men and members of the public on this question, and with few exceptions they are entirely in sympathy with our contention—that this attempt to stifle the professional conscience of nurses is absolutely indefensible, and can only react injuriously upon the Nursing School and the reputation of the hospital.

THE PROTEST MEETING.

FREE SPEECH DEMANDED.

A special meeting of the Society for the State Registration of Nurses was held at 431, Oxford Street, on Thursday, January 23rd, to enter a protest against the denial of freedom of conscience and free speech to the nursing staff at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, on the question of their Registration by the State.

The President, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, was in the chair.

Mrs. Fenwick, in her explanatory remarks, said the meeting had been called, by request, to deal with a question of liberty of conscience on the subject of State Registration of Nurses, and a resolution would be proposed by Miss Ellen Kingsford and seconded by Miss Margaret Breay, nurses holding the certificate of the hospital in question. She then briefly reviewed the circumstances of the case. All present, she said, were fully aware that, for a quarter of a century, the privilege of free speech on their own professional affairs had been conceded by the authorities at St. Bartholomew's Hospital to the Nursing Staff within the gates. Thus through the whole period in which nurses have been petitioning Parliament that the standard of nursing should be defined by State authority, they had met, passed resolutions in support of Registration, and conducted their meetings with the greatest circumspection and discretion. When, therefore, a Sister had recently asked the Matron, Miss McIntosh, for the use of a room in the Nurses' Home in which to discuss the question, she was naturally astonished that her courteous request was not granted. The Matron, however, agreed to place the request before the Committee, and that body unanimously refused it, and placed such refusal on the minutes in a sweeping resolution, which determined that meetings for the discussion of controversial subjects cannot be held in the hospital: a determination which reversed the honourable policy of the past in relation to the nursing staff, which was conveyed to them by the Matron.

Here no doubt it was expected the matter would end. But not so. Resenting this evidence of a dangerous and reactionary policy on the part of the officials and Committee, the matter was reported to the BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING, with the request that publicity might be given to the matter. The ventilation of the grievance through the press had resulted in the Committee calling a meeting of the

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)