

—St. Bartholomew's Hospital—my reasons for differing from your point of view?

1. You say, "as members of the governing body of this charity we have no politics." That may be so, but presumably there is nothing in the regulations governing the charity which prohibits you from holding political views, and exercising political rights and duties and social obligations in your *personal capacity*; and it is these personal rights and duties I claim should be conceded, unquestionably, to each individual officer, male and female, in every public institution; and, indeed, any attempt to coerce the medical staff, or any of the male officers, of whatever grade, would I feel sure be promptly contested, should your committee attempt to impose any such restrictions upon them.

2. The head of the Nursing Department, responsible as she is to your committee for the efficiency and good government of the nursing and domestic departments of the hospital, can only exercise the necessary authority to maintain high standards of work and good discipline through moral influence. What moral influence can any woman exercise deprived—as you have deprived the Matron of St. George's Hospital—of the human right of personal responsibility? If you cannot trust this official to govern herself, how can you expect her to influence others for good? In reply to enquiry, I am informed that the subordinate domestic staff is not subjected to invidious restrictions of personal liberty of conscience and action upon appointment. What respect can these subordinates have for a senior officer so unjustly deprived of them? In my opinion none whatever.

Further, your House Committee cannot realize the cruel alternative which it placed before the candidates for the Matronship of St. George's Hospital as a condition of appointment. May I, therefore, point out the alternative you offered to the selected candidates?—either to subordinate their conscientious convictions to their personal advantage, or to forego the recognition to which their professional work would otherwise entitle them of appointment to the Matronship of one of the leading London nurse-training schools.

For its prototype we must go back 2,000 years to a certain scene in the wilderness—"All these things will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me!"

Is it surprising under such circumstances if Matrons hesitate to openly advocate professional reforms of the urgency of which they are profoundly convinced? The wonder is not that some refrain, but that so many have the courage to come forward in the public interest, when, as workers dependent on their profession as a means of self-support, they feel not only that their chances of promotion are imperilled, but that their rejection is certain, if they do not consent to suppress their professional conscience.

I shall be obliged if you will bring this letter before your House Committee, and hope that upon further consideration they will remove

the restriction imposed before the new Matron assumes office.

I am, dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

ETHEL G. FENWICK.

To the Deputy-Treasurer,
St. George's Hospital, S.W.

St. George's Hospital, S.W.

August 3rd, 1914.

DEAR MADAM,—I am in receipt of yours of July 31st, with a copy of the issue of your JOURNAL of 1st inst. As regards the paragraph from the *Daily Herald*, which you have seen fit to print,* I should like to point out that it is full of inaccuracies. As matters of fact:—

1. Our Committee did not demand or know the political views of any of the applicants.

2. We have not the slightest objection to our Matron in her private capacity signing any petition on whichever side she fancies; in fact, our late Matron did so recently.

3. The question of State Registration was not raised or touched upon by any candidate, or by any member of the Committee.

4. There was no question as to Matron "exercising her own discretion in private matters." On the contrary, in pointing out to the several candidates that we did not enquire as to their individual views, I added that every thinking man and woman must have views on most matters, social and political, and that the candidates in their private capacity would be quite free to exercise them as they thought fit, so long as their doing so did not interfere with their duty to the Hospital.

How a lady can "adopt the ideas of a Committee" on which there are many divergent forms of thought, I leave the *Daily Herald* to explain.

I am surprised that you should have been guilty of such a breach of the conventions alike of private life, as of journalism, as to publish, if not the contents, at any rate what you state to be the effect of a letter marked "private." Your interpretation, moreover, of my letter (so far as I can make any sense of your phrase, "denying personal responsibility of thought and action") is so unjustified that I must ask you now to print my "private" letter *in extenso*.

There is not the slightest suggestion in it that we desired to interfere with the personal opinions of any of our staff; on the contrary all that we ask is that they shall not take any "active" part in any propaganda.

The word "active" implies, of course, the addressing of meetings, canvassing, and such like only, and was, I feel sure, so understood by the candidates.

I will have your letter brought before the House Committee at its meeting on the 12th inst., if you still wish it. I trust, however, that in the meanwhile you will see fit by the light of the

* Published in our issue of the 1st inst.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)