

Army Nursing Notes.

Mr. Burdett-Coutts is not to be discouraged in his self-imposed and most thankless task of demanding that the truth should be made known to the nation, concerning the working of the present Army Medical and Nursing system in South Africa, and an opportunity having been denied to the House of Commons to discuss the constitution of the Commission of Inquiry, and their powers, Mr. Coutts has sent a long letter to the press, pointing out the very unsatisfactory condition of affairs. He objects to the fact that the Committee is not a Royal Commission, or a similar body which might have legal powers to call evidence. The only evidence it will be able to obtain will be that which is voluntarily tendered.

This being the case, he believes that there will be no small difficulty in inducing men in the Army to come forward and tell the truth. He adduces instances of men who have communicated with him as to hospital mismanagement, but in all cases the communications were accompanied by the desire that the names of the writers should be kept secret.

He wants to know how the Committee is to form an opinion of a state of things which will have been swept out of existence before the members can reach South Africa; and he asks whether the Committee is going to push its researches to "the real seed-ground of the disaster"—the unpreparedness of the Army Medical Department.

"Is it too late," inquires Mr. Burdett-Coutts, "to ask the Government to treat the subject with greater seriousness and sympathy than they have yet shown? It is one that touches many hearts, and closely concerns the future of our Army in time of war."

Though it was found impossible to discuss the composition of the Commission as a whole, in the House, it is well to remember that an opportunity will arise on the War Office vote. The vote for Lord Lansdowne's salary has still to be taken, and the appointment is technically within his department. It is stated that Lord Lansdowne has taken an active part in the constitution of the Commission, and it will therefore be possible to discuss it on the War Office Vote, for which the Government are bound to give a day, or at least part of a day.

The members of the Commission have already got to work, and possibly will sail for South Africa in a few days.

Mr. Watson Cheyne, who has just returned from acting as Consulting Surgeon to Lord Robert's forces in South Africa, gives us the benefit of his experiences in two columns of Monday's *Times*. The paragraph of most interest to nurses runs as follows:—

A good deal has been said also as regards the question of nursing. This is a very large subject and one which I need not enter into. Personally I strongly agree that female nurses are better, especially for cases of typhoid fever, than males. At the same time this is entirely a matter of opinion. It is one which I have frequently discussed, and I must confess that those who have had much experience of Army requirements have invariably taken the opposite view. In any case women could not go forward with an advancing army, nor can they be employed in field hospitals, and female nurses must be limited to base hospitals. As a matter of fact in this campaign a much larger number of female nurses than is arranged for in the Army Regulations was employed. My belief is that a still larger number might have been used with advantage, but even if the authorities had taken the same view any attempt to substitute female nurses for the orderlies to such an extent as is the case in a civil hospital would have dislocated arrangements most seriously, and would have meant practically the re-organization of the base hospital system in the middle of the campaign when the officials were already very much overworked. This is, however, a point which I think should be kept in view when the numerous lessons taught by the war are taken into consideration.

We are glad to observe that Mr. Watson Cheyne realises the largeness of the Army Nursing question, and, no doubt, he is right in his opinion that the middle of a campaign is not the best time to begin to reorganize the military hospital system. But we contend that this ought to have been done any time this ten years—before this war was thought of, and it is entirely because men, ignorant of nursing matters, have retained to themselves absolute power in military nursing organization, that the system is obsolete, as proved by its ghastly failure in the present war.

Addressing the *Times* in support of this best of all possible Governments on the Hospital question, the Hon. Arthur Stanley makes one very true remark. He writes:—"I believe that the more closely the whole question is investigated the more clearly will it be shown that the system on which the R.A.M.C. is worked is unsound, and that it has only been saved from complete breakdown by the magnificent exertions of the individual members of the corps—the doctors, nurses, and orderlies—of whose unremitting efforts it is difficult to speak in adequate terms."

Just so, it is the War Office system at home which needs keen investigation and thorough re-organization, and this is what the nation must insist upon.

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