

**Professional Review.****ROYAL COMMISSION ON SOUTH AFRICAN HOSPITALS.\****(Continued from page 174.)***REMARKS ON NURSES.**

"Bearing in mind the ordinary conditions of military hospitals we think it will always be necessary even in fixed hospitals and in suitable wards, that the employment of nurses should be supplemented by that of properly trained orderlies.

"Some objection was urged against the employment in this war of nurses who were locally chosen, on the ground that they could not be and were not properly qualified or trained. We find, however, that the local nurses employed were carefully selected, and that they did their duty well. No complaint was made against any of them except in three cases. Of these, one was quite trivial; and, in the other two, the nurses were trained one in England and the other in Ireland. We think that the objection taken to the employment of these local nurses was not well founded."

**DEFICIENCY IN THE STAFF AND EQUIPMENT OF THE ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS.**

The Commission states that at the outbreak of the war there were only available staff and equipment for two Army Corps and that after providing for these there was existing only a reserve of equipment sufficient to furnish one general and two stationary hospitals. The explanation of so small a reserve of equipment was that improvements were so often being made in various articles that it was undesirable to keep a large stock of what might ultimately prove to be out of date and useless. The comment of the Commission is: "Although this explanation has some force in it, it does not appear wholly satisfactory."

With regard to the deficiency in the staff "much difficulty was experienced in providing an adequate staff of doctors and orderlies in South Africa. To a great extent this was met by the employment of civil surgeons and untrained orderlies. The difficulty of supplying orderlies accustomed to or fit for hospital work was much greater than the difficulty of finding civil surgeons, and, in fact, was never overcome. Surgeon-General Wilson, in his evidence, put the fact tersely, though, perhaps, too strongly, when he said he was obliged to take all who offered themselves. A good orderly must be trained, and the training takes some time, and clearly ought not to be obtained at the expense of patients in a crowded hospital. Some orderlies were obtained from the St. John's Ambulance Association. These men, though as a body they worked well, were to a great extent untrained and quite unused to hospital work, and some of them appear to have been rough and unfitted for the purpose of tending sick men. Ordinary regimental privates were also largely employed." Bearing in mind the amount of education in nursing matters given to the so-called "trained orderlies," thoroughly trained nurses will hardly feel complimented by the remark made by the Commission in their Report—"as the war went on and it became obvious that the deficiency of trained orderlies could not be satisfactorily made

good, it became evident that nurses must be largely employed." However, from whatever cause arising, there is reason for congratulation that the obstinate antagonism of the War Office to the employment of an adequate number of female nurses in military hospitals has been to some extent broken down by force of circumstances in the present war, but with the increased employment of women nurses arises the urgent need for further organisation. In future wars nurses must not be promiscuously pitchforked into the scene of action, as well might the army be sent out without a Commander-in-Chief. A General Superintendent of Nursing with Superintendents of districts working under and reporting to her must be acknowledged factors in Army Nursing Organisation on active service. And in the War Office at home there must be an Army Nursing, as well as an Army Medical Department, with its own Assistant Director-General, working in touch and consultation with the Army Medical Department. It is further noteworthy that though the difficulty of finding a sufficient number of orderlies was insuperable, "with regard to the nurses there was no difficulty found in obtaining a sufficient number of suitable persons, nearly all of whom were properly trained."

A deficiency of equipment, which is over and over again mentioned in the Report is the lack of bed-pans. At Bloemfontein this was most marked, but in his evidence before the Commission Surgeon-General Wilson, "speaking generally, and not of Bloemfontein in particular, said he knew of the absence of bed-pans, but it was always made light of more or less, on account of the fact that the prevalent disease, namely, enteric fever, was one which as a rule in that country was not accompanied by diarrhoea." The comment of the Commission is, "We think this view was an unfortunate one," and is one which all nurses will endorse. "The lack of sufficient commodes and bedpans" (in at least one hospital) led to severe enteric and dysenteric fever patients having to go long distances from their tents to the latrines, which were themselves not properly equipped or kept." Again we read of patients remaining for days with their clothing unchanged, "even when fouled by evacuations," and that "typhoid patients, though probably not of a severe type, had in some instances to wash and tend themselves, that night stools were not properly emptied, and beds not always kept as clean as they might have been."

No wonder that the Commission speaking of the shortage of bed-pans say: "The great necessity for such articles, especially in a country like South Africa, when dysentery and enteric fever are rife, appears not to have been adequately recognised by the medical authorities and was certainly not sufficiently provided for." Here again the advice of a trained nurse would have been invaluable.

**COMPLAINTS AGAINST ORDERLIES.**

Charges against orderlies during the war have been rife, and though many have worked well there have been a large number of justifiable complaints. Amongst these the Commission mention inattention, roughness, intoxication, and brutality, the practice of stealing the stimulants and other comforts, the money and other property of patients, and also of taking bribes from the patients for the supply of comforts, or for rendering the assistance due to them.

*(To be continued.)*

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[previous page](#)

[next page](#)