

The Indian Army Nursing Service.*

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THE Nursing Service for British Soldiers in India has now been in existence for about eight years. The great need of skilled nursing in that country had been strongly urged by Lord Roberts, Commander-in-Chief of Her Majesty's Forces in India, and by others who were deeply interested in the welfare of sick officers and soldiers; and in the beginning of the year 1888 the Secretary of State for India sanctioned the establishment, and about twelve Nurses were sent out to India.

At first the scheme was looked on more or less as an experiment, but after two years it was considered sufficiently successful to justify its extension, and during the cold weather of 1890-91, eighteen new Sisters were sent out, and the year following they were increased to a total strength of fifty-two.

These Nursing Sisters are divided amongst the principal military stations of India and Burmah. There are from two to four Sisters together in each station, one of whom holds the position of Deputy Superintendent. There is also a Lady Superintendent at the headquarters' station of each of the four military commands into which the army in India is now divided, and she has authority over all the subordinate stations within the command where she is placed, and she makes an official inspecting tour every year to visit the stations under her charge, and must report officially to the principal medical officer on the conditions of the work found in them, and on the capabilities and conduct of each Deputy Superintendent and Nursing Sister. Besides this, she keeps a regular correspondence with the Deputy Superintendents, who are expected to consult her on all important matters, and to send her regular monthly reports.

Before commencing to describe the work required of military Nurses in India, I must try to give some idea of the organisation of the Hospitals into which they are introduced, for the arrangements are in many ways different from what they have been accustomed to at home.

First there is a medical officer of senior rank in administrative and medical charge of the Hospital, who is ultimately responsible for, and in authority over, everything. Next the medical officers in direct charge of the patients. These visit their wards always once, and frequently twice, a day. The regular "doctors' visiting

hours" commence at 6.30 or 7 a.m. in the hot weather, and at 9 a.m. in the cold weather, and they can be sent for should any case of emergency arise between whiles.

There is also a class of subordinate medical officers called "assistant surgeons," who hold the rank of warrant officers. These assistant surgeons receive four years' college and Hospital training before entering the service; they do not treat the patients except under the orders of the medical officer; but they do all the dispensing, they are responsible for the maintenance of order in the wards, and during the absence of the medical officers they are in medical charge, that is to say, they must prescribe on their own responsibility should any emergency arise.

When Nursing Sisters are non-existent it is also their duty to superintend the nursing of the patients, and in very special cases they no doubt partly undertake it themselves. But generally speaking, no actual nursing is done by them: they are far too few in number in proportion to the number of beds in Hospital to undertake anything more than a general superintendence, even if they had not a great deal of office work and many other things to do.

Then, there is a regular Hospital corps of native ward servants of various grades. They do the cleaning and ward work, but are absolutely useless from a nursing point of view. They are nearly all a very low class of men, and poorly paid, and they never do more work than they are absolutely obliged. The soldiers do not like them, and would often bully them if they dared—that is if it were not forbidden under severe penalties—and the ward boys retaliate by being as idle and as provoking as in their turn they dare to be, even sometimes by hiding themselves and keeping out of the way altogether as soon as the doctors' hours are over.

In addition to all these, there are soldier orderlies. Up to two years ago, soldier orderlies were only supposed to be obtained for the nursing of their comrades when there were very specially bad cases in Hospital. They were men drawn at random from the ranks, knowing nothing naturally of the duties required of them, and totally ignorant of the most rudimentary principles of Nursing. They were not even always trustworthy men, for often men would volunteer for Hospital work merely to escape parades and field days, and except in regiments where the officers took a special interest in the personal welfare of their sick men, those chosen out and sent to act as sick orderlies were often only those unlucky characters who did little credit to the smartness of their company.

* Being a Paper read at the Nursing Conference, London, June 4th, 1896.

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