

Our American Letter.

[BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]



THE failure of the Army Nursing Bill to reach a vote in the Senate has been a great disappointment to American

nurses. It had passed the House, but before there was time to take it up in the Senate Congress adjourned, leaving it over with other unfinished business. Many Senators had promised to vote for it, and it is possible that it may have been carried. At any rate, its friends and supporters have not relinquished the hope of having it passed in the future.

It was a foregone conclusion that the army nursing would meet with much opposition, some that was reasonable and some that was selfish. While it was under preparation, men who were cordially in favour of it, both in military and in medical circles, said of it: "It is too good to pass; it can hardly succeed, for they will never give you so much authority, but try; it is worth trying."

The Bill was a definite and courageous attempt to have trained nursing officially recognized and charged with the responsibility of its own province of work. This, one would think, was the natural and obvious thing to do, yet it was, after all, such an innovation, even here in America, as to cause much opposition, and it clashed with too many other interests and prejudices to be easily done. There was the prejudice of militarism against giving women any authority in military hospitals. What! Allow trained nurses to order the hospital corps men about? The regulations would have to be changed! The summer's experience showed how distasteful to the average military surgeon would be the proposition that he could not move the nurses about and change their work continually after the inexplicable fashion which seems to be a peculiarity of army work. This mysterious method made a jumble all summer of the orderlies' work, the dining room, kitchen and general attendance, to the despair of the nurses.

Then there was the ever recurring dread of a certain type of medical mind that we all know, that if nurses were not kept strictly disorganized

and under the thumb of the doctor in all things, there was no telling where they would end!

The last "Trained Nurse" contains the report upon the Bill made to the Committee by the Surgeon-General, and these two prejudices stick out all over it, especially in his suggestion that the pay of the whole hospital corps service would have to be raised, keeping all these men just a line above the trained nursing service.

There is no doubt the Surgeon-General has suffered many trials, for last summer, after hundreds of nurses had thrown all their strength, energies, and resources into the work of repairing the frightful results of the incompetency and neglect of these same men, the only light the Surgeon-General had upon the subject, when testifying before the Commission, was that "they were getting a great many requisitions from the nurses for rocking-chairs and looking-glasses—things that they never had with the male service."

Then there was the opposition of Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee. She is a brilliant and talented woman, and through the war, like many others, she worked untiringly and devotedly. She is a physician, and without experience in nursing organization, so that while there was much that was fine about her work there was also some that would, on the whole, have been better done by women of the laity who have been active on Training School Boards. She would, for instance, send a number of nurses to a given point, without appointing any one to be in charge, and a process of natural selection would have to take place. In estimating her services truly, while appreciating them thoroughly, they should not be overestimated, and we as nurses all feel that she would show herself a bigger and broader woman if, now that the emergency is over and plans for a steady routine are being made, she were to recognize such conspicuous ability as, for instance, Miss Maxwell showed at Chickamauga by supporting the claim of the nursing profession that a trained nurse only should be placed in the position of Superintendent of an army nursing service. However, she opposed the Bill with great influence, saying that "it was easier to defeat it than to offer a substitute."

The opposition of the Red Cross, I think, was quite natural. In every other country, I believe, the Red Cross is more honoured by the Government, and given a more official recognition than in ours, and when one considers the history and the standing of this International Association, one can readily put one's self in the place of its officers and realize why they opposed a Bill which would, as it seemed, take entirely out of their

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)