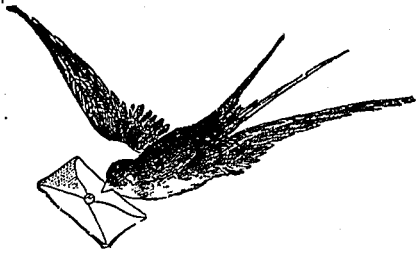


Our Foreign Letter.

WOMEN NURSES IN WAR.



THE war with Spain proved the utility of the woman nurse. The nurse question was only one of the many serious problems that confronted the

Government at the beginning of hostilities, but it caused an endless amount of perplexity before its solution. A valued correspondent sends the following news: Surgeon-General Sternberg and other officials in the Medical Department of the army thought that the Hospital Corps, as organized in the beginning, would prove adequate to any emergency that might arise. There also existed a prejudice against the employment of women in the army camps and hospitals, and a strong feeling that if outside nurses were needed men only should be employed. That these opinions were erroneous was shown when the camps and hospitals began to be filled with sick. The male nurses employed, when the emergency came proved in many cases incompetent, and as a result large numbers of women were pressed into service.

It was not until the latter part of June that the Government agreed to accept the services of women as nurses, but from that time on, till the war's conclusion, more than 500 women served their country by nursing its defenders. Everywhere their conduct met with unqualified approval from the surgeons, while their devotion and self-sacrifice proved an inspiration to their patients.

When the War Department early in June began to consider the necessity of a corps of nurses as an auxiliary to the Medical Department, one of the serious questions which immediately arose was that of transportation. No special fund for this emergency had been provided for by Congress, nor had any other plan been adopted in regard to the management of such an auxiliary branch. The problem was finally solved by charity, and to the thousands of patriotic men and women of the country who contributed for this object is largely due to the credit for the good work done by nurses and the consequent preservation of life. The first of the large relief organizations to pay special attention to the subject of nurses was the Red Cross Society. At the request of the Women's Committee on Auxiliaries of that society, an auxiliary known as No. 3 was organized on May 18th, to provide funds for the maintenance of trained nurses. It was the original intention of the society to place the nurses to be maintained by the auxiliary on a hospital ship to be furnished by the National Relief Committee. This plan was abandoned early, it being found that more good could be done by using the funds collected in supplying trained nurses to the camps and hospitals.

The Government soon after the beginning of hostilities, with a view to meet a possible emergency, organized a committee of competent women to select women nurses

if they were needed. This committee consisted of Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee, Miss Mary Desha, Mrs. Francis G. Nash and Mrs. Amos G. Draper. The members of the Committee were all members of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and it became known as the Hospital Corps of that Society. Dr. McGee, as director, and the others as assistants, represented the the Surgeon-General in all matters pertaining to the nurses. The Red Cross Society at first acted independently of Dr. McGee and her assistants, but without much success. Gen. Sternberg for some time refused all outside offers of nurses and at one time it looked as if the plans of the society in regard to the nurses would fall through. An understanding, however, with the Government was reached finally at a conference held on July 16th between the Secretary of War, the Surgeon-General, and a committee of the Red Cross Society. In a letter from Gen. Sternberg to Mrs. Whitelaw Reid, the President of the auxiliary maintaining the nurses, written the day after the conference, the views of the Surgeon-General were set forth. He said:

"I am quite willing to employ female nurses vouched for by yourself as Secretary of the Red Cross Society for Maintenance of Trained Nurses. I had previously made very satisfactory arrangements for the employment of trained female nurses through a committee of the Daughters of the American Revolution. As I said to you during our interview, I recognize the value of trained female nurses in general hospitals, and we expect to make use of their services to such an extent as seems to be desirable. But I do not approve of sending female nurses with troops in the field or to camps of instruction. It is the intention to transfer the seriously sick men from our field hospitals to the general hospitals as soon as practicable; and we wish our enlisted men of the Hospital Corps to take care of the sick in the division field hospitals and in camps of instruction, so that they may be fully prepared to perform the same duties when the troops are in active operations.

"Among these privates of the Hospital Corps who constitute the Red Cross organization of the regular military service, and who are non-combatants in accordance with the terms of the Geneva Convention, we have many medical students and even graduates in medicine.

"I have made an exception with reference to sending female nurses to Cuba in view of the outbreak of yellow fever at Santiago, and am now sending immune nurses, both male and female, for duty at the yellow fever hospitals. In accordance with our agreement you are authorized to send ten female trained nurses selected by yourself, to the Leiter Hospital at Camp Thomas, Ga.; ten to the United States General Hospital at Fort Monroe, Va.; and two to the hospital at Fort Wadsworth, N.Y.; the understanding being that those at Fort Monroe and at Fort Wadsworth shall be boarded and lodged outside of the hospital."

The first women nurses to see actual service were sent from New York to Tampa on June 30th in response to a despatch from Dr. Lesser of the Red Cross Society, then at Santiago. Three parties, consisting of fifty-five nurses in all, were sent to Tampa, with the idea that they could reach Santiago and be of service on the battlefield. Twenty-nine nurses were sent on the transport Lampasas from Tampa. When the

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