

International Congress of Women**NURSING SECTION.****MORNING SESSION.**

MRS. MAY WRIGHT SEWALL presiding.

**NAVAL AND MILITARY NURSING
IN THE UNITED STATES.**

By MRS L. W. QUINTARD,

Directress of Nurses, St. Luke's Hospital,
New York, U.S.A.

In response to the invitation to read before your Congress a paper upon this subject, and presenting our views as to the organization of an Army Nursing Service for the future, I must say that I consented to do so with reluctance, for two reasons:—

First, knowing that you, having already mastered the first difficulties of such an organization, are in a position to criticise our efforts in this direction; and, in the second place, the matter has been so fully written up in the different magazines that it has left me very little that is new or interesting to add either in the way of existing facts or suggestions for the future. My encouragement has been a hint dropped that even on this side of the Atlantic you are not quite satisfied with your present methods, and I trust that the discussion which will follow will be of mutual help for our future work. Before attempting to explain our present position, and our aims for the future, it will be necessary to glance over the events of the past year which called into existence the necessity for the employment of the woman nurse in the army, and for legislation in regard to the work. The United States had for so many years been at peace with all the world, that the declaration of war, following so closely upon the disaster which shook the nation to its foundation, came like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. We were totally unprepared for war, our standing army was small; it was thirty-five years since it had been called into the field for anything more serious than skirmishes among the Indians on our far Western posts. Severe illness among the soldiers had been so rare a circumstance as to call no attention to the fact that we had no nursing staff connected with the army other than that provided for in the Hospital Corps. This Hospital Corps is composed of stewards, acting stewards, and privates; the latter may be called upon at any time to do duty as acting stewards, cooks, ward masters, or attendants in camp or field. In the regular army these men may be drilled into some kind of apology for a nurse; but with a volunteer army

of 125,000 men, with every regiment more or less stricken with fever, one can imagine the effect of this raw material turned loose in the hospital to nurse the sick. Preparations of all kinds had to be hurried forward, so, perhaps, it is not to be wondered at that one which proved to be of vital importance should have been overlooked in the early days of organizing a large army at short notice.

Our Surgeon-General applied for, and received authority to employ graduate nurses at an early date, but no provision was made for carrying this into effect until the war was practically over.

Very few nurses were near the battle fields, though hundreds stood ready to give their services. This privilege was accorded only to Red Cross Sisters and assistants whose right is unquestioned to be wherever death or disaster calls to duty, and a few nurses were on the transports which brought the wounded from the South. The frightful epidemic of fever which developed in the camps led to the call for the services of the graduate nurse in the field hospitals. The public demanded that their men should receive proper care. Associations were formed which raised large sums of money for the support and payment of nurses, and committees were appointed for their careful selection. They were admitted into camp and field hospitals, at first reluctantly, but a very short time demonstrated the value of their service, and during the months of August, September, and October, over 1,700 nurses, including Sisters of Charity, were in the employment of the Government as contract nurses at \$30 per month. About 100 are still in the service. The result of graduate nurses' work during this emergency has been to convince army men that their service is a necessity, and in making their official reports to the Surgeon-General, they have been most generous in their acknowledgements of the good service rendered in their ranks.

There is no doubt as to the future employment of the graduate nurse in the army during time of war and in peace. Recognizing this fact, many of the women whose work during the past year brought them into direct contact with army hospital life, and who realised the manifold difficulties and dangers of its environment, felt the importance of organising a system for the maintenance of a nursing staff which should be authorised by law, which should accord, as far as possible, with existing military regulations, and yet should not jeopardise the dignity and interests of the nursing profession. To accomplish this, a committee was appointed last autumn to frame and present to Congress a Bill which should embody the requirements of such a service. This committee was formed of women who had been

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)