

Medical Department at the Cape to deal with these questions on the spot. There are half-a-dozen first-class Army Nursing Superintendent Sisters in South Africa, well able to undertake such duties, for the War Office to select from. We ask for this appointment not only that justice may be done to colonial nurses, but in order that there may be some responsible Head of the large number of nurses who have been sent out, and practically turned loose in the country, responsible to no one. Already reports of friction have reached this country, and this friction is bound to increase unless some responsible person is placed in control of the whole Nursing Department. There is a Commander-in-Chief of the Army—the absurdity of dispensing with his services is self-evident. There is a Head of the Medical Department—this also is recognized as a necessity; but when we come to the Nursing Department, no one is responsible, it is "Go as you please." Neither is any check placed upon the nurses by the knowledge that they have been sent out by the institution with which they are connected, and to which, as responsible for their conduct, they will be required to give an account of themselves on their return.

The consequence is, as all Superintendents of Nurses have foreseen, laxity and disorganization. The sooner those responsible recognize the inevitable, and appoint a Superintendent of Nursing, the better it will be for the prestige of the War Office.

SOUTH AFRICAN WAR NURSES.

FROM A COLONIAL POINT OF VIEW.

The trained nurses of South Africa are not in the calm and tranquil mood that befits their profession. As at first colonial volunteers were refused permission to fight in the ranks, so since the outbreak of war nearly all the applications of the colonial trained nurses for appointments on the Army Nursing Staff have met with official refusal. Local nurses are overlooked and rejected, and such volunteers are informed that "plenty of nurses are coming out from England," "No more nurses are needed," etc. Surely the height of absurdity has been reached when applicants in Cape-town have been gravely advised that their only chance of attachment to the Army Medical Service is to journey to London and to endeavour to join a draft of nurses "from home." The hospital worker is not usually a moneyed person; and at present "there aint no 'buses running" from the Cape to Pall Mall. So the trained and certificated nurse stands idle while time is lost and money is expended in the importation from England of nursing material which could most satisfactorily be supplied on the spot.

THE CLAIMS OF THE COLONIES.

It is perfectly fair—and the colonial women are the first to concede this—that the British Army Nursing Reserve Corps should have a chance of active service. But it is clearly unjust to the highly-trained certificated

women of South Africa that the nursing material for the Army should be chosen almost entirely from "Uitlander" sources. Many of the nurses in the Colony have gained their certificates in the best British hospitals. They are the sisters and daughters of settled colonists, men with a stake in the country. All are used to colonial ways, and have colonial sympathies. In addition, they have a specialised knowledge of malarial and local diseases. Many of them have served useful apprenticeships in mining hospitals, are "salted" to the hardships of a rough and ready life on the veldt, and are accustomed to the eccentricities of a colonial commissariat. In fact they are just the women needed for camp and field hospital, and nurses with such useful practical antecedents should have had the first chance of attachment to the Army Nursing Service in South Africa. There is no feeling of rivalry or jealousy on the part of the colonial women towards their nursing sisters from over seas. But one cannot help realising that a colonial has as great an advantage over the English-bred nurse as the native over the foreign scout.

ADVANTAGES AND MISCONCEPTIONS.

She knows her ground, for she is at home. She is familiar with climatic peculiarities, is not so likely as a stranger to contract dysentery or malaria; and with an intimate knowledge of the Kaffir and his ways, she can deal with the vagaries of the "black and yellow boys" who constitute the domestic staffs of South African hospitals. The British nurse, however excellent her training, is at a great disadvantage when suddenly removed from the conventional environment of a London hospital to a country whose race distinctions and labour difficulties are a constant puzzle even to the oldest inhabitant. Colonials cannot help recognising the amusing circumstance that the ordinary Britisher appears to regard South Africa as some "out in the wilds" spot hardly known to civilised geography. Medical correspondents to the home papers express astonishment that the Röntgen rays have penetrated to savage Capetown, and apparently regard as marvellous the fact that aseptic surgery is practised with almost as much scrupulousness in the Matabele as in the London hospitals. Indeed, it would almost seem that the home authorities are labouring under some misgiving as to whether or not the trained nurses of South Africa may not be some sort of black women!

OUT OF WORK THROUGH THE WAR.

In the face of widespread ignorance as to the resources of South Africa, it may be explained that the colony is amply provided with nurses who have taken their certificates at the leading British hospitals. In addition, there are some excellent colonial nurse training schools whose graduates should not have been despised and rejected in favour of nurses from other countries. It sounds paradoxical to state that because of the war many nurses are out of employment. But at the first sounding of the war note there was a general exodus from the colony of many of the more prosperous and wealthy, among whom the nurse in private practice finds her patients. Considerable numbers, therefore, find themselves almost destitute, and this at a season when the price of necessaries is naturally high. The nurses not merely suffer from the grievance that they are not allowed to help the soldiers in their need, but they are at the same moment face to face with privation, consequent on the fact that their normal work is at a standstill.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)