

## Military Nursing Notes.

### LESSONS DRAWN FROM PRACTICAL PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE WITH TRAINED WOMEN NURSES IN MILITARY SERVICE.\*

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In this paper by the terms *nurses* and *trained nurses*, women are always meant.

In the earlier part of 1899 I had clinical charge of the patients in Military Hospital, No. 1, Havana, during the reorganisation and Americanisation of that institution. It was the chief military hospital of Cuba under the Americans, as it had been under the Spaniards. By the Spaniards it was called Hospital Alfonso XIII. At this hospital I had serving under me from twenty to thirty nurses, nearly all of them graduates of good training-schools in different parts of the United States, from New York to New Orleans. In 1900 I was placed in charge of the Department of Charities and Hospitals of the Province of Havana, my most important duty being reorganising and modernising the municipal hospitals, which had become woefully run down and demoralised under the last years of the Spanish rule. In one of these, Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes, we had established a training-school for Cuban nurses, under the superintendence of a most capable American trained nurse. She was afterwards assisted by several other American nurses. In 1901, and up to the end of the American occupation, May, 1902, I was in command of Las Animas, the yellow-fever hospital of Havana. At Las Animas there were on duty, during my incumbency, about twenty nurses—not all at the same time, the average being from eight to ten. The work of these nurses was both arduous and dangerous. I personally treated nearly all of the patients while at Hospital No. 1, and so had control of the nurses in their clinical work. At Las Animas I had entire charge of them, both clinically and executively.

This preamble is to show that I have had favourable opportunities to gather facts and draw conclusions about trained nurses in active military service.

The nurses who went to Cuba at the beginning of the late war with Spain were not selected with any particular care. On the contrary, the demand was so great and urgent that almost any respectable woman professing to understand nursing, and willing to go, was sent. Among them, however, were a number of the very best equipped and capable nurses in the United States.

\* From the Journal of the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States.

Of the forty to fifty nurses with whom I was professionally associated so closely, two or three turned out to be incompetent, professionally or otherwise, and had to be got rid of; three or four others found themselves less adapted for military than for civil work, and gradually dropped out. But the large majority were excellent and most useful—admirably suited for the work, and the work for them. To this majority, as a whole, the following remarks apply.

They proved to be from a decidedly higher class of society than that from which male nurses come, well bred and fairly educated—the daughters and sisters of doctors, lawyers, clergymen, commissioned officers, and prominent business men. They respected themselves and commanded the respect of the men, patients and others, with whom they came in contact. They were well liked by the hospital-corps men and other male attendants, who, when not prompted to the contrary, recognised the superiority of the trained women nurses and assisted them willingly. The nurses appreciated this and showed little or no tendency to impose upon the male attendants—cheerfully assisting those who wished to learn of them.

I found it advisable, everywhere, that the nurses should be supplemented by male attendants; the latter to do the heavier unskilled work. In this way, the nursing of a hospital would be properly done with comparatively few trained nurses. It is demoralising, as well as poor economy, to have a skilled employee at 50 dols. a month, consume her valuable time at menial labour, such as carrying slops, washing dishes, &c., which may be done equally as well by unskilled attendants, at less than half that pay.

The nurses on duty should always have the full charge and responsibility of their wards, being next in authority to the medical officer. Women are now placed as head nurses in each male ward in Bellevue Hospital, New York City, over the men nurses.

No instances of improper relations between the sexes occurred among the nurses and men with whom I was associated in Cuba. There was no trouble about having the venereal cases properly cared for; the nurses attended to everything except the dressings, which were satisfactorily done by the male attendants or by the patients themselves. Without being immodest, the nurses were not squeamish. They handled the patients remarkably well, lifting them about in bed, giving them general baths, changing their clothing, &c., with apparent ease to themselves and comfort to the patients. They had a knack about it which they had learned in their training—more a matter of skill than of physical strength.

I was impressed by their endurance and capacity for going without sleep. As one instance, out of

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