

### Annotation.

#### VOLUNTARY AID IN TIMES OF WAR.

During the meeting of the British Medical Association at Oxford an interesting discussion was opened by Colonel J. E. Squire, C.B.; M.D.; V.D., on the organisation during peace of civil, medical, and ambulance aid. He laid down as a fundamental principle that in a war of any magnitude it is necessary to supplement the military organisation for the care of the sick and wounded, by civilian aid, which aid, he says, is essentially of two kinds:

1. Surgeons, nurses, and orderlies, who are temporarily employed by the military authorities, receiving pay through the War Office.
2. *Personnel* and stores provided by voluntary subscription.

Voluntary aid, we are reminded, may be wasteful and embarrassing or may be misapplied if no statement of probable requirements and no regulations for their employment are laid down. Organisation during peace is essential to ensure the best provision and to avoid unnecessary waste in war.

In regard to surgeons and nurses adequately trained in their professional work, they are to be obtained in sufficient numbers to allow selection, but, in order to obtain, at short notice, the best professional aid, selection must have been made previously. The same applies to the details of organisation of voluntary aid. It is, says Colonel Squire, essentially the duty of the permanent voluntary aid societies—such as the Red Cross Society—to perfect such organisation during peace.

It is very desirable that there should be some organisation, with branches throughout the country, by means of which individuals wishing to help when a war breaks out could at once be brought into touch with a central body which is in direct communication with the War Office. These local committees should be permanently established under some central organisation—preferably not connected with the War Office—with its head office in London.

The British Red Cross Society (the National Society for Aid to the Sick and Wounded in War), founded during the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, has supplied aid to several foreign countries and to the British troops in several campaigns; but it hibernates during periods of peace, and only wakes to activity when a war breaks out, instead of spending the leisure time of peace in organising for war.

The British Central Red Cross Committee, formed in 1898, appears, says the lecturer, to be closely modelled on the German organisation for voluntary aid, though the military and official systems of the two countries are widely different. In Germany, the army is the nation, and the whole life of the country runs in official grooves. With us, the army forms but a small section of the community, and the official and social relations of the people are kept distinct. So, too, though in Germany it may be wise to restrict the offer of aid to certain specified organisations, this seems hardly necessary or advisable with us. Again, the representation of certain organisations, Red Cross Society and St. John's Ambulance Association, on the Central Red Cross Committee seems calculated, in Colonel Squire's opinion, to arouse jealousy which should be avoided.

The main thing required is the organisation of local committees through the country in connection with a single "buffer" committee, purely civilian, standing between the Central Red Cross Committee and local committees or individuals. If the British Red Cross Society is unwilling to undertake the work, then Colonel Squire suggests that the British Medical Association, with its branches all over the Empire, might well serve as a means of forming a truly Imperial Red Cross Society, and form the direct communication with the Central Red Cross Committee, the functions of which should be advisory rather than executive. The latter would decide on the requirements, and it would be for the new Committee to see that they were forthcoming when needed.

We have long pleaded for the efficient organisation of civilian nursing aid for war in time of peace. At the time of the South African War the available nurses on the Roll of the Army Nursing Service Reserve were speedily exhausted, and then, as the War Office only accepted Reserve Nurses for service, it became necessary to pass applicants through what has been described as a "skeleton Reserve" before sending them out to the seat of war. But the value of such an organisation lies in the careful investigation of credentials and the acceptance of candidates by a professional authority in time of peace, not when, in the stress of sudden demands, nurses are urgently needed to sail forthwith, to take up work of a most responsible nature. We welcome the ventilation of the whole question of the organisation of voluntary aid.

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