

A Page of Nursing History.

QUEEN ALEXANDRA'S IMPERIAL MILITARY NURSING SERVICE.

Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service was established by Royal Warrant in 1902, its formation being the direct outcome, as we propose to show, of the lessons of the South African War, which plainly revealed the insufficiency of the Army Nursing Service, then existing, to meet the demands of a campaign of any magnitude.

The honour of being the pioneer of the employment of ladies in Military Hospitals belongs to Miss Florence Nightingale, whose work in connection with the Crimean War is now a matter of history. Soon after this war, we are officially informed, Nursing Sisters were employed at Chatham, but were afterwards removed to the Royal Victoria Hospital, Netley, Lady Jane Shaw Stewart being then Matron or Lady Superintendent.

In the year 1866 provision was made for the appointment of Nursing Sisters to any Military General Hospital, and subsequently a few were employed at Chatham, Netley, and Woolwich.

On November 1st, 1869, Mrs. Deeble succeeded Lady Jane Shaw Stewart as Lady Superintendent at Netley, and in 1877 Miss A. E. Caulfield was appointed Lady Superintendent at the Herbert Hospital, Woolwich. In 1889 Mrs. Deeble retired and was succeeded at Netley by Miss H. C. Norman, who resigned in 1902.

In 1882 a staff of Nursing Sisters was appointed to the Guards' Hospital in London, and subsequently also to the hospitals in Egypt and Aldershot. In 1884 it was decided to appoint a nursing staff of Sisters to every Military Hospital of 100 beds and over, such as Gosport, Portsmouth, Devonport, Dover, Shornecliffe, Canterbury, Dublin, Curragh, Gibraltar, and Malta.

The defects of the system of organisation in the Army Nursing Service were:—1. The Service had no Trained Matron at its head, the Sisters in the various hospitals being under the control of the Medical Officer, and, ultimately, of the Director-General of the Army Medical Service. Further, although there was nominally a Head Sister in each hospital, she was responsible for the practical work in a certain number of wards as were the other Nursing Sisters. Under these circumstances the performance of a Matron's duties of general supervision was clearly impossible, and, indeed, the especial work of the Head Sister, for which extra pay was allowed, seems to have been

chiefly confined to the housekeeping arrangements of the Sisters' Mess.

2. The number of Sisters allotted to each hospital was far too few to allow of the thorough nursing of the patients. Thus the Sisters had not only to supervise, but to do a large proportion of the actual nursing, for, as subordinate workers, they had only orderlies who were engaged in this work for no definite period; moreover, they were subject to the directions of the Quartermaster-Sergeant, who might, and did, remove them without reference to the Sister, for other duties, such as window cleaning, gardening, &c., and the Sister returning to her ward might find it denuded of orderlies. It was impossible that without the assistance of an experienced nurse who should work under the Sister when in the ward, and be responsible for the nursing in her absence, that efficiency could be maintained. The arrangements for the night nursing also left much to be desired.

So impossible did it seem to some Sisters to do their duty that one of them kept a diary during the ten years she was in the Army Nursing Service and upon her retirement placed it at the disposal of the Editor of this Journal.

To their infinite credit it must be recorded that several of the Army Nursing Sisters from time to time urged upon the Director-General the necessity for reform, notably the present Matron-in-Chief, Miss Sidney J. Browne. It seemed impossible, however, that reform should be accomplished from within the Service, and at the Conference held in connection with the Nursing Exhibition in London in 1896, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick read a paper on "The Nursing of our Soldiers and Sailors," which presented a clear survey of the Army Nursing Question, and contained many suggestions which have since been adopted in the reorganised scheme for the Military Nursing Service.

In February, 1900, the Matrons' Council petitioned Lord Lansdowne, then Secretary of State for War, asking him to receive a deputation from the Council so that it might explain the views of the members on the reforms in their opinion necessary in the Army Nursing Service, and received a reply regretting that "pressure of public affairs prevented him from receiving the deputation," but suggesting that the Council should place their views before him in writing. The Council replied that they did not see their way to present a written Report, as suggested, and expressed the hope that when the pressure of business was less Lord Lansdowne might see his way to receive a deputation.

In 1900 Mrs. Lancelot Andrews read a paper at the Annual Conference of the Matrons'

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