

## A Plea for the Queen Alexandra Military Nursing Service for India.

BY A RETIRED SISTER.

There must be many who are now nurses, or who wish to become such, and have no definite idea what to do with their future. To these I appeal to think seriously of joining "Queen Alexandra's Military Nursing Service for India." Q.A.M.N.S.I.; so many letters look formidable, but its one of the best of Services if only the women in it would make it so. The Indian Government are good masters to serve, so I, who have spent all my nursing life in the above, have a longing to gain the highest and best for it.

One often hears the complaint that cultured, refined girls are no longer becoming nurses. I will not use the word "ladies," as that has quite changed its meaning during the last few years, but for the sake of the Service of which I write, it is quite essential *ladies* (in the highest sense) should apply.

I need not enter into the good pay or the many advantages of society; above all, a pension after fifteen years' work. These facts can be obtained from the India Office; but I would rather instil into those who want interesting work among our soldiers in that far distant land, besides many other nice things, that its worth considering as a life's work.

The best motto to work on in any army employment is to do what one can for the moment, and let others in turn do their share. I have always advocated those who have just finished their training entering the Service, but for any who do not know the system of the work I will explain as briefly as possible.

There are four or five Sisters at each station hospital, such as Lucknow, Mhow, etc. At four stations the senior Sister is also Lady Superintendent; she has the *privilege* of having three or four hospitals to inspect yearly and gives confidential reports on all Sisters in her circle. At these other station hospitals it is a "senior Sister" who acts as Matron, house-keeper, and general bearer of all responsibilities and worries. I am sorry to say the senior Sister is not always a judicious manager, and the chief cause of half the unhappiness in the Service is the inability of the seniors to manage their small households. This, no doubt, has occurred through the method of the "next in the Army List" getting promotion. One knows so well that everyone is not capable of being a Matron, and in civil hospitals Sisters and Matrons are chosen with forethought. Some day, in these advancing times, it

may be managed to have that rule in the Q.A.M.N.S.I. It is sincerely to be hoped so.

However, for the future of the Service with so many advantages, I would ask women to go expecting some trials and hardships; but surely, if one does one's share of work in the wards and uses the little forbearances and unselfishnesses required in any sphere, even of home life, one would not hear of so many who have found their Indian nursing a failure.

On landing at Bombay, the newly-arrived Sisters go to the P.M.O.'s Office (Principal Medical Officer), and have their orders (as a rule) awaiting. It is with a feeling of excitement one looks to see to what station one is appointed. It may be to ice-bound Quetta in January, or far-distant Rangoon, the glorious hills of Wellington on the Madras side, or steamy, sticky Bombay—they each and all have their attractions. I will not enter into details of railway warrants, shouting coolies, solar topies, the hundred and one things which assail one. How I wish I could see them all again for the *first* time. The "glorious glamour of the East"! Alas! it has its drawbacks, but from the first I have always loved it.

Then the arrival at the new station, and being told you can go on "duty" next day; it sounds so vague. Sometimes one of the other Sisters stays on to put the new arrival into the right way. In most of the hospitals the system is for the "Sister for duty" to take over the wards for serious cases for the half day, and be solely responsible for such time. With a certain amount of give and take, and a senior Sister who is firm as to her organisation, this works well enough, but to those in English civil hospital life it sounds hopeless.

In a short letter it is impossible to explain that women in India must have longer hours off duty, and often there are not enough really serious cases to take up more than one Sister's time. Of course, soldier orderlies have to be taught to act as probationers, and, I assure you, it wants untiring zeal and energy to go on for ever teaching rough soldier men to be useful nurses.

It would take up too much space to tell of the rush of work one often gets—90 enterics in three or four months, and some of us have experienced the horrors of cholera attacking our poor sick. I think at such times the Sisters deserve all sympathy and praise. I often feel that the Empress Eugenie's answer might apply to many a nurse, that attending the sick and dying is "our way of standing fire!"

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