

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD
EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 1,087.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 30, 1909.

Vol. XLII.

Editorial.

VOLUNTEER OR COMMANDEER?

The Secretary of State for War, in the organisation of the Nursing Service of the Territorial Force, has adopted a scheme which is likely to attract to the ranks of the Service an ample supply of excellent nurses. Both on the Advisory Council and on local committees the nursing profession is given strong representation, and the selection of the nurses is entrusted to an organising matron, usually a matron of a large general hospital in one of the great centres, who has the knowledge and experience necessary to estimate the suitability of candidates and to weigh testimonials and references before recommending any candidate for appointment. The scheme, which has been carefully thought out, has justified the care which has been taken to ensure its acceptability. It has been taken up with enthusiasm by matrons, sisters and nurses both in the provinces and in Scotland, and, as we reported last week, the nursing staff of the 1st Scottish General Hospital—that of the Highland Division—is already fully formed, owing to the nurses having come forward in such numbers; and in other Divisions progress is well advanced.

It has remained for the matrons of some of the "leading London Training Schools" to strike a discordant note and to claim that there is no need for organisation in time of peace, but that the members of the Service would be best supplied when war breaks out—as Miss Haldane aptly put it at the Mansion House meeting—"along with the lint and the bandages."

These objectors further consider apparently that nurses should not be permitted to volunteer individually, but should be commandeered, when necessity arises, by the matrons of the Training Schools in which

they are working. We believe that the scheme as initiated by the Advisory Council—which includes the matrons of St. Thomas', St. George's, the Royal Free, King's College, and Middlesex Hospitals, as well as the General Superintendent of the Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute, and the late Matron-in-Chief of Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service—is fundamentally sound because it appeals to the patriotic spirit of nurses, and permits everyone possessing the necessary qualifications to volunteer her services. We hold that every nurse of standing has a right to volunteer to serve her country in time of national emergency. Conscription—and that is what the alternative proposition amounts to—has never found favour in this country.

Another point is that the majority of nurses in hospitals are in training, and to deplete the staffs of these institutions of their most experienced workers in a time of national distress would be to seriously impair their efficiency.

If certain hospital managers disapprove of the scheme promulgated by the Advisory Council and decline to participate in this work of national importance, those who do appreciate the opportunity offered to the nursing profession by a liberal-minded Minister for War must carry it out. The constitution of the Advisory Council is sufficient guarantee of its efficiency, and, as regards London, the supply of well-trained volunteers will far exceed the 420 nurses required.

The nation may rest assured that the forces whose special duty is Home Defence will shortly be provided with a Nursing Service which will be adequate to meet the demands likely to be made upon it in the event of invasion for the care of both friends and foes.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)