

WOMEN'S WORK IN WAR.*

By MRS. ST. CLAIR STOBART.

It is well known that the War Office has organised through the British Red Cross Society, for purposes of National Defence, a system of Voluntary Aid Detachments, in which women are invited to serve. But in my opinion, this scheme is failing for the following reasons. The British Red Cross Society, as at present constituted, is unfitted to be entrusted with the scheme of organising aid for the sick and wounded, in National Defence, because the care of the sick and wounded is obviously the work of women, and yet, upon the Executive Committee of the British Red Cross Society, as notified on Form "A" (1) of March, 1913, there are twelve men, and *there is not one woman*. Upon the Voluntary Aid Advisory Sub-Committee appointed by this Executive Committee, there *are* a few ladies, representative of the aristocracy of various counties of England and Wales, but there is not one representative of the nursing profession. The name of one trained nurse has been smuggled in amongst the imposing list of Royalities and titled Aristocracy, which composes what is called the Council of the British Red Cross Society, but with this exception, the Society, which has for its main function the care of the sick and wounded, has, in the most marked fashion, boycotted from its Council the one profession whose members sacrifice their whole lives to the study of how most efficiently to carry out the work upon which the British Red Cross Society's money is expended.

The result of this exclusion of women from the Councils of an organisation devoted to the interests of the sick and wounded, was brought into almost comical relief during the late Balkan War, when controlled by men, the British Red Cross Society, in ignorance of the conditions prevailing in the Balkan peninsula, refused the services of trained nurses who would have been invaluable in the hospitals of war, and with the exception of a few nurses, despatched at the request of the Queen of Greece, sent Detachments, consisting of men only (of whom many were totally unfitted for the task) to nurse the sick and wounded.

Further it must be noted that in direct ratio to the discouragement given by the British Red Cross Society to the trained nurse, is the encouragement offered to the inefficient amateur who, with practically no qualifications, is welcomed in Voluntary Aid Detachments, and smothered with lightly-earned brooches and medals, and given altogether false notions of her own value in national emergency. Instruction in first aid has been excellently given by the St. John Ambulance Association, for years, and it is difficult to see why the British Red Cross Society should have been asked to

do work, which merely overlaps that of the older Society. But though both Societies are excellent for teaching women an elementary knowledge of first aid, suitable for use in the street, and the home, in time of peace, the training is totally insufficient for the more serious emergency of war, in which discipline and a wider training are all important.

It is not suitable that women who are to be called upon to take a share in the important work of National Defence, should in time of peace be under the control of philanthropic, drawing-room Associations, and in time of war be suddenly transferred to military authorities who would exact thoroughness and discipline. Discipline is not learnt in five minutes. The duplication of authority is crippling in time of peace; it would cause chaos in time of war.

Women who are to be efficient in the Territorial sphere, must be given opportunities of training and discipline similar to those which are given to Territorial Royal Army Medical Corps men. The triviality of the present V.A.D. training, the lack of discipline and the haphazardness of the whole V.A.D. scheme, as now in practice, would result in fiasco in time of emergency, and the whole cause of women's work in national service would be seriously prejudiced.

I plead that women should be allowed to form a supplementary Army Medical Corps, to act in conjunction with the men, and to be subject to the same authority as the men of the territorial army. There are in this country more women than men, there are a large number of able women doctors and surgeons, also a very large number of trained nurses, and there are, in addition, a large number of women capable and desirous of being trained in all the other departments of work (not only cooking, laundry, nursing and doctoring, but in ambulance work, both with stretchers and wagons) which occur in that sphere of operations between the Field Hospital and the Base Hospital. So long as there is a shortage in territorial numbers, it is wasteful to draw off able-bodied men from the fighting line, to do work which could be done by women.

But if women are to do this work, they must be allowed to do it as a duty, not as a game, and they must be seriously trained, not only in the work but in the discipline which the proper conduct of the work demands. I suggest—as negative criticism is, in my opinion, valueless—that women who are dissatisfied with the present condition of affairs, and who are serious in their desire to take their share in the territorial service of their country, should appoint representatives from amongst women doctors, nurses, and also amateurs desirous of being treated seriously, to consider a scheme for the organisation of an efficient territorial service of women for presentation to the War Office.

It can no longer be asserted that women are only capable of a little first aid and amateur nursing in their homes or in hospitals of war which are conducted by men. The Women's

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