

On November 2nd, 1912, the Matrons' Council of Great Britain and Ireland passed the following Resolution, which was subsequently forwarded to the British Red Cross Society:—

“That in the opinion of this meeting only nurses who are fully trained should be sent to nurse the sick and wounded in time of war, and that no base hospital can be considered properly equipped which has not such a staff of nurses.”

The Resolution was consequent upon the policy of the Society in relation to the War in the Near East, when trained women nurses were excluded from the units sent out to give help to the sick and wounded.

On November 23rd, 1912, the National Council of Trained Nurses of Great Britain and Ireland also passed, at its Annual Meeting, and subsequently forwarded to the British Red Cross Society, the following Resolution:—

“This Council of Trained Nurses deprecates the policy of the British Red Cross Society in refusing to include thoroughly trained women nurses in the units sent to relieve the sick and wounded in the Near East.

“This Council is of opinion that only nurses who are fully trained should be sent in this capacity, and that no base hospital can be considered effectively equipped which has not such a staff.”

At the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Trained Nurses held on November 27th, 1913, the Council agreed that the British Red Cross Society should be asked to state whether or not thoroughly trained nursing was to be included in its primary object of furnishing aid to the sick and wounded in time of war.

To this question no satisfactory answer was received, and when war was declared in August, 1914, no preparation whatever had been made, by the British Red Cross Society, to provide trained nursing to supplement that available through the Reserves of the Military Nursing Service and the Territorial Force Nursing Service.

In support of our criticism of the organization of nursing in connection with the British Red Cross Society, we may quote the words of Viscount Esher, G.C.B., President of the County of London Territorial Association, who wrote in November, 1913, in a Prefatory Note to “War and Women,” by Mrs. St. Clair Stobart: “I have resigned my connection with the British Red Cross Society not being satisfied that the organization, plan, and sphere of operations of the Society, although philanthropic, are framed with a sole view to the welfare of our country. . . . Nursing the sick and wounded in war is clearly women's work. The detailed arrangements, their plan and ordering, are a sphere of activity for women in peace. As matters now stand, nursing schemes are worked out and stereotyped by the military authorities without advice or suggestion from those who in war will have to bear the chief burden. The plea has always been that the hierarchy of the R.A.M.C. know all about war and its requirements, whereas women know nothing. This book disposes of that fallacy.”

Voluntary Aid as now organized through the Voluntary Aid Detachments is, we are aware, primarily intended to supplement the work of the Territorial Force Service, in case of invasion (in the present War it has been used abroad), and trained nurses claim that so far as nursing is concerned the system as approved by the War Office is fundamentally wrong, and permits the dangerous interference of unqualified persons, who may have no practical experience whatever in the management of hospitals for the sick, or of medical or nursing requirements.

III.—DANGEROUS INTERFERENCE BY THE UNSKILLED.

1. During the present war, upon the mobilization of Voluntary Aid Detachments, a large number of women, irrespective of age, have been permitted to assume the responsibilities of Commandants, as sanctioned by the War Office Scheme, and given the practical control of hospitals for the wounded, who are absolutely ignorant of sanitary, domestic, medical, and nursing science—interference upon the part of the unqualified which is as dangerous as it is unjustifiable, in the care of “men who are risking their lives in the defence of the Empire.”

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