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EDITORIAL.

PROTECTION FOR NURSES IN MILITARY AUXILIARY HOSPITALS.

The repudiation by the Army Medical Department of any obligation to the nursing staffs of military auxiliary hospitals, to which we refer in another column, is so serious a matter that we feel it our duty to direct the attention of nurses to their position if they take service in these institutions.

A military auxiliary hospital is one approved by the War Office, inspected and subsidized by it, that is to say by the British taxpayer, to the extent of three shillings a day for each patient. The remainder of the funds are raised by lay persons, sometimes gentlepeople, more often plutocratic patrons, who have little respect for working women.

For the War Office to depute its responsibility for making due provision for the sick and wounded to a lay committee, unacquainted with the elements of hospital administration and management, as is usually the case, is a fundamental error prejudicial to the care of the patients in these supplementary hospitals, but trained nurses working in such hospitals—who have suffered many things at the hands of incompetent committees, and super society matrons, who assume control of professional work, because of the accident of their wealth, or social status—have hitherto believed that in a military hospital, whether regular or auxiliary, they work under the authority and protection of the War Office, and that it is their ultimate Court of Appeal. But since the pronouncement of the Under Secretary of State for War, after consultation with Sir Alfred Keogh, the Director General of the Army Medical Service, in the case of the Endsleigh Palace Hospital for Officers, this belief is no longer

tenable. Under the authority of the War Office they certainly work, for all patients in these hospitals are admitted and discharged by War Office officials, but it is evident that Sir Alfred Keogh repudiates all responsibility for the actions of committees, which are permitted to work under its ægis, in relation to the nursing staff, however grossly such committees abuse their power, and however unjustly they may treat professional women dependent on their professional reputation and skill, earned by many years of hard work, for their means of self support, and often for the support of others also.

The matter cannot be allowed to rest here. The trained nurses of this country, whose skilled services are indispensable to the sick and wounded, have a right to just conditions of service, and taxpayers who make a substantial contribution to the upkeep of military auxiliary hospitals, have not only the right to know that the money is properly expended, but have a moral obligation to insure that the staffs of these hospitals are justly treated.

At the present time the position of the nursing staffs in many of the military auxiliary hospitals in which the War Office has delegated its responsibilities to ignorant committees without a nurse representative upon them, is quite intolerable, though until the present time none have had the courage to resign in a body, and state their reasons for doing so, as in the case of the staff of the Endsleigh Palace Hospital for Officers. But all over the country resignations quietly take place, for reasons unstated, matrons and nurses feeling that they can serve no useful purpose by continuing to work under impossible conditions; and the principal sufferers are the patients, who are deprived of the services of excellent nurses who would only too gladly have worked for them devotedly.

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