

" American trained nurses are now on their way to enter English war hospitals in bands of ten or twelve under Red Cross orders.

" This means, first, that they will cease to be treated as they are treated in their work in this country and enter into the position of servant, cut off from their customary surroundings by an iron wall of caste; it means, secondly, that they will have to see social position rather than professional ability determine the choice of supervisors of nurses.

" The second point is the one upon which our nurses base their present plea that Congress give them some sort of rank as military officers. They assert with truth that a commission would compel recognition from foreign governments and allow trained nurses to handle the difficult technical work of nurse supervision, as they do in all first-class American hospitals to-day. This would mean better nursing for the wounded soldiers, which is, after all, the first reason for our Red Cross women being in Europe at all.

" This reason is vital. Scarcely behind it in importance lies the large social aspect of the case.

" We wish to see our women who go to Europe on army service help to raise the position of women of the Old World instead of sinking back to their condition. This war has made conservative England yield to her women some little share of the sex equality. We wish our women to help their English sisters forward up out of that black morass of caste in which they have been held down for centuries.

" If some sort of military rank as officers—'ensign,' or 'cadet,' or 'nurse'—will help to accomplish this purpose, and if it will at the same time bring better nursing to wounded American soldiers, our Government should bestow it upon our war nurses."

" Briton " writes :—

" This is the very reverse of the case. The position of a trained nurse in England is that of a lady, and her social standing is at least as good as that of hospital nurses in this country. Nurses in England are recruited from the educated classes and promotions to such positions as matrons in charge of hospitals are made from the more capable and experienced ones among them. I have known a number of nurses in Great Britain and I think any one of them would be surprised to find that it was said to be necessary for our women to help their English sisters forward up out of that black morass of caste in which they have been held down for centuries."

To which letter the Editor of the *Post* adds the following " Note " :—This is in direct contradiction of the experience of the first Chicago medical unit in the Royal Medical service, of the report of Miss Maxwell of the New York Presbyterian Hospital and the situation revealed in the action of the Canadian Government in giving officers' rank to Canadian nurses. If " menial " is too radical a description of nurses' rank in England (as we devoutly hope it may be) we

believe that " lady " is equally radical at the other extreme. The fact certainly is that there is some social degree of caste distinction raised against nurses in England which is not raised in the less rigid social structure in America.

We hope " An Army Sister " will not think us unsympathetic if we handle this question without sentiment, as our nurses are apt in their ignorance of economic and social conditions to mistake the position granted to them in the community by *courtesy*, for legal right. A trained nurse under British law is a " domestic servant " ; she has no legal status whatever. This lack of social and economic security is what we have been trying to impress upon them, in advocating State Registration for the past thirty years, and as a class they must blame their own selfish apathy, for the fact that, ugly word as it is, the trained nurse is still a " menial " in Britain.

It is also true that in America, as a result of the sound education of the women and the liberality of the men " the American trained nurse has won herself the social standing of a professional woman." Whilst British nurses have apparently lacked the energy, sense and perspicuity to drive one Registration Bill on to the Statute Book, American nurses, entirely upon their own initiative, have forced the Legislatures of 43 States to pass Registration Bills since 1903.

Again, who will deny the insolent exhibition of caste in nursing affairs, throughout the length of this war? Power, prestige, honours, rewards which should have been reserved for professional services—have they not been grasped by the totally ignorant women of high social position, to whom nothing has been sacred, from our uniform to the title of matron? Have they not been awarded our military decoration, First Class, when Matrons and sisters have been given Second Class honours?

We strongly approve of some sort of military rank as officers for our Service Sisters. Canada has taken the initiative, and pays them accordingly. The American units working in France are agitating for it. The more scope given to the Military Nursing Service the better. Its members should also share in the protection given to military rank. We might then hope to see expunged from the contract which they have to sign with the War Office the degrading " Serf Clause," astounding evidence of the " menial " position of trained nurses in Great Britain, and one no Government would have dared to print and enforce unless our working nurses were sunk " in a black morass of caste in which they have been held down for centuries."

Menial, according to the dictionary, means " servile," and our women must realise the fact that so long as they submit to indignity they cannot expect to be held in very high respect by their colleagues in more democratic lands. Perhaps the Editor of the *Chicago Post* has filed a copy of the " Serf Clause " !

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