

## REORGANIZATION OF V.A.D. ADMINISTRATION IMPERATIVE.

Great interest has been aroused by the recent correspondence in the *Times* from Sir Arthur Stanley and Dame Katherine Furse, and the resignation of a number of persons from the V.A.D. organization at Devonshire House. It is, however, not clearly understood what reasons led to the differences of opinion.

For a considerable time the Commandant-in-Chief has urged the necessity of certain administrative reforms, which were needed both for the sake of efficiency, and in order to secure fair conditions for all the workers. Amongst the questions to be dealt with were the following:—

1. The inability to supervise in a helpful way the welfare of the V.A.D.s in auxiliary hospitals, when not living in, and General Service V.A.D.s (who live out); and to investigate complaints and breaches of discipline. This supervision is at present in the hands of County Directors, who are mainly men, an obviously unsuitable arrangement. The Commandant-in-Chief should be given effective power to deal with these matters.

2. The question of grading. Although stripes are given for long service in certain hospitals, it is not done systematically throughout the V.A.D. service, and the stripes ensure no definite status—that is to say, there is nothing to prevent a stripe V.A.D., on appointment to a fresh hospital, being placed below the most junior one.

3. The question of V.A.D.s' expenses in auxiliary hospitals. The expenses should at least be guaranteed, in view of the fact that, owing to the long duration of the war and the urgent financial pressure, there are but few who can afford the continued drain on their resources.

4. There should be a central inspection of V.A.D. conditions, including salaries and housing, for local influences are much too potent to ensure local inspection, as at present, being impartial or just.

The Commandant-in-Chief and those who worked with her did all in their power to get these legitimate grievances, which lead to a great wastage in the V.A.D. ranks, remedied, but she was not supported by the Central Joint V.A.D. Committee of the British Red Cross Society and Order of St. John, under which the V.A.D. organization at Devonshire House functions.

When the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps was established, the Commandant-in-Chief saw clearly that the V.A.D. organization would be radically affected, and that for the sake of the country, to which economy in working power and money has become a matter of life and death, some system of co-operation was essential. Dame Katherine therefore, after a visit of inspection to France, undertaken in accordance with instructions received from the Central Joint V.A.D. Committee, recommended a system of co-ordination with the W.A.A.C. as regards General Service members (i.e.,

non-nursing members) which would provide for:—  
(1) A common recruiting ground through the Ministry of National Service (thus avoiding long waiting lists, waste of labour and rivalry); (2) a common administration (thus avoiding duplicating of administrative personnel, lodgings, medical inspection and so forth).

The Army Council and the W.A.A.C. officials both approved of the plan of co-operation and the Central Joint V.A.D. Committee apparently encouraged the promotion of the scheme.

It would now, however, appear that the Chairman of the Central Joint V.A.D. Committee (Sir Arthur Stanley) when he found that the Army Council proposed the inclusion of the V.A.D. General Service section in the W.A.A.C., refused to consider the matter any further and that the Army Council instruction providing for co-operation and Dame Katherine's report of the conclusions she had come to in France, both sent to the Chairman, were never read to his Committee. Nevertheless, the V.A.D. administration at Devonshire House was left in ignorance of the fact that negotiations with the War Office *re* co-ordination with the W.A.A.C., had been abandoned. This fact alone is enough to condemn the methods of the Joint Committee.

Owing to the chaotic conditions consequent on the refusals to introduce necessary reforms, the hopelessness of obtaining a fair hearing or business-like dealing, and the conviction that no administration had the right to waste the workers and the money of the nation, Dame Katherine Furse and many others felt that there was no course open to them, as honest women, but to resign. Dame Katherine's letter to the *Times* gave her reasons in general terms; the answer published from Sir Arthur Stanley was misleading.

This is summed up another history of how honest work and patriotic zeal are swamped by autocracy, unfair methods and a biased Press. Fortunately for the world, these qualities are fairly irrepressible, and if rejected by those who cannot see, they place themselves at the service of those who are more enlightened. Thus, in the end, they do their work. But the nation nevertheless is the sufferer from wasted driving force and brain power.

The whole question is really one of co-ordinating women's work for the nation, and putting the control in the proper hands.

In the opinion of some, there should be called into existence an official "Women's Medical Service."

In the opinion, I suppose, of every progressive-minded nurse with an intimate knowledge of the subject, the War Office should, before the war broke out, have placed the management of the auxiliary nursing of the forces in the hands of a body on which the nursing profession was strongly represented. Much mismanagement, wastage, and friction would in that way have been avoided.

It is interesting to note in connection with the matter the statement made recently by Mr. Macpherson in the House of Commons, when

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