

THE WOMEN'S SENIOR WAR SERVICE.

THE SHORTAGE OF V.A.D.'s.

Under the above heading there has appeared in the *Spectator* during the month of September an interesting correspondence and series of articles on the important question of the shortage of V.A.D.'s or Auxiliary Nursing Service members, for our Military and Red Cross hospitals both at home and abroad, due to the competing and superior attractions of the three newer war services for untrained, or non-*ad-hoc*-trained women—Queen Mary's Auxiliary Army Corps (Q.M.A.A.C.), Women's Royal Naval Service (W.R.N.S.) and Women's Royal Air Force (W.R.A.F.), which, both for officers and members, provide a much more inviting field for girls who have to consider the problem of earning their living, or supplementing slender means.

It is pointed out that not only has recruiting for Voluntary Aid Nurses under the British Red Cross practically ceased, but that much of the already existing *personnel* is being drained away from what is woman's first and most essential war work, because it is the work that is universally admitted she can do *better* than men, whereas the newer services were avowedly called into existence in order that women might temporarily fill men's places, and set them free for service in the fighting line.

It is quite clearly recognised that the V.A.D.'s are not trained nurses, but constitute material for the dilution of skilled labour, and the failure in the supply of this material, leading to the closing of Home Hospitals, or the impossibility of opening new ones abroad (actual instances of both these dangers are given) will be, in the opinion of the correspondents, a national disaster.

Various commandants and other Red Cross officials give their experiences of the enormous difficulty of finding a continuous supply of competent women to fill the posts in what is an arduous and monotonous occupation leading nowhere, carrying no pay except in the doubtful guise of a compassionate allowance to the really needy, and no reward except the vague one of "a diffused sense of general self-sacrifice."

It is stated that V.A.D. members employed in subordinate positions in military hospitals do receive a small salary, but it is less than that of the newly-recruited soldier; there is no prospect of a rise, and these workers have no definite standing and no hope of real promotion.

Sir George Beatson, who speaks with the authority of the Red Cross Council, points out that this failure in supply is due to various factors.

Firstly, Voluntary Aid Detachments were originally raised, organised and trained to do temporary First-Aid Ambulance work near their own homes. The pre-war Red Cross regulations show this, for it is laid down that members working away from home shall receive suitable military grading and pay, but this provision was apparently entirely lost sight of when war actually broke out.

When the V.A.D. members had to be used to supplement, in however humble a capacity, the insufficient supply of trained labour in hospitals, the support and approval of the nursing profession was not first obtained and friction inevitably arose. Sir George Beatson writes that following on this difficulty came the further hardship that, not being a recognised part of the Military Nursing Service, no official grading nor promotion was possible. He advocates the immediate formation of a Red Cross Nursing Reserve by which a definite though subordinate position would be given to the partially-trained nurses, and full use made of them. He considers that in this he could safely count upon the approval and support of the Military and Civilian Nursing Services. The body thus formed would have a definite standing, and promotion in its own ranks would be possible.

The *Spectator* itself goes much further, and wishes to see the formation of an entirely new War Service, to be called the Women's Auxiliary Army Medical Service (W.A.A.M.S.) to take rank *above* the other three new forces, on the ground that not only is there no war work for women superior to that of Nursing, but none in any way equal to it, in importance or dignity.

All members of this Service would be duly enlisted by the Government, under definite contract, would wear the King's uniform, receive pay and be eligible for promotion; the officers to be appointed by the Military authorities, receiving pay and allowances suitable to their rank, as in the other recently formed women's Services, with which the Auxiliary Nursing Service would then be able to compete on equal terms, and, by offering the same advantages, would retain the material now being drawn away from it.

The *Spectator* suggests that this matter be taken up without delay, in order to retain material for the work of keeping the hospitals fully staffed, thus enabling them to fulfil their functions in "the maintenance of man-power, the mending of men, and the restoration of the soldier to the fighting line," which, in the long run, is the only way to end the war.

REMARKS.

It is interesting to note these views on the V.A.D. question, and some of the opinions expressed are sound. But the root of the evil has not been made clear, and that is that the organisation and management of this auxiliary branch of the work of tending the wounded was most disastrously shifted by the War Office on to the shoulders of the inexpert. The initial mischief was done in pre-war days. The V.A.D. movement was fostered and managed by lay people. It was practically a Society movement; the professional point of view was not taken into consideration, in spite of the representations made by various societies of trained nurses who foresaw the danger and endeavoured to get the authorities to avoid it. When war broke out there was not a single nurse on the Council of the Red Cross nor of the Order of St. John, and they had no reserve of trained

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