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EDITORIAL.

BUILDERS WHO ARE MASTERS OF THEIR CRAFT.

The proposal that the military organization of the British Red Cross Society should assume authority in civil nursing, and be utilized to provide nursing aid to the poor in country districts, is one which raises questions of the greatest professional and public importance.

Fundamentally, the point upon which efficiency, or the reverse, depends, is, to whose hands the organization of the proposed new work is to be entrusted.

The Red Cross Society in this country has always, in relation to nursing, been an aristocratic, unprofessional, organization, and those in high places in its counsels have been selected for their social position and influence, not their professional knowledge.

This is where our own organization contrasts so unfavourably with that of our American colleagues. The material to be utilized in war-time, to supplement the work of trained nurses, when the demands on their services are abnormal, is much the same both in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Thousands of women, the majority young, eager, undisciplined, ardently desirous of giving help to their country at a time of national danger, offered their services to their respective Red Cross Societies.

In such a crisis it is of supreme importance whose hand is at the helm.

As the *Times* admits, "the minimum educational equipment of a V.A.D. nursing member before the war was of the slightest. She had to attend a few lectures, and pass two very tender examinations, in first aid and home nursing. She need have no practical experience worth mentioning."

In America the organization to deal with

such willing untrained help was ready to hand, for at the helm of the Red Cross Nursing Service were some of the most experienced leaders of our profession. Only trained and registered nurses were enrolled as members of Red Cross units, and numbers of these were set free for active service by the untrained volunteers, who took subordinate positions in home hospitals, and thus rendered most useful assistance.

In this country the situation was not controlled by a central professional organization, and persons of social influence and position, and little or no training in nursing, proceeded on active service, while thousands of trained nurses were unable to obtain the opportunity of rendering the help to our sick and wounded for which their training and standing entitled them, and of which our sailors and soldiers were in urgent need.

It is now proposed that the British Red Cross Society shall organize a Peace-time Service of V.A.D.s to assist in the nursing of the poor in their own homes in country districts. If such work is undertaken, it is imperative that its organization should be in the hands of "Builders who are Masters of their Craft." At the present time the organization of nursing in country districts is largely in the hands of ladies of social position, and the standard, outside that maintained for Queen's Nurses, usually leaves much to be desired. If the nursing in rural districts is to be controlled by lay persons, carried out by nurses inadequately trained, with the assistance of V.A.D.s whose work they have not the knowledge to supervise, Heaven help the poor. It is for their representatives in Parliament to see that the poor in sickness are protected, and that one standard of knowledge and efficiency is demanded of nurses of rich and poor alike.

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