

ST. JOHN'S DAY

By ESTELLE M. KERR

THE twenty fourth of May is an anniversary known to all Canadians, but the number who will celebrate the 24th of June is comparatively small. Yet these people are very important just now and it is fitting that on the anniversary of the birth of St. John the Baptist, which they celebrate, we should show some appreciation of their work. Next Sunday the members of the St. John Ambulance Brigade still in this country will parade to church. The Canadian division includes 1,200 nursing sisters, who have passed examinations in First Aid to the Wounded and in Home Nursing, and, after a period of practical training, have been elected members of the Brigade. Last September a draft of 60 of these nurses, selected from all parts of Canada, went overseas in response to a call sent to the late Duchess of Connaught by the Women's Voluntary Aid Department in England, and a new draft of 110 are leaving this month. These are women of from 23 to 38 years of age who wear the uniform of the Brigade, the dress and long cloak of dark grey cloth, a dark blue felt hat with a grey band in winter, a straw hat in summer, and the St. J. A. A. badge worn on the right arm. They will serve as probationers under graduate nurses in British military hospitals and will receive an honorarium of 20 pounds per annum—about two dollars a week—and £4 yearly for the upkeep of their uniforms. As all have left comfortable homes, their sacrifice can be estimated.

BESIDES the Brigade members, thousands of women have taken the courses instituted by the St. John's Ambulance Brigade in the various centres established throughout Canada. Hundreds have gone to England and France on their own initiative, and are now serving in auxiliary hospitals. The Canadian military authorities have not as yet officially recognized the partially trained nurses, though members of the St. John's Brigade are now serving in the convalescent homes under the authority of the Military Hospitals Commission, and the heads of these hospitals say that they do not see how they could manage without them. There are no salaries whatever paid to partially trained nurses in any of the military hospitals in Canada, yet so great is the desire of women to serve their country in this way that there is a long waiting list at all the convalescent homes to which they are admitted. At some they are taken in for a period of three months, at others they are on duty on alternate weeks, and in this way a large number of women get the benefit of practical hospital experience which will make them very valuable in the near future if the wounded continue to return to Canada in the appallingly large numbers they have assumed during recent months.

High-salaried graduate nurses are not needed to perform the menial tasks in a hospital, and orderlies are very difficult to obtain, yet the admittance of the V. A. D. into Canadian military hospitals has been looked upon with disfavour. One person, formerly in the highest authority, referred to them as "brow-smoothers and hand-holders," and said that V. A. D. stood for "Virgins Almost Desperate." Yet England, with 80,000 of them, is clamouring for thousands more! The Voluntary Aid Detachment is under the joint committee of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, and their work has been of inestimable value. At the beginning of the war the amateur nurse was the subject of many a joke, and one writer in speaking of her says:

"She qualifies herself for her new profession by dressing up like one of the chorus of 'The Quaker Girl' and getting her portrait, thus attired, in The Tatler. She then proceeds to invade any hospital that is available, where she flirts with everything in pajamas, and freezes you with a look if you ask her

to empty a basin or change your sheets. I know her! I've had some, and I know her! She is one of the minor horrors of war!"

But the frivolous young ladies whose appearance as ministering angels called forth so much ridicule have been gradually weeded out, and those who have continued their work since the beginning of the war have acquired the skill of professionals.

SOMETIMES the V. A. D. worker is paid, sometimes she is not. Most people in authority find it best, if possible, to give some remuneration, no matter how small, to put things on a better business footing. The trained nurse in Canada has come in for her share of the glory of war, but the V. A. D.'s have come in for a good deal of opprobrium. The trained nurse is pursuing her own profession in the most interesting field possible, the voluntary nurse has given up her life work to perform almost menial tasks, but their work calls for steadiness, cheerfulness, devotion, loyalty, discipline. It is of immense importance to the Empire, as is shown by the demand for more. They are needed at both military and auxiliary hospitals in England, on the lines of



These ladies of St. Paul's Anglican Church, Toronto, have sent overseas more hospital supplies than any other church in Canada.

communication and bases in France. They are needed in Malta, Egypt and Saloniki; only in Canada are they not wanted, and the other places are so far away and transportation so difficult!

LAST October the War Office applied to the Voluntary Aid Detachments for women to fill the vacancies on the depleted staffs of the military hospitals, and women are now doing duty as general service superintendents, dispensers, clerks, cooks, telephone operators, storekeepers, X-ray attendants, and laboratory attendants. Their pay is from \$6.50 a week for a trained laboratory attendant to \$8.25 for a general service superintendent. Many more women are wanted. They serve one month on probation and then sign an agreement for 12 months or the duration of the war. The age limit is 18 to 50.

Every woman should be proud to belong to a body with such tradition and such a record of achievement as has the Brigade of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, which is a much older organization than that of the Red Cross.

In the 11th century some rich Neapolitan merchants founded and endowed a hospital for the Latin pilgrims who thronged to Jerusalem. This was a precursor of the Knights Hospitaller of St. John, and during the Crusades, when Godfrey de Bouillon captured Jerusalem, he praised the Hospitallers and endowed them with revenues of one of the richest manors in Brabant. Thus they were formed into a

regularly constituted religious order and wore a black habit adorned with a white cross of eight points. Branch hospitals were established in many of the maritime provinces of Europe, where pilgrims could be cared for while waiting transport to the Holy Land. The Knights and Dames of the Order were required to be of noble birth, there were religious chaplains and serving brothers, too, and they pursued their charitable work in France, England, Italy, Spain and Portugal till, after a career of 500 years of magnificent moral and material achievement, there came a slow decline and final extinction as a religious community till it was recreated in our day into civilian form.

The Order of St. John of Jerusalem is a decoration for merit conferred by the King, and may be given to people of any religion with the exception of Jews, but for the members of the Brigade there is not even that exception. Indeed, Jewish nurses are desirable for Jewish hospitals, where the fighting men of their faith are cared for and served with the diet prescribed by their church.

ST. JOHN'S DAY, or Midsummer's Eve, on the 24th of June, was celebrated widely in England in the old days, but with no religious significance. The populace made holiday with bonfires to keep off the evil spirits which were supposed to roam about that night. The citizens paraded the town in relays with lighted torches, and altogether presented a very picturesque appearance, so much so that bluff King Hal, who witnessed, with his wife, Queen Catherine, the procession of 2,000 armed citizens carrying lighted torches through the streets of London, was delighted with the sight. On second thought, he decided that such a large muster of citizens was a menace to his power and he prohibited the continuance of this custom, since when the St. John's Day passes by unnoticed, except by the scattered members of the great Brigade, who, while pursuing their mission of healing, observe the birthday of the Patron Saint of their society, and on this day we should unite to do them honour.

The army nurse faces danger and death as surely as the soldier, and women have shown high courage in the hospitals under bombardment of Zeppelins, in shipwreck and during submarine menace, in slight danger from shells and great danger of nervous prostration. From one despatch we learn that 22 members of the Society for Aid to the Wounded Soldiers in France have lost their lives, carried off by shells or contagious diseases.

While we recognize the grand spirit of British and Canadian women, we still send out a generous share of admiration to the women of France, whose achievements during the past year have been simply wonderful. There are now no less than 66,449 in the French Red Cross army, equipping 1,500 hospitals with an aggregate of 118,000 beds, and the insignia of the order flies above 268 buildings in the city of Paris alone. Of the women that have fallen we hear but little. The nurses of the society have received sixty-three epidemic medals, sixty war crosses, and one Cross of the Legion of Honour. Mlle. Susanne Gilles was the first Red Cross victim. She fell at Luneville, her chest torn by a fragment of a shell that burst into the ward in which she was attending the wounded. Mlle. Cagnard, who fell at Cambrai, is said to have been shot by a Prussian soldier who fired at her through a window of an hospital. Seven women of the Red Cross lost their lives during the bombardment of Rheims, five Sisters of Charity being amongst the victims. And these are the women of La Belle France, the "Gay sportive land of mirth and social ease," which we have been wont to regard as given over for the lighter and more frivolous things.

In the light of what these women are doing to help a stricken world, those of us in Canada should be inspired to a greater sense of responsibility and of actual power. None of us do too much. Compared to other women we often do too little.