

THE WOMEN'S LEGION

By

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WOMEN were formerly limited, not only in the things they were permitted to do, but also in the places they were allowed to do them. No one doubted their ability to cook, wash, mend, yet they were never allowed to accompany an army even in pursuance of those womanly activities. They were admittedly able to drive and repair their own motor cars, yet it is only recently that the military authorities permitted them to drive motor trucks or ambulances for the army. Now the question is not of sex, but of ability, and women are supplanting men in the army itself wherever their qualifications show that they are well fitted for the work.

The first auxiliary army work of nursing was introduced by Florence Nightingale, sixty years ago; now nursing in the military hospitals is done by women as a matter of course. Seventy thousand French women are serving in the Red Cross hospitals with the French armies, though when the war broke out France had just 80 permanent nurses. This was immediately augmented by thousands of temporary nurses, and the gradual growth of the various Red Cross associations has brought the number of partially trained nurses to their present state of efficiency. In addition to this there are 10,000 women of various foreign nationalities serving with the French. Every woman in France is now a war-worker, but while the French women have worked, the English women, in their greater security, have organized, and the result is that the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps has developed into an organization of surprising resources, which is carrying on the work of substitution of female for male labour in the army to a surprising extent.

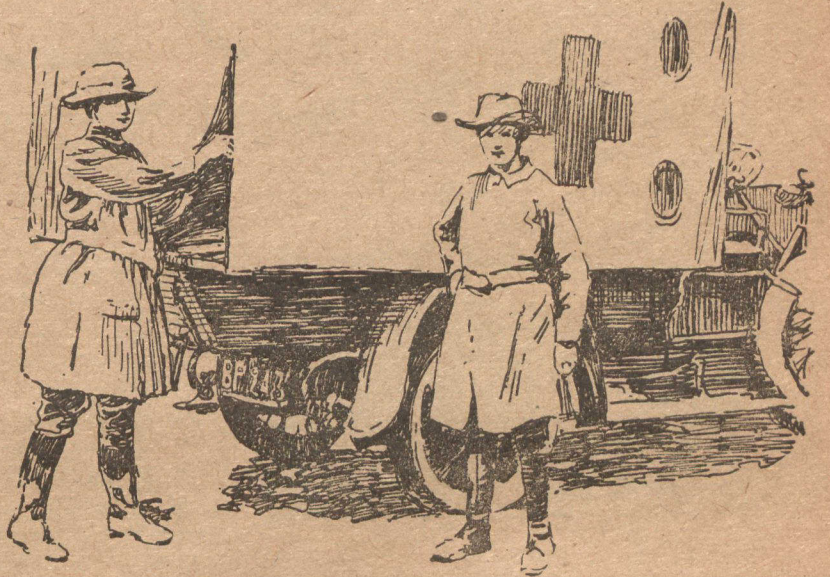
STATISTICS given last March showed that 288,000 women responded to the call for recruits, some for service in France, some for the land army in England. The majority of those accepted were placed on duty in England, while 5,000 were sent to France for work behind the firing lines. These have proved so successful that a call has been issued for 10,000 more recruits and once more the offices of the society have been deluged with applications from every class of women throughout the land, from the wealthiest to the poorest. Sometimes the reasons and qualifications for serving are pathetic, sometimes amusing. Some state that they can feed pigs or dig potatoes. Several want to "get away from washing day," and one girl said she was "fond of animals and might like motors. One, in reply to the question as to previous war work, said: "I have brought up six sons to be soldiers." One solitary man applied for a form, as he wanted "to look after women on the land."

Women who are skilled in trades are those most readily accepted by the corps. The chief demand is for mechanics, automobile drivers, cooks, stenographers, waitresses, packers, telephone operators, and women who are trained in farm work. The first applicants to be accepted for service in France were 200 highly qualified clerks, shorthand writers and typists, who received three weeks' special instruction in London, which included some teaching of hygiene and during which time they were inoculated. Some drill, also, is necessary, for when large bodies of women have to be transferred quickly from one place to another, even a matter so seemingly simple, as entering or leaving trains, can be greatly delayed by haphazard methods. The low pay seems to be no deterrent to recruiting. Wages vary with the different kind of employment, the minimum wage being \$5 a week with 14 cents an hour for overtime, and the maximum amounting to \$13 a week when board and lodging are not included. A clothing allowance of \$20 is granted to provide a khaki tunic and trousers, high boots and sombrero hats. At the end of the second year a bonus of \$25 is paid. The badge of the corps, a laurel wreath surrounding the initials "W. A. A. C." is worn on the shoulder strap with the badge designating the wearer's rank, a combination of roses and fleur-de-lis,

which varies from the double rose, worn by Mrs. Chalmers Watson, controller of the W. A. A. C., to the single rose of Class II. quarter-mistress attached under war office orders.

The quarter-mistress is perhaps the greatest innovation, for she comes into more direct contact with the soldiers, having control of their stores, distributing the belts, boots and other things they need. Wash women and seamstresses are also attached to this department to look after their clothing; there are also women shoe-makers. The chief difficulty experienced at first was that of providing suitable accommodation, so 200 women carpenters were dispatched to the front to build huts and new camps, which can accommodate from 30 to 500 women and are established wherever they are needed. Hostels, too, are supplied, and sometimes there is a social supervisor to see that all work and no play will not make Jill a dull girl. They receive rations which they cook for themselves.

Women may enlist for a year or "for duration," and are accepted for home service at a minimum age of 18, and for service in France at 20. The test for women chauffeurs is very exacting: they must not only be accomplished motor drivers, capable of driving any type of machine through London traffic, but they must be able to take a machine apart and put it together again. They are usually required to serve one month before they are given a uniform and six months before they are allowed to go to France. They are treated as privates under strict army discipline and are not allowed to speak to officers. Even a woman chauffeur who may have



Many of the ambulances in France are now driven by women.

and Order of St. John, who care for the sick and wounded. Nurses have the rank of lieutenants and are consequently not under such strict discipline as the privates in the W. A. A. C. Some people hint that nurses have an easier life because they have men for their superior officers, and it is said that women are more particular about their use of their military titles than men. The head doctor in the "All Women Hospital" in Endell Street is a colonel, and her own nephew, a captain, must, in accordance with army regulations, salute her with due respect. The women orderlies and nurses of the hospital do not object to having women for their superior officers, but they did grumble when the wounded soldiers were cleared out of some of their wards to make way for a large number of members of the W. A. A. C., who had been in France and had broken down under the severe work and unaccustomed food. They quite disproved the assertion of some of our civilian doctors that women are more patient on their sick beds than men.



Serving in the Land Army.

a title in her own right may not address a modest sub-lieutenant, or passing with an empty ambulance she may not give him a lift.

WHEN the first draft from the Women's Legion went to France they had orders to salute all officers. The first one they met was a Highlander, who looked astonished on seeing so many women in uniform saluting him, but he responded by holding out his skirts and curtseying! Then the order went out that they were to salute no officers except those of the women's Army Auxiliary Corps.

This organization works in close co-operation with the Joint War Committee of the British Red Cross

IN most of the branches of the W. A. A. C., women are engaged in work that has long been regarded as belonging to women's sphere, but some branches of their work are an innovation. As carpenters, their value is regarded with scepticism. It is hard to disassociate a woman and a hammer with a vision of a mangled thumb, yet the head of a big Glasgow shipbuilding firm speaking at an exhibition of women's war work, paid a warm tribute to their qualifications when he said:

"Given two more years of war, I would undertake to build a battleship from keel to aerial in all its complex detail entirely with women labour.

"The idea is neither fantastic nor visionary. The woman who has trained for a trapeze can find her vocation at the giddy heights of a Scotch crane, and the girl who is proficient at dancing is well equipped for undertaking the work involving movement of position."

The W. A. A. C. is only the beginning of a vast system, but so far it is an assured success.

To-day the women employed in the war office in London, including the cable and postal censorship department, number 7,700, though at the outbreak of war they numbered only 156.

One of the largest activities of the Women's Legion has been the organization of a land army, and Mr. R. E. Prothen, the president of the Board of Agriculture, tells of the invaluable service they have rendered to farmers and to the nation by enrolling, training and placing in employment such a large number of agricultural workers. There were, last September, in England and Wales, 200,000 women doing real national work on the land. In the management of horses, in the hundred and one jobs about a farm, he states that women can hold their own.