A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

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MEDICAL WOMEN AND THE WAR

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WHEN THE WAR broke out a large number of our general practitioners belonged to the local territorial or other army units, and, like the rest of the population, had to mobilize. Also, many young doctors joined the army at once, as did medical students.

Women also entered the war zone. Many medical women and students have, since the early part of the War, been serving in hospitals abroad. Hospitals run entirely from the medical and surgical point of view by women have been established in Belgium, France and Serbia. One of the women's units on the way to Serbia was stopped at Malta to attend to our wounded soldiers and sailors, moved there from the Dardanelles. At other hospitals in France women are doing medical work as part of a mixed staff of men and women. One of the earliest hospitals to be sent out to France (under the French Red Cross) was first in Paris and later at Wimereux and is now appointed here by our own War Office as the Endell Street Military Hospital. It is under the charge of Dr Louisa Garrett Anderson and Dr Flora Murray, who were responsible for the equipment, organization, and working of the hospital in France.

While there has been a demand for medical women to take the place of medical men in every capacity, the larger proportion of the posts that have been offered to women are for newly-qualified or quite junior practitioners. There are practically none for the older and more experienced women doctors.

The majority of members of the profession are willing for women to take their places as hospital residents or other appointments so as to release them for the front, but they will expect the women to give up their positions with smiling faces when they return at the end of the War. However, many will not return, and, consequently, the preservation of the health of the nation will tend to be more in the hands of women than was the case before the War.

There is a great shortage of women doctors. The London School of Medicine for Women (Royal Free Hospital) is enlarging to provide further accommodation for training women medical students. Attempts have been made to allow women to work at the men's schools in London, as is done in Ireland and in all the provincial schools. Within this year a number of women students were received at one general hospital, and were working in the wards and outpatient department, but the experiment came to an end because the men students did not like the women working with them. At another London medical school, the advisability of admitting women as students has recently been discussed seriously and vetoed. All this seems to point to what must come in the near future: a combined medical teaching centre for London open without let or hindrance to both sexes. That the War will assist to this end is undoubted.

