

Begging the Question.

LORD WANTAGE, Chairman of the Red Cross Society, enters into a lengthy defence of the construction, in Monday's *Standard*, of the hospital ship *Princess of Wales*, from which we quote as follows:—

"I think it may be a matter of interest to the public, and especially to those who have generously contributed to the Red Cross Society, and who are doubtless anxious to be assured that their money has been and is continuing to be well spent, to have some account of the work done by the Society since my last report. The uniform approval which has been accorded by the Press to the working of the Army Medical Service in South Africa, including the Red Cross Society, has been so marked that I feel scarcely warranted in claiming space for a few words of explanation on certain points of controversy that have arisen with regard to the Red Cross Hospital Ship which bears the name of the *Princess of Wales*, and to which her Royal Highness has accorded her special patronage and practical assistance. The condition of the ship has been adversely commented on, and although these criticisms do not emanate from the leading or influential portions of the public Press, yet I am informed that they have excited considerable attention, and caused anxiety and distress, which is likely to increase unless authoritatively contradicted.

On the return of the *Princess of Wales* from her first voyage, the Central British Red Cross Committee summoned the medical officer in charge of the ship, Major Morgan, and the master of the vessel, Captain Johnson, before them, and took their evidence as to her condition. Major Morgan expressed himself as absolutely confident of the construction of the vessel, being strong and good and thoroughly seaworthy, and that the electric lighting arrangements, which required some overhauling, are in perfect order. He also stated that there was absolutely no foundation for adverse criticism in connection with the hospital arrangements, which were excellent, that the food was splendid, and that the patients all picked up in a marvellous way on board.

Captain Johnson stated that he never wished to be in a better sea-going vessel. His expression was that she was a 'sea kindly' boat, and that she weathered storms when finer, newer, and bigger boats got damaged by them. I can add my own testimony to the above. I visited the ship in company with Major Macpherson, Hon. Secretary of the Central Red Cross Committee, within an hour of her arrival at Southampton, and went over her from top to bottom. I was much struck with the excellence of all the arrangements and the comfort of the fittings, and especially by the perfect sweetness and cleanliness of the wards, pantries and offices generally. The patients, 176 in number, were unanimous in their expressions of satisfaction and appreciation of the good food, excellent medical attendance and nursing, favourable surroundings, and general comfort. The evidence of this could be seen in the wonderful recoveries most of them had made during the voyage. In fact, I consider the ship a model hospital ship, and in every way worthy of the distinguished name she bears. She has been

thoroughly overhauled and cleaned, and is about to start on her return journey to the Cape, from whence she will bring home another cargo of sick and wounded men."

As the NURSING RECORD was the first organ in the Press to call attention to the fact that the hasty transformation of the old boat the *Midnight Sun* into the *Princess of Wales* hospital ship did not result in perfection, and as, in the opinion of Lord Wantage, our criticisms "do not emanate from the leading or influential portions of the public press," it is gratifying to our self-esteem to learn from this gentleman that "they have excited considerable attention," and that "the Central British Red Cross Committee summoned the medical officer in charge of the ship, Major Morgan, and the master of the vessel, Captain Johnson, before them, and took their evidence as to her condition," and, more important still, "that she has been thoroughly overhauled and cleaned," and "that the electric lighting arrangements which required overhauling, are in perfect order." And as this is all we asked for in order to safeguard the lives of our sick soldiers, we remain eminently satisfied with our sphere of influence.

The medical, nursing, and domestic arrangements we never called in question, and in our issue of the 25th of November, commended the ward appointments and arrangements for nursing the sick, so that Lord Wantage's reference to these details is superfluous; but as our statements and remarks are "authoritatively contradicted" without any reference being made to them in detail, and without, therefore, producing evidence as to their inaccuracy, we will content ourselves with putting the following questions to Lord Wantage, so that he may avail himself of the opportunity of disproving their accuracy, if possible. Flat denials, even when offered in the most lofty official tone, remain unconvincing unless supported by evidence.

QUESTIONS.

1. On what date did the *Princess of Wales* hospital ship leave Tilbury Dock—was it, or was it not, the 23rd of November?
2. Was her machinery found to be defective before she got down the river, and was she, or was she not, buoyed off Gravesend for repairs?
3. Did she make a second false start, and was she, or was she not, again taken in harbour for repairs at Sheerness?
4. Did she, or did she not, arrive at Cape Town on the 8th January, 1900, thus taking *forty-seven days* (six weeks) to make a voyage which can be accomplished in a fortnight?
5. How long did she remain useless at the Cape, and were further repairs found necessary, or not?

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)