

Our Foreign Letter.

IMPRESSIONS OF SOME HOSPITALS ON THE MEDITERRANEAN

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THE MILITARY HOSPITAL AT ATHENS.



Our time at Athens was very limited; it was a long way from the Piræus to the city—and who could resist visiting the Acropolis and the museums?

—so that I had very little time remaining to visit the hospitals, several of which are nursed and superintended by British nurses. However, as I happened to be nearest the Military Hospital, and as I had a card of introduction to the Superintendent Sister, I decided to go there.

It was seven o'clock when I was driven there, on a terribly dark night, so that I could not see the appearance of the building from outside, but the instant I entered I was struck by the palatial aspect of the corridors, the beautiful marble floors, and the stately wide marble staircase.

I was in uniform, and the instant the orderlies saw me they rushed forward and saluted me in a very joyous and certainly unmilitary manner; they seemed wild with excitement—why, I could not make out. Not knowing a word of Greek, I gave one of them the card, and, to my astonishment, he tore it out of my hand and flew up the passage and stairs, followed by another equally excited orderly. Half-way up they turned around and beckoned me to follow. I do not think I ever saw anything so funny, they seemed so different from the stolid British orderly on duty or the arrogant Turkish soldier. Suddenly, and without knocking, announcing, or handing the card, they opened a door wide, and I was shown into a very large, well-lighted room, in which sat half-a-dozen nurses. They all rose up and gave an exclamation of astonishment. We were strangers to one another, and I could see that my sudden appearance amongst them in a strange country and at that hour of the night was a great surprise to them. Whilst I introduced myself, the amiable orderlies stood grinning, so that I was compelled to relieve one of my card and explain that my time was limited and that I should like to see the hospital. But, as the Sisters were just going to have supper, they kindly invited me to join them. I then perceived a table put in a corner of the sitting-room with a screen around it, from which I gathered that they only had a public sitting-room for everybody, and they had to take their meals in it!

Here again it struck me that the position of the Superintendent Sister was not sufficiently defined; she had to work in the wards the same as the others, and she had no little sanctum of her own. Apart from the fact that familiarity breeds contempt, it showed that the Committee had not given her a sufficiently defined position of power and authority, which is a pity. There is a boundary line between

too much power—which may produce tyranny—and too little—which may cause lack of discipline. Of course I may be mistaken in this particular instance, but it is the principle of the thing that I speak of.

After supper, the Superintendent Sister took me all around. As I stated before, the passages were wide and palatial, the wards were very large and fine, and contained all that was necessary. The bedsteads were painted white, the dressing-wagons and dressing-tables were of glass; everything was thoroughly aseptic, but there was that same feeling of bareness and comfortlessness. On the whole, though the building must have cost more and there was an attempt at beauty and grandeur, yet the Greek hospital at Alexandria seemed to be better organised, more real excellency, with less *show*—what the French call *fa-la*. For instance, the moment one entered the hospital at Athens one was conscious of unpleasant odours.

Another apparent and very grave mistake was the operating theatre leading out of one of the surgical wards, with neither anæsthetic nor ante-room; there was no proper steriliser for the instruments and none for the dressings, to say nothing of the absence of an apparatus for the sterilisation of water. But, worse still, there were not even any taps for either hot or cold water, and every drop of water had to be brought in from the neighbouring lavatory!

These were the sad omissions in construction, which struck one as incongruous with white marble floors and sinks!

As far as I could make out, the nursing was worked on the same lines as in British military hospitals under the old regulations—the Sisters superintending and doing the skilled part of nursing, whilst the orderlies work under them and do all the attendance and rough part of the work, with this difference—that the Greek orderly is to be less relied upon than his British prototype. Also, they are changed much too frequently, so that as soon as they are useful they are moved, which is very disheartening work for the Sisters.

Should any of my friends ask my advice on accepting a post at this hospital, my answer would simply be this: It depends on yourself and the object you have in view. If you wish to see Greece and study the Greeks, you will find your term of agreement a very dreary one, and the proposed "change" longer than you supposed; but if you wish to show what the true British nurse is, and set a high and noble example to Greek ladies to take up nursing, then go at once.

The Greek young lady is still tied and bound by old Eastern traditions, and she still finds it hard to break her chains and set herself free.

Pioneer work has already been done, and several Greek ladies have gone to England and received their training, but their position is not yet assured; pride and shyness still stand in the way. Greece is a small country, and young ladies who have held a social position in their country fight shy of returning amongst their people on a new footing. So that if her British sister wishes to persevere and by force of noble example make the position of a nurse one of dignity and respect in Greece, let her go; she will be doing a national work. Let me add that the pleasure and joy with which the orderlies and patients greeted me was a certain proof to my mind of the popularity of the British nurse with the Greek soldier and patient,

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