

The Royal Herbert Hospital, Woolwich.

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF MILITARY NURSING.

Military nursing has always had a great fascination for me. Perhaps it is that amongst my earliest recollections I remember my mother making charpie out of square bits of old linen for the wounded soldiers of the Franco-Prussian War, and hearing my father extol and admire the bravery and self-sacrifice of those ladies who had gone to nurse them. One of these ladies (a German countess) having lost four brothers, returned from the war with two swords, one French and one German, and nailed them up crossing each other in her sitting-room.

I remember my mother shuddering at the sight of them, and asking her "How *can* you?" But I remember quite as well, thinking to myself, "When I grow up I shall go to all the wars I can; I shall dash amongst the wounded amidst all the firing and smoke and bring back as many swords as I can." In fact, my room was to be covered with trophies of war, but I do not remember that I was in any way filled with the idea of relieving the sufferings of the wounded, the sense of bravery and adventure being the only predominant thought in my mind.

But, castles in the air, whether they be children's or adults', rarely come true, and thus it has happened that not only have I never so much as seen a freshly-wounded soldier, nor heard a war gun-shot, but that apart from the Military Hospital at Athens and the Turkish Military Hospital at Beyrout, the only English military hospitals I have seen, are the Dorchester one and the Royal Herbert at Woolwich, which I have just visited, and which left such a pleasant impression on my mind.

My recollections of the hospital at Dorchester are very dim. I knew nothing about nursing in those days, but I went to visit a soldier with a fractured arm, and I used to go around and chat to the others. I remember so well a young fellow suffering with acute rheumatism groaning with pain and looking so uncomfortable. There was no nursing Sister there, and an orderly used to come in at certain intervals and attend to their wants. But I shall never forget a sergeant in a separate ward who had a long gash in his leg, which he informed me would not heal, and no wonder, now that I think of it, for I can now see the orderly coming in with a steaming hot poultice (evidently well-cooked in a saucepan) in his hand, removing the old one and clapping on the fresh one, without the slightest attempt at cleanliness, let alone asepsis.

But that was years ago, and we all know that the medical, nursing, and hospital administrative departments have undergone a great change since the Transvaal War. We all know, too, that the

results of war taken in a right and intelligent spirit bring good with them.

If there is any grit in a nation, it rises, develops, and learns by its mistakes, its weaknesses, and its failings.

The present condition of British hospitals, and, in fact, the very existence of the British nursing profession, is due to the lessons learnt at the Crimean War.

The Transvaal War has not passed without leaving its good results. All those nurses who went out must have returned experienced and with a wider and broader horizon.

But the great point is that military hospitals and military nursing took a new lease of life.

The Government and the whole nation awoke to the fact that the hospitals and the nursing staff required reorganisation, and that more money and a freer hand must be given the medical and nursing departments, in order to bring the hospitals to a more recent and up-to-date standard and to increase the nursing staff.

Thus it was that the whole organisation was altered and the new post of "Matron-in-Chief" was created.

The good results of this newly-created post are obvious. I believe in women having a place and position. I believe in man and woman each sharing their responsibilities according to the natural gifts bestowed on each, and it certainly seems to me that in nursing questions, and in nursing administration, it is but right that a nurse—one who has gone through the mill herself, and had a long and varied experience—should be placed at the head of a nursing staff.

It therefore seems to me a matter for congratulation that military nurses should now have at the head of them a woman who understands their needs and difficulties, and that this woman should be Miss Sidney Browne—one who is so essentially womanly and yet so fitted to the post.

It is strange how a feeling which we imagine to be quite gone is only dormant. And thus it happened that when recently it was my good fortune to meet Miss Browne, her military appearance, with her scarlet trimmings, her gold badge on the right and a long row of coloured ribands on the left attracted my attention, and like a magnet she drew me to her and the old feelings surged in me till I could restrain myself no longer, and, looking at her, I exclaimed: "How I envy you."

Miss Browne gave an amused laugh (she knew nothing about my German Countess and the swords), and though there was some satisfaction in the laugh, yet she seemed to say: "It wasn't all smooth, nor was it a Royal road." "I daresay," I thought to myself, "but you must have had a very happy time of it on the whole, and what road is royal, even to royalties?" But our conversation ended in my obtaining leave to visit the Woolwich Hospital.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)