

## Echoes of the Past.

(Concluded from page 397.)

The following letters show that some of the nurses who served in the hospitals in the Crimean War were far from satisfied with their position:—

From G. H.

“Scutari Barracks,

“December 5th.

“You will no doubt think us neglectful for not writing to you before, but we have been patiently waiting to tell you good news, but we cannot wait any longer, we are all so very unhappy. Miss Nightingale has some spite against us, but for what cause we know not, and Mrs. Bracebridge has treated us with the greatest contempt ever since the day Mr. — left us. I would not mind what hardships we had to encounter with if they would be kind to us. They treat us worse than the common, low nurses they brought out. I was never so unhappy in my life, and we are truly sorry that we ever came out without some one to care for us. We do the thing that is right, and if God be for us we need not fear. I believe we are the only party that has come with a good motive. There are some merely for a name, some for gain. Mrs. Clarke, the housekeeper, is a complete tyrant. She insults us every time she sees us, Mary Anne in particular.

“My earnest desire and prayer to God is that war may speedily be terminated, and we may safely be restored to our own dear country. We do not know anything about the war; for all we are among military men we dare not speak to them, and we never see a paper. There are papers sent for the nurses but they will not let us see them.

“We do not mix with those low women Miss Nightingale brought out, and for that reason they are so embittered against us.”

For the sake of clearness we have amended the orthography of the letter, but a specimen is interesting as showing the standard of education of a nurse who undoubtedly was of a superior class to many employed.

“They treat us worse than the Common Low woman they brate oute. I was never so unhappy in My life, and wee are truley sorey that we ever Come oute withoute some one to Care for us. Wee do the thing that is rit, and if god be for us wee need not feer.”

Miss Nightingale's task could have been no easy one.

From I. J.

“Scutari Barracks,

“December 4th, 1854.

“With great pleasure we received your kind note, and all of us shed a tear of joy and trouble, for we are treated with the greatest disrespect and unkindness by Miss Nightingale and her housekeeper. She all but starves us, and it is very hurtful to our feelings to have to stand like poor prisoners that had committed some low crime, and

then she picks out all the outside bits of meat that we cannot get our teeth through, and the maggots jump on our plates. We very often go without many a meal, and without a breakfast many mornings, because we cannot drink the water she puts in the teapot; and as to Miss Nightingale, she tries everything she can to find fault with us, and she believes everything that these low women tell her; so you may guess how very unhappy we are. If there is not a change very soon, or some friend to come to us, I think Miss Nightingale will soon have the trouble of losing us very soon. I cannot say more at present, but I trust in God to see you all some day, that I can explain our troubles to you and Mr. —. From the day he left us we have been treated with every disrespect, but we thought every day it would be better; but it is worse.”

FROM THE SAME.

“All the nurses will write to you, and will explain all to you better than I can, for I was very ill and had bad diarrhoea for three days and was very bad; but I might lie there for all the notice Miss Nightingale took of me. But, thank God, I got better, and able to go to my duty where I am sent, but very unhappy at present. The sea is very rough at the present time; only for that I think we should go home; not that we are tired of our work but of Miss Nightingale's treatment to us.”

It is only fair to say that Mrs. Bracebridge wrote of these nurses on their return home.

“In every way they were not suited to this situation, and leave unregretted by any of the little community; at the same time they do not go home in disgrace, nor have they done anything contrary to the character they came out with of respectable women, though their manners were somewhat flighty with the patients.”

Miss Nightingale, to whom the grievances expressed by the nurses were mentioned by the home authorities, interviewed the nurses, and wrote subsequently:—

“The rule against reading to patients in a military hospital without the Chaplain's leave (observed alike by everyone) is the only approximation to the supposed interdiction of speaking. As to ‘sympathy’ and ‘consideration,’ they can only explain that Mrs. Clarke did not ‘speak to them respectfully,’ and they were not accustomed to it. Mrs. Clarke, as I believe, though somewhat brusque, sets them an example of incessant labour and anxiety to fulfil her duties. But their main complaints were against Mrs. —, one of their own body, and jealousies of Mrs. —.

“Had they given me an opportunity of setting matters right I might have convinced them of the impropriety of lightly taking offence. The enormous pressure of the sick cases on us, the supplying them with proper food, and the supply of the wards with utensils, clothing, etc., form a task of so very heavy a nature that I am wholly unable to inquire into trifles which I know nothing of, and which were not intimated to me at all, though constantly passing through the common room for at

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)