

The Portland Hospital.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. HOWARD H. TOOTH.

Consulting Physician to the Portland Hospital.

THE return of the staff of the Portland Hospital, which has done such admirable work in South Africa, has occasioned much interest in nursing circles at home, and some account of an interview with Dr. Tooth, which I recently had the pleasure of securing, will be welcome to many readers of the RECORD, more especially as Dr. Tooth is a great favourite amongst nurses, whose regard he has won by his ready appreciation of the work of the daughter profession of medicine, and by his courtesy to its individual members.

"When we first arrived in South Africa," said Dr. Tooth, "we were stationed at Rondebosch for three months. Our hundred beds were nearly always filled, and amongst our patients we had fifteen officers. We did not, however, have the rush of work which we got later, which was fortunate, because it enabled the Sisters to train the orderlies, so that when the heavy time came they were really of use, and could be trusted to perform nursing duties. The names of the Sisters, as you know, were Sisters Pretty, Cox-Davies, Russell, and Davies, and admirable they all were. We were fortunate in obtaining their services. The orderlies were St. John's ambulance men, and, under the tuition of the Sisters, the average of those who proved efficient workers was high, one man certainly was quite as good as a woman nurse. When they came to us they were absolutely raw, they knew their stretcher drill, but with personal nursing they had had nothing to do. At first there were instances of their going to sleep on night duty, but after a time they got so keen about their work that this was unknown. I am sure the Sisters will bear me out in what I say of the good work done by these men; in fact, I do not know what we should have done without them. Indeed, I think that the Portland Hospital may serve as an example of what can be done by competent Sisters with regard to the training of orderlies. Of course, the training should be done in time of peace, and I think it is important that available training ground should be utilized for this purpose. Of the value of the services of suitable men, carefully trained, there can be no question.

"When we moved up to Bloemfontein we increased our beds to 160, and as soon as possible added to our staff of nurses. We had first two New Zealand Sisters—Sisters Godfrey and Carston—who were most excellent. One of them, I think, had had some training in this country, but the other was trained entirely

in New Zealand. As to night duty, at first we could not spare a Sister to be Night Superintendent, and so each member of the medical staff, as well as the Sisters, undertook to be responsible for a night in turn. When the New Zealand Sisters joined us, they were put in charge of the enteric wards, and acted alternately as Night Sisters.

"This went on for a month, and then Sister Godfrey and Sister Carson went on to Pretoria, and Sister Harland came up, and took charge of the enteric tents, where there was still work; indeed, we had two marquees of 18 beds each for this disease to the end, when Sister Harland went up to Pretoria, where she is still."

"What do you think about employing women nurses in the Field Hospitals?" I asked. "Do you think it is desirable?"

"Yes," said Dr. Tooth. "Of course, if women work in the Field Hospitals they must understand that they may be under fire, and having seen the working of the hospitals out in Africa, I can now understand the difficulties which undoubtedly exist in connection with their employment, and which are urged against it by those who do not wish to see them there. There may also be difficulties which I do not sufficiently appreciate, for, although I have been with the Army for eight months, I do not imagine I understand all about it. But, at the same time, I think there is no question that the patients would gain by the services of women nurses in the Field Hospitals. As you know, I was not with my own hospital all the time, but for a time I lived in a Field Hospital at Modder River. The medical officers were in and out of the patients' tents all day long, and did everything in their power for the sick; but I was impressed by the fact that the services of women nurses would have been of the greatest value, and I see no reason why they might not have been there at that particular time. Among the difficulties are those of increased transport. There is the Sisters' kit to be considered, then each must have a tent, and they must have a separate mess from the medical staff—at least, I think it is better from the points of view of both. Then, again, I have not seen a Field Hospital on the move, but it is supposed to be able to move at any time. Sisters could not be asked to march across the veldt, it is stiff work for a man. I mention these difficulties, but I, nevertheless, hold to my belief that the presence of nurses in the Field Hospitals is desirable. One thing I think is most essential, that Army Nurses should invariably be gentlewomen. Tommie knows a lady in a moment, and treats her with respect. One more point—there is, it is pretty well known, a certain

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