

of its proper use made the hall bright and gay. In one of the smaller rooms four beds were made up for nurses, but there too was the operating table, and the dressing tables at the side with all the beautiful and costly dressings supplied by the army. Another of the smaller halls had to be the guard-room for orderlies, but it was a long room, and the upper half had tables with rows and rows of clean white enamel mugs, each with a new spoon in it, and rows and rows too of bottles of Bovril, jars of Liebig, tins of condensed milk, all opened ready for use, and loaves of bread. Lord Loch said to me: "At 2.30 there was absolute chaos! It seemed impossible that a sick man could be put in for weeks; by 8 p.m. it was a most beautiful hospital." As I was looking, the ambulances began to arrive, and I leave you to guess how long it was before those nurses thought of bed.

In the same way we undertook the public schools with 130 beds; and a few days later in St. Mary's Hall and the skating rink we received the wounded Boers from Cronje's laager at Paardeberg. There indeed was a scramble; 137 men with awful wounds, dirty, draggled, wretched, and beaten. The shops had no more bedsteads, the line of railway was blocked with soldiers, wounded, military stores, horses, and food for the starving town of 43,000 souls, as well as with the military arms, ammunition, and huge guns with all their limber. It was far too hot for the nurses to take the half-mile walk there and back to come home for their meals, and there was absolutely no accommodation for them except one miserable little room (half of which was broken down by a shell) where the corporal took his meals. In some way or other, through the kindness of friends, they were provided for. But here was nursing indeed! There was not one bedstead, only three mattresses and three pillows; sheets and pillow-cases were entirely lacking; there were only two or three chairs and a few little tables; but in both rooms there was a thoroughly good floor, and I don't think the men suffered, lying on it on folded blankets. Of course, there could be no comfortable undressing, but Boers are not accustomed to that.

But the nurses! Through the whole day standing in the furiously hot little operating-rooms, or dressing ghastly wounds, almost standing on their heads—for the men were all on the floor. Indeed, the heat of the whole place was indescribable. Kimberley was burning with heat. The rink was crowded in another week, when the whole 135 Boers were put there and St. Mary's filled with our own men. In about three weeks' time the Boers were well enough to be moved to Simon's Town, except three, who went into the civil hospital. They wrote a letter of thanks for the treatment they had received before they left. I looked upon that as one of the best and most difficult

pieces of work we ever did. We had one of the hospital nurses to help us. Meanwhile the workshops of the De Beers Company were pouring out stretchers, and, in a few days after we took it over, pillows, sheets, towels, and pillow-cases made St. Mary's quite handsome.

Our work in these halls came to an end when the eleventh general hospital came up country, the twenty army sisters and six Canadian nurses taking them over, until the 1,400 beds of the eleventh hospital made a city of canvas on a fine, healthy brow, with a most complete equipment of thirty-four nursing sisters and an army of doctors and orderlies.

Of course, all I have told you sounds very rough and unprepared, and the work was much unlike the order and discipline and finish of a well-worked civil hospital. But in a town crushed by an awful time of tension, with the great strain on the railways, the rush of patients, the difficulty of providing suddenly for some twelve or fifteen hundred more patients than we usually have to provide for, the impossibility of knowing beforehand whether one man will be sent in after a battle or a thousand, and the general distress and misery that war brings, the difficulties were very great; but all the men I saw spoke most gratefully, and, far from complaining, seemed to think that everything they could possibly want was provided in Kimberley. The ladies in the town were, and still are, most good in sending milk, fruit, jelly, and all kinds of nice things to the soldiers—often, I am sure, at the cost of much self-denial in their own households.

In such a vast organisation as our Army Medical Corps, in the multitude of calls of all kinds and the huge press of work, and the strain that war brings on every department, it appears to me inevitable that there must be some incompetent, some dishonest, some mistakes and blunders—much work which might be better done. I hear of army sisters and reserves who behave badly, neglect patients, and care for nothing but amusing themselves, but I have not met them. All I have seen—and I have seen many—have appeared to me to be, each in her own degree, quiet, earnest, painstaking women, saying little or nothing of their own discomforts, and most anxious to do all they possibly can for the sick under great drawbacks, not the least of which is that they are strangers to one another, in strange land, 7,000 miles away from home and hospital. I do not believe that, given all the circumstances, the numbers, the heat, the freedom; the poor food (bringing its sensations of lethargy and weariness), the constant illnesses, the many deaths—I do not believe, I say, that any other profession could have borne it as we have done. A few weeks ago I was in company with some half-dozen army reserves who were travelling with

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)