

October 21st, 1854, and when they arrived at Boulogne early on the following morning they were met by a stalwart company of Boulogne fishwives, a merry and picturesque band in snowy caps and gay petticoats, who seized trunks and bags, and almost fought for the privilege of carrying the luggage of *les sœurs* to the railway station. They would accept no pay, not a *sou*, and they bustled along with their brawny arms swinging to straps and handles, or with boxes hoisted on their broad backs, chattering of "Pierre" or of "Jacques" out at the war, and praying *tho bon Dieu* that if he suffered the Sisters might tend him. The tears streamed down many of the old and weather-beaten cheeks when they said adieu. They claimed but one reward, a shake of the hand, and then, as the train steamed out of the station, they waved their hands and cried *Vive les Sœurs!*

Miss Nightingale, on arrival at Scutari, found the barrack hospital "a scene of filth, pestilence, misery, and disorder impossible to describe. On either side the endless corridors the wounded men lay closely packed together, without the commonest decencies or necessities of life." "There were no vessels for water or utensils of any kind; no soap, towels, or cloths, no hospital clothes; the men lying in their uniforms, stiff with gore, and covered with filth to a degree and of a kind no one could write about; their persons covered with vermin, which crawled about the floors and the walls of the dreadful den of dirt, pestilence, and death to which they were consigned. . . . The medical men toiled with unwearied assiduity, but their numbers were inadequate to the work."

"Then the wounded from Inkerman poured into the hospital, and at this crisis Florence Nightingale brought 'the organising and governing faculty and the brain power of which the officials in charge seemed bereft' to bear on the situation. It was the testing moment of her life. Had Florence Nightingale failed at this crisis in personal endurance, or in power to inspire her subordinates with a like courage, her mission would have sunk into a benevolent futility. . . . The Lady-in-Chief had to look beyond the present moment, though not neglectful of its demands, to the more important future, and institute a system of nursing reform which should make such scenes as she now witnessed impossible. It was her ability to do this which lifted Florence Nightingale into such a supreme position. It was Miss Nightingale's promptitude which saved the situation. When men were dying daily by the score for want of suitable nourishment, she declined to listen to under-officials, who feared to disobey regulations by opening stores without the usual order, and took the responsibility of having the packages undone." "Medical stores," as Mr. Herbert had previously written, "had been sent out by the ton weight," but "through mismanagement these stores had been rotting on the shore at Varna, instead of reaching Scutari, and much that had arrived was packed beneath heavy ammunition and difficult to get at."

As the cold increased, the frost-bitten patients, arriving from the trenches before Sebastopol, had not even the luxury of a warm shirt. One of the nurses, writing home, said:—"Whenever a man opens his mouth with 'Please, ma'am, I want to speak to you,' my heart sinks within me, for I feel sure it will end in 'flannel shirts.'"

"The reticence of the hospital authorities prevented the true state of affairs from reaching the British

public. Indeed, the whole Service, from commandant to orderly, conspired to say 'All right' when all was wrong. One of the Sisters has described how this policy worked in the wards. An orderly officer took the rounds of the wards every night to see that all was in order. He was, of course, expected by the orderlies, and the moment he raised the latch he received the words, 'All right, your honour,' and passed on. This was hospital inspection!" "In excuse" (surely no excuse) "for the officers who were thus easily put off, it may be said that the wards were filled with pestilence, and the air so polluted by cholera and fever patients that it seemed courting death to enter."

"For that reason orderlies already on the sick list were set to act as nurses, and they often drank the brandy which it was their duty to administer to the patients in order to keep up their spirits, or 'drown their grief' as they preferred to put it. Men in this condition became very callous. Those stricken with cholera had their sufferings terribly enhanced by the dread of being buried alive, and used to beseech the orderlies not to send them to the dead-house until quite sure that they had breathed their last. Utter collapse was the last stage of Asiatic cholera, and the orderlies took little pains to ascertain when the exact moment of dissolution came; consequently numbers of still living men were hurried to the dead-house. Into these insanitary, filthy, and pestilential wards came the Lady-in-Chief, and she did not say 'All right.' It was useless for officialdom to 'pool-poo.' She fortunately had Government authority. What her quick eye saw was communicated to the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Raglan, and to Mr. Sidney Herbert at the War Office, and brought in due course the needed instructions for reform."

One of the first things to be organised by Miss Nightingale was an efficient kitchen. One Crimean veteran thus described his astonishment at the new order of things initiated. He received a basin of arrowroot on his first arrival at the hospital early in the morning, and he said to himself, "Tommy, me boy, that's all you'll get into your inside this blessed day, and think yourself lucky you've got that. But two hours later if another of them blessed angels didn't come entreating of me to have just a little chicken broth! Well, I took that, thinking it was maybe early dinner, and before I had well done wondering what would happen next, round the nurse came again with a bit of jelly, and all day long at intervals they kept on bringing me what they called a 'litle nourishment.' In the evening Miss Nightingale she came and had a look at me, and, says she, 'I hope you are feeling better?' I could have said, 'Ma'am, I feels as fit as a fighting cock,' but I managed to git out somethin' a bit more polite."

The next thing to be organised was a laundry and disinfecting station. Order and comfort replaced disorder and neglect in the wards, and the sick fairly worshipped their Lady-in-Chief, and even kissed her shadow as it fell.

The wives and widows of the soldiers were not forgotten. A certain number had been allowed to accompany their husbands, and were living in a most distressing condition; now the many infants which arrived were cared for, and employment was found for the women.

But though Miss Nightingale and her heroic band were rendering such unique service, at home she was not allowed to escape criticism. "Some declared that she

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