

Annotations.

THE FALL OF PORT ARTHUR.

Everyone must hail with relief the news that the sanguinary struggle about Port Arthur has come to an end. The conditions of the fortress during the last days of the siege are said to be too terrible for description, albeit they were not too terrible to be endured. There were twenty thousand sick and wounded, and but 4,000 were still able to help in the defence. A recent issue of the Port Arthur journal, *Novy Krai*, contains pathetic reference to the prevailing conditions: "we do not look for relief, but we can fight to the death. Russia will know what her sons have suffered, and yet it is past power of human genius to paint or describe Port Arthur's sufferings as they really are." Victor and vanquished are alike to be congratulated on their courage.

HOSPITAL SHIPS.

Mr. Alfred Stead describes in detail in a letter to a contemporary the Japanese arrangements as to hospital ships, arrangements which have certainly added much to the efficiency of the provision for the care of the sick and wounded during the present war. The hospital ships are under the Red Cross Society, which, like most Japanese undertakings, is organised with wonderful thoroughness and efficiency. It numbers over a million members, and after the war with China, when the necessity of hospital ships to transport the sick and wounded in any future war was recognised, steps were taken to make effective provision.

It was decided that it was useless to depend upon transports improvised into hospital ships on the outbreak of the war, because at such a time all available vessels are needed for the service of the active forces. Even should these transports be available, the lack of adequate sanitary arrangements in vessels not specially constructed for the purpose intended was considered too great a danger to be risked. It was decided, therefore, to build hospital ships of special design.

To minimise the expense, and also to obviate the drawback of the lying idle of such ships in long periods of peace, an arrangement was made with the steamship company, Nippon-Yusen Kaisha, subsidised by the Government, on the following lines:—

The Society built and equipped at its own expense two ships for the transport of the sick and wounded.

The plan of construction was determined by a technical committee, composed of the directors of the medical services of the army and navy, a naval architect appointed by the Imperial Navy, an engineer of the steamship company, and members of the Administrative Committee of the Red Cross Society.

The actual construction of the vessels was confided to the Nippon-Yusen Kaisha, to which the ships were subsequently sold at the cost of construction, repayable in instalments without interest extending over twenty years, on condition that whenever the Society had need of them for relief service one or both ships should be placed at its service without delay, the Society to pay the company an indemnity during the time ships are in use.

During the twenty years the company is responsible for damage to or loss of the ships. At the end of the twenty years the Society undertakes to build three ships with the accumulated sum of the partial payments from the company and the compound interest paid upon them by the bank of deposit.

The two steamers, the *Hakuai Maru* and the *Kosai Maru*, each costing £54,000, were completed on the Clyde in 1898 within eighteen months after the arrangement was entered into. Each contains 208 beds, and has complete arrangements for hospital purposes. During the Boxer rising they made seven trips and carried 3,059 patients. During the present war they have been supplemented by seven improvised ships, but it was possible to give the necessary time for the transformation of these, as, owing to the foresight of the Red Cross Society, the two special ships were ready for service at the beginning of the war.

Great Britain might well take a lesson from Japan as to a service of hospital ships. In the Boer War, if we except the transports, one of the hospital ships was provided by the liberality of the present Queen (then Princess of Wales), who is ever solicitous for the welfare of the sick soldier; the other (the *Maine*) by the generosity of American women in London. But neither were built for the purpose for which they were used, and there was considerable delay in one case, as more than once the ship broke down before leaving British waters and had to return to dock. It is obvious that as we, like the Japanese, are a maritime nation, we should during time of peace make adequate provision for time of war, which is the moment for effective action, not for preparation.

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