

Recollections : 1899 and 1900.

BY AN ARMY RESERVE SISTER.

The time I spent in South Africa already seems getting dream-like and misty, though a few main impressions will always stand out large in one's memory.

Being at liberty when the Boer War broke out and a surgically inclined person, I put my name down as a Volunteer for the Army Nursing Service, directly there was a hint more nurses would be required. I was politely told by the War Office I should not be required, and was a selected candidate for two hospital appointments the same week that I was telegraphed for, to hold myself in readiness to sail for Africa in four days.

It was an exciting time and full of work, between interviews, shopping and adieux. I shall not soon forget the send-off our mail steamer had from Southampton. She carried 1,200 of the Lancashire Fusiliers, all of whom, except some 200, died at Spion Kop, only a few months later. But early in December, 1899, such things as reverses were not dreamt of, and the one fear of all was that we "should be too late for everything."

A few hours ahead of us sailed a troop-ship, and the sight and sound of such numbers on their decks and ours singing patriotic songs, which were taken up and echoed by crowds on the docks, was very fine.

The first morning nearly everyone was up to breakfast, and we congratulated each other on being such excellent sailors. We felt rather crestfallen when we heard we had not put out to sea at all, but were befogged in Southampton water. Soon after this, for obvious reasons, many of us were lost to sight till we reached Madeira. Here we landed for a few hours, and I came away with a general impression of a land overflowing with fruit and flowers.

On board I got my first shock over nursing

matters. One of the soldiers was very ill with pneumonia, and as there were only two nursing Sisters on board, we naturally wanted to help. We were told "Certainly not, an orderly was in attendance, and it was not suitable for a young Sister to go to the troop deck." I was not youthful, and had recently been Sister of a male ward of thirty beds. The man died, and to this day I wonder—but some things are "bes' lef'" as Mrs. Green observes.

We made a record passage of seventeen days across 5,900 odd miles, and arrived in Table Bay about midnight, just before Christmas. Although we were below, an indefinite feeling of uneasiness soon seemed to spread round the ship, which was not relieved by



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hearing two of the Tommies talking outside our state cabin window. "They might as well chuck us overboard as send us up to Natal," was the remark, and the poor fellow was right, for they went direct to Spion Kop.

The news they were discussing was of Magersfontein, of Colenso, and of Stormberg. After a dreary wait of two days, I got my orders for Wynberg Camp, eight miles from Cape Town, where there was always a small stationary hospital of about forty beds, at this time enlarged to over 1,000, by using wooden barrack huts as wards.

The camp had an ideal situation; behind, the bold range of Table Mountain, in front a

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