

LETTERS FROM THE FRONT.

BRITISH CONVALESCENT HOME FOR WOUNDED
[SOLDIERS, PETROGRAD.]

A correspondent writing from Petrograd says that when the War broke out the British Community, anxious to help, finally decided to establish a Convalescent Home for wounded soldiers, and obtained a wing of a hospital, used as an orphanage, on the outskirts of the town, which had been given over to the Red Cross Society, and which was placed at the disposal of the British Community, to be fitted up at their expense.

The surgeons on the staff of the main hospital attend the patients, and any operations and dressings required are performed in the main building. The wing, besides the administrative portion, contains a ward of eight beds, with a bath room, and cosy sitting room attached for officers, and three large rooms containing forty-two beds.

The letter continues: We were very fortunate in getting an English lady who understands Russian well enough to keep the many documents required by the Red Cross Society, under which we work; our Head Sister is a Russian Red Cross Sister, just home from the Balkan War. Under her there are twelve ladies, myself—an English nurse—and a masseuse, four woman servants, three men, two of whom do orderly work, bath the patients, shave them and cut their hair; and several English ladies take turns to be "visiting lady" for a week at a time.

The nurses' hours are most perplexing. Sister Anna is there always, and sleeps in the large hospital next door. She directs everything to do with the nursing, and diet of special cases. I come in every morning and remain as long as I like. The other nurses come on at eight in the evening (two of them together) and remain on for twenty-four hours. One lies down on a sofa for half the night while the other goes about the wards, then they change places. At eight in the morning two more nurses come on, these also go away at eight at night, when all get time off. Those who have done twenty-four hours' duty get thirty-six hours off, and then return for their day duty of twelve hours. Those who have been on day duty get forty-eight hours off and return for their twenty-four hours' duty. It is a bad system and works badly, but with these nurses who are all only nurses while the War lasts and have their own households to look after, I am told that it is the only way to manage.

We opened on October 6th with a Russian service—the choir being composed of the orphans whom we had turned out of their home, who sang very well. Then we waited for some time for our patients, but this was really very fortunate, as it gave us time to attend to small details and rectify "forgets."

The men were announced in the morning, and

came an hour before we expected them—twenty wounded men, most of them able to walk, one or two recovering from very serious wounds; they had all been to other hospitals before they came to Petrograd, but they were very dirty and ragged for all that; they were bathed and given their tea, and then they went by fours to the dressing-room, to have their wounds attended. I was sent with the first batch, and I was immensely sorry that I had had no opportunity of studying the ways of the room beforehand. I think now, that, provided the nurse keeps her eyes open, dresses in an overall, and conforms to some rules about not touching things and not passing a certain part of the floor, she can go on her own method a good deal; and I found both surgeon and nurses very patient and kind.

In the wards things were rather more difficult to manage—of course, methods differ in different countries; we roll our patients, they lift theirs; we put on hot poultices, they use cold compresses, &c., &c., so that when two of us were set to do anything together we failed to understand what the other was about; however, we are shaking down, and Sister Anna allows me to wash anyone I like "English fashion." The worst thing was sorting the clothes. Each soldier has two bags prepared—in one his clothes are put, the linen the overcoat, &c., everything that can be sterilized; the bag is tied up, and his name and number are put upon it; in the other bag are his boots and all the other things which would spoil under the great heat. Sorting the clothes, emptying the pockets of the mud-stained coats—often soaked with blood—and feeling in the long boots, which the mujik so often uses as a pocket, was not pleasant work. Two days later another batch of patients came in just at dinner time, chiefly medical cases—one man suffering from pneumonia, who died next day; every one else is doing well; and now we are full upstairs.

The patients get their dinner at noon; most of them sit round the tables and behave very well; after dinner each man crosses himself before the icon, and then turns and thanks the Sister who is presiding; after that they go and smoke and get a lounge in the garden if the weather permits; they are a nice set of men, very easily pleased, very grateful, very ready to talk, and even more ready to ask questions. I only wish my Russian were good enough for me to give them little lectures; they are so keen for information. A favourite question is, "Why are our Czar and your King so much alike?" I was asked, "Why do the Americans talk English?" and one soldier remarked, "Of course, there must be a Latin language, or else we should have no doctors."

We have two Jews, an Armenian, a Cossack, and a man who can only speak Sart; but most of the men are just Russian mujiks. I like mujiks, they are so respectful, quiet and well-behaved; and now that they are to have no more vodka and plenty of schools, Europe will, I hope, see great things.

M. E. F.

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