

BRITISH NURSES IN FRANCE.

Many people consider nursing in French hospitals so hopeless that to help the French soldiers Anglo-French and Anglo-American hospitals have been organised in many parts of France. This opinion has been formed on pretty good evidence of the conditions generally obtaining in hospitals nursed by nuns, and by untrained Red Cross workers, but for all that there is also evidence that the British trained nurse is beginning to make her mark wherever she has a chance of proving her powers, and we are of those optimistic persons who firmly believe that a little good done is better than none, and that nothing of good is ever lost or wasted.

We get peeps into many French hospitals in letters from over the Channel, and are not surprised to learn that jealousy plays its usual cruel part in opposing the efforts of trained nurses. But have we not just the same demon to fight at home? One nurse writes: "It is awful to watch the Red Cross ladies doing the dressings, often giving needless pain through their ignorance, for to receive a Red Cross certificate is a very high qualification here, and they are most jealous of the dressings, so that we have to suffer in silence, unbandaging and bandaging, often cleaning up the wound surreptitiously, and mopping up iodine and silver nitrate spilled all over the skin before reapplying the bandage."

Another writes: "From other quarters you must have heard the many difficulties that arise to meet English nurses working in France. We have been particularly isolated here, and with so few of us it has been quite impossible to organise nursing in a large institution, with probably 120 untrained helpers, who insisted on doing dressings, above all, feeding the patients with dainties, and then gazing in amazement at our attempt to make beds and keep things clean. It was evident from the beginning that we would be forced to walk "gingerly" and it has been by doing *what we could* and in some cases doing in Rome as the Romans, that we have managed in the slightest degree to gain the respect of the other workers. Even more difficult has it been to get the medical men to realise the meaning of "certificated" nurses, and to recognise our nursing powers. Can you imagine the feelings of a 'diplomée' when a doctor deliberately chooses in her presence a young man, by trade anything, to give several anæsthetics in a morning, or perhaps to do a big dressing in his absence? However, that is finished; we have worked quietly and we have gained." The writer of this letter is the right woman in the right place. How incomparable is common-sense!

Another nurse writes: "Our hospital is our own, we work it entirely with helpers from the village, untrained, but kind and most willing to

learn. There are three separate buildings which were schools, with from 28 to 30 beds in each, and beds at the convent, nursed by nuns; 50 beds at Baron——'s Château, which is a most beautiful place and well equipped, originally intended for convalescents, but now used as a regular hospital, and worked by three British nurses. . . . We were sent down by Countess H—— to open this hospital, but I am grieved to say we are not well treated, and the administration is in such a muddle the whole scheme may fail. Our French doctors (trained in England) cannot understand the attitude of the committee, and are utterly ashamed of it.

"It is a brighter tale to turn to the patients. Our first] batch (120 men) were principally Soudanese and Singalese, the second all French. Shall I ever forget the stretchers coming in, and the still, black figures? Not a sound; only their eyes moved. Icy cold they were, badly wounded, patiently enduring. They had been in the train three or four days, some had been wounded for three weeks, no attention but the first field dressing, the wounds of many pouring with pus; typhoids and scarlet fever amongst them. We had four deaths from tetanus in a week. How pitiful are the military funerals! We have sent a good many back to the firing line, and they go most bravely. From our English stores we fit each one with woollen comforts; they are most grateful.

"Our 'darkies' are so interesting; their gratitude and devotion are most touching. I have a ward of 14 beds, and from the beginning have done most of the dressings, so that 'Madame Sister' is a wonderful person in their eyes. One morning I had extra time off; the patients were told I was dead. One shook his head, and pointing to the ceiling said, 'Non, le bon Dieu ne fait jamais ça,' and when I arrived the welcome in Soudanese, Singalese, Arabic and French was not to be forgotten. We have been reading about the French Flag Nursing Corps. After all our experiences, amazement is the only word that expresses what we think. They will never realise in England what a big thing has been accomplished in having the French Government recognise this corps of British nurses. We who have worked here, and know the Red Cross opposition to any such scheme, can realise its significance.

"All the time the men have been dying in the trenches and elsewhere, for want of good nursing, there have been dozens of English nurses waiting in Paris for work they might not do, and dozens of ambulance men loafing about for five weeks—the soldiers in utmost need. It made one's heart ache to think of it. I read of the French Flag Corps work, out of THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING, to our surgeons. They can hardly believe it. 'What! English nurses in French military hospitals! Amazing!' Our patients who have been in them tell us of the terrible need of good nurses, and say they are in an appalling state. If this hospital is closed later we would much like to join the Corps with which you have had to do."

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