LETTERS FROM THE FRONT.

NURSING FRENCH SOLDIERS.

Having just returned from six months' nursing of the French soldiers I thought perhaps a slight description of the work and difficulties from one who has been through them might interest your readers. We, a unit of trained Nurses, were sent to work at the Hôpital Militaire, a base hospital, under usual circumstances a civil hospital, of some twelve pavilions, built only six years ago and therefore one might say "up-to-date." White tiled floors, painted walls and ceilings; each pavilion with windows at either side and consisting of two large *salles* or wards, seven smaller rooms in between—one used as a kitchen for cooking extras. The distribution of the food was done by the nuns with the help of infirmiers and convalescing soldiers. The lingerie, for storing linen was kept also by the nuns; a room for the soldiers' own uniform, all of which was fumigated, and various other offices. Each pavilion was under one nun or two—it depended on the sort of cases taken in. They saw to the bed linen and bed-making, with the help of infirmiers and the soldiers, and superintended all the feeding. I was very much struck with the French idea of feeding an invalid, say a pneumonia—he would have on his locker a jug of milk, a jug of bouillon and a jug of tisane, and he might help himself. This supply was brought round twice a day and if he finished his portion before the time for more he had to wait. When a little better he had potato purée and perhaps eggs twice a day, and sometimes rice pudding. Then he quickly got on to ordinary diet, which was vegetable soup with bread in it about 10 o'clock—nothing before. *Ma Sœur* went round with an infirmier and a large basket of bread; she put on the foot of each soldier's bed a chunk of bread, sometimes when you were doing his dressing. Then came wooden trays with plates of meat and haricot beans, or a stew with vegetables or meat and rice or eggs. Then supper at 4 o'clock, when they had again a plate of meat and vegetables and a large piece of bread, with cider to drink both at 11 and again at 4. Nothing more till next morning. After the beds were made and the soldiers washed (many of them had no soap and *ma Sœur* kept the soap under lock and key and would allow one square out for the doctors) came the Visit. Sometimes the doctor began his round at 8 o'clock. We all trooped after him. That is *ma Sœur*, who knew all about her soldiers, myself, the Sergeant who wrote the prescriptions (and they were only for 24 hours) and took orders about presenting the soldier's papers to the Médecin Chef for discharge. Educated men also act as infirmiers, but are not to be confused with the infirmiers who cleaned the wards or distributed the food; they did cupping, of which there was a great deal, gave enemas and helped with the dressings. They were a trial with the dressings—forgot to wash their hands, except after a dressing, would feel if the boiled water were hot with their dirty fingers and rummaged indiscriminately in the sterilized gauze or wool box, leave dirty dressings lying about on a bed or the floor, or a table, and never by any chance cleaned up a basin they had used: they left that to you. Neither had they any instruments—and the ward very few. Unless you kept a very sharp look-out after your own instruments they were left about and nobody knew anything about them, so it was nobody's fault if they were lost. Yet in spite of these little drawbacks, the French are a charming nation. They cheerfully do the work they have to do, and thoroughly enjoy their smokes and games.

The doctors devote their whole time and energies to their work and their surgery is wonderfully effective. Plaster of Paris is much used instead of splints, with windows left to dress the wound, but it means much massage after, as the plaster is sometimes left on for six weeks. For an extension anything—heavy bricks for choice. But the cures are wonderful. One man—to state a case—had two inches of bone taken from his right shoulder; he had no shoulder joint, and yet I saw that man digging day after day in the grounds. My part was to do the dressings, see to any little thing a bedfast soldier wanted, and to keep the wards as straight and tidy as I could, see to the cutting of the gauze for dressings, also the wool, give hypodermics, of which there are many; and one time, when we had in a number of pneumonias, I gave over thirty in the day.

The great difficulty one has, if not a fluent French speaker, is the receiving orders from the doctor or *ma Sœur*, as they have not time or patience to keep trying to explain again and again. When a soldier is very ill he cannot be bothered to tell his wants to someone who does not understand, and you just have to do what you think best, but it is not always to his satisfaction, though a soldier is a most grateful man for any little attention, and if you have the luck to have an English-speaking Frenchman in the ward he will always come to your help. There are no screens, which is sometimes trying till you get used to it, as all those who are up and dressed take a keen interest in one another's dressings and lend each other little mirrors to see their own wound. I shall not forget my feelings when first doing a fistula. Eight or ten soldiers all looking on and discussing it, all ready to lend a helping hand in the dressing, with the box of gauze and wool, and the postman came in and stood at the bottom of the bed, remarking, "Tch, tch, cette mauvaise place—c'est bizarre," and I thought so too.

One cannot speak too highly of the French cheerfulness—their accepting circumstances without a grumble when one remembers what war means to them—every man in the service of his country. In hospital work one must remember that though their ways are not our ways they are not therefore ways to be sneered at, but suit the people and meet the circumstances, perhaps, better than our ways would. Always keep in mind that *ma Sœur* is the head of her ward and has the welfare of her soldiers at heart and is devoted to them.

AN ADMIRER.

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