

### "MY EXPERIENCES ON THREE FRONTS."\*

Sister Martin-Nicholson, who went out to Belgium in August, 1914, with the party sent out by the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, has added yet another to the "War Books" in "My Experiences on Three Fronts," published by George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., Ruskin House, 40, Museum Street, W.C. After Belgium, Sister Martin-Nicholson went on to Russia with Miss Violetta Thurstan, returning shortly to England on urgent personal affairs, and later nursed in France with both the French and English troops.

One question, asked by the author, who herself spoke French fluently, is, "Why is it that amongst the many things we nurses learn in hospital (some so totally unnecessary) the vital question of language is never gone into? Few have any idea of the confusion which time after time has arisen during this war through the inability of nurses, Sisters, Matrons and doctors to speak even the most elementary French.

"It is a terrible triangle, that of patient who does not understand nurse, and nurse who does not understand doctor; and of the contingent which went across with me that day to help a French-speaking people only I spoke French perfectly. Of the rest one spoke well, and two or three stammered a few words."

Sister Martin-Nicholson was one of the party of English nurses who arrived in Brussels by the last train allowed in from Ostend. She writes:—"Hundreds of people had gathered to welcome us. In rows and rows they stood, until the square of the Gare du Nord was packed tight, and the thunder of their cheers rent the evening air.

"God bless you for coming! God keep you and help us, for the Germans are at the gates."

The Sister refrained from obtaining the British newspapers, which were secretly circulated, realising the danger to the runners, but news was communicated to her by word of mouth. She relates:—

"Then one day I sped as swiftly as I dared to my news corner, for German wounded were pouring in, and the guns had not ceased morning or night for many days. A sinister whisper was afoot, and so, knowing that Jean-Marie was due back, I hastened up the steep little street. The door was open, but the place was unswept, the air forlorn. In a corner, with tears streaming down from the poor old eyes staring straight ahead, sat the mother with a grimy bit of paper in her hand. Gently I took it and read:—

"To advise Widow Brun that her son, Jean-Marie, was caught carrying letters from Antwerp, and was shot at dawn.—A FRIEND."

"And in this little house of mourning, while doing what I could to help the stricken mother, I

rejoiced that, in spite of terrible temptation, I had never sent one letter by runner to England or bought one newspaper smuggled into the city."

Another note is:—"At the end of each day sounds of revelry and ribald mirth would rise to the starlit skies; for women had been provided, like so much cattle, for the German soldiery, each regiment being allotted so many women on so many nights a week."

In one hospital where she was on duty Sister relates that she went across the gardens "to be caught in a vortex of German nurses. They had just arrived, weary and dusty, and had already heard of the English Sister, and, full of patriotism, they turned and scowled at me." Soon afterwards "A thundering knock brought me to the door. The Colonel Graf von B—— begged me to pack at once, as the German nurses had gone on strike, refusing to work if the Englishwoman remained."

On another occasion, when looking after the wounded at the railway station (though thereby hangs another tale) we read, "A strong hand pulled me roughly to the ground. 'Get out of here, and quickly—quickly!'

"The soldier pushed me violently, but was not quick enough to prevent me seeing what I was not supposed to see. A train steamed slowly by. A guard was at each window, and packed together in each carriage a screaming, shrieking, blaspheming set of German soldiers, all of them mad, raving mad from the horror and strain of what they had undergone. They were being taken back, in straight jackets, or handcuffed, to the country which had brought them to such a state."

Of the journey from Belgium to Denmark by way of Germany, Sister Nicholson relates that the two soldiers in her carriage not only crushed themselves into a corner so as to give the nurses more room, but also helped them to arrange their light luggage.

She emphasises the difference between German soldiers and the German officers. The former were "perfectly tractable and grateful after they had once got over their sullen suspicion of the enemy woman, of whose treatment of her patients almost incredible tales were told, such as that she went round at night to gouge out their eyes with scissors and put poison in their medicine." The officers—those who were victors in Belgium—she found, with one or two exceptions, brutal, domineering and ready in every instance to browbeat and insult, and she maintains that, except for the dressing, feeding and general management of the seriously ill, the officers should be attended by orderlies.

Like other nurses, Sister Martin-Nicholson testifies to the kindness of their reception in Denmark, and to the joy of seeing smiling faces.

The route of the Sisters, of whom the author was one, who went on to Russia, lay through Sweden, and at Stockholm she relates, "Directly we stepped out of the train I felt that curious, hostile glances were turned to my uniform. And at the hotel recommended to us in Copenhagen

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[previous page](#)

[next page](#)