

FROM THE LETTERS OF A NURSE.

Paris! and a heavenly Sunday morning. Never had the city looked more beautiful—the flower beds and borders in the Parc Manceau a riot of colour, the exquisitely clean streets in the brilliant sunshine fringed with the cool shade of the long avenues of tall, green trees. I had been away from it all for a long time nursing in the ugly barrack hospital of a squalid little town, and there is something so particularly welcoming about a return to Paris after a long absence. I was so glad to be back. *Tout homme a deux patries la Sienne et la France.*

It would not be for long, for I had volunteered and been accepted for service in the East, but this morning I could revel in the thought of a long Sunday of leisure. I could worship at the beautiful devotional morning service at St. George's, and receive inspiration from one of Dr. Cardew's sermons and then, because I had been working so hard nursing in very bleak surroundings, I thought I might indulge in the treat of the concert at the Sorbonne, a really dainty dinner with a delightful Irish friend, in the Bois de Boulogne, and afterwards, in the cool, a long, long walk together through the woods and home by them in the moonlight.

And the morning fully came up to one's expectations, but on my return to the little hotel at midday, when the heat had become a little overpowering, there was an abrupt change of programme. The clerk advances from his little bureau to greet me with a telephone message he had taken down for me from the Ministère de la Guerre. The hospital ship *P*— would sail early on Monday for Salonika. They had secured my passage by wire; I must take the express on Sunday to arrive at Toulon in time.

It was a very packed train; there were seven *Militaires* in our carriage, the youngest of whom shut with a horrified exclamation the window I had timidly opened. As we neared Toulon my spirits rose; from past experience I felt sure the *P*— would not sail before the afternoon. How delightful to explore Toulon and see at close quarters the many interesting warships of all nations, but before one had time to more than glance round at the crowded, animated streets and recover breath after the tight fit of the shut railway carriage all passengers for the hospital ship *P*— were ordered on board, and I find myself surrounded by no less than seven big bundles, packages and wraps in a small cabin without a porthole. I have just tidily apportioned and fitted all this luggage round me when an angry Frenchwoman—one of the hospital ship's permanent staff—vociferates from the little passage that I have been put into the particular cabin she had appropriated, and for which she had a very particular fancy. She stated afterwards that she heard me murmur "*J'y suis, j'y reste,*" and I confess it is my way to talk big even when well aware that I am vanquished. Any way, in the

end I find myself meekly vacating her airless dug-out, and finally established by four or five onlookers—French soldiers—in a really good cabin with porthole and bath.

No sooner have we started than I find that for the moment we are not going to Salonika at all, but that the boat's nose—if one may so express it—is turned towards Algiers, that the *P*— is a very big boat of no less than 22,000 tons, ravenous in her consumption of coal, the price of which at Toulon at the present time is 140 francs a ton. So that very slowly we are making for Algiers, where we shall stay about five days and lay in a really good supply. Five days at Algiers, all expenses paid, is all very well, but now that I have got over the disappointment of my broken-up Sunday in Paris I want to be back at work.

At table I was placed with the staff of ship nurses, eleven in all, and on their return trip there would be probably three thousand sick and wounded to tend. I don't suppose they looked on me with the admiring interest I did on them. Most of them were so pretty, kind, vivacious, their little white hands raised and gesticulating when they talked, though professionally I objected to the little hands being laden with rather dirty diamond rings. One, a young Parisian, was heavily perfumed *très décolletée*, ends of pink and mauve ribbons outlining her pretty chemise, surrounded always by many admirers on the captain's bridge. There was a little plain, elderly one—it was her first trip at sea, nor had she often travelled by land—she was mortally afraid of submarines and shipwreck and of being inoculated against cholera. I saw what it all cost her and how the round little brown shoulder was trembling when presented for the *médecin chef's* inoculating needle. She was short-sighted, too, timid, awkward and plain, but when the surgeons gathered in conclave to apportion to each nurse her particular duty, it was she they unanimously chose to take charge of the beautiful operating theatre. The *médecin chef* had seen her work, and deft indeed it was. Afterwards I heard that she never tired, on the sad journey home, when the *P*— was over-full with sick and wounded, and, alas! many dying men. She began her day always with attendance at the earliest Mass, and after a long, long day, when her duties in the theatre were over, she would be in the wards looking after her patients till late in the night. Arrived at Algiers, I longed to be alone—to have respite from the long, long ship's meals, and the effort to be as cheerful, chattering and vivacious as the French.

On a passing tram was written "Kuba." There was something alluring in the name, and I climbed on to it. A very small package by way of luggage in my hand, an order of absence from the ship till Monday evening signed by the *médecin chef* in my pocket, no fixed plan of any sort in my head.

It was hot but all beautiful and interesting. We left Algiers far behind, the road to Kuba always ascending, and the air becoming deliciously

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