

RUSSIAN RED CROSS SISTERS.

Writing on Red Cross Sisters in Russia in the magazine of the N.U.I.N., Miss Violetta Thurstan says:—

"Russian nurses are called 'Sister' from the first day they enter their training schools. They are considered and spoken of always as Sisters of Mercy, though they do not take any religious vows. Some of the training schools are very strict, and do not allow their sisters to walk in the street with any man, even if it is a near relative, nor to take any meal in a public tea-room or restaurant.

"The term of training varies from two and a half to four years, and this always includes a course in the dispensary. At the end of the training the sister receives a certificate and is diplomée, having the right to wear a red cross sewn on to the bib of her apron. No one is allowed to wear the red cross on their apron unless they are fully trained, though they may and do wear it on their arm as a brassard.

"The various 'obschenas,' or training schools, have slightly different uniforms for their nurses. The dresses are of cotton, either dark brown, dark blue, or grey. The ordinary aprons are of blue check on weekdays, black alpaca on Sundays and a small white cambric one on very special occasions. The cap is usually of the Army handkerchief type, but it is so arranged as to conceal all the hair, and fastens in front instead of at the back. When the sisters enter the wards they invariably put on a white theatre overall that covers them up from head to foot. They are so wedded to the idea that this is the only possible garment to wear in the wards that they will occasionally cover up a spotless apron, just put on, with a crumpled, none too clean overall; but this is exceptional, as Russian sisters are extremely well trained in the matter of asepsis, and are far beyond ourselves in many ways in this respect. They are inclined to despise English nurses for not being as particular as they are in many little ways, and are particularly shocked at the way English nurses leave their hair uncovered. They often ask if we are not afraid that dust from the hair might fall on to the wound. Most of their training time is given up to surgical work; indeed at some of the training schools in Petrograd no medical cases are taken at all. The result is, of course, that the bandaging and dressing is exquisitely done and an example to most English nurses, while the art of nursing, as we have it in England, is—apart from the wound—entirely unknown. That is to say, if a man is admitted with a severe wound in the chest, the wound is most carefully and adequately treated and beautifully bandaged, while the pneumonia that accompanies it is hardly nursed at all. There is little or no sponging down of feverish patients, no 'art of bedmaking,'—the 'sedeilka,' or ward-maid, generally makes the bed—and very little idea of

bringing dainty little dishes to tempt the patient's appetite; if they do not like, or do not want, what is provided, they simply leave it.

"Russian food is very good and of great variety. The sisters are generally well fed in hospital, and in any case very rarely grumble about their food. At the front, where food was often scarce, the Russian sisters never minded, and were quite cheerful if there did not happen to be any dinner that day. The usual hours for meals are:—

Coffee and bread and butter at 7 or 7.30 a.m.
Dinner at 3 p.m. or 3.30, two courses, followed by tea and biscuits.

Supper about 8 or 8.30, again followed by tea.

No regular meal is provided for night duty; tea can be had at any time.

"There is no regular staff of night nurses; the sisters take it in turns to sit up. When the wards are very busy, this is extremely tiring. One's turn may come once or even twice in a week and it means all day on duty, all night, and then all day again. When the wards are slack, however, a morning off, for sleep, is given after the night's duty.

"Russian sisters are extremely kind and gentle to their patients, and much beloved by them; indeed, such a thing as a troublesome patient is almost unknown.

"Russian hospitals are generally very large, and look drab, dreary places sometimes, without the pretty counterpanes, books and flowers, of our English hospitals. Dressings are almost never done in the wards; the atmosphere would be considered too septic. The patients are put on a stretcher and carried off to the dressing room. This has many advantages, but also some disadvantages, as in bad fracture cases, for instance, it is not always beneficial to the patient to be lifted from the bed to the stretcher, from the stretcher to the table in the dressing-room, then back to the stretcher, and, finally, back to bed.

"There is much that we can mutually learn from each other. The Russian sisters can teach us a good deal about surgical work, and their self-sacrifice, extreme endurance, and devotion to duty, teach us many a lesson. From us they have very much to learn as regards actual nursing and making the patient comfortable. In Moscow there has been a movement on foot for some time to introduce the English system of nursing into that city, and the Municipality have now just applied to the National Union of Trained Nurses to send a fully trained nurse out as Matron of one of the Military Hospitals. So the little seed has been sown; let us hope that it may bring about a great harvest."

The Chelsea Hospital for Women has received from the Trustees of the Zunz Bequest £5,000, being the balance of the £10,000 generously promised by the Trustees towards the rebuilding of the hospital.

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