

THE FRENCH FLAG NURSING CORPS.

Strange it seems that the nursing of nervous cases appeals to so few Sisters. At the beginning of the war the French Government asked specially for nerve nurses, and the Inspecteur-Général, who at that period had the power to invite foreign assistance, went to great trouble to induce Britain to send nerve nurses.

At one important nerve centre in the war zone a Scotch Sister, F.F.N.C., is in charge, and finds her work of unending interest. Always ready to tell a joke against herself this Sister informs one that she owes her appointment to the fact that the Head Doctor considered her the hardest woman he had ever met, which is her own appreciation of the firm character she possesses, and which is indispensable for nerve work.

As may be supposed the number of nerve cases coming from the French front is legion. There are patients who have completely lost their reason, and others highly nervous have acquired the mentality of little children; yet others have limbs which appear totally paralysed, others have deluded themselves or allowed their gentle amateur nurses to delude them into becoming very sick men; and others are just tired men. All these cases are interesting; all need special and different treatment devised according to the psychological capacity of the Sister-in-Charge.

The first treatment naturally is to re-educate the will, and this is done by some form of discipline and physical exercises. Here, for example, is an ex-circus performer—the whole of his left side is completely paralysed—at least so it is supposed. The Sister, by the most careful observation, must help the doctor to decide whether this is the case or not. It is extremely difficult, for the patient has already made up his mind that he is paralysed, nevertheless his "will power" education begins with a course of massage and electricity. Under a strong current of electricity his dead arm has given the tiniest sign of life. The Sister then places the arm on a table, sits opposite to him, lays her hand near his and commands him to touch her hand. All the Sister's energy is concentrated on making the patient move his fingers. His "I cannot" is answered by her, "You have got to." She will not give way, he feels it. From sheer exhaustion he gets from somewhere the strength to make the superhuman effort and moves his fingers. The Sister has won.

And so the education of the paralysed arm perforce continues. The patient's limbs have regained life; as exercise he hops across the ward; he can brush the floor and carry pails of water, heavier by degrees, up and down stairs. Skipping, too, is an invaluable exercise, the directions being given in English, which, argues the Sister-in-Charge, makes the patient exercise curiosity, and therefore thought, no matter whether he understand or not, and the orders have ultimately to be translated. If the skipping and other physical exercises are unsatisfactory through inertia—and

the Sister can always tell—probably a strong course of electricity will be prescribed. The patients know that Sister means what she says, and so they give way.

The large ward is divided into cubicles, the patients are ordered complete rest and silence, and certain hours when they may and may not smoke. The silence, rest, fresh air and discipline work wonders.

But perhaps the most serious and responsible part of the work is to help the doctor to decide whether a patient is malingering. During the hours of massage and electricity the patient chatters, the Sister listens and observes, then makes her report.

Said the Head Doctor—only a very few people in any land could do the work. A keen observer, a good psychologist, a woman passionately interested in her work, is of course necessary, but to succeed she must be what this doctor calls "a super-woman." One who inspired by pity and tenderness and justice and all the other feminine attributes yet keeps her head, and sees only her duty to heal the patient. The F.F.N.C. congratulates itself on the work of its Sisters.

The concert in the French military hospitals is a very favourite form of amusement, and amongst the simple *poilus* is some of the finest talent in the land. Ah! the pity of it that such talent must go to the trenches, yet, as an opera singer recently remarked, "Why should our profession not be sacrificed as well as the others, why should not we pay for the privilege of citizenship?"

Nevertheless a hospital where musical and dramatic talent is found is bright indeed. To pass away the time *Revue*s, so essentially a French art are given, and M. Clément of the Opéra Comique, and M. Joseph Bonnet, the organist of St. Eustace, Paris—the world's best known organist—are only too willing to give their less talented soldier brothers the benefit of their art.

At one Ambulance the celebrated Comédie Française actor, M. Ferandy, stayed for some time, and the Sisters and patients have retained the kindest remembrance of his wit and talent.

English poets and writers were amongst the first to take up ambulance work. Mr. John Masefield was an orderly at Arc-en-Barois, everyone knows the story of the British poet so appreciated in France, Rupert Brooke, whilst Mr. Lawrence Binyon whose beautiful "Ode" is one of the masterpieces of the war has been driving an ambulance in the Vosges. This poet is now writing a book which should be of great interest, the official account of England's help to France. Such a work must be written with all the tact and understanding Mr. Binyon is known to possess.

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