

A DIARY WITHOUT DATES.*

This "Diary without Dates," by Miss Enid Bagnold, V.A.D., is a book of great literary merit, as well as of keen insight, and the writer possesses one at least of the qualities which are essential to a good nurse, although she tells us "they are complaining that I am not efficient," for her power of observation is unquestionable, so that it is a brilliant record of hospital life as seen through the eyes of a V.A.D.

The Diary deals with Miss Bagnold's hospital experiences in three sections, "Outside the glass doors," "Inside the glass doors," and "The boys." Let the writer tell her own story.

OUTSIDE THE GLASS DOORS.

"I like discipline. I like to be part of an institution. It gives one more liberty than is possible among three or four observant friends.

"It is heaven to me to be one of such a number of faces.

"To see them pass into mess like ghosts—gentleman, tinker, and tailor—each having shuffled home from death, each having known his life rock on its base . . . not talking much—for what is there to say?—not laughing much for they have been here too long, is a nightly pleasure to me."

* * * *

"It takes all sorts to make a hospital.

"For instance, the visitors. . . .

"There is the lady who comes in to tea and wants to be introduced to everyone as though it was a school treat.

"She jokes about the cake, its scarcity or its quantity, and makes a lot of 'fun' about two lumps of sugar.

"There was once a lady who asked me very loudly whether I 'saw many horrible sights,' and 'did the V.A.D.s have to go to the funerals?'"

There is the tragedy of the father of a subaltern who was killed, and who came to glean what he might from his officer.

"Low voices. . . . There in the dimmest corner sat Captain Matthew, his chin dug deep in his grey dressing-gown, and beside him a little elderly man, his hat on his knees, his anxious ordinary face turned towards the light.

"A citizen—a baker, or a brewer, tinker, tailor, or candlestick maker?"

"There had been the buying of the uniform, the visits to the camp in England, the parcels to send out—always the parcels—week by week. And now nothing; no more parcels, no more letters—silence.

"Only the last hungry pickings from Captain Matthew's tired memory and nervous speech.

"I turned away with a great shrinking.

"In a very few minutes the citizen went past my bunk door, his hat in hand, his black coat buttoned, taking back to his home and his family the last facts that he might ever learn.

* William Heinemann, 20-21, Bedford Street, W.C. 2. 2s. 6d. net.

"At the end of the passage he almost collided with that stretcher which bears a flag.

"Of the two the stretcher moved me least."

INSIDE THE GLASS DOORS.

"My feet ache, ache, ache . . .!"

End of the first day.

"Life in a ward is all scurry and rush. I don't reflect; I'm putting on my cap anyhow, and my hands are going to the dogs.

"I shall never get to understand Sisters; they are so strange, so tricky, uncertain as collies. Deep down they have an ineradicable axiom: that any visitor, anyone in an old musquash coat, in a high-boned collar, in a spotted veil tied up at the sides, anyone with whom one shakes hands, or takes tea, is more important than the most charming patient (except of course, a warded M.O.)."

* * * *

There is the tragedy of Mr. Wicks. "It is curious to think that I once saw Mr. Wicks on a tennis lawn, walking across the grass. . . . Mr. Wicks, who will never put his foot on grass again, but lying in his bed, continues to say, as all Tommies say, 'I feel well in meself.'"

"The ward has put Mr. Wicks to Coventry because he has been abusive and violent-tempered for three days. . . .

"It is in these days that Mr. Wicks faces the truth. . . .

"He began a bitter conversation—

"Nurse, I'm only a ranker, but I had a bit saved. I went to a private doctor and paid for myself. And I went to a specialist and he told me I should never get this. I paid for it myself out of what I had saved. . . .

"There was nothing to be said. . . . One must have one's tea. I went down the ward to the bunk, and we cut the pink iced cake left over from Christmas. . . .

"I did not mean to forget him, but I forget him. From birth to death we are alone. . . .

"But one of the Sisters remembered him.

"Mr. Wicks is still in the dumps," she remarked.

"What is really the matter with him, Sister?"

"Locomotor ataxy.' And she added, as she drank her tea, 'It's his own fault.'

"Oh! hush, hush,' my heart cried soundlessly to her, 'You can't judge the bitterness of this, nun, from your convent.'"

THE SISTERS AS SEEN BY A V.A.D.

The attitude of Miss Bagnold to the Sisters, shows a lack of appreciation, and criticism, of women who may not be perfect, but we know are a splendid, self-sacrificing, disciplined and sympathetic class of workers, and our soldiers know it, too, though they may not be emotional or wear their hearts on their sleeves.

If we except the following remark, there is scarcely a criticism of the Sisters which is not adverse and often unjust:—

"The Sister who is over me, the only Sister who can laugh at things other than jokes, is going

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)