

NURSING AND THE WAR.

THE ENTRY INTO METZ.

NOVEMBER 19TH, 1918.

(Extracts from a Nurse's Journal.)

The current issue of the *Englishwoman* contains a vivid account of the entry into Metz by a Nurse (Miss Juliet Mansel), from which we print the following extracts:—

I do not think that English people fully realise what the entry into Metz meant to the French soldier and those who had been serving with the French army all through the War. It was to them the day above all others for which they have been fighting for four and a half years. It was their "Tag." Not one of those who took part in that march forward from Nancy on November 19th will easily forget the moment when they crossed the frontier into Lorraine, and by doing so re-claimed it as a French province after forty-seven years of bitter slavery.

Madame D'A., Mlle. C., and I were the only nurses of the "Groupe Léger Sanitaire No. 1" of the Tenth Army, and as our *groupe* had the privilege of being the sole "Section Sanitaire" allowed to go into Metz with the troops we congratulated ourselves on what was indeed an extraordinary bit of luck. The other formations being larger and more cumbersome, had to follow a few days later.

Our starting-point was Nancy, where we had been waiting for some time trying to cope with the masses of British prisoners who were coming through from Germany in the most piteous state of illness and neglect. Mangin's army had gone down to that part of the line from the Aisne to be in readiness to attack if the Germans did not sign the Armistice; and we, who had been working at Laon, found ourselves at Nancy on or about November 13th. The day for the entry of the troops was November 19th, and we left at 7 a.m. on a bright, cold morning, our convoy of nineteen ambulance cars all decked out with flags. I was in the last car, and I never saw a prettier sight than the long procession of beflagged ambulances speeding ahead of us, and climbing the steep "couronne" above the town in the morning sunlight. We soon crossed the old line and then the frontier. The country was not nearly so devastated as on the Aisne but a network of immensely deep trenches and dug-outs marked the four years of trench warfare that went on in this region. The moment we crossed the frontier we noticed a marked change in the landscape. Everywhere there were neat, well-built villages, red-tiled roofs, and numerous other marks of German thoroughness, down to the inevitable notices in large black lettering, beginning "Es ist verboten," which abounded in every village. Even the children looked more thoroughly drilled and obedient. There was no need of a post to mark the frontier; one could

not fail to see where the Boche had begun to lay his hand.

The entry of the troops was truly magnificent, but we were all terribly disappointed because Mangin did not lead his glorious 10th Army. He had had a fall from his horse just before entering the town, and was so badly hurt he was taken to hospital, where he remained for three weeks. It ought to have been essentially Mangin's day, for it was his army more than any other that had started pushing back the Germans in July. Fortunately his fall was not serious; but it was a cruel disappointment to the great leader not to come into Metz with his troops. However, we could not but be thrilled as we heard the strains of the Marseillaise coming nearer and nearer, with the tramp of thousands of feet, and saw the flashing of the first grey helmets in the sun. At last, at last, the gallant Poilus were coming into their own. Lorraine was French once more. The bitter days of 1870 were avenged.

The march past lasted over an hour and a half. I will not attempt to describe it all here. The infantry came first, the 233rd, the 164th, the 8th, and many more—all regiments decorated with the red or yellow "fourragère"—regiments that Madame D'A. and I knew so well, whose wounded she and I had nursed after the attacks in Flanders and on the Oise and the Aisne in sadder times. It was a supreme moment as they marched in now so proudly to their glorious music, the Colonel and the flag at the head of each regiment, and as our thoughts flew to those other thousands who had fought and died amongst them, we could not help feeling that they too were watching and knew. Then there were the artillery and the armoured cars and tanks, and the Colonial cavalry, who were greeted with redoubled cheering from the already hoarse-throated crowd; one old boy standing by me, a veteran of 1870, throwing up his hat and shouting, "Vive les Américains," when he saw the mustard-coloured uniforms of the "Chasseurs d'Afrique!"

After the review a *Te Deum* was to be sung in the Cathedral, but the dense crowd collected in the streets unfortunately prevented us from getting there in time. When at last we had managed to force our way to the Place in front of the Cathedral, the ceremony was nearly over; but I shall always remember the scene in the grey autumn twilight—the squadrons of Chasseurs d'Afrique, on their white Arabs, pressing back the surging crowds—the mighty Cathedral looming up grand and solemn in the background, and when Pétain and his attendant generals emerged from the shadowy porch, the deep and thrilling peals of the "Mute," the Cathedral bell, tolling out far and wide to tell Lorraine she was free once more and that the day of victory had come indeed.

We found ourselves billeted with a charming Herr and Frau Gredt in a little old house in a back

* Fourragère—the cord of honour worn round the shoulder and given to regiments which specially distinguished themselves in battle.

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