

LETTERS OF AN AUSTRALIAN ARMY SISTER.

A published volume of these circular letters of Sister Donnell's experiences under the Red Cross was not, we take it, originally intended, as they were written for her private friends. Probably this is the reason why they, to a very large extent, refer to the lighter side of life under the régime of an Army Sister. Her varied travels and delightful holidays are to be envied and will emphasise the great opportunities of pleasurable enlightenment and experience that the war brought into the lives of hundreds of nurses, who otherwise would never have been able to get very far from their immediate surroundings. From a professional point of view, the former portion of the book referring to the work in Lemnos is the most interesting. "The hospital is all that you would expect a field hospital to be. Entering it by the main thoroughfare, 'Macquarie Street,' with its marquees and tents on either side, you would see, instead of pretty little flower gardens in the square patches in front, maps of Australia, the emu, the kangaroo, and all sorts of reminders, made with white stones. Our chief luxury is exercise and fresh air, and as we get these in abundance, we bring a keen appetite to our tinned provisions served up on enamel plates. Yes, we are real waybacks. I'll warn you not to expect dainty maidens when we return—rather weather-beaten old hags."

Her home-sickness is constantly peeping out. "To-day I passed a dear little dog and stopped to play with him, and it suddenly dawned on me what a changed life we are living—no little children to love, no flowers, no pets, no shops, nothing dainty or nice."

A visit from Lord Kitchener is recorded. His "Well, boys, I hope you will soon be well," is noted; and his visit to the men in camp across the bay, "when he delivered the King's message that he was very proud of them, and said to the officers that our boys (the Aussies) were among the bravest soldiers in the world."

Sister Donnell managed to secure a snap of him, of which she was justly proud.

She draws a terrible picture of the sufferings of the boys on the Peninsula from frost-bite—hundreds being drowned because their feet were too paralysed to crawl away.

At this juncture she rejoices because the "grey bonnets that we disliked so much died a natural death there. Grey felt hats and coats are on the way for us."

"I think the experiences we had together at Lemnos formed a deep attachment among us all. I have said very little about our Sisters, and forgive my saying it (seeing I'm one of 'em), but our Sisters are just *fine*. One top-notch officer who had been nursed at Lemnos remarked that if No. 3 Sisters came within coo-ee of them, the No. 1 Sisters would have to look to their laurels. We have many smiles over our experiences and

when we first came to Cairo we were known as 'those shabby Sisters with the bright colour.' Our shabbiness was soon remedied, but I am sorry to say we are losing our colour in the horrible, dirty Cairo."

What she terms "the craze for inoculation" is her *bête noir*. "How I do hate it. The first dose!—I felt I nearly died. Now the second dose is coming along and rumour says others are to follow. I felt desperate so approached Matron though the answer was what I expected. 'No, Sister,' she said, 'there is no getting out of it. You *must* be done.' I am sure if it wasn't for the pleasure of working and doing for our boys—and that, I may say, is the biggest blessing we have—we should all be rushing to do transport work in Australia. . . . When I came back I'll be a walking bacteria shop."

As a set-off against these drawbacks she had delightful excursions to the Pyramids and to the Tombs of the Kings. "We start at 9 a.m., cross the Nile, and take donkeys or drive, as we please." Delightful! For lunch she owns to consuming half a chicken and five eggs. "After resting we go to see some other tomb, but I was too sleepy or tired, I don't remember what it was." (Obviously the eggs were at fault.)

Her impressions of England are given with a freshness that is very attractive. On the way from Southampton to Brighton "every man, woman or child cheers and waves to us as we pass, and we feel its just lovely of them to give us such a welcome."

"Green, green England. The clusters of mushroom rooms that we pass on the railway banks just make me and my pal itch to go and gather some. We arrive at Brighton (en route to the Kitchener Hospital) at 6.30 p.m., and truly we have never seen anything so gloomy and so dismal." This arrival, of course under war conditions, is graphically described, and certainly it must have been disquieting to these strangers from sunny Australia. "Ne'er a light, and pitch, pitch dark." She announces a little later. "We are not going to be a bit happy in England." First she considers the rations will be insufficient for "us hungry Australians;" the cook says we "92 eat more than the 140 English sisters," but the real grievance was the Matron's order. She said "I give it to you this once, and once only, I shall never tell it again. Now that you Sisters have got the rank of officers and wear stars, you are not to go out with N.C.O.'s or Privates, or speak to them excepting on duty. If you do so you will be sent away at once into a British hospital."

A protest was met with "That is the order, Sister."

"We never asked for stars—we have never received a commission from the King. Could we slight our boys so? This is worse than inoculation." The order was never enforced.

She is not keen on London, and is disgusted with the "tipping" custom; "here in the centre of civilisation the effect seems to me demora-

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