

CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES.

MALTA, THE NURSE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN.

By MARGARET McDougall.

WHEN, in 1915, this little island was called upon to receive large numbers of sick and wounded, she only resumed her title of "Nurse of the Mediterranean. Long years ago she earned it, when the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem established their hospitals at Notabile and Valetta.

The group of three islands, Malta, Gozo and Comino, set in the tideless sapphire sea, look like so many heaps of stones when they appear on the horizon. Malta is smaller than the Isle of Wight, but no country in the world is richer in historical associations, and none surely, in spite of varying fortunes, has clung so closely to ancient customs. Here one may see the ox treading out the corn, and the blindfolded pony pumping up the water. Here also is used a plough so primitive that it is identical with that in existence many years before Christ. Malta looks so small on the map of Europe that it seems impossible there should be room for a motor-car, but the means of communication and transport are so poor that it takes days for letters to travel from one end of the island to the other. The people are born, live and die without, in many cases, having left their own villages. Even the educated classes travel little, and numbers of them have never been as far as Sicily, 50 miles away, and visible from Valetta on clear days! The language, when the modern Italian words are dropped out, is a corrupt form of Arabic, and during the war, Turkish and Arab prisoners easily made themselves understood. Italian is the language of the law Courts, but English is taught in the schools. It is quite common in Valetta to find the poorest and otherwise most ignorant, speaking three languages. They are a devout people—Roman Catholic to a man—and every family practically has one son a priest, just as every town and village has a "Strada San Paolo" after their patron saint. There are many superstitions, as in all countries. Amongst the most interesting is a firm belief that when St. Paul shook the viper from his hand into the fire when "a certain ship from Alexandria" was wrecked, all poisonous snakes died at that moment. Strangely enough, though there still are snakes, there are no poisonous ones! The place believed to be the scene of the wreck—St. Paul's Bay—exactly tallies with the narrative in the Book of the Acts. Soundings have been taken, and it seems proved beyond a doubt that Malta is the "Melita" of the scriptures. The spot "where the two seas meet" is a favourite picnic resort, and one cannot but be reminded of the Bible story, because a tiny islet in the Bay has upon it a large statue of the Apostle.

Most travellers East and West who have put into the Grand Harbour, and have only had time to rush round Valetta and buy some of the wrong

kind of lace at an absurd price, sail away reviling the islanders. But to one who has lived there for some years, the island has an allure of its own. The land of sunset and dawn, of fascinating historical interest, of happy memories, of delightful sea-bathing, of glorious Italian Opera, and of friendships amongst the Maltese.

Few countries have had so many changes of Rulers—Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Goths and Arabs have held it in turn. The Christian dynasties have included German Emperors, Aragonese Kings, French Princes, and Spanish Dons. In 1530, when the Knights of St. John, expelled from Rhodes, were seeking a new habitation, Malta was given to them by Charles V, at the rent of a falcon a year to the king or the Viceroy of Sicily. The Knights built forts, cultivated the land, and brought water from the Bengemma Hills into Valetta by a viaduct. Valetta is no irregular ancient town, it was built on a settled plan. La Valette, Grand Master, laid the first stone in 1566 after the repulse of the Turks, and in 1571 the city was completed. It stands high, and is reached from the Harbour by streets of stairs, or by a lift.

The French overcame and abolished the knights, but they plundered the people and oppressed them to such an extent that early in the last century they became, at their own request, part of the British Empire. Many of Malta's sons proved their loyalty in the Great War.

The English in Malta are all service people—Naval and Military—and each service has its own fine hospital. Bighi, the Naval one, is most beautifully situated on the spot Napoleon chose as the site of his Summer Palace when his hopes of ruling in Malta ran high. During the war there were 22 hospitals, 20,000 beds, and a nursing staff, including V. A. D.'s of nearly 1,000. Valetta Hospital, the oldest building in the world, actually erected for the reception of the sick, was re-opened, and English nursing sisters tended English soldiers in its wards. "The Long Ward" contained 250 beds, and in spite of all the many inconveniences caused by lack of kitchens, duty rooms and bath-rooms there was a romantic interest in following the Knights Hospitallers of St. John. Our patients, in the earliest days, used the silver flagons and bowls provided originally for the patients of the knights! These are ordinarily kept in glass cases in Valetta Museum. There is a library in the hospital, a fine room with a frieze painted with the coats-of-arms of the various Grand Masters. A curious volume, probably the oldest treatise on nursing extant, directs that each patient on admission shall be provided with a clean shirt. There are three Civil Hospitals in Malta, all staffed by sisters of Catholic religious orders. These nuns, though not trained in our sense of the word, have all a true vocation for nursing, and the hospitals are well-arranged and spotlessly clean. The one in Sliema is very fine and modern. The nuns there belong to "The Little Company of Mary", are generally called "The Blue Sisters" because their veils are of a lovely Madonna blue. It is an Italian order, and the sisters are mostly Italian or French, though there are British amongst them too. In this hospital the wives of Naval and Military officers are nursed when ill, and they go there when their babies are born. A Maltese midwife attends

on these interesting occasions and helps with the nursing afterwards. The Civil Hospital in Valetta is for the poor, and the one in Citta Vecchia—the old city—for tuberculosis cases only. The latter is called the Connaught Hospital, in honour of the Duke of Connaught's term of service in the Mediterranean.

King George V Hospital for Seamen has been built and opened since the war. The money was provided for its building and endowment, half by the son of a former Presbyterian chaplain to H. M. Forces, and half by public subscription. It was badly needed, as ships of all nations call at Valetta, and there was formerly no provision for any sick amongst the crews. The foundation stone was laid by Lord Methuen in 1919, just before the end of his term of service as Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Maltese Islands. His interest in all that concerns the care and nursing of the sick is well known, and he continues to be President of the Hospital. The matron and sisters are all English.

The Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association maintain a small staff of English nurses to visit and nurse the wives and children of non-commissioned officers and men of both services in their own homes.

TEACHING OF MOTHERCRAFT.

BY DR. JANET CAMPBELL.

(WRITTEN FOR THE NATIONAL BABY WEEK COUNCIL.)

From the Red Cross Nursing Supplement.

It was realized early by the pioneers of the Infant Welfare movement that their strongest weapon in the fight to reduce the infant mortality rate and to improve the health of the surviving infants and little children was the intelligent co-operation of the mother. We cannot, unfortunately, do as we should like and provide a satisfactory environment for all babies. Only too often we have to make the best of surroundings which are anything but ideal. A sensible, well-informed mother can work wonders under most unpromising conditions, and the aim of Infant Welfare workers has therefore been to teach the mother every day rules of infant management and nursery care, and advise her how these may be applied in her individual case; to give her, in short, through the Infant Welfare Centre, a training in practical mothercraft.

The mother who comes to a centre does so of her own accord, and one may assume that she comes because she is keenly interested in her baby's health. She is prepared to take some trouble to obtain help, and one of the virtues of the centre is that the mother who attends is called upon to use her own brains and make a definite personal effort. She is not relieved of responsibility—she is advised what to do and how to do it, but it is for her to remember and carry out the advice, and the well being of the baby depends on her success in so doing.

In what way can mothercraft be taught? *First*, there is personal teaching at the Infant Consultation, and instruction given in this way by the doctor carries great weight. *Secondly*, there are the visits to the home by the health