

CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES.

EXPERIENCES IN THE BALKANS.

(February 1915 to December 1920.)

BY MISS ROUND.

(Concluded from page 126.)

THERE being no trains I went about 80 miles by car, and then picked up the boat which was running up and down the Danube, getting to the landing stage by evening. We did go a few miles by train, one of the only bits of line that had not been destroyed. We travelled in a cattle truck. The party consisted of an English engineer with two Serbs going on a mine inspection, a Serbian colonel and his wife, a major and his orderly, another member of our staff and myself. The boat did not come in until next morning so the little Serbian orderly said he had better put us all to bed. I was the first victim. He pulled out my holdall and rug and made me lie down and covered me up, next came the colonel's wife and then the colonel, then the others in order and lastly himself. Later on in the night the colonel, whom I could see looked very ill, began to get worse, I advised the orderly to go to the landing stage and see if the man in charge had anything in the way of a bed or extra blankets, also hot coffee. He came back with a favourable reply, so off the colonel and his wife went.

About 4 a.m. I woke and went off and performed my ablutions in the Danube, on my return awoke the others and ordered them off while I prepared our breakfast. My trunk made a good table, I lit the primus stove (the train had left, else we usually made tea from the engine water), opened a tin of bully beef and with some cheese and a stale loaf and a very few biscuits and jam, it looked an imposing meal to which we all did justice. Drinking vessels were scarce, but we borrowed one another's and one plate and knife did fine. The boat came in during the morning and at lunch time we were enjoying a meal on board. It took four days to reach Belgrade and we passed the Lion Gate and the wonderful road made by the Romans. I stayed in Belgrade a few days and saw what havoc had been made of it. I reached Fiume the night before De Annunzio put in his troops. I had to get my passport viséd by the English, French and Italians and was informed that it would take two days, but I made a desperate effort and finding the French officer at his dinner was asked by him to wait until he had finished his wine when he would come along, as if I didn't get through that night he feared I would not be able to do so for some time. The train left at 5 a.m. and 9 p.m. they locked me with my luggage into one of the carriages and being very tired I rolled myself up in a rug and went off to sleep. I awoke about 3 a.m. and found we had started! At the Italian Frontier, Dalmation Coast, a guard came along with two big fat men, they at once addressed me in German, at which I loudly protested and said no German should come in

here, if the train is full bring along a Serb and his wife or two Serbs or two Italians but Germans I will not have. The carriage was given me for my private use until I reach Trieste. They grumbled but did not come in, later three Serbs came along and these were welcomed. At Trieste there was much confusion and no one spoke English except a man who had formerly been one of Cook's agents. He informed me that my train went at 5 p.m. and offered to look after my luggage.

At 4-30 I saw the train and every body else's luggage being checked but no man. At last I managed to get mine checked and going to the booking office asked for a through ticket to Boulogne. The man kept on saying Boulogna but I thought it must be the Italian pronunciation, so got into the train and made myself comfortable for a two or three days' journey. At 2-15 a.m. I found myself at Boulogna, not a soul about, all my big luggage reposing at one end of the station and the small at the other. No one could speak English, but eventually an American was found who was just splendid, he got me an American Army travelling order, re-registered my luggage and put me into a first class carriage and asked some Italian ladies who were travelling to look after me. At Turin I was fortunate enough to meet with an Army matron and some sisters going on leave, so we travelled together. We had a nice crossing from Boulogne and I had six weeks' holiday in England.

On my return I was sent to a village where there was an epidemic of scarlet fever. I was there six weeks and was then sent down the coast to an old monastery where the Serbian Relief had 100 orphan boys and girls. They had developed typhus, but how was never discovered. Out of the hundred sixty were ill, some pneumonia, some influenza and a good many typhus. While here we were bombarded by Albanians. The children were very frightened, specially the boys over twelve years of age, they knew what to expect if they were taken prisoners. We told the children to say their prayers earnestly and then lie very quiet. The bombardment lasted about two hours and then the band suddenly disappeared. From there I went as matron to a small hospital of 40 beds with a big out-patients' department. The staff consisted of one woman doctor, myself and a V. A. D. with three Serb orderlies. I stayed here over a year, we re-organised and equipped the hospital with bed linen, instruments and lots of extra food. By this time the Serbian Relief Fund felt that they had done what they could. More than half of Serbia had been clothed and fed during its greatest need, so our work was taken over by the Serbian authorities and we were sent home. I arrived in England December 20th, 1920, having spent nearly six years with the Serbs.

I shall never forget them. Their wonderful cheerfulness and faith in the Allies. The way the women tilled the land and kept the homes going even when under German rule. How the young boys sneaked out of the country to join the army. That miraculous retreat over the Albanian mountains and the journey to Corfu, return to Salonica and dogged perseverance. These things will belong to history. We could not but love such a gallant little nation. May they continue so.