

CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES.

A DIARY OF THE WAR.

BY ANON.

SITTING beside the blue waters of Lago de Garda, one of the most beautiful Italian lakes I have seen, all is peaceful. Yet the lake is not very often calm, and even in fine weather the spirits of the wind come down and trouble the waters.

Here in Bogliaco, this beautiful retreat amidst the lemon gardens and shady nooks of vines and Cyprus trees, roses and luxuriant flowers and surrounded by snow-capped mountains, is it possible that a few years ago the hot breath of war can have blown this way and have devastated Riva at the northern end of the lake almost beyond recognition? I wonder?

As I sit by the lake, the peacefulness is disturbed by the booming of blasting rock away in the distance and I can see the volumes of smoke as a new railway is being tunnelled through the rocks to Riva. How it makes one think of guns and takes one back to 1914 when almost all the world could hear, if not in imagination then in reality, the sound of Armageddon.

I remember I had just returned to my home in Scotland on leave, and even as I drove from the station, a detachment of the "Gay Gordons" and military waggons passed me on the granite roadway. A day or so later (August 5th, 1914), my mobilisation papers reached me, warning me to stand by ready to join my unit at any moment. How restive I became waiting my final orders, for as Wenda says in that sweet story of Peter Par, "Our sons will die like English gentlemen" and one longed to be up and doing one's small bit to help those poor sick, wounded and dying. A little while went by and then I joined my unit, one of the large Territorial Hospitals which began with 1,000 beds and ended with many more.

The Territorial Service is over 7,000 strong, and I think it was in 1908 the units were first organised, so that when war broke out, we were ready even to our little capes and unbecoming bonnets, to proceed to our units at a moment's notice. We got a good deal of fun out of our costumes. I know, I for one, went down many a back street in London in case of meeting friends until I got accustomed to my garb. As three old char ladies in a tram said one day, nudging each other, "What them uniforms be for?" "Them uniforms, don't yer know what them uniforms be for, why, them be orphans!" Collapse of the little Terriers opposite.

I was given the post of Night Superintendent the day I mobilised, but not a wink of sleep did I get that first afternoon and it turned out such a busy heavy night. The hospital was full of Tommies, most of them severely wounded and I had never seen such sights before. How brave these lads were, many

smashed to atoms almost, fine fellows, sometimes minus both legs and arms, or hopelessly wounded; or these piteous blind—they made me think of Milton's lines "Seasons return, but not to me returns Day or the sweet approach of even or morn or sight of vernal bloom or Summer rose, or flocks, or herds or human face divine." I wept to myself, it was all so harrowing, going round from ward to ward doing what one could to help. The sisters and orderlies were so splendid, never a moment to themselves almost, and it was with difficulty I could get them to go to their meals. Our principal matron and matron too were ever helpful; they did so much to help the nursing staff, to keep them fit and well for the rush of work.

Christmas 1914 was a happy one in hospital, but then the 25th of December generally is. The whole day was given up to amuse, cheer, and feed the Tommies, and we ran about like lamplighters doing what we could. There were entertainers too from the outside world in almost every ward, and the convalescents had helped to decorate the wards beautifully. One ward, I remember, was like a snow-storm, hung with threads of cotton with cotton wool attached here and there to look like flakes of snow.

Being Night Superintendent for six months was a delightful post and I was very sorry when my chief would not allow me to remain on a moment longer. I had accumulated my "nights off" due to me during these six months and had them all in a bunch the first week in March 1915, so had time to run north to Scotland to see my little mother, little dreaming it would be over five years before I could do so again, for, as these pages will unfold, I was sent half over our restless world. At Easter, our matron had leave and I was promoted acting matron for the time.

Visitors were very good coming to see the patients and always brought gifts of some kind or another. One Society brought hundreds of eggs. It was Easter and it was rather quaint, for each egg had a text written round it. Fancy sitting down to breakfast and seeing on your egg "The cook crew thrice" or "The woman tempted me!" The patients were tickled to death and I am sure the kind donors would have enjoyed seeing the fun it created among the Tommies. We nurses loved the fun too. Unfortunately, I gave "Love your enemies" to a patient who had just been allowed out of the padded room a short time before. He went into a fearful passion and shouted "Love your enemies? Not much!" I had to call an orderly to come and help me tackle the poor soul.

In May 1915, our matron, myself and several sisters had four days' notice to proceed to Malta, to open a thousand-bedded hospital for the poor warriors from Gallipoli. What a list-making we had of all we would require abroad, and rushing around to get uniforms for a hot station!

We had a great send-off and left Paddington about midnight for Plymouth. I was so cross—someone asked me if I had a camera, and honest-like I opened my attaché case and said "Yes." "Well, you must not take that with you," and it was promptly taken from me. I got another however at Malta and had a special permit to use it!

How busy Plymouth was, destroyers and submarines dashing in and out, and when night came we could see the twinkling lights of signalling going on from one ship to another and to the mainland.

Being a hopelessly bad sailor, I took a preventive seasick medicine—one dose half an hour before going on board and another half an hour after (by directions). This was on a Monday. We were supposed to have sailed soon after embarking that morning, but alas, owing to the Hun outside playing about with submarines, we did not sail for two days later, when we rushed out at midnight at 20 knots, in utter darkness. So my dose was useless the first time and I was too frightened to try another, as it caused me to become blind for some hours. Our troopship was crowded and alas, I fear, few of these men returned. We kept far out from land and were so glad to get into smooth waters on nearing Gibraltar.

How mysterious the blue misty shores of northern Africa looked. We landed some sick men at Gib, and then on again.

I remember they brought strawberries on board for dinner, but we were asked not to eat them owing to some scare. They were the last many of us saw for five years!

Shortly, we ran into the magnificent natural harbour of Malta. It ought to be counted as one of the wonders of the world. How impressive to see so many battleships and destroyers about! It was the base of the French Fleet for a time.

Valetta is an interesting town with its steep-stepped streets from which one catches glimpses of the blue Mediterranean every here and there. Flocks of goats roam about the streets eating anything they can find; I have seen paper bags and a straw hat added to their bill of fare. It is a noisy place, so many churches with ever-ringing bells—most trying to our sick and wounded men, but the Governor, ever thoughtful for the sick men's comfort, had these very much modified.

They say Malta is a place of yells, bells and smells!

We were detailed to proceed by a little railway to the huge barracks at Imtarfa and convert it into a hospital to receive all the typhoid and dysentery patients from Gallipoli.

Imtarfa stands very high, commanding a good view of almost all the island and near by is Citta Vecchi, which I christened the "Holy City." It looks it somehow with its many monastic buildings, its deep resonant bells that toll in the early hours of day and its monks of different orders in their picturesque habits. I was so struck once wandering about, and happening to turn round suddenly in my walk, to see a school of young priests all in white robes and cowls, playing with a ball, their skirts tucked up, as they leapt over a wall. I remember being so glad these lads could have some fun, but when they passed me, they were all walking as monks, hands crossed before them, eyes downcast.

Imtarfa only saw me a few weeks, but what a busy time, convoy after convoy coming up from the hospital ships from the Dardanelles, with men very

very ill. How often at 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. we could hear the "last post" and know that many more of our men were being laid to rest. The "last post" seems the expression of the Harvest Home, when all is safely gathered in, and it is not followed by "lights out" for God has other work and it is His call to Higher Service. If you remember, it ends on an unfinished note; the ending is not here, it is continued elsewhere.

In August 1915, I was sent to open another hospital of 1,040 beds under canvas. What a joy that place was; we all loved it, but here also, we had a busy time, ambulances continually rolling in. My staff of sisters and orderlies was splendid; they all worked with little off-duty time at first, except to "roost," for we were very short-handed.

In September, however, we welcomed the first V. A. D.'s who were detailed from England to help us, dear bright girls they were, full of life and willing to do anything and everything. What forty fits I had when I found I had two Lords' daughters on my staff! How could I ask them to sleep under brown blankets, eat off enamel ware, and use black-handled knives and forks as we did? But I was fussing needlessly, for they were delightful and worked, if anything, better than some of the others.

On November 22nd, 1915, that fearful night of storm when many tents were blown down, it was the Lords' daughters' tents among the sisters' lines that came down, lying as flat as a pancake, and I found them at 4 a.m. in the bright light of incessant lightning, in sou'westers and mackintoshes digging a trench round their tent for the water to run away. The tent with the acute enterics was another that was blown down. May I add that the shock and changing to another tent in the deluge at 4 a.m. gave them all a new lease of life!

That same storm brought us sad cases from the Dardanelles of "trench feet." The standing in the water caused many lads to lose one or both feet, and I had one tent of ten beds with men who had not a foot among them. Robert Browning says, "All service is alike to God," but I do not agree when I think of what I have seen. Poor old boys, how they suffered, but we had their beds carried out into the sun daily, and did our best to entertain and comfort them—then, home to "Blighty."

Christmas 1915, every man had a packet of good things. The sisters helped me to make up 1,640 packets, mostly from my Red Cross Stores, for the Red Cross Society was most generous all through the war, and each of us had friends at home who sent lovely bundles.

There was plenty of talent among the patients, and those who could, and were able to, helped us to get up weekly concerts or whist drives for the men, and the Y. M. C. A. attached to our camp helped enormously with entertaining the weary convalescents. Each Christmas, we sisters got up a two hours' show for our hospital and the lads loved to see their own sisters decked up and acting. Those terrible rehearsals for about three weeks before-hand when we were all tired and cross! But when "the" day came and all went well we forgot the fag and the losing of tempers, etc.

The Governor and his wife were most awfully kind visiting all the hospitals, and I think there were over 20,000 beds in that little island. Hardly a hospital boat came or went without the Governor visiting each one.

Malta is such a biblical island outside Valetta with its flat-roofed houses, and its shepherds who lead their flocks. Stones are laid across the fields to divide one man's land from another and it reminds one of—"Cursed is he who removeth his neighbour's land-mark." The ox and ass still tread out the corn which takes us back to Moses' words, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn."

On St. Paul's Day, we had to make a pilgrimage to a beautiful bay some way from our camp, called after that Apostle who remained on the little island of Melita for three months. The waters of that little bay are like a "Lapis lazuli" and one could almost see the phantom ship wrecking itself on the rocks, for here tradition fixes the wreck we read of in Acts. 27 and 28 chapters, and see those 200 odd men making for the shore, some on boards and some on broken pieces of the ship, while they who could swim cast themselves into the sea and got to land,—only, they had a bitter cold day of rain and storm while we were basking in delicious sunshine.

My hospital closed down in March 1916 and I was sent to take over another large converted barracks of 1,070 beds on the other side of the island. Such a lovely view looking out to sea, and such a busy sea with its battleships and destroyers! Hospital ships at night too were rather thrilling, sailing past with their vivid green lights all around and great Red Cross shining in the middle.

My night staff saw the sad sight of the "Russell" going down in the early dawn, and all next day the mine-sweepers were out destroying mines.

In May that year my orders came to proceed with 27 nursing sisters to Mesopotamia and we left on a gorgeous new Australian hospital ship for Alexandria, the sea like glass. Of course, our kind busy Governor made time to come down to the harbour to wish us "Good Luck," and to thank us for our year's service there,—so courtly and nice of him. Many sisters and V. A. D.'s got "Dghaisas" and sailed round and round our vessel lying in the harbour, and shouted up adieux. We were so sad parting with so many jolly friends.

The usual numerous Maltese were diving under the vessel for any coins we threw overboard, while others in boats were selling sponges and various other things.

We spent some weeks in Alexandria awaiting our passage for the East. Here again the whole place seemed one vast hospital, and my staff was detailed to help at various places while I did office work. Many fine buildings were converted into hospitals and there was much canvas also.

Before the end of our sojourn there, I was granted a day's leave and ran up to Cairo with three of my nursing sisters. The whole railway run was so full of interest along the banks of the Nile. Camels, heavily laden, wended their way to the cities, "for there was much corn in Egypt." Asses, large and small too, bore their burden, and the fascinatingly coloured garments of the Egyptians

all added to the picture,—women wading in the water to fill their water-pots, oxen treading out the corn, donkeys grinding wheels to draw water for irrigation, and so on.

We made a quick run to some of the bazaars in Cairo and bought some lovely brasses, called at the Citadel, a big hospital, where I picked up an old "Pro." of mine, and off we motored to the Pyramids and that beautiful Sphinx. We were awfully impressed, and did the usual thing, going round on camels. I had a fiend who *would* turn his head and try to bite my foot, and the Dragoman spent the time assuring me he would guard me, and kept hitting the poor animal across its nose.

One feels what a pity it is civilisation has encroached so very near to these grand sights; one would love them to be far off in the desert, and I am glad the Sphinx lies rather hidden and solitary, behind sand-hills. One almost wished the wonderful monster could open its mouth and tell tales of bye-gone years.

During the last week of May 1916, our "orders" came, and early one morning we left Alexandria by hospital train for Suez, to join our hospital ship there. Another interesting route, though exceptionally hot, and through a sandstorm across the desert. We passed many a regiment of sunbaked Tommies. How they lived, poor old boys, I know not! There seemed no shade anywhere. Then we passed a camel corps.

At Suez, we were bundled quickly into a hospital ship awaiting us. Our train was rather late and the ship's people were in a hurry to be gone. She was carrying Indian sick back to their home and was manned by natives who soon got all our trunks and camp kit on board. The heat was appalling and we were very moist all day, but the ship's captain, a dear, good, Scotch soul, one of Nature's gentlemen, was so anxious to do anything for us. So at night he ordered our beds to be carried up on deck, where we tried to sleep. In the morning such sights to behold as we were! The smuts from the funnel, mixed with rivers of perspiration down our cheeks made us indeed "sights for sair een." He also had erected a swimming bath astern and gave us stated hours when we sisters could bathe. Thus we journeyed down to "the barren rocks of Aden," with their guns and fortresses here and there, and away in the distance across on the other mainland, we could see the smoke of the enemies' fires. The skipper sent me down a "chit" to say the steam launch was at my disposal if I cared to go on shore at Aden and take some of the sisters with me, but on *no* account to let my staff pull the grass. I thought this a strange message at the time, but when I got on *terra firma* I understood. Not a blade was to be seen on that barren spot! We walked about for a little with the roasting sun beating down on us and then went into an ostrich feather shop and tossed for some beautiful feathers, and a very lovely one came to me. On our way back to the launch, we came across some little green plant trying to push its way through the sandy soil. So we picked it and sent it up to our skipper instead of the grass he had warned us not to pull! We were so shocked to hear this kind friend died in the East about a year later, before getting home to his wife and bairnies. He had often shown me their photos with such pride, and I felt grieved for him.

There were many sharks floating round the ship, grabbing what they could, and one felt thankful it was now prohibited for the people to dive for coins round the vessels that lay out in the stream.

After leaving Aden, alas, we ran into the Monsoon, and I, for one, had an unhappy time till we reached Bombay. We lay outside that harbour for some hours awaiting the pilot, and had a general view of the town with the Taj Mahal Hotel and Yacht Club just opposite us. A strange sickly smell, that one ever afterwards associates with nearing India, came wafted on the air to us.

The pilot brought on the news of Lord Kitchener's death, and a big battle at sea, and our spirits fell to zero. We thought this a bad omen on our entry into this wonderful country.

After the Indian sick had been taken off the boat in spotless white garments and sent in ambulances to the Indian hospital, we said "Goodbye" to our kind ships' officers and were whisked away in Red Cross Transport cars to the Taj Mahal Hotel. Here we spent some weeks, part of the hotel being "purdah" off for sisters' quarters and another portion for 100 beds for sick officers coming down the Gulf from Mesopotamia. Our hospital for the Tommies was some way off, (for between 200 and 300 of them) and there were another 200 beds in a large shed in the Dock precincts for men going up-country by train to a convalescent dépôt, or going by ship to Blighty.

The ladies of Bombay were so good to our men, coming to see them and bringing liberal supplies of cigarettes, matches, notepaper, handkerchiefs and lots of odds and ends, or when able to, arranging motor drives. One had to be a real policeman and arrange who should go, for I often caught one of my naughty lads entering a car for the second time that afternoon and pretending he had never been at all! Some of them were deliciously naughty at every turn.

What a dear couple the Governor and his wife were! They brought so much joy and pleasure with them when they came, and we loved their visits. I am glad it was not in our time they left for other work in India, and how glad we were a year or two later to meet them again in dear old Mesopotamia, where they were visiting, and to show them round our hospital there. That wonderful lady would let me have almost anything for my men that India's Red Cross could supply.

In April 1916, a sad outbreak of cholera occurred, and late one night I was roused to go at once and help as our Commanding Officer had been seized with it. Such a piteous sight it was to see this big strong man, with whom I had been in the office only at 6 o'clock that afternoon, now lying with death clearly marked on his shrunken face. Five or six of his medical officers, his batman and myself worked hard all night, but alas, we could not save him. He "passed on" early in the morning and later that day, his batman also died. In the evening, when we were attending the Colonel's funeral, the orderly officer also died. So our unit lost three of its staff in 24 hours, and we hardly knew how to go about our work so that the Tommies would not know the sadness overhanging us. Other units suffered too. Several of the Australian sisters died, and later we lost a charming sister belonging to our unit.

(To be continued.)