

CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES.

A DIARY OF THE WAR.

BY ANON.

(Continued from page 201.)

THE hospital was full of wounded from beyond Kut as our men were now advancing towards Baghdad. Amarah had four British hospitals at that time and several large Indian hospitals, but there were no sisters further up the line until a few months later.

The nights and mornings were freezingly cold but we had brilliant sunshine through the day. Then the rain came and by the end of January, we were swimming about in oceans of mud, with gum boots, mackintoshes and sou'westers as our uniform. With the least drop of rain, Mesopotamia became as slippery as an iceberg. I always used a stick during the rains and those who did not, very often came down on "all fours," much to the delight of the ever-watchful sick Tommy. From April to November, we packed away all rain clothes as we knew well they would not be required. We were almost flooded out, the rain came down in such buckets, six inches in seven days. The orderlies were most racy; I heard them shouting to each other as they went about their work, "Why don't you bring your 'Bellum' (an Indian boat) out," or another, "Where is your 'Mahala?'", or "Where is your paddle steamer?"

Sick convoys were constantly coming down the line at any hour, for there was a great struggle going on beyond Kut in these early days of 1917, and how surprising it was to see how sure-footed the "doolie" bearers were in the slippery mud.

About 700 Turkish prisoners were marched through the town between lines of fixed bayonets. Runners had come in with the news to the Arab population, that if the British said they had taken prisoners, it was not true. So, naturally, the boat was stopped and the prisoners were marched through the town and back to their boat to impress the Arab.

On March 4th, 1917, at tea-time, the H. S. "Basrah" came downstream laden with Turkish prisoners. She was the boat our men captured and the whole of Amarah turned out to stare. We were so delighted to see the Union Jack flying over the Turkish ensign. Later that month great excitement was caused by the news of our men having taken Baghdad, I think it was on March 11th, 1917, and twenty-one guns boomed out the glad tidings, and 900 prisoners

came downstream and were marched through the town. Our sick men got a taste of what champagne we could lay our hands on, and we doled out tinned cakes and fruit and made great rejoicings.

How busy were the little Monitors tearing up and down the Tigris and what wonderful work they did in the early days. We generally rushed out when they passed looking so trim. The "Greenfly," the "Gadfly," the "Firefly" and all the other "Flies" were there, and sometimes I had the privilege of being entertained on board and then heard exciting news their gallant officers could tell.

Sometimes we go for tramps across the desert. How picturesque it all is to see the Arab ride up bareback, with his flowing white head-dress (Keffiya) streaming out in the wind and kept in position by an Agal (thick coils of woven goat hair, originally used, I believe, to tether the two front feet of their steed or camel, while the Bedouin rested near by). How picturesque also it was to see the cattle wending their way to their mud-walled village.

The Bedouin Arab is such an impressive, handsome creature, and I have often watched him gallop across the desert on his splendid Arab steed, his gun swung across his shoulder, his flowing robes waving in the breeze, and away behind a great blood-red, orange sunset. As he approached how suddenly he pulled his animal up short and stared at one. At first they terrified me, but I soon got accustomed to them and stared back with longing looks and broke the tenth commandment over the handsome saddle bags arranged across his steed or over the bedecked bridle or his broad inlaid stirrup.

By the end of March, it was stoking up and we had to wear our topees from 8 a.m. till sunset, and tiresome fleas kept bothering us. The plague season too had begun and such inoculations we had. Our sisters inoculated many hundred Arab women who came to a room prepared for the purpose in an Arab dwelling. Poor souls, how terrified they were. Many friends would bring one victim, the whole party weeping loudly till the inoculation was over, then all smiles, they departed looking so pleased, having had *one* drop of sal volatile in water. They would return the next day for the same "stimulant!" The plague was spreading, and these women would not allow the mer doctors to inoculate them, so our sisters were only too glad to do what they could.

April 1st, 1917.—The temperature is now 102° in the shade and one longed, like Robert Browning, "Oh, to be in England, now that April's there." We look such sights with our large mushroom topees over our caps, our black glasses and our green-lined sun umbrellas. There is not an empty bed anywhere; sick men come and go all the time and everyone is fearfully busy. Occasionally, two or three sisters take some convalescent men across the water to a lovely plantation of date palms, orange trees in blossom, peach and pomegranate trees, and there they have a picnic. How the Tommies love it, boiling up their own kettle.

From May, all the embarking of the sick convoys going down to the Base is done either about 5 a.m. or 6 p.m., as the rest of the day is too stifling. At 6 a.m., kirk on Sunday, great drops drip on our prayer books from our poor old, hot faces and one can feel trickles going down one's spine all day long. I often wonder what a London hospital would think if they saw our medical officers doing their rounds in shorts and shirts, their sleeves rolled up to the shoulders and wearing no collar or tie, and dripping from every pore. We drink and drink oceans of chlorinated water and the enamel mug is so hot one can hardly touch it.

For a change the Shamal (north-east wind) blows, and a sand-storm blows from across the desert. The wards are covered with sand, and even our eyebrows and lashes are white with it. We are careful to keep our army caps well over our hair these days. At meals, our plates are covered with sand and we eat our "peck of dirt" at each sitting. Wee sparrows, their tongues hanging out, are lying panting on the ground, too overcome to move out of our way as we pass. The electric fans spit out hot air like a furnace and the lotions for the medical officers require no "hot" added as they are quite hot enough as they are. Even the bullock carts and tongas have the spokes of their wheels bound up separately with bits of old, brown blanket to keep them from warping. The flies bother us so, perpetually coming for refreshing drinks off our hands and faces. And, this is only the last day in May, what will July and August be like? I wonder. The nights are cool, thank Allah, and we all sleep on the roof and enjoy the wonderful stars. How brilliant they are out here. Emerson says "If a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. One might say the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give men in the heavenly bodies the perpetual presence of the Sublime. Seen in the streets of cities, how great they are. If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore, and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the City of God which had been shown; but every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile." I am sure, every night, none of us went to rest without feeling the better of gazing on these glorious heavens and feeling the presence of God around us.

It is June now and the sun is scorching at 5-30 a.m., and we are glad to run down from our beds on the roof and seek shelter in our rabbit warren rooms. It is only at night when we creep up again that we can see, eye to eye, with Henry S. Sutton and exclaim, "How beautiful it is to be alive."

Two sisters at a time are detailed to do duty on the paddle boats and hospital ships. The paddle boats have a covered in barge on either side and these sisters are on duty for a few weeks at a time, going up and down the river. Every inch of the barge and boat is covered with troops going up river and all kinds of sacking and sheeting are hanging round to try and keep off the awful sun. Coming downstream, they bring the sick convoys.

Eggs are very difficult to procure for the patients these hot days. Out of 100 eggs about 30 only are fit to eat. Just coming across the river, they seem to go wrong. The hens must have an easy time for the sun does most of the hatching! One day, an egg-flip was going to be made for one of the patients, and the egg was lying ready on the table, when out it walked! The Tommy who ought to have got the egg-flip christened it "Egg-flip," and it ran about the ward for about three weeks till one day, one of my naughty lads gave it a dose of his medicine. Later they gave it a military funeral, the "Last Post" being sounded over the little grave and being played on a comb with tissue paper over it!

It is rather amusing to count to how many uses one can turn a kerosene tin here. They are used as water carts to throw water on the roadways, for drinking water, for boiling water in, for sand-fire buckets, for letter boxes, for covering roofs of houses, for seats on boats, as draft screens for our Primus stoves and a hundred other things.

Now it is July. Heat stroke cases, quite unconscious, are brought in all day long, their temperatures 109° or over, and the temperature in the shade is 118° to 125° . The hospital is perfectly full and everyone is doing double duty to help those poor cases of heat. These patients we wrap up in ice sheets (ice-packs) and rub down with blocks of ice. The nurses work in the huts with wet towels round their heads instead of caps. They, the orderlies and medical officers, all work splendidly, and many of us did this for over three years in Mesopotamia.

In July, during the terrific heat of 121° in the shade, our delightful little Commanding Officer died overcome with the heat and malaria, and was laid to rest next day in Amarah's well kept cemetery. These were sad days when we lost so many men. Everyone spent the days sponging unconscious patients. Luckily, the ice-plants were in good working order.

It is August now, and 900 of a convoy is expected down to-day. We have no beds, but floors are still available and I expect, by the time the convoys arrive, we will have borrowed or arranged something for their comfort.

The flies are troubling us perpetually. Every patient who can use a fly-flip has one given to him and great strappings go on. The patients find it so absorbing to watch the Secret Service of ants going into action. First they send out scouts who rush back for stretcher bearers, who push, drag and haul every dead fly to some hidy hole. Some ants fly ahead to tell others and some thought there were not enough stretcher bearers so came to help push the fly along. Ant nurses came and walked beside them carrying a leg or a wing. I could have wasted hours by the men's beds watching the scene.

Here I should like to give "A Brief Outline of the Work of the Nursing Sisters in Mesopotamia" handed to me by one who has left us.

(To be continued.)