

CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES.

A DIARY OF THE WAR.

BY ANON.

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IT was not until the autumn of 1915 that it was considered necessary or advisable to have nurses in Mesopotamia, though troops had been out and fighting began in 1914.

At first all the medical arrangements were in the hands of the Indian Government, and in October 1915, four sisters of the Indian Nursing Service were sent out to undertake the nursing of sick and wounded at Basrah. These sisters did magnificent work, never tiring, and always ready to meet emergencies at all hours of the day or night. Early in the following year a few more were sent out and they went to Amara 200 miles further up the river half way between Basrah and Kut. Undoubtedly these first arrivals bore the heat and burden of the day as there were no conveniences of any kind. Provisions were short and the sick and wounded many in number. They deserve all the honour and respect that is due to them for the tremendous amount of work they accomplished.

In the early spring of 1916 the Home Government took over the operations in Mesopotamia and at once sent out from England several large general hospitals, stationary hospitals, casualty clearing stations, and field ambulances. The general and stationary hospitals had their full number of specially selected trained nurses composed of matrons, sisters and staff nurses. They arrived just at the beginning of the hot season, but nothing daunted them and they all did grand work. Through the hot months of May, June, July and August, when many of the officers and men were daily going down with heat-stroke, enteric fever, dysentery and cholera, they worked unceasingly and won many praises and thanks from the brave soldiers whom they were nursing. At one hospital where it had not been possible to have sisters, the staff begged that one might be sent if not for work just to be seen, as they said the very presence of a sister would fill the patients with hope and a desire to live, instead of them dying in despair feeling that they were left forgotten in this far away and desolate country.

Mesopotamia now is very different to what it was twelve months ago. There are nurses now in all the hospitals from Basrah to Baghdad and Nasirizeh on the river steamers, hospital ships and isolation hospitals.

The nurses in the isolation hospital all volunteer for the work. Their devotion to duty and utter disregard for self is magnificent. There are necessarily many badly wounded and a good many cases of typhus and relapsing fever amongst the prisoners of war come into our hands. These are all nursed

in our own hospitals by our nurses who grudge neither time nor trouble to make them comfortable. A sick man is a sick man and as such is tended carefully and lovingly nursed whether he be British, Indian, Turk or Arab.

Most of the hospitals for the Indian native troops have also trained nurses to supervise the nursing of the sick and wounded. These nurses are mostly trained in India, they understand the native and speak the language.

The nurses on the river sick convoy steamers do invaluable work, especially during the recent fighting when the wounded were brought straight on board from the trenches and the battlefields. The nurses were able to help with the first dressings, and their presence on board just made all the difference to the tired, wounded and very sick men. Only those who have been out in this country can understand the tremendous difficulties which have been surmounted and yet have to be contended with. The distances are so great, and transport so slow owing to this great bending and twisting river. It takes from eight to twelve days to get from Basrah to Baghdad so it will give an idea of the almost impossible feats which have been and will have to be accomplished.

As well as the river sick convoy steamers there are the hospital ships which run between Basrah and Bombay carrying the sick and wounded who will not be ready for duty for some months or who may have to be sent back to England as unfit for further service. From September to May this is quite a pleasure trip, but with May comes the monsoon, and then it is very disagreeable. The sisters on board these ships are wonderful. They carry out their arduous duties in the heat and storms of the monsoons in a quiet, methodical manner and take as a matter of course the intense heat and the terrible discomfort, and they always have a bright and cheery smile for the patients.

All the actual nursing arrangements are in the hands of a Matron-in-Chief of Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service who was sent from the War Office for this great work in 1916. There is now a staff of nearly 400 trained nurses in the country. There are a very few Regular Service, the numbers are made up of reserves from Home and India and Territorials.

Much has been accomplished in these twelve months and the highest standard of efficient nursing adhered to, wherever our sick and wounded men are, all that is possible is done for them not only by the sisters but by the R. A. M. C. orderlies as well who are sent from Home, and who give loyal devoted service ungrudgingly to all who pass through their hands.

On August 15th, 1917, that magnificent new bridge across the Tigris at Amarah was finished by our Engineers and the I. G. C. opened it. When it was "cut" the S. I., the staff boat sailed through, the skipper tooting away all the time, feeling very proud that his was the first boat to go through.

We have now that horrid wet heat. Trickles run down from the crown of one's head, behind the ears, and on down one's spine. Flies sit and drink up great beads of perspiration on one's hands.

The "date season" is here. Of course they have got to ripen and all the trees are hanging so heavily laden. It is 121° in the shade, but I wish they

would hurry up and ripen for we are just panting for the cool days. The Arabs stamp these dates into boxes when the time comes. Do people really eat them I wonder?

We are a wretched picture these days and the wet bulb is registering 84°. I was so amused to-day seeing my colonel and adjutant persisting in walking backwards from me as their garments were soaking with perspiration, and they were wet through and through. We really are rather sorry sights but at the same time very merry and bright and as busy as bees, attending to the convoys which come and go,—no time to think of self.

The flying foxes come out of their holes in the daytime and hang like black pancakes round the walls in order to get a "breather."

Most of us are so troubled with prickly heat these days, and try every imaginable kind of lotion to relieve it. What a good thing it is we have no evening dress to wear; it would be an impossibility.

Now it is the end of August and the days are really getting shorter and we are so thankful to see a little less of the great sun, but still, even at night, as one lies on the roof and sometimes lets one's ten toes hang out at the end of the camp bed, one wonders if there is not a little fire at that end at which one's toes are being toasted. The air is so hot, but as it gets later, one has to draw up the sheet and then towards morning, the blanket. Then the sun gets up and so do we.

The mosquitoes and sand-flies worry us day and night. What tiresome little creatures they are; they make us tear ourselves to pieces, and no one thinks it rude if one bends down in the middle of a conversation to scratch one's ankle, for everyone does it!

I dined at a mess dinner one night, at a camp some way up river on the left bank and the table was outside. We were eaten alive, but none the less enjoyed the outing and dinner, though the latter was served on enamel plates, the mustard in an egg cup and the pepper in an old Keating's tin, and we were seated on forms. A beautiful great moon came up, and away across the river at a camp opposite, we could see the moon flashing on the sentry's bayonet as he walked to and fro. How stately the palm trees looked in the moonlight. Stealthy Bellums were creeping away beyond the Perimeter; if they came on this side they might be fired at.

This camp was just at the first "outpost" at the Perimeter. They must have lively nights I am thinking, as the Arabs are great thieves and love to get inside the lines to steal. We heard shots most nights and saw the rockets going up. On our way home downstream, we could see the Indian sentries of different regiments standing like ebony images every here and there.

Often we sisters would get up Whist Drives in different wards for the men. The patients loved it, and prizes were got from the ever-kind Red Cross Supply. One sister I had always made such wonderful Booby prizes; sometimes a bottle of beer dressed up in some garb or other, sometimes strings of red sausages made out of calico, with smokes in some of them. So little amused the men. Sometimes we got up sports with every imaginable kind

of obstacle race, eating from a treacly bun suspended on a string which had to be eaten with hands behind backs, to Hat Trimming which was always a favourite.

Early in October 1917, we had 600 wounded brought down one night from that wonderful bit of work round Ramadie and the hospital was still very busy. Our first convoy by train left Amarah that month, and a beautiful ambulance train it was too (narrow gauge). It took the wounded right away to Kurna and thence by boat to the Base and Home. Hitherto, all our convoys had gone by paddle steamer and barges down to Basrah.

It was my privilege to be sent up to Baghdad in 1918, and what an interesting journey upstream it was, so much had happened there. We passed little Kut, the scene of that ghastly siege where General Townsend and his gallant men spent many an anxious day under such privations. We passed those bends of the river where so many regiments were mown down, the remnants coming to us (the year before) so badly wounded. The trenches were there somewhat as the men had left them. We tied up for the night and went among them and came across all kinds of memorials of the dead.

On the left bank we passed the stately Arch of Ctesiphon, one of the wonders of the world, some eighty feet high, seventy odd feet wide, and 115 feet deep,—a picture any artist would love to paint. It is a most perfect curve and one wonders what its history is.

I shall never forget as our steamer approached Baghdad, that romantic spot of blue domes and minaret among the palms. With the sun shining full upon it, it was like entering into a fairy tale; yet, when one approached its narrow, evil-smelling streets, one's ideas had to change! Still, I always loved it and its bazaars of sunburnt mud and its picturesque Arabs in their "Abba," with their wonderful head-dresses bargaining and haggling over their wares. I loved also its collection of old brasses and copper, its amber and jewels, and the salesman ever clinking his rupees together in his hand made the darkened bazaars a babel of sound.

I had just read that novel "Miss Harun-er-Raschid" on the way up river, and here one could think of nothing but "Harun."

Many women passed us, heavily veiled but peering through to see what we looked like and I often noticed one eye come out if an officer approached!

Wistful-eyed donkeys with their beautiful saddle-bags heavily laden trudged past us and often the Arab on his steed jostled us in the narrow parts of the bazaar.

Outside the city wall sleep our comrades who gave their lives for King and country. General Maude lies in the cemetery surrounded by his men awaiting that last Reveille to which all must answer.

Our kind escorts took us to the ruins of Babylon one afternoon. Is it possible that one's wildest hopes are sometimes realised? I seemed to be living in a dream come true. We took about two hours to get to Babylon on the little railway trolley away down the Euphrates side. It was a blazing afternoon; one felt that if one struck a match the whole atmosphere would

have ignited. We had our topees, veils and black glasses on however, and our kind escort had taken drinks. We passed caravan after caravan of pilgrimages trekking across the desert to Kerbela, their Mecca of the East. They were a wonderful sight, some on donkeys, some on camels and some on horses, while many trudged it on foot. We got to the ruins about five p.m. A wall with a circuit of about eleven miles surrounded these ruins. We felt we were far away back in the days of the Old Testament with Nebuchadnezza who undertook the rebuilding. It is sad to think that the Turks allowed bricks to be taken from Babylon to help them build Baghdad and Hillah. The Ishtar Gate is still magnificent with its extraordinary, moulded figures of animals on the outside walls. The throne room of Nebuchadnezza is shown at least the site thereof, and one could picture Belshazzar the King at the feast with his wives, relatives and concubines, commanding silver and golden vessels to be brought for the drinking of wine. Those silver and golden vessels, his father had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. Babylon, they tell us, was possibly occupied before 4000 B.C. and one hopes that now war is over, more excavating will take place to tell us more of the wonders of that vast city of ruins. The huge excavated lion, possibly one of the many belonging to the Citadel, is supposed to represent Babylon conquering Egypt. It stands out, a lonely figure, guarding the ruins. Little remains of the Hanging Gardens, but one can imagine the wonderland as King Nebuchadnezza "walked in the Palace of the Kingdom of Babylon" before "he was driven from men."

The Euphrates runs near the ruins and how very lovely it looked that evening with a magnificent sunset of deep gold shining through the palms. Darkness came down on us in a few minutes and presently a huge moon rose and jackals crept about as we made our way back to the trolley en route for Baghdad.

It was Cyrus, King of Persia, who captured Babylon, I think about 538 B.C. He changed the course of the Euphrates by breaking down a dam, for at one time the river ran very differently to what it does to-day.

Another day my kind escort took me to the city of Kazimain. We crossed the river where the famous shrines are. Long before we arrived we saw its golden domes shining out from among the palm trees. We went by motor, and how odd it was to see a quaint little tramway which takes the Arab from Baghdad to the place where lie the bones of Imam (one of the Prophet of the Shiah belief). I took some photos, but of course could not enter the sacred edifice.

In the autumn of 1918, a huge camp of many thousands was formed at Bakubah, some miles north-east of Baghdad, for the poor refugees trekking down country. One part of the camp was converted into a hospital. English sisters were sent and did magnificent work there among the Jews. I passed through it later; it was wonderful to see the order of that town of tents. A General has written a very interesting book about it all. I knew him and received much kindness from him and his staff. He loved the Refugee Camp and the refugees all loved him. Little children were often seen holding his either hand.