

to rumour is plentiful eggs, chickens, etc., being very inexpensive. The Serbian authorities take complete charge of the feeding of the patients, so there is nothing to be done in that line. The Serbian doctors are by no means behind in their profession, but the immensity of the present problem appears to have overwhelmed them, and not much wonder. The Commission before mentioned, speaks of the condition of things as being worse than any they could conceive, yet the Serbs are not an uncivilised race, the officers of their army are smart men of irreproachable manners.

The town itself is quite an important little town. There is a bishop here, a cake shop, picture post cards, and a post office which has the playful habit of frequently running short of stamps. It has been once or twice evacuated and at first it was almost impossible to buy even a tin bucket, but now it provides most elegant enamel ware, while the native garments one can buy, are a joy to the heart.

The language presents many difficulties, as it is more closely allied to Russian than to the ordinary Western tongues, and the letters, written and printed, differ in about half the alphabet from our own. The language beside Serbian most usually spoken, is German. All the orderlies speak this, and with a little French thrown in, a few words of Russian (for those that know it), and an occasional English word, the confusion is great.

But it is more than interesting to have been in the country at such a time, and to see its heroic struggle under such appalling circumstances, while one cannot be too glad if one can alleviate a little, the hardness of its lot by sharing its terrible burdens.

THE PARIS FLOOD.

A MEMORY.

By Miss R. H. BRUCE.

PLACE and time are unpropitious to the recital of an experience which is a common place in so many parts of India, and which, as an unusual happening, in Europe, is daily eclipsed by the events of the war. Nevertheless, the Paris Flood in the year 1910* had a character of its own which makes it impossible for us who lived through it to lose altogether the impression it made.

It was winter. Light snow lay on the ground, and hoar-frost covered the trees. All day a dark blue cloud hung low over the city, and the night came in between three and four of the afternoon. There had been no rain in Paris; the torrents which brought the catastrophe fell over the head waters of the river Marne.

Water and light were the two comforts of life which the flood took from us. The swelling river had pushed through the drains into the water-pipes, poisoning all the fresh conduits of the city. "Water, water, everywhere, nor any drop to"—make use of! The wise do not *drink* water in Paris at the best of times.

Our household of eighty persons was fortunately supplied from a private well in a neighbouring garden. But the supply was scanty. A tumblerful in

our bedroom basin had to last us all day for washing purposes; and the successive courses of our meals were eaten from a single plate wiped with a dry cloth between meat and pudding!

And this was one of the most expensive and luxurious 'finishing-schools' in Paris! There was no luxury for anyone in those days.

We had tried to be prompt in ordering several hundred candles the moment the gas failed us; but all our questing produced no more than thirty! A friend indeed lent us a tall standard-lamp with a good strong light; and round that centre sixty-odd of us gathered every evening from four o'clock till seven, when we groped our way to bed, undressing as best we could in the pitchy blackness of the starless nights.

This state of affairs lasted about three weeks.

Out of doors an atmosphere of excitement overpowered the gloom. If the flood had been a mere rising of the river about its banks, it would have been more easily dealt with; but the danger and the uncertainty lay in the flooding of the great city sewers and of the labyrinthine network of the *Metro*, the Parisian equivalent of the London "Tube." It was this that made it impossible to know where the hydra-headed creature would push its way to the surface next. Even in the broad boulevard of the Champs Elysée, sloping high out of sight of the river, suddenly the street sagged, and without warning gave way beneath a horse and his rider, plunging them into the stream below.

The hasty flight of the parents whose baby was born in a boat in the street, (and christened Moses!); the home-coming of a gentleman in top-hat and frock-coat whom I saw rowing through his drawing room window on the second floor, and tying his boat to the banisters of the stair-case; the group cut off in St. Lazare station, watching the waves lap up, up, up, nearer and nearer, till suddenly they stood,—and the flood had turned: all these marked the unexpectedness of events which held the least timid among us silent before unknown dangers.

The catastrophes which were foretold did not occur.

Is it the Pont d'Alma which has stone soldiers larger than life supporting its columns? We watched the river rise, to their knees, to their waists, to their shoulders, over their heads. When it reaches the level of the road, we were told, the bridge must be blown up to prevent the damming and spreading of the waters. One night a terrific report was heard. "The Pont is gone," we told each other in the morning. But it was not so; the Pont stands firm; the explosion we had heard was caused by the water having reached some chemicals in a factory.

Neither did the awful epidemics ensue, which were prophesied as the result of these disasters. It was in a *Scottish* newspaper that I read of dead bodies being washed out of their graves and floated through the doors and windows of dwelling houses. The foundation facts which gave rise to such wild tales as these, must certainly have been observed outside Paris, if at all. I believe that the riverside villages suffered terribly, and that the loss of life in the country places was very much greater than in the capital itself.

Though many did indeed die of exposure in spite of all that could be done to provide lodging and clothes for the homeless in that bitter weather, the deaths by drowning were comparatively few.

This was largely due to the soldiers who seemed to spring up wherever help was needed. If a child paddling in the street fell through a manhole in the pavement, a soldier would appear from nowhere, and pulled him to safety before his head was under water. If it were only your way to Church that was blocked on Sunday morning, a soldier would be there with a punting pole to ferry you across in his boat.

They worked at rescuing furniture and valuables from the deserted houses by day, and they guarded the town by night. We used to see them returning to the *caserne* in the early morning, haggard with weariness, unshaven and unclean. Often we had scoffed at their slouching walk, at their baggy trousers and ill-fitting jackets; but it was in those days of trouble that we began to respect the *piou-piou* and his powers.

Street guarding was no sinecure during the flood. In all of Paris outside the walls, the lights were out. Miles and miles of suburban avenues and boulevards stretched and interlaced in complete darkness. It was not a case of lights shaded from the eye of the Zeppelin; there was no light to be had; the damaged gas-pipes were disconnected from the meters, and after passing through the *barrière* from the brightly-lighted streets within, it was necessary to keep one's wits awake to find even the most familiar ways. Naturally the *apachés*, those *budmushis*, who had been giving so much trouble in Paris before the flood rose, took full advantage of this cloak for their evil deeds; and soldiers, mounted and unmounted, were kept busy helping the police to protect wayfarers from assaults, and to guard flooded houses from pillage.

I can still see the night picture at the end of our avenue in Neuilly, where the water filled the road from railing to railing, and lapped at the layer of snow as it rose. The moon was out, and shone upon the branches of the plane trees, making them cast black, clear shadows on the pavement. The soldiers had kindled a fire in a great brazier, and as they moved about it, their faces glowed red in its light. A man holding a lamp was doing something in a boat which he had moored to a lamp-post at a little distance.

During the whole period the Parisian women whom I knew showed that quiet resigned calm, which so much surprised those who were with them in their hour of fear a year ago. There was none of the hysterical noise and gesticulation by means of which French women are wont to express their lesser emotions. They did indeed weep silently from time to time, in an un-English way, and they looked askance at any attempt to lighten the gloom by artificial mirth. The spirit of the "laughing devils," who take their pleasure so sadly, and turn their troubles to jest, did not, in any wise, appeal to them. They shook their heads and murmured, *C'est que vous n'êtes pas ici chez vous*. (It is not your home.) So we quitted our useless efforts, and wept with them that wept, waiting for the happier days which followed, to rejoice with them that did rejoice!