

Twenty Eight Years Ago

Magazine
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It was wonderful to be hailed by our own boys from the banks of the Suez Canal and they, in turn, were "hailed" by us with cigarettes, oranges, etc. I was most thrilled by my first sight of Seaplanes at Port Said, which looked like graceful seabirds alighting round their warship.

A great thrill came to me early in 1916 with an invitation to join the staff of the Military Hospital, Endell St., London; at which the medical staff was composed entirely of women, headed by Dr. Flora Murray and Dr. Louisa Garrett Anderson, daughter of the renowned pioneer medical woman, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson.

The first incident that enlivened the sea trip to England was a strike by the stewards just after we left Ceylon; the strike was for an insurance on their lives ~~for~~ ^{having} many of their friends ~~had~~ perished a short time previously, when the Persia was torpedoed and sunk in the Mediterranean. The company was unwilling to grant their demands and so it was necessary ~~to put out~~ ^{to ship a fresh lot of stewards at} Bombay where we spent an interesting day. The stewards who came aboard at Bombay were Goanese, from the old Portuguese settlement of Goa; they knew very little English and for a time the waiting at meals was rather comic.

Of course the usual steps were taken to observe black-out precautions at night and we steered a zig-zag course through the Mediterranean and spent a whole day crawling along the north coast of Crete and making up for lost time by going full speed ahead during the night. The men passengers took it in turns to help in look-out duties but fortunately the Mediterranean was in a choppy humour and the weather misty and showery so that conditions were not encouraging for submarines.

On arriving in England we were greeted by an air raid of mild character and the news of the Irish ^{Easter} rebellion; the latter came as a bit of a shock as we had rather taken the unity of the Empire for granted and did not expect to find division so near the centre. Later on I met at our hotel a young Irish girl rebel who had come over to be decorated by the King for her bravery in rushing out to drag to shelter a wounded man who was lying exposed to ^{further} risk from gunfire.

The two chiefs of the Endell St. Military Hospital, Dr. Flora Murray and Louisa Garrett Anderson had been responsible for the organization of the Women's Hospital Corps Voluntary Unit, which went to France in September, 1914 and did outstanding work

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among the wounded who were arriving from the front and accumulating in large numbers on the coast while awaiting embarkation. The hospital here ~~suffered~~ satisfied a real need for there were at this point not nearly enough facilities for ~~treatment~~ ^{treatment} of the men who required it. The War Office appreciated the women's effort and in acknowledgment offered them accommodation for a hospital in London to be staffed entirely by women doctors and run on strict military lines. Dr. Murray was C. O. and Chief Physician to the hospital and Dr. Anderson was Chief Surgeon and besides them the staff was enriched by women specialists in all branches. Dr. Helen Chambers, the bacteriologist, was very well known and after the war became famous for her work on cancer. Dr. Sheppard was the eye specialist and Dr. Magill the very busy radiologist; a prodigious number of pieces of shrapnel must have been located by her skill. Dr. Woodcock, the physician, died of pneumonia during an influenza epidemic and was succeeded by Dr. Thackrah. It was indeed a pleasure and an inspiration to be associated with so many splendid women of the overseas contingent. Dr. Windsor, one of the anaesthetists, was a Canadian and while at the hospital married a brother of Stephen Leacock the Canadian humourist. The Australians who were there at the same time were Dr. Hamilton-Browne who after the war went to India, Dr. Scattlebury who later became Director of Maternal and Child Welfare in Victoria and Dr. Champion who was married while at the hospital to a Melbourne surgeon. At this time wedding cakes were not allowed to be iced, so Dr. Champion's cake was decorated with white heather.

We caught no more than a glimpse of Dr. Anderson's famous mother, Dr. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson; we never actually met her for she was then in failing health and indeed died soon afterwards. A memorial service was held for her in the hospital chapel. Her life-story has been told ⁱⁿ by a book written by her daughter and published in 1939.

One famous woman whom we did meet was Mrs. Parkhurst

the militant suffragette leader, small but very definite and forceful. Dr. Anderson won our admiration for having undergone a hunger strike but I am afraid that both she and Dr. Murray regarded us Australians as rather lukewarm in the suffrage cause. They would say, "But you have had the vote for 15 years!" with the implication, "What on earth have you accomplished by it in all that time?" On our part we found it hard to swallow the doctrine that everything that was wrong, including set-backs at the front, were due to the fact that we live in a man-made world. When the order came out that prohibited women from travelling overseas from Australia, this was regarded as another injustice and insult to women, whereas really it was out of consideration for the crews, who would risk their valuable lives to save the women if the ship were torpedoed.

The Hospital Librarian was Miss Beatrice Harraden, the famous authoress of "Ships that pass in the Night", and no one could have been better. She was a short woman with bobbed iron-gray hair, very quiet and retiring and intensely sensitive and sympathetic. She went to endless trouble to find out the sort of reading matter the men preferred, to advise and encourage those whose reading had been neglected and to provide the books which had been ~~selected~~ requested.

The Hosts of good friends gave their services voluntarily in various ways. For instance, through their good offices a very liberal diet was provided, for which the hospital earned much popularity with the Tommies. Various forms of handwork were taught to the patients and entertainments in the wards, or in summer in the central courtyard, relieved the tedium of hospital life, while those who were able to enjoy them were taken for drives into the country or for visits to the theatre.

Royalty honoured the hospital by visiting it on several occasions. Queen Alexandra came more than once; she was very warm-hearted and much affected by the men's sufferings and on one occasion she left with a patient a handkerchief embroidered with her crowned initial and bedewed with her tears; the proud recipient, almost speechless with embarrassment, was hardly able to express his thanks.

The nursing staff was headed by a matron and army nursing sisters; under them were orderlies, young girls selected from the best-known schools in England; they worked excellently and most of them became very proficient. They were nearly all very good-looking and were nick-named by some people "the beauty chorus" but this did not impair their efficiency and keenness. They looked very well in the uniform, which had a smart short skirt and a round cap with a crepe veil; the colour was a ^{light} khaki tending to mole-colour; the medical staff wore scarlet shoulder straps and the orderlies blue. Besides nursing and other duties, the orderlies did all the stretcher-bearing except lifting down the patient from the upper stretcher in the ambulance; this was done by members of a small squad of R.A.M.C. men who were attached to the hospital under a sergeant-major. Some of the orderlies sketched well and produced amusing caricatures, even the Chief sometimes falling victim to their efforts. Dr. Anderson was small, quick and energetic in her movements, Dr. Murray tall, calm and unhurried; some slight clash of directions regarding a patient on a trolley en route for the operating theatre provoked a drawing which brought out clearly Dr. Anderson's quick fussiness and Dr. Murray's quietly beckoning finger. A clever sketch captured my back view as I waited in the court-yard by the lift and convinced me that a bad habit of standing with my feet wide apart needed correction. The orderlies paraded on pay-day before the Orderly Officer for the day to receive the usual army pay of $\text{1s } 6\text{d}$ a day, which they gleefully referred to as a tip.

The hospital had between 400 and 500 beds and was situated in a street parallel to Drury Lane and quite near Covent Garden and Theatre-land generally. It had been an old disused work-house infirmary at the time that Belgian refugees were pouring into England. For a time it housed Belgians but, as these gradually found work and other accommodation, the place became empty and was offered by the War Office for the hospital. It must have looked an awkward proposition as it first appeared, for work-house infirmaries ~~was~~ ^{were} not provided with all modern conveniences. The immediate necessity was lifts and a lift

shop was therefore erected in the court-yard outside each of the three blocks of wards which formed three sides of the square, the administrative block and the kitchens forming the fourth side. One of the interesting features of the hospital was its chapel, situated just to the right of the entrance gate; this was a church of quite considerable size and had been built as a thanksgiving after the Great Plague.

Nearly all the staff lived outside the hospital and at first I took up residence in Woburn Place near Tavistock Square, where the British Medical Association has now built a magnificent home for its headquarters. This is the district just north of the British Museum, where the London University was engaged before the present war in erecting some wonderful buildings in connection with its re-organization. Of these perhaps the most notable was the Library which has unfortunately fallen victim to Nazi brutality. Bloomsbury no doubt has an atmosphere of old-fashioned distinction but I am afraid that, as a stranger in war-time, I found it a little depressing; the long lines of terraced houses seemed so unending and the homes of strange cults which faced one at every turn seemed so bewildering and comfortless. Some of us went once to a vegetarian restaurant and our reactions were typified by an athletic Australian hockey-player who exclaimed with feeling, "Well, I call it a process of semi-starvation!" Getting tired of Bloomsbury, ~~to the~~ I scandalized some of my old-fashioned friends by my bad taste in moving nearer to the Parks, to a new, scarcely finished hotel behind Selfridges, which has now been incorporated by that octopus as its Provisions Department. ^{later} I returned to Bloomsbury, while studying for the Diploma of Public Health, and was very happy there, sharing a flat opposite the Foundling Hospital with a lady named Shrapnel, a descendant of the famous ammunition expert.

The hotel near Selfridges had the advantage that the manager owned a farm so that our food was passable at a time when supplies generally were rather low ~~at the~~ before rationing had ~~by~~ begun. Among interesting guests at the hotel was ~~the tropical~~ Sir Patrick Manson ~~who had discovered the embryos of filaria in human blood, who had proved that the embryos of filaria are carried by mosquitoes and also showed that mosquitoes carried the disease and~~ suggested to Sir Ronald Ross that this might also be the way that

malaria was spread; this Sir Ronald Ross after laborious work proved to be true. Castellani was another tropical expert who lived in the hotel and was responsible for introducing ^{the} threefold ^{simultaneous} immunization of typhoid, para typhoid and dysentery. Staying in the hotel also was the mother of Owen Hares, the matinee idol of those days, who was herself something of a poetess. As in most hotels in war-time, strange and suspicious characters appeared from time to time. I remember three, supposed to be a brother and sister and maid escaped from Russia; someone remarked that the maid looked very like the brother and sister. They were very good-looking and the sister, accompanied by a forbidding bull-dog, used to dine delicately on a grape and a glass of champagne. She also had a parrot and when one day the trio disappeared, Polly was left to foot the bill.

There were a few air raids even in those days and from the roof of the hotel one night I saw a glowing light fall from the sky; it was the first Zeppelin being brought down. A piece of shrapnel once came through the old roof of one of my wards. The daylight raid was rather exciting and it was hard to believe that the buzzing planes, looking like a swarm of flies, might really drop something dangerous; on this occasion the hospital was showered with bits of burnt paper from the nearby Guard Post Office which got a hit.

The Medical Officers used ^{each} to act once in eight days as Orderly Officer for 24 hours and slept at the hospital. She dealt with anything that occurred during that time such as convoy, did the night round for the whole hospital and the dinner round asking for "any complaints?" I well remember one wintry night when a convoy of 300 arrived; as the ambulances circled the courtyard the ground became more and more slippery and so did the floors of the lifts and it was amazing how the girl stretcher-bearers managed to keep their feet with their heavy loads.

Christmas of course seems to bring more gaiety and good cheer to hospital than anywhere else and on that occasion the orderly officer had no need to ask whether there were any complaints about the dinner; each medical officer had the duty and pleasure of carving the turkey

X. It was a red-letter day for the hospital when Dr Murray and Anderson were known by the King for their services by the hospital of the C.R.E. On the day when they went to the Palace they were escorted by a bodyguard of doctors and attendants and accompanied by their Highness, General Black and White, who of course had to wait at the gates until their majesties appeared when they were all photographed together.

in her own ward. All the wards were beautifully decorated with great originality and the Chief, after parading the wards on a visit of inspection and judgment, awarded a prize to the best. For weeks beforehand a choir had been practising Christmas carols and, early on Christmas morning, carrying lanterns to light them through the black-out, clad in sheets and crowned with holly, the singing procession passed through the wards announcing that the great day had come.

Altogether the experience of working in this famous hospital in the world's metropolis was unforgettable and I look upon it as one of the high lights of my life.