ON ACTIVE SERVICE SERIES

A SCOTTISH NURSE AT WORK

HENRIETTA TAYLER

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On Active Service Series.

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SISTER AND SEFKE

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A SCOTTISH NURSE AT WORK

BEING A RECORD OF WHAT ONE SEMI-TRAINED NURSE HAS BEEN PRIVILEGED TO SEE AND DO DURING FOUR AND A HALF YEARS OF WAR

WITH SEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS

BY HENRIETTA TAYLER

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To

COLONEL J. SCOTT-RIDDELL, M.V.O.

RED CROSS COMMISSIONER FOR THE NORTH-EAST OF SCOTLAND, AT WHOSE SUGGESTION THESE NOTES WERE ORIGINALLY COMPILED

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CHAPTER I

SCOTLAND

SO many people have written of their doings in the great war that it seems as if there were nothing more left to be said, but one whose opinion I value tells me that my experiences are in some ways unique as being so varied and would interest readers, so in gratitude for many kindnesses I can but put them down and see.

What one did before the war can be of no possible interest to anybody. Suffice it to say that circumstances had prevented me from qualifying for admission to that finest of all services the Q.A.I.M.N.S., or wearing the T.N. badge of the British Red Cross, and that, therefore, during all my nursing service I have had to bear the stigma of the semi-trained; a stigma that I have tried, as we all do, to rub off with extra hard work, and by trying to make use of the various things we learned during the years we were

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not training, or training for something else, which, after all, ought to have yielded us something. Most things come in useful some time, even a superficial acquaintance with such different arts and sciences as dressmaking, carpentry, geometric drawing, chemistry, cooking or Greek; and some knowledge of laboratory and dispensing work. Also, all the experience one has had in "roughing it" in various parts of the world, and any practice in former times in trying to talk to some one of whose language one knows about ten words!

The beginning of war found me in a small Scots seaside town, where for a week or two I helped with Red Cross work parties, ambulance lectures, etc., and all the paraphernalia with which staying-at-home women hoped at that period to assist the speedy ending of the war—while selfish people laid in stores of sugar, jam and tinned foods, as for a siege.

A small boy of my acquaintance was asked, "What is every one doing now?" The answer expected—as the Latin grammar used to say— was, "Praying for victory," but what he actually and truthfully replied was "Knitting."

It was he, also, who remarked one day in

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August when the war was about a fortnight old, "I suppose if the Germans win, it will be the end of the world, the awful day, what the hymn talks of?" but was quite reassured when told the Germans were not going to win. "Oh, aren't they? then *that's* all right."

We had to steel our nerves to the oft-repeated tales of great Naval victories and disasters, to smile at reports of Russian reinforcements travelling through Scotland, and to set our teeth grimly as the stories of Belgian horrors came through. A chance acquaintance with the Dutch tongue—which is practically the same as Flemish—enabled me to be useful to an early party of Belgian refugees, much troubled by unknown Scottish ways and foods, and before long I was plunged into the organization and running of a V.A.D. hospital for Belgian wounded in the South of England. Many people's French was a little rusty at that time and one of my first efforts was to ask to be allowed to modify the notice I found stuck up in every ward: "Le Médecin défend de expectorer." A notice, moreover, quite unnecessary as regards those particular most polite Belgians. And I received with a joy which I *now* know to

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have been the mark of the amateur the orders of the hard-worked Surgeon in charge, that I must never take regular off-time as he might want his interpreter at any moment!

It is curious to remember how every one flocked to see these first victims of the war. We had actually to limit the number of children to be admitted at one time, for good-tempered as the patients were they did not want to be a penny peep-show; and the authorities had to supervise most carefully the gifts of cigarettes, chocolates, fruit and other dainties brought in, or all the men would have been ill. One man remarked, "Ca ne manque pas de cigarettes en Angleterre!"

From here I hoped, as so many did, to be allowed to join one of the irregular units going to the Front, but I was summoned back to my own country for less heroic but equally necessary work; and for eighteen months struggled with the organization and management of a small Red Cross Hospital of thirty-six beds, with one trained nurse and daily V.A.D.'s, and a local Committee, *none* of whom knew anything about hospital management. How often did I long to say with my favourite hero Montrose:

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"My dear and only Love, I pray,
That little word of thee,
Be governed by no other sway
But purest monarchy.

For if Committees thou erect
And go on such a score,
I'll laugh and sing at thy neglect
And never love thee more."

He, it will be remembered, had some experience of war waged under the direction of a Committee and the successful results—to the enemy!

One can smile now at the difficulties of those early days and how we worried through. There were no restrictions then on the treating of or the sale of liquor to soldiers. There were no hospital suits to enable one to recognize escaped patients at a distance; every wounded soldier was a hero, and all authorities in charge of him were made to be hoodwinked if possible by civilians; the men were allowed outside the hospital grounds, and it was Matron's daily anxiety to count heads at meals and see how many were missing and might be expected to roll in or be brought back later, with the cheerful remark: "Here's ane o' yer lads te ye." She ruefully told herself that one thing she was learning was

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the different manner in which Englishmen, Scots, Welsh and Irish carry their drink and the different ways of dealing with them.

There was the pathetic little Welsh boy, who after a bout of furniture breaking, when he took chairs for crouching Germans and made one's blood run cold by his reproduction of the cries of the battlefield, was found on the floor moaning, " Kill me, Matron, do kill me—I ain't fit to live," suffering agonies from one glass of port and one of whisky, given him by a supposed friend—both potions being hitherto entirely unknown to him. There was the educated Londoner, quaintly enlisted in the Seaforths from admiration for the kilt, who was led to bed five times in one evening, and always emerged in ever greater " deshabille " to make further elaborate and respectful apologies for his conduct. This man was curiously enough afterwards met by one of us, in a military hospital in the South of England, doing exactly the same thing.

There were the many Irish who tearfully promised amendment and went out next day and " did it again," till we told our good friend the priest that members of his flock gave us more trouble than all the rest put together!

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The truculent Highlander whom I faced for two hours in the front hall, while he swore he *would* go out again and "do" for the policeman who had brought him in with a cut and bleeding face, and each time he was reminded that he could not get out without knocking me down, as the key was in my pocket, invariably replied: "Oh, I wouldn't touch *ye* for the world, mem;" and, at length, quite suddenly announced, "Weel, I'll awa' to my bed, and thenk ye." I feel sure he afterwards led a forlorn hope somewhere, and killed many Germans. He was, like the immortal Alan Breck, "a bonnie fighter."

On another occasion I found one of my flock laying about him in the village street, the centre of an admiring crowd. A huge and kindly policeman, unwilling to arrest him, said, "Maybe he'll gang wi' you," and he *did*, suddenly as meek as a lamb.

Even a tall ex-London policeman, now a Trooper in the Blues, thought it quite good fun to climb out through a forbidden window, and passed some painful and salutary minutes when he found this was a military offence for which he had to beg forgiveness, from a woman! He was forgiven, but dispatched to Headquarters as soon as possible—only

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without the dreaded " crime " marked on his paper and not under escort. Only twice during eighteen months and with 300 patients did I have to resort to this last extremity, though I sometimes had some tense moments, for there was literally no one and nothing on the spot to support my authority with an insubordinate patient, except the good feeling of all the rest.

They used to have terrific discussions as to the rival merits of their various regiments, the number and value of their " battle-honours," etc., and expected one to be able to decide off-hand which battle or campaign was most historically important. My countrymen can be terrible in argument as we all know, but they never allow one to be dull.

The wounds of the healthy old soldier seemed to give him strangely little trouble, but of course we had many more serious cases whom we were able to keep in bed, and a large number of men from the training camps, recovering from minor operations. Among these was one American recruit, also in a Highland regiment, who was still in difficulties with his kilt, in which he said he felt " kind o' bashful," and thought *all* regulations were made for the pleasure of

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evading them. This was the boy who announced that he was going to be married to a girl he had met in the streets of Perth during his two days there, and proudly exhibited a post card from his company officer, probably about as old and experienced as himself, to the effect that there was "no objection to Private So-and-so getting married!" Being told something about the kind of company he had obviously been keeping, he said naively: "Wal, you've been as good to me as a mother, and if you don't *want* me to marry that little gurrl, I won't," and wrote her a post card to say so! I afterwards heard that he deserted from his Highland camp, in sheer disgust at not having been sent to the Front at once, and enlisted in something else. I hope he "got there" in the end.

We had one splendid well-grown young Scot who had had his *fifteenth* birthday in the trenches, and asked for a cake to celebrate it! and a veteran who was so full of tales of South African and Indian wars, that an irreverent Londoner gravely assured the listeners that "Old John's best story, if you can make him tell it, is of the battle of Bannockburn!"

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There were patients hailing from every part, from the Devonshire man, so thrilled with being in the North of Scotland, that he asked Matron to show him John o' Groat's house—some 200 miles away—to the local ploughboy, come home to be a hero to his family, and the gallant Gordon of twenty-seven who explained that he was "terrible anxious about feyther," now in the Dardanelles—"Feyther" having enlisted at the same time with him, in another regiment and given *his* age as twenty-eight.

The first contingent of wounded from Gallipoli, with their sun helmets and bronzed faces, created enormous interest.

The housekeeping in those days was difficult, with a difficulty unknown now. Gifts in kind simply poured in—but yet of course one could not count on them, and it sometimes happened that one had provisioned the house for the family of forty-five for two or three days and would then come in to find the front hall filled with little presents, such as forty rabbits, a whole salmon, a 20 lb. roast of beef, or a haunch of venison. I sometimes mentally compared myself to Mrs. Poyser, "lying awake o' nights, with twenty gallons of milk on me mind."

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When one thinks of those luxurious patients, with their two-course breakfast and unlimited butter and jam, and sugar left in the bottom of their cups, their three-course dinner, tea at 5 and "something to it," and hearty supper, one wishes that some form of rationing had been introduced earlier to equalize matters throughout the war, and then the hardships of the 1917 winter—when the Naval officer's wife, with three sick children, had to *beg* the butcher to sell her "one bone" to make soup for them—might have been avoided! One compares our soldiers also, with the French or Italians on their scanty and monotonous rations, and absence of all medical comforts.

Small gifts, too, were frequent. The mother of one soldier would bring a shilling to buy "Cookies for the lave," and another would bring six herrings or a bag of peppermints; and the local shops vied with one another in supplying our minor wants, such as collar-studs, braces and free boot-repairs.

I kept a book in which the patients when leaving sometimes wrote the quaintest effusions, of which the following is an excellent specimen, showing the spirit of the cheery

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youngsters in French's "contemptible little army."

For the Matron's Book.

"I left England on the 15 of Aug. 1914, for France, with the K.O.R.L.R. Machine Gun Section and when we arrived we had a good day at Boulogne. At 12 midnight we left for the firing-line—of course we had a good ride and then a few miles march, and on the 25 Aug. we came in action at the battle of Mons, and then we retired a few miles and then a rest—of course we done this for a few weeks until we were a few miles off Paris, and then we were to have four days rest, but we only got two days as the Germans were making their way for the S.E. of Paris and we went to help the French. Of course after a few days hard fight the Germans retired on the Marne and then we had another go at them, and after very hard fight they retired to the river Aisne in which I was wounded, but not much. Of course I was not sent away, but stopped with my regiment on the River Aisne for 28 days in which the French relieved us and we were sent to Armentieres, of course another good fight with the Germans until we got to Le Bizet and then

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we chased them to Le Touquet in which we stopped for a few weeks, doing four days in the trenches and four out—we had to clean ourselves up and the French girls in Armentieres were very good to us while we were there. Then we left for Ypres, and it was my 21st birthday on the 7th of May, and I got wounded on the 8th of May. Of course I was sent to the hospital No. 8, and then to Rouen, and then to Le Havre and then to dear old England and landed there on the 16th of May.

"F. Mortigue,
"1st Batt. K.O.R.L.R."

Sometimes they were flowery in sentiment and talked about the Paradise in which they found themselves, and sometimes they burst into poetry.

Since I have been in this house
  The —— V.A.D.
The Matron and the Nurses
  Have been very kind to me.
With gentle hands they dressed my Wounds
  And helped to ease my pain,
For which I'm very thankful
  And below I'll sign my name—

LANCE CORP.——

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I also cherish a letter from the wife of one patient who nearly died. When at length he could be sent home, Madame wrote and thanked me for "returning my husband in pretty good condition."

Two hard winters and one fine summer I passed in this work, and then I "moved on.'

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CHAPTER II

LA PANNE

BEING at length allowed by those in authority to gratify my long-standing desire to volunteer for foreign service, I went up to London and offered myself to the Anglo-French section of the British Red Cross, and had the great luck to be sent to Dr. Depage's famous ambulance at La Panne, in the little bit still left of free Belgium. Here I thankfully ceased to be a " boss " on a small scale, struggling with daily difficulties of patients, personnel and committee, and became a very small unit in a splendid organization.

The hospital had its nucleus in an hotel formerly owned by a German ; here some of the worst cases were housed, and the central operating rooms situated ; but almost more convenient in many ways, because absolutely designed for hospital use, were the numerous iron buildings which formed the rest of the

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wards, holding in all 1000 beds, afterwards increased to 1400. With these large numbers, even in a first-line hospital, it was possible to classify the cases, and there were wards for abdominal and chest wounds, head wounds, articulations, fractures, eyes, nerve lesions, etc., besides general wards, and one especially devoted to experimental treatment of complicated cases with all the newest therapeutic discoveries.

The routine treatment of all wounds, except in these special cases, was with the Carrel Dakin liquid, in the use of which Dr. Depage introduced some modifications of his own, and his hospital shared with the Direction of the famous Rockefeller institute at Compiègne—now, alas, no more—the distinction of being the best exponents of the system, and wonderful results were obtained.

The medical and surgical staff comprised some of the best operating skill in Belgium, and all the nurses had opportunities, for which in work at home they might have waited for years, or for ever, of seeing some of the most marvellous and delicate operations. There was also a school of mecano-therapie, with all the newest electric and other machines for restoring the normal use of wounded and

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incomplete limbs in the shortest possible time, and a famous bacteriological department which was able, of course, to pursue its researches on abundant material and under the best conditions. The result of its labours is given to the world twice annually in the form of "Annales" with beautiful illustrations.

One was fully conscious of the great privilege of being attached, in however minor a capacity, to this huge organization, and of helping, when one was allowed, any of the specialists in their own line.

Another feature of the establishment, which gave an extraordinary educational opportunity to the doctors of the other field hospitals within reach and to any nurses who happened to be free to attend, was the excellent series of Saturday lectures by specialists on their own subjects, illustrated by lantern slides and sometimes even by cinema-films of actual operations. The hall in which these were delivered had later on to be turned into a ward, but in normal times was used for all sorts of social gatherings for the staff. The patients, also, who were well enough had a recreation room of their own. There was one convalescent ward where a number of men

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DR. DEPAGE

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requiring prolonged treatment remained to be under the surgeon's eye, and later a workshop was established to teach them trades. Some were being trained in the "atelier," which turned out beautiful artificial arms and legs, fitted to each patient, who was also carefully instructed in the proper use of his new acquisition.

The whole ambulance was like a little self-contained town and it was sometimes difficult to remember how near the Front we were. We had our own shop, supplied from Harrods, where we could buy—at any rate in 1916—English soap, jams and biscuits. Later on the shop was wrecked by a bomb, and the man behind the counter killed.

A little old inn a few hundred yards from the central buildings was taken for us, and fitted up in old Flemish style, as a nurses' club; some of the nursing staff also sleeping there. Here, when we had any time, we held informal concerts, and entertained each other and, by special permission, strangers, visiting doctors, or chance English friends, to tea.

There was an interesting little wooden chapel, built by the soldiers specially for the Ambulance, and so near that the patients could attend Mass in their pyjamas and the

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nurses in cap and apron. The *aumônier* was every one's friend. A pathetic interest attached to this building, which was filled with relics from all the ruined churches in the neighbourhood; fragments of altar rails, bells, statues and broken crucifixes decorated the walls. An English Naval chaplain came over sometimes from Dunkirk, and held service in a room, but subsequently a second little chapel was specially built for the use of the English staff and dedicated by the Anglican bishop of northern Europe. In the stirring times of the summer of 1917, beds were placed here for the use of extra staff, but never actually occupied. This chapel was used for Parade services while La Panne was in British hands, and then the congregation used to overflow into the surrounding yard.

My first job at La Panne was in an ordinary surgical ward, where, " save the mark," I sometimes bemoaned that I had not enough to do. There were six Sisters—as we were all called !—to fifty patients, and the " off-duty " times were very liberal. In June 1916, just after the busy month of May, and during the Somme offensive, there was not a great deal of activity on the Belgian front, and our

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staff was very large, being about half British and half Belgian.

Four of us slept in a small bedroom in one of the villas on the sea front, and we suffered a good deal from heat and mosquitoes, or then thought we did—these things being entirely comparative.

In peace time La Panne is a small seaside resort of artists and children. It has shining yellow sands, now, alas, disfigured with barbed wire entanglements, and miles and miles of soft sandy dunes, where nothing higher than a juniper bush can grow, and whence all animal life has long been driven by the numberless camps and patrols. The colour effects on sea and sky are marvellous and the sense of space recalls Browning's description of the Campagna with its " everlasting wash of air " ; but there were moments when we longed for the shade of our own green trees and a *road* to walk on instead of a sand-hill. Later, when sentries and gendarmes forbade us to walk at all, we regretted the sand-hills !

They were very lovely in the springtime and early summer, covered with a carpet of tiny pansies and creeping dog-roses, and again in autumn when the berries were red ; but in the blazing midsummer days when

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there was not an atom of shade anywhere, and, also, when the wintry gales blew driving mist and sand into every corner, La Panne had a trying climate.

There was always plenty of excitement in the shape of Taubes over-head, and the sight and sound of big guns on the Front, and star shells at night; sometimes we witnessed naval and aeroplane duels, most thrilling sights.

In the first days of August, to my intense joy, I was transferred to the Receiving Ward and worked there for three blissful months, six weeks on day duty and six weeks on night. Day duty began at 8, but I was also employed from 5 a.m to 7.30 on a special job with operation patients, and tasted to the full the joy of being really busy.

When going on duty one morning at 4.30 I saw the dim outline of a Zeppelin on its way from England, and often caught sight of the picturesque Belgian cavalry stealing along the shore in the morning mist to exercise.

As there was no civil hospital anywhere in Free Belgium, Dr. Depage sometimes took in civil cases for urgent operation, men, women and children. The latter were always my charge as they passed through the Re-

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ceiving Ward, for they rarely spoke anything but Flemish. There were casualties too, sad little children with bomb wounds or burns. One evening an aerial torpedo went straight through the roof of a house in the village, through all the stories and reached the basement where it exploded under the kitchen table, injuring the legs of five people having supper. All were brought to us at once, the three little girls dead or dying, but immediate operation saved the man and woman, and he will go through life with one leg and she with none! The only person uninjured was the baby in the cradle.

On the occasion of King Albert's birthday the courteous Hun dropped bombs all around his villa and killed and wounded many gendarmes, who were brought at once to us. Once we had an English aviator, the victim of an accident, and one or two gassed Engineers engaged in mysterious operations near Nieuport. Later on, of course, our countrymen were not so rare in those parts!

Night duty was a wonderful experience, and I never got over a kind of mysterious thrill when the two of us took up our 12 hours' vigil, not knowing whether we might sit peaceful and idle for an hour or two at inter-

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vals, or work without stopping until relieved.

When the ambulance clattered up in the dark, and the door was thrown open with the cry of "Blessés!" the sleepy *brancardiers* would slowly bestir themselves—the very slowest was appropriately called Désiré—a hasty messenger would fetch our *médecin de garde* if not already on the spot, and we would hurriedly get ready all that he might possibly want, while doing what we could in the meantime. The doctors, of course, took it in turn to be "on call" during the night—though any member of the staff or any number of them could be summoned if necessary—and we always had to remember carefully their individual idiosyncrasies, and how *one* liked his attendant nurse to have everything prepared and to hand it without being asked, while another would consider this a liberty and if anything was offered to him for which he had not asked would stop and remark witheringly, "Tiens, c'est l'infirmière qui fait le pansement!" Sometimes, however, when many wounded came in at once, we all worked for dear life, together, and it would have to be decided which cases were the most hopeful for immediate operation; while the others waited their turn if still alive. Some-

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times half a dozen of the great surgeons would be at work together, and extra theatre Sisters would have to be called up.

One of our own young surgeons, when he went back to take his turn in the trenches, was brought in badly wounded and died with us.

What the newspapers call " the customary artillery activity " brought us ten or twenty patients every night, an hour or so after they had been wounded, and any local attack *many* more: Belgians from the most tortured parts of their lines and sorely wounded Frenchmen from the critical sector between Nieuport and the sea. We only had the very serious French cases, for those at all " transportable " were always taken to French hospitals in French territory, such a little way behind us really, as the German lines were such a little way in front, and we had many, many deaths. At one time French colonial troops were encamped at Coxyde; such picturesque people, with flowing robes and high peaked saddles, a terror to the Boche we were told. They made excellent patients, these, and grumbled at nothing, even at the number of hypodermic injections introduced into their tough hides.

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I shall never forget one lurid night I passed with three of them and ten other patients, the Sister in charge being engaged elsewhere; one brown man had to have injections of *huile camphrée* hourly, another morphia whenever his pain became unbearable, and the third was coughing up his lungs all night, and died before morning. The other two lived to be moved to another ward, but not much longer. The sad part about "receiving" work, besides the number of fatal cases that must necessarily occur in an ambulance so near the lines, is that want of time and opportunity nearly always prevents one seeing again those who do not die.

One Frenchman, belonging to the famous Algerian regiment of Joyeux, who gave us a great deal of trouble, desired me to write to his father that he had died the death of a hero and, when I pointed out "Nous ne sommes pas encore à ce point-là," was quite hurt. Him, I did manage to see again, being very noisy in another ward.

Every night brought us its own emergency operations, at which I was often allowed to serve the surgeons, or to bandage one limb while they hastily operated on another. The first time I was called upon to shave a frac-

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tured thigh, while the surgeon held the leg, impressed me greatly and the sight of the poor fellows we hurriedly washed and wheeled into the theatre with shattered limbs and brought back without, always tore my heart. We often had to keep them all the rest of the night on the patent electric bed, warmed both above and below, which I think saved many lives.

One who in civil life had been a clerk in England, and was proud of his command of the language, kept crying pathetically for hours: "Seestair, seestair, elevate me—I cannot respire." The nature of his wound necessitated his lying quite flat, and at length he realized this.

There were many, alas, whom we could not save, who died during or after operation, or for whom nothing at all could be done save to wash off the mud and the blood, close the tired eyes, straighten the distorted limbs and cross the weary hands.

After my three months in the Receiving Room, I was given a turn of work in one of the *étages* of the original hotel and did more night duty.

Some of the patients were officers and we had a good many deaths amongst them; there

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was one sad case of a very young lieutenant, whose mother came all the way from Italy, when she heard of his serious wound. He died literally by inches after several operations. and her despair was pathetic. She had his poor body dressed in full uniform and photographed and would not leave him, even when he was placed in the mortuary.

Many of the officers were very young— and one six-bed ward was called the nursery

My work, however, lay mostly among the men, and being all abdominal cases, chiefly treated with continuous serum on the system known as Murphy, they kept us very busy, for they required so much attention, and we were constantly passing from room to room.

One man, with a crushed spleen and other complications, mildly resented ever being left, and when I returned from duties with patients in the other small wards would look up reproachfully and say in his halting Flemish French: " Vous, toujours partie."

How I loved the work, and thanked Heaven daily for allowing my unworthy and half-trained self to do it, and then the interruption came. I, who in more than thirty-five happy years had never been a day in bed except to have measles, fell ill and did not

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realize it—thought I was merely getting tired and slack, and struggled on until with a temperature of 104 and a heart beginning to "give out," I was ignominiously carried on a stretcher to the sick-house and lay in bed for six long weeks with pneumonia.

I should be the most ungrateful of mortals if I did not record the angelic goodness of every one to me during this time, Matron, Belgian surgeons, Belgian day nurse, kindly English Sisters who looked after me at night. I had been told that to be ill in hospital was almost a crime, but I can only say that, if so, my crime was most generously condoned! I used to listen to the military funerals passing along the street, and wonder if I should have one too, and made the one person I really trusted promise to tell me when that moment seemed imminent, while holding fast to her hand, to combat the ghastly sensation of falling, falling, falling through the floor of the world!

A civilian relation who was sent for to see me received from Belgian Headquarters a pass authorizing his presence "on the Front" for five days. If found there after that date, he was to be shot at sight. Unfortunately, he was not allowed to retain the interesting document.

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I can never be thankful enough for having had this novel experience. I learnt to understand and appreciate many things hitherto unknown to me, from the patient's point of view. Among others, instead of myself wielding the syringe I became the victim of three-hourly *piqûres* of *huile camphrée* with strychnine, caffeine and other horrors, during three weeks, till I felt like a pincushion! and, though I have never been "wounded," yet I shall carry to the end of my life the scars gained on the Belgian Front!

At that time, the glaring summer weather had given place to Arctic winter. When I was again allowed to see my friends they brought me lurid tales of frozen sea with blocks of ice and snow on the shore, reminiscent of Captain Scott's voyages—these I did just see, a little later—hot-water bottles that fell out of bed and froze hard and bedroom floors a sheet of ice. Our wards, both the original hotel and the Humphries iron buildings, were heated with hot-water pipes, so that the patients did not suffer, and of the sufferings of the staff I am ashamed to say I can only speak from hearsay; my little sick-room always had a fire, stoked by a heavy-handed, heavy-footed Flemish maid,

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who invariably bumped into the bed whenever she entered the room and breathed hard over the trays of food she carried to me through the snow.

Eventually I was sent home on three months' sick leave, but made triumphant proof of a sturdy Scots constitution by returning in six weeks, certified sound and fit for work.

The spring was lovely, and from the beginning of April rumours of a great push kept us busy. It is now a matter of history that British plans for the capture of the Belgian coast in the spring of 1917 had to be modified to suit our French Allies, and very shortly after our friends the *fusiliers marins* had marched away from our neighbourhood—with colours flying and under a rain of daisies, our only flower—and been replaced by British troops, something like a disaster overtook us, front line positions were lost and the capture of our Ambulance with all its magnificent plant seemed imminent.

Meantime, however, as the British C.C.S.'s were not installed, we were privileged to supply their place, and for weeks casualties poured in day and night: in ambulance waggons when available, then in every kind of vehicle.

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I shall always remember the sight of a coal cart filled with wounded Highlanders! Then the conditions formerly prevailing were reversed and it was the Belgian and not the English nurses who had difficulty in talking to the patients, and the doctors who required interpreters; especially when inquiring into the man's previous history and profession. "Sister, que c'est que c'est qu'un pled-le-eur? (plate-layer) ou un aillebaileure?" (hay-baler). They worked nobly to save as many British lives as possible and all the resources of science were employed.

I, myself, had the joy of being put in charge of the Finsen light apparatus "Les rayons ultra-violets," which in connection with various new antiseptics were used to combat gas gangrene, and other forms of septicaemia and in the treatment of sluggish wounds. From the Belgian patients I received the charming title of "Sœur de la Lumière."

I also passed part of my day going from ward to ward with Pachon's blood pressure recorder, and in keeping charts of the progress in this respect of the gassed cases.

These sometimes came in great numbers, suffering horribly from their eyes, their lungs and hearts, from terrible nausea, and also

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a few days later from very painful sores.

There were many Scots amongst the British troops and I took great joy in attending on them and writing their letters home. One especially amused me, when I asked him one day while tidying the ward, " Is that your basin, McGregor ? " he replied with true Scottish caution, " It's the watter I've washed in, anyway."

The sad part was that, since no one knew what might happen next, all these patients had by military orders to be evacuated so very quickly and we scarcely had time to get to know them or to see any improvement in their wounds. The British portion of the Adinkerke cemetery, also, became sadly crowded.

Events moved rapidly, too, and soon all around the somewhat deserted little town sprang up British lines and cantonments, light railways, lorry parks, ammunition dumps, etc. With the advent of their own hospitals in the neighbourhood, the British wounded ceased to come to us, and almost simultaneously the Boche began to manifest a desire to suppress the Belgian Ambulance altogether. Bombs and shells fell more frequently than before, and later the place was bombarded

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from the sea and became momentarily unsuitable as a home for the wounded. A temporary Belgian hospital was quickly put up, further inland, some of the wards being transported bodily and part of the staff went there; but the larger number of British Red Cross and other nurses left, for lack of work, and under orders from home. I, whose heart was strongly bound to the harassed Belgian people, obtained permission from Headquarters to take service in connection with Refugee children at Adinkerke, and transferred myself there one teeming wet day when the famous mud of Flanders was making the roads almost impassable.

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CHAPTER III

ADINKERKE

MY new home was a small wooden barrack, or rather two of them, somewhat reminiscent of glorified cow-sheds, planted on brick piles with a mud-yard between. Here were gathered Belgian children of all ages from three months to twelve years, received from farms and villages in or near the firing line and waiting to be sent to a more permanent shelter in a neutral country. There might be any number from twenty to sixty. In times of stress, just before the departure of a convoy, we would have two children in every bed, of which we numbered forty, and sometimes a few old people as well. My only assistants were two Flemish refugee women, one to cook and one to wash, and a young girl who did housework with the assistance of the elder children. She was subject to fits of hysterics at night, the result of all the horrors through which she had passed,

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when she would declare there were soldiers hidden in the huts and I would have to rise from my bed to reassure her by looking!

There was also a hunchback man who chopped wood, carried water and slept with the elder boys, but he had a distressing habit of coming to one at night with a lugubrious face and "Mademoiselle, je ne suis pas maître des garçons, voulez vous venir"—and one had to go and read the Riot Act. On the whole they were very good, but sometimes during the long days the big boys would bully the little ones. It was difficult in wet weather, and in that confined space to provide adequate occupation for them all; they seemed at first to have very little idea of play, except breaking things or throwing stones, and I felt that had I known before the war that I was to be entrusted with this special work I should have tried to qualify in advance as a scoutmaster, a kindergarten mistress, a caterer, a haircutter, and in various other trades.

On one occasion four of the big boys took refuge from Sister's wrath among the brick piles below the barrack. They were dislodged by the simple expedient of calling in the friendly British Military policeman on point duty outside. He merely stood and

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said, " Come oot o' that " in his parade voice. Young Belgium did not know what he *said*, but it came ! and subsequently felt that Sister had the whole British Army at her back and had better be obeyed. The little ones were a never-ending joy and their faith in one's power to protect them from all dangers of shot and shell most touching. There was no cellar or dug-out within reach, so mercifully one did not have to get them out of bed on raid or shelling nights—one merely sat and comforted those who woke and cried. Really more trying to the nerves than the enemy projectiles, to the long-drawn scream of which one grew strangely accustomed, was the concussion of the Allies' fifteen-pounder in our immediate neighbourhood, at the sound of whose voice pictures fell from the walls, and books leapt from their shelves ; friendly shrapnel also frequently pattered on our roof and shells fell within a few yards of our door.

One twelve-year-old boy, a refugee from Armentieres, always fled crying to me when the shelling began, and when told that he ought not to show more fear than the little ones, replied sadly, " Mais, ma sœur, *moi* je sais, qu'après les obus, arrivent les chariots plein de blessés." He, quaintly enough, could

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only speak French, and therefore the little Flemings said he was a Boche and would not play with him! He had seen and known more than any child of his age had a right to do.

The only nights on which we were not shelled were those on which it poured with rain and all the weak places in the barrack roof were revealed. I used to pass from room to room placing basins to catch drips, and shifting little beds, while plaintive voices would wail, " Suster, het kommt weder doorr "—" It is coming through again," or " Myn neusje is nat " —" My nose is wet ! " All these little people were very badly nourished when they came to us and used to rush to their meals, plain though these were, with shrieks of joy, like chickens, or seagulls! Many of them had sores or boils, bad eyes, ears, etc., some had been wounded, and a Belgian military surgeon came to see us when required. The most interesting patient was a dear little girl of seven who had been run over by a motor-lorry and had a fractured pelvis and internal injuries, but in less than two months she was able to totter about and take an enormous interest in her own bandages. Her mother was so much pleased with her

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progress that we were shortly asked to fetch a twelve-months-old sister from a shell-shattered home. I then had five babies under two. One woman left her three-year-old boy with me while she was busy with the arrival of her twentieth child. The joy of my heart was Joseph (Sefke), an eighteen-months-old boy from a cellar near Pervyse, where he had spent most of his short life. He was paper-white when he came, hardly had the use of his limbs, or took any interest in surrounding objects. Six weeks' regular feeding and days passed in the sunshine, or, at least, in the fresh air, when the rain of Flanders permitted, gave him pink cheeks, bright eyes and the power to stand on my knee with soft arms round my neck, saying "Dear-r" so that I could flatter myself he was talking English! His own hard-worked mother came to see him one day and he would not look at her, but fortunately she thought this a good joke!

Sometimes the parents brought the children in order to get them out of the way of danger, and then a few days later, feeling they could not bear the separation, came and fetched them away again. Two dear little boys from a barge on the Furnes Canal were twice

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brought by their mother and fetched away by their drunken father, who said he required their help! they were seven and nine years old. Eventually they departed with the rest for Switzerland. The evening on which this party was despatched, the Queen of the Belgians came to see them and gave a packet of sweets to every child. I was distressed that the only one among the fifty-three that I could present to her as bearing the name of Elizabeth was a recently arrived neglected baby with faevus, whom the cook described as "cette vilaine gosse."

When seeing off the parties for their long railway journey one always felt that the people who really deserved gold medals were the Sisters of Charity, who were about to pass two nights in that confined space in charge of the band!

Clothes were a terrible difficulty, for kind friends who sent them out from home seemed to imagine that all our children were about four years old and never grew, but the quaintest things came in useful and "trying on clothes" was always great fun, even when nothing fitted!

The little huts were situated absolutely *on* the main road to the British front, and

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almost all day and night a constant stream of men and horses, guns, motor-lorries, traction-engines, and ammunition waggons passed our door. Amusing for the children, but a little noisy! Belgian trenching parties also used to go out at night and return past us in the morning. Army sisters from the C.C.S.'s—before these were bombed out and moved further from the lines—and from the canal barges sometimes visited me and gave me many little comforts for my large family.

Sometimes when the mud yard was *too* muddy, I took the greater part of my flock out for a walk, and, as I flapped along the road beside them in my white veil, felt just like one of the good Nuns of Nazareth House, who hold up the traffic at Hammersmith Broadway! We were soon well known to all the military police. It was not till nearly the end of my time that I was able to get a perambulator and take out some of the babies; as a rule their cots were all placed round the door, and I sat and fed them in full view of the British Army. Our soldiers loved them and used to come and give pennies to the most sickly, and try to establish some means of communication.

Lighting regulations so near the front were

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naturally very stringent, and as the autumn days shortened it was a little trying to have to spend a long evening with one candle in a hermetically sealed room—for the smallest chink of light at once brought the gendarmes with threats of a *procés-verbal.*

While at La Panne I received notice of a fine due for an offence of this kind committed by four of us in our tiny room. The document was printed in French and Flemish in alternate lines, and set forth that the amount of the fine, 4 fr. 10 c., would be recoverable from my heirs for the space of thirty years!

We got up at six, as soon as day dawned, and the family were put to bed early, but there was hardly ever a night undisturbed by shelling—the railway station and ammunition stores were too near.

Sometimes I had out-patients, British and Colonials, mostly with minor accidents, the nearest British dressing station being some way off. They were much surprised to find a Belgian *infirmière* speaking their own tongue.

I loved the life and would have remained much longer, but was recalled to London by orders from Headquarters, passing through Boulogne on the night following their worst raid. There was another *alerte* about 9 p.m.

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and a fellow nurse and I stumbled into bed in the room allotted to us at the Hôtel Christol and had a long and interesting conversation, knowing neither each other's names nor faces, as I had to leave in the morning before she was up.

My arrival in England was so unexpected by my family and friends and London so inhospitable late on a dark night, that I had to spend my first night as a stranger in a hostel near Victoria station. All honour to those who devote their time and energies to providing shelter for homeless travellers, and going out to invite them in. My kind hostesses told me their intention had been to help only those connected somehow with the army, but they interpreted the connection in a very liberal spirit and were temporarily housing a young servant whose " Mother, please'm, ran away with a soldier."

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CHAPTER IV

FRANCE

THE reason of my recall from Adinkerke was an order to proceed to Italy—nurses, even half-trained ones, who chanced to be able to speak Italian being somewhat rare. Unfortunately, the unexpected events of October 1917 made it impossible for any Englishwoman to get leave to travel to Italy at all at that time. I could not get back to Belgium at once, owing to passport regulations, and after a brief job, to fill in time, as night Sister in an officers' hospital in London, I was sent by the British Committee of the French Red Cross to a large new Hospital for *rapatriés.* These are the people from the occupied district of France who, after three years of living, in fearful hardships, under German dominion, were treated as useless mouths and are sent by way of Belgium, Germany and Switzerland back to France.

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Only men stricken with mortal disease or those over sixty-five, only boys under twelve, or girls under sixteen, only women over fifty, or those ill or with five young children—and a certain number who pay heavily for the privilege—were allowed to come, and of those we seemed to get the *most* ill! Those who recovered under our care were afterwards sent farther on.

The Hospital had been quite recently opened, in a disused convent on the Swiss frontier, which frontier, though only ten yards from our gate, we were never allowed to cross, and even in order to obtain a *permis de séjour* to remain there, we had to supply most exhaustive details as to our parentage and extraction; some people really did not know the birthplace of their parents. Where I last filled up a paper for the corresponding permission in Italy, I described myself, as usual, as a spinster, but was gravely told that this was not the correct term, I must be entered as "marriageable!"

The Swiss landscape stretching in front of our windows was the more tantalizing because immediately behind us, where we *might* walk, were only frowning mountains, covered in mist, and we used to feel that the

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sun *sometimes* shone in Switzerland, but never in France—and oh, it was cold! The nearest town was five kilometres away, as I knew to my cost, when I had to walk the distance along in the pitch dark, on a freezing night, alone a road like glass, where I never met a soul. I had gone in, on an American ambulance, to dispatch and discharge patients, all over eighty, so I had to wait and see them entrained for their ultimate homes.

We had a mixed staff, chiefly English, some of the more able-bodied *rapatriés* acting as ward-maids and general assistants. Much of the equipment, clothing and medicines had not arrived; my first job was assistant in the children's ward, to the charge of which I was shortly promoted, and the conditions under which we worked are best described in the following parody:

IF (with apologies to Kipling)

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are howling babies, shrieking for their food,
And keep your temper when the big ones flout you
And find them jobs to do and keep them good!
If you can dress a babe in Esmarch's bandage
And make pneumonia coats from scraps of wool,
Can cut up twenty dinners with one penknife
And get them handed round while still just cool!

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If you can make sick children happy
With toys made out of bits of cork and string,
Settle their quarrels, mend their clothes and love them
And still be ready for what morn may bring!
If you can wheedle towels from " Madam Lingère "
And drugs and pills after the dispenser's hours!
Beg odds and ends from all for every purpose
And keep on friendly terms with *all* the powers.

If you *like* living miles and miles from nowhere
And walking seven miles to buy a pin,
While clouds of rain and mist hide all the landscape
And any warmth and cheer come from within.
If you can answer fifty different questions
And talk three languages with equal ease,
If you are never tired, and *never* grumble!
Then come out here and help the Refugees!

One of the trained Sisters with whom I sometimes worked always addressed me severely—and quite correctly—as " Nurse," but I felt somehow comically that I was going down in the scale! As a matter of fact my fifth War Job very nearly was as a " General Orderly " in a Scottish Women's unit in the Near East, only that I was not free when the opportunity occurred. After that, the next stage would seem to be to become a ward-maid! But what does it matter so long as one can be useful—" Qu'importe, pourvu que je travaille ? "

After Christmas, our work increased rapidly,

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while at the same time, for various reasons, our staff became temporarily depleted. Only three trained Sisters remained, and I was given " charge " at night, first alone, and afterwards as numbers grew, with one English colleague, and then also with a French nun—three of whom came to join us.

It was a weird sensation being the only person " up " in this enormous building, with stone staircases and vast echoing corridors, and to have to minister to the wants of asthmatic and arthritic old men—many of whom could not *move* without help—in one place, of coughing and groaning old women and girls in another, while listening all the time for the cries of the children and especially of the motherless baby, who with three little brothers had been brought, unwashed and unchanged on a four days' journey by a lame father, now acting as stoker in the hospital. This child was always my especial care, so much so that, when he recovered, the father quite seriously proposed to give him to me, to bring to England!

One night we had an out-patient brought in suddenly, a drunken soldier who had fallen under a cart and cut his head open. The house-surgeon sewed it up, and we kept one

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of his companions to sit with him through the night, in case he should get up and walk away when my back was turned, but he was quite peaceful!

As all our patients of every age had suffered from semi-starvation, it was hard to restrain the appetites of those not actually on a diet, and the generous hospital feeding often disagreed and produced various skin complaints. We began, gradually, to get much more serious cases and a sad number of deaths occurred of hopeless heart disease, cancer, dropsy, nephritis, lupus, tuberculosis and other cruel illnesses. Fortunately, drugs were no longer lacking and we were able to soothe the last day and hours.

Many, many times in the cold winter nights did we have sad little processions through the snow to the small mortuary chapel.

Of one convoy of twelve sent to us, one man died the same night and three within the week. Another time a woman dying of nephritis was placed on the floor in Matron's office, as it seemed impossible she could live to be put to bed, but she lasted several hours. Another curious case was a stout old woman, past all hope with bronchitis, brought in by a solicitous nephew, who then

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hurried to fetch a notary that she might make her will and leave him all that the Boches had left to her!

Sometimes we called up one of the *auxiliaries* or unfit soldiers, who worked for us, but oftener we did the job alone, or with the help of the good sergeant-priest who was at every one's service in critical moments, day or night. Almost the saddest case was one of acute nephritis, a comparatively young man, and quite hopeless; everything possible had been done, when he suddenly looked up in my face and said, "Je suis perdu, n'est-ce pas, ma sœur," and instantly died, in the most distressing circumstances.

There were several bad cases of broncho-pneumonia including a little brother and sister, desperately spoilt children, who gave me some very anxious nights, but all these recovered. We only lost two children all the time. There were also many elderly people of both sexes, who were semi-paralysed and we had a certain number of *alienés*, mild mental cases whom we *had* to keep till proper places could be found for them. They generally became embarrassingly affectionate; but there was one elderly man who fiercely resented the sight of a woman in the ward when he was in

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bed, and in order that one might attend to the others he had to be surrounded with screens until his nightly sleeping draught, administered with enormous difficulty, had taken effect. Of these screens there were three to a floor ; and I should not like to count the number of miles I must have covered in carrying them from ward to ward when I returned to day duty on the women's floor—five wards and a hundred beds—to seclude various patients for various dressings, washings, nutrient enemas, etc.

We were not expressly an infectious hospital, but it was inevitable that contagious diseases should be brought by members of the convoys, and at one time we were struggling with diphtheria, scarlet fever, measles, German measles, mumps, whooping-cough and erysipelas all at once ! Two of the Sisters went down with measles, one Staff Nurse with the German variety, and one with " query scarlet fever," and at the end of the doctor's morning round I had always, by Matron's order, to attend and interpret for all four—none of whom spoke French ! I was thankful that I personally remained " immune " and for that reason stayed on considerably beyond my contract time.

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"A SAD LITTLE PROCESSION"

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All our servants were *rapatriés* and none of them strong ; so often, after the day's work was over, one had to give professional attendance to them—notably a Creole cook who suffered severely from the cold, and at times from fits of temper, when she flung saucepans at the heads of meek old women cutting up the turnips and potatoes which formed so large a part of our diet. The patients were really very well fed and I have often since regretted that Italian soldiers in hospital could not have some of the beans and other vegetables these pampered people always left on their plates. They used to complain, too, if the butter on their morning bread was not spread thick enough, or the coffee less strong or sweet than usual!

There was no glamour or Romance of War about the nursing of these poor folks, and one felt all the time one was really doing Germany's dirty work for her, succouring the victims she no longer wished to feed, and sometimes one faintly echoed the plaint of the Garrison gunner in *Punch*, "Ow do you think me scrubbing this blinkin' table is going to 'elp to win the blinkin' war?" But the sheer human need of the poor sick people, and the joy of soothing, at least, the last

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moments of their lives, made one forget all else.

The motto of another hospital was especially true here: " Guérir quelquefois (alas, not often) Soulager souvent, Consoler toujours."

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CHAPTER V

FLORENCE

WHEN at length I was free to leave the hospital for *rapatriés* shortly to be handed over to an entirely French unit, I betook myself to Paris, by permission from home, there to obtain all the necessary papers for getting to Italy at last.

The first thing I heard on coming out of the station was the voice of "big Bertha," whose attentions continued during the whole time of my stay. I did not go to see the havoc wrought in the beautiful church of St. Gervais—I never want to see wounded buildings any more than wounded people, unless I am there to help, but shell-holes in the streets I saw, of course, and on the night of April 1st there was an air raid, when to please a nervous woman I had never seen before, in the room next to mine at the Club, I descended with her to the cellar, where

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several people brought their luggage and provisions ! though there really was very little danger.

Next day, duly provided with passport, *ordre de transport militaire* and *laissez-passer* from the police, I started at length for Italy, and after thirty-six hours' journey, and three long waits, the last from 3 to 6 a.m. ! I arrived in Florence ; where I hastened that very day to inscribe myself with the Italian Red Cross and was asked if I were willing to proceed at once to Verona. I agreed with delight, and innocently expected to be sent immediately, in fact during the whole of my stay in Florence I never unpacked, though my departure for the War Zone became rather a case of "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." However, the military surgeon who had first urged my applying for service in Italy, gave me work in his own hospital, to which I went daily in a workmen's tram, costing ¼*d.*, and I began to make acquaintance with the Italian wounded soldier. A most attractive person and *so* grateful for the very little that is done for him. In this hospital of over 150 beds, there was one *infirmière* and one ward maid—with an ex-patient who acted as orderly—but the patients who

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were able seemed to do most of the work themselves. There were a great many surgical dressings, with which I helped, numbers of cases of frozen feet where the toes or half the foot had been removed; and old shrapnel wounds, still suppurating after many months. Of real nursing hardly any was done, and the first bed-patient, not in this hospital but another, whom I started to wash, remonstrated gravely on the ground that he had "*febbre*" and also that his back, at any rate, had been washed the week before last! Two leg-cases demanded a glass of wine each as a restorative after the unusual exertion of enduring a blanket bath. It is, perhaps, not astonishing under these circumstances that bedsores are very common; they call them "*piaghe di decubito*"—wounds from lying down!

As the whole of my day was not occupied by this work, I filled in a little time by attending some medical and bacteriological lectures offered to the Red Cross. The latter by the famous Professor Sclavo—and just had time in my ten weeks' stay in Florence to pass the viva voce examinations at the end of the courses, a rather amusing experience.

A month after my arrival I was called up

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for a turn of service in No. 1 Red Cross Hospital, nothing more having been heard of the Verona plan. All Italian Red Cross nurses, except at the Front, are *externes*, i.e. find their own sleeping quarters and their own food. A "turn" means four half-days a week and two nights, forty-eight hours actual duty, but, unless one lives very near the hospital, the half-days during which one neither eats nor drinks, nor pauses for a moment, certainly are very long. For the morning half you have to be on duty by 7.45, having had your cup of coffee at 7 or earlier, and do not get out till after 1, by which time *déjeuner* in the *pensions* or restaurants is practically over. The afternoon duty is from 12.45 till a little after 8, when dinner also is a thing of the past.

I do not mean that this is a hardship, it is a very minor detail, but it makes things a little difficult for the solitary woman; and one certainly gets very thirsty on long hot busy afternoons. When on night duty, I did manage to boil a little water for myself and drop a tea-tabloid into a little cup I brought with me; nothing of any sort is provided! I had to have a bread-ticket like every one else and go personally to draw my ration, and

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when I could not go till about 2 o'clock the authorities would sometimes refuse to issue it. Latterly I took many of my meals at the "Ente autonomo di consumo"—the Communal kitchen and eating-house — where the company was the most entertaining part, and where if the *plat du jour* was something one did not like but dared not leave, one could always give it to one's next-door neighbour, who accepted gratefully and became a friend for life. Food in Italy was *really* scarce. Not only dear, it was simply not there. No one could get more than his allowance, however much he paid. The Italian, too, is economical by nature; and I have seen a man carrying a raw egg, drop it in the street and pick up and *eat* the remains rather than waste it!

The Communal dining-room is the only place where women are employed to wait; otherwise it seems to be considered an exclusively masculine profession, and, failing men, the posts are filled with tottering grandfathers and boys in short socks. Women drive trams in Florence, but in the most feminine of uniforms—long grey coats, like dressing-gowns, and little black bonnets, embroidered with the Florentine lily.

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I spent some very happy days in that hospital—my Italian colleagues were so delightful, and when my own work allowed it, or at times when I should otherwise have been off-duty, I was always invited to help in the theatre. For a little while I continued to work in the military hospital during my off-time from the Red Cross. Then the former was closed and the remaining patients dispersed among other military hospitals in the town and neighbourhood. They all begged to be visited, and it was very interesting seeing the inner working of the various hospitals, some staffed only by the Religious Orders, men or women, some having a few women and girls of the service known as "Samaritana," but everywhere the proportion of patients to nursing staff would horrify an English Matron.

Some of the French and Italian Red Cross ladies have had very little instruction, and I think I shall be forgiven for repeating this little tale, gaily told me by the heroine of it. She was asked by an Examiner what she would do if a patient were brought in who had taken a heavy dose of poison—"I should make the sign of the Cross and go away as quickly as possible." A young

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assistant nurse was sent to us in the French hospital who did not know how to take either a temperature or pulse! Others, of course, have had a great deal of war experience and are very skilful, but none are what we should call even half "trained"—and there is no real organization or discipline such as there is in an English hospital. The ward-maids are the quaintest people; mostly wives or widows of soldiers. They make the beds and sweep the floors and spend the rest of the day talking to the patients! or the visitors, or doing their own fancy work.

One day I wanted one to carry away a sack of dirty linen and after hunting in vain through all my wards, I found five engaged in an animated discussion with the Prince President of the Red Cross, to the neglect of all work.

Like the nurses, they get no food in the hospital, but they greedily gather up the scraps left by the patients. There are never very many of these scraps, for rations are scanty and the very badly wounded cases in my ward, who could not go to the table, used to greet me with cries of "Viva nostra Signorina," because, by dint of great activity, I secured them occasional second helps!

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Just before the resumption of operations on the Austrian front I received the welcome order to " proceed forthwith to Headquarters, Zona di Guerra " as soon as I had the necessary official permit. As no one in Florence seemed competent to provide this, or to take any steps about it, I had to go to Rome for thirty-six hours, and by great persistence obtained it at length from a kind official in the Ministry of War. The difficulty was enhanced by the Roman summer habit of closing all offices from 12 till 5 and by the curious omission of those who had summoned me, to tell their own office that they had done so. However, dogged British obstinacy obtains most things, and no one could grumble at a fate which gave her two glowing June afternoons among the ruins in Rome.

I returned to Florence with the permit and departed for the Front at last.

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CHAPTER VI

THE ITALIAN FRONT

ON arrival at the Ambulance to which I was posted, a French one, I was asked by the surgeon-in-chief if I were willing to go to the Medical side. As coming from La Panne, I believe he had wished to put me in the Surgical Department, but being the most popular it was fully staffed.

I was surprised at being asked, for I always imagined that one just went where one was told—moreover, my pre-war experience had all been medical. I once said to an English colleague in the French hospital where we were busy over an old lady with bronchitis, " I have been nursing my own relations with this kind of thing all my life," to which she naively responded, " And did they all die ? "

I, of course, agreed to go where most wanted and was duly installed in the Medical annexe of which the nucleus was school

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buildings with overflow into tents and wooden barracks in the so-called garden—a large bare enclosure stretching down to and draining into the canal; the whole garden section, third division, being handed over to me.

I was also asked to undertake the prisoners' ward in a kind of wooden outhouse—it being considered convenient that I could talk German to them; but I soon found that, in this heterogeneous medley of Austrian subjects hardly anyone spoke or even *understood* German. There were three Hungarians, one Bohemian, two Rumanians from Transylvania, two Bosnians, a Pole and the rest Croatians. The language of the latter seemed to be almost universally known and I set to work to learn it. It is a curious kind of debased Russian, written in Latin characters, but as I had in the first instance to learn it from the patients, word by word and without any books, that was no help to me. My acquaintance with Russian is of the slightest—I only began to learn it the previous summer, with hopes of getting to that Front—but it was something to start on, and I managed to procure an Italian-Russian dictionary which often gave me a word understood by

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the Croatians and amended by them. The Pole was able to speak almost pure Russian.

After a while one of the Austrian prisoners from the neighbouring camp, to whom I taught a little French for daily use, brought me a tattered copy of a quaint little handbook intended to teach Croatians to speak German, but of course that gave me no rules of Croatian grammar and I fear my speech is still very much what the French call " du petit nègre " —entirely uninflected, but at least I made myself understood and could ask and get answers to all the doctor's usual questions. When I realized that, but for the difference of alphabet, Croatian is very much the same as Serbian, I sent home for a dictionary of *that* tongue and got on better.

The men took the utmost pride and pleasure in teaching me and chorused joyfully each time I unexpectedly produced a complete sentence, as when I handed a bottle of cough mixture to one and told him " Saki sat jedan schlitska " — every hour one spoonful! These sick men, mostly chest and heart cases, were in the lowest possible condition, almost starving, and we had great struggles to pull them through. One, who had intestinal troubles as well, had a temperature of 40°

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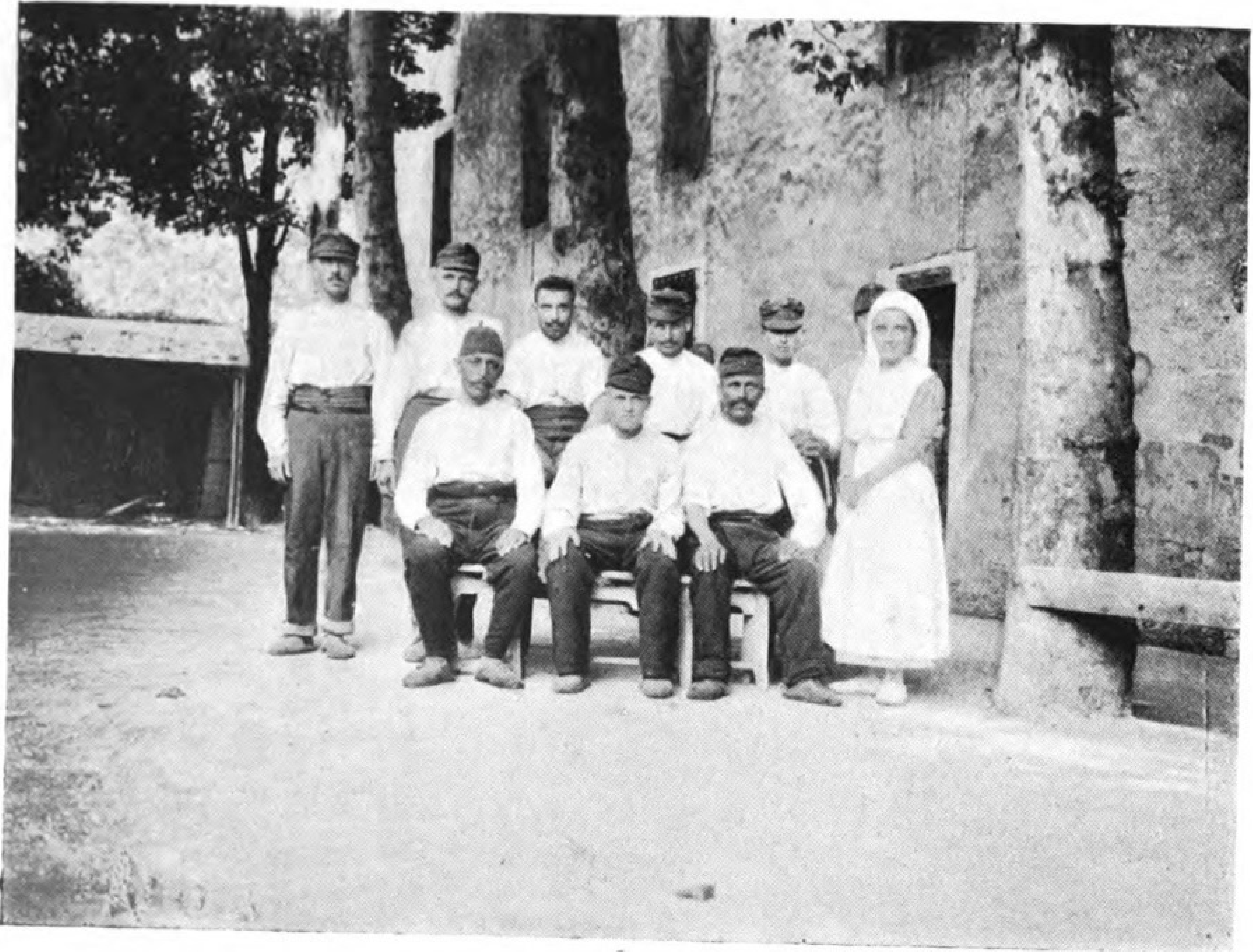

AUSTRIAN PRISONERS

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Cent. (104° Fahr). for over a week. As the French orderly remarked: "Il ne descend pas, il se trouve bien là-haut," but at length he began to yield to treatment; and later he embarrassed me by announcing daily that he owed his life only to "Bogu e Gospodina" (God and the lady) and rubbing his forehead on my hand whenever he got the chance! He was a shepherd by trade, and strangely like a sheep.

None of these men impressed one as being great warriors, nor as having much stomach for the present fight. They only longed to get home.

They were pathetically grateful for all that was done for them and asked me *when* peace had been declared, as they could not believe the treatment they were receiving could possibly be accorded to enemies. When an English friend of mine gave them a few cigarettes they said he was a "jako fini covek" (very fine man), and were lost in wonder that an English officer could deign to *speak* to them and did not rather kick them out of his path!

They were delighted with their food and the fact that those who could sit up had a table to sit to; occasional clean shirts,

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ragged or patched though they were, filled them with joy, for while in the field they had worn the same ones for six months, which accounted for many things. As they got better and thought I understood them, they became very talkative and it was curious to compare the point of view of the different subject races. The Rumanians I came across were very poor specimens, physically and intellectually, and if they are at all typical of their nation one is not surprised that the Rumanian campaign was so quickly over. Trajan's Latin colonists have indeed degenerated, and one falls to wondering whether the captive Dacians whom he carried off to languish in Rome would have left a manlier race of descendants. But on the other hand had Arminius not defeated the Roman legions under Varus, Anno Domini 9, would there have been no mediæval or modern German empire? These questions are too big for us. I must confess that I never acquired very much of the Rumanian language, which always seems like Italian gone wrong. "Sara buna" stands for good night! The Croats, sturdy peasant types, were the best, and I managed to train one to act very fairly as orderly to the rest and gave him elaborate directions as to

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what the others might or might not do, for I had a great deal of work among the French patients as well. There were numbers of malaria cases from Salonica and elsewhere, which were treated with constant hypodermic injections, but otherwise gave very little trouble; cases of dysentery, of which we had a great many in a more or less convalescent stage, but frequently combined with other ailments, necessitating a variety of treatments, and finally numerous cases of pleurisy, bronchitis and pneumonia. As there were only three nurses to the whole hospital of over 300 beds, it was impossible for us to take regular night duty; the orderlies were supposed to be responsible for that, but they were so often changed, and though as a rule very willing, they also had day duty, and were not skilled nurses, so that when patients were very ill, one of us *had* to stay up all night and manage the thirty-six hours' continuous duty as best we could. Each of us is responsible to the surgeon-in-chief for her own division only, but if your colleague has a very bad case you, of course, take alternate nights with her, and your own duty in the day. One often longs for a matron who would decide, on the merits of the case, whether one *ought* to sit up on a

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particular night or not, in view of next day's work, and would, generally, arrange reliefs and other things and take some of the responsibility which goes with our too great freedom! It is, of course, a truism that the less you are under orders, the more you are tied The alternative in my case to being up all night, was very late and very early excursions to the tents and barracks through the yard made perilous by the numbers of miniature trenches cut to carry away our tropical rain. French tents have no guy ropes, being made on a frame-work, but there are plenty of other things to fall over!

Of course one could not carry a light; though this particular spot is not very often the subject of attention from aeroplanes, yet they do sometimes arrive, and most things around us were sand-bagged. When an "alarm" comes, the electric current is switched off without a moment's warning, and as candles were rare in this economical Ambulance, lamps non-existent and an electric torch somewhat inadequate, if one is engaged in giving an injection of serum just nicely warmed, or one of those horrible intra-muscular hydrargols, one does indeed vituperate the Austro-boche. Hypodermic

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injections, curative and tonic, form a large part of the French system of treatment, and cupping, dry and wet, is practised to an enormous extent.

One nurse has often to *poser les ventouses* on as many as fifty patients in one afternoon. The Croatian prisoners, who had probably never been ill and certainly never been nursed before ,were hugely amused by the daily ceremony of the " chalitza " as they quaintly called the little forcing glasses. They were extraordinarily docile under all treatments. More so than some of their French fellow-patients, who resent plaintively what they consider unnecessary pain as ordered by the doctor, though bearing their wounds most gallantly.

All the outdoor work is done by the *prisonniers valides*, who often can talk German, and perpetually ask advice for minor ailments ; there are also local charwomen to wash dishes, etc., on whom to exercise one's Italian, as well as four of the nurses in the Surgical Hospital, lent, like myself, by the Italian Red Cross, and occasional British out-patients —the nearest British medical station being miles away. The first time one of these arrived, I chuckled inwardly when my dip-

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lomatic little orderly remarked, " Mais, Mademoiselle parle aussi l'anglais ? C'est qu'elle est *très* instruite."

When I really felt I must talk English, and had the time, I could walk several miles up the railway line and find one of the British Ambulance trains waiting its orders to " load up." One of the four is always in garage. When the Sisters came to see me, I was told " Two Salvation Army sisters are asking for you ! " On these walks, I often fraternized with Italian soldiers, who are always very friendly—and conversational—particularly so to the English, or to nurses. What strikes one very much in the Italian army is the absence of any *camaraderie* or friendly feeling between officers and men. The former seem strangely lacking in sympathy. I once came across the tail end of a company marching wearily back to billets. One man fell by the roadside and at once became the centre of an excited group, and I was eagerly hailed to render first-aid. It was a clear case of epilepsy and I commandeered a little country cart to convey the man to the nearest hospital. A very junior officer who was passing declared the man was drunk and tried to rouse him by kicking—but when he departed on his bicycle

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we were able to continue our salvage operations. Even the subalterns hardly ever march with their men.

It is now an open secret that the Caporetto disaster might have been avoided if the High Command had been more in touch with the feeling of the troops, or had known the extent to which the "defeatist" propaganda had ruined the *moral* of the unlucky Second Army, the defection of which was so nobly atoned for by the actions of the First and Third.

The British Sisters always regaled me, no matter the hour, with most welcome tea and bread and butter (margarine!)—things not included in our French soldiers' rations! We live just like our patients, as is only right. *Déjeuner* at 11.30 and dinner at 6, with an early morning cup of coffee. *We* can have a little bit of dry bread with the latter, which they don't unless they have saved it over-night!

Sometimes the French bread is mouldy; but if you have time you can always buy, without a ration ticket, a small loaf of the sustaining but somewhat indigestible Italian bread. Everything else in the War Zone, even if obtainable, is at famine prices, because of the competition of the mess caterers of the various Allies.

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During the summer months our meals were served on a little table in a corner of the yard, hastily carried into the stone passage when it rained. Thus we suffered as little as possible from the plague of flies. If we ever left anything on the table, a passing patient finished it, and once when I was very busy all my *déjeuner* was thus treated and I had none! In the colder weather we had to eat where we slept! We struggled with the heat, the mosquitoes and other insects all through the summer season, and later came *intense* cold, which at least killed the fleas *et hoc genus omne.*

I have often been reminded of the witty Frenchwoman who said apropos of these gentry, "Ce n'est pas la morsure qui m'ennuie, c'est la promenade!" but one gets almost accustomed to anything.

In October I was at home for a brief leave, after twelve months' work; but I went back gladly, proud and grateful for the opportunity, and more than ever convinced of the truth of Browning's lines:

> "When a man's busy, why leisure
> Strikes him as wonderful pleasure;
> Faith, and at leisure once is he,
> Straightway he wants to be busy."

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CHAPTER VII

ITALY AGAIN

WHEN I returned from leave, I found my French ambulance in the little Italian town in the throes of the most terrible epidemic of "Spanish Influenza." Numbers of cases were coming in daily and the mortality was distressingly high; in the first forty-eight hours after my return, twelve men died; every corner of the hospital was filled, in fact my first job, on the day of my arrival, after four days' journey, was to "lay out" a man in what had been my own bed. Nearly all the cases turned to a kind of septic pneumonia; it seemed, indeed, to be very much like what travellers describe as the "pneumonic plague of China." We did all our work in eucalyptus masks and everything was disinfected, even our letters. One of our doctors died, and three out of the six nurses had minor attacks of the disease. One

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had to go away on sick leave after only two weeks' work and did not completely recover for months.

The method of treatment chiefly followed was that of constant "wet packs," cupping, wet and dry, and *piqûres* of every kind at frequent intervals. It was quite difficult to find time for even the necessary amount of washing; the bedmaking and much else had perforce to be left to the Italian women and French *infirmiers*. The untidiness of the wards, when we had time to think of it, was what my old nurse would have called "a fair heart-break." But, indeed, there was so much else that was heart-breaking—strong young men, poisoned through and through, burnt up with fever, fighting for their lives and passing through delirium and coma to the final collapse.

A most interesting and valuable method of treatment, which certainly saved a good many lives, was that by *abcès de fixation*, the principle of which is that of concentrating the poison of the system into one spot and then getting rid of it. The process involves a good deal of apparently unnecessary pain, but, if a cure is to be effected, it is, of course, abundantly worth it. An injection of one

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cubic centimetre of pure spirits of turpentine is made into the cellular tissue of the thigh, and after a period varying from twelve to twenty-four hours violent pain and swelling sets in; the limb must be fomented with hot dressings, and when the abscess is ripe, after five or six days probably, it is opened and drained, the other septic symptoms meanwhile subsiding; and if the patient's strength can be maintained a cure of the disease results. It is difficult, of course, to know the exact moment at which to abandon routine and adopt this heroic remedy, for if it is left too late the patient's system may have lost all power of reaction. Sometimes, if the first injection produces no result, a second or even a third may be tried before all hope is given up. The dressing of these abscesses must be carried out most carefully, for, though the pus itself is aseptic, they are very easily infected, and delirious patients always try to remove the dressings.

The terrible epidemic ran its course for some weeks. Gradually the numbers of new cases coming in slackened and some of the wards were closed and disinfected, the few patients out of these filling up vacant beds in the lighter wards, each, however, bringing

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along with him his chart and numbered bed-card, so that going round at night to give injections, etc., became a grim kind of hide and seek, as the numbers were all illegible at night if not in the day, and most soldiers prefer to sleep with their heads almost under the clothes. Beside each bed was a little wooden stool on which stood the patient's tin cup, in which he took his milk, coffee, wine *and* medicine! probably a bottle of medicine, as each man, except the delirious ones, had to be given his portion for the day, to be taken, as I used to say to the Croatians, "malo po malo," little by little; a spittoon; a jug with his half-day's portion of milk; some lozenges or half a lemon; his pocket-book, pipe, or any other treasures, and very likely some remains of the last meal, egg-shells or the like! The state of these little stools, which were of unstained wood and should have been white, was unspeakable, and one thought sadly of the well-scrubbed lockers at home in which V.A.D.'s take so much pride.

When one took over at night extra wards in which one had not worked by day, where all sorts of changes had occurred since one had last visited them, it was a work of the

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utmost difficulty to steer round all these obstacles as well as pails and jugs, etc., and to arrive at the right portion of the right man, for No. 63 might quite possibly be occupying the next bed to No. 5, and what had been No. 5 last night would now have become 49—while all the instructions would still be by numbers! Added to which, in the war-time dearth of everything, drawing-pins were growing so rare that many of the temperature charts instead of being pinned *on* to the boards were impaled on the nail from which the board hung, and had to be taken down before the number could be read—a sad waste of precious time when one was frantically busy!

We had, of course, to arrange that one of us was on duty every night, with all these serious and dying cases; but took it in turns for one night at a time, as is the Italian and French habit, and did our fair share of work on the day following, all the same.

As I said before, we now had all to sleep outside the hospital, and in the first spare moment I had to find a bedroom for myself. I thought of the shades of our maiden aunts and Mid-Victorian relatives, and the care that used to be exercised in choosing lodgings,

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and how the respectability of the owners, the cleanliness of the rooms, the aspect, the state of the drains, etc., were all subjects of scrupulous inquiry. This time, I went from shop to shop, merely inquiring for a place in which to sleep as near my work as possible. The chances were that it would be none too clean, possibly insect-haunted, probably damp, and the drains, if there were any, certainly bad.

As a matter of fact, I was really rather lucky. I went to a good many houses, but I *took* the very first vacant room I saw, in a second floor flat in a little street just outside the town gates. The room was fairly large with two broken windows, one mended with brown paper, the other not! but they faced the afternoon sun. There was quite a good bed, though the sheets were undeniably damp, a microscopic washstand, but a real towel—in hospital the towels and the table-napkins were interchangeable—three chairs and a large wardrobe and chest of drawers, both of which, however, proved to be full of the family's clothes. The *padrona* was the young wife of a soldier at the Front, and we became friends at once, though I saw but little of her. She gave me a key of the front

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door and seemed perfectly contented that I should come in at 10 p.m., 1 a.m., 6 in the morning, or not at all, according to my work.

If I were in bed at 7.30 a.m. I would hear the scurrying feet of the seven-year-old son, who would tap at my door, saying "Pongo l'acqua," deposit a little tin pail and dash away again. If I came in by chance in the middle of the day, I might very likely find him standing on the chest of drawers to unhook his Sunday coat or other dusty garment from my wall; but he never seemed to touch anything of mine, and was a real little gentleman. No one appeared to consider us nurses as specially infectious, for the whole town was more or less filled with the same disease. What first seemed to break the back of the epidemic and put new power of resistance into men's blood was the good news from the neighbouring front line. The crossing of the Piave by the English, French and Italian armies, and the triumphant surge forward all along the line from the Asiago to the sea, though in a way expected, was so sudden and so rapid that it took us all by surprise and upset many elaborate arrangements for occupying positions a little further forward than the present ones.

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Our own ambulance, for instance, was told to be ready to move on to Feltre, well within the Austrian lines of the past year. Rumour next said we were to go to Udine, and shortly afterwards we had hopes of accompanying a French army of occupation as far as Innsbruck. As a matter of fact, what really happened to us, a week after the Italo-Austrian Armistice was signed, was a gradual evacuation of our ambulance. All the patients who had weathered the crisis of their disease were despatched as cot cases to the base hospitals at Milan, and the rest elsewhere. The tents were pulled down, beds folded up and a general *sgombramento* took place. The Surgeon-in-Chief with one assistant and two of his nurses moved on to another French ambulance a little nearer the frontier, while the other doctors went on leave and the Italian nurses returned to their own people.

Our new quarters were very beautiful, among hills covered with autumn foliage and quite near the real mountains, Monte Pasubio, etc. A French hospital had been located in a big school there ever since the arrival of the French contingent in November, 1917. But of the original staff only two

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remained at work and another one ill. Four Americans from the unit of 100 recently arrived in Italy had come to help, but were hampered by knowing no language but their own. We two had our hands full. I was given charge of two tents for sick Austrian prisoners, and the fifty beds filled up at once, and remained full; though many died, being only sent to us at the last gasp, there always seemed to be others to take their places. It was a real nightmare; I had not even an orderly who knew anything—only four dear old French soldiers, who relieved each other day and night and, of course, did not understand one word the patients said. They belonged to the class which was to be demobilized first of all—the *pères de famille* of over 45, and indeed they were most fatherly, but not of course very useful—though later, when I had none at all, I found out how much work these had managed to do.

It was rather curious that almost the worst realization of the horrors of war should come to me personally after the actual war was over, for we had only been a week in this hospital when we heard of the flight of the Kaiser and of all the rejoicings at home. I found it quite difficult to realize, for the conditions

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under which I was working reminded me forcibly of the accounts given by other nurses of the early days in Serbia. Poor miserable objects, dying like flies, because only arriving when at the point of death ; though, of course, the French doctors were goodness itself, and we had the necessary tinned milk and drugs for the patients, only so many were too far gone to profit by these things. Many of the patients were Magyars who spoke nothing but their own tongue, of which the one word which will always remain with me is " Fai, fai," apparently meaning " it hurts," for they would also encourage one another to submit to a *piqûre* or a poultice with " nim fai," " it doesn't hurt ! " And " schweedert, schweedert " when they wanted to drink. I have heard of globe-trotters in peace-time who boasted that they could ask for hot water and clean towels in ten or eleven languages. I feel that after one's experiences of nursing amongst the Allies one inevitably knows the words for pain, hunger, thirst, sleep, the names of different parts of the body and kindred subjects in most of the languages of Europe, and quite a useful hand-book could be compiled, not too large for anyone's pocket, of the absolutely necessary

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hospital "shop" in the languages of *all* the belligerents.

It is curious that none of the phrase books I have met give one, ready made, any of the questions which every doctor asks one to address to new patients, which therefore one has to build up for oneself by experience, and even the sixpenny pamphlets in Russian, Rumanian and Serbian, specially designed for Red Cross workers, occupy space with elaborate lists of foods, relatives, colours and the like, and such phrases as "Please remember me to your mother," and "I have a very nice dog in England," which can hardly be regarded as strictly necessary! There were some Bosnians with a great deal of Turkish blood. One whose name was Stanko-Stankis was exactly like a native of lower Egypt as depicted in mural paintings. He looked about seventy with his hollow eyes and black beard, but managed to make me understand that he was eighteen!

There were the usual Rumanians, Poles and Croats; two of the latter, fortunately, soon made a good recovery and were able to help me, but directly I had a man really on his feet and able to carry coal and water he would be claimed for duty in some other ward,

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and I quite dreaded the appearance of a bland doctor with "Mademoiselle, vous serez bien gentille de me prêter un Boche—ce n'est que pour faire du feu chez les officiers," or something like that. "Il sera très bien chez nous," but such a "loan" was never returned except to eat and sleep—unless indeed he fell ill again, as happened once or twice—and I was left with no other helpers than the absolute fools with sheep-like faces and brains, or those who could barely totter about, but were always willing to carry anything to a *Colléga*—the pleasant Rumanian word for a friend. Another half Turk was called Ahmed Bugaro. He had meningitis as well as broncho-pneumonia, and sat up and talked in a high-pitched gabble to his own toes all one night till it was a mercy for the others when at length he died.

All their lungs were affected and many had pleurisy as well. My days were passed in an endless round of putting on cold packs, giving *piqûres*, cupping, wet and dry, and administering drugs and milk whenever possible. It was a moment of triumph when I felt that every one had been washed all over at least once, and all the claw-like nails cut.

Every day and every night, for a long time,

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some one died—and some of the death-beds were almost unbearably pathetic. One fair-haired boy from East Austria clung to me, panting and crying, " Schwester, Schwester, ich soll nicht sterben. Lass mich nicht sterben "—and when he found it was inevitable, begged for a priest. One of the *infirmiers* in a French ward was found and came at once, but of course the two had no channel of communication except through me, for the boy, though a devout Catholic, said he knew even his Paternoster in his own tongue only. When he had had Absolution, *Letze Ölung* and everything, he said earnestly, " Nun, lass mich sterben, morgen sall ich nicht mehr so gut sein." He lived till next morning, but was hardly conscious again.

Many of them were delirious, and when things were not too tragic I could not help being amused at the various titles by which I was addressed. " Liebe Schwester," " Gnädiges Fräulein," " Schöne Frau " (this from one *very* delirious) Gospodja, Sestra, Maika, Mámá ; one half-black man perpetually called me something which sounded like " Mummy," and another pathetic little fellow pursued me all day with " Màdama, Màdama, seien Sie so gut " as to give him something perfectly

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impossible. Finally, the whole ward compromised on "Mutter," which pleased me best. They were mostly very good patients, accepting all remedies and treatments with unquestioning patience and resignation, and when I finally had to leave the few remaining ones, a German scholar of the party sat up in bed and with shining eyes said undeserved things that brought the tears to mine, of how they had been mothered and cared for in their sickness and captivity, and had *never* asked in vain for anything—not, I fear, strictly true. But what else could one do but one's best for them? A *malade* is always a *malade*, of whatever nationality; and weakness and misery must always appeal to one wherever found.

Many of them only expected to die, and gave one addresses in outlandish places to which to write to their parents. One always wondered if these letters arrived!

The spot in which the French ambulance 227 was situated was a charming little mountain village. It had been at one time a station of British troops, and with the movements which took place at once on the signing of the Armistice many began to pass through again and an actual lorry park was estab-

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lished in the *Place* in front of the village church, through which we ran daily between the hospital and the little villa where we slept. It was curious to see our own men sitting round a roaring camp-fire, made on Italian cobble-stones, when we passed by to bed, and to be greeted by the linguist of the group with a tentative "Bon jawno," and to see his surprise at the answer "Good night, you *do* look cheery." "We *are* cheery, Sister, we're for Blighty;" and in the morning, as we descended the steep and stony path, after a hasty bit of dry bread and a drink of black coffee made in a large cauldron over an open wood fire, which gave it a strange but not unpleasant flavour, to meet the eminently British smell of fried bacon and toast! It is odd how smells, which are such prosaic things, can recall quite romantic associations! It was rather trying, when one had time to think of it, to be quite cut off from all British newspapers. Even those we expected weekly from home never arrived. The best Italian papers came a day old and the French two days, while even the local rag never arrived till six in the evening, and by the time one could go out and buy it, one was often told "è terminato," and had to wait until next

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day for news! However, as I have tried to feel, several times during the war, if one gets news of distant events fairly regularly, it ought not really to matter to one whether those events happened twelve hours ago or sixty hours! One can live in the history all the same, even though a little bit "behind the times."

The rejoicings of the Italians over their own successes and the Austrian debacle were childish and charming. Every one ran about with flags and flowers, children sang everywhere, and even a lonely sentry was heard whispering to himself "C'è la pace, la pace, la pace." When the Armistice with Germany was signed I personally was too busy fighting for the lives of dying Austrians to realize quite what an epoch-making event it was.

As the acuteness of the work among these latter tended to diminish slightly by the death of all the worst cases—nearly a third of the whole—French contagious cases began to come in rapidly, and I had to spend part of my day in giving anti-diphtheritic and anti-dysenteric serums. Fortunately, before long, some other French nurses, from an ambulance which was closed, joined our *équipe*. Three of the Americans left shortly after our arrival,

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leaving one only, and after a short time the Inspector-General on one of his periodic visits intimated that her presence was no longer necessary and that she must return to her own unit. She personally was very sorry, as she had enjoyed her work with us; the others had been homesick for their own people, more cheerful surroundings and the food to which they were accustomed, finding our conditions rather too strenuous. It does make an enormous difference to what one is accustomed, also there is no doubt that fully trained professional nurses of either of the English-speaking races find it naturally very hard to adapt themselves to the methods of a French military hospital where the *infirmière* sometimes works absolutely on a level with the doctor, is consulted by him about all treatments, is given a very free hand, and does many things which in England are the work of the junior doctors, such as giving anti-tetanic and other injections, inducing and opening artificial abscesses, using the thermo-cautère, etc., also makes out his prescriptions from his own rough directions and alters the progressive doses from day to day. In other cases the doctor's orders may reach her through her own orderly, the

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infirmier de visite who in some cases, particularly if the nurse is not skilled in pharmacy, alone goes round with the doctor, and has often, of course, a great deal more experience and even training than some of the French Red Cross nurses, and *knows* it! Some of the *infirmiers-majors* are men of refinement and education, not infrequently priests, and may be of the greatest help and comfort to the patients. Others are merely rather bullying Jacks in office, apt to treat all patients as if they were prisoners; but this type is not common and very likely the hectoring manner in which these particular individuals used to distribute the special rations, hurt the patients' own feelings less than it did mine for them, though I have heard a man say more than once, "Il me régale mon oeuf comme si c'était lui qui le payait." To which a philosophic friend once replied, "En effet ce n'est pas lui qui le paye, mais ce n'est pas toi non plus."

A French officer once said to me that the French army was the best disciplined in the world, "mais cela ne se montre pas." It certainly does not, in many points. I once had a patient about to be evacuated that evening to a base hospital 100 miles away.

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He was able to walk, and very anxious before leaving to go out and collect his belongings from his battery in the immediate neighbourhood. Unfortunately, the *médecin-chef* had already gone out to lunch, and the leave given by the *médecin traitant* was without the more important signature. The man was in great distress and I went to the *Salle de garde* and consulted four junior doctors sitting round the fire as to what to do in the case. One said, " Get the order signed by the *médecin-chef de place*," a superior officer who had his bureau in our building, and had *not* yet gone to lunch! A second begged me not to do this, " Cela emmenera des histoires "—which I could well believe. A third suggested that I should sign it myself! and a fourth that I should let him go with it unsigned.

For the benefit of the curious, I may mention that eventually I went myself and got the battery sergeant to send the things.

In the Italian military hospitals I believe the position of the Red Cross nurses is sometimes worse, though I speak from hearsay only, having always been exceptionally lucky myself in having lots of work given me. They are sometimes told, I believe, by the doctors in charge that they must on no

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account interfere with the work of the *infirmiers*, and are left to find a sphere of usefulness as best they can. This not infrequently consists in washing the faces of those who have been unwashed for weeks. Even in a French hospital one sick man has been heard to say to a newly arrived friend, "On te lave les pieds ici, mon vieux, et cela fait tellement de bien."

The absence of all proper equipment and of even the most elementary hospital discipline and etiquette *is* trying even to the semi-trained, though more than counter-balanced by the extraordinary opportunities we get of being really useful, of being able to *boucher un trou* which would otherwise certainly remain empty!

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CHAPTER VIII

"MONTECCHIO MAGGIORE, PROV. DI VENEZIA"

NURSING prisoners in tents in the snow was somewhat of a new experience for me. I had thought the wards in my last hospital during the Influenza epidemic painfully untidy—they were *nothing* to my tents, and yet what was I to do? Nearly all hospital comforts and even necessities were lacking. At first there was literally nothing but rows of beds in the two tents and, far from keeping the beds tidy, it was difficult enough to keep the clothes on the beds at all—or even sometimes the poor delirious patients in the beds; a very rotten boarded floor, on which to put down the tin cups from which the patients were to drink their milk or tea. Sometimes these were only converted Nestlé's milk tins, and unconverted milk tins to serve as spittoons. The patients well enough to

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"SICK PRISONERS CLAMOURING FOR CIGARETTES
By a Hungarian prisoner

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use either for themselves found it difficult to discriminate between them! In a few days I managed to obtain some little wooden tables, the kind that consists of a small tray on a trestle, and invariably collapses if one tries to move it with one hand; but when I had secured one of these to every two beds I felt we were quite luxurious. Then I got one large table on which to keep my own bottles, the temperature charts and my books and papers, except those I prudently carried in my own pocket—for this table rather naturally became the happy dumping ground for milk jugs, bowls, plates, etc., in fact, everything that was not left on the floor, and I could have wept sometimes to find a large wet circle on my topmost chart, put there by a strange orderly or a new patient just up, and therefore not warned to be careful. Fortunately, the doctors never seemed to notice such things, so it was only my own pride that suffered. For the first week or two I did not have to battle with greasy plates as well, for *all* the patients were confined to bed and on a milk diet. It was very difficult to make them take enough milk—I suppose they were not accustomed to it, and much preferred the pharmacie " chai "

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PRISONERS IN A TENT

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(tea), which to my mind might just as well have been made of hay. Those who were able to speak at all always asked at once for food. "Mnagi" in the Hungarian tongue and, in the curious pot pourri of language which became so catching in a place where five or six tongues had to be spoken at once, a Hungarian who knew a little French frequently asked for "le ménage." One of the American sisters who came to help me for a few days in my most arduous time greatly amused a German-speaking Austrian one day when giving him an extra blanket by saying consolingly "Friede." She thought she was using the Italian word for cold! I often wonder what queer things *I* may have said when trying to make myself understood by the Rumanians, Hungarians and Poles, and possibly using to each one words that belonged to the other. The delicious Rumanian word for cold is "frig."

As some of the patients grew a little better and were able to get up to have their beds made, I managed to group the nationalities, to a certain extent. They preferred it and it was much easier for me to remember that in *one* corner of the tent (the Magyar) "pogrot" meant a blanket and "marod" very

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ill, while the Rumanians called the same things " cuvertura " and " bolnav."

And that " Utvoriti usta, dishi dobra " would cause a Russian, Pole, Croat, Bosnian, or Serbian at least to understand to open his mouth and take a deep, breath while it would have no effect on the others. The quaintest thing was to make them count while having their chests sounded, and I wish I could now remember the many funny words I learnt in that way—but I was generally too busy to write them down. " Cum ti cheama ? " always produced the name of a Rumanian, and seemed to me almost as pretty a baby phrase as the corresponding Flemish " Hoo is oo naam ? " I write phonetically.

On the whole the different nationalities were quite friendly, though the Hungarians were rather apt to look down upon the inhabitants of the stolen provinces, Bosnians, Transylvanians, etc. I had one *sous-lieutenant* and one *aspirant* among this lot, both of a Hungarian Regiment ; they were among the good recoveries, after many anxious days. At first I made some attempt to give the former a little privacy, at least that afforded by one empty bed next to him, but even that became impossible, as more and more patients

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arrived, and he made himself very happy among the men, though of course he thought every one else very inferior to the Hungarians and expressed himself as much ashamed of some of the representatives of the Austrian army. He spoke German and Magyar, of course, a fair amount of French, and could make himself understood in Rumanian. When he wanted to converse with the Poles and the Bosnians he had to have recourse to my help! and there was one Czech with whom none of us could have *much* communication, though when sent to work amongst the French he seemed to get along very happily. He was a most cheery child of sixteen.

To add to our tower of Babel we had the very friendly Italian sentries, nominally stationed at the tent doors to prevent these poor miserable prisoners from running away, but usually to be found sitting by the stove fraternizing with every one. On one or two occasions I was very glad indeed of the assistance of one of these with patients who were practically mad, or even to help in making the bed of a very helpless one. On some very cold winter nights these sentries arrived about 6 p.m., placed their belts and their *fusils* at the tent door and later on

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quietly slipped away to their warm beds in the village. I discovered this once when making a night round, and was told then that it had happened often before! It was difficult to take much pride in one's own personal appearance when each succeeding clean veil received douches of yellow water from the half-melted snow dripping from the tent roof at the doors and various other points. The atmosphere within, too, when the tiny stoves were quite recently lighted, or as often happened were entirely choked with soot, was quite thick with floating smuts. The white fog outside which wrapped our mountain village every night and morning, and sometimes lasted all day, thus became translated within into a fairly good imitation of Mr. Guppy's "London particular." Since the washing of one's personal linen was difficult of arrangement, and a matter of great length, we all supplemented our precious aprons by wearing doctor's blouses, generally rather long for *me*, or the quaint Canadian smocks, to be found in the stores, most of them, unfortunately, already irretrievably stained with Iodine and other traces of former work.

As some of the poor prisoners who had arrived from camp wrapped in blankets got

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well enough to get up, the problem of clothing them became acute. At first the stores issued to me scratch lots of hospital clothing, and I never saw anything so funny as two little Poles who went about in long black greatcoats much too big for them, and pointed white night caps. They looked for all the world like the gnomes of fairy tale! After a while, some of those who had recovered from their acute illness, but proved to be tuberculous, or otherwise unsuited to undertake hospital fatigue duties, were drafted on to an Italian hospital. I was suddenly told that the chosen ones could be despatched "cet après midi," if I would get them all dressed, but that they must on no account depart wearing anything French! I asked where I could procure their Austrian kit, and was told to send a fatigue party and take anything I wanted of what had passed through the "désinfection." That would have been all right, only on removal from the hot air machine, all these derelict garments had been hung up to air in a field! and were now soaked with melting snow.

I said my patients could *not* put on such garments and threatened to appeal to the surgeon-in-chief ("à quatre galons!") who

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was always kindness itself to all patients alike, so the *direction* agreed to provide transport on the following day if I would have my contingent ready then. I then selected the least dilapidated of the garments hanging out and brought them in to dry by our little stoves. Of course there was nowhere to hang them, and patients had to stand dejectedly holding torn breeches or crushed greatcoats to steam before these very small sources of heat. I never before understood so well what Americans mean by some one who " hasn't sense enough to come in when it rains," for one or two of these wretched Slavs seemed incapable of understanding *anything*, and I found one of them a little later, still with outstretched arms holding the garment I had given him to dry, but turned right away from the fire to talk to a friend ! As one of our doctors said one day when examining a patient like this, " Si l'empereur d'Autriche avait beaucoup de sujets comme ça, il n'avait qu'a démissioner ! "

The little villa in which we nurses slept was high up the mountain side, and comfortable enough when one got there, though rather far from one's work. It was quite

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fairly warm in the evenings when we came in, and we were not obliged, as so often elsewhere, to sit *in* our beds, to write our letters or teach each other foreign languages! We slept two in a small room, with a sheet for curtain between us. The food was rough, though better than in many places. I must apologize for mentioning the commissariat question again, but friends at home so often ask with regard to various places where I have worked, "What was the food like?" that I suppose it must be a subject of general interest! We still had the French army bread, always dry and tasteless, and at least a fortnight old, daily sardines, very tough meat, rice *or* potatoes, and for dessert, one or two nuts, or figs, or very rarely one teaspoonful of jam! One day when the only thing besides meat—which my teeth could never manage—was a dish of lentils, imperfectly cooked, and the bread was so hard that it was physically impossible to eat enough to satisfy one's hunger, I took mine upstairs, soaked it in hot water and made a kind of chicken food, much to the amusement of my room mate. At least it was sufficient to stoke the internal stove and to work on; but when in in another Unit we received rations of Nestlé's

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sweetened tinned milk, I found it really made excellent bread and milk, and I will never again despise it. We have all shed many prejudices during the war, permanently let us hope. As one cheerful French girl said to me once, " Après la guerre, nous ne serons pas difficile pour le manger ! " We have also learnt with how little sleep one can do, for quite a long time !

Shortly after we were settled in this village more and more British troops moved in, till the whole place teemed with them and they even washed their clothes in the fountain in the *Place*. One or two of our own men occasionally came in to the French hospital for minor dressings, etc., and I was often hailed when on a hurried journey from one tent to another, or to some distant department. " Mademoiselle, un de vos compatriotes—qu'est-ce que c'est qu'il désire ?" and one found he had a foreign body in his eye, or wanted a tooth out or a thumb lanced.

One day the doctor asked me to undertake, on my way home, an Italian patient for him. He said it was a case of bronchitis, not very severe, but requiring the inevitable *ventouses*. The patient's aged mother came to

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the dispensary for a bottle of medicine and conducted me in the dark up a narrow lane and through a courtyard into a huge kitchen, the only light for which came from an open fire, and on the hearthstone were seated three tiny children all alone! We penetrated into a back kitchen, with a mud floor and full of fowls. Then the old crone lighted a small oil lamp and preceded me up a chicken ladder. In a vast cold attic we found the patient, also in the dark, a beautiful young woman, lying in an enormous double bed, with no other furniture in the room; while waiting for the cupping glasses to do their work I fell to wondering how the bed ever got up the ladder! It seemed rather like George III's puzzle over the apple inside the dumpling, and perhaps had the same answer. I attended this patient for three or four days and became great friends with the family. Their manners were beautiful, and they were the cleanest Italians I have ever met; they always provided hot water in a copper bowl and a clean towel for doctor or nurse—a most unusual attention. They seemed very poor—the father breadwinner was of course a soldier, and hoping to be released shortly.

There were very few men left in the village

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at all, and when I tried to get a watch glass put in, was told that the *orologiaio* had gone to the Front, but that perhaps the " Maestre di musica " would oblige, which he did, but without much skill.

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CHAPTER IX

"AMBULANCE 10/1"

AFTER a month of this strenuous service, in which I was very happy, I, with my English colleague, who was then working in the Officers' Ward, was sent for by the surgeon-in-chief whom we both knew well, as he had made a point of visiting all the wards in his hospital several times a day and assuring himself that every one was as happy and comfortable as circumstances allowed. It was he personally who insisted on the installation of a second little stove in each of the prisoners' tents and asked me frequently if there was anything else I wanted for them. He was too kind for his own peace of mind, and could not bear to disappoint anyone; as he said to me once when I met him in the village street evidently returning from a trying interview, " Mademoiselle, c'est difficile

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de contenter tout le monde *et* sa femme "—a very nice phrase !

On this occasion he was asking for *our* help ! More sick had come into the hospital in the town which we had left ; the French voluntary nurses who had just arrived in our mountain village and were sharing our work were recalled, but objected to going ; he, therefore, asked us as a personal favour to go instead. Those who have worked with kind French doctors will know in what pretty and undeserved phrases, as to the value of our work, his regret at losing us, etc., this request was conveyed, and we both felt that " in order to uphold the best traditions of the British Empire and the honour of the Nursing profession " (if indeed such heavy artillery were needed for so small a matter !), we could do nothing else but agree to go, though in my case, anyway, with very real regret, tempered only by the fact that, as no more sick prisoners were to be received by the French ambulance and many were now convalescent, my *special* service would have lasted only a short time longer.

So we prepared ourselves for the road once more, and for the fourth time since returning

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from leave I congratulated myself that, contrary to the advice of many friends, I had brought *so little* luggage with me, nothing in fact that I could not carry myself. In my half room at the little villa at this spot, I had had three nails in the wall and a minute shoe cupboard for all accommodation. In most other places, however, I had only had the nails. I was specially sorry to leave this spot, from the fact that it had recently become for the second time, in the British occupation of that part of the Italian front, a Brigade Headquarters, and occasional teas with the "Staff" had been a great change and refreshment. There were also Sunday services in a tent opposite the canteen, where we could sometimes exchange views on things in general, and English news with our *compatriotes* the canteen ladies. They enjoyed British rations, but were somewhat worse lodged than we and worked nearly as long hours.

On the day of our departure, the surgeon-in-chief presented each of us with a certificate in recognition of our services in his ambulance and I found I was not too old to blush! The French *infirmières*, of course, carry about with them a little note-book, in which each

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doctor for whom they work gives them good or bad marks. They always speak of "*bonnes notes*" and "*mauvaises notes*" exactly like schoolgirls. We were asked to produce these note-books and, failing them, were given our credentials on a half-sheet of paper.

When we got back in early December to the town where I had worked since June, and my comrade since mid-September and through October, we found that the medical annexe which had been the scene of our former labours, and only left by us when completely emptied, had been taken over by the British as a Casualty Clearing Station.

It was most interesting to see all the different and better arrangements they had made, but we were slightly consoled by the fact that there were eight of them where there had been three of us, and fewer patients. Our services were required in what had been exclusively the surgical hospital for the French, several wards being now turned over to that always less popular work of nursing the sick, and we were each given charge of one. As before in this town, we were expected to sleep out, and to find our own quarters, unless we preferred to take over those of some Italian nurses departing on Refugee work. As we

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overlapped with them for two nights, while they made their preparations for departure, we were invited *pro tem.* to occupy the little room where in earlier and busier times the *infirmière de garde* sat or lay down at night, between her rounds. The quarters were very confined, but it was so much more comfortable than having to go out at night, after one's work was over, to a stone-cold room some distance away, where there might, quite possibly, not even be any hot water, and return shivering to work before morning dawned, that we begged to be allowed to stay, which was graciously permitted, and we passed some most contented and happy weeks in our new work.

Most of our patients were suffering from Spanish Influenza in one of its many forms, or from pneumonia, bronchitis and kindred complaints; not a great many serious cases, and being on the spot we were able to go to bed every night, and let the *infirmier de garde* call us if any emergency arose with which he could not deal. This happened not infrequently, for the men available for night duty at that time were simply soldiers who happened to be there, but knew nothing. One night we had a peculiarly stupid one—I had told him

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to call me if a special patient became restless and showed him where the door was at which he might knock. Instead of doing this he opened the door very softly and, nearly falling over my bed, woke us both with a hoarse stage whisper, "Le malade demande qu'on lui change de chemise. On pourra lui dire de rester tranquille—mais peut-être voulez-vous venir." I went in about two minutes and made that particular "malade" comfortable; he was a Paris taxi-cab driver, suffering from congestion of lungs and kidneys, a heavily built man, obviously a hard drinker and therefore a bad subject and extremely difficult to nurse, as he was both bad tempered and suspicious, and requiring endless humouring. This would not be a veracious chronicle if I gave the impression that all the patients I met and nursed in four and a half years, belonging to most of the nations of Europe, were all equally delightful! They varied, as people do in most places and in most walks in life, but this was the only one with whom I had transient feelings of repulsion to overcome. Next time a drunken cabman tries to charge you double fare and becomes abusive, try to picture him as a heavy and half-helpless bed patient, deter-

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mined to be as ill as possible and to do nothing the doctor orders! He reminded me a little of an Algerian officer I nursed at La Panne, who, in agonies with gas gangrene, seized my wrist and crushed it black and blue while shouting for "Champagne et Suzanne." Poor fellow! A very nice brother came afterwards and asked me what were his last words! When cleaning the taxi-driver's mouth, I always had the sensation that he was just like a tiger and would bite if he could, and the doctor must have had the same thought, for he cautioned me to use a very thick baton of wood with the *tampons*. He would spit at his fellow patients and the orderly, and took a positive delight in giving as much trouble as possible; but even he had his polite moments, and when wandering one night asked me earnestly if I had yet found my son! At times he was really humorous, as only a *parigot* can be.

It was very little use trying to train anyone, even in the most elementary matters, though their goodwill was unfailing, as the whole personnel might be changed several times a week. A particular prisoner might be wanted elsewhere, or the Commandant of the Camp would desire to give fresh ones an outing!

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A ward-maid would quarrel with some authority and suddenly disappear, perhaps in the middle of the day, and an orderly would turn into a patient, and a patient into an orderly with bewildering suddenness. A few had been orderlies before and knew a little. They were of the type that loved to take its own temperature at odd times and come and report on it with suggestions as to some new malady from which they might be suffering. A number of our patients were only sent in from the camps with bronchitis and congestions in order to qualify them for sick leave, and the repatriated prisoners were chiefly suffering from malnutrition and consequent skin complaints, so that for a day or two I began to feel that I was almost a special nurse for one *aliéné* and put him in the bed close to the little table where I sat when I had nothing else to do, after the few dressings and treatments for the forty other patients were done. A very great deal of walking about was entailed from the size of these vast dormitories, and the fact that water was only to be found at the extreme end of the corridor, about half a kilometre away. That, at any rate, was better than the École Communale at Montecchio, where there was

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no water at all, and it had to be fetched from the yard, so that except when everything was frozen I, in the tents, was the best off, for slops could be emptied in various corners of the yard and any prisoner who could walk was always happy to fetch water, while even in the days when they were all bedridden and feverish it was possible to do it oneself.

I had often wished in those days that I had a pedometer with me for the pleasure of seeing how many miles one covered in "courses" (journeys) to the Bureau (office), the stores, the kitchen, the dispensary, etc., besides up and down the two tents themselves. Anyone would *give* me anything I came for or brought a prisoner to fetch, but there was no organization for supplying it to the prisoners' tents. We were "les parents pauvres de l'hôpital."

There was a kind of "after the war" feeling gradually pervading the atmosphere of our ambulance. Doctors went on leave and did not return, orderlies were called up to rejoin their units and presumably to return to France, and queerer and queerer makeshifts were handed out to us as assistants. For several nights as *infirmier de garde* we had the carpenter, who, though very kind, was quite

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anxious to secure enough rest to enable him to do his next day's work of coffin-making, and it seemed really grimly humorous that he should also have to attend the last moments of those for whom the coffins were to be used.

There was one gruesome and very chilly night in mid-December ; at six in the evening a poor little *isolé* (query typhus) who seemed to have been breathing his last for several days, a victim to influenza, tuberculosis and peritonitis, passed away, and was carried off for an autopsy next day. About the same time a batch of new patients arrived from the ambulance at Castelfranco, with the usual vague diagnoses. One case was simply described as " Bronchitis," but it was pointed out to me by the sergeant of the Bureau des Entrées, who had allowed him to *walk* up two flights of stairs ! that he was " très fatigué," a term which covers almost anything from temporary exhaustion to " articulo mortis." The doctor who saw him at eight warned me he was a cardiac case which indeed I could see for myself, but the only instructions were to keep him warm and comfortable and on a milk diet. He seemed, however, terribly oppressed and, as the old taxi-driver was also getting steadily worse, I felt it was

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impossible to go to bed. About eleven I fetched the *médicin de garde* and he determined to perform blood-letting on the cardiac-bronchitic man. The lighting of the huge lofty ward was only provided for by two very much exhausted and distant electric lamps, so the operation was carried out by the light of one candle, perilously held by the carpenter in very close proximity to the tumbling locks of the operating doctor, and I was momentarily expecting a fizzle! The doctor arrived without a white coat and asked me to pin a sheet round him, more to protect his pale blue uniform from accidents than with any idea of asepsis. If the whole thing had not been a tragedy it would have been quaintly reminiscent of nursery theatricals. Three of the doctor's lancets one after the other were tried before one was found that would cut—we were not of course surgically equipped in that ward, but, fortunately, I always had a reserve one of my own for use when doing the scarified *ventouses*. When at length the blood flowed, it did relieve the poor man, but only temporarily and about an hour later he ceased to breathe; and at three in the morning the taxi-driver, who after having been madder than ever all the previous day had

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at length become almost comatose, died also. I had them both carried into the next ward, which was fortunately empty, where they could lie peacefully until the arrival of the Austrian prisoners in the morning, they, curiously enough, being now the only people detailed to remove the French dead.

At this stage we rarely received men in so serious a condition. Among the diagnoses of *Bronchites, Suite de grippe, Courbature,* and the like, we sometimes got things like "*Mauvais état genéral,* "*Respirations saccadées*" and even "*troubles psychiques.*" This last patient was merely an amiable idiot, said to have proved incapable of leading a mule in his battery, but quite willing to do whatever he saw others doing and he really became quite helpful to me. Another, whose diagnosis was hemiplegia, was also certainly suffering from cerebral weakness. He rarely stopped talking, but that appeared to amuse rather than to annoy his comrades; all the patients were extraordinarily good-tempered with each other, and in all the time I nursed French soldiers I *never* saw a quarrel. I note this because I think we British are rather apt to speak lightly of the French as excitable, etc., and their patience and "bonhomie"

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under the most trying circumstances have struck me forcibly.

They were delightfully inquisitive as to one's home life, circumstances and surroundings, and one's motives for being at the Front in a country other than one's own. That seemed to them the acme of devotion. Several of them went so far as to inquire my age and how long it had taken me to acquire each foreign tongue!

Their politeness under all circumstances, too, was striking. When almost at the last gasp they would wish one "bon appétit" when one left them for a short time at mid-day or in the evening.

Here I must also mention the Austrian sergeant who invariably said "Ich küss' Ihr die Hände" when given his nastiest medicine!

A trifle which always seems to me characteristic is the way in which individuals of different nationalities attract one's attention. The English man or boy on friendly terms with you begins "I say." The Italian says "Senta"—"Listen"—for fear you might not otherwise do so, but the Frenchman invariably begins with "Dites, mademoiselle," or "Dites, ma sœur," implying that what he

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really wants to hear is *your* opinion of the matter in hand.*

They do not of course love all their *infirmières* equally well, and one very efficient one of fifteen years' standing was described to me by a sad little patient as " Sympathique, celle-là, comme la porte d'un prison," which reminds me of an English Sister whose somewhat rough methods caused one patient to exclaim, " I should think she 'ad 'ad 'er training in a dogs' 'ome ! " We know that there are exceptions to the rule in every profession and are only concerned not to furnish such ourselves. Some of the French nurses were wonderful, more especially considering their lack of training. There was a brave little French girl of twenty-one when the war broke. When I knew her she was of the mature age of twenty-five and a capable anæsthetist under most difficult circumstances, but at the beginning, though she had just passed her Red Cross Examinations, she had never *done* anything, and scarcely ever been out alone. When the first flood of thousands of French wounded poured into her native

* To those who love the French soldier as I do, I should like to recommend a charming little poem, " La passion de notre frère le poilu," by Marc Leclerc.

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town, in the grim days of August, 1914, she with many others was called up for service, and was placed alone in a ward of forty men, to carry out the hasty orders of the doctors as best she could. When told to give an injection of anti-tetanic serum, she had to fetch a book to see how it was done and the point that nearly defeated her was how to open the hermetically sealed phial. Eventually she knocked its head off with a stone from the garden, carefully disinfecting the stone with alcohol !

Another *infirmière* of much experience described to me some terrible weeks near Verdun, when literally thousands of wounded passed through their hands daily in what was practically an Advanced Dressing Station always under fire. The nurses in this case were lodged in a half-ruined [farmhouse a kilometre away from the scene of their labours, and when one of them fell ill of rheumatic fever she lay alone all day in a fireless room—in mid winter—quite untended, save when one of her companions ran back at mid-day with a drink of hot milk for her. When a doctor came to see her, he put on again the great coat he had taken off, as the room was so cold, and then he *did* arrange for her

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removal. It seems as if sometimes France was strangely wasteful of her human material!

French patients, of course, are very talkative. There is hardly ever silence in the ward, even during the doctors' visits, and there is rarely any medium between a night orderly who must be perpetually talking to some one and one who sleeps so heavily that his snoring keeps the patients awake. They have naively mentioned this to me more than once! One night when there were several really anxious cases, the doctor who left me at midnight politely hoped I was now going to take some rest, but added, "Faites surtout que l'infirmier veille bien," and it did not seem to occur to him that not being capable, like Sir Boyle Roche's bird, of being in two places at once, it was impossible for me to fulfil *both* orders. I did go away for a little and came back to find every one, including the orderly, "resting very nicely."

There are also sometimes the ultra-conscientious, and I have been aroused at 2 a.m. on a cold winter's night by the hoarse croak of the *infirmier* whom the patients called "le petit père" and we "le petit grisé"—he was invariably kind to them even when drunk—"Mademoiselle, c'est pour donner

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quelque chose à boire à un entrant," only to find it was the same patient to whom I had given cough mixture three hours before, and whose cough had begun again, but whose presence the orderly had only just discovered. We received at that time a good many ex-prisoners, described as "Rapatriés" when they came back by train and "Évadés" when they had come on their feet. Some of them had been through great hardships and were mere bags of bones, and so took bronchitis and kindred ailments very hardly.

Suddenly one day we were told that our ambulance, as such, had ceased to exist, and another had taken its place; but as far as we could see it was only the number on our letters and the *médecin-chef* that were changed. The work went on exactly as before, and Christmas drew nearer. A week before that date my English colleague left us to go on leave after three months' work and to return to sunnier skies in Rome; she had been suffering agonies for weeks past, from chilblains due to cold weather and marble floors. I missed her greatly. Just at that moment it was decided to move all the remaining medical cases to a vacant floor in the surgical building, and after two nights, during which I inhabited

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the disused orphanage alone, and was able to "*constater*" that huge wards with stone floors and no occupants were *much* colder than tents, the doctor asked me if I would not rather establish myself in the little cubicle on the landing which was intended to serve us as a kind of bureau. I gratefully accepted this suggestion. Anything was preferable to having again to seek for a room in the town, which one would never visit save in the dark, while during all one's working hours one would be practically without home or shelter, or anywhere to lay down one's belongings. The cubicle was very like a ship's cabin, 5 ft. by 12 ft., and was divided from the outer world only by a match-boarding partition 7 ft. high, the ceiling being 5 ft. higher still. But, curiously enough, though there were plentiful chinks between the boards, and, as far as conversation went, the whole landing only formed one room, a blessed sense of privacy was given to me by the primitive hook and eye fastening of my little wooden door, so that the *donne de servizio*, or orderlies, who at any hour of the day or night knocked with one hand while saying "permesso" and pulled with the other, had actually to wait until I got up and opened to them. I

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felt I could put up with a great deal for the sake of this privilege!

For the first two nights it was so cold that I could not make up my mind to undress, knowing I should have to get up several times in the night, but it was merely a question of collecting enough blankets, and in a short time I settled myself extremely happily in my little prophet's chamber—which contained very literally just a bed, a table, a stool and a candle—and occupied the proud position of being the only woman in the whole ambulance at night.

We had not been established in our new quarters more than a few days when patients began to pour in again, and I soon had my hands as full as even I could wish, for, as far as medical work went, I was quite alone for the whole hospital and in charge of three wards until one little French nurse returned from leave and took over part of the work.

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CHAPTER X

CHRISTMAS, 1918

THE fifth Christmas of the War; for, though there is no more fighting now, we are still living under war conditions, and in many ways privations are greater than in 1914 and 1915, though our hearts, thank Heaven, are so much lighter.

I had always dreamed of some day spending Christmas in Italy, as I had twice spent Easter, in far-off days of tourist travel. The reality was strangely different from the anticipation. The biting cold and frost with brilliant sunshine, which we had experienced earlier in the month, gave way to a spell of dreary persistent rain, and the streets of our little town, when one had time to go out, presented that curious anomaly of painful cobble stones, covered with liquid mud! One wonders where the latter comes from, for in dry weather the roads are apparently bare

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as bones. When spattered from head to foot with yellow mud, one longs for a khaki instead of a blue uniform !

Our medical wards were full to overflowing with the usual winter complaints, and the amount of cupping and poulticing to be got through every afternoon reached the utmost limits of which one pair of hands was capable. Such treatments as were possible I always managed to give before the doctor's visit, which, with careful auscultation of anything from fifty to eighty patients in the three wards, often lasted from eight o'clock till well into the middle of the eleven o'clock meal ; and then there came the wild scurry of getting the orders sent down to the dispensary as much before twelve as possible, in order that something might be put in hand before the august officials of that department went off to their midday meal. As in all institutions of many departments—and I have noted the characteristic even with the heads of much smaller sections, in domestic establishments !—each individual head rather seemed to consider himself as the owner of the stores in his charge, and was, as the Americans would say, somewhat " unwilling to part," and it became a daily game to keep possession of a few bottles

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for necessary reserves; for those concerned liked to have all the empty bottles sent down to them at eight in the morning and returned to us about three p.m. with the prescribed daily mixtures; being apparently unable to realize that the doses required in between those hours, of cough mixtures and other things, cannot be left suspended in mid-air, nor even in the unfortunate patient's hard-worked tin cup, from which he takes his coffee, milk, wine or any other drink, though he is perfectly willing, and indeed likes to have a dose of castor-oil put in his cup, to sit beside him all night and be drunk with the coffee in the morning!

As I believe I have mentioned before, medicine glasses are unknown in French ambulances, and when I introduced one it was at first looked on with suspicion by one doctor, as likely to distribute microbes of influenza, even when duly washed! Though the same doctor must have been as well aware as I was that the battered and stained tin cups were often used promiscuously and not washed at all. When a patient well enough to sit up is engaged in shaving and has his own cup full of soapy water, he innocently offers you his neighbour's to receive the mix-

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ture you are distributing, and as you are quite sure he will drink it (for Frenchmen, like their wives, never waste anything!) you must sometimes shut your eyes to the fact that it is not his own, for, with the best will in the world and even by walking many miles up and down the wards, you know that the needs of the seventy-odd other patients for whom you are responsible single-handed would probably prevent your returning to him at the moment when he would have finished shaving and emptied the remains of the soapy water on to the floor or other convenient spot. In the Bessonier tents it used to be a great joke to find the cracks between the boards and use them as drains.

It will be obvious that cough mixture distributed in the manner intended by the dispenser gives less than the maximum of comfort in cases of acute bronchitis and the like, so the thing is to collect as far as possible some little 100 grammes (3½ oz.) bottles and leave some mixture beside each patient's bed, in order that he may, like Mrs. Gamp, "put his lips to it when so dispodged," and every morning some active orderly tries to collect and carry off all the dispenser's bottles, until caught by the Sister, who points out those she

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must retain ; leaving one or two also carefully locked up in her cupboard where she tries to keep a small reserve of necessary medicaments against the arrival of acute cases at all hours of the day and night. The doctors are quite willing she should do this. It is merely the chemist's assistants who like to think that theoretically every drug in the hospital is under their personal care until about to be swallowed and, if your daily order contains such items as fifty tabloids of aspirin or twenty-five of calomel, like to ask you, if they get the chance, how many patients are actually requiring those drugs that day!

All this is "fin de guerre" of course. In the rush of actual warfare many regulations became, perforce, "dead letters," as, for instance, the one which prescribes the number of grammes of mustard (a gramme is, roughly speaking, 15 grains) which may be used for poultice or plaster for one French soldier in one day. Of course if three or four poultices a day are ordered for one man, and you cannot get possession of a tin of meal, you must simply enter on the daily sheet poultices for four men, and so the regulation is merely a useless waste of time—but this characteristic is not confined to *French* administration!

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Equally a dead letter is the rule that every drug ordered must be specially signed for by the doctor, for as soon as your doctor acquires the least confidence in you he gaily signs you a batch of *bons en blanc* for your daily use, and even leaves you to fill in the formulæ of his prescriptions and to modify the daily amounts of various ingredients as required.

Through my kind friends of the British Red Cross I got a few little china bowls and in these I could make and leave lemonade beside the very feverish patients, for I have a strong chemical prejudice against acids in those grimy tin cups! A *pot à tisane* or covered china milk-jug could sometimes be obtained if one had time to get an order from the surgeon-in-chief, countersigned by the gestionnaire, stamped in the office and presented in the store. I actually did all this one breathless afternoon when working in the tents without an orderly—and then got tartaric lemonade from the dispensary to fill it! The gratitude of the thirsty patients made it well worth while—but such a pot was very apt, if left unprotected, to find its way back to the shelves of the store, the orderly in charge of which took a huge pride in his well-filled shelves and reminded one rather of the

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Russian Grand Duke, of earlier days, who is reported to have said after a great military review, " Je déteste la guerre, cela gâte les armées."

One must have worked in a French military field hospital to appreciate the distinction of departments, and how tea comes from the dispensary, bandages, gauze and matches from the *magazin de matérial*, soap, candles and bread from the *dépense*, etc., all at special hours, and an extra slice of meat for a special patient by an order signed by the surgeon-in-chief—though the cook is often complaisant enough to give it to you—if you promise, " foi d'une Anglaise," to procure and bring him the order next time you can catch the *patron*. I am now again speaking of the conditions in the ambulance when I had charge of the prisoners' tents and where, knowing my lack of assistants, all the officials were most extraordinarily good to me. One day, while engaged with a sick prisoner, one of the officials from the bureau dashed in and asked me hurriedly the date of my arrival in Italy, and the Christian name of my father. The connection between the two facts seemed remote until I received a day or two later the certificate accompanying the order to

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wear the ribbon of the "Fatigues of War." Later, in connection with the Médaille d'honneur des épidémies, I was requested to procure a certificate "d'honorabilité" from the "Commandant of the British Garrison!" I did not quite know to whom to apply nor exactly what was required—it sounded like a charwoman's character for honesty and sobriety, but apparently what was necessary was done.

Our medical wards were *archi-complets* at Christmas; in fact, the few patients who were ready to depart *en permission* by the evening train on Christmas Eve were barely dressed and had not yet had time to pack their bundles when their beds were required for new-comers. A week or two later this became a daily occurrence. Being the nearest ambulance to the few remaining French camps, we were bound to receive patients at all hours of the day or night, and they arrived *en petits paquets* of two or three at a time, quite without warning. The first night that I spent in my queer little loose box on the landing I was aroused three times by new arrivals. Breakfast in bed sounds very luxurious for active service. What it really means is a cupful of patients' coffee handed in about

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seven a.m. by the night orderly through a chink of open door. One scurries back into bed to drink it, before dressing—for one's feet are so cold—and one supplements it by a hunk of the brown Italian bread bought daily by means of one of the Italian women who will bring it in. Sometimes there is no bread left, because it has been given away overnight to some unlucky patient who has arrived too late for anything but milk rations and says piteously: "Mais, ma sœur, je crève de faim." Even so, one is no worse off than the patients who only have bread for breakfast when they have saved it from the previous day's rations.

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day were therefore very busy ones, and it was impossible even to attend, as I had hoped, the Midnight Mass some distance away. There was a Mass for patients and staff early on Christmas morning in the tiny chapel in the building and all who were able struggled to attend. There was a wheezy little harmonium and we sang one Christmas canticle of which every verse began with "Bergers pourquoi!"—but I must say I missed the familiar "Herald Angels" and the "Adeste fidelis." The latter, of course, one would have heard at the Midnight Mass.

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In the afternoon all the surgical patients and the majority of the medical were gathered together into one large ward and treated to music, champagne and oranges and such gifts as we had been able to collect. On the following day, by dint of much persistence and the obtaining of the signatures of three important personages, I managed to *dénicher* two bottles of champagne to divide among sixteen of my own patients who had been unable to attend the fête.

When the patients were all safely composed for the night, about eight p.m. I was whirled off in a car to dine with the Red Cross Commissioner, a most unexpected and joyful dissipation. I thankfully remembered that I was the proud possessor of *one* English-washed apron. Those who have watched their linen grow greyer week by week, as it returns unstarched from its soapless contact with the cold water and stones of the river, will appreciate my feelings. I don't think I *could* have accepted the invitation but for this circumstance. How odd it will be when we return to civil life and shall no longer feel fully dressed for opera box or dinner party by merely putting on a clean veil and apron! I for one shall be quite sorry—it is so simple.

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A New Year's festivity in which I was also asked to take part gave me great pleasure. It was indirectly connected with the war, since it was described as Italian propaganda! The local priest was requested to collect seventy of his flock between the ages of five and twelve, and these were entertained to games, refreshments, gramophone and presents in the hall of the beautiful Renaissance palace inhabited by the British Red Cross Headquarters. I asked permission to bring as my guest the dear little gentleman who at one time brought me my morning hot water—no one had done so since I left his mother's roof! This entertainment was the most enormous success, and two Italian Red Cross ladies who had been asked to assist put an account in the local paper, describing the festival as something to be remembered for generations. Personally, I made great friends with the mother of three small guests, a refugee from Asiago, who pressed me to come and visit her there, when her now ruined cottage should have been rebuilt.

I had not meant to "sit the New Year in," having had a very exhausting day, and had already fallen asleep, but, curiously enough, I was called just before twelve, to a

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nervous patient who begged for a hot fomentation, and so I heard the bells ringing in that year of the Lord 1919 which is to witness the remodelling of the map of Europe and the ending of all that may properly be called "War-work."

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CHAPTER XI

IN THE NEW ITALY. OSPEDALE DA CAMPO 79. ZONA DI GUERRA

A POSTSCRIPT must be added concerning the last hospital in Italy in which it was my happy fate to make even a brief sojourn.

There was first a wonderful railway journey, beginning with a double crossing of the Lagoons at sunrise—due to a prudent Scottish reluctance to leave the train when invited to change at Mestre, since it was obvious that, being bound for Trieste, a train that went into Venice must come back again!—and continued across the shifting Piave, the almost dry Tagliamento, and the deep blue-green Isonzo, all over recently mended portions of the blown-up bridges, and through the midst of ruins everywhere, right up to the historic city of Gorizia, for the possession of which so many lives were sacrificed.

There was something inexpressibly thrilling

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in setting foot on the *only* portion of enemy territory in Europe actually conquered by the Allies in the great war. The first dash of the Italian armies in 1915 carried them over the Isonzo into the *paesi irridenti* for which they longed, and a year later all lovers of Italy, and in particular her British Allies, rejoiced with her over the taking of this city and the surrounding country. Like Compiègne, Gorizia—Austrian Görz—changed hands three times and suffered accordingly. It was strongly fortified and defended by the Austrians, and a marble tablet in the southern gateway of the Castle still records how a young officer of Artillery "fand hier den Heldentod" in 1915. After the Austrians had been driven out in 1916, and had established themselves on the heights of Monte Santo behind, they in their turn almost demolished the northern defences of the fortress, which now looks as one would imagine Edinburgh Castle would do after a heavy bombardment from Arthur Seat; but they failed to retake the fort or the city, and it was only the "débâcle" consequent on the disaster of Caporetto which compelled an Italian evacuation of this district and restored the Austrian dominion for another year.

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In November, 1918, the Austrians left without striking a blow, and since then the Italian flag has again floated over the citadel of this quaint Slav city. It is said that about twenty of the original inhabitants remained through all the vicissitudes and are still there. I did not hear what was their nationality.

Only when actually visiting these Adriatic provinces can one realize the difficulties of deciding where Italian rule should end and that of the new Jugo-Slav state begin. German-speaking masters were obviously out of place, but there is no question here but that the Slovene element is very strong and only those who know them best can really estimate the sources of trouble between the Jugo-Slavs themselves and their possible capacity for forming and ruling a large empire.

Within forty miles of Gorizia, Serbs and Croats were already at each other's throats in the city of Lubiana (Laibach), and to the Western mind it hardly seems as if the orders issued from Zagabria (Agram) as to the methods to be pursued with brawlers were likely to have much permanent effect. It has been enacted that a Serb and a Croat found fighting shall be confined for several days in the same dungeon, without food,

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while at the hours when meals *should* be served they are to be compelled by their jailers to embrace! Subsequently, for a month they are to sleep on the same bed and eat out of the same plate. Presumably at the end of that time, if both are still alive, they will not want to meet again! And thus the peace may be kept.

A Serbian proverb says that when a Serb sees a Bulgar he sees the devil, but when he sees a Croat he begins to remember the Bulgar's virtues! Reminding one of the schoolboy saying, "It is only when Jupiter begins to oppress us that we remember what a jolly fellow Saturn was!"

Even the youngest of us have known *several* Balkan wars, and it seems likely that some time will elapse before the Dalmatic and Albanian coast, with all its heterogeneous hinterland, settles into permanent peace.

In this hospital the nurses "messed" with the Medical and Administrative officers, and their passing visitors, Naval, Military, etc., and we heard a vast amount of political discussion carried on with true Latin vehemence. It was extraordinarily interesting, though, perhaps, some of it was not to be

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taken *au grand sérieux*—otherwise demobilization would seem a mistake!

Besides Gorizia and Görz, the city has its Slovene name—written Gorica, but pronounced Goritsa, the letter c in Slovene and Croatian being equivalent to the ts of Russian and Serbian. Those who know Russia say that the churches, and the very houses themselves recall that country, as do the faces and often the clothes of the people. All shop signs, notices, etc., are put up in Slovene, and it gave me a delightful sense of novelty to be actually in a place where an inn was *gostilna*, a garden, *vrt*, a woodmerchant, *trgovic drvima*, a barber, *brivac*, words with which I was familiar from conversations with prisoners, but had never expected really to use in daily life or to see posted up around me.

To be offered one's change in Kroner which carry their face value (very different from the intrinsic) printed on them, in ten out of the twelve languages current in the late Austrian Empire, seemed to place one very much on the outskirts of Europe.

The little villages on the Carso are more desolate than anything I have anywhere seen except in Belgium. Not a single house left with its roof on and no inhabitants, except

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in one or two cases where a few brave spirits have lately returned and are living in wooden shanties while trying to repair their shattered homes.

At Gorizia station I saw a whole trainload of returning refugees, being despatched northward to their own villages—and a quaint sight they were. Many of the faces recalled those of Russians and Poles, as we know them in the slums of London or New York, and they wore fur caps and other things to correspond. Most of these people wore new and tidy Italian boots and shoes—the *calzature dello Stato* of which we hear so much. They had the queerest bundles of personal and household goods and nearly every man, woman and child carried, like Joseph's brethren returning from Egypt, a sack of flour—this being an Anglo-Saxon gift.

On the platform at this station and doubtless at others, there is exhibited a glass case containing specimens of the deadly Austrian bombs and hand grenades still to be found all too frequently in the neighbouring country, and the cause of numerous fatal accidents. Some of them certainly *look* harmless enough. Sticks wrapped in rags and string, little tin cans, etc. The notice attached to this case

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of specimens says " Bombe à mano, austriache, Pericolo di morte "—" Danger of death," and adds tersely " Sono ancora altre "—" There are others "—which notice is repeated in the languages of the vanquished: " Es gibt noch andern " and " Ime tud drugi."

The famous Monte Santo, which dominates Gorizia, may now be climbed as a peaceful though arduous excursion. All the Austrian defences, munition stores, etc., are still *in situ*, or were when I was there in February 1919, exactly as they were left; but of the Monastery fort at the top scarcely one stone is left upon another. There is a marvellous view southward to Aquileia with its giant tower, to Venice and the sea; northward over the great Bainsizza Plateau to the Carinthian Alps, some say the loveliest thing in Europe.

A most interesting point of Austrian defence of Gorizia in the early days is the ancient town cemetery, where a whole system of barbed-wire entanglements, trenches, dug-outs and gun emplacements can still be traced amid the gruesome ruins of family vaults in which Italian shells exploded, where coffins float in water, or stand up at all sorts of grim

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angles, revealing their contents and recalling Doré's engravings of "The Day of Resurrection" or "The Valley of Dry Bones."

Inscriptions in this cemetery are almost equally divided between German, Italian and Slovene. All the Austrian defenders of the city in 1915–16 are buried here in painfully tidy rows. Officers at the head of their men—a position which rumour states they did not always occupy in battle.

There are "emplacements," also, in all sorts of unexpected places in the city, in villa-gardens, public squares, etc.

Our hospital had been formerly a well-equipped Austrian one, and it was curious to be using sheets, blankets, temperature charts, etc., all marked in the German tongue as belonging to the military sector of Marburg, though indeed most of what was portable, except the patients, had been carried away by the enemy in his hurried retirement in November, 1918. Some hospitals were actually left without doors or window frames, all having been used for firewood.

The soldier patients in this hospital were mostly medical cases—those which, like the poor, are always with us—and work was not so arduous as to prevent an excursion to the

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lovely city of Trieste, which made one long to go on to Fiume and Pola, with its wonderful Roman amphitheatre. Food in Trieste was rather scarcer than elsewhere. A kind of penny bun (no currants) cost one *corona* nominally 10*d.*; but on the other hand a night's lodging was 3 francs *with sheets*, 2 francs without!

One was tempted to forget one was a nurse and long to be a mere traveller once more, a "globe-trotter amabilis," as Professor Chamberlain of Tokyo used to say—and yet I do not think I could bear to be in any of these countries which have suffered so in this long struggle without having some work to do in helping the people. There will probably be plenty of that for all of us for many a long day to come.

THE END

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