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WAR OF 1914-18

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The Official War Historian of the Commonwealth Government (Dr. C. E. W. Bean), after his study of the collection of private war records preserved in the Australian War Memorial Library, wrote :—

"The private diaries in this collection furnish some of its most valuable historical records, but, like all private memoirs which were not compiled with any historical purpose, they should not be regarded as first-hand evidence except where it is certain that they are so. The diarist is almost always sincere in his desire to record accurately, but he is subject to no obligation or inducement to indicate whether he is recording his own observations or incidents told him by friends or heard at third or fourth hand at the mess-table. Thus, in some of the diaries in this collection, scenes described with vivid detail, and without any warning that they are told at second or third hand, have been found to be completely inaccurate in important details. A certain number also have been written up or revised long after the events, though doubtless usually from notes made at the time. In most cases the student must rely on his experience and on internal evidence to guide him in judging what is and what is not likely to be historically accurate."

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I beg to submit, herewith, a report of my experiences, during my career as a Sister nursing in the Hospitals of the Oversea Forces.

I sailed from Australia on August 22nd 1916 by the S. S. Mooltan and disembarked at Bombay on Sept. 12th same year, taking up duties at the Lambala War Hospital at Malaba Hill where I remained for 3 months.

My work at this beautifully erected British Hospth., situated on the shores of Bombay Harbour, consisted in the nursing of a good many exchange prisoners-of-war after the fall of Kut in Mesopotamia where General Townshend was taken prisoner.

These unfortunate Tommy patients were indeed in a deplorable state, suffering terribly from the severe effects of thirst, hunger and negligent treatment of their wounds and diseases &c.

The Hospital contained 600 beds and was well fitted out.

I was transferred to Poona, some 200 miles inland from Bombay, and took up duty on December 23rd 1916 at the Loccum War Hospth. receiving English sisters. This establishment was formerly an Agricultural College, situated in a picturesque locality in the beautiful highland scenery & climate of the Western Ghats.

On taking over this Hospital it contained but 100 beds, with a small staff of one Australian Matron and 6 sisters, which was increased, during my service of 2 1/2 years there, to 1200 beds, and a staff of 50 more sisters.

During my period of duty there I was in charge of the Acute-Surgical Ward.

I left Poona in November 1918, travelled overland to Colombo & sailed on S.S. Wiltshire to Singapore.

Egypt, where we returned to Cairo.

I was in Cairo for 3 weeks nursing at an English Hospital and then boarded the ship "Haiscrist" at St. Said which took us to Marseilles. We travelled to Paris & on to Le Havre & then crossed to Southampton.

On reaching ^{England} I was sent to Southall Hospital where I did duty until 6 weeks ago, when I was transferred to this Hospital.

Speaking generally, I found the equipment and management of the different Hospitals at which I served most satisfactory, and the mutual support so willingly offered by the other Sisters and Staff generally with our work really commendable, such harmony being greatly appreciated.

My service of nearly 3 years abroad has been very interesting and instructive to me, and has decidedly improved my nursing capacity.

Having experienced such a variety of work and coming into continual contact with such a representative body of men of all classes and callings as patients, I have become much better acquainted with human character; and this truer conception is a material advantage to a nurse who, I think, should study the different temperaments of her patients so as to treat differently accordingly.

In conclusion, I must remark that the behaviour of the patients was always splendid, and their untiring efforts always helped in the tidy appearance & upkeep of their respective wards. They, also, invariably showed marked respect & obedience to we Sisters.

Mary Keating
A.F.N.S.



Australian War Memorial

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