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[1017]

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."

M. Nichol

France

30.6.19

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I sailed from Australia on the 'Ulysses' on May 9th 1917, and after calling at Durban, Cape Town and Lyons - Leone arrived at Doverport on July 27th.

After a short leave in London & Scotland was detailed for duty at the 'Croydon War Hospital' commenced duty the following day in a surgical ward. It was a big disappointment when we discovered the place was full of tommyes, as we had hoped of nursing our own countrymen. The majority of cases there were nerve cases, the result of gunshot wounds in France.

We were very fortunate in having an Australian matron & a staff of our sisters. The medical staff being British. About 4 months later the hospital was taken by the British in January 1918. I was fortunate enough to be picked for duty in France. A fortnight later 10 sisters were given leave & later sent to us. I & 9 of the 7 names & put on duty in a surgical ward. The work was fairly slack during Jan & Feb & the beginning of March, when owing to heavy fighting which ensued from the stopping of the German advance into Amiens, we received a heavy rush of work. The cases came down in hundreds, the boys were wonderful & always brave and in excellent spirits. The work was frightfully heavy & most worrying, as one always felt it impossible to administer the treatment they required. For days & days the theatre staff worked day & night. I was ^{also} doing my first night duty in the surgical but

that I had the awful experience of an air-raid. I shall never never forget it - though the whole place would collapse. It's burned later that bombs had been dropped some short distance away. Fortunately very little damage was done as they were dropped in open fields. While at Rouen we had several air-raids & occasionally spent nights in the trenches, which was really a novel, although not quite a pleasant experience.

We were in Rouen until the beginning of December when the complete unit was transferred to 'England'. The work was totally different & we loved nursing our own boys. Here the difference in the nature of the casualties became very apparent. Instead of awful wounds of France, the cases are all the usual surgical cases consistent with civilian life. In the ward at present, we have only one wounded man.

Madge Fisher



Australian War Memorial

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