

A CHRISTMAS IN A CAIRO HOSPITAL.

BY A CANADIAN SOLDIER OF THE EGYPTIAN
EXPEDITIONARY FORCE OF 1882.

The consciousness of a debt of gratitude of long standing to a noble lady, who, with her husband, won golden opinions from all classes of society during their stay in Canada some years ago, prompts the writer to pen the following lines. None the less also does he incline to the opinion that an omission to make public in detail the facts he now describes, notwithstanding the present lateness of the day, would be a lack of duty towards his fellow-countrymen, who, whatever their peculiarities or failings, are, he is confident, always pleased to learn of kindnesses bestowed upon any of their number, when abroad among strangers, and at a distance from their native land. How much more does this become the case when the benefactor is no less a personage than the Marchioness (then the Countess) of Dufferin, a lady whose name, even yet, from one end of Canada to the other, is a household word for all that is lady-like, gentle and good; and the benefited young Canadian, then serving the Empire with the Army of Egypt, who, simply because he was a Canadian, was the recipient of marked kindnesses at the hands of Her Ladyship and her daughter, then the Lady Helen Blackwood.

After the cessation of hostilities in Egypt, in September, 1882, the British Army there was much reduced, only about half of the force being retained as an Army of Occupation, the remainder being drafted to England, India, Malta, and other stations. Still, at the time of which I write, we had something over 10,000 men in Egypt, by far the greater portion of which were quartered in Cairo, where the corps in which I served was also stationed.

During the short and sharp campaign of August and September, the troops had suffered comparatively little from serious illness, but early in October enteric fever set in, and the large hospitals of Abbasseyeh, Gezireh and the Citadel were soon taxed to their utmost capacity to provide accommodation and treatment for the ever increasing number of patients. The corps to which the writer belonged had suffered little since leaving England, but in the beginning of November we caught the fever, and several of our members were sent to hospital. In the last weeks of November the writer, who up to that time had enjoyed excellent health, was stricken with the prevailing malady, and, after vainly fighting against its early attacks for a few days, during which time he was generously exempted from duty, was finally obliged to report himself sick for hospital. Our corps was quartered at Kasr-el-Nil, a large and commodious barracks on the Cairo bank of the Nile, in company with the 42nd and 74th Highlanders, and as he was the nearest medical officer at the time, I reported myself to the surgeon of the former regiment, who, after examination, pronounced me a case for the hospital. An ambulance wagon belonging to the Egyptian army was in waiting, and, in company with two others, I was assisted into it by the non-commissioned officer in charge, a corporal of the Commissariat and transport corps. Our destination was Gezireh. The drive was not far, but quite long enough for persons in our condition. Faint and sick with the fever and momentarily becoming weaker through the jolting of the rough ambulance, I at length found myself among the hospital tents at Gezireh, and was glad to descend from the vehicle as well as I could and throw myself on the grass, which, though it was then December, flourished as it does in Canada in June, whilst we awaited the coming of the surgeon on duty to inspect and receive us over from the non-commissioned officer who had escorted the party from Kasr-el-Nil. I felt pleased at the change; it seemed good to get out again in the open air after our experience of the heated barrack room, and the tents, with their beds of bamboo, looked very inviting and comfortable. In a few moments we had been told off to our several quarters, and I found myself, in company with three others, all Highlanders, assigned to a large marquee tent, very commodious and comfortable. The hospital orderly assisted me to undress, for I was very faint and feverish, and after urging him, as a good fellow, to see my kit-bag brought safely to my quarters, I gave myself up to memories and thoughts such as a sick man is prone to. I felt rather despondent at leaving my corps and comrades, and being now dependent, as it were, upon a corps, which, if we combatant or "fighting" soldiers did not exactly look down upon, we by no means looked up to. This though without any imputations on the army hospital corps I felt quite mean at being, in a sense laid upon the shelf, and that I was now more of a drone in the army hive than a worker. However, here I was, down with the fever, having alternate chills and flushes, feeling very miserable and indifferent, and, for the time at least, not imbued with much interest in our army or its doings.

Gezireh was pleasant enough, though the tents were very cold at night time, so cold one would scarcely believe he was in Egypt, and owing to the great mortality which had occurred in the Highland Brigade during its stay on this same camping ground, on the first arrival of our army in Cairo, we were all much pleased when, a few days after our reception, we were told by one of the hospital sergeants that the worst cases were to be moved as soon as possible to the large hospital at the Citadel, and that those who would be selected by the surgeon that afternoon were to go at once. I was one of those selected, and underwent another trip of torture in the rickety old Egyptian ambulance. From Gezireh to our new abode was about four miles, over roads none too smooth, and it is with a very vivid recollection of my misery that I recall that drive. Still, I was

pleased to go the Citadel; it was the main hospital of our army, and we had heard that we would be comfortably housed and cared for; moreover, a corps of nursing Sisters had arrived out from Netley to look after the worst cases. The first pleasant impressions of Gezireh had been rudely dispelled by the experience of the cold night air, which the tents seemed quite inadequate to exclude, and it was with the most favourable ones that we passed through the historic gateway of the fortress of Sultan Saladin; through the court, the scene of the terrible massacre of the Mamelukes, and on through more gateways and a garden, with a fountain playing, until we found ourselves at the front entrance of a large commodious looking building, which, on alighting, and while awaiting the medical officer, we were informed by a soldier at the door, was the Palace of the Citadel, now used as the main hospital of our army, and in which upwards of 800 patients were undergoing treatment. The ride and the excitement of the moving had, in a measure, livened me up, but I was still so faint that, in endeavouring to mount the staircase leading to the fever wards above, I swooned, and would have fallen but for an hospital orderly near by. The surgeon noting this, at once directed that I be put to bed and attended to. I remember being taken in a large room which seemed full of beds, with pale, washed-out looking occupants, and being tucked away in a little iron bed cot, similar to that used in the barracks in England, by a sturdy kind-hearted fellow of the hospital corps. Of the remainder of that afternoon I have but little recollection, except a hazy vision of a blue-coated orderly coming occasionally with cool iced cloths for my forehead, or cooling drinks of lime water. The next day passed as indistinctly, but I have a vivid recollection of the surgeon's visit on the following evening. He was a handsome young officer of about 25 or so, Dr. Turner by name, and was fated, poor fellow, to die of fever away up the Nile on the subsequent ill-fated expedition to relieve General Gordon. I can remember him so well taking my temperature and feeling my pulse, and then telling me in very serious tones that he thought it right to inform me that he feared I would not live till morning. I recollect so well, after hearing him caution the attendant orderly to call him upon any change taking place, and when he had gone, how I tried to realize that I was really dying. I thought his words over in a confused sort of way, but somehow they did not seem to alarm me so much—I did not seem to feel very much concerned, and yet I might be dead before morning—so he said; but though I cogitated long into the night in a confused sort of way, I felt that I was not going to die just then, and that somehow I would pull through. I thought of Canada and home, and many things, but all in a sort of dreamy, muddled fashion; nothing seemed to impress me, and I once felt frightened to think that I was so indifferent to all that previously had seemed of such a serious nature and worthy of consideration. The following morning, on coming to my cot, the surgeon remarked that "I was a tough little fellow," and that he now had hopes of pulling me through, as he considered the crisis was past. That day I felt better, cheered and revived, no doubt, by his words, and was able to take note of surroundings which, until then, had utterly failed to interest me. I found I was lying in the centre of a large stone-floored room, which had been cleared of everything in the way of furniture, and cots placed around the sides and ends, with another row of the same down the centre, about 50 in all. The room was lofty, had large windows, and was decorated with paintings of landscape, scenery, &c., on the walls; cut-glass chandeliers hung equidistant from each end, and the room evidently had been intended for something other than an hospital. I learnt afterwards it was one of the reception and ball-rooms of the Palace. Surgeons and orderlies passed through going to other wards beyond; bare-footed Arabs, employed in the more menial work of the hospital, came and went, and now and then a nursing Sister, in plain but neat dress, glided noiselessly past. All went on quietly, regularly and systematically, and I could not but contrast the difference between what appeared to prevail now and when I first visited the Citadel, immediately after the occupation of Cairo by our army after Tel-el-Kebir. Then the sick had no beds, but lay in their uniforms indiscriminately on the floor in hundreds. Fever, dysentery and ophthalmia were then the most prevalent diseases, and so numerous were the cases that even in the Citadel, where, at the time of which I write, there were over 800 patients, sufficient room could not be found for them, and as fast as those able to bear the journey could be conveyed away, they were shipped by train to Alexandria to be transferred to Cyprus or Malta, where invalid hospitals had been established.

To return, however, to myself. The day on which I had begun to mend was an exceedingly warm one, though it was the 9th of December. Early in the afternoon I had fallen into a doze, more or less sound, when I was awakened by hearing a very sweet voice, in accents quite new and unknown to me, ask me if I should like a paper. On opening my eyes I was much surprised to see a very beautiful young lady in white standing at my bedside and holding in her hand a newspaper, which, if I recollect aright, was a copy of the *Toronto Mail*. I was thunderstruck at the vision, and completely non-plussed when my visitor continued, "I am so sorry, but it is the only one I have left, and it is 'an American one too.'" I replied, as well as my feebleness and surprise would permit, "So much the better. I would like to see an American paper." "Oh, indeed, I am so glad then, for I did not think you would care for 'it,'" answered the young lady. "I am very pleased to 'get it, as I am from America,'" I replied. "Indeed, may I ask what part?" "Canada," I said, inwardly wonder-

ing who my fair questioner could be, and thinking how good it was of her to have a Canadian paper. For though I heard regularly from home, it was some time since I had got a paper from Canada, or heard how they thought there of our doings on the sands of Egypt. But, if my surprise had been great at first, it was very much heightened when the lady repeated, "Canada? Are you really a Canadian?" "From what part? Who would ever think of meeting a 'Canadian here?'" I replied that I was from Ontario, though a native of Montreal, and my astonishment was now much increased when the young lady, turning abruptly, left me, crossed the room to where another lady was sitting by the bed-side of one of the 42nd Highlanders, and whom I had not previously observed. Imagine my surprise to hear the younger lady repeat, "Oh, mamma, I have found a 'Canadian!'" "A Canadian?" repeated the elder lady, directing her attention from the Highlander to my visitor, "Where?" "Over here, come over and see him before 'you go.'" "To say that I was surprised is indeed a mild statement of my feelings. I had heard of no Canadian people being in Cairo, or in fact of any English ladies having as yet come out, and I had not met a Canadian, or anyone who took any interest in that far away land for so long, that I was at a loss to understand who these ladies could be who appeared so interested in me because I was a Canadian. In a few moments 'Mamma,' accompanied by the young lady, came over to me, and, seating herself on the side of my cot, said: 'My daughter tells me you are from Canada?'" "Yes," I replied, "I am a Canadian." "How strange to 'find a Canadian in the army here, and you are so young.'" "What part of Canada do you come from?" "Eastern Ontario; my father's home is in South Grenville, near 'Prescott,'" I answered. "Have you ever been in Ottawa?" the lady continued. "Oh, yes, several times, 'M'm.'" "Then you must have often seen us?" continued my visitor, who, however, noting my puzzled look, added, "You know, my husband is the British Ambassador here, 'Lord Dufferin, and we spent several years in Canada.'" Upon this announcement I was, I must admit, somewhat disconcerted, but assured her Ladyship that I had seen Lord and Lady Dufferin several times. As a matter of fact I had, upon two occasions, seen their Excellencies when Lord Dufferin was Governor-General of Canada, but it was some years previous, and being very young at the time, the recollection was not sufficient to enable me to recognize the lady until after she had revealed her identity. "This is 'my daughter, the Lady Helen,'" continued her Ladyship, "and we shall be very glad to have a long talk with you 'again, for I notice you are now in no condition for conversation.'" "This was the beginning of a very pleasant and, on my part, much prized intercourse, and which I firmly believed helped materially to restore me to health. Lady Dufferin, for the many months she resided in Cairo, devoted every afternoon to her sick soldier countrymen, and, in company with Lady Helen, visited, on alternate days, the hospital at Abbasseyeh and that at the Citadel. We all appreciated these visits very much, and eagerly looked for 'Ladies' day,' as the days of their visits soon came to be called among the patients. Flowers, books, newspapers and magazines were distributed in profusion, for her Ladyship never came empty-handed, and the only person who seemed to view her visit with apprehension was the hospital librarian, who often complained that it was little use having rules and regulations when ladies were always interceding on behalf of some patient for their disregard. A few days after my meeting with her Ladyship, I was privileged with a long chat with her and Lady Helen about Canada, and, when taking her departure that day, Lady Dufferin asked me if I had written home and if they were aware there of my illness. Upon my reply that I had not, as I had been so weak, she kindly offered to write for me if I would give her the address. This I gladly did, and in due course my father received a charming letter from the Countess informing him that I had been ill but was fast progressing towards recovery. This was but one of her Ladyship's many kind and thoughtful acts to the sick of the Army of Occupation during her stay in Egypt. To me, as a Canadian, she was specially kind, and evinced much interest in my welfare. We had many pleasant chats about Canada, the cold winters, the skating, tobogganing, &c., and both mother and daughter seemed to have retained the fondest recollections of our country, and grateful reminiscences of the kindness (as they termed it) shown them there throughout their entire stay. Lady Dufferin several times remarked how strange she thought it to find a Canadian serving in the army of Egypt, and that she had never expected to find one there. She was much interested one day when, in reply to an expression of this nature, I assured her that we Canadians were very proud to serve the Empire under the old flag of our fathers, and that, as in the Roman armies of old, you might always find a few representatives of even the most distant Provinces, in the Imperial force of any magnitude.

A few days before Christmas her Ladyship was so kind as to honor me with an invitation to take my Christmas dinner with her at the Villa Cattoui, a beautiful residence in the west end of the city, and which had, on his arrival, been placed at Lord Dufferin's disposal by one of the leading native Pashas. To say that I felt grateful for this marked distinction to a soldier of the rank and file, with, as yet, but two chevrons on his arm, is quite an inadequate expression of the feelings entertained by myself and comrades in return for her Ladyship's condescension. My readers will understand the disappointment experienced when, on application to the surgeon, I was re-