Echoes from the Past.

NOTES OF QUEEN VICTORIA'S VISIT TO FORT PITT AND CHATHAM.

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Deputy Inspector-General of Hospitals, 1855-6.

PART II.

On the third visit of the Queen to Chatham—November 28th, 1855—she drove as before direct to Fort Pitt, and went round all the wards, above stairs as well as below, expressing herself much pleased with their cleanliness, and the cheerful and contented countenances of the men. Both she and Prince Albert asked several questions about the Medical Staff Corps, seeing many of the orderlies in the wards. On this occasion she did not speak to George Hayward, which was a cause of great distress and vexation to him.

At Brompton Hospital the men were all inspected in the wards, and seeing a Medical Officer in nearly every one of them, the Queen remarked to me that she was glad to see I had so many surgeons. The history of one of the wounded men in this hospital, an Irishman, interested and amused her very much: he had been wounded when retreating after the Cavalry Charge at Balaklava, and was carried a prisoner off the field by the Russians, and detained for upwards of seven months at Simpheropol.

QUEEN: "And how were you treated by the Russians, my poor fellow, did they behave well to you?"

SOLDIER: "Troth, they didn't, Your Worship—Your Majesty, I mane."

QUEEN: "I suppose they gave you plenty to eat and drink, at all events, while you were in the hospital?"

SOLDIER: "Sure 'tis in the hospital I was all the time, Your Majesty; and not a ha'porth they gave me to ate, only some black bread."

QUEEN (drawing him out): "Well, but you were better off, I hope, in the way of drink?"

SOLDIER: "Oh, but Your Highness—Your Majesty, I mane—that was the worst of all, sorra a drap I had at all, but one glass of nasty sour wine; and all manner of hardships and bad treatment."
QUEEN: "It was lucky after all that you got so well out of their hands at last."

SOLDIER: "So it was, indeed, Your Majesty, and 'tis thankful I am to Almighty God for it."

PRINCE ALBERT: "How did you get away from Simpherapol?"

SOLDIER: "'Tis carried away I was, myself and a parcel more prisoners of us, to Odessa."

PRINCE: "How far is it from Simpherapol to Odessa?"

SOLDIER: "About 700 miles it is, Your Royal Highness."

PRINCE: "And how did you travel? Did you march?"

SOLDIER: "Och! no Sir—Your Royal Highness, I mane, 'tis upon Arabas they took us, about 100 miles a day, an' 'tis the life was a'most joutled out of us."

On quitting Brompton Barracks I said to the Queen, "If Your Majesty is not fatigued, the convalescents from St. Mary's are paraded for your inspection, in the Old Garrison Chapel, on the opposite side of the Barrack Square." "I am not in the least fatigued," she replied, "and should be very glad to see them."

The portico of the Chapel building was decorated with flags and evergreens, and the pavement laid down with crimson cloth; the invalids were ranged in concentric circles round the interior of the Chapel, and the galleries filled with spectators, and as Her Majesty and suite and the staff entered, the scene altogether was very impressive. The maimed and wounded occupied the front row, seated on forms, those behind standing. One fine old soldier (Pte. John Skilley, 88th Regiment) to whom Her Majesty had presented a pair of spring crutches, begged to be allowed to step forward and thank Her Majesty in person; this seemed to affect and gratify her very much. Another remarkable old soldier of the 12th Lancers (Pte. William Penn) attracted her attention also, by his striking soldier-like appearance, and the number of medals and clasps with which his breast was decorated.

As she left the building the Queen said, "How many men, Mr. Dartnell, do you think I have seen here?" I guessed the number at 500, and said so, and on subsequent inquiry I found it was 503.

Before entering her carriage, Col. Eden asked her if she would like to see the new huts just completed for the Sappers and Miners, to which she readily assented, and directly drove over; she examined one hut carefully, asking several questions about them from the Commanding Engineer, Col. Savage. After conversing with him for some time, the Queen walked across the hut
to where I was standing, and said, "These are very nice huts, Mr. Dartnell, do you not think so?" "Yes, Your Majesty," I replied, "I think they are very comfortable," she then suddenly added, laughing, "I cannot help thinking of our friend the Irishman, who laid such stress a while ago on the glass of sour wine he got at Simpheropol." "I fear, Your Majesty, there are a great many others would lay quite as much stress on a similar deprivation." "Well, indeed," she replied, "I'm afraid there are."

On reaching the railway station at Strood, the Queen went into the waiting room for a few moments, while the train was being got ready, she presently came out, bowed very graciously to the officers, who had gone to see her off, and was in the act of stepping into the railway carriage, when she suddenly turned round, walked across the platform towards me, and holding up her forefinger in a playful way, said: "there will be no mistake in the return this time, I hope Mr. Dartnell," laughing as she said so. "I hope not, Your Majesty," I said, "I shall take every possible care to have it correct, and I hope," I added, "that the explanation I gave of the last mistake, which you detected in such an extraordinary manner, was satisfactory to Your Majesty." "Oh yes, quite so," she replied, "but take care this time, you know," smiling as usual, as much as to say, I shall be sure to detect an error, if you make one; as she certainly would.

The mistake here alluded to was this: In the nominal return, made up for Her Majesty after her previous visit, the name of one of the wounded men was accidentally omitted; the error she immediately detected, and ordered Colonel Phipps to write next day for an explanation, giving not only the man's name, but his regiment, and the nature of his wound, which she must have done entirely from memory, as no notes had been taken, either by herself or any of her suite. From this and the other curious instances given in this little narrative, it is evident that our present Queen possesses in a wonderful degree the same gift of memory which was so remarkable in our old King George the Third, and other members of the Royal family.

On the occasion of Her Majesty's fourth and last visit to Chatham she did not go to Fort Pitt, as her chief object was to see the Crimean soldiers, and there were at that time but five or six in the General Hospital; she therefore drove direct to Brompton Barracks, and more than an hour earlier than the time fixed for her arrival, in consequence of which there was no one in time to meet her at the railway station, and the arrangements
for her reception at the barracks were barely completed when she drove up. She first inspected the convalescents from St. Mary's, of whom there were about 700, all drawn up in a single line along the south front of the Engineer Barracks; here they were completely under shelter of the range of buildings which fronted the south; the day was beautifully bright and fine, but with a cold north-east wind, while the sun was so hot that as we went along the line Her Majesty was pleased to remark to me: "This place has been well chosen, Mr. Dartnell, for parading the invalids, it seems like a different climate under the shelter of the barrack; the sun is quite hot."

The inspection of this line occupied Her Majesty about three quarters of an hour; many of the cases deeply attracted her attention and sympathy, especially those of two or three men who had been very severely wounded by large grape shot in the face and head; two of these iron balls weighed 20 ozs. each, another 13 ozs. Photographic portraits were taken of these men and some others, by an artist sent down by Her Majesty, a day or two after.

After completing her inspection of the barrack convalescents, Her Majesty crossed over to the hospital on the opposite side of the square, first taking the medical cases in the Eastern wing of the building; here she found some soldiers of the British German Legion, to whom she and the Prince spoke a good deal in their native language. The Surgical Division of this hospital contained on this occasion several cases of great interest, among others, one which I pointed out to Her Majesty as "the triumph of surgery," by which term she designated the case in a communication through Colonel Phipps, a few days after. The patient was a young soldier of the 68th Regiment, who had been severely wounded in the right hip, and on whom Mr. O'Leary, the surgeon of the regiment, had very skilfully and successfully performed the operation of excision of the head and neck and a portion of the shaft of the thigh bone, in all upwards of five inches of bone; the wound had now healed, the man's health was completely restored, a false joint had been formed, and he had very tolerable use of the limb, which was only shortened about 2 inches; this deficiency was made up by a cork sole to his boot, and although he was not yet able to bear the weight of his body on it, with the help of a pair of crutches presented to him by Her Majesty his progression was easy, and the strength and usefulness of the limb improving every day; this young man, after his discharge from Chatham, was sent up for a week to the Royal Hospital at Chelsea for exhibition to
the "surgical celebrities" of London, as a case hitherto unparalleled in the annals of surgery, and reflecting the highest credit, not only on the surgeon who performed the operation, but on the whole department.

The next man to whom Her Majesty's attention was directed was a young Dragoon, who had received thirty-one lance and sabre wounds in various parts of the body, which were described to Her Majesty by Staff.-Surg. Reade. He received his wounds in returning from the Light Cavalry Charge at Balaclava, was surrounded by a cloud of Russians, by whom he was ultimately taken prisoner, and carried to Simpherapol, where he was detained for upwards of twelve months. The Queen and Prince Albert asked him several questions respecting his sojourn at Simpheropol, and especially how he was treated by the Russians. He told them that although at first they behaved very badly to him and the other prisoners, yet latterly they treated them very well, and that they really had not much to complain of in the way of diet and everything else. The Queen, turning to me and smiling, with rather a comic expression, said: "I am glad to find that they did not behave as badly to all our poor fellows as they did to our friend the Irishman," and as she passed on towards the next, she added: "I forgot to ask that man's name, Mr. Dartnell." "A classic name, your Majesty, John Dryden." "Oh, indeed! I shall not readily forget that name." "Your Majesty," I replied, "seems never to forget anything." She smiled very graciously, and did not seem displeased with the remark. In this same ward was a third man, of whom, after the description by Mr. Reade of his very severe wound, I said: "I should be glad to be allowed to call your Majesty's particular attention to this man; he is a fine old soldier of twenty-one years' service, and from having been in the Regiment (The Royals) with myself, I know him to be as good and brave a soldier as there is in Your Majesty's Army; he served throughout the whole of the campaign, from the first landing of the army in the East to the final assault on Sebastopol, when he received the severe wound of his left arm, for which he is to be invalided; during the whole of that time, I am informed, he was never in hospital, or a day absent from duty. I should also mention to Your Majesty that O'Brien was one of three men who had received a silk handkerchief each, as a present from Your Majesty, but that his was unfortunately lost with his knapsack after he was wounded, which has caused him the greatest distress." The Queen and Prince Albert both seemed greatly interested in the account of O'Brien, who is an exceedingly
fine and soldier-like looking fellow. The Queen said: "I am much gratified to hear such an account of you, O'Brien, and your handkerchief shall soon be replaced for you." The Princess Royal, who had been standing at some little distance during the conversation, asked me what I had been telling the Queen, and on repeating the story to her, she immediately exclaimed: "Oh, I shall take care to send Corporal O'Brien another handkerchief, instead of the one he has lost." The next day a parcel arrived, containing a silk handkerchief, hemmed by Her Majesty, for "John Dryden," and a black morocco leather arm sling from the Queen, and a silk handkerchief from the Princess Royal, both for Corporal O'Brien.

A few days after this Colonel Phipps, by command of Her Majesty, wrote to say that Sir Benjamin Hall, having placed the situation of Superintendent of Park Constables at Her Majesty's disposal, she was anxious to confer it on Corporal O'Brien, if he was found to be fitted for it, and desiring that he should be sent up to Sir Benjamin to be examined and approved. The appointment is a very excellent one, and O'Brien is now fairly and comfortably installed in it. In consequence of the gracious permission given to me by Her Majesty on her first visit to Chatham, I recommended several maimed and wounded soldiers to her for presents of artificial limbs, and other mechanical appliances, all of which were supplied and paid for, through me, from Her Majesty's Privy Purse. These appliances, which were manufactured in the most careful manner, afforded the greatest comfort to the poor soldiers, and were received by them with the greatest pride, and the deepest expressions and feelings of gratitude. Indeed, the sympathy evinced by Her Majesty for the wounded, and her repeated visits to them and their sick comrades in these hospitals, has made a lasting impression on the whole army.