

## New Zealand Doctors at the Front.

Our readers are all interested and proud to read of the good work being done at the Front by those of our doctors who are as yet so far on.

Dr. Martin, of Palmerston North, has been mentioned in despatches for gallant services to the wounded while under shell fire, and it has been stated that he is to have the D.S.O.

His letters which have been published in the Palmerston papers are exceedingly interesting.

His latest letter is from Rouen, where he had been posted to take charge of the surgery in a large base hospital. Temporary charge he says, for he was to again rejoin his Ambulance.

"Our Division is resting, equipping, receiving reinforcements, and allowing the men a much needed rest and baths and good sleep. Well they deserve it. The nerve effects of living in an atmosphere of bursting shells and constant exposure to German bullets are very trying, even to the hardiest of men. We are all living in a "nervy" state. We are "wrought up" in the highest sense, and a week's rest will act as a wonderful soother.

The trenches are as comfortable as one can make them, but they are not very "comfortable" for all that. Two nights and two days in a front line trench leaves one frozen and numbed physically and intellectually. On one occasion I could hardly bend my fingers sufficiently to handle the hypodermic syringe in order to inject some morphia into a wounded man near me. But there you are—we are resting for a week and we have had baths and good meals and good beds.

All the armies are living in holes in the ground, and when the "coal boxes" are hurtling over the landscape a hole in the ground is a very good place indeed. Frostbite is somewhat prevalent with our men, and it is an important factor, for a bad frostbite can incapacitate a soldier for many months. Charcoal braziers made out of perforated buckets and petrol cans are used in the trenches. The position of the men is very cramped and the only muscular exertion they get is that produced by shivering. You will agree with me that the muscular fibrillation produced by shivering is not a very good form of exercise. It is obviously unsafe to stand up. So crouch they must and they must still shiver.

### PLAGUES OF VERMIN.

Another factor that has to be attended to in the hygiene of our troops is the unsavoury one of vermin. It is very difficult to keep down lice from the body. Officers and men get this affliction. Lice are very difficult to get rid of. Boiling the clothes will not do it. Petrol is useful when the skin is smeared with it. A large number of our wounded came in with lice through their clothes and on their bodies. At the front we try to sterilise the clothes by dry heat, which is quite effective. But dry heat is not everywhere

available. The lice disturb the men's sleep and the constant rubbing produces sores and excoriations. It is not, therefore, a matter that one can disregard. One meets it with Belgian, French, British, and German wounded, and the medical officers have to devise ways and means to kill off these pests.

### THE GALLANT FRENCH.

One cannot speak too warmly of our gallant French colleagues. The French are splendid. It is a sight and an experience never to be forgotten to be behind a French battery in action. The din is frightful, and the calm insouciance of the French gunners fills one with joy at being their allies. I saw some weeks ago a French Brigade charging, and the reckless daring of these bold fellows as they swept across a neck of land full of barbed wire entanglements and swept by shrapnel made one realise what a gallant and heroic nation we are fighting with to-day.

In an earlier letter Dr. Martin gives some idea of the hospital work.

### HOSPITAL WORK.

At La Bassee the wounded came in such numbers that a section of this ambulance was sent into a neighbouring town, Bethune, to find accommodation, and rig up some temporary hospital. I was posted to this town for the surgical operating work and commanding a French hospital for the purpose. It had a splendid operating room fully equipped with instruments and sterilising apparatus.

### THE DEVOTED SISTERS.

I enlisted the Sisters of Mercy as nurses. The Reverend Mother was a trained anaesthetist and she administered for me all the chloroform. Here for two days and one long night I was operating without a stop. The Reverend Mother and the sisters fortified me all this time by giving me hot coffee and brandy to drink. The people of the town hurriedly came to our help and made straw mattresses and pillow-cases, provided blankets, hot soups and warmth for our mutilated and dying men. The work of the Mother Superior and of the nurses was beyond all compare. They were angels to our men, and worked night and day with the most uncomplaining spirit and devotion to the cause of duty—the great care of the wounded.

### THOUSANDS OF WOUNDED.

In about 14 days over 5,000 wounded were passed through the various temporary hospitals and from the fighting round La Bassee alone about 7,000 wounded men were sent back. I am not counting the dead. My work dealt only with those requiring prompt surgical operations, and here my hands were full night and day.

One need only watch a military surgeon trying to repair the ravages of shell and bullet to scoff at the pomp and magnificence of war. Yet Bernhardt in his book "The Great War," says that wars are necessary and that battles are for a country's good.

At Bethune we had beside our own wounded British a great number of wounded Germans. Need I say that they got exactly the same treatment as our own men. We made no distinction, and did all we could to the wounded and crippled foe.