

## DR. DALYELL.

One of the most interesting recent events in the Australian medical world has been the return of Dr. Elsie Dalyell to Sydney after an absence of over seven years. Dr. Dalyell was in England when war broke out, having completed about fifteen months of the three-years term of the Beit Fellowship, which she had been the first Australian woman to win, and she immediately offered her services to the War Office; but unfortunately, in those early days, the value to the nation of women's services was not yet recognised, and Dr. Dalyell shared with many others the disappointment of refusal. It was this lack of broad-mindedness on the part of the War Office that led to the formation of so many private units composed of medical women—units such as the Scottish Women's Hospitals and those of Lady Paget and Lady Wimbourne—all of which served with the Allies instead of with our own armies.

Dr. Dalyell, during the first months of the war, never relaxed her efforts to obtain work, if not with our own troops, with those of the Allies. She then entered into negotiations with the Serbian Legation in London—negotiations accompanied by so many promises and disappointments that it used to be said at the Lister Institute, where she was then working that "Dr. Dalyell went to Serbia every Friday and returned every Monday."

However, early in 1915 her efforts were rewarded—she was appointed bacteriologist to the hospital unit formed by Lady Wimbourne to go out to Serbia in relief of the Paget unit there. Lady Wimbourne's unit was essentially a surgical one, as it was expected their work would be with the Serbian wounded, but on arrival they found the country overwhelmed by a typhus epidemic, which the members of the Paget unit were endeavouring to combat, several of them having already fallen victims to the disease. The "surgical" unit immediately became a "medical" one, and for six months fought typhus under most distressing conditions, but with such magnificent success that its members must have returned to England at the end of their period of service with the satisfying knowledge that a difficult piece of work had been well done. Dr. Dalyell returned to the Lister Institute while waiting for another opportunity for service abroad, and she immediately settled down to the solving of one of the many new and difficult problems which were already confronting

laboratory workers as a direct outcome of the war. Army bacteriologists were demanding large supplies of substances known as typhoid and dysentery anti-sera, in the production of which rabbits are inoculated with typhoid and dysentery organisms. It was found that the mortality amongst the dysentery rabbits was extremely high, so much so that, though it was a comparatively simple matter to supply the army with the required amount of typhoid anti-serum, it was almost impossible to keep up the supply of dysentery anti-serum. Dr. Dalyell tackled the problem in her characteristically thorough manner, and within a few weeks evolved a technique whereby the dysentery rabbits were able to do just as much as their typhoid brothers, and the required amount of dysentery anti-serum was provided.

Just as this good piece of work was completed, Dr. Dalyell was appointed bacteriologist to the Scottish Women's Hospital, which was attached to the French, and, housed in the lovely 12th century abbey of Royaumont. Here her best work was done in connection with the gas-gangrene cases which were so tragically prevalent at that period of the war, but at times of stress she added to her duties as bacteriologist those of anaesthetist, surgeon or physician, as the situation demanded, and was, as ever, able and willing to turn her hand to anything.

Early in 1916 the War Office realised that women doctors might be utilised in the base hospitals, thereby relieving men for service further forward, and the medical women of Great Britain were circularised and asked to volunteer for service abroad. Dr. Dalyell was one of the first to answer the call, and was sent out to Malta, soon to be transferred to the Salonica command, where she was given charge of a laboratory in the Balkan heights. Here she remained until after the armistice, living and working in army tents; often doing her own washing, exposed to such extreme heat in the summer that it was only possible to work in the early mornings and late evenings, and to such intense cold in winter that she only managed to sleep at all by building for herself what she described as a "wigwam" within her tent. Into this she would creep at night, and having piled on all available blankets, would compose herself to rest, satisfied that the casual observer might be excused for mistaking herself and her bed for the mound of a wandering bush turkey!

But what wonderfully good work was done under these conditions! Malaria and dysentery were the two great problems which confronted bacteriologists on the Eastern Front.

and those who know her can well realise the tower of strength that Dr. Dalyell proved to her fellow-workers. She possesses, to a quite unusual degree, the power of overcoming almost unsurmountable obstacles, and it would be difficult to imagine anyone more suited than she for active service under such trying conditions.

After the armistice her services were retained for the Army of Occupation, and early in 1919 she was sent down to Constantinople to take charge of the laboratory of a large hospital which the British had taken over from the Germans; here she served until the termination of her contract with the R.A.M.C., when she returned to England, intending to sail at once for Australia.

But work almost of greater importance than that which she had been called upon to do during her five strenuous years of active service was awaiting her, and her return to Australia had to be postponed.

For some considerable time Dr. Harriette Chick, a colleague of Dr. Dalyell's at the Lister Institute, had been working on an important piece of research which dealt with the experimental production and cure of diseases known as "deficiency" diseases, so called because they occur in individuals in whose diet there has been a deficiency of certain food factors. The animal experiments had been complete and convincing, and Dr. Chick and her fellow-workers were waiting the opportunity to confirm their animal results in the human subject. Obviously it was not possible to produce these particular diseases experimentally in human beings, but, unfortunately, the starvation diet of the people of Central Europe during the war had provided the very material for which Dr. Chick was looking, and with the signing of the armistice came details of the conditions of the people in such centres as Vienna, Prague, and Warsaw. These people were suffering from "deficiency" diseases to a most terrible degree, and arrangements were quickly made for Dr. Chick to proceed to Vienna, Dr. Dalyell being invited to accompany her to take charge of the clinical side of the question.

It is difficult to appreciate the delicacy of the situation that confronted these two British women. They were proceeding to an enemy country only a few months after the signing of the armistice, in the hopes of being able to convince the medical profession there of the soundness of the views they held. It was essential to the success of their plans that they should have access to some of the hospitals in Vienna, and should be given entire charge of certain cases in

these hospitals, and to achieve these ends an almost unlimited amount of courage and tact were required. For the first few months events moved slowly. They lived through the hardships of a Vienna winter with practically no fuel, and the witnesses of untold sufferings on the part of the Viennese population, but working quietly and patiently, gaining the confidence of the doctors with whom they came in contact, always certain of the foundations on which they were building and of the ultimate good that must follow their efforts.

At the end of nine months they had certain proof of the success of their undertaking. They were offered the complete control of 200 beds in the finest hospital in Vienna; they would remain there for another twelve months to amplify their already most convincing results. The offer was too good to be refused, so after a short five-weeks' holiday in Australia, Dr. Dalyell is now on her way back to Vienna, where she will rejoin Dr. Chick and settle down to another twelve months of strenuous work.

It is a matter for regret that only her personal friends have the opportunity of appreciating many of Dr. Dalyell's most striking characteristics—her humour, her vitality, her good-fellowship, her ready sympathy—but fortunately all share in the honours she has gained, for she is a member of our University and a past student of our College.

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Sydney, 11th August, 1919.

D. M. PHILP, Hon. Treasurer.