

6th Reserve (Fever) Hospital
Skopje
Serbia
May 31st 1915

Dear Professor Welsh

This letter has been in my mind for a long time. I am conscious of grave sins of omission but I beg you to take my apologies as read – the crowded hour leaves little time to write them.

I have been here for about four months (we left London on Feb 9th) and I brought a small laboratory equipment with me. Typhus was raging when we came out and I was speedily at work here. This is a fever hospital – has been adapted from a Serbian hospital (incredibly filthy) and an unfinished building which was meant for barracks. Lady Paget came here first. With four people from her unit and the five did herculean work until four of them contracted typhus. I had arrived just when they fell ill and since that time Dr Bellingham-Smith (he is a friend of Dr Martin's) and I have been the only English physicians here, and we have been managing the whole place.

We have had 500 beds all occupied but the numbers are diminishing in the last few days and we have less typhus now but we have to arrange to take 300 cases of other fevers from the Civil hospital which is to become a surgical base.

The work has been tremendous but I have enjoyed myself well, and have found it full of interest. My appointment was made as bacteriologist and my laboratory has been equipped accordingly but as there were only two of us I have been doing all sorts of varied work as well.

I took over 100 typhus beds for myself and have been doing the differential diagnosis for the other cases too. All sorts of things crop up – there is a great deal of relapsing fever (I am very familiar with Spirillum ????) and enteric we have always with us, and have to differentiate – diphtheria is a common complication in typhus and crops up in the wards constantly – there have been 10 cases of malaria and dysenteries occur pretty often. I have been able to diagnose 2 Amoebic dysenteries the others are of F??? type of Bacillus "Y" dysentery – I haven't found Shiga.

Three weeks ago the American Sanitary Commission arrived and some offered to work here if needed. They are here to do sanitary work so I placed my tiny lab at the disposal of their bacteriologist. He is Hans Linsser – Professor of Columbia University. (Do you remember that his textbook [Hiss and Linsser] was sent to you on approval – and you decided that it wasn't satisfactory? – I remembered and smiled.)

My tiny equipment (I had only £125 to spend and altogether and had to pay £23 for a microscope and £19 for an autoclave out of that!) proved equal to the strain and we have worked amicably together in quest of the organism of typhus. We have taken about 50 blood cultures – we take the blood into agar melted and cooled to 42° and incubate anaerobically.

The agar has 20% glucose added and is made up with ascetic fluid – but so far results have been negative. Except in one doubtful case, which may give a organism which is an obligate anaerobe – it looks like it.

We have been taking elaborate precautions to avoid infection of course. I have been splendidly fit all the time and our staff (we have 25 nurses) have all been well save for one case of diphtheria. It has been a revelation to see this place blossom into a clean healthy attractive hospital under the influence of our splendid nurses. Each nurse has a ward with about 40 patients their assistants are all Austrian prisoners recovered from typhus and all hopelessly ignorant and inefficient to begin with – but they turn them in admirable helpers and the dingy wards are shining and spotless.

Now there is a call for my letter and I must run. I am sorry to cut it short so abruptly but have not a moment longer and will write again.

With kindest regards
Always Sincerely
Elsie J Dalyell