

A FEW HUMOROUS AND INTERESTING STORIES ABOUT THE DISTRICT OF BANCHORY DEVENICK.

I have been asked to contribute something to the *PIANTA*, and not knowing what news to write, I believe one or two stories I have heard about this district might amuse some of you.

About a quarter of a mile up the road from Drumduan stands the Established Church of Banchory Devenick, which really was the parish church of the district until the disruption arose, and a "free" church was formed separate from the Established Church, but that is a "lang tale," and I'm not going into the details of it.

What I believe will interest you is, that in the churchyard there is a tombstone bearing the inscription:

"Here lies John Smith, a lawyer, an honest man.

The Lord works wonders now and then."

Let it be added that Aberdeen abounds in lawyers, so that the people have had plenty of opportunities to criticize them, and they ought to know!

In a corner, also, of this same churchyard, stands a tiny stone hut with no roof, called the "watchhouse"; this was erected about 1813 for the protection and comfort of "watchers." These "watchers" were the relations of friends of newly-buried people.

It was found necessary for them to watch their relatives until the grave became overgrown with grass, because the medical students used to come out from Aberdeen University on dark nights and steal the bodies; for every student of medicine in those days was required before qualifying as a doctor to furnish a body for dissection, and various expedients were fallen upon to meet the demand.

These students went by the name of "Resurrectionists,"

and terrified all the country people so much that even the "watchers" did not always succeed in preventing the bodies being carried away.

One dark and wintry night three students came out to Banchory Devenick for this purpose, but the relations of the deceased, after a stiff tussle, secured the three offenders, and they were taken to prison and fined £20.

One enterprising builder from a village near here invented some years ago an iron cage, which used to be placed over the coffin when it was buried; the grave was then filled up for six weeks, after which time decomposition had taken place, and a visit from the "body snatchers" was no more feared, the cage was then removed and the grave covered in.

One of these iron safes is still to be seen in the churchyard. After the passing of an Act of Parliament ordering all unclaimed bodies to be delivered up for purposes of dissection, there was no more need for the "safe," or work for the Resurrectionists!

About a mile from here, along the Deeside Road, there stands a mill and a few cottages; this spot rejoices in the name of "Hilldowntree."

Tradition tells us, that once a huge tree was floated down the Dee from the hills, and landed at this spot, where it took root and grew to an enormous size. It was blown down by a storm in October of 1860, but its root is still visible; and at one time public executions are supposed to have taken place there.

I cannot forbear to tell you also of the origin of "Finnan haddies," which are now famous in many parts of the world. You may see them put down on menus as delicacies under the name of "Finnans," and this is the way that they came to be famous. In the wee village of Findon, about four miles from here, on the east coast, a few fisher folk have been employed since the eighteenth century in line fishing. Then, as now, the "fleet" consisted of two fishing boats manned

by crews of six men each, and three yawls containing four men each. It happened that some years ago an "auld wifie" kept in her cottage by the sea at Findon a good supply of these fish. One day her house was burnt down, and afterwards some of the spectators found a few "smoked" fish among the ruins; they determined to try the fish, which proved such splendid eating that people tried smoking them for themselves; afterwards the "curing" of finnans became the industry of the village, which has now made a world-wide name on account of its delicately flavoured "haddies." An American once explained at a dinner that they were special fish from "Finland."

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS OF A NURSE AT THE FRONT. (NURSE FLOWER).

"The packing case has arrived to-night, and though I have been trying about a quarter of an hour with my scissors, the only implement I have, I cannot get into it. So must leave it till morning and get one of the men to undo it. I know I shall be glad enough of the contents. The rubber hot water bottles you sent have been so useful. Can't think how we managed without them before. It is funny that they don't seem to use them in France.

"We gave out all the books at once, and they were just grabbed for, and everyone is enjoying them. We were very short of literature, but shall be right now."

January 29th: "We have had two or three days' hard frost here—it is a treat after the rain. I had a glorious walk this morning, and got some hazel catkins and some flowers."

February 8th: "The slippers are most appreciated. All that came are in use in the wards. The games and puzzles

are such a boon to the men. The latter are a never-ending source of amusement. You would be amazed to see how long they will go at them till they master them. The peppermints, etc., travelled beautifully, and will be much appreciated when I give them round. The mufflers, mittens, and linen are quite a godsend. We feel quite smart. Thanks for the footballs. There are several divisions here, and the officers encourage the men to play as it helps to keep them fit and makes them get exercise. I am glad more cigarettes are on the way. I am eagerly looking for them, for we are without, and have not given out any for five days. The men look at me rather forlornly."

A later letter says: "The rubber ring pillows are lovely, and the men welcomed them so joyfully. They gave two men, who have been suffering with their backs, one a back fracture and the other a big operation, a good night. One told me he wouldn't want to get up, I had made him so comfortable. The rubber bottle is most useful. The gingerbread is delicious and the pencils welcomed with joy by the men this morning."

In a letter (dated February 14th) Sister Flower acknowledged a parcel of cigarettes (3,000) that had been ordered out of bond on November 23rd. Where they had been all that time is a mystery still unsolved, but they turned up at last. "The footballs," she writes, "have been much appreciated. One of the men (on the lines of communication) diffidently approached me to-day to know if I thought they could get some discarded football boots. The men, he said, would pay the carriage. I told him I would mention it and see. P.S.—The men love chewing gum, and 'would like some more.'"

(Unfortunately old football boots could not be discovered, but chewing gum was put in every box after this.)

March 1st: "The marmalade is delicious, and such a treat. They do not make it here. . . . In fact, the only thing you

can get seems to be apple or red currant jelly; no jams or potted meats, except paté de foie gras."

March 15th: "I have changed from night duty, and have little time for writing. . . . We go to our wards at 7.30. The patients are then having their breakfasts, which consists of porridge or bacon, tea, bread and butter, and jam. We get the ward cleaned and tidied up, the patients helping who are able. All bright things are polished till you can see your face in them. The floors are polished and the flowers rearranged. We always try to keep flowers in the wards, though they are rather expensive. The M.O. makes his round about 10 a.m. and does any dressings he wants. Dinner is at 12.30, meat, vegetables and bread, pudding, milk, suet or jam. Then we clear up the ward again and make the ill patients comfortable for an afternoon nap. There are generally a few dressings to do in the afternoon, but not much else. We often use that time for giving baths. They have tea at 4.30, and then all the patients get a wash and those in bed get their beds made. Supper at 7 p.m., of cocoa and bread and butter. The patients all have to be in bed and the lights down at 9 p.m. We have been quite busy getting the new surgical wards equipped the last day or two. We have also been short of orderlies. They have been needed for duty at the railway station."

March 25th: "We had a delightful day in the country last Monday, and gathered wild daffodils, primroses, and violets. It was quite a gala day."

April 4th: "We have gathered great bunches of a purple flower, which I think is fritillary, down by the river, and we mix it with kingcups. Then we have lots of oxlips, so we are very gay with wild flowers at present. The daffodils are getting over a bit, but the cowslips are lovely."

April 16th: ". . . It is good of you to have sent a cake for us. We are looking forward to it ever so much. French ones are very fancy, and no chance of getting a wholesome

big cake. They are all pastry, custards, and things like that."

May 10th: "Please thank G. for her painting of fritillary. I saw at a glance that it was the flower I had found. We have since found it white as well as purple, and it is very dainty. The sweets are so much appreciated. I took chocolate round to all the men and a tin of toffee to each of the worst cases that can take it. It is quite funny what babies the men are over sweets. I spent a very pleasant hour when my work was finished going round with cigarettes to every man. They are dears and very grateful, though they don't say a good deal. There is one dear Canadian boy who wanted a tobacco pouch. I was giving out those you sent and he put in for one. Then there was one too few, and he very quickly and quietly drew back and so, as he goes out to-day back to his regiment, I took his address and said he should have the next."

May 28th: "I have been on the river once or twice, and it is glorious—water-lilies are coming on and the flags are just coming out, and there are heaps of that little white water plant. The whole place abounds in wild flowers like Amble-side does."

"We are very glad to have the air rings; we have so many bad cases now, and our beds are woefully hard. One poor Scotch boy, who is dreadfully ill, asked me to send for a feather bed! The games are very useful, also the magazines and books, and the sweets are much appreciated. I wonder if you could get me a really reliable electric torch. The gas gangrene which has been so prevalent in the wounds is a dreadful thing, and it appears so very suddenly with slight indication in the wound. If caught then it can be cured: if not a few hours are sufficient to kill the patient. I had a case the other night, and I can't help wondering if there was any indication of it when I looked at 3 a.m., and if I missed it by the pooriness of the light, for the man died at

9 a.m., and as you may imagine I don't want to feel that way again. I want one with a really powerful light that would show up just a faint yellow edge to the wound. I am afraid it will be very expensive, but it won't be dear if it saves a life."

(Needless to say a powerful electric torch and refills were sent out almost per return of post.)

June 3rd: "Another packing case has arrived this a.m. with that nice backgammon board, heaps of magazines, sweets, writing paper, etc. Thank you ever so much. Also last night the electric torch arrived. It is exactly what I wanted. . . . We are very busy, and I am thankful it is so, for we really feel we are of use and doing the work that we came out to do. Some of the cases are really most appalling. I have never seen such wounds, and am thankful to know that I am never likely to do so again once this is over. . . . It is just ripping to get a gramophone, and the men are looking forward to it no end. . . . By the way, how we should have got on lately with all these bad cases without the rubber air rings I don't know. They have been a godsend. We have to run round with them, letting one man have it for a while and then another. It gives them all a rest and changes."

On June 6th the gramophone arrived. Sister Flower writes: "It is a beauty, and what a lovely lot of jolly good records. I unpacked it about 9.30 p.m., and fixed it up. It had got its internals jolted a bit in travelling, but I screwed it up and managed to get it going, and we tried some of the records. The men thoroughly enjoy it. They are awfully bucked up at having such a nice gramophone and so many records."