

A NOBLE WORK.

SCOTTISH WOMEN'S HOSPITALS
FOR WAR SERVICES.

(Address by Mrs Elizabeth Abbott, given in the Town Hall (Concert Chamber), on Wednesday, January 9th, 1918.)

An eloquent appeal on behalf of the Scottish Women's War Service Hospital was made in the Concert Chamber of the Town Hall, Wellington, on January 9th, by Mrs Elizabeth Abbott, who has already toured India and Australia lecturing on the splendid work of the hospitals. The lecturing tour has covered a space of two years, and since its inception Mrs Abbott's appeals have resulted in the cabling Home of £25,000 from India and Burmah, and 6000 from Queensland.

In returning thanks for the kindly welcome and hospitality she had received in New Zealand, Mrs Abbott said that she felt it had been accorded, not to herself, but to the Scottish Women Hospital Workers. Wherever she has been the story of the work had been welcomed, and a ready response to the appeal had been met with.

Mrs Abbott said she wished to stress the point that the work of the Scottish Women's Hospital did not in any way overlap that of the British Red Cross. The two societies worked in unison and co-operated whenever possible, and the hospitals were greatly assisted by the Red Cross, which supplied them with "minor munitions," such as dressings, etc. The Scottish branch of the Red Cross had made them important gifts, and last year sent them four motor ambulances for use on the battle front, believing that they could be sent to no better place. The various hospitals, camps, and canteens under the control of the organisation required £7000 a month to keep in working order, but she wished to make clear that the Scottish women had not simply collected funds and carried on the work as it suited their wishes. The growth of the movement had been made at the demands of the military and civil authorities of the countries in which they worked.

Mrs Abbott then told the story of the beginning and expansion of the hospitals. The organisation, she said, was founded in 1914, by a little band of Scottish women under the leader-

ship of Dr. Elsie Inglis. She was a woman not only of high attainments, but of indomitable spirit, who knew that women could manage peace hospitals, and was convinced that they could run war hospitals as well. The first donation of £10 was received from a school teacher, who gave her increase in salary to the cause, and the first large sum was received from the Scottish Women's Federated Suffrage Society, which made a donation of £1000. Since then the movement had become British and Imperial in scope and appeal, and workers from all parts of the Empire had enlisted in its ranks. New Zealand, the most loyal of all the Empire's dominions, had sent three women doctors to do their splendid part in the work—Dr. Mary Blair, Dr. Agnes Bennett, and Dr. Jessie Scott—and, Mrs Abbott felt sure, would give further and willing help by a ready response to the appeal for funds to back these women and the Hospital in their endeavour to make easier the lot of sufferers, not only of the British race, but of all nations.

The first hospital unit, under Dr. Alice Hutchison, was hurried across the Channel to Calais to deal with an epidemic of typhoid which was then raging. So successful was the effort, that the hospital was shortly afterwards reported to have the lowest death rate of any in the epidemic area.

The venture had been kept under the close surveillance of the French authorities, who were so thoroughly satisfied, that the women were asked to establish a surgical hospital of 100 beds in the Abbey of Royaumont, some twenty miles behind the firing line. The British papers, said the speaker, still wrote of the "Miracle of Royaumont." It was a beautiful old abbey, with delightful historical associations, and wonderfully picturesque, but it was far from an ideal hospital. The drains had been laid down in the time of Louis IX., and nothing had been done to them since; there was no lighting or heating apparatus, and no water was laid on. The first night after the arrival of the unit, five women slept on the floor of the cloister. However, they found a decrepit plumber and a friendly electrician, and in five weeks the 13th century abbey had been transferred into a modern hospital, with an operating theatre, a laboratory, and—greatest of all—an X-ray equipment. It was

the only X-ray plant within a very large area, and many patients were brought from other hospitals for treatment and diagnosis. Moreover, the Scottish women were the first to have a mobile X-ray equipment, fitted up by Madame Curie and Madame Eyerton, at a cost of £1000, and this had been in use ever since. The first hospital, of 100 beds, had started to receive cases only six hours after the final inspection by the French medical and military authorities. Twice since then the hospital capacity had been doubled, at the request of the French Government, so that Royaumont Abbey was now a 400 bed hospital. Even that was found insufficient to cope with the terrible rush of wounded which came in after the big Somme push, for the men came in at the rate of 70 a day, and on the first day Dr. Frances Evens, who was in charge, operated from 9 o'clock one morning until 5 the next morning, taking only what food was brought to her, and some of the nurses worked 20 hours out of the 24, until they were completely exhausted, and had to be reinforced by others rushed across from England. A special feature of the work at Royaumont was the treatment of the deadly gas gangrene, which must be immediately dealt with if life is to be saved. One of France's most eminent medical men visited the hospital to study the dread disease, and the methods employed in its cure. A fleet of motor cars and ambulances brought and took the wounded from the Abbey, and drivers, stretcher-bearers, orderlies, all were women. Royaumont at the present time took the less severe cases only, as another hospital of 230 beds had been opened nearer the firing line.

The success gained at Royaumont led to a second demand by the French in the way of a camp hospital of 250 beds near the firing line. The French authorities, said Mrs Abbott, were perhaps afraid that such a camp, though very necessary, would be a failure, and so they asked the women to make the attempt, for then if the scheme had failed, why, it was a case of mismanagement. The experiment, however, was far from a failure, and the organisation now maintained a camp of 400 beds near Soissons in tents perfectly pitched and with excellent equipment. This again was the unaided work of women. General Petain, after inspecting the camp, described it as a "little paradise for wounded men."