

The story of "Holmleigh" Auxiliary Military Hospital, Harrow on the Hill / by the commandant [ie C.J.S. Thompson, 1914-1919].

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THE STORY OF "HOLMLEIGH"



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AUXILIARY MILITARY HOSPITAL, HARROW-ON-THE-HILL

1914 - - 1919

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THE STORY OF
"HOLMLEIGH"
AUXILIARY MILITARY HOSPITAL,
HARROW-ON-THE-HILL

C. J. S. Thompson

BY
THE COMMANDANT

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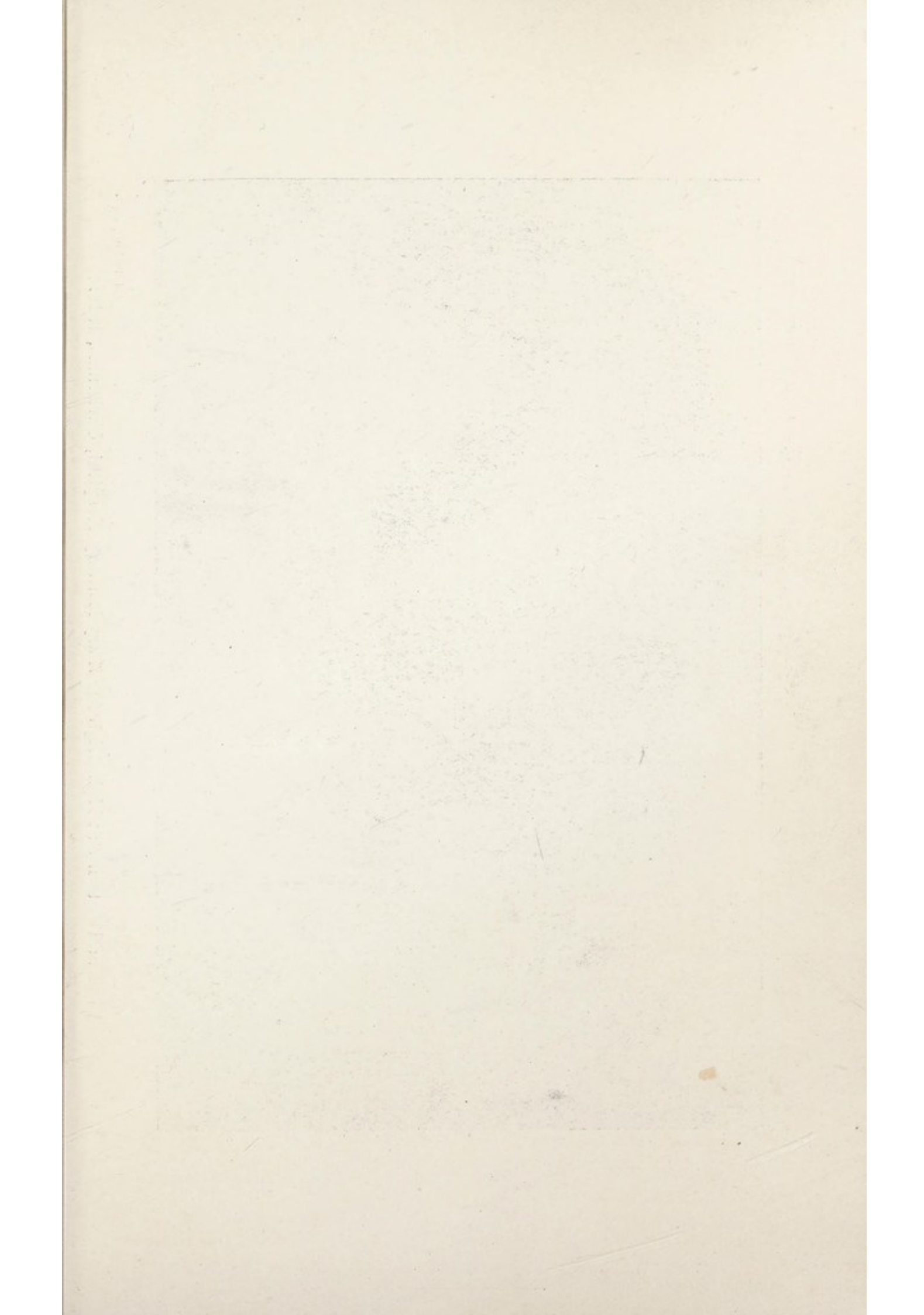
MILITARY HOSPITALS : Harrow

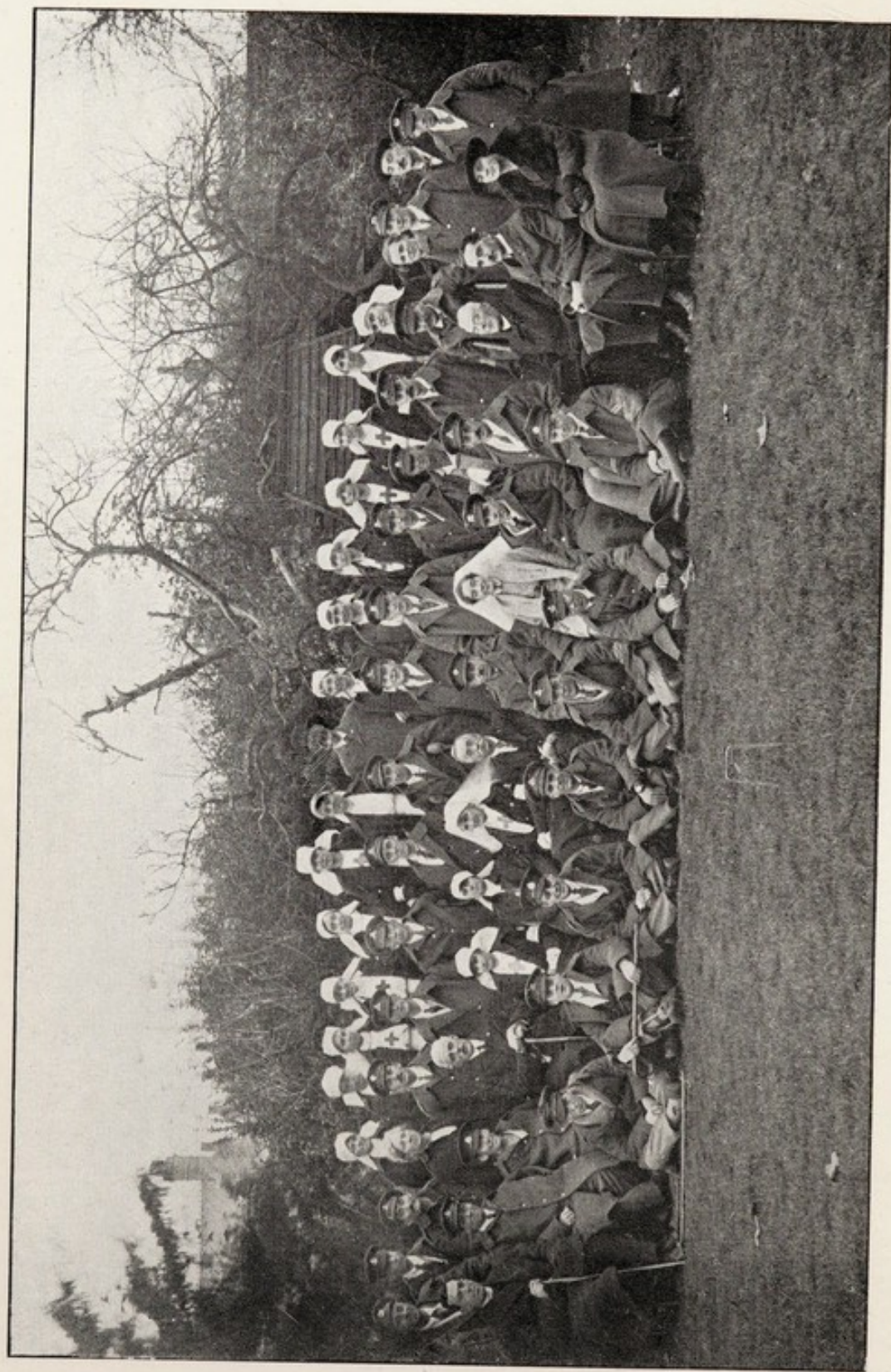
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HARROW : Hospitals (Holmleigh)

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Staff and Patients at Holmleigh Auxiliary Military Hospital, Christmas, 1918.
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THE CRIMSON CROSS OF HOPE.

WHEN every puddle upon every road
Gleams red through ooze and mud,
When every stretcher from its broken load
Darkens with drying blood,
When the horizon cracks with scarlet light
Above the reeking slope,
Their hands upraise upon a banner white
The crimson cross of hope.
Their hands have held the fluttering souls of men
And bidden the wings refold ;
Their hands have loosed the pulsing oxygen,
And driven the steel sea-cold.
With silver tube and slender barb they bend
To bid life live again,
Or make it end in peace, if it must end,
And dull the fang of pain.
Unswerving, though the heavens are rent apart,
They do these silent things
To strike the purple music of the heart
From its half-riven strings.
Man fights with man along the thunderous line
To change or keep its span ;
But where the white flag bears a crimson sign
Man fights with death . . . for man ;
There, where the fume and stain of death pervade,
They wage their endless war,
With all the god-like knowledge they have made
From all the things that are.
One aim is theirs . . . not for themselves, God knows,
For self is nothing now :
They raise their hands to tear the royal rose
From death's triumphant brow.
And theirs is the imperishable pride
That they have proven well
How Love in Wisdom's chariot can divide
The confluent seas of hell.

DOROTHY MARGARET STUART.

*By kind permission of the Editor of the
"Weekly Dispatch."*

THE STORY OF "HOLMLEIGH"

I.

THE RAISING OF THE V.A.D. AND THE FOUNDATION OF THE HOSPITAL.

WHEN the great war cloud, which had hovered over Europe in the Summer of 1914, burst on August 4th, and Great Britain, true to her traditions, declared war on Germany in defence of the famous "scrap of paper," no one foresaw the part that women would play in the great struggle.

The Voluntary Aid Detachments of the British Red Cross Society, originally formed to aid the Army Medical Service of the Territorial Forces in case of invasion, were little known or heard of by the public. The Red Cross Society had no organization in the County of Middlesex in 1914, and when the first attempt was made to raise and train a Detachment in Harrow, the advice of one in authority was to "Teach the women how to cook and to wash clothes and not to nurse," but ignoring this suggestion, the Red Cross banner was raised and a Women's Detachment with a personnel of twenty was formed at a drawing room meeting one evening, early in August, 1914. Courses of lectures in "First Aid" and "Home Nursing" were organized, all worked strenuously and in three months the members had gone through their drill, passed their examinations, obtained their certificates, and the first Harrow Women's Red Cross V.A.D. was officially recognized and registered by the War Office as London /168.

All eager and willing, the next thing was to find work to do, and this was soon forthcoming.

It was the time of the great retreat from Mons and Belgian wounded and refugees were flowing into London, when, in October, 1914, the Harrow V.A.D. Detachment was mobilized and called on active service, and allotted Charing Cross Station,

to render aid to the sick and wounded as they arrived by train. By permission of the South Eastern Railway officials a stall was established on the arrival platform. Each member contributed food of some kind, and from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. the trains from Dover and Folkestone were met, and hundreds of wounded soldiers and famished women were given hot coffee and food and despatched to hospitals, or handed over to the Belgian Refugee representatives to find lodging in London. Many were the sad and pitiful stories poured into our ears and some of the scenes will ever remain in our memory.

On the afternoon of November 2nd, a party consisting of forty-five nuns and their Mother Superior, of the Augustine Order, from a convent at Ypres, came in by the Dover train. Many were quite exhausted and others in a starving condition. The Mother Superior, a very old lady, was almost collapsed and had had practically nothing to eat for forty-eight hours. She said that for several weeks they had been in the heart of the fighting zone and had nursed five hundred British soldiers in their convent, including "the Queen of England's brother," of which she was very proud. The nuns continually expressed their great admiration of the bravery of the British soldiers, and all exclaimed "even when suffering much, they never complained of pain." The good women were fervent in their gratitude to our Staff and pressed on them the little silver medalettes they carried.

Another day, the refugees were all women and children, weak and weary. They were fed and passed on to the Central Refugee Station. Among the Belgian soldiers there were many strange cases, some being in an exhausted condition, and others suffering from wounds and shock. One man, who but a few weeks previous had been a clown in a travelling circus, had been seriously wounded in the head and arm. He had been in a train in Belgium which had been blown up by dynamite, and was the only survivor out of thirty-six of his company.

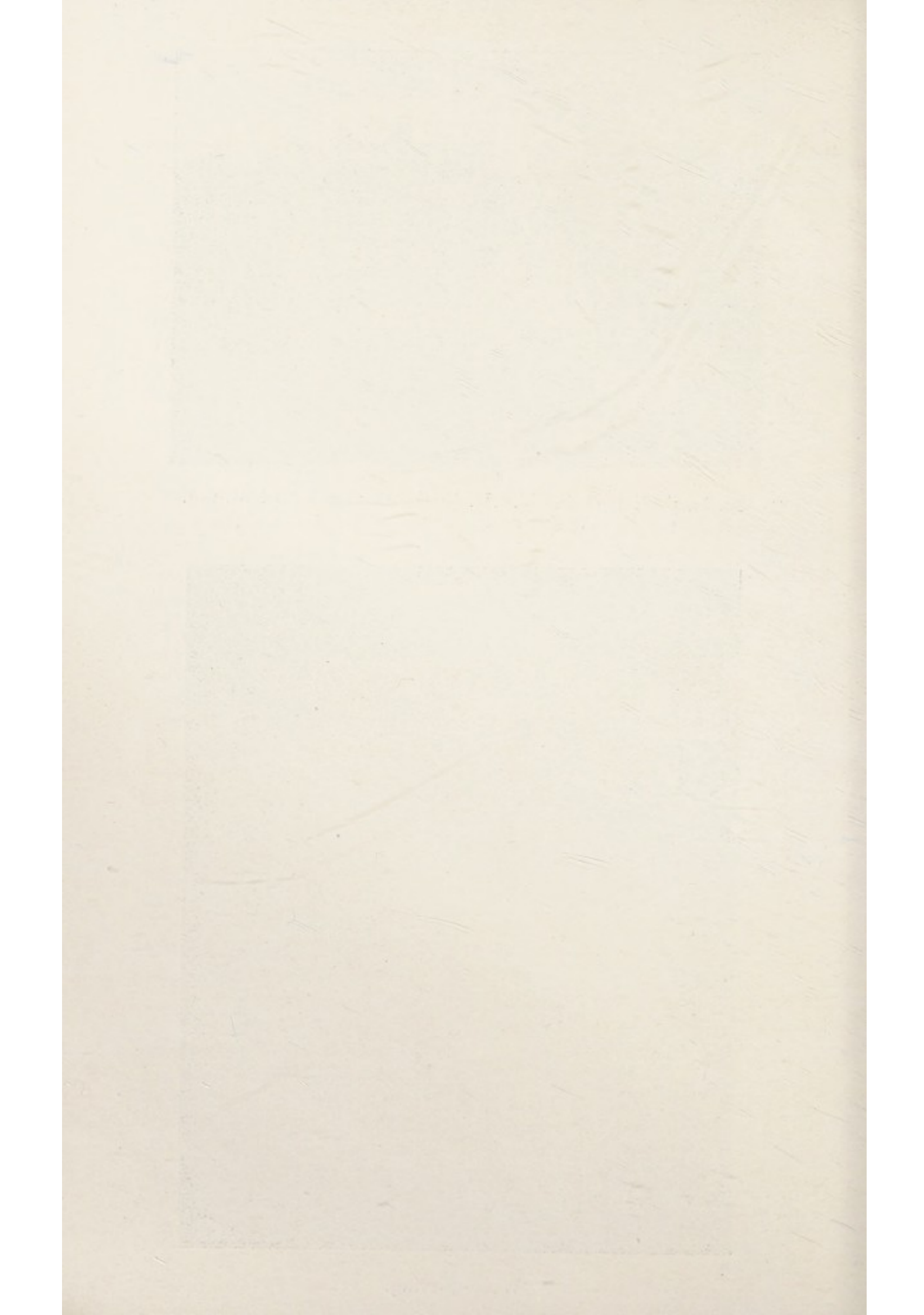
On the incoming trains being transferred from Charing Cross to Victoria Station, where already similar work was being done, the Commandant decided to found a Convalescent Home for British wounded soldiers in Harrow, where the energies of the Detachment might be utilized. A large room attached to a private house, called "Green Gable," Middle Road, Harrow, was offered by one of the members, which afforded accommo-



An Inspection of the V.A.D. in the Garden by Lieut.-Col.
Valentine Mathews, 1915.



Wood-Carving.



dation for six beds. It was equipped and as a small beginning at once offered to the War Office, but was refused twice. After persistent pressure and the promise of patients being obtained through Charing Cross Hospital, it was at length officially accepted and opened on December 15th, 1914, with six beds. It was among the first Auxiliary Hospitals under the auspices of the British Red Cross to be established and the first in Harrow to receive British wounded soldiers. The first six patients admitted were men of the "Contemptible Little Army" which held the German hordes at bay at Mons and Ypres. They were Pte. Davis, 1st King's Shropshires, suffering from shrapnel wounds in the head and arm; Pte. Griffin, Connaught Rangers, with aural concussion; Pte. Weaver, 3rd Worcesters, with a strained ankle; Sergeant Alexander, 60th Rifles, gunshot wound in the right arm; Lance-Cpl. Welch, 60th Rifles, gunshot wound in the right arm; and Pte. Britten, 1st Wilts, also with a gunshot wound in the right arm.

Here the work was carried on until March 31st, 1915, when the Commandant, desirous of enlarging the scope of the work, decided to transfer the hospital to larger premises. A suitable house was found in "Holmleigh," College Road, then occupied by Belgian refugees, but through the kindness of the local committee, and the secretary, Mr. Llywelyn Griffiths, it was vacated and by the kind permission of the owners, Mrs. Bird, Senr., and Mr. Alfred Bird, it was lent, rent free, for use as a hospital for our wounded men. The house, with its extensive garden, was excellently adapted for the purpose, and was officially inspected and passed by the War Office with beds for twenty patients on April 21st, 1915.

The V.A.D. entered into the work with enthusiasm. The building had to be cleaned, decorated, equipped, and all ready for patients within fourteen days. It was accomplished, however, and on May 5th, 1915, the beds were filled with wounded soldier patients passed on from Charing Cross Hospital.

The house, consisting of two floors, with spacious rooms, was arranged into four wards, named respectively, "Queen Alexandra," "King George," "Queen Mary," and "General French," each containing five beds.

In November, 1915, an offer of the loan of a billiard table was kindly made by Mrs. Cobb, of Wealdstone. It was gladly accepted, and the billiard room was opened by that lady on

November 26th, and since then has been an unending source of pleasure and amusement to the patients.

From its establishment, in December, 1914, for seven months the hospital was entirely dependent on voluntary aid, but we carried on, and it was not until June, 1915, when it was raised to the status of an Auxiliary Military Hospital, Class "A," that a Capitation Grant of 2s. per day was allowed by the War Office. This was to cover not only food, laundry, fuel, lighting, drugs and dressings, but the maintenance of hospital staff, salaries and upkeep of buildings, rates, &c. Needless to say, the cost of these things, even in 1915, came to nearly double the grant, which deficit was gladly provided. Of special comforts we were able to supply the patients, mention may be made of cigarettes, of which we distributed on an average 700 per week, easy boots, shoes and soft slippers, pants, vests and pyjamas, pipes, toothbrushes, sticks, crutches, and the free stamping of their correspondence. Thanks are due to Sir Thomas and Lady Pile for their generous gifts of tobacco and cigarettes from time to time.

In response to a call from the War Office for more beds, in April, 1917, the Commandant solved the difficulty of enlarging the hospital by erecting a large hut in the garden, together with a nurses' sitting room. The hut served as mess and recreation room with accommodation for forty to fifty men. All the living rooms in the house, with the exception of one for the resident sister, were converted into wards, thereby giving accommodation for an additional eleven beds, and an extra bathroom and lavatories were also added. Two new wards were equipped and opened, viz., "King Edward," with six beds for surgical cases on the ground floor, and the "Connaught" on the first floor.

Early in 1918, by re-arrangement, the hospital was again enlarged, four more beds being added, and accommodation provided for thirty-five patients in all.

On October 15th, 1917, the Committee of Charing Cross Hospital intimated that, owing to the limitation of their work for military patients, they wished to terminate their arrangement with "Holmleigh," and a letter was received by the Commandant from the Governors, "Thanking all concerned most heartily for the great assistance rendered at 'Holmleigh,' and for all that had been done during the past three years."

The Deputy Director of Medical Service for the London

Command then attached "Holmleigh" to Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital, Millbank, and from December 20th, 1917, all patients were received direct from that institution.

In looking back and reviewing our patients, through the perspective of years, one can visualise the gradual evolution of our great army. At the beginning there came the splendid men of the Old Army, then the finest body of troops in the world. Those who first crossed the seas in September, 1914. They were the tenacious fighters, the "Old Contemptibles," who held back the Germans in the retreat from Mons, and at the first great battle of Ypres. They took their wounds lightly and almost as a matter of course.

Then came the men of the "First Hundred Thousand," the men of Kitchener's Army; those who first came forward unselfishly and nobly as true volunteers. Often men of great intelligence, from all classes of the community, men from the Universities, the Public Schools, athletes and sportsmen, lawyers, stockbrokers and bank clerks. All bright and cheery under suffering, and as brave as their predecessors. Many of these were the Territorials who came to the rescue in 1915, and were flung into the fiery line and acquitted themselves like veterans.

Next came the "Derby Men," those who had given up wife and family, business or shop at the call of duty, and had left the counter, desk or workshop to join the ranks. All good fellows who have fought well and bravely. They built up the millions who have helped to hold the Empire together. The glorious spirit of the Old Army had settled on the New, and the men who came back wounded, in 1916, had the same cheeriness, heroism and indomitable courage as the men who fought and died in 1914.

Last, came the younger men, some mere boys of eighteen and younger, but all of the same brave spirit. Many of these were the untried lads who were rushed up to the front-line trenches, who fought like veterans and stemmed the German rush at Cambrai, and saved a break through at the junction of the British and French armies, in the spring of 1918.

We have had men from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Newfoundland. Altogether, some two hundred regiments have been represented in our wards.

Often looking pale and worn when admitted, the fresh air

of Harrow soon gave the patients a good colour. The bright surroundings and plenty of amusement helped them to forget the horrors they had experienced at the front. A liberal diet of good food, in the cooking of which our experienced house-keeper, took a special pride, largely assisted the men to regain their physical strength. The wonderful cheerfulness displayed by our patients was one of the most remarkable features of our hospital life, and to hear them say, as many did, that while at "Holmleigh" they "had spent the happiest time of their lives" was, to us, the greatest tribute they could pay for the little we were privileged to do for them.

Truly it has been said, "It is idle to attempt to find words worthy of the men to whom we owe our very existence. Certainly, as long as courage and devotion are admired, so long will their fame endure." May it never be forgotten—especially by those who stayed at home.

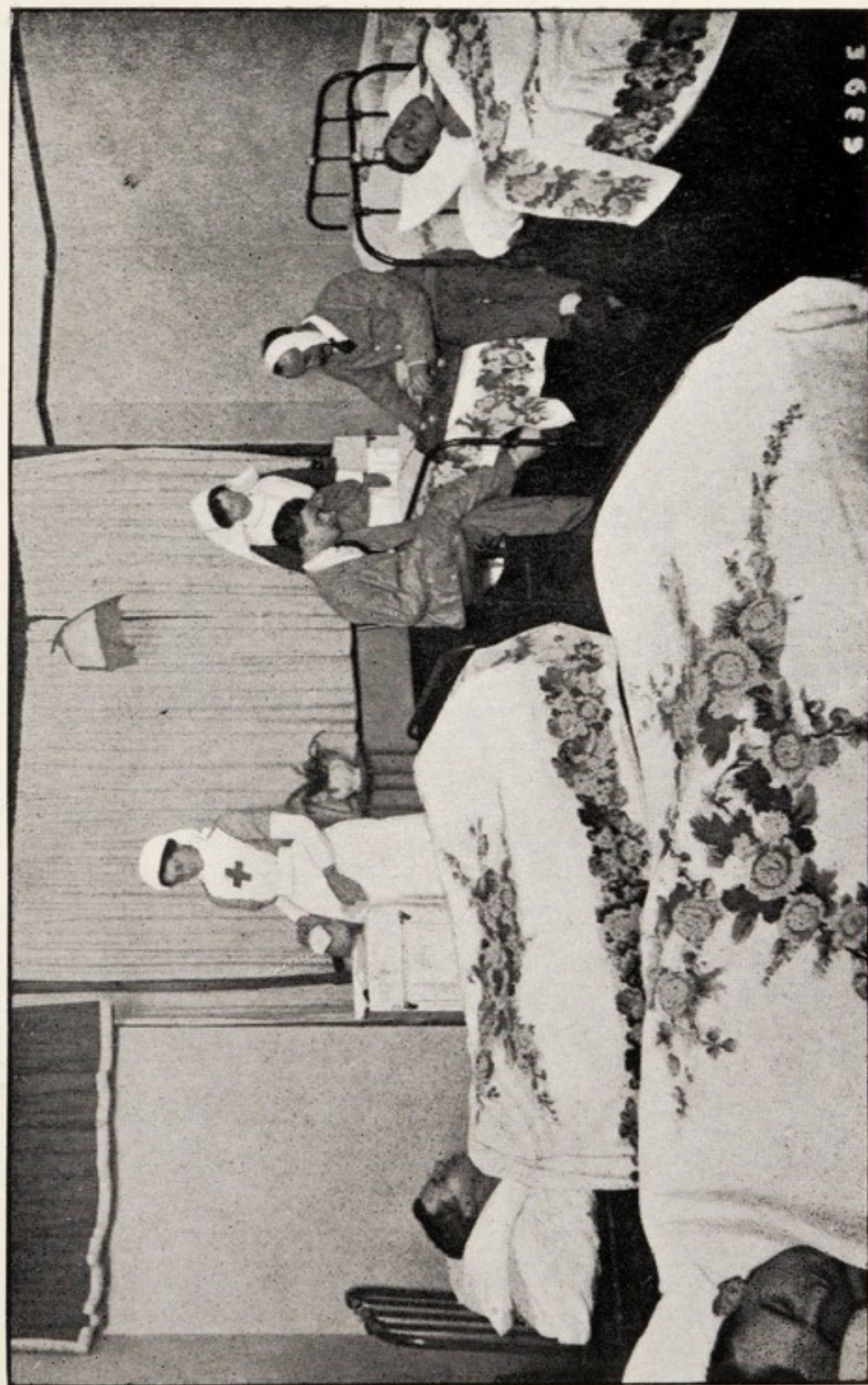
II.

SUMMARY OF FOUR YEARS' WORK.

DECEMBER 5TH, 1914—DECEMBER 31ST, 1918.

FROM December 15th, 1914, to December 31st, 1915, one hundred and fifty-one patients had been treated in the hospital, eighty-four of whom were discharged fit for duty. The cases admitted consisted of 2 partial paralysis, 1 loss of speech, 4 with fractures of the skull, 56 with gunshot wounds, 9 with shell wounds, 7 with fractures of the femur, jaw, &c., 3 gassed and poisoned, 8 with trench feet and rheumatism, 3 with amputated limbs, 22 cases of disease, and 36 other cases.

During 1916, one hundred and fifty-five patients were treated, 118 of whom were discharged fit for duty, 12 invalided out, and 5 with amputated limbs transferred to Roehampton. 78 patients were admitted suffering from gunshot wounds, 15 with fractures of legs or arms, 1 case of paralysis, 1 gas poison, 16 with wounds due to explosions and other causes, and 44 suffering from disease. The average number of patients resident daily throughout the year was 18. The average



A corner of the "King George" Ward,

Langflet, 343, Finchley Road.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

number of days each patient was resident was 31. The average total cost of each patient per day was 3s. 3d.

During 1917, two hundred and sixty-five patients were treated. Of these, 185 were cases of gunshot and other wounds, 2 gassed, and 78 cases of disease. 189 were discharged fit for duty, 15 invalided out, and the remainder transferred to Convalescent Camps or Command Depôts. The average residence of each patient was 26 days. The average number of patients resident daily was 26, and the average total cost of each patient per day was 3s. 2d.

In 1918, two hundred and ninety-four patients were treated, 196 discharged fit for duty. 188 were admitted with gunshot and other wounds, 20 with fractures of legs, arms, femurs, &c., 5 with dislocations, burns, &c., 15 gassed, 1 shell shock, 13 with trench feet and fever, and 52 cases of disease. Nine cases of amputation were transferred to Roehampton. The average residence of each patient was 27 days, and the average number of patients resident daily was 33, the average total cost of each patient per day being 3s. 5½d.

The hospital throughout has been remarkably free from infectious diseases. In 1917 there were two suspected cases of cerebro-spinal fever which, on bacteriological examination, happily proved negative, and in the spring of the same year a patient developed German measles. He was transferred to a hospital for infectious diseases within twelve hours and, after disinfection of the ward, no further cases occurred.

During the four years nearly a thousand patients, including many serious cases, have been treated, in- and out-door, and there have been no deaths. The balance sheets and financial statements have been published annually in the local press, and the final accounts of the hospital for the year 1918 will be issued shortly.

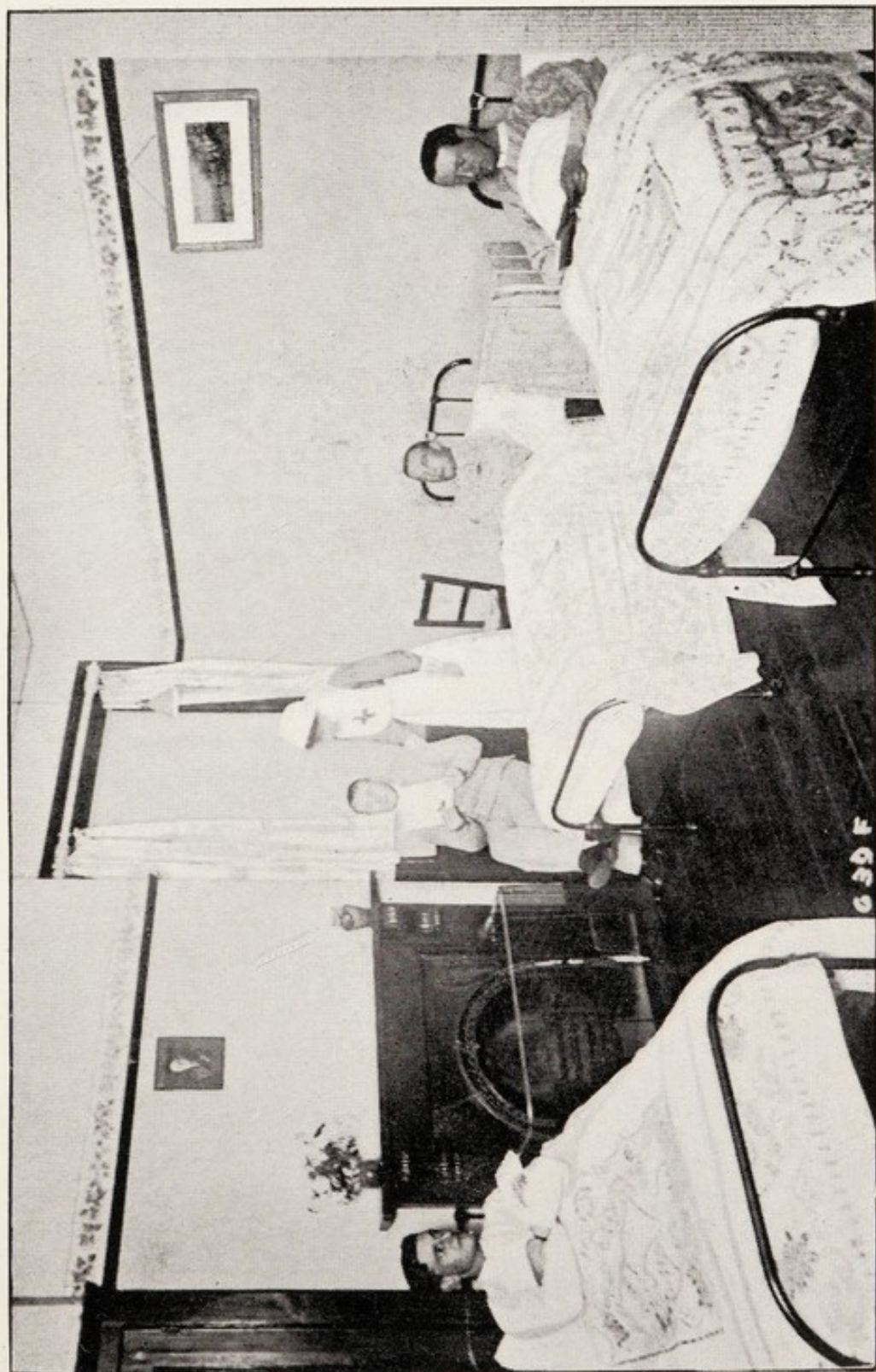
III.

LEAVES FROM OUR CASE BOOK.

SOME PATIENTS AND THEIR STORIES.

FEW of those on duty at the time will forget the coming of Pte. G., of the 2nd Leicesters, afterwards known as "Daddy." A little shrivelled-up man, paralysed on the left side, with a pathetic, dazed look in his almost sightless eyes, as he was carried to his bed. He could not articulate and was completely helpless. A short time previously he had been found lying unconscious by the roadside, somewhere in France, near the firing line, with a terrible wound in his head, which had fractured the skull, and for three weeks he had lain unconscious in a Base Hospital. For days he lay in bed at "Holmleigh," carefully watched and fed. He was unable to speak or give an account of himself, and the first word he uttered was "lovely." It was his sole reply to all questions. His memory had entirely gone, and he did not know he had been in France. He began to improve slowly and was carried out into the garden daily, where he would sit motionless and inert.

We found that he had a wife and child living in Northampton, and they were sent for in the hope of recalling his memory. Their first meeting was a most pathetic one. "Daddy" was sitting in the garden, his hands on his knees, and his eyes gazing vacantly into space, his customary attitude. His poor wife, scarcely able to keep back her tears, quietly spoke to him, but he only shook his head and did not know her. The little girl, about eight years old, shyly approached her father and without a word took hold of his hand. Presently he put his hand out and stroked her hair, and the ghost of a smile passed over his face. When asked if he knew who she was, he nodded his head. At their second visit he called the child by name, but it was some time before he recognized his wife. Then, gradually, he began to talk, and say a few words, much to her delight. When first taken out in a bath-chair, he imagined the dogs he saw were horses, and that the lamp-posts were churches. He made slow but steady progress until at last he was able to walk, and converse quite rationally. His sight gradually became normal, and



Langflet, 343, Finchley Road.

The "French" Ward.



before he was discharged he could get about and speak without hesitation, but he was never able to recall how or when he was wounded. He was invalided out of the Army and returned home to Northampton, where he hoped to go back and work at his old trade as a boot-maker.

A more unlikely man than Pte. P. to don the King's khaki could scarcely be imagined. In civil life he had driven a dust cart in the East End. Scarcely five feet high, with a round red face, and a perpetual smile, P. came as a patient owing to injuries received from a sandbag falling upon him, when digging a trench. His constant good humour and readiness to help every one, made him a general favourite, but his popularity was greatly enhanced one night when he was asked to contribute a song at a concert. Private P. quickly responded with a ditty, called "Good Old Strawberry," sung without accompaniment, which so convulsed the audience with laughter that the artist himself had to join in, and could not proceed. Ever after, "Good Old Strawberry" remained a pseudonym for the indomitable P., who became quite proud of his reputation as a vocal artist.

A bullet lodged in the liver is a serious matter, but more than one man has passed through "Holmleigh" and gone away, apparently well and strong, still carrying this inconvenient war relic with him. One of these interesting cases was that of Pte. W., of the 24th London Regiment, who received a bullet in the abdomen, which touched the spine, and then became embedded in the liver. For weeks he lay helpless, as his left side was paralysed. With special electrical treatment and care, he made steady progress and after some months was discharged able to walk about without assistance. While in hospital he was taught Morse telegraphy and was transferred to the Royal Engineers.

A curious case of poisoning by dope was instanced in Pte. M., of the R.F.C. He was seized with a fainting attack whilst working in a shed in which the materials used in constructing aeroplanes were being coated with dope varnish. It contains a volatile ingredient of a highly poisonous nature, which causes anæmia and great weakness when inhaled. He was nursed back to health, and went home on furlough quite well again.

Another satisfactory case was that of Pte. McL., of the 1st Inniskillings. He was wounded in five places in the leg and arm by machine-gun bullets whilst attacking a German

trench when fifty yards from the enemy's front line. He had a terrible experience and lay unconscious through loss of blood in "No Man's Land" for four days, surrounded by heaps of dead. He was eventually picked up by an officer and brought in on the fifth day after being wounded, nearly dead from exposure and loss of blood. He made good progress, and was discharged fit for duty.

A fine type of a soldier of the old Regular Army was Company-Sergt.-Major B., of the 1st Batt. Grenadier Guards. He was admitted suffering from a wound in the left foot caused by shrapnel. He made a good recovery. On the day he was discharged from hospital, on behalf of his fellow patients, he left a record stating that "they had been treated in a magnificent way, with splendid food, and given unlimited privileges. Every one went out of their way to make them all happy. They were all sorry to leave 'Holmleigh,' which had been like a home to them all, and they felt they could never be so happy and well off anywhere else." When leaving, he handed the Commandant the following letter, signed by all his comrades:—

"We, the undermentioned military patients of Holmleigh Hospital, wish to offer a vote of thanks to the Commandant for the many kindnesses he has shown us and which have been fully appreciated by all."

(Signed) ————— March 25th, 1916.

B. was sent back to the Front in December, 1916, and on January 6th, 1917, was seriously wounded by a bomb dropped by an enemy aeroplane, and died three hours after reaching a dressing station. His Commanding Officer wrote the following eloquent testimony, which speaks for itself: "He was a splendid man and as brave as a lion. He was a gallant and splendid soldier, and greatly esteemed by all ranks. His last thought was of his duty."

Another interesting case was that of Pte. T., of the 1st Wales Borderers. A lad of 19, he went out with the B. E. F. on November 1st, 1914, and was first wounded at Festubert with a gunshot in the arm. He returned to the Front in August, 1915, and in the January following, whilst in the trenches, a high explosive shell dropped near him. He remembered no more until he recovered consciousness in a hospital in Calais three days afterwards. He was in a serious



Langflier, 343, Finchley Road.

The Toy-making Class.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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condition, his thigh being fractured, also the bones of both legs and the right arm. Curiously enough, although so many bones were broken, he had no wounds. He was in too serious a condition to be operated upon until March, 1917, when several pieces of bone were removed from his leg. He was unable to walk when admitted, but under careful treatment he recovered the use of his legs, and was discharged able to get about as usual.

Some of our patients seemed to be quite as proud of the number of operations they had experienced as the wounds they had received. Pte. P. boasted that "he had been cut into twenty times in France and at home." On the last occasion he is said to have signified that he had a request to make to the surgeon before the anæsthetic was administered, and on being asked what it was, he remarked, "Oh, it is nothing much; I just want to tell him that if he is not successful this time, and thinks he will have another try, don't sew me up, just put buttons on me, to save trouble."

Another remarkable case was that of Rifleman K., of the Rifle Brigade, who was admitted with trench-feet in a gangrenous condition, on December 30th, 1917. He had already lost four toes from the right foot and two from the left. Gangrene had spread up to the instep of the right foot, and he was unable to walk. After nearly two months' treatment the left foot healed, though it was feared amputation of the right would be necessary, but, under new treatment, the gangrene was again arrested and he made steady progress towards recovery. Before he was discharged he executed a dance at one of our concerts, to the horror of the Sister under whose care he had recovered and owed his limb.

In November, 1915, Company Sergt.-Major S., of the 12th West Yorks, was admitted, having received a bullet in the chest, which had not been extracted. When charging, close to his captain, in the advance at Loos, he said he felt as if he had been hit by "a clod of earth" in the chest. He did not remember feeling much pain, and carried on until he felt faint and dropped on the field. He remembered nothing more until he recovered consciousness in a dressing station, where his condition was pronounced serious, and he was sent to the base. When admitted to "Holmleigh" his wound had healed, and it was deemed advisable to have him X-rayed. The plate revealed the fact that the bullet was embedded in his liver.

He seemed to suffer no ill effects and made a good recovery, and was returned to duty for home service. Such are a few of the many cases that have passed through our wards with satisfactory results.

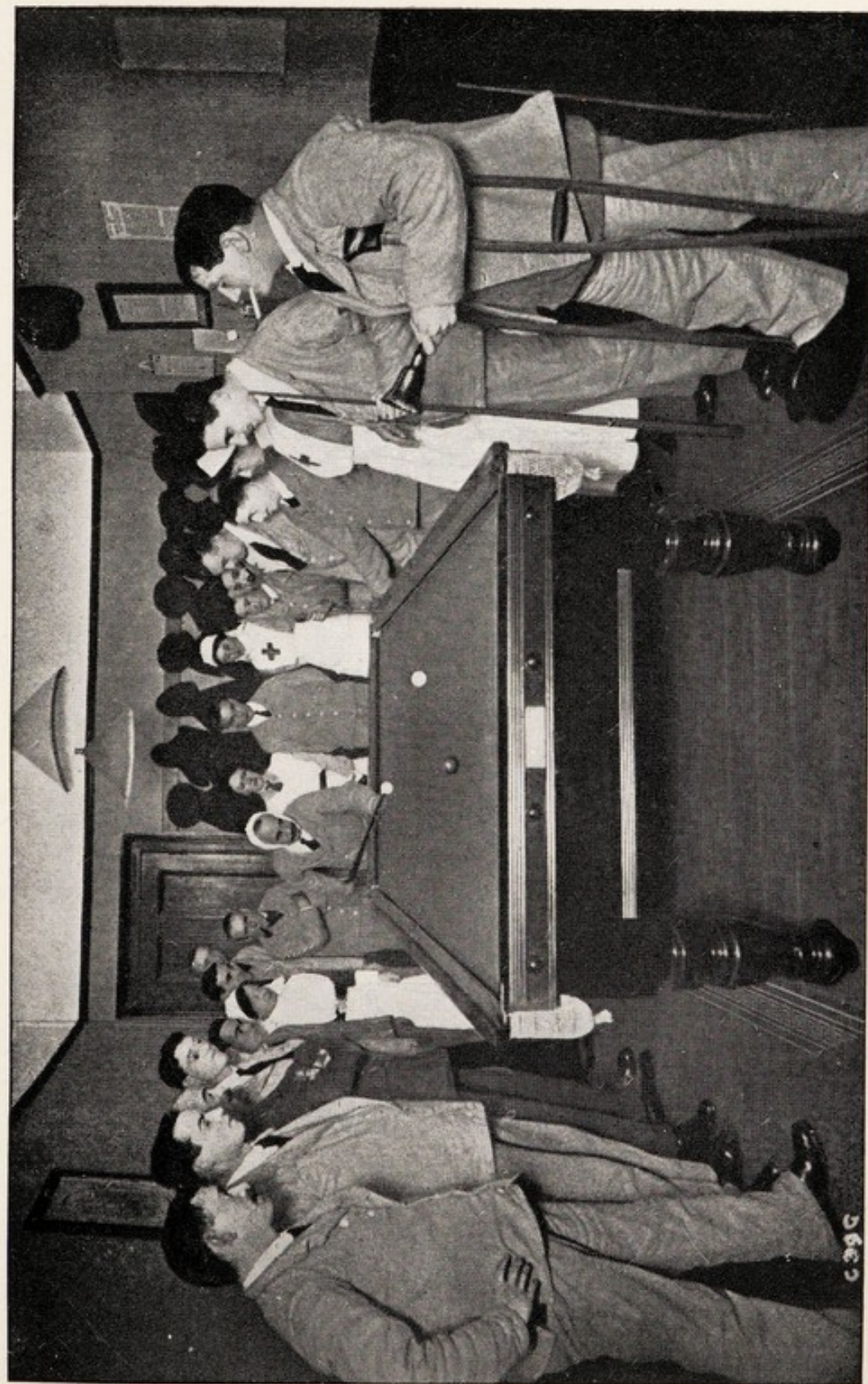
IV.

STORIES OF THE GREAT WAR, TOLD BY OUR PATIENTS.

MANY were the thrilling stories related by our patients of their experiences on the battlefield, and some of them are worthy of record. From the following personal narratives recorded by the men in their own words, one is able to trace a brief history of the Great War.

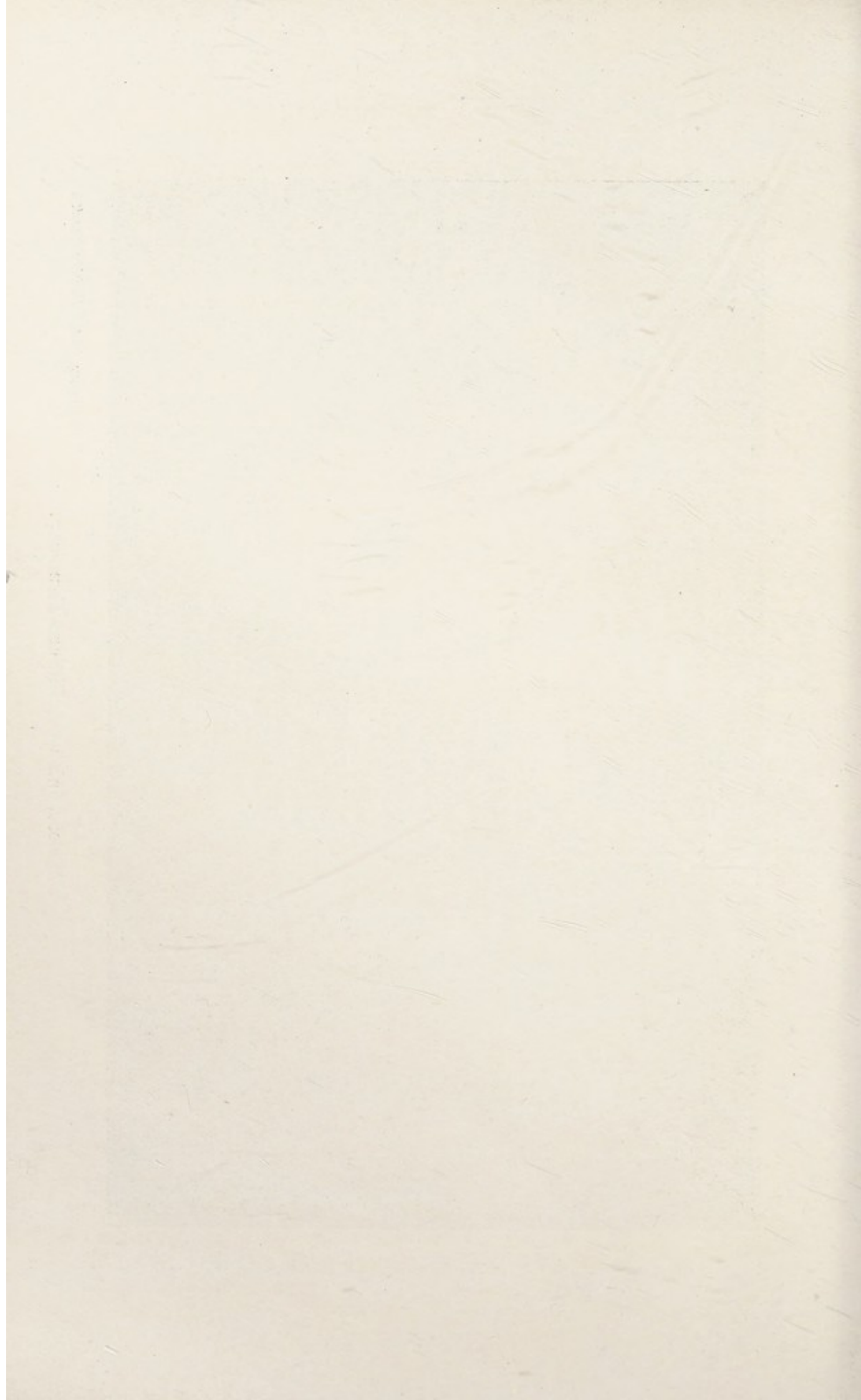
Pte. W., of the 3rd Worcesters, one of our first patients in 1914, crossed to France on August 13th of that year, and took part in the Retreat from Mons. He says: "I got into action on August 23rd, 1914, at Cambrai. We had the order to retire and marched through St. Quentin, Ham and Noyon to Crecy, where we started the advance on Sept. 8th. We took up a position eight miles from Soissons, in a thick wood on a hill. Here we were attacked by the Germans on the 19th Sept. and had heavy fighting, in which we lost about 300 men and five officers. Relieved by the French troops, we left for Belgium and got into position at La Bassée, and there fought the Germans for ten days. We then were hurried by London Motor Buses to a new position fifteen miles away, and engaged in the great battle of Nov. 7th-8th, where we lost over 500 men and all the officers but the C.O. and the Adjutant."

Sergt. A., of the 60th Rifles, who fought in the first Battle of Ypres on the 23rd October, 1914, says: "It was the hardest fighting I took part in. One night we were turning-in at our billets, when we had the order to **A Charge of the Rifles at Poperinghe.** 'Fall in,' and marched about four miles. Here we fixed bayonets and marched towards the German lines. We came under heavy rifle fire about 11 p.m., and dug ourselves in till daybreak, and then advanced under fierce fire for 800 yards, and got it hot. We got close to their trenches just outside



A close finish — a Billiard Handicap.

Langflier, 343, Finchley Road.



Poperinghe and then had to retire, as they were enfilading us. The 2nd Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Batt. 60th Rifles, 1st L.N. Lancs, 2nd Queens, and the Sussex Regiment, in reserve, then advanced, but still they drove us back. Then we had another try to carry out what we started to do in the morning, and by short rushes, got within eighty yards of the enemy. All the regiments got mixed up together, and there were only a few officers left. A major of the "Queens," a very brave man, then gave the order to charge and up we got, about 600 of us, and got to grips with the Germans. You should have seen them run. Those we didn't get with the bayonet, we captured. We took about 600 prisoners and the dead and wounded were very numerous, lying about like sheep."

Lance Corporal B., of the 1st Somerset Light Infantry, who was with the Fourth Division, encamped in August, 1914, at Harrow, first got in touch with the Germans at Le Cateau, on Aug. 24th, 1914, when his regiment was engaged in covering the retirement of three Battalions. From the 25th, he says :

**Battle of
the Marne.**

"We had rearguard actions all the way, until Sunday, Sept. 6th, when we received orders to advance and were engaged in the Battle of the Marne. We crossed the river on Thursday, Sept. 10th. We next came in touch with the Germans at Homdenhen on Oct. 13th, where they were trying to push their way to Calais. We steadily drove them back, until we reached Armentières. On Oct. 20th we marched to Ploegstreet and the following day attacked the village of St. Ives, which we took at the point of the bayonet, and took 120 prisoners."

Lance Corporal W., of the 60th Rifles, was another who formed part of the "Contemptible Little Army," and took part in the Retreat from Mons. He says: "We got into action on August 23rd, 1914, and crossed the canal at Mons, and then fought rearguard actions for the best part of three days, with terrible marching which greatly exhausted our men. We lost two lots of outposts with the Uhlans close on our heels. We had another fight outside St. Quentin, but still had to retire and passed thousands of exhausted refugees half starved, and in a terrible condition. We lost many men in retiring, and could not keep up with the columns. We stopped at last, and made an advance and on Sept. 30th, 1914, when we took part in the Battle of the Marne. Whilst crossing the pontoon built

by the Engineers, we lost many men from artillery fire. On Sept. 14th, we marched four miles and took up a position with two companies, in the dark, expecting to find a picket of about two hundred Germans, with two guns, instead of which, we were surprised to find ourselves in the middle of *two thousand*, and as soon as day dawned, they let drive into us from a hundred and fifty yards. We lost three hundred men. I received a bullet in the left arm, and got a worse wound later from a piece of shell. We lay in caves for two days, on account of the heavy German fire, but at midnight on the 16th we marched to a church two miles away, where we stayed until dinner-time, and were just out in time to see the church blown up. Here we got into Red Cross wagons and afterwards entrained for St. Nazaire, first stopping outside Paris, where I got my wounds dressed."

Pte. B., of the 1st Wilts. Regt., who was also in the Retreat from Mons, arrived in Belgium on Aug. 22nd, 1914, and went straight into action. "We got heavily shelled and held out from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m., when the fire became so hot we retired trenching and digging all night. We had a general order to hold the trenches until 11.30 a.m., and held them till the order came to retire. We fell back at length on Cambrai, and arrived there at 11.30 p.m., on Aug. 25th. We got into action again next day and at 5 a.m. nearly all my company were lost, as we went on the field one hundred and sixty strong, and only had twenty men left. We had Germans each side of us and were penned in an orchard, and had to charge our way out of it through a lane of fire, as they were only ten yards from us. We retired behind the town and went back towards St. Quentin and on to Crecy, and joined a division there."

Corporal R., of the Royal Engineers, who was also encamped at Harrow on August 18th, 1914, with the Fourth Division, was in the retreat from St. Quentin to the Marne, where he says, "Turning our backs on Paris we made a steady but determined advance. We were ordered to build a bridge across the river for the troops. It was warm work, as the Germans kept dropping shells very close. After finishing this bridge, we had to repair the steel one which the Germans had tried to destroy."

Pte G., of the Connaught Rangers, describes a furious

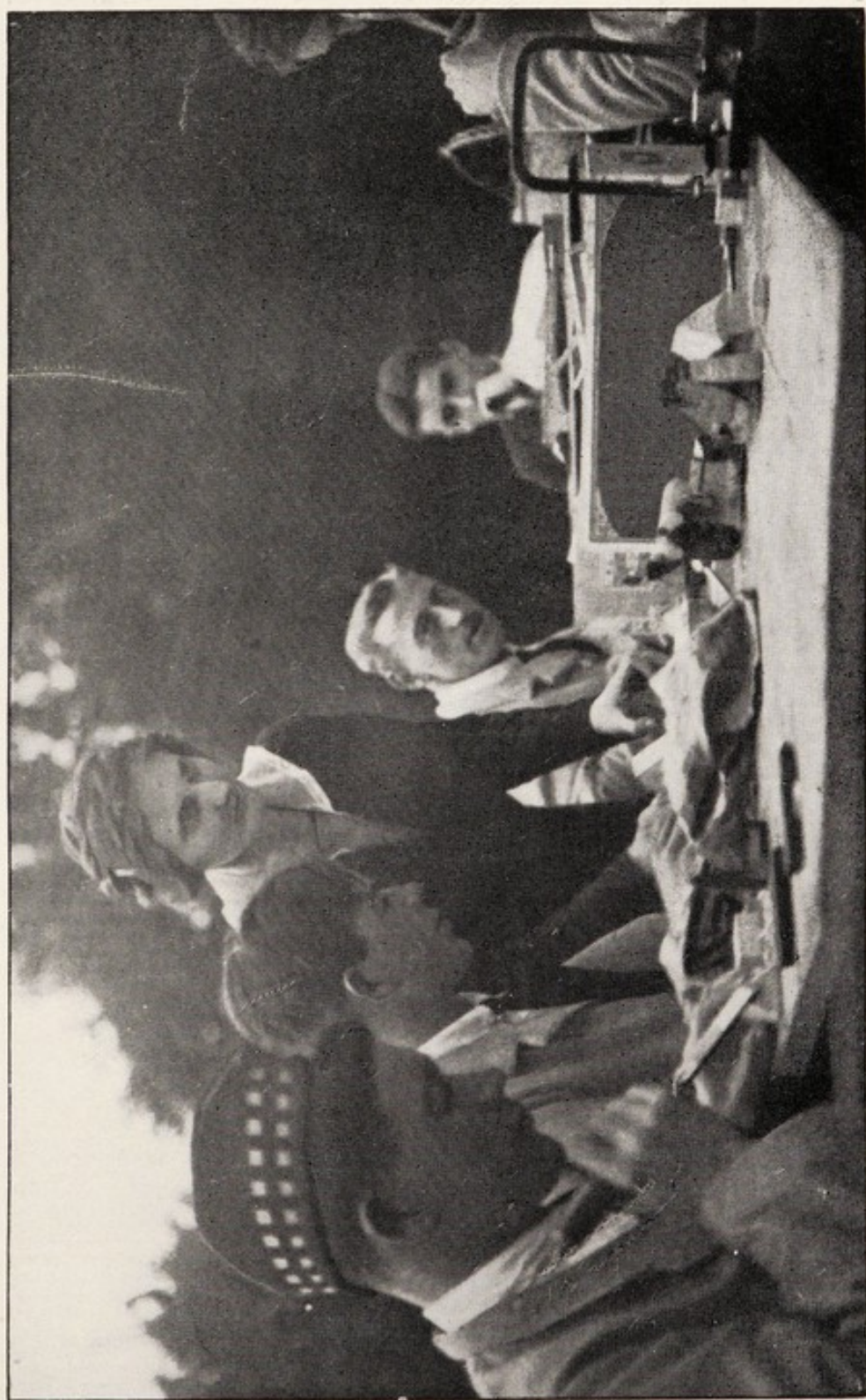
attack, in which he took part. "We were only eighty yards from the enemy lines, and under terrible artillery fire, "Black Marias" bursting everywhere. A German Taube would circle overhead and sail along the lines and trenches. Then it would drop a white light, the signal for the artillery to get range. Five minutes after that, they would be drilling holes every ten paces along our trenches with "Jack Johnsons," followed by repeated infantry attacks. One night we were being relieved by the French, and the trenches were overcrowded with troops. The Germans got to know of it, and opened a murderously heavy fire upon us. Suddenly an order was given to charge, and immediately every man sprang over the top of the trench and charged onwards. Half got entangled in the barbed wire, but we charged on somehow, until we got up to the enemy lines, and in the rush half my company were shot down. Wholesale slaughter then began again, and we all got mixed up. Orders were shouted everywhere, and the cries of the wounded and dying were awful. Then we got the order to retire, as the enemy were too strong and in force. We got back to our own trenches and kept on firing though terribly exhausted. An hour later we charged again, returning with heavy losses, but we were not going to lose ground. Our Major gave us great encouragement and we fought like demons until the Germans ceased fire for an hour. Then they let it go again, worse than ever. They had the range and it was like real hell. We charged them *seven times* during the night and at last drove them back six hundred yards, and occupied three hundred yards of their trenches. Here we held on until relieved by the French."

Rifleman S., of the Queen Victoria Rifles, one of the first Territorial Regiments to enter the firing line, tells us of his first experience in the trenches. "We halted in the rear of a farmstead and half our company were directed to the reserve trenches close by. Our other two platoons were then escorted by a guide across some more fields, and we had to creep at times in single file, along the hedges, and out of the moon-light. Here and there a horse or a cow lay dead, signs of a very heavy shell fire. Very cautiously we crept along across a field, up to what appeared to be a large hedge. We could plainly hear voices and a gunshot here and there quite close to us, and to our surprise we found ourselves on the very edge of the trenches. Catching the whispered words,

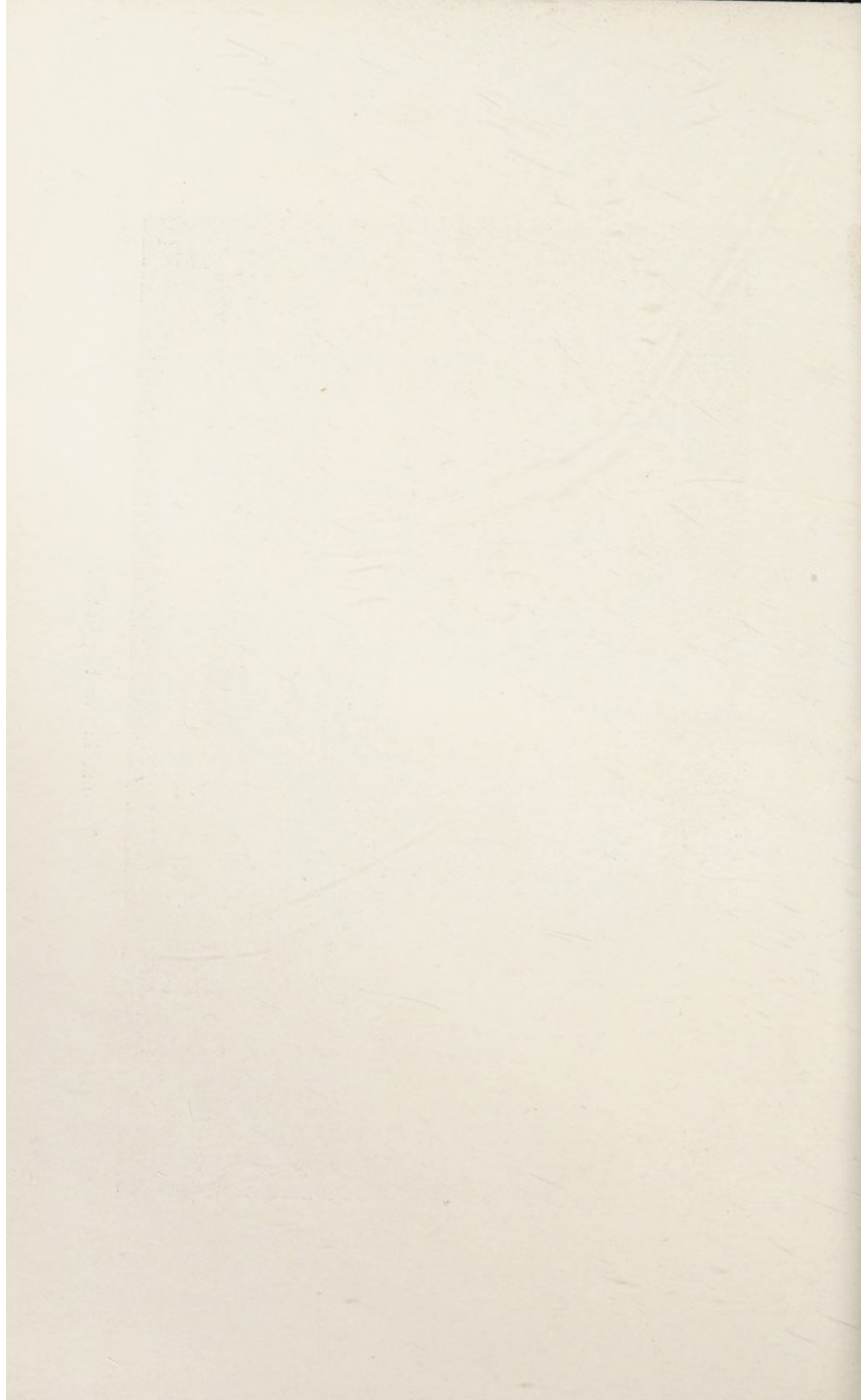
"For God's sake get in," we all hopped into what seemed a long ditch filled with straw. After receiving a few words of good advice from the occupants we were left on our own. Every now and then a German sniper would send a bullet whizzing overhead. The enemy were entrenched in a good position on rising ground some three hundred and fifty yards in front, and were clearly visible. Just as it was light, the German guns opened fire, a loud distant report, a low shrieking whistle, and then a deafening crash, and shrapnel fell by the hundred. This continued for a considerable time, and the whole earth shook, but we were not scared. Early in the afternoon the shells burst nearer to us, and all of a sudden our own artillery returned the fire, and it was the greatest relief to hear the German guns gradually silenced."

Sergt. H., of the Scots Guards, landed at Zeebrugge on October 7th, 1914. The first task of his Brigade was to cover the Retreat of the Belgian Army coming from Antwerp, which they carried out successfully. He says, "We first came in touch with the Germans at Ghent, and led them a dance across Belgium till we arrived on the left of the "Contemptible Little Army," coming up victoriously from the Marne and the Aisne. We turned on the enemy near Ypres. Our brigade, the 20th, was composed of the 1st Grenadiers, 2nd Border, 2nd Gordon Highlanders, and the 2nd Scots Guards. Several times they attacked us fiercely, but although they were ten to one, we stood firm, and never let them through. We withstood their onslaughts at Ypres for nineteen days, and then occupied trenches at Armentières, where I was wounded."

Pte. D., of the King's Scottish Light Infantry, who was in the great battle at Ypres on October 31st, tells us how his regiment lost 400 men. "The Germans kept on attacking us, but we drove them back till night came on, and then they swarmed over in hundreds towards our trenches. They got within fifty yards and entrenched themselves. Our company officer, a brave man, wanted to charge them, but we only had eight men left in the section and the Senior Major would not let him go. They started sniping, and a man on each side of me got his head blown off. I sat down to bite a biscuit, when a big piece of shell dropped at my feet and I thought my time had come. I moved farther up the



Toy-making in the Garden.



trench, and again the man next me was killed. At length, worn out, I went into a dug-out to get a sleep, when the trench fell in on me, but I got out unhurt, and then was wounded by a sniper at last."

Sapper P., of the Canadian Engineers, who took part in the second battle of Ypres on April 22nd, 1915, says, "The first indication we had that the Germans were busy, was a cloud of gas drifting over our billet at 4 p.m., followed by a perfect hail of shells of all kinds. No notice was taken, until over the hills came a disorderly mob that looked like Turcos, and then we sighted another lot of men closing in on our billet. We saw they were Germans, then our C.O. thought it was time to move, so after getting all the transport out, he calmly marched us out of the farmyard and a few minutes later the Germans marched in, on the other side. We made our way over a stretch of open ground, with bullets and machine-gun fire playing all round us, and reached a line of reserve trenches. There were 168 of us, officers and men. The order soon came, 'Engineers, shoot low, and shoot to kill.' We did, and held this position twenty-three hours, until the infantry came up, and made the renowned charge."

Company Sergt.-Major S., of the West Yorks Regiment, received his baptism of fire at Loos. He says, "We advanced along in the direction of Loos, until we came under rifle fire; still we crept nearer and nearer until midnight, and laid ourselves down for a sleep, practically under the enemy's nose, prior to attacking at daybreak. The morning dawned dull and glowing, with wounded crawling about as best they could, to keep from the murderous fire. The Company received orders to take part of a line in position, where we had to make short rushes to get it, and then dig ourselves in. It was here I got a bullet in the stomach."

Sergeant G., of the 22nd London Regiment, tells of stirring adventures on the night of September 26th, 1915, at the battle of Loos: "On that night, we took three lines of German trenches, but it was with heavy loss."

**Battle of
Loos.**

We went over the top 1,000 strong, and when we came back there were only 113 of us left to answer the roll. On Xmas Day, 1915, we had the order to 'stand to!' We were only thirty yards from the enemy. They had blown up five of their mines, when I received orders to take my men with our Lewis gun, into the crater of one of them. We got

THE STORY OF "HOLMLEIGH"

there, after struggling through mud and water up to our waists, and dodging the shot and shells which were very heavy. When I got to my position, I kept up a rapid fire for three quarters of an hour, when the Germans exploded another mine almost beneath us, which buried five of my comrades and half of the gun. There were only myself and a private left. When we came round a bit, we set to and dug out our gun, while the shells were bursting about us. We then managed to get the gun into action again, and my pal and I held the crater for three and a half hours."

G. received his stripes as Sergeant for this gallant act whilst at "Holmleigh."

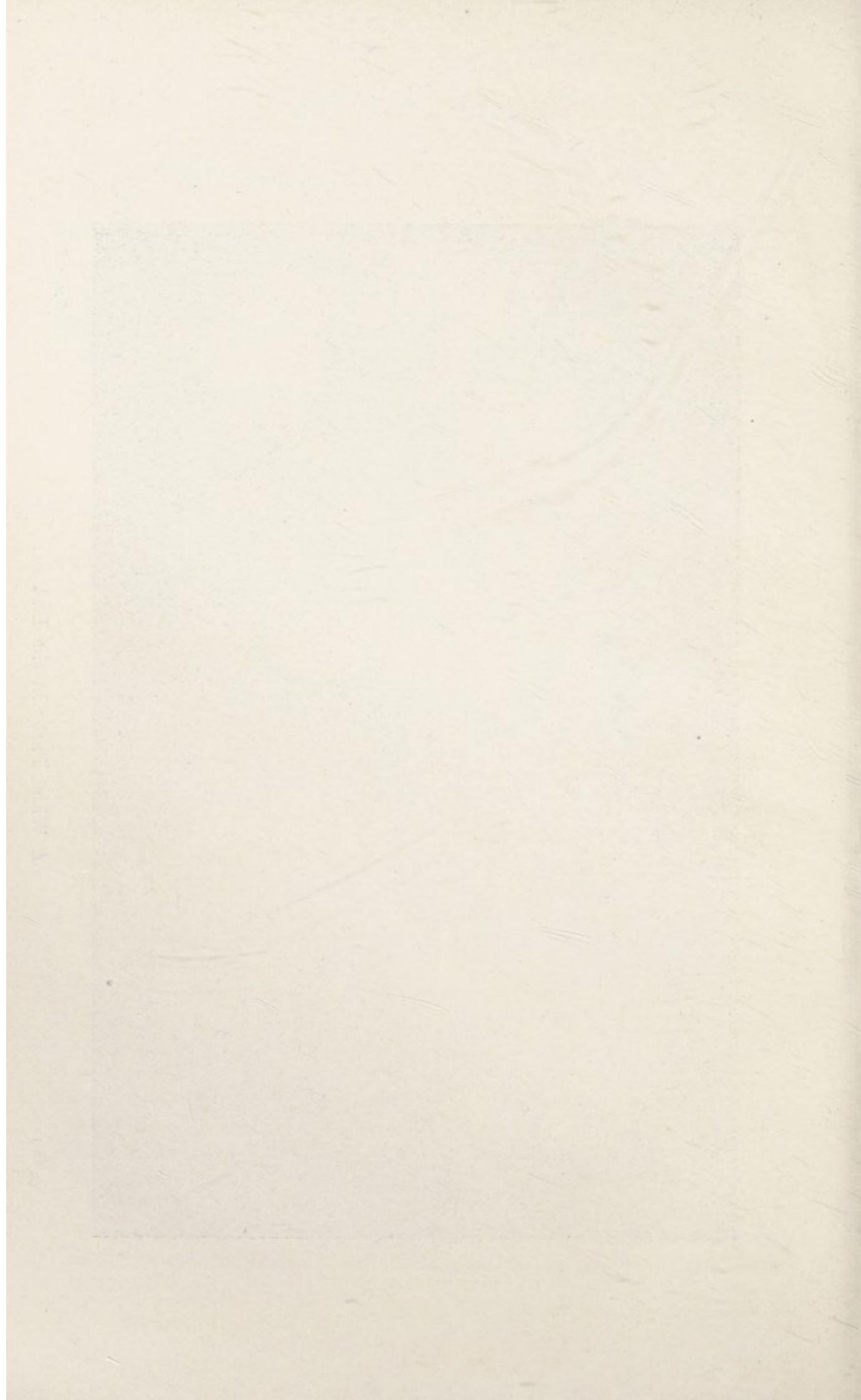
An incident in the Battle of the Somme is related by Pte. G., of the Machine-gun Corps, who says, "I shall never forget my first day on the Somme. To begin with, we had to set to and find a place to sleep. We dug down into the earth about four feet and then got branches of trees for head-cover and filled in with mud. Four of us were warned for gas guard, and it was about 12 p.m. when it came to my turn. As soon as I started, a shell came over and burst just behind an old trench or I should have been finished. Of course that fairly "put the wind up" me. A little later I saw a transport coming up with ammunition for the guns and ourselves, when another shell burst about fifty yards from the transport. The men seemed shaky, but the Sergeant-Major told them to go on at all costs and then rode off. He hadn't gone more than a hundred yards, when a shell came and burst right in the middle of them, and killed every man and mule. I couldn't describe the sight. The next day we went into the trenches and got up against the Prussians, who sent poison gas over us that was something awful. We got word that it was coming over, then we were ordered to mount the gun. I was in charge of the firing, and I knew that the Boche never takes a machine-gunner prisoner, nor shows him any mercy. I saw them coming, and started firing about five hundred rounds a minute, mowing them down. As fast as I knocked them over, more came on, making straight for me. I knew I couldn't get away, and kept on with joy. I killed a few hundred of them, then the attack was repulsed with heavy loss. In a little while came the gallant Cameron Highlanders, rushing to the counter-attack. They 'went' for them and everywhere we were standing on German dead.

**Battle of the
Somme.**



Goshawk

A Whist Party in the Hut.



"It was at Martinpuich, on September 15th, 1916, that the Tanks first came into action. You would have laughed if you could have seen them. The Germans were running and shouting "Mercy, Kamerad," but the Tanks don't know what mercy means, and they let them have it. We followed up, jumping from shell-hole to shell-hole, with the gun. We got to the German trenches, when one of my pals got excited, and in throwing a bomb, it fell and burst two yards from us, blowing his hand off and his stomach out, and wounding four of us. I got seven wounds which sent me down."

Pte. S., of the 1st Cameronians, a fine type of the Highlander, had served seven years with the Colours before war broke out. He re-enlisted in 1915, and was first wounded at the Battle of the Somme. He was sent back to France in the winter of 1916, and rushed up to the front line at Arras, where the Germans had made three attempts to break through. Here the Wiltshire Regiment had lost over seven hundred men. The Cameronians held a ridge about twenty-five yards from the German trenches, and dug themselves in. Next morning they were moved to another section of the line, and he says, "This is where I had the hottest time I shall ever have. Our bombers were sent into a German trench for over two hundred yards. The enemy shelled our position, putting our only two Lewis guns out of action, and knocking some of our men out. There were only two bombers left, and myself, but we held the Germans back for an hour and a half till reinforcements came up. We threw our bombs so fast that the Germans must have thought there were a lot more of us, and when we were relieved we were utterly exhausted. It was a tight corner and we were nearly cut off twice. I got a severe wound in the knee, which knocked me out, and the three of us got the Military Medal."

Pte. W., of the 11th East Yorks Regiment, was in the attack at Oppy Wood, near Arras, on June 3rd, 1917. He says, "We soon found ourselves fighting face to face with the Boche, and they were taking our chaps prisoners very fast. I was lying low in a shell-hole between the German front line and the second, when I saw a German officer coming at me with his revolver, just going to shoot. I got in with my rifle first and shot him, and then tried to make my way back to our own lines. Before I had gone many yards I came across

two German Red Cross men. I knocked them over with my rifle and escaped, and struggling on, came upon four more German bombers in a stronghold. Being a bomber myself, I had just four left, and, coming up behind them unseen, I got the first one and then the other three, and so knocked the lot out. In crossing 'No Man's Land' I got a shot through my leg, but managed to get back to our lines."

Sergt. S., of the Machine-gun Corps, tells of a thrilling experience at Monchy-le-Preux. His company had been holding a trench for three weeks, and the relief had taken it over. He and the two gun teams had to remain with the new-comers for twenty-four hours. He was at the gun position in a section of trench ten yards long, when, at 4 p.m., he says, "Old Fritz put a salvo of 5·9's bang into the trench. The gun was blown to pieces and we were all buried, with the exception of one of my boys, who had his head and shoulders left free. He was able to clear himself and set to work at once to dig out the rest of us. The weight of the earth was crushing us. When it was eventually cleared away, I found the sergeant lying across me, dead, and his men were also killed. Myself and my boys got off with a shaking up. Whilst in front of Infantry Hill, I was firing my gun one night, when an enemy shell, which failed to explode, fell between the legs of my tripod. If it had exploded, there would not have been much of *me* left. Another curious incident happened one night, when we were going into the line on the Somme. The guide sent from the company to pilot us, belonging to the regiment we were relieving, lost his way, and actually led my men and gun-team right round *behind* one of Fritz's bombing posts. Fortunately they never heard us, nor did we know it ourselves until afterwards."

V.

SOME CURIOUS GIFTS.

DURING the past four years we have received some curious gifts from anonymous donors. One of these came in the form of a registered letter addressed to the Commandant, which contained a welcome surprise in the shape of twenty-five pounds in notes, without any indication of the name of the generous donor. A slip of paper enclosed asked for an

acknowledgment to be sent to a Poste Restante in London, which we were only too pleased to accompany with our hearty thanks.

Another series of curious gifts came from an individual unknown, whose representative called at the hospital one night, a few days after the Zeppelin raid, when one of the raiders had been brought down for the first time. He said, that a friend of his, a Galician Pole, had empowered him to give five pounds to a war charity for every Zeppelin brought down on British soil. This he divided with another hospital, and at once gave us a cheque for the amount. After each successive raid, when a Zeppelin was brought down, our friend regularly called and left the apportioned amount. We have no idea even now of the identity of the giver, but take this opportunity of thanking him.

During the time of the enlistment of men under the Derby scheme, the sum of 2s. 8d. was left at the door one night, wrapped in a piece of paper, being the recruiting fee received by the anonymous donor, after his attestation.

Gifts of money, or in kind, however small, were always welcome, and the offering of a box of matches brought by two ragged little urchins to the door one night, and the gift of 13s. from twenty-one little girls of the Wealdstone High St. Girls' School, who had resolved "not to buy or eat any sweets during Lent in 1917, but give the money instead for the benefit of the wounded soldiers," were as welcome as the largest amounts received.

We owe another unlooked-for donation to our funds to the air-raids. This was sent as a thank offering from London Jews who had taken refuge and were afforded shelter in Harrow, during the successive night raids made by the enemy aeroplanes in the Spring of 1918.

Perhaps the most gruesome gift received was a parcel containing two shrouds, which was handed in at the door one day. We are glad to say they were never required.

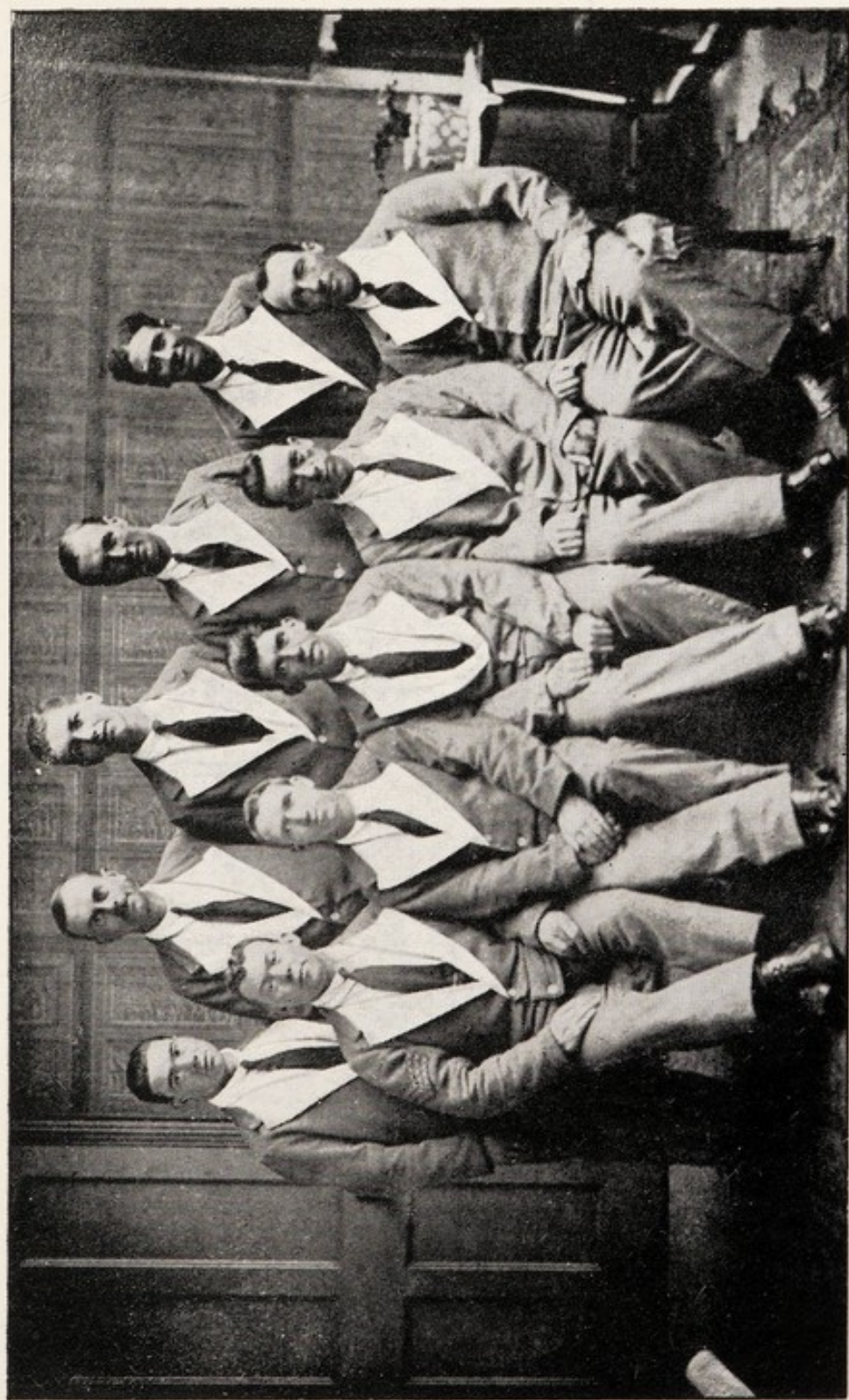
VI.

HOSPITAL RECREATIONS AND ENTERTAINMENTS.

It was our endeavour to make the life of the patients at "Holmleigh" as unlike the conventional life in a military hospital as possible, by providing every opportunity for recreation, and so to try and divert the men's thoughts from the horrors and hardships they had experienced at the Front. Music and amusements proved most important aids in restoring the health of the patients, and had a distinct remedial value. Besides our social evenings, whist drives, sing-songs and concerts, the instructional class in toy-making, so excellently carried on by a lady from the Peasant Arts' Guild, was greatly appreciated by the patients. The latter was, we believe, the first effort of the kind made to instruct the patients in an Auxiliary Hospital. Most of the men entered into the work heartily, and the toys made realised quite a good sum at our Exhibitions. At the Great Red Cross Fair, held at the Central Hall, Westminster, in February, 1917, fifteen of our patients had an exhibition of their work, and gave practical demonstrations for three days. The sale of their toys raised the sum of £15, which went to the British Red Cross Funds. Specimens were purchased by H.R.H. Princess Patricia of Connaught, and Lady Ampthill, who was photographed with the men. They also took part in an exhibition of work done by wounded soldiers, held in New Bond Street, in July, 1917, when the toys shown were inspected and greatly admired by Her Majesty Queen Mary and Her Majesty Queen Alexandra, on the occasion of their visit. In wool-working on canvas and the making of belts embroidered with their regimental badges, the patients were kindly instructed by Miss Symonds, who inaugurated the work by an interesting lecture on military heraldry.

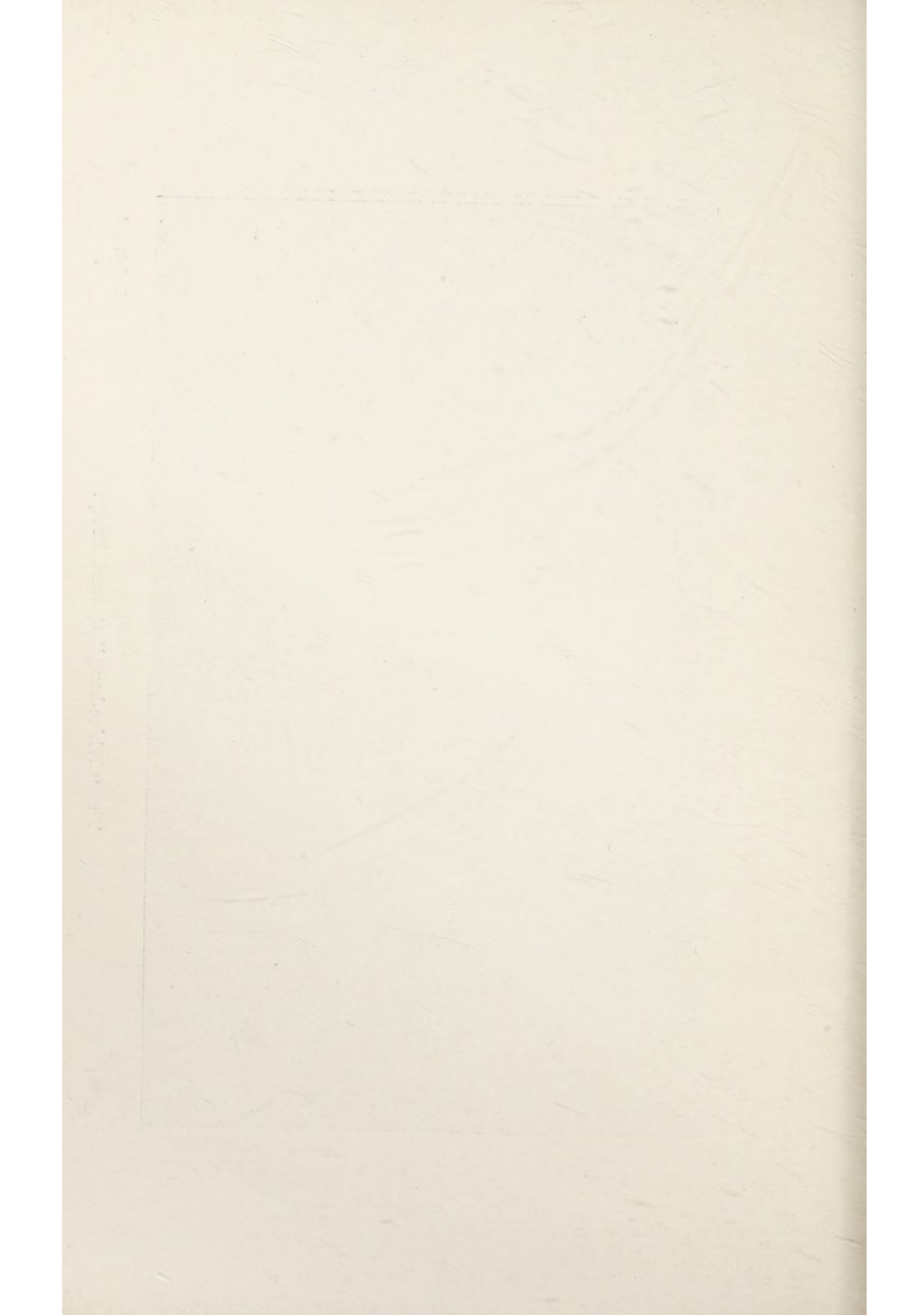
Concert parties of professionals and amateurs organized during the War, came and entertained the patients regularly each Saturday evening. The weekly concerts were eagerly looked forward to, and played a valuable part in cheering up the war-worn and shell-shock patients. Men wounded and depressed, recently back from the firing-line, with sad and tired faces, would laugh for the first time on concert nights.

In all, over two hundred and forty concerts have been given



Kodak, Ltd

The "Whizz-bang" Concert Party.



since the hospital was established. To those who have thus kindly assisted, our grateful thanks are due. They include the "Union Jack Concert Party," organized by Miss Mott, Miss Winifred Coombes' Ladies' Orchestra, Miss Lena Ashwell's Concert Party, Mr. Goodman and friends, Mr. Deas, of the Polytechnic Lantern Society; the Three Arts Club; the Metropolitan War Brigade Concert Party, organized by Mr. Edgar; Mr. Arthur Small, Mrs. Dee, the Misses Sibley, Mr. Dear, Madame Ghita Corri, Miss Judith Wogan and Company, the Harrow Male Voice Choir, the Harrow Weald Concert Party (Mr. Groves), the "Evening News" Concert Party, the Wesleyan Church Choir Concerts organized by Mr. Nichols; Mr. Harry Read's party, and Mr. Lea's party from Wealdstone, all of whom paid repeated visits. We also wish to thank Mr. Llywelyn Griffiths, Miss Violet Burnell, Mr. Gronow, Rev. G. Parkinson, Miss Bulloch, Miss Waite and the pupils of the Girls' Bridge Schools at Wealdstone (who contributed largely by their entertainments and did most useful work in mending); the Kodak Recreation Club, the Wealdstone Women's Co-Operative Society and the Girls' Club, Miss Stiles, Miss Woodbridge, and Lieut. Robinson, all of whom organized concerts or entertainments on our behalf. Thanks are also due to Miss Steele and her "Wolf Cubs," who helped in the garden; Miss Gayford and the Staff and Pupils of the Girls' High School, who sent regular contributions to our funds and entertained the patients; Mr. and Mrs. Lee, Col. Tupman for his many kindnesses and support; the Herga Lawn Tennis Club, Miss Grundel's pupils, Mrs. Philp and the pupils of the "Oaks" School, Miss Ruth Tongue, who organized several entertainments, and all who entertained our patients at various times.

One of the most gratifying and interesting of our musical entertainments was that given by the party which Pte. Bailey, one of our patients, organized among his comrades in the hospital, in 1918. An accomplished musician and conductor himself, he trained eight of the patients within a fortnight, and, under the name of the "Whizz Bangs," the party gave two excellent entertainments in Harrow and Wealdstone, which delighted their audiences. The concerts resulted in the sum of £50 being added to the hospital funds.

We should also like to thank those who have kindly lent their motor cars and carriages to the hospital for driving the

patients out, and to Mr. Vincent Howells we are specially indebted for placing his car exclusively at the disposal of the hospital during the past twelve months.

VII.

OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF WOMEN'S V.A.D., LONDON /168, ON THE STAFF DEC. 31, 1918, AND PERIODS OF SERVICE.

	Service.	
	Years.	Months.
Mrs. E. M. Thompson, Matron and Quartermaster	4	... 3
Miss C. F. Thompson, Assistant Quartermaster ...	4	... 3
Mrs. E. Davies, Nursing Member...	3	... 11
Miss M. Ward	3	... 6
Miss C. Barber	3	... 0
Miss R. Laidlow	2	... 9
Mrs. A. Phillips	2	... 7
Mrs. S. Newson	2	... 6
Mrs. E. Wolfsky	2	... 3
Miss G. Baldwin	2	... 0
Miss G. Brothers	2	... 0
Miss W. Miles	1	... 9
Miss Mold	1	... 8
Miss R. Currie	1	... 8
Mrs. R. Pearce	1	... 8
Miss W. Barber	1	... 8
Miss M. Gordon	1	... 8
Miss D. Ward	1	... 1
Mrs. D. Vickary	1	... 0
Mrs. Ekins	{and Acting Qtr.-} {Master 5 months}	
Mrs. C. Hughes	0	... 11
Miss V. Young	0	... 10
	0	... 5

Our V.A.D. members have worked with a spirit of self sacrifice worthy of the highest praise, and have rendered most valuable service. Many have passed through our ranks since 1914. Some have had to retire, broken in health through the stress of work and others owing to removal and other causes.

Thanks are due to all, past as well as present members, who have given help in the good work of tending the brave men, whom they have considered it a privilege to care for when sick and wounded.

VIII.

MEDICAL OFFICERS.

WE wish to render grateful thanks to the Medical Officers Dr. L. W. Sambon, Mr. McLeod Yearsley, F.R.C.S. (Consultants), Capt. J. Bensley Beatty, R.A.M.C., and Dr. Godkin Downes, who have had the medical charge of the patients.

Also to the Dental Surgeons, Lieut. H. Sharp, R.A.M.C., and Dr. E. Fox; to Mr. Coldwell, who has given excellent service as radiographer; to Mrs. Tracy, who acted as trained nurse and lecturer to the detachment and who gave devoted voluntary service as sister-in-charge to the hospital in 1915; and to the masseurs and masseuses, Mr. F. Marriott, Miss Tunarley, Miss Dorothy d'Eyncourt, and Miss H. Townshend, who gave voluntary service and rendered valuable assistance.

ADMINISTRATION.

CORDIAL thanks are due to Mr. F. T. Twyford, who has filled the post of Honorary Treasurer with great ability since 1915, and rendered excellent service. Hearty thanks are also due to Mr. Arthur Small, who from April 1917 has given whole-hearted service to the hospital as Honorary Secretary, and during the last six months has acted as Assistant Commandant and been in charge of the Food Rationing arrangements.

We also desire to express our thanks to the chaplains, viz.: the Revds. A. P. Jaggard, M.A. (Church of England), E. D. de Russett, M.A. (Baptist), W. Salmon and A. Gordon James (Wesleyan), and W. Quaife (Roman Catholic), for their attention to the spiritual welfare of the patients.

In conclusion we should like again to express our personal gratitude to Mr. Alfred Bird and Mrs. Bird, Senior, for so kindly lending the house, "Holmleigh," free of rent, as a hospital for wounded soldiers during the period of the War.

C. J. S. THOMPSON,
Commandant and Officer in Charge.

"We should also thank the women, our trained and untrained nurses, whose tenderness and care for the wounded have earned thanks from the lips of hundreds of thousands of poor men, whose lives have been spared much suffering through their tender ministrations. We all owe them a debt of gratitude."

Extract from the PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH THANKING THE ARMY IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, October 29th, 1917.



