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# THE RED CROSS IN FRANCE

By Granville Barker

WITH A PREFACE BY  
SIR FREDERICK TREVES, F.R.S.



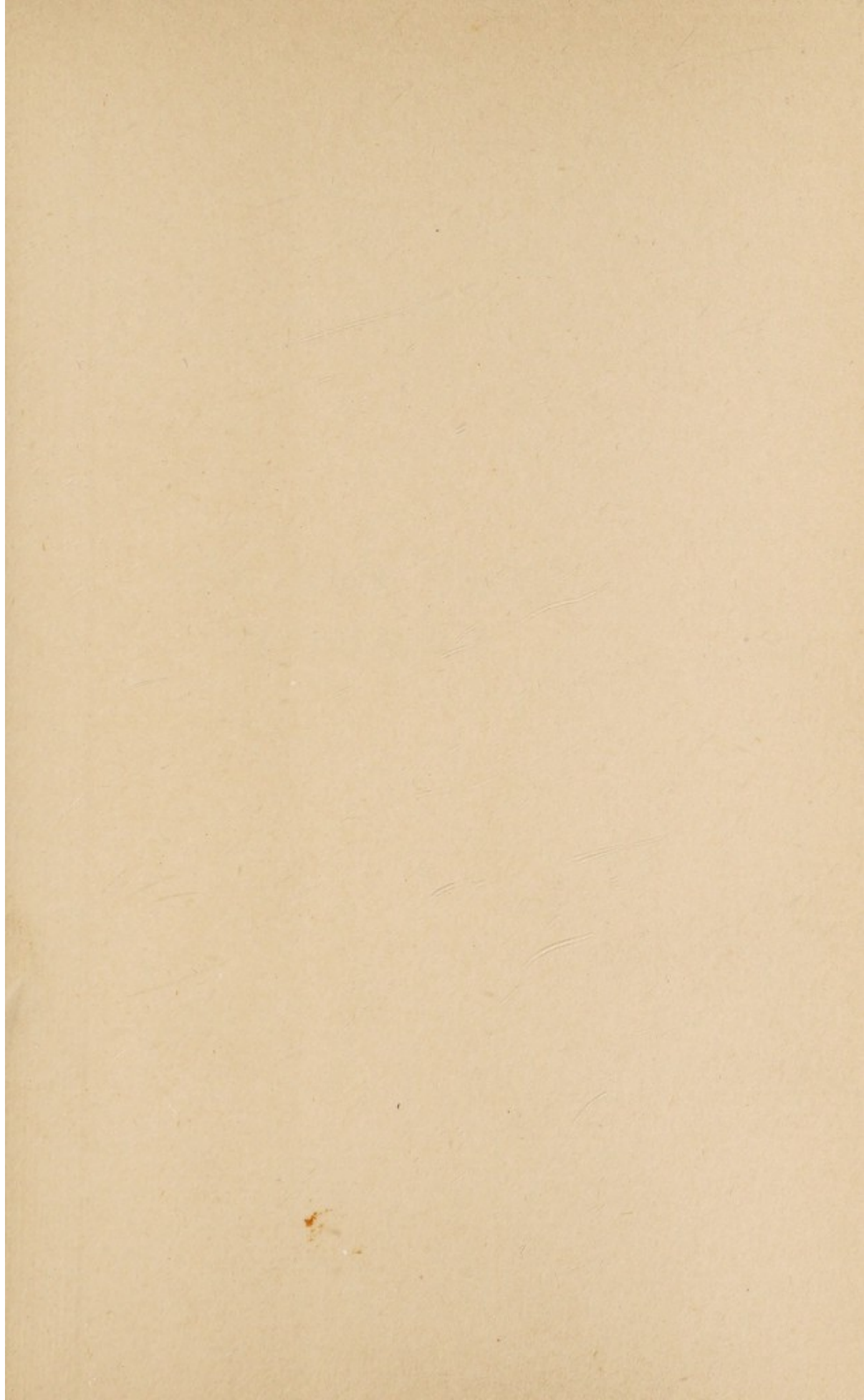
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THE RED CROSS  
IN FRANCE





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THE  
RED CROSS  
IN FRANCE

BY  
GRANVILLE BARKER

WITH A PREFACE BY  
SIR FREDERICK TREVES, BART.

G.C.V.O., LL.D., M.D., F.R.C.S.

SERJEANT-SURGEON TO THE KING

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

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at its disposal. It had indeed but one great, wonder-working asset—the goodwill of the people of Britain.

Now, in July 1916, the Society—in association with the Order of St. John—has expanded into the amazing organisation described by Mr. Granville Barker in the vivid account set forth in the present volume. The joint Societies can to-day number their ambulances in hundreds ; can boast of battalions of nurses and orderlies ; can despatch from their stores medical comforts to the value of many thousands of pounds a week, and have hospitals, hostels, rest stations, and convalescent homes in England and abroad that are almost beyond the counting.

Wherever the British soldier has gone the banner of the Red Cross has marched with him ; has followed him to France, to the Far East, to Gallipoli, to the Ægean Sea, to equatorial Africa, to the Persian Gulf. It has brought to thousands comfort and peace, and to every stricken man the dearest of all assurances—that he has the earnest sympathy and love of the men and women of his own country. What comes to the soldier from the War Office he regards as a right, but the help of the Red Cross, he knows, comes from the very heart of England.

Long ago, during the war in the West Indies, British soldiers were dying by hundreds of yellow fever. The general wrote home imploring assistance, for the men lacked proper food, medicines, medical comforts, common comforts, and even clothing. Nothing came. At last he sent back



one of the most pathetic dispatches ever penned—"You seem to have forgotten us." Things have happily changed. Those generous people who have maintained the Red Cross Societies in the present war have taken care the soldier shall be well assured that, night or day, he is never forgotten.

Those warm-hearted people of the Empire who have poured gold into the treasury of the Societies have the satisfaction of knowing that not one penny has been wasted on red tape or parade, and that—since the chief Red Cross officials are unpaid—it has been spent as they would wish it to be spent, in affording direct relief to the sick and wounded soldier.

The work of the Societies is not to be expressed in mere money. The wounded man estimates the service rendered in no known coinage, for it dispenses the gold of Havilah, of which it is truly said "and the gold of that land is good."

Of the personnel of the Societies Mr. Granville Barker has written with an appreciation which is as generous as it is well deserved.

It is said that the Great War has produced no Florence Nightingale. That may be so; but it has produced a much esteemed and lovable lady, hitherto unknown in any war, who has earned for herself a reputation little less than that attained by the great pioneer of Red Cross work. She is known by the curious title of "the V.A.D." She works as a volunteer. She is quite a new being, yet she represents the womanhood of England, the tender-hearted, unselfish,



capable woman, whose sole desire is to help the wounded soldier. She seeks no glory. She has no name. She is merely a "V.A.D."

She will work as a cook, as a housemaid, as a kitchenmaid, and none will beat her. She will carry trays all day and be proud of it. She will live in a railway truck and there keep a buffet for tired men. She will tramp a station platform night and day if only she can give some comfort to a sick man in a passing train. She will nurse so far as her abilities will permit, and her abilities are considerable. She will feel it an honour to be a ward maid if only she can help to make things comfortable for the patients she scarcely sees. The men are devoted to her, and in that devotion she finds the sole reward she seeks.

One little episode that I saw in France will remain in my mind as the embodiment of the spirit of Red Cross work. A V.A.D. was holding a cup to the lips of a dying man. Looking at her with a dim curiosity he asked faintly, "Where do *you* come from?" "I come from Home," she replied. A smile spread over his face and in a while he was dead. Such was the secret of his last pleasant thought—she came from Home.

FREDERICK TREVES.



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

WHEN I was asked to do this piece of work I tried a Bibliomancy ; though first, of course, I said that most gladly I would do it. I opened the Bible to find that my finger had fallen just above this verse in Ezekiel : " And behold the man clothed with linen which had the ink-horn by his side reported the matter saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me." I was to be clothed in khaki. Quite possibly some modern hypercritical translator might find that the more accurate rendering. It was significant enough, I thought ; and I took heart.

I have not attempted to deal with Red Cross work in England. This book is for English readers and they can view most of that for themselves if they'll take the trouble. I do not pretend, either, that I have completely covered the Red Cross work in France ; but I have touched on it, I think, at its main points.

Nor is this a critical account of what I have seen ; it is written frankly from the Red Cross point of view. But, on the other hand, it is, in all essentials, a true account ; I have invented nothing. And the things I saw asked for as little imaginative interference as possible between them



and their writing down. The conversations held are, of course, purely imaginary, and I will be solely responsible for all the opinions expressed. But I think I do not much belie the opinions of my "characters"; possibly I reveal their true opinions more truly than their very words would have done. That is the virtue of the imaginative form. Its other virtue is that, for me, it is easier to write, and, for others, it may be pleasanter to read.

I have mentioned no names, partly to preserve this unity in the tone of the book, more because the men and women working for the Red Cross have a healthy dislike of advertisement. It is usual for an author in such a preface as this to distribute thanks. Red Cross workers learn to lay little stress on that sort of compliment; but was there a soul, I ask myself—from the Commissioner to the orderlies on his landing—that would not cheerfully turn aside for the moment from his job to help me with mine? I cannot recall one.

Partly by chance, partly by choice, this is a record of work done not in time of stress, but in the longer, wearier time of dull routine. I think it cannot be too often said that, if one test of an organisation is its power to withstand emergency, the test of its truest worth, and the character of the men composing it, is the strain of every day.

H. G. B.

*Jan. 1916.*

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# THE RED CROSS IN FRANCE

## CHAPTER I

### A CHAT IN PALL MALL

*The scene is at 83, Pall Mall, in the Office of the Financial Secretary of the Joint Committee of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John. He sits at his desk. I sit and look at him.*

HE. D'you think you'd care to do it?

I. I'm sure I'd like to try.

HE. We want a report about the work in France. I want to let the man know, who has been sending me his thousand pounds or his thousand pence, what we spend the money on.

I. Something different from the ordinary facts and figures document?

HE. The fellow must have that, as well, of course, and he may read it. But I wonder what pictures of a big job being done it raises in his mind. I wonder if that, by itself, disposes him to send me another thousand pounds or thousand pence.



I. Ah !

HE. Four thousand pounds a day we have to get to run this show. Can you bait a hook ?

I. Send me over to France to see what I can, and write down as simply as possible just what I see. Will that answer ?

HE. Do it your own way.

I. Don't expect too much. I'm not an expert on hospitals, or ambulance, or stores. The Comprehensive View, the Statesmanlike Mind—that's not my lay. But I like finding out how people do their work, and I can write about that sometimes.

HE. The fact is, you see, that to say comprehensively, the Red Cross does this or that, doesn't tell half of the truth. We're useful help to the medical side of the army—that's what we are. If I had to frame the advertisement we were ready to answer ;—what about this ?

*"Wanted, by a gentleman temporarily residing somewhere in France and engaged upon a philanthropic enterprise of importance, Assistance, mainly in the large Repair department that has been established. Applicant must be of great experience and proved ability, modest and even-tempered, but inventive and enterprising. He must be ready to go anywhere and do anything upon the shortest notice and to stop doing it upon shorter. He must bring his own equipment, which should be first class, so that other departments may borrow it of him from time to time. Some recognition. No salary. Apply Director-General of Medical Service, British Expeditionary Force, Army Post Office, No. 1."*

We have also applied and been engaged for similar posts in Serbia and Egypt, in Italy and



Russia. And the amazing thing is that I think we suit.

I. And you're that puffed up with pride——!

HE. Well, I ask you—wouldn't you be? Have you ever had much dealing with government departments?

I. It is true my life has not been a happy one, but I have been spared that.

HE. No, no; that irony is cheap. They do their best, and a very good best, give them time. But how long would it take one of them to send four thousand hot water bottles to a hospital somewhere in France?

I. Six months.

HE. No, they could do it in three weeks; working by the method they have to work on, whether they like it or not. But we got those hot water bottles over in twenty-four hours.

I. Any particular secret?

HE. Yes. We're responsible to nobody but ourselves, so we can do out-of-the-way things at a minute's notice when we think the occasion calls for them.

I. You must have good men slaving for you.

HE. There again, we can let them do their job a little more in their own way than a truly and officially brass-bound organisation can. And they mostly work for nothing.

I. Does that make a difference?

HE. Well . . . the casual thing to say is that it makes no difference. And, mind you, it makes no difference to discipline. We've men in command without power to enforce a single



order, and I don't believe they've ever wanted it. Some of our men are paid for their work ; they can't afford not to be ; you'd never tell them from the others. No, it makes no difference ; an honest worker is an honest worker. Still, I sometimes think there's a rare quality in work freely given.

I. I think so. But that is a nicety.

HE. Sir, it is the genius of the Red Cross to indulge in niceties.

I. I believe, what's more, that you're the finest recruiting agency in the country.

HE. Then, for heaven's sake, write it down. Print it in capitals. Why?

I. Let's remember that we're enlisting men for death-service in a quarrel that still they only very dimly understand. But off they go ; and the brass bands and the cheers make it seem to a simple young fellow—how otherwise ?—that some sort of heroic picnic is what's ahead. Is he downhearted ? No !! But catch him coming back, hurt or ill, without the pals he marched so well with. He has left them, some to chance it still, some horribly hurt (he'd sooner forget those), some more mercifully dead (and that's not cheery remembering). He's a bit lonely, very tired, asking himself, "What's it all about, anyhow ?" There isn't any cheering now.

Be careful how you treat that man. Be careful in what frame of mind you send him home. Discipline's a fine thing to fight on, but a sick man wants something more, and less. If he is only to feel as he lies on his bed that he is still



but a number in a numbered regiment, and that the surgeon's only care is to put him back to duty as soon as may be, or to put him aside——

HE. No military hospital is like that.

I. I'm sure it isn't. But wounded men are queer things ; and the very atmosphere of discipline and authority—it's as well for a little to free them from it. It may be worth the nation's while to indulge them with all the niceties that are the Red Cross boast. For the convalescent soldier home on leave is the best recruiter for the army—or the worst.

HE. That's a cold-blooded reason for treating him well.

I. It's the modern spirit, isn't it, to ground even your charity on self-interest ? But go on. Don't let *me* talk.

HE. Thank you ; I go on. The Red Cross Society is the most typically English thing existing since John Company disappeared.

I. What was John Company ?

HE. Do I feel my age, or is your ignorance exceptional ? John Company was a pet name for the private corporation that used to govern the whole of British India till within a very few years of my lamented birth. Tell a mere foreigner that the greater part of the British wounded in war are ultimately cared for by a private society and he simply won't believe you.

I. He thinks it's nothing to be proud of.

HE. I don't say it is. I'm not proud of being English ; the feeling goes deeper. I *am* English and I gratefully take the consequences.



But the voluntary Red Cross fits naturally on a voluntary army. One is the free expression of a man wishing to serve his country in that way; the other is how men and women left behind can best express their feelings at his going to fight for them. Now I don't say that either is the best way of doing either job, but it has been our English way so far.

I. And maybe there just must be some outlet for the human feelings of those who are left at home and can indulge in them, towards those who have to go and fight and forget while fighting that such things survive.

HE. You'd say, of course, that our plan couldn't work. The answer is: It does. Mind you, the Army people are as good as gold to us. They have the hard end of the job. Think what it has meant for them. They've had to multiply themselves by four since this war started, and under field service conditions, too. And they're professional and to them we're amateurs—you know the deadly dividing line. We need tact, I don't deny it; but in their hearts they thank God for us. And sometimes they do it to our faces.

I. You make experiments for them?

HE. Yes. What time or chance have they to? We spent twelve thousand pounds building a hospital train. It answered. We've given them two more. So now they've officially built another ten for themselves. Mind you look at those when you get over there. But how long would it have taken an enthusiastic R.A.M.C.



man, struck with this new idea, to get twenty thousand pounds allowed him to buy it?

I. You tell me you've got a thousand hospitals running in England?

HE. We have.

I. It isn't possible.

HE. If you say that I'll make you inspect every one. But again, it's typically English, the way we work it, oh, typically! There's the King George's at the Stationery Office in the Waterloo Road; we provided it and "provide" it, and the Army runs it. Sixteen hundred and fifty beds and sentries in the corridors. There's Mrs. Smith's at Prettyton-on-the-Avon. Ten beds. She provides it, we help her run it.

I. She gives the jam and you the judicious advice.

HE. There are hospitals we both provide and run. Some we take over; some we subsidise. All of them we inspect and are responsible for; we guarantee to the War Office that their standard is high and their working sound.

I. You're the great clearing house for voluntary work for the wounded.

HE. We're that, my friend, and there has to be that—

I. I'm sure there has.

HE. —and we're the father and mother, and the uncle and aunt, and the doctor, the solicitor, the banker, and the parson of voluntary workers for the wounded as well. We're a buffer between people frantic to do something and authorities frantic to be let alone to get quietly on with



their own necessary work. We find out what wants doing and we find out people who can do it. We find out what other people can do when they can't do that. We get money for things which aren't getting done from people who don't mean to give it. And when dear old gentlemen and ladies can think of no better channel for their charity than to stand at the window and throw sovereigns into the street, we stand underneath with a clothes basket and catch them.

I. And what'd happen if you ceased to exist?

HE. If you ask that question of any Red Cross man that's worth his salt he'd tell you, of course, that if we started putting up the shutters at 83, Pall Mall, in an hour there'd be the whole War Office staff kneeling in the road in a line from here to Whitehall begging us to take them down again. Seriously, if an organisation of this sort didn't exist, there'd have to be a stop put to voluntary work altogether. Could you do that?

I. I wonder.

HE. You needn't wonder. But you can wonder what'd happen if you tried to. No. If this is a nation's war the nation must fight it and it will only fight in its own way. Think of it. A man and a woman send their sons. Do you think they can sit still with folded hands waiting and waiting for news? It's not humanly possible. They may have their usual work to do which will absorb them. No doubt we all ought to have, and heaven forbid people should think that any good end is to be served in time of crisis by



throwing up one job and rushing wildly and vaguely looking for another. (That's another thing this office does—gives little lectures of that sort.) But no one can *sit still*. And naturally they turn to war work. It'd be cruel to stop them; you couldn't stop them. The thing is to help them do it usefully and well.

I. You oughtn't to stop them. Nobody can stand aside from this war, and nobody ought to think they can or be let think they can.

HE. Well, imagine the chaos of anxious people applying to busy officials to be let do this or that. The busy official has only time to say one or two things—Yes, or No. If he says No—weeping and wailing! Pathetically does Mrs. Smith wonder why he can't say Yes at once to her most business-like proposal to run the nicest of field hospitals just behind the firing-line. Bless her! There's no such thing now as a field hospital, but how should she know that! She has got lots of money and could have boarded tents and a wonderful field kitchen and all, and she'd take the greatest care not to engage any spies as orderlies, so why can't he say Yes?

Or Mr. Brown comes in with the meekest, mildest proposition for providing five million patent fly papers for Mesopotamia. He brings one with him and catches the office flies there and then. Mr. Brown is so meek and the proposal so mild that Yes is said. Within a month Mr. Brown has made a mistake—two—three. Venial mistakes, mere little blunders in routine. But the great war machine jolts a little—jars.



Something is wrong ; it's somebody's fault. Correspondence begins, piles up ; the wrong people are written to and have to answer ; time is wasted. Result : every official concerned is reprimanded. So when that same morning in walks Mr. Jones with an admirable proposition for sending ten million flannel belts to Flanders he only narrowly escapes being kicked downstairs. "But," says Mr. Brown to Mr. Jones, when they meet at the club and discuss it, "the confounded fellows muddle enough among themselves !" Yes, but, dear gentlemen, sometimes that can't be avoided in the best regulated wars, while, by dint of saying simply No to you and your pet (and sometimes petty) schemes, your muddle can be.

I. Well, The Powers that Be could organise it all themselves. They know what they want, or ought to. And Brown and Jones could apply for the jobs.

HE. No, my friend, all that the Powers that Be could do—would do anyhow—is to draw up what is called a comprehensive plan. Its rules must be hard and fast, must be made before ever a stroke of the work is done, and can never, never, never be altered after. Now, we'll say that Brown and Jones are men of experience and authority in their way. They find that they are not working well under these conditions ; after a time they find that they are really being of no more use than an office boy could be—and they give it up. And after a bit the Powers that Be give it up too, and the job is left undone.

I. Still, it need not be so.



HE. No ; there's always the Eyes Front sort of thing which we think they call organisation in a country that we do not speak to now. But I call it organisation, too, and good organisation, to find out what people can do and how best they can do it and how they *want* to do it, and then to fit your rules round them as far as you can.

We're the honest broker for all sorts of enterprise that never could get started if we weren't there to smooth the way. We take the bullying from the authorities if things go wrong, for it's up to us to get them right. And—you need not mention it—but we can do a little bullying ourselves if need be. For we matter. We stand for the country's interest in the men who are suffering and dying for their country. We stand for the country's love for them. And we stand to show that the people trying to help—who yet can do no more than give such help—are not a rabble of sentimental fools, but, working together, are a disciplined, capable body of men and women, with their hearts in the job and brains that are sometimes second to none in the Empire.

That happens to be the peroration for my speech at our next public meeting to ask for funds. But you can have it for your silly book if you like—I'm rather fertile with that sort of thing.

I. Yes, if you'd only struck an attitude and waited I was going to applaud.

HE. Instead of gibing at me you'd better start getting ready for your journey.

I. What do I do ?



HE. You go to the passport department for your passport; they'll send you on to the photographer. You go to room 68 for your identification certificate and to room 73 for your brassard and badge. Have you been inoculated for typhoid?

I. I have.

HE. Who did it?

I. I don't know the name of the cow that did it, but she lived near Manchester and allowed me to drink her milk. I spent eight weeks on my back in Dublin being most thoroughly inoculated.

HE. Well, we'll do you again—and rather quicker—if you like. You must go to the tailor's.

I. Have I to wear uniform?

HE. You'll be arrested about once every ten minutes in France if you don't wear a Red Cross uniform. You go to room 83 about your contract.

I. What do I contract to do?

HE. You agree to put yourself under military law, which means you may be shot at dawn if you misbehave yourself enough; you promise to do your devilmost in that position to which it has pleased the joint committee of the British Red Cross and Order of St. John to call you, and you swear by the head of Lord Northcliffe that you have no connection with the Press. Lastly you go to the Travelling Office about your ticket. You can do it all in about half an hour if you're quick, and after that don't say that 83 Pall Mall isn't organised.



I. I'll try to do you justice.

HE. You'll not attain to that.

I. Boaster !

HE. Come now. I've not said a word about my own department. But advertise us. Advertise us ! The public must be told that we want four thousand pounds a day and that we know how to spend it.

I. I'll do my little best.

HE. Good-bye, then, and good luck.



## CHAPTER II

### AT BOULOGNE—HEADQUARTERS

THE Channel boat backs up the harbour and makes fast. From the crowd of khaki uniforms on the quay one detaches by eye and ear a figure with a megaphone courteously haranguing us.

"Will the Military please use the forward gangway and civilians the aft?"

"There is a special car waiting for Major Burrows."

"The civilians will please retire to the other side of the boat till they have had their papers examined."

Meekest of civilians, I retire; and, as the examination takes time, I contemplate, and count, and re-count the Red Cross Ambulances packed on the further quay. There are sixty-seven of them. After twenty minutes or so I am examined. Unless some Mighty One will take me by the hand and insinuate me out of turn I hang back always to the fag end of such ceremonies: the officials are wearier of them by then and my ordeal the lighter. But this time, though, I'm questioned and cross-questioned thoroughly enough. Were it not for my Red Cross brassard, that



my passport has other documents tacked to it which signify to all whom it may concern—and whom doesn't it seem to concern——?

As at last I reach the gangway I meet a Red Cross Uniform.

"Your name Barker?" says he.

"Yes," say I.

"I've got a car," he says. "Give my man your bag. I'll get you through."

We thread the crowd and manœuvre marvelously through the custom house. We drive joltily along the line of war-worn cars.

RED CROSS UNIFORM. See that Daimler?

I. Shrapnel holes, are they?

R.C.U. May be pure swagger. The drivers punch them on the sly. Still, I can show you some . . . in ambulances of ours.

I. Good of you to meet me. But I could have managed . . . I needn't have wasted your time.

R.C.U. Not at all . . . it's part of my job. I pack people off and meet them and put them through. Dozens a day.

I. Where's the need? What's the trouble?

R.C.U. Well . . . women rushing over to see their wounded. It's always serious or the War Office won't let them come . . . and they know that before they start. They're not much up to battling with red tape . . . the necessary yards of it.

I. Hardly.

R.C.U. And I'll tell you when anyone can buy my job cheap.



I. Yes?

R.C.U. When I get a woman off the boat and have to tell her then and there that she's half a day too late.

I. Red Cross work!

R.C.U. Oh yes. You can't expect the army to detail Official Comforters. But someone must help them through . . . it's only human. Not that they cry, you know, or make a fuss . . . not often. I oftener wish they would.

Here's our shop. Orderly . . . take this bag . . . look after this gentleman. I must get back. See you again.

I am deposited on the pavement at the front door of the Headquarters of the British Red Cross and Order of St. John (their flags wave from above) and the Official Comforter disappears with his car.

If you want to send us letters you write, as clearly as you can, H.Q.B.R.C.S., A.P.O. 3, B.E.F., and give no further hint that you know where we are. For though we do inhabit a house—we do indeed inhabit a hotel, still advertised in Bradshaw and flaringly on a wall or two by the roads that lead to Boulogne—in official theory we are a mobile unit and must be treated as such.

### HEADQUARTERS

It is a gaunt, grey, echoing French hotel. Where once the bowing manager stood behind his desk is posted a sergeant major, erect or condescending as you pass, according to your rank



and station. The *salle-à-manger* has not changed, for the Red Cross must eat ; and as its hours of work here vary only from ten to twenty at a stretch, it is ordered to eat regularly and well. But, for the rest of the rooms, the one-time waiters wouldn't know them. Do they know themselves, these gliding French waiters, in whatever trenches they are waiting now, or whatever bridges they are guarding, rifle instead of napkin to their hand ?

We run a dozen different departments. They ask for forty offices to contain the heads, their secretaries, typists, the correspondence files and catalogues, and then we are crowded. Above and behind the offices every corner that remains becomes a hostelry for army nurses. Thus do we economise. If one works here in the evening, one can tell that the nurses rejoice in a piano, a pianola too, or my ear is mistaken ; also I have heard the impersonal voice of the gramophone dropping from that topmost floor. At meal-time the nurses fill the better half of the *salle-à-manger* and on the dreariest days of dull weather and hopes deferred, the glow of their red capes is encouraging.

#### IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF THE COM- MISSIONER

On the first floor is the Sanctum. Once it was the best bedroom of the hotel, if one may judge by the really swagger bathroom attached. I am admitted to the Sanctum and take my orders. They are disguised as good advice. I am even to



feel myself the guest of the Red Cross, with its officers at my service to do what they can for me. But one is under discipline here, and the more voluntarily, the more strictly one must be so. For the credit of the Red Cross the sooner that is recognised the better.

I do not stay long in the Sanctum. I am conscious of unheard clamouring from without. In the next room the secretary eyes my re-appearance with satisfaction and promptly passes through another intruder. But with him I am welcome to stop and at intervals acquire knowledge. The secretary's table is piled high, though the load seems not to be grievous upon his mind. It is the time of day when he signs many letters. I look out of the window the while.

I suppose to an Englishman newly come this is as strange and as interesting a scene as any in Europe, this corner of a French town roped in khaki. But the rightful inhabitants have ceased to stare ; they shoulder these fellow citizens of a year's trial with the friendliest unconcern. And one would not think there were so many motor lorries in the world.

"Well," says the secretary, as he scratches his last signature, "what do you want to know?"

"How it's all done," I answer.

THE SECRETARY. Take your time and look and see.

I. Where?

THE SECRETARY. Well, not here. I write letters and tell people that they *cannot* see the Commissioner. The British public won't be interested in that.



I. Who wants to see the Commissioner (*not that my tone implies that no reasonable man would*)?

THE SECRETARY. Who doesn't? The Red Cross has a fairy godmother reputation, you see.

I. You strive for that.

THE SECRETARY. We're proud of it. But equally it means that whatever's wanted of whatever sort or kind by any one who knows he won't get it elsewhere—ask the Red Cross.

*Enter a COMPETENT CLERK with a name on a scrap of paper.*

THE SECRETARY. No, he cannot see the Commissioner. Tell him to write and it will be attended to.

*Exit COMPETENT CLERK.*

I. I know the uninstructed vision of Red Cross work : a thousand anxious and enthusiastic heroes rushing round with bandages and lint. You couldn't bandage anyone to save your life, or theirs.

THE SECRETARY. I beg your pardon. I am thoroughly competent at First Aid. Speak for yourself.

I. Thoroughly incompetent.

THE SECRETARY. Don't think I *like* sitting here running an office. Don't think that any of us really revel in residing in Boulogne fifty-two weeks in the year, tackling endless detail, correspondence, minutes, rules and regulations, price lists, passports, birth certificates, health certificates, character certificates, rates of exchange, the cut of



men's tunics and the colour of their boots. But I tell you, if this office and all the other offices weren't so competently run that the Commander-in-Chief can send a General and a Bishop and a Chartered Accountant to size us up and report on us at any hour of the day or night, we couldn't hold out to be what we are and do what we do for five minutes. Then there'd be lint and bandages and enthusiasm and loving-kindness lacking several wheres I can tell you ! It's a large hole the vanishing of the Red Cross would leave.

I. I know. I wish that finally we could all get to understand that brains and method count and are worth paying for ; that, if someone doesn't sit here and think, a sick man's soup in a hospital fifty miles off will get cold . . .

*Re-enter COMPETENT CLERK with another scrap of paper.*

THE SECRETARY (*as he reads it*). He can see the Commissioner if he comes back at two.

*Exit COMPETENT CLERK.*

THE SECRETARY. You must see the Stores. Then the D.T. will show you his garage and tell you all about the Ambulance Convoys. The M.A. will tell you about the hospitals.

I. D.T. stands for *Daily Telegraph* and *Delirium Tremens*.

THE SECRETARY. And Director of Transport. And M.A. for Medical Assessor. I'll introduce you to the O.C. of the V.A.D.'s.

I. Please don't translate. I'll find out who he is. This is a new game.



THE SECRETARY. He's a woman. You can talk to the Finance people. There's the Commandant of Orderlies. There's the Wounded and Missing department. There's the Billeting and the Laissez Passer . . . and the Post Office.

THE COMMISSIONER *crosses the room, showing out the guest that succeeded me, his uniform a puzzle to my uninitiate eye. Silence.*

I. (*When they have passed the outer door.*) Who's that chap?

THE SECRETARY. That's the new D.D.V.P.C. at advanced base. Wants fifty beds added to a hospital.

I. I suppose the poor wretch has a name.

THE SECRETARY. He had before he came out here. And the Commissioner calls him Tommy, so I daresay they've met before. But initials save time.

I. And they're symbolic.

THE SECRETARY. Eh?

I. A man out here is the thing he does and nothing more. If he goes home or to Heaven, another takes his place, for the thing must still be done. But I should forget what all the darned initials stood for.

THE SECRETARY. So we do.

THE COMMISSIONER *passes back, nods to me, speaks to his SECRETARY.*

THE COMMISSIONER. I could go over that new contract now.



*And he passes into the Sanctum. THE SECRETARY whips out that new contract.*

THE SECRETARY. Be watch dog for five minutes.

I. Can't I have some initials ?

THE SECRETARY (*Throwing me an official-looking guide*). That's full of 'em. Take your pick.

I. What about I.E.G.A.B.R.S.C. ?

*But the door of the Sanctum has closed behind the contract and THE SECRETARY.*

### THE STORES

No, one wouldn't think straight away of taking a feather duster to fight the Germans.

I am inspecting the stores, a railway shed that would not be unimposing as a railway station. To reach the feather dusters we had passed bedsteads, bed sheets, blankets, bolsters, mattresses, pillows, anything one can sleep or lie sleepless in, under, or on. Bales of bandages we had passed, too, packets on packets of gauze and lint and wool (wool-absorbent and wool-thermogene).

There were boots and body belts and bed jackets and bed socks, cardigans, chest protectors, helmets (Balaclava), and handkerchiefs. A thousand pairs of woollen gloves came in last week ; three hundred and twenty are already gone, with a hundred pairs of mittens and a hundred and fifty mufflers to reinforce them. Pants and



pyjamas and puttees and shirts for day and for night. I never have seen so many shirts piled so high. Gay looking shirts, too—none of your grey flannel for us.

Do you know what a frostbite boot is ?

We issue hundreds every week.

We have a couple of thousand doses of anti-tetanus serum in stock, if you'd like to try one. We can furnish you with chloroform, or foot powder, or Epsom salts. We have enough peroxide of hydrogen to bleach the hair of the British Army to a bright light gold. We serve out fifty or sixty gallons a week, though, probably, not for that precise purpose. But four hundred pounds or so of sweets a week the British Army, as it lies in hospital, does manage to consume.

Always remember we may do nothing for it—we may not send it a safety pin—till it is on its back wounded or ill. So says the Red Cross charter all the world over.

Do you wonder, then, why we serve out axes large and small, shovels, and hurricane lamps ? We may look after our own folk who are driving ambulances over roads which have ceased to be roads at all, or of which the heroic cars are making roads themselves, in weather, which—well, a new vocabulary has been found for weather as the Red Cross Ambulances face it, a racily descriptive one.

And so, through avenues of razors (ordinary and safety), sparklet siphons, teaspoons, sleeping bags, air cushions (square and circular), deck



chairs, and hypodermic syringes, we reach that bunch of feather dusters with which the Germans are to be fought. I sink on a packing case. The Director of Stores, who is a mining engineer by training and conviction, now a captain in the Army by commission, and a stores director apparently by sheer instinct, leans against a pillar facing me and makes fancy passes at some scrubbing brushes with his cane.

"Feather dusters," says he, "of course they want them. Most necessary weapon in a hospital."

"A woman's weapon," I suggest.

"Why, yes," and most expertly he jabs a scrubbing brush in its vital part; "your orderly would go dusting with a dirty sheet no doubt. When I find myself at a hospital asking the O.C. what he wants, he sends for the matron."

I. "Red Cross Hospital or Army?"

DIRECTOR OF STORES. Either. Except that the Army people don't ask. We offer.

I. Is that a rule?

D. OF S. Almost. We're their luxury store and their emergency store. The principle's a good one. After all, public money is public money. You can't have the O.C. of any military hospital indenting for chocolate creams and gramophones. You cannot expect the War Office to fit up an officers' rest station just behind the lines with linen tablecloths and a china dinner service. But we like to provide these things, they are some of the things the public expect us to provide when we think they ought to be provided.



I. For they probably cure men as quickly as medicine, and quicker. But no official mind in the world is delicately adjusted enough yet to consider that.

D. OF S. Besides, isn't there something in the sense that such things are gifts, with goodwill behind them?

I. Perhaps.

D. OF S. I wish you could see some of these places near the lines. Remember that all casualties aren't wounds or even definitely nameable illnesses. And the surgeons don't want them to be thought so. For that would mean sending a man down to the Base, through all the routine of sick or wounded leave, and perhaps losing him from his work for weeks. Take a case of nerves, shock or overstrain, a cough and cold, in time; give your patient ten days' rest and distraction—two week ends and a week—and you get him back pumped full of energy. Do you know what they say these men want—men that are on the edge, just falling over the edge, of a breakdown?

I. What?

D. OF S. Colour, cooking, music.

I. Colour?

D. OF S. Yes. So we send up bright-tinted distemper to wash over the walls of old barns with—the old stable, factory, whatever the make-shift shelter is they've been able to pick on for a Rest Station (that's what they're called). We send them picture posters to stick about, red blankets, books.

I. For music, gramophones!



D. OF S. Who invented the gramophone? I loathe it.

I. So do I.

D. OF S. But the men remember him in their prayers. Yes, and penny whistles we send, and mouth organs and concertinas. And cards and draughts and chess; games of the silliest sort besides. Come out of those mud-choked trenches, the slimy clay-brown dug-out where you've sat, finding silence and your muttered talk worse than the shell-shriek you must listen for—you'll be childishly glad of the spoonful of jam after the powder.

I. That's where the sweets go then, is it?

D. OF S. Yes indeed. You may find there a Tommy not wanting to smoke. I repeat—a *Tommy not wanting to smoke!*

I. How many cigarettes sent out though last week?

D. OF S. (*looking at a list he has*). Sixty-four thousand five hundred. But knock a man's nerves out of him while yet you give him no physical hurt for them to re-act to, and he'll beg you to let him lie in the sun and suck sweets like a baby.

I. Are you ever asked for things you can't supply?

D. OF S. I was asked for a harmonium once. And when I couldn't give it him he blushed and said: Had we got a roulette table?

I. Instead?

D. OF S. He didn't say Instead.

I. Oh, accurate Director of Stores. But it would improve the story.



D. OF S. No, that's a fact. And it's one I'm rather proud of, what's more. I like people to feel there isn't anything on earth that it's a fair chance the Red Cross stores may not have.

We leave the high piled shed and begin to stroll back through the mud. I hear how emergencies are met, seeing that the R.A.M.C. cannot in the nature of things get from England in two days what they could not foresee ten weeks ahead they would need. The Red Cross stores can give it them in ten hours—can and do. I hear of rushes, when hospitals built for two hundred men were sent five hundred in a day. Thereupon, beds, bedding, bandages, splints—the Red Cross store hasn't been caught napping yet. "No credit to us," says the Director. "Besides keeping our own hospitals working smoothly, this is what we are here for. The R.A.M.C. has the big job. We're here to back it up when it needs us."

"To hold its arm when its foot slips in the mud?" I said, as I caught his elbow.

For, in turning to impress on me his own abnegation and the R.A.M.C. virtues, he was as nearly as possible sitting on the cobbles. Oh, the muddy, slippery, cobbly cobbles of windy, rainy Boulogne!

I hear of hospitals furnished and decorated, of ambulance trains supplied, of a thousand newspapers delivered daily, and three thousand and more week by week.

I ask about the men employed.

"They're a fine lot," says the Director. "I wouldn't wish for better. They do the work of



double their number. They work any number of hours ; I have to stop them working sometimes. There isn't one who hasn't by now so specialised in his share of the job that I could ill—oh, very ill—afford to lose him, and he knows it. But, except for the book-keepers, they all came to it as you'd come to the study of Chinese. And though perhaps, all said and done, it don't need much more than common-sense and a clear head and a good temper——”

“Still you don't find those merely by looking—or merely by paying for them,” I interrupt.

“I think our chaps feel,” he said, “that what they do *matters*—I know they feel it.”

“And therefore,” I added, “it does.”

We talked a little then of this Red Cross spirit. How some men would join because the work meant more to them than fighting, but later would leave to train and fight. I hear of men refused by the Army doctor, for weak hearts, varicose veins, what not ; but never refused by the Red Cross, hearts and veins responding healthily enough to its call. Of men long past the fighting age, uncounted units in the potential army of England, fighting with brain and pen, patience and knowledge in the Red Cross ranks, re-learning the simplest school tasks and buckling to them, day in day out, as regular at their desks as the aspiring office boy grown junior clerk. The spirit of the Red Cross is the cosmos of such spirits.

“By Jove, though,” says the Director, in one of those sudden descents from things supreme to tintacks, which comes easily when you live in such



times and places, "you should have seen how we started. Organisation! I was shipped over with four tons of stores at a day's notice to Le Havre, to find the British Army and give it what extra medical comfort I could. The British Army wasn't at Le Havre and nobody at Le Havre seemed to know where it was. It was quite another army they were expecting then. Somebody suggested 'Nantes'; he'd heard that was the temporary base. So, carrying my four tons, two in each hand (really, it seemed like that), off I trekked to Nantes. Sure enough they were turning Nantes into a medical base as fast as they could, and my four tons melted like butter—and four more as soon as I could get them, and forty more after that. Later I found myself in Paris. Then in October eighteen months ago I was sent here. There was that devil of a push on up at the front and the hospitals were bulging. Men were in the beds and between the beds and lying out in the hall. My hat, but how the R.A.M.C. worked, surgeons and nurses and orderlies! And the little Red Cross toddled after them everywhere with its pockets full of things, from bedsteads and feeding cups to primus stoves and roller bandages. Its pockets got emptied pretty quickly too.

"I was to meet a ship load of things coming from England and to set up our permanent store. There was the ship right enough, howling out to be unloaded, but not a store was to be had for love or money, not for kicks or halfpence. And it rained! I think you've seen it rain in Boulogne."



I. I've seen it do nothing else for a week.

D. OF S. So I sent six men to search the town. I said they could tell what lies they liked, swear they wanted a shed to make a tennis court for the King of England or the Tsar, say it was for the General Staff's infant children to play war games in with their nurses. Meanwhile I dumped the things out of that ship on the quay into the mud—yes, into the mud. And then and there we parcelled them out and packed them off. We sent 'em round in vans.

“Call at the hospitals,” I said, “like a costermonger. And what can we do for you to-day? A hundred pairs of pyjamas! Certainly. We also have a very good line of kidney dishes, and our crutches are considered second to none. Thank you, there is no charge, and we always give away five hundred packets of cigarettes with each order.”

Then one of my store-searchers came back with the news that he had found a shed—yes, that one we've left. “They tell me, sir,” he said, “that it's the property of the railway company, but that a government department has control, so it will be necessary first of all to communicate by letter with Paris.”

“Will it?” I said. “Is the place empty?”

“It is empty, sir,” said he.

“Then come along,” said I, and I was wet through. We packed a cart as full as it would hold and along we went and down we dumped our stuff in the middle of the shed and I sat on it while the other fellows went back for more.



And the wet trickled off me and oozed out of me and made little puddles on the floor. But I chuckled because it was a truly gorgeous shed. I wondered though what would happen next. Had I been there ten minutes before a lot of Army Service Corps men arrived? No, not ten.

They said they'd had orders to take this place over. They asked me who I was, while I sized them up. I guessed their orders were the same as mine, to take their luck where they found it. So I stood up in the puddles I had made. I asked them who the devil they were. I was somewhat more colloquial than, in my report of the proceedings to the Red Cross Committee afterwards, I made myself appear. I asked them how they dared—how they *dared* come interfering with my shed, my own private freehold shed. They said they must report the matter to the Major. I said they could report it to the Commander-in-Chief and the Prime Minister and the Mayor of Chelmsford. Sorrowful and sulky, and even wetter than I was, they went away. Then the next cartload of our truck arrived and the Army Service Corps never raised its head in that locality again.

We were back at Headquarters.

"It must be lunch time," said the D. S.

"I hope it is," said I. "Next to walking through picture galleries, looking over Red Cross Stores is the hungriest occupation I know."

#### TRANSPORT

If you stand at a window that gives on the



quay and look up past the fish market and the long line of hotels, you notice that a long strip of the cobbled road—the smoothest strip—has been railed off with wooden rails. If you hit upon the right hour, though it may be any hour—four in the afternoon or four in the morning—you can watch the Red Cross Ambulances coming full tilt from the garage and bumping over the rough stones. Then they turn across the bridge and into the station yard. They are to evacuate a hospital train. Soon the ambulances return, driven slowly, wonderfully slowly ; not driven at all, it seems, but coaxed along as a man coaxes a billiard ball into a pocket. They take their way this time up the long, smooth, railed off strip. The aisle of pain, a woman called it, as she leant on the rail and watched them pass.

You would not think, would you, that a pair of muddy upturned boots might seem one of the saddest sights in the world. But—sticking just over the edge of a stretcher, four pairs of them blocking the ambulance opening, helpless, resigned—they can seem so, they can indeed.

Still at that wonderfully slow and even pace the cars pass out at the end of the aisle of pain, and on to the hospitals. Then, emptied, back they come again if need be. Sometimes there is need to come back many times. Once they came and went for a day and a night without stopping ; the drivers would halt ten minutes or so for food, or carry it with them and eat it as they drove.

It was the garage dog that showed me round the garage. He is a capable beast, and divides his



time very fairly between its superintendence and necessary conversation with the French dogs that pass by.

I turned out and up for the first order of the day : Inspection of Cars at 7 a.m. Down the long lines of them we walked, the dog and I. We had sent the Director of Transport and the Deputy Assistant Director of Transport—(now you see the advantage of naming a man by his initials)—who is titular superintendent of the garage, a few paces ahead.

“Frankly, this bores me,” said the dog, “but these human beings need what they call discipline. Now what I enjoy is a night ‘turn out.’ Two minutes we give them from the time the bell goes till the first car starts. And if they’re not down at the railway station before the orderlies have begun to unload the ambulance train, I tell you they hear of it from me afterwards. Oh, never mind lifting up the bonnets. Have you ever seen a car of ours stop for engine trouble yet? When you do, let me know. They’ll hear of it.”

But each bonnet is opened for all that and within the engine shines (the parts of it that are meant to shine) with pride. Some drivers will be finding outside ends and corners of brasswork to polish too. But that is mere dandyism. The best taste dictates that, without, an ambulance car should show all honourable signs of its service ; only within should it be as wrought gold.

“Sensible fellows,” said the dog. “Take care of your inside and your outside will take care of itself. That’s my motto too.”



They stand to attention, the sensible fellows, each by the bonnet of his car. Sometimes it is his car in every sense. Then he is an owner driver, has given his ambulance to the Red Cross, gives his time and work. He must give all his time, and do all the work that's to be done. Or he may be a voluntary driver, or a paid driver. But for one and all there are the same conditions of service, the same discipline. You clean your car, you parade, you obey orders without questioning them, you work all day in foul weather or fine, you go without your sleep at night if need be, and your promotion for excellent conduct is to be sent on to a Convoy where conditions are six times as hard.

The boast of the Transport Department is that it has never refused to send or carry anything, anywhere, at any notice, or at none.

It does not fall here to speak of the Ambulances at the Front, whose business it is to make cattle tracks feel like wood pavement to the wounded, and dodge the firing when they can. At least, there is sauce of excitement in that. But it needs some sheer devotion to duty to keep a man standing by in Boulogne for a year or more, till he can travel the road from the station to any hospital with his eyes shut, asleep ; till his only excitement is to be travelling it at times when in bed and asleep is where he'd normally be. Once the work went on practically without ceasing for twenty days. In one day they carried seven thousand cases and more.

"Come along," says the dog, "and see the workshop."



He is enthusiastic, his tail is straight as he bursts through the glass door and leaves me to follow. It may be that a certain faint flavour and promise of rats explains this. So he leaves me then with a mere Director of Transport to show me the machinery. It is a noble workshop.

All this was a gift in kind, and now you could make a motor-car here if you wanted to.

"But we don't want to," says the D.T.; "repairing keeps us busy. How many are we working at now?"

"More like eighty than seventy," answers the Superintendent.

"Well, out of seven hundred cars running, and considering the sort of work they do, that's not bad."

I think of pampered cars that I have met in peacefuller days and agree.

"You see," the D.T. goes on, "we have to run all our Red Cross staff about the country too. How many miles they covered last year I wouldn't care to say, and I'm sure they don't care to think. But look how scattered our stations are. Nieuport to Rouen, G.H.Q. to Paris, and other good stretches to take. And train-travelling in France to-day is an occupation for a philosopher.

"The cars must wear out altogether pretty quickly," I said.

SUPERINTENDENT. They do. But the early ambulance bodies wanted improving, anyhow. We've had to learn a lot.



I. How the deuce do you find new cars? They're not to be bought in England.

D. OF T. We order them from America. We beg, borrow, or steal 'em. Don't enquire too closely. We get 'em.

SUPERINTENDENT. A German shell smashed three the other day—new ones.

I. And the drivers?

SUPERINTENDENT. No, by the mercy of heaven. Though three drivers would have been easier to replace.

D. OF T. Ah! but there's the German chassis we found. Come and see it.

So we set off to view the trophy. The Superintendent (with human hardihood) whistles to the dog, who, finding the place less ratful than he had hoped, condescends again to lead the way.

D. OF T. Yes, and a pretty good chassis too. Two of our men brought it in and made a present of it to the Red Cross.

I read the little brass plate which commemorates the capture.<sup>1</sup> We are in the backyard. I look up. Of all things in the world, there is before my amazed eyes a completed and elaborate statue of Coquelin. How is it derelict here? No one knows. No one indeed seems to have noticed it. The dog sniffs round the Muse of Comedy that reclines undulantly on the base, and expresses his opinion of her.

#### THE V.A.D.'s

What is a V.A.D.?

<sup>1</sup> This (let me be particular) is fiction. But the capture of the chassis is fact.



It shows the grossest ignorance to ask such a question, and I answer it merely for the pleasure of sounding their praises.

I would sound them in verse if I could—not in blank verse either; but in rhymed decasyllabics, with lyrics singing out at frequent intervals.

To begin with, I will boldly make this statement. The English nation has even now not recognised the full use that could be made of women in this war. You cannot expect two or three million women, however anxious, able, and ready they are to be of use, to organise themselves. Nor can you get them organised in a month or two. But if, even as late as that of August third, 1914, a General Staff of Women had been created, with power and means to put their sisters into training, what a disciplined and wonderful army of them in this January of 1916 there would be.

That was the pull of these Voluntary Aid Detachments which the Red Cross had gathered. They were a standing force in time of peace, and so were found in time of war expert, capable, ready for use.

What are their qualifications for foreign service?

First-aid training, Home-nursing training, Cooking certificates, Domestic Science certificates. Beyond these there must be good recommendation by their divisional commandants. Beyond that, the strictest selection; for a hundred apply and but ten can be taken. But for all this it



wasn't till October 16, 1914, that the War Office found it had any use for them. Even then only eighteen members were called up, three trained nurses added, and the party dispatched to Boulogne.

They first established themselves at a railway station in some trucks and disused carriages. They turned these into a dispensary, a kitchen, a store; into quarters where sick men, cases delayed on the way home, could shelter and sleep at night. They began to look after sick and wounded men held up at Boulogne on their way across the Channel. In the first twenty-four hours, though they had only three little alcohol stoves to cook with, they fed a thousand. Four days later they fed at a stretch two thousand three hundred and re-dressed two hundred wounds. For the dressing they needed some extra trained help. It is meticulously recorded in their report.

After this, they took over two more railway trucks, were given a motor ambulance and some boy orderlies, and allowed to draw Army stores. Promptly they also set to work to make splints and bandages for the hospitals and sandbags for the trenches in their spare time: so says the report. *Their spare time!*

But V.A.D. work at the seat of war had definitely begun. And by now in these Rest Stations, Detention Stations (the small hospitals that can keep cases for a few days), in Rest Clubs for Nurses, at the Red Cross Headquarters, and in Military Hospitals generally there are above five hundred of them, slaving their fiercest.



The rest station at Boulogne was promoted to worthier quarters very soon. These are but a corner stolen from the railway building, it is true, but once you are snugly in that corner you'd never suspect that ; for it is the neatest, cheeriest corner in the town. It has been made so upon a very definite principle which deserves record. The V.A.D.'s must trouble no one else to do what by hook or by crook they can do themselves. They must absorb no energies and spend no money which might be put into what the fighting men call necessary work. On that condition only do they claim a right to their place in the great war machine. Think of the thousands of other women who would work on these terms, and of the fighting energies they could have released by now.

In the rest stations, for instance—in this and in the others modelled on it—every stick of furniture, every chair, table, cupboard, and bench, has been made on the premises. The women themselves do all the incidental work ; they must scrub the floors as well as pour out tea. They are private soldiers, proud to be ; by choice, without pay.

V.A.D.'s are in charge of the big headquarters building. Here they clean and cook and wait, and 5.30 a.m. is their rising hour of a winter's morning. I have never seen women happier. I have never seen work better done.

They must be finally and definitely competent at their jobs, they must not "show off," they must not grumble. So their commanding officer



tells me. She will sternly pack a delinquent back to England and can take her pick of the crowding applicants to fill the place.

I have never quite come to the end of the jobs they do, odd jobs, "unnecessary" jobs, but jobs that make the war machine run more sweetly than it would. The fact that there is a V.A.D. hotel at Le Touquet where a wounded man's relatives, brought over to help recover him, often in effect to see the last of him, can stay in peace for their few days may not seem to bring us many steps nearer Berlin. But at least, it lets us feel that we do not deserve to have the "efficient" Prussian nearer London. That a card index was made of the 18,000 names and records of men passed through the Indian hospital does not stop the Germans planning to conquer India. But it does directly and definitely make India just a little more difficult to conquer.

We see how lives are lost, we do not look to see by what little things lives are saved. The sum of a service is its test. The Powers that Be ask of the V.A.D.'s only the little thing, sometimes the seemingly inglorious thing. Obediently and capably they do it and the sum adds up well.

Serving soup at a station will never be mentioned in despatches. I am proud to mention it in this despatch. Distributing magazines to hospitals, correcting misdirected letters, running canteens in convalescent camps, waiting at table, orderly work in hospital——!

"It doesn't sound much I daresay," says the Commandant.



But she knows the quality of it, she better than any ; and there is a pride in her voice that belies her words. I catch her up on this point though.

I. Are you satisfied now with the use that's being made of your women ?

THE COMMANDANT. Satisfied !

I. Half satisfied ?

THE COMMANDANT. Not half, not a quarter. Give me the full strength of the V.A.D.'s out here and we could release for the fighting line every second man you meet walking the streets at the base.

I. They won't let you near the front will they ?

THE COMMANDANT. No.

I. Why not ?

THE COMMANDANT. Don't ask me.

I. Well, I have my own test-rule. Keep women out of nothing in war or peace that they're willing to train hard to go into. I don't know what is the real risk of stray shells. But then I can't see that it's much worse for women to be killed than men.

THE COMMANDANT. Just the contrary. As things are now we're the easier spared.

I. I won't say that either. Still, let's be practical. There are things, as one gets near the firing line, which you couldn't ask women to do—no, nothing you shouldn't, only that the qualities needed there are sheer brute strength and endurance. But how much there is, though, that you could set them to. Not merely hospital work but housekeeping work, clerking (you should hear the typewriters clicking at G.H.Q. !), detail organisation of various sorts—



THE COMMANDANT. Not in a hundred years of war ! The curse of the skirt, you don't appreciate it. How should you ?

I. But even that can be—shall we say—looped up ? No, I'm not idealising. I don't idealise about war, believe me. I'm only trying to visualise the jobs that men themselves must own you can do better than they, jobs they'd be thankful to be rid of too. Frankly, I fear it's prejudice keeps you where you are, some lack of imagination.

THE COMMANDANT. But don't you say I grumbled. Whatever else, don't say that.

I. I won't. I'll say you were most humbly grateful—you and your five hundred—for the chance to prove this tithe of your worth. Men made this war ; they must unmake it. Meanwhile, if women can but mitigate it a little——

THE COMMANDANT. That's something.

### FINANCE

Deep into the mysteries of the Finance Department I will not pry. There it sits turning its day-books and ledgers and spreading its balance sheets. In every other office there are posted notices and reminders of what it will and will not have you do. Its inky finger is in everybody's pie, the tangy taste remaining to remind us that money is not generously given to be got rid of without due and sometimes overdue cause. The Finance Department is the Red Cross organ of digestion ; while it works well you never know it's there, if it worked badly, nothing else would



work well. I think it is roughly true that a man is more careful of other people's money than of his own, always unless it be—must one say so?—government money. The Red Cross must collect thousands and it must spend thousands. It cannot think in pennies, either of getting or giving. It must be statesmanlike in finance. If it were not, its great organisation could not hold together for a month. And it holds.

### ORDERLIES

Orderlies come and go. The hall at Headquarters is the muddiest evidence of their coming and going. When the war began they were of all sorts, but bunch by bunch the enlistable men enlisted and no more of that sort came. Therefore, first of all, the supply of them is a problem ; for their work must be done and done well. Boys under age we ask for now ; men over age, men who from one cause or another have no soldiering in them.

Convoy work they have done, hospital work they do, ambulance trains are manned by them, clerking, portering, this niche and that has to be filled. You must keep the standard high, for you must have no more than you actually need. It is to be noticed how the standard does lift over here even in the doing of commonplace things ; how little slacking there is even in slack times. This is implicit in the atmosphere of war, you would say, in that feeling of endeavour, ultimately of desperate endeavour, which must underlie everything. But that's not a constant feeling by any



means. Month passes after month of the same round, the same dull round. What is that comforting hackneyed line? "They also serve who only stand and wait." Well, to wait patiently is hard enough. To wait alertly, keenly, to keep the standard of waiting high, that's an achievement.

Saying it quite simply, there is something in the spirit of the Red Cross work which seems to help its humblest workers so to achieve. No sentimental feeling for the wounded and suffering would do it; nor can you keep that very easily, when you sit screwed to an office desk all day. No flag-flying patriotism helps you: we do not fly flags over here. But find a good cause, one that a man can believe in, and be sure the spirit of human endeavour will not fail.



## CHAPTER III

### A FEW HOSPITALS

RED Cross hospitals are planted pretty thickly in this corner of France. In huts, in tents, in barges, in schools, hotels, and casinos you can find them. In Rouen, the officers' hospital has been set up in a seminary for priests ; each ward there has its separate patron saint ; and for nerve cases and for patients who prefer both their own room and their own company, the cells come in useful. The rightful inhabitants are away fighting. From time to time, the matron says, a woman in black will come to undo her dead son's locker and take his things away.

At Le Touquet, what a hospital the Casino makes ! The gaming tables, dust-sheeted, hide their heads in far corners ; drugs are dispensed from the bar and a castor oil cocktail can be served you at any moment ; while in the star dressing-room of the little theatre, where many a time has Mlle. Flirt de Paris braced up her stockings and run up her scales, sits the pathologist with his microscope doing his "bloods." We should not be lucky enough to find in England, I think, such roomy, airy, cheery public buildings as are these casinos scattered over Normandy, hospitals now



every one. So do we reap the reward of French social spirit.

And at Le Touquet, either from the generous donor's sheer good taste, or from some unconscious prevision he may have had of this strange use for it, the Casino is liveable-in, sleepable-in, even (if sad need be) dieable-in, by men whose wearied senses might resent being beamed on by pink nymphs or bounced at by plump cupids. It is restfully vacant of such intoxicants. All that it is, with its open court and broad veranda, its lofty rooms with their high windows and polished floors, suits well with the white beds and tables, and the white curtains round them by which a bed is made the centre of a little arrased room, its owner withdrawn to wished-for loneliness and peace. For cheerier souls with chirpier bodies the veranda is the thing. Beds are wheeled out there and the patients can watch the coming and going ; for people pass and repass, and gossip flies. An army might survive the failure of rations, but if gossip failed it would crumble. So they lie, making light of their ills, solaced by many cigarettes, genially cursing the Germans and the General Staff.

In the hall, as I pass out, there is a screen, a decoration of delicate painted columns of blue and green and yellow and pink ; it would make a perfect dado. There is no crowd round it, but I can hardly tear myself away. For, apart from its beauty, it is indeed that most fascinating of all things, a chart :

Admitted to the hospital (week by week) :—



Sent to England :—

Sent back to duty :—

Died :—

Would one believe it? They have had —— men through that hospital in —— months,<sup>1</sup> carried back from fighting with all the baseness of war's brutality upon their bodies. Of all that number, less than two in a hundred have died. Science and kindness, those twin opposites, can be proud of their job.

Said the merchants of Liverpool : We will send you the best Hut Hospital that can be built. It shall be built, what's more, to take to pieces in forty-eight hours and pack up in sections to follow the army. So they sent it and there it stands at Etaples, justifying to the full as much of its claim as the fortune of war will allow. Say the present incumbents to impertinent questioners: "Pack up in forty-eight hours? It can't be done. This would not be the hospital it is if it could be." But I like to think the Liverpool merchants right and that I shall yet see that hospital marching gaily to Berlin.

What do I best remember about it?

The X-ray room. Röntgen was a German, but bless him for all that. What must it not mean to a surgeon to do his work with that transparent map of his subject's body before him, with every bullet and splinter charted clearly there?

I remember the Commandant's garden. I found flowers from England prospering as bravely as may be in their sandy, sunny corner with what

<sup>1</sup> Publication of figures not permitted.



encouragement there's time to give them. But flowers from England they are, and if you'd know home sickness tread the round of work at a base hospital for a year. Patching and passing on (so you may phrase the job—a part of the everlasting anti-climax of war) brings a sense that you are cut off from the world's natural life and are only a hidden and half-forgotten part of some monstrous machine that is built to destroy and be destroyed, you, who daily turn your little crank, half forgetting why and how.

I remember the matron's plum cake. I'm sure no such cake was ever army rations ; but this was Sunday and we were the Liverpool merchants' guests. I remember an armless lad of eighteen, upright in his bed, disputing gaily whether if you had your choice you'd sooner lose a leg or an eye ; and he swayed his stump to emphasise his views.

I hardly know for what the expert eye searches in a hospital. Their varied and inappropriate clothings of architecture apart, those that I have seen are much alike in their equipments and efficiencies ; in what they do and the way they do it. I have to feel for quite another, an amateur and personal test of their excellence. I only ask myself all the time : Should I choose to be ill in this house, in this ward, under this nurse or surgeon ? A most deficient test I'm sure. For, given the approved treatment, the right number of doses of the right drug, why shouldn't you be cured as quickly under one hand as another ?

Well, medicine is not merely a science, nor is



nursing a mere discipline, however much pure science and good discipline may be needed for their creation and support. Their technique once mastered, they are arts, dependent as much on what the practisers of them are as on what they do. You cannot make such things fool-proof, though that is what science and discipline too often stand for doing. A patient will not get well because he ought to get well, nor a hospital be a good hospital because it has everything money can buy. This is only the patient's, the amateur's point of view, but, since the will to be cured is half the battle, it is a point of view that counts. Demand competence by all means. Put enthusiasm to the hardest test you can. If you cannot safely test it more hardly than any mechanical training man has devised, it is not what it pretends to be. But, competence granted, I plead for the things that will make the dry bones of competence live.

I know, I know how to the official mind fussing and pampering and petting are no good. I agree. And we have the defects of our qualities, we amateurs, as you, sir (I stand to attention), have yours. But fussing and pampering are no ideals of ours. As to petting, all sorts of troubles will give way under it, if it's well and scientifically done.

I have very little Latin, but if I saw inscribed on the front door, *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* I think I should know what it meant, and I suggest it as a motto for the Nurses' Rest Home that is settled in the comfortablest house possible, in as



sleepy pinewoods as you can wish to see, not many miles from Boulogne.

In theory, of course, a nurse is never tired and never ill any more than a doctor is. In practice, even nurses are human. In practice, too, the healthier the nurse, then, *ceteris paribus* (the Latin habit grows), the quicker the patient will mend. Nurses are indeed wonderfully immune from ailment. They get to learn, I suppose, the avoidable folly of it. But from fatigue they are not immune, and nursing in this war, moreover, is not a "beef-tea again at six, smooth my pillow, and read me to sleep" business by any means. Surgical cases, nearly all, they are, of course. This is the heaviest sort of nursing labour to tackle, anyway, and in times of rush only the heaviest of these cases can be kept in the various hospitals from which this rest home is the nurse's refuge. A day's or week's refuge it is for those ready bedside labourers that a watchful matron sees a little too ready, a little too carefully steadying themselves against the last half hour of duty for her to be quite happily sure that they may not make to her searching question that dangerous reply: "No, I am perfectly all right, matron, indeed; not in the least too tired."

Then she sends them for a day or two to this house among the pines.

Its hostess welcomes her guests, shows them round, shows them their rooms. The place has no rules that I could discover, though I have no doubt a prejudice exists in favour of punctuality



for dinner. Breakfast? Breakfast in bed. Oh, the witty mind that thought of that! Luxury of luxuries to the hospital nurse, to be in bed without being ill and to be waited on. And she gets up when she likes, just whenever she likes. What does she do all day? Nothing, absolutely nothing but lounge and laze, read if she will, play a game if she will, talk a little, stroll a little, sit around. There is a steep, sandy path from the garden (yes, indeed, the place has a garden) to a summer-house that commands a magnificent view of nothing in particular. The half-rested ones climb slowly up and chat there. What is more restful than to sit for an hour or two, gazing at nothing in particular and talking of the same! As I walked down some almost fully rested ones were playing like children on the sandy slope. I thought of the extra quality of smile, the added touch of bracing cheer which would meet wounded Tommy in his hospital tomorrow, and I waved a grateful good-bye for him to the pretty house in the wood.

It is plain, I hope, by this time that I am standing hard for what the Red Cross Society means by a military hospital. I set up no impertinent comparison between the work I have seen and other fine regulation work around. I am not fitted to do so, nor is anything to be gained nor much to be learnt that way. For the claim of the Red Cross only is that in this matter of the sick and wounded the spirit they work in is the right one. Admit that claim, we say; let that spirit have the freest play you can; and without doubt it will leaven the lump. For there is a con-



stant danger, no one but will own it, in this tendency to lumpishness in official bodies.

Soldier patients are queer customers. In a civil hospital you may be pretty sure that with most of your inmates the disease you are treating them for is but the one that has finally chosen them out of the many that have hardly passed them by. They are poor things ; their bodies now asking dumbly to be protected from all the other evils in the name of this one. But with these soldier men, nine times out of ten it is bodies braced to the robustest health, fenced by nerves strung to the highest pitch, that have been brought into sudden and violent disagreement with bits of German steel. If the steel has not had the best of it at once, the fight goes on. Give the man half a hospital chance and the odds (thank goodness) are all on his side. For the conquering human will is being pitted against the inert thing, now only helplessly evil. They fight on, these men, lying on their backs, grinning or groaning at their pain. And the surgeon, half the time, is but another officer showing them how to fight ; the nurses are but another sort of A.S.C. bringing up supplies. Some of the finest fighting of this war has been done as much in the hospitals as on the field.

I remember in the little detention hospital at Gourlay they showed me a dead man's chart, a curiosity. The temperature had run up right off the top of the paper. "But once," the Sister said, "I really thought we should have saved him, he fought so hard."



I asked further about him. He had been a motor-driver ; caught a chill, had stayed out too long in the wet and the cold. Uræmia was written on the chart. I suppose one might brutally have added : "Damned carelessness, too." But one stopped to think that, far from that mysterious spot, the front, and from the thrilling sound of guns, he died of sticking to his job—died fighting.

I remember well that hospital at Gourlay, and another like it not far off. They were typical Red Cross affairs. Set up in little houses in these little towns, they have but nine or ten beds each. They serve the camps around, keep their patients till the R.A.M.C. surgeon can diagnose and be satisfied, send this man for treatment here, that man there, the other back to duty in a week. They are "nip-it-in-the-bud" establishments, with a V.A.D. commandant in charge, a nursing sister heading the ward, a probationer, and a cook. They ask nothing more than their rations and an ambulance to fetch and carry, these outposts of Red Cross work.

As has been said elsewhere, if the V.A.D.'s have a thing to be done, they do it themselves. If they want a cupboard they make it, if a room is to be papered they paper it, if they need a silk purse and can find but a sow's ear, a silk purse it has to learn to be. You should see the kitchen at Gourlay. Now, I know something about kitchens, for I've worked in one. I know that, if it isn't larger than a society woman's wardrobe, if it contains no sink and not



much of a range, if its store cupboards are near the ceiling and its larder is somewhere else, if its sole water supply is the distant village pump, it is not only a matter of hard work and willingness to cook there for fifteen people, while you keep the place as specklessly clean and scrupulously tidy as I saw it, it is a matter of fine training and great moral discipline as well.

You may say that all this is waste of energy and patience, that it would be better to spend money building a decent kitchen and laying on a water supply. Money you could certainly get. But men's labour in France at this moment to build kitchens? I ask you!

Besides, there is value during this time of war in women doing such things and in such a way. This is their particular fighting and they are fighting their own particular foe. We talk wisely at home of world problems, but the outward sign of our solution of them, as seen by the simple souls we train to march and to shoot, is the dirty devastation of fair country and the mutilation of fine men. So are we teaching them to contribute to advancing civilisation. Is it not a wise protest for women, delicately framed, and with subtler spirits, to be found taking their places silently, sympathetically, in the humblest ranks, for a new campaign in that long, wearing fight against the barbarism by which the common things of life are so crudely thought about and sluttishly done? If you tell me that it means nothing, even to the coarsest grained man, to come from the filth of his fighting into a



house which is not only sweet and clean, but one in which, besides, fine thoughts are daily building him a home—well, I can only say you don't know what human beings are like, that's all.

Of course, if he is an ex-coalheaver whose furthest range of enjoyment has so far been football and a cinema, don't expect him to write a sonnet to the Sister when he leaves. I sat in a third-class carriage at Victoria with a young soldier, whose father was seeing, in one sense and perhaps in the other, the last of him. The older man was unashamedly crying.

"Now, write to your mother, my lad," he said, as the sobs choked him, "and get a whack at the bloody Kaiser if you can."

But he had the true vision, had that ridiculously sobbing parent. And I hope he will always feel that the few shots fired at the mocking sandbags, and later the life perhaps blindly and obediently thrown away were the whack he wanted; for indeed they were.

Well, the doing of common things in that little hospital at Gourlay, by the better way instead of the worse, is equally a whack at a barbarism more thinly spread than the German sort may be, more widely spread though, and to be far longer in the final breaking down.

As I climbed up its polished stairs and peeped into its rooms, the lines kept quoting themselves to me:

Who sweeps a room as to God's laws  
Makes that and the action fine.

It was a jolly, happy, helpful place. If ever I'm



to be wrecked on a desert island, wreck me with a select company of V.A.D.'s.

The effect on the room and the action one owns to ; the poet might well have had something to say of the effect on the sweeper, too. Another conversation I overheard—on a Channel boat this time, just when the short passage began to seem the longest. Two officers behind me, having exhausted fresh gossip of the war, were searching for other subjects :

“D’you know Molly’s over here ?”

“No. What’s she doin’ ?”

“She’s in a hospital at Wimereux.”

“Nursin’ ?”

“Oh, lord ! nothin’ so swagger. She’s in the kitchen ; helps with the cookin’ and the washin’ up.”

“Pretty borin’, that !”

“Has to stick to it, too. Ten hours a day and no gettin’ off for tea parties. Been at it seven months. I think it’s done Molly a lot of good.”

Later in the week I’m sure I met Molly. Certainly the sticking to it was doing her good. Molly is making several very interesting discoveries. For instance, that character comes into scrubbing as much as into golf, that dirty work is never nice to do, that between kitchen uses and parlour tastes there is no gulf fixed. Molly will say she knew it all before. Yes, but we know so much and care so little. This new burned-in knowledge will bring her irresistibly to grasp a small corner of that great paradox on which the



whole world's progress must be built :—We become worthy of our work only by making it worthy of us. If Molly continues to stick to it, she will go back a different woman from the one she came, and, wanting a different world to go back to, will begin to see that she gets it.

Under the thumb of the Red Cross Society are all the voluntary hospitals for the English forces in France. It guarantees to the powers that be that their work is sound and its standard high. It minds their P's and Q's for them, and sometimes much more of their alphabet as well. It has taken between a stern finger and thumb the dainty ladies (hush ! but there were a few) who did so want to do *something* for the dear soldiers, and has told and shown them how to do it, and how to do it thoroughly, or else how to go. And those that were too dainty have long gone.

In a ward of a wonderfully cared for hospital at Wimereux I found three bundles of bed-clothes from which tousled heads stuck out. One head, rolling round, showed me a boy's flushed face, while the eyes, like a doubtful puppy's, blinked at me sleepily.

"And what's the matter with you?" I asked.

"There ain't nothin' at all the matter with me, sir," said the boy (he was north country), "'cept that I'm regular doon oop."

"How long have you been out here?"

"Siven months. Up in the trenches six."

"Well, go to sleep now," I said. So, obediently, the head rolled back.



I looked at the chart above his bed. He had had to own to sixteen. Well, thought I, petting and pampering or not, this is the sort of place a kindly regimental surgeon wanted to send you to.

I went further to another hospital, as carefully thought of, as well cared for. The man (a busy man in other times), who had given a year's work to it, showed it me all, as I thought, and I thanked him and was going.

"But you haven't seen our office," he said. "Book-keeping's no joke in a military hospital. From the time a man comes till the time I lose sight of him, I've sixty-four forms to fill up about that case.<sup>1</sup> Well, in sixty seconds I'll pick out any history you like, complete; tell you when he came and how he did, and when he went and where he went, and, if he died, why he died and what he left behind."

"Have you had many die?" I asked.

"One decimal thirty-seven," said he. "That's out of three thousand odd, and two poor chaps hardly lived to get through the front hall."

"Well," I thought to myself as I bowled back to Boulogne, "if all this doesn't satisfy both the British public and the Official mind besides, what will?"

<sup>1</sup> Having written that, I feel that it simply could *not* have been sixty-four; but, as Mr. Justice Stareleigh said, "It's in my notes."



## CHAPTER IV

### WOUNDED AND MISSING <sup>1</sup>

IN one office in London and half a dozen others in France there is being built up a unique history of the war. How many sorts of stories of fighting have we not had? From Cæsar's Commentaries and Wellington's Despatches through Marbot's Memoirs and Major Gahagan to the Eyewitness at the Front—that expert witness with an official eye. But this, so far, is a soldier's war, a war of platoons, we are told, so that in one sense its truest history will be the stories that privates and corporals and sergeants tell of the things they did and the things they saw. That is the history which is being written in the Red Cross offices which search for the fate of the Wounded and Missing.

It has come about in this way. When a man enlists, leaves his home, is sent abroad, he is swallowed into a shifting gulf of humanity, the Army on Field Service. From the time he enlisted he ceased, for official purposes, to be a man, has become a numbered unit among millions

<sup>1</sup> The names of men and places and titles of regiments mentioned in this chapter have, of course, been falsified.



of others ; and in war time there are no purposes but official ones. He is shifted, added or subtracted, carried over or lost count of with all the other ticketed units which make up the sum which the Commander in Chief sits trying to do. He may write home, but he may not say where he is, even if he knows ; nor may he say what he is doing, even if he can quite make out. He never was very apt at letter writing, was Private Smith, and after a time perhaps he wearies of saying that he hopes they're quite well as this leaves him at present, and being able to say no more. So he writes less, or ceases to write at all. Meanwhile his family read of battles fought and trenches taken, and have visions of Private Smith doing such deeds of valour single handed with his bayonet as must make the Kaiser tremble upon his blood-stained throne. More furtively, and feeling rather sick inside, they follow down the long close printed lists of killed and wounded that each Sunday with its Sunday paper brings. One day, after months of silence they find this :—

*Missing*

*Mudshire Regt. : 1st Bn., Smith, 10568, A. S.  
Pte.*

And that is all.<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes, of course, it is not all. A good officer knows his men. You'll find him many

<sup>1</sup> The relatives ought to and often do receive the information direct from the Record Office, but with one thing and another going wrong it is in the paper first as likely as not.



a time after an action sitting in his billet, a dead man's little property piled before him, the leather case with its letters and cuttings and picture cards, the pipe and pouch, the ring he'd bought made from the aluminium of a shell, the dozen other foolish bits of rubbish he had gathered, childlike, to take home. And Captain Jenkins or Lieutenant Vere de Vere will sit writing a letter to be sent home with them, puzzling to find some personal thing to say, some way to tell them how the fellow died, doing his best, doing perhaps the thing that in mere discipline he need not have done, if the telling of it may lift a little the burden of the news.

But often, oftener than usual, alas, this cannot be. The good officer has gone, too, and at that moment the Colonel is sitting to *his* hardest job, the kindly letter to Mrs. Jenkins or to Lady Vere de Vere.

Think what they mean, these night attacks. The clambering out of the trench, the lumbering dash across the hundred yards or so of ground, smashed by shell fire, hundreds of shells now smashing it again and smashing, too, the men that cross it. By Germans and English this ground will be crossed two and three times to-night, and fewer men will make the journey each time. In the morning things may be but as they were as far as the trenches go; for the men, it needs not the roughest counting to make a different tale. They look across the ground they fought for. In and out of the shell craters there are bodies; there are things, too, bits of things



of human shape ; there are wounded men, you can see them move. But the wounded must stay there till nightfall at least, though they may be dead by then. After dusk the relief comes and the chances of salvage are asked and noted. Leaving the new-comers to this job, the men who have fought—what remains of them—march away.

Back at billets comes the roll-call.

Smith, 10568, H. S. Pte. does not answer. Where is he ?

“ Well, sir, he was in the front trench when the scrap started, and it’s my opinion that he was standing between Jephson and Linacre.”

“ Where’s Jephson ? ”

“ Jephson was done in by a bullet when the first flare went up. He never got more than twenty yards. They brought him in about four o’clock and buried him before we left.”

“ Where’s Linacre ? ”

It is thought that Linacre was shot in the stomach and the face—badly. Stretcher bearers report carrying back a man they think might have been Linacre about half past three.

Did anyone see Smith after the first charge ?

Someone thinks he saw Smith in the last traverse on the left just before they started the second time. Someone else notes that a shell certainly came in that direction when they made the second rush. It knocked out five men and there was nothing left at all of three of them.

Could he have been left in that second German trench ?

Well, yes, he could. If he was hit in the leg,



or anything like that. There was five or six of them didn't seem to know we were retiring and then two made a rush back and got shot, and what happened beside nobody knows.

Were they taking prisoners?

Well, with an officer anywhere about they were.

"Smith, 10568, A.S. Pte. Missing. Further enquiries if possible."

There comes next a letter of appeal from Smith's wife or parents to this Red Cross Enquiry Department. The official list, with all that the War Office has learnt of the fate of Smith, will just have reached it, too. The enquiry starts; word goes to the branch offices; the officials instruct the searchers. Each searcher has his allotted hospital and pays his daily visit.

This man is not well enough to talk. This man is well enough; and being well enough, would like to. What regiment? what company? Does he know any of these names. Smith? Yes, he knew Smith, a little dark chap with a yellow patch in his eye. Killed last February at Ypres. Ah, but this Smith was not missing till May. Well, there was a Smith in B Company killed in February, a little dark chap with a yellow patch in his eye. Does he remember his number? No, he's afraid he doesn't; it might have begun with an 8—but it might not. But he knows he was killed, for he helped to bury him. Not much use this, but the searcher makes a careful note, for stranger things happen than that a man reported missing in May should be found to have been buried in February.



There was Private Shapter, of a Border regiment officially reported missing in March. But four comrades rounded up in one ward three months later have four quite separate tales to tell :

*Tale one.*—Knows Shapter quite well ; says the strain of war has been too much for him, and that he has disappeared.

*Tale two.*—Knows Shapter quite well ; has a scar on the side of his face ; is convinced he never came out at all ; was left behind as medically unfit.

*Tale three.*—Knows Shapter quite well ; he has a scar on his cheek and a blue mark over his nose. He has been with the battalion all the time ; no casualty reported of him up to three weeks ago.

*Tale four.*—Perfectly certain that Shapter was captured with nearly the whole of No. 8 platoon the first time the battalion was in action.

The searcher adds that the men were apparently intelligent and undoubtedly speaking in good faith. The work therefore has its complications.

Day by day the thirty or forty searchers go through their lists and their hospitals. For weeks and months an enquiry may hardly bear fruit, but any report worth making is sent round to each office, docketed, collated, and little by little the contradictions are sifted down and good evidence built up. The stark facts will appear quite suddenly sometimes. A wounded serjeant will be found who had, as in duty bound, his eye on Private Smith in that little scrap in May. Better still, one finds a Serjeant-Major, perhaps the



finest thing the British Army can produce. He saw Smith killed, he hasn't a doubt of it. Remembers him well, a tall chap with a habit of whistling shrill through his teeth when he took aim ; tried to cure him of it. It was a shell got Smith by the corner of Hellfire wood the third time they advanced. When the shell had finished with him there wasn't much left of Smith. It had a bit to spare all the same for the Serjeant-Major that has had him on his back these three weeks, not able to think of or remember anything much, but now he remembers this perfectly. "Yes, sir, a very fair soldier, never groused or shirked. I'd be glad if you'd say that to his wife from me and say that I'm sorry."

So the War Office hears, and Mrs. Smith hears, and the separation allowance, on which she was so rich and perhaps so thriftless, changes to a meagre pension on which she must learn to be very thrifty indeed. She sheds her tears and is a little extravagant over crêpe, and there's an easy sum in subtraction to be done from the Army list.

Many letters of thanks reach the Office ; one turns them over with a twitching lip. Anything is better to these women than uncertainty ; they thank you always to have been relieved of that.

"I wish to thank you very much for all the trouble you have gone to. For, although the news is hard, it is far better than Wounded and Missing, as that is a terrible suspense



and worry. I am very grateful to you for being able to get news of his death for me."

For the wives and mothers of private soldiers neither understand nor rejoice in curt official forms and phrases. To them it is a strange and monstrous thing that when Lord Kitchener (a fine gentleman, no doubt) has called up their Alfred and sent him to be killed, his War Office should have no more bowels of compassion than to send them printed bits of paper like this. Write to Lord Kitchener and his War Office and what happens? Only more bits of printed paper.

"Do all you possibly can for me. It is nearly nine months now and the suspense is almost killing me and they have cancelled my pay at the War Office a month ago and I do not know what for. I think they must have heard something."

There is little enough to be heard, but it makes such a difference to her, the friendly letter which tells her all that is known; that he "did his bit," that his comrades spoke well of him; how he was wounded and carried to an ambulance, how the ambulance was shelled and destroyed. It soothes her ruffled soul a little to be made to think that the Red Cross cares, to have it hinted that even Lord Kitchener and his War Office, were they not busy with many things, would find time to regret the loss of this worthy three millionth part of that Army of England's salvation which they strove so attractively to acquire.



And it is not fair (let us put it as the women do) that any time and trouble should be spared which will ease for them the long waiting. What else can one say to this ?

“Thank you very much for your kindness of the information of my dear son. Trusting you will soon find his whereabouts and all well he as been my only support since I have had no husband.”

What would one do but search and docket and report and count the days well spent that sent her even half an answer to that question which seems more than half a prayer ?

They must write the finest letters possible, they often feel, to such an almost almighty being as is this Red Cross and Order of St. John, with its offices where all the clubs are, and its Queens and Dukes and Duchesses that sit there all day and write letters themselves, and make socks and bandages and all. We expect the letters to be funny ; sometimes, indeed, we almost like them to be. For so little is left of that simple looking towards the wise and noble as parental patterns for life's great occasions, that it flatters us ; we like them the more for their childishness, very humanly. One may remember, too, that at most other times the parent is as comic to the child.

“I am very thankful for your inflammation and his wife is also very thankful to hear something although it is not very pleasant news but still we have waited eight



long months and have only got to know through your very kindness as to enquire about him. Perhaps you will be pleased to hear that his wife has wrote to your informant. I am very grateful to you as you have been so kind as to help us in our great trouble hoping God will bless you in all your work as you have tried to help others as you have helped."

Can you quite succeed in smiling at it? Good God, what does not this country of England owe to these women that are so robbed!

When the war ends it should be a truly wonderful history that these searchers for wounded and missing will have written in the rough. From the time the work started, no engagement is missed, for the tiniest will have its losses, certain and doubtful too. And so every battle can be found described, not from its planning thirty miles away, not from the result of it as weeks later the journalists may tell, but from the hundred points of view grasped by and made vivid to the very men who were fighting it there on the field. You learn not what tactics are and leadership, but what crude fighting is and the luck of fighting and the ill-luck. These privates and corporals, who tell the tale how this man died or that, put no gloss upon the matter. A fine flourish now and then of course they love, but it would not deceive a child. One may mistrust the frightfulness a little too. But only a little; there's not much "Gentlemen of the Guard,



fire first," with the effects of six hours' shelling scattered round you to put your blood up.

They are honest, simple stories on the whole. When the facts were clear to the men who tell them I would not want to go further for the truth. And if I were the men about whom some of the stories are told—and can we, any of us, read them or write of them without that unreasoning feeling of shame that we were not with the men there, chancing our deaths as they did?—I would not ask a finer epitaph. Listen to this :

“He was going about for days with a bandage on his head, he wouldn't give in and go sick. . . . On the Thursday he was very badly wounded again, and when we had to retire at his own request was left behind. He told his men who went to his assistance that he was too far gone to be moved. He was a very brave officer and never would let any one else run the risk of exposing himself.”

Or do you want to see, as if you had been standing there, how one man managed to die?

“He fell on his side and I saw him feel in his coat and pull out a crucifix. Then he looked towards the German lines and kissed it. After that he lay quite still on his right side. It was the last I saw of him as I had to go on. . . . He was a great one for sport and always kept us lively.”



Or what more than this can you need ?—

“When the order came to retire Fellowes was left behind and Corporal Dunston had shaken him to see if there were any signs of life but could not discover any. He was left behind when our men retired. Some of our Company have since turned up in Germany. Fellowes was about 5 ft. 7 and the best made fellow in the Company and a very smart soldier. He was never sick or sorry. It happened in the day time.”

Or than this :—

“A shell came over and about eighteen men fell together. We ran up to Martin and spoke to him. He did not reply and his eyes were closed. I knelt down beside him but could see no trace of a wound, others turned him over and found no mark on him. He may have been unconscious but we concluded he was dead.”

The conflict of evidence would sometimes seem impossible, were it not for the amazing circumstances that engender it. As one corporal poetically and unfeignedly puts it :—

“I do not think any one can remember exactly what happened during that two days fighting. It was such a tornado. The Germans sent shells over almost as thick and fast as a man sows corn, and it is a wonder there is a man left in the Battalion. I hope there will never be such another spasm of madness.”

The whole world is hoping that.



But Private Stapleton's case is puzzling. One man is sure he was killed on November 18, because a Corporal friend of his asked him if he knew Stapleton and he said "Yes," and then the Corporal said, "Well, he's got wiped out." But another man is equally sure that Stapleton was wounded and missing on December 2 with Major Tonks. And later he knows that the acting Captain read out the news that both Major Tonks and Private Stapleton were prisoners in Germany. This seems to clinch it though :—

"I the undersigned saw Private Stapleton lying dead on November 18 at Wytschaete, he being shot through the head and I buried him the same night, Private Soper assisting me." (Signed) T. SMEDLEY, Sergt., 3rd Loamshires.

"I have read over and corroborate the above statement." (Signed) O. SOPER, Pte.

And what pictures you get of the things that happen as they happen :—

"He was last seen entering a clump of bush near the German lines and half an hour later a German patrol was seen leaving the bush. It was at night time. He was a red-faced fellow and an excellent banjo player."

Poor red-faced fellow! Why is it that the banjo playing seems to add yet another touch of tragedy?

"He was singing Tipperary and was shot in the mouth and went a few paces and fell dead."



Here's another, too uncanny, one feels, not to be literally true.

“This sergeant seems to have gone completely out of his mind and ran deliberately into a company of Germans. They were given orders to retire, but instead of that he jumped over the parapet and ran right into them.”

I like the descriptions the men give of their fellows. We civilians see regiment upon regiment marching by, rank after rank, with weather worn faces and close-cropped hair. To us they are khaki, little more. But always, in the communities they make among themselves, there remains the echo of the things they were before khaki clothed them (a hollow echo sometimes), and there may spring the passing fame which marks a man as hail-fellow when he strays abroad. One is just “a dark chap, a reservist who was a policeman somewhere in the West Riding”; another “had a business in Blackpool and attained some *notoriety* (unkind unconscious critic!) by writing a parody entitled ‘Hold your hands up, Germany,’ which the men sang on the march.” Then there was “the tall chap, stoutish, with a moustache. He used to travel with a Fair.” I’m sure it was a magnificent moustache.

One has glimpses of queer happenings too; for all disappearances are not tragic, or even accidental. The British army is no more an entire communion of Saints than was every Belgian refugee a wingless angel, much of a grievance though that was



to kind old ladies who unenquiringly offered them hearth and home. There is the story, apocryphal perhaps, of the man who for months marked his own letters "Missing, cannot be traced," and returned them. But how one sympathises with his anger when the Red Cross discovered and restored him perforce to his belongings and their correspondence. Again, if your blackest family sheep has enlisted and a silence of some months falls between you, it is wiser perhaps not to be too curious about him. Men do not like their regiments' shortcomings noised abroad; their collective pride is quite a dreadful thing. The smallest blot is bitter and a searcher sometimes will get very curt replies:—

"That man's in prison. He ran away from the trenches. No, not a coward or it isn't in prison he'd be. He was absent from trench duty. It was due to drink and his first offence. If he's out again he may be wounded by this time. The letters or no letters of a man like that mean just nothing. A reckless fellow."

Then there are the really comic things:—

"Informant reports that this man lost his set of teeth during a charge and is now at the base under canvas awaiting a new set."

Is not the inference irresistible that the teeth were left embedded in an enemy?

And I like the description of a hard-fought field as having "lots of Germans lying about."



They were not dead but they were demoralised." I am sure they were.

But the supreme value of these simple stories is that they do sink to the sheer rock bottom of war. We can see in them fighting, as it was to the men who had to fight, in all its beastliness, in all its dignity. And, finally, that is all there is worth knowing about war.

We want to know that a shell "blew this man to pieces so that burial was impossible," that this other man "was hit in the stomach on May 9 and he crawled into a shell hole and has never been seen since." We want to understand that "the pond was in some places quite deep up to our necks. Many men were wounded and went under and were drowned."

We shall learn nothing much more real about war than that—

"On November 18 he fell on the far side of the trench. The Sergeant said it was useless to try and get him in as the enemy had a machine gun trained on the spot and were riddling the bank. One man tried to reach out a rifle for him to climb in by, but at that moment he rolled down the bank out of reach."

If we want to know what the everyday life of this War has been, here it is :—

"I went up with a message on Wednesday to the Bassetshires' trenches. When I got near I met several men who said: 'The Germans have got your gun and our first



line.' I said : 'Have you seen our officer ?'  
'No.' 'Have you seen our sergeant ?' 'Yes,  
we found him lying dead on the cross roads  
and shall bury him to-night.'"

Do we want to know how men can make  
themselves bear pain ?

"He was wounded when in the trenches  
by a shell splinter in the breast. He walked  
to headquarters."

He walked a mile or two, that is to say, with  
a shell splinter wound in his breast.

Do you think there is any suffering which the  
sane spirit of humour in a man will not strive to  
surmount ?

"The man he alludes to was wounded in  
both legs by bullets at Ypres. Informant  
remembers it perfectly, as Richardson called  
out and said : 'Hullo, that's my leg.' And  
he had scarcely said it when another bullet  
hit him and he said : 'There goes the other  
leg.' Informant does not know what hap-  
pened to him after that."

Do you want to hear how the simple spirit  
in a man would not easily perish ?

"Sergeant-Major Tucker was sitting on  
the wall for observation when he was shot  
straight through the head. For a few  
minutes he had consciousness and sang a  
hymn. But he died almost directly after."

The profit of the future is often but a bye-  
product of our present labour. Pepys's comfort



in his 'Diary' was, I think, unalloyed by any forecast of our joy in him. It is a merciful work this Red Cross department is about, bringing certainty of good or ill to the wives and mothers and fathers of the fighting men, as, helpless and ignorant, unwillingly patient, they sit at home. And for their children's children it is also enshrining a perfect picture of the things they did, registering this heritage of honour, that it be not merely scattered and lost in the gossip of the countryside.



## CHAPTER V

### YORICK'S OWN

ONE hears that the Flemish peasants are apt to ask among themselves :—"These English here again! and haven't they come to stay?"

It is not surprising. What are a few centuries in the life and memory of a nation? In their grandfather's grandfather's time the English held Dunkirk. His grandfather saw our flag fly at Calais. And now from the coast inward for miles we swarm. We build huts, we mend the railways and the roads, we learn their language. The little children learn ours. Why should we ever go?

Dear patient Flemish peasants, the English will go when their job is done with little enough delay; most of us, I fear, will very gladly go. But as to some few thousands you are right. These will remain for ever, each with his little freehold in your soil.

For the graveyards are thick behind the lines the English hold. One cannot walk a road for half a mile, it seems, but there, railed off from the field, is the plot with its fifty or a hundred or five hundred graves. Hidden away there are



others in little groups of two and three, and often you can find a solitary cross.

"Yorick's Own" is the Graves Registration Commission. You must not make too free with its nickname unless you know it well, for it is a full-blown, dignified section of the British Army, with its Headquarters, its advanced bases, with everything ordered and handsome about it, from its Director to the Private, sent back by some watchful surgeon from the firing line excused from fighting, who yet in the bitter weather can dig and fill day by day, as he must, to keep pace with the deadly demand.

But it had humble beginnings. In the early days of the War, before organisation with all its rigour had set in, there was dashing about this part of France with three or four motor-ambulances—rare blessings in those days—a Mobile Unit of the British Red Cross that filled in what gaps in the carrying and succour of the wounded it could find. One day near Bethune the present Director found a grave or two hurriedly made and very carelessly marked. What wonder!—for those who made it had other work in hand. But, said he, here is another job wants doing. So then and there they set to it, he and the half dozen with him.

When a man in a fighting and marching regiment is killed, you really cannot reasonably expect the regiment to make much fuss over his remains. Whatever reverence time and circumstance allow they pay; it's wonderful, indeed, how much they do manage to pay. Tommy will



dig the grave an extra foot though his back be half broken with trench digging. Tommy will post a weary, muddy mile or two to fetch the Padre. He'll spend his money on cross and wreath; he'll come back to earth up the grave, to turf it safely; somehow he'll find primrose roots and plant them there. But in the early days of fighting all that could be done with the utmost goodwill was to dig a decent depth, write the man's name and rank and regiment on a scrap of paper, find a bottle that would keep this dry, and stick it in neck down. Such was the tombstone of many a good soldier.

Does the good soldier care what happens to his body when, thanks to the enemy, his regiment will have done with it? Sometimes he does, even though, looking ahead, he may deny he does; for the good soldier never wants to give more trouble than he need. But war is a primitive thing, and primitive feelings revive and grow strong in it. And from the time when Achilles most frightfully dragged the body of Hector round the walls there have been strong opinions in armies about the dishonouring of the dead.

Many a man will risk his life, if he be let, to go the twenty yards and bring his officer's body in. And though he may know his credit is the same if, with his duty ended, what remains of him is heaped in a common pit, if at the best he is to lie a few inches down on a spot which the big map will register: Grave of an unknown British Soldier—no, he does not really like it, even though he mayn't complain. And his comrades



like it less. And his wife and children here at home will like it least of all. Strange and unreasonable that this should be so, but so it is. Though the British Empire have no further use for him, somehow they feel, these friends and relations, so proud he died fighting, that the Empire should do him any honour it can now he is dead. With which slice of simple human understanding this unit of Red Cross workers set out to help the Empire do this extra job.

They cut wooden crosses, dipped in creosote, warranted to last, light enough to carry to the queer places they had, and still have to be carried to. Do you remember a kind of penny-in-the-slot machine standing on station platforms by which, when your train was very late indeed, you could, to pass the time, stamp out your name on a length of zinc ribbon? To the vague and un-mechanical mind it seemed to need such time and understanding that I imagine they were only a success on the very worst railways. But for graves registration they are a boon. On a length of zinc ribbon can be indelibly stamped name, number, rank, regiment, and date of death. The ribbon is screwed to the cross, the cross stuck deeply in, and there is a monument sightly and secure at least. It will last ten years; yes, it will even last till the war is over.

For some months, quite informally, doing the work when and how they could, the Red Cross unit went ahead. They would tidy up the grave itself as well as might be, copy the inscription, elucidate its occasional vagueness if they safely



could. And this was the formula: This cross was erected by the Mobile Unit of the B.R.C.S. to preserve the records found on the spot.

But they saw they had but touched the fringe of the work. They could not do it with any real thoroughness either. There were obviously incorrect inscriptions that needed comparison with the regiment's records. There were graves marked simply: twenty men of such a regiment, with a date to follow. Had they had but the power, it still was not too late to find the names. There were little cemeteries quite out of unofficial reach. And as the work grew, difficulties grew with it. So they went to the military Powers that Be, and asked for recognition and authority.

I rather think they wondered if they'd get it. I rather think that they might not have got it as and when they did but for their good fortune in the particular Power they had to go to, the then incumbent of magic initials holding sway over this department of things. But the great man having looked them over, having walked round them, having stared clean through them, said: "We are here to beat the Germans. If you ask me to add to the official activities of the Army anything that will not help us beat the Germans half a minute sooner, I do not know that I can do it. But——"

And they waited.

"But," said the great man, "this isn't only an Army of old professional soldiers any longer. Oh, if the beggars pip me, fling what's left of me on a dung heap if you like! After the



war—" (It is good to hear a soldier speak of things that are to be after the war.)"—after the war people will begin to ask where their dead men lie. They'll be coming out to see. I do think we ought to get the answer ready for them. And then let the Government of that future day say Thank you to us that we did."

So he, having generously said his "Thank you" to the Mobile Unit and the Red Cross, gave them what they asked. The Red Cross gave them a paternal blessing, and "Don't lose touch with us," it added. "We may be useful to you still." For that, if you please, is the way of the Red Cross—to give and count no cost and then to stand aside.

And by now, with a year of official existence behind it, the Graves Registration Commission is an affair of some size. The Headquarters are in a dilapidated old château, beautiful without, within hung with the remnants of as hideous a wall paper as ever a manufacturing mind could conceive. But there is ample office space and one asks no more. The staff specialises mainly upon maps and a card index. They are large scale maps, but yet the cemeteries seem to dot them very thickly, and the index takes a lot of room.

This is the organisation and the method of work. There are three advanced Units stationed up and down the British line, another yet to deal with Communications and the Base. It is heavy work for this last, too. Base hospitals, for all the skill and care spent in them, feed the graveyards without pause.



An advanced Unit will divide into sections, and this is a section's daily routine. To visit each graveyard and note the new graves, to verify the marks on them by the regimental report that has been sent in, or will be sent in within a day or two, to register and number and file and duplicate and forward to Headquarters, and at the next visit to carry the zinc-ribboned cross and set it up. A hundred of these crosses in their rows don't look so many. No, but look at the stacks that are waiting in the workshop. One does not want to count them. And still the carpenter keeps busy.

Each graveyard now has its staff of men attached; they also dig in anticipation. And they take much pride in their charge.

"It'll look much better in the spring," said a corporal to me. "But just now this rain do defeat you."

He had turfed the graves and put what rubble on the paths the all-requiring road menders would spare him.

"You'll have a nice lot of flowers, too," I said.

"Ah," said the corporal, "the people around bring us these. Very kindly the people around here are."

This is between our batteries and Germany, and the firing seems never to cease, but there are still people around. I was in this Unit's show cemetery. Placed in a little belt of pines, it feels removed, remote for the moment, from the open flat waste and desolation spreading mistily as far as can be seen.



When the spring does come there'll be another graveyard I should like to see again. It is lodged in an apple orchard. No one now quite knows how or why these spots were chosen. Half a dozen dead men, I suppose, would be put in hastily where they fell, and round these graves the graveyard would grow. The regiment which has proud cause to give its name to this one has put up a lych-gate (a fine rough bit of work it is), and fenced in the great square plot securely. When April comes and the apple-trees are in bloom it will seem a very sacred place.

The Captain commanding the Unit has his work cut out and re-cut out from time to time. All cemeteries are not accessible and workable with a permanent staff. There are those too near the lines to be visited except at night, or at such hours when our methodical enemies have not the habit of shelling them. And a well-shelled cemetery needs some putting to rights.

Besides, we have been speaking so far of what the folk in Flanders have now come to know as peace-time, a daily giving and getting of profitless shell fire, a nightly sniper's harvest. But when, every month or so, war breaks out, and each side gives its thousand lives to gain or lose a thousand yards, the Yorick's Own is also lifted out of mere routine. Losses are known soon enough ; it is easy, too easy sometimes, to count the survivors, but it will be weeks before the bodies can be brought in. Some bodies never are found ; some can be seen but never reached ; some must be buried unidentified. Such a tangle



of things the G.R.C. must unravel as best it can. And they must do it with meticulous care. For names and numbers in a regiment are mighty confusing; prisoners were taken, and some men may have been behind the lines, have been wounded and sent back early in the scrap. Once a mistake is made, a man killed and buried by register, though he come up smiling and salute his company officer in the flesh, it is the world's work to resurrect him on the roll of the British Army again. And chance does seem to play the meanest tricks. Duplicates of Browns and Robinson, J., J.B., and B.J., one is ready for; but while you might deny that such a name as Podophyllin could exist, let it exist and you are sure to find three of them in a battalion. This to the complete confusion of some unwary clerk and the temporary self-felt disgrace of the entire Unit. There was a battle fought three months ago. Bit by bit the detailed records of its losses are being made out but—"No," said the Captain of this Unit, "we're by no means finished with them yet."

Day by day, though, the records travel back to Headquarters to find their permanent place. They are checked and counter-checked; each graveyard has its plan, each grave is marked on it, no later shifting of the crosses can cause confusion.

And the Red Cross still keeps its finger in the pie. There is a fund for photographing. Mrs. Smith in Whitechapel, Mrs. Brown in Montreal, can be sent a picture of the son's or husband's grave. Not a matter of serious military im-



portance that they should have such a thing, maybe; you'd not expect a Government grant for it. It is a Red Cross "extra comfort." Note two things on the card that carries the photograph. The nearest railway station is marked there. After the war, how many pilgrimages there will be! Also this sentence: "Owing to the circumstances in which the photographic work is carried on, the G.R.C. is unable at present to send any but rough photographs." Which means that often they are only snapshots taken under risk of fire.

The anniversary of official recognition has just come round.

"Are you abreast of the job?" I ask the Director. "There must have been leeway enough to make up."

"As much as we can be," he says, "till the great move comes. What we may find on an advance, who knows? But I daresay they have done something decent, the Germans, when they could. We keep the records of their men when we can."

Sure enough, there is beginning a separate index of the German graves.

I ask permission to do a morning's round. "Be at that Unit's number one section's headquarters at 8.30 to-morrow," I'm told.

It's a cool, not to say cold thirty miles, but then and there I am. They thaw me with hot coffee and we start, the search officer in his little car, the driver, and I. Our equipment is a bundle of crosses, a note book, and gas helmets. We are



going fairly close. At short intervals British guns are firing ; there seems to be no reply. Presently, obedient to a notice : "No vehicle further than this by daylight," we leave the car and commit our boots to the mud. We carry three of the crosses. If a vehicle went this road by night I'd be sorry for it unless it had a liking for shell holes. The guns still fire. We stop at a corner by a gap broken into the hedge.

"I don't know how many times I've passed here," says my companion, "but I never found this till the other day. Pure chance."

*This* is the solitary grave of a dead man hastily thrust into a corner of the field ; later they had found time to add a roughly painted cross to mark the spot. We plant our own cross. Another gap in the great register is filled.

We leave the road, a wooden slatted path leading us to what was once a farm.

"Walk fairly quickly here," I'm told. "They snipe."

"But surely it's too misty," I object.

"Innocent ! They fix their guns, then let them off occasionally on chance."

So I walk fairly quickly.

The farm house—mostly sandbag shelters and dug-outs it seems to be—shelters two cemeteries. In one we plant our remaining crosses, and find occasion for three more. The note book is busy for a few moments.

The other holds but two graves.

"You remember so and so—the runner—great quarter-mile man. There he lies."



The regiment with headquarters here is evidently a little proud of his neighbourhood, for the grave is trim and fine. I stoop to look at the name and date. There is a sniper's bullet stuck fast in the cross.

We return, still walking fairly quickly, to the road and up the road to our car. We are carried to another cemetery lying near the road this time. We plant more crosses, make our notes of still more crosses to be brought, drive on. Another cemetery, we do the same. Yet another. There is further business to be done here. Consultation begins with the corporal in charge about more ground that must be taken in.

"We'll be full up in a week at this rate," he says.

I wander round.

Close by, a communication trench begins. "Drury Lane," it is marked, "leading to Strand and Fleet Street. Keep to the right." And the board has a fully official look. It was a London regiment that first held the trench beyond, I suppose, and cockney bodies were carried to their rest along Fleet Street and up Drury Lane, and here was the place in which to lay them handy. Well, that was as it should be, if anything is as it should be in war.

They do what they can, the dead man's comrades, to mark his memory well. Besides the official cross, there will often be another, sometimes plainly lettered, sometimes carved and all ornate. Killed in action, or died of wounds. That is what his fellows want you to be sure of, for there



are other and less glorious deaths to die out here. Often a man's cap is there, the rain destroying it by degrees; or a cross laid out of tiles fetched from some fire grate—harmless loot, since the house that held the fireplace is probably a house no more. And here are the little painted clay figures you can buy in these quiet Catholic towns of the Virgin, St. Joseph, St. Anthony. What would the parson or minister at home say to that? But Christian creeds are friendlier when war's about.

My companion and the corporal are still pacing out the extra bit of ground that they will need. I squelch my way along the lines of graves. It rains, the wind blows, and the guns are steadily firing. Here they lie as they fought, officer, sergeant, and private side by side. For them, at least, the war is over. Yes, and for the men that die the battle is always won. Texts are rare, for the slim crosses will not easily hold them. But I find one:

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.

For the first time this morning I hear the savage crack of a German shell as it explodes. It is a mile off perhaps. I hear the corporal's voice:

"Then if I may 'ave that bit of the bank I can get another 'undred and fifty in easy."

Except a corn of wheat—

I stand among hundreds of graves, and there must be a thousand graveyards such as this. It is in the faith of those words, symbolic as they



are of all sacrifice, that for us and for the future these men have given their lives. We who stand whole and sound in body, if, alas, a little warped in mind—to us must fall the fulfilling task, a battle also in its kind, for freedom for the soul of man from the tyranny of its own hate and fear; another battle that is not to be so easily won. But if from the gardening of their death we cannot bring forth a sweeter, saner world than this that now tumbles around us, then indeed we are proved traitors and cowards and they, poor ghosts, will have died in vain.

France will do one peculiar honour to our dead. A while back, various technical difficulties arose. These fields have owners. And when, in the towns, a communal cemetery was used, the purchase of large plots in it involved, or its enlargement mooted—imagine the legal complications. There had to be much tactful talk with Maire and Prefet; but in the end the matter was beyond them. So there had to be a journey to Paris, consultation with the Ministry, a request to France herself. We asked, I believe, for special permission to purchase land for our graveyards and, as we were foreigners, that we might hold it through some native trustees. The answer was apt and ready. No, indeed. But that whatever scrap of ground in which an English soldier lay who had given his life for the common cause should be made the nation's own, his body and his memory to become the charge of France herself to honour and preserve.

In these words they answered us.



Monsieur Bonnevey, reporting the Bill to the Deputies, asks them unanimously to decide that the French Republic shall adopt and cherish in their death as her own children the soldiers fallen on her soil fighting for the liberty of the nations.

Speaking later for the Government, Monsieur Matter says :—

“Ainsi seront constitués dans notre pays de France des saints lieux de pèlerinage, consacrés désormais par les dépouilles de nos immortels héros.

“Là viendront les familles pleurer, avec une douleur que relèvera un légitime orgueil, leurs enfants, tombés pour la patrie. Et d’âge en âge là viendront les générations futures porter sur les tombes des soldats mort pour la justice et pour la liberté l’hommage perpétuel de leur reconnaissance et de leur admiration envers l’alliance des peuples, la plus sainte et la plus noble qui fut jamais.”

In old unhappy days how many English bones became French dust ! Conquerors or conquered, what does it matter now ? And they lay unblest. But the centuries make all things even. For any wrongs their fathers did to France the sons of England have perhaps to-day atoned ; their blood upon her soil the pledge, please God, of some happier future for England, France, for Europe, and the world.



## CHAPTER VI

### THROUGH THE HANDS OF THE M.A.C.

I WAS at the Regimental Aid Post, which is also the Headquarters of this battalion. The Headquarters take up the farmhouse, the Aid Post is an outbuilding solidly sandbagged. In quiet times this serves ; when shelling is bad, one shifts to the dug-out. There was a brazier on the earthen floor ; half a dozen men sat round it. On a table were the drugs and dressings.

"There is a case coming up," they told me. They seemed to doubt, though, whether it would reach them. It was serious and the M.O. had gone, but the Padre had gone too. Medical officers vary their practice ; some stick to their aid posts, some prefer to work in the trenches ; it depends on accommodation and the sort of scrapping that is on.

I was going a little further towards the lines. It was night. The officer in front of me whistled as he went, stopped and turned now and then to bid me mind some obstacle, exclaimed at a rat occasionally. But the communication trench seemed to me a marvel, drained and stable and secure. At one of the many turns we met the Padre, stretcher bearers following him with



the case coming up. The officer stopped whistling.

"Is he dead, Father?"

"Afraid so."

"Who is it?"

"O'Donnell."

"A good man. Sorry."

A doctor in our party clambered forward two places in the single file. He slid his hand under the blanket that covered O'Donnell and seemed to feel the pulse. Then he turned back the blanket from the face and touched the mouth.

"Yes," he's gone, he said.

A rough, reddened, unshaven face was O'Donnell's; there was a little blood on the bandage round the head, a solemn but indifferent fixity about him as he lay. They covered him again and we stood pressed against the trench side as they carried him by. No, he was not for the Aid Post after all. Then we went on and the officer began whistling again.

The process with a wounded man is, first, for his fellows to do what they can for him on the spot; there is the field dressing that he carries, which they know more or less how to use. Next come the stretcher bearers. They must carry him back if they can, if the way back is clear and safe; if not, it means waiting till night and then they take what risk they must. Not that they mind, though indeed it is their business to mind. For it is nobody's business to get hurt and the stretcher itself above ground is an easy mark. Snipers, could they distinguish it, might be parti-



cular ; shrapnel will not be. If the man must be kept so long in the trenches, down comes the Medical Officer to him. Or he waits him at the Aid Post, where more extensive patching up and soothing can be done.

From the Aid Post the next step is to the Advanced Dressing Station. This is a long and a stumbling step too, as likely as not. Stretcher-carrying in the dark, across sodden fields or honeycombed roads, is no pleasant business either for carriers or carried. The carriers face their job, though—this or the hundred worse aspects of it—with that grim indifference which must replace the excitement or suspense that actual fighting brings. As to the carried, has he the sense left to know anything, he knows his wound for the best friend met lately, however complete its present disguise may be.

At the Advanced Dressing Station he passes out of the hands of his regiment into the care of the R.A.M.C. In the farmhouse or barn, well bomb-proofed, or, if the shelling is bad, in a dug-out near by, he can rest and be tended for an hour or a day. Back the next stage of a mile or two a little motor ambulance will carry him. There is the Field Ambulance, set up in a house, in huts, in tents, and receiving all the time from four or five more dressing stations as well.

They will operate here, if they must. There is time to examine and take decisions. But they do not keep him longer than they need. The word, when fighting is on, is to keep clearing back. Accommodation is not yet luxurious ; shelling is



less likely, but not at all impossible. From here, a longer stage is travelled, of five or six miles maybe, to the Casualty Clearing Station.

That begins the work of the M.A.C.

A Motor Ambulance Convoy now seems a normal part of any army's equipment. But in August 1914 there wasn't at the Army's service even one ambulance car. What they did without them one cannot think. Oh, if the wounded had to be dragged on sledges, wheeled on wheelbarrows, carried for miles to railhead pick-a-back, there'd be willing men to do it. But the strain, the wasted sufferings! I know: it is not the wounded who will beat the enemy, not on that day at all events; so that the most perhaps you can ask of the fighting machine is that it spare enough of its power to salvage quickly and efficiently those it may best hope to regain. That is the hard efficient view, not so far removed in spirit and sometimes in consequence from the older happy-lucky way, which left the wounded to the best chance fortune, in the person of a harried, hurried surgeon, starved for help and equipment, but desperately working, planning, puzzling, could provide. Now the R.A.M.C. is a separate power, a different command, fighting another battle on another front, as keen to save as the fellow army it draws from must be to destroy. Munitions, transport, personnel, it will have the best or know the reason why. It calls the Red Cross its friend and the privileges of friendship are between the two. Well, never I think was a thing given and taken with greater gladness than



when, after a month or two of driving horses, of pushing hand carts, of loading wounded into lorries, the first motor ambulance rolled up.

To suppose that in August 1914 no one had ever thought of motor ambulances is obviously absurd. The question of their use and usefulness in war must have been debated and answered with a No. It took not many days of fighting to change that to a most insistent Yes. But ambulances would not leap on to the roads for the asking, nor yet for the crying for them. And through the working out of official formulæ, how long the army might have waited for them Heaven knows.

It was a characteristic Red Cross chance. First, a dozen or so mere touring cars dashed off to France and were permitted to scour the roads around Boulogne, succouring what wounded stragglers they could find. They found enough. Then, behind this adventurous advance guard serious organisation began. Cars, of course, could be had for the asking. They were stripped to the chassis, and ambulance bodies, the best that could be quickly made, replaced their former polished glories. But a lot had to be learnt before the perfect motor ambulance was designed and much unhappy jolting, many well-cursed breakdowns on the rough French *pavé*, taught the lesson. In a month, though, or less, a pattern was evolved that would stand the wear and strain—evolved, tested, and approved. And six Red Cross convoys, each fifty ambulances strong, have been made part of the equipment of the British Army in the field.



They were a godsend and the convoyers knew it and were proud of it. The more impossible things drivers and orderlies were asked to do the better they were pleased. To work for forty hours at a stretch—well, that was the common lot when things were lively. To drive under fire in the pitch dark up an unknown road to fetch your wounded. To drive back with them, to drive slowly, the shells still splitting overhead. What little knowledge of the road you had gained going up was likely to be falsified by new holes the shells would make before you came down. That is war. And it is not the courage to face such things that should be noted, for courage in war is to be expected, even as one expects good health, and is not to be more boasted of. But think of the cool skill, the mental and moral discipline, self-imposed, that was asked of and found in men, volunteers, collected haphazard, to whom no drill, no outward ordering of smartness at command had been applied, to whom, I think, no words of command could have given the chiefest virtues by which they carried on, and carried through this work they had sought and found their duty in.

By now the Army has its convoys, too, and the Red Cross cars take their place in the official ranks. The Red Cross men have enlisted, the regulation discipline is over all. Do I think the work one whit less fine, or is it less heartfelt in the doing, because it is now but part of the ordered routine that takes a man indifferently to the sheltered base or to the firing line? I



know it is not ; I know that if in any patch of its activity it were, the fault could lie only with some human unit of the machine, grown more machine-like than human. I think that the Red Cross men, free volunteers though they were or are, sink themselves in the ranks, blend their ways with the ways that the Army will have, find life as commonplace as a policeman can (and is not every policeman a hero?) and yet lose no jot of the spirit that brought them first to serve.

Had the Red Cross done not a thing besides, yet its pioneering, experimenting, and placing on the road of the pattern motor ambulance is an achievement for which the Army and the nation behind it might well say : Thank you. And since that first start they have found, moreover, one way and another, a thousand cars and the men to run them.

In easy times, when one sees the ambulances garaged, spotlessly clean, each taking what seems a leisurely hour on an appointed round, one questions thoughtlessly the need for all the elaborate contraption that a Convoy is. The O.C. showed me round. We began at the office, of course, with its maps, its routine orders hung round and, most importantly, its telephone. He stayed to write a chit or two, to sign a letter which seemed to begin "Sir, in reply to your communication, No. 527834 R.B., X. 28, I have the honour to inform you—" Then he took me to his work yard and his stores. Fifty cars need some seeing to ; a hundred and thirty men need some looking after. Everything as to which the



convoy must be self-contained has to be on wheels. There are two workshop lorries and a third and fourth to follow full of stores. The elbow room in them is small ; it demands a sailor-like neatness. How long they have lived in the yard here I do not ask ; how long before they'll be upon the march who knows ?—for it must be a march towards Germany to move them.

These are pleasant quarters enough. Out of the adjoining warehouse has been gained a dormitory for some of the men ; there had been squeezed even a recreation room, with its piano and gramophone. But that, alas, has been reclaimed by its lawful owners, the French authorities, to its rightful use as a tobacco store. As we pass through, some overseer of importance is superintending the sorting of the bales. Yes, it is a Government monopoly, and all the tobacco grown must be brought to him. He sorts it into five grades of excellence ; each has its price. Now it will be kept to dry in the sometime recreation room. He regrets to disturb our occupation of it, but——!

Then I viewed the ambulances themselves. Surely no cars had ever such cleaning.

“ We get underneath 'em every morning,” said the O.C.

“ How many journeys a day ? ” I asked.

“ Oh, well,” said he, “ we're slack enough now. But when anything's on we don't wait here taking turns. I get a mile or so further up to where the roads divide and hang on to the telephone. I can keep in touch with any Field Ambulance we



serve and send the cars where they're wanted. Back they come with their cases to the Clearing Station, then to me to report, and up again for more. And so on till the row quiets down. We look a bit lazy here now, don't we?" (They didn't.) "But in war either you've little to do or much too much."

An orderly came up and reported: "Train expected any time now, sir."

"That's the Hospital Train," said the O.C. "Come along and see us evacuate the C.C.S."

So into an ambulance we bundled and to the Casualty Clearing Station we went, a half dozen other cars following us. The loading up was smart, and off went the cars to the train, and back they came again, for fifty cases or more had to be cleared. They were not sorry to be moving on again from this great bare barracks of a school-building in which the C.C.S. was set up, glimpse of heaven after the trenches though it had been.

"We do our best for them," said its O.C. "But comfortable you just can't make it."

I mounted the last ambulance and went down to the train.



## CHAPTER VII

### IN THE TRAIN

FOR the Hospital Train this is railhead, this desolate siding. The Clearing Stations are contributing processions of stretcher-bearers with their even dropping walk. Then come bandaged men, that hobble, totter a little, sway a little. One has his head so swathed that he must be led along by another, who looks almost too dazed to lead him.

By the train stand its Medical Officers, pencil and berth-plans in hand, to sort their cargo.

"And what's the matter with you, my man?"

"My man" speaks hoarsely from under his blanket.

"It's my knee, sir," says he, "a bit of shell."

"Coach D—D for David," directs the M.O., and makes his note.

"D," says the leading stretcher-bearer. And they move on, carefully out of step, in that queer dropping walk.

Another bundle of blankets is waiting.

"And what's the matter with you?" It is the M.O.'s kindly formula. But no audible answer comes. So he looks for the label that will be tagged to some buttonhole on the tunic, finds it,



and reads. "G.S.W. chest," and the label has a red border.

"Coach F—F for Father," says he. And that case moves on. G.S.W. stands for "Gun Shot Wound," and a red border to your label stands for "Dangerous." So he portions them. Coach E is E for Edward. I wait patiently to discover what coaches A and B are for, only to find that they were full before I came.

"You wouldn't think," says the M.O., "they could muddle an initial in a hundred yards march. But they can. Tell 'em 'E stands for Edward': they ruminate on that."

Slowly the train fills. They are deft enough, the bearers who deliver and the orderlies who receive, but lifting a stretcher through a carriage door and turning it and placing with never a jar or a jerk is a delicate business, not to be hustled over.

The Sisters, too, are in the carriages to receive. Here in the safe-seeming shelter of a train is about as near to the fighting as womanhood may get (much to its disgust); here for the weary wounded man nursing begins. I really think admittance to the train does cheer up anyone who can be cheered. It's a clean place, a tidy, efficient and well-ordered place. The very red capes of the nurses are jolly. The orderlies have a word or two of welcome.

"Now stick your elbow in, old chap; you're a tight fit anyhow."

He sticks his elbow in. If he can't, it is stuck in for him. Men can be gentle creatures when they choose.

To one end of the train march the "sitting"



cases. What a procession ! They are in their khaki, with the trench dirt clinging still, ragged some of them, unshaven all. They don't talk, and their faces are quite expressionless. They have been told the coach to find and they march on towards it in a slow, unrhythmical march. If the leader is in doubt, he stops helplessly and then all the others stop too in the same unquestioning way. Orderlies meet them and help them in.

Next comes a queer cavalcade. Men with damaged feet or legs : an orderly carries each one pickaback. It looks like a childish game, the childish fun all gone. One fellow has both feet bandaged to a mighty size ; nothing else is wrong with him, but he is helpless.

"What's that case ?" I ask the M.O. standing near.

"Trench feet," says he.

They pass and are settled in their turn. I notice that a short way with muddy-bloody uniforms must be taken. The offending part, if it offends past repair, is cut away. So from one great coat the whole skirt has been ripped, and it hangs ridiculously like a fantastic beggar's garment.

The train is nearly full, and above us all this while aeroplanes have been buzzing. I had glanced up at the first deep sound of them, but no one else took any notice. Now they have climbed high and one hears nothing. I count four. There were more than that though. So I search the sky, and far away I find a dozen small



black clouds. Every few seconds comes a bright spark of light and another black cloud is born.

"Those two chaps are getting it hot," says the M.O. by my side.

"I can't see them," I say. "Are they ours or Germans?"

"Ours," says he. "That's German shrapnel—black smoke. There! one's coming through. They hardly ever hit 'em."

From among the cluster of clouds I do see a tiny speck sail steadily away.

At the other end of the train everything seems packed and ready, but at ours doors are still open and on the track a few orderlies linger.

"What are we waiting for?" I ask.

"German prisoner," says the M.O.

Round the end of the train he comes and heads are out of the window to see him. He lies on his stretcher with closed eyes. Rather a good looking fellow, thin and pale. The fair hair is clipped so close that the skull gleams through it. His grey-green tunic is thrown over his blanket. They hoist him in. I cannot say that the looks thrown at him are exactly chivalrous or kindly. Were his ears over quick, did he know English, he might catch a rough remark or two. But they mean no harm by it. They treat him with perfect correctness, and to the Sister who awaits him it is another patient, a more interesting one than usual, maybe.

The German prisoner is our *bonne bouche* and, he safely stowed, without warning the train gets slowly on the move. We climb aboard.



"That other chap has got clear now," says my particular M.O. and points back to where, out of many newly born black shrapnel clouds, another speck of an aeroplane is serenely sailing.

"By the way, where are we going to?" I ask.

"Don't know," says he.

"But somebody must know," I argue, "or do we just roll down the line, take the first to the left and see what happens?"

"No, we'll get orders at Hazebrouck," says the M.O. "Going to Etaples maybe. Boulogne I hope. We've got bad cases on board and it's a bit nearer. Must get to work. What'll you do?"

"Wander, if I may," I say.

"All right," says he. "Tea's at five."

First I find the inevitable office, the clerk hard at work in it too.

"How many on board?" I ask him.

"Four fifty," he tells me. "Pretty full!"

Four hundred and fifty cases need some cataloguing in a five or six hours' journey. And the endless form-filling and schedule-making and ledger entering! It is all necessary, I know. Nevertheless, that no organisation can exist competently without this mass of check and counter-check, instruction, and acknowledgment, is surely a sign of a deeper and subtler incompetence somewhere. What we proudly call System has been sent us both for the softness of our heads and the hardness of our hearts.

I leave the clerk dipping himself patriotically ever deeper in ink, and pass to the coach of sitting cases. Some of them are sitting up now



spryly, for, their dressings changed, close on the heels of Medical Officer and Nurse comes food. Wonderful how cheering food is! Wonderful, too, what a sure test it is both of sorrow and sickness. Attack us primitively, we are simple, unassuming animals; if warmth and a proffered belly-full lose their appeal, then we may know we are touched in the vitals, body or soul.

I should like to linger and talk to the sitting cases. What pluck the fellows have! Quite well but for his wound, one tells me, as he munches bread and butter and swigs his tea. And he but twelve hours out of hell! It is the older men the strain tells on. Here is a sergeant; he must be over forty, a called-up reservist probably. He seems but slightly wounded; he sits upright; you could order him back to the front with his bandages on and he'd go without a murmur; neither pluck nor discipline would fail. But his eyes! I never saw such frightened eyes. You can nurse his body back soon enough and he'll march it to fight again, but the soul of the man has been scared.

"I was through the two big shows at Ypres, sir," he says (and he does *not* call it "Wipers!"), "but this was the worst hour or two that ever I struck."

And I learn that they exploded a mine right underneath his platoon and blew them all any-ways. Well, it would be alarming. The survivors then rallied and advanced in the best order possible, *to occupy the crater*.

So I suspect he is not sorry to be wounded and



sitting in this most comfortable train. What a sense of security there suddenly must be in this gaily lit, English-looking affair, rumbling steadily away from the sharp interruption of the damned guns! We nod to each other and I pass on, but I shall not soon forget the look in his eyes.

It is a busy train. Four hundred and more re-dressings to be done; three doctors and three nurses to do them. And the bad cases take time; and there are some very bad cases this journey.

They lodge these as near to the centre of the train, as near to the doctors and nurses, as possible. We are on a short journey now, but to Tréport or Le Havre might be a matter of thirty hours. And it is then that the value of equipment tells; a complete dispensary, a full and accommodating linen store. Even the little operating theatre, which a surgeon seeing only as part of a jolting train might eye with amused dismay, may be a scene of life-saving, with the train quite possibly side-tracked for an hour or so while more military traffic passes and clears.

I find myself in the kitchen. A truly wonderful kitchen.

"And what couldn't you cook here?" I ask the ruler of this realm. Was there ever a head cook, clothed, and adorned in white, who did not seem the very epitome of pride and consequence? He says that, give him time (with quite false modesty he asks for time), he'd cook the King a dinner that would knock the bottom out of all the war economy that ever was. And it really is a first-rate kitchen. Of its chief glories



is the simple one that it will give you, and go on giving you all the hot water you want—hot water, which is one of the seven things generally necessary to civilisation.

The kitchen would remind me, did I need reminding, of tea. I pass the orderlies' bunks, packed for the day with a neatness that a submarine commander might approve. In the next coach I catch the jingle of tea things and make towards it.

I mess, of course, with the medical staff, but the Sisters entertain us to tea, and they give us most authentically English penny buns. Not rations, not imported; there's a baker bakes them at St. Omer. Enterprising baker!

Two Sisters have turned up, and the O.C.

"We won't wait," says the chief hostess, seizing the teapot, "the others'll be busy a while yet."

So we take tea and they talk of the cases. And just as our first cups are finished and the list of wounds worth mentioning seems through, another M.O. arrives. He has more cases to talk about; also he spurns buns and demands marmalade. Then a Sister gets up to go back to her ward.

"I'm verra anxious about one or two," she says.

One of the pleasantest things to note about war-work in France is how from all over the British world people are thrown together haphazard. English, north country and south, Scottish and Irish, we sat there, and with a little search in the train one could have collected, I am sure, from Canada, Africa, Australia, too. It's



true that in the most ordinary times we meet and entertain each other ; but settling to work together is a closer and a better bond ; there is none better and closer.

In another minute they were all off and back to work, the O.C. to his officers' ward. I followed him.

It hardly differs from the others. That's a sound principle and one is proud of it. The nearer you get to the front and the actual business of war the less distinction between officer and man is made. This ward has red blankets and the beds may be more widely spaced ; but that, I really think, is all.

I leave the O.C. to his labours and walk the long corridor again. Unhurriedly, but with much method and precision, all the work is going forward, even as the train goes (at fifteen miles an hour, I should say) rhythmically rumbling along.

The sitting cases have mostly passed now into a new phase of recovery, exhausted slumber. Poor fellows ! They lounge in the ungainliest attitudes ; and the atmosphere you could cut with a butter knife. But the fresh air of Flanders is no treat to them.

We pull up or, rather, insensibly we cease moving, at a station. There are excursions up and down the dim platform, reports are made and taken, we learn our destination ; Boulogne it is. And here we lose our German prisoner. I note, as the steady stretcher passes me, that he seems not to have moved at all. I try at a bookstall for an English paper and fail. Then we begin moving again.



I take refuge, by permission, in the O.C.'s quarters. They are comfortable though confined. I slake my curiosity upon his books (the outside of them at least), which range from Kipling to Somebody's *Diseases of the Eye*. I speculate as to that young lady's photograph ; on the whole, I think she is engaged but not yet married to him. His boots and his hairbrushes and his razors—you must live tidily to live here comfortably for a year. I note a picture-paper cutting of an R.A.M.C. friend "mentioned in despatches." Then I settle to consider.

They are pretty well worth while, these Hospital Trains. Something of the sort there'd have to be ; you can't run big hospitals within reach of motor ambulances. What did we start with in this war ? I remember : Trucks, covered or open, with straw spread in them as a luxury. And when it rained and the wind blew and they clattered and jolted (that fusillade of jolting) as they were shunted up and down ! No indeed, dear Spartan friend, who holds so highly the bracing necessities of war, it is not only the difference between comfort and discomfort (though even then there is much to be said against applying too powerful a tonic of agony to a man with a lump of his side and stomach blown away) but these Hospital Trains save lives, and there is nothing more precious to England than human life just now. That, by the way, is always true, but just now we seem to see it more easily. Save them where you will, from the battlefield or in the slum cradles, you do service to her future and its building.



Once again the B.R.C.S. (British Red Cross Society *and* Order of St. John), nimble experimenters, were first in the field. They had run one in South Africa, so they knew the sort of thing needed. But to build a train and cart a train to France in all the bustle of war time wanted some doing. They didn't wait, though, until this present piece of perfection could be brought to being. Ordinary rolling stock was bought from the first French railway that would sell it; fittings were made in England and hurried out; the carriages gutted as far as might be and something that would serve its turn got going. It was better than trucks at least. Indeed, it served its turn so well that it still stands honourably ready for service. Its showy successors are the sights now, but I think the Red Cross looks back to that glorious makeshift with even greater pride. It saved lives.

The successors, these genuine hospitals on wheels, three of them (in one of which I sit), were something of a worry to get going.

To begin with, the War Office wisely looks a gift horse in the mouth, not once but many times, and has its own particular ideas about dentistry too. The inside of the train had to please the War Office. With equal wisdom and no less particularly the railway engineers in France demanded that its outside, its couplings and brakes and what not, should please them. And the Red Cross never even heaved a sigh; it did all that was demanded and only asked, "What more?"

The building done, and a few Red Cross ideas



made manifest in it too, there was the transport to tackle. The authorities that deal with Channel crossings did their best, but one coach at a time was all they could take, and that only when and how they could. Still, here they all are now, smooth running, efficient and easily, I think, the most civilised bits of the great machinery of repair that works from trench to Base. They have saved lives.

One does not want to estimate such gifts in terms of cash, but, being (supposedly) a practical people in money matters, we may ask : Are they worth the £20,000 apiece which has been spent on them ? And the answer is : Yes, they have saved lives.

Another station ! A silent station and a silent train. We are in touch with the sea, a gale is blowing and the rain beats against the darkened windows. I remember the open cattle trucks, sodden straw in them, and the wounded men soaked through and shivering, praying for an end to their misery. We have stopped for a train to pass us. It goes by now, a troop train, the men in it bawling a jolly chorus. They are on their way to the front. We, on our way back, make no response. A queer contrast.

Soon I am called to dinner. Work seems over, for all three M.O.'s, looking spruce, settle down to beef with pudding to follow. There is again much talk about the cases, and furious disputes as to treatment. I augur well for the patients from this. We Britons never fight a common enemy so well as when we're quarrelling with



each other. Death on this hospital train hasn't half a chance.

But suddenly enters a breathless orderly.

"Hæmorrhage in coach H., sir," he says.

The M.O. he addresses (it is my particular M.O.) saves a bit of beef from entering his lips, puts it down on upturned fork and is gone.

"H for Hustle,"—I haven't time to say it to him.

"Yes," says the O.C., "but we couldn't do that in Old Number Eleven. Separate coaches then, no communication. That is, we couldn't, but of course we did. We grew quite expert in carriage jumping. It was like doing the 'rings' in gymnasium. But a tricky business in the dark."

"And the nurses?" I asked.

"Oh, they did it too," says he. "There was no stopping them. But after one had fallen on the line—by the mercy of Heaven we missed her and stopped!—there was an order posted: 'No nurse to jump the train without the assistance of an orderly.'"

We pass on to tales of Old Number Eleven. She was the first train built, the one patched together as aforesaid. This O.C. served in her. It was an adventurous time and already legends of it are growing.

"I liked the old thing," says the O.C., "but compared with this, of course, her couplings and buffers and springs were awful. And they travelled us on the rottenest bit of line, up hill and down. It's a wonder she didn't open up like a split apple and scatter us gracefully on the



track, patients and all. And the old engines they sent to pull her! All they could spare I suppose. Jerk! I'd go up to the driver, an ancient gentleman brought back from the brink of the grave to replace a man drafted to the army. I'd explain in my best French that this was a hospital train, that it might mean death to my patients if he didn't drive us like a cargo of loose eggs. And the poor old chap would nearly cry.

"*'M'sieu, je ferai tout mon possible,'* he'd say. But it made him so nervous that I believe he only jerked us the more. Still——"

"We're on the bridge at Boulogne," I said. I knew the sound.

Sure enough we were, and the final flourishes had to be put to the journey's work. There came the orderly clerk with reports, and the quartermaster-sergeant with requisitions for signing. The O.C. got busy again and I slipped away.

It took us ten minutes or more to roll gingerly over the points and come to rest in that well-known finish of France, the station, Boulogne-Ville. The gale was blowing finely. There were the station orderlies waiting to unload, and the receiving officer was at his little table, with his list of hospitals spread before him. There were the Red Cross ambulances backed up to the curb, gaping, like Post Office vans awaiting the mails.

Swiftly the unloading began. The sitting cases roused, the men on the stretchers turned, if they could turn or know or care whether they had arrived and where. Another break of jour-



ney, another rise in the crescendo of comfort. Better that rough dressing station than the dank shelter of the Aid Post, better the field ambulance and its safety, better the clearing station, better yet the train. But soon to be in a real hospital, in a real bed! For, indeed, fighting and the filth of it are good things to get away from.



## CHAPTER VIII

### A DIARY ON CONVOY

THIS Red Cross Convoy is attached to the French Army. It was a day's run to its Headquarters, and we arrived fully late at the château to find they had already dined. It sounds romantic, doesn't it, to arrive at a château in the dusk, even if you are late for dinner? But never was there a less romantic place, unless, as is sometimes held, it is dinginess and disorder that makes up romance. And they had dined in an outhouse. Well, there is always a potential omelette. We managed to add to it soup, cheese, marmalade, pickles, Army bread, and white wine; so we did very well.

Afterwards we walked in the garden: it was a marvellous summer night. The flowers and shrubs, though untended since last year, had nevertheless done their best. They asserted themselves among the weeds like struggling gentlefolk in a slum. Down the hundred yards of avenue were the motor ambulances, parked safely beneath the bordering trees. For a Taube flies over here once a week or so and he might spare a bomb if he saw them. The Convoy serves four posts. That calls for eight cars as a rule; and, when a rush comes, as many more as can be



spared from the other work, which is to carry casualties that are on the mend from their field hospitals to the trains. Then there are a couple of touring cars for the running about ; and one must allow for casualties, for cars are as vulnerable to mischance as men. We passed a bad case.

"That's Lowndes's new Buick," I was told. "They dropped a shell not five yards off and blew lumps out of her."

"Any one hurt?" I asked.

"Why, as luck would have it, he'd had tyre trouble and was round at the back swearing at that. He got a message in and we sent and towed him home. She'll be running again next week."

We settled for the rest of the evening in the Commandant's office, where whisky and soda circulated, and much technical talk. Fly papers hung above his table ; moths from around the lamp were the nightly sacrifice. On the table, piled high, were letters, bills, orders, documents innumerable, since even a motor convoy, it seems, must correspond with all the world on every subject under heaven.

At bedtime we tramped resoundingly up the back stairs. It is part of the bargain with the landlord that the resplendent front ones shall not be used. Expecting a mere shakedown, I was undeservedly lucky in finding an attic bed. But what a strange superstition are sheets ; we cling to them even when their natural tie with the laundry has long since been broken. The bed, though, was cleaner than the floor I had been



ready to sleep on, for truly that was not at all clean. Domestic service is hardly to be had in these times and parts. Not that this would have surprised me, had I not seen how, after any shock, almost at any cost, people at once make efforts to resume their normal lives. The Army has been in these same lines for ten months past, may be in them ten or twenty or forty months to come. So the farms must be run, and the women, children, and old men labour. There's a little marketing done and the schools are under way. Amiens, indeed, not so far off, seems much as usual, but for the many uniforms, the occasional khaki, the ever crowded station, and the unexpected sentries here and there.

This château, as a matter of fact, is housemaided by a merry little Frenchman. He promised to bring me hot water in the morning and even to clean my boots. Next to keeping its cars in order I do believe that a motor-convoy is keenest on being shaved. It must be the outward and visible sign of moral courage. If the Germans were entering Paris, all the more should one shave regularly and have one's boots cleaned. The merry little housemaid-man has been wounded five times, I discover. Whether it is felt he has done enough for honour, or whether the army doctors are weary of patching him up, I cannot say, but here he is.

I lay awake for a while. There were owls about, and a screech owl; at first I took it for a distant and unhappy cat. But otherwise it is quiet, and yet we are but four miles from the



trenches. The silence was deep. They tell us, though, there are nights when they cannot sleep for the firing ; then others pass like this, when you'd think that war had already emptied the world. I slept well ; the dirt was honest dirt.

"You had better go to Bray," said the Commandant.

The Bray relief starts at nine. A new ambulance, a special gift, is being sent. It is its first journey, so most of the Convoy, rather proud, turn out to see it start.

"Take her round once to see you've the trick of that gear," says the Adjutant. She is taken round and we set off.

We are three : Paterson, orderly ; Richmond, driver ; I, extra. Richmond is, I think, a professional chauffeur ; I know the cut of him. "I don't exactly like this ball gear," he says, "but she pulls nicely, don't she?"

Paterson, when he is at home, may be anything that would not now take him doctoring or fighting. It is his car, his second gift of one. The country as we plough through the dust of it looks very empty and is still very silent ; there's not a sound of a gun. I look around for aeroplanes, for one can see great distances. Not a Taube. We pass supply-lorries, ten or twelve ; run through a village and stop for sentries. Richmond knows the word and gives it. The village is full of soldiers, horses and waggons, and is pretty busy ; the forge is crowded.

A French officer passes. We salute. He returns it with an air. We take a high road ;



a hill that we can see now is within the German lines.

"Has there been this quiet for long?" I ask.

"Since last Tuesday, about," says Paterson. "Friday week, though, you should have heard it; hardly stopped for forty-eight hours. They were busy at Albert. So were we."

"Ever get hit?"

"Nothing to speak of, so far."

"The worst casualty this convoy's had——" says Richmond, now pat with the ball gear and ready to talk. "Have you told him about Mr. Lollingdon, sir?"

"Wasn't here then," says Paterson. He is lighting a pipe.

"Nor you were, sir," says Richmond. "Nor's *he* now! I used to drive around with him a lot. When we'd be waiting up at a dressing station he was always prowling around. And one day he must have picked up a German shell, one of those 3-inchers, that hadn't exploded. He took it home—though I never saw it on the ambulance, you bet—and there he'd go round asking everyone: Couldn't they tell him how to get the fuse out? Made himself precious unpopular at the château, so after a bit they got it from him and buried it in the garden. But he found it, he did, and dug it up just like a dog with a bone, and—'I'll demonstrate,' he says, 'that the explosive power of these shells is confined to a narrowly circumscribed and lateral area,' or words to that effect. So he collared his shell and up he climbed with it to the top of that busted windmill, the



one on the left as you leave the gate. But just as he was chucking it down a bit of the floor or something give way and he fell—why, it was a good fifteen feet—shell and all. And would you believe it, the darned thing never went off? But he barked his chin against it something awful and twisted his knee and knocked himself sillier than ever he was. And it's a marvel how he didn't break his neck. Mr. Murdoch took his own ambulance down to him, but laughing so much he backed her into a ditch and broke her axle. When he did get the beggar in, though, the doctor filled him that full of anti-tetanus stuff that he was in bed for three weeks. And then they asked him to resign. I've got the shell. A French gunner took the fuse out for me."

We were at Bray. The sentry nodded and smiled as we passed his barrier. The ambulance to be relieved was impatiently waiting, pawing the ground and champing its bit, so to speak; for Bray, as village or as a Post, does not overflow with amenities.

"First time I've been here," said Paterson to the man we relieve. "You'd better show me round."

"Is it?" said the other. "I've stopped counting my weary vigils. Come along."

He takes us to the end of the main street, shows us the two roads and a track up which the ambulance may be called to the three dressing stations it serves.

"You can get right to either of the farms," he says, "but if you're called to Hill 71 you must stop about twenty yards this side or they may



shell you. You can't mistake ; there's a sort of screen up."

We stroll back.

"What's been the bag?" asks Paterson.

"Nothing all day. Three about half-past seven, sitting-ups ; six during the night, two serious. Nothing much doing."

The Post headquarters are at a three-roomed cottage. But in one room reigns a regimental cook, serving meals to the fifty or sixty men billeted in the out-houses round ; another is the consulting-room of a regimental doctor ; only the third for this day and night is ours.

"You can toss up for the bed or the mattress," says the outgoing tenant. "There's not much to choose. In fact, if it's hot, I prefer the floor."

"Bugs?" I ask, sizing up the bed.

"Rats," says he, "and a mouse or two. And I wouldn't drink the water ; we'll leave you a bottle of ours. The hotel's shut up ; you can get fed at that pub at the corner ; it's not bad. Ta, ta ! The flies are damnable."

He departs. We settle to our day. First, we take another stroll to fix our bearings, hit on the regimental headquarters (sentries and saluting!) order our lunch. Eggs? Certainly. Then we will have eggs. And a mutton cutlet? No chicken? Alas, M'sieu, no chicken. Yesterday there were pigeons. Were there indeed? I wonder who is so unwise as to keep pigeons half a mile from the front. Well, though the evil that they did may live after them, I regret that the good they were cannot be interred in us.



The ambulance itself makes the best sitting-room. There may not be fewer flies (the test of all comfort in Bray), but there is more air. One can watch proceedings, too, though nothing much proceeds.

It is now ten o'clock. A line of mules and horses comes back from watering. The white ones have been painted khaki and look rather ashamed of it. A postman bicycles by. Later, an old woman trudges along with papers. We buy a paper. "Entire tranquillity has prevailed upon the greater part of our front." I idle through the rest of the news.

*Eleven o'clock.*—Two staff officers have passed in a car. A child has leant for five minutes or more against the wall of the house opposite, silently regarding me. From the pleasant smell that begins to drift along the street I gather that the French Army are having a meal. I walk into our yard to see. They are, and it looks good. Mostly the men sit in the outhouses, each in the little grave of straw that is his bed, munching contentedly. After this they'll lie around again, sleep, smoke, mend their clothes, read the paper, play cards, till it's time to march for a fresh spell in the trenches. Such a life! They look philosophical, but bored—oh, bored!

*Eleven thirty.*—At last I have heard firing—three shots. Too distant to bring us cases I think.

*Twelve o'clock.*—We lunch, and so do the flies—with us.

*One o'clock.*—Richmond, full of lunch (and the



wine wasn't bad), thinks he'll go for a stroll. We undertake to stand by the ambulance and chase him on emergency.

"That's a good chap," says Paterson. "He drove eighteen hours at a stretch with me a few weeks back. And when I'd pushed him off the car to get some food, on he came again in twenty minutes. You'll happen on a week at a time like that, maybe, if we make a push or the Germans make a push. It's not so hard unless you're driving. I don't drive much. But with every car and man running full time—and, remember, you've to do for your car as well and keep her running sweetly! And its back and forth, dressing station to hospital, till you lose count, and it seems as if the tale of poor, half-dead devils would never end."

"What's the process exactly?" I asked. "What's the link in the chain that we're making here now?"

"Well, with the French," said he, "it's rather less complicated than it is with us. A man in the trench gets hit. He has his first dressing then and there; a surgeon does it in a dug out, or even one of his pals. Then they get him back, or he gets himself back if he can, along the *boyau*."

"What's a *boyau*?" I asked.

"It's what we call a communication trench, but a handier word, isn't it? That'll be a kilometre or more sometimes. There are perfect streets of trenches about here. They've dug back till they can come to the surface somewhere else altogether,



and dug forward till they can throw biscuits at each other. Well, back he gets to the dressing station. That's a shed or a tent or what not, as near as they think may be safe from shells, which it mostly isn't. There they make a better job of him, give him morphia if he's going to take the journey badly, and hand him to us ; meanwhile we've been brought up by telephone from here. We cart him as gently as we can—they've started now to mend the roads again, but it's none so gently yet, if we've to hurry back for more—we cart him to the field hospital. That may be a couple of miles further back and in tents ; or more likely in a decent-sized house they've collared, for the gentry don't stay about among all this like the peasants do. There they keep him a bit ; how long depends on how bad he is and how full they are. Later on he's carted further back still, often right to the base and in a train this time. And there, nearly always, he gets better. Most of the dying is done up here."

"What pluck they have !"

"It isn't only that strikes one. But they're so quiet about it all, these French ; businesslike, polite, a little ironic. I carried a fellow one day, hit in the stomach, so bad I didn't think he'd last the journey. It was when I first joined. I've got so much into the way of it all now, I'm such a part of the machine, I suppose, that I don't notice things as I did. But then with every jolt of the car I'd curse myself for not bringing a chassis with better springs ; that I hadn't rubber cushions—anything. When I landed this fellow



he opened his eyes and waggled his fingers faintly for me to take them. Then he made a little formal speech of thanks. Most grateful for my care ; what a stupid business this was, to be sure, for men like myself who had doubtless other and more useful things to do !

“Did he pull through?”

“I don’t know. That’s the queer thing. These men are handed to you ; sometimes they die while the car jolts along and you sit there by them. For half an hour you seem all they have in the world ; there’s nothing you wouldn’t do then if you could. But you never see them again.”

*Three o’clock.*—It’s as stuffy a day as ever was and the flies are loathsome. There were two or three shots about ten minutes ago. They woke me, so they must have been somewhere near. Big guns. But I can’t tell ours from the German yet, or the sort of firing it is. That comes after a little. Surely we shall get a call soon. Pater-son shakes his head. It takes a deuce of a lot of ammunition to hit a man in these well-trenched times. There’ll be mischief at night, though, he expects.

*Four o’clock.*—A young soldier bicycles by, monkey-like. He hails us, speaking English with a devastating cockney accent. He has just ridden from the trenches, only to do some shopping apparently. The procession of horses and mules to be watered begins to pass again. The regimental doctor comes up, pauses a moment to be civil.

“Not very busy,” we say.

“Quite busy enough,” he tells us. Yes, indeed.



"Dashed if we don't get to think there's something wrong when men won't get wounded," says Paterson. "Wasting our time like this!"

*Five o'clock.*—A lot of English engineers have been passing through. The English are to take over a part of this line soon. The first cart was surmounted by a fat and wondering puppy. It had been a hot march. The men looked uncouth. They are less smart than the French, but they seem businesslike, if also a little bored, and they have on their faces that early morning look of the country labourer as he faces a field to be ploughed. No hurry, but it's got to be done.

The village was out to see them. The children were excited, their elders kindly, if not demonstrative. After a year of war within a mile of you, you may be thankful it's no worse, but the hope of it ever being better is already a little chilled in your heart.

*Six o'clock.*—Still no call. Frankly, *I* am bored, but I realise how absolutely unimportant that is. We order dinner and take a walk, leaving Richmond to stand by the car. The walk is a breach of discipline.

The village grows quite lively now, for the soldiers are at their evening meal and they prefer it, many of them, in the street. Even then they don't come too much in evidence for any aeroplane that may fly. But for some reason this village had not been shelled—so far. We reach the river and happen on a man fishing. No luck. The Boches catch them all higher up, I suggest. He laughs good-naturedly. We meet an old



farmer with his horses coming back from work—over there. Over there is towards the trenches. He has been working his fields apparently well within rifle range ; on the sky line too, I shouldn't wonder.

*Seven o'clock.*—We dine. The flies take a sleepier, less discriminating interest in the affair.

*Eight o'clock.*—It is now raining, but heavy dusk, and the street is quite alive. They stand about, do the soldiers, in their blue overcoats, gravely chattering. I should like to know what the discussions are, but my French is at its worst in the rain. The English engineers come wandering up two and two. They are greeted, but remain rather disconsolate. A sergeant with an interpreter is going from house to house spying out better billets. There has been no more firing.

*Nine o'clock.*—As it's dark now, as no lights are allowed, as the flies have ceased from troubling, as we're sure to be called out, we say, about midnight, we think of bed. I enter our official abode and survey it with a discreet electric torch. Paterson proffers me the bed. I decline ; he is my superior officer. I even decline the mattress and propose to share the ambulance with Richmond, for that is his choice too. We spread stretchers, roll up blankets for pillows, put on greatcoats, and so prepare for the sound sleep of men who have passed an idle day. But I lie awake a little, for now at last firing has begun. One hears rifle shots, two or three together, then a duller sound.



"That's a hand grenade," says Richmond, as he settles himself. "They'll be at it this way all night."

*Past midnight.*—I slept, though through my sleep I seemed to hear troops passing. They were changing the trench parties, I suppose. Then I woke at nothing. Richmond is awake too and would like a pipe. It has stopped raining, so we stroll down the road that our summons must come by.

"Met Mr. Paterson before, sir?" asks Richmond.

"No," I say.

RICHMOND. Jolly good sort he is! Drive a car, clean a car—anything. Knows all about it. He and me worked the Albert post last February and March pretty near all the time when they were shelling it. Seen Albert?

I. Going to-morrow.

RICHMOND. It's a caution. Like as if a child could have taken a hammer and laid about him in a temper. We were pretty busy at that time getting the *blessés* through, day and night work; and they shelled it day and night too. We'd get our car to the corner of the main street there that leads past the big church. All supplies had to go that way and the Germans knew it, and they'd got the range nicely and they'd shell that road up and down for half a mile quite methodical. Ten shots at a time they'd mostly come; something to do with their batteries that was, I suppose, and we'd stop and count them. "Now let's make a rush," says Mr. Paterson. "All right,"



I'd say. But what price a rush in the pitch dark with new shell holes to look out for! You try standing inside one of them to-morrow. He'd have to get out and go ahead with his little torch to warn me. One night he says: "Here's the Round Pond here since this afternoon, but stick to the Broad Walk with the perambulator and—damn their eyes for a lot of savages—there's a bit of a wretched dog I've just found here. Come on," he says. Coming back with the *blessés* we had to go slow anyway.

I. Never get hit?

RICHMOND. Now that's the funny thing; that's just what makes you laugh. They'll fire tons of the stuff away; and what mustn't it cost 'em? Well, you go about your business just the same, because it's no use waiting around; you might wait weeks. And they never get near us. Then once going up the hill beyond on a fine afternoon never thinking about 'em—bang!—and a bit of shrapnel got me in the arm. And it was the only shot they fired that afternoon! There's luck! I wasn't hurt much.

We had reached the end of the village. The sentry challenged us ever so quietly. We gave the word and passed and stood on the empty road beyond. There was only starlight, but the hills were outlined well. The firing had not stopped. Still came the sound of those rifle shots, four or five close together, and then the dull exploding hand grenade and sometimes a distant gun. And beyond the hills we could see the trench flares, bright blue lights fired up some fifty feet, slowly



falling, burning brighter as they fell. They're beautiful, like the Roman candles one once delighted in. The children of the village ask to be let sit up to see them.

*Six o'clock.*—I have slept excellently. But no call came and now the firing has ceased. Which was this—"Absolute tranquillity prevailed," or "The usual slight bombardment"? I shall look for the bulletin with interest.

*Seven o'clock.*—We walk along to the corner pub for our morning coffee. Coming back we meet a young soldier who accosts us in good English. He is a marine engineer who has worked at Glasgow. He was at Hamburg when the war started and his captain ran the ship out and escaped at night. Yes, he has been ten months in these trenches. These same trenches? "Well, it is now a maze, a perfect city. To be within fifteen yards of the Germans was too close—for them and us. Too many grenades came in, so we decided on an attack. The *soixante quinze*s and the big batteries fired for many hours, because our men go out happy if they hear the *soixante quinze*s behind them. We attacked on a front of only sixty yards and won three lines of trenches. But we could not hold them long, so we blew them up and returned to our own line. And we lost a thousand men. Yes, indeed, there are bodies of four officers out there still that we cannot reach. The Germans lost more I hope; if as many only, still that is something. This sort of warfare impossible? No, it is quite possible. One does not like to think of another



winter in the trench, no, nor another after that. But one must have patience."

*Eight o'clock.*—The regiment's doctor arrives, establishes his consulting-room, and the patients file up one by one, eight or ten in all. I discover that Paterson has shaved.

*Nine o'clock.*—Our twenty-four hours have passed and never a call. This also is war, then, this weary fruitless waiting. Waste of life, waste of time! Waste! An old, old peasant leans his head in at the ambulance and pitifully details me his symptoms. His French is strange but his gestures are eloquent, hovering in circles round the stomach. To him, anything with a red cross on should mean medicine. I feel a fraud, he is so pitiful. I send him in to the regimental doctor who, I daresay, will only throw him out again.

*Nine thirty.*—Our relief arrives.

"How many?"

"Not one."

"Never mind. Worse luck next time."



## CHAPTER IX

### AMONG THE FRIENDS

It was once the dining-room of a fifth-rate hotel. At present it resounds to the pleasant noise of a concert, given both to and by as full a strength of the Friends' Ambulance Unit as can conveniently be mustered at this their headquarters. It is dusk and dusty and stuffy. Though we open the windows they are low almost to the ground, and Flemish heads and bodies fill the space. For amusements are few in Dunkerque these days, and an English song, all the better for a chorus, is cheery. The dust blows in over their heads ; there's a wind stirring at sunset. We must be finished by nine, and then find our way home in the dark.

It is August, 1915, and the Friends have been here since October. Forty came at first, and now they are two hundred strong. "Friends" the Flemings understand ; it is a natural title for the work they do. Quakers would puzzle them. They fell into some queer jobs when they came. The French were holding the line beyond Dunkerque, as they are holding it still, and it was hard to hold ; the wounded were coming in three or four thousand in a day sometimes. The theory



was that cases unfit to travel further should be selected for the Dunkerque hospitals. These had not less than a quarter of the staff needed to run them, and held already not more than twice as many patients as they could conveniently hold. The French doctors did their best. There is a story of one of them :

“I was called to the station. They wished to evacuate wounded. I had been at work in my hospital for eighteen hours. I had had no more to eat than I could hold in my hand, my courage was not high, but naturally I went. The wounded were there. They said : ‘We must take as many of these on as possible, but will you select the most serious cases to be kept behind, for it will be a pity if more die on the train than can be helped ?’ Also, will you dress as many of the wounds as you can, for they have not been touched for four or five days, or it may be longer ?’ I asked : ‘How many are there here ?’ They said : ‘There are five hundred and twenty-three.’

“I asked again : ‘When must the train start ?’ They said : ‘We hope it will start in fifteen minutes. It must not keep the line. There is ammunition to come.’

“My dear, I felt like a little child. I went out and smoked a cigarette. And in less than fifteen minutes the train started.

“I was wrong. I do not cease to regret it. I could have dressed two, or perhaps three. I could perhaps have saved a life. I hope I shall never so fail in my duty again.”

The Friends—surgeons, doctors, dressers, and



nurses—were welcomed without much circumlocution. The French Army (catch the working side of it) is not over swaddled in red tape. In its eyes the chief business of war is fighting. When that is going as well as it can go, time may be found for regulations, even as to the shape of an orderly's sleeve or the number of pleats in a nurse's cap—details mysteriously dear to the unoccupied military mind.

Said the French Army to the Friends at that moment: "Thank you beforehand. Do your best. Here are our rules; the fewer you break the more convenient for us. We will discuss difficulties afterwards."

With more help arrived, and the fortune of war adding breathing space, matters improved. In time each patient had a bed, and wounds could be dressed every two days at least.

Then came typhoid. Typhoid is not a pleasant neighbour for an army, even if the army is sanitarily encamped at a safe distance from the populace infected. When the populace is doubled and trebled by refugees of the class that can least afford to travel further, and when the army is billeted in its midst, as the French Army was perforce, typhoid is the very devil. Soldiers and civilians both, there were at one time five thousand cases in hospitals placed in the Dunkerque area alone. "We ran up buildings as well and as quickly as we could," said my particular Friend, "for nursing is what the thing mostly wants, you see, and one must hang on to one's patients as long as may be."



The concert was over. It had been a good concert, as these things go. The Friends muster talent, and the audience had a talent for enjoyment which made it better. We were now walking slowly in the dark and stillness, over the open space that spreads before the fortifications there. "1876" I had seen carved on a stone arch in them. Poor despised things! Time, Creusot, and Krupp have outworn them, unused. Said my Friend: "To-morrow you'd better see our hospital here. In the afternoon I'll drive you out to Coxyde. You'll find there the last of the military work we do in these more normal times. It's an ambulance convoy. All the morning I've office work."

"Office work!" I said. "Isn't it awful. Even war does not quench our passion for it."

"Well, war's a muddle anyhow, you see, and the people actually fighting have no time to be tidy, so we have to run round after them a bit and tie off the threads. Hospital work means book-keeping too; and now the French have got things straight, they like them very straight indeed. You should see the sort of reports they want on our cases; every detail down. They don't mean to be caught by typhoid again. I'm proud of the hospital, though it's rather empty now."

"You can be prouder of that," I ventured.

"Yes. There's been some decent work done," he said. "We're a voluntary unit, top to bottom. Three or four paid cooks, that's all. Voluntary cooking for eight months at a spell is a difficulty. We're skilful enough, I think, where we should



be. There've been some operations pulled through that would make a stay-at-home surgeon jump. And our lower ranks stick finely to their jobs. Now, to be hospital orderly in a make-shift place under war conditions—well, three weeks' devotion to it is easy enough, with a war-conscience stirring in you, but six months of the sights and the sounds and the smells——”

“Which never vary all the long time,” I said.

“No, indeed. Dirt and disease and the distress of war! The job wants some sticking to.”

We walked back towards headquarters and bed. It was a clear night. We could see the gun flashes twenty miles away.

“We did twenty thousand inoculations,” he was saying. “Three a minute you can work up to, with the serum in a beaker and someone standing by to sterilise the needles. Later, a lot of them started para-typhoid and I'll own I was annoyed.”

“What the devil's that?” I asked.

“As a layman,” he said, “I will not commit myself. All I know is that they don't die of it and that they did of the other. It is said by some to be a disease invented to account for the failure of inoculation. The answer to that is the discovery of a serum for para-typhoid—yes—and two varieties of it—A and B. This is again regarded by the other side as merely deepening the fraud. How these scientists love one another!”

The Alexandra Hospital, so it's called, is contained in ten huts. It is all simple, sweet, and clean. They take no *blésés* for there is now no need, but military *malades*. There is a broad



veranda on which the patients sit and sun themselves and smoke and talk. I like a hut hospital. I like its impermanent look. I believe that if I were a patient it would impress me all the time with the transitory nature of illness and get me well the sooner. Somehow these great palaces of pain they build seem to glorify disease. But I am a layman and doubtless on this point a fool.

I went later to visit one of the French military hospitals. It is set up partly in a school, partly in the Mairie, inconvenient, but clean and cheerful. In this slack time the doctors and nurses themselves are painting and re-decorating one of the wards. The doctor who showed me round I shall not forget, I hope. He had all the charm of the Frenchman, that clarity of mind which, expressed in perfect courtesy, teaches me what civilisation is. He would have me as interested in each case as he was ; he knew it without reference from the beginning ; and he had a comradely word for each man. They were common fellows no doubt, but as he walked the ward and spoke to them and made them speak, he made them seem distinguished gentlemen. He sighed a little over his equipment. "You have things better," he said. "What you see here is the best that we can hope for." We were standing by the kitchen, a tiny wooden shed with earthen floor. I have no doubt French cooks worked wonders in it.

"Really ?" I asked him. For I know our English satisfaction with ourselves once it gets going. "You really think so ?"



"But I know it," he said. "Your doctors should be grateful for all the best of things that are given them to use. These things save lives."

I travel to Coxyde, a loose little bundle of houses half way to the front, tied together now with tents and ambulances, sentry boxes, transport lorries and work sheds, the higgledy-piggledy (mainly, in this case, piggledy) of war. The Friends' Post flanks the road ; a tent to live in, two bell tents for the eight men to sleep in, two bathing machines for the kitchen and ever-needed Office, and the disused body of an ambulance (the guest chamber) honourably bestowed on me.

Opposite are ranged the ambulances. They are battered to look on, but they go—and go anywhere. They have to, for the roads are a wonder to behold. Above the little camp rises a sand dune. The seaward villages about here are built amongst them. Mosquitoes abound.

"We're only half a convoy, really," says the Friendly Commandant. "We share the job with the French. They've just got new cars. Look at them."

I look along the road. The French cars are spotless, and a Frenchman is busy removing any other suspicion.

"So they give us all the infectious cases. It'd break that chap's heart to sully his beauties with disinfectant. We're on duty twelve hours for *coups de téléphone*, and we take *malades* from anywhere they may be to any of the hospitals round. Then we've our regular calls for *blessés* at the Aid Posts at Nieuport Ville and Nieuport Bains—



four times a day. Four times when things are quiet like this—nearer forty when they're noisy."

We climbed the sand dune and looked around. It was sunset. An aeroplane was sailing high from east to west above the lines. They were firing at him; we could see the shrapnel burst. But they made bad practice and he didn't seem to mind. A little later the blue trench flares began to dance up and down.

We started for Nieuport in the empty ambulance about half past nine. It was as dark a night as might be. We called at the little Brancardier Post in the village ("confound my French," I said. "What the deuce does Brancardier mean?" "Stretcher-bearer," said the driver. "First word of French I ever really learnt.") Here they hold the threads of the ambulance work around, pass on calls and instructions, sort the cases, give the wounded as they come by such small comforts as there are to ease them on their way. Then we went on up the road northwards.

"It's desolate enough, if you could see it," said my driver, "what with trenching and hacking the woods about for gun cover, and with workshops and lorries and stores dropped all around. They're as clever as you like at all this, the French, but they're not tidy."

It was a surprising ride. A railway track borders the road and crosses it at intervals. The trains puff along slowly in the darkness. They are not full-size trains, it is true, but amply too big to collide with. We hoot on our way, passing as best we can the hundred and one



obstructions with which the road is crowding. In daylight nothing must move on that road that need not. As soon as night comes it is crawlingly alive. Troops, mustered there, wait the word to start; you find them by the glow of their cigarettes. There are troops on the march up, in companies, or in twos and threes. If we stop—and we stop every twenty yards—these stragglers ask us for a lift. It is forbidden; there's a thing called a Geneva Convention that forbids it. Our batteries are firing from in front of us and behind us now, in a leisurely, detached sort of way, apparently just so that the enemy shan't forget them. But suddenly, close on our right, we hear another sort of bang without the following whistle of the shell through the air.

"Damn them," says my driver, though in appropriately Friendly tones, "they always begin to land 'em in this wood whenever I'm passing it. There's one of our batteries somewhere near. Not that they've found it in seven months. I run past pretty quick in the daytime. Nobody minds shrapnel, but you don't want those big shells within fifty yards of you, if you can help it."

I listen carefully for another bang. None comes. The German battery, having thus asserted itself, apparently meditates other things. We are stopped by a sentry who looks us over with his lantern. We cross the railway and run into Nieuport—that is, into what once was Nieuport we run. I don't think there is a whole house in the place. Excellent cellars remain, however, and you are wise to remain in them if you make a long stay.



The night had now grown a little lighter and my eyes more cat-like! I could make out the shell of the church as we passed it. At the first two Aid Posts there was nothing; at the third we found three cases, sitting cases—hands, arms, shoulders, or heads; shrapnel wounds, probably, and not serious. Also we found a portly, black-bearded French surgeon who announced that he would return with us. We squeezed him into the front seat between us, where after awhile he seemed to expand. Just as we started I heard a new sort of whistling overhead.

"It is a *marmite*," said the surgeon, "not for us—for the batteries behind there, if it can find them."

"Why *marmite*?" I asked.

"It makes a hole round and deep like a *marmite*. They are the big shells. In a city they are bad; if they hit you they are naturally bad; but in the fields they are not so bad."

So we ran out of Nieuport and past the sentry, who again looked us over. We heard more shells—passing, bursting, or pitching. It was the usual nightly dose, I was told. The surgeon was talkative.

No, it had been a quiet day in his part of the trench. Three men killed. That was by a trench torpedo. It comes of the trenches being so close—yes, we are forty yards near to them. A torpedo is unpleasant. You can see it coming and it does much damage. But things are dull now in the war. We wait and wait. Well, we will go on waiting. We wait to some purpose. So will you wait, too, I hope."

"What else?" I said.



"Ah, but I mean your Friends and their work here. It is dull for them, too, now ; but it is good they do it and are so Friendly. We are all Army now—there is much besides we must leave undone. They give us things we should not have without them. It makes a good feeling. Soon you will be all Army too."

"Perhaps," I said.

"War is very dull and very unpleasant and very ridiculous. I cannot go on wanting to kill other men all the time. To-day a great Bosche came out of his trench and stuck before it a placard : 'Warsaw is now German.' Then he bowed politely and went back. We should by rights have shot him, but we did not. Instead, a man shot a pretty pattern on the placard. That is childish, but how can you be savage all the time ? Still, one must kill Bosches and kill many of them, for in the end it is all they understand."

"I was told," I said, "of a Franco-German card party the other day."

"Ah !" said the doctor. "There was something. Never mind. It was serious, and a regiment was sent away. But you must not believe all." He wished us good-night at the Brancardier Post ; the *blessés* we were bidden take on to a hospital near. And so, empty, home to find the camp already in its beauty sleep. The mosquitoes were out for business. But Friendly heads, each tied in its blue gauze bag, defied them. I tied up mine, crawled into my ambulance body, and was soon asleep.

Through the night no *coups de téléphone*, none



that I heard at least. But at six we left for our first morning round (the "milkman" round), towards Nieuport-Bains this time. A half-mile street of hotel-backs and lodging houses, pierced and smashed by German shells, the hotel fronts making a sea-parade on which you may not walk now for fear of drawing fire—that is Nieuport-Bains. Three barricades cross the street. They are beautiful barricades; a foundation of bathing machines, topped up with cupboard doors and filled out with sand bags. Stray bullets fly over them. We drew a blank at Nieuport-Bains—nothing but smiles and thanks from either regimental Aid Post; and so back to breakfast. I note the breakfast; porridge and, to follow, twenty-two buttered eggs in a saucepan, the best I have ever tasted, hunger allowed for.

"And where did you learn cooking?" I demanded of the friendly cook. "Here," he said; he and the stove proudly filling their bathing machine.

I left the Post cleaning its cars, not to the pristine brightness that the proud French chauffeur was again achieving as I passed, but to a useful competency of appearance fitted to withstand, patiently and with fortitude, as their owners must too, the never ending bumps and breaks, the muddy monotony of discomfort and unnoticed endeavour, which is war.

From Coxyde and the French army I passed to Poperinghe, Dickebusch, Caestre, Watten, and the Belgian civilians; not quite compassing even then the Unit's work.



Frankly, the Belgian civil population clinging desperately to that selvage of its country which Belgian, French, and British armies are disputing with the invader, is a serious worry. It is a danger too, to itself, and, if it is not most carefully shepherded and inspected, a danger to the armies that are fighting its battle. I know the sentimental cry that the last of a suffering people be not torn from their homes, though as to the moral effect of the tearing upon Europe and the enemy, I fancy we are past such niceties of opinion now. For practical reasons there is the harvest to be gathered in and the land to be kept alive. It is true, too, that the thrifty Fleming is earning the wages of his life, road-making, trench-digging, washing clothes, billeting troops, doing what not else, and it is pleasant to see somebody make something out of the woeful war. But villages that are bombarded daily, and farms that one shell half wrecked last Tuesday, that another may wholly wreck next, are not places at any price for women and children. You can see children playing in places where troops are forbidden to go lest they draw fire. Better far that the Belgian civil authorities abdicate the futile remnants of their power and leave the armies to clear, compulsorily and strictly, a belt of fifteen miles or so behind the lines.

But meanwhile there the people are, and for every one's sake there is much to be done for them. Hospitals are needed, and the Friends have provided three. Living in a town under a daily ration of German shells is not so dangerous as it



might seem. Still, there are enough beds full of civilian wounded, men, women, and children—how can you teach tiny children fear of such things?—for the sound of the bursting shells above the houses to sicken you a little. Belgian doctors in this corner of Belgium are not many now, though I hear there are posts for them in England, and so the Friends do many village rounds. Important, most of all, there is still the typhoid fear. Sanitary search work well done may yet save regiments from the hospital ; so Friends do this too.

Dickebusch ! Name of suggestive charm ; home, one would say, of a bird—a not too serious bird—that sat all day upon a bough and sang. But Dickebusch is mostly ruins. 'The Friends' Post is a comfortable four hundred yards from the village. It is a pleasant little house with every convenience, a good view of the German lines from the upper windows, a bomb-proof shelter against the outer-wall, a dug-out in the garden. It is simply furnished with packing cases and window shutters, two canvas chairs, a camp bed for the doctor and six mattresses. Acetylene gas has been installed. It began to work, too, on the night of my arrival and the inhabitants were very proud of it, so proud that I suspected previous evenings of disappointment.

You may pass many comfortable nights in a sleeping bag on a mattress at Dickebusch. The firing will wake you at first, but unless it grows to more than the usual "artillery duel" of the reports you learn to roll over and sleep again. If



you choose to get up, though, and stand at the gate in great coat and pyjamas (we did one night during a literally hellish hour, each side giving and getting it hot), the sight is attractive enough. The gun flashes are incessant, while the trench flares, giant Roman candles, and rockets with a hanging descent, add a rhythm to the scene. Trees and buildings silhouette vividly into strange shapes and, if they are shelling Vlamertinghe, as they often do, you can catch the uncanny whistle of their shells overhead. And that night, when the clouds would part from time to time, there was a serene moon. It is almost as good as an ordinary thunderstorm; and then—man had made it.

The doctor starts on his round pretty early: the car is trotted out. Cars that have no shame and are frightened of nothing do good service on these roads and things that once were roads before heavy guns took to walking over them. How this war would have been fought without motor cars I don't know, for from base to front no one walks a step and horseback seems joy-riding. But there! I wish it had to be fought with fists alone.

The first thing we must do on reaching a village is to find the Curé. He alone knows (it would seem) who is ill and who well, who should be doctored and who not. At Dranoutre we catch him in the midst of his Saturday shave. By no means must he be disturbed, we will wait. I looked round the churchyard. The English graves are crowded close; they lie there, officer and man side by side, each with his wooden cross,



name, regiment and date on it, and "killed in action," or "died of wounds." The churchyards are mostly full now and you pass roadside cemeteries, a little barbed wire railing them in—thousands of graves, thousands.

FIRST PATIENT. An old gentleman with a splinter of iron in his eye. No, not an obus ; some difficulty yesterday with a hammer. A neighbour is called in to interpret, for he speaks no French, and our Flemish is not what it might be. He is an admirable patient, though his daughter does bring us a bottle reeking with oil to put his eye lotion in. It is the old wife that most attracts me. She rose to greet us and give us chairs, then slipped back to the window and her lace-making, from which she can hardly be brought to look up again. I never saw anything more deft than her throwing of the bobbins, never anything keener than the narrow look she concentrates on it all. Their living room is spotless though stuffy. Their manners are perfect. As the visit ends they ask what they may pay. It is a gift to them from the Red Cross. They are surprised a little, make a formal protest, give us genuine thanks. The old wife rises as we go, but I can see her at her lace again before we are through the door.

SECOND PATIENT. Paul, aged twenty months. He has been vaccinated twice and has not yet "taken." He can be given a certificate that he is a baby above such things. He exhibits, however, a crowing delight in his abortive scars, shows them with pride. In purest joy he tweaks the



doctor's nose. I believe one can tell a happy people by the fearlessness of their children. But one might have doubts of Paul's future. His father is alive and strong—yes ; but his mother died of consumption when he was two months old. For three months more he was hardly alive at all and was very, very small. Now, we are told, he is strong and always gay and will surely prosper. One likes to think so.

THIRD PATIENT. Paul's aunt. A private talk to the doctor.

FOURTH PATIENT. The little house does not look much of a convent, but it is safe from shells which, alas, their own house at St. Eloi, cherished with so much pride, was not. So they might have fled further with advantage one would think. But here they find still a little work to do, a few coals of fire to heap on the head of ill-fortune. We are to see the Mother Superior. Poor old lady. It is her heart ; symptoms of dropsy ; her nerves.

“*Monsieur le docteur*, I sit and cry. I have no courage left.” She suffers from that most prevalent disease—the European War.

“We are so ashamed to receive you like this, but we have nothing ; no furniture, no linen, nothing at all. We stayed on at St. Eloi, for there was much to be done ; nursing, children to be taught, soup to be made for the poor. And the poor stayed, for nobody sent them away. Then came the bombardment, and three sisters were killed, and one so wounded that she died when we tried to move her, and we had to go.



It was difficult, we had only one carriage. I am no longer very young ; they lifted me in. And now I hear that there is nothing left. Two pianos, two harmoniums, and a cross of copper so high (she measures with her feeble hands) from our chapel—everything is taken." What could one say to comfort her ?

We journeyed then by devious ways up Kemmel Hill, past rows of soldiers' huts named by the tasteful fancy of the dwellers, "Trench View," "The Cedars," "The Pig and Whistle" ; past supply wagons unloading ; men by the roadside sorting hay, bacon, and cases of jam, chopping meat, sweating at their job ; past a cricket field (field by courtesy) ; past a regimental band at practice.

FIFTH PATIENT (also SIXTH and SEVENTH). Typhoid inoculations. This is compulsory now in what is left of Belgium, and the last of the population is being rounded up. Three men clumped heavily one by one into the cottage ; their womenkind, who had felt the needle last visit, looking on to chaff them if they flinched. They sat round, the men ever so crookedly, smiling but silent. How like a Teniers picture it was.

EIGHTH PATIENT. The eighth patient was from home, but we administered pills and tonic, wrapped up and bottled, to her husband instead, with explanations in as much French as he understood and as much Flemish as we talked. I only hope they were clear to the ultimate absorber of the stuff. His inoculated neighbours spoke



French, but that could not help us, for the two families did not speak. Some trouble about a hen, it appeared. I noticed he no longer kept hens. But that seemed all he did not keep. I never saw such opulent thrift upon so small a scale. Goats, rabbits; pigeons he had had too, but it is as well to be without pigeons near Kemmel just now. His garden was full; he was drying tobacco on his cottage wall.

NINTH PATIENT. A refugee girl with a scalded foot. The cottage was uncomfortably crowded. The patient's mother welcomed us and produced the patient. The *patron* welcomed us, gave us chairs, gave us his own and then went on with his meal, which we had happened in on, standing. The old lady in the far corner went on with her meal, taking no notice. A young person aged five or thereabouts, who seemed to belong to nobody in particular, leaned on the corner of a table and went on with her meal, regarding us doubtfully from the corner of an eye. The mother and the girl (full of pride as her foot was dressed) were refugees from Wytschaete, where now the Germans are, if anyone is—if there is any Wytschaete left. They had stayed while they could, and it was hard to be turned out of your home where you had had everything *tout propre*, as other people had, but M'sieu understood.

I wonder how these folk live. They work a little, I suppose, for the people who take them in. Whether or no, they tell me that in seven cases out of ten they are not charged for their shelter. Two rooms out of your four, that is a gift indeed.



Here, I am sure, neither host nor guests had much to spare, but when we rose to go, and the doctor said he would not need to come again, the mother thanked us first and then, with courteous dignity, asked to be allowed to pay. I thought of what that meant and I was glad to shake their hands.

"The Red Cross does not take payment. Its work is a little token to you of friendship from England." She thanked us again.

We now had to journey to Houplines, which is beyond Armentières. They were dropping shells, were the Germans, noticeably near some houses we passed. At the first crack of shrapnel out came all the people to gaze around.

"We'll look in here as we come back," I said. "You may find patients."

"Nothing cures them of it," said the doctor. "I suppose it's a natural curiosity to know who and what'll be hit next. But this is nothing; you should have seen them at Ypres. Till there was nothing left of the town but cellars, they stayed there. And then we had to dig them out and carry them off by force. It's a fact we had. Shells dropping around all the time—and I don't like shells."

We found the curé of Houplines—a refugee himself, for his house had been bombarded and burnt over his head—in a convent near by. We were to ask what help he needed for his people. At present none, and he thanked us, for difficulties had solved themselves; of the seven thousand that had lived and worked in Houplines only a



thousand were left. But if a third bombardment came, if it were like the second at all—! Did we know in that they had forty women and men killed and wounded, no one to attend to them, six houses burning at once (he forbore to remark that one was his own), no one to put them out? In that case they would be glad of help indeed. Then he had wise and witty little things to say about the war. Who is more charming than an old and charming churchman?

It was marvellous what good health his congregation now enjoyed. Except for the shell wounds he had very few complaints. The imminence of death was perhaps a good specific against disease. On the other hand, to be bombarded every day for two months, even though it was sometimes but for ten minutes of an afternoon, involved a certain strain on the nervous system, even of quite common people and did in the end help to lower their vitality. I said I thought that it might.

As we left he showed us a grave, among the other convent graves, of an Irish soldier, the first man killed in Armentières, he said. He had been brought to them dying. They could do nothing but be kind to him, and later show him this last respect.

"McGaun : Dublin Fusiliers," was painted on the wooden cross. M'Cann, I think it should have been, but the Irish name had puzzled them.

There was more firing that night to trouble Dickebusch slumbers ; in the morning a Sabbath peace. It was indeed Sunday, but every morning



of quiet after the guns has the Sunday feeling about it. The people passed early going to mass, one man in a shining new straw hat looking strangely out of place. There are still one or two churches on the countryside almost, if not quite, intact. It is a long walk often from the neighbourhood of their own blackened ruin, but the people seem to go.

I return to Poperinghe to watch puericulture. Puericulture—as far as I could watch it then—consists in holding court in a long workshop-shed, the administrators of the rite being a doctor, a dispenser, and an interpreter, who is as smart as smart with his Flemish. To them are brought in protesting procession babies chargeable with simple offences under a mild sanitary code. Lack of soap and water and senseless feeding have mostly caused their downfall. I imagine one could parallel the slighter cases in any English slum. It is hard to blame the mothers, refugees nearly all, when one thinks, for instance, that the shed in which we now sit is the home (save the mark) of ten of them. I cannot imagine that I should cultivate spotless cleanliness under such conditions myself. Powders, advice, and liberal application of iodine to the ruthlessly exposed person are the main punishments, while the reward for coming to endure them (and mainly, I suspect, the inducement to come) is a litre of unimpeachable milk presented on departure.

A humble-seeming job is this, not exciting perhaps for the surgeon who leaves for the Front warned by his friends to look out under fire. But



I doubt if there's a more useful job being done, day by day, in the whole of Belgium.

The Poperinghe Hospital occupies a château on the edge of the town. Anything may be called a château if its front gates are big. This is a great, gaunt house—large, but not large enough by any means. For present needs there is an overflow into huts in the garden, and there are tents for the orderlies. First designed for typhoid ; that scourge having now abated it displays a very mixed bag. There are Belgian soldiers who cannot reach their own big institution at La Panne, civil pneumonias, pleurisies, what not, ancient ladies with shell-wounds (very cross about them, too, and the rule is not to be cross about one's wounds), while some of the latest recruits to the Belgian population—of the class of 1935 as the grim joke has it—do from this outpost of safety hear the guns for the first time.

One talks lightly enough about these daily bombardments ; they are the staple of chaff. One does so, I think, instinctively to lessen a little the strain of their inconvenience ; for in truth they can be serious enough. Once you have been hit, moreover, and have had to wait patiently, perhaps, while the next half dozen shells burst round you, wondering, if you have faculties enough left to wonder, what your further luck in the matter may be—well, a bed within range of those big guns, however comfortable, is not the most nerve-resting place to recover in. Poperinghe Hospital, however, sits fairly secure, for modern artillery makes good practice, and if they aim at a railway



station they're not likely to miss it by more than half a mile.

Nevertheless, a "shell wounds and shock" is evacuated to other quarters as soon as may be. (What a joy there is in technical terms! How military it sounds to evacuate patients from a hospital!) And were I a Belgian *blessé* I should choose, I think, to reach convalescence at Watten. I should like to be sent there in the late afternoon of a still August day. One seems to pass so quickly from the hurly-burly of this army at work uprooting and destroying immemorial things into a country that has never dreamed of war; though heaven knows it has had its share; for what nation in Europe has not fought over Flanders! But Nature is forgiving and forgetful, and there can hardly be a more peaceful-looking landscape in the world. Do you know Cassel? Have you overlooked the plain from it at sunset? I think that the Great Treaty should be signed there.

Watten is by a canal, which is rather better than a canal, for clear water flows slowly through it. On the banks are the hospital tents, on the canal itself is the hospital barge. The plan of things at Watten seems especially to suit the Friends, to fall naturally in with their easier ways. There are no soldiers near. One can do one's best as best one can.

Here also is a barge hospital. Now a barge hospital is good fun; but more than that, this barge has been made a good hospital. Think what its name was in its mere bargian days: Notre Dame de Secours. Who could resist it?



There are many points to such a contrivance. Find a canal like this, as sweet as a sweet river, and at any needed point you can tie up and remain, complete and self-sufficient for your work. And for carrying desperate cases there is no less jarring way.

I set out one morning for a day's sanitary inspection. An ambulance dumped us at Neuve Eglise. What you do as a sanitary inspector of these parts and times is this: You take a large scale map (an artillery map it is called now), you outline on it for yourself a small trampable area, and in that you visit every house or remains of a house, round up the inhabitants, and do some severe cross-questioning.

Have you been ill since the war began? Have any of your children? What was it? How long did it last? Did you see a doctor? If so, who? How do you feel now? Have you been inoculated for typhoid? Do you sell milk to the soldiers? Do you boil it?

Answers to all this must be noted and tested as far as may be, tabulated, and sent to Authority. Authority considers them and takes steps, if necessary. Typhoid is what you are really after, and (more elusive) the remains of typhoid, which, left to re-germinate, will, at any excuse, be typhoid again. Remember that an army is billeted among these people, and not under the most comfortable or sanitary conditions. This job matters.

At the first house we do a little amateur doctoring. The baby has a temperature, so we discover by our thermometer after unwrapping and undoing



about ten layers of clothing ; among them, if you please, a buckram corset. There are other symptoms. "Trench fever, probably," says my Friend. I fear I grin. I have seen babies like this before in English cottages while Belgian trenches were yet undug. But it's always simpler to have the disease that's going. And in Flanders at the moment there's a choice of several. The bacteriologist is having the time of his life : a new coccus waggles its head at him every week. We give a little very safe advice, make our notes and pass on.

One must be careful not to miss these little farms, for people live in the oddest places. There is perhaps a rather suspicious chorus of good health. The folk may fear eviction, though you wouldn't think they'd want to stay in this trodden, trenched, broken-down country. But for one thing, I suppose, there is the peasant's instinct to cling hard to the soil he conquers year by year in truer fashion than any invader can conquer him ; for another, he does very well out of the troops, and is probably laying by quite a little money.

So we plough through the morning, finding one household and its answers monotonously like another. Comes lunch time. As we are near a village, though it be but the remains of one, we can be luxurious. Bread and cheese and a haystack we despise, and turn our way into Neuve Eglise to a little house beyond the toppling ruin of a church, humble and untouched. It was strange to find this demure little haven of neatness amid such ruins. We sat down in the empty



shop where nobody now came to buy. We had soup, tinned salmon, apricots, and cheese, and they had dug us out a bottle of wine. Two fat dogs and a thin cat disputed the remains. The ancient man who served us leaned against the wall, looking at us, half humorously I fancied, with blinking eyes. He was about the last inhabitant; he might well have been the oldest. I wondered what he was thinking. Later he thawed to a cigarette, but he wouldn't talk much. I suppose he was weary of talking, weary of the war, one's only subject. Well he might be. We paid a modest bill and departed; he blinked us out of sight.

The afternoon might easily have become more exciting, for we had to find our way along deserted roads with shell holes neither few nor far between, and into trenched and sand-bagged farms in our search for the final outposts of Belgian population. But there they still were, men and women, living in whatever corners the shells had left intact, calm enough, determined to tend their cattle and gather their harvest. I only hope they had no other trade. We found one farm, an unsavoury hole, the yard mostly manure, the livestock mainly flies, headquarters of a Canadian battery.

The O.C. gave us kindly welcome. "Come in when you've done and sit down for ten minutes and hear our gramophone. It's a damned hot day for walking." We had, indeed, heard that gramophone afar off. And now as we bit our way in Flemish through the prescribed questions—Have you been ill since the war? Have you got diarrhœa? Do you sell milk to soldiers?—



into my other ear was ground Caruso in Pagliacci. We sat with our friendly Canadians awhile. They offered us drinks, gave us more gramophone, asked us for news. The nearer you get to the front the more you are begged by the people who belong there for information about it. The Major commanding put us some searchingly personal questions too. He was politeness itself. But if you wander near the lines with an artillery map and a note book, wear what uniform you will, you must expect to be asked your business.

We satisfied him, I think; inquired on our parts if any more civilians lurked about. There were two women, it appeared, on a farm still further on across the fields. Yes, it was quite safe to go if we followed the hedge. We found the women, the farm was wrecked around them. They were living in the cowshed, their household stuff that remained piled in the middle of it. They received us politely and protested perfect health.

Next evening I was taking another and a final stroll in front of those outworn, unused fortifications of Dunkerque.

I. It's a fine work you do. But speaking callously, these wretched people ought to be cleared out by force from what remains to them of their miserable country, and the armies left undisturbed to the job of getting it all back for them. Then four-fifths of your work wouldn't have to be done at all.

MY PARTICULAR FRIEND. I agree. But there are difficulties in the way. And anyhow, it isn't



done. And while they are here they are a danger to themselves and to us if no one looks after them. That's speaking callously, too. It's a job the army has no particular resource for. It's a job, too, wanting, frankly, rather more tact than an army is apt to bestow. For, after all, it is these people's own country which, with the best intentions in the world, we are making desolate. Except for the honour and glory of national existence, the Germans wouldn't do them much more harm if they took care to behave themselves, and so they must feel. We owe the Belgians a bit.

I. We're paying it to some of them, one way and another, in good hard cash.

M.P.F. Yes, to some of them. But it does no harm to be paying them this way, too, with a little extra kindness and care and no self-interest in much of what we do.

I. Come, you don't want typhoid, for your own sakes.

M.P.F. And they don't want it either, for their own. And this is where the Red Cross ought to come in, doing the job that officially is bound to get left undone, because they haven't time at Headquarters to lay down all the rules. Don't you think so?

I. Oh, yes. I'm only grumbling to draw you out.

M.P.F. We've turned from one thing to another here all these nine months. If the army has got a big job on, we've ambulances to spare them. They'd sooner have a man unofficially carted in than officially left lying another hour or two. In the bad times at Ypres we had a dressing



station at the Sacré Cœur—you saw it, just outside the town.

I. I saw where it had been.

M.P.F. We did about seven hundred dressings in a day there once—soldiers, civilians, anyone, fetching them in from all over the town. We had to move further out after that. There's no object in doing dressings under fire when you needn't. They'd smashed it badly by the next week.

I. I notice that though it's against your principles to fight, that's not because you mind being shelled.

M.P.F. Well, we're not all Friends; but most of us are, and they can't enlist, of course, or do anything of that sort. And I think some of them feel—I know they do—that because of it, they must care less, if possible, for the danger than men who may hit back when the chance comes. I have to tell them not to be reckless. But we're as frightened as everyone else is.

I. I don't think you're frightened; indeed, I don't think anyone is. Nervous, yes; horrified at the thought of disgusting wounds. But not frightened of death. After all, it was the first lesson man ever learnt, that he had inexorably to face it. Therefore it remains one of the things that, on the whole, you can't frighten him with. Lawyers and doctors and over-clever folk like that still try. But the soldier knows better. War, I suppose, will teach us once again a few such things that you'd think we need never have forgotten.



## POSTSCRIPT

AT 83, PALL MALL, AGAIN

*Some months later. I enter, finding that same Red Cross Official even busier than before.*

HE. Back again?

I. Back again.

HE. Seen it all?

I. Perhaps half. As much, though, as I can write about for people to read at a sitting.

HE. Have you written me a good "begging" chapter?

I. Confound it, what a son of a horse leech you are! I never heard of such gifts as you get. People seem to hand you over their houses, their table-spoons, the very clothes off their backs.

HE. So they ought. I don't beg humbly. I'm a highwayman. But we're all travelling this same road now, and, if riding is too costly and we all have to walk, it's as well we should travel light. So "Stand and Deliver" is my word, and we'll beat the silver spoons into crutches for those that can never walk unhelped again.

I. Yes, indeed; Red Cross Work won't end with the war's end.



HE. Write me that begging chapter, then.

I. No, it belongs to another book. You'll not be let down for money while the war's on—have no fear. But there is a book to be written—a more imaginative one than this of mine—by some one who has worked for you, not merely looked on in praise or blame as I have done.

HE. What sort of a book?

I. An answer, it might be, to the question that is, I think, implicit in this one.

HE. What question?

I. Well, it has framed itself to me at the end of every chapter, asking the secret by which this Red Cross Work is done in what we're proud to call the Red Cross way. Now, we don't pretend it's always perfect work, or that every worker is a wingless angel. But there is a quality about it, isn't there? which you can't buy for money, which I think we know mere drill and discipline won't give.

HE. Yes, our rank and file are good. By Jove, they are good!

I. Well, why are they? How are they? Answer me that. Any drill sergeant can make men get up early and stay up late. But how does one make them *want* to get up earlier and stay up later still? It isn't so hard to make people do as they are told. But how do they learn to do it without telling? For it wasn't the ten minutes' training he had one wet October afternoon that turned a chemist's assistant into a smart superintendent of stores. It isn't a wish to excel in your eyes or mine that sets a golf-playing young lady to scrubbing floors and



seeing in a full-fledged army nurse a strangely superior being. What makes men line up in the soaking wet beside their cars, semi-millionaire and paid mechanic shoulder to shoulder, any self-importance that the one once had packed home (oh, no doubt kept there tidily ready for him to reclaim !); but all that's important now for them that their engines should be spotless—and it isn't always the mechanic's engine that shines the best. Surely there never was to a mere Census-taking mind such a hodge-podge of ability and disability, of the expert and the amateur, of likely and unlikely, of simply preposterous people (so a mere drill sergeant would say) doing credit to the Red Cross in six or seven countries at this moment as we sit and talk. How then; and why?

HE. I think it's very simple. They've got the right Idea.

I. That best commander in the world. And what a thousand pities if they ever lose it! It has taken War to pull them together, these several thousand men and women of such different ages, classes, opinions—radically, quarrelsomely different. And most of them are dumped in dreary holes with what is—to say the truth—most devilishly uninteresting work to do, work they wouldn't look at if you offered to pay them for it. They keep their differences of mere opinion still, and you'll hear hot argument; but they're working with a sense of fellowship they've never known till now, and being—I make bold to say—individually more efficient than they ever were before. Why must Peace drag them, in any final sense, apart?



HE. It mustn't. We've work that stretches years ahead already. Think of that "Star and Garter Home"! Five hundred men and more it's to hold, men paralysed for life. But somehow we must make it life for them and not the living death it otherwise will be. Then there's St. Dunstan's with its blind men. Not the greatest victory we can win will give them back their eyes. Boys, some of them are yet, and looking forward—for that saddest sort of vision is always left you—to long years. If their old age finds them forgotten, England will be shamed for ever. Think of the thousands and thousands of men that the war will leave helpless and half helpless in all sorts of other ways. The Red Cross must help them, and go on helping them, and keep on helping them.

I. Yes, the fighting men can be out of khaki long before your Red Cross army can disband. And even then—even when the last piece of patching-up is done—why should such a fellowship finish? This war was to end war, wasn't it? But not all war; only this stupidest sort. For there's the other war at home—longer and bitterer that may be. But these two years have proved, it seems, that to win anything in the world at all we have to fight and win *that* war day by day. We needn't name the enemies.

HE. Do we quite agree yet who—and what—they are?

I. No; that—to those who needed a proof—has been the difficulty, hasn't it? And still for want of agreeing on what else to fight we fight each other! But my personal gain from doing this little job



(and I thank you) has been that I met and managed to agree a little with men and women that I might have disagreed with all my life, merely for lack of a common ground to meet on.

HE. I understand. Are you looking for a phrase to finish your book with?

I. Yes.

HE. One does. Why not quote Milton?

I. That sounds swagger. How?

HE. There's a phrase in one of the Latin Tracts—oh, don't imagine I carry a tattered copy of a well-loved classic in my pocket; I saw it quoted the other day—"Unless you rid yourselves of Avarice, Ambition, Luxury, you will suffer a harsher despot at home than any you have encountered in the field."

I. Good. I'll end with that. That shall be the "War after the War" mapped out for us, against all the microbes of social disease that our half-fledged European civilisation has fostered, till the blood-letting of crude fighting has brought the nations face to face with social death. Do we agree yet which they are; is it more than verbally if we do agree it? I can't say. But if our war after the war isn't to be war to stamp such things out—well, somehow the old stupider sort of fighting will be back on us again before long. Various remedies, various ways of attack there must be, I know; I only hope the Red Cross way won't be quite lost sight of. For I do believe that the spirit in which its work is done is in some degree the spirit by which our newer England must be built. Not strictly germane to my subject this? But, seeing what you've let me



see has bred that thought in me. You're busy. I won't keep you any longer. Good-bye.

HE. Good-bye—and thank you.

I. No, no. Thank *you*. For the little that's in this book is a little part indeed of what I've learnt in writing it.



