

For instance, my wire ran:—

"Transport *Kildonan* passed Hurst seven ten p.m. Will stop in river to-night. Small-pox on board. Do not know when they will land."

However, by dint of telephoning to worried dock officials, I made out that by midday Friday she might be in, and made my way down. It was a very gusty, windy, wet day—muddy, a grey sky and flying clouds; an English day to land from South Africa.

Southampton docks are a network of railway lines, with long embarkation sheds and store houses lining quays and basins. The railway lines are distracting as you dodge among them to reach your destination, often more than half a mile off. Everywhere there are boards placarded "Look out for the train!" and furious engines puff down upon you at an alarming rate. You certainly have, as the Americans say, to "keep a skinned eye" upon the railway traffic as you cross Southampton docks.

The *Kildonan* was in the Empress dock, the policeman—supposed to keep the people out—let me pass without a word. The disembarkation had already begun. There were not a hundred people there besides the officials, but the shed was already filling with khaki—khaki that was in a desperate hurry to write telegrams. The tables, the benches, the walls were being utilised to scribble on, and the little telegraph office was doing a brisk business. Outside, against the wharf, the huge white boat was moored—slowly disgorging its fourteen hundred scaramouches. They were bronzed when they were not haggard; they were cheery, though subdued (the small-pox and a suicide on board had scared them)—but oh! their clothes were not the clothes of the soldier that drills in Hyde Park. They wore khaki helmets, huge and hideous; slouch hats, also khaki; khaki tunics in various shades; khaki trousers, or breeches and dirty and faded putties; some wore grey great coats, fearfully weather-beaten, stained and crumpled; but very few looked smart. None, of course, had any arms, and all were encumbered with bags of kit and birdcages and even monkeys. They were mostly convalescent; a few of their necks or heads were bandaged; some walked with sticks; half-a-dozen had their arms in slings. They looked as if they had left something behind them they were not sorry to see the last of. A man who passed me stamped his foot on the wharf, saying "Thank God I'm in England again."

A few men—notably of the Imperial Yeomanry—looked smart in their clothes and well set up, but the mass of the men looked more like emigrants landing than soldiers. But there was no mistake about one thing—they

looked as if they had done hard work and lived a hard life.

You could tell what they belonged to by their helmets—some Highlanders had sewn a bit of tartan on their helmets or slouch hats, others had scribbled on them with an indelible blue pencil R. A., or R. F., or S. H. One man who belonged to the Imperial something or other, had "Pom-pom Section" written on his hat. I think there was hardly a regiment that was not represented—Coldstream Guards and all;—and there was a tall Padre, looking very odd to civilian eyes, in khaki tunic, breeches and puttie, with the black Maltese Cross on his cap and shoulder straps. A couple of Highland officers in full, proper uniform, formed an enormous contrast to the weather-stained crew.

The Southampton cornet-player who plays to every transport as she arrives or leaves, was there, playing "Soldiers of the Queen," Irish airs, English airs and Scotch airs, and the men overhead hanging over the side waiting their turn to disembark, cheered him and threw pennies at him. Here and there friends had come to meet someone—generally an officer.

Among the 1,400 there were only a few bad cases; the four small-pox cases had already been removed from the temporary isolation hospital, rigged up on the hurricane deck, to the Southampton small-pox ship. There had been six cases of lunacy on board, but one had drowned himself on the way home. One was a doctor of the R.A.M.C.

Unfortunately, owing to the small-pox cases, the order allowing no one on board—generally a dead letter—was rigidly enforced, so that one could not go to see the accommodation, etc., provided on the ship; but she is a beautiful boat and they all seemed to have been very comfortable. We saw a group of seven reserve Sisters saying good-bye to all and sundry on the deck, but I was not able to speak to them.

The trains ran into the back of the embarkation shed and were rapidly filled, and each train-load, as it ran out, was cheered by those remaining, whilst the fine white train, labelled "War Office Ambulance," carried the fever cases to Netley.

Perhaps the chief thing that remains impressed on my mind is the quiet matter of fact way in which the whole disembarkment was carried out—friends met quietly, men came on shore orderly, there was a little shouting and cheering, no singing. When I close my eyes I can see a good-tempered, bronzed crowd, clad in shocking clothes, with odd bags and bundles, bird-cages and sticks, packing themselves quietly into railway carriages, and melting away inland—England's soldiers coming home.

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