

LETTERS FROM THE FRONT.

LETTER FROM MR. STEPHEN PAGET, F.R.C.S.,
AFTER HIS VISIT TO THE URGENCY CASES
HOSPITAL AT BAR-LE-DUC, MAY, 1915.*

In the train between Paris and Dieppe,
Friday morning.

[DEAR MISS EDEN,—You said you would like some notes with "local colour," so please forgive pencil, for I shall be happily busy with home when I get there, so I write in the train. Now for anything that you may like to use in any way for your journal.

The journey out was delightful. I had no idea what a lovely country France in May is; we went for hours through country, every mile of it beautiful. We came across the first results of the war at Sermaise, all of a sudden—poor little place, a horrible wreck. Then we began to note other results—the graves, with their little wooden crosses, some with a képi hung on them. Then came Bar-le-Duc. It is a jolly old town, with river and a good Haute Ville, and the Hotel de Metz was good fun; a bit rough, but so busy and crowded. The little *salon à manger* was a delightful hustle and babble at dinner, and our rooms were clean, and at night (Bar-le-Duc goes to bed about 8.30) all silent but the church clocks and the frogs, and perhaps the sound of guns nearly thirty miles off. Soldiers of all ranks and uniforms everywhere, and the chief industry—jam-making—is very acceptable to the hospital people, and Bar-le-Duc takes things philosophically and cheerily. Fancy the little gamins, we found them playing marbles with shrapnel bullets!

There was a fanfare in the big courtyard of the Hopital Centrale the evening we got there. Such a pretty sight. It was 14 or 15 "amateur" French soldiers. They had found some instruments in a deserted village or villages, and had rehearsed a bit, and they played very well, with a crowd round them of patients, soldiers, and French and English doctors and nurses and orderlies, and for a background to the pavilions and store tents and outhouses a hillside of fresh green and apple blossom, and sunshine and blue sky. It was really a beautiful sight. I was talking with the French Médecin-chef, and looking at some of his cases, when "God Save the King" was struck up, and he stood rigidly at the salute, and I bare headed beside him, all through it. "Werry nice and comformable" it all felt.

Next morning—Sunday—we went to Mass in the receiving tent, at an altar made of packing cases duly covered. Some of the patients sat on the beds, and two or three were laid on stretchers close to the altar. The curé of St. Mihiel said Mass, and made a little discourse. Everybody likes him at the hospital. That afternoon Mr. Philips motored us to Vassincourt and Sermaise. I can't describe the frightful thoroughness of the de-

* We are indebted to Miss Eden for this most interesting letter.—Ed.

struction. It was really like the pictures I have seen of Pompeii. Vassincourt is just wiped out and emptied. It is just a rubbish heap. Monday we were pretty much all day at the hospital. We saw the *train des blessés* come in, the daily consignment of patients. The medical cases were even worse to see than the surgical. Such poor wrecks of men, some with some lung trouble, and many with typhoid, and some looking just dazed and worn out, body and soul. Certainly the hospital can't complain that it doesn't get sufficiently urgent cases. Most of the wounds are shell or shrapnel, and some of them indeed many of them, are *frightful*, such as you very rarely see in civil hospitals. But you'll be very glad to hear that the death rate of our hospital has been very low, and this good result is due not to luck but to good surgery and good nursing, and to the persistent use which our hospital makes of the open air. The men doze for hours there in deck chairs. I heard that the French surgeons were greatly surprised at the English employment of unlimited open air, even for serious cases.

Tuesday, having done our work at the hospital, we were taken a grand motor round—Mr. Philips' great kindness again—to Villers-aux-Vents, Les Ilettes, Ste. Menehould, Clermont; indeed, other places too, whose names I can't remember. It was a day of contrasts. Villers-aux-Vents is terribly wrecked, and so is much of Clermont. At Villers, they showed us the dug-outs of the Crown Prince and his staff, made last autumn. I note in *Le Matin* that to-day is his birthday. He is of the memorable age of thirty-three. We drove through miles of the Forest of the Argonne, and very beautiful it is, and we picniced in a little "heaven on earth" in the forest, and were given a big bunch of lilies of the valley by a French soldier, who picked them in the wood for us, and would take nothing for them. At Les Ilettes and at Clermont we visited the clearing hospitals, "Hopitals d'Evacuation," and were received with the utmost kindness by diverse army surgeons. These little clearing hospitals are well arranged, and seem to be doing very good work, but of course they get some frightful cases, and it seems idle to expect anything like "asepsis" anywhere. Wednesday we paid good-bye visits to General Mignon, who is a "pearl," and to the French Médecin Chef, and to everybody at the hospital, and departed for Paris. It has been a wonderful and *most happy* week, and we are quite sure that we have been useful. I think the good nursing has been a grand appeal to the French people. Of course we still want lots of things for the hospital.

I'm finishing this on the boat, in the smoothest, glassiest passage that man could wish.

Yours very sincerely,
STEPHEN PAGET.

We are asked to state that for the future any gifts for the Urgency Cases Hospital should be addressed to 50A, Curzon Street, London, W., instead of to 11, Stratford Place.

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