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EDITORIAL.

GUARDIANS OF THE EMPIRE.

In the War in which we are now engaged, when the finest men that the country can produce are freely offering their lives in the defence of the Empire, it is inevitable not only that many shall die gloriously on the battle field, but, what is inexpressibly sadder, that many shall be maimed for life, and unable to follow the occupation at which they have been accustomed to earn a living.

Sir Frederick Milner, who has been visiting the wounded men in military hospitals for some months, writes to the press—

“What has caused me more pain than anything is the mental suffering these poor fellows endure. They do not know what is to become of them. I endeavoured to assure them that they need not worry, that a grateful country would see to it that they did not want; but they said they had been told that so often only to be deceived, and I found it impossible to reassure them. Now it is inconceivable to me that these men will not be amply provided for. The country surely would not suffer it. Would it not be possible for the War Office to give instructions to the officer in command at the various hospitals to tell these poor fellows that they need not worry; to tell them definitely what will be done for them as soon as they leave the hospital, and so save them from the mental torture which adds so much to their sufferings. It seems to me that mere humanity demands this. . . I commend this suggestion most earnestly to our great War Minister, whose sympathy for these gallant men is well known.”

Trained nurses who know so well how mental anxiety adds to the distress, and retards the recovery of their patients will endorse every word of Sir Frederick Milner's letter. As nurses they will wish that the

assurance which “mere humanity demands” may be given at once, as patriots they will earnestly hope that the sailors and soldiers, by whose gallantry alone we are spared the invasion by a relentless foe, the horrors of which would exceed those which have appalled the world in Belgium, shall receive not only just but generous treatment. For the nation to accept all that these men, brave beyond compare have done for it, and to refuse to pay the bill when, broken in our service, they need the means of support for themselves and their dependents, would be an act of incredible meanness of which we refuse to believe the nation would be guilty.

But it is our national duty not only to pay our debts eventually, but to give a Promissory Note at once in order to relieve the mental anxiety of the patients which is inevitable, when blind, halt, and maimed they lie in cruel uncertainty in hospital wards, waiting for the time when the kindness and care now lavished upon them will cease, and crippled, or sightless they have to face life once more.

We hope that one of the first acts of the House of Commons, when it reassembles on February 2nd will be to put this question on a sound financial footing. “The Incorporated Soldiers and Sailors Help Society” is doing good work, but this is not a matter for private charity, the responsibility must be assumed by every man and woman in the kingdom who is financially able to share the burden of Empire.

The most magnificent and wealthy Empire that the world has ever known cannot expect to defend its treasures at the miserable rate of pay which has been considered sufficient for our defenders in the past, the whole system of National Defence needs putting on a new economic basis. Nor must widows and orphans be forgotten. If the Empire is worth keeping it is worth paying for.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)