

CONCERTS AT THE FRONT.

"The cheer you bring is worth much physic and not a few sermons." So wrote a chaplain at the front of the Concert Parties, organized by Miss Lena Ashwell for His Majesty's Forces in the Great War, and all nurses, who know well the pleasure and relief from strain which these entertainments give will endorse his words, and those of a Colonel who wrote of his men: "They have been through hell, and poor chaps, are soon to undergo it again, and these glimpses of civilization have had the most ennobling effect on them, and seem to take them out of their drab surroundings here." Such testimony must be a full reward to Miss Lena Ashwell and those who with her organized the first concert party in February, 1915, at the request of the Ladies' Auxiliary Committee of the Y.M.C.A. "as anything would have been organized at the suspicion of a wish for it from the gallant armies in the battlefield."

"We are not," says Miss Ashwell, in an account of a year's music at the Front, "supposed to be a musical nation, but the war has changed everything for those who realize what the war means, and one of the needs of our armies has been discovered to be music—the best music, and still more music."

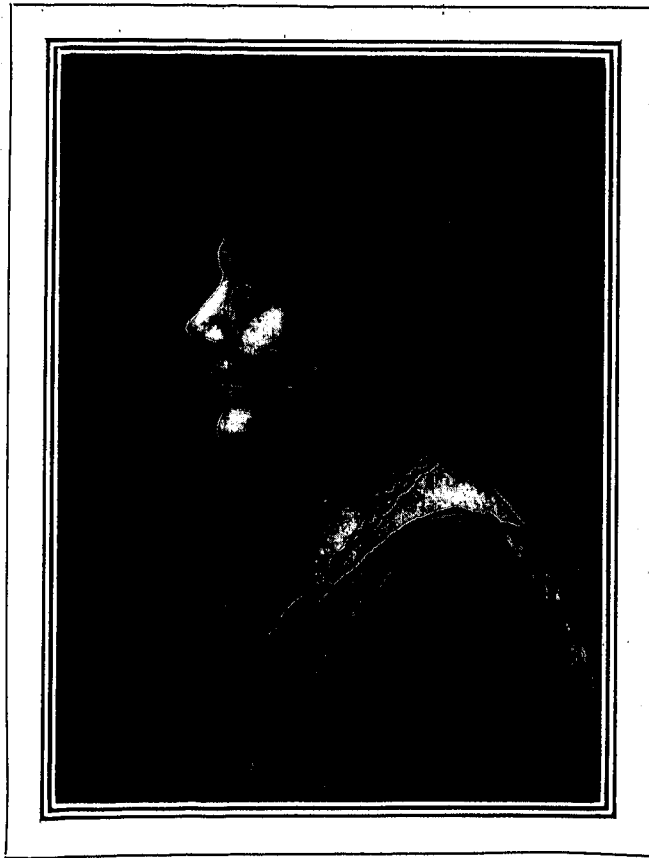
As is well known the Y.M.C.A. had followed the Army to the front and been busy erecting the now famous "huts" some of which hold 1,000 men. "The men were writing home for children's mouth organs with which to make a cheerful noise in the trenches, and gramophones were the most popular items (from the patient's point of view) in the equipment of military hospitals.

"It is very difficult for people at home to realize the monotony of life, when life consists of hard work, rigid military discipline, and nothing else, and when one's world is suddenly a town of bare huts in a sea of mud; or a casino, race-course, or a railway station transformed into a

hospital—a veritable city of pain. Such worlds would be nightmare worlds if it were not for the patience and cheerfulness which are the victorious spirits of any army.

"In these worlds the visit of a concert party is an event looked forward to for weeks beforehand and talked of for weeks afterwards. The men welcome the music as if they were hungry and thirsty for the beauty and comfort of it; and if it was a touching surprise to find out how much the concerts were needed, it was even a greater surprise to find that it was the good music, true music, that they loved most. . . .

"But it isn't only the sick and wounded and combatant branches of the Army that need and enjoy the concerts. There are hundreds of thousands of A.S.C. and Army Ordnance men who have been out since the early days of the war working sixteen hours or more a day, officers and men, week-days and Sundays alike, without leave or recreation. And then there is the medical service and the nursing sisters. It is one of the mysteries of the war where so many splendid trained nurses have come from. The nurses live under as strict a military discipline as the troops—rather stricter, in fact, for they are never allowed out in the evenings at all except to come to the concert we



MISS LENA ASHWELL (MRS. SIMSON).

give them once a month. Our 'Officers' and Nurses' concert is the only occasion when the nurses from the different hospitals meet each other, and we have pauses between the music so that they can talk. It is their one opportunity. They are all fetched in from the different hospitals in motor cars by the Y.M.C.A., and driven back again when it is over. It is a very pretty sight—the vast audience of nurses in their white coifs and uniforms, the blues and greys, with touches of military scarlet, and their happiness over the very simple pleasure is delightful."

Again Miss Ashwell, in an article originally

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