

AN AMBULANCE IN REST.

A charming article by Captain Andrew Macphail, of the Canadian Army Medical Corps, on "An Ambulance in Rest," published in the *British Medical Journal*, shows how sometimes in the horrors of war the lot may fall for a short time in pleasant places. Captain Macphail writes in part:—

For more than eleven months we had been in the Ypres salient, still a salient, but now happily turned in the opposite direction. We left it without regret, since that particular part of Belgium is not calculated to inspire much enthusiasm as a place of residence. During that year the only rest was a change of work. But now the corps was on the move, and there was a chance that some particular unit might remain in a sheltered nook whilst the army flowed by. . . . That was the happy chance which befell the Nth Field Ambulance.

The short march brought us from Belgium to France. Every mile the scene of desolation faded. Next day came the long march.

Boolezele was the place of rest. To every man in this particular unit Boolezele will always be remembered as the place "where our caravan has rested." The day's march and the quiet interval that followed was an interlude between Ypres and the Somme. We had moved out at 7 in the morning. Rain threatened, but the farmer assured us that the "barometer was good." . . . Then the sun came out, and we had brilliant August weather, with the light in a strong blaze travelling from field to field. France disclosed to us all its dignity, beauty and richness in dainty châteaux half hidden in wooded parks, in massive buildings set in large undulating and hedged fields. For such a treasure house, France may well fight.

Towards evening we gained the summit of a hill through a long avenue of trees. The land fell away to the left. A yellow road led down the slope and upward again towards the west. Red roofs were shining in the sun across the valley and a single spire lifted itself to the sky. The Quartermaster came riding back and met us at this spot. His young face shone as if he had seen an angel. He had been into the promised land. This was our place of rest and he was to be our guide.

The march was twenty miles. We had been in the saddle, or afoot, for nine hours, and there was yet something to be done before we sought our billets. But we had done it so often that now it did itself. Wagons were parked and off-loaded. The fifty horses were put on their lines. Hospital tents were erected. The cooks were at work. The men were fed and the details of the camp were left to those who were responsible for them.

There was dinner at an *estaminet*—hot soles from the sea in a rich, brown sauce, two pairs of portly ducks, yards of crisp bread, butter fresh from the

dairy, and coffee made with a loving hand. The woman served the meal with a light heart. Her husband was *permissionnaire*; he sat in his own kitchen smoking his pipe, and we gave him much respect. A French soldier is sacrosanct in our eyes. We go softly in his house.

We were in civvies once more. Each house stood square on its own bottom. The walls were intact, and true as a plummet could make them. The church had a spire and its windows glowed in the sun. The Place was undefiled by the *debris* of war. Women walked in the streets, free and unafraid. We spoke with them. Fresh from witnessing the bowed and broken women of Belgium, who creep in the gloom and mire of their ruined homes, or toil in their heavy black fields, these French women seemed to be creatures of life and gaiety; but at a chance word the smile and sparkle would fade. In the presence of unshed tears the conversation died. . . .

When the newness of the situation wore off, the surrounding district afforded fresh interest. To obtain a general view one climbed the church tower. It was a blue, blowy afternoon, following a sunny, showery morning, and earth and sky were at their cleanest and freshest. From this considerable elevation of hill and tower there was much to be seen. To the north—Dunkirk, with a flash of breaking wave in the Channel beyond; Gravelines to the west of that; and Calais itself in a dun cloud away to the south. Two years ago the advanced guard of the enemy was arrested in this very town. The enemy was within actual sight of Calais. That will be for ever a bitter moment in his history. . . .

Best of all we were out of the mud. With the nearness to the coast, the nature of the soil had changed and the roads were crisp with sand. In Belgium the horses slid and slipped over the greasy earth; here their hoofs bit into the path with a clean, crunching sound. This was riding for pleasure, by curving paths and sunken lanes as beautiful as any in England, where we had once spent nearly five months in training.

By common consent, the most perfect billet of all was in the house of a man named S—. His sister lived with him, a silent, shy woman, who crept about the silent rooms in silent slippers of cloth.

The woman had the repute of being a *chef de cuisine*. In the morning she proved that it was so. In the little room that fronts the street a table was spread. There were pears from the garden, an omelette from the clean kitchen, coffee clear as a trickle from a Highland peat bed, milk hot—yet free from scum—little breads of white flour, and butter made whilst the food was preparing.

Meanwhile the battle of the Somme was in progress. Officers were returning who had gone to prepare the way. They furnished us with an estimate of the casualties we should be obliged to care for. . . .

In the morning we moved out upon the road at daybreak.

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