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EDITORIAL.

PATIENTS FIRST.

We are glad that Mr. Philip Gibbs, the *Daily Telegraph* correspondent, writing from the War Correspondents' Head Quarters in France, makes clear that when it became necessary to move the casualty clearing stations farther back the *mot d'ordre* was "patients first"; as the *Times* reported "nurses first," and stated they were the first to be sent away on lorries, such patients as were able following on foot, a procedure contrary to all precedent where British Nurses are concerned.

To quote Mr. Gibbs in describing the retreat:—

"As heroic a story as anything in all this history of the past four weeks is that of the medical officers and nurses and orderlies, and ambulance men belonging to these casualty clearing stations, who were not far behind our old fighting lines when the battle began on March 21, and then in a very few hours were on the very edge of the enemy's advancing tide, so that they were almost caught by it, and had to make brave efforts to rescue their wounded and save their equipment, and get away to places where, for a little while again, they could go on with their noble work until the red edge of war swept up with its fire again, and they had to retreat still further. I used to pass very often the outer ring of those casualty stations on the right of our line beyond Bapaume in the Cambrai salient, and away towards St. Quentin. . . . It was always great to get a glimpse of the nurse in her white cap and grey frock amidst all the khaki and mud and wreckage, always fresh and bright against the filthy background of war.

Then they were almost caught. . . . It became a question of only a few hours, sometimes of a last quarter of an hour,

whether these medical officers, with nurses and orderlies could get away. It was always the rule 'patients first' and at Ham there were 1,200 wounded, and many others in other places."

Mr. Gibbs brings the scene before us. The railways choked with military transport, or destroyed by shell fire. On the roads refugees mixed up with our transport and guns and troops. But the medical staffs were equal to the occasion. The wounded who could walk were gathered together, and sent on the roads to make their way back, the badly wounded were packed into all the available ambulances, equipment was put on to any train regardless of destination, medical officers looked after the surgical instruments and trundled them along the roads on wheeled stretchers. The sisters, after the wounded had left, were put on any vehicle going back from the battle line, and Mr. Gibbs describes them as he saw them, "squeezed between drivers and men on motor lorries, sitting amongst our Tommies on motor lorries, one at least on a gun limber, and others perched on the top of forage, still merry and bright in spite of the tragedy about them, because that is their training and their faith."

In this retreat one sister was killed and another wounded. "Three ambulances were smashed by bombs, and two drivers and some of the patients killed. But all the wounded were brought away from the outer ring of the casualty clearing stations—a noble achievement—and then from the second ring. . . . At Roye seventy patients remained with a medical officer and twelve orderlies until they could be rescued if there were any possible chance. There seemed none," but happily a rescue was effected, only just in time, for the last ambulance came under German rifle fire.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)