

We pressed forward hour after hour—it would be too great honour for the Boches to take as prisoners the Sisters of the F.F.N.C. ! We covered thirty-eight kilometres the first day, and in spite of the tragedy in the rear we welcomed the breaking of dawn—thrilled with the triumphant music of thousands of birds, including the purple notes of the nightingale and the monotonous gibe of the ever-artful cuckoo. At intervals we sat for a brief rest on the roadside and consumed our bully beef and dry bread—and very grateful we were for these unappetising viands. Strength renewed, we marched on, coming in time to a little town where we were made welcome, billeted, fed, and sank to sleep—but not for long, as we were still under fire from Gothas and bombs. Nothing daunted, however, we were up and off again in the early hours of another superb day; the sun smiled upon us; we were foot-sore but warm and dry. One medical member of our unit tracked us along the dusty road by the trace of our little heels. On this day our march was very slow, owing to the congestion from traffic of all kinds—refugees with all their worldly goods piled high—poor old people, whose place should be a seat in the sunshine of their homes after a life-time of toil. How sad to see their homeless plight!—the pale mothers and weary children. We tramped on, covering another twenty-five kilometres—and came by night to a dépôt for soldiers *en route* for the Front. Here we rested on the straw shake-downs of the soldiers—good enough for them, good enough for us—and slept long and peacefully, in spite of the mice playing hide and seek in our hair! The following day we entrained for Paris, and arrived there dishevelled, yet triumphant—having covered seventy kilometres in the two days and escaped a fate no British woman can contemplate unmoved, and where we experienced a terrific barrage by way of welcome.

Once in Paris, the splendid organisers of the British Committee of the Croix Rouge Française soon arranged our affairs. We bought a few remnants and made us blue veils and felt clothed and in our right minds. Our Matron advised "Blighty" for rest and fresh outfit. To this the French War Office agreed. Soon we had free first-class passes to destination and back—and when we arrived in London, Queen Mary's Hostel took us in (what comfort and joy), and our Hon. Superintendent soon met us at headquarters, where our warm welcome and most generous treatment compensated us for all the trials we had gone through. We are to rejoin our old Ambulance to which we have so long been attached in the war-zone as soon as it is reinstated. This is our only ambition—the gratification of which we owe to the generous supporters of our Corps, to whom we desire to express our sincere gratitude."

Another Sister writes:—"I am writing the first moment I can to tell you that I am safe. We have had a terrible week! All Monday night we worked as fast as we could

amid the noise of bombs falling. I was specially busy, as most of the patients were English and at every moment I was called to translate for them. During the night the front line ambulances came to us with two Dames de la Croix Rouge—one killed and the other slightly wounded. The Boches had surrounded the hospital, and as the ambulance left they pointed a mitrailleuse on them. . . . When we had orders to leave, we travelled first in a troop train and then in a trolley with our surgical equipment. We, as *équipe chirurgicale*, were commandeered the first day for one of the hospitals, and since then we are at the station."

The above letter proves what a narrow escape our Sisters had at J———. No doubt, had they been discovered by the enemy, "shooting at random," they would have been murdered, as was their chauffeur and the unfortunate Dame de la Croix Rouge. The Sisters who so skilfully "silently melted away" with their walking patients were Sisters Ellen Bennett, Dorá T. Simpson and Annie Mackinnon (veterans of the first Scottish Unit, 1914); and Sisters Anna B. Banks, Catherine M. Richard, Lucy B. Giles and Gladys M. Hawthorne—whose colleagues and friends will be glad to know they are none the worse for their exciting experiences.

A Sister writes:—"We had a unique and most interesting journey and arrived here safely (Paris). We were so delighted to see Miss Haswell. She has been kindness itself to us in every way. I shall never forget the morning of May 27th. I was lying in my little barrack bed, with the window wide open, facing south, when suddenly, at one o'clock, the sky seemed ablaze with great pink flashes and the earth shook again and again with the terrific bombardment, announcing in true dramatic German fashion that their long-expected offensive had begun, and we *now* knew *where!* Our thoughts fly back many times a day to those little wooden huts on the hillside. If only they could have been burnt, before the Boche had any use or pleasure out of them! It was a blessed relief to feel that last night not a patient was left in the "contagieux." All had been evacuated the day before. We are ready to go off at any moment and I sincerely hope it may be *soon!*"

News has now been received of the safety of the Sisters working at Chateau-Thierry, Coincy, Vauxboin, Jouaignes, and Verneuil. Many of them have followed the flag, and are busily at work elsewhere. Miss Haswell reports that throughout everyone has been splendid.

Colonel Sir J. Cantlie says that a soldier's chances of recovery from wounds are usually determined by his treatment during the first half hour in which he is brought from the trenches.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)