

culties to the head of the Y.M.C.A. in France, to whom I had an introduction, and who was passing through the town. His answer was, "I wouldn't hesitate; there are ladies in England who would give anything for your opportunity; it is sad work but worth while, and the chances of being useful in it are many and great." That decided me, and for the remainder of my time I stayed with and tried to "mother" the relatives.

In some places the Red Cross took officers' relatives, and the Y.M.C.A. the people of the N.C.O.'s and privates, but in this hostel, the nearest one to the firing line, they were mixed, and we had the Lancashire mill girl and the agricultural labourer sitting next to the titled husband and wife, and enjoying exactly the same treatment as to billets and messing.

The chateau possessed fourteen bedrooms, accommodating in all about twenty-two, not including the French maids who mostly slept out. Each bedroom was kept ready for guests with clean sheets, towels, &c., and was numbered, and its number and accommodation known to the trusty orderly (an Indian cavalryman), whose duty it was, lantern in hand, to open the great gates in the middle of the night and let in the travel-stained visitors. An electric bell rang in his room and mine, and I quickly got up, and came down to superintend the welcome.

The relatives summoned to the bedside of their dear one were hurried across from any part of the United Kingdom, no matter how remote, and became the joint guests of the Government and the organisation receiving them. Everything was made easy for them, in London, on train and boat, fares paid (except in the case of officers' relatives who were able to afford it), and they were motored quickly up from the Channel Port to the hospital.

After seeing the patient, if he was not in immediate danger, they were brought to the chateau and given a good meal with hot drinks and put to bed in one of the quaint tapestried rooms, with canopied and curtained beds and glorious furniture, in one of which it was said Royalty had slept.

Hot water was provided, but the wash-hand-basins were sadly small, often not much larger than a respectable British sugar bowl, and every drop of water had to be pumped from the courtyard well.

The next morning, after a good breakfast, they were motored to hospital, where they remained until dinner in the middle of the day, and then they were taken to the hospital till supper time, tea being provided in the hospital hut. In the evening the great object was to divert them if possible by music, books and even games and the cinema, a private view of the last being sometimes given in the long *salle à manger*.

A large percentage of the patients it was found turned the corner on the arrival of their relatives, and began to recover; this was due to the mental relief which was as a weight in the scales. For doctors did not wait until there was no hope—they considered the patients' welfare

and sent for parents or wife when they thought their arrival would give a new lease of life. And the relatives who came—some were women with babies in their arms who had only had time to throw a shawl over their heads; they had no luggage, and we were able to lend them change of clothing from our store; others were fur garbed and jewelled, and came with leather suitcases and dressing bags.

One old couple, dazed and bewildered, had never left England in their lives, and had never expected to; again, a Scottish mother and sister who had come to see a boy of 19 with three limbs gone, and only kept alive by transfusion of blood from another patient. Incidentally how can one say enough for the magnificent work done by the doctors, nurses and orderlies, not to speak of the motor drivers, driving through the night in mist and fog along the endless poplar-lined roads of France.

And sometimes the patient died; and then all in the house, French maids included, turned all their energies to trying to comfort as far as possible *les parents de blessés* the poor bereaved, suffering in a foreign land, but what could we do? Nothing but sit with them, listen to them, throwing out all the sympathetic thoughts possible, and seeing that creature comforts such as a blazing fire, hot tea or coffee, etc., were not lacking.

Then came the funeral, after a day's interval, and we followed the flag-covered coffin to the military cemetery on the hill outside the town. At these funerals, most reverently conducted as they were, I had the privilege of being able to suggest and get accepted, a reform in detail, which though a small one, meant a great deal to the relatives present. When the coffins on the transports arrived from the various hospitals, they were lined up in a row just below the burying place. Now the rule of the army is that the funerals take place in the following order, Church of England, Nonconformist, Catholic and Jew, so when the transports arrived and the padre waited, the attendants had to lift up each Union Jack to see which denomination each soldier belonged to. One mother turned to me and said: "They don't seem to know which my poor boy is." After a word to the sergeant majors of the hospital, this method ceased and the coffins were sent out in order according to denomination. The Last Post sounded, the gerbes or wreaths of flowers laid down by the grave, we drove back to the chateau, and there the relatives were given lunch before proceeding to the station armed with packets of sandwiches and a beautiful coloured print of their son's or husband's last resting place.

Though all entertainment was free, sometimes the officers' relative or the richer visitors gave me a donation, and this I always spent in laying flowers on the graves, or more often in carrying large baskets of luscious fruit round the hospital wards.

And now, thank God, there is no need for the work of "Relatives of Wounded," but I shall always be grateful I was privileged to help in a small way in one of the most humane enterprises of the war.

MARGUERITE FEDDEN.

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