

A Letter from a Lady in England to her Niece in Wellington

You must find the war news very scant and unsatisfactory, we do here in England. We are in the thick of all the preparations, as it is from here that most of the troops are sent off, and wounded are landed. It is rather a long story of how we started work; but I was asked to help the St John's Ambulance Association. There were some 200 members who were formed into eight divisions; but somehow owing to the R.A.M.C. Colonel who had trained them for some eight years having to go to the War Office, there was no one to take the lead. So as I had passed the exams., I was asked to do what I could, and the eight nursing divisions were made over to me to help. Well the next day I found that hundreds, even thousands of soldiers were passing into the town and on the common and the arrangements for rations were most inadequate. So I got the loan of a very shaky little tent, and the very next day the 11th August, 1914, we started to give the soldiers tea, coffee, bread, butter, cheese, etc. The St. John members turned out trumps, and we have kept open all day and all night ever since, seven months. The starting meant real hard work and I have often been at work for 19 or 20 hours on end. The day we opened our two hospitals for Belgian wounded I was at it for 34 hours. I have found my knowledge of French a tremendous help. We have a trained matron in each of our hospitals and a trained nurse to every ten patients; otherwise the V.A.D.'s as they are called (Voluntary Aid Detachments) do all the work, and some of them are turning out splendid nurses. We have had some very severe operations, and it is wonderful what one can stand seeing when one has to. One poor fellow refused to have his left leg cut off until he had seen me, as he wanted the lady who could speak French, so I was there for a good part of the operation, and my mind so full of the poor fellow's faith in me, that only anxiety that all should go well was my feeling; no horror of what I saw whatever and I think the first thing he said was "Ah, madame comme

vous etes bonne." Poor fellow! That was five weeks ago; he is alive, but that is all. We hoped so much, but they had to operate again right up to the hip joint, and he is very ill. His wife and child managed to get over from Holland, and are here. We have another patient who has been with us four and a half months, shot through the spine, and paralysed from waist down. No one knows how he lives, but he has no pain and lies there patiently. The end must come as he has the most unbelievable bed sores; but he has constant care.

We have seen such wonderful recoveries and men whom we never hoped to see recover are back in the fighting line. So few of them can get or have had any news from their homes.

People are helping and giving in the most generous manner. I know that I only have to say I want anything for the soldiers and wounded, and everybody helps. We built the hut we now have on the common out of small donations from people of every class. They give us vegetables, groceries, butter, blankets, etc., in the most liberal way, and men come (old men) straight from their work and help on the common, to stoke fires and keep the boilers going. Most of our members are working women who have their own homes and children to attend to, and yet work hard at the hospitals and on the common.

We have had over 1,000 men at a time in and round our tent being fed. We had 200 Scotchmen this evening and one of them said to me "Do you ladies never get tired?" The men are so nice as a rule and we bandage their sore feet and attend to cuts and kicks, bites from horses, boils, sprains, sore arms from inoculation. If the war does nothing else it will draw the classes together. I don't think there is much fear from Zeppelins and there is no panic in old England. I wish we could all meet; but it is a long, long way to New Zealand, and I don't fancy we shall roam much now.