

With the Red Cross in France

(By Private Charles Clark, formerly Student at Westminster Hall)

We, the members of a certain ambulance corps, hailing from the Land of the Maple, had just completed a long march from—— to within a short distance of the French front. On leaving the salient the sound of the guns had faded away behind us, until it had become inaudible. Then we had marched for many stages through a quiet, peaceful country, and had it not been for the almost constant drone of aeroplanes flying overhead like gigantic dragon-flies, one might have imagined war to be a thing unknown in all the land. As we moved forward the familiar "boom-boom" again began to greet us out of the far distance, and we realized that we were again approaching the front.

One day, towards the end of September, just as we finished dinner in our comfortable quarters at a deserted farm, a message came from the front saying that our corps was to report for duty up the line the following morning. The news was welcome, for our walking tour through the quiet country had got us into fine form for a spell up where the big guns were at work.

So, having filled our water bottles, and packed our emergency rations in our haversacks, we piled into the ambulance cars, and were off for the new scene of our labors.

We reached the ambulance headquarters about ten p.m., only to find that there was no sleeping accommodation inside. But being by this time hardened campaigners, we did not allow such trifles to worry us. We unrolled our waterproof sheets and blankets, and, choosing the driest spots, we proceeded to make ourselves comfortable on the ground. There, with the earth for our couch, the skies for our roof, and the roar of artillery for a lullaby, we passed a fairly good night.

On awakening in the gray dawn of a cloudy morning, the scene of desolation which lay before us was appalling!

The whole country-side was simply riddled with shell holes; not a level piece of ground, and scarcely a blade of grass was to be seen!

Near our station was the place where lately had stood the village of——, but where was the village? Far from there being a whole building, I question whether a whole brick could have been found! Just a great mass of rubble, half smothered with earth, where a picturesque village had stood only a few weeks before!

After breakfast, we were detailed for stretcher duty, told off in carrying parties, and accompanied by guides, were sent forward to our various aid-posts just back of the firing line.

The party to which I belonged was sent to man a dressing station which had been established in a deep underground tunnel in a ruined town, which the enemy had been compelled to evacuate some days before. Being only about a thousand yards from the German front line, they had the ranges "down pat," and for reasons best known to themselves, kept shelling the ruins most unmercifully; the spot around our station coming in for a full share of their unwelcome attentions.

To this underground surgery the wounded were brought by the regimental stretcher-bearers, from the trenches. Then, their wounds having been attended to by the medical officer, the patients were taken in hand by our party, and carried to where our ambulance cars were waiting, some two miles down the road.