

# THE REFUGEES

By ESTELLE M. KERR

*HOW a Canadian V.A.D. feels when she is really in action. This was written just after the "mystery" gun bombarded Paris, and just after the big offensive sent so many thousands of people out of their little towns to places of safety behind the lines; many of them to Paris.*

Paris, March 30, 1918.

**O**UR little refugee is asleep before the fire; he has evidently walked a long way, for he is thin and dirty and limps a little. But we have given him a good supper and the heat and long sleep will put new life into him.

He is the only one of the thousands who daily come to Paris from the evacuated territory, to whom we have offered shelter; for the majority of the refugees are transferred from one train to another. They enter Paris at the Gare du Nord and leave from stations at the other side of the city by lines going West or South.

But our little refugee did not come by train, and I don't think he was very kindly treated on the road. Perhaps his master or mistress was not allowed to take him along. With 5,000 people on one train, is it any wonder that a little fox terrier should be left behind?

He is evidently a one-man dog, for he has attached himself to the little English chauffeuse and is miserable when out of her sight. He has been loved, too, for he responds very quickly to affection. On his collar is written, "Mirabeau, Villa Narcisse, Ortonvillers."

Whether Mirabeau is his name or the name of his master we do not know; but we have rechristened him "Jerry."

"L'Oeuvre de Bon Accueil" has established a canteen at the Gare du Nord with beds and hot drinks for the refugees; and the American Red Cross has lent its large motor lorries to assist in this work, while we of the French War Emergency Fund, stand ready to help in any way we can. Some of us collected bottles and filled a hundred each day with malted milk for the babies; and it was my humble lot to transport them to the station with a shift of workers to assist in the British canteen.

"Copley" and I were sent to the Gare du Nord again yesterday to help in transportation. Copley is my Ford van. He is green with a large red cross and the name of our society on his sides; the new paint makes him look much younger than he really is. The Canadian girls were there before us, with their large lorries, which make Copley look very small indeed. Their leather driving-coats and dark blue caps look very business-like; and without a uniform it would be impossible for us to go unquestioned through the station. The Canadian Red Cross drivers are English girls, but everyone calls them "the Canadians." Their big lorries are better adapted for the transportation of great numbers of refugees. Copley can take only seven and some small luggage with larger bales and sacks piled on top.

The passengers must have been very uncomfortable while we rattled across the rough stone pavements, but they were glad to get a little farther on their way. None are allowed to remain in Paris, which is being rapidly deserted by its permanent residents.

My first load consisted of three women in rusty crepe veils, a paralyzed old man, who had to be lifted into the van, and a large black dog. They did not belong to the class of peasants who were evacuated at the expense of the government, but were comparatively poor people who found it impossible to get transportation across Paris. When they finally arrived at the station they gave me a generous tip and told me to give something from them to the wounded.

The next lot were hatless, and the women wore aprons and black crotched shawls. They, too, had a paralyzed grandfather, but unlike my last paralytic, he was able to stand up, but could not sit down.

Next I had a family with two children. They had been evacuated from St. Quentin a year ago and now they were forced to leave their new home.

"I have never been in Paris before," said an old lady, looking about her with interest. "It needed this catastrophe to bring me here!"

A mother with two babies had come from near Amiens, not very far from Paris, but it had taken them three days on the train. Some of my loads had to be taken to one station and some to another, according to their destination. At five o'clock Copley was overheated, and his engine was knocking to tell me he wanted water. I asked a taxi-driver where this want could be supplied, and he told me to go to any cafe. The nearest one was the restaurant of a large hotel, where a very grand waiter proffered me a small carafe. I tactfully explained that I must have a painful, but he looked rather hurt, so I hastily ordered tea—tea with lemon and saccharine, which is the only way one can get it in Paris now. It refreshed me, and Copley proved more amiable after his rest and water, so we bumped gaily back for another load of refugees.

Next day the transportation was better arranged, and the authorities decided that the larger lorries could handle the rounds; but I went to the station at night to take more malted milk for the babies. It was rather eerie driving through the darkened streets, for all the lights are blue, and the blue glass in our motor-lamps throws a sickly light on the pavement, so wise drivers go slowly. The canteen in the basement of the Gare du Nord is both picturesque and pitiful. Part has been turned into a dormitory, for many have to spend the night there; and at long tables lighted by candles stuck in bottles, the people are fed. We hope that our bottles of milk will diminish the suffering of the little babies who have a long journey still before them.

We have been asked by the French War Office to open canteens at two stations where the wounded will arrive in large numbers. All our workers have been divided into two shifts, for we will give hot drinks and other comforts to the wounded day and night. Mine will be the humble part of driving the night shifts down and the day shifts back; and also to carry equipment. We are glad—oh so glad, to help the soldiers, but each one of us has the wish, "Oh, if they were only our own men!"

**T**HE Canadian chauffeuses seem to have a more exciting time than we do; perhaps the lives people lead in the next garage are always more interesting than our own. But they are the first to be summoned to the scene of disaster. They are a splendid lot of girls, rather boyish in their manners and most of them answer to such names as "George" or "Stephen." I have made a drawing of Stephen; the pose is hers as she stands waiting by her car,



"Stephen," one of the "Canadian" chauffeuses, as she stands waiting by her car. You must use your imagination to supply her curly black hair, her soft brown eyes and lovely pink cheeks. She was sent to the Church of St. Gervais to help bring to the mortuary the mutilated forms of those killed by the "mystery" gun on Good Friday.

but you must use your imagination to supply her curly black hair, her soft brown eyes and lovely pink cheeks. The badge of the British Red Cross is on her cap, and the winged wheel surmounted with V.A.D. on her sleeve shows that she belongs to the motor corps. Yesterday was Good Friday and a holiday for the people of Paris; but Stephen was on duty and soon after a bomb was heard to explode, she was ordered to take her ambulance to the Church of St. Gervais. One of the long-distance German guns had found its mark in the Church while a service was in progress, and Stephen had to wait while her passengers were dug out; but she took their mutilated forms to the mortuary, not the hospital. Then she came back and washed her gory ambulance.

This morning she told me she was going away for a fortnight.

"I am so glad you have got leave," I said. "I know you need a rest."

"Rest!" she cried. "We're going to Trouville to drive for the British. The other girls have broken down from overwork. We won't have a bath or go to bed for two weeks—but isn't it wonderful to be able to look after our own men for even two minutes?"

**A**T the Gare du Nord there is another canteen, a British canteen, "for British soldiers and the Allies"; and when there is need of extra workers some one telephones to our Oeuvre, and if any of us

are off duty we are so glad to help. There is a table for the Belgians, and one for the French; but it is impossible to keep the British helpers from showing a certain amount of favoritism for their own men. They give them real meals too—not simply the drinks and sandwiches of the other canteens, and the British Tommies on Paris leave find a welcome from their own countrywomen when they arrive from the front, and a farewell when they return.

We thought that during this great offensive all leave would be cancelled, but the canteen seems busier than ever. The flood of refugees has passed through Paris, and on my last visit to the Gare du Nord there were no pitiful, homeless groups to be seen, but workers, workers, everywhere. Hundreds of Red Cross men and women, canteen workers, motor drivers, were there ready to cope with any emergency. Another train might arrive with thousands of starving and homeless on board, but perhaps their hastily-organized work had come to an end. If the Germans retreat, there will be no need of evacuation; and those who are eager to serve must transfer their efforts into other channels. If the Germans advance—we don't admit this as a possibility, but still we must be prepared.

In any case, there are the wounded—thousands of them; but when they will arrive, and where they will be sent, remains a mystery. We have made a wonderfully efficient kitchen from a dirty ticket box at one of the goods stations. We have rows of little stoves, and the Government has provided 12 tents with 22 stretchers in each; surgeons are waiting, and so are we, with fires burning in case they come with little warning.