

## PREFACE

ANY one walking down Victoria Street in the month of July 1914, on the shady side of the road, might have noticed, painted on a window blind, a small red cross. If he had entered the place he would have found himself in a dark passage which blundered into three small rooms, occupied by a secretary, two clerks, and a boy.

These were the Headquarters of the British Red Cross Society. The staff were engaged—like pupils in a classroom—over that vague, inconsequent work known as office work. On enquiry they would have said that they were forming Voluntary Aid Detachments to succour our soldiers in the event of an invasion which was as chimerical as the invasion of the island of Lilliput. The passer-by may have ventured to think that these diligent men would be as well employed if they were enlisting recruits for the Quest of the Holy Grail. Circumstances have proved otherwise, for these apparently futile preparations in times of peace became a factor of solid strength when war broke upon the country.

The Society in July 1914 did not own a single ambulance, could not provide a single bed, had not even a store-room of its own nor any supplies