

SHIPBOARD SKETCHES

By ESTELLE M. KERR

WE are still in Halifax harbor. When we shall sail—is a state secret; what cargo we are carrying—is a state secret; when we shall get our coal, when our convoy—these are state secrets also. An American battleship appeared in the harbor and vanished in the night; a white hospital ship ornamented with large, red crosses and green stripes, has gone; but other gaily camouflaged vessels flying flags of various nations are hovering near, while tugs and barges come and go on mysterious errands. Sometimes the ship's motor boat is lowered and the captain goes ashore, or the officer in command of troops; but these dignitaries sternly refuse to post our letters or purchase the $\frac{1}{4}$ pound of wool we need for our knitting.

We gaze daily at the snow-clad hills around Halifax. We can see the residential part of the city, with its windows covered with new boards. The town of Dartmouth, too, looks picturesque, its charm increased a thousandfold by the fact that none may enter. The devastated part of the city of Halifax is hidden from us by a bend in the river, and in the distance we see the slanting masts of the beached "Imo." At sunset the river is flooded with pink and gold, and the signal stations on the hill are outlined sharply against the radiant sky. At night, when the wind has dropped, the scene is even lovelier; and the lights of the vessels trail serpentine reflections of yellow, red and green in the dark water.

There is little to do. We pace the deck, but it is too cold to use our steamer chairs; even when playing shuffle-board the hands and feet get numb. But there are plenty of comfortable chairs in the lounge; convenient tables at which to write or play cards; and books may be obtained in the cosy library with its open fireplace.

At first the passengers complained bitterly of the delay, but now they are becoming reconciled or more accustomed to the monotony of ship life. They have become interested in their games of cards, their books; but most of all, now that the big ship is about to start on its journey over the ocean, they have become interested in each other. The proper study of mankind is man, and daily we acquire some new piece of information about the scant hundred of first-class passengers and learn to call them by their names.

The genial captain has time to be sociable now, and a privileged few have visited him in his cosy quarters aloft. The officer in command of troops is able to join in a game of bridge, the doctors have few patients, and the people who will retire to their berths at the first hint of stormy weather discover how pleasant life on the ocean wave may be.

ON the short voyage from St. John to Halifax, many were laid low; but even with a dizzy head it seemed good to be moving. Additional excitement was caused by a fire in the lounge, due to defective insulation in the wiring of the electric fans. A small flame appeared on the ceiling, blistering the paint. A little girl with a scar on her cheek—victim of the Halifax disaster—was the first to see it and began to scream hysterically: "Tell the captain! Fire! Fire! Tell the captain!" Her mother clapped her hand tightly over the child's mouth and took her below. No one else betrayed the slightest excitement. The stewards, in a

leisurely manner, brought fire extinguishers, the ship's carpenter, with hammer and chisel removed the moulding from a beam and laid bare the smouldering wires, the amorous young man in "civies" drew his lady-lover into his protecting arms, and the young lieutenant, when the extinguisher splashed in his direction, ducked to safety behind the corpulent lady, mistaking her for a parapet. In half an hour the fire was out, the smoke cleared away and the stewards were busily cleaning the woodwork and splashed mirrors. An extension cord with a drop-light replaced the illumination in the damaged circuit and, in another half hour, tea was served in the lounge in its usual orderly fashion, and the passengers who had slept through the excitement, drank two cups of tea before their eyes, following the trail of their cigarettes, remarked:

"Why, what's happened to the ceiling?"

FRIENDSHIPS are formed quickly on ship board, and if, by chance, a man and a maid who are seated beside each other in the dining saloon find pleasure in each other's company, we are apt to come to the conclusion that they are married. It surprises us to learn that the pretty little red-cheeked girl who paces the darkened deck each evening, arm in arm with the young lieutenant, is going overseas to marry a soldier, and that her constant companion carries in his breast pocket a photograph of a small baby. The staid spinster who sits knitting in the corner all day proves to be a prospective war-bride, and the pretty young thing who romps around the deck in running shoes, and you have mentally placed in the bride category, calls your attention to her wedding-ring and tells you that "he" went overseas in 1914.

I am making a study of uniforms and military badges, for there are no two alike, but just as I am becoming



proficient, most of the officers have donned mufti. I can distinguish between the grenade of the artilleryman worn on the coat lapel, from that of the engineer. I can tell the Imperial machine gun badge from that of the Canadian.

A youthful officer in the Royal Canadian Dragoons, crossing for the first time, remains in uniform, spurs and all, and we can't help murmuring:

"Twinkle, twinkle, little spur,
How I wonder what you're fer,
Fastened to the boot so tight
And not a bloomin' horse in sight!"



The Medical Officer.



The Aviator.



The Nursing Sister.



The Infantry Lieutenant.



The Belle of the Ship.

I take an interest in wound-bars and try to discover where each of my fellow-passengers "got his"—at the Somme—at Ypres—in Macedonia. "And how do you feel about going back?" I often ask.

Usually they admit that when they first got their "blighty" they were so glad to get out alive that they never wanted to go back again, but after a long time in the hospital and a short period of more or less normal existence at home they began to itch to get back. "As long as the war keeps on you can't think of anything else," they say. "And it's so dull to be out of it!"

But a line that a youth whose sick-leave wasn't sufficient to restore his nerves to their former strength has written in my autograph album, tells a different story:

"If the boat were going the other way,
There would be something more to say,
But I've been before,
I've seen the gore.
How I wish it were going the other way!"

Most of the sentiments written in my little book by the officers are very cheerful. One has drawn a crude picture of our ship, a submarine and a torpedo, and has written underneath:

"In keen anticipation of the voyage!"

Many time-worn verses deemed suitable for autograph albums are there, but sometimes, meaning to be funny, the modern rhymes are pathetic. In the trenches one acquires a grim sense of humor, and one of the N. C. O.'s on board has written:

"What does it matter—the loss of an arm or a leg,
The glory and honor of having to beg?
Think of your duty, think of your pay,
To shoot and be shot for a dollar a day!"

Another writes on "The Glory of War":

"A trench,
A stench,
Some scraps of French;
Some horrible German vapors.
A shell,
A yell,
No more to tell,
But a paragraph in the papers."

Many of these gallant fellows, both officers and N. C. O.'s, crossed to England steerage, returned in a hospital ship and are now enjoying the luxuries of a first cabin passage for the first time. Perhaps there may be more equality between the officers and men in the trenches, but cer-

(Concluded P. 30.)