THE RED TRIANGLE

WITH THE MAPLE LEAF IN PARIS.

By MAPLE LEAF.

The taxi drew up at a busy corner—one of those dizzy hubs in Paris where half-a-dozen teeming streets pour their traffic into a vortex of danger to pedestrians more imaginary than real. For Paris, a metropolis of rushing taxis and devious roadways, without a single traffic policeman, is more terrifying to contemplate than to negotiate.

A dull stone building stood on one corner, and just before me a high stone wall with a wide gate at which were on duty a Briton and two French soldiers in their field blue. Khaki and blue were passing back and forth through the gateway into a grassless court beyond. As I followed, the British sentry came smartly to attention and saluted the uniform. The French sentries looked on listlessly. Only up in the fighting area do the ranks of one Allied Army salute the officers of another.

A STREAM OF KHAKI.

On both sides of the courtyard the bare building raised its uninteresting grey stone to four stories, ending in an eaveless roof. Ahead, a long low hut extended across the yard from building to building—a cheery spot in the grey. Through its wide windows suggestions of palms spelt warmth and comfort. And the steady stream of khaki moving in and out told of a wide publicity to the welcome of the palms.

Far to one side the familiar red triangle explained—especially when over the triangle was the word "Canadian."

Several Canadian soldiers stood aside as I entered. Inside was a peculiar scene, even in Y huts in France. First of all I was conscious of the activities of many women. Over all the noise of hundreds of men eating and talking, the white uniforms of a half-dozen women explained the palms—the crowds—the general air of home and luxurious restfulness. For nothing in the power of man takes the place of one woman's kindly smile, her spotless whiteness of service, her anxious concern and frank interest.

I remembered when, only a few months before, I had stolen off by car on every opportunity, a hundred and fifty miles return, from the barren waste before Arras to the officers' canteen down at Abbeville—merely to be waited on by women.

And after the women in the hut I was overwhelmed by a sound I had not heard for years—the singing of canaries. There in the windows hung their cages; and the little things were swelling their lungs in—to me—successful competition with the talking of soldiers, the laughter of fighting men whose fighting was over.

The palms were there, too. And the women and the birds and the palms—it was a picture into which khaki-clad men blended with bewildering fitness. That is one of the peculiarities of the Canadian soldier: he fits into any picture where women are, and the beauties and comforts of home. And in the horrors of trench warfare he was no more incongruous. When he fights he fights; when the fighting is over—well, he is just Canadian.

There were, I suppose, thirty or forty tables in the hut, each with its clean white cloth. Seating four only, they extended up to the platform with an effort like a good class restaurant. Across the aisle from the door to the canteen at the back was a sitting room, a brightly burning stove, easy wicker chairs, lounging lads who had just eaten.

And then the orchestra struck up from the platform; and the talking died down, and a couple of hundred Canadian, and Australian, and British—with a few American—soldiers sat back to listen. Add that orchestra of three young French women musicians to the rest and you have a picture of the Canadian Y hut in the French barracks in Paris. For there was not an incongruous touch about it.

The door opened and a long line of strangely dressed men entered. Immediately two or three of the white dressed women ran to them. For these were returned prisoners, their blue uniforms strangely striking amidst the khaki—or was it the different look in their faces. For they had seen things they did not like to talk about.

That is one of the unexpected services of the hut. I discovered that every returned British prisoner reported first to the Canadian Y hut in which I stood. There they were fed. Among them was but one Canadian, and he the Y took in charge and put up at their luxurious hotel until he should return to England. They drank in the scene, did those men who had spent—some of them—years among the German brutes. The women of their own race, the flowers, the clean white tables, the birds, the orchestra!—I saw moisture gather in the eye of more than one. There seemed to sweep over them at last the full meaning of freedom again. And the one who had been working close up to the fighting lines, amidst the rain of shells from his own friend, gulped a little, laughed weakly, and I heard him whisper to his mate, "This is better." I knew then what that hut in the heart of Paris was doing.

About two the hut emptied a little. The boys were off to look about. But a group clung to the cosy chairs and the glowing stove. And now and then a tardy diner entered and ate.

THE WOMEN SMILED.

Two stunted little street urchins peeped in—ventured to push the door open and enter. One was thin and awkward and tall for his apparent age. The other was a sturdy chap, tiny in height and tiny in age, with the chest and frame of an athlete and the confidence of a chap who has seen more than his share. Under his arm he carried a little roll. They were evidently not unknown, for several of the women looked at them and smiled. And the youngsters seated themselves beside a table and proceeded to count a little mound of money the larger one drew from his pocket.

Someone informed me they were a pair of itinerant tumblers—the smaller looked as if he should be cuddled to bed o' nights by his mother. I sat beside them and helped them count. There were twenty francs. They were not so impressed as I was. The elder told me they had got it from a performance to American soldiers in an American hut. Neither of them seemed to appreciate the value of the silver and nickel and copper that made quite an imposing pile on the table. The elder walked confidently to the counter and changed it for a bill. But when he carelessly asked for a package of cigarettes—"to take to a sick father"—the sergeant who served only smiled and shook his head.

Then, in a businesslike way fit for his father, the little lad unrolled the parcel beneath his arm and spread a tiny patch of carpet on the floor. With a quick kick he relieved himself of his oversize shoes, discarded a thick sweater, and stood, a chubby figure of pomposity in his operating costume—a zebra striped jersey, a pair of too large trousers, and stockings of which the heels came up somewhere about his sturdy calves. The elder worked more leisurely and less impressively.

FOUR FLIPS.

Their stunts were marvellous. The little dot was as strong as a lion cub and as quick as a cat. He could stand on one hand and turn flips in rapid succession. Indeed, after he had his shoes and extra sweater on a soldier entered and asked him to do something, and he just stood where he was and turned four flips, ending up with pouted lips and extended hand. The larger lad was something of a contortionist and an apparatus for the other to gyrate about.

At the end little chesty walked round with his cap. I helped them count that, too. And it was twelve shillings. Thirty-two shillings in what could not have covered more than twenty-five minutes of performance—which they might repeat many times a day! I knew *one* family that need not starve in the high prices of Paris.

About four I returned to the hut. Tea was being served. Scores of soldiers were nibbling cake and sipping tea, as they listened to the orchestra. I ate a dish consisting of cake swimming in chocolate cream, and it was the best thing to eat I had in Paris. Before five the tea turned to supper. Nobody but the Y seemed to be able to get eggs in Paris, yet the majority of the soldiers were eating two eggs for the substantial part of their evening meal. I was told some of the troubles of the Y providers in getting those eggs—a scouring of the country, a buyer on the market much of the day, a nigh reckless disregard of prices, that the boys might have what they wanted. That day the two buyers who had been out had managed to purchase eighty dozen. Some went to the Hotel d'Iena, the Canadian Y hotel in Paris, the rest to the hungry soldiers who frequented the hut.

In fact, so unusual were the meals supplied at the Canadian Y hut, and so low the prices, that the officers of other Y's in Paris had at one time acquired the habit of making it their dining room—until the Canadian Y found it necessary to intimate to them in a kindly way that the benefits of the hut were rather intended for the British soldiers on leave in the French capital. And I don't blame either of them.

A CANADIAN "GOD'S ACRE."

One spot in England that will be for ever Canada is the little cemetery in the Italian Garden at Cliveden Court, Taplow, where lie the war heroes who died in the Canadian Hospital adjoining. In four years 24,000 patients passed through this hospital, provided by Major and Mrs. Astor in their own grounds.

Sir Robert Borden recently unveiled a Canadian Red Cross memorial—a female figure representing Life, bearing the Biblical inscription beginning "But the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God."