

# THE TALE OF A FIELD HOSPITAL

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*Portrait of Frederick Treves*

# THE TALE OF A FIELD HOSPITAL

BY  
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NEW EDITION

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## Preface to New Edition

The South African War, of which this Tale is told, is already near to be forgotten, although there are many to whom it still remains the most tragic memory of their lives.

War is ever the same: an arena, aglare with pomp and pageant, for the

display of that most elemental and most savage of human passions, the lust to kill, as well as a dumb torture place where are put to the test man's fortitude and his capacity for the endurance of pain.

This brief narrative is concerned not with shouting hosts in defiant array, but with the moaning and distorted forms of men who have been "scorched by the flames of war." It deals with the grey hours after the great, world-echoing display is over, with the night that ends the gladiator's show, when the arena is occupied only by the maimed, the dying and the dead.

It is admitted that in the South African War the medical needs of the Army were efficiently and promptly supplied. This account serves to show of what kind is the work of the Red Cross in the field. It may serve further to bring home to the reader the appalling condition of the wounded in war when—as in the present campaign in the Near East—the provision for the care of the sick is utterly inadequate, if not actually lacking.

FREDERICK TREVES.

THATCHED HOUSE LODGE,  
RICHMOND PARK, SURREY.

*November, 1912.*

## Preface to the First Edition

In this little book some account is given of a field hospital which followed for three months the Ladysmith Relief Column, from the time, in fact, that that column left Frere until it entered the long-beleaguered town. The fragmentary record is based upon notes written day by day on the spot. Some of the incidents related have been already recounted in a series of letters published in the *British Medical Journal*, and certain fragments of those letters are reproduced in these pages, or have been amplified under circumstances of greater leisure.

The account, such as it is, is true.

It may be that the story is a little sombre, and possibly on occasions gruesome; but war, as viewed from the standpoint of a field hospital, presents little that is cheery.

It appears that some interest might attach to an account of the manner in which our wounded faced their troubles, and of the way in which they fared, and under the influence of that impression this imperfect sketch has been written.

# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER

1. The Field Hospital
2. Frere Camp
3. The Hospital Dog
4. The Morning of Colenso
5. The Hospital under the Ridge
6. Inside an Operation-Tent
7. The Surgeons of the Field Hospitals
8. A Professional Visit by Rail
9. The Hospital Train at Colenso
10. The Nurses at Chieveley
11. Some Traits in the Men
12. The Sign of the Wooden Cross
13. The Men with the Spades
14. The Marching
15. Spearman's Farm
16. The Hospital at Spearman's
17. The Two White Lights
18. After Spion Kop
19. The Story of the Restless Man
20. "Did We Win?"
21. The Fighting Spirit

22. [The Body-Snatchers](#)
23. [Seeing Them Off](#)
24. [A Funeral at Spearman's](#)
25. [Absent-Mindedness](#)
26. [At Chieveley Again](#)
27. [A Journey to Ladysmith](#)
28. [A Straggler](#)
29. [How a Surgeon Won the Victoria Cross](#)
30. ["SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI"](#)

## THE TALE OF A FIELD HOSPITAL

### I THE FIELD HOSPITAL

The Field Hospital, of which some account is given in these pages, was known as "No. 4 Stationary Field Hospital." The term "stationary" is hardly appropriate, since the Hospital moved with the column, and, until at least the relief of Ladysmith, it followed the Headquarters' camp. The term, however, serves to distinguish "No. 4" from the smaller field hospitals which were attached to the various brigades, and which were much more mobile and more restless.

At the commencement of the campaign the capacity of the Hospital was comparatively small. The officers in charge were Major Kirkpatrick, Major Mallins, and Lieutenant Simson, all of the Royal Army Medical Corps. These

able officers—and none could have been more efficient—were, I regret to say, all invalidated as the campaign progressed.

Before the move was made to Spearman's Farm the Hospital was enlarged, and the staff was increased by the addition of eight civil surgeons. It is sad to report that of these two died in the camp and others were invalidated. No men could have worked better together than did the army surgeons and their civilian colleagues.

The greatest capacity of the Hospital was reached after the battle of Spion Kop, when we had in our tents about 800 wounded.

Some account of the nurses who accompanied the Hospital is given in a section which follows.

The Hospital was well equipped, and the supplies were ample. We carried with us a large number of iron bedsteads complete with mattresses, blankets, and sheets. These were all presented to the Hospital by Mr. Acutt, a generous merchant at Durban. It is needless to say that they proved an inexpressible boon, and even when the Hospital had to trust only to ox transport, all the bedsteads went with it.

The ladies of the colony, moreover, worked without ceasing to supply the wounded with comforts, and "No. 4" had reason to be grateful for their well-organised kindness.

The precise number of patients who were treated in the Hospital is no doubt recorded in the proper quarter, but some idea of the work accomplished may be gained from the fact that practically all the wounded in the Natal campaign—from the battle of Colenso to the relief of Ladysmith—passed through No. 4 Stationary Field Hospital. The exceptions were represented by the few cases sent down direct by train or ambulance from the smaller field hospitals.

## II

### FRERE CAMP

It was from Frere Camp that the army under General Buller started for the Tugela River, and the Hospital pitched its tents in that camp on the evening of Monday, December 11th, 1899. We went up from Pietermaritzburg by train. The contents were soon emptied out on the line, some little way outside Frere Station, and close to the railway the Hospital was put up. That night we all slept under canvas—

many for the first time—and all were well pleased that we had at last arrived at the front.

Frere is merely a station on the line of rail which traverses Natal, and as it consists only of some three or four houses and a few trees it can hardly be dignified by the name of hamlet. Frere is simply a speck—a corrugated iron oasis—on the vast undulating plains of the veldt. These plains roll away to the horizon, and are broken only by kopjes and dongas and the everlasting ant-hills.

On the way towards Ladysmith are a few kopjes of large size, from any one of which the line of the Tugela can be seen, with the hills beyond, occupied by the Boer entrenchments, and over them again the hills which dominate Ladysmith. On the way towards Estcourt winds a brown road, along which an endless train of ox-wagons rumble and are lost in the wilderness of the camp.

The river which is reputed to "run" through Frere has long since ceased to run. The water is retained by certain dams, and the pools thus formed are uninviting. The water is the colour of pea-soup, and when in a glass is semi-opaque and of a faint brownish colour. The facetious soldier, as he drinks it, calls it "khaki and water."

In the lowest pool, immediately above the iron railway bridge which has been blown up by the Boers, Tommy Atkins bathes with gusto in what is seemingly a light-coloured mud. Here also he washes his socks and his shirts.

The centre of the camp is the railway station, and that of Frere is the smallest and most unpretending that any hamlet could pretend to. It is, however, crowded out of all reason, and its platform of hard earth is covered with boxes and baggage and sacks and saddles in as much disorder as if they had been thrown in panic from a burning train. Between the little goods shed and the little booking-office are several stands of rifles. A sentry, proud apparently in his covering of dust, is parading one end of the platform, while at the other end a motley crowd of perspiring soldiers are filling water-bottles at the tank which supplies the engine. In the waiting-room a tumbled mass of men are asleep on the floor, while on a bench in front of it two men-of-war's men are discussing an English paper six weeks old.

Outside the station are ramparts of provision boxes and cases of ammunition, and iron water cisterns and mealie bags, and to the fragments of a railing which surrounds the station horses, of all kinds and in all stages of weariness, are tied.

A ragged time-table on the wall, dealing with the train service to Pretoria, and with the precise hour of the arrival of the trains there, seems but a sorry jest. The stationmaster's house has been looted, and the little garden in front of it has been trampled out of being, save for two or three red geraniums which still bloom amidst the dirt. This house is, for the time, the general's headquarters,



and before it waves the Union Jack.

When we reached the camp it was stated that 30,000 men were under canvas. A camp of this size must of necessity present an endless scene of bustle and movement. Nothing seemed at rest but the interminable array of white tents and the rows of baggage wagons. Cavalry would be moving in one direction and infantry in another. Here a mounted patrol would be riding out or a couple of scouts coming in. There would be a long line of Kaffirs carrying bales and boxes to a temporary depot, and here a troop of eager horses hurrying to the river to drink. Gallopers would be seen in all directions, and everywhere would be struggling teams of oxen or of mules enveloped in clouds of dust and urged on by sweating men and strange oaths, and by the shrill yells of the Kaffir drivers, whose dust-dried throats gave out noises like the shrieks of parrots.

There was no shade of any kind, and the camp during the day lay dry, dusty, parched and restless under a blazing sun, but at night there was a cool wind and cheery camp fires, and a darkness which blotted out the dusty roads, the dried-up river, the dismal piles of stores, and the general picture of a camp in a desert of baked earth.

Every night a search-light was at work sending dispatches to Ladysmith, and almost every morning could be heard the Boer guns thundering over that unhappy place.

The British soldier looked very smart in his khaki suit when embarking at Southampton, but at Frere he showed the effects of wear, and his tunic, his belt, his pouches, his boots and his face, had all toned down to one uniform tint of dirt colour. He was of the earth earthy. He was unshaven. His clothes had that abject look of want of "fit" that is common to clothes which have been slept in, which have been more than once soaked through, and which have more than once dried upon the body of the owner.

### III

#### THE HOSPITAL DOG

Prominent among the *personnel* of the Hospital should be placed "Durban," the Hospital dog. He was a brindled bull terrier of exceptional physique and intelligence, and the story about him was that he was a refugee dog who had attached himself to "No. 4" at Durban, and that for want of a better name he had been

called after that pleasant town.

He had a great love of adventure, and fell into the life of a moving camp with gusto. His good temper and his placid appreciation of a practical joke were among his many excellent qualities. When the orderlies were paraded on the platform of Pietermaritzburg Station, previous to their being entrained for Frere, "Durban" took his place in the ranks with no little dignity.

The orderlies were devoted to him and he to them, and I have no doubt that, pampered and humoured in every canine whim, he is with the Hospital still.

"Durban" had had a special collar made for him on which was emblazoned the red cross and the name of his company. Just before starting for Chieveley his particular master made him a pair of putties, in which his fore legs were enveloped. He was uncommonly pleased with these embarrassing articles of clothing, and was never tired of going round the camp to show them to his many admirers. At Spearman's he was provided with a travelling kit, consisting of a waterproof cape with two minute panniers on either side, marked with the red cross, and furnished with unappreciated surgical dressings. This exquisite outfit was with difficulty secured in position, and in the early stages of a march was sure to be found dangling beneath "Durban's" ample chest.

His passion for bathing was only equalled by his passion for catching flies, and when we reached the Lesser Tugela he would join party after party on their way to the river, and would bathe as long and as often as he found anyone to bathe with.

He was useful, too, as a watch-dog, and performed no mean services in connection with the commissariat department. Some sheep were given to the Hospital, and for a day or two it was a problem as to how advantage could be taken of this important supply of food. The sheep, when wanted for the kitchen, could not be caught, and could not be shot, and so "Durban" was appealed to in the difficulty. Accompanied by the cook, on certain mornings "Durban" made his way to the little flock out on the veldt, and never failed to pull down a sheep. He followed the cook and the sheep back to the camp with the air of one who deserved well of his country.

## IV

### THE MORNING OF COLENZO

At daybreak on the morning of December 15th the Field Hospital was already astir. While it was yet dark the silence of the camp was broken in upon by the rousing of the orderlies, by much slapping upon the sides of silent tents, by much stumbling over darkened tent ropes, and by sudden calls of "Get up, you chaps," "Tumble out," "Chuck yourselves about." "Why don't you wake a man up?" cries out one peevish voice among the recently roused. "Why don't you make a noise?" says another in sleepy tones. "Is the whole camp afire and is the Boers on us, or is this your idea of calling a gentleman?" mutters a sarcastic man, as he puts his head out of the fly of his tent.

In a few minutes everyone in the camp is on the move, for there is little needed to complete a toilet beyond the tightening of a belt and the pulling on of a pair of boots. All are in the best of spirits, and the collecting together of goods and chattels and the preparing of a hurried breakfast proceed amidst infinite chatter and many camp pleasantries. We are at last on the move. We are the last to go. This is the day of the long expected battle, and we are to push on to the front. The real fighting is to begin, and there is not a man who is not possessed by the conviction that the Boers will to-day be swept from the Tugela—if they have not already fled—and that General Buller will have a "walk over."

One cannot but be reminded, many times since, that the advance to Ladysmith was always spoken of as a "walk over."

Moreover, everyone is glad to leave Frere—dreary, sweltering Frere. Since the column left it has become a waste of desolation; the very grass has been already worn away, and there is nothing but an expanse of bald earth, scarred with the landmarks of a camp that was, glistening with empty meat and biscuit tins which flash in the sun, and dotted over with a rabble of debris. The picturesque cavalry camp, with its rows of restless horses, is now only indicated by more or less formal lines of dirtier dirt. The avenues and squares of white tents are gone, and in their place is a khaki waste covered with the most melancholy of refuse.

At the outskirts of great towns there is usually, in a place or two, a desert plot of land marked off by disreputable relics of a fence and trodden into barren earth by innumerable untidy feet. If such a plot be diversified with occasional ash heaps, with derelict straw, and with empty tins and bottomless pots and pans, it will represent in miniature the great camp of Frere after the column had moved to the river.

Frere was indeed no longer Frere. It had become suddenly quiet, and the depressed garrison left behind were almost too listless to watch, with suitable jealousy, our preparations for departure.

On this particular morning the sun rose gloriously. Out of the gloom there emerged rapidly the grey heights of the far-off Drachenbergs, and as the light of the dawn fell full upon them, their ashen precipices and pinnacles became rose-

coloured and luminous; and the terraces of green which marked the foot of each line of barren cliff seemed so near and so strangely lit that many a man, busy in the work of striking camp, stopped to gaze on these enchanted mountains. The whole range, however, looks chilled and barren—as barren, as solitary, as unearthly as the mountains of the moon.

Before the peaks of the Drachenbergs were well alight the boom of our great guns sounded with startling clearness, and it was evident that the prelude for the battle had begun.

In due course a train of goods wagons backed down to the side of the hospital. The tents and countless panniers, boxes, sacks, and miscellaneous chattels of the hospital were packed upon the trucks. Our instructions were to proceed by train to Colenso, and to there unload and camp. There was apparently no doubt but that the village by the Tugela would immediately be in our hands. Early rumours reached us, indeed, that the Boers had fled, and that no living thing was to be seen on the heights beyond the river. These rumours were soon to be discredited by the incessant roar of cannon, and later by the barking of the "pom-pom" and the minor patter of rifle firing.

Four nurses were to go with the train: the two who had accompanied me from London, Miss McCaul and Miss Tarr, and two army sisters from Netley, Sister Sammut and Sister Martin.

While the train was being loaded the nurses waited at the hotel or store. The hotel, a little unpretending bungalow, represented one of the three or four dwellings which made up the settlement of Frere. It was kept by Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, to whose hospitality we were, on this and other occasions, much indebted. Mr. Wilson and his family were excellent representatives of the many sturdy and loyal colonists who are to be found throughout Natal. When the Boers approached Frere they were compelled to fly to the south, and when they returned to what had once been a home, they found such a wreck of a house as only Boers can effect. Everything had been looted that could be looted, and what could not be removed had been ruthlessly broken up. Even the books in the ample book-case had been torn to pieces. The empty rooms were filled with filth and wreckage, and nothing had escaped the obscene hands of these malicious marauders. Every cupboard had been torn open and, if possible, torn down; every drawer had been rifled of its contents; and on the floor, among fragments of broken chairs and crockery and discarded articles of clothing, would be found a photograph of a child, trampled out of recognition, or some small keepsake which had little value but its associations. The Boers, indeed, do not stop at mere looting, but mark their visits by fiendish malice and by a savage mischievousness which would not be unworthy of an escaped baboon.

The train carrying the hospital and its possessions moved on to Frere Sta-

tion, where it took up the equipment of officers and men. There was a passenger carriage with one compartment in which were accommodated the nurses and three others. The officers, sergeants, and orderlies rode on the piles of baggage which filled the open trucks.

The day was blazing hot, and thirst proportionate. The heat oppressed one with the sense of something that had weight. Any breeze that moved was heavy with heat.

At last we started for the actual front, full of expectancy and in the best of spirits. The distance to Chieveley is about seven miles across the veldt, across the trestle bridge, and past the wreck of the armoured train. The train moved up the incline to Chieveley very slowly, and as we approached the higher ground it struck us all that the incessant artillery and rifle firing, and the constantly repeated crack of the "pom-pom," were hardly consistent with the much-emphasised "walk-over."

Outside Chieveley Station, the station of which we were to see so much later on, the crawling train stopped, and a galloper came up with a message requesting me to go down to the battlefield at once. At the same time, Major Brazier-Creagh, who was in charge of the hospital train, and who was always as near the front as he could get, came up and told us that things were going badly at Colenso, that we had lost several guns, and that the wounded were coming in in scores.

## V

### THE HOSPITAL UNDER THE RIDGE

My wagon and mules were already at Chieveley when the train reached that place, and I was able to start for the scene of action without a moment's delay.

From Chieveley the grass-covered veldt slopes evenly to the Tugela and to Colenso village, which lies upon its southern bank. This slope, some few miles from Chieveley, is broken by a long ridge, upon which the 4.7 naval guns were placed. From this ridge the whole battlefield could be viewed.

Under the shelter of the ridge, and close to the great guns, four little field hospitals were pitched, and here I made my first acquaintance with the circumstances of war. Each field hospital would be represented by a small central marquee, which formed an operating and dressing station, and a number of bell tents

around it, which would accommodate in all about one hundred patients.

When I arrived the ambulances were already coming in—the dreary ambulances, each one with a load of suffering, misery, and death! Each wagon was drawn by ten mules and driven by a Kaffir, and over the dusty hood of each the red cross flag waved in the shimmering heat. They came along slowly, rocking and groaning over the uneven veldt like staggering men, and each drew up at one or other of the little hospitals under the ridge. Every ambulance carried a certain number of wounded men who were well enough to sit up, and a smaller number who were lying on stretchers—the "sitting up" and "lying down" cases, as they were respectively called. Those who could move themselves were soon helped down from the wagon by willing hands, while the stretchers were taken out by relays of trained bearers.

What a spectacle it was! These were the very khaki-clad soldiers who had, not so long ago, left Waterloo, spick and span, amid a hurricane of cheers, and now they were coming back to camp silent and listless, and scarcely recognisable as men. They were burnt a brown red by the sun, their faces were covered with dust and sweat, and were in many cases blistered by the heat; their hands were begrimed; some were without tunics, and the blue army shirts they wore were stiff with blood. Some had helmets and some were bare-headed. All seemed dazed, weary, and depressed.

Their wounds were of all kinds, and many had been shot in more places than one. Here was a man nursing a shattered arm in the blood-stained rags of a torn-up sleeve. There was another with his head bandaged up and his face painted with black streaks of dried blood, holding a crushed helmet beneath his arm like a collapsible opera hat.

Some still gripped their rifles or dragged their bandoliers along as they limped to the tents. Many were wandering about aimlessly. All were parched with thirst, for the heat was extreme. Here a man with a bandaged, bootless foot would be hopping along with the aid of his gun, while another with his eyes covered up would be clinging to the tunic of a comrade who could see his way to the tents. One or two of those who were lying on the ground were vomiting, while near by a poor fellow, who had been shot through the lung, was coughing up blood.

All around the operation-marquee men were sitting and lying on the ground, waiting for their turn at the surgeon's hands; while here would be a great heap of dusty rifles, and there a pile of discarded accoutrements, tunics and boots, and elsewhere a medley of boxes, panniers, canteen tins, cooking pots, and miscellaneous baggage. A few helmets were lying about which had probably dropped off the stretchers, or had been removed from the dead, for some of them were blood-stained and crushed out of shape, or riddled with holes.

The saddest cases among the wounded were those on the stretchers, and the stretchers were lying on the ground everywhere, and on each was a soldier who had been "hard hit." Some of those on the stretchers were already dead, and some kindly hand had drawn a jacket over the poor, dust-stained face. One or two were delirious, and had rolled off their stretchers on to the ground; others were strangely silent, and at most were trying to shade their eyes from the blinding sun. One man, who was paralysed below the waist from a shot in the spine, was repeatedly raising up his head in order to look with persisting wonder and curiosity at limbs which he could not move and in which he could not feel. Here and there groups of dusty men, who had been but slightly wounded, were sitting on the ground together, too tired and too depressed even to talk, or at most muttering a word or two now and then in a whisper.

Overworked orderlies were busy everywhere. Some were heating water or soup over the camp fires; others were hurrying round to each wounded man with water and bread. The majority were occupied in helping the injured to the tents or were concerned in attempting to relieve those who seemed in most distress.

The surgeons in their shirt-sleeves were working for their lives. Some were busy in the operation-marquee, while others were going from man to man among the crowd upon the ground, giving morphia, adjusting limbs, and hurrying each of the wounded into the shelter of a tent with as much speed as possible. Yet, although the whole ground seemed covered with stricken men, the dismal ambulances were still crawling in, and far over the veldt the red cross flag of other wagons could be seen moving slowly up to the naval ridge.

Would this procession of wagons never end!

Besides the ambulances there was the Volunteer Bearer Company, organised by Colonel Gallwey, C.B. The men of this Company were now tramping in a long, melancholy line made up of little groups of six slowly moving figures carrying a stretcher between them, and on each stretcher was a khaki mass that rocked as the stretcher rocked, and that represented a British soldier badly wounded, possibly dying, possibly dead.

Above the hubbub of the swarming hospitals was still to be heard the boom of the accursed guns.

In the rear the whistle and puff of a train at Chieveley sounded curiously out of place, and about the outskirts of the hospital some outspanned oxen were grazing as unconcernedly as if they were wandering in a meadow in England. Over all was the blazing sun and the blinding sky.

Late in the afternoon a thunderstorm passed overhead, and when the rain came down the wounded, who were lying on the grass, were covered over with the waterproof ground-sheets which were used in the tents. This did little to mitigate the grimness of the occasion. There was, indeed, something very un-

canny in the covered-up figures, in the array of tarpaulins glistening with rain, and beneath which some of the wounded lay motionless, while others moved uneasily.

No pen, however, can fitly describe this scene at the foot of the ridge. Here was a picture of the horrors of war, and however accustomed an onlooker may have been to the scenes among which a surgeon moves, few could have wished other than that the circumstances of this day would be blotted out of all memory. I could not fail to be reminded over and over again of the remark made by many who were leaving England when I left to the effect that they hoped they would reach the Cape "in time for the fun." Well, we *were* in time, but if this was "fun" it was humour of a kind too ghastly for contemplation.

If of this dismal scene there was much to be forgotten, there was at least one feature which can never be forgot, and that was the heroism with which the soldier met his "ill luck." The best and the worst of a man, so far as courage and unselfishness are concerned, come out when he is hard hit, and without doubt each one of the wounded at Colenso "took his licking like a man." Bravery in the heat and tumult of battle is grand enough, but here in the dip behind the gun hill, and within the unromantic lines of a field hospital, was a display of grim pluck, which showed itself only in tightened faces, clenched teeth, and firmly knit fingers. Among the stricken crowd who had reached the shelter of the hospital there was many a groan, but never a word of complaint, never a sign of whining, nor a token of fear. Some were a little disposed to curse, and a few to be jocular, but they all faced what had to be like men.

They were not only uncomplaining and unselfish, but grateful and reasonable. There was no grumbling (no "grousing," as Tommy calls it), no carping criticism. As one man said, pointing to the over-worked surgeons in the operation-tent, "They will do the best they can for the blooming lot of us, and that's good enough for me."

## VI

### INSIDE AN OPERATION-TENT

There were four operation-marquees pitched under the naval ridge on the day of Colenso, one connected with each of the field hospitals. There is little about these marquees or about the work done in the shadow of them that is of other than



professional interest. They were crowded, and overcrowded, on December 15th, and the surgeons who worked in them worked until they were almost too tired to stand. Every preparation had been completed hours before the first wounded man arrived, and the equipment of each hospital was ample and excellent. To my thinking, a great surgical emergency, great beyond any expectation, was never more ably met than was this on the day of the first battle.

The marquee is small. It accommodates the operation-table in the centre between the two poles, while along the sides are ranged the field panniers which serve as tables for instruments and dressings.

It is needless to say that the operation-tent is very unlike an operating theatre in a London hospital, but then the open veldt is very unlike the Metropolis. The floor of the tent is much-trodden grass, and, indeed, much-stained grass, for what drips upon it cannot be wiped up. There are no bright brass water-taps, but there is a brave display of buckets and tin basins. Water is precious, more precious than any other necessity, for every drop has to be brought by train from Frere.

There is little room in the tent for others than the surgeon, his assistant, the anæsthetist, and a couple of orderlies. The surgeon is in his shirtsleeves, and his dress is probably completed by riding breeches and a helmet. The trim nurses, with their white caps and aprons, who form the gentlest element in the hospital theatre, are replaced by orderlies, men with burnt sienna complexions and unshaven chins, who are clad in the unpicturesque army shirt, in shorts, putties, and the inevitable helmet or "squasher" hat. They are, however, strong in the matter of belts, which vary from a leather strap or piece of string to an elaborate girdle, worked, no doubt, by the hands of some cherished maiden. From the belt will probably be hanging a big knife or a tin-opener, in place of the nurse's chatelaine, and from the breeches pocket may be projecting the bowl of a pipe. The orderly in a field hospital—who is for the most part a "good sort"—look's a little like one of the *dramatis personæ* of Bret Harte's tales, and is a curious substitute for the immaculate dresser and the dainty nurse.

Still, appearances do not count for much, and the officers and men of the Royal Army Medical Corps did as sterling good work on December 15th as any body of men could do, and they were certainly not hampered by the lack of a precise professional garb.

The wounded are brought into the marquee one by one. Not all are cases for operation, but all have to be examined, and an examination is more easily carried out on a table than on a stretcher or the bare ground. Moreover, to make the examination painless, an anæsthetic is usually required. I wonder how much chloroform and morphia were used on that day, and on the night and day that followed! The drugs would fill one scale of a balance in the other scale of

which would be found the dull weight of pain they were destined to obliterate. The horrors of war are to some small extent to be measured by the lists of the wounded and the dead, but a more graphic representation would be provided by the hideous total of the drops of chloroform and the grains of morphia which have come from the surgeon's store.

The flies of the operation-marquee are wide open, for the heat is intense, and access must be easy. As it is, there is much mopping of brows and many "pulls" of dirty lukewarm water from precious water-bottles. Unhappily the scenes within the shadow of the canvas cannot be quite hidden from those who are lying in the sun outside waiting their turn. As one man after another is carried in there is sure to be some comrade on the ground who will call out as the stretcher goes by: "Keep yer chivey up, Joe"; "Don't be down on your luck"; "They will do you a treat"; "Good luck to yer, old cock, you won't feel nothing."

One instance of the limited capacity of the marquee I may be pardoned for recounting. The amputation of a leg was in progress when the pressure of work was at its height. Beneath the table at the time of the operation was the prostrate figure of a man. He had been shot through the face. His big moustache was clotted with blood, his features were obliterated by dust and blood, his eyes were shut, and his head generally was enveloped in bandages. I thought he was dead, and that in the hurry of events he was merely awaiting removal. The limb after amputation was unfortunately dropped upon this apparently inanimate figure when, to my horror, the head was raised and the eyes were opened to ascertain the nature of the falling body. This poor fellow was attended to as soon as the table was free. I was glad to see him some weeks after in the Assembly Hotel at Pietermaritzburg hearty and well. He was a gallant officer in a Natal regiment, and when I recalled this gruesome incident to him, he owned that, feeble as he was at the time, it gave him a "shake up."

## VII

### THE SURGEONS OF THE FIELD HOSPITALS

Among the many officers of the R.A.M.C. I must confess that my strongest sympathies are with those who are in charge of the little field hospitals. These handy hospitals have their own transport, and move with the various brigades or divisions. The officers who command them have little comfort, little rest, the least

luxurious mess, and the hardest of work. They bear the brunt of the campaign so far as the medical and surgical needs of the Army are concerned. They must be always ready, always at hand, prepared to be full of patients one day and empty the next; and those whose lives are spent with them can certainly claim that they have "no abiding city."

The officers in charge of these hospitals are picked men, but as sound experience is necessary they are often men who are no longer young, and who may claim that they have already had their share of roughing it. They are, perhaps, more than any others, the most exposed to criticism. If anything goes wrong at the front a large proportion of the blame falls upon them, and if all goes well their names appear in no roll of honour.

No surgeon who saw these men could be other than proud that he belonged to the same profession as they did. Of their work at Colenso, at Spearman's Farm, and before Pieters I can only say that it was, to my thinking, a credit to the medical department of any army.

## VIII

### A PROFESSIONAL VISIT BY RAIL

After a busy afternoon among the field hospitals under the naval ridge, I returned in the evening to Chieveley, in the hope, now that the bulk of the work was over, of getting something to eat. I had not been at Chieveley long when an orderly arrived with a letter to tell me that Lieutenant Roberts had been brought in wounded, and to ask me to go back to the naval hill at once. It was now dark, and I had at that time no horse. However, the hospital train was standing in the station, and to the fertile brain of Major Brazier-Creagh, who was in charge of the train, it occurred that we might detach the engine and go down on it to the ridge, since the field hospitals were close to the railway.

There was the difficulty, however, that the line was a single line, and a water train had already steamed down to the ridge, and was expected back at any moment. It was the simple problem of an engine on the one hand, and of a train on the other, proceeding in different directions at night on a single line of rail.

The case being urgent, the engine was detached and we started. Major Brazier-Creagh and Captain Symonds came with me. It so happened that we

went tender first. The railway line appeared to us to go up and down with many undulations, and at the top of each rise we expected to meet the water train. Fortunately the moon was coming up, and the blackness which oppressed us was fading a little. We proceeded slowly, with much whistling and considerable waving of a red lamp. At last there was made out the dim outline of the water train coming towards us at a fair speed. We stopped, and there were redoubled efforts in the direction of whistling, lamp waving, and shouting. These exhibitions had an immediate effect upon the water train, which, after some hysterical whistling, stopped and backed promptly out of sight. The driver told us afterwards that he thought a whole train was coming down upon him at full speed, and that he might well have backed down into Colenso.

We got out some way above the ridge and walked on to the field hospital I had so lately left. The gallant officer I came to see was comfortably bestowed in a tent, was quite free from pain and anxiety, and was disposed to sleep. From a surgical point of view the case was hopeless, and had been hopeless from the first, and no idea of an operation could be entertained. Our examination and our discussion of the case with Major Hamilton, R.A.M.C., under whose care the patient was, occupied some time, and the engine had long since gone back to Chieveley. There was nothing to be done but to sleep on the ground in the open, and this we proceeded to do, lying down on the grass outside the tent we had just visited. There was no hardship in this, as it was a splendid night, and the full moon had risen and had flooded the whole country with a spectral light.

As if by magic the restless, hurrying, motley crowd of the earlier day had vanished. A cool breeze and pleasant shadows had replaced the heat and the glare of the sun; a gentle silence had blotted out the noise and the turmoil; and of the scene of the afternoon there was nothing left but the white tents gleaming in the moon, the open veldt, and the shadow of the ridge.

## IX

### THE HOSPITAL TRAIN AT COLENZO

The battle of Colenso was fought on Friday, December 15th, and on Saturday, the 16th, an armistice was declared for the burying of the dead. Very early on Saturday morning, while it was yet moonlight, the hospital train backed down from Chieveley and came to a stand as near the field hospitals as possible. As

soon as it was daylight (and at this time of the summer the sun rose before five) the loading of the train commenced.

The filling up of a hospital train is no easy business, and affords a somewhat depressing sight.

The worst cases are dealt with first, and a long line of stretchers soon began to pour from the hospital tents to the railway. The stretchers are put down on the railroad close to the wheels of the train. On this particular morning it so happened that the carriages threw a shadow on the side of the line towards the hospital, so that the stretchers, if near the metals, were in the shade.

Many of the wounded had had no sleep, and many were developing some degree of fever. A few had become delirious, and were difficult to control. With the stretcher parties would come a certain number of such of the wounded as could walk, and very soon a not inconsiderable crowd was gathered in the shade of the train.

But what a crowd! The same sunburnt men with blistered faces, but now even a more motley gathering than filled the field hospitals the day before—a gathering made piteously picturesque by khaki rags, blue bandages, casual splints, arm slings, eye bandages, slit-up trousers, and dressings of all kinds. Here they came crowding to the train, some limping, some hopping, some helped along between two stronger comrades, some staggering on alone. A man with a damaged arm assisting a man with a bullet through his leg. A man stopping on the way to be sick, cheered up by another with a bandaged eye.

An untidy, sorrowful crowd, with unbuttoned tunics and slovenly legs, with unlaced boots, with blood on their khaki jackets and on their blue shirts and on their stiffening dressings. The gentle hand of the nurse had not as yet busied itself with this unkempt and unwashed throng. There had been no time for washing nor for changing of garments, and if the surgeon has had to cut the coat and the shirt into rags, the wearer must wear the rags or nothing; and as for washing, it is a sin to wash when water is priceless.

The greater number of those who come to the railway line are carried there on stretchers, but all who are well enough to take any interest in the journey are eager not to miss a place in the train.

The business of getting the "lying down" cases into the carriages is considerable, and everybody lends a hand, the surgeons being the most active of any. The berths in the train are placed one above the other, and the room for manipulating stretchers is small. The equipment of the train was very complete, and every luxury was at hand, from hot soup to iced "lemon-squash," and even to champagne. Many generous ladies in the Colony had seen that the train should want for nothing, and Major Brazier-Creagh took as much pride in his travelling hospital as if he had built it himself.

Innumerable instances came under my notice of the unselfishness of the soldier, and of his solicitude for his friends in distress. It was by the side of this hospital train that occurred an episode I have recorded elsewhere, and which may well be described again. An orderly was bringing some water to a wounded man lying on the ground near me. He was shot through the abdomen, and he could hardly speak owing to the dryness of his mouth, but he said: "Take it to my pal first, he is worse hit than me." This generous lad died next morning, but his pal got through and is doing well.

Another poor fellow, who was much troubled with vomiting, and who was indeed dying, said, as he was being hoisted into the train, "Put me in the lower berth, because I keep throwing up." How many people troubled merely with seasickness would be as thoughtful as he was? He died not long before we reached Chieveley.

Lieutenant Roberts, whom I had visited at intervals, went up by this train, and was placed in No. 4 Field Hospital at Chieveley. Here a bedstead, with a comfortable mattress and white sheets, was waiting ready for him.

As the train moved off it was sad to note that a few who had been brought down to the rail in the hope of a place being found for them, had to be left behind, and had to be carried back to the tents to await some other means of transport.

## X

### THE NURSES AT CHIEVELEY

The train which brought up No. 4 Field Hospital from Frere was stopped, as I have already said, at Chieveley. The tents and baggage were thrown out, and with as much haste as possible the hospital was pitched on the open ground, close to the station. Before, however, more than a few tents could be put up the wounded began to arrive. They came in all Friday evening, and all Saturday, and all Saturday evening. The field hospitals by the naval hill had soon been filled, and all cases that could be sent on to Chieveley were sent there, while as many as could go at once to the base were taken down by the hospital train.

Saturday was a day of truce, but at sundown on Saturday not only had all the wounded to be cleared out from the field hospitals, but those hospitals themselves had to move, as, with the renewal of hostilities, they would be in a place of danger. Chieveley was therefore soon filled to overflowing.

There were three army surgeons with "No. 4" whose names I have already mentioned. They were reinforced by a small field hospital under the charge of Major Baird and Captain Begbie.

Some of the wounded came up by train, and some by ambulances or by wagons, but a very large proportion, a proportion which included nearly all the serious cases, were carried up on stretchers by hand. No mode of transport is more comfortable than this, or is less fatiguing to the patient, and the splendid organisation of volunteer bearers and of coolie carriers enabled this means of bringing up the wounded to be very largely made use of. Certainly the stretcher-bearers were the means of saving lives, and of sparing those they carried an infinite amount of pain.

As seen at night, the procession up to Chieveley was doleful and mysterious. The long line of silent men moving in clusters, each cluster with a stretcher and a body in its midst. Stealing slowly and cautiously over the veldt in the moonlight, they all made for the two white lights which swung over the hospital by the station.

The coolies carried their stretchers shoulder high, so that the body of the man they bore was lit fitfully by the moon as they passed along with absolutely noiseless feet. The coolies themselves added no little to the uncanny spectacle, for in the shadow beneath the stretcher stalked a double row of thin bare legs, and by the poles of the stretcher were the white or coloured turbans that these men affect; while here and there a sleek black head glistened in the light.

There was but one house at Chieveley—the stationmaster's house. It had been effectually looted after the Boer fashion, but it would have done well as a resting-place for the four nurses who came up with the hospital. The house, however, had been taken possession of, and the nurses had to contemplate either a night in the open or in the waiting-room at the station. As this latter room had been used as a stable by the Boers, it was not in much request. It served, however, as a place for the depositing of personal baggage and for the preparing of such food as it was possible to prepare—chiefly, indeed, for the making of tea.

The question of where to sleep was soon solved by the necessities of the position. These ill-housed women, as a matter of fact, were hard at work all Friday, all Saturday, and all Saturday night. They seemed oblivious to fatigue, to hunger, or to any need for sleep. Considering that the heat was intense, that the thirst which attended it was distressing and incessant, that water was scarce, and that the work in hand was heavy and trying, it was wonderful that they came out of it all so little the worse in the end.

Their ministrations to the wounded were invaluable and beyond all praise. They did a service during those distressful days which none but nurses could have rendered, and they set to all at Chieveley an example of unselfishness,

self-sacrifice, and indefatigable devotion to duty. They brought to many of the wounded and the dying that comfort which men are little able to evolve, or are uncouth in bestowing, and which belongs especially to the tender, undefined and undefinable ministrations of women.

The English soldier is as sensible of attention and as appreciative of sympathy and kindness as any other man who is at the mercy of circumstances, and I can well believe that there are many soldiers—some of them now in England, crippled for life—who will long keep green the memory of the sisters at Chieveley.

Some weeks after Colenso I was at Pietermaritzburg, and was looking up in the hospital wards certain cases which had been attended to in "No. 4." Among them was a paralysed man to whom one of the nurses had been very kind at Chieveley. I found him comfortably bestowed, but he was possessed of a handkerchief the extreme dirtiness of which led me to suggest that, as he was now in a centre of luxury, he should ask for a clean one. To which he replied, "I am not going to give this one up; I am afraid of losing it. The sister who looked after me at Chieveley gave it to me, and here is her name in the corner."

As the truce was over on Saturday, and as the Boers might assume the aggressive and shell Chieveley and its helpless colony, the order was given to break up the hospital and get all the wounded away by train, and to retire with the tents and equipment to Frere. This was done on Sunday morning.

As soon as the wounded had left—and it was no light matter getting them away—it was thought desirable that the women should be at once got out of danger, and so they were bundled down to Frere with little ceremony in a mule wagon. As they had no hospital to go to (for "No. 4" did not arrive until the small hours of the following morning) they took refuge in the hotel at Frere. They had some food with them, albeit it was not of a kind to attract the fastidious, and the four of them slept on the floor of a looted and empty room, which even the kindly heart of Mrs. Wilson could not render other than a dreary resting place. This was their only "night in" in three days.

I had, I am bound to confess, the advantage of them in the matter of ventilation, for I slept in a wagon.

## XI

### SOME TRAITS IN THE MEN



As I have already said, the wounded took their turn of "hard luck" like men. A few were sullen, a few relieved their feelings by fluent but meaningless profanity, in which the Boers were cursed with as much thoroughness as was the Jackdaw of Rheims. The majority were silent or said little. The tendency of most of the men was to make the least of their wounds, and some of those who were the worst hit were the most cheery. They were, with scarcely an exception, unselfish, and were singularly patient, considering that the exercise of patience is not a marked quality in men.

They ministered to one another's wants with a tender solicitude which was not marred by the occasional uncouthness of its method. There was a widespread belief that tobacco was a panacea for all ills, and any man who had the wherewithal to smoke shared the small luxury with his mates. If there was only one pipe in a tent it was kept circulating. One would see a man on one stretcher trying to arrange a pillow for a comrade on the next: the pillow in question being commonly made out of a squashed helmet with a boot inside it. The man in any tent who was the least disabled was never so well pleased as when he was given something to do for those who were under the same canvas with him. With a pannikin and a spoon he would feed those who could not feed themselves, until they were glad to be rid of the attention; or he would readjust a dressing, or cut off a boot, or get the dried blood from an exposed surface with a never-wearing anxiety.

With few exceptions the men were honestly anxious "not to give trouble." It was an article of faith with them to "take their turn," and no man would try to make out that his case gave him a claim for attention over his fellows. Indeed, on the occasion of a visit, the occupants of a tent were eager with one voice to point out what they considered to be the worst case, and to claim for it the earliest notice. The men of a tent were, in the kindest way, a little proud of having a "real bad" case in their midst. When the curtain of a tent is up the occupants whose heads are nearest to the tent ropes can easily converse with those who are similarly placed in the adjoining tent. Thus I heard one man on the ground, whose head was nearly in the open, call out to another head just in view on the floor of the next tent: "We've a real hot 'un in along with us; he's got 'it through the lungs and the liver both, and the doctor has been in to him three times." To which the other head replied: "That's nothing to a bloke in here. He's been off his chump all night; his language has been a fair treat, and he's had four fits. We've had a night, I don't think!"

Another article of faith with the soldier takes the form of a grim stoicism under pain. Some of the wounded endured the examination of their wounds with Spartan pluck. They seemed to consider it above all things essential that they should not cry out "until they were obliged." One enormous Irishman with

a shattered thigh yelled out in agony as he was being lifted upon the operating table to be examined. The pain was evidently terrible and excuse enough for any degree of exclamation. But he apologised quaintly and profusely for the noise he made, urging as an excuse that "he had never been in a hospital before." He expressed his regret much as a man would do who had wandered into a church with his hat on and who excused himself on the ground that he had never been in a church before.

Every patient took a lively interest in his own case, and especially in the removal of any bullet which may have lodged in any part of him. One ruddy youngster, a Devonshire lad, had had a shrapnel bullet through his leg, and the bullet could be felt, on the side opposite to the point of entry, under the unbroken skin. He begged that it should be taken out without chloroform, as he wanted to see it come out and to keep it and take it home. He sat up with his back against the tent pole during the operation, and watched the cutting out of the lead without a murmur. No doubt this Boer missile will find a place in a corner cupboard in some cottage among the delectable villages of Devon, and will be for long the wonder and admiration of devoted women folk.

Among other traits, one notices that the soldier clings with great pertinacity to his few possessions, and especially to his boots. When the haversack has been lost, and when the tunic has been cut up to make its removal more easy, or left behind because it is too blood-stained, there is little remaining in which the owner may bestow his goods unless it be in his boots. There was one poor man I remember at Spearman's, who was in great distress because, just as he was being sent down to the base, he had lost his solitary boot. He said it contained a puttie, a tin of jam, two shillings in money, and a bullet that had been taken out of him. These are no mean possessions.

The puttie also is not lightly discarded. If not used as a gaiter it is useful for many other purposes, and especially is it considered well to wind it round the abdomen as a cholera belt, for the soldier has great faith in anything in the way of a belt.

When the men were bathing together in hundreds at Springfield, there was an opportunity of seeing such variety in the matter of abdominal belts as could never have been dreamed of. Some of these favoured garments were mere shreds and rags, and were worn probably in order to keep faith with some good soul at home who had made her boy promise he would never leave off his belt. Other binders were undoubtedly home-made, and the work of anxious mothers and wives who believed in red flannel and plenty of it. Some of the belts were knitted, and were made to be pulled on, but they had shrunk so much from repeated wettings, and had become so infantile in their proportions that the owner of the garment had to get at least one comrade to help him pull it over his hips. When

it was at last in place it quite constricted the body, and justified the comment of one bather, who exclaimed to his belted but otherwise naked friend: "Well, ye've got a waist on ya, if nothink else!"

## XII

### THE SIGN OF THE WOODEN CROSS

After Colenso, No. 4 Stationary Field Hospital returned to the same quarters at Frere, and at Frere we remained until January 13th, 1900, nearly a month. The wounded who fell on the unhappy 15th of December had been satisfactorily disposed of, thanks to the admirable arrangements made by the Principal Medical Officer, Colonel Gallwey, C.B. Not a single wounded man was left out on the field on the night of the battle. On that particular Friday every man had been attended to before midnight, and on the following Sunday all the wounded who had fallen on the 15th were comfortably housed in one or other of the hospitals at the base.

Our tents, although emptied of the wounded, soon began to be filled up with cases of sickness, and especially with cases of dysentery. Those who presented the slightest form of the disease could be sent down to the base, but when the type was severe the patient did better with as little movement as possible. Those, therefore, who remained in our lines presented a large proportion of examples of serious illness.

Provisions were ample, medical necessities abundant, and the ladies of the Colony were infinitely kind in forwarding to Frere comforts of all sorts. Our tents were by no means filled, and yet, in spite of what may be considered favourable circumstances, there were a good many deaths.

Deaths mean the need for burial, and a little burying ground was marked off in the rear of the hospital, close to the railway line. As weeks went by the little enclosure needed enlargement, and so the engineers came and fenced it round afresh with a wire paling, and gave it a fit aspect of formality. The names of the dead were indicated on tablets of wood, and now and then the comrades of a man, or the survivors of the tent he died in, would erect over the mound a wooden cross.

These crosses were made usually out of provision boxes, or perhaps from a whisky case, and many were very admirably finished and very cleverly carved, and many were curious of design. They represented long hours spent in tedious

hacking at a tough slab of wood with a pocket-knife, and, after that, infinite patience in the cutting out of the letters of the dead chum's name. Finish would be given to the lettering by means of a tin-opener.

These crosses will be found all over the land of the war. Few of them will long survive the wind and the rain and the blistering sun, and the hand of the Kaffir who is lacking of fuel. So long, however, as they dot the solitary veldt they will be symbols of the tenderest spirit of good comradeship, of the kindly heart of men who are supposed to be little imbued with sentiment, and of that loyal affection for his friend which is not among the least of the qualities of the British soldier.

Here and there some elaborate monuments with some promise of permanency have been erected. There is one, for example, in which the inscription is fashioned out of empty cartridge cases stuck into cement. There is another carved with some art out of stone.

I think, however, that those sleep best who lie beneath the wooden cross fashioned with labour and some occasional dimness of eye by the pocket-knife of an old "pal."

### XIII

#### THE MEN WITH THE SPADES

The graves at Frere were dug by our own men, or rather by a small fatigue party from a regiment near by. Nearly every morning they came, the men with the spades. There were six of them, with a corporal, and they came up jauntily, with their spades on their shoulders and with pipes in their mouths. They were in their shirt-sleeves, and there was much display of belt and of unbuttoned neck. Their helmets were apt to be stuck on their heads in informal attitudes. They were inexpressibly untidy, and they made in their march a loose, shambling suggestion of a procession.

They came past my tent about breakfast time, and every morning I wondered whether the men with the spades would come, since, when they came, I knew that a death had taken place in the night, and wondered who it was.

As in some way symbols of death, as elements in the last services to be rendered to the dead, the men with the spades filled me with great curiosity. They came up cheerily, and when they reached the outskirts of the hospital the

corporal would call out to any orderly he saw: "Well, nipper, how many have we got to dig to-day?"

When they had finished they went by my tent on their way back to camp: still the same untidy, shambling lot; still, as a rule, smoking, and still with the appearance of being infectiously cheerful.

I know well enough, however, that there was little cheeriness among these men with the spades. They were dull enough in their inmost hearts. The soldier is much impressed by a burying and by the formalities which surround the dead. And as he knows he must not "give way" he is prone to cover his easily stirred feelings by an attempt at a "devil-may-care" attitude, and by an assumption of rollicking indifference. It is, however, a poorly executed pretence, and it needed no exceptional acumen to see that in reality no small shadow of unhappiness followed the little shuffling procession, in spite of their pipes and their jauntily posed helmets and their laboured jokes.

If a soldier's grave is to be dug by sympathising hands, let it be dug by the hands of these very men with the spades.

## XIV THE MARCHING

On Friday, January 12th, Sir Redvers Buller left Frere, and on the following day we took our second departure from that place. The movement was to be to Springfield, some eighteen miles across the veldt. No. 4 Field Hospital was now to leave the railway and trust to transport by oxen and mules. The hospital was equipped to accommodate a minimum of three hundred beds, and was made up of sixty tents and ten marquees. The rank and file of the R.A.M.C. numbered eighty-eight non-commissioned officers and men; the staff was represented by three army surgeons, nine civil surgeons, the two army sisters who had worked at Colenso, and my remaining nurse, Miss McCaul. The other nurse, Miss Tarr, who came out with me, was at Maritzburg, desperately ill with dysentery. She nearly lost her life, and was scarcely convalescent when the time came for us to return to England. Her unexpected recovery was largely due to the skill of the doctor who looked after her (Dr. Rochfort Brown, of the Assembly Hospital), and to the extraordinary kindness of a lady who was waiting at Pietermaritzburg to join her husband, then locked up with his regiment in Ladysmith.

The three nurses kept with the hospital, and did as good work at Spearman's Farm, after Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz, and at Chieveley, after Pieters, as they did on the occasion of Colenso. They had no easy time, for from the day we began at Frere until the lull after Ladysmith we pitched the hospital no less than six times; viz., twice at Frere, twice at Chieveley, once at Spearman's, and once at Springfield.

Our train was composed of sixteen ox wagons, each with sixteen oxen, so that the number of oxen employed was over 260. There were besides five ambulances, each drawn by ten mules. The transport provided me consisted of a small covered wagon, a Scotch cart, sixteen mules, a conductor on horseback, four Kaffir "boys," a groom, and my own horse and manservant.

On the occasion of our leaving Frere on January 13, we were roused at 3 A.M., while it was yet quite dark, and while the Southern Cross was still ablaze in the sky. All the tents were struck by the ungenial hour of 4 A.M. Packing up and the circumstances of removal were conducted with difficulty and no little confusion. The ox teams were lying about, and only a precarious light was furnished by the lanterns we carried. It required no exceptional carelessness to allow a wanderer in the camp to fall, in the course of a few minutes, over a prostrate ox, a rolled-up tent, a pannier, a pile of cooking-pots, or a derelict saddle. When the dawn came an agreeable sense of order was restored, and we started on the march at 5 A.M.

There was a splendid sunrise, and the day proved a glorious one, although it was painfully hot. The road was a mere track across the veldt, which had been worn smooth in some places and cut into ruts in others by the hundreds of wagons and the great array of guns which had already passed over it.

"No. 4" formed a long convoy by the time the last wagon had rumbled out of Frere. The pace was very slow, for the ox moves with ponderous lethargy. The surgeons rode by the side of the train, the sergeants and the orderlies walked as they listed, and the nurses rode in ambulances, to the great shaking of their bodies. With us were a hundred coolies, who were attached to the hospital for camp work. They were a dismal crowd as they stalked along, with their thin, bare legs and their picturesque tatters of clothing, with all their earthly possessions in bundles on their heads, and with apparently a vow of funereal silence in their hearts.

The heat soon became intense, and the march blank and monotonous. There was ever the same shadeless veldt, the same unending brown road, relieved by nothing but an occasional dead horse or mule; the same creeping, creaking, wallowing wagons, the never-absent perspiring Kaffirs, the everlasting cloud of dust, and over all the blazing sun that neither hat nor helmet could provide shelter from.

At 7.30 A.M. we reached a spot on the veldt known as Pretorius' Farm. It was marked by what was called, with reckless imagery, a stream, but which was represented by a wide and squalid gutter filled with stagnant water which would have done no discredit to that of the lower Thames. Here we outspanned, and here we breakfasted.

These breakfasts under the dome of heaven are not to be looked back upon with rapture. Picnicking is an excellent relaxation in England, but a picnic without shade, without cooling drinks, without pasties and salads and jellies and pies, without white tablecloths and bright knives, without even shelter from incessant dust, lacks much. Tinned provisions are, no doubt, excellent and nourishing, but oh, the weariness of them! And oh, the squalor of the single tin mug, which never loses the taste of what it last had in it! And oh, the meanness of the one tin plate which does duty for every meal, and every phase of it! Perhaps of all unappetising adjuncts to a breakfast the tin of preserved milk, which has been opened two days and is already becoming disgustingly familiar, is the most aggressive. The hot climate and the indefatigable ant and the fly do little to make the items of a meal attractive.

What does not rapidly decompose promptly dries up. On one occasion a roasted fowl was brought up reverently to Frere in a tin box, but when it came to be eaten it had dried into a sort of *papier mâché* roast fowl, and was like the viands which are thrown at the police at pantomimes. We brought many varieties of preserved food with us, and of much of it the question could not fail to arise as to whether it had ever been worth preserving.

Many had experience, too, of the inventive art of the shopkeeper, as shown in the evolution of canteens and pocket table knives. The canteen, when unstrapped, tends to fall into a hundred parts, and can never be put together again. It is a prominent or generic feature of most canteens that the kettle should look as little like a kettle as possible, and that everything should pack into a frying-pan. The pocket picnicking knife contains a knife, a fork, a spoon, and a corkscrew. The fork runs into everything and prevents the knife from being carried in the pocket. The spoon and fork are jointed for more convenient stowing, and at crises in a meal they are apt to bend weakly in the middle and then to incontinently shut up.

The outspanning and the inspanning at Pretorius' Farm occupied over two hours, and then the march was resumed. A better country was reached as we neared the river, and it was a pleasant sight to see the tumbling stream of the Lesser Tugela, and to find in one valley the pretence of a garden and a house among trees. This was at Springfield, which place we reached at 2.30 P.M. The march of some eighteen miles had therefore been effected in two treks.

At Springfield the camping ground was the least dreary of any the hospital

had experience of, and the proximity of the Lesser Tugela made bathing possible.

After a few days at Springfield we moved on to Spearman's Farm, where we camped by the hill called Mount Alice.

The return from Spearman's after Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz was even more monotonous than the going forth. The first journey was to Springfield, which was reached at sundown, and where we bivouacked for the night. Springfield was left at dawn, and the next night was spent in a bivouac at Frere. On the following day, before the sun was well up, we took the last stage of the march and reached Chieveley. Here all enjoyed once more the luxury of having tents overhead, for during the crawling journey over the veldt we slept in wagons, on wagons, or under wagons.

## XV

### SPEARMAN'S FARM

In a lonely valley under the mimosa-covered heights which dominate the Great Tugela is the lonely homestead of Spearman's Farm. Those who built it and made a home in it could have had little thought that it would one day figure in the annals of history. The farmhouse and the farm buildings and the garden were enclosed by a rough stone wall, and upon this solitary homestead the hand of the Boer had fallen heavily. The house had been looted, and what was breakable in it had been broken. The garden had been trampled out of recognition, the gates were gone, the agricultural implements had been wantonly destroyed, and the unpretending road which led to the farm was marked by the wheels of heavy guns. The house was small and of one story, and was possessed of the unblushing ugliness which corrugated iron alone can provide. The door swung open, and any could enter who would, and through the broken windows there was nothing to be seen but indiscriminate wreckage. There was about the little house and its cluster of outbuildings a suggestion of the Old Country, and it wanted but a rick or so, and a pond with white ducks to complete a picture of a small English farm. The garden had evidently been the subject of solicitous care, and was on that account all the more desolate, and what delight it ever had had been trampled out of it by countless hoofs or obliterated by the rattling passage over it of a battery or so of artillery.

At the back of the farm, and at the foot of a green kopje, was a quaint lit-



tle burial ground—little because it held but two graves, and quaint because these were surmounted by unexpected stone memorials of a type to be associated with a suburban English cemetery. These monuments were fitly carved, and were distinctly the product of no mean town, and they were to the memory respectively of George Spearman and of Susan Spearman. For some undefinable reason these finished memorials, so formal and so hackneyed in their design, appeared inappropriate and even unworthy of the dignity of the lonely graves at the foot of the kopje. Some more rugged emblem, free from artificiality and from any suggestion of the crowded haunts of men, would have covered more fittingly the last resting-place of these two pioneers. A few trees, almost the only trees within sight, shaded the little graveyard, and the trees and the monuments were enclosed by a very solid iron railing. It was in the shadow of this oasis that the dead from our hospital were buried.

## XVI

### THE HOSPITAL AT SPEARMAN'S

The hospital reached Spearman's on January 16th, and was pitched at the foot of the hill, upon the summit of which the naval gun was firing. We were, therefore, close to those scenes of fighting which were to occupy the next few weeks, and too close for comfort to the great 4.7 gun, the repeated booming of which often became a trouble to those who were lying ill in the hospital.

The heights that dominated the southern bank of the Tugela were very steep on the side that faced the river, but on the side that looked towards Spearman's the ground sloped gradually down into a wide plain which, like other stretches of veldt, was dotted with kopjes and slashed with dongas. Anyone who mounted the hill at the back of the hospital would come by easy steps to an abrupt ridge, beyond which opened a boundless panorama.

In the valley below this crest was the winding Tugela, and just across the dip rose the solemn ridge of Spion Kop. Far away in the distance were the purple hills which overshadowed Ladysmith. If the crest were followed to the right the ground rose until at last the summit of the naval hill was reached, and here were the "handy men" and their big gun. From this high eminence a splendid view was obtained of the country we desired once more to possess. The Tugela glistened in the sun like a band of silver, and over the plain and in and out among the

kopjes and round the dongas the brown road wound to Ladysmith. The road was deserted, and the few homesteads which came into view showed no signs of life. At the foot of the hill was Potgieter's Drift, while above the ford was a splashing rapid, and below was the pont which our men had seized with such daring.

The face of the hill towards the river was covered with mimosa trees and with cactus bushes and aloes, and this unexpected wealth of green almost hid the red and grey boulders which clung to the hill-side. Among the rocks were many strange flowers, many unfamiliar plants, and creeping things innumerable. This was a favourite haunt of the chameleon, and I believe it was here that the hospital chameleon was captured.

The quiet of the place, when the guns had ceased, was absolute, and was only broken by the murmur of the numerous doves which occupied the mimosa woods. The whole place seemed a paradise of peace, and there was nothing to suggest that there were some thousands of grimy men beyond the river who were busy with the implements of death. On looking closely one could see brown lines along many of the hillsides, and these said lines were trenches, and before the hubbub began men in their shirt-sleeves could be seen working about them with pickaxes and shovels.

I should imagine that few modern battles have been viewed by the casual onlooker at such near proximity and with such completeness in detail as were the engagements of Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz, when viewed from the high ground above our hospital.

The hospital, though now more than twenty-five miles from the railway, was very well supplied with almost every necessity and with the amplest stores of food. Bread was not to be obtained, or only on occasion, when it would be brought up by an ambulance on its return from Frere. We had with us, however, our flocks and herds, and were thus able to supply the sick and wounded with fresh milk, and the whole hospital with occasional fresh meat. We were a little short of water, and fuel was not over abundant. As a result the washing of clothes, towels and sheets presented the same type of problem as is furnished by the making of bricks without straw. The aspect of a flannel shirt that has been washed by a Kaffir on the remote veldt leaves on the mind the impression that the labour of the man has been in vain.

Our stay at Spearman's was extended to three weeks, and we dealt with over a thousand wounded during that period, and I am sure that all those who came within our lines would acknowledge that at "No. 4" they found an unexpected degree of comfort and were in every way well "done for."

On the Sunday after our arrival the wounded began to come in. Thirteen only came from the division posted at Potgieter's Drift, the rest came from Sir Charles Warren's column. Increasing numbers of wounded came in every day

in batches of from fifty to one hundred and fifty. They were all attended to, and were sent on to Frere as soon as possible. All the serious cases, however, were kept in the hospital.

## XVII

### THE TWO WHITE LIGHTS

Many of the wounded who were brought in between the 18th and the 24th of January came in after sundown. The largest number arrived on the night of Monday, the 22nd. It was a very dark night. The outline of the tents and marquees was shadowy and faint. The camp was but the ghost of a camp. Here and there a feeble light would be shining through the fly of a marquee, and here and there an orderly, picking his way among the tent ropes by the aid of a lantern, would light up a row or two in the little canvas town. In the front of the camp was the flagstaff, high up upon which were suspended the two white lights which marked the situation of the hospital. These lamps only sufficed to illumine a few of the tents in the first line. The flaps of these tents were probably secured and the occupants asleep.

It was a weary journey to the hospital, and one can imagine with what eagerness the tired, hungry, aching wounded would look ahead for the two white lights. Rocking in pain on a crawling ox wagon, or jolted in the rigid fabric of an ambulance, the way must have seemed unending. Tumbling along in the dark, with no sound but the creaking of the wagon and the incessant moans of the shapeless, huddled figures who were lying in the cart, the journey might well have been one never to be forgotten. How many a time a tired head must have been lifted up from the straw to see if there were yet any sign of the two white lights. Would the journey never end, and the pain never cease? and was the broken limb to be wrenched every time the blundering wagon pitched and rolled? And why had the man who had talked so much ceased to speak—and indeed to breathe? Would they drive through the dark for eternity? and would they never come in view of the two white lights?

It was a miserable sight to see these belated wagons come in, and they would often rumble in all night. They emerged one by one out of the darkness and drew up in the open space between the two central lines of tents, and between the few uplifted lanterns held by the sergeants and the men on duty. After they

had deposited their load they moved away and vanished again into the night.

Some of the wounded in the wagons were sitting up, but the majority were lying on the straw with which the wagon would be littered. Some were asleep and some were dead; and by the light of the lanterns the wagon seemed full of khaki-coloured bundles, vague in outline and much stained with blood, with here and there an upraised bandage, and here and there a wandering hand, or a leg in crude splints, or a bare knee. And round about all a medley of rifles, boots, haversacks, helmets, cartridge pouches and tin canteens.

What the journey must have been to many I could gather from an incident of one of these dreary nights. A wagon had reached the hospital lines and was waiting to be unloaded. A man with a shattered arm in a sling was sitting up, and at his feet a comrade was lying who had been very hard hit, and who had evidently become weaker and less conscious as the wagon had rolled along. The apparently sleeping man moved, and, lifting his head to look at his pal, who was sitting above him, asked wearily, for probably the fiftieth time, "Don't you see nothing yet, Bill, of the two white lights?"

## XVIII

### AFTER SPION KOP

On Wednesday, January 24th, came the terrible affair of Spion Kop. On the previous day some hint of what was expected was foreshadowed in the order that an additional hundred bell tents were to be erected in No. 4 Field Hospital. These tents were obtained from a brigade who were bivouacking, and were all pitched by Wednesday afternoon. They represented accommodation for an additional number of five hundred wounded, and it was, therefore, evident that an important engagement was at hand.

On Thursday the wounded came pouring in, and they came in the whole day and until late at night, until the hospital was full. The number admitted on that day was nearly six hundred. Those who were deposited in the bell tents had to lie on stretchers. All were provided with blankets. In spite of the immense number of the wounded, they were all got under shelter by Thursday night, and had had their more serious injuries attended to, and were made as comfortable as circumstances would admit. Some of the staff went round with water and food, and others with morphia, while a third party made it their business to see that

every man was bestowed as comfortably as extemporised pillows or change of posture could make him. The pillows were represented by helmets, or by the happy combination of helmet and boot, or by haversacks or rolled-up tunics.

The volunteer ambulance corps and the coolie bearers did excellent service. The larger number of the wounded were on the top of Spion Kop. The path down was about two miles, was steep, and in places very difficult. The carriage of the wounded down the hill had all to be by hand. From the foot of the hill to the hospital the carriage was by ambulance wagons and in some cases by bearers. All the stretchers had hoods. There was no doubt that the wounded suffered much on account of the tedious transport, but it was rendered as little distressing as possible.

The surgeons who went after the wounded on the top of the hill told us that the sight of the dead and injured was terrible in the extreme, the wounds having been mostly from shell and shrapnel; some men had been blown almost to pieces. The weather on Wednesday was warm, but was not to be compared with the intense heat on the day of the battle of Colenso. The temperature was that of a hot summer's day in England. Thursday was fortunately cloudy and much cooler.

As to the wounded, there was the usual proportion of minor injuries, but on the whole the wounds were much more severe than those received at Colenso. This is explained by the large number of wounds from shell and shrapnel. The men, however, were much exhausted by the hardships they had undergone. In many instances they had not had their clothes off for a week or ten days. They had slept in the open without great-coats, and had been reduced to the minimum in the matter of rations. The nights were cold, and there was on nearly every night a heavy dew. Fortunately there was little or no rain. The want of sleep and the long waiting upon the hill had told upon them severely. There is no doubt also that the incessant shell fire must have proved a terrible strain. Some of the men, although wounded, were found asleep upon their stretchers when brought in. Many were absolutely exhausted and worn out independently of their wounds.

In spite of all their hardships the wounded men behaved splendidly, as they always have done. They never complained. They were quite touching in their unselfishness and in their anxiety "not to give trouble"; but it was evident enough that they were much depressed at the reverse.

The shell wounds were the most terrible and the most difficult to treat. One man had most of his face shot away, including both eyes. Another had the forearm shot off and two fearful wounds of each thigh dividing the anterior muscles to the bone. In one case a shrapnel had opened a main artery in the forearm, and the man came down safely with a tourniquet on his brachial artery composed of a plug of cake tobacco and the tape of a puttie. I cannot help thinking

that this ingenious tourniquet was the work of one of the "handy men."

## XIX

### THE STORY OF THE RESTLESS MAN

The following incident may serve to illustrate the often-expressed unselfishness of the soldier, and his anxiety to do what he can for a comrade in trouble.

Among the wounded who came down from Spion Kop was a private, a native of Lancashire, who had been shot in the thigh. The thigh-bone was broken, and the fracture had been much disturbed by the journey to the hospital. The man was given a bedstead in one of the marquees; the limb was adjusted temporarily, and he was told to keep very quiet and not to move off his back. Next morning, however, he was found lying upon his face, with his limb out of position and his splints, as he himself confessed, "all anyhow." He was remonstrated with, but excused himself by saying, "But you see, doctor, I am such a restless man."

The limb was more elaborately adjusted, and everything was left in excellent position. Next morning, however, the restless man was found lying on the floor of the marquee, and in his bed was a man who had been shot through the chest. The marquee was crowded and the number of beds were few, and those who could not be accommodated on beds had to lie on stretchers on the ground. The man who was shot in the chest had come in in the night, and had been placed on the only available stretcher. The restless man proceeded to explain that the newcomer seemed worse off than he was, and that he thought the man would be easier on the bed, so he had induced the orderlies to effect the change. The man who was shot in the chest died suddenly, and in due course the restless man was back in his own bed once more.

It was not, however, for long, for on another morning visit the Lancashire lad was found on the floor again, and again beamed forth an explanation that one of the wounded on the ground, who had come in late, seemed to be very bad, and so he had changed over. The present occupant of the bed was in a few days moved down to the base, and the restless man was in his own bed again. But not many days elapsed before he discovered among the fresh arrivals an old chum, who longed to lie on a bed, and thus the good-hearted North-countryman found himself once more on the floor.

The moving of a man with a broken thigh from a bed to the ground and

back again means not only such disordering of splints and bandages, but much pain to the patient and no little danger to the damaged limb. So this generous lad was talked to seriously, and with a faintly veiled sternness was forbidden to give up his bed again on any pretence. In the little attempt he made to excuse himself he returned once more to his original joke and said, with a broad grin: "But you see, doctor, I am such a restless man."

## XX

### "DID WE WIN?"

One instance of the indomitable pluck of the British soldier deserves special notice. A private in the King's Royal Rifles, of the name of Goodman, was brought from Spion Kop to No. 4 Field Hospital in an ambulance with many others. He was in a lamentable plight when he arrived. He had been lying on the hill all night. He had not had his clothes off for six days. Rations had been scanty, and he had been sleeping in the open since he left the camp. He had been struck in the face by a fragment of shell, which had carried away his right eye, the right upper jaw, the corresponding part of the cheek and mouth, and had left a hideous cavity, at the bottom of which his tongue was exposed. The rest of his face was streaked with blood, which was now dried and black—so black that it looked as if tar had been poured on his head and had streamed down his cheek and neck. Eight hours had been occupied on the journey to the hospital, and eight hours is considered to be long even for a railway journey in a Pullman car.

He was unable to speak, and as soon as he was settled in a tent he made signs that he wanted to write. A little memorandum book and a pencil were handed to him, and it was supposed that his inquiry would be as to whether he would die—what chance he had? Could he have something to drink? Could anything be done for his pain? After going through the form of wetting his pencil at what had once been a mouth, he simply wrote: "Did we win?" No one had the heart to tell him the truth.

His memorandum-book—which is in my possession—was used by him while he remained speechless in the hospital, and certain of the notes he made in it, and which are here appended, speak for themselves:

"Water."

"I haven't done bleeding yet."

"I've got it this time. I think my right eye is gone, and I can hardly swallow."

"There are no teeth in front."

"It aches a lot."

"I'm lying the wrong way for my wound."

"I found the trenches."

"I've had all the officers over to see me."

"He is pleased, the doctor."

"Did my haversack come with me? If it did, there is some tobacco in it. You can give it to them that smoke."

Poor Goodman, he had no mouth to smoke with himself. I am glad to say he reached England, is in good health, and is as cheery as ever.

## XXI

### THE FIGHTING SPIRIT

The circumstances under which men enlist in the Army are, no doubt, varied enough. But not a few find their place under the colours in obedience to that fighting spirit which has for centuries been strong in the hearts of the islanders from Great Britain and Ireland. That spirit has anyhow carried the colours over the world.

Among the wounded there are many who, to use an expression common on the soldiers' lips, "were fed up with the war": they had had enough of it. There were others who were eager to be at it again, who felt that they had a score to wipe off; and even among the desperately hurt there would be here and there a man keen for revenge, and full of a passionate desire "to have another go at 'em." These men, ill as they often were, would describe with a savage delight, and in savage language, the part they had played in the battle out of which they had been finally dragged on a stretcher. A little success, a victory however small, did much to lessen the torment of a wound and to gild the contemplation of a life henceforth to be spent as a cripple. One gallant lad had been paralysed by a Mauser at short range, and had little prospect of other than permanent lameness. He had been in the assault on Vaal Krantz, had escaped without hurt until just towards the end, and was shot as his victorious company were rushing the last trench. After he had been examined, and while he was still lying on his stretcher, I could not avoid the remark, "This is a bad business." To which he replied, "Yes,



but we took the bally trench.”

To many and many of the dying the last sound of which they were conscious must have belonged to the clamour of war, and it was well for those who heard, or fancied they heard, above the roar of guns the shout of victory. One officer, dying in the hospital at Spearman's, had his last moments made happy by the sound of battle. He had sunk into a state of drowsiness, and was becoming gradually unconscious. Every now and then the boom of the 4.7 gun, firing from the hill above us, would rattle through the tents, and with each shot a smile would come over his face, and he would mutter with great satisfaction, "They are getting it now." He repeated these words many times, and they were, indeed, the last he uttered. Things were evidently going better with the army in his dream than they were at that moment with the real regiments by the river.

Some most vivid suggestions of what may pass through the soldier's mind during the actual circumstances of war were afforded by the utterances of more or less unconscious men when passing under the influence of chloroform in the operation-tent. Before they fell into the state of sleep, it was evident that the drug, with its subtle intoxicating power, brought back to the fading sense some flash of a scene which may have been real, but which was rendered lurid, spectral, and terrifying by the action of the poison. Under this condition incoherent words of command would be uttered in rapid tones, full of an agony of eagerness and haste; and cries for help would be yelled forth in what seemed to be a maniacal frenzy. Many of the actual utterances that escaped these unconscious lips, and gave glimpses of a phantom war as seen through the vapor of chloroform, were too fragmentary to be remembered, but two at least were muttered with such an emphasis of horror that I took note of them.

One of the wounded from Spion Kop had evidently engraved upon his mind the hideous scene of slaughter which the trenches on that hill presented. As he was being anæsthetised it was apparent that in his dream he was back again in the trenches, and was once more among his dead and mangled comrades. The vision of one wounded man especially haunted him and fascinated him, and at last he screamed out: "There goes that bloke again whose leg was shot away; blimzy, if he ain't crawling now!"

Another poor fellow had before his eye the spectre of an awful kopje. His fragmentary utterances made vivid the unearthly land he was traversing. All who stood by could picture the ghostly kopje, and could almost share in his anguish when he yelled: "There they are on the hill! For God's sake, shoot! Why don't

we shoot?"

## XXII

### THE BODY-SNATCHERS

Early in the campaign Colonel Gallwey, the P.M.O., organised a volunteer ambulance corps. Two thousand bearers were wanted, and in a few days two thousand were enrolled. Their duties were to carry the wounded off the field, to transport serious cases from the advanced hospitals or dressing stations to the stationary field hospital, and thence, if need be, to the railway. There were to be twelve on a stretcher.

This corps contained examples of all sorts and conditions of men—labourers, mechanics, "gentlemen," dock loafers, seamen, dentists, a chemist or two, a lawyer or two, tram drivers, clerks, miners, and shop assistants. Many were refugees from the Transvaal, and the majority had been thrown out of work of some kind or another by the war. A chance of getting employment had, no doubt, induced many to enlist, while probably the greater number were attracted by a spirit of adventure, by a desire to get to the front and to see something of the pomp and circumstance of war.

They formed a strange company when they mustered at Pietermaritzburg—a section of a street crowd in their everyday clothes, or in such clothes as were selected for roughing it. There was immense variety in the matter of hats. Belts were a feature. The flannel shirt, which was practically *de rigueur*, was replaced in an instance or two by a jersey. Collars were not worn; neckties were optional. There was no fixed fashion in the matter of boots; they varied from canvas shoes, worthy of a dandy at the seaside, to top boots fit for a buccaneer.

As to the men themselves, they were of all ages, heights, shapes, and sizes—the men of a crowd. Some were sunburned, and some were pale. Some were indifferent, but most were eager. Some were disposed to assume a serious military bearing, while others appeared to regard the venture as a silly joke of which they were beginning to be a little ashamed.

There is no doubt that the corps was in appearance not impressive. They were wild and shabby looking, disordered, unsymmetrical, and bizarre. They were scoffed at; and acquired the not unkindly meant title of the "body-snatchers." Later on the exuberant invention of the soldier dignified them by the

titles of the "catch-'em-alive-oh's" or the "pick-me-ups."

It is needless to say that a good number of unsuitable and undesirable men had found their way into the ranks. These were gradually weeded out, and under the discreet command of Major Wright the corps improved day by day, until the time Spearman's was reached they formed a very efficient, reliable, and handy body of men. They did splendid service, and one which was keenly appreciated. They were the means of saving many lives and an infinite amount of pain. Their longest tramp, of which I had knowledge, was from Spearman's to Frere, a distance of twenty-five miles. They showed the usual British indifference under fire, and went without hesitancy wherever they were led. Unfortunately it happened that many of the worthy "body-snatchers" were wounded, and not a few of them were killed.

In the early days of their career the "catch-'em-alive-oh's" fell upon bad times. They knew little of camp life, and less of the art of getting the most out of it. They had no organisation among themselves, and many were incompetent to shift alone. They began as a mob, and they tried to live as a mob, and the result was that about the time of Colenso they had little comfort but that which is said by the moralist to be derived from labour. In their camp after the battle they had time to settle down. They entered the camp a thriftless crowd, and came out of it a company of handy men.

They were popular with the soldiers. They had the gift of tongues of a kind, and could compete with most in the matter of lurid language. Their incessant hunger and indiscriminate thirst were a matter for admiration. They were good-hearted, and, although they looked wild, they meant well. Many a wounded man has been rocked to sleep on their stretchers, and on more than one dying ear the last sound that fell was the tramp of their untidy feet.

## XXIII

### SEEING THEM OFF

On the afternoon of Thursday, February 8th, the news came to the hospital at Spearman's that the army was once more to retire, and signs were already abroad to show that the retreat had commenced. At the same time an order arrived to the effect that all the wounded were to be moved at sunrise on the following day to Frere. Our stay at Spearman's—extended now to three weeks—had therefore

come to an end.

Among those left in the hospital were 150 patients whose condition was more or less serious. They had been kept under care as long as possible in order to avoid or postpone the danger of the long journey to the base. It was determined that these 150 men should be carried down to Frere on stretchers and by hand. And this was done, and well done, by the much-ridiculed corps of "body-snatchers."

It was no light undertaking, for the distance was twenty-five miles, and the road was dusty and not of the best. Every step had to be tramped under a glaring sun, and the heat of that day was great. Allowing twelve men to a stretcher, 1,800 men would be required. This number was forthcoming at sunrise, and they accomplished the march in the day, reaching Frere at sundown. This was a splendid piece of work.

It is not hard to surmise what would have happened to many of those who were the most ill if their journey to Frere had been by the ox-wagon, or by the still less easy ambulance. As it was, the whole convoy went down with comfort, and only one man died on the way, and he had indeed just reached his journey's end when his life ebbed away.

Long before sunrise on the morning of the departure from Spearman's the hospital was astir; and while it was yet dark lights could be seen in most of the tents, and lanterns carried by orderlies or coolies were moving here and there among the grey lines. The two white lights which hung from the flag-pole in front of the hospital were still shining. By the time the shadows had vanished and the light of the dawn fell upon "No. 4," it was in a state of untidy turmoil. Everyone was on the alert to "see them off."

In the marquees the last dressings were being carried out by candle-light. Clothes were being got together; helpless men were being dressed; blankets were being rolled up, and such comforts as the hospital could provide were being packed for the wounded to take with them on their journey. Cherished possessions were being dragged out from under pillows, to be safely disposed in a haversack or a boot. The grey light fell upon orderlies in their shirt sleeves bustling from tent to tent; upon piles of provision cases and of forage which were being turned out; upon heaps of stretchers; upon the rolled-up kit of the Army Medical Corps men; upon melancholy coolies who had been up all night, and were still crawling about, and were still in their night attire. This night outfit would consist, probably, of a turban, a mealie sack round the neck, and a decayed army mackintosh on the body; or of a turban, a frock-coat, which might at one time have graced Bond Street, and bare legs. Here and there in the indistinct light would be seen the white apron and trim dress of a nurse, who still carried the lantern she had had with her since the small hours of the morning. All were

anxious to be up in time to "see them off."

In due course, and even yet before the sun could be seen, the Volunteer Ambulance Corps began to form up outside the camp. They were nearly two thousand strong, and they were a wild-looking company. There was, however, more uniformity in their clothing now, because they had been supplied with khaki tunics, and with occasional khaki trousers. Some wore putties, some gaiters, and some had tucked their trousers inside their socks. A few had cut their trousers off about the knee and were distinguished by bare legs. A gaiter on one leg and a puttie on the other was not considered to be in any way *démodé*. Their hats were still very varied, but many had possessed themselves of helmets which had been picked up on the field. Uniformity and smartness could, however, not be expected if one man wore a helmet and the next a tam-o'-shanter, the third a bowler hat, and the fourth a "squasher" or a headpiece of his own designing. They had red-cross brassards on their left arms, but these had become merely fluttering bits of colouring.

This weird corps carried their possessions with them, and it was evident that in transporting their impedimenta they had appreciated the value of the division of labour. Many had military water-bottles, which they had probably picked up. Others carried their water in glass bottles, which dangled from their waists. Hanging about their bodies by strings or straps would be various useful domestic articles. Attached to one man would be a bundle of firewood, to another a saucepan, to a third a kettle and a lantern. Here a man would have in the place of a sabre-tache a biscuit tin suspended by a cord, or a hatchet and a tin-opener, or a spare pair of boots, which swung bravely as he marched. A popular *vade mecum* was an empty jam tin (much blackened by the smoke of the camp fire) with a wire handle, and evidence that it represented a cooking-pot. Belts, knives, sticks, overcoats, rolled-up mackintoshes, and a general tint of sunburn and dirt completed the uniform of this strange company.

Before they entered the camp the wounded had been brought out on stretchers. The stretchers were placed on the grass, side by side, in long rows which extended across the breadth of the hospital. The men lying on them were not pleasant to look at. They formed a melancholy array of "bad cases." Each man was covered by a brown blanket, and within the hood of the stretcher were his special belongings, his boots and his haversack, and, with them, such delicacies for the journey as a pot of jam, a chunk of bread, some biscuits, a lump of tinned meat in a newspaper, and bottles (mostly with paper corks) containing water or milk or tea. Those on the stretchers presented bandaged legs and bandaged arms, splints of all kinds, covered-up eyes and bound-up heads, and the general paraphernalia of an accident ward. Some of the faces were very pinched and pale, for pain and loss of blood and exhaustion had caused the sunburn to fade away.

The light of the dawn fell upon this woe-begone line, and dazzled the eyes of many with the unaccustomed glare. Those who were not too ill were in excellent spirits, for this was the first step on the journey homewards. Such were excited, garrulous and jocular, and busy with pipes and tobacco. A few were already weary, and had on their lips the oft-repeated expression that "they were fed up with the war." Many a head was lifted out of the hood to see if any old chum could be recognised along the line, and from those would come such exclamations as: "Why are you here, Tom?" "Where have you been hit?" "Ain't this a real beanfeast?" "Thought you were stiff." "We're on the blooming move at last."

Many of the men on the stretchers were delirious, and some were almost unmanageable. One poor fellow was babbling about the harvest and the time they were having. He was evidently in his dream once more among the cornfields of England, and among plenteous beer. Another shook the canvas hood of his stretcher and declared with vehemence that he "would not go in any bally sailing boat, he was going in a steamer, and the colonel would never let his men go in a rotten sailing ship." Whereupon he affirmed that "he was going to chuck it," and proceeded to effect his purpose by rolling off his stretcher.

When the Volunteer Ambulance Corps marched along the line of stretchers they were the subject of much chaff, and many comments such as these burst forth: "You're being paraded before the General. So buck up!" "Pull up yer socks." "You with the kettle! Do you take yourself for a gipsy van?" "We ain't buying no hardware to-day-go home." "You know there's a Government handicap on this job, and half a crown to the man who gets in first, so you had better hurry my stretcher along." And so on; in the dialect of London, of Dublin, of Lancashire, and of Devon, with infinite variety and with apparent good spirits.

There were many anxious cases among this crowd on the stretchers. One, for example, was an Irishman named Kelly, a private in the Lancashire Fusiliers. He was as plucky a soldier as the plucky soil of Ireland has ever produced. His right arm had been smashed on Spion Kop. He had been on the hill two nights; and when the darkness fell had spent his time in crawling about on the ground, holding the sleeve of his shattered arm between his teeth, dragging his rifle with his left hand, and searching the bodies of the dead for any water that may have been left in their water-bottles. He had lost an incredible amount of blood, and when he reached the hospital it was necessary to amputate the whole upper limb, including the shoulder-blade and the collar-bone. He went through this ordeal with infinite courage and with irrepressible good humour. He had been the strong man of his regiment and a great boxer, and, as he casually said, "He should miss his arm."

Kelly's spirits were never damped, and he joked on all topics whenever he had the strength to joke. He was a little difficult to manage, but was as docile as

a lamb in the hands of the Sister who looked after him, and for whom he had a deep veneration. Nothing in the ordinary way upset this gallant Irishman, but just before the convoy started he did for once break down. Two bottles of English beer had found their way into the camp as a precious gift. Kelly was promised these bottles to take with him on his journey. In due course they were deposited in the hood of his stretcher. When his eyes fell upon the delectable vision of English beer he could stand no more, and Kelly wept.

I little thought when I saw Kelly off at Spearman's that the next time I should say good-bye to him would be in a hansom cab in Pall Mall; but so it was.

When all was ready the stretchers were lifted off the ground in order, and the bearers filed out of the camp and on to the dusty track. The morning was like that of a summer's day in England, and we watched the long convoy creep along the road until it was nearly out of sight. The perfect quiet of their departure was only broken by the oft-repeated boom of the naval gun on the hill.

## XXIV

### A FUNERAL AT SPEARMAN'S

There were many deaths at Spearman's, and the burying ground was under the shadow of the clump of trees which stood at the back of Spearman's Farm, and of which burying place I have already spoken. Those who died were carried away to the mortuary-tent, and there each body was sewn up by the coolies in the brown army blanket or in a sheet. The sewing was after the manner of the sewing up of a package. The brown blanket, however, formed but a poor covering at the last, and it made little mystery of what it shrouded. Beneath its tightly drawn folds there was shadowed something that was still a man, for was there not the clear outline of head and chin and shoulders and feet? When the body was ready it was brought out of the tent, placed upon a stretcher, and carried to the grave. Over the bodies of the officers was thrown the Union Jack, but the bodies of the soldiers were covered only by the brown blanket or the sheet.

There was one funeral which I have in mind, on the occasion of which eight were buried—eight who had been struck down on Spion Kop—four non-commissioned officers and four men.

The funeral party drew up near to the mortuary-tent, and halted there in precise military formation. There was the firing party, who went first, with in-

verted rifles; then came the bearers, and then a small company from the regiments of the dead.

Some little way off stood a cluster of men who had come, in a shy, apologetic sort of way, to see the last of their pals. They seemed to think that their presence near by the formal procession was an intrusion, and they huddled together, some ten of them, at a distance. From their attitudes one inferred that they did not wish to be considered as taking part in the funeral. They were pretending to be merely onlookers. They were restless, and disposed to shuffle their feet, or they kicked the earth up absently with the toes of their boots.

Some of the ten kept their eyes fixed upon the mortuary-tent, to watch the bodies come out. As each of the blanket-covered objects was brought from the tent into the sunlight there were murmured comments from this small knot of untidy men—these men who did not want to look like mourners, but who were mourners indeed. "That's surely Ginger," says one of the number, pointing to the body last brought out. "No, that ain't Ginger," says his companion. "Ginger never had a chest on him like that. That's more like Jimmy Evans. Jimmy held hisself like that often."

So they talked, and they kept up fairly well this pretence at a casual conversation. But some could not trust themselves to speak, and these kept their backs to the tent and kicked at the earth absently. Those who took part in the apparent nonchalant talk had a struggle, I think, to keep their voices from breaking and their eyes from becoming dim. The "things" they were bringing out of the tent, done up in blankets, had once been men who had, perhaps, enlisted with them, who probably hailed from the same town in the Old Country, and who were the subjects of many memories.

When all the bodies were ready and the stretchers in line, the procession started, and marched slowly and silently round the kopje and along the glade that led to the trees by Spearman's Farm.

But for the tents of a far-off camp the veldt was a desert. There was scarcely a human being in sight. There was none of the pomp of a soldier's burial; no funeral march; no awed crowd; no tolling of bells; no group of weeping women in black clothes; no coffin borne on a gun-carriage and distinguished by the helmet and accoutrements of the dead. There were only the eight bundles in the brown blankets on the eight stretchers. And some little way in the rear were the slouching company of the ten, who did not want to be regarded as mourners, and who, with occasional "sniffing," and perhaps a surreptitious wiping of eyes with a shirt cuff, were shuffling along with a poor affectation of indifference.

In due course the last resting-place is reached, and here are eight separate graves in a line, and at the head of them stands the chaplain. He has on a college cap, a white surplice, riding breeches and putties. He reads the service with the



utmost impressiveness. The men who form the firing party and the escort are ranged round the place of burial in precise military lines, and, in spite of the blazing sun, every head is bared. The words of the chaplain alone break the silence, although now and then there comes across the plain the boom of the naval gun. And here, under the dazzling sky of Africa, and at the foot of a kopje on the veldt, the eight dead are laid in the ground.

There are no onlookers except myself and the little group of ten. They stand in a cluster at a respectful distance. Their heads are bare, and more than one man has hidden his face in his helmet, while others have turned their heads away so that their mates shall not see their eyes. Their pretence at indifference and at having been drawn to the funeral by mere curiosity is now of the very slenderest.

As the graves are being filled up the funeral party marches back to the camp with a brisk step. The slovenly ten, who are not taking the part of mourners, scatter. They wander off in twos and threes, and they have become curiously silent. Some have dragged out pipes from their pockets, and are filling them absently. One is whistling an incoherent fragment of a tune. They look towards the horizon, and perhaps see nothing but the barren veldt, or perhaps they see a familiar village in England, and within a cottage in the small street the figure of a woman with her face buried in her hands.

## XXV

### ABSENT-MINDEDNESS

My small experience of the British soldier in the field leads me to think that he does not altogether deserve the title of the "absent-minded." The average soldier has, I think, the most anxious regard for his belongings, and although that anxiety may have been obscured or even dissipated by the boisterous incidents which attend an embarkation for the Cape, still when he reaches camp his mind is much occupied with recollections of the people at home, and with concern for their well-being.

Among the wounded were always those whose first anxiety was as to the effect the news of their injuries would have upon mothers, sweethearts, or wives. And many a message of consolation was confided to the sympathising ears of the Sisters, and many a letter of assurance was laboriously written by those who had

the strength to write.

In the matter of letters the soldier takes profound interest. He writes whenever he has the chance, and makes a great deal of fuss about the performance. To most of those in camp the posting of a letter home is an event, and so precious is the pencilled epistle that the writer will hesitate before he commits it to the casual sack which is tied up to the fly of the post office tent, and which appears scarcely formal or official enough to receive the dirt-stained dispatch. For such dispatches, nothing less pretentious than a post office building or an iron letter-box seem fitting.

Many a time have I seen a letter dropped into the sack with such an expression of insecurity, and such evident feeling of hopelessness as to its safe conduct, that the writer of the same has appeared to regret that he had parted with it. A post office official in his shirt sleeves, with a pipe in his mouth and a helmet on the back of his head, seems hardly to be responsible enough for the occasion; and if the letter-writer would venture to express a hope that his elaborately directed letter "would be all right," the post office deity is apt to regard this concern with flippancy. "There's the sack! Chuck the blooming thing in. It won't break," was about all the comfort he would get.

The receipt of letters from home also was attended with an eagerness which was hardly fitting in an absent-minded man. The sergeant with the bundle of letters would read out the names on the envelopes in a military voice, ferociously and without feeling, and each man who got a missive grabbed it and marched off with it with the alacrity of a dog who has got a bone. If he could find the shelter of a wagon where the letter could be read unobserved it was well.

The letters dictated to the Sisters in the hospital were apt to be a little formal. It seemed to be thought proper that expression should be curbed, and that the sensibilities of the Sister should be in no way shocked by the revelation of a love passage. One dying man, who was dictating a letter to his mother, thought he would like to send with it a last message to "his girl," and in answer to the Sister's inquiry as to what she should write, modestly said, "Give her my kind regards."

There need have been no precise decorum in the wording of these last hopeless utterances, for if the sender of the letter "sniffed" a little as he dictated the message, the Sisters cried over them.

When a wounded man came to be stripped it was common to find some precious keepsake or some secret package hung about his neck, and to which he clung with the earnestness of a worshipper to his fetish. One man particularly was much more anxious about a locket that hung on his hairy chest than he was about his wound. He seemed to think that so long as the cheap little trinket was not lost his life mattered little. In the operation tent he was reluctant to take

chloroform until a solemn promise had been given that no harm should befall his locket, and that it should not be removed from his neck, I am afraid that the history of the locket ends here, for the loyal man died.

Among the wounded brought in one day from Potgieter's Drift was a man of scanty clothing, who held something in his closed hand. He had kept this treasure in his hand for some eight hours. He showed it to the Sister. It was a ring. In explanation he said, "My girl gave me this ring, and when I was hit I made up my mind that the Boers should never get it, so I have kept it in my fist, ready to swallow it if I was taken before our stretchers could reach me."

## XXVI

### AT CHIEVELEY AGAIN

On Sunday, February 11th, No. 4 Field Hospital once more reached Chieveley, after the tedious march from Spearman's of which mention has been made. The hospital was pitched near the station, and not far from the spot it had occupied on the day of the battle of Colenso. Chieveley is represented only by a railway station and a station-master's house. There are, however, many eucalyptus trees about these buildings, and the spot is shady. The ground stands high, and miles of undulating country are open to view. There are a Kaffir kraal or two in sight, and many mimosa groves, and beyond them all the line of the river. Chieveley, therefore, as a camp was well esteemed.

The sojourn at Chieveley began with that terrible fourteen days of incessant fighting which ended in the taking of Pieters and the relief of Ladysmith. Every day at sunrise the guns began, and it was not until sunset that they ceased. Any who looked up from their work in the camp, and turned their eyes towards Umbulwana, would seldom fail to see the flash of a lyddite shell on the far-off ridges, or, clear against the blue sky, the white puff of cloud from a shrapnel. Every day the wounded came in, mostly towards evening. Fortunately their numbers were few.

The days had again become very hot and very trying. It was weather which the soldier is apt to describe, in the vivid language of his kind, as weather "when a man should have his body in a pool and his head in a public-house!"

Standing in the station at Chieveley was commonly to be seen the armoured train. Whatever iron plates could do to make a structure indestructible had been

done; but to such beauty as a railway train may possess nothing had thereby been added. The sailors had, however, been busy with the engine of the train. The engineers had given it the outline of a square gasometer, but the "handy man" had covered the disfigured machine with ropes as with a garment. From the top of the funnel a veil of closely placed ropes trailed to the ground. A like panoply of ropes covered the body of the engine, and its wheels, and its cylinders, and its every detail. The officers called this production the "Russian poodle," but the soldiers gave it the name of "Hairy Mary"; and this name clung to it.

During the movement to Spearman's, Chieveley had been carefully fortified. A space round the station had been marked off by a very deep wire entanglement. Trenches had been dug, and some sort of a fort thrown up. There were entrenchments about the stationmaster's mild little house, and before the windows were erected iron plates with loopholes such as were used on the trucks of the armoured train. Similar iron plates formed a barricade along the modest veranda, and the result of it all was that the small unobtrusive house was made to look fierce and truculent. The few bare rooms were used by the Headquarters Staff, and the rough tables and stools were littered with all sorts of war-like paraphernalia. Among these insignia of battle, murder, and sudden death were two strange objects which had been left behind by the looting Boers, and which seemed out of place. One was a stuffed jay, and the other a dressmaker's lay-figure or "bust." The bird was stuck upon the wreck of the mantelpiece, and stared amiably and foolishly from its perch. The "bust" was life-size, and suggested the torso of a black woman, with a little polished knob for a head. It may have at one time graced the salon of a Parisian dressmaker. It was, however, now no longer used to show off dresses, trimmings and flounces, for a helmet surmounted the graceful chest, and belts, carrying pistols and swords, hung from the fine shoulders or clung to the delicate waist.

## XXVII

### A JOURNEY TO LADYSMITH

General Buller reached Ladysmith on March 1st, and on Friday, March 2nd, I had the good fortune to enter the town. The journey was not accomplished without difficulty. It was necessary to follow the road the army had taken, as the main road was not known to be free from the enemy, and, moreover, the bridge leading

to it had been blown up. The distance from Chieveley to Ladysmith by the route taken was between twenty-three and twenty-four miles. I took my covered cart (called in the camp the "bus"), with ten mules and two Kaffir "boys." A man rode in front to pick out the road. With me came my remaining nurse, Miss McCaul, and Mr. Day, an army chaplain. We took provisions, water, and forage for two days.

We left Chieveley at 6.30 a.m., and the first part of the journey was across the battlefield of Colenso. The road then became very rough, ran over ridges and down into dongas, over boulders and deep into ruts, so that the mules would now be at a fair trot and now dragged to a standstill. At last we reached the hill commanding the pontoon bridge over the Tugela. At the top of this precipitous height was the mighty convoy of ox-wagons with food for Ladysmith. The wagons could be counted by hundreds and the cattle by thousands. The hubbub could not be surpassed. The lowing of the oxen, the shrieking of the Kaffir "boys," the bellowed orders of the convoy conductors, the groaning of colliding wagons, made a compound of sound worthy of the occasion. Among the rabble would be seen ambulance wagons, water carts, isolated gun carriages and ammunition wagons, bread carts, mounted officers hurrying through, weary pickets returning to camp, and a few "Tommies" tramping along with a cheery indifference to the restless, struggling crowd.

The actual road above the pontoon was the very steepest declivity I have ever seen negotiated by structures on wheels. The 'bus (empty of all occupants) slid unsteadily down the incline, rocking like a ship in a troubled sea, and the mules had to put on their best pace to keep clear of the onrushing wheels.

The river at the point of crossing is extremely picturesque. The steep rugged banks are rendered beautiful by mimosa and cactus, and below the pontoons the torrent breaks into foaming rapids, while up-stream is the celebrated waterfall of the Tugela. From the river the road wound on to the foot of Umbulwana. It ran across plains and down into valleys, and over spruits and across boulders, and through mimosa groves and over dusty wastes. A river at the foot of the great hill was forded, and as the mules were nearly carried off their feet, and the wagon was flooded with the stream, we were glad to land on the opposite bank.

The Boer camps through which the road led showed every evidence of a hurried departure. The cooking pots were still on the camp fires; the rude shelters under which our hardy enemy had lived were still intact. The ground was strewn with refuse, with the remains of the last meal, with discarded articles of clothing, with empty bottles and barrels, with fragments of chairs and tables, with empty flour sacks, and, above all, with the straw, which is a feature of a Boer settlement. There were no tents. The shelters were made of boughs, of beams of

wood from adjacent farms, of iron railings, of barbed wire, of plates of corrugated iron, of casual patches of canvas, and of old sacks. In some of the trenches the shelters were more elaborate, and varied from an almost shot-proof retreat to a simple tent, made out of two raw cow skins stretched over bamboos.

These wild camps, amid a still wilder country, suggested the conventional "brigand's retreat." The only evidences of a gentler mood were provided by a discarded concertina and by a letter I picked up on the roadside. The letter was from a Boer wife at the home farm to her husband in the trenches. As we passed along the road we met with many evidences of a hurried flight. The dead horses were very numerous; and left by the roadside, with traces cut, were carts, light spider-carts, water carts, wagons, and such cumbrous impedimenta as wheelbarrows and a smith's forge. One wagon had fallen headlong into a donga in the dark, and was an utter wreck.

At last, on mounting the summit of a little ridge, we saw before us a wide green plain of waving grass, and beyond the plain and under the shelter of purple hills lay the unhappy town of Ladysmith. Ladysmith looks very pretty at the distance—a cluster of white and red roofs dotted about among trees, and surmounted by the white tower of the Town Hall.

The military camps were placed at various points about the town. The first of these camps was that of the gallant King's Royal Rifles. They had made some sort of home for themselves on the side of a barren and stony hill. They had, of course, no tents, but had fashioned fantastic shelters out of stone and wood and wire. They had even burrowed into the ground, and had returned to the type of habitation common to primeval man. Among the huts and burrows were many paths worn smooth by the restless tread of weary feet. The path the most worn of all was that which led to the water tanks.

The men themselves were piteous to see. They were thin and hollow-eyed, and had about them an air of utter lassitude and weariness. Some were greatly emaciated, nearly all were pale, nearly all were silent. They had exhausted every topic of conversation, it would seem, and were too feeble to discuss even their relief.

Ladysmith was reached at 2.30 P.M., and the food convoy did not arrive until late the same evening, so we had the sad opportunity of seeing Ladysmith still unrelieved—unrelieved so far as the misery of hunger was concerned. I had no food at my disposal, but I had, fortunately, a good quantity of tobacco, which was doled out in pipefuls so long as the supply lasted. It would have taken many pounds, however, to satisfy the eager, wasted, trembling hands which were thrust forward on the chance of getting a fragment of the weed.

The town is composed almost entirely of single-storey houses built of corrugated iron, with occasional walls of brick or cement. In the suburbs of the town

these houses are made as villa-like as possible by means of verandahs and flower gardens and creepers. The main street of the town, however, has no pretensions to beauty, and is merely a broad road with corrugated iron shops on either side.

On walking into "Starvation City," one's first impression was that of the utter emptiness of the place. Most of the villas were unoccupied, were closed up, and, indeed, barricaded. The gardens were neglected, and everything had run wild. The impression of desolation was accentuated by an occasional house with a hole in its roof or its wall due to a Boer shell. All the people we met were pallid and hollow-eyed, and many were wasted. All were silent, listless, and depressed. There were no evidences of rejoicing, no signs of interest or animation, and, indeed, as I have just said, Ladysmith was still unrelieved. Nearly every shop was closed or even barricaded. Sign-boards showed that here was a coach builder, and there a grocer. The chemist's shop appeared to be empty of everything except the coloured water in the large bottles in the window. Such shops as were open were dark and desolate.

There were many grim evidences of better days. Thus one restaurant presented, among other cheery signs, the announcement of "Meals at all hours." Another establishment was gay with placards of "Ice creams." Notices of groceries of all kinds for sale made radiant a shop which was empty of everything but a table and some rough chairs.

Such was the aspect of the weary town. Streets empty of all but a few tired and listless men, stores without goods, shops without customers, a railway station without passengers, a post office without letters, stamps, or post cards. No words, indeed, can fully describe this city of desolation, this little colony of the almost hopeless, this poor, battered, worn-out, hungry town of Ladysmith, with a bright summer sun making mockery of its dismal streets.

The wretchedness of the place was not mitigated by the horrible smells which greeted one at every corner, nor by the miserable, dirty river which crawled slimily through the place.

We left the town about 5 P.M., and met on our way back the long convoy of wagons with food. It was dark when we reached the river by Umbulwana; and as it was dangerous, and, indeed, impossible to cross the drift except in daylight, we outspanned by the river bank and made a pretence of sleeping.

When yet it was dark on the following morning the mules were put in, and with the earliest streak of dawn we crossed the river and made for Colenso. The wagons were still toiling onwards towards Ladysmith.

The road, as I have said, was very rough, and the poor cart, which had served me well for three months, began to show signs of giving out. It broke down at last, one of the wheels coming to pieces. We were then some seven miles from Colenso, and the vehicle was beyond all repair. So it was left by the

roadside among other wreckage, a forlorn relic of what was once a smart "bus." Our very scanty luggage was packed upon the mules' backs, our remaining food was distributed among the passers-by, and we proceeded to walk to Colenso. From Colenso we travelled to Chieveley by a casual goods train, sitting on the floor of an open truck, as there was no guard's van. We reached Chieveley on Saturday at 1 P.M., tired and dirty.

## XXVIII

### A STRAGGLER

The photograph which is appended to this paragraph was taken during the course of our journey to Ladysmith. The scene is on the north bank of the Great Tugela below the waterfall, and close to the pontoon bridge by which the troops had crossed on their victorious march. Sitting in the sun on a pile of timbers, which the engineers have left, is a typical straggler. His company has moved on to Pieters, and he has fallen out somehow and somewhere on the march, and is following the lost column as best he can.

The day is hot, and his jacket is thrown across his shoulders. A small cloud of flies buzz over him. He is tired, dirty, thirsty, and hungry. Fever has taken hold of him, and he is—as he would say—feeling "a bit thick." He is sitting by the river bank to await the first wagon across the pontoon on which a conductor will give him a lift. In the meantime some good Samaritan is getting him a drink of water from the stream.

## XXIX

### HOW A SURGEON WON THE VICTORIA CROSS

On December 15th was fought the battle of Colenso, on the morning of a brilliant summer's day. At dawn the men had marched out eagerly and in keen spirits, and with a swing of the shoulders which told of a certain victory. Before sundown they were beaten back, more than a thousand dead and wounded were lying on



the field, the hospital tents were crammed to overflowing, and the wagons, which were prepared to move forwards, were moving back.

The small hamlet of Colenso, battered, empty, and woe-begone, stands on the south bank of the river, and clings about the railway as a homely, unpretending little settlement made up of a few corrugated iron cottages on either side of a single street.

It looks almost like a toy village, and its prim formality is tempered by a friendly growth of cactus, aloes, and mimosa, by a few trees and by many gardens. Behind Colenso is the veldt, which here extends southwards as a vast undulating plain to Chieveley, Frere, and Estcourt. Between Chieveley and the river the veldt is smooth, and is broken only by ant-hills, by a few Kaffir kraals, and by the precise line of the railway. The plain is green, but it is not the luxuriant green of England, and in the early morning and about the time of the setting sun, tints of yellow and brown and pink spread over the wold and render the place strangely beautiful.

During the glare of noonday the veldt gives simply a blinding sense of scorched and faded green and its monotony and its boundlessness, and the utter lack of shade and variation, make the expanse dreary as a desert.

Beyond the village the brown torrent of the great Tugela tears seawards between high banks and under broken bridges, and among the *débris* of pitiless ruin. Across the river are the bare, stony, trench-lined kopjes and hills held for so many long weeks by the Boers. About the foot of these bastion-like ridges is the squalor of a neglected camp, and on all sides are rifle pits and trenches and stone shelters and hidden holes. Man seems on this river bank to have gone back to the savagery of the cave dweller, and to be once more crawling on the earth. Beyond these low hills are the grey heights of Umbulwana towering over Ladysmith.

It was to the right of Colenso that the battle raged fiercest on December 15th, 1899. It was here that Colonel Long's batteries of field artillery were surprised by the enemy and were abandoned after a hideous sacrifice of horses and men. It was here that Lieutenant Roberts received his fatal wound, and it was here that Babbie won the Victoria Cross.

The batteries were moving towards the river with the usual British unconcern, and in the quiet of a summer's morning. Suddenly there was poured upon them from the shelter of a mimosa wood such a torrent of lead that in a few moments there was scarcely a horse or a man standing. The men faced the wood as only the British soldier can face death. The gallant attempts made to save the guns led only to further loss of life. Colonel Long had been shot down, some fifty horses had been sacrificed, and the scanty ranks of the English were thinning rapidly. Still the cry went up, "Hold fast to the guns!" and when the last forlorn hope had been attempted and had failed, the green veldt was littered with the

wounded, the dying, and the dead.

Near by the guns was a donga, and into this many of the wounded had crawled. The galloper who took up the news of the disaster reported the need of help for the injured. To this call Major Babtie, R.A.M.C., at once responded as a volunteer. His duty did not take him to the battlefield. He rode down to this Inferno. He might as well have ridden before a row of targets during the smartest moment of rifle practice. Three times was his horse shot under him before he reached the donga. Here, in the face of a galling fire, he dragged the wounded into shelter, and a little later he ventured out under a rain of lead to bring in Lieutenant Roberts, who was lying in the open desperately wounded.

For some seven hours Babtie kept by the wounded in the shallow donga, no one daring to lift a head above the edge of the dip. He alone had a water-bottle, and he doled out what water he had in a 60-minim measuring glass. He was also able to relieve pain by morphine, and when not otherwise occupied he sheltered poor Roberts's face from the scorching sun by holding above it a letter he chanced to have in his pocket. It was not until darkness was setting in that it was possible to venture from the scant shelter the donga provided.

The scene of this heroic act was a level stretch of green veldt lying between the river and a brown road which led with many desultory turns to Hlangwani. To the left were the village and gardens of Colenso, and to the right the grove of mimosa trees in which the Boer force was hidden. Beyond the river rose the enemy's entrenchments and the grim ridge of Grobler's Kloof.

The last time I passed over this spot was on the day after our cavalry had reached Ladysmith. It was on a day of peace. The sky was cloudless and no breath of air stirred along the grass. The bodies of the horses belonging to the lost guns were lying in a long line across the veldt. Their bones were as white as are the bones of museum skeletons, for the vultures and the ants had done their work thoroughly. The hides were still drawn over the bleaching bones, and round the necks of these ill-fated beasts were still the collars and the harness by which they had dragged the guns into action. There was an absolute stillness over the whole scene. To the left a train was being shunted at Colenso station with leisurely persistence, for the day was hot and the sun dazzling. To the right were the mimosa groves, glorious with yellow blossom, in the shadows of which the Boers had hidden. It was strange that it was from these dainty woods that the hellish fire had poured forth which laid low so many gallant English lads, for on this quiet day the trees were busy with complaining doves.

By the banks of the donga, which had been for a whole summer's day a valley of the shadow of death, a Kaffir was crooning over a concertina, from which came a lazy, dirge-like music.

The railway engine, the doves, and the rapt Kaffir were the sole moving

objects in this garden of peace, and in the blue distance was the ridge of Grobler's Kloof, no longer belching fire and shell, but standing out delicately against the tender sky.

No brave deed had ever a gentler setting.

### XXX

"SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI."

"The Glory of the World," as the soldier sees it, can be understood by most of us. There is the glory of having served his Queen and his country, and of having done his duty like a man. There is, probably, the glorious memory of some great charge and of the storming of some stubborn trench. And there is the home-coming, made glorious by the ringing of bells and the waving of flags, by a march through familiar streets and through shouting and cheering crowds, with the rattle of drums and fifes, with hurrahs and yells of welcome for the regiment he loves so well. A home-coming like this is worth many days of hardship, many a Spion Kop, and many a dull week in a hospital tent. But it does not fall to the lot of all.

I remember at Chieveley one morning before breakfast watching a solitary man approach the hospital lines. He was as melancholy an object as ever a war has produced. He was a soldier who had fought at Colenso, at Vaal Krantz, and before Pieters, and he was now staggering towards the hospital, a ragged, broken-down, khaki-coloured spectre of a man. He dragged his rifle along with him; his belt was gone; his helmet was poised at the back of his head; his frowsy tunic was thrown over his shoulders; he was literally black with flies. His clothes had not been off for many days, and he had missed the ambulance, he said, and had walked to the hospital.

How far he had come he could not tell, nor could anyone gather how he had fared or where he had slept. All that was evident was that he was wet with dew and had spent the night in the open. He knew that for vague hours he had been making his way, with ever faltering steps and failing eyes, towards the red cross flag on the crest of the hill. And now he had reached it. As to why he had come: "Well! he had a touch of the dysentery," he said, "and was about played out."

Poor lad! this was a sorry home-coming at the last. A squalid ending of a

march; staggering in alone, a shuffling wreck, without a single comrade, with no fifes and drums, no cheering crowd, and no proud adoration of mother or wife. He was helped to a bell tent and put to bed on a stretcher, and on the stretcher he died; and this was the end of his soldiering. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

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\*\*\* END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TALE OF A FIELD HOSPITAL \*\*\*



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