

The Times - 20/10/1916

FAREWELLS AT CHÂTEAU D'OEX.

RETURN OF SOLDIERS' WIVES.

(FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.)

PARIS, Oct. 19.

All Château d'Oex was at the railway station to see the last of the first party of soldiers' wives, as they left yesterday for England. There were 16 in the party, and one of the number, the *fiancée*, has been left behind, and hopes to be married in December.

If the meeting of wives and husbands was affecting, the parting was even more so, although all the women showed the utmost courage until the last moment. All said their farewells bravely, but, as the train pulled out of the station and began the long descent to Montreux, there was a sad silence. They had with them the thought that they have left their men after two weeks of utter happiness, and that will in one way make their loneliness seem more supportable and in another more difficult to bear. They have all been wonderfully patient and have never once complained during two journeys that would have tried the patience of even a commercial traveller. There is not one of them that would not do all the trip over again to-morrow.

Lord Northcliffe's idea has been a brilliant success and has brought happiness to many people already. As subsequent parties come out the difficulties of the trip will be materially smoothed out, and the wives will have less walking about and less trouble at the various *douanes* on the frontiers.

PROPOSED SPELL AT HOME FOR THE MEN.

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A proposal that the men should be allowed to come to England for a spell of perhaps a month has aroused great interest in the little Alpine valley, and the only fear of the *internés* is that it is too good to be true. There seems no reason to doubt that the Swiss Government is trying to arrange this, and there is less reason to doubt that it is practicable. The same number of Englishmen and Germans could be allowed to go from Switzerland to their homes for a stated period. All of them would give their parole and would, as well, have to give an undertaking that they would engage in no military work during their visit home. The Swiss authorities would have nothing to fear as to consequences, nor would the Germans or English. The matter could be arranged reciprocally, and if by any chance a man did not come back, then one man of the other party could be kept in England or Germany as the case might be.

There is no suggestion that the men may be useful to their several Governments if allowed home, for their Governments have every access to them now. There are some cases where the men could be taken home for a month for treatment at specialist hospitals, and there are, undoubtedly, others where the men should not be detained at all in Switzerland, for it is a sad fact, but true, that many of them have passed the stage when they are any longer useful to their country.

At any rate, this suggestion of leave should be looked into. The Germans would necessarily profit, for the Allies would have to halve the permissions between the French and English. The Germans would get one man home for every man of the Allies. In its generosity the Swiss Government might put Swiss officers in charge of the leave parties. If this were done, and the several Governments were made responsible for the men allowed home, the scheme would, surely, be practicable.

LEARNING NEW TRADES.

There are men in Château d'Œx who have still, after two years, open wounds, but much is being done for them by the Swiss doctors, and there is every hope that soon there will be no unhealed limbs in the hospital.

Already there has been one marvellous recovery. There was a man here who could not move either leg. He was paralysed from the waist downwards, and had to be wheeled about in a Bath chair. One day on a hilly road the man wheeling him left the chair and its occupant on the road while he went into a chalet. He had put a stone under the wheel, but some movement of the patient caused the chair to start down the

hill. It went at a great pace until a stone wall stopped it. The paralysed man shot over the wall, got up, swore fluently, and climbed back, to the amazement of the man who had been wheeling him.

Needless to say, the problem of keeping the men fit is a serious one, more especially as they are not allowed to be taken out on route marches in any military formation. This would constitute military training, and as they are still Germany's prisoners they cannot be given anything in the nature of drill. Football, gymnastics, cycling, and work are the essentials for their well-being. Small workshops have lately been started, where the men are being trained in trades which are not only useful at present, but will afterwards help them to get a living when they are repatriated.

Of the behaviour of the men there is nothing but good to tell. They are well disciplined to a degree. Walking down the village street to where they sit outside the post-office, you notice the smartness of the salutes. You would not see better in a barrack town in England. Of course there are exceptions to the rule, and now and then the men are inclined to break out in a fresh place.

The Y.M.C.A. could do great work here, but it would have to be done on quite a big scale, and it would have to be done from England. It would need careful organizing, but where could the Y.M.C.A. spend their money better than in providing recreation and shelter for these men, who have much less means of amusing themselves than the troops in an English garrison town? The winter is approaching, and with it there will be skiing and sleighing, but with greater opportunities for exercise and amusement in the daytime there will be less in the long, dark evenings. Then every one will feel the want of such a room. Such a hut as the one at Lark Hill, with billiard tables, canteen, dining-room, and a quiet room for reading, would meet the case.
