

The Times 13/6/1916

OUR WOUNDED IN SWITZERLAND.

ARRIVAL OF THE SECOND PARTY.

A BROTHERLY WELCOME.

(FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.)

CHÂTEAU D'OEX.

The second convoy of wounded British soldiers reached the end of their long journey 24 hours after the first, still hardly able to believe that the time of their durance vile in the enemy's country was actually over for good and all. Like them they were worn out by all they had gone through, and happy and bewildered by their own good fortune, and like them they were all full of compassion for the bitter disappointment of their fellow-soldiers who, after being originally selected by the German medical officers as fit subjects for the Grand

Swiss Cure, had at the eleventh hour been turned back at Constance.

Although they had travelled so close on the heels of the first arrivals they had been greeted everywhere all along the route—"from the moment we were five yards this side of the frontier"—with the same generous hospitality and the same extraordinary displays of sympathy and admiration. For, after all, it is extraordinary that on two nights in succession, from end to end of the country, tens of thousands of people should be ready to sit up half the night, or to leave their beds in the small hours, in order to extend the right hand of brotherly fellow-feeling to a few hundred war-worn fighting men with whom they have no sort of connexion either of blood or alliance. It is difficult to express in moderate terms what these two nights and days have meant to all the British who have lived through the triumph of them. For the men themselves they have changed everything. The open-handed and large-hearted Swiss have restored to them their belief in human nature.

CHEERING THEIR HOSTS.

When the second 150 arrived the weather was so threatening that the official reception had to be given under cover, and only a limited number of the populace were able to crowd in on tip-toe behind the brass-helmeted row of *pompier*s to watch the British lions being fed. But both at the station and, later in the day, when those who could not walk had been taken to their quarters in the carriages lent by the local cab-proprietor, every one joined in the welcome and every one who could gave a helping hand. While the men were having their tea Mr. Grant Duff three times asked them to give three cheers—for Switzerland, for the boy scouts (than whom nothing could have looked more English), and for the children of Château d'Oex (who had been hard at work for weeks practising songs for the *soldats anglais*), and it was with something very like tears in their eyes that the *soldats anglais* hurrahed away the lumps in their throats.

Since then Château d'Oex has become a little bit of England, in a land flowing with milk and honey and other good things, fragrant with flowers, and not fenced in with barbed wire. In the village street the men are as thick as bees in a herbaceous border. They are not busy

...not yet—but they are wonderfully contented.

At the station in Berne, as one of our men was painfully climbing back into his railway carriage, a Swiss soldier gave him a helping push in the small of his back. He turned round quickly, with a snarl on his lips, and then seeing that the hand which had touched him was the hand of a friend, limped up the last step and turned to the Swiss Red Cross nurse beside him, his face red with confusion. "Please miss," he said, "will you tell him I'm sorry? I thought it was a bayonet."

Among the 450 odd now lodged (and most comfortably lodged) in the various hotels and pensions of the village, all within five minutes' walk of each other, there are only a few Irish, a few sailors, a few Canadians—one of them a volunteer of over 60—and one or two soldiers of our Indian Army. The great mass are the men of Great Britain; there is hardly a Highland, Lowland, Border, or county regiment which has not one or more representatives.

HELPING THE PRISONERS.

I suppose at present, next to the beauty and dignity of their surroundings, the two things the men chiefly talk about are food and clothes. The food question is chiefly of interest for its contrast with the past. It is of practical value that people at home should realize that their great standby in the prison camps was the weekly supply of bread that came to them from Mrs. Grant Duff's depôt at Berne. The cost per head is only 1s. a week, and there is no better or simpler way of helping our prisoners in Germany (of whom over 19,000 are now being regularly supplied) than by sending that amount of money either direct to the depôt at Berne or to one of the many regimental agencies in England which work through it. By the unanimous testimony of all the officers and men I spoke to on the subject things would have gone very badly with them without the weekly parcel from Berne.

As for clothes, the men are at present dressed either in faded khaki or in the ugly black-blue tunic and trousers which (for very excellent and obvious reasons) are the regulation kit served out by the War Office to the men in prison camps. I believe that the business of replacing or supplementing these is being undertaken by the military authorities at home, and a large supply of underclothing has been

provided by Mrs. Grant Duff's Swiss branch of the Red Cross Society. Thus as far as the men are concerned everything necessary in the way of clothing is already well in hand. I should imagine that a particularly welcome kind of present, both for officers and men, would be a supply of literature of all kinds, especially books about the war.

IN THE ENGLISH CHURCH.

A thanksgiving service has been held in the English church, at which, besides the British Minister and Mrs. Grant Duff and Colonel and Mrs. Picot, all the officers and a large number of the men now interned in Château d'Oex were present. The most moving part of a very moving ceremony was the singing, after a thoughtful sermon by the British chaplain, the Rev. E. Lampen, of "God save the King." To the Swiss population outside the church it must have been a strange experience to hear it sung by some hundreds of English to the tune of their own national anthem. To the English inside it was something more than that. It was at once a song of thanksgiving and triumph, and a solemn prayer that "their" politics may be confounded, and that God may save us all, King and people. And it was sung mainly by men who had fought in some of the most deadly battles of the war, and had been saved almost as if by a miracle. For nearly all of them belonged to the original Expeditionary Force.