

The Times - 7/10/1916

## TEARS AND SMILES AT CHÂTEAU D'ŒX.

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### ARRIVAL OF PRISONERS' WIVES.

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#### A HAPPY REUNION.

(FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.)

#### CHATEAU D'ŒX.

There are 16 British soldiers in the Valley of Château d'Œx who are happier than they have ever been in their lives before. After many months they have their wives with them again.

It was a long pilgrimage that these brave little women made from England, but it was worth all the fatigue of the travelling and the weary delays when they arrived at their destination. One says brave women advisedly, for they have behaved in a sterling manner. Southampton, with its three days' wait, did not fray their patience, and they arrived in Paris after what seemed a week's travelling. It was rather like travelling with a children's treat to be with them; their joy was so infectious when they were pleased and their wonder so real when they saw something new.

They saw Paris as a dream city, but it was when they got their first sight of the Bernese

Oborland that they really gave vent to their feelings. They had no sooner craned their necks from one window than there was something to see on the other side, and the whole sixteen made a dash across the carriage. First it was a herd of cattle with great brass bells swinging on their necks ; then a milkmaid with a long yellow plait of hair, looking for all the world like " one of those ones on the lid of a box of chocolates," as one of the travellers said. The great, deep valleys and the tumbling streams far below made the party forget their four nights without sleep, and the air refreshed them like wine.

#### FROM EVERY PART OF GREAT BRITAIN.

At Frasne, where their passports had to be examined, they sat round in the waiting room and drank coffee and ate rolls and told each other stories for an hour. They were always patient, for they had everything to look forward to. Every part of Great Britain had a representative. There was one wife from Belfast, immensely proud that she had had a much longer journey than any of the others ; there were two Scottish women, one of them with the softest of accents ; she came from Peebles and had capability writ large on her handsome face. Then Lambeth had its representative, and Manchester, and the Cotswolds. They talked of our regiments and had a great pride in them and their men.

There were 16 women, and it would not be wrong to say that there were 16 different types, but at Château d'Œx all dividing traits were wiped clean out when they met their men. They were all women with a great happiness, the happiness that made them as like as sisters. The electric railway line climbs up from Montreux, twisting and turning in its track like a snake, with the toy town far below and the sapphire lake and the Dent du Midi in the background. The women sat still, for they were very tired, but they were all of them thinking hard, and then, as the train pulled into a small chalet station, a British soldier rose from his seat on the platform, rushed to the carriage, and in less time than it takes to tell was in the arms of his wife.

#### A TRANSFORMATION.

Of course there were tears, and why not ? The little woman was transformed ; she was travel-stained and weary a minute before, now she had a radiant colour, her eyes were bright, her man " was the same." He was a man who had seen hell in the big retreat and in the Ger-

... from ... in the big ... and in the Ger-  
man prison camps ; he had faced all this with-  
out more than ordinary emotion, but now he  
was trembling like a child, and his brown cheeks  
were wet with tears of happiness. Presently  
there were hilarious introductions and formality  
was waived!

Ten minutes later the chalets of Château d'Œx  
appeared on the skyline, and then came the  
sound of good British cheers as the train entered  
the station, where there were two rows of khaki-  
clad figures. Then it was that I saw the  
bravest little woman in the world. It was one  
of the Scottish girls. She had been warned by  
her friends that her husband had suffered more  
than most of the others and that he had scars  
and wounds that had changed him greatly. She  
picked him out of the crowd and was in his  
arms almost before he saw her. He was sadly  
battle-scarred, but as brave as she, and he wore  
no patches to hide his honourable wounds. And  
the wife and the man went away arm in arm, but  
not before she had introduced her man all round  
with the pride of the soldier's wife.

Then little Swiss girls came up with flowers,  
and every woman had a bunch of blue blossom  
in her hand. There was tea and a reception,  
and several speeches were made. To not one of  
these did the guests listen. They had their heads  
close together and their talk was of other things.

I passed one pair on the road this morning.  
"It looks a bit like rain," I said. "I don't  
care if it snows," said the soldier, as he looked at  
his wife.

## SECOND PARTY LEAVING TO-DAY.

The second party of soldiers' wives who are  
going to Switzerland to visit their husbands  
interned there will leave London to-day.

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