

Trek to the South

Rolt's Story of Fourteen Days as a Refugee on the Road from Paris to the Spanish Frontier

It will be remembered that Rolt, one of the first to urge that Royaumont should do something for the French soldiers in this war, found herself unable to accompany the Maginot Line canteen staff because she had had to go instead to a brother who was ill in France, but that Inglis and Morgan were expecting her to join them about the time that they had orders to evacuate—June 13th. Here is Rolt's story, significant for all friends of France.

On June 9th, 1940, I returned to Paris from my visit to my brother to find a message from Madame de Wendel asking me to go up to Metz in a car that was leaving her house at midday on the 10th. I went next morning to the Red Cross office to get my papers. Mlle. Voisin alone was there: they had had orders to evacuate. The staff and as much as they could pack of their material had been sent off already in two lorries, and she was about to follow. She gave me my papers and I squeezed into her car, laden to the roof with further material and luggage, and she drove me to the Government office to get my *sauf conduit*. The Ministry concerned had already gone to Tours. I was unable to enter the War Zone without the pass, and I was to have taken a box of games and some uniform up to the Lorraine canteen: it had come out with Anderson, Lewis and Vereker. So I left this with the concierge and hastened to Madame de Wendel's house for a consultation. I could get no further information, and, as I could not now join the Royaumont unit or even communicate with it, I decided to go south to join a hospital near Toulouse whose directrice had invited me—"or any Scottish Women's Hospital" member—to come and help her. Paris had just been declared an "open town", and when I reached the station on the 11th I found that no railway tickets were being issued. Nothing more could be done that day but I tried again next morning with no better luck. The Boches were expected in Paris the following day. There was nothing for it but to walk.

During those last few days Paris had emptied. There was hardly any traffic on roads or boulevards, and it was impossible to get a taxi. I packed a few things into a kitbag and started off in the early morning of the 13th, hoping to get a train once I was well clear of Paris. The Champs Elysées was deserted and all the cafés were closed, with their shutters barred. It gave one a sense of impending doom on that lovely June morning. The Metro still ran, so at the Place de la Concorde I booked to the Porte d'Orléans. There I found hundreds of thousands of other people all going south, pushing bicycles, handcarts, wheelbarrows, boxes on wheels and even hospital trolleys, all piled high with bundles, yard-long loaves, cats in baskets, birds in cages, and with children and dogs trotting alongside, all jostling one another on the crowded road and completely holding up any motor traffic that tried to force a way through. It looked as though the whole of the poorer

population of Paris was walking out of the city. No panic, just grim determination to get away before the Germans came in. Their one clear aim was to reach the other side of the Loire. When the Low Countries were invaded the slogan had been: "If Paris falls, we hold the line of the Loire!" A stand was now to be made on the Loire.

It was hot, and going was slow. About midday my small kitbag got very heavy and I got hungry, but shops and restaurants were all closed, and I only had a bit of chocolate with me. Then, at a cross roads, where more streams of traffic and refugees joined the main road, I got a lift on an Army lorry among other refugees and an odd assortment of bundles. At the top of a hill I looked forward and back to the solid mass of people and began to picture the scene if German 'planes started machine-gunning as they had done in Belgium and Northern France. Towards evening it began to rain. When darkness fell we were still only 15 kilometres beyond Paris. People camped by the roadside, under improvised tents made from blankets, or under their barrows. The driver of my lorry spread out his coat and offered me the hospitality of the lorry for the night—we had already bedded down the three children we had picked up. I tried to avoid the drips from the tarpaulin, curled up and got a little sleep. In the early hours we moved on—as part of a convoy whose units had now assembled on the outskirts of a village, where, by the time I had got the children up and we had all had a wash under the village pump, the army cooks were ladling out soup, which they shared with us, providing us with bowls made from bully-beef tins—rather jagged round the edges! We were very grateful. An Army cyclist brought the news that the Germans had entered Paris that morning. The village was empty, but already refugees, and weary and wounded soldiers, crowded the roads. We travelled all morning, keeping to byroads, so made better time, and by afternoon reached the H.Q. of our convoy, where it was to park for the night. I went to the station to get information, but the place had been evacuated, the P.O. was closed, and there were no trains. When I got back to where I had left the convoy it had gone—and with it my kitbag, including my papers and nearly all my money! No one could tell me anything, but I found a bit of cardboard pinned to a tree and on it a message for one "Jean Brejean" telling him to "se rendre à Malesherbes" and guessed he was a straggler belonging to the convoy. Malesherbes was 45 kilometres further along the road and I managed to get to within a dozen miles of the place by dusk, thanks to two lifts. Of food I had a choice between pork (that had been hot but was not cold) and boiled sweets, and secured the sweets, which I sucked as I went along. Looking back towards Paris I could see the red glow of oil and munitions dumps that the French were blowing up ahead of the German advance. At 1 a.m. I rested in a hayfield, burrowing under the hay for warmth, and slept from sheer weariness. When I awoke the road was once more crowded with refugees and I joined the stream, and, at 6 a.m., caught sight of a lorry in a road block with a little white elephant sign painted on it. I could have jumped

for joy for that was the emblem of my convoy! When I finally found my own lorry the driver and I greeted one another like long lost friends: he had been *désolé* to go off without me but orders had come for them to move on as the Boches were still advancing, and it was not until the evening that he had found my kitbag—and then he was still more desolated! I wondered what his feelings would have been had he known that my precious papers and my money were in it! More streams of refugees in a pitiful condition swelled the flood at the next cross-roads: old people completely exhausted, young women pushing tiny children in broken-down prams piled with bundles. And we passed people in cars that had run out of petrol or broken down, stranded by the roadside. Several young mothers, seeing my uniform, knelt in the road at my feet, and implored help. In the end the convoy took on board 150 of the most needy, but it was only a drop in the ocean compared with those left behind.

That day—and for many days after—German 'planes were active. We had to keep on stopping, when we would make the old people take cover beneath and beside the lorries, while the children we threw into ditches or hedges. We were never actually hit. In the afternoon we reached Chateaudun. I thought I should get a train there, but the station was wrecked and the lines torn up and twisted, and not a soul in sight. Some of the people seemed glad that I was to continue with the convoy, as, by this time, I had been adopted as their *infirmière*. Luckily I had brought a first-aid outfit in the kitbag, and dabs of iodine and boric lint worked wonders as they always did at Royaumont. We were now out in the open country and roads were less crowded though there were still refugees everywhere. When we came to a deserted farm the cooks got busy among the poultry and rabbits, and with the help of the women of our company a good meal was soon prepared.

On the evening of the fourth day after leaving Paris we crossed the Loire—where we thought we should find defences. It was disappointing to see a tired-looking sentry standing beside an inadequate wire barricade at one end of the bridge and a few heaps of stones that a child might have knocked over at the other end. The next day we heard that the Boches had crossed the Loire; it seemed hardly surprising. Then came the terrible news of the Armistice. It was about the most tragic evening I can remember. We were all stunned by it. Everyone thought that Britain would give in, too, but I felt absolutely certain that we should fight on to the end, and I told them all that I *KNEW* we would never surrender, and that we would fight till France and all the other enslaved countries were set free and Hitler laid in the dust. I think I was able to bring a little comfort to those broken French people.

I knew I must now get home as quickly as possible and that there was no question of going on to Toulouse. So I said goodbye to them all somewhere south of Blois and shouldered my bundle and set off again. They were all so nice, refugees and *militaires*, and I could not get anyone to take any money and all I could do was to leave a little to provide "conforts" for the children and

old people. The driver of my lorry gave me as a parting gift a knife, a mug, and a large hunk of bread—all of which proved most useful during the next few days. It was now just a matter of keeping on, getting lifts when I could and walking when I could not—sleeping in barns or in woods or under haystacks, washing in streams, eating chunks of bread, and sometimes some *paté* or chocolate, with now and then some coffee or *pinard* or a mug of milk at a farm. My conviction remained unshaken that we British would fight on to victory as no compromise with Hitler was thinkable, so it seemed worth any effort to get home so as to join in the struggle. There was never a hope of a lift from a civilian car; all were piled with luggage to the roof and on the roof. "Mother" would be driving, and beside her would sit Grandmère or Grandpère, with several children, a dog, cat, and the inevitable birdcage and masses of bundles at the back. On the roof a mattress or two to turn machine-gun bullets; and a bicycle or two, whole or in parts, tied on the bonnet and in front of the radiator, while on the back and the running boards would be an odd assortment of pots and pans, trunks, even sewing machines and bits of furniture. Army transport was thus my only hope. I developed a technique. I would stand well out in the road, flap of coat turned back and chest thrown out displaying medal ribands (with shame I confess it!) and hold up my hand authoritatively. It worked so well that French people whose presence had been ignored by driver after driver came and put themselves under my protection and often I had to hand up whole families on to a lorry before getting up myself.

To anyone who knew France in the last war it was heart-rending to see the officers leading the van of the retreat in their own little cars and to note the apparent readiness with which they accepted defeat. Somehow I could not imagine our own people behaving like that. All the poilus and peasants to whom I spoke declared that they had been let down by their political and military leaders: *nous avons été trahis par nos chefs* was what I heard over and over again. So many of the men I spoke to longed to go on fighting by the side of the British, saying they were ashamed of being French after the capitulation. I met with the utmost kindness, chiefly, I think, because I was English. Seldom could I get anyone to accept a *pourboire*. All seemed to look to Britain for deliverance from the hated Boche. In these days I think it is well to remember this.

On the twelfth day after leaving Paris I reached Périgueux in the Dordogne and had a real dinner at an hotel. But there was no bed to be had for love or money, so I gratefully accepted a shakedown on the floor of a refugee centre among other refugees as it was pouring in torrents and I had been wet through already so many times in the past few days. It had not been much good changing (under cover of darkness *bien entendu*!) because the contents of my kitbag were also soaked, and after I had spread my sopping garments out in the sun to dry during the hour's rest I allowed myself during the day, there had usually been another deluge which caught me on some long stretch of unprotected road and the good work would be undone. From

Périgueux I got my one and only bit of organized transport of the whole journey—a bus, which took me some thirty miles and left me stranded still fifty miles from Bordeaux. During those last few days I had had difficulty in getting lifts. It transpired that army drivers had had orders not to stop for civilians, so the only way was to get the gendarme in any town I came to to stand by me and hold up a likely looking vehicle to find out if it were going my way. To enter Bordeaux I had to get a permit signed and countersigned, and after a three hours' wait by the roadside in the company of a gendarme I finally got a lift and entered Bordeaux on the 13th evening of my journey. I made straight for the British Consulate to find the staff had left for England, but there was a notice on the door saying that cases of urgency would be dealt with by the American Consulate. This had closed for the night, and I heard that the last boat for England had sailed some days earlier. No restaurants were open, but at the station I found some charming Red Cross (Association des dames de France) people who offered me a bed in one of their hostels. I gratefully accepted, but there was a catch in it, for the dormitory—everyone else was in bed—had no ventilation. My cautious opening of a window was greeted with a storm of protest so I had to shut it again. Comfortable as was the bed I could not sleep a wink. It was the worst night I'd had on the whole trip! I stifled and longed for the day. They were most kind to me, gave me breakfast, and sent me on my way with expressions of confidence in a British victory that would bring with it the liberation of France. At the American Consulate I met the first British I'd seen since leaving Paris—among them a niece-in-law of Newton's! She was sitting beside me on a bench and when our names were taken for the Consul I recognized her's. After a wait of some hours news came that Bordeaux was surrounded and the Consul said he doubted if he would be able to get us out. It was the worst moment of the whole thirteen days. Up till then I had kept well ahead of the enemy—at least fifteen to twenty kilometres—and here at the end of it all they had caught up! I began planning how to escape internment. However, we did not give up hope, and, after a further wait, the Consul said he had got us a lorry if we cared to risk it, but if we got caught he had no authority to help us. There was no hesitation. We climbed into our uncovered iron tender (used for hauling stone) and started off on the 200 kilometre run to Bayonne, and soon it began to rain and poured the whole way, soaking us all to the skin. We passed several barricades, but saw no Germans and reached Bayonne without incident—only to be told the last boat had sailed the day before. I made inquiries about Spain but the frontier was closed. Our last hope was St. Jean de Luz, so we went on there in our lorry. On the quay, there, we saw two British sailors.

They looked to me like angels from Heaven. We knew we were now safe. When we asked if they could help us they said "That's what we are here for". We had no further doubts, but we dared not leave the quay in search of food or shelter from the rain and the howling gale that had now got up for fear of being left behind.

The naval officer in charge then told us it was too rough that night to take us out of harbour to the tramp steamer standing by and he sent us away till six next morning. There were, of course, no beds to be had, but one or two of us persuaded the people at one of the hotels to let us have some bread and a bottle of wine, for which they refused payment, and by pooling our resources we contrived quite a good meal. Newton's niece had a tin of *confiture de marrons*, someone else some sardines, and I dug out some of the famous Périgueux paté from my kitbag. We spent the remainder of the night in the lounge of another hotel and by dawn were down on the quay. All ports were to be closed by the French at noon that day. After some hours' wait the British began taking us off. There were Polish troops in hundreds: they filled two ships, and the remainder came in our boat, which took, beside every kind of Ally, a most varied assortment of people claiming British nationality; foreign wives of British men, Palestinians, West Indians, and people from all parts of the Empire. We were taken out in small boats and had to climb up a rope ladder, but the last man, woman, child and dog was on board with just twenty minutes to spare. Perhaps the less said about the voyage the better. We were just a human cargo, and the one before us had been coal. The women slept in rows on the floor in the hold, the men in another part of the ship, and the troops in the stern; the Navy supplied us with bully beef, biscuits and water. There were 800 of us, and only hand luggage was allowed. We felt so sorry for those who had to abandon trunks and big suitcases on the quay; I was glad I had left my things in Paris at the outset. The thought of the cars abandoned in rows for the Germans to get when they came in on the following day, made one sick!

There were two other Red Cross people on the boat and together we organized the distribution of food and water and did what was possible about sanitation and caring for the sick. Anyone who was ever night orderly in "Millicent" will get a faint glimmering—but only a glimmering—of what things were like; but nothing seemed to matter since we had escaped, and it made one very proud and thankful to see all those people of so many nationalities looking to England for deliverance from the common foe. The first night out there was an alarm and we heard distant firing, but nothing came of it, and our destroyer kept watch over her charges and brought them all safely to port on the fourth day. It was a wonderful moment when we first sighted the British shores and still more wonderful when we landed and were greeted by the Y.M.C.A. with trays of sandwiches, cake and lashings of tea, and a tremendous welcome. I thought what it must mean to those poor people who had been hounded by the Nazis and had had their homes destroyed and their countries overrun, and who were so touchingly grateful. What chiefly struck me was the order and efficiency everywhere and the feeling of preparedness, so great a contrast to the awful chaos I had witnessed all the way from Paris to St. Jean de Luz; everyone seemed calm, confident and cheerful. We reached London at 2.30 a.m., to be greeted by more Y.M.C.A. workers with more cups of tea and *hot sausage*

rolls! Buses were waiting for the foreign refugees and we parted from them with many a hand-shake and wishes of *bonne chance* and *auf wiedersehen* as they were taken off to a camp to be "sorted". Some of us sat in the waiting-room till London woke up. My first thought was for a bath, and the station bathrooms opened at six. I don't think that wallowing in hot water had ever seemed so good, and after a shampoo and breakfast I began to feel quite civilised again. When I went to report to Mackay, in Chelsea, I was much relieved to hear that all the Metz people had reached home safely. She promptly put me to bed till lunch time. I had been harpooning food on the end of my pocket knife for so long that the dainty cloth, lovely china, silver spoons and forks and the delicious meal she provided seemed like a fairy tale. It was a Saturday, but in the King's Road I was able to collect some garments before going for the weekend to my brother looking rather less of a refugee. But had it not been for the good old S.W.H. uniform I do not think I could have "made it" in time to escape. It gave me confidence when trying to get lifts and it seemed to give me a status with the French officials.

I should like to think that that marked the end of an episode and that there is still useful work for the old S.W.H. to be doing again. Let me know if there is! It would be good to be in it.

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EDITORIAL NOTE.—The Hon. Treasurer, Canteens, writes, in regard to obtaining funds (under date of June 25th), "... as time goes on ... it will be more difficult for our organization than for the generality of war undertakings, because of the widespread unpopularity of France. It is no use disguising that fact—it's one of the difficulties with which we have to contend." Rolt's story points the way. We can contend with it by *telling British people the truth*. Rolt will read elsewhere in this issue a suggestion about "useful work by the old S.W.H."—for those French people "betrayed by their leaders" this time last year. We can do it if the Association puts its back into the job and spurns *all defeatism*.

The Oulton Park Canteen

By BETTY MACPHERSON (MRS. BRUCE)

At the beginning of September, 1940, the Royaumont Canteen Unit Committee was asked to open a canteen for French sailors under canvas at Oulton Park, Cheshire, and I was sent to take charge, with Percival and Howard Smith to help. The Church Hall at Little Budworth, which was about five minutes' walk from the camp, was put at our disposal, and with the aid of three delightful French sailors we did our best to make it look like a French café. If one could judge by some of the remarks made by the men we were quite successful. The walls were distempered blue-green, the curtains were made of orange and white chequered gingham, the tables (mostly card tables that had seen better days)

were covered with gaily coloured American cloth. There were one or two large tables which were kept for writing and reading. We supplied writing materials, newspapers and magazines, and we had a good and varied library.

There was a variety of games, the most popular being jig-saws, which the sailors called "jeu de patience". Percival and I gave lessons in English in the afternoons—some of the men were very keen and made good progress. We had great fun over the pronunciation and other things, and it gave us a chance of getting to know the men better. I used to see some of them surrounded by school-children, and found later on that they were airing their newly learnt English. The wireless went on all day. We also had a piano, a gramophone, and a jazz band. Sometimes the men brought their songs, and Howard Smith played for them. Every evening for half an hour before closing time she played their favourite French songs, which they sang in chorus, accompanied by the jazz band.

We had arranged to have a weekly cinema, but unfortunately there was only one performance before the men left; we had a crowded house, and they did enjoy it. We had a delightful little orderly called Jean who belonged to the South of France. He was gay and full of fun, very practical and helpful. Many of the sailors were mere boys, and were very home-sick. The majority belonged to Brittany, although we had men from all parts of France. When saying goodbye to us they assured us that, although they wanted to return to France to see their people, their sympathies were with us—and they volunteered that they would take practical means to prove it when they got home. I was very sorry to see them go, and I often wonder what is happening to them now. Some of them were quite upset when they left us, particularly our little Jean, who was almost in tears. We got many invitations to visit them in France *après la guerre*.

The Allied Sailors' Club

By MACFIE

Perhaps one of the nicest things ever said about the Allied Sailors' Club was by a foreign sailor who, in saying Goodbye, put it this way: "Thank you for the *kind hand*." This was so exactly the feeling we were trying to create. If success can be measured by regular customers, confidence in us, making use of the club as a meeting place, requests to render "un petit service", a warm handshake or a grateful letter, we were more than rewarded. "Un copain", brought for the first time, shyly, reluctantly—he did not know the way—would partake of real French coffee "on the house" as a welcome, and would come again of his own accord. Our members have steadily increased. They love their *foyer* with its blazing winter fires, piano and comfy chairs and games. The well-equipped library of books in seven languages, and newspapers in almost as many, have been much appreciated. Comforts, week-ends, and

"marraines de guerre" have all been carefully thought out. It has been possible to deal with individual cases and, without unnecessary or unwelcome questions, to find out what was required and how to deal with it. One evening when the *cafard* was about we brought out bread and forks, and with the smell of toast the group seated by the fire soon lost itself in friendly badinage.

The generosity of the French Welfare and Lord Bessborough, and the great kindness of the British Council, have been a great help and encouragement. One felt the work was a trust and might have a much wider influence than was at first realized.

A word about the men themselves—is it possible to describe our friends? Loyal, spirited, brave, intelligent, conscious of having made a vital choice for the right. Being cut off as they are only makes their appeal to our hearts the stronger, and anything we could say or do to help and encourage them in their struggle by our side is our idea of service.

General de Gaulle and Admiral Muselier have both thanked the Club personally on behalf of their men. The delightful old house in which the Club started was burned to the ground in a raid, but the work and happiness found there are being continued in new quarters. The work is full of possibilities and I enjoy creating and building it up.

EDITORIAL NOTE (at time of going to press).—The attendance at the Allied Sailors' Club having slackened, Macfie has resigned her post there. She and Mrs. Bruce are now (August) working at the French Military Club in Camberley.

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Unorthodox Editorial

By THE ACTING-EDITOR (*pro tem.*)

Members of the Royaumont Association will have seen from our regular Editor's Letter and from the breathlessly interesting stories of Morgan, "Big Andy", Prance, and Rolt, of the "Royaumont Canteens" in being or hoping to be, that individual old R's have been trying to hold our end up in this war and that all sorts of things have happened in consequence. It therefore seemed to your former editor a pity that no attempt was to be made to get out a *News-Letter*, or even to send round a report on the adventures and vicissitudes of the Canteen scheme subsequently to the polite acknowledgment of members' donations, albeit the explanation was that this would be wasting money and paper. I confess to having chosen our own motto, printed on the cover of *News-Letters*. That aim and all it implied in common responsibility with a medium for voicing our corporate opinion in times of crisis was the *raison d'être* of our organized Association. We already had a social reunion. I did not believe that purposeful good comradeship could long survive the absence of a Voice that could speak our united Thought, or that united Thought could emerge without opportunity for responsible discussion. Humanity implies free thinking, free discussion, voluntary submission of the will of the few to that of the many as well as that absolute justice in the many that can be trusted to protect the interests of the few. Is not this the real issue to-day between Humanity and Hitler? It is both a wider and a deeper issue than that between democracy and totalitarianism, whether corporative, communistic or national socialistic.

I believed that most of us really did want to stick together as a Unit and that that Unit really did want to stick to the French people. I believed that the Association was even more necessary in war than in peace, and that we ought to have a voice—our *News-Letter*—to proclaim our real feelings and intentions as a body of faithful friends of France. Luckily I still enjoyed that comparative quiet and opportunity to make leisure that our Editor lacked. So I got busy, and here are Royaumont news and views in variety. No committee ruling had vetoed the appearance of our *News-Letter* in wartime. (The Committee had not met since 1938.) La Colonelle was willing, Mackay was willing, Smieton was willing, and—most important!—our Hon. Treasurer said we had the money to pay the printer's bill. After all, you gave that money that the Association might exist

Col. and Mrs. Finlay, Lady Garroway, Miss Howard Smith, Mrs. Kelsey, Mrs. Kevill, Mrs. Kilby, Mrs. J. Lang, Miss A. K. Mair, Mrs. J. O. Morris, Mrs. Reid, Miss S. A. Roberts, Miss Robinson, Mrs. Spiller, Mrs. Willyams, Miss Worthington, Mrs. Wrigley, Mrs. Young, Miss M. Young; 7s. 6d., John Mackay, Esq., Mrs. J. D. Parker, The Misses Smith; 5s., Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, Miss Barker, Miss Bartleet, Mrs. W. H. Duncan, Mr. and Mrs. Flack, Mrs. Golding, D. Harper, Miss Sybil Hey, Mr. and Mrs. Holloway, Miss Kirby, Mr. and Mrs. Macfarlane, Miss J. S. MacLeod, Miss Milbanke, Miss Nannie Moffat, Miss M. M. Petrie, Arthur Rennie, Esq., Mr. and Miss Scott, Miss A. Scott, James Smith, Esq., Dame Alicia Still, Mrs. J. Walker, Mr. and Mrs. R. Wood; 4s., Anon. (by MacLeod), Miss Noble; 2s. 6d., Mrs. Berry, Capt. Dewar, Miss Dow, Miss Daisy Fraser, Mrs. Goode, Miss Haig, Miss Peggy Munn, Miss Mary Smith; 2s., Miss Chambers; 1s. 6d., Miss Buhl; 1s., Mrs. Westcott Meade.

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NOTE TO SUBSCRIBERS.—The indulgence of subscribers is asked if some names are missing, entered twice, mis-spelled, or given without title. A year has gone by since the Hon. Treasurer during whose period of office the money was collected had to resign and leave London on account of family illness. She has not since had access to the books and her unaided memory has been inadequate to resolve problems arising from some subscriptions having been paid in instalments, and from the only list available to the Acting-Editor of the *News-Letter* giving no addresses and sometimes no initials, while sums collected by members are lumped together. Some of these difficulties arise out of the London Blitz last year, when the records were inaccessible. They are now in the care of the Hon. Treasurer *pro tem.*, who is naturally unwilling to risk them in the post, and, being unable to sanction the printing of a Report out of the Canteen Funds without the consent of the subscribers, does not feel called upon to make detailed copies of the records for publication in the *News-Letter*, which publication may or may not be approved in the event. We think it will be.

[END OF CANTEEN RECORD.]

and might publish a *News-Letter*. Have I your approval? I am ready to carry on until Mackay once more has the leisure to resume her editorship.

You may read between the lines of the history of the Canteen effort. (Do not be tempted to read what is not there.) Editors have the privilege of frank speaking. I am taking it. Royaumont as a Unit, in the person of its Old Comrades' Association, should wake up from its Rip Van Winkle slumber and take command of that effort for the future. One of our members (Middleton) lands us one on the point. She says, bluntly: "There can be no Committee of one. Members who were at first interested were given no information about the doings in France, so lost any interest they may have had. Under the circumstances it seems obvious that any funds over could be allocated to French Relief Funds or French A.T.S., and close the matter. . . . There is not enough cohesion and there will be no money forthcoming. . . . So be wise and sensible and do not try to rouse what is already moribund." I think she means us, and not the Canteen scheme, for she adds: "Being an unbiased observer it makes me feel all the more strongly that it will be a further mistake to try and reconstitute the Association, which did a good job in the last War and should realise that too many years have now passed for us to take a place in this. A trial has been made with disastrous results. . . ." (Shades of Humpty Dumpty!)

Well, shall we take the count? I hope not! (The famous rhyme specifies *men*!) Good comradeship, however, means more than sticking together; it means not letting the others down, and, in this instance, not letting them go on lying down! A Committee means shouldering, in common, responsibility for a common effort. In fact, not a bad, but an uncommon good egg, containing that rare bird the Phoenix!

At the end of the *News-Letter* you will find a questionnaire. Please regard it as a referendum, fill in your replies and address it to the Acting-Editor. If you think I have exceeded my authority, you can add a further expression of opinion and give me the bird. (I will then solace myself by writing a "Lament for Good Comradeship".) My suggestion is that you appoint joint Hon. Secretaries of the Royaumont Association to take the place of Smieton, who served us so well for so many years but who has had to leave home and the Y.M.C.A. canteen work that was absorbing all her time in order to be with her husband "somewhere in Great Britain" and quite beyond reach of meetings in London. Morgan and Mrs. Alison, so well equipped with the right qualities (including a respect for as well as

familiarity with the French language) are willing to tackle the job of putting Humpty Dumpty together again if you invite them to do so. Neither of them approve of sitting on fences. On the contrary, both are good hurdlers. Inglis, who is driving an ambulance in London, *faute de mieux*, is willing to come back as Chairman of Committee, for she is under the impression she resigned the office when she left London to work in the North, although I can find no minute on the matter in the book which Smieton sent to me that I might report the Association's activities. I suggest that the Canteens "Committee of One"—Cicely Hamilton—hand over to the Royaumont Association the funds collected by members and their friends and hold herself at the disposition of the Association to speak for it at meetings and rallies if we find that further opportunities are open to us, as a Unit, to serve our old comrades of France who have escaped and still call themselves "Free". I suggest that our President and our officers—if enough of you agree to the appointment of the joint Hon. Secretaries proposed—call together a really representative committee of the Association (to retire and offer themselves for re-election, in competition with any others who may be proposed by members, by postal ballot, the ballot papers to be carried in the next *News-Letter*, at the end of twelve months) and that that Committee take over the responsibility for "Royaumont S.W.H. Canteens", including the raising of funds.

In regard to the Canteen funds remaining in Miss Hamilton's care, a rough analysis of the List of Subscribers and Subscriptions shows that the thousand odd pounds total was raised as to less than one third by forty-eight active members of the Royaumont Association together with about a dozen old R's who have allowed their membership to lapse. Between them they subscribed about £365. The general public subscribed the remainder. If we take it that the funds given by the general public (including the £100 grant made by the Vicomtesse de la Panouse from French Red Cross funds placed at her disposal) have already been usefully expended on Canteen work for French troops, the balance of £400 odd is hardly more than the sum our own members have given. Indeed it would be no more if subscribers should sanction, as I think they are in honour bound to do, payment out of the Canteen funds for the cost of printing and circulating the Canteen Record. (My own contribution has been after the event in the only commodity at my disposal, and I can therefore only plead with subscribers and not speak as one of them.)

I suggest, further, that, as soon as we are allowed to send a Unit to France—it may not be until 1942—Morgan should be our travelling Hon. Secretary and directrice of service in France, whilst Mrs. Alison should carry on at the headquarters office in England. She has been driving for the London Auxiliary Ambulance Service in Woolwich for two years and no doubt could get permission from the Government to retire "on the score of age" should we need her whole-time services. Probably Inglis could also obtain her release and join Morgan in France. I imagine that the Government would welcome their transference to such important work for the Entente. In all such matters the Association must necessarily carry more weight than the private committee that so gallantly endeavoured to wear the mantle of Dr. Elsie Inglis, the S.W.H., and Royaumont rolled into one. (Miss Hamilton's "late lamented" democracy still carries more conviction to English-speaking and French-speaking folks than the most efficient single-handed *führer*!)

My suggestion for future Canteens is this:—

Let us appeal to the old supporters of Women's Suffrage who, at Dr. Elsie Inglis's call, put up the nucleus of the money to send the first Units of the "Scottish Women's Hospitals for Foreign Service" to Serbia and France; but especially let us appeal to those of them overseas who have not yet felt the financial pinch as we have done in Britain. I had the privilege of doing the first newspaper publicity, from the Press Department of the N.U.W.S.S. in London, for Dr. Inglis in 1914, and I believe that our old supporters would listen to the renewal of the call. That princess of beggars, Miss Kathleen Burke (Mrs. Girard van Berkaloole Hale) is in the golden land of California, ready once again to plead our cause—which is the cause of Free France. Fulton is also there. In every part of the world there is some old supporter of the S.W.H. In many parts there are old R's. All could become collectors for the new effort. Let us say to them: "Give us the *dollars* and the comforts, and we will *do the job*!" I propose that we aim at two or more Mobile Canteen Units, consisting of a Cafeteria on wheels with light transport vans attached, each self-contained unit to be under the command of an old Royaumontite, with a crew of younger volunteers recruited by Royaumontites. At least two persons in each unit should speak fluent French and write it correctly, and at least two should be up to the standard of a Royaumont Whitecap in emergency surgical nursing. Such mobile units to be given a district in which their one object should be to convince the

French People, by demonstration of practical sympathy (these people will be sick and hungry), that the British never have deserted France, and never will—so long as the French People themselves try to remain FREE and do not succumb to the soothing syrup of false totalitarian philosophy, in which good faith is called weakness, slavery is called efficiency, and survival *en masse*, and power vested in tyrannical leaders, are rated higher than honour or humanity. For such dupes (poisoned by the dope of Nazi-administered defeatism) the true comrades and friends of France should be able to bring forward intelligent argument, expressed in good French. Each unit's captain should be given wide freedom of action, subject to the overriding control of the directrice in France, to carry out this programme in the most tactful and efficient manner having regard to local circumstances, and being at liberty to work in co-operation with both the Military and the Civilian organizations of la France renaissante. Areas suggesting themselves are the Ile de France, the Villers Cotterets district, Lorraine, Charente, Troyes, and my own beloved Morbihan. In all of these the *dames écossaises* are not without those who remember and trust them. France has been cruelly stricken in spirit and body, her national pride humbled in the dust. Humbled not by Hitler, but by the present leaders of the French nation's once loyal Army and Navy. Humiliated by the French people's nominally representative parliament that sold its constituents to the imitators of Mussolini while abdicating in favour of the military martinet turned preacher and the ambitious and crafty fascist who has cynically used this aged soldier, his reputation and his Catholic educationist ideals, together with the French Navy and the French Empire, as mere pawns in his own game of political chess played against his opposite number, Hitler. France is sick and wounded. Shall we not continue, in this world crisis, to minister to her with the same cheerful, comradely sympathy with which we helped last time to put her wounded soldiers on their feet again? The opportunities of service may be different, the means open to us dissimilar, but the same inspiration is called for and, I believe, will kindle the same response.

There is no profit to anyone in listening to the insinuations against the French people being made on all sides—and which it is the honourable privilege of Royaumont to counter! Such whispers are often put about by the common enemy, whose policy is always to divide old friends by sowing suspicion. We cannot get away from the waters of the Channel that link France and England so closely, nor from

our common history of *victorious* struggles for the dignity of Man. France cannot do without Britain, and Britain cannot do without France. In Europe we are the twin king-pins of the vehicle of Humanism without which the smaller nations, vowed to the same faith, have no chance of being carried on into a future in which they will live again as free civilised peoples instead of as serfs. The whole point about Royaumont standing by France now is that thousands of French people all over the country do already trust *les dames de Royaumont* because of what we were to them last time: not just an efficient auxiliary hospital but proven friends and loyal comrades. Which of you, revisiting France, has not experienced that warm-hearted welcome due to her having *fait la guerre* with the French people? Now it is our turn to show that we still count the ordinary Frenchman and Frenchwoman as our comrades in this struggle for the victory of human dignity and human kindness over degradation and bestiality. Until we can cross the Channel again we can show our sympathy best by interpreting the Real France to those here who still confuse her with the Vichy faction and its broken-spirited defeatist following of so-called "Realists".

I believe that if we make it clear to the S.W.H.'s old supporters overseas just what it is that we want to do, they will give us the money wherewith to buy these canteen vans and completely to finance the effort. By that I mean to put up the money to enable volunteers to join even if they cannot afford to pay for their own keep. We found out in the last war that however good might be the volunteers with ample private means, we should have lost many of our finest workers had the Edinburgh Committee decided that membership of the S.W.H. Units must be restricted to those able to pay their own expenses.

May I further suggest that each mobile canteen should be called after a Royaumont Ward? We ought to start with "Elizabeth of Scotland", and it might be that we could prevail upon another royal lady of that name and style and more tender years to become our Patron in token of the old friendship of her mother's country for France. The thistle emblem—symbolic also of Lorraine—could be painted on all the vehicles, with the letters "S.W.H."—for Scottish Women's Hospitality.

Fellow members, your response will provide the best refutation of the criticism that we are moribund. "Aged" in the equine sense we may be, but many an "aged" horse has proven itself so sound in wind and limb that it could not merely stay the course at Aintree but win the steeplechase

having the most punishing obstacles in the world. Those who doubt should ponder the descriptions of their journeys given by Prance and Rolt! Those who have the will to victory are unbeatable.

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From Far and Near

Madame Pereire's grandson, **Père Alby**, a Dominican priest, who was an ecclesiastical attaché in the French diplomatic service and was serving as an artillery officer, came to England when France signed a separate armistice with the enemy. He is Chaplain-in-Chief of the Free French Forces and frequently broadcasts to France on Sunday evenings. Three old R's have met him, and he lost no time in telling French listeners that he had been welcomed with open arms by some of the *dames écossaises de Royaumont*. Here is a link, ready-made, between the Royaumont Association and the thousands of French families who knew us either in the last war through our hospitals and post-war work in the devastated regions, or in this war in Lorraine and Charente. If the Association stirs to active life again and your Acting-Editor is allowed to take charge of our war-work publicity, this link will be exploited to the full in the interests of the Entente. Our president kept up with Madame Pereire till her death. Mme. Pereire's daughter had a house in Asnières-s-O. Father Alby's father was a general. The family was connected with the architect of much of the Paris of Napoleon III—now polluted, in the P.M.'s phrase, by Nazi occupation. One can imagine Père Alby's feelings.

A. L. Anderson, since her return from France, has been working at a Red Cross hospital in Bude, where she is living with a sister, Mrs. Leader. **Alison Blood** had just got safely back to West Africa when Andy last wrote. Andy will have her hands full helping her Bude sister to look after nieces and nephews and their children in the summer but she is anxious to start on a less "inglorious venture" in France if Royaumont is able to re-organize and once more give evidence of our friendship for the real France, when the time comes for the Allies to set foot on the Continent again.

Mrs. Alison, whose name is put forward as a possible joint Hon. Secretary, the Royaumont Association, with Morgan, will be better known to some old R's as Mrs. Crawshaw Williams who joined us in 1915 with a truck-load of hospital stores from Cherbourg, retrieved by **Dr. Winifred Ross** from a hospital that had closed down. She stayed on as assistant to Miss Cicely Hamilton, who was then Secretary of our Unit, and, from her, earned golden opinions. The Acting-Editor was with her on a fortnight's caravan tour, selling goods made by the blind at St. Dunstan's, and collecting for the Sunshine Babies' Home for the Blind, in abominable weather, a good many years ago, and has retained a lively recollection of her tact and organizing power and her capacity for hard work in most trying conditions (not only from the weather!). She has been

driving for the L. A. Ambulance Service for two years, and her daughter Olwen was recently married. John has joined the local forces in East Africa.

Burrard (Mrs. Dashwood) left Wimbledon before the war and now lives with her father in Farnborough, Hants, where her daughter Mary, aged 17, has been for a year a shorthand-typist in the physiological laboratory at the Royal Aircraft Establishment. Last summer Burrard met several members of the Free French Forces, including **Capitaine Alby**. "He was thrilled to hear I had been at Royaumont and some old Royaumontites may remember his grandmother, Madame Pereire. He told me he had landed in Glasgow and searched the streets in vain for "Scottish Women"—so anxious was he to meet them! I introduced him to **Salway** and **Large**. Last Autumn, when broadcasting to France in French, he referred to meeting us three and to finding the photo of his old Asnières Curé in my album. The broadcast was jammed! We went to a theatre show at the French Camp in which members of the Foreign Legion played, and I was afterwards introduced to the famous Colonel of the F.L. who wears seven palms on his Croix de Guerre riband. He, too, apparently, had been to Royaumont in the last war, as he recalled a ward called 'Canada' staffed by Scottish nurses. We have a good many French soldiers here to tea and supper and two young Bretons come every Sunday . . . We are very busy growing vegetables."

Berry, members will be sorry to learn, was stricken severely with rheumatism after the death of her father last year. **Morgan** went to nurse her in a tiny cottage, adjoining that of her F.A.N.Y. sister near Market Harborough, Berry's own cottage being let furnished as a source of income, and remained with her till this spring, always hoping that she might recover sufficiently to get a job, but Berry is still too crippled for active work. Apart from her service at Royaumont Berry's entire life has been sacrificed to her parents.

Kathleen Burke (Mrs. Girard van Berkalo Hale), who raised thousands of pounds for the S.W.H. in the last war, and visited us at Royaumont, and whose home is now in California, was in Paris last spring, whence she wrote to Mrs. Ivens-Knowles: "We were very near the Canteen and intended to visit it next day when the sudden change of conditions forced us to head for Paris." She was anxious to have the new address of the Canteen, anticipating a move, but continued: "Our stay here now may be short, . . . as I feel we could do better work in America", and she asked for a copy of the Canteens Report as she thought she could arouse interest in the States. **Florence Harvey**, she said, "made an all too short visit to us in California".

Dr. Courtauld writes from Essex to the Acting-Editor in May of this year: "The one word that does for my activities during the past nine months is 'Bed'. In August last I fell getting over a stile into the ditch below, broke my thigh, and I have been in bed ever since. For seven months I was at the County Hospital in Colchester, and my leg was pegged, went wrong,

was re-pegged, and then things did not go on too well. But early in March I came home with a nurse. And I think there must be at last complete union, for I am beginning to be able to move the leg just a little, and all pain has gone. So I have not much to tell you. I hope in time I shall be able to walk again. It has been a very wearying time, but everyone is kind and I have a good many relatives near at hand, so, petrol allowance permitting, they visit me frequently. And people drop in from the village, and tell me how things are getting along there. I had been asked to fix up a First Aid Point, and all I could find for it was my large timbered barn. Far too big, but I got lots of things together there and I had some classes and talks on First Aid to villagers. All that has been stopped since my accident, though the barn with its equipment remains. Fortunately there has been no occasion to use it—in fact I myself have been the only one to benefit, for I got people to fetch the stretcher to carry me home on! . . . I live in the midst of agriculture here, and farmers are working nineteen to the dozen. Several of my grass meadows are ordered to be ploughed up. My house and buildings are quite isolated and a good many trees about. We get plenty of 'planes over us and sometimes much rattling of windows but so far bombs have only been dropped in fields and not many of them near our village. . . . Like everyone else we are growing extra vegetables for storing next winter. It is a boon to be in the country to do that. I am indeed thankful that I am not in London or in any large city. I am so glad our people who have jobs in London are safe so far." [We all wish "Mammie" a perfect recovery.—Ed.]

Talking of agriculture, **Collum**, too, is thankful to be in the country. Her archaeological work, and the explorations of her friends, the famous "Trio" of missionaries, in the Gobi, long since turned her attention to the problems of erosion and their connection with man-made exhaustion of the soil's fertility; so when she moved from fertile Dorset to the iron sands of S.E. Surrey in 1936 and came up against a barren sandy soil infested with moulds, both tangible and filter-passing, and insect pests in greater profusion than she had met with anywhere else in her travels, an interest that had been incidental to her professional researches became an urgent and immediate challenge. Death, and the executors' repudiation of an undertaking to carry her Brittany researches through to completion, and the War in the Atlantic against Britain's food supplies, together caused her to concentrate all her energies on soil fertility research in her own garden and in a rented ½-acre building-site adjoining. She believes she has found the explanation of why humus gives permanent fertility to the earth's top layer—whereas "artificial" only stimulate plant-life temporarily and then exhaust land permanently—in the mathematical relations between the frequencies of the infra-red rays of the sun in spring and those of the ultra-violet light stored up in decayed animal and vegetable matter (constituting humus), and in the detonating or "harmonic" effect of these last on the radio-electric activity in the

cells of plants and their seeds in the physiological series of changes known as "growth", an hypothesis she could never have arrived at without her X-ray experience at Royaumont and her consequent interest in radiological research. She is seeking a maintenance grant to carry on with her investigations so that she may do a popular book on the necessity for re-fertilizing the soil with humus if civilization is to endure, and would welcome any recorded observations on erosion from members overseas. Meanwhile, she, too, grows vegetables, selling her surplus, and organizes the (very) local fire-watch, a duty the country dweller cannot be induced to take seriously, despite the many fire-bombs of last autumn, or perhaps because they so seldom hit buildings.

Figgis wrote from Australia to **Tollit** in October, 1939: "You may be sure our thoughts are always over there with you, and if it were not that we might be eating up food needed for more useful workers than ourselves, my sister and I would love to be in England or France now. I keep wondering what the S.W.H. are doing, feeling sure they will be in the van of all women's branches of service . . . are our hospital units once more working in France? . . . we feel so far off and lonely without personal news. Not one letter have we had from friends or relatives yet since the outbreak of war. Only *Punch* comes still . . . our isolation has up to now given people a false sense of security, but in this war Japan's unknown intentions help to awaken our politicians from their dreams of invulnerability. As before, the submarine menace is grave. . . . **Armstrong** has lost the sister with whom she lived, and is desolate, as she was devoted to her." Up among the deciduous trees of lovely Macedon, where she was staying, an old lady was giving a party in her beautiful garden for the French Red Cross. "One longs to be able to bring out thousands of children and helpless people to share our peaceful country until war is over. But 4,000 miles is so far, when the seas are mined and submarines everywhere. No one doubts what the end will be. General Gamelin's strategy inspires confidence, and out here Winston Churchill is idolized. Refugees we are interested in through our cousins in Hampstead are longing to get into the Army; one has relatives in Vienna, the other in Prague. . . . My best wishes to all S.W. who remember me. . . ."

Her personal friends will already have heard of **Chapman's** sad death. Her mother, writing to the Acting-Editor in June, says: ". . . she had a very severe attack of laryngitis in October and returned to duty"—she was Section Leader of the Suffolk/50 Women's Red Cross V.A.D. and a member of the staff of a First Aid Post and was also doing full-time nursing duty at the White Lodge Emergency Hospital in Newmarket—"long before she was well enough, as they were very busy at the Hospital, where she was considered quite the most efficient and conscientious nurse on the staff. She had almost completed two months' night duty and we were so looking forward to some holiday for her when she must have contracted meningitis (probably from a 'carrier') which entered the blood stream and she only lived a few hours . . . nothing could have

saved her, for she was thoroughly run down and utterly unfit for work but her brave heart refused to give in and she died at her post like the good soldier that she was, always cheerful, helping others and never complaining: the patients loved her as did every one at the Hospital where she is very much missed. If she had not been so terribly run down and had not had the cruelly cold nights to face on duty and getting to and from the Hospital she would not have fallen a victim to meningococcal septicaemia; she suffered terribly in the few hours she was ill before she was rushed off to the Hospital. She kept her sweet face and young figure up to the last, and was always so neat and cheerful. . . . I got over 170 letters, many from her Royaumont friends where she had been so happy and whom she loved; and her patients at the White Lodge often write to me." All old Royaumontites will join in expressing our deepest sympathy with her parents. 'Chappie' was one of the Old Guard White Caps and her comrades are proud of her courage. We all remember her capacity for untiring work and the quiet efficiency with which she did it. Both Main and Young sent wreaths.

Fulton (Mrs. Loring) wrote on February 3rd, 1939, from Santa Barbara to Tollit: "We have just heard the tragic news of War this morning and of course everyone is very pro-Ally. I wonder if you know what the S.W.H. are doing. Will you please let me know if they are organizing in any way, as of course I am anxious to offer my services if they will take me. I think Kathleen Burke lives in S.B. and if I can find out will try and contact her. I am sure S.W.H. will be doing something. I will stay out here until I can make more definite plans, but at present one feels as if all the stuffing is knocked out of one." Ill-health, so **Middleton** informs us, prevented Fulton from coming home as she intended.

Dr. Edna M. Guest, O.B.E., writing to our President in May last year, said: "This year I am President of the Federation of Medical Women of Canada, which has its annual meeting in Toronto on June 20th." She asked for a letter, for her to read at the luncheon, telling about the splendid contributions of the Canadians to the S.W.H. in the last war. "When I was in Corsica as head of the unit there in 1917, I was asked to hoist the Canadian flag over our S.W.H. convalescent hospital in the mountains, because it was the Canadian contributions which made this hospital possible. There was a unit of three hospitals in Corsica, a main hospital in Ajaccio with two convalescent hospitals. . . . The S.W.H. was a very popular movement in Canada during the last war, and a stimulating letter from you might focus attention on it again and start the ball rolling." Well, quite a different ball was set a-rolling on June 13th culminating in the fall that must have provided bitter news for that luncheon. We hope Dr. Guest will help us if we do reorganize the Association and if the Association decides to try again.

Goss (Mrs. Harpur) wrote to Tollit, pre-war, that "I have been busy passing my first-aid gas, and home nursing, once again, and am now a full-fledged St. John

Ambulance-ite and attend the First Aid Point when we have black-outs, etc. My husband being a doctor and M.O.H. is in charge of the first aid arrangements here"—Alsager, Cheshire. "I have recently become a councillor, and managed to get second to the top in the poll at our recent election; women are a novelty on our council and at the moment I am the only one. . . . I am supposed to be in charge of the evacuation scheme here under the W.V.S. but find it rather like a game of snakes and ladders and I think we got on quicker before we started W.V.S.! You will be sorry to hear that **Willmot** (Mrs. Smith) lost her husband a year last Christmas; she has returned from Ceylon and now lives at Wycombe, Bradham Lane, Exmouth."

Royaumontites will remember **Henri Gouin**, the son of the owner of the Abbaye. In March of last year he wrote to Mrs. Ivens-Knowles: "C'est avec une bien grande joie que j'apprends le renouveau de votre activité sur le front français. Votre dévouement et celui du 'Royaumont staff' a laissé un souvenir impérissable chez tous ceux qui en ont été les témoins—et l'on ne peut que se réjouir de lui voir une nouvelle occasion de se manifester au moment où nos deux pays se voient encore dans l'obligation de joindre leurs énergies dans de si dramatiques circonstances. Nous nous faisons un réel plaisir, ma femme et moi, en vous envoyant notre modeste contribution à vos efforts. Est-il possible de savoir où vous organisez votre cantine? Je suis aux Armées depuis la mobilisation, et il me serait peut-être possible, au cours d'un déplacement, d'aller lui rendre visite." The Lieutenant Gouin was serving in the 13th Regiment d'artillerie, in Secteur Postal 390, and was then about to go on leave for ten days. He winds up: "Je vous remercie de m'avoir fourni cette occasion de reprendre contact avec vous et d'évoquer des souvenirs qui me sont chers"—and asked to be remembered to Miss Hamilton. One wonders what happened to him—and—the thought has been an agony to us all—to the beloved abbaye and all our friends in the surrounding villages. They at least, one feels sure, are to be counted among "the Free French" at heart.

Grandage, who was obliged to resign her Hon. Treasurership of Royaumont Canteens in June, 1940, writes to the Acting-Editor on July 11th: "I am fitting about among sick relations". She spent eight months of the intervening period in a Government office. "The Smyths", she writes, "are well but **Williams** has no children with her now." It will be remembered that General and Lady Smyth emigrated to Australia in order that their children might grow up real Australians: they have. "Her eldest boy is over here (was at Cambridge) and now in an O.C.T.U. for Welch Guards, the girl, my god-daughter, has just received her commission in the W.A.A.F. over here, and the youngest boy is in the Australian Navy" says Grandy. Since this was written *The Times* has recorded the death at Melbourne at the age of seventy-two of Major-General Sir Nevill Maskelyne Smyth, V.C., K.C.B. The sympathy of members will go out to Williams who is now left doubly alone. General Smyth won his V.C. at

the Battle of Khartoum in 1898, saving the life of the famous war correspondent Bennett Burleigh. After a distinguished career in Africa and India he commanded the second Australian Division at the capture of Bapaume in 1917 and in "Third Ypres". He was beloved by all ranks of the Australian troops.

During an afternoon's visit to the Acting-Editor, on her day off—she is now driving for the London Auxiliary Ambulance Service—**Inglis** told of **Violet Inglis's** joining up in the W.A.A.F. (as an enthusiastic flier she naturally had to get as near to aeroplanes as she could!), and of her doctor sister's decision to stay on in unoccupied France, where she has long been living. They only get news through the Red Cross at long intervals. Inglis herself was looking thin and worn. Her friends will be glad to hear she was out of Town on the night of London's worst raid this year. **Main** (Mrs. Breakey), she told us, was in charge of the Blood Donation Service at the Middlesex Hospital.

Sister Lindsay, writing from Dundee on June 22nd to the Acting-Editor, says: "Matron (**Winstanley**) . . . asked me to see about some news. Compared with what you people"—she means the South, one supposes—"have stood up to so grandly we don't have much to write about. The Home is ready for anything, but so far has not been needed to any great extent. Last November a bomb landed in the garden: all the windows were smashed and fires blown in, but no casualties. It was a really marvellous escape. I haven't seen many old R's. **Moffat** came down from Brechin one day and we had lunch together. That was early in the war and she was discussing what she was to do. I haven't seen **Wilson** (Perth) for a very long time, but I'll ask her to write you. **Bewick** is very busy at her school; and sometimes I see **Sturroch**; she never changes. . . . I wish you could see how splendidly Matron has the place arranged for anything and everything"—well, she would! "Best of luck to you and all of you and we are looking forward to a grand NEWSY Letter."

Royaumontites will remember our neighbour, the **Comtesse Joachim Murat**, the great-granddaughter of the Napoleonic painter, David, though less for her celebrated peace-time salons in the Rue Saint Dominique than for her kindness to our blessed in the last war. She was the friend of Bergson, Léon Daudet, Maurice Barrès, Charles Maurras, and the poet Anna de Noailles, and many another famous in the world of art, literature, and diplomacy. She died, mercifully, in February of last year, thus being spared the humiliation of June.

Big Murray, members will be delighted to hear, is again on her feet and doing a fine job. Writing to the Acting-Editor in June, she says: "This is a segregated existence, with little outside contact and such leisure as there is occupied by 'chores'. This is the poorest poor relation of all war work, but interesting." Since June of last year Murray has been running a large hostel in Bradford-on-Avon for unbilletable children! These hostels are now taken over by the County Council from Local Authorities. "That meant that it was possible

to sort the children out better—older boys who were only enuretics in one hostel; bad big boys in another; medical cases in another; and to me was given the charge of 'backward and difficult children, boys from five to eleven, girls from five to fourteen'. I now have twenty-seven of these, nineteen boys and eight girls. Three boys are definitely feeble-minded; the rest are—or were!—completely undisciplined and had all been well tried in billets before coming here. Teaching them rudimentary obedience is a long and arduous task, but I fix them with a basilisk glare, bark at them, and usually get what I want. The principal worry is their entire unpredictability and the fact that they have so far shewn no spark of honour to which one might appeal; that, coupled with the unceasing and appalling noise of their raucous and quite uncontrolled voices, wears one to shreds. Two of them—girls as well as boys—will be 'talking' quite amicably together alone in a playroom, shrieking at each other in shrill scolding tones and quite amazed when I tell them so and tell them to try and remember they are in a house, not in a London street. Some of them are just nice naughty wild boys who have been badly billeted. These come in for two or three months and are re-billeted more suitably. The girls are a varied crowd—all from poor homes or bad backgrounds, all responsive, and, bar one, teachable. The one, a cherub with a halo of lovely curls and blue eyes, is just totally amoral—age seven! The children fortunately go to a day school, so there is a little time to attend to the administrative side and to see to clothes, food and such. When they are all at home they need constant supervision, but I am thankful to say that in spite of storms and 'blitzes', we are very good friends and I find that even these very unwanted children, however unattractive they are, have something so pathetic and pitiful about them that we get fond of them. It isn't their faults that their parents grew up in the last war, running wild and undisciplined, and with no standard to teach to their own children. And after all is said and done, from a county the size of Wilts with its thousands of evacuees, twenty-seven is a very small proportion.

You can guess what a satisfaction it is for me to be able to hold down a job again. I have had one quite serious heart attack, but after the first week carried on from bed until I was allowed up again. I've had 208 children through my hands, and those I now have will be more or less permanent until the need for these places is over. It's a thankless and unrecognized job from the point of view of the community as a whole, and is ignored by all who do 'War workers as I have met them' journalism. We wear no uniforms and are not known even by the local clergy, but those of us who do it cannot but feel that it is the sort of work that will pay in the long run because it is constructive, just for a change. Should health have permitted, however, I would be in a hospital again somewhere, as S.W.H. canteens were beyond me." Murray says that the main drawback of her work is that "practically no one is sufficiently interested to want to come and help, and domestic or other help is almost non-existent". She is also kind enough to say: "It will

be a joy to have a *News-Letter* again and I thank you warmly for undertaking its production in these difficult times. I was overjoyed to have the chance, some months ago, of talking to and inviting to my home some French troops who were in these parts, then. My doctor sister met them one day along a country road looking lost and forlorn, picked up three of them and landed them here one evening. Their joy at finding someone to speak to them and understand them was really pathetic. After that, as long as they were here, she went over twice a week, filled a car, and brought them either here, if I couldn't get home, or home if I were free, and we took them back by 'Lights Out'. We missed them when they were moved."

Merrylees wrote in December last: "I have slept in a bed only twice since the beginning of September. I go down to ground floor when guns get loud and sleep on a friend's sofa—very warm and comfortable but I shall be glad to get back to my bed. E . . . P . . . Mansions is bombed out—one end of it; my end only had windows broken, but P . . . Walk, F . . . Road, from here to R . . . Gardens, and K . . . Road at this end are pretty well a ruin. Isn't the *Royaumont News-Letter* coming out? I hoped there was going to be one with an account for us all of the Canteens, etc. I don't understand what we are doing now. Howard Smith and others seem to be at a canteen in the North—who is financing it? I think the Unit ought to be told about it if a fresh venture is entered on. I don't know who settles all that is settled now."

Miss Nicholson wrote to the Acting-Editor on May 1st, *à propos* the Editor's present home and researches: "Soil fertility must be a charming occupation in a hateful war. If ever the war ends and I am alive I mean to leave towns for ever and will apply to you for a clean country cottage with a plot of land to cultivate. My doings are not at all interesting. I am a part-time officer of the local Emergency Medical Service, which means that I am the head of one of the teams at the Stanley Hospital. The team consists of an assistant (orthopaedic surgeon) and an anaesthetist (a woman) and a house surgeon. My team is on duty every other day and night. At first we had to sleep at the Stanley every fourth night, then every other night, but now we only go down in a lull or after the blitz is over, as we have a resident surgical officer who can start off on resuscitations, blood transfusions, etc. As a matter of fact I have not really had much to do. The November 28th and December 21st and 22nd nights were our bad ones. You see, Liverpool has so many hospitals that the casualties get scattered and it is only when the damage is in the section in which the Stanley is that we have them. Early in the bombing days the poor old Stanley got a bomb in the road outside which cut off the water, the gas and the light. We had to evacuate the whole hospital for three or four days but were able to re-open, and apart from broken windows it has survived whole, since. There has been a lot of damage altogether here in various parts of the town and especially in the centre and in the poorer working class parts. A wide area was burnt out—

luckily not military damage." She then breaks off—at 10.45 p.m.—as the alarm had just gone. At 11.30 she added: "As there are a lot of 'planes going over and much gunfire we have come down to the cellar. I expect we are in for a night of it." This cellar she shared with her friends Dr. Muriel Duval, and Frances Tozer—sister of our Tozer. "The cellar has been shored up with wooden posts, the windows bricked in, camp beds installed, an emergency store cupboard fitted up, pickaxe, crowbar, axe, etc., at hand: we mean to fight for life if necessary! In the autumn we slept here every night—I have got the telephone installed—but now we sleep upstairs and come down when necessary. Otherwise life goes on as usual in a limited way. Private work is very slack. So many people have evacuated themselves and no one wants an operation unless it is absolutely necessary, naturally. Hospital is slack, too, as we have to keep beds empty for casualties. I haven't had such a leisurely time for years. No week-end jaunts now, nor even Sunday outings. We have got a piece of a friend's cabbage patch. Last year it was a field and we dug it up ourselves and grew quite a lot of vegetables. . . . The University was badly hit and the Medical School shaken and shattered. Birkenhead and Wallasey have had a much greater peppering than we have, mostly residential parts. The cases I have operated upon have been much like *Royaumont* ones. Bits of shrapnel, fractures, burns, chest cases, and a good many with bruises, injured eyes and multiple wounds. The children are the most upsetting sort of case. They are often carried in by men who pick them up out of their houses and they are covered with debris, dust, and terribly shocked. 12.30. 'All clear' just gone—so to bed!"

She continues this letter—written at the Editor's request for news to pass on to readers—on May 6th: "Since writing this we have had our very worst raids—five nights in succession—fires everywhere, houses and buildings of all sorts demolished, many dead and injured"—members will recall reading the accounts in the Press. "The Stanley hospital was damaged on Saturday night and every service cut off. We had 150 casualties at the same time: had to attend to them by storm-lamp-light and get the whole hospital evacuated to country hospitals. It will be patched up and start again for casualties, I expect. Last night, fires all round here. St. Luke's Church gutted, the huts in the Cathedral grounds caught fire from it and acted as a beacon. Lots of shops and buildings near also on fire. Just like hell, last night. Our street had one or two but they were put out quickly. I'll send this off now in case I am not alive to do so tomorrow." The Luftwaffe, however, left Merseyside alone after that. And there has been the lull!

Prance, members will be glad to know, after her terrible ordeal in the retreat from Metz, is well rested. Writing in June from Essex she says: "I took longer than I knew really to get over that strain; that is how age affects one." (Prance was the Acting-Editor's first volunteer, when, from the Press Department of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1914,

she appealed in the Press for owner-drivers and ambulances for Dr. Elsie Inglis's projected Units of women-staffed hospitals, and Prance was then nearing her fortieth birthday. Remember this as you read her diary!) "Happily one does not often get a concentrated effort of that magnitude. I got going too soon, as Hitler said he was coming on August 15th, and I could not bear to disappoint him by not being ready to meet him! But my first two months or so I felt it a big effort to keep up to the work"—ambulance driving. "Am kicking with health now: tried for the W.A.A.F. as 'fifty-five', but they said, though they would consider my last war service up to fifty, not over, so I told them it was hard lines to be too modern for the British Army in 1914 and too ancient in 1941!" Members will recall that the War Office turned down Dr. Elsie Inglis's offer and flatly refused to allow her ambulance drivers passports admitting them as drivers to the French military zone; their vehicles must be driven in France by men, though they themselves could accompany them. Dr. Inglis only grinned. "It will be all right" she told your Acting-Editor. It was. Once in the French zone the owner-drivers were able to snap their fingers at London! "Just now", Prance goes on, "we are very quiet. It is just a stand-by job."

Members will remember that Middleton was an Almoner at St. Thomas's Hospital, and they will have read in the Press about the severe punishment this hospital has taken—no doubt the Houses of Parliament were being aimed at. It has suffered a million pounds worth of damage and its nearly 700 beds have had to be reduced to seventy, a country branch, however, of 350 beds having been opened last March in Surrey. Naturally the occupation of most of its large staff of almoners has gone. "Poor old S. T. H. had four high calibre bombs on her all within a week", Middleton wrote last March. "I was on duty when two of them fell, but luckily the wall held and did not collapse over us, only the ceiling came down on our heads though the other side of the wall was completely wrecked and my office under the ruins. I have gone back to driving, under the W.V.S. I drive for the Ministry of Home Security, Civil Defence, and for the Ministry of Information on Sundays, taking round dispatches. Any spare time is spent house-keeping, visiting Mother and my sister, who are evacuated to my cottage in Sussex, visiting for the Almoner to the Mayor's Fund in Paddington, and, last but not least, knitting scarves for the Air Force and fire-watching when necessary. . . . Your letter is the first news of work at Portsmouth or Cheshire." In April she wrote: "Having had so many raids, it seemed as if the worst must be known, but Wednesday night taught me better; it was just hellish. The house two doors off was hit with loss of life and our next door neighbours' house damaged and condemned as dangerous. We were lucky in only having our windows blasted out, so are still here. . . . My hairdresser got it, also my Club opposite Middlesex Hospital, and the Overseas had its old part burnt by incendiaries. My driving office H.Q. got it last night, but with material damage not casualties. I ran into Morgan in Regent Street and heard a word

or two of her experiences and was glad to see how well she had stood the ordeal." (Morgan told the Acting-Editor that her flat in Hunter Street was ringed by fires and that she never expected to live to see the morning. From the Editor's upper windows in south-east Surrey the reflected glare of the London fires was intense, and the barrage sounded terrific. Her own old flat in Chelsea is forsaken, with devastation around it, but the target aimed at—surely one of the most conspicuous on London River!—stands intact.) Middleton continues: "I also ran into X-Ray Anderson, who told me she was working at St. James's Palace, I believe Prisoners of War job; her two children are evacuated to America and her husband is in Greece as he is Wilson's second-in-command." (We hope he is safe?)

Smieton (Mrs. Sanderson), writing about Association business to the Acting-Editor in February, from Wales, says: "I'm afraid I can't help you very much. We are here for the duration. My husband has been made Director of . . . Supplies and had to come here." (The gap is not due to "hush, hush" but to the Editor's inability to read the word, whose apparent sense does not fit in with the functions of the Ministry to whose H.Q. they were sent!) "We had only five days' notice to leave Sevenoaks. I was busy at Sevenoaks running mobile canteens for the troops. I was in charge of the show, responsible for stores, money, etc., and trained all my drivers and had to keep in touch with my units (searchlighters) when they moved about, a he-man's job, but very worth while. I had no spare time for anything else as we worked every day, week-ends included. We carried on in air raids, which were frequent, just clapped on a tin hat and hoped for the best—sometimes it was quite exciting. I was terribly sad at having to leave Sevenoaks as it meant giving up everything. I can't give you any information about the Association as I was completely out of touch with them, alas! I had no time to get to London, for one thing travelling was awful, took hours to get there. A *News-Letter* would be quite a good idea. I hope to go to Sevenoaks next week to see that the Military haven't completely ruined our place. . . . I don't think you will get a report about the Association from anyone. . . . I don't think the time has arrived yet for us to make too much of France. Wait to see what Pétain and Darlan are going to do first. If they refuse to hand over the Fleet and Weygand fights for us in Tunis, then let us do something to help. If it hadn't been for France throwing in her hand our towns and cities would not have been so badly knocked about. . . . Let France show her worth first! Sorry I can't be more helpful." Smieton sent along the Association Minute Book from her home to assist the Acting-Editor in writing up the Annual Report. But the last entry was dated 1938.

This ends the news in the Acting-Editor's possession, but there must be many other members who can contribute exciting "stories". We note, for instance, that one member's address is the Commandant's House at a famous inland aerodrome that, as all the world knows since the B.B.C. broadcast "The Battle

of Britain", had a most thrilling and glorious part in that epic fight, of whose outer fringe your Acting-Editor sometimes saw and heard the backwash. Please send in news of all kinds. We are all part of this show and none of it is dull or unimportant.

Anniversary Postscript

By THE ACTING-EDITOR

15th June, 1941.

The letter quoted in "From Far and Near" from Smieton, the Association's Honorary Secretary from its inception, is evidence that not all Royaumontites share the view of the Acting-Editor that the old comrades' association of Royaumont should go all out to help the Free French. France, in her letter, urges that, as individuals, we should join the de Gaulle Association, A.V.F., adding that English people have said doubtfully to her: "You don't think the Free French will let us down, do you?" That is the polite equivalent of the British Tommy's remark, after Dunkirk: "Thank God we have no more bloody allies to let us down!" (The British troops had not yet had the stimulating experience of fighting beside the heroic Greeks and Cretans, nor had the Russians been attacked.) It is no use being indignant. They and Smieton have a right to their viewpoint. Rather should pity and patience animate us. France, through her elected government and the generals and admirals that government appointed to lead her armed forces, broke when the enemy assailed the allies, and then, rather than face the consequences of loyalty, deserted her ally, and then, allowing herself to be disarmed, acquiesced in co-operation with the enemy directed against her former ally. There is no getting away from it. Let us rather grasp the nettle firmly. Logically the French people have only themselves to blame if their government—as the Free French, the friends of France, and three-fourths of the enslaved and blindfold French people themselves believe—betrayed them. There is still a minority that believes in the inevitability of a Nazi victory and intends to be on the winning side. *Sauve qui peut!* For many years the French Empire has been largely governed in the interests of exploitation by Big Business, by a bureaucracy that has purchased the support of the wealthier native elements, all of whom dislike the British and fear the influence of their methods of colonial government on the discontented poorer natives. Honest Frenchmen have loathed the practice, but acquiesced in it as inevitable. Had we been in the French people's place last June, should we not also have blushed to behold the indecent spectacle of a lot of hitherto obscure persons in Britain eagerly pressing forward to save their worthless skins by clinging to the skirts of Hitler's totalitarian "New Order in Europe"? Here it behoves such sewage rats to keep silence and to stay in obscurity, for they would get short shrift from a people grimly determined to fight in the last ditch—and there to win. Those of us who keep eyes and ears open know that

such vermin exist. In France last June this element had its opportunity to come out into the open.

There are historical, geographical and philosophical reasons for the pitiful French failure. Our Mother of Parliaments (Witanagemot) is nearly a thousand years old; *Magna Carta* was signed 726 years ago to-day. The Third Republic of France is seventy years old, and only 145 years have gone by since the First Republic was followed by the bloody Convention of Danton and Robespierre. The British interned Napoleon only 126 years ago. There was no Alfred, no Wycliffe, no Scottish Puritanism in France. There was St. Joan who heard voices—and Pascal. The ecclesiastical totalitarianism of Rome ruled there unchecked until the Revolution swept it away in bloody violence only to substitute for it an almost equally doctrinaire scepticism. The law of equal inheritance with its reaction on the birthrate has been sapping the foundations of the peasant proprietorship in France which, to the doctrinaires, appeared capable of implementing the challenging slogan—*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*. Lorraine, the land associated with the lovely Celtic allegory of the Swan of the Sun (misunderstood and misappropriated by the Germanic barbarians and turned by them into the childish fairytale of Lohengrin) has, in sober fact, been the iron core of economic difficulties insoluble between neighbours living at such different levels of culture and industrial proficiency as the French and the Germans. Big Business gravitates there. High Finance operates there. It is neither French nor German, but *franco-phil* and *Mark-sian*. A picture of the "ordinary Frenchman" in the part of helplessly writhing Laocoon rises before the mind's eye. Despite the menace of those strangling coils, French intelligence with French logic has emerged as the most sparkling jewel crowning civilized mankind. The pearls in our own chaplet of freedom have shone with borrowed lustre from the brilliance of the French Revolution. Let us also remember that in the last war the French people of the North suffered a daily martyrdom, for three years, under the conqueror's heel, with which our own aerial blitz casualties cannot compare in cumulative effect because, between the attacks, we remain our own masters. A whole nation saw its grievous sacrifices then of no avail to-day in averting war. It went into the present war bowed beneath a crushing weight of discouragement. The much-tried French people have not betrayed the British. They have fallen by the way. Are we going to pass by on the other side, proclaiming "Thank God, we are not as they are"? The French people were more patient with us when we abandoned them to the far-reaching plotting of the common enemy when he walked unhindered into the strategic key-point of the Ruhr with a British government's blessing and the British people's acquiescence. With all due deference to the author of *A Lament for Democracy*, there is no original sin. There is only failure to learn from past mistakes. Let us go forward fearlessly, hand in hand. The "V" campaign has already kindled hope and purpose in the hearts of the unhappy French people. The flame will burn ever brighter.

Questionnaire Addressed to all Members

(Please post your numbered answers to the Acting-Editor.)

1. Do you want our Royaumont old comrade's Association to go on?
2. Do you want the *News-Letter* to be continued?
3. How much will you (a) subscribe annually for five years, (b) give now as a special donation to put the Association and *News-Letter* on a sound basis for the future? (Overseas members, see No. 11.)
4. Do you invite the following to serve?
(a) as Joint Hon Secretaries, Mrs. Alison, Morgan;
(b) as Chairman, Executive Committee, Inglis;
(c) as Acting-Editor, *pro tem.*, Collum.
5. Do you suggest any alternative names of persons known to you to be able and willing to serve?
6. Are you willing that, from a year after the proposed re-organisation, the officers and committee should be elected annually by postal ballot carried in the *News-Letter*?
7. Do you agree that the ultimate aim of our Association is actively to use the bond of our Royaumont comradeship to re-knit the Franco-British Entente?
8. Do you wish the Association to implement this aim by re-organizing, under Association control, a Scottish Women's Hospitality Royaumont Canteen Service for Free French People?
9. Or do you think it better to allow our President and Miss Cicely Hamilton to continue to use up the remaining funds collected by Mackay's Committee, under the Royaumont name, in any way that they consider most helpful to the Free French, and then to let the idea of Royaumont Canteens fade out? (Only one subscription has been received by Miss Hamilton since July, 1940.)
10. If you wish the Association to re-organize a Canteen Service do you (a) approve the general scheme outlined by the Acting-Editor? (b) agree to the appointment of Mrs. Alison and Morgan as joint Hon Secretaries, Morgan to take charge in France when the time comes? (c) approve (i) of the appointment of Salway as Hon. Treasurer, Canteens, alone, or jointly with Tollit? (ii) of Collum as Hon. Publicity agent, Canteens Service and Scheme?
11. How much can you (a) give, or (b) undertake to collect, towards such a reorganized scheme in the next six months? (Members in certain Dominions could arrange for funds to be advanced through the Foreign Branches of London Banks and their Correspondents overseas.)
12. Could you give personal service (a) on a voluntary basis, paying £1 per week towards your keep? (b) if your living expenses only were found for you by the Committee? (c) if, in addition, you received £2 monthly to cover other expenses? (d) when, and for how long?