

The "Not Forgotten" Association

By Miss Marta Cunningham, C.B.E.
Founder and Hon. Organiser

I HAVE been asked by the Editor of the ST. MARTIN'S REVIEW to tell the story of the work of the Not-Forgotten Association.

This work began with a casual visit to a hospital near my home, about a year after the Armistice. I had heard there was, possibly, a handful of wounded soldiers still under treatment and strolled along to ask the Matron, a charming, sympathetic woman, if she had a few lonely patients who would care to come to us for a cup of tea? The Matron looked at me rather queerly, I thought, and replied grimly, that she had a *few hundred* lonely patients who would be glad to go to tea with us, or with any one else kind enough to invite them.

"A few hundred!" I gasped.

"Six hundred, to be accurate," was the answer.

For pitiful verification, Matron led me through long still corridors into many vast wards, through row on row of silent, listless, white-faced men, who took no notice of our coming or going. Something seemed to snap in my brain! Could these wasted, inert men be the once adored youngsters, who but a few years, nay months ago, went so dashing, with a swing and a song to the Nations' rescue, with the ecstatic plaudits of the multitude ringing in their ears? Alas! and *this* was their reward, suffering, silence and loneliness! – And there were many *thousands* of these shattered youths, all of the Country, with only the four walls of their hoses of pain to greet them day after day, month after month – perhaps, year after year – they paying in blood and prolonged agony, the price of the World's and *our* safety!

The thought was unbearable! I sped home, and the result of much telephoning was that within half an hour, six astonished hostesses were ready to open their homes and hearts, to any patients, able to leave their beds. Within a week, we had our first party – 60 "Boys in Blue" to a high tea and entertainment. I formed a small Committee with my hostesses, and proclaimed our name – "Not-Forgotten" Association – to the Press.

My first party took some tactful persuasion to induce our guests to accept our proffered hospitality.

Matron insisted I should personally invite our first guests; I was received with a frosty smile and prompt refusal!

"We don't want no charity, Miss, we are forgotten by everybody and we'd better stop so" one spokesman declared.

I hastened with a denial, "Not forgotten, Boys! only no one realised you were still about; we imagined you were all discharged in your homes." "Or dead!" declared another. "I daresay they wish we were! Dead 'uns don't give you trouble."

Extract from St. Martin's Review, Armistice Day, 1929

But there was no pressing required for subsequent "Not-Forgotten" Association parties – our "do's" caught on and the first year our Hosts and Hostesses entertained 10,000 patients in their *own* houses, while up to date some 110,000 have been entertained *outside* the hospitals.

The Hosts included the King and Queen and Princess Mary, whose magnificent response to my appeal, all the World knows. The example of their Majesties and Her Royal Highness, our well-beloved Patroness, has been a great incentive to many helpers, distinguished and humble, and the effect on the patients themselves has been re-vivifying ! – to again be remembered, honoured – indeed Not Forgotten !

For the difficult and costly transportation, we were deeply indebted to the generosity of the Joint Council of the Order of St. John and the British Red Cross Society, who have always helped us in every possible way.

Small funds started to trickle in, first from personal friends, our hostesses and our generous Presidents, and then, through kindly Press, from a small public, and were promptly turned into "comforts."

Then more friends, more wards, more hospitals – more "Comforts", outings and drives.

Hospital days are busy days in my house. Say it is a Thursday and we are due at Queen Mary's Hospital, Roehampton – now the largest surgical M.O.P. hospital in London. A thousand fruit have to be counted out in portable hampers – supplemented by 20 pounds of best grapes – 25 pounds of best butter for delicate patients – 4,000 cigarettes and 4 pounds of tobacco – 9 gross chocolate bars – odd magazines and, if it is the summer, fresh salads and something cool to drink. The hospital has to be reminded we are coming, the canteen how many hungry musicians will require tea and sandwiches, various artistes reminded to turn up to time and the cars that transport us at the "comforts" to be here at the house in good time. The drivers loads up the fruit, cigarettes, etc. and an artiste or two squeezes in. We are off and will be at the hospital from 3 to 6 p.m.

The concert party give their show wherever the Matron has appointed ; the wards take their turn and always clamour for more music ! No more listless faces now ! A cheery smile and a jolly welcome wherever we go.

There are some 10,000 wounded still in hospital, of which over 2,500 are in the London Hospitals and as long as there are sufferers in the wards, so long will the "Not-Forgotten" Association be needed.

As Martha Mae has said: "The Great War, in a measure so easily forgotten, has not forgotten us. It has left a legacy of personal suffering which will not die in this generation. Hidden away in hospitals and nursing homes and sanatoriums all over the country are fifteen thousand men still trying to recover from that accursed thing. Here in these forgotten places, the men have to face day-after-day, each day as alike to its fellows as the waves that follow each other along the shore. How do they bear it ? "

If you want to help them bear it and make it up in some small degree for all they have lost, will you become members of the "Not-Forgotten" Association ? We will welcome your talent, your personal service, your car or your money, each is of value and will help the "Boys in Blue" to know they are "Not-Forgotten."

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