"THE CAMP FOLLOWERS."

ENTERTAINMENTS AT BALCOMBE.

Largo and thoroughly representative audiences assembled at Ditton Place, Balcombe, on the evenings of Friday and Saturday last, by invitation of Mr. A. B. Horne, to make the acquaintance of "The Camp Followers." Who are "The Camp Followers"? Well, they are a small (but very select) dramatic and concert party, who, led by Mr. A. B. Horne, and under distinguished military patronage, have been engaged during the past eighteen months in efforts to relieve the long drawn out tedium of waiting on the part of our troops in camp to brighten the heavy toil of our munition workers, and to cheer the convalescents of our wounded soldiers in hospital. And this not only in England. In October, 1915, by invitation of the Y.M.C.A., "The Camp Followers" embarked on the still more delightful and exciting enterprise of work in France, where in the course of short working days they had the immense gratification of entertaining no fewer than about 15,000 men, drawn from almost every section of the wonderful machine known as the B.E.F. Base camps, rear camps, convalescent camps and hospitals were visited in quick succession, and the crowded audiences included not merely men of the line, but also drivers, transport workers, veterinary corps, hospital attendants and nurses. Only the splendid organisation of the Y.M.C.A. could have succeeded in crowding so much work into so short a time.

Three entertainments per day, as a rule, were given, often at places far apart. Hospitals were visited in the afternoons, and it was good indeed to see pales, drawn faces brighten by laughter, till, long ere the close of the entertainment, the marks of pain and privation, were wiped out—at any rate temporarily—under the influence of music and laughter. Then off and away would go "The Camp Followers" driven at rather reckless speed, perhaps, by an energetic young Y.M.C.A. motor driver, to some busy camp on health or hillside, where the waiting crowds within and without the Y.M.C.A. but told how keenly the men appreciated the effort to cheer them up in their exile, and enable them for a brief hour or two to forget the toils and dangers of the past, or the ever-present thought of what the future might have in store. Everywhere, of the four little "The Camp Followers" spent in France was a joy, for not ever their natural modesty could disguise from them the fact that they were doing good work. On every side they were met and encouraged by such applause, such hearty thanks, and such entreaties to return, as only real success could have earned. One of the party finds pleasure in remembering how a badly wounded man in hospital took her hand in both of his, and said with an earnestness not easily conveyed in print—"You don't know how much good you are doing. Only we know how much you have cheered us up!"

Since their return to England, "The Camp Followers" have visited many other scenes of activity, including West End, and the great central Y.M.C.A. Building in Chelsea. The entertainments given have been on the same lines as those presented on Friday and Saturday at Ditton Place near Balcombe, the country home of their leader, Mr. A. B. Horne.

J.L.