

Mid-Sussex Times 15th February 1916 page 1

"THE CAMP FOLLOWERS."

ENTERTAINMENTS AT BALCOMBE.

Large 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 convalescence 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 a visit to France, where in the course of thirteen 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, rest camps, reserve camps, convalescent camps and hospitals were visited in quick succession, and the crowded audiences included not only men of the line, but also motor drivers, transport workers, veterinary corps, hospital orderlies 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 pale, drawn faces brighten by degrees, 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 lonely camp on heath or hillside, where the waiting crowds within and without the Y.M.C.A. hut 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. Every hour of the fortnight "The Camp Followers" spent in France was a joy, for not even 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 Woolwich Arsenal and the great central Y.M.C.A. Building in Tottenham Court Road. 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.