

On an ambulance waggon from Bouillon
to Sedan. September 10th 1870

AL/2963 (To F. G. Sanderson)

I think you will perhaps like a note from
this novel position. Anyhow having
4 hours on my hands I shall like to write
one. To make the position clear I must
go back a little. My companions, a young
brother of 20, a quiet Cambridge lad seized with
a sudden desire to see this region, & a still
younger sister, met me at Antwerp & from
Thursday & Friday we were doing the ordinary
ruts of tourists, cathedrals, pictures, town
halls, Waterloo, opera every night & so on.

Yesterday afternoon we left for Arlon, the
head quarters of the English Society. I had written
to the chief administrator, ~~of the~~ Capt Brakenbury

+ hoped to find him there. However our train was nearly two hours late & we missed him in consequence. On the road we met an ambulance train. It was a sight one does not forget quickly. At a quiet country station in the bright moonlight, rows of stretchers on the ground being carefully lifted one by one into the carriages, with here & there a figure just able to walk being helped along by the red-cross bearers. The moon was bright enough to make everything clear, but in addition there were torches ~~the~~ increasing the effect of contrast between the scene on the platform & the still beauty outside it. At Arlon we met W. Noto

of Wimpole St whom I dare say your brother knows. He offered to take us on to Metz but as he did not start till Wednesday we thought we wd, if possible get to Sedan & then drive across to join him near Metz. So having received instructions we left Arlon for Sedan via Libramont & Bouillon. The difficulty everywhere is how to find horses. The railway is up in many places & the horses all occupied by the soldiers. However there was a coach from Libramont in wh. we were able to get places for Bouillon. It is a four hours journey. Josephine & I shared the coupe' with a Flemish merchant.

tabac. He smoked 15 cigars or, at least, as many as the time permitted. If I smell of smoke some day at Lime St Square it will be due to that journey. However we made great friends, talking the whole way. He was very sorry we did not smoke too & so was I. We had counted on having dinner or lunch at Bonillon & then getting a carriage to Sedan, but on arriving we found it impossible to get even a biscuit or an apple, & quite impossible to get even the promise of a horse for tomorrow or of beds. An Englishman told us a Prussian ambulance wd. be leaving the barracks about 6 o'clk, another kind hearted man

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gave us some wine & after a long hunt
we were able to buy some raisins &
nuts upon which we dined, at the barracks
the Prussian officer was very kind &
allowed us to sit in one of the ambulance
waggons going back to Sedan with
stores for the hospital. This was where
I began this letter. Captain in 1st wagon
we in the 2nd, then 10 others trailing
along at foot pace between the hills by
Bonillon & at last by moonlight entering
the gates of Sedan at 11:30 pm
Sept. 13th. Friendly Captain in 1st wagon
had never been in Sedan before, did not
know where the hotels were, had no
lodging. We had unwillingly to turn out
of our wagon & begin our search for
rooms - Capt & Lieut^t went one way

we tried another. Every hotel was full
+ we began to be in despair. Found a
church open, with one lamp alight,
peeped in, saw a bier with a dead
man on it in the gloom + thought we
wd not lodge there. Clocks now striking

12. Here our adventures become so
serious that I must ask you to consider
them confidential. Saw an officer with
the red cross on his arm, thought he took
good + rushed at him with our anxiety.
He was Pombrian, + c^d only speak a
little of either French or English. However
after making out our tale + hearing that
we had tried all the hotels he asked
us home with him saying that J + I
shd have his room + that he + my brother
wd share with one of his comrades,

We were extremely glad of the offer +
accepted it. This morning we found
our good Samaritan had passed the
night on a chair in the anteroom! How
we wished we c^d say something grateful
enough to him in a tongue he c^d understand.
He took us to an inn to breakfast + went
away to see his patients (he was head
of the Pombrian fever hospital) + we said
him no more. It is good to know there
is so much kindness about in the world.

Serap is also almost eaten up. At breakfast
we c^d get nothing but bread + coffee with
milk; some red cross men opposite us gave
some biscuits, + for once we were able
to reciprocate with some eggs wh^{ch} we
had succeeded in buying. Finding it
quite impossible to get a carriage we were

obliged to give up the plan of joining
the ambulance to go to Metz. We therefore
went to the Anglo American hospital
where I had many friends among the best
doctors. The hospital is in the barracks
on the hill commanding a view of the entire
field of battle round Sedan. Dr Sims
Webb showed us everything & we talked
a long time with the soldiers well enough
to talk. It was very wonderful & thrilling
to think that one was on the scene of
such an event. From there we drove
to Donchery where a train was being
filled with wounded for Mezières. Here
we waited 3 or 4 hours spending the time
distributing chocolate, tobacco, water &
apples to the wounded. My sister is particularly
good at this sort of work as she is pretty enough
to be a sewing attendant. And at 18 there is

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and charm in the smallest action of
kindness. I felt it was one of the many
occasions in life in which the feminine
element did really add something to the
value of the actual service rendered.

Madame votre mère as the soldiers named
me in conversing with their favorite contented
herself with the more prosaic work of
dressing their wounds in the waiting
room. At Mezjures a pause & a
change of carnage, all the worst wounds
attended to again. Josephine again filling
the pipes of the legs all ones & getting
into their carriages to chat with them
& amuse them. When we parted from
them there was a pathetic effort to
cry Vive la France, many promises
to remember us for ever, & an outpouring
of sympathy wh. one will remember with

happiness all one's life.

I hope this long account has not
been tiresome.

Not being able to get to Metz we
are now coming homeward -

It has been a delightful piece
of experience - Everyone shows
his best under these conditions

& in spite of the wounds I am
still not sure that to have one's
best called out is not, even at
the price of suffering, a blessing -

Yours truly
G. Harrett