

THE

RED CROSS

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By Coningsby Dawson

THE RETURN OF THE GUARDS

TO-DAY was a great day in London. The Guards' Division was inspected by the King at Buckingham Palace and had a triumphant march to welcome them home. We saw the parade from the curb opposite to Bath House. The waiting throngs were nearly as wonderful as the procession. They were composed of hospital chappies in their blue uniforms; demobilized men with their ribbons and wound stripes on civil clothes; Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians, American, soldier-girls in their various uniforms; and mutilated men of all the services. The trees of the park were dense with sailors who had climbed into the branches to get a better look-out. Everyone was immensely cheery and kindly—there was no ugly and selfish shoving. The police were especially considerate in allowing wounded men to occupy the islands in the middle of the road where there was no chance of their being hustled. East End and West End rubbed shoulders to-day and showed the same respect for each other that not so long ago they had shown in the trenches.

Presently, approaching from the Circus, we heard a military band. Then we saw the city police leading the procession. With a deluge of brazen music, playing a march which had often led us into battle, the Guards were upon us. You may think there was shouting; there wasn't. I don't know why other people were silent—all I know is that the lump was too big in my throat for me to shout. Such tired faces! Some were too haggard for words. Others looked puffed with years of concussion and sleeplessness. All looked stoically indifferent and tragic. They had gazed on death and the gray monotony of hell. London had turned out to do them honor. Very nice of London, but London could never understand. Loos seemed a century away from us to-day; but ever since Loos these men had been there, tortured, dead with cold, mad with thirst, deafened by shells, seeing their comrades' bodies smeared across the landscape. They had never expected that

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the ordeal would end. And now that it had ended, London wanted them to march for its pleasure. London had done better to have given them its beds—and London, watching their weary bodies, marching upright and mechanically, felt that, and did not shout. Behind each battalion shuffled the wounded men and behind them, in lorries, those who were maimed for life by their adventures. The bands might play their martial music; but here, plain for everyone to see, was the nemesis of military glory. They wore ribbons on their breasts, it was true; but where was the youth of these young men and their reckless, defiant handsomeness? Their shoulders were bowed—there was hardly a six-foot man in a regiment. Before the war six foot was the standard of the Guards; no man was admitted under that. And the officers—the swells of aristocratic Britain—were just as crushed and puny. It was as though their head and shoulders had been telescoped into their chests by an immensely heavy burden. And these were the Guards, the crack fighting division of the British Armies—the equals of the Dominion troops and the Highlanders, whom the Huns most dreaded. The tragedy of war, the pathos, the simple splendor of steadfastness to duty was here exemplified, but not the glory. Christ was not glorious when He bore the cross on the road to Calvary. He was heroic, yes—but not glorious. Had one stood in the crowd which watched Him, he would not have shouted. And so it was with us to-day—sacrifice does not call for cheers.

I am glad that the Guards showed themselves, for they wrung the heart of England. They went away so tall—such splendid animals. England knows now what the victory has cost her fighting men. Applause will not make them young again, nor grow fresh limbs on their bodies, nor put eyes back into sockets which are empty, nor cause the dead to rise out of their nameless graves and walk. Only love can make amends for what they have lost.

At the head of each regiment wreaths were carried on furled banners in remembrance of the comrades who would march no more. If the world would praise them, it must live out the love of their sacrifice for remembrance. Wherever we march, through whatever cities of the future, the love of their example must lead us.

The Guards have come back, as Christ came back from Calvary; the marks of their dying are upon them.