



Hannah Mitchell, matron Saltaire Hospital WW1

*A number of wounded heroes, in solemn conclave assembled, desired to show some appreciation of the treatment they have received at the hands of the matron and staff of the Salt Auxiliary War Hospital and the following literary effusion is the result of their cogitation:*

*"Lucky dog! Been marked for Saltaire!"*

The scene is the interior of St Luke's Hospital, Bradford, and the speaker a bed-ridden warrior and the fortunate canine, myself.

When a patient has become convalescent and is 'marked out' he feels some anxiety as to his next resting place and it seemed to me at St Luke's that if the patients were allowed to choose, something like a thousand more cots would be needed in Salt's Auxiliary Hospital.

Two 'lucky dogs' in addition to myself seated themselves behind a Bradford Motor Volunteer driver and we are whirled smoothly around through the suburbs to our destination. My companions are a one-legged and cheerful hero of the Somme and a Military Medallist from Vimy, with a bullet-riddled arm.

We are met at the hospital entrance by matron and sister. To these ladies we take an instant liking. Matron is a lady with striking grey eyes in which an unmistakable flash of humour hovers and sister is also grey-eyed with a manner eloquent of gentle concern for us. To soldiers accustomed for several years past to 'roughing it' in excelsis, the reception given by these ladies, to whom the men feel they are only going to be an additional burden, is reassuring.

"Here they are," says Matron pleasantly, "with their little bags and belongings. Go that way, boys."

We are conducted into a cosy room like a gentleman's study, containing three comfortable beds. Over the fireplace, in which a fire burns brightly, hangs the photograph of a bearded, elderly man. Every line of his face depicts force of character and underneath, in a neat, firm hand, appears the signature, "Yours truly, Titus Salt."

For the moment we can scarcely realise that this restful region is to be our home until we are considered 'fit' but as we sink into an easy chair by the fireside, we begin to feel quite at home.

My mind reverts to a vision – more of a nightmare – of myself, only a few weeks ago, seated on a nail-studded box in a sour-aired dug-out over an unsympathetic brazier. Then, I had wondered whether it was in some previous earthly existence I had lolled in an easy chair by a fireside and grumbled because it was "too cloudy to venture out far."

Our satisfaction is real and complete when a cheery young nurse brings in tea on a tray and proceeds to set it out for us on a snow-white cloth.

The pleasant days are racing on and we endeavour to close our eyes for the time being to what the stormy future may have in store for us. When it is fine we wander abroad, returning here to sleep and eat, and when it is not fine we lounge about here, reading, sleeping and eating; and ye gods, such army luxuries as 'bully beef' and biscuits are banished from our daily lives.

We are drawn from all corners of the British Isles – Ireland, Scotland, Wales and London – and we unanimously agree that if the inhabitants of Saltaire and Shipley are characteristic of the people of the West Riding, this part of Yorkshire must be a pleasant district to live in.

Why we deserve all the kindness showered upon us by everybody we cannot thoroughly grasp. Their sons, brothers and husbands are at the front doing exactly what we have done; their sacrifices are as great, and often greater than ours and yet there is an immense overflow of goodwill and tenderness towards us strangers.

If, however, we are strangers, we wear the same uniform as their men-folk and in the past we have faced the shell-fire of the enemy side by side with their men. That may be the bond between us.

These are the sentiments of Eighteen Grateful 'Tommies.'