

BERTA RUCK

‘The Shirker’, in *Khaki and Kisses* (London: Hutchinson, 1915), pp. 196–203.

‘The Purple of the Shoulder Strap’, in *Khaki and Kisses* (London: Hutchison, 1915), pp. 39–51.

Berta Ruck (1878–1978) is nowadays more often discussed as a footnote in the history of modernism thanks to her mention in Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room* (1922): ‘Yet even in this light the legends on the tombstones could be read, brief voices saying ‘I am Bertha Ruck, I am Tom Gage.’¹ As Quentin Bell points out, Ruck, who in 1922 was ‘very much alive and inclined to be litigious on the subject of her literary extinction’, was understandably annoyed by Woolf’s reference and had her solicitor send a letter.² The two women met (an event described in comic terms in Woolf’s letters), patched things up and even went to the theatre together, Woolf maintaining all the while that she had used the name unconsciously, not realizing its currency.

Woolf’s claim not to have registered the name Berta Ruck takes some believing. Ruck may not have been a frequent visitor to the literary salons of Bloomsbury (Knightsbridge was more her *milieu*) but hers was a name to be reckoned with in the 1920s, constantly advertised and, as the *Edinburgh Review* noted in 1922, ‘on every bookstall’.³ When Ruck died, on 11 August 1978, just nine days after celebrating her 100th birthday, *The Times* recalled that she was ‘a novelist of popular stamp, who wrote very largely for and about young girls’ and who referred to literature as ‘the amusement business’.⁴ In the 1920s Ruck and her husband, Oliver Onions (1873–1961), were a formidable literary power-couple who wrote prolifically and profitably for most of the popular magazines of the day, though clearly – at least in Ruck’s own case – for a different literary market than that to which Woolf sought to appeal. (Onions seems to have been rated rather more highly than his wife.) Ruck’s sprightly romances, like those of another best-seller, Ethel M. Dell (with whom she likened herself), went down well with library borrowers and suburbanites and, by the time she met Woolf, Ruck was getting £400 a novel. In 1916, trying to fathom Ruck’s appeal, the

Bookman observed that readers appreciated her 'bright, sparkling school-girl English' and lively tone. This was despite, as the reviewer made clear, the writing being 'as far removed from the efforts of the ordinary novelist as *Lands End* from John o'Groats. No serious person would call it literature.'⁵

Originally an illustrator, Ruck turned to writing in about 1905. Her ability to work quickly and seemingly spontaneously (the result, she claimed, of not planning anything) allowed her to take advantage of the expanding magazine market. She began with stories in middle-brow publications such as *Home Notes*, *Forget-Me-Not*, the *Royal Magazine* and *Home Chat* – the latter running her breakthrough serial *His Official Fiancée*, paying her £30. So popular was this story about a girl who marries her employer that Ruck expanded it into a novel, setting the tone for the (mostly) formulaic stories of love and misunderstandings which followed. She begins chapter twenty of her autobiography, *A Storyteller Tells the Truth* (1935), with the observation that: 'By the end of the War, I was more or less established in my modest niche as a writer for – and about – young girls.'⁶ The danger in all this was monotony but Ruck seems never to have considered it and rarely changed tack.

Like many other people, Ruck seems to have got caught up in the 'war-fever' which spread through the country in the early days of the conflict. Later she wrote, seemingly with a sense of personal regret, of the mood prevailing in 1914 – the 'diabolically evil' hate 'that can send pilot against brother-pilot, and can make it possible for the mother of young children to rejoice, in utter lack of imagination, over the horrible deaths of other women's brave sons. I didn't know – then.'⁷ Professionally, the war proved a busy time for Ruck. She was never less than topical and between 1914 and 1919, and her working heroes and heroines invariably wore military or nursing uniforms, part of a new – but not unexpected – trend whereby 'Cupid' found 'favourite and appropriate reincarnation in the form of an airman' as the *Scotsman* observed in 1915.⁸ Ruck continued to churn out short stories for the magazines including *Pearsons* and *Home Chat*.⁹ Her most notable wartime success was *The Lad with Wings* (1915). Deemed slightly risqué on account of a scene in which hero and heroine bathe naked in a Welsh pool, it was labelled 'an aircraft novel' by the *Times Literary Supplement*. The reviewer noted that its

pages teem with an immense flow of voluble and vivacious girls' talk – 'chatter' the wise call it – freely bespattered with italics and exclamation marks ... But there is a certain attraction about the continual sparkle and bubble of these pages which at any rate girl readers may enjoy; and the end is splendid.¹⁰

Ruck's work seemed escapist and frothy, qualities which appealed to readers, including, it was claimed, those on the front line.¹¹ *The Bridge of Kisses* (1917), with its hero an officer in the Welsh sappers, was especially popular and thanks

to its serialization in the *Daily Mail* was hard to escape. Ruck also seemed to have a knack of capturing her public's mood at each phase of the war, coupled with an ability to describe 'small' types of lives resembling her readers' own, albeit in heightened form. *In Another Girl's Shoes* (1918) is the story of Rosa Whitelands who, mistaken for a war widow, is forced to live with her dead 'husband's' family Sir Richard and Lady Meredith. As the *Bookman* wrote approvingly:

There is nobody more ingenuous than Miss Berta Ruck at weaving a romance around topical subjects, and nothing is more acceptable to the modern reader than a novel that is essentially up to date in its scheme and setting ... The war widow is one of the most pathetically familiar figures amongst us as the present time.¹²

The *Times Literary Supplement* suggested that the seriousness of the novel's subject matter was unusual for Ruck since she tended to dwell on 'home life in war time on its lighter side, with all the grave issues completely omitted'.¹³ This sums up Ruck's method quite well. The subject matter could be sombre but the ways in which Ruck handled it meant that the novels tended to seem more light-hearted and springy than they actually were.

Many of the titles of Ruck's wartime novels suggest this element of the 'here and now': *Miss Millions Maid* (1916), *The Lad with Wings* (1915), *The Girls at His Billet* (1916), *The Land Girl's Love Story* (1918), *The Years for Rachel* (1918) and *Three of Hearts* (1918). The same is true of her short stories, although these tend to possess a sharper edge. In October 1914, 'Cut with the Sword', her tale of an English girl married to a German, caused a stir when published in *Pearson's Magazine*. Not surprisingly, perhaps, Ruck's 'girl-wife' refuses to join her German husband: 'I won't go. He can't make me. Stay in Berlin, when We are fighting – Them?'¹⁴ Over the next year her output included the twenty-seven stories which would make up *Khaki and Kisses* (1915).¹⁵ The collection's title sums up its basically romantic mood, as well as indicating who should be kissed.¹⁶ The collection included the two stories reprinted here: 'The Shirker' and 'The Purple of the Shoulder Strap'. By and large, the stories in the collection are bittersweet but also bullish in tone, though not aggressively so. They are optimistic too, in the way they suggest the possibilities for personal growth available in wartime via unselfish or independent behaviour. 'The Shirker' and 'The Purple of the Shoulder Strap' also present readers with two very different kinds of women and raise all kinds of questions about the role played by romance fiction in stabilizing or destabilizing ideas about marriage and motherhood. Is the woman who refuses to have children really a 'shirker', as the story suggests? In 'The Purple of the Shoulder Strap', is Mrs Latham walking from one prison to another?

Another take on Ruck's work came from the *Bookman* in 1920. Noting that it was powerful and propagandistic, the journal suggested that Ruck's writing was also characterized by its equanimity. This was an unusual quality given the

apparent need in a 'troubled age' for modern fiction to 'attack'. In contrast to her younger, angrier and more restive contemporaries, Ruck seemed 'to attack nothing, seems to evince no hatred'. The reviewer continued:

She seems to leave institutions alone and to accept the large conventions as they are. In place of indignation she has simply interest ... The avoidance of the methods of attack which distinguished her from so many of her contemporaries is probably instinctive in the writer. Very likely she has never written the words Patriotism, Honour, or Good Manners, but in every book she has written, she shows these qualities at work; in this she is a link between the Dead Army and the new democracy. She is able to carry over those codes and traditions and standards of conduct of the former to the gallant subalterns who joined up at the beginning of the war; she is a vehicle for women's traditions also. The polo-playing lad fresh from Sandhurst and the civilian officer on his six-weeks course of intensive war-training both acknowledge her. The girl who goes to the hills for the hot weather and the girl who filled shells at Woolwich or Birmingham meet in Berta Ruck.¹⁷

Whereas Virginia Woolf reckoned Ruck 'harmless' and thus inconsequential,¹⁸ she is here being given a more central role in post-war culture. Writers like Ruck, it is suggested, would 'actually take us a little farther on the road to the Reconstruction of which we all talk so much' if only they were allowed to.¹⁹

Notes

1. V. Woolf, *Jacob's Room* (1922), ed. K. Flint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 183.
2. Q. Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, 2 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1982), vol. 2, p. 92.
3. W. A. Trilby, 'The Best-Seller Problem', *Edinburgh Review*, 236 (July 1922), p. 88.
4. Unsigned article, 'Miss Berta Ruck: Girls' Own Novelist Centenarian', *Times*, 12 August 1978, p. 14.
5. Unsigned review, 'Bookman Christmas', *Bookman*, 45 (30 December 1916), p. 158.
6. B. Ruck, *A Storyteller Tells the Truth* (London: Hutchinson, 1935), p. 146.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
8. Unsigned review, 'New Fiction', *Scotsman* (28 October 1915), p. 2.
9. See, for example, 'The War and Minnie Mansen', *Pearson's Magazine* (December 1915), pp. 598–601.
10. Unsigned review, 'New Books and Reprints', *Times Literary Supplement* (28 October 1915), p. 383.
11. See Ruck, *A Storyteller Tells the Truth*, p. 115.
12. Unsigned review, 'In Another Girl's Shoes', *Bookman*, 53 (January 1918), p. 139.
13. Unsigned review, 'New Books and Reprints', *Times Literary Supplement* (29 November 1917), p. 585.
14. B. Ruck, 'Cut with the Sword', *Pearson's Magazine*, 38 (October 1915), pp. 573–6, on p. 576.
15. The stories are: 'The Infant-in Arms', 'Cut with the Sword', 'The Eleventh-Hour Lover', 'The Purple of the Shoulder Strap', 'The Tommy Doll', 'The War Baby', 'None but the Brave', 'P.P.C.', 'The Subaltern's Girl', 'The Doctor's Girl', 'The Bank Clerk's Girl', 'The Flyer's Girl', 'Passed by the Censor', 'O.H.M.S.', 'The War-and Minnie Mansen', 'The Soldier's

Parcel; 'The V.C.'s Christmas Dinner', 'Penelope Knits', 'The War Film', 'The Shirker', 'Wanted – A Master', 'The War Bride', 'In a Woman's Gift', 'The Crock', 'The House of Pelph', 'The Enchanted View', 'Joy of Life'.

16. See 'New Books and Reprints', *Times Literary Supplement* (1 July 1915), p. 223: 'This is a happy title, which is really in itself a full and fair review of the book ... all about soldiers and the girls they loved; and all as fresh and engaging as the sprightly alliteration of the title suggests'.
17. A.O.I., 'A Note on the Work of Berta Ruck', *Bookman*, 58 (July 1920), pp. 138–40, on p. 139.
18. Quoted in A. Trodd, *Women's Writing in English: Britain 1900–1945* (London: Longman, 1998), p. 49.
19. A.O.I., 'A Note on the Work of Berta Ruck', p. 140.

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THE SHIRKER

'Thou wear a lion's hide? Doff it for shame.
And hang a calf-skin on those recreant limbs.' KING JOHN.¹

I

HE was, as he said, 'fed up' with it. 'It' had begun almost as soon as the War had.

To begin with, there had been that white feather pressed into his hand by some officious flapper at the gate of a tennis-ground. Then there had been the anonymous postcard, sent to his club, and inscribed: 'Kitchener² is getting anxious about YOU!' Then, as he travelled in tubes and omnibuses, there had been the appraising stares of young men of his own age and class and build, dressed in khaki (private's quality). Also the indignant and wide-eyed glances of girls who wore regimental badges to fasten their furs, or naval buttons, mounted, as hatpins.

This all had its cumulative effect! Upon the nerves of the young civilian it was gradually burned in, in one contemptuous word:

'Shirker!'

Yes; from every recruiting poster that word seemed to shout at him; it seemed printed between the lines of the latest War-telegrams; it gazed at him from the hostile eyes of every stranger....

He was, in short, in danger of growing rather morbid about it.

About that one simple English word that he felt was so often applied to him, silently. 'For no one had actually said it to him, yet.

'That,' he thought grimly and unhappily, 'would be about the last straw!'

The last straw was laid upon those broad shoulders of his one evening at a London dinner-party.

His hostess was the wife of a school-chum, now at the front, but the other people there were strangers to him.

Several pretty women, two or three middle-aged men and a couple of wounded convalescent officers. One of these had his head bandaged. The other

laughed merrily with his neighbours – the prettiest of the women – over the difficulties of ‘keeping up one’s table-manners with one’s left hand.’ His right hung in a black silken sling.

So that there was only one man present who was strong and fit and of a fighting age – and yet no fighter.

The girl in white, whom he had taken in to dinner, seemed to have nothing to say to him. (She was full of eager questions to the young subaltern with the bandaged head.) And the girl in red on his other hand, put a stop to easy conversation by her first remark: ‘Have you seen *The Man Who stayed at Home*?’³ It was possibly said in all innocence. But it stabbed deeper still into the young civilian’s already jangled nerves. He sat through dinner, fumingly monosyllabic.

It was in the drawing-room that he was at last goaded into speech.

II

THE rest of the party had grouped themselves round the piano, where the white-frocked girl played at the request of the wounded warriors selections from the lately revived *Florodora*.⁴

*‘I want to be a Military man!’*⁵ they hummed in chorus; while the young civilian stood aside in a corner, as stiffly as one of the gilded wooden stands that supported a great glass vase filled with laurel-boughs.

There was the soft tap of a woman’s shoe upon the gleaming, polished floor; the scented breeze from a fan. He turned to meet the prettiest of the women at the party; the one who had sat next to that young fellow with his arm in a sling.

‘I’m going to talk to you,’ she announced, in a voice half-coquettish, half-dictatorial. ‘I watched you at dinner, and – I’m a terrifically frank and outspoken person, you know! There’s something I *must* say.’ A presentiment of what it was flashed through him as he wheeled up a low chair for her and watched her drop lightly down into it. Then he sat down himself on the edge of an Empire settee,⁶ his shoulders turned to the group about the piano, and his face, set, mulish, and defiant, upon the graceful woman in the charming gown.

She began with dainty, conscious insolence:

‘I’ve been really interested to watch you. You can’t be more than twenty-five! You look in what they call the pink of condition. You’re twice the size of that poor child’ – she nodded towards the boy by the piano – ‘who was winged.

And –’

He broke in brusquely, almost savagely. ‘You’re going to say I ought to join the Army.’

‘Oh, no!’ she protested with a shrug. ‘I’m not so crude as that. But I do want to probe into the reason. The psychological why and wherefore. That’s what’s so enthralling about human beings, whatever they do, or don’t do. I want to get

right down to the point of view of the young, strong man - who doesn't enlist. It's so difficult for a woman - a real woman-to understand!' - with a little gesture of the hand upon which the flash of diamonds eclipsed the plain gold gleam of her wedding-ring. 'To think that it isn't your natural impulse! You know!'

He knew without being told that the pretty creature before him belonged to the type that 'tries on' impulses and poses just as she tries on hats. Her latest assumption was the decoration of patriotism. She went on: 'I'm broad-minded. I always say *'Tout savoir'*⁷ - but I don't even *savoir* in your case. I feel that it's such a problem. Don't take offence if I ask you questions, will you?'

She was misled by the utter gentleness of the young civilian's tone as he promised not to take offence at anything she said.

'Well, then,' she said, 'is it 'home ties' that keep you back?'

'No,' he said.

'Have you principles - against shedding the blood of your fellow-creatures?'

'Oh! Under the circumstances, no. None.'

'Are you,' she pursued, with an effect of daring, 'are you *afraid*?'

He said nothing;

'Scientists have proved that physical cowardice is not a man's own fault,' took up the woman. 'They say he can't help it ... just as we, of course, can't help despising him for it. Is it that, do you think? Or is it that you're enervated by the life of ease that you young men of this generation have got yourselves accustomed to? Has it soaked into you and sapped you until you simply *can't* face the trenches and the smells, and the cold wet and the dirt, and the hideous discomforts out there? It might be *that*.'

'It might,' he said quietly, mulishly.

And she answered, with a light laugh and manifest enjoyment, in that one contemptuous word:

'*Shirker!*'

III

HE turned, without any sign by which she could see that it was with a snap of his utterly over-wrought nerves. He spoke so gently!

'Since I've let you ask questions, will you allow me to ask you some as crude - that is, as frank?'

'Certainly,' said the pretty woman, looking up at him - he was distinctly good-looking! - with real amusement and interest in her bright gaze. The situation was more entertaining than she had promised herself.

He began: 'Are you a soldier's wife?'

'No,' she answered. 'My husband is a surgeon; and I don't think anyone can say that he isn't more useful in Harley Street⁸ than he would be in a trench! He's

immensely busy – at it day and night now – since the War. He saved the right arm – for instance – of the boy sitting next me at dinner. And he was much too busy to come tonight.’ Pride – perhaps real pride over a husband so important – was in her voice.

She asked: ‘What’s your next question?’

He answered quickly: ‘Are you a soldier’s mother?’

She drew herself up, piqued. ‘My good young man, is it *eyes* that you were spun for? Why, nobody else thinks I look twenty-six – : – and; honour bright, since we are talking undraped franknesses – I shan’t be twenty-seven till October. Scarcely old enough – even in these days of baby-officers – to have a son in the Army?’

‘He answered quietly: ‘Have you a son of any age?’

‘No,’ she said, ‘I haven’t any children.’

The man before her had the sensitive ear that is so often a gift of his profession.

He knew that that particular tone of curtness did not hide the misery of a Rachel – who, weeping over her children,⁹ refused to be comforted, because they were not – either because Death had taken, or because Life had not brought.

He looked down at the charming figure, which, for all the new fashionable fullness of its skirts, showed slim as that of the veriest flapper; the pistil of a lily hidden in the convolutions of the petals.

And he said: ‘How long have you been married?’

‘Five – six years.’

‘And still no babies? *Why not?*’

‘Why – ? But this is incredible – !’

‘You said I might be crude, and frank,’ the young civilian reminded her as she made a movement to rise and join the group at the other end of the room. ‘You said you were broad-minded.’

‘Of course!’ I am! – with an angry little laugh, as she leant back again in the chair. ‘But I don’t see why you put these *extraordinary* questions!’

‘I’m interested,’ he persisted, ‘in the psychological why and wherefore. You’re young. Aren’t you a strong and healthy woman?’

‘Perfectly!’

‘And you’re well-off enough. Are you *afraid*, then?’

‘I think you are absolutely –’

‘We’re not talking about me, now. We’re talking about you and these babies that you ought to be having.’

‘Ought! Apart from the glaring bad taste of your speaking to me –’

‘You spoke first!’

‘Well, but as if there were any “ought” about such a thing!’

‘Germany thought there was,’ he said quietly. ‘Germany owes a good deal of her strength to that. Her women haven’t refused to fill the cradle year after year – bringing up six and seven boys to be soldiers.’

‘And looking awful! Regular lumpy, Hausfraus and nothing else. Having no youth at all, once they’re married,’ broke in the Englishwoman. ‘No good times – no beauty, no figures –’

‘Ah! So that’s it,’ retorted the civilian. ‘You’re enervated by the life of ease that you young wives of this generation have got yourselves accustomed to. Has it sapped you until you simply refuse to –’

‘I refuse to listen to any more of this!’ she cried furiously. But, as she swept away to join the two wounded officers, she caught, from the young engineer of Aircraft, whose services had been commandeered by the Government, his last word:

‘It’s *you* that are the shirker!’¹⁰

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4. Calvary: the name given to the mountainside outside Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. See Luke 23:33.

Steel, ‘Sunrise’

1. *All Souls’ night*: 2 November, the feast of the Roman Catholic Church on which prayers are said for the souls of those still suffering in purgatory.
2. *‘It’s a long, long way to Tipperary’*: One of the most popular songs among the British, German and Russian armies during World War I. See note 1 to Barclay, *My Heart’s Right There*, above, p. 289.
3. *Charpentier*: unidentified.
4. *Tower of Babel*: the building mentioned in Genesis 11:19, part of a vainglorious attempt by descendants of Noah to build a structure which would reach to heaven.
5. *crown of thorns upon the Sorrowful Brow*: a reference to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. See Matthew 27:27–31: ‘Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band [of soldiers]. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put [it] upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify [him].’

Ruck, ‘The Shirker’

1. *Thou wear a lion’s hide? ... KING JOHN*: lines spoken by Lady Constance in Shakespeare’s *The Life and Death of King John* (III.i.55–6). Lady Constance accuses the men around her of cowardice for refusing to support her son’s claim to the English throne.
2. *Kitchener*: Lord Horatio Herbert Kitchener, first Earl Kitchener (1850–1916), the very popular Secretary of State for War responsible for the recruiting campaign which saw the enlistment of huge numbers of volunteers for the so-called ‘Kitchener armies’. A picture of Kitchener pointing at the viewer appears on the most famous poster of the war, accompanied by the slogan ‘Your country needs you’. See note 8 to Barclay, *My Heart’s Right There*, above, p. 290.
3. *The Man Who stayed at Home*: One of the most popular plays of the early war years. A spy drama by Lechmere Worrall and J. E. Harold Terry, it opened at London’s Royalty Theatre in December 1914. Set in a genteel boarding house on the south coast of England which is run by the widow of a German officer, it reveals a network of spies passing information about coastal positions, sending documents by pigeon carrier and making signals to outlying ships. Brent, an English detective posing as a silly-ass type of young man in disfavour for not having enlisted, comes down to investigate the occupants of the boarding house, helped by a young English woman. The climax of the play comes when Brent prevents the German spies from burning down the house as a signal to an outlying submarine and instead he signals to English vessels which destroy the submarine. The play was supposedly a powerful force in helping recruitment and in prompting the conscience of the stay-at-home men.
4. *Florodora*: a light opera with music by Leslie Stuart (1866–1928) and words by E. Boyd-Jones and Paul Rubens. First seen in London at the Lyric Theatre, London, on 11

November 1899 where it ran for 455 performances, it was revived in February 1915 at same theatre with additional songs designed to bring it up to date. ‘The singing is as good as ever, the dances and dresses are equally attractive; but the wit has by this time lost its point’ (unsigned review, ‘Drama’, *Athenaeum*, 4557 (27 February 1915), p. 198).

5. ‘I want to be a Military man!’: sung by one of the characters from *Florodora*, Captain Arthur Donegal (4th Royal Life Guards): ‘I want to join the military-tary / I’ve got no chance with Jane or Flo’ or Mary / I want to hear the hear the martial plan, / I want to be a military man’.
6. *Empire settee*: from the imperial Bonapartist regime of Napoleon III (1852–70).
7. ‘Tout savoir’: French: to know all.
8. *Harley Street*: situated just north of Oxford Street in central London, close to Regents Park, and from the 1860s famous as the location of London’s most renowned – or expensive – doctors and clinics.
9. *Rachel ... weeping over her children*: In the biblical book of Genesis (29), Rachel is the wife of Jacob and mother of Joseph and Benjamin who cannot recover from the loss of her children and comes to stand for the archetypal bereft mother. See also Jeremiah 31:15: ‘Thus says the LORD, “A voice is heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; She refuses to be comforted for her children, Because they are no more.”’
10. ‘It’s you *that are the shirker*’: The need to repopulate Britain after the war as a way of ensuring her future was a recurring theme amongst commentators for the daily and weekly press. See, for example, ‘The State, the Babies – and You’, *Pearson’s Magazine*, 43 (July 1916), pp. 37–9, which laments the fact that ‘the first quarter of this year showed the lowest birth rate on record’ and urges improved state-run nursery care. ‘If we cannot afford to invest a few million pounds in insuring healthy children to replace the men that are gone the future of our race scarcely seems worth fighting for’ (pp. 37, 39). See also E. Sharp, ‘The Declining Birth-Rate’, *Herald* (1 July 1917), p. 4, a response to a report by the National Commission of Public Morals, for the Promotion of Race Regeneration; and ‘The Endowment of Motherhood’, *Athenaeum*, 4634 (October 1918), pp. 427–30, which discusses the practical financial steps which the state needs to take to encourage women to take up their roles as mothers once in a new post-war society.

Ruck, ‘The Purple of the Shoulder Strap’

1. For years I’ve longed ... *BAB BALLADS*: lines from W. S. Gilbert’s (1836–1911) verse ‘The Rival Curates.’ This was part of a collection of humorous ballads published originally under the pseudonym ‘Bab’ (i.e. ‘baby’) in *Fun* magazine from 1861 and later collected in *The ‘Bab’ Ballads – Much Sound and Little Sense* (London: Routledge, 1868).
2. *Bloomsbury*: an area of central London situated north of Tottenham Court Road and close to the British Museum, notable for its numerous squares and town houses which were originally occupied in the nineteenth century by prosperous professionals but were increasingly turned into hotels and lodging houses.
3. *Girls’ Friendly*: the Girls’ Friendly Society, established in 1875 by Mary Townsend (1841–1918). A committed Christian (the Society was an offshoot of the Anglican Church), Townsend was concerned about the welfare of young country girls who went off to work in large cities often as servants or factory workers, thereby cutting themselves off from the support of family or friends. Groups of girls would meet regularly at a ‘lodge’, under the guidance of an ‘Associate’ leader or counsellor. One of the first lodges