

# BELGIAN WOMEN IN FLIGHT FROM RUINED HOMES



"And not a shot comes blind with death and not a stab of steel is pressed home, but invisibly it tore and entered first a woman's breast." This sentence describes the plight of the women and children of Belgium in the path of the German armies. From ruined homes, from burned villages they fled with such of their belongings as they could carry to the cities. They formed a weary, hopeless, pitiable procession. Even in the cities they found only a poor refuge. A fund for their relief has been started in England.

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# WOMEN OF FRANCE BRAVELY TAKE UP WORK OF THE MEN FIGHTING AT THE FRONT

EVERYWHERE one hears and reads tributes to the wonderful women of France who, in the lowest class as in the highest, attest their loyalty to their country, their patience under laws which are difficult to endure, but are made necessary by the dominance of military authority, and their marvellous industry.

In the Normandy fields garnering the grain, in the Paris shops and markets taking the place of those who are mobilized, receiving fares on the trains and working as switchmen, skilfully driving public taxis—one encounters them every-where, never pennant, never ungracious and always readily content.

On our way to a "Refuge Tea" in Paris one day my companion and I took our correspondences (transfer) to the desk of a pleasant faced young woman, neatly dressed and smiling. At our inquiry as to whether this work was not new to her, she said with a smile, "Oh, yes, I've only been here a few days. My husband went to the frontier last week."

In *Le Temps* recently an article by one of the leading writers entitled "Les Femmes Françaises" says:

"What a comforting spectacle, these wives, these mothers—the most of them have no news of their best beloved. Where are those dear ones? They do not know. Some letters without postmark—such is the mandate of the States—have come to them. It is true, but the letters have been delayed, the army has moved. This uncertainty is cruel, yes, but the women of France are above selfish sentiments at such a time. They do not complain. They remember that in the Balkan war the Government suppressed entirely the correspondence between the soldiers and their families. Hard law! Dure loi! The French people are fortunately less severely treated than that."

"The secret is a weapon of war, a fierce weapon, which makes the hearts bleed even in sight of victory. They comprehend the cruel necessity and, like Cornelia of historic chronicle, they bow without a murmur to the rigorous necessity. They may suffer, but they realize that all indiscretions must be avoided, and even the indiscretion of a postmark at these times is serious."

"In these dread hours every one makes a useful sacrifice. None lives for herself, but all are living for each other. Let us salute the courage of our women, worthy mate of the valor of the Frenchman before which already recoils the Germanic horde."

If this truth is evidenced by the people from whom the soldier or night expect great courage and great endurance, but is constantly surprised by the self-control displayed, how greatly are these qualities emphasized among the women of wealth, station and that confirmed habit of luxurious living which would excuse their temporary withdrawal after the departure of father, brother, son and husband to the fight? In the isolation of country chateaus and town houses, carefully guarded by well-trained servants, it is natural to suppose that these women of France would seek a day's delay before taking up the

onerous work that has fallen a heavy mantle upon their slight shoulders.

Never! Not for a moment, not for a second have they faltered!

Much has already been written of the Red Cross work. In fact that preliminary labor is now an accepted feature of Paris life. One does not step even a few paces from one's door without seeing the uniform of a garden-maid or the white flag barred with scarlet insignia floating on the right hand side of the requisitioned auto. Newspapers—from which all items except those relating directly or indirectly to the war are cut out—print columns of notices of meetings, gifts and the names of new members, which include those of the highest titles and the flower of the art and social world. So far the Government does not accept the offer of hotel or house unless it can maintain at least twenty beds, for offers have been so munificent and frequent that it has had till now to maintain this standard.

Headquarters are established on every street for the work of nursing, either in the hotels denuded of guests, in shops empty of their wares or in big official buildings prepared immediately.

But the work of the women of Paris is not confined to such activities as have been described. I recently received an invitation to attend a meeting which had another important object in view. It was held at the home of Mme. Michel, wife of the former Military Governor of Paris.

With Mme. Bourgeois, wife of the President of the French Republic, who is the honorary president, Mme. Michel is at the moment organizing a society which should be particularly interesting to the women of America who have been long interested in work of a similar kind.

This work is the care of the little children of the mothers of those of the first age—2 years—and particularly the care of the women about to become mothers.

The name under which it is to be known is the "White Cross," and the emblem adopted is a white cross similar in design to the red cross on a ground of red and blue—the colors of the city of Paris, forming so the tricolor.

Although essentially a war measure of relief, so important is the work considered to be that it has already been suggested it be enrolled as a permanent instead of a temporary organization and to enfold in its embrace as parent society all the many smaller societies which are now existent for the nurture of children and the care of poor women during the period of childbirth and afterward.

It is a beautiful, clear day when we turn our faces to the designated place. The temperature is high but without the humidity that would make a similar heat unendurable in New York.

The room where the meeting was held is a long rectangular apartment, containing a businesslike table. The walls are gold papered, the curtains a tan gold with embroidered edges; there are no pictures, but several chandeliers drip crystal prisms.

At the table sits Mme. Michel, and whom later we are introduced, and who expresses herself as delighted with the



A woman of Paris.

appreciation shown France by the Americans, "our American friends," as she puts it.

Through the two hours of the session her attention and courtesy never flag, although this new one is only one of many societies to which she belongs, and it is said that she rises at 7 every morning and spends every minute of a long day answering the pressing needs of this necessitous time, eating her meals by stray bites whenever occasion offers.

With Mme. Michel at the long table sit two distinguished men. One is Prof. Pinard, the head of the Maternity Hospital and the most celebrated accouchement doctor in Paris. He is gray haired, in the uniform of a Colonel and wears the cross of the Legion of Honor. Beside him is M. Boudineau, head of a great industrial organization, who has been invited to assist in the proper handling of details of organization.

The room is filled with an assembly of French women unlike the usual class one sees when one is a casual visitor. They have no resemblance to the women one meets at the races, sees in the shops, theatres and public places in general. They are wives of the Faubourg St. Germain, celebrated writers, artists, wives of distinguished generals and professional men, women of title and distinction. Almost invariably they are simply gowned, their dresses of the finest materials, but without dash or exaggeration. The embroidered blouse is hand made, the skirt of a wash material perhaps, but fitted perfectly, the hat becoming but not exaggerated.

It is interesting to note the methods of French women in organizing. There are here no unnecessary delays, no time lost in mere chatting. At the hour mentioned the meeting is called to order, and from that moment the visitor is conscious of the intense interest felt by the participants and their silent acknowledgment of its seriousness.

For of all the work now going on in France, this touches the country most vitally, for it means, as is explained in one of the opening addresses, the preservation of the coming race.

At the front is the flower of France's manhood. It is naturally the assumption that many must be lost. Upon the children now in swaddling clothes, France must, in the future, depend. The greatest care must be taken to preserve their health; to bring them into the world in the happiest conditions possible. To take care of the children means that the mothers must be taken care of, too. They must be reassured, their nervous threads allayed, their bodies nourished.

An interesting address is made during the course of the session by Mme. Faber, one of the best known women doctors. In appearance she does not, by regulation tailor made or stiff collar and cuffs, suggest her work. In fact she is as daintily gowned as any woman present; her dress a blue and white striped voile, her hat a small, flat, girlish looking capote with a garland of tiny flowers about it. She is not any taller than Mme. Michel, is very alert, very vivacious and very popular. Her words are heard with great interest and she is

applauded. She wears on her corsage the red cross badge and depending from the ribbon an order or merit. She makes her address sitting. It relates to the care of the mothers to be.

Already the State gives the wages of the soldiers a franc fifty centimes a day and for each additional child there is a donation of fifty centimes. How little way that would go, even with French thrift, when a new child is coming, may readily be imagined, but that must be sure, and after the first regularity, it passed came a second stating that the month's allowance where needed would be paid in a lump sum instead of weekly gifts.

An interesting moment in the session is when the Mayor of one of the arrondissements suggests that help be given only to the women who are the legitimate wives of the soldiers and that they bring with them the military papers of their husbands or their marriage certificates to prove their contention.

Scarcely are the syllables uttered before the great Dr. Pinard sweeps down with a forceful gesture, a movement which seems to prick the bubble of some worthy minded Mayor's rigor. "It is no time to argue in regard to marriage lines," says he decisively. "The first place too much children, the second would be wasted examining such papers. If it were otherwise advisable, the second place hundreds of soldiers have gone to the war without thinking of leaving their papers behind, and would be impracticable, such a suggestion does not appeal to us on humane grounds. All we want to know is that a woman is in need. We do not ask whether the child she is to nurse is legitimate or illegitimate."

All sorts of gifts are made accepted, ranging from the offering of the care of twenty women in private homes to boxes of soap, peignoirs and small supplies. Several women offer their cars to take sick women to the hospitals or homes and the next day to the homes when they are ready. One woman gives the use of her garage near Paris and only asks for a little help in taking care of the car which can house there.

A particular caution is suggested by Mme. Michel that the women engaged in this way be not so luxurious as to dress as to make them dissatisfied with their humble homes when the time comes for their departure, such a suggestion is met to three weeks after the war, the less conditions are normal.

The only American woman seen invited to cooperate actively with the French women in this work is Miss Minnie Tracey, the well known pianist, singer, who has lived in Paris for several years and was in charge of the benefit organized after the assassination of the Empress of Ireland. Following an address by Miss Tracey at the American Embassy the other day a sum of money, several thousand dollars was raised for the White Cross.

Besides this Mrs. McLaughlin, a Frenchman's daughter of Lyons, who won, who came over on her first trip, gave one of her checkbooks and designed to buy new Paris dresses, a check amounting to \$2,000 into Tracey's hands for this work.