SOLDIERS OF HUMANITY

By MICHAEL WHITE

THE terror was abroad in the land, and the white men who knew looked at one another with serious faces. He was a high official of the Indian Medical Department, and in his hand was one of those parchments you see hung in doctors' offices,—usually a Latin script with beautiful flourishes and a big gilt seal in the bottom right hand corner. This particular parchment set forth that Catherine Bruce Carey had attained the degree of doctor of medicine, and was fully competent to practise the same according to the charter of the University of Pennsylvania. Miss Carey, who sat beside the high medical official's desk, presented a trim figure in her well fitting khaki suit, with her pith helmet half shading features none the less attractive because displaying characteristic strength. Perhaps her deep violet eyes were the most significant,—wide and thoughtful, yet lit occasionally with flashes of naïve humor. Above the two a punka flapped back and forth, while native clerks and orderlies slipped noiselessly in and out. Presently the Indian medical officer spoke.

"I think you said you had not actually practised medicine?"

"That is true," she replied. "In the first place, I took it up as a study leading out of chemistry; but when I decided to do a little exploring I thought it would prove useful."

"Ah—yes, you have recently been up in Nepal. I remember reading your account of the Dhangari Valley in the papers. You—er—must have had some remarkable experiences."

"Well," a slight reminiscent smile touched the corners of her expressive lips, "I certainly had a flourishing practice there. I guess that was my best passport through difficulty."

"No doubt, no doubt!" nodded the other.

"You see," she went on, "I was going down to Bombay to catch a steamer for Europe and thence home to the United States, when I heard the epidemic had broken out in your province, and that you were badly in need of physicians. I thought you could use my services, particularly after my experience with natives."

"Yes, the need is urgent, and I fully appreciate your offer. At such a time women physicians are most desirable, because the natives do not regard their entry into the house—behind the purdah, you know—as a violent intrusion. That is our chief difficulty. Cases are concealed in the women's quarters, which men physicians cannot reach, and so the contagion spreads. I should like to accept your offer; but—" He looked at her with hesitation.

"You do not doubt my proficiency or my physical condition for the work?" she questioned.

"Certainly not!" he replied. "Six months in the heights of Nepal ought to put anyone in first class fighting trim; but, you see, you could be of the greatest use to us in the field—there is always the odd chance of being bowled over on the firing line, and your friends in America might blame me."

"My friends in America didn't prevent my going to Nepal, and that was not exactly an afternoon picnic."

"Not exactly," smiled the medical officer. He thought for a moment before putting a question of considerable relative importance. "How are you off for servants? Will they stand by you at a pinch?"

"Ahmad Kerim and his wife were with me in Nepal," she answered, "and I was wondering how to get rid of them in Bombay. They vow they will follow me to the ends of the earth. They are Mohammedans from the northwest provinces. I feel sure that they will stand by me."

"Queer people, these," mused the officer. "When I first set foot in this country, who should be waiting for me but my father's servant's son! How he knew I was coming passes comprehension. He has ruled my household—and incidentally myself—ever since. I presume his son will do the same for my son twenty years hence. In any case, the character you give Ahmad Kerim removes three parts of my reluctance. Yes, I shall be glad to accept your services—more than glad, in the present emergency. The fact is," he continued, "young Fraser in the district of Satarabad wired me that the epidemic had broken out there with great virulence, and that he feared he would not be able to cope with it single handed. But at present we have no one to send. Will you go to Satarabad?"

"Certainly," she responded. And there was nothing in her voice or manner to indicate that she was accepting a particularly dangerous mission: on the contrary, rather eagerness for it.

"And—er—you can start without delay?"

"At once—by the next train."

"Very well. I will have your appointment as assistant to Dr. Fraser at Satarabad made out and gazetted. He will post you regarding local conditions when you get there. But, as you can't go on to Satarabad until the down country mail tonight, your first order from medical headquarters is to make our bungalow your temporary resting place. My wife will restock your food supply, as it will not do to trust to luck in Satarabad, and in the meantime we can chat over a few details."

SO Miss Carey went down by the night mail in a compartment filled with women flying oversea from the terror, who regarded her almost as unfeminine because knowledge had won for her the mastery over unreasoning panic. In the early gray of morning Ahmad Kerim's wife saw to it that tea was prepared for the Hakim (doctor) Memsahib, and shortly after Ahmad Kerim was dragging her baggage out on the platform of Satarabad. No one was permitted to board the train; for the place had been strictly quarantined. Except in this instance of a Government order permitting Miss Carey to alight, the few trains on the line fled past as if driven by the specter of a nightmare. Thus the train went on, leaving a white woman to fight for the dark mass of humanity plunged in all manner of superstitious ignorance.

Datta Moved Cringingly Forward.

Her first glimpse of Satarabad did not distinguish it from the usual small native town,—a straggling mass of thatched mud hovels, with here and there a temple roof or a slightly more pretentious dwelling. The railway barely touched it on one side, and on the other a camp of gleaming white tents indicated Miss Carey's field of work. On the platform a group of spindle-shanked natives seemed to be taking in the situation with the philosophy of indifference. With these Ahmad Kerim had got into a hot argument, the result of which was that he approached Miss Carey with a grave face.

"Oh, Memsahib, something very bad has happened!"

"Well, what is it?" she demanded.

"These people, whom the Memsahib will notice are of low birth and not to be compared with those of the country from which this servant comes, say that Fraser Sahib was stricken by the hand of Kismet yesterday, died swiftly, and was buried at sunset."

MISS CAREY was naturally startled. If true, it meant that she was temporarily in medical charge of the district and local conditions with which she was unfamiliar. She did not waste discussion with Ahmad Kerim, moved to heap scorn on an inferior race; but hastened to the camp.

The disorder into which she found conditions had promptly descended lent strong color to the first rumor that Dr. Fraser had fallen in the discharge of his duty. And it was not easy to obtain a clear report of the circumstances. In the first place, Bhim Datta, Dr. Fraser's native assistant, had absented himself on the plea of sickness, and it became necessary to fall back upon Ahmad Kerim's muscular form of persuasion to elicit even evasive answers. It was then Miss Carey appreciated the value of a native servant who regarded her interests so entirely as his own that woe betide anyone but himself who attempted to dispoil her of an anna! But that was his prerogative according to the most ancient custom, and in justice to him it must be said had she parted from her last coin he would thereafter have served her for nothing. Meanwhile a newly made grave in the compound was pointed out as Dr. Fraser's last resting place, and Miss Carey was informed that all his effects had been burned by his direction.

"These people be all liars," said Ahmad Kerim in delivering his opinion. "The Memsahib will please to remember that we are in a strange country where no one is to be trusted. Doubtless Fraser Sahib is dead; but who knows how that came to pass? The Memsahib is fortunate in having this servant for her protector."

Then he glared at the gathering of camp attendants in a manner to intimate that it required only a word from her for him to cut all their throats. Simultaneously his wife jangled around among the tents, voicing her opinion that such a race of pigs was honored beyond reason in having the Memsahib come that distance to minister to their misfortune.

The urgent need of immediately taking Dr. Fraser's place for the time being compelled Miss Carey to set aside further investigation of his death. She promptly wired the news to provincial medical headquarters, and began reorganizing the chaotic native staff. It might be expected that one herewith would plunge into a description of the horrors of an epidemic in India; but that would in no wise fit Miss Carey's view of the situation. Disease and death were to her perfectly natural phenomena, to be fought with all her ability; but that did not include regarding things with the eye of emotion, though subconsciously she was far from being unsympathetic when confronted by distress.

She was inspecting the dispensary tent when she noticed a crumpled sheet of paper on the floor. She picked it up and began to read what were evidently notes Dr. Fraser had been making for his last report. They proved to be mere routine details, and ended in a blank space. But what roused her curiosity was his repeated insertion of the chemical formula $Cu\ So_4$, followed by the word "heat," in places where it bore no reference to the text.

She understood, of course, that $Cu\ So_4$ signified copper sulphate, a valuable disinfectant; but there was nothing to show from his notes why he laid such emphasis on that substance as applied to heat. She wondered what he meant by it, and summoned the native who had thus far given the clearest account of Dr. Fraser's death. But he professed ignorance concerning the paper and Dr. Fraser's use of copper sulphate. Ahmad Kerim, who followed Miss Carey round like a watchdog, took the privilege of a familiar servant and was for beating information out of the man with a stick.

"Ahmad," she reproved him severely, "if you begin fighting here I shall discharge you at once."

"Very well, Memsahib. But I think before long you change your mind. These people all telling lies. They bribed or frightened by somebody: soon we shall find out."

Whether they were or not, the conclusion Miss Carey reached was that Dr. Fraser's mind might have begun