

The NURSE'S STORY



BY ADELE BLENEAU

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(Continued.)

We had brought over with us, by Dr. Curtis' advice, numerous trunks containing all kinds of things necessary for a field hospital, so our stay at the customs was rather long. Shipman insisted on remaining and closing the last trunk. "It's the captain's orders, miss." And Shipman had served too long with a soldier to allow anything to swerve him.

We left the station at 9 o'clock and rode down to London in the lovely misty sunshine, going through the soft rolling hills, wet with dew and overhung with violet shadows. I found myself drawn with a peculiar, with a scribble of affection for this emerald world. Had my ancestors been English I might have explained the pull at my heartstrings in that way; but being French I gave it up and abandoned myself to watching the hills, the black faced sheep and the picturesque cottages until we reached London.

Some one has said, "After all, since life is a fragment of the brain, built up notions of things are far more impressive than the actuality." London to the uninitiated means a fanfare of names, a swirl of memories, vast reputations, history, poetry, noble ideals, recollections of great deeds.

We were leaving for Paris the next morning, so mademoiselle and I spent the afternoon buying various articles that Dr. T. had suggested, as his report from France was that most hospital supplies were falling. We returned to our hotel late and tired, but mademoiselle insisted we go down to dine. I think she thought I needed the change. But it wasn't a gay experience. The dining room was almost deserted. There were not more than a half dozen tables occupied.

Sitting next to us was a party of four—a mother, father and son, the fourth being a young English girl who, I felt instinctively, was not of the same family. She was tall and slender, with a lovely white and pink coloring, such as I had never seen before. It made her appear to me as unreal as Undine and as beautiful. Masses of shining blond hair framed her face. She fascinated me, and unconsciously my eyes turned again and again to that table.

The young man was a soldier. I was beginning already to know the type. Tall, clean cut, he looked the scion of a long race. Their conversation had the familiarity of a devoted family and was uninteresting to the outsider. We soon knew that the young soldier was going on the morrow to the front and that the lovely girl was his fiancée. The others talked a good deal, but the young girl said little. It was as if she did not trust herself. Her great wide blue eyes were rarely ever, even for a moment, taken from the young officer. Once I heard her say something about "the great danger," at which the young man leaned toward her, and there was in his voice a note I had never heard. He spoke with deep conviction. I shall never forget his words: "You must remember, dear, individuals cannot count. We are writing a new page of history. Future generations cannot be allowed to read of the decline of the British empire and attribute it to us. We live our little lives and die, and to some are given the chance of proving themselves men, and to others no chance comes. Whatever our individual faults, virtues or qualities may be, it matters not, but when we are up against big things we must forget individuals and act as one great British unit, united and fearless. Some will live, and many will die, but count not the loss. It is better far to go out with honor than survive with shame."

As he was speaking I watched the faces of his hearers. There came into the eyes of his mother an expression almost exultant in its nature. Only the great, soft eyes of the girl, but only a moment, and then they fell over her expression hurt me, and I looked away, for I had a premonition of happiness foredoomed to sorrow—that this hopeless expression had come to stay. The mother probably felt just as deeply, but she had—fortune—a mask that was never raised. Only the eyes of God, I was to learn, are permitted to see naked an Englishwoman's soul.

CHAPTER III.

Ominous Signs of War. I WAS oppressed—this was the beginning of war—I was beginning to see its face, and its face was ominous. Mademoiselle, who knew my every mood, sometimes before I was conscious of it myself, realized the shadow on my spirit and suggested we have coffee upstairs. Two men, one a soldier in khaki, entered the dining room and stopped at our neighbors' table. As we passed I heard the Scot say to the older man with him, "Father, this is Captain — of the —" I did not hear the regiment.

Months after, under conditions which had I known at the moment would have frozen the blood in my veins, I was to learn the name of his regiment and all that it stood for. The next day we started for Boulogne. We arrived in a pouring rain. Finding we had hours to wait for our train, I decided to look up a Miss Russell, a Canadian, who had for several years been Dr. Curtis' operating and office nurse in New York and had volunteered at the beginning of the war.

the station if he knew where base hospital 13 was he replied laconically, "It's next door." And so it was.

The shed over the tracks had been hurriedly converted into a great receiving hospital. When I asked for Miss Russell the orderly at the door looked at me suspiciously and asked if



He Was Raving About "Suffragettes."

I had a permit. As I was about to reply in the negative, a tall, slender woman with soft, pretty gray eyes, dressed in a straight coat and sailor hat, came toward me. Something in her manner made me feel she could help. She asked, smiling: "Is there something I can do for you?" I explained who I was and my mission.

"Why, certainly you can see Miss Russell. I'll send for her, and, too, I want you to see our hospital life, but effective. We sometimes handle a thousand men a day. You will be interested, I know." She waited until Miss Russell came, and after showing me "the store," which she explained was her part of the work, she said goodby. It was Lady Aiky Lenox, the head of the hospital, herself. Miss Russell laughed at "her part of the work." "It's all her work," she declared. "Lady Aiky hasn't been back to England since the hospital opened, months ago. She is the first one here in the morning and the last one to leave at night. Dozens of times each day she goes through the wards, and she knows the men's names, wounds and histories."

Later the head surgeon told me that in getting the men straight from the battlefield, as they did, resting there and putting them directly on the channel boats undoubtedly saved thousands of lives. While I was there an ambulance train from the front came in, and the surgeon permitted me to see the men brought in. It consisted of car after car of wounded and dying. The mud was caked on their clothes, in their hair and in their wounds, until, in some instances, they could knock it off in lumps. An aseptic wound did not exist. Many had received first aid, but often they came as they had been picked up, straight from the battlefield.

As I was leaving, Miss Russell came running out and asked if I would go for a moment into a small ward where a German boy was very excited about something, they couldn't make out quite what I went, to find he was raving about "suffragettes." He had been warned by his mother in a letter that there were suffragettes acting as nurses in the different hospitals and that when they got the chance they gouged out the wounded prisoners' eyes. He felt sure he had been put in that small room with another German, who happened to be unconscious, for that purpose. He was only a lad, not more than eighteen, from the Polish frontier, simple and ignorant. Happily for his peace, I was able to convince him of the utter absurdity of it all.

Not only all the men in Boulogne were wearing khaki, but women so were acting as military chauffeurs. Often I was puzzled to decide whether they were young boys or women. Under the caps and in their smart military coats they looked like fresh faced lads. While waiting for the train I saw one of them change a tire. With no help she did it in just seven minutes. True, it was a demountable rim, but that was good work. It interested me particularly, as even with a chauffeur to help me I had never been able to accomplish it in less than six and a half.

Waiting for the train to pull out, we watched the khaki world about us, for Boulogne was English, not French. Mademoiselle said when the train began moving: "As splendid and dazzling as the uniforms used to be, I find this quiet habit has a spell all its own. It suggests efficiency and eternal fitness and is the badge of a great conviction

and the courage of that conviction." Our train was a long one, pretty well filled with soldiers, mostly French, except for a sprinkling of English officers. We were many hours en route, as at every station we were sidetracked to allow the troop trains to pass. In our compartment, accompanied by her maid, was a pink, slender, lily-like woman of say, twenty-eight or thirty, Dresden-like in color. Mademoiselle afterward expressed it exactly in saying, "She had a perfection of hauteur as to manner, so well bred that her voice seemed subtly suggestive of it all."

She was a titled English lady going over to her husband, wounded and in the English military hospital at Versailles. When she knew that I was going for the first time to Paris she smiled and said:

"It is rather too bad you are having your first impressions of Paris under such circumstances. Still," she added reflectively, "I am not sure that the clearest intelligence is not very frequently confused or hypnotized by certain situations and scenes, and weaker ones filled with the wildest forms of illusion. My own first impressions of Paris were confusing, disturbing impressions, which were not at all valid." Her blue eyes wandered off into space, as if seeing it all again, while before my own came visions of Napoleon, the Louvre, gay restaurants, wide boulevards, everywhere artistic perfection, enveloped in a wine-like atmosphere.

We were arriving at Amiens. Just outside our windows we saw a little group of women laughing and chatting. It came to me suddenly how little of anything approaching gaiety I had seen lately. Looking at them, with their adorably rounded chins, scarlet lips, dark half almond shaped eyes, the Englishwoman seemed to take up and put into words my train of thought. She said to mademoiselle in French, nodding toward the group, with that little touch of remoteness which a foreign accent lends:

"They may be decadent, as one sometimes hears, but these shapely, plump, sensitive women, with their eyes showing a subtle awareness of what life has to offer, come to me as a pleasing contrast with the dreary commonplace of the English type. I sometimes think it is the uniformly damp, cold and raw atmosphere that has produced us, an over sober minded race." Mademoiselle was silent, and she continued: "I always have thought of France as a beautiful, brilliant, fragile child, not made for contests and brutal battles. But in this I sadly wronged her, as the world has found. France brave, calm, poised, under the fiercest invasion history records."

As we wearily went on I noticed how few trees there were in comparison with England, and I missed the rich green mold which made the English trees so lovely. The houses, too, in the towns seemed narrow and high and crowded together, by new and again I got a glimpse of the Gothic architecture, mazes of slender, graceful, peaceful spires, soft graystone carved into fragile, lacelike designs, and I thought what an inspiration religion must have been in those days to have produced such noble designs.

I had always heard that one finds nowhere else in the world the snip and intensity of emotion and romance that one finds everywhere in French streets. But it was all lacking that night, and while I could not put into words what constituted the difference between English and French people, I felt it.

In Paris we went to the Ritz, where we found Dr. Curtis waiting for us. It was so good to see him again, and we sat and talked until nearly midnight. He explained something of what my life as a nurse would be, though he felt sure I would not actually be stationed for several weeks. There were always delays and formalities, especially as there were complications, due to the three different Red Cross societies in France. However, he understood I was to be with the regular military hospital, Les Secours des Blessés. My application had been made by him to that society.

"As nurses go, in England or America, you are," he said, "not at all up to the standard; but in France you will find you are better equipped than most of the French ones, for, you know, only English speaking races have, in our sense of the word, trained nurses." The next day I was introduced to the surgeon in chief, who had been a friend of father's, an intelligent and agreeable gentleman, who was pleased to find I spoke three languages. He assured me I would be helpful and thanked me for bringing certain equipment. Promising to send me notice in a few days as to when and where I was to go on post, he bade us goodby.

Dr. Curtis had to return at once to his own hospital, which was twenty miles away, but before doing so took me to call on Mrs. —, one of the ladies of the American embassy. She had just returned that day from one of her "tours of relief." We found her not only very kind, but extremely efficient. She seemed to have exact knowledge as to what was needed most and where. This last trip had been to the hospitals near Dunkirk, where she had gone with heres following her motor, filled with bathtubs, anaesthetics, rubber gloves and all sorts of hospital supplies. She asked me to write her as I went about the exact conditions I found. "France, you know," she said, "was not meditating war, and that accounts for the sad lack of proper hospital provision for her wounded soldiers." Nobody gave me such helpful advice that was destined to be of such far-reaching good in so many ways, as did Mrs. —.

After our visit we went to the photographer's, and I had some instantaneous pictures made, for an army nurse's photograph must be carried on her card of identification. Dr. Curtis laughed a good deal at them and said the expression of my face indicated there was no crime I would not commit, even to scuttling a ship!

(To Be Continued.)

It was officially announced in Ottawa that the troops Missant and Scandinavian have arrived in England with 3,000 Canadian troops.

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Miss Margaret Adams, who has been the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Hanford, returned to Bridgeport on Wednesday.

Mrs. Jerome Godfrey, who has been spending the week end with Mr. and Mrs. Fred Toquet, in Longmeadow, Mass., returned home on Monday.

J. Robert Sturges left on Monday for Bridgeport, where he has accepted a position.

Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Rounds were in town on Saturday to install their farm and family in their new surroundings on the hill.

Ernest Tanner has been confined to the house for the past week with bronchitis and grip.

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