

C'Est La Guerre; Que Voulez, Vous?

By MADELINE L. DOTY

I WANTED to see France. The land of the battlefield would be revealing. Germany is grim, bitter, reckless and determined; England busy and outwardly normal. What should I find in a country in the hands of the enemy? It was 10 p. m. when I reached Paris. London at night is dark, but Paris is black. There was not a ray of light in the street when I stepped from the cab to my lodging place. Silent, dark, and motionless lay the city. In that one swift glance I knew Paris was not Paris.

The next day I began to explore. I wandered up and down streets, in and out of shops, and drank coffee at sidewalk cafes. The streets were filled, taxis clattered past, the driver's whip snapped, but was a totally unfamiliar Paris. The lightness, the color, the gaiety, the brilliant women, the smiling men, the wit, the bubbling laughter and song, had vanished. The Opera House sparkled in the sunshine, hurrying people crowded the Avenue de l'Opera, the sidewalk cafes of the Boulevards des Capucines and des Italiens were filled, but with a sober, sad, black-clad people. I saw that practically every woman was in mourning; even the street women wore black. And the men? Grey-haired men drove cabs, white-haired, bent-shouldered waiters served drinks; the straight, upstanding young men there were none. I say none, that is not true. A one-legged Turco, scarcely more than a boy, went hustling by on crutches with an empty red trouser leg flapping aimlessly. Paris is full of cripples. Legless, armless, blind men, all young, passed in a steady stream. As I watch that procession of cripples and women in black, intermit-

tently comes the hoot-hoot of a speeding automobile. Before that sound all gives way. Great grey auto-ambulances emblazoned with red crosses rush suffering burdens to hundreds of hospitals all over Paris. Then comes a whirring, rushing sound. All eyes are turned upward. Like great birds, five or six aeroplanes dip and dive and skim over the spires of Paris. Paris does not fear Zeppelins. Her own aeroplanes are too active.

For France is awake—France is alert. She is proud and heroic. She says nothing and fights bravely on. But the heart and life of Paris are being crushed. It is impossible to see this and remain idle. I offer my services as assistant nurse at the American ambulance, and am accepted.

I am of the Peace Society, but there was no peace talk. When the enemy is in the backyard it is like having a burglar in the house. In such a crisis, to dilate on the treatment of burglars is useless. The householder has but one desire, to drive the invader out. It may be that in so doing he will smash himself and his house, but as the Frenchman says with a significant shrug: "C'est la guerre. Que voulez-vous?" How often that phrase struck my ears. In the operating room, at the death bed, or when I shuddered at sight of hundreds of little white crosses in the meadows, telling of a bloody battle, I hear the voice of the soldier proclaiming: "C'est la guerre. Que voulez-vous?" In all the city there is only one topic of conversation—war. In all the city, activity centres around the wounded, the needy and the necessities of life. While the men of

the earth destroy, patiently the women struggle against the tide of destruction. In hospital, business and home they labor to save, to build, to create. The women are very busy, for in a house of mourning there is work to be done. The shops are crowded. Supplies must be bought. But these tragic-faced women buy quickly. There is but one color to choose—black. Gay dresses and evenings wraps may be bought for a song. Who is there to buy?

Wherever I go my little red crosses, sign of the hospital, win favor. A torn skirt is humbly mended on bended knees, and when I offer a fee, the money is pushed back into my hands with the words: "pour les blesses." No service is too great. For out of the suffering of war has come gentleness. No cross word is spoken. Ready hands help one another. Strangers talk in the street. I see weeping women stop to tell each other their story. Vainly I search for signs of heartlessness or gaiety. The Montmartre district is closed. The paint is peeling from the front of the Moulin Rouge, and the theatre door sags on its hinges. The Folies Bergere was open, and I went there. It was a dreary performance—no lightness—no gay little jokes, no evening dresses in evidence. Even the street women, clad in black, plied their trade cheerlessly.

I remembered the conversation of my neighbors in a restaurant. Unknown woman to soldier home on leave: "Can't you stay over this evening?" Soldier: "No." Woman: "I don't want any money; I want to be with you and talk." Soldier: "Why?" Woman: "Paris is so boring—there are no men."

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