

AN ENGLISHWOMAN'S HOME

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AN ENGLISHWOMAN'S HOME
MRS. A. BURNETT SMITH
[Annie S. Swan]

The removing of those things that are shaken, ... that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Hebrews xii, 27

[image]

Mrs. A. Burnett Smith

AN
ENGLISHWOMAN'S
HOME

BY
MRS. A. BURNETT SMITH
[*Annie S. Swan*]

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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Printed in the United States of America

TO
THEODATE POPE RIDDLE
AND THE DEAR AMERICAN WAR WOMEN WHO OPENED TO ME
THEIR HEARTS AND HOMES, THIS RECORD OF TRUE
HAPPENINGS IN THE ENGLISH WAR ZONE

IS AFFECTIONATELY AND
GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED

A PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

It was in "*Aldersyde*" many years ago that I first met Mrs. Burnett Smith, writing then as during the intervening years under the pen name of Annie S. Swan, beloved of all readers of wholesome books.

Many times since I have met her—acquaintance ripened into friendship—visit succeeded visit, until now upon the occasion of her official visit to the United States it has been the good fortune of myself and my family to entertain her as an honoured guest.

In the course of our quiet talks Mrs. Burnett Smith has told me the story of her life in England, just outside of London, since war began. Her experiences were so varied, yet so typical of what the Englishwoman has been called upon to endure, that I begged of her to make record of them for her friends in America. She demurred until I reminded her that she was in our debt many letters—hence the intimate form of this narrative. Indeed it was only by urging the personal obligation that she has been persuaded to tell her story, which it is my proud privilege to publish in this form.

[image]

Signature of George H. Doran

NEW YORK, May 10, 1918.

AN ENGLISHWOMAN'S HOME

I

My Dear: To-day I opened the cedar wood box—I can see the little wrinkle of your level brows over these cryptic words, can almost hear you ask why something so simple should be chronicled as a war time event.

I expect you remember just where the box stood on the little very old table at the left side of my study window. It was often between us, when we had those wonderful talks in the summer of 1913. Once I remember I removed it gently out of your reach, as you thumped its precious lid rather hard to emphasise your indignation over the accumulated injustices of life.

It is far removed now from the delicate setting you so much approved, the red rose of the window hangings no longer accentuates its quaint outline.

It now stands bald and bare on the workman-like writing table in the smoking room of our Kingdom by the Sea. You never achieved acquaintance with this dear place in your extensive yet inadequate travel year, owing to George's feverish desire to transport you to the particular bit of Germany he had so long idealised. I am thinking now of his chastened demeanour when he brought you back. Something had gone out of his early dream; that elusive essence which once gone can never be recaptured. Youth is ours only once—we may go on pretending; but there comes no second spring.

Your letters—and certain of George's—considered by his critic worthy of the privilege, have always been "taken care of" (I love that comforting American phrase) in the cedar wood box. It so happens that it is the one intimate thing I have brought here with me. It was picked up in the garden with part of its contents scattered, after making a hasty exit through the window—Heavens! I hear you say—what can she be talking about—and why is she so far from her base in war time? Here is the bald and awful fact—

There is no more North House. Have you taken it in, Cornelia? You loved its simple dignity, its old-world repose. You had no fault to find because it did not spread itself to any great extent, and lacked all the wonderful conveniences to which you are accustomed in your own home. You allowed it the defects of its quality, nay, I even believe that you loved them. Did you not put your hand over my mouth when I audibly wished that my mauve thistle spare bedroom had been a more spacious chamber, where you could sit or stand at an angle immune from draughts, or from bumping against some aggressive article of furniture.

I often apologised for the one bathroom, small at that, and for the inadequate supply of hot water. Then you would point to the moss-grown terrace at the back, the cedar tree on the lawn, sloping to the winding river, and the deli-

cate vistas beyond. "Oh yes," I said, "it is the only garden in the world, but the house could be improved on." Did I really say that? I know I did, not once, but a thousand times, and now I am the prey of a most unendurable kind of remorse, that which we feel when something we loved is removed permanently from our sight and we know we belittled it.

Now perhaps you will understand, Cornelia,—the home we all loved together—though often belittling it in the grumpy Scotch way—is dead. It will never be ours any more. Its roof can never shelter those we love, nor its walls echo the happy laughter which doeth good like a medicine. I see the bewilderment gathering in your quizzical eyes, and you wonder what it is all about, and whether I have taken leave of the small modicum of sense Himself and you allotted to me the last time we discussed the question together.

The truth is, I am afraid to begin. I do not know how to tell it. The world is full of words—but there do not seem to be any to fit this case. But I must try. I have been sitting ever so long, looking out to the sea, which is no longer a pathway to the sun, but a menacing grey highway across which awful shapes may at any moment race to destroy our peace, and fill us with terror and dismay. To the left, as I turn my eyes, through the window I see the gleaming nozzle of one of the big guns, with the gunners ready beside it. They are there night and day. So even our summer home is in the grip of the war monster from which there is no escape. It is the 16th of October and the skies are very grey, the air heavy with a strange chill, the sea mists are creeping up—and the moan of the breakers against the rocks seems to presage some coming doom.

It was very lovely in Hertfordshire in October—its early weeks gave us a taste of the most beautiful Indian summer I have ever seen. Our chestnut trees were never more glorious, nor more vividly clad. Flame was the keynote of the colour scheme, and it lingered—wonderfully blent with all the undertones of departing summer, till the picture our garden presented was so entrancing, I could not attend to my ordinary tasks, grudging every moment spent away from it. We were clearing the herbaceous borders—and planning a new scheme for enhancing the beauty of the lily pond. I had long serious discussions with the gardener, an understanding creature, about economy in bulbs. The true garden-lover would do without clothes, rather than raiment for her garden; but we had to patriotically compromise, and, with a little ingenuity and extra planning, saw a very promising vista for the spring. You have noticed, indeed, it was, I think, more than once the subject of our talk, that the last summer of a person's life is often the most beautiful. It was so with our boy.

Do you remember how I told you that when our little fishing expedition at Amulree came to an end in 1910, and the children were so loth to leave the old inn and the everlasting hills, I said to him, "Never mind, son, next summer when

Dad and I go to America to visit Uncle George and Aunt Cornelia, you and Effie will come here all by yourselves, or with Aunt Jack, and have it all over again.”

He turned his big quiet grey eyes on mine and said very simply, “These things don’t happen, Mummy.” He was very young when he learned that lesson. It all came true, not in my sense, but in his.

Before the next summer came, his dear beautiful body was laid on the cliff side at the Kingdom by the Sea and his soul had stolen “away” to his appointed place in his Father’s House.

That was the most beautiful summer in our lives—not in his only, but in our whole family life, of a richness and nearness and dearness, to describe which, there are no words.

Well, and this the last summer of our garden’s life, in so far as it concerned us, was the most beautiful we have ever known, in a circle of many summers, all beautiful.

Never had there been such wealth of bloom. The roses! They simply flung themselves in regal magnificence at our feet. The more you cut and gave away the more persistently they insisted upon coming on; not in single spies, but in battalions.

The old walled vegetable garden which you so loved, being invariably found, when missing, between its box hedges, surpassed itself. We could not use the stuff. Our Belgian household over the way, of whose doing and being I as chairman of the Belgian Guest committee have written you so much, had access to the garden to help themselves. It is a royal memory we have; but only a memory. Sometimes it seems as if soon, all life would be only a memory.

Hope seems—for the moment—to have folded her tent like the Arabs, and silently stolen away.

II

On the 12th Effie came home from France in her first leave from active service. You can imagine the excitement in the household, the somewhat tremulous expectancy of Himself and myself.

The one ewe lamb, as you know right well, is a kind of desperate possession. Once or twice I have recalled your warning counsel not to let her leave us; but, my dear, you would have to be here to understand the strange new blood that is

firing the veins of both youth and maturity and age, the red blood of patriotism. She was very young to go out to that strange awful sublime place they call the war zone. But she came back to us radiant, quite unchanged; but yes, there is a change. She has the eyes of one who, born in a great time, is striving to live greatly. She was, before the war, one of the lotus flowers to whom the call came opportunely, and now she is blooming for others all unconscious of herself. You who have known and shared my anxieties about her future, will rejoice with me, I know. She is not a good letter writer, she has the very Scotch habit of leaving out all you want to know.

A dear English friend of mine, whose name I must not tell you, speaking of her husband, one day in a moment of exasperation said, "You have to take too much for granted with a Scotch husband." I smiled comprehendingly, having lived so long with Himself.

Effie is a little like that. You never know what is shut up inside of her. The Boy was so different, so easy to know—and so lovely when you did know him. Well I suppose it would not be good for us to be given without effort or seeking the key to every treasure house. Heavens, how I wander! I must come back and tell about the thing to which Effie came home.

We had had a quiet lovely day together. I had managed to worm a little out of her about her beloved camp at Etaples, not half enough—but just enough to know what this wonderful new life of service for others is doing for the child.

Himself was rather busy, and had to go out after dinner to see some patients who required a late visit. The house surgeon from the hospital had just dropped in asking for him and we kept him, expecting that Himself would be back quickly.

At half past nine, tea came up. Do you remember how you, and especially George, jeered at our evening teacups, and how gradually you were drawn into the snare until you acquired the passion, and used to watch the library clock, sure the kitchen one did not correspond?

I had a restless feeling that night. It was very dark, with a close sultry air, and I went upstairs throwing open windows that had been shut. I was standing at the open window of Himself's dressing room when I heard the unmistakable whirr of the Zeppelin engine.

I have tried to describe it to you before. It is a sinister grinding noise, unlike anything on earth. I flew down to tell them that the Zeppelins were out. Effie, eager with the quick longing of youth for every adventure, said, "No such luck," and we immediately went out on the terrace to crane our necks in an endeavour to discover the marauder's silver silhouette against the clear dark sky. Then quite suddenly there was the most terrific bang, and somewhere in the near distance strange lights like shooting stars seemed to descend upon our little inoffensive town—we stood dumb, holding our breath, while the bangs continued getting

louder and louder. Presently, we were joined by the terrified servants, who, at their supper in the basement kitchen, unaware that the Zeppelins were in the neighbourhood, came rushing out. The young ones were inclined to scream. I remember laying my hand on somebody's arm, and saying, "Hush, be still!" To me it was a stupendous moment, during which the whole fabric of existence seemed to be tottering—and we on the edge of some unimaginable abyss. I remember Effie's face lit by the weird glare from the incendiary bombs now falling in rapid succession from the upper air.

There was no fear upon it, only a kind of uplifted spirituelle look. I seem to remember that she said, "Do you think it will be this one, Mummy?" but she stoutly denies having uttered any such words. Presently, however, "this one" descended and found its mark. The din was indescribable; conceive of forty-two bombs dropping in a limited area in the space of four minutes, the glare of their bursting, the air full of sulphurous fumes and an awful indescribable sense of evil, imminent, devilish, against which we were absolutely helpless and unarmed. As we stood there in absolute silence, holding on one to another, we had no sort of knowledge or information that our very own house was being destroyed. To you this may seem incredible, when you reflect that the terrace, though wide, is joined to the house.

It was all so quick and so terrible, that we felt it must be the end of the world, the total destruction of everything we had considered stable in our earthly life. Presently, the voice of the man beside us spoke: "I think it's over now, and we're safe." The air-ship, sailing low, so that we saw it distinctly between the cone of the cedar tree and the sky, disappeared rapidly and the noise of explosions ceased—only to be replaced by the cries of excited people, and the moans of the hurt and dying in the street. The darkness was profound, the power station having been destroyed early in the attack.

We pulled ourselves together, and proceeded towards the house with a view of entering. Part of the walls remained standing, but there was no house. There in the middle of the beautiful hall you so much admired the whole fabric seemed to have collapsed. Doors, windows, furniture, pictures, piled in an inextricable heap. We saw right out into the street in the further side, where already there were twinkling lights and moving figures as the work of mercy and assistance began. But where was Himself?

Quickly people began to climb in upon our ruins, seeking presumably for us or for our remains. Presently, among them, very white in the face, and very glassy about the eyes, appeared Himself, wheeling his bicycle. They had told him down the street that his home and every one in it had been destroyed. He counted

us,—we clung together for just a moment, then he said, "I must go." "Where?" I asked, still holding on. "To my job," he answered as he unstrapped his emergency bag from his machine and strode away. We did not see him any more till the early morning, he and his colleagues being busy at the hospital. Then the whole population seemed to be crowding us where we stood. We had no lights but a few stray candles. Police and military presently appeared to take possession, and the general public were excluded. The accredited powers climbed across the debris to reach the garden, when a strange sight presented itself. Five incendiary bombs which had been dropped after the explosive ones and were intended to complete the work of destruction, had only sunk in the soft earth, and were burning there like bale fires. The authorities were hunting for unexploded bombs, always a terrific menace until handled by experts and shorn of their hellish power. They said, and say still, that one is at the bottom of the river where it can't do any harm. We tried to go up what remained of the staircase. The secondary staircase which connected the old wing with the more modern part, was blown into space; not a step of it remained. The beds, which had been in the rooms of the old wing, were outside somewhere, their twisted metal work and torn mattresses being afterwards found near the railings of the front garden.

You remember the mysterious little passage with the double doors that led from my bedroom into the old wing; well, it was entirely gone; cut off as clean as if a knife had done it. We were very adventurous, climbing about trying to see by candlelight the full extent of the damage, and with nobody to tell us that we took our lives in our hands every minute where walls were tottering, and ceilings, so to speak, hanging by a thread. My eight-foot old mahogany wardrobe which you admired so much had climbed upon my bed, and half the ceiling was on the top of that. Conceive what would have happened had the attack come without warning, when we were asleep in our beds!

It has happened in other places. The protecting mercy of God was over and round about us—our time had not yet come. I had then no feeling of anguish over my ruined home, none of us had. To Effie, it was a great adventure—the War in concrete visible tangible form! We simply did not realise what it all meant; I suppose we shall realise it right enough later on.

Midnight came—one o'clock in the morning—two o'clock—Himself turned up at last and insisted that I should find a billet somewhere and lie down. He and Effie determined to keep a vigil in the ruins. A fine rain had begun to fall, but there were dry places in the house, a corner of the drawing room queerly almost untouched. The vagaries of the concussion were beyond belief. The gable end of the dining room left standing was stripped inside of every scrap of plaster, leaving

the lathes naked and bare. An old Chippendale mirror still stuck heroically to its nail, above the mantel, or rather the place where the mantel had been, not shattered or scratched. But all the lovely old ladder-back chairs are gone and the sideboard. I shan't really know till I go back whether we have anything left.

Effie took me up to my billet in a neighbour's house, and as we groped our way by the railings in the inky darkness I suddenly clutched something soft. The flashlight revealed part of our dining room curtains—heavy silk damask ones, that had evidently been blown clean out up the street, and twisted round the railings by invisible hands.

I did not sleep any, you may be sure. I was the slave of physical fear after the excitement had died down. Shaking in every limb, even to my lips, I lay till about six o'clock, then got up again and dressed to go and seek my treasures.

The sun was shining cheerfully as I wended my way through the gaping crowds which had come from God knows where, getting a sympathetic word and grip here and there from familiar friends.

And presently I came to the North House gate, Oh Cornelia!

It all looked so piteous in the clear sunlight, the shell of the dear home; the inextricable mass of plaster and bricks and broken wood work and all the belongings of a house. The crowds, there seemed to be millions of them, everywhere fell back to let me go in. Himself met me, smiling bravely, but a little grim about the eyes.

"We are going to breakfast at the Odell's," he said, "and after that you and Effie go off to Scotland; it is all arranged."

It was no use protesting—you know how Himself can look, and what it means when he says a thing has got to be done.

We hung about a little, and I had a sort of resentment because the public were all over the place where my house had been. They were not our own town-folk, but incomers, who had arrived in motors, in horse traps, on bicycles from miles away. The North road was simply black with them. We went off presently in a cab to our kind neighbour's house, where we had a good breakfast and much sympathy, which seemed to put fresh heart into us. When we got back, it was to get ready for our journey to Scotland.

Somebody found my clothes; people I had never seen before seemed to be packing them up in trunks, not ours, which appeared mysteriously from the outside. Kind hands brought us lunch, already prepared, and so we got ready to go away. But before the end I had a hard task. Poor Tubby, the lovely old mother chow, had gone mad, or at least become dangerous through sheer terror. You know how sensitive she was. She had to be shot and nobody could get her out of

the kennel but me. I went and dragged her forth and put the collar around her neck and took her to the place of execution, where the man with the gun was waiting.

How did I do it? God knows, Cornelia. But it was absolutely necessary for the safety of human creatures, and I know she has forgiven me in the happy hunting ground where she has gone. She knew I loved her; but when I heard the report of the gun the iron seemed to enter into my soul. Wang has gone too, and Satan, the impish and delicious Persian cat that became an inmate of this animal-loving house after you left, was found stark by the edge of the immense crater made in the front garden by the bursting shell. It wiped out his favorite laurel bush, under which we suppose he had been sleeping when the terror came.

He was not injured in any way—he died of the same concussion which split the old cedar tree and broke it right in two. Soon after eleven we trundled away to the station en route for London and Scotland, leaving Himself to make shift alone. It was his ordination, and we seemed too dazed to stand up against it. We have been here three days, and already Effie and I are both very restless. I expect in a few more days in spite of Himself we shall be speeding back, for there is much to do there. First and foremost we have to find another roof to cover us.

I will write as soon as I get back, and can co-ordinate my thoughts.

You and George will mourn with us, and I have no doubt George's sentiments on the subject of America entering without further parley will be vivified and strengthened. As I write I see the desolate ruins—the broken and desecrated household gods, the crowds of gaping strangers who regarded it as a spectacle without appearing to sense its tragedy. Other houses in the town were destroyed, but I have presently no knowledge or cognisance of them.

All sorrow and loss must be intensive at the first. This certainly is. It is a poor devilish kind of sport, to rain death upon non-combatants and sail away immune from punishment or reprisal. It makes women dumb and men desperate. I know what is in the mind of Himself. Loathing of the age limit, longing to defy the years and be out with the fighting forces in the field. I shall never keep him after this, Cornelia. He will slip through another door.

Is there a light? Yes, I remember kind faces I never saw before looking eloquently into mine, the clasp of strange but friendly hands, the offer of a score of homes. The gleam of brotherhood and sisterhood lightens the dark places of

the earth, and defies organised and perfected cruelty to do its worst.

III

It is three weeks since I wrote my last letter—two weeks and three days since I came back—no, not home, only back. We have no home any more—as we used to have it, though we have found a roof to cover us.

I got your cablegram yesterday—it was dear of you to send it, but my spirit quailed at what it must have cost you to send such a lengthy despatch. Of course we knew how George and you would feel about it, and there was a curious softness in Himself's eyes when I showed it to him; we even discussed whether we should launch out into a similar extravagance. We decided, however, that no adequate presentment of what we were doing could be offered in any cablegram, and that we must ask you to wait for another letter. Himself even said, he would write it, but you know how he lives, and what stacks of unanswered ones lie in his pigeon-holes. I heard him say in an exasperated moment, that his private and particular hell would be a place where there were unending streams of letters of no importance, which he would be compelled to answer by return of post. It was he who suggested the one word, "reconstructing," and we both hope you grasped its full significance. It is a big word, and it means a lot. Before there can be reconstruction, there has to be destruction, and the *Hun* has done it very thoroughly for us.

I had better go back, I think, to where I left off. I told you, I remember, that after three days both Effie and I grew restless, and on the sixth we wired Himself that we were coming back and that he must find a place for us. We knew that he was still sleeping on a shake-down in the corner of the drawing room where the free winds of Heaven blew in upon him—and the rain when it chanced that way.

You know how he loved everything in the house, how much of it was his individual choice, only the grouping left to me. And he was hanging on desperately to the remnant of his treasure house—though forbidden by official orders to touch anything until the representative from the Government Air Raid Insurance should come to inspect the premises, and the damage.

When we arrived we found it arranged for us to stay at the Wrights' house. You remember how you liked them, free, jolly, unconventional people, who understand hospitality in the big sense, which makes you feel at home in their

house. I can never forget what they have done for us at this time; and they were only two out of many. Effie remained only long enough to collect her kit and go back to her beloved Camiers—of course the house couldn't mean as much to her; and for the time being she is detached from us and her usual surroundings. She went off gaily and gladly, not aware I am sure of the heartache she left behind. She will be the heroine of a great adventure when she gets back to her comrades. But I am sure she will never tell how fearlessly she carried herself through it.

To us—that is to me, principally, is left the work of reconstruction.

We have got the loan of a house from a kind neighbour who volunteered to find his family other quarters. They all felt that Himself must have quarters as near as possible to the old place, so that his patients could easily find him, and his professional work be carried on.

You will remember the house, a wide red brick many-windowed structure, standing sheer on the street just opposite St. Andrew's Church. You will particularly remember it because you asked me what style of architecture its porch was supposed to represent. I replied that I had been told it was Chinese Chippendale.

You said, "Whatever is that, anyway?" And we both laughed. Behold us then, installed in the house of the Chinese Chippendale porch. It's just round the corner from the North House, less than two minutes' walk. It is very strange and rather awful, I find, to live with other people's things. They don't belong to you. There is no intimate touch, and you don't in the least want to arrange them or show them to the best advantage.

There are more chairs in this house than in any house I have ever seen or heard tell of—the sort you don't want to sit on.

It is too full of everything for comfort, but the beds are beautiful, and it is such a relief to have a shelter, that we never can be grateful enough.

Cornelia, I wonder if you will understand that I was two whole days here, nearly three, indeed, before I dared to go round the corner. I simply couldn't; but at last, quite early one morning before many people were about, and Himself was safely out of the way, I stole round. There was a policeman at the gate, for there were heaps of things that could easily be removed by predatory hands. Wooden barricades had been erected everywhere, and what windows were left were boarded over. The man touched his hat to me, but did not open his mouth. He was an understanding creature, who saw how it was with me.

Before I went inside I took a bird's-eye view of what had happened outside. There was a great gap in the wall of the kitchen garden which flanked the street, a gap big enough to let a horse and cart through. In this street just by the kerb you could see where the crater made by a shell explosion had been filled up. I forget whether I mentioned in my first letter how that particular shell had broken the water main, causing a small deluge to add to the general horror of that night

of desolation. I went into the garden through the gap, and round about, to the river's brim, thankful to find little damage, except much trampling of the lawns. The gardeners, I think, had gone to their breakfast—at least, I did not see either of them. All the time I kept my eyes averted from the house; but when I came behind the cedar tree, half of which was torn away, showing a hideous scar all over its beautiful body, I could not help seeing. I gripped myself tight, and ran, just ran up the sloping lawn across the terrace, and right in. I don't know how I can describe it. I feel as if I must not even try. Nothing had been touched. It was sealed, so to speak, by Government orders. A few things had been covered up to prevent the rain damaging them. It was just awful, indescribable, heartrending. The dining room was pitch dark, but a candle standing on the seat of a broken chair with matches beside it invited me to inspection. I can't describe what I saw, and there seemed to be a faint odour of sulphur and brimstone redolent of the bottomless pit. The drawing room had suffered least, though part of the ceiling had fallen on the piano, marring its beautiful top. The shake-down on which Himself had slept all the time we were away, stood in what looked like the safest corner. He had set up a screen to keep the night winds off his dear head. I just sat down there and after a minute tears came. They were the first I had shed and they were blessed. They relieved the tightness of my heart, the band across my brain. Afterwards I was able to climb in and about, taking stock and inventory of what had happened. I thought that with luck a few sticks might be retrieved, and mended up, but knew that all my cupboards must be bare of the glass and china which every housewife holds most dear. You remember the cupboard in the dining room with its priceless store of Waterford and old English glass? There is not so much as a salt cellar left.

A cup here and there, with the handle off, or a gash in its side is all that is left of my Crown Derby, my old Worcester, my Lowestoft. It is all very awful. But these are only things. They don't at this moment matter. What does matter is that the monster of war has laid its foul desecrating hand on the sanctuary of my home.

In a flash of lightning, the suffering of France, of Belgium and all the invaded countries stood revealed. I understand, and I know why our sweet dignified old Belgian refugee guest, Madame Savarin, spat upon the remnants of the bomb I showed her yesterday.

IV

Himself got George's second cable this morning. When I read it the words of the old hymn flashed back, "Death like a narrow sea divides that happy land from ours."

I wonder if you just quite know how safe and free and happy you are on the other side of the Atlantic. I see you knit your brows, and hear George's language, occasionally,—I regret to say, not quite fit to grace any very genteel chronicle. I hope this is going to be a little more than that anyway. I will take back the last adjective, and beg you to thank God that you are safe and free for a little while longer. Happy I know you and your kind will never be until you are standing shoulder to shoulder with us in this awful but glorious fight. I don't know how George's cable ever got through, really, on your side or ours. Conceive what would have happened had he presented it at any telegraph office in Germany. His head would have paid the forfeit. I am going to set it down here just to see how it looks in real writing with the cold official script.

There, what do you think of it? I only hope you are properly proud of George.

All the Georges are nice. There is something comforting about them. Shall I ever forget the other George, whom you too liked, who flew to us when the Heavens darkened in 1910. He was here again at this time, the moment he could be of any use. When we are in trouble, his own affairs, however urgent, have to stand by. It is wonderful to have friends like that. They are a shield and buckler in the day of trouble.

Well, I laughed out loud when I read George's cablegram and it did me so much good that I wish he would think up a new one every day, each one more violent than the other. It would never exceed or even fit the crime. Perhaps you wonder how I can joke and play about with words in the midst of what is happening. I have to, Cornelia. Don't you understand? If I didn't I should never be able to carry on? And when I sit down in obedience to George's express command by cable to tell you every single solitary thing—though how he ever expects it to be allowed out of the country I don't know, my spirit positively quails.

It is very awful, my dear—much more awful than it seemed at first. I am now spending all my days in the ruins, mostly quite alone, trying to retrieve what remains of our household gods. I am allowed to do this since the day the Government Insurance Inspector came, and, having inspected, pronounced and assessed the damage, unsealed the debris, and went away—I don't doubt, quite satisfied with himself. I suppose there is some kind of a system for the appointment of such officials, perhaps the less they know about their job the better. This one had no sort of conception of values. I tried to explain some of them, but soon gave out, and let him carry on. Let me try to give you some idea of the tragic

comedy. He was elderly, quiet and polite, not in the least sympathetic, because I am only one of many similarly placed, and sentiment interferes with business. His job was to minimise our loss. What was mine, I wonder? I'm not sure, but this I do know, that it hurt, hurt desperately, to have to stand by, and hear this well-meaning person make light of what had happened. Once or twice I longed to see Wang come bounding out of the unknown with his lovely face distorted, his bristles standing up and his growls like distant thunder in the air, but alas, I have to go through this thing quite alone. Himself couldn't do it—even if he weren't too busy. He would just have a stand-up fight with the government representative, and that would be an end of compensation, though no doubt Himself would enjoy the tussle immensely. We didn't know quite where to begin. A table was erected in what is left of the library, and he spread out his inventory sheets and we started in. I had made an inventory too, and the contents of the dining room came under discussion first. He had a copy of this which had been previously submitted to him through our lawyer. His business was now to assess the amount they would pay. He put down the entire contents of the glass cupboard at ten pounds. Fifty dollars of your money. I gently but firmly pointed out that there were single pieces in it that had cost that. He shook his head, and explained that in that case each piece should have been insured separately, as in the case of articles of jewellery. That was the platform from which he never departed, and I quickly realised that our cause was lost. Six dollars he allowed for that priceless old Chamberlain Worcester tea service over which you raved so often, warning me that it should not be used every day. But you know we have never kept anything just for ornament; or lived in a house as a mere show place. The other George, of whom I've just been speaking, once told me I could make a home out of a cave, supposing I had only a handful of twigs to start with. Well, that is how we have lived. The Insurance gentleman was more reasonable about large solid articles of furniture, with which he seemed to be quite familiar. I don't suppose he observed at what an early stage I gave up the ghost and simply allowed him to carry on, and put down what figures he liked. He visibly brightened, however, as the ghastly inspection proceeded, and became more and more friendly every minute, but not any more understanding.

I got even with him over Effie's clothes. You know she wears only uniform in France, with one simple silk or crêpe-de-chine frock for the rare occasions when she goes out to dine, or to some informal hospital dance. So all her clothes were down in the wardrobe room, and they had been pulled out of the debris, and laid, a melancholy array, on the only bed left standing, which happened to be her own. You can imagine what last year's frocks look like, especially when they have been a good deal worn, and finally come through an air raid. A torn and crumpled mass of satin and lace and chiffon, stained with lime and water.

The sight seemed to affect the official mind profoundly; though my shattered treasures had left him cold. He asked their values, touching them rather pitifully; perhaps he visualised the radiant youth they had once enfolded, and I may have been misjudging him all along.

He then asked bluntly what they had cost. I replied vaguely about ten pounds each. He put down fifty pounds without a murmur, and hurried out of the room as if he had had enough.

It took the whole long, long day, Cornelia, and when he went out for his lunch I sat among the ruins, and ate the dry sandwich Florence had put up for me. I fear I watered it with my tears. I never knew there could be so many tears in the world. I had none to shed when the Boy went away; but somehow this has unsealed the fount. It is a different kind of grief; it tears you a thousand ways; sometimes you are shaken with an impotent rage. Of course it means that it will be more evanescent.

The heart can only stand a certain number of vital, staggering blows. After the assessing business was over I was free, so to speak, of what remained of my own possessions, and I have been going round every day immediately after breakfast and stopping until dusk drove me away. Lots of people wanted to help. I didn't want them—I had to be alone with my ghosts. Florence would come round now and again when her work was done, or between whiles, and then we just stood together thinking unutterable things. She is not quite a servant, as you know, but a dear faithful, understanding friend who lives in the heart of us, and loves us every one. But mostly I was alone, my job to gather up the fragments—the little things, and try to gauge and co-ordinate the whole before the removal men came to take everything away. I found quite a lot of things and carried them one by one to one of the pantries where a shelf remained intact. My greatest find, in a place with which they had no connection whatever, was four cut crystal baskets belonging to the old Sheffield plate epergne, we used as a centrepiece in the days when table decoration was of the heavy ornate type.

How pleased I was to get them, you can't think! I held them tight quite a long time, gave them a little polish with the corner of my apron, and then took them to the pantry shelf aforesaid, where I regarded them with a species of adoration as the nucleus of some future glass cupboard collection, when war has ceased to be.

But I think it is ordained that for me there shall be no new glass cupboard. When I got back next day, two of them had gone. I pinched myself, wondering whether, like some of the college boys after a night out, I had been seeing double.

Then my friend, the big policeman, told me he had turned out some well-dressed people wandering through the ruins after I had left. It was no common thief who took these little things. There were articles of more value beside them.

No, it was some horrible woman who coveted a souvenir from the Zeppelined house, and took what she fancied most. I rather wish she had taken the four, then I might have amused myself by dreaming that they had been found.

It was a mean cold-blooded unsisterly kind of theft. It almost deserves to have the adjective Hunnish attached as a label.

Every day this sad task of mine has been going on, for more than a week, and now, tomorrow, this being Sunday, the workmen are coming in and the removal men, and the few sticks, at least such as are worth removing, will be taken away to a furniture hospital for repair.

Your housewifely soul, already rent, I am sure, by this recital of my woes will be still further exercised by a brief description of what happened to my store cupboard. It was very full this autumn, owing to the garden abundance aforesaid, and our conspicuous industry and success in bottling, preserving and pickling,—the shelves simply groaned with good things, and now it is all one inextricable sticky mass of jam, and fruit, and broken glass, and lathe and plaster. You could not imagine anything more disgusting. It is part of the needless waste of war—a little bit, however, that just comes right home.

Just one more straw, surely the last. Friend Government Assessor valued the stock of my store cupboard at ten shillings, two dollars and a half. And I just let him, because it was so funny, and there didn't seem to be any use telling him any more about anything.

When I write again I expect it will be all over and the lid shut down on the place that was once a home.

I sat a little while to-day on the mossy wall beside the lily pond, one of your numerous garden thrones.

Do you remember the day they cleaned it out, and your excitement over the queer little black fresh water cray fish the men took out with their hands and laid on the grass while they swept and scoured the concrete bottom of the pond? They crawled about so painfully, poor things, and if they thought at all, I suppose they must have imagined it the end of the world. Then how pleased you were, and they too, I expect, when they were put back, and the lovely clean water from the upper river ran in on them. It is very clear to-day, and there is a crooning sound in the voice of the waterfall—it sounds almost like a dirge. Summer is quite gone, and the yellowing leaves are drifting down everywhere. Some of them have camouflaged the horrid burned places the incendiary bombs made in the grass. A few late roses hang about rather wistfully, but there doesn't seem to be any hope anywhere. We don't quite know what is going to happen, whether this house is going to be rebuilt, and we come back to it.

There are immense legal and technical difficulties in a situation for which no precedent or legislation exists. We do not own, but only lease the property,

and at the moment don't know where our responsibility begins or ends.

Himself is wrestling with the problem, and the little lines are gathering about his eyes and mouth.

He does not say very much at all, and he won't go near the North House any more. I know he can't bear it.

You and I have often talked of how dear they are, and how they never, never grow up, but are just boys all their days.

They can do the fighting, but they can't do the enduring. That is our bit.

I am trying to do mine, all I know how, but I am hard hit this time, Cornelia. I am on my knees.

V

Such a lot has happened since I wrote last. I am beginning to regard these letters as a real and faithful record of this strange phase of our life. I know how faithfully you will keep them as I do yours. They may come in handy one day to the person who may gather up the fragments of my achievement—when *Finis* has been written across the last page.

You see, Cornelia, here we have to keep rather quiet and lift a gallant head—*Noblesse oblige* has to be the watchword. This for two reasons, that so many people require bolstering, who if they detected any weakening in this direction would feel that the front line had broken.

Then it is necessary for our inward life. You know how much I have been through, and unless I had held my head high right along why then, it would just have meant the end of all things. But oh, how we can be misunderstood!

In the dark days of 1910 I met a woman in the street about three months after the Boy had passed, and after we had exchanged greetings she remarked with a charming smile, "How nice that you have got over it so easily." My smile was a little sickly as I replied steadily, "Yes, isn't it very nice?"

I did not see anything very clearly for quite a while after I had passed on.

Just for a moment, I wondered whether it had been all wrong to bury that irreparable loss so deep that nobody suspected its existence, as a loss. I had been rather proud because I had been able to "carry on," but these careless words suddenly awoke in me a passion of remorse lest I had been disloyal to his precious memory. Then I just laughed weakly as I wiped my nose and eyes. Am I not his

mother, and do mothers ever forget or prove disloyal? Another of "that sort of person" said to me on the morning of the raid as I was hurrying to the bank to get some money, "So sorry; you *have* had bad luck, haven't you, since you came here?" Have we, I wonder? And what is luck anyway? You and I both know there is no such thing.

There have been developments since I wrote you, chiefly regarding our tenancy of the North House. It happens that under the terms of our English lease we are responsible for this damage, and will have to rebuild for the proprietor at our own expense. Preposterous, you exclaim! So do we, and Himself has got his mind firmly made up that he will fight it out. Some of our advisers would like us to take it to the law courts and make a test case of it, but our adviser-in-chief—that dear friend and great law lord who made such fun of your Nipigon fishing story at our big dinner party, is strongly against it. He says, "Pay up whatever it costs. The case simply bristles with litigious points and I see it going on indefinitely and finally coming up before me at the House of Lords." Himself is in fighting trim, however, and the decision will rest with him.

Meanwhile we have got to do something about our future, as we can't go on living in this furnished house, which gives me the queer unhappy feeling of not belonging anywhere in particular. The kind neighbour who offered us the shelter had another proposition, that he should vacate altogether and have us take over his lease. We are going to do it, but will have to wait some time before the transaction is completed, because we have no furniture except the broken stuff which is being mended up at the furniture dealer's in the town.

I have to go down almost daily to consult and decide whether this or that article is worth repairing. It usually resolves itself into an argument with the expert. The more he says it can't be done, the more I want it done. Of course, it is our dearest treasures that have received the deadliest damage. Meanwhile, my dear, all these matters merely fade into insignificance beside the one great tremendous yet glorious fact. Himself is going to the war.

You know how hard and often he has hammered on the War Office doors, and how his age was hurled at him, and he was bidden go and carry on the good work he was doing in his own town. Well, he has got a commission at last through the intervention of an old college friend who occupies the exalted position of A.D.M.S. to a part of the Northern Army. That means that he is the Director of Medical Service. Himself will be attached to the Black Watch and report himself first to the Headquarters in Perthshire.

Is he pleased about it? He does not say much, but he has been far more restless since the raid. Am I pleased? Cornelia, honestly I don't know. Every woman wants her man to be in this tremendous fight, but I think I am a little afraid.

Our household is sadly reduced. Two have gone to munitions from indoor service, and the gardeners have been called up. We don't need them mercifully, as we have no garden now; only a backyard. Life is being gradually shorn of some of its more dignified material attributes. No doubt they are the things that don't matter, but some of them we loved, and parting from them hurts.

This morning I read a wonderful verse in Hebrews. Every bit of the Bible takes on new meanings these days. I can't recall the chapter at this moment. I daresay, you will remember it at once. "Yet once more, signifieth the removal of these things that are shaken—as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." What do these words mean quite? Have I been clinging too frankly to the things that are made, and must they all go one by one, so that I may realise and grip the things that cannot be shaken?

Perhaps that is the war in a nut-shell. It is a poignant, almost a terrifying thought.

He went this morning, Cornelia, New Year's morning, "in a blast of Januar wind that blew hansel in on Robin." He looked so dear and splendid in his perfect-fitting uniform (you know he never leaves anything of that kind to chance and would go without food any day if the fit of his clothes depended on it). I was worshipping all the time and Cook, our faithful chauffeur, left the car at the door to come and see whether he could help with the leggings which were rather stiff and new—and just to take a general view. He was the picture of desolation and woe. Old servants don't like those cataclysms. They have no reserve weapons to deal with them. They are conservative to the innermost fibre of their being.

At last they drove away to catch the north-going train at the junction.

I have often envied other women when I heard them speak with conscious pride of their men at the front—but oh, Cornelia, when the door was shut and the toot of the horn echoed faintly in my ears, I forgot to be proud—and was nothing at all but a lone woman, left desolate in the house of her dreams.

VI

Reconstruction is now my job. Everything that could be removed from the wreckage at the North House has been removed and the ruins left to the owls

and the bats. The retrieval was conducted during days of pitiless rain which accentuated the desolation. But it is all accomplished now, and I don't go around there any more.

We had twenty tons of coal buried in the debris of the old stabling, where it was housed, and the police came to tell me it would have to be removed, if I wanted to get the benefit of any, as a steady pilfering was going on. It was a tremendous job but with coal at its present price an effort had to be made to get it out. It has just been put down in the cellar of this house and the transfer cost four pounds.

In the absence of Himself, I have concluded the arrangements for an actual possession of this house, which we have taken for a term of three years. No more leaseholds for me in this country, and though a casually rented house gives one an odd feeling of insecurity—anything may happen in three years. There will have to be a little papering and painting done, just to make it clean and wholesome, and then I will bring back my poor sticks from the repairing shops, and group them in this strange new setting. It is really quite a nice house, with some points the other lacked. A great advantage when one has a depleted staff is a kitchen on the ground floor. It is a thoroughly bad kitchen, dark and gloomy, and the hot water arrangements, and facilities for cooking are positively the worst I, an experienced housewife, have ever encountered. If I had not two specimens of the salt of the earth in these regions beyond, the situation would be impossible. They are quite selfless, as far as their own comfort and accommodations are concerned. They think only of us. Such personal devotion takes the edge off many sorrows.

Already I have a scheme which perhaps in the far future will convert this house into a real home. How ineradicable is the instinct to reconstruct in the human breast! That it cannot be killed has been incontestably proved by the persistence with which our poor French and Belgian confrères creep back to their ravaged fatherland and begin again.

Himself builded better than he knew when he began to talk of reconstructing the moment the shock was over. He is always distressingly right in the fundamentals, and our small internal wars have invariably been caused by my refusal to admit it. But life is not all fundamental, Cornelia, it needs camouflage, needs it desperately. All women know it.

There are gleams of glory. The finest is the love of the people for my lover. A poor woman rushed up to me to-day to ask the latest news of him. From her I learned that they call him "The Friend of the Poor." If I were to die to-morrow, Cornelia, I could ask no sweeter epitaph.

I have decided that the house is not bad at all, and I am beginning to sit up

and take a little notice. Only I must not look out of the back windows.

You remember the enchanting vistas spread before the green bedroom, and the study window around the corner. There was no fret of the spirit that could not be healed and comforted, always there was beauty to lift you up, and a message, no matter how bleak the prospect elsewhere. It was that dear intimate kind of a garden where there was something for every mood.

Doctor Horton once came to dine and sleep when speaking at a meeting here, and at six next morning he was out roaming about, to the disquiet of the staff. He had visions of a hermit's study cell in the ruined tower by the waterfall, and wondered why I did not establish a writing room out of doors.

I explained that my writing was a stern business which would admit of no distractions. I have found that even a very comfortable study is a bad place for the cultivation of thought. A wooden bench and bare walls, or the "fender end" of my childhood and a block on my knee produced the best results.

But to return to the only thing that matters at the moment. I am reduced to a cabbage patch. Even that is a misnomer, for there is not even a "Kailyaird runt" i.e. remnant, on that little ugly bit of mother earth.

It is a slice of No Man's Land that has never grown anything but weeds. It is relieved by a background of trees, our own chestnuts, Cornelia, whose glory of pink-and-white cones we used to watch till they were mirrored in all their majesty in the clean depths of the backwater above the fall.

When I want positively to revel in heartbreak, to be homesick and unashamedly miserable (which I fear I am most of the time, since Himself retired from the scene), I go to the uttermost edge of my No Man's Land, where I can hear the rush and tumble of the waterfall, though I cannot see its foaming tears.

To descend to mundane things, let me explain that this house belonged to a master-builder who once upon a time had his workshop and all the paraphernalia of his business in the backyard. After a while he secured more ambitious premises, and carried away all the plant, leaving us the legacy of a concrete floor in the very middle of the patch.

So before we can obey the Food Administrator's order to plant potatoes, the concrete will have to be broken up and removed by the hand of George Cook.

His face was a study when I explained that as the young doctor preferred to drive the car himself, his, George's, job would be to make the desert blossom like the rose. He looked at me, and then at it, queerly, with his one active eye; pulled his forelock with rather a grim smile, and went forth for a pick. Inside of an hour he had started on that task and now the thud of the pick is the music to which I waken of a morning. Sometimes consulting together (I am beginning to be interested, though I try not to be), we doubt very much whether the concrete

plus the ineradicable root of an obnoxious weed called horseradish, will ever be gotten out in time for a spring crop. But Cook is very dogged; and the joy of the creator is beginning to lay hold on him. I find it is a better day's work when I potter round the patch, sympathising and anathematising turn about. Anyhow, the work of reconstruction, as ordained by Himself, is going forward cheerfully. The workmen are in possession of most of the rooms, and I am just about as uncomfortable and as busy as the most active housewife could desire to be.

My war-work has had to call a halt till I get through with this business of home making; that being the duty that lies nearest. You think I'm not saying so much as usual about Himself? I can't, because, oh, Cornelia, he seems to have passed out of my life! I get his dear letters, but they are all about people I have never seen and don't want to see, because they are there with him, seeing him every day, and I am not. He is loving the life—you know how he would—and the boys with whom he lives in the mess, himself the biggest boy of all.

In every letter I can sense the buoyancy of spirit that comes with the laying down of responsibility. Here he had so much, and now he is only a nut in the great machine of war, and so long as he does his duty and obeys orders he can have an easy and comfortable mind.

He is stationed at the moment up in what is the frozen north, but they are the hills of home, and he is assuredly content. He is not even homesick, though always asking when I am coming. I am waiting for Effie's next leave, when we will go up together. Meanwhile I must hold the fort here, or all the wrong wall papers will go up, and there might even be structural undoing if the workmen were left to their own sweet wills. But it is an empty life, Cornelia, out of which the soul has gone. Even the picture in uniform, on my desk, the man of the house at war, fails to afford the uplift or the comfort once imagined. I must get through with this reconstruction job as it affects material things, and start the reconstruction of my own inner life. I, too, must go to the war.

VII

I had your dear letter yesterday and have every word of it by heart, even George's postscript. I always knew him to be an understanding creature, but his knowledge of human beings, more especially the heart of woman, is a wee bit uncanny.

Is he your product, Cornelia, or is he just the American husband at his best?

It is long since you told me (it was on that wonderful testing first visit which we essayed fearfully—not sure whether it would grapple us to one another with hooks of steel or merely end in a polite parting with regrets on either side) that English husbands are not properly brought up. You imagined, or really perceived, in them a lordly air of superiority—and even said that some of our households bear the impress of the feudal age in which our race was cradled.

I remember wanting to say that the criticism did not, and could not, apply to Scotch husbands. But perhaps wisely I held my peace.

We left it, what is called in Scotland "a moot point"—and a moot point, I guess, it must remain. Anyway, wherever George got his knowledge, whether natural or acquired, he has gripped the essence of this thing when he calls separation the supreme test of the bond. I am going to write to him when I am through with this, and you are not to see that letter, nor yet ask to see it—I need him—I want the man's point of view.

What is this all about anyway? I think I hear you say with the uplift of the brows which is your very own.

You, in America, with your semi-detached ideas of marriage, which enable you to bear six months' or a year's separation without any sinking of heart, or vague questionings, must naturally find it difficult to realise our point of view. With us marriage is "for keeps," as you say, and when upheaval comes, it seems always to spell disaster.

Perhaps our theory is all wrong, and an unwarrantable interference with the freedom of the individual. But I can't be happy thinking of Himself with a whole lot of new interests I can't share, making shoals of friends, which is as easy to him as breathing the air, friends whom probably I shall never see. He can guess pretty well what I am about, but I can't visualise him. Just think of the hundreds of wives, and of other women who are feeling like this, and who are at war with the war, that has brought it about.

There is another side to the picture, the side that proves the part truth of your assertion that we don't bring up our husbands properly. Let me present a little cameo of the times in which we live. I was at a war tea at a women's club in London the other day, and there met an old acquaintance I had not seen for some time. She was quite middle-aged—and had been rather dowdy, not paying much attention to her clothes. Before I spoke to her, I was arrested by a subtle change in her outward appearance. She had a smart suit on, and wore a distinctly youthful hat with a rakish air.

The thing interested me, and I had to find out its meaning.

When we exchanged greetings she informed me that her husband, retired, had gone back to professional work, which meant that he could not live at home, but at a military Headquarters.

I sympathised and asked how she got through the lonely days which I was feeling so desperately. She looked at me queerly through her shrewd candid grey eyes.

"Oh, I'm not lonely," she assured me. "In fact, *entre nous*, I'm having the time of my life."

"Tell me about it," I asked breathlessly, and she told—

"Well, I go out and in as I like, do all the things I have always wanted to do, but could not. Nobody now asks me where I've been or what I've spent. In fact, I don't really think I have any more use for Dan."

There, Cornelia—it will make you smile, perhaps, but there is a tragedy behind it. Poor old Dan! comfortable, complacent, no doubt inflated by a new sense of his own importance because his country still needs him, to what strange and hostile atmosphere will he return! I can imagine him rubbing his eyes and wiping his *pince nez* and saying, "Tut, tut, this will never do!"

But he won't be able to put back the clock. He'll have to march to the new marching tune.

I foresee ructions in the household of Dan.

Meanwhile, she is having the time of her life!

It makes no appeal to me, because I have always been able to have the time of my life, as she understands it. I have gone in and out without let or hindrance, none daring to make me afraid. And now, I am just a lonely creature like a bit of drift on the shore.

There is another side to which George calls the supreme test—a horrible sordid side. Hear it now. When I went to France first in 1915, to talk to the boys, I was asked whether I would go to a small forage camp in a God-forsaken place away up near Abbeville, beyond the British Headquarters. It was a kind of No Man's Land which nobody ever visited. Lectures and concert parties passed it by. I said, "Of course I'll go, it is what I've come out for."

So Effie and I got up at four o'clock in the morning to catch the only available civilian train leaving Rouen for "up the line." The distance could not be far, according to the map, but it took us till three o'clock in the afternoon to get there. We were shunted into sidings to let troop trains and ammunition trains and hospital trains go by, and there were no passengers in ours except French officers and other people connected with the war.

No women, but we two. I was so thankful to have Effie. Her gay inconsequence, her complete disregard of everything but the great adventure, helped us over every stony bit of the ground. Gendarmes, sentries with fixed bayonets, grumpy passport and permit officials—she captured them all. Youth is quite in-

vincible, and when its smile is sweet like hers obstacles melt like mist before the rising sun. If I had even attempted that wonderful journey through the war zone without her I should either have been shot as a spy, or interned for the duration. It is short shrift for the middle-aged and the ordinary beings who can't explain their business in the area where death and destiny walk side by side. Well, in course of time, through several minor adventures, we reached our destination.

A sturdy little divinity student from Aberdeen was holding the fort there for the Y.M.C.A. and holding it well. When he went first to give them a bit of humanizing Christian comradeship, he had to sleep with a revolver under his pillow, fully aware that any night he might get his throat cut. These men were not soldiers, though they wore khaki, but rough east-enders, dock laborers, most of them, with lawless anarchic blood in their veins. They had spent the major part of their lives rebelling against law and order. They were the husbands of some of the women whose faces broke your heart when I took you to my big mothers' meeting "down east" two years ago. The fortunes of war had cut them off from the grime and glory of the Barking Road, and those in authority found them a tough proposition in that sweet valley in the pleasant land of France.

We pottered about the camp till nightfall, when the men gathered into the tent to hear the woman who had brought them a message from home.

I knew when I stood up in front of them and saw their faces, looking grim and unrelenting through the haze of tobacco smoke and the reek of the oil lamp, that I was up against something, and would need not only all my art, but the grace of God to help me through.

But I got them after a bit, got them in the hollow of my hand—playing on their hearts with memories of home, though all the time I knew the kind of homes they had left, and how hard most of them had made it there for the women they had vowed to love, honour and cherish.

When the talk was over they crowded round and one particularly unattractive person with a scowling eye inquired whether he could have a word with me privately. We managed it later on in a remote corner, hard by one of the evil-smelling lamps.

"'Ere, missus," he began. "Do yer 'appen to know the Barkin' Road?"

I eagerly asserted my complete familiarity with the Barking Road, the Kings' Highway to Dockland! I was even ready to proclaim it the finest thoroughfare in the world.

"See here, then, Lidy, thet was good talk, but it don't go far enough. Maybe I weren't all I should a bin w'en I was back there, but my missus she ain't played the game, she's played it low down on me since I've been in this 'ere war. I ain't had no letters from 'er for over four months, and I carnt 'ear nuthink about the four kids nah, but a bloke wot lives dahn our street sends me word that she's sold

up the whole bloomin' shoot and nobody knows where she is, and the kids is in the Union. An' I can't git out of this blarsted 'ole to see to the kids and give 'er wot for. Wot are ye goin' to do about it, Lidy?" That was what people call a tough proposition, Cornelia, the whole tragedy of one-half of the war in a nutshell.

I did what I could. I tried to comfort him and took down all the particulars in the note book already bulging with behests, which it will probably take me the rest of my natural life to fulfil.

When I got back to England I made the inquiries, put the Salvation Army angel on the track, and found it all just as he described. His missus has never been found—she has gone down in the underworld, urged there by the very same temptations which made Dan's wife say she had no more use for Dan. Tasting independence of action and of purse for the first time, she lost her sense of proportion. With the well-to-do, it is the sweets of independence that is testing them—with the other sort, the lure of the separation allowances, which means more money in hand than they had ever dreamed of before in their poor, narrow, sordid lives.

There's something all wrong with life, Cornelia. It will have to be straightened out and evened up, and the poor and the oppressed will have to taste a little of the glory and the beauty and the dignity of life.

Perhaps that is what the war is for.

Meanwhile the poor bond!

It will have to be recast in the new world we are coming to.

How many of us will stand the test?

Himself has been back on his first leave. It is Sunday night, he has just gone, and the door is shut again; leaving me inside while he is speeding away back to the unknown. It has been a lovely heartbreaking time. But he is detached, Cornelia, he doesn't belong any more. I had made superhuman efforts to get the whole house in order, sitting up late at night to cover cushions and put in all the fixings that make the real home. He was very polite, looking industriously at everything, and all the time his eyes were not seeing my poor little attempts at home-making—but something else far away. All he said was, "It's very nice, but I have all I want in a tent," He didn't mean to be cruel; he was only gripped by his new life, saw the mess table with his comrades round about him—the route march—the sham attack, all the pomp and preparation for the real war they are going out to presently. The things no woman can share; or can be asked to share!

It is the man's life, the big grey splendid thing which we are outside of, not once in a while, but forever and ever.

He has changed, Cornelia—not to me, but he has gotten the vision of the

fierce arena where men are fighting and dying that Liberty may live; has not only gotten the vision, but has become part of it.

And I am only the woman left by the fireside. I don't see the glory of the war as I used. The envy I felt towards the women who spoke proudly of their men at the front has died utterly. I don't want him at the front. I want him *here* desperately, every minute of the time. He doesn't feel like that. He can do without me.

You said somewhere that since George heard that Himself has gone, he is, like Carlyle, "gey ill to live with," cursing the waiting policy of the President, the everlasting framing of notes full of dignified protest about nothing in particular.

He wants to have a hand in the great big game, I know. But if the time should come, soon or late, when your roads and streets shall resound with the beat of armed and arming men, put the lid on George. Never mind how, but just do it.

It is hell!

VIII

I am writing this quite a long way from my base. The Black Watch, to which regiment Himself now belongs, has been sent to the East coast and I am here in a billet with him for a few weeks.

It is the loveliest old city, interwoven with all the ancient history, when Flemings and Danes and all kinds of weird aliens invaded or flocked to these shores. It is beloved by your American tourists; if George and you did not differ from all American tourists whatsoever, you would have been here long ago, and could tell me far more about it than is to be obtained out of the most authenticated guide book. You, however, have always preferred to take your travel in microscopic doses, to make a little bit your intimate and dear possession for all time. I am surprised to find this old Norwich such a noble city, and I should love to show you the ancient landmarks. It is full of treasures, of values which cannot be told, or was, rather, for the powers that be have mysteriously spirited them away, and the priceless stained glass windows have been boarded up—the very most priceless of all has been taken down. The fate of Rheims and Louvain and Ypres has made the city fathers wise. But it is an omen, Cornelia, which keeps me awake o' nights and gives me the jumps when I hear the streets resound with

the tramp of armed men in the silent watches—Himself having been summoned with the rest to "stand to" as they call it, with their faces toward the sea.

The boys have an expression which sums up these frequent forced marches—they call it "getting the wind up." The wind is up here more often than I like it, and when I hear quite sober quiet matrons tell what they will do if the dread moment ever comes when the Hun invades these shores, I have no strength in me. I am not brave at all, Cornelia, something has been left out of my composition. This is the most vulnerable part of our far-flung coast, and there is a great watching army right along. Those whose duty it will be to guide the civilian population in case of emergency have what you call the schedule ready, and nothing will be left to chance. I don't want to be here when it happens, my dear; this nameless lurking fear that never sleeps takes the edge off the joy of being with him. He has no belief at all in the landing of German troops in England. You know he is an incurable optimist about the War. He considers that we are invincible and that victory is only a matter of time. It must be a delightful atmosphere to live and move and have your being in; it helps to keep one young. He can sleep through anything and only grumbles when he has not enough of sleep.

My war experiences are widening. Yesterday we had a bombardment from the sea—not of Norwich, of course—if you remember your geography you will know that it is not possible—but of the coast places, Yarmouth and Lowestoft, less than twenty miles away.

I was awakened about four o'clock in the morning by a dull boom and the sharp rattle of the windows. Having lived so much beside naval guns in our own special Kingdom by the Sea, I knew exactly what it was and shook Himself. "That's naval guns," I said. "There's a fight going on quite close by." "Nonsense," he answered. "You're dreaming—go to sleep." I could not, and rose early to hear from the little maid, who had heard it from the milkman, that the coast places had been bombarded and much damage done. You know how rumours fly and how disasters are multiplied and intensified, as they pass from mouth to mouth. Himself came back from the mess with little news beyond the facts, and I was glad when a friend rang me up to ask if I'd like to go down to the coast with her in her car.

Of course I liked it, and we took some of the bigger children with us—it was Easter week and they were all at home from school, round-eyed, eager, fearless about the war, which to them is nothing but the Great Adventure. We hardly expected to get through the military barrier, but we did, and saw what had been done.

It is the same pitiful tale of destruction which follows in the Zeppelin's track, senseless, horrible war on defenceless folk who have little or nothing to protect them. These delightful east-coast watering places are all ruined, because

everybody who could afford it has "quit" as you say, and the boarding houses and hotels are empty, and will be for the "duration."

It was very typically British to find the front thronged with spectators, women wheeling babies in perambulators, all gazing upon the scene, but not apparently frightened at the wreckage. The story was soon told. Some battle-cruisers suddenly appeared about six miles out and opened fire for twenty minutes or so, and then ran. There was no patrol to attack them, if it was anybody's business to be on the outside there, they were off guard. The only criticism one is inclined to make is that it could not happen in Germany.

This pleasant East Anglian land is lovely beyond compare in the exquisite spring unfolding, but the blight of war seems over all.

They are getting ready great camps nearer the sea, and the troops will be taken out of their winter billets.

Himself is very busy inspecting and reporting, and generally proving as efficient and thorough in military life as he is in civilian.

I begin to understand the lure of the life. There is perpetual movement, excitement, expectation. There is a certain kind of social life, lunches and dinners and other entertainment offered by hospitable people to the incomers, the great Highland host that has invaded their stately precincts. There are lots of little war brides here with their young soldier husbands, and maturer matrons, some of them with considerable families, living in furnished houses trying to make a bit of home for the soldier men, and very interested themselves, though it is all so strange and inconvenient and far from home.

We have delightful rooms in a comfortable house; it is quite a rest for me, and I am getting through with my next book.

When they get into camp I shall have to go back home to the loneliness that is only companioned by fear.

We are kept in inky darkness here on account of the frequent air raids. A month's imprisonment without the option of a fine is the sentence for striking a match in the street. The authorities are lynx-eyed and vigilant, their reward is that this beautiful old city in its historic setting has remained immune through more than a score of attacks from the air. It is protected, too, by the trees, which add so much to its beauty.

It has been an experience, Cornelia, it is all part of the strange upheaval men call war, the outward fringes of it only, yet how deeply, inextricably woven in with the whole woof of life!

Every day one hears of the most extraordinary war marriages, rushed into, too often, after a few days' acquaintance, without a thought given to the awful indissolubility of the bond. For whatever the experience of matrimony may be like, you can never be as you were before. Already there has been much repenting

at leisure, and when the glamour of the khaki is off, the tragedy will deepen and enfold the helpless creatures who cannot free themselves, and have no basis for a future.

There are scandals, too, and tragedies too deep for tears, broken vows, faithless lovers and husbands, all the cursed things born of abnormal situations, and the kind of feverish false atmosphere created by war.

These things cry as loud to Heaven as the blood and sorrow from the battlefields, and make thoughtful people reiterate the prayer, Oh, Lord! how long?

They are what we call "after the war problems." Some of them will never be tackled—there is no machinery known to the human understanding capable of tackling them—many will just have to be buried deep, and no cross left to mark the burying place.

There stands out for me here the joy of comradeship as men understand it, gripping it to their souls with hooks of steel.

We don't have it, Cornelia—we women, I mean—it is something we do not get, nor perhaps understand. It is not that we are too petty, but rather, I think, because we have to keep ourselves more detached and selfless for all that men need and must have from us, if the Family is to be held together.

I have never seen anything more lovely than the tie between Himself and the young officers, these splendid boys, pictures, every one in their Kilts, and all the panoply of war. Old enough to be father to any one of them, he has kept the boy's heart, so that he is not only with them at the mess, but one of them. He is so wise and tender with them, that they come to him in every trouble. It makes me weep, and yet feel so proud, but not in the least surprised. Did I ever tell you about the bundle of letters, docketed, dated and tied up, I found among the Boy's things after he went away? His father's letters—which revealed to me a side of Himself I had never seen.

They ought to be printed, but I suppose other fathers write the same kind of letters to their sons at schools, letters that help the sensitive young souls to grapple with the mysteries of life. It is all part of their nature—the bit that isn't ours—comradeship between man and man! When found between father and son, it is the most beautiful thing in life.

You will be stunned by the news of Kitchener's passing. It created a panic here among the common folk.

I met a woman in the street, with a crushed copy of the evening paper under her arm, wringing her hands and crying out that "all was lost." It shows what a hold he had upon the popular imagination. His has been, and is, a name to conjure with. The product of his vast personal magnetism is on every fighting front, and in every training camp at home. He was a great man—but his work was done—others will reap where he has sown.

The memorial services in the Cathedral here were fitting and fine, massed and muffled bands, a dense crowd of khaki-colored men. Generals and high military personages galore, all the pride and pomp of war. But Kitchener will live in the hearts of the people—his true memorial is to be found in the serried rows of crosses in France and Flanders where so much of the army he called into being lies in consecrated dust that is "forever England."

I am back again in old Hertford to find letters urging my return to France.

It is sweet to hear, not only from Effie, who says it in almost every letter from Camiers, but from those in authority, that the boys are always asking when I am coming back.

The time-limit is the difficulty—everywhere, but more especially in the war zone, the restrictions are growing in intensity, and permits for foreign service to civilians are now almost impossible to obtain. If I agree to stay three months, I can go to-morrow, but how can I leave home for three months, as long as Himself is still on this side of the water, liable to come on leave any day, or even just to say good-bye before he sails?

I can't do it, so I am compromising by agreeing to go for a spell to the home camps.

The Winchester Command has asked me for a month and I'll try to put in a part of it soon. Effie is due on leave immediately, but she is finding conditions changing too at her base. What has happened is that all the butterflies and the undesirables, out merely for a new sensation, have been weeded out and only the solid workers remain.

"The plague of women" that tormented the military authorities during the Boer War and created endless problems in South Africa has been more drastically dealt with in this war.

I wish I could tell you all the things Effie has told me, but there is a certain reticence to be observed, and amid so much that is fine and noble why insist or dwell upon the flaws?

You asked about Florence in your last letter and I gave her your message. Daily I thank God for my faithful servant and friend who cares for me so tenderly, and is so understanding of all the trials of this changed, unnatural life. She is part of the House of Defence—the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. She has three brothers in the war. One who had been frightfully wounded about the head and face came back convalescent the other day and I saw him here. I was afraid to go into the kitchen, knowing what the nature of his wounds had been, but so cleverly, wonderfully, had he been handled by these heaven-born surgeons who repair the waste and wreckage of war that he looked much as of yore, though with some deep scars where part of a new jaw had been grafted on. He was very quiet, as those are who have been long in the midst of unspeakable things, but

when I asked him whether he was willing to go back, he just smiled.

"There is nothing else to be done," he answered. "And there's the regiment and the pals." That is the spirit of Kitchener's Army—the spirit that lives after him, and which will bring the victory. It makes one proud to be alive and to belong to the old flag.

Picture me then, Cornelia, carrying on as bravely and steadily as may be, a little rocky and homesick at times, but yet following, if afar off, in the track the boys have outlined and worn by the tramp of their brave unflinching feet. To be worthy, not only of those who have died to keep us safe and free, but of those who have been maimed and wrecked for us in the summer of their days, and have still to live with their cross upon them—that is the charge laid upon the rest of us, by the God who is watching the conflict from His secret place, biding His hour to strike.

IX

The grip of war is tightening in on our little Island, Cornelia. Soon it will be relentless.

As I was standing this morning with Florence in our sadly diminished and attenuated store cupboard she said in her simple direct way, "Do you notice that every day there is a little less, something else we have to do without?" It was apropos of the plum puddings and the mincemeat, now due to be made, but for which there are no ingredients. A good many households in England and Scotland depended upon our Christmas puddings. I hate to have them go short, but diplomatic relations being what they are with Tino of Greece, we have no cur-rants. It is thus we visualise and realise the intimate discomfort of a world at war. It has all to be cheerfully faced, however, and we talked substitutes for a good half hour, and there will be a pudding of some sort to go forth to the waiting households, though it will be minus the plums.

Since I wrote you last I have been to Scotland.

War has shaken the foundations of our Kingdom by the Sea. It has ceased to be a haven and become in very truth a coast defense. The cliffs bristle with guns, they have crept up from the fort, till the nearest one is over the garden wall not fifty yards away. There it stands with its gleaming nozzle to the sea, the gunners unsleeping night and day by its side.

It has become horrible and menacing. Its old-world intimate charm, which belongs to simple places untouched by conventionality, has surely gone, forever sacrificed, as so much else has been, to the monster that has convulsed the world.

When we could not keep the Boy we laid him here in the place he so loved—and it was a crumb of comfort in our sorrow to feel that if he had been given choice he would himself have chosen to sleep on the windy hill above the shore where in his childhood days he used to paddle with his fat brown legs, and his bucket gripped hard in his podgy little hands.

As I sat there by his white cross on the windy hill and listened to the beat of the surf on the rocks below, I wondered what he was thinking of it all, and I felt glad that his dear dust was sleeping sweetly, his soul safe in the Father's House. I think I must tell you here, my soul's friend, of a strange story I have had sent to me from France, a story which affects me and mine. The Boy had his father's genius for friendship, and clung to his chums with all the ardour of his nature. I lost sight of his chief one when Oxford swallowed him. In a busy life like mine there is not time to do all the things one wants to do. The garden of friendship even has to suffer through the lack of cultivation.

This chum was starting what promised to be a brilliant professional career when the war threw him into the vortex. As a young lieutenant of the Engineers he crossed to France and received his death wounds at La Bassée. I was in France at the time and could so easily have found him in the hospital among the sand dunes near Wimereux, only I did not know. I did not even see his name in the *Times*. You know we don't read the lists so carefully now, most of us are afraid. After a time I got a letter from his mother telling me how he had died. He had lingered three weeks, suffering no pain, fully aware that he could not recover, ready to die as he had lived, without fear, bravely, as brave men only can and do die. His mother was with him to the end. I am not sure whether I envy her. Mine went in a flash without pain or warning, or possible shrinking, straight from one home of love to another. It must wring a mother's heart to watch the candle flickering out so slowly. She wanted to be with him night and day, but he always urged her to leave him at night; both because she never slept and he was better alone. She was very sad until he said one night, "Do go mother, I am never lonely you know, for when you go, Ned comes. He is here all the time—and I want you to know he's waiting for me and I'll be all right over there." All right over there! God, how beautiful it is, and how it comforted me to feel that my son is no more lonely in the Father's House.

Those things are not figments of the imagination, Cornelia—the veil is very thin, and the Lord Christ Himself walks with these dear lads and shows them the way home.

I am glad they are both out of it now—safe forevermore.

My sister, Janet, whom you never met, and who has so long cared for our summer home, is no longer able. She has never really recovered the shock of the Boy's passing—and though she stoutly denies it, the strain of the war had told on her very much. She must have a rest and get away for a while from the guns of the coast defence. So we have let the house. Conceive it, Cornelia, if you can—strangers living and sleeping and possessing our Kingdom by the Sea!

The house the children loved best of all the houses in the world is now in military possession! How truly Florence touched the spring when she said, "Every day there is something to be given up."

If it means helping to win the war, if it can be won no other way than by giving up all we are and have, why then let us in the name of God do it gladly, with high heads and shining eyes in which there are no tears.

It is liberty and love we fight for. If they are slain, what will be left?

My sister has come here to be with me for some months. I am disquieted about her. She looks frail, and she has lost the old buoyancy and wit. Now that she can rest for the first time in her life, the desire to rest has passed. It is all so pathetic and so typical of the stern discipline we call life. We really are in the fighting line from the cradle to the grave. I smiled this morning looking back to when I said it was necessary to take her out of the strain of the Coast Defence. Because she has come into the real war zone here, and last night got a taste of invasion from the air. I must tell you about it because, though we have had many attacks from the air during the last year, this one stands out. We brought one of the raiders down—a mass of flaming wreckage—an awful but a glorious sight.

I have sometimes wished I could have you come here to share one of our Zeppelin nights, to feel the thrill of tense fear which seizes the bravest when the warning sounds, to run with us to shelter, and live the long hours of strain and terror through.

I forget whether I told you that we have very good cellarage in our Chinese Chippendale house and that we accommodate about 20 or 30 less fortunate neighbours while the danger is most imminent. Florence takes special pride in the cellar; she keeps it very clean and snug, spreads old rugs and sets out the garden chairs. Then there is an oil stove and various wraps for the cold nights. It can be very cold in a cellar about 3 A.M. when one's vitality is at its lowest ebb, and fear lurks in every corner.

Some of the women bring their knitting and the mechanical exercise helps to allay nervous distress. A woman I met one morning after a raid said she had been out buying dusters for her Zeppelin guests to hem in their forced seclusion. Of course it is the gregarious instinct which brings them together; danger seems less awful somehow when it is shared.

I don't know whether they notice how short a time I spend under ground—I

never sit down there. I want to be up and out if possible, facing the danger, of which I am yet mortally afraid. I don't fancy death in a cellar and I fear I am like the tommies, a fatalist as regards bullets and bombs.

But I'm digressing shamefully. The warning came about seven, and just before nine, we heard the grating of the engines up aloft. It was so loud we thought there must be two or three, but we could not see anything. They went straight over London, approaching as usual from the North, and just missing us. They dropped a good many bombs, and the air was full of the noise of bursting shells, and the clatter of our anti-aircraft guns. Shrapnel was flying from them, even over our little town, and safety was only to be found indoors.

About midnight the marauders began to retrace their steps, if I may put it so, and came right overhead.

Then we beheld a wonderful and glorious sight. Our intrepid airmen, just like great gadflies winging through the night, were searching the sky for the enemy and presently one got above the stationary Zeppelin and found the range. It looked as if they were directly above the church opposite to us, but the actual conflict took place in the air about 8 miles away.

When he got the range he showed a green light, a signal to the anti-aircraft guns below to cease firing. We could not hear the shot that made an end of the monster, but presently we saw vivid streaks like forked lightning run along the side of the giant airship. The next moment, a mass of white flame, it toppled over and began slowly to descend. The cage became detached first and those who were near enough saw the body of its unfortunate occupant fall from it. It descended in a field behind the doctor's house at Potter's Bar, and such a cheer rent the air, ringing hoarse from a million throats, from London to the sea, that one felt positively thrilled, and forgot the night of fear. Some wept and some sang "God Save the King." The great solid satisfying fact that the death-dealing monster had been utterly destroyed sent us thankful to our beds. These awful happenings have their comic as well as their tragic side, and even with nerves strung to the highest pitch we are able to laugh.

We had the Holbrooks for the week end—the whole four of them. He is a typical John Bull, and he was much annoyed because a very keen game of bridge was interrupted. He resented the interference with his liberty and personal convenience. Nothing on earth would take him to the cellar, he simply planted himself with a very long pipe and a whiskey and soda in the library, where he sat with a suffering air, what we call the "O Lord, how long?" expression on his face. His women folk, thrilled and interested, for though they live in London their area has so far escaped intimate acquaintance with Zeppelins, could not be brought in from the street.

Mrs. Holbrook is just as amusing in her way as her spouse. Born in England

of German parents, she is loyal to the core, and rejoices that she has never even seen Germany. She loathes the war and all it stands for, and she will never give her son until she is obliged to; she is the living personification of the line, "I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier." She can't understand, though she is a dear soul, the thrill and the pride with which we can give and give and give, not money, but our heart's blood till there is nothing left.

It is the waste of war which terrifies her. You see, she has no hope or belief in anything beyond this life. She just shakes her head if you speak to her of the souls that are marching on. "I hope you're right," she says, "but I don't believe it myself, when I am dead there will be an end of me; that's as far as I've got."

How awful to have to live up against such a blank wall—no wonder she clings to the material body of her son with frantic hands that will never let him go.

We got through the night at last, snatched an hour or two's sleep, and in the morning went over to Potter's Bar in the motor to see all that was left of the monster of the air.

The pretty little village swarmed with people "out for to see" just as our town swarmed with them when we got our share of attention from Count Zepelin.

We tramped through indescribable mud to the sweet meadow where the wreckage lay; partly caught in the branches of a giant oak tree—then trailing away across the sward like the tail of some enormous rattlesnake. We did not see the engines—they had been removed in the small hours on a military truck. What we did see was the retrieval of the bodies from the wreckage—poor charred objects—perfectly unrecognisable. Mothers' sons every one, and somewhere in Germany their homes will be desolate because they do not return. I thought of that, but the temper of the crowd was hostile and bitter, and the feeling uppermost was grim satisfaction that they had met a righteous and deserved doom.

More of the dark fruits of war, the tempering and hardening of a naturally kindly people into a thirst for revenge.

God send it may end soon—before we are all so changed that we shall bear no semblance to our former selves.

I seem to have reached the end of my letter just about the time I wrote to you last and the doctor, whom in the absence of Himself, I had to call in, ordered me to go away and take a complete rest—you know the formula—but dear God, how can we rest in a world where there is no rest, and with the thunder of the guns in our ears night and day. It is the Somme fighting now, in which we have lost so many of those we love.

I think I gave up the day I got a telegram telling me Dick had been killed at Trones Wood. You remember Dick, and Isabel, that lovely pair for whom I wrote the little book, "Letters to a War Bride."

I don't quite know how to tell you what he was like—a most gallant gentle Knight without fear and without reproach—yet so full of fun, that somehow laughter sang in the heart wherever he came—the laughter that doeth good like a medicine. The last time I saw him, Isabel had come down from Palace Gate to spend a few days and Dick came marching through with his Fusiliers, en route from Colchester to France. He and his Major dined with us—and I never saw him again—nor ever will see him now, till we meet on the other side.

No doubt we are naturally drawn towards those whom nature has richly endowed. He was as handsome as a dream—tall, dark with flashing tender eyes and a smile that was never far away from his lips. A man of peace if ever there was one, yet he was dedicated to war, in order that peace may be established for all time as "one of those things that cannot be shaken."

They were a beautiful pair; she with her slender, delicate charm, her braids of red gold hair, her pathetic eyes. I have never seen such love. It often made me afraid. And now he sleeps there on the Somme where we have already left ninety thousand like him. Great God, and yet there are those who ask when Britain is going to come into the war and why she doesn't bear her share!

I felt I had to go to her, but she was far away at her father's place in Scotland and I was not able to go. My marching orders were drastic. Himself ordered me to Harrogate, where he said he would come the moment he could get forty-eight hours' leave.

So I got me ready, and Janet went part of the way, branching off at York, for Hull. I arrived at Harrogate like a person in a dream, seeking a cure. A cure from what? Inside my heart were wounds for which there never could be any cure this side the grave. I found I was nearer the breaking point than I knew, for when I got to bed there I found I was not able to get up again. The heart had gone clean out of me. I remember Himself arriving from out of some void at six o'clock in the morning, and his face as he stood over me asking me questions, taking temperatures and doing all the things the Doctor has to do when he is up against his job.

Then there were consultations and telephones and people coming in and

out of the room. Strange men asking questions and looking at me, and at one another, with grave faces. I seemed so out of it all, and when I heard them say outside of the door, "We'd better tell her," something flashed through me with a thrill of unexplicable, inconceivable joy. I had come to the end, the door was ajar, and I should get away clean and forever from the fever and the fret—the holding up when you feel yourself wilting, the carrying on when there is nothing to carry on with.

Tired? There is no word that can begin to describe how tired I was. Then they came in and told me I should have to have an operation immediately—within an hour or two. I just smiled and said, "Very well."

The next thing I was being carried down the hotel stairs on a stretcher to the ambulance, where they laid me down rolled in a blanket—a nurse was at the head and Himself sitting like a grim sentinel at the foot—we never spoke to one another, not a single word. You have never seen him look like that, Cornelia—you have only heard his laugh, and seen his dancing eyes, while he tried to tease you and to imitate what he called the Yankee twang.

As for me my eyes were fixed on the tender blue of the sky—flecked with those wonderful delicious little fleecy clouds like foam flakes on an azure sea, and all the time I wondered whether soon I would be up and away beyond them.

It was to a private hospital they took me and I had to lie in a weird kind of bed there till the hour came. I had no fear or apprehension—I had just given up. Himself and I did not talk. When you have been so long together surely everything has been said. But I saw his face hard and set and sharp in the clear light, and understood that the bond had stood the test.

The operation was successful, but when I awoke and found I was still in the land of the living, I wept with sheer disappointment. I had relaxed my hold, given up, wanted to be free. But apparently there is work still to be done, but where, oh where, am I to find strength to do it?

Convalescence in pleasant surroundings is a kind of lotus land and I have a sympathy I had never felt before for the women who acquire what Himself calls the "nursing Home habit." The utter lack of responsibility, submission to the will of others; complete surrender of one's entity has its private and particular lure for the human soul. To eat and sleep and get well is a simple creed enough, but it is apt to have a corroding effect. Sometimes I had the awful feeling that I should never be able to go back to the real world and begin the fight all over again. I read much and was able to give my full attention to "Mr. Britling Sees It Through."

It impressed me so much that I wrote a long letter to H.G. and had a very characteristic reply. He is taking himself as seriously as ever, and all the world is called to witness the evolution of his soul. I have been watching it for quite a long time. To us who are veterans on the road it seems all a little crude and

pathetic.

Nevertheless it is one of the finest books of the war that has been written. I expect you have already read it—tell me how it strikes you?

Himself, restored to his normal courage and cheerfulness, came and took me home. His commanding officer has been very decent to him through it all, and has not grudged nor forbidden the necessary leave. I was about a week alone before Effie came and she is going to stay this time till I am quite well. We have all sorts of plans. It all ended in our going to Bournemouth to get out of the air raid zone and enjoy the sunshine of the south coast.

The place was very full and though it was quite safe from the air alarms—everywhere we met wounded and broken men, blinded men, and those wearing on their faces the look of those who have seen and known. And it was there at Bournemouth that we got the glad, the glorious news that you had come in. We did not know how badly we had wanted it, how near we were to the breaking point till the message which has transformed the whole world was flashed across the seas.

We were at Boscombe and the Nicolls at the Bath Hotel at Bournemouth. When we met that night I was struck by the expression on Sir William's face even more than by anything he said. He looked like a man from whom the cloud had been lifted and who could once more breathe freely. He knows all there is to know about the war and when I saw the effect the momentous decision had upon him, I seemed to realise how much had depended on it. All he said was "Thank God, America has come in!"

* * * * *

I wanted to send a cable to George and the only thing I could think of was "Hail Columbia!" Effie remarked, "It will be nice and cheap."

This has narrowed the dividing seas and I am seeing you and George and all the other Georges and Cornelias who care, holding a jubilee. Nothing seems to matter now—however long the war lasts, we can see it out. Though the way may be uphill to the very end, we can climb it to the victory peaks—companied by your strength and sympathy and substantial help.

I am so glad about it I can't sleep. Effie has just made a little sketch of Uncle George receiving the news; it is a disrespectful sketch, but I'm putting it in.

All that matters now is that we belong to one another and to posterity

forever and ever.

XI

I got your delightful letter yesterday. It came at the psychological moment when I was right down in the depths. It was a friendly true hand stretched across the dark void.

It has happened, Cornelia; Himself has gone beyond my ken in the troop train and the troop ship, across the seas. It came, as all the marching orders do, without warning or preparation. He was simply told to be ready for embarkation in forty-eight hours—destination Egypt—not France or Flanders, but away to the Orient, from whence come no leave trains. How often have I stood on the platform at Victoria or Charing Cross to bid some comrade good-bye; and been thrilled by the poignant tenseness of the hour, the glory and the humour and the pathos of it. Saying good-bye to a pal, however good he may be, is not the same as saying good-bye to your very own, every hair of whose head is dear. There was no glory nor humour for me that day at Waterloo, though Ronald Robertson of the gallant Gordons did his best to provide both, with his crutches and his merry smile.

I told you how he had lost his leg at Loos; a boy to whom legs meant so much. All he says is that he would give the other one, too, if it would do them any good. How are you to even *think* of your own sorrow in the face of a devotion so invincible, so divine?

We were a little company of close friends to see Himself go off; no woman dare go through that ordeal quite alone. It was an officers' train, some of them so very, very young, and so pathetically proud to be really going at last in all the panoply of war, with the addition of brand new pith helmets which extinguished their features when they put them on, and made them look like overgrown mushrooms.

There was the usual hustle and delay, but at last the signal blew and the snorting engine dragged them away to the tunnel which swallowed the hearts of half the women left behind. It was an awful moment, just black darkness that could be felt. There is something wrong, Cornelia, something terribly wrong with a world in which such things are possible. People can't have been meant to suffer so much, yet somehow I feel that we have not come to the end of the pain

yet. It is Calvary we are coming to, and this is only getting us ready.

Himself said very little. He just looked wrung and asked some one in a very quick, hoarse voice to take care of me.

So he is away out into the void, the biggest void of all, and I am left to fill up and carry on as best I can.

Your dear letter has turned my thoughts into an entirely new direction. George's summing up of your feverish war activities in America as "getting restless in your sleep" is really fine. Tell him with my love that I did not think he could have evolved it from his gay inner consciousness. What I am absolutely sure about, is that there is nothing feverish or casual about *his* war activities. I shall expect to receive a photograph of him in uniform. Age? What is Age? It doesn't count in this war. The uniform took ten years off Himself's age and he will see that they are kept off.

I know a man, one of our County magnates, who has given four sons to the war. Two have been killed, one still fights and the last has been invalided out and given a military post at home.

The old man, seventy, if he is a day, has got himself taken on somehow, and in ranker's uniform acts as his Colonel Son's orderly and is very particular about the salutes!

Love of country is ageless, thank God; Himself thinks before we are through every veteran will have to take his stand.

Don't get worried, because you seem to be going slow. Of course, what you tell me in confidence is a little disappointing. We did think you were quietly getting ready before the clarion call was sounded.

Well, never mind, you will soon get a move on. You are such a tremendous big brother. When you really get into fighting trim the earth, to say nothing of the Kaiser, must tremble.

Tell George to write to me without fail whenever he gets back from Washington.

I should love to come out to you now, but there is so much to do here and so few to do it.

I am now strong enough to get into harness again and have been doing quite a lot of talking at the camps and ammunition works.

The other night, I had rather a curious experience. They asked me if I would go down to a big shell factory, almost entirely manned by women, and speak to the squad on the night shift. I ought to explain a little about the women working in Munitions.

They are not ordinary factory hands nor even all working girls.

When the urgent call went out that thousands of women were needed to make the implements of war and stand as a rampart behind the fighting men, the

response came from all classes.

I know hundreds of women who formerly only knew work as something they paid other people to do, who are now cheerfully standing on their feet twelve hours a day with intervals for meals; living side by side in horrid little communal villages with girls from the East End and the slums, and who give all they earn to the war funds.

Further, they are happier than they have ever been in their lives. They have found the key to one of the finest paradises available to humanity, and are proving work to be a panacea for almost every sorrow. I don't think they are going to lose that key any more.

But though it is all very fine, the first time I was in real big munition works and saw these heads—some of them such pretty heads—bent over the machines, I rebelled, just as I sometimes rebel over Effie's youth being spent in the drudgery of the French war zone.

For we are only young once, and for youth there is no substitute. You have to grip yourself hard sometimes when you are overwhelmed by the sight of womanhood dedicated to the work of destruction and ask what it all means. God made us creators, builders, conservers, and the waste and cruelty of war is opposed to the very basic principles of our being. Then why?

Just because there is one thing worse than war, a dishonourable peace based on selfishness, and love of ease, and shirking of responsibility.

I had the same feeling always when I had to stand up in the huts in France before the units of the First Hundred Thousand and it was only by gripping myself tight and holding on to the great ideals they stood for, that I had the courage to say anything to them at all.

The spirit is fine among the women munitioners but sometimes they get tired and discouraged and long for the old sweet peace of home, and the cheerful comradeship of the fireside. It is then that the welfare superintendents, watching with unsleeping vigilance, call to the helpers outside to come and do their bit. I was to speak to them at the lunch hour, half past two in the morning, just to remind them that they are in the trenches too and that they must stand solid and unflinching behind the men who are laying down their lives for us.

I was walking to and fro on the great floor of the factory and had just paused to ask a rather white, sad-faced girl what was worrying her, when suddenly the lights went out. We knew what that meant, all of us, and it really was one of the most awful moments I have ever experienced. As we listened through a silence that could be felt, the machinery having stopped as if by magic, we could hear the sinister grinding of the Zeppelin engine overhead. We all knew that if a bomb crashed through the frail roof very few of the four thousand would see another dawn.

Presently nerves began to break a little; a sob sounded here and there, and once there was a little scream. Then some angel in a far corner, guided from above, no doubt, began to sing low and softly, "Jesus lover of my soul."

I have heard many lovely heart-breaking things, Cornelia, but never anything that thrilled like that. It reminded me a little of your Jubilee singers who came over with Moody, the Evangelist, so long ago from your country. When they sang "Steal away to Jesus," it had the same grip and thrill as it came stealing across the vast arena, taken up by almost every voice. The effect was instantaneous; it fell like Balm of Gilead on our terrified hearts.

We suddenly felt that God was over all, and that unless He permitted, nothing could happen. Nothing did happen. After a time the menace passed, lights went up again and work was quite quickly and cheerfully resumed. We did not speak about it at all afterwards. It is just part of the day's work.

I saw something quite as fine when I went to Gretna for a five-day visit to the workers there. You know Gretna Green? Every good American does. It is one of the shrines at which you worship. The sweet old world village has been swept away, or rather become quite unrecognisable. A great new city like those to which you are so accustomed "out West" has sprung up. When I saw all the signs and symbols of organised industry on a gigantic scale, I looked away across the shifting Solway sands and wondered whether the ghost of Ravenswood, riding to his doom, ever comes back to marvel at the thing that has happened.

Great crowds of women and girls are employed there and the welfare superintendents have their hands full. The problems and grave menace to youth segregated in such numbers far away from home influences are big enough to keep some of us awake at nights. We are fully alive to them and tackle them with all the wisdom and foresight we can muster for the gigantic task.

The spirit is fine—patriotism is a holy fire indeed which can purge the human heart clean of the dross itself.

I spoke a big incontrovertible truth in answer to a woman who was condoling rather profusely on the loss of our dear home. "You can get another house, but there is only *one* country."

There are several rows of danger shops at Gretna, where the most inflammable of all the high explosives is handled.

To minimise the loss in case of accident these shops have been made to accommodate only ten or twelve workers. There was an explosion when I was there, and some of the workers were killed. The girls behaved with such quiet courage and endurance that one can hardly speak about it without tears.

And every one of them insisted on being sent at once into another shop to take the same risks all over again. The true war spirit which danger and death only deepens and intensifies.

But oh, Cornelia, more and more I feel that it is all wrong.

If only all this splendid force could be dedicated to construction, instead of to destruction, why then our social vices and problems would melt like mist before the morning sun. But perhaps my vision is limited, so that I do not see far enough. Perhaps we are building better than we know in the midst of this mighty débâcle.

Perhaps, who knows,—the work of national reconstruction through the discipline, the sorrow and the pain of its individual units has already begun.

XII

Your last letter gave me so much to think about, that I have had to put off answering it day after day. Have you observed that those who wait for the convenient season, never, somehow come up with it? The time to answer letters is when you get them, though there may be some danger lurking in that admirable habit.

For instance, if you get one which causes your dander to be "riz," it is better to wait for the cooling process. Disasters have been averted, especially in business, by the counsel of patience. How often have I had to get surreptitious hold of letters written by Himself and keep them over till he said, "I wish I hadn't sent that. Why did you let me?" Then I produce it and all is well. But sometimes I have been too late, or he wouldn't let me intervene.

Then sometimes it was the right thing for the bomb to be thrown.

Peace at any price is not the best always; it can be the very worst. And now he is away where there are no letters to answer, not even mine. I haven't had a message of any kind for six weeks—I don't even know where he is.

We live through these things. Thousands of women are eating their hearts out all over the world, just as I am. It is the price of war.

What you tell me about your Anne fills me, not with your disquiet, but with an understanding sympathy. You are feeling a little as I felt when I realised that for a time I had lost the Boy. The period extended over quite a few years from the second year of his school life. The first year he was nothing but a homesick little chap, needing his mother dreadfully. Then he began to stiffen up, his father standing like a comrade by his side.

I never got him back, Cornelia, not as I had him once. He went out very soon into the world of men, and the things he met there I could not share. No

woman can. When a man fails his young son during those moulding years of destiny, there is no retrieval. It is the greatest failure in history or in life.

Mine did not fail his son, and I stood by a little wistfully sometimes, bolstering my heart with a vision of the days to be, when the grown man, a child at heart, would creep back to his mother's arms.

But the day never came. I don't mind now, for he belongs to me so utterly. Himself gave him up the day we laid him on the windy hill above the sea; a chapter of his life that was the most radiant had *Finis* written across the page.

But I got my baby back, and can never lose him again.

You must not worry too much about Anne. Girls pass through quite as many phases as their brothers and some of them are more tiresome. The only child is an object for commiseration rather than for envy. Growth can be retarded, sometimes even stopped, by over cultivation. Anne has had too much waiting on, too much anxiety and sheltering care lavished on her. She is the product of intensive culture.

But her nature is so sweet and wholesome that she'll come out on top yet.

Of course the very best thing that could happen to her, would be to marry a comparatively poor man and have a lot of children, certainly not less than six.

I think I see you gasp, but Cornelia, in these words lie hidden one of the first elemental truths of existence and of happiness. It is what we were made for—to be mothers of men, and when for one reason or another we miss, or shirk that high destiny, we have got to pay the price. What can match the flowers of the field for beauty and strength? Their sweetness is flung ungrudgingly on a desert world; no man prunes, or trains or troubles about them; they are the children of mother earth and greatly do her credit. We shall have to get back to old primeval simple things where the big issues are concerned. The family, not the solitary child, but the healthy, sturdy row, "steps and stairs," as we used to call them, will have to become, as of yore, the basic column of our national life.

The war which has torn at the very roots of our vaunted civilisation has revealed to us the canker.

Anne is being as tiresome as a self-willed girl of seventeen can be, and that is saying much. You see they know everything at that age, and nobody else knows anything. Parents are back numbers, their only function to provide the setting for the soaring ambitions, through which seventeen aims at self-realisation.

I don't think there is much you can do at this juncture. If she had been but two years older, I should have asked you to ship her over here and I would have taken her to France. I expect to go there next month. If she could be beside Effie and do a bit of honest work, the more sordid and unattractive work the better, she would get something of a perspective. When my girl went out first and I was very anxious, a wise man and true friend said:

"Now you must leave Effie alone. You have done all you can. Let Destiny do the rest."

It comforted me mightily and I have honestly tried to follow his advice. It isn't easy. I am one of the candid outspoken kind of people, and I never see any reason for not talking about what interests me.

But Himself and Effie don't talk. Half the time you never know what they are thinking or meaning to do. I suppose they know themselves, only they don't feel the need of sharing things. Once when particularly exasperated, I informed Himself he ought never to have been married, as he would have been a success as a Swiss Family Robinson, without the family, quartered on a desert island. He just smiled and made no comment.

A friend of mine, married to a very distinguished man, whose name I daren't mention, said to me once: "It is quite possible to love your husband dearly and yet to want frequently to throw him out of the window."

I have just had an interruption from a woman who runs one of the camp tents here—an awful kind of woman, who never stops talking about herself for a moment. When she went away she thanked me for our pleasant talk. I very nearly said: "Thank yourself, Ma'am—I had no talk."

It took me back quite a long time to a Bohemian night in Douglas Sladen's flat, at Kensington, which was filled to overflowing with a motley crew of what are popularly termed "leading lights" of the stage, literature, and art. The party overflowed itself out to the stairs. I was caught in the passage beside Hall Caine; he did not know me, though I knew him. How he talked! I was grateful to him, for it made me forget the weariness and discomfort of the moment. A day or two later I got a letter from him, written at Greeba Castle, Isle of Man, telling me that the only thing he carried away from that party was the memory of our interesting conversation. There was no conversation that I could recall. What *I* had carried away was a very interesting, one-man talk. It was mostly about himself, but one forgets that when it is an interesting self.

To return to Anne, I should not discourage that early love affair if I were you. Some girls need such for their education.

From what you tell me about the boy, the experience is not likely to seriously endanger her future settlement in life.

Don't worry, because she doesn't talk to you about it. You are the very last person in the world she will make a confidant of in such an affair. You are too near of an age, yet not near enough. Besides, you are her mother. Don't bully poor George. He can't help it. Fathers can't bring up girl-children; they only make it more difficult for the mother. He can't do anything; and that he isn't worrying should reassure you, I think. We have to admit that a man sees further and gets a grip of the whole, while we are handling sections. Leave it at that. I

mustn't close without explaining why I am here in the midst of the great camps stretching right through the heart of Surrey to the sea.

Scenes of unimagined beauty have either disappeared or become so horribly disfigured as to be unrecognisable. As I ride through the wind and rain between the long lines of tin and wooden huts, see the felled timber, the burned heather, all the ugly features of the military camp, I chalk up more and more against the makers of war.

I feel sorry for all the people who have built lovely homes and lordly dwelling places among these matchless hills and downs. They have been so good about it, never grumbling or standing in the way.

I am talking every day to the boys. Last night I was at Bramshott. But, oh, my dear, it is not the same; the glow and the glory have departed. Those who radiated that white heat of splendour are sleeping in quiet graves in France, or Flanders, or on Eastern sands.

I am not suggesting that the stuff here is not as good—in some respects, it might even be better.

But youth has gone—these men have the deep eyes of seeing men, and their mouths are grimly set. They are here because they have no choice. I think your draft bill is splendid, but oh, I hoped great America would come in on the volunteer basis. There is something different about it, something more finely subtle. I am conscious of the mighty difference every time I stand up to speak to them. They are not less determined that the fight shall be to a finish, but they question more.

They are asking some explanation at the hands of those who claim the sacrifice of their homes and lives and all men hold dear. Who is to answer their righteous questioning?

Sometimes in my dreams I see a great Judgment seat where Kings and Emperors, and diplomats, and politicians, and wire pullers and profiteers will have to answer to the blood stained hosts they summoned to fight and die, for what?

I am due back in the French camps in about ten days' time and I am half afraid to go. I can't answer all the questions they will put to me. I don't know enough.

In the early days you could play upon their mobile hearts as on a harp of ten strings; tears and laughter and smiles we had then, all side by side, with the most glorious courage the world has ever seen.

In some of the battalions now you find the fathers of the boys who sleep in Flanders and in France.

Oh, Cornelia, the waste, the wanton waste and cruelty of war. Where is it tending? Where shall we be brought before it is over? Sometimes my brain reels at the thought.

Meanwhile the band is slowly tightening.
We have not had any butter at home for over a week.

XIII

The awful suspense about Himself I was enduring when I wrote last was broken at last by a cable from France. It came from Effie at Camiers and it took me some time to grasp its meaning. "Safe, unhurt; tell your mother," was every word it said.

Florence and I, poring distractedly over it together, could only arrive at the conclusion that there had been a disaster at sea, in which our troopship was involved. We did not even know its name, from what port it had sailed, or whither bound; in fact we did not know he had sailed at all from the French base.

It is the black darkness in which one has to live which makes it so hard to be a soldier's wife in war times. A few more awful days had to be lived through—whole ten of them, then a long, closely written letter from Himself, arrived from a port in France, whose very name was not given.

But the story was wonderfully vivid and full; in fact I didn't know how it had passed the Censor, till I saw his own signature on the envelope, indicating that he had censored it himself.

I must not enclose the letter, nor yet tell you all it contained, because I want you to get what I am writing. These are the facts:

They set sail from Marseilles after long, dreary waiting in a particularly unpleasant camp, and next morning at ten o'clock were torpedoed off the Italian coast, not far from Genoa. Do you remember Genoa and its terraces where we met first, so long ago that it seems as if it must have been in some other existence?

You know how Himself writes, very simply and directly, without any embroideries, but his narrative was far more impressive than if he had tried to make it effective. It simply just makes you see it all, realise the horror of it.

The first torpedo disabled the ship, but if the enemy had left it at that, she could have been taken into port under her own steam.

There was, of course, a good deal of excitement and the boats were difficult to handle, apparently they had never been inspected or tested for any emergency. Can you conceive it, Cornelia, we have been three years at war and yet such elementary precautions are left to chance?

Priceless time was lost grappling with them, and before they could be lowered, priceless lives were lost. Himself waiting calmly, ready for the emergency,—or for the end, for which he needed no preparation, saw the second shell launched from the submarine. Many of the boats had got clear. One had the sixty nurses who comprised the hospital unit; sitting up to their middles in water, they sang hymns to cheer those drifting helpless in the sea.

The second torpedo found its mark amidships and the gallant boat went down in eight minutes.

The only chance for those still remaining on her decks was to jump into the sea. But that takes a special kind of courage; only those who had it were saved; the rest went down in the awful swirl of the sinking ship. Himself was picked up by a Japanese destroyer, filled with wonder that he who had done his day's work should have been saved, while so many of his boys, with all their lives in front, should have gone down. It is a great mystery.

How often have we asked ourselves that kind of question during these dreadful years. So many of us would have gone so gladly in their place.

They were landed at the port of Savonna. The Italians were extraordinarily kind to them, furnishing them with food and wine and clothing of every kind. He enclosed some snapshots—one actually taken of the sinking ship. There will be people, I am sure, ready with the camera on the Judgment Day. One of these snapshots depicts Himself in his riding breeches and leggings and an Italian military cloak, which makes him look like a bandit.

He lost everything except that which he happened to have on at the moment. All the lovely new Eastern kit, to say nothing of his photographs, letters, and dear intimate possessions, are at the bottom of the sea.

Nothing matters except that he is safe. He has no idea what will happen to him now—he supposes they will just have to wait for another ship. Meanwhile he is getting a little respite from the Spartan rigours of one of the worst cantonments he has ever struck, by being a voluntary patient in a hospital.

What he says about that is very amusing. He has been accustomed to boss a hospital, and now he is being very effectively and vigorously bossed. I fear he is not chastened yet, but only rebellious.

I can smile at it all because my heart is lightened of its load. God means him to come back to me, or he would have gone down in the Mediterranean.

It is odd how in this war, you have convictions about this one and that; the sort of presentiment who will get safely through, and who will never come back. But they are not always true. I felt so sure about Dick, of whom I wrote in my last letter. I felt that his kind, the very highest type of fearless soldier and a fine Christian gentleman, was so much needed here, that God would care for him specially. When one thinks of how many like him lie on the blood-soaked

fields, one is staggered, and uncertain about the future of the race.

But we must leave it, leave it all and just hold blindly on. It has gotten clear beyond us. It is so big and awful, we can just not grasp it at all.

I am now a little like a Jack of all trades, master of none. Food is beginning to be spelled with a very large capital and they tell me I must talk about food. I went to Scotland for that purpose and to speak at a great meeting in Glasgow Cathedral to commemorate on the 4th of August those who had fallen in the war.

It is the first time a woman has ever lifted up her voice in the Cathedral, and the occasion caused some searching of heart. The noble edifice was absolutely packed and directly I got up, standing at a specially selected spot in the Nave, I forgot everything but the faces in front, the great sorrowing heart of my own country and its bitter need. She is a very little country, but none have more nobly done their bit. Do you know, Cornelia, that there are villages in the north and west of Scotland where the young men are all wiped out—where there is no link between one generation and another except the babies in arms. There are no sons left, no husbands for the girls. It was with these things my heart broke as I tried to speak.

Nowhere is there any grudging or holding back. At the overflow meeting that had to be held in an adjoining church a woman came up at the close, a little plain country woman in mourning with a bag on her arm. From it she took three photographs of soldiers in Highland dress and a war office telegram which she laid against one of the lads. "That came yesterday," she said. "It's Jamie—he's the last—"

All gone and she a widow. What is one to say to a woe like that? Where is compensation to be found? There will have to be something very satisfying over there beside the river of God to make up for the roll of the whelming billows here.

I went on from Glasgow to Dundee to speak to two thousand women about the necessity for saving food. The situation is becoming acute and it has to be explained to the people. I have come to the conclusion that food is the supreme test. They'll give almost anything more cheerfully, go into small houses, wear old clothes, economise anywhere but on what is vulgarly called their "inwards."

Then you see our industrial population was never better off. In the ship-building districts, the munition areas—the great textile neighbourhoods, they are simply piling it up. Of course they want all the things money can buy. I am sure I should, if I had been cheated out of them for a whole section of my life.

So you can't blame these people for buying salmon at four shillings per pound, the best beefsteaks and prime cuts from the joints, when they can get

them. But the trouble is they can't now get them, so there is grumbling and unrest. They have got it into their heads that the government is hoarding the stuff and that favour is being shown. So labour has said that it will go short if capital goes short with them.

It is a perfectly reasonable proposition and the sooner the card ration scheme comes into operation, the better. It will not solve the whole problem, of course, nor yet increase incredulously or automatically the available stores. What it will do is to ensure equal distribution.

I, for one, hope Lord Rhondda won't lose any more time. I am afraid my letters are getting less and less interesting.

What you asked for was a plain, unvarnished record of war conditions here, which you want to keep, and I am setting them down as simply and faithfully as I know how. We are getting bit by bit down to the sordid bedrock where we are face to face with the hideous nakedness of war. There are things that the glow and glory of our Pentecostal sacrifice can hardly illumine.

In my deep heart I feel that we are coming to them soon, and that we shall need more different kinds of courage than at any time during those searching, aging, interminable years.

I got back to find that the war office has commandeered our "substitute" for active service. There is no one else to be got, so the door will have to be shut. It means that our living is all gone except what Cook calls "the Captiving's pay." Cook himself is working at munitions now after having successfully planted the potato patch. So there is only Florence and me left, and we don't eat much.

Life truly is shorn for me of much of its dignity, and the amazing thing is that one doesn't mind—we are not our own any more, but bought with a price.

A woman condoled with me not long ago over the house being destroyed. All I could think of was to say as cheerfully as possible, "You can get another house, but there is only one country." I must just keep on saying it to myself over and over, but sometimes when there is nobody looking, I am afraid I don't hold my diminished head so high.

Food is the question of the hour. The people who have read with uncomprehending eyes the imploring official appeals "Eat less bread," "Save the Wheat," "Food will win the War," are now face to face with real shortage. The psychology of this war, in so far as it operates in human consciousness, is a very remarkable thing. I had to sit down to think it over this morning after a very exhausting argument with a food waster and hoarder. These two words don't sort together, do they, but they are apt to the hour. He or she who hoards food at this moment of national stress, wastes it, because he is preserving it for his own wretched body, which is of no value to his country. A few minutes' silent contemplation brought me into a clearer light. The absolute refusal of those people to admit the need for conservation and self-denial, is a form of national pride. They simply can't admit the humiliating fact that Great Britain, proud mistress of the seas, is no longer self-supporting or sufficient to her own needs. They never knew, of course, that in our most prosperous years we could produce only forty per cent. of what we consumed. And if they had known it, would it have made any difference? It is all so very English, so dogged, so unchanged and unchangeable.

But even this partially comforting reflection, that the grumblers and obstructionists are really patriots in disguise doesn't ease the situation or fill the empty store cupboards.

And I am in it now, Cornelia, up to the neck in it. Having filled many rôles, I have now become a food expert, from whose lips calories and proteids and other heathen words ought to flow glibly. Only they don't. I am a plain woman and most people are plain in the same sense. They hate camouflage; it worries and wearies them. I am trying to tell as simply as I can, how they may make up with other things, for the things that are not there.

It does not read very clearly or convincingly, does it? But that is my job.

It is not easy. Food is not an inspiring theme. You cannot wax eloquent over it; the only dramatic moments are those when you flame red with indignation over the breaking down of the voluntary system. It has failed all along the line, and card rationing is bound to come. There have been several distressing instances from sources where we had every reason to look for better things—ay, even for leadership in high ethics. But alas! the temptation to be secure against more troublous times was too great for resistance. All this causes a searching of heart lest there should be very weak points left in my armour. I am determined that in this particular respect I shall do rather more than my share. I am kept up to high-water-mark by Florence. She really ought to have a medal for allegiance to the Government under the most trying conditions. She has weighed everything, done all the things I might not have done, stood firm between me and every temptation.

If food doesn't actually win the war, at least its shortage is searching the

hearts and trying the reins of the children of men.

All the time wrestling with those sordid details, trying to interest people in oatmeal and bones, and the superiority of casserole cooking over the waste of roast and frying, I have to keep thinking of the glory and travail which is bound up in it all. If you haven't something to illumine with, if only a farthing dip, you just can't go on.

Although some people have complimented me on my housekeeping, a lot of it doesn't really interest me much. It is no credit to me that I happened to be born determined to do my job well. Even in the great old dinner-giving days, long before the deluge, when we vied with one another in frantic endeavours to discover something entirely new, with which to decorate our menu cards, and fill other women with hopeless envy, the game never seemed worth the candle. After all, it takes very little to keep us alive.

The things that interested me most in those great dinner contests was the eager look in the eyes of the women as they sampled the unknown and sometimes fearsome looking dish.

The men usually showed their discrimination by leaving the entrées severely alone.

Where in Heaven's name am I wandering to? We housekeepers have at last got something really testing to whet our axes upon. We have got to invent and concoct appetising dishes minus most of the ingredients we once thought necessary to them.

This is going to be the testing fight. I am learning great new lessons every day. I only wish I could pass them on. A woman came up to me in the street the other day and said: "Please, I've tried to do what you said wi' them substitoots (oh, the scorn in her voice!). But 'Arry, 'e won't look at 'em. Calls 'em messes, 'e does; wants 'is 'onest beefsteak, 'e does, an' I don't blime 'im, either."

Neither do I, nevertheless it will be my mournful duty to try and impress on him and all the other Harrys who are making the lives of their helpmeets a burden over this food conservation business, that the true patriot is the man who eats his imitation steak with a smile, assuring the woman who has laboured over its preparation that it is quite equal to the real thing.

Nobody would be deceived, but life would be easier.

I never before realised that bread is really the staple food of our working folks. It is rather humiliating to discover how scanty are the reserves we are now able to call up. When you speak to the average cottage woman about soup and explain how nourishing it is for the children and how cheaply it can be prepared out of bones, if only the necessary care is bestowed on it, she has a way of putting her hands on her hips and looking you very haughtily in the face with the air of a person receiving a personal insult. "Feed me chillen on bones! Good Lord! 'as

it come to that? Not me, thank you, ma'am. I'll get me bit o' meat and bread and butter as long as I can get 'em and wen they ain't to be got, will do without."

How are you to combat that sort of argument which is everywhere, like sorrow—"not in single spies, but in battalions"!

I shall have to think hard. These people have got to be educated. The whole process of teaching them the alphabet has to be entered on now, when we are in the thick of the testing fight.

Oh, it is so very, very English, so tremendously, unutterably stupid, and maddening! I shall have to stop off or I shall be writing down things that the admirable George, with his exclusive command of strong language, will not permit you to read.

As usual, when one arrives at the end of one's tether, something happens, and there, right in front at the end of what looked like a blind alley, stood the open door.

The Administration, having fully tested the value of the Communal Kitchen, has sent out advices to the country to establish them wherever possible. As Chairman of our Kitchen Committee, I went to London with another member—a delightful, practical, breezy person, to inspect the working of the big experimental Kitchen on Westminster Bridge Road. It was thoroughly interesting and for the first time hope of solutions of many problems dawned on our weary spirits.

We returned home to report and got authority to act. I will explain the Communal Kitchen to you, though it is incredible to imagine your great, rich and inexhaustible country ever coming even within long-distance range of such a contingency.

The Communal or Central Kitchen is established and run by experts for the cooking of a large number of meals at the lowest possible cost. A first-class plant is necessary, the most up-to-date ovens, steamers, utensils of every kind. The cook must not only be an expert, but an artist, as she has to disguise many inferior ingredients and make them appetising for her consumers. Stores are purchased, wherever possible, in large quantities, special permits, of course, being afforded by the vigilant Food Administrators. Thus considerable saving is effected.

The cook and her immediate assistant or assistants are highly paid workers, but those who apportion and handle the food, over the counters, are volunteers, giving about four hours' service every day.

No food is consumed on the premises. The customers bring their own utensils in which they carry their portions away. There is a very complete and clever system of tickets issued at a little box office near the door, so that no money is tendered at the counter.

The menu cards are hung in the windows so that customers may make their

choice before they come inside.

We went early, watched the cooking in process, got stuffed up with unheard-of knowledge of every kind, and then waited for the customers.

They interested me beyond everything; although it is a very poor neighbourhood, it was not the very poor who came. Some quite well dressed people, with baskets nicely covered and lined, appeared and were more than satisfied. One bank clerk's wife assured me that it was the greatest Godsend to her, because she was working, too, and they were both now assured of one good warm, substantial meal every day, and nothing else mattered.

A mother of seven, "steps and stairs," clinging to her skirts had tears in her eyes as she spoke of the salvation the Kitchen had brought to her family.

When I saw the quarts of soup disappearing in jugs and pails through the swing doors, I took fresh heart and decided to make another onslaught on the Amazonian mother who would let her offspring "go without" instead of "demeaning 'erself" to any truck with bones.

Have you ever noticed how a little thing can change the whole outlook; how you can be transported by a lift of the brows, the glimpse of some unexpected object, miles from your base?

As I sat there behind the counter of the Communal Kitchen in the Westminster Bridge Road, I was suddenly transported to South Germany, to that little Bavarian university town we both know so well. What do you think transported me? Why, the sight of a student-like person, German, surely, carrying the little arrangement of dishes in a stand (I've forgotten its German name and glory in the lapse), which used to bring my greasy dinner from the hotel Drei Mohren.

Did these days really exist? Do you remember my landlady with the sweet, deprecating smile, her painful humility, her awe and worship of the temporal powers that ruled her destiny? How we distrusted it all, sure that it was a false foundation for life, and that freedom is the heritage of the human soul!

Even then, we were both conscious of hidden fires—of smouldering hates. They were deferential to us; yet inwardly loathing, perhaps fearing us. They have not changed at all, Cornelia, the little river which watered German sentiment in that horrid mediæval place, has only broadened and widened into a vast and overwhelming sea. They were getting ready even then. I could see it in the jealous eyes of the women, their veiled and laboured politeness at the coffee parties had nothing convincing about it. It did not warmly enfold you like the gracious hospitality of kindred peoples. They were bidden to hate, and they knew how to do it, and could veil their fine accomplishment in the art.

Oh, Cornelia, where am I now?

The Food Expert has got out of bounds. Call her back, discipline her; make her toe the line.

The outcome of that interesting morning is that we have a Communal Kitchen and it is going to be a tremendous success.

Some doubts had to be dispelled. People have to be convinced that it is not a charity, bearing the brand of the soup kitchen, or the Penny Dinner scheme. We have tried to explain that it is merely co-ordinating the forces; co-operation on a large scale.

We have gotten the cook, the machinery, the volunteers, and I think we are going to sleep more soundly "o' nights" because of it.

At least the children will be better fed. Some of them are getting to look so peaky, for milk has been very scarce all winter, and butter a thing of the past.

We just simply daren't sit down to think of the children. It must seem so strange and cruel to them. What have they to do with the quarrels of Emperors and Kings and Diplomats? They are heirs of all the ages and have the right to live in peace and comfort, none daring to make them afraid. Sometimes I have a nightmare of the first indictment this young generation will bring up at the Day of Judgment—the children who have known naught but terror—the sons who have had to die before they lived—the widowed girls and the girls who never will taste the joy of wifehood or motherhood, but must go unmated to their graves.

Almost it makes me long to be there lying sweetly and unconsciously beside the quiet dead.

I have no letters from Himself. Where he is—whether alive or dead—how can I tell? I haven't even the poor consolation of writing to him—because I have no address.

There is no glory in war for women's hearts, Cornelia. To-day I am neither proud nor glad, but only sorry to be a soldier's wife.

XV

I have been reading over your last letter and find that my impassioned tirade about Food left many of your questions unanswered.

What you tell me about the present state of your war activities takes me back about three years to the time when we were at the same stage. Have you noticed that one woman's matrimonial experience is not of the slightest use to another? It doesn't even help her to avoid quite obvious pitfalls. War seems to me to be a little like that. Every country has to "dree her own weird" in it—grope

for her soul in her own particular way.

One of Lloyd George's speeches put the matter in a nut shell: "To peace-loving peoples war is a trackless waste—an undiscovered country through which a pathway has to be made."

That being so, there must of necessity be side tracking. I see your George stamping about in righteous indignation because things are not being "put over" with the rapidity and despatch which seem to him essential. Tell him he'll just have to possess his soul in patience, and don't let him do anything foolish. He'll only hinder thereby.

I do hope and pray most fervently, however, that you are exaggerating the state of affairs. I wonder why it is that the war machine has such a tendency to become unwieldy. It needs not any vivid imagination, nor a particularly brilliant intelligence to grasp the magnitude of your war task.

You have almost everything the old world now lacks, your trouble is to co-ordinate your forces from sea to sea, and get them into line. Colossus can't move with the agility of his lesser brethren, we must comfort ourselves and stay our impatience with that reflection. I am sure you will hate leaving your lovely home, but Washington will have compensations. I could not, somehow, imagine or contemplate existence for myself very far from London, in wartime, at least for any length of time.

I don't agree with all you say about the mobilisation of your women for war.

There is no other way of doing it; and the things you tell me are only the excrescences of a great forward movement, the shock of which will soon make itself felt throughout the entire country.

We, too, had the kind of women you criticise so severely. I knew one whose first act of war service for her country was the purchase of a red cross of rubies to wear with her uniform. She went to France with it, but abandoned it before very long. The real cross, when she came up with it, red with the blood of brave men, put her to shame. She has won the saint's crown out there, and her name has been on a hundred dying lips.

So don't worry about these little things, Cornelia, they will pass as a tale that is told. The best will remain—the things that cannot be shaken, and which are the same in all countries, and of all peoples.

God, how I cling to that text. I have to say it over and over a hundred times a day. We are getting so badly shaken here that sometimes we feel as if we had no foundation whatsoever.

I don't know whether I have made you understand that a big section of England now is as truly the war zone as that across the Channel.

The air raids are increasing in number and intensity; this week we had four

nights in the cellar.

There are not so many oddities about the proceedings now we have settled in to the game in dead earnest. When we get the warning we act with as little delay as possible, seek one nearest available shelter, where we sit down to endure the strain as best we can.

There is precious little badinage now about the Zeppelin parties; we all feel that they have long passed the amusing stage.

Can you read between the lines? I wonder have you grasped the fact that the strain is becoming almost more than we can bear? I have the dreadful feeling that perhaps I myself will not be able to hold out.

You know I never could do without sleep; my too active brain has always demanded its full measure, and rebelled when cheated of it.

A Zeppelin night means anything from seven or eight o'clock at night till four in the morning—the strain of tension and fear never relaxed for a moment. Always you are listening, listening—and the gunfire never ceases. It is punctuated by the noise of the explosions following the bomb dropping, which means, though it may be a good many miles from you, that somebody is being punished.

We still speak about the Zeppelins, though they don't come any more. Their successors, the Gothas, are not less terrible; in fact they seem to be more daring, more destructive, faster and less vulnerable.

Also they are equipped with all kinds of new and terrible death-dealing weapons.

A very strange one descended on our little town night before last. We heard a noise like a rushing mighty wind or an express train, going at lightning speed through the air. It was not the usual steady whirl of the Gotha's engine. The thing fell in a garden at the top of Queen's Hill and then exploded, doing much damage to houses, though mercifully no one was killed. They say it was an aerial torpedo which travels through the air by its own momentum. If this is true, imagine what magnitude this form of attack might achieve and how much we may yet have to suffer!

How often one is appalled by this dedication of human will and mind power to the devil's service. Is there to be no limit set to it? Is it the beginning of the terrors which will make men call on the rocks to cover them? You have no idea, Cornelia, what a weak helpless thing humanity is until it is subjected to this sort of thing. It isn't clean fighting; it makes brave men desperate.

I think on the whole the women bear it better. They are more used to suffering and never forget to be protective. All sorts of moving things happen about the children. One poor woman stretched herself over her two children on the floor as the torpedo was coming, hoping to receive the brunt herself. None of them were hurt.

But these things are getting home, Cornelia, they are telling on us all. Little portents show the weakening of the fibre here and there. I am feeling it myself, while all the time fighting against it.

Of course the chief object of these diabolical visitations is just that, so to weaken the moral stamina that we people will cry for peace at any price. That cry will never be heard in this country, Cornelia, not if he sends his aerial torpedoes hurtling through the sky, world without end.

There is no grumbling, surprisingly little protest anywhere. Our people accept these things as part of the horrible business in which we are presently engaged. They don't even know how to hate properly. We have a German prison camp nearby, the men being employed in the woods, cutting and preparing the timber of which so many of our finest properties are now being denuded. These men are scared to death in the raids, but though you may hear an occasional hope expressed that a bomb might fall on the prison camp, I question whether, if you drove it home, you would find they really desired such a thing to happen. We are not successful haters; we are only clean fighters, and desperate lovers of peace.

Can you accept that paradoxical presentment which is an actual description of our mental attitude?

The children in the war zone here are beginning to exercise us; some of them are really subnormal now, like their poor little brothers and sisters in the other countries. Those who can, remove them to safer places, sending them often to relations in remote parts of the country. Children quickly droop when their sleeping hours are shortened or much disturbed.

The school teachers find them either restless or extremely languid after an air raid; and cannot urge them to concentrate on their lessons. One wee chap in our cellar, in his pajamas the other night, said pathetically to his mother, with eyes heavy with sleep: "Mummy, you won't get me up next night, will you, till they are really here?"

No, I am not hearing regularly from Himself. There has been no letter for weeks and weeks. Whether they are being torpedoed when written, or not written at all, I don't know. There is only the blank wall of silence. How much can the human heart stand, I wonder? We are amazing creatures, bound by "cords which

come from out eternity.”

XVI

Yes, I have read Sir Oliver Lodge’s book and had some correspondence with him about it. Somehow he got it into his head that I had written a rather brutal, unsigned article on it in the *Daily Mail*. Writing to refute this, I set forth my views on spiritualism and the intervention of mediums between us and those who have passed on. We say ”gone away” in Scotland, and I think I like it better. He sent me a long letter in reply. I will enclose you a copy.

I don’t think there is any road that way. The only key to the grave was left on the stone of the sepulchre on the Resurrection morning.

Do you remember the Leightons—Robert and Marie? They lost their beautiful son, not the only, but the favourite one, in France, and she has written a beautiful book about him, called ”Boy of My Heart.” It is the best thing by far she has ever written, and immensely worth reading. She is now side-tracking with the rest along these doubtful and bewildering paths. Oh, I wish people wouldn’t. To me it seems a kind of desecration.

If I can have any communication with my son, I don’t want to have it through some strange, odd freak of a person, who has to go into a trance for the purpose. If God means me to hear from the other side, He will send the Boy to me direct. That I most firmly believe, and am content to wait that day. If it never comes, why then I can go on waiting for the day which can’t be so very far distant, when I shall cross the narrow sea between that happy land and ours. I wrote as strongly and convincingly as I could to Mrs. Leighton, but I don’t think it availed much. There is a little group of the intellectuals just now all heading in the same direction, names familiar all the world over.

To me it is all intensely pathetic. It is the cry of lost youth, the admission that they have no real city or abiding place, and no sort of surety about what is going to come.

I remember Himself coming in one day and sending me out to a dying woman with the words: ”I’m through with my job. It’s yours now.” When I got to her she looked at me so wistfully, saying: ”Doctor says you are so sure.”

You have no idea how these words thrilled me. Thank God I am sure. We are all sure, who know in Whom we have believed.

Since I wrote to you last I have had disquieting news about Effie. She was knocked down, while standing beside her car, by a big French military motor. The officers riding in it did not even stop to pick her up. Possibly they were not even aware that anything had happened. One must be charitable enough to suppose so. Some one came along and took her to a hospital, from which she is now able to send a few pencilled lines. She escaped with a few good bruises and it was quite a few days before I could discover whether there was any facial injury. Nobody seemed to reflect that I might be worrying about that. I applied for permission to go over to see her, but was refused. Nobody is permitted to cross the Channel to visit wounded or sick relatives unless the case is hopeless.

Her temperature kept up obstinately for longer than they liked, but I am thankful to say she is now convalescent.

I have had shoals of letters from all kinds of people over there, from the Brigadier to the orderly, expatiating on her absolute indispensability at the Base. They seem terrified in case we order her to come home.

It is very sweet to hear that she is so greatly beloved, and doing efficiently and cheerfully so much useful service. What experience she must have locked in her too uncommunicative bosom! She has had three years of it now, and has really told us very little. If she never tries to express it in writing, well, it surely will inform and colour all her after life. I should not dare to bid her home on my own responsibility, though there are days when I not only want, but need her desperately.

Talking of the modernity of these inaccessible, mysterious young creatures, I don't think I told you of a friend of mine, mother of four, who soon after the outbreak of war, received from her family a letter signed by each member, thanking her for permitting them to be born at the psychological moment of history.

Another friend of mine who had the misfortune to marry a full-blooded and very German German, who, however, conveniently departed this life the year before the war, told me her sons passionately reproached her for giving them a German father.

One gets bewildered in this strange hurly-burly where every mask seems to be torn off and the decencies of life hardly respected any more.

I am so glad you are easier in your mind about Anne. Effie was tremendously interested. All she said was "Anne will never marry that one; he's only experimental." Perhaps that may comfort you a little. Presumably, these birds of a feather understand one another!

Sometimes I have the awful feeling that Effie has passed out of the region of my love and care. Yet how dare I intrude these little personal fears upon a world's sorrow?

Every day I am writing letters to fathers and mothers whose darlings have

gone forever "where, beyond these voices, there is peace."

One grows heart weary of the task, and even the balm of Gilead seems to have lost its power to soothe or heal.

Yet often and often I am thrilled by the courage and calmness and faith of those who have given the most. They are upheld and illumined by some white and lovely flame which surely emanates from the secret place of the Most High.

Never has there been such glory of sacrifice ennobled by that passion for the right which lifts those whom it inspires very high, above ignoble things.

My country was never greater than now, Cornelia. Shorn and blood-stained, she is worthy to be numbered with those who are arrayed in white robes and have come out of great tribulation.

A wonderful, wonderful thing has just happened. I don't know quite how to tell you.

I have been asked by our Foreign Office to go to America and tell part of the story of what we have done in the war and what the war has done for us.

Do you understand, Cornelia, I am coming to you, right now, by the very earliest boat?

God has undoubtedly opened this door. I shall be so glad to leave the tired Old World for a spell, and drink at the Fount of your glorious youth.

Even the submarines can't scare me away from this great Adventure.

At this moment America means only you and George and dear little Anne, and the heavenly rest under your roof tree.

Perhaps it may prove to be something very different, but that is how I am feeling at the moment.

God will surely forgive me for this momentary slackening.

I am so tired, Cornelia.

Only God knows how tired I am!

THE END

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AN ENGLISHWOMAN'S
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