

An Echo of the South African War.

She had been back from South Africa for more than a year, and was matron of a cottage hospital distant some four or five hours journey from London when I visited her.

I knew that she had volunteered, and had gone out in the Army Nursing Reserve, but we did not at once begin on her war-like experiences. She was not one of those who, in season and out of season, insisted on emphasising the personal note, and our conversation proceeded pleasantly along the lines of common-place topics, till I began to think of taking my leave. Then my eye fell on a framed photograph of a hospital camp, unmistakable by the Geneva cross that flew from the flagstaff.

"That was my last camping-ground," she said, noticing my interest.

"You liked the work?" I asked.

"Well, yes. It gave one experience of a special kind. But I own that I confessed to a feeling of great satisfaction on regaining my native land once more, and I never realised what a comfortable place a house was to dwell in till I lived under canvas."

"The feeling of insecurity must be unpleasant," I suggested. She gave an odd little laugh.

"I found it rather more than unpleasant once," she said. "In fact, out of all the many incidents that happened to one out there during nearly two years sojourn, that which had to do with the insecurity of tent life constituted my only real adventure."

I begged her to tell me about it, and she began at once.

"That I had a tent to myself I considered a matter for congratulation. Usually two or three nurses shared one. That was mine"—pointing to a bell tent in the photograph standing a little apart from the others—"you will notice that it is somewhat isolated, and quite near to the barbed wire fencing that enclosed the camp all round."

"At the season of which I am speaking, the darkness of the African night is blackness, and it was on one of those nights that I suddenly awoke with a feeling of terror upon me.

"My first thought was of nightmare, I had been dreaming, I would strike a light. But no, the terror of even moving paralysed me. Then while I lay perfectly still, horror was added to terror. I felt a hand stealing its way towards my throat.

"If I close my eyes now and think of it, I can still feel that creeping hand—a ghastly sensation.

"The agonising shudder that passed through me restored my power of movement, and, flinging off the clothes, I sat up screaming for all I was worth. And do you know," she said, looking at me earnestly with eyes that gave me some idea of what those

moments must have been to her. "Do you know, even at this distance of time, I still think those screams were justified."

I nodded emphatically, unwilling to break the thread of her narrative, and she continued—

"I had no sooner began to scream than a heavy body fell on the bed, there was a scuffle, then silence.

"I didn't wait to see what would happen next, but mechanically thrusting my feet into slippers, I fled, fled out into the darkness, and by some lucky instinct ran straight into a tent inhabited by four sleeping nurses. And there seated on the ground, I panted out my story to the astonished quartette, ending by reiterating my fixed determination, that nothing should ever persuade me to sleep alone in a tent again.

"The next morning one of the nurses returned with me to my tent, and the first thing she noticed on drawing near was that the flap close to my bed had been torn up.

There had been a tendency on the part of the nurses to attribute my sudden appearance in their midst on the previous night to the effect of nightmare. But the fact that the tent had been tampered with was looked upon as sufficient evidence to create an alarm throughout the nursing staff of the camp.

Some of them declared that they should henceforth sleep with loaded revolvers under their pillows, a course which I earnestly deprecated.

"But two or three did actually get as far as what they termed 'practising' out on the veldt, and blazed away in the direction of a target which I believe they never so much as hit!

"A good many of us now joined forces, sleeping together in one of the larger tents, and nothing happened for some nights.

"Then one morning, just at dawn, a nurse who happened to be awake, saw the flap of the tent cautiously raised and a dark something begin to crawl in.

"With a cry that awoke us all simultaneously, she plunged out of bed, and rushing to the tent door, she was just in time to see that dark something scramble over the barbed wire fence and disappear. Then we knew that it was a Kaffir. White men could not deal with barbed wire in the same dexterous fashion.

"This time we sent up a request to the commanding officer for a guard, but it met with a refusal. I believe he saw no reason for giving in to the stories and fancies of a parcel of hysterical women!

"Consequently revolver practice went on with renewed vigour, though I was careful to point out that in those days the penalty for shooting a Kaffir was greater than that for killing a white man.

"At last one of the doctors took pity on our unprotected state. I suppose he saw that we were really getting overwrought with the pleasing

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