

papers," and she unfolded the ha'penny, "but I do say —"

Here however she paused as one stricken, her eye on the very middle of the page, and then she gasped, and no wonder. For there in the place of honour usually reserved for royalty, or the common lot that pay, was not only Mrs. Dill-Binkie, but Mrs. Dill-Binkie as a Red Cross nurse in a uniform manifestly created by no less a one than "Lucile." Wherever a red cross could be put a red cross had been put, and the very biggest one was just over the place where, according to Maria, she hadn't any heart, and her upturned eyes were shining, possibly with charity, but more likely with belladonna.

It took Maria quite a moment to recover, and she cried tragically, "There she is, and don't know any more about nursing than the cat—not so much, for Mrs. Dill-Binkie has never even had kittens! And to think she's already in the papers and hasn't had her uniform a week, and only had one convalescent and he ran away in two days. I know all about it!" Maria added mysteriously. "I know she had to wait three months for her uniform, for Lucile was so rushed making uniforms for duchesses who simply wouldn't wait they were in such a tearing hurry to start nursing. But as soon as she got her uniform she did hurry up!" And Maria offered Mrs. Dill-Binkie the tribute of her admiration. "For she had to board out Mr. Dill-Binkie before she could turn her house into a rest-cure for convalescent officers, the kind that need the comforts of home and are well enough to play bridge. And all in a week! Doesn't she look stylish in her uniform!" Maria acknowledged with her usual sense of justice.

"I met her in Piccadilly, and she told me now that her uniform was ready she was, and she'd already had one convalescent, with golden curls, but he was off in two days—cured. As if I didn't know better," and Maria sniffed. "And the way the photographers rang the front-door bell all day long and asked to take her photograph surrounded by her nurses was most touching. Amateur nurses," Maria explained, "they have so much more real feeling, and they have a common one to do the work. Still, I am surprised to see her here already," and Maria sighed heavily; "but, of course, she paid for it," and she studied Mrs. Dill-Binkie in the shortest of skirts, the tallest of heels, the kind whose click is so particularly soothing to the suffering, and with something at her waist that looked like a rosary, only it wasn't a rosary, but the very latest thing in bridge-markers at the end of a chain. And on her head she wore a fetching snow-white veil, one of the sort that flops in the soup and catches in the door, but makes them all look like amateur nuns, though, of course, they aren't nuns, but just ministering angels who love to sit by the bedside of the suffering and stroke their hair and wash their faces and coo. For, according to Maria, the science of nursing consists entirely in stroking the sufferer's hair or washing his face. The only

things so far the photographers had not asked permission to photograph were Mr. Dill-Binkie and the kitchen and the beetles in the kitchen. But these are, of course, prosaic details of no public interest.

Still, Maria is human, and so she added with a gloomy joy that she had heard that the amateur nurses were rebelling against always being photographed as surrounding Mrs. Dill-Binkie, like humble and adoring satellites. They were neither humble nor adoring, and their uniforms cost just as much as hers did, and so did their caps. It was tiresome always to be photographed from left to right and never to be in the middle, and never to have a chance at a convalescent, for Mrs. Dill-Binkie, because she boarded out Mr. Dill-Binkie and contributed the house, had insisted on always being in the middle of the photograph and on having the pick of the convalescents, so as to wash their faces and stroke their hair. But, it seems, the only convalescent who so far had come—and that by mistake it turned out—declared to the common or garden nurse who did the hard work and to whom he clung, that he didn't believe he had any face left, for it had been nearly all washed away. But, of course, as there were so many nurses and only one convalescent, he couldn't possibly go round. And being a young giant with the kind of curly, fair hair of which most men are ashamed, they had nearly driven him mad, for they all sat by him in turn and perpetually stroked his defenceless head. It was Mrs. Dill-Binkie who drove them away and undertook that heavy task herself, and that finished the golden-haired sufferer, for the very next night he disappeared, lightly clothed in his pyjamas, bedroom slippers, and dressing-gown. But he left a note to say that he was eternally grateful, but not to search for him as he had gone back to the trenches, for he was homesick for the trenches.

"Of course"—and Maria sighed—"she's in it, for she's got her uniform and her picture's in the papers, and she's got a convalescent home, even if she hasn't any convalescents."

I had to admit that Mrs. Dill-Binkie was indeed enjoying the first-fruits of benevolence. She'd had a patient for two days and washed his face and stroked his hair, so if anyone had a right to wear a uniform she had.

"Of course," Maria cried in despair, as she looked about, so to speak, for other fields of active benevolence, "there are mufflers—but one can't get any credit for making mufflers now that even Board School children do 'em, can one?"

On no account miss "Maria Again." Put it on your library list forthwith.

P. G. Y.

WORD FOR THE WEEK.

"When the Government talk to women about thrift and saving, it is like a little child talking to its grandmother."—*Alison Garland.*

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