

stalks; in fact, if I had not stood on a little heap of them the water would have been over my shoe-tops. . . . Very disagreeable to *faire les Halles* on a wet day. The cabbage woman was most sympathetic. Going out, Madeleine and I got a cup of hot chocolate. I assure you that I wanted to put my feet in it, they were so cold, and we left all the oranges behind; the potato-man said he would send them and he forgot—so tiresome of him. And last week we left the brains at the fish market. They never notice, these people, when you leave things behind. . . . You wouldn't believe, fowls have gone up again, 6 francs; *petits régimes* can't have them. And butter, Mademoiselle, is 6 francs the kilo. The butter-woman is very nice, she has a good heart, but she gave me bad eggs last week. She has three sons at the front. I forgot to ask about the cheese. Would you like *petits suisses* or *port sahi* for *déjeuner*. . . . but I won't bother you now. I'll come to your room and talk if you are not busy. . . . Won't keep you a minute."

It seemed that at one time she had been a "public singer," and she spoke with pride of her triumphs. This glorious life continued until she caught a *laryngite* and had to give up singing. Then, I think, came sad days, about which she says little, but I imagine her loneliness, and from the way in which she speaks of her little dog I gather that she showered on him the affection that she would have so readily have given to others.

I think it must have been after this that she became "Professor of English"; she even had gold and silver medals. That to us was most astonishing, as not only did she lisp, but her l's and r's were lacking, and she always pronounced her th's like f's. I dare say her pupils were in happy ignorance that she did not speak the Queen's English. She said, "There's one thing I am very strong on, and that is grammar; no one should learn grammar," and certainly she used none herself, either in French or English.

One day she described how she had fallen down in a *syn cup* (syncope), and Nurse Mary was under the impression that it was a kind of grating, and asked if it was a deep hole, so she explained, "No, my dear, not a hole, a *syn cup*, a swoon; but really I have lived so long in France that my sister tells me that I *think* in French. I always write to my sister in French—that is, postcards. My sister's not so good at French as I am, but then I have lived in Paris for 20 years. Yes, Mademoiselle, I have travelled a great deal; it enlarges the mind so much; don't you find it so? Can you take pills? Some people find it very difficult to take them, but I always say it is a question of brain, a question of brain. I myself find it quite easy, except the very small ones; you can't firm the gorge on very small ones, but it really is a matter of brain. You know I took the First Help certificate; I learnt to be a nurse in three weeks; I consider it a very interesting occupation, and very ladylike. I can bind. . . . You use your hands in a very curious way, but I

didn't go in for fancy binding . . . only arms and legs, that sort of thing.

"I want my daughter to marry a doctor. Being, like myself, a lady born and bred, it is not likely that I should want her to marry a coal-heaver. I tell her she was born with a silver spoon in her mouth. My husband's family brought her up. . . She might marry anybody—anybody. Oh, mademoiselle, I must tell you now I think of it, I had such a curious dream last night. I dreamt about cattle. You know it is very lucky to dream about cattle, but they must be fat cattle—mine weren't. I felt, as the French say, quite *égayée*. . . One can't entirely disregard dreams. Who was it in the Bible? Oh yes, Jacob, and then there was Dick Whittington. I have a book of dreams I'll show you—most interesting. Do you believe in dreams?" And so she wandered on.

But after all what really mattered was that the food became materially better. We had mishaps sometimes. Perhaps the milk did not turn up; this was serious; or the butcher sent bad meat. Occasionally prices went up so alarmingly that we wondered how we were going to feed our family without breaking the bank. Fish at one time was almost impossible to get, and we fell back on a large salt creature that was quite good if well soaked for days, but absolutely terrible if served in its salted state. This actually happened one day. The *cuisinière* was in a furious temper at the economies made in the kitchen. The coffee was made with chicory, the salt was pitched into the soup, the omelettes were as flat as pancakes, and the fish was not soaked and was like solid brine. The poor old dear was nearly in tears. Nobody could eat it. "I told Marie to change the water," she said tearfully afterwards, "and I assure you I got into such a state about it I nearly had a congestion." She had many *filleuls* at the front to whom she wrote regularly; in fact, she told us she was accustomed to sit up till quite late writing tender letters to her godsons in the trenches. I am quite sure from the letters she received they imagined their *marraine* was a young and pretty woman. She would come into the room brimming with news of her boys and then say in a queer shy little way, "You know, Mademoiselle, a woman is never too old for romance. You must have had many—No? I am surprised! Ah, later on I will tell you a few of mine, and I always think that some day Mr. Right will come along. I should like to be happy in my old age; a woman feels so lonely without a companion. I am having a very interesting correspondence with a gentleman now. I don't say that anything will come of it, but one can always *hope*, can't one?"

One evening she took one of her "godsons" to the Cinema, there was an unexpected Zeppelin raid, and all the lights were turned out, and when they got into the street the poor old thing, who was always rather blind, fell over the curb, and before she got home she had another tumble, and was quite badly bruised. Next day in a loud aside

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)