

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"BACK OF THE FRONT."*

"Back of the Front," as Mr. W. L. Courtney, M.A., LL.D., says, in his introduction, is "a very pathetic and interesting record. But there is something more in it than its interest, or its appeal to human sympathy. It is quite unpretentious, and therefore convincing—a straightforward account of certain poignant experiences undergone by a Scotch girl when she was nursing French and British wounded during the opening months of the Great War."

Miss Phyllis Campbell relates that in July, 1914, she was studying in Germany, when suddenly and without apparent reason, her aunt arrived from Paris and insisted on her return. There was considerable unpleasantness in the school about her leaving, but, the aunt being a very determined person, on July 4th they were in Paris.

Later, a friend, going to England, offered them the loan of his country house some distance from Paris, in the great forest which stretched from Marly to Crèpy-en-Valois.

"In the forest all was calm and peaceful. The trees murmured together like the sea, there was a wandering perfume from the undergrowth, and little odd snatches of bird songs. The people sang as they went too and fro. Even the train noises were modified into a sort of music—rushing through the greenness like the breaking of a great wave."

France, in those days, seemed pleasure-loving, without religion or spirituality. "One hated to agree with the wearisome repetition of the German opinion, 'France is corrupt,' but dearly as I love France," says Miss Campbell, "I thought that was possibly true."

Old Madame D'A—— tersely explained the situation.

"*Ma Petite!* when a man is humiliated, he gets drunk to forget. When a great nation is humiliated, it is the same. France is only forgetting. But hearken well, when the time comes, she will be sober enough. *Sapristi!* Yes!"

"So dawned Saturday, the 1st of August. A low, dull, brooding, smoky day, under a canopy of silence.

"Madame D'A—— came over in the morning and took us home with her in the car to dejeuner.

"'My little English ones,' she said, 'I know not exactly what is the matter with me. It is perhaps my liver. But I am suffering with a great uneasiness. I feel as if an earthquake were about to happen. What absurdity! Yet I feel it. So please be cheerful. Let us laugh! . . .

"Suddenly into the murky thickness of the afternoon burst the ringing of the old church bell—such a strange ringing!

"Clank! Clank! Clank!"

"Madame D'A—— reeled a step back, the

soldiers came suddenly to attention, the old man seemed to become rigid, the people on the terrace came to a sudden halt. Whatever anyone was doing, he or she froze in the act. All animation seemed smitten into abeyance by that dreadful bell.

"The tocsin!"

"The next instant we were all flying along the path to the church. On the church steps stood a man with a drum, the sticks suspended in his fingers. His face was as white as marble, and his black eyes looked out of it with a kind of furious anticipation—joy yet terror. The bell ceased and the drum began; for about sixty seconds it rolled out its imperative summons over the heads of the gaily-clad crowd of pleasure-seekers, all silent now. In dead silence, over the motionless crowd the drum throbbed out. . .

"Suddenly, the drum stopped, and in a high clear triumphant note the man began to declaim.

"He finished; brought the drumsticks down again, in a long roll; descended the steps and was gone. In utter silence the crowd melted away; not a word of comment, not a sound of acclamation, protest or approval. They were all gone and with them that old world we knew. There, at that moment, died 'corrupt' France, and under the hot, grey August sky, leaped in silence into being France—Regenerate, Immortal, Splendid.

"Germany has declared war against us and her troops have already invaded our soil."

Next is shown to us the advance of the whole French Army. "There we saw for the first time that new and splendid France, before whom, as before Belgium, the whole world bows in admiration and respect.

"It was midnight, but all the world was on the Route de Paris, to bid them 'God speed.' . . . Many of these men were known to us. One was our baker, another the son of a multi-millionaire, another a priest, and another old Peter's second son; yet these grave noble faces had all a likeness to each other that was very remarkable. It was the expression I had seen on the face of the drummer on the church steps—a kind of exultation, a fierce joy. We, too, were speechless in face of it. It was as if these great knightly men were each exulting inwardly at the prospect before them. They were going out to wipe the stain of conquest from off them. They had found themselves. France was suddenly stripped bare to the soul, and behold! the soul was a pure white light of knightly splendour. Now, in silence, they departed to lay down their lives for France."

Then the women left behind did what they could to qualify for the work they foresaw would some day be demanded of them. "We went with 'Latty,' as we called her, and bandaged a dummy, or each other, and learned how to sterilize things, how to use certain surgical instruments, and to wait on the surgeon at imaginary operations. . . . Then, one morning, Latty came with the Commandant, and her sweet face was all puffed with weeping and her eyes strange.

"Oh! my little English," she said, 'I have

* George Newnes, Ltd., 8-11, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C. is.

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