

AUNT SARAH AND THE WAR.*

The publication of "Who Goes There?" by the author of "Aunt Sarah and the War" reminds us that reference has not yet been made in this JOURNAL to "Aunt Sarah," and as only those who know her can fully enter into the later volume we hasten to repair the omission.

"Aunt Sarah and the War" is "A Tale of Transformations" told in a series of letters from Mrs. Neldon-Weldon, of 60, Grosvenor Square, to her nephew, Captain Owen Tudor, at the Front, and also from Miss Pauline Vandeleur, his cousin, and betrothed. The last is to be gathered from internal evidence rather than from any statement of fact, for, as Pauline herself writes in a postscript: "Aunt Sarah said to me yesterday, as if rather aggrieved, that young people are so secretive now, she never can make out whether you and I are really engaged. I said, 'My dear Aunt, you are very like ourselves in that particular.' Then she said, rather mysteriously, that if there wasn't enough money, that was a difficulty that could be at once removed, and we could marry as soon as the War is over! I turned it off by saying that you could think of nothing now but your engagement—at Ypres."

Aunt Sarah's first letter to her nephew, dated August, 1914, relates, "A great trouble has come upon me, and I feel I must tell it out to some one, and that's you, knowing of old your always sympathetic ear. . . . Yesterday afternoon, when Henry came to clear away the tea things (you remember the second footman with the slight squint?) he seemed very nervous and jumpy, and spilt Belinda's milk on the rug that was the apple of your poor uncle's eye.

"Well, I noticed Henry's clumsiness, and was telling him how inconsiderate he was, when he turned and said he had decided to go for a soldier and therefore respectfully tendered his notice! Of course, I promptly declined to accept it; for I own to you, my dear nephew, that he *understands Belinda* better than any of the rest. . . .

"Next day Henry had *disappeared*. I rang and rang, and then Elise came up and broke to me in very broken English that Henry, who had, it seems, a weakness for her, left her a note simply saying he was sorry to annoy his kind mistress (me!!), but his country called to him and he had enlisted. . . . When he returns from the War, what will he do?—not darken these doors again—that is all I *prophesy*."

To which in due course Capt. Owen Tudor replied to his "afflicted Aunt," "Of course I'm very sorry you're disappointed and head-achey about Henry. But I must say I think he's a brick. It's just fine of him not to have been spoiled by the finicky fed-up atmosphere of dear greasy old Grosvenor Square. Well, he is 'fed up with it in one sense I reckon, and no blame to him either! We want that sort badly.

We want all sorts, and we want them now, nobody dare say how much.' I suppose the Censor knows his business, but it seems a bit hard that English soldiers here are to suffer what English civilians at home may not even read."

Later Aunt Sarah writes: "My maid Elise's queerness and her evident sympathy with Henry, when I lament his downfall, makes me sometimes suspect, Parisian as she is, she may be in the Kaiser's pay. . . . She rambles on that she would have married him but for that squint in his left eye I always rather liked. . . . Elise told him this the day he ran away. . . . Belinda has quite a distemper; but the Vet. sees her twice a day and is very hopeful."

Captain Tudor writes in reply: "You have so many worries of your own that I won't be so downright selfish as to tell you much more about ours out here. . . . But I won't waste words, and I won't ask after Belinda because I simply can't and keep what's left of my equilibrium. That vet. of hers could save scores of horses that I shoot here just to put them out of their pain. And the human wounded, left untended for hours! Heaven, that within a hundred miles or so, there should be thoughts and feelings and experiences 'a whole God's breadth apart'—'the breadth of death and life.'"

Next we have a letter from Miss Pauline Vandeleur to her "dear and dauntless defender." "Know it's from my heart I call you my dear defender—and against more than merely physical ills—and I feel you to be so, in every fibre of me. . . .

"But I really want to write to you about Aunt Sarah. It's a pity that Hawthorne's not alive to observe her in her own 'Transformation.' She really is a psychological study worthy of his steel (pen). When I first told her that I had to give up eight hours a day to my Red Cross studies, she said she supposed she was very Early Victorian, but she did not think that nursing was a very nice or even proper profession for girls. She was glad that poor dear Queen Victoria was not alive to see what women had become—partly perhaps by her injudicious patting on the back of Florence Nightingale, who ended, Aunt says, by hating women, and spitting at them all sorts of spiteful names. Aunt said she found people fearfully selfish, 'girls and footmen'—a not very flattering conjunction for poor me."

In a letter from Dunkirk Captain Tudor makes reply: "I want to tell you that if you were here you would feel that a woman who frivols has ceased to exist for anybody who's up against the stark facts of death and life. The standards of womanhood as well as of manhood are all to be changed by this War, and thank the Lord for that!

"And so Aunt Sarah damns dear Florence Nightingale because she said spiteful things about women! She did, but the question is whether the ways of some women didn't righteously provoke her into angrily saying them? . . .

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