

UNCENSORED LETTERS FROM THE DARDANELLES.

WRITTEN TO HIS ENGLISH WIFE BY A FRENCH MEDICAL OFFICER OF LE CORPS EXPEDITIONNAIRE D'ORIENT.

In reading these letters we must emphasise two facts. They are written by a Frenchman, and published by an Englishwoman—his wife. It is the second fact that is somewhat incomprehensible. The publication of these very intimate present-day letters is explained by her, in her introductory note, and it would be churlish to comment on the making public of what an ordinary woman would have jealously kept to herself, when she gives us the following motives for so doing:—

She says: "The two greatest passions of men, love and war, are at this time mingled in the breasts of thousands of our soldiers. How can they be separated if a true picture is to be given? My husband is only typical of all men fighting for us, and I am glad of this opportunity which may rouse to a still higher degree all our admiration for them."

The purely personal matter with which these letters of absorbing national interest are mingled gives them, no doubt, a reality and conveys an atmosphere which would be lacking were they mere chronicles of war and travel.

We give some typical passages for the benefit of those who are not able to read the book as a whole.

"I am alone in a small restaurant at Alexandria and I think of you passionately. I do hope you are well and happy. Don't be worried about your Joe. He will come back in a few months, and we will love each other more and more."

"As we go into action with the dawn to-morrow, my dear little wife, I have spent these last hours putting into shape all my belongings. In clearing out everything I have decided to send you the diary I kept in Alexandria. Why not? On such occasions a husband should have no secrets, no reservations from the dear wife of his heart. I can trust you to read it as it was meant to be read—and to understand."

Quotations from the Diary at Alexandria.

"At 11 o'clock there was an apparition in my tent. A friend accompanied her. Broken bits of sentences, broken phrases, a laugh that did not ring true. A bewitching little foot swung under the dress. The ankle is of irreproachable purity of line. . . . When I return to my tent this evening I looked for the marks of her little feet in the sand. My tent is bathed in light and love."

To his wife: "For the world I would not distress you, beloved. Do not take it all too seriously. There is nothing wrong in these femininities."

His wife must, of course, be quite an exceptional woman. We are amused and also gratified

by his attitude to untrained nurses. His wife evidently has arranged to come out in that capacity.

"Let me tell you that I do not approve, that I do not want you to leave Europe with a war mission. I am absolutely put out and annoyed. I don't understand where you get such ideas. There are enough men to support the horrors of war without adding women. You say you want to serve on a boat, but I hope they will take only very experienced nurses. Others are useless, and consequently harmful."

Tenedos.

"Dearest. We are all sad to-day as we mourn one of the best-loved men in the regiment. He was nineteen. Death had accomplished its work. Not only that, but the youthful face, the laughing eyes, were mutilated.

"A man stepped to the edge of the hole. He was an old and hardened 'Poilu.' He said, 'Good-bye, my little one,' in a manner we shall never forget.

"And so, dear one, we are sad and silent tonight.

"Your devoted Joe."

He gives a touching description of his Christmas day:—

"I am alone. My garret has been emptied of the maize which blocked it up. It is almost decent. For Christmas I have lighted seven candles. They spread a solemn, church-like atmosphere and light around my hearth. When Barama came in just now, he burst out laughing. He is not only Singalese, he is Mussulman. What a pity he did not understand and kneel down instead of laughing. It is, however, Christmas, and I wish my tapers to burn all together to remind me of it. How many Christmases have been celebrated by men, and yet the world is as ferocious and cruel as ever. Jesus told us to love one another. Assassination and massacre are still held in honour. What madness attacks men and changes them into brutes.

"A merry Christmas to my darling, so far away and so longed for by her devoted Husband."

The last letter, from Salonica, announces that the eagerly waited for leave has been granted. It is brimful of human anticipation and impatience for the meeting with his wife. He must wait eight days: "There is nothing this moment at Salonica but horrible little ships which take eight or ten days to go to Marseilles." We ought to be very grateful to the anonymous lady who has made such a generous contribution to war literature.

H. H.

The donations from Australia for the "France's Day" Fund of the French Red Cross Society amount to nearly £10,000. The Australian Red Cross Society has given £4,000, the South Australian branch £2,000, the Melbourne branch £1,080, the Western Australian £1,000, and the Tasmanian £700.

* Anon. William Heinemann, London.

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