

THE CHURCH OF MEMORIES.

SOMEWHERE IN BELGIUM.

The little Church of Ste. Elisabeth stands among the grey dunes looking out on the silvery sea.

A gentle, almost imperceptible rain is falling.

The whole world seems a symphony of grey just now, a soft, grey sky, grey sand dunes veiled by a film of mist, a sea pearly as the iridescent breast of a dove.

The fisherfolk trawling off the coast see no friendly little light of a Sunday evening twinkling from these windows, the church hides modestly, sheltered by the dunes, bowing its head, fearing to be seen. For the Church of Ste. Elisabeth is an *église de guerre*, and had it a tower or a spire like some of its more important neighbours, it would have been shelled away long ago even as they. It is a plain wooden structure put together by the soldiers themselves, and you will notice that they have hung the great black wooden Cross bearing the piteous Christ on the wall furthest away from the German guns.

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Now the mist has rolled right up enveloping everything and muffling every sound; even the waves lapping up on the shore are no longer heard and the shrill voice of the seagull is silent.

Enter and you will see that the Church is full of spectral forms. Can it be that these phantom shapes, gleaming faintly in the blueness of the twilight, are the ghosts of the innocent victims who have lost their lives and who have come together to mourn the tragedy of Belgium?

Look again, and you will see that this little church is a sanctuary, full of poignant memories of what has been. This is the home for the crucifixes, the statues, the holy things from the bombarded churches in the neighbourhood. There hangs a great broken crucifix found unaccountably in the trenches at Pervyse, a poor, battered St. Lawrence, and a less maimed St. Christopher from Nieuport, some worm-eaten prie-dieu, one of the drab velvet cushions pierced and burnt by a bullet passing through. There on a stand is the mediæval copper reliquary that was once one of the glories of the church at Caesherbe. That fragment of masonry in the corner is all that is left of the altar at Avchappelle, and most of those brass candlesticks huddled up together once stood upon it. You may, if you choose, say your prayers beside the Madonna from Ramskapelle, from whose tender arms the Child has been torn by a fragment of shell and splintered into a thousand pieces. She stands there with Her piteous empty arms outstretched, and another mother, mourning her only son has crept into the Church and knelt down beside Her, for comfort and sympathy in her loss. . . .

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One can picture the priest-in-charge in this place of memories. He should be an ancient Abbé clad in a rusty black soutane, sympathy and

resignation shining out of his eyes as he ministers to his tiny flock.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The next morning a cheerful young priest in khaki, muddy to the knees, tramps up the side aisle, threads his way between the statues, and after the usual preparations, says a brisk Mass.

The shadows and the silence of the night before are gone.

The sky is a pale November blue, the wind has risen in the night and is whistling in the timbers, the tide is rolling in with rhythmic frenzy and passion, lashing the flat ochre sand. Just overhead an aeroplane or two are humming, guns far away are thundering dully.

The chapel is quite full, a few village people, some hospital patients in grey and scarlet, a few Nursing Sisters in blue dresses and soft white caps, a good many *petits soldats belges* in their new khaki, so like and so unlike the English soldiers.

Presently the priest gets up into the pulpit and begins to preach a little sermon. "Blessed are ye that mourn," he began, but his voice was almost drowned by the clamour of the guns. Dicke Bertha had begun to bombard X — two or three kilometres away and our guns were replying hotly to the challenge. But no one takes much notice of it, the rumble of the guns is almost as ceaseless as the roar of the sea, and like the sea, sometimes it is more, sometimes it is less, that is all.

And the *blestés* hobble painfully out of Church presently and see two specks high up in the sky and speculate idly whether the intruders will drop bombs or not. Two of them have a bet on it, and the one who bets that they are Taubes wins.

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And after a time silence reigned again in the little Church of Memories.

FOR A JUST BILL.

Miss Annie Hulme sends £5 to the President of the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses "for a just Bill." She writes: "I wish I could send £100." Every member of the Society owes a debt of gratitude to those who are able and willing to give such generous support to our movement for a Bill which provides for the organisation of the Nursing profession on a just and independent basis. It is now quite apparent that this fundamental principle will not be conceded unless we continue to work and pay for it in the future as we have done in the past. Ignoble subjugation must be resisted.

TRUE TALE WITH A MORAL.

Nurse with enquiring mind invited to join the College of Nursing: "Please, Matron, can you tell me—"

Matron, smiling benevolently and patting Nurse: "You be a good little girl and do as you're told. Just run away and join the College."

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