

THE ODYSSEY OF FRANCESCA.

(Concluded from page 209.)

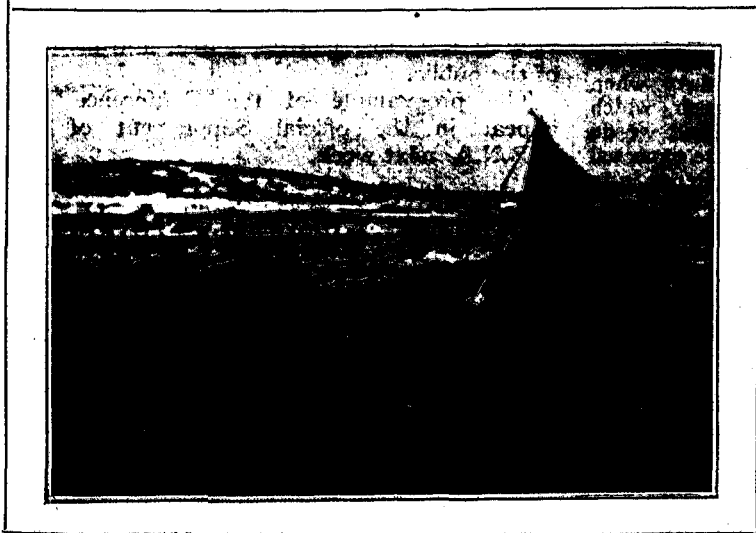
It was a long goods train, taking up food, forage, and ammunition for the troops. Apparently, as an afterthought, a passenger coach was attached, composed of six unclean carriages with narrow wooden seats and a half partition between each two carriages, over which one could easily step. No lights were provided by the railway company, but Francesca had a candle and matches, and as the train went off she lighted up and had a look at her fellow-travellers. They were all soldiers returning to the front—one Negro, one Serb, and the rest French colonial soldiers. Being Christmas Eve they had already drunk liberally of that which gladdens the heart of man, and had brought

a glorious night—still and cold and nearly as light as day. The train meandered slowly past desolate stretches of bare rock and wide lonely plains where the moon shone down on gentle-faced bearded shepherds watching their flocks, as they did on that other Christmas night so long ago.

After a time the ground grew hilly and broken and they began to climb slowly up a steep gradient. Then a long stop, and an extra engine was put on and they began to climb mountains which seemed as steep as the side of a house, panting up hills painfully and slowly through steep rocky defiles, short tunnels, over bridges and viaducts and deep dark chasms with valleys far below. It grew very cold as they climbed up, but it was wilder and more beautiful than anything Francesca had ever seen before. Once the train stopped for a long time and Francesca could see a town standing on

a cliff, with slender white minarets gleaming in the moonlight.

About six in the morning the train stopped in a wide valley, a small shed alongside the railway the only sign of civilisation. The Serb soldier yawned and stretched himself, looked at Francesca and finally said "Voici, madame, c'est la gare Moharrem." There was no sign of life, but he helped Francesca out with her luggage, and the train went on and left her sitting on her kit-bag beside the railway line, wondering what to do next. A Greek brigand, who is station master and everything else combined, appeared at last from nowhere and made her understand that she must go over to the hospital camp, about a quarter of an hour's walk,



UNFRIENDLY LOOKING TENTS.

several bottles of wine with them, so Francesca looked forward to a lively night. It was cold, for there were no panes of glass in the windows, and one of the carriage doors flew open every quarter of an hour all night.

Before long the big Negro and one of the French soldiers began to have a furious quarrel and Francesca feared that blood would be shed, for the Negro was much more than three parts drunk by this time, and with threats and curses he brandished a long and evil knife, and certainly looked as though he proposed to use it.

The Serb soldier was a peacemaker, and at last persuaded them to sit down, while Francesca tried to propitiate them with offerings of oranges. It was long before they were quiet, but at last most of them went to sleep in horribly cramped positions, and Francesca looked out of the window at the new world she was going through. It was

and he would take care of her things meanwhile.

And then poor Francesca had *qualms* as she walked in the cold grey dawn towards some unfriendly-looking tents which she saw in the distance. She was sleepy and tired and cold and early morning-ish, and the glamour of the night had departed. Suddenly she felt better. A large red sun rose slowly and deliberately, and illumined a fairy white camp with thin blue curls of smoke rising lazily into the air, suggesting breakfast among other nice things. Behind the tents she saw tiers of mountains capped with snow at the top, and swathed with lilac mist lower down and in front were piled masses of rocks and hills of every colour—saffron, ochre, sage green and burnt sienna. The bluest lake Francesca ever saw lay at her feet.

At the very entrance to the camp a sheep was

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