

## THE TRANSFIGURATION OF A PRISON CELL AND SOMETHING ELSE.

In the November issue of this JOURNAL, a brief announcement appeared, of the anniversary observance in Brussels of *October 12th*, 1915. With the Editor's permission, I should like to supply a few details from my own personal experience.

A prison is not always a place for the detention and punishment of criminals, it has frequently harboured a just man or woman, who suffers for conscience sake. Such an one was Edith Cavell, whose memory the Belgians have delighted to honour. I happened to be in Brussels last September, and hearing that the Prison of Saint-Gilles was open to English-speaking visitors every day (to other foreigners once a month) a party of four Englishwomen resolved to take advantage of the generous permission.

The Governor received us with charming courtesy, and after having briefly scanned our passports, he handed to us copies of the account of the last pathetic interview between Edith Cavell and the chaplain of the English Church (Christ Church), and waited patiently while we read it. He then conducted us to the cell, which has become at once a thing of painful and proud memory to English people. It is no longer a prison cell, but has been transformed into something in the nature of a *Chapelle-Ardente*. Over the door, which is draped with the flags of England, Belgium and America, the following words are inscribed:—

*Cellule de Miss Edith Cavell,  
fusillée par les Allemands.*

One enters a bower of flowers. Over the mattress upon which she slept, which is rolled into a small compass, a wooden structure is erected, upon which is mounted a large-sized portrait of the brave, martyred woman. This is draped with the Belgian and English flags, and the whole is profusely and artistically decorated with flowers and foliage. In front of all, is a small, unobtrusive money box, inviting visitors to keep this memorial a perpetual "thing of beauty." On the wall hangs a crucifix. Here also, preserved in a large folio, are kept various Press accounts of the tragedy in the French and English languages, besides many pictures. These the Governor showed us.

He further informed us that upon each recurring anniversary *October 12th*, the prisoners of Saint-Gilles are taken to the cell, and the story of the woman and her great self-sacrifice is related to them; how she nursed and aided to escape, soldiers of England, Belgium and Canada, knowing full well the price she would probably have to pay.

The Cell of Gabrielle Petit, a young Belgian woman of 23 years of age, who was shot for refusing to betray her

countrymen, which we also saw, is treated in the same way.

Solitary confinement is the rule in this prison, and every prisoner has his own small recreation ground. The governor took us into that belonging to "Cell 23." It was well planted with flowers, some of which Edith had planted herself, and were in blossom. With exquisite courtesy he silently gathered them and placed them in our hands. We were finally conducted to the hall where she received her sentence of death.

As this courteous gentleman showed us out, he gave utterance to what was probably his own guiding principle: "Duty First."

Upon my return home, I wrote to him a letter of appreciation of his kindness, enclosing a copy of that supremely beautiful *In Memoriam* of Edith Cavell, written by Henrietta J. Hawkins, and I received the following reply:—

"Ministère de la Justice.

"Administration Des

Prisons.

"Saint Gilles, le

17 Octobre, 1924.

"MADAME,—Je vous suis bien reconnaissant des sentiments que m'exprime votre lettre du 12 Octobre courant, et vous remercie infiniment du poème que vous avez bien voulu m'adresser. Je fais placer dans la cellule qui fut occupée par Edith Cavell, votre grande et héroïque compatriote, ce beau poème inspiré par le sentiment du patriotisme le plus élevé, et qui célèbre, en des termes aussi émouvants que captivants, les hautes vertues morales et civiques de la glorieuse fusillée.

"Veuillez agréer, madame, l'hommage de mes sentiments respectueux.

"Le Directeur-délégué,

"X. MARIN.

"A Madame Beatrice Kent, Membre du Conseil Municipal de l'Arrondissement Saint Pancras, Londres."



CELL OF EDITH CAVELL IN THE PRISON OF ST. GILLES, BRUSSELS. A PERPETUAL THING OF BEAUTY.

The beautiful article entitled "Dawn," by Virginia L. Montgomery, which also appeared in the November issue of this JOURNAL, as a reprint from the *American Journal of Nursing*, describes the writer's visit to the place of execution. I, too, with my three friends, paid the same tribute to the memory of our compatriot.

The ground on the Tir National (the National Shooting Ground) which marks the spot where 35 patriots were shot by the Germans—34 Belgian men and one Englishwoman—is now enclosed by a handsome iron railing. Within the enclosure there are two stone slabs, the larger one is placed in a sloping position, to enable visitors to read easily the names inscribed upon it; beyond it, and in a line with it, is the smaller slab placed flat on the ground, at the four corners of which are short, stone pillars connected by an encircling band of iron. This smaller slab marks the precise spot where the chair was placed.

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