

THE TRIBUTE OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NURSES OF GREAT BRITAIN TO THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER.

Who shall say what warrior rests under the memorials to the Unknown Soldier in various countries? None may know. What we do know is that in honouring him, we honour the countless dead who gave their lives for freedom, and that no homage we can offer can be adequate.

In the Great War, British and Italian soldiers fought side by side. British Nurses, high up in the mountains and elsewhere, nursed Italian soldiers back to health, or alleviated the pains of their passing, and learnt to appreciate their valour and patriotism. It was, therefore, a happy thought of Miss A. M. Bushby that the members of the National Council of Nurses of Great Britain, when in Rome, should publicly demonstrate their admiration of the Italian Army by bringing their tribute of laurels to the tomb of its Unknown Soldier.

The site of this tomb is most happily chosen. On a slope of the Capitol is the National Monument to Victor Emmanuel II., the symbol of United Italy, in gleaming Brescian marble, which, in its commanding position can be seen from all the environs of the city. Except for the bronze gilt sculptures with which it is surmounted, it is of pure white. Approached by an imposing flight of steps is the "Altare della Patria" with a symbolical figure of Roma, and it is at her feet that the Italian nation have laid their Unknown Soldier.

It was here that on September 27th British Nurses brought their wreath of laurels, to which was attached the purple ribbon of the National Council of Nurses of Great Britain—now so familiar a feature at National and International Congresses of Nurses—inscribed in letters of silver with the name of the Council.

On Thursday, September 27, the great bronze rail at the foot of the Memorial, easily identified in the picture on page 261, was lowered, and the group of British nurses, led by the President of the National Council, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, and including Miss F. M. Bartleet who nursed in military hospitals on the Italian front in the Great War, passed up the marble steps and reverently laid their wreath on the grave of the Unknown Soldier at the feet of Roma, in the centre of the Monument.

Who that took part in the touching ceremony could be unmoved, as she pictured the Unknown Soldier, far from home and kindred, in weariness, discomfort and pain, defending to the end with all his manhood, the home and the kindred who were so dear to him and the country which he loved so passionately, living, maybe, in trenches to which the warmth of the sun penetrated but rarely, and from which a glimpse of the lovely Italian sky could only be obtained with difficulty and danger. Little could

he have thought that his country put so high a value on his services, that it would count him sacred, and bring his worn out body with all circumstance and honour to the Eternal City and place it where his countrymen and countrywomen, as well as men and women of other nations, would for all time pay him homage.

As we still lingered at the tomb, loth to leave this sacred spot, instinct with so many emotions, a Royal carriage drove swiftly up to the foot of the steps, and passing through lines of Red Cross Nurses who grouped themselves on either side of the steps, came S.A.R. the Duchesse d'Aosta, President of the Committee of Honour of the International Reunion of Nurses, and nurses of the Italian Red Cross, bearing a wreath of laurels to which white and crimson ribbons were attached, bearing in gold letters the words:—

"LE INFIRMIERE DELLA
CROCE ITALIANA.
RIUNITE PER LA PRIMA
VOLTA IN
CONVEGNO INTERNAZIONALE."

This they placed at the grave of the Unknown Soldier, side by side with that of their British colleagues.

The Duchesse and those with her, knelt for a while in silent prayer before the tomb of the Unknown Soldier and then Her Royal Highness, graciously coming over to the place where Mrs. Bedford Fenwick and a group of British Nurses were standing, said to our President, earnestly and simply, "I do thank you very much for your thought for our Italian soldiers. Our soldiers when they fight in the same cause are all one."

To which Mrs. Fenwick replied, "The cause of freedom, Your Royal Highness," and the Princess said, "All the dead are our brothers."

Mrs. Fenwick said a few words of thanks to the Duchesse who then gave the Roman salute and passed on.

After a last look at the tomb and the wreaths of the British and Italian Nurses, we descended the steps, feeling that it had been "good for us to be there" and returned once more to ordinary life.

The magnificent monument to King Victor Emmanuel II. is of special interest in its connection with the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Amongst its symbolical groups is a marble group representing Power, Concord, Sacrifice and Right, and four statues surmount the portals of honour, namely, Politics, Philosophy, Revolution and War. On the extremities of the Portico are Unity and Liberty.

At the foot of the grand stairs are two marble groups, gilded, that on the right represents Action, and that on the left Meditation.

The monument was designed by Count Guiseppe Sacconi, whose design was selected in open competition. The foundation stone was laid in 1885, and it was unveiled in 1911 when the essential parts were complete.

Instinct with majesty and beauty, it must ever have an abiding place in the memories of those British nurses.



MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK, F.B.C.N.,
President of the National Council of Nurses of Great Britain,
With its wreath placed on the Memorial to the Unknown Soldier.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)