

BOOK OF THE MONTH.

"FOUR YEARS OUT OF LIFE."*

Of War books there have been many, yet there is room for "Four Years out of Life," by Miss Lesley N. Smith, for, written from a different angle from most that have appeared, and with considerable literary skill, simply and sincerely, it grips our attention.

Its attractiveness is increased by the author's black and white illustrations.

To the young womanhood of to-day the "Four Years" are for the most part but a faint echo of something past and gone, very terrible at the time, no doubt, but having no particular significance for them, and it is well that this book should reveal to them what these years meant to girls of their own age, and what a deep impression they left on their lives.

The author recalls that "in retrospect the moment before a storm breaks is found to have been heavy, lurid, pregnant with foreboding. So it was with the summer of 1914, which seems to have been lived in a breathless pause before the storm. Actually at the time it was like every summer there ever had been or ever would be. To a girl of twenty-three, the tennis parties, the garden parties, the weddings and dances seemed as inevitable and unchangeable as the calm prosperity of everyday life.

Then in the middle of all this permanence came a sudden announcement that a yachting trip on the west coast of Scotland must be postponed because war had been declared. It was too annoying."

There followed the usual First Aid Classes and a sort of intensive course of medical training which was *bound* to be useful. "Nurse Gair's voice droned on and on, talking about splints and bandages, and fractures and pelvis bones—nothing that could have a possible relation to everyday life; it was all as remote as manna in the wilderness, or golden calves in the desert, a sort of war-time allegory . . .

One morning in early October I came down to breakfast. Everything was very much as usual, there was a lovely aromatic smell of coffee and chrysanthemums and a cheerful fire. Mother picked up the paper first and skimmed through the news and then dropped it with a queer cry:—"Why, Douglas Braidwood has been killed in action—Douglas! . . ."

I looked hastily at the list and found not only Douglas's name but the names of five other boys who had been friends of his and ours; sons of people we knew—our friends! It was a queer crashing start to one's own personal war. Before that it had been the Government's affair, and now we were all in it just because some boys we knew had been killed outright instead of dying with the usual paraphernalia of doctors and nurses and wreaths.

It suddenly seemed to be necessary after that to try to stop muddling, and do some one thing tidily and properly. The hospitals had sent such numbers of their trained staffs to France that they were glad of probationers, and within a fortnight I found myself bumping along a country road in a horse cab with a trunk in front of me and all the feelings of a frightened 'tweeny' going to her first place."

The arrival at the nurses' home of a hospital on the South Coast was not inspiring. A gaunt warrior of a woman flung open the door of a small cell and said, "There isn't a room for you Nurse Kay, but you may use this till Nurse Blakely comes back. . . . At last I summoned up courage to ask what I should do about my trunk. I asked a nice fat-looking nurse thinking she might be kind. She looked at me with a lack-lustre gaze and said drearily: "Oh you haven't a room? Well, just take handfuls of clothes up from the box-room as you need them."

UNDER ORDERS.

"On November 8th, 1915," says Miss Lesley, "I was called up by the War Office, and in company with fifty other hats (navy felt, price 15s. 6d. and fifty other coats, navy serge, price 27s. 6d.) I reported in London. We stood like fifty Mrs. Noahs from a child's ark, and looking no more intelligent, while one of those maddeningly bright and wholesome women who are notoriously 'good with girls' gave us brassards and identity discs and good advice—none of which was of any use to us beyond Boulogne. At Boulogne Quay I picked up a rug, my haversack—in which were packed the necessities for one night—and with a couple of francs ready in my hand for the porter, I walked jauntily down the gangway.

"At the foot of the gangway a grim sister in grey and scarlet stopped me with a gesture, and said coldly, 'Stand behind me, Nurse.'

"I meekly joined a group of V.A.D.s and we stood waiting till the Sister-in-Charge had ticked everyone off her list.

"Then we were allowed to wander along the muddy quay clutching our rugs and self-consciously swinging our haversacks over our shoulders. This was the moment when many of us realised with apprehension, amazement and dismay that as individuals we were now impotent. We had signed away our rights of initiative. We had subjected ourselves to the monstrous unreason of a dispensation entitled 'Movement Orders.' Money was as useless to us as to the thirsty traveller lost in the Sahara. There were cars there but we could not hire one. The booking office was plentifully stacked with tickets but we could not buy one. The appropriate movement order was not forthcoming and we were told simply to wait at the hotel on the quay.

"We waited."

It was here our author formed what proved to be a lasting friendship with the girl who sat next to her—Miss Gratton. She was nice looking and had an eager amused expression as if all experiences were of interest to her. "At last Sister arrived at the door, and said in a loud commanding voice 'You may all have lunch.' Later Sister came again, fluttering sheaves of papers and obviously full of importance. She cleared her throat with a parade ground rasp and said peremptorily: 'You will all please pay attention.'

"Ten nurses are wanted for No. 129. Any of you who want to go together *stand* together.'

"Miss Gratton and I moved forward, two or three others did the same, and Sister rapidly scored off ten names and numbers, dropped all her papers, picked them up obviously in the wrong order, and barked at our little group of ten, "Stand aside and stand together.'

"At last the list was ended and Sister raked our group with a suspicious eye.

"Those for 129 *only* follow me.'

"When every V.A.D. had seen and identified her own luggage we were packed into another ambulance and drove off into the unknown.

"After about an hour we stopped abruptly. The back curtains of the ambulance were drawn aside and a cheerful voice said:—

"Tumble out now you've arrived. Each one must be responsible for her own kit; clutch it and follow me.'

"A large, cheerful woman swung a storm lantern as she spoke. She was a welcome surprise after the acidulated spinster at the quay.

"Every one called Matron 'the General' medical officers and sisters alike—partly in admiration and partly in fear.

"The General knew her job. She managed the hundred women like a team of horses and got the last ounce of

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