

work out of everyone with charm or scorn, whichever method suited each particular case. But she used her powers of organization equally to ensure our comfort; but, above all, every department of that varied life fitted neatly into place. In the midst of chaos meals seemed to be waiting just at the moment when there was time to take them, extra help arrived just when it was most needed, and there was no confusion and waste of energy."

Of the work in the wards, the heroism of the men, the Zeppelin raids, the nerve-racking experience of night duty in "a world gone mad," it is impossible to quote at length. To the utmost of their ability the nursing staff in this unit cared devotedly for their patients.

"I stayed in 'heads' for eight weeks and at the end my only happiness was in remembering how few during that time had recovered enough to go home. It was not possible for me to attune myself to the existence of head wounds. Death has its own clean finality; but these men whose admirable bodies lay inert and helpless at the mercy of a grotesque obscenely rolling head seemed a denial of everything beautiful and fair. I saw and admitted the triumph of ugliness and evil, and knew, wherever I went afterwards, I would take my own Bedlam with me."

The story of the Sister who refused to leave her patients until she was relieved, is good reading. "But the Germans are in the next field" pointed out the young man sent to make provision for her safety. "Well, I said, that is nothing to do with me . . . and then he said he could not go till I did and he'd be shot for the sake of an obstinate old woman. I wasn't wanting to be the death of any young man, impertinent or otherwise, so I said, 'Well, if there's all that hurry, who's going to look after my patients?'"

Having got rid of the "obstinate old woman" the young man conducted the patients to safety.

The end came at last: "The last two hours were a frenzied rush to catch up lost time, and I had barely finished when the day people came into the ward and converted me into an intruder."

"Well Kay I suppose you're going to settle down at home now and buy clothes and do the flowers for mother?"

"I did not answer for a moment, but as I knew of no alternative, I could only shrug and say:

"I suppose so"

The book is one which will live, it is a true picture, written with restraint, of such a nightmare as, please God, the world will never see again, which left an indelible mark on all who passed through it. It is one to possess and to ponder over.

LEAVES FROM THE DIARY OF A DISTRICT NURSE.

"MRS. SNEAT, MALINGERESS."

It was a real pilgrimage to Mrs. Sneat's room, for she lived at the top of innumerable stairs.

If I enterprised it rashly, I had to stop and pant; if I dawdled, it wasted time.

In either case I invariably found her prone in bed with a sputum cup, richly besprinkled with blood, beside her.

I have since seen reason to suppose that she replenished that cup—as occasion offered—from the butcher's wares.

It was designed to impress me with her ardent tuberculousness—and—just at first it did.

But when I found that Mrs. Sneat possessed the hefty limbs of a Norwegian farm lass, and a complexion *en suite*, not to mention a voice which (when she forgot to reduce it) was like a channel pilot's in a fog, I ceased to be impressed and waxed irritable.

For Mrs. Sneat was a *malade imaginaire*, almost the

only one (certainly the only *blatant* one) I have ever found among the poor.

She looked about thirty, and, in a tow-haired Norse way, was prepossessing.

I think she must have been spoilt as a child. She was certainly spoilt as a married woman, for she had espoused a Patriarch, and all day long, from that hypocritical couch of hers, she dealt out languid orders to him, which he fell over himself to obey.

He was a seafaring Patriarch with a pension, and a small, clean-cut face like a very gentle Napoleon's.

He did the family sewing, sitting close against the window and screwing up his eyes.

I have even seen him industriously mending corsets, presumably in hopeful anticipation of the day when his wife should arise and don them.

But she never did—in his time.

She was the egocentre of egocentricism!

North, South, East and West she was bounded by Mrs. Sneat.

It was epic, *unmatchable* selfishness—one all but admired it.

She treated the old fellow exactly as a good-natured shepherd treats his dog, making him trot up and down that Bhuddish-penance of a staircase some twenty times a day, and calling him to heel in her grand-lady voice, while he beamed devotion.

Poor Napoleon! he scrubbed, cleaned, cooked and shopped—besides the stay-mending; and lest his spare moments should lure him into mischief, he massaged Mrs. Sneat's spine.

Lodgers on the lower floors, in various stages of curling pins and wrath, would catch me as I passed, and tell me "what a burning shame it was, and for goodness gracious sake, couldn't I *do* something?"

But what action could I take?

Mrs. Sneat subscribed her penny a week to the Nursing Association with passionate regularity, and if she required me to smear prescribed portions of her chest and back with iodine, who was I to say her nay?

Besides, any straight speaking would have broken Mr. Sneat's heart. He hugged his fetters.

Oh, of course, I ought to have had the courage to hike her from between the blankets, shake her for a bone-lazy hussy, tuck her husband up in her place, and take the consequences.

But I was inexperienced in those days, and if I hadn't been, I believe the old man's wistful, anxious eyes would have weakened me.

He *did* admire her so much. . . He was so pathetically grateful for her condescension in marrying him. He believed so intensely in each concocted symptom.

He could recite them as a schoolchild recites Casabianca at the Term-end concert. He expected her demise at any given moment and the sight of me, professionally equipped, gave him a sense of security, and probably prolonged his life. If it didn't, I like to think it did.

But in time he thinned away to bones and parchment, and died abruptly (I can't imagine his lingering or giving trouble to anybody) of sheer overstrain.

No one was surprised except Mrs. Sneat who, failing a slave to carry out her behests, was forced to get into the patched corsets and shift for herself.

I left the neighbourhood at about this time; but the last I heard of Mrs. Sneat was that she had married a young man (I knew she would!) who had no patience with "not a wink of sleep the blessed night through," or "I've a stabbing pain just 'ere that's fair killing me."

He probably broke the sputum cup over her head.

I *hope* he did—well, almost I do.

Anyhow, I hope he makes her work and work and *work!*

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