

BRIGHT ARMOUR.

MEMORIES OF FOUR YEARS OF WAR.*

"Bright Armour," as the author, Lady Salmond, tells us in her Foreword, "is really an account of happenings, of events clearly remembered during the years from 1914 to 1918." That is true. It is true also that for those who lived through them, who played their gallant part on active service, or brought their various gifts to the service of their country, life is evermore sharply divided, as so well expressed by our French Allies, into "Avant la Guerre" and "Après la Guerre." Yet since the beginning of the Great War a whole generation has grown to man's estate, and Lady Salmond's book, which vividly depicts the pain and suffering, the tragedy and sorrow of those four fateful years, is timely.

The book opens with the last days of a very brilliant London Season, and "a party at almost the most lovely of England's great houses. The massive beauty of the house, the serenity of the huge park, the fern, the deer, the whole picture of steadfast England gave out a feeling of security.

"The news was grim, but the Bank Holiday horse show was still held in the park, the best horses in the west country were paraded, and hunting friends turned up from many quarters. On August 4th, 1914 (my twenty-first birthday), came the awful certainty: and then we had to face the reality.

"The Kaiser had stayed in that house; we all went solemnly to watch our hostess turn his photograph to the wall."

The author tells us "we all had the most happy childhood, spent at our much loved home at Taplow and made perfect for us by our parents. We were a large family and very devoted to each other. My parents are Lord and Lady Desborough and the family name is Grenfell. My name was then Monica Grenfell, and the rest of the family consisted of Julian and Billy, my two elder brothers, of Ivo, who was younger, and of my sister Imogen, the youngest of us. We had none of us wasted those happy, care-free days. We had shared all the happiness as a band of close friends, united by affection and laughter, and we rushed to meet all the fun."

Then the War, and the separation of this happy family, as they took up their several duties, never again in this world to be wholly reunited.

The author "concentrated on becoming a nurse." The first expedition to London in search of a hospital wanting "green" nurses was fruitless. "I called at two hospitals and humbly asked if any probationers were wanted, if anyone willing but ignorant could possibly be wanted. It was no good. I remember envying every nurse in uniform, envying them passionately."

A visit to the London Hospital brought a better result, and on the nineteenth of August the author went into residence there; there was a lecture in the evening by Mr. Russell Howard, the first of a series of admirable lectures given by him that autumn. In the course of it he mentioned "the poster of a Red Cross nurse lifting up a wounded soldier and pouring brandy down his throat—methods most quickly calculated to be fatal!"

Life at the London is vividly described in some detail. The picture of it is of considerable interest and should be read *in extenso*. Nurses will recognise it "to the life." The sorrow, the humour, the courage, the pathos, the hard work, and the constant strain on sympathies which must be outwardly repressed but by no means suppressed, are admirably described.

Meanwhile "many people we knew were home, wounded, by this time, and we had first-hand accounts of the fighting. I went for a drive in a motor with Desmond FitzGerald

one lovely September afternoon; and I went to see him also in the hospital in Grosvenor Street.

"Aubrey Herbert was there, more ill. Desmond told me of their first engagement under fire. They were in cover, in a wood which seemed to be full of advancing Germans. The Germans opened fire, and the Colonel called out, 'It's all right. They're only doing that to frighten us.' Aubrey said very quietly 'If that is their object, they have succeeded so far as I am concerned.'"

Later came a precious day at Taplow with a brother home from South Africa with his regiment.

"It was thrilling to see Julian again, after an interval of a year and a quarter. He was such an eager soldier—the tremendous activity of that time suited him, and all his vigour and the zest of his imagination seemed to spring towards the task to be undertaken." Alas, this beloved brother early in the War, and later the second of the three brothers, made the supreme sacrifice. For them honour, for their family "grief too deep for words."

"As a great many extra short-time probationers were taken at this time—and useful we were too in the shortage of nurses—we were collected one day and spoken to by Lord Knutsford, the Chairman of the hospital. He put us on our honour to work well and justify the experiment."

There is a story of an Armenian Archbishop in the wards. He looked very dark and bushy and biblical, and some apostles used to come and visit him. "When I gave him the choice of supper dishes (bread and milk, or fish and potato cakes, or bread and cheese and milk, or custard, or bread and butter) he said that would do, meaning the whole lot."

Later came hospital work in France, at Wimereux, and we get just a glimpse of a well known friend. "A wonderful surgeon, Sir Victor Horsley, was there for a short time. For a few weeks the patients had the luck to be under him. Sir Victor struck terror into the hearts of all the staff. He had the reputation of being very difficult to work for. . . . He had got the most tender heart and fine sensibility as far as the patients were concerned. I have never witnessed such wide and acute sympathy. He was original, and witty, and keen, with knife sharp interests everywhere."

Taplow Court was turned into a home of rest for war nurses by Lord and Lady Desborough in July, 1915, and when the last batch left in December 1918, just over a thousand had been received on visits there.

During the last part of the War Miss Grenfell studied at the National and other hospitals for the I.S.T.M. Massage certificate, and in the dreaded examination, written, oral and practical, passed fifth out of thirty in the class, and then, under the teaching of Dr. Justina Wilson, took the course in Medical Electricity, and an advanced course in X-ray and X-ray treatments, as well as instruction in High Frequency and Diathermy.

Armistice Day came at last, at Avon-Tyrell, the home of the Manners family, then a Convalescent Home for Officers.

"It fell as a blessing so great that it could hardly be realised. It was wonderful to be amongst those warriors, who showed tremendous elation, excitement and triumph. I saw tears of gratitude and pity, the sorrow was being mourned in the midst of thankfulness and relief.

"In the evening a huge bonfire was lighted in the heather, up near the pine clump. We all held hands round it. We were in the company of great soldiers, the flames licked up, and in the glare one could see their brave faces, very moved, their uniforms, and our sisters' caps. The light flickered on us. Lord Manners began a speech. He said: 'This signals the end of the greatest war the world has ever known.' . . . The words were not spoken without tears, and his thoughts soared far beyond the bonfire, and the moorland scene."

M. B.

*Faber & Faber, Ltd., 24, Russell Square, W.C. 7s. 6d. nett.

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