



WHEN QUEEN ELISABETH CALLED ON ME

By MARGARET BELL SAUNDERS

We all remember how shocked we were when the news was published in Canada that Margaret Bell Saunders was wounded in Belgium. Miss Saunders, as a Canadian Guild Nurse, was on duty when hit by a German shell. For some weeks she lay in the hospital in great pain, but always bright and cheerful. Here she recounts the facts of an important little incident that happened to her.—Editor's Note.

A MURMUR went through the corridors and wards of the hospital. Nurses scuttled here and there, giving a pat to a pillow, or straightening a sheet. Pretty little V. A. D.'s stopped a moment before a mirror, pushed back an errant curl, then hurried on. Thermometers remained but a fleeting second to register their duty, and then were thrust back into their cases.

Tibot and Oiseau—so-called because they whistled so well—were hurried back to their wards. They were both able to walk now and had been steeping themselves in sunlight in the window which looks toward the sea. Tibot was the wag of the floor. He wore a large bandage over his head and always wept at dressing time. The wound had affected his brain, and he would talk of strange things at times. Not ravingly, just joyous prattle, a bit unbalanced. He was a great favourite; but he would never go back to his fishing boat, and the wild waves he loved so well.

Probably that was why he always bathed himself in sunlight in the window facing the sea. It brought back a bit of the old life.

Has it ever occurred to any one how very unsimple is the life of a professional nurse? How they surround everything with ceremony! What mountains of complications they make out of a mere molehill of simplicity!

And the thousand and ten little items of etiquette which must be observed! Dear me, yes! A pleasant-faced night sister comes in to pay you an afternoon visit, very kindly suggests that there may be something she can do for you and when you, to please her, ask for a glass of water, apologises humbly that she is unable to give it to you, because she is off duty!

If your own night nurse happen to drop in for a few moments, during her afternoon walk—purely unprofessional—she is met by black looks and an expression which proclaims more eloquently than kindly, perhaps, "You're off duty, Sister. This is my time on."

It's amusing and perhaps a bit sad. For the motive of the night and day nurses is the same—the ultimate healing of wounds and knitting together of shattered bones, not the small personal jealousies which unfortunately infest a hospital, as children do the parks in Spring.

And so it was. On the day of the excitement, I was full of attentions. Sister Marian hurried in to hand me my looking glass; the tall, good-natured Scotch nurse hovered about, tucking in blankets and giving a touch here and there to the room; the head sister straightened my chart; the pretty, fair one shook up my pillows; while the V. A. D. hurriedly thrust a thermometer under my arm.

Fuss reigned supreme. What a relief it would be when everything were over! Every few minutes some one rushed in to give the latest information.

"She's on the floor below," or "I saw her crossing into the ward where the German prisoner is; she always talks to him, and she's brought him books to read."

Presently the cause of all the ceremony was revealed. Presently she came, heralded by the Matron, the Receiving Matron, the Head Surgeon and the Doctor of that floor.

The moment she entered the room all ceremony vanished and simplicity came into its own.

It is such people as queens who are always simple. They can afford to be perfectly natural.

The Queen of the Belgians came up to

my bed, took my hand and in laboured English said, "I want to thank you for what you have done and are doing for our children. I know of your work, have known for some time; and I have always intended to come and see you and your depot, but I never have had a moment. However, I hope to be able to come soon."

BELGIUM'S Queen is not brilliant. One could never imagine sensational books being written around her life at court. But one could very easily imagine books being written about her life amongst her people. I fear they would not be popular, however, as they would have to do with kind acts and gracious words—nothing more enthralling than that.

She is very kind and simple; her face is sad now, however, for she is living a divided life. Her own brother is in command of the hostile forces which are nearest in line to the Royal Villa on the sea. But she does not think of him as a brother any more. In happy peace times their summers were spent together, a great part of them at least, in the Bavarian Tyrol. King Albert was there too, all of them forgetting the responsibilities and conventionalities of the superficial life they lived in public.

Those days, of course, are ended. Devoted as Elisabeth, Queen of Belgium, was to her brother, Louis Guillaume, and the

rest of her family, all ties are now broken. For her heart is in Belgium, her interests with Belgium's people, who are now her people, and who love her as a Queen is seldom loved.

One reads many charming bits about the friendliness of royalty and their subjects. Such things always make charming reading and help to bridge the chasm that surrounds those who are set in high places. In meeting them one is surprised to find them simple, quiet and charming, exactly like other well bred persons.

An English major came into our depot one day with a rather interesting tale. He had come across a motor with a flat tire—out in the wild, flat roads of Flanders. The chauffeur was on his knees beside it, and above him stood a woman, small, petite, clothed in a man-tailored blue serge suit and soft white felt hat—a familiar costume in Flanders.

"Are you going toward La Panne?" she said to the major who slowed up.

He was. "Well, I wonder if you would be good enough to give me a lift? I have guests coming to luncheon and am already late."

He gave her a lift. She sat in the back of his ambulance on a rough board. She was Elisabeth, Queen of the Belgians.

EVERY morning, at nine o'clock, sees her in the Pavilion of the Hospital de L'Océan at La Panne, which bears her name, dressing wounds of soldiers. There is no ceremony. She is merely a sister, the same as the other sisters, and wearing the same uniform.

Her afternoons are taken up in various ways. There are several schools in the small bit of unoccupied Belgium under her direct control. It is from the Royal bounty that the little dresses arrive periodically in these schools, and a great many extra delicacies.

She has organized sewing classes, where the clothes are made, and is a very active patron of the "Aide Civile Belge," which provides work to the lacemakers who have been rendered workless by the War.

That is how the blue serge suit and soft hat are so well known in Belgium. The

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