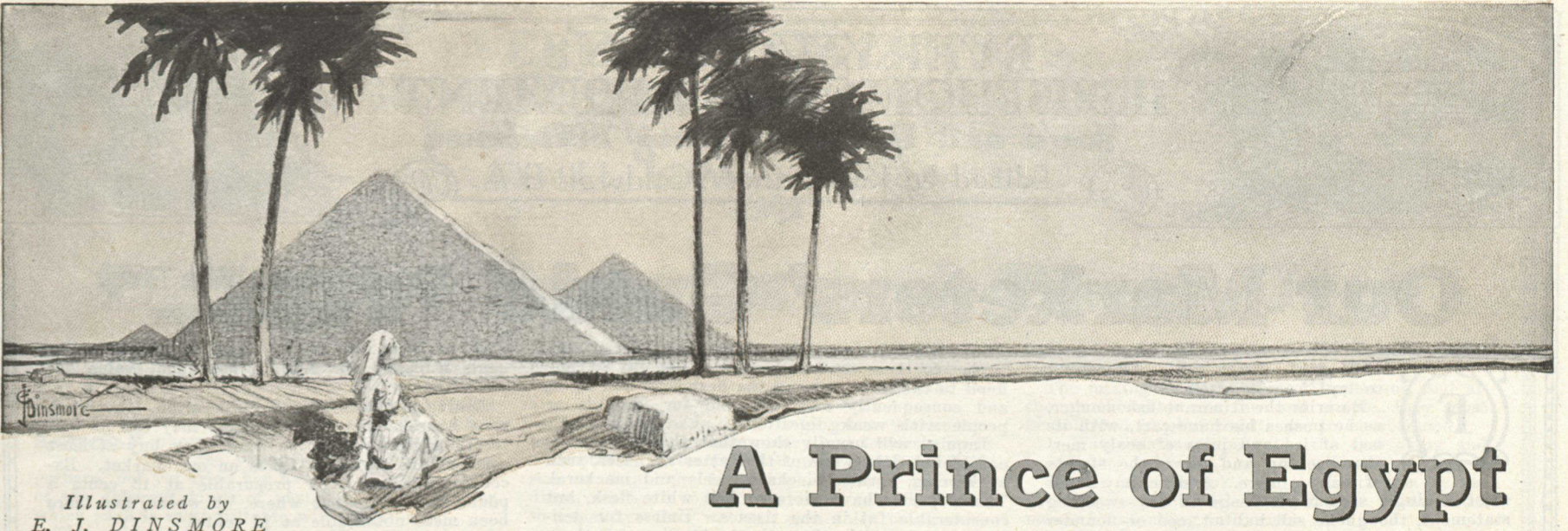




Illustrated by
E. J. DINSMORE

A Prince of Egypt

A Modern Tale Of Ancient Significance--As Enthralling As It Is Weird

By MADGE MACBETH

SHE is a very old lady, and her smile is set and tired, yet in it I found both warmth and welcome—yes, and a stirring recollection, like the awakening of a dim remembrance of something once familiar but gradually forgotten during the passing of many years. And I stood a long time in silent contemplation of the Sphinx, trying to understand the message she had for me, coming as I have at last to the land of my fondest dreams; coming, not as a stranger among unknown people and untrodden ways, but as a world-wide traveller returned home after many, many years."

THIS is the first entry in the diary of a nurse with whom I was associated for several months in Egypt, and the book came into my possession in almost as unaccountable a manner as that in which the writer of it went out of my life.

I was the matron of our hospital, which was stationed at Cairo. I don't know that the War Office really looked for much fighting in that section, but troops were sent out to Egypt, it will be remembered, during the time that Germany's policy was to keep the Allies on tenderhooks, and England was obliged to maintain a considerable fleet at the mouth of the Dardanelles, as well as to strengthen her forces in India and Egypt. Of course, hospital units accompanied the troops.

None of us thought we would be busy. We used to joke about the overcrowding of the Continent, and tell one another that if Cairo became unpleasantly full of tourists, we would move on to the more exclusive and mountainous regions of Abyssinia. But before long there was little time for ordinary conversation, much less joking. With batches of wounded coming in and a discouraging number of fever patients among our own staff, we found ourselves toward the middle of the winter obliged to send out calls for relief.

Days passed and no help came. Meanwhile, the wards grew more crowded, and the staff less able to care for the men. Almost every night the name of a nurse or a doctor was added to our list of patients, until I found myself alone one morning, save for the questionable assistance of a couple of native orderlies. The climax came when Colonel Mowberly brought me word that a boat-load of "cases" were on their way, and that we would have to make room for them.

I stared at him, helplessly. "We ask for relief, and they send us patients!" I muttered. Then aloud: "It isn't simply because handling the wards under present conditions is a problem, but there isn't room for the men. . . . It doesn't seem fair to them . . . no attention. . . . I am willing, but human!"

The rows of cots were moving in a crazy quadrille as I looked from my old friend to them, and my knees felt unsteady, limp.

"There'll be some nurses with them," cheered the Colonel. "You shall have as many as can be spared. Swallow hard, Sister, and take a fresh hold! No matter who else fails, you must stick by us!" He turned at the door to call back: "Mind, I am depending upon you to hang on until the finish. Whenever I can, I will come in and help you."

I shrugged and looked down the long rows of beds, each with its victim of Kultur and Kaiserism. There wasn't room for another man. The heat was withering; not the sort of sun-heat

that sends the thermometer up in an honest endeavour to dry the mercury, but the torrid atmosphere that comes from fevered bodies too closely packed together, from boiling water and saturated dressings; heavy, fétid heat, unrelieved by a breath of freshness or purity; heat that throbbed with sighs and moans and gibberish, often shouted in high-pitched voices.

Wisps of steam hung about the ward and obscured my vision as I moved with leaden feet from bed to bed, and something inside me seemed to threaten that if another fellow shrank and quivered under the touch of my hands I would shriek aloud and beat my head against the floor.

I DON'T know when she entered the room, but I was somehow conscious of her presence, even before the sound of murmured voices came to me. One was low and indescribably sweet. I distrusted the evidence of my own senses. "People hear angels singing just before they die," was the thought that ran through my heavy head. "It is likely the fever coming on."

My last dressing finished, I turned, and was amazed to see a girl kneeling beside Jim Donaldson, our youngest and our worst patient. She was crooning to him and trying to quiet his delirious ravings. "Your hands are cool," he muttered, "cool and sweet—like dog-wood blossoms. Lay them on my cheek . . . on my lips! A drop of dew, if you please, and a glimpse of green! The accursed glare of the sun hurts my eyes, and drives sharp arrows through

my head. . . . There is a fragrance about you. . . . You are very fair, just like an English primrose," he babbled happily. "I love you, Primrose. Are you Primrose?"

He clutched at her face and held it between his burning hands, repeating the question with all shades of anxiety and pleading in his voice.

"Yes, yes," she murmured, "I am Primrose."

He began to sob. "I believe you are teasing me. Will you swear that you are Primrose?"

"Of course," she smiled, her face very close to his. "And I will come to you often. . . . I will sit beside you while you sleep. . . . Close your eyes." She trailed her fingers across them. "Close your eyes and think of the cool, green lawns and the close-clipped hedges, and the shady lanes. Think of primroses . . ."

His muttering ceased, and he fell asleep.

The chap in the next cot held out a wound-shrivelled hand, and the girl, after a look at young Donaldson, slipped noiselessly across the floor to him.

"I say, is your name really Primrose?" he whispered.

"Oh, no," she replied, brightly. "My name is Dryad Dixon."

If I were to tell you that she was tiny of form and feature, with a pale, serious face, framed in shimmering yellow hair, with great staring eyes that never seemed to see you, even though they looked directly into yours, you will have no idea of the girl who, quite oblivious to me, knelt on the floor and stroked that boy's close-cropped head.

I watched her with a sort of dull fury. I had been promised help, and this inefficient atom had been sent! I felt keen resentment, too, at her apparent contempt for military etiquette. Why had she not reported properly and asked for her assignment? And then her casual treatment of the truth—this both shocked and angered me. Strictly reared in the Established Church, not even the ravings of a delirious patient could have induced me to tell a lie, and to this day "Cross-my-heart-and-hope-I-may-die" is as binding as any oath. Above all, I was fretted by her method of dealing with the men. It was irregular, queer; it made me vaguely uneasy.

Weeks went by before I would acknowledge even to myself that Dryad Dixon helped me. What she really did, God knows—I mean of the things nurses are supposed to do. She just sat still in an uncanny way and thought them done, and the necessity for doing them passed!

For example, all the rest of us bathed the fever patients frequently to reduce their temperatures. She did not. She merely sat beside them and patted their pillows and smoothed their heads and talked to them about cool things, and when I went around with my thermometer, they were hardly more than normal! She did not make the men quiver and flinch in changing their dressings, for she seldom changed any. Not only did I think her untrustworthy for such work, but there never seemed to be the necessity for changing them when she was on hand. When I went through the ward, and she was there, I felt as though I were stirring it up. I was conscious of seeming to bustle with a fearful activity. My voice sounded



Daring to raise my eyes I recognized the personality whose presence I have only felt all this while.

(Continued on page 48)