

EACH ONE HER SPECIALTY

HE wrote stories. Perhaps you have read some of them, or don't you condescend to read the "Daily Short Story" in the evening paper? They were bought by a syndicate that supplied literature to numerous newspapers in various parts of the States and Canada, and were read, presumably, by the tired working-man. They were easy to write and easier still to read, for they were never long enough to bore you, never sufficiently thrilling to excite you. Her husband called them "dope," but though he rarely read them, he was really proud of his clever wife and her foolish little stories, which brought a smile to the lips and a tear to the reader's eye—and incidentally a substantial cheque to the writer's pocket book. The plots were not new, they were, her husband said, inherited. At Christmas time she was sure to write about the snow-bound train, the crusty traveller and the little golden-haired child. The St. Valentine story reeked with sentiment; in March the plots were hinged on the fact that something got blown away; the midsummer stories were strewn with hammocks, canoes and moons, especially moons, while ghosts were apt to haunt the lovers' walks in November. But the characters throughout them all were human, and they were sketched in a whimsical way that made them popular.

Even when the war broke out she continued to write. It helped to keep her mind off the fact that her husband was leaving soon for the front, but she longed to show her patriotism in some definite way. Her first thought, of course, was to take up nursing. "Then I could go to England and be near you," she told him.

"But nurses aren't made in a day," he reminded her, "and while I always wanted to have you with me that time I was laid up, you know you never remembered to give me my medicine, and you couldn't learn to take my temperature or change the dressings."

"That's true," she admitted, "I can't even make one. Someone always had to stand over me at the Red Cross rooms, to see that I did it right. They only let me roll bandages now. I'm good for nothing!"

"What about your stories?" he reminded her.

"Piffle! The world doesn't want such foolishness now!"

"But what would become of our little girl if you were off nursing all day? I would feel much happier if I knew you were safe at home. England is too near the seat of war, and even while I was training I couldn't see much of you."

So she continued to write stories. It was even necessary to do so if she kept up the little home. At first she thought of dispensing with her maid, but at that time work was scarce and people were asked not to dismiss their servants. And so things went on.

Then came the call for women in munition plants and she promptly volunteered for service. She was glad to get on a night shift, for that did not separate her so much from her little daughter, and so she was happy feeling that now she was really doing something for her country. But the work was hard, very hard for her. All around her were girls accustomed to factory life who found the short shift of munition work comparatively easy. They were more deft, too, with their fingers. At the machine next to her was a lady who had formerly been a sculptress and worked with amazing quickness and accuracy. Her previous training served her in good stead.

"Though I was a failure in my own profession, financially speaking," the artist told her. "You are just beginning to work with your hands, and it takes time."

She concentrated all her efforts to increase her output and the strain, combined with the night-work and the casual meals of tinned goods served at the canteen, brought on an illness which kept her in bed for a month. Even then she was not strong enough to return to munition work. Labour was very scarce and the papers were filled with exhortation for people to release their servants for munition and agricultural work, so she decided to do her own

housework. The maid took a position in a jeweller's store, and her former mistress faced the problem of caring for a house and a child, work for which she had little aptitude. Inexperienced at housekeeping, she spent all her spare time attending thrift demonstrations, but neither she nor the child flourished on the "substitute" dishes she learned to cook. Then she became interested in the Back-yard Garden Campaign and spent a considerable sum in having the ground prepared and in buying seed, but something had been overlooked, or there wasn't enough sun, the whole crop was a failure.

Then came a letter from husband in which he said:

"Last night I found a bundle of old Canadian papers in a Y. M. C. A. hut, and in them were a lot of your home-cooked stories which I never had time to read before, but I tell you I didn't miss one word now. I showed them to some of the boys and they are all clamouring for more. Your stories may not

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have real literary merit, but they are just what the tired soldier at the front—and the tired factory-girl at home—like at the close of the day. So don't despise your work! Isn't it better than raising potatoes and cooking cheese and bread-crumbs? Isn't it even better than making munitions when there are lots of stronger young girls waiting for your place? Isn't it better to do the one thing that you can do better than other women, and do it well?"

By the same mail came a note from an editor, asking for more of her whimsical stories at an increased rate, and, incredible as it may seem, an excellent maid answered her advertisement (also at an increased rate). So once more she is writing stories and they are better than ever, for now she is thinking of her readers, the tired factory girl, the soldiers in their billets, and not so much of the cheque, though she thinks of that, too, and wonders how much she will be able to save each month for the Red Cross.

WE must decide all for ourselves, in this country which we call free and democratic, how best we can serve the State. There is no thought of conscription for women; we are not even registered for National Service. Enthusiasm makes us work madly at unprofitable tasks. During the first year of the war I was in charge of a small group of women who

spent one afternoon each week in making hospital dressings under Red Cross directions. We had an average attendance of six. Then came the news of the first gas attack, in which many of our own men had been victims. A hurry call was issued for respirators, one of our newspapers published directions, and twenty women, instead of six, arrived to make them. A good sum of our Red Cross money went for elastic, one of our members spent the morning dyeing the cheese-cloth covering (the paper said that white would be too conspicuous). It turned out a chocolate brown, and the respirators, made carefully according to the patterns provided, resembled a pair of padded spectacles to be worn on the upper lip. Whenever I see a picture of the modern gas helmet I think of the little brown moustaches we made by the hundreds! Not only ours, but countless societies did likewise before the Red Cross headquarters could stop them, and the worst feature was that, for the time, we neglected to make the much-needed dressing pads.

THE only thing more disastrous than too much enthusiasm, is too little. The Red Cross workers have by this time got weeded out. Those who are hopelessly stupid or ignorant about sewing have realized that their time is more valuably spent in other directions and the constant workers have acquired a skill and velocity that makes them doubly valuable. Rolling bandages by hand has been found to be a waste of time, while hand-knit socks are more in demand than ever. Now that shipping space is so precious, only the most necessary articles are sent overseas, but that is no reason why there should be such an appalling shortage of Red Cross supplies as has been shown during the past months. There is great need in the hospitals still, particularly for pyjamas and hospital shirts. Are we losing interest? With the falling off in recruiting, do the women also become slackers?

MANY girls have stopped their Red Cross activities for munition work, and are investing their earnings in the war loan. Others are working on the land,

and to these all honour is due. Each one must judge for herself what she can do best; we can all do something better than the majority of our neighbours. Don't insist upon becoming a V. A. D. if you are hopelessly stupid in a sick-room and faint at the sight of blood. Don't take your knitting to a concert and sit in the front row if you have to concentrate all your attention on putting the wool carefully over your needles. Don't try to do munition work if that makes you neglect your children at home. Don't drive a Red Cross Waste Collection van if you are a trained nurse or have a teacher's diploma. Don't start a course in massage if your fingers "are all thumbs." Don't try to run a patriotic club if you antagonize its members.

But what's the good of saying "Don't," the point is to discover what you can do best—and to do it with all your might. There is something that each of us can do a little better than our neighbour. Had women been included in the registration for National Service, the Government might have assisted us to use our talents to the best advantage. But though a large proportion of the women of Canada have the privilege of the vote, the obligation of service has not been demanded of us, and it rests with each one to decide just what this obligation is, and to use our strength and talents to the very best advantage.