

## THE WOMEN OF FRANCE DON'T WANT PEACE

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and recognized that it was necessary for the good of their country—for France!

THE advance of the British and French army and the retreat of the Germans after the Battles of the Aisne and the Marne is history that is now well known. Baroness Huard started on her return to Villiers on British Red Cross wagons, acting as official interpreter. Her own words will describe that return better than mine. Speaking of Villiers, she said:

"Through a gap in the trees I caught a glimpse of the roofs below. The broken grill of our stately gateway told of the invaders' visit. A few paces further, and the Chateau came into full view.

"Yes, it was standing, but only the shell of that lovely home from which I had fled but fourteen days before. I turned away in despair. All the wilful damage that human beings could do had been wrought on my house and its contents. The spell was broken. My nerves relaxed, and heedless of the filth, I dropped on the steps and wept.

"I think it was the stench from within that first roused me from my grief and made me realize that this was War, that there was no time for tears. Pulling myself together, I started across the lawn toward the village in search of aid, for a second glance told me it was useless even to think of entering the house, so great were the filth and disorder."

The animals about the place, she explained, were killed and left to rot, and the unbelievable condition and state of rank disorder reigning within the Chateau did much credit to Von Kluck and the other German noblemen who had been quartered there. "Oh, 'Kultur'!" exclaimed the Baroness in disgust, when narrating the story.

A few days later the French military authorities requisitioned Chateau de Villiers as a Red Cross Hospital—the purpose for which Baroness Huard had begun to arrange it at the beginning of the War.

ALL that Baroness Huard experienced, nearly every peasant woman in the invaded part of France underwent—only to a worse and more horrible degree. Their homes were looted and such indescribable atrocities, with which the whole world is but too familiar, perpetrated. They fled from their homes, and those of them who could, returned. Reconstruction was before them. They mastered it.

Now, after two years and a half of life in the closest proximity to the scene of battle, they are living as happily as they may, and are uncomplaining.

"Their *sang froid*," said Baroness Huard, "is remarkable."

Within the past year the Baroness has revisited Soissons, which is the actual front. It has had two years of almost steady bombardment, yet about seven hundred souls live there in apparent defiance of existing conditions.

"BUT what of the women in the other parts of France?" the Baroness was asked. She went into detail. They are wonderful. They took hold of things from the beginning. They are turning out munitions in a marvellous manner.

"Of course, as you know, we never had an Equal Suffrage question in France," the Baroness explained.

"In France every woman has always been given work for which she was competent. If she could fill a certain office as well or better than a man, she has been allowed to do so. So when war work announced itself, there was no confusion, no experimenting. Each was assigned work of which she was capable. Naturally, it is mostly the working class who are doing this work. They are better fitted for it. The other women work unceasingly and untiringly for the Red Cross and other patriotic organizations."

OF the country itself, Baroness Huard painted an entirely different picture to any that has ever been presented. "There is no starvation there," she said. "There is no begging—no beggars. Every poor person who is dependent upon some one in the trenches may have fifty kilometres of coal free every week and may purchase fifty more, if she desires, at a price fixed by the Government."

"Of course, every one is depriving herself of luxuries, but voluntarily. Still, if one has the money, one can yet buy anything one desires in France. There is no such thing as food rations—no meatless days."

Returning again to the French women, Baroness Huard could not eulogize them highly enough. "Their spirit," she said, "is undaunted, but it is not a new spirit. It is the spirit of the true French woman as she has always been. These women don't want peace. When peace negotiations were announced not long ago, I heard one woman remark: 'Why has the blood of my two sons been spilled, if we are to have peace while the Germans are still in our country? There can be no question of peace yet. We are willing to fight for a hundred years if necessary.'"

And so they go on fighting, these courageous, unequalled women of France. Their husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, may be sacrificed, but their honour is still intact.

And still proudly allied to their cause, which is indeed hers, is Baroness Huard, who comes occasionally to America to ask for help in her noble work. Villiers being too near the seat of operations, she is now in charge of an immense hospital in Paris, for the maintenance of which funds are sorely needed. But with her initiative and untiring ability, with her power of winning the hearts of all to whom she relates the story of France and the women of France, since August, 1914, she will continue to raise these funds as she has done in the past.



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