

FRENCH SILHOUETTES

A Nova Scotia Woman's Experiences in Italy and France in War Time

By ALICE JONES

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CROSSING the border from Italy into France in June was like passing from the glowing youth of one nation to the strenuous middle-age of the other. Italy was still in the first stage of war, the flag-waving, speech-making, flower-throwing farewell to her soldiers. France in the eleventh month of her nobly-faced ordeal had buckled down to the grim realities of nursing the wounded, clothing the returning soldiers and keeping business and shop going without the men-folk. Hardly across the frontier, at Ventimiglia, one felt the difference.

Frontiers are now things like matrimony, not to be lightly or unadvisably undertaken, and in spite of my latest thing in passports, swollen-faced photo stamped and sealed and French vised, I felt a qualm when the train drew up at the first French station, flowery, tranquil Garaver, where once the only person on the platform would be an English old maid or white-haired general. It was from this station that Lord Wolsey's body started on its last home journey to its resting place in St. Paul's. Now, there were armed soldiers here and there, stout, little Chasseurs des Alpes in their serviceable dark blue uniforms and hanging caps.

One of them guarded the door of a small office, into which we were marshalled after the police had passed through the train. Three men sat at a table reminding one of the dread tribunals of the Terror as one passed before them and produced our papers, the passport and the permission to reside in the last Italian town we were in. Neither French nor Italian take any risk in such matters, and one cannot be more than two days in any French commune without getting a permit and depositing one's photo with the gendarmes. Certainly, what with the sentiment of parting soldiers and the demands of the police, photographers must thrive in these days.

My voice sounded to me curiously meek as I answered their few curt questions and underwent their keen scrutiny, but once the ordeal over, we could have the satisfaction of squeezing into as big a portion of a bench as we could get and watching the later sufferers.

AND here I saw a dramatic thing, of which I should have liked to have known the end. A woman of distinctly northern, perhaps German-Swiss type, with an accompanying child, was in difficulties, and, sure sign of a Teuton when hard pressed, was making the mistake of cheeking her inquisitors. For want of a more satisfactory document, she had produced a telegram from a brother-in-law at Nice. "But it's not addressed in your name," objected the centre official.

"That doesn't matter. It's to a man in the hotel," was her stupid answer.

THE I. K. B. GIRL

When a Young Lady Goes Buying Furs in the Ghetto, She May Expect Strange Results

By ED. CAHIN

"NOW," said Mrs. Samuels to her slender and wide-eyed Canadian guest, "this is the Ghetto. I hope that you see all that you want of it to-day, because it's a big journey from away uptown and I hate walking. I ain't maybe as thin as I used to be."

"How terribly crowded it is! And is everybody in business here?"

"Of course; there's no room for anybody that don't work. Even the cripples have pencils and shoe-strings for sale, and the kids have a quarter's worth of gum and candy—no more—so that if they should get hungry and eat up their stock the loss ain't so big. Just look at the fine linen that feller's got on his arm. But this is only the edge; wait until we get down a few blocks—talk about crowded!"

The almost incredible congestion of the district increased as they went on; even the doorways being seldom clear of peddlars, for business, after flooding the streets, had rushed into the basements, conquered all first floors, crept upstairs and invaded quarters meant originally only for dwellings; though the tenants usually combined living quarters with business and signified the combination by putting a sign in the window and a heterogeneous array of pots, bottles and yellow paper bags on the sill, completing the effect by draping criss-cross before the windows and on the fire escapes the frankest articles of the family washing; for the Ghetto dwellers ignore the American prejudice which would relegate all such displays to the rear.

Everywhere there were swarms of people and troops of dirty, laughing, shouting children. Nearly every shop window was lettered with signs in Hebrew and the broken English here and there being spoken was almost drowned by torrents of Yiddish, Russian and every dialect to which German can be distorted.

"Can this be America?" exclaimed Ethel, looking

"It matters very much," the man rapped out. Then came a question I failed to catch, but the half-defiant answer caused a ripple of sensation to run over the listeners; all intent now on the scene.

"Yes, I was maid in a German family at Milan."

It was then I noticed the round spots of pink on the woman's white face and saw the look of an animal at bay in her eyes.

"Are you married?"

"No."

"Ever been married?"

"No."

"Whose is that child, then?"

I did not hear her murmured answer, but I knew, as did everyone else, that they were handling her without gloves.

Her judge tossed her papers to her, saying in a final fashion:

"Here! Take these and go back to Milan, whence you came."

Milan had already been swept of its German population, but we all knew it to be still the most Teutonic city in Italy.

The woman's lips tightened and she seemed to droop, but the official had already stretched his hand for the next passport before she said in a sullen tone:

"I can't go back. I have no money."

"That's enough," he said, then seeing she did not stir. "Here, sit down there and wait," pointing to a bench behind the door which I now noticed already had a depressed woman occupant. It was evidently the bench of penitence.

"Have you hand baggage in the train?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then go with that soldier and fetch it."

The last I saw of her she was walking along the platform beside the little soldier with the long rifle. I was never to know her story, but I shall not forget her in a hurry.

I had seen an Italian peasant woman in screaming hysterics at the Ventimiglia station because of some obstacle. I had marked the downcast faces of a man and woman in the custom shed as they watched the turning out of her trunk and the confiscation of a lot of leather tops for boots, leather, the precious stuff that is not now permitted to be sent out of Italy, but somehow that woman's air of dull despair as she walked beside the soldier made me realize what travelling in war time means.

Mentone Station—but where are the ranks of eager, golden-braided hotel porters, where are the rows of smart motors and omnibuses, where are the broad-backed, grey-clad German

tourists, pushing their vigorous way in and out of the crowded trains regardless of those in their way?

Gold-braided porters, those not mobilized on Swiss frontiers, and grey-clad tourists, may be heaped in nameless graves, for most of them were German or Swiss. Mentone is fairer than ever in her summer setting of peacock blue sea and pink and white oleander blossoms, with the background of dreamy mountains, but her hotels are closed save the few turned into hospitals. The Casino, too, is a hospital, and in its gardens and on the promenade, where on winter mornings a cosmopolitan crowd used to sun themselves, the most frequent figures are uniformed boys and men in the pride of life maimed and wounded or pale and spectral from recent illness. In the Casino enclosure they are often in pyjamas, outside it in shabby war-worn uniforms of the old blue and red type—some in the new, long, loose, coats of pale grey-blue, some in khaki canvas or even in brown corduroy.

And beside the wounded there is another mark of the war in the black veiled women, for the French women are conservative, and even when they wear a white summer dress cling to their black veil. And those black veils are terribly frequent, for the Chasseur des Alpes are recruited here and they have paid a heavy toll in the Vosges Mountains in the terrible winter fighting.

THE plane trees, untrimmed this year, make a dense shade over the road, a shade only broken by golden flecks of sunshine, that flicker on a melancholy little procession. Down the broad avenue comes a humble hearse, but the tri-colour on the coffin tells that here is another life laid down for France.

There is no priest or acolyte, no military music, but behind the hearse comes a little band of tall, straight Senegal soldiers, their dark brown skins showing under their high red caps, their square shoulders, spare bodies and long, thin arms and legs encased in yellow-brown khaki. Sturdy little Chasseurs des Alpes in dark blue form the firing party. And so, on this July Sunday afternoon, they wend their way through old Mentone to the resting place on the height where the dead man will lie facing the Mediterranean that separates him from his Africa.

This morning down the same avenue came a forlorn party of these Senegalese. They came from the station, wearing their light-blue overcoats, some too lame and decrepid to be burdened with the sacks that a sturdier comrade carried. Some lagged and limped, but all save one carried their heads high with the easy grace of the desert, so that one scarcely seemed to note the pathos of their dusty, travel-worn raiment. From what battlefield, east or north, did they come?

about her in bewilderment.

"This is the heaven of the pushcart man," answered Mrs. Samuels.

Hundreds of pushcarts were backed up against the curbs with scarcely space left to pass between them.

There were carts filled with men's apparel—new at some previous date; carts filled with walnuts and almonds; carts boasting bananas and oranges, some of them very bad; carts filled with all sorts of cakes, spiced, seeded and sugared to suit the still eastern taste of the bulk of customers, while, cheek by jowl with them were the barrows of fish merchants with casks odoriferously advertising the various pickled and smoked fish therein. Then there were other carts each with its load of small hardware, crockery, tin-ware or cheap notions. Some were massed high with knitted goods and some with ribbons and feathers. Still others were freighted with pillows in turkey red ticking and many more wobbled beneath the weight of piece goods in heavy bolts. These were only a few, for every conceivable article of portable merchandise was represented somewhere in the multitude.

HERE and there in the press were box-like stoves on wheels with charcoal fires in the middle and baked apples or sweet potatoes or hot buns in an oven which pulled out like a drawer in a table. As it was a very cold day, the proprietors of these wheeled ovens did a thriving business.

"Ain't it awful?" demanded Mrs. Samuels, but Ethel was too fascinated to do anything but look the harder.

Most of the afternoon's shoppers were women, big and little, obese and attenuated.

Nearly all had arms full of purchases or carried all-encompassing string bags, for the pushcart merchants employ no delivery men. Ethel noticed one bag which revealed through its wide meshes such ill-assorted purchases as pink collars, oranges, onions, eggs, smoked fishes and some loose sheets of writing paper.

THEY watched a big-eyed Yiddish beauty buy an egg for a cent, because its shell had been accidentally crushed and it was likely to become that thing of horror to its owner, a dead loss. The beauty produced a small glass from the folds of her shawl and carefully scooped the egg out of the carton departing all smiles at her bargain and watching her treasure with both eyes lest some one jostle it out of her hands.

Presently they came upon a group of rotund, rosy fish women, stretching their numbed fingers over a fire which they had kindled in an old ash can in the gutter.

"I'm cold, too," said Ethel.

"Why didn't you tell me before! Come right in here and have a hot chocolate."

While the chocolate was being ordered and prepared, Ethel sank into an unheeding reverie.

Mrs. Samuels held her peace until the drink was almost finished and then her magpie tongue got the better of her.

"You know, Ethel, your Popper sent you on this trip to have a good time and to learn something, and I brought you to the Ghetto for the experience; not for you all the time to be dreaming about nobody knows what."

Ethel laughed and put down her cup.

"Isch ka bibble! For once you are wrong, Rosa. I was only wondering if I couldn't buy a muff to match the fur on this suit. I saw a fur cart just before we