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A NOBLE WOMAN

The Life-Story of EDITH CAVELL

By
ERNEST PROTHEROE

Author of 'In Empire's Cause.' &c., &c.

'I will give thee a crown of life.'

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INTRODUCTION

Edith Louisa Cavell was born in 1866 at the country rectory of Swardeston, near Norwich, of which parish her father, the Rev. Frederick Cavell, was rector for forty years. In that pleasant sunny house the little girl passed her early days in uneventful happiness, for Swardeston had few interests apart from the obscurities of its own rural retirement.

The rector, who was a kindly man at heart, but firm to the point of sternness where his duty was concerned, ruled his home with evangelical strictness. His daughter Edith was a thoughtful child; [Pg 8] and her unfailing consideration for others and her concern for their welfare caused her to be beloved by everybody. But the child's innate gentleness was tinged with a sense of duty remarkable in one of her years, which characteristic was the undoubted outcome of her father's precept and example.

Edith Cavell's education was as thorough as her parents could contrive; and, apart from mere scholarship, her outlook was widened by being sent to a school at Brussels.

When the Rev. Frederick Cavell died, the family removed from Swardeston to Norwich, and Edith decided to adopt the profession of nursing the sick poor. To that end on September 3, 1895, she entered the London Hospital as a probationer, and remained in that great institution for nearly five years. From the first, by her unselfish devotion to duty she endeared herself to her colleagues and patients alike. Part of the time she was staff nurse in the 'Mellish' Ward; and when the authorities sent her to Maidstone at the great outbreak of typhoid in that town, she did [Pg 9] excellent work.

Later, Miss Cavell was appointed to the post of night superintendent at St. Pancras Infirmary, where she remained for three years; then she migrated to Shoreditch Infirmary to act as assistant superintendent. As evidence of her more than ordinarily wide experience, it should be stated that for a time she worked at Fountain Hospital, Lower Tooting, under the Metropolitan Asylums Board; and for nine months she acted temporarily as matron of the Ashton New Road District Home, Manchester.

In all these varied spheres of activity Nurse Cavell proved herself not only a capable nurse, but she became a clever, painstaking teacher, able to illustrate her eloquent lectures by means of her own facile and useful diagrams. Many nurses acknowledge their indebtedness to her lucid teaching, and are proud to claim their one-time association with one whose devotion and energy [Pg 10] made her an ornament of a noble profession.

The sense of duty, which in the child was indicated so plainly, in after years developed into almost a religion. Every one with whom Miss Cavell came in contact speedily understood that she placed duty before either friendship or personal comfort. Her hospital training had taught her the value of discipline, and she would never tolerate inefficiency, or any tendency towards slackness, in her subordinates. As a surgical nurse her skill was remarkable; but her undoubted *forte* was the power of organization, which is almost rare compared to mere cleverness in the technical details of nursing.

Her absorption in her calling and her outwardly stern and reserved demeanour sometimes caused Nurse Cavell to be misunderstood; but those who were fortunate enough to serve under her quickly came to learn to admire her, equally as a nurse and a kind woman. Her expressive eyes were an index to her overflowing sympathy; and her fellow nurses found themselves [Pg 11] impelled to take their troubles and difficulties to her, sure of a patient hearing and tactful and sympathetic advice.

In 1906 Miss Cavell was offered and accepted the position of matron of a surgical and medical home in Brussels, which had been founded by Monsieur de Page. This enlightened and enthusiastic Belgian doctor was impressed by the need of a better knowledge of hygiene and aseptic methods, of which through no fault of their own the nursing sisters in Belgium were generally ignorant.

Nurse Cavell's new post was one that called for the utmost discretion, for she was an Englishwoman and a Protestant, engaging in work which hitherto was practically a monopoly of the Roman Catholic religious sisterhood. But even inborn prejudice, and in some cases positive enmity, could not long hold out against Miss Cavell's professional skill, backed up by her charm

of manner; and in quite a short time she was as popular with the Belgian staff and patients as had always proved to be the case in her English experience. [Pg 12]

The establishment of a training school for nurses was a bold experiment, for Belgian women of good birth and education were accustomed to look upon earning their own living as a loss of caste.

The English nurse was fully aware of the difficulties with which she had to contend, and resolutely set herself to combat them. Soon she had five pupils, who commenced their work on recognized lines. Their uniform consisted of blue cotton dresses, high white aprons with white linen sleeves to cover the forearm, which was bare beneath, 'Sister Dora' caps without strings, and white collars. 'The contrast,' wrote Miss Cavell to the *Nursing Mirror*, 'the probationers present to the nuns in their heavy stuff robes, and the lay nurses in their grimy apparel, is the contrast of the unhygienic past with the enlightened present. These Belgian probationers in three years' time will look back on the first days of trial with wonder.' [Pg 13]

By April, 1908, the probationers had increased to thirteen; and by 1912 the number was thirty-two. Some of the members of the staff were English nurses who had worked in the London Hospital or the Shoreditch Infirmary. They not only assisted in training the probationers, but also attended the private patients in the Nursing Home which was attached to the school.

Miss Cavell's school met with the warm approval of the Queen of the Belgians, who was quick to realize the value of trained nursing in Brussels. When Queen Elizabeth broke her arm a few years ago she did not hesitate to have it attended to by the nurses at the Home. Her Majesty's action was an exceedingly valuable tribute to the institution and the Englishwoman at its head. It gave public opinion a lead that caused the School and Home to be viewed favourably, where, perhaps, hitherto the new departure had been deprecated, if only because it was considered to be an unnecessary rival of the nuns and lay nurses, who worked under religious vows. [Pg 14]

The Queen came to hold a very sincere regard for Miss Cavell, and it is certain that the feeling was reciprocated. Little did the royal patient and the English nurse then imagine that within but a few short years they would figure together in adversity, in their respective spheres, as two of the most pathetic heroines in modern history.

Quiet and unassuming, yet determined and courageous, Nurse Cavell continued her good work, which was bound to have a marked effect on the future of the Belgian nursing profession. She herself declared that 'the spread of light and knowledge is bound to follow in years to come. The nurses will not only teach, as none others have the opportunity of doing, the laws of health and the prevention and healing of disease; they will show their countrywomen that education and position do not constitute a bar to an independent life; they are rather a good and solid foundation on which to build a career which demands the best and highest qualities that womanhood can offer.' [Pg 15]

In acting as directress of three hospitals, Miss Cavell found full scope even for her unusual organizing capabilities. In addition to her arduous lectures throughout the day, she gave four lectures to the doctors and two to the nurses every week. She always attended at the operating-theatre herself. One of her greatest pleasures was the children's ward, decorated in blue and white after her own design; she made a special point of visiting the little inmates every evening. The better class of Belgians paid for the services of the private staff of nurses, but the call of the poor never went unheeded.

Although Miss Cavell was intensely happy in her work in Brussels, she always looked forward with positive joy to visiting her aged mother, with whom she spent every possible holiday in England. In the summer of 1914 mother and daughter were enjoying one of these affectionate reunions.

Suddenly the great war-cloud burst. Edith Cavell was in her mother's garden weeding a bed of heartsease when she heard the news. She needed no heart-searching to decide where her duty lay; and, without hesitation, she returned hotfoot to Belgium, where she had an intuition that she would be wanted. [Pg 16]

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II

THE HEEL OF THE OPPRESSOR

WHEN Germany had disclosed her infamous designs against the neutrality of Belgium, followed by her declaration of war against France, succeeded in a few hours by the entry of Great Britain into the fray, Miss Cavell's intuition of trouble became an absolute and appalling fact, with the positive certainty that war's ghastly harvest would mean work for nurses in Brussels.

Forthwith the Berkendael Medical Institute became a Red Cross Hospital, of which Miss Cavell was *directrice*, with a number of English and Belgian nurses under her charge. Others of her training staff and some of the school probationers were in a board school, which had been rapidly [Pg 18]

converted into another hospital. Some of the nurses of the Training Institute were of German nationality, and these sorrowfully made a hasty departure for the Dutch frontier, carrying only hand luggage, which was all that they were allowed to take. Miss Cavell was sorry to have to send them away, but they would have been in a most invidious position if they had remained in an enemy capital towards which the German army was ruthlessly hacking its way.

Although there was every indication of the extreme danger of Belgium, none could foresee the inexpressible agony that awaited her. How utterly Miss Cavell herself failed to realize the impending doom of the heroic little nation was shown in her letter of August 12, 1914, which she addressed to the Editor of *The Times*:

'Sir,

'I notice that there is a big movement on for the establishment of Red Cross Hospitals in England. In the natural course of things these will get almost exclusively naval men, whereas the army wounded will have to be dealt with on the Continent, and, as far as can be seen at present, mainly at Brussels. [Pg 19]

'Our institution, comprising a large staff of English nurses, is prepared to deal with several hundreds, and the number is being increased day by day. May I beg, on behalf of my institution, for subscriptions from the British public, which may be forwarded with mention of the special purpose, to H.B.M.'s Consul at Brussels?

'Thanking you in anticipation, I am yours obediently,

'E. Cavell,
'*Directrice* of the Berkendael Medical Institute, Brussels.

'Ambulance 53,
'Rue de la Culture, 149, Bruxelles,
'August 12, 1914.'

Probably Miss Cavell learned later that the big movement in England to which she referred not only provided for our wounded soldiers from France and Belgium, but also distant Gallipoli, when that region became embroiled in the almost world-wide War. [Pg 20]

Events moved with startling rapidity. It was on August 4 that the German troops commenced to swarm across the Belgian frontier. Liège was attacked with a fury and violence that fortresses hitherto considered practically impregnable could not withstand. Only eight days after the dispatch of her letter to *The Times* the heroic English nurse witnessed the entry of 20,000 Germans into Brussels.

'News came,' she wrote to the *Nursing Mirror*, 'that the Belgians, worn out and weary, were unable to hold back the oncoming host.... In the evening (August 20) came word that the enemy were at the gates. At midnight bugles were blowing, summoning the civic guard to lay down their arms and leave the city.... As we went to bed our only consolation was that in God's good time right and justice must prevail.' [Pg 21]

Although Nurse Cavell was an Englishwoman, and her sympathies were claimed for the people within whose gates she had laboured for eight years, her great heart could feel compassion for the physical sufferings of the invaders, for the article continued: 'Many more troops came through. From our road we could see the long procession, and when the halt was called at midday some were too weary to eat, and slept on the pavement in the street. We were divided between pity for these poor fellows, far from their country and their people, suffering the weariness and fatigue of an arduous campaign, and hate of a cruel and vindictive foe bringing ruin and desolation to a prosperous and peaceful land.'

From that date Nurse Cavell was cut off from the outside world. Enveloped in the fog of war, nothing was heard of her for eight months, although she had arranged to act as special correspondent to the *Nursing Mirror*. Not until the month of April was another and last communication received. It was dated March 29, 1915, but was not delivered in London until seventeen days later, when it came to hand in a dilapidated condition and without any outward sign that it had undergone inspection by the Censor. The article cannot be quoted at full length, but a few paragraphs of it vividly depict the conditions of life under the iron heel of a relentless conqueror: [Pg 22]

'From the day of the occupation till now we have been cut off from the world outside. Newspapers were first censored, then suppressed, and are now printed under German auspices; all coming from abroad were for a time forbidden, and now none are allowed from England....

'The once busy and bustling streets are very quiet and silent; so are the people who were so gay and communicative in the summer. No one speaks to his neighbour in the tram, for he may be a spy. Besides, what news is there to tell, and who has the heart to gossip? [Pg 23]

'I am but a looker-on after all, for it is not my country whose soil is desecrated and whose sacred places are laid waste. I can only feel the deep and tender pity of the friend within the gates, and observe with sympathy and admiration the high courage and self-control of a people enduring a long and terrible agony.'

Edith Cavell had anticipated that there would be work for her in Brussels. She found it in

abundance, first in nursing wounded Belgians, succeeded by an influx of suffering Germans, for the new authorities allowed her to continue her work; and in due course numbers of English and French soldiers came under her ministering care. And be it noted that to be wounded was a sure passport to the great heart of the English nurse. Even the injured invaders were tended with impartial care, in accordance with the great tenet of the Red Cross nursing creed, that suffering humanity shall know no distinctions, whether friend or foe, their necessities calling for the same single-minded devotion. [Pg 24]

Miss Bertha Bennet Burleigh relates that she spent a pleasant half-hour with Miss Cavell, whom she met by chance shortly after the German occupation. In conversation the lady journalist learned that the nurses in the various nursing institutions had been requested to give an undertaking that they would also act as guards of the wounded. Miss Cavell said, 'We are prepared to do all we can to help them to recover from their wounds, but to be their jailers, never!' A German general smote the table with his clenched fist when the nurse gave her emphatic reply, but he could not cow her indomitable will. 'He looked,' Sister Edith afterwards told one of her colleagues, 'as if he would like to shoot me dead.' From that day onwards the German authorities commenced to deal harshly with the British Red Cross nurses who were in their power.

There is evidence available to prove that many Germans had occasion to bless the good offices of Nurse Cavell; and from all who passed through her hands she won the most profound esteem, which in itself was a cause of offence to the German authorities, who knew that they themselves were just as cordially detested. [Pg 25]

But Edith Cavell's greatest offence lay in the fact that she was an Englishwoman, heroic daughter of the race that no specious promise or bribe could tempt from the path of honour; that could not view its treaty signature as a 'scrap of paper,' whose 'contemptible little army' had played a dramatic part in hurling back the Germans when Paris was literally in their mailed grasp; and that had succeeded in locking the once weak line of the Allies, which now forbade approach to the Channel ports of France from which a royal bully had proposed to attack the shores of England.

Baron von Bissing had been appointed Governor-General of Belgium, and forthwith he had commenced to terrorize the inhabitants. Brussels was plastered with proclamations calculated to make life scarcely worth living. One of them in particular forbade any person to assist subjects of countries at war with Germany to leave Belgium. [Pg 26]

It is not quite certain whether Baron von Bissing ever came in personal contact with Miss Cavell, but it is positive that she became suspect to some of his emissaries, who promptly set about weaving a web for her undoing. It did not take long for clever German spies to ascertain that the English nurse had supplied British, French, and Belgian refugees with food, clothing, and money, and had connived, if not actually assisted, in their escape across the frontier into Holland.

No purpose would be served by attempting to deny that there was in existence a Band of Mercy whose object it was to smuggle fugitives out of Belgium. The members of this secret organization included Prince Reginald and Princess Marie de Croy of Belignies, the Comtesse de Belleville, a French abbé, Mademoiselle Thulier, M. Philippe Bancq, a Belgian architect, and others. It may be stated that the Princess is partly of English extraction, and her arrest caused the death of her English grandmother as a result of shock and subsequent illness. The Comtesse de Belleville belongs to the French nobility through her father, while her mother, the Vicomtesse d'Hendecourt, is Belgian. She spent much of her time in Belgium, devoting herself largely to charitable work, and when war broke out she came to the aid of her distressed compatriots. [Pg 27]

Nurse Cavell undoubtedly participated in these simple acts of humanity which the Germans construed into 'crimes.' She permitted her hospital to be used in the chain of rest-houses by means of which fugitives escaped detection and capture, as they were passed from point to point towards their golden enfranchisement across the Dutch frontier. Admittedly Miss Cavell did wrong in setting the German military law at defiance, but it was the policy of German 'frightfulness' that was her justification. The enemy army violated their own treaty obligations, and had plundered, burnt, slaughtered, and ravished a helpless people in a manner that had not been conceivable in this twentieth century. Edith Cavell's contact with wounded soldiers had afforded her first-hand information concerning the brutal atrocities of which the invaders were guilty, and doubtless gave rise to a passionate desire to enable any wounded British compatriot, Belgian or French friend, to escape from the common peril. [Pg 28]

For nearly a whole year Nurse Cavell continued her work, one supreme and unbroken test of the heroic spirit with which she was imbued. It was wonderful that her God-given befriending of refugees should have escaped detection so long; but at length the German Administration in Belgium verified some of the escapes of men from their iron thrall, and Edith Cavell was wrenched from her hospital by soldiers and put in prison.

III

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THE ARREST

On the evening of August 5 Nurse Cavell was engaged in binding lint on the wound of one of the invaders, when a peremptory knock on the door resounded through the quiet hospital. Not waiting for admission, half a dozen German soldiers burst open the door with the butt-ends of their rifles and entered the ward. Without preamble the corporal in charge seized Miss Cavell roughly, and commenced to drag her away from his wounded compatriot to whom she ministered.

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The Englishwoman did not quail before this uncouth representative of 'Kultur,' but with calmness and dignity demanded to know the reason of the brutal exhibition of authority. The bullying corporal's instructions evidently included nothing in the way of explanation. He considered a cuff to be the best means of meeting the situation; and forthwith he marched her through the gathering gloom to the military prison of St. Gilles.

The German authorities made no public announcement of the arrest of the English nurse or any of her alleged associates. In all probability at first they maintained secrecy in the hope of being able to incriminate other suspects, and thus make a clean sweep of an agency that had attempted to lift by the fraction of an inch the iron heel that was grinding out the life of suffering Belgium.

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Three weeks elapsed before Edith Cavell's relatives in England heard of her arrest from a chance traveller who had come to England from Belgium. The news was communicated to the Foreign Office, and on August 26 Sir Edward Grey requested Mr. Page, the United States Ambassador in London, to make inquiry of the United States Minister at Brussels whether the arrest of Miss Cavell was an actual fact, and, if so, the reason assigned for it.

In the interval the German authorities were hard at work in securing evidence, not merely to justify the arrest, but to provide plausible excuse for the execution of the prisoner, which later sinister mockeries of justice proved to have been a foregone conclusion from the commencement.

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It is believed that not only did German spies ransack Belgium for evidence, but some even visited Norwich to interrogate Miss Cavell's friends, to trace her movements, and, if possible, to intercept her correspondence. But even then the testimony against the prisoner aggregated but a sorry charge of presenting a great-coat to an ill-clad man, a glass of water to a thirsty pilgrim, and small coins to persons who were being hunted for their lives. There was a fear that these 'crimes' would be insufficient to secure a conviction on a capital charge. There was no time to ferret out any real damning testimony, and so the jailers of the English nurse fell back upon the method of attempting to convict her out of her own mouth.

It requires to be accentuated that Miss Cavell, apart from her profession, was a well-read woman. She knew more than a little of modern German philosophy, and had come to believe that the triumph of Prussianism would result in the collapse of Christianity. Once, when she was expressing some such view, a friend inquired whether it was prudent. 'Prudent?' she exclaimed, with reproach in her eyes. 'In times like these, when terror makes might seem right, there is a higher duty than prudence.' And as she was a woman who would not count the cost of clinging to her standards, she was little likely to hide her opinions when confronted by the enemy.

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It is a prime feature of English justice that the veriest felon need not incriminate himself; nay, he is specifically warned that any statement he makes may be used as evidence against him. Practically he is reminded of the old legal axiom that a man who is his own lawyer has a fool for a client, with the consequent advisability to bridle his tongue against any unwise admission. The conception of German justice in Brussels was the converse, and the accusers of the Red Cross representative of a hated race deliberately laid snares for the extortion of the evidence they required.

The course of procedure was terribly reminiscent of the methods of the old Spanish Inquisition. True, Miss Cavell was not subjected to actual physical torture, but the mental strain was calculated to break down anything in the nature of obstinacy. With diabolical cunning she was cut off from communication with the world outside the jail as completely as if she were dead, lest any whisper of warning to guard her tongue might reach her from outside; and often she had to face interrogation by brutal and implacable enemies, who sought not to do her justice, but only to assure her condemnation.

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It is a comfort to believe that Miss Cavell's keen perception and her knowledge of German unscrupulousness enabled her to realize the inevitable end that awaited her, thus saving her from carking speculation that might have unhinged her reason. With Christian fortitude she grasped the inestimable boon of resignation, fully assured that 'death is the liberator of him whom freedom cannot release, and the comforter of him whom time cannot console.'

Really the secrecy of her arrest and imprisonment and the precautions taken for her utter isolation were scarcely worth the trouble the crafty conspirators had taken, for Nurse Cavell took up a simple and heroic position that greatly simplified matters from the German standpoint. She was not an inexperienced girl, she was a noble woman of clever intellect, and had never been in doubt of the penalty she might incur by succouring compatriots and friends in distress in defiance of the German military code.

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Inspired in her perilous work by the dictates of purest humanity, which has been the glory of women of all nations in all ages, she boldly avowed to her accusers that she had nothing to conceal. The last thing to have entered her mind would have been to attempt to mitigate her offence by lying; she would not even palter with disingenuousness. Not only did she admit the charges against her, but she related incidents about which her inquisitors had but the most fragmentary particulars, or even only flimsy suspicions. She did not hesitate to supply dates and details for which the spies had sought in vain.

It is impossible to tell when Miss Cavell first became aware that a considerable number of her friends were under arrest. In any case during her long incarceration in prison and the numerous interrogations she had to undergo in order to elicit the admissions to construct the case against her, she scrupulously avoided the implication of other persons. No brutality, no wheedling, no bribe, could ever have made that brave soul disloyal by word or deed to any of her associates. [Pg 36]

IV [Pg 37]

SPINNING THE TOILS

THE Germans have asserted that Edith Cavell's arrest, trial, and punishment were necessary as a warning, especially to others of her sex, that enterprises conducing to the disadvantage of their army were punishable with death. It is sufficient commentary upon this claim to remember that Baron von Bissing caused the English nurse to be arrested in secret and tried *in camera*, when publicity was a prime necessity if her case was to act as a warning to others.

The arrest took place on August 5, but the fact was carefully concealed—and the significant reason is not far to seek. Germany had agreed that all British civil subjects in Belgium, so long as the German army occupied the country, were under the protection of the United States Minister. Baron von Bissing's paramount duty was to notify Miss Cavell's arrest without delay to Mr. Brand Whitlock, the American Minister in Brussels. [Pg 38]

This obviously honourable course found no place in von Bissing's villanous scheme of vengeance. If he could avoid it, he had no intention of allowing his English prisoner the benefit of neutral protection. But news of the arrest did in due course reach the American Legation, and Mr. Whitlock at once commenced to make inquiries, in which he was assisted by Mr. Hugh Gibson, his secretary, and Maitre G. de Leval, a Belgian advocate and legal adviser to the Legation.

On August 31 Mr. Whitlock wrote to Baron von der Lancken, the German Political Minister in Brussels, asking whether it was true that Miss Edith Cavell had been arrested. If so, the reasons for the arrest were requested, and the German judicial authorities were asked to allow M. de Leval to interview the prisoner and make arrangements for her defence. [Pg 39]

Baron von der Lancken having vouchsafed no answer to the American Minister, Mr. Whitlock reiterated his request on September 10, which elicited a reply that was delivered on the 21st. It was ominously suggestive that the Baron had dated his letter September 12, obviously a crafty subterfuge to palliate the delay, which was all part and parcel of a treacherous intention to deceive those who had the temerity to desire that justice be done to Nurse Cavell.

The Baron's letter stated that the accused admitted that she had facilitated the departure from Belgium of British, French, and Belgians of military age. Her defence was in the hands of Advocate Braun, who was in touch with the competent German authorities. The missive ended with the statement that for M. de Leval to be permitted to visit Miss Cavell, so long as she was in solitary confinement, would be contrary to the principles of the Department of the Governor-General. [Pg 40]

Promptly the American Legation wrote to M. Braun, requesting him to attend at the Legation in order that he might afford details of the accusation made against his client, and further to consort arrangements for her defence.

Although time was now pressing, seven weeks having elapsed since the arrest, Braun wasted several more days before he put in an appearance at the Legation, which certainly indicated no energetic interest in the unfortunate prisoner. This casual attitude became understandable as by degrees the German plot disclosed itself. It was amazing with what a web of deception the Department of the Governor-General considered it necessary to weave about one poor weak woman, evasions, chicanery, and callousness summing up a cold-blooded villany of purpose without parallel in the annals of any nation subscribing to the most elementary principles of humanity, leaving justice altogether out of the question. [Pg 41]

Braun's next tardy step was to inform the American Legation that 'owing to unforeseen circumstances' he was unable to act further on behalf of Miss Cavell, whose personal friends had besought his assistance; but he had arranged for M. Sadi Kirschen, another Belgian lawyer, to defend the prisoner.

There was thus a fresh delay while M. de Leval got into communication with Kirschen, a meeting

with whom provided but very cold comfort. The legal adviser to the American Legation was astounded to learn that the prisoner's new advocate was ignorant of the details of the charges against her; for the German military code did not permit him to see his client before the trial, and he was not allowed to inspect any documents in connexion with the case.

When M. de Leval announced that he himself would attend the trial, Kirschen strongly deprecated any such course. He asserted that the judges would not approve of the presence of a [Pg 42] neutral spectator, and they might show their annoyance by delivering a judgement more severe than otherwise would be the case. M. de Leval, not desiring to prejudice the prisoner in any way, did not persist in his intention to be present at the trial. He had to rely upon Kirschen's statement that the tribunal would act with fairness, and that a miscarriage of justice was a very remote possibility. Kirschen further explained that these trials of suspects generally developed so slowly that, as the charges against Miss Cavell were disclosed, he would be able to elaborate the best possible defence.

In view of later events it is evident that Kirschen was but a cog in the wheel of German 'rightfulness'; but at the time there was nothing in his demeanour or his expressions of opinion to cause one to suspect his genuineness. But it goes without saying that if M. de Leval had evinced the utmost determination to attend the trial, the Department of the Governor-General would have [Pg 43] found means to prevent the presence of an unbiased spectator of their clandestine and insincere method of 'justice.'

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V

THE SECRET TRIAL

The trial of Edith Cavell took place behind an almost impenetrable veil of secrecy. A fortnight after the execution of the victim certain German newspapers printed an account that was mainly a brief for the prosecution, while the accused were put in as unfavourable a light as possible. Fortunately an eye-witness afterwards afforded M. de Leval additional details, by which we are enabled to picture the scene with tolerable certainty; and surely never since Joan of Arc faced the corrupt Bishop of Beauvais has the light of heaven looked down on a more merciless and brutal caricature of law and justice. [Pg 45]

The secret court-martial was held in the Brussels Senate House, where thirty-five persons were charged with similar offences. The judges' names were not made public. Of the accused, the principal were Edith Cavell and Princess Marie de Croy, the Comtesse de Belleville and Mademoiselle Thulier, and M. Philippe Bancq. Prince Reginald de Croy did not stand his trial, for the simple reason that the Germans had been unable to lay hands on him. Armed guards had escorted the prisoners to the court, where soldiers with fixed bayonets stood between them.

The court-martial was not likely to be a long and tedious affair, for the prisoners had been questioned and cross-examined *ad nauseam* long before this final stage, and in most cases the accused had signed depositions admitting their guilt.

The outstanding figure among the prisoners was Miss Cavell, the typical Red Cross nurse, whom sick soldiers love and reverence, whose incomparable devotion to duty places her in the forefront of the world's womanhood. She appeared in the uniform in which she had been arrested: the [Pg 46] white cap covering the back of the head; the stiff collar around the neck; starched bow beneath the chin; and on her arm the Red Cross, the badge of her merciful mission.

Even in a British court of justice perfectly innocent people are overawed by their surroundings, causing them to be self-conscious, nervous, and distracted at a time when cool collectedness should be the first line of their defence. But Miss Cavell knew that she was arraigned before unjust judges, who lacked the virtues of charity, sincerity, humanity, and probity, without which the exercise of judgement is a mockery and a sham.

Her clear and expressive eyes looked out of a countenance that two months of close confinement had made deathly white. She was of the stuff of which martyrs are made. For what amounted to no more than a series of acts of womanly compassion she had become the sport of dire misfortune; but 'misfortune is never mournful to the soul that accepts it; for such do always see [Pg 47] that every cloud is an angel's face.' Edith Cavell fearlessly looked about the court, viewing with evident curiosity the row of malevolent-looking officers in gorgeous uniforms, who occupied the judges' bench under the black Prussian eagle that is now the emblem of a nation's degradation. Occasionally her delicate features were illumined with a commiserating smile to encourage those who shared her own imminent peril.

The case for the prosecution was that the accused were the principals in an organization that assisted British, French, and Belgian soldiers to escape from Belgium. It was alleged that fugitives were first smuggled into Brussels, where they were hidden either in a convent or in Miss Cavell's hospital. Later, as opportunity offered, they were disguised and conducted in tram-cars out of the city, and handed over to guides who led the way by devious routes to the Dutch frontier. [Pg 48]

When Miss Cavell was called upon to plead, she mastered her physical weakness, and serenely faced her accusers. In gentle accents she asserted that to the best of her belief she had but served her country, and, so far as that was wrong, she was ready to take the blame. Calmly she contemplated her end; cheerfully she was willing to be the scapegoat, in the hope that some at least of her friends might escape the dread punishment that she perceived would be her fate.

She was interrogated in German, which an interpreter translated into French, with which tongue she was perfectly familiar. She spoke without trembling, and exhibited a clear and acute mind. Often she added some greater precision to her previous depositions. Her answers were always direct and unhesitating. When the Military Prosecutor inquired why she had helped soldiers to go to England, the reply came promptly: 'If I had not done so they would have been shot. I thought I [Pg 49] was only doing my duty in saving their lives.'

'That may be true so far as British soldiers were concerned,' agreed the interlocutor, 'but it did not apply to young Belgians. Why did you help them to cross the frontier, when they would have been perfectly free and safe in staying here?'

Miss Cavell treated this question with the silent contempt it deserved. She knew only too well what freedom and safety had been accorded to many Belgians of military age who had been found in their own desecrated fatherland.

She not only admitted that she had assisted refugees to escape, but she acknowledged that she had received letters of thanks from those who had reached England in safety. This was a vital admission. German evidence alone could have charged her with an 'attempt' to commit the crime, but the letters of thanks conclusively proved that she had 'committed' the offence. [Pg 50]

Among the other prisoners, M. Philippe Bancq was equally fearless. Without a quaver he admitted that he had assisted young Belgians to escape and rejoin their army. 'As a good Belgian patriot,' said he, 'I am ready to lay down my life for my country.'

The Military Prosecutor demanded that the death penalty be passed upon Nurse Cavell and eight other prisoners. Whether the Englishwoman's compassionate conduct that was her offence and her heroic bearing under trial made an impression on her judges, one cannot tell. Their apparent disagreement may only have been a theatrical adjunct to the tragedy which Baron von Bissing had staged with consummate care. It may have been that they lacked the moral courage to pronounce sentence in her presence. In any case, judgement was postponed. In an ordinary trial this respite would have given play to hope, the miserable man's god, which keeps the soul from sinking in despair.

But hope could neither flatter nor deceive Edith Cavell as she was led back under escort to her [Pg 51] cell to wait—to wait for the assured condemnation that her eyes of courage must have perceived at the end of the cul-de-sac of German infamy.

VI

[Pg 52]

THE FIGHT FOR A LIFE

The trial had occupied two days, and had ended on Friday, October 8. M. Kirschen had promised to keep M. de Leval informed how the matter was proceeding. He duly notified the date of the trial; but in thorough keeping with what had gone before, during the two days' progress of the inquiry he made no sign. He did not disclose that the Military Prosecutor had asked for the death penalty; he maintained silence even when the sentence was promulgated. Thus he was a party to cutting off the unhappy prisoner from the only friends who could bring powerful influence to bear upon the authorities for a revision of the sentence. Kirschen not only did not communicate with [Pg 53] M. de Leval, but he disappeared entirely after the trial.

It is placed on record by one present in court that Kirschen pleaded well for his client, but it is doubtful if it were more than a formal plea for mercy for one who was prejudged and her fate already sealed. That Kirschen is believed to be an Austrian by birth, although a naturalized Belgian, doubtless explains much that for a time had mystified the officials of the American Legation. It makes one's gorge rise to think that while the German conspirators pretended to allow the prisoner a friendly advocate, he was in reality a hideous travesty, a hypocritical cat's-paw of the Department of the Governor-General.

After the perpetration of the crime M. Kirschen informed a sceptical world that he was not of Austrian origin, but was born at Jassy, in Roumania. He also denied that he promised to inform the American Legation about the sentence, and, in fact, did not know until it was announced [Pg 54] publicly. It need only be commented that M. de Leval's letters to his chief are in emphatic contradiction, and there is no doubt whose word is worthy of credence.

Failing to find M. Kirschen or learn any news of him, on Sunday night M. de Leval went to see Baron von der Lancken. The Baron was out, and Mr. Conrad, a subordinate, was unable to give any information.

On Monday morning M. de Leval was informed by Conrad that the American Legation would be made acquainted with the judgement immediately it was pronounced, at the same time volunteering the assurance that it need not be expected for 'a day or two.'

M. de Leval did not propose to rely upon any German assurances, and, further, was bent upon learning some of the details of the trial. In view of M. Kirschen's continued silence, he called at the house of the advocate at 12.30, but was informed that he would not be at home until late in the afternoon. He therefore proceeded to the house of another lawyer, who had been interested [Pg 55] in one of Miss Cavell's fellow prisoners, but failed also to find that gentleman. However, he called upon M. de Leval a few hours later, and reported that he had heard that judgement would be passed on Tuesday morning. He also said that he had good grounds for believing that the sentence of the court would be severe for all the prisoners.

Meanwhile repeated telephonic inquiries were made by the American Legation at the Politische Abteilung (Political Department), and upon each occasion it was stated that sentence had not been pronounced; and this was the reply as late as 6.20, together with the renewed promise to afford the required information as soon as it came to hand. And so the day dragged on.

Yet the death sentence had been passed at five o'clock in the afternoon, and the execution of Miss Cavell was fixed for the same night! Not until 8.30 p.m. did the American Legation learn [Pg 56] from a reliable outside source that sentence had been passed, and the execution would probably take place at two o'clock in the morning. Thus the American Minister was hoodwinked up to almost the last moment. The same fiendish mind that had engineered the secret arrest and the trial *in camera* had deliberately jockeyed the Legation out of anything like the time required for taking the requisite steps to secure the deferring of the execution, pending an appeal in the highest quarters for clemency.

At this critical juncture Mr. Brand Whitlock was ill in bed; but, nevertheless, with Mr. Hugh Wilson, he threw himself into the task of attempting to save Miss Cavell's life, although the brief time at their disposal afforded but a slender chance of success. In a letter already prepared for dispatch to Baron von der Lancken, it was pointed out that the condemned Englishwoman had been treated with more severity than had been the result in other similar cases, although it was only her own commendable straightforwardness that enabled the charges against her to be [Pg 57] proved. It was urged that she had spent her life in alleviating the sufferings of others, and at the beginning of the War she had bestowed her care as freely on German soldiers as on others. Her career as a servant of humanity should inspire the greatest sympathy and call for pardon. A letter in identical terms was addressed to Baron von Bissing.

Apart from what may be termed these strictly official communications, the Minister directed a touching personal appeal to Baron von der Lancken that was calculated to move the heart of a Bashi-Bazouk.

> 'My dear Baron,
>
> 'I am too ill to present my request in person, but I appeal to the generosity of your heart to support it and save this unfortunate woman from death. Have pity on her!
>
> 'Yours sincerely,
>
> 'Brand Whitlock.'

That this poignant intercession failed in its purpose is indubitable proof, if further testimony were [Pg 58] necessary, that the Prussian model of manliness is utterly devoid of chivalry, and that blood-lust takes the place of the ordinary dictates of humanity.

Forthwith Mr. Gibson and M. de Leval sought out the Marquis de Villalobar, the Spanish Ambassador, and together the anxious trio proceeded to the house of Baron von der Lancken. Not only was the Baron not at home, but no member of his staff was in attendance, which suggests even to the most charitable chronicler that the visit had been anticipated. An urgent message was sent after the Baron, with the result that he returned home a little after ten o'clock, and was shortly followed by two members of his staff.

When the circumstances necessitating the visit were explained to Baron von der Lancken, he professed to disbelieve that the death sentence had been passed, and asserted that in any case there would be no execution that night, and that the matter would lose nothing by waiting until [Pg 59] the morning. But the neutral diplomatists were too hot upon the trail of German trickery and prevarication to permit of the desired procrastination; they were ambassadors in mercy rather than mere politics, and they firmly insisted upon the Baron instituting immediate inquiries. He retired to engage in telephonic communication with the presiding judge of the court-martial, doubtless not to seek for information, but to condole with each other upon the disclosure of their cunning scheme to these pestering neutrals, whose interference they had exercised their ingenuity to avoid.

Shortly the Baron returned and admitted to his visitors that their information was correct, whereupon Mr. Gibson presented the letters appealing for delay in execution of the sentence, and at the same time he verbally emphasized every conceivable point that might assist to gain even the most temporary respite; and in these representations the Spanish Minister lent all the [Pg 60] support at his command.

Baron von der Lancken informed them that in these matters the supreme authority was the Military Governor; that the Governor-General had no authority to intervene; and that appeal could be carried only to the Emperor, and only in the event of the Military Governor exercising his discretionary power to accept an appeal for clemency.

Upon the urgent appeal of the neutral diplomatists Baron von der Lancken agreed to speak to the Military Governor on the telephone. He was absent half an hour, and upon his return stated that he had been to confer personally with the Military Governor, who declared that the sentence upon Miss Cavell was the result of 'mature deliberation,' and that the circumstances in her case rendered 'the infliction of the death penalty imperative.'

The Baron's attitude was that of absolute finality, and in signification of the end of the interview he asked Mr. Gibson to take back the note which he had presented to him. This apparently simple [Pg 61] request was typical of the subtleties of Teutonic diplomacy, which cynically repudiates its own 'scraps of paper,' and consequently cannot be expected to hold those of others in very high esteem. Astute as Baron von der Lancken may have imagined himself to be, his idea is patent to an ordinarily unsophisticated mind, which not unnaturally, albeit ungenerously, infers that at some time in the future the Baron may desire to deny that he had received the written appeal of the American Minister, which would be borne out by its absence from the official archives. He is welcome to any satisfaction that the preparation for mendacity may afford an atrophic conscience and a mental attitude that is foreign to honourable diplomacy.

For an hour longer the visitors argued and pleaded, only to be informed very positively that 'even the Emperor himself could not intervene'; but even then Mr. Gibson and the Marquis de Villalobar continued to make fresh appeals for delay. Finally the Spanish Minister drew Baron [Pg 62] von der Lancken aside in order to express some forcible opinions that he hesitated to say in the presence of the Baron's subordinates and M. de Leval, a Belgian subject; and in the meantime Mr. Gibson and M. de Leval argued desperately with the younger officers—but all in vain.

Edith Cavell was doomed to death by that same tyranny that had consummated the horrors of Louvain, that had heaped up atrocity upon atrocity to appal all Christendom. As the bells of the city chimed the midnight hour the victims' friends returned in despair to the American Legation.

VII

[Pg 63]

THE BLOOD OF THE MARTYR

At eleven o'clock that same night, while Mr. Gibson and the Marquis de Villalobar were expostulating with Baron von der Lancken, the Rev. H. S. T. Gahan, the British Chaplain in Brussels, entered the cell in which Nurse Cavell had spent the last ten weeks of her life.

Even in that supreme hour when she was being hurried to the grave by her implacable foes, she knew no fear. She was calm and resigned. Upon her gentle lips was no execration of her enemies, but only sentiments that make us infinitely proud of her, that shall be repeated by generations [Pg 64] yet unborn, that shall endure in our national affection and reverence as long as British tongues have speech and words have meaning.

In his report to the American Legation Mr. Gahan said that Nurse Cavell's first words were concerned with a matter concerning herself personally, 'but the solemn asseveration which accompanied them was made expressly in the light of God and eternity.' In expressing the wish for all her friends to know that she willingly gave her life to her country, she said, 'I have no fear nor shrinking; I have seen death so often that it is not strange or fearful to me.' She further said, 'I thank God for this ten weeks' quiet before the end. Life has always been hurried and full of difficulty. This time of rest has been a great mercy. They have all been very kind to me here. But this I would say, standing as I do in view of God and eternity, I realize that patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards any one.'

When the chaplain administered the Holy Communion, she received the gospel message of [Pg 65] consolation with all her heart; and when he repeated the words of the hymn 'Abide with me,' Miss Cavell softly joined in the last verse:

> Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
> Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies;
> Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
> In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

Afterwards the chaplain and Miss Cavell quietly conversed until the jailer intimated that the interview must end. She then gave him final parting messages for relatives and friends. 'She spoke of her soul's need at the moment, and she received the assurance of God's word as only the Christian can do'; and when he bade her 'good-bye' she smiled and said, 'We shall meet again.'

Early in the morning Miss Cavell was led out to execution. As there is no official account of her last moments, we at first had to rely chiefly upon the report of the Amsterdam *Telegraaf*, a

thoroughly reliable and influential journal; but later, additional details were available from [Pg 66]
various accredited sources. The *Telegraaf* records that the soldiers of the shooting party were greatly impressed by the courage and fortitude of the nurse, and much distressed at their enforced participation in a dastardly crime. Each individual soldier purposely aimed high so that he might not have the murder on his conscience. The whole firing party thus being impelled by the same humane motive, the volley left the victim standing unharmed.

Only in that dread moment did her physical strength refuse to respond further to her sublimely heroic spirit. She swooned and fell; and the officer in charge of the soldiers stepped forward and shot her through the head, close to the ear, as she lay mercifully unconscious of her surroundings.

Whether it be true or not that the soldiers acted as described, one would like to believe it, if only because it would afford some satisfaction to think that the German rank and file can be stirred by humane impulses to which their superiors are strangers. The rough soldiers would appear as [Pg 67]
veritable angels compared to Baron von Bissing and von der Lancken, his companion in crime. These ruffians consigned themselves by their conduct to everlasting loathing and contempt; to satisfy their rabid hate of England they proved themselves worthy peers of Judge Jeffreys, Robespierre, Nana Sahib, and other unnatural monsters.

Six weeks after the grim tragedy three of Miss Cavell's friends returned to England from Belgium, and several of their statements correct previous errors. One of these ladies saw Miss Cavell in prison a few days before the end, but by that time the secrecy and isolation from all advice had accomplished all that her jailers desired. The visitor says that during the interview Miss Cavell was quite herself, wonderfully calm, and preferred to talk on ordinary topics. Originally it was stated that the execution took place at 2 a.m. in the prison of St. Gilles, but Miss Wilkins, who took over the management of the hospital after Miss Cavell's arrest, was at the [Pg 68]
prison at five o'clock on the morning of the 12th. She was just in time to see her friend being conducted to the motor-car in which she was to be driven to the Tir National, two miles out of Brussels, which was the selected place of execution. She walked firmly, and, from the expression of her face, she was serene and undisturbed.

The German military chaplain was with her at the end, and afterwards gave her poor body Christian burial. He told Mr. Gahan that 'she was brave and bright to the last. She professed her Christian faith, and that she was glad to die for her country.' 'She died like a heroine.'

But the German chaplain did not inform Mr. Gahan that, accustomed as he was to painful death scenes, the brutal end of the gentle victim so horrified him that he himself sank to the ground in a dead faint—a weakness that stands to the credit of his heart and calling.

The Rev. H. S. T. Gahan was sent to Brussels by the Colonial and Continental Church Society only [Pg 69]
a few months before the outbreak of the War. He was imprisoned for a few days in November, 1914, but was released when the Americans represented that they required a clergyman. All other British men were deported, but many British women and children remain in Brussels. Many of those who have contrived to escape from the stricken capital testify to the help and kindness and sympathy of the British chaplain.

It has been asserted that by her own request Miss Cavell was permitted to face her executioners with unbandaged eyes and unbound hands. But more than that, according to later information, the Germans, with one of their acute refinements of cruelty, allowed her to witness the execution of M. Bancq, and it was this sight, more than fear of her own end, that caused her to collapse.

The only announcement of Miss Cavell's death received by her friends and pupils was through a [Pg 70]
poster displayed on the walls of Brussels baldly announcing that the execution had taken place; and letters which were addressed to them the day before she died were not delivered until a month afterwards.

The body of the martyr was buried by her enemies near the prison of St. Gilles. Mr. Whitlock, on behalf of the First President of the Brussels Court of Appeals and President of the Belgian School of Certificated Nurses, asked Baron von der Lancken for the body of Miss Cavell, its directress. It was undertaken, in the removal of the body and its burial in the Brussels district, to conform to all the regulations of the German authorities. Mr. Whitlock remarked that he felt sure that His Excellency would make no objection to the request, and that the institution to which Miss Cavell had generously devoted a part of her life would be permitted to perform a pious duty. Baron von der Lancken did not send a written reply, but called upon Mr. Gibson in person. He stated that under the regulations governing such cases it was impossible to exhume the body without written [Pg 71]
permission from the Minister of War in Berlin. Thus the Germans took the opportunity of crowning their foul deed with the final dishonour of a refusal of even such a last pitiful request.

Really it is immaterial where Edith Cavell's body may be laid to rest, although sentiment may demand its ultimate recovery. Her memory will lack nothing. It is enshrined in glowing effulgence in the hearts of Britons and our Allies for all time.

Although our story is the record of Edith Cavell, we can spare a thought for her heroic companions. M. Philippe Bancq declared his willingness to die for his country, and the Germans took him at his word. Princess Marie de Croy was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment; but the

Comtesse de Belleville and Mademoiselle Thulier were condemned to death. Upon strong representations made by the King of Spain and the Pope, however, the German Emperor hastened to pardon these two ladies, because he was aware of the universal horror caused by the [Pg 72] deliberate political murder of Miss Cavell. Von Bissing, too, evidently was warned by the Kaiser to moderate his bloodthirstiness, as evidenced by a promise of their lives to all British and French soldiers still hidden in Belgium if they surrendered without delay. Verily, it was speedily proved that Nurse Cavell had died that others might live—and it is not always the case that even the greatest sacrifices bear so speedy a fruit.

VIII

[Pg 73]

IN MEMORIAM

It is almost impossible to express how deeply the heart of the nation was stirred by the crowning deed of infamy signalized in the tyrannous execution of Edith Cavell; and all classes, from the highest to the lowest, were desirous of testifying their admiration of one whose devotion to duty and consecrated death will ever be an inspiration to our race.

The following message was dispatched from the King and Queen to Mrs. Cavell, the stricken mother of the dead heroine:

'Buckingham Palace,
'*October 23, 1915*.

'Dear Madam,—By command of the King and Queen I write to assure you that the hearts of their [Pg 74] Majesties go out to you in your bitter sorrow, and to express their horror at the appalling deed which has robbed you of your child. Men and women throughout the civilized world, while sympathizing with you, are moved with admiration and awe at her faith and courage in death.

'Believe me, dear Madam, yours very truly,

'Stamfordham.'

Queen Alexandra's letter, through the medium of the Rector of Sandringham, ran as follows:

'I am commanded by Her Majesty Queen Alexandra to write and say how deeply Her Majesty feels for you in the sad and tragic death of your daughter. Her Majesty views the unheard-of act with the utmost abhorrence; no words of mine are in any way adequate to express the deep feelings of Her Majesty as she spoke to me of Miss Cavell's death. Her Majesty's first thought was of you, and I was to tell you how deeply, very deeply, Her Majesty sympathizes with you. "Her poor, poor mother. I go [Pg 75] on thinking of her," were Her Majesty's words. The women of England are bearing the greatest burden of this terrible War, but by all the name of Miss Cavell will be held in the highest honour and respect. We shall always remember that she never once failed England in her hour of need. "May God bless and comfort you!" is the prayer of Her Majesty.'

Naturally the tragic death of their heroic sister went like a trumpet-blast through the ranks of the nursing profession, and the following letter of sympathy addressed to Mrs. Cavell from the President and Council of the Royal British Nurses' Association was signed by Princess Christian herself:

'We, the President and Council of the Royal British Nurses' Association, desire to express the warm and heartfelt sympathy of the whole Association with you in the bereavement which has fallen on [Pg 76] you in such tragic circumstances. Your daughter's heroic death is one which will always remain a lasting memorial to devotion, courage, and self-sacrifice, and her name will ever be remembered among those heroes who have laid down their lives for their country.'

Of the condolences from abroad a few examples must suffice. M. Cambon, the French Ambassador in London, received from the Committee of Foreign Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies the following telegram for transmission to the House of Commons:

'The Chairman and Members of the Committee of Foreign Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies, deeply moved by the tragic fate of Miss Cavell, desire to offer to the members of the House of Commons the expression of the respect and admiration which they feel for the noble heroine of British patriotism, and beg the House of Commons to accept, on behalf of themselves and of their [Pg 77] colleagues, their message of grief and indignation.'

Acting under the instructions of his Government, the Belgian Minister telegraphed to Mrs. Cavell:

'The Belgian Government shares with emotion and respect in your grief. Our entire population to-day associates in a universal sentiment of admiration and gratitude the name of Miss Cavell with that of the many Belgian women who have already fallen martyrs to German barbarism, and from whose innocent blood will arise new heroism for the defence of civilization.'

A Great Memorial Service.

London in particular, and the nation in general, laid its wreath of prayer around the bier of Edith Cavell in a great memorial service held in St. Paul's Cathedral on October 29, 1915. It was a fitting and touching token of affection and admiration of one of our greatest national heroines, [Pg 78]

solemnly performed in one of the most sacred of our national shrines.

The morning found London enshrouded in blue-grey mist; but at eleven o'clock, the time of service, the weather-worn old sanctuary commenced to gleam in pale sunshine, as if it were a halo from the glorious dead to lighten the gloom of the sorrowing multitude.

St. Paul's Cathedral has witnessed many moving ceremonies, sad and joyful, pathetic and glorious, but never in its history had it witnessed a spectacle quite like the present occasion, which had its origin in a brutal act of tyranny that had given rise to a cry of horror to agitate the civilized world.

Under Wren's great dome were gathered representatives of every department of the national life. Mr. E. W. Wallington attended on behalf of the King and Queen. It had been expected that Queen Alexandra would be similarly represented, but Her Majesty preferred to attend in person in [Pg 79] strictest privacy, typical of that gracious tact that has made her universally beloved, and one more proof of her special friendship for nurses.

The family of the martyred nurse was represented by two married sisters, Miss Scott Cavell, matron of the Hull and East Riding Convalescent Home, and other relatives. The aged mother was not present; she was too weighed down by weight of years and sorrow to face a public ordeal whose pathos would have been too poignant to bear. In imagination could be conjured up a white-haired stately dame in her quiet Norwich home, engaging in a simultaneous service all her own in the silence of her saddened heart.

Among the more distinguished members of the congregation were the Prime Minister and not a few members of the Cabinet; members of both Houses of Parliament; Sir A. Keogh (representing Lord Kitchener); Lord Charles Beresford, a popular representative of the Navy; the Diplomatic Corps; the High Commissioners of Canada and Australia; the Deputy Lord Mayor and Sheriffs in [Pg 80] state; and notable representatives of the arts, sciences, commerce, &c. For the rest there was a vast concourse, all bent upon the one single purpose of taking advantage of the grave and beautiful Anglican ritual to place on record, without bitterness, hate, or venom, their deep sense of the foul crime that had sent Edith Cavell to her death.

But the outstanding feature of the multitude was the nurses. Six hundred of them were in reserved seats, but there must have been at least two thousand in the building. First and foremost were various members of Miss Cavell's training school in Belgium; and, of course, the 'London,' in their dark rifle green, had a prominent place in the great company of nurses of all grades, ambassadors and delegates of their noble profession. Many of them were simply in caps and aprons with a cloak around their shoulders, suggesting that they had come straight from their duties in the city's palaces of pain to engage in a service that was a fresh consecration of [Pg 81] their merciful calling.

Except for the gorgeous habiliments of the civic officials, Queen Alexandra's corps of nurses provided the only note of colour in the touch of red at the capes; for even the band of the First Life Guards was dressed in sober khaki instead of their usually resplendent uniforms.

Wounded soldiers, often in groups, were pathetically noticeable among the congregation, poor fellows who could testify above all others to the mercy and healing brought to the sick and the maimed by 'a noble type of good heroic womanhood.' Of the whole immense gathering the majority were women. A large proportion of them were in black, the significant badge of grief for the loss of their own particular dear ones, the brave fellows who have laid down their lives on the battle-fields, or on the ocean for whose mistress-ship they died.

As the Cathedral clock boomed out the hour the drums rolled in prelude to Chopin's 'Funeral March,' which struck the first note of emotion in the massed assembly and brought it to its feet. [Pg 82] Slowly the choir, headed by the symbol of our and Edith Cavell's faith, moved to their places, preceding the clergy, chief of whom were the Bishop of London and Dr. Bury, the Bishop of Central Europe.

The service proper commenced with the hymn 'Abide with me,' in which ten thousand voices joined, and never was it sung with more feeling and reverence. The last verse in particular must have called to every mind that inexpressibly sad scene in St. Gilles' Prison. The words brought solace and strength to Nurse Cavell, and some of her quiet faith, her touching fortitude, seemed to be communicated to the congregation.

Following the special Psalms and the Lesson from the Burial Service, band and organ together played the Dead March in *Saul*; and as the notes pulsed and throbbed, pealed out with mighty rush of sound, or decreased to little more than the volume of human breath, the terror of death [Pg 83] became secondary to the triumph of the spirit.

With singularly moving effect the choir commenced to sing the Liturgy of St. Chrysostom, the beautiful prayer that contrasted so strongly with the crashing harmonies that had scarcely ceased to reverberate far up in the empty dome.

Prayers from the Burial Service were followed by a special petition that, 'laying aside our divisions, we may be united in heart and mind to bear the burdens which the War has laid upon us....' The congregation sang 'Through the night of doubt and sorrow,' with its happy marching

swing; the Bishop of London pronounced the Benediction; then came the resonant notes of the National Anthem; and the organ played a recessional as the choir and clergy retired. A moment later two thousand nurses fell to their knees, and 'if ever a soul went well charioted to its Maker it was the soul of Edith Cavell.'

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The service was over, and those who had been privileged to participate in a soul-searching ceremony streamed out into the hum of the mightiest camp of men the world has ever known. It was like coming from the Holy of Holies, with an everlasting memory to kindle the love and enthusiasm of all who worship at the shrine of duty.

And the wonder of it all, it was a great national tribute to one who a fortnight earlier was unknown outside her own family and immediate circle of friends. She had 'lived unknown till persecution dragged her into fame and chased her up to heaven,' as a cry of horror and execration, mingled with agonized pity for her harrowing fate, flashed her name from peak to peak and continent to continent.

The columns of the British press were flooded with letters denouncing the crime and acknowledging the death of the martyr as an irresistibly compelling call to duty; and innumerable suggestions were made for perpetuating in tangible form the memory of a daughter of England who had taught us how to die.

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One notable scheme for a memorial was speedily announced in connexion with the London Hospital, which happened to be establishing a new nursing home, which was to bear the name of Queen Alexandra. With true nobility of heart Queen Alexandra promptly requested that her name should give way to that of Edith Cavell, and public subscriptions quickly assured an enlargement of the original scheme.

The *Daily Telegraph* initiated a subscription fund to provide a statue in stone and bronze by Sir George Frampton, and the eminent sculptor intimated that his work would be a labour of love and a voluntary gift. The Westminster City Council offered a site opposite the National Portrait Gallery; and thus the statue will face Trafalgar Square, already rich in national memories. Edith Cavell's death first became known in England on Trafalgar Day. The base of the Nelson Monument was hidden under the customary floral tributes to our greatest naval hero, and amid them was placed a wreath of laurels, a symbol of the martyrdom of the heroic nurse, of which the public would learn through the press the following day. It will be peculiarly fitting for the statue to Edith Cavell, whose last words were that she was glad to die for her country, to be within sight of the column where stands the one-armed Nelson, whose last immortal signal, 'England expects every man to do his duty,' has ever been an inspiration not only to the Fleet, but to every true lover of his country.

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Other ideas for the perpetuation of the name of Nurse Cavell included the raising of a Cavell Regiment, that should be a living monument of brave men, who would be heartened and vivified by the noble life and death of their devoted countrywoman. But the true spirit of Britons negatived the necessity for a particular regiment. The next day after the announcement of the death of Miss Cavell every eligible man in her native village joined the Forces, and the recruits, all told, must have numbered many thousands.

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Probably it would afford general satisfaction if another proposal bore fruit, namely, the institution of a new Order, equivalent to the Victoria Cross, for heroism by women of our race and Empire; and the heroism of our women in the present War emphasizes the justice and wisdom of some such acknowledgement.

Up and down the country there were soon memorial schemes, generally in connexion with local hospitals or the British Red Cross Society. One of the first of this kind was the endowment of a bed in King Edward VII's Hospital, Cardiff, by Sir W. J. Thomas. There speedily followed the proposed institution of other beds to be named after Miss Cavell: the City of Dublin Hospital asked for £500 to endow a bed; the 'Ediths' of Yorkshire commenced to collect to perpetuate her memory in the north; and a fund of £1,000 was started for a free bed for nurses at the Mount Vernon Hospital for Consumption.

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Miss Scott Cavell made it known that her sister had hoped some time in the future to establish a home for nurses only, those either convalescent or tired, or who required a temporary home on holiday from abroad, or a temporary place of rest only. A subscription list was at once opened to give effect to a plan that had been so near Nurse Cavell's heart.

A similar idea, but on a larger scale, was favoured by Sir John Howard, well known in Brighton as the giver of the John Howard Convalescent Home for Ladies in Reduced Circumstances. He announced that in memory of Miss Cavell he would build twenty-four cottage homes for incapacitated nurses, and endow each with the sum of ten shillings a week. This munificent memorial will entail the expenditure of about £30,000.

IX

[Pg 89]

BRITISH OFFICIAL REPROBATION

The language of diplomacy is of a restrained and judicial character, even when dealing with questions that arouse in the lay mind a whole storm of feeling. But the letter of Sir Edward Grey of October 20, 1915, addressed to Mr. Page, the United States Ambassador in London, with studied calmness and marked dignity indicts the German authorities of an unwarrantable haste in carrying out the sentence that amounts to political murder. The Foreign Secretary's comments were as follows:

> 'Sir E. Grey is confident that the news of the execution of this noble Englishwoman will be received with horror and disgust, not only in the United States, but throughout the civilized world. Miss Cavell was not even charged with espionage, and the fact that she had nursed numbers of wounded German soldiers might have been regarded as a complete reason in itself for treating her with leniency.
>
> [Pg 90]
>
> 'The attitude of the German authorities is, if possible, rendered worse by the discreditable efforts successfully made by the officials of the German civil administration at Brussels to conceal the fact that sentence had been passed, and would be carried out immediately. These efforts were no doubt prompted by the determination to carry out the sentence before an appeal from the finding of the court-martial could be made to a higher authority, and show in the clearest manner that the German authorities concerned were well aware that the carrying out of the sentence was not warranted by any consideration.
>
> 'Further comment on their proceedings would be superfluous.
>
> 'In conclusion, Sir E. Grey would request Mr. Page to express to Mr. Whitlock and the staff of the United States Legation at Brussels the grateful thanks of His Majesty's Government for their untiring efforts on Miss Cavell's behalf. He is fully satisfied that no stone was left unturned to secure for Miss Cavell a fair trial, and, when sentence had been pronounced, a mitigation thereof.
>
> [Pg 91]
>
> 'Sir E. Grey realizes that Mr. Whitlock was placed in a very embarrassing position by the failure of the German authorities to inform him that the sentence had been passed, and would be carried out at once. In order, therefore, to forestall any unjust criticism which might be made in this country, he is publishing Mr. Whitlock's dispatch to Mr. Page without delay.'

Sir Edward Grey also wrote to the Spanish Ambassador in London acknowledging the good services of the Spanish Minister at Brussels, and concluding thus:

> 'His Majesty's Government much appreciates the efforts made by the Marquis de Villalobar on this occasion, and the sentiments of humanity and chivalry which animated him, and they would be grateful if your Excellency would be good enough to so inform the Spanish Government.'
>
> [Pg 92]

In the House of Lords the Earl of Desart asked the Government if they could give any information with regard to the execution of Miss Edith Cavell by the German authorities in Belgium. Her offence, he said, of assisting her own countrymen and the countrymen of our Allies to escape was one which a belligerent was entitled to protect itself against, and a sentence of execution might even be passed, but such sentence ought never to have been carried out by any country. It was rumoured that other persons against whom similar charges had been made were lying in peril of their lives, and it might be possible through the action of neutral countries to prevent a recurrence of one of the greatest tragedies of the War.

The Marquis of Lansdowne replied:

> 'I am not surprised, and I am sure no member of the House can be surprised, that the noble Earl should have called attention to this most deplorable incident. We have been during the last few months continually shocked by occurrences each more terrible and moving than its predecessor; but I doubt whether any incident has moved public opinion in this country more than the manner in which this poor lady was, I suppose I may say, executed in cold blood.
>
> [Pg 93]
>
> 'It is no doubt the case that she may by her conduct have rendered herself liable to punishment, perhaps to severe punishment, for acts that could be taken to be a violation of the kind of law which prevails when war is going on. But I have no hesitation in saying that she might at any rate have expected that measure of mercy which, I believe, in no civilized country would have been refused to one who was not only a woman, but a very brave and devoted woman, and one who had given all her efforts and energies to the mitigation of the sufferings of others.
>
> [Pg 94]
>
> 'I am able to tell my noble friend that a full report relating to the circumstances under which Miss Cavell was executed was forwarded to the Foreign Office by the United States Ambassador. We learn from this report that the representatives of the United States and Spain at Brussels up to the very last moment neglected no opportunity or effort in order to obtain a commutation of the death sentence passed on Miss Cavell, or even to obtain at least a period of suspense before that sentence was carried into effect. These efforts failed.
>
> 'With regard to the second part of my noble friend's question, I am able to tell him that two French ladies have been condemned to death on a charge of sheltering British and French fugitive soldiers. These ladies were to have been executed on Monday last; but I am glad to be able to add that, as the result of strong representations made by His Majesty the King of Spain and by the Pope, the execution of these sentences has been postponed pending consideration by the German Emperor of the reports on both cases. I will only add that I am convinced there is not a man or woman in this country who will not join with the noble Earl in the protest he has made against this terrible
>
> [Pg 95]

occurrence.'

In the House of Commons Mr. Asquith, the Prime Minister, said:

> 'If there be moments such as come to all of us when we are tempted to be fainthearted, let us ask ourselves what year in our history has done more to justify our faith in the manhood and the womanhood of our people? It has brought us, as we cannot at this moment forget, the imperishable story of the last hours of Edith Cavell, facing a terrible ordeal worse than that of the battle-field. She has taught the bravest man amongst us the supreme lesson of courage. Yes, and in this United Kingdom and throughout the Dominions of the Crown there are thousands of such women. A year ago we did not know it. We have great traditions, but a nation cannot exist by traditions alone. [Pg 96] Thank God, we have living examples of all the qualities which have built up and sustained our Empire. Let us be worthy of them, and endure to the end.'

The Secretary for Foreign Affairs was asked whether, according to Article 10 of the Hague Convention of 1907 and the guarantee of the neutrality of Belgium, to which Prussia was a party, the late Miss Cavell was, according to such law as could be applied to her case, guilty of any military offence.

Sir E. Grey: 'It seems unnecessary to go into technical legal points to condemn what has been done in this case. The reprobation of it, which I believe is widespread in the world, rests upon higher considerations, which arouse deeper feelings, than mere illegality.'

In another question the Secretary for Foreign Affairs was asked whether he had taken, or intended to take, any steps to convey to the Military Governor of Brussels that, when opportunity [Pg 97] offered, he would be held personally responsible by His Majesty's Government for the quasi-judicial assassination of Miss Cavell.

Lord Robert Cecil: 'On May 5 last the Prime Minister assured the House that due reparation would be exacted from all persons, whatever their position, who can be shown to have maltreated our prisoners in Germany. That pledge still holds good, and applies with twofold force in the case of the savage murder under legal forms of a noble woman. I do not think that it would serve any good purpose to attempt to convey this resolve to any particular German official, who, for aught we know at present, may not be the chief offender.'

The statement of the Prime Minister to which the above reference was made was as follows:

> 'The Government were at least as anxious as anybody else that when the proper time came due reparation should be exacted from all persons, whatever their position or their antecedents, who [Pg 98] could be shown to have violated the most elementary principles, and perhaps the most fundamental, of all the rules and usages of civilized warfare.'

If there be any value in the British Government's expressed determination, then assuredly von Bissing and von der Lancken will be indicted for the offence that stinks in the nostrils of the whole world.

X

[Pg 99]

GERMANY'S CYNICAL DEFENCE

Germany speedily found it wise to attempt to justify the execution of Miss Cavell in order to moderate the storm of indignation that had been aroused in neutral countries. To that end Dr. Zimmermann, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, set forth the German defence in an interview granted to a United States correspondent in Berlin.

> 'It was a pity,' said Dr. Zimmermann, 'that Miss Cavell had to be executed, but it was necessary. She was judged justly. We hope it will not be necessary to have any more executions. [Pg 100]
>
> 'I see from the English and American press that the shooting of an Englishwoman and the condemnation of several other women in Brussels for treason has caused a sensation, and capital against us is being made out of the fact. It is undoubtedly a terrible thing that the woman has been executed; but consider what would happen to a State, particularly in war, if it left crimes aimed at the safety of its armies to go unpunished because committed by women. No criminal code in the world—least of all the laws of war—makes such a distinction; and the feminine sex has but one preference, according to legal usages, namely, that women in a delicate condition may not be executed. Otherwise men and women are equal before the law, and only the degree of guilt makes a difference in the sentence for the crime and its consequences.
>
> 'I have before me the court's verdict in the Cavell case, and can assure you that it was gone into with the utmost thoroughness, and was investigated and cleared up to the smallest details. The [Pg 101] result was so convincing, and the circumstances were so clear, that no war court in the world could have given any other verdict, for it was not concerned with a single emotional deed of one person, but a well-thought-out plot, with many far-reaching ramifications, which for nine months succeeded in doing valuable service to our enemies and great detriment to our armies. Countless Belgian, French, and English soldiers are again fighting in the ranks of the Allies who owe their escape to the band now found guilty, whose head was the Cavell woman. Only the utmost sternness could do away with such activities under the very nose of our authorities, and a Government which in such

case does not resort to the sternest measures sins against its most elementary duties toward the safety of its own army.

'All those convicted were thoroughly aware of the nature of their acts. The court particularly weighed this point with care, letting off several of the accused because they were in doubt as to whether they knew that their actions were punishable. Those condemned knew what they were doing, for numerous public proclamations had pointed out the fact that aiding enemies' armies was punishable with death. [Pg 102]

'I know that the motives of the condemned were not base; that they acted from patriotism; but in war one must be prepared to seal one's patriotism with blood, whether one faces the enemy in battle, or otherwise in the interest of one's cause does deeds which justly bring after them the death penalty. Among our Russian prisoners are several young girls who fought against us in soldiers' uniforms. Had one of these girls fallen, no one would have accused us of barbarity against women. Why now, when another woman has met the death to which she knowingly exposed herself, as did her comrades in battle?

'There are moments in the life of nations where consideration for the existence of the individual is a crime against all. Such a moment was here. It was necessary once for all to put an end to the activity of our enemies, regardless of their motives; therefore the death penalty was executed so as to frighten off all those who, counting on preferential treatment for their sex, take part in undertakings punishable by death. [Pg 103]

'It was proved after a long trial of the sentenced persons that they for some months past had been engaged in assisting Belgians of military age to enlist in hostile armies, and in enabling French and English deserters to escape the country. They had many helpers, and had organized branches.

'The Governor-General had repeatedly issued warnings against such activity, pointing out that severe punishment for such action was unavoidable.

'The guilty persons were sentenced in a public sitting according to the law based on the provisions of the imperial penal code and the military penal code for war treason and espionage. No special law exists for Belgium, and no so-called "usage of war" influenced the verdict of the court.' [Pg 104]

Dr. Zimmermann maintained that the execution was carried out in accordance with the established regulations, death occurring immediately after the first volley, as attested by the physician who was present.

The greater part of Dr. Zimmermann's futile reasoning is not worth discussion in detail. The one outstanding fact is the common belief that no military authorities in Europe, other than German, would have executed Miss Cavell for an offence actuated by purest motives of patriotism, and in which there was not the faintest suspicion of espionage. It may be remarked, too, that in America Judge Lynch never executed a woman. The attempt to draw a parallel case between Nurse Cavell and Russian women who have fought as soldiers is puerile in the extreme. In the case of the Russian, she is dressed in male uniform, and the German who shoots her in action does so in ignorance of her sex; Miss Cavell was a Red Cross nurse whose services to German wounded alone should have struck a spark of compassion. [Pg 105]

Later, an inspired telegram was issued from Berlin to counteract the 'incorrect and exaggerated' discussions in the foreign press. It was stated that Miss Cavell was sentenced in a public sitting, although it is an incontrovertible fact that the American Legation could not get permission to be represented. It is laid to Miss Cavell's charge that she 'nursed only rich people for heavy fees.' Even if it were true, it would not palliate the German offence of hurried and clandestine murder; but we know, and the Germans know, that her whole life was spent in doing good for others. Finally is repeated the old statement that cruelties were committed by Lord Kitchener during the Boer War on women and children. This oft-repeated libel needs no refutation of ours, because it was demolished years ago by the German official history of the Boer War.

The next step in German impudence was an attempt to make believe that in the documents exchanged between the American Legation in Brussels and the German authorities as published by the British Government, some circumstances of the utmost importance are inaccurately reported by the Belgian lawyer who acts as legal adviser to the Legation. To this Sir Edward Grey informed the press that the papers relating to the case of Miss Cavell were published exactly as they were received from the American Embassy and with the American Embassy's consent. [Pg 106]

On November 20, however, nearly a month later, the British Foreign Office did make public one correction:

'The letter addressed by the United States Minister at Brussels to the Ambassador in London, under date October 14, to the effect that the German prosecutor had asked for a sentence of death against Miss Edith Cavell *and eight other persons implicated by her testimony* was due to erroneous information furnished to the United States Legation, and, so far as it has been possible to discover, no other person has been directly implicated by any testimony on the part of Miss Cavell.' [Pg 107]

The acknowledgement of this mistake, however, could have afforded the Germans but little satisfaction, because its only effect was the removal of a slur on the loyalty of Miss Cavell to her friends.

In the clumsy attempt to justify their savagery the Germans have done nothing to prevent judgement going by default in the heart of all civilized nations. They omit all reference to their inhuman haste and calculated trickery, and their venomous refusal to allow exhumation and proper burial. No laws of war permit such outrages, no military necessities can excuse and no pedantic partisan can vindicate them.

XI

[Pg 108]

JUSTICE AND SAVAGERY CONTRASTED

Sir John Simon, the late Home Secretary, in an interview with a United States correspondent in London, averred that in the record of Britain's treatment of persons accused of military offences the case of Miss Cavell had and could have no parallel. To no woman, even in cases of clearly proved espionage, had Britain meted out a sentence of death; and in no case is a woman, whatever her nationality, tried in any but a civil court.

It may be urged that in an occupied territory such as Belgium the administration of the law may call for slight difference; but the Cavell case was not a sudden or unexpected discovery that [Pg 109] called for a drumhead court-martial on a battle-field. The 'crime' was committed in Brussels, where the invaders claim to have restored orderly government under their own civil governor.

> 'In England the accused is brought before a tribunal which holds a preliminary inquiry taking the summary evidence. He is always assisted by a lawyer, and a complete record of the evidence, oral and documentary, is given to the accused, who is then allowed an interval to prepare for defence. *If it is a woman, the trial always takes place before a civil tribunal*; if a man, he has the right to claim to be tried before a civil tribunal instead of a court-martial, if he be a British subject. At the trial, whether military or civil, the lawyers for the defence have the same opportunities as are given the accused in an ordinary case in peace times.
>
> 'In the last case involving a woman in this country the offender was of German birth, though [Pg 110] technically a subject of another country owing to marriage. She was acting in association with a male spy, and was detected travelling to various points in order to collect information about naval defences. The evidence against her was overwhelming, and did not depend solely on witnesses, but on documents found in her possession and letters written by her and her associates.
>
> 'Going through the preliminary proceedings as previously described, she was tried in September by three civil judges of our High Court and a jury, and was convicted, not of harbouring German soldiers, but of deliberate and persistent spying for the purpose of providing the enemy with important information. Her male companion was condemned to death; she was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment.
>
> 'In the case of a court-martial, reconsideration always takes place; in a civil trial, such as the one just recounted, there is a right of appeal to the Court of Criminal Appeal and consideration by the Home Secretary, who gives his advice as to the prerogative of mercy. In the particular case [Pg 111] mentioned the woman did not appeal.
>
> 'In any case when the accused has claimed to have connexion with a neutral country we have not waited for application to be made to us. We thought it right to give the neutral Embassy information of the arrest. It has happened in several cases that the accused was carrying what he alleged to be a United States passport. In such cases, as the others, the American Embassy was consulted, and the solicitors and counsel for defence were retained with the Embassy's approval.
>
> 'Execution never follows a sentence here without a proper interval. Indeed, there was a case not long ago when on the eve of the execution a postponement was requested in order that some further representation might be considered. The sentence was postponed for a week, and the whole case was reviewed in the light of the new material. In a case now pending the accused says he wishes to call evidence from the other side of the world. We don't know whether the evidence will be helpful, [Pg 112] but we have postponed the final trial from August to December.
>
> 'Mind you, I am not claiming any credit for the British Government for our procedure. There is nothing unusual, to my mind, in taking care that the accused persons have the fullest opportunity for their defence. The thing that strikes Englishmen as most incredible in the case of Miss Cavell is the calculated indifference with which the inquiries of the American and Spanish Ministers were treated. If the excuse is suggested that in time of war severe and harsh measures have to be taken, our own experience is enough to show that it is possible to combine a regard for the rights of the accused and the respect for humane considerations with the effect of punishment of hostile offences of the most serious kind.
>
> 'It would have seemed impossible for the Germans to do anything to increase the horror produced by their behaviour in Belgium. It would have seemed impossible to do anything which could cement [Pg 113] more closely the bond of sympathy between the populations of England and Belgium. But they have accomplished both impossibilities by one horrible act of brutality.'

The foregoing contrast between British and German conceptions of justice is practically the difference between barbarism and civilization; and Sir John Simon's impressive exposition of the difference between the two systems calls for nothing to elaborate it.

XII

[Pg 114]

PULPIT AND PEN UNITE IN DENUNCIATION

THE publication of the official correspondence affording the details of Miss Cavell's stealthy execution raised a storm of righteous indignation, which found expression in every pulpit in the British Isles; while on the platform or in the press men of light and leading joined in their condemnation of the German atrocity. The following are but a few notable examples of whole sheaves of similar outpourings.

The Bishop of London, in preaching the Trafalgar Day Sermon, at St. Martin-in-the-Fields, said: [Pg 115]

> 'The cold-blooded murder of Miss Cavell, a poor English girl, deliberately shot by Germans for housing refugees, will run the sinking of the *Lusitania* close in the civilized world as the greatest crime in history. There is one thing about the incident which, perhaps, was not taken into account by those who perpetrated the crime. It will settle the matter once for all about recruiting in Great Britain. There will be no need now of compulsion. I wonder what Nelson would have said if he had been told that an Englishwoman had been shot in cold blood by the members of any other nation? He would have made more than the diplomatic inquiries which have been made by a great neutral into this crime, right and proper as those inquiries are. He would have made his inquiries by the thunder of the guns of the British Fleet, and pressed the question with the Nelson touch which won Trafalgar, as, indeed, our own Fleet at this moment is only too ready to do. But is it possible that there is one young man in England to-day who will sit still under this monstrous wrong? The three [Pg 116] million new recruits asked for will be there. Why was she put to death? Why was she murdered? Three thousand thousand Englishmen, and Scotsmen and Irishmen too, will know the reason why. God's curse is on the nation that tramples underfoot and defies the laws of chivalry which once relieved the horrors of war.'

The following is the Rev. F. B. Meyer's eloquent contribution:

> 'We may thank God for the chivalrous reverence in which the British race holds womanhood; and how nobly that reverence has been responded to is evident in the unparalleled service which the women of our time have been giving to fill the depleted ranks of labour and to render invaluable service in all departments, from the hospital to the harvest-field.
>
> 'The crowning horror of the German treatment of womanhood is the atrocious murder of this [Pg 117] woman, who lived to alleviate suffering, and who only did what any one of us would have done in saving the lives of refugees who sought the shelter of a home. There should be no necessity for executing a woman in war-time; and if it is said that crime is committed in passion, the murder of Miss Cavell is inexcusable even on that ground, because she was executed in cold blood.
>
> 'It is impossible for any British men who are of suitable age and physical fitness for the army to hold back, because it is certain that the measure meted out to Nurse Cavell would be gentleness itself compared to the treatment which would befall our womanhood if once the German invasion triumphed over our resistance.
>
> 'If only the crime that we deprecate to-day would lead us to concentrate our thought on the War, we should be doing more than we realize towards bringing it to an end. The pessimist, the croaker, the grumbler, the critic, work in a contrary direction. Our enemies, with their Hymns of Hate and [Pg 118] concentrated venom, endeavour to hurt us, and they forget that passions of that sort recoil on their instigators as poisonous gases roll back with the wind to those who sent them. We do not concentrate in a spirit of revenge or hatred, but in the stern resolve of an entire nation that we shall never stay our hands until our Empire is free from all fear of menace.
>
> 'Miss Cavell has set the world an example of how we should bear ourselves in a supreme crisis. Her heroic conduct, her calm composure in the face of death, cannot be accounted for merely by her temperament. They were due to her religious faith.
>
> 'She died as a Christian, looking towards the Redeemer, and forgave her persecutors, and she will go on ministering still.
>
> 'A life like hers will reverberate through the world. Thousands will be inspired by her example, and long after the War has passed away her name and character will shine like a beacon light in history.'

The Rev. Lord William Cecil contributed a special sermon to the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*, [Pg 119] of which is quoted only the final portion:

> 'Edith Cavell lives in the heart of the nation; nay, in the esteem of the world.
>
> 'She by her deed has won undying renown, and has made England more glorious. Far and wide will they tell the tale, and add—"Of such are the English."
>
> 'The work of the statesman passes. New generations arise, with new problems and new combinations. The victories of the general are forgotten or live in the musty pages of history with dates and sententious comments of the historian. But glorious deeds of sacrifice never die. They live and grow mightier as years roll on.
>
> 'The old English chronicler, Hall, after discussing the question whether Joan of Arc was justly killed or no, adds this comment—that "it matters not, for in a few years the whole story will be forgotten." [Pg 120] Poor fool! He forgot that good deeds live, and therefore can never be forgotten. So we shall tell the

story of Edith Cavell to the wondering children, and they on their knees will lisp in childish words a prayer that they may grow like such a holy woman.

'And the ages that are to come will learn her name. Yes, long after other great actors in this awful tragedy are forgotten—when the names of kings and kaisers are lost in the obscurity of the past—the sacrifice made by Edith Cavell will be remembered as we remember the holy deeds of saints and the martyrdom of the Christian virgins.

'This foul world needs some saint to save it.

'The world that tells lies, breaks sworn treaties, murders and kills, needs a ransom. Vile as it is, so vile that those who look on it marvel at the depravity of human nature, and now, as a sin-offering, a woman has been offered by the blood-lusting Germans. [Pg 121]

'The sacrifice will surely tell in the great world beyond, and a blessing will come from her death.

'The heavenly trumpets sound the victory. Fear and cruelty shall not prevail. Honour, love, and sacrifice are conquerors. And this world will be saved from that combination of human power and vileness which is revealed to the world by the Prussian military system.

'Edith Cavell, by her sacrifice, pleads with God to send righteousness again on this war-torn earth.

'She will conquer.'

Mr. T. P. O'Connor delivered more than one eloquent speech, and that which we quote may be accepted as the voice of Ireland:

'If ever we had any doubts as to what our duty is in this War, it must have been removed by the events of the past few days. We have given to this cause of liberty one of the noblest figures that ever appeared in the martyrology of liberty throughout the history of the world. [Pg 122]

'I like to think of Miss Cavell as a symbol of our race. By her devotion to duty, her assiduity in her work, her determination to stand by her post, her humanity to the enemy as well as to the friend, her words of courage, and at the same time of broad pity and humanity, even under the shadow of death, that woman has done more to inspire our race in our fight than the gallantry even of a hundred thousand men.

'I am glad to see that a great newspaper has opened a fund for the purpose of raising an adequate monument to her memory; but no monument of marble or of bronze will speak as her own personality, her own life, and her death.'

The following is extracted from a powerful article by Professor J. H. Morgan in the *Graphic*:

'The execution of Miss Cavell is not, perhaps, the most revolting of the innumerable outrages committed by the German army, but it is certainly the most callous and the most authoritative. [Pg 123] Hundreds of women and young girls have been outraged by German officers and men; many have been shot, and others burnt alive. But what distinguishes the case of Miss Cavell—not forgetting the singular nobility of her character—from these obscurer tragedies is the fact that, owing to the presence of the vigilant and high-minded Minister of a neutral State, the veil has been lifted upon the whole proceedings, from their inception to their mournful conclusion in the courtyard of the prison of St. Gilles, and the world has had revealed to it in the most lurid light the sinister character of German "justice."

'The noble woman who, out of the abundance of her charity, sought to save men from these things has been condemned and executed on a charge of having offended against military law. I know nothing more tragically ironical than that the Power which has broken all laws, human and divine, should seek to justify the condemnation of Edith Cavell with all the pomp of a tribunal of justice. [Pg 124] While thousands of ravishers and spoilers go free, one woman who had spent her life in ministries to such as were sick and afflicted is handed over to the executioner. Truly there has been no such trial since Barabbas was released and Christ led forth to the hill of Calvary.'

Mr. G. K. Chesterton contributed a scathing indictment to the *Illustrated London News*:

'There is not much that can be said, or said easily, about the highest aspects of the murder of Edith Cavell. When we have said, "Dear in the sight of God is the death of His saints," we have said as much as mere literature has ever been able to say in the matter.

'The thing was not done to protect the Prussian power. It was done to satisfy a Prussian appetite. The mad disproportion between the possible need of restraining their enemy and the frantic [Pg 125] needlessness of killing her is simply the measure of the distance by which the distorted Prussian psychology has departed from the moral instincts of mankind. The key to the Prussian is in this extraordinary fact: that he does truly and in his heart believe that he is *admired* whenever he can manage to be dreaded. An indefensible act of public violence is to him what a poem is to a poet or a song to a bird. It at once relieves and expresses him; he feels more himself while he is doing it. His whole conception of the State is a series of such *coups d'état*. In Poland, in Alsace, in Lorraine, in the Danish provinces, he has wholly failed to govern; indeed, he has never really attempted to govern. For governing means making people at home.

'Wherever he goes, and whatever success he gains, he will always make it an occasion for sanguinary pantomimes of this kind. And awful as is the individual loss, it is well that now, at the very moment when men, wily or weak, are beginning to talk of conciliatory possibilities in this [Pg 126] incurable criminal, he should himself have provided us with this appalling reply.'

Mr. Hall Caine attended the great Memorial Service in St. Paul's Cathedral; and below is a short extract from his impressions as recorded in the *Daily Telegraph*:

'What has brought this multitude together? A great victory? The close of a great campaign? The funeral (as at this time last year) of a grand old warrior who, after many glorious victories, has died, as is most fit, within sound of the guns in the War he foretold, and is being borne to his lasting place amid the acclamations of his countrymen and the homage of the world? No, but the memory of a poor woman, a hospital nurse, who has been foully done to death by a barbarous enemy, condemned for acts of mercy and humanity, tried in secret, shot in haste, and then buried in a traitor's grave! [Pg 127]

'What a triumph for religion, for Christianity, for the Church! What an answer to Nietzsche! What a rebuke to Treitschke! What a smashing blow to the all-wise philosophers who have been telling us that Corsica has conquered Galilee! That in these dark and evil days the people of London should assemble in tens of thousands to thank God for the shadow of the scaffold and to find inspiration in thinking of the martyr's end is proof enough that not lust of empire, not "the will to power," not war for its own sake or for the triumphs it brings in its train, but religion, with its righteousness, is still the bread of our souls.'

XIII [Pg 128]

THE LASH OF THE WORLD'S PRESS

Selections from British Journals

The Times.

'The ordinary German mind is doubtless incapable of understanding the "horror and disgust" which the military execution of Miss Cavell will arouse throughout the civilized world. We shall be surprised if within the next few days the press of all neutral lands does not re-echo these feelings with an intensity which will astonish the disciples of "Kultur." Here we have in its highest development that boasted product of the Teutonic intelligence and the Teutonic heart. The very spirit of Zabern, but of Zabern in war-time, broods over the whole brutal and stupid story. There is [Pg 129] not in Europe, outside Germany and her Allies, a man who can read it without the deepest emotions of pity and of shame. The victim was a lady who had devoted her life to the noblest and the most womanly work woman can do. She was the head of a great nursing institute which has trained numbers of nurses for Germany as well as for Belgium. She herself nursed many wounded Germans at the beginning of the War. She has been sentenced to death by their officers, and shot by their comrades. So is it that the Germans requite the charity of strangers. She had been guilty of a military offence—the offence of harbouring her own wounded countrymen and Belgians amongst whom she had lived and worked, and of getting them across the Dutch frontier. That was enough for the uniformed pedants who tried her, and for their civilian subordinates. She was perfectly straightforward and truthful with the court. They sent her to her death upon her own admissions. [Pg 130] They could not, even by their own harsh law, have convicted her without these admissions. Her frankness did not profit her any more than did her sex, her calling, or her services to the Kaiser's wounded troops. There was the fact: she acknowledged certain acts which could be twisted into "conveying soldiers to the enemy," and the legal penalty for this offence under the German military code is death. That was enough for her judges. They sentenced her on a Monday afternoon, and had her shot in the dark at two o'clock next morning. Napoleon ordered a similar "execution" in the ditch of Vincennes. It cost him and his Empire dear.

'There is not much more to tell. The Councillor to the American Legation was refused permission to visit the prisoner after sentence, and a like refusal was at first given to the English clergyman, Mr. Gahan. This last refusal, worthy of the Jacobins who refused a confessor to Marie Antoinette, was, however, not persisted in, and the doomed Englishwoman had the consolations of her own Church, [Pg 131] and received the Holy Communion from Mr. Gahan's hands. He found her "admirably strong and calm." She admitted again her guilt according to German military law, but assured him that "she was happy to die for her country." Her country with one voice acknowledges the claim. She did in very truth die for England, and England will not lightly forget her death. That she had committed a technical offence is undeniable; but so did Andreas Hofer and other victims of Napoleonic tyranny whose doom patriotic Germans never cease to execrate. We do not know whether the hide-bound brutality of the military authorities or the lying trickery of the civilians is the more repulsive. Both were determined that Miss Cavell should die, and they conspired together to shoot her before an appeal could be lodged. They have killed the English nurse, as Napoleon killed the Duc D'Enghien, and by killing her they have immeasurably deepened the stain of infamy that degrades them in the [Pg 132] eyes of the whole world. They could have done no deed better calculated to serve the British cause.'

The Morning Post.

'Often as in the course of the past fifteen months we have been astounded by the relapses into elemental barbarism which our adversaries have exhibited, perhaps there is no case that shows up so much as this the ghastly descent of the German character into primitive brutality. When it is admitted that the charge was proved true, by the accused's confessions, and that it was a charge that, according to the military code in force at Brussels, might be visited with the penalty of death, all is said that can be said for the real criminals. A proclamation of martial law usually invests the military authority with the power of inflicting the severest penalties over a wide range of offences. This does not mean that that authority is to deal in nothing but death sentences. But it is quite [Pg 133] useless to look for any colourable pretext for German remorselessness in this matter. They were resolved from the first to commit this deed of cruelty, but they were feverishly anxious that it should be kept secret until beyond recall. From the moment that the American Legation was known to have got news of Miss Cavell's arrest and to be concerned in seeing that she was properly defended, the German local Government begins to adopt every means for throwing dust in the eyes of the United States representatives. Surely such a story has never been presented to the modern world as is here

unfolded.

'All who have given attention to Napoleonic literature must have recollections of prints of the death of the Duc D'Enghien—the firing party under the glare of the torches, the prisoner standing on the brink of his newly dug grave. In Napoleon's lifetime, and for many years after, nothing hurt his personal reputation more than this summary, furtive execution in the dead of night that seemed to proclaim its own blood-guiltiness. But the great Frenchman acted in this matter with the motives [Pg 134] and in the manner of an Eastern Sultan. He saw a man whom, rightly or wrongly, he believed to be a danger to himself; he arrested him lawlessly on foreign soil, and struck him down lawlessly. But what is there in common between such an episode and the midnight execution of a defenceless woman who never meant harm to any human being, who only came within reach of the criminal law by her superior regard for the higher precepts of mercy and compassion?

'When we think of the scene in that Brussels jail we may well wonder that at this time of day it should be possible to get men to participate in such a deed. Is it that insufficient blood has been shed during this past year that men should hunger after one harmless life? Yet we should evidently make a great mistake to treat our heroic countrywoman's end as if a mere case for compassion.

'One cannot mourn beyond a certain point for such a death. Who could have dreamed a few years [Pg 135] ago that English womanhood would be producing such a heroine—the counterpart and realization in actual life of the Antigone whom the tragedian's inspired imagination has held up to the world's admiration for so many centuries?'

The Daily Telegraph.

'We do not know whether any comment would be adequate in a case like this, or whether, indeed, all comment is not superfluous. We have had large experience of the brutality with which the enemy conducts his warfare, and especially the inhuman recklessness with which he pursues his vengeance against the civilian population of the countries which he invades. We venture to think, however, that in the case of a nurse, a woman whose life is dedicated to the alleviation of pain, cruelty of this kind, cruelty that presses against her the very extremity of martial law, is more diabolical even than all the other counts of a growing indictment. No other nation in Europe, we believe, would have put a [Pg 136] nurse to death in circumstances of this kind. They would have made some allowance for her woman's tender heart, even though she had been guilty of an offence, and therefore deserved some punishment. Nothing, probably, can now brand with fouler infamy the German name, stained as it is by all the damning items in its past record, from Louvain and the *Lusitania* down to the murder of an English nurse.'

The Standard.

'Those who sorrow for the death of a good and brave Englishwoman who died for her country as truly and nobly as any soldier in the field must most warmly acknowledge the efforts made on her behalf by the Ministers of the United States and of Spain. Everything which could be done by gentlemen of kindly spirit and resolution to save her was done. We are once more under a debt of unbounded gratitude to those neutrals who have, from the first, striven to maintain some of the [Pg 137] mitigations of the horrors of warfare which our enemy thrusts aside with contempt. They strained their diplomatic prerogatives to the utmost in the cause of mercy, and, if all their efforts were unavailing to combat the logical savagery of the German military mind, the fault was none of theirs. We must add also that, despite the horror at the outrage which they cannot conceal, the representatives of the United States who have reported are perfectly fair to the Germans. Although their own proposals for the defence of Miss Cavell were rejected, they do not deny that her trial was, in a sense, fair, and that the issue was in accordance with the evidence and the provisions of the German military code. The correspondence of Mr. Brand Whitlock with Mr. Page, and the documents he forwards, gain the greater cogency from their frank avowal of that fact. Murder by process of law is, of course, no rare thing. Judge Jeffreys was a murderer of that kind. But it has [Pg 138] always aroused greater anger and contempt among men of right feeling than murder of any other kind, and those, we are sure, will be the feelings aroused throughout the world by the story of the murder of this noble woman, who, if she offended against the laws of her country's foes, could have been so easily rendered harmless by means far less severe. The vengeance of the strong upon the weak is the most abhorrent spectacle in the eyes of all right-minded people which can be exhibited.

'It would be easy to pour forth vials of denunciation on the heads of the Germans for this act. But it is utterly useless to do so, and, if useless, then weak. A homely proverb says that you can expect nothing from a pig but a grunt, and we know by this time what to expect from our present enemy. Their standard of justice, of manliness, of chivalry, is altogether diverse from ours, and atrocities such as this done on Miss Cavell must simply confirm us in our determination that it is our standard [Pg 139] and not theirs which is going to prevail in the world of the future. As one outrage follows another the conviction grows the stronger that the world on the Prussian model would be an intolerable place, and that every man who loves freedom, mercy, and justice had better die than live to see it so. The correspondence must be read in full. We shall not attempt to discuss it in detail. In due course, as we most fully believe, the blood of all those who have perished to slake the brutal German thirst for dominion will be required at the hands of the guilty. On the other hand, the name of Edith Cavell is henceforth enshrined among the patriots and martyrs who have died nobly for the honour of the Empire. May her relatives and friends find comfort in that thought!'

The Daily Mail.

'The story of Miss Cavell's arrest, trial, and martyrdom is one of those sublime tragedies which make the deepest appeal to the heart of man. The facts cover the enemy with eternal infamy. The [Pg 140] Germans did to death a woman whose whole life had been dedicated to the service of suffering man, for a breach of a barbarous law which they themselves had imposed. All efforts to save her were in vain. The German authorities tricked and attempted to deceive the United States Minister at Brussels, who made the most persistent exertions in her behalf. They evidently hurried on the execution in order that no chance might baulk them of their prey. This is a deed which in its horror

and wicked purposelessness stuns the world and cries to heaven for vengeance.

'Miss Cavell neither grieved nor faltered when she knew her fate. She was happy, she said, to die for her country; and a life which had been generously devoted to a noble work was crowned by an heroic death. It is difficult to say what inspiration a nation does not draw from such an example as hers, which lifts up even the meanest and most selfish heart to new heights of unselfish love and devotion. "To weep would do her wrong." Her life and death are beautiful as those of the saints of [Pg 141] old, and will move mankind like immortal music or song. In the truest sense she may be said to have died happy. Her country will never forget her. Her memory will brace our troops in the hour of battle, and when the grey forms close in the North Sea it will be there. Those who die thus have won immortality.'

The Daily Chronicle.

'In a War which numbers its casualties by millions, and which has witnessed holocausts of atrocity like the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the sack of Louvain, the murder of a single lady may seem a small episode. But the enormity of a crime is not always measured by the number of its victims. Here was a lady of education who had devoted her life to the relief of human suffering. The head of a great nursing institute, she had helped to train hundreds of nurses, including Germans. When the War broke out she devoted her whole strength to the care of the wounded, and had lavished her [Pg 142] personal attention on wounded German soldiers. Latterly she had assisted certain British, French, and Belgian soldiers to escape to England across the Dutch frontier. Charged with this military offence, she admitted it with complete candour; indeed, she seems to have been the principal witness against herself. One may safely affirm that, having regard to her transparently humanitarian motives and all the circumstances of the case, no Government in the world but the German would have inflicted the death penalty on such a culprit. They not merely inflicted it, but compassed its infliction with a mixture of duplicity and brutality that must make every decent human being's gorge rise. Of Miss Cavell herself no one will dispute that if any death in this War has been heroic, hers was; one cannot say less, and no one could say more. The sense of the whole civilized world can be left to judge between this helpless woman and her murderers.'

The Scotsman. [Pg 143]

'That Miss Cavell was guilty of an offence against martial law was not denied. But it was not a crime that implied any moral delinquency or transgression of the normal rules of human conduct. On the contrary, it was prompted by the spirit of self-sacrifice and mercy that had guided her whole life, but of which not the tiniest measure was yielded to herself by the men who pursued her to the death. While it may be said that she acted imprudently, and that punishment, and even severe punishment, for her offence was to be looked for, she acted from motives and under circumstances that could only raise her in the eyes of all who are capable of appreciating generosity, courage, and kindness. No suspicion of espionage was attached to her conduct; no accusation of that nature was brought against her; and on being charged with what she had done, she made full and frank acknowledgement. This candour of confession was turned against her as one of the aggravations of [Pg 144] her offence. It is made but too clear that the tribunal before which she was hurried thirsted for her blood and for the blood of all who were concerned in the escape of those prisoners from the tender mercies of the Brussels military authorities. Having already lain for several weeks in prison, Miss Cavell was brought before a court-martial, and after a two-days' trial was sentenced to death in the evening and led out to execution early next morning. There was a surreptitiousness as well as a vindictiveness about the whole proceedings that cannot but amaze, as well as horrify and disgust.'

The Irish Times.

'If any one in Ireland still fails to see the necessity for resisting to the utmost the extension of Prussian power in Europe, this should open his eyes. It will be equally admitted by every one but her executioners that her sex, her kindness to German wounded, and her charitable intentions in [Pg 145] committing the undoubted offence against the law imposed upon Belgium by the conquerors should have been regarded as good reasons for treating her with leniency. All these considerations were ignored by the German authorities. Their haste to accomplish the foul deed without possibility of interference is not out of keeping with the worst that we know of savage races. In utter contrast with their proceedings, there was reported yesterday the hearing in a North of England town of an appeal by a woman charged with attempted espionage against a sentence of six months' imprisonment. The woman was of German descent; she had sought information concerning a shell factory, and she admitted that she would have passed it on to the Germans if possible. Her trial was fair and careful, and she had the fullest opportunity of securing legal advice at every stage. Her appeal was patiently heard. So it is with every case of the kind, whatever may be the nationality of the accused person. British justice has a name throughout the world. Henceforth, so will German [Pg 146] justice, but the name will be of other significance.'

The Nursing Mirror.

'The heroic and tragic death of Miss Edith Cavell has placed the martyr's crown on the head of this most courageous and patriotic woman, and has consecrated afresh the whole of the nursing profession for her sake in the eyes of the world. Never has the heart of the nation been more deeply stirred than by this crowning deed of infamy; never have the vials of its righteous indignation been poured forth in such a torrent of just anger. The whole of the civilized world has risen as one man to protest against this violation of all the laws of mercy and of judgement against this act by which Germany stands forth for all time alone, apart, leprous and unclean, among the people of the earth. Her words to the chaplain on the evening before her execution were those of quiet courage and resignation. Spoken in the stern solemnity of that prison cell, with the sincerity that comes from the [Pg 147] nearness of the eternal dawn, these words carry a force and conviction they might otherwise lack to every one of her fellow workers round the world, and are driven home to each heart like a nail fastened in a sure place.... This day of national adversity is our day of opportunity. In it may we be all "brave in peril, constant in tribulation, and in all changes of fortune, and down to the gates of death, loyal and loving one to another."'

The Lady's Pictorial.

'It is difficult to speak of the crime which has blotted the already foul page of Germany's infamy in constrained language. The whole civilized world stands aghast at the callous brutality and deceit of the German officials in Brussels who have done to death a noble Englishwoman; and words are impotent things in which to express the horror, the disgust, the fury, that this brave woman's murder has excited. Nor is it possible to deal in other than conventional phrases with her splendid [Pg 148] self-sacrifice. She has died for her country, but she has also won the martyr's crown. Her love for her country was boundless. To serve it she ran a risk the gravity of which she fully recognized, and she freely admitted that in so doing she had offended against military laws. We all know—it is written for all time on the pages of history—how she paid the penalty. There is no need to retell the shameful story, to extol further her splendid heroism, to waste breath in execrating the savages whose name is now besmirched beyond all cleansing; whose blood-thirst has been slaked at the heart of a helpless woman. But it is worth while—it cannot be too often repeated—to cry aloud that Edith Cavell died that her countrywomen may live. Who dared to ask what is one woman among the tens of thousands of men who have perished for their country in view of all that this heroic nurse's slaughter means to England? Dying in her country's service, sacrificed to the savagery of the most [Pg 149] treacherous, bestial, merciless enemy against which civilized peoples have ever had to fight, a victim to their lust of hate, she has left to Englishwomen an example and a message which must surely stir them to follow her, if need be, to death.'

The British Weekly.

'The Saxon name Edith, which is linked with the most ancient glories of English history, has acquired a new lustre through the sufferings of Edith Cavell. In every church on Sunday preachers sounded the praise of the loving, gentle woman who was shot by the Germans in Brussels in the dark of a mid-October night a few hours before the fleet of Zeppelins started on their flight towards London. Her only crime was that she furthered the escape from Belgium of her countrymen and their Allies. The shield clasped for their sake in her delicate hand was like the buckler of Arthur in Spenser's poem, "All of diamond perfect pure and cleene," and coming ages will see that it was hewn out of the adamant rock. Amid the panoply of the martyrs her diamond shield will burn.' [Pg 150]

The Catholic Times.

'Baron von Bissing, the German Governor-General of Belgium, recently addressing a meeting of German women in Brussels, said, "We must do our best to carry on here in Belgium a real German 'Kultur' work." He has just given the world a proof of what the Germans can do for the promotion of "Kultur" in Belgium. It is a proof which has brought home fully to civilized people the truth that when the Germans are called barbarians there is no exaggeration in the charge. The shooting of women is a relic of barbarism abhorrent to the general feeling of the present day. The execution of Miss Cavell brings into relief once more the main characteristic of German warfare. Laws, civilized customs, honourable traditions, must give way if they obstruct German domination. A multitude of Belgians, male and female, have been put to death with as much cruelty as was displayed towards [Pg 151] Miss Cavell. It is needless to say that by revealing their true character during the War the Germans have been fighting most effectively against their own cause. The horror excited by their infamies is worth whole regiments of recruiting-sergeants. Not only in the countries at war with Germany, but amongst the populations of the neutral nations, it produces the firm belief that there could be no greater enemy of popular rights than Germany, and that the success of German "Kultur" work would blast civilization like a deadly blight.'

The Voice of France

The French Senate 'bowed with respect and profound emotion before the memory of this heroic martyr to duty, who sacrificed her life in the cause of patriotism and of eternal right'; and the French press glowed with magnificent tributes to the memory of the brave Englishwoman. One of the most striking articles was that communicated to *L'Homme Enchaîné* by M. Clemenceau: [Pg 152]

'It was necessary that Miss Cavell, symbolizing in her heroic death and her simplicity an incalculable mass of awful butchery, should rise from her tomb to show the Germans that every soul of living humanity revolts with disgust against a cause which can only defend itself by a most cowardly assassination.

'The profound truth is that she honoured her country in dying for that which is the finest in the human soul—the conscience of a grandeur of which the greater part of us dreams, and which only a few of the elect have a chance of realizing. This was the lot of Miss Cavell; driven to a wall by a detachment of riflemen, she was walking without a complaint, without a regret, being already no longer of this earth, when a physical faintness made her falter. To me it only makes her appear greater, since, combination of strength and weakness, she thus showed herself woman, purely [Pg 153] woman, to the end. "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"—said Another on His cross, in a moment of weakness and distress by which the splendour of His sacrifice was increased.

'Edith Cavell did not speak a word; she fell. Thereupon an officer, a representative gentleman of "Germany above everything," a delegate of the Emperor, and, through the Emperor, of "the old German God," carrying out his despicable task of butcher, calmly drew near, placed his revolver at the temple of his victim, pressed the trigger, and then, with his hand red with blood, signed to his "men," if such I may call them, that the work of Germania was done. We shall not forget the name of Miss Cavell, but we do not know, we never shall know, the name of the other. He calls himself a German—that is enough. Every other German would have claimed the honour of carrying out the same task. Since the day of Joan of Arc, to whose memory I know that the British will one day wish [Pg 154] to erect a statue, Great Britain has owed us this return. She has given it nobly.

'Now the Eumenides are let loose—Miss Edith Cavell, murdered by a coward, will live among the

men of all ages and of all countries with a life which, for a time of which one cannot foresee the end, will bring shame and torment on the people on whom her blood lies; and that the lesson may be lasting, I should like to see in Rome, Brussels, Nish, Paris, London, and Petrograd, as an indestructible memorial of a community of sentiment, a statue of this noble woman and of the German officer. It would be sufficient to take as a model the excellent drawing published by Abel Faivre in the *Echo de Paris*, in which that fine artist has indicated in a few strokes of sublime grandeur the nobility of the blessed victim, and, without forcing anything, the features of the assassin.

'Those who come after us, and whose knowledge of the terrible realities of these days will only be derived from cold, dispassionate words, must have before their eyes an image recalling the living facts: Edith Cavell and a Boche without name, representative of a people which, feeling the weight of universal opprobrium, has not found one spark of conscience from which to utter one word of protest.' [Pg 155]

The Journal des Débats.

'Miss Cavell died like a heroine, like a true worthy daughter of England, the victim of those who would like to have killed her country, and who revenged themselves on a woman. The murder of Miss Cavell deserves to be avenged, and it will be, and in a manner more terrible than the Germans dream of. The soul of England and the soul of France are to-day united over the body of poor but glorious Miss Cavell in a most sacred oath.'

Intransigeant.

'The German who cold-bloodedly, without even the excuse of the passion of battle, judged, condemned, and executed Miss Cavell is a monster, a being who has placed himself voluntarily beyond the pale of human law. England, who has furnished us with so many causes for gratitude since the beginning of the War, now offers for our admiration a loyal, strong, and simple heroine. This winter at the feast of Joan of Arc English officers brought flowers to her statue. The French will not forget the great example of Edith Cavell. She has entered the eternal light which shines on the foreheads of heroines and martyrs. For centuries to come little children will spell her name, and learn in the story of her life lessons of courage.' [Pg 156]

Dutch Protests

The German reign of terror just over their own borders the Dutch may accept as a menace and a warning to themselves; but the assassination of Nurse Cavell aroused the most emphatic denunciations of the crime. [Pg 157]

The Amsterdam Telegraaf.

'Under the fatherly government of Bissing, the Belgians at present have cause to envy the Parisians of 1793 in the Reign of Terror. Not a person is sure of his life, and certainly not an honest and brave person, for the German reign of terror seeks by frightful examples to make the whole of Belgium a nation of traitors and cowards. Love of country, which the Germans themselves claim to honour as the highest virtue, they punish in the enemy as the most frightful crime.

'In the last fortnight were pronounced ten sentences of death and thirty-two of penal servitude for from ten to fifteen years. Among these death sentences were four women. We wrote once in this journal, "Holland is incapable of shuddering any more." We were wrong. The death penalty on a brave woman has caused the whole of this country to freeze with horror. Openly and unashamed Germany makes herself a nation of outlaws against whom in the future every possible measure of reprisal must be counted as warranted.' [Pg 158]

Nieuws Van Den Dag.

'What poor psychologists German officials and officers seem to be! They started with the request to the Belgian Government for free passage; they then overwhelmed the neutral press with one-sided reports regarding the *Lusitania* case and the visits of Zeppelins to undefended towns; finally, incidents of this sort! Everywhere they betray a lack of the most elementary conception of psychology.'

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XIV

AMERICA'S VERDICT

Apart from questions of common humanity, Americans are keenly interested in the tragical end of Edith Cavell because of the untiring services of the American Legation in Brussels, first to see that the accused had a fair trial, and, second, their desperate and heroic efforts to gain time in which to formulate a final appeal for clemency. The admiration of all true Americans must be excited by the account of the humane endeavours of their representatives, which lose not a jot because their appeals were made to a cold-blooded, ferocious tribunal that is a stranger to compassion, and does not subscribe to the ordinary decencies of civilized life and practice. [Pg 160]

The following press comments indicate the unanimity of the note of detestation with which America views one of the greatest crimes of all time.

New York Herald.

Under the heading 'Nana Sahib in Belgium' was foreshadowed the national abhorrence which will hold Germany to be the moral leper of civilization. Mr. Whitlock's report 'will cause a wave of horror to sweep over the world at the possibility of a nation which is capable of perpetrating such terrible deeds as a mere matter of military routine succeeding in this War and dominating Europe.

'For the consolation of those weaklings who object to the execution of Miss Cavell it is announced that the black act was done according to German military law, and therefore "legal." So the slayings in Louvain, Dinant, and other blood-soaked spots in Belgium were in accordance with military law, [Pg 161] and therefore "legal." The sinking of the *Lusitania* was therefore similarly "legal." The desolation of Armenia was in accordance with Turkish military law, and therefore "legal." The order of Herod, if re-enacted by the military authorities of Germany, would be in accordance with German military law, and therefore "legal." But the civilized world would denounce it just as it denounced the Belgian, *Lusitania*, and Armenian slaughters, and as it is denouncing the execution of Miss Cavell.'

New York Times.

'In the great tribunal of civilization the Germans have done themselves immeasurable hurt by their savagery against those who opposed them. Putting the interests of State above the interests and rights of the individual, putting the ends Germany seeks to attain above all other things on earth, destroying the peace of the world, bringing on the bloodiest War in history, a War that has brought [Pg 162] to their deaths millions of the people of Europe and threatens to impoverish great nations, all for the attainment of ends the world has denounced in themselves, and by means which too often have violated the foundation principles of humanity and justice, Germany has brought herself into a position where the world turns from her in horror, and dreads nothing so much as the success of her arms. Man's love of life, the chivalric sentiment of man for woman, tender consideration for the helplessness of age and of youth, all these she has maimed and bruised and defaced with her mailed fist, all these she has trampled under foot. The execution of Edith Cavell but carried out the spirit and purpose of the Imperial military policy.'

The Sun.

'In spite of the manifestations of "frightfulness" with which the record is already crowded, we are not willing to believe that chivalry to women is dead in the German army. To the rank and file von [Pg 163] Bissing can never be a hero. Doubtless his monstrous deed will be justified; nevertheless, it will sicken the soul of many an honest German officer. And the German women—for woman is true to her sex the world over—will deplore the fate imposed upon one who was the victim of her sympathies. Never has there been a war in which women have not played such a part as this Englishwoman did.

'Indeed, to all Germans who have not been corrupted by Prussian militarism, the hurried, stealthy shooting of hapless Edith Cavell in the dead of night behind prison walls will always be a bitter memory. More than all the counts in the Bryce Report of atrocities in Belgium it will weigh in the scale of judgement, for it has struck the world with horror.'

The Tribune.

'Alive, Miss Cavell was but an offender against German military rules; dead, dead after summary conviction, dead under circumstances that give the incident the character of a midnight [Pg 164] assassination and the colour of an atrocity, she becomes to all men of English blood a martyr and an inspiration to new patriotic devotion.

'The thing is like the Zeppelin raids, it is like the Louvain slaughter, it is like the *Lusitania* massacre. The wrongs done to the women and children of a race do not terrify the men. They only serve to rouse the spirit, strengthen the arm, nerve the will. "Terribleness" is but the emptiest of threats and the weakest of weapons. There is something almost pathetic in the German dullness to the things that move the world. It begs, whines, pleads for the goodwill and the approval of neutral mankind. It stands almost as a suppliant for the alms of approval of other races. But in the same moment, without warning, without reason, without anything but an incomprehensible stupidity and folly, it does something that shocks the moral sense, the humanity, of men and women the world over.'

Philadelphia Public Ledger. [Pg 165]

'The Administration has a duty in this matter which it should not overlook. Miss Cavell, as a British subject, was under the protection of the American Legation. The American Minister made both an official and a personal request that her life might be spared. This request was not only refused, it was treated with contempt. Mr. Gibson's report is scrupulously restrained in language, but his indignation may easily be read between the lines. The sentence was carried out with a haste that emphasizes the insults to the United States; the procedure from the beginning was marked by insolence to its representatives. To let the matter drop here would be a confession that this country can neither protect its citizens' interests, nor those of other nations whose interests it has undertaken to guard.'

The Baltimore Sun.

'It is difficult to speak in temperate language of the execution of Edith Cavell. ... The world will [Pg 166] pronounce this one of the crowning atrocities of cold-blooded brutality. It is impossible to think of it without horror, to speak of it without execration.'

The Chicago Tribune.

'The execution of Edith Cavell should and may be the cause of mental awakening on the part of those who have hitherto remained obstinately secure in the face of a world of terrors.... Civilization

is breaking faster and faster. How far the sword and torch will sweep no man can prophesy, but this we know—the American nation has given to the German Empire an offence greater than that furnished by Belgium, and has not as yet taken any step to protect itself from retribution.'

XV

[Pg 167]

CONCLUSION

It may be urged against this simple chronicle of the life and death of Edith Cavell that an Englishman could be expected to approach the subject only in too heated and partisan a spirit to set forth the case dispassionately.

There is no occasion to import factitious bitterness into the tragedy, which was born in prejudice, suckled in suspicion, and reared to its foul maturity on hatred. All the cogent and damning facts dealing with the arrest, trial, and death of the heroic Red Cross nurse are vouched for by the American Legation in Brussels; these facts are embodied in the statements communicated by Mr. [Pg 168] Whitlock to Mr. Page for transmission to Sir Edward Grey, and may be read in the British 'White Paper,' *Miscellaneous No. 17* (1915), entitled, 'Correspondence with the United States Ambassador respecting the execution of Miss Edith Cavell at Brussels.'

The American Legation summed up the truth so far as the Germans would allow the truth to be made known—and it may be accepted that what details they permitted to escape from their net of secrecy and deceit would be only those that would enable them to put the best face on what they were pleased to consider merely a regrettable, but inevitable, incident of warfare.

In this old world of ours, however, 'murder will out.' Whatever steps Potsdam cunning took to keep the secret in its own dark bosom, the enormity was disclosed to a scornful world, and the Germans found themselves in a common pillory upon which beat the fierce light of a merciless [Pg 169] criticism and well-merited opprobrium.

The German authorities may be safely left to the judgement of fair-minded peoples; and in passing it may be remarked that civilized communities have an inherent regard for justice, even when it operates to their own immediate disadvantage. It would be a sorry world if it were otherwise; how sorry a few nations who consigned their honour to the melting-pot can make it, we know only too well. It would be sorrier still but for the firm conviction that in the end right will triumph over might, justice will prevail over injustice, encouraging us to look forward to the time when 'Civilization smiles; Liberty is glad; Humanity rejoices; and Pity exults.'

When the welter of blood and the ruinous dissipation of treasure is at an end, and we can appraise our tangible losses in life and money and endeavour to form some conception of the moral gains resulting from the conflict, amid the innumerable individual deeds that make us proud of those of our race the heroism in life and death of Edith Cavell will shine forth like a [Pg 170] precious jewel.

It is well to remember that 'of every tear that sorrowing mortals shed, some good is born, some gentler nature comes'; and in her death and the tears that we shed for it, the martyr leaves behind her an inestimable legacy that will yield rich dividends to humanize the souls of those who are left behind to admire and reverence the example of a noble woman.

When the foregoing paragraph was written, one's faith in the strength of our Empire and belief in the righteousness of our cause justified the sure knowledge that we had not witnessed the real conclusion of this pathetic soul-rending incident, that was without exact parallel in our varied Empire story; but one could only wait—and wonder.

For three further searing years the war continued its desolating course, that entailed the death and mangling of millions of the combatants and the expenditure of uncountable wealth. [Pg 171]

The end came with dramatic suddenness that almost paralysed the suffering nations, who could scarcely realize that intense courage, energy, and determination had at length given the Allies the victory.

Even while the Germans stood at the bar of justice at the Peace Conference, Mother Empire decided the time had arrived to take Edith Cavell to her own broad bosom; and the dust of one of the most gallant women of our race was brought from Belgium to be reinterred under the shadow of Norwich Cathedral, in the county that must ever be proud that it gave her birth.

From Dover the body of Nurse Cavell came through Kent towards the capital; the orchards were in full blossom, the fields golden with buttercups, every bank blue and white with wild flowers, as if England had put on her richest garment to receive her own.

From Victoria Station the funeral *cortège* passed into the streets amid the wonderful stillness and [Pg 172] silence of vast crowds, a tribute of silence that acclaimed the dead no less surely and splendidly than the living heroes of the war had been welcomed home by the heartfelt cheers of the

multitude.

To the roll of the drums, the stately tread of escorting Coldstreamers, the beautiful melody of funeral marches by the Scots and Welsh Guards' bands, the gun-carriage and its honoured burden came to Westminster Abbey, where, in the shadows of the dim old church, the first portion of the funeral ceremony was to be performed.

A great congregation, representing all classes of society, had assembled, and the nursing profession and the various branches of the women's military services were largely in evidence. For fully half an hour the waiting gathering listened enraptured to entrancing and uplifting music of the Grenadier Guards' band.

The last notes died away. Suddenly the assembly rose as Queen Alexandra was ushered to her seat. With her was Princess Victoria; and the King was represented by the Earl of Athlone. [Pg 173]

A few moments later the strains of Chopin's funeral march could be heard outside the Abbey, betokening the arrival of the *cortège*; and then beautiful voices echoed and re-echoed through aisle and transept as the choir met the coffin, which progressed slowly from the great west door towards the catafalque that waited to receive its noble burden. Tall Guardsmen bore shoulder high the coffin, covered with the Union Jack, which Edith Cavell had honoured with her life. To rest upon the glorious colours Queen Alexandra had sent a magnificent wreath of red and white carnations and arum lilies, to which an autograph card was attached upon which she had written:

> In memory of our brave, heroic, never-to-be-forgotten Nurse Cavell.
>
> Life's race well run,
> Life's work well done,
> Life's crown well won,
> Now comes rest.
> From ALEXANDRA.

The service was marked by severe simplicity that savoured nothing of exultation over a fallen foe; and yet there was the beautiful exultation that belongs essentially to the Church of England Order for the Burial of the Dead, which proceeded with tense emotion until the congregation and choir united in singing 'Abide with me.' The Dean pronounced the blessing. [Pg 174]

The Dead March from *Saul* was played with all the poignant appeal of rolling and booming drums, wailing reeds, and the triumphant clangour of brass. The 'Last Post,' heralded by a roll of drums, commencing so softly as scarcely to be audible, swelled to a roar before it died into the silence, on which broke the bugles; and last the 'Réveillé.'

Out of the shadows of the centuries into the sunlit street the flower-decked coffin was borne by the eight Guardsmen bearers to be replaced on the gun-carriage, which passed through the crowded City to Liverpool Street Station, *en route* for Norwich, and every yard of the way there was evidence that the spirit of Edith Cavell was living in the throngs who mourned her loss, even as they honoured her sacrifice. [Pg 175]

Later in the day came the final scenes in the obsequies of Edith Cavell at Norwich Cathedral, where the ashes of the world-famous victim of an unchivalrous foe had come home for sepulture in an atmosphere of intimate and almost personal concern. The citizens turned out in tens of thousands. Every department of the civic life of the county was represented, but again the nurses were in the forefront of the picture. Wreaths came from near and far, and among not a few from Belgium was one inscribed 'Elizabeth, Reine des Belges.'

The tribute of Empire had already been paid in London, and the closing ceremony was more in keeping with the sweet simplicity of her who was being laid to rest by the side of her mother amid the peaceful and mellow surroundings of the ancient Close, in a sequestered little corner called 'Life's Green.'

At the graveside the Bishop of Norwich delivered a touching address, in which he dwelt more upon the manner of Nurse Cavell's death rather than the work of her life. In conclusion he said: [Pg 176]

'Edith Cavell rests under the shade of our cathedral in its eight-hundredth year, adding one more to the long line of those blessed saints of God over whom it has watched in life and death. We will think of her while her body rests in its keeping as herself alive unto God and present with the Lord, and we will look on to the glad day when she and we and all we love, having waited and watched for the glory of the Resurrection, at last shall see

> The splendour of the morning
> Dawn on the hills.'

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