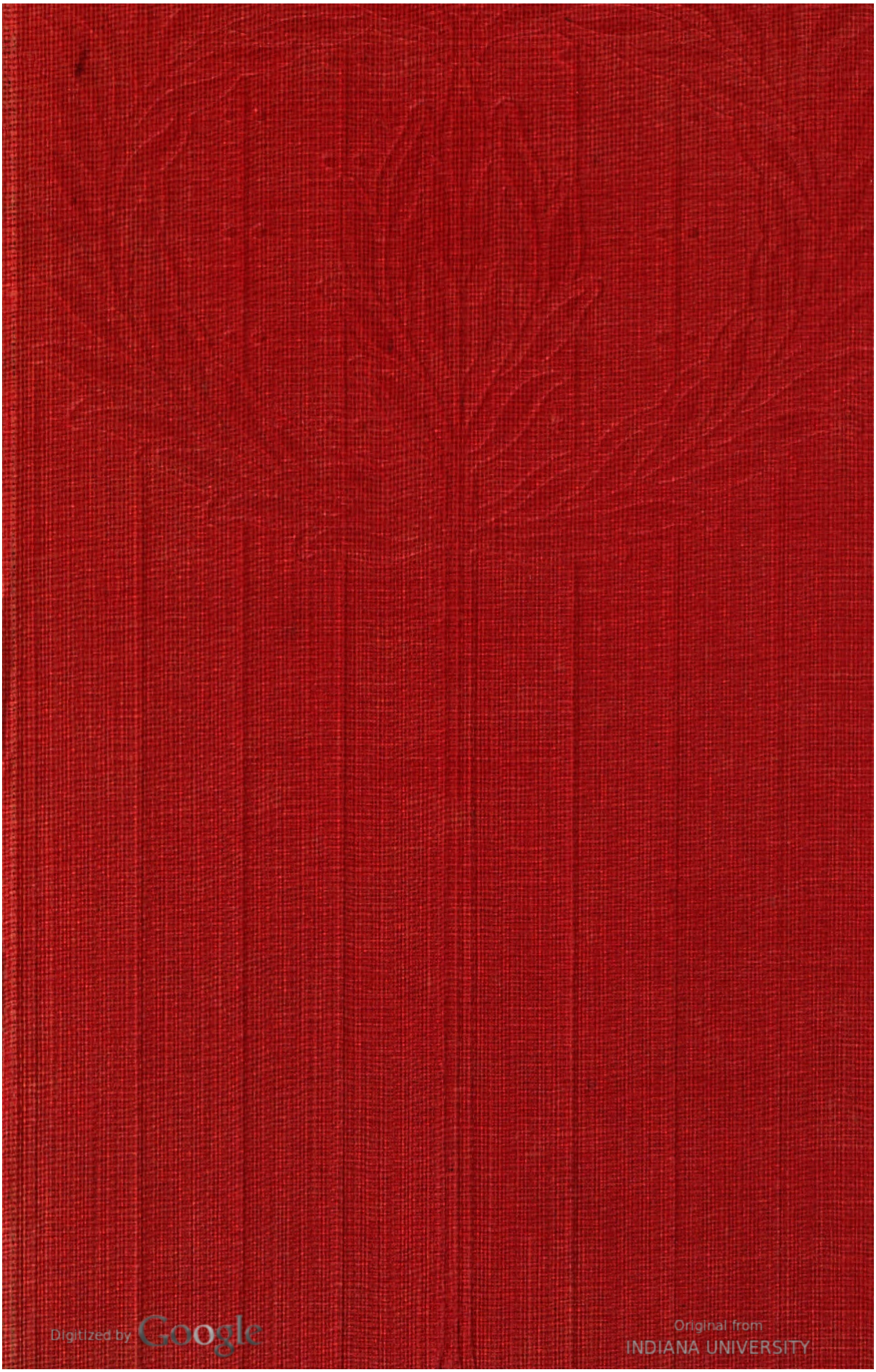


Our Girls

From One of Our Girls To One of Our Boys

To.....

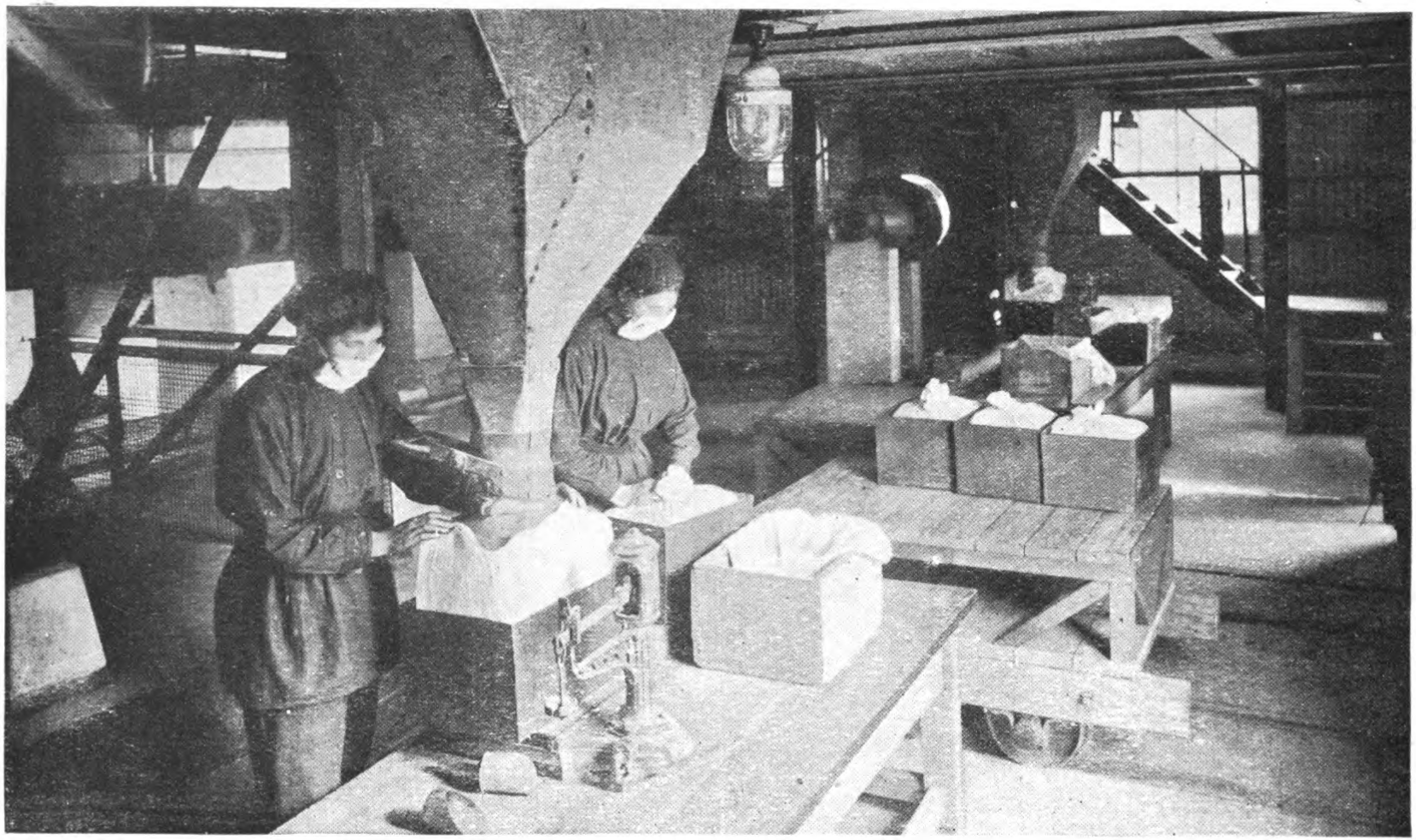
.....

Photograph of Sender may be pasted on this space.

WISHING YOU A HAPPY CHRISTMAS
AND A GLAD NEW YEAR ⊙ ⊙ ⊙

From.....

.....



Women packing T.N.T.

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OUR GIRLS

:: Their Work for the War ::

By Hall Caine With 15 Illustrations from Photographs by the Ministry of Munitions

LONDON: HUTCHINSON & CO.
PATERNOSTER ROW :: :: 1916

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

OUR GIRLS

CHAPTER I

AT WOOLWICH

WE have always been proudly conscious of what the sons of Britain have been doing at the Front. But is it not time we realized, not merely in abstract phrases or yet definite figures, but vividly, tangibly, and as by the evidence of our own eyes, what the daughters of Britain are doing at home?

To do this we must get close to the mighty army of women in our munition factories, and we cannot do better than take a first sight of them at their work at Woolwich. The enemy knows Woolwich, where and what it is, therefore there can be no danger of revealing secrets.

But though the vast Arsenal is at our own doors few of us who sleep in London, under the broad shadow of its wings, have any real sense of its colossal presence, its immense significance, the tremendous force it stands for. Its origin dates back to the days of other wars, but when the present war began its workers were only fourteen thousand in all, without a woman of their number. Now there are nearly seventeen thousand women within its high walls, and fifty thousand men besides.

But that is not all. Notwithstanding its fierce reality, Woolwich is a symbol rather than a geographical expression. To that centre on the Thames, three and a half miles by two and a half, with its numberless workshops, its endless avenues, and its hundred and twenty miles of internal railway, there radiate the activities of scores of associate factories round about, so that thirty thousand workers more, chiefly women (ninety-seven thousand in all), are feeding this almost fathomless reservoir. Woolwich is a great mechanical

octopus, with arms that reach over, across and around London and the country about it.

Has the world ever witnessed a mightier example of human force? To think of the building of the Pyramids of Egypt is to fill the mind's eye with visions of innumerable armies of labourers, like trains of human ants, conveying gigantic masses of stone across the desert from the quarries of the Mokattam Hills to the plains of Mena. But Woolwich is a yet greater and more awesome vision than that, especially now, at this very moment, though we who walk the neighbouring streets of the metropolis think so little about it.

By permission of Mr. Montague, the Minister of Munitions, and with his approval, we are at the gates of the great Arsenal. The space outside is a square of irregular shape, to which many streets are converging, like rivers running to the mouth of an estuary. The rivers are always flowing. The scene reminds us of the human tide outside the gate of an

Eastern city, and if less picturesque it is more urgent. Electric cars come clanging along the busy thoroughfares, stop, discharge people who are going in at the gates, take up others who are coming out. Outside the rails stand the town police; inside wait the police of the Arsenal. You are challenged, questioned, summoned to a neighbouring lodge to present your credentials and register your name, a guide is assigned to you (or perhaps the Chief Superintendent himself undertakes your direction) and you begin on your tour of inspection.

It is difficult at first to realize where you are, so complete is the change from the world you have left without. You are walking between two lines of old guns on their gun-carriages, many of them broken, splintered, shattered, all red with rust or encrusted with hard-baked mire. They are back from the front for repair, with the scars of battle on their faces, and for a moment you could well believe you are walking, not in Woolwich, but

among the batteries on the other side of the sea.

Before going into the women's workshops you are taken to the forges of the men, for it is impossible to come to Woolwich without seeing the awful basilicas of bridled force in which the mammoth guns are created. Here is one of them, a vast place, as big as Albert Hall. A colossal Nasmyth hammer with a blow of forty tons is pounding on a thick block of white-hot steel. First, a gentle tap to make sure of position, and then a thunderous thud that makes the earth quake beneath your feet, and gives you the sickening sense in your stomach which you may have experienced at the rumbling approach of a great eruption.

A few moments later you are in another vast forge, but here there is nearly no noise and hardly any motion. A gigantic press of four thousand tons' power is drilling a hole through another enormous block of white-hot metal. The great thing seems almost as large as the façade

of St. Mark's at Venice, and not unlike it in form, though stark and black. Under its open arch, without a sound, or the appearance of a hand to guide them, and with a motion that is almost ghost-like, the great anvils, with their burning freights, glide into position. A score of stalwart men, stripped to the waist, stand round with long iron rods and pincers. They push a thick black ring of apparently cold metal on to the top of the white-hot block. One man stands under a huge clock with his hand on a lever. No one speaks. There is scarcely a sound. Presently there comes slowly down as from the key-stone of the monster machine, a shining column of steel. It reaches the black ring, presses down on it, descends without a pause to the white-hot block, rests on top of it for a moment, there is a thud as of something falling into a pit beneath, and then the column rises, the arch is reopened, and the ring has disappeared, having passed through the metal and dropped to the ground below. The

sense of silent, irresistible, oceanic, almost motionless power has left you breathless.

After another few minutes you are in the smelting houses. Here are lines of furnaces, some locked, but with gleams of imprisoned fire looking out at you from the interstices of the shutters like ferocious eyes; some open and pouring out liquid metal into moulds in blue and yellow flame. Then there are huge ovens, from whose glittering depths, lit as by thousands of electric lamps, long ribbons of red-hot steel are being drawn at the ends of pincers by half-stripped men with the sweat pouring down their blackened faces. Then smithies, where shells in their earliest processes are being shaped, under fire and hammer, from rough blocks of metal into round things with noses, and flung off from the cranes of anvils to roll away and cool. And then underground pits of fire from which sinuous tongues of many-coloured flame are escaping into the air—reminding you, if you have travelled so far, of the boiling solfataras on the breast

of Hecla, among which you have walked with fear, knowing that one false step might be fatal, or, perhaps, with the intoxicating fumes of sulphur in your nostrils, dropped to your knees and crawled.

But perhaps the most awesome of all sights in Woolwich is that of the big furnace-house for the manufacture of the U M steel. I think I have witnessed in various parts of the world many scenes of nature in her wrath—scenes of earthquake, eruption, tidal wave, geyser, and boiling river—but I doubt if I have ever been more awed, more moved, and in a sense more terrified, than by the spectacle here presented of the physical forces of nature chained and harnessed to the work of man. How can I, who have no mechanical science, convey a sense of it? A huge, clay-coloured oven, shapeless like a wart, thirty to forty feet high, topped with an open mouth like the crater of a small volcano, belching out a thick column of hungry flame, which comes with a blast

General view of 9·2-in. High Explosive shell shop.

[*Facing p.* 16

Girl milling powder groove in fuse body

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and roar as from the bowels of the earth, driven up by some frantic subterranean tempest, and scattering showers of blue stars in a ring about it. The light is so fierce that you put coloured glasses before your eyes to protect them; the noise is so deafening that it drowns all human speech. And around the furnace stand the half-stark furnace-men, fifteen to twenty feet away, but within the radius of its sweltering heat, silhouetted even in the glistening light of the vast chamber against the white glare of the roaring oven.

At the first moment you lose consciousness of the actual purpose of this gigantic agent of man's will, and think of it instinctively as a great sacrificial altar to some pagan deity—some far more real and terrible upleaping of heavenly or hellish fire than ever struck down to their knees in worshipful awe the terrified multitudes before the altars of Pompeii.

But you are brought back to the reality of the modern world a few minutes later, when you cross to the shed in which the

big guns, forged and finished, lie resting for a while before their removal to the shipyards and the front. The gigantic things are almost beautiful in their sleek and shiny blue-black coats. Eight of their kind may protrude from the decks of a great battleship like the *Queen Elizabeth*, and, as the round breech of one of them is swung back, like the door of a safe, and you look down the shining and tapering barrel to the far-off mouth, it is easy to imagine that the grey waters of the North Sea are heaving beyond it, while the enemy ships are lying on the edge of the horizon, in their low visibility against a misty sky.

Nor is your spell broken, though the scene of your vision is changed, when you look up to the hundred-ton crane, wide as the Strand, that will soon lift these mammoth creatures into the cradles that will carry them away (and is now rolling over your head to the bell-like clangour of its swinging chains) and see above it, through the darkening air, for the day is

now fading, the light coming from the glass roof of the lofty, iron-framed shed as from the open top of some Roman temple.

Surely this, and such as this, is a scene proper for man's work only—for man's muscle, man's naked and blackened body, man's brain and man's nerve alone. Every instinct of our nature revolts against the thought that woman, with the infinitely delicate organization which provides for her maternal functions, should under any circumstances whatever take part in the operations such scenes require. And just as we feel that our men only may do work like this, so we must see at the swiftest glance that to any question of *which* of our men should do it there can be one answer only—the skilled and brawny men who can do it best. Once cross the threshold of the places I have attempted to describe, and there can be no test for the workers but one test—capacity. Capacity to fight this mighty battle with natural forces, and compel

them to obey man's will; capacity to turn out the largest number and most perfect specimens of guns and shells. Man-power for the field, yes; but man-power for the forges also. To forget that in this hour would be fatal.

But Woolwich has a world of operations that are entirely suitable to women, and in a few minutes more we are in the midst of them. Here is a new shop, entirely operated by women, having been built for them since the beginning of the war. The vast place covers an area which is apparently as great as that of Trafalgar Square. Two thousand women are here, and there is room for three thousand in all. Innumerable lathes, generally of small size, cover the cemented floor, with pulleys and wheels spinning in the air above them. It is a dense forest of machinery, pulsing and throbbing and whirring and tossing as from some unseen storm.

There is at first something so incongruous in the spectacle of women operating masses of powerful machinery

(or, indeed, any machinery more formidable than a sewing-machine), that for a moment, as you stand at the entrance, the sight is scarcely believable. But you go in and move around and after a while the astonishing fact seems perfectly natural. Although most of the machines in this shop are small, some are large and a few are alarming. Here is a slip of a girl working one of the latter kind, a huge thing that has two large wheels like mill-wheels revolving at either side of her, and though she looks like a child in the jaws of some great black monster, she does not seem to be the least afraid. Here is another young girl who is feeding a round disc with bits of metal that look like discoloured farthings, and as her own particular Caliban eats them up it utters from its interior a hoarse grunt that hits you like a blow on the brain, yet she does not seem to hear.

But most of the work done by the women looks simple enough, and seems perfectly natural to their sex, although it has always

hitherto been done by men. One woman is turning base plates for shells on a turret lathe. Another is cutting copper bands for shells from tubes. Another is pressing the copper bands into their places. Yet another is riveting brass plugs on to high explosive shell bodies. Some are drilling the holes through the six-inch shells. Others are rough turning the shell surfaces. And yet others are gauging and parting off the bodies of the huge, eight-inch high explosives. Many are making shell fuses, a task in which women have become amazingly proficient, and many more are at work at the inspection board, where, being trained to the use of one gauge only, they have developed an efficiency to which men have never attained. All this sounds portentous in description, but at close quarters it looks astonishingly simple. The machines themselves seem almost human in their automatic intelligence, and, if you show a proper respect for their impetuous organisms, they are not generally cruel. So the

women get along very well with them, learning all their ways, their whims, their needs and their limitations. It is surprising how speedily the women have wooed and won this new kind of male monster.

The vast workshop we are walking in is laid out on a simple methodical plan. The lathes are ranged in regular lines along the length of the place, with alleyways, called streets, between them. A few of the lathes seem to work almost automatically, and to require little or no attention, but before each of the other machines a woman stands to start, stop, feed and control it. Sometimes her machine goes wrong, a strap breaks or a tool wears out, and then a male mechanic, known as a setter, steps up to set it right. Sometimes it requires more than a woman's muscle to master it, and then a male labourer has to be called to pull the crank or turn the lever. In cross streets forewomen sit at desks, or walk to and fro at the heads of their sections, while up and down the

alleyways the under-forewomen with their account books pass from operator to operator to take tally of the work that has been done.

All the women wear the same uniform, a khaki-coloured overall girdled at the waist, and a cap of the shape of a bathing-cap. This is in the interests of safety, lest the dress or the hair of the operator should be caught in the pulleys and belts of the machinery; but it has the further and not altogether negligible advantage, in the eyes of the male creature, of being extremely becoming. If there is any man in London who can pass through the workshops of Woolwich without thinking he has been looking at some thousands of the best-looking young women in the world, it is certainly not the present writer. Their hard work does not seem to be doing much harm to their health, for their eyes are bright, their cheeks are fresh, and there is hardly any evidence of fatigue among them. The clamorous and deafening noise of the machinery, its jar and whirr

and clank, which makes your temples throb, sings (after their first days in the factory) like music in their ears and they would miss it if it stopped. They work day and night, in two shifts of twelve hours each, with a break of an hour for dinner and half an hour for tea. Their pay, which is by the piece, is generally large, the minimum being, I think, a pound a week, and the maximum five to seven pounds.

But you realize that the lure of money is not the sole or yet the chief magnet that draws women to work for the war when you leave this immense workshop for the sinister-looking sheds in which the finished shells are filled. Everybody knows that a shell is not merely a lump of dead steel, but a living reservoir of compounds which have been brought up from the bowels of the earth and transformed into terrible explosives. Everybody knows, too, that somewhere the womb of the shell has to be loaded with its deadly charge. Therefore there ought not to be

any question of exciting public alarm (there is no reasonable cause for it) or any fear of betraying a secret to the enemy (it is no secret) if, as evidence of the moral and physical courage of the daughters of Britain, and as an example of the bravest single thing woman does for the war, I describe the scene of what is known as the danger zone at Woolwich.

This section of the Arsenal is at some distance from the factories and we drive to it in a motor-car. The day has closed in by now, the darkness has fallen, and the moon is rising. We travel over a kind of marsh to a promontory that seems to have the river running about it. The long stretch of dark road is jealously watched. At one moment the car stops and the face of a guard appears at the window. He asks for any matches, cigarettes and knives we may carry about with us. After we have emptied our pockets of such combustibles our car is permitted to proceed. There is another long stretch of dark road (between wooden sheds,

probably magazines for the storage of munitions) which reminds us of the rutted ways through the log-built villages on the steppes of Russia, and then we draw up at an open door from which the pale red of electric light is streaming.

A moment later we are in the women's cloak-room, with its rails (all full) for coats and hats. Here we take off our superfluous clothing, for the night is warm, and at a low footboard, which is the boundary-line of the safety and danger zones, put rubber shoes over our boots, lest the grit of the streets should strike fire from something within. And then, feeling as we felt when we walked, in Oriental slippers, into the Mosque of Omar on the site of the Temple of Solomon, we pass into a far more impressive and tremendous scene.

It is a broad encampment of small, one-story wooden houses or huts, separated from each other by a liberal space, and having wide streets between, with raised causeways on either side. Down the

middle of the streets are lines of hooded and darkened lamps, at long and unequal intervals. But the streets here are not for traffic. Within this zone there is hardly a sound or sign of motion. The moon is now shining, and in the distance, under its slow-growing light, we see the shadowy figures of women workers in their khaki gowns and caps, moving noiselessly about like nuns. We could almost imagine that, out of the noise and tumult, the thud and roar of the forges behind us, with their tall chimneys showing black against the steel-grey sky, we have passed into the calm rest and silent atmosphere of some open-air convent.

A Zeppelin might drop a bomb on this noiseless place without doing much mischief. But what of the peril within itself, and the courage required to work in it? We walk along our causeway until we come to one of the detached wooden huts. The door is open (for fresh air is wanted), and electric light is streaming out of it. A dozen women are sitting within at two

oblong tables, weighing and measuring out in little brass scales, like a chemist's, with all the care of apothecaries, small quantities of black, green, yellow and bluish powder (which recall in their volcanic colouring the lakes of Kruisivik and the pits of Caltanasetta), and then pouring them into the open mouths of half-empty shells that stand upright by their sides. They talk very little—indeed hardly at all. Perhaps their work requires all their attention; perhaps their spirits are under the spell of the deadly things they are dealing with. Some of them are wearing over their mouths and nostrils light green veils that are like the veils of Arab women inverted; others, in their indifference to danger, have tucked their respirators into their waistbands, and are working with nostrils and mouths exposed.

It is not for long we can bear to look on a scene like this, so fearfully charged with spiritual as well as physical tragedy, and when we step back to the causeway out-

side we breathe more freely. It is still very quiet. The moonlight is now shining clear on the wraith-like figures which are moving silently to and fro in their rubber slippers. The river must be somewhere near, for we can hear the syrens of the steamers that are sailing by, and sometimes the lap of the running waters. We have a sense, too, of the imminent presence of the great city that is unseen and unheard from here, though not far away. Its tumultuous life must now be at high tide of early evening, with its darkened but crowded thoroughfares, its hurrying taxis, its glimmering theatres, its surging railway stations and its faces, faces, faces everywhere. And is it only an effect of the strained and perhaps disordered condition of one's nerves, at sight of these brave and fearless women filling with deadly explosives the shells that are soon to batter down the trenches of the enemy who lies in wait behind them to kill their husbands and lovers on the battle-field, that as one stands in the breathless silence

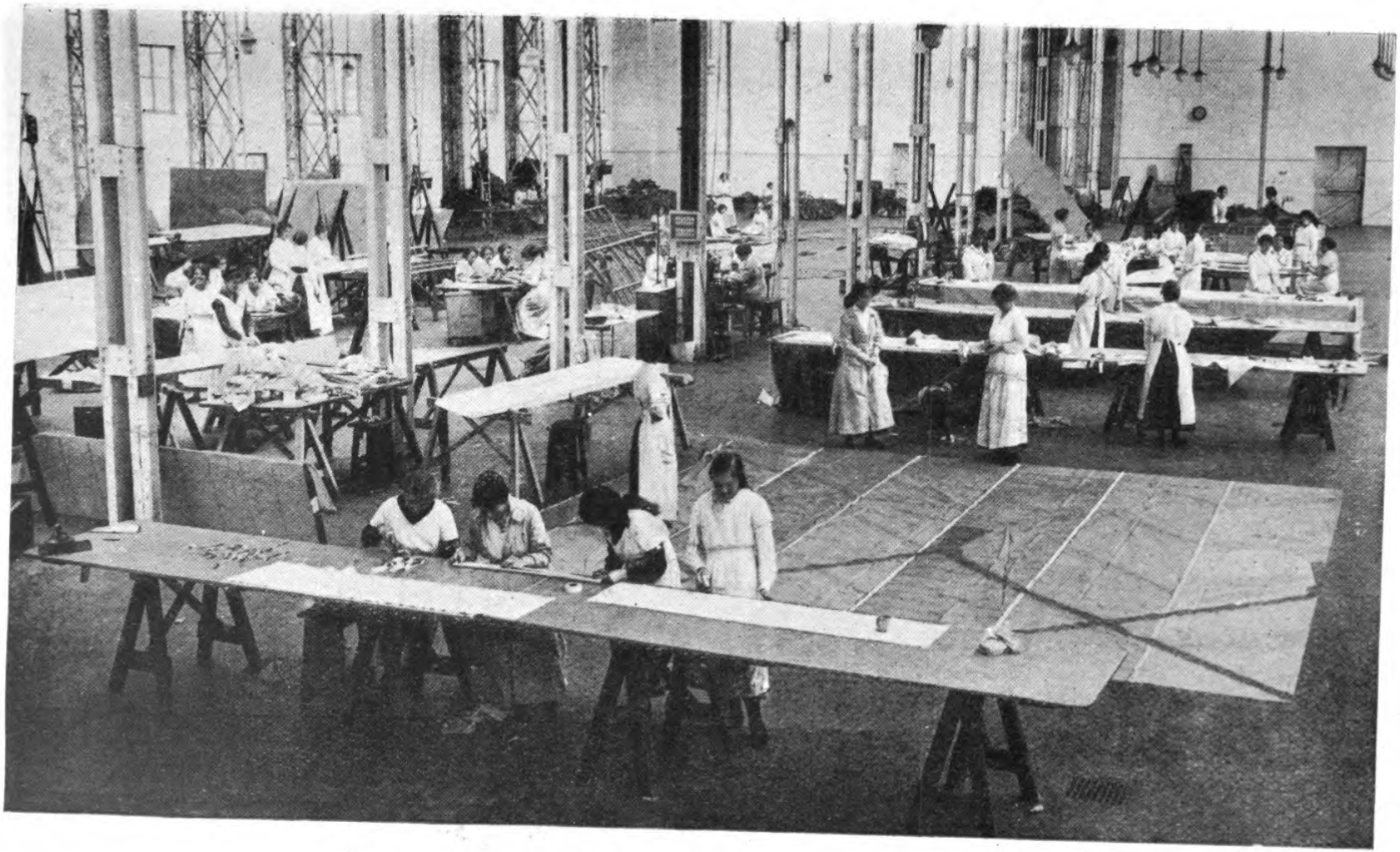
of this sombre spot, one thinks one hears the low, deep, far-off, booming of the great guns across the sea ?

For centuries the spirit of mankind has knelt at the feet of its great creators, its Miltons and its Dantes, in awe of their awful imaginings. But what are the highest reaches of the imaginative mind compared with the realities of that mightiest of all tragic poets—War ?

CHAPTER II

BY NIGHT

WE can never be sufficiently grateful for what the great towns of the country have done towards the output of munitions. But it is only as it should be that London, which is the soul of the Empire, is its right arm also. Let us try to form an idea of what the women of the Metropolis are doing for the war by making a rapid tour of some of the associate factories which feed the great Arsenal of Woolwich. Only an imperfect survey is possible, for a tour like this is sufficient to show that in point of size London is the greatest city of the modern or perhaps of the ancient world, compared with which Carthage was probably a



View of general fabric work-room in aircraft factory

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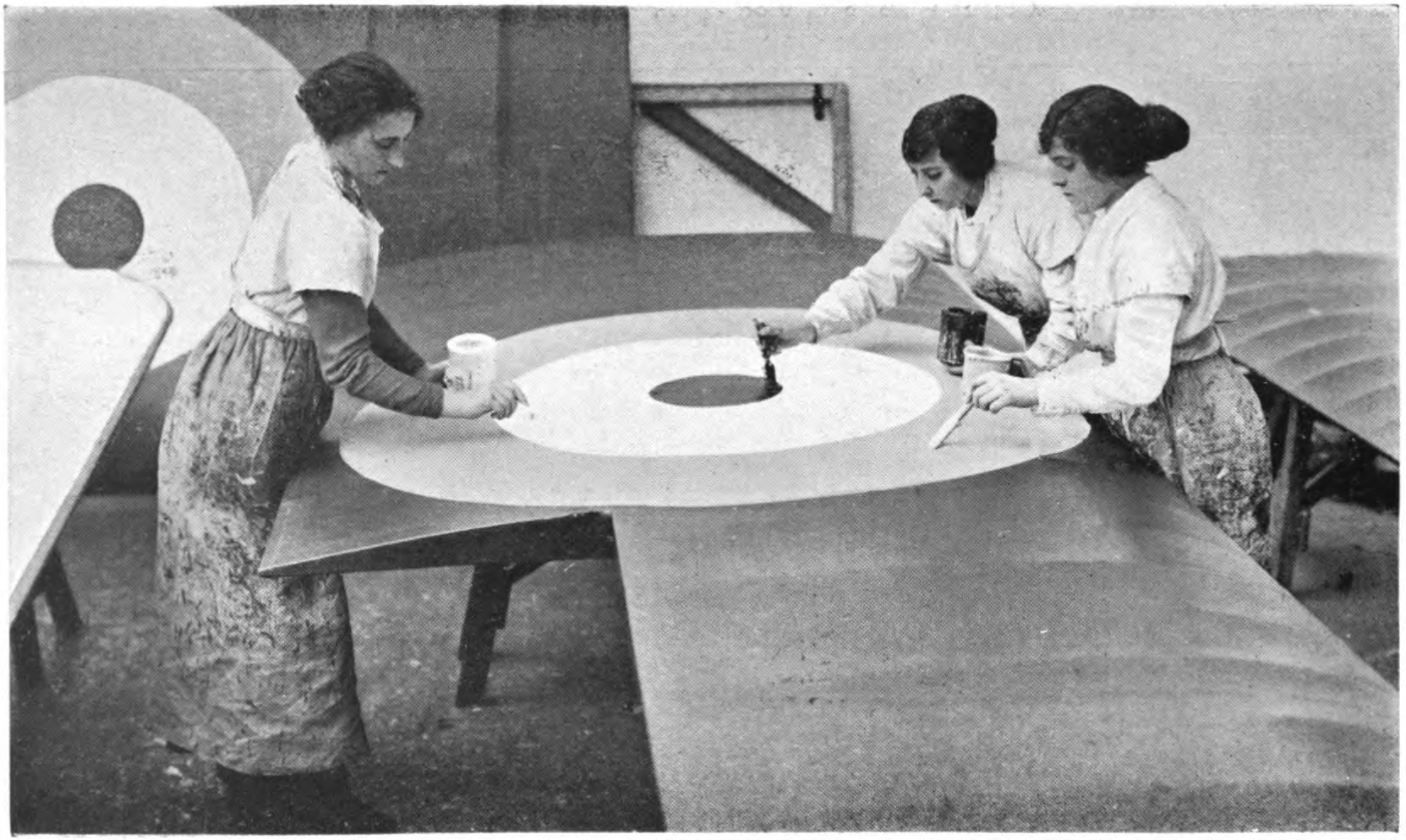


Painting identification rings on aeroplanes

village and Athens a suburb, and even old Rome not much bigger than Battersea.

We will begin at seven in the evening at the gates of Woolwich, where the workers are changing shift. Seventy thousand of them of both sexes are passing in and out in two great streams, like the Rhône and the Saône at Lyons, one quiet and of equal speed, the other (the outgoing one) loud and urgent. The female workers, now in their outdoor costumes, are recognizable as the women we see in the streets, many of them apparently recruited from domestic service, but not a few out of offices and shops.

Crossing the river, we find the streets crowded with women. The electric cars, like long trains, are full of them. Some are returning to their homes, others are going to their work. One wonders what the ancient world, whose utmost idea of female labour seems to have been covered by the scenes of Ruth gleaning in the fields, or Rachel feeding her flocks, and then returning to her house at nightfall to lie

soft and warm, or gather her children about her knee, would have thought of the spectacle of hundreds of thousands of the daughters of Britain on their way to the factories in which they are to work all night.

It is a dark and rather sullen evening, without moon or stars, and as we drive to one of the northern heights of London we become aware of the long journeys through lonely thoroughfares, and even open gaps of country, which multitudes of the girls may have to make before they begin on their night shift. We have also time to reflect that a stronger impulse than the desire for large earnings must be operating with many to enable them to defy so much discomfort. This is not the first time that women have made munitions of war. For every war that has yet been waged women have supplied the first and greatest of all munitions—men. There has never been a war on earth but women have borne the heaviest weight of it. There has never been a

battlefield but the flesh and blood of women have been lying among the slain. Therefore, consciously or unconsciously, the daughters of Britain may be answering some mysterious call of their sex in working all day and all night in the munition factories for the most glorious war in which Great Britain has ever been engaged.

The associate factories of Woolwich have many forms of industry, and the first we call at is largely, though not exclusively, occupied in the making of cartridges. It is an immense place, covering an area of twenty acres and employing more than five thousand girls. You are perhaps surprised to see that paper plays an important part in the making of a shell. Large numbers of the girls are working machines that roll paper into hard, oblong tubes, some for use as cartridges, others as shell linings to receive the explosive. After what we have seen of women's work in steel and brass to shape the weapons of death this labour in paper

seems almost tenderly proper to female hands.

But if such work makes less demand of robustious strength, it requires equal conscientiousness. Here is a young girl examining caps. Out of a boxful on the bench before her she scoops up as many as will drop into the holes of a small tray which is perforated like a colander. Then with a needle she flicks off, faster than the eye can follow her, the caps that have a scratch, a dot, a dent or such other defect as might prevent percussion. She works by the piece, receiving fivepence for each boxful. So small is the cap, and so buried will it presently be in the brass top of the cartridge, that if she scamps her work nobody may ever know —nobody, except the soldier at the front, when he is, perhaps, face to face with his enemy, and finds his rifle fail him after he has pulled the trigger. But the girl knows that, and she knows, too, that the soldier who may fall at the next instant under the enemy's more certain

weapon may be her own brother or sweetheart.

The next factory we call at is engaged in the making of shot. It lies far out in the fields, and as we turn down the lane that leads to it we pass an obelisk to the memory of Warwick, the King-maker, who fought his last battle there and was slain. The earth around sleeps full of the dead who died with him that day, and over yonder, behind fires that burn through the darkness like blood-shot eyes, some of their daughters, down many centuries, are making deadlier weapons of war than Warwick's men ever knew.

It is practically an open-air industry, for the doors of the tent are thrown wide, the heat being great within. In long rows of vats that are like huge kitchen coppers, women are boiling lead and pouring it into the shot-moulds. They are older and, perhaps, coarser women who engage in this labour, and as you approach the tents, and see the scaly grey liquid ladled out, you find it impossible not to

think of the witches in *Macbeth*, especially when the hair of one of the workers falls from its knot, and, in lifting her ladle, her gaunt figure sways across the light. A closer view brings tenderer feelings, for the elderly woman has a face such as Rembrandt loved to paint, seamed and scored with years of toil, and telling of children brought into the world in labour and sorrow, and then buried, perhaps, in infancy. You find that the poor old thing has lost her son in the war, that he was her breadwinner, and therefore she has had to begin again to work. It is perhaps the cruellest part of the ancient human tragedy she is living through, but there is a dark fire in her old heart still. "Yes, I'm cooking some pudding," she says, "for them as killed my Joe."

Our next call is at a filling factory, which has points of difference from the danger zone already described. It occupies a broad expanse of waste ground that used to be employed, long ago, I think, as a pleasure resort. Over the

darkened ground—darker than ever on this dank and somewhat misty night—the wraith-like figures of the girls in their overalls are moving to and fro. Inside one of the open-mouthed sheds a dozen girls are filling the paper containers with explosives. At the end of the shed there is a cauldron about five feet square, full of reddish-brown liquid, which is kept hot and seething by steam pipes beneath. One of the girls is stirring this sinister mess, while others come to her from time to time for supplies in a kind of two-handled kettle, from which they pour the liquid into the containers that stand upright in an aluminium mould on a long, low table. All the girls wear overalls and asbestos gloves, and some wear respirators, but most of them disregard the latter precaution.

It is a weird scene, this silent encampment of detached huts, with the hum of the busy city round about it, and one of the great cemeteries of London lying cold and dark not far away. But if any-

body thinks the women working in such places are in fear of their lives he makes a woeful error. Let nobody be afraid to speak of the filling factories, or talk of them as places not proper for women. If that were so we should have to put men into them, for their work is necessary and urgent. But I truly believe that the sense they give of the war being actually with us, not far off in a foreign country, is part of their fascination, their thrill and their power to attract female workers. One day a delicate-looking elderly lady, accompanied by a slight and obviously tenderly-nurtured girl of sixteen, called at the office of a filling factory and asked to see the manager. "I've lost both my sons in the war," she said, "and now I bring you my daughter—she is all I have left for my country."

We have a long drive to our next place of call, but the scene at the end is worth the journey. It is a factory for the making of the wooden boxes that carry the shells to the front. All the joiners are girls.

They are working the hand-saw, the circular-saw, the hand-plane, the machine-plane, and are morticing and hammering the boxes into shape and splicing up their thick rope handles. Never was there a brighter scene. The girls seem to have a sense of doing big things with a blow and a swing—not tinkering with feminine trifles. They love their work. It is said that not long ago a theatrical company, playing a rather foolish revue, came to a neighbouring theatre, and some of the ladies of the chorus lodged at the same house with one of the female joiners. "I'm surprised at ye, my dears," said the munition girl, "kicking your legs over the footlights when you might be earning more money in our shop, and doing something for your country." "Well, that's worth thinking about," answered the ladies of the theatre; and on the Friday night following the whole chorus presented themselves at the factory and were engaged.

But it is impossible to get away from

the war-tragedy for long, and I am one of those who think it cowardly to attempt to do so. Our way to the next factory lies along a road that borders one of the sinuous reaches of the Thames, past the docks for the ships that bring foreign cattle. A few hours hence these dark ways will be noisy with the trundling of heavy lorries taking live cattle to the abattoirs and dead ones to Smithfield market, that the big, hungry monster, London, may be fed to-morrow. It is growing late, and the night air is misty and damp. We can scarcely see the waters of the river, though we can hear their wash as they run past the wharf-head to the sea. But we can plainly descry the dark outlines of a line of barges which are being tugged at long range up-stream. These spectre-like shapes are ammunition boats, carrying the filled charges we have seen to Woolwich. They bear a signal, often changed but always known to the initiated, warning other craft to keep clear.

It is a factory of a new kind we come to next. Not one vast chamber, but a number of small rooms in big, naked, unhomely houses such as you may have seen in some of the meaner towns of Galicia, where, before the war, people seemed to live and work in herds. The girls here are seamstresses, and many of them are plainly of Polish-Jewish origin. Their work is to make Batiste bags (like elongated finger-stalls of rubberized cotton) that are put into the shells, and also the gas-masks which the men now carry at the front. The gas-mask is a canvas hood such as the burial confraternities wear at funerals when they walk in procession through the streets of Rome, covering the head and neck and shoulders, but with eye-places made of transparent mica and an aluminium mouthpiece that filters the air before allowing it through. Looking at the comely, dark faces of the girls who are sewing these canvas hoods in their close workshops in the East End, one has visions of the ghoul-like figures

of a line of infantry hacking at a barrier of barbed wire, running frantically up and down to find a gap in it, and falling, perhaps, under curtains of fire, but no longer, thank God, before clouds of the poisonous gas which used to burst the lungs and plunge down the throat like bars of burning steel.

Our way is now westward, past one of the great London hospitals, and through the dark zone of the city, which, thronged with millions by day, is nearly deserted during the night. It is eleven o'clock by this time, the theatres are emptying, the supper-rooms are filling, and London, with its lowered lights, is looking like old Cairo under its dark mantle of night, with the difference that taxis are hooting through the principal thoroughfares, and in the silence of some of the narrower streets, which flank the great railway stations, lines of ambulance wagons are waiting for their nightly toll of our wounded from the front.

The first factory we visit in the western

area was formerly a motor factory. Its long garage is now half full of taxis which are lying up, but its workshops are breathlessly busy. They are chiefly occupied with the manufacture of the larger-sized shells, and are especially interesting as showing men and women working together. In a huge shop, which is pulsing and throbbing with machinery, seven hundred and fifty of them are face to face or side by side. It is a stirring sight. The women are generally of larger build than we have seen before, and some of them are superb specimens of virile womanhood. The men are of a big type too, for the work here wants strength. As far as one can see the sexes get on well together. Common interests and common labour seems to have brought them into friendly relations. Constant intercourse at work appears to have given the men a high opinion of women, of their steadiness and power to endure. In like manner the women seem to have come to a good understanding of the men, their helpfulness

and unselfishness when at work. It looks like a brave fellowship, a fine *camaraderie*, and one hopes that long after the war it may continue to be a living reality. And let nobody suppose that to these men these women will be less desirable as wives because they have worked by their sides in soiled overalls with oily hands and even blackened faces. In an immortal passage an old Roman writer tells of how the wives of the men who built up the Roman greatness ground the swords of their warrior husbands, accompanied them to war, and exhorted them to deeds of valour. What else are these daughters of Britain doing ?

But here allow me to strike a note of warning. As in the march of humanity (or is it inhumanity ?) the swords of modern warfare are generally shells, and shells are heavy bodies, it is impossible that women should make them without the help of men. Look, for example, at these two lathes standing back to back. A man and a woman work them in part-

nership, the man receiving five-eighths of the piecework pay, and the woman three-eighths. They are roughing or drilling eight-inch shells. First the man lifts the shell into its place in one of the two machines, leaves the woman to watch it, and then crosses to the other machine, lifts another shell into its place, and stands by it himself. When the woman's shell has been roughed out or drilled she calls to the man, and he returns to it, lifts it off and substitutes another, while she, perhaps, takes her partner's place at his lathe. Each of these eight-inch shells weighs something like a hundredweight. Attending to two machines, the woman's and his own, the man fixes and removes about one hundred of them twice in the course of his twelve hours' shift. Thus he has lifted ten tons a day! And, if he works on Sunday also, seventy tons a week!

There are thousands of such men in the munition factories. I am not concerned about who they are, whether they are of military age, or what brought them

to the workshops. That is their business, not mine, and not even, I think, the State's. They are doing inevitable work that can only be done by broad loins and brawny muscles. And when people talk about removing them to the front and filling their places, either with women, assisted by cranes, or with other men who have been adjudged too old or too weak for military service, the natural man in me can only be appeased by one reply—Don't talk damned nonsense.

The last of our visits to the munition factories of the London area is to a colossal place, whereof a portion was previously engaged in the manufacture of a musical instrument. We find vast numbers of women in the workshops here, chiefly occupied in the making of fuses. It is a delicate job in which an error of a thousandth of an inch is enough to scrap the work. The lathes are carefully set, so that errors may not occur, but the machine has never yet been made that is fool-proof. There is an inspection bench

Girl operating vertical milling machine on machine tool parts.

[*Facing p.* 48.

Drilling small parts (of ball bearings) with multiple spindle drill.

[*Facing p.* 49.

with lines of examiners from Woolwich, but the worker is well aware that in the last resort much must necessarily be left to her own conscience. She knows, too, that a faulty fuse may mean the blowing out of the breach-block, and the wounding or killing not of the enemy's men but our own.

The women have done almost miraculous work in the munition factories, but they have their limitations, and it would be madness to forget it. The first of their limitations is want of physical strength, and the next their lack of long mechanical training. Here, for example, in one big shop, is a line of girls sitting idle for a quarter of an hour at their lathes, because the lusty labourer who lugs the heavy shell-bodies in his hand-bogey along their "street" is away sick for the half-day. Here, again, is a girl whose machine has been pulled up by the failure of a clutch, or, perhaps, for want of the tools which wear out quickly against the hard steel, and require frequent changing. In the

tool-shop near by there are a hundred and fifty men, all skilled mechanics, having served seven years to their trade, and earning one-and-sixpence an hour. They have intricate drawings before them in white lines on blue paper, and are working with the precision and delicacy of the makers of watches and chronometers. The manager of their tool-shop is said to be one of the best mechanics in London, which means one of the best in Europe. He looks like five-and-thirty, and few of his men seem to be older. But let there be no talk of combing out men like these. Too many of their comrades enlisted at the beginning of the war, and are now lying under the sod in Flanders, and if you remove these men the women cannot be expected to replace them. Yet so closely co-ordinated, so deftly dovetailed, are the many processes in the manufacture of shells that if one process fails, or is even temporarily arrested, the long wave of production is broken and the output goes down.

It is approaching midnight, but so far as we can see there is no weariness anywhere. The girls look fresh and bright, in their blue overalls and caps, and when the steam-whistle is sounded at twelve for their midnight dinner, they fly off to their canteen amid a chatter of tongues like children let loose from school. We follow them down the dark ways outside, and find a beautiful picture. In an immense shed, well lit and admirably appointed both for warmth and colour, three thousand of the blue-capped girls are eating at cross tables, and of course talking in linnet-like chorus as only three thousand girls can. When their meal is over they have a delightful surprise. A famous singer, with the splendid generosity of her class, has come down after her work at one of the concert halls to sing to the girls who are working all night for her country. The girls are overjoyed. And what an audience they are! Never has a singer had a more glorious reception. Very wisely she selects the simple ballads

familiar to everybody, and she has her reward. Only three thousand working girls, yes, but that means three thousand human hearts capable of being filled to over-flowing. What more does any artist want ?

And now I come to an incident which moves me more, perhaps, than any single thing that has ever fallen with my experience. I pledge myself to the general truthfulness of the fundamental part of the story I am about to tell, though for good and sufficient reasons I do not vouch for the details, or indicate in any way the scene of the incident I describe.

We are in a large munition factory within the broad circle of what may be described as the London area. It is somewhat later than twelve o'clock at night. The vast shops are humming and pulsing and throbbing with machinery ; several thousands of girls, fresh from their midnight dinner, are working with good cheer ; the labourers are bringing their trolleys up " the street," and the setters

are moving about the lathes. Suddenly the hooter is sounded. It is sounded twice. The girls know what that means—the Zeppelins are coming!

We wonder if there will be a panic, and a few shrill cries in the first moments give hint of gathering hysteria, with here and there the laughterless laugh that sometimes goes before a fainting fit. But at the next instant one of the managers, a manly fellow with a knowledge of female nature, shouts in a loud, encouraging, yet commanding voice, "Now, girls, sing something!" It is an inspiration. The word acts like magic. One of the women strikes up, "If you were the only boy and I were the only girl." Before she has reached the second line all the girls in her shop have joined her, some in full voice, others in the quavering tones that tell of still trembling hearts. It is thrilling; the situation is saved. After another few moments the machinery slows down, the pulleys and belts begin to stop, the lights are put out, and the whole factory is

plunged in darkness. It is safe enough now.

We feel our way through the big room into the adjoining workshop. There the foreman, with no less prescience, has pulled out a gramophone, turned on a "rag-time," and the girls (having more open space) are dancing a two-step. The darkness seems to be full of the drumming of innumerable feet, punctuated at intervals by little nervous shouts and trills of laughter.

We reach the lift and are taken on to the flat roof of the factory. It is pitch dark up there. The night is still misty and dank. Not a sign of anything on the earth or in the sky. Clearly the authorities have given timely warning. While we wait for the Zeppelins which are approaching our metropolis, we can hear the deadened beat of the dancing below, and the sound of the singing that is creeping up the walls from the open windows.

The factory is a very lofty one, and

from the roof one may look over nearly the whole of greater London. We can see nothing of it to-night through the mist that lies on it like a shroud, but the mind's eye is full of pictures. The same warning must have been given to the whole of the London factories at the same time, and what is happening here is almost certainly happening everywhere. Up yonder in the filling factories, over there among the shot-vats in the fields, and down on the dark promontory at the bend of the river, the girls will be singing, as they are singing here, to crush down fear and keep brave hearts, while the big furnaces will be locked hard and the hundred and twenty miles of railway standing still. One has the sense of all the munition factories within the twenty-five mile area of London crouching in the dark and waiting. While one waits oneself, with the singing and the dancing in one's ears, it is impossible not to remember the night before Waterloo, when the beauty and chivalry of Brussels were

startled out of their revelry by the booming of the guns. But this is a far more tremendous moment.

Presently the sky is shot through as by a star that comes from below. It is a searchlight, clear and white as a wand, and in another moment ten, twenty, thirty of its kind seem to leap out of the earth and to cross each other like silver swords that are fencing. The Zeppelins must be near; they have been heard; the lights are trying to find them. After a few moments they find one. There it is, far up in the south-eastern sky, perhaps three miles above the earth, a huge, oblong thing of steely grey, as plainly to be seen in its circle of silver white as if it were sailing in broad daylight.

I despair of conveying a sense of the emotions of that moment. Man, who had developed the powers of angels to ride through the sky, was using them for the work of the devil. Even if our enemy had to be believed that he was not coming in his airships to kill non-combatants (which

on such errands he always is), but only to destroy fortified places, and places for the making or storing of ammunition, it followed that he was hunting our women at work in the munition factories. Still one heard the singing of the girls below. It was impossible to think calmly. If at that instant, by touching a button I could have destroyed the whole body of the enemy nation that had sent out these assassins of the air and the darkness, I should certainly have done so.

At the next moment there was the boom of a gun, followed by the booming of another and another, until a hundred guns seemed to be firing at once. For some minutes the roar was deafening, and then, suddenly came dead silence. The searchlights remained, and they were keeping the flying thing in focus, but the sky seemed to be holding its breath. Then a sharp, blue, horizontal star stabbed the black clouds, and at the next moment, there was a red flash that flew across the sky like a desert sunset. The Zeppelin was

aflame. She seemed to stop for an instant, to pause and to shudder. Then she dipped nose forward and fell earthwards, at first slowly, and then headlong.

During this time, standing on the high roof of the factory, one had forgotten London, thinking of it as lying asleep. But now there came from below that most moving of all sounds on earth, perhaps more moving than the sound of the sea, the mighty shout of innumerable voices under one universal impulse. People everywhere were cheering. Near and far their cheers came in short, sharp cracks, like the splashes of breakers, and then in long, low, far-off, rolling waves. It was just as if the great city London itself were uttering its cry of relief and joy.

I trust I shall not be blamed for attempting to describe a scene which I have twice witnessed (a scene which has occurred three times this autumn, with unimportant variations, in nearly every great munition factory in the London area, and outside of it), if only for the sake of the object

I wish to serve. When public men, with more zeal than knowledge or imagination, talk of people "skulking behind munitions," let them know that the war is in the munition shops just as surely as it is in France, and that, without the rightful glory of the battlefield, our women, as well as our men, are constantly facing the perils of it.

The manager of the big factory told me afterwards there was not too much work done during the remaining hours of that night's shift, but there was no scare, and not a girl in the employ showed broken time next day.

At eight in the morning, when the night hands went out and the day hands came in, there was a tumult of excitement at the gates, with breathless stories of the fallen Zepp. and pieces of her aluminium framework handed round. The sunrise was beginning to creep up over the fields as the night girls went chattering and laughing homewards—brave daughters of a brave breed.

Why, in God's name, do we so often talk of the great deeds of our race as if they had all occurred in the past? In one of the old sagas we read of how Brynhild, the warrior maid, whom Sigurd found, gave him "the deepest counsel that ever yet was given to living man, and wrought on him to the performance of great deeds." What hinders us from opening our eyes and seeing that we have tens of thousands of Brynhilds in our midst at this moment? Cockney girls, perhaps, but the old heroic blood is in our women still—the blood that made our Britain great and will make her greater yet.

CHAPTER III

TOMMY'S SISTER

IF you wish to take a scenic view of women's work for the war, I ask you to stand with me at mid-day on London Bridge, the spot from which Macaulay's New Zealander is to contemplate the silent ruins of the Empire-city. Nothing on earth could be less like that than the scene before you. The surging mass of tumultuous traffic seems to be concerned almost entirely with the business of the war. Here is a woman in khaki, driving a motor lorry that is full of cotton bales for cordite. Here is a wagon full of large tins of cartridge cylinders and small ones of fuses. Here is a covered cart full of rolls of cloth, and another full of uniforms packed

in bales. And here is a slip of a girl, on the front-board of a two-horse van, whistling her way through the heaving throng, with a ton or two of leather skins behind her which she is taking from the tanneries of Bermondsey to the railway station for Northampton, to be made into boots for soldiers.

On the river below the tide of war-traffic is no less urgent. Barges, barges, barges, some tugged, some going by motor-power, some under their own sail, coming down stream from the direction of the Houses of Parliament to where the grey walls of the Tower stand four-square against the eastern sky, some of them laden with milk and meat, others with planks to be made into shell-boxes near Dagenham Dock, and others with pit props for the trenches—bringing lacerating visions of denuded valleys, where blue-bells were nodding under the shade of sycamores only a little while ago.

Or, better still, let us stand on West-minster Bridge at midnight, where to

Wordsworth's eye one early morning a century ago the "very houses seemed asleep, And all that mighty heart was lying still." The mighty heart is going with a bounding throb now, and I am by no means sure that the night-long activities of these red years of war do not make a yet more moving picture. Millions of women must be asleep in London by this time, but hundreds of thousands are at work—down there to the south-east, over the burrowings of the Borough, and through the interminable ways of the New and Old Kent Roads to Greenwich and Plumstead and Erith; round to the south-west over Lambeth and Wandsworth to Richmond and Farnham; up to the north-west over the scrambling reaches of Willesden to Amersham, and over the heights of Hampstead and Highgate to the towns and villages along the Great North road, where a blazing Zeppelin fell the other day, and De Quincey's stage-coach awakened the midnight echoes of 1815 with the triumphant bugle-blasts that

were the first tidings of the victory of Waterloo. Standing on this central spot it is easy to imagine one can hear the hammering on thousands of anvils, and the hum and whirr of hundreds of thousands of lathes, at which women are working in the broad circle of greater London and the country round about.

It is a tremendous picture of war work such as the world has never before seen equalled in magnitude, and common justice requires that we should say that it is due in the first instance to the public spirit of the Captains of Industry (Generals of the King, as surely as any on the field, some leading their tens of thousands, others their twenties and thirties) who have submerged their private businesses in this malign but necessary business of the war as absolutely as the temple of Philæ is submerged by the overwhelming waters of the Nile. Certain of them are said to be making fortunes. I know nothing about that. But I do know they are working for the nation as they never

Inspecting and gauging fuse bodies.

[*Facing p.* 64.

Driving motor van.

[Facing p. 6

worked for themselves—going up to their factories by the workmen's train in the morning, snatching a hasty lunch on the edges of their desks, and rarely returning home until the night-shift has got under way at seven or eight o'clock. Nor can it be said that in encouraging Aaron's rod to swallow up all other rods they are preparing a lucrative future for their private enterprises. The fine inscription to Chatham on the monument in the Guildhall says he "made commerce flourish through war." But a few years were sufficient to change the country's view of that kind of prosperity, and none of us know what is to happen to the munition firms after the war is over.

The great and determining fact, however, of the war industry is the employment of women in it. There has been nothing like that in the history of the world, since the days when the barefooted and white-robed Northern women, as the ancient writers tell us, led their hosts on the long march to Italy "to dare

with their men in war." We could see that the throb of the old heroic blood was in our women still when, a year and a half ago, thirty thousand of them walked in procession through London, to ask to be allowed to do war-work—women of every class, the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated, the gently-born and the heavily-burdened, the woman with the delicate, spiritual face, and the woman with the face hardened by toil. They are in the factories now, five hundred thousand of them all over the country, a vast army of female soldiers, who stand for British womanhood.

But what took them there? If they had gone into the Red Cross, or into the commissariat or clothing departments (woman's ancient domain) they would have seemed to take life's straightest road. But there is a natural antagonism between woman and war, and it is difficult to think of her as a maker of weapons of death. Battle is in the blood of man, and perhaps it is natural that he should

settle his disputes with his fellow-man by the barbaric expedient of seeing which of them can kill most men. Although not naturally more inhuman than woman, he is capable of beating his drums and his kettle-drums over a battlefield covered with ten thousand dead, if only they are the enemy's dead. But woman is the life-giver, not the life-destroyer, and in her heart of hearts ten thousand slain, whether friend or foe, are ten thousand mothers' sons, each of them a man born of a woman and suckled at her breast. What, then, brings women into the munition factories?

To find an answer to that question I must ask you to spend an hour with me in the office of a lady-superintendent when she is taking on hands. Here they come to "sign on," a various and talkative queue. Rose and Alice, and Annie and Mabel, the young woman who has left a home of comfort and luxury, the daughter of the mechanic, the girl out of domestic service, and perhaps the girl

out of the slums. What are their names? Where do they live? Are they married? If so, have they any children? And why do they want to work at munitions? The first to reach the superintendent's table is a Girton girl with a grave face who thinks it her duty to her country to work in the factories. The next is a laughing young chit, whose patriotism, being more substantial, takes the form of her "fella" who has gone to the front, so she thinks she would like "to be doin' a bit o' what 'e does." The next is a young bride, who was married last week to a soldier on leave, and wishes to "keep 'er mind from worritin'." The next is a mother of two children, who says she cannot live and pay rent on her separation allowance. And the next is a woman with a mouth like a scar, who has lost her husband in the war, and "wants a chance to pay them back a bit."

We talk of the British Tommy and his unconquerable light-heartedness, as if he were a peculiar type, but the Cockney

girl is Tommy's own sister, with the same humour, and the same tameless blood in her. Here she comes sailing into the superintendent's office, Tommy's sister, one of her many varieties, wearing a hat as big as a fish-basket, and with her pretty face painted red as the sun with rouge. Then follows a scene. "Helloa, what do *you* want?" "Work, miss." "*You* couldn't work." "Couldn't I? Just you try me, miss," and up goes the chin, with a curl of the saucy mouth. There is silence for a moment, and then the superintendent says, "Now that I look at you I don't think you would be a bad-looking girl if you hadn't such a dirty face." "What? Dirty fice? Me?" "Yes, all that red stuff. And then that hat!" "Is it as bad as all that, miss?" "Awful! Go and take it off and have a wash, and then perhaps we can do something."

Tommy's sister in the munition factories, like Tommy in the trenches, lives in the last moment, now joking, teasing,

laughing and wriggling, and then fuming and flaming and weeping over her troubles as if the world were coming to an end. The lady-superintendent at one of the factories has contracted a habit of giving pocket-handkerchiefs to the girls who come to her with tears dripping down their noses. She has given away so many that her empty handkerchief-case is a source of amusement to her friends. It is also a cause of hilarity to the female workers. As often as a girl, who has gone off in a fury to "tell her strite," comes back to the canteen with a composed countenance, she is greeted with "Got a wipe?" And then there are screams of laughter.

Tommy's sister usually brings a small leather bag into the factory, and if she allowed you to look into it you would probably find a penny novelette, or perhaps a lurid sevenpenny novel, a prodigious quantity of sweets, a tiny hand-mirror and a powder-puff. The Cockney girl has often very beautiful hair, generally

of a dark brown colour, with a glint of gold in it, and it goes grievously against her grain that to protect it from the clutches of pulleys and belts it has to be hidden under her cap. When the lady-superintendent is in sight up it goes, every hair of it, and her face is as bare as a nun's; but the moment the superintendent has turned her back down it comes in an instant, and her kiss-curls are twiddling over her temples.

Tommy's sister is proud of her leather bag, which is certainly a presentable possession which in its spruce freshness would put to shame at least fifty per cent. of the brief bags to be seen in the neighbourhood of the Temple. One of Tommy's little sisters (eleven years of age), having earned five shillings for her first week's work, was asked what she was going to do with her wages. "Buy a tashy case (attaché) like muvver's and Cissy's," she said.

Tommy's sister is just as courageous as Tommy himself, but when she gets her

finger squeezed or cut in her lathe she likes her chum to sympathize with her and carry her off to the factory infirmary —often a fresh, sweet place, presided over by trained nurses, who dress slight wounds all day long and provide easy chairs and rest rooms for girls who are faint from charcoal fumes or sick from sniffs of some greenish compound. And though Alice and Annie and Rose are usually brave enough on the nights of air-raids, they sometimes have bouts of hysteria which have to be put down with an iron hand. One such operation was delightfully ludicrous. A forewoman at a great factory, having received notice of the coming of Zeppelins, removed her girls to the wash-room, where some of them began to cry. "Stop that," she cried, but the hysterical girls would not or could not stop. So she picked them up, one by one, and put them to sit in the wash-basins that lined two sides of the room, and then called in a number of the men to look at them. The lights were switched

on for a moment; the weeping ones were seen leaning their backs against the walls and dangling their legs above the floor; there was a general peal of laughter; and then the girls were lifted down and the hysteria was gone.

Tommy's sister rather likes the air-raid nights, however, because she is sometimes allowed to go out into the dark to look for the Zeppelins, and the men usually help her to find them. One lady-superintendent was lately much exercised about the measure and the manner of the sympathy which on such occasions was proper to be expressed. "You know something about human nature, so tell me," she said, "one arm about a girl's waist, I don't see much harm in that, but when it comes to two. . . . What do *you* think?"

Tommy's sister loves to bring her photographs to the factory—pictures of "Muvver" and "Dad" and of course "my fella at the front." She loves to get letters from the trenches, too, and is

not above handing them round for general reading. "The weather is bad this month, and it will be a hard winter, but the summer is coming, and then this beastly scrap will be over, and I'll be home with my darling Annie." ("*Darling* Annie! He do 'ave a sauce, don't he?") "We are living in a German gun-emplacement, and Fritz is shelling it with 8-inch stuff all day long, something silly. But never mind, old girl! If a bullet or a shell has your name and number on it, you're a gone coon, it will be sure to hit you and put you out of worry; but if it hasn't it won't, which just shows the army is a game of fate." ("*Fite?* He don't know nothing, do he?")

But handing round her love-letters occasionally is the utmost limit of the sharing propensities of Tommy's sister, where her sweethearts are concerned. She can hardly ever be got to bring her boy in training to the clubs for recreation which the admirable Welfare Department of the Ministry of Munitions have established outside some

of the factories. A lady-supervisor at such a club said recently to a group of munition girls, "I do believe your young men are all cross-eyed and bandy-legged, you are so afraid of letting them be seen. Mabel, why don't you bring yours?" "Me bring my fella here?" said Mabel. "Not me! I'd lose him." Gorgeous tribute to the superior attractions of her girl comrades! Or was it a scorching satire on the fickleness of men?

Tommy's sister has sometimes, it must be confessed, got a heart like Hetty Sorrel's, as bright as a cherry and as hard as its stone. One day the lady-superintendent of a great factory, having just parted from her brother on his departure for France, and feeling tender and sympathetic, chanced on a love-sick Australian boy at the gate of her factory. "Would you please tell Rose So-and-so I'm under orders to leave to-night, and ask her to come out to see me?" he said. The superintendent promised to do so, and finding Rose So-and-so told her there was

a young soldier waiting for her at the gate, and as there were only two hours left of the shift she might have them off to spend with him. Away went the girl in high glee, but seeing her emerge from the dressing-room a few minutes afterwards, the superintendent was surprised to observe a Canadian (not an Australian) badge on the lapel of her coat, and so waited for an explanation of the mystery. It came like a smack in the face from a wet clout on a clothes-line. Up sailed the girl until she came within sight of the woebegone figure at the gate, and then she stopped suddenly and said, "What? Me lose two hours for *that?* Not much!" And turning about she went bouncing back to her workshop.

Under the provisions of the Munitions Act a female munition worker may not pass from factory to factory without a proper discharge from her employer, saying that the change is necessary or desirable in the girl's interest. The only condition of the discharge that is generally

agreeable to the employer is the medical condition. But Tommy's sister, having other reasons for desiring a change, sometimes does her best (when she is not troubled with too much conscience) to drive her coach and horses through the law. In one of the big factories there was, until recently, a young woman, with innocent eyes and a sloppy face, who, thinking she was not earning enough at munitions, had made up her mind to find other occupation. So she came to the office one morning with a most doleful face, and a pennyworth of crêpe pinned on to her hat, saying her mother had died during the night, leaving her with three young sisters, one of them a baby, and therefore she must ask for her discharge. "But what are you going to do?" asked the superintendent. "I'm going to put Aggie and Ellen into a' orphanage," she said; "and then I'll have to stay at home to nurse the byby." As this did not sound plausible, a welfare supervisor was sent to the girl's home to inquire, and

then it was found that the girl's mother was as well as ever she had been, Aggie and Ellen were going to school, and the baby did not exist.

But Tommy's sister is generally a girl with a heart of gold. When a comrade has bad news from the base hospitals, she whispers to her next neighbour, over the thud and rattle of the lathes, "Aggie's a-worryin' about 'er 'usband, he's wounded, pore thing." And when the telegram comes from the War Office saying Aggie's husband is dead, her chums make a collection to buy flowers to comfort her. It frequently happens that the munition girl is the sole support of her family, an invalid mother and perhaps two or three young children, and not rarely, when on the day-shift, she cleans up the house before starting out for the factory at six o'clock in the morning, and when on the night-shift, she gets up too frequently at three in the afternoon (equivalent to three in the morning) to do the shopping for the following day.

Tommy's sister is often a war-bride, having been married the day before her soldier was called up, and she frequently tells her chums in the canteen that when her "'Arry comes back she won't be 'arf glad, not me!" But sometimes she is single and thinks it her duty to marry. One day lately in a North London factory a girl asked for a frugal hour off to get married in, and promised faithfully to return as soon as the ceremony was over. She returned all right, and she had been married too, but as her "fella had gone back on her," she had had to find another man in the meantime. "I said I was going to get married, and I couldn't disappoint the girls, could I?" she said.

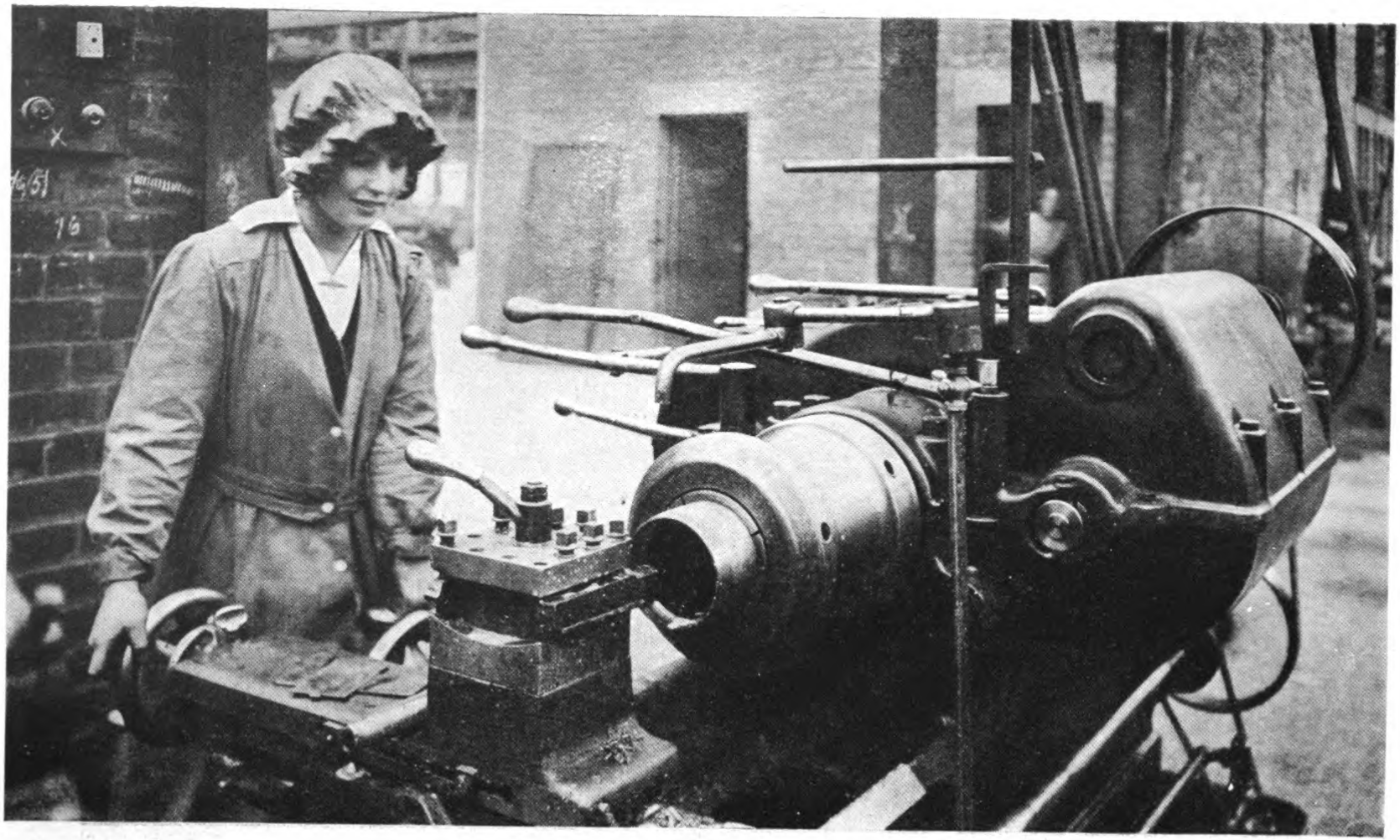
Tommy's sister is vastly proud of her badge, the pretty, triangular brass ornament she wears on her coat. It is only given to her if she is working in a national or controlled factory (a grave mistake, it ought to be given to all women doing war work everywhere) and after a period of

probation. In order to get safely over the period of probation she sometimes resorts to expedients that are equally humorous and pathetic. It is generally a condition of the greater factories that a girl shall not live at a greater distance from her work than she can travel in an hour. Knowing this, a quite astonishing proportion of the girls who apply at the Arsenal declare that they live in Woolwich. But at the end of two months, when they have proved their worth, and know they will not be dismissed, and have to go through a strict examination before receiving their badges, the number of "removals" they confess to would have been enough to employ all the pantechnicons in the district.

Tommy's sister (when she is a married woman) loves few things more than a good story, and hates nothing so much as the angular-looking maiden lady of uncertain age, with thin lips and a mouth like a slit, who lies in wait for her at the gate of her factory; or calls on her at

Woman operating drilling machine on part of a fuse.

[*Facing p.* 80



Turning recess of 60 pdr. shrapnel shell

[*Facing p.* 81.

her home with the object of lecturing her on the imprudence of her early marriage, or perhaps the improvidence of having too many children. When she can indulge both passions at once, her time of rest after meals in the canteen is a period of rollicking joy. One of the most popular of the probably fabulous stories in some of the factories at the period of my tour was of a lady of something-and-forty, aflame with patriotic fire, sweeping up in the street to a young munition foreman who was not wearing his badge, with the withering question, "Why aren't you carrying a white feather, sir?" Whereupon the young foreman quickly replied, "And why aren't you carrying a war-baby, ma'am?"

Tommy's sister is as honest as the sun in big things, but in little ones she sometimes has her besetting weaknesses, and in the matter of boots and hats she is not always to be trusted. The munition factories, particularly the filling factories, where both boots and hats have to be

changed, present peculiar temptations, and the dressing-rooms are always "a-askin' 'em to tyke things." One day lately a stormy party of girls swept into the office of a lady-superintendent to ask her to decide which of two claimants a certain hat belonged to. It was one of those little silk hats with a bow behind that are much worn by working girls at present. There were thousands like it in the factory. One of the girls produced a bill to prove that she had bought and paid for the hat. The other pointed to a piece of tape which she had sewn inside of it. The judgment of Solomon might have failed to say which was the rightful owner. After some deliberation, the superintendent gave her verdict in favour of the girl with the bill, and to a tumult of talk the girls went away. But the end was not yet. Going home in her little motor car a few minutes later the judge overtook the rival claimants and their relative sympathizers, walking on opposite sides of the thoroughfare, but now the lady of the tape was

sailing along with the hat on her head, while the lady of the bill, with her hair hanging loose and disordered, was shouting across the street.

Tommy's sister in her factory has the battlefield not far away and often knows by very near approach the whole tragedy of war. There is a young woman in one of the great factories whose husband was a gunner in the Royal Field Artillery. Being very fond of her he used to send her a postcard every day. It was not always easy to do so, but he managed it by carrying his cards about with him, and in moments of lull behind the trenches, in the open gaps of shell craters or even resting in the mud of the roads, he would overscore the lines that did not apply, leaving the line saying he was well, and the other saying he would write soon, and then signing "Dick" at the bottom.

Every day the young wife had received her husband's cards, and even when the big push began there had rarely been more

than a day's lapse in their delivery. But suddenly the cards ceased to arrive, and then came a telegram from the War Office saying that Gunner So-and-so, of such-and-such a brigade of the R.F.A., had been killed in action.

It was a paralysing shock. Death in war, especially in a war like this, a war of shells, has a stupefying effect for which life has perhaps no parallel—being yet more stunning than death in Eastern countries, where you may dine with a friend one day and follow his funeral on the next. But there was just one ray of hope in this case. The number of the brigade was wrong. The War Office was appealed to and it found there were two gunners of the same name and initials in the R.F.A. The War Office would inquire, but the inquiry would take time, and the young wife must be patient. She tried to be, still cherishing another expectation. The postcards would begin to come again. There had been trouble in the Channel, and perhaps that had stopped them. But

the days passed—three, four, five, six—and nothing came to her. It was paralysing, this blank silence. To *know* that her husband was dead, and that they had buried him—that would have been so human, so comforting. But this dead stopping, this silence, it was like being plunged to the bottom of the sea, with all sound and hearing gone.

Then on the seventh day came great news from the War Office. There had been a mistake. Gunner So-and-so had suffered no casualty. It had been the other soldier of the same name who had been killed in action!

When they brought the telegram to the young woman in the workshop, and she had read it, she first flung her arms about her chum at the next lathe, and then went down on her knees in "the street" to thank God for being so good to her. All the girls gathered round and cried with her, and then they laughed, and then they laughed and cried at the same time and were very merry.

But then came war's worst tragedy—its bitter, wretched, heartless, devilish cruelty. During the days of waiting some of the girls had discovered that the other Gunner So-and-so was the son of a woman who was working in the same shop and she was a widow. And now, with creeping fear, they left the scene of the young wife's happiness and went over to where the old mother was working. They found her with her seamed face ashen, her parted lips quivering, and her glassy eyes with a barrage of unshed tears behind them. She, too, had had a telegram, and she was still holding it in her trembling fingers. . . . O God, what demon invented war—what demon out of the depths of hell?

The war has been full of surprises, and not more startling have been the surprises of the battlefield than the dramatic and even melodramatic incidents at home, which are fast putting a period to the tall talk of the people who say such things "do not happen." In one of the smaller

London factories, where the female workers are relatively few (some three or four hundred), and therefore know all about each other's affairs, there is a story that seems well worth telling. It is of a girl named Lily Something, commonly called Lil. She was a delicate, fair-haired little thing, only eighteen years of age, and before the war she had been, I think, a junior teacher in a neighbouring Council School. Lil's sweetheart had been William Somebody, commonly called Will, twenty years of age, a bookbinder in the factory (a bindery in pre-war days), and not quite out of his time. They had not meant to be married for a year or two, but the Military Service Act came, calling up unmarried men, so Will had joined up, been put into training for a short period, and then ordered to the front. A day or two before going Will had persuaded Lil that they ought to be married, and after he was gone, Lil, to keep herself from worrying, had applied for work at his factory, where they were now making

the paper containers which, being charged with the explosives, are put into the shells.

The girls liked Lil, who was a little educated lady among them, though she gave herself no airs, and Lil liked the girls, partly because they had all known Will. Months passed, and Lil, being about to become a mother, was not turned off, as too often happens, but put to the light work of gauging and examining. At last she had to leave and a group of the girls took her home to the house of her mother, with whom she lived. The baby was born; it was a boy; and during the first days there was great happiness in Lil's home, and collections in the shop to buy bunches of flowers for her. But then came a thunderbolt—a message from the War Office that Private Will was "missing," probably dead. Nobody dare tell Lil; she had had a bad time and was weak and it would kill her. And there she was, with her pretty pink and white face on the pillow, smiling like sunshine,

and talking about Will and the baby. How he would love it! And wasn't it like him? The living picture! As soon as ever the doctor would let her sit up she would write Will *such* a letter!

Lil's mother found it as much as she could bear to listen and be silent, and when the girls came in twos and threes (nobody dare trust herself alone) to see the baby, they soon had to find an excuse for running out of the room, lest they should blubber in the little mother's happy face. Thus a fortnight passed, and by that time Lil had conceived a great and wonderful scheme—to have her baby photographed by a photographer, whose studio was in the next street, so that she might post it to Will and give him a delightful surprise. Only she must take baby herself, and have it photographed in her lap, and for this purpose, as mother, having lodgers, could not leave the house, one of the girls must please go with her.

It was growing tragical in the factory.

Lil would have to be told some day, but it would be cruel to tell her yet. At last one of the girls agreed to go with Lil to the photographer's—a big, soft-hearted thing, Mabel, called "Mybel," working on the night-shift. On the day appointed she got up early in the afternoon and went round to Lil's house. It was like going to a funeral. There was the little mother in the back parlour, up and dressed, and baby was dressed too, and everything was arranged with the photographer, and after the photograph had been taken and printed (it was to be finished off in half an hour) and posted with the letter, they were to come back to tea. It was heart-breaking.

But at that very moment there came a knock at the outside door. Lil's mother went to open it, and—Private Will himself came marching through the lobby into the room!

When "Mybel," amid gusts of tears, told the story in the factory that night, the girls laughed and cried like children.

"Lil allus seemed to know 'e was alive and well, and when 'e came in sudden like it was a bit of orl right, I tell ye. And if ye'd seen 'er going down the street to the photographer's, 'oldin' on to Will's arm, and 'im carryin' the byby, she wasn't lookin' 'alf glad, was she?"

Tommy's sister is "a proper kiddy," as Tommy himself would say, but it would not be right to put too much on her. We have to remember her sex and its perils, and her youth and its dangers. That is why the Ministry of Munitions have established a Welfare Department, whereof the object is to humanize the work of the women while they are in the factories, and to guard and guide their lives outside. Great numbers of girls come up from the country to work in the vast Arsenal at Woolwich, and hostels for their accommodation have been opened in various parts of London. It must be admitted that Tommy's sister is not always "partial" to hostels, preferring the homeliest room that is her own in a labourer's

cottage to the best-appointed apartment in an institution. Something may yet be done towards giving the girls themselves the management of these hostels and thus stripping the institutions of their institutionalism, but meantime they are doing good work.

Better still is the propaganda work of the scientific committees which, under the direction of the Ministry, are showing employers how selfish and shallow is the old doctrine that you have discharged your duty to your work-girls when you have paid their wages. On going through the munition factories I have found no thought more insistent than this—here are three thousand beautiful machines; the owner walking by my side is immensely proud of them; the shining things are throbbing with a steady rhythmic hum that is music n his ears, and, naturally enough, he takes every possible care of them; yet there, standing by the side of one machine, is another machine of immeasurably greater beauty and complexity, capable of a

millionfold more variety of usefulness—that slight, seventeen-year-old girl who is working it. Shall he not take every care of this machine also? Only Tommy's sister, but a bit of the human machinery that is the greatest wealth of the world.

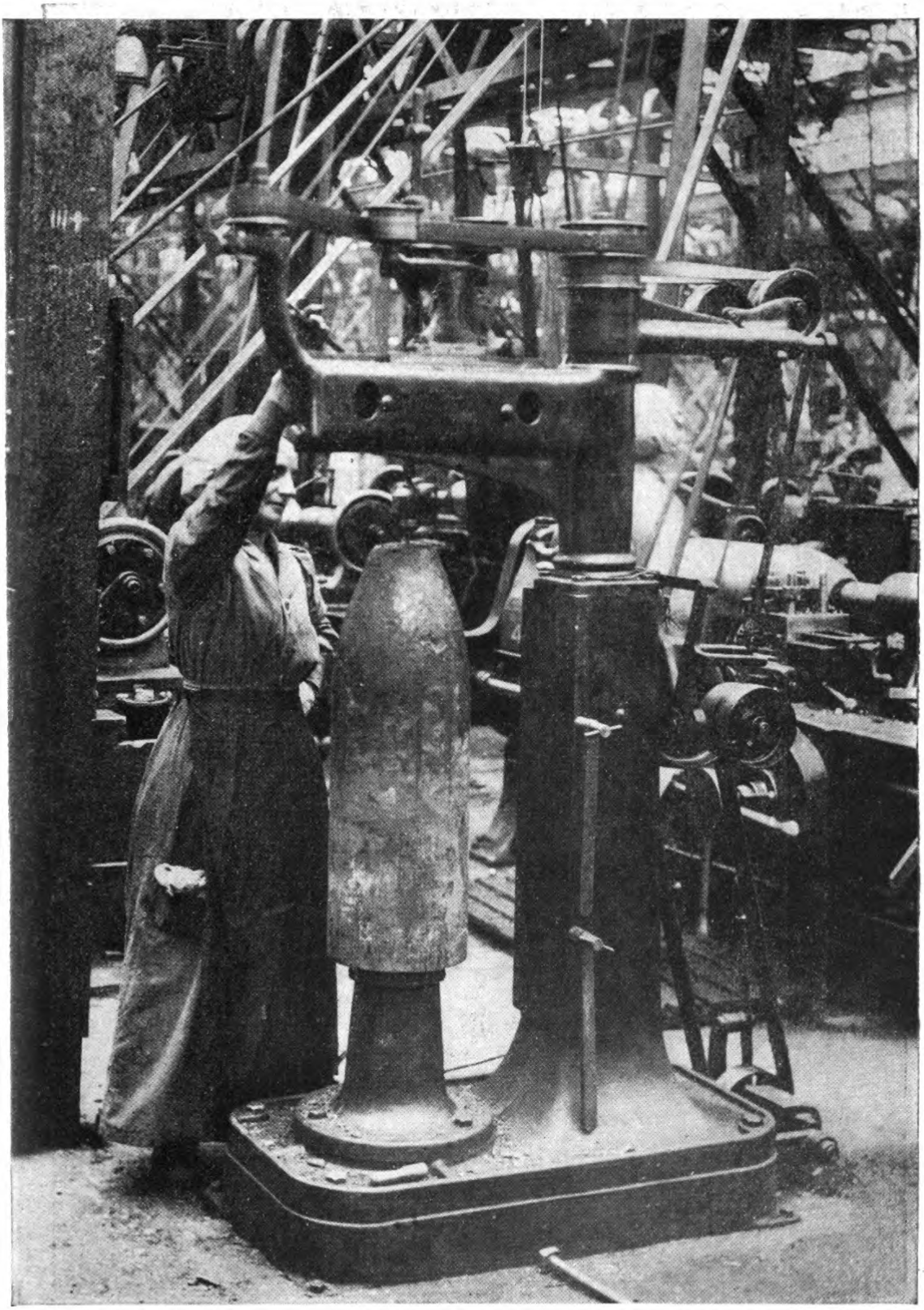
Tommy's sister has her faults, of course she has; God made her, as Mrs. Poyser says, to match her men, but she is wonderful, and war-work has done her good. Wholesome food, regular hours, healthy workshops, animated company, human discipline, and above all, the sense of being somebody of importance in the world, doing something of consequence, have made a better woman of her. In the long march of the centuries we see two general views of woman's relation to labour; one that she should be the drudge, doing without reward or recognition all the meaner and lower forms of work; the other that she should be the parasite, doing no work at all, being kept from its supposed dangers for the protection of her maternal functions, or perhaps

the preservation of her sexual attractions. Both are wrong, and both damnable, the one turning woman into the squaw, the other into the houri. Work, if it is right in kind and degree, is good for woman, and in this war the daughters of Britain seem to have found themselves. If, instead of five hundred thousand, there were a million of them at work in the factories, the British race would be the better for the next hundred years. Their work has increased their physical attractiveness, and it is not likely to lessen their fecundity. Doing a national service of immense importance has infused such a spirit of self-respect into British women as we have never known before. Earning substantial wages, and being free to marry or not to marry, as they please, has dealt a death-blow to that hoary old wickedness (prostitution in its various forms) which is based on the poverty of the woman and the wealth of the man. Let the German woman, in obedience to her imperial order, which imposes unbroken child-bearing

upon her that the State may survive, be brought to bed not of a son but a Hun. The daughters of Britain are free women, worthy of the men they are fighting for. And when our soldiers come back, with their flags torn but triumphant, they can line up and salute them.

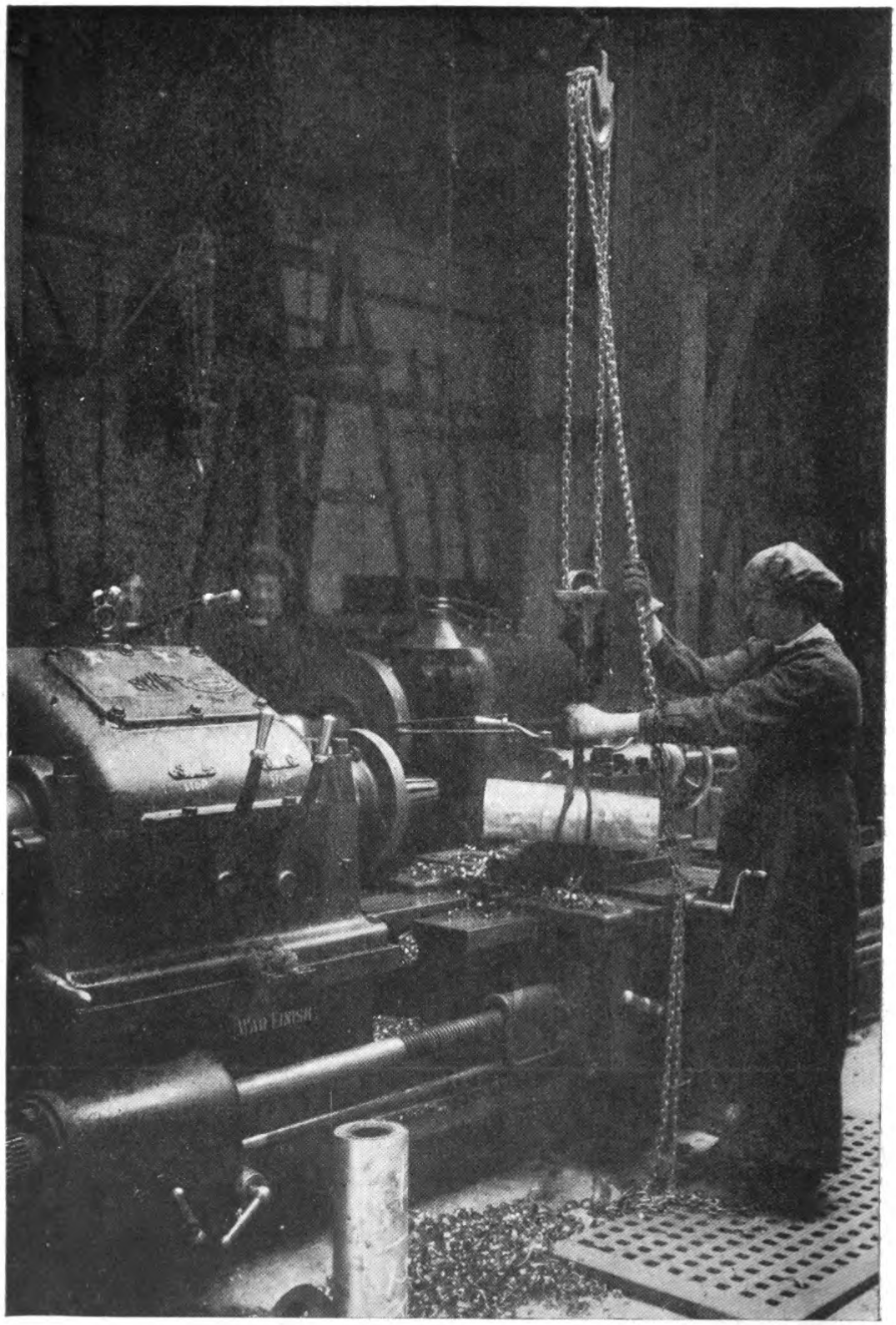
But when all is said, and we take a last survey of what we have seen in the vast munition factories of the London area, there remains the grim and perplexing paradox that women, being what they are, should be working there at all. We know what took them into the machine shops—the shortage of shells towards the end of the first year. But when we think of the "long procession" of horrors the war has produced, how the thousand industrial activities, which in times of peace are so dear to women because they make for our comfort and happiness, have been turned from their true channels into this black business of making shells, shells, and yet more shells; how thousands of millions of money have already been spent

in the forging of barbaric forces which have only been blown into the air, leaving nothing behind but the wreckage of the homes which women have made beautiful; how the dear and precious lives, which women have produced in labour and fear, have been destroyed in the same devilish carnival; how women all over our own country are weeping the long nights through the scorching tears that will never be dried, for the sons they bore, the husbands who lay in their bosoms; and again, when we think that half the wealth we have been compelled to waste in this war, if it could have been spent in the enterprises of peace, in fighting down ignorance and disease, would have made our islands for the next hundred years just such a paradise as good women dream about, where no poor widow lies down uncomforted, and no orphan goes to bed hungry, and the cry of women and children is never heard—when we think of all this we ask ourselves, with quivering hearts, why we have ever allowed woman



Centering 9·2-in. High Explosive shell.

[*Facing p.* 96.



Special device for lifting heavy shell into the lathe.

[*Facing p.* 97

to take any part in this hellish if inevitable business, she, the giver of life, to be set to the making of the weapons of death!

Yet who shall say but that the unconquerable impulse of woman's sex which says "*Thou shalt not kill*" may be operating even here? Perhaps it was the greatest of all thoughts to bring woman into the war. No one with eyes to see and ears to hear, and a heart to feel, can go through the great munition factories without realizing that there is always thrilling through them a mysterious call to the battlefields, and that a kind of invisible hand-clasp is constantly being made between the women at the lathes and the men in the trenches. This mysterious call is the spirit of our race, the spirit that keeps it alive, telling our women, who are bearing within them the future of our nation, that our men are being destroyed out there in France—their husbands who are, their husbands who are to be—and therefore they must kill if they would not be killed, or much

worse than killed—left mateless and loveless and barren.

That is why no woman wants a regicide peace,* much as she hates the war, and prays God to end it.

* Burke.

CHAPTER IV

THE NIGHT OF WAR

CHRISTMAS is approaching while I am writing about woman's work in the munition factories, the third Christmas of the war. And in order that I may make (in response to many requests) a general survey of female war-work outside the London area, and give, at the same time, a broad if necessarily hasty sketch of the war-activities of the kingdom at this most critical time, I will ask the reader to follow me in memory and imagination while I attempt to describe three Christmas Eves—that which immediately preceded the war, that which is now so near at hand, and that which will soon come, please God, with

its blessed and authentic message of a righteous peace.

It is the Christmas Eve of 1913. We see the people of these islands approaching with steady hearts the sweet, short pause in the calendar of the year which goes before the Christmas festival. We see the streets of our great industrial towns surging and swaying with long processions of cheerful sightseers—women with eager faces, children with sparkling eyes, and men (washed and dressed after their work in the forge or the mill) carrying babies on their shoulders that they may see over the heads of the throngs into the brightly-lit shop windows, which are full of all dainty and beautiful and appetizing things, decked out with holly and mistletoe. We see millions of homes, each with its little Christmas tree, that is shining with fairy lamps and glittering with tinkling toys, and has its merry company of happy little people dancing around it and clapping hands. As midnight approaches we hear the ringing of bells and the singing

of "The Waits," and see people streaming into the churches, where the pulpits are decorated with ivy and red berries, and the walls of the chancel, above the tables of the Commandments, are pricked out in evergreens with the triumphant message, "Peace on earth, good will to men." In the Catholic churches we see the little Nativities which have been set up in the side chapels, with their tiny pasteboard figures of the Mother and Child, Joseph and his ass and the Wise Men of the East, for Christmas makes us all children. And because Christmas comes at a time of the year when want is keenly felt, we see good women, to whom God has given no children of their own, perhaps, going out into the fog and darkness of the streets to look for the homeless and hungry among the children of other people.

Such in very simple sooth, although it seems so hard to believe it, was the Christmas of only three years ago—a few short hours snatched as by the angel of healing out of the immense sorrow of existence,

even while humanity was standing on the brink of tragic abysses. And now what about the Christmas of 1916 ?

Already we realize that there is to be no rest, no calm, perhaps no holiday, or next to none, in any of the greater munition factories. A hideous crime has been committed, a foul plot against the welfare of the nations has been hatched, and if the whirl of blazing misery which it has already brought upon mankind is to be beaten down, we must go on working. Shells, shells, and yet more shells must be made and sent across the sea that the carnage may be stopped, that civilization may be saved, and (awful and inexplicable mystery) that Christianity may be justified.

But what a spectacle for Christmas Eve ! We see the coasts of our islands blackened out, lest from the dark waters about them (which were " to serve us in the office of a wall ") that offal of all fighting-craft, the submarine, should fall unawares on our sleeping towns which lie breast-open to the sea. Our streets

are darkened, and our church bells are silenced, lest the lights of the one, and the music of the other, should betray our presence to that agent of the devil, the Zeppelin, which is riding above the clouds three miles up in the sky. Behind the dark blinds of our houses our young children may be playing, but their young mothers are watching them with quivering hearts, in fear of the black fate that may fall on them at any time. Our churches are, perhaps, full at the midnight services, but chiefly with women; and while the organ is played and the anthem sung they are trying, too often in vain, to pierce the veil which interposes between them and the divine wisdom, to bow before the Unknown Will, to believe that everything is for the best, to feel that God's ways are sure; or perhaps, under the recent shock of heart-shaking news, to persuade themselves (ah, how hard it is, how infinitely pitiful!) that great as was the glory they had pictured for the future lives of their brilliant boys, death on the battlefield

has been a yet greater glory than any they ever dreamed of.

From north to south, from east to west, our people are at work making munitions of war, and more than five hundred thousand of them are women. We look along the "garden of England," from the harassed coast of Kent, across the wild west country, to where the feet of Cornwall dip into the sea. Once at least in times long past this long stretch of our island was swept by the wings of war, and more than once by the storms of religious strife, leaving the splendid stories of both in the stones of the cathedral cities, Canterbury, Winchester, Salisbury, Exeter, Truro, whose great names are woven into the history of England, through many centuries. But another war is here now, a silent, muffled, semi-subterranean war, in the great factories for the manufacture of deadly explosives, and the filling of the shells, as well as in the tin mines of Redruth and the copper mines of St. Just, not to speak of the coal

mines of Cardiff, whose tall shafts may be seen at night before the glow of the smelting works of South Wales at a far view across the Severn. The women of the west country, like the women of Wales, love to sing in the little square chapels that lie scattered over their dales like sparks from some celestial anvils; but there is no time for that now. Christmas as it is, the mines must work at full speed if the furnaces and factories of the kingdom are to be fed.

Then we glance along the midland counties from the coast of Norfolk, with the salt spray on its face, to where, beyond the Black Country, the green mountains of Merioneth look into the blue waters of St. George's Channel. War has been here, too, and some of the memorials of it remain in the grim old castles which looked brave and formidable, perhaps, in the days when the Ironsides stood under them, or in the nights when Elizabeth and her followers went up into them by the light of torches, though they seem

foolish enough now, when one shot from a howitzer would probably make such a breach in their broad-bastioned walls as an army might pass through. Romance has been here, too, for the great forest of Arden, sacred to the memory of Shakespeare's sweetest heroine, stretched as far as to the fringe of Birmingham, where now there is another and much greater forest—the forest of innumerable tall chimneys from the great factories of the smiths, engineers and glass-blowers who have done so much to make man's life on the earth human and clean. They are doing other and deadlier work now, and as one drives up in the darkness towards Coventry and the vast amphitheatre of the great capital of the Midlands, and sees the wide glare with which it lights up the night sky, like a fiery buckle in the blazing belt of England, visible, one thinks, from the middle of the North Sea, and bidding defiance to Zeppelins, one remembers that tens of thousands of women are working here also. They love the theatre and the

cinema, these midland women, but there is no time for either. Fuses, cartridges, cartridge cylinders, small arms, hand grenades, aeroplanes, Lewis machine-guns and the big guns must continue to be made, if the lives of our men across the sea are to be saved.

Then we look along our northern counties from the Mersey to the Wharfe, and up, perhaps, at an oblique angle to the Tyne. Some of the quaint old castles of former days are here too, looking like ghosts that have not heard the cock-crow and are surprised by the dawn. But here, also, is a line of the great towns which have stood for the finest activities of England for nearly five hundred years, and now again are standing for much of her greatest effort in her utmost need. At one end of this broad belt of Britain glycerine is being made towards the manufacture of gun cotton, and at the other end the big "Nasmyths" are being forged that hammer out our steel, the thick armour is being rolled that is to be

the breastplate of our battleships, while in dockyards as big as Marston Moor, the great battleships themselves are being built in every operation, from their solid keel to the crackling wireless apparatus that is to quiver and crack at their mast-heads. Between these two, along the banks of rivers and canals, are the immense mills with innumerable eyes, which in times of peace took cotton and wool from all parts of the earth and sent them back in textile goods to the limits of the sea, and are now working, day and night, by the help of tens of thousands of women, to clothe and re-clothe our vast armies and the armies of our Allies. The women of Lancashire and Yorkshire love to dance, but there is no time for that, for the winter has come and the trenches are deep with rain, and if our men are to fight they must be kept warm and dry.

Then we look along the great border country from Berwick to the Brigs o' Ayre, where Burns whistled to the plough, and where Wallace and Bruce made

history in the brave, bad times of strife between Scotland and England, leaving Scott, in a later day, to tell the tale of it. Yesterday the heather was blooming, the peat smoke was rising, and the wild geese were screaming over broad stretches of this open country; and now strange new cities, such as the world has never seen before, larger in their area than Edinburgh and dedicated to the duty of manufacturing guns and shells, have sprung up like the prophet's gourd. Numbers of women are working here, also, braw Scottish lasses, often fishermen's daughters, coming from as far away as Skye and Stornoway, and the shores of the stormy waters that swallowed up Kitchener. They, too, love to sing and dance, especially at Christmas and the New Year, but there is no time to lose now. The Great Push has begun, and if the enemy is to be driven back and back, over the countries he has laid waste and the towns and villages he has reduced to shapeless heaps of scrag, the work of

these strange new cities must not pause for a moment.

Finally, we look along the Clyde to the great city that gained its first prosperity, perhaps, out of the only British war that remotely resembled this one, when "the great Commoner," sick of the corruption and inefficiency with which it was being prosecuted, went down from his house in Hampstead to the mansion of the First Lord of the Treasury in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and said, with splendid audacity, "I can save England and nobody else can," and then, being made Minister of War, startled the Empire by asking for ten millions in a single year to prove his word. He did prove it. He made himself the first Englishman of his time, and England the first country in the world, and Glasgow, meantime, the greatest manufacturing centre in North Britain. But not even in his wildest dreams could Pitt have thought that a time could come when the shipyards of the Clyde would have to work day and night, and all

through Christmas and New Year, to repair the losses to our fleet of innocent merchant ships which, full of food, are put down without warning, in the solitudes of the sea. But that is what they are doing now, and thousands of Scottish women are working at this great task also, and must continue to work, if our bread is to be sure, and we are to preserve what Cromwell called "our mastery of the sea."

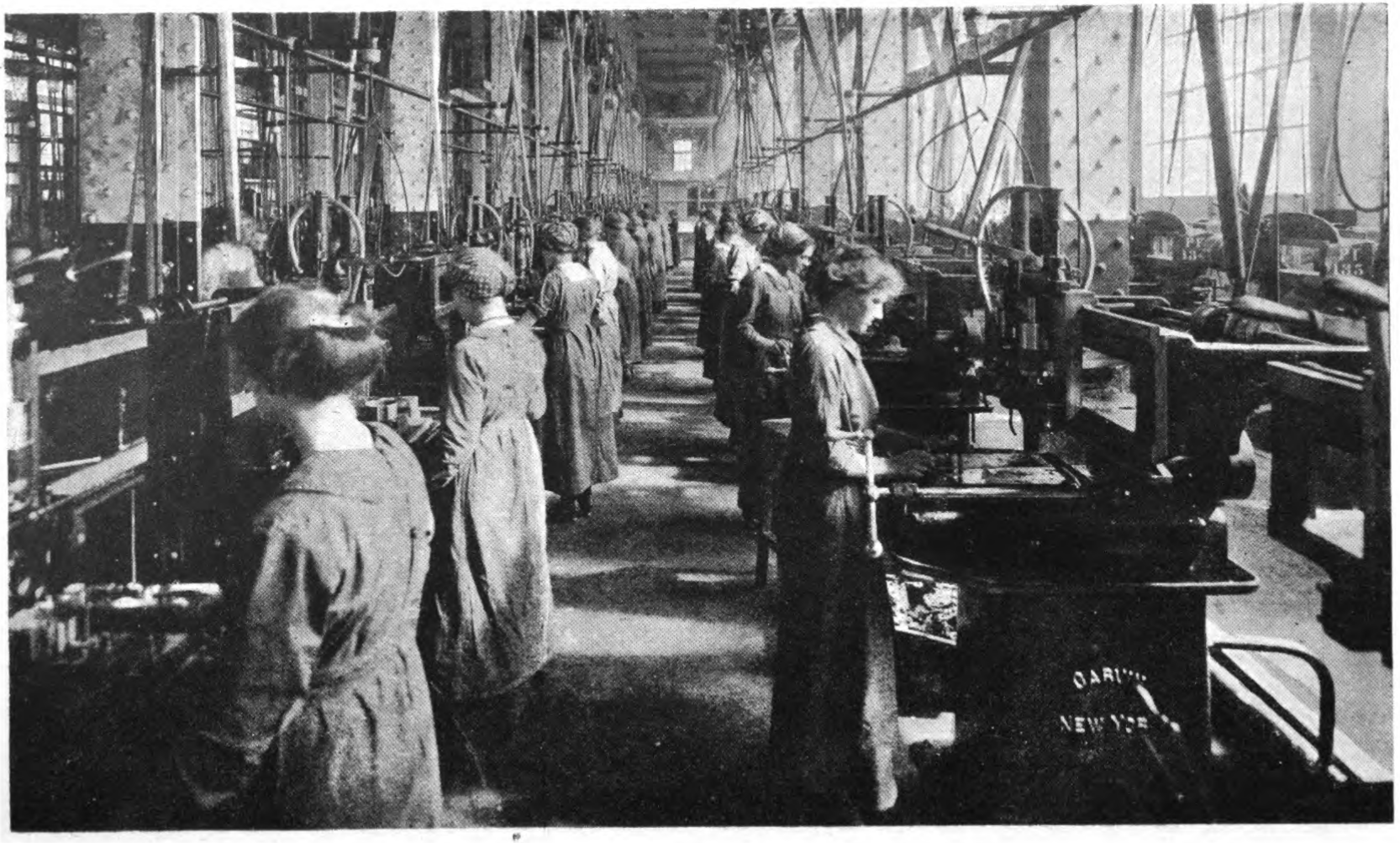
Such then, in general, will be the Christmas of 1916. It makes a tremendous, almost a terrible picture. That such, and of such kind, should be the activities of Great Britain on the eve of the festival of Him Whom we agree to call the Prince of Peace, and that women with their tenderness should be in the midst of them, is a paradox of almost perplexing mystery. If another Moses ascending another Pisgah on the Christmas Eve of 1916 could look down on our islands from Cape Wrath to Land's End, and from King's Lynn to Carnarvon, not knowing that all

the mighty labours in the plains below are intended to put an end to a torrent of rapine and violence and fraud, and seeing only that in this year of our Lord our people are submerging all their work for human welfare in the one sole effort of creating weapons of destruction, he would surely say that Britain was the kingdom of Satan, and that on the eve of the birthday of Christ Himself itwas singing a hymn to the devil. The blazing furnaces of Warwickshire and Staffordshire and Durham and Northumberland would seem to be the devil's altar fires, the smoke of their chimneys his incense, and the thunder of their engines his awful orchestra.

But thank God we know better than that. We know that while thousands of factories and forges all over our islands are working day and night to destroy life, thousands of houses that stand side by side with them are working just as hard to save it. We know that while half a million British women are making muni-

View of girls operating drilling machines on ball bearings.

[*Facing p.* 112.



General view of girls working on parts of machine gun

[Facing p. 113.

tions for the war, another vast army of them, their sisters in the hospitals, are nursing its sick and wounded. We know that the women in the factories and the women in the hospitals are working under the same general impulse, and that in spite of the war, Britain, with all her faults, is still Christian to the core. We know that what some of us saw on the Christmas Eves of 1914 and 1915 we may see again in 1916—the night nurses in the great houses of pain, as the clock strikes twelve, walking in slow procession with lanterns and candles, down the long corridors and through the darkened wards, singing the simple old ballads "Christ was born in Bethlehem," and "When shepherds watched their flocks by night," which come back to some of us who are growing old in the accents of an infant's prayer. We know that our soldiers, straight out of that hell across the sea, and bearing on their bodies the scars of it, being awakened in the peaceful half-darkness of their wards (such of them as

are able to sleep) after the shrieking of shells and the screaming of shrapnel, by women's soft voices coming from a long way off, pausing by their beds and dying away, will be stirred up to their throbbing hearts and quivering lips by God knows what memories of home and kindred. We know, too, that even where the wounded are our enemy's, not our own, the scene will be the same, and that it will make no difference to our women nursing in our hospitals that the stricken men lying in the beds as they pass are German soldiers, and that they are dreaming of their German homes. And that is why we also know that, sooner or later, come what may, we must win this war—because the heart of a nation is the thing it lives by, and the heart of our England is sound.

NOTE.—I have been glad to learn, since the foregoing chapter was written and printed, that by order of the Ministry of Munitions, the munitions workers (unless prevented by military exigencies) will have a short holiday at Christmas. I am told, however, that the order will not be of universal applicability, and that, with certain limitations, my picture of the war activities of Great Britain at Christmastide will generally apply

CHAPTER V

THE DAY OF PEACE

AND now what of the Christmas Eve that is to follow the war? None of us know when it will come, or what it will be, and perhaps it is futile and even foolish to predict. Yet a dream may be something better than an idle and useless effort, for the longest and blackest night may be shortened and made bearable by a vision of the morning. After two years of the night of war it is not for us, who have known its unimaginable horrors, to prate about peace until we see that it is near and know it will be right. But some of us who through the dark hours have been watchers for the dawn think we see the signs of it. For my part I take my

courage in both hands, and say we shall be a happier people at this time next year. I think the great Peace will come before that, and when it comes it will be righteous and authentic and bring tidings of great joy not to Britain and her Allies only, but to the whole body of mankind, who have lived so long in the deep bondage of an unnatural fear. I think next Christmas will see the war ended, our soldiers coming home, and the world lit up afresh as by a flaming torch. I think it will be worth ten years of life to live to see the morning of that mighty day. May I not venture to describe it as I see it ?

I see the great news of the new peace flying over Britain, not as the news of the peace of 1815 did, to the galloping o horses and the sounding of trumpets, by stage-coaches from Lombard Street, like spokes from the hub of a wheel, down the dark high roads to Bath, to Portsmouth, to Manchester, to York, to Edinburgh, but in one instant through the air to every corner of the kingdom, so that if

it goes by day the very earth seems to know of it, and if by night the darkness seems to hear and the morning light to tell of it.

I see twenty million of men on the long line that used to be their battle-front, breaking up with joyous cries, now that the thunder of the guns has ceased, and turning north, south, east and west, but always towards home. I see our own armies coming westward, war-weary, perhaps, but full of cheer. I see them travelling by train through the desolate country which has been laid waste for the next ten years at least by a Niagara of shells, but is to be known henceforward to history as the scenes of splendid victories. I see the life of the world already beginning again. I see a man ploughing a field that is not yet cleared of broken guns, shattered gun-carriages, and tangled masses of barbed wire; a woman milking her cow in a half-roofed cow-house, and children playing among the piled-up stones of a village street where less than

a week ago a child lay face down after the bursting of a shell.

I see our armies arriving in Paris, now our second capital, and full for all time to come of vivid memories. I see a flower-girl on the platform of the Gare de Lyon handing up a flower to one of our wounded men, who is waiting in his carriage to be taken round to the Gare du Nord. "Ah, yes, Monsieur looks pale, but the air of England will soon bring the colour back to Monsieur's handsome face." I see our men arriving at Calais, welcomed with handshakes, and speeded on their homeward way with shouts. I see them crossing the grey waters of the Channel—the English Channel still, thank God, but now swept of its mines, its patrols and its destroyers. I see them arriving under Shakespeare's Cliff at the Admiralty pier at Dover, and going ashore amidst tumultuous greetings. I see them travelling up through Kent, and wondering if the world ever saw anything so beautiful, with its grass that is really green, its trees

that are not torn through at the trunks, and its red-roofed homesteads, covered with ivy and with chimneys smoking for tea.

I see our armies arriving at Charing Cross, after stretching their necks in thick clumps through the carriage windows to catch the earliest glimpse of it. I see the platform of the railway station crowded with fluctuating masses of women, who have come up from every part of the city and from every quarter of the kingdom to meet the trains from France—the wives, mothers, sisters, sweethearts who are the daughters of Britain. I see all the distinctions of classes and all the reserve of strangers broken down, at the bidding of a great national impulse—one joy, one pride, one glory.

Perhaps it is night outside the station, and perhaps it is raining, but that makes no difference. As our men sweep through the streets, saluted by shouts, the big, busy, tumultuous city seems to them to be laughing aloud. Motor-buses, taxis,

umbrellas and bright eyes, eyes, eyes, are everywhere. And then how light! Is this really London, this brilliant, gorgeous, glorious place, with all its thoroughfares ablaze after three years of darkness? Our soldiers almost feel as if they do not know it.

And then next day, Christmas Day, perhaps (God grant it may be sooner), I see our armies of men going up to St. Paul's to thank God for their great deliverance. I see our armies of women workers going up with them, for have they not also won the right to be called soldiers of the King? I see such a congregation in the Cathedral as can never have gathered there before; not even at the service for Kitchener, for Nurse Cavell, or yet for the old warrior, Roberts, who died on the battlefield, within sound of the guns in the war he had foretold. I see the crimson altar, the white-robed choristers and the glistening winter sunshine that is slanting in through the windows of the clerestory. I see the procession of

priests and the hanging up of the torn but triumphant flags of the Somme by the side of the tattered banners that are the emblems of British history through a thousand years. And I see, too, that more moving than all the pomp of scene and ceremony is the sense which everyone has of the presence in the grey old Cathedral of another congregation that has not been called, and yet is there—the congregation of the armies of the dead. They died in the day of struggle, often in the night of defeat, but if there is victory now it is theirs also, and if there is rejoicing it is for them to share it. Therefore they are there with the armies of the living, above and about and within them, not lying out yonder in acres on acres and miles on miles of uncounted graves in France, under lines of wooden crosses. That is what seems to be pealing through the thunder of the organ and thrilling through the jubilation of the choir—the voice of the invisible hosts who died in the war.

I see the preacher in the pulpit. I hear him tell our soldiers the majestic story. They have won a great victory, not merely over human enemies (who may have thought they were doing right and were therefore all the more wrong), but over the powers of darkness which have been using our fellow men to destroy the living soul of humanity. For this reason God in His wisdom has permitted the miseries and calamities of war, that as once by flood so now by fire the world may be purged of its impurities. The earth sleeps full of the dead who have died to win this conflict. Over the tranquil graves of the millions who fell on former battlefields (Wagram, Waterloo, Sedan, Metz), other millions have fought and fallen and been trampled into the ground. In the drifting shadows of the North Sea, which has swallowed up through centuries of storm our bravest and best, mighty warships, which we believed to be invincible—amid the roll of smoke and the roar of flame, like creatures cut across the throat, and

screaming to the empty mists—have turned over and gone down in a moment, with every soul of their gallant companies. Yet our faith, and the fulfilment of the promise of this day, tell us that nothing has been wasted—no suffering, no sacrifices. The heroism of the martyrs of humanity has not perished from this planet, but passed into the souls of those who remain, so that none who fought for the right can ever again live for the wrong. That is what lifts war, with all its anguish and barbarities, into the "realm of glory, and gives to sorrow its recompense 'as darkness gives to night its stars.'" Therefore let us sing together to the Most High God Who through the grandeur as well as the sorrow of the times has granted to His stricken world a glorious resurrection: "Peace on earth, good will to men."

I see the congregation coming out of the Cathedral as out of a great confessional in which the soul of a whole nation in public, not that of one poor penitent in

secret, has been absolved and strengthened. And not in St. Paul's in London only, but in St. Peter's in Rome, in Notre Dame in Paris, in St. Isaac in Petrograd, and among the ruined stones of the desecrated churches of Belgium, I see the same great scene. Out of the storm of battle a new spirit of brotherhood has been born into the world, and men who have shed their blood together are vowing before God that never again will they take up arms against each other.

And then the singing and the shouting being over, the streets once more full of the trade and traffic of peace, and the spring having come again, perhaps, to heal the battlefields with "the sweet oblivion of flowers," I see another scene, less splendid but more moving, a scene which, sooner or later, will only too surely find its way into innumerable houses in these islands, into palaces as well as cottages—that of an old mother, sitting alone with the memory of her only son. There, perhaps, and not in cathedrals or

in parliaments, or yet on fields of battle, will lie the whole tragedy and ultimate test of war. What is it to the mother in her darkened dwelling that the tyranny of military domination in Europe has been destroyed, the liberties of the little nations established, the covenants kept that were made before she was born, by men whose names she had never heard of, and that the great empires of the world have entered into a league for the protection of peace, if all she has left as part of the price that has had to be paid for such triumphs and honours are a few soiled postcards, scored across with lines, a few scraps of letters scribbled in pencil from the mud of the trenches, and a few French photographs of her boy in his British uniform?

But I see, too, that an angel's searching eye is able to light up even that dark place of a mother's sorrow as with a heavenly torch, telling her that just as the woman who loses her child in infancy has a child always in her lap, and never knows the bitterness of seeing it grow up

to go astray and suffer, so the woman who has lost her son in the war has "a young man in all the beauty of his strength"* and the pride and glory of his love for ever beside her.

That is what keeps the hearts of the mothers of Britain alive, notwithstanding all they have lost and suffered. And the heart of our British Empire, too, which is the mother of all of us, may yet find comfort in the same deep thought—that her loss may be her gain; that those of her children who died earliest may live the longest; that her vast armies that have fallen in the war may be the multitude of her invisible subjects who will rule her in the days of peace; that dark as it sometimes seems to be, even now, the sky is shot through with gleams from the morning, and that as long as the night lasts we must work on and fight on (cruelly hard as it is to say so) in the sure and certain hope that we shall be the happiest and most united people that have

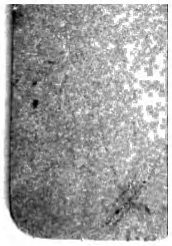
* Maeterlinck.

ever lived on British soil if we are here to see the dawn.

And that, too, is why some of us who hate war with all our souls, and would gladly die to end it, are living and working for that great day and the hope of seeing it.

THE END

PRINTED AT
THE CHAPEL RIVER PRESS,
KINGSTON, SURREY.



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