

much of goodness as I do. I try to spur them to revolt against the hideous conditions under which they live."

She uttered a deprecating snort, and spoke of their need of "higher things." The American, scenting the breath of conflict between us, tactfully interposed with questions of the neighbourhood and its history.

The guests gathered at the door of the small hospital building, eager to enter; but the matron met them acidly; her patients were at rest; none might enter. Even Mrs. Astor could not question her decision.

There was still something to be seen, for some of the "Tommies," in the shapeless garments of the now familiar hospital blue, were sitting about in wheeled chairs and playing on the lawn. Some stopped to have a word with them; but the ladies found them less willing to be talked to than patients prostrate in bed. The gentlemen, in their well-cut clothes, adopted a humorous tone towards these curious working men, who had never been thought so interesting before the War. The soldiers were surly, and little disposed to respond to their banter. The guests wandered away.

A poor fellow, whose bed had been brought outside, had his wife and little children beside him. He knew me, and signalled me to come to them. He was trying to talk cheerfully; but a dull torpor overcame him; there were depths of misery in his eyes. His wife, distressed by his silence, could hardly restrain her tears, but bravely assured me he would soon be well. When she rose to fetch their toddling baby running far across the grass, the soldier told me both his legs had been amputated, but his wife did not know it yet. Shocked by this knowledge, I found difficulty in facing her unknowing eyes.

Returning aloof from the house party, I was overtaken by the long strides of the American.

"It is glorious to come to your country at a time like this!" he broke in on me; "to see all this wonderful selflessness and unity amongst all classes. I tell you it's an inspiration to us Americans! We did not know the old country had it in her!"

Some hot words burst from me, of hatred for such canting untruth, and of sorrow for the poor fellows we had left down there in the vale.

He answered quietly: "I understand you." His talk seemed quenched.

The words of my old great-aunt: "A fat sorrow is better than a lean one," knelled in my mind.

I was glad I had refused to remain till Monday. The great car was waiting now to speed me to the nearest railway station.

£15 had been collected at the little meeting and Mrs. Astor herself gave Lady Sybil Smith a donation to swell the sum; but of that anon.

CHAPTER XIX

PEACE EFFORTS—THE WOMEN'S CONGRESS AT THE HAGUE

THE War grew daily more terrible. The miseries of a winter in the trenches were followed by frantic efforts to break through the opposing lines, in which thousands of lives were lost without result. On the shores of the Dardanelles poor fellows were dying in attempting the impossible, the blockade was tightened—submarine warfare intensified. Behind the great offensive, Peace efforts were feebly striving. News filtered through that there had been a Truce in the Trenches on Christmas Day, that British and German soldiers had thrown down their arms to fraternise, exchanging little keepsakes and comforts, rejoicing in the respite from slaughter their mutual confidence had won for them, finding themselves as brothers in their adversity. This brief manifestation of human solidarity, banned from official reports, was never permitted to recur.

Vain efforts were being made to resurrect the Socialist International. The Dutch Socialists had given hospitality to the Secretary of the International Socialist Bureau, Camille Huysmans, a Belgian. It was their hope that on neutral soil he would be able to perform the difficult task of resuscitation. The difficulties were great, and Huysmans unequal to the task. The officials of the Majority Socialist Parties in belligerent nations maintained, until the end of the War, their refusal to meet the Socialists of the countries with which the capitalist Governments of their countries were in conflict.

The Socialist Parties of the northern neutral countries had met at Copenhagen in January 1915 and had issued a manifesto denouncing the War as a product of Capitalist imperialism and its secret diplomacy, and calling on the Socialists of the belligerent nations to be active for peace, and to work with renewed energy to conquer political power. The leaders who controlled the Socialist parties of the belligerent nations were in no mood to second such a pronouncement. Under the auspices of the British Section of the International Socialist Bureau, a conference, which was supposed to represent the Socialist movements of Britain, France, Belgium and Russia, issued a declaration strongly supporting the cause of the Allied Governments, and declaring the Socialists of their countries "inflexibly resolved to fight until victory is achieved." When this manifesto was condemned at the I.L.P.

conference, J. R. MacDonald, who had been a party to it, characteristically replied that it was a compromise. He urged his critics to "be very careful to remember the date on which it was passed."

Across the ruins of the International came the voice of Karl Liebknecht, demanding on the floor of the Prussian Landtag the democratisation of the franchise and of foreign policy.

"Democratic control by the people would have prevented the War. . . . Away with the hypocrisy of civil peace! On with the international class struggle for the emancipation of the working class and against the War!"

His words thrilled round the world, evoking the heartbeat of a multitude. Brave Karl Liebknecht!

Already on December 2nd, 1914, he had voted against the War Credits in the German Reichstag. No British Socialist was ready to follow his example. On March 10th, 1915, Liebknecht repeated his negative. We learnt with joy that on March 18th several thousand women, who had organised secretly with this intent, had appeared before the Reichstag, shouting for peace. Karl Liebknecht from a window in the Reichstag had addressed them. As punishment he was ordered to the Front—to his death his friends feared. He had been joined by Ledebour, Ruhle, Mehring, Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg in a manifesto calling for an immediate peace, without annexations, which would secure political and economic independence to every nation, disarmament, and the compulsory arbitration of international disputes. At Christmas Liebknecht had conveyed a message to the I.L.P. in London appealing for a new Socialist International.

In March a conference of Socialist women, summoned by Clara Zetkin, the International Secretary of the Women's Socialist Organisation, and one of the leaders of the German Social Democratic Party, met secretly in Berne. It was attended by delegates from both factions of warring nations, who met in their old fraternity, to utter a call for the speedy ending of the War, and a peace which should impose no humiliating condition on any nation. Unheralded and unchronicled, little was heard of the event. Women Socialists of all countries had overcome the nationalist hysteria of war time, which held the male leaders of the International in its grip. Clara had planned this conference with Rosa Luxemburg. They intended to go together across the frontiers to visit the Socialists of the other nations. Then Rosa was arrested. Clara saw her in prison, then went to Holland, but was unable to pass the Belgian frontier. She sent couriers to Huysmans but he did not reply. Soon Clara was herself in prison for four months; she was ill when she came out, but she persevered with the conference. The Social Democratic leaders declared it an offence against the discipline of the Party and forbade their members to distribute the conference manifestoes.

Amongst women of another milieu a movement for peace was also

germinant. At Christmas Emily Hobhouse, Helen Bright Clark, Margaret Clark Gillett, Sophia and Lily Sturge, Isabella Ford, Lady Barlow and Lady Courtney of Penwith had addressed a letter to the women of Germany and Austria, urging them to join in calling for a truce. Through *Jus Suffragii*, the organ of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, whose editor, Miss Sheepshanks, bravely upheld its internationalism, despite very great discouragement from the majority of the British Suffrage Societies, a response was received from prominent German and Austrian women.

Dr. Aletta Jacobs and other Dutch Suffragists now issued an appeal for a women's international congress at The Hague, to urge the belligerent governments to call a truce to define their peace terms; and to demand the submission of international disputes to arbitration; the democratic control of foreign policy; that no territory should be transferred without the consent of its population; the political enfranchisement of women; and the inclusion of women delegates in the conference of Powers which would follow the War. The conference was to cost £1,000; the Dutch Suffragists offered a third of the sum; the German Suffragists responded with a further third. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies under Mrs. Fawcett, which represented British women in the International Suffrage Alliance, repudiated the Congress; but a group of seceders from that organisation met with other women's organisations, including our Federation, in conference at the Caxton Hall to answer the invitation from Holland. The delegates were enthusiastic. More than 200 of us volunteered to go to The Hague.

The Congress now began to receive tremendous publicity. The Press condemned it; prominent women assailed it. We who had agreed to go were execrated. Mrs. Fawcett declared that to talk of peace while the German armies were in France and Belgium was "akin to treason." Mrs. Cecil Chapman, President of the New Constitutional Society for Women's Suffrage, considered the time "painfully inopportune" for members of the belligerent nations to confer. The W.S.P.U., which had been *hors de combat* and existing on occasional speeches by Christabel and Mrs. Pankhurst, now burst into life to oppose the Congress. The *Suffragette* reappeared on April 16th, 1915, after eight months' suspension, declaring in its leading article that it was a "thousand times more" the duty of militant Suffragettes to fight the Kaiser for the sake of liberty, than it had been to fight anti-Suffrage Governments. Nina Boyle, in the Women's Freedom League organ, *The Vote*, attacked *Jus Suffragii* for becoming "the mouthpiece" of the promoters of the Conference, and protested that the Women's Freedom League "refused to ask for more legislation—even reform legislation—until women could help to control and administer it." She marvelled that there should be Suffragists "who imagine it possible for them . . . to be an international power, and set in motion reforms vaster and more quixotic than any body of men with franchise, representatives, and Cabinet Ministers in their pocket, would venture to attack at the present moment."