II

As The Hague Ordains*

Article VII., Chapter II., Annex, Section I., of the convention with respect to the laws and customs of war on land decreed at The Hague in 1899, declares that, "failing a special agreement between the belligerents, prisoners of war shall be treated as regards food, quarters and clothing on the same footing as the troops of the government which has captured them." This ordinance furnishes the title and the text of this picturesque narrative of the experiences of the wife of a high Russian officer, who, with the gracious permission of the Mikado's government, took up her abode near the hospital at Matsuyama, where her husband was lying, a seriously wounded prisoner. She travelled across Europe, across our continent, and across the Pacific to reach him. On the way she gathered some impressions of our customs system which she expresses with great freedom. She opines that the great Republic treats tourists rather worse than Russia treats her exiles in transit to Siberia. Frankness of speech, it may be added, is the lady's habit. She is no less open in the chronicling of her contempt for the Russian official clique that brought about the Russo-Japanese War, its disastrous results, and the unnecessary sufferings and privations of the troops. The grand-dukes, Alexeieff, De Witte, Bezobrazoff, Kuropatkin, Stoessel, Rojestvensky—they all were frankly discussed by the captured officers in the Japanese hospital —Stoessel to be denounced and execrated more than all the others combined. The author reports their talk, and adds her own opinions of Russia's autocracy and Russia's inarticulate millions; of Tolstoy, the *poseur,* as she calls him, and of George Kennan and the British press and their highly colored pictures of Russian prison methods. She has only words of condemnation for her own country, because she loves it so sincerely, only words of praise and gratitude for the modern Japan.

Efficiency, with never a stoppage of the system, is the keynote of her picture of Japan in war-time—that and humanity and unfailing courtesy, not merely formal, but from the heart. The insolence of the conquering warrior she only experienced once, in a minor official. Those in authority never gave offence, and this not deliberately, but unconsciously, as the natural outcome of their code of honour, of *bushido.* The governor of the camp even took steps to prevent the populace from coming too near it on a night of celebration of some new victory: the *banzais* distressed the prisoners; moreover, the surgeon-general had complained that they sent up the temperature of the wounded!

This reads like a fairy-tale, but one must accept it with the rest of this account or reject it altogether. What civilisation at its best can do for the prisoner of war was evidently done by the youngest of modern nations. The author draws a comparison between the condition of her countrymen in Japan and

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that of the French prisoners in Germany in 1870 and of the Turkish in Russia in 1876. They were made as comfortable as they could be, but the narrative returns again and again to the feeling of racial humiliation of white men conquered by Asiatics. And in the background there was always the dread of a murderous outbreak of the peasantry should the tide of fortune change and Japan meet with ultimate defeat.

There are pictures of the volunteer nurses, ladies of birth and exquisite breeding, dainty and formal, of young Japanese officers of the modern school, *à l'Allemande*, with upturned moustaches, abrupt of speech, masters of the genuine military swagger, and of middle-aged commanders, *daimios* in uniform. The charm of old Japan is reflected on many a page, its art, its flowers, its cleanliness and industry, to serve as standard of comparison for the filth of the Russian village and the indolence of the *moujik*.

While apparently the author gives the fullest possible clues to her identity—she informs us that her husband is a great noble as well as an officer of high rank, a member of the court circle of St. Petersburg, of the diplomatic service, and of the international society that gathers on the Riviera, in Paris, and in London—while she thus seems to make her identification easy, one doubts whether she will ever be identified. In fact, one is inclined to believe that this description of herself and her husband is part of the fiction of the book, for fiction it contains, certainly in the form of a love affair of one of the Russian officers. One would expect the author to hide her identity as closely as possible after her *franc parler* about things Russian. But whoever she be, the main facts of her narrative appear to be true: they are certainly corroborated by reports of Japanese medical preparedness and Japanese humanity in the treatment of prisoners from other well-authenticated sources. Perhaps gratitude has somewhat overdrawn the picture, but even so, one prefers this theory to the only possible alternative one, which would suggest that this wholly delightful book is altogether a work of the imagination.

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