MISSING

The faith of the wife of a soldier that endured the severest tests

By Jerome Shorey

HEN Nell and Hester Cookson were left orphans, there was no doubt as to which would be the ruling factor in their existence. Nell was ten years younger than her sister, and pretty. Her prettiness had never been permitted to give her any satisfaction, however. "Never could expect to find any brains inside that doll's bead" was one of Hester's daily rebukes. It was not because Hester did not love her sister, but because she felt her responsibility to protect her against the cruelties of life, that she insisted upon this

axiom of their relations—that Nell must do nothing without her approval. There might have been, too, something of the involuntary jealousy that one woman cannot help feeling for another to whom nature has been kind.

Also, it is unfair to criticize too severely those upon whom heavy responsibilities are placed, without resources adequate to the situation. The sisters were not destitute, but the little annuity left them was barely sufficient for actual necessities, as necessities are measured by that class which inhabits the border land between the middle class and the aristocracy in England. They had been tenderly nurtured, well educated, taught to know and appreciate the finer things of life-taught everything, in fact, except how to make their own way in the world, and find joy in

it as well. It was not merely that the idea of a gentlewoman working was revolting to them—or at

least to Hester—but it was bewildering. What could they do? They knew music, but not enough to teach it; and everything else they knew was of about the same practical value—useful for social purposes and little more.

There was an obviously simple solution to the entire problem—anyone could see it at a glance, and Hester seldom allowed a day to pass without reminding Nell of it. This was, of course, that Nell could marry money. Hester did not even state it in the customary diplomatic form—make a good match." "You must marry money" she said

to Nell, over and over again. Perhaps it was this crude but honest expression of the idea that brought about the first and only revolt in the history of the sisters' lives. Had Hester taken a less desperate view of the situation, and tactfully managed to keep before Nell's attention the various desirable possibilities among the men of their acquaintance, there might have been a different story to tell. But with the cold, calculating manner of a social auditor, she appraised every man they met, maligned their possible virtues, until Nell could hardly endure it.

Even then, the habit of obedience might have broken down her resistance, only for the arrival in Nell's life of a romance which drove out all thought of any course of action incompatible with its demands. It happened quite suddenly, before Hester could take any steps to prevent it from coming to a crisis. The sisters attended a bazaar, given for a war charity. Hester approved of her sister's activities in such matters, because they brought one in touch quite intimately with the "right sort of people." Of course, many undesirables were present as well, but this could not be avoided in war times, so completely were all barriers of caste destroyed. This very leveling was an advantage not to be scorned, for did it not also bring within their reach desirable acquaintances otherwise impossible?

The acquaintance of Lieut.
George Surratt was not, however,

such a desirable one, but it was accomplished without Hester's knowledge. The bazaar opened early in the afternoon and continued until late in the evening. Hester employed her time in hunting, deliberately, for the right man for Nell to marry, and so engrossed was she in this quest that she did not notice that her sister was almost constantly in the company of Lieut. Surratt. George's regiment was soon to leave for France. He and Nell were attracted to each other immediately, and the very feeling that they might never meet again had'a compelling force in drawing them closer together in a day.

The man's supplication was all for glory, for victory,—the woman's only that he be brought back to her safely.

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than they might otherwise have come in months. With everything at such high tension, true character dwells close to the surface, and before Nell and George parted that first evening, they knew that they loved each other.

Hester looked askance when the lieutenant called at their home the following day and she began making in-

quiries. That evening she took Nell to task.

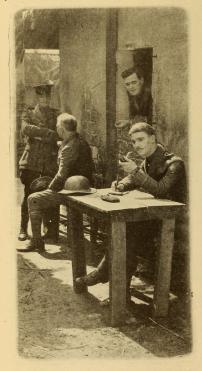
"You must not see this young man again," she said. "He is nobody—a beggar! Why, he has hard,y any more money than we ourselves. And he doesn't stand to inherit anything. He is quite impossible. You must drop him."

"It's too late, Hester," Nell replied quietly. "I have

promised to marry him."
"Marry him!" Hester exclaimed, aghast. "Never! You shan't, do you hear? You shan't!

"I have promised to marry him, and I shall-immediately," Nell insisted calmly.

This disobedience was unthinkable. The submissive Nell had never before displayed even the suggestion of such a possibility. Never having encountered the problem before, Hester did not know how to handle it, so she



George's letters from the front were replete with descriptions of life in the little French village, his assurances of victory over the ruthless foe, his hope and confidence in the outcome.

stormed, scolded and threatened. But the Nell who had found love was a different person from the listless girl who never had questioned her sister's authority simply because nothing had sufficiently mattered. So she remained calm and immovable in her simple declaration.

There was, inevitably, another scene when Lieut. Surratt arrived the next day to take away his betrothed. He might be called any day, and they decided not to postpone the wedding.

"Young man," Hester sneered, "how do you propose to support my sister?

We have discussed all that," he replied. "You do not seem to realize that life is somewhat different from what it was a few years ago. There are millions in England today who would regard you as wealthy. I have a little money, and that shall be added to what Nell has. She will be comfortably situated, and need have no fear for the future. She has assured me that she wants nothing more."

"It is not what she expects-it is what she is entitled to that I am talking about. I am here to protect her, and I

propose to do so," Hester loftily replied.

"I would like to retain your friendship," the young man answered, "but it is your sister's happiness I am thinking about first. And I do not believe you have the least conception of what is necessary for that happiness. I don't believe you understand her ideals. And since you compel me to do so, I must say it is obvious that you are thinking more of yourself than you are of her.

When she could find words to express her rage, Hester ordered her sister's betrothed out of the house, but when he went he was accompanied by Nell. So buoyant is youthful love that not even the shadow of war and George's impending departure, could dim the light of their happiness, much less the querulousness of a disappointed sister who, they assured one another, would eventually recover from her anger. They little knew the depths of vindictiveness in Hester's heart.

Surratt took his bride to a little village in the north of England and there they forgot-or pretended to forgetfor a week, that the guns were booming in France. George rented a little cottage, and made all arrangements for his bride to be cared for while he was doing his country's work. So the days passed swiftly, and they learned in the quiet hours of understanding silence, that they had made no mistake, and that the romance which had bloomed so suddenly in their lives was in truth a life mating.

One afternoon the peremptory summons came. The moment before, it had seemed that nothing ever could interrupt their happiness. Nell was at the piano, singing George's favorite song, "Bonnie Sweet Bessie, the Maid o Dundee." Her voice was c'ear and untroubled as that of a lark. As she ended George leaned over and kissed her.

"I shall never forget this moment as long as I live," he whispered. "No matter where I may be, I shall always hear you sing that song.'

Then the knock on the door and the telegram. He had to leave in the morning. But while, for the first time in her life, Nell faced the prospect of being alone in the world, entirely dependent upon her own strength, there had come to her a new vision of existence which lent her a quiet confidence. She nearly broke down once, as she packed his kit bag-the visual fact that told of his imminent departure.-but she pulled herself together, determined to be a worthy member of that vast army of women who were giving all that was dearest, to free the world from its awful menace. Yet when they knelt together for a little moment of prayer, the man's supplication was all for glory, for victory,-the woman's only that he might be brought back to her safely.

Nell wrote to Hester at once, ignoring their quarrel, simply telling her that George had gone to the front, and inviting her to come and live with her. Hester, realizing that nothing was to be gained by obstinacy, and that she

might as well make the best of things, accepted, and a week later joined her sister. She had been beaten once—in the critical battle of her life with Nell, and so there was less of her former spirit of imperious domination. Moreover, she could recognize strength when she encountered it, and realized that Nell was no longer the listless little girl she had always known. So she learned to have her way by more subtle methods, and as Nell had no interest in anything except her husband's welfare, their life together was quite harmonious.

One of the nearest neighbors of the sisters was Sir William Farrell, a young man who, owing to a slight lameness, was unfit for military duty, but who had made splendid reparation to the general cause by establishing upon his estate a hospital and convalescent camp. This was the center of the war charity activities of the vicinity, and the sisters soon met the philanthropist. Hester, always the sycophant, cultivated the acquaintance persistently, and invited Sir William to call at their cottage. He found it a restful place, and as one of his favorite diversions was sketching, he used to escape frequently from his numerous responsibilities and stroll away to some pictur-esque spot with Nell, for relief from the constant scenes of pain at his hospital.

Hester watched the growth of this friendship with sinister eve. There was no telling what might happen. The fortunes of war were such that any day might bring news of the death of the man whose insult she would never forget. The greater Nell's faith and love, the more Hester chafed against the memory of her defeat. 'So she lost no opportunity of throwing the two together alone. She might gain her ends with Nell even yet.

But Nell was supremely unconscious of anything that might be in her sister's mind, and whatever may have been Sir William's thoughts, he kept them closely in his own heart. He shared with Nell the joy she had in George's letters from the front, his descriptions of life in the little French village where they were quartered, his assurances of victory over the ruthless foe, his hope and his confidence in the outcome.

And when it grows quiet," he wrote once, "I can hear you singing 'Bonnie Sweet Bessie' again, and see you as you sat there that last afternoon at the piano. And then I know it will all come back again-it comes to me with all the sure knowledge of my belief in you and in my God."

Then came a day when there was news about George but not from him. He had led his men in an unsuccessful raid upon the enemy's lines, and had not returned. He was listed simply as "missing." He might have been taken prisoner by the Germans, but this was unlikely, as the Germans did not care to take prisoners, or he might be lying out in No Man's Land, dead or mortally wounded.



Sir William believed Nell to be a widow and he could not continue forever to conceal his love for her. At last he found occasion to plead his cause

Hester slyly persuaded Sir William to break the news to Nell, and he did so with all the gentleness and sympathy he possessed. He did not try to rob her of her slender hope that George might still be alive, and yet he showed her carefully how little chance there was that such might be the case. Yet somehow, she could not believe that George was dead. It was not that she did not recognize the logic of what was told her, but there was an unquenchable feeling that somewhere he still lived. Nor did this feeling pass away with the passing weeks. No news arrived, and there was nothing upon which to base either hope or fear, but still Nell clung to that positive assurance that George would vet return.

For several months, Hester made no open attempt to combat this belief. The memory of her other defeat was too keen to permit her to risk another open encounter where Nell's love was concerned. So she satisfied herself with subtly encouraging Sir William, and noted with satisfaction that Sir William needed but little encouragement. At last she felt that she might risk a suggestion.

"Sir William is very fond of you, my dear," Hester remarked, one morning, with an attempt to be quite casual. "He has been very kind," Nell replied. "I don't know

how I should have got along without his sympathy and understanding." "You can have much more than his sympathy, if you

will accept it." Hester said, insinuatingly.

"What do you mean?"



Little by little the gleam of intelligence returned to his eyes. Nell's voice trembled so she could hardly sing on, but somehow she managed.

"Oh don't be such a silly. The man's in love with you."

"Hester!"

"Well, what of it?"

"If I thought that-oh! But he knows how I feel about

"It's time you came to your senses, sister. You surely aren't going to mope all your life over-

"Hester!" Nell's voice was firm and commanding. "Perhaps you had better never speak of George again, until he returns."

Nell turned from her sister and went out into the garden. Her brain was in a turmoil. Surely Sir William was not thinking what Hester had hinted. Yet it was, of course, possible. She knew that she could give no reason for her absolute confidence that George would return. She knew that, to everyone else, she was a widow. At any rate, she

would not precipitate matters, but at least she would be on her guard. So she succeeded in retaining Sir William's friendship without giving him any opening for a declaration of his feelings.

Nearly a year after George had been reported missing there came a letter addressed to Nell, the envelope bearing the mark of a base hospital in France. Nell was not at home at the time, and Hester opened the letter. It was from Dr. How-

Missing

NARRATED by permission from the Paramount photoplay, based upon the novel by Mrs. Humphrey Ward, produced with the following cast:

Sir William Farrell . . . Thomas Meighan Lieut. George Surratt...Robert Gordon
 Dr. Howson.
 Winter Hall

 Nell.
 Sylvia Bremer

 Hester.
 Ola Humphrey
 son, a friend of the family, who was in charge of the hospital, and it read:

"Without desiring to arouse your hopes too strongly, I still feel that I should tell you there is a patient here who, I believe, may prove to be your husband. He was found wandering about in a village we recaptured, wearing a German uniform. He seemed to be completely deaf and his mind a perfect blank. He was suffering from a complication of ailments, and it was impossible to get any information from him. I met your husband but once, and there is no one here who could identify him. If it is he, however, he has changed terribly, from the suffering he has undergone, and he is still far from being out of danger. If you come, be prepared for a shock."

Hester quickly decided upon her course. There was no use letting Neil know the situation until the facts were established. She would go to France herself, first. So she made an excuse that she wanted to go to London for a few weeks, and left for the hospital.

One glance was sufficient. There was no mistaking George Surratt-Hester remembered his features only too well. But what a different George it was who lay on the cot before her. His hair was white, his cheeks sunken, his eyes dull. He was still in the same stupor in which they had found him. He looked up at Hester without a gleam of recognition. She turned back to Dr. Howson.

"That is not my sister's husband," she said, without a quiver. "I am glad

I spared her the false hope."

"Perhaps it is as well," the doctor replied. "The poor fellow hasn't long to live, I fear. We are barely able to keep him alive, but unless his mind can be brought back, it is only a question of

days before he must waste away." So Hester went back home, and said nothing of her journey. She warned Dr. Howson also against mentioning it, on the ground that it could not possibly do more than cause Nell further unhappiness. All this she justified to herself with the excuse that nothing could be done for George, and Nell would be better off to remain ignorant of his misfortunes. Eventually she would be convinced of his death, and then all would be well. In fact, it was now clear that Nell had been right when she insisted that George was alive, and when he died she would also, doubtless, realize this. So Hester concluded to stand aside and watch the drama unfold itself.

Meanwhile the seemingly inexhaustible patience of Sir William Farrell was beginning to show the strain. He believed Nell to be a widow, and he could not continue forever to conceal his love for her. Not all Nell's tact in

fending off the issue could keep him silent forever, and at last he found occa-

sion to plead his cause.

The temptation was tremendous. Perhaps she was wrong-only her instincts told her that George still lived. As against that, there were all reasonable And here was a fine, arguments. sympathetic gentleman of the highest type, offering her a life not merely of

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Missing

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comfort, but of opportunity to be useful in the world. His wealth tempted her not at all, but his ideals of the use of wealth opened up great vistas of desire to do something great for England. And yet, with all these temptations, Nell hardly wavered an instant. The thoughts passed through her mind only to be driven out by the one consuming thought of her life, that one day she and George would meet again and be happy as they had been in the past.

A week after Hester's return, the messenger from the village telegraph office came to the cottage. Hester answered his

knock

"This telegram's for Mrs. Surratt, lady," the messenger explained, as Hester reached for it. "Most special instructions to give it to no one else. "But she's not at home," Hester ex-

plained. "I will see that she gets it." "Why, Hester!" came Nell's voice. She had come into the room unheard by her sister.

Trembling with apprehension, Hester stepped back. Nell signed for the message, and quickly tore it open. It was from Dr. Howson.

'Your husband very ill in hospital here," it read. "Is now positively identified although your sister came last week and insisted patient was not Surratt. Come at once.

Nell turned upon Hester.
"You fiend," she cried. "You-"

But Hester had fled to her room and locked the door, and Nell realized that it was too important that she should speedily reach George's side, to waste time denouncing her unscrupulous sister. Gathering together what few necessities she could take on the journey, she hurried to find Sir William Farrell. She did not feel equal to the ordeal of making the trip alone. She showed him the telegram and he consented, without a second's

Two days later they reached the base hospital, and were met by Dr. Howson. He welcomed them, but warned Nell that she must be prepared for the worst.

"You will hardly know your husband," he said. "He has aged terribly. And he will not know you, I fear. He recognizes no one. I have had you come because unless his mind is restored he cannot possibly recover. We can do just so much with the body, and then all our science fails unless the brain is alive and helping us. We must have that determination to live which does not exist save in the conscious mind. So you must be brave, for everything now depends upon you.'

Nell was brave, not merely because she had become inured to the idea that had been instilled into all women of the allied nations through the years of the war, but because of her faith that still burned within. She knew that one day she and George would be reunited, and this was not vet a reunion. This was not even George-this inert body lying upon the The George she knew must come back. She would bring him back.

It was no simple task. She sat beside him, and smoothed his brow with her hand, but he only looked at her blankly. She kissed him, and held his head close to her heart, but when she looked into his face again there was the same vacant. bewildered stare. It was heartbreaking. but her faith never wavered. Then, of a sudden, she remembered his words, that happiest of moments, when she was singing to him, just before the fateful summons had come.

"No matter where I may be, I shall always hear you sing that song.

So she leaned down close, and began singing softly the song he had loved so well. At first it seemed that this, too, would prove unavailing. But as Nell began the second verse a puzzled expression came over George's face, the first expres-sion of any kind there had been there since they first found him. He seemed trying hard to remember something, try-ing but without success. Then little by little the gleam of intelligence returned to his eyes. Nell's voice trembled so she could hardly continue, but somehow she managed to go on to the end—

Her heart then broke, and she fer-

vently prayed, "Oh God in heaven, let me go too, And be wi' my laddie, sae gude and true

The song ended in a sob.

"Nell!" George's voice was a whisper -a weak, barely audible sound, but Nell heard it, and buried her face beside his on the pillow

A few weeks later George was able to leave the hospital, and go back to the little cottage in the north of England. Sir William preceded the reunited couple, to have everything in readiness for the still weakened man. Hester, he learned, had already gone, exiled by her own un-natural ambitions. And so the faith of the bride was proved, and the happiness of these two renewed-a happiness wrested from the awful conflagration of the world, which cannot utterly consume all joy, and makes that which survives the stronger for the tests which it imposes upon humanity.

An Authorization

A MARRIED man of draft age, who could not read or write, asked his wife to write the Exemption Board of his district stating that his family was dependent upon him. Here is what she wrote, and which he guilelessly presented to the Board in person:

"Dear United States:

"My husban ast me to rite you a recommen that he s'ports his famly. He cant rede so dont tell him, jus take him. He aint no good to me. He aint done nothin but drink lemon extrack and play a fiddle ever sins I maried him ate yeres ago and I gotta feed sevn kids of hisn. Maybe you kin get him to carrie a gun. He's good on squirls and eatin. Take him an welcum. I need the grub and his bed for his kids. Don't tell him this but take Hiz wife, Mary mead.'