

## SOLDIERS' WIVES.

BY THE REV. E. HARDY, Chaplain to the Forces, Author of "The Five Talents of Woman," "Mr. Thomas Atkins," etc.

VIRGIL sang of arms and the man; let us think a little of arms and the woman. Women can do almost anything they like with men, and there is little doubt that if they joined together and set their faces against wars, these would never be waged. Instead of this they are attacked by scarlet fever, and favour the attentions of soldiers even more than they do those of parsons. They dote upon the military and are attracted by the pomp and circumstance of war. Since the Trojan campaign women have been either the direct or indirect cause of almost every great war, and it would seem that the Boer war is no exception. It is said that the Boer ladies "kept on" at their male friends until Natal was invaded, and that for years they had belonged to rifle-shooting clubs. One old wife literally led, or rather let off the ball, by firing with her own hands the first cannon that was aimed in one place against the hated Britishers.

Well, we may be sure that these Boer ladies are now very sorry for what they have done. They must have suffered from the war far more than British women, and that is saying much. It sounds well to be a soldier's wife in war time, but the reality cannot be very pleasant. And yet Hymen has been helped by Mars, and there has been a "boom" in military marriages. Engagements blossomed into fruit that might have withered in the bud had the warriors not become interesting by being ordered to the front. And now, when our soldiers are returning home to be healed of their wounds, the matrimonial effects of the war are still further manifesting themselves.

Certainly marriage is not encouraged in our army. If a junior officer ventures upon it, his colonel thinks that he has taken rather a liberty, and those of his own standing talk of another having "gone wrong." "This sort of thing," they say, "breaks up the mess and spoils a soldier."

And yet Wolseley, Roberts, Wood, White and many others still with us, not to mention past heroes, have shown that it is possible to be good soldiers though married. Roman soldiers were encouraged to marry, because it was thought that the shame of going home to their wives and families if they were guilty of cowardice, would make them behave as they ought. When the Guards were leaving London for the Boer war, a girl who had lately married one of them was heard to say to her husband, "Keep your pecker up, Dick!" "Tain't me," replied the guardsman, "as needs keep my pecker up, but Kruger." Sweethearts and wives have great influence in keeping up or keeping down the "pecker" of soldiers. When Nasmyth, the inventor of the steam-hammer, had been married forty years, he used to say that he and his wife were the same devoted cronies as they were the day they were married. On the 17th of last May Lord and Lady Roberts celebrated their forty-second wedding-day, and they can say what Nasmyth said. When her husband was in India, Lady Roberts used to accompany him on tours of inspection, and everywhere except to active service. Very few couples have been so little separated, and the value Lord Roberts attached to the help his wife gave him is very gracefully acknowledged in the dedication to her of his book, *Forty-one Years in India*.

The following is told of Lord Roberts soon after he had taken up his residence at Bloemfontein. He walked up to Lord Kitchener in the presence of several officers, and said—

"Kitchener, I am making an addition to my staff."

"Yes," replied the ex-Sirdar; "who is it?"

"My chief," replied "Bobs."

"Who?" inquired Kitchener, perplexed.

"I am an old man now," said Lord Roberts, "and I feel lonesome; so I have asked Lady Roberts to join me. Her headquarters will be in the vicinity of Bloemfontein until they can be moved to Pretoria."

Lady Roberts received from her husband the following telegram: "Received your dear flag." What did it mean? It may be remembered that when "Bobs" took Bloemfontein he had a Union Jack put up which had shamrocks on its corners. This was the work of his wife and daughters, and the telegram announced its safe arrival.

Lady Roberts does not care much for society; but Lady Wolseley has always admirably performed the social duties of her position. Few people realise what it is to be the wife of a successful soldier. Lady Wolseley has seen her husband set out for five campaigns. If, however, the face of this devoted wife bears traces of the anxiety she has had so often to endure, she has also upon her, on full dress occasions, the reward of victory. We allude to her specially fine diamonds, which came off the sword presented to Lord Wolseley by the people of Cairo. Another trophy of war which is greatly prized by Lady Wolseley is in a little gilt frame, and hangs in her boudoir. It is the autograph copy of the words spoken by the Queen when she proposed the health of the Commander-in-Chief at Balmoral, shortly after his return from Egypt.

There is no more congenial couple in our army than General Sir William and Lady Butler. In their case "The Roll Call" became the call to matrimony. Seeing the picture in the Royal Academy, Butler sought the acquaintance of its painter and gave hints for her next work. They became more than friends, and were married in 1877. Lady Butler is a devoted mother to her five children, and is quite unspoiled by success.

We all sympathised with the terrible anxiety Sir George White's wife felt until Ladysmith was relieved, and we admired the way she forgot herself in collecting comforts and New Year's gifts to send to the besieged troops. She was, however, very far from being the only wife who had to suffer from suspense and hope deferred, though the great responsibilities upon her husband made the ordeal most trying in her case.

"What did the Colonel's lady think?"

Nobody never knew.

Somebody asked the Sergeant's wife,

An' she told 'em true!

When you get to a man in the case,

They're like as a row of pins,

For the Colonel's lady an' Judy O'Grady

Are sisters under their skins."

I call to mind the devoted wife of a sergeant who, whenever I visited her, used to be surrounded by clothes and other things belonging to her husband. It was quite pathetic to see her airing them and saying that her "poor man might come back suddenly and want them if our chaps ever get out of that horrible town" (Ladysmith). She had no children and no one to think of except her "only husband." How painful must be the suspense of not knowing for weeks or months whether one is a widow or not!

Everyone who knows anything about the army understands the difference between a soldier's wife being on and off the strength. In the former case she has quarters and allowances, and belongs to a corps as much as does her husband; in the latter she is ignored, and has to exist on the five shillings a week or whatever miserable pittance her husband can allow her. The mistress with whom she last lived, meeting a servant-girl, said to her—

"Well, Mary, where are you living now?"

"Please, marm," was the reply, "I'm not living anywhere. I'm married."

The same answer might be given by the majority of those who marry soldiers before these impatient swains have got leave from their commanding officers to become Benedicts.

I saw it remarked in an American paper that our soldiers are treated like children, because they have to get leave to marry. Suppose, however, Mr. Thomas Atkins were permitted to marry when he thought proper, and bring his wife upon the strength of his corps, would there not soon be nearly as many women in the army as men; and how would the poor tax-payers like to provide these ladies with quarters, fuel and light, rations of beef and bread when abroad, and transport them from place to place? If a soldier were allowed to marry without any regard being had to his character or to that of the girl he proposed to bring into his regiment; if no question were asked about his length of service and his ability to support a wife, the suffering and drunkenness which are now caused by reckless and improvident military marriages would be indefinitely increased. And to what extent that suffering and drunkenness exist even now is only known to a chaplain or someone else who has had for years an opportunity of studying the painful subject. A soldier concluded a letter to the girl with whom he was keeping company as follows: "May God bless you and keep you from your loving George Smith." Certainly it is a great blessing for a girl to be kept from marrying a soldier whose character is not good, who cannot get her on the strength, and who earns only the pay of a private.

It is to be hoped that marrying off the strength will not be encouraged by the generosity of the public to the families of soldiers who went to the South African campaign, and that designing fair ones will not by the memory of it be induced to set their caps at soldiers on the approach of the next war. Wanted, a soldier going to be killed!

Before being severe upon soldiers for their reckless marriages, we should remember the opportunities many of them have. There are women who almost throw themselves at soldiers if a war makes them the fashion or they belong to a crack corps. The other day I asked a Lifeguardsman if it were true that girls paid them so much an hour for walking out with them and making them the fashion.

"Well, sir," he answered, "it is not exactly like that; but, in course, if a girl is out for an afternoon with one of our chaps, she will not mind giving a matter of a guinea to defray expenses."

And, indeed, soldiers who are rising non-commissioned officers may not be undesirable husbands. Their pay is as good as that of most working men, and their characters, owing to discipline, are more reliable. No doubt the woman who "enlists" has a good deal to put up with. She has no settled home, and is under command and discipline like the men, but she soon comes to look upon her regiment as a home and to take pride in it.

Soldiers might choose much better wives than they do, and there are no men who ought to attend to the maxim, "Mind whom you marry," more than they. I have known several gentlemen-rankers who could not get recommended for a commission because they had married social impossibilities; and certainly a young officer, before he unites himself to a girl, should ask himself, "What kind of a wife for a colonel or general will she be in case I reach that position? Will she fill the position with credit?"