

A LITTLE "SOCIETY STUFF" ON FIFTH AVENUE

BY HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON

ALL day long, in a window on Fifth Avenue, the ladies sit at their narrow white tables. They wear pretty headdresses and—with delicate, deliberate fingers—they roll long strips of cotton into neat bandages. This morning, as I left my club, I passed the window. Two men were unloading a heavy box from a truck. With a crash the box slammed down on the sidewalk and the men rested a little before their next exertion. One of them glanced at the ladies behind the window-panes. "Say, Bill," he said to his companion, moving his cap to the back of his perspiring head, "Look at those swell guys. That's what they call workin'." Then, with a tone of profound contempt he added, "That's just society stuff."

I moved on and waited for my bus. It was a little slow in coming. Suddenly the Avenue faded from my sight. Once more I saw the old road in Flanders. Endless it appeared; running straight into a wasted, devastated land. On both sides of it a row of poplar trees. Beyond, a desolate field, and here and there a ruined stable and a few blasted willows. In front of me, quite clearly, I saw a house and a nearby stable—all that was left of the home of a peasant. The door was gone. The windows had been smashed. A small flag (made out of a towel) with a red cross in the center of it had

been fastened to the chimney with a piece of barbed wire.

DOWNSTAIRS, on the tiles of the living room, a number of tired soldiers are placing the stretchers which a rumbling old ambulance brings from the front line trenches. Before they are taken into this cheerless place an orderly sees whether or not the men on the stretchers are dead. Those who are alive are carefully lowered to the floor.

There is no noise. Under their dirty gray blankets, dark with the stains of blood, the men lie very still. Their knees are pulled up to their chins. Here and there a hand gropes aimlessly at the fringe of a blanket. The rooms are full of flies. They come swarming in through the windows. There is a sweet smell of ether all through the house.

A doctor now enters from the little kitchen in the rear, which is an improvised operating room. He wears a long apron. The apron has not been white for many a day. The sleeves of it are touched with red. Slowly and carefully the doctor looks at the men on the floor and then he points to one of the silent figures. Two orderlies get up from the box in the corner where they have been trying to rest. They take hold of the stretcher. The wounded man opens his eyes. "Mother of Jesus," he says, and

makes a gesture as if to push the doctor away. The two soldiers begin to carry him out of the room. I hear his troubled mummings in the operating room, and then the merciful chloroform enfolds him in a deep dream of peace.

Once more there is quiet. The flies return. But suddenly the door of the kitchen is thrown open. The doctor reappears. "Orderly: you lazy beast! Bandages: and be quick about it!"

From out of the yard a tired orderly drags a heavy box. With an axe he hacks at the cover. The wood splinters but the box will not open. There is another oath from the doorway. Then the doctor throws his knife on the floor and takes the axe out of the orderly's hand. He pries it deftly under the cover of the box and leans on the handle with his full weight. Suddenly the cover gives away. He plunges both hands into the case and withdraws them, full of white bandages. Then he rushes back to the operating room. The hall is stifling with the smell of fresh chloroform and the drowsy flies—

AND now it is evening, and I am on my way to my club. And the ladies still sit at their narrow white tables, in the window on Fifth Avenue. They wear pretty headdresses and—with delicate, deliberate fingers—they roll long strips of cotton into neat bandages.

THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER

An Explanation of Why—With the Best Will in the World—We Cannot Sing Our National Hymn

BY ALEISTER CROWLEY

THE poor exile from India stood in the great hall. Everybody else had risen, was stamping, shouting, cheering. He had never seen such enthusiasm; it was the next best thing to a fight. He thrilled. He was about to hear the Great American People—about 15,000 of them—sing their national hymn. Only—it didn't happen. The band played it, thunderingly; and the people were all trying to sing. But only now and again did the effort become articulate. He turned to his friends. He saw that they understood his perplexity, that they were distressed, even humiliated. Presently they explained it to him: they couldn't remember the words.

So the poor exile got himself a copy of the hymn and bethought him of the cause of this great misfortune. For it is nothing less. America has a tremendous tune—one of the most stirring ever written. But it's quite impossible to fit the words to it. May one offer a suggestion as to the rationale of the matter?

WE have to go back a long way, all the way to Vergil and Horace and Catullus. Latin poetry has the most elaborate rules for distinguishing 'long' syllables from 'short.' We may dwell so lightly on this theme that we barely brush it with a dove's wing; we need only say that a 'long' syllable is one which takes a long time to say. Thus 'scrunched' is much longer than 'an,' though both words are of one syllable. Try to repeat 'an' fifty times; you can do it while the most fluent lady of your acquaintance gets through twenty 'scrunched's. The general rule is that it is hard work, except

for Welshmen, to pronounce more than nine consecutive consonants. Also, 'long' vowels do not go so trippingly off the tongue as airier trifles. So, too, accented syllables are really 'long' because one has to dwell on them to get the emphasis.

It doesn't matter very much about the fine points of this in ordinary iambic verse, such as blank verse; for the metre is very flexible. We can have a line full of 'longs' like "Thoughts that do oftentimes lie too deep for tears," with no other result than the intended one of making the line slow, heavy, meditative, melancholic. But, in a tripping 'dactylic' waltz-time tune, if you have long syllables where short should be, it produces the effect of dancing with a club-footed partner. Change "O mystic and subtle Dolores, Our Lady of Pain" to "O mystic, proud, reserved Dolores, Lady of our pain" and the lilt is gone altogether.

NOW this is just what happened to Francis Scott Key. He wrote in the then highly popular lilt of "Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle, are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime?" and he spoiled the whole thing—and over and over again—by putting in a long syllable where he most needed a short one.

"O, say can you see by the dawn's early light" is all right but for "dawn's early" which has to be pronounced "dawnsly" if it is to be properly sung. "O, say can you see at the dawn of the light" would go perfectly. This is not a very bad place; an effort will take you over it; but worse follows. "Whose broad stripes

and bright stars" is six long syllables. "Whose stripes and whose stars" is a little better; but the "whose" is always too long, especially before a double or triple consonant. Sing it "O standard of stars" or "O banner of stars" and there would be no difficulty.

Again, the line ending "half conceals, half discloses" asks too much of the breath. You have to sing "—ceals, half discl" in the same time as you would take to sing "daintily."

"As it blows, covers up or discloses" is a good deal easier. What a swollen-tongue-feeling one gets in trying to sing even "Their blood has washed out their foul footsteps' pollution." Always the same trouble of too many consonants. Try "The boss has amended the bad resolution" and it might be appointed for use in Tammany Hall, as a democratic rallying song.

SOMETHING of the sort occurs in nearly every line of this blessed hymn of ours, but the best choral steeple-chaser ever foaled is bound to come down over the "Heaven-rescued land" fence. 'V N R' and 'dl' are not happy combinations for the people who objected to the Russian offensive because it obliged them to try to say "Przemysl." "Heavenly land" is a bit nearer the mark. This is not to say that 'heavenly' is the right word to use; it is not the word, as a matter of fact, that I should use. And surely it is better to wait for a commission from the President to set this whole jumble right. Quite enough now for us to amend the sound without attention to the sense!

Observe that even (Continued on page 90)