

## HOW THE WOMEN OF AMERICA HELPED

### (1) Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, journal (21st October, 1918)

I am not to be persuaded that love of adventure makes war good, any more than the spirit of sacrifice, or the patient endurance of pain. Is it good for the world, for his mother, or that the boy himself, who is so gifted for life, that Rick (the son of a friend) should be killed. And for how many individuals of the millions of fighters has this war, after all, been good? To prolong it by one unnecessary day, hour, minute, would be criminally wrong - of that, at least, I am sure.

### (2) In her journal, Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, described being in hospital recovering from her wounds (23rd November, 1918)

A certain amount of bad pain may be good for the moral character - I may as well think so, though I don't really believe in Purgatory. But pain prolonged is degeneration, not purgation. I am losing, coin by coin, the last of the treasure of patience. I have been so carefully hoarding. It has reached the point that I want to remove the head of anyone who merely walks boldly across my floor, thereby causing a faint vibration of my iron bed, which at once communicates itself to my hyper-responsive ankle. I have learned, among my pillows, an art of timid stillness that would give points to a mummy. At moments, as after dressings, it seems quite too perilous to take a long breath.

### (3) In May 1919, Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant returned to the United States on the troopship, *Rochambeau*.

For adventure was only the keen edge of the experience with which our slow-moving *Rochambeau* is so heavily laden. Tragedy was its blade. I catch an arrowy flash in the clear American sunshine, where young men in civilian clothes move swift beyond the waiting crowds. Their busy patterns of life are traced in something hard and bright.

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"The hearts of the women of America!" cried President Grant. "When will they remain deaf to the call of humanity's suffering, and unready to respond with sympathy and self-sacrifice? Never—never, until those hearts themselves are no longer open to joy and sorrow."

When the sound of the guns swept across the vastness of the waters and reached the ears of the women of the United States, it came to them as one of those calls of which the President had spoken—a call for them to come to the aid of the sufferers in the mighty conflict. The response was instantaneous. In every great city in the States women met to deliberate how best they might render assistance to the men, women, and children whom the war threatened to engulf in its devastating progress. A short time later, as each mighty liner entering New York harbour disembarked its American passengers who had been touring in the belligerent countries at the time of the outbreak of hostilities, and from which they had escaped in many cases with considerable difficulty and suffering, there were scattered through the cities of the States those who, by personal narrative of what they had seen and heard, brought to the women of America a keener perception of the anguish they might alleviate. In New York, Philadelphia, Brooklyn, Chicago, Boston, St. Louis, Baltimore—in innumerable cities—ladies of social standing and wealth threw themselves into the work with characteristic American ardour.

Appeals on behalf of Red Cross work awoke the American woman to her supremest generosity and it was largely owing to her that scarcely had thirteen days passed after the declaration of war between

Britain and Germany, than funds had been collected and arrangements made for the early departure to Europe of an American Red Cross ship carrying one hundred and fifty surgeons and trained nurses with stores and medical and surgical supplies. Each day the subscription lists were open the dollars poured in, while the number of ladies proffering their services as nurses was so great that hundreds were disappointed in their ambition to render aid.

"My daughter has always felt that she wanted to do something for humanity," declared Mr. McAdoo, the Secretary of the Treasury, as he watched her departure by the *Lusitania* to take her place as a nurse in a French private hospital. The feeling that "she wanted to do something for humanity" was a common one amongst American women. It was an American woman, Mrs. Ternure, who with her husband was responsible for the establishment of what is believed to have been the first base hospital recognized by the French Government, situated at Château de Passy, only twenty-five miles from the fighting zone. All the supplies for the hospital—the funds for the establishment and upkeep of which were supplied by Mrs. W. J. Fitzgerald in honour of her son, a major in the Inniskillen Dragoon Guards—were sent from America, and the hospital was staffed with twenty nurses from New York.

Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, daughter of the late Cornelius Vanderbilt, spent a fortune on ten motor omnibuses, the clothing for three thousand men, women, and children, and a vast supply of medical and surgical appliances, all of which were shipped from Chicago. Ultimately Mrs. Whitney herself travelled to northern France to establish a field hospital behind the firing line.

Among the many influences that have stimulated warm-hearted American women to energetic activity in the sphere of beneficent "War Work" may be included that of "The American Volunteer Motor-Ambulance Corps." This Corps was organized by Mr. Richard Norton—son of the late Professor Charles Eliot Norton of Harvard—soon after his return from scenes of hospital work in Paris. Convinced by these experiences of the urgent need of help for the wounded—often left long hours on the battlefield—his Unit of ten ambulances, collected in haste, left London for France early in October, 1914, on their errand of mercy.

Attached to the French army, and presently vigorously assisted by British volunteers, this small fleet, manned for the most part by a group of Harvard, Yale, Cornell, and Princeton graduates, had developed in November, 1915, to to a convoy of some sixty cars working at the front.