

The Lady of Valparaiso.

Long years ago, while they were living in Cambridge, I knew Lady Frazer and, very slightly, her husband, Sir James Frazer, the author of the "Golden Bough". One afternoon I, and a few others of her friends, were her guests at tea. Lady Frazer was even then very deaf and she confessed how great a trial it was to her and she promised to tell us after tea the possible cause of her deafness. I cannot remember who were her other guests. Lady Frazer would always be likely to hold the attention of those with her and she certainly then held mine. I can see her still as she told her tale. She was ^a small woman with dark eyes. She had finely cut features and thick frizzy grey hair which stood out well from her head. After tea we sat round the fire for it was cold. She sat in a big chair and the firelight shone on her face. The fading light from the window behind her made her hair shine like a grey halo.

The event she described took place before she had married Sir James, who was her second husband. She was born of French parents but married an Englishman. Her name was Mrs. Lilly Grove. When she was left a widow she found herself the owner of some land in Chili. It lay behind Valparaiso, up country. She decided that she must go there herself to make arrangements

for the care of it or the selling of it. Lady Frazer - I call her Lady Frazer for she is now so associated with the name that I cannot call her by that of her first husband - arrived at Valparaiso confident that she was at the end of her journey. She found however that while she had been on ship board a war had broken out between Chili and Peru. The country was overrun by soldiers and it was impossible for her to reach her property so she was obliged to remain for a time in an hotel in the city hoping that it would not be long before things quietened down.

I gathered from what she said that a large hospital must have been situated very closely to the hotel for she heard of its overcrowded condition and perhaps saw the constant arrival to it of wounded soldiers. The fact that a European lady was staying at the hotel was soon known in the hospital and she was appealed to when a difficulty arose. The settlers in Chili were men of all nationalities and the matron and attendants could not understand the speech of many of the wounded men. A poor man was brought in who was not expected to recover. He was of French birth and wished so ardently to send back a message to his people in the language of his country that the matron felt she must, if possible, find someone who could help her to do it. Having heard that the visitor at the hotel was French she begged her to come to the dying man. Lady Frazer went and did all she could for him. While attending on him she saw enough to be absolutely horrified at the state of things in the hospital. It was overcrowded,

dirty, with an insufficiency of beds, mattresses and bedclothing. The men were lying on the floors of the ward and indeed anywhere where there was room, in the clothes in which they had fought. Food was scarce and badly cooked, the attendants ignorant. Wounded men would be brought in and there was no time and no means of making provision for them. She could see that the work to be done was beyond the powers of the matron and staff to cope with. She returned to her hotel much troubled at such conditions, but what could she do? Very soon she was sent for again. It was known that she knew many languages besides french and when any poor soldier could not be understood Lady Frazer was called in to help. She became a constant visitor but it was not merely her knowledge of languages that made her welcome. Her advice was needed. Her very presence would give confidence for she had push, go and a talent for organisation. In that hospital it was plain that doctors, matron and attendants recognised her leadership. As time went on more and more wounded were brought in to be treated. The matron fell ill, resigned or died, I can't remember which. Lady Frazer must have had some experience in nursing for apparently the headship of the hospital slipped into her hands. Her horror at its state had been growing the more she knew of it and the feeling that now she was in a way responsible must have weighed on her mind with a deadening weight. She did not tell us when she first thought of how she could get help but I imagine that it came to her when she was looking

out of her window and saw the english Man of War in the bay. It was watching over english interests during the struggle. She decided that she would write to the captain and tell him of the conditions of things in the hospital. She wrote. She asked him if he could possibly spare some men to do some cleaning for her. The captain did not fail her. There marched to the hospital about twelve Jack Tars who washed, scrubbed and polished floors, walls and furniture. They moved the wounded when it was possible to move them while they were doing this and did not leave until every ward was clean.

The new head of the hospital organised the work on better lines. She was trusted. The ladies of Valparaiso were roused and interested. Gifts of linen and other necessaries poured in, No longer was there so much despair and misery.

One difficulty was that the sick and wounded lay close to one another and although all weapons were supposed to be taken from them at their entrance, the men, with the help of their comrades proved themselves extraordinarily clever in concealing them. In the night Lady Frazer had to keep herself ready to go into the ward as soon as she could hear sounds. She knew that the poor night attendant would not be able to cope alone with men so wild so she would hurry to the ward and often she would find a patient in delirium flourishing some weapon, a danger to himself, the other patients and the attendant. Lady Frazer's mind was never free from anxiety, she was always listening for

some noise that seemed to promise trouble. The result of the strain fell on her ears. Her hearing from that time became gradually less acute. The war ended, her work ceased and she returned to England.

That was the story that she told us that winter afternoon long ago.

Not more than a few weeks back I heard that Sir James and Lady Frazer had been driven from London by the raids and were living once more in Cambridge. I thought I could venture to re-introduce myself to Lady Frazer and I hoped that I might hear again a bout her time in Valparaiso. I was told that she was very deaf indeed but I knew how often deaf people were glad to be able to speak about ~~the~~^a past event when they are certain of the interest of the listener. I wrote to her and she told me to come and call on her at her flat overlooking the Fen. I found her very frail, her hair still frizzy and framing her face, but it was now quite white. Her features were still fine but had become somewhat like those of the fairy god-mother on nursery tales. I doubt if she remembered me. Our conversation was carried on by means of writing on a note book but, to my great disappointment, she could not tell me her story again. The memory of her own adventure in Chili had faded from her mind, or was too dim to enable her to help me in any detail. She told me that perhaps Sir James could remember what she had told him about it and she would ask him to write to me but I

heard no more from her or from him. Then, not long afterwards, I read the news in the paper that Sir James had died and the next day came the news that Lady Frazer had died a few hours after the death of her husband.

I have tried to verify this memory of what she related to us but I have failed. Yet by speaking to those who have known her I can feel confident that the tale she told as I remember it, is true to her character.