

She Sacrificed to Serve

BY

Amelia Doctor

In 1895 a young nurse destined to sacrifice her life to serve suffering humanity was graduated from the Lutheran Memorial Hospital at Newark, New Jersey, U.S.A. This nurse was Clara Louise Maass, the eldest of nine children, born June 28, 1876, to German immigrant parents.

Already as a child Clara's interest turned to serving other people. At the age of ten she became a mother's helper before and after school hours in order to assist her parents who were very poor. In order to find expression of this desire to serve, she entered the Lutheran Memorial Hospital (then known as the Newark German Hospital) at the age of sixteen, to take the two-year course then given in nurses training.

Upon her graduation in 1895, Nurse Maass did private and hospital nursing until the beginning of the Spanish-American War, when she volunteered and was accepted to serve in United States Army field hospitals in her own country and in Cuba. Here she saw more men dying of dysentery, malaria and yellow fever than of battle wounds. When the war was over she received an honourable discharge, but soon afterwards volunteered again to serve in the Philippine Islands during an insurrection. She was re-appointed and sent to Manilla where she found conditions similar to those in Cuba. Here she contracted dengue fever and after seven months was sent home to recuperate.

In the meantime doctors in the tropical countries were fighting fevers which were taking a heavy toll in lives. One of the greatest scourges was yellow fever with its hemorrhages burning fever, excruciating pain and the final most dreaded and fatal symptom "black vomit". Because of this the Spanish people in Cuba called the disease "el vomito negro".

Physicians in Cuba were experimenting to determine the cause of yellow fever. They had observed that contact

with the patients, their clothing and bedding did not spread the disease. It was then thought that filth and dirt caused its spread. Major-General Dr. William C. Gorgas, head of the Sanitary Department in Havana, Cuba, began to rid the city of unsanitary conditions but even after the city was spotless, yellow fever epidemics recurred.

When this experiment failed, physicians turned to the theory expounded by Dr. Carlos Finlay of Havana, who already in 1881, believed that yellow fever was transmitted by the *Stegomyia* mosquito. His theory did not carry much weight because he had not been able to prove it to the medical world.

Dr. George M. Sternberg, Surgeon-General of the U.S. Army, was deeply interested in the subject. He sent Major Walter Reed, a young army doctor, to Havana to conduct experiments to determine the cause of the fever. These experiments were first made by exposing healthy volunteers to deceased patients' clothing and bedding soiled with vomit and excreta, with the result that this theory was ruled out. Then healthy volunteers were placed in a clean screened room and exposed to the bite of infected *stegomyia* mosquitoes. They were bitten, developed yellow fever and—all twenty—recovered; thanks to good nursing care. It was now conclusively proved that Dr. Finlay's theory was correct.

Clara Maass, in the meantime had become engaged to be married but when, in 1901, another yellow fever epidemic raged in Cuba, she left her home and family once more and went to Havana to nurse the fever patients in the Las Animas Hospital. She was intensely interested in the experiments, because she had seen much untold suffering. After the U.S. army closed its experimental station, Dr. Guiteras of the Las Animas Hospital, directed inoculation experiments because he believed that people could be immunized by giving controlled

doses of yellow fever. Of the seven healthy people who volunteered, Nurse Maass was the last, the only woman and the only American to offer herself, even after she had seen two of the six volunteers die.

On June 24, 1901, Nurse Maass was bitten for the first time by an infected mosquito which caused only a slight case of fever. She again volunteered and after the fifth attempt on August 14, she became violently ill with yellow fever and died as the result on August 24, 1901, at the age of twenty-five years.

Nurse Clara Maass' sacrifice for

humanity is considered of such great importance that Cuba and several South American countries have issued commemorative postage stamps as a tribute to the heroic nurse, on the fiftieth anniversary of her death in August of this year.

On her tombstone in her home town is found this inscription: "Greater love hath no man, than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". Saint John 15, 13.

(Miss Doctor very kindly sent this story from the U.S.A.)

Some Advice to Nurses

The International Red Cross Society has issued a pamphlet giving a brief summary of the rights and duties of nurses in time of war. The text of the pamphlet is given below by courtesy of the Indian Red Cross Society:—

In time of war, a Nurse's first duty is to give her services to her country and to observe its regulations. If you do not know your legal obligations, find out what they are, as it is essential you should know.

Your country has signed certain international agreements known as the Geneva Conventions. As a member either of the Medical Personnel of the Armed Forces, or of a Red Cross Unit assisting them, these Conventions give you certain rights; they also impose on you the duty of respecting their clauses and seeing that they are applied.

The emblem which you bear, whether Red Cross, Red Crescent, or Red Lion and Sun, gives you the right in time of war to the respect and protection of civil and military authorities of all belligerents; but this protection implies certain obligations.

Whatever your rank and duties, no one has the right to make difficulties for you, for having spontaneously nursed the wounded and sick—whatever their nationality. All the wounded and sick,

both friend and foe, must be looked after with the same care, and only reasons of medical urgency justify giving priority in any particular case.

The emblem you wear on your left arm—an armlet bearing the stamp of the military command—must be accompanied by an identity card. This card must be countersigned by the military authority under whose command you will be placed in time of war, even if you are enrolled in a Red Cross Unit. Never leave for any destination without taking your identity card, with photograph, signature and all necessary visas; you must never be without it when you are in the fighting zone. Should you be taken prisoner, this card will certify you as a member of the medical personnel, entitled to protection by the enemy command. In no circumstances whatever may a Red Cross nurse be deprived of her identity card, her badges and the right to wear her armlet.

The Red Cross emblem of large size is used, in time of war only, to denote hospitals, personnel and equipment protected by the Conventions; it may not be displayed on any premises without the permission of the military command.

If you work in a Red Cross hospital, remember that wounded and sick combatants must be disarmed on arrival, if this has not already been done. Able-bodied and armed combatants must not