LIBERTY GIRL

(ILLUSTRATED)

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BY

RENA I. HALSEY

ILLUSTRATED BY

NANA FRENCH BICKFORD

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ILLUSTRATED &

PUBLISHED BY

E-KİTAP PROJESİ & CHEAPEST BOOKS



www.cheapestboooks.com

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Istanbul

ISBN:

978-625-6014-54-1

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIBERTY GIRL (ILLUSTRATED) ____ *1*
Table of Contents ____ *5*
Chapter I ____ *8*
"God Speed You" ____ 8
Chapter II ____ *22*
Giving Her Best ____ 22
Chapter III ____ *37*
The Liberty Girls ____ 37
Chapter IV ____ *49*
The Liberty Garden ____ 49
Chapter V ____ *60*
The Liberty Pageant ____ 60
Chapter VI ____ *74*
The Strange Letter ____ 75
Chapter VII ____ *89*
The Visit to Camp Mills ____ 89
Chapter VIII ____ *102*
Seven Pillars ____ 102
Chapter IX ____ *113*
The Little Old Lady In the Red House ____ 113
Chapter X ____ *125*
The Sweet-Pea Ladies ____ 125
Chapter XI ____ *139*
The Ride Through the Notch ____ 139
Chapter XII ____ *151*
Nathalie's Liberty Boys ____ 151
Chapter XIII ____ *165*
"The Mountains With Snowy Foreheads" ____ 165

Chapter XIV _____ *178*
"Sons of Liberty" _____ **178**
Chapter XV _____ *187*
The Gallery of the Gods _____ **187**
Chapter XVI _____ *201*
Butternut Lodge _____ **201**
Chapter XVII _____ *216*
The Cabin On the Mountain _____ **216**
Chapter XVIII _____ *232*
The Liberty Cheer _____ **232**
Chapter XIX _____ *242*
"The White Comrade" _____ **242**
Chapter XX _____ *254*
The Liberty Tea _____ **254**
Chapter XXI _____ *271*
The Funnies _____ **271**
Chapter XXII _____ *282*
The Man In the Woods _____ **282**
Chapter XXIII _____ *293*
A Mystery Solved _____ **293**
Chapter XXIV _____ *304*
The Winner of the Prize _____ **304**





THE LIBERTY GIRL

BY

RENA I. HALSEY

Author of "Blue Robin, the Girl Pioneer"

and "America's Daughter"

ILLUSTRATED BY

NANA FRENCH BICKFORD

CHAPTER I



"Ah there, girls! How are you?"—

"GOD SPEED YOU"

"Oh, Nathalie, I do believe there's Grace Tyson in her new motor-car," exclaimed Helen Dame, suddenly laying her hand on her companion's arm as the two girls were about to cross Main Street,

the wide, tree-lined thoroughfare of the old-fashioned town of Westport, Long Island.

Nathalie Page halted, and, swinging about, peered intently at the brown-uniformed figure of a young girl seated at the steering-wheel of an automobile, which was speeding quickly towards them.

Yes, it was Grace, who, in her sprightliest manner, her face aglow from the invigorating breezes of an April afternoon, called out, "Ah there, girls! How are you? Oh, my lucky star must have guided me, for I have something thrilling to tell you!" As she spoke the girl guided the car to the curb, and the next moment, with an airy spring, had landed on the ground at their side.

With a sudden movement the uniformed figure clicked her heels together and bent stiffly forward as her arm swung up, while her forefinger grazed her forehead in a military salute. "I salute you, comrades," she said with grave formality, "at your service as a member of the Motor Corps of America.

"Yes, girls," she shrilled joyously, forgetting her assumed rôle in her eagerness to tell her news, "I'm on the job, for I'm to see active service for the United States government. I've just returned from an infantry drill of the Motor Corps at Central Park, New York.

"No, I'll be honest," she added laughingly, in answer to the look of amazed inquiry on the faces of her companions, "and 'fess' that I didn't have the pleasure of drilling in public, for I'm a raw recruit as yet. We recruits go through our manual of arms at one of the New York armories, drilled by a regular army sergeant. Oh, I've been in training some time, for you know I took out my chauffeur's and mechanician's State licenses last winter.

"One has to own her car at this sort of government work,"—Grace's voice became inflated with importance,—"and be able to make her own repairs on the road if necessary. But isn't my new car a Jim Dandy?" she asked, glancing with keen pride at the big gray motor, purring contentedly at the curb. "It was a belated Christmas gift from grandmother.

"But I tell you what, girls," she rattled on, "I've been put through the paces all right, but I've passed my exams with flying colors. Phew! wasn't the physical exam stiff!—before a regular high official of the army medical corps. I was inoculated for typhoid, and for paratyphoid. I'll secretly confess that I don't know what the last word means. Yes, and I took the oath of allegiance to the United States Government, administered by another army swell,—and that's where my Pioneer work proved O. K. And then we had the First Aid course, too, at St. Luke's. The head nurse, who gave us special lessons in bandaging, said I was A No. 1; and in wigwagging, oh, I did the two-flag business just dandy."

"But what is your special work?" asked Nathalie, for the two girls were somewhat surprised and bewildered by all these high-sounding, official-like terms. To be sure, Grace had long been known as an expert driver, but she had never shown her efficiency in any way but by giving the girls joy-rides once in a while; yes, and once she had driven her father to New York.

But war work, thought Nathalie, for this aristocratic-looking, sweet-faced young girl, whose eyes gleamed merrily at you from under the peaked army cap—with its blue band and the insignia of the Corps, a tire surmounted by Mercury's wings—set so jauntily on the fluffy hair. To be sure the slim, trim figure in the army jacket, short skirt over trousers, and high boots did have a warlike aspect,

but it was altogether too girlish and charming to be suggestive of anything but a toy soldier, like one of the tiny painted tin things that Nathalie used to play with when a wee tot.

"Do? Why, I am a military chauffeur," returned Grace patronizingly, "and in the business of war-relief work for the Government. At present I'm to act as chauffeur to one of our four lieutenants, Miss Gladys Merrill. Oh, she's a dear! I have to drive her all over the city when she is engaged on some Government errand. You should see me studying the police maps, and *then* you would know what I do. Sometimes we are called to transport some of the army officers from the railroad station to the ferry, or to headquarters. Then we do errands for the Red Cross, too.

"Why, the other day I helped to carry a lot of knitted things down on the pier, to be packed in a ship bound for the other side; they were for the soldiers at the front. We do work for the National Defense, and for the Board of Exemption. I'm doing my 'bit,' even if it is a wee one, towards winning the war," ended the girl, with a note of satisfaction in her voice.

"O dear, but wouldn't I like to drive an ambulance in France! But I've got to be twenty-one to do that sort of work,"—the girl sighed. "But did I tell you that brother Fred is doing American Field Service? I had a letter from him yesterday, and he said that he and a lot of American boys have established a little encampment of ambulances not far from the front-line trench. They live in what was once a château belonging to Count Somebody or Another, but now it is nothing but a shell.

"Oh, Fred thinks it is glorious fun," cried the girl, with sparkling eyes. "He has to answer roll-call at eight in the morning, and then he eats his breakfast at a little café near. He has just black bread,—*think*

of that, coffee, and, yes, sometimes he has an egg. Then he has to drill, clean his car, and—oh, but he says it's a great sight to see the aëroplanes constantly flying over his head, like great monsters of the air. And sometimes he goes wild with excitement when he sees an aërial battle between a Boche and a French airman.

"Yes, he declares it is 'some' life over there," animatedly continued Grace, "for even his rest periods are thrilling, for they have to dodge shells, and sometimes they burst over one's head. Several times he thought he was done for. And at night the road near the château is packed with hundreds of *marching* guns, trucks of ammunition, and war supplies and cavalry, all on their way to the front.

"But when he goes in his ambulance after the *blessés*—they are the poor wounded soldiers—it is just like day, for the sky is filled with star-shells shooting around him in all colors, and then there is a constant cannonading of shells and shot of all kinds. When he hears a purr he knows it's a Boche plane and dodges pretty lively, for if he doesn't 'watch out' a machine-gun comes sputtering down at him. He's awfully afraid of them because they drop bombs.

"But he says it would make your heart ache to see him when he carries the *blessés*. He has to drive them from the *postes de secours*—the aid-stations—to the hospitals. He has to go *very* slowly, and even then you can hear the poor things groan and shriek with the agony of being moved. And sometimes," Grace lowered her voice reverently, "when he goes to take them out of the ambulance he finds a dead soldier.

"But dear me," she continued in a more cheerful tone, "he seems to like the life and is constantly hoping—I believe he dreams about it in his sleep—that he'll soon have a shot at one of those German

fiends. Yes, I think it would be gloriously exciting," ended Grace with a half sigh of envy.

"Gloriously exciting?" repeated Nathalie with a shudder. "Oh, Grace, I should think you would be frightfully worried. Suppose he should lose his life some time in the darkness of the night, alone with those wounded soldiers? O dear," she ended drearily, "I just wish some one would shoot or kill the Kaiser! Sometimes I wish I could be a Charlotte Corday. Don't you remember how she killed Murat for the sake of the French?"

"Why, Nathalie," cried Helen with amused eyes, I thought you were a pacifist, and here you are talking of shooting people." And the girl's "Ha! ha!" rang out merrily.

Nathalie's color rose in a wave as she cried decidedly, "Helen, I'm *not* a pacifist. Of course I want the Allies to win. I believe in the war—only—only—I do not think it is necessary to send our boys across the sea to fight."

"But I do," insisted Helen, "for this is God's war, a war to give liberty to everybody in the world, and that makes it *our* war. We should be willing to fight, to give the rights and privileges of democracy to other people, and our American boys are not slackers who let some one else do their work."

"*Our* boys! You mean *my boy*," said Nathalie, with sudden bitterness. "It's all right for *you* to talk, Helen, but *you* haven't a brother to go and stand up and be mercilessly bayoneted by those Boches. And that is what Dick will have to do." Nathalie choked as she turned her head away.

"Yes, Nathalie dear," replied Helen in a softened tone, "I know it is a terrible thing to have to give up your loved ones to be ruthlessly

shot down. But what are we going to do?" she pleaded desperately, "we must do what is right and leave the rest to God, for, as mother says, 'God is in his Heaven.' And Dick wants to go," she ended abruptly, "he told me so the other day."

"Yes, that is just it," cried Nathalie in a pitifully small voice, "and he says that he is not going to wait to be drafted. Oh, Helen, mother and I cannot sleep at night thinking about it!" Nathalie turned her face away, her eyes dark and sorrowful. No, she did not mean to be a coward, but it just rent her heart to picture Dick going about armless, or a helpless cripple shuffling along, with either she or Dorothy leading him.

"Oh, I would like to be a Joan of Arc," interposed Grace at this point, her blue eyes suddenly afire. "I think it would be great to ride in front of an army on a white charger. And then, too," she added more seriously, "I think it takes more bravery to fight than to do anything else."

"Perhaps it does, Grace," remarked Helen slowly, "but when it comes to heroism, I think the mothers who give their boys to be slaughtered for the good of their fellow-beings are the bravest—" The girl paused quickly, for she had caught sight of Nathalie's face, and remorsefully felt that what she had just said only added to her friend's distress. "But, girls," she went on in a brighter tone, "I have *something* to tell you. I'm going to France to do my 'bit,' for I'm to be stenographer to Aunt Dora. We expect to sail in a month or so. You know that she is one of the officials in the Red Cross organization."

There were sudden exclamations of surprise from the girl's two companions, as they eagerly wanted to know all about her unexpected piece of news. As Helen finished giving the details as to

how it had all come about, she exclaimed, with a sudden look at her wrist-watch: “Goodness! Girls, do you know it is almost supper-time? I’m just about starved.”

“Well, jump into the car, then,” cried Grace Tyson, “and I’ll have you home in no time.” Her companions, pleased at the prospect of a whirl in the new car, gladly accepted her invitation, and a few minutes later were speeding towards the lower end of the street where Helen and Nathalie lived.

After bidding her friends good-by, Nathalie, with a *tru-al-lee*, the call-note of their Pioneer bird-group, ran lightly up the steps of the veranda. Yes, Dick was home, for he was standing in the hall, lighting the gas. With a happy little sigh she opened the door.

“Hello, sis,” called out Dick cheerily,—a tall well-formed youth, with merry blue eyes,—as he caught sight of the girl in the door-way. “Have you been on a hike?”

“Oh, no, just an afternoon at Mrs. Van Vorst’s. Nita had a lot of the girls there—” Nathalie stopped, for an expression, a sudden gleam in her brother’s eyes, caused her heart to give a wild leap. She drew in her breath sharply, but before the question that was forming could be asked, Dick waved the still flaming match hilariously above his head as he cried, “Well, sister mine, I’ve taken the plunge, and I’ve come off on top, for I’ve joined the Flying Corps, and I’m going to be an army eagle!”

“Flying Corps?” repeated Nathalie dazedly. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, Blue Robin, that I’m going to be an aviator, a sky pilot,” replied the boy jubilantly. “I made an application some time ago to the chief signal officer at Washington. I was found an eligible

applicant, for, you know, my course in the technical school in New York did me up fine. To-day I passed my physical examinations, and am now enlisted in the Signal Corps of the Signal Enlisted Reserve Corps. I'm off next week to the Military Aëronautics School at Princeton University. It's an eight-weeks' course. If I put it over,—and you bet your life I do," Dick ground his teeth determinedly,—"I go into training at one of the Flying Schools, and then I'll soon be a regular bird of the air; and if I don't help Uncle Sam win the war, and manage to drop a few bombs on those Fritzies, I'll go hang!"

For one awful moment Nathalie stood silent, staring at her brother in dumb despair. Then she turned, and with a blur in her eyes and a tightening of her throat, blindly groped for the stairway. But no! Dick's hand shot out, he caught the hurrying figure in his grasp, and the next moment Nathalie was sobbing on his breast.

"That's all right, little sis," exclaimed the boy with a break in his voice, as he pressed the brown head closer. Then he cried, in an attempt at jocularity, "Just get it all out of your system, every last drop of that salted brine, Blue Robin, and then we'll talk business."

This somewhat matter-of-fact declaration acted like a cold shower-bath on the girl, as, with a convulsive shiver, she caught her breath, and although she burrowed deeper into the snug of her brother's arm her tears were stayed.

"Dick, *how could you do it*? Think of mother!" Then she raised her eyes, and went on, "Oh, I can't bear the thought of your getting ki—" But the girl could not say the dreaded word, and again her head went down against the rough gray of Dick's coat.

"Well, Blue Robin, I'm afraid you have lost that cheery little *tru-al-lee* of yours," teased the boy humorously. "You've cried so hard

you're eye-twisted. In the first place, I don't intend getting killed if I can help it. And I can't help leaving mother. You must remember I'm a citizen of the United States—" the boy was thinking of his first vote cast the fall before—"and I am bound by my oath of allegiance to the country to uphold its principles, even if it means the breaking of my mother's apron-strings," he added jokingly.

"Oh, Dick, don't try to be funny," Nathalie managed to say somewhat sharply, as she drew away from her brother's arm and dropped limply on the steps of the stairs, in such an attitude of hopeless despair that Dick was at the end of his tether to know what to say. He stared down at the girl, unconsciously rubbing his hand through his hair, a trick the boy had when perplexed.

Suddenly a bit of a smile leaped into his eyes as he cried, in a hopelessly resigned tone, "All right, sis, seeing that you feel this way about it I'll just send in my resignation. It will let the boys know I've laid down on my job, for if you and mother are going to howl like two cats, a fellow can't do a thing but stay at home and be a sissy, a baby-tender, a dish-washer-er-er—"

"Oh, Dick, don't talk nonsense," broke in Nathalie sharply. "I didn't say that you were not to go, but,—why—oh, I just can't help feeling awfully bad when I read all those terrible things in the paper." Her voice quivered pathetically as she finished.

"Well, don't read them, then," coolly rejoined Dick. "Just steer clear of all that hysterical gush and brace up. My job is to serve my country,—she wants me. By Jove, before she gets out of this hole she'll need every mother's son of us. And I've got to do it in the best way I can, by enlisting before the draft comes. I'll not only have a chance to do better work, a prospect of quicker promotion, but, if you want to look at the sordid end of it, I'll get more pay. And as to

being killed, as you wailed, if you and mother will insist upon seeing it black, an aviator's chance of life is ten to one better—if he's on to his job—than that of the fellow on the ground. So cheer up, Blue Robin. I'm all beat hollow, for I've been trying to cheer up mother for the last hour."

"Oh, what does mother say?" asked a very faint voice, just as if the girl did not know how her mother felt, and had been feeling for some time.

"Say! Gee whiz! I don't know what she would have said if she had voiced her sentiments," replied Dick resignedly. "But the worst of the whole business was that she took it out in weeping about a tank of tears; all over my best coat, too," he added ruefully. "You women are enough to make a fellow go stiff.

"Now see here, Blue Robin, don't disappoint me!" suddenly cried the lad, as he stared appealingly into his sister's brown eyes. "Why, I thought that you would be my right-hand man. I knew mother would make a time at first, but *you*,—I *thought you had grit*; *you*, a Pioneer, too. Don't you know, girl—" added Dick, rubbing the back of his hand quickly across his eyes, "that I've got to go? Don't you forget that. I'm on the job, every inch of it, but, thunderation, I'm no more keen to go 'over there' and have those Hun devils cut me up like sausage, than you or mother. But I'm a man and I've got to live up to the business of being a man, and not a mollycoddle."

But Nathalie had suddenly come to her senses. Perhaps it was the brush of the boy's hand across his eyes, or the quivering note in his voice, but she roused. She had been selfish; instead of crying like a ninny she should have cheered. "Oh, Dick," she exclaimed contritely, standing up and facing him suddenly, "I'm all wrong. I

didn't mean to cry, and I wouldn't have either," she explained excusingly, "if you had only let me go up-stairs.

"No, Dick, I would not have you be a slacker, or a mollycoddle, or wash the dishes," she added with a faint attempt at a smile, "and we haven't any babies to tend. Yes, old boy, I don't want you to lie down in the traces, so let's shake on it, and I'll try to brace up mother, too," added the girl, as she held out her hand to her brother.

"Now that's the stuff, Nat, old girl," cried the boy with gleaming eyes, as he took the girl's hand and held it tightly, "and while I'm fighting to uphold the family honor and glory,—remember father was a Rough Rider,—you stay with dear old mumsie. Keep her cheered up, and see that everything is made easy for her. Do all you can to take my place here at home. Yes, Blue Robin, you be the home soldier. Gee whiz, you be the home guard!" added the boy in a sudden burst of inspiration.

"The home guard! Yes, that's what I'll be," cried the girl, her eyes lighting with a sudden glow. "And then I'll be doing my bit, won't I? I'll cheer up mother, and do all I can," she added resolutely; "and don't worry any more, Dick, for now,"—the girl drew a long breath, "I'll be on the job as well as you."

And then Nathalie, with a wave of her hand at the boy as he stood gazing up at her with his eyes fired with loyal determination, hurried up the stairs, straight on and up to the very top of the house to her usual weeping-place, for, oh, those hateful tears would not be restrained, and if she did not have her cry out she would strangle!

Ah, here she was in her den, the attic. Dimly she reached out her hand and pulled the little wooden rocker out from the wall and slumped into it, and a minute later, with her face buried in the fold of

her arm, as it rested on the little sewing-table, she was weeping unrestrainedly.

Presently she gave a sudden start, raised her head and listened, and then was on her feet, for, oh, that was her mother's step,—she was coming up after her. Oh, why hadn't she waited until she had a hold on herself. The next moment the little wooden door with the padlock opened, and Mrs. Page was standing in the doorway gazing down at her.

"Why—oh, mother!" Nathalie cried in surprise and wonder, for her mother was smiling. The girl's eyes bulged out from her tear-stained face in such a funny way that her mother broke into a little laugh. Then her face sobered and she came slowly towards her.

"No, daughter mine, mother is not weeping. Yes, I heard what you and Dick said, and you are patriots, and have shamed mother into trying to be one, too." Mrs. Page took the girl in her arms with tender affection.

"And Dick is a dear lad. Oh, Nathalie, in our grief at the thought of parting with him,—perhaps of losing him,—" her voice weakened slightly, "we have forgotten that he has been fighting a greater battle than we.

"It is surely a great thing," continued Mrs. Page sadly, "for a young man in the buoyancy of youth and the very heyday of life, to give it all up. For youth clings more tenaciously to life than older people do, for to them it is an untried and shining pathway, flowered with hope, anticipation, and the luring glimmer of unfulfilled aims and ambitions.

"And then to have to face about," her voice lowered, "and silently struggle with one's self in the great battle of self-abnegation, to end

by taking this glorious life and casting it far behind you,—this is what makes a hero. Then to face the dread ordeal of a battlefield, and go steadily forward, buoyed only with a feeling of bravery,—the heroism of doing what you believe to be right,—and, taking your one chance for life in your hands,—plunge into the unknown darkness and the horrifying perils of a No Man's Land."

There was a stifled sob in Nathalie's throat, but her mother went steadily on: "No, Nathalie, we must not weep. We must smile and be cheerful. We must inspire Dick with courage and hope, and if it is meant that he is to give his life, we must let him go with a 'God speed you,' his memory starred with the thought of a mother's love and a sister's courage, and with the soul-stirring song of the victor over death.

"And, Nathalie, Dick belongs to God; he was only loaned to me,—to you,—and if the time has come for God to call him home, we must not complain. We must gladly give him back. Then we must remember, too," went on the patient mother-voice, "that, after all, life is not the mere living of it, but the things accomplished for the betterment of those who come after. And if Dick has been 'on the job,'" Mrs. Page smiled, "no matter how small his share in this great warfare for the right, he will be the better prepared to enter into the Land where there is no more suffering, or horrible war, but just a glorious and eternal peace."

The last word was almost whispered, but, with renewed effort, she said: "Now, Nathalie, let us be brave, as father would have had us,—the dear father,—and go down to Dick with a bright smile and inspiring words of cheer." Mrs. Page bent and kissed the girl lightly, but solemnly, on the forehead, and then she had turned and was making her way towards the door.

CHAPTER II



GİVİNG HER BEST

"As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free."

Nathalie sat in the big rocker on the veranda, sewing a star on a service-flag. Yes, as soon as Dick had gone to do his "stunt," as he called it, in the great warfare,—gone with all the honors of war, as his mother had laughingly declared as he kissed them a noisy good-by,—Nathalie had felt that it was incumbent upon her to sustain the honor of the family, and had run lightly up to the attic. Here, in the big piece-trunk she found a bundle of Turkey red, a bit of white, and then, after begging a snip of blue from Helen for the star, she had set to work.

She was sure that star would not come off, for she had double-stitched into every angle and on every point. She held up the patriotic square, bordered with red, and sorrowfully stared at that one lone star, although a thrill of pride stirred at her heart and caused her eyes to beam.

She must hang it up. And then she was busy tacking the little flag to a small staff, which she had fastened to the roof of the porch so it could be seen. Ah, the wind had caught it, and it was waving in a salute to its many mates curling from the neighboring porches, and to the Red Cross insignias that starred a window here and there, ofttimes overshadowed by the graceful sweep of the Stars and Stripes.

But Nathalie's heart was still sore, for although she had given up Dick with as good a grace as she could muster, and had tried to show that she possessed the true American spirit, yet it did seem as if it was a needless sacrifice. With a sudden turn on her heel, the girl burst into a new patriotic air that she had heard somewhere, as if hoping that it would drive away the rebellious thoughts that jarred her attempt at cheer, and hurried into the kitchen.

As Nathalie stepped to the window and stared carelessly out, her eyes were caught by the gleam of yellow crocus and purple hyacinth as they peeped up at her from their beds of green. Somehow their flaunting colors reminded her of the spring blooms that used to nod so gayly to her from the flower-beds in her beautiful city home in the upper part of New York.

She could hardly believe it was a year since her father's death. The poignant grief she had suffered then again caused her eyes to fill with tears, and her mind dwelt upon the sorrowful circumstances

surrounding her loss, the changes that had followed, in their financial losses, and the many sacrifices it had entailed.

She again saw the sorrowful farewell to the first and only home she had ever known; she again felt the grief that came to her in the giving up of the many things that had made life so happy,—her schoolmates, her many enjoyments, and her hope of going to college. She again experienced the dolefulness that had assailed her mother, her brother Dick, her younger sister, Dorothy, and herself, on their coming to the humble cottage home in Westport, the being associated with strangers, and the many people who at first had seemed so different from their city associates.

Yes, there was the tree where she had found the nest of bluebirds. The girl's eyes gleamed amusedly as she peered down the garden at the old cedar tree, and remembered that she had called them blue robins, thus giving Dick an opportunity to nickname her, Blue Robin.

Nathalie attempted to smile, but the thought of Dick's going away aroused her slumbering grief, and once more the tears flowed silently down her cheeks. But she bravely brushed them away and went on with her reminiscences,—the remembrance of spraining her ankle up in the woods, and how it had led to her meeting Helen Dame, her next-door neighbor, and *now* her dearest friend.

How lovely Grace Tyson had looked that day, and dear old Barbara with her near-sighted eyes, and the girls' favorite, Lillie Bell, with her gracious charm and dramatic poses. The girl smiled again as she remembered Edith Whiton, the sport, and her harum-scarum oddities. Yes, they were all dear girls. And how glad she was that she had become a Pioneer, and a real blue robin, by joining the Blue Bird group.

And what a dear Mrs. Morrow, the Pioneer director, was that day the Pioneers called. Oh, that was the day the "Mystic" had passed. Who would have thought she would turn out to be Mrs. Van Vorst, who was so lovely. And that ride with Dr. Morrow to the big gray house, and then she mentally saw herself, with that handkerchief over her eyes, talking to the Princess, Nita, the little hunchbacked girl. And what good friends they had become through those history lessons!

The many useful things she had learned from the Pioneer hikes and crafts, and the joys she had experienced from their many sports and activities had certainly proved worth while. And the "overcomes" she had fought for by adopting the Pioneer motto, "I can," had certainly meant something in her life.

But they did have gloriously good times at Camp Laff-a-Lot at Eagle Lake, with the Boy Scouts, Miss Camphelia, Miss Dummy, and all the other good sports. Then, too, there was the surprise, on her return to learn the good that had come to Dick through the money so kindly loaned by Mrs. Van Vorst. Indeed, that one year had brought many new things into her life, for—O dear, there was all that silver to be cleaned! For, now that her mother kept no maid, this duty, with many other menial tasks, had devolved upon Nathalie. Oh, how she hated that job!

With a resigned air, however, she managed to carry the basket of silver from the sideboard to the kitchen table, and then returned to the dining-room for the tea-service. After getting her cleaning cloths, her brushes, and the scouring-powder, with vigorous determination she began to rub and polish.

But somehow everything acted aggravatingly mean, for she dropped the polish, and the powder flew all over; then she knocked

the tray and the knives and forks clattered to the floor. O dear! what ailed things anyway? And how her arms ached trying to polish those horrid tarnished stains on the teapot! The tableware had never seemed so obdurate, nor the means for making it bright so utterly ineffective.

"Oh, I guess I am the one who is ailing," she exclaimed glumly, as she suddenly realized that her mind was not on her task, and that the elation of playing at being a patriot had departed, with Dick evidently, leaving her as limp as a rag. Oh, it does seem such a shame that we had to get into that war—Nathalie bit off her thought like a thread, resolved not to let her mind dwell on that forbidden topic. But how angelic her mother had acted when Dick went. Well, she was a dear, anyway, so brave. But suppose he *never should* come back after all. Something suddenly seemed to snap in the girl's breast, and down went her head on the tray, into a heap of powder, while a great sob strangled out of her throat.

O horrors! Nathalie's brown head bobbed up from the tray, not very serenely either, for she had heard a step on the kitchen porch. Oh, Helen always came in that way! "Where *is* my handkerchief?" The girl grabbed desperately at something white lying on the tray, dimly seen through a blur of tears, and began to scrub her nose energetically with alas, not her handkerchief, but the powder-cloth with which she had been polishing the silver! "Ah chee! Ah chee!" sneezed Nathalie again and again, while groping frenziedly, but blindly, for her handkerchief. She must have dropped it. And then Helen's arms were around her, and she was kissing the flushed cheek.

"What's struck you, honey girl?" she asked in that gentle way of hers. "Have you got the influenza? But here's a very necessary

article at times, if that's what you're after," she finished with a laugh, as she stooped and picked up Nathalie's handkerchief from the floor.

"Influenza? No," blurted out Nathalie savagely, tortured to a pitch of desperation at her unfortunate predicament. "I've been rubbing my nose with that dirty old piece of rag I clean the silver with. Serves me right, I suppose, for being such a fool as to cry when I should be 'on my job,' as Dick says." She shamefacedly tried to hide her red eyes from her friend's keen gaze.

"Oh, well, it will do you good to cry, Nathalie, dear," advised Helen softly, as she stroked the brown head caressingly, "for you were quite a heroine when Dick went away, so courageous and cheery. Mrs. Morrow says you are the nerviest Pioneer she knows."

"But I'm not," confessed Nathalie honestly, "in fact, I'm beginning to think that I'm a bluff. But anyway, I'm glad to get a bit of praise, something to warm me up, for I have felt like a congealed icicle for the last few days. Yes, I have smiled and smiled like the poor Spartan boy, while the fox of Grief was gnawing a hole into my internals. That sounds like one of Lillie Bell's dramatics, doesn't it?" she smiled pathetically into her friend's kindly eyes.

"But, Helen, you are a dear, anyway," cried Nathalie in a sudden burst of admiration for her tried and trusted friend, who was always such a stanch and timely comforter. "And do you know," she added, swinging about in her chair with the teapot in one hand and the despised polishing-cloth in the other, "you grow better-looking every day. Oh, I think you are just lovely!"

"*I lovely?*" mocked Helen, opening her eyes in surprise at this unexpected praise. "Well, Blue Robin, what started you on that trail?

You must have been kissing the Blarney Stone, for you are handing me out 'the stuff,' as the boys say, for fair. Poor me, with a knob on my nose, a wide mouth, and green eyes—to call me lovely is a libel on the word."

"Oh, Helen, your eyes are just lovely—every one says that, for they are so expressive," retorted her friend loyally; "and as for the knob on your nose, no one would know it was there if you weren't constantly telling them about it. But I don't care what you look like anyway," she added determinedly, "for I think you are a love of a friend. But when do you go to France?" she finished abruptly.

"I don't quite know yet," replied the girl; "perhaps not until a month or so. But mother is brave about letting me go. She says it will be a fine experience for me,—as long as I don't have to go 'over the top.' Oh, you finished your service-flag! It's a Jim Dandy!" Helen plunged recklessly into another topic, again blaming herself for her trick of alluding to forbidden subjects, for she had seen Nathalie's lips quiver as she said "Over the top."

"Yes, I finished it, and now the neighbors know where *we stand*, even if *you* consider me a pacifist," said the girl a little defiantly. "Well, perhaps I shall think differently some day," with a quickly repressed sigh.

"Yes, and that day is coming very soon, too, Blue Robin," rejoined Helen; "for I'll bet you a box of candy that you won't be a pacifist after you hear Mrs. Morrow talk on liberty. Surely you haven't forgotten that we are to go to a Liberty Tea at her house this afternoon?" she inquired as she saw her friend's face settle down into an expression of gloom.

"Oh, I don't think I'll go," retorted Nathalie quickly, "for I don't feel a bit Pioneery this morning, and then I have all this silver to clean."

"But, Blue Robin," returned her friend cheerily, "I'm going to help you finish up that silver, and then I'm going home to dress for this afternoon. Then I'm coming over here and just make you go to that Liberty Tea with me. You know, Nathalie, it would be mean for you to desert Mrs. Morrow," she added wisely, "for you are the leader of the band and should help to entertain the girls."

Whereupon, Helen caught up one of Nathalie's kitchen-aprons, and a few moments later the two girls were laughing and chatting in the best of spirits, as they rubbed and polished with youthful ardor, every bone and muscle keyed to its task.

Yes, it was enlivening to be so warmly welcomed by her hostess, Nathalie decided, as she greeted her a little later in the afternoon, and her depression vanished. And how perfectly lovely Mrs. Morrow looked in that blue gown; yes, it was just the color of her blue-gray eyes. Under the fascination of this lady's charming personality Nathalie was soon flying about, showing the girls how to start sweaters, or to purl, as this task had been delegated to her by the director, who herself had taught Nathalie.

When the tea was served it was Nathalie who occupied the place of honor at the little tea-table, decorated with the United States flag, and who dispensed the dainty little china cups filled with what was patriotically called *Liberty Tea* in honor of the young ladies who had given it its name over a hundred years ago, and who the Pioneers had impersonated last year in their entertainment of "Liberty Banners."

After the teacups had been removed, and one or two announcements of coming events had been made, Mrs. Morrow, with sudden gravity, said:

"We have gathered here to-day, girls, to commemorate the Spirit of Liberty, the one great principle that has budded like Aaron's rod, and brought forth other qualities as splendid and compelling as itself, as, for example, the principles represented in our national emblem. The principle of humanity, which means living the Golden Rule by taking thought for your neighbor; democracy, the equal rights of mankind, which in turn gives rise to justice, loyalty, and unity,—the principles that have not only given us that wonderful, mystical something called Americanism, but the principles that mean the Christianity of Christ."

After the girls had discussed the meaning of liberty and summed it up as standing for man's right to self-expression, either by words or actions, and made it clear that it had to be governed by the law of self-control, as too much freedom would mean license or lawlessness, Mrs. Morrow continued her little talk.

"Liberty is not something that sprang into being with the coming of the settlers to America, for it is as old as man himself; but under the rule of king-ridden states it has been fighting its way through many long centuries, because the peoples of the Old World failed to grasp its meaning.

"Under the stimulus of the Reformation and the Revival of Learning, induced by the printing of the Bible and other books, the early comers to America, as they endeavored to worship God as they thought right, not only left the intolerant forms and bigoted narrowness of the Old World, but threw the first light on liberty by teaching man his right to freedom of the soul. The Pilgrims and

Puritans were the Pioneers of liberty, for they not only gave us religious freedom, but, by establishing a government for and by the people without the aid of king or bishop, laid the cornerstone of a great commonwealth, and gave us democratic liberty.

"If you girls would make a study of the history of the Thirteen Colonies," went on their director, "you would learn that not only each Colony contributed to the principles embodied in every stripe, star, and color of our spangled banner, but that a universal love of freedom seems to have animated the settlers. Each individual group, to be sure, had its own peculiar belief, but, in the working-out of their cherished ideals and aspirations, liberty was the bone and sinew of every colony.

"It was under the influence of these early settlers—the giving of their best to mankind in their struggles for freedom—that the ideals and beliefs of the New World were molded into higher and better institutions, purified and strengthened by a new significance. Their ideals and aspirations were essentially different from anything known before,—ideals peculiar to this soil, which were absolutely American, not only in religious freedom, but in the institutions of local government and the union of all states into one, which gave rise to the United States of America.

"Now we have come to the great subject of the hour, the war, and a question I have heard several of you girls ask, 'Why are we in the war?'"

Nathalie felt her face redden, and shifted uneasily in her seat. O dear! she did wish she had not come. Of course the talk was very interesting, but still she didn't want to think of this terrible war.

"I have heard it said," pursued Mrs. Morrow, "that we are in the war to avenge the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and that we must not allow the Germans to break the international law by killing our sailors and seamen. I have heard it said, too, that if they conquered the Allies they would come over here and fight us. These are all sufficient reasons in a sense."

The lady paused, and then, with grave solemnity, said: "And I have heard it put forth that we are in the war to maintain our national honor and integrity. I think I hear some of you girls say, 'But we haven't done any wrong: we have kept neutral; our principles are not involved.'"

Nathalie's eyes were aglow as she bent forward, and with parted lips anxiously awaited Mrs. Morrow's reply to this question.

"Now that we realize the depth and grandeur of the principles given to us by the founders of this nation, and know that every time our flag is unfurled it tells the world that religious and democratic liberty were born on these shores of America, are we going back on these principles? Are we going to allow other nations to say that our principles are just in the flying of our colors, that they stand for nothing but self-praise and the nation's glorification?

"No," cried the lady with grave emphasis, "by our love for our flag, by our love for our birth-land, by our reverence for the men who taught us these principles we swear to defend every time we hoist our colors, we must get into this war. We must prove that our flag is in the right place, and that we carry it in our hearts. We must strive to show with our soul's might that we are living these principles by being true to ourselves and to our nation's honor, and carry our feelings into action.

"We must forget self, our desire for selfish ease and pleasure. We must align ourselves with the suffering masses of people across the sea, and help them to rid themselves of the iron-shod heel of one-man power. We must stand side by side with the Allies for humanity, democracy, and liberty. We must show the world that the so-called divine right of kings is a worn-out belief of savagery, and prove by the principles back of our flag, prove by the living of these principles, the sacredness of God's heritage to man, the right of the world's people to know, as we know, the principles that have made us the freest people in the world.

"Each one of you girls must not only do your bit, but must give of your best to your brothers and sisters over the sea. And if the best means the giving-up of those who are so dear to us, we must prove that we are true daughters of liberty, and send them forth cheerfully, to give freedom and liberty to the world."

There was an impressive silence, and then Mrs. Morrow's voice broke into song. In another moment the girls had joined their voices with hers, and were loudly sounding forth the old-time tune and the well-beloved words:

"In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me;
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.

"He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment seat;
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet;
Our God is marching on!"