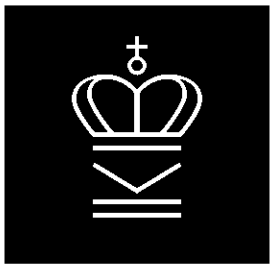

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THE TALE OF A SCHLESWIG DANE

ERICH ERICHSEN

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LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

Translated from the Danish by
INGEBORG LUND

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FORCED TO FIGHT FOR THE HUNS

I

He was a boy at the time when I first met him—a little lad of four, with sun-bleached hair and bright eyes ; a child of the fields and the soil, of the stable and the barn.

We were sitting that day above a roadside ditch, the bright summer sun shining down upon us, and around us the fragrance of wild roses in the hedges. I had to tell him stories, but they all had to be about noble knights clad in gilded armour and carrying good gleaming swords. The knights all had to slay the wicked dragon and rescue the fair princess. Unless they did that, neither they nor the stories were any good.

All the time while I was telling him these tales his ardent, enraptured eyes were fastened upon me, while his soft and yielding child's mouth looked like a big note of interrogation.

I saw him again in July in the first year of the war. He was then a happy and light-hearted young man of twenty-four; straight and strong, heavy in limb and firm in step. He had that confidence and calm in all his movements which is common to those who own the ground they walk on.

His face was bronzed by the sun and hardened by all kinds of wind and weather. The glance of his blue-grey eyes was open and fearless, as in those who are used to seeing far and distinguishing clearly, and his voice, when speaking the language of his childhood and youth, was gentle and rich.

His father's homestead stood on one of the downs overlooking the fjord. He had been born there, and his father and grandfather before him, and their forefathers, for as long as the family could be traced back.

He came of that good, sound peasant stock that has drawn its nourishment from the soil, and that looks upon each foot-space of ground, each little hummock of earth, as a sacred treasure that fills the mind with joy and the heart with love.

His glance had absorbed the green of the fields and the blue of the fjord, the golden brightness of the corn and the white sheen of the church

tower, both when the sun rose and when it set behind the downs.

His mind had drunk from the pure source of fidelity, and whether guiding the plough or swinging the scythe, in the barn or the loft, he had learnt to sing *that*[1] which his father and grandfather always kept in their hearts, because it was the greatest thing in their lives and held their dearest hopes.

When I saw him then he was lying on a heather bank in the summer sunshine and gazing up at the southward-drifting clouds.

He had been telling me about the homestead on the downs above the fjord, about the girl he loved and who belonged to the same countryside as he, born of the same soil and of the same steadfast race, that might sometimes be silent but would never forget.

With his eyes he followed the clouds racing across the blue vault of the sky. He saw them vanish under the skyline, and sent a greeting with them, as they sped on, to all that he held most dear—the golden rye and the green forests, the blue fjord and the white church towers, and to the girl to whom he had given his young and joyous love.

I remember him on the day when he stretched

[1] *I.e.*, the Danish national songs.

out his hand to me to say good-bye before going home to the farm that he loved and that he was to guard and tend like his father before him when the time came for him to take possession of it.

He stood facing me with radiant eyes and smiling lips. His voice rang out with such joy and freedom that it seemed as if he was shouting the words across wide fields. He was so young and handsome, so gallant and strong. He looked as if he were going out to face life with firm steps and happy thoughts because he knew that he and life were on the best of terms.

He was the finest picture I have ever seen of youth endowed with the will and the power to do something good and great—of youth full of faith and hope, health and truth, uprightness and honesty.

He was the incarnation of the growing, promising future: the fermenting grape that yields precious wine, containing the strength and fragrance of many a glorious summer.

I saw his face once more for the last time when the train glided away amongst the downs near by. I had a last glance from his clear, steadfast eyes. I had the last smile from two strong and firmly chiselled lips.

I never saw that glance nor that smile again.

This summer he was sitting one day in my room.

His right coat-sleeve hung empty and was tucked into his pocket. His body was limp and shrunken, his chest flat, his shoulders bent. He sat hunched up like one newly risen from a long and severe illness, and his face, which bore traces of sorrows and hardships, looked like an old man's.

His hair was white at the temples, his skin sallow and shrivelled, and it looked as if it had by main force been stretched over his sharp bones. There were deep lines on his forehead, his lips were pale and thin, and the lines from his nose down to the corners of his mouth were long and like two deep scars.

His blue-grey eyes, which before had been so bright and fearless, were the strangest thing about him.

Now they lay deep under two sharp eye-ridges, as if they had been pressed back into their sockets by force, and the look in them was at the same time staring and distant.

They never rested at any definite point. It was as though there was before them a constant vision that kept on pursuing them and never

left them any peace—as if he saw some dread thing from which he could not escape that terrified him and drove him to despair.

Now and then he would close his eyes and pass his left hand over his brow. The hand was long and thin—all its sinews could be seen stretched under the skin like violin strings; they looked as if they lay and quivered and could not find rest.

He had been sent home from a hospital in the Rhine country, where he had lain for nearly three months tortured by the fever of his wounds and near to death.

He was now to be sent to Norway to regain his health, if possible, in the mountain air, and to find healing for a suffering mind that seldom left him any peace, day or night.

We had been sitting a while talking about many things. We had talked about his home, his mother and father, his *fiancée*, and everything that lay nearest his heart.

We had not yet exchanged a word about the war. I avoided the subject continually. It seemed to me that it would be like digging dirty fingers into a wound that was still bleeding and suppurating.

There was something distant all the time about his way of speaking. It was evident that his

words and his thoughts mostly went each their own way, and that his wandering and distant look beheld something quite different from that of which he spoke.

Then a silence fell between us. I really could not think of anything else to talk about. He sat with closed eyes and pressed his hand against them.

Sometimes a fit of trembling seized him. He stooped as if he expected a thrust from behind, a thrust which he knew must inevitably come and which he could not ward off. His lips quivered, and the lines about his mouth grew deeper and sharper.

At last he spoke. His glance hurriedly sought mine, but immediately after it was again caught by something that made it falter and hesitate, and as though filled with apprehension.

"It was the horror of horrors. You cannot understand it at all, you who are living safely in your own land and growing rich on the misery of others. You can have no conception of the crushing wretchedness, the fathomless despair, the appalling inhumanity, that we have had to see, we who have had to fight for a country that had made us its subjects by force.

"I can imagine suffering, and suffering every-

thing, for that which is beautiful and sacred and eternal. I can imagine that one might in that case look back upon what one had seen of horror and dread as upon something great and exalted, because in its intention it was dedicated to an ideal so precious, so dear that one could not bear to lose it—something beyond life and time, something filled with eternal hopes and longings.

"I can imagine all this.

"I can imagine still more.

"I can imagine that a man's mind might be filled with a holy pride in all that he had done—so that he could look back upon every hour of suffering, every moment of horror, bought with fire and murder, as upon something that had been consecrated by justice and the beautiful relentlessness of eternal retribution.

"I can imagine that.

"But when it is all a mere matter of *duty!* Cold, inevitable duty! Do you understand now what a chalice of suffering and torture one has to drink when it is only that? Not just at the actual moment. You do not think at the time; you only act. There is nothing human left in you when you are in the midst of the tumult.

"You fight for your life. You are driven on by forces you have never known before and that

you will never learn to understand in all their horror.

"Passions and instincts, hot as one's blood, must have been lying dormant in one's mind, and when they are set free by the licence of war, they flame up with all primeval man's desire to kill and destroy.

"You laugh as if for sheer joy every time you see a body fall, the light fade away from a pair of eyes, or the flames devouring and wasting what human skill and human art have brought forth in joy or in pain.

"You proclaim your joy in wild shouts, while your heart hammers and your cheeks burn and beat as if you were caught up to the highest state of bliss.

"I do not understand it. But it is *the* glory of glories at the actual moment. The extreme height of happiness. Seething and spell-weaving passions dissolve into a state of intoxicating joy.

"But afterwards—afterwards!

"I shall never be able to find words to express the pain and torment, the shame and despair of it all. I always feel as if I must hide away from myself, or escape from it all with a bare-faced lie, or else fall on my knees and humbly implore God's forgiveness.

"I could never look my comrades in the face. It always seemed to me that they would be able to look down into the unclean depths of an unclean soul, and that they were afraid I should see the same in them—all of us who had our homes on the same dear soil, all of us who had done our *duty*, and killed those who had never injured that which was dear and precious to *us*, or that which was our very life and our hope and future.

"Wherever I went my comrades and superiors always called me 'The silent Dane.'

"They were right. I *was* silent.

"How could it all make me anything else?

"Do not horrors, in their paralysing relentlessness, always make one silent?"

He ceased speaking a while, and again closed his eyes. Two red, burning spots came out on his cheeks and a quiver passed over his face. His body sank down still more in the chair. He looked as if all his muscles were slack and as if he had no strength to straighten his sunken chest.

After a while he spoke again and his voice grew husky as if he were on the verge of tears.

"I do not count *that* as anything."

He looked down at the empty sleeve with a glance of indifference.

"Many would say I came off cheaply; I think so myself. But all the thoughts that rack and torment one's mind, early and late. . . . It is said that remorse can torture a soul to madness. I believe that the thoughts and memories that day and night tear at me like red-hot pincers in living flesh are a hundred times more merciless. From the moment when I regained consciousness in the hospital I have felt that there is a bond between these memories and myself which nothing can break. They meet me in my dreams, making a hell of my nights and turning the dark into an abyss of horror.

"I lie in torment until the day breaks without finding rest. I stare up at the merciful light of day and yet find neither rest nor peace.

"I meet them in human smiles and sounds of joy. I meet them in a child's glance or in the kind words of my dear people at home. Wherever I look I encounter them.

"It does not matter what I see or what I hear. There is always a bridge connecting it with all the things I have had to witness or take part in.

"A woman in a street door, and I see the houses I had to help to set on fire, whilst bullets took innocent lives or the flames devoured their bodies.

"A child crying; and I see innocent babies, whose lives were destroyed amidst cold and terror, or whose existence ebbed away on the point of a bayonet.

"A man smiling. I see a distorted face, full of hate to the last, its glance evil and cursing, even after the heart itself has long ceased beating. . . .

"Great God! to think that we have been born with such passions! That we should destroy and kill and murder till we could not go on for very weariness, and take life after life in order to save our own!"

He clenched his hand in the air, and, while his face stiffened under a sallow paleness, he repeated, in a voice that seemed to force its way through his throat:

"Great God in heaven! That we have been born with such instincts and that all these horrors should come upon *my* head! I, who never wished the least harm to anyone! . . .

"Great God! that it became my duty—my *duty!*—to be like that to people who never wished harm to anything dear to *me*—never thought any evil against that which holds all *my* hopes and *my* longings!"

He fell back with his hand pressed against his eyes. His face was distorted as if by the

horror of a vision of blood and fire, and he groaned heavily and hopelessly.

II

That evening and during the evenings that came after it he told me, sometimes calmly and sometimes with excitement, about all those experiences that had whitened his hair and worn out his body, and made him an old man, though he had not yet completed his twenty-seventh year.

I am telling his story as he told it to me.

The words are mine, but all that gives life to them, the moods and thoughts, the hopes and sufferings, the abasement of the soul and the horror of the mind—all these are his. I have neither added nor taken away. For it can *not* be more saturated with grief and horror than it was. Sometimes I had to get up and leave him or ask him to cease.

It was so far and away beyond all reason and understanding, all that he had lived through and endured, and often it was impossible to see anything human behind it.

. . . . .

"I came home at the end of July, 1914,"

he began. "You remember that even then, before we said good-bye to each other, I was rather anxious about what might come, and when I saw my people at home my anxiety grew. It is true that none of us said anything that could add to the anxiety, but when we read the papers and what they said about the state of tension we looked at each other, and our looks really said all that we had not the courage to put into words.

"I remember that one evening a day or two after I had arrived, my *fiancée* and I were sitting in the garden on the seat under the old flag-staff. It has continually been renewed, but no flag has been hoisted upon it for fifty years—it has only stood ready. . . .

"I remember how we sat there and looked down at the corn-covered fields, wreathed about with scented hedges, and with the light blue of the fjord behind them.

"The deepest peace seemed to brood over that evening. The air was mild and soft, and easy to breathe. Sitting there and listening to the healthy breathing of the soil seemed to me to fill one's mind with a wonderful calm and quiet.

"A last streak of sunshine passed over the tops of the trees on the other side of the fjord.

I sat and watched how after a time the light faded away, while the evening clouds in the west lay sleeping, with golden rims that gradually sank away into the purest crimson.

"Suddenly my *fiancée* seized my hand in a hard and violent grip. I turned to her and smiled. I thought she meant that I dreamt too much and spoke too little.

"But when I looked at her face I grew frightened and asked her if she were ill. She was pale, and her eyes had a strange, staring and distant look.

"When our eyes met she bent her head, and again gripping my hand tightly she said in a voice that could hardly find utterance: 'Why don't we say it straight out to each other?'

"I turned away my head. I understood, as I had understood during these last few days, what it was that tormented her. But it seemed as if I could not find the words. And why seek for them? We did not need them. There is no need for anyone to speak of that which is in everybody's thoughts.

"But she said again: 'Why don't we say it straight out to each other?'

"I turned round to her and put my arm about her, and she leaned her head against my shoulder. I could feel that her body was trembling and that

she was weeping. I sat silent awhile and then, as I drew her closer to myself and stroked her cheek, I said to her: 'Let us hope that it will blow over.'

"And because I believed it would comfort her, I said, as I tried to smile: 'I am certain it will blow over. You just wait and see; nobody will dare to do it when it really comes to the point of being serious.'

"She looked at me; she said nothing, but I could read in her face that she knew I was saying something quite different from what I meant.

"She rose slowly and stood for a moment looking intently at me; then she threw her arms round me and clung closely to me. With her lips close to my ear she moaned softly: 'I *will* not lose you! I will not lose you!'

"I did not answer. I passed my hand over her cheek and her shoulder. I knew quite well, of course, that what I had said to comfort her was exactly what I did not believe myself. I had not the least doubt that the crash would come.

"I had that strange feeling in my mind that is like the firm and unshakable conviction of a presentiment. It was perfectly clear to me that in a few days', perhaps in a few hours', time the disaster would be upon us, and I should have

to say good-bye to my home, along with several other young men in the neighbourhood. Perhaps to say good-bye for ever! . . .

"I dared not think that thought down to its roots.

"Then I rose slowly, put my arm about her, and kissed her. Her lips were cold, and I felt how they trembled against mine.

"After that we went down through the garden and across the fields. A path beside the hedge runs from the farm down to the fjord. The rye stood golden and rich and full. Here and there poppies flamed up, and the deep-blue crowns of the cornflowers shone on their climbing stalks, as if they were standing on tip-toe in order to peep out over the heavily filled ears of corn.

"We walked with our arms round each other. But we were still silent, and there was not a sound about us. We could hear each other's quiet breathing. Only a grasshopper in the ditch played at whiles on its tiny fiddle.

"Down by the fjord we stood still and looked over its calm surface. We could see a forest steamer running out from the opposite shore. We saw its two lanterns gleam like two big shining pearls. And once we heard the faint sound of distant voices of laughter and merry

talking. Soon after we went home again, still without speaking.

"Dusk had begun to fall. A pale mist was rising over the sloping fields, and a slow and whispering breath of evening air sent a trembling and fear-laden sigh through the heavy ears of corn.

"It seemed to me that never had the soil about me been so tenderly dear to me as at that moment.

"I felt a reverence towards it, as if I were walking on holy ground. I could hardly bear to set my foot on the straws in the path.

"It was all so unutterably dear to me. I could have put my cheek against the warm earth as against the strong bosom of a loved woman and wept out my love in tears as hot and frightened as a child's.

"We went on together past my home and along to the local magistrate's where she kept house. We met one of the men from the nearest farm; he greeted us with a 'God's peace,' as he passed us. Usually he was cheery and talkative, but that evening he walked with a weary and lurching step close to the ditch, and his voice was low and anxious.

"My poor girl looked at me. Her eyes were very bright and she was not far from tears.

But she said nothing, while she rested her arm still more heavily in mine.

"Outside the garden gate we stood holding each other's hands. Our eyes met and she tried to hold mine with her look.

"Then she clasped me closely about my neck, and with her cheek against mine she whispered: 'I *will* not lose you! I *will* not lose you!'

"I patted her gently on the shoulder and pressed my cheek against hers.

"Then she suddenly loosened her hold of me, pressed her hands against her face, and ran up through the garden into the house. She did not turn round, not even in the doorway. I only saw a fluttering fold of her light summer gown as the door was closed.

"I stood still awhile and looked about me. The dusk had glided into the pure deep blue of a July night and all the shadows were vague and soft. My eyes sought her room. I had expected to see a light appear, but it remained in darkness. The window was open, and the night wind played with the chaste white curtain.

"Then I turned and walked home! I thought at first of going into the house, but I went into the garden.

"I don't know how it came about, but suddenly I glanced at the naked flagstaff, and

looked at it from the foot up to the knob at the top, where the bright weather-cock pointed northwards.

"I felt its emptiness like a physical pain. It stood there as the symbol of something both old and new, stirring at that moment within myself —something that ran like a chill through my mind, but which I am not able to put into words. It came nearest to that feeling of forsakenness that used to seize us when as children we had gone too far from home to find our way back again.

"From the flagstaff my eyes wandered over the fjord to the downs on the other side. The changing fields and the green of the forest glided away into the same blue haze. Here and there a light gleamed out like a little child's eyes blinking in the night, so trustfully and confidingly.

"And then my glance sought the pure sky of the summer night.

"I let it wander from horizon to horizon, watching how star after star came out, noticed how their colour varied from pale golden to almost glowing red, and how their shining gradually grew keener and keener, while the vault beyond them seemed to grow clearer and deeper and more infinite.

"It seemed to me so comforting to look upwards. I was in kinship with all these wonders —we came and went under the same Will. But at the same time they told me how infinitely little I mattered in all this great unfathomable mystery.

"Then I went into the house.

"The lamp was lit in the sitting-room, but the blinds had not been pulled down, and the window over-looking the garden was open. Mild scents of flowers breathed into the room— the scent of roses and elders in the hedges.

"My mother sat leaning back in a corner of the sofa ; she had just finished reading the newspaper which was lying on the table in front of her, with her spectacles upon it. The stems stood up in the air, blinking in the lamplight.

"My father was sitting at the writing-table smoking his pipe. He was writing and I could hear his heavy breathing—a habit with him when he had a pen in his hand. The quiet snoring of his pipe murmured through the stillness.

"I went over to my mother and stroked her hair. She seized my hand and pressed it hard: 'So you have been for a walk with Marie. What did she say, by the way?'

"She spoke softly and again gripped my hand tenderly. I could feel her hand trembling.

"'She did not say anything in particular,' I answered. 'She was only . . .'

"'She feared the worst—the war—didn't she?'

"My father turned from the writing-table and his words seemed to come as if by a great effort of will. And, bending his head low, he continued quietly: 'We all fear that, though none of us say so straight out. May God be merciful to us, each and all!'

"It was the first time that the word 'war' was mentioned in my home in those days, and it was as if a painful silence had been broken by my father's words. It seemed to me that we came closer to each other all at once and found the old open and steadfast confidence again.

"Then we talked about it for a little while, but quietly and in anxious voices. The word 'war' was not mentioned again; we avoided it or alluded to it in other ways.

"'If it does come,' we said, or 'if things get serious,' or 'if the worst should come to the worst.'

"At last my father said, as he passed his hand over his deeply-lined forehead: 'Let us pray to God that He will bring good out of it for us all—in our Saviour's name. . . .'

"His head sank forward with a quick move-

ment upon his chest and my mother covered her eyes. She pressed her lips closely together like one who is determined to be strong, not only against tears, but against despairing words struggling to find utterance.

"The room was so quiet that a mere sigh would have made us tremble.

"The next day the orders for mobilisation came.

"I was standing outside the gate in the morning, waiting for the postman.

"The road, white and quiet, was flooded in sunshine, dappled by the fleeting shadows of the old poplars.

"Suddenly I saw Marie running down the middle of the road from the magistrate's house. She stumbled once or twice and looked as if she were going to fall. She ran like one pursued by something evil, and with her arms stretched out as if pleading for help.

"She did not stop until she had reached me and had flung her arms about my neck. There was a wheezing in her chest every time she breathed, and in a voice that was almost soundless she moaned: 'It's coming now—it's coming! . . .'

"I tried to remove her arms from my neck. I have never cared much for violent expression

of feelings. But I allowed her to keep hold when I saw her face.

"I have never seen a face stamped with such helpless despair as hers was then. I could not recognise it. The eyes were rigid and dead as if they were made of glass, the skin a sallow grey, and the features distorted to plainness. She had bitten her under-lip until it bled. A streak of blood lay upon her chin, and a drop of it had trickled down upon her breast.

"Unfortunately she was right. The order for mobilisation came soon after. It was my duty to report myself without unnecessary delay at the nearest railway station and to proceed to my garrison by the first available train. In my case this meant going to Berlin.

"I remember the last half-hour before I left home.

"There was silence both outside and in. An arbitrary, painful silence that caused a trembling in one's chest and seemed to empty one's lungs.

"One or two young fellows had come in from the nearest farms to ask for news, but otherwise there was no one about. The farms are rather far apart in our part of the country, and people stayed at home looking after their own affairs. We voluntarily avoided each other in those days, so that we might not have to speak about that

which tormented the minds of all of us, but which we were so painfully loth to believe.

"We had just risen from our mid-day meal. My father had said grace as usual, but his voice had faltered and scarcely been audible. His 'Amen!' sounded like a full-stop to something beautiful that had come to an end, and like a prayer that all that was to come might not bring us too great sorrows.

"He was standing now beside his writing-table, one hand resting upon its surface. I could see how his hand shook.

"My mother was sitting on the sofa with her hands folded upon the table, and gazing straight in front of her, her eyes fastened upon me as if she wanted to fix my image for ever in her mind.

"Her eyes were tearless, and her features looked as if they had stiffened in pallor.

"I stood near the window. I could hear our head man dragging out the little light dogcart and the horses stamping on the stone flooring.

"My father turned round to me. His face was ashen-grey and his lips tightly clenched. He blinked once or twice and then said, in a voice that sounded as if something broke now and then in his throat:

"'. . . Well, whatever happens to you, my lad, remember that you can with perfect right

be called upon to do your duty to the utmost. It shall not justly be said of us here that we did not know what *duty* was.

"'I know, of course, where your heart is. I know, too, that you could never go out to that to which you are now called upon to go with sacred enthusiasm. But you can do one thing; you can earn the report that you acted to the last as duty bade you—even though your heart was cold and your feelings elsewhere—and that you gave your strength, your life perhaps, fairly and honestly to the country you had undertaken to serve.

"'Duty, my lad, is never deserted by the man who respects himself and his word, even if it hurts ever so much. We have asked for it ourselves from the others, early and late, without growing weary. They did not know what it meant. They shall see now that at any rate *we* understand what duty is and how to act accordingly.'

"He had put both his hands upon my shoulders and looked into my eyes. I looked back at him calmly and steadily. I could feel my eyes smarting, but I kept firm and strong. I did not wish to be the first to be conquered by tears.

"Then he kissed me on the forehead. It

seemed like a consecration to me. I felt his lips trembling.

"He then let go of me, turned to the window and looked out. I could see by the heaving of his back that he was sobbing heavily and hopelessly.

"Soon after I went to my mother and put my arms round her neck. She sat quite still and silent, as if she were paralysed. Her hands were still folded upon the table and her eyes turned to my father.

"Still she neither moved nor spoke when I bent over her, kissed her and whispered: 'Good-bye, mother dear, and may we all meet here again soon!'

"I stroked her hair and patted her hands. But suddenly she collapsed. Her head sank upon the table and she moaned in broken cries: 'My son, my boy—my only one! . . .'

"My father hurried to her side and bent over her while he kept on whispering: 'We are all in God's hands, mother dear; we are all in God's hands. . . .'

"Then he said calmly to me: 'The horse is put in now. I think you will have to be going, my boy.'

"I stood in the middle of the room and looked at the two, and for the first time in my life I

understood what two people who love their child can be made to suffer, and how mercilessly grief can paralyse both their words and their bodies.

"And one thing more: how little it all meant to me compared to all that it meant to them.

"I could lose only one thing—my life.

"They could lose much, very much, more. They could lose that which meant happiness to them, and life, and the future—that which was *everything* to them.

"My father slowly raised his head and looked at me.

"'There my boy, go now,' he said in a voice that trembled and broke, while at the same time he sat down beside my mother and drew her to his side. 'We two will fold our hands and trust and hope in Him who permits everything to happen according to His will and for our good.'

"He nodded to me. I stood a moment hesitating. Then I went slowly out of the room, looking at the two who were sitting cheek against cheek as I closed the door, and quickly I mounted the dogcart.

"I saw nothing of Marie. I reined up at the magistrate's. They told me that she had collapsed upon the floor in a violent fit of weeping when she came back that morning. They

had had to carry her upstairs to bed, and since then she had had no control of herself. She had lain moaning and weeping and had spoken in a way that no one could understand.

"I heard later that on the following night they had had to send for a doctor, and that for many days they feared for her reason.

. . . . .

"That is how one says good-bye when one goes away to the war," he said, and beat his head. "At least that is what happened in my case, and I know it was the same in that of many, many others.

"It was duty that called.

"But the rejoicings, the enthusiasm, the flying banners and the martial music!

"It is dreary when duty calls and one's heart is cold. I was made to feel that so often later on, and even still more painfully than on the day when I said good-bye to my people and my home."

III

"I arrived in Berlin late in the evening, together with several others who had also come by train from my part of the country and from one or two other places on the road.

"I knew Berlin quite well. When serving my military duty I spent three years in this cosmopolitan city, which has an atmosphere of provincial pettishness and narrow-mindedness. It is the strangest mixture of power and industry, of integrity and the most coarsened vices. God-fearingness and bestiality walk side by side; beauty and incomprehensible lack of taste live next door to each other. A city in which language snaps out lashing words of command and of overbearing brutal energy, or lisps in decadent rottenness.

"I could not recognise it that evening.

"There had been joking and singing in the train. 'Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles, über Alles in der Welt' had run from carriage to carriage, had found hearing and response in one and had glided unnoticed away to the next.

"We were not all equally pleased, of course, with the prospect before us.

"I recognised the tone, however. I had had an experience of something like it at the manœuvres. Only now it was still more blatant, more self-satisfied and self-glorifying wherever it could find a vent.

"But Berlin! It was something quite new that evening. It was like a world by itself

hidden away under an immense blue dome filled with clamour.

"It seemed as if every throat tried to shout itself hoarse, as if it were a question as to who could shout the loudest. Everybody's eyes shone. Every mouth laughed; at last the great day had come when we were to display our might and power, and the indomitable, invincible strength of our army.

"'Long live the Emperor! Long live the Army!' they shouted.

"Now and then, as if the longings and dreams in every one's mind had found clamorous utterance, one heard the shout, 'To Paris! To Paris!'

"It came from somewhere or other in the densely-massed crowd surging through the Friedrichsstrasse and filling Unter den Linden from the Monument of Victory up to the Palace like a human rampart pressed from wall to wall. It struck like lightning in the nearest mind, it caught like fire in tow, and it flashed through the multitude like an electric shock: 'To Paris! To Paris! Long live the Emperor! Success to the War!'

"Then it died away far off in a faint and lessening murmur. But only for a moment. The surging mood of the hour rose again. Some

voices began to sing: 'Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles, über Alles in der Welt'; and at once the song burst forth from everyone's lips while faces laughed and shone with enthusiasm, courage, and rampant self-assurance.

"There was a strength and grandeur in the sound that made one giddy. It was like the flames of a sacred fire shooting heavenwards and turning the city into one great, beating heart, into one single mind, filled with the same burning hope and the same ardent longings.

"Rich and poor were there, working-people and grand folks, bright-eyed and modest young women and painted minxes of the street, 'souteneurs' and street arabs, students and idle loungers, people from offices, factories and shops—all were singing, all were shouting, when the last notes of the song came back to their ears like a faint echo from far away: 'Long live the Emperor! Long live Germany! Long live the War!'

"I understood then that it must be a joy to let oneself be caught up by this omnipotent enthusiasm; to be able to feel in one's own mind something of the same grandeur and glory, something that only needed setting free to become ardent zeal, dauntless will, courage far beyond all human thought and reason.

"At the same time I felt so unutterably poor as I walked there amongst all these noisy people, who went on shouting and singing as if a world had to sink into ruins under the breathing of their lungs.

"At last it was more than poverty that I felt. It was a painful consciousness that I had really no place amongst all these tumultuous and rejoicing people who shouted and went on shouting 'To Paris! Long live the Emperor! Long live the Army! Long live the War!' just because this very desire, 'To Paris,' would be the realisation of all their desire, their hope and their hate.

"There was nothing in the shouts that kindled any ardour in me. There was nothing in all that happened around me that could make my heart beat with joy or cause the blood to course quicker in my veins. I was as a stranger in the midst of it. It inspired me with loathing at last, with weariness and ill-will. All this roaring and yelling jarred upon my ears.

"It was sheer physical pain to me, all this shouting about Paris and the Emperor, the Army and the War.

"It was all something in which I had no concern.

"I had never learned to become part of it;

that was beyond me. My hopes lay in another direction, my innermost thoughts too. I had no love whatever for all that these people about me worshipped as their own life. Nor did I curse what they cursed. Their dreams were not my dreams, nor their hate my hate.

"I felt very forsaken and lonely as I walked back to the barracks—so inconsolably deprived of everything.

"All the others possessed the hopes and longings of a great period in history—something great to suffer for, something great to die for, with a bright and happy smile on their lips, and a glad light in their dying eyes.

"They were ready, all of them, for the utmost sacrifice. I understood that.

"I had only one thing as my goal to guide me—duty. Cold, hard, unalterable duty, demanding everything of me, without giving me anything whatever in return, except the pale consciousness that I had done what I ought because I *had* to; and only because of that.

"I think I could not very well have had less.

. . . . .

"At the barracks I met a comrade who had been next to me in the ranks during the last year I spent as a soldier in Berlin. It was a homely and comforting pleasure to see

him again after the lapse of four years. He was always such a decent fellow, rather heavy and usually of very few words, but I knew he had a heart of gold.

"He told me about his home. It was all so touching and simple, and his words were so quiet and gentle. Apparently there were no violent emotions in his mind.

"He had been married about a year and had been living on a small, half-neglected farm in Brandenburg. He told me about the farm, the fields, and the cattle. It all sounded very beautiful. It breathed the gentlest and tenderest love for the soil that had become his. I understood that every acre, every little hummock, every blade of grass had a happy and hidden place in his heart.

"He told me, too, about his wife and the little daughter who was not more than two months old.

"'My little wife is so pretty,' he said; and his voice took such a warm and tender tone. 'And she is so good. She was so cheerful and brave and proud when I had to go. She never cried once; she only told me to be brave and strong and not to worry about anything at home. She would manage everything all right until I came back.

"'She placed our little girl in my arms and promised me that she would take care of her and tell her about her father who was away at the war to fight for the rights and the honour of his country.

"'It certainly never occurred to me for a moment that perhaps I might never again see her or our little girl.

"'"When you come back again, soon," she kept on saying, as if there could not be two opinions about that matter.

"'"But if I should happen to stay there?" I asked her once. But she only smiled and kissed me and said that she *knew* I would come back. She *knew* for quite certain. God would not have the heart to take a father from such a dear little girl and her mother. She had already arranged all that with God.'

"My dear old comrade took my hand in a warm and hearty grip. There was a trembling anxiety in his voice as he said to me:

"'But who knows what will happen to you and me? Perhaps neither of us will ever see our homes again. They all say, of course, that it will all be over before Christmas; and I suppose it will, or why should they say so? But promise me one thing. If I am killed, write to my little woman. Tell her that I was

a good comrade and a brave soldier, and that I died honourably for my country.

"'It isn't at all that my wife needs to be told; she knows all that quite well. But I think it would be a fine thing for my daughter to read something like that about her father some day when she is older: "That he died honourably for his country."'

"My dear man, he said it so sincerely and cordially, this plain and simple-minded young Brandenburg peasant. It seemed to send a warm thrill through my mind. It was clear to me that the words came from the depths of his soul; that they were part of himself and gave him rest and peace of mind and the everlasting consolation that his cause was just and great.

"I understood so many other things that night and the following day as we marched to the railway station, to proceed to the Belgian front.

. . . . .

"I shall never forget the exultation that hailed us as we marched through the town, clad in new substantial uniforms.

"Bright smiles greeted us and exciting cheers. Flowers rained down upon us.

"It was a brisk and smart parade march, accompanied by sweeping, noisy and flourishing music. We were the hope of the nation,

and its heroes, before ever we had fired a shot.

"They believed in us. They trusted in us as one trusts in that which cannot be shaken. There was no doubt in their hearts. They had read and heard so often that we were unconquerable. Young women waved their handkerchiefs to us. Old men and young waved their hats, and cheering roared about us. Mothers held their babies up high, so that they might get a good view of the pride of the nation and its victorious power setting out to deeds of glory and the unfading honour of heroes.

"And as the train carried us through the radiant summer country, flooded in sunshine and golden grain wherever we turned, the rejoicings surged around us.

"Along the railway-line children and grown-up people stood waving flags and handkerchiefs. Blushing young ladies with bright, enthusiastic eyes gave us flowers and fruit and other good things at the stations we stopped at.

"It was a triumphal progress—a festival, a splendid, all-reconciling glory.

"In the train we sang all the songs we knew—'Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles,' 'Wacht am Rhein,' 'Heil dir im Siegerkranz,' and all those; and running from carriage to carriage

there was the constantly recurring cry that had burned in the hearts of all and expressed the longings and hopes of years. And the hate.

"'To Paris! To Paris! Long live the War!' 'We shall be there in a month, in a month!' they shouted. 'In a month! in a month!'

"And the laughter was loud and uproariously sure of victory.

"Sometimes the laughter had an evil ring in it. It foreboded death and seemed not to be quite human. It was inspired by new and hot instincts—instincts that began to work their way to the surface and that made the voices gruff and hoarse and kindled in the eyes a strangely wild and burning brightness.

"I wondered at the change that had come over my old, quiet comrade of the ranks. His quietness seemed to have been swept away. His eyes glittered too; and there were lines about his mouth that I had never seen there before.

"There was a brutal, lustful laugh on it. Something coarse had come out upon it that seemed to bring out the animal in him and stamp it upon his face.

"I asked him once how he thought his wife and little daughter were getting on.

"He looked at me for a moment. He stared and seemed surprised. It seemed to me that

something bright and tremblingly tender awoke in his eyes, but it vanished again at once.

"'Long live the Emperor! Success to the War!' was shouted around him.

"He joined in the shout in a hoarse and grating voice, and as he struck his rifle against the floor, he went on, his lips seeming to tighten evilly about the words,—

"'To hell with the French!—to hell with them!'

"I have often wondered since what all these young men, who rejoiced in war and seemed so assured of victory, really thought about the war then. I am inclined to believe that they did not think at all, or, at any rate, in their overweening confidence, they thought the whole affair would be ended in their one day meeting a few Frenchmen who would make tracks for Paris as soon as they saw them.

"And that would be the end of *that* war.

"The whole thing was only to last about a month or so. Then France would be paralysed. It was really only a matter of a little parade march to Paris. That was what was commonly said, and probably not much more than that was thought about the matter.

"It is hardly likely that they had any suspicion of what war was, or what it might be expected to develop into: hardly more than I,

at any rate ; and to me war was something vague and indefinite.

" I had some suspicion, of course, that houses might be burnt down, towns laid waste, fields trampled into dust and human beings killed. . . .

" But what I imagined then was only child's play compared to that which I witnessed later ; and I am convinced that if any of us had dreamed what this war was to demand of us in hardships and sufferings, of tears and misery, of physical strength and superhuman spiritual endurance, we would assuredly all have sat in silent dread of what was coming—in spite of all our courage and enthusiasm and ardent patriotism.

" But now it was all more like a pleasure trip : at any rate, something that was chiefly grand and splendid, something offering fine, easily-won victories and the grateful acclamations of a rejoicing people—a glorious adventure, grand and splendid, and exciting to relate some day when one reached home again and friends flocked round one and listened in mute admiration.

" It was fortunate for us that we took it all as carelessly as we did, that we could dismiss it with a song and a few shouts of overweening self-confidence.

" I say ' we ' for I joined in the singing and

shouting myself. There was nothing in my mind any longer that made any resistance.

"You see I was amongst so many good comrades, and I fell in with their mood without any thought or reflection about anything. I could even sometimes feel a certain satisfaction in the thought that I was taking part in it—a satisfaction produced and maintained by that massed suggestion that must certainly be the fundamental explanation of war excitement.

"If we had each been allowed to sit and nurse our own undisturbed thoughts, with no shouting, no cheering, no flowers, no smiling faces, with none of all that whirling excitement that distracted our minds and troubled our senses, there would hardly have been much left, I think, of the cheery singing and self-confident shouting.

"Then, surely, our thoughts would have turned to those to whom they found their way in the beginning in the case of my old comrade in the ranks—to our homes and to all those dear people who were undoubtedly thinking far more deeply and seriously of what we were going to than we were ourselves.

"They turned in that direction, at any rate, many a time later, when we had a lonely watch, when we lay tired to death and tortured in soul and body in the hell of the trenches, or

when we lay like lumps of flesh that have been thrown to one side, waiting for that snatch of sleep which we did not get after all, because the events of the day tormented our minds like diabolical visions, blood-stained and horror-filled to a degree that words cannot express, because our language is far too bleached and threadbare for the description of visions such as no one can conjure up even with the wildest and most bestial imagination."

IV

"I was one of those who took part in the storming of Liège.

"On that day I gained for the first time some idea of what a horrible thing war really is, whether one is fighting for one's most precious and sacred rights, or only driven on because one has to go.

"I shall never forget it. It is graven in my mind in writing that can never be worn away. It is buried there with so much else that happened; and, even if I have bright and good memories of happy comradeship and the grandeur of self-sacrifice to look back upon, it all pales before the horrors and the wearing agony

that tear into the soul like dirty fists in an open wound.

"I took part in the rushing of the barbed wire defences, instruments of torture compared to which even crucifixion must be a joy.

"We began at once in the morning with a violent drumming from our artillery. Its roaring was terrible. The earth rocked beneath us, as if the solid ground were giving way. The bombs incessantly dug holes in the earth near the enemy's positions. Hundreds of small white shrapnel clouds hovered in the air, and hundreds of others kept on coming up.

"The enemy's artillery replied. The thunder of our guns blended with the roaring of bombs and shrapnel falling in our lines. They poured lead over us, and in between the shrieking of the projectiles and the thunder of cannon we heard the groaning and screaming of the wounded.

"'Fix bayonets!' was the order that rang out, and then we rushed on in storming columns. We had to force the barbed wire hindrances. We *had* to, cost what it might.

"We had to go forward, and we did.

"I don't understand now how it was all done. It was a doom's-day of yelling and screaming and shouts of command, of the

growling of cannon and the shrill whistling of shrapnel.

"My comrades fell round about me, but I did not heed them. I was driven on, along with the others, by a force stronger than myself. I plunged on blindly, seeing nothing but what happened right at my own feet, hardly even that.

"Yes—I remember one thing: the first sight that burnt itself into my consciousness.

"I saw a Belgian soldier standing upright on a rampart and shooting with his machine-gun into the storming-lines, rapidly and incessantly. He stuck to his post with a coolness that despised death. He did not give up until a bayonet thrust put an end to his life. He was a hero and I admired him. Even in death his hand tightly held his machine-gun. He might have saved his life; he might have sought cover and been taken prisoner like several others that day. But he would not. To the very last his lips curved in trembling joy every time he saw how he had made a clearing where his bullets had struck home.

"He had only one thought, if indeed he thought at all—'I shall die and I must die, but that does not matter. The only thing of the least importance here is to take as many as

possible of the others with me into eternity—kill, kill, kill!'

"And so we rushed on—still on.

"It seemed to me once that the thousands in front began to falter, but what was the use? They were pushed on by us who came behind, and behind came new ranks storming on and pushing forward, as if they were driven on by lashing scourges upon a naked back.

"There was only one way—onward, still on.

"And on we went.

"Sometimes I stumbled, but I was kept on my feet by those in front and those behind. I ran as if on slippery lumps. At my feet lay corpse by corpse with open mouth and staring eyes—bathed in pools of blood, splashed with gushed-out brains, or rent intestines—or with torn bodies.

"Still we rushed on.

"I tramped away on what happened to lie nearest. I put the heel of my boot in a glazing eye, not to fall. I trampled steaming intestines, to get a foothold for the next step.

"I heard groaning at my feet—in front, behind, at my side. I saw arms stretched up in fervent prayer to Heaven for mercy on the anguish and the misery. I heard young men scream 'Mother, mother!' in the death-lisp of

horror and dread. I saw arms catching at arms, and comrades lying clinging to each other, their faces pressed to the ground to save themselves from the trampling of heavy boots.

"To save themselves! Before very long they would be trampled into blood and strings of flesh in a steaming, sticky mass of blood and brains that would splash up the legs of those who came after and stain them as would the unheeded mud of the roads.

"Onwards and still on:

"Until we reached the barbed wire.

"The sight was appalling—later on. At the time my mind only grasped the picture as it took shape hastily during the moment of our onward rush.

"It was not a barbed-wire defence any longer. It was a steaming rampart of human bodies, torn asunder and trampled to pieces. Stumps of arms and legs, torn throats from which the blood ran in a clotted stream. Faces torn in cheeks and jaws and eyes. And a shrieking and death-rattling, a wailing and moaning that filled my ears and mingled with our own shrieks and shouts till it sounded as if the world were coming to an end in fear and terror.

"But still we went on.

"We had to leap over the barbed wire, while

the lead screamed about us and man after man fell. We did not see where we jumped or where we trod. We trampled on that wall of living and dead, of ebbing life and torn bodies, as if we trampled on hard, resisting lumps of earth. Some were caught in the wire, fell with a shriek and stretched out groping hands to save themselves. They pulled and pulled, while the points dug deeper and deeper into their flesh and tore their clothes and limbs to rags.

"But on—still on—while one's chest perspired and one's forehead steamed and every nerve trembled as if it would snap.

"And at last a hand-to-hand fight. Chest against chest—blows with rifle-butts—a rending asunder with bayonets—a tearing to pieces of mouths and eyes with the bare fists: a savage fury; an unspeakable bestiality—a seething desire to murder; and at the same time an infinite, all-pervading rejoicing every time a body fell.

"I remember close against my face another face distorted by hate. A pair of blood-shot and blazing eyes staring into my own. A mouth grinning like a death's head. Teeth glittering sharp and white between open blood-red lips, like those of a wild beast. A body that was like a closely compressed knot of strength and savage

energy. A human being—an enemy—raging with fury and hate and the lust of vengeance, and with the joy of being able to slay everyone that came near him.

"I saw the butt of a rifle raised in a pair of trembling arms, ready to hammer my forehead to splinters and crush the life out of me. I heard laughter screaming into my ears and rending my very soul, as though it tore my nerves into rags.

"I remember jumping aside; and a foot crushing into a face of ashen paleness, staring up at me, its lips awry, like a drunken man babbling some stupid coarseness. The foot was mine.

"I remember a rifle-butt whistling through the air and touching my arm. . . .

"And I remember how I suddenly felt as if my strength increased tenfold and as if my glance distinguished all the flickering beams of dust in the blazing sunshine about me. The blood raced through my body as if driven on, quivering, stamping and pressing on the valves of my heart till they smarted and ached. There was a tug at my muscles as if they were tightly stretched steel springs that suddenly struck out with all their compressed strength because all resistance was gone.

"A stinging pain at the back of my neck, as if my brain could not contain all that suddenly rushed through its intertwined cords.

"And then a forward thrust with my bayonet. I saw it glitter in the sun in a rapid flash like an electric spark. I saw it plunge into a throat and a jet of blood springing up like a gurgling stream—hot and steaming. . . .

"A face that suddenly paled and fell heavily with a shriek. A body that swayed and sank down.

"But while all this was happening, a pair of eyes that for an instant burnt into mine with a glare of hate, and glowing with malice and cursing; and two lips writhing as if they were shrieking coarse abuse at me, as they whitened under the last gasping breath.

"Then a rattling sound tore through my nerves like a blunt knife—and a moment after a body lay like a lump at my feet.

"It was a fight in which I had been the victor, but there was a shout: forward again; fresh blows, fresh bayonet thrusts—more bodies falling; a steam and reek of death and corpses and the pouring out of horrors; a chaos of groaning and screaming; insensate murdering; shouting and shrieking, cursing and yelling, moaning and gasping in the throes of death agony.

Man against man in unbridled, insane fury, with but one hope, one wish, one trembling desire—to murder and rend and rush on and cut down—only murder, murder, murder. . . ."

My friend groaned as if the effort of breathing caused him pain, and there were two burning red spots on his cheeks. He closed his eyes and pressed his hand against them, while his body sank still deeper into the chair in which he sat.

For a long while he sat silent. I could see that he jerked sometimes in sudden starts. Then, as his eyes for an instant caught mine, he said: "No, it was not the fairy-tale of our childhood. But I am quite willing to admit that at the time it was going on I felt nothing against it. I did not think, I only slashed on; and every time I saw a man fall, I could have laughed aloud and kicked him in contempt.

"I dare say I did, too.

"After all, we who escaped alive, or those who died at once, did not get the worst of it. But all the wounded lying moaning around us, who were trampled to death without mercy or pity by their own comrades—for them those moments must have been appalling if they were conscious. And I am afraid that must have been the case with many of them.

"My own experience points in that direction.

"Can you picture to yourself the horror and suffering those poor fellows must have endured before death took them or they lost consciousness? What an extreme torture it must have been to lie there helpless and forsaken, feeling foot after foot trampling into eyes and mouth, into breast and stomach, crushing down every inch of life, while the agony grew and the mind was tortured by the most frightful blood-streaked visions.

"There is really no standard by which you can measure and understand what it is that happens when an attack of this kind has to be carried on to its completion, regardless of cost, and which is completed.

"There was plenty of human material, as the phrase goes.

"'Human material!' Have you ever heard of a more contemptuous and contemptible expression to use of the living and thinking beings who are driven on like cattle, mown down, torn asunder or maimed, with the prospect of dragging on wearily through a long life of care and misery, burdened by a pity that borders on contempt? I cannot hear it without feeling stung with indignation. It seems a shameful word to use about men who do their

duty in enthusiastic joy and who give up their lives in selfless devotion for a great and holy cause—and that is what spurs them on—in most cases. . . ."

He paused awhile, then went on :

"I said before that I could have laughed aloud in the midst of the commotion. I could, and I certainly did, too. There was sometimes a strangely compelling excitement about it.

"But afterwards—afterwards !

"I remember the first night, when we got a little rest after the attack. We lay down in our clothes, flung amongst some heaps of straw like flabby bundles, three or four hundred men.

"We were dead tired, yet rest was unobtainable. Some laughed and some shouted, and arrogant boasting flew from mouth to mouth. It was all so new still, so glorious. They had done great deeds, worthy of heroes. Later on most of us forgot both the great deeds and the glory.

"The coarsest and most brutal boasting of what each had achieved in the way of slaughter was shouted from one to another. There was a malicious joy in the words, but at the same time there was a glowing pride, speaking of well-done work, of satisfied revenge, of justice fulfilled.

"I lay a long while listening before I dosed off. My eyelids were as heavy as lead; my body was slack and ached all over with weariness. All my muscles and sinews were like tender lumps. My brain alone did not cease working, and as I lay there dosing, all that I had lived through during these last hours glided through my thoughts like constantly-changing visions.

"I had never before had so appalling an experience as this. I have seldom lived through anything so satiated with horror.

"I saw it all before me again—the murdering, the maimed bodies, the distorted faces, the heaps of corpses that we trampled upon to make way for ourselves, the glazing eyes, the smashed skulls, the steaming intestines, the fragments of bodies, the torn throats, all these were only gathered in a rapid impression the first time I saw them, but were now settled into a fixed memory which I slowly lived over again and dwelt upon in all its details, without the furious excitement of the moment and its unthinking, unfeeling suspense.

"What I now saw was only cold, naked reality, shorn of all embellishments. The horror of it nearly drove me out of my mind. I had the sights before me without ceasing. Sometimes it seemed to me as if I could smell the fumes and

reek of corpses and clotted blood and crushed flesh where I lay. I had the shouts and shrieks and the prayers for mercy and the straining death-rattle tearing at my ears. I saw dying eyes staring into mine with all the appalling dread of torment and the terror of death. I saw lips twisted in hate and heard thundering curses rolling through all the ear-splitting roaring and clamour.

"I groaned in horror. I felt as if I had heavy stones on my chest —something crushing me so that I gasped for air; something that clutched at my throat and squeezed it so that I felt as if I must lose my reason.

"I possessed nothing whatever that might have reconciled me to all this—nothing to tell me that I ought to suffer gladly because it was for something great and good, something eternal and holy. There was nothing at all to shed any redeeming light on the horror. There was not even the excuse of hatred.

"I had only murdered—murdered until I was weary; taken the lives that came my way; destroyed as many human beings as possible.

"But why? Who will give me the answer to that 'why'?

"They were not *my* enemies. I did not hate them; I did not despise them; I had no

revenge to gain; I had not to administer any retribution. There was only one thing that could explain my conduct; only one reason could be given to justify it.

"I had done my *duty;* I had obeyed orders and done my best; I had acted as I had been compelled by the force of circumstances to act.

"Of course, I had that consoling consciousness. But I had had to pay a heavy price for it—an appallingly heavy price.

"I had to pay a good deal more yet before my accounts were squared."

V

"I have read many accounts of the atrocities said to have been committed. I have read both our own reports and those of the other side. I have also seen that they have been denied, or that attempts have been made to explain them away as the visions of diseased brains, as fiction, or as the efforts of untruthful people to make themselves interesting.

"Yes, indeed! Would it were so!

"But even if there are fictions and falsehoods and visionary tales amongst them, there is plenty of truth left. And I do not understand

how anyone can believe that shameful and revolting things have not been committed—things so bestial, so coarse and horrible in all their gruesomeness, that they are beyond all description.

"Are there really people so simple-minded as to believe, or capable of imagining, that thousands and thousands of soldiers, whose compassion has gradually been blunted, or whose animal instincts gradually get the mastery of them, because everything is placed ready in their way—whose contempt for human life and human suffering has at last no limit, because, in hunting down their fellow men as if they were unclean animals which had to be slaughtered, their work has been belauded and honoured as their greatest and highest achievement—are there really people so simple as to believe that these men have gone through all this without any trace or effect being left upon their fanatically excited minds?

"Remember what sort of men many of them were. They were not selected as you would select the friends you wish to be the society of your wife and your daughter of seventeen. There were bad fellows amongst them, many bad fellows, because there are many bad people in the world. And there are far more of them,

and far worse, when instincts are allowed free play. Not to mention what happens when they are directly spurred on—and there are always plenty of ways of doing that, because there is always plenty of coarseness and brutality.

"To me it seems to be so very plain. It would be against all reason and common sense to deny it.

"And, anyhow, denials are useless. Facts speak their own forcible language.

"Just imagine what it would be if all the homeless, hunted and insulted people, all the violated and murdered women, all the ill-treated old women and men, all the murdered children, if all these could stand forth and give evidence of what they have had to endure, what they have had to see and to suffer. . . .

"It would be appalling, heartrending misery.

"There would be a wailing, a groaning, a shrieking, and a cursing, that would make humanity stand rigid in horror at what man can do against man, coldly and heartlessly, often with a happy smile, often with a merry laugh.

"No, it is a good thing the dead are silent. It is a good thing it is only paper that can tell what has been done. It is a good thing there are no words appalling and misery-charged enough

to describe what this war has demanded of suffering and injustice, of horror and boundless despair.

"I am afraid the world would become a madhouse if we could hear each one shriek out his or her anguish and horror, or see what each had had to endure of tortures and overwhelming misery.

"No, war is war. And humanity and war have not much to do with each other. After a while men become cruel, as war is cruel, even the best of them.

"Scrape off the thin varnish of culture upon us that covers the animal and you will find a creature in which are instincts for evil, for murder, for theft, for rapine, for incendiarism and torture, for all that in times of peace can tolerably well be kept under by the discipline of the law and the watchful supervision of the community—how it all blazes up and burns with an overmastering power!

"I have seen so much of all this. Many a time I have wept in horror at all that it fell to my lot to see and hear.

"It has been said that much of what happened was only a plain and just retribution—a necessary chastisement; an example that needed setting.

"This has been said, and not least frequently with reference to Belgium. It has been asserted that civilians fired upon us, both openly and from behind ambushes. It was probably true. But was that so strange? Was it not in every way perfectly justifiable? I have never been able to understand that what was done against Belgium was anything but a gross assault, nothing else—a violation of all right and justice; a crime for which there is no justification.

"I have been told that it has been justified from the point of view of absolutely vital interests.

"It was *necessary*. It was the only resource for the attack on France—the only possible means of a quick attack on that country.

"I have, however, never heard anyone dare to assert seriously that one is justified in murdering one man in order to be able to kill his neighbour. I should like to see how many amongst civilised people would support that view in everyday life; and has the State a greater and better right? Does a crime cease to be a crime because the State commits it? I think not. Altogether I cannot imagine a poorer defence of what was done to Belgium than this, and I believe that history will pass a sentence that knows no lenience on the guilty.

"Nor do I see why there should be any

lenience. It seems to me that the nation which has perpetrated this deed stands self-condemned.

"Was it so strange, then, that the Belgian people rose against us, when it saw how we destroyed the country, laid waste the fields, blew its fairest monuments to ruins, tramped through the country like hordes of Huns, burned down houses and towns, violated women, ill-treated old men, behaved brutally to young people and children?

"Do not misunderstand me. We are not the only ones who have committed vile deeds. But we have certainly committed the most and the worst because we have had the greatest opportunity, and because we have been filled to the brim with a brutal and self-confident pride, and that contempt for all hindrances which never considers the means if only the object is attained.

"I must admit that I have learnt to admire this people which defended every inch of country that belonged to it with such ardent and self-sacrificing patriotism. I think that in the way they have fought and suffered they have been grand and splendid and worthy of all the honour that posterity can give them; and I shall never grow weary of acknowledging that when civilians sometimes took their share in

defending the country they only did what was right.

"We deserved no better, considering the way in which we marched on.

"I admire this nation: its women, its men, its youth. I admire its ardent courage and its boundless devotion. I admire its honest and holy hatred.

"I remember a single incident, one out of many others, which gave me the firmest assurance that a country in which the young men have such a sense of justice, such fortitude, can never decay.

"It happened during our march on Brussels. We had reached one of those beautiful, idyllic little towns that seemed made purposely to contain industrious, good and happy people.

"We were fired upon from one of the houses—anyhow, so it was positively asserted later. I do not know whether there was any truth in it or not; at any rate, I am not sure that it was true.

"There was always a dread hanging over us wherever we went. We always felt uneasy—bad consciences, of course. Much of it came, perhaps, of the continual assurance that these people wanted to do us all the harm they could. It was said that the vanguard troops which

had crossed the frontier on August 4th had been fired upon by the civilian population ; and we received orders to punish the civilians without mercy at the first shot.

" We were in constant fear of attacks by free-lances ; and our fear was increased by countless assertions of civilian deeds of terror. I believe this was said to spur our hate and our desire to fight. Anyhow, I saw nothing of any atrocities committed by civilians.

" We reached the village early in the afternoon and scattered over the neighbourhood while we waited for a pontoon bridge to be put together.

" At first our relations with the townspeople were very peaceable. They gave us what we asked for and we paid honestly for what we received.

" Meanwhile the bridge had been finished. We mustered up and began our march through the town. People stood at the windows and in the doorways and looked quietly and peaceably at us.

" Then it was that a shot was said to have been fired suddenly. No one quite knew where it came from, but it was immediately followed by a violent rifle-fire from our front ranks. Our vanguard stopped, the ranks got into disorder,

and panic was on us at once. We fired blindly. A mitrailleuse was put up at a street corner and we began to fire at the houses. One gun sent four shells over the town, one to each point over the compass.

"When the first shot was fired it was clear to the inhabitants what they had to expect. Our fame had preceded us. They hid in cellars, jumped over walls and hedges, and fled into the country to seek a hiding-place. Many of them who would not, or could not, escape were at once shot in their houses where we found them.

"And then began the sacking and plundering of the unfortunate town. Doors and windows were smashed, furniture broken to bits, and fires made with benzine in various places. Many of our men rushed down to the cellars, where they got drunk. They assaulted and outraged the women, afterwards murdering them if they bewailed their lot. They clubbed old men and young with hatchets, ran them through with their bayonets or split their skulls with blows from rifle-butts; fired on children or quite young people and shouted and raged like maniacs.

"We behaved like vandals. I am ashamed every time I think of it. I burn with indignation when I remember the wailing and pleading of

these unhappy people, their boundless grief, their indescribable helplessness and despair.

"In the midst of the rioting a lieutenant was shot.

"It was a straight and well-aimed bullet that took his life, and there was no doubt whence it came. At the gable-end of one of the houses that were still spared stood a lad of seventeen with his rifle, calm and erect as one who knows he has a perfect right to do what he has done.

"Four men were ordered to seize him. I was one of them. But when he saw us approaching he disappeared behind the house, and we did not find him till we had climbed to the loft of a building behind. He had barricaded himself there behind some barrels. We caught a glimpse of the rifle-barrel pointed at us as we came up the stairs, and we could see his eyes like two sharp glints in the semi-darkness.

"He shot one of us. The bullet struck home surely enough. The man who was hit sank down with a sigh, and we could hear his body fall with a heavy thud against the floor in the passage below.

"Then he came out with the gun in his hand. He had sacrificed his last cartridge.

"He came with us quietly. He did not say a word. His lips were closed in a thin straight

line and his face was pale. But he held himself erect and walked proudly between us as one who has no thought of pleading for mercy. He was as dauntless as one who knows his fate, and who has made it what he wished it to be.

"He was to be shot.

"When he was placed against the wall of the house his mother came running up. I heard later that she was a poor widow and that he was her only son.

"She screamed in terror, and her face was white with horror. She threw herself on her knees before the leader of the company, and, clinging to his knees, she cried, 'Don't shoot him! He has done nothing wrong. I know it. He has *not* done anything wrong!'

"It was a mother pleading in extreme agony of soul for her child. I have never heard a voice so charged with anguish. I have never seen a form so twisted in despair.

"Still clinging to the leader's knees she begged and implored.

"'He is my only child—my only one—my only . . . God in Heaven! spare him! spare him! Take me instead! Take me!'

"She still lay on her knees with her face to the ground, and her weeping was like a wild shrieking. It was the horror-choked madness

of despair, and it tore through my mind so that it nearly made me ill, and I felt as if I were going to faint.

"The boy still stood against the wall, erect and not moving a muscle. His face was white and his eyes burned like live coals.

"Two of my comrades dragged the woman away, but she went on screaming:

"'He hasn't done anything; he hasn't done anything but what was right! Oh, you hangmen! You murderers!'

"It was all the two could do to hold her. She struggled to free herself. Her clothes were torn and her hair hung about her face in wild disorder.

"The order rang out: 'Attention! Ready!'

"I laid my rifle against my cheek. I felt my arms shaking, and it was almost impossible for me to keep hold of my gun. It weighed like lead in my hand.

"At the same moment that the order was given I looked at the boy.

"He stood immovably erect and proud, not a muscle in his body trembled.

"But, my God! I shall never forget the look that met us from his eyes. They blazed with hate. They were the very picture of holy hatred, those two glowing pupils. They burnt into my innermost soul. They sent all of us to

hell in their boundless force and penetrating flame.

"'Fire!'

"I closed my eyes and pulled the trigger. Where my bullet went I don't know. I believe it went into the air or down into the ground. My arm shook as if it had received a hard and sudden blow.

"I don't know; but I hope, in any case, that I had no share in causing his death.

"I heard a crack and a dull thud, and when I opened my eyes again the boy lay prostrate on the ground. At the same moment his mother managed to free herself. The two soldiers who had held her tumbled back. The next instant she lay over the body of the boy.

"She flung her arms about his neck and buried her face in his fair hair.

"I could hear her moaning:

"'My darling boy—my darling! Oh, you murderers! You murderers!'

"Then someone kicked her and another killed her with a bayonet thrust through her back.

. . . . .

"Such in the main was that experience.

"One might perhaps be tempted to say that, in times like these, the death of a youth is not

of very much consequence, when hundreds of thousands of young men in the full vigour of health have to suffer death, and when other hundreds of thousands are bereft of their homes, their future, their children, their fathers or bread-winners.

"I admit it. He was only a boy of seventeen; and what is a boy of seventeen amongst hundreds of thousands? There were many who were not even so mildly treated as he, or had so easy a death. So perhaps he is not more to be pitied than so many others; nor, perhaps, is his mother.

"She had the happiness—perhaps the greatest she could have—of being united in death with her boy.

"But you will understand how such an incident can torment one's mind, when it seems that what the boy did—from an average human point of view—was only common right and justice.

"Every time I see a bright and plucky-looking boy, *this* Belgian boy's fate stands out firmly chiselled in my consciousness. I live through each moment of that time: I see again that white, pale face, on which the calm was that of cold, immovable justice, when justice has been consummated.

"I remember that in that little Belgian town

there was a boy, a brave and dauntless boy, whom the war had transformed into a hero and the protector of the imperishable rights of his home and country, and who flung his burning hate in our faces—a hate that wished us all the torments of life and death and eternity in return for that which we had had a share in doing.

"It is a heavy burden to bear, a heavy hate to have dragging upon one all through life.

"And it is just as hard and heavy, even though I *could* not act otherwise, because duty bade me act as I did.

"But what about those who bear the original blame? What about them?"

VI

"I received my first letter from home when I was in the trenches in Flanders. I cannot say that I had been longing very much for it. The events of the day had somehow pushed my home into the background, driven it into an out-of-the-way corner of my mind, and my thoughts rarely strayed thither.

"Everything was concentrated mostly on the incidents of each day and on all that the war had

taught me. These thoughts were my companions by day, and they were with me in my dreams. They filled my mind to its innermost recesses and did not leave room for much else.

"Sometimes it seemed to me that I had no past—as if my life had only begun on the day the war began.

"If it happened now and then that my thoughts tried as if by force to bring joyful memories, the picture of home, or the faces of those dear to me, into my consciousness, it was at once thrust aside by one incident or another of the war, and always by something that tormented me and that hurt. It torments me and hurts this very day, and will never leave me until death shuts it out and locks the door.

"Perhaps there is a kind of mercy in it. I believe it was fortunate for me that everything at that time was overshadowed by the day and the moment. If my thoughts had been full of longing for my people at home and my anxiety for them, I don't know how I should have endured it all.

"I remember that I looked at the letter with a certain start of wondering curiosity, a sort of uncomprehending surprise; but only until I had opened the letter and read the first lines.

"'My own dearest friend,' it began.

"What wonderfully sweet and hushed words! What a world of gentleness and calm did they not contain! What a strange contrast to the hate and brutality that ever since the storming of Liège had overshadowed everything around me every single hour of the day and night!

"This feeling grew stronger as I read the letter through.

"I suddenly looked into a quite different world—a world which I had all but quite forgotten; a language of sweetness and song, of pure and beautiful cadences. As I read it seemed to me as if I could see my dear old mother sitting in the twilight and hear her singing softly, as she was wont, while my *fiancée* joined in and my father's eyes grew dim with longing for that which all our hearts desired.

"Suddenly I saw the fields before me; the garden, the blue fjord; the green forests and the white ribbon of the road with its border of wide-crowned poplars that gave forth a strong, sweet scent; the old farmhouses with their thatched roofs and the white out-buildings shining in the sun; the quiet, gentle and homely people and the merry, chattering children.

"I saw more than that, much, much more. I saw everything that had been dear to me and

that had had a place in my heart. I lived my childhood over again and my youth. I searched out all those hours that had given me happiness. I polished up all those memories that had begun to get rusty. I was far away at last, both in time and in space.

"My dear man, I was *at home;* and I understood then, to the very root, for the first time in my life, what home means, and what a marvellous, beautiful, and precious gift a happy home is.

"This little unpretentious letter, that in words did not tell me very much except ordinary, everyday incidents, became for me one of the most beautiful things I had ever known: the purest joy that had ever made my heart beat or caused my eyes to grow dim.

"I hid it in my breast, close against my skin. For many a long day it was my refuge when I wanted to forget the present.

"I also kept the few other letters that reached me whilst I was away. I keep them still as a sacred treasure. They are both black and frayed and not fit for fine ladies' fingers to touch, but they have been of more comfort and fuller joy to me than all the riches of the world could have been.

"But what else shall I tell you about the

time that I spent in those trenches? Where shall I begin and where shall I end? It was all one long chain of privations and disgusting incidents, and an unceasingly wearing strain, that drove many of my comrades mad, and that wore my body and my nerves with a mercilessness that you have no need to ask me about. You have only to look at me to know. Do I now look like a man whom life has handled with velvet gloves? And yet I think that I set out with a healthier body and a sounder mind than most.

"The actual everyday life there was not really the worst part of what one had to endure. You gradually get used to the growth of a stubby beard on your face, and to the dirt caked on your body. You can get used, too, to the cold, and to being soaked through by the rain for days, and having to wade in clayey mud far above your knees from morn till eve and through the night as well; and to sleep at night, if you can, while the lice nibble and the rats keep you company.

"In a way these things are trifles, mere details.

"You can also get used to hardly ever seeing the sun in those narrow, tortuous ditches and dens, and you get used both to hunger and thirst

when necessary. In short, you quickly get used to all that which is, after all, nothing but purely physical discomfort.

"No, it is the deadly monotony and yet the incessant watchful strain; a certain paralysing inactivity coupled with the consciousness that you can never for a moment feel safe.

"That was what sometimes wore one's nerves to rags.

"Bombardment was not even the worst part of our life. You quickly get used to that when it goes no further than the ordinary, daily kind. Your hearing is sharpened to an incredible degree of acuteness. You learn how to judge of distance and direction by sound. You know at last, with astonishing accuracy, where a shell will burst; and if now and then one carries off a few of your comrades, you accept it as quite a commonplace affair.

"After a time human life came to be regarded with great indifference. I had seen so many fall and die, that death no longer made any strong impression upon me. It had become a matter of course—something included in the routine of the day.

"But life in the trenches demanded watchfulness, not only when the bombs came shrieking at us, or aviators circled over our heads, but

also when, hour after hour, our eyes peeping just above the edge of the trench through a slit between two sandbags, we had to stand and stare into the night on the look-out for those who were sometimes lying only fifty yards away from us.

"We never knew when they would suddenly attack us. We never had either rest or peace. Just as we tried to get a little rest for a dead-tired body and worn-out nerves, we would be called out; and then to pull ourselves together had to be a matter of seconds. Weariness and over-wrought nerves had to be conquered on the instant. We had to keep at it with sound senses and all our muscles strung tight—for hours, perhaps, and that, too, often many times in the course of twenty-four hours.

"It was this everlasting uncertainty and uneasiness that preyed on one's mind and often made the happiest and most cheerful among us silent—myself not least.

"The others had at least something to buoy them up.

"They had the consciousness that they were serving a cause that meant future and fatherland to them. They faced an enemy. They lived and suffered for an idea that absorbed and inspired them.

"I lived and suffered for nothing beyond the fact that I *had* to live and suffer where I was, until a bullet struck me some day; or until I was worn out and ripe for an asylum or a hospital like so many of the others.

"I was the silent Dane—so many comrades said. My captain said so, too. I was the only Dane in my division. There had been five of us, but the others were long since gone. Death took three of them as early as Liège. One day a bomb found out the fourth. Nothing was left of him but a few scraps of flesh and some bits of his uniform.

"I knew that I was liked among them. Perhaps they did not always understand my silence. But they saw that on every occasion I had done my duty to the utmost.

"I even earned the Iron Cross because I rescued a little subaltern—a small, jolly and bright nineteen-year-old Berliner; an only child; a cheerful and enthusiastic soul, as eager as a terrier.

"He had collapsed under a bullet wound in his thigh. He lay about twenty yards from our trench, and would certainly have bled to death if I had not crept out of the trench and crawled up to him while we were still under fire from the enemy's positions.

"I got him up on my back, his arms round my neck, and, crawling along on all fours, I managed to bring him safely back to our trench.

"Neither he nor I took any harm on the way. A bullet struck like a hammer against the heel of my boot, but that was all it had to say to me.

"My comrades cheered and greeted me with a song. They sang 'There is a fair land,' not the words, for they did not know them, but the tune. They knew that was Danish.

"I have seldom been so happy as I was then. When the Iron Cross was given to me and my comrades cheered and presented arms, it seemed nothing at all in comparison with those loved sounds, in the tune of the Danish song, that brought the tears to my eyes and thrilled me with emotion.

"I heard later that the little lieutenant had had to lose his leg. But his life was saved, and his mother sent me a beautiful letter of thanks.

"I do not mention this as a piece of heroism. Do not misunderstand me—I do not wish for any glorification. It is only a very small trifle amongst thousands of incidents, far finer, far nobler, and stamped to an exalted degree with the grandeur of self-sacrifice and contempt of death.

"I only mention it because I am very anxious that you should understand that I took my duty seriously, and that I strove fairly and honestly to serve the country I belong to, even though it does not possess my heart and never can—now less than ever, by the way—and even though I could not serve it with the ardent and self-effacing devotion of patriotic enthusiasm.

. . . . .

"What then was the worst of the life in the trenches?

"Those hours were the worst in which we tried to get rest and could not; or when we lay dreaming, or saw how the others were tormented by nightmare.

"It was a scene that was repeated time after time, and it was always equally distressing and gruesome, because most of us knew what it was to suffer those torments.

"You would suddenly see two comrades, who had up till then been sleeping quietly side by side, become restless and begin to toss about. Then you would hear some abrupt shouts, that quickly turned into hoarse shrieks, and in a short time you would see them roll over and fight with their fists at each other's eyes, or mouth or temples, wherever the blow might happen to fall. You would see them seize one

another by the throat in a passionate strangling clutch, and hear them groaning and gasping until at last you succeeded in waking and parting them.

"The last was often a difficult matter. Even in a semi-wakened condition they often continued the assaults with a brutality and rage for which a peaceable third party had to suffer when intervening to prevent them from doing each other a serious injury. For it happened sometimes that a man was choked by the frenzied clutch of another at his throat.

"In their dreams they would imagine that they had been wounded and that they were lying on the field, waiting for the ambulance. Then suddenly they caught sight of an enemy lying beside them and staring at them. His eyes were full of malice and hate, and they could see his fingers, in spite of his agony, fumbling for his revolver. Even as a fellow-sufferer on the battlefield he could not control his hate. There was no other resource then but to throw oneself upon him and render him powerless to do harm. If one of the two had to lose his life, it had better be the other fellow.

"That, in its bare outline, is the story of the dream. It was terrible. I have had that dream myself and have often been in its grip, and every

time I have panted with excitement for a long time after and felt as if the valves of my heart were going to burst, and as if stinging blows were being struck on the nape of my neck.

"Now imagine having this dream, this horrible nightmare, two or three times, perhaps, in the course of a night, and you will understand that we were always in a state of uneasiness and misgiving when seeking sleep and rest, and that we would do anything to keep ourselves awake rather than fall into the horror of such dreams.

"There was another dream, though, that taunted many of us and which in its weirdness and mercilessness must have ruined the nerves of many for the rest of their lives. You see, when some dream vision or other had once established itself in one's consciousness it would keep on returning night after night for a long, long time; and of course matters were not improved by our telling our dreams to each other. They often dominated our minds even when awake with a violence impossible to shake off. Besides, what is there to talk about in a trench through the long night-watches if you don't talk about the very things that haunt you more than anything else that happens?

"This dream was something like this:—

"You would imagine that you suddenly woke

up and found yourself quite alone in the trench. Round about you the bombs were working their work of destruction and your comrades had quietly retired to a safer position.

"Looking out across the country through the veil of a grey rain-clouded night, you would see the bombs ploughing up the earth and flinging it into the air in huge smoking columns. Their crashing tore at the drums of your ears. Suddenly the sharp fan of a searchlight would cut across the trench, and the blood vessels of your eyes would feel as if they were bursting under the piercing white gleam. In its glare you would see the mutilated bodies of your comrades about you—fragments of limbs, smashed skulls, faces distorted by terror and the throes of death.

"You felt overcome with the eerieness of the solitude and darkness.

"You grew afraid of the loneliness and the darkness in the trenches; for it is only the knowledge that you have the companionship of your comrades that enables you to keep up your courage at any time. The least unfamiliar sound makes you start, and your body stiffens while perspiration oozes out of your every pore.

"It sounds childish, perhaps, but a rat

rushing in between your legs is enough to bring out the beads of perspiration.

"Then you try to find the others. You stare for a moment over the breastworks, but you see only the grey night and the flash from far away when a bomb is flung out.

"After that you grope your way through the darkness of the trench. You fall full length over a body and feel your way about you. You get your hand full of blood from burst intestines, or you feel the sticky mass of brains gluing your fingers together; or your hand pushes into an open mouth, and the scraping of teeth against your skin makes your blood run cold through and through.

"You crawl on—over dead bodies. You perceive the acrid smell of coagulated blood and the exudations of death.

"At last you are on the level ground again. You get up and grope on.

"But in a little while the same thing is repeated. Again you fall—again you grope your way among dead bodies. Now and then you hear a groaning and a pleading for water, or you feel a hand fumbling about your leg or your arm, or sliding over your face. You jump up and run away, terror tearing at all your

nerves until you fall again, and the same thing is repeated once more.

"By this time your reason is almost paralysed with terror. You feel every pulse hammering. You could scream—sometimes you do. You tear at your clothes to give your terror some outlet and relief. You scratch yourself till the blood comes, digging your nails deep in your cheek or your forehead. You hammer at your temples to drive the visions away.

"Then you grope your way round a turning.

"The searchlight suddenly flashes lengthways down the trench. You see a body supported by the wall of the trench, standing upright before you. The glazed, dead eyes are staring at you, the lips grinning in the rigidity of death. The blood is trickling from a wound in the temple and pours down the pale cheek, made still paler by the cold rays of the searchlight.

"It grows dark again. You continue groping —on, still further on. You are now haunted by fear and horror to the verge of madness. You feel you are stumbling over corpses—heaps of dead and mutilated bodies. You are tired ; your limbs fail you, you cannot keep up any longer, and at last you sink down, wearied and tortured to death. You plunge your hands up to the

wrists into a ripped-up stomach that is still warm. You scream wildly and loudly—a piercing scream that seems to rend your throat. . . .

"And then you awake.

"But you do not wake up to relief.

"All the wild visions continue to hammer at your mind. Their maddening pictures are still in your consciousness, and every time you are overpowered by weariness you glide back into the terrors of the dream.

"Then comes the wearing struggle to keep awake and give your thoughts another direction. But it is nearly always impossible. The dream has sunk far too brutally and deeply into your mind. You live through it with your eyes wide open, while you try to fix your glance upon some point or other in order to drive it away, but you very seldom succeed.

"Merciful daylight alone brings peace, but at the same time it brings an overwhelming, almost unconquerable exhaustion, a mental collapse, a nervous system so worn out and tender that you are not far from madness or from that extreme state of despair that leads to suicide.

"That is the horror of the trenches—far more terrible, far more destructive, than fighting, or bombs or mitrailleuses, or the tense and

staring watchfulness of the long hours of the night; far worse than the misery of the mutilations, the screams and the moans, and the panting rattle when a life is extinguished by a merciful death."

VII

"During the first part of December I was in a trench in the foremost line on the Russian front. We had a peaceful time. The Russian attacks were neither fierce nor frequent. They amounted mostly to small, hurried *sorties* or encounters between outposts or patrols. There were, too, only very few of those sudden, local, small engagements that come when you least expect them, and which as a rule never lead to anything but a few men on either side being wounded or killed.

"And yet it was an appalling life, during the close upon three weeks that I was there.

"It was rather more than four miles to the relief company, which had its headquarters in an old forester's house, long since deserted by its inmates, and of which only a roomy barn was fit for human habitation. Everything else had been burnt to the ground.

"The few troops stationed there for relief duty were not much good. They were worn out with hunger and cold.

"It fell at last to our lot to do the relief duty.

"We starved and froze, till at last we were nearly crazy and quite indifferent about everything.

"Starvation was not the worst, perhaps, of what we had to endure. You can get used to a great deal in that direction. I have had to live for about a week on frozen turnips which we thawed at a wretched little trench stove, and I had nothing to drink but snow.

"It was all right during the first three or four days. We even found it rather good fun; it was a new experience. But we found it hard to get through the last few days. And yet it was child's play to all the rest. It had this redeeming feature about it—it gave our dreams a quite different direction.

"We dreamed about food.

"You might feel tempted to laugh at these dreams, in which one saw before one a well-provided table and smelt the pleasant odour of food, striking upon one's senses like a provoking wave—one simply wallowed in a state of happy comfort and content. You prepared to take your place at this gorgeous table; and suddenly

it vanished and you only saw a gigantic earth-grimy turnip, like a face grinning at you in mockery and scorn.

"Or you would see other beautiful sights, all concerned with food, but they, too, always vanished at the moment of realisation, and you would wake up with a straining, smarting feeling in your diaphragm, an unbearable thirst, a sensation of giddiness, and an overpowering weariness.

"But, as I said before, hunger is not the worst thing. You get over that when you are healthy and strong.

"But the cold! . . .

"Try to imagine these ditches, just broad enough for two men to squeeze past each other, and just deep enough for you to be able to hide your head below the edge. Then try to imagine what it is to live there through the nights and days of the worst part of a Russian winter, inactive, and yet compelled to be continually wakeful.

"There was no protection but that which one's clothes could give and the slight shelter afforded at night by the holes dug into the sides of the trench and lined with straw that gradually crumbled into dust.

"Sometimes the wind swept like a razor along the flat bottom of the trench, and the frost bit

both one's hands and face. At last, in spite of mittens, one's hands were like torn strips of meat. The lobes of one's ears hung in rags, the lips had deep cracks.

"One's eyes, however, had the worst of it. They suffered terribly from the glare of the snow; and not least at night, when one had to stand for hours staring out over the white snow-cover and take note of everything that might happen both far and near, as far as one's sight could possibly reach.

"Sometimes it felt as if the apple of one's eye were scratched with sharp needles. The tears blinded and smarted, and their course over one's cheeks made one feel as if the flesh were being torn from one's face in long strips right to the very bone.

"There were many men whose sight was destroyed for life during that winter in Russia. Many went home blind from those trenches, broken, despairing, horror-stricken. Three men in my company shot themselves in the horror of blindness.

"It was not always the optic nerve, however, that was destroyed. Sometimes blindness was caused by a paralysis of the eyelids—a paralysis which, it was found later, could sometimes be cured by electric treatment.

"And then, when the snow began to fall!

"It would come sweeping over the flat country so that for days you were imprisoned in a world of whipping and whirling white and could not see your comrades at a distance of a few yards. Hour after hour you had to stand with your back against it and let it sweep and shriek around you, while the wind and the frost tore your flesh into strips. Or you might squat down and let the snow cover you until you collapsed, and you had suddenly to gather up all your energy and rouse yourself if you did not mean to sit and be frozen into eternity.

"Nothing is so terrible as cold in the inactivity of a trench. You know what a mental and physical discomfort it is, and how dull and apathetic it makes you feel to go about even in a slight state of chilliness. Imagine, then, living on day after day, without respite, feeling as if your body were a lump of solidly-frozen meat, and your bones aching as if they were going to crack.

"And then those long, long nights when you tried to get rest and warmth and neither rest nor warmth was to be had; when each single limb ached as if your whole body were one single, painful boil; when sores and cracks were torn and rent, and you could not make an

effort to move because the cold took away all your strength and energy.

"Then from time to time came the struggle to keep oneself awake in spite of weariness and hunger, because one knew only too well that, once under the dominion of sleep, there was little probability of ever waking again. Not infrequently, in the early morning, we found a comrade frozen to death by our side, wrapped in the oblivion of a merciful death. Frostbites, too, which as time went on destroyed one limb or another, and made a man a pitiable object for the rest of his life, these were not unknown during that winter in the trenches in Russia.

"Not everyone had bodily strength or spiritual energy enough to keep him from being overmastered by that feeling of utter apathy about everything which was the road to death. For there lies grave danger. There comes a time when men feel as if all suffering were over, all pains gone; moments come when they feel all aglow with happiness and warmth and well-being, and when the fairest sights and most vivid colours appear before their eyes.

"But it is in such moments as these that it becomes absolutely necessary to shake off the pleasant impression and to summon all one's

powers and energy. He who cannot do this, who cannot master himself enough to force his mind back to the harsh reality, the old weariness and pain, must inevitably fall a prey to death.

"We were relieved the day before Christmas Eve, and as far as I was concerned it was high time. I was almost overcome by cold and hunger. My eyes could no longer bear the painful glare of the snow and the long nights of anxious gazing over the shining white plains, or through the bewildering grey of the snow fog. My hands, too, and my face were covered with sores. It was an utterly indescribable joy to change one's clothes, and to get rid of the dirt and vermin. The lice had bitten us badly; hair and scalp were full of them. It was glorious to cover one's face and hands with vaseline, so thickly that it melted off in greasy drops. And oh! the joy of getting some decent food again, and the prospect of sleeping snugly on a delightful heap of straw, even though fully dressed, and with a bundle of thorn branches for a pillow! . . . One learns to appreciate keenly everything that concerns bodily comfort. One's thoughts are occupied almost entirely with food and sleep; everything else quickly becomes a weariness. Nothing outside oneself can arouse or retain any interest. Everything is a trifle compared to the question

as to whether there will be a chance of getting enough to eat that day, or whether there will be a chance of sleeping heavily through the hours like some weary animal.

"On Christmas Eve the Christmas letters and parcels were handed round. They arrived late in the evening by a motor car from the nearest town, which was over nine miles away. The car had made a laborious journey through a bare and devastated country, where the roads were deep in snow, and all tracks were obscured, and then through a thick wood, gloomy and wild, so torn by shells, that tree-tops and great trunks lay in a tangled confusion wherever it had to pass.

"The gifts were received with a joy that moved the men to tears. We were as happy and merry as children, and the happiest of all were those who had a letter from home. They wandered off into the solitude of the forest, each going his own way, and we did not see them again for hours.

"For those who had neither a letter nor any other message from their own home there were gifts from total strangers, kind souls who sent some touching little word of greeting as well: 'To our brave and blessed soldiers in the grey uniforms;' . . . 'To our best friends, wishing them a happy Christmas;' . . . 'From a little girl to

one of the heroes of the Fatherland;' . . . 'From a happy mother;' . . . 'From a mother who has no one left;' . . . 'From one whose dearest has given his life for the Fatherland.'

"Such were the greetings. And the gifts were gifts of love.

"These are dull words when one reads them in print in a newspaper. They sound like affectation. But those who have received a little gift like this with a greeting from a total stranger, and felt the love which prompted it, those who have seen how a little packet of tobacco, a few rolls of plug, a cake of chocolate, a pipe, or whatever the little thing might be, can gladden some man's existence at the front, and suddenly bring a new beauty and joy into life, filling it for a time with new colour and new meaning—those understand not only the purity, the deep feeling, and the tenderness which are expressed by such gifts of love, but also how deeply they sink into the heart of the man who receives them.

"I have seen my comrades stand and gaze at some such little gift and greeting as if they held some glorious and unexpected treasure in their hands. I have myself experienced that delightful and overwhelming feeling. It is an almost indescribable joy, because one's first and fairest

thought is an overwhelming rush of tender and silent gratitude to those strangers who have sent their good wishes and hopes not only to their own nearest and dearest, but also found it in their hearts and minds to make others glad as well. I have seen tall, strong men, who did not easily express their feelings as a rule, stand and weep with some such little gift in their hands. I have seen them, by stealth or openly, press it to their lips, as if it had been sent to them by their dearest on earth, as if it were a tender and touching message from one heart to another. . . .

"In the trenches behind the front, men are apt to revert to the primitive condition both for good and evil. All their feelings come to the surface, brutalities and sympathies alike, love, the sense of unity, the passion of hatred. They become easy to understand and easy to see through. There are few who can keep up the disguises of civil life. Everyone is laid open and turned inside out before he is aware of it. Early and late, every man sees into his neighbour's innermost soul, laid bare to his gaze. But no one is surprised at his neighbour's soul, and no one is ashamed of his own.

"The noisy and overbearing arrogance, which was noticeable during the first months among those who had been in the war from its beginning,

gradually disappeared, giving place to a heavy and weary realisation of the fact that no one knew when all this horrible business would end, or indeed what the end of it would be ; and at the same time we all became more and more like one another. Our thoughts and feelings were all the same. As soon as I knew what I felt or thought myself under any given circumstances I also knew exactly what was passing in the minds of the others. Thus by degrees we talked less and less to one another, and often avoided one another, each seeking privacy for himself. That was always pleasanter and better and happier than the society of our comrades, which generally resolved itself into nothing but a silent gazing into space.

"Now and then there was a little music to enliven us in the trenches or at the front. And naturally there were here and there merry natures, who could make the others smile and laugh. But all soon froze again, and turned to bitterness and discomfort. I know very well that quite a different description of things was given in many of the letters home. I have written that kind of letter myself. I have written descriptions of many hours spent with good and cheerful comrades and of amusements, of contentment, and that the whole thing was not

so very trying, when you come to the point, so long as you understood how to adapt yourself to it.

"Yes, exactly; pious lies, every one of them. A constant stream of pious lies has flowed homewards from the front during this year of war, and that, too, not merely on account of the censor. How could it be otherwise? Who would have the heart to make those at home more sad and anxious than they were already?

"No, indeed. So it was best to describe the whole thing in cheerful colours. To us it was all the same. The days were neither better nor worse for us. But perhaps we might be able to give those at home a few brighter hours, and help them to keep up their courage. And was not that well worth a handful of pious lies?

"In the afternoon we decked our Christmas trees. One inside the barn for those who were too much exhausted to stir; and one out in the snowy forest a short distance from the keeper's hut. People had sent us ornaments and little candles, while for the tree itself we chose a little snow-sprinkled pine—which was growing alone in an open space, encircled by venerable old trunks.

"It stood there, as if it had been expressly waiting for us and for our Christmas Eve.

"As the darkness came on, two or three hundred men gathered round the tree. Over us was a clear, starry night without a single cloud to mar the endless depth of its dark blue. Around us stood the silent forest, pure and white, with the pale moonbeams showing against the stems of the trees.

"It was a delightful and an absorbing sight for us all—this Christmas tree in the silent forest, where the only sound to be heard was the creaking of our footsteps on the snow ; all these various colours and all these tiny lights amid the white painting of the snow.

"It made us all quiet and silent. It led at once our thoughts and hopes far, far away—home to those dear rooms, where the bright Christmas tree of our childhood had stood, and where our Christmas happiness had filled everyone and everything with joy and with the tenderest feelings of the heart. We all stood with bent head : there were no words heard, nor any exclamations of pleasure ; only a sound as of a weary sigh was breathed through the silent air. Or perhaps it was only a quiet whisper among the old branches. A stirring of the night amid its winter's dreams. A deep and profound seriousness was seen on every face. There were lips which trembled. There were hands which

were laid over eyes; there were hands which clasped each other in the pressure of warm friendship, or in the silent comradeship of memory. There were arms that found their way about a comrade's neck.

"Then our captain stepped forward. His head was bent, and his eyes were fixed upon the snow at his feet. His lips were tightly pressed together, as though they held back some thought he would not utter.

"Then suddenly he straightened himself up and looked away in front of him as though he saw something beautiful far away in the sky.

"His lips quivered as he asked us if we would sing the hymn, 'Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht.'

"He led us in our singing; his voice sounded above all the others. It was so clear and strong: it sounded so touching and so sweet with the quiver in its tones. But there was no one else who sang properly, and the music dwindled away by degrees. At last it was only an indistinct humming. Sometimes it sounded as if only the captain were singing, and at last his voice also became only a murmur.

"The last verse melted away to nothing.

"Then he spoke a few words to us about Christmas. But they were short. He began in a clear, powerful voice, with that distinct

utterance which a soldier acquires from years of command. But it soon began to tremble, and when he spoke of home and the dear ones who at that very moment were thinking of us here, and not of their own peaceful Christmas, he was overcome by emotion. He bent his head and pressed his hand against his eyes; his words, when he began the prayer, 'Our Father, which art in Heaven,' were thick with tears and passed quickly to a sobbing 'Amen.'

"We all remained standing with bent heads. Here and there could be heard a deep sigh or a nervous cough, when the prayer was over. There were many who wept, and no one sought to hide his feelings. Why should he? All our thoughts were going the same way—to home and to all the dear ones, whether to wife and child, to father and mother, to whomsoever it was, whose thoughts in that moment were turned towards us in hope and fear.

"Then by degrees one after another began to go away. A little nod to a comrade, a clasp of the hand, a last look at the lights and colours of the Christmas Tree. And then away from it all, to be alone with one's own thoughts.

"More and more of the men went slowly away—some, farther into the forest by silent and lonely paths; others, out upon the open plain.

"I was one of the last to go. I watched the pale gleam of the little candles die away in the night. At last I felt the loneliness round me like a torment. But nevertheless I could not make up my mind to be with the others. I sought seclusion, as they did. I found it at the edge of the forest by an old stone dyke. I could see far over the flat country, white with snow as far as the eye could reach. I fancied I could see a glow far away, of something burning, like the spark of a glowworm by the edge of a ditch on a summer's night. I saw the beam of a searchlight pass over the first line trenches. And was not that the flash of a bomb, that blazed up and disappeared again? Even on the holy eve of Christmas the horrors of war were still there. I turned my eyes up to the sky, and scanned the vault of heaven from one horizon to the other. Far to the northward, over my home by the fjord, there was the same vault of heaven, the same stars. My home—— I closed my eyes and saw it all before me. The Christmas tree on the parlour table—father and mother each sitting in a corner, and round the tree, twenty poor children from the parish, singing and dancing, as our custom always had been, right on from the days of my grandfather.

"I heard mother sing 'A Child is born in

Bethlehem,' in her sweet, cheerful voice, which seemed to well out from the very depths of her heart. I heard father's deep bass joining in, and I saw his smile, which was never so bright and beautiful as on that evening, when he could make children really happy.

"I felt so deeply, overwhelmingly distressed.

"Do not misunderstand me; this distress had nothing to do with myself, or with my position at the moment. I was all right. I wanted for nothing: my life had been preserved. I could keep Christmas in peace.

"There was nothing amiss with me. But I was distressed nevertheless, and distressed as I have seldom been over anything. I felt it the whole time like a pain, like a torment, like something that could make me weep and sob helplessly. They were sitting there at home in the old farm by the fjord, on the holy, peaceful eve of Christmas, when never before had there been anything but joy and gladness for them; but now their hearts were full of anxiety and anxious questions rose to their lips. What could be happening to me? . . . Was I still alive? . . . Or was I lying dead and cold in the trenches or on the open plain? . . . Or was I lying wounded and helpless on some hospital bed? . . .

"Must it not be so? Must not their thoughts

and their questions be such as these? Such must they be on this evening, and such must they have been every day and every hour since I left my home.

"But they could get no answers to their questions. They could not get to know anything, however deeply they longed and prayed. Not even on the holy eve of Christmas could they know anything about the son whom they both loved so utterly, and who had been the joy of their lives, not least on every Christmas Eve, when heart meets heart so readily and when all human goodness and lovingkindness wells forth from its pure springs.

"Imagine what suffering it must mean to them, sitting there with thoughts of suspense in their hearts, and words of suspense on their lips. I hear my dear old mother say quietly, 'God only knows how it is with our boy to-night, father.' I see her eyes seek my father's. I see them grow dim. I see my father get up and go to her and lay his arm about her shoulders, reassuring her, while his lips tremble: 'You will see, little mother, the good God is protecting him.'

"I understand how sudden terror and alarm fill their hearts. How they tremble with emotion. How the bitter thought that I may perhaps be dead, wears them out and tortures them.

"They are both thinking of it. They think of it so much that they almost feel they know it. But neither of them dares express the thought for fear of alarming the other. And so by degrees the dread of it grows stronger and stronger in their minds. It fills everything. It overcomes everything. It torments them and wears them out with its horror. But nevertheless they clasp each other's hands, in a beautiful and comforting fashion, while they whisper, dreading all the while that it may be otherwise: 'Yes, yes, the good God is protecting our boy.'

"These were my thoughts that Christmas Eve before the Russian front. I believe they were true thoughts. Thus must things have been in my home, and in many others besides.

"But who can understand the painful helplessness, the grief, the torment that fills one's mind when one has come at last to realise what those at home must be suffering every moment and every hour of the day, because they know nothing—nothing?

"They have hope to support them and prayer to lean upon? Yes, indeed. No, they have nothing at all; for neither hope nor prayer can give them sure comfort for more than a brief minute.

"No, they have only one thing left. The

most terrible of all. Suspense. Terror. Despair. Hopelessness.

"I had never realised it all, until that silent Christmas Eve. It was only then I fully understood what a terrible existence it must be for those at home. I hardly know, but it seems to me that this is one of the saddest things which war brings in its train.

"It is almost worse than the nightmares and the hunger, the wounds, the groans and the misery all round one.

"I assure you, when in some lonely hour one probes that feeling to its depth and permits it to develop to its full extent in one's imagination, it wears one out and haunts one more than most things, because there is no remedy nor help nor comfort for it. It is nothing but a mighty, despairing, all-overwhelming sense of helplessness. It can torture. It can bring heartache. It can sometimes trouble a man till he loses his reason.

"One feels sometimes that one must shout, until one's voice cracks, and the cry is heard over the whole world: 'Yes,—I am alive, you dear ones, alive—alive!'"

VIII

"On the East front I took part in the great offensive against the Russians. My old comrade was there also; he was still alive. But there were many new faces in my division. The bloody days before Liège, the horrors of the fight through Belgium, and the long strife in the trenches of Flanders, had cost many men their lives or their reason.

"But many more were thinned out, before my turn came, one day in the Argonne in the early spring.

"I remember how Belgium was laid waste. But to tell the truth, things were much the same in East Prussia. Before the invasion, it was in many parts a melancholy country. But it looked more pitiable than ever, as we marched through it, with the Russians retreating before us. Trampled fields, ploughed up by shells, burnt farms, property wantonly injured or destroyed, towns in ruins and human beings in despair, robbed of all they had, their happiness, their joy, their future. It was an indescribable scene of misery and woe. But at the same time it was exceedingly touching to see how the greater number of the people clung to the

devastated home, whose master was probably in the fighting line, if he were not already killed. The wretched hovels and the ruined farms still sheltered human creatures, who did their work as best they could, and hid themselves from the night and the rain in some cramped space, between half-charred boards and ends of beams, or whatever they could find to hand.

"It was misery. It was poverty. It was wretchedness. But it was home—the one fixed point in their existence. If they once forsook that, they were exposed to the merciless uncertainty of life. So they clung to it obstinately and faithfully in spite of all they had to bear and suffer, both when the Russians advanced, and when they retreated. Among their other miseries they had also learnt to know famine. When the Russians advanced, they did not leave much behind. Many a time these people begged our last slice of bread from us, to stay the worst of their hunger.

"We gave to them willingly. I felt at times, that their lot was far worse than ours. We indeed might lose our lives in many different ways, and we also knew what it was to be hungry. But we had not to listen to our children crying for food, or see our tiny infants sicken

and die because there was no milk to be had, and the mother's breasts were empty.

"I can well understand why wherever we came, the people greeted us as their deliverers.

"I understand their joy and their often boundless gratitude in word and deed. I understand why the old men and the trembling women so often fell upon our necks with tears of joy.

"It must be heart-breaking to see the plot of ground you love laid waste and trampled down, without being able to do anything to save it. It must be still more heart-breaking to see the home that you have cherished devoured by flames, and then, on dark and stormy nights, taking your children by the hand or on your back, and followed by terror-stricken women and bewildered old people, to flee from that home and wander along toilsome roads to uncertainty, in company with hundreds of others who know just as little where to go for help or safety.

"We met many such crowds of homeless wayfarers on our march, people who could hardly drag themselves along for hunger and cold and terror.

"There were miserable carts drawn by miserable, starved horses and wretched bits of furniture, piled up anyhow in haste and fear.

There were people huddled together under the lee of a hedge or in a wood, or sheltering in the holes they had dug into banks of earth or dykes, wrapped in rags, starving with cold and still terror-stricken. Men gazing towards the homes from which they had fled, looking in bewilderment and despair at the downtrodden and ruined country; women lying down and trying to warm their little ones at a naked, impoverished breast, or groaning in misery and hopelessness over the dying eyes of a child; old men and old women with only one wish in the world—the sum and substance of their prayers from hour to hour being that God would take them away from all this misery, which they could not in the least comprehend and which they had not strength enough to bear.

"And what appalling things they told us, in trembling voices and shaking with sobs!

"Not only their homes, their domestic animals and their furniture had been harried by fire and sword—it cannot be otherwise in war, I suppose, for it has no mercy.

"It had been here as it had been in Belgium—the soldiers were intoxicated with savagery and the lust of destruction. In such an army there may be a thousand scoundrels amongst a hundred thousand decent men;

but scoundrels create new scoundrels, drink begets coarseness, and coarseness begets violence. Old men are mocked and tortured, women outraged without mercy, and innocent little children are made to suffer without pity. Men have to pay for their hate and their defiance, even though honest and justifiable, with military retribution, merely because one of them has been imprudent. He has stirred up and set ablaze passionate instincts that no one can quench.

"I knew what might happen—I had been through the whole affair in Belgium. I knew from experience all that they told me, and a great deal more. . . . But I can assure you now, and I shall dare to say it on the day I have to stand before my Eternal Judge, I have never of my own impulse harmed any civilian; I have no murder or other deed of shame on my conscience. The guilt of whatever I have had a share in doing is entirely on the heads of those who could demand it of me. They could demand of me that I should do my duty and whip me into doing it, or shoot me if I refused. I had long since sworn loyalty to the colours. That oath is sacred, like any other oath. And I was a subject of the country I served and had to serve.

"That being so, may I not be allowed to say

that while I was appalled at what I now saw, I was at the same time filled with a certain satisfaction. It appalled me because all horror appals, yet at the same time there was a certain satisfaction about it, because I saw in it a just retribution for all that we had done in Belgium—a mild and very lenient retribution, by the way.

"Don't you think one may be allowed to say that without being stamped as cruel and merciless?

"There is, amongst my Russian experiences, an incident which I shall always be glad to cherish with the warmest gratitude, because it represents to me what we mortals usually call Nemesis—that is, chastising justice, or whatever name you prefer to give it.

"I call it the judgment of God because it seemed as if there was a leading and guiding hand in it—a hand that struck one who was guilty and gave atonement for two whose lives had been taken.

"The rearguard to which I belonged—I think we were only a couple of thousand men—had been billeted for a day in a fairly large village not far from the Russian frontier. It was one of the first places to be laid waste. There were not many farms or houses left that were not in

ruins. The cattle had been taken and the corn trodden down. Many homes were quite deserted, and no one knew where the inmates were. Besides, who could know at such a time, when each one had enough to do to save himself and those belonging to him. Perhaps they were dead; perhaps terror had driven them to madness; perhaps they had dragged themselves along, weary to death, in the train of the fleeing crowds and had fallen by the wayside in a ditch or at the edge of a forest, left behind by the others who continued their insensate flight and took heed of naught but themselves and their own affairs.

"Perhaps they lay by the roadside gazing towards the home that was now a ruin, at the fires blazing over the flat country, and up to the heavens where it seemed to them that everything was forgotten—mercy, goodness, justice.

"Perhaps they murmured a prayer, the last, the very last, and then lay down and waited for what was to come—for silent, reconciling death, that would bring them peace and alleviation for all that they had not been able to endure in a world that seemed to them to have been quite forsaken by God.

"I know that old men were found with their hands folded on their breasts and the reconciling peace of death on their wasted, rigid faces.

"I know that young women were found with their infants pressed close to their bare breasts, as if trying to give them their last warmth, until they had both gone into the land of everlasting peace, slain by cold and hunger and terror.

"In one of the poorest of the small houses in the village lived a young woman. She had been beautiful, as women in villages often are, a radiant figure of health and strength, with the perfume and sweetness of the fields and their sunshine on her lips and in her eyes. She seemed to be about half-way through her twenties. But now her face was drawn and pale, and she dragged herself wearily about as if she were ill.

"I remember her home distinctly. It had been a little six-windowed thatched house near the end of the village. Two of the windows belonged to a room with an alcove and the kitchen. The other part of the house had been allotted to the cow, the pigs, and the hens.

"It was now almost in ruins. The roof was gone, the woodwork charred, and the walls had tumbled down in a crumbling heap where the animals had been. Only the little room with the alcove and the kitchen were intact, but the window-panes were smashed, the door battered in, and rags had been stuck in here and there as a slight protection against wind and weather.

"Behind the house there was a small, down-trodden garden, hedged about with a dyke of willows and elders.

"On the day when the Russians entered the village they ravaged it with fire and sword in their savage exultation. It was said that many of them were drunk. However that may have been, they forced their way into farmsteads and houses, took what there was of cattle and fodder, smashed everything to bits here and set on fire there, and did not deal gently with the women in the houses.

"The little house at the end of the village was also visited by a soldier. He stormed and raged and shouted and spared nothing of the little that could be spared. Finally he threw himself upon the young wife and tried to take her by force.

"Then the husband rushed upon him to save his wife's honour. He did not succeed, and it cost him his life. He fell within the room, killed by the blow of a sword on his head.

"The soldier's savagery increased, and at last it completely mastered him. He kicked the young woman till she was nearly beside herself with terror, and stabbed her little boy, who was lying in the bed, with a bayonet thrust.

"Then only, and not till then, was he satisfied with his achievements.

"The poor woman buried her husband and child the next day in a corner of the garden and covered the little mound with flowers.

"There was no one who could have helped her to give them Christian burial. It then became clear to everyone that she had lost her reason. She went about muttering continually, with a remote and strange look in her tear-worn eyes, that sometimes looked as if they were blind. She would often sit for hours on the garden dyke beside the grave of her husband and child.

"It was extremely sad and pathetic, and heart-rending, to see her sitting there, sometimes till late at night, as if she were waiting for the two to come back.

"Sometimes she would lie down on the grave, pressing one cheek against the ground, and she would lie a long time like that—sometimes until she fell asleep. If anyone asked her why she lay there she stared vacantly with a pair of bewildered, tear-bright eyes and answered through her sobs that she could hear her little boy crying and calling to her.

"Every time a convoy of prisoners passed through the village she was seized with restlessness. She was eager and quick in her movements, and she stood staring intently at those who passed by.

"It seemed as if she were looking for one particular face amongst the many hundreds, but when they had passed by she collapsed again and dragged herself back to the house, or out to the dyke and the mound in the corner of the garden.

"Towards evening, on the day that we had entered the village, I was standing outside her house with one of my comrades. She was going about that evening moaning as she had never moaned before. Her hair was hanging in matted strands about her face, and her clothes were nothing but torn rags. It seemed as if she had torn them in her horror.

"All the time she went on murmuring, between her moans: 'My lovely little boy—my lovely little boy! . . .'

"Now and then she clenched one hand in the other or struck them both against her forehead.

"While we were standing by looking at her my lieutenant came up. He tried to soothe her and patted her shoulder, but every time he touched her she shuddered and seemed to shrink in sudden terror.

"'My poor little boy!' she moaned. 'They killed him. He was only six years old and was lying in his bed. "Pray to God," I cried to him;

"pray to God." I was lying on the floor by his bed and saw him fold his hands in prayer, while he gazed at me in terror.

"'But he who was standing over him did not spare him. He stabbed him in the breast with his bayonet, and he kicked me along the floor. My husband was lying murdered on the door-step; his face was red with blood; his forehead was cut open.'

"Her words came in rapid, violent gasps, while she pressed her hands against her eyes as if to shut out all the horror she saw before her.

"'But there *is* justice in the world,' she screamed. 'There *is* justice. I shall find him; I shall find him; I shall find him! . . .'

"Then she grew a little calmer, and the lieutenant and I stood whispering to each other about what we had just seen and about what we had heard about her.

"Some time after a convoy of prisoners passed by. There were about two hundred men.

"The instant the young woman saw the prisoners she rushed out on the road. Meanwhile my captain had come up, too. He stood by her side and closely watched her movements. She looked like an animal ready to spring. Every muscle was tense, every nerve tightened, and

meanwhile her eyes scrutinised the prisoners as they passed by.

"There was a strange, penetrating force in her eyes. They burned like live coals. They flashed like rapiers.

"Suddenly she rushed out and almost threw herself upon one of the prisoners in the convoy. It stopped, and as she clenched her hands threateningly in the air she screamed in mingled exultation and agony: 'It's he! It's he! I knew I should find him!'

"At first the captive soldier stared at her in surprise. Suddenly a wave of deep red suffused his face, and then he turned ashy grey and bent his head. It looked as if he were slowly sinking on his knees.

"The young woman went on crying: 'It's he! It's he! I knew I should find him!'

"At last she laughed wildly, a laugh that was more like a mad shriek, and then collapsed on the roadside while the froth oozed through her tightly-closed lips."

My friend ceased speaking for a moment, and I felt a prickling and tingling all over me. It was emotion and uneasiness both in one.

I looked at him. His eyes had suddenly become bright and clear, and there was a smile about his narrow lips of mingled sadness and joy.

"I will not tell you anything more about it," he then said. "I will not go further into what happened. I will only add that half an hour later that man was no longer among the living.

"*We shot him.*

"Was it honourable and just? Is it never permissible to shoot a prisoner? Perhaps—perhaps not. I don't wish to dispute about it with anybody. In this case that question does not interest me in the least. I don't care whether it was lawful or not.

"I will only honestly and openly declare that to me this little incident stands out, amongst all the appalling things I saw, as something infinitely beautiful and exalted.

"I felt that at that moment I had seen cold, stern Justice face to face."

IX

"Towards the spring my regiment was again sent to the Western front. We were to strengthen the position in the Argonne. It was a slow journey from east to west, and it made me a good deal wiser while it lasted.

"Above all, I began to understand fully that my comrades were growing tired. Their

enthusiasm and their fighting ability were not lessened, perhaps, when matters were really serious ; neither, perhaps, had their hate cooled. I will not assert anything, one way or the other. But their overweening self-assurance was broken.

" They had learned to look soberly at things. They understood that victory was still a long way off—if, indeed, victory were ever to be won. They had grown silent and thoughtful.

" I found it very natural. There was not much to talk about, and there was nothing whatever on the journey to kindle their enthusiasm.

" There was nobody along the railway line to cheer us or wave flags, nor was there anyone at the stations to give us flowers or fruit. There was no rejoicing anywhere.

" On the other hand, we saw many women dressed in mourning, and there was an atmosphere of gloom and depression about every place we came to. The day's work went on behind a veil of mourning.

" The boisterous jubilations and the boundless confidence were gone. In every place that we arrived at everybody and everything seemed to bear an imprint of weariness and anxiety as to what the future might bring.

" We noticed it not least in the various places where we stopped, where officers or men had been

home on furlough and who were now returning to the front.

"There was no joy and pride, and there was no faith and enthusiasm, in those who had come to see them off. There was not so much as a flower.

"Instead there was gloomy and weary grief. Most of the women's faces were pale and thin. The eyes had that washed-out look that tells of long sleepless nights, and of days crawling along in uncertainty and anxiety from hour to hour. On the children's faces there was unconcealed complaint that their father was leaving them again, and that they had to go back again to the slow, dull days, in which they never saw their mother's smile or their mother's happiness, and in which every letter from the father they loved only gave rise to new anxiety and new uncertainty.

"And what of that parting smile that sometimes struggled out on a pale, sad face? It was a smile wrapped in despair and silent complaint, and charged with anxiety and troubled thoughts.

"In the last hurried embrace and in the last trembling hand-clasp there was a sort of tacit mutual consciousness that the parting was for ever.

"There were more tears and deeper grief than beside an open grave that holds one whom you have loved very deeply.

"Many women fainted when the train began to move away. The little courage and the little mental control left to them so long as they could hold their dear one in their arms and feel his living body against theirs vanished the moment he was beyond their reach.

"It was mournful to see, and it saddened our thoughts. Can you wonder at it?

"Many of us remembered the clamorous and ardent exultations when we first set out, the cheering, the enthusiasm, the stirring shouts, screaming out hate and assurance of victory.

"And now this contrast. This loud-voiced or only half-suppressed despair. These faces that spoke of grief, of sleeplessness, of care, of the scarcity of daily bread, even of hunger sometimes. All this silent plaint of longing that never quite found a voice, of hopes so often disappointed, of prayers so oft unheard.

"I could see the impression it made on my comrades, and how their thoughts were with their own people during most of the time.

"Many were the lips that quivered and the eyes that were dimmed. Head after head was

silently bent, and many a sigh found its way through firmly-closed lips.

. . . . .

"Arrived at the Argonne, we were sent out to a position on a height. There was only a narrow, marshy slope between the enemy's position and ours.

"We were ordered out in the evening and spent a cold and foggy, damp night in some holes dug the night before. Why we had to be there, of all places, none of us understood. The position was not even half prepared.

"We had calculated on getting away the next morning, but we were ordered to stay there the whole day, and were told that it was important that the hostile observers, especially the aviators, should not discover the position. There must be no putting up of heads—still less of the upper part of the body. If aviators appeared over the position, nobody was to stir an inch.

"If, at that, we had had only fairly convenient holes to stay in! But they were narrow, half a yard deep at the most, with a little earth in front. You could neither sit nor lie down, yet as the day slowly approached you tried to lie down, first one way and then another. At last you had to make the best of your lair, such as it was. One man had doubled his knees up under

his chin; another looked like a broken safety-match; a third had stretched his legs straight out, but had to stoop forward to keep his head from being seen. And there was nothing to lie down on or sit on but the hard damp stone flooring, and our overcoats were soaked through by the night mist. Our limbs were stiff and cramped after lying there all night. We shook with cold—it only remained for the enemy's artillery to begin firing.

"And at about nine o'clock in the morning it did begin.

"In the course of an hour they had fired so well into our position that they evidently knew with astonishing exactness where the holes were, and they sent their volleys at intervals of varying length. First one to the right; then, in mad haste, one of eight rounds to the left; then one in the middle. Up and down the row—backwards and forwards—backwards and forwards.

"We had hardly heard the shot fired ere the projectile struck its objective with a terrific crash. There was no means of defending oneself against them. They came tearing on, crafty, and screaming, and sent terror through all one's quivering nerves.

"It gradually strained one's mind to madness to sit there in the same position in the same

miserable little hole, while all one's limbs were aching and racked with pain.

"It tore at the threads of one's nerves to sit there and wait for the invisible projectiles, whose coming one did not suspect until they were actually in one's midst.

"Thoughts almost howled through one's brain. The shells were striking the left wing now—whose turn would it be next?—how long would it be before the next volley came?—there—now—no, it went somewhere else—but now—they have come this way again—you can't see them; but the drums of your ears are torn, and earth and stones fly screaming about you. You crouch down, cover yourself, shielding yourself with your arms, while all kinds of thoughts chase each other through your mind.

"It's over again now—but next time you'll be done for—or perhaps not yet—the last one struck a little further off—it's a miracle though, that you are still alive; but you mustn't hope—mustn't hope—the day is long—who knows whether you won't have to stop here for ever?

"Then a volley strikes again—roaring—thundering—the earth trembles around you. It is as if it would be blown into atoms and flung into the ether like dust.

"Then you suddenly shriek in terror: 'No,

no! I will live! . . . I *will* see all of them at home again! . . . O God, O God, help me! help me! for their sakes—only for their sakes!'

"Perspiration streams from every pore. One's sight is dizzied. There is a hammering as if with a mallet at the back of one's neck.

"Then it is quiet for a little while, half an hour perhaps. But the day is long; it is perhaps not more than two o'clock yet. You fumble for your watch; it is only twelve! Perhaps this hell is to go on for six or seven hours yet.

"Then you count the minutes. 'One—two—three—four.' How endless such minutes are! how slowly, how terribly slowly, the time crawls along!

"You get more and more tired of sitting in this cramped position. One limb after another feels thick and swollen and painfully tender. For a moment you try to straighten yourself, but then the volleys begin again.

"'Ambulance!' cries some one in terror; 'ambulance!'

"Then there is a sound of groaning and gurgling that runs through your chest like the stabs of long knives, and a last horrible, rattling shriek, 'Ambulance! Help me! Help me!'

"But no one is able to help, not even the man lying only three paces away.

"Then again some one cries, 'Ambulance! ambulance! Help! help!'

"Three or four men pass the call further on along the line. It gives comfort for a moment, perhaps. But it is hopeless.

"Suddenly three shells explode simultaneously. Then it seemed as if the earth opened under you and all its banks and slopes were rushing down in a rolling, shattering, crashing chaos. You cannot see anything, neither the ground nor the sky, for earth and tree-roots and stones are rising amid tremendous columns of smoke like the mighty outburst of a volcano.

"And now the earth sinks with a singing hiss. A little way off I see two men buried beneath the *débris*. Some time after I see the earth moving a little, like the crust of the ground when a mole is pushing its way up. Slowly a body appears. The face is streaming with blood. The frightened eyes stare helplessly round. The hands grope in the air as if looking for support. Then the head sinks, face downwards, to the ground. I hear a half-suffocated scream, which is drowned in the crash of a new shell. The man is dead.

"The other one remained buried.

"It goes on like that all day long. Weariness, fear, horror, tear at one's body and one's nerves till one is almost out of one's senses. One's body

is like a throbbing and suppurating boil, one's brain like a continually-aching lump. One's eyes water. One's heart pumps the blood out and in till it is sore, and till one can hardly breathe. One's throat feels as if it were torn into strips. A hundred times in the day one has suffered the burning agonies of the fear of death.

"At last the firing stops. Dusk is gradually beginning to fall. Only a single shell still finds its way to us and reaps its harvest.

"You get up. You feel as if your limbs had been hammered with mallets. At first you find it difficult to stand on your feet, but gradually the blood begins to circulate again. Some men run to and fro in front of the holes to warm themselves; others seek out the wounded. The stretcher-bearers have plenty of work to do. One by one they take the wounded away, using the brown tent canvas as stretchers.

"You hear a quiet moaning, a whimpering complaining. Here and there some man hobbles along with his arms round the necks of two comrades. One of his legs is only a stump, or it hangs loose and drags after him.

"In many holes you still find a silent, huddled-up form.

"'Hullo, comrade!' you call to him. He does not move.

"'Are you asleep? Anything the matter?'

"Still no answer.

"Then you kneel down to shake the silent one awake. His hand is wet; his forehead red. It is blood. He is dead.

"Over there sits a man babbling foolishly. His hair was black this morning. It is now as white as snow. He sings a stupid song, spits now and then like a baby slobbering, and babbles again and makes faces as if he were mocking at something. Then he laughs, brutally and loudly. He has gone mad.

"The day's horrors have robbed him of his reason.

"Two of his comrades go to him and pick him up. He babbles again and collapses like a limp rag. The stretcher-bearers arrive and take him away.

"I hear his babbling and brawling further off, and see him strike out his arms as if he had suddenly been seized with a wild and uncontrollable rage.

"He is only one out of very, very many who met the same awful fate in the horrors of bombardment or the hell of the trenches. Their fate is worse than death.

"I stand looking after him awhile. Then one of my comrades comes and puts his arm round

my shoulder. He shudders as if with cold, and his face is still drawn after all the scenes of horror.

"'Better two years in gaol than another day like this,' he says.

"I nod, and we silently press each other's hands.

"Then we are ordered to form up and march to the nearest line of trenches.

"At the same time the relief for the night and the next day have come up, and while the dead are being carried away the others creep into the holes.

"They see what awaits them. They are silent.

. . . . .

"Night brought us no rest, however. A couple of hours after we had got into position in the trenches the enemy began to storm them.

"It was one of those attacks that do not lead to anything.

"It began by shelling the holes, but that did not last very long. Then they came swarming from the other side of the marsh, and the handful of people in the holes were no use. They were knocked over and cut down in a few minutes.

"I understood less than ever why they had to be there at all.

"Then they made for our trench. They came

straight on with bayonets fixed. They hurled hand-grenades at us. The earthworks crashed and tumbled about us whilst our machine-guns ploughed deep into their ranks. But it was to no purpose. There was a fury about their attack that nothing could stop. They ran through our barbed wire defences as if they had been made of sewing-cotton. Our trenches were a chaos of earth and sand-bags and fragments of beams. You could neither see nor hear. The whole thing was a roaring, clamorous, simmering confusion. The air resounded with half-choked screams and the moans of the dying, with shouts and yells and oaths.

"Finally we went for each other with bayonets —or our bare fists. I chanced to see one of my comrades seized by the throat and strangled, and then thrown aside like a carcass. Another was kicked in the stomach, and fell with a roar and a catching gasp.

"Then we fled in mad flight. None of us stopped to think. We only wanted to seek cover—only cover again. We stumbled over each other—fell—could not rise again. One man had his skull smashed with a blow from a rifle-butt; another was run through his back with a bayonet. And the hand-grenades kept on crashing about us. Bodies were torn and limbs rent asunder.

The air was like one sounding string of cracking and crashing, of shouts and yells, of roars and moans.

"Not till we had reached the next line of trenches did we get any rest—the few of us who were left.

"The enemy slowly withdrew to our deserted position. But still the hand-grenades were hurled at us.

"We could hear them shouting their victorious 'Hurrah!' and their scornful 'Boche' as we were almost fainting under the furious heat of the attack and the horror of the retreat.

"Around us could be heard the moaning of the wounded. Looking through the embrasures through the underwood with its split and broken trees, we could see that it was filled with dead bodies like bundled-up rags. In between the crackling of the machine-guns we could hear cries for help. We could see figures attempting to rise, but sinking back and remaining, struck by a merciful bullet or collapsing with a last gasp.

"We could not go to their aid. We were still under fire from the foe.

"Our captain was lying a little way in front. He was in a half-sitting posture with his face towards us. Blood was streaming down his forehead, and he was stretching out one arm.

The bright moonlight rested upon his face and made its outline sharp and clear. We could see one or two others by his side, also groping about with their hands. Their teeth gleamed white, like those of a beast of prey in a fury.

"They were tortured by thirst.

"My old comrade of the ranks seized some field flasks and crept over the breastworks.

"We watched him in a fever of suspense. He crept out, flat on the ground, dragging the flasks after him in one hand. A volley from a machine-gun swept towards him. We ducked hastily and heard the bullets whistling over our heads.

"After a little while we again looked through the embrasures. He had now reached the captain and the two others and held out the flasks to them. They drank in eager gulps and then quietly lay down again.

"Then he crawled further on. There were others who were given to drink, until the flasks were empty.

"He crawled back, still flat on the ground, dragging himself backwards with his hands. We stared at him in breathless suspense. They must have noticed him on the other side, for a couple of volleys more swept after him, but missed him.

"He had now reached the breastworks and the lower part of his body was hanging down the wall of the trench. Then he raised his head and shoulders a moment to look round.

"There was another volley. We ducked, and at the same moment heard a half-choked scream. His body fell heavily in a heap, down to the bottom of the trench.

"I jumped over to him, lay down by his side, and raised his head.

"A stream of blood was trickling from his right temple. His eyes shone and glowed as if he were looking at something bright and beautiful. They rested in a hasty gleam in mine as if in thanks and a hurried farewell. Then his eyelids closed and his head fell back powerlessly. A few swift twitchings sped over his face and round his lips. They grew at last into a smile.

"Then he suddenly opened his eyes and looked at me, but his glance was now fading and distant —restless like that of a frightened child.

"He breathed quickly three or four times and then I heard him whisper as he turned his face with difficulty to mine:

"'Remember—home. . . .'

"There was a last panting sigh. His face twitched in a hasty, trembling grimace.

"He was dead.

"He died like a hero. I do not think it is too much to say that. He *was* a hero in his faithful helpfulness of comrades who were fainting for something to drink.

"True, it meant neither life nor death to any of them. They were already doomed. But I believe he brightened their very last moments and softened the sting of death.

"It was thoroughly fine and warm-hearted, infinitely great and good of him to do what he did.

"I did not forget my promise. I wrote to his wife, and I wrote as I had promised to write. I told her that he had died like a hero—that was what his little daughter was to read about him some day when she was old enough to understand and to be proud of it.

"Yes—he had a hero's death. He had a somewhat slow and heavy mind; he did not think very deeply about the problems of either life or death. But he offered up his life to sweeten the hour of death for others.

"Is not that enough to make a hero's wreath about the brows of a poor and faithful Brandenburg peasant? I think so.

"Anyhow, it seems to me that many have been made heroes for far less than that.

"My old comrade's death made a very strong impression on me. It sounds strange, perhaps, when one has seen hundreds and hundreds fall and die around one, and seen it with that indifference that comes at last from habit.

"Nevertheless the impression was deep and strong.

"The others had died, too. Quite true. But whom did they leave behind? Who wept over them? A father perhaps, or a mother. A wife and little children. Probably. Yet it was not the same, for I did not know their hearts.

"But I knew the beautiful and hidden cord that bound my old comrade to his wife and little daughter. He had spoken of them with such warmth and tenderness—so lovingly and faithfully. They were the sole joy of his toilsome life, as he was theirs. She was so happy in him, and believed so firmly that he would come home again to her and their little girl. And then the future was before them—a long, long future in love and in labour shared, and in mutual faithfulness and common care of their little child.

"Every single hour since he left home she would surely dedicate to him. His image had been woven into all her prayers and all her hopes. She had toiled and laboured to keep their little

home together, and to show him, when he came back, the worth of her love and loyalty.

"And one day she received the message that he was dead. . . . True, he had died like a hero—yet he was dead.

"And death is death, even though memory adds hero to the name. The happiness and future of two people is for ever lost.

. . . . .

"Those were the thoughts that constantly returned to me whenever I remembered my old comrade. And when I think of him I always see that uneasy, dying glance and hear him whispering the quiet words, the last he uttered :

"'Remember—home. . . .'

"At those times I ask myself what were the thoughts which at that moment sped through his mind : whether they were of grief—of dread—or of happiness, because he had been warm-hearted and kind ; or whether everything had been gathered into one bright and happy picture of the little home and those two who were so tenderly dear to him.

"Can you answer me ? Who can ?

"Is death in battle a joy, or is it a terror ?

"Would you not give years of your life to know what was behind that dying glance, or that last sigh that formed the boundary

between life and death for one who was dear to you?

"Imagine what it would be if you knew positively that it had been the purest and brightest joy. Would not your memories be twice as beautiful and ten times as happy?"

X

"It is surprising how little you think of death when you live side by side with it every day.

"One would imagine, I suppose, that most of one's quiet hours would be occupied with the thought that one might the next moment be lying dead or maimed or wounded, as has happened in the course of time to so many of one's comrades.

"It is not so, however. I have never feared or expected death less than during the eighteen months I was at the front—and sometimes in the hottest engagements.

"It is *only* during the hours when you are lying in a trench and cannot shield yourself at all, while the shells are crashing about you and ploughing up everything, that you sometimes think that the next minute your turn will perhaps come. But only then.

"Apart from that you take life pretty carelessly. You duck your head; you jump to one side or throw yourself flat on the ground. Sometimes flying earth and stones and splinters of wood are hurled at you. You see others die; you see others maimed.

"Yes, quite so. Death can take all the others. But it is not coming to fetch oneself.

"It can be the most awful agony to lie in a trench and endure all its torments, or those of a bombardment. It can be a hell of horror.

"But it has scarcely anything to do with the fear of death.

"You grow fatalistic. You firmly fix in your mind the idea that *you will not die;* and at last this grows into a conviction that you *cannot* die. At any rate, that was the case with me; and I think, on the whole, that this was the case with all of us. If it were not, fear alone of the death that was lurking to spring on us at any moment would turn every army into a flock of frightened children; and an army is not composed of such.

"On the contrary, most men do not lack courage—the courage that springs from a happy and cheery carelessness with regard to death, and a blind, simple faith that anyhow death has no message for oneself.

"There is really only one case in which the fear of death suddenly grips you with a trembling violence and almost paralyses your mind. It is when—after some time of rest, during which your mind gradually recovers some of its balance—you have to prepare yourself to go into immediate attack.

"Not the first attack you take part in. But later, when you have become thoroughly acquainted with the horrors of an attack and understand what endless misery and suffering it spreads around it—and still more when you have experienced the awful spiritual shock caused by a repulsed attack and still more if that attack ended in defeat and rout.

"Then a shaking and helpless dread may sometimes steal over you. It feels like a strangling grip round the throat; your heart and chest hammer as if the blood were going to burst all your veins.

"There is only one thing then that gives relief—alcohol; and there are many who resort to it.

"In civil life there is such a thing as drinking oneself into courage. It holds good no less in war. Sometimes great quantities of spirits were consumed before one of the big attacks. Many a time men drank to the point of stupe-

faction. But anxiety was quelled, while at the same time animal instincts were stirred to blood-heat; and that was the object to be attained.

"By this I do not mean to speak disparagingly of personal courage and enthusiastic disregard of death. I have seen many a brave and fearless deed. But I have also seen other things, and I am sure that I am not getting on the wrong side of the truth in saying that a good many victories were gained in a fog of brandy fumes.

"There was always plenty to be had of that kind of thing on the days of big attacks.

"It produced men who dashed on blindly. It endowed them with the gore-dripping grace of fury and brutality. It heated all their savage instincts to boiling-point.

"The fact was that gradually those whom one may call the veterans, the old set, had grown tired, not only physically, but mentally too.

"So long as you go forward at a furious pace and all the walls of Jericho tumble down, it is enough to keep your courage up and your ardour alive.

"But when the time comes in which you have also to feel the crushing sense of defeat, and moreover—even under the brightest conditions, in which you cannot see any prospect of an end

to it—when weeks grow into months and months into years, and you get no further—well, then it is very human, I think, and easy to understand, that courage breaks down and enthusiasm and grandeur fade into a gloomy and tired wish that it may all soon be over, no matter what the result is to be.

"I have heard that kind of talk so often, and everyone will be able to understand it.

"It is the same in war as in daily life; there is always a stage at which many cannot, either physically or mentally, bear any more, and when all outward claims are made in vain.

"'I pray to God, night after night, that it may soon be over. And now they are starving at home into the bargain, poor souls! . . .'

"When, therefore, a chaplain once said—and this is the naked truth—that it was clear even to Luther that God was *our* God—solely and entirely our God—and in proof of it referred to the first line of Luther's well-known hymn: 'Ein' feste Burg ist *unser* Gott'—*our* God—a God for us alone—it angered me to think that a man, about whose Christian faith I had otherwise no reason to doubt, could permit himself such distorted thinking—such blasphemy.

"On the other hand, I do not think that most of my comrades saw how distorted it was. God

had really become their God, and cared for us and our affairs and our families, and left the others to take care of themselves.

"They said so honestly, in full earnest. They believed it with that force of conviction that nothing can shake.

"To them the war was really God's judgment on their enemies, a judgment which it was their mission to carry out.

"I remember that my new rank comrade and I talked about it one Sunday night, while we were on outpost duty together at the edge of a forest in the Argonne, and gazed up at the unfathomable depths of the blue and star-strewn sky.

"Thoughts of that kind come into your mind so easily on a night like that.

"'God has now shown again that He is *ours*,' he said. 'He has given us a victory yonder on the eastern side. We have taken Riga and nearly two-hundred thousand Russians. We shall go straight to Petersburg now.'

"He was a young schoolmaster from Mecklenburg. He had got hold of one of the many extraordinary reports of victories that often ran their course along the front, and which came no one quite knew whence.

"'Don't you think we should keep God

outside that?' I answered. 'On the whole, I think we have far too much to do with God. It sometimes sounds like blasphemy.'

"He looked at me in astonishment, and then said:

"'You don't believe, perhaps, that God is on *our* side, that *we* are the rod of chastisement over the others because of their sins and their immorality.

"'Rip up their stomachs—smash in their skulls. . . . We serve God in that way. That is *our* divine service.'

"I remember smiling, and he looked at me with almost an indignant glance when I answered after a little while:

"'To tell you the truth, I don't think God interferes in that kind of thing. He is neither with "*us*" nor with the others.'

"He was silent a while. Then he said, and there was something like mockery in his voice:

"'Oh, well, of course—you are a Dane. I had forgotten that, to tell you the truth.'

"I had a hot answer on my lips. It was the first time anyone had spoken of my nationality in that way.

"But I held my tongue. For if this was the man's conviction, it was no use talking to him; and it could not make me either better or worse.

"I must add, however, that he immediately begged my pardon for his words. He did not mean any harm, he said. They had slipped out of his mouth unawares.

"'I have the highest respect and esteem for all of you,' he said at last; 'we all have. It must be hard for you and your compatriots—having to . . .'

"I could have hugged him for those words. They seemed to me like a mark of distinction on my breast.

"He was hit by a shell the next day and died immediately after. Two days later my turn came."

My friend ceased speaking a while. He closed his eyes, and at the same moment a quick trembling passed over his grey face. Then he smiled—a somewhat faint and tired smile. It looked as though joy and pain met at the same instant in his mind.

Then he continued:

"It was one of the first days of real spring in the Argonne.

"We had had a comparatively quiet and peaceful time for about a week. There had been a few skirmishes here and there, but otherwise the days had slipped by under incessant artillery fire.

"The weather was glorious. A richly perfumed, vigorous French spring, with the most beautiful blue skies and mild, soft nights.

"It was saddening, though, to feel the coming of spring over this devastated country: villages in ruins; fields torn up by shells or trampled down and as barren as stones, and woods torn and shattered as if a gigantic scythe had mown them down and fires had scorched away the undergrowth.

"For one who has grown up close to the soil and seen its generous bounty, and who has grown to love every single little fertile mound, it was heart-breaking to see how this country had been maltreated, and how homes and affection and human happiness had been blighted and laid waste.

"Those who are guilty will have a heavy reckoning to pay some day, when they have to settle their accounts with God.

"And there will be many who will not grant them a moment's peace or mercy.

"I had had a horrible night. A nightmare of horrors had torn at my mind. From midnight to dawn I had had a painful struggle to keep myself awake. But it was not much use. An incident I had witnessed on the eastern side had

come back to my remembrance, and I could not get rid of it again.

"It was not nearly so terrible, perhaps, as many of the other things I had seen, but it has caused me more pain than most of them.

"One morning I received orders to commandeer twelve horses in the course of the day. Commandeering is not a cheerful job. But what does that matter? An order is an order. I was allowed to take four men with me, and we set off on our uncertain quest in the occupied district.

"I shall never forget that day.

"It was already noon, and still we had no horses. Wherever we went the population was in the most miserable plight. Moreover, most of them had fled, and those who were still left on the farms could hardly hold themselves up for hunger; and I could not bring myself to take the horses from the carts of the refugees.

"At one farm the owner took us into the sitting-room and ranged himself, his wife, and his eight children in a row like organ-pipes. Then he bared his chest and asked me to stab him and put an end to their misery.

"What was I to do? I had not been taught to be hard-hearted. I had not the courage to rob the man of his last possession—a poor,

skinny horse that was to drag him and his family on their mournful flight from their home.

"We left them and went on.

"I managed, however, to collect eleven horses in the course of the afternoon. One was still wanting.

"By that time it was late and we were thinking of giving up our quest. But just as we had decided to go back a one-horsed vehicle came along the road. The horse was a powerful chestnut, the very one I wanted to complete the dozen.

"We stopped the man who was driving the cart and looked at the horse. At the same time we noticed pillows and quilts and several other things sticking out from beneath the canvas cover.

"The man was alone in the cart. It seemed he had no family. Apparently he was quite alone in his flight from home.

"When he understood that I meant to take his horse he broke into hard, bitter sobbing.

"It is a terrible sight to see a man weep. But he made no sign of attempting to prevent us from taking the horse; nor did he plead with us.

"He only threw the cover aside.

"What I saw underneath made my blood run cold, and I gasped for breath.

"There, in the cart, resting amongst the pillows, lay a young and beautiful woman, but she was dead. The Madonna face was wreathed in thick, fair, golden hair, flowing down over her shoulders and her naked breast. In one arm she held a newly-born infant, pressed closely to her bosom, as if she would even in death protect it from life's harm.

"The light of the setting sun fell softly on the pale face and tinged it with a strange, living hue. At the same time it revealed to us the despairing pain in the features.

"She had been confined and had died on the road during their flight, she and the child.

. . . . .

"Is not that awful to think of? And yet it is only one of the quiet, unknown incidents out of many thousands.

"It was the sight of this man's silent, fathomless grief, and it was the dead woman and the little newly-born child that stood before me continually all night until the day dawned.

"What an awful experience for that man! What a fate for a wife and mother! What an ending to all that she must surely have looked forward to with joy, and which must undoubtedly have made up his and her happiest thoughts and longings for many days!

"And then, tortured to death by fear and horror, to bring forth her child in a jolting cart, during a flight from a ruined home!"

My friend was silent a little while and looked at me. There were tears in my eyes, but I tried to hide them.

He smiled quietly.

Men may always be allowed to weep over the sorrows of others. It is only over their own that they may not. Yet, after all, there are moments when they cannot refrain even then.

There have been many in which I could not.

Then he went on with his story.

"Towards morning our peace and quiet came to an end. The enemy began a hot and incessant bombardment. It went on for eight hours without ceasing. Our barbed wire entanglements were snapped asunder like cobwebs, and our trenches were at last nothing but a confused heap of earth and scraps of beams. It was difficult at length to find cover. From all over came screams for help. But there was no one who could help. Each one had enough to do to look after himself.

"Then they began to attack us all along the line—the greater part of five hundred yards, I believe. Their hand-grenades came flying at us like hailstones. They did not, however, manage

to come up to our trenches. Our machine-guns stopped them, and their line began to falter.

"We went at them with the bayonet. It was a savage and reeking hot encounter. We had been heated by the violence of the bombardment. It was a furious brutality that knew neither mercy nor lenience: a bestial raging with bayonets and rifle-butts and bare fists, a roaring and howling chaos, that carried away one's reason and senses.

"I had my right arm splintered by a blow from a rifle-butt a little below the elbow.

"It cracked like match-wood. The stump hung dangling in a few strips of flesh. I fell down at the same moment, while a hot tingling ran right through me, a sweet and glorious dizziness, and a surging up of beautiful and shining colours before my vision.

"But after that I don't remember much more. It only seemed to me that, all of a sudden, everything was quiet around me, hushed and gentle. And I felt no pain—only a happy, peaceful calm and a tickling kind of warmth through my breast.

"How long I lay in this semi-conscious state I don't know. When I had recovered a little I felt an unbearable pain in my arm, and something tugging at my uninjured hand in short, excited jerks.

"I turned my head and saw a young, pale face close to mine, and two light, burning eyes, clear and shining, gazing into my own.

"They belonged to a lad of about seventeen or eighteen. The outlines of his face were still soft and child-like, and there was the soft down of first youth about his lips. His breast was bared and one hand was still convulsively clenched against his throat. Blood was trickling out between his fingers and flowing down in a thickened stream over his chest.

"Suddenly he jerked himself over towards me, gripped my hand in both his own and gazed at me. His face, which was drawn with pain, was all at once suffused with a happy smile, and I heard him whisper, in a voice that trembled with joy:

"'Then you have come, after all, dear little mother—you have come. . . .'

"His smile grew. His eyes almost laughed for joy. A little fainter, in a little more of a whisper, came the same words again:

"'Then you have come, after all, dear little mother—you have come. . . .'

"I leaned over to him, so far that I could touch his forehead with my lips. I kissed him on the forehead, which was cold and damp with sweat, and whispered into his ear:

" ' Yes, my darling boy ; your mother is here now. . . . '

" I felt two hands gripping mine till it almost hurt, and again I heard a quiet whisper, which, however, I did not understand.

" I remained there with my lips on his forehead, until I heard his last sigh and a quiet, breaking gurgle.

" Then I looked at his face. The open, glazed eyes gazed upwards as if they looked far away at something beautiful and glorious, and about the soft, yielding boyish lips there was an expression of infinite rapture.

" But then, his mother had been with him in the hour of his death and had kissed him on his forehead."

My friend's lips trembled, and his eyelids quivered.

Then he said quickly, as if he wanted to banish that remembrance as quickly as possible :

" After that I don't remember anything more of what happened to me, until the day when I recovered consciousness in a hospital in one of the towns on the Rhine."

XI

"I remember my waking up at the hospital very clearly and distinctly.

"It was like a beautiful dream.

"I felt a soft, warm hand on my forehead. I saw a pale and gentle woman's face bending over mine and a pair of kind blue eyes trying to meet my glance. As our eyes met I heard her say, in a sweet, low voice, as tender as a happy mother's :

"'That's right, my dear. You'll soon be better now. Just you wait and see.'

"I looked about me. I did not quite understand where I was. My brain was tired, my head heavy. And everything about me seemed so strange and unfamiliar.

"It was so white ; so light ; so quiet.

"I felt a pain near my shoulder-blade and tried to alter my position a little.

"Then I understood that my right arm was gone.

"I could feel that I turned pale, and a burning and tingling sensation ran right through my body. Things swam and flickered before my eyes, and I felt as if I were going to swoon.

"Then I caught the young woman's eyes.

"She looked at me with such a warm and

comforting smile, as she took my hand and stroked it between her own, and said :

" ' There, there, my dear boy ! You really must not go and be ill again, you know.'

" I had to close my eyes. The perspiration lay like steam on my forehead, and I felt that even through the closed lids the white light in the room tore at my sensitive nerves.

" Again I felt her soft and gentle hand on my brow and a warm pressure of the hand that kept a firm hold of mine.

" There was safety : a wonderful, happy safety ; an all-pervading feeling of being happily and safely away from all those other things that I had been through.

" What an extraordinary contrast between there and here !

" There :—Malice, Savagery ; Hate—the fury of all evil instincts ; the lust of brutal thoughts.

" And here :—Gentleness ; Peace ; Mercy—a warm and gentle woman's hand against a hot forehead ; tender words as to the child that one loves above everything and everybody.

" It was both beautiful and beyond understanding. It made my chest heave, and I felt the tears smarting under my eyelids.

" The young woman continued standing beside

my bed with my hand in hers. And not till now did I really begin to notice her.

"She was quite young—probably not more than twenty-two. Her hair was brown and lay chastely over a white brow. Her face was pure and soft in every feature, but sometimes there were lines of deep sadness about her lips, and her eyes would change in swift gleams to and fro, from happy gentleness to sudden melancholy, as when rapid little clouds come and go before the sun.

"She said nothing. She had laid down my hand and was gently smoothing my pillow. She did it as if she were making a baby comfortable in its cradle.

"Then she smiled quietly. I nodded brightly to her and took her hand.

"She nodded back to me and said:

"'You did have a bad time, didn't you? We were really afraid to hope that we might keep you. You have not been yourself for nearly a fortnight. But I think we may hope you have got over it now. And in a short time you will be able to go home.'

"'Home!'

"The word burnt itself violently into my mind the instant I heard it.

"To think that perhaps in a short time I

could go home! . . . Yes, exactly. . . . Of course. When one's right arm is gone one is not of much use for the business of war.

"At that moment it seemed to me that I had been singularly fortunate, and that I had paid for the good fortune by doing my duty to the last.

"Paid in full, therefore. We were quits.

"I know that I lay there smiling happily at the thought. In my mind's eye I saw, sketched in rapid outlines, everything connected with my home, from the greatest to the least, and it filled me with a trembling joy.

"The young nurse's eyes rested tremblingly on mine.

"'You look quite happy,' she said.

"She looked at the engagement ring on my hand.

"'You are engaged — married perhaps? Where do you come from, by the way?'

"I glanced at her hands, quite unconsciously. I saw a thin, plain ring on her third finger. I answered:

"'Engaged. And my home is in North Schleswig. I am a Dane.'

"I said it very quietly.

"She said nothing for a while. Then she nodded, and said, in a voice trembling with gentleness:

"'Then I understand why you are looking so happy. I am very glad for your sake, and for hers.'

"I seized her hand and kissed it. I understood now that I was allowed to be happy.

"I looked at the ring on her finger and then at her.

"The smile faded away from her face. The soft lines disappeared in sadness, and her eyes blinked.

"'He fell at Liège,' she whispered softly. 'He was only two-and-twenty. His father is gone, too, and his brother. And my two brothers. We are only women left now. It is a hard time.'

"I bent my head and closed my eyes.

"Such great grief and so good to others! So self-forgetting! So generous in love!

"But then, only women can be like that—women who have loved and have therefore been taught the value of love, and what joy a kind word and a warm, gentle hand on a restless brow is to one in pain!

"'Now you must rest,' she said. 'You can't bear very much yet. I am so glad you are getting well now.'

"Then she went on to another bed. She gave me a little friendly, parting nod, and I followed

her with my eyes. Her step was as light and buoyant as that of a young girl whose life has been nothing but sunshine.

"She had smiles and kindness to spare for all of us suffering ones. And she had only bitter grief herself.

"I looked about me to see the room in which I was lying. I had had no opportunity of doing so before.

"It was large and bright and white. I heard later that it had been a ballroom before it was turned into a hospital. It stood in a big park. From where I lay I could see the tops of some large trees and far away some mountains looming blue in the sunny haze.

"The ceiling was vaulted and white, and two heavy candelabra threw a golden and festive glitter over the room. Round the cornice there was a frieze of dancing cupids, and satyrs playing on reed pipes.

"A bright and beautiful home for happiness and the joy of life.

"It had other inmates now than gay men and laughing women.

"Three rows of beds stood lengthways down the room—two hundred altogether, I heard afterwards—and they were all occupied.

"So much misery gathered in one place! So

many maimed and crippled men in the prime of life!

"I could just see the nearest ones. I had not strength enough yet to move in the bed. But what I *could* see was quite sad enough.

"Not far from me a man was sitting up in bed while two nurses supported his back. His chest was bare. He was tearing his linen to pieces with violent tugs. His hair was shining white. A terrible night in the trenches, of course. Twelve hours under incessant fire from machine-guns and no possibility of a moment's rest. Every minute a nerve-wearing watchfulness in keeping under cover—twelve hours in terror of death, perhaps.

"At any rate, it was said that that was what had made him white.

"He had a bullet wound in his chest, and was nearing his end. His face looked almost green. Now and then he screamed, and his piercing shrieks rang through the room.

"I turned my head away; I could not bear the sight. It suddenly pressed all the horrors of remembrance into my mind.

"I looked in the other direction.

A little way off lay a man fumbling at the edge of the sheet with his fingers. He had bandages over his eyes and down over his nose. It was said

his eyes had been blinded and his nose was only a gaping wound.

"All the time he lay moaning, unhappy like a child in agony.

"'What will my little mother say? . . .'

"The sights that met one's gaze in this ballroom were not cheerful. Nevertheless—there was peace. *Peace!* And there were gentle women with kind words and soft hands. There was hope yearning for life, even though it might be dreary and hard enough for most of us, and even though we did not go out again in possession of all our limbs or with our old strength.

"They clung to life, all of them. Most of them with an unwavering confidence in good coming out of it all; many with smiles and childlike happiness, even though the future held out only a pair of crutches or some other physical misery.

"Now and then there was one with hopes of going to the front again—sometimes not only with hopes, but with eager, ardent longing. Hate was still vigorous and hot; confidence in victory still unshaken and strong.

"Man is strange. . . .

"But it *has* to be like that, I suppose. You *have* to feel like that, of course, when you are convinced that you are suffering and striving

for some great end, something that has made a covenant with the future and eternity, and everything that you cherish with every fibre of your being.

"Something that must not be lost—something far beyond time and reason.

"It was not always like this, however, for those who had gained their experience of the hell of the trenches and were still out there and suffering in them.

. . . . .

"I had a very happy time during those months I spent in the hospital—happy both while I was still confined to bed, and, later on, when I was allowed to be up and go out.

"We all met with such great kindness—often with such touching and unselfish love. It was not only the nurses and doctors who did everything they could to be kind to us. There were many people, complete strangers to us, who showed us all the warmth a good and kind heart can hold.

"Quite young, blushing little girls brought us flowers and fruit from their fathers and mothers. They came timidly and quietly, yet it made them very happy to be able to bring us a message from the spring and the sun outside. From life.

"Women came, young and elderly—mostly elderly women; and nearly all of them were dressed in mourning. They spoke but rarely of their sorrows. But their black garments and their long, black veils told a sufficient tale.

"There was something pathetically sad about them, but at times a soft and gentle smile shone through the sadness. It was as if they felt proud to think of those for whom they wore mourning—as if their black attire was a mark of distinction, their Iron Cross; something that told everyone that they had offered up their share for the Fatherland.

"They went about so quietly amongst the beds: spoke kind and friendly words; stroked a feverish brow; smoothed the pillow of a restless one with maternal tenderness.

"There was never any reflection on their faces of all the sad things they saw. There was always the same gentleness, always the same kind smile, tinged with sadness, that comforted and gave sympathy at the same time.

"Nearly every day during the time I was in the hospital a middle-aged, grey-haired lady came to my bed. Her face was pale, almost white, but it was beautiful and had an expression of touching kindness. Her eyes were bright and gentle, but had in their depths that great

warmth that speaks of a tender heart easily moved.

"She gave me many good gifts—flowers, sweets, and cigars; and every time she looked as kindly and tenderly at me as if I had been her own child. She stroked my hair and forehead, and patted my hand at parting, every time she left.

"She could not have been kinder or gentler if she had been my mother.

"She hardly ever said anything but the same words:

"'Well, thank God, you are getting on well, my dear boy. You are looking quite brisk and well to-day.'

"Yes—how did I look, I wondered?

"There was something I felt a desire to know. I had not seen my face in a glass for many a day.

"I was allowed to look one day, and I shuddered at what I saw.

"The white hair at the temples; the emaciated face; the grey, sallow skin, stretched like parchment over the bones; the staring eyes! . . .

"A burning tingle ran through me.

"Was that I—that wasted face! I threw away the mirror and seized my head in my hand. I felt as if I were going to be ill. I had

choking sensations, and the perspiration stood out on my forehead like dew. It was a ghost I had seen, and not a man of flesh and blood.

" A face I did not know at all.

" Imagine not being able to recognise your own face!

" It is harrowing; appalling. I can feel the terror running through me every time I am reminded of it; and even now, when I look at my face in a glass, I have something of the same feeling, although I have gradually become used to seeing how the torments of the trenches and the sufferings of fever can waste a face for many a long day.

" Ah, well, well! There are many white lies. Thank God there are!

" The old lady's words about my looking quite brisk and well were of that kind. But I was grateful to her for them all the same.

" It was her heart that spoke. What did it matter, then, that she lied with her lips?

" I did the same thing one day to her, and I saw that it made her happy.

" She asked me in a somewhat anxious, wavering voice, trembling with hidden uneasiness:

" ' Do you think that those who are killed in action suffer much, even if they don't die at once? '

"I looked at her eyes. They were pleading pathetically for a 'No.'

"'They don't suffer at all, madam,' I said. 'Death in battle is an easy and happy death. They pass away in joy. It is all rapture and exultation. . . .'

"She looked at me intently, as if she doubted for a moment the truth of my words. Then a look of confident happiness passed over her face and as she pressed my hand, she said:

"'Yes; it is so, isn't it? They pass away in rapture and joy. It always makes me so happy.'

"After I had been a couple of months in the hospital I was allowed to rest outside. My arm had been healed some time. It was nervous trouble that kept me in bed and in the sick-room.

"I could not get my strength back. All that I gained during the day the nights took away again with their evil dreams. I have told you about them. They tore at one's mind with endless brutality. Shrieks and moans and frightened cries might be heard at any hour of the night in the large room.

"It is impossible to grasp how even the smallest event sinks into one's mind, and how even one's dream-life can find them all out.

And always the worst—always the most painful.

"My first day outside in the beautiful park round the hospital was a wonderful experience.

"Simply to breathe the air—it flowed like a hot and sweet stream into my lungs, which had for so long been filled with the stench of iodine and carbolic. It almost hurt me to breathe. I swallowed it in big draughts like a drunkard, until I was nearly giddy and ill.

"And then this luxuriance around me—the colour and perfume of the flowers, the warming sun that made one so pleasantly tired; the mountains with their look of fairy-tale mystery, fading away in distant blue shadows.

"Nothing had been destroyed. Nothing had been trampled down. Nothing had been laid waste.

"Everywhere was blossoming and growing life, tended by careful hands, cherished with the solicitude of a lover.

"It was a marvellous contrast, which I could hardly grasp, but which made me very happy.

"I spoke very little to my comrades. There was enough in all that I saw about me to fill my mind with joy.

"The name that had been given me, 'The Silent Dane,' followed me here too. It was the

nurse who told me one day when calling me by it.

"I could not avoid, though, seeing the misery about me. The poor blinded ones, groping their way and leaning on the arm of a comrade or a nurse. Young men, mere children sometimes, dragging themselves along on crutches or hobbling about with the aid of two sticks on stiff, limping legs. Men tottering about on two stumps hardly reaching to their knees.

"But why go into further details about this misery? They were all maimed and crippled: people who were marked for life—heroes now—true *heroes*. But for how long?

"The day is bound to come when the hero and the halo about his name have faded and you will see in him who suffered for his country only a poor cripple who awakens your pity and causes you discomfort.

"Life is not more merciful than that, and not more grateful.

"Yet how happy they all were! Even those who, it seemed to me, were nothing but absolute wrecks and of no good whatever any more in life. They chattered like children. They laughed. They joked like irrepressible boys. They sang. They sat on the benches and enjoyed the luxury of letting the sun bake their bodies.

"I did not understand them. But that was my fault, of course. I forgot to think of myself.

"For what was I but such another poor cripple, a maimed creature that would perhaps never accomplish anything of value in life when it really came to the point.

"And yet I was happy myself—fervently happy. Why deny it? And I longed so unspeakably for the day when I was to see my own countryside and my home again.

"I have never known such longing as I had during the time I was in hospital.

"I longed like a child—to tears, sometimes.

"I longed for everything that was dear to me away yonder: the blue fjord; the woods, the farm, and the garden and the fields; the language; those dear, beautiful sounds.

"First and last—those dear, beautiful sounds: my mother-tongue and that of my father and my forefathers.

"'Sweet in joy and sweet in sadness,' as we sing and croon about it."

My friend looked at me and nodded quietly.

"Ah, well! You don't understand that, I suppose. Not altogether, at any rate," he added.

"I earnestly hope you may never come to understand it—*as we do.*"

XII

"The day I went home was terribly long. It seemed to me as if my journey would never come to an end. The journey was painful, too, as well as long. There were so many people who asked questions. They ferreted. They persisted in their ferreting to the point of impertinence. And those who did not ask questions scrutinised me offensively or gave me pitying looks.

"At last I had to shrink into a corner and pretend to be both deaf and blind, to escape from all that inquisitiveness and that obtrusive pity which I found so extremely objectionable.

"As I approached my home country and changed on to the little crawling local railway, I was so deeply stirred that I could have wept. My lips quivered and my breast was as empty as if all the air had been pumped out of my lungs.

"As the train glided into the small station I pulled down the window and looked out.

"It was all so joyously familiar. The name with the foreign, snarling sound. The station-master, erect and stiff, like the old non-commissioned officer with a big German beard that he was. The flowers on the window-sills of the

station-house. The faces of the station-master's wife and children against the window-panes. The smell of asphalte from the sun-baked platform.

"And over there—why, that was my father, *my* dear, dear old father! He seemed to me to have aged a good deal. His broad back, which before had been so straight and so proudly erect, was bent and tired; and his face looked worn as if after a long illness.

"His glance went down the train from carriage to carriage. I waved my hand to him and called out:

"'Father!'

"He turned at the sound and stared at me a moment.

"At first a startled look seemed to pass over his face. A sudden wonder, as when you see something you have not expected, and then it seemed to me that he tottered backwards a step or two when he understood who it was that had called. He bent his head and pressed his hand to his eyes.

"I think he was weeping.

"Then I jumped out of the carriage, and the next instant I was beside him.

"He threw his arms round my neck and kissed me fervently on both cheeks as he whispered in a trembling voice:

"'Oh, thank God we've got you back again! Welcome home, my dear boy — welcome — welcome! Thanks be to God from your mother and me and all of us! O my God, my God!— it has been a hard time!'

"He shook me as you shake a friend in exuberant joy. And then he took my arm. 'Why, I could not recognise you at first,' he said with a little smile. 'You have changed —somewhat. . . . But on the whole you are looking quite well.'

"'Yes, am I not?' I said. 'Quite well— I think so myself.'

"I smiled.

"I remembered that that was what they always said at the hospital.

"How alike words are when they are meant to comfort and cheer! How simple-minded people are—both those who give and those who receive comfort!

"Then we drove along the road to my home, and in thirsty eagerness my mind drank in all the old, familiar and beautiful luxuriance: the white road with the perfume of the poplars; the hedges with the wild roses; the white-washed, thatched farmsteads; the bright, summer gleam of the blue fjord.

"It was all just the same as when I left home

nearly two years ago—so it seemed to me, at any rate. I could not see any change.

"My father had sat silent awhile and had now and then stolen a glance at me, and I understood why. He had to feel at home with my face first before he could feel quite at home with myself. He was never at any time one to speak much, by the way.

"We drove past one of the big farms. The house stood close up to the road, and looked so peaceful, so bathed in sunshine; and the blossoms from the fruit trees sprinkled their pure white snow over the bright lawns.

"'The farmer in there fell last September,' said my father; 'and his two sons are also gone. There are no more men left now in that family.'

"I turned round and looked towards the farmstead.

"Was not the blinking of the sun in the bright window-panes like the brightness of eyes dewed with tears? Did not the sprinkled apple-blossoms on the bright lawns look like flowers on freshly-dug graves?

"It seemed so to me. It seemed to me also that the country looked different and unfamiliar in all its homeliness. The sunshine and luxuriance were there; the woods and the fjord and

everything; the old farmsteads, the fertile fields; and yet . . .

"Soon after we were up on a hill and could see far away over the countryside and out to the fjord and the downs on the other side.

"My father sat pointing with his whip to the houses and farms round about.

"'The husband is gone over there, and yonder the son. Both sons from that place are gone. And over there they have lost a son-in-law—you know, the one who had just got married. At the farm yonder the husband came home a cripple last Christmas; and the son in that one is blind.'

"His hushed and mournful words spoke of nothing but death and grief. There was scarcely a farm or a house the door of which was not marked with the cross of death, or in which mourning or disablement had not a home.

"I looked out on the sunny country. Its colour seemed to have changed. There was plenty of sunshine, but there was no joy in its radiance. There was growth and luxuriance enough, but there was no smile on its opulent abundance.

"The light summer breeze played amongst the tops of the poplars, and through the flowering hedgerows, over the varying chequers of th

fields, and along the gaily-coloured ditches by the wayside. It threw stripes on the blue fjord and frolicked in and out of the ripening corn.

"But it was not like the cheery humming of the summers of old.

"It sounded like a plaintive sighing, like a fear-stricken sobbing, stealing along by field and farm and whispering about grief and want and longing to every blade of grass, every leaf, every flower, to every little clucking ripple on the blue, shining water.

"I saw it so distinctly now; and I understood it.

"There was no pageant of summer here, on this countryside. It was a land in mourning. The glitter of tears was in the gleams of the sun, and wailing in the whispers of the summer breeze.

"It was not joy that met me at my home-coming. It was not my old, beautiful country that took me into its arms with a smile. It was a silent and weary land, in which there was weeping behind closed doors, and in which the nights were full of a restless, trembling fear and all the unfathomable misery of a terrible and merciless time.

"I had left so much evil and misery behind me; I had come home to still greater evils, still deeper misery.

"I had come home to those *who had to bear the sorrows*. And that is harder, infinitely harder, than to suffer death or see others suffer it.

"For sorrow never ceases. There are always tears in its eyes.

"As we drove into the yard I caught a glimpse of my mother at the door, but she disappeared again, before I had had time to nod to her.

"My *fiancée* was standing in the middle of the yard. Her face had not the same bright gentleness as before. About her features and on her lips there were the same sad and mournful lines that I had seen on the faces of the women in the hospital. She, too, was stamped with the daily silent longing and uncertainty, the nightly dread and heart-ache.

"She seemed to me to look old. And she was not yet twenty-two.

"She threw her arms round my neck, almost before I had reached the ground. She said nothing. She only cried, clinging closely to me and hiding her face on my shoulder.

"'Well, *you* can recognise him, it seems,' said my father. 'It was all I could do—just at first. . . .'

"She looked at me, and then turned to my father as she said:

"'I *knew* that he would look like that—that

was how I always saw him. In my thoughts by day and my dreams at night.'

"Then we went into the sitting-room.

"My mother was standing by the table. She was pale and there was a frightened and despairing look in her eyes.

"She gazed at me for a moment as if in terror. Then she sank down upon a chair and hid her face in her hands.

"'Is that *my* boy—is that *my* boy? . . .'

"It sounded like a heart-broken wailing. I saw that she was sobbing. I perceived that my face had frightened her; the empty sleeve too.

"I went over and knelt down before her, putting my arm round her waist and my head in her lap.

"I had always done that as a boy when she was grieved about anything.

"Then I felt her hand gently stroking my head. How soft that hand was! What a blissfulness there was in that quiet, gentle stroking!

"Is there anybody who knows how to caress like a mother? Is there anything in the world that holds such rapturous joy? . . .

"After a little while she took my chin in her hands and raised my head. Our eyes met Hers were soft and shining—a fathomless deep of love to gaze into.

"Her face was grey and there was a quivering about her firmly-closed lips. But I could see that she was happy — silently, speechlessly happy.

"I felt her lips on my forehead. It was like a great solemnity to me. And then she said in a soft whisper:

"'My own big boy—my own big boy—thank God for ever that I have you back again!'

"A sad little smile passed over her face, and, as if she felt a desire to say something showing a little of her warm-hearted and charming humour, she added between smiles and tears:

"'But you are *not* such a handsome boy as when you went away.'

"Then she broke down and bent her face over mine.

"That was my home-coming. I had looked forward to it and it had given me all the happiness I could wish for. It was neither boisterous nor effusive. It was wrapped in sadness. But it held all the deep and calm affection that needs no other expression than a glance or the stroking of a trembling hand to find its way to the best and richest depths in one's heart.

"In other ways, however, I had not come home to happiness.

"It was a grief-laden country and a grief-

laden people. I am certain there was not one home in which there was not weeping over a life that had been taken, or a body that had been maltreated.

"And at the same time there was extreme distress.

"What were they to do in all the little poverty-stricken homes that had lost their bread-winner? They could only suffer. They could do nothing but sit day after day with tear-laden eyes and stare into a misery that grew deeper and deeper and more and more hopeless.

"People helped them as well as they could. They comforted each other, and did their best in kind words and friendly gifts. But it was only a poor consolation for all that had been lost.

"And no one could do anything for the long, sleepless nights and the grief-laden days.

"Sometimes I went with my father to visit a little cottage near by. We knew the people, as both the husband and wife had been in our service some years before. But the man had been at the front since the beginning of the war, and the wife had to look after everything at home, including his mother, who was old and an invalid.

"The old grandmother sat in her corner all day long reading her Bible, a wedding gift with silver clasps, and there were not many hours in

the day when the tears did not well up in the young wife's eyes.

"How she would gaze at her boy sometimes! It looked as if she were seeking in *his* face compensation for him whose fate was never out of her thoughts.

"I can imagine her nights, how each waking minute would be a prayer for him and his life—she told me so later. She had prayed in deepest anguish; and every time she looked at me, and the marks of war I carried upon me, a shudder of horror ran through her.

"It was not always death, perhaps, that she dreaded most. It was the uncertainty that tormented her. The sufferings he might have to endure. The pain he might have to bear. And this—that perhaps he would be buried in the soil of a strange land, without her ever being told where.

"There had been one single card from him from the Eastern front. He was quite well, he said, and was in good spirits.

"It was his first and last greeting.

"That was how the days went by in that home. There was quiet whispering about the day's work, and then silence. Their fear was never put into words, but they understood each other just the same. In little pressures of hands

when they passed each other they gave the little comfort that warmed their hearts and soothed them a little while.

"Then one afternoon my father and I were sitting with them.

"We sat looking out at the fields, bathed in sunshine, at the twisting road, gleaming white against the green.

"It had been very lonely on the road all day. Altogether it was always lonely on the roads.

"While we were sitting there we saw the village magistrate coming up, walking heavily, as he had done of late. He had to bring so many sad messages.

"When the young wife saw him coming she jumped up with a start and held her hand to her heart, and her face turned sallow and pale.

"'It's coming now,' she whispered. 'It's coming.'

"The old grandmother looked fixedly at her from her corner.

"'What is coming?' she asked. But she got no answer.

"Then the young woman turned to the door. Her eyes stared, like those of one who sees everything about him falling into ruins, and she pressed her clenched hands to her temples.

"We could hear the rattling of the latch on

the outer door, but we did not move. We sat silent with bated breath. There were heavy footsteps in the passage, and we heard the quiet clearing of a throat.

"The next moment the magistrate opened the door and came into the room.

"The young wife stretched her hands out to him as if in prayer. She wanted to ask him a question. But the words could not find their way through her lips. He was silent, too, as he looked across at the old grandmother, gazing up from her Bible.

"She passed her hands quietly over her eyes, and as a look of quavering fear came into the old, life-worn face she asked:

"'Is Hans . . . ?'

"She said no more. Then the young wife moved heavily, almost fainting, across the floor, fell on her knees before her mother-in-law, and hid her face against the Bible lying in her lap.

"Standing beside the door the magistrate whispered:

"'Yes, he is—a long time ago—in Russia.'

"My father drew the boy close to him and patted his cheek. He looked up with frightened eyes, and then his glance went to his mother and his grandmother, who whispered, as she stroked the hair of her daughter-in-law:

"'The Lord gave—the Lord hath taken. The Lord gave—the Lord hath taken.'

"I can see it all before me still," my friend said quietly. "I think I would rather go through the horrors of war again than the hours of grief that came after them.

"After all, *is* there anything sadder than this—that one whom you have loved with all your heart has been swept away like a straw before the wind?

"It meant so infinitely much for one—so infinitely little for the whole.

. . . . .

"That is only one little picture from my countryside. But like many others it is deeply engraved in my mind. And it is filled with the same pain.

"And, taking it altogether, what sort of a generation, I wonder, will it be that survives the war in my old country? There will not be a single joy left for it. There will not be one single smile of happiness.

"Every home will have the memory of its dead to cherish. Every home will have its heavy sorrows to bear. And none of them have that great and beautiful background of suffering that reconciles one both to grief and death—or that softens them, at least.

"All of them live and suffer there, under the hard yoke of duty. There is a halo of glory about many names, but there are also streams of tears.

"And the lives of the future have to be lived under the pressure of all the horrors they have had to see and endure. It will be a generation with sad hearts and many diseased thoughts—both among those who were in the war and came through it as well as among those who were at home.

"An impoverished generation—a joy-forsaken generation.

"They called me 'The Silent Dane.'

"They were right.

"But all the others—what about them? I wonder if they will not be called by that name, too? I think so.

"I think there will be great and inconsolable silence where there was before so much strength, so much happiness, so much faith, and so many fair hopes.

"'The Silent Dane.'

"Isn't it so? I think that is the name they should all have.

"For memory needs quiet for its happiness. And great sorrows have no words."

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