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BACK TO LIFE

By Philip Gibbs

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BOOK I—THE END OF THE ADVENTURE

I

It is hard to recapture the spirit of that day we entered Lille. Other things since have blurred its fine images.

At the time I tried to put down in words the picture of that scene when, after four years' slaughter of men, the city, which had seemed a world away, was open to us a few miles beyond the trench-lines; the riven trees, the shell-holes, and the stench of death, and we walked across the canal, over a broken bridge, into that large town where—how wonderful it seemed I—there were roofs on the houses and glass in the windows, and crowds of civilian people waiting for the first glimpse of British khaki.

Even now remembrance brings back to me figures that I saw only for a moment or two, but remain sharply etched in my mind, and people I met in the streets who told me the story of four years in less than four minutes and enough to let me know their bitterness, hatred, humiliations, terrors, in the time of the German occupation.... I have re-read the words I wrote, hastily, on a truculent typewriter which I cursed for its twisted ribbon, while the vision of the day was in my eyes. They are true to the facts and to what we felt about them. Other men felt that sense of exaltation, a kind of mystical union with the spirit of many people who had been delivered from evil powers. It is of those other men that I am now writing, and especially of one who was my friend—Wickham Brand, with the troubled soul, whom I knew in the years of war and afterwards in the peace which was no peace to him.

His, was one of the faces I remember that day, as I had a glimpse of it now and then, among crowds of men and women, young girls and children, who surged about him, kissing his hands and his face when he stooped a little (he was taller than most of them) to meet the wet lips of some half-starved baby held up by a pallid woman of Lille, or to receive the kiss of some old woman who clawed his khaki tunic, or of some girl who hung on to his belt. There was a shining wetness in his eyes, and the hard lines of his face had softened as he laughed at all this turmoil about him, at all these hands robbing him of shoulder-straps and badges, and at all these people telling him a hundred things together—their gratitude to the English, their hatred of the Germans, their abominable memories. His field-cap was pushed back from his high, furrowed forehead from which at the temples the hair had worn thin, owing to worry or a steel hat. His long, lean face, deeply tanned, but powdered with white dust, had an expression of tenderness which gave him a kind of priestly look, though others would have said "knightly" with, perhaps, equal truth. Anyhow, I could see that for a little while Brand was no longer worrying about the casualty lists and the doom of youth, and was giving himself up to an exaltation that was visible and spiritual in Lille in the day of liberation.

The few of us who went first into Lille while our troops were in a wide are round the city, in touch, more or less, with the German rearguards, were quickly separated in the swirl of the crowd that surged about us, greeting us as conquering heroes, though none of us were actual fighting men, being war correspondents, intelligence officers (Wickham Brand and three other officers were there to establish an advanced headquarters), with an American doctor—that amazing fellow "Daddy" Small—and our French *liaison* officer, Pierre Nesle. Now and again we met in the streets and exchanged words.

I remember the doctor and I drifted together at the end of the Boulevard de la Liberté. A French girl of the middle-class had tucked her hand through his right arm and was talking to him excitedly, volubly. On his other arm leaned an old dame in a black dress and bonnet who was also delivering her soul of its pent-up emotion to a man who did not understand more than a few words of her French. A small boy dressed as a Zouave was walking backwards, waving a long tricolour flag before the little American, and a crowd of people made a close circle about him, keeping pace.

"Assassins, bandits, robbers!" gobbled the old woman. "They stole all our copper, monsieur. The very mattresses off our beds. The wine out of our cellars. They did abominations."

"Month after month we waited," said the girl, with her hand through the doctor's right arm. "All that time the noise of the guns was loud in our ears. It never ceased, monsieur, until to-day. And we used to say: 'To-morrow the English will come!' until at last some of us lost heart—not I, no, always I believed in victory!—and said, 'The English will never come!' Now you are here, and our hearts are full of joy. It is like a dream. The Germans have gone!"

The doctor patted the girl's hand and addressed me across the tricolour waved by the small Zouave.

"This is the greatest day of my life! And I am perfectly ashamed of myself. In spite of my beard and my gig-lamps and my anarchical appearance, these dear people take me for an English officer and a fighting hero. And I feel like one. If I saw a German now I truly believe I should cut his throat. Me—a non-combatant and a man of peace! I'm horrified at my own blood-thirstiness. The worst of it is I'm enjoying it. I'm a primitive man for a time, and find it stimulating. To-morrow I shall repent. These people have suffered hell's torments. I can't understand a word the little old lady is telling me but I'm sure she's been through infernal things. And this pretty girl. She's a peach, though slightly tuberculous, poor child. My God—how they hate! There is a stored-up hatred in this town enough to burn up Germany by mental telepathy. It's frightening. Hatred and joy, I feel these two passions like a flame about us. It's spiritual. It's transcendental. It's the first time I've seen a hundred thousand people drunk with joy and hate. I'm against hate, and yet the sufferings of these people make me see red so that I want to cut a German throat!"

"You'd stitch it up afterwards, doctor," I said.

He blinked at me through his spectacles and said: "I hope so. I hope my instinct would be as right as that. The world will never get forward till we have killed hatred. That's my religion."

"Bandits! Assassins!" grumbled the old lady. "Dirty people!"

"*Vivent les Anglais!*" shouted the crowd, surging about the little man with the beard.

The American doctor spoke in English in a large explanatory way.

"I'm American. Don't you go making any mistake. I'm an Uncle Sam. The Yankee boys are further south and fighting like hell, poor lads. I don't deserve any of this ovation, my dears."

Then in French, with a strong American accent, he shouted: "*Vive la France!*" Rah! 'Rah! 'Rah!"

"*Merci, merci, mon Général!*" said an old woman, making a grab at the little doctor's Sam Brown belt and kissing him on the beard. The crowd closed round him and bore him away....

I met another of our crowd when I went to a priest's house in a turning off the Rue Royale. Pierre Nesle, our *liaison* officer—a nice simple fellow, who had always been very civil to me—was talking to the priest outside his door, and introduced me in a formal way to a tall, patrician-looking old man in a long black gown. It was the Abbé Bourdin, well known in Lille as a good priest and a patriot.

"Come indoors, gentlemen," said the old man. "I will tell you what happened to us, though it would take four years to tell you all."

Sitting there in the priest's room, barely furnished, with a few oak chairs and a writing-desk littered with papers, and a table covered with a tattered cloth of red plush, we listened to a tragic tale, told finely and with emotion by the old man into whose soul it had burned. It was the history of a great population caught by the tide of war before many could escape, and placed under the military law of an enemy who tried to break its spirit. They failed to break it in spite of an iron discipline which denied them all liberty. For any trivial offence by individuals against German rule the whole population was fined or shut up in their houses at three in the afternoon. There were endless fines, unceasing and intolerable robberies under the name of "perquisitions." That had not broken the people's spirit. There were worse things to bear—the removal of machinery from the factories, the taking away of the young men and boys for forced labour, and then, the greater infancy of that night when machine-guns were placed at the street corners and German officers ordered each household to

assemble at the front door and chose the healthy-looking girls by the pointing of a stick and the word, “You—you!” for slave-labour—it was that—in unknown fields far away.

The priest’s face blanched at the remembrance of that scene. His voice quavered when he spoke of the girls’ screams—one of them had gone raving mad—and of the wailing that rose among their stricken families. For a while he was silent, with lowered head and brooding eyes which stared at a rent in the threadbare carpet, and I noticed the trembling of a pulse on his right temple above the deeply-graven wrinkles of his parchment skin. Then he raised his head and spoke harshly.

“Not even that could break the spirit of my people. They only said, ‘We will never forget and never forgive!’ They were hungry—we did not get much food—but they said, ‘Our sons who are fighting for us are suffering worse things. It is for us to be patient.’ They were surrounded by German spies—the secret police—who listened to their words and haled them off to prison upon any pretext. There is hardly a man among us who has not been in prison. The women were made to do filthy work for German soldiers, to wash their lousy clothes, to scrub their dirty barracks, and they were insulted, humiliated, tempted, by brutal men.”

“Was there much of that brutality?” I asked.

The priest’s eyes grew sombre.

“Many women suffered abominable things. I thank God that so many kept their pride and their honour. There were, no doubt, some bad men and women in the city—disloyal, venal, weak, sinful—may God have mercy on their souls; but I am proud of being a Frenchman when I think of how great was the courage, how patient was the suffering of the people of Lille.”

Pierre Nesle had listened to that monologue with a visible and painful emotion. He became pale and flushed by turns, and when the priest spoke about the forcible recruitment of the women a sweat broke out on his forehead, and he wiped it away with a handkerchief.

I see his face now in profile, sharply outlined against some yellowing folios in a bookcase behind him, a typical Parisian face in its sharpness of outline and pallid skin, with a little black moustache above a thin, sensitive mouth. Before I had seen him mostly in gay moods—though I had wondered sometimes at the sudden silences into which he fell and at a gloom which gave him a melancholy look when he was not talking, or singing, or reciting poetry, or railing against French politicians, or laughing almost hysterically at the satires of Charles Fortune—our “funny man”—when he came to our mess. Now he was suffering, as if the priest’s words had probed a wound—though not the physical wound which had nearly killed him in Souchez Wood.

He stood up from the wooden chair with its widely-curved arms in which he had been sitting stiffly, and spoke to the priest.

“It is not amusing, *mon père*, what you tell us, and what we have all guessed. It is one more chapter of tragedy in the history of our poor France. Pray God the war will soon be over.”

“With victory!” said the old priest. “With an enemy beaten and bleeding beneath our feet. The Germans must be punished for all their crimes, or the justice of God will not be satisfied.”

There was a thrill of passion in the old man’s voice and his nostrils quivered.

“To all Frenchmen that goes without saying,” said Pierre Nesle. “The Germans must be punished, and will be, though no vengeance will repay us for the suffering of our *poilus*—nor for the agony of our women behind the lines, which, perhaps, was the greatest of all.”

The Abbé Bourdin put his claw-like old hands on the young man’s shoulders and drew him closer and kissed his Croix de Guerre.

“You have helped to give victory,” he said. “How many Germans have you killed? How many, eh?”

He spoke eagerly, chuckling with a kind of childish eagerness for good news.

Pierre Nesle drew back a little and a faint touch of colour crept into his face, and then left it whiter.

“I did not count corpses,” he said. He touched his left side and laughed awkwardly. “I remember better that they nearly made a corpse of me.”

There was a moment’s silence, and then my friend spoke in a casual kind of way.

“I suppose, *mon père*, you have not heard of my sister being in Lille by any chance? Her name was Marthe. Marthe Nesle.”

The Abbé Bourdin shook his head.

“I do not know the name. There are many young women in Lille. It is a great city.”

“That is true,” said Pierre Nesle. “There are many.”

He bowed over the priest’s hand, and then saluted.

“*Bon jour, mon père, et merci mille fois*.”

So we left, and the Abbé Bourdin spoke his last words to me: “We owe our liberation to the English. We thank you. But why did you not come sooner? Two years sooner, three years. With your great army?”

“Many of our men died to get here,” I said. “Thousands.”

“That is true. That is true. You failed many times, I know. But you were so close. One big push—eh? One mighty effort? No?”

The priest spoke a thought which I had heard expressed in the crowds. They were grateful for our coming, immensely glad, but could not understand why we had tried their patience so many years. That had been their greatest misery, waiting, waiting.

I spoke to Pierre Nesle on the doorstep of the priest’s house.

“Have you an idea that your sister is in Lille?”

“No,” he said. “No. At least not more than the faintest hope. She is behind the lines somewhere—anywhere. She went away from home before the war—she was a singer—and was caught in the tide.”

“No news at all?” I asked.

“Her last letter was from Lille. Or rather a postcard with the Lille stamp. She said, I am amusing myself well, little brother.’ She and I were good comrades. I look for her face in the crowds. But she may be anywhere—Valenciennes, Maubeuge—God knows!”

A shout of “*Vive la France!*” rose from a crowd of people surging up the street. Pierre Nesle was in the blue uniform of the *chasseurs à pied*, and the people in Lille guessed it was theirs because of its contrast to our khaki, though the “*horizon bleu*” was so different from the uniforms worn by the French army of ‘14. To them now, on the day of liberation, Pierre Nesle, our little *liaison* officer, stood for the armies of France, the glory of France. Even the sight of our khaki did not fill them with such wild enthusiasm. So I lost him again as I had lost the little American doctor in the surge and whirlpool of the crowd.

II

I was building up in my mind the historic meaning of the day. Before nightfall I should have to get it written—the spirit as well as the facts, if I could—in time for the censors and the despatch-riders. The facts? By many scraps of conversation with men and women in the streets I could already reconstruct pretty well the life of Lille in time of war. I found many of their complaints rather trivial. The Germans had wanted brass and had taken it, down to the taps in the washing-places. Well, I had seen worse horrors than that. They had wanted wool and had taken the mattresses. They had requisitioned all the wine but had paid for it at cheap rates. These were not atrocities. The people of Lille had been short of food, sometimes on the verge of starvation, but not really starved. They complained of having gone without butter, milk, sugar; but even in England these things were hard to get. No, the tragedy of Lille lay deeper than that. A sense of fear that was always with them. “Every time there was a knock at the door,” said one man, “we started up in alarm. It was a knock at our hearts.” At any time of the day or night they were subject to visits from German police, to searches, arrests, or orders to get out of their houses or rooms for German officers or troops. They were denounced by spies, Germans or debased people of their own city, for trying to smuggle letters to their folk in other towns in enemy occupation, for concealing copper in hiding-places, for words of contempt against the Kaiser or the Kommandatur, spoken at a street corner between one friend and another. That consciousness of being watched, overheard, reported and denounced poisoned the very atmosphere of their lives, and the sight of the field-grey men in the streets, the stench of them—the smell was horrible when German troops marched back from the battlefields—produced a soul-sickness worse than physical nausea. I could understand the constant fret at the nerves of these people, the nagging humiliation—they had to doff hats to every German officer who swaggered by—and the slow-burning passion of people, proud by virtue of their race, who found themselves controlled, ordered about, bullied, punished for trivial infractions of military regulations, by German officials of hard, unbending arrogance. That must have been abominable for so long a time; but as yet I heard no charges of definite brutality, or of atrocious actions by individual enemies. The worst I had heard was that levy of the women for forced labour in unknown places. One could imagine the horror of it, the cruelty of it to girls whose nerves were already unstrung by secret fears, dark and horrible imaginings, the beast-like look in the eyes of men who passed them in the streets. Then the long-delayed hope of liberation—year after year—the German boasts of victory, the strength of the German defence that never seemed to weaken, in spite of the desperate attacks of French and British, the preliminary success of their great offensive in March and April, when masses of English prisoners were herded through Lille, dejected, exhausted, hardly able to drag their feet along between their sullen guards—by heaven, these people of Lille had needed much faith to save them from despair! No wonder now that on the first day of liberation some, of them were wet-eyed with joy, and others were lightheaded with liberty.

In the Grande Place below the old balustraded Town Hall I saw young Cyril Clatworthy, one of the Intelligence crowd, surrounded by a group of girls who were stroking his tunic, clasping his hands, pushing each other laughingly to get nearer to him. He was in lively conversation with the prettiest girl, whom he kept in front of him. It was obvious that he was enjoying himself as the central figure of this hero-worship, and as I passed the boy (twenty-four that birthday, he had told me a month before) I marvelled at his ceaseless capacity for amorous adventure, with or without a moment’s notice. A pretty girl, if possible, or a plain one if not, drew him like a magnet, excited all his boyish egotism, called to the faun-spirit that played the pipes of Pan in his heart. It was an amusing game for him, with his curly brown hair and Midshipman Easy type of face. For the French girls whom he had met on his way—little Marcelle on Cassel Hill, Christine at Corbie on the Somme, Marguérite in the hat-shop at Amiens (what became of her, poor kid?)—it was not so amusing when he “blew away,” as he called it, and had a look at life elsewhere.

He winked at me, as I passed, over the heads of the girls.

“The fruits of victory!” he called out. “There is a little Miss Brown-Eyes here who is quite enchanting.”

It was rather caddish of me to say: “Have you forgotten Marguérite Aubigny?”

He thought so, too, and reddened angrily.

“Go to blazes!” he said.

His greatest chum, and one of mine—Charles Fortune—was standing outside a *café* in the big Place, not far from the Vieille Bourse, with its richly-carved Renaissance front. Here there was a dense crowd, but they kept at a respectful distance from Fortune, who, with his red tabs and red-and-blue arm-band and row of ribbons (all gained by heroic service over a blotting-pad in a Nissen hut) looked to them, no doubt, like a great general. He had his “heroic” face on, rather mystical and saintly. (He had a variety of faces for divers occasions—such as the “sheep’s face” in the presence of generals who disliked brilliant men, the “intelligent”

facer-bright and inquiring—for senior officers who liked easy questions to which they could give portentous answers, the “noble” face for the benefit of military chaplains, foreign visitors to the war-zone, and batmen before they discovered his sense of humour; and the “old-English-gentleman” face at times for young Harding, who belonged to a county family with all its traditions, politics, and instincts, and permitted Fortune to pull his leg, to criticise generals, and denounce the British Empire as a licensed jester.)

Fortune was addressing four gentlemen of the Town Council of Lille who stood before him, holding ancient top-hats.

“Gentlemen,” said Charles Fortune in deliberate French, with an exaggerated accent, “I appreciate very much the honour you have just paid me by singing that heroic old song, ‘It’s a long, long way to Tipperary.’ I desire, however, to explain to you that it is not as yet the National Anthem of the British people, and that, personally, I have never been to Tipperary, that I should find some difficulty in finding that place on the map, and that I never want to go there. This, however, is of small importance, except to British generals, to whom all small things are of great importance—revealing, therefore, their minute attention to details, even when it does not matter—which, I may say, is the true test of the military mind which is so gloriously winning the war, after many glorious defeats (I mean victories) and——” (Here Fortune became rather tangled in his French grammar, but rescued himself after a still more heroic look). “And it is with the deepest satisfaction, the most profound emotion, that I find myself in this great city of Lille on the day of liberation, and on behalf of the British Army, of which I am a humble representative, in spite of these ribbons which I wear on my somewhat expansive chest, I thank you from my heart, with the words, ‘*la France!*’”

Here Fortune heaved a deep sigh, and looked like a field marshal while he waited for the roar of cheers which greeted his words. The mystical look on his face became intensified as he stood there, a fine heroic figure (a trifle stout for lack of exercise), until he suddenly caught sight of a nice-looking girl in the crowd nearest to him, and gave her an elaborate wink, as much as to say, “You and I understand each other, my pretty one! Beneath this heroic pose I am really human.”

The effect of that wink was instantaneous. The girl blushed vividly and giggled, while the crowd shouted with laughter.

“*Quel numéro! Quel drôle de type!*” said a man by my side.

Only the four gentlemen of the Town Hall, who had resumed their top-hats, looked perplexed at this grotesque contrast between the heroic speech (it had sounded heroic) and its anti-climax.

Fortune took me by the arm as I edged my way close to him.

“My dear fellow, it was unbelievable when those four old birds sang ‘Tipperary’ with bared heads. I had to stand at the salute while they sang three verses with tears in their eyes. They have been learning it during four years of war. Think of that! And think of what’s happening in Ireland—in Tipperary—now! There’s some paradox here which contains all the comedy and pathos of this war. I must think it out. I can’t quite get at it yet, but I feel it from afar.”

“This is not a day for satire,” I said. “This is a day for sentiment. These people have escaped from frightful things——”

Fortune looked at me with quizzical grey eyes out of his handsome, mask-like face.

“*Et tu, Brute?* After all our midnight talks, our laughter at the mockery of the gods, our intellectual slaughter of the staff, our tearing down of all the pompous humbug which has bolstered up this silly old war.”

“I know. But to-day we can enjoy the spirit of victory. It’s real, here. We have liberated all these people.”

“We? You mean the young Tommies who lie dead the other side of the canal? We come in and get the kudos. Presently the generals will come and say, ‘We did it! Regard our glory! Fling down your flowers! Cheer us, good people, before we go to lunch.’ They will not see behind them the legions they sent to slaughter by ghastly blunders, colossal stupidity, invincible pomposity.”

Fortune broke into song. It was an old anthem of his:

“*Blear-eyed Bill, the Butcher of the Boche.*”

He had composed it, after a fourth whisky, on a cottage piano in his Nissen hut. In crashing chords he had revealed the soul of a general preparing a plan of battle—over the telephone. It never failed to make me laugh, except that day in Lille when it was out of tune, I thought, with the spirit about us.

“Let’s put the bitter taste out of our mouth to-day,” I said.

Fortune made his sheep-face, saluted behind his ear, and said, “Every inch a soldier—I don’t think!”

III

It was then we bumped straight into Wickham Brand, who was between a small boy and girl, holding his hands, while a tall girl of sixteen or so, with a yellow pig-tail slung over her shoulder, walked alongside, talking vivaciously of family experiences under German rule. Pierre Nesle was on the other side of her.

“In spite of all the fear we had—oh, how frightened we were sometimes!—we used to laugh very much. *Maman* made a joke of everything—it was the only way. *Maman* was wonderfully brave, except when she thought that father might have been killed.”

“Where was your father?” asked Brand. “On the French side of the lines?”

“Yes, of course. He was an officer in the artillery. We said good-bye to him on August 2nd of the first year,

when he went off to the dépôt at Belfort. We all cried except *maman*—father was crying, too, but *maman* did not wink away even the tiniest tear until father had gone. Then she broke down, so that we all howled at the sight of her. Even these babies joined in. They were only babies then."

"Any news of him?" asked Brand.

"Not a word. How could there be? Perhaps in a few days he will walk into Lille. So *maman* says."

"That would be splendid!" said Brand. "What is his name?"

"Chéri, M. le Commandant Anatole Chéri, 59th Brigade, *artillerie lourde.*"

The girl spoke her father's name proudly.

I saw a startled look come into the eyes of Pierre Nesle as he heard the name. In English he said to Brand: "I knew him at Verdun. He was killed."

Wickham Brand drew a sharp breath, and his voice was husky when he spoke, in English, too.

"What cruelty it all is!"

The girl with the pig-tail—a tall young creature with a delicate face and big brown eyes—stared at Pierre Nesle and then at Wickham Brand. She asked an abrupt question of Pierre.

"Is my father dead?"

Pierre Nesle stammered something. He was not sure. He had heard that the Commandant Chéri was wounded at Verdun.

The girl understood perfectly.

"He is dead, then? *Maman* will be very sorry."

She did not cry. There was not even a quiver of her lips. She shook hands with Brand and said: "I must go and tell *maman*. Will you come and see us one day?"

"With pleasure," said Brand.

"Promise?"

The girl laughed as she raised her finger.

"I promise," said Brand solemnly.

The girl "collected" the small boy and girl, holding their heads close to her waist.

"Is father dead?" said the small boy.

"Perhaps. I believe so," said the elder sister.

"Then we shan't get the toys from Paris?" said the small girl.

"I am afraid not, *coquine?*"

"What a pity!" said the boy.

Pierre Nesle took a step forward and saluted.

"I will go with you, if you permit it, mademoiselle. It is perhaps in a little way my duty, as I met your father in the war."

"Thanks a thousand times," said the girl. "*Maman* will be glad to know all you can tell her."

She waved to Brand a merry *au revoir*.

We stood watching them cross the Grande Place, that tall girl and the two little ones, and Pierre.

Fortune touched Brand on the arm.

"Plucky, that girl," he said. "Took it without a whimper. I wonder if she cared?"

Brand turned on him rather savagely.

"Cared? Of course she cared. But she had expected it for four years, grown up to the idea. These war children have no illusions about the business. They know that the odds are in favour of death."

He raised his hands above his head with a sudden passionate gesture.

"Christ God!" he said. "The tragedy of those people! The monstrous cruelty of it all!"

Fortune took his hand and patted it in a funny affectionate way.

"You are too sensitive, Wicky. 'A sensitive plant in a garden grew'—a war-garden, with its walls blown down, and dead bodies among the little daisies-o. I try to cultivate a sense of humour and a little irony. It's a funny old war, Wicky, believe me, if you look at it in the right light."

Wickham groaned.

"I see no humour in it, nor light anywhere."

Fortune chanted again the beginning of his anthem:

"*Blear-eyed Bill, the Butcher of the Boche*."

As usual there was a crowd about us, smiling, waving handkerchiefs and small flags, pressing forward to shake hands and to say "*Vivent les Anglais!*"

It was out of that crowd that a girl came and stood in front of us, with a wave of her hand.

"Good morning, British officers! I'm English—or Irish, which is good enough. Welcome to Lille."

Fortune shook hands with her first and said very formally, in his mocking way: "How do you do? Are you by chance my long-lost sister? Is there a strawberry-mark on your left arm?" She laughed with a big, open-mouthed laugh, on a contralto note that was good to hear.

"I'm everybody's sister who speaks the English tongue, which is fine to the ears of me after four years in Lille. Eileen O'Connor, by your leave, gentlemen."

"Not Eileen O'Connor of Tipperary?" asked Fortune gravely. "You know the Long Long Way, of course?"

"Once of Dublin," said the girl, "and before the war, of Holland Street, Kensington, in the village of London. Oh, to hear the roar of 'buses in the High Street and to see the glint of sunlight on the Round Pond!"

She was a tall girl, shabbily dressed in an old coat and skirt with a bit of fur round her neck and hat, but with a certain look of elegance in the thin line of her figure and the poise of her head. Real Irish, by the look of her dark eyes and a rather irregular nose and humorous lips. Not pretty in the English way, but spirited, and with some queer charm in her.

Wickham Brand was holding her hand.

"Good Lord! Eileen O'Connor? I used to meet you, years ago, at the Wilmots—those funny tea-parties in Chelsea."

"With farthing buns and cigarettes, and young boys with big ideas!"

The girl laughed with a kind of wonderment, and stood close to Wickham Brand, holding his Sam Brown belt and staring up into his face.

"Why, you must be—you must be—— you are—the tall boy who used to grow out of his grey suits and wrote mystical verse and read Tolstoy, and growled at civilisation and smoked black pipes, and fell in love with elderly artists' models. Wickham Brand!"

"That's right," said Brand, ignoring the laughter of Fortune and myself. "Then I went to Germany and studied their damned philosophy, and then I became a briefless barrister, and after that took to writing unsuccessful novels. Here I am, after four years of war, ashamed to be alive when all my pals are dead."

He glanced at Fortune and me, and said, "Or most of 'em.

"It's the same Wicky I remember," said the girl, "and at the sight of you I feel I've gone back to myself as a tousled-haired thing in a short frock and long black stockings. The good old days before the war. Before other things and all kinds of things."

"Why on earth were you in Lille when the war began?" asked Brand.

"It just happened. I taught painting here. Then I was caught with the others. We did not think They would come so soon."

She used the word "They" as we all did, meaning the grey men.

"It must have been hell," said Brand.

"Mostly hell," said Miss O'Connor brightly. "At least, one saw into the gulfs of hell, and devilishness was close at hand. But there were compensations, wee bits of heaven. On the whole I enjoyed myself."

"Enjoyed yourself?"

Brand was startled by that phrase.

"Oh, it was an adventure. I took risks—and came through. I lived all of it—every minute. It was a touch-and-go game with the devil and death, and I dodged them both. *Dieu soit merci!*" She laughed with a little throw-back of the head, showing a white full throat above the ragged bit of fur. A number of French women pressed about her. Some of them patted her arms, fondled her hands. One woman bent down and kissed her shabby jacket.

"*Elle était merveilleuse, la demoiselle,*" said an old Frenchman by my side. "She was marvellous, sir. All that she did for the wounded, for your prisoners, for many men who owe their lives to her, cannot be told in a little while. They tried to catch her. She was nearly caught. It is a miracle that she was not shot. A miracle, monsieur!"

Other people in the crowd spoke to me about "*la demoiselle*." They were mysterious. Even now they could not tell me all she had done. But she had risked death every day for four years. Every day. Truly it was a miracle she was not caught.

Listening to them, I missed some of Eileen O'Connor's own words to Brand, and saw only the wave of her hand as she disappeared into the crowd.

It was Brand who told me that he and I and Fortune had been invited to spend the evening with her, or an "hour or so. I saw that Wicky, as we called him, was startled by the meeting with her, and was glad of it.

"I knew her when we were kids," he said. "Ten years ago—perhaps more. She used to pull my hair! Extraordinary, coming face to face with her in Lille, on this day of all days."

He turned to Fortune with a look of command.

"We ought to get busy with that advanced headquarters. There are plenty of big houses in these streets."

"*Ce qu'on appelle un embarras de choix*," said Fortune, with his rather comical exaggeration of accent. "And Blear-eyed Bill wants us to go on beating the Boche. I insist on a house with a good piano—German for choice."

They went off on their quest, and I to my billet, which had been found by the major of ours, where I wrote the story of how we entered Lille on a typewriter with a twisted ribbon, which would not write quickly enough all I wanted to tell the world about a day of history.

IV

I had the luck to be billeted in Lille at the house of Madame Chéri, in the Rue Esquermoise.

This lady was the mother of the girl with the pig-tail and the two children with whom Wickham Brand had made friends on this morning of liberation—the wife of that military officer whom Pierre Nesle had known at Verdun and knew to be killed. It was my luck, because there were children in the house—the pig-

tailed girl, Hélène, was more a woman than a child, though only sixteen—and I craved for a touch of home life and children's company after so long an exile in the war-zone, always among men who talked of war, thought of it, dreamed of it, year in, year out.

Madame Chéri was, I thought, when I saw her first, a beautiful woman, not physically—because she was too white and worn—but spiritually, in courage of soul. Pierre Nesle, our *liaison* officer, told me how she had received the news of her husband's death—unflinchingly, without a cry. She knew, she said, in her heart that he was dead. Some queer message had reached her one night during the Verdun battles. It was no ghost, or voice, but only a sudden cold conviction that her man had been killed. For the children's sake she had pretended that their father might come back. It gave them something to look forward to. The little ones were always harping on the hope that, when peace came, this mysterious and glorious man, whom they remembered only vaguely as one who had played bears with them and had been the provider of all good things, would return with rich presents from Paris—tin soldiers, queen-dolls, mechanical toys. Hélène, the elder girl, was different. She had looked curiously at her mother when the children prattled like that and Madame Chéri had pretended to believe in the father's homecoming. Once or twice the girl had said, "Papa may be killed," in a matter-of-fact way. Yet she had been his devoted comrade. They had been such lovers, the father and daughter, that sometimes the mother had been a little jealous, so she said, in her frank way, to Pierre Nesle, smiling as she spoke. The war had made Hélène a realist, like most French girls, to whom the idea of death became commonplace, almost inevitable, as the ceaseless slaughter of men went on. The German losses had taught them that.

I had the colonel's dressing-room—he had attained the grade of colonel before Verdun, so Pierre told me—and Madame Chéri came in while I was there to see that it was properly arranged for me. Over his iron bedstead (the Germans had taken the woollen mattress, so that it had been replaced by bags of straw) was his portrait as a lieutenant of artillery, as he had been at the time of his marriage. He was a handsome fellow, rather like Hélène, with her delicate profile and brown eyes, though more like, said Madame Chéri, their eldest boy, Edouard.

"Where is he?" I asked, and that was the only time I saw Madame Chéri break down utterly.

She began to tell me that Edouard had been taken away by the Germans, among all the able-bodied men and boys who were sent away from Lille for digging trenches behind the lines, in Easter of '16, and that he had gone bravely, with his little pack of clothes over his shoulder, saying, "It is nothing, *maman*. My father taught me the word *courage*. In a little while we shall win, and I shall be back. *Courage, courage!*"

Madame Chéri repeated her son's words proudly, so that I seemed to see the boy with that pack on his shoulder and a smile on his face. Then, suddenly, she wept bitterly, wildly, her body shaken with a kind of ague, while she sat on the iron bedstead with her face in her hands.

I repeated the boy's words.

"Courage, courage, madam!"

Proudly she wailed out in broken sentences:—

"He was such a child!... He caught cold so easily!... He was so delicate!... He needed mother-love so much!... For two years no word has come from him!" In a little while she controlled herself and begged me to excuse her. We went down together to the dining-room, where the children were playing and Hélène was reading; and she insisted upon my drinking a glass of wine from the store which she had kept hidden from the Germans in a pit which Edouard had dug in the garden in the first days of the occupation. The children were delighted with that trick, and roared with laughter.

Hélène, with a curl of her lip, spoke bitterly.

"The Boche is a stupid animal. One can dupe him easily."

"Not always easily," said Madame Chéri. She opened a secret cupboard behind a bookcase standing against the panelled wall.

"I hid all my brass and copper here. A German police officer came, and said, 'Have you hidden any copper, madame?' I said, 'There is nothing hidden.' 'Do you swear it?' he asked. 'I swear it,' I answered very haughtily. He went straight to the bookcase, pushed it on one side, tapped the wall, and opened the secret cupboard', which was stuffed full of brass and copper. 'You are a liar, madame,' he said, 'like all Frenchwomen.' 'And you are an insolent pig, like all Germans,' I remarked. That cost me a fine of ten thousand francs."

Madame Chéri saw nothing wrong in swearing falsely to a German. I think she held that nothing was wrong to deceive or to destroy any individual of the German race, and I could understand her point of view when Pierre Nesle told me of one thing that had happened which she never told to me. It was about Hélène.

A German captain was billeted in the house. They ignored his presence, though he tried to ingratiate himself. Hélène hated him with a cold and deadly hatred. She trembled if he passed her on the stairs. His presence in the house, even if she did not see him but only heard him move in his room, made her feel ill. Yet he was very polite to her, and said, "*Guten gnadiges Fràulein*," whenever they met. To Edouard, also, he was courteous and smiling, though Edouard was sullen. He was a stout little man, with a round rosy face and little bright eyes behind big black-rimmed glasses, an officer in the Kommandantur, and formerly a schoolmaster. Madame Chéri, was polite to him, but cold, cold as ice. After some months, she found him harmless, though objectionable, because German. It did not seem dangerous to leave him in the house one evening when she went to visit a dying friend—Madame Vailly. She was later than she meant to be—so late that she was liable to arrest by the military police if they saw her flit past in the darkness of the unlit streets. When she came home she slipped the latch-key into the door and went quietly into the hall. The children would be in bed and asleep. At the foot of the stairs a noise startled her. It was a curious creaking, shaking noise, as of a door being pushed by some heavy weight, then banged by it. It was the door at the top of the stairs, on the left—Helène's room.

"*Qu'est-ce que tu fais là?*" said Madame Chéri.

She was very frightened with some unknown fear, and held tight to the banister as she went upstairs. There

was a glimmer of light on the landing. It was from a candle which had almost burnt out and was guttering in a candlestick placed on the topmost stair. A grotesque figure was revealed by the light—Schwarz, the German officer, in his pyjamas, with a helmet on his head and unlaced boots on his feet. The loose fat of the man, no longer girded by a belt, made him look like a mass of jelly as he had his shoulder to the door, shoving and grunting as he tried to force it open. He was swearing to himself in German, and, now and then, called out softly in French, in a kind of drunken German-French: "*Ouvrez, kleines Madchen, ma jolie Schatz. Ouvrez donc.*"

Madame Chéri was paralysed for a moment by a shock of horror; quite speechless and motionless. Then suddenly she moved forward and spoke in a fierce whisper.

"What are you doing, beast?"

Schwarz gave a queer snort of alarm.

He stood swaying a little, with the helmet on the back of his head. The candlelight gleamed on its golden eagle. His face was hotly flushed and there was a ferocious look in his eyes. Madame Chéri saw that he was drunk.

He spoke to her in horrible French, so Pierre Nesle told me, imitating it savagely, as Madame Chéri had done to him. The man was filthily drunk, and declared that he loved Hélène and would kill her if she did not let him love her. Why did she lock her door like that? He had been kind to her. He had smiled at her. A German officer was a human being, not a monster. Why did they treat him as a monster, draw themselves away when he passed, become silent when he wished to speak with them, stare at him with hate in their eyes? The French people were all devils, proud as devils.

Another figure stood on the landing. It was Edouard—a tall, slim figure, with a white face and burning eyes, in which there was a look of fury.

"What is happening, *maman?*" he said coldly. "What does this animal want?"

Madame Chéri trembled with a new fear. If the boy were to kill that man, he would be shot. She had a vision of him standing against a wall....

"It is nothing," she said. "This gentleman is ill. Go back to bed, Edouard. I command you."

The German laughed stupidly.

"To bed, *shafskopf*. I am going to open your sister's door. She loves me. She calls to me. I hear her whisper, '*Ich liebe dich!*'"

Edouard had a stick in his hand. It was a heavy walking-stick which had belonged to his father. Without a word he sprang forward, raised his weapon, and smashed it down on the German's head. It knocked off Schwarz's helmet, which rolled from the top to the bottom of the staircase, and hit the man a glancing blow on the temple. He fell like a log. Edouard smiled, and said, "*Très bien.*" Then he rattled the lock of his sister's door and called out to her: "Hélène.... Have no fear. He is dead. I have killed him."

It was then that Madame Chéri had her greatest fear. There was no sound from Hélène. She did not answer any of their cries. She did not open the door to them. They tried to force the lock, as Schwarz had done, but, though the lock gave at last, the door would not open, kept closed by some barricade behind it. Edouard and his mother went out into the yard, and the boy climbed up to his sister's window and broke the glass to go through. Hélène was lying in her nightdress on the bedroom floor, unconscious. She had moved a heavy wardrobe in front of the door, by some supernatural strength which came from fear. Then she had fainted.... To his deep regret, Edouard had not killed the German.

Schwarz had crawled back to his bedroom when they went back into the house, and next morning wept to Madame Chéri and implored forgiveness. There had been a little banquet, he said, and he had drunk too much.

Madame Chéri did not forgive. She called at the Kommandantur, where the General saw her and listened to her gravely. He did not waste words.

"The matter will be attended to," he said.

Captain Schwarz departed that day from the house in the Rue Esquermoise. He was sent to a battalion in the line and was killed somewhere near Ypres.

V

Wickham Brand paid his promised visit to the Chéri family, according to his pledge to Hélène, whom he had met in the street the previous day, and he had to drink some of the hidden wine, as I had done, and heard the story of its concealment and of Madame's oath about the secret hoard of copper. I think he was more disconcerted than I had been by that avowal, and told me afterwards that he believed no Englishwoman would have sworn to so deliberate a lie.

"That's because the English are not so logical," I said, and he puzzled over that.

He was greatly taken with Hélène, as she with him, but he risked their friendship in an awkward moment when he expressed the hope that the German offer of peace (the one before the final surrender) would be accepted.

It was Madame Chéri who took him up on that, sharply, and with a kind of surprised anguish in her voice. She hoped, she said, that no peace would be made with Germany until French and British and American

troops had smashed the German armies, crossed the German frontier, and destroyed many German towns and villages. She would not be satisfied with any peace that came before a full vengeance, so that German women would taste the bitterness of war as Frenchwomen had drunk deep of it, and until Germany was heaped with ruins as France had been.

Wickham Brand was sitting with the small boy on his knees, and stroked his hair before answering.

"*Dites, donc!*" said Hélène, who was sitting on the hearthrug, looking up at his powerful profile, which reminded me always of a Norman knight, or, sometimes, of a young monk worried about his soul and the devil.

He had that monkish look now when he answered.

"I don't know," he said. "I have felt like that often. But I have come to think that the sooner we get blood out of our eyes the better for all the world. I have seen enough dead Germans—and dead English and dead French—to last a lifetime. Many of the German soldiers hate the war, as I know, and curse the men who drove them on to it. They are trapped. They cannot escape from the thing they curse, because of their discipline, their patriotism——"

"Their patriotism!" said Madame Chéri.

She was really angry with Brand, and I noticed that even Hélène drew back a little from her place on the rug and looked perplexed and disappointed. Madame Chéri ridiculed the idea of German patriotism. They were brutes who liked war except when they feared defeat. They had committed a thousand atrocities out of sheer joy in bestial cruelty. Their idea of patriotism was blood-lust and the oppression of people more civilised than themselves. They hated all people who were not savages like themselves.

Wickham Brand shook his head.

"They're not all as bad as that. I knew decent people among them before the war. For a time, of course, they went mad. They were poisoned by the damnable philosophy of their leaders and teachers."

"They liked the poison," said Madame Chéri. "They lapped it up. It is in their blood and spirits. They are foul through and through."

"They are devils," said Hélène. She shuddered as though she felt very cold.

Even the small boy on Brand's knees said: "*Sales Boches!*"

Brand groaned in a whimsical way.

"I have said all those things a thousand times! They nearly drove me mad. But now it's time to stop the river of blood—if the German army will acknowledge defeat. I would not go on a day after that, for our own sakes—for the sake of French boys and English. Every day more of war means more dead of ours, more blind, more crippled, and more agony of soul. I want some of our boyhood to be saved."

Madame Chéri answered coldly.

"Not before the Germans have been punished. Not before that, if we all die."

Hélène sprang up with a passionate gesture.

"All German babies ought to be strangled in their cradles! Before they grow up to be fat, beastly men."

She was thinking of Schwarz, I imagine. It was the horror of remembrance which made her so fierce. Then she laughed, and said: "Oh, *là là*, let us be glad because yesterday we were liberated. Do not quarrel with an English officer, *maman*. He helped to save us."

She put her hands on Wickham Brand's shoulders and said: "*Merci, mon capitaine!*"

So the conversation turned, and Wickham won them back by his courtesy, and by a tribute to the courage of French civilians behind the lines, of whom he told many haunting stories.

But when I walked round with him to his mess—we were going round later to see Eileen O'Connor—he referred back to the incident.

"Daddy Small is right." (He referred to the little American doctor.) "The hatred of these people is transcendental. It is like a spiritual flame. It is above all self-interest, kindly, human instincts, life itself. That woman would sacrifice herself, and her children, as quietly as she heard the death of her husband, rather than grant the Germans peace without victory and vengeance. How can there be any peace, whatever treaty is signed? Can Europe ever get peace with all this hatred as a heritage?"

VI

We walked silently towards the Boulevard de la Liberté, where Brand's little crowd had established their headquarters.

"Perhaps they're right," he said presently. "Perhaps the hatred is divine.... I may be weakening, because of all the horror."

Then he was silent again, and while I walked by his side I thought back to his career as I had known it in the war, rather well. He had always been tortured by agonised perplexities. I had guessed that by the look of the man and some of his odd phrases, and his restlessness and foolhardiness. It was in the trenches by Fricourt that I had first seen him—long before the battles of the Somme. He was sitting motionless on a wooden box, staring through a periscope towards the mine craters and the Bois Français in No Man's Land. The fine hardness of his profile, the strength of his jaw—not massive, but with one clean line from ear to chin

—and something in the utter intensity of his attitude, attracted my attention, and I asked the colonel about him.

"Who is that fellow—like a Norman knight?"

The colonel of the K.R.R. laughed as we went round the next bay, ducking our heads where the sandbags had slipped down.

"Further back than Norman," he said. "He's the primitive man."

He told me that Wickham Brand—a lieutenant then—was a young barrister who had joined the battalion at the beginning of '15. He had taken up sniping and made himself a dead shot. He had the hunter's instinct and would wait hours behind the sandbags for the sight of a German head in the trendies opposite. He seldom missed his man, or that part of his body which showed for a second. Lately he had taken to the habit of crawling out into No Man's Land and waiting in some shell-hole for the dawn, when Germans came out to mend their wire or drag in a dead body. He generally left another dead man as a bait for the living. Then he would come back with a grim smile and eat his breakfast wolfishly, after cutting a notch in one of the beams of his dug-out.

"He's a Hun-hater, body and soul," said the colonel. "We want more of 'em. All the same, Brand makes me feel queer by his ferocity. I like a humorous fellow who does his killing cheerfully."

After that I met Brand and took a drink with him in his dug-out. He answered my remarks gruffly for a time.

"I hear you go in for sniping a good deal," I said, by way of conversation.

"Yes. It's murder made easy."

"Do you get many targets?"

"It's a waiting game. Sometimes they get careless." He puffed at a black old pipe, quite silent for a time. Presently he told me about a "young 'un" who popped his head over the parapet twice to stare at something on the edge of the mine crater.

"I spared him twice. The third time I said, 'Better dead,' and let go at him. The kid was too easy to miss." Something in the tone of his voice told me that he hated himself for that.

"Rather a pity," I mumbled.

"War," he said. "Bloody war."

There was a candle burning on the wooden bench on which he leaned his elbow, and by the light of it I saw that his eyes were bloodshot. There was a haggard look on his face.

"It must need some nerve," I said awkwardly, "to go out so often in No Man's Land. Real pluck."

He stared at me as though surprised, and then laughed harshly.

"Pluck? What's that? I'm scared stiff half the time. Do you think I like it?"

He seemed to get angry, was angry, I think.

"Do any of us like it? These damn things that blow men to bits, make rags of them, tear their bowels out, and their eyes? Or to live on top of a mine crater, as we are now, never knowing when you're going up in smoke and flame? If you like that sort of thing yourself you can take my share. I have never met a man who did."

Yet when Brand was taken out of the trenches—by a word spoken over the telephone from corps headquarters—because of his knowledge of German and his cousinship to a lady who was a friend of the corps commander's niece, he was miserable and savage. I met him many times after that as an intelligence officer at the corps cages, examining prisoners on days of battle.

"An *embusqué* job!" he said. "I'm saving my skin while the youngsters die."

He stood outside his hut one day on a morning of battle in the Somme fields—up by Pozières. No prisoners had yet come down. He forgot my presence and stood listening to the fury of gun-fire and watching the smoke and flame away there on the ridge.

"Christ!" he cried. "Why am I here? Why aren't I with my pals up there, getting blown to blood and pulp? Blood and pulp! Blood and pulp!"

Then he remembered me, and turned in a shamefaced way and said, "Sorry!... I feel rather hipped to-day."

I was present sometimes at his examination of prisoners—those poor, grey, muddy wretches who came dazed out of the slime and shambles. Sometimes he bullied them harshly, in fluent German, and they trembled at his ferocity of speech, even whimpered now and then. But once or twice he was in quite a different mood with them and spoke gently, assenting when they cursed the war and its misery and said that all they wanted was peace and home again.

"Aren't you fellows going to revolt?" he asked one man—a *Feldwebel.* "Aren't you going to tell your war lords to go to hell and stop all this silly massacre before Germany is *kaput?*"

The German shrugged his shoulders.

"We would if we could. It is impossible. Discipline is too strong for us. It has enslaved us."

"That's true," said Brand. "You are slaves of a system."

He spoke a strange sentence in English as he glanced over to me.

"I am beginning to think we are all slaves of a system. None of us can break the chains."

It was after that day that Brand took a fancy to me, for some reason, inviting me to his mess, where I met Charles Fortune and others, and it was there that I heard amazing discussions about the philosophy of war, German psychology, the object of life, the relation of Christianity to war, and the decadence of Europe. Brand himself sometimes led these discussions, with a savage humour which delighted Charles Fortune, who egged him on. He was always pessimistic, sceptical, challenging, bitter, and now and then so violent in his criticisms of England, the Government, the Army Council, the Staff, and above all, the Press, that most of his fellow officers—apart from Fortune—thought he went "a bit too far."

Dear old Harding, who was Tory to the backbone, with a deep respect for all in authority, accused him of

being a “damned revolutionary,” and for a moment it looked as though there would be hot words, until Brand laughed in a good-natured way and said, “My dear fellow, I’m only talking academic rot. I haven’t a conviction. Ever since the war began I have been trying to make head or tail of things in a sea-fog of doubt. All I know is that I want the bloody orgy to end, somehow and anyhow.”

“With victory,” said Harding solemnly.

“With the destruction of Prussian philosophy everywhere,” said Brand.

They agreed on that, but I could see that Brand was on shifting ground and I knew, as our friendship deepened; that he was getting beyond a religion of mere hate, and was looking for some other kind of faith. Occasionally he harked back, as on the day in Lille when I walked by his side.

VII

I dined with him in his mess that evening, before going on with him to spend an hour or two with Eileen O’Connor, who had a room in some convent on the outskirts of Lille. The advanced headquarters of this little group of officers had been established in one of those big private houses which belong to the rich manufacturers and business people of Lille (rich before the war, but with desolate factories stripped of all machinery during the German occupation and afterwards), with large, heavily-furnished rooms built round a courtyard and barred off from the street by the big front door. There was a motor lorry inside the door, which was wide open, and some orderlies were unloading camp-beds, boxes of maps, officers’ kit, a mahogany gramophone, and other paraphernalia, under the direction of a young cockney sergeant, who wanted to know why the blazes they didn’t look slippy.

“Don’t you know there’s a war on?” he asked a stolid old soldier—one of the heroes of Mons—who was sitting on a case of whisky, with a wistful look, as though reflecting on the unfair privileges of officers with so much wealth of drink.

“War’s all right if you’re not too close to it,” said the Mons hero. “I’ve seen enough. I’ve done my bleeding bit for King and country. South Africa, Egypt——”

“Shut your jaw,” said the sergeant. “And down that blarsted gramophone.”

“Ah!” said the Mons hero. “We didn’t ‘ave no blarsted gramophones in South Africa. This is a different kind of war. More comfort about it, if you’re not in the trenches.”

Wickham Brand took me through the courtyard and mentioned that the colonel had come up from St. Omer.

“Now we’re sure to beat the Boche,” he said. “Listen!”

From a room to the left of the courtyard came the sound of a flute playing one of Bach’s minuets, very sweetly, with an old-fashioned grace.

“A wonderful army of ours!” said Brand. “I can’t imagine a German colonel of the Staff playing seventeenth century music on a bit of ivory while the enemy is fighting like a tiger at bay.”

“Perhaps that’s our strength,” I answered. “Our amateurs refuse to take the war too seriously. I know a young gunner major who travels a banjo in his limber, and at Cambrai I saw fellows playing chuck-penny within ten yards of their pals’ dead bodies—a pile of them.”

The colonel saw us through his window and waved his flute at us. When I went into the room, after a salute at the doorway, I saw that he had already littered it with artistic untidiness—sheets of torn music, water-colour sketches, books of poetry, and an array of splendid shining boots, of which a pair stood on the mahogany sideboard.

“A beautiful little passage this,” said Colonel Lavington, smiling at me over the flute, which he put to his lips again. He played a bar or two of old-world melody, and said, “Isn’t that perfect? Can’t you see the little ladies in their ^puffed brocades and high-heeled shoes!”

He had his faun-like look, his clean-shaven face with long nose and thin, humorous mouth, lighted up by his dark smiling eyes.

“Not a bad headquarters,” he said, putting down the flute again. “If we can only stay here a little while, instead of having to jog on again. There’s an excellent piano in the dining-room, German, thank goodness—and Charles Fortune and I can really get down to some serious music.”

“How’s the war?” I asked.

“War?” he said absent-mindedly. “Oh, yes, the war! That’s going on all right. They’d be out of Tournai in a few days. Perhaps out of Maubeuge and Mons. Oh, the game’s up! Very soon the intellectuals will be looking round for a living in dear old London. My goodness, some of us will find peace a difficult job! I can see Boredom approaching with its colossal shadow.... After all, it has been a great game, on the whole.”

I laughed, but something stuck in my throat. Colonel Lavington played the flute, but he knew his job, and was in touch with General Headquarters and all its secret information. It was obvious that he believed the war was going to end—soon. Soon, O Lord, after all the years of massacre.

I blurted out a straight question.

“Do you think there’s a real chance of peace?”

The colonel was reading a piece of music, humming it with a la, la, la.

“Another month and our job’s done,” he said. “Have you heard that bit of Gluck? It’s delicious.”

I stayed with him a little while and did not follow a note of his music. I was excited by the supreme hope he had given me. So there was to be an end of massacre, and my own hopes had not been false.

At the mess table that night Charles Fortune was in good form. We sat in a room which was rather handsomely furnished, in a heavy way, with big bronzes on the mantelpiece (ticketed for exemption from requisition as family heirlooms), and some rather good portraits of a French family—from the eighteenth century onwards—on the panelled walls. The *concierge* had told us that it had been the mess of a German headquarters and this gave Fortune his cue, and he entertained us with some caricatures of German generals and officers, amazingly comic. He drank his soup in the style of a German general and ate his potato pie as a German intelligence officer, who had once been a professor of psychology at Heidelberg.

The little American doctor, "Daddy" Small, as we called him, had been made an honorary member of the mess, and he smiled at Fortune through his spectacles, with an air of delighted surprise that such things should be.

"You English," he said in his solemn way, "are the most baffling people in the world. I have been studying you since I came to France, and all my preconceived ideas have been knocked on the head. We Americans think you are a hard, arrogant, selfish people, without humour or sympathy, made in set moulds, turned out as types from your university and public schools. That is all wrong. I am beginning to see that you are more human, more various, more whimsical than any race in the world. You decline to take life seriously. You won't take even death seriously. This war—you make a joke of it. The Germans—you kill them in great numbers, but you have a secret liking for them. Fortune's caricatures are very comical—but not unkind. I believe Fortune is a pro-German. You cannot laugh at the people you hate. I believe England will forgive Germany quicker than any other nation—far quicker than the Americans. France, of course, will never forgive."

"No," said Pierre Nesle, who was at the end of the table. "France will never forgive."

"We are an illogical people," said the colonel. "It is only logical people who can go on hating. Besides, German music is so-good! So good!"

Harding, who read no paper but the *Morning Post*, said that as far as he was concerned he would never speak to a German again in his life. He would like to see the whole race exterminated. But he was afraid of the Socialists with their pestilential doctrine of "brotherhood of man." Lloyd George also filled him with the gravest misgivings.

Dr. Small's eyes twinkled at him: "There is the old caste that speaks. Tradition against the new world of ideas. Of course there will always be *that* conflict.... That is a wonderful phrase, 'the pestilential doctrine of the brotherhood of man.' I must make a note of it."

"Shame oh you, doctor," said Fortune. "You are always jotting down notes about us. I shall find myself docketed as 'English gentleman, grade 3; full-blooded, inclined to obesity, humorous, strain of insanity due to in-breeding, rare.'"

Dr. Small laughed in a high treble, and then was serious.

"I'm noting down everything. My own psychology, which alarms me; facts, anecdotes, scenes, words. I want to find a law somewhere, the essential thing in human nature. After the war—if there is any afterwards—I want to search for a way out of the jungle. This jungle civilisation. There must be daylight somewhere for the human race."

"If you find it," said Brand earnestly, "tell me, doctor."

"I will," said Dr. Small, and I remembered that pledge afterwards, when he and Brand were together in a doomed city, trying to avert the doom, because of that impulse which urged them to find a little daylight beyond the darkness.

Young Clatworthy jerked his chair on the polished boards and looked anxiously at the Colonel, who was discoursing on the origins of art, religion, sex, the perception of form.

Colonel Lavington grinned at him.

"All right, Cyril. I know you have got a rendezvous with some girl. Don't let us keep you from your career of infamy."

"As a matter of fact, sir, I met a sweet little thing yesterday——" Clatworthy knew that his reputation as an amorist did not displease the colonel, who was a romantic and loved youth.

In a gust of laughter the mess broke up. Charles Fortune and the colonel prepared for an orgy of Bach over the piano in the drawing-room of that house in Lille. Those who cared to listen might—or not, as they pleased. Brand and I went out into the streets, pitch-dark now, unlit by any glimmer of gas, and made our way to the convent where the girl Eileen O'Connor lodged. We passed a number of British soldiers in the Boulevard de la Liberté, wearing their steel hats and carrying their packs.

A group of them stopped under a doorway to light cigarettes. One of them spoke to his pals.

"They tell me there's some bonny wenches in this town."

"Ay," said another, "an' I could do wi' some hugging in a cosy billet."

"Cosy billet!" said the third, with a cockney voice. "Town or trenches, the poor bloody soldier gets it in the neck. Curse this pack! I'm fed up with the whole damn show. I want peace."

A hoarse laugh answered him.

"Peace! You don't believe that fool's talk in the papers, chum? It's a hell of a long way to the Rhine, and you and I'll be dead before we get there."

They slouched off into the darkness, three points of light where their cigarettes glowed.

"Poor lads!" said Brand.

VIII

We fumbled our way to a street on the edge of the canal, according to Brand's uncanny sense of direction and his remembrance of what the Irish girl had told him. There we found the convent, a square box-like building behind big gates. We pulled a bell which jangled loudly, and presently the gate opened an inch, letting through the light of a lantern which revealed the black-and-white coif of a nun.

"*Qui va là?*"

Brand told her that we had come to see Miss O'Connor, and the gate was opened wider and we went into the courtyard, where a young nun stood smiling. She spoke in English.

"We were always frightened when the bell rang during the German occupation. One never knew what might happen. And we were afraid for Miss O'Connor's sake."

"Why?" asked Brand.

The little nun laughed.

"She did dangerous work. They suspected her. She came here after her arrest. Before then she had rooms of her own. Oh, *messieurs*, her courage, her devotion! Truly, she was heroic!"

She led us into a long corridor with doors on each side, and out of one door came a little group of nuns with Eileen O'Connor.

The Irish girl came towards us with outstretched hands which she gave first to Brand. She seemed excited at our coming and explained that the Reverend Mother and all the nuns wanted to see us to thank England by means of us, to hear something about the war and the chance of victory from the first English officers they had seen.

Brand was presented to the Reverend Mother, a massive old lady with a slight moustache on the upper lip and dark luminous eyes, reminding me of the portrait of Savonarola at Florence. The other nuns crowded round us, eager to ask questions, still more eager to talk. Some of them were quite young and pretty, though all rather white and fragile, and they had a vivacious gaiety so that the building resounded with laughter. It was Eileen O'Connor who made them laugh by her reminiscences of girlhood when she and Brand were "*enfants terribles*," when she used to pull Brand's hair and hide the pipe he smoked too soon. She asked him to take off his field-cap so that she might see whether the same old unruly tuft still stuck up at the back of his head, and she and all the nuns clapped hands when she found it was so, in spite of war-worry and steel hats. All this had to be translated into French for the benefit of those who could not understand such rapid English.

"I believe you would like to give it a tug now," said Brand, bending his head down, and Eileen O'Connor agreed.

"And indeed I would, but for scandalising a whole community of nuns, to say nothing of Reverend Mother."

The Reverend Mother laughed in a curiously deep voice, and a crowd of little wrinkles puckered at her eyes. She told Miss O'Connor that even her Irish audacity would not go as far as that, which was a challenge accepted on the instant.

"One little tug, for old times' sake," said the girl, and Brand yelped with pretended pain at the vigour of her pull, while all the nuns screamed with delight.

Then a clock struck and the Reverend Mother touched Eileen (as afterwards I called her) on the arm and said she would leave her with her friends. One by one the nuns bowed to us, all smiling under their white *bandeaux,* and then went down the corridor through an open door which led into a chapel, as we could see by twinkling candlelight. Presently the music of an organ and of women's voices came through the closed doors.

Eileen O'Connor took us into a little parlour where there were just four rush chairs and a table, and on the clean whitewashed walls a crucifix.

Brand took a chair by the table, rather awkwardly, I thought.

"How gay they are!" he said. "They do not seem to have been touched by the horrors of war."

"It is the gaiety of faith," said Eileen. "How else could they have survived the work they have done, the things they have seen? This convent was a shambles for more than three years. These rooms were filled with wounded, German wounded, and often English wounded, who were prisoners. They were the worst cases for amputation and butcher's work, and the nuns did all the nursing. They know all there is to know of suffering and death."

"Yet they have not forgotten how to laugh!" said Brand. "That is wonderful. It is a mystery to me."

"You must have seen bad things," said Eileen. "Have you lost the gift of laughter?"

"Almost," said Brand, "and once for a long time."

Eileen put her hands to her breast.

"Oh, learn it again," she said. "If we cannot laugh we cannot work. Why, I owe my life to a sense of humour."

She spoke the last words with more than a trivial meaning. They seemed to tell of some singular episode, and Brand asked her to explain.

She did not explain then. She only said some vague things about laughing herself out of prison and stopping a German bullet with a smile.

"Why did the devils put you in prison?" asked Brand.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"In Lille it was bad form if one had not been arrested once at least. I was three weeks in a cell half the size of this, and twenty women were with me there. There was very little elbow-room!"

She proved her sense of humour then by that deep-throated laugh of hers, but I noticed that just for a second behind the smile in her eyes there crept a shadow as at the remembrance of some horror, and that she shivered a little, as though some coldness had touched her.

"It must have been like the Black Hole of Calcutta," said Brand, measuring the space with his eyes. "Twenty women herded in a room like that!"

"With me for twenty-one," said Eileen. "We had no means of washing."

She used an awful phrase.

"We were a living stench."

"Good God!" said Brand.

Eileen O'Connor waved back the remembrance. "Tell me of England and of Ireland. How's the little Green Isle? Has it done well in the war?"

"The Irish troops fought like heroes," said Brand.

"But there were not enough of them. Recruiting was slow, and there was—some trouble."

He did not speak about the Irish Rebellion.

"I heard about it vaguely, from prisoners," said the girl. "It was England's fault, I expect. Dear old blundering, muddle-headed England, who is a tyrant through fear, and twists Irish loyalty into treason by ropes of red tape in which the Irish mind gets strangled and awry. Well, there's another subject to avoid. I want to hear only good things to-night. Tell me of London, of Kensington Gardens, of the way from Strand to Temple Bar, of the lights that gleam along the Embankment when lovers go hand-in-hand and see stars in the old black river. Are they all there?"

"They are all changed," said Brand. "It is a place of gloom. There are no lights along the embankment. They have dowsed their glims for fear of air-raids. There are few lovers hand-in-hand. Some of the boys lie dead round Ypres, or somewhere on the Somme, or weep out of blind eyes, or gibber in shell-shock homes, or try to hop on one leg—while waiting for artificial limbs—or trudge on, to-night, towards Maubeuge, where German machine-guns wait for them behind the ditches. Along the Strand goes the painted flapper, luring men to hell. In Kensington Gardens there are training camps for more boys ear-marked for the shambles, and here and there among the trees young mothers who are widows before they knew their wifehood. There is vice, the gaiety of madness, the unspeakable callousness of people who get rich on war, or earn fat wages, and in small stricken homes a world of secret grief. That is London in time of war. I hate it."

Brand spoke with bitterness and a melancholy that startled the girl who sat with folded hands below the crucifix on the whitewashed wall behind her.

"Dear God! Is it like that?"

She stared at the wall opposite as though it were a window through which she saw London.

"Yes, of course it is like that. Here in Lille we thought we were suffering more than anybody in the world. That was our egotism. We did not realise—not in our souls—that everywhere in the world of war there was equal suffering, the same cruelty, perhaps the same temptation to despair."

Brand repented, I think, of having led the conversation into such abysmal gloom. He switched off to more cheerful things and gave some elaborate sketches of soldiers he knew, to which Eileen played up with anecdotes of rare comedy about the nuns—the fat nun who under the rigour of war rations became as slim as a willow and was vain of her new grace; the little French mm who had no fear of German officers and dared their fury by prophecies of defeat—but was terrified of a mouse in the refectory; the Reverend Mother, who borrowed a safety-razor from an English Tommy—he had hidden it in his shirt—to shave her upper lip, lest the Germans should think her a French *poilu* in disguise.

More interesting to me than anything that was said were the things unspoken by Eileen and Brand. In spite of the girl's easy way of laughter, her quick wit, her avoidance, if possible, of any reference to her own suffering, I seemed to see in her eyes and in her face the strain of a long ordeal, some frightful adventure of life in which she had taken great hazards—the people had told me she had risked her life often—and a woman's courage which had been tested by that experience and had not failed, though perhaps at breaking-point in the worst hours. I supposed her age was twenty-six or so (I guessed it right this side of a year), but there was already a streak of grey in her dark hair, and her eyes, so smiling as a rule, looked as if they had often wept. I think the presence of Brand was a great pleasure to her—bringing to Lille a link with her childhood—and I saw that she was studying the personality of this newly-found friend of hers, and the strong character of his face, not unscathed by the touch of war, with curious, penetrating interest. I felt in the way, and left them together with a fair excuse—I had always work to do—and I was pleased that I did so, they were so obviously glad to have a more intimate talk about old friends and old times.

IX

I gained by my unselfishness (I did not want to go), for the Reverend Mother met me in the corridor and stood talking, to me about Eileen O'Connor, and told me part of the girl's story, which I found strange in its drama, though she left out the scene of greatest interest, as I heard later from Eileen herself.

The girl had come to Lille just before the war, as an art mistress in an "*Ecole de Jeunes Filles*" (her parents in Kensington had too big a family to keep them all), with lessons twice a week at the convent, and private pupils in her own rooms. She learned to speak French quickly and charmingly, and her gift of humour, her

Irish frankness and comradeship made her popular among her pupils, so that she had many invitations to their homes and became well known in the best houses of Lille—mostly belonging to rich manufacturers. A commonplace story till then. But when the Germans occupied Lille this Irish girl became one of the chief characters in a drama that was exciting and fantastic to the point of melodrama. It was she who organised the Lille branch of a secret society of women, with a network all over northern France and Belgium—the world remembers Nurse Cavell at Brussels—for the escape of young civilians of military age and prisoners of war, combining that work (frightfully perilous) with espionage on German movements of troops and other facts that might be of value to the Belgian Army, and through them to England and France. It was out of an old book of Jules Verne called "The Cryptogram" that she copied the cypher in which she wrote her messages (in invisible ink on linen handkerchiefs and rags), and she had an audacity of invention in numberless small tricks and plots which constantly broke through the meshes of the German network of military police.

"She had a contempt for their stupidity," said the Reverend Mother. "Called them dunderheads, and one strange word of which I do not know the meaning—'yobs'—and I trembled at the risks she took."

She lived with one maid in two rooms on the ground floor of a house near the Jardin d'Eté, the rest of the house being used as the headquarters of the German Intelligence Section of the Northern District. All day long officers went in and out, and by day and night there were always sentries at the door. Yet it was there that was established also the headquarters of the Rescue Committee. It was on account of her Irish name and parentage that Eileen O'Connor was permitted to remain in the two rooms to the left of the courtyard, entered by a separate door. The German Kommandant was a man who firmly believed that the Irish nation was ready to break out into revolt against the English, and that all Irish—men and women—hated the British Empire as much as any Prussian. Eileen O'Connor played up to this *idée fixe*, saw the value of it as a wonderful means of camouflage, lent the Kommandant books on Irish history dealing with the injustice of England to Ireland (in which she firmly believed as a staunch Nationalist), and educated him so completely to the belief that she was anti-English (as she was in politics, though not in war) that he had no doubt of her.

Here the Reverend Mother made a remark which seemed to illuminate Eileen O'Connor's story, as well as her own knowledge of human nature.

"The child has beautiful eyes and a most sweet grace. Irish history may not account for all."

"This German Kommandant," I asked, "what sort of a man was he?"

"For a German not altogether bad," said the Reverend Mother. "Severe and ruthless like them all, but polite when there was no occasion to be violent. He was of good family, as far as there are such things in Germany. A man of sixty."

Eileen O'Connor, with German permission, continued her work as art mistress at the *Ecole de Jeunes Filles*. After six months she was permitted to receive private pupils in her two rooms on the ground floor of the Intelligence Headquarters, in the same courtyard, though not in the same building. Her pupils came with drawing-boards and paint-boxes. They were all girls with pigtails and short frocks—not so young as they looked, because three or four at least, including the Baronne de Villers-Auxicourt, were older than schoolgirls. They played the part perfectly, and the sentries smiled at them and said, "*Guten Tag, schönes Fraulein*," as each one passed. They were the committee of the Rescue Society: Julienne de Quesnoy, Marcelle Barbier, Yvonne Marigny, Marguérite Cléry, and Alice de Taffin, de Villers-Auxicourt.

Eileen O'Connor was the director and leading spirit. It seems to me astonishing that they should have arranged the cypher, practised it, written down military information gathered from German conversations and reported to them by servants and agents under the very noses of the German intelligence officers, who could see into the sitting-room as they passed through French windows and saluted Eileen O'Connor and her young ladies if they happened to meet their eyes. It is more astonishing that, at different times, and one at a time, many fugitives (including five British soldiers who had escaped from the Citadel) slept in the cellar beneath that room, changed into German uniforms belonging to men who had died at the convent hospital—the Reverend Mother did that part of the plot—and walked quietly out in the morning by an underground passage leading to the Jardin d'Eté. The passage had been anciently built but was blocked up at one end by Eileen O'Connor's cellar, and she and the other women broke the wall, one brick at a time, until after three months the hole was made. Their finger-nails suffered in the process, and they were afraid that the roughness of their hands might be noticed by the officers, but in spite of German spectacles they saw nothing of that. Eileen O'Connor and her friends were in constant touch with the prisoners of the Citadel and smuggled food to them. That was easy. It was done by bribing the German sentries with tobacco and meat-pies. They were also in communication with other branches of the work in Belgium, so that fugitives were passed on from town to town, and house to house. Their success made them confident, after many horrible fears, and for a time they were lulled into a sense of security. That was rudely crashed when Eileen O'Connor, the young Baronne de Villers-Auxicourt, and Marcelle Barbier were arrested one morning in September of '17 on a charge of espionage. They were put into separate cells of the civil prison, crowded with the vilest women of the slums and stews, and suffered something like torture because of the foul atmosphere, the lack of sanitation and unspeakable abomination.

"Only the spirit of Christian martyrdom could remain cheerful in such terrible conditions," said the Reverend Mother. "Our dear Eileen was sustained by a great faith and wonderful gaiety. Her laughter, her jokes, her patience, her courage, were an inspiration even to the poor degraded women who were prisoners with her. They worshipped her. We, her friends, gave her up for lost, though we prayed unceasingly that she might escape death. Then she was brought to trial."

She stood alone in the court. The young Baronne de Villers-Auxicourt had died in prison owing to the shock of her arrest and a weak heart. A weak heart, though so brave. Eileen was not allowed to see her on her deathbed, but she sent a message almost with her last breath. It was the one word "courage!" Mlle. Marcelle Barbier was released before the trial for lack of direct evidence.

Eileen's trial was famous in Lille. The court was crowded and the German military tribunal could not suppress the loud expressions of sympathy and admiration which greeted her, nor the angry murmurs which interrupted the prosecuting officer. She stood there, wonderfully calm, between two soldiers with fixed

bayonets. She looked very young and innocent between her guards, and it is evident that her appearance made a favourable impression on the court. The President, after peering at her through his horn spectacles, was not so ferocious in his manner as usual when he bade her be seated.

The evidence seemed very strong against her. “She is lost” was the belief of all her friends in court. One of the sentries at the Citadel, jealously savage because another man had received more tobacco than himself—on such a trivial thing did this girl’s life hang—betrayed the system by which the women’s committee sent food to the French and English prisoners. He gave the names of three of the ladies and described Eileen O’Connor as the ringleader. The secret police watched her, and searched her rooms at night. They discovered the cypher and the key, a list of men who had escaped, and three German uniforms in a secret cupboard. They had been aided in their search by Lieutenant Franz von Kreuzenach, of the Intelligence Bureau, who was the chief witness for the prosecution, and whose name was recommended to the court for the vigilance and zeal he had shown in the detection of the conspiracy against the Army and the Fatherland. It was he who had found the secret cupboard and had solved the key to the cypher.

“We will take the lieutenant’s evidence in due course,” said the President. “Does that complete the indictment against this prisoner?”

Apart from a savage elaboration of evidence based upon the facts presented and a demand that the woman’s guilt, if the court were satisfied thereof, should be punished by death, the preliminary indictment by the prosecution ended.

It was a terrible case, and during its revelations the people in court were stricken with dread and pity for the girl who was now sitting between the two soldiers. They were all staring at her, and some at least—the Reverend Mother among them—noticed with surprise that when the officer for the prosecution ended his speech she drew a deep breath, raised her head, as though some weight of fear had been lifted from her, and —laughed.

It was quite a merry laugh, with that full blackbird note of hers, and the sound of it caused a strange sensation in the court. The President blinked repeatedly, like an owl blinded by a ray of sunlight. He addressed the prisoner in heavy, barbarous French.

“You are charged with conspiracy against our German martial law. The punishment is death. It is no laughing matter, Fraulein.”

They were stem words, but there was a touch of pity in that last sentence.

“*Ce riest pas une affaire pour rire, Fràulein.*”

Eileen O’Connor, said the Reverend Mother, who was to be called as a witness on her behalf, bowed in a gracious way to the President, but with a look of amusement that was amazing to the German officers assembled for her trial. Some of them scowled, but there were others, the younger men, who whispered, and smiled also with no attempt to disguise their admiration of such courage.

“Perhaps it was only I,” said the Reverend Mother, “who understood the child’s joyous relief which gave her this courage. I had waited with terrible dread for the announcement of the discovery of the secret passage. That it had been discovered I knew, for the German Lieutenant, Franz von Kreuzenach, had come round to me and very sternly questioned me about a case of medicine which he had found there, stamped with the name of our convent.”

“Then,” I said, “this Franz von Kreuzenach must have suppressed some of the evidence. By what motive ——”

The Reverend Mother interrupted me, putting her hand on my sleeve with a touch of protest.

“The good God works through strange instruments, and may touch the hardest heart with His grace. It was indeed a miracle.”

I would give much to have been in that Court at Lille when Eileen O’Connor was permitted to question the German lieutenant, who was the chief witness against her.

From what I have heard, not only from the Reverend Mother, but from other people of Lille who were present at the trial, she played with this German officer, making him look very foolish, ridiculing him in a merry, contemptuous way before the court. Indeed, he seemed strangely abashed before her.

“The cypher!... Have you ever been a schoolboy, or were you born a lieutenant in the German Army?”

Franz von Kreuzenach admitted that he had once been a boy—to the amusement of his brother officers.

Had he ever read stories of adventure, fairy tales, romances, or did he spend his childhood in the study of Nietzsche, Haegel, Schopenhauer, Kant, Goethe, von Bemhardi, Karl Marx———-

When she strung off these names—so incongruous in association—even the President permitted a slight smile to twist his thin hard mouth.

Franz von Kreuzenach said that he had read some fairy tales and stories of adventure. Might he ask the *gnadiges Fraulein*——

“Yes,” said the President, “what has this to do with your case, Fràulein? I desire to give you full liberty in your defence, but this is entirely irrelevant to the evidence.”

“It is my case!” cried Miss O’Connor. “Listen to the next question, Herr President. It is the key of my defence.”

Her next question caused laughter in court.

“I ask the Herr Lieutenant whether, as a boy, or a young man, he has read the romances of the French writer, Jules Verne?”

Franz von Kreuzenach looked abashed, and blushed like a schoolboy. His eyes fell before the challenging look of the Irish girl.

“I have read some novels by Jules Verne, in German translations.”

“Oh, in German translations—of course!” said Miss O’Connor. “German boys do not learn French very well.”

“Keep to the case,” said the President. “In heaven’s name, Fraulein, what has this to do with your defence?”

She raised her hand, for patience, and said, “Herr President, my innocence will soon be clear.”

She demanded of the witness for the prosecution whether he had ever read the novel by Jules Verne called “The Cryptogram.” He said that he had read it only a few days ago. He had discovered it in her room.

Eileen O’Connor turned round eagerly to the President.

“I demand the production of that book.”

An orderly was sent to the lieutenant’s rooms to fetch it. It was clear that the President of the Court made a black mark against Franz von Kreuzenach for not having mentioned its discovery to the Court. As yet, however, he could not see the bearing of it on the case.

Then, with the book in her hand, Eileen O’Connor turned to the famous cryptogram, showed how it corresponded exactly with her own cypher, proved that the pieces of paper found in her rooms were copies of the Jules Verne cypher in the handwriting of her pupils.

“You see, Herr President!” she cried eagerly.

The President admitted that this was proved, but, as he asked, leaning forward in his chair, for what purpose had they copied out that cypher? Cyphers were dangerous things to write in time of war. Deadly things. Why did these ladies want to learn the cypher?

It was then that Eileen O’Connor was most brilliant. She described in a simple and girlish way how she and her pupils worked in their little room. While they copied freehand models, one of them read out to the others, books of romance, love, adventure, to forget the gloom of life and the tragedy of war. One of those books was Jules Verne’s “Cryptogram.” It had fascinated them. It had made them forget the misery of war. They were romantic girls, imaginative girls. Out of sheer merriment, to pass the hours, they had tried to work out the cypher. They had written love-letters to imaginary young men in those secret numbers. Here Eileen, smiling ironically, read out specimens of the letters that had been found.

“Come to the corner of the Rue Esquermoise at 9.45. You will know me because I shall be wearing a blue bow in a black hat.”

That was the romantic imagination of the Baronne de Villers-Auxicourt.

“When you see a lady standing outside the Jardin d’Eté, with a little brown dog, speak to her in French and say, ‘*Comme il fait froid aujourd’hui, mademoiselle*.’ If she answers, ‘*Je ne vous comprends pas, monsieur*,’ you will understand that she is to be trusted, and you must follow her.”

That was a romantic idea to which Eileen herself pleaded guilty.

“Herr President,” said Eileen, “you cannot put old heads on young shoulders, even in time of war. A party of girls will let their foolish little minds run upon ideas of love, even when the sound of guns is not far away. You, Herr President, will understand that perfectly.”

Perhaps there was something in the character of the President that made this a chance hit. All the German officers laughed, and the President shifted in his seat and flushed to the top of his bald, vulture-like head.

The possession of those German uniforms was also explained in the prettiest way by Eileen O’Connor. They were uniforms belonging to three handsome young German soldiers who had died in hospital. They had kept them to return to their mothers after the war, those poor German mothers who were weeping for their sons. This part of her defence touched the German officers deeply. One of them had tears in his eyes.

The list of escaped fugitives was harder to explain, but again an Irish imagination succeeded in giving it an innocent significance. It had been compiled by a prisoner in the Citadel and given to Eileen as a proof that his own hope of escape was not in vain, though she had warned him of the fearful risk. “The poor man gave me the list in sheer simplicity, and in innocence I kept it.”

Simply and touchingly she admitted her guilt in smuggling food to French and British prisoners, and to German sentries, and claimed that her fault was only against military regulations, but in humanity was justified.

“I am Irish,” she said. “I have in my heart the remembrance of English crimes to Ireland—old, unforgettable crimes that still cry out for the justice and the liberty which are denied my country.”

Some of the younger German officers shook their heads approvingly. They liked this Irish hatred of England. It was according to their text-books.

“But,” said the Irish girl, “the sufferings of English prisoners—you know here of their misery, their hunger, their weakness in that Citadel where many have died and are dying—stirred my compassion as a woman to whom all cruelty is tragic, and all suffering of men a call to that mother-love which is in the spirit of all their womanhood, as you know by your German women—as I hope you know. Because they were starved I tried to get them food, as I would to starving dogs or any poor creatures caught in the trap of war or of men’s sport. To that I confess guilty, with gladness in my guilt.”

The Reverend Mother, standing there in the whitewashed corridor of the convent, in the flickering light of an oil lantern, which gleamed on the white ruff round her neck and the silver cross on her breast, though her face was shadowed in the cavern of her black headdress, repeated this speech of Eileen O’Connor as though in hearing it first she had learnt it by heart.

“The child was divinely inspired, monsieur. Our Lady stood by her side, prompting her. I am sure of that.”

The trial lengthened out, until it was late in the evening when the judge summed up. He spoke again of the gravity of the accusation, the dread punishment that must befall the prisoner if her guilt were proved, the weight of evidence against her. For a time he seemed to press her guilt heavily, and the court was gloomy. The German officers looked grave. One thing happened in the course of his speech which affected the audience profoundly. It was when he spoke of the romantic explanation that had been offered by the prisoner regarding the secret cypher.

“This lady,” he said, “asks me to believe that she and her companions were playing a simple girlish game of make-believe. Writing imaginary letters to mythical persons. Were these young ladies—nay, is she, herself—

so lacking in woman's charm that she has no living man to love her, and needs must write fictitious notes to nonexistent men?"

The President said these words with portentous solemnity. Perhaps only a German could have spoken them. He paused and blinked at the German officers below him. Suddenly into the silence of the court came a ripple of laughter, clear and full of most mirthful significance.

Eileen O'Connor's laugh bewitched the crowded court, and there was a roar of laughter, in which all the officers joined. By that laugh more even than by her general gaiety, her courage and eloquence, she won her life.

"I said a decade of the rosary to our Blessed Lady," said the Reverend Mother, "and thanked God that this dear child's life would not be taken. I was certain that those men would not condemn her to death. She was acquitted on the charge of espionage, and sentenced to two weeks' imprisonment for smuggling food to prisoners, by a verdict of seven against three. Only when she left the court did she fall into so deep a swoon that for a little while we thought her dead."

The Reverend Mother had told her story well. She held me in a deep strained interest. It was rather to myself than to her that I spoke the words which were my comment at the end of this narrative.

"How splendid!... But I am puzzled about that German lieutenant, Franz von Kreuzenach. He kept the real evidence back."

"That," said the Reverend Mother solemnly, "was a great mystery, and a miracle."

Wickham Brand joined us in the passage, with Eileen O'Connor by his side.

"Not gone yet?" said Wickham.

"I have been listening to the tale of a woman's courage," I said, and when Eileen gave me her hand, I raised it to my lips, in the French style, though not in gallantry.

"Reverend Mother," she said, "has been exalting me to the seventh heaven of her dear heart."

On my way back to Brand's mess I told him all I had heard about Eileen's trial, and I remember his enthusiasm.

"Fine! Thank heaven there are women like that in this blood-soaked world. It saves one from absolute despair."

He made no comment about the suppression of evidence, which was a puzzle to me.

We parted with a "So long, old man," outside his headquarters, and I did not see him until a few days later.

X

It was Frederick E. Small, the American doctor attached to Brand's crowd, who was with me on a night in Lille, before the armistice, when by news from the colonel we were stirred by the tremendous hope—almost a certainty—that the end of the war was near. I had been into Courtrai, which the enemy had first evacuated and then was shelling. It was not a joyous entry like that into Lille. Most of the people were still down in their cellars, where for several days they had been herded together until the air became foul. On the outskirts I had passed many groups of peasants with their babies and old people, trudging past our guns, trekking from one village to another in search of greater safety, or standing in the fields where our artillery was getting into action, and where new shell craters should have warned them away, if they had had more knowledge of war. For more than four years I had seen, at different periods, crowds like that, after the first flight of fugitives in August of '14, when the world seemed to have been tilted up and great populations in France and Belgium were in panic-stricken retreat from the advancing edge of war. I knew the types, the attitudes, the very shape of the bundles, in these refugee processions, the haggard look of the mothers pushing their perambulators, the bewildered look of old men and women, the tired sleepy look of small boys and girls, the stumbling dead-beat look of old farm horses dragging carts piled high with cottage furniture. As it was at the beginning so it was at the end—for civilians caught in the fires of war. With two other men I went into the heart of Courtrai and found it desolate, and knew the reason why, when, at the corner of the Grande Place, a heavy shell came howling and burst inside a house with frightful explosive noise, followed by a crash of masonry. The people were wise to keep to their cellars. Two girls, not so wise, made a dash from one house to another, and were caught by chunks of steel and killed close to the church of St. Martin, where they lay all crumpled up in a clotted pool of blood. A man came up to me, utterly careless of such risks, and I hated to stand talking to him with the shells coming every half-minute overhead.

There was a fire of passion in his eyes, and at every sentence he spoke to me his voice rose and thrilled as he denounced the German race for all they had done in Courtrai, for their robberies, their imprisonments, their destruction of machinery, their brutality. The last Kommandant of Courtrai was von Richthofen, father of the German aviator, and he was a hard, ruthless man, and kept the city under an iron rule.

"All that, thank God, is finished now," said the man. "The English have delivered us from the beast!" As he spoke, another monstrous shell came overhead, but he took no notice of it, and said, "We are safe now from the enemy's evil power!" It seemed to me a comparative kind of safety. I had no confidence in it when I sat in the parlour of an old lady who, like Eileen O'Connor, in Lille, had been an Irish governess in Courtrai, and who now, living in miserable poverty, sat in a bed-sitting-room whose windows and woodwork had been broken by shell-splinters. "Do you mind shutting the door, my dear?" she said. "I can't bear those nasty bombs." I realised with a large, experienced knowledge that we might be torn to fragments of flesh at any

moment by one of those nasty “bombs,” which were really eight-inch shells; but the old lady did not worry, and felt safe when the door was shut.

Outside Courtrai, when I left, lay some khaki figures in a mush of blood. They were lads whom I had seen unloading ammunition that morning on the bank of the canal. One had asked me for a light, and said, “What’s all this peace talk?... Any chance?” A big chance, I had told him. Home for Christmas, certain sure this time. The boy’s eyes had lighted up for a moment, quicker than the match which he held in the cup of his hands.

“Jesus! Back for good, eh?”

Then the light went out of his eyes as the match flared up.

“We’ve heard that tale a score of times. ‘The Germans are weakening. The Huns ‘ave ‘ad enough!...’ Newspaper talk. A man would be a mug——”

Now the boy lay in the mud, with half his body blown away.... I was glad to get back to Lille for a spell, where there were no dead bodies in the roads. And the colonel’s news, straight from G.H.Q.—which, surely, were not playing up the old false optimism again!—helped one to hope that, perhaps, in a week or two the last boys of our race, the lucky ones, would be reprieved from that kind of bloody death which I had seen so often, so long, so heaped up, in many fields of France and Flanders, where the flower of our youth was killed.

Dr. Small was excited by the hope brought back by Colonel Lavington. He sought me out in my billet, *Madame Chéri*, and begged me to take a walk with him. (It was a moonlight night, but no double throb of a German air-engine came booming over Lille.) He walked at a hard pace, with the collar of his “British warm” tucked up to his ears, and talked in a queer disjointed monologue, emotionally, whimsically. I remember some of his words, more or less—anyhow, the gist of his thoughts, “I’m not worrying any more about how the war will end. We’ve won! Remarkable, that, when one thinks back to the time, less than a year ago, when the best thing seemed a draw. I’m thinking about the future. What’s the world going to be afterwards? That’s my American mind—the next job, so to speak.”

He thought hard while we paced round our side of the Jardin d’Eté, where the moonlight made the bushes glamorous and streaked the tree trunks with a silver line.

“This war is going to have prodigious effects on nations; on individuals, too. I’m scared. We’ve all been screwed up to an intense pitch—every nerve in us is beyond the normal stretch of nature. After the war there will be a sudden relaxing. We shall be like bits of chewed elastic. Rather like people who have drugged themselves to get through some big ordeal. After the ordeal their nerves are all ragged. They crave the old stimulus, though they dread it. They’re depressed—don’t know what’s the matter—get into sudden rages—hysterical—can’t settle to work—go out for gaiety and get bored. I’ve seen it many times in bad cases. Europe—yes, and America, too—is going to be a bad case. A neurotic world—Lord, it’ll take some healing!”

For a time his thoughts wandered round the possible terms of peace and the abasement of Germany. He prophesied the break-up of Germany, the downfall of the Emperor and of other thrones.

“Crowns will be as cheap as twenty cents,” he said. He hoped for the complete overthrow of Junkerdom—“all the dirty dogs,” as he called the Prussian war lords and politicians. But he hoped the Allies would be generous with the enemy peoples—“magnanimous” was the word he used.

“We must help the spirit of democracy to rise among them,” he said. “We must make it easy for them to exorcise the devil. If we press them too hard, put the screw on to the torture of their souls (defeat will be torture to a proud people), they will nourish a hope of vengeance and go back to their devil for hope.”

I asked him whether he thought his President would lead the world to a nobler stage of history.

He hesitated at that, groped a little, I thought, among old memories and prejudices.

“Why,” he said, “Wilson has the biggest chance that ever came to a human being—the biggest chance and the biggest duty. We are rich (too darned rich) and enormously powerful when most other peoples are poor and weak—drained of wealth and blood. That’s our luck, and a little bit, perhaps, our shame, though our boys have done their bit all right and are ready to do more; and it’s not their fault they weren’t here before—but we’re hardly touched by this war as a people, except spiritually. There we’ve been touched by the finger of Fate. (God, if you like that better!) So, with that strength behind him, the President is in a big way of business. He can make his voice heard, stand for a big idea. God, sonny, I hope he’ll do it! For the world’s sake, for the sake of all these suffering people, here in this city of Lille, and in a million little towns where people have been bashed by war.”

I asked him if he doubted Wilson’s greatness, and the question embarrassed him.

“I’m loyal to the man,” he said. “I’ll back him if he plays straight and big. Bigness, that’s what we want. Bigness of heart as well as bigness of brain. Oh, he’s clever, though not wise in making so many enemies. He has fine ideas and can write real words. Things which speak. True things. I’d like to be sure of his character—its breadth and strength, I mean. The world wants a nobleman, bigger than the little gentlemen of politics; a leader calling to the great human heart of our tribes and lifting them, with one grand gesture, out of the mire of old passions and vendettas and jealousies to a higher plane of—common sense. Out of the jungle to the daylight of fellowship. Out of the jungle.”

He repeated those words twice, with a reverent solemnity. He believed that so much emotion had been created in the heart of the world that, when the war ended, anything might happen if a leader came—a new religion of civilisation, any kind of spiritual and social revolution.

“We might kill cruelty,” he said. “My word, what a victory that would be!”

XI

Our conversation was interrupted by a figure that slipped out of the darkness of some doorway, hesitated before us, and then spoke in French.

"You are English officers? May I speak with you?"

It was a girl, whom I could see only vaguely in the darkness—she stood in the shadow of a doorway beyond the moonlight—and I answered her that I was English and my friend American.

"Is there any way," she asked, "of travelling from Lille, perhaps to Paris? In a motor car, for example? To-night?"

I laughed at this startling request, put so abruptly. It was already nine o'clock at night!

"Not the smallest chance in the world, mademoiselle! Paris is far from Lille."

"I was stupid," said the girl. "Not all the way to Paris, but to some town outside Lille. Any town. There are motor cars always passing through the streets. I thought if I could get a little place in one——"

"It is difficult," I said. "As a matter of fact, it is forbidden for officers to take civilians except in case of saving them from danger—in shelled places."

She came suddenly out of the shadow into the moonlight, and I saw that she was a girl with red hair and a face strangely white. I knew by the way she spoke—the accent—as well as by the neatness of her dress, that she was not a working-girl. She was trembling painfully, and took hold of my arm with both her hands.

"Monsieur, I beg of you to help me. I beseech you to think of some way in which I may get away from Lille to-night. It is a matter of extreme importance to me."

A group of young men and women came up the street arm-in-arm, shouting, laughing, singing the "Marseillaise." They were civilians, with two of our soldiers among them, wearing women's hats.

Before I could answer the girl's last words, she made a sudden retreat into the dark doorway, and I could see dimly that she was cowering back.

Dr. Small spoke to me. "That girl is scared of something. The poor child has got the jim-jams."

I went closer to her and heard her breathing. It was quite loud. It was as though she were panting after hard running.

"Are you ill?" I asked.

She did not answer until the group of civilians had passed. They did not pass at once, but stood for a moment looking up at a light burning in an upper window. One of the men shouted something in a loud voice—some word in *argot*—which I did not understand, and the women screeched with laughter. Then they went on, dancing with linked arms, and our two soldiers in the women's hats lurched along with them.

"I am afraid!" said the girl.

"Afraid of what?" I asked.

I repeated the question—"Why are you afraid, mademoiselle?"—and she answered by words which I had heard a million times since the war began as an explanation of all trouble, tears, ruin, misery.

"*C'est la guerre!*"

"Look out!" said the little doctor. "She's fainting."

She had risen from her cowering position and stood upright for a moment, with her hand against the doorpost. Then she swayed, and would have fallen if the doctor had not caught her. Even then she fell, indeed, though without hurt, because he could not support her sudden weight—though she was of slight build—and they sank together in a kind of huddle on the doorstep.

"For the love of Mike!" said Dr. Small. He was on his knees before her now, chafing her cold hands. She came to in about a minute, and I leaned over her and asked her where she lived, and made out from her faint whisper that she lived in the house to which this doorway belonged, in the upper room where the light was burning. With numbed fingers—"cold as a toad," said "Daddy" Small—she fumbled at her bodice and drew out a latchkey.

"We had better carry her up," I said, and the doctor nodded.

The front door opened into a dimly-lit passage, uncarpeted, and with leprous-looking walls. At one end was a staircase with heavy banisters. The doctor and I supported the girl, who was able to walk a little now, and managed to get her to the first landing.

"Where?" I asked, and she said, "Opposite."

It was the front room looking on to the street. A lamp was burning on the round table in the centre of the room, and I saw by the light of it the poverty of the furniture and its untidiness. At one end of the room was a big iron bedstead with curtains of torn lace, and on the wooden chairs hung some soiled petticoats and blouses. There was a small cooking-stove in a corner, but no charcoal burned in it, and I remember an ebony-framed mirror over the mantelpiece. I remember that mirror vividly. I remember, for instance, that a bit of the ebony had broken off, showing the white plaster underneath, and a crack in the right-hand corner of the looking-glass.

Probably my eyes were attracted to it because of a number of photographs stuck into the framework. They were photographs of a girl in a variety of stage costumes; and glancing at the girl, whom the doctor had put into a low arm-chair, I saw that they were of her. But with all the tragic difference between happiness and misery; worse than that—between unscathed girlhood and haggard womanhood. This girl with red hair and a white waxen face was pretty still. There was something more than prettiness in the broadness of her brow and the long tawny lashes that were now veiling her closed eyes as she sat with her head back against the chair, showing a long white throat. But her face was lined with an imprint of pain, and her mouth, rather long and bow-like, was drawn with a look of misery.

The doctor spoke to me—in English, of course.

"Half-starved, I should say. Or starved."

He sniffed at the stove and the room generally.

"No sign of recent cooking."

He opened a cupboard and looked in.

"Nothing in the pantry, sonny. I guess the girl would do with a meal."

I did not answer him. I was staring at the photographs stuck into the mirror, and saw one that was not a girl's portrait. It was the photograph of a young French lieutenant. I crossed the room and looked at it closer, and then spoke to the little doctor in a curiously unexcited voice, as one does in moments of living drama.

"This girl is Pierre Nesle's sister."

"For the love of Mike!" said the little doctor, for the second time that night.

The girl heard the name of Pierre Nesle and opened her eyes wide, with a wondering look.

"Pierre Nesle? That is my brother. Do you know him?"

I told her that I knew him well and had seen him in Lille, where he was looking for her, two days ago. He was now in the direction of Courtrai.

The girl was painfully agitated and uttered pitiful words.

"Oh, my little brother!" she murmured. "My dear little comrade!" She rose from her chair, steadying herself with one hand on the back of it, and with feverish anxiety said that she must go at once. She must leave Lille.

"Why?" I asked. "Why do you want to leave Lille?"

"I am afraid!" she answered again, and burst into tears.

I turned to the doctor and translated her words.

"I can't understand this fear of hers—this desire to leave Lille."

Dr. Small had taken something off the mantelpiece—a glass tube with some tablets—which he put in his pocket.

"Hysteria," he said. "Starvation, war-strain, and—drugs. There's a jolly combination for a young lady's nerves! She's afraid of herself, old ghosts, the horrors. Wants to run away from it all, forgetting that she carries her poor body and brain with her. I know the symptoms—even in little old New York in time of peace."

He had his professional manner. I saw the doctor through his soldier's uniform. He spoke with the authority of the medical man in a patient's bedroom. He ordered me to go round to my mess and bring back some food, while he boiled up a kettle and got busy. When I returned, after half-an-hour, the girl was more cheerful. Some of the horrors had passed from her in the doctor's company. She ate some of the food I had brought in a famished way, but after a few mouthfuls sickened at it and would eat no more. But a faint colour had come into her cheeks and gave her face a touch of real beauty. She must have been extraordinarily attractive before the war—as those photographs showed. She spoke of Pierre with adoration. He had been all that was good to her before she left home (she hated her mother!) to sing in cabarets and café concerts.

"I cannot imagine Pierre as a lieutenant!" she remarked, with a queer little laugh.

Dr. Small said he would get some women in the house to look after her in the night, but she seemed hostile to that idea.

"The people here are unkind. They are bad women here. If I died they would not care."

She promised to stay in the house until we could arrange for Pierre to meet her and take her away to Paris. But I felt the greatest pity for the girl when we left her alone in her miserable room. The scared look had come back to her face. I could see that she was in terror of being alone again.

When we walked back to our billets the doctor spoke of the extraordinary chance of meeting the girl like that—the sister of our *liaison* officer. The odds were a million to one against such a thing.

"I always feel there's a direction in these cases," said Daddy Small. "Some Hand that guides. Maybe you and I were being led to-night. I'd like to save that girl, Marthe."

"Is that her name?"

"Marthe de Méricourt, she calls herself, as a singing-girl. I guess that's why Pierre could not hear of her in this town."

Later on the doctor spoke again.

"That girl is as much a war victim as if she had been shell-shocked on the field of battle. The casualty lists don't say anything about civilians, not a darned thing about broken hearts, stricken women, diseased babies, infant mortality—all the hell of suffering behind the lines. May God curse all war devils!"

He put his hand on my shoulder and said in a very solemn way: "After this thing is finished—this grisly business—you and I, and all men of goodwill, must put our heads together to prevent it happening again. I dedicate whatever life I have to that."

He seemed to have a vision of hope.

"There are lots of good fellows in the world. Wickham Brand is one of 'em. Charles Fortune is another. One finds them everywhere on your side and mine. Surely we can get together when peace comes and make a better System somehow!"

"Not easy, doctor."

He laughed at me.

"I hate your pessimism!... We must get a message to Pierre Nesle.... Good-night, sonny!"

On the way back to my billet I passed young Clatworthy.

He was too engrossed to see me, having his arm round a girl who was standing with him under an unlighted lamp-post. She was looking up into his face on which the moonlight shone—a pretty creature, I thought.

"*Je t'adore!*" she murmured, as I passed quite close; and Clatworthy kissed her.

I knew the boy's mother and sisters, and wondered what they would think of him if they saw him now with this little street-walker. To them Cyril was a white knight *sans peur et sans reproche*. The war had not improved him. He was no longer the healthy lad who had been captain of his school, with all his ambition in sport, as I had known him five years before. Sometimes, in spite of his swagger and gallantry, I saw something sinister in his face, the look of a soiled soul. Poor kid! He, too, would have his excuse for all things:

"*C'est la guerre!*"

XII

It was five o'clock on the following evening that I saw the girl Marthe again. The doctor and I had arranged to go round to her lodging after dinner, by which time we hoped to have a letter for her from Pierre, by despatch-rider. But Brand was with me in the afternoon, having looked into my billet with an English conversation-book for Hélène, who was anxious to study our way of speech. Madame Chéri insisted upon giving him a glass of wine, and we stood talking in her drawing-room a while about the certain hope of victory, and then trivial things. Hélène was delighted with her book and Brand had a merry five minutes with her, teaching her to pronounce the words.

"*C'est effroyable!*" cried Hélène. "'Through'... 'Tough' 'Cough '... *Mon Dieu, comme c'est difficile!* There is no rule in your tongue."

Madame Chéri spoke of Edouard, her eldest boy, who had disappeared into the great silence, and gave me a photograph of him, in case I should meet him in our advance towards the Rhine. She kissed the photograph before giving it to me, and said a few words which revealed her strong character, her passionate patriotism.

"If he had been four years older he would have been a soldier of France. I should have been happy if he could have fought for his country, and died for it, like my husband."

Brand and I left the house and went up towards the Grande Place. I was telling him about Pierre Nesle's sister and our strange meeting with her the night before.

"I'm precious glad," said Brand, "that no sister of mine was behind German lines. God knows how much they had to endure. Imagine their risks! It was a lucky escape for that girl Hélène. Supposing she had failed to barricade her door?"

When we came into the Grande Place we saw that something was happening. It was almost dark after a shadowy twilight, but we could see a crowd of people surging round some central point of interest. Many of them were laughing loudly. There was some joke in progress. The women's tongues sounded most loud and shrill.

"They're getting back to gaiety," said Brand. "What's the jest, I wonder?"

A gust of laughter came across the square. Above it was another sound, not so pleasant. It was a woman's shrieks—shriek after shriek, most blood-curdling, and then becoming faint.

"What the devil——!" said Brand.

We were on the edge of the crowd and I spoke to a man there.

"What's happening?"

He laughed in a grim way.

"It's the *coiffure* of a lady.. They are cutting her hair."

I was mystified.

"Cutting her hair?"

A woman spoke to me, by way of explanation, laughing like the man.

"Shaving her head, monsieur. She was one of those who were too complaisant with German officers. You understand? There were many of them. They ought to have their heads cut off as well as their hair."

Another man spoke gruffly.

"There would be a good many headless corpses if that were so. To their shame be it said. It was abominable. No pride. No decency."

"But the worst will escape," said another. "In private houses. The well-dressed demoiselles!"

"*Tuez-les!*" cried a woman. "*Tuez-les!*"

It was a cry for killing, such as women had screamed when pretty aristocrats were caught by the mobs of the French Revolution.

"My God!" said Brand.

He shouldered his way through the crowd, and I followed him. The people made a gap for us, seeing our uniforms, and desired us to enjoy the joke. What I saw when I came closer was a group of young men holding a limp figure. One of them was brandishing a large pair of scissors, as large as shears. Another held up a tangled mass of red hair.

"*Regardez!*" he shouted to the crowd, and they cheered and laughed.

I had seen the hair before, as I knew when I saw a girl's face, dead-white, lifeless, as it seemed, and limp against a man's shoulder.

"It is Marthe!" I said to Brand. "Pierre Nesle's sister."

A curious sense of faintness overcame me, and I felt sick.

Brand did not answer me, but I saw his face pale under its tan. He pushed forward through the crowd and I lost sight of him for a few moments. After that I saw him carrying the girl; above the heads of the people, I saw her head flopping from side to side horribly, a head with close-cropped hair. They had torn her clothes off her shoulders, which were bleeding.

"Help me," said Brand.

I am not quite clear what happened. I have only a vague remembrance of the crowd making way for us, with murmurs of surprise and some hostile cries of women. I remember helping Brand to carry the girl—enormously heavy she seemed with her dead weight—but how we managed to get her into Dr. Small's car is to this day a blank in my mind. We must have seen and hailed him at the corner of the Grande Place as he was going back to his billet. I have a distinct recollection of taking off my Burberry and laying it over the girl, who was huddled in the back of the car, and of Brand saying, "Where can we take her?" I also remember trying to light a cigarette and using many matches which went out in the wind. It was Brand's idea that we should go to Madame Chéri's house for sanctuary, and by the time we had driven to that place we had left the crowd behind and were not followed.

"You go in and explain things," said Brand. "Ask Madame to give the girl a refuge."

I think Madame Chéri was startled by the sight of the car, and perhaps by some queer look I had. I told her what had happened. This girl was the sister of Pierre Nesle, whom Madame Chéri had met. The crowd, for some reason, had cut off her hair. Would Madame save the poor child, who was unconscious?

I shall never forget the face or speech of that lady, whom I had found so kind. She drew herself up very stiffly and a relentless expression hardened her face.

"If you were not English I should say you desired to insult me, sir. The people have cut off the creature's hair. 'For some reason,' you say. There is only one reason. Because she was faithless to her country and to her sex, and was familiar with men who were the enemies of France, the murderers of our men, robbers and assassins. She has been well punished. I would rather burn down my house than give her shelter. If they gave her to the dogs to tear in pieces I would not lift my little finger to save her."

Hélène came in, and was surprised at the emotion of her mother's voice.

"What is it, little *maman?*"

Madame Chéri regained control of herself, which for a moment she had lost in a passion that shook her.

"It is a little matter. This officer and I have been talking about vile people who sold themselves to our enemy. He understands perfectly."

"I understand," I said gravely. "There is a great deal of cruelty in the world, madame, and less charity than I had hoped."

"There is, praise be to God, a little justice," said Madame Chéri very calmly.

"*Au revoir, madame!*"

"*Au revoir, monsieur!*"

"*Au revoir, mademoiselle!*"

I was shocked then at the callousness of the lady. It seemed to me incredible. Now I am no longer shocked, but understand the horror that was hers, the loathing for a daughter of France who had—if the mob were not mistaken—violated the code of honour which enabled the French people to resist German brutality, even German kindness, which they hated worse, with a most proud disdain. That girl outside, bleeding and senseless in the car, had been friendly with German officers, notorious in her company with them. Otherwise she would not have been seized by the crowd and branded for shame. There was a fierce protective instinct which hardened Madame Chéri against charity. Only those who have seen what war means to women close to it, in enemy hands, may truly understand, and, understanding, curse war again for all its destruction of souls and bodies.

XIII

Brand and Dr. Small were both astonished and indignant.

"Do you mean to say she shuts her door against this poor bleeding girl?" said Brand.

The American doctor did not waste words. He only used words when there was no action on hand.

"The next place?" he said. "A hospital?"

I had the idea of the convent where Eileen O'Connor lodged. There was a sanctuary. Those nuns were vowed to Christian charity. They would understand and have pity.

"Yes," said Brand, and he called to the driver.

We drove hard to the convent, and Brand was out of the car before it stopped, and rang the bell with such a tug that we heard it jangling loudly in the courtyard.

It seemed long before the little wicket opened and a woman's voice said, "*Qui est la?*"

Brand gave his name and said, "Open quickly, *ma sour*. We have a woman here who is ill."

The gate was opened, and Brand and I lifted out the girl, who was still unconscious, but moaning slightly, and carried her into the courtyard, and thence inside the convent to the whitewashed passage where I had

listened so long to the Reverend Mother telling me of the trial scene.

It was the Reverend Mother who came now, with two of her nuns, while the little portress stood by, clasping her hands.

“An accident?” said the Reverend Mother. “How was the poor child hurt?”

She bent over the girl, Marthe—Pierre Nesle’s sister, as I remembered with an added pity—pulled my Burberry from her face and shoulders and glanced at the bedraggled figure there.

“Her hair has been cut off,” said the old nun. “That is strange! There are the marks of finger-nails on her shoulder. What violence was it, then?”

Brand described the rescue of the girl from the mob, who would have torn her to pieces, and as he spoke I saw a terrible look come into the Reverend Mother’s face.

“I remember—1870,” she said harshly. “They cut the hair of women who had disgraced themselves—and France—by their behaviour with German soldiers. We thought then that it was a light punishment... we think so now, monsieur!”

One of the nuns, a young woman who had been touching the girl’s head, smoothing back her tousled, close-cropped hair, sprang up as though she had touched an evil thing and shrank back.

Another nun spoke to the Reverend Mother.

“This house would be defiled if we took in a creature like that. God forbid, Reverend Mother——”

The old Superior turned to Brand, and I saw how her breast was heaving with emotion.

“It would have been better, sir, if you had left this wretched woman to the people. The voice of the people is sometimes the voice of God. If they knew her guilt their punishment was just. Reflect what it means to us—to all our womanhood. Husbands, fathers, brothers were being killed by these Germans. Our dear France was bleeding to death. Was there any greater crime than that a Frenchwoman should show any weakness, any favour, to one of those men who were helping to cause the agony of France, the martyrdom of our youth?”

Brand stammered out a few words. I remember only two: “Christian charity!”

The American doctor and I stood by silently. Dr. Small was listening with the deepest attention, as though some new truth about human nature were being revealed to him.

It was then that a new voice was raised in that whitewashed corridor. It was Eileen O’Connor’s Irish contralto, and it vibrated with extraordinary passion as she spoke in French.

“Reverend Mother!... I am dismayed by the words you have spoken. I do not believe, though my ears have heard them. No, they are unbelievable! I have seen your holiness, your charity, every day for four years, nursing German prisoners, and English, with equal tenderness, with a great pity. Not shrinking from any horror or the daily sight of death, but offering it all as a sacrifice to God. And now, after our liberation, when we ought to be uplifted by the Divine favour that has come to us, you would turn away that poor child who lies bleeding at our feet, another victim of war’s cruelty. Was it not war that struck her down? This war which has been declared against souls as well as bodies! This war on women, as well as on fighting-men who had less need of courage than some of us! What did our Lord say to a woman who was taken by the mob? ‘He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone!’ It was Mary Magdalen who kissed His feet, and wiped them with her hair. This girl has lost her hair, but perhaps Christ has taken it as a precious napkin for His wounds. We who have been lucky in escape from evil—shall we cast her out of the house which has a cross above its roof? I have been lucky above most women in Lille. If all things were known, I might be lying there in that girl’s place, bleeding and senseless, without this hair of mine. Reverend Mother—*remember Franz von Kreuzenach!*”

We—Dr. Small, Brand, and I—were dumbfounded by Eileen O’Connor’s passionate outcry. She was utterly unconscious of us and looked only at the Reverend Mother, with a light in her eyes that was more intensely spiritual than I had seen before in any woman’s face.

The old nun seemed stricken by Eileen’s words. Into her rugged old face, all wrinkled about the eyes, crept an expression of remorse and shame. Once she raised her hands, slowly, as though beseeching the girl to spare her. Then her hands came down again and clasped each other at her breast, and her head bowed so that her chin was dug into her white bib. Tears came into her eyes and fell unheeded down her withered cheeks. I can see now the picture of us all standing there in the whitewashed corridor of the convent, in the dim light of a hanging lantern—we three officers standing together, the huddled figure of Marthe Nesle lying at our feet, half covered with my trench-coat, but with her face lying sideways, white as death under her cropped red hair, and her bare shoulders stained with a streak of blood; opposite, the old Mother, with bowed head and clasped hands; the two young nuns, rigid, motionless, silent; and Eileen O’Connor, with that queer light on her face and her hands stretched out with a gesture of passionate appeal.

The Reverend Mother raised her head and spoke—after what seemed like a long silence, but was only a second or two, I suppose.

“My child, I am an old woman, and have said many prayers. But you have taught me the lesson, which I thought I knew, that the devil does not depart from us until our souls have found eternal peace. I am a wicked old woman, and until you opened my eyes I was forgetful of charity and of our Lord’s most sweet commands.”

She turned to us now with an air of wonderful dignity and graciousness.

“Gentlemen, I pray you to carry this wounded girl to my own cell. To-night I will sleep on bare boards.”

One of the young nuns was weeping bitterly.

So we lifted up Marthe Nesle, and, following the Reverend Mother, carried her to a little white room and laid her on an iron bedstead under a picture of the Madonna below which burned an oil lamp on a wooden table. The American doctor asked Eileen O’Connor to bring him some hot water.

Brand and I went back in the car, and I dined at his mess again.

XIV

Colonel Lavington was discussing the art of the sonnet and the influence of Italian culture in Elizabethan England. From that subject he travelled to the psychology of courage, which in his opinion, for the moment, was founded on vanity.

"Courage," he said, with that gallant look of his which I had seen with admiration when he walked up the old duckboards beyond Ypres, with a whimsical smile at "crumps" bursting abominably near—he had done bravely in the old days as a battalion commander. "Courage is merely a pose before the mirror of one's own soul and one's neighbours. We are all horribly afraid in moments of danger, but some of us have the gift of pretending that we don't mind. That is vanity. We like to look heroes, even to ourselves. It is good to die with a *beau geste*, though death is damnably unpleasant."

"I agree, colonel," said Charles Fortune. "Always the right face for the proper occasion. But it wants a lot of practice."

He put on his gallant, devil-may-care face, and there was appreciative laughter from his fellow officers.

Harding, the young landowner, was of opinion that courage depended entirely on the liver.

"It is a matter of physical health," he said. "If I am out-of-sorts, my *moral* goes down to zero. Not that I'm ever really brave. Anyhow, I hate things that go off. Those loud noises of bursting shells are very objectionable. I shall protest against Christmas crackers after the war."

Young Clatworthy was in the sulks, and sat very silent during all this badinage.

"What's the matter?" I asked, and he confided to me his conviction, while he passed the salt, that "life was a rummy game."

"Hipped?" I said, and his answer was, "Fed up to the back teeth!"

That seemed to me curious, after the glimpse I had had of him with a little lady of Lille. The boy explained himself somewhat under cover of the colonel's conversation, which was holding the interest of the mess.

"We're living unnaturally," he said. "It's all an abnormal show, and we pretend to be natural and normal when everything that happens round us is fantastic and disorderly."

"What's your idea?" I enquired. It was the first time I had heard the boy talk seriously, or with any touch of gravity.

"Hard to explain," he said. "But, take my case to-day. This morning I went up the line to interrogate the latest batch of P.O.W.'s." (He meant prisoners of war.) "A five-point-nine burst within ten yards of my car, the other side of Courtrai, killed my driver and missed me by a couple of inches. I felt as sick as a dog when I saw Saunders crumpled over his steering-wheel with blood pouring down his neck. Not that it's the first time I've seen blood!"

He laughed as he gave a glance at his wound-stripe, and I remembered the way in which he had gained his M.C. at Gommecourt—one of three left alive in his company.

"We had been talking, three minutes before, about his next leave. He had been married in '16, after the Somme, and hadn't seen his wife since. Said her letters made him 'uneasy.' Thought she was drinking because of the loneliness. Well, there he was—finished—and a nasty sight. I went off to the P.O.W. cage and examined the beggars—one of them, as usual, had been a waiter at the 'Cecil,' and said, 'How's dear old London?'—and passed the time of day with Bob Mellett—you know, the one-armed lad. He laughed no end when he heard of my narrow squeak. So did I—though it's hard to see the joke. He lent me his car on the way back, and somewhere outside Courtrai we bumped over a dead body with a queer soft squelch. It was a German—a young 'un—and Bob Mellett said, '*He* won't be home for Christmas!' Do you know Bob?—he used to cry at school when a rat was caught. Queer, isn't it? Now here I am, sitting at a white table-cloth, listening to the colonel's talk, and pretending to be interested. I'm not a bit, really. I'm wondering why that bit of shell hit Saunders and not me. Or why I'm not lying in a muddy road as a bit of soft squelch for staff cars to bump over. And on top of that I'm wondering how it will feel to hang up a bowler hat again in a house at Wimbledon, and say, 'Cheerio, mother!' to the mater (who will be knitting in the same armchair—chintz-covered—by the piano) and read the evening paper until dinner's ready, take Ethel to a local dance, and get back into the old rut of home life in a nice family, don't you know? With all my memories! With the ghosts of *this* life crowding up! Ugly ghosts, some of 'em! Dirty ghosts!... It's inconceivable that we can ever go back to the funny old humdrum! I'm not sure that I want to."

"You're hipped," I told him. "You'll be glad to get back all right. Wimbledon will be Paradise after what you've been through."

"Oh, Lord, *I've* done nothing," said the boy. "Fact is, I've been talking tripe. Forget it."

But I did not forget, and remembered every word later, when I heard his laughter on Armistice night.

A despatch-rider stood outside the door in his muddy overalls and Brand went to get his message. It was from Pierre Nesle.

"I am mad with joy that you have found Marthe! Alas! I cannot get back for a week. Tell her that I am still her devoted comrade and loving brother.—Pierre." Brand handed me the slip and said, "Poor devil!" I went back to my billet in Madame Chéri's house, and she made no allusion to our conversation in the afternoon, but was anxious, I thought, to assure me of her friendship by special little courtesies, as when she lighted my candle and carried it upstairs before saying good-night. Hélène was learning English fast and furiously, and with her arm round her mother's waist said, "Sleep well, sir, and very good dreams to you!" which I imagine was a sentence out of her text-book.

XV

They were great days—in the last two weeks before the Armistice! For me, and for many men, they were days of exultation, wild adventure, pity, immense hope, tremendous scenes uplifted by a sense of victory; though for others, the soldiers who did the dirty work, brought up lorry columns through the mud of the old battlefields far behind our new front line, carried on still with the hard old drudgery of war, they were days not marked out by any special jubilation, or variety, or hope, but just like all the others that had gone before since first they came to France.

I remember little scenes and pictures of those last two weeks as they pass through my mind like a him drama; episodes of tragedy or triumph which startled my imagination, a pageantry of men who had victory in their eyes, single figures who spoke to me, told me unforgettable things, and the last dead bodies who fell at the very gate of peace.

One of the last dead bodies I saw in the war was in the city of Valenciennes, which we entered on the morning of November 3rd. Our guns had spared the city which was full of people, but the railway station was an elaborate ruin of twisted iron and broken glass. Rails were torn up and sleepers burnt. Our airmen, flying low day after day during the German retreat, had flung down bombs, which had torn the fronts off the booking-offices and made match-wood of the signal-boxes and sheds. For German soldiers detraining here it had been a hellish place, and the fire of our flying-men had been deadly accurate. I walked through the ruin out into the station square. It was empty of all life, but one human figure was there all alone. It was the dead body of a young German soldier, lying with outstretched arms, on his back, in a pool of blood. His figure formed a cross there on the cobblestones, and seemed to me a symbol of all that youth which had been sacrificed by powers of monstrous evil. His face was still handsome in death, the square, rough-hewn face of a young peasant.

There was the tap-tap-tap of a German machine-gun somewhere on the right of the square. As I walked forward all my senses were alert to the menace of death. It would be foolish, I thought, to be killed at the end of the war—for surely the end was very near? And then I had a sudden sharp thought that perhaps it would be well if this happened. Why should I live when so many had died? The awful job was done, and my small part in it. I had seen it through from start to finish, for it was finished but for a few days of waiting. It might be better to end with it, for all that came afterwards would be anticlimax. I remember raising my head and looking squarely round at that staccato hammering of the German machine-gun, with an intense desire that a bullet might come my way. But I went on untouched into the town.... As in Courtrai, a fury of gun-fire overhead kept the people in their houses. Our field batteries were firing over the city and the enemy was answering. Here and there I saw a face peering out of a broken window, and then a door opened, and a man and woman appeared behind it with two thin children. The woman thrust out a skinny hand and grasped mine, and began to weep. She talked passionately, with a strange mingling of rage and grief.

“Oh, my God!” she said, “those devils have gone at last! What have they not made us suffer! My husband and I had four little houses—we were innkeepers—and last night they sent us to this part of the town and burnt all of them.” She used a queer word in French. “Last night,” she said, “they made a devil’s *charivari* and set many houses on fire.”

Her husband spoke to me over his wife’s shoulder.

“Sir, they have stolen everything, broken everything, ground us down for four years. They are bandits and robbers.”

“We are hungry,” said the thin girl.

By her side the boy, with a white pinched face, echoed her plaint.

“We have eaten our bread and I am hungry.”

They had some coffee left, and asked me to go inside and drink it with them, but I could not wait.

The woman held my wrist tight in her skinny hands.

“You will come back?” she asked.

“I will try,” I said.

Then she wept again and said: “We are grateful to the English soldiers. It is they who saved us.”

That is one out of a hundred little scenes that I remember in those last two weeks when, not without hard fighting, for the German machine-gun rearguards fought bravely to the end, our troops entered many towns and villages, and liberated many thousands of poor people. I remember the girls of a little town called Bohain who put on their best frocks and clean pinafores to welcome us. It was not until a little while that we found they were starving and had not even a crust of bread in all the town. Then the enemy started shelling, and some of the girls were killed, and many were suffocated by gas shells. That was worse in St. Amand, by Valenciennes, where all the women and children took refuge in the cellars. The German batteries opened fire with yellow cross shell as our guns passed through. Some of our men, and many of their horses, lay dead in the streets as I passed through; but worse things happened in the cellars below the houses. The heavy gas of the yellow cross shells filtered down to where the women and their babies cowered on their mattresses. They began to choke and gasp, and babies died in the arms of dying mothers.... Dr. Small, our American, went with a body of English doctors and nurses to the rescue of St. Amand. “I’ve seen bad things,” he told me. “I am not weak in the stomach—but I saw things in those cellars which nearly made me vomit.”

He put a hand on my shoulder and blinked at me through his glasses.

"It's no good cursing the Germans. As soon as your troops entered the village they had a right to shell. That's war. We should do the same. War's war. I've been cursing the Germans in elaborate and eccentric language. It did me good. I feel all the better for it. But all the same I was wrong. It's war we ought to curse. War which makes these things possible among civilised peoples. It's just devilry. Civilised people must give up the habit. They must get cured of it. You have heard of typhoid-carriers? They are people infected with the typhoid microbe who spread the disease. When peace comes we must hunt down the war-carriers, isolate them, and, if necessary, kill them."

He waved his hand to me and went off in an ambulance filled with suffocated women.

I met Brand in Valenciennes five days after our liberation of the city, when our troops were making their formal entry with band and banners. He came up to me and said, "Have you heard the news?" I saw by his face that it was good news, and I felt my heart give a lurch when I answered him.

"Tell me the best."

"Germany is sending plenipotentiaries, under a white flag, to Foch. They know it is unconditional surrender.... And the Kaiser has abdicated."

I drew a deep breath. Something seemed to lift from my soul. The sky seemed to become brighter, as though a shadow had passed from the face of the sun.

"Then it's the end?... The last battle has been fought!"

Brand was staring at a column of troops—all young fellows of the 4th Division. His eyes were glistening, with moisture in them.

"Reprieved!" he said. "The last of our youth is saved!"

He turned to me suddenly, and spoke in the deepest melancholy.

"You and I ought to be dead. So many kids were killed. We've no right to be alive."

"Perhaps there is other work to do," I answered him, weakly, because I had the same thought.

He did not seem sure of that.

"I wonder!... If we could help to save the next generation."

In the Place d'Armes of Valenciennes there was a great crowd, and many of our generals and staff officers on the steps and below the steps of the Hôtel de Ville. Brand and I caught a glimpse of Colonel Lavington, looking very gallant and debonair, as usual. Beside him was Charles Fortune, with his air of a staff officer dreadfully overworked in the arrangement of victory, modest in spite of his great achievements, deprecating any public homage that might be paid him. This careful mask of his was slightly disarranged for a moment when he winked at me under the very nose of the great general whom he had set to music—"Blear-eyed Bill, the Butcher of the Boche," who stood magnificent with his great chest emblazoned with ribbons. The Prince of Wales was there, shifting from one leg to another, chatting gaily with a group of staff officers. A bevy of French girls advanced with enormous bouquets and presented them to the Prince and his fellow officers. The Prince laughed and blushed like a schoolboy, sniffed at the flowers, did not know what to do with them. The other officers held the bouquets with equal embarrassment, with that strange English shyness which not even war could cure.

Some officers close to me were talking of the German plea for armistice.

"It's abject surrender!" said one of them.

"The end!" said another, very solemnly. "Thank God!"

"The end of a dirty business!" said a young machine-gun officer. I noticed that he had three wound-stripes.

One of them, holding a big bouquet, began to dance, pointing his toes, cutting abbreviated capers in a small space among his comrades.

"Not too quick for me, old dears! Back to peace again!... Back to life! Hooray!"

The colours of many flags fluttered upon the gables of the Place d'Armes, and the balconies were draped with the Tricolour, the Union Jack, and the Stars and Stripes. Old citizens wore tall hats saved up for this day, and girls had taken their lace from hiding-places where the Germans had not found it, and wore it round their necks and wrists for the honour of this day. Old women in black bonnets sat in the centre of window-places and clapped their hands—their wrinkled, hard-working old hands—to every British soldier who passed, and thousands were passing. Nobody heard a word of the speeches spoken from the Town Hall steps, the tribute of the councillors of Valenciennes to the glory of the troops who had rescued their people from servitude under a ruthless enemy, nor the answer of Sir Henry Home, the Army Commander, expressing the pride of his soldiers in the rescue of that fair old city, and their admiration for the courage of its people. Every word was overwhelmed by cheering. Then the pipers of a Highland Division, whose fighting I had recorded through their years of heroic endurance, played a march tune, and the music of those pipes was loud in the square of Valenciennes and in the hearts of its people. The troops marched past, and thousands of bayonets shone above their steel helmets....

XVI

I was in Mons on the day of Armistice, and on the roads outside when I heard the news that the Germans had surrendered to all our terms, and that the “Cease fire” would sound at eleven o’clock. It was a misty morning, with sunlight glinting through the mist and sparkling in the coppery leaves of autumn trees. There was no heavy bombardment in progress round Mons—only now and then the sullen bark of a gun. The roads were crowded with the usual transport of war—endless columns of motor-lorries and horse-wagons, and mule-teams, crawling slowly forward, and infantry battalions trudging alongside with their heavy packs. I stared into the faces of the marching men, expecting to see joy in their eyes, wondering why they were not singing—because to-day the guns would be silent and the fighting finished. Their packs weighed heavy. The mud from passing lorries splashed them with great gobs of filth. Under their steel hats the sweat ran down. They looked dead-beat, and marched in a grim fine of tired men. But I noticed that the transport wagons were decorated with small flags, and these bits of fluttering colour were stuck into the harness of gun horses and mules. From the other way came another tide of traffic—crowds of civilians, who were middle-aged men and boys, and here and there women pushing hand-carts, and straining forward with an eager, homing look. The men and boys were carrying bundles, too heavy for many of them, so that they were bent under their burdens. But each one had added the last straw but one to his weight by fastening a flag to his bundle or his cap. I spoke to some of them, and they told me that they were the civilians from Lille, Valenciennes, and other towns, who had been taken away by the Germans for forced labour behind the lines. Two days ago the Germans had said, “We’ve no more use for you. Get back to your own people. The war is over.”

They looked worn and haggard, like men who had been shipwrecked. Some of the boys were weak and sat down on the roadside with their bundles and could go no farther. Others trudged on gamely, with crooks which they had cut from the hedges, and only stopped to cry, “*Vivent les Anglais!*” as our soldiers passed. I looked into many of their faces, remembering the photograph of Edouard Chéri which had been given to me by his mother. Perhaps he was Somewhere in those troops of homing exiles. But he might have been any one of those lanky boys in ragged jackets and broken boots, and cloth caps pulled down over the ears.

Just outside Mons, at one minute to eleven o’clock, there was a little desultory firing. Then a bugle blew, somewhere in a distant field, one long note. It was the “Cease fire”! A cheer coming faintly over the fields followed the bugle-call. Then there was no other sound where I stood but the scrunching of wheels of gun limbers and transport wagons, the squelch of mud in which horses and mules trudged, and the hard breathing of tired men marching by under their packs. So, with a curious lack of drama, the Great Adventure ended! That bugle had blown the “Cease fire” of a strife which had filled the world with agony and massacre; destroyed millions of men; broken millions of lives; ruined many great cities and thousands of hamlets, and left a long wide belt of country across Europe where no tree remained alive and all the earth was ravaged; crowded the world with maimed men, blind men, mad men, diseased men; flung Empires into anarchy, where hunger killed the children and women had no milk to feed their babies; and bequeathed to all fighting nations a heritage of debt beneath which many would stagger and fall. It was the “Cease fire” of all that reign of death, but sounded very faintly across the fields of France.

In Mons Canadian soldiers were being kissed by French girls. Women were giving them wine in the doorways, and these hard-bitten fellows, tough as leather, reckless of all risk, plastered with mud which had worn into their skins and souls, drank the wine and kissed the women, and lurched laughing down the streets. There would be no strict discipline in Mons that night. They had had enough of discipline in the dirty days. Let it go on the night of Armistice! Already at mid-day some of these soldiers were unable to walk except with an arm round a comrade’s neck, or round the neck of strong peasant girls who screeched with laughter when they side-slipped or staggered. They had been through hell, those men. They had lain in ditches, under frightful fire, among dead men and bleeding men. Who would grudge them their bit of fun on Armistice night? Who would expect saintship of men who had been taught in the school of war, taught to kill quick lest they be killed, to see the worst horrors of the battlefield without going weak, to educate themselves out of the refinements of peaceful life where Christian virtues are easy and not meant for war?

“Come here, lassie. None of your French tricks for me. I’m Canadian-born. It’s a kiss or a clout from me.”

The man grabbed the girl by the arm and drew her into a barn.

On the night of Armistice in Mons, where, at the beginning of the war, the Old Contemptibles had first withstood the shock of German arms (I saw their ghosts there in the market place), there would be the devil to pay—the devil of war, who plays on the passions of men, and sets his trap for women’s souls. But I went away from Mons before nightfall, and travelled back to Lille, in the little old car which had gone to many strange places with me.

How quiet it was in the open countryside when darkness fell! The guns were quiet at last, after four years and more of labour. There were no fires in the sky, no ruddy glow of death. I listened to the silence which followed the going down of the sun, and heard the rustling of the russet leaves and the little sounds of night in peace, and it seemed as though God gave a benediction to the wounded soul of the world. ‘Other sounds rose from the towns and fields in the deepening shadow-world of the day of Armistice. They were sounds of human joy. Men were singing somewhere on the roads, and their voices rang out gladly. Bugles were playing. In villages from which the enemy had gone out that morning round about Mons crowds of figures surged in the narrow streets, and English laughter rose above the chatter of women and children.

XVII

When I came into Lille rockets were rising above the city. English soldiers were firing off Verey lights. Above the houses of the city in darkness rose also gusts of cheering. It is strange that when I heard them I felt like weeping. They sounded rather ghostly, like the voices of all the dead who had fallen before this night of Armistice.

I went to my billet at Madame Chéri's house, from which I had been absent some days. I had the key of the front door now and let myself into the hall. The diningroom door was open, and I heard the voices of the little French family, laughing, crying, hysterical. Surely hysterical!

"*O mon Dieu! O mon petit Toto! Comme tu es grandi! Comme tu es maigre!*"

I stood outside the door, understanding the thing that had happened.

In the centre of the room stood a tall, gaunt boy in ragged clothes, in the embrace of Madame Chéri, and with one hand clutched by Hélène and the other by the little Madeleine, her sister. It was Edouard who had come back.

He had unloosed a pack from his shoulder, and it lay on the carpet beside him, with a little flag on a broken stick. He was haggard, with high cheek-bones prominent through his white, tightly-drawn skin, and his eyes were sunk in deep sockets. His hair was in a wild mop of black, disordered locks. He stood there, with tears streaming from his eyes, and the only words he said were:

"*Maman! O maman! maman!*"

I went quietly upstairs and changed my clothes, which were all muddy. Presently there was a tap at my door and Hélène stood there, transfigured with joy. She spoke in French.

"Edouard has come back—my brother! He travelled on an English lorry."

"Thank God for that," I said. "What gladness for you all!"

"He has grown tall," said Hélène. She mopped her eyes and laughed and cried at the same time. "Tall as a giant, but oh! so thin! They starved him all the time. He fed only on cabbages. They put him to work digging trenches behind the line—under fire. The brutes! The devils!"

Her eyes were lit up by passion at the thought of this cruelty and her brother's suffering. Then her expression changed to a look of pride.

"He says he is glad to have been under fire—like father. He hated it, though, at the time, and said he was frightened! I can't believe that. Edouard was always brave."

"There's no courage that takes away the fear of shellfire—as far as I'm concerned," I told her, but she only laughed and said, "You men make a pose of being afraid."

She spoke of Edouard again, hugging the "thought of his return.

"If only he were not so thin and so tired! I find him changed. The poor boy cries at the sight of *maman*—like a baby."

"I don't wonder," I said. "I should feel like that if I had been a prisoner of war and was now home again."

Madame Chéri's voice called from downstairs: "Hélène! *Où es-tu? Edouard veut te voir!*"

"Edouard wants me," said Hélène.

She seemed rejoiced at the thought that Edouard had missed her, even for this minute. She took my hand and kissed it, as though wishing me to share her joy and to be part of it, and then ran downstairs.

XVIII

I went out to the officers' club which had been established in Lille, and found Brand there, and Fortune, and young Clatworthy, who made a place for me at their table.

Two large rooms which had been the dining and drawingrooms of a private mansion were crowded with officers, mostly English, but with here and there a few Americans and French, seated at small tables, waited on by the girls we called Waacs (of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps). Two old-fashioned candelabra of cut-glass gave light to each room, and I remember that the walls were panelled with wood painted a greyish-white below a moulding of fruit and flowers. Above the table where my friends sat was the portrait of a French lady of the eighteenth century, in an oval frame of tarnished gilt.

I was late for the meal on Armistice night, and many bottles of champagne had already been opened and drunk. The atmosphere reeked with the smell of food, the fumes of wine and cigarette smoke, and there was the noise of many men talking and laughing. I looked about the tables and saw familiar faces. There were a good many cavalry officers in the room where I sat, and among them officers of the Guards and the Tank Corps, aviators, machine-gunners, staff officers of infantry divisions, French interpreters, American *liaison* officers, A.P.M.'s, town majors, and others. The lid was off at last. All these men were intoxicated with the thought of the victory we had won—complete, annihilating—and of this Armistice which had ended the war and made them sure of life. Some of them were a little drunk with wine, but not enough at this hour to spoil their sense of joy.

Officers rose at various tables to make speeches, cheered by their own groups, who laughed and shouted and did not listen.

"The good old British Army has done the trick at last——"

"The old Hun is down and out."

"Gentlemen, it has been a damned tough job——"

Another group had burst into song:

"*Here's to good old beer, put it down, put it down!*"

"The cavalry came into its own in the last lap. We've fought mounted and fought dismounted. We've rounded up innumerable Huns. We've ridden down machine-guns——"

Another group was singing independently:

> "There's a long, long trail a-winding,
> To the land of my dreams."

A toast was being pledged at the next table by a Tank officer, who stood on a chair with a glass of champagne-raised high above his head: "Gentlemen, I give you the toast of the Tank Corps. This war was won by the Tanks——"

"Pull him down!" shouted two lads at the same table. "Tanks be damned! It was the poor old bloody infantry all the time."

One of them pulled down the little Tank officer with a crash and stood on his own chair.

"Here's to the foot-sloggers—the infantry battalions, Tommy Atkins and his company officer, who did all the dirty work and got none of the reward, and did most of the dying."

A cavalry officer with a monocle immovably screwed in his right eye demanded the attention of the company, and failed to get it.

"We all know what we have done ourselves, and what we failed to do. I give you the toast of our noble Allies, without whom there would be no Armistice to-night. I drink to the glory of France——"

The words were heard at several tables, and for once there was a general acknowledgment of the toast.

"*Vive la France!*"

The shout thundered out from all the tables, so that the candelabra rattled. Five French interpreters in various parts of the room rose to respond.

There were shouts of "The Stars and Stripes—Good old Yanks—Well done, the U.S.A.!" and I was sorry Dr. Small was still at Valenciennes. I should like him to have heard those shouts. An American staff officer was on his feet, raising his glass to "England."

Charles Fortune stood up at my table. He reminded me exceedingly at that moment of old prints portraying George IV. in his youth—"the First Gentleman of Europe"—slightly flushed, with an air of noble dignity and a roguish eye.

"Go to it, Fortune," said Brand. "Nobody's listening, so you can say what you like."

"Gentlemen," said Fortune, "I venture to propose the health of our late enemy, the Germans."

Young Clatworthy gave an hysterical guffaw.

"We owe them a very great debt," said Fortune.

"But for their simplicity of nature and amiability of character the British Empire—that glorious conglomeration of races upon which the sun utterly declines to set—would have fallen into decay and debility as a second-class Power. Before the war the German Empire was gaining our trade, capturing all the markets of the world, waiting at table in all the best hotels, and providing all the music in the *cafés-chantants* of the universe.... With that immense unselfishness so characteristic of their race, the Germans threw away these advantages and sacrificed themselves for the benefit of the British. By declaring war they enabled all the ancient virtues of our race to be revived. Generals sprang up in every direction—especially in Whitehall, Boulogne and Rouen. Staff officers multiplied exceedingly. British indigestion—the curse of our race—became subject to a Sam Brown belt. Business men, mostly bankrupt, were enriched enormously. Clergymen thundered joyfully from their pulpits and went back to the Old Testament for that fine old law, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' Elderly virgins married the youngest subalterns. The youngest flapper caught the eldest and wiliest of bachelors. Our people were revivified, gentlemen—revivified-"

"Go easy," growled Brand. "This is not a night for irony."

"Even I," said Charles Fortune, with a sob of pride in his voice, "even I, a simple piano-tuner, a man of music, a child of peace and melody—Shut up, Brand!—became every inch a soldier!"

He drew himself up in a heroic pose and, raising his glass, cried out: "Here's to our late enemy—poor old Fritz!"

A number of glasses were raised amidst a roar of laughter.

"Here's to Fritz—and may the Kaiser roast at Christmas!"

"And they say we haven't a sense of humour," said Charles Fortune modestly, and opened a new bottle of champagne.

Brand had a sense of humour, and had laughed dining Fortune's oration, knowing that beneath its mockery there was no malice. But I noticed that he had no spontaneous gaiety on this night of Armistice and sat rather silent, with a far-away look in his eyes and that hag-ridden melancholy of his.

Young Clatworthy was between me and Brand, drinking too heavily, I thought. Brand thought so too, and gave him a word of caution.

"That champagne is pretty bad. I'd 'ware headaches, if I were you, young'un."

"It's good enough," said Clatworthy. "Anything to put me in the right spirit."

There was an unnatural glitter in his eyes, and he laughed too easily at any joke of Fortune's. Presently he turned his attention to me, and began talking excitedly in a low monologue.

"Funny to think it's the last night! Can you believe it? It seems a lifetime since I came out in '14. I

remember the first night, when I was sent up to Ypres to take the place of a subaltern who'd been knocked out. It was Christmas Eve, and my battalion was up in the line round Hooge. I detrained at Vlamertinghe. 'Can any one tell me the way to Hooge?' I asked one of the traffic men, just like a country cousin at Piccadilly Circus. He looked at me in a queer way, and said, 'It's the same way to hell, sir. Straight on until you get to Ypres, then out of the Menin Gate and along the road to Hell-fire Corner. After that you trust to luck. Some young gentlemen never get no further.' I damned his impertinence and went on, till I came to the Grande Place in Ypres, where I just missed an eight-inch shell. It knocked out a gun-team. Shocking mess it made. 'The same way to hell,' I kept saying, until I fell into a shell-hole along the Menin Road. But, d'you know, the fellow was wrong, after all."

"How?" I asked.

Young Clatworthy drank up his wine and laughed, as though very much amused.

"Why, *that* wasn't the way to hell. It was the other way."

I was puzzled at his meaning and wondered if he were really drunk.

"What other way?"

"Behind the lines—in the back areas. I should have been all right if I had stuck in the trenches. It was in places like Amiens that I went to the devil."

"Not as bad as that," I said.

"Mind you," he continued, lighting a cigarette and smiling at the flame, "I've had pleasant times in this war, between the bad ones, and, afterwards, in this cushy job. Extraordinarily amusing and agreeable along the way to hell. There was little Maiguérite in Amiens—such a kid! Funny as a kitten! She loved me not wisely, but too well. I had just come down from the Somme battles then. That little idyll with Marguérite was like a dream. We two were Babes in the Wood. We plucked the flowers of life and didn't listen to the howling of the wolves beyond the forest."

He jerked his head up and listened, and repeated the words:

"The howling of the wolves!"

Somebody was singing "John Peel":

"D'ye ken John Peel with his coat so gay.
D'ye ken John Peel at the break of day,
D'ye ken John Peel when he's far, far away.
With, his horn, and his hounds in. the morning?"

Cyril Clatworthy was on his feet, joining in the chorus with a loud joyous voice.

"We'll follow John Peel through fair and through foul.
If we want a good hunt in the morning!''

"Bravo! Bravo!"

He laughed as he sat down.

"I used to sing that when I was captain of the school," he said. "A long time ago, eh? How many centuries?... I was as clean a fellow as you'd meet in those days. Keen as mustard on cricket. Some bat, too! That was before the dirty war, and the stinking trenches, and fever, and lice, and dead bodies, and all that. But I was telling you about Yvonne, wasn't I?"

"Marguérite," I reminded him.

"No. Yvonne. I met her at Cassel. A brown-eyed thing. Demure. You know the type?... One of the worst little sluts I ever met. Oh, a wicked little witch... Well, I paid for that affair. That policeman was wrong."

"What policeman?" I asked.

"The traffic man at Vlamertinghe. 'It's the same way to hell,' he said, meaning Hooge. It was the other way, really. All the same, I've had some good hours. And now it's Armistice night.... Those fellows are getting rather blue, aren't they? It's the blinking cavalry who used to get in the way of the infantry, blocking up the roads with their ridiculous horses and their preposterous, lances. Look here, old man, there's one thing I want to know. Tell me, as a wise owl."

"What is that?" I asked, laughing at his deference to my wisdom.

"How are we going to get clean enough for peace?"

"Clean enough?"

I could not follow the drift of his question, and he tried to explain himself.

"Oh, I don't mean the soap and water business. But morally, spiritually, intellectually, and all that? Some of us will want a lot of scrubbing before we sit down in our nice little Christian families, somewhere at Wimbledon or Ealing. Somehow I funk peace. It means getting back again to where one started, and I don't see how it's possible.... Good Lord, what tripe I've been talking!"

He pulled the bow of one of the "Waacs" and undid her apron.

"*Encore une bouteille de champagne, mademoiselle!*" he said in his best French, and started singing "La Marseillaise." Some of the officers were dancing the fox trot and the bunny hug.

Brand rose with a smile and a sigh.

"Armistice night!" he said. "Thank God there's a crowd of fellows left to do the dancing.... I can't help thinking of the others."

He touched a glass with his lips to a silent toast, and I saw that he drank to ghosts. Then he put the glass down and laid his hand on Clatworthy's shoulder.

"Care for a stroll?" he said. "This room is too fuggy."

"Not I, old lad," said the boy. "This is Armistice night—and the end of the adventure. See it through!"

Brand shook his head and said he must breathe fresh air. Fortune was playing a Brahms concerto in the style of a German master on the table-cloth.

I followed Brand, and we strolled through the dark streets of Lille and did not talk. In each of our minds was the stupendous thought that it was the last night of the war—the end of the adventure, as young Clatworthy had said. God! It had been a frightful adventure from first to last—a fiery furnace in which youth had been burnt up like grass. How much heroism we had seen, how much human agony, ruin, hate, cruelty, love! There had been comradeship and laughter in queer places and perilous hours. Comradeship, perhaps that was the best of all: the unselfish comradeship of men. But what a waste of life! What a lowering of civilisation! Our heritage—what was it, after victory? Who would heal the wounds of the world?

Brand suddenly spoke, after our long tramp in the darkness, past windows from which came music, and singing, and shouts of laughter. He uttered only one word, but all his soul was in it.

"Peace!"

That night we went to see Eileen O'Connor and to enquire after the girl Marthe. Next day Pierre Nesle was coming to find his sister.

XIX

Eileen O'Connor had gone back from the convent to the rooms she had before her trial and imprisonment. I was glad to see her in a setting less austere than the whitewashed parlour in which she had first received us. There was something of her character in the sitting-room where she had lived so long during the war, and where with her girl friends she had done more dangerous work than studying the elements of drawing and painting. In that setting, too, she looked at home—"The Portrait of a Lady," by Lavery, as I saw her in my mind's eye, when she sat in a low armchair by the side of a charcoal stove, with the lamplight on her face and hair and her dress shadowy. She wore a black dress of some kind, with a tiny edge of lace about the neck and a string of coloured beads so long that she twisted it about her fingers in her lap. The room was small, but cosy in the light of a tall lamp on an iron stand shaded with red silk. Like all the rooms I had seen in Lille—not many—this was panelled, with a polished floor, bare except for one rug. On the walls were a few etchings framed in black—London views mostly—and some water-colour drawings of girls' heads, charmingly done, I thought. They were her own studies of some of her pupils and friends, and one face especially attracted me because of its delicate and spiritual beauty.

"That was my fellow prisoner," said Eileen O'Connor. "Alice de Villers-Auxicourt. She died before the trial—happily, because she had no fear."

I noticed one other thing in the room which was pleasant to see—an upright piano, and upon a stool by its side a pile of old songs which I turned over one by one as we sat talking. They were English and Irish, mostly from the seventeenth century onwards, but among them I found some German songs, and on each cover was written the name of Franz von Kreuzenach. At the sight of that name I had a foolish sense of embarrassment and dismay, as though I had discovered a skeleton in the cupboard, and I slipped them hurriedly between other sheets.

Eileen was talking to Wickham Brand. She did not notice my confusion. She was telling him that Marthe, Pierre's sister, was seriously ill with something like brain-fever. The girl had regained consciousness at times, but was delirious, and kept crying out for her mother and Pierre to save her from some horror that frightened her. The nuns had made enquiries about her through civilians in Lille. Some of them had heard of the girl under her stage name—"Marthe de Méricourt." She had sung in the *cabarets* before the war. After the German occupation she had disappeared for a time. Somebody said she had been half-starved and was in a desperate state. What could a singing-girl do in an "occupied" town? She reappeared in a restaurant frequented by German officers and kept up by a woman of bad character. She sang and danced there for a miserable wage, and part of her duty was to induce German officers to drink champagne—the worst brand for the highest price. A horrible degradation for a decent girl! But starvation, so Eileen said, has fierce claws. Imagine what agony, what terror, what despair must have gone before that surrender! To sing and dance before the enemies of your country!

"Frightful!" said Brand. "A girl should prefer death."

Eileen O'Connor was twisting the coloured beads between her fingers. She looked up at Wickham Brand with a deep thoughtfulness in her dark eyes.

"Most men would say that. And all women beyond the war zone, safe and shielded. But death does not come quickly from half-starvation in a garret without fire, in clothes that are worn threadbare. It is not the quick death of the battlefield. It is just a long-drawn misery.... Then there is loneliness. The loneliness of a woman's soul. Do you understand that?"

Brand nodded gravely. "I understand the loneliness of a man's soul. I've lived with it."

"Worse for a woman," said Eileen. "That singing-girl was lonely in Lille. Her family—with that boy Pierre—were on the other side of the lines. She had no friends here before the Germans came."

“You mean that afterwards——”

Brand checked the end of his sentence and the line of his mouth hardened.

“Some of the Germans were kind,” said Eileen. “Oh, let us tell the truth about that! They were not all devils.”

“They were our enemies,” said Brand.

Eileen was silent for another moment, staring down at those queer beads of hers in her lap, and before she spoke again I think her mind was going back over many episodes and scenes during the German occupation of Lille.

“It was a long time—four years. A tremendous time for hatred to hold out against civility, kindness, and—human nature.... Human nature is strong; stronger than frontiers, nations, even patriotism.”

Eileen O’Connor flung her beads back, rose from the low chair and turned back her hair with both hands with a kind of impatience.

“I’ve seen the truth of things, pretty close—almost as close as death.”

“Yes,” said Brand in a low voice. “You were pretty close to all that.”

The girl seemed to be anxious to plunge deep into the truth of the things she had seen.

“The Germans—here in Lille—were of all kinds. Everything there was in the war, for them, their emotion, their pride in the first victories, their doubts, fears, boredom, anguish, brutality, sentiment, found a dwelling-place in this city behind the battle-front. Some of them—in the administration—stayed here all the time, billeted in French families. Others came back from the battlefields, horror-stricken, trying to get a little brief happiness—forgetfulness. There were lots of them who pitied the French people and had an immense sympathy with them. They tried to be friends. Tried hard, by every sort of small kindness in their billets.”

“Like Schwarz in Madame Chéri’s house,” said Brand bitterly. It seemed to me curious that he was adopting a mental attitude of unrelenting hatred to the Germans, when, as I knew, and as I have told, he had been of late on the side of toleration. That was how his moods swung when as yet he had no fixed point of view.

“Oh, yes, there were many beasts,” said Eileen quickly.

“But others were different. Beasts or not, they were human. They had eyes to see and to smile, lips to talk and tempt. It was their human nature which broke some of our hatred. There were young men among them, and in Lille girls who could be angry for a time, disdainful longer, and then friendly. I mean lonely, half-starved girls, weak, miserable girls—and others not starved enough to lose their passion and need of love. German boys and French girls—entangled in the net of fate.... God pity them!”

Brand said, “I pity them, too.”

He walked over to the piano and made an abrupt request, as though to change the subject of conversation.

“Sing something... something English!”

Eileen O’Connor sang something Irish first, and I liked her deep voice, so low and sweet.

“There’s one that is pure as an angel
And fair as the flowers of May,
They call her the gentle maiden
Wherever she takes her way.

Her eyes have the glance of sunlight
As it brightens the blue sea-wave,
And more than the deep-sea treasure
The love of her heart I crave.

“Though parted afar from my darling,
I dream of her everywhere;
The sound of her voice is about me,
The spell of her presence there.

And whether my prayer be granted,
Or whether she pass me by,
The face of that gentle maiden
Will follow me till I die.”

Brand was standing by the piano, with the light of the tall lamp on his face, and I saw that there was a wetness in his eyes before the song was ended.

“It is queer to hear that in Lille,” he said. “It’s so long since I heard a woman sing, and it’s like water to a parched soul.”

Eileen O’Connor played the last bars again and, as she played, talked softly.

“To me, the face of that gentle maiden is a friend’s face. Alice de Villers-Auxicourt, who died in prison.”

“And whether my prayer be granted,
Or whether she pass me by,

The face of that gentle maiden
Will follow me till I die.”

Brand turned over the songs, and suddenly I saw his face flush, and I knew the reason. He had come to the German songs on which was written the name of Franz von Kreuzenach.

He turned them over quickly, but Eileen pulled one out—it was a Schubert song—and opened its leaves.

“That was the man who saved my life.”

She spoke without embarrassment, simply.

“Yes,” said Brand. “He suppressed the evidence.”

“Oh, you know?”

I told her that we had heard part of the tale from the Reverend Mother, but not all of it. Not the motive, nor what had really happened.

“But you guessed?”

“No,” I answered sturdily.

She laughed, but in a serious way.

“It is not a hard guess, unless I am older than I feel, and uglier than the mirror tells me. He was in love with me.”

Brand and I looked absurdly embarrassed. Of course we *had* guessed, but this open confession was startling, and there was something repulsive in the idea to both of us who had come through the war-zone into Lille, and had seen the hatred of the people for the German race, and the fate of Pierre Nesle’s sister.

Eileen O’Connor told us that part of her story which the Reverend Mother had left out. It explained the “miracle” that had saved this girl’s life, though, as the Reverend Mother said, perhaps the grace of God was in it as well. Who knows?

Franz von Kreuzenach was one of the intelligence officers whose headquarters were in that courtyard. After service in the trenches with an infantry battalion he had been stationed since 1915 at Lille until almost the end. He had a lieutenant’s rank, but was Baron in private life, belonging to an old family in Bonn. Not a Prussian, therefore, but a Rhinelander, and without the Prussian arrogance of manner. Just before the war he had been at Oxford—Brasenose College—and spoke English perfectly, and loved England with a strange, deep, unconcealed sentiment.

“Loved England?——” exclaimed Brand at this part of Eileen’s tale.

“Why not?” asked Eileen. “I’m Irish, but I love England, in spite of all her faults and all my grievances! Who can help loving England that has lived with her people?”

This Lieutenant von Kreuzenach was two months in Lille before he spoke a word with Eileen. She passed him often in the courtyard and always he saluted her with great deference. She fancied she noticed a kind of wistfulness in his eyes, as though he would have liked to talk to her. He had blue eyes, sad sometimes, she noticed, and a clean-cut face, rather delicate and pale.

One day she dropped a pile of books in the yard all of a heap as he was passing, and he said, “Allow me,” and helped to pick them up. One of the books was “Puck of Pook’s Hill,” by Kipling, and he smiled as he turned over a page or two.

“I love that book,” he said in perfect English. “There’s so much of the spirit of old England in it. History, too. That’s fine about the Roman wall, where the officers go pig-sticking.”

Eileen O’Connor asked him if he were half English—perhaps he had an English mother?—but he shook his head and said he was wholly German—*echt Deutsch*.

He hesitated for a moment as though he wanted to continue the conversation, but then saluted and passed on.

It was a week or so later when they met again, and it was Eileen O’Connor who said “Good-morning” and made a remark about the weather.

He stopped, and answered with a look of pleasure and boyish surprise.

“It’s jolly to hear you say ‘Good-morning’ in English. Takes me straight back to Oxford before this atrocious war. Besides——”

Here he stopped and blushed.

“Besides what?” asked Eileen.

“Besides, it’s a long time since I talked to a lady. Among officers one hears nothing but war-talk—the last battle, the next battle, technical jargon, ‘shop,’ as the English say. It would be nice to talk about something else—art, music, poetry, ideas.”

She chaffed him a little, irresistibly.

“Oh, but you Germans have the monopoly of all that! Art, music, poetry, they are all absorbed into your *Kultur*—properly Germanised. As for ideas—what is not in German philosophy is not an idea.”

He looked profoundly hurt, said Eileen, “Some Germans are very narrow, very stupid, like some English perhaps. Not all of us believe that German *Kultur* is the only knowledge in the world.”

“Anyhow,” said Eileen O’Connor, “I’m Irish, so we needn’t argue about the difference between German and English philosophy.” He spoke as if quoting from a text-book.

“The Irish are a very romantic race.”

That, of course, had to be denied by Eileen, who knew her Bernard Shaw.

“Don’t you believe it,” she said. “We’re a hard, logical, relentless people, like all peasant folk of Celtic stock. It’s the English who are romantic and sentimental, like the Germans.”

He was amazed at those words (so Eileen told us) and then laughed heartily in his very boyish way.

“You are pleased to make fun of me. You are pulling my leg, as we said at Oxford.”

So they took to talking for a few minutes in the courtyard when they met, and Eileen noticed that they met more often than before. She suspected him of arranging that, and it amused her. By that time she had a staunch friend in the old Kommandant who believed her to be an enemy of England and an Irish patriot. She was already playing the dangerous game under his very nose, or at least within fifty yards of the blotting-pad over which his nose used to be for many hours of the day in his office.

It was utterly necessary to keep him free from any suspicion. His confidence was her greatest safeguard. It was therefore unwise to refuse him (an honest, stupid old gentleman) when he asked whether now and again he might bring one of his officers and enjoy an hour’s music in her rooms after dinner. He had heard her singing, and it had gone straight to his heart. There was one of his officers, Lieutenant Baron Franz von Kreuzenach, who had a charming voice. They might have a little musical recreation which would be most pleasant and refreshing.

“Bring your Baron,” said Eileen. “I shall not scandalise my neighbours when the courtyard is closed.”

Her girl-friends were scandalised when they heard of these musical evenings—two or three times a month—until she convinced them that it was a service to France, and a life insurance for herself and them. There were times when she had scruples. She was tricking both those men who sat in her room for an hour or two now and then, so polite, so stiffly courteous, so moved with sentiment when she sang old Irish songs and Franz von Kreuzenach sang his German songs. She was a spy, in plain and terrible language, and they were utterly duped. On more than one night while they were there an escaped prisoner was in the cellar below, with a German uniform and cypher message, and all directions for escape across the lines. Though they seldom talked about the war, yet now and again by casual remarks they revealed the intentions of the German army and its *moral*, or lack of *moral*. With the old Kommandant she did not feel so conscience-stricken. To her he was gentle and charming, but to others a bully, and there was in his character the ruthlessness of the Prussian officer on all matters of “duty,” and he hated England ferociously.

With Franz von Kreuzenach it was different. He was a humanitarian, and sensitive to all cruelty in life. He hated, not the English, but the war with real anguish, as she could see by many words he let fall from time to time.

He was, she said, a poet, and could see across the frontiers of hatred to all suffering humanity, and so revolted against the endless, futile massacre and the spiritual degradation of civilised peoples. It was only in a veiled way he could say these things in the presence of his superior officer, but she understood. She understood another thing as time went on—nearly eighteen months all told. She saw quite clearly, as all women must see in such a case, that this young German was in love with her.

“He did not speak any word in that way,” said Eileen when she told us this, frankly, in her straight manner of speech, “but in his eyes, in the touch of his hand, in the tones of his voice, I knew that he loved me, and I was very sorry.”

“It was a bit awkward,” said Brand, speaking with a strained attempt at being casual. I could see that he was very much moved by that part of the story, and that there was a conflict in his mind.

“It made me uneasy and embarrassed,” said Eileen. “I don’t like to be the cause of any man’s suffering, and he was certainly suffering because of me. It was a tragic thing for both of us when I was found out at last.”

“What happened?” asked Brand.

The thing that happened was simple—and horrible. When Eileen and her companions were denounced by the sentry at the Citadel the case was reported to the Kommandant of the Intelligence Office, who was in charge of all anti-espionage business in Lille. He was enormously disturbed by the suspicion directed against Eileen. It seemed to him incredible, at first, that he could have been duped by her. After that, his anger was so violent that he became incapable of any personal action. He ordered Franz von Kreuzenach to arrest Eileen and search her rooms. “If she resist, shoot her at once,” he thundered out.

It was at seven o’clock in the evening when Baron Franz von Kreuzenach appeared at Eileen’s door with two soldiers. He was extremely pale and agitated.

Eileen rose from her little table, where she was having an evening meal of. soup and bread. She knew the moment had come which in imagination she had seen a thousand times.

“Come in, Baron!”

She spoke with an attempt at cheerfulness, but had to hold to the back of her chair to save herself from falling, and she felt her face become white.

He stood for a moment in the room, silently, with the two soldiers behind him, and when he spoke, it was in a low voice, in English. “It is my painful duty to arrest you, Miss O’Connor.”

She pretended to be amazed, incredulous, but it was, as she knew, a feeble mimicry.

“Arrest me? Why, that is—ridiculous! On what charge?”

Franz von Kreuzenach looked at her in a pitiful way.

“A terrible charge: Espionage and conspiracy against German martial law... I would rather have died than do this—duty.”

Eileen told us that he spoke that word “duty” as only a German could—as that law which for a German officer is above all human things, all kindly relationships, all escape. She pitied him then more, she said, than she was afraid for herself, and told him that she was sorry the duty had fallen to him. He made only one other remark before he took her away from her rooms.

“I pray God the evidence will be insufficient.”

There was a military car waiting outside the courtyard, and he opened the door for her to get in and sat opposite to her. The two soldiers sat together next to the driver, squeezed close—they were both stout men—with their rifles between their knees. It was dark in the streets of Lille and in the car. Eileen could only see the officer’s face vaguely and white. He spoke again as they were driven quickly.

“I have to search your rooms to-night. Have you destroyed your papers?”

He seemed to have no doubt about her guilt, but she would not admit it.

“I have no papers of which I am afraid.”

“That is well,” said Franz von Kreuzenach.

He told her that the Baronne de Villers-Auxicourt and Marcelle Barbier had been arrested also, and that news was like a death-blow to the girl. It showed that their conspiracy had been revealed, and she was stricken at the thought of the fate awaiting her friends, those young delicate girls, who had been so brave in taking risks.

Towards the end of the journey, which was not far, Franz von Kreuzenach began speaking in a low, emotional voice.

Whatever happened, he said, he prayed that she might think of him with friendship, not blaming him for that arrest, which was in obedience to orders. He would ever be grateful to her for her kindness, and the songs she had sung. They had been happy evenings to him when he could see her and listen to her voice. He looked forward to them in a hungry way, because of his loneliness.

“He said—other things,” added Eileen, and she did not tell us, though dimly we guessed at the words of that German officer who loved her. At the gate of the prison he delivered her to a group of military police, and then saluted as he swung round on his heel.

The next time she saw him was at her trial. Once only their eyes met, and he became deadly pale and bent his head. During her cross-examination of him he did not look at her, and his embarrassment, his agony—she could see that he was suffering—made an unfavourable impression on the court, who thought he was not sure of his evidence and was making blundering answers when she challenged him. She held him up to ridicule, but all the time was sorry for him, and grateful to him, because she knew how much evidence against her he had concealed.

“He behaved strangely about that evidence,” said Eileen. “What puzzles me still is why he produced so much and yet kept back the rest. You see, he put in the papers he had found in the secret passage, and they were enough to have me shot, yet he hushed up the fact about the passage, which, of course, was utterly damning. It looked as though he wanted to give me a sporting chance. But that was not his character, because he was a simple young man. He could have destroyed the papers as easily as he kept back the fact about the underground passage, but he produced them, and I escaped only by the skin of my teeth. Read me that riddle, Wickham Brand!”

“It’s easy,” said Brand. “The fellow was pulled two ways. By duty and—sentiment.”

“Love,” said Eileen in her candid way.

“Love, if you like... It was a conflict. Probably his sense of duty (I know these German officers!) was strong enough to make him hand up the papers to his superior officers. He couldn’t bring himself to burn them—the fool! Then the other emotion in him——”

“Give it a name,” said Eileen, smiling in her whimsical way.

“That damned love of his,” said Brand, “tugged at him intolerably, and jabbed at his conscience. So he hid the news about the passage and thought what a fine fellow he was. Mr. Facing-Both-Ways. Duty and love, both sacrificed!... He’d have looked pretty sick if you’d been shot, and it wasn’t to his credit that you weren’t.”

Eileen O’Connor was amused with Brand’s refusal to credit Franz von Kreuzenach with any kindness.

“Admit,” she said, “that his suppression of evidence gave me my chance. If all were told, I was lost.”

Brand admitted that.

“Admit also,” said Eileen, “that he behaved like a gentleman.”

Brand admitted it grudgingly.

“A German gentleman.”

Then he realised his meanness, and made amends.

“That’s unfair! He behaved like a good fellow. Probably took big risks. Every one who knows what happened must be grateful to him. If I meet him I’ll thank him.”

Eileen O’Connor held Brand to that promise, and asked him for a favour which made him hesitate.

“When you go on to the Rhine will you take him a letter from me?”

“It’s against the rules,” said Brand rather stiffly.

Eileen pooh-poohed those rules, and said Franz von Kreuzenach had broken his for her sake.

“I’ll take it,” said Brand.

That night when we left Eileen O’Connor’s rooms the Armistice was still being celebrated by British soldiers. Verey lights were rising above the houses, fired off by young officers as symbols of their own soaring spirits. Shadows lurched against us in the dark streets as officers and men went singing to their billets. Some girls of Lille had linked arms with British Tommies and were dancing in the darkness with screams of mirth. In one of the doorways a soldier with his steel hat at the back of his head and his rifle lying at his feet kept shouting one word in a drunken way: “Peace!... Peace!”

Brand had his arm through mine, and when we came to his headquarters he would not let me go.

“Armistice night!” he said. “Don’t let’s sleep just yet. Let’s hug the thought over a glass of whisky. The war is over!... No more blood!... No more of its tragedy!”

Yet we had got no farther than the hall before we knew that tragedy had not ended with the Armistice.

Colonel Lavington met us and spoke to Brand.

“A bad thing has happened. Young Clatworthy has shot himself... upstairs in his room.”

“No!”

Brand started back as if he had been hit. He had been fond of Clatworthy, as he was of all boys, and they

had been together for many months. It was to Brand that Clatworthy wrote his last strange note, and the colonel gave it to him then in the hall.

I saw it afterwards, written in a big scrawl—a few lines which now I copy out:—

"*Dear old Brand,—It's the end of the adventure. Somehow I funk Peace. I don't see how I can go back to Wimbledon as if nothing had happened to me. None of us are the same as when we left, and I'm quite different. I'm going over to the pals on the other side. They will understand. Cheerio!*

"*Cyril Clatworthy*."

"I was playing my flute when I heard the shot," said the colonel.

Brand put the letter in his pocket and made only one comment.

"Another victim of the war-devil.... Poor kid!"

Presently he went up to young Clatworthy's room, and stayed there a long time.

A few days later we began to move on towards the Rhine by slow stages, giving the German Army time to get back. In Brand's pocket-book was the letter to Franz von Kreuzenach from Eileen O'Connor.

END OF BOOK I.

BOOK II—THROUGH HOSTILE GATES

I

The advance of the Allied Armies towards the Rhine was by definite, slow stages, enabling the German Army to withdraw in advance of us with as much material of war as was left to them by the conditions of the Armistice. On that retreat of theirs they abandoned so much that it was clearly impossible for them to resist our demands by fighting again, however hard might be the peace terms. Their acceptance of the Armistice drawn up by Marshal Foch with a relentless severity in every clause, so that the whole document was a sentence of death to the German military system, proved that they had no more "fight" in them. It was the most abject and humiliating surrender ever made by a great nation in the hour of defeat, and an acknowledgment before the whole world that their armies had broken to bits, in organisation and in spirit.

On the roads for hundreds of kilometres out from Mons and Le Cateau, past Brussels and Liège and Namur, was the visible proof of the disintegration and downfall of what had been the greatest military machine in the world. Mile after mile and score after score of miles, on each side of the long straight roads, down which, four years before, the first German Armies had marched in endless columns after the first brief check at Liège, with absolute faith in victory, there lay now abandoned guns, trench mortars, aeroplanes, motor lorries, motor cars and transport wagons. Those monstrous guns which had pounded so much of our young flesh to pulp, year after year, were now tossed into the ditches, or overturned in the wayside fields, with broken breech-blocks or without their sights.

It was good to see them there. Field-guns, upturned, thrust their muzzles into the mud, and Belgian peasant-, boys made cock-shies of them. I liked to see them at that game. Here also was the spectacle of a war machine which had worn out until, like the "one-hoss shay," it had fallen to pieces. Those motor lorries, motor cars, and transport wagons were in the last stage of decrepitude, their axles and spokes all rusty, their woodwork cracked, their wheels tied round with bits of iron in the place of tyres. Everywhere were dead horses worn to skin and bones before they had fallen. For lack of food and fats and rubber and labour the German material of war was in a sorry state before the failure of their man-power in the fighting fields after those years of massacre brought home to them the awful fact that they had no more strength to resist our onslaughts.

One of those who pointed the moral of all this was the little American doctor, Edward Small, and he found an immense satisfaction in the sight of those derelict wrecks of the German war-devils. He and I travelled together for some time, meeting Brand, Harding, and other friends, in towns like Liège and Namur. I remember him now, standing by a German howitzer—a colossus—sprawling out of a ditch. He chuckled in a goblin way, with his little grey beard thrust up by a muffler which he had tied over his field-cap and under his chin. (It was cold, with a white mist which clung damply to our faces.) He went so far in his pleasure as to pick up a big stone (like those Belgian boys) and heave it at the monster.

"Fine!" he said. "That devil will never again vomit out death upon men crouching low in ditches—fifteen miles away. Never again will it smash through the roofs of farmhouses where people desired to live in peace, or bash big holes in little old churches where folk worshipped through the centuries—a loving God!... Sonny, this damned thing is symbolical. Its overthrow means the downfall of all the machinery of slaughter which has

been accumulated by civilised peoples afraid of each other. In a little while, if there's any sense in humanity after this fearful lesson, we shall put all our guns on to the scrap-heap and start a new era of reasonable intercourse between the peoples of the world."

"Doctor," I answered, "there's a mighty big 'If' in that long sentence of yours."

He blinked at me with beads of mist on his lashes.

"Don't you go wet-blanketing my faith in a step-up for the human race! During the next few months we're going to re-arrange life. We are going to give Fear the knock-out blow.... It was Fear that was the cause of all this horrible insanity and all this need of sacrifice. Germany was afraid of being 'hemmed in' by England, France and Russia. Fear, more than the lust of power, was at the back of her big armies. France was afraid of Germany trampling over her frontiers again. Russian Czardom was afraid of revolution within her own borders and looked to war as a safety-valve. England was afraid of the German Navy and afraid of Germans at Calais and Dunkirk. All the little Powers were afraid of the big Powers and made their beastly little alliances as a life insurance against the time when they would be dragged into the dog-fight. Now, with the German bogey killed—the most formidable and frightful bogey—Austria disintegrated, Russia groping her way with bloodshot eyes to a new democracy, a complete set of fears has been removed. The spirits of the peoples will be uplifted, the darkness of fear having passed from them. We are coming out into the broad sunlight of sanity, and mankind will march to better conquests than those of conscript armies. Thank God, the United States of America (and don't you forget it!) will play a part in this advance to another New World."

It was absurd to argue with the little man in a sodden field on the road to Liège. Besides, though I saw weak links in his chain of reasoning, I did not want to argue.

I wanted to believe also that our victory would not be a mere vulgar triumph of the old kind, one military power rising upon the ruins of its rival, one great yell (or many) of "Yah—we told you so!" but that it would be a victory for all humanity, shamed by the degradation of its orgy of blood, in spite of all pride in long-enduring manhood, and that the peoples of the world, with one common, enormous, generous instinct, would cry out, "The horror has passed! Never again shall it come upon us.... Let us pay back to the dead by contriving a better way of life for those who follow!" The chance of that lay with living youth, if they would not allow themselves to be betrayed by their old men. That also was a mighty "If," but I clung to the hope with as passionate a faith as that of the little American doctor....

The way to the Rhine lay through many cities liberated from hostile rule, through many wonderful scenes in which, emotion surged like a white flame above great crowds. There was a pageantry of life which I had never before seen in war or in peace, and those of us who went that way became dazed by the endless riot of colour, and our ears were tired by a tumult of joyous sound. In Brussels, Bruges, Ghent, Liège, Namur, Venders, banners waved above every house. Flags—flags—flags of many nations and designs, decorated the house-fronts, were draped on the balconies, were entwined in the windows, came like flames above the heads of marching crowds. Everywhere there was the sound of singing by multitudes, and through those weeks one song was always in the air, triumphant, exultant, intoxicating, almost maddening in its effect upon crowds and individuals—the old song of liberty and revolt: "La Marseillaise." With it, not so universal, but haunting in constant refrain between the outbursts of that other tune, they sang "La Brabançonne" of Belgium and quaint old folk-songs that came to life again with the spirit of the people. Bells pealed from churches in which the Germans had left them by special favour. The belfry of Bruges had not lost its carillon. In Ghent, when the King of the Belgians rode in along flower-strewn ways, under banners that made one great canopy, while cheers swept up and around him to his grave, tanned, melancholy face, unchanged by victory—so I had seen him in his ruined towns among his dead—I heard the great boom of the cathedral bell. In Brussels, when he rode in later, there were many bells ringing and clashing, and wild cheering, which to me, lying in an upper room after a smash on the Field of Waterloo, seemed uncanny and inhuman, like the murmur of innumerable ghost-voices. Into these towns, and along the roads through Belgium to the Meuse, bands were playing and soldiers singing, and on each man's rifle was a flag or a flower. In every city there was carnival. It was the carnival of human joy after long fasting from the pleasure of life. Soldiers and civilians, men and women, sang together, linked arms, danced together through many streets, in many towns. In the darkness of those nights of Armistice one saw the eyes of people sparkling, laughing, burning; the eyes of girls lit up by inner fires, eager, roving, alluring, untamed; and the eyes of soldiers, surprised, amused, adventurous, drunken, ready for any kind of fun; and sometimes in those crowds, dead eyes, or tortured eyes, staring inwards and not outwards, because of some remembrance which came like a ghost between them and carnival.

In Ghent there were other sounds besides music and laughter, and illuminations too fierce and ruddy in their glow to give me pleasure. At night I heard the screams of women. I had no need to ask the meaning of them. I had heard such screams before, when Pierre Nesle's sister Marthe was in the hands of the mob. But one man told me, as though I did not know.

"They are cutting off some ladies' hair. Six of them—the hussies! They were too friendly with the Germans, you understand? Now they are being stripped, for shame. There are others, monsieur. Many, many, if one only knew. Hark at their howling!"

He laughed heartily, without any touch of pity. I tried to push my way nearer to try by some word of protest to stop that merry sport with hunted women. The crowds were too dense, the women too far away. In any case no word of mine would have had effect. I went into a restaurant and ordered dinner, though not hungry. Brand was there, sitting alone till I joined him. The place was filled with French and Belgian officers and womenfolk. The swing-door opened and another woman came in and sat a few tables away from ours. She was a tall girl, rather handsome, and better dressed than the ordinary *bourgeoisie* of Ghent. At least, so it seemed to me when she hung up some heavy furs on the peg above her chair.

A waiter advanced towards her, and then, standing stock-still, began to shout, with a thrill of fury in his voice. He shouted frightful words in French, and one sentence which I remember now.

"A week ago you sat here with a German officer!"

The Belgian officers were listening gravely. One of them half-rose from his chair with a flushed, wolfish face. I was staring at the girl. She was white to the lips, and held on to a brass rail as though about to faint.

Then, controlling herself instantly, she fumbled at the peg, pulled down her furs and fled through the swing-door... She was another Marthe.

Somebody laughed in the restaurant, but only one voice. For a moment there was silence, then conversation was resumed, as though no figure of tragedy had passed. The waiter who had denounced the woman swept some crumbs off a table and went to fetch some soup.

Brand did not touch his food.

"I feel sick," he said.

He pushed his plate away and paid the bill.

"Let's go."

He forgot to ask whether I wanted to eat—he was absent-minded in that way—but I felt like him, and avoiding the Grande Place we walked by hazard to a part of the city where some fires were burning. The sky was reddened and we smelt smoke, and presently felt the heat of flames.

"What new devilry?" asked Brand. "Can't these people enjoy peace? Hasn't there been enough violence?"

"Possibly a bonfire," I said, "symbolical of joy and warmth after cold years!"

Coming closer, I saw that Brand was right. Black figures like dancing devils were in the ruddy glare of a savage fire up a side street of Ghent. In other streets were other fires. Close to where we stood was an old inn, called the Hotel de la Demie-Lune—the Hotel of the Half-Moon—and its windows had been heaved out, and inside the rooms Belgian soldiers and citizens were flinging out tables and chairs and planks and wainscoting to feed the bonfire below, and every time the flames licked up to the new fuel there were shouts of joy from the crowd.

"What does it mean?" asked Brand, and a man in the crowd told us that the house had been used as the headquarters of a German organisation for "Flemish Activists"—or Flamagands, as they were called—whose object was to divide the Walloons, or French-speaking Belgians, from the Flemings, in the interests of Germany.

"It is the people's revenge for those who have tried to sow seeds of hatred among-them," said the man.

Other people standing by spoke disapprovingly of the scene.

"The Germans have made too many fires in this war," said an elderly man in a black hat with a high crown and broad brim, like a portrait by Franz Hals. "We don't want to destroy our own houses now the enemy has gone. That is madness."

"It seems unnecessary!" said Brand.

As we made our way back we saw the light of other fires, and heard the noise of smashing glass and a splintering of woodwork. The mob was sacking shops which had traded notoriously with the Germans. Out of one alley a man came running like a hunted animal. We heard his breath panting as he passed. A shout of "Flamagand! Flamagand!" followed him, and in another second a mob had caught him. We heard his death-cry before they killed him like a rat.

Never before in the history of the world had such crowds gathered together as now in Brussels, Ghent or Liège. French and English soldiers walked the same streets, khaki and sky-blue mingling. These two races had met before, not as friends, in some of these towns—five centuries and more before in history. But here also were men from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the new world which had come to the old world on this adventure, paying back something to the old blood and the old ghosts because of their heritage, yet strangely aloof on the whole from these continental peoples, not understanding them, despising them.

The English soldier took it all as it came, with that queer adaptability of his to any environment or any adventure, with his simple human touch.

"Better than the old Ypres salient," said one of them, grinning at me after a game of kiss-in-the-ring at Venders. He wiped the sweat from his face and neck, and as he raised his arm I saw by his gold stripes that he had been three times wounded. Yes, that was better than the old hell. He roared with laughter when one of his comrades went into the ring with a buxom girl while the crowd danced round him, holding hands, singing, laughing, pulling him this side and that.

The man who had just left the ring spoke to me again in a confidential way.

"My wife wouldn't like it if she'd seen me just then. I shan't tell 'er. She wouldn't understand. Nobody can understand the things we've done, the things we've thought, nor the things we've seen, unless they've been through with us... and we don't understand, neither!"

"Who does?" I asked, to express agreement with him, but he took my words as a question to be answered.

"P'raps Gord knows. If so, 'E's a clever One, 'E is!... I wish I 'ad 'alf 'Is sense."

He drifted away from me with a gurgle of laughter at a girl who pushed his cap on one side.

Along the kerbstone of the market-place some transport wagons were halted, and the drivers were cooking their evening meal over a charcoal stove, as though on one of the roads of war, while a crowd of Belgians roared with laughter at their by-play with clasp-knives, leaden spoons, and dixies. One of them was a cockney humorist—his type was always to be found in any group of English soldiers—and was performing a pantomime for the edification of the onlookers and his own pleasure.

A woman standing on the edge of this scene touched me on the sleeve.

"Are you going forward to the Rhine, *mon lieutenant?*"

I told her "yes," and that I should soon be among the Germans.

She gave a little tug to my sleeve, and spoke in a kind of coaxing whisper.

"Be cruel to them, *mon lieutenant!* Be hard and ruthless. Make them suffer as we have suffered. Tread on their necks so that they squeal. *Soyez cruel.*"

Her face and part of her figure were in the glow from the charcoal fire of the transport men, and I saw that

she was a little woman, neatly dressed, with a thin, gentle, rather worn-looking face. Those words, "*Soyez cruel!*" gave me a moment's shock, especially because of the soft, wheedling tone of her voice.

"What would you do," I asked in a laughing way, "if you were in my place?"

"I dream at nights of what I would like to do. There are so many things I would like to do for vengeance. I think all German women should be killed to stop them breeding. That is one thing."

"And the next?" I asked.

"It would be well to kill all German babies. Perhaps the good God will do it in His infinite wisdom."

"You are religious, madame?"

"We had only our prayers," she said, with piety.

A band of dancing people bore down upon us and swept us apart. From a high balcony an Italian who had been a prisoner of war sang "La Marseillaise," and though these people's ears had been dinned with it all day, though their throats were hoarse with singing it, they listened to it now, again, as though it were a new revelation. The man sang with passion in his voice, as powerful as a trumpet, more thrilling than that. The passion of four years' agony in some foul prison-camp inspired him now, as he sang that song of liberty and triumph.

"Allons, Enfants de la patrie!
Le jour de gloire est arrivé!"

The crowd took up the song again, and it roared across the square of Venders until another kind of music met and clashed with it, and overwhelmed it with brazen notes. It was the town band of Venders, composed of twenty-five citizens, mostly middle-aged and portly—some old and scraggy, in long frock-coats and tall pot-hats. Solemnly, with puffed cheeks, they marched along, parting the waves of people as they went, as it seemed, by the power of their blasts. They were playing an old tune called "Madelon"—its refrain comes back to me now with the picture of that carnival in Venders, with all those faces, all that human pressure and emotion—and behind them, as though following the Pied Piper (twenty-five pied pipers!) came dancing at least a thousand people, eight abreast, with linked arms or linked hands. They were young Belgian boys and girls, old Belgian men and women, children, British soldiers, American soldiers, English, Scottish, Irish, Canadian, Australian, Russian, and Italian ex-prisoners of war just liberated from their prison-camps, new to liberty. They were all singing that old song of "Madelon," and all dancing in a kind of jig. Other crowds, dancing and singing, came out of side-streets into the wide Grande Place, mingled, like human waves meeting, swirled in wild, laughing eddies. Carnival after the long fasting.

Brand clutched me by the arm and laughed in his deep, hollow voice.

"Look at that old satyr!... I believe Daddy Small is Pan himself!"

It was the little American doctor. He was in the centre of a row of eight in the vanguard of a dancing column. A girl of the *midinette* type—pretty, impudent, wild-eyed, with a strand of fair hair blowing loose from her little fur cap—was clinging to his arm on one side, while on the other was a stout, middle-aged woman with a cheerful Flemish face and mirth-filled eyes. Linked up with the others they jigged behind the town band. Dr. Small's little grey beard had a raffish look. His field cap was tilted back from his bony forehead. His spectacles were askew. He had the happy look of careless boyhood. He did not see us then, but later in the evening detached himself from the stout Flemish lady, who kissed him on both cheeks, and made his way to where Brand and I stood under the portico of a hotel.

"Fie, doctor!" said Brand. "What would your old patients in New York say to this Bacchanalian orgy?"

"Sonny," said the doctor, "they wouldn't believe it. It's incredible!"

He wiped the perspiration from his brow, threaded his fingers through his grey beard, and laughed in that shrill way which was his habit when excited.

"My word, it was good fun! I became part of a people's joy. I had their sense of escape from frightful things. Youth came back to me. Their songs danced in my blood. In spite of my goggles and my grey beard that buxom lady adored me as though I were the young Adonis. The little girl clasped my hand as though I were her younger brother. Time rolled back from the world. Old age was touched with the divine elixir. In that crowd there is the springtime of life, when Pan played on his pipes through pagan woods. I wouldn't have missed it for a million dollars!"

That night Brand and I and some others (Charles Fortune among them) were billeted in a small hotel which had been a German headquarters a few days before. There was a piano in the billiard room, and Fortune touched its keys. Several notes were broken but he skipped them deftly and improvised a musical caricature of "Daddy" Small dancing in the carnival. He, too, had seen that astonishing vision, and it inspired him to grotesque fantasies. In his imagination he brought a great general to Venders—"Blear-eyed Bill, the Butcher of the Boche"—and gave him a *pas seul* in the Grande Place, like an elephant gambolling in green fields and trumpeting his joy.

Young Harding was moody, and confided to me that he did not like the idea of crossing the German frontier and going to Cologne.

"There will be dirty work," he said, "as sure as fate. The Huns will begin sniping and then we shall have to start reprisals. Well, if they ask for it I hope we shall give it them. Without mercy, after all they have done. At the first sign of treachery I hope the machine-guns will begin to play. Every time I see a Hun I shall feel like slitting his throat."

"Well, you'll get into a murderous state of mind," I answered him. "We shall see plenty, and live among them. I expect they will be tame enough."

"Some poor devils of ours will be murdered in their beds," said Harding. "It makes my blood boil to think of it. I only hope we shan't stand any nonsense. I'd like to see Cologne Cathedral go up in flames. That would be a consolation."

Charles Fortune broke away from his musical fantasy of “Blear-eyed Bill” and played a bar or two of the “Marseillaise” in ragtime. It was a greeting to Pierre Nesle, who came into the room quietly in his *képi* and heavy motor-coat, with a salute to the company.

“*Bon soir, petit Pierre!*” said Fortune, “*qu’il y a, done—quoi?—avec ta figure si sombre, si mélancolique, d’une tristesse pitoyable——*”

Pierre Nesle inspired him to sing a little old French *chanson* of Pierrot disconsolate.

Pierre had just motored down from Lille—a long journey—and was blue with cold, as he said, warming his hands at the charcoal stove. He laughed at Fortune’s jesting, begged a cigarette from Harding, apologised for keeping on his “stink-coat” for a while until he had thawed out—and I admired the boy’s pluck and self-control. It was the first time I had seen him since he had gone to Lille to see his sister. I knew by the new lines about his eyes and mouth, by a haggard, older look he had that he had seen that sister of his—Marthe—and knew her tragedy.

It was to Brand’s room that he went after midnight, and from Brand, a day later, I heard what had happened. He had begun by thanking Brand for that rescue of his sister in Lille, in a most composed and courteous way. Then suddenly that mask fell from him and he sat down heavily in a chair, put his head down on his arms upon the table and wept like a child in uncontrollable grief. Brand was immensely distressed and could not think of any word to comfort him. He kept saying, “Courage! Courage!” as I had said to Madame Chéri when she broke down about her boy Edouard, as the young Baronne had sent word to Eileen from her prison death-bed, and as so many men and women had said to others who had been stricken by the cruelties of war.

“The boy was down and out,” said Brand. “What could I say? It is one of those miseries for which there is no cure. He began to talk about his sister when they had been together at home, in Paris before the war. She had been so gay, so comradely, so full of adventure. Then he began to curse God for having allowed so much cruelty and men for being such devils. He cursed the Germans, but then, in most frightful language, most bitterly of all he cursed the people of Lille for having tortured a woman who had been starved into weakness, and had sinned to save her life. He contradicted himself then, violently, and said, ‘It was no sin. My sister was a loyal girl to France. In her soul she was loyal. So she swore to me on her crucifix. I would have killed her if she had been disloyal.’... So there you are! Pierre Nesle is broken on the wheel of war, like so many others. What’s the cure?”

“None,” I said, “for his generation. One can’t undo the things that are done.”

Brand was pacing up and down his bedroom, where he had been telling me these things, and now, at my words, he stopped and stared at me before answering.

“No. I think you’re right. This generation has been hard hit, and we shall go about with unhealed wounds. But the next generation?... Let’s try to save it from all this horror! If the world will only understand——”

The next day we left Venders and crossed the German frontier on the way to the Rhine.

II

Brand and I, who were inseparable now, and young Harding, who had joined us, crossed the Belgian frontier with our leading troop of cavalry—the Dragoon Guards—and entered Germany on the morning of December 4th. For three days our advanced cavalry outposts had been halted on the frontier line beyond Venders and Spa. The scenery had become German already—hill-country, with roads winding through fir forests above deep ravines, where red undergrowth glowed like fire through the rich green of fir-trees, and where, on the hillsides and in the valleys, were wooden *châlets* and villas with pointed turrets like those in the Black Forest.

We halted this side of a little stone bridge over the stream which divides the two countries. A picket of Dragoons was holding the bridge with double sentries, under orders to let no man pass until the signal was given to advance.

“What’s the name of this place?” asked Brand of a young cavalry officer smoking a cigarette and clapping his hands to keep warm.

“Rothwasser, sir,” said that child, removing the cigarette from his lips. He pointed to a small house on rising ground beyond, a white building with a slate roof, and said: “That’s the first house in Germany. I don’t suppose they’ll invite us to breakfast.”

Brand and I leaned over the stone bridge, watching and listening to the swirl of tawny water over big grey stones.

“The Red Water,” said Brand. “Not a bad name when one thinks of the rivers of blood that have flowed between our armies and this place. It’s been a long journey to this little bridge.”

We stared across the brook and were enormously stirred (I was, at least) by the historic meaning of this scene. Over there, a few yards away, was Germany, the fringe of what had been until some weeks ago the mighty German Empire. Not a human being appeared on that side of the stone bridge. There was no German sentry facing ours. The gate into Germany was open and unguarded. A deep silence was over there by the pine-woods where the undergrowth was red. I wondered what would happen when we rode through that silence and that loneliness into the first German town—Malmédy—and afterwards through many German towns and villages on the way to the Rhine....

Looking back on that adventure, I remember our psychological sensations, our surprise at the things which happened and failed to happen, the change of mind which gradually dawned upon some of our officers, the incredulity, resentment, suspicion, amazement, which overcame many of them because of the attitude of the German people whom they met for the first time face to face without arms in their hands. I have already said that many of our officers had a secret dread of this advance into German territory, not because they were afraid of danger to their own skins, but because they had a greater fear of being called upon to do "dirty work" in the event of civilians sniping and any sign of the *franc-tireur*. They had been warned by the High Command that that might happen, and that there must be a ruthless punishment of any such crimes.

"Our turn for atrocities!" whispered young cavalry officers, remembering Louvain and Alost, and they hated the idea. We were in the state of mind which led to some of the black business in Belgium when the Germans first advanced—nervous, ready to believe any rumour of treacherous attack, more afraid of civilian hostility than of armed troops. A single shot fired by some drunken fool in a German village, a single man of ours killed in a brawl, or murdered by a German out for vengeance, might lead to most bloody tragedy. Rumour was already whispering of ghastly things.

I remember on the first day of our advance meeting a young officer of ours in charge of an armoured car which had broken down across the frontier, outside a village.

"I'd give a million pounds to get out of this job," he said gloomily.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

He told me that the game was already beginning, and swore frightful oaths.

"What game?"

"Murder," he answered sharply. "Don't you get the news? Two of our fellows have been killed in that village. Sniped from the windows. Presently I shall be told to sweep the streets with machine-guns. Jolly work, what?"

He was utterly wrong, though where he heard the lie which made him miserable I never knew. I walked into the village and found it peaceful. No men of ours had been killed there. No men of ours had yet entered it.

The boy who was to go forward with the leading cavalry patrol across the Rothwasser that morning had "the needle" to the same degree. He leaned sideways in his saddle and confided his fears to me with laughter which did not conceal his apprehensions.

"Hope there's no trouble.... Haven't the ghost of| an idea what to do if the Hun turns nasty. I don't know a word of their beastly language either! If I'm the boy who takes the wrong turning, don't be too hard on me!"

It was a Sunday morning, with a cold white fog on the hill-tops, and white frost on fir-trees and red bracken. Our cavalry and horse artillery, with their transport drawn up on the Belgian side of the frontier before the bugle sounded for the forward march, were standing by their horses, clapping hands, beating chests, stamping feet. The men wore their steel hats as though for an advance in the usual conditions of warfare, and the troopers of the leading patrol rode forward with drawn swords. They rode at the trot through pine forests along the edge of deep ravines in which innumerable "Christmas-trees" were powdered with glistening frost. There was the beat of horses' hoofs on frozen roads, but the countryside was intensely silent. The farmhouses we passed and cottages under the shelter of the woods seemed abandoned. No flags hung out from them like those millions of flags which had fluttered along all the miles of our way through Belgium. Now and again, looking back at a farmhouse window, I saw a face there, staring out, but it was quickly withdrawn. A dog came out and barked at us savagely.

"First sign of hostility!" said the cavalry lieutenant, turning round in his saddle and laughing boyishly. The troopers behind him grinned under their steel hats and then looked stem again, glancing sideways into the glades of those silent fir-woods.

"It would be easy to snipe us from those woods," said Harding. "Too damned easy!"

"And quite senseless," said Brand. "What good would it do them?"

Harding was prepared to answer the question. He had been thinking it out.

"The Hun never did have any sense. He's not likely to get it now. Nothing will ever change him. He is a bad, treacherous, evil swine. We must be prepared for the worst, and if it comes——"

"What?" asked Brand.

Harding had a grim look, and his mouth was hard.

"We must act without mercy, as they did in Louvain."

"Wholesale murder, you mean?" said Brand harshly.

"A free hand for machine-guns," said Harding, "if they ask for it."

Brand gave his usual groan.

"Oh, Lord!... Haven't we finished with blood?"

We dipped down towards Malmédy. There was a hairpin turn in the road and we could see the town below us in the valley—a German town.

"Pretty good map-reading!" shouted the cavalry kid. He was pleased with himself for having led his troop on the right road, but I guessed that he would be glad to halt this side of the mystery that lay in that town where Sunday bells were ringing.

A queer thing happened then. Up a steep bank was a party of girls. German girls, of course, and the first civilians we had seen. A flutter of white handkerchiefs came from them. They were waving to us.

"Well, I'm damned!" said Harding.

"Not yet," answered Brand ironically, but he was as much astonished as all of us.

When we came into Malmédy the cavalry patrol halted in the market square and dismounted. It was about midday and the German people were coming out of church. Numbers of them surrounded us, staring at the

horses, whose sleek look seemed to amaze them, and at the men who lit up cigarettes and loosened the straps of their steel hats. Some girls patted the necks of the horses and said: "*Wundershon!*"

A young man in the crowd in black civilian clothes with a bowler hat spoke in perfect English to the sergeant-major: "Your horses are looking fine! Ours are skin and bones. When will the infantry be here?"

"Haven't an idea," said the sergeant-major gruffly.

Another young man addressed himself to me in French, which he spoke as though it were his native tongue.

"Is this the first time you have been in Germany, monsieur?"

I told him I had visited Germany before the war.

"You will find us changed," he said. "We have suffered very much, and the spirit of the people is broken. You see, they have been hungry so long."

I looked round at the crowd and saw some bonny-faced girls among them and children who looked well-fed. It was only the younger men who had a pinched look.

"The people here do not seem hungry," I said.

He explained that the state of Malmédy was not so bad. It was only a big-sized village and they could get produce from the farms about. All the same, they were on short commons and were underfed. Never any meat. No fats. "*Ersatz*" coffee. In the bigger towns there was real hunger, or, at least, an *unternahrung* or malnutrition, which was causing disease in all classes, and great mortality among the children.

"You speak French well," I told him, and he said that many people in Malmédy spoke French and German in a bi-lingual way. It was so close to the Belgian frontier.

"That is why the people here had no heart in the war, even in the beginning. My wife was a Belgian girl. When I was mobilised she said, 'You are going to kill my brothers,' and wept very much. I think that killed her. She died in '16."

The young man spoke gravely but without any show of emotion. He narrated his personal history in the war. He had been in the first and second battles of Ypres, then badly wounded and put down at the base as a clerk for nearly two years. After that, when German man-power was running short, he had been pushed into the ranks again and had fought in Flanders, Cambrai, and Valenciennes. Now he had demobilised himself.

"I am very glad the war is over, monsieur. It was a great stupidity from the beginning. Now Germany is ruined."

He spoke in a simple, matter-of-fact way, as though describing natural disturbances of life, regrettable, but inevitable.

I asked him whether the people farther from the frontier would be hostile to the English, troops, and he seemed surprised at my question.

"Hostile! Why, sir?.... The war is over, and we can now be friends again. Besides, the respectable people and the middle classes"—he used the French word *bourgeoisie*—"will be glad of your coming. It is a protection against the evil elements who are destroying property and behaving in a criminal way—the sailors of the fleet and the low ruffians."

The war is over, and we can be friends again! That sentence in the young man's speech astonished me by its directness and simplicity. Was that the mental attitude of the German people? Did they think that England would forget and shake hands? Did they not realise the passion of hatred that had been aroused in England by the invasion of Belgium, the early atrocities, the submarine war, the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the execution of Nurse Çavell, the air-raids over London—all the range and sweep of German frightfulness?

Then I looked at our troopers. Some of them were chatting with the Germans in a friendly way. One of them close to me gave a cigarette to a boy in a college cap who was talking to him in schoolboy English. Another was in conversation with two German girls who were patting his horse. We had been in the German village ten minutes. There was no sign of hatred here, on one side or the other. Already something had happened which in England, if they knew, would seem monstrous and incredible. A spell had been broken, the spell which for four years had dominated the souls of men and women. At least, it seemed to have been broken in the village where for the first time English soldiers met the people of the nation they had fought and beaten. These men of the first cavalry patrol did not seem to be nourishing thoughts of hatred and vengeance. They were not, it seemed, remembering atrocities. They were meeting fellow-mortals with human friendliness, and seemed inclined to talk to them and pass the time of day. Astounding!

I saw Wickham Brand talking to a group of German children—boys in sailor caps with the words *Hindenburg, Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse, Unterseeboot*, printed in gold letters on the cap-bands, and girls with yellow pigtails and coloured frocks. He pulled out a packet of chocolate from a deep pocket of his British warm and broke it into small pieces.

"Who would like a bit?" he asked in German, and there was a chorus of "*Bitte!... Bitte schön!*" He held out a piece to the prettiest child, a tiny fairy-like thing with gold-spun hair, and she blushed very vividly and curtseyed when she took the chocolate, and then kissed Brand's long lean hand. Young Harding was standing near. He had an utterly bewildered expression, as a man who sees the groundwork of his faith slipping beneath him. He turned to me as I strolled his way and looked at me with wide astonished eyes.

"I don't understand!" he stammered. "Haven't these people any pride? This show of friendliness—what does it mean? I'd rather they scowled and showed their hatred than stand round fawning on us.... And our men! They don't seem to bear any malice. Look at that fellow gossiping with those two girls! It's shameful.... What have we been fighting for if it ends in this sort of thing? It makes it all a farce!"

He was so disturbed, so unnerved, by the shock of his surprise that there were tears of vexation in his eyes.

I could not argue with him or explain things to him.

I was astonished myself, quite baffled by a German friendliness that was certainly sincere and not a mask hiding either hatred or humiliation. Those people of Malmédy were pleased to see us. As yet I could not get the drift of their psychology, in spite of what the young French-speaking German had told me. I gave Harding the benefit of that talk.

“This is a frontier town,” I said. “These people are not real Germans in their sympathies and ideas.”

That seemed to comfort Harding a little. He clung on to the thought that when we had got beyond the frontier we should meet the hatred he expected to see. He wanted to meet it. He wanted to see scowling looks, deep humiliation, a shameful recognition of defeat, the evil nature of the people we had been fighting. Otherwise, to him, the war was all a lie. For four years he had been inspired, strengthened, and upheld by hatred of the Germans. He believed not only in every atrocity story that appeared in English newspapers, but also, in accordance with all else he read, that every German was essentially and unutterably vile, brutal, treacherous, and evil. The German people were to him a race apart—the Huns. They had nothing in common with ordinary human nature, with its kindliness and weakness. They were physically, mentally, and morally debased. They were a race of devils, and they could not be allowed to live. Civilisation could only be saved by their extermination, or if that were impossible, by their utter subjection. All the piled-up slaughter of British youth and French youth was to him justified by the conviction that the last man of ours must die if need be in order to crush Germany and kill Germans. It is true that he had not died, nor even had been wounded, but that was his ill-luck. He had been in the cavalry, and had not been given many chances of fighting. Before the last phase, when the cavalry came into their own, he had been transferred to the Intelligence (though he did not speak a word of German) in order to organise their dispatch-rider service. He knew nothing about dispatch-riding, but his cousin was the brother-in-law of a general’s nephew, and he had been highly recommended for this appointment, which had surprised and annoyed him. Still, as a young man who believed in obedience to authority and in all old traditional systems such as patronage and privilege, he had accepted the post without protest. It had made no difference to his consuming hatred of the Hun. When all his companions were pessimistic about final victory he had remained an optimist, because of his faith that the Huns must be destroyed or God would be betrayed. When some of his colleagues who had lived in Germany before the war praised the German as a soldier and exonerated the German people from part at least of the guilt of their war lords, he tried to conceal his contempt for this folly (due to the mistaken generosity of the English character) and repeated his own creed of abhorrence for their race and character. “The only good German is a dead German,” he said, a thousand times, to one’s arguments pleading extenuating circumstances for German peasants, German women, German children.... But now in this village of Malmédy on our first morning across the frontier, within three minutes of our coming, English troopers were chatting with Germans as though nothing had happened to create ill-feeling on either side. Brand was giving chocolate to German children, and German girls were patting the necks of English horses.

“Yes,” he said, after my attempted explanation. “We’re too close to the frontier. These people are different. Wait till we get on a bit. I’m convinced we shall have trouble, and at the slightest sign of it we shall sweep the streets with machine-gun fire. I’ve got my own revolver handy, and I mean to use it without mercy if there’s any treachery.”

III

Harding had no need to use his revolver on the way to the Rhine or in Cologne, where he stayed for some months after Armistice. We went on with the cavalry into many villages and small towns, by slow stages, the infantry following behind in strength, with guns and transport. The girls outside Malmédy were not the only ones who waved handkerchiefs at us. Now and then, it is true, there were scowling looks from men who had obviously been German officers until a few weeks ago. Sometimes in village inns the German inn-keeper would be sullen and silent, leaving his wife or his maidservant to wait upon us. But even that was rare. More often there was frank curiosity in the eyes of the people who stared at us, and often unconcealed admiration at the smart appearance of our troops. Often German inn-keepers welcomed our officers with bows and smiles and prepared meat meals for us (in the country districts), while explaining that meat was scarce and hardly tasted by ordinary folk. Their wives and their maidservants praised God that the war was over.

“It lasted too long!” they said. “Oh, the misery of it! It was madness to slaughter each other like that!”

Brand and I went into a little shop to buy a toothbrush.

The woman behind the counter talked about the war.

“It was due to the wickedness of great people,” she said. “There are many people who grew rich out of the war. They wanted it to go on and on so that they could get more rich. They gorged themselves while the poor starved. It was the poor who were robbed of their life-blood.”

She did not speak passionately, but with a dull kind of anger.

“My own life-blood was taken,”, she said presently, after wrapping up the tooth-brush. “First they took Hans, my eldest. He was killed almost at once—at Liège. Then they took my second-born, Friedrich. He was killed at Ypres. Next, Wilhelm died—in hospital at Brussels. He had both his legs blown off. Last they took little Karl, my youngest. He was killed by an air-bomb, far behind the lines, near Valenciennes.”

A tear splashed on the bit of paper in which she had wrapped the tooth-brush. She wiped it away with her apron.

“My man and I are now alone,” she said, handing us the packet. “We are too old to have more children. We sit and talk of our sons who are dead, and wonder why God did not stop the war.”

“It is sad,” said Brand. He could find nothing else to say. Not with this woman could he argue about German guilt.

"*Ja, es ist traurig*."

She took the money with a "*Danke schön*."

In the town of Mürren I spent some time with Brand and others in. the barracks where a number of trench-mortars and machine-guns were being handed over by German officers according to the terms of the Armistice. The officers were mostly young men, extremely polite, anxious to save us any kind of trouble, marvellous in their concealment of any kind of humiliation they may have felt—*must* have felt—in this delivery of arms. They were confused only for one moment, and that was when a boy with a wheelbarrow trundled by with a load of German swords—elaborate parade swords with gold hilts.

One of them laughed and passed it off with a few words in English.

"There goes the old pomp and glory—-to the rubbish-heap!"

Brand made things easier by a tactful sentence.

"The world will be happier when we are all disarmed."

A non-commissioned officer talked to me. He had been a hairdresser in Bayswater and a machine-gunner in Flanders. He was a little fellow with a queer cockney accent.

"Germany is *kaput*. We shall have a bad time in front of us. No money. No trade. All the same, it will be better in the long run. No more conscription; no more filthy war. We're all looking to President Wilson and his 'Fourteen Points.' There is the hope of the world. We can hope for a good peace—fair all round. Of course we'll have to pay, but we shall get liberty, like in England."

Was the man sincere? Were any of these people sincere? Or were they crawling, fawning, hiding their hatred, ready for any treachery? I could not make up my mind....

We went into Cologne some days before our programme at the urgent request of the *Burgermeister*. We were invited in! The German seamen of the Grand Fleet had played the devil, as in all the towns they had passed through. They had established a Soldiers' and Workmen's Council on the Russian system, raised the Red Flag, liberated the criminals from the prisons. Shops had been sacked, houses looted. The *Burgermeister* desired British troops to ensure law and order.

There was no disorder visible when we entered Cologne. The revolutionaries had disappeared. The streets were thronged with middle-class folk, among whom were thousands of men who had taken off their uniforms a few days before our coming, or had "civilised" themselves by tearing off their shoulder-straps and badges. As our first squadron rode into the great cathedral square on the way to the Hohenzollem Bridge many people in the crowds turned their heads away and did not glance at the British cavalry. We were deliberately ignored, and I thought that for the Germans it was the best attitude, with most dignity. Others stared gravely at the passing cavalcade, showing no excitement, no hostility, no friendliness, no emotion of any kind. Here and there I met eyes which were regarding me with a dark, brooding look, and others in which there was profound melancholy. That night, when I wandered out alone and lost my way, and asked for direction, two young men, obviously officers until a few days back, walked part of the way to put me right and said "*Bitte schön! Bitte!*" when I thanked them, and saluted with the utmost courtesy.... I wondered what would have happened in London if we had been defeated and if German officers had walked out alone at night and lost themselves in by-streets and asked the way. Imagination fails before such a thought. Certainly our civility would not have been so easy. We could not have hidden our hatred like that, if these were hiding hatred.

Somehow, I could not find even the smouldering fires of hate in any German with whom I spoke that day. I could find only a kind of dazed and stupor-like recognition of defeat, a deep sadness among humble people, a profound anxiety as to the future fate of a ruined Germany, and a hope in the justice of England and America.

A score of us had luncheon at the Domhof Hotel, opposite the cathedral which Harding had hoped to see in flames. The manager bowed us in as if we had been distinguished visitors in time of peace. The head-waiter handed us the menu and regretted that there was not much choice of food, though they had scoured the country to provide for us. He and six other waiters spoke good English, learnt in London, and seemed to have had no interruption in their way of life, in spite of war. They were not rusty in their art, but masters of its service according to tradition. Yet they had all been in the fighting-ranks until the day of Armistice, and the head-waiter, a man of forty, with hair growing grey and the look of one who had spent years in a study rather than in front-line trenches after table management, told me that he had been three times wounded in Flanders, and in the last phase had been a machine-gunner in the rearguard actions round Grevilliers and Bapaume. He revealed his mind to me between the soup and the stew—strange talk from a German waiter.

"I used to ask myself a hundred thousand times, 'Why am I here—in this mud—fighting against the English whom I know and like? What devil's meaning is there in all this? What are the evil powers that have forced us to this insane massacre?' I thought I should go mad, and I desired death."

I did not argue with him, for the same reason that Brand and I did not argue with the woman behind the counter who had lost four sons. I did not say, "Your war lords were guilty of this war. The evil passion and philosophy of you German people brought this upon the world—your frightfulness." I listened to a man who had been stricken by tragedy, who had passed through its horrors and was now immensely sad.

At a small table next to us were the boy who had led the first cavalry patrol and two fellow-officers. They were not eating their soup. They were talking to the waiter, a young fellow who was making a map with knives and spoons.

"This is the village of Fontaine Notre Dame," he said. "I was just here with my machine-gun when you attacked."

"Extraordinary!" said one of the young cavalry officers. "I was here, at the corner of this spoon, lying on my belly with my nose in the mud—scared stiff."

The German waiter and the three officers laughed together. Something had happened which had taken away from them the desire to kill each other. Our officers did not suspect there might be poison in their soup. The young waiter was not nervous lest one of the knives he laid should be thrust into his heart....

Some nights later I met Wickham Brand in the Hohestrasse. He took me by the arm and laughed in a

strange, ironical way.

"What do you think of it all?" he asked.

I told him that if old men from St. James's Street clubs in London, and young women in the suburbs clamouring for the Kaiser's head, could be transported straight to Cologne without previous warning of the things they would see, they would go raving mad.

Brand agreed.

"It knocks one edgewise—even those of us who understand."

We stood on one side, by a shop window filled with beautiful porcelain-ware, and watched the passing crowd. It was a crowd of German middle-class, well dressed, apparently well fed. The girls wore heavy furs. The men were in black coats and bowler hats, or in military overcoats and felt hats. Among them, not aloof, but mingling with them, laughing with them, were English and Canadian soldiers. Many of them were arm-in-arm with German girls. Others were surrounded by groups of young Germans who had been, unmistakably, soldiers until a few weeks earlier. English-speaking Germans were acting as interpreters in the exchange of experiences, gossip, opinions. The German girls needed no interpreters. Their eyes spoke, and their laughter.

Brand and I went into an immense *café* called the "Germania," so densely crowded that we had to wander round to find a place, foggy with tobacco-smoke through which electric light blazed, noisy with the music of a loud, unceasing orchestra, which, as we entered, was playing selections from "Patience." Here also were many English and Canadian officers and men, sitting at the same tables with Germans, who laughed and nodded at them, clinked their mugs or wine-glasses with them, and raised bowler hats to British Tommies when they left the tables with friendly greetings on both sides. There was no orgy here, no impropriety. Some of the soldiers were becoming slightly fuddled with Rhine wine, but not noisily. "Glad eyes" were passing between them and German girls, or conversations made up by winks and signs and oft-repeated words, but all quietly and respectfully in outward behaviour.

Brand and I were wedged close to a table at which sat one of our sergeant-majors, a corporal, a middle-aged German woman, and two German girls. One of the girls spoke English remarkably well, and the conversation of our two men was directed to her, and through her to the others. Brand and I were eavesdroppers.

"Tell your ma," said the sergeant-major, "that I shouldn't have been so keen to fight Germans if I had known they were such pleasant, decent people, as far as I find 'em at present, and I take people as I find 'em."

The girl translated to her mother and sister and then answered: "My mother says the war was prepared by the rich people in Europe, who made the people mad by lies."

"Ah," said the sergeant-major, "I shouldn't wonder! I know some of them swine. All the same, of course, you began it, you know."

There was another translation, and the girl answered again: "My mother says the Germans didn't begin it. The Russians began it by moving their armies. The Russians hated us and wanted war."

The sergeant-major gave a snort of laughter.

"The Russians?... They soon tired of it, anyhow. Let us all down, eh?"

"What about atrocities?'' said the corporal, who was a cockney.

"Atrocities?" said the English-speaking girl. "Oh, yes, there were many. The Russians were very cruel."

"Come oft it," said the corporal. "I mean German atrocities."

"German?" said the girl. "No, our soldiers were well behaved—always! There were many lies told in the English papers." *

"That's true enough," said the sergeant-major. "Lies? Why, they fed us up with lies. 'The Germans are starving. The Germans are on their last legs.' 'The great victory at Neuve Chapelle.' God! I was in that great victory. The whole battalion cut to pieces and not an officer left. A bloody shambles—and no sense in it.... Another drop of wine, my dear?"

"Seems to me," said the cockney corporal, "that there was a deal of dirty work on both sides. I'm not going to say there wasn't no German atrocities—lies or no lies—becos saw a few of 'em myself, an' no mistake. But what I says now is what I says when I lay in the lousy trenches with five-point-nines busting down the parapets. The old devil 'as got us all by the legs!' I said, and 'ad a fellow-feelin' for the poor blighters on the other side of the barbed wire lying in the same old mud. Now I'm beginning to think the Germans are the same as us, no better nor no worse, I reckon. Any 'ow, you can tell your sister, miss, that I like the way she does 'er 'air. It reminds me of my Liz."

The English-speaking German girl did not understand this speech. She appealed to the sergeant-major.

"What does your friend say?"

The sergeant-major roared with laughter..

"My chum says that a pretty face cures a lot of ill-feeling. Your sister is a sweet little thing, he says. *Comprenney?* Perhaps you had better not translate that part to your ma. Have another drop of wine, my dear."

Presently the party rose from the table and went out, the sergeant-major paying for the drinks in a lordly way and saying, "After you, ma'am," to the mother of the two girls.

"All this," said Brand when they had gone, "is very instructive.... And I've been making discoveries."

"What kind?"

Brand looked away into the vista of the room, and his eyes roved about the tables where other soldiers of ours sat with other Germans.

"I've found out," he said, "that the British hatred of a nation breaks down in the presence of its individuals. I've discovered that it is not in the character of English fighting-men—Canadian, too, by the look of it—to demand vengeance from the innocent for the sins of the guilty. I'm seeing that human nature, ours anyhow,

swings back to the normal as soon as an abnormal strain is released. It is normal in human nature to be friendly towards its kind, in spite of five years' education in savagery."

I doubted that, and told him so, remembering scenes in Ghent and Lille, and that girl Marthe, and the woman of Venders. That shook Brand a little from his new point of view, and he shifted his ground with the words: "Perhaps I'm wrong there."

'He told me of other "discoveries" of his, after conversation with many German people, explaining perhaps the lack of hostility and humiliation which had surprised us all. They were glad to see the English because they were afraid of the French and Belgians, with their desire for vengeance. They believed in English fair-play in spite of all the wild propaganda of the war. Now that the Kaiser had fled and Germany was a Republic, they believed that, in spite of defeat and great ruin, there would be a peace which would give them a chance of recovery, and a new era of liberty, according to the pledges of President Wilson and the terms of the "Fourteen Points." They believed they had been beaten by the hunger blockade, and not by the failure of the German Armies in the field, and they would not admit that as a people they were more guilty in the war than any others of the fighting nations.

"It is a sense of guilt," said Brand, "that must be brought home to them. They must be convinced of that before they can get clean again and gain the world's forgiveness."

He leaned over the table with his square face in the palms of his hands.

"God knows," he said, "that there was evil on both sides. We have our Junkerdom, too. The philosophy of our old men was not shining in its Christian charity. We share the guilt of the war. Still, the Germans the aggressors. They must acknowledge that."

"The German war lords and militarists," I suggested. "Not that woman who lost her four sons, nor peasants dragged from their ploughs, ignorant of *Welt-politik*."

"It's all a muddle," said Brand. "I can't sort it out. I'm full of bewilderment and contradictions. Sometimes when I look at these Germans in the streets, some of them so smug, I shudder and say, 'These are the people who killed my pals,' and I'm filled with cold rage. But when they tell me all they suffered, and their loathing of the war, I pity them and say, 'They were trapped, like we were, by false ideas, and false systems, and the foul lies of politicians, and the dirtiness of old diplomacy, and the philosophy of Europe leading up to that."

Then he told me something which interested me more at the time than his groping to find truth, because a touch of personal drama is always more striking to the mind than general aspects and ideas.

"I'm billeted at the house of Franz von Kreuzenach. You remember?—Eileen's friend."

I was astounded at that.

"What an amazing coincidence!"

"It was no coincidence," he said. "I arranged it. I had that letter to deliver, and I wanted to meet the fellow. As yet, however, I have only seen his mother and sister. They are very civil."

So did Wickham Brand "ask for trouble," as soldiers say, and certainly he found it before long.

IV

The first meeting between Wickham Brand and young Franz von Kreuzenach had been rather dramatic, according to my friend's account of it, and he did not dramatise his stories much, in spite of being (before the war) an unsuccessful novelist. It had happened on the third night after his presentation of the billeting-paper which by military right of occupation ordered the owners of the house to provide a bedroom and sitting-room for an officer. There had been no trouble about that. The *Madchen* who had answered the door of the big white house in a side street off the Kaiserring had dropped a curtsey, and in answer to Brand's fluent and polite German said at once, "*Kommmen Sie herein, bitte*," and took him into a drawing-room to the right of the hall, leaving him there while she went to fetch "*die gnadige Baronin*," that is to say, the Baroness von Kreuzenach. Brand remained standing, and studied the German drawing-room to read its character as a key to that of the family under whose roof he was coming by right of conquest, for that, in plain words, was the meaning of his presence.

It was a large square room, handsomely and heavily furnished in an old-fashioned style, belonging perhaps to the Germany of Bismarck, but with here and there in its adornment a lighter and more modern touch. On one wall, in a gilt frame to which fat gilt cupids clung, was a large portrait of William I. of Prussia, and on the wall opposite, in a similar frame, a portrait of the ex-Kaiser William II. Brand saw also, with an instant thrill of remembrance, two large steel engravings from Winterhalter's portraits of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. He had seen them, as a child, in his grandfather's house at Kew, and in the houses of schoolfellows' grandfathers, who cherished these representations of Victoria and Albert with almost religious loyalty. The large square of Turkey carpet on polished boards, a mahogany sideboard, and some stiff big armchairs of clumsily carved oak, were reminiscent of German furniture and taste in the period of the mid-nineteenth century, when ours was equally atrocious. The later period had obtruded itself into that background. There was a piano in white wood at one end of the room, and here and there light chairs in the "New Art" style of Germany, with thin legs and straight uncomfortable backs. The most pleasing things in the room were some porcelain figures of Saxon and Hanover ware, little German ladies with pleated gowns and low-necked bodices, and, on the walls, a number of water-colour drawings, mostly of English scenes, delicately done, with vision and a nice sense of atmosphere.

“The younger generation thrusting out the old,” thought Brand, “and the spirit of both of them destroyed by what has happened in five years.”

The door opened, he told me, when he had taken stock of his surroundings, and there came in two women, one middle-aged the other young. He guessed that he was in the presence of Frau von Kreuzenach and her daughter, and made his bow, with an apology for intruding upon them. He hoped that they would not be in the least degree disturbed by his billeting-order. He would need only a bedroom and his breakfast.

The Baroness was courteous but rather cold in her dignity. She was a handsome woman of about forty-eight, with very fair hair streaked with grey, and a thin, aristocratic type of face, with thin lips. She wore a black silk dress with some fur round her shoulders.

“It will be no inconvenience to us, sir,” she answered in good English, a little hard and over-emphasised. “Although the English people are pleased to call us Huns”—here she laughed good-humouredly—“I trust that you will not be too uncomfortable in a German house, in spite of the privations due to our misfortunes and the severity of your blockade.”

In that short speech there was a hint of hostility—masked under a graciousness of manner—which Wickham Brand did not fail to perceive.

“As long as it is not inconvenient——” he said awkwardly.

It was the daughter who now spoke, and Brand was grateful for her friendly words and impressed by her undeniable and exceptional good looks. That she was the daughter of the older woman was clear at a glance. She had the same thin face and fair hair, but youth was on her side, and her finely-chiselled features had no hardness of line that comes from age or bitterness. Her hair was like spun gold, as one sees it in Prussia more, I fancy, than in southern Germany, and her complexion was that perfect rose-red and lily-white which often belongs to German girls, and is doll-like if they are soft and plump, as many are. This girl’s fault was thinness, but to Brand, not a sentimentalist nor quickly touched by feminine influence (I have written that, but on second thoughts believe that under Brand’s ruggedness there was a deep strain of sentiment, approaching weakness), she seemed flower-like and spiritual. So he told me after his early acquaintance with her.

Her first words to him were charming.

“We have suffered very much from the war, sir, but we welcome you to our house, not as an enemy, because the war finished with the Armistice, but as an Englishman who may come to be our friend.”

“Thanks,” said Brand.

He could find nothing else to say at the moment, but spoke that one word gratefully.

The mother added something to her daughter’s speech.

“We believed the English were our friends before they declared war upon us. We were deeply saddened by our mistake.”

“It was inevitable,” said Brand, “after what had happened.”

The daughter—her name was Elsa—put her hand on her mother’s arm with a quick gesture of protest against any other words about the war.

“I will show Captain Brand to his rooms.”

Brand wondered at her quickness in knowing his name after one glance at his billeting-paper, and said, “Please do not trouble, *gnàdiges Fraulein*,” when he saw a look of disapproval, almost of alarm, on the mother’s face.

“It will be better for Truda to show the gentleman to his rooms. I will ring for her.”

Elsa von Kreuzenach challenged her mother’s authority by a smile of amusement, and there was a slight deepening of that delicate colour in her face. “Truda is boiling the usual cabbage for the usual *Mittagessen.* I will go, mother.”

She turned to Brand with a smile and bowed to him.

“I will act as your guide upstairs, Captain Brand. After that you may find your own way. It is not difficult.”

Brand, who described the scene to me, told me that the girl went very quickly up a wide flight of stairs so that in his big riding boots he found it difficult to keep pace with her. She went down a long corridor lined with etchings on the walls, and opened a white door leading into a big room furnished as a library. There was a wood fire burning there, and at a glance Brand noticed one or two decorations on the walls—a pair of foils with a fencing-mask and gauntlets, some charcoal drawings—one of a girl’s head, which was this girl’s when that gold hair of hers hung in two Gretchen pig-tails—and some antlers.

“Here you can sit and smoke your pipe,” said Elsa von Kreuzenach. “Also, if you are bored, you can read those books. You see we have many English authors—Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, G. K. Chesterton, Kipling—heaps. My brother and I used to read all we could get of English books.”

Brand remembered that Franz von Kreuzenach had read Kipling. He had quoted “Puck of Pook’s Hill” to Eileen O’Connor.

“Now and then,” he said, “I may read a little German.”

“Pooh!” said the girl. “It is so dull, most of it. Not exciting, like yours.”

She opened another door.

“Here is your bedroom. It used to belong to my brother Heinrich.”

“Won’t he want it?” asked Brand.

He could have bitten his tongue out for that question when the girl answered it.

“He was killed in Flanders.”

A sudden sadness took possession of her eyes and Brand said, “I’m sorry.”

“Yes. I was sorry, too, and wept for weeks. He was a nice boy, so jolly, as you say. He would have been an artist if he had lived. All those charcoal sketches are by him.”

She pointed to the drawing of a young man's head over the dressing-table.

"That is my brother Franz. He is home again, *Gott sei dank!* Heinrich worshipped him."

Brand looked at the portrait of the man who had saved Eileen O'Connor. He had Eileen's letter to him in his pocket. It was a good-looking head, clean-cut, with frank eyes, rather noble.

"I hope we shall meet one day," said Brand.

Elsa von Kreuzenach seemed pleased with those words.

"He will like to meet you—ever so much. You see, he was educated at Oxford, and does not forget his love for England."

"In spite of the war?" asked Brand.

The girl put both her hands to her breast.

"The war!" she said. "Let us forget the years when we all went mad. It was a madness of hate and of lies and of ignorance—on both sides. The poor people in all countries suffered for the sins of the wicked men who made this war against our will and called out our evil passions. The wicked men in England were as bad as those in Germany. Now it is for good people to build up a new world out of the ruins that war made, the ruin of hearts."

She asked a direct question of Brand, earnestly.

"Are you one of those who will go on hating?"

Brand hesitated. He could not forget many things. He knew, so he told me, that he had not yet killed the old hatred that had made him a sniper in No Man's Land. Many times it surged up again. He could not forgive the Germans for many cruelties. To this girl, then, he hedged a little.

"The future must wipe out the past. The peace must not be for vengeance."

At those last words the blue eyes of Elsa von Kreuzenach lighted up gladly.

"That is the old English spirit! I have said to my mother and father a thousand times, 'England is generous at heart. She loves fair play. Now that victory is hers she will put away base passions and make a noble peace that will help us out of our agony and ruin. All our hope is with England, and with the American President, who is the noblest man on earth.'"

"And your father and mother?" asked Brand. "What do they say?"

The girl smiled rather miserably.

"They belong to the old school. Franz and I are of the younger generation... My father denounces England as the demon behind all the war-devils, and little mother finds it hard to forgive England for joining the war against us, and because the English Army killed Heinrich. You must be patient with them."

She spoke as though Brand belonged already to their family life and would need great tact.

She moved towards the door, and stood framed there in its white woodwork, a pretty figure.

"We have two maidservants for this great house," she said. "The war has made us poor. Truda and Gretchen they are called. They are both quarrelling for the pleasure of waiting on you. They are both frightfully excited to have an English officer in the house."

"Queer!" said Brand, laughing.

"Why queer?" asked Elsa von Kreuzenach. "I am a little excited, too."

She made a half-curtsey, like an early Victorian girl; and then closed his door, and Brand was sorry, as he told me quite frankly, that he was left alone.

"The girl's a pretty piece of Dresden china," he said.

When I chaffed him with a "Take care, old lad!" he only growled and muttered, "Oh, to hell with that! I suppose I can admire a pretty thing, even if it's made in Germany?"

Brand told me that he met Elsa's father and brother on the third evening that he slept in the Kreuzenachs' house. When he arrived that evening at about five o'clock, the maid-servant, Truda, who "did" his bedroom and dusted his sitting-room with a German passion for cleanliness and with many conversational advances, informed him with a look of mysterious importance that the "Old Man" wanted to see him in the drawing-room.

"What old man?" asked Brand, at which Truda giggled and said, "The old Herr Baron."

"He hates the English like ten thousand devils," added Truda confidentially.

"Perhaps I had better not go then," was Brand's answer.

Truda told him that he would have to go. When the old Herr Baron asked for a thing it had to be given him. The only person who dared to disobey him was Frâulein Elsa, who was very brave and a "*hubsches Madchen.*"

Brand braced himself for the interview, but felt extremely nervous when Truda rapped at the drawingroom door, opened it, and announced in German: "The English officer!"

The family von Kreuzenach was in full strength, obviously waiting for his arrival. The Baroness was in an evening gown, of black silk showing her bare neck and arms. She was sitting stiffly in a high-backed chair by the piano, and was very handsome in her cold way.

Her husband, General von Kreuzenach, was pretending to read a book by the fireside. He was a tall, bald-headed, heavy-jowled man with a short white moustache. The ribbon of the Iron Cross was fastened to the top buttonhole of his frock-coat.

Elsa was sitting on a stool by his side, and on a low seat, with his back to the fire, was a tall young man with his left arm in a sling, whom Brand knew at once to be Franz von Kreuzenach, Eileen O'Connor's friend.

When Brand came into the room everybody rose in a formal, frightening way, and Elsa's mother rose very graciously and spoke to her husband.

"This, Baron, is Captain Brand, the English officer who is billeted in our house."

The Baron bowed stiffly to Brand.

"I hope, sir, that my servants are attending to your needs in every way. I beg of you to believe that as an old soldier I wish to fulfil my duty as an officer and a gentleman, however painful the circumstances in which you find us."

Brand replied with equal gravity, regretting his intrusion, and expressing his gratitude for the great courtesy that had been shown to him. Curiously, he told me, he had a strong temptation to laugh. The enormous formality of the reception touched some sense of absurdity so that he wanted to laugh loudly and wildly. Probably that was sheer nervousness.

"Permit me to present my son," said the lady. "Lieutenant Franz von Kreuzenach."

The young man came forward and clicked heels in the German fashion, but his way of shaking hands and his easy "How do you do?" were perfectly English. For a moment Brand met his eyes, and found them frank and friendly. He had a vision of this man sitting in Eileen O'Connor's room, gazing at her with love in his eyes, and, afterwards, embarrassed, shameful, and immensely sad in that trial scene.

Elsa also shook hands with him and helped to break the hard ice of ceremony.

"My brother is very glad to meet you. He was at Oxford, you know. Come and sit here. You will take tea, I am sure."

They had prepared tea for him specially, and Elsa served it like an English girl, charmingly.

Brand was not an easy conversationalist. His drawingroom manners were *gauche* always, and that evening in the German drawing-room he felt, he told me, "a perfect fool," and could think of no small talk. Franz von Kreuzenach helped him out by talking about Oxford, and Brand felt more at ease when he found that the young German officer knew some of his old college friends and described a "rag" in his own third year. The old Baron sat stiffly, listening with mask-like gravity to this conversation. Elsa laughed without embarrassment at her brother's description of à "debagging" incident, when the trousers of a proctor had been removed in "the High," and the Frau von Kreuzenach permitted herself a wintry smile.

"Before the war," she said, "we wished our children to get an English education. Elsa went to a school at Brighton. We were very fond of England."

The general joined in the conversation for the first time.

"It was a weakness. Without offence, sir, I think that our German youth would have been better employed at German universities, where education is more seriously regarded, and where the national spirit is fostered and strengthened."

Brand announced that he had been to Heidelberg University, and agreed that German students take their studies more seriously than English.

"We go to our universities for character more than for knowledge."

"Yes," said the elder von Kreuzenach. "It is there the English learn their Imperialism and political ambitions. From their point of view they are right. English pride—so arrogant—is a great strength."

Franz von Kreuzenach toned down his father's remark.

"My father uses the word pride in its best sense—pride of race and tradition. Personally, what struck me most at Oxford was the absence of all deliberate philosophical influence. The men were very free in their opinions. Most of those in my set were anti-imperialists and advanced Liberals, in a light-hearted way. But I fancy most of them did not worry very much about political ideas. They were up for 'a good time,' and made the most of youth, in sport and companionship. They laughed enormously. I think the Germans laugh too little. We are lacking in a national sense of humour, except of a coarse and rustic type."

"I entirely disagree with you, Franz," said the elder man sternly. "I find my own sense of humour sufficiently developed. You are biassed by your pro-English sympathy, which I find extraordinary and regrettable after what has happened."

He turned to Brand and said that as a soldier he would understand that courtesy to individuals did not abolish the sacred duty of hating a country which was essentially hostile to his own in spirit and in act.

"England," he added, "has behaved in an unforgivable way. For many years before the war she plotted the ruin of Germany in alliance with Russia and France. She challenged Germany's trade interests and national development in every part of the globe, and built a great fleet for the sole purpose of preventing Germany's colonial expansion. England has always been our enemy since she became aware of our increasing strength, for she will brook no rival. I do not blame her, for that is the right of her national egotism. But as a true German I have always recognised the inevitability of our conflict."

Brand had no need to answer this denunciation, for Elsa von Kreuzenach broke into her father's speech impatiently.

"You are too bad, father! Captain Brand does not wish to spend the evening in political argument. You know what Franz and I think. We believe that all the evil of the war was caused by silly old hatred and greedy rivalries. Isn't the world big enough for the free development of all its peoples? If not, then life is not worth living, and the human race must go on killing each other until the world is a wilderness."

"I agree," said Brand, looking at Elsa. "The peoples of Europe must resist all further incitements to make war on each other. Surely the American President has given us all a new philosophy by his call for a League of Nations, and his promise of peace without vengeance, with the self-determination of peoples."

"That is true," said Franz von Kreuzenach. "The Allies are bound by Wilson's 'Fourteen Points.' We agreed to the Armistice on that basis, and it is because of the promise that lies in those clauses—the charter of a New World—that the German people, and the Austrians, accept their defeat with resignation, and look forward with hope—in spite of our present ruin—to a greater liberty and to a more beautiful democracy."

"Yes," said Elsa, "what my brother says, Captain Brand, explains the spirit with which your English soldiers have been received on the Rhine. Perhaps you expected hostility, hatred, black looks? No, the German people welcome you, and your American comrades, because the bitterness of defeat is softened by the knowledge that there is to be no more bloodshed—alas, we are drained of blood!—and that the peace will begin a nobler

age in history for all of us."

The general shifted in his chair so that it scraped the polished boards. A deep wave of colour swept up to his bald head.

"Defeat?" he said. "My son and daughter talk of defeat!... There was no defeat. The German Armies were invincible to the last. They never lost a battle. They fell back, not because of their own failure but because the heart of the German people was sapped by the weakness of hunger, caused by the infamous English blockade, which starved our women and children. *Ja*, even our manhood was weakened by starvation. Still more, our civilians were poisoned by a pestilential heresy learnt in Russia, a most damnable pacifism, which destroyed their will to win. Our glorious armies were stabbed in the back by anarchy and treachery."

"It is defeat, sir, all the same," said Franz von Kreuze-nach, with grim deference, to his father. "Let us face the tragedy of the facts. As an officer of the rearguard defence, I have to admit, too, that the German Armies were beaten in the field. Our war machine was worn out and disintegrated by the repeated blows that struck us. Our man-power was exhausted, and we could no longer resist the weight of the Allied Armies. The Americans had immense reserves of men to throw in against us. We could only save ourselves by retreat. Field Marshal von Hindenburg himself has admitted that."

The general's face was no longer flushed with angry colour. He was very white, with a kind of dead look, except for the smouldering fire of his eyes. He spoke in a low, choking voice, in German.

"If I had known that a son of mine, bearing the name of Franz von Kreuzenach, would have admitted the defeat of the German Army before an officer of an enemy power I would have strangled him at birth."

He grasped the arms of his chair and made one or two efforts to rise, but could not do so.

"Anna!" he commanded harshly, to his wife, "give me your arm. This officer will excuse me, I trust. I feel unwell."

Franz von Kreuzenach went quickly over to his father, before his mother could rise.

"Father, I deeply regret having pained you. The truth is tragic enough——"

The old man answered him ferociously.

"You have not spoken truth, but lies. You are a disgrace to the rank of a German officer and to my name. You have been infected by the poison of socialism and anarchy. Anna—your arm!"

Elsa's mother stooped over her husband and lifted his hand to her lips.

"*Mein lieber Mann*," she said very softly.

The old man rose stiffly, leaning on his wife's arm, and bowed to Brand.

"I beg you to excuse me, sir. As a German soldier I do not admit the words 'defeat' or 'retreat,' even when spoken within my own household. The ever-glorious German Army has never been defeated, and has never retreated—except according to plan. I wish you goodnight."

Brand was standing, and bowed to the general in silence.

It was a silence which lasted after the husband and wife had left the room. The girl Elsa was mopping her eyes. Franz von Kreuzenach stood, very pale, by the empty chair in which his father had sat. He was the first to speak.

"I'm awfully sorry. I ought not to have spoken like that before my father. He belongs to the old school."

Brand told me that he felt abominably uncomfortable, and wished with all his heart that he had not been billeted in this German house.

Elsa rose quickly and put her hand on her brother's arm.

"I am glad you spoke as you did, Franz. It is hateful to hurt our dear father, but it is necessary to tell the truth now, or we cannot save ourselves, and there will be no new era in the world. It is the younger generation that must re-shape the world, and that cannot be done if we yield to old falsehoods and go the way of old traditions."

Franz raised his sister's hand to his lips, and Brand told me that his heart softened at the sight of that caress, as it had when Elsa's mother kissed the hand of her old husband. It seemed to him symbolical of the two generations, standing together, the old against the young, the young against the old.

"In England, also," he said, "we have those who stand by hate, and those who would break with the old traditions and forget, as soon as possible, old enmities."

"It is the new conflict," said Franz von Kreuzenach solemnly. "It will divide the world and many houses, as Christ's gospel divided father from son and blood-brothers. It is the new agony."

"The new hope," said Elsa passionately.

Brand made an early excuse to retire to his room, and Franz von Kreuzenach conducted him upstairs and carried his candlestick.

"Thanks," said Brand, in the doorway of his room. Then suddenly he remembered Eileen O'Connor's letter, and put his hand into his breast-pocket for his case.

"I have a letter for you," he said.

"So?" The young German was surprised.

"From a lady in Lille," said Brand. "Miss Eileen O'Connor."

Franz von Kreuzenach started violently, and for a moment or two he was incapable of speech. When he took the letter from Brand his hand trembled.

"You know her?" he said at last.

"I knew her in old days and met her in Lille," answered

Brand. "She told me of your kindness to her. I promised to thank you when I met you. I do so now."

He held out his hand and Franz von Kreuzenach grasped it in a hard grip.

"She is well?" he asked, with deep emotion.

“Well and happy,” said Brand.

“That is good.”

The young German was immensely embarrassed, absurdly self-conscious and shy.

“In Lille,” he said, “I had the honour of her friendship.”

“She told me,” answered Brand. “I saw some of your songs in her room.”

“Yes, I sang to her.”

Franz von Kreuzenach laughed awkwardly. Then suddenly a look of something like fear—certainly alarm—changed his expression.

“I must beg of you to keep secret any knowledge of my—my friendship—with that lady. She acted—rashly. If it were known, even by my father, that I did—what I did—my honour, perhaps even my life, would be unsafe. You understand, I am sure.”

“Perfectly,” said Brand.

“As a German officer,” said Franz von Kreuzenach, “I took great risk.”

He emphasised his words.

“As a German officer I took liberties with my duty—because of a higher law.”

“A higher law than discipline,” said Brand. “Perhaps a nobler duty than the code of a German officer.”

He spoke with a touch of irony, but Franz von Kreuzenach was unconscious of that.

“Our duty to God,” he said gravely. “Human pity. Love.”

An expression of immense sentiment filled his eyes An Englishman would have masked it more guardedly.

“Good-night,” said Brand, “and thanks again.”

The young German clicked his heels and bowed.

“Good-night, sir.”

Brand went to bed in a leisurely way, and before sleeping heard a violin being played in the room above his own. By the tune he remembered the words of an old song, as Eileen O’Connor had sung it in Lille, and as he had learnt it in his own home before the war.

“There’s one that is pure as an angel,
And fair as the flowers of May,
They call her the gentle maiden
Wherever she takes her way.”

Franz von Kreuzenach was having an orgy of sentiment, and Brand, somehow, envied him.

V

Our entry into Cologne and life among the people whom we had been fighting for four years and more was an amazing psychological experience, and not one of us there on the Rhine could escape its subtle influence upon our opinions and subconscious state of mind. Some of our officers, I am sure, were utterly unaware of the change being wrought in them by daily association with German civilians. They did not realise how, day by day, their old beliefs on the subject of “the Hun” were being broken down by contact with people who behaved with dignity for the most part, and according to the ordinary rules of human nature. Charles Fortune, our humorist, delighted to observe these things, and his irony found ready targets in Cologne, both among British officers and German civilians, neither of whom he spared. I remember that I was walking one day down Hohestrasse with young Harding, after the proclamation had been issued (and enforced with numerous arrests and fines by the A.P.M. and the military police) that all German civilians were to salute British officers by doffing their hats in the streets. The absurdity of it was so great that in a crowded street..like the Hohestrasse the civilian people would have had to remain bareheaded, owing to the constant passing of our officers.

Fortune saluted Harding and myself not only with one hand but with two. He wore his “heroic” face, wonderfully noble and mystical.

“How great and glorious is the British Army!” he said. “How immense are the power and majesty of the temporary lieutenant! For four years and a half have we fought to crush militarism. Nine hundred thousand men of ours have died explosive deaths in order to abolish the philosophy of Zabernism—you remember!—the claim of the military caste to the servility of civilian salutes. Two million men of ours are blind, crippled, shell-shocked, as martyrs for democracy made free of Junkerdom by the crushing of the Hun. Now, by a slight error in logic (the beautiful inconsistency of our English character), we arrest, fine, or imprison any German man or child who does not bare his head before a little English subaltern from Peckham Rye or Tooting in a ‘Gor’blimy’ cap! How great and good we are! How free from hypocrisy! How splendid our victory for the little peoples of the earth!”

Young Harding, who had been returning salutes solemnly and mechanically to great numbers of Germans, flushed a little.

"I suppose it's necessary to enforce respect. All the same, it's a horrid bore."

Fortune wagged his hand behind his ear to an elderly German who took off his bowler hat. The man stared at him in a frightened way, as though the English officer had suddenly gone mad and might bite him.

"Strange!" said Fortune. "Not yet have they been taught the beauty of the Guards' salute. That man ought to be put into a dark cell, with bread and water, and torture from 9 a.m. till mid-day on Wednesdays and Fridays."

Fortune was vastly entertained by the sight of British soldiers walking about with German families in whose houses they were billeted. Some of them were arm-inarm with German girls, a sergeant-major was carrying a small flaxen-haired boy on whose sailor's cap was the word "*Vaterland*."

"Disgraceful!" said Fortune, looking sternly at Harding. "In spite of all our atrocity tales, our propaganda of righteous hate, our training of the young idea that a Hun must be killed at sight—'the only good German is a dead German,' as you remember, Harding—these soldiers of ours are fraternising with the enemy and flirting with the enemy's fair-haired daughters, and carrying infant Huns shoulder-high. Look at that sergeant-major forgetting all my propaganda. Surely he ought to cut the throat of that baby Hindenburg! My heart aches for Blear-eyed Bill, the Butcher of the Boche. All his work undone. All his fury fizzled. Sad! sad!" Harding looked profoundly uncomfortable at this sarcasm. He was billeted with a German family who treated him as an honoured friend. The mother, a dear old soul, as he reluctantly admitted, brought him an early cup of tea in the morning, with his shaving-water. Three times he had refused it, remembering his oath never to accept a favour from male or female Hun. On the fourth time his will-power weakened under the old lady's anxious solicitations and his desire for the luxury of tea before dressing. He said "*Danke schön*," and afterwards reproached himself bitterly for his feeble resistance. He was alarmed at his own change of heart towards these people. It was impossible for him to draw back solemnly or with pompous and aloof dignity when the old lady's grandchild, a little girl of six, waylaid him in the hall dropped a curtsey in the pretty German style, and then ran forward to kiss his hand and say, "*Guten Tag, Herr Offizier!*"

He bought a box of chocolate for her in the Hohestrasse and then walked with it irresolutely, tempted to throw it into the Rhine, or to give it to a passing Tommy. Half-an-hour later he presented it to little Elizabeth, who received it with a cry of delight, and, jumping on to his knee, kissed him effusively on both cheeks. Young Harding adored children, but felt as guilty at these German kisses as though he had betrayed his country and his faith.

One thing which acted in favour of the Germans was the lack of manners displayed by some young English officers in the hotels, restaurants, and shops. In all armies there are cads, and ours was not without them, though they were rare. The conditions of our military occupation with absolute authority over the civilian people provided a unique opportunity for the caddish instincts of "half-baked" youth. They came swaggering into Cologne determined to "put it across the Hun" and "to stand no nonsense." So they bullied frightened waiters, rapped their sticks on shop-counters, insulted German shop-girls, and talked loudly about "Hunnish behaviour" in restaurants where many Germans could hear and understand.

Harding, Fortune and I were in the Domhof Hotel when one such scene occurred. A group of noisy subalterns were disputing the cost of their meal and refusing to pay for the wine.

"You stole all the wine in Lille," shouted one lieutenant of ours. "I'm damned if I'll pay for wine in Cologne."

"I stole no wine in Lille, sir," said the waiter politely. "I was never there."

"Don't you insult English officers," said one of the other subalterns. "We are here to tread on your necks."

Fortune looked at me and raised his eye-brows.

"It isn't a good imitation," he said. "If they want to play the game of frightfulness, they really ought to do better than that. They don't even make the right kind of face."

Harding spoke bitterly.

"Cads!... Cads!... Somebody ought to put them under arrest."

"It doesn't really impress the Germans," said Fortune. "They know it's only make-believe. You see, the foolish boys are paying their bill. Now, if I, or Blear-eyed Bill, were to do the Junker stunt, we should at least look the real ogres."

He frowned horribly, puffed out his cheeks, and growled and grumbled with an air of senile ferocity—to the great delight of a young German waiter watching him from a corner of the room, and already aware that Fortune was a humorist.

The few cads among us caused a reaction in the minds of all men of good manners, so that they took the part of the Germans. Even various regulations and restrictions ordered by the military governor during the first few months of our occupation were resented more by British officers and men than by the Germans themselves. The opera was closed, and British officers said, "What preposterous nonsense! How are the poor devils going to earn their living, and how are we going to amuse ourselves?"

The wine-concerts and restaurants were ordered to shut down at ten o'clock, and again the British Army of Occupation "groused" exceedingly and said, "We thought this war had been fought for liberty. Why all this petty tyranny?" Presently these places were allowed to stay open till eleven, and all the way down the Hohestrasse, as eleven o'clock struck, one saw groups of British officers and men, and French and American officers, pouring out of a *Wein-stube, Kunstler Conzert or Bier-halle*, with farewell greetings or promises of further rendezvous with laughing German girls, who seemed to learn English by magic.

"Disgraceful!" said young Harding, who was a married man with a pretty wife in England for whom he yearned with a home-sickness which he revealed to me boyishly when we became closer friends in this German city.

"Not disgraceful," said the little American doctor, who had joined us in Cologne, "but only the fulfilment of nature's law, which makes man desire woman. Allah is great!... But juxtaposition is greater."

Dr. Small was friends with all of us, and there was not one among our crowd who had not an affection and admiration for this little man whose honesty was transparent, and whose vital nervous energy was like a fresh

wind to any company in which he found himself. It was Wickham Brand, however, who had captured the doctor's heart most of all, and I think I was his "second best." Anyhow, it was to me that he revealed his opinion of Brand, and some of his most intimate thoughts.

"Wickham has the quality of greatness," he said. "I don't mean to say he's great now. Not at all. I think he's fumbling and groping, not sure of himself, afraid of his best instincts, thinking his worst may be right. But one day he will straighten all that out and have a call as loud as a trumpet. What I like is his moodiness and bad temper."

"Queer taste, doctor!" I remarked. "When old Brand is in the sulks there's nothing doing with him. He's like a bear with a sore ear."

"Sure!" said Dr. Small. "That's exactly it. He is biting his own sore ear. I guess with him, though, it's a sore heart. He keeps moping and fretting and won't let his wounds heal. That's what makes him different from most others, especially you English. You go through frightful experiences and then forget them and say, 'Funny old world, young fellah! Come and have a drink.' You see civilisation rocking like a boat in a storm, but you say, in your English way, 'Why worry?'... Wickham worries. He wants to put things right, and make the world safer for the next crowd. He thinks of the boys who will have to fight in the next war—wants to save them from his agonies."

"Yes, he's frightfully sensitive underneath his mask of ruggedness," I said.

"And romantic," said the doctor.

"Romantic?"

"Why, yes. That girl, Eileen O'Connor, churned up his heart all right. Didn't you see the worship in his eyes? It made me feel good."

I laughed at the little doctor, and accused him of romanticism.

"Anyhow," I said, more seriously. "Eileen O'Connor is not without romance herself, and I don't know what she wrote in that letter to Franz von Kreuzenach, but I suspect she re-opened an episode which had best be closed.... As for Brand, I think he's asking for trouble of the same kind. If he sees much of that girl Elsa I won't answer for him. She's amazingly pretty, and full of charm from what Brand tells me."

"I guess he'll be a darned fool if he fixes up with that girl," growled the doctor.

"You're inconsistent," I said. "Are you shocked that Wickham Brand should fall in love with a German girl?"

"Not at all, sonny," said Dr. Small. "As a biologist I know you can't interfere with natural selection, and a pretty girl is an alluring creature, whether she speaks German or Icelandic. But this girl, Elsa von Kreuzenach, is not up to a high standard of eugenics."

I was amused by the doctor's scientific disapproval.

"What's wrong with her?" I asked. "And when did you meet her?"

"Sonny," said the doctor, "what do you think I've been doing all these weeks in Cologne? Drinking coffee at the Domhof Hotel with the A.P.M. and his soldier-policemen? Watching the dancing-girls every evening in wine-rooms like this?"

We sat in a *Wein-stube* as we talked, for the sake of light and a little music. It was typical of a score of others in Cologne, with settees of oak divided from each other in "cosy corners" hung with draperies of green and red silk; and little tables to which waiters brought relays of Rhine wines in tall thin bottles for the thirstiness of German civilians and British officers. At one end of the room was a small stage, and an orchestra composed of a pianist who seemed to be suffering from a mild form of shell-shock (judging from a convulsive twitch), a young German-Jew, who played the fiddle squeakily, and a thin, sad-faced girl behind a 'cello. Every now and then a bald-headed man in evening clothes mounted the stage and begged the attention of the company for a dance by the well-known artist Fraulein So-and-so. From behind a curtain near the wine-bar came a dancing-girl, in the usual ballet dress and the usual fixed and senseless smile, who proceeded to perform Pavlova effects on a stage two yards square, while the young Jew fiddler flattened himself against the side curtain with a restricted use of his bow, and the pianist with the shell-shock lurched sideways as he played to avoid her floppy skirts, and the girl behind the 'cello drew deep chords with a look of misery.

"These are pretty dull spots," I said to the little doctor, "but where have you been spending your time? And when did you meet Elsa von Kreuzenach?"

Dr. Small told me that he had been seeking knowledge in the only place where he could study social health and social disease—hospitals, work-shops, babies' *crèches*, slum tenements. He was scornful of English officers and correspondents who summed up the social state of Germany after a stroll down the Hohestrasse, a gorge of *ersatz* pastry ("Filth" he said) in the tea-shops, and a dinner of four courses in a big hotel on smuggled food at fantastic prices.

"You might as well judge Germany by the guzzling swine in this place as England by a party of profiteers at Brighton. The poor middle-classes and the labourers stay indoors after their day's job and do not exhibit their misery in the public ways."

"Real misery?" I asked. "Hunger?"

Dr. Small glowered at me through his goggles.

"Come and see. Come and see the mothers who have no milk for their babes, and the babes who are bulbousheaded, with rickets. Come and see the tenement lodgings where working families sit round cabbage soup as their chief meal, with bread that ties their entrails into knots but gives 'em a sense of fulness not enjoyed by those who have no bread. Man, it's awful. It tears at one's heart. But you needn't go into the slums to find hunger—four years of under-nourishment which has weakened growing girls so that they swoon at their work or fall asleep through weakness in the tram cars. In many of the big houses where life looks so comfortable, from which women come out in furs, looking so rich, these German people have not enough to eat, and what they eat is manufactured in the chemist's shop and the *ersatz* factories. I found that out from that girl, Elsa von Kreuzenach."

"How?" I asked.

"She is a nurse in a babies' *crèche*, poor child. Showed me round with a mother-look in her eyes, while all the scrofulous kiddies cried, '*Guten Tag! Guten Tag!*' like the quacking of ducks. 'After to-morrow,' she said, 'there will be no more milk for them. What can we do for them then, doctor? They will wither and die.' Those were her words, and I saw her sadness. I saw something else presently. I saw her sway a little, and she fell like that girl Marthe on the doorstep at Lille. 'For the love of Mike!' I said, and when she pulled round bullied her.

"'What did you have for breakfast?' I asked.

"'*Ersatz* coffee,' she said, laughing, 'and a bit of bread. A good *fruhstuck*, doctor.'

"'Good be hanged!' I said. 'What did you have for lunch?'

"'Cabbage soup and *ein kleines brodchen*,' she says. 'After four years one gets used to it.'

"'What will you have for dinner?' said I, not liking the look of things.

"She laughed, as though she saw a funny joke.

"'Cabbage soup and turnips,' she said, 'and a regular feast.'

"'I thought your father was a Baron,' I remarked in my sarcastic way.

"'That's true,' she says, 'and an honest man he is, and therefore poor. It is only the profiteers who feed well in Germany. All through the war they waxed fat on the flesh-and-blood of the men who fought and died. Now they steal the food of the poor by bribing the peasants to sell their produce at any price.' *Schleichandlung* is the word she used. That means 'smuggling.' It also means hell's torture, I hope, for those who do it.... So there you are. If Wickham Brand marries Elsa von Kreuze-nach, he marries a girl whose health has been undermined by four years' semi-starvation. What do you think their children will be? Rickety, tuberculous, undersized, weak-framed. Wickham Brand deserves better luck than that, sonny."

I roared with laughter at the little doctor, and told him he was looking too far ahead, as far as Brand and the German girl were concerned. This made him angry, in his humorous way, and he told me that those who don't look ahead fail to see the trouble under their nose until they fall over it.

We left the *Wein-stube* through a fog of smoke. Another dancing girl was on the tiny stage, waving her arms and legs. An English officer, slightly fuddled, was writing a cheque for his bill and persuading the German manager to accept it. Two young French officers were staring at the dancing-girl with hostile eyes. Five young Germans were noisy round six tall bottles of *Liebfraumilch*. The doctor and I walked down to the bank of the Rhine below the Hohenzollern bridge. Our sentries were there, guarding heavy guns which thrust their snouts up from tarpaulin covers.

Two German women passed, with dragging footsteps, and one said wearily, "*Ach, lieber Gott!*"

The doctor was silent for some time after his long monologue. He stared across the Rhine, on whose black surface lights glimmered with a milky radiance. Presently he spoke again, and I remember his words, which were, in a way, prophetic.

"These German people are broken. They *had* to be broken. They are punished. They *had* to be punished. Because they obeyed the call of their leaders, which was to evil, their power has been overthrown and their race made weak. You and I, an Englishman, an American, stand here, by right of victory, overlooking this river which has flowed through two thousand years of German history. It has seen the building-up of the German people, their industry, their genius, their racial consciousness. It has been in the rhythm of their poetry and has made the melody of their songs. On its banks lived the little people of German fairy-tales, and the heroes of their legends. Now there are English guns ready to fire across the water and English, French and American soldiers pacing this road along the Rhine, as victors and guards of victory. What hurt to the pride of this people! What a downfall! We must be glad of that because the German challenge to the world was not to be endured by free peoples. That is true, and nothing can ever alter its truth or make it seem false. I stand firm by that faith. But I see also, what before I did not see, that many of these Germans were but slaves of a system which they could not change, and spellbound by old traditions, old watch-words, belonging to the soul of their race, so that when they were spoken they had to offer their lives in sacrifice. High powers above them arranged their destiny, and the manner and measure of their sacrifice, and they had no voice, or strength, or knowledge, to protest—these German peasants, these boys who fought, these women and children who suffered and starved. Now it is they, the ignorant and the innocent, who must go on suffering, paying in peace for what their rulers did in war. Men will say that is the Justice of God. I can see no loving God's work in the starvation of babes, nor in the weakening of women so that mothers have no milk. I see only the cruelty of men. It is certain now that, having won the war, we must be merciful in peace. We must relieve the blockade, which is still starving these people. We must not go out for vengeance but rather to rescue. For this war has involved the civilian populations of Europe and is not limited to armies. A treaty of peace will be with Famine and Plague rather than with defeated generals and humiliated diplomats. If we make a military peace, without regard to the agonies of peoples, there will be a tragic price to pay by victors as well as by vanquished. For the victors are weak too. Their strength was nearly spent. They—except my people—were panting to the last gasp when their enemy fell at last. They need a peace of reconciliation for their own sakes, because no new frontiers may save them from sharing the ruin of those they destroy, nor the disease of those they starve. America alone comes out of the war strong and rich. For that reason we have the power to shape the destiny of the human race, and to heal, as far as may be, the wounds of the world. It is our chance in history. The most supreme chance that any race has had since the beginning of the world. All nations are looking to President Wilson to help them out of the abyss and to make a peace which shall lead the people out of the dark jungle of Europe. My God!... If Wilson will be noble and wise and strong, he may alter the face of the world, and win such victory as no mortal leader ever gained. If not—if not—there will be anguish unspeakable, and a worse darkness, and a welter of anarchy out of whose madness new wars will be bred, until civilisation drops back to savagery, or disappears. *I am afraid!*"

He spoke those last words with a terrible thrill in his rather high, harsh voice, and I, too, standing there in the darkness, by the Rhine, had a sense of mighty powers at work with the destiny of many peoples, and of risks and chances and hatreds and stupidities thwarting the purpose of noble minds and humble hearts after

this four years' massacre.... And I was afraid.

VI

Symptoms of restless impatience which had appeared almost as soon as the signing of the Armistice began to grow with intensity among all soldiers who had been long in the zone of war. Their patience, so enduring through the bad years, broke at last. They wanted to go home, desperately. They wanted to get back to civil life, in civil clothes. With the Armistice all meaning had gone out of their khaki uniform, out of military discipline, out of distinctions of rank, and out of the whole system of their soldiers' life. They had done the dirty job, they had faced all its risks, and they had gained what glory there might be in human courage. Now they desired to get back to their own people, and their own places, and the old ways of life and liberty.

They remembered the terms of their service—these amateurs who had answered the call in early days. "For the duration of the war." Well, the war was finished. There was to be no more fighting—and the wife wanted her man, and the mother her son. "Demobilisation" became the word of hope, and many men were sullen at the delays which kept them in exile and in servitude. The men sent deputations to their officers. The officers pulled wires for themselves which tinkled little bells as far away as the War Office, Whitehall, if they had a strong enough pull. One by one, friends of mine slipped away after a word of farewell and a cheerful grin.

"Demobbed!... Back to civvies!... Home!"

Harding was one of those who agonised for civil liberty and release from military restraint, and the reason of it lay in his pocket-book, where there was the photograph of a pretty girl—his wife.

We had become good friends, and he confided to me many things about his state of mind with a simplicity and a sincerity which made me like him. I never met a man more English in all his characteristics, or more typical of the quality which belongs to our strength and our weakness. As a Harrow boy his manners were perfect, according to the English code—quiet, unemotional, easy, unobtrusively thoughtful of other people's comfort in little things. According to the French code, he would have been considered cold, arrogant, conceited and stupid. Certainly he had that touch of arrogance which is in all Englishmen of the old tradition. All his education and environment had taught him to believe that English civilisation—especially in the hunting set—was perfect and supreme. He had a pity rather than contempt for those unlucky enough to be born Frenchmen, Italians, or of any other race. He was not stupid by nature—on the contrary, he had sound judgment on matters within his range of knowledge and a rapid grasp of detail, but his vision was shut in by those frontiers of thought which limit public-school life in England and certain sets at Oxford who do not break free, and do not wish to break free, from the conventional formula of "good form," which regulates every movement of their brain as well as every action of their lives. It is in its way a noble formula, and makes for aristocracy. My country, right or wrong; loyalty to King and State; the divine right of the British race to rule uncivilised peoples for their own good; the undoubted fact that an English gentleman is the noblest work of God; the duties of "*noblesse oblige*," in courage, in sacrifice, in good maimers, and in playing the game, whatever the game may be, in a sporting spirit.

When I was in Harding's company I knew that it was ridiculous to discuss any subject which lay beyond that formula. It was impossible to suggest that England had ever been guilty of the slightest injustice, a touch of greed, or a tinge of hypocrisy, or something less than wisdom.

To him that was just traitor's talk. A plea for the better understanding of Ireland, for a generous measure of "self-determination" would have roused him to a hot outburst of anger. The Irish to him were all treacherous, disloyal blackguards, and the only remedy of the Irish problem was, he thought, martial law and machine-gun demonstrations, stern and, if need be, terrible. I did not argue with him, or chaff him as some of his comrades did, and keeping within the prescribed limits of conversation set by his code, we got on together admirably. Once only in those days on the Rhine did Harding show an emotion which would have been condemned by his code. It was due, no doubt, to that nervous fever which made some wag change the word "demobilisation" into "demoralisation."

He had a room in the Domhof Hotel, and invited me to drink a whiskey with him there one evening. When I sat on the edge of the bed while he dispensed the drink, I noticed on his dressing-table a large photograph of a girl in evening dress—a wonderfully pretty girl, I thought.

He caught my glance, and after a moment's hesitation and a visible blush, said: "My wife.... We were married before I came out, two years ago exactly."

He put his hand into the breast-pocket of his tunic and pulling out a pocket-book, opened it with a snap, and showed me another photograph.

"That's a better one of her."

I congratulated him, but without listening to my words he asked me rather awkwardly whether I could pull any strings for him to get "demobbed."

"It's all a question of 'pull,'" he said, "and I'm not good at that kind of thing. But I want to get home."

"Everybody does," I said.

"Yes, I know, and of course I want to play the game, and all that. But the fact is, my wife—she's only a kid, you know—is rather hipped with my long absence. She's been trying to keep herself merry and bright, and all that, with the usual kind of war-work. You know—charity bazaars, fancy-dress balls for the wounded, Red

Cross work, and all that. Very plucky, too. But the fact is, some of her letters lately have been rather—well—rather below par—you know—rather chippy and all that. The fact is, old man, she's been too much alone, and anything you can do in the way of a pull at the War Office——"

I told him bluntly that I had as much influence at the War Office as the charwoman in Room M.I. 8, or any other old room—not so much—and he was damped, and apologised for troubling me. However, I promised to write to the one High Bird with whom I had a slight acquaintance, and this cheered him up considerably.

I stayed chatting for some time—the usual small-talk—and it was only when I said good-night that he broached another subject which interested me a good deal.

"I'm getting a bit worried about Wickham Brand," he remarked in a casual kind of way.

"How's that?"

I gathered from Harding's vague, disjointed sentences that Brand was falling into the clutches of a German hussy. He had seen them together at the Opera—they had met as if by accident—and one evening he had seen them together down by the Rhine outside Cologne. He was bound to admit the girl was remarkably good-looking, and that made her all the more dangerous. He hated to mention this, as it seemed like scandal-mongering about "one of the best," but he was frightfully disturbed by the thought that Brand, of all men, should fall a victim to the wiles of a "lady Hun." He knew Brand's people at home—Sir Amyas Brand, the Member of Parliament, and his mother, who was a daughter of the Harringtons.

They would be enormously "hipped" if Wickham were to do anything foolish. It was only because he knew that I was Wickham's best chum that he told me these things, in the strictest confidence. A word of warning from me might save old Brand from getting into a horrible mess—"and all that."

I pooh-poohed Harding's fears, but when I left him to go to my own billet I pondered over his words, and knew that there was truth in them.

There was no doubt to my mind that Brand was in love with Elsa von Kreuzenach. At least, he was going through some queer emotional phase connected with her entry into his life, and he was not happy about it, though it excited him. The very day after Harding spoke to me on the subject I was, involuntarily, a spy upon Brand and Fraülein Elsa on a journey when we were fellow-travellers, though they were utterly unaware of my presence. It was in one of the long electric trams which go without a stop from Cologne to Bonn. I did not see Brand until I had taken my seat in the small first-class smoking car. Several middle-class Germans were there, and I was wedged between two of them in a corner. Brand and a girl, whom I guessed to be Elsa von Kreuzenach, were on the opposite seat, but farthest away from me and screened a little by a German lady with a large feathered hat. If Brand had looked round the compartment he would have seen me at once, and I waited to nod to him, but never once did he glance my way, but turned slightly sideways towards the girl, so that I only saw his profile. Her face was, in the same way, turned a little to him, and I could see every shade of expression which revealed her moods as she talked, and the varying light in her eyes. She was certainly a pretty thing, exquisite, even, in delicacy of colour and fineness of feature, with that "spun-gold" hair of hers; though I thought (remembering Dr. Small's words) that she had a worn and fragile look which robbed her of the final touch of beauty. For some time they exchanged only a few words now and then, which I could not hear, and I was reading a book when I heard Brand say in his clear, rather harsh voice: "Will your people be anxious about you?"

The girl answered in a low voice. I glanced up and saw that she was smiling, not at Brand, but at the countryside which seemed to travel past us as the tram went on its way. It was the smile of a girl to whom life meant something good just then.

Brand spoke again.

"I should hate to let your mother think that I have been disloyal to her confidence. Don't let this friendship of ours be spoilt by secrecy. I am not afraid of it!"

He laughed in a way that was strange to me. There was a note of joy in it. It was a boy's laugh, and Brand had gone beyond boyhood in the war. I saw one or two of the Germans look up at him curiously, and then stare at the girl, not in a friendly way. She was unconscious of their gaze, though a wave of colour swept her face. For a second she laid her hand on Brand's brown fist, and it was a quick caress.

"Our friendship is good!" she said.

She spoke these words very softly, in almost a whisper, but I heard them in spite of the rattle of the tram-car and the gutteral argument of two Germans next to me. Those were the only words I heard her say on that journey to Bonn, and after that Brand talked very little, and then only commonplace remarks about the time and the scenery. But what I had heard was revealing, and I was disturbed, for Brand's sake.

His eyes met mine as I passed out of the car, but they were unseeing eyes. He stared straight through me to some vision beyond. He gave his hand to Elsa von Kreuzenach, and they walked slowly up from the station and then went inside the cathedral. I had business in Bonn with officers at our headquarters in the hotel "Der Goldene Stern." Afterwards I had lunch with them, and then, with one, went to Beethoven's house—a little shrine in which the spirit of the master still lives, with his old instruments, his manuscript sheets of music, and many relics of his life and work.

It was at about four o'clock in the afternoon that I saw Brand and the German girl again. There was a beautiful dusk in the gardens beyond the University, with a ruddy glow through the trees when the sun went down, and then a purple twilight. Some German boys were playing leapfrog there, watched by British soldiers, and townsfolk passed on their way home. I strolled the length of the gardens, and at the end which is near the old front of the University buildings I saw Brand and Elsa von Kreuzenach together on a wooden seat. It was almost dark where they sat under the trees, but I knew Brand by his figure and by the tilt of his field-cap, and the girl by the white fur round her neck. They were holding hands like lovers in a London park, and when I passed them I heard Brand speak.

"I suppose this was meant to be. Fate leads us..."

When I went back to Cologne by tram that evening I wondered whether Brand would confide his secret to me. We had been so much together during the last phase of the war and had talked so much in intimate

friendship that I guessed he would come one day and let me know this new adventure of his soul.

Several weeks passed and he said no word of this,-although we went for walks together and sat smoking sometimes in *cafés* after dinner. It had always been his habit to drop into deep silences, and now they lasted longer than before. Now and then, however, he would be talkative, argumentative, and passionate. At times there was a new light in his eyes, as though lit by some inward fire. And he would smile unconsciously as he blew out clouds of smoke, but more often he looked worried, nervous, and irritable, as though passing through some new mental crisis.

He spoke a good deal about German psychology and the German point of view, illustrating his remarks sometimes by references to conversations with Franz von Kreuzenach, with whom he often talked. He had come to the conclusion that it was quite hopeless to convince even the broadest-minded Germans that they were guilty of the war. They admitted freely enough that their military party had used the Serbian assassination and Austrian fury as the fuel for starting the blaze in Europe. Even then they believed that the Chancellor and the civil Ministry of State had struggled for peace until the Russian movements of troops put the military party into the saddle so that they might ride to hell. But in any case it was, Brand said, an unalterable conviction of most Germans that sooner or later the war had been bound to come, as they were surrounded by a ring of enemies conspiring to thwart their free development and to overthrow their power. They attacked first as a means of self-defence. It was an article of faith with them that they had fought a defensive warfare from the start.

“That is sheer lunacy!” I said. Brand laughed, and agreed.

“Idiotic in the face of plain facts, but that only shows how strong is the belief of people in their own righteousness. I suppose even now most English people think the Boer War was just and holy. Certainly at the time we stoned all who thought otherwise. Yet the verdict of the whole world was against us. They regarded that war as the brutal aggression of a great power upon a small and heroic people.”

“But surely,” I said, “a man like Franz von Kreu-zenach admits the brutality of Germany in Belgium—the shooting of. priests and civilians—the forced labour of girls—the smashing of machinery—and all the rest of it?”

Brand said that Franz von Kreuzenach deplored the “severity” of German acts, but blamed the code of war which justified such acts. It was not his view that Germans had behaved with exceptional brutality, but that war itself is a brutal way of argument. “We must abolish war,” he says, “not pretend to make it kind.” As far as that goes, I agree with him.

“How about poison gas, the *Lusitania*, the sinking of hospital ships, submarine warfare?”

Brand shrugged his shoulders.

“The German answer is always the same. War is war, and they were hard pressed by our superiority in material, man-power and sea-power. We were starving them to death with our blockade. They saw their children dying and diseased, their old people carried to the grave, their men weakened. They had to break through somehow, anyhow, to save their race. I don’t think we should have stopped at much if England had been ringed round with enemy ships and the kids were starving in Mayfair and Maida Vale, and every town and hamlet.”

He laughed, with a shrug of his shoulders, as he lit his pipe for about the fifteenth time.

“Argument is no good,” he said. “I’ve argued into the early hours of the morning with that fellow Franz von Kreuzenach, who is a fine fellow and the whitest man I’ve met in Germany. Nothing will convince him that his people were, more guilty than ourselves. Perhaps he’s right. History will decide. Now we must start afresh—wipe out the black past, confess that though the Germans started the war we were all possessed by the devil—and exorcise ourselves. I believe the German people are ready to turn over a new leaf and start a fresh chapter of history if we will help them and give them a chance. They have an immense hope that England and America will not push them over into the bottomless abyss, now that they have fulfilled Wilson’s demand to get rid of their old rulers and fall into line with the world’s democracy. If that hope fails them they will fall back to the old philosophy of hatred, with vengeance as its goal—and the damned thing will happen again in fifteen—twenty—thirty years.”

Brand made one remark that evening which referred, I fancy, to his love affair with Elsa von Kreuzenach.

“There is so much folly in the crowd that one despairs of reaching a higher stage of civilisation. I am falling back on individualism. The individual must follow his own ideals, strive for his own happiness, find friendship and a little love where he can, and stand apart from world problems, racial rivalries, international prejudices, as far as he may without being drawn into the vortex. Nothing that he can do will alter human destiny, or the forces of evolution, or the cycles of history, which make all striving futile. Let him get out of the rain and comfort himself with any human warmth he can find. Two souls in contact are company enough.”

“Sometimes,” I said, “mob passion tears them asunder and protests against their union with stones or outlaw judgment. Taboo will exist for ever in human society, and it is devilish unpleasant for individuals who violate the rules.”

“It needs courage,” said my friend. “The risk is sometimes worth taking.”

VII

Brand decided to take the risk, and though he asked my advice beforehand, as a matter of friendship, I knew my warnings were useless. It was about a month after that train journey to Bonn that he came into my room at the Domhof, looking rather pale but with a kind of glitter in his eyes.

"I may as well tell you," he said abruptly, "that I am going to marry a German girl."

"Elsa von Kreuzenach?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Just a guess."

"It's against her parents' wish," he said, "to say nothing of my parents, who think I have gone mad. Elsa and I will have to play a lone hand."

"'Lone' is not the word," I suggested. "You are breaking that taboo we talked of. You will be shunned by every friend you have in the world—except one or two queer people like myself"—(here he said, "Thanks," and grinned rather gratefully)—"and both you and she will be pariahs in England, Germany, and anywhere on the wide earth where there are English, Germans, French, Americans and others who fought the war. I suppose you know that?"

"Perfectly," he answered gravely.

I told him that I was amazed that he of all men should fall in love with a German girl—he who had seen all the abomination of the war, and had come out to it with a flaming idealism. To that he answered savagely: "Flaming idealism be blowed! I came out with blood-lust in my heart, and having killed until I was sick of killing—German boys who popped their heads over the parapet—I saw that the whole scheme of things was wrong, and that the grey men had no more power of escape than the brown men. We had to go on killing each other because we were both under the same law, thrust upon us by those directing the infernal machinery of world-politics. But that's not the point, and it's old and stale, anyhow."

"The point is," I said, "that you will be looked upon as a traitor by many of your best pals, that you will smash your father and mother, and that this girl Elsa and you will be profoundly miserable."

"We shall be enormously and immensely happy," he answered, "and that outweighs everything."

He told me that he needed happiness. For more than four years he had suffered agony of mind in the filth and mud of war. He craved for beauty, and Elsa fulfilled his ideal. He had been a lonely devil, and Elsa had offered him the only cure for the worst disease in life, intimate and eternal love.

Something prompted me to say words which I deeply regretted as soon as they were spoken. It was the utterance of a subconscious thought.

"There is a girl, not German, who might have cured your loneliness. You and Eileen O'Connor would have made good mates."

For some reason he was hit rather hard by that remark. He became exceedingly pale, and for a moment or two did not answer me. I thought he would blurt out some angry reply, damning my impudence, but when he spoke it was in a grave, gentle way which seemed to me more puzzling.

"Eileen would make a fine wife for any man she liked. But she's above most of us."

We stayed up talking nearly all that night, and Wickham Brand described one scene within his recent experiences which must have been sensational. It was when he announced to the family von Kreuzenach that he loved Elsa and desired her hand in marriage.

Brand's sense of humour came back to him when he told me of this episode, and he laughed now at the frightfulness of his ordeal. It was he who had insisted upon announcing the news to Elsa's parents, to avoid any charge of dishonesty. Elsa herself was in favour of hiding their love until peace was declared, when, perhaps, the passionate hostility of her parents to England might be abated. For Brand's sake, also, she thought it would be better. But she yielded to his argument that secrecy might spoil the beauty of their friendship, and give it an ugly taint.

"We'll go through with it straight from the start," he had cried.

Elsa's answer was quick and glad.

"I have no fear now of anything in the world except the loss of you!"

Franz von Kreuzenach was the first to know, and Elsa told him. He seemed stunned with surprise, and then immensely glad, as he took his sister in his arms and kissed her.

"Your marriage with an English officer," he said, "will be the symbol of reconciliation between England and Germany."

After that he remembered his father and mother, and was a coward at the thought of their hostility. The idea of telling his father, as Elsa asked him to do, put him into what Brand called "the bluest of blue funk." He had the German reverence for parental authority, and though he went as far as the door-handle of his father's study he retreated, and said in a boyish way, speaking in English, as usual, with Brand and his sister: "I haven't the pluck! I would rather face shell-fire than my father's wrath."

It was Brand who "went over the top."

He made his announcement formally, in the drawingroom after dinner, in the curiously casual way which proved him a true Englishman. He cleared his throat (he told me, grinning at his own mannerism), and during a gap in the conversation said to the General: "By the way, sir, I have something rather special to mention to-night."

"*Bitte?*" said the old General, with his hard, deliberate courtesy.

"Your daughter and I," said Brand, "wish to be married as soon as possible. I have the honour to ask your consent."

Brand told me of the awful silence which followed his statement. It seemed interminable. Franz von Kreuzenach, who was present, was as white as though he had been condemned to death by court-martial. Elsa was speechless, but came over to Brand's side and held his hand. Her mother had the appearance of a lady

startled by the sudden appearance of a poisonous snake. The General sat back in his chair, grasping its arms and gasping for breath as though Brand had hit him in the stomach.

It was the mother who spoke first, and ignoring Brand completely, she addressed her daughter harshly.

"You are mad, Elsa!"

"Yes, mother," said the girl. "I am mad with joy."

"This English officer insults us intolerably," said the mother, still ignoring Brand by any glance. "We were forced to receive him into our house. At least he might have behaved with decency and respect."

"Mother," said Elsa, "this gentleman has given me the great honour of his love."

"To accept it," said the lady, "would be a dishonour so dreadful for a good German girl that I refuse to believe it possible."

"It is true, mother, and I am wonderfully happy."

Elsa went over to her mother, sinking down on her knees, and kissing the lady's hand. But Frau von Kreuzenach withdrew her hand quickly, and then rose from her chair and stood behind her husband, with one hand on his shoulder.

The old man had found his means of speech at last.

He spoke in a low, stern voice to his daughter. Brand was ignored by him as by the mother. They did not recognise his presence.

"My daughter," he said (if Brand remembered his words) "the German people have been brought to ruin and humiliated by one nation in Europe who was jealous of our power and genius. That nation was England, our treacherous, hypocritical enemy. Without England, France would have been smashed. Without England, our Emperor would have prevailed over all his enemies. Without the English blockade we should not have been weakened by hunger, deprived of the raw material necessary to victory, starved so that our children died and our will to win was sapped. They were English soldiers who killed my dear son Heinrich, and your brother. The flower of German manhood was slain by the English in Flanders and on the Somme."

The General spoke very quietly, with an intensity of effort to be calm. But suddenly his voice rose, said Brand, to a kind of harsh shout.

"Any German girl who permits herself to love an Englishman is a traitorous hussy. I would have her stripped and flogged. The curse of our old German God shall follow her."

Another silence, in which there was no sound except the noisy breathing of the old man, was broken by the hard voice of Frau von Kreuzenach.

"Your father has spoken, Elsa. There is no more to say."

Elsa had become very pale, but she was smiling at Brand, he told me, and still held his hand in a tight grip.

"There is something more to say, my dear father and mother," she answered. "It is that I love Captain Brand, and that I will follow him anywhere in the world if he will take me. For love is stronger than hate, and above all nationality."

It was Franz von Kreuzenach who spoke now. He was standing at the table, facing his father, and it was to his father that he talked. He said that Elsa was right about love. In spite of the war, the souls of men and women were not separated by racial boundaries. When two souls touched and mingled, no hatred of peoples, no patriotic passion, could intervene. Elsa's love for an English gentleman was but a symbol of the peace that was coming, when all countries would be united in a Society of Nations with equal rights and equal duties, and a common brotherhood. They saw in the streets of Cologne that there was no natural, inevitable hatred between English and Germans. The Army of Occupation had proved itself to be an instrument of goodwill between those who had tried to kill each other during four years of slaughter. Captain Brand had behaved with the most charming courtesy and chivalry, according to the traditions of an English gentleman, and he, Franz von Kreuzenach, was glad and honoured because this officer desired to take Elsa for his wife. Their marriage would be a consecration of the new peace.

The father listened to him silently, except for that hard noise of breathing. When his son uttered those last words, the old man leaned forward in his chair, and his eyes glittered.

"Get out of my house, *Schweinhund!* Do not come near me again, or I will denounce you as a traitor and shoot you like a dog."

He turned to Elsa with outstretched hand.

"Go up to bed, girl. If you were younger I would flog you with my hunting-whip."

For the first time he spoke to Brand, controlling his rage with a convulsive effort.

"I have not the power to evict you from the house. For the time being the German people of the Rhineland are under hostile orders. Perhaps you will find another billet more to your convenience, and more agreeable to myself."

"To-night, sir," said Brand, and he told me that he admired the old man's self-control and his studied dignity.

Elsa still clasped his hand, and before her family he kissed her.

"With your leave, or without leave," he said, "your daughter and I will be man and wife, for you have no right to stand between our love."

He bowed and left the room, and, in an hour, the house.

Franz von Kreuzenach came into his room before he left, and wrung his hand.

"I must go, too," he said. "My father is very much enraged with me. It is the break between the young and the old—the new conflict, as we were saying one day."

He was near weeping, and Brand apologised for being the cause of so much trouble.

In the hall Elsa came to Brand as the orderly carried out his bags.

"To-morrow," she said, "we will meet at Elizabeth von Detmold's—my true friend."

Her eyes were wet with tears, but she was smiling, and there was, said Brand, a fine courage shining in her face.

She put her hands on Brand's shoulders and kissed him, to the deep astonishment and embarrassment of the orderly, who stood by. It was from this man, Brock, that the news of Brand's "entanglement" spread, through other orderlies, to officers of his mess, as he knew by the cold shoulder that some of them turned to him.

VIII.

I met Elsa and Franz von Kreuzenach at the house of Elizabeth von Detmold in the Hohenzollernring, which became a meeting-place for Brand and the girl to whom he was now betrothed. Dr. Small and I went round there to tea at Brand's invitation, and I spent several evenings there owing to the friendship of Elizabeth von Detmold, who seemed to like my company. That lady was in many ways remarkable, and I am bound to say that in spite of my repugnance to many qualities of the German character I found her charming. The tragedy of the war had hit her with an almost particular malignancy. Married in 1914 to a young officer of the Prussian Guard, she was widowed at the first battle of Ypres. Her three brothers had been killed in 1915, '16 and '17. Both her parents had died during the war, owing to its accumulating horror. At twenty-six years of age she was left alone in her big house with hardly enough money for its upkeep, and not enough to supplement the rigid war rations which were barely sufficient for life. I suppose there were thousands of young women in Germany—hundreds of thousands—who had the same cause for sorrow (we do not realise how German families were massacred in that blood-bath of war, so that even French and British losses pale in tragedy before their piled dead), but there were few, I am sure, who faced their grief with such high courage and such unembittered charity. Like Elsa von Kreuzenach, she devoted her days to suffering childhood in the *crèches* and feeding-centres which she had helped to organise, and she spent many of her evenings in working-women's clubs, and sometimes in working-men's clubs, where she read and lectured to them on social problems. The war had made her an ardent pacifist, and, to some extent, a revolutionary of the Liebknecht school. She saw no hope for civilisation so long as the junker caste remained in Europe, and the philosophy of militarism, which she believed stood fast not only in Germany but in France and England, and other nations. She had a passionate belief, like many other German people at that time, in President Wilson and his League of Nations, and put all her hopes in the United States as the one power in the world who could make a peace of reconciliation and establish a new brotherhood of peoples. After that she looked to a social revolution throughout the world by which the working classes should obtain full control of their own destiny and labour.

I found it strange to hear that patrician girl, for she was one of the aristocratic caste, with an elegance that came from long breeding, adopting the extreme views of revolutionary socialism, not as a pretty intellectual theory, but with a pasisonate courage that might lead her to prison or to death in the conflict between the old powers and the new.

To Elsa von Kreuzenach she behaved in a protective and mothering way, and it seemed to me that "Brand's girl," as Dr. Small called her, was the spiritual child of this stronger and more vital character. Elsa, was, I fancy, timid of those political and pacifist ideas which Elizabeth von Detmold stated with such frank audacity. She cherished the spirit of the human charity which gave them their motive power, but shrank from the thought of the social strife and change which must precede them. Yet there was nothing doll-like in her character. There were moments when I saw her face illumined by a kind of mediaeval mysticism which was the light of a spirit revealed perhaps by the physical casket which held it, insecurely. Truly she was as pretty and delicate as a piece of Dresden china, but for Brand's sake I did not like the fragile look which hinted at a quick fading of her flower-like beauty. Her adoration for Brand was, in my opinion, rather pitiful. It was very German, too, in its meek reverence, as of a mediaeval maid to knighthood. I prefer the way of French womanhood, convinced of intellectual equality with men, and with their abiding sense of humour; or the arrogance of the English girl, who makes her lover prove his mettle by quiet obedience. Elsa followed Brand with her eyes wherever he moved, touched his hard, tanned hand with little secret caresses, and whenever he spoke her eyes shone with gladness at the sound of his voice. I liked her better when she was talking to our little doctor or to myself, and, therefore, not absorbed in sentiment. At these times she was frank and vivacious, and, indeed, had an English way with her which no doubt she had learnt in her Brighton school.

Brand interested me intensely at these times. Sometimes I found myself doubting whether he was really so much in love with his German girl as he imagined himself to be. I noticed that he was embarrassed by Elsa's public demonstrations of love—that way she had of touching his hand, and another trick of leaning her head against his shoulder. As a typical Englishman, in some parts of his brain at least, he shrank from exposing his affection. It seemed to me also that he was more interested in political and psychological problems than in the by-play of love's glances and revealings. He argued long and deeply with Elizabeth von Detmold on the philosophy of Karl Marx, the anarchist movement in Berlin, and on the possibility of a Rhineland republic, which was then being advocated by a party in Cologne and Mainz whose watchword was "*Los von Berlin!*" and freedom from Prussian domination for the Rhine provinces. Even with Elsa he led the conversation to discussions about German mentality, the system of German education, and the possible terms of peace. Twice at least, when I was present, he differed with her rather bluntly—a little brutally, I thought—about the German administration of Belgium.

"Our people did no more than was allowed by the necessities of war," said Elsa. "It was stern and tragic,

but not more barbarous than what other nations would have done."

"It was horrible, bloody, and unjustified," said Brand.

"All war," said Elizabeth von Detmold, "is bloody and unjustified. Directly war is declared the moral law is abrogated. It is simply the reign of devildom. Why pretend otherwise—or weaken the devilish logic by a few inconsistencies of sentiment?"

Brand's answer to Elsa was not exactly lover-like. I saw the colour fade from her face at the harshness of his answer, but she leaned her head against his body (she was sitting by his side on a low stool), and was silent until her friend Elizabeth had spoken. Then she laughed, bravely, I thought.

"We differ in expression, but we all agree. What Wickham thinks is my thought. I hate to remember how Belgium suffered."

Brand was utterly unconscious of his harsh way of speech and of his unconcealed acknowledgment of Elizabeth von Detmold's intellectual superiority in her own drawing-room, so that when she spoke his interest was directed from Elsa to this lady.

"Daddy" Small was also immensely impressed by Frau von Detmold's character, and he confessed to me that he made notes of her conversation every time he left her house.

"That woman," he said, "will probably be a martyr for civilisation. I find myself so cussedly in agreement with her that when I go back to New York I shall probably hang a red flag out of my window and lose all my respectable patients. She has the vision of the future."

"What about Brand and Elsa?" I asked, dragging him down to personalities.

He put his arm through mine as we walked down the Hohestrasse.

"Brand," he said, in his shrewd way, "is combining martyrdom with romance—an unsafe combination. The pretty Elsa has lighted up his romantic heart because of her adoration and her feminine sentiment. I don't blame him. At his age—after four years of war and exile—her gold-spun hair would have woven a web round my heart. Youth is youth, and don't you forget it, my lad!"

"Where does the martyrdom come in?" I asked.

The little doctor blinked through his horn spectacles.

"Don't you see it? Brand has been working out new ideals of life. After killing a good many German boys, as sniper and chief assassin of the XI. Corps, he wants to marry a German girl as a proclamation to the world that he—Wickham Brand—has done with hatred and is out for the brotherhood of man and the breaking down of the old frontiers. For that ideal he is going to sacrifice his reputation and make a martyr of himself—not forgetting that romance is pleasant and Elsa von Kreuzenach as pretty as a peach! Bless his heart, I admire his courage and his boyishness."

Any doubt I had about the reality of Brand's passion for Elsa was at least partly dispelled when he told me, a few nights later, of a tragic thing that had happened to both of them.

He came into my room at the "Domhof" as though he had just seen a ghost. And, indeed, it was a ghost that had frightened him and put a cold hand between him and Elsa.

"My dear old man!" I cried at the sight of him.

"What on earth has happened?"

"A damnable and inconceivable thing!"

I poured him out some brandy, and he drank it in gulps. Then he did a strange and startling thing. Fumbling in his breast-pocket, he pulled out a silver cigarette-case, and going over to the fireplace, dropped it into the blaze of the wood logs which I had had lighted because of the dampness of the room.

"Why do you do that?" I asked.

He watched the metal box blacken and then begin to melt. Several times he poked it so as to get it deeper into the red embers.

"My poor little Elsa!" he said in a pitiful way. "*Mein hussches Madel!*"

The story he told me later was astounding. Even now to people who were not in the war, who do not know how many strange, fantastic things happened in that wild nightmare, it will seem improbable and untrue. Indeed, I think the central fact was untrue, except as a subjective reality in the minds of Brand and Elsa.

It happened when they were sitting alone in Elizabeth von Detmold's drawing-room. I fancy they must have been embracing each other, though Brand did not tell me that. Anyhow, Elsa put her hand into his breast-pocket and in a playful way pulled out his cigarette-case.

"May I open it?" she asked.

But she did not open it. She stared at a little monogram on its cover, and then began to tremble so that Brand was scared.

"What is the matter?" he said.

Elsa let the cigarette-case drop on to the carpet.

"That box!" she said, in an agonised voice. "Where did you find it?"

Brand remembered where he had found it, though he had not given a thought to it for more than two years. He had found it on a night in No Man's Land out by the Bois Français, near Fricourt. He had been lying out there on the lip of a mine crater below a hummock of white chalk. Just before dawn a German patrol had crept out, and he had shot at them. One man dropped quite close to where Brand lay. After an hour, when dawn came with a thick white mist rising from the moist earth, Brand crawled over to the body and cut off its shoulder-straps for identification. It was the body of a young man, almost a boy, and Brand saw, with a thrill of satisfaction (it was his "tiger" time), that he had shot him clean through the heart. A good shot in the twilight of the dawn! He thrust his hands into the man's pockets for papers, and found his pay-book and some letters, and a cigarette-case. With these he crawled back into his own trench. He remembered reading the letters. One was from the boy's sister, lamenting the length of the war, describing the growing hunger of

civilians in Germany, and saying how she prayed every night for her brother's safety, and for peace. He had read thousands of German letters as an intelligence officer afterwards, but he remembered those because of the night's adventure. He had handed them over to the adjutant, for headquarters, and had kept the cigarette-case, having lost his own. It had the monogram of "H. v. K." He had never thought about it from that time to this. Now he thought about it with an intensity of remembrance.

Brand told Elsa von Kreuzenach that he had found the box in No Man's Land.

"It is my brother Heinrich's," she cried. "I gave it to him."

She drew back, shivering, from the cigarette-case—or was it from Brand? When she spoke next it was in a whisper: "Did you kill him?"

Brand lied to her, and she knew he was lying. She wept bitterly, and when Brand kissed her she was cold, and fainted in his arms.

That was Brand's story, and it was incredible. Even now I cannot help thinking that such a coincidence could not have happened. There is plenty of room for doubt about that cigarette-case. It was of a usual pattern, plain, with a wreath engraved round a monogram. That monogram "H. v. K." was astonishing in relation to Elsa von Kreuzenach, but there are thousands of Germans, I imagine, with the same initials. I know two, Hermann von Kranitz and Hans von Kurtheim. In a German directory I have found many other names with those initials. I refuse to believe that Brand should have gone straight to the house of that boy whom he had killed in No Man's Land.

He believed it, and Elsa was sure of it. That was the tragedy, and the ghost of the girl's dead brother stood between them now.

For an hour or more he paced up and down my room in an agony of mind, and none of my arguments would convince him or comfort him.

Several times he spoke one sentence which puzzled me.

"It makes no difference," he said. "It makes no difference."

I think he meant that it made no difference to his love or purpose. When one thinks over this incident one is inclined to agree with that view. He was no more guilty in killing Elsa's brother, if he did, than in killing any other German. If their love were strong enough to cross over fields of dead, the fact that Elsa's brother lay there, shot by Brand's bullet, made, as he said, "no difference." It only brought home more closely to two poor individuals the meaning of that world-tragedy.

Elsa, after her first shock of horror, argued that too, and at the beginning of March Brand and she stood at the altar together in a church at the end of the Hohenzollem Ring, and were made man and wife.

At the ceremony there were present Elizabeth von Detmold, Franz von Kreuzenach, Dr. Small, and myself, as Brand's best man. There was, I think, another presence there, visible only to the minds of Brand and Elsa, and, strangely enough, to mine. As the bride and bridegroom stood together before the priest I had a most uncomfortable vision of the dead body of a German boy lying on the altar beyond them, huddled up as I had seen many grey figures in the mud of Flanders and Picardy. This idea was, of course, due to that war-neurosis which, as Dr. Small said, was the malady of the world. I think at one moment of the service Elsa and Brand felt some cold touch upon them, for they both looked round in a startled way. It may have been a draught stealing through the aisle.

We had tea at Elizabeth von Detmold's house, and Brand and his wife were wonderfully self-controlled. They could not be happy beyond the sense of a spiritual union because Brand had been ordered by telegram to report at the War Office in London, and was leaving Cologne at four o'clock that afternoon, while Elsa was going home to her parents, who were ignorant of her marriage. Brand's recall, I am convinced, had been engineered by his father, who was determined to take any step to prevent his son's marriage with a German girl.

Young Harding was going with him, having been given his demobilisation papers, and being desperately anxious, as I have told, to get home. It was curious that Brand should be his fellow-traveller that night, and I thought of the contrast of their journey, one man going to his wife with eager gladness, the other man leaving his wife after a few hours of marriage.

At the end poor Elsa clung to her husband with most passionate grief and, without any self-consciousness now, because of the depth of his emotion, Brand, with tears in his eyes, tenderly embraced her. She walked back bravely with her brother to her mother's house, while Brand and I raced to the station where his orderly was waiting with his kit.

"See you again soon," said Brand, gripping my hand.

"Where?" I asked, and he answered gloomily: "God knows."

It was not on the Rhine. There was a general exodus of all officers who could get "demobbed" on any claim or pretext, the small Army of Occupation settled down to a routine life without adventure, and the world's interest shifted to Paris, where the fate of Europe was being settled by a company of men with the greatest chance in history. I became a wanderer in a sick world.

END OF BOOK II.

BOOK III—BUILDERS OF PEACE

I

Those of us who had been in exile during the years of war and now returned to peace found that England had changed in our absence. We did not know this new England. We did not understand its spirit or its people. Nor did they understand the men who came back from the many fronts of war, by hundreds of thousands, now that demobilisation had become a spate after murmurings that were loud with the menace of revolt from men who had been long patient.

These "*revenants,*" the men who came back out of the terror, were so many Rip van Winkles (of a youthful kind), looking round for the companions of their boyhood, going to old places, touching old stones, sitting by the same fireside, but with a sense of ghostliness. A new generation had arrived since 1914. The children had become boys and girls; the girls had grown into womanhood precociously. There were legions of "flappers" in London and other big cities, earning good wages in Government offices and factories, spending most of their money on the adornment of their prettiness, self-reliant, audacious, out for the fun of life, and finding it. The tragedy of the war had not touched them. It had been a great "lark" to them. They accepted the slaughter of their brothers or their fathers light-heartedly, after a few bursts of tears and a period of sentiment in which pride was strongest. They had grown up to the belief that a soldier is generally killed or wounded, and that he is glad to take the risk, or, if not, ought to be, as part of the most exciting and enjoyable game of war. Women had filled many of the jobs which formerly were the exclusive possession of men, and the men coming back looked at these legions of women clerks, tram conductors, ticket collectors, munition workers, plough-girls, and motor drivers with the brooding thought that they, the men, had been ousted from their places. A new class had arisen out of the whirlpool of social upheaval. The profiteers, in a large way of business, had prospered exceedingly out of the supply and demand of massacre. The profiteer's wife clothed herself in furs and jewels. The profiteer's daughters were dancing by night and sleeping by day. The farmers and the shopkeepers had made a good thing out of war. They liked war so long as they were untouched by air-raids or not afflicted by boys who came back blind or crippled. They had always been optimists. They were optimists now, and claimed a share in the merit of the victory that had been won by the glorious watchword of "business as usual." They hoped the terms of peace would be merciless upon the enemy, and they demanded the Kaiser's head as a pleasant sacrifice adding spice to the great banquet of victory celebrations.

Outwardly, England was gay and prosperous and light-spirited. It was only by getting away from the seething crowds in the streets, from the dancing crowds, and the theatre crowds, and the shopping crowds, that men came face to face with private and hidden tragedy. In small houses or big, there were women who had lost their men and were listless and joyless, the mothers of only sons who did not come back with the demobilised tide, and the sweethearts of boys who would never fulfil the promise that had given hope in life to lonely girlhood. There was a new rich, but there was also a new poor, and people on small fixed incomes or with little nest-eggs of capital on which they scraped out life found themselves reduced to desperate straits by the soaring of prices and the burden of taxation. Underneath the surface joy of a victorious people there was bitterness to which victory was a mockery and a haggard grief at the cost of war in precious blood. But the bitterness smouldered without any flame of passion, and grief nagged at people's hearts silently.

Many of the men who came back were in a strange mood—restless, morbid, neurotic. Their own people did not understand them. They could not understand themselves. They had hated war, most of them, but this peace seemed flat and unprofitable to their souls. All purpose and meaning seemed suddenly to have gone out of life. Perhaps it was the narrowness of English home-life. Men who had travelled to far places of the world, who had seen the ways of foreign people, and had been part of a great drama, found themselves back again in a little house, closed in and isolated by the traditions of English individualism, so that often the next-door neighbour is a stranger. They had a sense of being suffocated. They could not stay indoors with the old pleasure in a pipe or a book by the fireside or a chat with mother or wife. Often they would wander out on the chance of meeting some of the "old pals," or, after a heavy sigh, say, "Oh, God!... let's go to a theatre or a 'movie' show!" The theatres were crammed with men seeking distraction, yet bored with their pleasures and relapsing into a deeper moodiness afterwards. Wives complained that their husbands had "changed." Their characters had hardened and their tempers were frayed, so that they were strangely irritable and given to storms of rage about nothing at all. It was frightening.... There was an epidemic of violence and of horrible sensual crimes with women victims, ending often in suicide. There were mob riots by demobilised soldiers or soldiers still waiting in camps for demobilisation. Police stations were stormed and wrecked and policemen killed by bodies of men who had been heroes in the war and now fought like savages against their fellow-citizens. Some of them pleaded guilty in court and made queer statements about an utter ignorance of their own actions after the disorder had begun. It seemed as though they had returned to the psychology of that war when men, doped with rum, or drunk with excitement, had leapt over the parapet and remembered nothing more of a battle until they found themselves panting in an enemy trench or lying wounded on a stretcher. It was a dangerous kind of psychology in civil life.

Labourers back at work in factories or mines or railway stations or dockyards, after months or years of the soldier-life, did not return to their old conditions or their old pay with diligence and thankfulness. They demanded higher wages to meet the higher cost of life and after that a margin for pleasure, and after that shorter hours for higher pay and less work in shorter hours. If their demands were not granted they downed tools and said: "What about it?" Strikes became frequent and general, and at a time when the cost of war was being added up to frightful totals of debt which could only be reduced by immense production the worker slacked off, or suspended his labours, and said: "Who gets the profits of my sweat?... I want a larger share."

He was not frightened of a spectre that was scaring all people of property and morality in the Western world. The spectre of Bolshevism, red-eyed, dripping with blood, proclaiming anarchy as the new gospel, did not cause a shiver to the English working man. He said, “What has Russia to do with me? I’m English. I have fought this war to save England, I have done the job; now then, where’s my reward?”

Men who looked round for a living while they lived on an unemployment dole that was not good enough for their new desires became sullen when they returned home night after night with the same old story of “Nothing doing.” The women were still clinging to their jobs. They had earned their independence by good work in war-time. They hated the thought of going back to little homes to be household drudges, dependent for pocket-money on father and brothers. They had not only tasted liberty; they had made themselves free of the large world. They had proved their quality and strength. They were as good as men, and mostly better. Why should they slink back to the little narrow rut of life? But the men said, “Get out. Give us back our jobs.”

It was hard on the officer boys—hardest of all on them. They had gone straight from school to the war, and had commanded men twice as old as themselves and drawn good pay for pocket-money as first lieutenants, captains, even majors of air squadrons and tank battalions. They had gained immense experience in the arts and crafts of war, and that experience was utterly useless in peace.

“My dear young man,” said the heads of prosperous businesses who had been out to “beat the Boche,” even though they sacrificed their only sons or all their sons (with heroic courage!), “you have been wasting your time. You have no qualifications whatever for a junior clerkship in this office. On the contrary, you have probably contracted habits of idleness and inaccuracy which would cause a lot of trouble. This vacancy is being filled by a lad who has not been vitiated by military life, and has nothing to unlearn. Good-morning!”

And the young officers, after a statement like that, went home with swear-words learnt in Flanders, and said: “That’s the reward of patriotism, eh? Well, we seem to have been fooled pretty badly. Next time we shan’t be so keen to strew the fields of death with our fresh little corpses.”

These words, all this murmur from below, did not reach those who sat in high places. They were wonderfully complacent, except when outbreaks of violence or the cessation of labour shocked them with a sense of danger. They arranged peace celebrations before the peace, victory marches when the fruits of victory were as bitter as Dead Sea fruit in the mouths of those who saw the ruin of the world; and round a council table in Paris statesmen of Europe abandoned all the ideals for which the war had been fought by humble men and killed the hopes of all those who had looked to them as the founders of a new era of humanity and common sense.

II

It was when the Peace Treaty had been signed, but not ratified by the representatives of Germany and Austria, that I met some of the friends with whom I had travelled along many roads of war or had met in scenes which already seemed far back in history. In London, after a journey to America, I came again in touch with young Harding, whom I had seen last on his way home to his pretty wife, who had fretted at his long absence, and Charles Fortune, whose sense of humour had made me laugh so often in the time of tragedy. Those were chance meetings in the eddies of the great whirlpool of London life, as I saw other faces, strange for a moment or two, until the difference between a field-cap and a bowler hat, a uniform and civil clothes, was wiped out by a look of recognition and the sound of a remembered voice.

Not by chance but by a friendship which had followed me across the world with written words, I found myself once more in the company of Wickham Brand, and with him went again to spend some evenings with Eileen O’Connor, who was now home in Kensington, after that grim drama which she had played so long in Lille.

With “Daddy” Small I had been linked up by a lucky chain of coincidences which had taken us both to New York at the same time and brought us back to Europe on the same boat, which was the White Star liner *Lapland*.

My chance meeting with Harding led to a renewal of friendship which was more of his seeking than mine, though I liked him a good deal. But he seemed to need me, craving sympathy, which I gave with sincerity, and companionship, which I could not give so easily, being a busy man.

It was on the night when London went mad because of peace, though not so mad, I was told, as on the night of armistice. It all seemed mad to me when I was carried like a straw in a raging torrent of life which poured down the Strand, swirled round Trafalgar Square, and choked all channels westwards and eastwards of Piccadilly Circus. The spirit of London had broken bounds. It came wildly from mean streets in the slum quarters to the heart of the West End. The worst elements had surged up and mingled with the middle-class folk and those who claim exclusiveness by the power of wealth. In ignorance that all barriers of caste were to be broken that night, “society” women, as they are called, rather insolent in their public display of white shoulders and diamonds and furs, set out in motor cars for hotels and restaurants which had arranged peace dinners and peace dances. Some of them, I saw, were unaccompanied by their own men, whom they were to meet later, but the vacant seats in their open cars were quickly filled by soldiers, seamen, or merry devils in civil clothes who climbed over the backs of the cars when they were brought to a standstill in the crush of vast crowds. Those uninvited guests, some of them wearing women’s bonnets, most of them fluttering with flags pinned to their coats, all of them provided with noisemaking instruments, behaved with ironical humour to the pretty ladies, touched their coiled hair with “ticklers,” blew loud blasts on their toy trumpets, delivered cockney orations to them for the enjoyment of the crowds below. Some of the pretty ladies accepted the

situation with courage and good humour, laughing with shrill mirth at their grotesque companions. Others were frightened and angry. I saw one girl try to beat off the hands of men clambering about her car. They swarmed into it and paid no heed to her cries of protest....

All the flappers were out in the Strand and in Trafalgar Square and many streets. They were factory girls, shop girls, office girls, and their eyes were alight with adventure and a pagan ecstasy. Men teased them as they passed with the long "ticklers," and they, armed with the same weapon, fought duels with these aggressors, and then fled, and were pursued into the darkness of side-streets, where they were caught and kissed. Soldiers in uniform, English, Scots, Canadians, Australians, came lurching along in gangs, arm in arm, then mingled with the girls, changed headgear with them, struggled and danced and stampeded with them. Seamen, three sheets in the wind, steered an uneven course through this turbulent sea of life, roaring out choruses, until each man had found a maid for the dance of joy.

London was a dark forest with nymphs and satyrs at play in the glades and Pan stamping his hoofs like a giddy goat. All the passions let loose by war, the breaking down of old restraints, the gladness of youth at escape from death, provided the motive-power, unconscious and primitive, behind this carnival of the London crowds. From some church a procession came into Trafalgar Square, trying to make a pathway through the multitude. A golden cross was raised high, and clergymen in surplices, with acolytes and faithful women, came chanting solemn words. The crowd closed about them. A mirthful sailor teased the singing women with his "tickler." Loud guffaws, shrill laughter, were in the wake of the procession, though some men stood to attention as the cross passed, and others bared their heads, and something hushed the pagan riot a moment.

At the windows in Pall Mall men in evening clothes who had been officers in the world-war sat by the pretty women who had driven through the crowds, looking out on the noisy pageant of the street. A piano-organ was playing, and two young soldiers danced with ridiculous grace, imitating the elegance and languorous ecstasy of society dancers. One of them wore a woman's hat and skirt, and was wonderfully comic.

I stood watching them, a little stupefied by all the noise and tumult of this "Peace" night, and with a sense of tragic irony, remembering millions of boys who lay dead in quiet fields and the agony of many peoples in Europe. It was then that I saw young Harding. He was sitting in his club window just above the dancing soldiers and looking out with a grave and rather woe-begone face, remarkable in contrast with the laughing faces of fellow-clubmen and their women. I recognised him after a moment's query in my mind, and said: "Hulloa, Harding!"

He stared at me, and I saw the sudden dawning of remembrance.

"Come in," he answered. "I had no idea you were back again!"

So I went into his club and sat by his side at the open window, glad of this retreat from the pressure and tumult of the mob below.

He talked conventionally for a little while, and asked me whether I had had "a good time" in the States, and whether I was busy, and why the Americans seemed so hostile to President Wilson. I understood from him that he approved of the Peace Treaty and was glad that Germany and Austria had been "wiped off the map" as far as it was humanly possible.

We chatted like that for what I suppose was something more than half an hour, while we looked out upon the seething multitude in the street below, when suddenly the boy's mask fell from him, so abruptly and with such a naked revelation of a soul in anguish that concealment was impossible.

I saw him lean forward with his elbows on the windowsill and his hands clenching an iron bar. His face had become like his shirt front, almost as white as that. A kind of groan came from him, like that of a man badly wounded. The people on either side of him turned to look at him, but he was unconscious of them, as he stared at something in the street. I followed the direction of his eyes and guessed that he was looking at a motor-car which had been stopped by the crowd, who were surging about it. It was an open car, and inside were a young man and woman in fancy dress as Pierrot and Columbine. They were standing up and pelting the crowd with long coloured streamers, which the mob caught and tossed back again with shouts of laughter. The girl was very pretty, with an audacious little face beneath the white sugar-loaf cap, and her eyes were on fire. Her companion was a merry-eyed fellow, dean-shaven and ruddy-faced (for he had not chalked it to Pierrot's whiteness), and looked to me typical of a naval officer or one of our young airmen. I could see nothing to groan about in such a sight.

"What's wrong, Harding?"

I touched him on the elbow, for I did not like him to give himself away before the other company in the window-seat.

He rose at once, and walked in a stumbling way across the room, while I followed. The room was empty where we stood.

"Aren't you well?" I asked.

He laughed in a most tragic way.

"Did you see those two in the car, Pierrot and Columbine?"

I nodded.

"Columbine was my wife. Pierrot is now her husband. Funny, isn't it?"

My memory went back to that night in Cologne, less than six months before, when Harding had asked me to use my influence to get him demobilised, and as an explanation of his motive opened his pocket-book and showed me the photograph of a pretty girl, and said, "That's my wife;... she is hipped because I have been away so long." I felt enormously sorry for him.

"Come and have a whisky in the smoke-room," said Harding. "I'd like a yarn, and we shall be alone."

I did not want him to tell me his tale. I was tired of tragic history. But I could not refuse. The boy wanted to unburden himself. I could see that, though for quite a time after we had sat on each side of the wood fire he hesitated in getting to the point and indulged in small talk about his favourite brand of cigars and my evil habit of smoking the worst kind of cigarettes.

Suddenly we plunged into what were the icy waters of his real thoughts.

“About my wife... I’d like you to know. Others will tell you, and you’d have heard already if you hadn’t been away so long. But I think you would get a wrong notion from others. The fact is, I don’t blame Evelyn. I would like you to understand that. I blame the Germans for everything.”

“The Germans?”

That was a strange statement, and I could not see the drift of it until he explained his meaning.

“The Germans made the war, and the war took me away from Evelyn just after our marriage.... Imagine the situation, a kid of a girl, wanting to be merry and bright, eager for the fun of life, and all that, left alone in a big old house in the country, or when she got fed up with that in a big gloomy house in town. She got fed up with both pretty quick. I used to get letters from her—every day for a while—and she used to say in every one of them, ‘I’m fed up like Billy-O.’ That was her way of putting it, don’t you know, and I got scared. But what could I do out there except write and tell her to try and get busy with something? Well, she got busy all right!”

Harding laughed again in his woeful way, which was not good to hear. Then he became angry and passionate, and told me it was all the fault of “those damned women.”

I asked him what “damned women,” and he launched into a wild denunciation of a certain set of women—most of the names he mentioned were familiar to me from full-length portraits in the *Sketch* and *Tatler*—who had spent the years of war in organising fancy bazaars, charity matinées, private theatricals for Red Cross funds, “and all that,” as Harding remarked in his familiar phrase. He said they were rotten all through, utterly immoral, perfectly callous of all the death and tragedy about them, except in a false, hysterical way at times.

“They were ghouls,” he said.

Many of them had married twice, three times, even more than that, before the boys who were killed were cold in their graves. Yet those were the best, with a certain respect for convention. Others had just let themselves go. They had played the devil with any fellow who came within their circle of enticement, if he had a bit of money, or could dance well, or oiled his hair in the right way.

“They corrupted English society,” said Harding, “while they smiled and danced, and dressed in fancy clothes, and posed for their photos in the papers. It was they who corrupted Evelyn when the poor kid was fighting up against her loneliness and very hipped, and all that.”

“Who was the man?” I asked, and Harding hesitated before he told me. It was with frightful irony that he answered: “The usual man in most of these cases, the man who is often one’s best pal. Damn him!”

Harding, seemed to repent of that curse; at least, his next words were strangely inconsistent.

“Mind you, I don’t blame him, either. It was I who sent him to Evelyn. He was in the Dragoons with me, and when he went home on leave I said, ‘Go and cheer up my little wife, old man. Take her to a theatre or two, and all that. She’s devilishly lonely.’ Needless to say, he fell in love with her. I might have known it. As for Evelyn, she was immensely taken with young Dick. He was a bit of a humorist and made her laugh. Laughter was a devilish good thing in war-time. That was where Dick had his pull. I might have known *that!* I was a chuckle-headed idiot.”

The end of the story was abrupt, and at the time I found it hard to find extenuating circumstances in the guilt of the girl who had smashed this boy Harding. She lied to him up to the very moment of his demobilisation; at least, she gave him no clue to her purpose until she hit him, as it were, full in the face with a mortal blow to his happiness.

He had sent her a wire with the one word “Demobilised,” and then had taken the next train back and a cab from Charing Cross to that house of his at Rutland Gate.

“Is the mistress well?” he had asked one of the maids when his kit was handled in the hall.

“The mistress is out, sir,” said the maid, and he remembered afterwards that she looked queerly at him, with a kind of pity.

There was the usual note waiting for him. Evelyn was “very sorry.” She hated causing her husband the grief she knew he would feel, but she and Dick could not do without each other. The war had altered everything, and many wives to many husbands. She hoped Harding would be happy after a bit....

Harding was not happy. When he read that note he went a little mad, and roamed round London with an automatic pistol, determined to kill his former friend if he could set eyes on him. Fortunately, he did not find him. Evelyn and Dick had gone off to a village in Devonshire, and after three days with murder in his heart Harding had been very ill and had gone into a nursing-home. There, in his weakness, he had, he told me, “thought things out.” The result of his meditations amounted to no more than the watchword of many people in years of misery: “*C’est la guerre!*”

It was the war which had caused his tragedy. It had put too great a strain on human nature, or at least on human nerves and morals. It had broken down the conventions and traditions of civilised life. The Germans had not only destroyed many towns and villages, but many homes and hearts far from the firing-line. They had let the devil loose.

“Quite a number of my pals,” said Harding, “are in the same boat with me. They either couldn’t stick their wives, or their wives couldn’t stick them. It gives one a sense of companionship!”

He smiled in a melancholy way, but then confessed to loneliness—so many of his real pals had gone west—and asked whether he could call on me now and then. It was for that reason that he came to my house fairly often, and sometimes Fortune, who came too at times, made him laugh, as in the old days.

III

Fortune and I met also in a crowd, but indoors. Brand and Eileen O'Connor were both to be at one of the evening parties which assembled every now and then in a flat at Chelsea belonging to Susy Whincop, designer of stained glass, driver of ambulances for the Scottish Women's Convoy, and sympathetic friend before the war of any ardent soul who grew long hair if a man, short hair if a woman, and had some special scheme, philosophy, or inspiration for the welfare of humanity.

I had known Susy and her set in the old days. They were the minor intellectuals of London, and I had portrayed some of them in a novel called "Intellectual Mansions," which they did not like, though I loved them all. They wrote little poems, painted little pictures, produced little plays, and talked about all subjects under heaven with light-hearted humour, an arrogance towards popular ideas, and a quick acceptance of the new, the unusual and the revolutionary in art and thought. Into their way of life war crashed suddenly with its thunder notes of terror. All that they had lived for seemed to be destroyed, and all their ideals overthrown. They had believed in beauty, and it was flung into the mud, and bespattered with blood, and buried beneath the ugly monsters of war's idolatry.

They had been devotees of liberty, and were made slaves of the drill sergeant and other instruments of martial law. They had been enemies of brutality, cruelty, violence, but all human effort now was for the slaughter of men, and the hero was he who killed most with bayonet or bomb. Their pretty verses were made of no account. Their impressionistic paintings were not so useful as the camouflage of tin huts. Their little plays were but feeble drama to that which now was played out on the world's stage to the roar of guns and the march of armies. They went into the tumult and fury of it all, and were lost. I met some of them, like Fortune and Brand, in odd places. Many of them died in the dirty ditches. Some of them wrote poems before they died, stronger than their work before the war, with a noble despair or the exaltation of sacrifice. Others gave no sign of their previous life, and were just absorbed into the ranks—ants in these legions of soldier-ants. Now those who had escaped with life were coming back to their old haunts, trying to pick up old threads, getting back, if they could, to the old ways of work, hoping for a new inspiration out of immense experience, but not yet finding it.

In Susy Whincop's flat some of them had gathered when I went there, and when I looked round upon them, seeing here and there vaguely-remembered faces, I was conscious of a change that had overtaken them, and, with a shock, wondered whether I too had altered so much in those five years. I recognised Peter Hallam, whom I had known as a boy just down from Oxford, with a genius (in a small way) for satirical verse and a talent for passionate lyrics of a morbid and erotic type. Yes, it was certainly Peter, though his face had hardened and he had cropped his hair short and walked with one leg stiff.

He was talking to a girl with bobbed hair. It was Jennie Southcombe, who had been one of the heroines of the Serbian retreat, according to accounts of newspaper correspondents.

"My battery," said Peter, "plugged into old Fritz with open sights for four horns. We just mowed 'em down."

Another face rang a little bell in my memory. Surely that was Alfred Lyon, the Futurist painter? No, it could not be, for Lyon had dressed like an Apache, and this man was in conventional evening clothes and looked like a Brigadier in mufti. Alfred Lyon?... Yes, there he was, though he had lost his pose—cribbed from Murger's *Vie de Bohème*—and his half-starved look, and the wildness in his eyes. As he passed Susy Whincop he spoke a few words, which I overheard.

"I've abandoned Futurism. The present knocked that silly. Our little violence, which shocked Suburbia, was made ridiculous by the enormous thing that smashed every convention into a cocked hat.' I'm just going to put down some war scenes—I made notes in the trenches—with that simplicity of the primitive soul to which we went back in that way of life. The soldier's point of view, his vision, is what I shall try for."

"Splendid!" said Susy. "Only, don't shrink from the abomination. We've got to make the world understand—and remember."

I felt a touch on my sleeve, and a voice said, "Hulloa!... Back again?"

I turned and saw an oldish-young man, with white hair above a lean, clean-shaven face and sombre eyes. I stared, but could not fix him.

"Don't you remember?" he said. "Wetherall, of the Stage Society!"

"Oh, Lord, yes!"

I grasped his hand, and tried to keep the startled look out of my eyes. But he saw it, and smiled.

"Four years as a prisoner of the Turk have altered me a bit. This white hair, eh? And I feel like Rip van Winkle."

He put into words something which I had been thinking since my arrival in Susy's rooms.

"We are the *revenants*, the ghosts who have come back to their old haunts. We are pretending that everything is the same as before, and that we are the same. But it's all different, and we have changed most of all. Five years of war have dug their hoofs into the faces of most people in this crowd. Some of them look fifteen, twenty, years older, and I expect they've been through a century of experience and emotion."

"What's coming out of it?" I asked. "Anything big?"

"Not from us," said Wetherall. "Most of us are finished. Our nerves have gone to pieces, and our vitality has been sapped. We shall put down a few notes of things seen and understood. But it's the next generation that will get the big vision, or the one after next."

Then I was able to shake hands with Susy Whincop, and, as I have said, she left me in no doubt about the change that four years of war had made to me.

She held me at arm's length, studying my face.

"Soul alive!" she said. "You've been through it all right! Hell's branding-irons have been busy with a fair-

faced man."

"As bad as that?" I asked, and she answered very gravely, "As bad as that."

She had hardly changed, except for a few streaks of grey in her brown hair. Her low, broad forehead was as smooth as before; her brown eyes shone with their old steady light. She had not lost her sense of humour, though she had seen a good deal of blood and agony and death.

"How's humanity?" I asked, and she laughed and Shrugged her shoulders.

"What can one do with it? I thought we were going to catch the old devil by the tail and hold him fast, but he's broken loose again. This peace! Dear God!... And all the cruelty and hatred that have survived the massacre! But I don't despair even now. In this room there is enough good-will and human kindness to create a new world. We're going to have a good try to make things better by-and-by."

"Who's your star to-night?" I asked. "Who is the particular Hot-Gospeller with a mission to convert mankind?"

"I've several," said Susy.

She glanced round the room, and her eyes rested on a little man with goggles and a goatee beard, none other than my good friend Dr. Small, with whom I had travelled down many roads. I had no notion that he knew Susy or was to be here to-night.

"There's one great soul—a little American doctor whose heart is as big as humanity itself, and whose head is filled with the wisdom of the wise."

"I know him," I said, "and I agree with you."

He caught our eyes fixed on him, and blinked through his goggles, and then waved his hand, and made his way to us.

"Hulloa, doc.!" I said. "Why didn't you tell me you knew Susy Whincop?"

"No need," he answered. "Miss Whincop is the golden link between all men of good-will."

Susy was pleased with that. She patted the little doctor's hand and said, "Bully for you, doctor! and may the Stars and Stripes wave over the League of Nations!"

Then she was assailed by other guests, and the doctor and I took refuge in a corner.

"How's everything?" I asked.

The doctor was profoundly dejected, and did not hide the gloom that possessed his soul.

"Sonny," he answered, "we shall have to fight with our backs to the wall, because the enemy—the old devil—is prevailing against us. I have just come over from Paris, and I don't mind telling you that what I saw during the Peace Conference has made me doubt the power of goodness over evil."

"Tell me," I said.

"Daddy" Small's story was not pleasant to hear. It was the story of the betrayal, one by one, of every ideal for which simple men had fought and died, a story of broken pledges, of hero-worship dethroned, and of great peoples condemned to lingering death. The Peace Treaty, he said, would break the heart of the world and prepare the way for new, more dreadful, warfare.

"How about Wilson?" I asked.

The little doctor raised his hands like a German crying, "*Kamerad!*"

"Wilson was not big enough. He had the future of civilisation in his hands, but his power was filched from him, and he never knew until the end that he had lost it. He was like a simple Gulliver among the Liliputians. They tied him down with innumerable threads of cotton while he slept in self-complacency with a sense of righteousness. He was slow-thinking among quick-witted people. He stated a general principle, and they drafted out clauses which seemed to fulfil the principle while violating it in every detail. They juggled with facts and figures so that black seemed white through his moral spectacles, and he said Amen to their villainy, believing that God had been served by righteousness. Bit by bit they broke his pledges and made a jigsaw puzzle of them so artfully that he believed they were uncracked. Little by little they robbed him of his honour, and he was unaware of the theft. In preambles and clause headings and interpretations they gave lip-service to the fourteen points upon which the armistice was granted, and to which the allied nations were utterly pledged, not only to the Germans and all enemies, but to their own people. Not one of those fourteen points is in the reality of the Treaty. There has been no self-determination of peoples. Millions have been transferred into unnatural boundaries. There have been no open covenants openly arrived at. The Conference was within closed doors. The clauses of the Peace Treaty were kept secret from the world until an American journalist got hold of a copy and sent it to his paper. What has become of the equality of trade conditions and the removal of economic barriers among all nations consenting to peace? Sonny, Europe has been carved up by the spirit of vengeance, and multitudes of men, women and children have been sentenced to death by starvation. Another militarism is enthroned above the ruin of German militarism. Wilson was hoodwinked into putting his signature to a peace of injustice which will lead by desperation to world anarchy and strife. When he understands what thing he has done he will be stricken by a mortal blow to his conscience and his pride."

"Doctor," I said, "there is still hope in the League of Nations. We must all back that."

He shook his head.

"The spirit has gone out of it. It was born without a soul. I believe now that the future welfare of the world depends upon a change of heart among the peoples, inspired by individuals in all nations who will work for good and give a call to humanity, indifferent to statesmen, treaties and Governments."

"The International League of Good-will?"

He nodded and smiled.

"Something like that."

I remembered a dinner-party in New York after the armistice. I had been lecturing on the League of Nations at a time when the Peace Treaty was still unsigned, but when already there was a growing hostility

against President Wilson, startling in its intensity. The people of the United States were still moved by the emotion and idealism with which they had roused great armies and sent them to the fields of France. Some of the men were returning home again. I stood outside a club in New York when a darkie regiment returned its colours, and I heard the roars of cheering that followed the march of the negro troops. I saw Fifth Avenue filled with triumphal arches, strung across with jewelled chains, festooned with flags and trophies of the home-coming of the New York Division. The heart of the American people was stirred by the pride of its achievement on the way to victory and by a new sense of power over the destiny of mankind. But already there was a sense of anxiety about the responsibilities to which Wilson in Europe was pledging them without their full and free consent. They were conscious that their old isolation was being broken down, and that by ignorance or rash promise they might be drawn into other European adventures which were no concern of theirs. They knew how little was their knowledge of European peoples, with their rivalries, and racial hatreds, and secret intrigues. Their own destiny as a free people might be thwarted by being dragged into the jungle of that unknown world. In any case Wilson was playing a lone hand, pledging them without their advice or agreement, subordinating them, it seemed, to the British Empire, with six votes on the Council of the League to their poor one. What did he mean? By what right did he do so?

At every dinner-table these questions were asked before the soup was drunk; at the coffee end of the meal every dinner-party was a debating club, and the women joined with the men in hot discussion; until some tactful soul laughed loudly, and some hostess led the way to music or a dance.

The ladies had just gone after one of these debates, leaving us to our cigars and coffee, when “Daddy” Small made a proposition which startled me at the time.

“See here,” he said to his host and the other men. “Out of this discussion one thing stands clear and straight. It is that in this room, now, at this table, are men of intellect—American and English—men of goodwill towards mankind, men of power in one way or another, who agree that whatever happens there must be eternal friendship between England and the United States.”

“Sure!” said a chorus of voices.

“In other countries there are men with the same ideals as, ourselves—peace, justice between men and nations, a hatred of cruelty, pity for women and children, charity and truth. Is that agreed?”

“Sure!” said the other guests.

They were mostly business men, well-to-do, but not of the “millionaire” class, with here and there a writing-man, an artist and, as I remember, a clergyman.

“I am going to be a commercial traveller in charity,” said the little doctor. “I am going across the frontiers to collect clients for an international society of goodwill. I propose to establish a branch at this table.”

The suggestion was received with laughter by some of the men, but, as I saw, with gravity by others.

“What would be the responsibilities, doctor. Do you want money?”

This was from the manager of an American railroad.

“We shall want a bit,” said the doctor. “Not much. Enough for stamps and occasional booklets and typewriting. The chief responsibility would be to spot lies leading to national antagonism, and to kill them by exposure to cold truth; also, to put in friendly words, privately and publicly, on behalf of human kindness across the barriers of hate and malignity. Any names for the New York branch?”

The doctor took down twelve names, pledged solemnly to his programmes....

I remembered that scene in New York when I stood with the little man in Susy Whincop’s drawing-room.

“What about this crowd?” I asked.

“Sonny,” he said, “this place is reeking with humanity. The real stuff. Idealists who have seen hell pretty close, most of them. Why, in this room there’s enough goodwill to move mountains of cruelty, if we could get a move on all together.”

It was then that I saw Charles Fortune, though I was looking for Brand.

Fortune was wearing one of his special “faces.” I interpreted it as his soulful and mystical face. It broke a little as he winked at me.

“Remarkable gathering,” he said. “The Intellectuals come back to their lair. Some of them like little Bo-Peep who lost her sheep and left their tails behind them.”

“What does that mean?” I asked.

“Nothing,” he answered. “We used to talk like that. I’m trying to grope back.”

He put his hand over his forehead wearily.

“God!” he said. “How terrible was war in a Nissen hut! I cannot even now forget that I was every yard a soldier!”

He began to hum his well-remembered anthem, “Blear-eyed Bill the Butcher of the Boche,” and then checked himself.

“Nay, let us forget that melody of blood. Let us rather sing of fragrant things of peace.” He hummed the nursery ballad of “Twinkle, twinkle, little star, How I wonder what you are!”

Susy Whincop seized him by the wrist.

“So the Fat Boy has escaped the massacre? Come and make us laugh. We are getting too serious at the piano end of the room.”

“Lady,” said Fortune, “tempt me not to mirth-making. My irony is terrible when roused.”

As he went to the piano I caught sight of Brand just making his way through a group by the door.

I had never seen him in civil clothes, but he looked as I had imagined him, in an old pre-war dinner-jacket and baggy trousers, and a shirt that bulged abominably. A tuft of hair stuck up behind—the tuft that Eileen O’Connor, had pulled for Auld Lang Syne. But he looked fine and distinguished, with his hard, lean face and strong jaw and melancholy eyes.

He caught sight of me and gripped my hand, painfully.

“Hullo, old man! Welcome back. I have heaps to tell you.”

“Good things?” I asked.

He shook his head.

“Not good.... Damned bad, alas!”

He did not continue the conversation. He stared across my shoulder at the door as though he saw an apparition. I turned to see the object of his gaze. It was Eileen O’Connor, whom I had first met in Lille.

She was in an evening frock cut low at the neck, and her arms were bare. There was a smile in her dark Irish eyes, and about her long humorous mouth. The girl I had seen in Lille was not so elegant as this, not so pretty. The lifting of care, perhaps, had made the change.

Susy Whincop gave a cry of “Is that Eileen?” and darted to her.

“It’s myself,” said Eileen, releasing herself from an ardent embrace, “and all the better for seeing you. Who’s who in this distinguished crowd?”

“Old friends,” I said, being nearest to her. “Four men who walked one day of history up a street in Lille, and met an Irish girl who had the worship of the crowd.”

She took my hand and I was glad of her look of friendship.

“Four?” she said. “That’s too good to be true. All safe and home again?”

It was astonishing that four of us should be there in a room in London with the girl who had been the heroine of Lille. But there was Fortune and “Daddy” Small and Brand and myself.

The crowd gave us elbow-room while we stood round Eileen. To each she gave her hands—both hands—and merry words of greeting. It was only I, and she, perhaps, who saw the gloom on Brand’s face when she greeted him last and said: “Is it well with you, Wickham?”

Her colour rose a little at the sight of him, and he was paler than when I saw him first that night.

“Pretty well,” he said. “One still needs courage—even in peace.”

He laughed a little as he spoke, but I knew that his laughter was the camouflage of hidden trouble, at which he had hinted in his letters to me.

We could not have much talk that evening. The groups shifted and re-shifted. The best thing was when Eileen sang “The Gentle Maiden” as on a night in Lille. Brand, standing near the door, listened, strangely unconscious of the people about him.

“It’s good to hear that song again,” I said.

He started, as though suddenly awakened.

“It stirs queer old memories.”

It was in Eileen’s own house that Brand and I renewed a friendship which had been made in a rescued city where we had heard the adventure of this girl’s life.

IV

As Brand admitted to me, and as he had outlined the trouble in his letters, he was having “a bad time.” Since his marriage with Elsa von Kreuzenach he had not had much peace of mind nor any kind of luck. After leaving Cologne the War Office, prompted by some unknown influence—he suspected his father, who knew the Secretary for War—had sent him off on a special mission to Italy and had delayed his demobilisation until a month before this meeting of ours. That had prevented his plan of bringing Elsa to England, and now, when he was free and her journey possible, he was seriously embarrassed with regard to a home for her. There was plenty of room in his father’s house at Cheyne Walk, Chelsea—too big a house for his father and mother and younger sister, now that the eldest girl had married and his younger brother lay dead on the Somme. It had been his idea that he and Elsa would live in the upper rooms—it made a kind of flat—while he got back to novel-writing until he earned enough to provide a home of his own. It was still his idea, as the only possible place for the immediate future, but the family was dead against it and expressed the utmost aversion, amounting almost to horror, at the idea of receiving his German wife. By violent argument, by appeals to reason and charity, most of all by the firm conviction of his father that he was suffering from shell-shock and would go over the borderline of sanity if thwarted too much, a grudging consent had been obtained from them to give Elsa house-room. Yet he dreaded the coldness of her welcome, and the hostility not only of his own people but of any English society in which she might find herself.

“I shouldn’t have believed,” said Brand, “that such vindictive hatred could have outlasted the war, in England. The people here at home, who have never seen war closer than an air-raid, are poisoned, twisted and envenomed with hate. And the women are worst. My own mother—so sweet and gentle in the old days—would see every German baby starve rather than subscribe to a single drop of milk. My own sister—twenty years of age, add as holy as an angel—would scratch out the eyes of every German girl. She reads the papers every day with a feverish desire for the Kaiser’s trial. She licks her lips at the stories of starvation in Austria. ‘They are getting punished,’ she says. ‘Who?’ I ask her. ‘Austrian babies?’ And she says, ‘The people who killed my brother and yours.’ What’s the good of telling her that I have killed *their* brothers—many of them—even the brother of my wife——”

I shook my head at that, but Brand was insistent.

"I'm sure of it.... It is useless telling her that the innocent are being punished for the guilty, and that all Europe was involved in the same guilt. She says, 'You have altered your ideas. The strain of war has been too much for you.' She means I'm mad or bad.... Sometimes I think I may be, but when I think of those scenes in Cologne, the friendly way of our fighting men with their former enemy, the charity of our Tommies, their lack of hatred now the job is done, I look at these people in England, the stay-at-homes, and believe it is they who are warped."

The news of Brand's marriage with a German girl had leaked out, though his people tried to hush it up. It came to me now and then as a tit-bit of scandal from men who had been up at Oxford with him in the old days.

"You know that fellow Wickham Brand?"

"Yes."

"Heard the rumour about him?"

"No."

"They say he's got a German wife. Married her after the armistice."

"Why not?"

That question of mine made them stare as though I had uttered some blasphemy. Generally they did not attempt to answer it, but shrugged their shoulders with a look of unutterable disgust, or said, "Disgraceful!" They were men, invariably, who had done *embusqué* work in the war, in Government offices and soft jobs. Soldiers who had fought their way to Cologne were more lenient. One of them said, "Some of the German girls are devilish pretty. Not my style, perhaps, but kissable."

I saw something of Brand's trouble when I walked down Knightsbridge with him one day on the way to his home in Chelsea. Horace Chipchase, the novelist, came face to face with us and gave a whoop of pleasure when he saw us. Then suddenly, after shaking hand? with me and greeting Brand warmly, he remembered the rumour that had reached him. Embarrassment overcame him, and ignoring Brand he confined his remarks to me, awkwardly, and made an excuse for getting on. He did not look at Brand, again.

"Bit strained in his manner," I remarked, glancing sideways at Wickham.

He strode on with tightened lips.

"Shared rooms with me once, and I helped him when he was badly in need of it.... He's heard about Elsa. Silly blighter!"

But it hurt the man, who was very sensitive under his hard crust.

It was on the way to his house that he told me he had made arrangements at last for Elsa to join him in England. One of his friends at headquarters in Cologne was providing her with a passport and had agreed to let her travel with him to Paris where he was to give evidence before a committee of the Peace Conference. Brand could fetch her from there, in a week's time.

"I am going to Paris next week," I told him, and he gave a grunt of pleasure, and said, "Splendid! We can both meet Elsa."

I thought it curious then, and afterwards, that he was anxious for my company when he met his wife and when she was with him. I think the presence of a third person helped him to throw off a little of the melancholy into which he relapsed when alone.

I asked him if Elsa's family knew of her marriage and were reconciled to it, and he told me that they knew, but were less reconciled now than when she had first broken the news to her father and mother on the day of her wedding. Then there had been a family "scene." The General had raged and stormed, and his wife had wept, but after that outburst had decided to forgive her, in order to avoid a family scandal. There had been a formidable assembly of uncles, aunts and cousins of the von Kreuzenach family to sit in judgment upon this affair which, as they said, "touched their honour," and Elsa's description of it, and of her terror and sense of guilt (it is not easy to break with racial traditions), was very humorous, though at the same time rather pathetic. They had graciously decided, after prolonged discussions in which they treated Elsa exactly as though she were the prisoner at a court-martial, to acknowledge and accept her marriage with Captain Brand. They had been led to this decision mainly owing to the information given by Franz von Kreuzenach that Captain Brand belonged to the English aristocracy, his father being Sir Amyas Brand, and a member of the English House of Parliament. They were willing to admit that, inferior as Captain Brand's family might be to that of von Kreuzenach—so old and honoured in German history—it was yet respectable and not unworthy of alliance with them. Possibly—it was an idea suggested with enormous solemnity by Onkel von Kreuzenach—Elsa's marriage with the son of an English Member of Parliament might be of service to the Father-land in obtaining some amelioration of the Peace Terms (the Treaty was not yet signed), and in counteracting the harsh malignity of France. They must endeavour to use this opportunity provided by Elsa in every possible way as a patriotic duty.... So at the end of the family conclave Elsa was not only forgiven but was, to some extent, exalted as an instrument of God for the rescue of their beloved Germany.

That position of hers lasted in her family until the terms of the Peace Treaty leaked out, and then were published in full. A storm of indignation rose in Germany, and Elsa was a private victim of its violence in her own house. The combined clauses of the Treaty were read as a sentence of death by the German people. Clause by clause, they believed it fastened a doom upon them, and insured their ruin. It condemned them to the payment of indemnities which would demand all the produce of their industry for many and uncertain years. It reduced them to the position of a slave state, without an army, without a fleet, without colonies, without the right to develop industries in foreign countries, without ships to carry their merchandise, without coal to supply their factories or raw material for their manufactures. To enforce the payment of these indemnities foreign commissions would seize all German capital invested in former enemy or neutral states, and would keep armed forces on the Rhine ready to march at any time, years after the conclusion of peace, into the heart of Germany. The German people might work, but not for themselves. They had freed themselves of their own tyrants, but were to be subject to an international tyranny depriving them of all hope of gradual recovery from the ruin of defeat. On the West and on the East, Austria was to be hemmed in by

new states formed out of her own flesh-and-blood under the domination of hostile races. She was to be maimed and strangled. The Fourteen Points to which the allies had pledged themselves before the armistice had been abandoned utterly, and Wilson's promise of a peace which would heal the wounds of the world had been replaced by a peace of vengeance which would plunge Central Europe into deep gulfs of misery, despair, and disease. That, at least, was the German point of view.

"They're stunned," said Brand. "They knew they were to be punished, and they were willing to pay a vast price of defeat. But they believed that under a republican Government they would be left with a future hope of progress, a decent hope of life, based upon their industry. Now they have no hope, for we have given them a thin chance of reconstruction. They are falling back upon the hope of vengeance and revolt. We have prepared another inevitable war when the Germans, with the help of Russia, will strive to break the fetters we have fastened on them. So goes the only purpose for which most of us fought this war, and all our pals have died in vain."

He stopped in the street and beat the pavement with his stick.

"The damned stupidity of it all!" he said. "The infernal wickedness of those old men who have arranged this thing!"

Three small boys came galloping up Cheyne Walk with toy reins and tinkling bells.

"Those children," said Brand, "will see the things that we have seen and go into the ditches of death before their manhood has been fulfilled. We fought to save them, and have failed."

He told me that even Elsa had been aghast at the Peace Terms.

"I hoped more from the generous soul of England," she had written to him.

Franz von Kreuzenach had written more bitterly than that.

"We have been betrayed. There were millions of young men in Germany who would have worked loyally to fulfil Wilson's conditions of peace as they were pledged in his Fourteen Points. They would have taken their punishment with patience and courage, knowing the penalty of defeat. They would have worked for the new ideals of a new age, which were to be greater liberty and the brotherhood of man in a League of Nations. But what is that league? It is a combination of enemies, associated for the purpose of crushing the German people and keeping her crushed. I, who loved England and had no emnity against her even in war, cannot forgive her now for her share in this peace. As a German I find it unforgivable, because it perpetuates the spirit of hatred and thrusts us back into the darkness where evil is bred."

"Do you agree with that?" I asked Brand.

"On the whole, yes," he said, gravely. "Mind you, I'm not against punishing Germany. She had to be punished. But we are substituting slow torture for just retribution, and like Franz I'm thinking of the effect on the future. By generosity we should have made the world safe. By vengeance we have prepared new strife. Europe will be given up to anarchy and deluged in the blood of the boys who are now babes."

I had dinner with Brand's people and found them "difficult." Sir Amyas Brand had Wickham's outward hardness and none of his inner sensibility. He was a stiff, pompous man who had done extremely well out of the war, I guessed, by the manufacture of wooden huts, to which he attached a patriotic significance, apart from his profits. He alluded to the death of his younger son as his "sacrifice for the Empire," though it seemed to me that the boy Jack had been the real victim of sacrifice.. To Wickham he behaved with an exasperating air of forgiveness, as to one who had sinned and was physically and morally sick.

"How do you think Wickham is looking?" he asked me at table, and when I said, "Very well," he sighed and shook his head.

"The war was a severe nervous strain upon Mm. It has changed him sadly. We try to be patient with him, poor lad."

Brand overheard his speech and flushed angrily.

"I'm sorry I try your patience so severely, sir," he said in a bitter, ironical way.

"Don't let's argue about it, dear lad," said Sir Amyas Brand suavely.

"No," said Lady Brand plaintively, "you know argument is bad for you, Wickham. You become so violent, dear."

"Besides," said Ethel Brand, the daughter, in a low and resigned voice, "what's done can't be undone."

"Meaning Elsa?" asked Wickham savagely. I could see that but for my restraining presence as a stranger there was all the inflammable stuff here for a first-class domestic "flare-up."

"What else?" asked Ethel coldly, and meeting her brother's challenging eyes with a perfectly steady gaze. She was a handsome girl with regular, classical features and tight lips, as narrow-minded, I imagined, as a mid-Victorian spinster in a cathedral town, and as hard as granite in principle and prejudice.

Wickham weakened after signs of an explosion of rage. He spoke gently, and revealed a hope to which I think he clung desperately.

"When Elsa comes you will all fall in love with her."

It was the worst thing he could have said, though he was unconscious of his "gaffe."

His sister Ethel reddened, and I could see her mouth harden.

"So far I have remarkably little love for Germans, male or female."

"I hope we shall behave with Christian charity," said Lady Brand.

Sir Amyas Brand coughed uneasily, and then tried to laugh off his embarrassment for my benefit.

"There will be considerable scandal in my constituency!"

"To hell with that!" said Brand, irritably. "It's about time the British public returned to sanity."

"Ah!" said Sir Amyas, "there's a narrow border-line between sanity, and shell-shock. Really, it is distressing what a number of men seem to come back with disordered nerves. All these crimes, all these cases of violence——"

It gave him a chance of repeating a leading article which he had read that morning in *The Times*. It provided a conversation without controversy until the end of dinner.

In the hall, before I left, Wickham Brand laughed, rather miserably.

"It's not going to be easy! Elsa will find the climate rather cold here, eh?"

"She will win them over," I said hopefully, and these words cheered him.

"Why, yes, they're bound to like her."

We arranged for the Paris trip two weeks later, but before then we were sure to meet at Eileen O'Connor's. As a matter of fact, we dined together with "Daddy" Small next day, and Eileen was with him.

V

I found Eileen O'Connor refreshing and invigorating, so that it was good to be in her company. Most people in England at that time, at least those I met, were "nervy," depressed, and apprehensive of evil to come. There was hardly a family I knew who had not one vacant chair wherein a boy had sat when he had come home from school or office, and afterwards on leave. Their ghosts haunted these homes and were present in any company where people gathered for conversation or distraction. The wound to England's soul was unhealed, and the men who came back had received grave hurt, many of them, to their nervous and moral health.

This Irish girl was beautifully gay, not with that deliberate and artificial gaiety which filled London theatres and dancing halls, but with ah inner flame of happiness. It was difficult to account for that. She had seen much tragedy in Lille. Death and the agony of men had been familiar to her. She had faced death herself, very closely, escaping, as she said, by a narrow "squeak." She had seen the brutality of war and its welter of misery for men and women, and now in time of peace she was conscious of the sufferings of many people, and did not hide these things from her mental vision or cry, "All's right with the world!" when all was wrong. But something in her character, something, perhaps, in her faith, enabled her to resist the pressure of all this "morbid emotion" and to face it squarely, with smiling eyes. Another thing that attracted one was her fearlessness of truth. At a time when most people shrank from truth her candour was marvellous, with the simplicity of childhood joined to the wisdom of womanhood.

I saw this at the dinner-party for four arranged in her honour by "Daddy" Small. That was given, for cheapness' sake, at a little old restaurant in Whitehall which provided a good dinner for a few shillings, and in an "atmosphere" of old-fashioned respectability which appealed to the little American.

Eileen knocked Brand edgewise at the beginning of his dinner by remarking about his German marriage.

"The news came to me as a shock," she said, and when Wickham raised his eyebrows and looked both surprised and dismayed (he had counted on her sympathy and help), she patted his hand as it played a devil's tattoo on the table-cloth, and launched into a series of indiscretions that fairly made my hair curl.

"Theoretically," she said, "I hadn't the least objection to your marrying a German girl. I have always believed that love is an instinct which is beyond the control of diplomats who arrange frontiers and generals who direct wars. I saw a lot of it in Lille—and there was Franz von Kreuzenach, who fell in love with me, poor child. What really hurt me for a while was green-eyed jealousy."

"Daddy" Small laughed hilariously, and filled up Eileen's glass with Moselle wine.

Brand looked blank.

"Jealousy?"

"Why, yes," said Eileen. "Imagine me, an Irish girl, all soppy with emotion at the first sight of English khaki (that's a fantastic situation anyhow!), after four years with the grey men, and then finding that the first khaki tunic she meets holds the body of a man she knew as a boy, when she used to pull his hair! And such a grave heroic-looking man, Wicky! Why, I felt like one of Tennyson's ladies released from her dark tower by a Knight of the Round Tower. Then you went away and married a German Gretchen! And all my doing, because if I hadn't given you a letter to Franz you wouldn't have met Elsa. So when I heard the news, I thought, 'There goes my romance!'"

"Daddy" Small laughed again, joyously.

"Say, my dear," he said, "you're making poor old Wickham blush like an Englishman asked to tell the story of his V.C. in public."

Brand laughed, too, in his harsh, deep voice.

"Why, Eileen, you ought to have told me before I moved out of Lille."

"And where would maiden modesty have been?" asked Eileen, in her humorous way.

"Where is it now?" asked the little doctor.

"Besides," said Brand, "I had that letter to Franz von Kreuzenach in my pocket. I don't mind telling you I detested the fellow for his infernal impudence in making love to you."

"Sure now, it was a one-sided affair, entirely," said Eileen, exaggerating her Irish accent, "but one has to be polite to a gentleman that saves one's life on account of a romantic passion. Oh, Wickham, it's very English you are!"

Brand could find nothing to say for himself, and it was I who came to the rescue of his embarrassment by dragging a red herring across the thread of Eileen's discourse. She had a wonderful way of saying things that

on most girls' lips would have seemed audacious, or improper, or 'high-falutin', but on hers were natural with a simplicity which shone through her.

Her sense of humour played like a light about her words, yet beneath her wit was a tenderness and a knowledge of tragic things. I remember some of her sayings that night at dinner, and they seemed to me very good then, though when put down they lose the deep melody of her voice and the smile or sadness of her dark eyes.

"England," she said, "fought the war for liberty and the rights of small nations, but said to Ireland, 'Hush, keep quiet there, damn you, or you'll make us look ridiculous.'"

"Irish soldiers," she said, "helped England to win all her wars, but mostly in Scottish regiments. When the poor boys wanted to carry an Irish flag, Kitchener said, 'Go to hell,' and some of them went to Flanders... and recruiting stopped with a snap."

"Now, how do you know these things?" asked "Daddy" Small. "Did Kitchener go to Lille to tell you?"

"No," said Eileen, "but I found some of the Dublin boys in the prison at Lille, and they told the truth before they died, and perhaps it was that which killed them. That and starvation and German brutality."

"I believe you're a Sinn Feiner," said Dr. Small. "Why don't you go to Ireland and show your true colours, ma'am?"

"I'm Sinn Fein all right," said Eileen, "but I hated the look of a white wall in Lille, and there are so many white walls in the little green isle. So I'm stopping in Kensington and trying to hate the English, but can't because I love them."

She turned to Wickham and said: "Will you take me for a row in Kensington Gardens the very next day the sun shines?"

"Rather!" said Wickham, "on one condition!'

"And that?"

"That you'll be kind to my little Elsa when she comes."

"I'll be a mother to her," said Eileen, "but she must come quick or I'll be gone."

"Gone?"

Wickham spoke with dismay in his voice. I think he had counted on Eileen as his stand-by when Elsa would need a friend in England.

"Hush now!" said "Daddy" Small. "It's my secret, you wicked lady with black eyes and a mystical manner."

"Doctor," said Eileen, "your own President rebukes you. 'Open covenants openly arrived at—weren't those his words for the new diplomacy?"

"Would to God he had kept to them," said the little doctor, bitterly, launching into a denunciation of the Peace Conference until I cut him short with a question.

"What's this secret, Doctor?"

He pulled out his pocket-book with an air of mystery.

"We're getting on with the International League of Goodwill," he said. "It's making more progress than the League of Nations. There are names here that are worth their weight in gold. There are golden promises which by the grace of God——"

"Daddy" Small spoke solemnly—"will be fulfilled by golden deeds. Anyhow, we're going to get a move on—away from hatred towards charity, not for the making of wounds but for the healing, not punishing the innocent for the sins of the guilty, but saving the innocent—the Holy Innocents—for the glory of life. Miss Eileen and others are going to be the instruments of the machinery of mercy, rather, I should say, the spirit of humanity."

"With you as our gallant leader," said Eileen, patting his hand.

"It sounds good," said Brand. "Let's hear some more."

Dr. Small told us more in glowing language, and in Biblical utterance mixed with American slang like Billy Sunday's Bible. He was profoundly moved. He was filled with hope and gladness, and with a humble pride because his efforts had borne fruit.

The scheme was simple. From his friends in the United States he had promises, as good as gold, of many millions of American dollars. From English friends he had also considerable sums. With this treasure he was going to Central Europe to organise relief on a big scale for the children who were starving to death. Eileen O'Connor was to be his private secretary and assistant-organiser. She would have heaps of work to do, and she had graduated in the prisons and slums of Lille. They were starting in a week's time for Warsaw, Prague, Buda-Pesth and Vienna.

"Then," said Brand, "Elsa will lose a friend."

"Bring her, too," said Eileen. "There's work for all."

Brand was startled by this, and a sudden light leapt into his eyes.

"By Jove!... But I'm afraid not. That's impossible."

So it was only a week we had with Eileen, but in that time we had some good meetings and merry adventures. Brand and I rowed her on the lake in Kensington Gardens, and she told us Irish fairy-tales as she sat in the stem with her hat in her lap, and the wind playing in her brown hair. We took her to the Russian Ballet and she wept a little at the beauty of it.

"After four years of war," she said, "beauty is like water to a parched soul. It's so exquisite it hurts."

She took us one day into the Carmelite Church at

Kensington, and Brand and I knelt each side of her, feeling sinners with a saint between us. And then, less like a saint, she sang ribald little songs on the way to her mother's house in Holland Street, and said "Drat the thing!" when she couldn't find her key to unlock the door.

“Sorry, Biddy my dear,” she said to the little maidservant who opened the door. “I shall forget my head one day.”

“Sure, Miss Eileen,” said the girl, “but never the dear heart of you, at all, at all.”

Eileen’s mother was a buxom, cheery, smiling Irishwoman who did not worry, I fancy, about anything in the world, and was sure of heaven. Her drawing-room was littered with papers and novels, some of which she swept off the sofa with a careless hand.

“Won’t you take a seat then?”

I asked her whether she had not been anxious about her daughter when Eileen was all those years under German rule.

“Not at all,” said the lady. “I knew our dear Lord was as near to Lille as to London.”

Two of her boys had been killed in the war, “fighting,” she said, “for an ungrateful country which keeps its heel on the neck of Ireland,” and two were in the United States, working for the honour of Ireland on American newspapers. Eileen’s two sisters had married during the war and between them had given birth to four Sinn Feiners. Eileen’s father had died a year ago, and almost his last word had been her name.

“The dear man thought all the world of Eileen,” said Mrs. O’Connor. “I was out of it entirely when he had, her by his side.”

“You’ll be lonely,” said Brand, “when your daughter goes abroad again.”

Eileen answered him.

“Oh, you can’t keep me back by insidious remarks like that! Mother spends most of her days in church, and the rest of them reading naughty novels which keep her from ascending straight to heaven without the necessity of dying first. She is never lonely because her spirit is in touch with those she loves, in this world or the other. And isn’t that the truth I’m after talking, mother o’ mine!”

“I never knew more than one O’Connor who told the truth yet,” said the lady, “and that’s yourself, my dear. And it’s a frightening way you have with it that would scare the devil out of his skin.”

They were pleasant hours with Eileen, and when she went away from Charing Cross one morning with Dr. Small, five hospital nurses and two Americans of the Red Cross, I wished with all my heart that Wickham Brand had asked her and not Elsa von Kreuzenach to be his wife. That was an idle wish, for the next morning Brand and I crossed over to France, and on the way to Paris my friend told me that the thought of meeting Elsa after those months of separation excited him so that each minute seemed an hour. And as he told me that he lit a cigarette and I saw that his hand was trembling, because of this nervous strain.

VI

We met Elsa at the Gare de l’Est in Paris the evening after our arrival. Brand’s nervous anxiety had increased as the hour drew near, and he smoked cigarette after cigarette while he paced up and down the *Salle d’Attente* as far as he could for the crowds which surged there.

Once he spoke to me about his apprehensions.

“I hope to God this will work out all right.... I’m only thinking of her happiness.”

Another time he said: “This French crowd would tear her to pieces if they knew she was German.”

While we were waiting we met a friend of old times. I was first to recognise Pierre Nesle, who had been attached to us as interpreter and *liaison* officer. He was in civil clothes and was wearing a bowler hat and a light overcoat, so that his transformation was astonishing. I touched him on the arm as he made his way quickly through the crowd, and he turned sharply and stared at me as though he could not place me at all. Then a look of recognition leapt into his eyes and he grasped both my hands delightedly. He was still thin and pale, but some of his old melancholy had gone out of his eyes and in its place there was an eager, purposeful look.

“Here’s Brand,” I said. “He’ll be glad to see you again.”

“*Quelle chance!*” exclaimed Pierre, and he made a dash for his friend and before Brand could remonstrate kissed him on both cheeks. They had been good comrades and after the rescue of Marthe from the mob in Lille it was to Brand that Pierre Nesle had opened his heart and revealed his agony. He could not stay long with us in the station as he was going to some political meeting, and perhaps it was well, because Brand was naturally anxious to escape from him before Elsa came.

“I am working hard—speaking, writing, organising—on behalf of the *Ligue des Tranchées*,” said Pierre. “You must come and see me at my office. It’s the headquarters of the new movement in France. Anti-militarist, to fulfil the ideals of the men who fought to end war.”

“You’re going to fight against heavy odds,” said Brand. “Clemenceau won’t love you, nor those who like his peace.”

Pierre laughed and used an old watchword of the war.

“*Nous les aurons!* Those old dead-heads belong to the past. Peace has still to be made by the men who fought for a new world.”

He gave us his address, pledged us to call on him, and slipped into the vortex of the crowd.

Brand and I waited another twenty minutes, and then in a tide of new arrivals we saw Elsa. She was in the

company of Major Quin, Brand's friend who had brought her from Cologne, a tall Irishman who stooped a little as he gave his arm to the girl. She was dressed in a blue coat and skirt, very neatly, and it was the glitter of her spun-gold hair that made me catch sight of her quickly in the crowd. Her eyes had a frightened look as she came forward, and she was white to the lips. Thinner, too, than when I had seen her last, so that she looked older and not, perhaps, quite so wonderfully pretty. But her face lighted up with intense gladness when Brand stood in front of her, and then, under an electric lamp, with a crowd surging around him, took her in his arms.

Major Quin and I stood aloof, chatting together.

"Good journey?" I asked.

"Excellent, but I'm glad it's over. That little lady is too unmistakably German. Everybody spotted her and looked unutterable things. She was frightened, and I don't wonder. Most of them thought the worst of me. I had to threaten one fellow with a damned good hiding for an impertinent remark I overheard."

Brand thanked him for looking after his wife, and Elsa gave him her hand and said, "*Danke schön*."

Major Quin raised his finger and said, "Hush. Don't forget you're in Paris now."

Then he saluted with a click of spurs and took his leave. I put Brand and his wife in a taxi and drove outside by the driver to a quiet old hotel in the Rue St. Honoré, where we had booked rooms.

When we registered, the manager at the desk stared at Elsa curiously. She spoke English, but with an unmistakable accent. The man's courtesy to Brand, which had been perfect, fell from him abruptly and he spoke with icy insolence when he summoned one of the boys to take up the baggage. In the dining-room that night all eyes turned to Elsa and Brand, with inquisitive, hostile looks. I suppose her frock, simple and ordinary as it seemed to me, proclaimed its German fashion. Or perhaps her face and hair were not so English as I had imagined. It was a little while before the girl herself was aware of those unpleasant glances about her. She was very happy sitting next to Brand, whose hand she caressed once or twice, and into whose face she looked with adoration. She was still very pale, and I could see that she was immensely tired after her journey, but her eyes shone wonderfully. Sometimes she looked about her and encountered the stares of people—elderly French *bourgeois* and some English nurses and a few French officers—dining at other tables in the great room with gilt mirrors and painted ceiling. She spoke to Brand presently in a low voice.

"I am afraid. These people stare at me so much. They guess what I am."

"It's only your fancy," said Brand. "Besides, they would be fools not to stare at a face like yours."

She smiled and coloured up at that sweet flattery.

"I know when people like one's looks. It is not for that reason they stare."

"Ignore them," said Brand. "Tell me about Franz and Frau von Detmold."

It was unwise of him to sprinkle his conversation with German names. The waiter at our table was listening attentively. Presently I saw him whispering behind the screen to one of his comrades and looking our way sullenly.

He kept us waiting an unconscionable time for coffee, and when at last Brand gave his arm to Elsa and led her from the room, he gave a harsh laugh as they passed, and I heard the words, "*Sale Boche!*" spoken in a low tone of voice, yet loud enough for all the room to hear. From all the little tables there came titters of laughter and those words, "*Sale Boche!*" were repeated by several voices. I hoped that Elsa and Brand had not heard, but I saw Elsa sway a little on her husband's arm as though struck by an invisible blow, and Brand turned with a look of passion, as though he would hit the waiter or challenge the whole room to warfare. But Elsa whispered to him, and he went with her up the staircase to their rooms.

The next morning when I met them at breakfast Elsa still looked desperately tired, though very happy, and Brand had lost a little of his haggard look and his nerve was steadier. But it was an uncomfortable moment for all of us when the manager came to the table and regretted with icy courtesy that their rooms would not be available another night owing to a previous arrangement which he had unfortunately overlooked.

"Nonsense!" said Brand, shortly. "I have taken these rooms for three nights, and I intend to stay in them."

"It is impossible," said the manager. "I must ask you to have your baggage packed by twelve o'clock."

Brand dealt with him firmly.

"I am an English officer. If I hear another word from you I will call on the Provost Marshal and get him to deal with you."

The manager bowed. This threat cowed him, and he said no more about a change of rooms. But Brand and his wife, and I, as their friend, suffered from a policy of passive resistance to our presence. The chambermaid did not answer their bell, having become strangely deaf.

The waiter was generally engaged at other tables whenever we wanted him. The hall porter turned his back upon us. The page-boys made grimaces behind our backs, as I saw very well in the gilt mirror, and as Elsa saw.

They took to having their meals out, Brand insisting always that I should join them, and we drove out to the Bois and had tea there in the *Chalet des Iles*. It was a beautiful afternoon in September, and the leaves were just turning to crinkled gold and the lake was as blue as the cloudless sky above. Across the ferry came boatloads of young Frenchmen with their girls, singing, laughing, on this day of peace. Some of the men limped as they came up the steps from the landing-stage. One walked on crutches. Another had an empty sleeve. Under the trees they made love to their girls and fed them with rose-tinted ices.

"These people are happy," said Elsa. "They have forgotten already the agony of war. Victory is healing. In Germany there is only misery."

A little later she talked about the peace.

"If only the *Entente* had been more generous in victory our despair would not be so great. Many of us, great multitudes, believed that the price of defeat would be worth paying because Germany would take a place among free nations and share in the creation of a nobler world. Now we are crushed by the militarism of

nations who have used our downfall to increase their own power. The light of a new ideal which rose above the darkness has gone out."

Brand took his wife's hand and stroked it in his big paw.

"All this is temporary and the work of the old men steeped in the old traditions which led to war. We must wait for them to die. Then out of the agony of the world's boyhood will come the new revelation."

Elsa clasped her hands and leaned forward, looking across the lake in the Bois de Boulogne.

"I would like to live long enough to be sure of that," she said, eagerly. "If we have children, my husband, perhaps they will listen to our tales of the war as Franz and I read about wolves and goblins in our fairy-tales. The fearfulness of them was not frightening, for we knew we were safe."

"God grant that," said Brand, gravely.

"But I am afraid!" said Elsa. She looked again across the lake, so blue under the sky, so golden in sunlight; and shivered a little.

"You are cold!" said Brand.

He put his arms about her as they sat side by side, and her head drooped upon his shoulder and she closed her eyes like a tired child.

They went to the opera that night and I refused their invitation to join them, protesting that they would never learn to know each other if a third person were always present. I slipped away to see Pierre Nesle, and found him at an office in a street somewhere off the Rue du Louvre, which was filled with young men whose faces I seemed to have seen before under blue shrapnel helmets above blue tunics. They were typewriting as though serving machine-guns, and folding up papers while they whistled the tune of "*Madelon*." Pierre was in his shirtsleeves, dictating letters to a *poilu* in civil clothes.

"Considerable activity on the western front, eh?" he said when he saw me.

"Tell me all about it, Pierre."

He told me something about it in a restaurant where we dined in the Rue du Marché St. Honoré. He was one of the organising secretaries of a society made up exclusively of young soldiers who had fought in the trenches. There was a sprinkling of intellectuals among them—painters, poets, novelists, journalists—but the main body were simple soldiers animated by one idea—to prevent another war by substituting the common-sense and brotherhood of peoples for the old diplomacy of secret alliances and the old tradition of powerful armies.

"How about the Peace Treaty and the League of Nations?" I asked.

Pierre Nesle shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"The Peace Treaty belongs to the Napoleonic tradition. We've got beyond that now. It is the programme that has carefully arranged another and inevitable war. Look at the world now! Look at France, Italy, Germany, Austria! We are all ruined together, and those most ruined will, by their disease and death, drag down Europe into general misery. *Mon vieux*, what has victory given to France! A great belt of devastated country, cemeteries crowded with dead youth, bankruptcy, and everything five times the cost of pre-war rates. Another such victory will wipe us off the map. We have smashed Germany, it is true, for a time. We have punished her women and children for the crimes of their war lords, but can we keep her crushed? Are our frontiers impregnable against the time when her people come back for revenge, smashing the fetters we have placed on them, and rising again in strength? For ten years, for twenty years, for thirty years perhaps, we shall be safe. And after that, if the heart of Europe does not change, if we do not learn wisdom from the horror that has passed, France will be ravaged again, and all that we have seen our children will see, and their suffering will be greater than ours, and they will not have the hope we had."

He stared back into the past, not a very distant past, and I fancy that among the figures he saw was Marthe, his sister.

"What's the remedy?" I asked.

"A union of democracy across the frontiers of hate," he answered, and I think it was a phrase that he had written and learnt by heart.

"A fine phrase!" I said, laughing a little.

He flared up at me.

"It's more than a phrase. It's the heart-beat of millions in Europe."

"In France?" I asked pointedly. "In the France of Clemenceau?"

"More than you imagine," he answered, boldly. "Beneath our present Chauvinism, our natural exultation in victory, our inevitable hatred of the enemy, common-sense is at work, and an idealism higher than that. At present its voice is not heard. The old men are having their day. Presently the new men will arrive with the new ideas. They are here, but do not speak yet."

"The old men again!" I said. "It is strange. In Germany, in France, in England, even in America, people are talking strangely about the old men as though they were guilty of all this agony. That is remarkable."

"They were guilty," said Pierre Nesle. "It is against the old men in all countries of Europe that youth will declare war. For it was their ideas which brought us to our ruin."

He spoke so loudly that people in the restaurant turned to look at him. He paid his bill and spoke in a lower voice.

"It is dangerous to talk like this in public. Let us walk up the Champs Elysées, where I am visiting some friends."

Suddenly a remembrance came back to him.

"Your friends, too," he said.

"My friends?"

"But yes; Madame Chéri and Hélène. After Edouard's death they could not bear to live in Lille."

“Edouard, that poor boy who came back? He is dead?”

“He was broken by the prison life,” said Pierre. “He died within a month of armistice, and Hélène wept her heart out. He confided a secret to me. Hélène and he had come to love each other, and would marry when they could get her mother’s consent—or, one day, if not.”

“What’s her objection?” I asked. “Why, it’s splendid to think that Hélène and you will be man and wife. The thought of it makes me feel good.”

He pressed my arm and said, “*Merci, mille fois, mon cher*.”

Madame Chéri objected to his political opinions. She regarded them as poisonous treachery.

“And Hélène?”

I remembered that outburst, months back, when Hélène had desired the death of many German babies.

“Hélène loves me,” said Pierre simply. “We do not talk politics.”

On our way to the Avenue Victor Hugo I ventured to ask him a question which had been a long time in my mind “Your sister, Marthe? She is well?”

Even in the pearly twilight of the Champs Elysées I was aware of Pierre’s sudden change of colour. I had touched a nerve that still jumped.

“She is well and happy,” he answered gravely. “She is now a *religieuse*, a nun, in the convent at Lille. They tell me she is a saint. Her name in religion is *Sour Angélique.*”

I called on Madame Chéri and her daughter with Pierre Nesle. They seemed delighted to see me, and Hélène greeted me like an old and trusted friend, giving me the privilege of kissing her cheek. She had grown taller and beautiful, and there was a softness in her eyes when she looked at Pierre which made me sure of his splendid luck.

Madame Chéri had aged, and some of her fire had burnt out. I guessed that it was due to Edouard’s death. She spoke of that, and wept a little, and deplored the mildness of the Peace Treaty which had not punished the evil race who had killed her husband and her boy and the flower of France.

“There are many German dead,” said Pierre. “They have been punished.”

“Not enough!” cried Madame Chéri. “They should all be dead.”

Hélène kissed her hand and snuggled down to her as once I had seen in Lille.

“*Petite maman*,” she said, “let us talk of happy things to-night. Pierre has brought us a good friend.”

Later in the evening, when Pierre and Hélène had gone into another room to find some biscuits for our wine, Madame Chéri spoke to me about their betrothal.

“Pierre is full of strange and terrible ideas,” she said. “They are shared by other young men who fought bravely for France. To me they seem wicked, and the talk of cowards, except that their medals tell of courage. But the light in Hélène’s eyes weakens me. I’m too much of a Frenchwoman to be stern with love.”

By those words of hers I was able to give Pierre a message of good-cheer when he walked back with me that night, and he went away with gladness.

With gladness also did Elsa Brand set out next day for England where, as a girl, she had known happy days, and where now her dream lived with the man who stood beside her. Together we watched for the white cliffs, and when suddenly the sun glinted on them she gave a little cry, and putting her hand through Brand’s arm, said, “Our home!”

VII

I saw very little of Brand in London after Elsa’s arrival in his parent’s house at Chelsea. I was busy, as usual, watching the way of the world and putting my nose down to bits of blank paper which I proceeded to spoil with futile words. Brand was doing the same thing in his study on the top floor of the house in Cheyne Walk, while Elsa, in true German style, was working embroidery or reading English literature to improve her mind and her knowledge of the language.

Brand was endeavouring strenuously to earn money enough to make him free of his father’s house. He failed, on the whole, rather miserably. He began a novel on the war, became excited with it for the first six chapters, then stuck hopelessly and abandoned it.

“I find it impossible,” he wrote to me, “to get the real thing into my narrative. It is all wooden, unnatural, and wrong. I can’t get the right perspective on paper, although I think I see it clear enough when I’m not writing. The thing is too enormous, the psychology too complicated for my power of expression. A thousand characters, four years of experience, come crowding into my mind, and I can’t eliminate the unessential and stick the point of my pen into the heart of truth. Besides, the present state of the world, to say nothing of domestic trouble, prevents anything like concentration... And my nerves have gone to hell.”

After the abandonment of his novel he took to writing articles for magazines and newspapers, some of which appeared, thereby producing some useful guineas. I read them and liked their strength of style and intensity of emotion. But they were profoundly pessimistic, and “the gloomy Dean,” who was prophesying woe, had an able seconder in Wickham Brand, who foresaw the ruin of civilisation and the downfall of the British Empire because of the stupidity of the world’s leaders and the careless ignorance of the multitudes. He harped too much on the same string, and I fancied that editors would soon begin to tire of his melancholy tune. I was right.

“I have had six articles rejected in three weeks,” wrote Brand. “People don’t want the truth. They want cheery insincerity. Well, they won’t get it from me, though I starve to death.... But it’s hard on Elsa. She’s having a horrible time, and her nerve is breaking. I wish to God I could afford to take her down to the country somewhere, away from spiteful females and their cunning cruelty. Have you seen any Christian charity about in this most Christian country? If so, send me word, and I’ll walk to it on my knees, from Chelsea.”

It was in a postscript to a letter about a short story he was writing that he wrote an alarming sentence.

“I think Elsa is dying. She gets weaker every day.” Those words sent me to Chelsea in a hurry. I had been too careless of Brand’s troubles, owing to my own pressure of work and my own fight with a nervous depression which was a general malady, I found, with most men back from the war.

When I rapped the brass knocker on the house in Cheyne Walk the door was opened by a different maid from the one I had seen on my first visit there. The other one, as Brand told me afterwards, had given notice because “she couldn’t abide them Huns” (meaning Elsa), and with her had gone the cook, who had been with Wickham’s mother for twenty years.

Brand was writing in his study upstairs when the new maid showed me in. Or, rather, he was leaning over a writing-block, with his elbows dug into the table and his face in his hands, while an unlighted pipe—his old trench pipe—lay across the inkpot.

“Thinking out a new plot, old man?” I asked cheerily.

“It doesn’t come,” he said. “My own plot cuts across my line of thought.”

“How’s Elsa?”

He pointed with the stem of his pipe to the door leading from his room.

“Sleeping, I hope.... Sit down and let’s have a yarn.”

We talked about things in general for a time. They were not very cheerful, anyhow. Brand and I were both gloomy souls just then, and knew each other too well to camouflage our views about the state of Europe and the “unrest” (as it was called) in England.

Then he told me about Elsa, and it was a tragic tale From the very first his people had treated her with a studied unkindness which had broken her nerve and spirit. She had come to England with a joyous hope of finding happiness and friendship with her husband’s family, and glad to escape from the sadness of Germany and the solemn disapproval of her own people, apart from Franz, who was devoted to her.

Her first dismay came when she kissed the hand of her mother-in-law, who drew it away as though she had been stung by a wasp, and when her movement to kiss her husband’s sister Ethel was repulsed by a girl who drew back icily and said, “How do you do?”

Even then she comforted herself a little with the thought that this coldness was due to English reserve, and that in a little while English kindness would be revealed. But the days passed with only unkindness.

At first Lady Brand and her daughter maintained a chilly silence towards Elsa, at breakfast, luncheon, and other meals, talking to each other brightly, as though she did not exist, and referring constantly to Wickham as “poor Wicky.” Ethel had a habit of reading out morsels from the penny illustrated papers, and often they referred to “another trick of the Huns” or “fresh revelations of Hun treachery.” At these times Sir Amyas Brand said “Ah!” in a portentous voice, but, privately, with some consciousness of decency, begged Ethel to desist from “controversial topics.” She “desisted” in the presence of her brother, whose violence of speech scared her into silence.

A later phase of Ethel’s hostility to Elsa was in the style of amiable enquiry. In a simple, childlike way, as though eager for knowledge, she would ask Elsa such questions as “Why the Germans boiled down their dead?”

“Why they crucified Canadian prisoners?”

“Was it true that German school children sang the Hymn of Hate before morning lessons?”

“Was it by order of the Kaiser that English prisoners were starved to death?”

Elsa answered all these questions by passionate denials. It was a terrible falsehood, she said, that the Germans had boiled down bodies for fats. On the contrary, they paid the greatest reverence to their dead, as her brother had seen in many cemeteries on the Western front. The story of the “crucified Canadians” had been disproved by the English intelligence officers after a special enquiry, as Wickham had told her. She had never heard the Hymn of Hate. Some of the English prisoners had been harshly treated—there were brutal commandants—but not deliberately starved. Not starved more than German soldiers, who had very little food during the last years of the war.

“But surely,” said Lady Brand, “you must admit, my dear, that Germany conducted this war with the greatest possible barbarity? Otherwise, why should the world call them Huns?”

Elsa said it was only the English who called the Germans

Huns, and that was for a propaganda of hatred which was very wicked.

“Do *I* look like a Hun?” she asked, and then burst into tears.

Lady Brand was disconcerted by that sign of weakness.

“You mustn’t think us unkind, Elsa, but, of course, we have to uphold the truth.”

Ethel was utterly unmoved by Elsa’s tears, and, indeed, found a holy satisfaction in them.

“When the German people confess their guilt with weeping and lamentation the English will be first to forgive. Never till then.”

The presence of a German girl in the house seemed to act as a blight upon all domestic happiness. It was the cook who first “gave notice.” Elsa had never so much as set eyes upon that cross-eyed woman below-stairs who had prepared the family food since Wickham had sat in a high chair with a bib round his neck. But Mary, in a private interview with Lady Brand, stormy in its character, as Elsa could hear through the folding doors, vowed that she would not live in the same house with “one of those damned Germings.”

Lady Brand's tearful protestations that Elsa was no longer German, being "Mr. Wickham's wife," and that she had repented sincerely of all the wrong done by the country in which she had unfortunately been born, did not weaken the resolution of Mary Grubb, whose patriotism had always been "above suspicion," "which," as she said, "I hope to remain so." She went next morning, after a great noise of breathing and the descent of tin boxes, while Lady Brand and Ethel looked with reproachful eyes at Elsa as the cause of this irreparable blow.

The parlour-maid followed in a week's time, on the advice of her young man, who had worked in a canteen of the Y.M.C.A. at Boulogne and knew all about German spies.

It was very awkward for Lady Brand, who assumed an expression of Christian martyrdom, and told Wickham that his rash act was bearing sad fruit, a mixed metaphor which increased his anger, as he told me, to a ridiculous degree.

He could see that Elsa was very miserable. Many times she wept when alone with him, and begged him to take her away to a little home of their own, even if it were only one room in the poorest neighbourhood. But Wickham was almost penniless, and begged her to be patient a little longer, until he had saved enough to fulfil their hope. There I think he was unwise. It would have been better for him to borrow money—he had good friends—rather than keep his wife in such a hostile atmosphere. She was weak and ill. He was alarmed at her increasing weakness. Once she fainted in his arms, and even to go upstairs to their rooms at the top of the house tired her so much that afterwards she would lie back in a chair, with her eyes closed, looking very white and worn. She tried to hide her ill-health from her husband, and when they were alone together she seemed gay and happy, and would have deceived him but for those fits of weeping at the unkindness of his mother and sister, and those sudden attacks of "tiredness" when all physical strength departed from her.

Her love for him seemed to grow with the weakness of her body. She could not bear him to leave her alone for any length of time, and while he was writing, sat near him, so that she might have her head against his shoulder or touch his hand, or kiss it. It was not conducive to easy writing or the invention of plots.

Something like a crisis happened after a painful scene in the drawing-room downstairs on a day when Brand had gone out to walk off a sense of deadly depression which prevented all literary effort.

Several ladies had come to tea with Lady Brand and Ethel, and they gazed at Elsa as though she were a strange and dangerous animal.

One of them, a thin and elderly schoolmistress, cross-questioned Elsa as to her nationality.

"I suppose you are Swedish, my dear?" she said sweetly.

"No," said Elsa.

"Danish, then, no doubt?" continued Miss Clutter.

"I am German," said Elsa.

That announcement had caused consternation among Lady Brand's guests. Two of the ladies departed almost immediately. The others stayed to see how Miss Clutter would deal with this amazing situation.

She dealt with it firmly, and with the cold intelligence of a high schoolmistress.

"How *very* interesting!" she said, turning to Lady Brand. "Perhaps your daughter-in-law will enlighten us a little about German psychology which we have found so puzzling. I should be so glad if she could explain to us how the German people reconcile the sinking of merchant ships, the unspeakable crime of the *Lusitania* with any belief in God, or even with the principles of our common humanity. It is a mystery to me how the drowning of babies could be regarded as legitimate warfare by a people proud of their civilisation."

"Perhaps it would be better to avoid controversy, dear Miss Clutter," said Lady Brand, alarmed at the prospect of an "unpleasant" scene which would be described in other drawing-rooms next day.

But Miss Clutter had adopted Ethel's method of enquiry. She so much wanted to know the German point of view. Certainly they must have a point of view.

"Yes, it would be so interesting to know!" said another lady.

"Especially if we could believe it," said another.

Elsa had been twisting and re-twisting a little lace handkerchief in her lap. She was very pale, and tried to conceal a painful agitation from all these hostile and enquiring ladies.

Then she spoke to them in a low, strained voice.

"You will never understand," she said. "You look out from England with eyes of hate, and without pity in your hearts. The submarine warfare was shameful. There were little children drowned on the *Lusitania*, and women. I wept for them and prayed the dear God to stop the war. Did you weep for our little children and our women? They, too, were killed by sea warfare, not only a few, as on the *Lusitania*, but thousands and tens of thousands. Your blockade closed us in with an iron ring. No ship could bring us food. For two years we starved on short rations and chemical foods. We were without fats and milk. Our mothers watched their children weaken and wither and die, because of the English blockade. Their own milk dried up within their breasts. Little coffins were carried down our streets day after day, week after week. Fathers and mothers were mad at the loss of their little ones. 'We must smash our way through the English blockade!' they said. The U-boat warfare gladdened them. It seemed a chance of rescue for the children of Germany. It was wicked. But all the war was wickedness. It was wicked of you English to keep up your blockade so long after Armistice, so that more children died and more women were consumptive, and men fainted at their work. Do you reconcile that with God's good love? Oh, I find more hatred here in England than I knew even in Germany. It is cruel, unforgiving, unfair! You, are proud of your own virtue and hypocritical. God will be kinder to my people than to you, because now we cry out for His mercy, and you are still arrogant, with the name of God on your lips but a devil of pride in your hearts. I came here with my dear husband believing that many English would be like him, forgiving, hating cruelty, eager to heal the world's broken heart. You are not like him. You are cruel and lovers of cruelty, even to one poor German girl who came to you for shelter with her English man. I am sorry for you. I pity you because of your narrowness. I do not want to know you."

She stood up, swaying a little, with one hand on the mantelpiece, as afterwards she told her husband. She

did not believe that she could cross the floor without falling. There was a strange dizziness in her head, and a mist before her eyes. But she held her head high and walked out of the drawing-room, and then upstairs. When Wickham Brand came back she was lying on her bed very ill. He sent for a doctor who was with her for half-an-hour.

"She is very weak," he said. "No pulse to speak of. You will have to be careful of her—deuced careful."

He gave no name to her illness. "Just weakness," he said. "Run down like a worn-out clock. Nerves all wrong, and no vitality."

He sent round a tonic which Elsa took like a child, and for a little while it seemed to do her good. But Brand was frightened because her weakness had come back.

I am glad now that I had an idea which helped Brand in this time of trouble and gave Elsa some weeks of happiness and peace. It occurred to me that young Harding was living alone in his big old country house near Weybridge, and would be glad and grateful, because of his loneliness, to give house-room to Brand and his wife. He had a great liking for Brand, as most of us had, and his hatred of Germany had not been so violent since his days in Cologne. His good nature, anyhow, and the fine courtesy which was the essential quality of his character, would make him kind to Elsa, so ill and so desperately in need of kindness. I was not disappointed. When I spoke to him over the telephone he said, "It will be splendid for me. This lonely house is getting on my nerves badly. Bring them down."

I took them down in a car two days later. It was a fine autumn day with a sparkle in the air and a touch of frost on the hedgerows. Elsa, wrapped up in heavy rugs, lay back next to Brand, and a little colour crept back into her cheeks and brought back her beauty. I think a shadow lifted from her as she drove away from that house in Chelsea where she had dwelt with enmity among her husband's people.

Harding's house in Surrey was at the end of a fine avenue of beeches, glorious in their autumn foliage of crinkled gold. A rabbit scuttled across the drive as we came, and bobbed beneath the red bracken of the undergrowth.

"Oh," said Elsa, like a child, "there is Peterkin! What a rogue he looks!"

Her eyes were bright when she caught sight of Harding's house in the Elizabethan style of post-and-plaster splashed with scarlet where the Virginia creeper straggled on its walls.

"It is wonderfully English," she said. "How Franz would love this place!"

Harding came down from the steps to greet us, and I thought it noble of him that he should kiss the girl's hand when Brand said, "This is Elsa." For Harding had been a Hun-hater—you remember his much-repeated phrase, "No good German but a dead German!"—and that little act was real chivalry to a woman of the enemy.

There was a great fire of logs burning in the open hearth in the hall, flinging a ruddy glare on the panelled walls and glinting on bits of armour and hunting trophies. Upstairs, also, Brand told me, there was a splendid fire in Elsa's room, which had once been the room of Harding's wife. It wanned Elsa not only in body but in soul. Here was an English welcome and kindness of thought. On her dressing-table there were flowers from Harding's hot-houses, and she gave a little cry of pleasure at the sight of them for there had been no flowers in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. That night she was strong enough to come down to dinner, and looked very charming there at the polished board, fit only by candlelight, whose soft rays touched the gold of her hair.

"It is a true English home," she said, glancing up at the panelled walls and at portraits of Harding's people in old-fashioned costumes which hung there.

"A lonely one when no friends are here," said Harding, and that was the only time he referred in any way to the wife who had left him.

That dinner was the last one which Elsa had sitting at table with us. She became very tired again. So tired that Brand had to carry her upstairs and downstairs, which he did as though she weighed no more than a child. During the day she lay on a sofa in the drawing-room, and Brand did no writing now nor any kind of work, but stayed always with his wife. For hours together he sat by her side, and she held his hand and touched his face and hair, and was happy in her love.

A good friend came to stay with them and brought unfailing cheerfulness. It was Charles Fortune who had come down at Harding's invitation. He was as comical as ever, and made Elsa laugh with ripples of merriment while he satirised the world as he knew it, with shrewd and penetrating wit. He played the jester industriously to get that laughter from her, though sometimes she had to beg of him not to make her laugh so much because it hurt her. Then he played the piano late into the afternoon, until the twilight in the room faded into darkness except for the ruddy glow of the log fire, or after dinner in the evenings until Brand carried his wife to bed. He played Chopin best, with a magic touch, but Elsa liked him to play Bach and Schumann, and sometimes Mozart, because that brought back her girlhood in the days before the war.

So it was one evening when Brand sat on a low stool by the sofa on which Elsa lay, with her fingers playing in his hair or resting on his shoulder, while Fortune filled the room with melody.

Once or twice Elsa spoke to Brand in a low voice. I heard some of her words as I lay on a bearskin by the fire.

"I am wonderfully happy, my dear," she said once, and Brand pulled her hand down and kissed it.

A little later she spoke again.

"Love is so much better than hate. Then why should people go to war?"

"God knows, my dear," said Brand.

It was some time after that, when Fortune was playing softly, that I heard Elsa give a big, tired sigh and say the word "Peace!"

Charles Fortune played something of Beethoven's now, with grand crashing chords which throbbed through the room as the last glow of the sunset flushed through the windows.

Suddenly Brand stirred on his stool, made an abrupt movement, then rose and gave a loud, agonising cry. Fortune stopped playing with a slur of notes. Harding leapt up from his chair in a dark corner and said,

“Brand!... what’s the matter?”

Brand had dropped to his knees and was weeping with, his arms about his dead wife.

VIII

I was again a wanderer in the land, and going from country to country in Europe saw the disillusionment that had followed victory, and the despair that had followed defeat, and the ravages that were bequeathed by war to peace, not only in devastated earth and stricken towns, but in the souls of men and women.

The victors had made great promises to their people, but for the most part they were still unredeemed. They had promised them rich fruits of victory to be paid out of the ruin of their enemies. But little fruit of gold or treasure could be gathered from the utter bankruptcy of Germany and Austria, whose factories stayed idle for lack of raw material and whose money was waste paper in value of exchange. “Reconstruction” was the watchword of statesmen, uttered as a kind of magic spell, but when I went over the old battlefields in France I found no sign of reconstruction, but only the vast belt of desolation which in war I had seen swept by fire. No spell-word had built up those towns and villages which had been blown into dust and ashes, nor had given life to riven trees and earth choked and deadened by high explosives. Here and there poor families had crept back to the place where their old homes had stood, grubbing in the ruins for some relic of their former habitations and building wooden shanties in the desert as frail shelters against the wind and the rain. In Ypres—the city of Great Death—there were wooden *estaminets* for the refreshment of tourists who came from Paris to see the graveyard of youth, and girls sold picture-postcards where boys of ours had gone marching up the Menin Road under storms of shell-fire which took daily toll of them. No French statesman by optimistic words could resurrect in a little while the beauty that had been in Artois and Picardy and the fields of Champagne.

On days of national thanksgiving the spirit of France was exalted by the joy of victory. In Paris it was a feverish joy, wild-eyed, with laughing ecstasy, with troops of dancing girls and a carnival that broke all bounds between Montmartre and Montparnasse. France had saved herself from death. She had revenged herself for 1870 and the years just passed. She had crushed the enemy that had always been a brutal menace across the frontier. She had her sword deep in the heart of Germany which lay bleeding at her feet.

I who love France with a kind of passion, and had seen during the years of war the agony and the heroism of her people, did not begrudge them their ecstasy, and it touched my spirit with its fire so that in France I could see and understand the French point of view, of ruthlessness towards the beaten foe. But I saw also what many people of France saw slowly, but with a sense of fear, that the treaty made by Clemenceau did not make them safe except for a little while. This had not been, after all, “the war to end war.” There was no guarantee of world-peace. Their frontiers were not made impregnable against the time when the Germans might grow strong again and come back for vengeance. They could not stand alone, but must make new alliances, new secret treaties, new armies, new armaments, because hate survived, and the League of Nations was a farce, as it had come from the table at Versailles.

They looked round and counted their cost—a million and a half dead. A multitude of maimed and blind and nerve-shocked men. A birth-rate that had sunk to zero. A staggering debt which they could not pay. A cost of living which mounted higher and ever higher. A sense of revolt among the soldiers who had come back because their reward for four years of misery was no more than miserable.

So it was in Italy, stricken by a more desperate poverty, disappointed by a lack of spoil, angry with a sense of “betrayal,” afraid of revolution, exultant when a mad poet seized the port of Fiume which had been denied to her by President Wilson and his conscience.

Across the glittering waters of the Adriatic I went to Trieste and found it a dead port with Italian officers in possession of its deserted docks and abandoned warehouses and Austrians dying of typhus in the back streets, and starving to death in tenement houses.

And then, across the new State of Jugo-Slavia, cut out of the body of the old Austrian Empire now lying dismembered, I came to Vienna, which once I had known as the gayest capital of Europe, where charming people played the pleasant game of life with music and love and laughter.

In Vienna there was music still, but it played a *danse macabre*, a dance of death, which struck one with a sense of horror. The orchestras still fiddled in the restaurants. At night the opera-house was crowded. In *cafés* bright with gilt and glass, in restaurants rich in marble walls, crowds of people listened to the waltzes of Strauss, ate smuggled food at monstrous prices, laughed, flirted, and drank. They were the profiteers of war, spending paper money with the knowledge that it had no value outside Vienna, no value here except in stacks to buy warmth for their stomachs, a little warmth for their souk, while their stock of kronen lasted. They were the vultures from Jugo-Slavia and Czecho-Slovakia come to feed on the corpse of Austria while it still had flesh on its bones, and while Austrian kronen still had some kind of purchase power... And outside, two million people were starving slowly but very surely to death.

The children were starving quickly to death. Their coffins passed me in the streets. Ten—twelve—fifteen—in one half-hour between San Stefan’s Chinch and the Favoritenstrasse. Small living skeletons padded after one with naked feet, thrusting out little claw-like hands, begging for charity. In the great hospital of Vienna children lay in crowded wards, with twisted limbs and bulbous heads, diseased from birth, because of their mother’s hunger and a life without milk and any kind of fat.

Vienna, the capital of a great empire, had been sentenced to death by the Treaty of Peace which had so carved up her former territory that she was cut off from all her natural resources and from all means of industry, commerce and life.

It was Dr. Small, dear “Daddy” Small, who gave me an intimate knowledge of what was happening in Vienna a year after Armistice, and it was Eileen O’Connor who still further enlightened me by taking me into the babies’ *crèches*, the *Kinderspital* and the working people’s homes, where disease and death found their victims. She took me to these places until I sickened and said, “I can bear no more.”

Dr. Small had a small office in the Kârtnerstrasse, where Eileen worked with him, and it was here that I found them both a day after my arrival in Vienna. Eileen was on her knees making a wood fire and puffing it into a blaze for the purpose of boiling a tin kettle which stood on a trivet, and after that, as I found, for making tea. Outside there was a raw, horrible day, with a white mist in which those coffins were going by and with those barefoot children with pallid faces and gaunt cheeks padding by one’s side, so that I was glad to see the flames in the hearth and to hear the cheerful dink of tea-cups which the doctor was getting out. Better still, was I glad to see these two good friends, so sane, so vital, so purposeful, as I found them, in a world of gloom and neurosis.

The doctor told me of their work. It was life-saving and increasing in range of action. They had organised a number of feeding centres in Vienna, and stores from which mothers could buy condensed milk and cocoa and margarine, at next to nothing, for their starving babes. Austrian ladies were doing most of the actual work apart from organisation at headquarters, and doing it devotedly. From America and from England money was flowing in.

“The tide of thought is turning,” said the doctor. “Every dollar we get, and every shilling, is a proof that the call of humanity is being heard above the old war cries.”

“And every dollar and every shilling,” said Eileen, “is helping to save the life of some poor woman or some little mite who had no guilt in the war, but suffered from its cruelty.”

“This job,” said the doctor, “suits my peculiar philosophy. I am not out so much to save these babies’ lives ——”

Here Eileen threatened to throw the teapot at his head.

“Because,” he added, “some of them would be better dead, and anyhow, you can’t save a nation by charity. But what I am out to do is to educate the heart of the world above the baseness of the passions that caused the massacre in Europe. We’re helping to do it by saving the children and by appealing to the chivalry of men and women across the old frontiers. We’re killers of cruelty, Miss Eileen and I. We’re rather puffed up with ourselves, ain’t we, my dear?”

He grinned at Eileen in a whimsical way, and I could see that between this little American and that Irish girl there was an understanding comradeship.

So he told me when she left the room a minute to get another tea-cup or wash one up.

“That girl!” he said. “Say, laddie, you couldn’t find a better head in all Europe, including Hoover himself. She’s a Napoleon Bonaparte without his blood-lust. She’s Horatio Nelson and Lord Northcliffe and Nurse Cavell all rolled into one, to produce the organising genius of Eileen O’Connor. Only you would have to add a few saints like Catherine of Sienna and Joan of Arc to allow for her spirituality. She organises feeding-centres like you would write a column article. She gets the confidence of Austrian women so that they would kiss her feet if she’d allow it. She has a head for figures that fairly puts me to shame, and as for her courage—well, I don’t mind telling you that I’ve sworn to pack her back to England if she doesn’t keep clear of typhus dens and other fever-stricken places. We can’t afford to lose her by some dirty bug-bite.”

Eileen came into the room again with another tea-cup and saucer. I counted those on the table and saw three already.

“Who is the other cup for?” I asked. “If you are expecting visitors I’ll go, because I’m badly in need of a wash.”

“Don’t worry,” said Eileen. “We haven’t time to wash in Vienna, and, anyhow, there’s no soap, for love or money. This is for Wickham, who is no visitor but one of the staff.”

“Wickham?” I said. “Is Brand here?”

“Rather!” said “Daddy” Small. “He has been here a week and is doing good work. Looks after the supplies, and puts his heart into the job.”

As he spoke the door opened and Brand strode into the room, with rain dripping from his waterproof coat which he took off and flung into a corner before he turned to the table.

“Lord! A cup of tea is what I want!”

“And what you shall have, my dear,” said Eileen.

“But don’t you know a friend when you see him?”

“By Jove!”

He held my hand in a hard grip and patted me on the shoulder. Our friendship was beyond the need of words.

So there we three, who had seen many strange and tragic things in those years of history, were together again in the city of Vienna, the city of death, where the innocent were paying for the guilty, but where also, as “Daddy” Small said, there was going out a call to charity which was being heard by the heart of the world above the old war-cries of cruelty.

I stayed with them only a week. I had been long away from England and had other work to do. But in that time I saw how these three friends, and others in their service, were devoting themselves to the rescue of human life, partly, I think, for their own sake, though without conscious selfishness, and with a passionate pity for those who suffered. By this service they were healing their own souls, sorely wounded in the war. That was so, certainly, with Wickham Brand, and a little, I think, with Eileen O’Connor.

Brand was rescued in the nick of time by the doctor's call to him. Elsa's death had struck him a heavy blow when his nerves were already in rags and tatters. Now by active service in this work of humanity and healing he was getting back to normality, getting serene and steady. I saw the change in him, revealed by the light in his eyes and by his quietude of speech and the old sense of humour, which for a while he had lost.

"I see now," he said one night, "that it's no use fighting against the injustice and brutality of life. I can't re-make the world or change the things that are written in history or alter in any big way the destiny of peoples. Stupidity, ignorance, barbarity; will continue among the multitude. All that any of us can do is to tackle some good job that lies at hand, and keep his own soul bright and fearless if there is any chance and use his little intellect in his little circle for kindness instead of cruelty. I find that chance here, and I am grateful."

The doctor had larger and bigger hopes, though his philosophy of life was not much different from that of Brand's.

"I want to fix up an intellectual company in this funny old universe," he said. "I want to establish an intellectual aristocracy on international lines—the leaders of the new world. By intellectuals I don't mean high-brow fellows with letters after their names and encyclopaedias in their brain-pans. I mean men and women who by moral character, kindness of heart, freedom from narrow hatreds, tolerance of different creeds and races, and love of humanity, will unite in a free, unfettered way, without a label or a league, to get a move on towards a better system of human society. No red Bolshevism, mind you, no heaven by way of hell, but a striving for greater justice between classes and nations, and for peace within the frontiers of Christendom, and beyond, if possible. It's getting back to the influence of the individual, the leadership of multitudes by the power of the higher mind. I'm doing it by penny postcards to all my friends. This work of ours in Vienna is a good proof of their response. Let all the folk with good hearts behind their brains start writing postcards to each other, with a plea for brotherhood, charity, peace, and the new world would come... You laugh! Yes, I talk a little nonsense. It's not so easy as that. But see the idea? The leaders must keep in touch, and the herds will follow."

I turned to Eileen who was listening with a smile about her lips while she pasted labels on to packets of cocoa.

"What's your philosophy?" I asked.

She laughed, in that deep voice of hers.

"I've none; only the old faith, and a little hope, and a heart that's bustin' with love."

Brand was adding up figures in a book of accounts, and smiled across at the girl whom he had known since boyhood, when she had pulled his hair.

His wounds were healing.

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