

R/0





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*ROBERT SHENSTONE:
A NOVEL*

THE BODLEY HEAD

*THE FATHER
OF A SOLDIER
BY W. J. DAWSON*

LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD.
NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY
MCMXVIII

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

THE HIGHER CHOICE

*At last the tragic hour arrives :
Wilt thou be faithful to thy soul
And live the only life that lives,
Or that which mortals call the whole ?*

*In thee, behind all smiles and mirth,
There lurks in being's inmost cell
A Power, a something not of earth,
Steadfast, serene, unconquerable.*

*Thou recognizest life and death,
Thou movest in thy right of will,
Subdued by love, yet with free breath
Obeying higher promptings still.*

*This is the Power I cannot touch,
Which flashes on me unsubdued,
Nor should I love thee half so much,
Nor half so deeply, if I could.*

*That thou art mine is partly true,
With me thou art content to dwell ;
A closer vision tells me, too,
That thou art wholly God's as well.*

The Father of a Soldier

THE PARTINGS

I

I HAVE just returned from the Docks, and have seen my son off for his third trip to the trenches.

Beside the landing-stage lay a ship strangely camouflaged, as if a company of cubist artists had been at work upon her. She looked like an old lady of sober habits, who had been caught in the madness of carnival, and dressed as a zany. She was adorned—or disfigured—by stripes of colour that ran in all directions, splashings of green, splotches of grey, curves of dull red, all mixed in uttermost confusion and with no discernible design. I was told that this

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

extraordinary appearance was designed to give the ship invisibility : thus clothed she would flee like a ghost over the grey perilous waters, a phantom thing of blurred outlines, as if evoked from the waters themselves.

There was none of the cheerful bustle one usually sees on a departing ship. Tired men, with keen, searching eyes, stood at the gangways, scrutinizing each passenger as he came aboard. There were very few passengers—a little group of officers in khaki, a haggard-eyed elderly man who carried a conspicuous portfolio, and two women in black, cheerfully adorned in the American fashion with large bunches of violets fastened to their waists. At a little distance from the gangway, sitting on a bale of merchandise, was an American soldier and his wife. She was quite young, with fair, wheat-coloured hair ; her face was pale and drawn, and her fingers twitched as she talked. Those twitching fingers were never still. They beat a tattoo on the bale, opened and

THE PARTINGS

closed spasmodically, pushed back a strand of the fair hair that fell over her forehead, fixed themselves on a button of her husband's tunic. She did not weep ; she looked as if she had exhausted the power of weeping. Her husband talked rapidly and softly, with a fixed smile upon his face. I guessed that he was counselling a cheerfulness which he himself did not possess.

From this same dock I had seen this same ship sail more than once. In those other days, which I recalled, there had been a cheerful crowd, to the last moment shouting messages and congratulations. Great boxes of flowers had been carried aboard ; small American flags had been waved ; once, I remember, a band had played in the moment of departure. To-day there was a grim, brooding silence. There was an air of stealth and secrecy that made one speak in whispers. The smart cheerful sailors, who used to stand at attention, waiting for the word to cast off, had

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

vanished. The young, alert, white-jacketed stewards were represented by two white-haired men, who moved slowly and rarely lifted their eyes from the ground. The decks, once immaculately clean, were littered and dirty. Over them rose those strange ring-straked masts and funnels, pitifully absurd, as a decent citizen might be if forced to stand upon a pillory in the clothing of a clown. At the bows two long ring-straked guns thrust out their formidable snouts. At the stern, the bulwarks were cut away, and another gun pointed to the Jersey coast. They explained the entire scene. America was at war.

On the stroke of the hour the gang-plank was swung up, and the little crowd began to disperse. My son looked very lonely as he stood beside the deck-house, watching us. But he stood erect, and presently raised his hand in a military salute. It was his sign to us that we had better go. He did not wish us to wait till the ship moved

THE PARTINGS

out of dock, watching her till she faded in the distance.

“ It only makes it harder for us all,” he said. “ And I don’t want you to break down. Go away as soon as the gang-plank is up, but don’t go straight home. Get your lunch in New York, and let it be a good lunch. It won’t be so hard to go back to the house after lunch, as if you went direct from the dock. And don’t worry about me. I shall be all right.”

So we turned away and walked slowly down the long, empty, resounding room. We stopped at the top of the stairs, thinking we might hear the siren sound, as the ship swung seaward ; then we remembered that it was war-time, and she would sail in silence. She would melt out into the mystery of the sea, desirous only to escape observation. There would be no wireless message, as in other days, from that one dear traveller, who took our hearts with him. Swift as a hound pursued by peril,

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

silent as a shadow, she would glide through the days and nights of sea, towards that world of war that seemed so unreal as we looked on the secure magnificence of New York, the busy river, and the warm sunlight that still held the benison of summer.

No messages? Yes, there was one. When we reached home a huge box of flowers awaited us. They lit up the lonely house with colour, and filled it with perfume. They were the last expression of our son's thoughtfulness for us. He would not have us come back to a cheerless home; and as we arranged the flowers in all the vases we possessed no doubt he was thinking of us, and picturing to himself our surprise and pleasure.

II

THIS is the third time we have parted with him since the war began.

The first time was at a military camp in

THE PARTINGS

Canada. It was an artillery camp, situated on a wide sandy bluff above the Ottawa river, which was here broad as a lake. Two miles across the water, facing the camp, was a long, low, rambling hotel, at which we stayed. From the veranda of the hotel we could see the white tents of the camp, and at night we watched the flash of guns and heard the shells burst upon their hidden targets. The hotel was packed with the wives of officers, and during the day I was the only man among the guests. A primitive ferry-boat, making far more racket than an ocean-liner, plied irregularly between the camp and the hotel. Every evening officers came over to dinner, and now and then there was a dance in a long, dimly-lit outbuilding, thronged with mosquitoes. Once there was a soldiers' concert, and a very creditable showing these lads in khaki made, for there were excellent actors and singers among them.

I had never been in contact with soldiers,

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

and, until I came to the camp, I had never seen my son in uniform. I will confess to the pride I felt when he met us, and I was conscious of a great change in him. The long months of training, the open-air life, the regular habits of a camp, had obviously resulted in a kind of physical regeneration. He seemed taller, fuller in the chest, better poised ; he moved with a firm step, and had acquired an air of decision and authority.

I came to know the women in the hotel with some intimacy, for during the long hours of those summer days we were naturally thrown much together. I learned their histories. Their husbands had been doctors, lawyers, and business men before the war. They had been able to give their wives good homes, and in some cases a degree of comfort which approached modest luxury. When they enlisted, in most cases, these means of livelihood were at an end, or greatly reduced. Homes had been given up, servants dismissed, furniture sold, and

THE PARTINGS

children sent to the care of relatives. Yet I never heard one of these women complain of the sacrifices she had made. They were uniformly cheerful, quiet and courageous. They talked of their narrowed means with a kind of ironic gaiety, and made fun of the business of remaking old dresses, and refurbishing unfashionable finery. They swam daily in the lake—some of them were splendid swimmers—made clothes, and were always ready for a dance at night. I heard a whisper of tears shed secretly in bedrooms over midnight tea-makings, when the men had gone back to camp; but if there was sorrow it was private and very carefully concealed.

When the first surprise of a novel situation was abated, we settled down to our life as if it were merely a new kind of summer holiday. My son had hired a launch, in which we made many pleasant excursions in the upper reaches of the river, where it flowed between nobly wooded cliffs. We

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

visited the camp, drank tea with this and that officer, talked of books or listened to camp gossip ; but the war was very rarely mentioned or discussed. It looked as if there was a tacit understanding that it should be avoided. Every man was quietly prepared to do his bit when the hour came, but each knew that the chance of active service was precarious. They might go to-morrow, they might go in a year ; no one could tell : and this uncertainty made anticipation foolish. Now and again a small body of men left the camp. One night about a hundred went. They swung down the long sandy road, in the bright moonlight, singing, " Keep the home-fires burning till the Boys come home." But the camp next day looked quite unaltered. The day's routine went on as usual. The very fact that a hundred men had gone made it all the more unlikely that another call would be made immediately. When once we realize that happiness is precarious we cease to

THE PARTINGS

think of its possible loss. We live in the moment, and ignore the future. Perhaps we live even more intensely. But we certainly forget that what we regard as a stable condition is really unstable, just as the fact of the brevity of life itself, absolutely known as it is, does not prevent us from living as though life never ended.

So the days passed, the long summer days; and, although the signs of war were obvious enough, the reality of war was not apprehended. The guns that fired each night became as integral a part of the daily spectacle as the red flames of sunset that burned behind the wooded islands, or the aurora that played faintly on warm nights across the northern skies.

Then, with a startling suddenness, as though a gong had struck, the blow fell. We had gone over to the camp in our launch one afternoon to meet our son, and bring him back to dinner at our little inn. He was late, and we lay beside the wharf idly

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

watching the soldiers swimming in the lake, and thinking how picturesque the scene was. The white bodies of the men flashed in the sun, horses splashed in the shallows, a bugle called in the camp above the hill. We heard voices in the woods, and footsteps on the steep sandy road that climbed through the woods to the camp. A moment later he appeared.

“ Well, it has come,” he said quietly.

“ What has come? What do you mean? ” we cried.

“ I go in a week. They’ve asked for artillery officers to go at once to the Front, to replace casualties ; I’ve volunteered and been accepted.”

A few days later he went. We had our last dinner together in the hotel, and all the folk came down to the wharf with us. An old Major—he was sixty-two—tried to console us with the assurance that the war was nearly over, and would end long before my son could reach the Front. We did not

THE PARTINGS

believe him, and he knew that he did not believe himself ; but his innocent falsehood passed uncontradicted. The ferry-boat, dark as King Arthur's barge, lay against the wharf. It was soon filled with men, standing shoulder to shoulder, and quite silent. A hundred yards from the shadowy wharf the moon made a broad road of silver on the water. The boat moved off. As it passed into that road of silver the men began to sing. I do not remember what they sung : I think it was " Keep the home-fires burning till the Boys come home." It disappeared in the darkness beyond that silver road, and the sound of singing voices died away.

A day later the train bore us westward. It was five o'clock in the morning when we passed the camp. I looked out, and saw the white tents, the rutted roads, and a long string of men riding slowly against the morning sky. I think I never felt so keen a sense of emptiness and desolation.

That was the first parting.

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

III

THE second parting was some months later.

For four months our son had been at the Front, he had come to England on leave, and was returning. The ten wonderful days in London, which we had crossed from America to share with him, were over, and we stood at the dock gates in Folkestone.

We were not allowed to go further. A staff officer drove up to the gates with his wife, and was courteously stopped. His last farewells were made behind the curtains of his automobile, and his wife drove back alone.

No ship was visible. The great empty space within the dock-gates lay glittering in the winter sun. A bitter wind was blowing. In the extreme distance, behind a long building, we saw a pennon fluttering and a thin feather of steam sailing up into the sky and dissolving there.

THE PARTINGS

“ I think it is about time, sir,” said the sentry at the gate.

It was then that my son turned to me, and asked the question :

“ If you knew that I was going to be killed within the next month, would you rather I went or stayed? ”

“ Much rather you went,” I answered.

There were three of us standing there with him in that bleak winter parting—his mother, his sister, and myself. It was their answer as well as mine. I knew that, and he knew it. We all felt alike.

Our home lay three thousand miles away. He was going back to a peril that we now fully comprehended, we to a house whose loneliness we had experienced. But some uplifting Power was with us in that moment, and by virtue of that Power we answered as we did that heart-rending question.

We embraced once more. He turned from us immediately, and marched proudly to the hidden ship. He looked back once

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

and waved his hand, and disappeared. We walked away slowly, and returned that night to a London that had suddenly become unutterably dismal.

“How is the city desolate that was full of children!” cried Dante of Florence, when all that he had loved in Florence was taken from him. It was so we felt that night in London.

And that was the second parting.

IV

THERE was another parting, which predates these I have mentioned. It took place not at a camp or dock, but in my own house. On a dim January afternoon we sat at our last meal before my son took train for Kingston, where he was to receive training as an artillery officer.

We were all unhappy. The son who had lived with us so many years, with whom I had worked so often in common literary

THE PARTINGS

tasks, whose gentleness of mind and rare consideration had made the happiest element in our lives, was going away to unknown tasks and duties. He was being violently wrenched from us, as by a brutal and strong hand. The fine efficiency, which he had won with so many years of effort, was to be discarded. He was going to a kind of life in which all this fine efficiency was valueless. He was about to begin life again upon what seemed an infinitely lower scale. The irony, the bitterness of the thing seized upon me, and I cried, "What I can't stand is the damnable waste of it all."

I ought not to have said it, for I knew that it would hurt him. But the cry was involuntary. It sprang from an overwhelming pain. For months I had been upon the rack, foreseeing his decision and dreading it. I had tried to see things from his point of view and had failed. I could see nothing but the waste of rare powers

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

which war demanded, and my cry was in reality a protest against the indiscriminating heartlessness of war itself.

The point, then, that I wish to make is now plain. The person who spoke beside the dock-gates at Folkestone was certainly not the person who spoke that January afternoon in my house at Newark. They are separated by more than a hemisphere. They speak a different language. They think upon a different plane.

The father who said farewell to his son on that dark wharf upon the Ottawa has a certain likeness to the father who turned from the dock in New York dry-eyed but yesterday. But here, too, there is a wide disparity. On that night of parting at the camp, I was sustained by illusion. I was ready to believe that going to England did not mean necessarily going to France. My son might not see fighting after all, and I devoutly hoped he would not. But beside the dock at Folkestone and the wharf at

THE PARTINGS

New York, I was sustained by no illusions. I knew now the reality of war. My son had endured its horrors. He had lived in a miserable dug-out, roofed with the dead. He had been wounded, had nearly lost his right arm, and been for two months in hospital. He had escaped death almost by miracle.

He was going back to it all, and going back to a harder fight than he had ever known. He would again spend bitter nights of cold at the observation post, take his guns in under fire, be exposed to the flying death of shrapnel, the chance of mutilation, the contamination of disease. I knew it all : the dreadful panorama of battle was vivid to me from his own description ; illusion was impossible, yet from my heart I could say that I had rather a thousandfold that he should go back than remain at home in an ignoble safety.

Here is surely a surprising evolution. It has come unsought. It is a growth, not the

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

difficult achievement of deliberate effort. While we try to shape our own lives, they are shaped for us ; while we work, we are worked upon. A new set of forces have played upon my life, and I know myself changed. The same forces are working at this hour on multitudes round about me. They are equally unsought ; perhaps equally uncomprehended and unwelcomed.

It is very confusing for a man whose entire concept of life has been pacific to find himself the father of a soldier. It is still more surprising that he should find himself in most intimate agreement with his son. Yet in all evolution there is order, discernible process, definite development. I see now, what I could not see while the separate elements of the process were at work, that the total process has been orderly. I have moved by definite stages to a new development, a new temper, a new view of life. I wish now to trace these stages, not for my own satisfaction only,

THE PARTINGS

but that I may possibly be of help to others, who may learn through my experience whither their own experience is leading them. The whole world is being fashioned anew, and in this remoulding of human thought parents participate as well as sons. The son becomes a new kind of son when he is a soldier, and the father must needs become a new kind of father.

THE PEOPLE'S CAUSE

O People, must the tale run on the same,
Thro' all the generations, soon and late,
The lamentations of a fruitless shame,
The broken armies bowed to meet their fate?
Is all in vain—the flaming barricade,
The Cross, the gallows, the red guillotine,
And all your marred redeemers, each one made
A sacrifice for thy new sloth and sin?
When will ye come, no more disconsolate,
With banners terrible, and feet of flame,
Treading the wine-press of the grapes of wrath,
In purple raiment, travelling in your might,
With Him Who long since trod the self-same path,
And died in darkness that you might have light?

O People, shall these lesser Kings of clay
Once more weld cruel chains about your feet?
Shall lords of Mammon your great progress stay,
Or counsel you with craft to vile retreat?
Great Rome, with all her legions, slew you not,
Proud Paris kissed for peace your brows blood-hued,
You were not crushed by Cæsar's chariot;
With Jesus crucified, in life renewed
You lived again. And shall you fear to greet
The flaming pennon of your ultimate day,
Bought with a little gold to serve the lust
Of those who build an empire on your pain?
Once more the Spirit stirs the bones of dust,
O ye dry bones, let Him not call in vain.

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

I

MY mind goes back to the summer of 1914.

This year had been the wonderful year of our lives. As a family, we had known some vicissitudes, but we had now passed through all the broken waters, and were afloat upon a bright and placid stream. June found us all together upon our ranch in British Columbia. We planned to remain there a month, and then sail for England. It was an extravagant holiday, but things had happened to us which deserved our unusual celebration.

The ranch was actually the creation of my second son, Reginald. He had gone to it almost a boy, fresh from college, without the least experience of physical toil. When

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

he first saw it, it was wild bush, with not more than an acre cleared and cultivated. Up the lake, which was to us in those summer days so great a pleasure, he had rowed one dark night in a leaky boat, with the vaguest surmise of what he was to find. A friendly rancher gave him shelter for the night, and bluntly expressed the opinion that he would never "stick it." He explored his little kingdom next day, wading through cedar swamps, and climbing over fallen forest trees. His first job was to build a frail shack which must be his home. The isolation and the loneliness of the scene were dismaying. Bears were heard quarrelling in the woods, on the winter nights the coyotes cried like women in mortal pain, and it was no unusual circumstance to be followed by the soft stealthy pad of the mountain-lion as one climbed the trail at night. Nevertheless, he "stuck it," and not till long afterwards did we know the hardness of his first experience.

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

Since these days a miracle had been wrought by the simple magic of courage. The forests had been felled, the swamps drained, and acre after acre added to the ranch. Its very soil had become sacred to us all by these labours. We loved it for its beauty, but much more for the precious treasure of youth which had passed into its soil and hallowed it. In course of time my youngest son, Eric, came to the same district to be near his brother. He was studying law in the neighbouring town of Nelson, at the foot of the lake. So, then, the situation may be conceived. The summer brought a reunion very rare in family life. Even with the plan to visit England duly laid, we, who lived three thousand miles away, could not forgo our visit to the ranch. We hastened to it, my wife, my daughter, myself, and this year my eldest son, with winged feet.

The summer days passed in joyous pageant. One plain log-house sheltered us,

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

and our life was primitive in the extreme. We all realized the truth of the classic fable, that he who touches his mother earth draws new strength from her embrace. There was boating in the lake, continual swimming, and excursions into the wild hills, which had known no change for centuries, and the foot of man but rarely. In the early morning Eric rode into the town ; as the sunset washed the hills with crimson, we waited for the sound of his horse's hoofs upon the road, and found our happiness complete with his arrival. We each felt that we had attained, after many trials, a complete and harmonious plan of life. The ranch itself, no longer swamp and forest, but clothed in orchards, was the symbol of achievement. Thus would we meet each year, here should the family bond be drawn closer by common pleasure, and the intimate communion of mind with mind, based on common memories and affections. Here should books be planned and written, our

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

various schemes of life discussed, our simple festivals of love be celebrated. So we talked and planned, not knowing that this was the last occasion when we should be all together on the ranch—that to-day it would be uninhabited and derelict.

One day the idea suddenly took shape that Reginald should come with us to England. We had never thought of this as possible, but in our existing mood of high spirits all things were possible. His eldest brother insisted on it; his youngest, foreseeing his own solitude, was unselfishly urgent that he should go. He had deserved it, but in the constant self-denials of his life he was not accustomed to think much of his deserts. It was ten years since he had left England. We had all been back, but he had not seen her green shores since he left them as a lad of eighteen. Instantly there was wild riding to and fro, to find some one who would look after things in his absence. A suitable overseer was found.

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

The good luck was so incredible that I think he only half believed it true, until the hour when his valise was packed, and lay upon the wharf waiting for the steamer. For myself, I had scarcely thought to see England again; at least, not for many years. I had a private reason, which I knew to be unreasonable, yet it was very real to me. I had always intended taking my youngest child to England with me when next I went ; but I had delayed too long. She was dead, and I felt as though I had not acted fairly by her. But even that morbid sorrow seemed to dissolve at last in the joy of this united pilgrimage to the dear home land. God had given us so much that summer that I could not but be grateful, nor could I permit the private accusations of a wounded heart to spoil the joy of others.

So then, I say again, conceive the situation. Our lives had touched a fine excess of happiness. We were much too absorbed in it to be greatly interested by outside

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

affairs. The daily paper was flung aside, almost unread. Our casual eyes remarked nothing of importance in external events. We were going to England, going together, all but one of us—nothing in the world could equal the significance of that event. And yet, in those very days, unremarked by us, events were happening that were to touch our lives to the very core, alter the current of our thoughts, and reshape our characters to an undiscerned design.

II

AN Archduke had been murdered somewhere in the Balkans. Let the fact be stated with circumstantial accuracy: "Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, and the Archduchess Sophie Chotek were assassinated to-day at Serajevo, capital of the Austro-Hungarian province of Bosnia, by a Bosnian student, Gavrio Prinzip."

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

So read the paragraph that was flashed round the world on a June morning of 1914.

It seemed of very small importance to the world that an Archduke had disappeared. Certainly it was an event totally unrelated to my own humble existence. Who could have foreseen that a bloody hand would presently thrust itself up out of Serajevo, a hand with vast, groping, cruel fingers that was to pluck twenty million men out of homes and lands, and fling them, unresisting, into the vile Aceldama of War?

Had such a prophecy been made in those last days of June 1914, it would not have been believed. Least of all by me, for I had come to think of war as an anachronism. I was not a pacifist in the usual sense of the term. I thought Tolstoi's doctrine of non-resistance nonsense, and I was unwilling to admit that war was at all times and on all occasions incompatible with Christianity. I could conceive a just war, but I could not conceive the injustice that would provoke

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

it. Time had taught men many lessons, the chief of which was to replace force by reason, and passion by the useful wisdom of mutual advantage. The mind of man, more highly rationalized with each generation, had inevitably moved away from war, which was the supreme unreason. Arbitration was the new word of statesmanship, and the Peace Palace at The Hague was its symbol.

So I supposed, as all rational men supposed in the summer of 1914, that the murder of an Archduke in Serajevo was an incident of no general significance. Nor was I alarmed when threats of revenge, which slowly grew into the menacing voice of War, began to be heard. There was always trouble in the Balkans, as Kipling had reminded us in one of his books, and it usually came to nothing. Besides, I had other things to think of. Our trip to England was not to be postponed by obscure conditions in the Balkans : our berths were

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

already booked on a Canadian steamer. We started on the appointed day, traveling across the entire breadth of Canada to Quebec, from which port we were to sail.

It was in the last days of July when we began that six days' journey across Canada. By this time we had begun to realize that war was imminent, and that there was a remote possibility that England might be involved. As we sped eastward, that distant voice of war began to swell louder, like a thunder-storm that was determined to outrace us. There were moments when I could fancy that bloody hand, with cruel, groping fingers, pushing itself up above the mountains, in growing menace. Prudence suggested that it might be unwise to go on. If England were drawn into war, it was highly probable that we should reach Quebec only to discover that no ship was allowed to sail. But we were possessed by an obstinate thirst for happiness which

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

discounted our reasonable fears. It was just then the most important thing in life for us that we should see England, and see it together, as we had so long dreamed of doing, and we were not to be deterred by so small a thing as the murder of an Archduke at Serajevo.

We could get little news upon our journey. The news service on the train was suspended. Local papers were hard to get, and were of little use. At Winnipeg, where we confidently anticipated accurate information, the news-stalls were closed, no paper was obtainable, and not so much as a telegram was posted on the bulletin board. We had forgotten that it was Sunday, and that Winnipeg kept the Sabbath with exemplary strictness. At last we reached Montreal, and there the real truth met us, that England had declared war on Germany. We reached Quebec the same evening. The streets were thronged, bands were playing, the "Marseillaise" was being sung every-

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

where, and orators, both French and English, were addressing shouting crowds from the base of Champlain's monument. Of course the sailing of our ship was postponed, and there was nothing to do but wait events. We drove about the city, visited the Falls of Montmorency, walked upon the Heights of Abraham, talked of the death of Wolfe, and drew from his heroic history pleasant conclusions on the might of England and the traditional glory of her armies. All the time we were profoundly uneasy, not over public events, but the precariousness of our own plans. It became a matter of eager debate whether or no we should give up our trip. German cruisers were reported in the Atlantic, and I drew a very convincing picture of myself and my family captured and held as prisoners of war. We actually went so far as to drive to the shipping office to cancel our tickets. We did not do so because at that very moment a lying telegram, called official, was posted in the

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

hotel and circulated in the city, announcing that the British Fleet had met the German, destroying eighteen battleships, and capturing as many more, besides an incredible number of cruisers and torpedo boats. Who originated this gigantic falsehood, and how it came to be stamped official, are mysteries unsolved to this day. Of course we believed it. Apparently the shipping authorities believed it, too, for late at night we went aboard our boat, and in the hot still dawn of the next day she put out to sea.

We crossed in perfect safety, and, thanks to that lying telegram, without a single uneasy thought. In those long sunny days and warm starry nights at sea, we came almost to think the fact of war, made so patent to us in Quebec, was a delusion. True, the ship was painted grey, no lights were shown at night, and we were running sixty miles out of our course, but life on board ship retained its customary air of security and pleasure. There was the usual cheerful

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

intercourse among the passengers ; there were deck-sports and games, and an admirable concert given by members of the crew, in which the comic element prevailed. There were a few military men aboard, but they were the most unconcerned of all the passengers ; they showed themselves particularly keen on the deck-sports, but they were quite silent about the war. One old Major-General, who had served in the South African war, was alone communicative. He was quite sure that the defeat of Germany would be rapid and complete. One thing he said was in the nature of a prophecy :

“ We learned one thing from the Boer War—the value of open formation. Germany has never learned it. You mark my words, she will attack in close formation. She depends on mass attacks.”

His words gave me a comfortable sense of the superiority of British strategy, and my confidence was strengthened when he

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

remarked that the only nation with any actual experience of modern war was the British, which was always more or less at war, whereas Germany had not fired a gun since 1870.

“Then you think the war won't last long?” I said.

“Oh, no, it cannot. It is impossible for Germany to stand up against Great Britain, France and Russia. The Franco-Prussian War only lasted six weeks. This may be even shorter.”

I saw my two sons on the forward deck engaged in a game of deck-quoits, and I remembered the Boer War when the C.I.V.'s were recruited in London, and many youths I knew among them.

“Then you don't think there will be any general recruiting?” I asked.

“Oh dear, no. This isn't like the Boer War, when we fought alone. We have France and Russia with us. And besides, remember the British Expeditionary Force

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

will be the very pick of the army, and they'll do their job all right."

He smiled proudly, and because he was old and experienced I believed him.

Why trouble about the future? The sun shone bright, the sea flowed in rippling azure, the Irish coast was looming up, and to the starboard lay two long grey British cruisers, flying the flag that had never known defeat. England, the forsaken but unforgotten land of a thousand happy memories; England, the beloved and long-desired, lay just beyond that faint pale mist and by nightfall we should reach it. Even now, it might be, she had struck her victorious blow on the land, as she had already done upon the sea.

And there was no one to tell me that my friendly Major-General's gay prognostications had as little base in fact as that lying telegram in the hotel lobby at Quebec.

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

III

I LOOK back at that England of August 1914 with surprise and wonder. In a single moment all her destinies had been staked upon the cast of war, but she did not seem to be aware of it. Her life was moving stolidly in the deep ruts made by long years of peace. Liverpool glittered with a thousand lights through the veils of murk, crowded ferry-boats were running to and fro, the great lighted train waited to convey the ocean traveller to London. I was conscious of no tension in the air. The papers gave their front pages to the war, but the great space allotted to sports was not abridged. Men went about their ordinary business in the ordinary way, cheerful, imperturbable, good-humoured, apparently unconscious of peril, or proudly ignoring it. I gathered the impression that for the average man the war was merely an incident.

Some one had started the watchword,

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

“Business as usual.” There must have been something in it that appealed to British doggedness, for it was generally adopted. On most men’s lips it implied a complete half-humorous contempt of Germany. In one Cathedral city which I visited a patriotic baker had improved upon the motto. He was executing some repairs in his shop, and hung out a board on which the caption was displayed, “Business as usual, during the extension of the British Empire.” I have no doubt he was a very stupid man, who knew as little of the British Empire as he did of Germany, but I could not deny him the virtue of chuckle-headed courage. He was certainly representative and typical, for I met the same attitude among all sorts of men. They seemed to imagine that it would be a kind of cowardice to confess that things were serious, and an insult to suppose that they cared. A studied indifference to the war was their synonym for fortitude.

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

The English attitude astonished me ; as I look back I am not less astonished at my own. I was intelligent enough to know the war was serious, but I had no understanding of its real dimensions. I supposed it a war of armies, not of armed nations, as it proved to be. I was told on all sides that the English army had been trained to the highest point of efficiency, and of its valour there was no question. The same was true of the Navy. There was the dramatic story of how the vast fleet of England, assembled for the innocent purpose of an annual review, had melted away in a night, secretly warned of danger and cleverly directed to encounter it. There was the equally dramatic story of how in the dusk of a summer evening a great army had crossed the Channel unobserved, and was in the battle-line before the enemy knew that it had left England. These things encouraged optimism. They gave proof of the skill and vigilance of English statesmen. Perhaps

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

the old Major-General was right when he said that the war would be brief. Why worry about it? We had come to England for a definite purpose: we were exiles returned, eager to renew acquaintance with old scenes and old friends; and there appeared to be no reason why we should not do so. If the shopkeeper's motto was business as usual, it was quite legitimate that the traveller's should be pleasure as usual.

We hired a motor-car, and for sixteen days toured England. We visited places dear and sacred to us by association, a house my father had inhabited in a remote Cornish town, the grave of a sister I had dearly loved in an old parish churchyard of the Midlands. We slept in ancient inns, with Tudor ceilings and Jacobean furniture that had known the stately presences of Wolsey, Milton, Cromwell; and long before their days the feet of Chaucer's pilgrims, and the song of steel-clad Crusaders. We

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

stopped in quaint villages hidden in green nooks above opal seas, Tintagel, Boſcastle and Clovelly. The immemorial peace of these delightful places was undisturbed by the loud clamour of war. Life pursued its ancient courses, as it had done for centuries. The fishing-boats came and went upon the sea, the wheat was being stacked in the fields, and in the evening light the old labourer bent above his little garden or smoked his pipe in the rose-covered doorway of his cottage. If these simple folk talked at all of the war, it was usually to inform us that a vast army of Russians had passed through England secretly, and had joined our forces at the Front. The same legend met us in countries so far apart as Devon and Derbyshire, Gloucester and Suffolk. Eye-witnesses had seen them, shopkeepers had taken their money; there was apparently no railroad over which they had not travelled and no dark wood where they had not been heard conversing. It was like the

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

famous telegram at Quebec : another falsehood born of hope and imagination.

Conceive me, then, touring England with my family during those blazing August days, when the fortunes of England hung upon the valour and endurance of ninety thousand men confronted by a host five times as numerous and infinitely better armed. I ask myself how I could have done it, and the only reply I can find is that my action was the natural result of the ideas which I had imbibed. I was not more selfish than another man, I was not unpatriotic, and what I did was not due to levity of spirit. It was due in part to ignorance of world conditions, in part to a habit of mind. Thoughts, emotions, sentiments, the poetry of legend and romance, the niceties of literature, the idealisms which are rooted in aloofness from real life, and express themselves in a temper of foolish superiority—these made the warp and woof of my mental life. As for war, as I have already said, it

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

lay quite outside my thinking. Granted that wars may be necessary, it was the business of states to pay men to fight for them, and my business to provide the money. Between the civilian and the soldier there was no common bond : they inhabited different stratas. I assumed that the state knew its business, and would see to it that I was duly protected in my personal pursuit of life, liberty and happiness. Therefore when I had discharged my financial duty to the state I was perfectly justified in going about the pursuit of my own private interests. Like that "brooding East," the cradle of all mysticisms, of which Matthew Arnold speaks, I was disposed to

Let the legions thunder past
And plunge in thought again.

It was not a noble habit of mind, not even a creditable, and I do not defend it. I suspect, however, that it is not an uncommon condition of mind among men who have lived tranquil lives of cultured self-

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

development, and lived them for a long time. Such lives, without being selfish, undoubtedly become self-centred, and that which lies outside their own experience does not exist for them.

But, if this was my attitude, there were many signs that it was not the attitude of my sons, nor was it my attitude for long. As we drew nearer London the signs of war became more open. We passed camps where Territorial troops were being drilled, long lines of houses marked with numbers in chalk for the billeting of troops, army wagons, guns, horses, and supplies. And the news too—it was like a black cloud rolling out to meet us.

It was poisonous with lies, reports called “official” which proved baseless, but amid the lies only too much truth of a disastrous kind. For the first time I saw alarm upon the faces of the people. And I saw in the eyes of my sons a question, which I knew must presently shape itself into words.

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

The long grey streets, in a hot blur of August dust, opened out before us. We passed a vast hospital, at whose windows we could see wounded soldiers. The news-boys, shrill-voiced, were calling above the dull roar of the streets, "British Defeat, Great Losses." A church-bell rang in a cracked monotone. Out of the church-door a woman dressed in shabby black was coming. At the end of the long grey vista rose something that appeared buoyant and strong, a Dome and a Cross. It was St. Paul's, shining in the setting sun, its dome like the polished breast of a great bird, and its Cross a crest of flame.

IV

THREE pictures live in my memory.

The first is of men drilling on every open space in London, and of troops marching through the streets. Kitchener's first proclamation had appeared calling for half a

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

million men, and with it his prophetic statement that the term of the war would not be less than three years. I read it with amazement. The actual armed forces of the Empire, including Territorial troops, already numbered a million. Britain had won Waterloo with less than eighty thousand troops, half of whom were not English-born. Napoleon's vastest army was less than half a million. What kind of war was this, for whose demands a million troops were insufficient?

Yet Kitchener's statement was received with grave assent. There were those who ridiculed his ideas about the length of the war, but no one questioned the need for immediate recruiting, and on a vast scale. The men came forward in thousands. They waited in long lines from earliest dawn till night at the doors of the recruiting depots. They were drawn from every class. Men of education, familiar with all the amenities of good social station, stood shoulder to

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

shoulder with carpenters, bricklayers, ostlers, day-labourers, each alike eager to be chosen for the peril of a great game in which his life was the pawn. The parks echoed to the sharp commands of military instructions, and the tramp of men learning the first elements of drill. I saw these men, with mixed feelings of pity and admiration. They were in their civilian clothes; they wore straw hats and bowler hats, brown boots and white tennis shoes; many were narrow-shouldered from long stooping over desks, and few presented a robust appearance; yet their eagerness to learn was evident, and their interest in their job enthusiastic. Groups of women, no doubt relations, watched them, some with pride, some with sad-eyed apprehension. And one afternoon, in Shaftesbury Avenue, I saw the first completed product of this intensive training. The Artists' Corps came swinging down the Avenue, many of them men connected with the arts—painters, sculptors,

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

designers, musicians, architects—men individually and collectively much above the average, and as they marched they sang “Tipperary.” It was the first time I had heard that lilting air. It has often been criticized for its triviality, and some persons, I believe, have compared it unfavourably with the stern quality of Teuton army songs. But as I heard it for the first time that day, it seemed to me to express all the pathos of war, all the heroism and self-sacrifice:

So good-bye, Piccadilly,
Farewell Leicester Square.
It's a long, long way to Tipperary,
But my heart's right there.

For the first time I had a sense of the heroism and gay courage which war invokes in ordinary men.

The next day I went into a bank in the Strand. A very tall man, with a strong face, was standing at the counter talking to the clerk. He was dressed in dark clothes, and wore a black tie. He

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

finished his business, and walked to the door where he stood in a bemused fashion gazing out upon the thronged street. Presently he came back to the counter, and said in a low voice to the clerk :

“ Did I tell you he was dead ? ”

“ Your son ? ” exclaimed the clerk.

“ Yes. He’s dead. I’ve just got the news. He was killed in action. I thought you would like to know.”

He went again to the door, and stood there, with his sombre, heavy eyes gazing out on the sunlit street.

I had drawn my cheque and was coming away. He was still standing at the door, as if he could not muster up resolution to mix with the busy folk of the street, who all seemed so complacent and so satisfied.

As I approached him he stepped forward and laid his hand upon my arm.

“ Did I tell you that my son was dead ? ” he said in a dull mechanical voice, as though he were repeating a lesson. “ He was

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

killed in action. I've just got the news. I thought you would like to know." I knew then that he was crazed with grief. He lifted his hat, and said, "Forgive me for troubling you."

He turned back to the counter, where he stooped down to whisper to the clerk, uttering no doubt the same words, which were all his stricken mind could frame.

I left him there. I had received a second impression of war, and a great terror fell upon me. If such a thing should ever happen to me, what should I do?

A week later I saw just the bare fringe of war in its collective aspect. We had crossed to Holland to visit my newly-married daughter who was living at The Hague. Gun-boats accompanied the steamer, from which instructions were megaphoned as to the position of mines. I returned from Holland on a boat packed with fugitives from Belgium. None of them possessed much beyond the clothes

THE FIRST VISION OF WAR

they wore—a few tiny bundles at the most. From one of the bundles a doll's legs protruded. A dazed child sat beside it, fondling the wax feet of the doll. There were old men and women who sat perfectly still, never moving from one position, as if they had lost the power of action. There were young girls in whose eyes a secret horror lurked. There were white-haired priests, who huddled together shocked and silent, rarely lifting their eyes through the entire voyage. There was a middle-aged man, who looked like a prosperous merchant, with a bloody rag wound round his forehead. None of these poor people spoke among themselves. So vast a distrust of human nature had possessed them that they distrusted one another. Or perhaps speech was dead in them; what they had seen and suffered lay beyond speech.

I saw once a dying hare that had been run down by dogs, and I never forgot the human look of appeal and accusation in the

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

wide brown eyes of this tiny victim of what men call sport. There was the same look in the eyes of these people. The dogs of War had chased them from their homes, run them down, torn them with cruel fangs ; and in their anguished eyes was the unanswerable question why these things had happened to them, and why the good God had let them happen.

In the gallery of my mind, as I write, these three pictures hang side by side : marching men, singing " Tipperary ; " a crazed father telling strangers that his son is dead ; a dismal crowd of fugitives, with a dying hare's look of terror and accusation in their eyes.

They compose my first vision of War. They epitomize its gay courage, its bitter tragedy, and its unspeakable cruelty and injustice.

DE PROFUNDIS

*So long around our heart we drew
The flaming line of hope that kept
Despair at bay, and held it true
That Christ watched while the great world slept.
And now our creed breaks like a star,
And falls in fire, and ends in night ;
The heaven we sought is all too far,
Our hearts are tired, we have no light.*

*We drew the sword, we struck at wrong,
We fought to mould a better world ;
Now all we held as right so long
Lies at our feet in ruin hurled.
We learn the bitter speech of scorn,
“ Their wrong was right, our right was wrong ” ;
We tear the flag in conquest borne,
And bow our heads beneath the strong.*

*Yet not so ; if a splendid dream
We served, we will not perish thus.
Some Easter-glory yet shall gleam
Beyond “ God has forsaken us ! ”
Gird on the sword, the flag raise high !
Once more against the spears of hell
We hurl ourselves, and if we die
We fall as all God's worthiest fell !*



THE GROWING FEAR

I

THOSE who say that fear lies at the root of all that is base in human life are undoubtedly right. The thief fears poverty, and therefore steals. The business man fears defeat, and therefore stoops to dishonour. The thinker fears the ostracism which is the punishment of originality, and therefore hides his real convictions. We all fear pain, loss, and suffering, and therefore are willing to do almost everything to evade them. Most people fear Death, because they conceive it to mean the ultimate disaster.

I returned from London in 1914 with Fear for my companion. It was a sort of subtle ghost which manifested itself capri-

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

ciously, disappearing for long intervals, reappearing unexpectedly, but, as I knew, never very far away. It leapt out at me from the brightest sunlight ; it assailed my sleep, and visited me in dreams.

One dream I remember because it was recurrent. I was travelling over a wide moor in England, with my son beside me in the motor-car. Grey rocks lay in heaps among the purple heather, and the setting sun was poised upon a distant hill like a great cauldron, over whose lips red lava poured. We were talking eagerly of books, scenery and the legendary history of the moor, when all at once I discovered that he was wearing khaki. The sun sank lower and a change passed across the moor. What I had thought heaps of rocks were human bodies huddled in grotesque attitudes. The red light flowed over them, bathing them in blood. My son pointed to them, and said something to me which I could not understand. The motor stopped. He

THE GROWING FEAR

stepped out of it, regarded me wistfully for a moment, then turned his back, strode out upon the moor, and walked toward the huddled bodies. I called after him, using words of endearment, of protest, and finally of anger. He waved his hand to me, became a tiny speck against the red sun, and disappeared. Darkness fell suddenly upon the moor, thick and noiseless as a black velvet curtain. A peewit cried in the distance, a mountain brook gurgled with a sound like sobbing, a cold wind began to thresh among the heather. A horror of great loss fell upon me, and I awoke with an extraordinary sense of desolation.

This dream was, as all dreams are, a dramatization of an habitual thought. The spectacle of those multitudes of youths drilling on every village green of England was not one to be forgotten. It had laid hold of my imagination, and I knew that it must have been more affecting to my son than to myself. For me it was a spectacle,

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

but for him it was a challenge. I saw the pathos of heroism ; he felt its call.

He did not tell me this, but our relation had been so intimate, our minds had moved to a common rhythm through so many years, that I knew his thoughts, and he knew that I knew them. Our relation had never been the accepted conventional relation of father and son, which implies superior experience on one side and conscious immaturity upon the other. I remember thinking with some bitterness on the day when he left home to go to Oxford, that in all probability his life would now move on a plane different from mine. Henceforth he would have his own aims and pursuits, and they would put a widening gulf between us. It was part of the inevitable irony of parentage, which serves its turn, launches a new life upon the world, and is forgotten. Youth must be served ; I must decrease and he would increase. So it had always been, so it would always be, and

THE GROWING FEAR

the final act of fatherhood was abdication, which I trusted I might be able to achieve at least with grace, at all events without protest which is ineffectual, and without envy which is absurd.

To my joy and surprise this sadly anticipated hour of abdication never came. My son outshone me in a thousand ways, but one faculty I possessed which held him to me—the faculty of youth. I do not know whether sober people of conventional habits will count this quality in me a virtue or a fault, but I can testify that it has earned for me great dividends of happiness. I was not cast for the part of the “heavy father” in the drama of life. I could not have played it if I had tried. I have always been treated by my sons with a kind of genial irreverence which sprang from an affectionate acknowledgment that I was less their father than their comrade. I have shared their pleasures and, upon occasion, have been as ready for some gay adventure as

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

they. Thus there has always been between us an absolute confidence, a complete communion, based upon equality of thought and similarity of temper.

We have not only shared pleasures, but exile. Coming to America with no accurate knowledge of the country, flung by chance into a small town where there was little or no social life to distract us, we were all forced very close together by the loneliness of our situation. We re-discovered one another. We leaned much upon one another, both giving and receiving strength! We attained a new valuation of the simple virtues of fidelity, constancy, and family loyalty. In these years nothing was done save in common council. Any plan I had, any purpose I designed, since it affected each member of my family, was fully debated with them. The important question of finance, which most parents conceal in provoking reticence, was considered their business as much as mine, for were we not

THE GROWING FEAR

all partners in a common venture? My children knew the condition of my bank account to its last penny. And, since my eldest son, of whom I am writing more particularly, lived at home with us through all those early years of our American experiment, the burden of the household lay heavy on him. When I went to hospital for an operation which we perfectly knew would end or save my life, it was he who went with me, and parted from me at the door with a silent hand-grip. When my youngest child died, during the absence from home of both myself and my wife, it was upon him that the chief responsibility of those tragic hours was laid.

There was beside the bond forged by isolation and dependence, the bond of common mutual work. All he wrote I read, all I wrote he read. There was not a situation in his novels which had not been discussed between us. I had watched the growth of his powers not only with parental

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

pride but with the sympathy of a brother artist. I knew the rarity of those powers long before it was acknowledged by the critics. Our literary ideals, not always identical, were compared, discussed, dissected in endless conversations, as we took our daily walk through the park or sat round a fire of logs on winter evenings. In one literary undertaking we had been actual partners. I mention these things to show that the bond between us was of unusual intimacy. I valued it all the more when I remembered my own childhood. I left home when I was a little over eight years old and, with the exception of an interval of two years between leaving school and going to college, I never lived at home again. I never knew my father with the intimacy of a daily contact, continued through unhurried years. When the time came that I was able to spend long holidays at home, my father was an invalid, and the brightness of his mind was dulled.

THE GROWING FEAR

And now the Fear had seized on me that this profound intimacy was liable to sudden rupture. We had lived, during our residence in America, a life very much apart from the world, and we had been content to do without the world because we were so contented with each other. World events had become unimportant; they had receded from us as the full tide recedes from a little pool among the rocks. We heard the clamour of the sea as something far off, insignificant, diminished and disregarded. The tide was now rolling back. The little rock-pool of our still life was agitated with the first ripple that predicted change. Soon, very soon, the great sea would be upon us, and there was no Power, lifting a magic rod, to say, "Thus far shalt thou come, and no further."

I heard the noise of the approaching water and I was afraid.

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

II

CHRISTMAS had come again, and once more we were together. Some premonition that it might be the last Christmas we should spend together for a long time haunted each one of us. For that reason we had made a great effort to meet. My three sons travelled together the three thousand miles that lay between the ranch and Newark. We were the same group that had found life so delightful six months before among the hills and woods, but how changed had our thoughts become! The contrast between those days of July splendour and these grey December skies was symbolic of the alteration in ourselves. Happiness no longer rose in fine excess like a sparkling fountain; it flowed soberly between dull banks, and there was the murmur of the ocean in the distance.

There were long talks round the fire as in other days, talks full of intimate recol-

THE GROWING FEAR

lection, but I had the sense of unspoken thoughts which we dared not utter, and yet felt a strong compulsion to reveal. We were very tender with each other in those days. Our minds moved warily, seeking but shrinking from full contact, as if we were aware of a bruise we feared to touch. In the long silence I found my son's eyes fixed on me questioningly. And often I looked at them in the same way. What was going on in their minds? Two of them had looked on the reality of war in England, and Eric, the youngest, was aware that several of his old Yale friends were either going, or had gone, to serve with the American Ambulance Corps. For Coningsby I knew that there were certain peremptory undertakings in literature which could not be set aside in haste. He was bound, as a mere matter of honour and conscience, to complete them. He had written me about them, reporting his progress, and I was glad to find his progress had been slow. I hoped

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

it might be yet slower, for each day that he was bound to his task was a day snatched from the threatening future.

I comforted myself with similar reflections about the other two boys. How could Reginald leave the ranch which represented the invested capital and toil of so many years? How could Eric break his law indentures, and fail to go on with those examinations on which his career depended? In each case I found not only the obligation of self-interest, but the still more exigent obligations of the pledged word. I found myself arguing their case for them, but from my point of view rather than theirs. And I knew that they would look to me for counsel. What counsel could I give? When I argued their case before the bar of my own intelligence I had no difficulty in winning a verdict. But if I argued the case before the court of their own honour could I win it? As a last resort, I thought that I could use one argument which they

THE GROWING FEAR

would respect. If I admitted the claim of inevitable duty, I could not admit it for all three. The most that I could grant was that one must go. But no sooner had I made this admission than my mind recoiled from another question—"Which?" They were equally dear. The career of each had been costly. I had lived in the success of each, and in their anticipated future. And, even if I could persuade them that only one must go, which would be ready to retire in favour of the other two?

The newspapers came each morning with their stories of heroic struggle and their toll of death. We read them furtively. I would enter the room suddenly and find one of my sons absorbed in the war news; the paper was instantly thrust aside, with a pathetic assumption of indifference. I myself read the war news secretly. I found paragraphs that so stirred the heart that I was deeply moved; but not the less I hoped that my sons might not have noticed

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

them. In ordinary circumstances we should have discussed them fully. We should have read aloud the war-poems that filled the papers, many of them so excellent in quality and so pathetic in substance that we should have been delighted with their merit. Now I dared not do this, and I knew why. I feared the touch that might precipitate the avalanche. And my sons, equally conscious of the poised peril, feared it too, for my sake.

We all tried to make believe that this was an ordinary Christmas, like any other. We visited theatres, dined at restaurants, tried to keep alive the old spirit of gaiety and light-heartedness ; but there was no spontaneity in our mirth. Fear sat beside us in the theatre, and whispered at our shoulders in the restaurants. The jests of the theatre fell flat, the gaiety of the well-dressed crowds in the restaurants was an offence. I remember one performance on behalf of some form of war relief, at which a

THE GROWING FEAR

celebrated actor made an eloquent appeal for help. We sat silent and unthrilled. It seemed such a poor thing to be sending dollars when other nations were sending lives. We saw behind the brilliant scenery of the stage those pale youths drilling in the London parks, and marching with "Tipperary" on their lips to their ultimate fate. From such excursions we came home silent and depressed. Money I was willing enough to give, but could that cancel my debt? Could America hope in the long run to pay her debt to liberty with dollars? How could she, and how could I buy myself out of the stern conscription of inevitable duty by such means? And, as we came back in the train at midnight the very wheels seemed to chant in dreadful rhythm, "Lives, not dollars."

One night the tension broke quite suddenly.

The hour was late, and we sat round the embers of a dying fire. Coningsby had

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

been writing all day, and I asked him how his book was going.

“I can see the end,” he said quietly. “When I have finished it of course I shall enlist.”

A sharp pain shot through my heart, and was followed by a hot wave of indignation.

“No, no, you must not think of that,” I cried.

His mother and his sister, braver than I, said:

“He knows best what he ought to do.”

“My dear father,” he said, “you know what I ought to do, don’t you? I’m not acting in haste. I’ve thought it all over. I know how serious a step it is. I wouldn’t take it, if I wasn’t forced to. I must, I simply must enlist.”

“And I,” said Reginald. “All the men are going in Kootenay. I can’t lift up my head if I don’t.”

“And I,” said Eric. “I don’t mind going as an ambulance driver, if you

THE GROWING FEAR

strongly wish it, but I would rather enlist with the others."

"But think of your careers," I pleaded. "You've each worked so long and so hard, and now, just when you're going to reap your rewards——"

"Think of our careers, if we don't go," they answered.

"Just because you've been so proud of us, we want you to go on being proud of us," said Coningsby. "And you couldn't be proud of us if we were slackers, could you?"

I had no answer. I was too stunned for argument.

"Both Con and I wanted to join when we were in England," said Reginald. "But do you remember what you said? You said it would break your heart, and so we didn't join."

"I think it will break your heart if we don't join now," said Coningsby. "It won't get broken all at once; but in years

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

to come you'll be ashamed of us, and that's what will break your heart. My dear father, do try to see it all from our point of view. I know that you do really think as we think, but pain won't let you be quite honest with yourself. When the pain is past you'll not only agree with us, but you'll be proud of us."

"I'm afraid not," I said brokenly. "At all events I can't think like that now."

"You will some day. I am sure of it. We've not been so close together all these years without my discovering that you can rise to hard occasions as well as any other man, indeed much more readily than most men."

But in that hour all the resilience of my soul seemed broken. The occasion crushed me and drew forth no answering courage. All I knew was that the Fear that had so long haunted me had dropped the veil, and now gazed into my shrinking eyes with its own cold eyes of calculated malice. Those

THE GROWING FEAR

eyes were awful as the eyes of Death, and I was afraid.

III

My fear tried to justify itself on philosophic grounds.

One night we put upon the victrola an exquisite violin solo of Kreisler's. The paper had informed me that morning that Kreisler had joined the Austrian army, and was going to the Front. Instantly my mind conceived a picture of Kreisler with a shattered right hand, trodden down in the indiscriminate rage of battle. He would return, if he returned at all, a maimed man, and who could estimate what his loss would mean to the music of the world? The papers had discussed that very point, and some one had written a poignant letter, pleading that artists and musicians should be considered sacrosanct in time of war.

My mind went back once more to that

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

Artists' Corps which I had seen, singing "Tipperary" with such light hearts as they marched down Shaftesbury Avenue. I knew that many of them must be men of achievement and some of original and conspicuous genius. They carried the art of the future with them. An ordinary man might fall in battle, and the world be no poorer; but when a man of genius dies untimely, the world is robbed of a great inheritance.

I told myself that even in a time of war some respect was due to the canons of economy. A nation might squander its treasure and replace it, but it could not replace squandered genius. The world could better spare a regiment of Austrian peasants than one Kreisler. War was brutally indifferent to spiritual and intellectual values. In the commonalty of a soldier's life the poet was of no more value than the hodman. What stupid tragic Vandalism was this, that men of the highest gifts, of immense value to

THE GROWING FEAR

the world, should be sacrificed upon a job that could be as well or better done by men whose sole efficiency was physical!

I looked upon Coningsby, and remembered how many years had gone to his making, to the discovery and development of his peculiar gifts. There were the days of childhood—even then he had begun to write. There were the years of school; how well I remembered leaving him one bitter winter day at the iron gates of a puritan academy, and noticing how red his hands were with the cold, and how forlorn he looked. There were many months, during which he rode his bicycle sixty miles a week to the house of the scholar who tutored him for Oxford. There were the years at Oxford, and then the hidden years during which he wrought in doubt and difficulty to learn the art of writing with distinction and lucidity. How many years in all? A fifth of a lifetime in all probability. Would it not be the most monstrous

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

kind of waste if all the fine efficiency gained through those laborious years were sacrificed? Certainly common sense demanded some discrimination between the man who had been trained for a difficult and rare task and the man whose sole possession was his physical efficiency.

And then there was that other thought already made so obvious: he was my eldest son, and if he enlisted it was certain that the two younger brothers would enlist. They would follow his lead and would not be outdone in sacrifice. The encroaching wave would not be satisfied with one victim. The stern spirit of war, like the half-inspired fanatic of Ibsen's poem, would demand "All or Nothing."

Again and again I rehearsed these thoughts. I knew that they were rational. I knew that I had a case which any reasonable jury would respect. The writer who had pleaded the exemption of musicians and artists had stated that case for me on the

THE GROWING FEAR

large grounds of human welfare, seen not in a passing phase, but in its enduring claims.

And yet the moment I endorsed it I became aware of its weakness. If the poet, the artist, the musician were exempt, why not the chemist, the engineer, the man of science? Where could we stop? Who, among the professional classes at least, could not give ample proof that he was of more real value to the community in the pursuit of his calling than in using his bodily strength upon a battlefield? Besides, there was the fact that Kreisler *had* gone. He knew the rarity of his gift better than anyone, yet he had gone. He could estimate its value with the finest judgment, yet some powerful impulse had led him to count his gift as of small account weighed in the balance with a duty that was heroic and imperative.

There was also another plea which insisted on a hearing. In this plea for the

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

exemption of men of intellect was there not something inherently snobbish? What it really came to was that common men should perform all the heroism of the world, and uncommon men should profit by it. The labourer and the artisan should die that a Kreisler should enjoy security for the development of his art. And, after all, was that art more truly necessary to the world than the toil which raised harvests, built roads, launched ships, and riveted the bridge over which the commerce of a continent was carried? And, if it came to a measurement of individual loss, was not the loss of a breadwinner from a humble home as truly tragic as the loss of a violinist from a concert-hall, even though he played a fiddle as no other man could play it?

So I argued with a mind divided. No sooner had one reason triumphed than another contradicted it. My thoughts ran to and fro, like waters washing round a shallow bowl, without outlet, without defi-

THE GROWING FEAR

nite aim. And all the time, reason it as I would, my Fear drew nearer. I could not exorcize it, nor dared I say with Hamlet to his father's ghost :

I'll cross it though it blast me.

I could only wait in silence the approaching step, as one in a dark wood, who hears the dry twigs crackle under the stealthy movement of some dreaded foe.

IV

ONE day we received a letter informing us that a man whom we all knew well had been killed in action. He was young, bright, alert, with a wife and two-year-old son. He had gone out with the first contingent of the Canadian forces, and had been less than three months in Flanders when he was killed. A silence fell upon us as we read the letter. After breakfast we went away to our various duties, but all day long the spectre raised by that letter haunted us.

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

War in the abstract may be philosophized upon, but this was war in the concrete, and it struck home to the heart. It was as though the commonplace, "We all must die," had been replaced by the poignant message, "You must die, and soon." No one is concerned by the general threat of death which hangs above the entire human race, but we are instantly and profoundly affected by the death of a person we have loved. In the same way the casualty lists of a battle leave us cold, or inspire only a pity too diffused to be intense, but the death of a single friend in battle shocks us with a sense of outrage. It was so we felt when this news reached us, and the very mode in which it was conveyed was significant. It was contained in a postscript, as if the writer of the letter attached slight importance to it. To him it must have appeared a normal occurrence, and I found myself reflecting on the blunted sensibility which war produces in the spectator. But to me

THE GROWING FEAR

it was abnormal to the point of horror. What the writer of the letter had put into a callous postscript, I saw blazoned on the heavens in a scroll of blood and fire.

During all that day I thought over the history of the dead man. His heroism I could not deny, but very soon I found myself searching for reasons which might lessen its force as an example. I told myself that he was an adventurer, to whom peril of any kind was an attraction. He had spent his life in taking risks. He belonged to that large class of wandering Englishmen who are brave, high-spirited, enamoured of danger, but who follow no definite plan in life, and are incapable of looking very far ahead. He had not even looked far enough ahead to imagine what might happen to his young wife and child if he should die. He was symbolic of that splendid thoughtlessness of youth, which sets little value upon life ; which also, it must be confessed, wins and builds up empires. And I added, with

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

a qualm of shame at the meanness of the thought, that after all in his death no special loss of rare gifts was involved, which would make the future of the race definitely poorer.

These reflections were, of course, the product of my own condition of mind. I wanted, above all things, to find convincing reasons why my sons should not enlist, reasons which would have weight with them. And I knew that this story of our friend's death would affect them in a way that I did not desire. What would appeal to them most in the story would be the chivalry of the dead man, and they certainly would not be deterred by its tragedy. To me also the chivalry appealed, but my fear was too potent for me to appreciate at it its true worth. Here was the work of Fear again ; it sought to diminish the motives of an heroic act, in order that I might gain a personal end very dear to me. And yet I had always been very sensitive to the splen-

THE GROWING FEAR

dour of heroism! I had read *Plutarch's Lives* with a thrilled heart. I had written and lectured on great patriotic histories. One of my first and most memorable journeys as a boy was to Portsmouth, that I might stand in the cockpit of the *Victory* where Nelson died. I had made a point when travelling in England of visiting battlefields, the graves of heroes, and ancient castles before whose immemorial walls great deeds were done. I had often stood in London at the base of Nelson's monument, and had seemed to hear from those lips of bronze the sacred invocation, "England expects this day that every man will do his duty." In America I had visited the battlefields of the Civil War with the same feelings. I was familiar with the heroisms of Gettysburg, and had walked among the nameless graves of Chickamauga. All this was true, and yet, when a true hero appeared before me, I turned my head away. I was unwilling to recognize him because

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

to praise him might invite disaster for myself. To such a mean attitude of mind had Fear conducted me.

I think it was this consciousness of the growth of mean thoughts within me that first made me aware of how Fear was debasing me. I found no extenuation in the plea, which was true, that my fear was, after all, not for myself but for others. Affection, not less than hatred, can play the Judas part of betrayal. When Christ said that a man's foes might be those of his own household, was He not thinking of affection as a foe to heroism? Might He not have been thinking of just such a case as mine, for was not I allowing my affection for my sons to become the foe of their honour? And, after all, was I thinking only of my sons? Was it really true that my fear was altogether for another, not myself? No: I saw now that it was in large part the fear of losing my own happiness. I foresaw the anguish of separation, the loneliness, the

THE GROWING FEAR

empty days, the anxious nights, the total disruption of those schemes of life on which my personal happiness was based. "If I lost them"—ay, there was the rub—I was measuring my own loss and was afraid to contemplate it. Love for them and love for myself were interwoven so closely that I could not disintegrate them, but I knew that the one was as authentic as the other. I was afraid because I loved; but not the less I was afraid of the loss that love might suffer.

By virtue of that magic which interprets the silence of thought between those whose minds are exquisitely intimate, I knew that my sons comprehended the anguish I endured. I found on Coningsby's table one night Tennyson's poems, opened at the noble poem called "Love and Duty," and there was a broad pencil mark beneath the lines :

If this indeed were all,
Better the narrow brain, the stony heart,
The staring eyes glazed o'er with sightless days,
The long mechanic pacings to and fro,
The set grey life, and apathetic end.

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

I think he meant me to read the passage, and I knew the message he meant it to convey. Robbed of the heroisms of duty, what was life worth? If duty were deflected from its sacred task by love, what result could be expected? "The set grey life, and apathetic end"—that was the penalty of a life that sat in fear, the reward of heroism silenced and renounced.

A memory came to me of a family I had known in London, whose modes of life we had often spoken of with humorous scorn. There were three sons and a daughter, each of whom had been mollycoddled from birth. The boys were educated privately because the parents had concluded that public schools were deeply injurious to youthful morals. They were allowed to take no part in manly sports, because all sports were dangerous. They were forbidden to take a holiday in Switzerland, because sometimes men lost their lives there on treacherous glaciers. I think the night air of London

THE GROWING FEAR

was also considered dangerous to their lungs for they were never allowed out of doors after nine o'clock. The girl was high-spirited, broke away from the parental prison-house and joined the militant suffragettes. The boys grew up as might have been expected, shy, timid, ineffective, fearing wet feet more than a soldier fears wounds and death, concerned over a winter influenza more than a football player is over a broken leg in a victorious game. Here was the work of Fear again, the total emasculation of manhood, youth robbed of its joy, and covered with absurdity. Did I wish my sons to become even as these? The idea was ridiculous, and yet if I allowed my fear for them to interfere with the natural energy of their desires, and if their affection for me induced them to submit to my wishes, was I not guilty of the emasculation of their manhood which must ensue?

Fear—I saw now that it was the real root

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

of all evil. It attacks the roots of action, as a canker worm eats its way through the hidden fibres of the flower, until the leaf withers and the petal falls in ruin. It was already breeding base thoughts in me, and would breed baser. It was making me insensitive to all those higher visions of life and duty which had once delighted me. I noticed that I could no longer read *Plutarch's Lives* with pleasure. I was reluctant to read patriotic poetry or histories ; and, if I did, found myself out of sympathy with them. I could not even read the newspapers, with their daily epic of great deeds upon the battlefield, without a certain impatience. Fear was poisoning me. The slow virus was infecting every thought. Then I said, I must kill Fear, or Fear will kill me.

Through all this struggle one thing grew upon me with increasing clearness—my sons were not afraid. I knew what they would do as surely as though I had seen

THE GROWING FEAR

them girding on the armour of a knight, and dedicating their swords in silent midnight vigil before some altar, over which hung the tortured body of the Crucified. If I was to remain their comrade, must not I kneel there with them? Could I retain that sensitive and all but perfect community of mind which had so long united us if I failed them now? And at that question my Fear suddenly took a new and blessed shape, as though a dark cloud had been penetrated by the rosy fires of dawn—I feared lest I should prove unworthy of them. When I had feared because my happiness was threatened, I had feared ignobly; but this was noble fear. The fear lest I might prove unworthy, carried with it the resolution to be worthy, whatever it must cost me.

I have been at pains to trace these movements of my mind because I know that there are multitudes around me who are passing through the same experience. The

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

strange horror of war has found them unprepared, and, in adjusting themselves to it, the very heart is wrenched apart. One great lesson I have learned from my experience—not to despise the man who is afraid. If the truth be told, we are all afraid when we hear the footsteps of Tragedy approaching us. We are all disposed at first to buy off the invading foe with any kind of bribe. In the conquest of fear lies our only chance of escape from the baser elements of our nature which always threaten to destroy us. Our sin is not in being afraid, but in yielding to our fear ; and the highest courage is in being afraid, but still going on and acting as though we are not afraid.

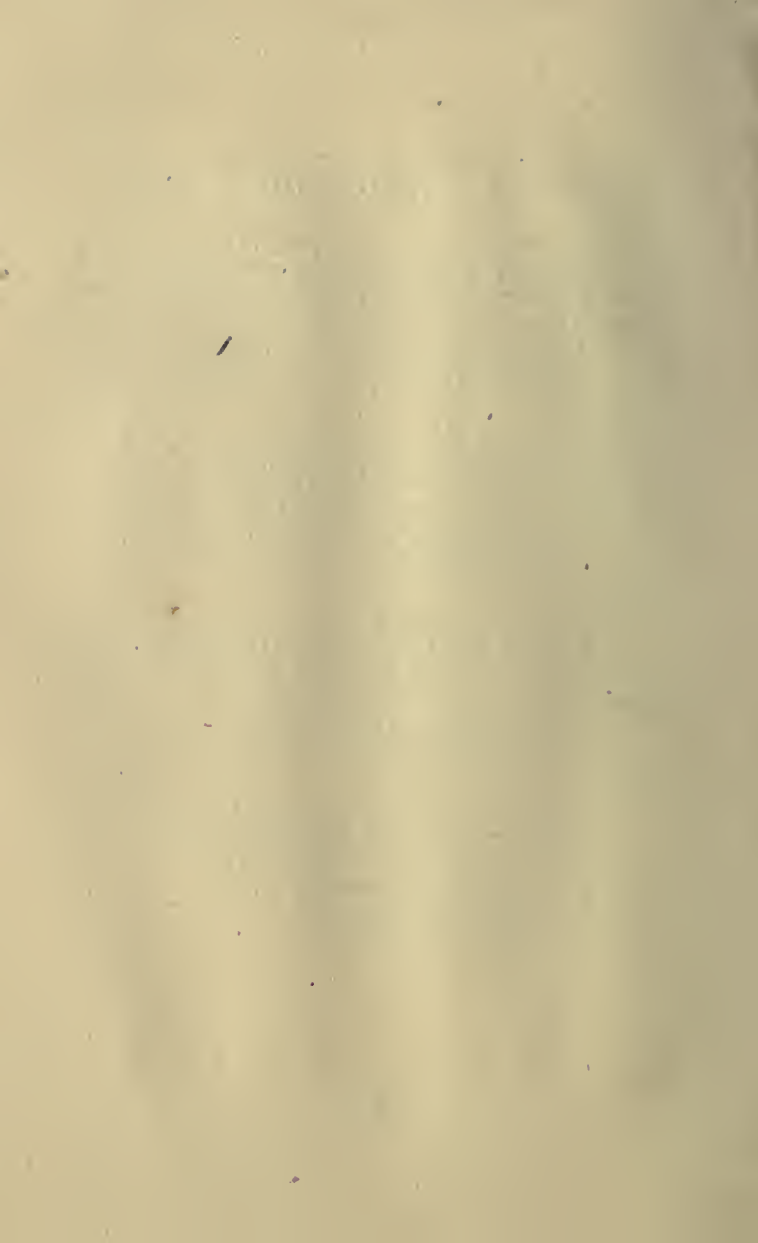
WHEN HEROES DIE

*When Heroes die no tears shall fall ;
For them the morning stars shall sing,
And golden planets bear their fall
With hosts of heaven following,
And close-ranked angels, wing on wing,
When Heroes die.*

*When Heroes die it is not meet
To make them mournful obsequies,
With candles at the head and feet,
And cere-cloths drawn around their eyes ;
A Brightness fills the earth and skies
When Heroes die.*

*When Heroes die tall trumpeters
Before heaven's gate proclaim their worth.
In marble tombs the great dust stirs
Of soldiers who subdued the earth,
And God Himself makes solemn mirth
When Heroes die.*

*Wherefore for us, when Heroes die,
Shall be no mournful grave-ward glance :
Our souls, with theirs, invade the sky
And to immortal strifes advance ;
For great is our inheritance
When Heroes die.*



THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

I

I WAS in England again.

The great decision had been made, and my son was a soldier. His two brothers had joined the British Navy. In a single month they had all gone from us. His brothers were waiting their appointments, and he was returning for a brief leave after four months' service at the Front. We were to meet all three sons in London, as I have narrated elsewhere.

One vision of War I had had, and it had created in me apprehension and resentment. That mood had by no means passed away, although it was greatly modified. I had submitted to the inevitable, but I was not reconciled to it. I had submitted

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

because I realized that the honour of my sons was involved, and that they would feel their honour stained and themselves eternally disgraced if they had not gone. But to accept the Cross reluctantly is one thing ; to accept it because its meaning is profoundly apprehended is quite another.

If I had remained in America I do not think I should have been able to attain this profounder apprehension of the war. I am speaking now, of course, of the days before America had realized her true relation to the great world struggle. A large and influential body of people still preached peace, and were apparently prepared to advocate or retain peace at any price. The European struggle was commonly regarded as lying outside the immediate interests of America. America was not directly threatened, or believed she was not. Judging by the press, and by the war books that began to flood the market, it was evident that the horror of the war was much

THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

more vitally perceived than the ideals for which the Allies fought. The suspicion still lingered that the war was like all other European wars, more or less a conflict of dynasties, of national ambitions, of commercial rivalries. In a word, the spiritual aspects of the struggle were not realized; they were not thoroughly realized even by myself; and I owe it to that visit to England that at last my attitude of reluctant acquiescence in an inevitable Cross was changed to a real perception of its meaning, and of reconciliation to it.

The England of 1914 I have already described: an England half-awake, ignorantly confident, imperturbably cheerful, treating the war as an incident and deriding its menace with the motto—"Business as usual." How different was the England I now saw, so different that it appeared almost unrecognizable! Since that memorable August of 1914, blow after blow had fallen. The splendid army which grappled

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

with overwhelming forces at Mons was no more ; of the officers and men who had formed that heroic Expeditionary Force, not a tithe was left. The human wreckage of the iron storm that swept the fields of Flanders had drifted back on every tide, and the streets were full of wounded men. The threat of invasion, which had not been heard since Napoleon had assembled an army at Boulogne more than a hundred years before, had once more become credible. The entire eastern coast was scarred with trenches, and on the inland railway stations there were posted elaborate instructions of what must be done in case of the landing of the enemy. Portions of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge were hospitals. The parks of the nobility were camps, and great historic houses, which had known for centuries nothing but the stately and sustained splendour of lordly lives, were convalescent homes. Blow after blow had fallen indeed, but it would seem that each

THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

blow had but beaten the nation into a firmer consistency of courage and resistance, as steel is tempered in the fire. It was an amazing England, an incredible England, and I could not but recall the great words of Milton, "Methinks I see in my mind a noble and a puissant nation, rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks ; methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam, purging and unscaling her long-abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance."

Through a land swept clean of youth we travelled from Liverpool to London. The porters at the stations were boys or old men, and the conductors of the train were past middle-age. When I commented upon this fact, it was explained to me that from this railway alone sixteen thousand men had joined the army. The windows of the carriages were darkened, the light veiled, so

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

that we travelled as in one long tunnel for two hundred miles. London was dark too. The great railway station was like a dim cave, in which spectral figures moved. The lamps in the streets were so shaded by a heavy coat of paint that they cast only a little pool of light upon the black road. In one direction only was there light—far across the sky, flung up like flaming fingers which groped amid the murk, the great search-lights played, feeling for the silver body of some hidden Zeppelin. Under this canopy of weaving flames, between these dark bulks of houses, mad taxi-drivers drove at full speed, as if in purposed defiance of conditions which made a London street more perilous than the shelving road of a Colorado canyon.

London conveyed an extraordinary sense of Empire. I had seen two Jubilees in London, and the burial of the Queen, whose long reign had thus been celebrated ; each was a great occasion for the home-

THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

gathering of the far-flung British race. But in the main these were spectacular assemblages of the picked figures of the race. I saw now a nobler pageant—not a splendid group of princes, soldiers and statesmen, surrounded by troops in all the bravery of dazzling uniforms, riding down Whitehall to the solemn portals of the Abbey, but, as it were, the race itself assembled. The Australian, the Canadian, the New Zealander, men from Labrador and Honduras, from Hudson's Bay and India, jostled one another in Piccadilly and the Strand. Every theatre and restaurant was full of men in uniform. Strange stories were told of friends and brothers who had not met for years suddenly coming face to face in the London streets. The population of London was said to have increased by half a million. It had become, not in theory, but in visible reality, the focus of an Empire.

The wounded and the maimed were everywhere. At the theatres I saw boxes

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

filled with blinded soldiers, in the restaurants one-legged men cutting up the food for one-armed men. Every public institution conspicuously displayed its Roll of Honour, the long list of those who had passed through its doors to die in battle. On one such roll I counted three hundred names ; on another the list was too long for counting. From one suburban church one hundred and seventy men had gone, from another eight hundred. There were no young men in the shops. Aged, half-decrepit shopwalkers, long ago retired, had returned to their posts, and did the best they could to fulfil duties beyond their strength. A new motto was on every lip, not the foolish phrase "Business as usual," but that every one should "do his bit." Every man was obviously doing it, and every woman too, for women in semi-uniform were everywhere acting as porters, chauffeurs, and bus-conductors. Great munition works had arisen everywhere.

THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

They were said to number four thousand, and they employed more than a million workers, seven hundred thousand of whom were women. At Gretna Green, a solitary hamlet on the Scotch border, where two years earlier scarcely a dozen houses could be counted, a city of twenty thousand persons had sprung up, and the solitary moor was lit far and wide with the red flame of furnaces, and starred with electric lights. The multitude of women thus employed had proved themselves brave, capable and trustworthy. Their tasks were hard, but they did them with painstaking thoroughness, making no complaint even when noxious gases discoloured their complexions, and were a threat to health as well as beauty. During the time I was in London there was a terrible explosion in one of these munition factories, resulting in the death of scores of women, and the maiming of far more. I heard the opinion expressed that so dire an accident would frighten the women workers,

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

and that it was probable many would not return to work the next day. Nothing of the kind occurred. It was proudly reported that on the day after the calamity not a single woman in the London area was absent from her post. They were doing their bit, and they were not to be outdone by soldiers in the trenches in taking the chance of death with a gay deliberate courage.

Even more remarkable in the light of past history was the fact that the people had surrendered all their rights and liberties into the hands of the Government. No people has ever fought harder for their liberties ; nowhere on earth has individualism claimed so wide a latitude. I shall hardly be contradicted if I say that the English are the most contentious people in the world where personal rights are involved, the readiest to resist authority, the quickest to resent improper interference, always bristling with pugnacity at the least

THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

threat of tyranny, and making it one of their chief pursuits and pleasures to oppose whatever government happens to exist, whether good or bad. Yet all these individual liberties, so hardly fought for, were surrendered without a protest. Hotels were commandeered for public uses ; regulations were put on light and food ; the railways were run by the Government ; the public houses were submitted to a strict discipline, which before the war, had it been attempted in a much less drastic form, would have resulted in violent mob-meetings, street-fighting, and possibly insurrection.

An amazing England indeed, an England refashioned and reborn into a likeness of which past history gave no indication, held no barest hint of prophecy. An England no longer divided by party, turbulent in counsel, complacently individualistic in spirit, but welded into unity, coherent, determined, moving with the perfect rhythm

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

of common action toward a common end. By what miracle had the change been wrought? It was the fruit of a new idealism working like a potter's hand upon the plastic soul of the nation, the soul whose hard crust of materialism and selfishness was broken, whose inner substance had been softened and made plastic by the process of a great suffering.

Out of that suffering there had arisen a new ideal of the State. It was no longer the paid soldier's business to defend it, but the solemn primal duty of every man who had a home he loved, or a hand that could grasp a musket, to defend it. It was a new ideal of personal life. What the true prophets of the race had preached so long to heedless ears was now seen to be true: the chief end of life was not to get, but to give.

Renounce joy for my fellow's sake?
That's joy beyond joy.

The values of life were all altered. Wealth

THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

had suddenly become valueless, and the sordid quest of wealth a sacrilege. Personal happiness had been supplanted by an ideal of collective good. Death was not the ultimate disaster, for there were things more to be feared than death. To suffer for a cause was no longer the sole prerogative of martyrs, it was the common privilege. And these ideals, working themselves out in practical results, had produced something so astonishing that it was all but incredible. What the boasted supermen of Germany had accomplished by forty years of intense effort, backed by every weapon that autocracy could wield, England had achieved in two years. She had built a war machine superior to Germany's; she, who had so long loved peace and striven for it, had put five million men in the field, and each man was there because he had so willed it. She had appealed not to the lust of world-dominion, but to that deep love of liberty and justice which was inherent in the Eng-

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

lish heart, and at her voice the England of Cromwell had risen from the grave, but a much greater England than Cromwell knew, inspired by a wider vision and dedicated to a harder task.

II

THIS new spirit which was in the English people manifested itself in many ways. The general public spectacle of collective energy directed to a common task was impressive, but this was not all. Individuals were changed. Persons whom I had known well during my long residence in London were changed. They spoke with a new accent, acted in a new way.

I can best explain that change by an illustration. When I left London for America in 1904 there was a religious revival at work in Wales which was unlike any other movement of the kind, both in its method and its quality. It was not organ-

THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

ized, it had no outstanding preacher, it was scarcely directed ; it was in the strict sense of the word a movement, a mysterious stirring of the depths, a spreading wave, a swelling and rush of spiritual tides that swept through the entire Principality. I remember an agnostic journalist telling me that no sooner did he reach Wales than there fell on him a curious awe. He had intended to write a cynical article for his newspaper—all his articles were cynical—but he was overwhelmed by the sense of a spiritual power which he could not comprehend. He came back to London with his article unwritten. "I feel," he said, "as though I had seen God."

The England of 1916-17 produced in me a similar sensation. I do not mean that there was any sign of a revival of religion. The change had nothing to do with organized religion. The churches were by no means crowded, and public worship was, from all I could observe and hear, less

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

popular than in times of peace. But the change was there, and its signs were a strange composure, a detachment from self, an elevation of thought and temper, perceptible in all classes of society. One could only describe it as the soul of a nation liberated from long bondage and expressing itself in new terms. And there were moments when the sense of miracle, of spiritual forces visibly at work, was so overwhelming that the same curious awe fell on me which my cynical London journalist had felt, and like him I said, "I feel as though I am seeing God."

It may be thought that I exaggerate. It may be said, "But America has been at war for some months, and no such phenomenon as this has been discernible." But the cases are not equal. I thankfully admit that a great change has passed over American life since that memorable Good Friday of 1917 when America declared war. Millions of men and women have altered

THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

the entire method of their lives, replacing selfish personal aims with devoted public service. The flower of American youth has dedicated itself to the war, and many an American girl, bred to an empty round of social pleasure, has crossed the seas to toil among the maimed and dying in the hospitals of France. Nevertheless, the cases are not equal. The war has not yet touched the deep springs of American life. The tide of blood has scarcely washed her shores. The grim agony of the conflict, with its daily toll of death, its frightful casualty lists, its demand on faith and fortitude, has not yet gripped the heart of the American people. Two years of war had done these things for England. Men and women had been violently thrown back on primal conceptions of faith and duty, and had been forced to refashion their creeds in conformity with their circumstances. They had looked into the eyes of death, and had seen there that which made the

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

common uses of life worthless. That was the secret of their spiritual transformation. Before the war is done the same transformation will come to America. It is already at work, and lies at the root of things. When it is accomplished, as it surely will be, I shall not be accused of exaggeration when I say that a solemn awe fell on me as I looked on that England of proud sorrow and exalted heroism which met me in the last days of 1916.

Here is one feature of the scene, small in itself but deeply significant. I have spoken of the multitudes of maimed soldiers in the streets, the theatres, the restaurants, and they were indications of how wide had been the swath cut by the scythes of death among the people. "Every one has lost some one," people said. Yet, as I watched the London streets, comparatively few wore black. In the old days, especially among the poorer classes, no imagined insult to the dead could be more heart-

THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

less than not to wear black for them. Decency demanded the trappings of bereavement, and a grief that wore not the apparel of grief was not a real grief.

I went to a theatre one night to hear Harry Lauder. His son, on whom all his hopes were set, had been killed in action a week or two earlier. He was absent from the stage for two nights ; on the third he resumed his part, saying that he believed his son would have wished him to go on doing his bit. The part that he had to perform was the cruellest test of courage that could be imagined. The scene was set at the Horse Guards ; a company of men in khaki marched past to the gay lilt of martial music ; Lauder sang a song about the boys coming home. Conceive the situation : his own son lay dead, and he had to sing of the boys coming home ! It seemed as if the management should have cut this song ; every canon of decency demanded it. But the song was the best

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

thing in the performance ; to have omitted it would have deprived the public of a pleasure, and Lauder himself would not have agreed to its deletion, for it would not have been "doing his bit." He sang it with every nerve drawn tense. His stern set face, deeply lined ; his trembling lips and stiff attitude, witnessed to the strain he suffered. But he sang it to the end without faltering, and left the stage amid the sympathetic silence of his audience. That silence was their tribute to one of the rarest acts of courage that the stage had ever witnessed.

I dined with an old friend one night, whose children had been brought up with my own. When the war broke out his eldest daughter was newly married to a brilliant University professor. He enlisted at once, with the entire consent of his young wife. He went to France with the first British forces, fought through eight terrible months unscathed, and came home on leave to see his new-born son. He returned,

THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

and within a few weeks news came that he was severely injured. His wife instantly crossed the Channel, but arrived at the hospital too late to see him alive. She travelled back alone, and her mother said, "We sat in this room dreading her arrival. We watched the garden gate, and wondered what we could say to her when she came, and how we could comfort her. She came at last, just as the darkness fell, and directly we saw her we knew that it was she who would comfort us, not we who could comfort her. She was perfectly composed; she came up the garden path quietly and proudly. I could not have imagined it possible. All I can say about it is, that Dorothy seemed to have found the peace that passeth understanding."

The words were spoken without tears. We rose and went down to dinner, and a more cheerful meal I never shared. In the middle of the meal the youngest girl arrived. She left home every morning at

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

six o'clock to work in a munition factory on the other side of London. There was but one son in the family, and he was a soldier in France. He also had lately been home on leave, bringing with him a knapsack shot through with shrapnel. The war had revolutionized the entire life of this family. Yet it had left no touch of gloom. Often, in the old days, I had talked with my friend on the serious things of life, for he was one of the few men I knew who possessed a philosophic mind. After dinner he began to talk of life and death, quite naturally, in quite the old way. When I happened to mention his father, who had died years before, saying how I wished he could be with us, he said simply, "I have no doubt he is with us now. He has probably watched you eating your dinner at the table where he so often sat, and I'm quite sure he was pleased that you enjoyed it." He did not say it, but I knew he meant me to imply that his daughter's husband was

THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

with us too. He also, in his total repudiation of death as anything but a momentary pause in being, had found the peace that passeth understanding.

I may admit that these dear friends of mine were unusual people. They had inherited and developed a certain strain of fineness. But I met the same attitude of mind in humble men and women, who could boast of no such heritage. I made a point of searching out some of them who had lost sons and husbands, and on the lips of none did I hear a single bitter or resentful word. They had given the most precious treasure that they had to the Cause, and they were proud to do it. They had risen, not by virtue of a special culture, but by native greatness of spirit, to meet supreme occasions. What shall we say of the widow who, when she was informed of the death of her only son, replied, "My greatest sorrow is that I have not another son to give?" Or how shall we estimate the

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

heroism of the country pastor's wife, who received the telegram announcing her son's death on Sunday morning, and locked it up till night had come, because she did not wish her husband to learn the bitter news till all his Sabbath duties were fulfilled? Such acts truly surpass human nature. Of the rare hero of history we expect them: his allies

Are exaltations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

The miracle is to find them latent in all human hearts, to discover a whole nation capable of heroic tempers which we supposed the sole possession of the lofty few.

III

THE effect upon my own mind of these experiences will be readily perceived.

Living in America, among people who had been called upon to make no active sacrifices for the war, my position was

THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

isolated and peculiar. I was the recipient of much sympathy and consideration, but this very consideration had the effect of fixing my own thoughts more thoroughly upon the features of my own case. This is not good for a man. It magnifies his burden, and makes it impossible for him to forget it. Every sympathetic word uttered by persons whose own lives run smoothly emphasizes the tragedy of his own life, and sets him thinking anew of the pang of parting and the loneliness of separation. It helps to keep alive his resentment of the blow that has shattered his schemes of happiness, and by so much weakens his fortitude.

In visiting England I attained a new perspective. My case ceased to be peculiar; it was commonplace. No one was prepared to waste sentiment upon me, because every one had risen above the need of sentimental consolation. The path that I had thought solitary proved to be a thronged road. I was one of millions, who carried

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

the same Cross up the same Calvary. And there was a stern reality in this catholicity of suffering. It burned out self-pity, and all the weakness that self-pity breeds. Job, afflicted by a calamity that is solitary, fills the world with bitter outcry ; had the houses of all his friends, with their children and their cattle, been destroyed by the same earthquake that ruined him, he would have been ashamed of personal complaint. Collective calamity creates collective courage. When one house in a city burns there is general commiseration, but, when a whole city burns, its citizens forget their own losses, and at once combine in a brave effort to rebuild it.

England was rebuilding her City. Much had been destroyed. The old life of careless ease had vanished, never to return. Wrecked homes were everywhere. No class had escaped the devastating whirlwind. The landed gentry and the aristocracy had suffered equally with the peasant and the

THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

artisan. Heirs of noble families had been slain in battle, and great titles, which represented centuries of public service, were threatened with extinction. The heads of great businesses had no sons left to whom they could bequeath their fortunes. Poets and men of letters had perished. These were conspicuous in their death, but the clerk also had left his desk, the workman his job, to die upon the fields of Flanders, with the same devotion. In a real sense which before the war would have been unthinkable, all class distinctions had disappeared. The nation was one, and this unprophesied unity had been accomplished by a common suffering.

The same result will no doubt be accomplished in America before the war is done. The real unity of nations is not achieved through shared prosperity but through shared suffering. In a recent letter written from the Front, I read the words, "Here, in the trenches, it is the sharing which is the

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

truly wonderful thing. Oh, the joy of the sharing." The letter was written by an ordinary man, but he had discovered something that made him extraordinary. England had made the same discovery. Losing her life, she had gained it. The divine spirit of sharing had given her a real unity which she had never known. And so she was rebuilding her City, but upon a nobler plan. Individualism was dead; it was replaced by a sacrificial collectivism. And one effect of that new collectivism was to extirpate the egoism of personal suffering. She had no time or patience for vain self-pity. She sat amid the wreckage of the past, austere and strong, with wide eyes fixed upon the future. She demanded from all her children courage. She regarded agony as a commonplace. She made me feel that in giving three sons to her service I had done no more than I ought to do, and that to have done less would have meant dishonour. I had done no more than

THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

multitudes of men had done, and had I done less I should have been unworthy of her motherhood.

I would not be interpreted as saying that the England of 1916 was flawless in her virtues. Old habits of thought are not broken in a moment, although there may be created in some decisive moment the force which finally destroys them. There were here and there obscure persons who clung to the fragments of an exploded pacifism. Hidden in some safe occupation, one might discover now and then a miserable youth who had dodged the call of duty, and was ashamed to walk the streets, beneath the eyes of men in khaki. But these were the exceptions, and for them, in the long-run, conscription waited. Nor was this rebirth of virtue, as I have already said, attended by any features that were the specific product of religion. It was composed of elements that lie deeper than conventional religion. It was the forcing

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

up of hidden strata which lie beneath all religions. It was the essential soul of the nation, resurgent through the wreckage of many conventional beliefs, a little amazed at itself, not yet fully able to articulate its faith, but conscious of a new faith based on the reality of things, in the strength of which it would shape and inherit a diviner future.

This was my second vision of War. The first had revealed only the destructive force. When the first great thunder-clap of battle broke upon the world I was so dismayed that I would have been glad to die. I had no desire left to live in a world which had learned so little from the follies of the past that it was willing to repeat them, with an utter disregard of the voice of wisdom and experience. When the dark fringes of the storm began to sweep across my own life, I was still conscious only of its destructive force. It was about to root up my happiness, and scatter my house of life in unconsidered ruin. But this second vision of

THE SECOND VISION OF WAR

War revealed a constructive force, steadfastly at work beneath visible destruction. I saw its elemental fires burning out the unrealities from the thoughts and lives of men. I saw it consuming a vast holocaust of human shams, as Savonarola once burned the vanities in the Piazza of Florence. He burned the wanton book, the lewd picture, the gay apparel, the means and instruments of selfish and voluptuous life ; this diviner fire was burning up the qualities which produced these things. It was clean flame, attacking all that was unclean—the plague of decadence, the corruption of cowardice, the rottenness of selfish living, the foolish pride, and the still more foolish complacency of stagnant lives. And it did more than destroy the evil : it made room for the good to grow and thrive. The world lay scorched and sterile for a time, as it did when the primal creative fires had spent themselves ; but the verdure of a new Eden began already to appear, and Beauty trod be-

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

hind the footsteps of Destruction. Who was I that I should resist that cosmic process? How great would be my loss if I was not a part of it! Rather, was it not my wisdom to embrace the cleansing fire, for were there not things in me that deserved to perish?

I knew that this was so, and in myself I felt the beginnings of a new heart. I saw War reconstructing men into a nobler image, and what could I do but pray that that image might appear in me? This was, in truth, my one supreme chance of attaining heroism. Whatever happened, this was my immitigable duty, to be worthy of my sons, and worthy of the great cause to which they were devoted.

THE COMRADE HEART

*I led thee once, but now thy steadier feet
Move upward, where the cloud and mountains meet,
And all is changed from that which went before.*

*I am no more thy spirit's creditor,
But am become thy debtor : I, who lent
Thee strength, now borrowing thine when mine is spent.*

*The Pentecostal fire that once was mine
Now leaves ungrudged my brow, and burns on thine,
And in thy speech I hear what none may bind—
The voices of God's mighty rushing wind.*

*For thou hast found great wisdom, O my son ;
Through singleness of purpose thou hast won
Thy way through vales of limitless self-shame
To that firm mind which seeks but loves not fame ;
And last through Faith, that, fixt on noble ends,
Bends to its use the plastic will, and bends
Alike opposing circumstance, the Power
That overcomes the World and its dark Hour.*

*O Thou, my Star, my Light, my other Soul,
Not separate are we : toward one goal
Our spirits move upon the wide-drawn arc
Of common skies, thro' brightness and thro' dark ;
Nor shall it my parental pride displease
That thou increasest, but that I decrease.*

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

I

A STRANGE thing is happening in these days: the children are educating their parents. This is a war of youth. In the long lines of battle is arrayed the youth of nations. From many thousands of homes the eyes of parents are fixed upon the sons who carry the family name and honour in their hands. The larger aspects of the war are concentrated in the soldier-son; for the parent he is the war. The morning newspapers are searched for any item that may give the clue to his concealed existence, and Arras, Vimy, and Lens are not so much vital points in military strategy as the theatres of action where he performs his part.

The father of a soldier thus finds himself

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

living a new kind of life, as new and strange, though in a different way, as the life his son lives. The physical world itself is remade for him. Places that were formerly not so much as geographical expressions become focused in the light of actuality. He talks familiarly of Ypres, Courcelette, Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, Salonika, as though he knew them as well as the towns within a day's journey of his home. He has a new sense of world-politics. A ward election, or at the most a Presidential contest, formerly set the high-water mark of his political activities. He is now thrust into a world of larger horizons, the solidarity of mankind becomes real to him. He finds his life profoundly affected by events happening thousands of miles away, and he becomes a student of these events. It is of immense moment what goes on behind the guarded doors of European chancelleries, what Bernhardt writes or Hindenburg may plan, what happens in South Africa

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

or Bagdad, how the line of battle sways beside the Tigris or the Jordan. His thoughts have ceased to be local and have become cosmopolitan.

This is but the superficial aspect of the case. A more important process is at work in his range of ethical conceptions. Like most men, long accustomed to security and ease of life, he has never paid much attention to the foundations on which political security reposes. He has, no doubt, a sentimental reverence for liberty. He knows enough of history to appreciate its value and the heroism of those who have won it for him. He takes it for granted that every one values liberty, because he himself values it. But as he had grown better off, and comforts have been multiplied to him, his love for liberty has become a very placid love. Very probably he has grown a little critical about its benefits, and in expansive moments has uttered oracular remarks about the peril of liberty degenera-

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

ting into licence. But now that his son has gone to the war, Liberty has suddenly assumed a new aspect. He sees it as a real thing, and the divinist thing in human life. He sees that the true line of cleavage is between men who love liberty and men who do not; nations that are free, and nations that are servile; peoples who prefer martyrdom to tyranny and peoples who "prefer bondage with ease to strenuous liberty." The lines are drawn, the camps are set, and he must make his choice. His son is serving in the cause of freedom, and he must needs follow where his son leads. His son has educated him.

The same thing happens to his theories of human government. Hitherto he has not troubled himself much about them, for he has been conscious of no need to examine and define them. He has assumed that English or American modes of government are the best, and has never met a man rash or bold enough to contradict him. As for

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

Germany, he has been enamoured of her efficiency, and has never troubled himself to think of what lies behind it. He has had no objection to employing German clerks, and has even magnified their superiority to the native product. He has thought the interchange of German professors with American in University teaching an excellent thing, and has very likely planned to send his son to Germany to complete his education. Now his son has gone to fight Germany, and his eyes are opened to the truth about her form of government. He realizes that all her efficiency was created for the definite end of world-power. He sees that there is an irreconcilable disparity between autocratic and free government. He knows that his own forms of government make for world-peace, and that the autocratic militarism of Germany as surely makes for world-conflict. He would never have learned these things from books. It comes to him now in one blinding flash of

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

truth, when he sees that the mailed fist of Germany has thrust itself into his own peaceful home, and snatched his son from him. His son has educated him.

His spiritual conceptions, if he have any, have suffered a similar transformation. He had taken it for granted that War and Christianity were in deadly opposition. He has listened every Christmas—it is perhaps the only occasion in the year when he goes to church—to admirable homilies on peace. He has taken, alas, so much for granted! It has never occurred to him to study the actual words of Christ. He has never known or has forgotten that Christ used force when He scourged a crowd of heartless hucksters out of the Temple which they had defiled, that He predicted wars, that He once even counselled the man who had no sword to buy one. No religious teacher has ever tried to show him the relation between war and justice. Why, in any case, should he be concerned over

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

such matters? Is it not an undoubted fact that the growing humanitarian sentiment of society is ceaselessly working towards world-peace, and that this sentiment will as slowly dissolve the iron sinews of war as the acid dissolves the toughest metal, which is impervious to the hammer? Why worry? The world is growing better all the time, and men are growing too wise to waste their substance in the mad extravagance of war. But now all is altered. The secret diabolism of the human heart has burst forth in violent explosion. Deeds are being done that would disgrace primeval savages. Christianity cannot be silent on such outrages, and cannot condone them. Christianity cannot be indifferent to justice. He sees that now, but he would never have seen it unless his son had become a soldier. He begins to recognize in his son's heroism a more real religion than he had ever heard inculcated in churches. His son has educated him.

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

These are examples of a process very widely at work among those who have sons at the War. They belong to the surface of events ; there are other processes pregnant with more subtle and important transformations, of which I will speak presently. The examples I have used are, however, sufficient to suggest that the relation between the father and the son who is a soldier have become paradoxical. The positions formerly occupied by each are directly reversed. The son becomes the teacher and example, the parent the disciple. The son, so long dependent on his father for wisdom, now becomes the prophet of a new wisdom, into which he initiates his father. Both are treading a path entirely new. For neither is any previous experience of life a guide. They move upon a dim and perilous way, but it is the son who leads. Out of what the son hopes and does, endures and suffers, is born a new annunciation of a new gospel of life and conduct. It is a new

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

gospel for the father, quite different from all the teachings of tradition, in which he has placed his trust. It has to be learnt afresh, in all its strange outlines, its spiritual contradictions, its dismaying difficulties, its unexpected and original conclusions.

This gospel I have learnt from my sons, particularly from the son who has now seen months of service on the Western Front. During all that period he has been my unconscious teacher, and I his disciple.

II

THE chief means of my education have been his letters from the Front. They have come with a singular regularity, in spite of the havoc wrought by the U-boats. We know when to expect them ; they arrive on Tuesday or Wednesday of each week. These are the conspicuous and splendid days for which we live. The other days do not count ; they are merely the grey links

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

between these red-letter days. The postman's ring at the door is waited for with tense nerves. It comes, and the one of us who is down first shouts up the stairs to the others, "Letters from the Front!" They lie upon the breakfast table, apart from all the others: it is a point of honour that they should not be opened till we are all present to hear them read aloud. They do not look like the other letters. The other letters have a prim propriety. They are enveloped in good thick paper, and have come through the mail unsoiled. They are like good children in their fresh clothes; but these letters are the ragged children. They are mud-stained, misused, torn at the edges, written in pencil, and the censor has left his mark upon them. They have been written anywhere, in wet dug-outs, upon thin grey paper, by a guttering candle, with a blunt pencil. Their paragraphs have been punctuated by the roar of guns. They have been folded by a tired hand, long after

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

midnight, and have been carried to us across fields of carnage. And yet they have the sacredness of Gospels: they contain indeed the Gospel of the Trenches.

We sit silent for a time after the letter is read, trying in vain to visualize the scene which he describes. Perhaps by the same mail there are letters from my two younger sons, one at his solitary post in the wild waters of the Hebrides, the other on the coast of Ireland. Their environment is at least partially clear to us, for we have seen the egg-shell patrol boats hunting their prey like alert terriers on the fields of ocean, and, in happier times, I have spent holidays on those bare and perilous coasts. But these seas of Flanders mud, in which the unburied dead are perpetually churned up, these abominable desolations swept by the flying death of high explosives, these lonely observation posts where our men's eyes watch for the unnoticeable movement in some distant trench which is the prelude to

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

attack—how can we picture these things? Besides, he says hardly anything that is definite about them. Any mention of peril or discomfort is purely incidental. He writes as though it were an entirely normal thing to be soaked with hours of rain, to sleep in wet clothes for nights on end, to play cards with a man in a dismal dug-out one night, and see him blown to pieces on the morrow, to dodge death yourself at all times—all these things are in the day's work. He might be writing of a game of football—not of this atrocious game in which the stakes are life and death; and he writes of it just as a healthy-minded boy might write of the part he takes in college sports, with boyish high spirits and ignorance of danger.

During the day this letter is always in my thoughts. I put down my writing in the middle of the morning, and read it through again. It means more to me as I read it for myself; I can see where the pencilled lines are faint because the hand

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

was weary, the half-finished sentence broken off, as though he had fallen asleep while writing it, woke up, and resumed it with an effort. I think I can hear his voice now, thin as an echo, a tiny voice, audible from an immense distance, like the whisper on a telephone. I think I hear him saying, "You know, don't you, why I always write in high spirits? I want to encourage you three lonely folks at home. And, recollect, I really am in high spirits, because I've never been so happy in my life. I've found my happiness where I never supposed it was, in doing the hardest thing I know; and, because you have just as hard a thing to do, I want you to find it in the same way. No doubt I do exaggerate my high spirits just a little bit for your sakes, but you'll understand, won't you?" Yes, I understand, and as I put his letter down there flows through my heart a new wave of courage created by his own.

There are touches of humour in his letters,

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

perfectly natural and unforced. He can laugh at odd incidents, quaint sayings of the men, sometimes at his own ridiculous predicaments. He makes me realize that war is not all horror, and that there is some saving sanity in men which enables them to go through scenes of horror with laughter on their lips. I remember Lincoln's saying that laughter was his "vent"; if he had not laughed he would have died of a frenzied brain or a broken heart. I realize that these men whom he commands are very human creatures. They sing childish songs, act in childish ways, and end their letters when they write home with rows of crosses, which stand for kisses, just as a child does. War has not debased them, it has not brutalized them. War has certainly not destroyed the fineness and tenderness of my son's mind. He can remember my birthday, cable from the trenches his congratulations, and be at pains to order from a local florist roses for remembrance.

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

I perceive in these letters a new growth of human sympathy. All intellectual pursuits are narrowing. He who lives in a world of thought is apt to think a good deal more of thoughts than of men. He is tempted to measure all men by intellectual values and to be indifferent toward plain and common men, whose defects of education unfit them for intellectual pursuits. I have been guilty of that fault, and so, I think, has he. But, as I read these letters, I am conscious that this spirit has entirely disappeared. It matters nothing to him that few among his comrades have read books, that none have read his own, that they are not even aware that he has written any. He does not despise them on that account ; it is a purely negligible deficiency. His own literary tastes remain, of course. He can plan novels while he lies in the mud with shrapnel whistling over him. On one occasion, rare and memorable, he walks over No Man's Land at night with an officer who

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

loves Shakespeare, and they debate together the meaning of the sonnets. But he has come to see that literature is a much less thing than life. He has found in common men qualities which command his reverence. He is one with his kind, and his kind is mankind. He has achieved the true democratic spirit, become one of the real brotherhood of man, and he makes me ask myself whether I am not still unwisely reverent of intellectual values in men, and not always wisely conscious of those broader qualities which make all men my brothers.

In this new standard of values courage stands first. This is the supreme test of the soldier. Though he have the mind of a Shakespeare, and speak with the tongue of angels, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have not courage, yet is he but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Dare he go forward when the call comes, in simple obedience to duty? If he is detailed to creep out over the rotting

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

dead at midnight, and cut the wire of the Huns' defences, will he go without hesitation? When the guns must be pushed forward to what is called a "sacrifice" position, will he be the first to volunteer, never thinking of his own peril? Does he realize the corporate unity of an army, and therefore realize that other men's lives are in his hands, and that he must think of others before himself? These are the daily tests which War imposes. To survive them is to win one's own self-respect, and the respect of others; to fail is to forfeit both. The fictitious values of life are all stripped away under the test of battle. Only the naked soul of a man is left. Has it what the soldier calls "a yellow streak"? Fear it may have, but has it the will to conquer fear? Does it reveal itself as pure, divine, indomitable flame, a spiritual dynamic that can control the body, and drive it to a task from which every nerve in the body shrinks? To discover in oneself this spiritual essence

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

which dominates the body is to find the highest human happiness ; to find it lacking is to be disgraced and miserable.

The joyousness of these letters springs from the discovery of the spiritual self. In civil life its existence was not realized, for there were few occasions to evoke it. Sometimes the mind was haunted by a shameful suspicion that it did not exist. The atmosphere of doubt had corroded all our thinking, and had ended in doubt of our own souls. We were full of self-despisings, and we knew we had only too good ground for our contempt. The virtue of War is that it reveals the best and the worst in a man. It is a rehearsal of the Day of Judgment. When it reveals a Best, of whose existence we were doubtful, what wonder that a man is full of joy? For these letters are joyous. I compare them with other letters, written in the years of peace. These earlier letters were written in scenes of beauty, from the benignant solitude of

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

mountains, from London, from grey French cities "half as old as time," where life is a lyric still, on whose air the music of the Troubadour still vibrates. But in spite of all that made for joy, in none of these letters do I find the authentic joy that throbs in these battle-letters. There is always an undercurrent of dissatisfaction, a whispered question whether, after all, life is quite worth while. In these letters that perturbing question is quite silenced. No doubt about life being worth while, for life is now expressing the best that is in it. Outward beauty is not necessary to its pleasure, and outward horror cannot diminish it. It springs from within. It is the profound satisfaction of a soul that has realized itself. One of these letters records that one day, in the interval of gun-fire, he heard a lark singing with untroubled sweetness in the grey sky. So here, above the grim facts of filth and corruption, the soul sings joyously, drawing its joy from within itself, and not from ex-

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

terior conditions which are hopelessly at variance with joy. To receive these letters is, as it were, to hear the lark-song of hope, out of the grey sky that often covers us.

For life is often grey with us. There is no escape from the apprehension that walks stealthily behind us, inseparable as our own shadows. We cannot hear the phone ring without the dread of what message it may bring. We hurry back from this or that engagement, wondering what may have happened in our absence. Our first anxious glance is toward the hall-table, where perchance a cablegram may greet us. Our heart-strings are tied to that life far away, and not seldom they tremble with baseless premonition. It is hard to fulfil the round of public and social duties under these conditions. Sympathetic people sometimes say, "How brave you are!" But I know that I am not braver than they, in my natural qualities. I have a melancholic tendency. I have a painful gift of imagi-

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

nation. When I am separated from those I love I am apt to construct poignant dramas of all the dreadful things that may have happened to them. I have never seen one of my children sail for Europe without vivid pictures of shipwreck, which have filled my waking and my sleeping thoughts. I have never conquered these habits of mind, and they are still unconquered. But yet something has happened to me that has negatived their force. I can thrust them aside by an effort of the will. I can go about the business of my life with calmness of temper. I ask how this has come to pass, and I know the answer. I hear continually the lark's song out of the grey sky. I hear the voice of Courage, of Faith, of Joy, travelling to me from those distant battlefields. I realize that to be unhappy is a form of cowardice, and that all true happiness is the fruit of courage. If my resolution fail, I have only to read these letters again, and they act on me as a

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

tonic. The impression they leave is never of the visible horror of death and carnage ; it is of the invisible spirit of man, triumphing over circumstance, rising above fear, acclaiming itself divine and unconquerable. From my sons I draw whatever fortitude I may possess. They have educated me in the school of their own courage.

III

I HAVE used the phrase, “ the Gospel of the Trenches.” It has a somewhat strange sound, and, as I weigh it, I am aware that it may be considered by some people paradoxical, and even profane. They will say that Gospel is a word of exquisite traditions, a synonym for infinite tenderness and love and consolation. But is it only that ? It seems to me that the Galilean Gospel, out of which the world has built its faith, is infinitely stern as well as infinitely tender. It commands loyalty to conviction in the

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

face of death. It bids men hold in scorn those who slay the body, and after that have no more that they can do. It makes the claim of truth superior to the claim of life. When truth comes into collision with love, it counsels men to forsake father and mother, wife and children, lands and houses, for the sake of truth. It praises them when they do this ; it condemns them when they do not. It is above all things an heroic Gospel, a gospel that demands heroes and creates them.

That is my justification for the phrase, "the Gospel of the Trenches," for the message that has come to me from these fields of death is based upon the same view of conduct and the same spiritual sanctions which were enunciated long ago in Galilee. I begin to perceive certain forgotten truths about that Galilean Gospel and its Master. I find I have been deceived by the stress laid upon His meekness and His lowliness ; even by the emphasis put upon His loving-

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

kindness. These qualities have been interpreted to me as amiability. But I see now that Christ was not an amiable person, for amiability is weakness. An amiable Christ would never have given deliberate offence to the rulers of His nation, and would not have been crucified. He would never have insisted on men forsaking all whom they loved to follow Him ; He would have been too tender-hearted. There was a sternness in His character which made Him terrible. He was against all soft and selfish modes of life. He could be pitiful toward error, but He had no mercy on complacent ease and deliberate cowardice. The whole impact of His life and teaching was to create heroes, and He did create them out of the most unpromising material.

So I find in these letters something that may be called a Gospel. It is the Gospel of Heroism. It is the story of men who have left all things for the sake of a paramount duty. They are not soldiers by choice ;

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

they are civilians who have become soldiers under the compulsion of a divine call. It is probable that few of them would put it in that way. They are quite unconscious of their own heroism. If we met them they would not remind us in the least of saints and apostles. They have faults, and some of them have vices. Their virtues they are accustomed to disguise ; they would count it immodest to display them. But the virtue is there, that supreme virtue of self-surrender to which Christianity itself makes its appeal, in response to which men exceed their own natures, and become the true supermen of the realms of the spirit.

They are unwilling to display their virtues ; it is also probable that few of them are capable of stating their creed. Its most articulate article is a certain quiet reconciliation with death. A friend has just left my house whose boy has been home on his last leave before going overseas. He is only eighteen, and young for his age. He

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

has been trying to enlist ever since his seventeenth birthday. He succeeded at last, and joined by choice a branch of the service which is generally regarded as the most dangerous. Speaking of him, his father said, "Of course he expects to die. They all do." The words were uttered calmly, as though they expressed a commonplace! How does a boy of eighteen arrive at such a thought? There is only one way—the profound conviction that death is not the great disaster which a comfortable civilization supposes it to be. Years do not make a life. Deeds afford the only authentic measurement of life. Life is a quality of the spirit over which death has no power. There is no greater victory possible to the spirit of a man than the temper which ignores death at the call of duty. This boy of eighteen has won that victory. All these men of whom my son writes have won it, won it so completely that when volunteers are asked for some perilous service,

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

from which it is certain only one or two can return, the difficulty is not to find volunteers but to restrain the men who jostle and outbid one another in the effort to secure the chance of dying.

I notice a curious change in myself in my attitude to War : I have ceased to be acutely conscious of its horror. I do not mean that I have ceased to think of War as abominable, and of its wholesale destruction of human life as atrocious. I am indeed much more sensitive to what this destruction means than in the early days of the war, because it is interpreted to me to-day in the threat that hangs over lives very dear to me. Nevertheless, I find my mind dwelling less and less upon the spectacle of physical destruction. Why is this? I think it is because I have become more conscious of the spiritual grandeur of War. I have realized that man is so much more than his body that the loss of the body is not the loss of the man. I have learned to think of the

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

body of a soldier as the vesture only of the spirit, and of the spirit as stepping out of its torn and blood-stained vesture in the vigour of indestructible existence.

This belief is, of course, a traditional belief, inculcated by the Christian religion ; but like most traditional beliefs it has little real vitality, and no firm grip upon the mind. I know how little real vitality it has had for me by the pains which I have taken to maintain it. I have buttressed it by all sorts of vulnerable analogies drawn from nature, by the chance words of science, by the assertions of poets, by the rare conviction that visits the mind when a great man disappears from the theatre of action, that the qualities of his mind and character cannot be utterly extinguished. But the doubt remains, and for one analogy that points to the survival of human personality a hundred suggest its extinction. It is probable that most intellectual men who have a real interest in religion, in their secret

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

thoughts, never move far beyond the dying declaration of John Sterling, that he anticipated death with much of hope, and no fear.

But this belief, so solemn and consoling, has become to me a real belief to-day, strong enough to stand firm without the vain buttresses of precarious analogies. I have learned it from no theologian ; I have been persuaded to it by no elaborate argument ; it is the natural deduction drawn from the grim but splendid facts of war. It is the soldier's faith. The soldier sees his comrade, who yesterday was a sentient, thinking, foreseeing creature, smashed into pulp by an explosive shell. His body has disappeared so completely that only a handful of pitiful fragments remain to witness that it once existed. He is no philosopher, but some inward voice assures him that this handful of battered clay is not his comrade. He speaks of him not as dead, but as "gone west." The west for him represents all

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

that was most precious in life—the prairie farm, the ranch house in its orchards, the child, the wife, the home he loved and toiled for—so he has “gone west.” The phrase is not to be analysed, but its implication is clear—the body scattered in the mire of Flanders is not the man. The man has passed on, and taken with him all that composed his personality, his gaiety and courage, his unselfishness and heroism, and all “the endearing blend of his faults and virtues.” The tragic ease with which the body vanishes from sight conveys the sense of something unreal in his disappearance. So, in his simple way, not arguing the matter or being capable of argument, the soldier assumes human immortality as a necessity of thought. He could not go on with the work of war without it. He could not believe in God unless he believed that the spirit of a man returned to God when the red earth received the poor remnants of the broken body. He stands upon a field

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

covered with the dead, and hears his Commander say,* “As regards our comrades who have lost their lives—let us speak of them with our caps off—my faith in the Almighty is such that I am perfectly sure that when men die, doing their duty and fighting for their country . . . no matter what their past lives have been, no matter what they have done that they ought not to have done (as all of us do), I am perfectly sure that the Almighty takes them and looks after them at once. Lads, we cannot leave them better than like that.” He hears the brave message, and he accepts it as a vital gospel; and the words which he may have heard many times as an idle boast become to him a trumpet sounding over these fields of inhuman slaughter, “O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?”

This sublime truth of the survival of

* Address to the Canadian troops, delivered on the field of battle, after twelve days and nights of fighting, from April 23rd to May 4th, 1915, by Lieutenant-Colonel E. A. H. Alderson, C.B.

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

personality has been made vital for me by the letters of my son, and by his conversations. In all that he has written, in all that he has said, this truth is assumed. Again, the father has been educated by the son, and this process is going on in millions of hearts to-day. The faith in the real spirituality of human life, dimmed by the doubtings of agnosticism, has recovered its divine lustre on the battlefield. We have seen but the pillar of cloud resting on the grave ; our sons see the pillar of fire. What we have attained by painful argument, if indeed we do attain it, they have seized by intuition. What creeds affirm in vain to careless ears, they have heard as the Voice of God speaking from the heavens. Strange as it may seem, war has strengthened faith in personal immortality among those who endure its utmost sacrifices, and it would be the irony of all ironies if faith in immortality dwindled in the Churches while it shone resurgent on the battlefield.

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

I have learned one other thing, which is not a light thing to learn, that the fear of sacrifice is much more terrible than its reality. I have in mind a mother who was half crazed with grief when her son first talked of enlisting. She poured out the fierce resentment of her heart to all her friends, and believed she could not live if her son became a soldier, and to-day this mother is the proudest woman alive. The whole spirit of her mind, the entire method of her life, is changed. She is first in all war-work, indefatigable in patriotic enterprises, unselfishly giving all her energies to public duties; and it is clear to all who know her that she has learned the joy of sacrifice from her son. This is my own experience, as I doubt not it is the experience of multitudes. Seen from afar, the mountain summit appears menacing and inaccessible; but as we approach nearer we discover a practicable path. It is steep and hard, but nevertheless it can be

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

climbed, and there are clear fountains springing from the rocks and flowers by the wayside.

We are all of us, after all, more adaptable than we suppose, more flexible, more plastic to circumstance. We assure ourselves that there are certain conditions of life which we could not endure. That other people endure them and survive them appears to us a miracle, but we tell ourselves that we are made of different stuff. Some day we find we have to endure them. Wealth or health disappears, and we have to begin life anew as poor men or as invalids. When that test comes we find in ourselves resources of courage of which we were unaware. The stuff that we are made of proves itself to be pretty much the same stuff that all our friends are made of, the friends whom we have thought of as special heroes and martyrs. This is the process through which I have passed, and through which thousands of parents are now passing. There is

THE EDUCATION OF A FATHER

something in the inevitable that calms us. As long as the fate we feared could be evaded, we shuddered at it. When Fate at last knocks at our door we cease to contend with it. This is what I mean when I say that the fear of sacrifice is worse than its reality. We fear as we enter into the cloud that veils the altar of sacrifice ; when once we have entered it we see that not only cloud but also ineffable brightness rests upon the altar.

The supreme unselfishness, the ungrudged self-surrender, the patient and even joyous endurance of the men who fight our battles is having a profound effect upon the thought of the world. It is giving us a new standard of conduct, and is, in effect, the enunciation of a new religion. Yet it is, after all, the old religion whose watchword is that he who loseth his life for a purpose superior to self saves it ; he who saves his life unworthily loses it—only, in our contented security and ease, we had forgotten the

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

watchword. It sounds afresh to-day from the red fields of war. We begin to think of Christ, not as artists have painted Him, weeping unavailing tears above the slain in battle, but as standing in a strange new pulpit built of shattered guns and shattered men, preaching the only essential Gospel which men care to hear, the spirituality of man, the dignity of his soul, the splendour of his faculty for sacrifice. It is a hard Gospel, but we are slowly learning it. And it is not a gospel of words ; it is a gospel of examples. The examples are our own sons, and through them we are being educated into truer ways of thought, and loftier modes of life.

THE DAY AFTER TO-MORROW

*The fog's on the world to-day,
It will be on the world to-morrow ;
Not all the strength of the sun
Can drive his bright spears thorough.*

*Yesterday and to-day
Have been heavy with labour and sorrow ;
I should faint if I did not see
The day that is after to-morrow.*

*Hope in the world there is none,
Nor from yesterday can I borrow ;
But I think that I feel the wind
Of the dawn that comes after to-morrow.*

*The cause of the peoples I serve
To-day in impatience and sorrow
Once more is defeated—and yet
'Twill be won—the day after to-morrow.*

*And for me, with spirit elate
The mire and the fog I press thorough,
For Heaven shines under the cloud
Of the day that is after to-morrow.*

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

I

IN that same room, where, in the Christmas of 1914, the words were spoken which were the sword of separation thrust through all our pleasant forms of life, we have met again. My two younger sons are not with us ; they are busy somewhere on the grey waste of the estranging seas. Coningsby, more fortunate than they, has found the way back to the old home. The visit was unexpected, so totally outside all prediction, that it seems almost unreal. As we look back upon it, it is as though we had dreamed a dream, in which a blessed apparition had met us and spoken with a human voice.

First there came the news that he was wounded ; then hasty scrawls written by

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

an injured hand, assuring us of his recovery ; then a cautious message saying that it might be possible for him to spend his convalescence leave at home. The news was too good to be believed, but at least we were encouraged to be hopeful. At last there came a blessed cable, informing us that he would leave Liverpool upon a certain date. Some one told us that such cables were usually delayed till the ship was well at sea, or within sight of the port of destination. He might actually be landing on the date when we received the message. Would it be in Canada or America ? We did not know. Out of the mysterious and secret seas he would appear presently, and we knew no more.

We decided that he was almost certain to land in Canada, and hurried off to Montreal. We were summering in a small Canadian village at the time, upon the shores of Lake Ontario, in a simple hostelry known as *The Village Inn*. It was Sunday when the cable

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

came, and it amuses me to recollect that we left in such haste that I had to borrow all the money in the exchequer of the inn, for the bank was closed, and, I was informed, all its cash was in a safe whose time-lock could not be opened until Monday morning. Perhaps we should not have made so swift an exodus but for the counsel of a young aviator who assured us that he had received just such a cable from his brother, and discovered later that the cable and his brother had arrived simultaneously. The good folk staying with us in the inn were almost as excited as ourselves. They had sons and brothers in the war, and could understand. A father whose son would come back no more saw us off, and helped us with our baggage, betraying by no word or sign his sense of the contrast between our happiness and his own desolation of spirit. We were to have met that afternoon a lady whose husband had been killed, whose only son was a prisoner in Germany, from whom

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

no news had come for six months. We did not meet her because it would have seemed like parading our own gladness before her mournful eyes. But probably we were wrong in this excess of sensitiveness, for among all these Canadian folk there was more than fortitude ; there was that unselfish temper which rejoices in another's joy while one's own heart is broken.

At Montreal there was no news. The military authorities showed us every courtesy, but they knew nothing. Our cherished plan to meet Coningsby the moment he should land broke down, just as a similar plan had broken down some months before in London, when he was returning on his leave from the Front. War has no concern in individual dramas. We waited three days, haunting the railway station, seeing wounded men arrive and men departing from their last leave, and then reluctantly returned to New York. A week passed in silence, and then came the telegram

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

saying that Coningsby was at Quebec. The next night he arrived in New York. There was a frenzied meeting at the Grand Central Station, which the stolid spectators watched with some amusement. The stenorian official who ropes off the waiting crowd with such callous insolence must have been amazed as well as amused, for his rope was of no avail against an excited mother and sister who dodged beneath it, and hung upon the neck of their returning soldier.

If war brings hours of agony, it also has its great exalted moments. Not till that moment when we stood in the Grand Central Station, did we realize how keen had been the dread that our last separation might be final. That we should really see him again had in it all the wonder of a resurrection. The father's words, in Christ's tenderest parable, rang in my ears: "This my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found." It was worth paying months of

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

pain for that moment. All the long arrears of sorrow were overpaid in that supreme happiness.

II

FOR a month he has lived with us, and I am now able to understand, as I never did before, his attitude to life. Letters written from the battlefield may be never so truthful and sincere, but they are apt to be the record of exceptional moods of feeling and experience. Before the sobering and solemn vision of death, never absent for a day or for an hour, the soul may rise to great heights, not afterwards sustained. From mounts of transfiguration we come down to the petty atmosphere of common life, and men do not always bring their transfiguration with them. The first impression I record is that with my son the transfiguration of mind and character is permanent. It did not fade into the light

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

of common day, nor lose its lustre when brought into contact with the commonplace of life.

Amid so much that was abnormal, he had remained normal. Much had been added to his life, but its original texture was unchanged. He was as boyish as ever in his simple love of life, as sweet-tempered and considerate, as eager to please and to be pleased. Had he sat in sombre silence, with his inward eye fixed upon the horrors he had seen, I could have understood it and forgiven him. I had prepared myself for something of the kind, but I found I had been mistaken. Why, he could even jest, and play off practical jokes on me in quite the old irreverent style. It is a little thing to mention, but not without significance, that one day he dressed up a fifteenth-century life-size figure of an eminent saint which I possess in my hat and coat, and with elaborate seriousness informed me that a famous editor was waiting for me in the

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

drawing-room, much enjoying my discomfiture when I returned from a silent interview with this strange effigy. As long as a man can jest and enjoy a jest, we are under no doubt of his normality.

I had often wondered whether at the termination of the war he would be able to resume his old interests in life and literature. He himself had shared that wonder, for he knew not only how the big things of war make all other things look insignificant, but how the mind, withdrawn from daily tasks, grows indifferent to them, and loses the efficiency to perform them. But on the third day after reaching home he appeared at breakfast in the old tweeds he used to wear while writing. The soldier, with his uniform, had disappeared; his place was taken by the writer. After breakfast he went quietly to his little study at the top of the house, and in a few hours was hard at work upon a book. Looking into the room, I saw a scene familiar by years of use and

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

wont: the writing-board upon his knees, his head bent over it, and a cloud of tobacco smoke that hung like a misty aura round him. It seemed as though he had never been away. He had stepped back into the normal as a derailed wheel fits its flange to the rail again, and glides smoothly on its way. His mind, deflected from its true task by a violent force, resumed it again with perfect naturalness the moment the pressure was removed. The hand that had fired so many guns resumed the pen with delightful ease, and that range of faculty for which war had no use proved to be not abandoned or destroyed, but only in abeyance.

People who talk with prophetic melancholy and misgiving of the brutalizing effects of war may find something in these facts that is worth their consideration. War is certainly inhuman, but it does not dehumanize. It is a false rhetoric which labels it as "organized murder." It is rather organized justice, and a passion for

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

justice exalts rather than debases men. It is hatred that dehumanizes men, hatred which is the root of murder ; but the singular thing is that men can be engaged in a collective antagonism without any spirit of hatred towards individuals. The British soldier does not hate the personal antagonist whom he calls, half-humorously and half-affectionately, " Fritzie ! " He has to kill him if he can, but since there is no hatred in his killing the deed has no relation to the crime of murder. A very brief moment of reflection is sufficient to assure us that the man whose trade is war is by no means deficient in the virtues of pity and humanity. Some of the greatest soldiers have been both the most tender-hearted and the most pious of men. Robert E. Lee remained a great Christian through all the slaughter of the Civil War, and Lord Roberts was an eminently pious man. What war really does is to develop the sterner virtues of a man, as we can all see ; but it also develops

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

his tenderness and pity by the constant appeal made to him by suffering, which is something the pacifist is incapable of seeing or of understanding.

But perhaps it is not necessary to persuade reasonable persons that there is a strong conservative force in human nature which enables men to survive abnormal conditions, and glide back into normal modes of life with surprising ease. Men continually achieve this transposition. It happens after severe sickness, after adventures in foreign lands, after great reversals of fortune. There is no reason to suppose that war is any exception to the rule. The novel grip of event which takes a man from sedentary occupations and flings him forth as an explorer or a lion hunter into the African jungle is as dislocating to normal modes of life as the event which makes the conventional man a soldier. The returned explorer and adventurer soon finds his place in ordinary life again, and the

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

soldier will do the same with an equal adaptability.

Next to this complete normality of my son, the thing that struck me was his absolute tranquillity of spirit. I had remarked this quality in his letters, but it was much more impressive in the unconscious revelations of his speech. He was happy, but it was happiness with a difference. It had no relation to material desires. I do not mean that he was indifferent to the wholesome pleasures of life, or to the success of his own work, but these things were regarded as of relative unimportance. They were worth having, but only as pleasant accessories, not as vital necessities of life. The agitation of personal ambition had disappeared. His happiness sprang from within, from the deep fountain of a hidden peace. And, studying this new temper in him, my mind recalled the poem of Wordsworth's which he calls "The Happy Warrior." Wordsworth wrote with Lord Nelson

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

in his mind, but also, as he tells us, with the memory of his own brother John, who was a naval officer to whom was given no great occasion of heroic conduct or triumphant death. He perished by shipwreck, but Wordsworth recognized in him the same qualities that made the great Admiral immortal. The theatre of action differed, but the movements of the spirit were the same, and are the catholic inheritance of all who are governed by the same ideals.

What these ideals are Wordsworth states at length, and I do not wish to recapitulate them. But there is one passage which was to me so vitalized by the manifest temper of my son that it describes better than my words can do what that temper was. The Happy Warrior is he

Who comprehends his trust, and to the same
Keeps faithful with a singleness of aim,
And therefore does not stoop, nor lie in wait
For wealth or honours or for worldly fame ;

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

Whose powers shed round him in the common strife,
Or mild concerns of ordinary life,
A constant influence, a peculiar grace ;
But who, if he be called upon to face
Great issues, good or bad for human kind,
Is happy as a Lover ; and attired
With sudden brightness, like a Man inspired ;
And through the heat of conflict keeps the law
In calmness made, and sees what he foresaw.

The lines are capable of an exact analysis, but it is enough to remark where Wordsworth discovers the authentic root of happiness. It is in the satisfaction of being able to meet great issues. It is in the noble self-acclamation of a soul that has vindicated its capacity for heroism. The Happy Warrior now sees what he foresaw, but sees it not only without dismay, but with the calm resolution of a mind bent on high ends, and dedicated to them.

In those long conversations which we had through those brief crowded weeks of renewed communion, there was no attempt made to disguise the horrors of war. Neither were they paraded. To him they

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

seemed not remarkable. We drew them from him, for he was unwilling to lay stress on them. The thing he did lay stress upon was the spiritual significance of the things he had witnessed and endured. We saw, through his eyes, men driving their guns into battle over dead and living bodies, intent only on the immediate duty which brooked no delay. We saw maimed men, without the least consciousness of heroism, giving up their own turn for medical attention for the benefit of others worse wounded than themselves. We saw young officers writing their last letters home before going into action, with the clear knowledge that they would be dead in a few hours, yet with perfect calmness.

I think he would not have realized that the stories he had to tell were of any value, unless we had persuaded him to the contrary. They were the commonplaces of his daily life, and why should other folk think them remarkable? He was even

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

unwilling at first to wear his uniform in the streets, because he did not wish to be stared at as exceptional. It was only when he realized that America also wore khaki that he resumed his own. If I had not persuaded him to employ a court stenographer to record his three public speeches, much that he had to tell would have been lost. There was a modesty in this temper, but it was not altogether modesty; it was the sincere conviction that anything that he and his comrades had done was "all in the day's work," and deserved no special praise.

He spoke of these comrades in arms with deep affection.

"Queer to recollect how I once valued men for their intellectual sympathies, isn't it?" he said. "With most of these men I haven't a thought in common, so far as the intellectual life is concerned. As a writer of books they would probably hold me in contempt. But we've learned not to judge each other in that way. We've found each other's

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

spiritual qualities. When a man leaps forward to take your chance of death, you don't inquire whether he's read your books. You yourself forget you've ever written any. All you remember is that he's a true kind of superman, and you can't think of anything finer than to be a little like him."

He spoke sometimes of death with a kind of quiet scorn. He had no desire to die—far from it—and he believed he would not. But he had found out that the intimidation of death was a vain thing. The terror men felt at death was based on a false idea of death as abnormal. We saw it in isolated instances. But where you saw it in the mass it became normal. It was as catholic as birth. It was as common as breathing.

His constantly recurring testimony was that he was happy. He was happy through a certain unification of life, the bending of the will to one deliberate purpose which was not personal. "The weight of chance desires" was lifted from his heart. Life

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

was no longer self-centred. It is a very old discovery ; but in civil life it is hard to make it, because the occasions of heroism are not thrust on one. War brings the occasion to every man. It challenges men, summons them to a new valuation of their aims of life, and makes the pursuit of personal happiness appear a sorry business. It offers them, even the humblest of them, the rare joy of self-renunciation.

“ You know how I have always loved France,” he said, “ and you remember my intense pleasure in visiting Tours, Les Baux, and all those other lovely places where romance lingers, and beauty seems indestructible. Yet, as I recall my feelings, I know that even then I was not truly happy. I had an uneasy sense that I was only seeing France with an artist’s eye, and using her as a means for my own gratification. The France I see to-day is a battered waste of mud and ugliness. It is pock-marked with shells, its soil reeks

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

with corruption, and there's not even a tree left. Yet I am happier among these shattered French towns than I ever was at Tours and Les Baux. I suppose it is because in the old days I was taking something from France, and now I'm giving something to her. It makes a wonderful difference whether your life is taking or giving."

And there, no doubt, for him and for others, is found the real root of happiness. It withers in the soil of self, it thrives in the soil of self-renunciation. Fed with too much sunshine it bears the poisonous flower of egoistic satisfaction; nourished with blood it blossoms with the lily of peace, and carries in its heart the light that never was on sea or land.

He thought that religion, like courage, was indigenous in men. All men had it, in its elemental essence, but few of the men he lived with knew much about its forms. Probably they could not satisfy the most

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

lenient Church on earth that they were proper candidates for membership, but they had nevertheless what Cromwell called "the root of the matter" in them.

"An army's very like a school," he said. "The cardinal ethic of the schoolboy is that he must play the game. That's the top-notch of schoolboy morality. The soldier reasons just in the same way. If a man plays the game, God will look after him, and he'll be all right whatever happens. If he doesn't, it won't do him much good to go sneaking to God with all sorts of excuses, for God won't listen to him. Reading the Bible, praying and singing hymns, are very good things in their way, but they aren't religion. Religion is doing your bit, and not letting other fellows down because you fail to do it. The men judge the chaplains entirely by that test. They won't listen to a man, if they think he isn't as brave as they are; but if he never shirks, and is willing to face peril with them, they believe

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

in him, and anything that he says to them about right living goes. I've known lots of religious people, but I very often think that the most truly religious men I have met are those chaps who don't appear to have any religion at all."

"What will happen when these men, all the millions of them, are reincorporated in civil life?" I asked.

"What will happen to myself?" he replied. "I often think of that. I suppose I shall go on writing, but I know I shall write in a new way. I hope I shan't have lost the sense of romance, but I think it will be romance seen from a totally different angle. It will be the romance of virtue—using the word in the strict Latin sense—not the romance of man's weaknesses, but of his strength. It will be the austere romance which recognizes in man's struggle for spiritual mastership a far more fascinating theme than his mean adventures in the conflicts of sex, which

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

leave him with a dirty mind and a dishonoured soul.”

He sat silent and thoughtful for a moment, and then continued :

“ But I suppose what you’re thinking of is what effect will the return of all these men to civil life have upon society, and upon religion. As regards the first, there is nothing to be feared, but a great deal to be anticipated. Pessimists who talk gloomily about the prospects of lawlessness when the army is disbanded talk like fools, as all pessimists do, because they won’t trust human nature. The vast majority of the men will return to the occupations they have left. A good many won’t go back to sedentary tasks—they have tasted a free life in the open, and they’ll turn their backs on cities and find their way to the prairies and the mountains. I don’t remember that there was any serious detriment to society after the American Civil War. The great leaders became captains of industry,

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

and so forth, and the greatest became President of the United States. The rank and file brought with them habits of discipline which made them capable of doing better work than they'd ever done before. The same thing will happen after this war. The returning soldier will be an asset to society of immense value.

“ But he's going to bring new ideals with him, be sure of that. He will be a thousand-fold more democratic than when he enlisted. He'll have learned the great lesson of valuing men for what they are, not for what they have. And this lesson, which he has learned in the naked contact of his own soul with other souls, is going to have its effect on popular forms of religion. He won't be accessible to the old selfish motive of getting his own soul saved, as the formula of religion. He has learned too thoroughly the prime ethic of a soldier's life, that his first business is to think of others before himself. And he won't have any use for

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

a little unheroic religion that makes no call for real sacrifice. If the Church can get rid of her pettiness, and offer him a big job that's worth doing, she'll recruit him; if she can't, she'll lose him. And I'm quite sure he won't pay the least attention to creeds and dogmas. They won't interest him. He's been accustomed to measure men by deeds, not words, and he'll go on doing it. War has burned out the unrealities for him, and he will look for a religion that is real. If he can find it, he'll embrace it; if the Church has nothing to offer him but pietistic camouflage, he'll go off on his own road, and either disdain the conventional Church or, perhaps, establish a new Church of his own. That's a great idea, isn't it—a Soldier's Church? But it has sense in it. Don't we speak of the Church Militant? Only the last feature of the Church as we know it is militancy. Is that an answer to your question?"

I owned that it was; and, as I reflected on it, I began to see a dawning vision of the

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

regenerating work of War. I saw War not only as destructive, but as creative ; I saw it as a powerful solvent, in which old forms of thought and life were dissolved, but also as a crystallizing force, combining into new forms the latent spiritualities of men.

“ There’s a passage of Emerson’s,” I said, “ which you’ve often heard me quote. He is speaking of the Civil War, which, to a man like himself of philosophic mind and quiet literary habits, was an unspeakable calamity. Yet this is what he says : ‘ I shall always respect War hereafter. The waste of life, the dreary havoc of comfort and time, are overpaid by the vistas it opens of Eternal Life, Eternal Law, reconstructing and upbuilding society.’ ”

“ Yes, that’s profoundly true,” he said. “ I used to think when I heard you quote those words that it was easy for us to be optimistic about the results of a suffering which we’d never endured. Well, I’ve endured it, and I believe. You have en-

THE FATHER OF A SOLDIER

that struggle, I should have for ever forfeited my right to happiness. I know also that in giving all I had I have gained much more than I have lost. I have found the Garden of Peace that lies on the other side of the hill called Calvary :

I am one with my kind,
I embrace the purpose of God, and the doom assigned.

THE END.

UCSB LIBRARY

X-87681

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 634 965 8

