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**THE PRAYER**

*The Real Experience of a French Gunner.*

You say there's only evil in this war—  
That bullets drive out Christ? If you had been  
In Furnes with me that night . . . what would you say,  
I wonder?  
It was ruin past all words,  
Horror where joyous comfort used to be,  
And not clean, quiet death, for all day long  
The great shells tore the little that remained,  
Like vultures on a body that still breathes.  
They stopped as it grew dark. I looked about  
The ghastly wilderness that once had been  
The village street, and saw no other life  
Except a Belgian soldier, shadowy  
Among the shadows, and a little group  
Of children creeping from a cellar school  
And hurrying home. One older than the rest—  
So little older!—mothered them along  
Till all at once a stray belated shell  
Whined suddenly out of the gloom, and burst  
Near by. The babies wailed and clung together,  
Helpless with fear. In vain the little mother  
Encouraged them—“But, no! you mustn't cry,  
That isn't brave, that isn't French!”  
At last  
She led her frightened brood across the way  
To where there stood a roadside Calvary,  
Bearing its sad, indomitable Christ—  
Strange how the shells will spare just that! I saw  
So many . . . There they knelt, poor innocents,  
Hands folded and eyes closed. I stole across  
And stood behind them. “We must say our prayer—  
“Our Father, which art in heaven,” she began,  
And all the little, sobbing voices piped,  
“Hallowed be Thy name.” From down the road  
The Belgian soldier had come near. I felt  
Him standing there beside me in the dusk.  
“Thy Kingdom come—”  
“Thy will be done on earth  
As it is in heaven.” The irony of it  
Cut me like steel. I barely kept an oath  
Behind my teeth. If one could name this earth  
In the same breath with heaven—  
what is hell?  
Only a little child could pray like this.  
“Give us this day our daily bread—”  
A pause.  
Urgently. Still the hush. She opened wide,  
Reproachful eyes at them. Now, that prayer  
Had grown too hard even for little children.  
“I know—I know—but we must say the prayer.”  
She faltered. “Give us this day our daily bread,  
And—  
“Our trespasses  
As we forgive them who have trespassed against us.”  
The children turned, amazed, to see who spoke  
The words they could not. I, too, turned to him,  
The soldier there beside me—and I looked  
Into King Albert's face. . . . I have no words  
To tell you what I saw . . . only I thought  
That while a man's breast held a heart like that,  
Christ was not, even here, so far away.  
—Amelia J. Burr, in The Outlook.

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