

IN BRUGES, 1917

BY GILBERT WHITE



LD Madame Cortlandt groaned aloud as she climbed the cellar stairs, a foaming mug of beer in either hand. As she reached the sunlit hall, she saw by the long clock that it was already half-past four. The August afternoon was on the wane.

"Marianne," she called softly, "Marianne, the beer for the General! Be quick and take it up this time without spilling it."

A chair creaked in the kitchen, and a heavy step crossed the floor. Through the open doorway came a young woman, tray in hand. There was a dull, vacant look in her brown eyes.

"The swine!" she hissed between her teeth. "I will kill him some day."

"Hush, my girl. Be good as you always are, and help to keep food in our mouths until the little one is born."

Placing the beer-mugs carefully on the tray, the old woman went out through the back door to attend to the evening meal of her chickens.

Marianne carried the tray upstairs and knocked at the door at the far end of the hall.

"Come in," a gruff voice called in German. The girl opened the door and crossing the room, served the German General, who was seated at the desk. Then she offered the other mug to his companion, another officer of the German Army which was in occupation of Bruges.

"Where is Elspeth?" the General

questioned, spreading a newspaper in an apparently careless manner over the papers and maps which littered his desk.

"She is out, mein herr," Marianne answered quietly, "helping at the hospital." She turned toward the door, then stopped. She tried to speak, but her mouth trembled and the hand which held the tray shook.

"That will do," the General said in a stern voice. "Go at once."

"What is wrong with the girl?" asked the other officer. "Insane also?"

"Yes, of course. She will be better, they say, when her child is born. She and Elspeth are sisters, daughters of Emsden, a merchant whose people have been well-to-do for generations. He is working for us somewhere in the Fatherland, I believe, if not, he is dead. One never knows which road they will prefer at the last. Both girls were left to the soldiers, but the younger one, Elspeth, was rescued by that young nephew of mine, Carl Rudolph. He wants to marry her, but she won't, if you please." The General took up his mug of beer. His companion laughed.

"I did not know that there was a girl in the whole of Belgium who could, or would dare do that."

"I am sure that there is not another," said the General. "But Carl has ideas which he calls advanced and I call stupid. He got them in America. I am a fool, I suppose, to indulge him as I do, but when one has no other living relative, a nephew is