

The War Party

U. N. C. DUDLEY.

THE six boys stood around the piano, their arms across each others' shoulders. Within the half circle stood three girls; and a fourth was playing, with a touch that the boys' eagerness of the song could not hide, "Long live the King! Don't you hear them cheering?" The six were in uniform. Minerva and I sat by the fire, watching and listening.

Afterwards Minerva told me she had not a serious thought all the evening—she was delighted to see the youngsters having so merry a time. The boys had come from the camp, where the refinements are not always the most refined. They would soon be going to cheerless France. It was good to see them so full of all that youth should revel in—good cheer, sweet company, the wish to sing, and the sense of freedom which those who cross Minerva's threshold feel as soon as they clasp her hand and read the welcome of her eyes.

I have seen the King go by. I have seen the one-legged veteran at the window; I have seen the graves on the velvet; and have walked where men died; and have rested in the trench whence they sought the lives of others. And when I looked and listened, how could I help asking, "Which of them will . . . ?"

When you fall to thinking like that, and you know the kind of stuff of which the boys are made, the uniform becomes the vesture of a new sacrament in patriotism. You wonder how they would have looked if they had come in the clothes in which they had been wont to appear. The linenless collar, the puttee, the shoes that are made for service alone—these things may draw from the more apparent excellence of social convention; but they carry a distinction, a seam of pathos all their own. For where there has been answer to a call of duty, as we knew there was in these six, there is a dignity that cannot be mistaken.

There is a philosophy of fighting clothes, which one can't stop to discuss just now. It is part of the rhythm of the march—that curious harbinger of impending victory and impending death which comes to you as the fellows swing along, with rifle barrels swaying in ominous unison. It is a prophecy of things to come—glorious things—dreadful things.

Hudderson told me the other day that a friend had sent him the helmet of a Belgian who had gone unscathed through all the fierceness of the campaign. Hudderson had given it to a patriotic association, whose officers would auction it as a relic of the war. I thought of the helmet as I watched the boys linked together around the piano. What would these garments become if they should be carried to France, to Belgium, and perhaps to Berlin? And then—suppose that some of them should have to be covered in the ground—on what scene would grim eyes look—eyes of men too well accustomed to the broken shovels of the Reaper, working pitilessly when all the world should be at peace?

Half an hour before, as the boys had come downstairs with me from the smoke room, they had surprised the four girls tripping into the house, wearing the hats and overcoats which they had purloined from the cloak room, and in which they had made a route march to three of the neighbors, singing "Its a long, long way" as they marched.

The four had been lined up in the hall and put through a saluting drill. 'Faith, I never saw a prettier sight; for the girls that live here and near here are good to look upon. It was a piece of pure

jollity, bright as the morning, and innocent as the earliest pipe of wakened birds.

Later, I overheard Ush say that he and the other four could hug the big fellow for bringing them out to enjoy such a break from the rigid round of the camp. "I haven't been home for three years," he said, in partial explanation. The remembrance of the girl-soldiering in the hall will come back more than once to the fighting boys, and also to us. We only wanted to make these fellows who have forsaken all that our name might still be regarded in the world, feel like that—that those for whom they fight wish to minister to them a little, while they prepare for the unseen, deadly road.

They were just boys—I don't think any one of them was past twenty-three. This one came from a bank. That one had taught school. We would have been glad to have them at any time. They are in the ranks because they understand. Of course they did not discourse on the sacrificial relation in which they stand to the rest of us. Life is still pretty much of a humor to all of them. The ebullient jocularity of a camp is not far from them at any time. The solemnity of the times is not very far away either.

Without intention, they gave us glimpses of both. Ush had been named as the traveller of the bunch.

Said Dick, "He is an ex-mariner, for he has been half over the world."

Brey chimed in, "And he is an ex-banker."

Palmer joined the descriptive corps with, "And the next will be ex-it."

it. They can retreat, because they want a better opportunity to win. Don't you think that is the difference?"

Here, surely was a soldier boy with a thinker in his head. He did not realize that he had illustrated his own philosophy when Palmer had joked about the ex-it. For Ush had said, laughing as he spoke, "Perhaps I shall, but there'll be some other ex-its before I go out."

Maybe they thought the old man sitting by the fire was pretty dull—a good carver of a joint; the father of fine girls and all that; but still rather an uninteresting old codger. They didn't come out to see him anyway. They went out into the night, for the most generous leave comes to an end, and the old man, standing on the steps as they clattered down the walk with apples and candies in their pockets, wondered which of them . . . ?

We loved them all.—In "The Canadian War."

Breathes there a man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,

This is my own, my native land!
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned,
As home his footsteps he hath turned
From wandering on a foreign strand?

If such there breathe, go, mark him well;
For him no minstrel raptures swell;
High though his titles, proud his name,
Boundless his wealth as wish can claim;
—Despite those titles, power, and pelf,
The wretch, concentrated all in self,
Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust, from whence he sprang,
Unwept, unhonored and unsung.



ON THE PORCUPINE TRAIL, NEW ONTARIO.

Amateur photograph. Negative by Mrs. W. J. Brown, Shallow Lake.

Everybody laughed, Ush as much as any. But in a minute a graver note came from the ex-mariner, ex-banker, ex-it.

"I had a letter from my prospective brother-in-law," he said; "and he tells me he has talked with some Northumberland Fusiliers who have come back wounded. They agree that the French soldier is great when he thinks he is winning; but he is not very good when he has to retreat. I think the difference between them and our fellows is the difference of mental attitude. The Frenchman goes to war prepared to die for France. He thinks it is glorious to fall on the field fighting valorously for her. I dare say it is. But our fellows don't think so much about dying for their country as of making the other fellow do

Those who study and work for the happiness of others are too busy to think about their own.

The way to meet emergencies is to live right every day.

Efficiency is the best economy. Measure by that.

Fear of failure is no reason for want of effort.

Idealism will take the drudgery away from our lives, and it is what our fathers called aiming at perfection.

Good-enough is the enemy of the best.

Rest is not inactivity, but controlled activity.

Eternal life is a life of quality not quantity.

—Credo.