

DIARY OF A FRENCH OFFICER

but my deception might help him to die in hope. I also knew the terror of dying there slowly, and alone, all alone. But he was beyond our help.

The German guns were firing violently on the French positions. We did not realize this during the day, as our anguish and pain kept us from studying the battle. It was foolhardy to go forth under the bombardment, but we were really crazed. A single idea, a fixed idea, remained with us — to go back, to go back by all means, or die. For my own part, I was not quite conscious of what I was doing.

I could not crawl on my stomach. I was obliged to lie on my back, and advance head first toward the French trench. The rockets gave me a glimpse of our lines. They were several hundred yards distant. I pushed myself along with my feet as does a man when swimming on his back. As soon as a rocket flashed its light, I remained motionless, feigning death among the dead. And in those few instants of immobility, I could hear my heart beat, and a vague horrible murmur made up of moans and cries of men dying, and of wounded calling for help. I passed by a sol-