

quite still, as still as if the poor sorrowful souls within it were taking their last long sleep, rid at last of life's sad troubles and misfortunes. Oh how wearied and forlorn I felt. But I must be up and doing. I heard the sound of the distant church-bell, and the jingling bells of sleigh after sleigh, as they passed along the road, reminded me of the day, a happy season to so many. But how different to us! no sound of those familiar voices, and there, staring at me as it were, was my brother's vacant seat by the fire-place.

On coming down stairs, I found Anna as I had left her. How glad I was that sleep had brought her a few hours of forgetfulness. My mother was still in her room, and I went about as quietly as I could to put things in order, and feeling that I ought to get something for my mother and Anna, I laid the table for breakfast—or rather for dinner, as it was now approaching noon. It was nearly two hours after this before our plain and cheerless Christmas dinner was over. We had very little appetite for anything, and merely went through the form of partaking of food for the sake, as it were, of the festive season. We had no visitors that day; everybody seemed to be away. There were family reunions, and meetings of old friends, but no one came to see us, not even a sunbeam made its appearance the whole day, and then when the dismal shades of evening came again and the night followed dark and stormy, we sat around the fire as before thinking; thinking of what might be in the future and communing with our melancholy thoughts.

Four days had now passed since the sad parting on Christmas morning, and no message had come from those who had left us. I called at the post office two or three times, but no letter was received. On the evening of the next day I almost clutched with beating heart two letters which were handed to me. One was from John to my mother; the other was from William Brightman to myself. My mother was so nervous, that I had to read the letter for her. John wrote as if in the best of spirits. Everything had, he said, been arranged. He had been readily accepted as a substitute for Thomas. He and William Brightman were, he said, fortunate enough to get

into the same regiment, even into the same company, and they would be sent to the front together in a few days. He wrote on like one who was about to start on a pleasant excursion through a peaceful country instead of being one to be borne off to "the front," hurried off to the battle-field, to the place of slaughter and death, to shoot down a so-called enemy, or be shot or wounded himself. My father, he said, had taken a cold and would not return for a few days; he would of course stay to see them off.

William, too, was in the best of spirits. They were going to have a fine time. My mother nor I must not be discouraged. He would write often and so would John, and they would be back, safe and sound, much sooner than we expected. This was the tenor of their letters just as they were on the eve of being sent with hundreds of others to "the front."

"To the front!" I never fully understood the dreadful import of these three words until then. To the front, that is to be crowded into the front ranks, in the midst of fire, smoke and thunder, and brought face to face with men arrayed against you, and then and there in the horrid arena of carnage and confusion, be obliged to kill or mutilate fellow-beings placed before you, in order to prevent them from doing so to yourself. Terrible alternative of so-called civilization! We are told with the greatest complacency, even by moralists and philanthropists, that war has been a dire necessity all along from the beginning: the only decisive way of settling disputes among nations. In old times a personal encounter was often the usual method in which individual quarrels were settled, but common sense and the voice of public opinion have now forbidden a resort so barbarous. By means of strength, skill and overwhelming numbers, brutal force and not justice is too often triumphant. Oh, what a fearful curse war has been to the world!

I waited until I had retired to my room that night before I had the courage to look at William's letter. I held it unopened in my hand for some time, guessing at its probable contents, and agitated to some degree by conflicting hopes and fears. There was, however, little in it to