

on the battlefields—so many brave Scots—like “the flowers of the forest” and last year’s leaves. I heard the pipes to-day in one old barn, where a feast was on, not far from where the guns were shooting through the mist with a round or two at odd moments, and though I had had one good meal, I had to eat another, even to the Christmas plum pudding, just to show there was no ill-feeling.

It was the pudding that threatened to do me down.

But it was good to sit among these splendid Seafortths and their feast, all packed together shoulder to shoulder, and back to back, under high old beams that grew in French forests five centuries ago. They were the transport men, who get the risks but not the glory. Every man here had ridden, night after night, up to the lines of death, under shell-fire and machine-gun fire, up by Longueval and Bazentin, carrying food for men and guns at their own risk of life. Every night now they go up again with more food for men and guns through places where there are now shell-craters in the roads, and the reek of poison gas.

The young transport officer by my side (who once went scouting in Delville Wood when the devil had it all his own way there) raised his glass of beer (the jug from which it had been poured stood a yard high in front of me) and wished “Good luck” to his men in the New Year of war, and bade them “wire in” to the feast before them. So in other Scottish billets the first of the New Year was kept, and to-night there is sword-dancing by tilted men as nimble as Nijinski, in their stockinged feet, and old songs of Scotland which are blown down the wind of France, in this strange nightmare of a war where men from all the Empire are crowded along the fighting-lines waiting for the bloody battles that will come, as sure as fate, while the New Year is still young.

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The queerest music I have heard in this war zone was three days ago, when I was walking down a city street. The city was dead, killed by storms of high explosives. The street was of shuttered houses, scarred by shell-fire, deserted by all their people, who had fled two years ago. I walked down this desolation, so quiet, so dead, where there was no sound of guns, that it was like walking in Pompeii when the lava was cooled. Suddenly there was the sound of a voice singing loud and clear