



## HUMOUR IN TRAGEDY



landin' 'im one in the side, to cheer 'im up. No one ever saw 'im, though, when 'e were blue; ye'd jus' miss 'im an' ye'd understan'.

"'E were always plannin' things, too, so as 'e'd 'ave the dirty end an' the dangerous end, an' then pretendin' as it jus' 'appened that way, an' 'e 'adn't noticed it at all; but the lads knew 'im an' was always watchin' out to see as they took their share. I don't mean 'e were what ye'd call religious," explains the boy.

"Indeed!" exclaims the Sister.

"By golly! 'E could swear like a trooper," he continues, "'e learnt *me* 'ow, an' 'e weren't always sober, neither. I remember one night seein' the Sergeant-Major bring two French gals into a restaurant, when we was there. The gals didn't close in around their table, but set like they was in a movin' picture, an' one on 'em starts lookin' at Charlie. The Sergeant moves a bit, but Charlie moves, too. Then 'e moves again, an' so does Charlie; so up gets the Sergeant-Major an' asks us did we mean to insult 'im, an' Charlie jumps up an' tells 'im where to go to, an' says, if 'e isn't careful, 'e'll 'ave 'im up fer insultin' 'im. Then we goes out, an' when we passes by, arf a 'our later, we sees the Sergeant-Major an' only one gal. I 'spect the pretty one 'ad gone out to look fer Charlie. 'E were a great one fer the gals."

"Were you friends before the war?" asks the Sister.

"No, but we both joined up at the beginnin', an' even if 'e got it before I did, we've often cleared the parapet an' went into No Man's Land together, an' 'e were the best pal I ever 'ad."

The boy clears his throat. "I'll never forget a night, when we was out o' the trenches, sittin' lookin' at the flashes in the sky. Some on 'em looks like long serpents o' fire an' some goes zig-zaggin' everywhere. Some noise! Then the signals fer *our* artillery goes up, 'S.O.S.' we calls

'em, an' ye could feel the earth shakin' under ye. I were jus' thinkin' as 'im an' me was lucky to be out o' the scrap that night, when they comes to fetch me up with the reserves. 'Good-bye, Charlie,' I says, but 'e shoves me 'and away. 'Ye needn't think yer goin' to keep all the fun to yerself,' 'e says, 'fer I wouldn't miss it fer the 'ole bloomin' world. I'll go in some other guy's place.' 'E did, too. 'E says 'is prayers afore 'e started, an' then 'e cussed all the way up, jus' like 'is ol' self, so cheerful-like."

"When was he killed?" inquires the Sister.

"The mornin' we took Vimy," answers the boy. "The two on us was sittin' along with the rest, out in a crater, beyond the front line trench, waitin' fer the charge. Charlie laughs at me an' asks me, 'Are ye afraid?' I couldn't tell a feller like 'im as I were afraid, an' no more could I tell 'im a lie, so I jus' looks at 'im straight. 'It's 'ot stuff,' 'e says, 'andin' me 'is mother's address, an' a dark look comes into 'is eyes, like 'e were afraid 'isself, but kin' o' 'squarin' 'is shoulders in 'is min'. Then 'e says, 'If one on us comes through, go to see me people, matey. They'd like to see ye.'

"I wanted to ask 'im did 'e think 'e were goin' to the Rest Camp, fer it weren't like Charlie to talk like that, but I couldn't say a word.

"'We're goin' over to show Fritzie what we can do,' 'e says, presently, tryin' to keep up 'is 'cart, an' then we jus' sits thinkin', an', arter a bit, the order comes to charge. I were a'ead, pickin' me way aroun' the shell 'oles, an' 'e were close be'ind. We reached Fritzie's front line, but the Artillery 'ad smashed it all in, an' we jus' walks over. As we was comin' to the secon' line, I felt a wind that knocked me 'at crooked. Somethin' made me look aroun', an' Charlie—I could see 'is boots an' part on 'is legs."

When a frail and ragged civilian is seen,