

Mighty is the Truth.

A. C. G.

We were four—week-ending in a little front line trench during the height of the season last Spring, at Arras; a warm, lazy, Sunday afternoon, and but for an occasional "heavy" sighing rearward, a single old scout-bus droning lazily overhead with the very material and more intimate evidence at hand, war seemed as far as the stars. We had oiled the rifles and bombs, cleared up the trench, and repaired to the dug-out to make tea; four men drawn together in the common cause, collectively so alike, individually so different, each bearing in his own way his mark of birth and environment; the Soldier, the Poet, Old Bill, and the humble writer.

While the tea-aaten steamed, we talked as men will—of women, of lands afar, hopes and ambitions; we planned, all of us, against the day when this war would be over and we could go home, wash our hands and start all over again. The Soldier, who all his life had borne arms in odd corners, under strange stars, entertained us with spicy observations of life in India, bits of the Hills and the Plains, pertinent barrack-room reminiscences, some sage conclusions on the inability of the Eastern mind to see as that of the West, a rather dissertation on the "wimmin"—of long marches across the sandy wastes of the Soudan—of towns and idols made of mud, a familiarity with South Africa, and at least a nodding acquaintance with local events from Ypres up to date; and concluded with some very interesting side-lights on some of England's greatest soldiers.

The Poet, between sips of scalding tea, rendered, and to the vanishing point of finished elocution, many of Kipling's most beautiful lines; then, with only a breath between, swung the call of the East to the call of the North, and with stanza after stanza of Services' gems, carried us to the eternal snows and the deadly calling silence of Alaska.

Old Bill must have sensed that he, too, should hold up his end, and surely his recital of weird adventures held and thrilled us; here were tales of life in the fulness thereof. They ranged from gold dredges on the Yukon to steam-shovels at Culebra, shearing sheep in Idaho to picking fruit under California's turquoise sky—frightful avalanches, of mining camps in their hectic flush of easy wealth, affairs of the heart from a Pelly Kloooh to a half-breed senorita on the Mexican border, affluence and poverty, long nights on the rods of a freight train in the marrow-searching cold, always for the only and to-morrow, taken carelessly, yet one felt that somehow he had seen many of the lights and shadows of real life, which most of us had been denied.

And the writer listened.

Naturally, the war came in for its share; its evolution from the day of spears and shields, to gas and planes, and seventy-five mile guns, was discussed with an indifferent impartiality, as is common to those who know most of these things by first hand, and we agreed, with one dissenting vote, that it was a perfectly wonderful war.

More tea, and the Soldier very casually asked, I wonder what is the most wonderful thing in the world. Each had some flippant answer to this, like "double rum issue"—or "the war's over"—something equally absurd. It wasn't easy to seriously answer off-hand; each would be bound to have arrived at some conclusion, however hazy and indefinite to a question so direct. One glance at the Poet would suffice, his would be "the love of a woman." The Soldier wasn't so easy to figure, his far-away look carried with it something of the inscrutable East. Suddenly, Old Bill remarked, "I know"—he was all animation, all eagerness, as a child is eager when it will have its say, so the writer very accomodatingly asked, "Well," and old Bill said, "A little kid, when he finds his big toe, and tries to put it in his mouth."

There was a long full minute of stupefied silence, then we laughed—all but the Poet, and perhaps it was just because he wasn't joining in the mirth that we stopped, for he fixed his eyes on Old Bill, saying, "No, Bill, you're wrong, it's *not* the most wonderful thing in the world, but I'll tell you what is, that you, who hasn't spent a decent hour in a decent home since you left your own, who never had ten dollars ten hours after pay-day, a drunken, shiftless hobo, dirty and lousy, should sit up here in a dug-out on the Western Front"—and here his fine big eye clouded, his voice lowered, and all the infinite tenderness of a young mother with her first-born was in that easy, even cadence,—"*that you*, Bill, should think of it—that is the most wonderful thing in the world."

OVERHEARD AT THE DEPOT.

R.S.M. (To newly-joined cavalry recruit): "You are late. Didn't you hear the Stables sound."

Recruit: "Yes. Played it rather well, didn't he?"

R.S.M.: "Well, I'm"

A man tried to sell a farmer a new bicycle for 50 dollars.

"Why," said the farmer, "If I had 50 dollars to spare, I'd buy a cow."

"But," said the agent, "you'd look funny trying to ride a cow."

"Aye," said the farmer, "but I'd look a darn sight funnier trying to milk a bicycle."