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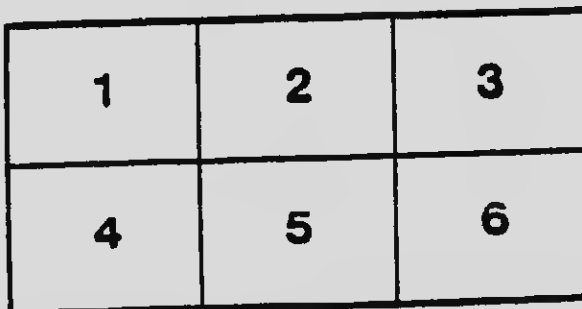
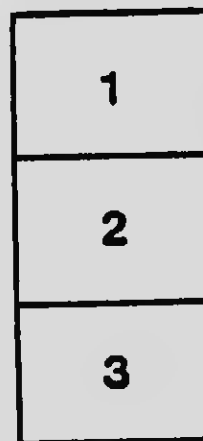
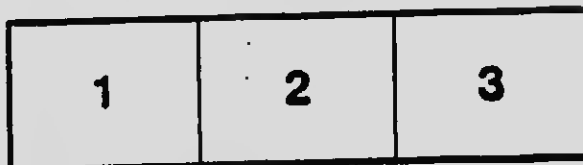
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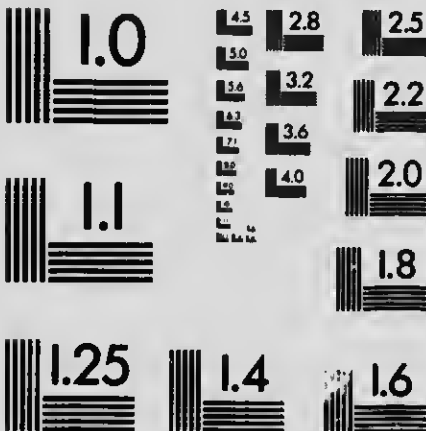
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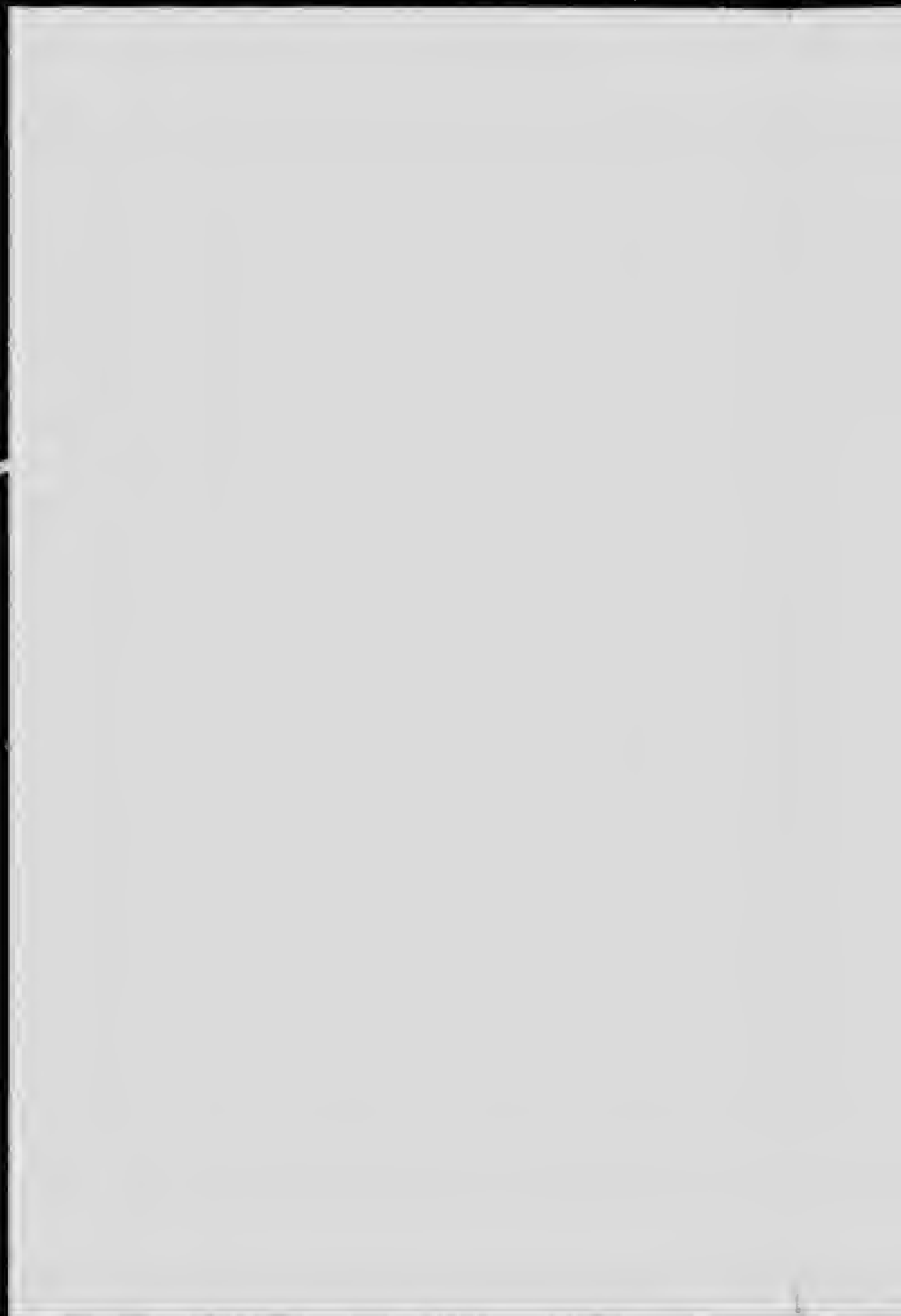
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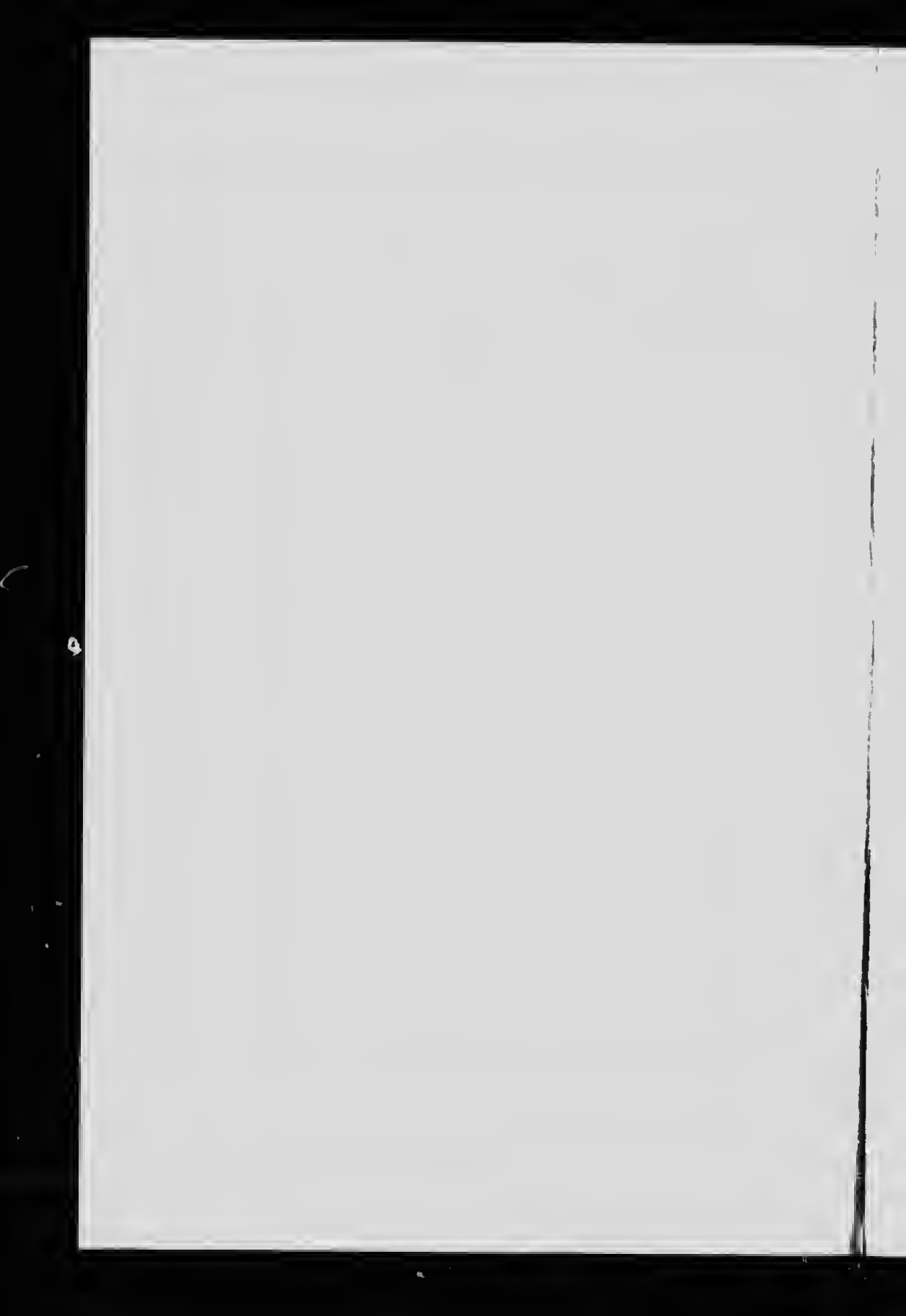
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—“*Made in Germany*”



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WHAT TOMMY AND POILU THINK
ABOUT IT

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

MCMXVII

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PEACE

—“*Made in Germany*”

A DYING SOLDIER'S MESSAGE.

THE following is an exact copy of the first letter I opened on the morning of Christmas Day. It was signed by a R.A.M.C. Major, and came from a military hospital some sixty miles away.

“No. 9/17329, Corporal E. D——, 9th B'n. —Regt., now a patient in this hospital, is, I believe, known to you. He is exceedingly anxious to see you with regard to an important ‘message’ of some kind which he says he can give only to you. I should add that there is practically no chance of his recovery, and that he is not likely, I fear, to live more than one or two weeks, if as long. There have been two amputations of the right leg, necessitated by gangrene, and there are abdominal wounds from shrapnel. Should you be able to come here to visit this patient, you naturally would not let him see that you thought his case hopeless, even though, as I fancy is the case, he realises this. On the other hand, you need not fear the

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effects upon him of talk. His ease being as it is, one would be sorry to deny him anything in reason that he desires, and his anxiety to see you would seem to be more of a strain for him than any amount of conversation would be."

E. D—— is, of course, a sufficiently common name, particularly among my fellow Welshmen. But "No. 9/17329, Corporal E. D——." One gave three minutes to a head-scratching search of memory, before writing out a telegram to the R.A.M.C. Major to say one would start at once. And even then, I could not place the man at all. The only E. D—— I seemed to have known much about was the engineer of that name, who I remembered very well, both down in S—— and in London. But he certainly could not be "No. 9/17329, Corporal E. D——," for his hair was grey when I last met him several years ago, and I recollected that he then had a son at a public school. Also, he was single-handed in his rather extensive and valuable practice, and a very busy man indeed; a good and keen Liberal in politics, pronounced rather extreme by some in his attitude toward Labour questions, but never by me; a quick thinker, a trenchant speaker, and a notable figure on the platform. One could easily picture him a vigorous worker in a Whitehall appointment of some kind, in these strenuous days; and a very useful man for it, I thought; but not a corporal in a Line Battalion. That was

A DYING SOLDIER'S MESSAGE 7

out of the question. I recalled one specially good and effective speech in which I once heard him trounce some itinerant advocate of National Service. He had always been a keen and admirably well-informed opponent of militarism of every kind.

However, it seemed to me there was only one way of answering that letter, even though the poor chap it referred to was possibly entirely mistaken in thinking he knew me. There might be some small thing one could do for him. I took all the Christmassy sort of periodical literature I could lay hands on, along with various creature comforts—Christmas Day travelling is apt to be a cheerless business—and then spent nearly five hours in and out of trains before reaching the hospital, though the distance was a bare sixty miles.

The R.A.M.C. Major was not in the building when I arrived, but had been good enough to leave instructions about me, and in the course of a very few minutes I found myself at the side of Bed 11, Ward B. 3, clasping the hand of "No. 9/17329, Corporal E. D——," and realising that he was indeed the E. D—— who had previously been known to me (if not very intimately, then always with respect for his character and abilities) as engineer, thinker, and exceptionally well-informed man of affairs. His hair was now more nearly white than grey, and his son, I presently learned, had enlisted on the very day upon which his age made him eligible, and been

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killed during last July on the Somme. Before then, and since then, the father had been offered a Commission, but preferred to keep his place in the ranks, on the plea that he thought he could be of more direct service there, as soldiering was not his business, but simply, for the time, his necessity, as a British subject, a Christian, and a believer in civilisation. (These words were given me as E. D——'s own by an intelligent young officer under whom he had served.)

We have lived since August, 1914, in an atmosphere and an age of heroic sacrifices, and, personally, I have had a good deal to do with wounded and broken soldiers, of late. But I must say it was with an indescribable sense of shock that I looked down into the sunken, yellowish-white face of this man whom—as I suddenly recalled at that moment—I had last met at a public dinner in London, in the spring of 1914, at which his had been, I thought, the strongest of three or four good speeches. His indictment of the fundamental immorality of the competitive system by which the armaments of Europe were continually swelling had been most impressive. Full of vigour, and of the assured confidence of the thoroughly well-informed and successful engineer, he had then very emphatically been a man in the prime of life. And now—I recalled the R.A.M.C. Major's words:—"One or two weeks, if as long."

A DYING SOLDIER'S MESSAGE 9

"A shame to drag you out on Christmas Day," he said, when I had settled down besides him. "Christmas! Last Christmas I was in a little bombing raid not far from the Ypres salient, and the best man in my section was killed within a yard of me by a Boche who——well, he went to his last account almost before he knew he'd killed my man. My O.C. said it was the best little raid we'd done. Yes, it's a shame to drag you out on such a day, my friend, but in a sense it's a kind of war work, and so I don't think you'll grudge it.

"You understand, of course, that I'm no more use. Ah, no; my little job's done, or will be before you go. The good folk here are very, very kind, you know, and talk the usual benevolent nonsense, because they think it cheers me. Not a bit. I'll be under the ground in a week; and many a better man I've seen go West without a hundredth part the comfort and kindly care and attention that will see me out. I don't in the least grudge the going, and the break up of my practice is of no consequence, since the boy's gone. He only had three weeks at the front. My wife is not the sort to be terrified by being poor——thank God! She's in lodgings down here now. No, no; I have nothing to regret or complain about. But there's something I badly want to say before I go. It's no good if it does not somehow reach a whole lot of people; and——that's how I came to think of you. I thought you would

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manage it for me, somehow. They say that people will take notice of what a man says from his heart, when he's dying. I've somehow lost any skill I used to have in putting a case. Talk doesn't amount to much in soldiering, you know, But if only you can somehow put it for me; get what I want to say to them; to the people—God bless 'em!—they'll understand. Once they understand they're all right. It's misunderstanding, being deceived, that I dread. If you can do this for me I shall go—out, knowing I've done my bit, all right. But, if not—as sure as God is in Heaven, my friend, if our people are deceived at this stage, then all the tens of thousands of bits that have been done by our men; yes, and by the hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers who have gone West with a sure faith in their hearts; all will be made a mockery and a waste—the most tremendous vain sacrifice of life and faith the world has ever seen. No massacre of the innocents that history has ever known could give the Devil so much pleasure as that. Why, man, it would be enough to rob Heaven itself of light!"

"But surely," I began, "there is no need for you——"

The Corporal's thin yellow hand was weakly raised.

"My dear man," he said, with a little twist of his head on the pillow, "I think you'll bear me out if

A DYING SOLDIER'S MESSAGE 11

I say that I don't need anyone to tell me that the heart of the people is sound. It's always been the basis of my creed. Now, listen! Two nights before my wife left S—— to come down here to me, she went to a meeting at the —— Hall, with her sister; and, mark this, our own pastor was on the platform; an honest man, if anyone is. The principal speaker was ——. If he's as clever as he was when I knew him—well, it's hard to understand how he can have been so completely befooled. But I haven't time to consider whether he and his friends are honest dupes, or perverse cranks, or treacherous blackguards. It doesn't greatly matter, anyhow. I incline to think them honest dupes, befooled because they never have been forced up against stark realities. I never was myself till I went into trenches, and I'm not ashamed to confess it. But it doesn't matter about their morals. The only thing that matters is the effect on the hearts and minds of the people of the spreading abroad of their delusions; the people, I mean, who have not been in the trenches. Those who have *know*, and can't be fooled.

“ It's all this foggy cloud of peace vapourings that strikes a chill into my heart. Any man who is able to claim that he bases his theories on kindness, mercy, and the desire to spare others, is always sure of a hearing with our folk; and they, not having been up against the realities—I see the danger of

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their being betrayed, from the very kindness of their hearts, into the cruellest, most devilish sort of sacrifice of their own flesh and blood, and their own future, and the future of their children and children's children, that the world has ever known.

"I understand there are a dozen clever fellows like —, who my wife heard, who are going up and down the country helping to thicken the fog of peace vapourings, and thereby playing Germany's game for her as surely as though they drew weekly wages from Berlin. Perhaps some of them do. I don't know. But it would almost seem that our authorities will allow anything at all in the name of the freedom of speech—which, God knows, I have upheld all my life. Just consider now the way this clever fellow my wife heard talked to a crowd of simple folk, our own folk, there in S—; and, mark you, with our dear old pastor—what a fog his kind old mind must be in!—on the platform. The fellow led off—and you know how well he can talk—with some little stories about our men at the front; warmed everyone's heart, you know; how fine the men are, and so on. It's little our chaps would thank him for his praise, if they heard what followed. They don't want his praise. They want backing; hard and consistent war work, to help them through to the only end of their job they've any use for.

"Then he went on to some telling pictures of the horrors of war; the terrible business that it is.

A DYING SOLDIER'S MESSAGE 13

What does he know of the horrors of war? What can he even dream of that we haven't felt in our own persons? And yet he'd rob us of the only end and reward for it all that any Tommy or Poilu in France cares a jot about. Then, very deftly, you know, he goes on to the beauties of peace. What does he know of the beauties of peace, who never has faced an enemy? Nothing, my friend; less than nothing. Yet he would override the will of the men who are facing the enemy, and dictate his kind of a peace in place of the kind they're living and fighting and dying to win. He wants the kind that will force their children into the sort of hell that our boys and the Poilus are fighting to save them from for ever.

"And then, having painted all those delights of peace that he cannot for the life of him appreciate, really, because he's never tasted in his own person the other thing, or seen the deadly, savage work of the Hun; then he warms to his work, and makes the simple souls in front, with their kindly, good-humoured British desire to do the best they can for everyone, feel that he really is taking them into his well-informed confidence now. 'If only you could understand, if only you knew all that I know,' he says, in effect—and the simple souls think of him as having lived and worked very close to the fountain head of information—'if only you had the opportunity of seeing the whole business from the inside, as I

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have, you would realise that the delights and security of peace can be yours to-morrow, if you would only accept them. You can demand and get them all now. Germany is willing, aye, and anxious to give peace.' (So is any murderous brute of an armed burglar, with the blood of defenceless women on his hands—if he sees a cordon of police surrounding the scene of his crime, and certain retribution ahead of him; but the fact would hardly make you feel very safe in accepting his word for it that he will not steal and kill any more if you consent to cry quits.)

" 'I give you my word,' says this clever fellow, 'that you can have peace to-morrow, if you will only demand it with one voice. I know the whole intricate inside of the business.' (There's nothing in the least intricate about it; and as far as essentials are concerned, I believe the greatest man in Whitehall knows no more than I do, or than any average man in the ranks knows. We are simply fighting to secure peace; not promises, which our enemy has shown us are of no more value than pie-crust, when they come from him, but real peace.) 'Germany will give peace to-morrow,' he says. 'The conditions and objects of the war are no longer what they were in the beginning, when we went in to save Belgium and France. Germany is willing to restore Belgium, and to give back all she has seized of France, and probably more. Why then should we continue

A DYING SOLDIER'S MESSAGE 15

to shed the blood of our splendid soldiers, when I assure you that we could obtain at once, by the simple process of negotiation, all our original objects in entering upon this terrible and devastating war? To continue means wanton and needless bloodshed.' But I daresay you have heard it all, and can appreciate the wicked folly of it. What I want you to realise is that this handful of misguided orators go up and down the country repeating all this cruel and mocking rubbish to thousands of simple-hearted men and women who are very likely to be deceived by it. For simple souls who only know of the war through what they read, and who hear this kind of thing in the light of their own natural good nature and good faith; of their own natural longing to see an end brought to separation, hardship, suffering and destruction; for such people, who never have faced bitter realities in the trenches, or seen with their own eyes the savage and barbarous iniquity of Germany's ravishment of France and Flanders, it is very easy to imagine they detect the light of truth and hope and peace, where we see only the foggy haze of self-deceiving sentimentality—or worse.

“‘There is no need of more fighting,’ say these wicked or bemused retailers of the most deadly sort of poison. ‘Our only objects in the war can be achieved without it. Germany will restore what she has taken, and enter into binding pledges for

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the future.' Yes. We had her binding pledges before the war. It is because she very brutally demonstrated that no pledge bound her or would be allowed to bind her—openly boasted of the fact—that we are fighting; not to win fresh promises from her, and see our children betrayed and our dead mocked by the fresh breaking of those promises when the time shall suit; not to win a worthless promise never to devastate Europe again; but, so far as we can, to make repetition of that crime impossible. 'By negotiation, which involves no bloodshed,' say the deluded ones, who have not seen the German military machine at its work, 'we shall be able to set up a League of Nations to Enforce Peace.' And that has a most appealing sound in the ears of the kindly-hearted dupes who listen.

"It should be the first business of the people who know better to undeceive them, and to let the cold light of truth in through the misty vapourings of peace talk. The League of Nations to Enforce Peace was established in August, 1914. Its task of enforcing peace was begun then, in the only manner which can possibly produce any effect upon a people saturated, as the people of Germany have been for nearly four decades, in the principles of the superman blasphemy and in the philosophy of aggressive militarism. If any other nation, in the interests of humanity, of civilisa-

A DYING SOLDIER'S MESSAGE 17

tion, and of secure peace, desires to join and to strengthen the League of Nations to Enforce Peace, is not the way open to them? They will never accomplish much by making eloquent speeches or by writing. Speeches and writing will not separate an armed and murderous burglar from his swag, and secure peaceful householders against his further depredations. That can only be accomplished by force; and it is open to any nation that truly desires to secure peace to add its quota to the strength and to the heroic sacrifices of the existing League of Nations to Enforce Peace; which, as a matter of simple truth, has been fighting the battles of other nations just as much as its own. There is no other way. From an arm-chair you cannot bring an end to a fight for freedom and secure peace; not an honest end."

For a minute or two the Corporal lay perfectly still and silent. I said nothing, because it seemed to me that speech from me must add something to the strain he placed upon himself. I had a feeling that for me to speak would be to interrupt a dying man in his delivery of himself; a thing none of us would care to do.

"But I shall weary you," he said, with his faint, slow smile; "and on Christmas Day, too! I ought to be ashamed."

I murmured something about himself.

"Ah, that makes no odds," he said. "I'm

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due for leave directly, you know ; going back for rest, as we say out there ; right back, this time ; no fatigues, o carrying parties ; not even any drill, my friend, where I'm going ; just rest. Lucky beggar, eh ? Well, I've done my best, such as it's been ; while it lasted ; and God knows, I grudge nothing, and regret nothing. I only wish I'd more to give."

Again he paused for a minute. And then he turned his head towards me on the pillow, almost lifting it, indeed, as he spoke again : —

" It grieves me to find I've lost the art of marshalling facts and putting points strongly. After this evening it wouldn't greatly matter if I were dumb ; but now——. Man, I never in my life so greatly desired the gift of words. What I feel about this thing makes every other feeling of my life seem little and unimportant. Even what we call patriotism is a small thing beside this issue ; for in this, believe me, the future of the civilisation of which we are a part is at stake. The peoples who are thousands of miles away from the carnage may perhaps never understand ; though their thinkers must, of course ; but, truly, our sacrifices and our fighting are just as much for the hundred million people in America as for the folk of these islands of our own.

" My regiment, you know, was right alongside the French. In billets out there I have talked with scores

A DYING SOLDIER'S MESSAGE 19

and scores of Poilus, and French civilians, too. The spirit of them is as fine as anything ever dreamed of by the master writers of old. The call of national patriotism may be strong, but, believe me, that alone could never have enriched history's great records of self-sacrificing heroism with the wonderful chapters it now has on Mons, the Marne, Ypres, Verdun, and the Somme; not to mention the miracle of the great Russian retreat, and their marvellous return across the fields of their martyrdom. Remember, the Allies are totally unlike their enemies. They do not drive their soldiers. On the Somme, at Verdun, and at Ypres, the Boche soldiers have been herded and driven forward in masses, again and again. Where for a moment free choice has been theirs—well, you know their watchword in such places: 'Mercy, mercy, Kamerad!' with arms well up.

"But our men and the Poilus have never for an instant felt the driver's touch; and you know how gladly and in what spirit they have gone forward, even against great odds.

"But perhaps you don't know why. The newspaper writers don't know why. Our men don't talk of such things—ever. But, believe me, every Tommy and every Poilu who has ever been over the parapet knows. It's that knowledge, which it would be foreign to their natures ever to put into words, that makes endurance of the trenches—an

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endurance with a grin and a joke, mind you, and never a hint of the Boche driver's methods—possible, and for us certain.

"Come now, think of it! I shall have gone—West, in a week."

Again that slow, faint smile.

"Right back, this time. I would not talk now for talking's sake; would I? This is my last talk, and after this—after this, my friend, I go to meet my Judge: the Father of mankind. And this, if you will somehow give it shape for me—and, man, if you can, give it some of the strength of a dying man's certain knowledge that fills me now—this is my message to my fellow-countrymen at home.

"The one mainspring of the strength and endurance that has protected all the world west of that blood-soaked line from the North Sea to Switzerland, where so many tens of thousands of French and British lads lie dead; the true source of all this willing and invincible heroism which—unless our men should be betrayed by those for whom they fight—Germany can never conquer, is the sure knowledge that we fight, not for this or that country or territory, but for the salvation of humanity, and the preservation of decency and freedom and justice as we understand them; and the sure faith that if we are steadfast we must triumph, that if we triumph it is for good and all, that this shall be the last struggle, the last sacrifice,

A DYING SOLDIER'S MESSAGE 21

and that, by it, we earn real safety and security for our children and for their children.

"That greater motive than any one country can supply is what the Franco-British line has fed and lived and fought on, and will fight on to the end. That is the spirit which has carried even men who cannot understand and recognise it smiling into the presence of Death himself.

"Morally, Germany is beaten, and knows it. In a military sense she is not yet beaten, and will not be for months to come. Her war machine is a great and terrible engine of destruction and of enforced martyrdom, prepared through forty years to do its present devilish work. Until the Boche is beaten in the full military sense, no other reward for our sacrifices, no better legacy for our children can possibly be won, than a miserable, mocking spectre of peace, based upon—what? Upon German promises! Would you offer German promises, 'scraps of paper,' to Belgium's widows and orphans; to the orphans of her tortured, ravished, slaughtered women, and savagely-murdered unarmed men? Would you offer German promises to the surviving mourners for scores of thousands of helpless Serbians and Armenians massacred by German hands, and by Turkish hands under German direction? Would you have our own glorious dead mocked, our own yet unborn children betrayed, by the bartering of our sacrifices for German promises?

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"The heart of our people is sound as a bell, and their minds are set. Do not suffer them to be poisoned into blind gropings after treachery, by the vapourings of either traitors, cranks or fools. Let the country be true, true to the bitter end to its fighters; and, my word for it, its fighters will be true to the country and its sacred cause, come what may; and the most deadly peril that Europe and civilisation have ever had to face will, in due time, be removed finally and for ever, so that the world may have real peace—not the sinister, ghastly make-believe, made in Germany by criminals seeking to befool and evade the majesty of the law!"

* * * * *

The Corporal bade me give his message strength. I give it in his own words; no more.

In the early morning of the last day of 1916 he passed away, very peacefully, to the rest he had earned.

WHAT THE POILU THOUGHT.

It was a slow and tedious crawl in the long French train away from the battle-scarred country. There was nothing very special happening at the front, yet we seemed to be continually shunted for the passing of huge supply trains, moving eternally in the other direction. When the morning twilight rolled slowly away from the face of the country, leaving at first little clouds of white mist hovering over the freshly-ploughed fields, the sound of the guns was still in our ears. The face of the country, however, had changed. There were farmhouses to be seen, some of them intact and apparently prosperous, a château or two on the hillside, old men and women and young girls at work in the fields. . . .

We stopped at the station of some small town, and stretched out eager hands for cups of hot coffee and rolls and butter. The warmth of the coffee was like a talisman. My two companions thawed as I did under its genial influence. Monsieur Poilu accepted a sip from my flask and a cigarette, with a grateful little ejaculation. Madame, elderly, in deep mourning, a little shabby but wonderfully neat, beamed content upon us. The smoke did not

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incommode her. As for the flask—ah, well, she took only coffee, and a little wine and water, herself, but nothing in the world was too good for the brave soldiers.

Conversation blossomed out between the two, and flourished. At first I barely listened. We were passing through a marshy district which reminded me of home, little pools of water, tall rushes moving in the morning breeze, sedgy places, from which, at the sound of the shrill whistle of our locomotive, a flight of duck rose hastily. Then I heard a word behind me which in these days inevitably stirs the blood. The word was "peace!" I turned away from the window and listened.

"But, my son, have patience," the old woman was saying. "I speak who may speak, for I have given a husband and two sons. Yet I have others fighting, and it is of them I think. If indeed these Boches are weary of fighting, if indeed it is peace they offer, why should one not at least listen?"

The Poilu turned towards her. His haversacks, with their queer collection of miscellaneous articles, were on the seat by his side. The mud of the trenches was thick upon his clothes. There was a week's beard bristling upon his chin. But his voice suddenly proclaimed him a man of some education.

"Madame," he demanded, "who are they to offer peace as a gift, they who deliberately brought

WHAT THE POILU THOUGHT 25

this war upon the world? And what sort of a peace do you suppose is in their minds? You have read the boastfully arrogant words of their Emperor's declaration? Is there anything there of the humility of the wrongdoer, of the man who wishes to restore what he has stolen, to repair the greatest wrongs which have ever stained the pages of history? Peace, indeed! There is no peace in their hearts."

Madame sighed. She felt herself no match for this man in whom her words had kindled a sudden eloquence. But in her heart there was the longing.

"They are brutes and savages, my son," she admitted, "and our people would do well never to clasp again in friendship the hand of one of them. But, behold, I have two sons left. I have lost much and suffered much. Day by day I have seen the losses of those about me increasing. I am fifty-eight years old, and peace would give me back my two sons. There are so many like me."

"Madame," the soldier answered, and this time he seemed to include me in the argument, "peace will not give back to the many hundreds of thousands of French mothers the sons and husbands they have lost. Peace would only dishonour their memories, would bring the cruellest of all bitterness into their lives. Look you, they fought for their homes and their womenkind, they fought for a sacred cause, they fought for others besides themselves. See how it is to-day with those others.

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Belgium! Can one speak of it? It is Belgium who shall make peace when it comes. Who has a better right? What will she ask for, I wonder? Fifty thousand German men and women to make slaves of them? The maidenhood of Germany to debauch? No; they are not Boches; but strict justice would give them all that and more."

Madame shook her head. She, too, was moved.

"One must try to forget," she muttered. "I had a niece myself at Lille—but one must not speak of those horrors. God alone can punish such crimes."

The Poilu rolled another cigarette viciously.

"But indeed, Madame, on the contrary, one must try not to forget. Monsieur," he added, glancing across at me, "I appeal to you. You are English, are you not?"

"I am English," I told him, "but with your permission I will be silent. Even our friends call us a somewhat obstinate nation. They say that we find difficulty in seeing any side of these great issues save our own. Let me hear you speak more of this peace."

The Poilu lit his cigarette. Madame leaned forward.

"Listen," she intervened. "I have heard it said that the Boches now are willing to restore all Belgium, that they will give back the whole of their conquered territory——"

"If we leave their military machine, their great

WHAT THE POILU THOUGHT 27

engine of tyranny, autocracy, aggression, and destruction, with all the power in it that made them begin the war," the Poilu interrupted, vigorously. "Ah, Madame, there is the trap! We trusted once to German treaties and German faith. See how they regarded them! Treaties! It was Germany who dismissed them with the immortal phrase 'Mere scraps of paper!' Promises! Listen, Madame. Their own Chancellor stood up in their Parliament and he pleaded guilty to a great broken faith. Necessity, he declared, demanded it. And I tell you this. When necessity, which with them means German ambition, demands anything, then a German promise and a German treaty are worth just a snap of the fingers—no more! That is why I say—I and those others who have lived and fought through these desolate years—that with an unconquered Germany there can be no peace."

"My son," the old lady declared, looking at him with interest, "you speak like one who has thought much."

The Poilu glanced down at his mud-stained clothes.

"I was an avocat's clerk before the war," he said grimly. "What I am now God only knows; but up there in the front it is not all fighting. There are long, lonely hours when the brain works; hours of solitude when one sees the truth."

Madame sighed.

"It is not often," she confessed, "that I read the

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journals. My eye-sight is failing, and my daughter—well, we will not speak of her. I lost her. Therefore, it is a new thing for me to talk to one like yourself. Remember now, if you please, that I speak only in the language of the village. They say—I have heard it said—that Germany hungers for peace, that therefore it is better for us to give peace now, and so spare needless suffering."

A little cloud of smoke surrounded the soldier's head. His clenched fist struck the knapsack by his side. His eyes—hot and red they were with fatigue—flashed.

"They talk like cattle, Madame," he declared vigorously. "Where are Germany's conquests? Belgium with odds against her of ten to one in men and fifty to one in artillery! Montenegro—a mountain tribe? Serbia? Well, it took them eighteen months and cost them a good many army corps to drive the Serbians from their country, and the end of them is not yet. Roumania? Victims of a foolish campaign if you will, but even then but temporarily overpowered by the war machine which it has taken Germany thirty-five years to evolve. Where are her victories against France, or Russia, or England? Her victories, I say, when you come to consider that for forty years she was slowly preparing whilst we refused to believe. Man for man, gun for gun, we are the better race. England is the better race; Russia is the better race.

WHAT THE POILU THOUGHT 29

Therefore I say to you Madame, wait. Germany's last hour of triumph has struck. England has gathered strength beyond all that was expected. France stands firm and undismayed, ready to spring when the hour comes. And Russia—Russia has shown what she can do. Wait till the mountain snows have gone. Germany has scattered her men, sacrificed them on every battlefield, the pawns of the game. It is not for ever she can do this. In the end it is the pawns who count."

The woman's eyes were filled with tears.

"It is brave talk," she cried, "brave talk my son. I shall speak to them in the village of you."

"Not of me, Madame," he begged. "Look at me. I speak for what I represent. I am the common soldier of France. I am the man who bids good-morning to Death, day by day, and will continue to do so until the end comes, rather than leave our beloved land to face the dread of mutilation again."

There was no sound of guns here. The train clanked across the streets of an old country town and drew up at the platform. Madame laid down her basket and embraced the Poilu.

"Son of my country," she exclaimed, "the good God guard you!"

She kissed his cheeks and departed. The Poilu handed down her basket and waved his hand. He was once more gay.

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"One is tempted, perhaps, to talk overmuch, Monsieur," he ventured, turning to me.

"One can never say too much in the language you speak," I assured him.

He accepted more of my cigarettes and our journey was resumed.

Presently he leaned out of the window and looked forward, shading his eyes with his hand.

"Soon," he announced, "I reach my home. For a week I shall rest. Monsieur is English," he asked, turning suddenly towards me, "not American?"

"I am English," I told him once more.

"America," he said thoughtfully, "is a great country. America has been the good friend of yourselves and of France. I would not say a word which might seem lacking in courtesy, and yet—there is this Note which started this peace babble, the Note which they say Monsieur le Président wrote.

"It has been answered," I reminded him.

"It has been answered with great words," the Poilu assented, "and of that no more. But always this puzzles me. What did Monsieur le Président mean when in black and white he set it down as an accepted thing that Germany, that our enemies, were fighting for the same cause as we—the cause of the smaller nations? Have they heard of Belgium over there, Monsieur? Have they

WHAT THE POILU THOUGHT 31

heard of the many thousands of slaves being dragged weekly from that country? Have they heard of Serbia and Montenegro? They were small countries, Monsieur. Germany is very great indeed in her care for the small nations, but it is her way of caring, not ours. What did he mean, do you think, Monsieur?"

I shook my head.

"The ways of diplomacy are not always so easy as they may seem," I replied. "Besides, there is much which remains behind all that is said in print."

The man's attention had wandered. He was gazing ecstatically out of the window. He beckoned me to his side. About a little wood-crested slope a space had been cut. A white farmhouse stood there, and near by a few cottages, and a church with a quaint tower.

"My home," he pointed out, with a little catch in his throat. "You see the hills beyond, Monsieur? It was there that the Boches swung round. A few more miles and I might have been homeless, wifeless—and the children——"

He stooped and picked up his haversacks. His eyes were curiously bright.

"You see," he concluded, "that is why we fight; that is why the word 'peace' to-day stinks in our nostrils. We shall fight until France is safe."

THE FRONT LINE VIEW OF PEACE.

WHEN weather conditions had checked the relentless British attack on the Somme, and reduced it to something like the dimensions of one of the "heavy engagements" of previous wars, leave was opened sparingly for certain Divisions, and No. 869 Sapper B—— found himself, with four other leave men, pulling out of Euston Station. His boots were still caked with clay, his pockets were stuffed with food of unaccustomed luxury, and a dapper little man opposite said fatuously, "Home on leave?"

If B——'s mouth had been free I am afraid that his reply would have been more sarcastic than encouraging, but the short time needed to chew up and swallow a penny sponge cake was sufficient for politeness to get the better of his first feeling.

"Yes," he said. "Have a sponge cake?" This presumably to discourage further speech.

The little man did not want a sponge cake it appeared, and turned to an excessively stout and florid fellow beside him to hear his views on the stock and share market. So B—— offered it to a

FRONT LINE VIEW OF PEACE 33

Lance-Corporal, who took it in exchange for a banana. Then the five warriors lit up and made programmes of amusement quite impossible to crowd into their short leave, with many appointments to meet each other, which of course none of them ever kept. So they talked until the word "Peace" sounded above, or below, the general babble as the report of a faulty eighteen-pounder will sound apart from the roar of its companions.

The fat man put his paper down, took off his glasses, and said, uncertainly, "Well, I don't know about that."

"No good was ever done by humiliating anyone," the little man went on to the hushed listeners, "and we have got to live with the German. It's the next generation I'm thinking of."

The click of an opened elasp knife sounded as someone stooped to scrape the mud from his boots, and the voice went on.

"Then again, how do you know that we can ever really smash their army, even if it were right to do so? They wanted to take Belgium, and they did. They wanted to drive the Russian back and take Warsaw, and they did. They wanted to take Serbia, and they did. They wanted to smash Roumania, and they did. I don't believe we could really break them, and any continuance of the war under those conditions is nothing but a criminal waste of life and treasure."

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The clasp knife snicked again and Sapper B——, raising his reddening face from the contemplation of a pile of mud on the floor, said "'Ave a sponge cake."

This was politely declined, and the fat man, who was getting a little bored, glanced round and said, "Well, that's all very well, you know, but there may be another point of view, which you might call a Front Line point of view. What do you think, boys?"

"There you make a mistake," the little man interrupted, "Principles are immutable, and the man most immediately affected is the one man least qualified to give an opinion. In all such things the outsider, he who watches from afar, is the truest judge of what is immutably right."

The fat man put on his glasses, raised his paper again as a straight hint, and said, "Well, I stand down; you have it between you."

Judging by the silence that followed, Corporal M——, who had acquired in the face of many immediate dangers the habit of quickly appreciating a situation, realised that the little man preferred discussing such things with a civilian, consequently he said, "Well, let's talk it over," and as the "Dove" refused to be drawn, turned round to B—— and said, "What do you think, Jim?"

B—— spat carefully between his feet and said, "Didn't 'e say something about future generations?"

FRONT LINE VIEW OF PEACE 35

I 'avent any as I know of, but it's a thing as might 'appen to any chap, and I want no son o' mine, no, nor grandson neither, to 'ave to work round the top end o' Trones Wood!"

Someone said, "'Ear, 'ear!" and B——, encouraged, went on. "I may be wrong," he said, "But I thought I 'eard something about 'umiliatin' someone. What 'appens to a poor chap as steals summut and gets pinched by the police? I don't mean a emperor or a chancellor; just a poor chap as makes a slip. 'Oo cares whether 'e's 'umiliated? 'You're a disgrace to the town,' the beak says, 'three months 'ard.' And they cuts 'is 'air, and subsequent turns 'im out to earn a honest living."

"The cases are hardly analogous," the little man said, uneasily, "you see——."

"The cases," B—— said, warming up, "is quite different. 'Ere you 'ave a set o' men as is scholars, as knows what's right, and 'as four square meals a day a-piece, and there you 'as a chap as knows nowt but 'ow he 'ates the police and 'asn't 'ad a square meal for a weck. You're quite right mister, the cases is different."

The fat man put down his paper again and said, "That's very well put. Now do you think we *can* lick the German?"

B—— lit another cigarette and nodded. "We 'ave licked 'im," he said. "You ever seen two chaps fightin' as is well matched? Ever notice 'ow

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the first few rounds goes all against your pal, so as your 'eart beats quicker and you tell 'im to stick it out? Ever 'eard 'im say as you bathe 'is face, 'I'll stick it, Jim, don't 'edge your bets!' Ever 'eard that? Ever seen the other man comin' slower and slower, playin' for fouls, doin' every dirty trick as is known to dogs or men, and your pal 'itting 'im punctual and proper just where 'e knows it 'urts? Ever seen the last round when clean livin' and clean fightin' tells and the other chap 'as to be warned every 'arf-minute for foul'in' till he loses 'is 'ead and 'is 'eart and goes down to a slap as wouldn't 'urt a canary? Ever seen that? Well I 'ave. We're not in the last round, not by a long way, but 'e's foul'in' and squealin' already and we're not 'edgin' any of our bets."

Then as the train stopped the little man got out, and B—— accepting a big cigar from the fat man said, "I 'ope I didn't 'urt 'is feelings, but 'e didn't seem to have the 'ang of the situation."

PEACE AND THE POILU.

I REJOICED when the news came that involved my going to Paris. For two years my soul had longed—"panted as the hart" in fact—for a sniff of Paris, for a glimpse of the outline of Saint Sulpice against the sky. Besides, I wanted to see my little cabin in the roofs of the Rue du Bac, to buy a yard of bread in the morning, and have old Marie bring me my coffee and milk. I saw myself, if time permitted, rooting round the stalls and little shops near the Quai Voltaire.

When I got my instruction I wired Marie and arrived in Paris. My first day's business being done, I went to the Rue du Bac. Marie hides a real affection for me in a formidable manner that matches well with her straggly moustache and gruff voice, but except for open and pointedly expressed disappointment that my chest was not covered with medals for valour, her welcome was, for her, very kindly. She forbore to grumble, as used to be her wont, at having to fill my flat, round bath; her coffee was as good, the bread as crisp, and the butter as cool and white, as ever. Morning found me strolling along the Boulevard Raspail, sniffing the air as if it were a tonic; then round by Mont-

38 PEACE—"MADE IN GERMANY"

parnasse, up north again by the Observatoire, into the "Boul' Mich'" and past the Luxembourg Gardens. Like the child of Epicurean tendency who reserves the choicest tit-bit of cake to the last, I was keeping Saint Sulpice as a liqueur to my meal. I made a dessert of the Pantheon—which I don't like half as well as Sulpice—and then turned by the Odeon and loitered up Rue Bonaparte. I sat on a seat in the square and drank my fill.

This place always makes me think of France's history, of the Revolution mobs, of the Marseillaise and the Carmagnole. I have never troubled to find out if Sulpice looked down on any special scenes in the Revolution, lest the truth should shatter my dreams. I sat and thought of France, her sorrows and her triumphs, her bitter shame and glorious renaissance. I marvelled at her efforts in the present war, at the steadfast spirit of her people and their self-sacrifice. My thoughts travelled over the thirty months of strife, through the varying phases, to this offer by Germany of a mock peace. I wondered how it struck the French people; whether their stupendous efforts had weakened them at all or made them wish they could accept even this travesty. And I was answered straight away.

A typical Poilu, a burly *permissionnaire* with three service stripes and two wound bars on the sleeve of his coat, came striding along towards my seat. He

hugged a clumsy paper parcel under his arm and carried an umbrella in his hand, with the most disarmingly naïve air in the world—a typical French working father, turned soldier. As he came level with my seat, he recognised a stout woman dressed in black, carrying her morning purchases in a string bag. Beyond a lift of the eyebrows there was no surprise in either face as they both stopped.

“*Eh, bien,*” said the woman, “and so it is yourself?”

“Ah, yes,” returned the Poilu, “and so it is you. You look well. How is your husband?”

“He is very well, we had a letter—let me see—on Monday, and he is still in the trenches. Young Gaston, you know, is gone——”

“Oh, la—la—la! What a pity! Sit down here and tell me.”

I made room for them on the seat.

“Ah, yes, he was killed six months ago. George is now a cripple, but he has won the *Médaille Militaire*. The General pinned it to his shirt as he lay in the hospital.”

“The brave one! And Ernest?”

“He is now sergeant-aviator, he brought down his sixth Boche the other day—it was in the newspaper. Ah, well, and now the Boche wants peace, then?”

“Nothing more sure, neighbour, but he won’t get it.”

40 PEACE—"MADE IN GERMANY"

"It is very hard—I don't know, but—*Eh bien, mon vieux*, one docs grow tired of the war, you know—would it be so bad, look you, if we stopped fighting now? I am all for France; I have given my husband and three sons. One son is dead, another is a cripple, and I tremble daily for Ernest and my husband. We have given our savings to the war loan—it is a little thing. Would it be so bad, regard it well, my friend, if we had peace at the moment?"

"Nothing worse could happen for France, Madame Chose, than that we should let the Boche have the peace he wants. It would not be peace, it would be war! Think well. France has suffered humiliation for forty years. She was not ready for war; the Boche struck a sudden foul blow, and desolated that poor Belgium. We have held him back, but it has cost us dear. Would you let him have peace while he is still on French ground, while still he oppresses the country he has betrayed? He says that he has *won!* Figure for yourself Verdun and the Somme. That is like winning, isn't it? The English are not fully strong yet; they are working night and day to beat the Boche in men and guns and shells. They have shown how they can fight—none better——"

Here he nodded gravely to me and included me in the conversation.

"The English Navy has swept the sea—I have

thoughts in my head, my neighbour, and the Allies get stronger and stronger while the Boche gets weaker."

"But we could make him see that——"

"Bah, there is only one thing he understands, that parishioner, and that is force! We must beat him and we *can!* Verdun and the Somme show that. My good friend, you have given two sons, you are risking your husband and another son. The good God knows what you have suffered; you have not said. Well, all your sacrifices and suffering would be in vain if we stopped now. As for me, I have been wounded once, twice; perhaps I shall be wounded again when I go back—perhaps killed, who knows? But I would rather be killed than that we should stop now. What does anything matter? France!——"

His voice took a deeper and more sonorous note as if it came straight from the strings of his heart.

"France! I would give myself willingly to her—you would give all you have, you know you would. Look round, my good neighbour, and see what others have given and are doing. Shall we fail France at last, by weakness, when victory lies within our reach? *Ce n'est pas possible. Jamais! Il nous faut la victoire, coûte qui coûte!*

"Eh, Francois, tu étais toujours le poète; mais c'est bien dit, ca."

"Aha! Le poète des usines à gaz!"

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He got up and held out his hand to help her to her feet.

*"Courage, Madame Chose, tout va bien chez nous!
Au 'voir!"*

"Au 'voir, mon vieux!"

And they parted, each with a nod to the other of understanding. I nodded understandingly, too—at the mass of Sulpice. I was well answered.

THE SOLDIER AND THE NURSE

HE was in hospital blue and sat comfortably smoking his "fag" in the corner of a third-class non-smoking carriage from Barnes to Waterloo. One foot rested on the opposite seat, his crutches strayed anywhere, and he was monarch of all he surveyed.

As the train was moving out of Putney Station the door suddenly opened and a lady got in. The soldier hastily lowered his foot and cleared his crutches out of the way.

She was in nurse's uniform and wore a decoration on her left breast.

"Don't stop smoking," she said, as he dropped his

THE SOLDIER AND THE NURSE 43

cigarette end on the floor and essayed to stamp it out with a crutch. Suddenly the nurse gave a little cry and scrambled for her pocket-handkerchief.

"What is it?" asked the wounded one, very much perturbed.

"I've got a cinder in my eye," she said.

"That's the worst of them large eyes, sister," remarked the soldier, pulling out a handkerchief that might have formed the foundation of a serviceable Union Jack, and tendering one huge corner of it. "Many good turns deserves one," he observed, "and I didn't expect a chance in Blighty. Lots of times I'd have liked a chance in France, but there was nothin' doin' there. The nurses used to do things for me as me own mother wouldn't 'ardly 'a thought of, though she's O.K., and I'm goin' 'ome to tea with her now. Better now? That's good."

"How long were you in France?" asked the nurse. "Were you hit more than once?"

"Peppered a bit at Loos," said the soldier, "got gassed later on, but nothin' serious, until last September, when one of the Boches haimed at a Tank and 'it me. It was what the oficers calls a cushy one, and instead o' goin' West I comes to Blighty. It's bin a proper scrap, ain't it?"

"Yes, and I've seen a good deal of it. Do you know, I used to long to earn a medal, and now I've got this one and am home on leave, I'm almost ashamed to be seen wearing it in the street."

44 PEACE—"MADE IN GERMANY"

"For why?" asked the puzzled soldier.

"Because I'm so weary of the war," said she, "and I wish it was over. At first I wanted as much as anyone to fight the Germans to a finish. In those days I thought it would be a matter of months, but it is spreading on into years. I've lost two brothers already and I've got two more fighting. But the Germans are offering peace at last, and perhaps we shall be able to come to terms and get what we want without fighting any more. If we only could!"

"Steady, sister, steady!" said the soldier. "P'raps you've not long bin on leave. You've seen some shockin' sights out there, I know. When I first come into 'orspital I was a bit shook up, too. Kinder anxious to see the larst of it. I'd got pals in different parts of the world—Lord knows 'ow many parts, and especially in France, where I'd made a lot I'd never knowed afore. And I've lorst some, too—that I 'ad. An' I felt somehow in the way you've bin talking. But not now I'm up again. If I 'ave only got one sound leg, I've got two crutches, and they're tidy weppins in a melly. Let a blinking 'Un try to put it acrost me if I 'ave only got two sticks and a swinger, and I'd give 'im the narpoos. You've seen a lot, but you ain't seen it all. No more 'ave I, but I've seen more'n you, an' I seen what I seen in France and Flanders, and the 'ealthier I gits the more I don't forget what I

THE SOLDIER AND THE NURSE 45

seen. There's things been done out there what I wouldn't see in England not for ever so. Look what they done to the Belgians. Look what they're a-doin' to 'em now. Don't talk to me of the Germans offerin' peace at last, nurse. They're as artful as a waggon-load o' monkeys and twice as mischievous. Don't you think they'd like peace now? I do. And for why? Why? To give 'em a chance to get on wiv it again!"

The soldier paused for breath, but his blood was up and his enthusiasm unexhausted.

"Got any kids? Beg pardon, Miss. Little nephews and nieces p'raps? Ah! The Boches don't pay no attention to little nephews and nieces. You may think that you'd like to see those little nephews and nieces grow up, and that the Boches 'ud let 'em. I've seen little nephews and nieces in Belgium that the Germans 'aven't given the chance to grow up. I've seen 'omes where the little nephews and nieces 'ave been buried in the ruins, and some where they 'aven't 'ad the chance of bein' buried at all, but they've bin ready for burial all right. You can talk about the Boches bein' ready for peace, nurse, and so they are. That I do believe. But no one is a-going' to give it to 'em, yet. Who's done all the tramplin' up to now? The 'Uns. Who's about reached the end of 'is tether? The Kayser. Who's squealin' for peace? Who's yelpin' 'Kamerad'? I never yet 'eard a

46 PEACE—"MADE IN GERMANY"

Frenchman or a Tommy yelp 'Kamerad,' except in fun.

"You carry on, sister, you'll feel better presently. Mark my words, that's 'ow you'll best please your two brothers who're still fighting and millions more like 'em. Don't you let 'em get discouraged by the idea that there's faint-'carts at home. What's it matter if your grub and your clobber corsts you more? I see a piece in the paper where it says you can't hardly get them things at all in Berlin. Peace! Yes, I don't fink. Not when the Boches arks for it, but when we tells 'em they've got to 'ave it, see? We've got to think of the little 'uns that are comin' on after us, sister, haven't we?"

Tears were still glistening in the sister's eyes as the train drew into Waterloo. She shook hands with the wounded soldier, and turned away.

"That cinder must have hurt her more than what she'd let on about," he said, as he gathered up his crutchcs and hobbled to the barrier.

THE PEACE IN FRANCE.

WE had passed through the Côte d'Or and were travelling southwards. Before the day had altogether gone we should be beside the Rhone and coming near to the great hills of the Dauphine. It was one of those magical, clear afternoons of winter when the high clouds are blue mountains capped with snow, and the low sunlight is all among the trees, covering their black branches for a brief moment with leaves of gold. As you looked out on that country-side you were very far from the war. Flanders and Picardy might have been on the other side of the world. Yet this golden, serene land was still France.

It was a slow train, stopping often, as if it were loth to leave that country and the magic of its afternoon. People came and went. They were nearly all soldiers and peasant women, and they spoke little. The men stared through the windows, as though they would fill their eyes with the sight of that country, those eyes that had seen many other things, or else they sat back wearily and tried to sleep. All the afternoon I watched the vineyards and the distant hills, and all the enchantment of that winter sunlight, like a golden incense going up from the fields.

The carriage was growing a little dark though

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there was still a clear light outside, and it had emptied until only two others were left. One was a soldier. He had come all the way with me, but I had hardly seen his face, for it had been turned continually to look through the window. The other was an old woman; she belonged to these vineyards of Burgundy. Her hair was not white, but silver, drawn in a few fine smooth strands across her forehead, and her face was serene, one of those peasant faces that seem hardly to be disturbed in their serenity by grief or joy.

At last the soldier looked away from the window and spoke.

"This is peace," he said, and nodded towards the hills.

The old woman shook her head.

"No," she answered. "We women are alone to work in it and be sad. It is not peace."

"It is peace to me," said the soldier, "coming from up there."

"Up there," she said, "you come from up there. You know. They will give us the real peace, they say. Is it not so?"

"They ask us for peace, but we will not give it them," said the soldier with emphasis.

"Ah, but why not, if they ask for it?"

"You have not seen up there. You would not know it for this France of ours. Those villages, those fields"—he waved his hand with a gesture of

anger—"they are gone. It is not like this world at all."

"But why wait?" she said. "I am old, and that is why I feel there is so little time to do things. Two years of war; is it not time to plough those fields again, and build those villages again, if the Boche seeks peace—and forget?"

"But there are scars," said he, "there are things that you cannot build again."

He drew out something from his pocket, a little bag that he opened very carefully. The old woman bent forward to see, for we were passing through trees and their shadow filled the carriage with a half light. Then from between the trunks a ray of the sun shot among us. It came and it was gone, but in that moment it fell on the soldier's hands, and what he held between his finger and thumb leaped with red light.

"It is a piece of the window of the Cathedral of Rheims," said he.

"It was like a jewel that moment," said the woman with awe.

"I heard," he said, "that an English Bishop wears a piece of that glass in his ring instead of a jewel."

"These English," said the old woman, "they are not all of the Church, but they understand."

"Oh, they understand. They are Allies."

That word was enough. It needed no adjective.

"They are Allies," the old woman echoed, and together they looked at the piece of glass. The light had gone out of it. It lay dull and colourless in his hand.

"That will never be mended," said he. "There is a scar."

"Yes," she said, "it cannot be mended. So why fight on? It is broken."

"All this day," he said, "I have been looking through the window. How much of France there is to fight for! I did not understand that before the war; nor its beauty; but I have seen other things now. And this is unbroken. We fight on for this. They would have peace now, but they are not beaten. Any year they may come again to break all this"—and he pointed through the window—"if we gave them peace now. Remember, they came before. You are old, you remember it."

"I have not forgotten," she said, "my husband——"

"Yes?" he said.

"He was at Sedan," she said simply, "and he never came back."

"And your sons?"

"I had but one, I was only nineteen then. He died at Verdun last spring."

"It has come to you twice," said he, "would you have it come to your grandsons and their children?"

The old woman was sitting with her hands clasped

on the handle of her basket. She bent her head a little lower.

"They will have no children, not now," she said, "they were boys when the war began and now——"

"They, too?" he asked very gently.

"They, too," she answered.

"You have suffered," he said, and that was all.

They sat for a little in silence as the train stopped.

"And yet," he went on, "there are others. There are others."

He was looking through the window. A girl was just opposite. She did not face us, but stood gazing away southwards down the line. We could see her very clear against the evening sky, with the profile of her face just beyond the edge of her heavy black veil.

"She has lost her husband," said the soldier, "but she carries his child."

The old woman looked and nodded. "Yes," she said, "I was as she is at the time of Sedan."

"Would you have her suffer it all again?" he asked, "as you have suffered it? Shall she lose her husband and yet not save her son?"

The old woman looked at him.

"You can suffer no more," he went on, "be patient until we have made it sure that none shall suffer again like you. That is why we fight on. We who suffer now, let us suffer a little longer. Another year? What is that after these two? If we can but make sure?"

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"It is true," she said, "I can suffer no more."

She nodded her head gently as if there were indeed some comfort in that thought.

The soldier took the little bag again from his pocket.

"It is precious to me," he said frankly, "but I can fight for peace, and you can only wait for it; and—you have little now. It may comfort you."

The old woman hesitated a moment and then patted his hand kindly and pushed it away, shaking her head.

"No," she said, "it has kept you from harm. Perhaps it will keep you safe till the end. I have little. That is true. But there is still the Church to comfort me.

"Yes," said he, "the Church and France."

"And France," she said. They looked together through the window at the peaceful fields of France.

A PEACE CONFERENCE.

I HEARD a delightful conversation the other day, which to my mind rather neatly summed up, and disposed of, the peace proposals that Germany put forward in December. I was leaving France for England, and had ridden into a village en route for Blighty, where, because there was an ever-blessed bath house, I graciously gave my servant five francs to get some food and told him to meet at the Church gate in an hour. I only had about eighteen miles to go to the train, and the main road was stiff with motor-lorries, any one of which could take me there, so it was more a question of killing time than hurrying.

I remembered the Church very well, for a large image of Christ built into the outside of the wall had suffered on the day that the Hun, searching for Brigade Headquarters, had shelled the vicinity. There I sat down on a pile of trench frames thinking how many things had happened since June. The French troops were almost as frequent visitors in the little village

as the English, so as a Poilu went through the gate with a punctilious French salute, and "Bo' jour, M'sieur," I got up to my feet and asked him if he were going into the Church. I knew I had some time to spend, and rather liked talking to those incomparable infantrymen and looking at old buildings.

"Mais, oui, M'sieur," he said gravely. "The old friend of my mother lives here, and my mother writes to say 'go and see her and give her my respects.' I have been to her house and they say 'She has gone to the Church,' so I come."

"Pardon," I said, and sat down again on my pile of trench frames.

Presently, just as I was wondering whether I wanted the Poilu and the old friend of his mother to come first or my servant, I heard steps behind me and threw my cigarette across the road.

"The old friend of my mother, M'sieu," the man said; and then to the old lady, "M'sieu is of our Allies, the British."

Then, as I explained that I was going home and must wait there for my servant, the old lady said, "But we will wait and talk to M'sieur. It is a pleasure."

So we sat down; the Poilu only on direct request; and I tried to learn something about the village, the Church and a peculiar old shrine away at the near cross roads, but unfortunately the old lady

had not lived there long and the Poilu was as strange to the place as I, so that whether I willed or not the conversation swung round to the war; as what else could you expect? Right opposite to us was a sandbagged dressing-post, and two motor-ambulances stood patiently waiting for freight. Casualties came thus far on a stretcher, for the roads beyond were impassable to drive wounded men over at the time.

"Mon Dieu," the old lady said, "but I am glad they talk of peace."

Now you can understand that, though I love the French, I do not feel that I know them so intimately as to be able to realise exactly their meaning. A Londoner misunderstands a Lancashire man entirely as I can witness, so I looked at the Poilu with just the same expression that a man has when he says "I leave it to you, partner."

"Yes," the Frenchman said, "so am I. The Boches talk of what they want. I am glad they want peace."

Verbally it was almost the same remark, but unless you heard the expressions and saw the faces you could never realise how the one seemed to impugn the other.

"As for me, I am old," she went on, "and my man, he is old, too. It is right to fight for France, but the Boche he has learned his lesson and will leave us alone after this."

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The Frenchman actually frowned, so that the care-free expression, that so generally greets you from under those steel helmets, fled.

"Yes," he said. "He will leave us alone for a while; will leave us alone till you are in Heaven, perhaps even till I die, too; and then?"

"Two sons I have lost, M'sieur," the old lady said, turning to me; "one more is crippled for life; one daughter is a widow, and I do not complain. It is for France. But if the Boche wishes now to stop, I do not know, M'sieur, I cannot but feel——"

The young man rose to his feet: "Listen, Madame," he said, "you are a friend of my mother. Once when I was very young my mother was in the village, and as the boys came out of school she saw big Jacques beating another boy. I saw it, too, for I was close behind. I was not as big as Jacques, none of us were; but I was bigger than the other, the boy he beat. 'Pierre, my little one,' my mother said to me at night when I had said my prayers, and she was taking out the candle that my father read by in the kitchen (for we are poor), 'why did you not help that little boy when Jacques beat him?'"

Then as though wishing to spare the old lady's feelings he turned to me.

"'Because Jacques is bigger than I am,' I said, and my mother put the candle back on the little

bracket that I had made and nailed up with so much pride.

“ ‘But my little son,’ she said, ‘did you not know that Jacques was wrong?’ She was always loving even when it was necessary to scold. ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘but he is also very big!’ Then my mother looked at me so that I began to cry. I was only young. I buried my face in the pillow, I kicked my feet in rage, M’sieur, for I felt shame as I pray God I may not feel it again.

“Next morning I went to the smithy where there was a friend who could fight! ‘How long,’ I asked, ‘would it take me to learn how to beat Jacques? I am strong,’ and I bared my arm. The friend was a good man; he is my sergeant now; and he said, ‘The arm is all right, Pierre, but the fight is won by the heart. Jacques he is a coward, or he would be too proud to beat little boys. I will teach you something, and for the rest it is courage and faith’ ”

At that moment my servant appeared, and I waved to him to go away, spreading the fingers of my hand out as a sign for him to come back in five minutes.

“A week later, Madame,” the Frenchman said quietly, turning to the old lady, “I fought Jacques by the last little stall of the market on a Wednesday, and I beat him. It is true that at first he hit me harder than I hit him; but it is also true that I beat him, Madame. You see my mother had been

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so silent for a week past that I was tired of crying myself to sleep.

"When I had Jacques half beaten he asked to stop, and he pointed out that my nose was then bleeding badly, and that he had torn a corner from my blouse. He had it in his hand. I was pretty sore, and I felt like stopping then, but well I knew that Jacques would surely beat me another day if I did. So I flew at him harder than ever, and we fought till I had him crying out; and still we fought; and presently he ran from me squealing like a pig. Then I knew that I might go home and repair myself, for Jacques was truly beaten. I slept without tears that night, and my mother was not silent when she took away the candle."

FIAT PAX IN VIRTUTE TUÁ

I MET him this morning in one of our London parks. "He" was a soldier arrayed in a blue uniform and a red tie, while on the arm of his khaki overcoat he bore the blue brassard denoting that he was a patient in one of the numerous military hospitals. He limped to the bench on which I was seated (this was quite one of the mildest New Year's days within my short recollection) and presently we fell into conversation. I gathered, among other things, that he was an old public school boy, that he had taken his degree at the 'Varsity and was reading for Holy orders when the war broke out. He at once enlisted in a corps consisting almost entirely of old public school boys and had been drafted overseas about the middle of 1915. After many vicissitudes he received in 1916 several fragments of shrapnel in his right side, and one in his right foot, consequently here he was, trying to get over the effects of it all.

It was natural enough that we should talk about "over there," and, I suppose, natural enough that we should also compare our impressions of "over

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here." Finally our conversation turned on the prospects of peace and I was anxious to hear what "the boys" thought about it.

"Well, it is just this, sir," he answered. "Of course, we should all be glad to see the end of this business. The bulk of us are not soldiers by profession, and this war has been playing old Harry with the careers we or our people had mapped out for us. Take myself; but for this wretched war I should have been a parson by now. At the same time we want the end of this war to be really the end, and it is obvious that this cannot be so as long as Germany bumbles about her 'victorious armies.' We want to see the show finished, but not half finished, and surely we have some right of say in this matter. After all we are the chief sufferers. As you know, sir, it is not a picnic out there, yet the boys where I am would willingly go back to-morrow sooner than see a patched-up peace, with the prospect of having to go through all this again, say ten years hence."

That man summed up the whole situation as well as the feeling of the men at the front. I have tried to boil down his sentiments still further in the words *Fiat pax in virtute tuâ*—"let there be peace in thy strength," and I take it that, human nature being what it is, peace can never be divorced from strength without endangering her very existence. Surely this is a truth which is as old as the Gospel, yea and older. "When a strong man armed

keepeth his house," said the Prince of Peace, "then are his goods in peace." That peace is broken only when a stronger man comes along. The Romans had only one advice to those who wished for peace: *Si vis pacem, para bellum*, and woe betide the nation who ignores that advice. "If only England had been more prepared," said a lady to me the other day, "the war would have been over by now." "Madam," I answered, "if England had been prepared there would never have been any war at all."

We recognise that a nation, as well as an individual, can make mistakes. The hopeless individual is one who repeats a mistake, and so it is with nations. I think that the reason why the peace-seeds which Germany has scattered so lavishly over the soil of the allied countries have fallen on stony ground is just that the people have realised the truth of this great principle. They have been caught once and they decline to be caught again. "Germany is not beaten," says Kaiser William, and in the strict military sense he speaks the truth this time; but very surely the Allies are not beaten either. How then can there be peace? For by peace, I mean, as I take it we all mean, real and enduring peace; a secure prospect, and no mere temporary truce.

"We *are* beaten," says one of the Kaiser's subjects, "we are beaten by hunger! but not by

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arms. . . . We have won where fighting is concerned. . . . England alone has done this against us! Therefore we decree infinite hate and revenge to England! Our great and only mistake was our fleet. It was not large enough. But we swear that in a few years it will be mightier than the English Fleet has ever been or can be. . . . We shall create a mighty combination, so strong that we can annihilate England. . . . It is for this work that we have so carefully preserved our fleet during this war. In three years we shall begin again to strike at England. . . . At this very moment when peace is on all lips we remember England. After some show of diplomatic resistance we shall concede all that England demands. . . . But on that day when peace is signed, we shall begin again to create a new fleet, and within three years we start afresh. And then we shall be a hundred times stronger than now."

Now the above is an extract from what purports to be the conversation of a German who holds one of the highest positions in his country. The documents from which I have taken these words may be a forgery, the report may be bogus, but if that is the case I can only say that it gives an admirable précis of the present position, together with the possibilities of what might happen were peace signed at an early date. After all, though, morally, she was defeated in 1914, when her brutal plans failed,

Germany is *not* yet beaten and broken by force of arms. Look at the map. No doubt she is beginning to feel the effect of the blockade, but to say that she is starving is certainly an exaggeration. The Germans manage things too well for that to come to pass just yet. She has her fleet almost intact and has preserved it. So the programme is not an impossible one and, I ask you, is it good enough?

You may say that the Allies could make Germany sign a treaty, and I have no doubt that she is ready to sign anything; but is she more likely to respect a new treaty than she did the old "scrap of paper" treaty? Does she deserve to be trusted? You may say that the civilian population of Germany is suffering, but has not Germany herself told the world that the proper way to wage war is to leave the civilian population of a hostile country without eyes to weep with? Does she deserve mercy? Does she consider the civilian population of Belgium when she sends a multitude from that country into exile and slavery at the very time, mark you, that she is appealing to the dictates of humanity? No, peace can only come when the Allies are strong enough to prevent these things happening once and for all. That time has not yet come. But come it assuredly will. And then, when Germany's engine of destruction is broken, we shall have true peace.

I agree with my wounded soldier. Those who have been "out there" have earned the right to

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• speak. They know what war is. Even as I write the vision of those shell-torn roads, ruined houses and blazing farmsteads of Northern France rises clear before my eyes. But ghastly and terrible as the reality is I should rather that it endured for a season than that it should fade for a time only to blossom forth again a hundredfold more terrible. *Fiat pax*, let there be peace with all one's heart, but let that peace be founded on such sure foundation of strength as will cause it to last through the ages of posterity. Under this condition only can it be then said that the gallant lads sleeping their last sleep on the battlefields of Europe will not have laid down their lives in vain; under this condition only will the future generations rise and call us blessed.

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