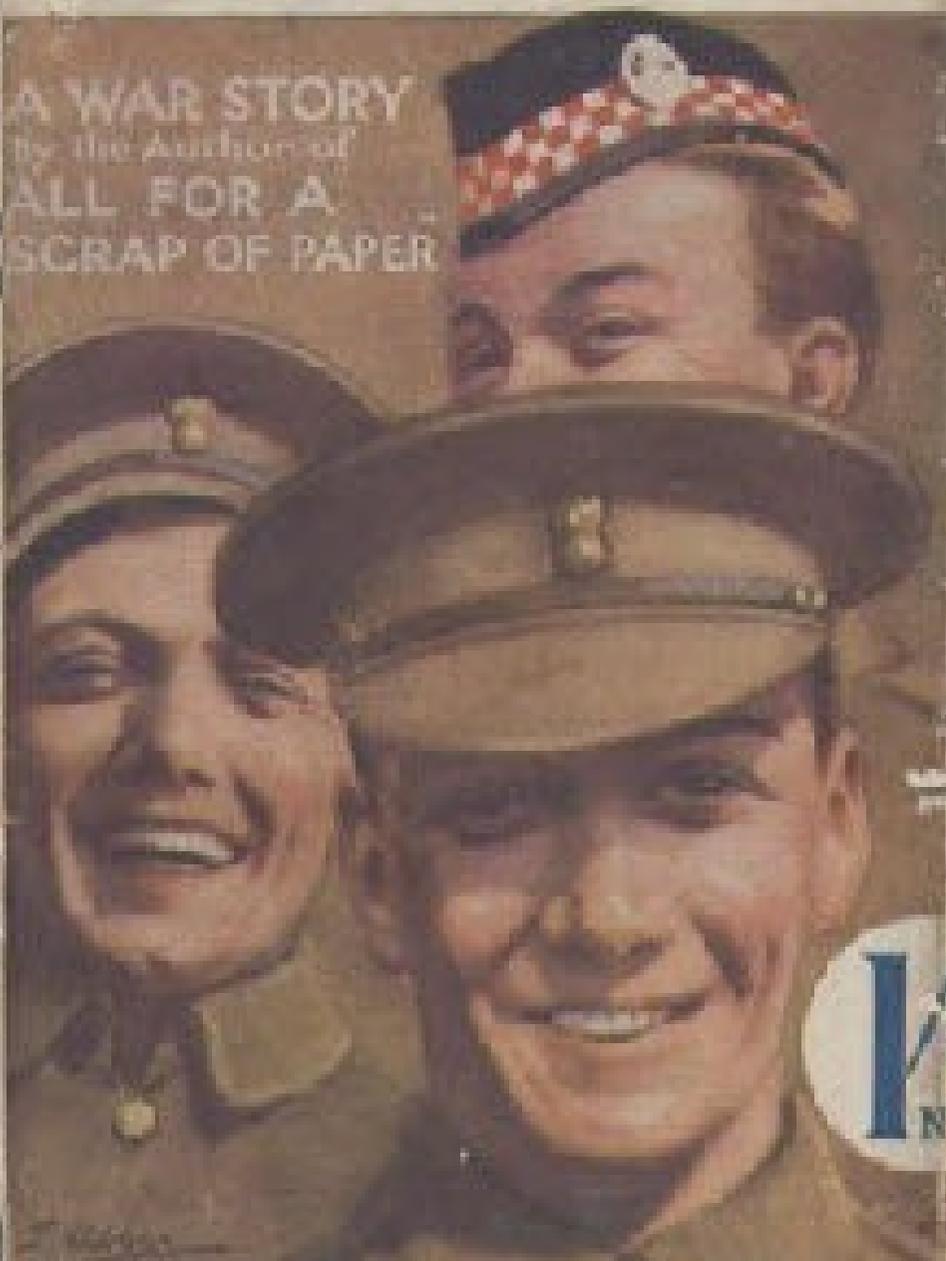


TOMMY

by
**JOSEPH
HOCKING**

Author of
**ALL FOR A
SCRAP OF PAPER**

A WAR STORY
by the Author of
**ALL FOR A
SCRAP OF PAPER**



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HODDER &
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JOSEPH HOCKING

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TOMMY

BY
JOSEPH HOCKING

AUTHOR OF
"ALL FOR A SCRAP OF PAPER"
"DEARER THAN LIFE" ETC.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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TWO GREAT WAR STORIES BY JOSEPH HOCKING

ALL FOR A SCRAP OF PAPER
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NOTE

My only qualification for writing this simple story of "Tommy" is that I have tried to know him, and that I greatly admire him. I met him before he joined the army, when for more than six months I addressed recruiting meetings. I have also been with him in training camps, and spent many hours talking with him. It was during those hours that he opened his heart to me and showed me the kind of man he is. Since then I have visited him in France and Flanders. I have been with him down near La Bassée, and Neuve Chapelle. I have talked with him while great guns were booming as well as during his hours of well-earned rest, when he was in a garrulous mood, and was glad to crack a joke "wi' a man wearin' a black coat." I have also been with him up at Ypres, when the shells were shrieking over our heads, and the "pep, pep, pep" of machine guns heralded the messengers of death. We stood side by side in the front trenches, less than a hundred yards from the German sand-bags, when to lift one's head meant a Hun's bullet through one's brain, and when "woolly bears" were common. So although I am not a soldier, and have probably fallen into technical errors in telling the story of "Tommy," it is not because he is a stranger to me, or because I have not tried to know him.

Only a small part of this story is imagination. Nearly every incident in the book was told me by "Tommy" himself, and while the setting of my simple tale is fiction, the tale itself is fact.

That is why I hope the story of "Tommy" will not only be read by thousands of men in khaki, but by their fathers and mothers and loved ones who bade them go to the Front, and who earnestly pray for their speedy and victorious return, even as I do.

JOSEPH HOCKING.
PRIORS' CORNER, TOTTERIDGE, HERTS,
February 1916.

Tommy

CHAPTER I

The Brunford Town Hall clock was just chiming half-past three as Tom Pollard left his home in Dixon Street and made his way towards the Thorn and Thistle public-house. It was not Tom's intention to stay long at the Thorn and Thistle, as he had other plans in view, nevertheless something drew him there. He crossed the tram lines in St. George's Street, and, having stopped to exchange some rustic jokes with some lads who stood at the corner of the street, he hurried across the open space and quickly stood on the doorsteps of the public-house.

The weather was gloriously fine, and for a wonder the air in the heart of the town was pure and clear. That was accounted for by the fact that it was Sunday, and the mills were idle. Throughout the week-days, both in summer and in winter, the atmosphere of Brunford is smoke laden, while from a hundred mills steamy vapours are emitted which makes that big manufacturing town anything but a health resort. Tom was making his way up the passage towards the bar, when the door opened and a buxom, bold-eyed, red-cheeked girl of about twenty-four stopped him.

"You're late, Tom," she said.

"Am I?" replied Tom. "I didn't mean to be."

"I was thinking you weren't coming at all. Some young men I know of wouldn't have been late if I'd said to them what I said to you on Friday night." Then she looked at him archly.

"I couldn't get away before," replied Tom. Evidently he was not quite comfortable, and he did not return the girl's glances with the warmth she desired.

"Anyhow I am free till half-past five," she went on. "I don't know what father and mother would say if they knew I was walking out with you; but I don't mind. Do you like my new dress, Tom?"

Tom looked at her admiringly; there was no doubt that, after her own order, she was a striking-looking girl, and her highly coloured attire was quite in accord with her complexion.

"Jim Scott was here half an hour ago," she went on; "he badly wanted me to go with him, but I wouldn't."

Tom looked more uncomfortable than ever; he remembered the purpose for

which he had set out, and was sorry that he had called at the Thorn and Thistle at all, even although the girl evidently favoured him more than any of her other admirers.

“I just called to say I couldn’t come for a walk with you this afternoon,” he said, looking on the ground. “You see I have an appointment.”

“Appointment!” cried the girl. “Who with?”

“Oh, with no one in particular; only I must keep it.”

The girl’s eyes flashed angrily. “Look here,” she cried, “you are still sweet on Alice Lister; I thought you had given up all that Sunday-school lot.”

“Well, I have noan been to Sunday School,” said Tom.

“Ay, but you’re going to meet Alice Lister now, and that is why you can’t go wi’ me.” Evidently the girl was very angry, and a look of jealousy flashed from her eyes. Still there could be no doubt that she was very fond of Tom and meant if possible to capture him.

“I can’t go out wi’ you this afternoon, and—and——but there, I’m off.”

For a moment the girl seemed on the point of speaking to him still more angrily, and perhaps of bidding him to leave her for good. She quickly altered her mind, however, and seemed determined to use all her blandishments.

“Ay, Tom,” she said. “Tha’rt too good to throw thyself away on the goody-goody Alice Lister sort. Tha’rt too much of a man for that, else I should never have got so fond of thee.”

“Art’a really fond of me, Polly?” asked Tom, evidently pleased by Polly’s confession.

“I’m not goin’ to say any more,” replied the girl. And then she laughed. “I was thinkin’ that after we’d been to Scott’s Park you might come back to tea. I don’t believe father and mother would mind. Father wur sayin’ only this morning that you’d got brains. You took three prizes at the Mechanics’ Institute last winter, and he said that if you got manufacturing on your own, you’d make brass.”

“Did he say that?” asked Tom eagerly,

“Ay, he did, only this morning.”

“But I have no capital,” said Tom rather sadly.

“Father’s saved money,” replied Polly eagerly. “The Thorn and Thistle’s a good house and we have good company; and if father liked a lad, especially if I recommended him, he could easily find money to start a small mill. But there, I suppose you are only thinking of Alice Lister.”

The Town Hall clock chimed the three-quarters, and, much as he wanted to stay with Polly, he moved towards the door and said, “Well, I must be goin’ now.”

Again anger flashed from Polly’s eyes, but still controlling her temper she said: “Ay, but you’ll come back this evening, won’t you, Tom? Jim Dixon’s coming to tea, and if you’re not here, and he wur to ask me to go out for a walk with him tonight, I shouldn’t have any excuse for refusing.”

There could be no doubt about it that, to Tom, Polly Powell looked very alluring. She was rather older than he, and her beauty was of a highly coloured order. At that moment Tom's mind was much distracted, nevertheless as the sound of the deep-toned bell in the Town Hall tower died away he determined to take his leave.

"And I thought we might have such a nice time, too," she said, following him. "But never mind, you'll be back this evening. Ay, Tom lad, tha doesn't know when tha'art well off." And she gave him her most bewitching smile.

Tom hurried up Liverpool Road with the sound of Polly's voice in his ears and the memory of the flash in her great black eyes in his mind. "She is a grand lass," he reflected, "and she's fair gone on me too; and what's more she's not so finickin' as some lasses are. After all, why should I be so straitlaced? She's a lass as loves good company, she likes a lark, and—and——" After that Tom became thoughtful.

Tom Pollard was typical of thousands of lads who dwell in the manufacturing districts of Lancashire. His father and mother had been weavers, and while his mother had ceased going to the mill, his father still earned his thirty shillings a week behind the looms. They did not belong to the best class of Lancashire operatives, and Tom's home influence was not all it might have been. That was why, years before, many wondered that Tom promised to turn out so well. He was not particularly clever, but he possessed a large share of the proverbial Lancashire sharpness and common sense; he had an eye to the main chance, and dreamt of becoming something better than an ordinary weaver. For that reason he had attended some technical classes at the Mechanics' Institute, and, as Polly Powell had reminded him, had only a few months before taken prizes there. Young as he was, he had already been promised a Tackler's job, which meant that he would be a kind of foreman, and have the oversight of a small part of a mill. This, Tom was sure, would open the way to a more responsible position, and then if he had good luck he might in a few years start manufacturing for himself. Many of the mill-owners in Brunford were, a few years before, poor men, while now, owing to a great boom in the cotton trade, they were quite wealthy men. During the last few months, however, Tom's best friends had not been quite so hopeful about him. He had been a frequent visitor at the Thorn and Thistle; and he had altogether given up attendance at Sunday School. This was considered a bad sign in Brunford, where the great bulk of the respectable young men attend one of the many Sunday Schools in the town.

As Tom neared the Town Hall his face changed somewhat, and a look of eager expectancy came into his eyes. He noted with satisfaction that the yard outside a big building was empty. "I'm in time after all," he reflected. "They've just sung the last hymn."

A few minutes later several hundred young people came into the street, and

Tom was not long in singling out one for whom he had evidently been watching. This was a young girl of about twenty years of age, and it was easy to see at a glance that she was superior to those whom she accompanied. Her face was refined, her eyes large and intelligent; and her neat, well-fitting clothes did not suggest the flamboyancy of Polly Powell's adornments.

"There's Tom Pollard waiting for you, Alice," said one of the girls. Alice Lister flushed as the girl spoke, and the colour which rose to her cheeks told its own tale.

"If I were you, Alice," said another, "I should keep my eye on him. Sin' he give up going to Sunday School he's noan so much of a catch; besides, I saw him with Polly Powell last Sunday evening after he went home with you; and Polly Powell is noan your sort."

Alice did not reply to this, but her lips trembled; evidently the words wounded her. All the time Tom stood smoking a cigarette. Although he had come to meet Alice, he did not like the idea of going up to claim her while so many girls were around.

"Ay, Tom," said one of the girls, shouting to him. "How's Polly Powell?"

Tom did not reply; his ready wit left him for the moment.

"If I were Alice," said another, "I'd give thee the sack. Tha's noan fitted to go with her."

"Ay," said another, "and Polly's only just playing wi' him; she's got more nor one string to her bow, has Polly. And she'd noan look at thee, Tom, if the young landlord at the Bull and Butcher had made up to her."

Lancashire folks are not slow in speaking their minds, and they have no false delicacy about telling people their opinion of them.

"Well," said Tom quietly, "I fly higher game than you, Emily Bilson, anyhow. I have only just got to hold up my finger to the whole lot on you, and you'd come after me. But I'm noan going to do it; I've got too much respect for myself."

Almost as if by arrangement the girls separated, and Tom found himself walking up Liverpool Road by the side of Alice Lister. Neither of them spoke for some minutes. Tom didn't know what to say, while Alice was evidently thinking deeply.

"Have you been to the Young Men's Class this afternoon," she asked presently.

"Nay."

"Why?" asked the girl, looking at him steadily.

"It's noan in my line," replied Tom. "That kind of thing'll do for kids, but when people get grown up they want something better."

"Better and cleverer people than you, Tom, don't give it up," replied the girl.

Tom continued to walk by Alice's side, looking rather sulky.

He and Alice had begun to walk out together a little more than a year before,

much to the surprise of their mutual friends. For Alice was not only better educated than Tom, but she moved in rather a better circle. Alice's father was one who, beginning life as a weaver, had by steady perseverance and good common sense become a small manufacturer. He was anything but a rich man, but he was what the people called "Doin' vary weel"—one who with good luck would in about ten years' time "addle a tidy bit of brass." Alice was his only daughter. He had never allowed her to go to the mill, but had sent her to a fairly good school until she was sixteen years of age, since which time she had stayed at home with her mother, and assisted her in the house work. Alice had continued her education, however. She had a natural gift for music and possessed a fine contralto voice. She had quite a local reputation as a pianist and was constantly in demand to sing at concerts. She was more than ordinarily intelligent too, and was a lover of good books. Added to this she attended classes in the town for French and German; and had on more than one occasion been invited to the houses of big manufacturers. That was why people wondered at her walking out with Tom Pollard. He, although looked upon as a sharp lad, was not, as was generally agreed, "up to Alice's mark."

Still facts were facts, and there could be no doubt about it that Alice showed a great preference for Tom, and, in spite of the fact that her father and mother were not at all pleased, had allowed him to accompany her home on several occasions.

"What are you going to do, Tom?" asked the girl.

"What am I going to do?" queried Tom. "I don't know that I am going to do anything. What do you mean, Alice?"

"I mean that you must make your choice."

"Choice? What choice?"

"I should not have met you this afternoon," replied Alice Lister quietly, "but for the fact that I want to come to an understanding. I have not been blind, neither have I been deaf, these last few months; a change has come over you, and—and you will have to choose."

Tom knew what she meant well enough, but he pretended to be ignorant.

"What has come over you, Alice? What do you mean? Surely," he went on, "you are not taking any notice of what Emily Bilson said. Just as though a lad can't speak to any lass but his own!"

"Tom," went on the girl quietly, "you know what you told me twelve months ago; you know, too, what my father and mother said when they saw us together; it has not been pleasant for me to listen to people's gossip, especially when I know that most of it is true. I have been very fond of you and I don't deny it; if I hadn't I should not have walked out with you, but I want to tell you this—you have to make your choice this afternoon; either you are going to give up me, or you are going to give up the Thorn and Thistle and all it means."

"You're jealous of Polly Powell," said Tom, with an uneasy laugh.

"I'm jealous of your good name, Tom, jealous of evil influence."

"Evil influence? What evil influence?"

"Going to the Thorn and Thistle has done you a great deal of harm; it has caused you to give up your Young Men's Class, and—and—but there, I needn't talk any more about it. You understand what I mean. It must be either one or the other, Tom."

"You mean that I must either give up you or Polly Powell?"

"It means more than that," replied the girl, "it means that you must either give up me or give up going to the Thorn and Thistle. You used to be a teetotaler, Tom."

"As though any lad's a teetotaler in these days," laughed the young fellow. "Come now, Alice, you are not so narrow-minded as that. I am nearly twenty-three now, and if I want a glass of beer surely I can have it. You don't mean to say that everybody but teetotalers are going to the bad."

"You know very well what I mean, Tom. You are not the kind of young man you were, and either you give up these things or we part company."

"Nay, Alice, doan't be narrow-minded. I suppose," he added bitterly, "that you are beginning to look higher than me, that you are thinking o' one of the manufacturers. I hear that Harry Briarfield was up at your house to supper the other night."

They had by this time left the Liverpool Road and had entered Scott's Park, which during the last few years had become a rendezvous for the people of the town, especially on Sunday afternoons.

"You know," went on the girl, "that it made no difference to me when people told me that I was choosing a weaver. I didn't think about it, I only thought of you. But, Tom, I shall never marry any one who—who can find his pleasure in such places as the Thorn and Thistle, and who sneers at Sunday School."

"You mean," said Tom, rather angrily, "that if you continue to keep company with me I must feed on your religious lolly-pops."

An angry flush mounted the girl's cheek, but she continued to speak quietly.

"Tom," she said, "will you answer me truly? Do you find anything at the Thorn and Thistle better than you found in the young men's class? You sneer at religion, but religion does no one any harm; rather it always does good; anyhow, it's everything to me, and you have to make your choice."

Tom looked at her steadily. He knew what she meant, knew too that the time had come when he would have to make his choice. At that moment he saw what Polly Powell meant to his life, saw, too, that if he followed the road in which he had been walking during the last few months he would have to give up Alice Lister. He saw more than this, for at that moment Polly Powell's blandishments had no effect on him. She appeared to him in her true light—a coarse, vulgar girl.

"You don't care about me like you did," he said angrily. "You are getting tired

of me.”

“If that were true I should not speak to you in this way,” and her voice became tremulous. “But I am not going to throw away my life, Tom; there’s something more in life than—than love.”

“What?” he asked.

“Duty, God,” was the reply.

Tom again laughed uneasily. Alice Lister lived in a different world from that in which Polly Powell lived; they breathed a different atmosphere; they spoke a different language. Yes, he would have to make his choice.

“I would rather have you than forty Polly Powells,” he burst out, “I would really, Alice, but—but——”

“There must be no buts, Tom, if—if you want me. Oh, Tom, can’t you see? You know that what I say is right and—and——”

He saw her lips quiver; saw the tears start to her eyes. He knew that his association with the daughter of the landlord of the Thorn and Thistle was coarsening him, making him have lower standards of life, making everything poorer, more sordid. Whenever he was with Alice he wanted to be better and truer, and she always made him ashamed of coarse, base things.

“Alice, do you love me?” and his voice became almost hoarse.

“If I didn’t would I talk to you like this?” was her answer.

A crisis had come into Tom’s life, and he knew it. Two forces were fighting in his heart, two angels were battling for his soul. At that moment it seemed as though his better angel were going to win the victory; he was on the point of telling Alice that he would never go into the Thorn and Thistle again, never speak to Polly Powell again, when he heard a familiar voice close to him.

“I say, Pollard, you are coming to-night, aren’t you?”

Tom turned and saw a well-dressed young fellow close beside him. He had come to Brunford some three years before to learn the cotton trade, and during the last few months he and Tom had been very friendly. Tom was rather proud of this, because young Harry Waterman was his superior, both socially and from an educational standpoint. Waterman claimed to be the son of a squire who lived in Warwickshire, who had sent him to Brunford to learn cotton manufacturing because more money was to be made out of it than by sticking to the land.

Waterman was a tall, handsome young fellow, with a florid complexion and light-brown hair. He had met Tom at the Mechanics’ Institute Classes, and the young weaver had been much flattered when the other had at various times discarded all social distinctions and been friendly with him. It was he who had laughed Tom out of going to the Young Men’s Classes on Sunday afternoon, and told him that religion was only fit for ignorant people and women. Waterman professed to have travelled a good deal, and had told Tom that after leaving an English Public School he had studied in one of the German Universities and taken

his degree there. He had described to the simple Lancashire boy the life of Berlin, and Leipzig, Munich, and other German cities. Tom had been a willing pupil and thought what wonderful people the Germans were. He felt proud too that young Harry Waterman had evidently taken a liking to him. "You will come, won't you?" went on Waterman; "just the same lot, you know."

"Ay, I think so," said Tom.

"That's all right, then; we'll look out for you about seven."

"Where are you going to-night?" asked Alice.

"Only with Mr. Waterman," replied Tom.

"But where?"

"To a kind of club we have at the Rose and Crown. Come now, Alice, it's no use looking like that; you can't expect me to be a ninny. Besides, Waterman's a swell, he is the son of a squire."

"That is how you are going to spend your Sunday evening, then?" said the girl.

"Certainly," replied Tom. He felt angry that Alice should interfere with his pleasures. Besides, he remembered that Waterman had once said to him that any fellow was a fool who allowed a woman to interfere with his pleasures.

"I see you have made your choice," said Alice.

"Look here, Alice," said Tom angrily, "if you mean that you expect me to behave like a Methody parson, I have. I mean to get on, and Waterman can help me; and—and—— I say, Alice, don't look like that!" for the look in the girl's eyes had almost destroyed the influence which Waterman had over him.

"I am going home now," said the girl.

"May I come with you?" asked Tom.

"That depends," replied the girl; "either you must be as you were when I first walked out with you, or we must part."

"You mean good-bye for ever?"

"Just that," she replied. "Oh, Tom, can't you see! Can't you see! Won't you promise, Tom? I don't know anything about young Waterman; but I know he is not having a good influence on you, and, Tom, why do you want to break my heart?"

Still Tom was undecided. He wanted Alice more than words could say; he felt there was no girl like her in all the wide world, and he knew that the last few months had not done him any good. But there was another side. He was only a weaver, and he had been proud to associate with Waterman, who was friendly with big manufacturers. But to give up Alice? No, he could not do that. He heard a loud laugh close by his side, and walking towards the Band-stand he saw Polly Powell with Jim Dixon.

Yes, Alice looked pale and bloodless beside Polly Powell. Polly had no squeamish narrow-minded notions. Polly loved a good joke and a laugh, and was not tied down to Sunday-school rule. The daughter of the landlord of the Thorn

and Thistle caught Tom's eye.

"I shall see you to-night, shan't I, Tom?" she said, looking at him languishingly, and then passed on.

Alice had become pale almost to the lips, and there was a look of steady resolution in her eyes. "You must make your choice, Tom," she said.

Tom looked at her for a second, then cast his eyes towards the spot where Polly Powell stood. He felt madly jealous of Jim Dixon at that moment. What right had he to be with such a girl as Polly? Besides, why should he give up all the fun of life? Why should he become strait-laced and silly?

Alice Lister held out her hand. "Good-bye, Tom," she said, "I see that your choice is made." And then she walked away.

Tom stood gazing after her for a few seconds, undecided what to do. Something, he could not tell what, urged him to run after her; to promise her what she wanted him to promise; to renounce the life which, although it might not be very bad, was still not good for him. He knew what she meant, knew too that she was in the right. No, he could not, would not give her up; he loved her too much. Then he felt a hand upon his arm.

"Ay, so you have got rid of her, have you? You must come back wi' me to tea." Polly's hand was caressing, and her eyes burnt brightly; evidently she had been watching him, and had left Jim Dixon for him. He turned and walked by Polly's side.

That night as Tom walked back to Dixon Street his feet were unsteady and his voice was husky and uncertain.

"What's matter with thee?" said his mother as he entered the house.

"Nowt's matter wi' me."

"Ay, but there is. Thou'st bin' drinkin' agean."

"Weel, and what if I have? It's cost me nowt."

"Ay, I know: thou'st been to the Thorn and Thistle after that Polly Powell lass. Ay, you ninny. I thought you looked higher nor that. What about Alice Lister?"

"She's got too much pie-jaw for me," said Tom sulkily. "I'm noan goin' to be a Methody parson."

"Thou'st goin' to be a bigger fool than I thought tha ever could be," retorted his mother angrily.

"That tak's a bit o' doin'," replied Tom as he fumbled with his boot laces.

"Thou'st gi'en up a nice lass for a brazen-faced 'uzzy; thou'rt an addle-headed ninny. Can'st'a see?"

"Ay, I tak' after my mother," was Tom's reply as he made his way upstairs. "Bein' fools runs in the family."

"It must or I should never 'a' reared thee," shouted his mother after him.

CHAPTER II

What I have related took place on the first Sunday in June in the year 1914. Brunford, a large manufacturing town which stood well-nigh in the centre of the cotton district of Lancashire, had enjoyed what was called "a great boom in trade." Mills had been working overtime, and money had been earned freely. During the last five years poor men had become rich, while the operatives had had their share in the general prosperity. This fact was manifest in the general life of the town. The sober and thrifty part of the population had increased their savings. Hundreds of people had bought their own cottages, and had laid by for a rainy day. The thriftless were none the better for the prosperity which abounded, rather they were the worse. Big wages had only meant increased drunkenness and increased misery. Still all the people hoped that good trade would continue and that there would be plenty of work.

On the following day Tom went to work as usual, but he felt that a new element had come into his life. He was not given to self-analysis, but while on the one hand he felt suddenly free, he knew on the other that he had sacrificed something which meant a great deal to him. Still he would not think about it. After all, all the time he had been keeping company with Alice he felt like a man tied to the end of a rope. He would now have his liberty. He was glad to be free from a girl who made him uncomfortable when he drank a glass of beer or went out to enjoy himself.

Tom was by no means a hero. There was a great deal of good in his nature, but there were coarse elements which affected him strongly. If Polly Powell had not appeared, it is possible, such was Alice's influence over him, that he would have remained true to his former ambitions, and probably have risen in the social scale. He was intelligent, and possessed a large degree of what the Lancashire people called gumption. On the other hand he was the child of his surroundings and of his order. The coarse life of the town had gripped him, and his home influences had not helped him toward the ideal which Alice Lister had helped him to strive after.

"Ay, Tom, I 'ear as Alice Lister has give thee the sack," said a youth a few days after Tom had parted from Alice.

"Maybe 'twas t'other way around," replied Tom.

"Why, yo doan't main that you chucked 'er?"

"She wur too goody-goody for me," replied Tom. "I am noan baan to be a saint, I am going to enjoy mysen."

"Weel, tha' won't be a saint if tha' has much to do with Polly Powell. She's noan a saint," and the lad laughed meaningly. "Still her feyther's got a bit of brass. I reckon he will have all thine, Tom; Jim Parkin told me that tha' spent four

shillings at the Thorn and Thistle last night.”

“Well, what if I did?” asked Tom.

“Ay, it’s noan my business, but I think thee’rt a fool. If a lass like Alice Lister took up wi’ me, I would not throw myself away on Polly Powell. Thou’lt ne’er mak’ much on ’er. She’ll lead thee a dog’s life, Tom, and tak’ all tha’ brass.”

“Well, I reckon it’s my business,” retorted Tom.

“Then it’s a fool’s business,” replied the other.

This kind of thing made Tom uncomfortable, but it didn’t turn him aside from the path on which he was walking. There could be no doubt about it, Tom’s character was deteriorating, and during the next two months he not only declared that he had chucked religion altogether, but that he meant to enjoy life. Tom spent most of his evenings at the Thorn and Thistle, and as a consequence his studies were neglected. Not that there was much outward difference in him; he still remained fairly sober, although on more than one occasion he was seen leaving the Thorn and Thistle at closing time with staggering footsteps; it never caused him to lose any work, however.

Meanwhile dark clouds began to arise in the nation’s sky. People had given only a passing thought to the news of the murder of the Crown Prince of Austria, but presently when Austria sent her outrageous ultimatum to Serbia, and the people read what Sir Edward Grey said about it, they began to talk seriously. For there is no part in England where politics have such a keen interest for the working-classes as they have in Lancashire. Almost every man there is a politician, and there are but few, especially among the older men, who have not an intelligent grasp not only of home, but of international affairs.

“I’ll tell you what,” said one manufacturer to another as they stood on the steps of the Mechanics’ Institute, “those Germans mean war; they have been preparing for it for years, and they are trying to force it.”

“Nay,” replied the other, “but I doan’t see how it can affect us, except”—and he laughed meaningly—“except for our benefit.”

“How can it be for our benefit?”

“Why, can’t you see? If the Germans join Austria against Russia and France, we shall be able to steal the German trade;—and we can do with it,” was the reply.

“Ay, we can.”

“Just see how Manchester is riddled with Germans. They have been robbing our trade right and left, and even here in Brunford Germans are poking their noses. I am about sick of them. Thirty years ago we hardly ever saw a German, and now they have nobbled our best-paying lines. If I had my way, all Germans should be driven out of the country; they are a bad lot to deal with; they have no business honour, and they don’t play the game.”

“Come now, it’s not so bad as that.”

“Ay, but it is. For years they have been sending their lads over here on the

pretence of learning the language. They take jobs in our offices for hardly any wage, and then when they have learned our secrets, and the names of our customers, they just play against us.”

“Well, more fools we for letting ’em.”

But it is not my purpose to deal with the talk which was so prevalent towards the close of July 1914. Neither am I going to try to trace the history of the events which led up to the war which has staggered humanity. We all know now what Germany had in her mind: how by pretence, and deceit, and fraud she worked her will; how she thought that England would allow her to crush France and Russia without moving a finger. Germany thought that the English were blind, and that for the sake of gain we should remain neutral and never lift a finger while she swept over Belgium to crush France; thought, too, that we should be supine while she violated treaties and committed the most fiendish deeds ever committed in the history of the world. But it is not my purpose to speak of these things; I have to tell the story of a commonplace lad in a workaday town, and what influence the great world convulsion had upon his life.

At first Tom was not much moved by the danger of war. For one thing he had given but little attention to public affairs, and for another thing he was enamoured with Polly Powell. Still he could not help being influenced by what every one was talking about. Local strikes, the rate of wages, and the quality of beer ceased to be the general subjects of conversation in the Thorn and Thistle. Every one was talking about a possible war. And when finally early in August the news came to Brunford that England had decided to take her part in the great struggle, Tom found himself greatly interested.

“I’ll tell you what,” said Enoch Powell, the landlord of the Thorn and Thistle, “the Germans have bitten off a bigger piece than they can chew. I give them about six weeks. What can they do with Russia on the one side and France and England on the other? Besides, the German people don’t want war. It’s that blooming Kaiser. In about six weeks’ time they will be on their knees crying for mercy.”

That was the general feeling of the town during the first fortnight of the War, and when as day after day the brave little Belgian army at Liege held out against the advancing Huns there was great confidence. “They have had their time-table smashed to smithereens at the first go,” was the joyful comment. “Wait till our lads get across, they’ll let ’em know.”

In these days there was very little bitterness against the Germans. The terror of war had scarcely been felt. People talked about the untold millions of Russian soldiers who would be in Berlin by the following October. They boasted confidently about the armies of France, and the unconquerable power of the British Navy. It is true that at the first news of the War many of the employers of labour were staggered; but presently as, when day followed day, they saw that trade would not be destroyed, but that possibly new avenues of wealth would be

opened, they became more cheerful. Besides, England was rising nobly to her responsibilities. Lord Kitchener's call for half a million men was answered in a few days. "Think on it," the people said one to another, "half a million men in a week! Why, we'll smash 'em afore they know where they are!"

Tom never thought of joining the army. The idea of being a soldier was utterly strange to him. The soldiers whom he knew were mostly of the lower orders; fellows who had got into trouble, or had taken the "King's shilling" while they were drunk. He had looked down upon them as being lower in social scale than himself, and he would never be seen walking with a soldier. When he saw lads of his own class enlisting, he shrugged his shoulders with a laugh. "Let 'em join if they want to," he said, "but it's noan in my line." In fact, after the first three weeks of the War, although terrible stories were reaching England about the ghastly atrocities in Belgium, and about the Germans nearing Paris, the manufacturing parts of Lancashire were largely unmoved. The terrible harvest of war which was to come later was not yet realised. It is true that thousands of young fellows responded to the call of duty. Young men of the better-educated class obtained commissions and were working at the local barracks; while here and there the more adventurous of the operatives found their way to recruiting stations. But the response was not large; partly for the reason that the reality of their country's call had not come to them with its full meaning.

One evening Tom found himself talking with young Waterman, who had been away from Brunford for some weeks.

"Hullo, Pollard," said Waterman, "I see you have not enlisted."

"Nay, I am not bound to enlist; there's enough gone to lick the Germans already. Don't you think so?" asked Tom.

A bright light came into Waterman's eyes. "I am going to enlist," he said—"that is, my people are getting me a commission. I have had some training, you know."

"But we shall quickly lick them, don't you think so?" asked Tom. "You've been in Germany a goodish bit. You went to school and college there, so you ought to know."

Waterman laughed. "We English are fools," he said.

"How's that?"

"Of course I am going to do my bit," said Waterman. "As an Englishman I must; but we shall never lick the Germans."

"Why? Think of the millions the Russians have got; think of the French; think of our Navy."

"Ay, think of it all," replied Waterman, "but you don't know what the Germans are. I do. In that country every man is a soldier. Look at Brunford; here are thousands upon thousands of fellows who are hanging back, and who are worth nothing in a time of war. If this had been a German town every man you see

would be a soldier. Then see how much in advance of us the Germans are in scientific matters. They have got mountains of guns and ammunition. Besides, they have made a science of war, while Englishmen are only amateurs. Think of what they have done already; nearly the whole of Belgium belongs to them, and a great slice of France.”

“But do you mean to say,” cried Tom, “that they will lick us? Why, think of our Navy; think of——”

Waterman did not wait to hear the end of Tom’s sentence; he crossed the road and was lost to sight.

One event took place, however, which somewhat opened the people’s eyes, and is talked of even to-day. A young German who had come to Brunford a few years before, and who had succeeded in amassing a fortune, was called home by his Government. So popular had he become in the town, and so little had the realities of the war laid hold of the people, that some of the leading townsmen decided to give him a dinner. This dinner was arranged to take place in the large dining-room of the Bull and Butcher, the largest hotel in the town. Although some people were anything but pleased at the arrangement, so little ill-feeling was felt towards the Germans that a good number of the townspeople gathered. When the dinner had been eaten the chairman rose to propose the toast of the evening. He said that although Mr. Schweitzer was called upon to fight against the English people, the town had no ill-will against him personally; they all knew him as a good fellow, a good sportsman, and an honourable business man. During the time he had been in Brunford they had opened their doors to him and received him as an honoured guest, and although the unfortunate war had taken place, they had nothing but good feeling towards Mr. Schweitzer. That was why they had invited him as their guest that night, and he, the chairman, expressed the hope that the war would soon be over and that Mr. Schweitzer would return and take up the position which he had so long occupied amongst them. The toast to his health was heartily cheered; good feeling abounded, and all waited for the response of the German guest.

As Mr. Schweitzer rose to respond he received quite an ovation; the diners even went so far as to give him musical honours. Mr. Schweitzer’s reply was in fairly good English. He thanked his friends for their good-fellowship, and for the kind things they had said about him.

“As to my coming back to Brunford again,” he concluded, “I have but little doubt that I shall return, but when I do, the Kaiser, and not the man you now own as king, will rule over England. For the Germans are going to lick your country, and Wilhelm II will be your future king.”

For a few seconds those who had gathered were so much astonished that there was a dead silence. Meanwhile the German looked around the room with a supercilious smile.

Then an Englishman who had been sitting close by came up to the German. He was a brawny, stalwart fellow. "Do you mean that?" he asked the German.

"Yes, I do," was the reply.

The Englishman without another word struck him a mighty blow on the jaw. "That for you and your Kaiser!" he exclaimed amidst the shouts of those present.

The blow was so heavy and so well aimed that the German's jaw was broken. He was taken to the hospital, where he remained for some months, and he has not yet returned to Germany.^[1]

During the next day Brunford was excited beyond measure. The story was told in a hundred mills by thousands of operatives; it was discussed in the public places, in every inn and tavern, and throughout the whole district. It did more to enlighten the minds of the people as to the real hopes and aims of the Germans than all the newspaper articles which had appeared. It revealed to the people, too, the real character of the Germans. Here was one of the best of them who had acted like a cad, and who in the face of good-fellowship had haughtily flaunted the superiority of the German people. The incident also gave point to the story of the ghastly atrocities which were taking place in Belgium. People were excited beyond measure; the War was becoming real to them.

All this had its effect upon Tom. Not that even yet he realised the full significance of what was taking place. Hundreds of young fellows were enlisting, but Tom held back. September, October, November passed away, and still Tom failed to respond to his country's call. He quite agreed with his friends, and said that of course England must lick the Germans; but he never admitted that the War had anything to do with him.

"I am earning good brass," said Tom, "and if I hold on I shall make more still. Let those as wants to fight the Germans fight 'em, I'm noan going to get killed." This he said to Polly Powell one night as he sat in the private sitting-room of the Thorn and Thistle.

"And quite right too, Tom," said Polly—"tha'rt too good a lad to be killed by the Germans. Besides, enough'll go without thee. If th' other chaps like to be fools, let 'em."

Still Tom did not feel altogether comfortable. At the back of his mind was the vague thought that he ought to do his bit, but his natural selfishness, added to Polly Powell's influence, kept him at home.

Besides, by this time winter had laid its icy grip upon the earth. News came of soldiers being crippled for life by frost-bite; stories were told of men standing up to the waist in icy slush; wounded men came back from the front telling stories about the terrible power of the Germans; newspapers were obliged to admit that we seemed to be powerless in the face of the enemy.

All this made Tom somewhat afraid; he was not cast in an heroic mould; the spirit of adventure was not strong within him.

“I say, Tom,” said a man whose three sons were in the army, “are you going to stay home like a coward?”

“I’m noan a coward,” replied Tom.

“Then what do you mean by not doing your duty?”

“I have my own views,” replied Tom. “Look here, Elijah, I’m not such a fool as to go over there and get killed; th’ other chaps’ll lick the Germans all right.”

“That’s the answer of a coward,” replied Elijah Butterworth; “if everybody said that, the country would be robbed from us, and we should have those German devils ruling over us.”

“No fear of that,” laughed Tom, and yet he felt uncomfortable.

“Aren’t you an Englishman?” cried Elijah, “and don’t you care for the old country?”

“Ay, I don’t know,” replied Tom, “the Germans are just as well off as we are.”

Meanwhile the real facts of the situation became more apparent. The Germans were not to be beaten easily. Russia, in spite of all that had been said about her power as a great steam-roller, could make no real headway; while France and England combined could not drive the Huns from the line they occupied. People tried to explain the situation, but the dreadful logic still remained: the country we had sworn to protect and save was in the hands of the enemy. The industrial part of France was held in a grip of iron; while Russia was powerless against the hosts of Germany.

First there were talks about the war being over by Christmas, but that delusion quickly vanished, and when a member of the Cabinet came to Manchester, and said that it might take years to drive the enemy from his position, people stared in bewilderment. More and more men were asked for, while some of the newspapers began to talk about conscription.

As Christmas drew near, Tom became more and more uncomfortable, even although the blandishments of Polly Powell grew more powerful. He had attended two recruiting meetings, but they seemed to him half-hearted and unconvincing. He still saw no reason why he should “do his bit.” When he was asked why he didn’t join, he mentioned the names of several young fellows who also held back.

“Why should I go,” he would say, “when so-and-so and so-and-so stay at home? They are manufacturers’ sons, and they are no better nor me. Let them enlist as privates, and then I’ll see about it.”

When the New Year came a big recruiting meeting was announced at the great hall of the Mechanics’ Institute. It was advertised that a man who had been to Belgium, and had witnessed what had taken place, was to be the chief speaker. At first Polly Powell tried to persuade Tom not to go, and would probably have been successful had there not been a dance that night to which Polly had been invited. Tom, not being a dancer, was not eligible for the occasion, so he made his way to the meeting.

That meeting marked an era in Tom's life. Little by little the speaker gripped the attention of the audience until the interest became intense and almost painful. He described what he had seen, he gave terrible proofs of the ghastly butchery, and worse than butchery, that had taken place. He made it clear to the audience what the war really meant. He showed that not only was the power of England at stake, but the welfare of humanity trembled in the balance. He related authenticated stories of what the Germans said they would do when they came to England. As Tom listened he heard the sound of the advancing Huns, saw towns and villages laid waste, saw the women of England debauched and outraged, saw the reign of devilry.

"By God!" he exclaimed aloud, "I can't stand this!"

His words reached the speaker, who made the most of them.

"Yes," he cried, "if the young men of England hang back, if they fail to love their country, if they care nothing about the honour or sacredness of womanhood, if they prefer their own ease, their own paltry pleasures, before duty; if they would rather go to cinema shows, or hang around public-house doors than play the game like Englishmen, this, and more than this, will take place. The England that we own and love will be lost for ever. Liberty will be gone, we shall be a nation in chains, while our women will be the playthings of inhuman devils. That is the problem which every man has to consider.

"What are you going to do? Let me put it another way. If we win this war, if the glory of England is maintained, and if she remains as she has always been—

"The home of the brave and free,
The land of liberty,

to whom shall we owe it? Who will have been our saviours? It will be the lads who have sacrificed everything to do their duty."

A great cheer arose from the audience, and Tom, scarcely realising what he was doing, shouted and cheered with the rest.

"But if we lose," continued the speaker, "if the Germans break our lines and come to England, if we are beaten, to whom shall we owe it? Who will be responsible? It will be the shirkers, the cowards! Look, you young men!" he cried passionately. "Thousands and tens of thousands of our brave fellows are at this time in the trenches; fighting, suffering, dying. What for? For England, for England's honour, for the safety of her women, for the sacredness of our lives, for you: while you, you skulk at home smoking your cigarettes, go to your places of amusement, and drink your beer. Don't you realise that you are playing the coward?"

Then the speaker made his last appeal, clear, impassioned, convincing.

"What are you going to do, young men?" he cried. "We don't want conscripts, but free men who come out cheerfully, willingly, gladly to do their duty to their

King, Country, and God. Who will be the first?"

He stood on the platform waiting amidst breathless silence.

"Will you wait until you are forced?"

"No! By God, no!" said Tom, and starting to his feet he walked to the platform and gave his name.

Thus Tom became a soldier.

"Tha doesn't say so?" said Tom's mother when, that night, he told her what he had done.

"Ay, I have."

"Then thou'st goin' for a sodger."

"Ay."

Mrs. Martha Pollard looked at him for a few seconds without speaking. Evidently she found it difficult to find words to express her thoughts.

"Weel, Tom," she said presently, "I thought thee't got low eno' when thee got drinkin' and picked up wi' that peacock-bedecked Polly Powell; but I ne'er thought a bairn o' mine would sink as low as that. Wer't'a baan now?"

"I'm goin' to tell Polly," said Tom.

"Ay, tha mun be sent to Lancaster asylum," said Mrs. Pollard.

[1] The above incident actually took place in a Lancashire city at the beginning of the War.

CHAPTER III

Tom made his way to the Thorn and Thistle, but was informed that Polly would not be home until eleven o'clock. He therefore wandered about the town until that time, and again appeared at the public-house door. But it was not until twelve o'clock that Polly made her appearance.

"Anything the matter, Tom?" she asked.

"Ay, I have joined the Army."

"Thou'st noan been such a fool?"

"I have noan been a fool," said Tom, "I couldn't help it."

Polly Powell looked at him rather angrily, then she said: "If you have done it, what do you want to speak to me about it for?"

"I shall be off to-morrow," replied Tom. "The recruiting officer told me I must report at the Town Hall to-morrow morning at ten o'clock."

"Where will you go?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Tom.

"Well, what are you waiting for?"

"I thought," said Tom, "that is—I thought as I was going away I'd—I'd—— Look here, Polly, you are going to keep true to me while I'm away, aren't you?"

"I never thought much of soldiers," said Polly. "Besides——"

"Besides what?" asked Tom. "Look here, Polly, I gave up Alice Lister for you, and if you had been at that meeting you would see as how I couldn't do anything else."

"Do you think you might get a commission and be an officer?" asked the girl.

"I never thought about that," said Tom.

Polly hesitated a second, then she said: "Of course I'll be true to you, Tom. There, good night, I must go in."

The next morning as Tom was making his way towards the Town Hall he met Alice Lister. At first he was going to pass her by without notice, but when he saw the look on her face he stopped. She came towards him with outstretched hand.

"Tom," she said, "I've heard about last night, and it was splendid of you. I am glad you were the first. I am told that your going up in that way led scores of others to go."

"Have you heard that?" said Tom. "I never thought of it."

"I am sure you will be a good soldier, Tom. We are all proud of you, and—and we shall be thinking about you, and praying for you."

Tom laughed uneasily. "I thought you had forgotten all about me, Alice," he said.

"Why should you think so?"

“I have heard there is a young parson going after you. Are you going to make a match of it, Alice?” And again he laughed.

“Good-bye, Tom, I hope you will do well.” And Alice left him with a strange fluttering in his heart.

Tom joined the Loyal North Lancashires. I will not say which battalion, as the mention of it might cause some of my readers to identify the lad whose story I am telling. His unit was located at a large Lancashire town some thirty miles from Brunford. Here he was initiated into the secrets of a soldier’s life. At first everything was a drudgery to him; he could not see the meaning of what he was doing, could not understand how “forming fours” and other parts of his drill could help him to be a soldier. Still, being a fairly sharp, common-sense lad, he picked up his work quickly, and in the course of a few weeks was physically much better for his training. At the end of three months he was nearly two inches taller, and more than three inches bigger around the chest than at the time he joined. He began to enjoy his work, too. The young subaltern whose duty it was to train the company had more than once singled him out as a capable fellow, and as the cold winter days passed away and spring began to advance Tom could undergo a twenty- or thirty-mile march without weariness. He was well fed, well housed, and well clothed, and while his pocket money was not extravagant, he had enough for his needs.

Indeed in many respects it would have been better for Tom if he had had less money. The influence of the Thorn and Thistle was still strong upon him, and I have to relate with sadness that on more than one occasion Tom barely escaped punishment for being drunk and disorderly. Most of the lads with whom he was brought into contact were, on the whole, steady and well-behaved. On the other hand, however, there were a number of them who had a bad influence upon him. In fact, while he narrowly escaped being brought before his superiors for his various misdemeanours, Tom’s character was steadily deteriorating. The first flush of enthusiasm, and loyalty, and even something nobler than loyalty, which had been aroused in him by the speaker who had caused him to join the army, slowly faded away. The men with whom he associated did not help him to be on the side of the angels, rather they appealed to what was coarse and debased in his nature.

To tell the truth, there was very little in Tom’s life which tended to ennoble him. It is true there was a service for soldiers every Sunday morning in one of the big buildings in the town, and while Tom, lover of music as he had always been, was somewhat influenced by the singing of the men, and while the hymns reminded him of his Sunday-school days, they did not move him very deeply. He paid little or no attention to the ministrations of the chaplain. Neither did he avail himself of the many meetings which were held for soldiers by the various churches in the town. Indeed, up to this point Tom was not the better, but the

worse, for joining the Army.

There was in Tom's company a young fellow much superior to the rank and file of the soldiers. He was a young Cornish lad, the son of a well-to-do father who had sent him to a good public school, and from thence to Lancashire to learn the manufacturing business. This young fellow, Robert Penrose by name, although belonging socially to a different class from that in which Tom moved, took a liking to him. He was amused at his good humour, and seemed to be grieved at seeing him drifting with the dregs of the battalion.

"I say, Pollard," he said to him on one occasion, "do you know you are making an ass of yourself? You have the makings of a man in you, and yet you mix with that lot."

"Why shouldn't I?" said Tom.

"Because you have more brains than they have, are better educated, and are capable of better things."

"Why shouldn't I have a lark while I can?" replied Tom. "I shall have to go to the front in a month or two, so I will just make hay while the sun shines."

"Make hay!" replied Penrose, "make a fool of yourself, you mean. I hear that years ago you were on the way to becoming an educated chap, and now everybody's looking upon you as one of the drinking fellows."

"It's all very well for you to talk," said Tom, "you're a swell."

"I am a private just as you are," replied Penrose.

"Ay, but you will be getting a commission soon, and there's no chance of that for me. I don't belong to your sort. Besides, what can I do? There's no places but the theatre, the cinema show, and the public-house when the day's work is over."

"That's all nonsense," replied Penrose.

"Well, what is there?" asked Tom.

"There's the Y.M.C.A."

"Y.M.C.A.!" laughed Tom, "none o' that for me! I know some of the fools who go to the Y.M.C.A. meetings."

"Why are they fools?"

"Because they go and hear a lot of pie-jaw; they are a lot of ninnies, that's what they are."

"They don't get hauled over the coals for misbehaviour, anyhow."

"No, they haven't got pluck enough. I didn't come into the Army to become religious; I joined to fight the blooming Germans, and what's fighting got to do with religion?"

"Maybe it has a good deal if you feel you are fighting for a good cause," replied Penrose; "besides, the Y.M.C.A. chaps are not ninnies, as you call them. Some of them are the best fellows we have."

"No religious lolly-pops for me," said Tom, "I had enough of that when I lived i' Brunford."

“Of course you can go your own way,” said Penrose. “I suppose you will spend your evening in the public-house, or at some cinema show, or perhaps you will be larking around with some silly girls; but I am going to the Y.M.C.A.”

“Do you go there?” cried Tom in astonishment. For Penrose was looked upon as anything but goody-goody, and he was generally admired. He was the best boxer in the company, was smart in drill, could do long marches with the best of them, and was always ready to do a kindly action. Besides all that, his evident education and social superiority made him a marked man. It was rumoured, too, that he had refused a commission.

“Of course I go,” replied Penrose.

“What, and listen to their pie-jaw?”

“There is precious little pie-jaw, as you call it,” was Penrose’s response. “We have jolly good entertainments almost every night, and some of the fellows who come to talk to us are not half bad, I can tell you! Besides, I go there to rub up my conversational French.”

“Conversational French!” said Tom, only dimly understanding what he meant. “Dost ’a mean to say that they learn you French there?”

“There’s a Frenchman who gives his services free,” replied Penrose. “It’s jolly good of him too, for the poor wretch has hardly a sixpence to his name; still he does it. In his way he’s quite a French scholar, and he has helped me no end.”

“Ay, but you learnt French at school,” said Tom; “he would have nowt to do wi’ a chap like me.”

“Don’t be an ass. Why, dozens of fellows go to him every night. A few weeks ago they didn’t know a word of French, and now they are picking it up like mad. Besides all that, the Y.M.C.A. rooms are open every night, they have all sorts of games there, lots of newspapers, and they give you every facility for writing letters and that sort of thing.”

“By gum!” said Tom, “I didn’t know that.”

“That’s because you have been making an ass of yourself. While the other fellows have been improving themselves you have been loafing around public-houses. Good night,” and Penrose left him alone.

Tom felt rather miserable; he was somewhat angered too. He didn’t like the way Penrose had spoken to him. In the old days he had been proud of his respectability, and before he had made Polly Powell’s acquaintance, and when Alice Lister had shown a preference for him, Tom was very ambitious. Now he knew he had not only sunk in the social scale, but he had less self-respect than formerly. “After all,” he argued to himself presently, “I didn’t join the Army to go to Sunday School, I joined to lick the blooming Germans.”

Still he could not help recalling the feelings which possessed him on the night he came out of the great hall at the Mechanics’ Institute. He had felt stirred then; felt indeed as though he had heard the call of some higher power. Hitherto he had

looked upon wearing the King's uniform as something ignoble; then it had appeared to him almost as a religious act. The speaker had called upon him to fight against brutality, butchery, devilry, and his heart had burned at the thought of it. Something which he felt was holy made him leap to his feet and give his name, yet now he found his chief delights in coarse associations and debasing habits.

He was still fond of Polly Powell. The girl's coarse beauty made a strong appeal to him, but he remembered Alice Lister; remembered the things which she had said to him, and he could not help sighing.

"Eh, Tom, is that you?"

Tom turned and saw a tall raw-boned fellow in kilts.

"Ay, Alec; wher't' baan?"

"There's a wee lassie I promised to meet to-night," replied the other.

Alec McPhail belonged to the Black Watch, a battalion of which was stationed in the town, and Tom and Alec had become friends.

"What's thy lass's name?" asked Tom.

"I dinna ken reightly, except that they ca' her Alice. Come wi' me, Tom; mebbe she has a friend."

"Nay," replied Tom, "I doan't feel like skylarking with the lasses to-night."

"Weel, I'm not ower particular mysel', but I have not much siller. Three bawbees will have to last me till Saturday, otherwise I'd be asking ye to come and have a drop of whisky wi' me."

"I am stony-broke too," said Tom. "I expect I have been a fool."

"Nay, man, nae man's a fool who spends his siller on good whisky."

By this time they were walking together towards the outskirts of the town.

"What is this lass o' yourn?" asked Tom after a silence.

"I think she's a wee bit servant lassie," replied the Scotchman; "she's a bonny wee thing too, and fairly enamoured wi' a kilt."

Tom still walked on aimlessly; the thought of going to meet a girl who might never come did not have much attraction for him; still he didn't know where to go.

"I don't think I'll come any further," he said presently.

"Nay, what makes ye alter your mind, Tom?"

"I think I'll go back to the Black Cow," replied Tom, "'appen there's some chaps there who'll stand a treat. After all, Penrose wur right when he called me an ass."

"Penrose is what you call a gentleman ranker, I'm thinking."

"Summat o' that sort," replied Tom,

"What did he call you an ass for?"

"Well, you see I've been a bit of a fool; I've spent all my brass, and I've took up wi' a lot o' lads as is no use to me. Penrose is gone to the Y.M.C.A. You wouldn't think it perhaps, McPhail, but I wur a bit in the religious line myself once. I wur educating myself too, and I had as nice a lass as there was i' Brunford,

but I took up wi' the daughter of a man as kept a public-house, and—well, there you are."

"And you have chucked releegion?" asked McPhail.

"Ay, there's nowt in it, and it keeps a chap from having a good time—but I doan't know," and Tom sighed.

"I am a wee bit of a philosopher mysel'," replied McPhail, "and I have reasoned it all out very carefully. My mither, now, is what you might call a godly woman; my father was an elder in the old U. P. Kirk, and I was brought up in a godly fashion. But, as I said, I reasoned it out. I read Colonel Ingersoll's Lectures, and he proved to me that Moses made a lot of mistakes. So, weel, presently I got fond of whisky, and I came to the conclusion that releegion was not logical."

"I reckon as you're none too logical," replied Tom.

"Ay, man, but I was well groounded in the fundamentals! I could say the Shorter Catechism when I was a wee kiddie of seven years old! How am I no logical?"

"After all," replied Tom, "it's noan logical to give up religion because of Colonel Ingersoll's Lectures. The religion my Alice had went deeper nor that. Ay, but there, I am a fool to be talking about it. Good night, McPhail, I will go back now." And Tom went back towards the town alone.

The following Saturday night Tom was again drunk and disorderly. This time he did not escape punishment. Tom never felt so degraded in his life as when he was undergoing that punishment. He had joined the Army under the influence of a noble impulse. He had felt that he was doing a noble thing. Not that he was proud of it, because in reality he could do nothing else; when he came to think of it afterwards he knew that he was doing nothing but his duty. All the same he was elated by his action. It had made him hold his head higher, and made his heart beat fast; now, after a little more than three months' training, he had actually been called before his officers for being a disgrace to his company. The colonel, who was a stern soldier, was also a kindly gentleman. He recognised at a glance that Tom was not a gutter lad; saw, too, that he had the making of a man in him. That was the reason perhaps why he used stronger language than usual, and for meting out a heavier punishment.

"What excuse have you for yourself?" asked the colonel. "You have evidently had some education and were meant for better things. Why did you make a beast of yourself?" His words cut Tom like a knife. "Make a beast of myself," he thought, "has Tom Pollard come to that?"

"Where is there to go, sir, when one's day's work is over?" he asked almost sulkily.

"Go?" replied the colonel, a little nonplussed, "go?" And then remembering a visitor who came to him the previous day, he said: "There's the Y.M.C.A. hall; they teach you something useful there."

After his punishment was over Tom could not help seeing that the better class of fellows somewhat shunned him. He could not say he was boycotted, but they showed no inclination to be in his company. This touched his pride. "I am as good as they are," he said to himself, "and a bit better nor some on 'em." He was delighted, however, to notice that Penrose acted differently from the rest, although he was by no means flattering.

"I told you you were an ass," he said. "If you go on in this way, you'll end by being kicked out of the Army."

Again Tom was wounded deeply. "Kicked out of the Army!" He had never dreamed of that. What! he, Tom Pollard, who had won prizes at the Mechanics' Institute, and who had ambition of one day becoming a manufacturer on his own account, kicked out of the Army!

"Come now, Tom," said Penrose, who almost repented of having spoken so sharply, "it is not too late to turn over a new leaf, and you have the makings of a fine fellow in you."

"I'd rather be kicked out of the Army as a straight chap than to be a blooming white-livered hypocrite."

"And do you think I'm a white-livered hypocrite?"

"A sort of plaster saint, anyhow," retorted Tom.

"Anything but that, Tom," replied Penrose; "all the same I've taken a liking to you."

"You have a nice way of showing it," replied Tom.

His anger was all gone now, for he instinctively felt that Penrose meant to be friendly.

"Come with me to the Y.M.C.A. hall to-night," urged Penrose.

"Ay, and be preached to," said Tom, yielding rapidly to the other.

"I promise you there will be no preaching," said Penrose, with a laugh, "unless you like to wait for it. Come now."

"All right, then," said Tom still sulkily, but glad that he had yielded. A few minutes later they entered a large hall where perhaps six or seven hundred soldiers had gathered.

There are few counties in England where music is more cultivated than in Lancashire, and that night Tom listened almost spellbound. Songs that he knew and loved were sung; songs which he had heard Alice Lister sing. Recitations were given in broad Lancashire dialect which gave him keen enjoyment. More than all this there was a feeling of good-fellowship; the Y.M.C.A. workers were evidently on the friendliest of terms with the men, while there was no suggestion of goody-goodyism.

"This is a special occasion, I suppose," said Tom to Penrose.

"Oh no, they have entertainments like this almost every night. All the musical people in the district give their services."

“What for?” asked Tom.

“Just to give us soldiers a good time; but we must be going now.”

“Why?” asked Tom, “it’s not late.”

“But there’s a fellow just going to speak, and as you object to being preached to we had better go.”

Tom rose almost reluctantly. He was not sure that he didn’t want to hear what the man had to say.

“Besides,” went on Penrose, “I haven’t shown you over the place yet. I want to take you into the rooms which are provided for writing letters, and playing games; there are the French classes too, and I should like you to see what they are like.”

That night at eleven o’clock, as Tom went back to the house where he had been billeted, he felt that he had indeed made a fool of himself. The Y.M.C.A. rooms had the feeling of home; none of the people there wanted his money, and he was the better, not the worse, for going.

“Of course,” said Tom to himself as he went to bed, “religious lolly-pops are not fit for a grown-up man, but it wur a grand evening; I am sure I could pick up that French, too. Let’s see, how did it go?”

<i>Je suis</i>	I am.
<i>Vous êtes</i>	you are.
<i>Nous sommes</i>	we are.
<i>Ils sont</i>	they are.

“Why, it’s easy enough,” thought Tom, “I could pick it up, and then when I go over to France I shall be able to speak their lingo.”

“Where have you been lately, Tom?” asked Alec McPhail when he met him some time later. “I have been to all the public-houses where we used to meet and have not set my eyes on you.”

“Nay,” replied Tom, “I have been to the Y.M.C.A.”

“Nay, Tom, a man like you, with your power of reasoning an’ a’, are surely not turning releegious?”

“Nay, I am noan turning religious,” replied Tom, “but I tell you, man, the entertainments are fair grand; champion, in fact! I am learning French too.”

“I suppose the entertainments are sandwiched between the dry bread of releegion?” replied the Scotchman.

“Nay, I have nowt to do wi’ religion,” replied Tom. “I have just listened to the singing and the recitations, and then when the chap has got up to talk I’ve gone into the writing-room or to the French class.”

“Will you tell me about it?” asked the Scotchman.

Tom gave him a full description.

“You see,” he said, “it’s not like Sunday School, or anything of that sort. There’s lots of folks what can sing, and play the piano very well, and can recite champion. And they give us a good concert every night. Then there’s a room

where we can go in and read papers, write letters, or play draughts or bagatelle and all that sort of thing. Then there's a good library where you can get any book for the asking. Ay, those religious folks have been kind; they have sent hundreds of books for us chaps to read, good books and all. Then there's a class-room where you can learn French."

"And will there be a bar where you can get some whisky?" asked the Scotchman.

"Nay," replied Tom, "there's no whisky or owt o' that sort, but there's a refreshment bar where you can get tea and coffee, and tarts, and sandwiches."

"For nothing?" asked the Scotchman eagerly.

"Nay, not for nothing, but cheaper than you can buy it at any shop. From what I can hear they sell it at just cost price."

"And," said the Scotchman, "do you mean, Tom, that you will give up the evenings we used to have, for that sort of thing?"

"I don't say I've turned teetotaler," replied Tom, "although I have took nothing sin'—sin' I were—disgraced, and I doan't mean to for a bit. You see, the chaps at the Y.M.C.A. doan't tell you not to go to the public-houses and then provide nothing better for you. Anyhow, I've been to the Y.M.C.A. every night sin' I had my punishment, and what's more, I'm going again."

A week later there was great excitement amongst the soldiers. They had now been nearly four months in this Lancashire town, and orders came for the Loyal North Lancashires and the Black Watch to move south. They heard that they were going to Surrey, and were to be situated at a camp in the most beautiful part of that county. Tom was delighted, for although he had made many friends at the Y.M.C.A and grown to know many people in this Lancashire town, the thought of a change appealed to him strongly. He was young, and longed for new associations and new surroundings. Besides, it meant a step nearer towards his desires. He was told that his battalion was to be moved to Surrey preparatory to orders for the Front. Possibly they might be moved to Salisbury Plain or Shoreham afterwards, but it was quite on the cards that they would go straight from the Surrey camp to France or Flanders.

As soon as Tom heard this, he applied for leave, and, the young lieutenant having reported that Tom had behaved very well since his punishment, and had apparently turned over a new leaf, it was granted.

He did not spend much of his time with his father and mother, but as soon as possible made his way to the Thorn and Thistle. He had saved practically all his last four weeks' regimental pay, a great part of which he spent on a present for Polly Powell. On the whole he was satisfied with Polly's reception, although he felt that she was not quite so affectionate towards him as she had been during the days when she was trying to win him away from Alice Lister. It was during his stay in Brunford, too, that Tom gave way to the temptation of drink.

“Nay, Tom,” said Polly when he said he would only take a bottle of ginger ale, “I never heard of a soldier who was worth his salt but would not take his beer like a man.” And Tom, who could not bear to be laughed at, yielded to Polly’s persuasions.

“Ay, she’s a grand lass,” he said to himself, “and a rare beauty too; she’s got eyes like black diamonds, and a face like a June rose.” All the same he remembered some of the ladies who had come to the Y.M.C.A. to sing to the soldiers, and he had a feeling, which he could not put into words, that Polly was a little bit loud. Her dresses were always highly coloured, while her hats were bedecked with big feathers. Of course these things suited her to perfection, and although he did not raise the slightest objection to them there were doubts at the back of his mind. Neither did he altogether like the way in which she bandied jokes, which were not always of the best taste, with the young fellows who came to the Thorn and Thistle. Altogether it was not an unmixed sorrow to him when his leave was up and he returned to his regiment.

He did not see Alice Lister during his visit, and if the truth must be told he was glad of it. Polly Powell’s spell was strong upon him, and he said repeatedly that Alice Lister was not his sort.

A week after this Tom’s battalion was ordered south, and amidst much excitement the men boarded the train which took them there. He had hoped they would stay in London for at least one night, but only two hours were allowed between the time they reached Euston from the time the train was due to leave Waterloo. Discipline was somewhat relaxed during the journey, and when at length Tom entered the train at Waterloo he noticed that many of the men were the worse for drink.

“What blithering fools they are!” said Penrose to him, as seated in their carriage they saw many of their companions staggering along the platform. Tom was silent at this, nevertheless he thought a great deal.

It was now the beginning of May, and the Surrey meadows were bedecked with glory. Tom, who had never been out of Lancashire before, could not help being impressed with the beauty he saw everywhere. It was altogether different from the hard bare hills which he had been accustomed to in the manufacturing districts of Lancashire. The air was sweet and pure too. Here all nature seemed generous with her gifts; great trees abounded, flowers grew everywhere, while fields were covered with such a glory of green as he had never seen before. By and by the train stopped at a little station, and then commenced the march to the camp for which they were bound. Penrose and Tom walked side by side.

“This is not new to you, I suppose?” Tom queried.

“No,” said Penrose, “I know almost every inch round here.”

“I saw you looking out of the train at a place we passed what they call Godalming; you were looking at a big building on the top of a hill there. What was

it?"

"It was my old school," said Penrose, "Charterhouse; the best school in the world."

"Ay, did you go there?" asked Tom. "Why, it was fair grand. How long were you there?"

"Five years," said Penrose.

"And to think of your becoming a Tommy like me!" Tom almost gasped.

"Well, what of that?"

"You might have been an officer if you had liked, I suppose?"

Penrose nodded.

"It wur just grand of you."

"Nothing grand at all," said Penrose. "A chap who doesn't do his bit at a time like this is just a skunk, that's all; and I made up my mind that I would learn what a private soldier's life was like before I took a commission."

"Well, you know now," said Tom, "and you will be an officer soon, I expect."

"My uniform's ordered," said Penrose.

Tom was silent for some time.

"I suppose you won't be friends with me any more, and I shall have to salute you," he remarked presently.

"Discipline is discipline," replied Penrose. "As to friendship, I am not given to change."

The battalion, eleven hundred strong, climbed a steep hill, under great overshadowing trees. Birds were singing gaily; May blossom was blooming everywhere; the green of the trees was wonderful to behold. Presently they came to a great clearing in a pine forest. The life of the country seemed suddenly to end, and they arrived at a newly improvised town. There were simply miles of wooden huts, while the sound of men's voices, the neighing of horses, and the rolling of wheels were heard on every hand. These huts, from what Tom could see, were nearly all of them about two hundred feet long, while around them were great open spaces where all vegetation had been worn away by the tramp of thousands of feet. The men, who had been singing all the way during their march, became silent; the scene was so utterly different from what they had left. That morning they had left a grim, grey, smoky manufacturing town; in the evening they had entered a clearing surrounded by sylvan beauty.

"I feel as though I could stay here for ever," said Tom. "But look at yon'," and he pointed to a long, low hut, at the door of which the letters "Y.M.C.A." were painted. "Why, they're here too!"

"Yes," said Penrose, "there's not a camp in the country where you don't find the Y.M.C.A. huts; for that matter they are on the Continent too."

"But yon' place must have cost a lot of money," said Tom, "you can't build shanties like that without a lot of brass. Where did they get the brass from?"

"I expect the people who believe in religious lolly-pops gave it to them," replied Penrose.

It took Tom two or three days before he became accustomed to his new surroundings. He found that in this camp nearly thirty thousand men had gathered; men who had come from every corner of the country—Cameronians, Durhams, Devons, Welsh, Duke of Cornwalls, they were all here. Tom had rather expected that the advent of a new battalion would have caused some excitement, but scarcely any notice seemed to be taken; their coming was a matter of course. Three days before a battalion had left for the Front, and they had come to take their place, that was all. Instead of being billeted at various houses, as they had been in Lancashire, they had now to sleep sixty in a hut. Tom laughed as he saw the sleeping arrangements. Beds were placed close together all around the building; these beds were of the most primitive nature, and consisted of a sack of straw, a couple of rugs, and what might be called a pillow. These sacks of straw were raised some three or four inches from the floor by means of boarding, and had only the suggestion of a spring. No privacy was possible, but everything was clean and well-kept. In a few days Tom got to like it. The weather was beautiful, the country was lovely, and the air was pure. Tom had a good appetite in Lancashire, now he felt ravenous. The work was hard, harder than he had had in Lancashire, but he enjoyed it; on the whole, too, he could not help noticing that many of the men seemed of a better type than those which made up his own battalion. With the exception of Penrose, nearly all his company were drafted from coal pits and cotton mills. Here were numbers of university men, public-school men, and the like. Truly the Army was a great democracy.

One thing made Tom feel very sad, and that was the loss of Penrose. He had been in Surrey only a few days when he was gazetted and was removed to another camp about four miles away. Still he made new friends and was on the whole happy. He found, too, that even the men, whose conduct was anything but praiseworthy in Lancashire, were sober here. Only a dozen public-houses existed, within the radius of almost as many miles; and as the rules of the canteen were very strict, there were few temptations to drink. Discipline was far easier, and on the whole the men were better looked after.

At the end of the second day in this Surrey camp, he was going with a message to the officers' quarters, when he stopped suddenly.

"Ay, can that be you?" he said aloud.

"What do you mean, my man?" And then Tom saw that the person whom he recognised wore a lieutenant's uniform.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Tom, saluting, "but—but—yes, sir, it is you."

"Oh, is that you, Pollard? I see you have enlisted, then; that's all right. You'll know me another time, won't you?"

"Yes, Mr. Waterman. That is, yes, sir. I hope you are well, sir."

“Yes, I’m all right. Good night,” and the officer passed on.

“By George!” said Tom to himself, “I didn’t expect to meet Waterman here, but there’s nothing to wonder about, after all.”

CHAPTER IV

It is not my purpose to give a lengthy account of Tom Pollard's stay in the Surrey training camp, although much of interest took place, and his daily life there would, if truly reported, gladden the hearts of thousands of fathers and mothers who have given their boys to their country at this time. I, who have been to this particular camp, and have talked with the lads there, can testify to this by personal experience. As I have before stated, Tom found the work hard, the discipline strict, and the duties many; at the same time everything was so well arranged and the spirit of such good-fellowship prevailed that thousands of young men were under much more healthy conditions, both physically and morally, than they were at home. Indeed, many told me that they would never care for the cramped life of the office, the workshop, and the factory again, after the free open-air life of a soldier.

Tom, who had been quick to learn his duties and to master his drill, especially after he had—as he termed it to me—“been disgraced, and turned over a new leaf,” found the work easy and pleasant.

“Ay,” said Tom to me, “it's very funny.”

“What?” I asked.

“The way these greenhorns try to learn their drill.”

“How's that?” I asked.

“Why, yesterday a chap came up to me wi' tears in his eyes. I asked him what wur the matter, and he said, ‘Ay, I have not got brains for it.’ ‘Brains for what?’ I asked. ‘Brains for this 'ere drill: a man needs to have a head like Shakespeare to get hold on it. That there formin' fours now: I have tried, and I have tried, and I have better tried, but I can't get a fair grip on it. Ay, I shall have to write a letter to the Colonel and tell him I shall have to give it up.’”

Tom laughed gleefully as he spoke. “Why, it's as easy as winking, sir,” he said; “but some chaps are thick-headed, you know—in fact they have no heads at all, they've just got turnips stuck on top of their shoulders. I fair pity the young officers sometimes when they are trying to knock these chaps into shape. But they are doing it fine; and fellows who came a few weeks ago, slack and shuffling, are now straight and smart. It's wonderful what a bit of drilling does.”

“And do you find the Y.M.C.A. helpful down here, Tom?” I asked.

“Helpful, sir! I don't know what we should do without it. You see it's different here from what it is in big towns where the men are in billets. We're away, as you may say, from any town that's sizeable, and there's no place to go to of an evening, except the public-house; and if the Y.M.C.A. hadn't been here we should have nothing to do but fool around. But the work they're doing here is just

champion. They have entertainments every night, and if you don't feel like going to them, there's a room where you can read the papers, and write your letters or play games; then they have all sorts of good books for us to read."

"And how are you getting on with your French?" I asked.

Tom blushed as he replied, "Would you like to see my report, sir?" and he took it from his tunic proudly.

"Why, Tom, this is splendid!" I said, after reading it.

"Ay, I have worked fair hard at it," said Tom; "but my difficulty is getting my tongue round the words. You see, they don't know how to pronounce, these French people, and you have to pronounce their way else they wouldn't understand what you wur saying, and you have to get a grip on it or you can't understand what they are saying. I can conjugate the verbs," added Tom proudly, "but when they speak to me in French, that's anything like a long sentence, I get mixed up. While I'm getting hold of the first part of what they're saying, I forget the rest; but I will master it. What a French chap can learn a Lancashire chap can.

"Do you know, sir," went on Tom, "that the Y.M.C.A. has got no less than six huts here; each of them will hold a thousand men, and they are jam-full every night. And all the workers are so friendly too."

"And do you go to any religious services, Tom?" I asked.

"I been to two or three," replied Tom, "but I don't hold much wi' religion. Still they're grand people, and you may ask any man in the camp, from the sergeant-major down to the newest recruit, and they will all tell you the same thing, The Y.M.C.A. is a fair God-send to us."

I found out afterwards that Alec McPhail had not followed Tom's example. Alec had discovered a wayside public-house about a mile from the camp, where he and several others of his companions spent most of their spare time.

"I'm noan religious," said Tom rather boastfully; "but the Y.M.C.A. showed me that I was making a fool of myself, and they have made me see that a soldier ought to be a gentleman. We're not a lot of riff-raff in the Army; we have come at the call of our King and Country to do our bit. And what I say is that a chap ought to live up to his job; we have got a big, grand job, and we chaps as is to do it ought to be worthy of our job."

Tom wrote regularly to Polly Powell during the time he was in the Surrey camp, although he could not help noticing that Polly's replies grew less and less frequent and less and less affectionate. When he had been there a little more than two months he received a letter from his mother telling him that Polly was walking out regularly with Jim Dixon. The letter from Tom's mother was characteristic.

"Dear Tom," she wrote, "thou'st been fooled by Polly Powell. I always said that Alice Lister was too good for thee, and thou used to get

vexed about it. A man is not to blame for his mother, he can't choose her, so I can't blame thee for thy mother, but he is to be blamed for his wife; he makes his own choice there, and the man as chooses Polly Powell is a fool. When I wur a lass I lived on a farm, I wur only sixteen when I came to Brunford, and the farmer I lived wi' always said when he was buying a cow, 'be sure to look at the stock before you close the bargain.' Look at the stock Polly Powell has come from. I say nowt about her feyther because I don't know him, but I have seen her mother, and that's enough for me. Polly is just the image of what her mother was when she was her age. She's only twenty-four years older than Polly, but she's like Bethesda Chapel, she's broader nor she's long. That's what Polly will be in twenty years' time. Her mother's got a mustash too, and Polly gives every sign of having one by the time she's her mother's age. Besides, she's a flighty thing is Polly, and has no stayin' power; she goes wi' one chap one week and another the next. She's walked out wi' seven chaps since you left Brunford, and she only took up wi' Jim Dixon again because he's making a bit of brass. I daresay she'll tell you that she's only larking wi' Jim, and is true to you all the time; but if I were thee I'd sack her. There are plenty of lasses everywhere, and thou can do better nor her.

"I expect you will be going to France soon, and will be fighting them Germans. If they find thee as hard to deal wi' as I have, they'll have a tough job. But they are a bad lot, and I don't ask you to show 'em any mercy.

"Your affectionate mother,
"MRS. MARTHA POLLARD.

"P.S.—Be sure to write and give Polly Powell the sack right away, she's noan thy sort. If you come across that German Emperor, don't be soft-hearted wi' 'im."

After Tom had read his mother's letter twice, he sat silent for some time. "So she's going out with Jim Dixon," he reflected; "well, I'm glad. After all, my liking for her was only top-water stuff, and she was doing me no good." The next minute Tom was whistling his way through the camp. "Yes," he continued, "mother's got what the writing chaps call 'a good literary style,' and she hits the bull's-eye every time. Gosh, what a fool I've been! Fancy giving up Alice Lister for a lass like that. I wonder if it's true that Alice has took up wi' that parson chap. I'd like to wring his neck, I would for sure."

At the end of nearly three months Tom was moved to another camp still nearer the south coast. He had a presentiment that the time was not far distant when he would have to cross the sea, and know in real earnest what soldiering was like. In

a way he was glad of this; like all youths he longed for excitement, and wanted to come to close grips with the thing he had set out to do. On the other hand however, he could not help looking forward with dread. When on reading the newspapers he saw long lists of casualties, and heard stories of the men he had known, who went out healthy and strong and never came back again, and others who were brought home maimed for life, he had a strange feeling at his heart, and a sinking at the pit of his stomach. It was not that he felt afraid, but there was a kind of dread of the unknown. What would it be like to die?

"I hear we're off soon," said Alec McPhail to him one day.

"There's no telling," said Tom laconically.

"Ay, but we shall," replied Alec, "and I shall be glad, I'm getting sick of this life in the camps."

"I doan't wonder at it," said Tom.

"What might ye mean by that?" asked the Scotchman.

"I am fair stalled wi' thee," said Tom. "I thought that you, being a thinking sort o' chap, would know better. You saw what a fool I was making of myself, and yet you kept on drinking and carousing, and making a ninny of yourself, as though you had no more brains nor a waterhen. Why, lad, with your education and cleverness, you might have been sergeant-major by now. Nay, nay, keep thee temper; I mean nowt wrong."

The Scotchman looked at Tom angrily for some seconds. He seemed on the point of striking him, then mastering himself he said, "Ay, Tom, you're richt, and yet I'm no' sure."

"What do you mean?" asked Tom.

"Tom, man," said the Scotchman, "ye canna think worse of me than I think of mysel'. I had a good home too, and a godly mither; as for my father he was a hard man, but just, very just. Ay, I know I ought to have known better, but the whisky got hold of me. Besides——"

"Besides what?" asked Tom.

"Ay, man, I'm not a hero when it comes to facing death. I fancy I'm as brave as most men about lots of things, but I just shiver when I think o' dying; then I tak' a wee drap of whisky, and it gi'es me courage."

"Poor sort of courage," replied Tom; "besides, you take more than a 'wee drap,' as you call it."

"Ay, it needs mair and mair. But it's this way, Tom; when I think of going over the water into those trenches, and when I think of the shells falling all around me; when I call to mind that men may be dying at my richt hand and on my left, blown all to smithereens, I get afraid, but after I have filled mysel' fou' of whisky I don't care. I know I ought to be ashamed of mysel'; I know, too, it's the wrang sort of courage. As for you, Tom, you have been wiser than me, you've got relegion."

“Nay, I’ve nowt o’ th’ sort,” replied Tom, “I’ve just kept straight, that’s all.”

“But it’s not enough, Tom,” said the Scotchman.

“What does a’ mean?” asked Tom.

“I mean that a man wants releegion,” replied Alec very solemnly. “I have been a thinking lad all my life, and when I chucked releegion and professed to believe in Colonel Ingersoll I kened fine I was making a fool of mysel’. It’s either whisky or releegion to keep a man’s courage up; that is, such a man as me.”

“Then you think there’s something after death?” said Tom.

“Ay, lad, I am sure of it. I’m a-thinking you’re richt, Tom, in going to the Y.M.C.A. meetings, and I know you’re wrang in not getting releegion. E’en when I’m fou’ of whisky, I have known that releegion was necessary; and if I only had the strength I’d gi’ up the whisky.”

The next day the camp was in a great state of excitement; the men had received definite information that they were to start for the Front in two days’ time. They did not know where they were going, but they were told it would be somewhere in France or Belgium. At first there was great cheering at this; the men shouted and boasted of what they would do when they were face to face with the Germans. After that, almost as if by prearrangement, a solemn silence fell among them; evidently they were thinking deeply. Some paid longer visits than usual to the wet canteen or public-houses; others, again, were seen walking alone as though they had no desire for company.

We who remain at home in safety, and talk about the heroism of the men going away to the Front, little realise the thoughts which pass through their minds. When the order to embark comes they don’t say very much about it, and even when they do talk they speak of death almost lightly. “If I am potted,” they say, “I am, and that’s all about it.” But that’s not all they feel, as I have reason to know. They love their lives just as much as we do, and they long to go back and spend their days amongst their loved ones. It is only rare that cowardice is seen, and it is rarer still for them to make any boast; the average Englishman is not given to boasting; he has his duty to do, and he just does it, saying very little about it.

On the night before they were to embark for France, farewell meetings were held at the Y.M.C.A. huts, and Tom noticed that Alec McPhail found his way to the hut where he went. Perhaps eight hundred or a thousand men had gathered, and although high spirits prevailed, each man felt that he was breathing an atmosphere which was not usual. There was a look not common in the eyes of the lads; a set, stern expression on their faces. Afterwards when they had been to the Front and returned, they would go out again without such feeling as now possessed them. But these lads had never been to the war before; they were entering upon an unknown; they knew that in all probability a large number of them would never come back to England again. Each had a hope that he might escape, although the chances were against him.

Still they cheered at the old recitations, listened to the old songs, and joined in the choruses which they liked just as they had been doing for months; they were not going to show the white feather.

A special speaker had come to the hut that night. He had been working among the soldiers in the Y.M.C.A. tents on the Continent, and had come home for a short holiday; now he had come to this camp in order to speak to the men before their departure. It is said that months before he had been fond of telling humorous stories, and had delighted in making the soldiers laugh. He certainly had a sense of humour, and now and then could not refrain from some witticism which set the highly strung lads in roars of laughter. But the close of his address did not inspire mirth.

“My lads,” he said, “you have done a brave thing; I don’t say that you deserve much praise for it, because at a time like this if an able-bodied youth does not join the Army he fails in his duty; and you are only doing your duty. If you had not done what you have done, I should be ashamed of you. All the same you are brave lads. You have offered your all, your very lives, at the altar of duty. I am not going to try and describe to you what you will have to do, and possibly have to suffer; you will find out that soon enough. Possibly many of you are going to your death. I don’t want to frighten you, but we have to face facts: I don’t say it is an awful thing to die, but it is a tremendous thing. You know that you have souls as well as bodies. I am not going to argue it out with you; I needn’t, because you know. I needn’t try to prove to you that there is a God, because you know it, you feel it. There is no atheism out at the Front: some of you have tried to live without God, and you have made a mess of your lives. I tell you, my boys, it’s a terrible thing to die without God. Some of you know what it is to believe in a personal Saviour; you have accepted Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came on earth to die for us that we might know God; and you have found Him to be a strength in temptation, a joy in sorrow. My lads, you all want that Saviour, and especially do you want Him now. You are embarking on the Great Unknown, and you need a Captain, a Guide, a Saviour: I have come to tell you about Him.”

I am not going to try to describe the close of his address. This man had seen hundreds die, he had come face to face with the great realities of life, of death, and of religion. He knew what he was talking about because he had experienced it, and he made the men feel what he felt. That night when the meeting was over Tom Pollard found himself again with Alec McPhail.

“That chap was fair earnest,” said Tom.

“Ay,” replied the Scotchman, “he went richt down to the bottom of things. Come wi’ me to the canteen, lad, I feel I must have a drink.”

“Not if I know it,” said Tom, “no drink for me to-night.”

But the Scotchman rushed away towards the canteen, and Tom, scarcely knowing what he was doing, followed him. When they entered, they saw a

number of men standing there drinking.

“Yes,” they heard one man say, “that chap was right; I know I’m making a fool of myself, but I’m going to have another drink. My God! What would my mother say if she knew I wur off tomorrow morning!”

A lad with a pale, refined face, standing by his side, had a glass in his hand ready to lift to his lips. “Ay, and what would my mother say!” he said. “I know she would be praying for me.”

At this some one uttered a coarse oath, but the lad threw the drink from him and left the canteen.

“Ay, he’s richt,” said the Scotchman as he watched him go. “Tom Pollard, man, I hinna prayed for years, but I am praying to-nicht. I ought to be a different man, for I ken the fundamentals of releegion, but I’m giving my heart to God to-nicht; I am for sure.”

Tom followed the Scotchman out of the canteen towards one of the numerous sleeping-huts.

“I am giving my heart to God, Pollard,” he said hoarsely, “and I’m writing to tell my mither about it this very night. Ay, man, something has come into my life stronger than the power of whisky!”

When Tom found his way to his own sleeping-hut that night, he was in a chastened frame of mind. “I’m noan going to turn religious,” he said almost sullenly, “but I believe he’s got the reight on’t.”

The next morning they were at Folkestone, where the big troopship lay in the harbour. Before mid-day the ship was crowded with soldiers. How many men were there Tom had not the slightest idea; but they filled every part of it. Generals, colonels, majors, non-commissioned officers, and privates were all huddled together. All over the ship officers and men were alike; they were going to the field of battle to die if need be for honour, duty, and the liberty of the world.

There were scarcely a score of civilians on board, and even they were in some way attached to the Army. Nurses wearing the Red Cross, religious workers with a look of wonder in their eyes, a few sent by the Government on some particular mission, but all were taking part in the great War which was staggering the world.

Perhaps a mile or more out at sea a great Destroyer proudly spurned the waves; she was to guard the troopship along her perilous passage.

Presently they landed at Boulogne.

“Where are we going?” said one of the soldiers in Tom’s company as they entered a waiting train.

“I don’t know,” said Tom, “but what does it matter? We have nowt to do with that, we have just got to do our job.”

They spent all the night in the troop-train, which was crowded almost to suffocation. Where they were going they didn’t know, scarcely cared. Sometimes they were drawn up to a siding where they would stay for hours, then the train

crawled on again. Presently the morning broke and Tom saw a flat and what seemed to him, after Surrey, an uninteresting piece of country. Everything was strange to him, even the trees looked different from those he had seen in Surrey. On and on the train crawled, until presently they had orders to alight.

It was now early morning, and after breakfast they were formed in marching order. Tom took but little notice of the country through which they marched, except that they were on a straight road, which was paved in the middle. As the day advanced the sun grew hot and scorching, but the men marched on uncomplainingly; there was little merriment, but much thought. Presently noon came, and again they stopped for food, after which there was another march. By this time Tom realised that he was indeed in the zone of war. He saw what looked to him miles of motor waggons filled with food and munitions, numbers of ambulance waggons marked with the Red Cross. More than one body of horse soldiers passed him, and again he saw numbers of men bivouacked near him; but everywhere there were soldiers, soldiers. Tom could not understand it, it was all so different from what he expected, neither could he see any order or purpose in that which was taking place around him. There was activity and movement everywhere, but he could co-ordinate nothing, he was simply bewildered.

Towards evening there was another resting-time, and each man gladly threw himself full length on the grass. For a moment there was a silence, then Tom heard a sound which gave him a sickening sensation; he felt a sinking, too, at the pit of his stomach: it was the boom, boom, boom of guns.

“Look at yon’ airship in the sky!” cried one of the men. Each eye was turned towards it, then they heard the boom of guns again, after which there were sheets of fire around the aeroplane, and afterwards little clouds of smoke formed themselves.

“I am getting near at last,” thought Tom. “I wonder now—I wonder——”

CHAPTER V

Tom discovered presently that his destination was the Ypres salient, one of the most “unhealthy” places, to use the term in favour among the soldiers, in the whole of the English battle line. Here the most tremendous battle ever fought in our British Army took place—indeed one of the most tremendous battles in the history of the world. A sergeant who was in a garrulous mood described it to Tom with a great deal of spirit.

“Yes,” he said, “you have come to an unhealthy spot; still it may be good for you. The blessed Huns thought they were going to break through here about last September when the battle of Wipers was fought. They had six hundred thousand men to our hundred and fifty thousand. Then that blooming Kaiser made up his mind that he would break through our lines, and get to Calais. Yes, it was a touch and go with us. Fancy four to one, and they had all the advantage in big guns and ammunition. You think *those* big guns? Wait till you have heard Jack Johnson and Black Maria. Talk about hell! Hell was never as bad as the battle of Wipers. I thought we were licked once. I was in the part where our line was the thinnest, and we saw ’em coming towards us in crowds; there seemed to be millions of ’em; we had to rake out every cook and bottle-washer on the show. Lots of our men were fresh to the job, too, and had never smelt powder, or felt the touch of steel. But, by gosh, we let ’em know! Four to one, my boy, and we licked ’em, in spite of their big guns and their boasting. Aren’t you proud of being a British Tommy?”

Tom listened with wide, staring eyes and compressed lips. There within a mile or two of the battle line he could picture all of which the sergeant spoke. As he looked he could see the brown line of earth away in the distance, and could discern too, here and there, dotted along this brown line, clouds of black smoke. All around him our guns were booming, while the distant sounds of the German guns reached him.

“Ay, it’s a bit unhealthy,” went on the sergeant, “but you will get used to it after a bit. There, hear that?”

Tom listened and heard the screaming of a shell in the air; the note it made was at first low, but it rose higher and higher and then dropped again.

“When the note gets to about B flat,” said the sergeant, “you may know it’s soon going to fall, and as soon as it has touched the ground the shell bursts and tears a big hole up.”

“Are many killed?” asked Tom.

“Ay, there’s a good lot of casualties every day, but not so much as there was at the second battle of Wipers. That was fair terrible. You see, the Germans could not drive us back nor break our lines. That was why they started bombarding the

city. I was here and saw it. Man, you should have heard the women screaming, and seen the people flying for their lives. Whole streets of houses were burning, and all the time shells were falling and bursting. How many people were killed here God only knows, but there must have been hundreds of women and children. But what did those dirty swine of Germans care! They could not break our lines, and they had lost a hundred and fifty thousand men, so they turned their big guns upon the city. 'We can kill Belgian women and children, anyhow,' they said, 'and we can smash up the old town.' Are you a bit jumpy?"

"No n-n-no;—that is, a little bit," said Tom.

"Oh, it's quite quiet now," replied the sergeant. "I will walk through with you if you like and show you round. This is the great square; one of the biggest in the world. I saw it before it was bombarded; the Cathedral and the Cloth Hall were just wonderful; see what they are now! knocked into smithereens. See the trees around, how they are twisted and burnt? That house there I saw shelled myself. I had got a bit used to the shelling by that time, but I tell you it gave me a turn. It was the biggest house in the Square, and a great bomb caught it fair in the face; it seemed as though the whole world was shaking, and the noise fair deafened you. The house went down as though it were cardboard, and other houses around fell as though to keep it company, while others caught fire. Ay, they're sweet creatures, are those German swine."

"Doan't you hate 'em?" asked Tom.

"Hate 'em?" said the sergeant; "well, I don't know. Mind you, they are fine soldiers, and brave men too, or at least they seem brave; but it's discipline does it. They are just like machinery. Once when I was right in the middle of it, they attacked in close formation, and we turned our machine-guns on 'em. Ever seen a mowing machine in a wheat field? ever seen the wheat fall before the knives? Well, that's how they fell. Hundreds upon hundreds; but still they came on. Just as fast as one lot was killed, the others, knowing that they were going to certain death, came on, thinking they would wear us down by sheer numbers."

"Did they?" asked Tom.

"No, that time they didn't," replied the sergeant, "but another scrap I was in they did. That is their plan, you know; it is terribly costly, but when it succeeds it works havoc."

"Have you been wounded at all?" asked Tom.

"Yes, I have stopped two bullets, one in the foot and another in the shoulder, but I quickly got over it. I have been wonderfully lucky. You will get used to it after a bit; you seem a plucky chap; you don't look like the sort that runs away. Although, mind you, I have seen plucky chaps hook it."

"No, I'm not plucky," said Tom; "but I don't think I would run away."

"Wait till the shrapnel is falling around you; wait till great pieces of jagged shell mow men down on your right and on your left. Still we have stuck so far,

and we must stick to the end. Still, from a military standpoint,” and here the sergeant spoke judicially, “our holding Wipers is a bad policy. You see, it’s a salient and the Germans guns are all around us; but if we made a straight line we should give them Wipers, and that would have a bad effect. Just look in here,” and he pointed to a house, the front of which was completely blown away, but the rest of which remained comparatively intact.

“There’s the room just as those poor blighters of Belgians left it,” continued the sergeant. “See the baby’s shoes, and the kiddy’s dress? There are one or two pictures on the wall, not of much value, or those blooming souvenir-hunters would have got ’em.”

“Do you think we shall lick ’em?” asked Tom.

“Lick ’em! Of course we shall,” said the sergeant, who had served nearly twenty years in the Army. “Mind you, it will be no easy job. Up to now they have had the upper hand of us, both in men and munitions; but we are gaining on ’em now. What I can’t stand is those blooming swipes, those shirkers who sit at home and who call themselves men. I tell you I’m for conscription out and out. This is no job to be played with; if we don’t put forth our strength we can’t beat ’em. But just think of those swine, who read the papers and talk about beating the Germans, who strut about with their patent-leather boots and fine clothes, and try to make out that they are gentlemen, but who won’t face the music; that’s what sickens me. Who are we fighting for, I should like to know? We are fighting for them, and for our women, and for the old country. They think they can stop at home and criticise, and then when we have done the work, share the benefits. Great God!”—and here the sergeant indulged in some unprintable language—“I would like to get hold of them.”

“Isn’t it dangerous here?” asked Tom, as another shrieking shell passed over their heads.

“Not just now,” replied the other; “their shells are falling on the other side of the town. Of course,” he added casually, “they may fall here any moment.”

“I asked you just now,” said Tom, “whether you hated the Germans?”

“Yes, you did,” replied the sergeant, “and I went off on another tack. Hate ’em? Well, it’s this way. At the beginning I don’t know that I hated ’em so much. Yes, what you call Belgian atrocities were hellish; but ’twasn’t that, and as long as they fought fair that was all I cared about. But when they got using that poisonous gas they came it a bit too strong. No, lad, I never hated ’em till then. But when they used that stuff and laughed about it, ay, and laughed to see our poor chaps writhing in agony, I felt I must kill every German I saw. Of course, we’ve got over it now a bit, and we’re all supplied with helmets, but when they used it first we had simply nothing to defend us. Yes, I have done some rough bits of work in my time, but I never met with anything like that. When you see your own pals getting bluer and bluer in the face, and coughing and gasping, oh, I tell you it made us

mad! We didn't feel like showing any mercy after that. Besides, they have no sense of fair play, the swipes. I was in a scrap once, and after a hard tussle, and after losing lots of men, a lot of Germans held up their hands and shouted, 'We surrender.' Our officer, a young chap new to the job, and knowing nothing of their tricks, instead of telling them to come to us, told us to go to them, they holding up their hands all the time; but no sooner did we get near them than they up with their pistols and shot two of our chaps. They thought our officer was going to take it lying down, and when they were taken prisoners they laughed and said everything was fair in war; but our young officer saw red, and he said 'No, my lads, you are going to kingdom come.' 'What!' shrieked those German swine, 'will you kill men after they have surrendered?' 'You are not men,' said the lieutenant; 'men don't shoot after they've surrendered—only Germans do that.'

"And then?" asked Tom, "then——"

"Ah well," replied the sergeant grimly, "there were no questions asked in the morning."

"Great God!" said Tom, "what a ghastly thing war is!"

"Wait till you have seen it, my lad," replied the sergeant.

For some weeks Tom was in the neighbourhood of Ypres without taking any part in the righting. During that time he got accustomed to the constant booming of the guns, and to the fact that any moment a shell might fall near him and blow him into eternity. On more than one occasion, too, he roamed around the ruins of Ypres; and while he could not be called an imaginative lad he could not help being impressed by the ghastly desolation of this one-time beautiful city. In many of the streets not one stone was left upon another, not one of the inhabitants who had formerly lived there remained; all had fled; it was indeed a city of the dead. To Tom the ruins of the great Cloth Hall and the Cathedral were not the most terrible; what appealed to him most were the empty houses in which things were left by the panic-stricken people. Bedsteads twisted into shapeless masses; clothes half burnt; remnants of pieces of cloth which tradesmen had been in the act of cutting and stitching; children's toys, and thousands of other things which suggested to the boy the life the people had been living. Not a bird sang, not even a street dog roamed amidst the shapeless desolation; the ghastly horror of it all possessed him. Great gaping holes in the old ramparts of the city; trees torn up by their roots and scorched by deadly fire: this was Ypres, not destroyed by the necessities of war, but by pure devilry.

At last Tom's turn came to go up to the front trenches. It was with a strange feeling at heart that he, with others, crept along the pave road towards the communication trench. They had to be very careful, because this road was constantly swept by the German machine guns. Presently, when they came to a house used as a first dressing station close to the beginning of the communication trench, Tom felt his heart grow cold. Still, with set teeth, and a hard look in his

eyes, he groped his way along the trench, through Piccadilly, and Haymarket, and Bond Street, and Whitehall (for in this manner do the soldiers name the various parts of the zigzag cuttings through the clay): while all the time he could hear the pep, pep, pep, pep of the machine guns, and the shrieking of the shells.

There was no romance in war now, it was a grim, ghastly reality. After following the lines of the trenches for well-nigh an hour he was informed that he had now reached the front line and was within a hundred or a hundred and fifty yards of the Huns. For the moment there was a comparative quiet, only occasionally did he hear the sound of a gun, while the shrieking of the shells was less frequent. Danger seemed very far away; he was in a deep hole in the ground, and above the earthworks were great heaps of sand-bags. How could he be hurt? The men whom his company was sent to relieve seemed in high good spirits too, they laughed and talked and bandied jokes. "There seems no danger here," thought Tom. An hour passed and still all was comparatively quiet.

"I would like to see those blooming German trenches," said a Lancashire lad, "and I will too."

He lifted his head above the sand-bags and looked towards the brown heaps of earth perhaps a hundred yards away.

"Dost' a see any Germans?" some one asked.

"I'm not sure," replied the lad, "but I believe I see the top of a German helmet."

"Duck down quickly," said another, "thou'st been holding thy head there too long."

"Nay, there's no danger," replied the lad, "it's all as quiet as——" But he did not finish the sentence; at that moment there was a crack of a rifle and a bullet passed through the poor boy's brain.

"That will be a warning for you fellows," said an officer who came up just then. "You must play no tricks; there have been hundreds of lads killed here who would never have been touched if they hadn't been careless and foolish. Let's have no more of your Hampstead Heath Bank Holiday skylarking."

Tom did duty at the front trench on several occasions, but nothing of importance took place. The Huns seemed comparatively quiet, and while there was severe artillery work on both sides, Tom did not receive a scratch.

The fourth time he went to the front lines, however, he felt that there was a change in the atmosphere, and he saw by the strained looks and the compressed lips of the men that something desperate was expected. The officers gave their orders with more sternness than usual; every one was alert.

Tom thought he knew what intense artillery work meant, but he realised that day that hitherto he had seen and heard nothing. Such a tornado of shells burst around him that it was like hell let loose. Hour after hour the Germans bombarded our trenches, tearing great holes in the ground, and undoing the work of months. It

seemed to Tom that no man could escape.

“Oh,” cried the boy, “if they would be quiet for only a minute! If one could only stop to take breath!”

But there was no cessation; it seemed as though the Germans were determined to make a final and overwhelming attack; as though all the explosives in the world were concentrated on those few miles.

The sights were horrible; he saw shells falling on groups of men, tearing them to pieces, while all around him were the shrieks and cries of the wounded. Some of the men who were yet untouched yelled as though they were mad, others laughed, but their laughter was not natural; it was frenzied, wild, just as though they were madmen.

“We can’t stand it! We can’t stand it!” cried the boy. “We shall all be blown into eternity. Why do we stay here like this?”

He spoke to the sergeant who had given him a description of the first battle of Ypres some time before. The sergeant was comparatively cool; he had been through it before.

“It’s nothing to you whether we are doing anything or not,” replied the sergeant, “besides, don’t be a fool; our guns are giving them as hot a time as their guns are giving us. Don’t lose your head.”

“I wouldn’t mind if I could do something,” said the poor boy, trembling.

“Do! Unless I’m mistaken there will be enough for us all to do very soon. There! firing has ceased! Look out!”

It was as the sergeant said; almost suddenly there was a calm, and a few seconds later Tom heard a command which made his knees knock together.

What happened after that Tom could never describe; even if he could, he would not have done so. As he has said to me more than once, “It was not something to talk about, it was a matter of bayonet work; it was fighting face to face, steel to steel.”

Tom didn’t feel fear now; all that was gone. His muscles were hard, his thoughts were tense, he saw red! Presently he had a conviction that we were gaining ground, and he suddenly became aware of the fact that we had gained the better of the situation and had returned to our trenches. A number of the enemy had been taken prisoners, and the plot which the Germans had hatched had come to nothing. Immediately afterwards something happened which Tom never forgot. A German officer lay wounded some little distance from the trench which the English had taken, and piteously cried for help.

“Which of you chaps will volunteer to go and fetch him in?” cried a young officer whose bravery that day had been the talk of all the men.

Each looked to the other as if for response; they were dazed and bewildered by all they had gone through.

“I say,” said another officer, “you can’t expect any of the chaps to do that.

Directly the Huns see any one going to him they will shoot him. Besides, he may be nearly dead; better put an end to him.”

“But hear how he groans!” cried the young fellow. “There, I’ll do it.”

He leapt from the trench and rushed along the intervening space for perhaps about fifty yards; then lifting the German officer bodily, he brought him back to safety.

“I am parched—parched!” cried the German, as if in agony, “give me water.” The young Englishman got a cup of water and held it to the German’s lips, but even as he did so the German drew his revolver and shot him through the heart.^[1]

What happened to the German after that I will not try to relate. Why am I describing this, and why have I mentioned this incident? Only that our people at home may realise what heroes our lads are; what they have to face in order to save our country, and what kind of an enemy they have to deal with. I am describing it to try if possible to raise a blush of shame on the faces of those shirkers at home who are a disgrace to the name of Englishman.

Tom passed through this ordeal without a scratch, and by and by when his company was relieved, and he returned to a place of safety, the whole episode seemed but a ghastly dream. And yet it caused a great change to Tom’s life. If he had been asked to describe it he would not have been able to do so; it was something subtle, elusive; but the change was there. He felt as though he had a new conception of life; and he realised its tremendousness as he had never realised it before.

He was by no means given to philosophising, but two things impressed him. One was the tremendous amount of heroism that lay latent in the commonplace lads who had come out with him. He knew many of them before they joined the Army; knew them just as they were. Humdrum workaday boys who did not seem capable of anything like heroism; but the war had brought out new qualities, fine qualities. He saw how those men were willing to sacrifice themselves for others; saw them doing all sorts of glorious deeds. One fellow impressed him tremendously. He himself was wounded, but not badly, for he could easily have crawled to a place of safety; and yet he remained with a comrade, holding his head on his knees and ministering to him as tenderly as a woman, in a spot where life could not be valued at a pin’s purchase. Deeds like that are common at the Front.

The other thing which impressed him was the tremendous power of religion. Before he went up to the firing line he had heard one officer say to another, “I wish the chaplains could be allowed to go up to the front line of trenches. You see, when men have no religion to support them, the constant bombardment and danger make them jumpy.” Tom realised what this meant after the action I have just described. He himself felt that he needed a Power greater than his own, to steady him.

Tom had just heard that he was to go on duty at the front trench again, when

passing along by the canal towards one of the officers' dug-outs he saw a staff officer talking with the major of his own battalion. Tom lifted his hand to salute, when the staff officer turned and spoke to him.

"Ah, is that you, Pollard?"

"Yes, Mr. Waterman—that is, yes, sir," stammered Tom.

"I hope you are doing well," said Waterman.

"I am still alive, thank you, sir," and then he passed on.

"He's got a safe job anyhow," thought Tom, "he'll be at the Divisional Headquarters I expect; well, he's a clever fellow."

That night when Tom returned to the first line he was put on sentry duty. It was one of those silent, windless, starless nights, when under ordinary circumstances a solemn hush prevails. Even the trenches were silent that night. On both sides the guns had ceased booming; it seemed as though a truce had been agreed upon, and yet the air was tense with doom.

Tom could not help feeling it as he traversed that part of the trench in which his especial duty lay. Unimaginative as he was, his mind worked freely. He called to mind the engagement of a few days before, remembered what he had seen and heard.

Again and again he traversed the cutting in the earth; his rifle on his shoulder, and bayonet fixed. How silent it was! Not a man's voice was to be heard. He knew that sentries were all around him, but he could not hear a footstep; he knew, too, that many of the soldiers lay in their dug-outs, sleeping as peacefully as though they were at home. And yet he felt all alone. "Where's Jim Bates now, I wonder, and Arthur Wadge, and Bill Perkins, and George Wilson? they were killed, but are they really dead?" he said to himself. He had known these lads well; in fact, they had been pals of his, and he wondered what had become of them. Were they still alive? What had they felt like when they had to cross the deep, dark valley? What was death?

He thought of his old Sunday-schooldays, thought of his old beliefs. "Ay," cried Tom aloud, "if I could only feel that Christ was wi' me now I shouldn't care a bit; but I gave Him up months ago. Alice Lister believed in Him, ay, she did an' all. I wonder where Alice is now? Does she ever think about me, I wonder? does she pray for me as she said?"

He thought of what the man had said in the Y.M.C.A. hut on the night before they set sail for France. He had told the soldiers that they needed a personal Saviour, and that that Saviour was ever waiting, ever watching, to give them help; that He would be near all those who stretched out their lame hands of faith towards Him, and help them, strengthen them, comfort them. It was very unreal, it seemed a long way off too. And yet was it? Was Christ there just as the man had said?

"Boom!" The sound came from an enemy's gun, but he heard no shell

screeching its way through space, saw no light of explosion. It was not repeated, although he waited, listening tensely. Minute after minute passed, still there was silence; evidently the English gunners were instructed not to reply.

What was the meaning of it? The silence became so tense that it seemed to make a noise; the air was laden with gloom.

“I wonder what it means,” said the boy, and a great fear possessed him; he felt as though he were on the brink of a fathomless chasm, a chasm which was as black as ink.

Minute after minute he waited, and still no sound broke the silence.

He tried to comfort himself by remembering pleasant things that happened at Brunford, but in vain. It seemed to him as though he was surrounded by something fierce and terrible; was it a premonition of death, he wondered?

Again he called to mind what the Y.M.C.A. man had said on the night before they started for the Front. He had advised them to pray, and to put their trust in a loving God who had been revealed to them through Jesus Christ.

He still tramped the bit of trench which it was his duty to guard, looking eagerly into the darkness as if to discern the outline of an approaching enemy. “If I only could pray!” thought Tom, “if I only could!”

But he had not prayed for years, the very thought of prayer had gone out of his mind and heart; but oh! how he longed for something to comfort and steady him!

Well, why should he not pray? It could do no harm, it might even do him good.

Lifting his eyes towards the inky-black sky, he tried to formulate a prayer, but he could not, his thoughts could not shape themselves, his mind refused to work; he opened his lips and cried, “O God!”

That was all; he could think of nothing else to say, but he repeated the words again and again:

“O God!—O God!—O God!”

That was all. He had asked for nothing, he had indeed hardly thought of anything. Nevertheless he was comforted; the words he had uttered meant infinite things, for at the back of his mind he had a confused belief that God saw, that God listened, that God understood, and the thought changed everything.

“I wonder what Alice Lister is doing now,” thought the boy presently. He did not know why it was, but somehow God seemed more real when he thought of the girl who had promised to pray for him.

[1] This incident was described to me as having actually taken place as I have set it down here.

CHAPTER VI

What was Alice Lister doing on the night when Tom prayed? If it had been a night of wonder to Tom, it had been a night of decision to Alice Lister, who had to face another crisis in her life. While Tom had been offering his almost inarticulate prayer in the trenches in the Ypres salient, Alice Lister sat alone in her bedroom.

More than a year had passed since the Sunday afternoon when she had told Tom that he must make his choice between her and the life he seemed determined to lead. What it had cost her to do this I will not try to describe, for Alice had truly cared for Tom. It was true that he did not quite belong to her class, and it was also true that her parents had done their best to dissuade her from thinking about him; but Alice had been fond of Tom: something, she knew not what, had drawn her heart towards him. She had believed in him too; believed that he was possessed of noble qualities which only she understood. Then as she saw Tom drifting, she knew that her decisive step must be taken, and she had taken it.

Afterwards, when she was told how Tom had risen in the great crowd at the hall in the Mechanics' Institute, and had gone up to the platform and volunteered for active service, her heart had thrilled strangely. She did not understand much about the war, but she felt that Tom had done a noble thing. In spite of the fact, too, that he had left her to walk out with Polly Powell, she had a sense of possession; it seemed to her that Tom belonged to her more than to this highly coloured buxom girl who had taken him from her.

Then something happened which set the people at the church she attended talking freely. The young minister was a bachelor, and it was evident he was enamoured with Alice; he paid her marked attention, and eagerly sought to be in her company.

"That's something like," said many of Alice's friends; "Alice will make a splendid minister's wife."

But when at length Mr. Skelton proposed to Alice, she had no difficulty in answering him. He could offer her a far better position than Tom dreamed of; the work she would have to do as a minister's wife, too, would be thoroughly in accord with her tastes and desires. But Alice cared nothing for Mr. Skelton. Her heart was sad when she saw how pale he looked at her refusal, but she had no hesitation.

The problem which faced her now, however, was not so easy to settle. Young Harry Briarfield was not a comparative stranger like Mr. Skelton; she had known him all her life, they had been brought up together in the same town, they had gone to Sunday School together, they had sung duets together at concerts, and although she had never looked at Harry in the light of a lover she had always been

fond of him.

Harry was in a good position too; his father was a manufacturer in a fairly large way, and he had just been admitted as a partner into the business. He was twenty-four years of age now, was highly respected throughout the town, and was looked upon as one who in a few years would hold his head high among commercial men.

During the last few weeks Harry had come often to Mr. Lister's house, ostensibly to talk about business, but really to see Alice.

Mr. and Mrs. Lister had nudged each other and smiled at Harry's frequent visits.

"I knew our Alice would do the right thing," said Mr. Lister to his wife; "for a time she went silly about that Pollard boy, but she threw him over of her own accord. Harry's a nice lad, and he's making a tidy bit of brass, while George Briarfield has about made his pile. In two or three years Harry will have the business entirely in his own hands, and then there will not be a better chance in Brunford for her."

Mrs. Lister sighed.

"I don't think our Alice has forgotten Tom Pollard, though," she replied.

"Nonsense," replied her husband, "what is the good of her thinking about Tom? I thought he would have done well at one time, and if he hadn't taken up with that Polly Powell lot he might have got on; but he did, and then he went for a soldier. What is the good of our Alice thinking about him? Even if the war were to finish next week and Tom were to come back, it would take him years, even if he had good luck, to make five pound a week, while Harry's making a thousand a year if he's making a penny."

"Ay, I know," replied Mrs. Lister, "but you can never judge a lass's heart. You know how it was wi' us, George; at the very time you asked me to be your wife you were only making thirty-three shillings a week, and William Pott was making hundreds a year. He was a far better chance nor you, George, and people said I was a fool for not taking him; but I couldn't."

"That was a different thing," said George Lister hastily, "that Pollard boy went wrong. Besides, we need not think about that now; Alice gave him up, and very likely he will be killed."

On the night when Tom was alone in the trenches, Harry Briarfield made his way to Mr. Lister's house, and it was not long before Alice and he were left alone together. Harry had made up his mind to make his proposal that night, and he had but little doubt as to the result.

"Look here, Alice," he said presently, "I want to say something to you, something very particular. You must have seen for a long time how fond I am of you, and perhaps you have wondered why I haven't spoken. I wanted to badly enough, but I waited until father took me into partnership. You see," he went on,

“at the beginning of the war things were going bad with us; there was a boom in the cotton trade about a year ago, but when the war broke out there was a regular slump, and we thought we were going to be ruined. Now, however, things are going very well again. We have got some war contracts, and we are making money.”

Alice’s heart beat wildly, although by an effort she appeared calm.

“I wonder you have not joined the Army, Harry,” she said; “every day there’s a call for more men.”

“Not if I know it,” replied Harry. “At one time I did think of trying for a commission, but that would have been foolish: you see I might not have been able to have got it, and of course a man in my position could not go as a Tommy.”

“Why not?” asked Alice quickly. “I am told that lots of men of every order join as privates.”

“No, thank you,” replied Harry, with a laugh. “I know one chap who did that; Edgar Burton. Do you know him? He joined at the beginning of the war, but he quickly got sick of it. He said the life was terrible; he described to me how he had to wash up dishes, and scrub the floors of his barracks, and how he had to be pals with a lot of chaps who didn’t know the decencies of life. Besides, think of me on a shilling a day!”

“Still, if your country needs you?” suggested Alice.

“I am doing more important work at home,” replied Harry; “they could not do without me at the mill. It’s all very well for boys like Tom Pollard, who used to be so fond of you, but for people like me it’s different.”

There was a silence for a few minutes, and then Harry went on again:

“Alice, you know how fond I am of you—in fact, I have loved you all my life. You will marry me, won’t you?”

Harry was very disappointed, and not a little surprised, that Alice did not answer in the affirmative right away; but he had conceded with fairly good grace when she had asked for a few days to think about it.

“It is all right,” said Harry to himself as he left the house that night, “I am sure she means yes. And she’s a fine lass, the finest in Brunford.”

That was why Alice sat alone that night thinking. She had promised to give Harry her definite reply in three days’ time, and although she was very fond of him she could not bring herself to give him the answer he desired. When he had left the house her father and mother had come into the room.

“Well, Alice, have you fixed it up?”

She shook her head, but didn’t speak.

“Come now, lass, you needn’t be so shy. I know he’s asked you to wed him; he asked for my permission like a man, and then he told me he was going to speak to you to-night. You can’t do better, my dear. Have you fixed it all up?”

“No,” she said.

“What!” cried the father, “you don’t mean to say you have been such a fool as to say no!”

“I have said nothing as yet,” was her answer.

George Lister heaved a sigh of relief. “Ay, well,” he said, “it’s perhaps a good thing not to say yes at once. Hold him back two or three days and it will make him all the more eager. When a man comes to me to buy cloth I never shows as ’ow I am eager to sell. But of course you *will* take him?”

“I don’t know,” replied Alice.

“Don’t know! Why don’t you know? You like him, don’t you?”

“I don’t know, father,” she replied, and then she rushed out of the room.

“What’s the meaning of this, lass?” said George Lister to his wife. “Has she told you anything?”

“Not a word,” said Mrs. Lister.

“But surely she can’t be such a fool as to refuse Harry! Why, there isn’t a better chap in Brunford! He’s an only son, and his father’s brass will go to him when he dies.”

But Mrs. Lister did not speak a word; in her eyes was a far-away look, as though she saw something which her husband did not see.

As for Alice, she sat for a long time thinking in silence.

Harry’s words still rang in her ears; the memory of the look on his face as he left her still remained. Still she could not make up her mind. Yes, she liked Harry, in a way she admired him. He was a teacher in the Sunday School, he was a good business man, he was clever, and he was respected in the town; and yet she hesitated.

Hour after hour passed away, and still she could not make up her mind. In spite of Harry Briarfield’s words she had not forgotten the lad from whom she had parted months before. Why was it? She thought she had forgotten him. He had been unworthy of her; he had taken up with a girl whom she despised, a coarse, vulgar girl, and she had heard since that Polly Powell had been walking out with a number of young men. And Tom had preferred this kind of creature to her love. Her pride had been wounded, her self-respect had been shocked, and yet even now, while she was thinking of Harry Briarfield’s proposal, her mind reverted to the boy who had gone away as a soldier.

The Town Hall clock boomed out the hour of midnight. Alice found herself mechanically counting the strokes of the deep-toned bell. Then she fell on her knees beside the bed, but the prayer which she had been wont to pray did not come to her lips. Her thoughts were far away; she pictured a distant battlefield; she imagined the boom of guns; she heard the clash of bayonets; she thought she heard the cries of wounded men, too; then a prayer involuntarily came to her lips:

“O God, save him! O God, help him and protect him!”

Thus it came to pass at the time Tom Pollard tried for the first time in many

months to pray, and to formulate his distracted thoughts, Alice Lister was kneeling by her bedside also trying to pray.

CHAPTER VII

Tom Pollard's mind was suddenly brought back to mundane things. It was now nearly one o'clock in the morning, and the night was chilly; a breeze having sprung up, the clouds had rolled away.

He distinctly heard a shout, and as far as he could make out it came from the German trenches, which were not far away.

"Holloa!"

"Holloa!" said Tom, "what is it?" He thought one of the other men on patrol duty had spoken to him.

"You belong to the Lancashires, don't you?"

"Of course I do," replied Tom; "what of that?" He was able to locate the voice now, and knew it came from a German trench.

"I have got something to tell you," and the words were followed by a laugh.

Whoever it was spoke in perfectly good English, although with a German accent.

"I reckon it'll be lies," was Tom's reply.

By this time another sentry, hearing Tom's voice, had rushed up to him.

"What is it? Who goes there?" he called out.

"Listen," whispered Tom, "it's one of the Bosches speaking to me. What is it?" he asked aloud.

"Only this," and the German laughed as he spoke: "you Lancashires are going to attack us at six o'clock to-morrow morning, eleven hundred strong, and we're ready for you. That's all," and again the German laughed.

"What does he mean?" said Tom to the man who stood by his side. "I know nothing about any attack. Do you?"

"I knows there's something on foot," replied the other, "but what it is I don't know."

"Do you think we ought to tell one of the officers?"

"Nay, it's not worth the trouble," was the reply; "besides, it's only a bit of bluff."

Two hours later the English trenches were full of movement; evidently, as the other sentry had told Tom, something was on foot. Orders were given in low, tense tones, and although it wanted some time to daylight, preparations were evidently being made for an attack.

The words which the German had spoken weighed heavily on Tom's mind. Of course he was only a private, but might not the news he had received mean something? The more he thought about it, the more he was convinced that the German who spoke to him told the truth. Tom had no knowledge, and no warning,

that an attack was to be made, and yet, within two hours from the time the German had spoken to him, preparations were being made for an attack. He knew, too, that his battalion was eleven hundred strong, having been reinforced only two days before. Seeing a young officer, he determined to speak to him and tell him what he had heard.

“It is very funny,” said the subaltern, “I can’t understand it a bit; but it’s too late now, we must go through with it.” All the same the subaltern found his way to his Colonel.

Precisely at six o’clock that morning the attack was made. From what Tom learnt afterwards, it had been conceived and prepared for in secret. None but those in high command had any knowledge whatever of it. But evidently the enemy knew. As the German soldier who had warned Tom said, “they were ready for them,” and when the attack was made they were met by a storm of bullets. Indeed the whole adventure would have been disastrous had not the subaltern to whom Tom had spoken reported the conversation to a superior officer, who had hurriedly given orders for a number of the Black Watch to be brought up. As it was, although our loss of life was heavy, we did not have to yield any ground.

When the affair came to an end the Colonel of Tom’s battalion sent for him.

“Now, my man,” said the Colonel, “tell me exactly what you heard.”

Tom told his story straightforwardly. It was little he had to say, and although the Colonel cross-questioned him very closely he was not able to shake him.

“This is very strange,” said the Colonel to the Major when Tom had gone; “no one breathed a word about our plans, and as you know I laid everything before the General at the Divisional Headquarters. They were good plans too, and if the Germans had not got hold of them we should have made a big haul. What is the meaning of it?”

The Major shook his head.

“It was the biggest thing we had planned for months,” went on the Colonel, “and I can’t tell you how sick I am. We had everything in our favour too. There must be some treachery somewhere!”

“Where can the treachery be?” asked the Major. “You know what the Staff General said. It was to be kept absolutely quiet; the men were to know nothing about it until an hour before the time, and all the junior officers were to be kept in darkness. You know how careful the General is too.”

“But the fact is there, man!” cried the Colonel, “we have the evidence of this lad, who could not possibly have been mistaken. He seemed an intelligent lad too; you saw how closely I cross-questioned him. Who is he?”

“I will send for his sergeant,” was the Major’s reply.

A few minutes later Sergeant Ashworth appeared on the scene. It was the sergeant to whom Tom had spoken when he first came to Ypres.

“Tell me what you know of Private Pollard,” said the Colonel.

Sergeant Ashworth spoke freely about Tom.

“A smart lad, sir,” he said, “intelligent, and well-behaved. I spoke to him about whether he would like his lance-corporal’s stripe, but he didn’t seem to want it. He would make a very good non-commissioned officer, sir.”

“He seems a lad of some education,” replied the Colonel.

“Yes, sir, a lot of those Lancashire lads are very well educated; they are quick and sensible too, and Pollard is one of the best of them. My opinion of him is that he is utterly trustworthy and intelligent.”

“Now then, Blundell,” and the Colonel turned to the Major, “what do you think?”

“Of course we must report it to Headquarters at once,” replied the Major, “but for the life of me I can’t see through it.”

The incident as far as the men were concerned was simply regarded as an affair which had missed fire. How, they didn’t know. But there it was; a number of their comrades had been killed, and many more had been wounded. Still it was what they had come to the Front for. Many of their attacks had failed, and no one seemed to know why.

As may be imagined, Tom thought a great deal about it. He knew by the Colonel’s questions, and by the tone of his voice, that the affair was regarded as serious. Tom, although not brilliant, had a good deal of common sense. He was able to put two and two together, and his Lancashire gumption led him to see further than many gave him credit for. He kept his own counsel, but he had become alert to the finger-tips.

Altogether that night was the most wonderful in Tom’s history. In a way he could not understand, it formed an epoch in his life; it affected him in many ways. From that time he felt the reality of God. It was not an impression which came to him for a moment and then passed away, it was something which became permanent. God was a personal Power ever present with him. He was not simply some great Eternal Abstraction, but He was a great loving Father, revealed through Jesus Christ His Son. All the teaching he had received in the Sunday School, all the addresses he had heard at the Y.M.C.A. huts, came back to him. He formulated no theories, he tried to shape no creeds, but there seemed to be a Spiritual Deposit in his life to which he had hitherto been a stranger. He was a child of the Great Eternal Father, and Jesus Christ had told him what that Father was like. He said nothing about it to any one, it was not something to talk about. To Tom it was very real, and in a vital sense the knowledge made him a new man; a new life pulsated through his being. What it was he could not tell, did not even care. But it was there. Indeed he had a greater love for his life than ever, but he was no longer afraid.

It was not until two days later that Tom received news that Alec McPhail was among the wounded and had been removed to a hospital some little distance from

Ypres, on the road leading to Cassel. He had seen but little of McPhail since he had come to France, as the Scotchman's battalion of the Black Watch occupied the trench some three miles from where the Lancashires were situated. They had met occasionally near Ypres, but had had little to say to each other. When Tom heard he was wounded, however, he determined to go and see him.

"He got it bad," said a friend of McPhail's; "they told me at the dressing station that he was in no fit condition to be removed, but they had to do it."

"You don't mean to say he's going to die!" said Tom.

"Nay, I don't think it's so bad as that," replied the other, "but he's got it bad."

When Tom arrived at the little town where the hospital was situated he immediately asked for permission to see the wounded man.

The nurse shook her head. "I doubt if you can," she replied.

"Is he very bad?" asked Tom.

The nurse nodded. "Very bad indeed," she replied; "he was wounded the other morning when the attack was made. We seem to have lost a number of men."

"Yes," said Tom, "I was there and I heard that the Black Watch were called up."

For a few seconds there was a silence between them, while Tom scanned the nurse's face closely.

"Do you mean to say he's going to die?" asked Tom, and his voice trembled a little.

The nurse nodded. "I am afraid so," she said. "He's too ill to see any one, and I doubt if he would know you."

"I am sure he would like to see me," said Tom pleadingly; "you see we were pals in Lancashire, and we saw a goodish bit of each other while we were in the camp in Surrey. I would like to see him if I could, I would really."

"Well, I shall have to speak to the doctor," was the nurse's reply. "Will you wait here? I won't be long before I'm back."

A curious feeling came into Tom's heart. He did not know very much about McPhail, but he recalled the conversations that they had had in Lancashire, and he vividly remembered the night before they had started for the Front. McPhail had been very much wrought upon then. Tom had watched his face while they sat together in the Y.M.C.A. hut when the speaker was telling them about the deep needs of their lives. McPhail's face had become set and stern, although his lips quivered. Afterwards when they had gone to the canteen the Scotchman had uttered words which Tom never forgot.

He wondered now if McPhail had meant what he said, wondered too if he had realised the same experiences which he, Tom, had passed through. It seemed awful that this tall, stalwart Scotchman was going to die. Why should men be killed in this way? Why should that lonely Scotchwoman, McPhail's mother, have to suffer because of German sins?

The nurse came back to him. "He wants to see you," she said, "and the doctor says he may. He's been asking for you."

"Asking for me?" queried Tom.

"Yes, I didn't know anything about it. He's been telling another nurse that he wanted to see you. Pollard is your name, isn't it?"

A few seconds later Tom was admitted into the room where a number of men lay. McPhail was in a corner of the room partially hidden from the rest. The Scotchman gave Tom a smile of recognition as he came up to him.

"I felt sure ye'd come," he whispered. "They told me I couldna get at ye, but I had a feeling that I should see ye before I died."

Tom hesitated a second before replying.

"It may not be as bad as that," he said, "lots of chaps who have looked worse than you have got better."

"Nay," said McPhail, "I'm pipped, I have got to go. I'm not in any pain, though," he added quickly, "the doctor saw to that, but it willna be long afore I'm gone. Tom, I would like ye to write a letter to my mither. As I told you, she's a godly woman, and I've grieved her sair."

"I will do anything you ask me, McPhail," was Tom's reply. "Ay, but don't give up; you may get well yet, and have another smack at the Germans."

"Nay," replied the other, "I have done my bit. I would like to live a bit longer, but there, it's a' for the best. I'm not afraid, Tom; do you remember that night before we came out here, when we left the canteen together?"

"Ay, I remember."

"I settled it that night," said the Scotchman. "You remember me tellin' ye that I was always a thinking sort o' laddie? Weel, when I got away by mysel' that night I made up my mind, and I just accepted the way o' salvation, which my mither explained to me when I were a wee laddie. And it worked, Tom! It worked! I laughed at reelegion when I was wi' you in Lancashire; but man, there's nothing else that stands by a man. Ay, and it works, it does. I want ye to write to my mither and tell her this. Tell her that I gave my life to the Lord on the night before I left England, that I have not touched a drap of drink since then, and that I died with the love of God in my heart. Will you tell her, Tom?"

"Ay," said Tom, "I will."

"Write down her address, will ye?"

Tom's hand trembled and the tears coursed down his face as he wrote the address of the woman who lived away in the Highlands of Scotland.

"It will comfort her," said McPhail when this was done. "It will make her feel that her teaching and her example were not in vain."

"Ay, but you must not die, you must not die," sobbed Tom.

"Dinna talk like that, lad," said the Scotchman. "I have been thinking it all oot sin' I have been here, and it's richt. It's a'richt. Without shedding of blood there is

no remission of sin, and you can't purge away iniquity without paying the price: I am a part of the price, Tom. The Son of God died that others might live. That's not only a fact, it is a principle. Thousands of us are dying that others may live. Christ died that He might give life and liberty to the world, and in a way that is what we are doing. I can't rightly explain it, it's too deep for me; but I see glimpses of the truth. Tom, have you learnt the secret yourself?"

"I think I have," replied Tom. "On the night of the attack I was on sentry duty, and while I was alone I—I prayed. I could not say it in words like, they wouldn't come, but I am sure I got the grip of it, and I feel as though God spoke to me."

"That's it, lad, that's it!" said the dying man eagerly. "Tom, do ye think ye could pray now?"

By this time the room had become very silent. The men who had been talking freely were evidently listening to that which I have tried to describe, but the two lads were not conscious of the presence of others.

"I don't know as I can pray in words," said Tom, "somehow prayer seems too big to put into words. I just think of God and remember the love of Jesus Christ. But happen I can sing if you can bear it."

"Ay, lad, sing a hymn," said the Scotchman. Tom knelt by the dying man's bed and closed his eyes. For some time nothing would come to him; his mind seemed a blank. Then he found himself singing the hymn he had often sung as a boy.

Jesu, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy Bosom fly;
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high;
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life is past,
Safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last.

"Ay, that's it, that's it," said the Scotchman, "it's a hymn I dinna ken, but it goes to the heart of things. Man, can ye recite to me the twenty-third Psalm?"

"Nay," replied Tom, "I forget which it is."

"That's because you were born and reared in a godless country," replied the Scotchman. "No Scottish lad ever forgets the twenty-third Psalm, especially those who canna thole the paraphrases. 'The Lord is my Shepherd,' surely ye ken that, Tom?"

"Ay," replied Tom eagerly, "I know that."

Then the two lads recited the psalm together:

"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside still

waters.

“He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name’s sake.

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.”

“Stop there!” said the Scotchman. “That’s eno’. It’s a’ there, Tom; that’s why I’m not afraid now. I’m in the valley of the shadow of death, but I dinna fear: the Lord is wi’ me, and He’s gotten hold of my hand.”

“You must go now,” said the nurse, coming up, “the doctor says you must not stay any longer.”

“Good-bye,” said the Scotchman, with a smile, “it’s a’ richt; you’ll tell my mither, won’t you?”

“Ay, I will,” said Tom.

“And—and Tom,” said the Scotchman almost eagerly, “although I shall be dead, I shall be near you, and mebbe—— Ay, but we shall meet in a better world, Tom. It’s a’ richt.”

As Tom passed through the room where the sick and wounded men lay, he noticed that they looked towards him longingly, wonderingly. The atmosphere of the place seemed charged with something sacred. At that moment Tom knew the meaning of the word Sacrament.

The next day the Scotchman died. The nurse was with him to the very last, and just before he breathed his last breath he lifted his eyes to her with a smile.

“It’s a’ richt, nurse,” he said, “what my mither taught me was true down to the very foundations.”

“Ay, it was grand, it was grand!” said Tom Pollard when he heard the news. “It doesn’t seem like death at all, it was just victory, victory!”

After that Tom did his work with a new light in his eyes. It seemed as though his visit to the Scotchman had removed the last remaining cloud which had hung in the sky of his faith.

CHAPTER VIII

“Yes,” said Colonel Blount to Major Blundell, “there’s treachery around; we may as well face it.”

“A man must be as blind as a bat not to see that,” was the Major’s reply, “but where is it?”

“That’s the question. But we cannot close our eyes to facts. Time after time our plans have been discovered, and not only discovered, but evidently revealed to the enemy. I’ve talked the matter over with General Withers, and while he agrees with me that these constant mishaps are strange, he cannot see where the treachery can come in. Why, man, he has even guarded himself against his own staff officers! He keeps his plans to himself, and only makes them known to those who have to carry them out; he’s taken every precaution a man can take, and you know what a keen fellow Withers is! Yet before we can strike our blow, the Huns get wind of our intentions!”

The Colonel sighed as he spoke. The constant mishaps were getting on his nerves; he felt that his brother officers regarded him as incapable. He wondered sometimes whether he would be relieved of his command, so unsuccessful had he been.

And yet he had been known as a capable, far-seeing officer, and earlier in the war his name had been mentioned in the dispatches. He had been spoken of in the General Headquarters, too, as an officer of more than ordinary ability, and yet for the last few weeks everything he had touched seemed to miscarry. There had been no great set-back, but there had been no advance worth speaking of. A spirit of restlessness and suspicion was felt in the whole regiment. It seemed to them as though there was an Achan in the camp, yet no one knew who the traitor might be.

Of course all these misadventures might have been owing to unfortunate accidents, or because the plans of the British officers were not well thought out. All the same Colonel Blount could not understand it. He was an old soldier, he had served in India, had been through the Boer War, and he felt sure that the plans he had submitted to the Divisional Headquarters had been sound and good. He had been complimented upon them too, and yet they had ended in failure, and he had narrowly escaped disaster.

“If I could see a glimmer of light anywhere,” said Colonel Blount to his senior major, “I wouldn’t mind. But I can’t. Only General Withers at the Divisional Headquarters, the Brigadier, you, and myself knew the details of our last scheme, and yet the Bosches got wind of them. It’s maddening, maddening!”

“Whoever the blighter is he’s got brains,” said the Major.

“Ah, here are two staff officers coming now!”

For some time after this Colonel Blount was more than ordinarily active. He was constantly in communication with the commanding officers of other battalions, and there were frequent journeys to Headquarters; but no one knew what was on foot. The presence of staff officers was constantly noted, and all felt that some big action was to take place, but when or in what way no one knew. Even the Tommies in the trenches felt that something of more than ordinary importance was in the air, and they discussed it one with another. They, too, could not help realising that things had been going bad with them, and that, to say the least of it, the Germans were not getting the worst of it.

Tom Pollard felt this more keenly than any one. He had been the man who had been questioned by the Colonel, and he had more than once fancied that he had been specially watched. Indeed Tom had determined to keep both ears and eyes well open, and if possible to do a little detective work on his own account. He entertained suspicions too, which he dared not breathe to any one. They seemed so wild and unfounded that they would not bear the test of a minute's careful thought, and yet they constantly haunted him.

Of course he knew nothing of what was being settled between the officers; he had not the slightest idea of the nature of the plans which had miscarried, he like the others only had a vague feeling that something was wrong.

One day, while near the canal which runs round the foot of the old ramparts of the city, he noticed that the Brigadier and Colonel Blount were talking with two staff officers; one of the latter was a general, while the other was a captain. Tom felt sure that the captain was Waterman, whom he had known in Brunford.

Tom was reclining near a dangerous corner, close by the Potijze Road which runs straight to the beginning of the British communication trench. German shells were constantly screeching their way through the air, and falling in various parts of the old town; but by this time he had become so accustomed to these ominous sounds that he had almost ceased to take notice of them. There was only one chance in a hundred that one of them might fall near him, and as he had been so far fortunate, he, like hundreds of others in a similar condition, thought he might escape altogether. Besides, although he stood near the dangerous crossing he was in a sheltered position, and as the day was hot he sat under the shade of a wall and looked out on the ruins of the old city.

A few seconds later the group of officers passed close by him, and Tom immediately rose and saluted.

"Oh, this is the man," said Colonel Blount as he caught sight of Tom. "Come here, Pollard."

Tom did as he was commanded, not without some fluttering around the region of his heart.

"Now, Private Pollard," said Colonel Blount, "repeat what you told me some time ago."

Again Tom found himself submitted to a keen cross-examination after he had told his story, and he noticed that all the officers, including Waterman, listened very attentively.

“There’s something wrong,” said Tom to himself; “they tried to shake me, but they failed; I know what I heard well enough.” And then he watched them as they quickly crossed the dangerous corner, and hurried into a sheltered position.

That same night, after the staff officers had returned to their Headquarters, Tom, who was passing the Water Tower, saw, much to his surprise, the retreating form of a staff officer. Of course this might mean nothing—he was utterly ignorant of the movements of those above him; all the same he felt as though hammers were beating against his forehead, so excited was he.

The next night Tom’s company was ordered to relieve a number of men who had been a good many hours in the trenches, and just as the shadows of evening were falling they crept along the Potijze Road towards the communication trench. An hour later Tom had taken up his post in the zig-zag cutting with a feeling that something of importance was going to happen.

Hour after hour passed away, and still Tom wondered at what he had seen and heard. He had no definite data upon which to go, no tangible reason for his suspicions, and yet with that bulldog tenacity characteristic of the sharp Lancashire boy he kept thinking of what he ought to do. Presently he heard a voice which he recognised; it was that of Major Blundell, in reply to something that had been said to him.

“Yes, yes,” said the Major, “I quite understand.”

“You are sure you have the instructions plain?”

“Perfectly sure.”

“Then I will get along here and speak to Captain Winfield.”

“Let me come with you,” said Major Blundell.

“Oh no, certainly not. I know the way perfectly well. Good night, Blundell.”

“Good night, Waterman.”

It was a fairly bright night, although a few clouds hung in the sky. Tom heard approaching footsteps, and then hid himself in a sharp corner of the trench while Waterman passed him. Tom followed noiselessly, all the time keeping out of sight of the man he watched. This he was able to do with comparative ease, owing to the zig-zag nature of the trench. Tom knew that at this particular point they were only a little more than a hundred yards from the German lines, and that the German snipers were constantly on the watch for any one who might happen to show himself above the sand-bags. He had not gone more than twenty yards when he saw Waterman stop and look around.

Tom stopped almost instinctively, still hidden by a sharp turn in the trench. The light was fairly good, and Tom’s eyes were keen. He saw that the man had adopted a listening attitude. That particular part of the trench was for the moment

deserted, although any moment a patrol might appear. Evidently Waterman was keenly watchful; he looked each way with evident care, and listened attentively. Then he took a piece of white paper from his pocket which seemed to be attached to something heavy. Even in the dim light Tom saw the white gleam of the paper which Waterman had taken from his pocket. Quick as a thought Waterman stepped on to the ledge of the trench, and then, leaning over the sand-bags, threw the paper towards the German lines. This done he stepped back and hurried quickly away.

For a second the lad was almost paralysed; then the meaning of it came to him like a flash of light, and before Waterman had proceeded half a dozen yards Tom had sprung upon him.

“What do you mean, fellow? Get away from me!” and Waterman struggled to free himself.

But Tom held on like grim death. “You are a German spy, that’s what you are!” he said hoarsely. “A mean, skulking German spy!”

“This will mean death for you, my man,” said Waterman, still struggling. “You are enough of a soldier to know that for a private to strike an officer in war time means court martial and death.”

“It will not be I who will be court martialled,” panted Tom. “Ah, you swine!” for at that moment Waterman had pulled out his pistol, and had not Tom struck his arm a bullet would have gone through his brain.

“I say, what’s this?”

“A German spy!” cried Tom hoarsely, “he tried to shoot me, sir!”

“A German spy!” said the new-comer. “You must be mad.”

“I am not mad, sir. I saw him.”

“He is mad!” said Waterman. “I’m here on duty and the fellow attacked me. Pull him off, Lieutenant Penrose, he’s strangling me!”

Tom recognised the new-comer although he had not seen him for months. It was Penrose who had been with him in Lancashire, and who had received his commission immediately after his arrival in Surrey.

“You know me, sir!” cried Tom, still holding on to the other; “you know I would not do a thing without reason, sir! Make him a prisoner, he’s been giving information to the enemy!”

“Prove it!” said Waterman.

“Yes, I will prove it!” panted Tom. “Make him a prisoner, sir; I tell you he’s been communicating with the enemy. I saw him not a minute ago!”

“What has he done?” asked Penrose.

“I saw him take a piece of paper from his pocket which was fastened to something heavy; then he threw it over the sand-bags towards the German lines. I tell you, sir, I saw him do it! Make him a prisoner.”

By this time others had come up, and Waterman, whom Tom had released

somewhat, laughed uneasily. "He's either a fool or a madman," he said; "he attacked me without a moment's warning, and without the slightest reason."

"Hold him fast, sir," cried Tom. "I'll soon prove to you whether it's without the slightest reason. Promise me you won't let him go, sir?"

Penrose, who had grasped the situation, replied quickly: "Of course I shall not let him go, but you must prove your accusation, Pollard. Where are you going?"

"I am going to get the paper he threw towards the German trenches," cried Tom. "That's it, sir, hold him fast!"

Tom was so excited that he had forgotten all about military rules and regulations. He acted just as he would have acted had he caught any one doing an outrageous deed before the war.

Waterman began to shout aloud, but Penrose was too quick for him. He placed his hand on the other's mouth, and said quietly, "No you don't, sir."

"Do you know what you are doing, Lieutenant?" said Waterman. "You are attacking your superior officer. Take away your men and let me go at once."

"Not until I get at the bottom of this," said Penrose quietly.

"I tell you the man is either a madman or a fool." Waterman was stammering painfully now.

"That will have to be proved," and Penrose gripped his arm tightly. "That's it, Jackson; take his revolver. As it happens," he went on to Waterman, "I know Pollard; he's a level-headed lad, and he would not have done this without reason. Ah, Major Blundell, will you come here a minute, sir," for by this time the Major, having heard the sound of voices, had rushed up.

"What's the matter?"

Penrose quickly told him what had taken place, and the young officer's words came like a bombshell upon this steady-going and rather dull officer. If it were true, all the mystery of the last few weeks was cleared up. But he could not believe it. Waterman was regarded as one of the most capable and trustworthy of the staff officers. He had shown zeal beyond the ordinary, and his intelligence and quickness of perception had more than once been remarked upon; indeed he had been mentioned in the dispatches as one who had rendered valuable service to the British Army; and now for an accusation like this to come fairly staggered the well-meaning faithful officer.

The whole affair had been so sudden too. Only a couple of minutes before, he had been discussing plans with Waterman, who had urged him to be more than ordinarily careful in carrying out the instructions from Headquarters, and yet here he was accused of communicating with the enemy, and seen by a trustworthy soldier to throw a missile towards the enemy's lines.

"Where is Pollard?" asked Major Blundell, for Tom had disappeared.

"He's gone to secure the paper he saw Captain Waterman throw," was Penrose's reply.

A second later Major Blundell was leaning over the sand-bags, looking across the "No-man's-Land" towards the enemy's trenches.

By this time a number of other men had gathered; as if by magic the news had flown, and for a moment even discipline was in abeyance.

As will be easily seen, Tom's work was not easy, and the space of ground between the English and the German lines was dangerous in the highest degree. Any one seen there was a target for both English and German rifles. But Tom did not think of this, indeed the thought of danger was at that time utterly absent from him. Just as at times the mind has subconscious powers, so there are times when the body is so much under the influence of excitement that ordinary laws do not seem to operate. At that time Tom seemed to be living hours in seconds, because he instinctively felt that great issues depended upon what he wanted to do. If he were right in his conclusions, as he felt sure he was, Waterman, who was naturally in the confidence of his superior officers, would have valuable information to impart. It came upon him too, like a flash of lightning, that Waterman had uttered a peculiar cry as he threw the missile across the intervening space. That was doubtless a prearranged signal between him and the Germans. If they had heard it, as was more than probable, one of their men would naturally be sent to find the paper. In that case the plans and arrangements which the English officers had made would be in the hands of the Germans.

Tom had noted the spot on which Waterman had stood when he threw his missile, and had also noticed the direction in which it had flown, at least he thought he had. But when he was in the open space he was not so sure. As fortune would have it, this particular bit of ground was not wired, and he moved without difficulty.

Tom looked around, bewildered; nowhere could he see the gleaming white paper which Waterman had thrown—in fact, nothing was plainly visible to him. He saw, dimly, the outline of the German trenches; saw the mounds of earth with the sandbags on their summits, but nothing else. A hundred yards or so is no great distance, but it is difficult to locate a small object in such a space at night. He could not tell how far Waterman had been able to throw the stone, or how near it might be to the German trench. But his eyes were young and keen; every faculty was more than ordinarily tense and active, and Tom was in deadly earnest. He had started to do this thing, and he would do it.

Presently he saw a white spot on the ground, and he felt as though hammers were beating against his temples. Crouching low, he made his way towards it, but he had only gone a few steps when he discerned the form of a man, apparently with the same object in view, creeping from a German trench. Like lightning Tom made a dash for it, but the other was nearer than he, and by the time he had reached it the German had secured it. As far as he could judge they were about half-way between the two lines, and he knew the danger of the task he had set

himself. In a vague way he wondered whether the Germans had seen him, he also wondered whether the British were watching him. But this did not trouble him much; the one thought which filled his mind was that he must at all hazards secure the paper which Waterman had thrown.

Without hesitating a second, and without making a sound, he threw himself upon the German and well-nigh bore him to the ground. Then followed a hand-to-hand struggle, the details of which Tom was never clear about. As a lad he had been a football player and had made good muscle; he had played half-back for the Brunford football club for several seasons, and although he was by no means a giant, he was well built and strong. During the time he had been in the Army, too, every muscle in his body had been developed to its fullest capacity: his severe training told in his favour now, and Tom never dreamt of giving in. On the other hand, however, the German was a big, heavy man, and he also had undergone a severe training.

Tom felt his antagonist weakening; he knew it by his gurgling breath and his weakening grasp. He himself was also well-nigh spent, although he was not quite exhausted. Then, fearing lest the apparent weakness of his opponent was only a ruse by which he might gain advantage, Tom determined on an old football trick. A second later the German's shoulder blade snapped like a match, and Tom, seizing the paper, rushed back towards the English lines.

He had only fifty yards to cover, but such a fifty yards! His legs seemed of lead, too, while his head was swimming. No sooner had he commenced to stagger back, than the Germans opened fire on him; a hundred bullets whistled by him, while he heard yells of rage coming from the enemy's trenches.

He felt his strength leaving him, his head was swimming, his breath came in short, difficult gasps, and he knew he was wounded. He suffered no great pain, but by the burning sensations in his left arm and in his right shoulder he knew that the German bullets must have struck him. More than once he stumbled and fell.

He felt himself going blind; he heard cries from the English trenches which seemed like cheers, but he could see nothing, and the cries seemed to be a long, long way off. Still he struggled on. "I must get in! I must get in!" was the thought which possessed his bewildered brain. Then he fell heavily; after that all became dark.

When he returned to consciousness it seemed to him as though he saw a number of ghostly faces around him. He had a sort of feeling that he was dead, and that those faces belonged to the spirit world; but in a few seconds they became clearer.

"That's better, Tom, that's better! You are all right. You did it, lad! You did it!"

"Stand back there, and give him air. Heavens! There hasn't been a braver thing done by any man in the Army!"

He heard all this, but not clearly. They seemed to be stray sentences, uttered by many voices. But it didn't matter; only one thing mattered. Had he done what he had set out to do?

"Have you got it?" he gasped.

"Got it! I should think we have." It was Major Blundell who spoke. "It's all right, Pollard, you've done the trick."

"Have I, sir?" said Tom. "I—I feel very strange."

"You will soon get over it, you are only pumped!"

"Ay," laughed another, and the voice was as sweet music to Tom, "I've seen thee worse nor this i' the Brunford Cup Tie match."

"That thee, Nick?" he said, lapsing into the Brunford vernacular, which he had been trying to correct lately.

"Ay, Tom, it's me; tha'st done a good neet's work to-neet."

Tom's brain was clearer now; he knew where he was; knew, too, that he had succeeded. Something was still hammering at his temples, and his head was aching terribly, but he didn't mind; his heart was light.

"You have done well, Pollard." It was Major Blundell who spoke.

"Was what I got any good, sir?"

"Good! I should think it was."

"And Captain Waterman, have you got him?"

"That's all right, Pollard, he's safe enough," replied the Major.

"Thank you, sir," said Tom, "I don't care now."

What happened after that Tom didn't remember. He had a confused idea that he was carried down a long line of trenches, and that he heard cheering words during his journey. But nothing was plain to him, except a burning sensation in his left arm and in his right shoulder; for the rest he was faint, sick, and weary.

"You are feeling better now, are you not, Pollard?" It was the doctor who spoke.

"Yes, sir, I am feeling all right," replied Tom; "there is not much the matter with me, is there?"

"You are simply a miracle," replied the doctor, "only a couple of flesh wounds, that's all. You have lost a great deal of blood, of course, but you will soon be as fit as a fiddle again. I wonder that a hundred bullets did not go through you!"

"They came mighty near," was Tom's reply.

"You must be removed from here at once," said the doctor, "this region's too unhealthy for you."

An hour later Tom found himself away from the screech of shells.

As he reflected afterwards, it seemed to him a miracle that he had not been killed. No sooner had he mastered the German and seized the paper than bullets showered upon him like rain, and yet beyond these two slight flesh wounds he was

wholly untouched. It was true he was very stiff and sore, but he knew that he would soon be as well as ever.

On the evening of the same day Colonel Blount came to see him.

“Pollard, my lad,” said the colonel, “I felt I must come to see you. You have rendered the British Army and your country a great service, and you will get your reward.”

“Thank you, sir, but I never thought about reward,” said Tom simply.

“I’m sure you didn’t,” replied the colonel, “but this job’s not at an end yet, my lad.”

“No, sir,” said Tom, mistaking his meaning, “we have got a stiff job before we lick the Germans.”

“I didn’t mean that,” replied the colonel. “I mean this Waterman business is not at an end yet.”

“No, sir,” said Tom, “of course you will shoot him.”

“He deserves a worse death than that,” replied the Colonel grimly, “but you will have to give evidence against him.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Tom.

“Will you be well enough to come to-morrow night?”

“Yes, sir.”

The Colonel knew he was not acting according to strict regimental rules and regulations in speaking to a private in this fashion, but it was no ordinary case, and Colonel Blount was not a man to be tied down to military etiquette. Private though Tom Pollard was, he had rendered, as he had said, a signal service, not only to the Army, but to the British Nation.

The next evening Tom found himself in a large room amongst a number of officers, and standing at one corner, carefully guarded, was Waterman.

CHAPTER IX

The evidence against Waterman was so clear, so overwhelming, that there was not the slightest doubt about the verdict which would be passed upon him. He had been caught practically red-handed in his deed of treachery; but this was not all. Tom Pollard's action had led to a number of other facts coming to light. He had by many cunning devices been in communication with the enemy; he had constantly made known the plans which he had learnt at the Divisional Headquarters, and had thus prepared the Germans for many of the attacks which we had made.

Tom could not help being impressed by the fact that even although Waterman's guilt was as clear as daylight, it was the evident desire of those who tried him to act fairly, and even generously, towards him. Everything that could be said in his favour was carefully listened to, and noted; and on the faces of more than one present was a look of concern almost amounting to pain. This, however, did not hide the truth that every man regarded him with horror, almost amounting to loathing. They respected an enemy who fought openly and fairly, but for a man who was a staff officer in the British Army and who consequently learnt many of the plans of that Army; for a man who had taken the oath to be faithful to his King and Country, and yet to act as he had acted, was ignominy too vile for expression.

But Waterman seemed to have no shame, no sense of guilt; he uttered no word of regret, but stood erect and almost motionless. His face was hard and set, in his eyes was a steely glitter; it seemed as though he defied his judges to do their worst, and to mock at their evident disgust.

Tom gave his evidence clearly, and without any waste of words.

"You knew him before you went into the Army, then?"

"Yes, sir," replied Tom.

"Tell us where."

Whereupon Tom told of Waterman's association with him in Brunford, and of the conversations he had had with the prisoner.

"I didn't quite understand at the time," said Tom, "why he seemed so sure of the Germans getting the best of it. He seemed to be glad when he told me of the tremendous strength of the German army, and the preparations they had made. He said he had been to Germany to school, and had lived there a long time; that was how he came to know so much about it. I could never quite make it out how an Englishman who loved his country could be so sure that the Germans would win. Besides, he didn't talk about it as though it would be a calamity, but something he would be proud of; but I don't know that I thought much of it at the time, especially when he told me he was going to receive a commission in our Army; but later on, when I found out the Germans knew what we were going to do, I

wondered how they'd found out, and that led me to put one thing to another."

This was not strict evidence, and the officers knew it, but they allowed Tom to tell his story his own way.

"That was why I determined to watch him," went on Tom, "and—well, sir, that was how things turned out as they did."

When Tom's evidence came to an end he was told to retire. The lad was sorely grieved at this, because he would have liked to remain to the end; but after all, he was only a private, and he was there simply to give his evidence.

"Shooting's too good for him," thought Tom as he left the room. "What a look he did give me! If a look could murder a man I should not be alive now!"

"Now then," said the President to Waterman, when Tom had gone, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

"Nothing," replied Waterman. He was no longer respectful or polite. His every word suggested insolence.

"You admit, then, that you are guilty of the charges that have been brought against you?"

Waterman shrugged his shoulders scornfully.

"You admit that you, an officer in the British Army, have given away your country's secrets and become an ally to the enemy?"

Waterman laughed. "I have simply tried to serve my own country," was his reply, "the country which will soon conquer yours."

Every eye was fixed upon him; the man's brazen confession almost staggered them.

"Then you are a German!"

"Yes," replied Waterman proudly.

The President looked at him keenly, and then turned towards some papers.

"I see that you claim English birth, that you were educated at an English public school, and that you went into an English house of business."

"That doesn't make me cease to be a German," replied Waterman.

"I find, too, that you boasted of being an Englishman."

"That helped me to do my work," was the jeering answer.

For some seconds there was a deathly silence save for the rustle of the papers which the President read. Each man who sat in the room listened almost breathlessly; each was so intensely interested that no one broke the silence.

"My father and my mother are German," went on Waterman; "when they lived in Germany they spelt their name German fashion, and there were two n's, not one, at the end of my name; but when they were in England they thought it would serve them best to spell it English fashion. But they never ceased being Germans. When I was a boy I was taught to love my country above all things; that was my religion, and I was always faithful to it. When I went to your British school I was always a German at heart; the other boys used to say that I was not a sportsman,

and that I could not play the game.”

“Evidently they spoke the truth.”

Waterman shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

“Then you mean to say that you, born in England, educated in England, and receiving all the benefits of our country, were all the time a German at heart, and sought to act in Germany’s interests.”

“Certainly.”

“And you didn’t feel that you were acting meanly, ungratefully?”

“I thought only of my own country,” was the reply. “I knew that this war was coming, knew too that I could best serve my country by professing to be an Englishman, and by entering the British Army. I proved myself in the right too,” he added significantly.

“But didn’t you realise that such conduct as yours must inevitably end in disgrace and death?”

“Disgrace?” cried the other. “No, it is glory. As for death, what does that matter? My death is of no importance; the victory of my country is everything.”

“Then you have no sense of shame for what you have done?”

“Shame?” laughed Waterman—“shame in feeling that I have served the Fatherland!”

“What do you think about your action, then?”

“I think what fools you all were and are,” and Waterman laughed insolently. “I and others have laughed when you have played into our hands. Why,” and here there was a touch of passion in his voice, “your country is simply riddled with friends of Germany. Do you think that because a German becomes naturalised he ceases to be a German? Do you think that, although he protests his loyalty to England, and his desire to help England, that he is the less a German at heart? Do you think that a German, whether naturalised or not, stops at anything in order to serve his country? You have hundreds of Germans in your army to-day, while your public offices are full of men, and women too for that matter, of German parentage and with German sympathies. Yes, you may kill me,” and he threw back his shoulders proudly, “but that will not stop us from conquering your country and being your masters.”

For a moment he almost seemed to dominate the room. He stood erect, haughty, scornful; it might seem as though he were the accuser and not the accused.

“Of course you know the consequence of your deed?” said the President presently.

Waterman shrugged his shoulders. “I have counted the cost, and am willing to pay the price,” was his reply.

When he was led away there was a silence in the room for some seconds. Whatever else he had done he had given his judges to see that he was a brave man;

that to him the victory of his country was more than life; that for what he had called the Fatherland he had trampled under his feet all ordinary conventions, all accepted rules of honour and truth. Germany was first, everything else came afterwards.

The Englishman always admires courage, no matter in what form it may appear, and there could be no doubt that Waterman was courageous.

“It is no wonder,” said the General, as if speaking to himself, “that they are such terrible enemies.” No man spoke, but each knew what was in the other’s mind.

Of course, there was no doubt about the verdict; Waterman had been guilty of the worst possible crime, and but for the quick wit and prompt action of the Lancashire lad he would doubtless have continued to help the enemy. The paper which Waterman had thrown towards the German lines contained the details of the next plan of attack; details which, known to the Germans, would have nullified the British action, and possibly have led to disaster.

“That young Pollard is a plucky young beggar,” remarked the President presently, “he is a lad of brains, too, and has behaved splendidly. Of course what he has done must not be lost sight of.”

There was a general assent to this.

He ought to be recommended for his D.C.M. was the general verdict.

Early next morning Waterman was led out to a wall not far from the room where he had been judged. He walked steadily and proudly towards the place of his execution, and then stood erect like a soldier at attention. He faced his dread ordeal with a look of pride on his face.

“Fire!”

Several shots rang out, and he fell heavily to the ground.

“Yon’ chap’ll never do any more spying,” said one soldier to another a little later.

“If I had my way,” said the other, “he should not have had such a death as that. When I think of the dirty meanness of these German swine; when I think of spies like that; when I think of poisonous gas, and of all their treachery, I feel as though nothing’s too bad for them Germans. At first, when the war commenced I had nowt but kindly feelings towards the soldiers, as soldiers; but now——”

CHAPTER X

It was late in November when the events just recorded took place, and a few days later the English newspapers contained special paragraphs headed "Heroism of a Lancashire Lad." Few details were given about Waterman, but Tom's bravery was fully commented on.

More than one journalist who had obtained details of what Tom had done made special reference to him and spoke of him in glowing terms. Mrs. Pollard received many applications for Tom's photograph, and presently when she learnt that it appeared in newspapers all over the country, she gave expression to remarks more forcible than elegant.

"Our Tom an 'ero, eh?" she laughed. "Weel, I never knowed it afore. I always looked upon him as a bit of a coward, but it's this 'ere sodgering as has done it, I suppose. 'Appen there's summat in th' uniform. When a lad's got sodger's clothes on, I reckon as aa' it makes him feel cocky. But it's a pity he's still such a fool as to keep on wi' Polly Powell. I wrote him a letter a while sin' telling him as aa' Polly wur walking out wi' other lads, but she still boasts as aa' Tom's faithful to her, and that she's got him under her thumb."

"'Appen he will give her the sack now," said a neighbour.

"Nay, our Tom wur always a fool. He might have had Alice Lister if he hadn't been such a ninny, but she's engaged to Harry Briarfield now. I wrote and told him about it only last week. I suppose George Lister is fairly suited about it."

"I hear that Tom's going to have the V.C. or D.C.M. or summat o' that sort," remarked a neighbour; "dost 'a know what that means?"

"Nay, I know nowt about it, but I hope as he will get a bit o' brass wi' it, onyhow."

"Will he come home, dost 'a think?"

"Nay, I don't know. Why should he leave his job for a thing like that? I expect if he wur to come home they'd stop his pay, and I hope Tom is noan such a fool as to lose his pay, but there, there's no tellin'."

In spite of all this, however, Mrs. Pollard was in no slight degree elated. She knew that Tom was the talk of Brunford, and that special articles were devoted to him in the Brunford newspapers.

"He will be sure to come home," said Ezekiel Pollard to her one night after supper; "when a lad's done a job like that, he's sure to have a bit of a holiday."

"Maybe, and I suppose tha'll be showing him around as though he wur a prize turkey. Ay, but I am glad about this drinking order."

"Why?"

"Because else all th' lads in the town 'ud be wanting to treat our Tom; they 'd

be proud to be seen wi' him, and they'd make him drunk afore he know'd where he wur. Our Tom never could sup much beer wi'out it goin' to his head."

"Our Tom has give up that sort o' thing," replied Ezekiel.

"How dost tha' know?"

"I do know, and that's enough," replied Ezekiel, thinking of Tom's last letter, which, by the way, he had never shown to his wife.

I am not going to try to describe Tom's feelings when he was told that he had been recommended for the D.C.M.

"Thank you, sir, but I've done nowt to deserve it," cried the lad, lapsing for the moment into the Lancashire dialect.

Colonel Blount laughed. Ever since Waterman's death he had felt as though a burden had been lifted from him. He felt sure now that his plans would not be frustrated.

"We are the best judges of that, my lad," he said. "You can tell your father and mother that, as a Lancashire man, I'm proud of you."

It was on a Saturday in December when Tom arrived in Brunford on leave of absence. He had spent Friday in London, and caught the ten o'clock train at King's Cross Station. There was no prouder lad in England that day, although, truth to tell, he was not quite happy. Naturally he had read what had been written about him in the newspapers, and reflected upon what the people in Brunford would be saying about him. He imagined meeting people whom he knew, in the Brunford streets, and the greeting they would give him. He knew it would be a great home-coming, and yet he had a heavy heart.

It was several months now since he had left Brunford, and he could not help reflecting on the change that had taken place in him. He still wore a private's uniform, and carried the mud of the trenches on his clothes. But the Tom Pollard who had enlisted at the Mechanics' Institute was not the same lad who now made his way to his Lancashire home. Since then he had been through strange scenes, and had realised wonderful experiences. New facts and new forces had come into his life; day by day he had been face to face with death, and this had led him to touch the very core of life. Thoughts which were unknown to him a year before now possessed his being; powers of which he had never dreamed had been called into life.

Tom could not put these things into words, he didn't even clearly realise them, but he knew that he was different. The very thought that he had looked into the face of death made him realise the wondrousness of life. Tom did not feel that he had been a hero, and yet he knew that the life he had been living, and the work he had been doing, especially during the last few months, had called qualities, which lay latent in his being, into life and action. The war had not made him a different man, it had only aroused dormant qualities within him. The fires through which he

had passed had cleansed him, and he knew that life would never be the same again. But more than all that, he, like thousands of others, had learnt the great secret of life, and realised that it was only by opening his life to the Eternal Life that the highest manhood could be known.

And yet he was strangely dissatisfied. He had read his mother's letter telling him that Alice Lister was engaged to Harry Briarfield, and his heart was very sore at the thought of it. Never before had he realised the meaning of the choice he had made, when more than a year before he had left Alice to walk out with Polly Powell. "And yet I loved Alice all the time," he reflected, as the train rushed northward. "I never knew how I did love her till now. I must have been mad and worse than mad!"

For a long time he had ceased to care for Polly Powell; when he was in Surrey his mother's letter had opened his eyes to the kind of girl she really was. He saw her, coarse, loud-talking, and vulgar; a girl who had appealed only to what was coarse in his own nature. And he had yielded to her blandishments; he had left a pure, refined girl for her, and he had lost Alice for ever.

That was the bitterness in Tom's cup of joy. He was proud of what he had done—what fellow situated as he was would not be? His heart thrilled with exultation as he remembered what the Colonel had said and written about him. He remembered with joy, too, what his comrades had said when he left for home, and the cheers they gave him.

Oh, if he hadn't been such a fool!

He thought of what his home-coming might have been if he had remained true to Alice; he fancied the look in her eyes as she greeted him; of the feelings which would fill his heart as he sat by her side in the church which she attended. But that was impossible now; he had made his choice, and she had made hers. Thus his home-coming would be robbed of half its joy. If he saw Alice at all she would be in the company of Harry Briarfield, and Briarfield, he knew, had always looked down upon him. "But there," he said to himself, "I'll bear it like a man. I have done my bit, and that's something, anyhow."

He had sent a telegram to his mother the day before, telling her of the time he expected to arrive in Brunford, and presently when the train drew into the station he looked out of the window eagerly expectant, and with fast-beating heart.

Yes, there his father and mother were, waiting for him. But what was the meaning of the crowd?

No sooner did he set foot on the platform than a great cheer arose.

"There he is! There's Tom Pollard!"

"Gi't tongue, lads! Gi't tongue! Hip! hip! hip! hoorah!"

Tom, heedless of the cheering and shouting, went straight to his mother. For a second this lady looked at him, and seemed to be on the point of greeting him with a caustic remark; then her mother's heart melted.

“Ay, Tom, I’m fair glad to see thee,” she sobbed.

“And I am glad to see you, mother. Ay, father, it is good to see you, it is.”

“And I am fair proud on you, Tom,” and Ezekiel Pollard’s voice was hoarse as he shook his son’s hand.

“But, Tom,” cried Mrs. Pollard, wiping her eyes, “thy clothes be dirty; I shall have a rare job to get th’ muck out of ’em.”

This was followed by a general laugh by those who had come to greet Tom and bid him welcome.

“Ay, and thou look’st as though thou hasn’t washed for a week. I thought as aa’ sodjers kept theirsens clean.”

“I’ll wash right enough when I get home, mother,” laughed Tom.

“Holloa, Tom. I am glad to see you,” and Polly Powell made her way through the crowd.

“Thank you,” replied Tom quietly; “have you brought one of your young men with you, Polly?”

“I have not got any young men,” was Polly’s reply. Whereupon there was a general laugh of incredulity.

Polly, heedless of the crowd, and although angered at the remarks that were made, still held her ground.

“You are coming down to the Thorn and Thistle, aren’t you, Tom?” she said; “mother and father are expecting you.”

“No, thank you, Polly,” said Tom. “I am going home with my mother and father. Besides, I don’t want to play gooseberry.”

At this there was general cheering. It was evident that Polly Powell was ready to give up her latest lover in order that the glory of Tom’s lustre might shine upon her; but her power over him had gone.

“Nay, thou’lt come down to the Rose and Crown wi’ us, won’t ’a’?” cried another.

“No, I am not going to the Rose and Crown,” replied Tom.

“Nay, you doan’t mean to say you’ve turned teetotaler?”

“Ay, that I have,” replied the lad, “you see I’m following the example of the King.” Whereupon Polly went away abashed.

All the way Tom’s progress down Liverpool Road was a great procession of people. On every hand he was greeted and cheered. Other soldiers who had gone out from Brunford had returned; some had been wounded, and many had done brave deeds, but Tom’s action had laid hold of the imagination of the people. To discover a German spy in Waterman, whom many in the town knew; to bring him to justice; to risk his life in order to render his country a service; to face almost certain death that he might obtain the plans which had been intended to help the enemy, made him a hero.

Perhaps there are few parts of the world where the people are more hearty and

more generous than the dwellers in those busy manufacturing towns in the North, and Tom was their own townsboy. He had been reared amongst them, had gone out from them, and so they gave him a great welcome.

No words can tell the joy which Mrs. Pollard felt when she found that Tom was going straight home with her. As she said, she had got the best dinner in Brunford for him, but she was afraid that Tom would yield to all the inducements which would be held out to him.

“Never mind,” she said to the neighbour whom she had asked to get everything in readiness by the time she returned, “we’ll have everything as though we were sure he wur coming ‘ome. Nobody shall say as ‘ow I didn’t prepare a good dinner for my boy when he returned from the War.”

Thus when Tom had refused the invitation to go to the Rose and Crown, and declared his intention of going straight home, her joy knew no bounds.

“Dost ‘a’ really mean, Tom, as thou’rt coming straight home with thee feyther and me?”

“Ay, I do,” replied Tom, “there’s no place but home for me to-day.”

“Ay, then I mun kiss thee agean,” she sobbed, throwing her arms around his neck.

Throughout the whole of the afternoon and evening Ezekiel Pollard’s house was besieged with visitors. Reporters came from the newspapers in order to hear any details which had been missed concerning Tom’s exploits. Relations whom Tom had not seen for years came to bid him welcome, while the neighbours thronged the doors.

“Ay, it’s good to be home again,” said Tom, standing on the doorstep and watching the last visitor depart that night, “I never thought that it would be like this.”

“Art ‘a’ tired, lad?” asked his father.

“Just a bit,” said Tom. “I couldn’t sleep last night, I was thinking all the time about coming home, and now——”

“Ay, lad, I’m proud of thee,” said his father for the hundredth time.

“Thou art a fool, lad,” said his mother, “but thou’rt noan such a fool as I feared. Thou’st done vary weel too, vary weel.”

“Father,” said Tom when they had entered the house and closed the door, “do you ever pray now?”

“I hadna prayed for years,” said Ezekiel Pollard, “till thou went to the Front, but every night sin’ I have asked God to take care o’ thee. I have asked nowt for myself,” he added almost proudly. “I didn’t deserve it; but I’ve asked God to take care o’ thee.”

“So have I,” said his mother. “I never towd anybody about it; I wur a bit ashamed, I reckon, but I have prayed twenty times a day.”

“Then,” said Tom, “let us kneel down and thank God for His goodness.”

And the three knelt down together.

CHAPTER XI

It was nearly midday when Tom awoke. The church bells had ceased ringing for nearly an hour, indeed at nearly all the churches the congregations were being dismissed. The Town Hall clock chimed a quarter to twelve, but all else seemed strangely silent. Tom rose in his bed, and rubbed his eyes.

"Where am I?" he gasped; "this is—this is—ay, where am I? Why, I'm home! I'm home!"

Immediately he jumped out of bed, and pulling up the blinds looked out upon the smoky town.

"Dear old Brunford, dear old Brunford," he said; "ay, this is a change!"

"Art 'a' got up, Tom?"

"Ay, mother."

"Make haste, then, I'll have dinner ready for thee by the time thou'rt ready."

"Ay, it's good to be home," said Tom, and then he sighed. "I wonder now, I wonder——" and then he sighed again.

"I mean to go to chapel to-day," he said to his mother when he presently appeared.

"Chapel!" said his mother, "I thought thou'd given up going to chapel."

"I am going to-day, anyhow," said Tom. "It would be grand if you and father would come with me to-night."

"Then us will," said Ezekiel quietly.

That night Tom, together with his father and mother, found their way to the church which he had attended years before. Many eyes were upon him as he was shown into the pew. All the town had heard of Tom Pollard's return, but few expected to see him at church that night. For some time Tom was very self-conscious, and it is to be feared that he thought little of the service; more than once, too, he caught himself gazing furtively around the building, but he did not see the face he longed yet feared to see. Since his return he had asked no questions about Alice Lister, and neither his mother nor his father had volunteered any information about her.

"Well," said Tom, "I must drive her out of my mind. What a fool I was!"

How beautiful it was to be singing the old hymns again! The Sunday before he had been in Ypres, and instead of church bells he had heard the boom of guns; instead of the music of hymns, the shrieking of shells; instead of the scenes of home, and the loved ones, were the blackened ruins of an ancient town which had been ruthlessly destroyed. Oh, how Tom wished the War were over! How he dreaded the idea of going back again! Yet he knew he must go, knew that he and thousands of others must fight on, until those who had made war should be

powerless to make it again.

Presently the service was over, and Tom made his way towards the vestibule of the church. Scores of hands were held out to him, hundreds of greetings were offered to him. Many congratulated him on his bravery, and on his distinction.

Then suddenly Tom's heart ceased to beat, for standing before him was Alice Lister.

Tom felt his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth. He could not speak, while Alice seemed almost as much wrought upon as he.

He looked around as if in expectation of seeing Harry Briarfield, but Harry was nowhere present. What did it mean?

Afterwards Tom wondered at his temerity; wondered that he should dare to speak to her at all. But some power which was stronger than himself compelled him to do so. He held out his hand to her.

"How are you, Alice?" he said.

Alice gave him her hand, but did not reply, save that her fingers trembled in his.

A thousand hopes, fancies, and fears flashed through his mind and heart; then Alice shyly lifted her eyes to his.

"May I walk home with you, Alice?" he stammered.

"Yes, if you will, Tom," and the two walked away, side by side.

They walked up Liverpool Road together for some time without speaking a word. On every side the crowd passed them, but Tom did not heed, his heart was too full for words, his mind too occupied with wild, turbulent fancies. Presently they passed into a quiet lane where they were apparently alone.

"Alice," said Tom at length, "I'm fair ashamed of myself, I—I'm just a——"

"No," and Alice interrupted him, "you are a hero, Tom, you have done wonderful things."

"Ah, but that is nothing," was Tom's reply, "I could not help doing that, no decent lad could. But the other now—ay, Alice, I am ashamed of myself. I was such a fool too!"

Alice did not speak; perhaps she was delighted at Tom's self-condemnation, or perhaps, which was more likely, she was eagerly waiting for him to say more.

"Is it true what mother told me?" he asked, after what seemed a long silence.

"What did she tell you?"

"That you are engaged to Harry Briarfield."

"No!" replied the girl eagerly, "I never was!"

"Then is it that young parson?"

"No, Tom; who could have told you such lies?"

Lancashire people are very undemonstrative in their love-making, as in most of their things, and although Tom was nearly swept off his feet with joy at what Alice had said, he still walked on by her side quietly, and for some seconds did

not speak again.

“I never really cared about Polly Powell,” he said presently, “even at the time I—I——”

“I knew, Tom,” and the girl almost sobbed as she spoke, “I knew all the time you could never really care for her, and—and that you would come back to me. That was why——”

“Why what?” asked Tom.

“Why there was never anybody else but you, Tom.”

“Do you mean it, Alice? do you really mean it?” and Tom’s voice was hoarse and tremulous. “Can you forgive me? I chucked Polly Powell long ago, and I let her know it yesterday when I came home. She met me at the station with the others, and I never knew what a fool I had been till I saw her just as she was. Ay, I must have been mad!”

“I heard all about it,” replied the girl, “but it didn’t need that to tell me that you would come back to me, Tom.”

“Ay,” said Tom, “but I feel so ashamed. I feel as though I have nothing to offer you. I am only a poor Tommy with a bob a day, but will you wait for me, Alice, till the war is over?—and then if God spares my life I will work for you night and day, and I will give you as good a home as there is in Brunford.”

“I can’t help waiting for you,” sobbed Alice.

“Can’t help! Why?” asked Tom.

“Because—because—— oh, you know.”

It was not until an hour later that Tom and Alice appeared at George Lister’s house. During that time Tom had told Alice the story of his life since he had parted from her. Told her of the influences which had been at work, how he had been led to pray, and how his heart had all the time been longing for her. In spite of Alice’s repeated questions he had said very little about his hour of peril, when he had risked his life to serve his country; that seemed of little importance to him. His one thought was to make Alice know that he was ashamed of himself for leaving her, and that he loved her all the time.

“Ay,” said George Lister to his wife when Tom had left the house, “our Alice is a fool.”

“ ’Appen she is,” replied Mrs. Lister, “but yon’s a grand lad, a fair grand lad!”

“He may be a grand lad,” retorted her husband, “and I don’t deny that he has behaved very weel, but how can he keep a wife? What sort of a home can he give our Alice?”

“A lad that can do what he has done,” replied Mrs. Lister, “will make his way anywhere. If God spares his life, he will come back when the war’s over, and you will not have any reason to be ashamed of him. He is not earning any brass now, and that’s right, for he’s serving his King and Country, and doing his duty like a

man; but wait till we have licked the Germans, then Tom will let you know.”

“I don’t deny that he’s a sharp, capable lad,” said George, “and it’s easy to see that our Alice is fair gone on him. That’s why she had nowt to do wi’ the young parson, and wi’ Harry Briarfield. Well, I want Alice to be happy, and marriage without love is a poor thing, however much brass you may have. ’Appen I can put Tom in the way of getting on when the war’s over. Ay, he’s a grand lad, as you say, and it was real plucky the way he nabbed that German spy and got the papers. No wonder the King thinks such a lot of him.”

Upon this George Lister filled his pipe slowly, and there was a look of pride in his eyes.

As for Alice, she sobbed for very joy when she went to her room that night. “Oh, thank God, thank God,” cried her heart, “and he is coming early in the morning too!”

“Well, mother,” said Tom when he reached home, “I have made it up with Alice Lister.”

“Tha’ never ses!” and Mrs. Pollard’s voice was very caressing. “That’s one for Polly Powell, anyhow. She wur never thy sort, Tom—a lass wi’ a mother like that can never be any good.”

“Ay, and she’s the finest lass i’ Brunford, is Alice Lister,” said Ezekiel contentedly; “and is she willing to wait for thee, Tom?”

Tom laughed joyfully.

“Maybe they will make an officer of thee,” said Mrs. Pollard.

“No,” said Tom, “I shall never be an officer, I don’t belong to that class; perhaps I will be a sergeant, or something like that, but that’s as may be; anyhow, I’ll do my bit.”

When Tom’s leave was up, George Lister said he had business in London, so Alice accompanied him. Truth to tell, the business which George had was only a secondary matter; he saw that Alice wanted to accompany her lover as far as she could, and the business was a pretext. I also made my way to Waterloo Station to see Tom off; that was only a few days ago, and what I saw and heard is fresh in my memory. But however long I may live, I shall never forget the look in Tom’s eyes as he stood on the platform with Alice by his side. A great light was burning there, the light of love, and duty, and faith, and chastened joy.

“Don’t fear, Alice,” said the lad, “I will come back again all right.”

“You—you are sure you will take care of yourself, Tom,” and Alice’s voice was husky, although she was evidently making a great effort to be brave.

“Ay, that I will,” said Tom.

Crowds of soldiers thronged the platform, while hundreds of their friends who came to see them off made it difficult to move; many of the Tommies were shouting and cheering, while others found their way into the carriages as if

anxious to be quiet.

“They seem splendid fellows,” said Alice, “but some of them are very rough, aren’t they?”

“Just a bit rough,” replied Tom, “but they are all right. Some of those very chaps who look rough and common are just heroes, you know; they would face any kind of danger to do a pal a good turn. Perhaps you may not think it to look at them, but their hearts are true as gold. This war has made a wonderful difference in them.”

Alice pressed his arm convulsively.

“You know that book you lent me the other day,” went on Tom, “that book of Kipling’s where there is a story about a ship that found herself. It means a lot, does that story. That’s what this war has done for a lot of us chaps, it’s helped us to find ourselves.”

The guard blew his whistle, and there was a slamming of doors.

“Good-bye, Alice,” and Tom held her close to his heart. “The war will be over soon, and then, please God, I will come back again.”

“Yes, yes, Tom, and—and you know I will be always thinking of you, and praying for you.”

“Ay, lass, I do, that’s why I’m not a bit afraid. It’s not good-bye, Alice, it’s only au revoir as the French say. You will be brave, won’t you?”

“Yes, Tom,” she spoke bravely, although her voice was husky; “and—and, Tom”—this with a sob—“I shall be loving you—loving you all the time.”

Slowly the train left the station. At the carriage windows hundreds of men stood waving their hands, and shouting. They were going back to the grim, cold trenches, going to danger, and possible death; but they were going with brave hearts and the light of resolution in their eyes. Amongst them was Tom. He, too, was waving his hand, although his lips were tremulous.

“God help me to do my bit, and then take me back to her,” he prayed.

Will he come back again, or will he be one of those who give their lives for the defence of honour and home? This I know: he with a great host of others will fight on, and hold on until victory is won, the victory which means peace.

[The end of Tommy by Hocking, Joseph]