

THE GLORY OF WAR.

“Glory!” said the School-Master in tones of withering scorn. “Glory! Oh, yes, I know all about glory. I once saw a fancy flowered waistcoat of Napoleon’s in a waxworks show. A little, round, pot-bellied waistcoat. And the crowd gaped at it with mouths and eyes. . . . I knew that for glory.” He tapped the black, worn rim of his briar pipe on the edge of the red-hot brazier that occupied the centre of the dugout, then resumed.

“All the glory is gone out of glory nowadays—out of the word ‘glory’ I mean. The Salvation Army and the newspapers have overworked and tortured the word until there’s no longer any juice left in it. . . . There’s a lot of piffle talked about the ‘glory of war’—or rather a lot of piffle is implied in the mere use of the phrase; and it is used by those who know as little about what glory is as they know about what war is. There’s no such thing as the ‘glory of war.’ The phrase is not merely meaningless: it gives expression to a lie. For there’s not a

trace of glory in war *as war*. . . . War is simply lunacy, organised, gigantic; it's the most pathetically futile thing known to the gods"

The School-Master paused to light his refilled pipe. His three companions, sprawling on the floor of the dugout, gazed into the red heart of the charcoal fire, but only The Artist ventured any comment.

"Go on; stick it, Jerry!" he encouraged the School-Master.

The latter continued—"It was the Ancients who started the prattle about the glory of war—and when I speak of the Ancients I mean, of course, all those who lived out their lives in that far-off period in the world's history that began with the first man and ended in August, 1914. And the Ancients didn't know what they were talking about, for they had never even conceived, much less experienced, a real war—a war as you and I understand it. *Their* wars were like garden party entertainments, where hired performers did tricks with bows and arrows, or maybe rifles and bayonets, and the guests were interested and amused and afterwards showed their appreciation by hip-hooraying or flag-wagging or blowing tin trumpets or writing songs in honour of the gentlemen in fancy

dress who had entertained them. And all boasted about the cleverness of their own particular star turns—about their valour and prowess—and all basked and preened themselves in the reflected glory of these. And this they called patriotism! . . .

“The poets . . . they were the men who used to record the big events of an era in great and glowing words, and to set down in measured syllables the high thoughts of their time. To-day this work is done by *The Daily Mail* and Horatio Bottomley and the cinema . . . the poets especially talked much of the glory of war—but that was simply because war provided them with good ‘copy.’ I’d defy Homer or little Willie Shakespeare to find any real glory in this war as viewed from the standpoint of the man in the trenches.”

The Artist lifted a querying eyebrow. “Me-thinks you’ve got the camellious hump, my scholastic friend,” said he. “Are you feeling fed-up?”

“Am I Hell!” The School-Master spoke with vigour and impatience. “And who wouldn’t be! I’ve fed on the glory of war for so long a time that I’ve got chronic tummy-ache.” He popped a morsel of Army biscuit in his mouth and bit and chewed viciously.

“Glory of war!” he repeated, with growing scorn. “Glory of war! Do *you* know the glory of war?” He spat out the question fiercely at Ginger, then continued without a pause. “I’ll tell you what the glory of war is. It’s leading an existence that any decent animal would hate—mucking it in the trenches day after day, week after week, month after month—wallowing in mud, plastered and caked with it, eating it with your meals. It’s discomfort—prolonged, awful discomfort—from cold and wet and vermin, being so acutely miserable at times that your greatest—nay, your only—desire is to go down for the count and that quickly. It’s loathing yourself with a sickening loathing because you know yourself for a filthy and verminous thing . . .

“It’s digging—endlessly digging—month in, month out—with burning hands and aching back; breaking up and parcelling the European Continent into sandbags—as one might ladle the Atlantic with a teaspoon. It’s having a discontent always gnawing at your vitals—for you see the pitiable futility of all your toil and stress—how essentially unproductive it is—how wastefully misapplied . . .

“At its best and easiest, war is a painfully dull, monotonous existence amid conditions of almost incredible discomfort and inconvenience,

and wholly divorced from all those pleasures and refinements of living that a civilised man may reasonably long for and expect to enjoy. At its worst——

“To crouch and cower for weary, endless hours against the parapet at the bottom of a trench, with a remorseless succession of shells bursting overhead and the hum and hiss of flying shrapnel ever present in your ears—to wait and wait and do nothing—nothing but wonder when one of these jagged missiles will find a target in you—to see your best pal go West in a sudden horrid gush and welter of blood—to see others reduced in a moment to hideous, shapeless things ; to hear strong men sobbing and drivelling like children . . . And still you wait and wait and wonder when *your* shell will come—and you feel dazed with the horror of the thing and the din—and under the strain your self-control gradually leaves you, and you find yourself babbling incoherent, inconsequent prayers into the wall of sandbags—just as the pale, haggard, wide-eyed, stupefied men beside you are doing. And you pray that *your* shell may come soon—soon ; fearful lest you should have to live an hour longer in this hell. . . . That’s war, my boy, as *we* know it—and that’s all of glory or romance there is in it . . .

“The Glory of War!” . . . The School-Master shook his head slowly. “War is the dreariest weariest, dullest game in the world—when it isn’t merely horrifying or saddening or disgusting and revolting.”

Ginger stroked the bald patch on his head with a caressing finger. “But what about the rewards of glory?” asked he.

The School-Master snorted. “Rewards, forsooth! Isn’t glory supposed to be its own reward? But perhaps you mean to infer that there are compensations for the ‘glory’ we suffer in the trenches. The gratitude of the people at home for our labours on their behalf, maybe? . . . H’m! That sort of gratitude is notoriously short-lived. Public service and public servants are soon forgotten. Past experience proves that. Or maybe you mean that we here in France receive some compensation for our miseries. . . . Well, there’s the bob a day that we receive from a grateful and beneficent Government. And there’s the grub we get . . . it’s a change from home fare, anyway. And there’s the soldier-like language we have directed at us by our loving N.C.O.’s when anything has happened to annoy them—there’s an element of education in that, I admit. Then there are the pleasures that the country of France itself—or

that part of it immediately behind our fighting line—affords. One certainly has the opportunity occasionally of getting villainously drunk on cheap wine and cheaper beer, which are not too cheap, however, when one considers their quality. And one may make-believe to flirt with the lady, usually possessed of a complexion of violent contrasts, who serves the poison in the estaminet . . . But we really have to deceive ourselves if we wish to believe that we are having a good time. It's only good in comparison with the bad times we have lately known—and these were very, very bad. The pleasures that the war affords us are crude, and we have to take them crudely. They are of the same stuff as—are part and parcel of—the glory of war.”

The School-Master shook up the brazier and dropped in a few more lumps of charcoal. “Let's drop for ever,” he said, “all this cant about the glory of war. There's no glory in it—there never was. War is a ghastly, hideous, lunatic business from beginning to end. Thank Heaven that—whatever our motives were—we didn't come into this war for glory. It was Germany who made that supreme error—and she has long ago realised that war is not at all the glorious thing that she had imagined—that her experience in 1871 had seemed to teach her.”

The School-Master reached backwards for a petrol tin containing water and took an economical sip. And just then a Sergeant blocked the entrance to the dugout. "Will any of you men volunteer to go on a patrol to-night?" he asked. "I don't mind telling you that it will be rather a dangerous job, and we're only taking volunteers for it. Any of you willing to go?"

"Put my name down," said the School-Master.