

Sheba Blake Publishing

ANOTHER SHEAF

John Galsworthy



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One

The Road



The road stretched in a pale, straight streak, narrowing to a mere thread at the limit of vision—the only living thing in the wild darkness. All was very still. It had been raining; the wet heather and the pines gave forth scent, and little gusty shivers shook the dripping birch trees. In the pools of sky, between broken clouds, a few stars shone, and half of a thin moon was seen from time to time, like the fragment of a silver horn held up there in an invisible hand, waiting to be blown.

Hard to say when I first became aware that there was movement on the road, little specks of darkness on it far away, till its end was blackened out of sight, and it seemed to shorten towards me. Whatever was coming darkened it as an invading army of ants will darken a streak of sunlight on sand strewn with pine needles. Slowly this shadow crept along till it had covered all but the last dip and rise; and still it crept forward in that eerie way, as yet too far off for sound.

Then began the voice of it in the dripping stillness, a tramping of weary feet, and I could tell that this advancing shadow was formed of men, millions of them moving all at one speed, very slowly, as if regulated by the march of

the most tired among them. They had blotted out the road, now, from a few yards away to the horizon; and suddenly, in the dusk, a face showed.

Its eyes were eager, its lips parted, as if each step was the first the marcher had ever taken; and yet he was stumbling, almost asleep from tiredness. A young man he was, with skin drawn tight over his heavy cheek-bones and jaw, under the platter of his helmet, and burdened with all his soldier's load. At first I saw his face alone in the darkness, startlingly clear; and then a very sea of helmeted faces, with their sunken eyes shining, and their lips parted. Watching them pass—heavy and dim and spectre-like in the darkness, those eager dead-beat men—I knew as never before how they had longed for this last march, and in fancy seen the road, and dreamed of the day when they would be trudging home. Their hearts seemed laid bare to me, the sickening hours they had waited, dreaming and longing, in boots rusty with blood. And the night was full of the loneliness and waste they had been through....

* * *

Morning! At the edge of the town the road came arrow-straight to the first houses and their gardens, past them, and away to the streets. In every window and at each gate children, women, men, were looking down the road. Face after face was painted, various, by the sunlight, homely with line and wrinkle, curve and dimple, pallid or ruddy, but the look in the eyes of all these faces seemed the same. "I have waited so long," it said, "I cannot wait any more—I cannot!" Their hands were clasped, and by the writhing of those hands I knew how they had yearned, and the madness of delight waiting to leap from them—wives, mothers, fathers, children, the patient hoppers against hope.

Far out on the road something darkened the sunlight. *They were coming!*

Two

The Sacred Work



The Angel of Peace, watching the slow folding back of this darkness, will look on an earth of cripples. The field of the world is strewn with half-living men. That loveliness which is the creation of the æsthetic human spirit; that flowering of directed energy which we know as civilisation; that manifold and mutual service which we call progress—all stand mutilated and faltering. As though, on a pilgrimage to the dreamed-of Mecca, water had failed, and by the wayside countless muffled forms sat waiting for rain; so will the long road of mankind look to-morrow.

In every township and village of our countries men stricken by the war will dwell for the next half-century. The figure of Youth must go one-footed, one-armed, blind of an eye, lesioned and stunned, in the home where it once danced. The half of a generation can never again step into the sunlight of full health and the priceless freedom of unharmed limbs.

So comes the sacred work.

Can there be limit to the effort of gratitude? Niggardliness and delay in restoring all of life that can be given back is sin against the human spirit, a smear on the face of honour.

Love of country, which, like some little secret lamp, glows in every heart, hardly to be seen of our eyes when the world is at peace—love of the old, close things, the sights, sounds, scents we have known from birth; loyalty to our fathers' deeds and our fathers' hopes; the clutch of Motherland—this love sent our soldiers and sailors forth to the long endurance, to the doing of such deeds, and the bearing of so great and evil pain as can never be told. The countries for which they have dared and suffered have now to play their part.

The conscience of to-day is burdened with a load well-nigh unbearable. Each hour of the sacred work unloads a little of this burden.

To lift up the man who has been stricken on the battlefield, restore him to the utmost of health and agility, give him an adequate pension, and re-equip him with an occupation suited to the forces left him—that is a process which does not cease till the sufferer fronts the future keen, hopeful, and secure. And such restoration is at least as much a matter of spirit as of body. Consider what it means to fall suddenly out of full vigour into the dark certainty that you can never have full strength again, though you live on twenty, forty, sixty years. The flag of your courage may well be down half-mast! Apathy—that creeping nerve disease—is soon your bed-fellow and the companion of your walks. A curtain has fallen before your vision; your eyes no longer range. The Russian “Nichevo”—the “what-does-it-matter?” mood—besets you. Fate seems to say to you: “Take the line of least resistance, friend—you are done for!” But the sacred work says to Fate: “*Retro, Satanas!* This our comrade is not your puppet. He shall yet live as happy and as useful—if not as active—a life as he ever lived before. You shall not crush him! We shall tend him from clearing station till his discharge better than wounded soldier has ever yet been tended. In special hospitals, orthopædic, paraplegic, phthisic, neurasthenic, we shall give him back functional ability, solidity of nerve or lung. The flesh torn away, the lost

sight, the broken ear-drum, the destroyed nerve, it is true, we cannot give back; but we shall so re-create and fortify the rest of him that he shall leave hospital ready for a new career. Then we shall teach him how to tread the road of it, so that he fits again into the national life, becomes once more a workman with pride in his work, a stake in the country, and the consciousness that, handicapped though he be, he runs the race level with his fellows, and is by that so much the better man than they. And beneath the feet of this new workman we shall put the firm plank of a pension.”

The sacred work fights the creeping dejections which lie in wait for each soul and body, for the moment stricken and thrown. It says to Fate: “You shall not pass!”

And the greatest obstacle with which it meets is the very stoicism and nonchalance of the sufferer! To the Anglo-Saxon, especially, those precious qualities are dangerous. That horse, taken to the water, will too seldom drink. Indifference to the future has a certain loveability, but is hardly a virtue when it makes of its owner a weary drone, eking out a pension with odd jobs. The sacred work is vitally concerned to defeat this hand-to-mouth philosophy. Side by side in man, and especially in Anglo-Saxon, there live two creatures. One of them lies on his back and smokes; the other runs a race; now one, now the other, seems to be the whole man. The sacred work has for its end to keep the runner on his feet; to proclaim the nobility of running. A man will do for mankind or for his country what he will not do for himself; but mankind marches on, and countries live and grow, and need our services in peace no less than in war. Drums do not beat, the flags hang furled, in time of peace; but a quiet music is ever raising its call to service. He who in war has flung himself, without thought of self, on the bayonet and braved a hail of bullets often does not hear that quiet music. It is the business of the sacred work to quicken his

ear to it. Of little use to man or nation would be the mere patching-up of bodies, so that, like a row of old gossips against a sunlit wall, our disabled might sit and weary out their days. If that were all we could do for them, gratitude is proven fraudulent, device bankrupt; and the future of our countries must drag with a lame foot.

To one who has watched, rather from outside, it seems that restoration worthy of that word will only come if the minds of all engaged in the sacred work are always fixed on this central truth: "Body and spirit are inextricably conjoined; to heal the one without the other is impossible." If a man's mind, courage and interest be enlisted in the cause of his own salvation, healing goes on apace, the sufferer is remade. If not, no mere surgical wonders, no careful nursing, will avail to make a man of him again. Therefore I would say: "From the moment he enters hospital, look after his mind and his will; give them food; nourish them in subtle ways, increase that nourishment as his strength increases. Give him interest in his future; light a star for him to fix his eyes on. So that, when he steps out of hospital, you shall not have to begin to train one who for months, perhaps years, has been living, mindless and will-less, the life of a half-dead creature."

That this is a hard task none who knows hospital life can doubt.

That it needs special qualities and special effort quite other than the average range of hospital devotion is obvious. But it saves time in the end, and without it success is more than doubtful. The crucial period is the time spent in hospital; use that period to re-create not only body, but mind and will-power, and all shall come out right; neglect to use it thus, and the heart of many a sufferer, and of many a would-be healer, will break from sheer discouragement.

The sacred work is not departmental; it is one long organic process from the moment when a man is picked up from the field of battle to the moment when he is restored to the ranks of full civil life. Our eyes must not be fixed merely on this stressful present, but on the world as it will be ten years hence. I see that world gazing back, like a repentant drunkard at his own debauch, with a sort of horrified amazement and disgust. I see it impatient of any reminiscence of this hurricane; hastening desperately to recover what it enjoyed before life was wrecked and pillaged by these blasts of death. Hearts, which now swell with pity and gratitude when our maimed soldiers pass the streets, will, from sheer familiarity, and through natural shrinking from reminder, be dried to a stony indifference. "Let the dead past bury its dead" is a saying terribly true, and perhaps essential to the preservation of mankind. The world of ten years hence will shrug its shoulders if it sees maimed and *useless* men crawling the streets of its day, like winter flies on a windowpane.

It is for the sacred work to see that there shall be no winter flies. A niche of usefulness and self-respect exists for every man, however handicapped; but that niche must be found for him. To carry the process of restoration to a point short of this is to leave the cathedral without spire.

Of the men and women who have this work in hand I have seen enough—in France and in my own country, at least—to know their worth, and the selfless idealism which animates them. Their devotion, courage, tenacity, and technical ability are beyond question or praise. I would only fear that in the hard struggle they experience to carry each day's work to its end, to perfect their own particular jobs, all so important and so difficult, vision of the whole fabric they are helping to raise must often be obscured. And I would venture to say: "Only by looking upon each separate disabled soldier as the complete fabric can you possibly keep that vision before your eyes. Only by revivifying

in each separate disabled soldier the *will to live* can you save him from the fate of merely continuing to exist.”

There are wounded men, many, whose spirit is such that they will march in front of any effort made for their recovery. I well remember one of these—a Frenchman—nearly paralysed in both legs. All day long he would work at his “macramé,” and each morning, after treatment, would demand to try and stand. I can see his straining efforts now, his eyes like the eyes of a spirit; I can hear his daily words: “*Il me semble que j’ai un peu plus de force dans mes jambes ce matin, Monsieur!*” though, I fear, he never had. Men of such indomitable initiative, though not rare, are but a fraction. The great majority have rather the happy-go-lucky soul. For them it is only too easy to postpone self-help till sheer necessity drives, or till some one in whom they believe inspires them. The work of re-equipping these with initiative, with a new interest in life, with work which they can do, is one of infinite difficulty and complexity. Nevertheless, it must be done.

The great publics of our countries do not yet, I think, see that they too have their part in the sacred work. So far they only seem to feel: “Here’s a wounded hero; let’s take him to the movies, and give him tea!” Instead of choking him with cheap kindness each member of the public should seek to reinspire the disabled man with the feeling that he is no more out of the main stream of life than they are themselves; and each, according to his or her private chances, should help him to find that special niche which he can best, most cheerfully, and most usefully fill in the long future.

The more we drown the disabled in tea and lip gratitude the more we unsteel his soul, and the harder we make it for him to win through, when, in the years to come, the wells of our tea and gratitude have dried up. We can do a much more real and helpful thing. I fear that there will soon be no one of us

who has not some personal friend disabled. Let us regard that man as if he were ourselves; let us treat him as one who demands a full place in the ranks of working life, and try to find it for him.

In such ways alone will come a new freemasonry to rebuild this ruined temple of our day. The ground is rubbled with stones—fallen, and still falling. Each must be replaced; freshly shaped, cemented, and mortised in, that the whole may once more stand firm and fair. In good time, to a clearer sky than we are fortunate enough to look on, our temple shall rise again. The birds shall not long build in its broken walls, nor lichens moss it. The winds shall not long play through these now jagged windows, nor the rain drift in, nor moonlight fill it with ghosts and shadows. To the glory of man we will stanchion, and raise and roof it anew.

Each comrade who for his Motherland has, for the moment, lost his future is a miniature of that shattered temple.

To restore him, and with him the future of our countries, that is the sacred work.

Three

The Balance Sheet of the Soldier- Workman



Let the reader take what follows with more than a grain of salt. No one can foretell—surely not this writer—with anything approaching certainty what will be the final effect of this war on the soldier-workman. One can but marshal some of the more obvious and general liabilities and assets, and try to strike a balance. The whole thing is in flux. Millions are going into the crucible at every temperature; and who shall say at all precisely what will come out or what conditions the product issuing will meet with, though they obviously cannot be the same as before the war? For in considering this question, one must run into the account on either side not only the various effects of the war on the soldier-workman, but the altered influences his life will encounter in the future, so far as one can foresee; and this is all navigation in uncharted waters.

Talking with and observing French soldiers during the winter of 1916-1917, and often putting to them this very question: How is the war going to affect the soldier-workman? I noticed that their answers followed very much

the trend of class and politics. An adjutant, sergeant, or devout Catholic considered that men would be improved, gain self-command, and respect for law and order, under prolonged discipline and daily sacrifice. A freethinker of the educated class, or a private of Socialistic tendencies, on the other hand, would insist that the strain must make men restless, irritable, more eager for their rights, less tolerant of control. Each imagined that the war would further the chances of the future as they dreamed of it. If I had talked with capitalists—there are none among French soldiers—they would doubtless have insisted that after-war conditions were going to be easier, just as the “*sans-sous*” maintained that they were going to be harder and provocative of revolution. In a word, the wish was father to the thought.

Having observed this so strongly, the writer of these speculations says to himself: “Let me, at all events, try to eliminate any bias, and see the whole thing as should an umpire—one of those pure beings in white coats, purged of all the prejudices, passions, and predilections of mankind. Let me have no temperament for the time being, for I have to set down—not what would be the effect on me if I were in their place, or what would happen to the future if I could have my way, but what would happen all the same if I were not alive. Only from an impersonal point of view, if there be such a thing, am I going to get even approximately at the truth.”

Impersonally, then, one notes the credit facts and probabilities towards the future’s greater well-being; and those on the debit side, of retrogression from the state of well-being, such as it was, which prevailed when war was declared.

First, what will be the physical effect of the war on the soldier-workman? Military training, open-air life, and plentiful food are of such obvious physical advantage in the vast majority of cases as to need no pointing out. And how much improvement was wanted is patent to any one who has a remnant left of

the old Greek worship of the body. It has made one almost despair of industrialised England to see the great Australians pass in the streets of London. We English cannot afford to neglect the body any longer; we are becoming, I am much afraid, a warped, stunted, intensely plain people. On that point I refuse to speak with diffidence, for it is my business to know something about beauty, and in our masters and pastors I see no sign of knowledge and little inkling of concern, since there is no public opinion to drive them forward to respect beauty. One-half of us regard good looks as dangerous and savouring of immorality; the other half look upon them as “swank,” or at least superfluous. Any interest manifested in such a subject is confined to a few women and a handful of artists. Let any one who has an eye for looks take the trouble to observe the people who pass in the streets of any of our big towns, he will count perhaps one in five—not beautiful—but with some pretensions to being not absolutely plain; and one can say this without fear of hurting any feelings, for all will think themselves exceptions. Frivolity apart, there is a dismal lack of good looks and good physique in our population; and it will be all to the good to have had this physical training. If that training had stopped short of the fighting line it would be physically entirely beneficial; as it is, one has unfortunately to set against its advantages—leaving out wounds and mutilation altogether—a considerable number of overstrained hearts and nerves, not amounting to actual disablement; and a great deal of developed rheumatism.

Peace will send back to their work very many men better set up and hardier; but many also obviously or secretly weakened. Hardly any can go back as they were. Yet, while training will but have brought out strength which was always latent, and which, unless relapse be guarded against, must rapidly decline, cases of strain and rheumatism will for the most part be permanent,

and such as would not have taken place under peace conditions. Then there is the matter of venereal disease, which the conditions of military life are carefully fostering—no negligible factor on the debit side; the health of many hundreds must be written off on that score. To credit, again, must be placed increased personal cleanliness, much greater handiness and resource in the small ways of life, and an even more complete endurance and contempt of illness than already characterised the British workman, if that be possible. On the whole I think that, physically, the scales will balance pretty evenly.

Next, what will be the effect of the war on the mental powers of the soldier-workman? Unlike the French (sixty per cent. of whose army are men working on the land), our army must contain at least ninety per cent. of town workers, whose minds in time of peace are kept rather more active than those of workers on the land by the ceaseless friction and small decisions of town life. To gauge the result of two to five years' military life on the minds of these town workers is a complicated and stubborn problem. Here we have the exact converse of the physical case. If the army life of the soldier-workman stopped short of service at the front one might say at once that the effect on his mind would be far more disastrous than it is. The opportunity for initiative and decision, the mental stir of camp and depôt life is *nil* compared with that of service in the fighting line. And for one month at the front a man spends perhaps five at the rear. Military life, on its negative side, is more or less a suspension of the usual channels of mental activity. By barrack and camp life the normal civilian intellect is, as it were, marooned. On that desert island it finds, no doubt, certain new and very definite forms of activity, but any one who has watched old soldiers must have been struck by the "arrested" look which is stamped on most of them—by a kind of remoteness, of concentrated emptiness, as of men who by the conditions of their lives have long been

prevented from thinking of anything outside a ring fence. Two to five years' service will not be long enough to set the old soldier's stamp on a mind, but one can see the process beginning; and it will be quite long enough to encourage laziness in minds already disposed to lying fallow. Far be it from this pen to libel the English, but a feverish mental activity has never been their vice; intellect, especially in what is known as the working-class, is leisurely; it does not require to be encouraged to take its ease. Some one has asked me: "*Can* the ordinary worker think less in the army than when he wasn't in the army?" In other words: "Did he ever think at all?" The British worker is, of course, deceptive; he does not look as if he were thinking. Whence exactly does he get his stolidity—from climate, self-consciousness, or his competitive spirit? All the same, thought does go on in him, shrewd and "near-the-bone"; life-made rather than book-made thought. Its range is limited by its vocabulary; it starts from different premises, reaches different conclusions from those of the "pundit," and so is liable to seem to the latter non-existent. But let a worker and an educated man sit opposite each other in a railway carriage without exchanging a word, as is the fashion with the English, and which of their two silent judgments on the other will be superior? I am not sure, but I rather think the worker's. It will have a kind of deadly realism. In camp and depôt life the mind standing-at-ease from many civilian frictions and needs for decision, however petty, and shaken away from civilian ruts, will do a good deal of thinking of a sort, be widened, and probably re-value many things—especially when its owner goes abroad and sees fresh types, fresh manners, and the world. But actual physical exertion, and the inertia which follows it, bulk large in military service, and many who "never thought at all" before they became soldiers will think still less after! I may be cynical, but it seems to me that the chief stimulus to thought in the ordinary mind is money,

the getting and the spending thereof; that what we call “politics,” those social interests which form at least half the staple of the ordinary worker’s thought, are made up of concern as to the wherewithal to live. In the army money is a fixed quantity which demands no thought, neither in the getting nor the spending; and the constant mental activity which in normal life circles round money of necessity dries up.

But against this indefinite general rusting of mind machinery in the soldier-workman’s life away from the fighting line certain definite considerations must be set. Many soldiers will form a habit of reading—in the new armies the demand for books is great; some in sheer boredom will have begun an all-round cultivation of their minds; others again will be chafing continually against this prolonged holding-up of their habitual mental traffic—and when a man chafes he does not exactly rust; so that, while the naturally lazy will have been made more lazy, the naturally eager may be made very eager.

The matter of age, too, is not unimportant. A soldier of twenty, twenty-five, even up to thirty, probably seldom feels that the mode of life from which he has been taken is set and permanent. He may be destined to do that work all his days, but the knowledge of this has not so far bitten him; he is not yet in the swing and current of his career, and feels no great sense of dislocation. But a man of thirty-five or forty, taken from an occupation which has got grip on him, feels that his life has had a slice carved out of it. He may realise the necessity better than the younger man, take his duty more seriously, but must have a sensation as if his springs were let down flat. The knowledge that he has to resume his occupation again in real middle age, with all the steam escaped, must be profoundly discouraging; therefore I think his mental activity will suffer more than that of the younger man. The recuperative powers of youth

are so great that very many of our younger soldiers will unrust quickly and at a bound regain all the activity lost. Besides, a very great many of the younger men will not go back to the old job. But older men, though they will go back to what they were doing before more readily than their juniors, will go back with diminished hope and energy, and a sort of fatalism. At forty, even at thirty-five, every year begins to seem important, and several years will have been wrenched out of their working lives just, perhaps, when they were beginning to make good.

Turning to the spells of service at the front—there will be no rusting there—the novelty of sensation, the demand for initiative and adaptability are too great. A soldier said to me: “My two years in depôt and camp were absolutely deadening; that eight weeks at the front before I was knocked over were the best eight weeks I ever had.” Spells at the front must wipe out all or nearly all the rust; but against them must be set the deadening spells of hospital, which too often follow, the deadening spells of training which have gone before; and the more considerable though not very permanent factor—that laziness and dislocation left on the minds of many who have been much in the firing line. As the same young soldier put it: “I can’t concentrate now as I could on a bit of work—it takes me longer; all the same, where I used to chuck it when I found it hard, I set my teeth now.” In other words, less mental but more moral grip.

On the whole, then, so far as mental effect goes, I believe the balance must come out on the debit side.

And, now, what will be the spiritual effect of the war on the soldier-workman? And by “spiritual” I mean the effect of his new life and emotional experience, neither on his intellect, nor exactly on his “soul”—for very few men have anything so rarefied—but on his disposition and character.