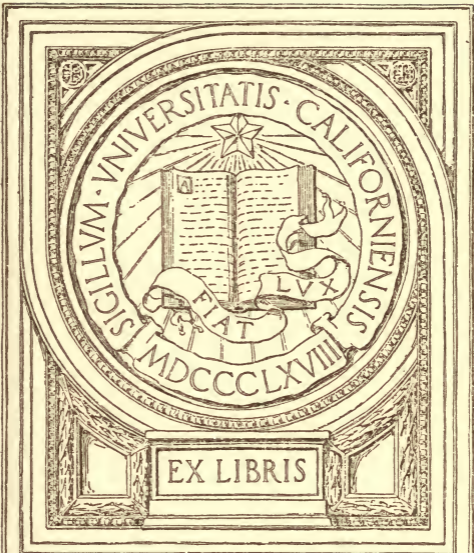


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THE GARRET WINDOW

*From a Painting by Joseph Pennell*

TO  
L'AMOUREUSE

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## PREFACE

IF it were not the custom in a Preface to thank those who have helped in the making of the book, I would still feel I owed an acknowledgment for the following pages to *L'Amoureux*—The Lover. Most real romances that come our way come incomplete. But he gave me his, if all unconsciously, perfect from its beginning in the old garret to its end on the battle-fields of France. Though for many months he has been at rest in his soldier's grave, it is but a few years since I first saw him radiant in the dawn of youth and adventure. Love, his great adventure, was as swift in flight as life seemed to the old monk who saw its passage through the world typified by the bird flying in at one window of the monastic hall and out at another. But *L'Amoureux* is to be envied. Swift as was his love in the passing, it never flew from him until life went with it.

## P R E F A C E

I have a debt, too, to acknowledge to *L'Amoureuse*, who, less happy than he, is left alone with only the memory of love. She has entrusted me with the letters that show the true lover *L'Amoureux* was to the last, and also the fine soldier, the finer because, as a private, the glory of war was not for him. He was simply one of the millions who go and come as they are bidden. But his letters explain, as do none others I have read, the stuff the ranks are sometimes made of, and they record, without meaning to, the experience of the millions in the training and the trenches. It is because *L'Amoureuse* realizes their beauty as the letters of a lover, and their interest as the letters of a soldier, that she is willing to give the world the privilege of sharing them with her.

Another word of thanks I must give to the editor of the *Century* for his kind permission to reprint my opening chapter, "In the Garret," from the pages of the magazine (June 1911), where it first appeared with the title "Les Amoureux."

ELIZABETH ROBINS PENNELL

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I  
IN THE GARRET

A



# I

## IN THE GARRET

**T**HE LOVERS—*Les Amoureux*—was Augustine's name for them and I never knew them by any other.

Augustine is French, to be more exact Burgundian. It has always been a mystery to me how she came to drift from her pleasant wine-warmed land into London's chill and fog, and still more why, having made her first halting-place in my small establishment, she should have stayed on ever since to run it. But, anyway, she has now been with me so long that I have got into the habit of relying upon her for many things in my daily life, among others for any choice bit of gossip in our little Quarter. Therefore, when she called to me, "*Venez vite, Madame, voir Les Amoureux,*" one spring morning when she ought to have been busy with brooms and brushes instead of bothering

## THE LOVERS

her head about lovers, I was startled only by the nature of the announcement. Perhaps because the month was May, when love is in season, I did not stop to ask whether her French would have found more favour in Burgundy than at the *Institut*, but jumping up from my own work, joined her at the kitchen window.

As I live on the very highest floor of a house that passes for a sky-scraper in London, though it would disappear among the real sky-scrapers of New York, my kitchen and indeed all my windows look on nothing save a vast stretch of sky and a vast stretch of roofs, but such a sky as you could not find anywhere out of England, and such roofs as you could not find anywhere out of London: new and old, tall and low, flat and steep, with gable-ends and towers and mansards and the latest patent inventions, jumbled up together anyhow, and none more extraordinary than the ancient, crooked, red-tiled group immediately below me—a view I would not exchange for the finest panorama in the Alps. To a garret window in the most ancient and crooked of these Augustine's finger was pointing. It is a window I had seen hundreds of times before, a window I can never go to mine



## IN THE GARRET

without seeing, for it is the nearest down there, and the biggest, made of two of the ordinary size thrown into one, projecting farther than any of the others, and, unlike them, covered on top with glass. But never had I seen it quite as it was on this brilliant May morning, flung wide open, with the spring sunshine streaming through upon a youth and a maid who stood just inside clasped in each other's arms. Augustine was right. They were *Les Amoureux*, by whatever other name they may have called themselves to the landlord of the shabby old garret in which they settled that same day, with an easel, two chairs, and a mirror for all visible furniture.

The lilac and laburnum were blossoming in London when they came, the evenings were growing long and golden, the spirit of youth was in everything, and with *Les Amoureux* as neighbours the meaning of May—which the years in passing dim for us all, alas!—was clear to me again. In the midst of the infirm, tumbled-down, tragic old houses their love sprang up like a flower, and it was so pretty blooming in the dingy attic that as the days went on I not only saw their window every time I went to mine, but I found myself going to mine on purpose

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to see it. I got into the habit of watching them much as I watched the wood-pigeons who had built their nest in a neighbouring tree. Everybody who ever was young has a sneaking sentiment for love and youth, and I was not too old to remember that I, too, began life in a garret, and often it was into mine I was looking across the past as I stood at my window, and the roofs, not of London, but of Rome, were spread out below me.

But, after all, I had not to find excuses for watching *Les Amoureux*, when they did not mind being watched any more than the pigeons. The consciousness that there were curious neighbours might draw the red-haired young lady in the garret on one side of their window to hers, and drive the lean, hungry-looking man in the garret on the other side from his. But it never occurred to *Les Amoureux* that there were neighbours to bother their heads about. For them the world was bounded by their own sloping walls, and they alone existed. They detached themselves so completely from the life of their little street and of all our little Quarter that it was not possible to think of them as in any way a part of it. They were no two people in particular,

## IN THE GARRET

but simply *Les Amoureux*—The Lovers—Daphnis and Chloe, Aucassin and Nicolette, Romeo and Juliet, strayed from the thyme-scented pastures of Lesbos, from the sun-burned land of Provence, from the stern palaces of Verona, to a little, musty, old London attic.

They were young, as lovers always are, or should be, except in the modern novel: that was half their charm. Age would have touched with ridicule a love so absorbing, turning their idyll into farce. But “Youth’s proud livery” as they wore it was as yet untarnished by Time. He could not have been more than twenty—the age to be happy in a garret—tall and slight, with smooth beardless face; she looked younger still, slim and girlish, her cheeks pale as a white rose, her hair hanging in a long dusky-brown pigtail behind. They seemed mere children, truants from school whom I should one day catch quaking as the master appeared at the garret door and ordered them back to their desks; only, truants as a rule do not set for themselves harder tasks than ever were set for them in class.

*Les Amoureux* had not brought that big easel with them solely because in the garrets of romance art is the fellow-tenant of youth

## THE LOVERS

and love. Poverty had also taken shelter under their roof, and in real life, if not in romance, poverty forces lovers like everybody else to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. *Les Amoureux* were no idlers. For that matter, we none of us are in our corner of London. In many of the garrets I overlook I see more than I care to of the cruel struggle for existence that life means to most people. But *Les Amoureux* could give an example of industry to the most industrious of us all. Though nobody begrudges to young lovers an interlude of idleness in Love's Lotos Land, from which it is so easy to stray and miss the way back, their life together from the first was one of toil.

Love lightened the labour, for they shared it. He was the artist, and she the model. On some days, in a nun's black veil, she knelt before him; on others, as a peasant, she lured him to the dance. Sometimes she wore patches and powder for him, sometimes classic draperies and sandals. She dressed for the river, the races, the moors, to which she never went. It was hard work, no doubt, but many a woman in love would have envied her chance to add the enchantment of variety to her beauty. And he was so ready to be enchanted—so ready to inter-

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rupt the pose, to throw down his pencil, push back his chair from the easel, and take her in his arms. As on that first morning, they would stand there, clasped close, in front of the window, heedless of the world on the other side of it, as if they had been a new Paul and Virginia adrift on a desert shore. I could almost hear the sigh with which they tore themselves apart and went back, he to his easel, she to her pose.

All through the long summer day they worked, all through the long summer evening, and as dusk gathered the lamp was lit in the garret and there it burned until, one after another, the lights went out in the window of the neighbouring attics, until one after another the lights faded from the windows of the big hotel rising like a rock beyond the stretch of low roofs. And in the blue moonlit night, in the midst of the blue moon-drenched houses, their lamp burned steadily—a clear flame for the vigil in love's sanctuary while a loveless world was sleeping.

I knew he was an illustrator by the number of his drawings—he seldom painted—and by the frequent changes of her pose. I guessed his illustrations were for the cheaper magazines that value a drawing less than a photo-

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graph, for, if much work went out of the garret, little money came into it. Nobody, not the most confirmed believer in the simple life, would from choice alone have lived as simply as they, but simple as they were, the mere living doubled their tasks. Even the pigeons in their nest were full of domestic cares, and a London garret will not keep clean of itself—though its furniture may be reduced to an easel, two chairs, a mirror, and a little table drawn out from somewhere when the time comes to lay the cloth, though its walls may be without decoration and its window without curtains. Nor will daily manna pour down into it from heaven. No servant waited upon *Les Amoureux*, no charwoman crossed their threshold; what cleaning and cooking had to be done, they had to do.

Love lightened this labour as well, but with no pretence of equality in their manner of sharing it. His eagerness to shield her from drudgery would have outraged the women who make a new-fashioned wrong of their old-fashioned right to be shielded from anything. Hers were the lesser duties; the heaviest he reserved for himself, though many were of a kind that disillusioned husbands believe to be essentially the wife's business.

## IN THE GARRET

In his pyjamas, with sleeves rolled up and loose white gloves to his elbows, he swept and scrubbed, while she, in white jersey and white handkerchief tied over her hair, followed with a dainty duster. She darned his stockings while he washed and polished the window. Sometimes at dawn before anybody else was about, sometimes at night when everybody else was in bed, sometimes in broad daylight when everybody else's house was in order, a fever of cleanliness seized him, and he mixed basins of paint and touched up the woodwork, whitewashed the walls, overhauled the few bits of furniture, rubbed the floor, baled out the gutter beneath the window. But still she followed with her duster, or, as the one concession, was permitted to help him shake their tiny strip of carpet.

Only on washing day did her turn come, and even then within limits. He must somehow have scraped together enough pennies and shillings to send the rougher part of the work to a laundry, for never more than a pair or two of stockings, a few handkerchiefs, and odds and ends of lace dangled in the window where she hung out the clothes to dry. But of the little left for her to do she made so much that I am sure she knew how

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pretty she was in her blue cotton gown, with the flowing sleeves pinned back to give free play to her white arms—she was always in his before she had done.

If when their kettle was to boil they had to keep it boiling, this, at any rate, was no serious hardship, for they lived mostly on the bread and cheese and kisses upon which lovers thrive in legend. Neither did it force them into regular hours. His small respect for time would have satisfied those people who insist first that there is such a thing as an "artistic temperament" and then make any sign of irresponsibility in any artist a proof of it. Some days *Les Amoureux* were at breakfast when I got up, on others they were not ready until I was at lunch; one night they might be finishing supper as I sat down to dinner, the next they would be just beginning as I went to bed. I am afraid they never dined. There were always cups on the table, suggesting a succession of teas; often there was nothing else. If, after he had brought the table from out the shadows, he disappeared into them, leaving her to lay the cloth, I knew they were in luck and had something to cook on the stove they kept carefully out of my sight, for then he always reappeared with a dish in his hand.



## IN THE GARRET

If he did not disappear into the shadows, he cut the bread and butter and made the tea, in this department also denying her equal rights. But whether they called the meal they sat down to breakfast, dinner, or tea, it was always a feast, for Love presided, and I used to see their lips meet and hands clasp above the teacups.

All this may sound like something in the *Vie de Bohème*, but nothing could really have been more unlike. To Murger, *Les Amoureux* would have seemed no better than *bons bourgeois*, as out of place in the *Quartier Latin* as Rodolphe and Mimi in Chelsea or St. John's Wood. It is impossible to love and be wise, the philosopher says, but the special kind of folly the French student believes in was a stranger in the garret of *Les Amoureux*. There were no *francs amis* to interrupt them with joyous knock at the door; *l'amour des chansons* never distracted them from their tasks. *Blague* was unknown to them, holidays unheard of. They were always alone, they seldom went out. If I met them in the near streets, they were on their way to fetch the day's milk and bread, or the oil for the midnight lamp. Their pleasure was to run their errands together, their rare amusement to sit hand in hand

## THE LOVERS

at the window through the long summer evening.

And yet I half suspected that separation was a sweet sorrow they would have been willing to endure more often. They could not part, if only for ten minutes, without heart-rending farewells and hesitations, endless last words and kisses. But the agony of parting over, I gathered that solitude had its compensations. If it was *L'Amoureuse* who was compelled to go, *L'Amoureux* would lean far out of the window to watch her to the end of the short street, but no sooner was she round the corner than he was in front of the mirror. The study of himself was an occupation that never palled—an occupation that never has palled with young lovers since the world began. I have seen him stand there parting his hair at a dozen different angles and considering the effect of each as if his life depended on it. I have seen him button and unbutton his coat, thrust his hands into his pockets, cross them behind his back, all the while turning slowly round like a tailor's dummy and staring into the mirror like a new Narcissus. And once I saw him for twenty minutes by the clock tie and untie a white stock, probably designed to dazzle her, and I knew he only stopped

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then because he heard her step on the stair, for he had just thrown the stock away and put on his old cravat again when the door opened and she was in his arms.

It was the same when she was alone. The minute he was out of sight, she was at the mirror, in her turn studying, first, her face—going over it minutely inch by inch, rubbing, washing, greasing, powdering it—and then her hair, examining its growth upon the temples, the line of its parting, its length, its abundance. And she would shake it out strand by strand, clip it, brush it, massage it, arrange it in a dozen different fashions, though always, when he got back, it was hanging in the thick pigtail, so that I knew this was the way he liked it best. If there was time the set of a skirt was tried, or she decked herself out with ribbons, or trimmed and retrimmed a hat. She might have spared herself the trouble, for he was far more minute than she in examining her face, far more ingenious in arranging her hair, while his skill in draping a skirt, knotting a ribbon, and twining a garland about her hat comforted me with the assurance that, should illustration fail, the practice of another and more profitable art would open alluringly before him.

## THE LOVERS

Poverty had come in at the door with *Les Amoureux*, but love was in no haste to fly out of the window. Through the weeks and the months it kept its bloom in the garret, though with every new day I trembled as I looked from my window into theirs, knowing that summer's lease hath all too short a date and dreading its falling in for them; knowing, too, how horrid a gap would be left in the roofs below my window when Time came to take their love away. Indeed, we all of us in my small family had grown absorbed in the pretty comedy they were playing, following it scene by scene, fearful lest some unexpected villain should stalk across the stage and spoil it, dreading the fall of the curtain. "And *Les Amoureux*?" we would ask each other anxiously in the morning, and always before we went to bed we would look to see if their lamp still burned. Even our friends—that is, those of whose sympathy I was so sure that I had shown them the garret—when they called would rush to the window before they spoke to us, and when we met them in the street would want to know how *Les Amoureux* were before they bothered as to how we were ourselves.

☞ Winter shut the garret window and mine,

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and hung a veil of fog and mist between. But I could see *Les Amoureux*, if dimly, coming and going about their daily work. I could see the easel by day, and the lamp at night : signs that the cold and the darkness had not sent love flying. Nor had it flown when the veil lifted and once again the leaves were growing green in the near garden and windows were open to the sunshine.

There was one change, however, a small one, but it is the little rift that in the end shall make the music mute, and my heart sank. They had taken in as companion a small cat, black and white, young and gay, whose soft paws pursued the pencil of *L'Amoureux* when he was at work, and who perched on the back of *L'Amoureuse* when she leaned out of the window. With the cat itself I had no fault to find. It was a charming creature to whom I gladly would have given shelter, so that I could not exactly blame them for doing what I would have done myself. But—a year ago would they have had eyes for a cat, would they have had a caress to squander upon it ?

Then one morning I caught them nodding and signalling to the little boy who lives in the flat under mine. A week later, on one

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of the hot June afternoons when London pretends that it is really going to be summer, and all my neighbours, with the Londoner's touching faith in the fiction, were gasping at their windows, I saw *L'Amoureux* making rapid drawings at his easel and *L'Amoureuse* holding them up—crude caricatures like comic valentines—and I heard the little boy laugh his ecstatic thanks. It was kindly meant and the child's joy repaid the kindness. But—a year ago, would they have been even aware that there was a little boy in the window overlooking theirs?

And I knew the rift was widening by the time she now spent hanging out of the window, not merely to say good-bye to him, but to wait for the things that never happened in their quiet street. And I knew it, too, by his readiness to be distracted—every passing hurdy-gurdy, every chance airship flying over London, sent him scrambling on the roof—and every morning he found leisure before dressing for a turn with the dumb-bells. True, she shared in the exercise as in the labour, and had her turn too. But—a year ago, were they in need of exercise, a year ago would they have heard the hurdy-gurdy in the street or seen the airship in the heavens? And many a night

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love's sanctuary was dark, many a day there were knocks at the garret door. Ladies in flowered hats sat round the tea-table. Men dropped in to smoke a friendly pipe. Visitors in frock coats and top hats called to look at the drawings—editors and publishers I was sure, so evidently were things prospering in the garret. Two or three rugs lay on the floor instead of the one tiny strip of carpet, a high screen was put up behind the easel and, at its side, a capacious stand for brushes and paints. An arm-chair was added to the furniture, and a new lamp double in size and brilliancy.

But worst of all was the notice they began to take of us. One year ago—one short year—they had been sublimely unaware that anybody lived in the top floor of our London sky-scraper—sublimely unaware, indeed, that there was a London sky-scraper so near for anybody to live in. Now they had discovered that we could look down into their garret and they did nothing but look up to see if we were, watching us more intently than we had watched them. Never any more did they fall into each other's arms before our sympathetic eyes. The easel was drawn back and the pose hidden by the screen. And the morning they hung a

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curtain at their window, I knew the end had come.

They can save themselves the trouble of looking up now. We seldom look down. The garret has grown dull with the withering of love, and *Les Amoureux* are no longer like the pigeons who do not mind being watched, they are no longer simply *Les Amoureux*—The Lovers—Daphnis and Chloe, Aucassin and Nicolette, Romeo and Juliet, strayed into a London attic. They have returned from the Lovers' Paradise to the everyday world where our neighbours' business is none of ours. But can we complain? Can they? The poet's love is sweet only for a season, theirs was sweet for a year. And the affection that survives love is more comfortable to live with and spares some leisure for thoughts of fame and fortune. But whatever greatness may be in store for *Les Amoureux* under a name by which I may never recognize them, one thing I know: for their "little moment" of perfection—the moment love alone can give—they will have to look back down the vista of the years to the days when they were *Les Amoureux* and the world for them was bounded by the sloping walls of a shabby little old London garret.



II

IN HARNESS



## II

### IN HARNESS

I HAVE an idea that with most people discretion is usually a polite word for cowardice. In my own case I have no doubts whatever—it always is. When I am praised for being discreet, as I often am, I say nothing to deny it, but I know all the same that I would be the most indiscreet woman in the world were I not afraid of what might come of it. I hardly deserve, therefore, that my one great indiscretion in print should have brought me in return nothing more alarming than gratitude.

This great indiscretion was the first chapter of my story—if story it can be called—which I wrote originally as an article for a magazine. I do not need to be told how discreet it seems on the face of it; if it didn't the editor of the *Century* would not have accepted and published it. But the trouble is that

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every word of it is true, and nothing is more indiscreet than the truth. From my high windows in London, day by day, I had watched my two Lovers in their garret below until I got to think of them as my own—my discovery and my property—and so I wrote of them as freely as I might have written of those other lovers, the pigeons in the gardens which my windows also overlook, and I would as soon have expected the pigeons to read me up in their tree-top, as those two delightful young people down in their garret. I saw them as just simply lovers, and even the story in cold print could not make me see them as neighbours into whose privacy I had no right to peer and to pry. Indeed, when they vanished from the Quarter, as they did within their second year in the garret, I was, if anything, pleased with myself, delighted to think I had given their love a little longer lease of life in the pages of the *Century*, for love at the best is short-lived and youth fast-fleeting.

But if I had not written the article and if it had not been published, I, at least, could not have forgotten them. Every time I looked down from my high window into their low one, I missed them. For all I

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knew, they might be prospering in a Tite Street studio, they might be the proud possessors of a semidetached St. John's Wood villa, they might be steeped in academic propriety, or—they might have drifted as the Poles apart, Love at last flown far from them. But wherever they themselves were, their garret for me was haunted by their youth—he was still there at his easel, she was still posing for him, they were laying the cloth for supper, they were in each other's arms, he was washing the big garret window, she was trimming a hat—and whatever they might be doing, always they were radiant in the light of their love. The new tenants who moved in after they had gone were never any better in my eyes than intruders, strangers with no right in the garret my Lovers had transformed into Love's sanctuary. In my memory *Les Amoureux* lived on in the low room under the old tumbled tiled roof, though it may be they faded into paler ghosts as the weeks and the months passed, and though to their romance Time seemed to have written "The End" as plainly as I had to the little tale I made of it.

But Time is not to be trusted to round out the romances of life quite so neatly. To

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my little tale, which I owed to chance, there was a sequel, and the astonishing thing is that this sequel I got straight from *Les Amoureux* themselves, who were the very last people from whom I had any reason to expect it.

They had been gone from their garret a year or so when, one summer afternoon as I sat at my desk deep in prosaic everyday affairs that had got into a tangle, Augustine came to announce a young man with a portfolio under his arm at the front door. Now when young men with portfolios under their arms present themselves at our front door, she knows as well as I do that it is the Artist in the House they want to see, but this particular young man would not budge though she assured him that *Monsieur* was not at home, and she had not English enough to understand his excuse. I must have been in a bad humour over my tiresome task, for I remember my annoyance was out of all proportion to the offence when I was obliged to go to the front door myself and explain, and I was the more irritated when even my explaining did not send this persistent young man with his portfolio away. He insisted he did not want to see the Artist in the House, he wanted to see me, and when

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## IN HARNESS

I asked him why, he handed me a card. I did not look at it, which shows how I had let my ill-humour get the better of me, and he could not hide his disappointment. He had evidently relied upon it to give me all the credentials I could ask for. But he hesitated only for one moment. The next he was smiling, and I had the grace to see that his smile was distinctly in his favour.

“Why, I wanted to tell you that we really never did put up a curtain,” he said, which was surely the most remarkable way a young man with a portfolio under his arm ever introduced himself at our, or I do believe anybody else’s, front door.

I looked at him bewildered, I put on my glasses and looked at the card as I ought to have done in the first place, I read: “*L’Amoureux, Lesbos*,” and—I knew.

He was the Lover from the garret. He had read my story or he would not have known his name was *L’Amoureux*, and Lesbos his home; the chances were that *L’Amoureuse* had read it too, and in a flash I saw the full extent of my indiscretion. If it had not been for his smile, I think I should have run. My indiscretion, once I realized it, loomed up before me, gigantic, unspeakable, wholly unpardonable. There was not

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a single thing I could say for myself, there was not a shred of justification I could plead, there was no redress I could make. My crime was not one to be carried to the Courts for compensation and was consequently all the more heinous. What then were they going to do about it? I wondered in my misery, sure of nothing except that whatever they chose to do or exact I was bound to accept meekly, in sackcloth and ashes.

And what did they do? I admit it is altogether incredible, but *L'Amoureux*, this admirable, this generous young lover, had come not to reproach, not to upbraid, not to threaten, but to thank me—absolutely to thank me! He and *L'Amoureuse* had seen nothing that called for forgiveness. They were too grateful for that; I had given them too much pleasure. They had understood, as they read, that if they in their garret were too engrossed with their love to be conscious of a world outside, I at my window was too engrossed with its beauty to remember it was their possession not mine, and he actually told me how touched, how thrilled they were by my sympathy. The *Century*, with the story in it, had reached them only a few days before at a moment of great difficulty and depression—I am afraid too



## IN HARNESS

many such moments fell to the lot of my Lovers in a sordid world run not by love but by good hard cash. It seemed that they had exchanged the old garret not for a fine studio building, or showy stucco front, or academic heights, but for another garret, this new one, however, in no delightful little out-of-the-way corner like ours, but in as commonplace a thoroughfare as can be found from one end of London to the other. It was here, in their discouragement, that the magazine from far over the sea was placed in their hands, and when, in its pages, they of a sudden met themselves, like the lovers in Rossetti's drawing, they forgot everything save their love and the garret with the sloping walls, where it had blossomed and bloomed, and those old days ever cherished as their best—as I knew they would be when I wrote. And peace fell upon their tired souls, and their troubles slipped away, and they were happy as they had not been for months.

There was just one thing, however—the little crumpled rose-leaf—*L'Amoureux* said. I wrote of a curtain they had hung up towards the last. They never had hung up a curtain there, and he could not rest until he had told me so.

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The affairs which I had thought so pressing were cheerfully neglected while I took *L'Amoureux* to show him his garret from my window, and then sat down to share the memories it awoke in him. He was precisely what I knew he must be. Up at my high observation post I had seen that he was tall and slight and fair and pleasant to look upon, but only now he was near could I see also the tenderness and manliness and charm of his face, the depth and seriousness of his eyes—the eyes of the dreamer. The impression he made was one of great simplicity and great strength, tempered by humour. He was simple as a child in telling me of their life down there, and their poverty, for they were so poor they added only at the last to the easel and chair or so and table and mirror which were all their furniture in the sunny May days when I first discovered them; they never ran to a real carpet; their bed was a door taken off its hinges. But love transfigured the bare garret and to them it was as beautiful as a palace, as holy as a temple. And I felt him strong in the brave front with which he faced life, hitherto so niggardly to him of all its gifts save the one great gift of love. He had had no success as an artist. He had been passed

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over, the portfolio under his arm made it hard to say why, for others less accomplished. He seldom found the publisher who wanted his drawings, he hawked round his paintings in vain. Most of the time the pockets of these two young people so rich in love were forlornly empty. But so long as they had love, which had been overshadowed by the demon of care perhaps, but had not withered as I feared, the rest could go, and I gathered that it was the easier for him to take the goods of this world lightly, since to him material things were an illusion—the Great Reality waited in the world beyond. He did not wear a mystic silver ring on his thumb for nothing, and a word here and a word there gave me a glimpse into the mysticism that inspired him and shone through his eyes.

And so, on that pleasant summer afternoon, as I listened to him, I pieced together the story of their adventures in the wonderful first blooming of their love before ever I saw them, and then the further story of their troubles after the sad day for me when, with their flight into less friendly regions, the love-lamps went out in the garret below.

The first part of the story was short. They met, they loved. He was poor, she was

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young, little more than a child, and her family would not hear of her marrying him. I cannot blame them. Age knows, if Youth does not, how well money smooths the rough edges of life. But Love is the Great Master and passion never cools to order. Juliet would have had her Romeo, and Nicolette her Aucassin, had hell itself yawned between. *Les Amoureux* did what all true young lovers do—they did not wait for permission, they ran away. He in his triumphant youth, and she in her flower-like loveliness, carried their romance down into the bustle and business of the Strand, and presented themselves at St. Mary's, as beautiful in its way as they in theirs, a romantic setting for their romance. But it seemed to them that too many questions were asked, that eyes were too curious, that their secret was suspected. They escaped to the safer, as they thought, if less romantic, refuge of the Registrar's Office, from which they had just come when I saw them on that sunlit May morning, down in the garret, clasped in each other's arms.

The story after they reluctantly shook the dust of their dear garret from off their feet was longer. When publishers and editors were most obdurate, and the portfolio on his rounds least fruitful, and he had to turn

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to other work to keep as much as a garret roof over their heads, a loaf in the larder, and oil in the lamp, *L'Amoureux* accepted a post as secretary to Craven the poet. His choice, naturally, would have been to go on drawing and painting, with *L'Amoureuse* always as his sitter; but as he hadn't any choice in the matter, he thought himself in luck to have dropped into the post—he would have to travel far, he said, before chancing upon another makeshift so congenial.

“Of course you know Craven?” he asked, as if not to know Craven was not to exist.

I could answer “Yes” with a certain measure of truth, and thus save myself the humiliation of seeming entirely out of it. Craven's name is too well known for me not to have heard it, and I had read his verse, and admired it, though not with the wholesale enthusiasm of *L'Amoureux*, who was of the opinion that no such true poet has sung in England since Swinburne, or, in his verse, struck a note at once so new and musical. It was fortunate for him that he could think so. This enthusiasm, together with the various interests he and Craven had in common, lightened his labours as secretary. He sorely needed something to lighten them.

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It is never easy for an artist to leave his work at home and go out to do somebody else's—to climb another's stairs.

For a while *L'Amoureux* joined the duties and cares of publisher with those of secretary. He took his part in an enterprise often embarked upon by the young who feel they have something to say the world would be the better or wiser or richer for hearing, and who can find no established publisher to give them the chance to say it in print. It was an enterprise on a very small scale, I am afraid, but it had an address, and the name of a firm appeared upon the title-page of its books. Proofs flew round the studios of Chelsea and St. John's Wood, slim little volumes were issued from time to time. Those whose memory can get clear of the shadow hanging over us all and wander back to "Before the War" will recall that it was a moment of many small enterprises of the kind—the moment when *Blast* was expected to make the whole world sit up, and *The Gypsy* to leave Beardsley and *The Savoy* leagues and leagues behind, and *Form* to outdo them both, though when *Form* did appear it found a world too electrified by war to sit up again at the thunder of mere words and paint—the moment, too, when

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*les jeunes* of London used to meet in the late evening at the far end of the café they patronized to plot insurrection in their work, and to dazzle each other by the length of their hair, the width of their hat-brims, the yearning eccentricity of their clothes, and their unlimited thirst for milk. A young friend of mine made the one sensation he can as yet place to his credit by appearing there one evening in green pyjamas under a long overcoat, and deliberately ordering coffee and cognac, though none of the others, he told me, ever called for anything as strong, except a young woman got up as a female Robespierre, who mistakenly imagined cognac to be in character. They were all very strenuous in the new way I do not doubt, but what, I wonder, would *les jeunes* of 1830, with a thirst quenched in the old way only by fiery spirits and deadly drugs, have thought of them and their intemperate indulgence in milk?

*L'Amoureux*, seeing books through the press and on to the market, making illustrations for them, designing covers, going and coming among authors and artists no better known than himself, was a good deal with this youthful group. But I do not think he was ever quite of it. I have said he was

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not given to pose, and he never stooped to the outward signs by which the newest "new movement" was hall-marked at the café. Burberrys and the white stock, the effect of which I had often seen him studying in the glass, were the most eccentric eccentricities he allowed himself. Besides, *L'Amoureux* was so fortunate as to have that saving sense of humour I had so quickly recognized in him. Again there was the twinkle in his eyes when his story reached the point of his relations with these terrible, these desperate young men, in their revolutionary garments, rivalling each other in reckless orders for milk. His talk left me in no doubt that neither did he run much to the café itself. That was not his idea of amusement and happiness. In a little bare room, by the quiet fireside in winter, by the open window in summer, *L'Amoureuse* was waiting, and the barest room where *L'Amoureuse* waited in her beauty was worth all the cafés in the world where mild, inoffensive, long-haired youths sat round little marble-topped tables, fondly fancying the eye of London and the world fixed in terror and trembling upon them.

What impressed me most as I listened to *L'Amoureux* was that life, like his talk, was



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for ever bringing him back to *L'Amoureuse*. He could not stray, or stay, from her for long. Whatever movement or enterprise Fate might fling him into, he himself would still revolve round her and her beauty. And he made me understand why, a rare thing for any man in love to succeed in doing.

I started out with the advantage of knowing that she was beautiful when his talk was of her beauty. But as if he feared the distance between my window and theirs had kept me from seeing it, he took from his portfolio, and gave me, two drawings he had made of her beautiful head, one on a bit of the paper that covered the walls of his beloved garret—I have it now, the whole romance of *Les Amoureux* in the beautiful head tenderly drawn on the odd piece of cheap wall-paper.

But beauty alone would not have worked the charm, or held him so tight in her toils. It was above all her sympathy that kept love glowing. She was close to him, with him, in everything he thought, tried, did. He was an artist, she was a poet, in her medium seeking to express the same things he sought to express in his. She loved beauty, and she sang its praise; she was a rebel because rebellion went with her years;

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but in her work she could not get away from the fundamental, the unchanging conventions of art. She was young, youth radiated from her verse. And yet, like him, she did not condescend to pose, to eccentricity, to modern self-conscious primitiveness masking as the Art of the Future. To publish her verses in a volume was, I felt without his saying so, the chief reason for his plunge into publishing.

Art freed her from the snares of fashion and notoriety, saved her from the spectacular. She had in her work and in herself much of the fine simplicity I was prompt to discover and admire in *L'Amoureux*. Moreover, hers was the uncommon gift of lavishing her sympathy upon the misfortunes of which she was one of the chief sufferers. Poverty did not frighten her. *L'Amoureux* might be at the end of his resources, but he could count upon the steadfastness of her love to warm and ennoble the simplest room they shared, to dignify the meanest street upon which their window might open. I do not mean that they escaped intervals of disillusion and discouragement; no mortal does, whether rich or poor; and, after all, love loses its savour when there is no bitter to its sweet. But she never failed when he

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was most in need of her, and by her trust in him she turned the failure that threatened to be ignominious into success—she made him feel that if he failed it was because he was an artist. So long as she was with him, could he, he asked me, complain if life had denied him its lesser pleasures and conquests?

Even for *L'Amoureux* the mystic, her understanding, her sympathy, was ready. She looked, as he looked, to the Great Reality beyond; this world to her, as to him, seemed but a passing mirage as we poor humans are whirled on our way through eternity. If many a time they had no butter for their bread, no sugar for their tea, they could still reach up to heaven as they sat side by side in front of their dying fire or at the open window with no light save the stars: artists together, seeing the mirage with the artist's eyes of wonder and delight; mystics together, dreaming of the Infinite, of which they were a part, with the mystic's hope and faith. In all things, small and great, she gave him the companionship without which love is an empty farce.

One does not exhaust Love and the Universe in an hour's talk, but when *L'Amoureux* said good-bye I felt I knew

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him better than many men who had been my friends for years and liked him better into the bargain. Indeed, I liked him so well that I did not mean to lose sight of him, or time either in getting to know *L'Amoureuse*. That she could not disappoint me, I was certain beforehand; if she had been of the kind to disappoint he would not have loved her; and I was the more convinced by all he had to say of her. Besides, no woman who was not charming, as well as a poetess, would have sent me her book of verse to ease my conscience, and written on the fly-leaf "To a Lover of Lovers" to clinch her generosity. But I kept putting off the next meeting. The romance of *Les Amoureux* so far had come without my seeking it, if I sought it now, might not the spell be broken? And in my fear I let the impulse go until, gradually, the visit of *L'Amoureux* was pigeon-holed in my memory with the old days in the garret, and once more the Lovers were for me lost in the immensity of London.

III  
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### III

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THE chances are I would never have heard of my Lovers again had it not been for the war, which brings me to the strangest part of my story. From the topsy-turveydom with which Europe's tragedy has burdened the world, the last thing I looked for was the real, the irrevocable End to the romance of *Les Amoureux*, and the privilege to make what use of it I chose without the shadow of indiscretion. And yet, this is exactly what the war has brought me. It was in its second year when *L'Amoureuse*, whom I did not seek, sought me of her own accord. It is not easy to write of her visit—sorrow has its sanctity. But this much I can say, I was right in knowing she could not disappoint me. She was beautiful in her sadness—if anything more beautiful than in her happiness, and I could not wonder

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that *L'Amoureux* had never tired of drawing her. Her love, free of sordid daily needs and anxieties, was strengthened, exalted by the titanic tragedy which had claimed from her, as her share, all she had to give—*L'Amoureux* had fallen at Loos.

In her grief she turned to me for the sympathy I had lavished upon them unasked in the first rapture of their love. They had both got to look upon me as the friend who understood, and therefore to me, who had told the story of their love, she was eager to tell the story of his heroism. Nor, I must admit in fairness to myself, did my sympathy fail her. As I had understood the lover, so I could now understand the hero, the greater hero because one of the kind who does the hard work and gets little of the glory. He had served not with the few who command, who are decorated, promoted, extolled, but with the thousands who obey, who, when their hour comes, perish unnoticed and unnamed, and it was the cruel injustice of it that led her to invoke my aid. It went to my heart when she asked me why, if I had written of the Lover, I should not write of the Soldier and let the world see, as nobody but I could—for so her love glorified my indiscretion—the heroic stuff he was made



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of. Many who had been with him in Flanders had spoken to her of his bravery, his devotion, his faithful work ; she knew the cost of the sacrifice to him, the splendour of the surrender of his allegiance to Love and Art, which were all he held most dear ; and yet he had died with nothing to distinguish him from the least worthy. I think this is what hurt most—this passing of *L'Amoureux* so silently into the Great Silence.

As if fearful I might think that she exaggerated the part he had played and that he was not quite so fine a creature as she made him out, she gave me all the facts she knew of his career in the Army and placed his letters in my hands. I could neither read them nor listen to her without feeling that I would do a good deal and my best to pay to the memory of *L'Amoureux* the tribute he deserves, the tribute *L'Amoureuse* knows to be his right, and, since there is no space in official history for such as he, to put on record, in a sequel to my tale of his love in the Garret, the tale of his heroism as a man who could be simple and strong, tender and loyal, in war as in love.

The facts are tragically few for the career of *L'Amoureux* as soldier was tragically short. In those August days when England was

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suddenly up against the biggest problem in her history, and men who had not forgotten what patriotism means, and men who saw in patriotism more money and less responsibility, alike gave themselves to her service ; and I could not go out from our quiet Quarter without meeting in the Strand detachment after detachment of recruits, half of them looking ashamed and half as if they wished they hadn't ; and I could not wander into the parks without coming to a drilling-ground ; and I could not even look out of my window consecrated to Love without seeing men in khaki marching along the Embankment ; in those critical August days when England plunged headlong into war, *L'Amoureux* was among the first to volunteer, he, in his direct simplicity, seeing only that his country called him. As an artist he would have preferred serving with artists in the Artists' Rifles, but there was no vacancy, and he did not care to wait while England was in need of men. Friends urged him to try for the Officers' Training Corps, but he had the grit and the sense to want to go through the ranks and earn his commission. Moreover, he was as penniless as in the old garret days, he had *L'Amoureuse* to think of, the private is without the

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expenses which cripple the officer, and the separation allowance for her was the final and unanswerable argument. He joined the first regiment he could, which happened to be the —th London, and he started in to drill and harden himself for the fight.

He could not, had he tried, have hit upon a regiment of men less his sort. He had not bothered, as had most young volunteers, to make sure friends were joining the same regiment with him, and he found himself alone in a crowd of stalwart youths well qualified to be moulded into decent soldiers, but as unlike him in most things as youths from the same town could possibly be. They were true Cockneys, there was no question of that, of the porter type many of them, the kind who are apt to be found helping in market-places, or on hand ready for any job—unmistakable Londoners, whatever their trade or want of trade, with the Londoner's cheerfulness and fine command of picturesque language, mostly from the drab, dreary parish with which their Regiment was associated by name, and all friendly and disposed to be amiable, but just not understanding him—the artist—any better than he at first understood them.

It was not pleasant. But I have an idea

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a good many, in those first breathless days, rushed madly into patriotism only to repent at leisure, when, had they taken time to reflect, there would have been no call for repentance later on. *L'Amoureux* had nothing in common with the men of his Regiment. He did not think, talk, walk, eat, wash, or do one single thing as they did, and I should not wonder if they, who couldn't for the life of them see why he didn't, resented it. Indeed, if they had not been decent fellows they might have mistaken him for a muff and treated him as one, and if he had not been what he was he might have had trouble to hold his own, for of all living creatures the artist is always most of a puzzle to his fellow-men. That he was their equal in muscle was distinctly in his favour, and though his ways were not theirs, any more than theirs were his, khaki wiped out the difference, and drilling and discipline did not leave much time for him, or for them, to think about it. When three weeks had passed and he received an official letter informing him that there was room now in the Artists' Rifles, his officers didn't want to let him go, so useful had he made himself, and by that time, thanks to his conscientiousness and dogged persistence in seeing his job through, he

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didn't want to go either, though he would have been more at home with men of his profession. I do not doubt he had his black moments when he realized that loneliness in a crowd is the worst loneliness of all.

By this time the Regiment was stationed near St. Albans, getting drilled and marched and trench-dug into shape. He was near enough to London for *L'Amoureuse* to come to him now and then, but there were long intervals between her visits. When she was not with him he wrote to her, and all his story as soldier is in his letters, told by himself far better than I could tell it for him. The letters in the earlier days are no better than memoranda, the sort of hasty notes one writes to somebody one is frequently seeing. But the hastiest give some little insight into his life and the life of all the men who, in the late summer and the autumn of 1914, to nobody's surprise more than their own, were being made soldiers of. From the series as a whole a very good picture is to be had of "Kitchener's Army" in the training, which can be followed step by step—the daily work and the daily discomfort, the constant moving from place to place, the unexpected and ever-varying

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billet, the test of obedience, the occasional revolt even to the verge of mutiny from the occasional martinet of an officer. In July he had been a publisher, a secretary to a poet, a student of mystic creeds ; in August he was the raw recruit, a creature of drill and discipline and roughing it, a mere dependent part of a huge relentless machine ; and the quick-turn change left him so breathless he could not keep the breathlessness out of the notes he at once set about scribbling off to *L'Amoureuse*, the first dated August 23, Hatfield :

“ DEAR ONE,

“ Arrived at St. Albans and had to tramp five and a half miles, with all our kit, to this hole. Hatfield a most lovely place. All well and happy. Love to all,

“ B.

“ P.S. We are sleeping on the floor of the railway-station, but it is only for a day or so as we are among the worst-off lot here, so the officer is having us shifted.”

“ *Sep. 3rd.* . . . I have no time to write as I am knocked up. Went on a glorious route march last night, and as the great moon came up tears ran down my face

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and mingled with the sweat. We sleep in the open now. Yesterday I started at 4.45 A.M. and finished at 10.50 P.M. A.'s all right ; am looking after him."

" *Sep. 4th.* . . . Can you catch the first bus or one starting at 11 A.M. and bring a few sandwiches ? I am at the small shop that sells sweets and teas just below the Antique galleries. If I am not there to meet you, ask in the shop. . . ."

There was a plan for her longer stay before the week was out, and his letter arranging for it is less breathless and so full of detail that I fancy he was shaking down into the new life, feeling more at home, taking more interest in his novel duties, and rather proud of himself on the whole, as he had every right to be. His officers were finding him out and meeting him on the friendly terms that roused the jealousy he refers to, not only then, but till the end. The Regiment was now at Hatfield, "the lovely place," and the date is September 10 :

" DEAR ONE,

" I called upon Lord William Cecil last night and he gave me (or rather my lady) an intro. to the head gardener, whom

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I saw to-day. They are quite willing to take you and Violet but they would not make any financial arrangements. They are full up till Sunday. . . . We went for a beautiful route march to-day of about fifteen miles, and the Adjutant was so pleased with us that he congratulated our Captain on our performance. Of course, your loved one was the most important private (the left-hand leading man), who has to keep the pace for his squad, and afterwards we sprinted up the hill to our billet. Rumour says we are going on a twenty-mile tramp to-morrow, but I don't think it is true. A. stood it very well and ended up quite fresh. Three of the band fell out, and the Recruits Squad was the only company that finished without a man short!!!

“ *Most important.* Please ask ‘the Reverend’ how I am to address a letter of thanks to Lord Cecil. I do not know exactly what his rank is and I do not know if I am to address him by title in writing a letter of thanks or merely address my letter to ‘The Rector.’ ”

“ Thanks awfully for the P.O. One gets so confoundedly thirsty, and a cup of tea after sleeping out all night is too seductive to be able to refuse. I have just heard that



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three regiments have been stopped at Southampton, so it is possible we may be drafted to Belgium to keep open communications and guard railways instead. Our Captain told us yesterday that we three were quite good enough to get our stripes as soon as we join our Company, and to-day told me to call on him any time I wanted to know anything, as he would be only too pleased to give any private assistance in his power. All this is very nice, but it is rather trying as one has to keep right up to the mark. Also it causes a lot of jealousy among the other men, which makes it rather uncomfortable at times. I had a long chat with the M.P. for our district on parade yesterday.

“ Well, must get to bed now, as another sergeant has just come in to tell us that the march to-morrow is settled.

“ Keep up your pecker, Old Girl. If I see any active service, I come back either dead or with my commission.

“ All yours,  
“ B.”

The next move nearer the front, though still comfortably far away, was to St. Albans, and there is a letter to announce the change on September 25 :

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“ DEAR ONE,

“ Just a very short note to say we are moving to St. Albans to-morrow morning, so do not come down on Sunday, unless you hear from me. I am very well and did well with my shooting. . . . Must close now as we have so much to do. We have only just (8.15) heard definite news of our move.

“ All my love,

“ B.”

A few days later he was sending off a notice of the arrival of the Regiment in St. Albans, for his first thought was always of her, and in it he put a hurried sketch to give her an idea of his new quarters, for the artist could not be entirely swallowed up in the soldier. After that came another letter with his impressions of St. Albans, his mood perhaps less buoyant because of his knowledge of her growing sadness. Both letters were written late in September, but without date :

“ DEAR ONE,

“ I have just made a very rough sketch out of my window for you. If you come on Sunday try to be here by 3 P.M. I hear we are shifting to another part of

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the town, so that if I do not meet you at the bus call at the station, and they will probably direct you to my company's quarters. Am just off for a march now. I have answered the P.C. referred to but am sticking where I am."

The p.c. was to inform him of the vacancy in the Artists' Rifles.

"DEAR ONE,

"I am glad the 'black shadow' has left you; possibly you dispelled it by dissipation, if only in wallowing in velvet and furs. . . . St. Albans seems positively hateful. For the time being we are in a room with another dozen or so, and mouth-organs and clog-dances drive me nearly silly. I do not know how long we shall be here—we were given a hint that we should join our company this week. I feel very sick just at the moment. I suppose it is being among strange people and in a strange place. All the people were sorry to lose us. I will try and get a week-end pass next week. Be a good girl.

"Love,

"B."

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October, after only two months of service, brought promotion, the lowest rung in the ladder which was to lead to his commission at the top. His additional duties left him time only to write of his new rank on October 2 :

“ DEAR HEART,

“ Thanks so much for your two letters and enclosure. We have been on night marches every night and are fagged out in the afternoon, when we have one hour off.

“ You may now address me as Lance-Corporal, as my promotion dates from Oct. 1st. Have just come back from my first outpost duty. Fortunately nothing much happened, as I know absolutely nothing of that work. . . .

“ Excuse short uninteresting letter.

“ B.”

I can add nothing to the next few letters in the series. The experiences that fell to the lot of inexperienced recruits in the process of being hardened fill them, and most men who passed through the process in this busy, hurried autumn of preparation would have the same report to give—only, as a rule, in the report that reaches the public the ugly

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side of the picture is left out. But I think it a mistake to omit the bad since, along with the good, it helped to make "Kitchener's Army" into whatever it has since proved itself to be. The first of the letters is dated, vaguely, October 1914:

"DEAR HEART,

"I have been wondering why I have not heard from you this week, as you promised to write. I am still off duty but will go on tomorrow. The Battalion went out bivouacking yesterday and came back at 2.30 A.M. soaked to the skin. I am jolly glad I skipped Parade.

"The Brigadier-General told the men he was proud of the —th for the energy and spirit they put into their work, and paid the men numerous compliments, telling them that they would be in France in about three weeks' time. Our discipline, he said, was bad, and I quite agree. There is great activity here, and for the third time to my knowledge the Colonel was hauled over the coals for overworking his men. I think the Colonel is getting it pretty thick. I am trying for a week-end pass. If you do *not* hear to the contrary, come about three on Sunday if fine. Do write to the poor old  
"B."

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“ DEAR HEART,

“ I am glad you answered me so promptly as I have not received your letter, nor, by some coincidence that seems suspicious, Hudson’s last parcels and letters posted on the same day. I suppose somebody pinched the lot. . . . We were to have slept out to-night, but as we were out from 8 A.M. till 8 P.M. in the soaking rain, and lying down in ploughed fields, the General said we would all be in bed with pneumonia if we did not get home. *Must* close now and get back. All my love,  
Dear One,

“ B.”

“ *October 16th, 1914.*

“ DEAR HEART,

“ Oh, such a short letter for the Girl and all the reverse of good to tell you. From Monday to Wednesday they worked us like the devil and then had a field-day in the soaking rain. The consequence was that the men could not put any heart into their work, and the General who came to see the attack ‘told off’ our Colonel in a frightful manner. Then came the storm. All leave has been stopped. Officers and N.C.O.’s were called up and slanged till we

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were sick, and now the N.C.'s have to do the whole thing over again on Sunday next. On top of this they are inoculating us, and 'A' Company have all gone delirious. 'B' and 'D' have refused, and 'F' Company's turn comes to-morrow.

"We are all absolutely done up, and on the eve of something very like mutiny. It will be quite useless for you to come on Sunday as I shall either be on my back or out marching. Thanks for stamps, etc. Will turn in now, Sweetheart. Write me soon and tell me something good. Love to all.

"All your

"B."

"October 19th, 1914.

"DEAR HEART,

"I am more than sorry for my gross neglect, but last week was a hellish one and I have had to keep a very strong hand upon myself, otherwise I might have done something irreparable. On Saturday I was knocked to the world, but managed to stick a seventeen-mile forced march—acting as scout (which means running backwards and forwards with messages that the roads are clear). All Sunday, except for parades, I

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lay in bed, and this morning we were inoculated. This I rather welcome as we have forty-eight hours' sick leave. Do write me a long letter soon and tell me *all* the news. . . .

"As far as I can see the war will last some time yet. . . . I feel very sleepy now, so will say good-bye.

"All my love,

"B."

"October 29th.

"DEAR HEART,

"Just one short line to say I am well again and to thank you for your two letters. I have not them with me now, so cannot answer in detail. Our night out was hell. I had to look after the food for fifty-four men—get it, cut it up, and serve it in the trenches. All has to be done in the pitch-dark, and at last, when we lay down, it was raining and most bitterly cold. Still, in the morning I felt as fresh as a lark, and have so far felt no bad effects from it. We do the same thing next week, I am told. We are also having our second dose of inoculation this week. I tried to get a week-end pass for Sunday, but couldn't.

"Must close now, as I must get the sick men on Parade, fetch the dry goods from



## IN TRAINING

the Town stores, get breakfast, wash, shave, clean buttons and boots and be on Parade by 6.15 to-morrow.

" All my love. Will write to-morrow.

" B."

*" November 6th, 1914.*

" DEAR HEART,

" I have just applied for a week-end pass to London, but all such hopes are knocked on the head as I have been appointed Orderly Corporal for the week and the week starts on Sunday! I have much to tell the Dear Old Girl but feel too seedy to write, so will wait till I see you. . . . If, however, it is a wet day don't come, as there is nowhere we can go to, to get out of the wet. . . . I have done no work since Saturday last, and my temperature must have been very high, as I tried to dodge Parade to-day but was caught by the Doctor. I thought I was normal, but the Doctor said I was close on 100° (and I was thinking myself well). On Tuesday last I went to a doctor in the town and he said I was completely run down and unfit for work, but of course the Regimental Doctor would take no notice of that. . . . Cannot write more just now as my wrist and eyes and head ache. I could

## THE LOVERS

have gone into the hospital all this week—in fact, if I hadn't dodged the Doctor I should have been put there, but I'm practically all right now. We go on a twenty-mile march to-morrow. Perhaps the Doctor won't let me go; in any case I shall be carried more than half the way.

“ Good-bye, Old Sweet Thing.

“ B.”

“ *November 9th.* Braintree.

“ DEAR OLD THING,

“ I have fallen into a bed of clover. Instead of being killed with work we are only putting in four hours' trench-digging and one hour's drill. Of course the trench-digging is killing work, but it is better than skirmishing.

“ I am billeted with an old woman who lives for and by her hens and pigs, and never has her windows open, but keeps her heart open instead. The weather is cold and wet, but I am keeping well. Will write soon. Yours to hand with P.O. Thanks.

“ The town is a manufacturing and factory town, and no decent people about. We have just had the good news that we have a new

## IN TRAINING

Colonel, a Regular and D.S.O., so I hope for better things for the —th.

“ All my love,  
“ B.”

So far there is not much love in the letters. Throughout these weeks the soldier, marching through the rain, digging trenches, getting inoculated, a mere sleepy brute by the day's end, had kept the lover decidedly in the background. But a pale suspicion of a shadow—who can say how or why?—fell between him and *L'Amoureuse* in London, and any doubts as to whether the lover in khaki had outgrown or no the lover in Burberrys will be laid to rest by a letter of reconciliation, or explanation, dated November 15, as tender a love-letter as I care to read. In it is the first hint of the certainty he had from the beginning that Death was to be the reward of his sacrifice for his country's sake :

“ DEAR OLD GIRL,

“ I was so glad to get your letter, as in a way it has made me happy. . . . I am relieved from a beastly suspicion, which has haunted me for a long, long time, and it has

## THE LOVERS

helped me to realize my own mistake in not throwing myself into life and living it to the full. However, that is all too late now.

“ I have the chance of seeing the finest sight in the world, a modern battle. I shall also have the opportunity of indulging in the finest sport—man-hunting, and if I can do that I shall not have lived in vain. I feel, too, that the Girl now should be given her freedom, as it is as like as not I shall not live a long campaign through. I will only ask you sometimes when you are happy to remember the old B. Not the thing I am now, a mock soldier in dirty khaki, but as I was in the old garret days, when I tried so hard to make you love me. Forgiveness, Sweetheart, you already have, and a busy life will soon make me forget all but your Dear Old Self. Before many weeks are over I might be shovelled into a trench on top of a dozen more, with a jest as to my length and a curse at my weight, or lying blue and bloated in some muddy stream. Think rather of me beneath some whispering fir, or by some homely bush, where the spring might blow a wild rose, or in some field of wheat, where, time to come, lovers will walk and talk as you and I once did.

## IN TRAINING

“ I have wandered out this afternoon to try and straighten things up a bit, and am now sitting on an old mill sluice-gate, with no living soul in sight, and only the wind and the trickling water to keep me company. I have done no work for two or three days, as I haven't felt up to it, so I have been spending my cash on quarts of tea to take to the men, who gladly do my share in the trenches. I will make inquiries as to money matters. . . . If the Girl remains true to the old Stick for a year or two, she might see it coming back with ' bands and drums and all ' and a bright sword swinging at its side—one is just as likely as the other. Only hitherto I have not made much progress in the world. I have worked too little, but I am making up for it now. Why aren't I ten years younger? I suppose it is the sadness of the scene, with the dead leaves and one solitary bird singing, that has made me write in this mawkish strain. I might just as well have said ' —s,' it doesn't matter, but I somehow feel it is more or less *my* fault for not making you happier. Still, it is good to think that after five years we part for the first long time not so very different from when we started, and if we ever have a home to settle down in again,

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we will both have some little tales to tell and happy memories to fall back upon.

“We start, I believe, on the 25th of November, but will be back in St. Albans Wednesday or Thursday next. I will get you, if I can, to stay for a day or two in St. Albans, but cannot make any plans *yet*.

“All the love I have is yours, and while I live try and keep a wee bit for your poor old

“B.”

But it was not every day even as ardent a lover as he could snatch an hour, or a minute, to sit by an old mill sluice-gate and forget himself and the stern present in thoughts of his love and the future, and the good that life might hold in store for him, or the death that lurked ready to waylay him on the battlefields of France and Flanders. He quickly got back to business, to drill and marches and billets and wet and discomfort, diversified by the more serious danger of mutiny and the more serious menace of invasion. Only a short passage here and there assures her again of the steady flame of his love, while his longer passages present as graphic a description of

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the modern soldier's surroundings and background as I know of. The first of another sheaf of letters is dated November 17, still from Braintree :

“ Thanks for your letters all. Am just off duty from a thirty hours' stretch and am on again at 12, so cannot write more. Have changed my billet again, but you can write to the last.”

“ *November 21st.* Braintree.

“ DEAR HEART,

“ When last I wrote I was just off guard. That night the —th mutinied, the town was put under martial law, the —th were served out with ball-cartridge, all inhabitants were sent indoors, and, like most other things, all ended in smoke. We mutinied because they turned us out of our billets into a verminous building, filthy dirty. Punishment: double daily task and half rations.

“ There is now supposed to be a battle off the East Coast, and we are confined to Barracks fully armed and ready to man the trenches at a moment's notice. Aircraft are flying about, but all the men carry on just as usual. Will not leave here for some time.

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I expect. . . . I have not written before as I have had no time. Weather is ghastly. Hard frost at night and rain, snow, sleet, and bitter winds in the day. We get soaked through and mud up to our necks. I am quite well. Do be a good girl and get well for when I see you. . . .”

“ *November 23rd, 1914.* Braintree.

“ DEAR HEART,

“ I had looked forward to writing you a long letter to-day, but as luck would have it, we started out this morning at 7 A.M., did a twelve-mile march with full pack, guns, and pickaxe, and started digging until about 4.30 P.M. and marched home again—only ten minutes’ rest!!! As we had no grub we did not get finished until about 7.30, so can only spare you a few minutes as rifle has to be cleaned, etc. Fortunately, it froze hard last night and a strong, biting east wind has dried up a great deal of the ghastly mud.

“ I should not think of coming to Braintree, Darling, as there is nowhere to go to get grub, and nowhere to walk except ploughed fields and slushy meadows. We have no idea when we are returning, but I think it will be soon now as the trouble we were



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expecting has apparently passed away, and we did not carry ammunition to-day.

“As for yourself, keep well and happy, and we will both look forward to more firelit nights and find another garret in the country and see what we can do on a clean sheet.

“I expect our departure will be delayed a bit, as there is still a lot of work to be done here. The engineers who superintend our work say the big guns we heard yesterday were naval guns, but they might have been practising, or there might have been a small naval engagement.

“Nearly every farm is protected by barbed-wire entanglement and trenches surround them. They are very wonderfully constructed, as you can walk from one position to another through the ‘communication’ trenches, which are 2' 3" wide and 10' deep. These also lead to temporary hospitals which are completely underground, also ‘rest’ trenches, where men can lie down on slabs.

“My hands are now like horny claws. I must be getting stronger, as to-day myself and mate completed our trench in hard chalk and sticky clay 12' × 2' 3" × 4' 6" deep. I think we were the only ones who

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did, and I am not quite done up yet. Must close now, Dear Heart. Love to all.

“ Always your old

“ B.”

“ *November 27th, 1914.* Braintree.

“ DEAR HEART,

“ With any luck I can spare you a few moments. Sounds strange, doesn't it? I cannot exactly remember what information I have given you about my stay here, and rather than repeat myself, I will leave all till I see you, which I hope will be shortly.

“ Last Sunday I thought would be free, and intended writing a long letter, but we turned out at 7 A.M. and did not get back until late, and I had to take duty immediately, and so it has been for the last ten days.

“ Take yesterday. I should have been ‘warned’ for guard in the morning, which would have relieved me from Parade, instead of which we started out at the usual time—7 A.M., got home at 6 P.M., and had to be on a twenty-four hours' guard at 6.45!!!

“ It is rather tiring work as we have four prisoners and we dare not take our eyes off them for a minute, as the door has to be left open and people are continually in

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and out. Of course the old Corporal of the Guard has all the work to do. Every two hours through day and night you have to change guard, as well as turn out when you are called, and as we have eight Brigades near here it is 'Out the Guard' every few minutes. One cannot help wondering at the disregard for danger which automatically possesses you.

" I will give you a description of the room. It is about 30' × 20', the ceiling vies with the interior of the chimney for dark complexion, and the one gas-jet would disgrace the dim lights of hell. First comes the door. I will give you the contents of the room in rotation from that point :

" A piece of cheese, bread, and waste paper.

" A huddled mass of clothes and blanket emitting obscene language to some individual in the nether regions—punctuation, snores.

" One cooking-pot, paper, three rifles, and heap of equipment.

" One pair of trousers, ditto boots, and bacon-rind.

" One stretcher accompanied by more snores.

" About two thousand rounds of ammu-

## THE LOVERS

dition. Stretcher and fittings and empty sugar-box.

“More clothes and somnambulistic remarks. One *retriever dog*—*scratching*.

“Cheese, bread, *rat*, and paper. Twelve thousand rounds ammunition.

“Medical chest, sugar-box as seat and dozing guard on top.

“Mantelpiece, on which is cheese, bread, tea, jam, condensed milk, orders, watch, bayonet, ink, paper galore, gloves, mess-tin, *mouse*.

“Medical chest as seat. Ten thousand rounds of ammunition upon which Sergeant of Guard lies stretched asleep. Lighted cigarette has just been extinguished by me, as it was burning holes in his coat.

“Medical chest, being used as table by myself, upon which are pickles, cheese, bread, etc., stick of rifles. Fourteen thousand rounds of ammunition making another serviceable bed.

“This completes the wall lining. In the centre is a medley of bones, food, and waste paper, which I wonder does not ignite, as all the cigarette-ends go on to the floor and the fire has no fender. Of course smoking is prohibited, so we enjoy our cigarettes the more. Our explanation would be FUN.

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“ The country here is just flat cultivated fields, over which the wind comes in volumes, sharpening its edge until it cuts through your clothes like a razor. We have been cooking our own food out in the fields, and with a few vegetables we sometimes manage to pinch a very savoury meal can be made out of meat that has to be *chopped*, as it is frozen so hard.

“ I hope the continual guards that I have been doing mean that I am training for another stripe. H—— (senior) has been sent to Chelsea for training as sergeant ; H—— (junior) will follow, and then myself. I am sorry to say that J—— is no longer Adjutant. On the other hand, we are having a new Company officer and the new Colonel is a brick.

“ I must close now, Dear Old Thing.

“ All my love,

“ B.”

“ *November 1914.* Braintree.

“ DEAR HEART,

“ Please note change of address. I moved on account of general stuffiness of place and am now in comfortable digs., but very poor people. . . .

“ I am told our departure is now only a

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matter of days, so I expect we will come back on Wednesday next and get dismissed for twenty-four hours the following Saturday. . . . I am almost sure to get a pass on Saturday week, but will let you know.

“ We have a new Major and Colonel coming, so great changes might be possible. All my love to the Dear Old Girl. . . .

“ From your old blistered  
“ B.”

The Regiment got off as promptly as he expected, and two little notes were dispatched from St. Albans to tell of his arrival there and the new manœuvres, the new duties, the new drills, the new examinations that accompanied the new change, all heralding the approach of the longer march to the front, where manœuvres and drills would cease and the actual fighting, for which they were the prelude and to which he looked forward with eagerness, would begin.

“ *December 3rd, 1914.* St. Albans.

“. . . Will write you more later, as we are now engaged in a Brigade manœuvre. We arrived here Monday night and have been on the go ever since.

## IN TRAINING

“ Must close now to go and call the Roll.

“ All my love,

“ B.”

“ *December 4th, 1914.*

“ DEAR HEART,

“ Just had news I cannot get down to town again on Sunday. I have been given a section of twenty-five men and they take up all my time, as the sergeant is ill and there is no full corporal. It is like having a large family. Will tell you all when I see you. . . . To-morrow all N.C.O.'s are being examined by the Colonel personally at first, and then we will have to drill our men before him. I dread it more than anything I have yet done, as I know nothing, not having had time to study my books. Pray for me, as I am afraid it will stand in my way for promotion, and an excellent chance is now at hand, worse luck. . . .”

Happily for *L'Amoureux*, he did not have to write again during December. *L'Amoureuse* was much with him at St. Albans, and towards the end of the month he at last got his leave, though it was cut short abruptly. On January 1 came the telegraphed summons, “ Report headquarters at once ”—“ an offi-

## THE LOVERS

cial blunder," he wrote when he got to St. Albans, "and we expect to complete our leave at an early date." Official discipline, I should say. Anyway, the leave never was completed. Back to St. Albans, *L'Amoureuse* followed, but she might as well have stayed in London. Day and night he was chiefly on duty. Her last evening there he stretched himself on the rug before the fire and was asleep in a second, to wake before the hour was up and start off on a night march. She had reason, I admit, to be blue, but her blueness brought out much that was finest in him. He wrote to her on February 3, 1915 :

"DEAR OLD SWEETHEART,

"You mustn't get so down in the mouth ! B. is just the same old thing it ever was. You see, this beastly war has given me interest which I cannot expect you to share. Before, we had our common ground based upon our work ; now that base has been broken up. My work is upon a plane which is perfectly foreign and beneath you, and I think it is that that you feel. B. is just the same, Darling, and always, always will be. We have had our test and stood the shock. Space also has altered our time sense.



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Days are long and wearisome to you, while days and weeks fly by with me with alarming rapidity.

“ You must not send me so much money next week and get the Kid or somebody to go and have an evening’s amusement somewhere. See if you can arrange it. We have been trench-digging again to-day and I feel very tired. My ‘bumps’ are spreading slowly and surely, so I will get a day or two off before we sail. I am trying to get down to town on Sunday, but I doubt it.

“ The Sergeant-Major stopped most of the N.C.O.’s passes last week, and as I have had no extra duties since Sunday, I expect I shall not be able to get away. I expect I shall have to wire you Saturday or Sunday morning.

“ Must close now, Dear One. Cheer yourself up for my sake, for you are all I have in this world and I have nothing much to look forward to in the next. . . .

“ B.”

For his sake she pulled herself together, or, at least, made it look to him as if she had. The next three letters show his relief that light was shining in upon her darkness—show also that there was no respite in the

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continual preparation for the front, no thought save for the one order bound to come now any day. And as Time drew him ever nearer to the carnage, Love triumphed over work and fatigue and wet to give more and more colour and life to his letters. I cannot read them from this date onward without remembering *Les Amoureux* as they were in the garret, and War, with its attendant Death, is the more hideous seen through the sunshine of May and Youth.

“ February 13th, 1915.

“ Just received your most cheery letter. I had made arrangements for you to spend the day at the above address, but I am on guard from 6.15 Saturday till about 7.30 Sunday evening! We have been firing for proficiency pay. I think I shall come through all right. To-day we had a divisional concentration march. It was a fine sight; about twenty-four thousand men. The length of route would be about thirteen miles!! Reports seem to vary very much about our departure. Personally, I think the order has been cancelled. It is now 11.10 P.M. and I have only just finished and feel very tired, so good night.

## IN TRAINING

“ All my love, Dear Heart : we each belong to each. . . . ”

“ *February 16th, 1915.*

“ DEAR OLD KIDDIE WEE,

“ I am glad your letter seemed more cheerful, also that you are having a little respite from the ‘ Gloom.’ I heard to-day that our leave starts from Monday, but it is not certain yet.

“ . . . I cursed all the gods that are so good to me on Saturday ! We started out to the ranges—three and a half miles—at 7 A.M. It was the coldest morning we have had as yet, and blowing a hurricane. So bad was the weather that they sent a messenger back stating that, on account of the snow and wind, firing was impossible. We waited there on the hill-top for two hours, and then extended out and started picking up all the paper and orange-peel that had been left from Friday’s Field Day. I got back literally soaked. The water had come right through top-coat, tunic, and shirt and vest. I just had time to clean my rifle, bayonet, boots, etc., and out again on a twenty-four hours’ guard—where you are not allowed to take off either coat or equipment !! Still, I feel none the worse for it.

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“Evidence seems to point to our going away somewhere soon, and except for your Dear Old Sake I shall be very glad. Even if I do not come down during the week, it is possible I may get a week-end pass next week. . . .”

“*February 17th, 1915.*”

“DEAR OLD SWEETHEART,

“ . . . I wrote you while on guard but did not post it as I thought I could give you more definite news about my forthcoming leave to-day. I hope to have at least five days in town within the next fortnight—provided we do not go away. I was in hope I could come this week, but only 10 per cent. are allowed absence at the same period. I don't know how it is but my shooting has been right off this last two days. My eyesight fails me over three hundred yards. . . .”

“Please don't forget to send my washing and kit-bag as soon as possible. I am very tired to-night as I got no extra time off for my twenty-four hours' guard, so am very egotistical. In other words, I cannot express myself in 'cushkoo' lingo. But I am awfully 'bucked' you are feeling happier and weller. Dear Old Thing. I wonder if we will ever

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## IN TRAINING

be able to settle down again and have a place of our own once more? I can hardly fancy mixing up paint and worrying my head over tones and the wonderful colours of its snaky 'bodie.' Do you remember the yellow screen, and the blue Chinese trousers, with two plaits, and a bit of gorse? Do you also remember what a big part that little bit of flower played in my little life, you bad, bad girl? Still, it's all over now and a different future lies before me. Cold and wet, disease and Death. I wonder if I shall survive?

"You, too, will have your part to play. So, after all, if to play our separate parts well is made our common cause, we shall still be linked as close as ever. I think perhaps yours will be the harder to play, but stick to the old B., Dear, and we will come through all right.

"Existence doesn't end with this rotten life, and I feel sure we can help one another if one or both get knocked out.

"I heard on good authority that the German war will be finished by August next, but that won't be the end in my opinion.

"I must close now, Dear One.

"All my love,

"B."

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All through the month he was sure would be his last in England before the ordeal his thoughts turned to her with greater love and care. He had shielded her from Life, who would shield her when he was gone? His letter of February 25 is as tender a love-letter, if in a different way—all his mysticism rising to the surface in it—as that other written when he sat among the dead leaves listening to a lonely bird's song and gave her his pledge that his love was of a kind no shadow could blot out.

*“ February 25th, 1915.*

“ DEAR OLD GIRL,

“ I was so glad to get your two cheerful letters, also contents. I would have written before but the Colonel has had the rats badly, so it has been drill, drill, drill, until my voice is cracked with shouting and I cursed that little bit of ribbon on my arm.

“ I have just heard that my name has been sent in again (the third time) for promotion, but whether I get it or not is another matter.

“ I am awfully anxious about your welfare after you have left No. 50. Dear Old Thing, I would hardly have you otherwise, but it

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seems so hard on you to have to rely so much upon others. . . .

“. . . Don't forget all the best you have learned from C——. You know better than I the obligations and responsibilities that are yours. You have now nothing to worry or aggress you, bar the feeding and housing of your poor troublesome 'bodie.' Knowing how you are influenced by your immediate surroundings, try to make them such as to influence you in the direction you wish your path to lead. For some reason you have reverted, or appear to have reverted, to Malkuth. If this is so, it is a good start, for you know for the first time *where you are*. Of course, you may be in Kether, but I think not as I miss the exaltation!!

“Dear Waif. Now I am talking out of sheer—what? Joking apart, you really have arrived at a time when you must prove to yourself your own potency. This surely should be your first duty. First take into consideration those local conditions that are beyond your power to alter or neglect. These are such that your natural poetic and æsthetic leanings are out of place.

“Æsthetic art for the moment is dead. All is now sorrow, hate, and the other attributions of Mars. To combat this just now

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would be beyond your strength. Therefore for the time being you must swim with the tide, until you have recuperated enough strength to swim up stream, collecting the lesser lights as you go. *How* you are going to do this I have neither the brains nor time to think, but you have both and must teach me. I would suggest that you first get with some one who has already been swirled about a bit in the said stream and learn to swim a bit from them. Then, as time goes on, you can indulge in a few antics, a few fancy strokes, i.e. swimming with your legs perpendicular in the air, etc. By this method you will, I assure you, attract attention, and you will then have your first small following to tow up stream. What will happen as the war progresses, or immediately after the war, I do not quite know, but I should say a feverish return to commercialism—out of which, of course, will spring art. Before art, however, will come the great reforms (esoteric), which will soon be expressed in the art to follow. Remember, war is always *Regenerate*, so that Art will also be *regenerate*. Personally I should say through some regenerated form of religion of a truer, deeper mysticism. All these things, as I say, are beyond your control,



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but you have all your time to yourself to investigate them. *We are living in the most historic period the world has ever known*, and you are allowing it to slip through your fingers and taking—lessons!!! Try to get your old wide outlook, Dear Heart, and you will soon begin to grow and find your feet.

“ I must close now. Write me soon.”

Promotion opens the month of March. He tells her of it on the 2nd, and hints that the new rank will not spare him more than a moment for her and his love :

“ SWEETHEART,

“ I am so sorry I couldn't let you know before Saturday, but at the last moment a corporal went ' sick,' so I had to take his place for Company Orderly Corporal. That means going stark raving mad for a week. . . . On Friday last I rose at 4.30 A.M. and was off my feet exactly forty-five minutes between that time and 12.45 A.M.!! Up again next morning at 6 A.M.

“ P.S. Please note I am no longer Lance-Corporal—the Lance has been dropped. . . .”

No false alarm this time : the front looms

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up heart-breakingly close. He warns her of it on March 4 :

“ SWEETHEART,

“ The great ‘ Day ’ is quickly approaching. We have had every mortal piece of kit inspected ; all men on leave have been recalled ; medical inspection, teeth, etc.—all on top of one another. We might be moved on Saturday next to Winchester.

“ Anyway, orders have come through that we shall be there on the 18th. The Brigadier has already gone to France, so we shall not be very long in following his footsteps. It will be hard lines if I cannot see you before I go. I am writing N. for a little cash, so I hope to arrange for you to come to St. Albans—only God knows where you can put up, all the houses are full of soldiers.

“ Personally I don’t think we will cross the water until the end of the month, but one never knows what is likely to happen now.

“ I must mount guard now. Try and think of some way we can meet. Will write again if I have time.

“ All love and kisses, Dear Heart,

“ B.”

## IN TRAINING

She found a way. She came to St. Albans, and put up where and as best she could. What her "billet" was mattered little at such a moment.

The Regiment set out on a wild March night, or rather in the early hours of the morning. It was not easy to say good-bye—in fact, *L'Amoureuse* could not get herself to say it. It stuck so in her throat that, to gain time, she marched out of St. Albans with the Regiment and as close to him as she could manage. A pale yellow moon was just sailing up over the tops of the trees, and she could see dimly, stretching out between the trees, the long, black, snake-like line of the men with their bayonets fixed. She got closer to him, she slipped her hand in his. They walked mostly in silence, broken now and then by a little word, he fearful she could not stand the pace, both perhaps dulled by the curious consciousness that comes to some people when the last hour of their life together has struck, but both making as brave a show of it as they could. Outwardly they seemed more absorbed with the things about them than with the pain in their hearts.

"What a wonderful lithograph it would make," she said to him once.

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“Magnificent!” he answered, as if that were all they had to think of.

At the first picket, about a mile from St. Albans, she left him, drifted away into the night. Her walk back I like best to pass over. The most that can be said for it is that it had its terrors, its dangers too, which could not be ignored. The moon was pale, the way under the shadow of the trees dark. Artillery rolled and rumbled by. One false step and the horses might be upon her, the soldiers challenging her. She had to walk warily and it was a blessing. I do not know what she would have done alone in the dark road with her thoughts.

He, on his side, had not time for thinking that night or the many nights and days that followed. He went with his Regiment to Southampton, getting there on the 9th.

“Arrived about 12.40,” he wrote in the first hurried note after that sorrow-laden march through the moonlit night. “Will embark to-night for unknown destination. All well and going strong. All my love, Dear Heart. Will write from other side as soon as allowed.”

IV

IN THE TRENCHES



## IV

### IN THE TRENCHES

**F**ROM the unnamed port where the Regiment landed, *L'Amoureux* marched straight to the trenches, Somewhere in Flanders. The days were full of the work that makes an animal of a man, the nights were too short to sleep it off. But always he could find time, always shake himself awake, to write to *L'Amoureuse*.

The letters now are, for a while, not much more than a few weary words to give her the comforting news that he is still alive; in them you can see how dog-tired he is, his body a burden and his mind a blank; in the first of all he has scarcely yet accustomed himself to the new conditions, or begun to understand the new country. But there is not one that does not reveal something of the man as well—something of his

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tenderness for her, his gentle manliness, his simple devotion to duty, his determined grappling with a life for which he was never intended, his saving grace of humour that kept him in his darkest moments from despair. In the later letters there is more than this. Animal as he confesses himself, his powers of observation have not deserted him, and vivid little pictures of the country, the people, the men, the trenches, life at the front, the fight, are scattered through his pages ; all set down with the simplicity that was his charm—no pretence to wider vision than was his from his own little corner of the vast battlefield, no false melodramatic touch, no hysterical sentiment, no heroic pose, but just the everyday reality of modern war, horrible and hideous, drear and drab, as desolating to the soul as to the shell-tossed, trench-riven land ; and it is the more astonishing that he could write so vividly, so intimately, when he must have been conscious of the eye of the Censor ever upon him and his letters. Because he was in khaki, he did not cease to be the artist with an enduring zest for beauty, nor the mystic with the courage to endure horrors heaped upon horrors, since they were for him but a new and undesirable series of life's



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illusions—of “the things that fade and die.” In moments of leisure memory carried him back to the old garret and his happiness there. As in England from the beginning, he felt, he knew that Death awaited him in battle.

They are very beautiful letters to me, the more beautiful because so genuine—the simple story of his daily progress, messages of his eternal love for *L'Amoureuse*, never intended to be passed on to the newspaper correspondent or the admiring circle, never faked into the sentimental rubbish and noble gush some journalists would have us believe that “Tommy” writes home from the front. They were really so entirely for the woman he loved that most of them will never be seen by any eyes save hers. But in as many as can be printed he lives, the lover, the artist, the man—the hero in his silent way, accepting the thousand daily miseries of life in the company of men wholly alien to him, as bravely as the hardships and dangers of the soldier he became for his country's sake, not his own.

The first letter after his arrival in France was scribbled off—you can see by the writing and the paper how scribbled—while he was still too dazed by the crowded impressions

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and incidents of the day to find the ease in expressing them that was his at Braintree and St. Albans, and that he was to master again with use and familiarity. But, dazed or not, he had an eye for character and was quick to seize upon the essential. The one thing that struck him most, and that he was not too weary to point out forcibly, has struck me, who am the peaceful, the neutral looker-on, more than once since the war began. I remember the scenes in the streets, the frantic farewells, the Mafficking orgies when the London crowds speeded the British troops on their way to South Africa during the Boer War. But there has been no such demonstration to the troops bound for Flanders and Egypt, for Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, Salonika. They seem almost to have slunk away, so silent and stealthy has been their going. Now and then, in the very early morning, from my comfortable bed, I hear cheering at Charing Cross Station and I know a troop train is starting out over the bridge, and soldiers are off to be butchered. But it is very mild in tone, very thin in volume, this cheering of a few faithful friends; in it none of the shrieking, yelling, caterwauling of the masses out for a sensation—and I feel, as *L'Amoureux* felt, the dramatic

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eloquence of the silence. The struggle this time is too serious to be an excuse for rowdy rollicking and drunken horseplay. His letter of March 10, 1915, gives the note, as Henry James would say :

“ DEAR HEART,

“ We arrived at some place in France safe and sound. Our departure was as dramatic as the burial of Sir John Moore.

“ We left Southampton about 9 P.M., not a wave of a hand or an echo of a cheer, or a laugh, or a sigh to denote anything happening of any interest to anybody. We disembarked with the same lack of interest except a few remarks respecting some nurses who were hanging out of the windows of the hospital.

“ Although it was 9 A.M., the streets of the town were almost deserted and the few we passed gave but a cursory glance and went their way. The dominant colour of the local dress is black, and after the crowded gaiety of London desolation seems to reign. We are under canvas some distance from the town and we shift to-morrow.

“ I am writing this in a small café where the boys are struggling with bad English and worse French to get grub. . . .”

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There was not much rest for a regiment on its way to the front and the soldier bound for the slaughter. Four days later he had crossed another frontier, his eyes wide open as he marched, but not yet, by a great deal, accustomed to the sights about him. He was not sure of his bearings, he was too fresh from untouched, unsullied, uninvaded England and the commercial cry of "Business as Usual" to take in the meaning of the silence and sadness and solemnity of a land that had stared war in the face, been swept by its sword, and seen a whole nation in flight from the Terror, or to understand the horror-stricken despair of the people for what it was. But he was eager, with the evening's halt, to pass on his impressions for what they were worth to *L'Amoureuse*, that so she might be assured war had not got him in its grip—the one bit of news she could not do without. On March 14 another short, crude bulletin was dispatched from Somewhere in Flanders :

" DEAR HEART,

" One line to say I am well and all is well with me. I regret I cannot give you interesting details of our journey, or the quarters we have taken up. The country

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itself is uninteresting, but the farmhouses, especially the barns, are very beautiful in proportion. Very little brickwork is used for these. The walls are made mostly of clay mixed with straw on a wood framework, and, of course, thatched. If I can I will try and send a rough sketch of one of these, but we are kept too busy at the moment. . . . Of course we get no war news and we wonder how things are getting on. There are a greater number of shrines here than in France (as I knew it), and in lieu of cemeteries crosses are placed at the foot or tied round the posts. Also I notice a great number are dedicated to St. Joseph and not Mary, as is usual—which suggests a feminine tendency. This is noticeable in the male population, who seem quiet and contemplative.

“ It is dark now and I cannot see to write more. . . .

“ Send me press sketch-book about 7 by 4, or a bit smaller.”

But by the end of March he was settling down more into the swing of it, less dazed by the novelty of his experiences and surroundings, his judgment better balanced as the full meaning of his new profession began to dawn upon him, more at ease in sifting

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and sorting his impressions, readier to fit in his letter-writing with the roughness and inconveniences of active service. He was within sound of the guns now, their rumbling and roaring in his ears, and so getting a little nearer to the people who had already learned for themselves the abomination of war, a little farther from the cynical excitements of London and the peaceful background of St. Albans. The guns echo through his next letter, the people's quiet he now knows for their sadness; he sets down one grim little incident that I have read nowhere else, while a sudden vision of the approach of age during the prosaic process of having his hair cut makes the man in khaki seem centuries older than the ardent young lover as I remembered him in his garret. Certainly I am conscious of the vital change in him as I read his letter of March 22 :

“ DEAR HEART,

“ I am told it was announced in the —, or some such rag, that the —th behaved well under their Baptism of Fire ! We certainly did, for we slept all through it ! The bombardment was some miles away, and those in action were probably unaware

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of our existence, although we could see the flashes of the shells as they passed through the air at dusk.

“ We did not even know what place was being bombarded. To-day we saw a hostile aeroplane chased by an Ally, or so we were given to understand. We could hear firing before the machines came into view, and fine little white clouds floated in the air in the direction from whence they came.

“ The conditions of ‘ war ’ are most curious at times. On our journey from the coast in the ‘ cattle train ’ we were at first almost ignored by the inhabitants, but as we got farther on and nearer the firing-line, they came running out of their houses and from their work to give us a silent wave of the hand. The pantomime was painful to see, for they were nearly all women who had borne some loss or sorrow—there was no smile upon their faces—they had seen so many like us go! Farther on we were welcomed by a grim gesture from the railway and field labourers! They drew their fingers sharply across their throats, stretched their capacious mouths, and pointed in the direction of the firing-line—suggesting, I suppose, we would get our throats cut there. At the foot of these crude men primroses

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clustered in cheerful yellow among empty jam and corned-beef cans.

“ We travelled thus for miles through country similar to the Midlands of England ; half agricultural, half manufacture. The people, the gestures, always the same. There is a curious silence, too, among those whom I have met lately returned from the trenches, an almost brooding atmosphere. The first night I heard the thunder of the guns in the distance and saw the flashes, I felt something akin to the sensation of taking First Communion—best described by the contradictory term, a restless calm ! Spiritually it has been a quieting influence, at the same time giving a physical restlessness. I am giving details in this letter that might be cut out by my platoon officer, of whom it is difficult to speak when he is Censor ! He is a decent youngster, apparently just down from Oxford. It is curious how old I feel. I had my hair cut yesterday—and behold, as the shears traversed my thinning locks, shoals of white fell upon the waterproof sheeting which hung about my neck.

“ Thanks very much for the bit of gorse, one values such items in times like these.

“ I must close now. Dear Old Sweet-



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heart, keep itself well and be good for my sake.

“ All my love.

“ B.”

The soldier who, on a hard day's march, had eyes for the primroses among the old tin cans by the wayside, could not fail to see all the beauty with which April was filling the land and the new life springing up about him, cruelly sad as a background to the business of killing and destroying he had come about. I have heard of other men who, after facing death unflinchingly, have broken down before the flowers which spring or summer had strewn over the ground between the trenches. Even in remote London, the tenderness of the budding trees in the parks, or the golden gorgeousness of the September sunset, or the splendour of night on the river, has often made my heart ache when a thought, or a word, or the cry of a newsboy in the street has suddenly supplied the contrast in a vision of the horror many miles away. And to this horror *L'Amoureux* had drawn very near and was drawing ever nearer. I am afraid in Flanders, with April there, tears were never far from his eyes when he was writing to *L'Amoureuse*.

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I feel nothing save sadness in the letters that bear the 1st and 2nd as date—the sadness of remembering happier things, and remembering, too, the follies, it may be, that he, like all poor stupid humans, allowed to mar the full perfection of his happiness when it was his.

“ DEAR OLD SWEETHEART,

“ Thanks so much for photo. I haven't yet received your eight-page letter. Thanks also for the Pantacle, which, of course, I will keep in a safe place, and place the proper value upon it.

“ Letters are the only things we can look forward to, so even if there is little or no news, write. Some of the officers have been up to the trenches, also some of the sergeants, and I hope I shall have my share soon. Your letter with the Pantacle was the first letter which sounded the real genuine ‘ Thou ’ for a long time, and it has made me feel tons happier. I suppose I have got a bit run down, for I cannot find a pair of rose-coloured spectacles anywhere. Even watching bombs burst at hostile aircraft arouses little or no interest. All this, however, will pass off in a day or so.

“ I had a letter from F—— the other day,

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and he is complaining of the same thing, so you can understand.

“ Must close now, will write the moment I can find time.

“ Always the old same

“ B.”

“ DEAR HEART,

“ . . . The weather has been glorious here the last three days. Heavy frost at night and brilliant spring sunshine by day. Wandering about to-day I find the fruit trees are just beginning to show bits of green, which takes me back to last spring. How mixed our life has been in a quiet kind of way! I wonder what is going to happen in the middle of this year? Dear Old Girl! Never forget I regret nothing. Our life together has been very good on the whole. I was in hopes this experience would help me find myself, but so far nothing has happened. Perhaps it will come in the reaction.

“ I would send you a sketch, but my hands have all gone to pot, and if I did anything here it would depend entirely upon the execution to make it interesting.

“ I wonder what profession I will adopt on my return. At present I am in a Rembrandt mood and feel I want an etching-press and copper-plates galore! One thing

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I cannot understand—the complete cessation of any imagination. The ‘Energized Enthusiasm’ idea is certainly proved in this case, but at present, of course, it is directed entirely into a physical channel. . . .”

There were some things he did not tell of that long hard march towards Death. It was not the sadness of the people, not the dishonoured primroses and budding fruit trees, not the farms and picturesque barns, that earned for him another promotion with the rank of Sergeant. The title figures before his name in the address at the top of his next letter—April 8 the date—the best proof that he was as keen for discipline and duty as for the sights and sounds by the way. But that he would do to the best of his ability what he had to do as soldier, he took for granted, and could not have bragged about it in the manner of the florid war correspondent who always seems so amazed that Englishmen should succeed in doing their duty as almost to justify the Nelson cliché. The one fact plain is that, after less than a month abroad and with his “Baptism by Fire” now the possibility of to-morrow, if not to-day, *L'Amoureux* was promoted to a rank that, low as it was, meant more risk

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for him than for the simple private he had been. The letter is all hustle and movement, with telling little glimpses of the preparation for the ordeal and the spirit of the men, while, between the lines, I read his own relief that this ordeal is at hand :

“ DEAR OLD SWEETHEART,

“ I received your parcel of meat tablets, book, pencils, ink, etc., quite safely, but I don't know if it is the registered parcel alluded to in your last. It was dusk when I received it and I was too anxious to see the contents to notice the cover.

“ Thanks also for your Easter Sunday letter ; a day may come when the picture you draw will be realized.

“ We moved again yesterday, and I expect to receive my Baptism to-night or to-morrow. I will let you know the result. I am more than glad. Unfortunately we have got so immune to any kind of change and circumstances that it is likely to make less impression than it would have made three months ago.

“ Everybody is in the highest spirits. Ten thousand songs are going at once, and the clatter of rifle-bolts and trigger-pulling gives

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the clue to the general trend of the minds of the men.

“ I enclose rough sketch of our last billet, but I cannot draw for little apples. By the way, how much were the *Bons Postes* worth? I could only receive six francs, although one was marked 10 F. and the other 1 F. Next time you send cash, let me have P.O. (English).

“ Food has been very meagre lately and everything here is terribly expensive. I got about half an ounce of cheese for four sous last night. Butter also is about two-and-six per pound. When we are lucky we get the latter served out, but the word-pictures in the London papers of the luscious feasts Tommy gets are words and words only. Still, life is very good, though rough. I went to a Regimental lecture the other night, given by a real live Regimental Bishop. It consisted mostly of pictures of churches the wicked Germans had destroyed. . . . Sunday we did two hours' bayonet exercise before 9 A.M., and then went to Divine Service in full pack, guns, and a hundred and twenty rounds of ball. Distant guns made a good substitute for an organ, and we sang ' There is a Green Hill far away ' with real feeling ! Truly, if Christ came again they would

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crucify Him. . . . We have a fine manly fellow for Chaplain, and Christianity is a real live thing to him. Tell R. I wish he was here, he would be invaluable. Some day I shall be able to write him, but for some reason our letters are limited to two per week. Let me know the contents of your reg. parcel and when it was sent.

“When we look out of the window here we can see the results, upon the building, of some of the German shelling.

“Good-bye, Dear Old Sweetheart. Keep up its spirits. The B.’s all right and all is, so far, well. . . .”

“Letters are such precious things. If anybody wants to do me a good turn they can send me the *Oversea Daily Mail* or *John Bull*. I don’t know what it costs, but you can get particulars from the office—or in the advertisements of the paper. . . .”

Three days later, the 11th, he writes from the firing-line. He has had his “Baptism,” he can send impressions of trench life and trench war, though all his letters help one to realize how little the soldier at the front can know of what is going on except along his own little bit of the line. I rather like my Lover the better for never pretending

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to see more than he could, and never setting himself up as an authority or a prophet. When I first turned over the letters I think I was glad to come to this one and to find him—I was on the point of saying *safe*—in the trenches. Out of them he had too much time for thought, for memory and introspection. His idlest moments were not his happiest—it is only the soldier who does not think who can be really happy.

“. . . We have but little time to spare. A fifteen-mile march and twenty-four hours' duty in the firing-line, and cleaning up and rest, and out again, all in forty-eight hours.

“Dry feet are now a luxury of the past, but we are awfully bucked up we are here at last. We haven't had to attack yet, and fighting has been confined by both sides to rifle-fire and shelling from behind the trenches.

“On the whole it is just a very rough picnic and it is only in the attacks that there is much loss of life. One very soon gets used to the whistle and hum of shells and bullets, but it is not a nice sensation in going out in front and digging to fill sand-bags ; or as we were yesterday in an isolated spot where we had to go and change sentries in the 'Listening Post' and 'Observation

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Post ' about half-way between our lines and the Germans. The trenches vary from seventy yards to a mile or so apart.

" I am glad you have settled upon a little den for yourself, and oh, Kiddie Dear, I do hope you will be happy. Must close now, Sweetheart.

" Your dirty, smelly, muddy old

" B."

By the 13th he had seen the real thing, and by the 15th he was describing it at great length, making a jest of it when he could, knowing full well how little of a jesting matter it would seem to *L'Amoureuse* in London eating her heart out with fear and dread. His is not the academic description of battle, probably all the truer because it isn't.

" *April 15th, 1915.*

" DEAR SWEETHEART,

" Writing becomes more and more of an effort and what seemed of interest yesterday is of no consequence to-day. A few weeks back the sight of a few wooden crosses at the foot of a wayside shrine conjured up untold possibilities; a week ago, to look over the breastworks into ' No Man's Land,'

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to see the German trenches two hundred yards away and speculate upon the identity of the dead lying in the open, was an irresistible desire. Two days ago we willingly faced death to see the effect of our shells bursting in our enemy's lines—one poor fellow paying the extreme penalty; twenty-four hours ago we were out and unprotected in that mysterious intervening space putting up wire entanglements—not even taking the trouble to fall on our faces when the flares went up—it's such a trouble scraping mud off one's overcoat! In fact it is difficult to understand all this work and trouble is war. From egomania one drifts into negomania, the only thing that really matters is to get through one's job. One soon gets used to the whistle, twang, and crack of bullets and the deeper drone of shells. It is not easy, when doing your work, to remember that each of these bullets is stopped by *something*, and that something might be you or your pal. We still have to stand the test of a 'mad moment' when we fire like a machine-gun at a rushing mass of men which nothing seems to stop. We still have to face cold steel and rush across the lead-swept track of a quick-firing gun, but I believe one is much too busy to think of, or even dread,

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possible ill-results. To me it is more trying to steadily carry a load over broken ground, and no cover, under the enemy guns. It is useless to attempt to hurry and the steady plod gives rein to the imagination. Fortunately I have not suffered in that direction and I do not think I ever shall. The whole thing is most uninspiring, and dinner, rum, or tea is always uppermost in one's mind—as at present—for I have an attack of heart-burn!

“The first twenty-four hours I spent actually in the trenches were the happiest and merriest I have yet spent. We are in a little fort all on our own with some of the kilted Glasgow Highlanders. A bigger-hearted, jollier lot one could not meet. All that they had was ours, together with many apologies for what they had not. . . . Of lice they have a prodigious lot, and gambling is rife. Each man hunts for a large and leggy animal. They are lined up with as much accuracy as a Derby start, and wagers made according to fancy. When all is settled each man lights a match and urges on his luckless steed to the winning-post. One bonny lad was sneezing violently: ‘What are ye making all that noise about, mon? Canna ye keep quiet?’—‘Hush, mon, I’m

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trying to give my family a cold in the head. It's a fine idea, for when they sneeze they will give awa their position.' Horrible as it sounds, it is not really so bad as digging to fill sandbags in the dark. A short while back I could not get my spade through an obstacle. I felt about in the darkness with my hands and found that obstacle hard and smooth and round—only it was soft and damp on the exterior and had hair upon it. To strike a match might mean death. So I just covered it up to deaden the stench and scratched a X upon the spot with my spade to mark an unknown grave. After I had eaten my breakfast in the morning I remembered I had not washed my hands. So you can understand that a 'Derby Race' makes a pleasant diversion.

“ Let me know if you received my picture post card. I sent it as an experiment. The gloves fit me well, they are a great boon. I think the size is eight. I wonder if you can remember. Will you tell R—— I have given up all hopes of writing him. We are restricted to two letters per week, and I cannot write P—— and him both. You must act as my sweet postman and spread the news around that the inimitable B—— is still alive and going strong.

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“ I enclose a diagram of the trenches I have just vacated (from behind). The distance between the breastwork and the dug-outs is exaggerated to make them more distinguishable. Actually there is only room to move between them. The roofs of these are composed of every conceivable thing, and considerable ingenuity in building them is displayed. On a cross-section, they would be something like this. [Here follows a sketch in pencil, too faint and rubbed to be reproduced.]

“ As far as I can judge, the general method of fighting is by apparently friendly arrangement with the enemy, who are quite decent fellows who don't interfere with your work if you don't interfere with theirs. Of course the snipers must keep in, so just pot off a few of our fellows when a pretty shot is obtainable. Ditto the artillery. They must find the range to a nicety and shell us until they've got it, and then they chuck up the job. Just before daybreak both sides 'stand to' and just let off a round or two per man and then we chuck it for breakfast, and trip down for sleep. About dinner-time we feel energetic, so we fire a few more shots, then both knock off for food. At dusk we 'stand to' again and take occasional pot-shots at

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their respective working parties. These parties clamber over the barricades, or rather breast-works, and advance say fifty to one hundred yards and stick up hurdles or sandbags, with barbed wire in front. These are covered by machine-guns. When the time comes we occupy them while the enemy shell us and try to capture them for their own use. Of course we do the same with them. It is not always so! A time comes when an advance is made by one section of the line, and the other portions must rearrange their positions accordingly. Both sides of the Artillery pound away, charges and counter-charges and attacks are made, and neat little mounds in very straight lines with a little wooden cross and an identity disc nailed upon it very much in the centre mark the place where heroes lie at rest, and can swear no longer at the length of the war and the Regimental Sergeant-Major.

“ I received a long letter from the Mater, which I was very pleased to receive. I am sorry I have not written her, but I do not think she can realize the strain put upon us. The racket and noise that is continually going on around, the extra duties of a sergeant, physical fatigue, and lack of everything to say of interest makes writing a difficulty.

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“ Hence this letter must do for both of you. Thank L—— also for his letter and tell him the stench alluded to was purely a sanitary one, and one can only judge things by comparison to that to which one is accustomed. I should not have been able to write you this much, but I am on guard to-night and all are fast asleep. Tell the Kid to write me and also tell A—— to write. He must come over, he is missing all the fun. Ask *him* to write me. A cake (home-made and plain) would be a luxury, also some cigarettes. Must close now, Dear One.

“ All my love.

“ B.”

Every day now was filled with fighting. We who, in London, read breathlessly the daily communiqués from the Western front through that spring of fast-accumulating horrors and desperate struggles, can imagine what the daily work must have been for the men who were in it. *L'Amoureux* kept on making as light of it as he could, but he could not quite keep the horrors out of the account of his rapidly multiplying experiences. Another long, but dateless, letter belongs to this period :

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“ SWEETHEART,

“ My letters of necessity have been short and scrappy of late, but it has been rather a disheartening time for me, and all coherent thought—or thought at all apart from the particular work in hand—is difficult to acquire. Anyway, we have dragged through another ordeal and we are now preparing for a few days’ ‘rest’ away from the trenches.

“ So far my health and nerves have remained good, and if they—the nerves—can stand the shelling we have had this last fortnight, they will stand most things. During the last week or two the Germans seem to have got in a new stock of ammunition, especially high-explosive shells, which have played the devil with our trenches. We have been holding practically the only portion of the firing-line where no advance of any consequence has been made since Christmas or thereabouts. The few yards of trench we captured in front of us cost us very dear and, even now we have them, they are a death-trap and almost untenable. Thank God we are out of it for a bit.

“ I think I have received all your letters, parcels, etc., but everything gets lost in the dug-outs, as men come tumbling in and out



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of shell-fire, upsetting everything that stands in the way. I wondered why my face and head felt so clammy, only to discover on investigation that I had been making a pillow of the men's breakfast bacon, the majority of which was fat! We managed to get into the canal and have a couple of swims last week, and it put new life into everybody; also a change of clothes, the first we have had in about two months. . . . I had my first experience of 'gas' the other day. It is a most filthy concoction! If you get one mouthful of it, it makes you cough and splutter, and before you know where you are, your head is swimming and you run—straight to 'Kingdom Come.'

"We have now only one Colonel in the Brigade and no Brigadier! The latter was shot yesterday. Perhaps it is as well to mention the shot was not a punitive one. Sad to relate, I am rapidly losing my sense of humour. A great deal came away with my hair, which was shorn off under compulsion with a pair of horse-shears. I had not seen a looking-glass since the catastrophe until this morning, when I discovered an interesting study of criminology gazing at me from a looking-glass. 'Long-headed Northern German type,' said I to myself,

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not recognizing the identity [*L'Amoureux* had some little German blood in him], but the reflection smiled upon the subject in pitying denial—'A German would have made capital out of that,' nodding towards the hair-speckled cranium, 'you're a fat-headed Englishman!' I thought it best to come away.

"It is surprising how difficult it is to think of anything worth recording. Things out here are so rough-hewn, not the noble suggestions of Rodin, but a petty, senseless, chipped effect overspreads everything. The country, of course, is flat and that gives a diminutive appearance to everything; existence is very confined, so is our range of vision, which leaves little else of note but bad language and phallic remarks. . . . Anyway, I feel I have much more to return home for than I did when I started out. . . .

"A horrible but amusing pastime in the trenches has been to 'scrump' for dead men's love letters and read them aloud. The amount of fair females who are sure of the return of those they love—by every conceivable sign—is prodigious. . . . Enough! I'm becoming too regimental. I will write again to-morrow if possible. . . ."

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So well "out of it" is his Regiment that the next letter—a line merely—describes his new billet, which could not have been much more comfortable than the trenches, though a rapid little pencil sketch accompanies the description as a proof that it had the one virtue of looking more picturesque. The date is April 20, when he had no reason to expect one sort of discomfort that was his portion :

" DEAR HEART,

" Have only just received your last three letters. I expect mine have crossed and are now to hand.

" I will write you to-night if I can. I must go on Parade now. I am very fit and am billeted in a farm barn where the snow comes in and the ducks quack just in my ear. The people, however, are awfully kind and will do anything for me. Altogether we are comfortable and have little to complain about. I will answer your letters in detail. Keep your pecker up, Old Girl. All my love.

" B."

The letters that follow are no more than short notes, and the wonder is not that they

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should be short, but that there should be any letters at all. We, the lookers-on, have not forgotten how crowded were the months of April, May, and June of 1915, and it does not call for any special power of imagination to picture to ourselves what they were to the actors in the murderous drama. Ypres, Artois, Givenchy, Neuve Chapelle, Festubert, Souchez, the Labyrinth are some of the names recurring like a refrain in the daily dispatch. The English had only begun to get to the front in numbers and those who had got there were in and out of the trenches with short respite, *L'Amoureux* no less than the others, each day's fight as it came seeming, in its intensity and the heavy toll of life it exacted, the most critical and important of all. On May 7 he is back at the front :

“ DEAR OLD SWEETHEART,

“ I wrote you a long letter from the Rest Camp (what a libel on a name), in which I wrote a good many particulars which might have been censored. Please let me know if you received it uncorrected—also the two rough sketches. I received your letters, luckily, and two P.O.'s (one value two shillings and the other two-and-six). My time sense is more and more broken up, and my memory

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—or the lack of one—is becoming a disease. Everybody is very tired, myself included, and there is such a lot to do if you really do what is expected of you. You can see by the envelope I can make no reference to military matters, and I have no news for you apart from that, except that I am very well—only an attack of the scabies! Lack of sleep and physical fatigue make writing a torture. My present billet is in an old loft with a few tiles knocked off for light. Forty-eight hours in the trenches after a long march kept me pretty busy going round visiting the men to make sure they were awake, poor devils, so I'm knocked up and must close now.

“ Keep well, Dear Old Thing. I was so pleased to get your photo and that of the Kid. Please thank her and say I will write, care of yourself, at the first opportunity. I received both in the trenches and have not had time to more than glance at them.

“ Love to Mater.

“ Always your

“ B.

“ P.S.—Please thank A. B. for a P.C. she sent me. I think if she saw the dear dirty boys, and heard their equally dirty talk, and

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their dear grimy mouths crammed to overflowing with *bread* (which they have managed to buy somehow—somewhere) she would feel less enthusiastic about amusing the poor darlings.

“ One poor fellow is driving himself dotty by fearing a presentiment. He is sure if he gets a presentiment it will obsess him! In other words, his Dweller on the Threshold is the fear of becoming obsessed. Can you untangle this? ”

By the 9th he had been through “ Hell ” again, and what he had seen and experienced only made him doubly sure of what the end of it all for him would be. On that day he wrote :

“ DEAR HEART,

“ Your parcel arrived safely on the evening of what must be one of the greatest days in history. Long before this you will have read in the newspapers of the great occurrence. I can write no more now. Give my love to all I know and care for. It is ten to one on my day’s work being finished out here, and all considering it is well. If I go under do not grieve, for I am pleased I shall be able to go first and clear a little

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way for you—if you really still love me. Good-bye, my Dear One. Continue to live and to live happily for my sake, so that when your time comes all will also be well with you.

“Tell the Mater to buck up. I have no time to write her. On the other hand, the gods may favour me and bring me back to you. *Somebody* will come back and why not me?”

“Always your  
“ B.

“P.S. These few flowers [primroses and violets, the most unexpected trophies from a battlefield] are all I can send you in proof of my thoughts of you. They were picked in a wood over which shells are whizzing. The weather is most glorious, all the fruit trees are in bloom, and both war and peace seem very far away. The larks are singing. Everything is worshipping Priapus, and even Death seems to have discarded his rags and decked himself with blossoms.”

The next day, the 10th, he is in a new billet, one as eloquent of war in that ravaged land as the first line of the trenches, as comfortless and chill :

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“. . . The house is roofless, the windows boarded up and stuffed with sandbags, the floor a mass of plaster fallen from the ceiling, the walls black with the smoke from our fire made from the staircase. A picture and a framed certificate still hang upon the walls, and at my feet lie these poor tired devils, over whom I am keeping guard through the night, so that I can write to you and think of all the happy days of studio twilight. I am dirty beyond description, the armpits of my tunic in rags and spotted with every kind of stain save latter-day sins. If you asked me if I am happy I couldn't tell you.”

Still two more reports he was able to dispatch from “comparative civilization,” one on the 15th, one on the 21st :

“ *May 15th, 1915.*

“ DEAR HEART,

“ Just a short note to let you know I am still alive—in every respect ! Do not worry about getting me anything if you are hard up after paying the framing expenses. I hope you will get something good from the sales, although I am rather sceptical. You will get no advance in your allowance until



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I am full Sergeant—at present I am only Lance-Sergeant. There was no advancement by the Government, except for those with families. I must get some rest now. I have not been to the Doctor yet. Enclosed is a small sketch which might interest you. We are back in comparative civilization again. I have an article which you might trot around. I have no time to work it out, so you will have to make use of the copy. Get A—— to type it. Must close now, Dear Heart. All yours,

“ B.”

“ *May 21st, 1915.*

“. . . Hell is the only description possible of a modern bombardment, and that is all I care to say about it. But to return to my present surroundings. Imagine to yourself any pretty country town surrounded by beautiful fields, quaint farmsteads, and little villas. Imagine those fields trampled into fields of mud—hardly a vestige of green left—thousands of weary feet, swollen, blistered, and bleeding, have smashed down every blade of grass. Crossed and recrossed are trenches blown to bits by shells and filled with stinking water. (Here we have just had to bolt for fear of shells, as the

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concussion broke the window-pane, and I have lost my pencil, damn it!) Stinking water, I say, covered with a verdant slime through which greasy bubbles slowly rise and burst. And what of the houses? Some are left, roofless, windowless, gaunt ghosts of human toil. Here, you will see one, just one heap of bricks. Once, perhaps a year ago, or even less, some proud young bride hung curtains to keep out the morning sun, lest it wake her too soon from her dreamless sleep of Love. . . . Years of toil and labour, ambition and saving, blown to that shapeless heap by one ruthless shell. On a moonlit night it is eerie beyond description—more awe-inspiring than at present, amid the din of shell-fire. Around me at the moment are twenty men, sleeping through all the noise and racket, tired out by their tiresome march.

“. . . On the whole the worst part of life here is the bad food, and dirt. It is impossible to keep clean, and the monotonous diet makes eating a painful duty.

“ People in England only hear of the *good* things. The papers record only our successes, and alas! too few will return to tell the other story. Anyway it is the wrong time to tell it now. . . .”

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The return to the trenches came all too soon. May was the month when the battle raged at Festubert and Givenchy, and from Givenchy, on the 24th, he had breathing-space to write :

“ DEAR HEART,

“ You must not fret about me. The war is no different now than it ever was, and my chances are as good as ever. We have just come out after a spell of some days—I do not know how many—six or eight—and I am no worse off than when I went in. My cardigan was blown to bits, and the glass and hands blown off my watch, and yet, bar a bruise or two, I am as sound as a cocoa-nut. I looked like a slaughterman when I got away. One poor boy in my section—he was in the next bay—had his leg almost blown off—about twenty wounds in him. I did my best to stop the bleeding and do him up, and I think he will pull through. His knee and foot were just pulp. It is torture getting them to the dressing-station. The trenches are too narrow to allow of getting round corners, so they have to be lifted above the surface—a most fatiguing task. For four days we were under shell-fire day and night. Poor little

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M—— got lost in a mine explosion. Captain P—— is gone and about [number scratched out, probably by Censor] more. W—— is now Captain. Two of my boys caught it and stuck it awfully well. I don't like shell-fire, it gets on one's nerves so. On the whole we took it pretty well. We are the only part of the line where an advance has not been made. I saw the admission by Lord Kitchener in the papers to-day. A little to our left we even lost ground. We are just in front of a famous brewery and orchard which the Guards captured about Christmas-time, and we have stuck there ever since. The lines in this part are enfiladed by the enemy, which adds to our discomfort.

“ I have no time to write to the poor Kid just now, but tell her I will send her a button off my coat and a shrapnel bullet that came into the sandbag just over my shoulder. I must close now as there is much to do. Thank R—— and W—— for their kindness and *don't* tell them the cake was more like stale plum pudding. I enjoyed it immensely. T—— sent me a watch, but a shell stopped that too.

“ All my love, Dear Heart,

“ B.”

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Then back to the trenches, then out again, with another bulletin to *L'Amoureuse* on the 27th :

“ SWEETHEART,

“ Thanks so much for your parcel, which arrived at a most convenient moment. We were just off to the trenches again, and food is difficult to get up to the firing-line, so you can imagine how acceptable were the contents.

“ You can imagine a clay dug-out about fifteen feet long by eight feet broad, crowded with twenty-three tired men, all very hot and very tired, and every one of them scratching. The pine-apple was worth pounds, and a loaf of real English bread a positive curiosity. We made our way to our present position through a famous distillery, which is a sight thousands of trippers will crowd to visit in the happy times of future peace. The roof of our dug-out consists of an iron bedstead, a gateway, a door, and odd timber from God knows where. On the walls are drawings of the *Photo Fun* type, a shelf with a bunch of flowers in a broken bottle, the cover of a soup-tureen, a pitchfork—used as a grill—and a hundred miscellaneous articles. All are well and more than happy, *I* especially

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after the two letters that came with the parcel. . . .

“ These [some enclosed poppies] are from what will in the future be a famous battle-field. . . . ”

I have two letters only for June—a few *L'Amoureuse* must keep entirely for herself. It is strange how short a time it takes to stale any novelty in this world, and from the first—dateless—of the two I gather that the trenches were beginning to be a matter of course and that he was living in his thoughts again—of her, of himself, of the past, of the future—and again, I should say, the thinking made the hard fighting seem less bitter work :

“. . . What will become of the poor wee girl in the arms of a great heavy brute that I have become the last three months? I do not think, however, I shall ever trouble you again. My work for the time being is here, and that work is almost daily spinning pennies with Death. Why I have not died before I do not know. I find a terrific fascination in going out in front of the trenches, in seeing the Dread One come to one and then another and leave me standing

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there! There is nothing I would love more than to come home to you all again. There is nothing I love more than to dream of that return and of all that might be mine! And yet it seems so impossible. Sometimes I want to tell you not to wait for me, to go your way and be really happy, and yet the very thought of leaving you is too much for me. Often when I am 'standing to' in the trenches at daybreak I see you sleeping there, wondering where your dreams are leading you. I seldom see myself figuring in your dreams except as something of the past, as something of a refuge in trouble, as a background behind the footlights to another scene. More than ever I see this life as an astral vision with self-made limitations, self-made colouring and action. We make up the play with any materials we have handy and call the materials Fate. I want to end the play I have made a Farce in such a manner as would be approved by God Almighty as the judge. I suppose I really mean B——. . . ."

To counteract the sadness of this, he is once more the soldier, sheer animal, in the letter of June 17:

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“ DEAR OLD SWEETHEART,

“ Now I am at last writing you it seems ages since I had the opportunity—in fact I cannot remember when I wrote you last! I think the last effort I made was just previous to sending my watch home for repairs. I also enclosed two tobacco-pouches which I thought would make good receptacles for *powder-puffs*. Give one to the Kid and keep the other for yourself. In point of fact, we were billeted for forty-eight hours in a shell-shattered village where a few enterprising people had stocked themselves with every procurable form of eatables. We had received no money for a month, so we were dished out with twenty francs. God! What a feast we had!! One little shop stocked everything from martinets to fried potatoes. (The martinet I intended to purchase as a sentimental gift for the Kid in remembrance of the old Kennedy days at F—— Road.) The first morning there I ate a tin of sardines, two eggs, and a portion of pine-apple. Dinner, three eggs, sardines, salad, fried potatoes, rabbit patty, tinned pears. Tea, two eggs, anchovies, jam. Supper, two eggs, pine-apple, cake, salad, and sleep. We found an old spring-mattress (single) upon which five of us slept the sleep



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of the just. The second day's fare was much the same as the first, and the two succeeding days in the trenches were one succession of gorges, as nearly everybody (including myself) received parcels. Thus, for once, we were really happy, and we had only three casualties! The heat has been terrible, and the *corpses stink horribly*. . . . I am enclosing you a piece of copper-rifling from a shell which burst close by. It flew past me into the sandbag at my back. Another inch and it would have been in my foolish brain-box. Get a pin fastened on it; it will make a decent brooch. Also a ring made from the nose-piece of a German shell; I think it will fit you. . . . The shrapnel bullets I kept for the Kid I dropped one day in the grass, and did not have the opportunity of going out and getting them again. . . .

“ Good-bye, my Dear One.

“ Your old stick,

“ B.”

The hard fighting he had been seeing led to his further promotion. In the merciless battles of that merciless spring he had given proof of the grit that was in him. One officer told *L'Amoureuse* afterwards how in the horrors of those unspeakable days, when

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the shelling was so terrific that the stretcher-bearers refused to advance and the men and officers had fled to the dugouts, he remained in the trenches attending to the wounded, tearing off his own shirt to make bandages with, and so exposing himself that it seemed a miracle every instant that he was not blown to pieces. He did not realize the danger, the officer fancied. But, being the man he was, it is likelier that he did; only, he realized still better the condition of the men he was trying to save. "He saw the path of duty long before most men do," a friend said of him after his death. In recognition of his soldierlike bearing, the full rank of Sergeant was conferred on him and he was put in charge of a Brigade Trench Mortar Battery, and thus allowed the chance to expose himself more recklessly than ever. The new post is duly chronicled in the address given at the head of a letter written early in July, and there is no question that he was pleased with the recognition :

“. . . Please note change of address and congratulate. I got your charm safely; it is very jolly. It is, I believe, the trademark of the T. S.

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“ I *made* a ring for you but it is too large and commonplace. It is not copper but aluminium. I lost the file, so cannot yet get on with the one I am working for you at present. I have made two attempts and failed. I wanted to give you a magical one, but all magic has gone for the moment. I am nearly dropping with fatigue, so excuse a short note. My feet too are bad. I have only had my boots off four times in thirty days, and then I had to pick my socks off. I hear from men who live in the vicinity that —— was blazing with placards—

‘ Heroic Deeds of the Gallant —th ’

or something like that. Please get half a dozen —— —— and cut out the column in question and let me have them. I want to send them round. It is unbecoming my modesty to write such things myself, but as others have done so, I am quite willing to accept and make the best of the affair. I am awfully glad I have got on to the Brigade Staff.

“ Please also give my new address to Mater and anybody else who is likely to

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write me. Don't forget my razor, will you ?

“ I was more than glad to get your parcel as I am too seedy to eat army rations ; my digestion has got all wrong of late. Too tired, I suppose. Anyway a rest is close at hand, so I hope to be able to write to you more fully about my new duties. I must close now, Dear One. Good-bye. Be very good for

“ Your old

“ B.”

Before the rest was due he had had the opportunity to write another letter, July 6 :

“ SWEETHEART,

“ Thanks for letter, also short. First let me tell you I have received all you sent me. I thought I had acknowledged all. The watch I am returning as it is more than useless. It will sometimes stop altogether and other times gain one hour in four. I will write a damned insulting letter to the cad who let you down like that.

“ Your parcel was not opened at the base neither were your letters. The short story

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is good, but I do not know who would take it. My own article I have not had time to copy out and it is almost obliterated by sweat and friction in my pocket. I am sorry you have got into debt ; I had had such hopes you would ' find yourself ' now you are on your own. Some of our fellows' wives are earning as much as thirty shillings a week making gas-helmets, etc., for the Government. You must not take this as a criticism on my part. I was only thinking of your own advantage. Since starting this letter I have received the sulphur and shaving-soap. The glass was quite intact, but don't send anything out to me unless I ask for it, as it is only putting you to needless expense.

" Why didn't you tell me all about John Gray's play ? I do not think it possible to get leave for some time yet. Men—even such as me—are much too needed out here. Do take care of yourself, Sweetheart ; we must be well and fit when I come home. I look upon your dancing as more of a pleasure than anything else. Get up before dawn—the air is beautiful then, and *I* am always on duty at that hour. Try, whenever you can, to be in the open at sunrise ; the stillness and peace will help you more than

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anything I can think of. It is good magic also.

“ This is the fourth time I have had to leave this letter, so forgive brevity of style. I have neglected to write lately, mostly on account of the weather. This sounds but a poor excuse, but the billets and dugouts we have been occupying for the last sixteen days are very far from being watertight and the rain has been most incessant. After only a few hours the water in the trenches came over the top of our boots (which we are not allowed to take off until out resting !) So you can imagine the state our feet get into. With water dripping everywhere, and everything you touch, from your food to your rifle, smothered in sticky clay, you can understand that writing is very difficult and far from a pleasure. Also I have been a lot run down, with the consequence that the petty little worries one always has to put up with out here had assumed undue proportions. For one thing, I was compelled to charge one poor little devil in my section with being asleep on sentry—a most serious crime punishable with death ; that worried me a lot, but with my colossal brain I managed to get him off scot-free ! Also I have at last got a good job. Very shortly

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I shall have a *Trench Mortar Battery* all of my own! At present I am studying it up and getting experience, and that too is worrying work as we make our own bombs, the detonators of which are composed of the highest explosive known, and very little is known about the substance. I hope in a few weeks to be attached to the Brigade Section, but at present I am only in reserve. It is most interesting work and well worth the extra risks.

“Of *course* I wrote the Kid a letter which was intended for the *two* of you. I thought it would amuse you as I had nothing else to write about. I am at present giving *you* all the news of *myself* and the froth to the fluffy, and if you feel like partaking of the effervescence I know you will do so. I *cannot* write of such little things to *you*. All my interests here are animal and I can only play at being otherwise—in fact, I think, by what I can remember, my letter to the twain was also purely animal. Do you want telling also, after all you know, how I should love to have you with me in those fields of poppies. . . . When I come home again, if come home I do, we will start all over again, if I am not too old.

“Good-bye, Dear Old Thing. I am in the

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trenches again to-morrow for four or five days, and after that I hope we shall have a bit of a rest. Since I first went into the firing-line I have only been out of range of guns for four days, so I hope we shall all get a good rest soon.

“ Good-bye, Dear Heart. . . .

“ All my love,

“ Your old standby,

“ B.”

He wrote one more letter before he left the trenches—on July 17—or rather a bit of a letter devoted, not to fighting, but to poetry, of all things. She had sent him a new poem, and he forgot shells and trench-mortars and new duties in his joy in it and his pride—the old pride in her that had shone and radiated in his garret until the glow had reached me in my high window above. It was a translation from a Persian Hymn to Allah, “ First Source of Light,” a hymn of passion and consecration. I interrupt the sequence of the letters to quote just one verse, the last, so as to explain the sudden flame of light it seemed to let into the darkness of dug-out and trench :



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*Say! what is this that stirs Earth to her  
confines, blurs sense in one rapture?*

*Hasten to comfort me, lest Death in ecstasy  
my Love should capture.*

*Eyes of my Heart have seen, ears heard (the  
sense between) things beyond naming,*

*Beauty, the whole of her, proves God the Soul  
of her, God the Light Flaming!*

It roused in him old interests, old memories,  
and he wrote :

“ DEAR OLD SWEETHEART,

“ Thanks so much for your poem.  
It is more your old self again. In it you  
have largeness—the same passion that swells  
the breast of the sea, the jealous love that  
sends lowering clouds, and the scorching  
passion of a desert sun. I think this is  
conveyed by the modesty of expression. It  
is of the Gods you sing the best. Thanks  
for flowers. What do they signify? . . .  
There was quite a lot I meant to write  
but cannot put my mind (what is left) to  
it. . . .”

The promised rest—the calm between the  
storms—began in August, and on the 2nd

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he sent her the first of a series of letters which I think the finest of all. He wrote at length, he was gay, he crowded his pages with the details of a soldier's day away from the trenches, all its roughness and odd chances and curious accidents accepted with the humour that alone made them endurable and left him sad and weary when it failed. And he is quite frank in owning to the relief of escaping from the unspeakable hell which the front is, and where I do not believe one of the millions now swallowed up in it—whatever his nationality—would stay if he could help himself.

In this letter *L'Amoureux* speaks of another enclosed, a few days earlier in date, and evidently the outpouring of a darker mood, for "Read enclosed last!" is the order, or advice, written on a separate sheet that accompanied it. With it came also a sketch—the working Flanders of mines and factories, his description underneath: "A sample of the country around us. Slack-heaps and factory chimneys"—a landscape of work whose character he did not miss, however black his mood. But in the letter of the 2nd the darkness had passed, though no day within range of the shells could be without its shadow.

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“ MY DEAR OLD SWEETHEART,

“ I am sending you the enclosed, which I have not had the opportunity to post as it must have been written about the 27th–28th, and it only goes to show how parallel our minds are. I suppose it is my love for you that makes me fear for your safety.

“ I really cannot see why you should die under normal circumstances before I return—or go under.

“ I cannot see you now, Dear One, and to know what is really in your heart is the only real link I have with you now, whether you be sad or gay!

“ You will be pleased, I know, to hear we have at last turned our back on the trenches for a time and in a day or two will be out of the range of shells. We will be Army Corps in reserve for about three or four weeks. This will be the first time in four months.

“ We have been billeted in many strange places; at the moment we are billeted in a *slaughter-house* yard, with yelling pigs and booful calves walking in to be killed. This is to-day's programme:

“ 8.30 A.M. Fall in, ready to march off.

“ 12 noon. Arrive in new billets.

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“ 12.45. Watched three pigs killed between playing banker with the boys and the butcher.

“ 1 P.M. Lunch—two hoofs and a café and bread and butter. Am keeping my tongue, etc., till we are out of a town.

“ 2 P.M. Watched the killing of bullies and skinning and chopping up of same. The butcher was an enormous man and felled the calves with a single blow of the fist.

“ 5 P.M. Cup of tea.

“ 6.30. R.A.M.C. concert—splendid band—in the hospital grounds—Red Cross vans coming in and out with the wounded. The Gordons were there and played their pipes. Who should be the chief piper but the famous Findlater, V.C. I read in the paper he had joined again, but never dreamed of seeing him at the front. He was the famous piper who played his pipes while the Gordons charged in the Darghi Heights. He played while lying wounded by four or five shots in both legs.

“ I gave a sprig of your heather to one of the Jocks and he nearly cried. All Scotch soldiers are called Jock.

“ 8 P.M. Usual round of duties and *now* your letter.

“ So you see our holiday has started at last, and with luck we will go even farther back still.

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“ I enclose a sketch I made the other day, but there is nothing in it beyond the fact that it is of historical interest.

“ Yesterday I was in an *estaminet* with my old sergeants—there had been severe shelling, which did not stop our drinking—when a woman was half carried in by one of our fellows. She had had three of her children severely injured and they had just found her fourth stone-dead. Poor woman was almost demented, and just before she had been the merriest of the crowd.

“ I am returning the nerves food for *you* to take. First, I have no room to carry it, and second, I have not time or means in the usual way to take it regularly. We have been so short of water that we have not been able to make any tea as it has all to be treated with lime, etc. Putrid. Consequently I have already two large tins of Nestlé's Milk and half a pound of tea untouched. You see, we cannot even light fires now. Cigarettes I can *always* do with, but I don't want you to spend your money. Rest and fine weather will soon pull me round. I have received everything you sent me. Of course I burn all your letters. You have no idea what a lot one has to carry about with one, and every ounce counts.

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“ Y——, I think, is in my section, and I have managed to get him into the Mortar Battery. He is a decent youth.

“ Now, Sweetheart, I must close. Take no notice of my enclosed of 28th—it is too long a lecture. Keep well and beautiful and the old dear Kiddie you used to be.

“ B.

“ P.S. Send a couple of envelopes large enough for picture post cards and I will send you an interesting photo of my company's officers and sergeants.”

A very beautiful letter of that comparatively easy August, during which he rested and refreshed himself with beauty for the last time on this earth, is dated Sunday the 15th, which is the Feast of the Assumption. It gave me a little pang when I came to the passage in which he recalls the old garret and his happiness there. From where I sit I can see the tumbled tiled roof and the great garret window which the last few years have hardly changed, and yet already one of the two young Lovers so happy under that old roof has done with this world and the love that made it good for him to be alive. I think he knew better than ever what Fate held in store for him, that quiet

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summer evening, as he looked out upon the simple loveliness of the peaceful Flemish country and sent his thoughts wandering far from it to a little dingy street in dingy London.

“ DEAR HEART,

“ I received your letter and parcel, the contents of both going a long way to making me feel very happy.

“ If you were with me now, with the certainty of death for us both, death quick and sharp, I should die contented. I have slipped away to a slight prominence and lie in a bed of clover, and all around me are undulating fields, violent yellows, deep purple shadows, golden corn and verdant greens. Strips of shadow from the floating clouds creep here and there like saddened thoughts passing through a happy heart. Only the hum of an aeroplane speaks of war.

“ Peasants are singing an evensong as they glean the fields, and a distant church bell speaks in its own language to all who wish to hear. The young lark is trying the strength of her wing and the nodding clover bobs her approval of the song. Away back, foul-mouthed men from London are singing

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their sentimental songs. Here and there a young mother listens to them, sometimes joining in the chorus as she rocks her 'souvenir' baby, wondering at the strangeness of these noisy English, wondering if the masterful English father will return and claim his child and her. They are very proud of their souvenir English babies.

"I think some of my letters must have gone astray. Probably they were opened at the Base and destroyed because of some unguarded reference to military matters creeping in. I can distinctly remember referring to your hair and the green string. A little child months ago tied a piece of red string on to my tunic button—the only thing she had to give as a parting gift. I kept it as a mascot and twined your piece of green around it. I managed to keep it tied to my button until ten days ago. The day before I left the trenches a shell came after me; it failed to do me any harm, but when I had got free of dirt and sandbags I found my two mascots missing.

"I expect you will find me changed, also, Dear Heart. I have had to scheme hard to hold my own against old hands at the game. A lot of jealousy is caused because I can laugh and talk to an officer, and have



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tea and play cards with them, while those who have been in the Regiment for years and are my seniors are left to walk the trenches and are not allowed in their dug-outs. Consequently, if they can let me down they will. This has made me creep even more into myself.

“ Well, Dear Heart, the great cave of the sky has assumed a purple hue and through the entrance a few golden shafts are tipping the distant clouds with a tinge of red. Far in the distance an occasional spark will flash in the sky—they are shells bursting. A pale crescent moon is struggling into life, and before she has half uncovered her face I shall be where those sparks are great flashes of flame. Perhaps the Gods will spare me for yet another spell. Perhaps I may still come back to those little sticky arms, and feel a foolish little head rest comfy on a hard old chest.

“ Poor little Kiddie Wee, and I feel such lots older. I want to make you happy and contented, but God knows if it rests in my power to do so.

“ The Angelus is tolling. Not a soul is in sight. A wonderful hush is in the air and the World seems suddenly empty. Only vague thoughts are left me, some memories of

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little joys and their balance of pain. In a few minutes I must be back amidst the clatter and noise, ribald laughter and coarse oaths, and I know I shall feel very, very lonely. But somewhere, from my corner in the straw, I shall be able to look into the shadows, and, perchance, a beautiful white face with an absurd little drooping mouth will come and beckon me with her eyes, and take me over the path of years to the shadow of a slanting roof, where a little black kitten darts in and out, a dying fire flickers, and a pair of arms stretch themselves out for me, and perhaps in their embrace I shall forget the path that I have trodden until the bugle calls me to tread that weary road again.

“ All my love,

“ B.”

Rest was all very well for the body out there in Flanders, but what of the soul? Perhaps it was that shadow of the Thing to come that set him to thinking of her with ever-growing tenderness, and a longing ever deepening as the month brought him nearer again to the trenches. Here is another of the August letters :

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“ . . . The world is fair I know, and you have seen but little of its beauty, but because I know you have the knowledge that that beauty is but an illusion conjured by your own brain, an illusive state after which you crave—because I know you have that knowledge, I see you as I stand and look out into the Night: a moth, a poor beautiful little moth, battering its wings as it tries to rise and lose itself in the great moon overhead. I want to see you an Eagle, Dear One, breaking its great wings (if necessary) in its flight towards the sun, for there is no life in the Moon and Mystery is never unravelled. Look to the Sun, the Giver of Life, for the hard facts of life are the only things that can really help; in truth, the analysing of these facts is the Great Work—as *I* understand it. . . .

“ I have been practically living in an underground cellar for the last four days, and I suppose the one small ray of light coming down upon a small wooden table has put the mood of the cloisters extra strong upon me. Anyway, I cannot at the present get in touch with the others, who at the moment are howling ‘ I hear you calling me ’ and ‘ I’ll make you love me,’ emptying their bowels of sentiment, even as I, each in his own way.

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“Your ring is nearly finished, although not yet to my satisfaction. I wanted the general shape to be that of a lotus around which the Universal Snake, above which a circle of copper, upon which you can have engraved the Key of Life. It is a rude attempt, but it is made from the nose of a German shell (aluminium), and the copper circle, a section of a bullet. Having no tools makes it a long job, and until the last few days I have had no time except for sleep. . . .

“I wish I could get my health back again and feel purely animal once more. To be able to dream of taking and crushing you in my arms . . . but it seems so far ahead, so absolutely improbable, and yet, worst of all, I cannot forget you.

“B.”

Perhaps he was conscious of the sadness of the letter, for he added a gay little post-script :

“P.S. This letter has been much delayed as we have had no opportunity for posting.

“Write me a booful long letter soon, as I am very bored just now. In the words of the song :

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*I—I—don't want to die,  
I want to go 'ome.*

“ . . . I have no news, and unless you write me I can find nothing to write about except shop—and that I want to forget.”

Though he did not return to the trenches quite yet a while, he was busy with work as hard and solid, if of another variety, and therefore his thoughts had less leisure to wander. In his letter of the 25th he gets back to the business of the day—gradually losing it again, however, for writing now seems always to set him thinking of the past, and it is his real self, his old self, he sees at the guns, as out of place there as a drooping Pierrot, footsore, with lute-strings untuned :

“ DEAR OLD SWEETHEART,

“ I have received everything you have mentioned, but your letters have been delayed because of incorrect address. I am no longer connected with the —th ; in fact, I am now temporarily attached to the —th. Being on the Brigade Staff, the above address is all that is necessary. I

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am now in charge of the whole Brigade battery—four guns and forty men. We are trying to get our leave as a Brigade unit, but I doubt if we can pull it off.

“ I am having a complete change—camping out. We have each made a little shelter out of branches, leaves, and waterproof sheets, and the country around is most charming. In the distance we see most of our old possessions and the smoke of the shells as they burst. The harvest is being gathered in. Our regular officer has gone home on leave, and his substitute does just what he is told like a good boy. He is an old Fleet Street hand and knew M—— on the *Tribune*. His name is W——, a rabid Rad. and Home Ruler. His outlook is typically journalistic and everything that does not coincide with his point of view is bad—bad art. I seem to know him—probably have met him at G. O.’s.

“ Please do not send me anything just now, as we are near a village and can get most things. Cigarettes are always most acceptable (Wills or B.D.V.), cakes or sardines or tinned fruit. The sterilizing tablets I can answer for from the 17th. . . . We really have no time or possibility for preparing food-stuffs of our own. All the

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wood is requisitioned by the regimental cooks, and our tea issue is ample just now. There is a lot I meant to write you about, but the mood has passed for the moment, and I am dried up. I struck a weird house of which I meant to tell you—quite a magic place, where the people take off the mask they wear and are their own selves ; anyway, thus it struck me. In point of fact it was like watching a cinema film, and I enjoyed it immensely. I would have written of it last night but I had no candle, and out here all lights are *supposed* to be out by 9.30.

“ I sent you the only photo I could get, so I cannot remember whom you refer to. Reading from the left, I think it was Lieut. B——, a rotten little snip ; A——, worse ; Major C——, C.S.M. ; Colonel D——, Q.M.S. : D—— is the only gentleman in the crowd, an Oxonian.

“ I do not remember all your questions. In point of fact I destroy all letters as soon as I have read them. I have so many papers to carry and I am apt to leave things about, so it is best to be on the safe side. The shaggy old hair is coming. I wanted something to tie it up with. Have had no time to put in any more work on your ring. I am

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running short of paper, so if you can send me some please do. I don't want any envelopes, just a block of thin paper. I had to borrow this. . . .

“Have you had any increase in your pay since I was made full Sergeant? If not, let me know and I will go to the —th O. Room and have it put through. I think you only draw one penny per day extra—as you have no children!!

“*Re* my short hair in the photo, it looks short because it is almost quite white.

“I am sorry I am so dry to-night. Somewhere at the back of my head a long-faced little Pierrette is spinning on a spindle toe and a wan and chill Pierrot putting grass in his shoes to stop the holes. His tears have rusted the strings of his instrument and he can twang it no more. Pierrot and Pierrette are very much in my mind of late—I wonder why? Clown too is often there. I think it must be the gossamer tints of the evening that suggest them to me, and at night I spend many hours walking up and down among the ‘shelters,’ wondering what dreams are hovering there, wondering what will become of all these peaceful slumberers *après la guerre*.

“I cannot help wondering also of my  
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own welfare—if I should ever see the end of this war to return sound and fit.

“Try as I may I cannot raise the veil, and that is why I cannot help but feel I shall stop here till the end.

“It seems almost in the period of my childhood when I look back to the time you were staying at Hatfield with me. I must have passed through many phases since then and they have doubtless left their mark.

“You, too, I suspect are altered more than you realize—how strange it would feel if we met again.

“I must close now. The dew is damping the paper and I have not my tunic on. It is most bitterly cold here at night and it is difficult to sleep even with an overcoat on. Still, it will harden us for the winter. . . .”

Hard, solid work, the practical things of war, continue to give the note in the letter that follows. For his new post in the Trench Mortar Battery preliminary training was not to be dispensed with. But hard solid work could not keep sadness away, could only deaden it a little at times. I feel him, in drawing nearer to the trenches again, sad as his own chill, wan Pierrot, trying to

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close more serious wounds than those in his shoes. The certainty of death had never left him—he could not raise the veil, but he knew now that soon it would be raised for him. His letter is dated September 3, and September was the month that saw the beginning and end of the Battle of Loos :

“ SWEETHEART,

“ Received parcels and P.O., for which many thanks. I have been sent down for a course of mortar instruction, where my memory is being sorely taxed.

“ Your letter sounded very ‘ blue ’ and I fain would write to cheer you up, but I haven’t a single idea in my head and there is nothing worth recording.

“ I have had the old black cloud over me for some time. I would drink it off if that were possible, but only very light wines and trench beer are allowed to be sold and they are even more horrible than the Horror itself.

“ Make it straight with K—— if you can. I am afraid my letter rather upset her. In point of fact I had buried a pal, and felt very bitter to think he should be lying peacefully there with a clean sheet to start

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upon, while I had only my dirty, smudged, and overscored record ever before me. Thank God I had written your letter first, for I am afraid I should have struck out just as wildly if writing to you.

“ I must close now. Do try to pull yourself together and keep well and out of harm’s way, Dear Old Thing.

“ Will write as soon as I feel myself again.

“ Poor old Captain H. ‘ copped out ’ the other day. I am sorry he is gone. Shot through the head.

“ All my love.

“ B.”

The next letter has the dates September 8 and 9, with a postscript of the 11th. On the envelope *L’Amoureuse* has written “ Last Letter.”

I am sure he was as conscious in writing it that it was his last as I am, a year later, in reading it. None other is so filled with messages to friends right and left, so occupied with the trivialities of life dear to him now he realized he must lose them. None other states so clearly his belief in the immortality of Love, which is the one gleam of light for him in the darkness of the coming night. Then too, the Army at the front in Flanders

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knew, if the people at home did not, that something was at hand, something big, colossal—murder for the British on the hugest scale yet. And he had the disadvantage of being an intelligent human being, which most Tommies may be thankful they are not, his intelligence making clear as daylight to him the preposterous uselessness of the wholesale slaughter, the madness of men from one end of Europe to the other hard at work killing each other for few could say what—the inhumanity of the cold, calculating, mechanical modern method of fighting—the uselessness, the madness, the inhumanity that is the true tragedy of the most tragic war the world has ever reeled under since the world began. Englishmen at home were boasting that they could see sport in the fight, but *L'Amoureux* in the trenches saw it too straight for that. His education as a soldier had not stood still, and he was weighed down by the sinister sacrifice, the waste, the wreckage of human life and human hope and human labour. I give the letter as it is, the fact that it is the last touching with importance every word, every message, however unimportant in itself. And, to be honest, I am in no hurry to say the last Good-bye to my Lover

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of the garret, of whom the trenches were making a more lovable and a finer creature than ever—in no hurry to reach that part in my story to which, come what come may, there can be no further sequel.

“ DEAR OLD SWEETHEART,

“ I was sent away back for ten days, so I received yours of 30th, 6th, and 3rd all together. I have been awfully busy as I still have the whole battery on my hands, no officer and no junior sergeant to help me. I will answer your letter in this order.

“ Pierrot’s shoes are only metaphorically in holes. One cannot imagine the picturesque wanderer in new boots or free from dust and mud! Yes, I am often very mizzy; there is so much I should be able to do and yet it seems so impossible. There is nobody to whom I can ‘talk’: the war itself is so absurd (from the philosophical standpoint), the sufferings so great, and the pleasure so trifling. It is all so cold, so calculated, the monotony stagnates one’s blood. Even the Germans, who tried to fashion the war as war has been understood through the decades of time—even they are getting nauseated and ‘flat.’

“ I am sorry to hear of L. and I am glad you are doing anything in your power to

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help her. She and I have never been good friends, but I think she would value a little genuine attention from you. Here I am to stop—more orders just come in, so will continue to-morrow.

*“ September 9th.*

“ To continue. Regarding your inclination to follow soon if I don't come back, although our nickname is ' The Suicide Club ' or ' The Gas Brigade,' I have no intention of throwing away my life for nothing. Something is bound to happen soon—I naturally cannot go into details—and then I shall just do my part with the rest. I only hope to God we get an officer before then—I don't like the idea of going into any big action on my own and have thirty odd men's lives hanging on my hands. [Here a line is scratched out by the Censor, the coming of Loos perhaps too plainly set forth.]

“ Please don't send out any clothes. I cannot carry them. Also everything gets lost or stolen. I am glad you sent me a wisp of hair, if only for the green silk to tie up enclosed. I have been very unlucky. After all my work I have lost the copper setting to your ring!!! I wonder if I shall ever manage to complete it. The real

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goatie hair is in the little envelope—all shaggy and grey.

“ Yes, I got the vest and the P.O. all right. The latter came in very handy. I am also glad you are getting three-and-six per week more. It is a little incentive to stick to a job that everybody is heartily sick of.

“ Regarding your moving, I don't somehow think it really wise, even if you like the air there better. I think the neighbourhood would play terribly upon your nerves. The dark, dank days of the winter with the endless slush and mud would be, I think, very detrimental to you. Again, if I *do* come home I should dearly love to come to some little garret-room just big enough for you and I. Of course I do not want to tie you down, but I think of the two you are better where you are.

“ . . . Regarding my note to K. It was *her* suggestion to make the cake. Silly child! I did not mean to throw out any hint to you. Surely you know me well enough to understand if I wanted you to make me a cake I should ask you.

“ I am glad you see the Mater occasionally. Poor Mater! I think one's heart gets very hard when things have to be done, but

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very open when there is aught to give away. I will write again this week if possible. I have just endeavoured to answer your letters in the order sent. I had a letter from poor old L. the other day. He seemed very hurt you never went near him.

“ I must close now. Keep on loving me, Dear Heart, if you can. It won't be thrown away. Love is not a finite thing, so it won't matter much, if Love is really there, whether I come back or not. If you and I are infinite, must not our Love be infinite too ?

“ Good-bye.

“ All your own

“ B.”

“ *September 11th.*

“ P.S. You Dear Old Thing ! I have just received your cake and I can scarcely believe you made it yourself. Just fancy you having all that capacity and hiding it under a bushel ! The Brigadier came down and questioned me about a hundred and one things—about ammunition supply, etc. etc. He is a wonderful man. I got through all right, for he sent down his Brigade Major in the afternoon to go further into the matters I had put to him. Everything I asked for was granted,



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including *arrangements for leave*. So I might have a few days in England yet ! Altogether I feel very satisfied with my day's work.

“ B.”

There was no other letter, but, on the eve of Loos, a short post card, the 22nd of the fatal month :

“ Sweetheart, thanks for dear letter. I have no time to write in detail. I am well. I am happy. I am busy. I am sleepy. I am *not* hungry. I am dirty, and I love you. Good night.

“ B.”

In less than a week the “ something bound to happen ” could have been put in plain words with no risk of having the Censor draw his black line through them. For the daily dispatch was now a daily list of the fallen in the massacre of Loos. England was beginning to pay the toll that France and Russia and Belgium had already paid in such ample measure. It is not easy to forget the long grim columns of names and names and names in the daily papers of that relentless month, each name meaning the loss of a man to the world and a burden of sorrow for all

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who loved him. But if they could have been forgotten in a year, the first anniversary of Loos has brought as grim a reminder, and only the other morning the *Times* filled again column after column on that first page dedicated to Marriage and Birth and Death, but now with *In Memoriam* notices of soldiers a year dead.

After this last post card there was a dreary interval of waiting—long hours of hope, longer hours of fear—and at last another post card, and when *L'Amoureuse* saw it I think, for one little minute, her heart must have lost its trick of beating. For it was the brown official card in which every case and contingency is arranged for in cold official print, so that by scratching out a sentence here and leaving in another sentence there, and adding an occasional word, the worst news can be conveyed with the least personality. In this way *L'Amoureuse* learned that *L'Amoureux* had been admitted into hospital wounded, was doing well, and had been sent down to the Base. It was much that the post card was signed by himself, and that the date, September 29, 1915, was in his writing, for the address was in somebody else's, which was not a comforting thing to see.

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It was only later that *L'Amoureuse* collected together the details—chiefly from his officers who wrote in sympathy and praise. He was wounded at Loos on the 26th, his thigh smashed. He lay long on the field—those were terribly busy days for stretcher-bearers and everybody connected with the Red Cross and the patching up and repairing of men broken in the fight—but he was not idle as he lay waiting and suffering in silence. His eyes and ears were open, his mind was alert, and all the odd bits of information that came his way he made mental notes of and had ready when at last it was his turn to be cared for. But other things besides bits of information were waiting and lying about in that death-strewn field—that field of human refuse, at the very memory of which I have seen a strong man cry like a child. Germs were hiding in ambush, germs were wandering here, there, and everywhere, and when the turn of *L'Amoureux* did come tetanus had set in, and with it the chance of his satisfactory patching, of his successful “spinning pennies with Death” was one to ten in earnest. And yet he was so gay, so helpful in telling what he had seen and heard; he dismissed his suffering so lightly that the seriousness of his injury was hardly

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realized. Not until five days afterwards did he have a splint—so many needed them, alas ! There was one more post card—from the Canadian General Hospital at Tréport—not printed this time, but, almost worse, written, as well as addressed, in a strange hand, his name misspelled—an ominous sign :

“ I am wounded badly—thigh-bone is broken. I do not quite know what they are going to do with me yet.”

And then to one side, his writing here, if shaky and feeble, these four words :

“ All my love. B.”

And so his life which, as I had watched it, began with love, was rounded out with love. It was his last word to *L'Amoureuse*, and none from him could have been more appropriate. “ *L'Amoureux* was *L'Amoureux* to the end ! ” she told me with pride in his love and its steadfastness.

He died on October 5, simple and strong in dying as he had been in living—his death, according to the cold official report, due to tetanus and gunshot wounds. His nurse could snatch a minute to say more, could say

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it with the sympathy the official bureau does not permit itself, and this much I know from her letter—*L'Amoureux* did not shrink from the Crowning Illusion of all in a World of Illusions, but accepted it bravely and without murmur. What she could not say, what nobody save he could, was the torture that was his at the thought of *L'Amoureuse* exposed to these illusions now he had done with them, and was no longer at her side to shield her from their bitterness.

He was only one of the thousands killed in the shambles of Loos—only one of the millions in the bigger shambles of Europe. There was no report of his death, not so much as a paragraph. He had not failed when summoned to the ordeal. More than that, he had not flinched, he had not faltered, when a too heavy responsibility was laid upon his inexperienced shoulders. For as he had feared, so it happened, and he went into action in command of his Trench Mortar Battery—four guns and forty men—leading in place of the Sergeant-Major and the First Lieutenant, who should have been there to lead him. His was the work, but not the rank. His worth was known, however. His name was on the list for the Distinguished Conduct Medal, but Death put an end to

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that. He had indentured for a Commission, but the papers had not been prepared, and the Colonel in whose hands the matter lay fell with him at Loos, and there was an end to that too. For weeks after the news came *L'Amoureuse* had thought, had interest for nothing save the one desolating fact that *L'Amoureux* had gone, not taking her with him, to the Great Reality beyond. Could she have thought in her misery, she knew no one at headquarters she could ask if to the dead might be granted the honours won by the living.

As he had hawked round his paintings and haunted editors' offices without recognition, so he fell in battle without reward. There is no monument to his memory, except perhaps a little cross somewhere at Tréport. No society, I fear, will set up a plaque in his honour on the old house with the tumbled tiled roof where he lived as triumphant lover but as artist unknown. My words, were they as eloquent as I would make them if I could, would still be fragile as flowers when laid in tribute upon the grave of the perfect lover, the staunch soldier, I knew him to be. But I fancy *L'Amoureux* himself would be content to leave things as they are. After all, he who believed his love to

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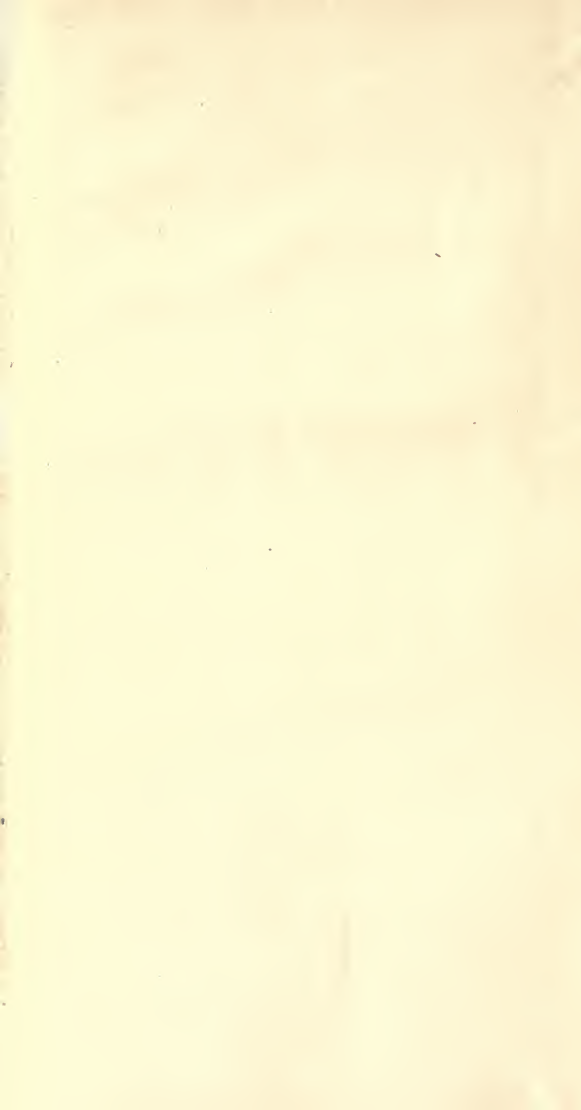
## IN THE TRENCHES

be infinite would see in that love his most splendid monument, since it must live for ever, brave and beautiful as in the days of its flowering in the shabby little old London garret.

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