CHAPTER X. THE WAR AGAIN

"One is a fool," said Lilly, "to be lachrymose. The thing to do is to get a move on."

Aaron looked up with a glimpse of a smile. The two men were sitting before the fire at the end of a cold, wet April day: Aaron convalescent, somewhat chastened in appearance.

"Ay," he said rather sourly. "A move back to Guilford Street."

"Oh, I meant to tell you," said Lilly. "I was reading an old Baden history. They made a law in 1528--not a law, but a regulation--that: if a man forsakes his wife and children, as now so often happens, the said wife and children are at once to be dispatched after him. I thought that would please you. Does it?"

"Yes," said Aaron briefly.

"They would have arrived the next day, like a forwarded letter."

"I should have had to get a considerable move on, at that rate," grinned Aaron.

"Oh, no. You might quite like them here." But Lilly saw the white frown

of determined revulsion on the convalescent's face.

"Wouldn't you?" he asked.

Aaron shook his head.

"No," he said. And it was obvious he objected to the topic. "What are you going to do about your move on?"

"Me!" said Lilly. "I'm going to sail away next week--or steam dirtily away on a tramp called the Maud Allen Wing."

"Where to?"

"Malta."

"Where from?"

"London Dock. I fixed up my passage this morning for ten pounds. I am cook's assistant, signed on."

Aaron looked at him with a little admiration.

"You can take a sudden jump, can't you?" he said.

"The difficulty is to refrain from jumping: overboard or anywhere."

Aaron smoked his pipe slowly.

"And what good will Malta do you?" he asked, envious.

"Heaven knows. I shall cross to Syracuse, and move up Italy."

"Sounds as if you were a millionaire."

"I've got thirty-five pounds in all the world. But something will come along."

"I've got more than that," said Aaron.

"Good for you," replied Lilly.

He rose and went to the cupboard, taking out a bowl and a basket of potatoes. He sat down again, paring the potatoes. His busy activity annoyed Aaron.

"But what's the good of going to Malta? Shall YOU be any different in yourself, in another place? You'll be the same there as you are here."

"How am I here?"

"Why, you're all the time grinding yourself against something inside

you. You're never free. You're never content. You never stop chafing."

Lilly dipped his potato into the water, and cut out the eyes carefully. Then he cut it in two, and dropped it in the clean water of the second bowl. He had not expected this criticism.

"Perhaps I don't," said he.

"Then what's the use of going somewhere else? You won't change yourself."

"I may in the end," said Lilly.

"You'll be yourself, whether it's Malta or London," said Aaron.

"There's a doom for me," laughed Lilly. The water on the fire was boiling. He rose and threw in salt, then dropped in the potatoes with little plops. "There there are lots of mes. I'm not only just one proposition. A new place brings out a new thing in a man. Otherwise you'd have stayed in your old place with your family."

"The man in the middle of you doesn't change," said Aaron.

"Do you find it so?" said Lilly.

"Ay. Every time."

"Then what's to be done?"

"Nothing, as far as I can see. You get as much amusement out of life as possible, and there's the end of it."

"All right then, I'll get the amusement."

"Ay, all right then," said Aaron. "But there isn't anything wonderful about it. You talk as if you were doing something special. You aren't. You're no more than a man who drops into a pub for a drink, to liven himself up a bit. Only you give it a lot of names, and make out as if you were looking for the philosopher's stone, or something like that. When you're only killing time like the rest of folks, before time kills you."

Lilly did not answer. It was not yet seven o'clock, but the sky was dark. Aaron sat in the firelight. Even the saucepan on the fire was silent. Darkness, silence, the firelight in the upper room, and the two men together.

"It isn't quite true," said Lilly, leaning on the mantelpiece and staring down into the fire.

"Where isn't it? You talk, and you make a man believe you've got something he hasn't got? But where is it, when it comes to? What have

you got, more than me or Jim Bricknell! Only a bigger choice of words, it seems to me."

Lilly was motionless and inscrutable like a shadow.

"Does it, Aaron!" he said, in a colorless voice.

"Yes. What else is there to it?" Aaron sounded testy.

"Why," said Lilly at last, "there's something. I agree, it's true what you say about me. But there's a bit of something else. There's just a bit of something in me, I think, which ISN'T a man running into a pub for a drink--"

"And what--?"

The question fell into the twilight like a drop of water falling down a deep shaft into a well.

"I think a man may come into possession of his own soul at last--as the Buddhists teach--but without ceasing to love, or even to hate. One loves, one hates--but somewhere beyond it all, one understands, and possesses one's soul in patience and in peace--"

"Yes," said Aaron slowly, "while you only stand and talk about it. But when you've got no chance to talk about it--and when you've got to

live--you don't possess your soul, neither in patience nor in peace, but any devil that likes possesses you and does what it likes with you, while you fridge yourself and fray yourself out like a worn rag."

"I don't care," said Lilly, "I'm learning to possess my soul in patience and in peace, and I know it. And it isn't a negative Nirvana either. And if Tanny possesses her own soul in patience and peace as well--and if in this we understand each other at last--then there we are, together and apart at the same time, and free of each other, and eternally inseparable. I have my Nirvana--and I have it all to myself. But more than that. It coincides with her Nirvana."

"Ah, yes," said Aaron. "But I don't understand all that word-splitting."

"I do, though. You learn to be quite alone, and possess your own soul in isolation--and at the same time, to be perfectly WITH someone else--that's all I ask."

"Sort of sit on a mountain top, back to back with somebody else, like a couple of idols."

"No--because it isn't a case of sitting--or a case of back to back. It's what you get to after a lot of fighting and a lot of sensual fulfilment. And it never does away with the fighting and with the sensual passion. It flowers on top of them, and it would never flower save on top of them."

"What wouldn't?"

"The possessing one's own soul--and the being together with someone else in silence, beyond speech."

"And you've got them?"

"I've got a BIT of the real quietness inside me."

"So has a dog on a mat."

"So I believe, too."

"Or a man in a pub."

"Which I don't believe."

"You prefer the dog?"

"Maybe."

There was silence for a few moments.

"And I'm the man in the pub," said Aaron.

"You aren't the dog on the mat, anyhow."

"And you're the idol on the mountain top, worshipping yourself."

"You talk to me like a woman, Aaron."

"How do you talk to ME, do you think?"

"How do I?"

"Are the potatoes done?"

Lilly turned quickly aside, and switched on the electric light. Everything changed. Aaron sat still before the fire, irritated. Lilly went about preparing the supper.

The room was pleasant at night. Two tall, dark screens hid the two beds. In front, the piano was littered with music, the desk littered with papers. Lilly went out on to the landing, and set the chops to grill on the gas stove. Hastily he put a small table on the hearth-rug, spread it with a blue-and-white cloth, set plates and glasses. Aaron did not move. It was not his nature to concern himself with domestic matters--and Lilly did it best alone.

The two men had an almost uncanny understanding of one another--like brothers. They came from the same district, from the same class. Each

might have been born into the other's circumstance. Like brothers, there was a profound hostility between them. But hostility is not antipathy.

Lilly's skilful housewifery always irritated Aaron: it was so self-sufficient. But most irritating of all was the little man's unconscious assumption of priority. Lilly was actually unaware that he assumed this quiet predominance over others. He mashed the potatoes, he heated the plates, he warmed the red wine, he whisked eggs into the milk pudding, and served his visitor like a housemaid. But none of this detracted from the silent assurance with which he bore himself, and with which he seemed to domineer over his acquaintance.

At last the meal was ready. Lilly drew the curtains, switched off the central light, put the green-shaded electric lamp on the table, and the two men drew up to the meal. It was good food, well cooked and hot. Certainly Lilly's hands were no longer clean: but it was clean dirt, as he said.

Aaron sat in the low arm-chair at table. So his face was below, in the full light. Lilly sat high on a small chair, so that his face was in the green shadow. Aaron was handsome, and always had that peculiar well-dressed look of his type. Lilly was indifferent to his own appearance, and his collar was a rag.

So the two men ate in silence. They had been together alone for a fortnight only: but it was like a small eternity. Aaron was well

now--only he suffered from the depression and the sort of fear that follows influenza.

"When are you going?" he asked irritably, looking up at Lilly, whose face hovered in that green shadow above, and worried him.

"One day next week. They'll send me a telegram. Not later than Thursday."

"You're looking forward to going?" The question was half bitter.

"Yes. I want to get a new tune out of myself."

"Had enough of this?"

"Yes."

A flush of anger came on Aaron's face.

"You're easily on, and easily off," he said, rather insulting.

"Am I?" said Lilly. "What makes you think so?"

"Circumstances," replied Aaron sourly.

To which there was no answer. The host cleared away the plates, and put

the pudding on the table. He pushed the bowl to Aaron.

"I suppose I shall never see you again, once you've gone," said Aaron.

"It's your choice. I will leave you an address."

After this, the pudding was eaten in silence.

"Besides, Aaron," said Lilly, drinking his last sip of wine, "what do you care whether you see me again or not? What do you care whether you see anybody again or not? You want to be amused. And now you're irritated because you think I am not going to amuse you any more: and you don't know who is going to amuse you. I admit it's a dilemma. But it's a hedonistic dilemma of the commonest sort."

"I don't know hedonistic. And supposing I am as you say--are you any different?"

"No, I'm not very different. But I always persuade myself there's a bit of difference. Do you know what Josephine Ford confessed to me? She's had her lovers enough. 'There isn't any such thing as love, Lilly,' she said. 'Men are simply afraid to be alone. That is absolutely all there is in it: fear of being alone.'"

"What by that?" said Aaron.

"You agree?"

"Yes, on the whole."

"So do I--on the whole. And then I asked her what about woman. And then she said with a woman it wasn't fear, it was just boredom. A woman is like a violinist: any fiddle, any instrument rather than empty hands and no tune going."

"Yes--what I said before: getting as much amusement out of life as possible," said Aaron.

"You amuse me--and I'll amuse you."

"Yes--just about that."

"All right, Aaron," said Lilly. "I'm not going to amuse you, or try to amuse you any more."

"Going to try somebody else; and Malta."

"Malta, anyhow."

"Oh, and somebody else--in the next five minutes."

"Yes--that also."

"Goodbye and good luck to you."

"Goodbye and good luck to you, Aaron."

With which Lilly went aside to wash the dishes. Aaron sat alone under the zone of light, turning over a score of Pelleas. Though the noise of London was around them, it was far below, and in the room was a deep silence. Each of the men seemed invested in his own silence.

Aaron suddenly took his flute, and began trying little passages from the opera on his knee. He had not played since his illness. The noise came out a little tremulous, but low and sweet. Lilly came forward with a plate and a cloth in his hand.

"Aaron's rod is putting forth again," he said, smiling.

"What?" said Aaron, looking up.

"I said Aaron's rod is putting forth again."

"What rod?"

"Your flute, for the moment."

"It's got to put forth my bread and butter."

"Is that all the buds it's going to have?"

"What else!"

"Nay--that's for you to show. What flowers do you imagine came out of the rod of Moses's brother?"

"Scarlet runners, I should think if he'd got to live on them."

"Scarlet enough, I'll bet."

Aaron turned unnoticing back to his music. Lilly finished the wiping of the dishes, then took a book and sat on the other side of the table.

"It's all one to you, then," said Aaron suddenly, "whether we ever see one another again?"

"Not a bit," said Lilly, looking up over his spectacles. "I very much wish there might be something that held us together."

"Then if you wish it, why isn't there?"

"You might wish your flute to put out scarlet-runner flowers at the joints."

"Ay--I might. And it would be all the same."

The moment of silence that followed was extraordinary in its hostility.

"Oh, we shall run across one another again some time," said Aaron.

"Sure," said Lilly. "More than that: I'll write you an address that will always find me. And when you write I will answer you."

He took a bit of paper and scribbled an address. Aaron folded it and put it into his waistcoat pocket. It was an Italian address.

"But how can I live in Italy?" he said. "You can shift about. I'm tied to a job."

"You--with your budding rod, your flute--and your charm--you can always do as you like."

"My what?"

"Your flute and your charm."

"What charm?"

"Just your own. Don't pretend you don't know you've got it. I don't really like charm myself; too much of a trick about it. But whether or

not, you've got it."

"It's news to me."

"Not it."

"Fact, it is."

"Ha! Somebody will always take a fancy to you. And you can live on that, as well as on anything else."

"Why do you always speak so despisingly?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Have you any right to despise another man?"

"When did it go by rights?"

"No, not with you."

"You answer me like a woman, Aaron."

Again there was a space of silence. And again it was Aaron who at last broke it.

"We're in different positions, you and me," he said.

"How?"

"You can live by your writing--but I've got to have a job."

"Is that all?" said Lilly.

"Ay. And plenty. You've got the advantage of me."

"Quite," said Lilly. "But why? I was a dirty-nosed little boy when you were a clean-nosed little boy. And I always had more patches on my breeches than you: neat patches, too, my poor mother! So what's the good of talking about advantages? You had the start. And at this very moment you could buy me up, lock, stock, and barrel. So don't feel hard done by. It's a lie."

"You've got your freedom."

"I make it and I take it."

"Circumstances make it for you."

"As you like."

"You don't do a man justice," said Aaron.

"Does a man care?"

"He might."

"Then he's no man."

"Thanks again, old fellow."

"Welcome," said Lilly, grimacing.

Again Aaron looked at him, baffled, almost with hatred. Lilly grimaced at the blank wall opposite, and seemed to ruminate. Then he went back to his book. And no sooner had he forgotten Aaron, reading the fantasies of a certain Leo Frobenius, than Aaron must stride in again.

"You can't say there isn't a difference between your position and mine," he said pertinently.

Lilly looked darkly over his spectacles.

"No, by God," he said. "I should be in a poor way otherwise."

"You can't say you haven't the advantage--your JOB gives you the advantage."

"All right. Then leave it out with my job, and leave me alone."

"That's your way of dodging it."

"My dear Aaron, I agree with you perfectly. There is no difference between us, save the fictitious advantage given to me by my job. Save for my job--which is to write lies--Aaron and I are two identical little men in one and the same little boat. Shall we leave it at that, now?"

"Yes," said Aaron. "That's about it."

"Let us shake hands on it--and go to bed, my dear chap. You are just recovering from influenza, and look paler than I like."

"You mean you want to be rid of me," said Aaron.

"Yes, I do mean that," said Lilly.

"Ay," said Aaron.

And after a few minutes more staring at the score of Pelleas, he rose, put the score away on the piano, laid his flute beside it, and retired behind the screen. In silence, the strange dim noise of London sounding from below, Lilly read on about the Kabyles. His soul had the faculty of divesting itself of the moment, and seeking further, deeper interests. These old Africans! And Atlantis! Strange, strange wisdom of the

Kabyles! Old, old dark Africa, and the world before the flood! How jealous Aaron seemed! The child of a jealous God. A jealous God! Could any race be anything but despicable, with such an antecedent?

But no, persistent as a jealous God himself, Aaron reappeared in his pyjamas, and seated himself in his chair.

"What is the difference then between you and me, Lilly?" he said.

"Haven't we shaken hands on it--a difference of jobs."

"You don't believe that, though, do you?"

"Nay, now I reckon you're trespassing."

"Why am I? I know you don't believe it."

"What do I believe then?" said Lilly.

"You believe you know something better than me--and that you are something better than me. Don't you?"

"Do YOU believe it?"

"What?"

"That I AM something better than you, and that I KNOW something better?"

"No, because I don't see it," said Aaron.

"Then if you don't see it, it isn't there. So go to bed and sleep the sleep of the just and the convalescent. I am not to be badgered any more."

"Am I badgering you?" said Aaron.

"Indeed you are."

"So I'm in the wrong again?"

"Once more, my dear."

"You're a God-Almighty in your way, you know."

"So long as I'm not in anybody else's way--Anyhow, you'd be much better sleeping the sleep of the just. And I'm going out for a minute or two. Don't catch cold there with nothing on--

"I want to catch the post," he added, rising.

Aaron looked up at him quickly. But almost before there was time to speak, Lilly had slipped into his hat and coat, seized his letters, and

gone.

It was a rainy night. Lilly turned down King Street to walk to Charing Cross. He liked being out of doors. He liked to post his letters at Charing Cross post office. He did not want to talk to Aaron any more. He was glad to be alone.

He walked quickly down Villiers Street to the river, to see it flowing blackly towards the sea. It had an endless fascination for him: never failed to soothe him and give him a sense of liberty. He liked the night, the dark rain, the river, and even the traffic. He enjoyed the sense of friction he got from the streaming of people who meant nothing to him. It was like a fox slipping alert among unsuspecting cattle.

When he got back, he saw in the distance the lights of a taxi standing outside the building where he lived, and heard a thumping and hallooing. He hurried forward.

It was a man called Herbertson.

"Oh, why, there you are!" exclaimed Herbertson, as Lilly drew near. "Can I come up and have a chat?"

"I've got that man who's had flu. I should think he is gone to bed."

"Oh!" The disappointment was plain. "Well, look here I'll just come up

for a couple of minutes." He laid his hand on Lilly's arm. "I heard you were going away. Where are you going?"

"Malta."

"Malta! Oh, I know Malta very well. Well now, it'll be all right if I come up for a minute? I'm not going to see much more of you, apparently." He turned quickly to the taxi. "What is it on the clock?"

The taxi was paid, the two men went upstairs. Aaron was in bed, but he called as Lilly entered the room.

"Hullo!" said Lilly. "Not asleep? Captain Herbertson has come in for a minute."

"Hope I shan't disturb you," said Captain Herbertson, laying down his stick and gloves, and his cap. He was in uniform. He was one of the few surviving officers of the Guards, a man of about forty-five, good-looking, getting rather stout. He settled himself in the chair where Aaron had sat, hitching up his trousers. The gold identity plate, with its gold chain, fell conspicuously over his wrist.

"Been to 'Rosemary,'" he said. "Rotten play, you know--but passes the time awfully well. Oh, I quite enjoyed it."

Lilly offered him Sauterne--the only thing in the house.

"Oh, yes! How awfully nice! Yes, thanks, I shall love it. Can I have it with soda? Thanks! Do you know, I think that's the very best drink in the tropics: sweet white wine, with soda? Yes--well!-- Well--now, why are you going away?"

"For a change," said Lilly.

"You're quite right, one needs a change now the damned thing is all over. As soon as I get out of khaki I shall be off. Malta! Yes! I've been in Malta several times. I think Valletta is quite enjoyable, particularly in winter, with the opera. Oh--er--how's your wife? All right? Yes!--glad to see her people again. Bound to be-- Oh, by the way, I met Jim Bricknell. Sends you a message hoping you'll go down and stay--down at Captain Bingham's place in Surrey, you know. Awfully queer lot down there. Not my sort, no. You won't go down? No, I shouldn't. Not the right sort of people."

Herbertson rattled away, rather spasmodic. He had been through the very front hell of the war--and like every man who had, he had the war at the back of his mind, like an obsession. But in the meantime, he skirmished.

"Yes. I was on guard one day when the Queen gave one of her tea-parties to the blind. Awful affair. But the children are awfully nice children. Prince of Wales awfully nice, almost too nice. Prince Henry smart boy, too--oh, a smart boy. Queen Mary poured the tea, and I handed round

bread and butter. She told me I made a very good waiter. I said, Thank you, Madam. But I like the children. Very different from the Battenbergs. Oh!--" he wrinkled his nose. "I can't stand the Battenbergs."

"Mount Battens," said Lilly.

"Yes! Awful mistake, changing the royal name. They were Guelfs, why not remain it? Why, I'll tell you what Battenberg did. He was in the Guards, too--"

The talk flowed on: about royalty and the Guards, Buckingham Palace and St. James.

"Rather a nice story about Queen Victoria. Man named Joyce, something or other, often used to dine at the Palace. And he was an awfully good imitator--really clever, you know. Used to imitate the Queen. 'Mr. Joyce,' she said, 'I hear your imitation is very amusing. Will you do it for us now, and let us see what it is like?' 'Oh, no, Madam! I'm afraid I couldn't do it now. I'm afraid I'm not in the humour.' But she would have him do it. And it was really awfully funny. He had to do it. You know what he did. He used to take a table-napkin, and put it on with one corner over his forehead, and the rest hanging down behind, like her veil thing. And then he sent for the kettle-lid. He always had the kettle-lid, for that little crown of hers. And then he impersonated her. But he was awfully good--so clever. 'Mr. Joyce,' she said. 'We are not

amused. Please leave the room.' Yes, that is exactly what she said: 'WE are not amused--please leave the room.' I like the WE, don't you? And he a man of sixty or so. However, he left the room and for a fortnight or so he wasn't invited--Wasn't she wonderful--Queen Victoria?"

And so, by light transitions, to the Prince of Wales at the front, and thus into the trenches. And then Herbertson was on the subject he was obsessed by. He had come, unconsciously, for this and this only, to talk war to Lilly: or at Lilly. For the latter listened and watched, and said nothing. As a man at night helplessly takes a taxi to find some woman, some prostitute, Herbertson had almost unthinkingly got into a taxi and come battering at the door in Covent Garden, only to talk war to Lilly, whom he knew very little. But it was a driving instinct--to come and get it off his chest.

And on and on he talked, over his wine and soda. He was not conceited--he was not showing off--far from it. It was the same thing here in this officer as it was with the privates, and the same with this Englishman as with a Frenchman or a German or an Italian. Lilly had sat in a cowshed listening to a youth in the north country: he had sat on the corn-straw that the oxen had been treading out, in Calabria, under the moon: he had sat in a farm-kitchen with a German prisoner: and every time it was the same thing, the same hot, blind, anguished voice of a man who has seen too much, experienced too much, and doesn't know where to turn. None of the glamour of returned heroes, none of the romance of war: only a hot, blind, mesmerised voice, going on and on, mesmerised by

a vision that the soul cannot bear.

In this officer, of course, there was a lightness and an appearance of bright diffidence and humour. But underneath it all was the same as in the common men of all the combatant nations: the hot, seared burn of unbearable experience, which did not heal nor cool, and whose irritation was not to be relieved. The experience gradually cooled on top: but only with a surface crust. The soul did not heal, did not recover.

"I used to be awfully frightened," laughed Herbertson. "Now you say, Lilly, you'd never have stood it. But you would. You're nervous--and it was just the nervous ones that did stand it. When nearly all our officers were gone, we had a man come out--a man called Margeritson, from India--big merchant people out there. They all said he was no good--not a bit of good--nervous chap. No good at all. But when you had to get out of the trench and go for the Germans he was perfect--perfect--It all came to him then, at the crisis, and he was perfect.

"Some things frighten one man, and some another. Now shells would never frighten me. But I couldn't stand bombs. You could tell the difference between our machines and the Germans. Ours was a steady noise--drrrrrrrr!--but their's was heavy, drrrrRURUrrrrRURU!-- My word, that got on my nerves....

"No I was never hit. The nearest thing was when I was knocked down by an

exploding shell--several times that--you know. When you shout like mad for the men to come and dig you out, under all the earth. And my word, you do feel frightened then." Herbertson laughed with a twinkling motion to Lilly. But between his brows there was a tension like madness.

"And a funny thing you know--how you don't notice things. In--let me see--1916, the German guns were a lot better than ours. Ours were old, and when they're old you can't tell where they'll hit: whether they'll go beyond the mark, or whether they'll fall short. Well, this day our guns were firing short, and killing our own men. We'd had the order to charge, and were running forward, and I suddenly felt hot water spurting on my neck--" He put his hand to the back of his neck and glanced round apprehensively. "It was a chap called Innes--Oh, an awfully decent sort--people were in the Argentine. He'd been calling out to me as we were running, and I was just answering. When I felt this hot water on my neck and saw him running past me with no head--he'd got no head, and he went running past me. I don't know how far, but a long way.... Blood, you know--Yes--well--

"Oh, I hated Chelsea--I loathed Chelsea--Chelsea was purgatory to me. I had a corporal called Wallace--he was a fine chap--oh, he was a fine chap--six foot two--and about twenty-four years old. He was my stand-back. Oh, I hated Chelsea, and parades, and drills. You know, when it's drill, and you're giving orders, you forget what order you've just given--in front of the Palace there the crowd don't notice--but it's AWFUL for you. And you know you daren't look round to see what the men

are doing. But Wallace was splendid. He was just behind me, and I'd hear him, quite quiet you know, 'It's right wheel, sir.' Always perfect, always perfect--yes--well....

"You know you don't get killed if you don't think you will. Now I never thought I should get killed. And I never knew a man get killed if he hadn't been thinking he would. I said to Wallace I'd rather be out here, at the front, than at Chelsea. I hated Chelsea--I can't tell you how much. 'Oh no, sir!' he said. 'I'd rather be at Chelsea than here. I'd rather be at Chelsea. There isn't hell like this at Chelsea.' We'd had orders that we were to go back to the real camp the next day. 'Never mind, Wallace,' I said. 'We shall be out of this hell-on-earth tomorrow.' And he took my hand. We weren't much for showing feeling or anything in the guards. But he took my hand. And we climbed out to charge--Poor fellow, he was killed--" Herbertson dropped his head, and for some moments seemed to go unconscious, as if struck. Then he lifted his face, and went on in the same animated chatty fashion: "You see, he had a presentiment. I'm sure he had a presentiment. None of the men got killed unless they had a presentiment--like that, you know...."

Herbertson nodded keenly at Lilly, with his sharp, twinkling, yet obsessed eyes. Lilly wondered why he made the presentiment responsible for the death--which he obviously did--and not vice versa. Herbertson implied every time, that you'd never get killed if you could keep yourself from having a presentiment. Perhaps there was something in it. Perhaps the soul issues its own ticket of death, when it can stand no

more. Surely life controls life: and not accident.

"It's a funny thing what shock will do. We had a sergeant and he shouted to me. Both his feet were off--both his feet, clean at the ankle. I gave him morphia. You know officers aren't allowed to use the needle--might give the man blood poisoning. You give those tabloids. They say they act in a few minutes, but they DON'T. It's a quarter of an hour. And nothing is more demoralising than when you have a man, wounded, you know, and crying out. Well, this man I gave him the morphia before he got over the stunning, you know. So he didn't feel the pain. Well, they carried him in. I always used to like to look after my men. So I went next morning and I found he hadn't been removed to the Clearing Station. I got hold of the doctor and I said, 'Look here! Why hasn't this man been taken to the Clearing Station?' I used to get excited. But after some years they'd got used to me. 'Don't get excited, Herbertson, the man's dying.' 'But,' I said, 'he's just been talking to me as strong as you are.' And he had--he'd talk as strong and well as you or me, then go quiet for a bit. I said I gave him the morphia before he came round from the stunning. So he'd felt nothing. But in two hours he was dead. The doctor says that the shock does it like that sometimes. You can do nothing for them. Nothing vital is injured--and yet the life is broken in them. Nothing can be done--funny thing--Must be something in the brain--"

"It's obviously not the brain," said Lilly. "It's deeper than the brain."

"Deeper," said Herbertson, nodding.

"Funny thing where life is. We had a lieutenant. You know we all buried our own dead. Well, he looked as if he was asleep. Most of the chaps looked like that." Herbertson closed his eyes and laid his face aside, like a man asleep and dead peacefully. "You very rarely see a man dead with any other look on his face--you know the other look.--" And he clenched his teeth with a sudden, momentaneous, ghastly distortion.--"Well, you'd never have known this chap was dead. He had a wound here--in the back of the head--and a bit of blood on his hand--and nothing else, nothing. Well, I said we'd give him a decent burial. He lay there waiting--and they'd wrapped him in a filthy blanket--you know. Well, I said he should have a proper blanket. He'd been dead lying there a day and a half you know. So I went and got a blanket, a beautiful blanket, out of his private kit--his people were Scotch, well-known family--and I got the pins, you know, ready to pin him up properly, for the Scots Guards to bury him. And I thought he'd be stiff, you see. But when I took him by the arms, to lift him on, he sat up. It gave me an awful shock. 'Why he's alive!' I said. But they said he was dead. I couldn't believe it. It gave me an awful shock. He was as flexible as you or me, and looked as if he was asleep. You couldn't believe he was dead. But we pinned him up in his blanket. It was an awful shock to me. I couldn't believe a man could be like that after he'd been dead two days....

"The Germans were wonderful with the machine guns--it's a wicked thing,

a machine gun. But they couldn't touch us with the bayonet. Every time the men came back they had bayonet practice, and they got awfully good. You know when you thrust at the Germans--so--if you miss him, you bring your rifle back sharp, with a round swing, so that the butt comes up and hits up under the jaw. It's one movement, following on with the stab, you see, if you miss him. It was too quick for them--But bayonet charge was worst, you know. Because your man cries out when you catch him, when you get him, you know. That's what does you....

"No, oh no, this was no war like other wars. All the machinery of it. No, you couldn't stand it, but for the men. The men are wonderful, you know. They'll be wiped out.... No, it's your men who keep you going, if you're an officer.... But there'll never be another war like this. Because the Germans are the only people who could make a war like this--and I don't think they'll ever do it again, do you?

"Oh, they were wonderful, the Germans. They were amazing. It was incredible, what they invented and did. We had to learn from them, in the first two years. But they were too methodical. That's why they lost the war. They were too methodical. They'd fire their guns every ten minutes--regular. Think of it. Of course we knew when to run, and when to lie down. You got so that you knew almost exactly what they'd do--if you'd been out long enough. And then you could time what you wanted to do yourselves.

"They were a lot more nervous than we were, at the last. They sent up

enough light at night from their trenches--you know, those things that burst in the air like electric light--we had none of that to do--they did it all for us--lit up everything. They were more nervous than we were...."

It was nearly two o'clock when Herbertson left. Lilly, depressed, remained before the fire. Aaron got out of bed and came uneasily to the fire.

"It gives me the bellyache, that damned war," he said.

"So it does me," said Lilly. "All unreal."

"Real enough for those that had to go through it."

"No, least of all for them," said Lilly sullenly. "Not as real as a bad dream. Why the hell don't they wake up and realise it!"

"That's a fact," said Aaron. "They're hypnotised by it."

"And they want to hypnotise me. And I won't be hypnotised. The war was a lie and is a lie and will go on being a lie till somebody busts it."

"It was a fact--you can't bust that. You can't bust the fact that it happened."

"Yes you can. It never happened. It never happened to me. No more than my dreams happen. My dreams don't happen: they only seem."

"But the war did happen, right enough," smiled Aaron palely.

"No, it didn't. Not to me or to any man, in his own self. It took place in the automatic sphere, like dreams do. But the ACTUAL MAN in every man was just absent--asleep--or drugged--inert--dream-logged. That's it."

"You tell 'em so," said Aaron.

"I do. But it's no good. Because they won't wake up now even--perhaps never. They'll all kill themselves in their sleep."

"They wouldn't be any better if they did wake up and be themselves--that is, supposing they are asleep, which I can't see. They are what they are--and they're all alike--and never very different from what they are now."

Lilly stared at Aaron with black eyes.

"Do you believe in them less than I do, Aaron?" he asked slowly.

"I don't even want to believe in them."

"But in yourself?" Lilly was almost wistful--and Aaron uneasy.

"I don't know that I've any more right to believe in myself than in them," he replied. Lilly watched and pondered.

"No," he said. "That's not true--I KNEW the war was false: humanly quite false. I always knew it was false. The Germans were false, we were false, everybody was false."

"And not you?" asked Aaron shrewishly.

"There was a wakeful, self-possessed bit of me which knew that the war and all that horrible movement was false for me. And so I wasn't going to be dragged in. The Germans could have shot my mother or me or what they liked: I wouldn't have joined the WAR. I would like to kill my enemy. But become a bit of that huge obscene machine they called the war, that I never would, no, not if I died ten deaths and had eleven mothers violated. But I would like to kill my enemy: Oh, yes, more than one enemy. But not as a unit in a vast obscene mechanism. That never: no, never."

Poor Lilly was too earnest and vehement. Aaron made a fine nose. It seemed to him like a lot of words and a bit of wriggling out of a hole.

"Well," he said, "you've got men and nations, and you've got the machines of war--so how are you going to get out of it? League of Nations?"

"Damn all leagues. Damn all masses and groups, anyhow. All I want is to get MYSELF out of their horrible heap: to get out of the swarm. The swarm to me is nightmare and nullity--horrible helpless writhing in a dream. I want to get myself awake, out of it all--all that mass-consciousness, all that mass-activity--it's the most horrible nightmare to me. No man is awake and himself. No man who was awake and in possession of himself would use poison gases: no man. His own awake self would scorn such a thing. It's only when the ghastly mob-sleep, the dream helplessness of the mass-psyche overcomes him, that he becomes completely base and obscene."

"Ha--well," said Aaron. "It's the wide-awake ones that invent the poison gas, and use it. Where should we be without it?"

Lilly started, went stiff and hostile.

"Do you mean that, Aaron?" he said, looking into Aaron's face with a hard, inflexible look.

Aaron turned aside half sheepishly.

"That's how it looks on the face of it, isn't it?" he said.

"Look here, my friend, it's too late for you to be talking to me about the face of things. If that's how you feel, put your things on and

follow Herbertson. Yes--go out of my room. I don't put up with the face of things here."

Aaron looked at him in cold amazement.

"It'll do tomorrow morning, won't it?" he asked rather mocking.

"Yes," said Lilly coldly. "But please go tomorrow morning."

"Oh, I'll go all right," said Aaron. "Everybody's got to agree with you--that's your price."

But Lilly did not answer. Aaron turned into bed, his satirical smile under his nose. Somewhat surprised, however, at this sudden turn of affairs.

As he was just going to sleep, dismissing the matter, Lilly came once more to his bedside, and said, in a hard voice:

"I'm NOT going to pretend to have friends on the face of things. No, and I don't have friends who don't fundamentally agree with me. A friend means one who is at one with me in matters of life and death. And if you're at one with all the rest, then you're THEIR friend, not mine. So be their friend. And please leave me in the morning. You owe me nothing, you have nothing more to do with me. I have had enough of these friendships where I pay the piper and the mob calls the tune.

"Let me tell you, moreover, your heroic Herbertsons lost us more than ever they won. A brave ant is a damned cowardly individual. Your heroic officers are a sad sight AFTERWARDS, when they come home. Bah, your Herbertson! The only justification for war is what we learn from it. And what have they learnt?--Why did so many of them have presentiments, as he called it? Because they could feel inside them, there was nothing to come after. There was no life-courage: only death-courage. Nothing beyond this hell--only death or love--languishing--"

"What could they have seen, anyhow?" said Aaron.

"It's not what you see, actually. It's the kind of spirit you keep inside you: the life spirit. When Wallace had presentiments, Herbertson, being officer, should have said: 'None of that, Wallace. You and I, we've got to live and make life smoke.'--Instead of which he let Wallace be killed and his own heart be broken. Always the death-choice-- And we won't, we simply will not face the world as we've made it, and our own souls as we find them, and take the responsibility. We'll never get anywhere till we stand up man to man and face EVERYTHING out, and break the old forms, but never let our own pride and courage of life be broken."

Lilly broke off, and went silently to bed. Aaron turned over to sleep, rather resenting the sound of so many words. What difference did it make, anyhow? In the morning, however, when he saw the other man's pale,

closed, rather haughty face, he realised that something had happened. Lilly was courteous and even affable: but with a curious cold space between him and Aaron. Breakfast passed, and Aaron knew that he must leave. There was something in Lilly's bearing which just showed him the door. In some surprise and confusion, and in some anger, not unmingled with humorous irony, he put his things in his bag. He put on his hat and coat. Lilly was seated rather stiffly writing.

"Well," said Aaron. "I suppose we shall meet again."

"Oh, sure to," said Lilly, rising from his chair. "We are sure to run across one another."

"When are you going?" asked Aaron.

"In a few days' time."

"Oh, well, I'll run in and see you before you go, shall I?"

"Yes, do."

Lilly escorted his guest to the top of the stairs, shook hands, and then returned into his own room, closing the door on himself.

Aaron did not find his friend at home when he called. He took it rather as a slap in the face. But then he knew quite well that Lilly had made

a certain call on his, Aaron's soul: a call which he, Aaron, did not at all intend to obey. If in return the soul-caller chose to shut his street-door in the face of the world-friend--well, let it be quits. He was not sure whether he felt superior to his unworldly enemy or not. He rather thought he did.