

THE LIGHT SHONE IN THE DARKNESS

F. A. Brennan, '43

Today the beach was a dark red. Men, dripping with blood, moved crazily over the sands, and staggered toward toy-like craft that seemed filled to overflowing. For this was Dunkirk in her 1940 performance of hell—and above, below, and on all sides were fire, hate, confusion, and savagery. Torn bodies, crawling in piteous, snail-like fashion, appeared to shudder, jerk quickly upwards for a moment, and then grow still. Death and smoke were everywhere, and it was difficult to say which was predominant.

Near the water's edge a young Frenchman lay breathing heavily. Half his face was torn away, and from a deep wound in his chest came the now not uncommon thick, red blood, which quickly soaked into his tattered tunic. A flower of France, the *politiciens* had called him; not a very pretty looking flower just now as he lay there moaning.

"*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!* What a terrible way to die. Where are my friends? Where is Francois? Marie? Why I am left alone like this?"

His eyes closed. Only God knew how long he remained unconscious. For time seemed to belong to another setting than to this diabolical one. When again he saw, he beheld a figure bending over him, a figure dressed in a colourless uniform.

The stranger spoke, "Be at ease. I am a friend, wounded as yourself. Look!" He held a white hand over his breast and drew it away dripping a bright red.

"You see, we have this in common haven't we?" he said softly.

On the face of the youth there came a look of wonder, and his lips began to form words that were never spoken. For speech had left him, and there remained only a semi-consciousness. However, the dislike, apparent in his eyes, caused pain to shoot over the strained face of the figure above him.

"I know what is going on within you, friend. You know that death is near, and you fear it. You feel nothing but pity for yourself. Yet you are wrong."

He reached for a water-bottle and applied it to the lips of the one on the sands. The youth drank deeply, and appeared greatly relieved.

"That's better, is'nt it?," the stranger continued, "Now you view sorrow as existing for you alone. But many there are that have felt a sorrow greater than yours. You speak of war as though it were something forced upon you, and yet you are partly to blame for it. If you say that the injustice of men, that greed and lust for power are the main causes of strife, can you truthfully say that you never infringed on the rights of another, nor desired what was not yours?"

"Men may give divers reasons for wars, but the main and true one is selfishness."

The stranger paused, and a pleased expression swept over his features as he beheld a look of deep interest in the eyes of the youth.

"The main battle," he went on, "was fought nineteen hundred years ago. A truly great Soldier met the most hideous enemy and defeated him. It cost this Soldier His life. But He did'nt mind."

The man on the sands was eager now; his whole frame seemed moved with emotion.

"Come", said the stranger, "Give me your hand and I shall lead you to a place of safety."

The youth clasped the proffered hand, and as he did his soul shouted in joy. For the hand was like no other that he had ever held. It was bleeding now from a wound that ran completely through it, and it seemed to fill him with unutterable strength and joy. He looked at the wound in the Other's breast and understood; he looked into the Face and knew that all was well.

Hand in hand they walked over the sea, through the thick cloud of smoke, into the brighter light.

Behind them the guns still roared, huge machines still droned overhead, and men on the beach still made for the bobbing ships, unaware that Peace had been with them in the hour of battle.



Two principles in human nature reign,
Self-love to urge and reason to restrain.