

## Rebenged

**P**RIVATE MacNair of the —th Regiment gazed moodily over the rail of H. M. Transport "Canada" oblivious to the noise and excited conversation around him. On the previous day his battalion had been ordered to the scene of action and now was bound for the port of——. From here their march would be to the far-extended lines where millions of human beings, professing followers of the doctrine of Christ, of Peace on Earth, Good-Will to Men, were exerting their utmost energies towards the compassing of their mutual destruction. And with his regiment, in his heart a strange mixture of pride and fear, loathing and self-pity, would march Private John MacNair.

He was but a single instance of a not uncommon case. He had received a fair education, and then through a sudden business failure, his funds had been cut short, and he was left to carve out his own career. Clever and agreeable, and with the gregarious instinct highly developed, his circle of friends was large, and through their influence he soon obtained a position which afforded him a respectable though not luxurious income: This however, proved but a mistaken kindness, for, lacking the fuel of necessity, the fires of his ambition burned low, and the talents which might have shone before the world, became rusted from neglect. Even thus, moreover his lot was not a contented one. Cursed with a faculty of introspection, incapable of self-deceit, he was subjected to the exquisite torture of seeing plainly his own deficiencies, while his lack of will-power presented an insuperable barrier to greater achievement. These feelings, working together within his mind, bred one still more dangerous, a kind of self-contempt which boded ill for the future.

It was in one of these fits of despondency, when a sense of the gulf between possibility and actuality was strong upon him, and when he saw in imagination years of the same uselessness stretching through the

future, that he had enlisted. He had no sense of loyalty or patriotism, his country represented to him merely the land whose laws regulated his daily life. Neither did he deceive himself with any visions of glory to be won on the battlefield ; he well knew that, as a mere unit among so many millions, his very individuality would soon be lost. His chief motive was to be revenged upon himself, for he well knew what the tedium of the months of training would inflict upon his impatient indolent character.

And he had been well revenged. Only a clear perception of the probable consequences, together with a feeling half of pride, half of vanity, which would not allow him to appear lower than his fellows had kept him from deserting. The monotonous routine of camp life, the forced association with rough uncultivated and immoral soldiers, the necessity of instant obedience to the commands of those whom he secretly looked down upon, his weak, sensitive nature, bred in him a morbid cynicism which soon marked him out as one of the disaffected. No fault however could be found with his conduct—he shrank from incurring the consequences of allowing his feelings to express themselves in actions.

He had sailed with the First Contingent and, for a time the excitement and novelty attendant upon the change, had diverted his thoughts sufficiently to allow him to forget the unpleasantness of his incongenial environment ; but after two days on the voyage, life again grew monotonous, all the old discontent returned, and he welcomed the prospect of soon arriving in port where change of scene, if not of circumstances, might lend some interest to existence.

This, then, was his frame of mind as he stood upon the deck of the transport which bore him from his last connection with home. In an hour they would be landed and on the march, in a day or two at the scene of action, and then——. Hitherto he had been too much occupied with thoughts of existing inconveniences to cast more than a careless glance towards the ultimate goal, whither they were tending, but now that it lay immediately before him, he shrank from consideration of the prospect. In his heart he admitted to

himself that he was a coward, and the morbid reflections of the past months had worked upon his mind to such an extent that he knew that when the crisis arose he would be found wanting. In the agonies of his disordered imagination, he suffered a thousand deaths, but one in particular forced itself upon his mind—the thrust of a bayonet, the crushing, tearing progress of the steel through the body and its withdrawal followed by the bright stream of his life-blood. With a shudder he tried to dismiss the thought from his mind, but it only obtruded itself the more persistently, haunting him, oppressing him until he wanted to cry aloud in agony.

In the excitement of disembarking and listening to the cheers of the enthusiastic people who welcomed them as the bearers of their salvation, MacNair's mind found a temporary diversion. But on the long march, when the thought of the weighty issue now so close at hand kept his companions silent, once more the horror returned, goading him to madness.

On noon of the second day they arrived at the scene of battle. Futile would it be to attempt description, who would decree himself capable, or his pen worthy, of describing such a holocaust, the daily sacrifice of tens of thousands of human beings, the mad unreasoning lust in the hearts of millions of men to take the lives of those endowed by the Creator, with minds and souls like unto their own. Even were it possible to portray, I would rather pass over such a blot on our much-boasted civilization, leaving it for others to glory in the accumulation of destruction and desolation worked by man among his fellow-men.

The —th was ordered up to the trenches to support a regiment which had been almost annihilated in a gallant though futile charge upon the enemy. The habits engendered by constant discipline form the ruling part in a man's life and MacNair found himself mechanically obeying orders with the precision and coolness of a veteran. He had no time to analyse his feelings, the necessity for constant activity and thunder of battle in the air left him as one temporarily bereft of all power of reflection.



The point at which they were stationed was one of considerable strategic importance, and the enemy had been striving by an incessant fire, and by repeated charges to obtain possession of it. They could now be seen massing their forces in the opposing trenches, as if considering a final desperate assault. The officer commanding, despatched a hurried messenger imploring further reinforcements, as the ranks were sadly thinned and the men exhausted by repelling charges and making counter-attacks. But it was plain that the contemplated attack would be carried out before aid could arrive, and all that could be done was to reserve their fire and await the onset.

The tension was becoming unbearable, when a simultaneous movement in the forces arrayed against them was observed, and instantly the space between was covered with the charging ranks of the enemy. The English guns played upon them with deadly effect, but the space was too short to check their career, and in a moment they were in the trenches, thrusting, stabbing, striking, striving to drive the British and Canadians out by sheer weight of numbers.

MacNair, when the word had first passed around to prepare to receive a charge, found all the old terrors crowding back upon him with redoubled force. He tried to calm himself—to fortify his courage by observing the coolness of those around him, but his brain refused to respond, and only the fear of being slain by his own comrades kept him in the trench. While the charge was taking place, he stood as one bereft of the power of motion, nor when the enemy were actually upon them did he assume an attitude of defence.

Around him the trenches were full of fighting, cursing men, but he did not seem to realize it. Suddenly the man before him, having slipped in parrying a thrust, fell forward upon his opponent's bayonet. Through the turmoil of strife, he heard the sound of steel tearing its way through human flesh, saw the blade protrude between his comrade's shoulders, saw the blade withdrawn followed by the crimson gush of his comrade's life-blood, saw the enemy take a step in his direction with the bloody weapon in readiness for a

thrust, and with a shriek turned and fled. It seemed to him that he ran on and on for hours, and ever could he feel the point of his enemy's steel at his back, relentlessly waiting for the first sign of exhaustion to give the fatal thrust. He could bear it no longer. Something in his brain seemed to snap and with an inarticulate oath of despair, he turned and blindly rushed upon his pursuers, his only thought the desire to exact the price of his life-blood from the enemy. He felt the point of a bayonet in his breast, and then all was silence and darkness.

When he awoke to consciousness, six days later in a hospital in Northern France, but a dim recollection of the events which had transpired on that memorable day remained with him. But they told him how the troops had been forced to evacuate the trenches, and had retreated but a short distance, when one of their number shouting to come on (as they thought) had turned and charged upon the enemy, how, catching the spirit of action, the retreating forces had turned as one man and followed him ; how the enemy utterly demoralised by this attack from men whom they believed in full retreat, had, after a brief resistance, fled to their own trenches, whence, the English reinforcements coming up just then, had driven them before they had time to recover from their panic. And the name of the man who had saved the day for the British, and whose fame was now ringing throughout the Empire was Private John MacNair.

And during the weeks that he lay there recovering his health, for the fever which had set in had completely enervated him, the wonder of it all was borne in upon him. In the examples of patience, of courage, of loyalty constantly before him he saw with regret what he should have been ; and when he left the hospital to return to the front as Lieut. John MacNair, it was with a calm assurance in his own patience, in his own courage, in his own loyalty that augured well to carry him to achievements which would cause his name again to resound through Europe.