

there is no hope. I would burn the house down to make a bonfire to light him up the street if he could be there. You know where he is, dead in that French place."

The man's words were harsh and pitiless, but the voice, that had grown in a few months an old voice, was very anguished. He was become like a poor agonised death-stricken hound that will bite at itself and everyone in its torture.

"But Fritz," Maria pleaded, "the priest who wrote did not say he was dead."

"He said he had found the boy, among eleven others, in a room at a school used as a hospital, mortally wounded. He said he had given him the Last Sacraments, and praised his religion and devotion. When he went back next morning he had no hope of finding him alive, and he found him gone. The dead it seemed were taken at once to the mortuary and buried quickly. It was a French priest who lived near by the school who buried them."

"But," urged Maria, "the priest who wrote never saw him dead. He did not bury him, though he buried some that very day on which he looked for him and did not find him."

"He saw a list of the dead—English, French, and German—who were to be buried that day, and our Fritzchen's name was among them."

The agonised father was in terror of listening to delusive hope.

His wife went away again from his side, and crossed the room to where a crucifix stood, between carved wooden figures of Christ's bereaved Mother and St. John, and from under the pedestal of the cross took a letter and brought it over to the fire. By its light she read the often-read letter over again.

It was directed to the Archbishop of P., and was written in English. It bore date of October 18, 1914 and said:  
My Lord Archbishop,

I may not say whence this is written. We may not give the place of writing on any letter we write even to our nearest relations. I write this to Your Grace instead of to the parents of a poor lad I assisted during his last moments yesterday afternoon, because I think it certain a letter addressed to one in your high station sure to arrive, and also because I can venture to write in English to Your Grace, and I can scarcely write in German at all. I was able long ago, but have forgotten. I cannot talk much German either, but can understand it still if spoken slowly. Yesterday at dusk I visited one of the several hospitals in this town for the wounded. This one is really a school used as a hospital. In one of the class-rooms I found eleven poor fellows of your nation all brought in from the battlefield mortally wounded. Four were Catholics, and all four made their confession, and received Extreme Unction and Holy Viaticum. All were very devout, and full of religion. But I was touched most of all by the devotion of a big lad of nineteen (he looked older) who talked to me also after he had fulfilled his religious duties about his home and his parents with most tender love and regret. It was harrowing. He yearned so terribly for his home and them, and suffered so much more for

their bereavement than from his own wounds and pain. I was a long time with him, but at last he slept, through exhaustion, and I went away. Next morning I went back, but found his place empty—as were the ten other places. Ten were dead—one little lad had become sufficiently better to be removed to train-head for transference to another hospital. He had told me his name—Karl Fuick. Where my poor fellow had lain was his prayer-book, and in it was his name, Friedrich Günther, son of Friedrich Günther, of Marienhilf, near P—. He, with the other nine who had died since I was there yesterday—two English, four French, and three Germans—were all buried by a very charitable French priest who lives next to that school used as a hospital. That priest talked German perfectly, and was as kind to any poor wounded Germans as if they had been of his own nation. I did not think at once of writing through Your Grace to let the poor parents know how Christian an end their son made. I fear it will be more difficult to send their son's prayer-book as well as a letter, but I will ask, and do so if it is possible.

Begging Your Grace's Blessing,

I am, most respectfully,

Your servant,

HENRY MASTERS,

Military Chaplain.

Attached to the English letter was a German translation, but the poor mother and father fingered most the original paper traced by a hand that had given the last holy Unction to their boy.

"It is certain," Friedrich sobbed; "it is hopeless. When we cheat ourselves with false hope we lose him again each time the hope breaks down."

"We break down," the mother persisted, "not the hope."

"It is cruel to say that. It is cheating one over again. It is as you have been hinting—preaching rather. I grumbled because God sent us children I had not wanted, thinking them too many, thinking they would prevent me leaving Fritzchen rich. So God has stolen away the one I wanted to keep."

"How can God steal—who owns everything? That is a wicked word, and I was wicked to say what I did. God would not let a lad be killed to spite his father. God loved the boy more than we did."

"Not more than I did—speak for yourself," the father gruffly retorted.

Maria shuddered.

"Fritz," she asked, "have you ever asked God to send him home?"

"No. What use to ask the impossible! We shall go to him: he will come no more to us. Did David get his son back?"

"Did David ask? He said what you have just said. I ask every day, and all day long. I should ask if I had seen him killed."

This time it was the father who shuddered. His wife's indomitable faith frightened him.

"What is being killed to God?" the poor woman cried aloud. "Is one way of being dead beyond His power, and another not? Lazarus was as much dead as if he had been killed in battle. Jesus knew when he died, and went to bring him back. The Jews laughed at Him. 'Our friend sleepeth,' Jesus said, 'and I go to waken him out of

sleep.' Has He forgotten how to raise the dead because He has raised Himself from death. Fritz, my beloved bridegroom, ask Him! Kneel down and ask Him. And get up and go and light the candle in the window. It will lighten him home even if they put him into the ground—that foreign ground. Ask, ask, ask! Don't let God think you agree to his being dead."

"What is the use of asking the impossible!" groaned the wretched father.

"Impossible! For you, for me, for any of us; but how impossible for Christ who raised Himself out of His own grave? Kneel down and ask Him."

"She grows crazy," thought Friedrich; and to quieten her he knelt down and asked.

Outside the gloomy air was filling with the noise of the Christmas bells. They chimed a regular tune, the air of the anthem,

"For unto us a Son is given."

The snow fell thicker and faster now. If any passengers had been abroad their clothing would have been thick with soft whiteness. There was only one in all the street. He looked, in the wan light of Schaun's window, outside which he stood, like a snow man, such as the children make. Around his neck and face a thick comforter was wrapped, up to his eyes. That also was half snow-covered.

Pushing the shop-door open he went in and said gruffly:

"A Christmas tree, please. The biggest you have."

"Ah, we have no really big ones this year. Everyone is too poor: what money they can spare they spend on comforts to send to their sons and husbands at the war. We have but these little ones."

"Then I will take these three," said the stranger. "And all these candles and these pretty decorations."

So large an order much impressed Frau Schaun: the stranger must be rich.

"No presents?" she inquired, wondering what to offer.

"Only one."

"For three trees!"

"Yes, only one. It will be enough. I have it."

His pockets were certainly bulgy. Frau Schaun stared at them, wondering what they might hold.

"But only one present," she objected, "for three trees."

"Yes, only one. They won't complain."

The stranger's voice suddenly changed—it had been cheery, almost mischievous. It took on a certain note of uncertainty and dread.

"Are all well in the village," asked the stranger.

"All well. No! How could that be? With Frau Scheuch bedridden, and Mattheus Hienz half doubled with rheumatism! Plenty of illness. A hard season and not too much fuel or food. Certainly not all well."

"None dead though—since, since the summer?"

"Many families in mourning: for so many killed at the war. But none dead in the town, since Ferdinand Schreiner died in July. It was to be expected at his age—who can be surprised when one of ninety dies?"

A. H. Fitzgerald

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