

## Storyteller.

### THE LAST WEAPON.

(Continued.)

#### CHAPTER XI.

"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God."

"Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths."

"The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings; they have made them crooked paths; whosoever goeth therein shall never know peace. Therefore is judgment afar from us, neither does justice overtake us; we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness."

"We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes. We stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men."

"We roar like bears, and mourn sore like doves; we look for salvation, but it is far off from us."

From east to west the Child wandered, seeing all that the Rulers of the people commanded should be done in the name of liberty and righteousness and self-defence.

Wherever he went, he marvelled at the skill with which the Sons of Fear persuaded men to their own undoing and drove their victims to acts, fierce, bloody, ruthless, dishonourable.

The necessity to win was the battle-cry which men shouted in order to nerve themselves to deeds they so often hated.

And everywhere he found men and women with brave hearts, emptying themselves of all they held most dear, that they might staunch the wounds of the world. Yet the wounds grew and grew beyond their power of staunching, and a great despair gripped their souls as they toiled. And the Child found women in all lands, holding out imploring hands to each other, seeking, if it might be, to bridge the horror, and everywhere he found that the path of the men and women of peace was made more difficult because the Sons of Fear dogged their footsteps and stirred up

the great ones of the earth—aye, and some of the poorest—to crush them to silence.

But everywhere an undercurrent of misery, anger, blighted idealism, simple humanity, rolled beneath the surface, gathering strength for its hour.

And the Child, knowing already the evil that moves men to pursue their brothers for their own advantage, even in the times called peace, was not surprised to learn that in every country there were those who steadily throttled the people in their agony, and blessed the whole occasion as a means to their own aggrandisement and the domination of their class; for the Prince of Fear knew exactly where to deal out his honours and his riches in order to gain his ends, and where to throw his refuse of ruin.

The enemy had broken through the lines. Dead and dying lay behind them, and the terrified villagers fled into their homes, waiting, waiting.

A man clutched at his rifle; a woman hid a knife within her dress, or roused the fire to a roar, so that she might at least have boiling water wherewith to defend herself.

And the wild troops, sent forth whether they willed it or no, mad with the lust of battle, with reeking clothes, and hands red with their brother's blood, swarmed into the village, to drink, to demand, to curse. Women flying before them were caught in their arms. Old men, seeking to protect, were clubbed to death before the eyes of the terrified children.

Shells crashed into the church. Why not? The Christ God was betrayed. His name was taken in vain. It was no longer necessary that His house should stand. Let it also go down amidst the ruins.

The soldiery were called away to other work. The village was left, looted, shattered, and horror-stricken.

A few women crept out of their hiding places fearfully, to stare at one another. They whispered together with bated breath. Plans must be made. It was necessary to bury the dead and comfort the little children.

There were other women who hid themselves in an anguish too horrible for tears. And at night, the other army rushed through the village, and learning of all that had happened, the soldiers dashed forward, thirsting for revenge. The spirit of the tiger was

in their blood, and the weapons of Fear were in their hands.

And without mercy they fought, and without mercy they won, and flesh and blood sank down before their fearful onslaught.

Yet, behold, the enemy heard of the slaughter of their comrades, and were roused in their turn once more to fight, fight, fight. It was the only way.

"Through again!" said a boy, with a wild laugh, as he flung himself down wearily. He was coated with mud and stained with blood. "My luck as usual! Not a scratch!"

"Do you know any reason why this sort of work should not go on for ever?" remarked his companion, as he unwound his puttee. "Ach!" It had stuck in a nasty flesh wound.

"Want a hand?" asked the other.

"Thanks—a beastly scratch—but it was his last! I got him in the throat beautifully!"

"You see," moralised the boy, as he did first aid with quick skill, "I believe you're right. It must go on for ever unless we can find some other weapon! Something to decide it! Something that will put one of us on top without any manner of doubt!"

"We're stuck here, anyway!" said the other grumpily, for his wound was smarting badly.

"I say, that's dashed impudence!" exclaimed the boy.

"Why, what?"

"Over there!"

The enemy's trench was not two hundred yards away. A board was shot up into view, and on it was written the words: "You are fools!"

"Shall we pot at it?" cried the boy.

"Not worth ammunition," said a sergeant. Besides—it's dashed true!"

But the board had disappeared. It came up again, and they read: "We are fools!"

"That's more to the point than the other," remarked the sergeant.

"Some chap enjoying himself," laughed the boy. "It's gone—I wonder what next!"

The board came up again, and on it was written:

"Why not all go home?"

The boy didn't laugh. To his disgust, he knew his eyes were full of tears.

"Dash it!" he muttered. He looked shamefacedly towards the sergeant. But the sergeant looked away towards the