

## BOOK OF THE WEEK.

## "TOWARDS MORNING,"\*

This book may be compared to a film—a terrible, realistic series of moving pictures, which is marshalled before our fascinated eyes with relentless force.

It may awaken, perchance, for the first time, our pity for the unfortunate victims of the German military system, as page after page depicts for us the remorseless crushing of the individual into the powder that is destined to cement the nation, or, to use the simile of the author, "the cog mattered only so long as it served its purpose—it was the machine, the machine that mattered always."

To illustrate this system, this amazingly strong book has been produced, which follows from the cradle to the grave, nay even while the child was yet in its mother's womb, one unit of that vast army which, after long years of like preparation, have been ruthlessly sacrificed to satisfy the insolent claims of the War God.

The Herr Amtshreiber is awaiting with nervous expectation the advent of his first born. He himself had never been a success. How this is he doesn't know. "My Bureau Chief doesn't like me. I don't know why. I have always done my best."

On the other hand his brother-in-law was a great man. He had no sympathy with the expectant parents at the supreme crisis.

"Women have to go through with it. It's their duty. They were made for it. Mustn't make a fuss. We fight—they bear children. Na gut, it must be a boy, then. You know the good old custom, the first child to the Kaiser. A fine boy. See to it, my dear fellow."

The young Helmut was ten when he first went to the Gymnasium, and the sufferings of the unhappy, nervous child on the first day there and the cynical callousness which was meted out to him could not fail to raise the compassion of the hardest heart. His return home to his mother in the evening is told with a brevity and force that is a good example of the fine work of the writer.

"Well, Helmut."

He did not answer, and she took off the bright yellow cap of the Lower Fifth and ran her hand with a caress over the close-cropped head. "Why, you're going to be a real man, Helmut." She helped him to unstrap his books. There were ten of them. He had got to take everything that was in those dull covers and squeeze them into his head. And his head ached now, as if it were full to overflowing.

Suddenly he turned, and there was a note of quivering hysteria in the boy's voice.

"And shall I never play again, mother?"

For a moment they stared at each other. There was an aghast look on the woman's dull,

pale face. She turned away, as though there were something in his eyes she could not meet.

"You must be a man, Helmut," she said quietly. "Life isn't a game."

He was ten years old when he found out that life wasn't a game.

And the end of it all was that he failed to pass the necessary examination and was compelled to enlist as an ordinary soldier. We suppose one must be a German lad of the better class to appreciate what the humiliation of that would mean.

We cannot give, for want of space, the description of the cruel twenty-four hours' march, to satisfy the ambition of rival divisions whose officers had laid a bet on the endurance of their respective men.

It was Viet Thomas who told them—

"If we don't play up it will cost our little officers fifty bottles of fizz. You'll see how they'll hound us along. Of course you know it's all unofficial; but you know what *that* means. If we win, the Herr Oberst can begin thinking about himself as brigadier. If we don't, he'll wake up one morning with a top-hat on."

It was the little Herr Leutnant Müller that first spoke words of kindness and encouragement to Helmut, which for one brief evening lifted him out of his sullen despair. The little Leutnant was killed in a duel next morning at dawn. Helmut recalled a voice he had heard say, "We'll get our little Müller out soon—freeze him out, or kick him out; somehow. You'll see!"

So they drove the body of the little Leutnant home.

Johan cried. The tears splashed on to his tunic, and made big stains on the blue cloth.

But Helmut did not cry. His eyes were empty—stupid-looking.

That night he succumbed for the first time to the bestial pleasures of his companions, because his loneliness and isolation were more than he could bear. After his rapid descent into brutality it is said of him, "There were stains on the field grey uniform, grotesque stains on the peaceful face half hidden on the curve of his arm. It was as though while he slept, an enemy had wilfully besmeared him."

And the end of it *all* was—

"Helmut Felde, at dawn, for disobedience in the face of the enemy."

But Helmut by this very disobedience made good, and the incidents connected with it are stirring and pathetic beyond description.

The relating of the grinding to powder of this human soul is no mere figment of the imagination, it is rather the play of the imagination around facts; but it is an embodiment of the system which no fiction can over-estimate—the relentless Juggernaut which, please God, we, in our turn, are out to crush.

This book should be read with sympathy and understanding.

\* By I. A. R. Wylie. (Cassell & Co., London.)

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