

## PROGNOSIS

*Darkness is lifting to the dawn.*

*From the cross-roads the débris of a village can be seen, with roofless walls cutting jaggedly into the horizon's light, and, all around, a blackened area of tree-stumps. In the foreground there is a disused trench, against the wall of which some gassed-stiff figures are huddled stupidly, caught in a clump. From a shell-cavity, a boot protrudes entangled in a broken gun-wheel. Beyond the trench a wayside crucifix, untouched by shells, points heavenwards.*

*The hush, preceding the morning sounds of war, still reigns.*

*There is a stir, as of wings, and a whiteness is hovering above. The whiteness descends, and at the cross-roads stands an angel's blazing form. He remains motionless, gazing over the shattered village and the scene of desolation.*

*Above the trench the figure of Lucifer becomes discernible in dark outline, leaning with elbows on the parapet. For a while he watches the angel . . .*

*"God's in His Heaven; all's well with the world."*

*The angel disregards him. Lucifer leans forward a little: "On earth peace . . ."*

*He raises himself on to the parapet, using the clump of corpses; then reaches down with his hand and pulls at the heads, until a row of faces, distorted in the death-agony, are turned upwards hideously:*

## *The Coming of the Monster*

*“How these Christians love one another!” . . .*

*He notices the crucifix, with the eyes of the Christus resting upon two corpses beneath His feet—the hand of one still clutching a water-bottle held to the lips of his comrade. Lucifer recoils slightly, resuming his taunts with hands together as though in prayer:*

*(In German) “Oh God, give us victory.”*

*(In Russian) “Oh God, give us victory.”*

*(In French) “Oh God, give us victory.”*

*(In Italian) “Oh God, give us victory.”*

*(In English) “Oh God, give us victory.”*

*The angel has not stirred. Lucifer sighs pretentiously:*

*“What a problem!”*

*The slow whine of a shell is heard, travelling westwards. It lands on this side of the village, with sods flying and smoke rising. A travelling splinter strikes a corpse in the face, and remains embedded there. Lucifer regards the phenomenon for a moment; then pushes the face sideways with his foot:*

*“Turn the other cheek—you Christian!”*

*The face swings back.*

*“Little children—love one another.”*

*He pulls away a bayonet and mimics it being driven and twisted into a body, replaces it decoratively, and folds his hands again:*

*“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth . . . Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done . . . Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done . . .”*

*He listens, with a hand to his ear, eyes heavenwards; then studies the immobile form of the angel.*

*“You are like God—silent. Perhaps it is well.”*

*He becomes confidential:*

*“You know what they are saying? That He is deaf? He is not there? He has failed?”*

## *Prognosis*

*A second shell burst with a sharp detonation, nearer to the cross-roads. The angel has spread wide his wings, shielding the Calvary. Lucifer is interested:*

*“So that is why you are here.”*

*He assumes amusement:*

*“Is it worth while?”*

*His voice is suddenly metallic and hard:*

*“They will not whine beneath the Cross, when this is over.”*

*He indicates the desolation around. “Nor cringe—in the day of revolt.” He waits. And then leans nearer:*

*“Supposing men win where God has failed?”*

*The angel folds his wings slowly, and turns:*

*“Did Lucifer win—in the Day of Revolt?”*