

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?”