

THE MACHINES

By Frank Filson

Lieutenant Rycroft's first experience of battle was so stupendous that for a few minutes he forgot to be afraid. He lay upon his face behind the little shelter which he had dug with his sword, waiting for the command to charge. On either side of him he could see men lying down, also waiting, and adjusting the mechanism of their rifles.

He was lying amid a pandemonium of noises. The heavy shells from the guns roared over him incessantly. Mingled with these sounds came that of the smaller artillery, a defying screech that set his teeth on edge. And with these, but blending, as it were, was the hoot of rifle bullets, now overhead, now low beside him, occasionally varied with a spurt of dust as a bullet struck the ground.

He remembered his six months' training in England. How proud he had been to serve his country and how proud his people had been of him! The girls had hung on his arm; it had been a period of hard training in the camp, varied with short visits home. Gradually he had begun to find that there was more jollity in the camp. There every one had been kind to him, from the colonel down; they had been comrades together. At home, however, the sadness of the approaching separation had cast a shadow over everything. It was known that he was foredoomed to death. No officer could hope to go through those separate and multitudinous hells and escape alive. The best thing to anticipate was being invalided out, permanently crippled or disabled.

What every officer feared and none expressed was this: That, when the time of battle came, he might turn tail. None could know how he would behave. Rycroft had heard stories whispered of officers, high in rank, some of them, who found the stuns-

ning shock of battle too much for their nerves. There was a certain major—

Rycroft, being an imaginative boy, had anticipated the stunning horrors of battle. He knew that it would require all a man's resolution to face them. Still, he came of a military family, and he had believed that, when his time came, he would not be found wanting.

But this actual experience was more terrifying than anything he had



He Began to Run Forward

ever conceived. As he lay there, helpless, conscious that men were looking to him for leadership, he felt his blood turning to water. He was shaking, he felt the sweat stream down his face.

He had imagined a battle of men, but this was a battle of machines. It was machines that were vomiting out that hail of bullets, that fury of shells,