



"I can do no more than wish you good luck. However, you will start at once." With another salute Lyndham turned upon his heel and walked away.

The trigger. Sergeant Lyndham had more than half expected to be killed before the war was over, but he never pictured his end as coming like this—at the hand of one who was already little better than a dead man. Yet what was to be would be, and in what he believed to be his last moment upon earth a thought flashed across his mind. For the first time throughout the black night he had just passed he remembered what day this was, and



THE bosom of Sergeant Lyndham was filled to the brim with disgust and loathing. Nor was this disgust and loathing entirely without reason. Months of wallowing like a pig in the mud of trenches does not sweeten the soul, and when it is combined with endless duties in the cold fall rains of a shell-swept region that is akin to the borders of inferno, the nerves become ragged. Hence had come about the curdling of the milk of human kindness which had previously existed within him.

Nor had a few little midnight surprise parties over the top in which the bayonet had been the principal piece de resistance tended to decrease these sensations. Even being bowled 20 feet by the concussion of a shell had not cheered him. But it had reminded for a whiff of poison gas and a squirt of liquid fire to set and solidify his mind to its present condition. Alive, dead, or as yet unborn, Sergeant Lyndham was of the fixed opinion that he did not like the Boches.

And the last 24 hours had been particularly obnoxious from the fact that they had been entirely sleepless. The horizon was still lurid with cannon flashes and the uproar remained fiendish despite the fact that it was hours after midnight, but he was accustomed to such things, and knew that once asleep, they would not trouble him. Also, for all he knew, he might dream of something pleasant. He was free now for a few hours within his blankets, and was in the act of removing his boots when his captain thrust his head within and motioned for him to come forth. Knowing that something both new and disagreeable confronted him, he arose and stepped out as commanded.

For a quarter of a mile they silently wound their way along a muddy road until the dim lights of a partially shell-ruined house appeared before them. Into this they entered, and the sergeant, casting his eyes about, saw the colonel of his regiment sitting at a table. Saluting he stood at attention.

"Sergeant Lyndham," said the colonel thoughtfully. "A few months ago when you accompanied one of our airmen over the line and destroyed a plant of the enemy, you did a very brave and skillful thing. For that act you were made a sergeant. Tonight we must have another duty performed, and I have selected you because of my confidence in your courage and ability. It is very likely that you will not return, yet war demands its sacrifices. Without knowing more of this new duty do you volunteer to try and accomplish it?" It was plain enough now that there would be no rest or sleep for him again this night, and the sergeant's disgust and loathing mounted accordingly. Yet he managed to swallow them.

"Yes, sir," he granted. The colonel nodded.

"You are a brave and willing soldier, sergeant. Were it not for the fact that the regiment contains so many men like you I would sometimes become filled with fear and sadness. Now for the reason I sent for you. You will remember the trenches which run through Thier's woods, do you not?"

"Slightly, colonel. I helped capture them from the Boches at the point of the bayonet."

"And in turn were driven from them by the same amiable gentlemen," Lyndham made a wry face.

"Yes, colonel. But they surprised us most unfairly. It was all very disgusting and made me loathe them."

"I have no doubt. But now listen. We have reason to believe that they have evacuated the position, while it has become important that we regain it. You will follow my reasoning. If the enemy has deserted the ditch we wish to know it, while if he has not, it is equally important that we should know, since we must be advised beforehand what we may expect when we make our advance—whether resistance or unopposed occupancy. Therefore, we are compelled to send someone as a scout to ascertain the conditions."

"And because of the darkness and treetops the airmen are useless?"

"Exactly. Therefore, you will crawl upon your stomach to the wood, going alone the better to escape observation. By working your way flat upon the ground and instantly becoming still should their lights fall upon you, you may be mistaken by them for what you are likely to become—one of the dead men of which you will pass many, if you are lucky. Should you return with this information, well and good; if not, we will be compelled to adopt other means to secure our information. You had best plan to arrive there by the first light of day that you may be able to observe conditions. If you find the trenches empty, you will have to run for it coming back. We will be watching and if we see you returning, even though you may not succeed in reaching our lines, we will understand that



"A Merry Christmas to You, Fritz," He Grinned.

the sardonic humor of the thing filled him. "Shoot. And a merry Christmas to you, Fritz," he grinned.

Slowly the fingers of the other relaxed. His eyes softened, and a deep sigh came from the heaving chest. The bloodless lips opened again.

"Himmel! And so it is Christmas morning! I had forgotten." The hand sank to the ground and the head fell forward. Very faintly the voice was arising.

"Peace on earth and good will to man! What good that I should shoot you, when many more are doubtless at your back—and none of mine? These trenches you have regained—for the time being. Five minutes more and I shall be dead. I die—it is the holiest hour of a man's life as this is the holiest day. Nein, I will kill no more." His face raised, and a faint smile lighted it. "Merry Christmas, Englisher."



BEST CHRISTMAS GIFT

"A fountain pen," answered an enthusiastic young philosopher to the question, "What was your best Christmas gift?"

"I had a hundred-dollar watch given to me once," he added, "but even that isn't as necessary as a fountain pen. If you get the right kind you simply wouldn't be caught dead without it. It never leaks. It never clogs. It'll write a clear, steady line on any old paper. It'd be cheap at \$10, and it only cost \$2.50."

"What are you doing now?" I asked.

"Selling fountain pens," he said.—New York World.



A CHRISTMAS LULLABY

Half an hour before midnight on Christmas eve in Mexico the "Lullaby of the God Child" is sung. It is after this that the world-famous lullaby song of all Mexico, the "Roro," is heard. Every Mexican mother knows this "Rock-a-bye" song, which is supposed for the soothing of the infant Jesus. In time and tune it is not unlike the American song, "Old Gray Goose."

Many other nations besides the Mexicans have their Christmas songs, but not many have distinctive Yuletide lullabies.

"BOXING DAY"

A AMERICANS go back to the "grind" on the day after Christmas, snuffing the cigars that the wife chose because of the "pretty bands," but the Englishman observes boxing day that day. The name would lead one to suppose something in the nature of a fist encounter, but the supposition is wide of the mark. The "boxing" means simply boxes—the neat little packages presented to the housemaid, the cook, the postman, the policeman, the railway conductor, the dustman. The boxes are now generally quite round, about the size of a fifty cent piece in the great number of cases, and are as much silver as the government thinks best to put into a two shilling piece or a half crown.

CHRISTMAS REUNIONS

HOW many families whose members have been dispersed and scattered far and wide in the restless struggles of life are on this day reunited and meet once again in that happy state of companionship and mutual good will which is a source of such pure and unalloyed delight and one so incompatible with the cares and sorrows of the world that the religious belief of the most civilized nations and the rude traditions of the roughest savages alike number it among the first joys of a future condition of existence provided for the best and happiest! How many old recollections and how many dormant sympathies does Christmas time awaken!—Charles Dickens.