

"THE HUMAN SLAUGHTER HOUSE!"

BY WILHELM LAMSZUS

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CHAPTER VIII.

And in the thick of this hurly-burly of Death, amid these whistling lungs, amid these painting, red, panic-stricken faces, the cloud of shells strikes home, and hurls its hail of iron overhead. The water spurts up in jets.

And again!

Explosions and screams, and the hissing of lead, and the shrieks of men, and blood and water foam up, till no one knows whether he has been hit or is still alive; for in front of me—so close that I could clutch it—I see a jugular vein, ripped through, spurting in an arch like a fountain—and in his blood the fellow hit staggers back, and blood and howls surfeit the black flood, until it is at length reddened with human blood. Get on! get on! Don't look around! There—the other bank over there! There life is standing and spreading out his arms toward us. Get on! Before they have murdered all of us in this swamp! Get up! Get up! Thank God! The water's falling! Only up to the hips now—only up to the knees.

And now—

Our feet leap on to the dry, blessed land and strike forward beyond all control, and race over the field. They refuse to obey any orders. They are racing—racing toward the protection of the forest beckoning us of its mercy.

There! Headlong in among the trees, and into the bushes, into the thorns. There they are falling lifeless to the ground, their faces buried in the soil, and they are squeezing their eyes tight, to shut out the sight of the accursed blue of heaven that spat down on us so treacherously. You dogs! You beasts! To shoot us down from behind—it is nothing

more or less than cowardly assassination.

And slowly breath and consciousness return to us again, and when we have come to our senses we look at one another with dumb eyes, and these eyes presage nought that is good.

A great, unspeakable horror that will never be allayed again has risen in these eyes.

Half-way on the march some one fell down beside me, flung out his arms, clawed himself tightly to the earth, and screamed and gasped against the soil.

Barely half an hour later we saw another who had fallen into convulsions. And when we were lying in a damp ditch waiting for the enemy, a man suddenly jumped up, and shrieked and ran away. He laughed back at us from afar until he vanished from our sight in the rain. The shrieking and running away had infected us all. 'Twon't be long before it will be your turn.

One night when we were lying in our trenches, and had fallen asleep to the thunder of guns, I suddenly started up—confused—dazed; and lo, the stars were tanding bright in the dark, rainless sky and shone down solemnly, ah God; how solemnly, on the turmoil, as if nothing in this world mattered. Yet there—in front of me, before my very eyes—glimmered a red reflection—that surely must be a pool of blood, for the stars are mirrored in it so redly—and suddenly a blind rage overtook me to howl aloud and clench my fists, and to scream in the very face of the great Master up above there. But I had neither time to howl nor to run. For in this self-same night it so happened that an uncanny whirr fell on our ears from out the distance. That was Death flying toward us on propellers. The spectres of the night whirled above us; we shot blindly into the air—for every moment the