

THE NOBLE ARMY

BY WINIFRED KIRKLAND

CONVOCATION was being held at Fisher's Forks. The opening service was just over. It was nine o'clock of the June evening. The door of the little church was open and ruddy in the gloom, and the clergy were coming out in little groups, two or three with the white surplice thrown across the arm. There was a tramping of clerical feet on the side porch of the rectory, and a pushing open of the screen door, until at last all were gathered together in the rectory living-room, — all but one, and the story of his absence was such as to make one lift drawn lips of prayer to a God, who, we believe, desires men cheery.

How free they all were, here with each other, the world for which they were working shut out for a little while! Most of them had their fads, their dreams, and it was pure jollity to talk of them freely to each other, for at home, each in his little dull gossipy village had learned to guard his speech well, and to bear the loneliness. Forder, a quiet old man, shrunken and lame, told the rector's wife of his flower-beds. Forder was perhaps the greatest living authority on the book of Job, but nobody knew it, for he never told. What he loved was roses, and sometimes he shyly sent to the *Floral Journal* a treatise on the diseases of the fair things he handled so gently.

And here O'Lane could talk in the wonderful way, in which he dared so rarely to indulge. His witty tongue had already cost him three parishes and he knew it, but his friends saw that he

fought with all his will against his own sarcasm, fought hardest that the caustic might not turn in upon his own soul and poison his work.

They were nearly all of them frankly poor, the shoulders of more than one clerical coat turning shiny.

'Oh, yes,' — Corning's big voice commanded a pause in the conversation, — 'we can all wipe dishes. Perhaps,' he added, 'Dailey can't.'

Dailey had inherited money. He looked down sheepishly at the cameo ring on one finger, at the gleam of gold at his fob. Without doubt Dailey was a dandy, and ashamed of it. He did not say that he had been up all night doing homely offices for a dying old man because there was no other watcher and the poor old wife was worn out.

They talked proudly of their boys in college, and openly of the ways and means of keeping them there, the sharp struggle. And the lads, too, were fighting their way pluckily; one heard bits quoted from the letters they sent home. He was the proudest father who could speak of a son in the seminary, with young face set toward the same old struggle his father knew so well; only, when the father spoke of his boy, he did not seem to remember the hardship of his calling, but only the blessing of service written on its portals.

At last the rector, who had been waylaid by a crabbed sexton, entered, swinging the church keys in his hand, mine host of the evening. All turned toward him. Perhaps no man was ever

more unconscious of the love that people bore him than the rector. He walked through life and never knew the healing in his handshake, the inspiration in his merry eyes. To-night he only knew that the brethren, each one dear to his friendly heart, were all there under his roof, and that they would have a jolly evening. He marshaled them forthwith into the study, a smoky room so small that two of the ministers had to sit on the desk and a third on the stove. The rector distributed the pipes and tobacco and cigars. He had a saucebox remark for every one, poking his fun at each in his most charming manner. He pulled a skull cap out of a drawer and set it on his thick silver hair, and leaned back, pipe in mouth, to enjoy them all, himself the heart of the group. He was fifty-five and still a boy. He clasped his hands behind his head, the long slim hands that show the generations of gentlemen. There was a black splash of court-plaster on one finger, a battle-scar from the morning's wood-chopping; he was so prone to hurt himself, the rector with the blue eyes sweet as a child's.

They smoked until the little study was cloudy, and the student lamp burned dim. It was the time for storytelling and their laughter sounded out into the blue June night. They were uproariously funny, joke capping joke. It was the camp-fire fun of soldiers whom bravery makes good laughers. Thus they kept themselves from the subject that was filling the hearts of all the brotherhood, — pity for the sorrow of the brother who was not there. There was a pause, at last broken abruptly by Everley, the young deacon: 'I suppose he will not come.'

Then they fell to talking about the absent one, until from the broken hints of the conversation even the two or three who did not know him perceived the picture of Grant's personality.

'The lad,' the rector called him, thinking of the days of Grant's diaconate, when he had driven over fortnightly to Fisher's Forks to receive instruction from the rector. It had been an illuminating study for the older man, that teaching the 'lad.' The name was fitting, for there must be something child-like in the soul of a man for whom trust in the good is inviolate, and whose hands had never been fettered in their doing. Yet Grant was not a boy, thirty-two at his ordination three years before. He had received the call in the market-place, his brother clergy said softly. Most of them had known him when he was a storekeeper, a man of great, simple righteousness, and of quaint, terse words, fraught with a philosophy of which he seemed unconscious. He had kept his hardware store at Duxbury until the very day of his ordination. He had not had experience of either college or seminary. Three of the neighboring clergymen had given him the instruction necessary for his examination for the priesthood. Corn-ing and the rector were of these three.

They spoke now of the zest of teaching him, of their privilege in watching the growth of the inspiration burning through the man. Sometimes the lesson would be given in the rear of the store, and would be interrupted by the calls of customers, interruptions that Grant seemed not to feel, always coming back to the argument or translation at the very word where he had left off. The testament in Hebrew and the testament in Greek lay on his desk along with his ledgers and his newspaper. His teachers remembered just how he had leaned across the counter, his eyes close to theirs, and they saw again the knitting and unknitting of his right hand, often blackened with service given his assistants about the stoves, while he spoke of his faith. Questions and answers both showed a rugged,

fearless brain, and the older men, with their larger learning, listened to the words of this shopman as to a new and more profound evangel.

The testimony to the force of Grant's personality was that he had been called to the church of his own town, and for three years had worked among people who had known him from babyhood. They liked to hear the twang of their own provincialism from his lips, for he spoke to them directly as townsman to townsman. He was a great tall fellow for whom his chancel seemed too small as he walked to and fro across it in his preaching. No surplice could conceal his muscular frame, no cassock cramp the swing and stride of him. People listened to him as people do listen to a man who sees the Christ.

How strange the event that must baffle the power of their young prophet! The fellowship in the rector's little study grew silent with the pity of it. They were men used to trusting the inscrutable. Their calling showed them to the world as those chosen to declare that the Unseen is good, and yet now they wondered mutely why God had chosen to break so great a heart. They were men of a delicacy which flushed their cheeks that they should intrude even in thought on a brother's privacy. They spoke only in shy, broken words of Grant's sorrow, of Judith, his wife.

Grant had found her on a vacation visit to the South and had brought her home to his parish, with her mother, two years before. The clergy said to each other that they had always, in visiting Grant's home, found themselves boyishly bashful in his wife's presence, and ashamed of the feeling afterward, for she was a mere girl, most winsome, rounded and ringleted, and wide-eyed as a child. Grant's friends had tried to shake themselves free of a vague distrust. If Mrs. Grant had been a little less beautiful, less graceful and charm-

ing; but she was so young that surely some day she might grow up to the steadfastness of their own wives. There was really nothing for tangible reproach. It was the mother who took charge of the housekeeping and of all parish work, but the wife was always at her side, in church, in Sunday school, at the sewing society,—and yet.

It was Everley, the mystic, whose interest in Grant's wife had been greatest, an interest frequently coincident with repulsion. He thought she laughed too often, a low laugh, sweet and silvery. To Everley, Judith Grant, with her great eyes and bare, dimpled elbows, had seemed ice-hearted as a fairy, and he had wondered what fascination Grant's great soul had found in this elfin woman; not seeing that her attraction for her husband was the intensity of the attraction she had for other men, namely, mystery.

Within the last year had come whispers, swelling to a buzz of slander. When these came to the ears of the clergy they had denied them hotly, yet knowing of experience that such rumors are prone to be true. Also, his friends believed that no suspicion had ever crossed Grant's soul. Then last Saturday had come the terrible exposure, when Grant himself had found her.

And now what was left for him to do, they asked each other, asked themselves. In the shadow the tears were running down the rector's face. It was possible for him to bury her in some quiet place with her mother, and go far off to do his work, but this could not be because she was his wife. Could he then continue to preach to others with that shame in his own home? The practical side must be considered; however brilliant the minister, what church could endure a minister's wife who was a drunkard? Grant must see as clearly as they, his fellows, saw, that he would be driven from parish to parish as the

secret of his house became known. Could Grant then cease to speak the faith, with such fire and wonder of it burning in him? Would his inspiration endure, crushed as he was? Everley looked out through the open door at the stars in the Eastern sky, and prayed that his service might never be put to so terrible a test. Yet, his thought ran, if the Christ does not hold comfort for all tortures a man may feel, how is He true at all?

Five miles to westward, along a hill-road odorous with woods at night, Grant was driving fast through the star-bright darkness, coming to the Convocation, little expected as he was. The brain plays strange tricks when a strong man has not slept for three nights. He seemed to think wholly in visual images, vivid and swift as a drowning man's. He saw the growth of his faith as the withdrawing of veil after veil from across the face of Christ, until the Galilean stood forth in all simplicity of manliness. Grant's conviction had been a matter of feeling more than thought, the logic of his brain supporting the perception of his spirit. Is it possible, Grant had questioned, to draw so near to this Jesus of history that time and the physical senses are annulled, and in actuality one walks as close to his person as did Peter and John? If this is possible, the riddle of life is simple as music. With impatience Grant struck aside all other argument, all dogma of creeds and churches; if this Christ cannot be lived, he said, He is a lie; if in all the world there is one hurt He cannot heal, He is a lie. Slowly the presence had grown for him clearer and clearer and more abiding, so that he came to speak and move and think, looking straight into the eyes of Jesus. When he spoke to Him he called him 'Friend,' and their comradeship was real as that of man and man.

In the darkness a wet branch flung across Grant's face like the arm of a living thing. He struck at it savagely, then relaxed his hand, remembering that he had not slept and must be careful. Of all the things for which he could not forgive Judith, this was the hardest, the loneliness of his three days' fight with God. It came flashing over him that from the first his marriage had been unholy. Yet what more innocent than his first memory of Judith! It was in the South, and it was at the time of the flowering of the red-bud hedges. She stood on the farther side of a hedge breast-high. A spaniel was leaping toward the white rose she held high above his head. She was bare-necked, bare-armed and wore a high-waisted dress of white. Her curls were done high on her head. They were jetty black, while her skin was white and pink as a sweet pea. Her eyes were neither brown nor gray, and you could see the white below the lower rim of the iris. Her lips were so young that she looked like a child dressed as a grown-up just for fun. He had loved her and won her and brought her home, but he had never known her, he told himself now.

His first sense of being distant from her had come on the occasion of the first of the 'headaches,' now so sickeningly well understood. Judith would lock herself away, and would not let him come near her, allowing only her mother to tend her. The husband would pace below in an anguish of sympathy, only hoping that if he were patient, not insistent, he might some day grow so close to his wife that she would let him cherish her in sickness. At last Judith would come out to him, languid, with a mistiness over her eyes, and he would take her into his arms as if she had been a sick child. The disgust, the dupery of it!

Yet he wondered if he had been

wholly blind since that morning when he had seen Judith's eyes so strange, a look in them that he had never forgotten. It was a morning of sunlight after a week of rain, and he had been saying the breakfast grace. As he opened his closed eyes he met Judith's fixed on him, wide-open, inscrutable.

On and on, as he drove through the night, still those burning pictures whirled through his brain. If he could only sleep just five minutes, and forget it, forget Judith lying there on the pavement. He had turned into the village street from a country walk, and quickened his pace at seeing a crowd ahead of him. Some fight perhaps or some trouble, for a stout arm and a ringing voice to put an end to. How swiftly the men and boys fell away, to leave him to look at Judith fallen there! He sprang to her, lifted her up, turned savagely on the men who had dared to stand looking at her, not helping her. Some one answered his look, —

'We was trying to git her home, David. She just fell.'

'What happened? What's the matter?' cried Grant.

'She's drunk,' a small boy said; but some one kicked him into the gutter, and the rest stood silent.

As he looked about on that ring of faces, in all was pity, in none surprise. Over Judith's fairy form, what subtle, hideous abandonment; her lips were close to his. In Grant's brain something seemed to snap with the swiftness of his realization. In a stupor of shame he carried his wife home. At the door he met her mother, who looked at him, not at Judith, in mute horror. He laid the unconscious girl on her bed, and left her. Then he locked himself in his study. He stumbled over a hassock, and lay there on the floor on his face.

Several times that night he heard the mother come to his door, and finding it locked, shuffle away. On the

morning of Sunday, she knocked timidly. He opened on her pinched, old face, long past tears.

'Here's some coffee,' she said, 'and will you — will you — preach to-day?'

'No.'

'What shall I tell people?'

'What you please. Tell them that I have nothing to say to them.' This was because the face of the Friend was turned away from him; for all night long he had cursed Him.

That day and the next and the next the mother hovered about him as often as she dared, looking the pity and alarm she might not speak. At last she said, nervously wetting her lips before she spoke, —

'You think it was all my fault, David?'

'You got it for her,' he said, not raising his head.

'She'd have killed herself if I had n't,' the mother explained in her tired, patient voice.

It was strange even to himself that he could not pity her as she stood there, a meagre old woman plucking her knitted shawl.

'What are you going to do to us?' she whispered.

'Nothing.'

The answer seemed to fill her with alarm.

'What are you going to do yourself?' she asked.

'I don't know.'

'O David, isn't it true any more, what you've preached?'

'I don't know.'

'You poor boy!' she pressed her hand on his head; 'I wish we all were dead!'

He had never asked after Judith or seen her from Saturday until to-day, Tuesday. As he had sat in his study this afternoon, his eyes turned from the light, she had come stealing in. She wore a white wrapper and her hair was

unbraided. She knelt down beside him with her elbows on his knee. She looked soft and lovely as a little girl. 'When are you going to forgive me, Davy?' she asked. It filled him with disgust that she should be there in his study in a white wrapper, with her hair loose. He looked down into her face, silent. Suddenly she sprang away from him. She stood grasping the black marble of his mantelpiece with one tense hand, a quivering fury.

'You dare not to love me! You dare to look at me like that! Do you think I'll be good now, ever, ever? You — you fool!'

He noticed that she was barefooted; the words broke from him, —

'Go and dress yourself!'

He could hear her laughing all the way upstairs.

'Oh, God, God, God!' he groaned. God had sent a demon to laugh in his ears like that all his life, and did God think that he would forgive Him, would go on praying to Him, and preaching for Him! Now he, too, was laughing.

Once Grant had said, If He cannot help, He is a lie. But through all this, he found that he could not annul God. For the Friend sat just on the other side of the desk, actually seen, the sweep of the robe, the sandaled feet, motionless; only now He sat with face averted, for again and again across the desk Grant had whispered, 'Curse Thee! Curse Thee!'

Out in the street a boy's call fell with the torture of a goad on Grant's nerves. He could have struck the child down; then he shivered at the horror he was becoming. He had never hated before, and he hated those footfalls upstairs. He spoke to the Friend. 'O don't you see that I must have sleep?' he said.

He found himself talking as if in a dream, complaining like a little child.

'The loneliness is hurting my head. There is n't anybody to take care of

me. Somebody must help me.' A paper fluttered off the desk-top. He stooped to pick it up, and found it the notice of the Convocation. It was this very day, now. They were all there, those strong, sweet men of whose company he was. There was relief in the mere thought of pressing their hands, looking into their eyes. They were old, some of them, yet unflinching; perhaps they might teach him how to forgive God.

Thus it was that he found himself driving down the long hills toward the lights of Fisher's Forks, and drawing rein before the rectory.

Just outside the screen-door of the rector's study a tall form loomed, a white face looked in on them. There was an instant's lull of surprise, then they gave him welcome simply and heartily as if he had been expected. Corning leading, they resumed the merry talk of the earlier evening. They let Grant sit unheeded in the shadow; only Everley's eyes watched him, questioning, 'Is Christ true?' And the rector's pity brooded over the 'lad.' Presently the door opened on the little glowing Millicent, in a crimson dress, white-aproned; her black curls fell about her face, and her lips were pursed with anxiety, for she carried a tray of coffee-cups, and it was difficult in the crowded study to move about and serve the guests without any spilling. She came to Grant last, and setting down her empty tray, snuggled into his arms, for they were comrades. In the night outside, the moon was just rising over the rim of hills. There was freer air out there. Unobserved, Grant and the little girl slipped out. They seated themselves on the bench under the apple tree, where they could watch the moon float up on their right, and on the left look into the study. They could hear scraps of the good cheer there. The tension of Grant's brain was less-

ening. He could feel a lassitude steal all over his body to the ends of his fingers; in all his life he had never felt so tired. He was too tired to hate Judith now, too tired to fight God. The Friend had followed him; He sat on Grant's other side; Grant could not get away from Him.

Grant looked toward the genial fellowship in the study and, listening to quip and laugh, remembered how he had thought cheer the finest praise. On all those faces there was wistfulness and peace and honest fun. Grant was recalling what he knew of the lives of these his friends. Corning, bluff, jovial, bravest of buffoons — Grant remembered the cry of the idiot child amid the play of Corning's little ones. He saw again the whitening of the father's lips as he told him how his son had been made a changeling by a nurse's carelessness. Forder sat in a corner of the bookcase, chuckling quietly to himself over the jokes. Once on a summer evening while they walked among the rose plants, Forder had talked to him very quietly, looking across the line of village gardens toward the peace of the hills, of the baby the dead wife had left to him to rear; of the boy who had run away from him. For a long time the father had hunted for him, always finding him sunk in worse and worse evil, until at last he had come home quietly to his bachelor housekeeping and the binding of roses in summer evenings. O'Lane, brilliant and witty; Grant knew that always there walked at his heel the spectre of insanity. And the rector, growing old, but still sunshine-hearted — there was a daughter of whom the rector never spoke, though she was

ten years dead, a wonderful girl dying at seventeen, and only because they could not buy the southern sunshine that would have given her life. Since her death the rector had always walked with a stoop, and he had never spoken her name. Had they all, all those black-coated men in the study, had their fight with God? If so God had prevailed, for their laughter rang true. The noble army of martyrs praise Thee — the words sounded and resounded through Grant's brain.

It was by no means usual for the brotherhood to close such an evening as this with prayer, but their hearts were over-full to-night, and all were glad when the rector asked them to kneel. He offered the Collect for God's care in the darkness, then they said, 'Our Father.' Out in the moonlight, Grant still sat motionless. There was a pause; then the rector with closed, uplifted eyes prayed, —

'O Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world,'

'Grant us thy peace,' they whispered.

'O Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world,'

'Have mercy upon us!'

Grant had fallen on his knees in the grass.

'God, I forgive Thee,' he said. 'O Friend, come back!'

Half an hour later the rector sought them. Millicent's head was on Grant's shoulder, but his lips were pressed to the hair of the woman whom God had commanded him to pity. The rector, coming up behind them, laid a hand on each head.

'It is late,' he said, 'time to say your prayers and go to bed, children.'

THE CLASSICS AGAIN

A DIALOGUE CONCERNING THE LOEB CLASSICAL LIBRARY ¹

BY HENRY DWIGHT SEDGWICK

BROWN, *a historian.*

JONES, *a clergyman.*

ROBINSON, *a dilettante.*

Scene, Brown's apartment.

BROWN; *enter* JONES.

Brown. — How d' do, Jones, delighted to see you. I hope that you are very well.

Jones. — Very well, my dear boy, and you? How are you getting on with your work? Have you the German microscope under your eye? Are you putting the atomic theory to use in history?

[*Enter* ROBINSON]

Robinson. — How d' do, how d' do? How are you, parson? And how are you, Mommsen Gregorovius Macaulay?

Brown. — I have been loafing lately. I felt the need of contrast, of looking about me a little at the actual world. If one does not turn away from dead records occasionally, one is in danger of forgetting that history professes to be a record of life.

Jones. — Does it? If the histories that I see record life, the world has been horribly dull. All past generations of Germans must have been delighted to die. I dare say that history should

be a record of life; it certainly should record enough of human experience to teach us, the living, what to do and what to let alone. History ought to be of service; that is its justification.

Robinson. — Yes, service in a broad sense, that whatever adds an interest to life is serviceable. I don't mean to correct you, *mon vieux*, but I am afraid you are tarred with the notion of a moral interpretation of history.

Jones. — You can't avoid the moral interpretation of history, *mon cher*, unless you are willing to eliminate from our lives metaphysics, ethics, relig —

Robinson. — Gladly, gladly!

Brown. — Have a cigar?

[*They take cigars and light them*]

Jones [*picking up a book*]. — Hullo! You, too, have got the Loeb Classical Library. Have you looked at it?

Brown. — Yes, a little, at the first volumes that have come out.

Robinson. — I subscribed the other day. I have an empty shelf at the top of my bookcase that needs to be filled up. I call it my *Via Appia*, because I bury the classics there.

Jones. — Do you frequent it?

Robinson. — I read them on Sunday mornings as an excuse for not attending your church.

Jones. — I'm more than glad to

¹ The Loeb Classical Library. Edited by T. F. PAGE and W. H. D. ROUSE. The Macmillan Co.