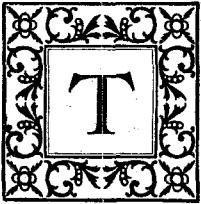


A Son at the Front

BY EDITH WHARTON

BOOK III

XXIV



THE gates of Paris were behind them, and they were rushing through an icy twilight between long lines of houses, factory chimneys and city-girt fields, when Campton

at last roused himself and understood.

It was he, John Campton, who sat in that car—that noiseless swiftly-sliding car, so cushioned and commodious, so ingeniously fitted for all the exigencies and emergencies of travel, that it might have been a section of the Nouveau Luxe on wheels; and the figure next to him, on the extreme other side of the deeply upholstered seat, was that of Anderson Brant. This, for the moment, was as far as Campton's dazed perceptions carried him. . .

The motor was among real fields and orchards, and the icy half-light which might just as well have been dusk was turning definitely to dawn, when at last, disentangling his mind from a tight coil of passport and permit problems, he thought: "But this is the road north of Paris—that must have been St. Denis."

Among all the multiplied strangenesses of the last strange hours it had hardly struck him before that, now he was finally on his way to George, it was not to the Argonne that he was going, but in the opposite direction. The discovery held his floating mind for a moment, but for a moment only, before it drifted away again, to be caught on some other projecting strangeness.

Chief among these was Mr. Brant's presence at his side, and the fact that the motor they were sitting in was Mr. Brant's. But Campton felt that such enormities were not to be dealt with yet.

He had neither slept nor eaten since the morning before, and whenever he tried to grasp the situation in its entirety his soul fainted away again into outer darkness. . .

His companion presently coughed, and said, in a voice even more than usually colourless and expressionless: "We are at Luzarches already."

It was the first time, Campton was sure, that Mr. Brant had spoken since they had got into the car together, hours earlier as it seemed to him, in the dark street before the studio in Montmartre; the first, at least, except to ask, as the chauffeur touched the self-starter: "Will you have the rug over you?"

The two travellers did not share a single rug: a separate one, soft as fur and light as down, lay folded on the grey carpet before each seat; but Campton, though the dawn-air was biting, had left his where it lay, and had not answered.

Now he was beginning to feel that he could not decently remain silent any longer; and with an effort which seemed as mechanical and external as the movements of the chauffeur whose back he viewed through the wide single sheet of plate-glass, he brought out, like a far-off echo: "Luzarches. . .?"

It was not that there lingered in him any of his old sense of antipathy toward Mr. Brant. In the new world into which he had been abruptly hurled, the previous morning, by the coming of that letter which looked so exactly like any other letter—in this new world Mr. Brant was nothing more than the possessor of the motor and of the "pull" that were to get him, Campton, in the shortest possible time, to the spot of earth where his son lay dying. Once assured of this, Campton had promptly and indifferently acquiesced in Miss Anthony's hurried sug-

gestion that it would be only decent to let Mr. Brant go to Doullens with him.

But the exchange of speech with any one, whether Mr. Brant or another, was for the time being manifestly impossible. The effort, to Campton, to rise out of his grief, was like that of a dying person struggling back from regions too remote for his voice to reach the ears of the living. He shrank into his corner, and tried once more to fix his attention on the flying landscape.

All that he saw in it, speeding ahead of him even faster than their own flight, was the ghostly vision of another motor, carrying a figure bowed like his, mute like his: the figure of Fortin-Lescluze, as he had seen it plunge away into the winter darkness after the physician's son had been killed. Campton remembered asking himself then, as he had asked himself so often since: "How should I bear it if it happened to me?"

He knew the answer to that now, as he knew everything else a man could know: so it had seemed to his astonished soul since the truth had flashed at him out of that fatal letter. Ever since then he had been turning about and about in a vast glare of initiation: of all the old crowded misty world which the letter had emptied at a stroke, nothing remained to him but a few memories of George's boyhood, like a closet of toys in a house knocked down by an earthquake.

The vision of Fortin-Lescluze's motor vanished, and in its place Campton suddenly saw Boylston's screwed-up eyes staring out at him under furrows of anguish. Campton remembered, the evening before, pushing the letter over to him across the office table, and stammering: "Read it—read it to me. I can't—" and Boylston's sudden sobbing explosion: "But I *knew*, sir—I've known all along..." and then the endless pause before Campton gathered himself up to falter out (like a child deciphering the words in a primer): "You *knew*—knew that George was wounded?"

"No, no, not that; but that he might be—oh, at any minute! Forgive me—oh, do forgive me! He wouldn't let me tell you that he was at the front," Boylston had faltered through his sobs.

"Let you tell me——?"

"You and his mother: he refused a citation last March so that you shouldn't find out that he'd exchanged into an infantry regiment. He was determined to from the first. He's been fighting for months; he's been magnificent; he got away from the Argonne last February; but you were none of you to know."

"But why—why—why?" Campton had flashed out; then his heart stood still, and he awaited the answer with lowered head.

"Well, you see, he was afraid: afraid you might prevent... use your influence... you and Mrs. Brant..."

Campton looked up again, challenging the other. "He imagined perhaps that we *had*—in the beginning?"

"Oh, yes"—Boylston was perfectly calm about it—"he knew all about that. And he made us swear not to speak; Miss Anthony and me. Miss Anthony knew... If this thing happened," Boylston ended in a stricken voice, "you were not to be unfair to her, he said."

Over and over again that short dialogue distilled itself syllable by syllable, pang by pang, into Campton's cowering soul. He had had to learn all this, this overwhelming unbelievable truth about his son; and at the same instant to learn that that son was grievously wounded, perhaps dying (what else, in such circumstances, did the giving of the Legion of Honour ever mean?); and to deal with it all in the wild minutes of preparation for departure, of intercession with the authorities, sittings at the photographer's, and a crisscross of confused telephone-calls from the Embassy, the Préfecture and the War Office.

From this welter of images Miss Anthony's face next detached itself: white and withered, yet with a look which triumphed over its own ruin, and over Campton's wrath.

"Ah—you knew too, did you? You were his other confidant? How you all kept it up—how you all lied to us!" he had burst out at her.

She took it firmly. "I showed you his letters."

"Yes: the letters he wrote to you to be shown."

She received this in silence, and he followed it up. "It was you who drove

him to the front—it was you who sent my son to his death!”

Without flinching, she gazed back at him. “Oh, John—it was you!”

“I—I? What do you mean? I never as much as lifted a finger——”

“No?” She gave him a wan smile. “Then it must have been the old man who invented the Mangle!” she cried, and cast herself on Campton’s breast. He held her there for a long moment, stroking her lank hair, and saying “Adele—Adele,” because in that rush of understanding he could not think of anything else to say. At length he stooped and laid on her lips the strangest kiss he had ever given or taken; and it was then that, drawing back, she exclaimed: “That’s for George, when you get to him. Remember!”

The image of George’s mother rose last on the whirling ground of Campton’s thoughts: an uncertain image, blurred by distance, as indistinct as some wraith of Mme. Olida’s evoking.

Mrs. Brant was still at Biarritz; there had been no possibility of her getting back in time to share the journey to the front. Even Mr. Brant’s power in high places would necessarily have fallen short of such an attempt; and it was not made. Boylston, despatched in haste to bear the news of George’s wounding to the banker, had reported that the utmost Mr. Brant could do was to write at once to his wife, and arrange for her return to Paris, since telegrams to the frontier departments travelled more slowly than letters, and in nine cases out of ten were delayed indefinitely. Campton had asked no more at the time; but in the last moment before leaving Paris he remembered having said to Adele Anthony: “You’ll be there when Julia comes?” and Miss Anthony had nodded back: “At the station.”

The word, it appeared, roused the same memory in both of them; meeting her eyes, he saw there the Gare de l’Est in the summer morning, the noisily manœuvring trains jammed with bright young heads, the flowers, the waving handkerchiefs, and everybody on the platform smiling fixedly till some particular carriage-window slid out of sight. The scene, at the time, had been a vast blue to Campton: would he ever again, he wondered,

see anything as clearly as he saw it now, in all its unmerciful distinctness? He heard the sobs of the girl who had said such a blithe goodbye to the young *Chasseur Alpin*, he saw her going away, led by her elderly companion, and powdering her nose at the *laiterie* over the cup of coffee she could not swallow. And this was what her sobs had meant...

“This place,” said Mr. Brant, with his usual preliminary cough, “must be—.” He bent over a motor-map, trying to decipher the name; but after fumbling for his eye-glasses, and rubbing them with a beautifully monogrammed cambric handkerchief, he folded the map up again and slipped it into one of the many pockets which honeycombed the interior of the car. Campton recalled the deathlike neatness of the banker’s private office on the day when the one spot of disorder in it had been the torn telegram announcing Benny Upsher’s disappearance.

The motor lowered its speed to make way for a long train of army lorries. Close upon them clattered a file of gun-wagons, with unshaven soldiers bestriding the gaunt horses. Torpedo-cars carrying officers slipped cleverly in and out of the tangle, and motor-cycles, incessantly rushing by, peppered the air with their explosions.

“This is the sort of thing he’s been living in—living in for months and months,” Campton mused.

He himself had seen something of the same kind when he had gone to Châlons in the early days to appeal to Fortin-Lescluze; but at that time the dread significance of the machinery of war had passed almost unnoticed in his preoccupation about his boy. Now he realized that for a year that machinery had been the setting of his boy’s life; for months past such sights and sounds as these had formed the whole of George’s world; and Campton’s eyes took in every detail with an agonized avidity.

“What’s that?” he exclaimed.

A huge continuous roar, seeming to fall from the low clouds above them, suddenly silenced the puny rumble and clatter of the road. On and on it went, in a slow pulsating rhythm, like the boom of waves driven by a gale on some far-distant coast.

"That? The guns—" said Mr. Brant.

"At the front?"

"Oh, sometimes they seem much nearer. Depends on the wind."

Campton sat bewildered. Had he ever before heard that sinister roar? At Châlons? He could not be sure. But the sound had assuredly not been the same; now it overwhelmed him like the crash of the sea over a drowning head. He cowered back in his corner. Would it ever stop, he asked himself? Or was it always like this, day and night, in the hell of hells that they were bound for? Was that merciless thud forever in the ears of the dying?

A sentinel stopped the motor and asked for their pass. He turned it about and about, holding it upside-down in his horny hands, and wrinkling his brows in the effort to decipher the inverted characters.

"How can I tell—?" he grumbled doubtfully, looking from the faces of the two travellers to their unrecognizable photographs.

Mr. Brant was already feeling for his pocket, and furtively extracting a bank-note.

"For God's sake—not that!" Campton cried, bringing his hand down on the banker's. Leaning over, he spoke to the sentinel. "My son's dying at the front. Can't you see it when you look at me?"

The man looked, and slowly gave back the paper. "You can pass," he said, shouldering his rifle.

The motor shot on, and the two men drew back into their corners. Mr. Brant fidgeted with his eye-glasses, and after an interval coughed again. "I must thank you," he began, "for—for saving me just now from an inexcusable blunder. It was done mechanically . . . one gets into the habit . . ."

"Quite so," said Campton drily. "But there are cases—"

"Of course—of course."

Silence fell once more. Mr. Brant sat bolt upright, his profile detached against the wintry fields. Campton, sunk into his corner, glanced now and then at the neat grey silhouette, in which the perpendicular glint of the eye-glass nearest him was the only point of light. He said to himself that the man was no doubt suffer-

ing horribly; but he was not conscious of any impulse of compassion. He and Mr. Brant were like two strangers pinned down together in a railway-smash: the shared agony did not bring them nearer. On the contrary, Campton, as the hours passed, felt himself more and more exasperated by the mute anguish at his side. What right had this man to be suffering as he himself was suffering, what right to be here with him at all? It was simply in the exercise of what the banker called his "habit"—the habit of paying, of buying everything, people and privileges and possessions—that he had acquired this ghastly claim to share in an agony which was not his.

"I shan't even have my boy to myself on his death-bed," the father thought in desperation; and the mute presence at his side became once more the symbol of his life's disaster.

The motor, with frequent halts, continued to crawl slowly on between lorries, field-kitchens, artillery wagons, companies of haggard infantry returning to their cantonments, and more and more vanloads of troops pressing forward; it seemed to Campton that hours elapsed before Mr. Brant again spoke.

"This must be Amiens," he said, in a voice even lower than usual.

The father roused himself and looked out. They were passing through the streets of a town swarming with troops—but he was still barely conscious of what he looked at. He perceived that he had been half-asleep, and dreaming of George as a little boy, when he used to have such bad colds. Campton remembered in particular the day he had found the lad in bed in a scarlet sweater, in his luxurious overheated room, reading the first edition of Lavengro. It was on that day that he and his son had first really got to know each other; but what was it that had marked the date to George? The fact that Mr. Brant, learning of his joy in the book, had instantly presented it to him—with the price-label left inside the cover.

"And it'll be worth a lot more than that by the time you're grown up," Mr. Brant had told his step-son; to which George was recorded to have answered sturdily: "No, it won't, if I find other stories I like better."

Miss Anthony, who had assisted at the conversation, had reported it triumphantly to Campton; but the painter, who had to save up to give his boy even a simple present, could see in the incident only one more attempt to rob him of his rights. "They won't succeed, though, they won't succeed: they don't know how to go about it, thank the Lord," he had said.

But they had succeeded after all; what better proof of it was there than Mr. Brant's tacit right to be sitting here beside him to-day; than the fact that but for Mr. Brant it might have been impossible for Campton to get to his boy's side in time?

Oh, that pitiless incessant hammering of the guns! As the travellers advanced the noise grew louder, fiercer, more unbroken; the closely-fitted panes of the car rattled and danced like those of an old omnibus. Sentinels stopped the chauffeur more frequently; Mr. Brant had to produce the blue paper again and again. The day was wearing on—Campton began again to be aware of a sick weariness, a growing remoteness and confusion of mind. Through it he perceived that Mr. Brant, diving into deeper recesses of upholstery, had brought out a silver sandwich-box, a flask and glasses. As by magic they stood on a shiny shelf which slid out of another recess, and Mr. Brant was proffering the box. "It's a long way yet; you'll need all your strength," he said.

Campton, who had half turned from the invitation, seized a sandwich and emptied one of the glasses. Mr. Brant was right; he must not let himself float away into the void, seductive as its drowsy shimmer was.

His wits returned, and with them a more intolerable sense of reality. He was all alive now. Every crash of the guns seemed to tear a piece of flesh from his body; and it was always the piece nearest the heart. The nurse's few lines had said: "A shell wound: the right arm fractured, fear for the lungs." And one of these awful crashes had done it: bursting in mystery from that innocent-looking sky, and rushing inoffensively over hundreds of other young men till it reached its destined prey, found George, and dug a

red grave for him. Campton was convinced now that his son was dead. It was not only that he had received the Legion of Honour; it was the appalling all-destroying thunder of the shells as they went on crashing and bursting. What could they leave behind them but mismatched fragments? Gathering up all his strength in the effort not to recoil from the vision, Campton saw his son's beautiful body like a carcass tumbled out of a butcher's cart. . .

"Doullens," said Mr. Brant.

They were in a town, and the motor had turned into the court of a great barrack-like building. Before them stood a line of empty stretchers such as Campton had seen at Châlons. A young doctor in a cotton blouse was lighting a cigarette and laughing with a nurse—laughing! At regular intervals the cannonade shook the windows; it seemed the heart-beat of the place. Campton noticed that many of the window-panes had been broken and patched with paper.

Inside they found another official, who called to another nurse as she passed by laden with fresh towels. She disappeared into a room where heaps of bloody linen were being stacked into baskets, returned, looked at Campton and nodded. He looked back at her blunt tired features and kindly eyes, and said to himself that they had perhaps been his son's last sight on earth.

The nurse smiled.

"It's three flights up," she said: "he'll be glad."

Glad! He was not dead, then; he could even be glad! In the staggering rush of relief the father turned instinctively to Mr. Brant; he felt that there was enough joy to be shared. But Mr. Brant, though he must have heard what the nurse had said, was moving away; he did not seem to understand.

"This way—" Campton called after him, pointing to the nurse, who was already on the first step of the stairs.

Mr. Brant looked slightly puzzled; then, as the other's meaning reached him, he coloured a little, bent his head stiffly, and waved his stick toward the door.

"Thanks," he said, "I think I'll take a stroll first . . . stretch my legs . . ." and

Campton, with a rush of gratitude, understood that he was to be left alone with his son.

XXV

HE followed his guide up the steep flights, which seemed to become bouyant and lift him like waves. It was as if the muscle that always dragged back his lame leg had suddenly regained its elasticity. He floated up as one mounts stairs in a dream. A smell of disinfectants hung in the cold air, and once, through a half-open door, a sickening odour came: he remembered it at Châlons, and Fortin's murmured: "Gangrene—ah, if only we could get them sooner!"

How soon had they got *his* boy, Campton wondered? The letter, mercifully sent by hand to Paris, had reached him on the third day after George's arrival at the Doullens hospital; but he did not yet know how long before that the shell-splinter had done its work. The nurse did not know either. How could she remember? They had so many! The administrator would look up the files and tell him. Only there was no time for that now.

On a landing Campton heard a babble and scream: a nauseating scream in a queer bleached voice that might have been man, woman or monkey's. Perhaps that was what the French meant by "a white voice": this voice which was as featureless as some of the poor men's obliterated faces! Campton shot an anguished look at his companion, and she understood and shook her head. "Oh, no: that's in the big ward. It's the way they scream after a dressing..."

She opened a door, and he was in a room with three beds in it, wooden pallets hastily knocked together and spread with rough grey blankets. In spite of the cold, flies still swarmed on the unwashed panes, and there were big holes in the fly-net over the bed nearest the window. Under the net lay a middle-aged bearded man, heavily bandaged about the chest and left arm: he was snoring, his mouth open, his gaunt cheeks drawn in with the fight for breath. Campton said to himself that if his own boy lived he should like some day to do something for this poor devil who was his room-mate. Then he looked about him

and saw that the two other beds were empty.

He drew back.

The nurse was bending over the bearded man. "He'll wake presently—I'll leave you"; and she slipped out. Campton looked again at the stranger; then his glance travelled to the scarred brown hand on the sheet, a hand with broken nails and blackened finger-tips. It was George's hand, his son's, swollen, disfigured but unmistakable. The father knelt down and laid his lips on it.

"What was the first thing you felt?" Adele Anthony asked him afterward: and he answered: "Nothing."

"Yes—at the very first, I know: it's always like that. But the first thing *after* you began to feel anything?"

He considered, and then said slowly: "The difference."

"The difference in *him*?"

"In him—in life—in everything."

Miss Anthony, who understood as a rule, was evidently puzzled. "What kind of a difference?"

"Oh, a complete difference." With that she had to be content.

The sense of it had first come to Campton when the bearded man, raising his lids, looked at him from far off with George's eyes, and touched him, very feebly, with George's hand. It was in the moment of identifying his son that he felt the son he had known to be lost to him forever.

George's lips were moving, and the father laid his ear to them; perhaps these were last words that his boy was saying.

"Old Dad—in a motor?"

Campton nodded.

The fact seemed faintly to interest George, who continued to examine him with those distant eyes.

"Uncle Andy's?"

Campton nodded again.

"Mother——?"

"She's coming too—very soon."

George's lips were screwed into a whimsical smile. "I must have a shave first," he said, and drowsed off again, his hand in Campton's...

"The other gentleman——?" the nurse questioned the next morning.

Campton had spent the night in the

hospital, stretched on the floor at his son's threshold. It was a breach of rules, but for once the major had condoned it. As for Mr. Brant, Campton had forgotten all about him, and at first did not know what the nurse meant. Then he woke with a start to the consciousness of his fellow-traveller's nearness. Mr. Brant, the nurse explained, had come to the hospital early, and had been waiting below for the last two hours. Campton, almost as gaunt and unshorn as his son, pulled himself to his feet and went down. In the hall the banker, very white, but smooth and trim as ever, was patiently measuring the muddy flagging.

"Less temperature this morning," Campton called from the last flight.

"Oh," stammered Mr. Brant, red and pale by turns.

Campton smiled haggardly and pulled himself together in an effort of communicativeness. "Look here—he's asked for you; you'd better go up. Only for a few minutes, please; he's awfully weak."

Mr. Brant, speechless, stood stiffly waiting to be conducted. Campton noticed the mist in his eyes, and took pity on him.

"I say—where's the hotel? Just a step away? I'll go around, then, and get a shave and a wash while you're with him," the father said, with a magnanimity which he somehow felt the powers might take account of in their subsequent dealings with George. If the boy was to live he could afford to be generous; and he had decided to assume that the boy would live, and to order his own behaviour accordingly.

"I—thank you," said Mr. Brant, turning toward the stairs.

"Five minutes at the outside!" Campton cautioned him, and hurried out into the morning air through which the guns still crashed methodically.

When he got back to the hospital, refreshed and decent, he was surprised, and for a moment alarmed, to find that Mr. Brant had not come down.

"Sending up his temperature, of course—damn him!" Campton raged, scrambling up the stairs as fast as his stiff leg permitted. But outside of George's door he saw a small figure patiently mounting guard.

"I stayed with him less than five minutes; I was merely waiting to thank you."

"Oh, that's all right." Campton paused, and then made his supreme effort.

"How does he strike you?"

"Hopefully—hopefully. He had his joke as usual," Mr. Brant said with a twitching smile.

"Oh, *that*—! But his temperature's decidedly lower. Of course they may have to take the ball out of the lung; but perhaps before they do it he can be moved from this hell."

The two men were silent, the same passion of anxiety consuming them, and no means left of communicating it to each other.

"I shall look in again later. Shall I have something to eat sent round to you from the hotel?" Mr. Brant suggested.

"Oh, thanks—if you would."

Campton put out his hand and crushed Mr. Brant's dry fingers. But for this man he might not have got to his son in time; and this man had not once made use of the fact to press his own claim on George. With pity in his heart, the father, privileged to remain at his son's bedside, watched Mr. Brant's small figure retreating alone. How ghastly to sit all day in that squalid hotel, his eyes on his watch, with nothing to do but to wonder and wonder about the temperature of another man's son!

The next day was worse; so much worse that everything disappeared from Campton's view but the present agony of watching, hovering, hanging helplessly on the words of nurse and doctor, and spying on the glances they exchanged behind his back.

There could be no thought yet of extracting the bullet; a great surgeon, passing through the wards on a hasty tour of inspection, had confirmed this verdict. Oh, to have kept the surgeon there—to have had him at hand to watch for the propitious moment and seize it without an instant's delay! Suddenly the vision which to Campton had been among the most hideous of all his crowding nightmares—that of George stretched naked on an operating-table, his face hidden by a chloroform mask, and an orderly hurrying away with a pile of red towels like those perpetually carried through the passages below—this vision became to the father's fevered mind as soothing as a

glimpse of Paradise. If only George's temperature would go down—if only the doctors would pronounce him strong enough to have the bullet taken out! What would anything else matter then? Campton would feel as safe as he used to years ago, when after the recurring months of separation the boy came back from school, and he could take him in his arms and make sure that he was the same Geordie, only bigger, browner, with thicker curlier hair, and tougher muscles under his outgrown jacket.

What if the great surgeon, on his way back from the front, were to pass through the town again that evening, reverse his verdict, and perhaps even perform the operation then and there? Was there no way of prevailing on him to stop and take another look at George on the return from his tour of inspection? The idea took immediate possession of Campton, crowding out his intolerable anguish, and bringing such relief that for a few seconds he felt as if some life-saving operation had been performed on himself. He stood watching the great man's retreat, followed by doctors and nurses; and suddenly Mr. Brant touched his arm, and the eyes of the two met. Campton understood Mr. Brant's look and gasped out: "Yes, yes; we must get him to come back."

Mr. Brant nodded. "At all costs." He paused, again interrogated Campton's eyes, and stammered: "You authorize—?"

"Oh, God—anything!"

"He's dined at my house in Paris," Mr. Brant threw in, evidently trying to justify himself.

"Oh, go—go!" Campton almost pushed him down the stairs. Ten minutes later he reappeared, modest but exultant.

"Well?"

"He wouldn't commit himself, before the others—"

"Oh—"

"But to me, as he was getting into the motor—"

"Well?"

"Yes: if possible. Somewhere about midnight."

Campton turned away, choking, and stumped off toward the tall window at the end of the passage. Below him lay the

court. A line of stretchers was being carried across it, not empty this time, but each one with a bloody burden. Doctors, nurses, orderlies hurried to and fro. Drub, drub, drub, went the guns, shaking the windows, rolling their fierce din along the cloudy sky, down the stone corridors of the hospital and the pavement of the streets, like huge bowls crashing through story above story of a kind of sky-scraping bowling alley.

"Even the dead underground must hear them!" Campton muttered.

The word made him shudder superstitiously, and he crept back to George's door and opened it; but the nurse, within, shook her head.

"He must sleep after the examination. Better go."

Campton turned and saw Mr. Brant waiting. A bell rang twelve. The two men, in silence, walked down the stairs, crossed the court (averting their eyes from the stretchers) and went to the hotel to get something to eat.

Midnight came. It passed. No one in the hurried confused world of the hospital had heard of the possibility of the surgeon's returning. When Campton mentioned it to the nurse she smiled her tired smile, and said: "He could have done nothing."

Done nothing! How could she know? How could any one, but the surgeon himself? Would he have promised if he had not thought there was some chance? Campton, stretched out on a blanket and his rolled-up coat, lay through the long restless hours staring at the moonlit sky framed by the passage window. Great clouds swept over that cold indifferent vault: they seemed like the smoke from the guns which had not once ceased through the night. At last he got up, turned his back on the window, and stretched out again facing the stairs. The moonlight laid a white strip along the stone floor. A church-bell rang one . . . two . . . there were noises and movements below. Campton raised himself, his heart beating all over his body. Steps came echoing up—the steps of several persons.

"Careful!" some one called. A stretcher rounded the stair-rail; another, and another. An orderly with a lantern

preceded them, followed by one of the doctors, an old bunched-up man in a muddy uniform, who stopped furtively to take a pinch of snuff. Campton could not believe his eyes; didn't the hospital people know that every bed on that floor was full? Every bed, that is, but the two in George's room; and the nurse had given Campton the hope, the promise almost, that as long as his boy was so ill she would keep those empty. "I'll manage somehow," she had said.

For a mad moment Campton was on the point of throwing himself in the way of the tragic procession, barring the threshold with his arms. "What does this mean?" he stammered to the nurse, who had appeared with a little lamp at the end of the passage.

She gave a shrug. "More casualties—every hospital is like this."

He stood aside, wrathful, impotent. At least if Brant had been there, perhaps by some offer of money—but how, to whom? Of what earthly use, after all, was Brant's boasted "influence"? These people would only laugh at him—perhaps put them both out of the hospital!

He turned despairingly to the nurse. "You might as well have left him in the trenches."

"Don't say that, sir," she answered; and the echo of his own words horrified him like a sacrilege.

Two of the stretchers were carried into George's room. Campton caught a glimpse of George, muttering and tossing; the moonlight lay in the hollows of his bearded face, and again the father had the sense of utter alienation from that dark delirious man who for brief intervals suddenly became his son, and then as suddenly wandered off into strangeness.

The nurse slipped out of the room and signed to him.

"Both nearly gone . . . they won't trouble him long," she whispered.

The man on the third stretcher was carried to a room at the other end of the passage. Campton watched him being lifted in. He was to lie on the floor, then? For in that room there was certainly no vacancy. But presently he had the answer. The bearers did not come out empty-handed; they carried another man and laid him on the empty stretcher.

Lucky, lucky devil; going, no doubt, to a hospital at the rear! As the procession reached the stairs the lantern swung above the lucky devil's face: his eyes stared ceilingward from black orbits. One arm, swinging loose, dangled down, the hand stealthily counting the steps as he descended—and no one troubled, for he was dead.

At dawn Campton, who must have been asleep, started up, again hearing steps. The surgeon? Oh, if this time it were the surgeon! But only Mr. Brant detached himself from the shadows accumulated in the long corridor: Mr. Brant, crumpled and unshorn, with blood-shot eyes, and gloves on his unconscious hands.

Campton glared at him resentfully.

"Well—how about your surgeon? I don't see him!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Brant shook his head despondently. "No—I've been waiting all night in the court. I thought if he came back I should be the first to catch him. But he has just sent his orderly for instruments; he's not coming. There's been terrible fighting—"

Campton saw two tears running down Mr. Brant's face: they did not move him.

Mr. Brant glanced toward George's door, full of the question he dared not put.

The father answered it. "You want to know how he is? Well, how should he be, with that bullet in him, and the fever eating him inch by inch, and two more wounded men in his room? *That's* how he is!" Campton almost shouted.

Mr. Brant was trembling all over.

"Two more men—in his room?" he echoed shrilly.

"Yes—bad cases; dying." Campton drew a deep breath. "You see there are times when your money and your influence and your knowing everybody are no more use than so much sawdust—"

The nurse opened the door and looked out. "You're talking too loudly," she said.

She shut the door, and the two men stood silent, abashed; finally Mr. Brant turned away. "I'll go and try again. There must be other surgeons . . . other ways . . ." he whispered.

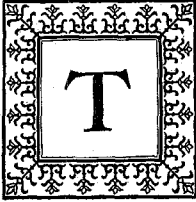
"Oh, your surgeons . . . oh, your ways!" Campton sneered after him, in the same whisper.

(To be continued.)

Are Our Universities Overpopulated?

BY HENRY S. PRITCHETT

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THE discussions of present-day educational difficulties have taken the form of intimations from one quarter and another that too many young men and women are to-day enrolled in our universities, and that the country would be better off if that attendance were, by some process or other, cut down. College presidents, editors, and other makers of public opinion have tossed this ball from one hand to the other without finding any comfortable resting-place for it.

Before undertaking to judge the present situation with respect to the relation of numbers to the effectiveness of the work done by the universities, it is well to bear in mind a few fundamental conditions that are closely related to the rise of the present difficulties.

We have in this country no universities in the strict sense. Institutions in the United States that bear that name are a mixture of the undergraduate college and the graduate university. In most institutions, even the older ones such as Harvard and Yale, the undergraduate college contains so large a number of students, its activities in athletics, in social affairs, and in other directions are so numerous and engage so much of public attention, that the university activities are, in the public mind at least, overshadowed. Perhaps the greatest exception to this statement is found in the case of Columbia University which has a relatively small undergraduate college, limited extramural activities, and is engaged almost wholly in university work either in the prosecution of graduate studies or in the professional schools of law, of medicine, and of teaching. It is not astonishing, under these circumstances, that the football team of Columbia University is not in the same class with those of Harvard,

Yale, and Princeton, which notwithstanding their age are still predominantly colleges. The process by which this telescoping of college and university came about was a very natural one. When the undergraduate colleges were founded, there was no intention of superimposing a university upon them. They represented, at the time, the highest form of education which American institutions of learning offered.

Forty-six years ago, when Johns Hopkins University was founded, it offered for the first time in the United States a distinctive university programme. The faculty that President Gilman gathered was an extraordinary group of able men. The university addressed itself to scholars. It assumed that the students who came to it had already completed undergraduate courses of study entitling them to enter upon scholarly and professional work. The effect of this example upon American university schools has been far-reaching. The graduate schools of the older universities have, in large measure, arisen out of the example set by Johns Hopkins.

Unfortunately, Johns Hopkins University very soon departed from its original university conception. The desire for undergraduate students, for a college of its own, and for all the things that go with undergraduate life became apparently too strong, and to-day Johns Hopkins, apart from its medical school, has few of the characteristics of a university. It removed to a suburban campus, the activities of the ordinary undergraduate college were expanded, and the university became essentially what other American universities are—a mixture of college and university, with the activities in athletics and other student undergraduate pursuits playing a larger and larger rôle in the life of the institution. To-day, except for its medical school, Johns Hopkins has to a large extent lost the primacy which it once enjoyed.