



WHEN the door opened in response to Carson's impatient "Come," there appeared on the threshold a young man of probably twenty-four, and so striking in appearance that Carson rose instinctively and placed a chair in readiness for him. Then he returned to his own and said very politely:

"Is there anything that I can do for you?"

The young man sat down, and after brushing a mass of tawny hair back from his forehead, replied:

"Forgive me if I say that you are the antithesis of all the editors I've ever read about. They told me at the boarding-house that I should meet with rebuffs—that so many persons wrote short stories that it was next to impossible for a beginner to gain the favor of a conversation with an editor."

He took an envelope from his pocket and held it toward Carson. "I think it's a most wonderful story," he said. "Will you read it, and if you like it pay for it?"

Carson couldn't repress the sigh. He picked up the visitor's slip that had come from the commissionaire at the door of the building, and said reproachfully:

"You state here that your business is of great import."

"I dare to think that it is," the young man replied. "You see, I believe this story will help people at a time where sympathy is most needed. It is the first story I have ever written."

"Indeed?" said Carson coldly. He was glancing at the first page of the manuscript. "You've even forgotten the title."

"No, I hadn't forgotten it. I couldn't think of one."

"What's it all about?" asked Carson smiling at the delightful ingenuousness.

"About the war."

Carson dropped the manuscript on his desk.

"We don't want any more war stories. We're fed up with them. People are sick of

reading war stories. Those who have lost friends and relatives don't want to be reminded of their grief; those who haven't wish to have their minds diverted from the calamity that has befallen the world. It was your name that attracted me—"Gilead."

The young man nodded acknowledgment of the doubtful compliment.

"Who led you astray and induced you to take to writing?"

"No one," said Gilead. "It just came to me—the idea. There was a little woman in the lounge at the boarding-house where I am staying. She was sobbing her heart out, because that morning she had received notice that her husband had lost his life in Flanders. I spoke a few words of sympathy to her; but she told me it was past sympathy, her grief. She became hysterical in her declamations against the enemy."

"And quite right, too," said Carson. "There's no room for the ordinary war story, Mr. Gilead. Write a 'Hymn of Hate,' and I'll publish it and pay for it."

Mr. Gilead's face underwent a change. The large, pathetic eyes looked past Carson. He said to him:

"You have lost some one dear to you?"

"My son," said Carson quietly. "My only child."

There was a long moment of silence; then the voice of Gilead came pleadingly:

"I wish you'd publish that story."

"I'll read it," said Carson, with an attempt at compromise. "I believe in encouraging new writers, although I'll be quite frank with you—the magazine is not doing as well as it might, and it's risky work to encourage new blood at the expense of one's property." He added quickly: "I'm only the editor."

The big eyes were inviting confidence. More, they couldn't be resisted.

"We were doing fairly well before this war came," said Carson, trying to turn his back on

the visitor and finding it impossible, "but the circulation has been dropping steadily since. The proprietors won't spend money on the magazine. They expect me to make bricks without straw.

"Why, if I said to you, 'Yes, I'll publish your story,' I couldn't pay you enough to buy you a good dinner. There! That's the position. I could have made it go if it hadn't been for this cursed war."

"The war will not last forever," remarked Gilead.

"No," said Carson; "nor will I. I was fifty last week. And if this publication should fail, I fail with it. And, my boy, this is the hardest profession in the world in which to start again at fifty. I don't know why I should be telling you this."

"I know," Gilead exclaimed quickly. "You're thinking of your son. Your heart's just bursting for sympathy."

"Is it?" Carson affected indifference. "Well, I'm only one of thousands, I suppose. That's why I say to you it is no good publishing an ordinary war story. You're young, so that you have plenty of time to learn how to gauge the public taste.

"War stories were all right at the opening of hostilities. There was a thrill in them, for those who wanted thrills—fictional thrills. But, by Heaven! there have been enough real thrills in most families in the country during the last two years, and there is a difference between the real and the fictional thrill. It's when the war comes home to you hard, when something happens that strikes right into your very life—it's when— You are a young man without responsibilities, I gather?"

"I am alone in the world, but I try to make a friend of every one I meet. I find it is much more pleasurable than to seek to make enemies."

"Ah!" said Carson, still in that bitter tone. "I've made nothing but enemies since I

received a letter from the War Office informing me that my boy had been killed while bravely leading his section out of a trench.

“Not hundreds, not thousands, but millions of enemies; a whole nation I marked down in my mind as enemies—enemies to be hated and contemned all the rest of my life—enemies that no amount of peace talk and preaching will ever make human to my mind.

“When they killed my boy, they killed my faith. He and I had understood each other so perfectly since the night his mother died. He brought back into my life all the brightness and happiness that fled the night she was taken.

“I didn’t urge him to stay behind when the new army was being formed; indeed, I acquiesced in everything he said and did, because I loved him so much that I could feel the pain of his being taunted later if he studied my loneliness and remained at home.”

He stopped; then again he said: “I don’t know why I’m telling you all this. But I want to help you with practical advice. Write a story that will teach us to remember the hell that has been created on the face of the world. I am speaking not only out of personal feeling, but from knowledge of what other people are suffering in this country.

“Look there on my desk! Piles of letters, all from men and women who have lost their best beloved. What is your story about?”

“Forgiveness,” said Gilead.

“Ah! I thought so. That won’t do.”

“I wish you’d read it,” with greater pleading. “I know I’m only a beginner, but I think you will like that story, and I don’t care what you pay for it. May I tell you a secret?”

Carson didn’t speak.

“I wrote that story for the poor little woman in the boarding-house. I said to her, ‘If the editor of the *Aureole* publishes this, I’ll read it over to you when the house is quiet.’

And, do you know, she seemed quite grateful.”

“Very well,” said Carson, “I’ll read it, but be prepared for a very candid opinion on it. I don’t believe in the common practice of buoying up beginners with false hopes. Story-writing is not easy. It’s not a trade that can be learned. If you do not possess the imaginative faculty you would be much better employed in attempting some other profession. You must be very new to this kind of thing, since you haven’t even put a title to it, as I remarked just now.”

“Now I come to think of it,” Gilead remarked thoughtfully, “an idea did occur to me. I could have put a title on it, but I thought it would be much better and more original to publish the story without a title, and if readers were interested they might suggest one. Better still, ask them to send in a title.”

Carson, having recovered some of his professional sternness, looked up at the clock and said:

“I will take it home with me to-night, and let you have an answer as soon as possible. Call here about this time to-morrow afternoon.”

As Gilead closed the door on his way out, Carson threw the manuscript of the story into the “To be Read” basket and leaning back in his chair, smiled at the recollection of how he had been tempted to let himself go, as he termed it.

“Forgiveness!”—as he recalled the word. “And millions of men dead and wounded in two years—all to appease the blood-lust of the Prussian wolf. And he talks of forgiveness! Still, it’s helpful, these times, to meet one so simple of nature. Looked like a curate out of work or a—”

He reached for the manuscript and glanced casually at the first sheet. He began to read with concentration. He found himself arguing against the writer at the end of the second

page; he decided that he was an ass when the third was turned over.

When he reached the end of the story he dropped the manuscript into the "Possible" basket, and wrote a letter to the proprietor of the magazine explaining that the drop in the circulation was due to a hundred causes. Then he reread Gilead's manuscript, and dropped it into the "Accepted" basket, but marked it "Cheap."

That night he attended a meeting addressed by his own member of Parliament, Sir Joseph Ansett, and cheered with the others the peroration: "They forced war upon us; they shall have it. Our dead cry for vengeance; they shall not cry in vain. They taught us to hate; we shall hate till the world is dead."

And all night long Carson fretted because of the story in the "Accepted" basket. He couldn't have said why it disturbed him, especially as there was a familiar ring about it. Before daybreak he wished that he hadn't seen Gilead.

Carson occupied a flat on the third floor; a little gray-haired spinster with big, lovable eyes occupied the flat immediately beneath. She had often spoke to him on the stairs, and when she read of his son's death she took the trouble to go up the next flight, tap timidly at his door, and say, "I know that your heart's aching; so is mine. I've just heard of the death of one who was always saying to me in the pre-war days, 'Wait, old girl—wait till I've made enough.' And now they've killed him—the fiends!"

As Carson went down the stairs on his way to the office the little spinster intercepted him.

"I'm afraid to look at the newspapers," she said. "Is there any news?"

"Oh, yes," he replied. "It's much brighter." And yet he hadn't opened his papers since his thoughts were held in a vise by the story written by Gilead, the unknown.

He had been in the office only a few minutes when he received a telephone call. The proprietor of the *Aureole* asked him very pointedly if he had seen the figures for the previous month. The proprietor was not a literary man, and had no sympathy for what he called the "stupid pandering to art" on the part of his editor. He was a stock-broker, and had bought the property in the spirit of one who would buy a new strain of domestic fowls.

"Look here," he said coarsely, "you've got to take those figures home and sleep on 'em! I want circulation and a profit, or what's the good of a paper to me? I read last month's magazine through from the first page to the last. I don't know how much you paid for the pap, but I didn't think it worth the sixpence I gave for the magazine.

"You get the right sort of war stories into it—give the Huns a punch. Pile on the agony. Did you hear Sir Joseph Ansett's speech last night? You did? Well, *that's* the clutter. Stuff some of that into your pages and make people think?

"Do you read the newspapers? You do? Do you see that the parsons are preaching the 'kiss and forgive' game? Well, you know what I think of the parsons, don't you?"

All the same, Carson read Gilead's story for the third time; and, at the risk of incurring the displeasure of the proprietor, he made up his mind to publish it and see what would happen.

If he had been asked his reason for coming to that decision, he might have said that Gilead had impressed him more than did the story. There was a haunted look in Gilead's eyes; although he had smiled during the whole of the interview on the previous day, it occurred to Carson that those big, smiling eyes were not unacquainted with grief.

After all, he said to himself, it was only a question of two or three guineas. He himself had lived in a boarding-house in his younger

days, and had felt some of the misery that creeps into the corners of a boarding-house lounge.

He said to himself: "If it is an act of kindness, I'll do it. God knows, the few guineas may help him more than the story will hurt me if the proprietor kicks up a row."

Gilead called as arranged. It would have taken a much harder man than Carson to turn him down, because he came in glowing with anticipation, and said eagerly: "You read it, didn't you? What do you think of it?"

"It's not a bad story," said Carson, uncompromisingly. "Sit down, Mr. Gilead, and we'll talk about it. As I said yesterday, you're a beginner, but I'm ready to admit that you show remarkable promise. Shall we go through the story together?"

"If you please," said Gilead, not at all dismayed by the somewhat faint praise.

"It's a dramatic theme." Carson was holding the manuscript before him, his eyes on it, but conscious that Gilead's eyes were riveted on his face. "There are many improbabilities in it, and nowadays one dare not ask the public to accept what we call 'the long bow.' But I want to help you. If I made you an offer for this story, it would not be more than three guineas. What do you think about that?"

Gilead's face flushed. He said with a rush of feeling: "Three guineas would make a lot of difference to me and a certain little woman in the boarding-house. I told you about her yesterday? Her husband didn't leave much."

"We are not a rich magazine," said Carson, "or I would double the sum. But I want to point out that I am taking risks in publishing this story. How long did it take you to write it?"

"About three hours," said Gilead.

"You work quickly for a beginner," observed Carson. "What strikes me most is the extraordinary lack of grip you have of a

parent's emotions—but you tell me you are a single man?"

Gilead nodded.

"Take the father in this story. He loved his boy—I was going to say as deeply as I loved mine—and yet when that boy fell into the hands of the enemy the father was collected enough to stand by and reason.

"Do you think that if I had been standing near my son when they fell upon him to that trench—do you think that I should have halted and asked myself whether or not it was a glorious death? That boy was everything to me—my only son! I lived for him; he made my life one long road of happiness. He belonged to me. He was part of me. Can you feel that?"

"Let me ask you a question," said Gilead. "*Who* gave that son to you? *Who* said that he was yours? Made in God's image, only for your benefit, your pleasure? Had the world no right to him? Had you done something in the sight of your Maker that was so great, so noble, that you were rewarded by this unfathomable pleasure?"

"But listen," exclaimed Carson testily. "You go on to say, in this scene, that although father and son were fighting a common enemy—although the father could have summoned aid that would have saved the boy, he dared to hesitate, and ask himself—I'll read the passage aloud:

"From his place of concealment the father saw the mass of envenomed men fall upon his boy. In their frenzy they struck at him with their fists and with any weapon that suggested itself.

"Once the face of the son rose out of the dense mass of black hatred and vindictiveness; the eyes looked to where the father was concealed, and if the poor, wounded body was racked with pain, the lips uttered no cry. Again it was lifted as the mob of soldiery heaved from all sides. This time the face was seamed with blood.

"Still the father kept silent. His boy was dying with resignation that ennobled him. He was teaching the whole of the sleeping army how to die.

“Explain that to me.”

“I will, presently,” said Gilead. “I’d rather that you went on reading for a while. Don’t overlook the fact that he epitomized all that the enemy hated. It was within his power to betray the whole of the cause for which he and his comrades were fighting. If they could make him speak, they had won. Will you go on?”

“Yes,” said Carson, and the manuscript was trembling in his hand. “All the same, I cannot see how you can reconcile the emotions of the parent with the callousness of the father standing by. I say again, that if my boy—”

“Supposing,” Gilead said softly, “that you try to forget your boy for a few moments. I want you to make an effort to understand the splendid silence of the father in that story.”

“I’ll go on reading,” said Carson. His voice was unsteady.

“Again and again they offered the son his freedom if he would speak, but when they realized that his courage was superhuman, that all the brutal blows which they had rained upon him, all the agony of their knife-thrusts, left him as strong of resolution as before, their frenzy increased to madness.

“All semblance of humanness left them. No memories of their own children, or their brothers or friends, were allowed to stay the fiendishness of their designs. They cried, ‘Torture him!’ and on the words a number of them drew apart and whispered of a method of torture that would break down all his fortitude.

“Among the mass of enemies there were some in whom the touch of humanity was not altogether dead. They shrank from the suggested torture, but fears for their own safety kept them silent, and they raised no protesting voice.

“The father heard, and—”

Carson dropped the manuscript.

“You’ll never get the public to believe this,” he exclaimed.

“They will,” said Gilead. “They will. Something tells me that they will believe it.”

“You go on to say that the father watched

the torture, although he could have prevented it by awakening the sleeping army behind; but he was able to say to himself, ‘My son’s death is so terrible that it will be remembered with horror, not only by his comrades, but by those who have brought it about. For years—hundreds of years—they will speak of it with shame. Whenever men talk of it, they will feel some of the agony that he is suffering now. It will awaken in the breasts of men, not hatred and vindictiveness, but a desire to prevent its recurrence.’”

“That is the end of the story, save that the son died under this torture. Do you think that if my son were tortured like that, I could forgive?”

Gilead’s eyes glowed as he replied:

“Your son died even as the one in my story; but, mercifully, there was no torture. You hate now because you are unable to differentiate between death and sacrifice. In the story, I have ventured to submit that sacrifice is not death.”

“My boy is dead,” said Carson sullenly.

Gilead murmured: “Read on. When peace is signed—when the world has ceased to labor in travail, you will not speak of your boy as being dead. Every time you look into the eyes of a free-born child you will see your son, since without the sacrifice he made there might not have been a free-born child. Try—just try to think of all those little mounds out yonder as stones—foundation stones of a new world.”

“Ye—yes,” said Carson feebly. There was a period of silence; then, “I like the story better than I did before you came in this afternoon, but it’s very doubtful that you will get others to agree with you. As I said yesterday, the reading public does not like an imagination that is too elastic. They may appreciate the—the originality. I don’t know.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” Gilead confessed. “I don’t think I’d call it

originality.”

Again there was silence.

“We go to press this week,” said Carson abruptly. “Perhaps we shall both feel different when we see the story in print. Would you like a check now?”

“No.” Gilead waved it away modestly. “But I should like you to send it to the little woman in the boarding-house. The surprise might do her a world of good.”

And so Gilead left, and Carson did not see him again until the magazine had been on sale a fortnight. And that fortnight had been full of wonderment for Carson. Within three days after publication the magazine had been reprinted. The story without a title was being talked about and argued about. Letters poured into the office, and the tenor of them may be suggested by the words of the gray-haired spinster who lived in the flat immediately beneath Carson. She went quietly up the stairs and dropped a note through the letter-box.

God bless you for that story in this month's *Aureole*.

The circulation of the magazine frightened Carson. At first it was professional fright—he feared that some other editor would get hold of Gilead and buy him, “body and soul,” as he put it.

The proprietor of the *Aureole* was equally alive to the commercial value of the new writer; he telephoned through to Carson: “You haven't let that fellow slip you, have you? Nail him down. Get him to write a series. Give him any price he cares to demand. That's a really new story.”

Carson went round to the boarding-house, but learned that Gilead had gone away without leaving any address to which correspondence might be sent. He questioned the landlady.

“Do you happen to know if Mr. Gilead did

much writing? You must have seen a great deal of him.”

“What sort of writing?” she asked, pursing her lips. “He told me that he spent most of his time in the British Museum, copying things for gentlemen.”

Copying! Carson went back to the office with all manner of fears assailing him. Was it plagiarism? Certainly the story had a familiar ring about it; he remembered having said as much to himself after he read it for the first time.

A fortnight passed. The *Aureole* had been mentioned from half the pulpits of the country. Then Gilead walked into the office, and, smiling benignly, said, “Well?”

Carson closed the door.

“I've had a fortnight of acute anxiety,” he said hurriedly. “For pity's sake, put me out of my misery. That story of yours—was it original—your own?”

Gilead's smile vanished.

“Why—no! I thought you understood.”

Carson felt for his chair and fell on it.

“Understood? What?”

“The story—the original story is known to everybody—”

“To *everybody*! It's increased the circulation of the magazine by seventy or eighty thousand!”

“And nobody sent in the title?”

“Never mind the title.” Carson was white to the lips. “From what book did you copy it?”

“I didn't exactly copy it. I dared to alter the—the form of narrative.”

“The book—the book?”

Slowly Gilead took it from his pocket and turned over the pages.

“The New Testament,” he said in a whisper. “It is the story of the greatest sacrifice in the history of the world.”