

Dying German Soldier Pens This Message to His Mother

(Note.—The following poem is an almost literal translation of a letter written by an unnamed German soldier from the "Mark" (Brandenburg). The original is a rhymed poem showing the writer to have been a poet of great talent. It is supplemented by the statement: "Letter written Oct. 18, 1914. Succumbed to his wound Oct. 20, in the Military Hospital at Forbach, Lorraine.")

The bullet struck me mother—it isn't serious— The fort before us split its bombs at us. Forward we stormed. Enraged, perhaps, I ventured Too far, to close. The comrades lay around— I forged ahead—The shrapnels burst around me— The captain's order did not reach my ear— I saw the wire entanglements before me, Saw men in red and blue—and stormed with "hurrah!" A shock, a fall—You mustn't think it hurts. One feels his forehead, finds the hand is bloody, And swoons and falls—and then one knows no more. Here in this hospital I am well cared for, I lay as cleanly as with you at home, At home in bed—and gently does the nurse, So cleanly clad, loth to my daily needs, A nurse, O Mother, blond as Gretel is. She is (but does not want it known) a countess. Simply and modestly, and faithfully, She labors for the comfort of your son, Though well she knows he's but a lowly peasant. So gently, mother, fixes she my pillow, And keeps the cooling bandage fresh and clean, With soft white fingers, beautiful and slender She cools my head—her touch relieves the fever, It's she who helps me to send you this message, The last, dear mother—know it and be strong!

Just now I see the firs around our home, In sandy fields our modest little house, The evening sun is shining on the sunflowers, Across the street I see the elder women Look anxiously for their yet missing chickens; The spotted cow is lowing from the stable, And Nero barks along the tracks of wheels— (Perhaps 't was Peter's mare just passing by) My greeting to them all, and to the flowers! The doctors say, of course—well, they will ever Encourage one, if pressed to tell the truth, I pressed them too, and they expressed but hopes, But afterwards I heard them speak in Latin—I think 't was Latin—and I knew enough—I've fought with courage—with the scythe man, too, As it behoves a German soldier, mother.

Tonight the sky was full of stars, Tonight I saw the graveyard round our little church; Saw father's grave and nearby little Lena's, They still were densely covered with the cowslips, As if 't were May—And I have felt it plainly Father and Sister wait for me, O mother, Greet you the graves from me and tell them That, as for me, they are too far away, And do not weep! I lay my head in peace Here at the empire's frontier, in a place Now by the right of honest warfare ours, Into an unmarked grave. But dare to hope That by and by, in better peaceful times, Perhaps a landsman will adorn the spot And sing the wail on his back again, In leaving: "T was a comrade brave, I had," Lo! mother, our great fatherland will soon Have peace again; and what in storm and fire Was lost to us will grow anew in time, Though thousands will not live to share the harvest— Not I, dear mother! But I feel and know,

Though but a peasant, I too, with my blood, Before the bullet struck me down, have helped To save a portion of our land. And lo! I think my share lies yonder in the Mark; 'T is neither town, nor burg, not even a park; Of all God's glorious gifts to Germany It's little, and yet much, which I have saved Two little houses only—one is yours (Thank God it's safe!)—the other built of slate, And thatched with straw, (into the little windows Of which I often slyly stuck the pink) It is the cozy nest where Gretel lives, And Gretel mother! Ah! our childish pranks Lie far away. Now other children romp Through streets and fields, O mother, go to her, And only say: "He fell." And if she weeps, Say: "He has sent you greetings."

Ah! dear mother, But one thing more. If (don't I know you well)— If it depresses you to see what gifts They send, to cheer the soldiers at the front, (Our neighbor Klaus and others, well-to-do), Just think you're poor and could not give as they; And when the Lord of heaven does some day Demand of you: "What have you, woman, given The Fatherland?" then say: "The best I had— The best I had, O Lord, my only son."

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