

GS32A

INTERNATIONAL.

LAST winter at Versailles, during the Prussian siege of Paris, military funerals were of daily occurrence.

Every afternoon about three o'clock a procession, marching with measured step timed to the solemn music of the military band at its head, wound its melancholy way from the château through the tortuous route which led to the city cemetery.

Borne aloft, each upon the shoulders of eight German soldiers, might be generally seen at that hour from three to a dozen coffins, containing the bodies of men who had been killed in battle, or who had died in hospital of wounds or disease, the biers of some of them adorned with wreaths of immortelles or crowns of laurel.

Escorted on either side by their comrades, or their enemies, with arms reversed, officers and private soldiers, friend and foe, were carried indiscriminately to their last resting-place in the soil of the land in the attack or the defence of the capital of which they had lost their lives. Reposing on the coffin lids, now the spiked helmet, dark and brass-mounted, of the German infantry, or the burnished morion of the cuirassier, now the red *képi* of the Frenchman, indicated the corps or the nationality of the dead within.

But whether the mournful procession escorted dead Teuton or Gaul, the French inhabitants of Versailles paid the customary tokens of respect as it passed: none, man nor woman, ever uttering a disrespectful word nor making a disrespectful gesture as they contemplated in solemn silence the daily *cortège* accompanying so many of their enemies to the tomb, while sometimes, in the case of their own countrymen, the spectators, perhaps friends or acquaintances of the deceased filed into and swelled the ranks of the mourners.

On these sad occasions it often happened that but a few miles off—at Bougival, Garches, or Montretout, at Ville d'Avray, Sèvres, or St. Cloud—the strife was sharply raging, and new victims for the morrow's sepulture were being struck down by the shot or shell of cannon or of mortar, by the bullet of musket or of mitrailleuse, the sound of the distant firing mingling faintly with the mournful music of the band.

If nations must still go to war to settle their real or imaginary differences, and each do its best to maim and slay, to burn and destroy

the subjects or the property of the other, the horrors of war are somewhat mitigated since civilisation has asserted itself, and in the name of humanity has gained the important point, that belligerents tend each others sick and wounded with impartial kindness, and bury each others dead with equal decency.

Soldiers in the field, civilians even in time of war, become hardened by the frequent recurrence of such sights as I have described. Those living for months where the solemn dirge in honour of the dead indicated each afternoon the hour of the day but rarely indulged in any reflections on the general evils of war, as, attracted by the music, they looked from their windows upon the passing pageant. Now and then speculative thoughts would find utterance upon the childless mother, the bereaved widow, the fatherless children, the unprotected sister, or the betrothed maiden, away somewhere in distant Germany or remote part of France, waiting with anxiety for tidings of the son, the husband, the father, the brother, or the lover, at that moment being carried to his grave, while they perhaps were still ignorant of his fate, and only more anxious than usual, because the accustomed periodical letter was overdue. Would it comfort or console them to be told, at the first moment of their loss being made known to them, that Fritz or Hans, Adolphe or Émile had died fighting for his Fatherland? No! The abstraction would be too much for *them*. More likely far that Emperor and King who began the strife, or Dictator and Kaiser who persisted in carrying it on to the bitter end, would be cursed in their inmost hearts when the sad tidings that the loved one, the bread-winner, had met a cruel and an untimely death far away from home and those he loved; and when the natural grief for his loss would be heightened by the thought that his dying pillow had not been smoothed, nor his eyes closed by loving hands, nor his body followed to the grave—which they would never see—by his friends and kindred, as would have been the case if he had died peacefully at home. The ceremonial of the funeral to them would be but an empty mockery; though by and by, perhaps, when their sorrow has become less poignant, they may tell with pride of their relationship to one who bravely met death with his face to the foe, and point out his name carved in stone or cast in more enduring brass amongst those of his brother heroes on obelisk or tablet in Platz or Kirche.

But to the nations engaged in war in the aggregate, the interchange of the courtesies customary on such occasions does much to soften the feelings of hatred which each nourishes towards the other; and at some future time, when the tale is told in Germany and in France of the tender care bestowed in both countries upon the sick and wounded by German and by French women—angels of mercy, who have with the widest exercise of the feelings of humanity tenderly wiped the death-damp from the brow of the dying enemy, and become the repository of his last message to those he loved; when the story is related of the

honour so scrupulously paid by both belligerents to the dead of the other side; who knows but that the graves of those who have been buried in the soil of either country where they fell in battle or died in captivity, while serving as a warning to both against lightly appealing to the arbitrament of the sword, may at the same time create a new bond of union between them and lead them to forget and to forgive the past?

Amidst all the horrors of war it is surely well that the nursing of the sick and the funeral obsequies of the dead should give occasion for the performance of those graceful acts of international courtesy which, like the little conventionalities of society, do so much to soften the asperities which often arise between individuals as between nations.

While the two countries at war were each day burying each other's dead, on December 9, 1870, an opportunity was given to the Germans at Versailles to pay martial honours to the dead of a nation with which they were at peace. An Englishman—a Captain of the staff of the Indian army—died suddenly in one of the hotels. Though he was not in good health, a zealous desire to learn something more of the art of war than he was likely to do so long as his country was at peace with all mankind, led him to employ his leisure time—time which one less devoted to the duties of his profession would have spent (and justifiably so) in quietly staying at home, nursing himself into health—in visiting the scene of the mightiest conflict of modern times in which the possession of the capital of France, the second city in the world, had become the prize for which the two greatest military powers of Europe fought, and where siege operations on a scale never heretofore undertaken were to be witnessed. Enfeebled by residence in an unhealthy climate, the hardships encountered in the tedious winter journey from England through Belgium and Northern France to Versailles proved too much for him. Ill when he arrived, after a few days' residence, ailing all the while but still hoping and manfully holding out to the last moment with true British pluck, he at length gave way and took to his bed, from which he was never again to rise. Attended assiduously by a devoted friend and brother officer who had accompanied him from home, and nursed by a kind Englishwoman, who, having come to Versailles on an errand of mercy to the sick and wounded soldiers of Germany and France, yet found the strength to devote the hours set apart for rest to the attendance upon her stricken countryman, who lay dying in a foreign land, for a few days he lingered, then the brave spirit took flight and the suffering body was mercifully permitted to be at rest.

As soon as his death was known, and the time of his funeral fixed, the German military authorities decided to pay to the body of the deceased English soldier the honours due to his rank. They did more, for they sent as an escort a body of cavalry more numerous than as a captain he was entitled to.

At the hour appointed, a considerable number of people assembled, and each being supplied with a piece of crape to tie round the left arm, two women amongst the number—one the Englishwoman before mentioned, the other an Italian countess well known for her untiring attention to the wounded in the hospitals—they followed, two and two, the body as it was borne by German soldiers to the grave, preceded by a mounted band and escorted by a squadron of cavalry.

Englishmen, countrymen of the deceased, Americans speaking the same tongue, walked intermingled in the funeral procession along the snow-covered streets. The French people as the *cortége* passed along, when they saw the Union Jack covering the coffin, filed in, and by the time the grave was reached the assemblage was about equally composed of English and Americans, Germans and French. Three nationalities besides his own joined in doing honour to the remains of the British officer. The beautiful service of the Protestant Episcopal Church was read over the body most effectively and touchingly by Colonel (since Major-General) Walker, military attaché at the Prussian Court, the responses being devoutly and audibly made by the English-speaking people present, while the Frenchmen and Germans, most of them of another faith, stood respectfully uncovered during the simple service in, to them, an unknown tongue.

There was no volley fired over the grave, for it is not the custom in war-time with the Germans; but the defenders of Paris unconsciously gave their tribute of honour to the deceased, for at the very moment when Colonel Walker uttered the solemn words, 'Earth to earth—ashes to ashes—dust to dust'—each couplet accompanied by the peculiarly eerie sound of the earth thrown upon the shell by the friend of the deceased—Boom—Boom—Boom—three guns from Mont Valérien distinctly marked the pauses, and the sound of the falling dust upon the coffin lid was partially drowned in the reverberations of the cannon.

As we were burying this man out of our sight, perhaps another, another, and another were sent to their last account by the shots which seemed as if fired to do him honour.

We English and Americans waited reverently till the grave was filled up, and then wended our way mournfully to our quarters, instinctively, and without a word spoken on the subject, avoiding the route taken by the band, which according to wont marched homewards to the sound of livelier music than we wished to hear.

That evening at the usual rendezvous of the English-speaking visitors to Versailles, our meeting was more quiet, our talk more subdued than usual, often turning to the subject of the widowed mother and sorrowing sisters in England of him whose body we had that day committed to the dust.

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