

ATLANTIC MONTHLY

August, 1923

World War I Letters from the Dying Americans

One young officer who was hopelessly wounded seemed to have no idea that he was dying. We knew that it would make his last hours terribly unhappy, so we did not tell him. As I was talking to him he said: 'I wrote a letter to my mother just before I went into the fight. I just told her what a good mother she had been to me, and now it won't have to be posted, because I'm going to get all right.'

The officer who wrote this letter was brought in during the battle of the Argonne. He was suffering a great deal, but never a murmur or complaint to show his agony, and this might be said of almost all the men who came in. He was taken in to the resuscitation ward, as he was too sick to be operated on at once, and there he was treated, with hope that his condition might improve. He asked what his chances were of pulling through and he was told that they were a little against him. Everything that was done for him he appreciated, and he put up a great fight. He asked me if I would send this letter to his wife in case he died, and as he dictated this to me he said: 'We have been married only a year and a half, but we have been so wonderfully happy. I am so thankful even for that short time of happiness.' He was only twenty-one, and so full of health that we felt he could not and must not die; but when I went into the ward the next morning, his bed was empty, he had died in the early hours of the morning.

Here is his letter: —

'My darling brave sweetheart, —

'Please don't worry about me, darling, because I am in good hands; I was hit this morning, and am now away down from the front in a nice warm bed. I am going to be operated on in a few minutes, and I feel fine. I have been hit by two pieces of shell, and the only thing is, it hurts a little bit once and a while. I was behind an American tank when some German shrapnel came overhead and got me in the chest. Darling, I make my hope all for the future happiness of us. Good-bye, God bless you.'