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GESANGVEREIN SING AS THEY LAY IN TRENCHES

Choral Society Among Kaiser's Soldiers in France—
Splendid Voices

SONGS OF THE RHINELAND

Big Bearded Fellows Fill Little Church With Music Divine. Beautiful Description by U. P. Correspondent at the Front.

By Karl H. Von Wyegand. (United Press Staff Correspondent.) With the left wing of the German Army, Tiacourt, France, November 1. (By courier to Rotterdam.)—This is a story of the men who form one of the great human slaughter machines of Europe in Tears. It is a story of how the real human hearts of men whose chief occupation now is to kill, showed through their eyes as they sang of home and loved ones.

A story has been cabled of the "Gesangverein," or choral society which has been organized by the Germans in one of the trenches north of Toul to relieve the monotony of the hours and days. Most of their singing is done in the deep black trenches. There is the dense fog, the gray, ghost-like figures of the soldiers; rifles ready for instant use rest across the protecting ridge of earth, pointed toward the enemy's line only 600 yards away. The stillness is broken only by the booming of artillery in the distance—and then song wells forth from the men whose voices may soon be stilled forever.

But the other day "Gesangverein" sang in the old French church at Tiacourt. The company had just come in for a rest after several days and nights in the trenches. There was a soft, dim light in the old church. The "singing society" of soldiers stood in the choir loft. Other soldiers and officers sat on wooden bench-like pews. Scores of soldiers stood in the aisles.

There was intense silence. Then the musical director raised his baton. "It is the day of the Lord," wailed out in rich musical tones. It was sung with the deepest feeling. As the anthem swelled forth a religious fervor shone in the faces of the soldiers. Among those in the pews and

standing in the aisles, hands were clasped, heads bowed—lips moved in silent prayer.

The anthem is ended. There is a moment of impressive silence and the soldier voices ring out in "dear fatherland, my beloved fatherland." Heads are raised, shoulders squared. Patriotic exaltation comes into the faces—the love of the country for which they are sacrificing their lives. Again the music ceases and once more the leader raises his baton for the next song. It is "Meine Heimat Is An Dem Schoenen Rhein." (My home is on the Beautiful Rhine.)

It sweeps softly through the church. There is a movement among the soldiers. The heart chord has been struck. Chins drop on breasts, faces soften, the patriotic fire in the eyes disappears before a softer, gentler gleam.

A French woman, leading two little children by the hand comes up the aisle from the door and kneels in front of the dark altar. A soldier at the end of the bench leans over and touches the hair of the little girl with his lips.

The great tears roll down the bearded cheek of a soldier nearby. He is struggling with some great emotion. His arms are partly outstretched as if reaching to clasp someone in them. In his eyes there is the expression of the most intense longing for home and loved ones. With the back of his rough hand he brushes away the tears.

"Never, never will I see my home; never will I again see them again—it tells me so," he softly whispers. "Oh God, protect them when I am no more."

Tenderly he caresses something that seems to wrap itself around his finger. In the dim light it looks like a lock of hair. He raises it to his lips again and again.

The song of home is ended. The French woman and her two little children all kneel before the altar. Silently the soldiers begin to leave the church. The concert of the "Gesangverein" is ended. Within a few days these men will be back in the trenches, a part of a war machine, but today a song laid their hearts bare.

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