

**THE
BRIGHT SHAWL**

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The Bright Shawl by Joseph Hergesheimer

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JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

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THE BRIGHT SHAWL

JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER



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WHEN Howard Gage had gone, his mother's brother sat with his head bowed in frowning thought. The frown, however, was one of perplexity rather than disapproval: he was wholly unable to comprehend the younger man's attitude toward his experiences in the late war. The truth was, Charles Abbott acknowledged, that he understood nothing, nothing at all, about the present young. Indeed, if it hadn't been for the thoroughly absurd, the witless, things they constantly did, dispensing with their actual years he would have considered them the present aged. They were so—well, so gloomy.

Yet, in view of the gaiety of the current parties, the amounts of gin consumed, it wasn't precisely gloom that enveloped them. Charles Abbott searched his mind for a definition, for light on a subject dark to a degree beyond any mere figure of speech. Yes, darkness particularly described Howard. The satirical bitterness of

THE BRIGHT SHAWL

his references to the "glorious victory in France" was actually a little unbalanced. The impression Abbott had received was of bestiality choked in mud. His nephew was amazingly clear, vivid and logical, in his memories and opinions; they couldn't, as he stated them in a kind of frozen fury, be easily controverted.

What, above everything else, appeared to dominate Howard Gage was a passion for reality, for truth—all the unequivocal facts—in opposition to a conventional or idealized statement. Particularly, he regarded the slightest sentiment with a suspicion that reached hatred. Abbott's thoughts centered about the word idealized; there, he told himself, a ray of perception might be cast into Howard's obscurity; since the most evident fact of all was that he cherished no ideals, no sustaining vision of an ultimate dignity behind men's lives.

The boy, for example, was without patriotism; or, at least, he hadn't a trace of the emotional loyalty that had fired the youth of Abbott's day. There was nothing sacrificial in Howard Gage's conception of life and duty, no allegiance outside his immediate need. Selfish, Charles Abbott decided. What upset him was the other's coldness: damn it, a young man had no business to