

**TO RUHLEBEN-AND BACK;
A GREAT ADVENTURE IN
THREE PHASES**

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To Ruhleben-and back; a great adventure in three phases by Geoffrey Pyke

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GEOFFREY PYKE

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A GREAT ADVENTURE IN THREE PHASES

BY
GEOFFREY PYKE

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FRATERNALLY
TO
EVELYN
AND
RICHARD LIONEL PYKE

"I wasn't afraid of something happening. I was afraid of nothing ever happening—nothing ever happening for all God's eternity."

He drained his glass and called for more whisky. He drank it, and went on :

"And then something did happen. Buck, it's the solemn truth, that nothing has ever happened to you in your life. Nothing had ever happened to me in my life."

"Nothing has ever happened ! " said Buck, staring. "What do you mean ? "

"Nothing has ever happened," repeated Barker, with morbid obstinacy. "You don't know what a thing happening means ! You sit in your office expecting customers, and customers come ; you walk in the street expecting friends, and friends meet you ; you want a drink, and get it. You feel inclined for a bet, and make it. You expect either to win or to lose, and you do either one or the other. But things happening ! " and he shuddered un governably.

"Go on," said Buck shortly. "Get on."

"As we walked wearily round the corners, something happened. When something happens, it happens first, and you see it afterwards. It happens of itself and you have nothing to do with it. It proves a dreadful thing—that there are other things besides oneself. I can only put it in this way. We went round one turning, two turnings, three turnings, four turnings, five. Then I lifted myself slowly up from the gutter where I had been shot half senseless, and was beaten down again by living men crashing on top of me, and the world was full of roaring, and big men rolling about like ninepins."

G. K. CHESTERTON, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill.*

PREFACE

IN September of 1914, two months after war had started between Germany and England, I set out to reach Berlin in order, it is hardly necessary to add unknown to the German authorities, to act as a correspondent on behalf of the *Daily Chronicle* of London. I had also been asked to write letters for the *Cambridge Magazine*. Ruhleben was not then in existence as a prison camp, and I should certainly have had no intention of going there even if it had been. My object was to go to Berlin and see what there was of interest going on there, and then to travel across to the Rhine and the industrial districts of the West and South. I reckoned a couple of months would see the whole thing done, and that if I felt matters were becoming hot and unpleasant I would bolt as quickly as possible. It must be remembered that the desire to know the truth of what was going on at that time in the interior of Germany was intense. At the words *Krieg, Mobil*, the floodgates of news had clanged to, and not a word that could be prevented, or had not a purpose in it, was leaving Germany. At home masses of information were being produced in newspapers of all complexions,

most of it contradictory, often to itself. One section of the Press told us that Berlin was a city of old men and children, of a darkness like that of Egypt and—triumph above everything else—of women tram drivers; yet when I arrived there a few weeks later one of the first things I found was young men not merely working but young men doing nothing, young men drinking, young men laughing, young men going about with young women, young men, in fact, who were committing the supreme crime of being young, while the arc lights of the Linden worked as merrily as ever; and it was not until months later, in January, 1915, when I was driven across Berlin, that I saw from behind the grille of Black Maria the quintessence of German ignominy in a female manipulating a tram-car. A well-known journalist with American connections told us of women clamouring for bread and screaming loudly for food outside the royal palace, yet I discovered from people who had actually been on the spot that here an isolated shout and there a lonely scream had represented the sum-total of that howling mob. Economic pressure, economic necessity, impossibility of import, necessity of export, ruin of industry—unemployment—howling mobs again—all these were phrases juggled with to make them mean first one thing and then another. But Germany was silent, and refused to show to the outside world what was going on within her frontiers, and rumours spread and grew, and

phraseology grew more redundant and more pompous, and of less, and still less meaning. The German Army marched from Liège to Namur and from Namur to Mons and further, and Economic Necessity and Economic Pressure, the effect of our water-tight blockade, and again and again the howling mobs of unemployed men and bereaved women were supposed to be just treading on the tracks of the victorious hordes, about to bring the whole machine on which it depended for its life's breath crashing to the ground. It was the truth and probability of this that I set out from London to investigate, and for a time the fates were good to me, and let me wallow lazily in the sun of the Economic Pressure and Economic Necessity that were to pull down Germany to the dust; but soon they forsook me. I was caught up in the vast mechanism that has been created by, and intervenes in the lives of 67,000,000 human beings, who live within the bounds of the German Empire, and was tossed from one part to another, was beaten, crushed and hammered first by one great section and then by another, finally to be tossed aside as useless and harmless while the great machine went on its way whirring, screaming and groaning as it worked. The way was long and weary and took long to wend. From the contemplation of itself, the machine took me and threw me into jail, and then into another jail, and then into another, and then back into the first, finally vomiting me, in a fit of