Self-realization! How far we have travelled from the ideals of these pre-war days. And as I thought things over I wondered at how faint a response that phrase, "I loathe militarism in all its forms," found in my own mind.

Before the war I too hated "militarism." I despised soldiers as men who had sold their birthright for a mess of pottage. The sight of the guards drilling in Wellington Barracks, moving as one man to the command of their drill instructor, stirred me to bitter mirth. They were not men but manikins. When I first enlisted, and for many months afterwards, the "mummeries of military discipline," the saluting, the meticulous uniformity, the rigid suppression of individual exuberance, chafed and infuriated me. I compared it to a ritualistic religion, a religion of authority only, which depended not on individual assent, but on tradition, for all its sanctions. I loathed "militarism" in all its forms. Now—well, I am inclined to reconsider my judgment. Seeing the end of military discipline has shown me something of its ethical meaning—more than that, of its spiritual meaning.

For, though the part of the "great push" that it fell to my lot to see was not a successful part, it was none the less a triumph—a spiritual triumph. From the accounts of the ordinary war correspondent I think one hardly realizes how great a spiritual triumph it was. For the war correspondent only sees the outside, and can only describe the outside of things. We who are in the Army, who know the men as individuals, who have talked with them, joked with them, censored their letters, worked with them, lived with them, we see below the surface.

The war correspondent sees the faces of the men as they march towards the Valley of the Shadow, sees the steadiness of the eye and mouth, hears the cheery jest. He sees them advance into the Valley without flinching. He sees some of them return, tired, dirty, strained, but still with a quip for the passer-by. He gives us a picture of men without nerves, without sensitiveness, without imagination, schooled to face death as they would face rain or any trivial incident of everyday life. The "Tommy" of the war correspondent is not a human being, but a lay figure with a gift for repartee, little more than the manikin that we thought him in those far-off days before the war, when we watched him drilling on the barrack-square. We soldiers know better. We know that each one of those men is an individual full of human affections, many of them writing tender letters home every week, each one longing with all his soul for the end of this hateful business of war which divides him from all that he loves best in life. We know that every one of these men has a healthy individual's repugnance to being maimed, and a human shrinking from hurt and from the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

The knowledge of all this does not do away with the even tread of the troops as they pass, the steady eye and mouth, the cheery jest; but it makes these a hundred times more significant. For we know that what these things signify is not a lack of human affection, or weakness, or want of imagination, but something superimposed on these, to which they are wholly subordinated. Over and above the individuality of each man, his personal desires and fears and hopes, there is the corporate personality of the soldier which knows no fear and only one ambition—to defeat the enemy, and so to further the righteous cause for which he is fighting. In each of these men there is that dual personality: the ordinary human ego that hates danger and shrinks from hurt and death, that longs for home, and would welcome the end of war on any terms; and also the stronger personality of the soldier who can tolerate but one end to this war, cost what that may—the victory of liberty and justice, and the utter abasement of brute force.

And when one looks back over the months of training that the soldier has had one recognizes how every feature of it, though at the time it often seems trivial and senseless and irritating, was in reality directed to this end. For from the moment a man becomes a soldier his dual personality begins. Henceforth he is both a man and a soldier. Before his training is complete the order must be reversed, and he must be a soldier and a man. In his conduct he no longer only has to consider his reputation as a man, but still more his honour as a soldier. In all the conditions of his life, his dress, appearance, food, drink, accommodation, and work, his individual preferences count for nothing, his efficiency as a soldier counts for everything. At first he "hates this," and "cannot see the point of that." But by the time his training is complete he has realized that whether he hates a thing or not, sees the point of a thing or not, is a matter of the uttermost unimportance. If he is wise, he keeps his likes and dislikes to himself.

All through his training he is learning the unimportance of his individuality, realizing that in a national, a world crisis, it counts for nothing. On the other hand, he is equally learning that as a unit in a fighting force his every action is of the utmost importance. The humility which the Army inculcates is not an abject self-depreciation that leads to loss of self-respect and effort. Substituted for the old individualism is a new self-consciousness. The man has become humble, but in proportion the soldier has become exceedingly proud. The old personal whims and ambitions give place to a corporate ambition and purpose, and this unity of will is symbolized in action by the simultaneous exactitude of drill, and in dress by the rigid identity of uniform. Anything which calls attention to the individual, whether in drill or dress, is a crime, because it is essential that the soldier's individuality should be wholly subordinated to the corporate personality of the regiment.

As I said before, the personal humility of the soldier has nothing in it of abject self-depreciation or slackness. On the contrary, every detail of his appearance and every most trivial feature of his duty assumes an immense significance. Slackness in his dress and negligence in his work are military crimes. In a good regiment the soldier is striving after perfection all the time.

And it is when he comes to the supreme test of battle that the fruits of his training appear. The good soldier has learnt the hardest lesson of all—the lesson of self-subordination to a higher and bigger personality. He has learnt to sacrifice everything which belongs to him individually to a cause that is far greater than any personal ambitions of his own can ever be. He has learnt to do this so thoroughly that he knows no fear—for fear is personal.