

dren of his own kind with whom doctors had learned the best methods of care. Consequently, the boy was sent to an institution which specialized in the care of mentally deficient children, where his parents visit him occasionally. They say that almost always the child recognizes them, and they seem to realize that their decision was best for the welfare of the boy.

And so, a life has been smothered, not by death as yet, but by the trembling hand of the Maker; thus, one is prompted to ask the question of why God did such a thing to a couple who could and would have provided a child with everything he could possibly desire. But because humans are hardly in a position to question the actions of God, it is expected that they accept His actions as just and right. To the man and his wife, God's judgment was difficult to accept, but they showed their true faith in many ways. Because they were wealthy, they contributed generously to the home where their child was placed, as well as to a national fund to provide for others like him. To outsiders, it seems that they have drawn more closely together in their desire to aid each other in bearing the knowledge that their long-awaited baby will never bring them the joy for which they had hoped. They plan parties for teenagers which are held in their remodeled basement, and are always ready to help these young people with advice or with just a listening ear. I cannot believe that a normal child would have brought about these far-reaching consequences. Just as the grotesque chickens in "The Egg" brought out a kind of ignorant sympathy in the desire of the father to preserve them, so the mentally deficient child brought about a sympathy and compassion never before present in the parents. The hand of the Maker never trembles; it only pauses so that He may consider how best He may make stronger the people involved in what seems to be a tragedy of His own creation.

Taps

John Stokesberry

THE old sergeant slumped in his chair as if the troubles of the world were on his shoulders. His hazy brown eyes were recessed far back into his head as though they had seen enough and were seeking a place in which to hide; dark clouds of worry hovered about them. A network of capillaries covered the tired, sullen, worried face. Above the wrinkled forehead lay a mass of gray hair, neat but lifeless, like last year's crop of clover hay. Fourteen rows of "hash marks," representing forty-two years of devoted military service, ran up and down the right sleeve of his olive-drab uniform. On the front of the coat, one-half inch above the right pocket, were four rows of campaign ribbons which included two silver stars, one bronze star, and a purple heart.

The orderly room was shrouded in hushed silence. The desk behind which the sergeant sat was cleared of its usual multitude of

papers, files, and orders. Only one paper remained, and it lay in the center. As the old war horse sat there, his eyes fixed on the paper and his teeth clenched tightly together, tiny tears found their way out of the corners of his eyes and down his cheeks. His lips trembled. The paper read, "Master Sergeant William James Staley to report to Headquarters' Company for processing and separation from the United States Army."

Master Sergeant Staley had known this day would come, but he had failed to prepare himself for it. He was neither physically nor mentally prepared to face the world outside the army, for army life and civilian life are two separate and distinct worlds. He knew much about the army, but he knew nothing about civilian life. His life had been regimented twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, year after year, for forty-two years. His home had been Fort Gordon, Fort Monmouth, Fort Sheridan, Camp Riley, London, Aisne, Noyon-Montdidier, Chateau-Thierry, the banks of the Meuse River, the Argonne Forest, Hawaii, the Midway Islands, and the Philippine Islands. He had marched or crawled over one quarter of the way around the world, from the trenches of France during World War I to the hot, stinking jungles of the South Pacific in World War II. How would he enter this thing that is called "civilian life" or "the outside"? Should he walk, run, or crawl? Would this gallant soldier, who fought in two world wars and who trained green troops for the war in Korea, find a home among the civilians? Would these greedy, nervous, flighty people who drive about in cars with three hundred horsepower engines and who live in twenty-five thousand dollar homes with twenty-four thousand dollar mortgages move over just a little to make room for Mr. William James Staley? There was nothing written in any of the training manuals which he had read that would prepare a soldier for the invasion of civilian life. He wondered where he would attempt to establish a beachhead. Where would be the least line of resistance? Suddenly the stillness was broken by a knocking at the orderly room door. The moment had arrived. He gritted his teeth and choked back the tears.

He spent the remainder of the day in the usual army fashion of "hurry up and wait." He was familiar with the process of separation from the army, for he had been through it many times, only to return for re-enlistment in a day or two. There would, however, be no returning this time. There is no room in the army for a man sixty years old.

As the day grew old and the separation process came to a close, there also came to a close the career and life of Sergeant William James Staley, United States Army. With his money belt filled with separation pay, soldier's savings, and a few dollars that he had won in a poker game the night before, he boarded a big yellow bus marked "Somewhere, U. S. A." As it roared away in a cloud of blue Diesel smoke, taps could be heard in the distance. A cannon fired. The day had come to an end.