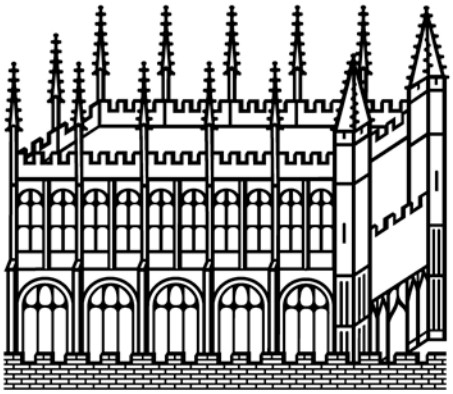


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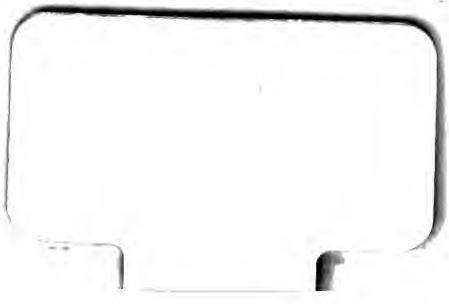
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WHEN ARMAGEDDON CAME



WILFRID EWART

WHEN ARMAGEDDON CAME

STUDIES IN PEACE AND WAR

By

WILFRID EWART

author of

WAY OF REVELATION



LONDON

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To

G. A. B. DEWAR

Also by WILFRID EWART

WAY OF REVELATION (*Putnam*)

A JOURNEY IN IRELAND (*Putnam*)

NOTE

WILFRID EWART died a fraction over ten years ago; upon Old Year's Night, 1922, to be precise, in the sultry darkness of Mexico City. The story is too widely known to require further amplification here and too tragic to allow casual comment to dwell upon it. Another of England's great novelists lay dead and Literature was the poorer for his loss. Beside the Tree of Dreadful Night, where Cortez wept for his martyred soldiery, under the shadow of Iztaccihuatl, they buried him. The traveller to the Tlacopan causeway marks yet the place.

Ewart was unquestionably a great writer. Where his contemporaries had essayed desperately and failed, he succeeded. With his *Way of Revelation* he immortalized a generation. His achievement was, and is, no mean one. The forerunner of Mottram with *Spanish Farm Trilogy*, and Montague with *Rough Justice*, he composed the first of the great English War novels a few years after the *Le Feu* of his *confrère* Barbusse.

It is almost unprecedented for a novelist preparing his first work to write a volume which will later do service as model; yet, with *Way of Revelation*, Ewart achieved this distinction. His book has served frequently, and doubtless will continue to serve, in that enviable capacity. In the panorama unfolding throughout its pages all the facets of an epoch are illumined. The war years are compassed and brought captive to the paragraphs to make there a brave picture, clear

and complete; for as an artist its author was never satisfied with fragments and particles. The war interested Ewart solely as a unity, a whole. If France and her battle-fields were to be described, on no account must he fail to deal with home life in England. "*La guerre c'est une chose entière.*" One-sided pictures, he realized, are usually ill-balanced; and so out of chaos and misery he formulated his design; with superb execution producing an acknowledged masterpiece. *Tell England; Ninety-Six Hours' Leave; Peter Jackson, Cigar-Merchant* sadly diminish in significance beside his work. On comparison they must appear but chapters of social history, trivial and unimportant, lacking the breadth of vision and humanity, the vital self-subsistence with which Ewart could infuse his prose. Brought into line with an English Tolstoy the majority of our early war novelists must seem, to a great extent, *raté*.

Way of Revelation was *War and Peace* over again; a massive performance that will ultimately rank with the best of Hardy, Gorki, Balzac and Zola. For Ewart was no less ambitious than his masters. He also selected as stage all life, showing no dismay at having to populate so broad a landscape. His characters he drew from the same source as his *décors*, the inexhaustible recesses of memory, building up his writing with minute detail. His notebooks, and these studies printed here, bear witness to this ruthless desire, this passion, for minor accuracies.

A disciple of realism he found nothing too slight to deserve notice. Nor was he slovenly in his self-criticism. Writing rapidly he ever rejected as much as he cared to preserve. "He would have gone right to the top," Conan Doyle sadly admitted upon learning of his death. How safe was that admission, "Right to the top!" No writer, with a pastoral style as exquisite as that of Edward Thomas, could have had anything to fear from the pundits in a day when fine writing has become so regrettably rare. Little to fear, indeed! With one novel Ewart had attained fame. The world of letters lay at his feet, its first province taken, its further realms awaiting conquest.

And now before us we have *When Armageddon Came*, studies in Peace and War. We may not predict that these are destined to advance Ewart's Standard, but at least they cannot fail to strengthen the position he left undefended with his death. They are his auxiliaries; in their formation he spared himself not at all. They have stood inactive, in his service, over-long.

"*When Armageddon came, much that was old and effete and exhausted and outworn perished, as we knew it would perish. But not all.*" Armageddon has come and gone. *Way of Revelation* (and the fame of its author) has come—and stayed; as we knew it would when first we read. The old, the exhausted, the outworn in our English Novel is at last perishing. We could not do better than turn back now and review the exhaustion

of a too-easily forgotten age, that period twelve short years ago, that tetrad of disillusion! For *When Armageddon Came* is the memorial of those years.

G.

Salcombe,
January, 1933.

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IN THE WAY OF PEACE

THE PASSING OF A VICTORIAN



SEVENTY years. Seventy years of unstressed, unstressful life: thought, reflection, contemplation—work: work for the poor, for the public weal, for the charity of causes: reading, learning, planning, painting: gardening, the scent of flowers, sunlight, air perpetually from the downs: quiet, wide spaces, seasons passing, days lengthening, days foreshortened, peace of soundless nights, of June dawns, November sunsets: endless company of birds. . . . Disharmony afar but none here. No single discord, wrench, strife or echo of strife, assertion of modernity, crudeness or coarseness of contemporary things. No grief, no confusion. The world, the century afar with its reek and dust and race and rack of a warring, destructive inhumanity. No change here till it came to an end.

But it came to an end. On a wet, dim, gusty, wild March evening—came to an end. Trees creaking, boughs bent and whining, last year's leaves a-rustling and a-roving, spring flowers crushed and retiring, rain drifting, birds crouching and ruffling in laurels, all awake and, as it were, awaiting, all nevertheless the same—so it came to an end.

When seventy years ago an immature girl journeyed from the railway twelve miles away in a coach, and when the coach set her down here—then, was it the same? The garden whispering as now it whispers, the trees creaking, the wild, wild rain drifting as now—or was it June? Never

mind. Girl became woman: passed from one of those starched, upright, severely cultured, severely clad, Tory figures so characteristic of the century—a Victorian parent. Passed, too, the fleeting youth of that over-decorous era with its memories treasured and lingering in after years of all that could be called Event. The journeys: the journeys abroad in a four-horse chaise with postilions and guards, through Italy to Rome, and one oft-repeated recollection of four captured *banditti* in a wicker cage set on high in the main street of an Apennine town. The painting, the readings-aloud, the careful, ordered, painstaking studies—with guide books and histories for companions—of views and points of view, of antiquities, churches, picture galleries, ruins. France, Spain, Italy, Greece; and London. The severely accomplished intellectualism of the 'fifties with its procession of distinguished prelates, men of letters, bewhiskered politicians, foreigners; its formal correct round of drives in the Park, " calls," parties, its formal conventionalised discussions, its frigid meticulous manners and mysteries. And Paris. Here, too, genteel studies in art, the cultivation of agreeable society, manners and conversation. An evening in the Tuileries. The vast galleries are lit up. A ball is in progress. In a small *salon* off the ballroom a bevy of young ladies sit, unpartnered, among them an English girl. There is a stir in the doorway—all rise. The third Napoleon enters. He looks round. His glance halts at a slender, an exquisite creature, fair-haired, with the voluptuous blue eyes, the

sinuous figure of the Montijos. To her he bows—she curtseys—he offers an arm. They dance. The world whispers—la belle Espagnole! . . . Next morning all Paris is placarded with the news.

That period passes. Now the English girl is a woman. For the rest of her life she is alone, and with still unopened eyes looks out upon her world from the ordered sanctity, from, so to say, the aloof bow-windows of English country life. There are annual interludes of travel, meticulously regulated; there is a suggestion, never far off, of *Palmerston*, and the Oxford and the Tory squire tradition; there is a correctly balanced application of the arts of "good works" in the village, of a decorous social relationship with neighbours, of "the charity which begins at home." "Do the right thing till you die!"—this is the axiom or the axle of a life so completely bounded, so entirely religious; "there's a right and a wrong in everything!" Then "Lytton Bulwer" comes upon the scene, now it is Trollope; now Wordsworth dominates the place, now Addison. There are ridings on horseback upon the downs, but not the slightest sympathy with sport; there is the study of botany, of poetry, of music—a little, perhaps, because these are of the "period," dating, by right of heritage, to the "cultured woman." The reading is austere, the judgment of men and things is almost too academic, too—positive. The management of one's temporal affairs, one's servants, one's solicitor, one's bank balance—these present in themselves a stringent code. Yet what a complete negation

they produce—of life as it is lived, of the egoistic self!

Out of it all—character. Out of all that carefully guarded, carefully ordered, carefully nurtured youth, out of all that close tradition is principle and religion and duty, and—yes—narrowness and assertion. Character. Character, too, which moulds, which groups about itself, which founds upon its own conceptions a world thus arranged and thus ordained. Skip time. Come straight to our own century and see before you the woman finally, the woman against whom the storms and illusions and disillusions and heartbreaks of a lifetime have broken so kindly, so remotely that her life is indeed as echoes of the sea muffled by cliff or pine. Great regrets—none; great griefs——? Emotions, passions, upliftings—no trace. What then? Regard of husband or children, need of a fostering care in womanhood and age? Not these—not even these. . . .

The afternoon streams in diagonally upon the bookcases, lighting the gilded names and titles of Gibbon's *Rise and Fall*, of Clarendon's *Rebellion*, of Smollett's *History of England*, Lodge's *Portraits and Memoirs*, Evelyn—volumes in drab and grey dating back a century and more. The sun lingers upon green wallpaper—wallpaper that once was gay with golden fleur-de-lys and is now a faded wistful blue. On one of the bookcases rests a plaster cast of Mrs. Siddons, said to have been fashioned by the hand of the actress herself. In a corner stands the perfect cast of a mid-

Victorian gentleman—prim, with whiskers and a long face, a pursed precise mouth, eyes that see nothing. On the walls—between bookcases—an " Interior of the House of Commons in June 1821," and this flanked by sketches of the down, of the vale, of the cathedral from the upland plain, of a West Country cottage, an Italian street, St. Peter's, Rome, flowers growing upon the wall-top of an Avignon Convent. Family portraits, a few—two a rich red, by Lawrence, and certain faded photographs of men in bygone uniforms and women in the small, prim tilted hats, the mountainous coiffures of their time. There you have the room and there its associations—but not all. Victorian in its formality, the Victorians are strangely touched to life: Mrs. Gaskell, who wrote *Sylvia's Lovers* at that shiny, leathery oak desk; Kingsley and Matthew Arnold, who discoursed within the four walls; and others, shadowy companions of rooms whose voice the world never hears.

Then the woman herself sits by the window in the failing light. She is stout, her face pink with health, her infirmities not apparent, her eyes a twinkling blue. Her hair is white, she wears a cap with a pale blue ribbon in it, her gown is of some dark chintz-like material, there is lace above. The attitude is of reflection, of large and calm composure, the expression kindly and serene; and when she speaks it is with a precision of utterance and of phrase, with a use of old-fashioned words which, since the great Victorian writers, have passed into the limbo of the language.

For she belongs to that other day. And the house does through and through, and the servants do with their faded, ageing faces, their precise habits, their individual and collective suggestion of the middle of the last century. Unlike the present, they are faithful to her—till death. And the prim garden somehow expresses her—as the middle-aged gardener does.

Her eyes roam over the vale, over the little green fields, and the filmy blue of the elms, over the cattle, the orchards, and the thatched farmsteads, over—the downs? It's early spring; already it's getting dark. A blackbird sings, but a hush comes to the garden. Of what is she thinking? Is it of that garden—of the mellow afternoon hours she has spent in it, of the part it has played in her life, of its plantings and trimmings and prunings, and of that crucial day in every year when spring steals into the garden like an angel, like a wraith? Even now with the windows open despite the damp, chill wind. Even now the scents float in: of verbena, of magnolia, of that lavender whose bushes upon the terrace pervade garden and interior alike. Even now a little grassy dell is aflame with daffodils among which the snowdrops picnic. There is another scent, that of a big Douglas pine which stands like a sentinel at the corner of the terrace. And soon the forget-me-nots will appear in the flower-bed and the forsythia will be yellow, the sweet briar will scent, the chestnuts in the park will flower and leaf, the lime and the great acacia by the dining-room window will too. Yet not for her? . . .

For it grows late. A red squirrel whisks across the lawn, from the wooded dell comes the first " hoot " of a barn owl. The woodpecker—that familiar day companion—is silent, and the company of jays and the little tree-creeper who all day long runs up and down the trunk of a cedar of Lebanon. Only the rooks talk still above the nuclei of their nests in elms beside a lane; only the starlings who have wheeled in very late from their day's work upon the downs—these keep up a subdued and clamorous murmur like exaggerated whispers in the shrubbery behind.

Then and there it comes to an end. When the spirit passes we come to an end. When the individual passes the epoch comes to an end. The spirit passed then in the dusk . . . and it came to an end.

Quite silently–stopped without jerk;
Better close no prevision could lend;
Working out as One planned it should work
  Ere it came to an end.

ST. MARTINSELL

A STRANGER looking due north from the verges of the Great Plain on any clear day might chance to remark a hill tufted with a clump of fir trees like a bird's head on the further side of the Vale. This hill is visible for many miles from whatsoever direction, and on a close inspection is seen to be the buttress or flank of a vast amphitheatre in the North Downs of which St. Martinsell is the easternmost point. Let the stranger approach closer. Let him cross the Vale by the high-road, and he shall come to the village of Oare, amid elms beneath the downs in a stretch of country attractive by reason of its remoteness, its anonymity to the world, and a certain broad, smiling English beauty. Let him start the climb of the hill—a lane branching out of the village street takes him to its very foot. A chalky path trickles upward as a white line drawn by some unsteady hand on green canvas. A wire fence helps the climber, whose first stage is a level platform, scooped, as it would appear, out of the hillside and covered with the fir trees previously mentioned. Playing through these, the wind, even on the calmest summer day, makes a faint sibilant hiss or rustle—they are never quite still, but, as the voice of Eternity itself, add in no small measure to the peculiarity of the unnatural platform whereon they stand. Nor has the mind long begun to puzzle out this phenomenon when it is confronted by a series of broad steps or ridges cleaving the shoulder of the down and looking as though

they had been specially cleft to accommodate the strides of giants in the long-ago. Whatever curiosity may have inspired the stranger to turn aside and visit St. Martinsell in the first place, whatever expectation, now deepens within him to a sense of mystery—baffling, curious and onward-drawing.

He continues to climb—if it be summer—in a world of wild flowers, blue, red, yellow, white. Here he will find the blue polygala frequent in the chalk; the beautiful blue bell-like campanula, the squinancywort, the delicate purple scabious, and the creamy butterfly orchis. By the path-side grows the lilac-coloured rampion, while everywhere are the yellow ragwort and the heath bedstraw; and everywhere the wild thyme. The smooth green face of the turf is no easy mounting, but the eye bent upon it sees many unexpected things—fossil shells of curious shape and queer-looking bits of chalk. It is a long, silent ascent with the hot sun beating down. In winter, however, every fibre of the body is braced, the lungs draw in the keen air as a welcome draught of life-giving health, and the very fact of motion is an uplift.

Towards the summit, mysterious signs begin to multiply on every hand. Just beneath it are seen a number of cup-shaped depressions like old small shell-holes, while everywhere appear strange disturbances in the smooth green turf. Martinsell here forms a promontory jutting out into the Vale, and on its highest point are found a dried-up dew-pond, an embankment, and a group of ex-

crescences such as have already been noticed. As the wayfarer proceeds along the ever-broadening ridge he perceives that the whole spacious upland of Martinsell is scored, here with vallum and dyke, there with saucer-like pits, and there again with obscure markings in the turf. Nor, upon attaining the highest point of a steep bank with a ditch beneath, can he long remain in doubt that he is in the presence of some great historic or prehistoric civilisation.

This is in fact the case. The gentle hiss of the fir trees, the sough of the wind in the bushes of gorse and furze, and the play and interplay of shadows upon distant hillsides, are, shall one say? the abiding expression of that which has long since joined the eternal things. There could be imagined perhaps no more solemn place other than Avebury Ring or Stonehenge itself; the sense of aloofness and height above the world, of microcosm in the wide spaces, of extreme loneliness at a spot seldom visited by human beings, and yet of the indicated presence of unknown human generations on every side adding to this effect. It were possible to conceive the very background of the history of England as being laid here. For the ridge or saddle upon which these neolithic remains are situated, gradually rising and broadening out, culminates in the highest point of Martinsell, whence the whole of the surrounding country lies outspread at the feet.

And gradually the form and meaning and detail of the place become visible to the mind as they are to the naked eye. Beneath the green coverlet

of all-concealing turf the full intention of the past reveals itself sign by sign. And where the first broad tiers of steps mount the side of the down were wolf-platforms, protecting the hill settlement from the south, while the platform with its growth of firs affords the same protection from the west or the amphitheatre itself. For was not all the cultivated Vale in those days forest country, vast, impenetrable, wolf-haunted? Again, the cup-like depressions just beneath the summit were guardhouses, and the high embankments with the ditch beneath, upon the second of which the stranger now stands, was the protection to the inner citadel itself. Lesser holes and pits everywhere seen on the face of the plateau mark the site of prehistoric dwellings once inhabited by ape-like, long-haired men clad in wolf-skins and armed with flint instruments. Ever so slight, ever so subtle, but still perceptible by reason of a filmy shade on the vivid green turf—an impression. Follow it—follow it along the whole length of the embankment's surface—mere trail of a ghost as it is and fades back into the turf. But it cannot be denied: the worn footpath of prehistoric sentinels who night after night patrolled that embankment unimagined years ago.

Nor as the seeker for knowledge proceeds towards the higher upland of Martinsell do traces of that dim, vanished human occupation disappear. They increase. Pits, quarries, dew-ponds, barrow signs. Faint shadows, seams, lines branching out like the veins of a leaf and leading towards some concentric point. Trace them. A lane

steeply descends the hillside towards the Vale, a lane, chalky, overgrown with blackberry, with dogberry, with hawthorn, with trailing tendrils of the wild rose. At the head of it a cup-like depression, larger only than those previously seen. Here all the veins join and descend the hillside. Again a pause—a little pondering, a little conjecture, a little thought! . . . Trace the veins upwards to a disused quarry, to a dew-pond, towards a straw stack and a shepherd's cot. They spread out, but all make for a low embankment—lower than the others, yet of much greater extent. Indeed, it encloses an area of several acres, a farmyard, the edge of a ploughed field—is sometimes difficult to trace, but always picked up again. Review the whole from the highest point of the hill, place these later signs in relation to the citadel, the dwellings, and the guardhouses . . . those frail, shadowy paths! Old cattle-ways, old dim signs of the passing of the flocks and herds night and morning—night and morning from their feeding grounds in the forested vale to their "yards" or compounds on the hilltop and back again. No mistaking that! Their trampling feet have worn a steep lane in the hillside; their trampling feet have left nothing but those faint shadows on the upland grass. A tally-house where the ways meet—that the explanation of the "cup" at lane-head! Gaze long enough and think; and picture after picture appears, true, relative, unmistakable. Man came and went; himself vanished, but the hills only cover up; Time has no power there, and Man alone can

destroy what Man has made. Nor is that all. Oare and Huish, neighbouring steeps, are covered with their remains: their dwellings, their paths, their works, their cattle-pens, their . . . everything theirs.

St. Martinsell is the home of the rook, of the wandering sheep, of the hare, of titlark, whinchat, kestrel and finches. Stranger seldom visits there, but it is an England that never changes. Too steep for the plough, too high for the builder, too wild and lone for the modern generation! How for their part the neolithic men must have looked out across the far-flung country in terror of marauding wolves, braving the elements, filled with imagination of the great forest that crept up to the foot of their stronghold like the lapping waves of a pitiless sea, and watching night by night the fires on other hilltops for many leagues around. . . .

And what does the wanderer see to-day? Rolling plains to the northward, rolling plains to the south, incalculable stretches of pale corn, of green down, of clover or of plough, with distances relatively marked by the beech clumps on every hillcrest. And to the east? The view over Savernake, which on a summer's day shall be rolling green, a dazzling sea of trees with a gleam of the Kennet in foreground and a reddish-grey group of the aged city of Marlborough at whose gates the down country begins to pitch and toss; and far beyond, the blue film above the Berkshire hills. At the feet, the Pewsey Vale, later joining that of Westbury—and here, too, the blue haze

hangs because of countless elms close-growing in high Wiltshire hedges between little fields; the villages, the thatch, the farms, the grey towers, the willows and poplars above the slow streams, the red-and-white cattle and the great estates. And beyond, the low green sides of the Plain white-scored with chalky lanes, beech-crested, and stretching away as a man looks down upon it from a vantage-point—stretching away into fathomless wastes of sheep-pasture and corn.

Such is the homeward-keep of Martinsell—a thing of Constable—the background of England. There the dead sleep on in the barrows and the tumuli. And the caw of the rook is heard and the bell of the sheep. And the dead city sleeps since the twilight of Time. . . . And the stranger passes on, feeling glad that all is well.

LONDONERS

It was not, as the novelists say, inevitable that they should meet—not in the least. It simply happened because a stout lady lost her head in Regent Street and the two collided.

What they thought of each other, why they looked at each other, why they smiled, why he turned back—who shall say? Ordinary mortals are not competent to decide such matters. Nevertheless, it was so. He turned back and walked beside her, she tripping on demurely, not speaking yet not attempting to rout him as any well-behaved young woman would have done. Such being London. . . .

He did say: "Do you mind . . . ?"

And she said nothing; she smiled.

They, in fact, made slow progress. It was that hour of the evening when all the funny little people from all the offices and shops, and purlieus of that lively neighbourhood are making their way homeward, at first on foot, then by bus or train. It had been a hot summer's day, and all the people looked tired and jaded, gasping for breath like chickens newly hatched from an incubator.

They, too, were a jaded couple—she with a fair, faded prettiness, he with a pale, clean-shaven face and lightless eyes.

When they came to the turning by Carrington's, he spoke again: "Where are you making for—anywhere in particular?"

She replied: "Leicester Square Tube Station."

"And then?"

"Oh—Golder's Green."

He sighed—it was almost a groan.

"I'll show you a short cut out of the crowd."

They turned down Berwick Street.

He meant, no doubt, to take her by Charing Cross Road, but they never got so far.

When they came to Beak Street, he said: "*Must* you go to Golder's Green—now? I'm alone—and lonely."

It was a bold remark.

"Well," she answered—"I must. At least—yes, I think so."

"An engagement?"

"No."

"A husband?"

"Away."

"Why then—Golder's Green?"

They stopped. She stood irresolute, looking in at the window of a picture-dealer's.

"Why—?" he pressed her again: "Why hurry?"

"Somebody's waiting for me."

"May I ask who?"

"My—infant."

He knew that much about her. He leant on his stick, bending gently backwards and forwards. In the tawdry little shop-window a Madonna gazed placidly out of a gilt frame. Somewhere a wild bird sang in a cage.

"Come!" he said, as though the matter were decided. He took her arm.

They walked on.

They passed into Soho. How dusty the streets

were, how dirty! How sun-drenched and unsavoury-smelling! And the inhabitants, Jews and Jewesses mostly, and foreigners, were standing at their doorways gossiping. Some, too, were watering their flower-pots, some sweeping up refuse, and some moving barrows into back-yards. A daily market is held in this street.

They came—goodness knows how, for it is not the shortest way—they came to Soho Square filled with a grey-blue mist, where the sunset dyed the windows scarlet, and sparrows chattered.

Here they stood a moment, as by some common impulse, some joint thought seeming to pass between them. . . .

They came to a restaurant about the end of Greek Street which has a non-committal appearance on the outside, yet where within you find two red-panelled, white-painted rooms, and chairs of red brocade. It's a quiet place—some say dull. But it is discreet. . . .

When they had ordered dinner—and Volnay—they sat looking at each other, without embarrassment, as people do who have known one another some time: he leaning back tapping the legs of his chair with his finger-tips, she too in an easy attitude of thought.

There were two other occupants of the room—a young Jew in the far corner with a woman who was undoubtedly an actress. Every now and then the young Jew used the expression, "Bet your life!" and the woman kept saying, "You *are* a guy!"

A few streets off, a barrel-organ began to grind out ragtime.

He opened the conversation: "Well—this is a rum go. . . . How did we get here?"

She smiled.

"How—*did*—we—get—here?" he repeated slowly, rather absurdly. "And—well, how interesting!"

This time she laughed—briefly, gaily.

"You ought to know. You brought me here."

"And—you had no business to come!"

Both laughed.

The waiter began dishing out *hors-d'œuvres*.

"Don't you like sardines?" the strange man inquired. "No—I should think you'd like shrimp-paste—or *foie gras?*"

She promptly claimed a sardine.

"You *are*—er—quaint!"

He did not reply at once, toying with the dishes.

"Oh, well! Most human beings are odd, don't you think?—until you get to know 'em and then—they're all alike."

"I suppose so," she replied.

"Don't be so—correct!"

A smile dimpled her features as she let her blue eyes rove round the room. All of a sudden she looked younger.

"I wish that damned barrel-organ would stop!"

"But I like it!"

"Like it? How could you! . . ."

"I dunno. I like all—or any—music: rather particularly barrel-organs."

"Music! . . . Interesting, that though," he murmured. "But—I wonder on earth why?"

She (after a pause): "It's London, and—well, Life."

"Barrel-organs?"

"Barrel-organs."

The waiter brought soup. Minutes passed before they spoke again. Then, as if there had been no interruption, he said: "Your life, perhaps?"

"Mine—yes. All jars and confusion. . . . And yours?"

"Chopin, I think . . . in a garden . . . after dinner . . . when it's warm and getting dark."

"Oh!" She laughed a shade mischievously. "We're—sentimental?"

"No," came the unexpected reply. "Disjointed—bereft."

A change came over their faces. Only a close observer would have noticed it . . . Perhaps the waiter who brought the fish, thinking it necessary to turn on the pink-shaded lamp which lit each little table, had something to do with it. The light threw a glow, and also a shadow, upon their faces, not Rembrandtesque but rosy, soft and warm. Or perhaps—for they sat by the window—the dusk had deepened a little in the street outside.

"Why?" she queried, serious now. "May I ask why?"

"Oh!" he answered laconically, "London."

The voice of the barrel-organ came to them

playing " Hullo, my Dearie ! "—an inexpressibly foolish out-of-date tune.

The Jew said, " Bet your life ! " and his companion, " You *are* a guy ! "

" That's strange," she observed presently. " I, too, seem to *feel* London. It's—well, a disease."

" A quite definite, difficult disease."

" And you've got it badly ? "

" Pretty fairly."

" I've had it years and years."

" You make yourself too old."

There was no doubt of a quickening interest now. There was no doubt they regarded each other with a new—yes, a powerful—absorption.

" What brings it on ? " he asked in a low voice. Another couple had just sat down at the table opposite theirs.

" I—in fact, I don't think I know," was her reply.

" You don't consider causes ? "

" The effects are—disastrous."

She smiled at her own remark, yet through the half-joking words came a deeper meaning. And he recognised that.

" Do you know," he said, " I've thought a lot about this. I've—I've had to . . . "

" Well ? "

" And do you know what I think about it—the cause, I mean ? "

" I should like to know. I've wondered . . . "

She rested her chin on her hands and looked across at him ; she seemed to him intensely attentive, vibrantly intelligent.

His words came quietly.

"That all we people—Londoners—suffer because we've wanted and we've never had."

Her eyes crept up to his. After a while he thought they gleamed like stars through a mist.

Somehow her foot touched his.

"Strange," she said, "—and true. I've never thought of that. . . . So simple!"

"Yes, simple enough," he replied, the lines of tiredness passing from his face. "You, too——? Tell me about yourself."

"How can one?" She made a helpless gesture. "How does one——?"

"Don't be self-conscious, my friend!" The words slipped out so naturally, so inevitably almost, that neither of them noticed. "Remember, we don't know each other. We're strangers and yet—more."

He filled her glass to the brim.

"You see—I dunno," she began. "I'm funny. I've always been funny. I've wanted—and wanted——"

"What?"

"Things."

"What things?" He was suave and kind as a doctor now, but convincingly sincere.

"Odd things. When I was—young . . . gay things, beautiful things, all the good things, I think, in people and life, all that's quiet and calm too—the country and lovely sunsets and still autumn days and rain in spring and lazy heat in summer; music, too, and books. When I grew up——"

She paused.

"Yes—when you grew up——?" He again leant towards her across the table.

"When I grew up, I thought of—I think—some large, rather solemn kind of person who would take charge of me, 'run' me as they say, do everything for me, see to everything, laugh when I was in a bad temper, and when I was in a good one laugh too, and—and make one happy."

"Ah!" He gulped down a mouthful of wine and gave a sort of sigh, as one who has heard something he expected to hear.

"You got . . . ?"

Silence. . . . The barrel-organ began playing "Hullo, my Dearie!" a street or two nearer.

"An infant!"

She laughed.

"And that's much to you—the child?"

"That's all."

The *entrée* came, and then the ice. They hardly spoke. But their feet were touching and their eyes were touching.

"More about yourself?" she interrogated.

"Nothing much," he answered with his half-humorous, half-weary smile. She noticed his hair was turning grey at the sides. "You're Golder's Green. I'm—Clapham."

"A daily breader?"

"Of course."

She laughed frankly, gaily at that, as she had earlier laughed; and for the moment there was no shadow on their faces. He said:

"When I was a boy, I—I thought. I was

solemn even. I read, I had ambitions. I wanted to be heroic. I wanted to go about the world, travel, see everything, and then come home and lead some political crusade or write a great book. In a calf-like way, I was what they call an 'idealist.'"

"And then . . . ?"

"I became a solicitor."

"Why?"—bluntly.

"God knows!" He lit a cigarette. "God only knows! . . ."

"But you must *know*," she insisted.

A pause. Then: "Oh! London . . . tradition . . . family . . . Fate."

He made a vague gesture with his hands.

"How weak!" she smiled.

Coffee came.

"But there must, there must be—have been," she corrected herself for some reason she could not have explained, "something else that counted at some time."

"There *was* another side," he agreed, "as there is in every man. I had, as they say, the world before me. I was highly-strung, impulsive, in a worldly sense secure. A devilish bad combination," he laughed. "An angel appeared in the Second Act of a musical comedy. I adored that angel . . ."

"Yes?"

A queer, humiliated look came into his eyes.

"The angel—unfortunately—had feet of clay."

She stirred her coffee slowly. When she spoke

it was softly: "But, you, have some—consolation?"

"I have nothing. I no longer believe in myself. I no longer believe in Providence, in God."

She looked up, her face momentarily wrenched as his was.

"That's me—too."

"I knew it. I understand you," he exclaimed impulsively, across the table.

Somehow their hands joined and pressed.

A little wine was left. He poured some into her glass, the dregs into his own.

"To our friendship!"

Their eyes drank long over the rim of the glasses. . . .

"Hail and farewell!" she said.

"Farewell!" he exclaimed, putting down his glass quickly. "*Farewell*——?"

An urgency came into his eyes—a kind of entreaty.

"No," she replied to his unspoken question. "You know—that's no use. Why——" she smiled: "We don't even know each other's names."

"Mine is——"

"Stop!" she cried. "I don't want to know it. Let's leave out names. It doesn't matter anyway. We happen to have met. We're two people, travelling the same road—in opposite directions."

"Two Londoners."

"Friends. . . . Now I must go."

She rose. He reluctantly helped her on with her coat. They stood outside in that mean little street whose pavements now refracted the heat of the day.

It was nearly dark and the street was empty. Only the barrel-organ had changed its tune. It was grinding out "Some Day I'll make you Love Me," by the Palace stage-door.

They walked a few yards, then stopped. She turned up her face to his! he discerned her faded prettiness under lamplight—and something that had not been there before.

He thought suddenly of the Madonna in the shop-window. She was kind to all such!

When he took his friend's hand she made no resistance. But when he bent down as though to kiss her, she whispered:

"No. We are friends, let us always be—friends."

"Always—always," he entreated. "Then rest—then peace—for us both. . . . We two will live out our lives in the grey streets and the squares, and if we cannot love—we'll dream."

"We'll dream," she said—"and have courage, both—remembering this night."

Their hands pressed. He turned and walked swiftly away.

A tear coursed down each cheek as she walked slowly in the opposite direction.

IN THE WAY OF WAR

TWO MORNINGS

I

It is related in Sir William Napier's *Peninsular War*, and has been handed down through successive generations, how during the bitterest periods of the campaign, French and British soldiers met and filled their water-bottles at either side of a stream, shouting friendly remarks across from bank to bank, whilst neither side fired a shot. Somewhere or another, similar incidents are reported of the American Civil War. The history of war, indeed, is full of queer reactions, complexities, anomalies, reversions to type, abstractions. And the little-understood, subconscious mind-workings of men acting upon and reacting from the abnormal to the normal, from complexity to simplicity, from artificiality to actuality, are responsible for these, so that they are not on the whole surprising.

Civilisation masks us with a screen from ourselves and from each other, with thin-depth of unreality. We habitually live—do we not?—in a world self-created, half-established of false values arbitrarily upheld, largely inspired by misconception, misapprehension, wrong perspective and objective proportion, misapplication. Our pre-war world had become—had it not?—a grand illusion. But war is reality. War takes the measure of every self-imposed, self-constituted system of society and brings to the light, as nothing else does, the true quality of

human "progress," the absolute stage of our human faring.

War, too, is Revelation. All the elaborate reredos of human imaginings and self-delusions and self-conceits knocked flat; all the pretences and garnishings and superficial trappings and make-beliefs of our mortal nature laid bare; all our individual imperfection and fatuity and insignificance and contemporary grossness laid bare too. What then left? Only Reality—Simplicity. The cold truth about each one of us for good and for evil, for better as well as for worse. This stands naked. This we cannot half-see now or pretend not to hear even though we become aware, in the process, of the mocking laughter of some Devil or some God.

And it is easy to lose oneself in the vortex of world-chaos. It is easy to forget that great facts spring out of universal tragedies—fine and strangely beautiful things, undeniable, unmistakable things, things happy and simple and fundamentally right. Individual things. Collective things. Queer collective impulses springing out of the mass, springing like hate and bestiality and cruelty out of the turgid contortion and miasma of our time—very near akin to these, too. And shy, unexplained things wrought of the conflict between the self-imposed and the real, born out of the travail of the soul, upward spring like flowers in the midst of old battle-fields.

II

And this following is a true tale. This is not a thing heard of and lightly repeated and half believed. But witnessed in these late years by living eyes; and, in the second case, by my eyes. . . .

December 18th–19th, 1914, was a night of tragedy in the British Army.[1] Forgotten now —buried in the sancta of regimental records, of Army and of Corps and of Divisional Orders, buried in the hearts of those who no longer need or wish or are desired to speak—for none would listen.

After all it was only a demonstration—of what, of whom, of how much or how little—that need be no inquiry here. And it was only on the front of two Divisions that the troops advanced at nightfall, artillery firing a quarter of an hour's bombardment, all the earth shaking, and a sprinkle of musketry shattering the dark. For the most part, the Germans sat quietly waiting whilst the shells whined overhead to their support lines; only when figures loomed up in their wire did they

[1] '. . . I issued orders to Corps Commanders enjoining them to demonstrate on their immediate front, to keep the enemy occupied, and seize any opportunity which might offer to capture hostile trenches. . . . On the 19th [December], the 8th Division captured some trenches at Neuve Chapelle and the 7th Division at Rouge Bancs, but of the latter, the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards in the 20th Brigade were driven back by a counter-attack; as also were the Devons.'—*Vide* p. 325, *1914*, by Lord French.

open fire. It withered, but the survivors came with a rush to the lip of the trench, where for several moments a silent tremendous struggle took place between bayonet, rifle-butt, revolver, and physical strength. Some lay where they fell under the enemy parapet, some dragged themselves back and died in the open, some were made prisoners. Here and there a party of ten or a dozen British fought their way into the German trench, and hung on till daylight; then, upon order given, withdrew.

It was left to daylight to reveal—as daylight faithfully reveals—the truth of tragedy, and the price to pay.

III

Less than a week later, the first Christmas morning of the war dawned.

After weeks of rain and mud, we are told, it broke keen and clear with white frost powdering everything. The flat Flanders landscape was strangely silent and still. No guns fired, and few rifles. Birds usually so rare in winter trenches appeared in numbers, as many as fifty sparrows being fed around a dug-out.

At 8.30 a.m. a British officer looking over his parapet saw four unarmed Germans leave their trenches, which at this point were some 350–400 paces distant. This officer and one from another company immediately went out and met the enemy outside our barbed wire. The latter

consisted of three private soldiers and a stretcher-bearer, and stated that they thought it only right to come over and wish us a happy Christmas, trusting us implicitly to keep the peace. The spokesman of the party, who spoke excellent English, asked that a postcard—which he wrote forthwith—might be sent to a young woman whom, together with a motor-bicycle, he had left in Suffolk. This request was carried out by one of the British officers.

These four Germans were Jaegers and Saxons of the 158th Infantry Regiment—the troops which had successfully defended their trenches on the night of December 18th–19th. They protested that they had come over out of good-will; that they had no feeling of enmity towards the English; that everything lay with their authorities and, being soldiers, they had to obey. There had come into their possession a copy of the *Daily Telegraph* of December 10th of that year which, they averred, had caused no end of amusement. "You English are being hoodwinked!" France was "done," they said, Russia had received a series of very heavy blows and would shortly give in. England alone carried on the war! There was more conversation of the same sort in the middle of No Man's Land. The Germans protested that the English Press was to blame for working up feeling against them by publishing atrocity reports. There was a discussion about soft-nosed bullets (which the Germans claimed to have seen in possession of English prisoners), dum-dum bullets, and the high-velocity sharp-

nosed bullet. Finally, the truce was formally ratified, a ditch being appointed as a half-way meeting-place. The interview terminated with an exchange of English cigarettes and German cigars.

A short while later there floated down between the two lines of trenches the strains of the well-known marching song, "Tipperary," followed by those, taken up all along the German line, of "Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles." Out in the middle of No Man's Land stood six or seven large groups of mingled Germans and English. And, although it must be said that the fraternisation was of the most genuine character, considerable suspicion prevailed on the part of the English, and no precautions against possible treachery had been neglected. Not so soon could the lessons of Zonnebeke, of Krusseik be forgotten! Every sort of souvenir was exchanged and many strange presents given. Addresses were taken down and the photographs of families handed round among those who six nights before had been locked in a life-and-death struggle. One German, on being offered a Virginian cigarette, said smilingly, "No, thanks, I only smoke Turkish!"

Next a Saxon non-commissioned officer wearing the Iron Cross and the badge of an expert sniper started his men on a marching song, the British meanwhile chanting national airs and Christmas carols such as "Good King Wenceslas." Finally, the frosty keen Christmas air of this desolate spot in Artois was awakened to the loud singing of

"Auld Lang Syne," in which all, English, Prussians, Scots, Saxons, Irish and Würtembergers alike joined. For the groups of Jaegers and Saxons of the 158th Regiment had been swollen by men of the 37th and 15th Infantry Regiments.

After the singing of "Auld Lang Syne," it is related, and not surprisingly startled by so unwonted a sound, a hare rose from between the trenches, and across the frozen plough, through the soaking cabbage-patches, over the ditches and over two lines of disused trenches, British and Germans gave chase until all of a heap they killed in the open.

It was at this juncture that the commanding officer of the British battalion appeared and, wishing everyone present a "Merry Christmas," produced from his pocket a bottle of rum, at which a shout of joy went up exceeding all that had gone before. A German soldier uncorked it and proceeded ceremoniously to drink his opponent's health in behalf of his *Kamaraden*. All then retired to their respective trench-lines for the Christmas dinner.

During the afternoon similar scenes were enacted. There was another coursing meeting. Of four more hares pursued, one was killed; this by right went to the Germans. There was much conversation. A German said that he hoped to get back to London soon; a British soldier remarked, "So do I!" A number of English newspapers were handed to the Germans who, with few exceptions, agreed that the war

would be over within three weeks. Blind incomprehensible delusion! Judging by the censored letters of that and a later time, it was one entirely shared by the British private soldier. The enemy expressed admiration for the charge of the English on the night of the 18th–19th, and announced that they also had suffered many casualties. They further expressed their intention of not renewing hostilities unless our side did: there would be no more shooting until they were relieved.

Nor had the hours of this day been, nor were those of the succeeding days, wasted. A great deal of work had been done—work which could not be done in ordinary times without mortal danger from snipers. Masses of timber, wire and trench-material were carried up in full view; parties were hard at work at drainage and on the parapets and on the roofs of dug-outs. At night, wiring went forward at speed and without risk. And there were not lacking among the British officers eyes to espy something of the siting, something of the conditions and wiring of the German defences.

IV

Meanwhile, however, a brief episode of another character was being enacted two or three hundred yards to the left of the festivities. Here the trenches approached each other as close as 90 or 100 yards; and naturally greater care had to be

exercised. It was over this ground that the night attack of December 18–19 had been hurled back. And the British dead still lay clustered about the German wire and close up under the parapet. In the course of the morning, a British officer met a German officer of an unusually agreeable type at a half-way point, and discussed the question of burial. The matter was quickly arranged, and one by one the Germans carried twenty-nine bodies to the half-way line, where they were laid side by side in a single large grave,Germans and British meanwhile standing in a semi-circle around. All personal effects and pay-books were removed, only the rifles on their side of the half-way line being retained by the enemy. Pointing to the fallen, the German officer remarked repeatedly: "*Les Braves, c'est bien dommage!*" That night a present of a scarf was sent by the British officer commanding to the German officer in recognition of his consideration. Very soon after a German orderly appeared at the half-way line bringing in return a pair of warm woollen gloves.

In the course of that same night, heavy wiring was carried out along the British line. In dim moonlight the Germans sat upon their parapet and watched. From the British side, word had already been sent that the truce was considered at an end. Nevertheless, when morning came the enemy was seen strolling unarmed and unconcerned as before outside his trench. The same four Germans as on the day previous came out to the half-way line and bespoke their desire

for a truce. But our men were forbidden to leave their trenches, only a small patrol being allowed to enter No Man's Land. A present of plum pudding sent across to the German trenches, however, was received with profuse thanks. Much heavy outside work was done on the British trenches. At 4.30, as before, the truce formally ended.

In the night that followed alarm came. A German deserter, crawling over the trenches of the Division on the right, volunteered information that the whole German line would attack shortly after midnight. All stood to arms. Reinforcements came up hurriedly. The English artillery opened in anticipation. . . . Nothing more happened.

But next morning shouts of laughter were heard in No Man's Land. It was the usual German truce-party and English patrol comparing notes over the previous night's experiences. The Germans protested they knew nothing of an impending attack from their side. On the British artillery opening, they, too, had stood to arms, expecting attack. There had been many casualties in their back areas. The base English! The dirty Boches! . . . But how they laughed together! And again the truce lasted all through that 27th of December. And only when one unit relieved another on either side did those two strange companies—none ever stranger, surely, in the history of war—go their respective ways.

One year passed.

The scene shifted a few hundred yards to the south. Perhaps the battle-field had become a little grimmer, a little more gashed with shell-holes, a little more torn and rent with trenches dug and trenches outward blown; a little more sprinkled and sown with the terrors and dreads and last perishing protests which are the seed-crop and harvest of battle-fields; a little more haunted and possessed by ghosts of the slain of Festubert, of Neuve Chapelle, and late September.

Christmas had come again to this world which had changed not in kind but only in degree; and to a world beyond which wept and prayed and waited and trembled and began to despair.

But there was no outward terror in these earliest waking hours of Christmas morning, 1915. On the contrary, Nature had mercifully and kindly, with her compassionate cloak of night, covered up the wounds and scars. There was only, in the words of Rupert Brooke:

> Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance,
> A width, a shining peace, under the night

—and this battle-field lay under the glance of stars, so clear, so calm, so keen, and so kindly winking as to belie the very credibility of war, the very existence of fear or pain.

It was only possible to believe, as children do, that God looked on from behind such stars. . . .

Down in the trenches frost grimly held. Four and a half years have passed since that Christmas Eve, four and a half years of incomparable struggle and crowding event; but, in the

writing, atmosphere surges back as it were this night just past. . . . Frost binding all things. Frost coming down on icy breaths from the east and seizing the ground and binding every coruscation and binding every rib and knoll so that they were brittle as bone or ivory. The trenches clean as marble passages and hard as pavements. And rising up from them that strange crisp scent of frost-bound sandbags and of the upturned earth at night, incommunicable, never-to-be-forgotten. There came to the ear no sound but a far-away shot at intervals and at intervals the loud, sharp crack of a bullet against a brick wall in the nearly ruined village, and now and again the harsh shrieks of the little owl (*Athene noctua*) from neighbouring orchards.

All slept save the sentries who peered out into vague spaces of moonlight, seeing nothing, however, but the grinning outline of contorted willows, frost gleaming white on parapet and parade, dim fields of barbed wire, the white banked-up frontage of the German trenches, and beyond all a faint lightening of the eastern sky that was Lille. An officer, a non-commissioned officer walked up and down the trench and, meeting, said as one voice: "Christmas morning!"

And as if to echo these words, to join in their greeting, to proclaim far and wide to the world in the speaking voice of that sinister time the age-long message of "Peace on earth and goodwill towards men"—the guns suddenly woke up. Far and near, along the whole frontage of the Army Corps, the guns blazed and winked,

boomed, banged, and thundered whilst sparks danced like luminous fiends above the German trenches and wherever a shell burst a quick glow rose against palls of moonlit smoke. And far beyond a dull glow rose where farmhouses behind Aubers began to burn.

Of the thunder and the booming; of the whining and wailing and whistling; of the shells crying hungrily through frosty air, of the shells crying their Christmas message to the sentries and to the sleepers; of their hollow crash in bursting; of the dynamic, cataclysmic disturbance in that severe mid-winter's night—who, what God or Devil, held the secret? . . . It lasted for twenty minutes. From the other side no reply came. One or two lone bursts from a machine-gun; one or two lone figures upstanding in brilliant moonlight as they, too, watched that strange and memorable scene. For the rest, emptiness, desolation.

As suddenly. . . . Silence again, stiller, colder, knife-edged and, if possible, more profound. A gentle stirring of the icy wind and frost binding, binding. Stars a-watching, moonlight and shadow vying. Rats a-hunting, Death and Doom a-flying. A sad world sleeping. A war at rest. . . . The second Christmas dawn a-breaking.

V

Grey, steel-grey light crept out of the east, above Aubers, above Fromelles, above the world of the trenches.

One by one the drab features of the landscape emerged as facts emerge out of the phantasmagoria of dreams. And night in the trenches was a dream—sometimes a nightmare.

Countless days had broken thus—and passed—and passed. And by force of repetition every detail of the landscape took shape. . . . First the ruined village with its great white husk of a church tower, then the skeleton trees waving withered, palsied, protesting arms at the winter sky and the double line of skeleton trees following the deserted road that ran parallel to the trenches; and the confused world beyond with its drab fields, its dykes and ditches, its shattered groves and orchards out of which the stark red of brick walls here and there peeped. And in the foreground, the waste beyond the trenches! the cesspools, the mud and earth upchurned, the shell-holes, the strands of wire, the grey, crooked crosses, the oozing battened graves, the silvery shine of cast-out ration tins and heaps of refuse, and heaps of sandbags—such the daylight showed. And beyond again, far beyond the German trenches, in the enemy country, the husk of a church tower showing above scarlet roofs and leafless trees near the summit of the long, low Aubers Ridge, and never a sign of life.

From the trenches themselves came those indefinable, insignificant sounds which so far went to the making of all that queer subterranean life. There were sounds of men stamping feet to get warm and sounds of men slapping themselves, and sounds, very distant, of men shouting to each

other through the keen air, and sounds—of all the most familiar—of the rifle's bolt being worked and the trigger's click at morning cleaning. Wherever sentries stood, breath vaporised upon bitter stillness. The blue smoke of fires began lazily to rise in their wisps along the respective lines, while to the nostrils came strongly the reek of bacon frying.

VI

About 7.50 a man was seen standing on a distant parapet half a mile or more away to the right. There the trenches bent back, bent round so that it was impossible to tell whether this solitary figure was German or English. An unusual excitement had already began to manifest itself among the soldiers who had been talking and laughing during "stand to," all agog—for what?

Episodes like those of 1914 had been forbidden, it is true. Sentry-posts had been doubled in anticipation of a German trick or surprise. Somewhere in the trenches a staff officer with special instructions loomed. Rumour said that the French objected to "incidents," deeming them unbecoming the spirit of the life-and-death struggle.

But there are things of which Governments and policies and Army Commands and even staff officers take scant cognisance, and of which they have necessarily an imperfect control. One of these is the collective human impulse—the

self-generated spontaneous action of a number of human beings that is beyond authority and outside restraint because accomplished almost as swiftly as the thought which inspires it.

So it happened now. . . .

No sooner had they observed the solitary figure standing on the parapet half a mile away than, leaving the cooking breakfasts, the cleaning of the rifles, the shaving or washing in which they were severally occupied, all rushed to the fire-bays. Looking over, at first cautiously and then boldly we beheld two Germans in field-grey overcoats and "pill-box" caps standing calmly on their parapet a couple of hundred yards away whilst a third was in the act of clambering into it. Seeing our men, the Germans immediately began to wave and shout across incomprehensibly. There was then no further hesitation on either side. Heads popped above the ruins of the opposite trench, and before long the white glacis or embankment, lighter in tone than the surrounding drab soil—which had always seemed a dead thing—was alive with field-grey and with men clad in what appeared to be whitish canvas overalls.

What was the feeling on beholding these? It was one of intense curiosity and surprise. What had been expected? It is impossible to say. Giants, perhaps, dragons, or devils. Through frequent peeping over, through long confronting of that high muddy glacis with its tumbled row of sandbags along the top, through long peering into emptiness and shadows and deceptive moonlight, and through the sense of an

enemy beyond, the imagination had created a nebulous inhuman figment of the beings who all this while had dwelt over there. There could have been no greater surprise than the discovery that those who came clambering over the long impenetrable barrier, who stood, hands in pockets, upon it, and who presently strolled leisurely out into No Man's Land, were men of ordinary proportions and of common shape.

But so it was. And the English, for their part, now climbed out of their muddy ditches or leaned over the fire-bays, shouting such remarks as: "Hullo, Fritz!" "Good morning, Fritz!" "Merry Christmas!" "Happy Christmas!" "How's your father?" "Come over and call!" "Come and have breakfast!" and the like amid roars of laughter. Far away to the right other men were doing the same, standing up above the trenches against the sky line—English on the one side, Germans on the other.

Some distance off occasional snipers' shots could still be heard. The truce thus far held good on a comparatively short frontage so that by reason of the curious twisting and convolution of the trenches, stray bullets occasionally wandered at queer angles overhead. In the midst of the merry-making a tall sergeant, well known and popular with all, tumbled down dead into the trench, where he lay for the rest of the day, his blood trickling out upon the muddy duck-board, his face covered with half a sandbag.

That was not in itself remarkable—it was probably an accident. But to the onlooker it

appeared strange, and on this quiet Christmas morning, altogether terrible. It seemed like the tumbling down of the world itself; of the whole illusion of civilisation; of the whole human creation. Lying at length there in the trench, never to move again, this fine man looked like a fallen idol—a shattered illusion. Something more than he—and more than us all—the soul of him—dead and killed. . . .

The incident was hardly noticed. All around the shouting and the exchanges of jokes and compliments went on. In the orchards near the ruined village the little owl shrieked demoniacally, as was his wont at that hour of the morning, and his cries resemble nothing so much as peals of ironical laughter.

VII

Presently the soldiers of the two armies began to swarm out into No Man's Land, which consisted of coarse, ashen grass with a willow-lined stream running down the middle. The movement had started on the right. It spread like contagion.

The khaki and the grey-uniformed soldiers met at the willow-lined stream, only the sentries, the officers, and a few non-commissioned officers remaining in the trench. They formed into large groups at crossing-places, and their shouts and laughter came freely back to the trench. They were glad to meet—there could be no doubt about that—to shake hands, to clap each other on

the back, and to exchange presents. They resembled nothing so much as boys of rival schools meeting on a common playground. Repeatedly they leapt the stream and back again for the sheer sport of the thing, helping one another over. Laughter was never so loud as when an Englishman fell in knee-deep and a German dragged him out.

A colloquy between the rival forces took place somewhat as follows:

German: "When's the war going to end?"

English: "After the spring offensive."

German: "Yes—after the spring offensive."

English: "What are the trenches like?"

German: "Poof! Knee-deep in mud and water. Not fit for pigs. . . . We're fed up. Aren't you?"

English: "Not yet. We can go on for ever."

German: "You gave our back areas a bad doing last night. What's it all about?"

English: "Oh! Only a Christmas present."

German: "I hear you got some of our billets and killed about forty."

English: "I suppose you'll do the same to us to-night."

German: "I shouldn't be surprised. I think we met you at Loos."

English: "You haven't forgotten—eh?"

German: "Wait till the spring offensive!"

English: "Yes—wait till the spring offensive!"

Several of the enemy could speak English, some well. Great admiration was expressed by

the British for the German canvas trench suits and by the Germans for the British fleece-lined leather jacket-waistcoats. But strangest of all was the fact that these men of the 95th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment had among them the tradition of Christmas morning 1914, even to the name of the British regiment and battalion concerned. They recognised us. By means occult but all-powerful in armies, the story of 1914 must have travelled through the length and breadth of the German forces.

The whole episode had lasted not more than a quarter of an hour. The colloquy in No Man's Land had lasted barely five minutes. But now two German officers in black accoutrements and shiny field-boots came out. They emptied their cigar-cases among the British soldiers, and expressed a wish to take photographs of the groups. This, however, our men refused to allow, whereupon one of the German officers intimated that their artillery was about to open fire: that we had five minutes in which to get back to our trenches. It was agreed, however, that there should be no more firing of rifles or machine guns for the rest of that day.

And sure enough it happened that within a quarter of an hour the German cannon were plastering the rearward roads with shrapnel. And within the same quarter of an hour there limped into a dug-out one of those who had been most active in No Man's Land. He had a shattered ankle.

So ended Christmas morning 1915—the second

and, as we believe, the last, fraternisation during the Great War.

VIII

Trench life quickly settled down again with its sniping and its fitful shelling. In the stirring spring, the armies stirred, taking their places one by one in preparation for the most sanguinary conflict the world has ever seen.

Among those who passed—and perhaps the majority of them have attained that bourne where all doubtings are set at rest—among those who passed from the quiet winter trenches under the Aubers Ridge into the sun-scorched maëlstrom of the Somme, one or two must have debated within themselves as to the nature of War, the nature of Man, and as to their joint significance in Life.

The issue is a confused one, the evidences complicated and contradictory.

The nature of war may be defined as fear born of peril, hatred born of fear, cruelty born of hatred, torment born of all; its origin, the nationalism of peoples (not their patriotism), the self-generating imperfections of monarchs, of statesmen, and of governments, their vague purposings, their misconceivings, their jealousies, schemings, ambitions, and their mistakes; its purpose, revelation, a purging reduction of civilisation to reality, travail, above all, out of which alone new life can spring.

The elemental nature of Man, simple, spontaneous, and undefiled may be defined in the words

of the Christmas hymn as "Peace on earth and good-will towards men." And so revealed itself upon the battle-fields of the Peninsula over a century ago. And so revealed itself upon two Christmas mornings of our own time.

AT NEUVE CHAPELLE

It is nearly ten o'clock before orders come to move. Then the long column winds its way on to the road, which here is narrow and straight. A staff officer on a bicycle passes down the column, giving the good news that the first three lines of trenches have been captured with slight loss. After the manner of his kind, the Tommy's spirits go up with a jump and he begins talking about the quarters he will occupy in Berlin next week. The road is alive with troops and movement of all kinds. Presently we turn off into a labyrinth of lanes winding this way and that; and now we are within easy range of the German artillery. It has, in fact, been so successful in shelling a certain section of the road that the order is given to move in artillery formation across the fields. However, nothing untoward happens.

Presently we come to a pleasant, sheltered meadow beside a farmstead. Here a halt is made, arms are piled, and acting on advice we prepare for a long wait. Things have gone well, so that we are not likely to move into the battle-line till to-night. It is now a mild, sunny morning, typical of early spring, the wind has gone down. With all the sounds of war and death at hand, the countryside looks peaceful enough. Two fields away a peasant is ploughing stolidly, automatically, though now and again a shell screams over his head. It is no business of his, he thinks; anyway, he must finish his spring ploughing, so on he goes.

Already wounded men are trickling down along the road to the dressing-station near by. Bloody heads and hands for the most part; not many serious cases, albeit now and then a still figure on a stretcher with chalky, quiet face speaks otherwise. The slightly-wounded Tommy, though often a humorist, is rarely an optimist. To every query as to how he liked his job there is one reply, "It was hell," he says with preternaturally solemn face. So they trickle by, supporting each other or supported by Red Cross orderlies. And presently there comes another procession along the road: German prisoners marching in file with an escort of French Territorials. Big, grey men of fine physique they are for the most part, yet with dull, heavy faces. Their drab uniforms and little round caps and scared expressions give them a funereal appearance as they trudge along two by two. How glad yet surprised they are to be saved! Some are Prussians, some Saxons, and there are a few Alsatians. The Prussians, it seems—an ignorant calibre of men—fully expected to be bayoneted on capture; between them and the others there is no love lost. The Alsatians, on the other hand—intelligent fellows, speaking French and English—are delighted to be taken prisoners, and speak disparagingly of their officers. All agree that the sudden onslaught had taken the Germans completely by surprise, and they thought themselves lucky enough to escape with whole skins.

Watching this passing show, we sit on a sunny

bank by the roadside. All morning the batteries in the orchards, enclosures, and farmyards just behind us never cease to boom and bang. Again and again the squat, black howitzers, peeping from their screen of leaves, belch forth flame, jerk up their heads, and are immediately surrounded by their little crowd of attendant gunners. Ceaselessly overhead the aeroplanes, English and French, pass to and fro.

Suddenly, without warning, a wailing shriek rends the air. A 16-inch German shell coming! We look up. No! We are petrified. For one appalling second we watch an aeroplane, crumpled, disintegrating, hurtle five hundred feet through the air—fall like a stone to the ground.

Half-an-hour later another little procession passes along the road. Two stretchers, four bearers to each, two bodies cased in leather, inconceivably torn and battered. So the two aviators, Irving and Morgan, had died. We walked along the road and there, three hundred yards away in a rickyard, was the shapeless, twisted mass of canvas, wood and steel that once had been an aeroplane.

Hard hit by the German guns, it had flown painfully down to our lines, only to crumple up at safety's door. And presently, a few fields off, another aeroplane descends. This time safety has been reached by a hair's breadth. The two aviators show us their machine, smiling calmly the while. The petrol tank has a hole large enough to put your arm in. All the way

from La Bassée, where the German shrapnel burst around it for half-an-hour on end, it had been leaking furiously. A narrow shave—but that is the sort of thing our aviators regard as a joke.

It is now nearly two o'clock. We eat our chocolate rations and a few sandwiches. No more news comes through, no more prisoners or wounded. But for the ammunition limbers, which constantly race along the road to replenish their batteries, nothing in particular happens. Just at this juncture, however, word arrives to move down into the reserve trenches vacated by regiments that have gone up to the firing line. We find them in an orchard alongside a farm—good, clean trenches, newly dug.

At a wayside farmhouse, which for the nonce is brigade headquarters, our battalion halts. A bright beam of light shooting out from the doorway discloses the files of men, heavily burdened with great-coats, packs, haversacks, water-bottles, entrenching tools, and equipment. Strange figures they must look in the dim light. Orderlies with steaming horses and one or two motor-cyclists are waiting outside. A long conference takes place between staff officers, the commanding officer, and the adjutant.

We move on. We pass our old trenches. We leave the road and begin to follow a light ammunition railway across fields. Eastward, the dawn breaks in streaks of ashy-grey, shedding upon the countryside a cold and cheerless light. Many were there who looked upon daybreak for

the last time. Not a word was spoken. It was all a man could do to pick his way along the narrow track on either side of which was liquid mud. Now and again we would meet parties of weary Highlanders trudging back from the firing-line for a well-earned rest. Presently in the distance a gun boomed. Close at hand another answered. Then one by one they took it up along the line behind. The grim business of our day had begun.

As the light grew, bullets began to whiz and hum above our heads. First occasionally, then increasingly, until the air sang with them. Quite close now in front there was a sudden little burst of rifle-fire. Across the open field we found ourselves in a road protected by a stout breast-work and fairly swarming with troops. The question now was how to find cover for the whole battalion. For already there was considerable congestion. Eventually this was done by splitting up the companies on either side of a gap in the line of sandbags through which bullets constantly whistled.

There followed a weary hour's wait. It was six o'clock. Orders had come to attack at seven. The first thing to do was to provide for the inner man. No one had had breakfast, there had been no time for that. So the men lie about eating their rations and smoking. Some take off their great-coats and equipment, folding the former away in the pack; some clean their rifles and bayonets; some talk and laugh together over breakfast. The Lancashire men, who occupy

the best place under the parapet of the trench, are doing likewise. And curious it is to hear at this odd moment in this odd place the intermingling of English dialects, Glasgow and Manchester, the burr of Devon, and the Cockney Territorials' nasal twang.

Very soon the Germans get busy. First one shell and then another hurtles across and bursts around a half-ruined, red-brick farmstead which stands beside the road. Soon they follow each other in regular succession minute by minute, now in front of the breastwork and now behind. Men walking along the road sink down beside it suddenly, whimpering like children, holding the head or clasping the limbs with their hands. Splinters and shrapnel bullets fly in all directions. The closer to the breastwork one is, so much the safer.

Seven o'clock approaches. Word comes that the attack on the right has been launched. Word is passed down to get ready. Officers load their revolvers and button their tunics across the throat. Platoons are marshalled together and told off. "Fix bayonets!" A cold, rasping sound, and six hundred blades flash in the morning sunlight.

"Move to the right in file!" "Right turn!" "Quick march!" The orders follow each other in quick succession. No. 1 company leads the way along the shell-stricken road. A lane branches off to the left and abutting upon it is a maze of deep, disused trenches. The commanding officer and adjutant are here, uttering

last words of encouragement to the men as they file into them. Knee-deep in mud and water they are, with planks laid along the bottom here and there to afford a better footing. At the end of the winding passages we halt, awaiting the final word. The order, when it comes, is short and simple: "Advance 95 degrees left."

Company officers blow their whistles and the whole front line swarms through the gaps in the sandbag breastwork and rushes pell-mell across a hundred yards of open ground, pitted with holes, and obstructed with loose strands of barbed wire. Now the bullets sing and splutter merrily in all directions. Once across that open stretch we are in the first line of German trenches. Already they have been reversed by our infantry though the trench is shallow and the breastwork low. Indeed, the crush of troops in this section is altogether too great. Men cannot obtain shelter from the ceaseless stream of bullets. Some even have to crouch down on the top of the ground. A strapping fellow topples forward groaning into the trench, his hands clasped to his forehead from which the blood pours. Another rolls quietly over on his side—stone dead. The lad next to you, virile and strong a moment ago, now lies feebly moaning, shot through the body. Two or three others, variously wounded, sit, half-conscious, with their backs against the parapet.

And we have seen out only five minutes!

It is time for another rush. Up we clamber again, dive one by one under a loose strand of wire and stream diagonally in batches across an

enclosure. No regular formation is possible in such ground—the men follow their officers as best they can. The air whistles, nay, tingles with bullets, and it is with a feeling more of surprise than anything that after each rush one reaches the other side. We find another breastwork similarly crowded with men, but better protected than the last. For the ground in front has been blown into a huge mound by the action of the British shells, and this provides adequate shelter. The mound must be at least forty feet high. Beneath it the soil has been hollowed and scarred and rent into a great cavity—a pit of horror indescribable. Here in some vast explosion all the refuse, all the material of the neighbouring trenches seems to have fallen. Many German dead are there, grey and bloody, amid the upturned earth; by itself lies the body of a British soldier, stark and stiff, the face covered, doubtless, by some comrade's hand with a piece of white tarpaulin; the trivial things of life are there, biscuit-tins, scraps of food, hand-mirrors, the trivial things men carry in their pockets. And everywhere litter of equipment—German helmets, with the golden eagle emblazoned on the front, German caps and accoutrements, rifles, clips of bullets, pistols, and weapons of all kinds. The tradition of blood and iron has found its fitting consummation in that one place.

Through this pit we clamber and up the mound beyond; then dart along a kind of ridge. A small river or large ditch of stagnant water is bridged at one place by a plank which has broken

down. It is no time to hesitate. The only thing to do is to plunge in and somehow stagger across with the filthy, brackish, greenish water lapping one's chin. Rifle and bayonet, already clogged with mud, are rendered useless. On the further bank lies a wounded officer attended by his sergeant. The country is now dead flat and open, the enemy cannot be more than three hundred yards distant. A broad stretch of ploughed field, heavy with recent rains, has to be crossed. Men fall right and left, prostrate khaki figures dot the ground in all directions. The crackle of rifle-fire freshens, the whole air hums with bullets. Burdened with our packs and weight of equipment, we can only muster a jog-trot in such heavy going. Many prefer to crawl over the ground on all fours, though this little advantages them; some pause for breath in the shell-holes, others lie down in the open.

On the far side of the ploughed field is a shallow depression in the ground. Here, the only available cover, are disposed a number of troops of various companies and regiments. Immediately in front, not 150 yards away, is a group of buildings surmounted by a tall, red-brick chimney—a landmark in all that country-side—known as the Moulin de Pietre. It looks more like a mine in one of our own colliery districts than a mill. It fairly bristles with rifles and machine-guns. The hail of bullets above our heads increases. We flatten our faces in the muddy ground. Now and again a machine-

gun sweeps round with its clack-clack-clack, and is followed by an audible stream of bullets.

Behind us the rear companies of the battalion are still advancing. They come on in groups and batches in widely extended order. Meanwhile, we lie down in a long, irregular line which grows ever thicker, thus affording a better mark for the enemy's riflemen and artillery. So, presently, the order comes for two platoons to advance about a hundred yards to a line of temporary breastworks. We show our heads and the bullets begin to fly as thick as hail. One has to leap a ditch. . . .

The sensation of being wounded is outside any ever felt before. A terrific thump in the thigh followed by a sharp stab of pain like a red-hot iron searing the flesh, then a collapse of the limbs, and you roll over as a shot rabbit might do. Like a rabbit, too, you squirm and kick as you lie on your back. A stalwart corporal drags you out of the ditch into which you have half fallen. Nor does a foot of dirty water make your appearance any the more elegant.

The hours roll by as you lie there. Presently a doctor and stretcher-bearers come up from the support-trenches. The doctor gets to work on the more serious cases, kneeling beside the prostrate figures, apparently regardless of his own life. Within five minutes he is shot through the stomach; his own stretcher-bearers carry him back. Shrapnel, in addition to rifle-fire, has now begun to burst freely. The place is grow-

ing distinctly warm. Wounded men are lying around in all directions, whimpering, groaning, silent. One active officer only is left to the company.

Regular as clockwork the shells burst within a thirty-yards radius, "whiz-bang"—a shower of earth, a playful shower of bullets. Luckily, the Germans plaster the same little area over and over again. Gradually, as the day wears on, the intensity of the bombardment increases until the battle is raging at its height. The noise is deafening, the confusion of sound indescribable. The crackle of rifle-fire, like newly-kindled wood, alternates with the metallic clack-clack of machine guns to right and left. The hollow roar of lyddite explosions resounds amid the ruins of Aubers and Neuve Chapelle. Near at hand the high explosive "coal-boxes" burst with a flash of fire against inky-black smoke, making the earth tremble. Sulphurous fumes of lyddite rise from the ground and poison the very soil, the very atmosphere, the very water. A thousand reports, dull, piercing, deafening, rend the air—the bang-bang of our field-guns behind, the heavy boom of 4·7's and 9·2's, every few minutes an earth-quaking, thunderous roll when "Mother" or "Grannie" speak from their positions far in rear. Then there are German guns in front, and especially a howitzer double battery near at hand, firing salvoes every three minutes with maddening persistency. "Boom—boom—boom—boom, boom—boom—boom—boom." The drum of the ear tingles in anticipation of it.

Ever and again the shrapnel screams across and bursts thirty yards behind, and the shells wail overhead in unending procession.

So this fiendish orgy of sound goes on far into the afternoon. There are occasional lulls. Once there is dead silence for at least a minute, when, far above, you may hear a lark sing. Then inferno breaks out again. "Bang—crash—smash." "Ping—ping—ping." "Clack—clack—clack." The man next to you, unhurt up to now, is bleeding freely from a shrapnel wound in the head.

What are one's thoughts as one lies out there with a sharp pain in the thigh, unable either to advance or retire? They are not difficult to analyse. Will the next one catch me? you think, as you flatten your face in anticipation of it. Maybe you conjure up a picture of your home in quiet England—the quietest spot you know—wondering what your friends are doing at that particular moment. It is wearing to the nerves certainly, this doing nothing. While advancing you have no time to think. You are just bent on getting to the other side. It is like crossing a crowded street—you do so with as little delay as possible. But lying down under shell-fire—even that has its monotony, and after a time you are in danger of falling off to sleep. Then comes "Jack Johnson," and the earth scattering over your neck quickly brings you back to reality.

At length an orderly crawls up with a message. "Dig yourselves in." Quickly the men get to

work with their entrenching tools, each individual scraping a hole for himself as he lies on his stomach, after the manner of a terrier digging for a rabbit. By this time the enemy's fire has slackened. It is a long while since any supports moved up, and the firing-line is screened from the riflemen in the mill by the slight rise of the ground. Those who can among the wounded crawl slowly to the rear. We have to cross three hundred yards of open plough. About half that distance has been covered when shelling begins again in deadly earnest. One after the other the shrapnel skims overhead to burst with a nerve-shattering crash twenty yards this side or that. Somewhere a machine gun opens and a solid stream of bullets whistles around one's ears. A deep, round shell-hole close at hand offers the likeliest refuge. All the earth is stained yellow by the sulphurous fumes of lyddite. A long-barrelled pistol of curious shape lies in the hole. Bearing a Birmingham trade-mark, it has the appearance of an old-fashioned highwayman's weapon, a century old. One wonders whether it is a German all the same. Amid the loose earth are bits of iron and shell-casing, a piece of a horseshoe, and divers grisly human relics.

For full a quarter of an hour an inferno of fire searches the field. All the sky is dotted with puffs of smoke, white and yellow and black. The air stinks of sulphur. In the distance the faint sound of men shouting proclaims that there something is happening. Ever and anon comes the boom—boom—boom of the German howitzer

battery, firing salvoes, followed by the scream of the projectiles. So the battle rages in bursts of concentrated fury. There follows another pause. The moment has come to struggle on.

. . . . .

The modern battle-field is no place for squeamishness or sentiment. There must even be a measure of callousness to suffering and death. At the same time, no ordinarily intelligent mind can pass through such an ordeal without retaining impressions which will never fade. Nor are these entirely disagreeable impressions. When together men face a deadly peril the best that is in them comes to the surface; the spirit of comradeship is there, the will to sacrifice, a certain mutual respect.

Yet beyond these, the land of Flanders can leave but one legacy. Never was it fair to look upon, this land of dykes and ditches, of mud and water, of miserable farms and miserable people, of flat acres bordered by straight trees, of dreary villages and squalid towns. To-day the hand of war has laid it waste so that the very earth is poisonous, the very water stinks. It is as if the curse of God had fallen there. To desolation is added the stench of death.

AFTER YPRES

THE RECORD OF A SOUTHERN JOURNEY

THE news came one breezy summer's afternoon, and it came direct from Divisional Headquarters. The groups standing and lying about on the canal bank got it first; then, like greased lightning, it flashed down the Yperlee and reached the innermost recesses of every dug-out, and was even conveyed to the newly-brought-in wounded who were lying in the dressing-station dug-outs. Near Bridge 4 it collected a crowd; at Blighty Bridge quite a number were discussing it half-an-hour after the first whisper had got abroad. By nightfall it had crept uncannily along the three-quarters of a mile of communication trenches to the front line: it travelled faster than any gas-wave. The only people who knew nothing of it were the three canvas-shrouded figures lying side by side on stretchers in a *cul-de-sac*, looking like so many mummies. And they would never know.

"The division is moving south!"

The news flew from mouth to mouth, and everybody congratulated everybody else. Everybody's heart leapt for joy that breezy July day because the dead weight of doom was lifted from their souls. The salient was to be left behind, with its brown ditches, its impotence for the defenders, and—its implacable Fate. No more sitting still and suffering. There would be a pause, at any rate, in the slow procession of the maimed, the dying, and the dead. There would

be a change of country, of scenery, of air, of habits. There would be a long journey, long marching, gorgeous rests in remote places, quiet nights and still, lazy days, and a breath of Peace—and of Life. And at the end—who knows? Nothing worse than a battle-field on which you *fight* and live or die as men should, not lie in a ditch and wait for the inevitable end like dogs. Give us the first a thousand times! Make no mistake—Ypres gets on the nerves.

. . . . .

The day came. A still, misty morning resolved itself into brilliant sunshine and great heat. And as the first train left the railway siding near the old Poperinghe road, cheer upon cheer went up to the blue sky. It was the men's farewell to Yperz, as they called it. "To the south!" They knew that they were going into action—perhaps in a few days, perhaps in a few weeks—but this mattered not a cuss: there was nothing but singing, laughter and shouting to-day. For with every mile the hated salient, the treacherous canal bank, the death-stricken city were left farther and farther behind. . . . The train rolled on. Its rhythm, its regular "clank-clank-clank" burst into the great heat. By ten o'clock a broiling sun poured down its rays upon the young oak-woods beyond Proven, upon the flat fields and vegetable gardens and the fruit-laden orchards, upon the white highways whence clouds of dust rose. By road and rail to-day the relieving corps was moving up to Ypres. For many leagues—as far, say, as Wormhoudt—the railway

line ran beside the road, and that road carried unending columns of perspiring, khaki-clad troops, unending lines of horse transport and motor lorries, unending columns of artillery—moving north. And they had come from the Somme, these dusty, heat-stricken warriors—at least thousands were left behind, and so many thousands were fresh from England—where they had been decimated. They were coming up here—for a rest! . . . God help 'em.

Wormhoudt was left behind, and with it the northward-bending army. One had a glimpse of three white roads converging on a wide, sun-baked square, which was full of troops. It reminded one of an Italian piazza, this Wormhoudt, where we had passed a showery fortnight in June. You could not quite see the old billets, the Flemish farm amid green, flat fields, with its heavy cows and brawling family of children that had seemed a Paradise then; but now the Hill of Cassel came into view, and northward a wide vista of the Pas de Calais. A great undulating expanse of green fields and groups of trees and farms and cottages bounded sharply by a semicircular rim and beyond this the blue ribbon of the Channel. At the edge of it, many miles away, a group of red-brick buildings surmounted by tall chimneys and a slight haze of smoke above that was Calais. And Gravelines was not far away, another little cluster of houses and chimneys right on the verge of the sea.

It was wonderful, this panorama, wonderful to those who had seen nothing more spacious

than Ypres viewed from the salient on a clear day.

The detraining point had an unpronounceable name; it was also insignificant, being a mere sun-baked, sleepy railway yard without a square inch of shade. But here, for the first time, there was no sign of war. For the first time in many months one seemed to leave the war behind, and as we marched out into the country—a merry, chaffing, laughing column of schoolboys—no stench of motor lorries and petrol or swarms of troops greeted us, but only the heavy silence of the woods and fields and villages, dreaming away their midday rest. A yellow cat strolled across the village street, dogs lay basking outside the unsubstantial-looking inns—peculiar-looking dogs and very sleepy. Barely could they raise the energy to wag a tail at the flies which everywhere buzzed and hummed, creating with the drowsy heat an indescribable languor and murmur of summer. We halted in a shady oak-wood, and the men, recklessly happy, threw themselves down amid the long grass, the convolvuli, the straying honeysuckle. Yes, they were happy now, these who had suffered much! It was good to watch them. In the drowsy hum of summer, in the measured beat of the greenfinch's song and the "ting-ting-ting" of the yellow-hammer, in the far-wistful cry of the soaring kestrel, in the quiet, mysterious woods and the sun-dappled, mossy earth, in the poetry of the long white roads, in the glimpse of great distances fading towards mist and sea, in the "chop, chop" of

the wood-cutter and the deep contrasting silence of the country, there was found a hidden balm for all these war-weary souls.

And so at two of the afternoon, smoking, singing and dust-covered, they marched into billets. Everybody's thought was, God grant we stay here a while! For it was a lovely little village, like enough to those that you will find in Devonshire or Dorset or those that you will commonly find in France, with its old-fashioned thatched farmsteads and its cottages covered, many of them, with creeper, honeysuckle and clambering roses. And what an agreeable old lady—old, very old, and small and wrinkled—who comes to the door of her cottage and welcomes you—yes, actually welcomes you! "Here is your bedroom, M'sieu. And would M'sieu like sheets? And would he, perhaps, like a cup of coffee after the long stroll?" She shows you a clean, sweet-smelling room opening out of the little parlour; its wide French windows looking on to a pleasant little vegetable and flower garden with box-borders and a box-arbour in the corner. Beyond that the fields and next to it other shady gardens, full of scents, hollyhocks, late roses and ripening fruit.

In ordinary times, perhaps, you would not have called this a strikingly pretty village, for, after all, the country around was rather flat and ordinary, neither were there any striking features in the landscape except the Hill of Cassel. But what is that to us, who for six weary months have seen little but the sombre, shell-scarred world of

the salient? So it became a Garden of Eden, a reincarnation, the haunt of a dream, Elysium, Paradise.

That afternoon the company was paid in the farmyard, and later, towards evening, we took books and a deck-chair—hero of many vicissitudes this, and survivor of all!—out into the box-arbour and abandoned ourselves to the dreamy stillness which steals over country places towards evening. We dozed. The air was full of gentle sounds, alluring, restful: the drowsy hum of insects, the rippling notes of birds, of wrens, warblers, finches, the "roo-coo-coo" of a wood-pigeon in elms near the church, the "purr-r-r" of stock-doves, and presently the pleasant sound of an evening church bell.

Within the cottage Madame, our hostess, could be seen entertaining an aged friend to coffee and rolls. They were chatting animatedly together while knitting. Thus one gained an insight into this queer little backwater of life, self-contained, untouched, unmoved by the war, a thing apart from blood and death. There were the men in worn and faded khaki—half stripped, some of them—lying smoking, or sleeping against the sunny wall. It was the hour when at home the cattle meander down to the waterside to cool their blistered legs in the shallows, when rooks come sailing homeward strung out in a long line against the sunset sky, when the great cart-horses clank into the farmyard laden with laughing children.

There had been no troops in the village for

nearly twelve months. That was why it was different from the other villages of this war-stricken country. Like ships that pass in the night, the soldiers came, stayed two brief days, and left behind ever so regretfully the first stage of the southward journey.

. . . . .

The battalion marched at dawn—a summery dawn that was shrouded in mists which presaged further great heat. Yesterday had been spent practically in idleness and resting, for the troops dozed away the hot middle hours, and only in the cool of the evening walked out into the country, watched the peasants working in the fields, strolled about, and looked at the gay village gardens.

By nine o'clock we were on the road again with a thirteen-mile march before us, and a long railway journey at the end. It was hoped to finish the march before the sun got up. Nobody minded the early hour, for the moist blue mists which blotted out the countryside and cloaked mysteriously the woods and fields were cool and delicious. Everybody felt fit, there was much laughing and singing as the battalion swung along the dusty road. We passed through villages—old-fashioned and sweet-scented like the one just left—whose farms and cottages and inhabitants were yet asleep. Only an occasional farm-boy, milk-pail in hand, would come to the gate to see the long columns go by. But as the morning advanced and shafts of sunlight began to peep through the mists, people appeared at

the gates of their cottages, at the cross-roads, and in groups and little family parties on their way to early church; which latter was the first intimation one had that it was Sunday, for in the vagrant stirring life of movement the days passed by almost uncounted. The halts were delightful, and more so as the noontide heat crept on; by the side of woods, shady and cool, on the edge of cornfields in lush grass, corn-flower-starred and scarlet-splashed with poppies, on the village greens where the geese and turkeys wandered and the children gathered round, wide-eyed and curious. Out of the mists there peeped presently, now quite close, an ever-beckoning landmark, the Hill of Cassel, with its grey, old-world houses grouped on the summit. Thence you may see on a clear day Ypres and the dreadful Pilckem Ridge on the one side, on the other the sea about Nieuport almost to Ostend, and the ships in harbour at Dunkirk, and away to the south, Armentières and Merville and the dim Forest of Nieppe, westward the quiet villages of the Pas de Calais as far as that city itself.

We halted at the foot of the hill in fields close to the railway station. There was to be a three hours' rest in the heat of the day before entraining. The men ate their dinners—which had been cooking on the march—under the shade of some majestic elms, and as for the officers, a fine spread awaited them (previously arranged by a thoughtful quartermaster) at the farmhouse near by. This was followed by a smoke and a sleep, after which, the hour being about one o'clock,

it was time to entrain. Cassel shimmered in the heat-haze; the sun scorched down upon a station-yard ankle-deep in dust. Two long trains stood in sidings, the engines with steam up; part of the brigade had already gone on ahead. Here was to be seen a group of Staff officers—"red-caps," as the men call them—there a couple of gendarmes in black, silver-braided uniforms and a few French railway officials in sky-blue. Once all the men were aboard, there was no waiting, and the train started on its sixty-mile journey at a good speed.

And what a perspiring, jolting, stifling journey it was! Rather it reminded you of going home from school for the summer holidays. When the train stopped, as it occasionally did, there was no sound but the singing heat, and you listened for the familiar clatter of milk-cans, which is a thing inseparable from hot days at wayside country stations. But no such sounds came. Only the countryside, from being flat and ordinary at first, grew more and more Arcadian after you had passed through the tract of coal-mines and slag-heaps near Bethune and not far from Loos. After that, in the neighbourhood of St. Pol, came hills richly crowned with soft green woods, valleys and deep combes tumbling into one another, and full green hedgerows, and farmsteads and villages and grey or reddish lichen-grown church steeples peeping out from the dense foliage of trees. To eyes wearied by ineffable flatness and desolation, such scenes appeared beautiful as Devonshire itself.

Indeed any country would have looked beautiful on so perfect a summer's day.

The train ran through quickly, there were few stoppages, and in the late afternoon the detraining point was reached at a small and apparently remote country town. Anyway, it was a considerable distance from the front. In the centre of the town, and near the railway station, on a grassy open space well shaded by elms, the men piled arms and had tea, while the officers found a repast waiting at the station buffet. There were boiled eggs and cold tinned salmon and salad, and coffee and rolls *ad lib.*, and jam and honey and excellent omelette and light beer—what more could the heart of man desire? Evidently troops had not passed through here in any great numbers.

Half-a-dozen stretchers in a row on the station platform, bearing recently wounded men, and a certain number of Red Cross Ambulances arriving and departing, were the only signs that a battle was raging barely fifteen miles away. Otherwise the typical little French provincial town appeared as peaceful as any other place of the same kind in normal times. There were the bourgeois taking their Sunday evening stroll on the central boulevard, stopping and gazing with a mild interest at the resting troops. There were the precocious French youths, with their vari-coloured bow-ties, their rakishly-perched soft hats, and their canes carried in the hand, strutting about in parties, ogling the hatless girls, laughing, sporting, and showing off. Those

who were not gathered in the boulevard were standing about chatting or playing leap-frog outside their houses.

When, soon after six o'clock, the battalion fell in and marched out with bagpipes playing, there was naturally much excitement and gesticulation, for few of the local population had ever seen or heard the pipes before. A fourteen-mile march lay ahead, and the first lap of a gradient three miles long was the most trying part of it. Away in front, poplar-lined and straight as a ruler, the broad white road climbed ever and ever upwards. Sometimes it was obscured by clouds of chalky dust, sometimes it simply disappeared over the rim of the horizon into that golden land where the sun would presently set. Looking backward, one saw the little town which we had left an hour ago lying picturesquely in a dip of the hills, the blue smoke of its chimneys rising in a gentle haze.

What a different country, this, from the flat, closely cultivated small holdings of Belgium! Rolling hills, crowned with woodland and scored with high leafy hedgerows, stretched away into distances infinitely dim and blue. It was God's own country that night. Not less wonderful because of the harvest which, more forward here than farther north, was strewn about the hillside fields and valleys in a wealth of stooks and sheaves. The reaper had done his work: the corn was cut and awaited carrying. Evening stole on, the rooks rose from the fields and wended their homeward way; from the grey

village churches, hidden in combes and clefts, came the sound of bells. In this late summer scene there could be found no jarring note, but as the long, snake-like column mounted the last rise you divined a panoramic study in blue and gold untouched, unsullied by a hint of war. Blue sky, blue mists, blue distances, and greenish-blue tinge on the woods, and golden sunbeams sloping across the yellow stubble kindling to a ruddy gold the wheat and oats.

At the start the march was noisy and boisterous, with the usual amount of laughter and singing, but after the first halt the men (who had already done fifteen miles) settled down to their work. It would take every man's utmost strength and determination to reach his journey's end. So, as evening fell and four miles of the journey had been covered, there was no more shouting and laughter, but the column tramped on in a silence that was almost grim. We passed through a large village with a long, broad, grass-bordered street, consisting of rather foolish-looking white-and-blue painted houses. The place was full of troops; another brigade had marched in only a few hours earlier. Beyond the village there stretched a great forest, which seemed to cover the surrounding hills.

When we entered the forest the sun had barely set, but under the great oak and beech trees, whose foliage arched over the road, forming seemingly an endless tunnel, night had already fallen. It was almost pitch dark, and when after a mile or two we emerged, twilight had

descended upon the world, and you could barely distinguish the hillside opposite. Here a halt was made, and it was pleasant to rest upon the bank in the cool dusk, watching the last embers of a gorgeous sunset die out of the sky. Close at hand, on the edge of the forest, no sound could be heard but the ceaseless chirruping of grasshoppers and crickets, the occasional croaking of a bull-frog in some distant pool, and the "whoo-twhoo-whoo-whoo" of an owl coming from the depths of the woods. Not far off was a railway, and the one lone lamp which stared out of the middle distance and the occasional whistle of an engine only served to emphasise the remoteness and solitude of the place.

Now it was completely dark, a thousand summery scents rose from the earth, the sky was bejewelled with stars, low down on the horizon a golden-coppery harvest moon, not yet at the full, sailed into the heavens. The night was indescribably contemplative; many and strange thoughts came to the mind. It is from this, this pageant of peace and plenty and beauty, that one goes into the bloody nightmare of battle-fields. . . . What do the stars say, those stars so wise, so inscrutable? What do they say to each man who in such quiet moments asks himself whether, after all, this is not the end—of a life? Of how many lives? for many must travel the same road before the trees have lost their leaves. Nor do such thoughts bring with them forebodings or any "sadness of farewell," for in England are left behind the loves, the griefs, the hopes, the

joys, the longings or regrets that make up the sum total of Existence and of Time. In France men think calmly of Death as of a thing ordained, knowing that it is ever near, knowing that for many the end of the road is their journey's end, not dreading or even allowing themselves to fear until the supreme moment comes, but ever wondering . . . and wondering.

Towards the middle of the night the men grew tired—so tired that they could scarcely stumble onward in their fours. After many months in the trenches they had marched close on thirty miles in one day, and the effort was proving almost too great. But not a complaint was heard. At intervals of a mile or so, a footsore or utterly exhausted soldier sank down by the roadside and had to be carried the last lap on a transport waggon. He murmured " I can't get any farther." However, the end of the march was near, and now the head of the column, after passing through a village which seemed to climb steeply a hillside, turned into an inky-black wood. Wooden huts were found, in which the men threw themselves down on bare boards without a word, and near by there was a farmhouse with courtyard and barn. After a cold repast quickly produced from the officers' mess-cart, we lay down thankfully to sleep, some in the living-room of the farmhouse, some on the floor of the barn.

Already the birds were awaking, and there was that deliciously fresh feeling in the air which comes just before dawn in summer. Already

the cool grey light had begun to peep in through the open doors and windows of the barn.

That barn! It was a place of unknown horrors which in due course the glaring midday sunshine revealed. Black-beetles were crawling everywhere—black-beetles that fell from the wooden partition, black-beetles that crawled into and out of and under one's sleeping-bag and—yes, over one's prostrate body; black-beetles that did company or battalion drill upon the floor under one's very nose. Hastily we fled the place, and next night slept in the farmhouse itself, but the memory of that rude awakening will long remain.

The farmhouse was a queer ramshackle, untidy place, overrun with poultry, overgrown with weeds. It could not have been tended since the outbreak of war. Not less queer and untidy and dishevelled-looking were the tenants, a couple of frowsy old women and slatternly-looking girls, together with a smaller and numerous family. The men were apparently away; the old women quarrelled with frenzied shrieks and abuse like London street cats. The country around, one could see, was glorious, and in the village were many pleasant cottages, but the day after the march was too hot and one felt too languid to wander far. The only thing to do was to sit out in the deck-chairs or read in the shadiest part of the orchard.

At dawn of the following morning another move was made through clinging mists which by eight o'clock had melted into scorching sunshine. On every hand one observed the glory of the harvest—

the corn cut and standing in sheaves on the hill-sides which sloped richly down to the valleys from their wooded summits. Among the corn-stooks flitted flocks of finches, sparrows, and linnets; the yellow-hammers and the crickets vied with each other in the beating out of an endlessly monotonous tune by the roadside. Overhead an unclouded blue sky—all the blue and gold and greenery of the year seemed to be concentrated in these early autumn days.

Of course the roads were ankle-deep in white dust; of course the distances were often very long and straight, and there was not always shade to be found at the halts. Already Ypres was forgotten, while the battle still seemed far away, and the war yet farther, so that there was the usual shouting and singing, and all marched well to the cheerful strains of the bagpipes. The villages, lying deep down in the trough of the valleys, looked curiously and utterly asleep. The inevitable dog slept head on paws in the middle of the road, the inevitable cat basked on a sunny window-sill or wall; at their cottage doors old women, with wrinkled yellow faces peering out of white linen sun-bonnets, might often be espied sewing. Somewhere, as one passed, the black-smith could be heard beating out the sultry minutes on his anvil. Nobody troubled to come to the roadside to see the soldiers pass, for doubtless many thousands had tramped that way since the great southward movement of troops began.

And at the end of the march there was a " kit-

strafe." Well—there would be on the hottest day in the whole year. All the officers' sacks and valises were hurled remorselessly down on the roadside in the middle of the camp, and the second in command went through them one by one. There was no ceremony—your hair-oil newly arrived from England was sent spinning across to join a patent wash-hand stand, some books, some underclothes, a collapsible bed, a collapsible bath, and—the deck-chair. That chair which had survived many marches, the rigours of Ypres, innumerable moves, substitutes, and evasions, and been the occasion of the most elaborate stratagems, was now solemnly sentenced to die an early death. "Folding chairs will not in future be included in officers' kit"—so ran the order. A chorus of protests was of no avail—the chairs were condemned not less than the hair-oil and the underclothes, and thereafter everybody was reduced to sitting on sugar-boxes or on roughly-knocked-up forms.

The camp, where we were destined to stay nearly a month, was deep-hidden in one of those young oak-woods which abound thereabouts. Situated on the top of a hill, it was shady and cool, and, although there were wooden huts sufficient to accommodate all, everybody preferred to sleep out of doors while the fine weather lasted, which was practically the whole time. Not many hours had been spent here before there came the first reminder of war since leaving Ypres. A German aeroplane, white and silvery in the sunshine, was observed travelling rapidly

and very high up, pursued across the blue expanse of sky by three or four British planes. At night the thunder of the guns seemed to come very close, and going to the eastern edge of the wood, you could see a great shimmering in the southern sky to show where the battle raged.

These last three weeks, quietly spent amid the rich peace of autumn behind the front, were a time of unsullied enjoyment. All knew that the storm was at hand, and in their secret hearts pondered deeply about the future. But none spoke of that, and none gave way to forebodings, which sometimes, when the roll and thunder of the guns made sleep almost impossible, and their great flickering lit up the whole night sky, came very near. There were moments, it is true, of doubt, of reflection, even of dread. Sometimes the sheer inevitableness of it all would appal one. Then, again, you simply could not visualise the proximity of fearful things. Away out there beyond the eastern horizon the storm muttered, but here were peace, sunshine, and rest.

The mellow silence of that early autumn entered into men's souls. And the plains of Picardy are very fair at harvest-time. There would be parades, marches, practice attacks, drill, physical drill, bayonet-fighting, schemes in the early morning, then the day's work was finished, and the men lay about in their shady wood all afternoon dozing or reading, while when evening came they would take country walks, assist the peasants in the harvest-fields, or get up a game of football. Thus they dreamed away

their days, for was not this to be a time of rest?

One morning a party of Staff officers came unexpectedly round the camp, resplendent in gold lace, red caps, and blue or red-and-white armlets. The guard turned out—one face seemed especially familiar, and everybody stood to attention. It was the King.

Of an evening or afternoon there would be glorious rides to quaint hidden places far back in the country. There would be motor drives too, and these reminded you of the days when France was a pleasure-ground instead of, as now, the battle-field of the world. One of the most favoured spots was Henancourt—a place chockful of troops, it is true, but distinguished by a magnificent eighteenth-century château, standing majestically at the head of a wide sloping village street. You confronted a spacious forecourt entered by finely-wrought iron gates. One wing had been burnt down by the agency of some careless soldier, but apart from the unsightly and blackened windows and roof, the symmetry of the great house had not been spoilt. The handsome stone portico, steps, and doorway were there; so was the spacious hall, white-painted, with main staircase branching half-way into two flights. The state rooms were, I suppose, as they had always been, splendidly proportioned, with parquet floors, panelled walls of yellow brocade, and magnificent glass chandeliers. In one room—occupied perhaps by some Staff officer or by orderlies—you would find a grand

piano; in another, exquisite Louis Quatorze cabinets and writing-tables, albeit most of the furniture had been removed. Upstairs Madame la Comtesse still dwelt—handsome and charming, it was said—the owner of the estate, who would not leave it except for an occasional visit to Paris to see her children. M. le Comte was away at the war.

Behind the château slumbered stately French and Italian gardens—much neglected, it is true—fruit and vegetable gardens once rich in produce, a home farm, a few paddocks, and beyond these vast woodlands, flower-strewn and steeped in silence, with grassy rides running through them and moss-grown statues gazing at each other from end to end.

By horseback, the forest of Lucheux could be reached, and of all the fascinating places in that richly endowed country, this was the most attractive. To reach it one rode through the provincial town of Doullens, which is surrounded by vast ancient earthwork defences, for the place is old in the history of France. And here one would stop for an excellent luncheon or dinner at the inn, while most things were to be bought at the shops, especially delicious chocolates and provisions of all kinds. It was amusing, too, to study the very provincial, civilian life of the place. Then one rode on four miles or so through a lush country, where water-meadows bordered a gently flowing stream to which eventually the forest tumbles steeply down as you enter Lucheux. This latter is a crooked, straggling village of old-

fashioned, thatched cottages lying in a basin of the hills beneath overhanging woods. We did not pause here long, but climbed the steep hill towards the forest and hit upon a track which leads right through it. On the very edge of the vast woodland, overlooking from a sort of promontory a wide stretch of rolling country, we found the Château de Lucheux, the property, it is said, of the Duc de Ligne. You entered the courtyard by a massive archway, and were immediately struck by the utter and complete silence of the place. There stood the castle, not large, but very old, built of grey stone and surmounted by a square tower. It looked fairly well kept, and one could see a vista of gardens hanging on the hillside beyond; but never a sign of human life, never a sound. On three sides it was shut in by the woods, which encroached upon the very edge of the forecourt. Perhaps these were responsible for the feeling of melancholy, for the impression of loneliness and unbroken solitude with which one left the place. Nor as one turned away into the forest did this feeling evaporate. Here, at any rate, the war had no power; it was as nothing in the great, solemn world of the beech trees and oaks, in the dim arched aisles which looked so like cathedral naves. Silence in the deeps of the forest, silence and dappled sunbeams falling through the fronds of the nut-bushes upon the mossy floor. A green woodpecker flew laughing away among the trees, a jay shrieked in alarm, a wood-pigeon poured out to the evening wonderful notes; somewhere

remote in forest glades the "pick-pick" of a woodcutter's axe might be heard. Far above, the soaring kestrel cried—one of the commonest sounds of Picardy plains.

Grassy rides, Arcadian by-paths, and roads traversed the forest; there were bosky unexpected glades, and on the outskirts cornfields and little pastures where cows grazed practically hemmed in by the woods. In these far rambles you longed to meet a party of the wild boars which roam the forest but are seldom seen. Human habitations there were none nearer than the neighbouring villages, not even, as far as one could see, a woodcutter's hut. Many of the trees, however, were being cut down for the use of the army by the peasants and by the Army Service Corps, while between the forest and the village of Lucheux there was a fairly large A.S.C. camp.

One trotted back through the late cool of the evening, through the gathering dusk of leafy lanes and the twilight of the rolling plains, then through Doullens, where lights were beginning to twinkle and the populace were standing in groups at the corners of streets or at the doors of their houses, gossiping and smoking. One rode back to a late supper under the trees of the home wood, for during the brilliant weather of those August days everybody slept, ate and lived under the sky.

. . . . .

All that is over now—a memory. When the order came to move, as it must come, and did—

and everybody knew what it meant—the day-dreams were over, the long solitary rides, the cool, quiet dusks and early mornings, the mellow beauty of the harvest time were at an end. Ahead there lay that other sadder harvest for which all had patiently waited as actors await a call.

But even then there was no foreboding, no grumbling or cursing, no futile regrets. Every man had had his fill of peace and sunshine—God had been good—and now every man felt fit to face whatever lay before him. So when the moment came, they just loaded their packs, shouldered their rifles, and tramped away, laughing and singing, along the dusty roads of France into the autumn haze.

They perished. Two weeks later they fought, bled, and died by the hundred, and few are left to tell of "after Ypres." Like a day that is done, like a picture that is painted, like a play played out to the end, the march south has fallen into a perspective which seems as though it had never been. Only there remains in the mind a clear-cut sequence of scenes, of incidents, of faces, which will never fade. The comrades of those days, most of them, the comrades of Ypres, Laventie, and Neuve Chapelle, lie now a few feet beneath the soil of the Somme country. One feels grateful that they passed from peace on earth through but a few terrible days to that peace which passeth all understanding.

A MEMORY OF BOURLON WOOD

In the grey first light of a mid-November morning, a certain battalion of a famous regiment set out upon its march along one of those roads which, having traversed the Somme battle-field, strikes across the waste ex-German tract of country south-east of Bapaume. There was not much cheer to the heart. For a damp, wind-riven mist partially veiled the landscape, while from a fitful quarter blew a breeze that threatened to cut one in two. The kits were late, the quartermaster was annoyed; the breakfast had to be eaten by candle-light under circumstances of chilly confusion which, if possible, enhanced its nastiness; most of the cups, plates, knives and forks had been already packed up. These misfortunes are, apparently, inseparable from an early move. Everybody "strafes," muttering oaths and curses. Nevertheless the men were in great form and tramped along right sturdily, fit after a week of hard marching, and reinforced by the belief that the British Army had "broken through" (blessed phrase!) at last, that the Boches were on the run, that the Tanks were driving all before them, and that the cavalry had entered Cambrai several hours previously.

Of these stirring events not a word had reached England in advance, nor had any reliable information leaked out in the hot-beds of gossip and "back chat" prior to November 20. Nearer the Front little was known, and, as generally happens, the wildest *canards* obtained credence.

Certain it was that on the 22nd, artillery and transport were pouring along the eastward roads, while the unceasing thunderous and often swelling chorus of the guns bespoke a tremendous battle.

Towards that sound a whole brigade marched through the dim hours after dawn till the hard cold steel of a winter's day tempered somewhat the hard cold steel of a wintry land. By villages extremely and utterly wrecked; past orchards whose every tree had been neatly sliced in half; across a grey prairie of waving ashen grass, interspersed with bleak, young oak-woods and stretches of cultivated land long since run to seed. Ridge succeeded ridge with troughs and hollows in between, rolling away into distance like a Canadian prairie. And always on either side the road for miles ahead those silent companions, the poplars, those mute watchers which speed the marching companies along the roads of France. Of *human* life there was no sign; of war there was every sign. Endless strings of artillery, transport and horses, motor-cyclists, and mounted orderlies, motor lorries, white tents gleaming from distant ridges and strips of naked woodland, aeroplanes that droned backwards and forwards overhead, batteries that banged away to right and left. Down in a hollow on the hither side of a battered village we came about the middle of the morning upon a bare piece of ground and a pile of unpitched tents. There was—just nothing. But in a twinkling thirty or forty tents appeared, fires were got going, food was cooking, an extreme briskness succeeded

the emptiness, and—lo! a camp. The keen wind blew, the grass waved, the cold grey clouds went sailing overhead, and every now and then a gleam of pale sunshine lit up the countryside.

A great spurt of flame, followed at an interval by a sullen boom that hit one like a shock, indicated the presence of a 12-inch howitzer in a small wood near by. And every two or three minutes a German shell would burst on the Bapaume–Cambrai road, whose course along the crest of the ridge was marked by the inevitable line of trees. The thunder of the battle was continuous, now rising, now falling, so tantalising that one felt impelled to mount a neighbouring hill—whence, however, nothing could be seen but ridge and hollow, ridge and hollow that suggested the everlasting sea.

It was an afternoon of preparation—of that bustling preparation which necessarily precedes a battle. The camouflage kits were produced, the water-bottles filled, haversacks loaded, revolvers cleaned, extra ammunition and bombs issued, and so forth.

Thus the hours slipped by. Night came early, and it was a night splashed and spangled with the gleam of innumerable camp-fires. Around these fires and braziers could be seen groups of men, warming their hands, and boiling water in their mess-tins, their faces richly lit up, softened or grave, or made merry by the dancing flames. Loud was the laughter and the singing of songs, uproarious at times the exchange of compliments from one fireside to another. A stranger might

imagine that of all these noisy fellows none had a care in the world.

Presently some of the more sober mounted a little ridge that formed one side of the hollow in which camp had been pitched. Thence a familiar but magnificent spectacle presented itself. Along the dark horizon flickered the flashes of countless guns; here and there rose coloured Verey-lights, red and green, yellow and white—lonely they looked and far away—and golden-shower rockets, and other powerful rockets that seemed to cast their glimmer even back here. There may have been greater night *spectacles* in the war, but seldom a horizon so far-flung, so panoramic. It was like a vast open amphitheatre enclosing within its walls of sky all the storm and passion, the mystery and obscurity of human life. Watching from that high spot was like a man at his birth, whose unseeing eye looks out into the future with its glimmerings of hope and fate,and its little lonely lights and its vast unknown shadows. Only in this scene there was found a sombre note, something wild and melancholy, something closer akin to the end of life than to its beginning.

It was pleasanter to look up and find the serenely twinkling starlight that never changed, that was on the whole kind.

At ten o'clock the battalion moved, and all that night we marched and marched. Often the narrow road, whose surface was pitted and rough, became alive with transport. Progress, therefore, was slow. Dug-outs—many of them snug-

looking and warm—honeycombed the banks on either side, and as we approached the old British line and the Hindenburg line beyond, communication trenches and disused trench systems began to appear on either hand. We passed into the area of field-batteries, and from pools of miry blackness would burst forth suddenly a vivid sheet of flame, followed by the piercing reports of field-guns—one, two, three, four. Then came the flotsam and jetsam of the battle-field with white-bandaged fingers, arms, and hands, walking and extremely cheerful. "What'll you give for mine?" says one; and to each in turn the men shout, "Is it a Blighty?" So they stroll back and we go forward again.

Then one by one, and afterwards in twos and threes, came the stretcher-parties—bearing, as it were stealthily, each its burden a perfectly still figure shrouded in a dark blanket. "Make way for the stretcher" would be passed down the column every few minutes. We must have crossed the Hindenburg line, scarcely knowing, about the middle of the night. So dark was it you could only discern occasional belts of barbed wire or German stakes, and opening from the roadside banks great deep trenches that appeared to face westward. Presently we were on the broad open highway. On one side squatted an abandoned Tank. A little farther on three dead horses lay in the roadway, but there was nothing to show that we were in country which had been German five days before. No shells came near. Once the column halted to let a battery fire

immediately across its front; once in a big village that in its silence and shattered solitude was a little uncanny. Then out in the open country with the Verey lights marking a wide semicircle, and the keen wind singing through the telegraph wires, though now that the circulation was stirred by hard walking it hurt no more. The chatter of machine guns came nearer, but it was spasmodic, and the night remained unexpectedly quiet. Presently—it must have been near daybreak—the guide halted before a square hole in the ground which, on peering down, disclosed steps leading deep into the bowels of the earth. It was a German dug-out. Descending we found a square room with table and chairs; another room with cooking-stove and benches; and, opening off the first, two small cells with wire-netting beds in two tiers, like cabins on board ship. Nor was it long before a meal had been prepared, after which everybody, heartened and refreshed, lay down to sleep in great comfort.

Morning had passed nearly into afternoon before anyone felt inclined to mount the steps and survey the country which last night, of course, had been completely invisible. There lay the Cambrai battle-field, spread out as in a picture under the bleak nor'-easter, a much more definite and circumscribed thing than most battle-fields. In this landscape the dominant feature was Bourlon Wood, whose dark shape rose high on its crested hill, overlooking the surrounding country. Without any tactical significance it would have

been conspicuous: to us it was a place of sinister import. No movement showed, but there one knew desperate fighting must be going on. In the foreground the battered village of Graincourt was being heavily shelled, every other minute great black "crumps" would splay up a mass of earth and stones, and a resonant thud came to the ear; another sort of shell sent up a fountain of red dust skyward; a third sort burst in heavy fumes of sulphur-yellow. Artillerymen came trickling back—the place had become too hot. A fold in the ground hid the village of Anneux. That, too, was being shelled. Away to the left lay Mœuvres. East and south-east from Bourlon a ridge extended unevenly past Fontaine and Cantaing, till far away, yet very clear, the eye fastened upon the towers and spires of Cambrai itself. There it lay, the promised city, with a vista of harmless-looking, rolling country between. Little woods dotted the landscape. Nearer at hand and behind was Flesquières, not badly broken, and still clustering round a church belfry. The other salient feature was the Bapaume–Cambrai road, which, clearly defined here as farther back by its parallel line of poplars, cut across the foreground like a palisade.

Signs of the battle were on every hand. Abandoned Tanks, resembling some strange animal asleep, looked perfectly natural, if a trifle lonely, against the wide waste of ashen grass; and as evening wore on they could be perceived only with difficulty. Artillery limbers, motor ambulances, motor-cyclists, mounted orderlies, and an

increasing stream of stretcher-borne or walking wounded ebbed and flowed along the Flesquières road. Now and then a shell fell unpleasantly close. Batteries fired intermittently from half-a-dozen secret places in the grassy hollows. Aeroplanes wended slowly homeward, and towards evening a great "strafe" began, when every gun within leagues seemed to open fire, and from a distance of two miles came the metallic irresistible roar and crackle of machine guns, Lewis guns, and rifles that was soon to become all too familiar. It was the unsuccessful German counter-attack of the afternoon of November 24.

In a loom of red and grey, in a strange fantastic fantasy of ochre wind-blown clouds shot with dying autumnal scarlet, the sun sank to rest; and for many their last day was done. Darkness quickly fell, rain swept up on the north-east wind.

When the dug-out was brilliantly lighted—with electricity, for the German installation was not yet exhausted—and from next door came the sound of sizzling bacon on the fry, when an atmosphere of comfort seemed to have entered our temporary home, and serious hope was entertained of a long night's sleep, when, in short, everybody had settled down quite happily, a message on the familiar pink form arrived—"Prepare to move immediately." It would be useless to pretend that anyone took the matter philosophically. Supper had to be hastily finished and before one had time even to get ready, the movement order came. Five minutes later we

were outside in the pitch darkness and the drizzling rain, stumbling forward in fours along a grassy track. The moon that should have illumined the scene was hidden by piled-up clouds. Shells were bursting some few hundred yards ahead—as it seemed, immediately across our path. At the junction of the grass track with a high-road a 5·9 burst within fifty yards. Nobody was hit, and nobody took any notice, though every one mentally asked himself, "Where's the next one coming?" It did not come—then. Half a mile farther on the head of the column struck a cross-country track that pursued a hollow between two slopes. Brisk shelling was going on, and you could hear the wail of each shell travelling through the air, and see the flying sparks of the explosion before you heard it. Also you could hear bits of iron and nose-caps humming around, and smell the powder. Everybody plodded on phlegmatically, for, though unpleasant, this sort of thing was to be expected. Then a quick salvo seemed to come straight at one, the shells burst on either side of the column, and the pace instinctively quickened. In the next platoon a man was killed and two or three wounded. Stretcher-bearers dealt with these while each company automatically doubled out into that artillery formation which had been so often practised peacefully in Hyde Park and Richmond Park. There was a twenty minutes' halt. You could just make out the line of the Cambrai road by its sentinel trees. Shells were bursting at random all across the open country.

It looked as if there was going to be an unpleasant relief. . . . The leading fours struck the *pavé* of the Cambrai road, and the last autumnal leaves on the trees shook and hissed in the wind. A vague shape loomed up—Bourlon Wood on its crested hill. An artillery limber clattered along the Cambrai road. We came to a shell-stricken wayside inn where pack-ponies and troops were sheltering, and in one of the rooms some men had lighted a cheerful-looking fire. In the lee of a wall several wounded were lying on stretchers. Turning off the high-road, a sunken lane seemed to lead into the very heart of the wood. Winding upward, it presently joined a hard road that in its turn struck towards the centre of the woodland. Now the shells went wailing overhead and burst behind. To those who through months and even years had been accustomed to trench-warfare, approaching a battle-field by way of a long communication trench or crater area, this experience was extraordinary. There were no shell-holes, no visible desolation or destruction. In Bourlon could be seen no resemblance to Delville or St.-Pierre-Vaast or Sanctuary Wood. The leaves were still on the trees. As regards fighting it was " virgin soil " : the nearest approach to open warfare that the majority had seen.

An occasional discarded khaki jacket, a grey German overcoat, a rifle or relic of equipment alone showed that the fighting had passed that way. Darkness blacker than night reigned on either hand. The wood seemed immense. After

twenty minutes' marching a cross-road, that must have been about the centre of it, was reached. Wheeling to the left we turned into a long straight ride that seemed to rise steeply at the farther end. (To such rides in England the pheasants flock about sundown when the keeper, blowing his whistle and scattering handfuls of corn, calls them out by the thousand; there, too, at night you will see a lamp dangling from a stick at either end to scare away the foxes.) The rifle and machine-gun fire which for long had been desultory now suddenly became fierce. Lights began to go up all round; bullets sizzed, twanged, and zipped overhead. It was not long before there came the usual message, "Pass the word down for the stretcher-bearers"—several men in rear had been hit. From mouth to mouth was murmured the order, "Keep well in to the side." Here and there a body lay half in, half out of the ditch. From the high part of the wood in front came the furious crackle of musketry—like dry sticks on a newly-lighted fire—sometimes drowned by the slow metallic roar of the machine guns and the quick rattle of the Lewis guns. Obviously something was doing. Some said "Wind up," others "Counter-attack." Then a strange thing happened.

Such things happen in war, have happened in all wars from the beginning of time.

Down the centre of the ride, and quickly in the midst of the advancing troops, hurried a small body of men, shouting and talking excitedly. At their head strode an immensely tall fellow,

capless, and shouting loudly—one pictures him now, towering suddenly out of the gloom. Their faces were chalky white, they seemed incoherent and distraught. "Retire!" they were crying. "The Germans have broken through. They're coming down through the wood. Get back! Get back!" Had they been ordered to retire? Were they acting upon a hasty impulse? It was impossible to say. For one, perhaps two minutes, confusion reigned. In the advancing column everybody was giving orders at once; some were for holding up the retiring party, others for endeavouring to extract more exact information; the men meanwhile were quietly standing easy in column of route. Mechanically, and very quickly, discipline—that discipline which had been built up by interminable hours of squad and company drill on the barrack square—re-asserted itself, bayonets were fixed, platoon after platoon lined the roadside banks: the Lewis guns came up and covered the long sweep of ride in front.

Others—and these shattered, nerveless men whose human nature had been tried past endurance—now came surging back in twos and threes. Especially memory recalls the drawn haggard face of an officer who was making rather pathetic attempts to re-form these twos and threes. He chattered wildly, disconnectedly, yet with a method of sense like a drunken man; he kept trying to pull himself together, then wandering off again. "The bay'net!" he kept repeating, "that's the thing for them. Show them the

bay'net, get at them with the bay'net, and they'll run. . . . I've been fighting all day," he went on. "Everybody's killed—everybody. I'm the only one left." As afterwards transpired it was pretty nearly true. The poor fellow was obviously shaken to the roots of his being, brain reeling, soul and body torn apart, yet groping for and sometimes finding himself. They call it "Wind up" in the Army—the doctors say "Shell-shock"—it was just the last phase of mental torture. We left him muttering, "Bay'nets, bay'nets!"

It wasn't pleasant lining the banks on either side the road—and waiting. "Drip, drip!" went the trees; the bullets came faster than ever, the rifle-fire seemed to get nearer. From the impenetrable gloom of the bracken and brambles you expected every moment to see a multitude of grey figures emerge. You felt that if they came it would be sharp work with steel—no time for shooting, no field of fire. But come they did not that night—the rifle and machine-gun fire died away and punctured only fitfully the dripping solemnity of the woodland.

There is at any time something ghostly and weird about a wood at night. Darkness fills all the spaces between the trees; these trees lean together and whisper and take on strange shapes; in the dim recesses, vistas and secret places that the eye cannot probe the mind pictures imaginary terrors and unsubstantial dreads. The woodland is peopled by a shadowy company of forms and sounds. To-night we crept in single file

along a narrow path, the trees and undergrowth pressing close in on either hand, their constant drip, drip being the only near-by sound. The darkness was such that a man could not see his hand before his face, nor, however close, his neighbour's back. Not a word might be uttered. The path wound now steeply between high banks, now tortuously, avoiding the trunks of fallen trees, now over stony and now over marshy ground. The Germans were in the wood, and close, though none knew where. Occasionally a Verey light lit up the moist, shiny trunks and the network of brambles; once, when all stopped, the pale glimmer disclosed a group of men in steel helmets, standing close together in a tense, listening attitude some fifty yards away. But whether these were Germans or English it was impossible to say.

Eventually the head of the long file of men reached the farthest extreme of the wood, that side which is most nearly adjacent to the village of Fontaine-Notre-Dame. It stretched back along the twisting path, almost to the point where that path joined the main ride. By this time everybody was very tired. No one knew what to expect till a runner arrived with instructions to dig in before daybreak, then to locate the Germans and drive them out of the wood. Contact was obtained with outposts of Highlanders and dismounted cavalry, wearier even than ourselves, for they had already beaten off two counter-attacks that day. The Germans, they reported, were established in the north-east corner, but in

what strength could not be determined. Day-break being no more than a couple of hours distant, there was no time to lose. The men, tired as they were, got out their entrenching tools and began digging with a will, each making a hole for himself. Not a complaint was uttered. They were even too tired to swear. The N.C.O.s, it is true, were a little captious, the men being perhaps stupid from lack of sleep. But they worked on patiently, and after a time their hard breathing and the grate of the entrenching spades against roots or stones were the only sounds heard.

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, a grey-blue misty light began to filter in among the trees. It was a curious sensation to see the dawn stealing through the woodland now so natural-looking and quiet, and to realise that a few yards away death lay in wait. Presently, as sure as the sun rose, the woods would echo with violent sound. The light spread and grew so that one expected the birds to awaken, but apparently Nature had fled the place, leaving Man to fight out his bitter quarrel alone. So undisturbed it looked, with its leaf-strewn paths and glades, its dim vistas and arcades and clumps of undergrowth and bramble, that (as it seemed then) one might have been watching dawn break in the quiet heart of England. The leaves lay thick, the dead sodden leaves, the soft, thick mould of years and years. It is the same in every large wood. Decades, generations, centuries go by and leave never a

change but that of the passing seasons overhead, never a footprint save those of the woodcutter going to his daily toil, never a sound but the sighing of the wind in the tree-tops and the woodcutter's axe at work. The wild things had fled. No chatter of magpies or jay, no woodpecker's laugh, no crooning of wood-pigeons or wistful cry of the soaring kestrel or sparrow-hawk's plaintive whistle; no squirrel's chuckle as he played with the beech-nuts and acorns. The shy little community that inhabits every French woodland had vanished like leaves at October's ending. Only the drip, drip, drip of the trees went on, and the daylight became real and hard and cold.



About 6.30 scouts went out in twos and threes, advancing boldly, darting from tree to tree. Then the main body went forward in extended order, rifles at the trail, the men talking and joking, many of them smoking. No shells, no bullets, not a sound. About the whole proceedings lingered an atmosphere of unreality—so that a man asked himself whether this was a sham fight or some game he was playing at. No thought of fear or danger or difficulty entered the mind. It seemed ridiculous and impossible during those first three hundred yards that an enemy could be lying in wait, that at any moment hell would be let loose.

Obviously the men experienced this same sense of unreality. It was unlike anything they had done before: the surroundings were unlike any-

thing they had ever fought in. One might be seen lighting a cigarette, another munching a biscuit, a third sitting down a moment to do up his puttee.

Away to the left a shot rang out from an English rifle. A German answered quickly. There was another shot, and soon a desultory sniping duel began. As the line pushed on a few yards at a time to allow the scouts in front to clear the ground, stray bullets began to whip overhead, and the leisurely skirmishing became hotter, though obviously the Boche did not yet realise what was happening. His snipers, however—one of them up a tree—were quite prepared for an early morning duel. Steadily the ground scouts crept on from tree to tree until the main body was clear of the outpost line. A sunken road was reached and things woke up. A Lewis gun spoke sharply, and the rifle-fire became a tell-tale crackle. On the near bank of the sunken road a scout began firing rapid. "Got one, I think," he said. Several Germans had doubled back across the sunken road. Suddenly a Boche machine gun swept round with a terrifying rush. The firing on the left had increased until a sharp rifle-duel was in progress. Now a second German machine gun came into action from some different angle, and more than one Lewis gun could be heard chattering volubly. The first wave went over the lip of the sunken road and lined the opposite bank. The road itself was dead ground and perfectly safe. Fighting now became general, and on the left waxed furious. The whole wood

rattled with rifle and automatic fire, and to these garrulous sounds were added the gruff notes of bursting bombs. Wounded men were carried back into the wood and attended to in security, for the enemy's vision was limited by the high bracken and close-growing trees. Word arrived that two officers, including a company commander, had been badly hit, and it became obvious that the attack was seriously hung up on the left.

A third German machine gun now came into play. The Lewis guns could not deal with these, for it was difficult even to locate them. Nor was the Boche weak in infantry, but inclined to be aggressive, and apparently in considerable strength. His bombers ran boldly back and forth across the road and showed no sign of yielding. In the left company the casualties grew. More than an hour must have gone by when the heavy firing became desultory again, and it was decided to dig in on the line gained.

The first attack had failed. It disclosed the enemy in strength, it disclosed unsuspected machine guns. Philosophically the men sat themselves down under trees and proceeded to cook breakfast. None paid heed to the stray bullets which continued to "zip" overhead. The fatigue of the previous night had worn off, and their spirits were high as the morning; whistling and chattering they set to work to light fires with the wood that was plentiful though damp. A cutting wind could not chasten their spirits, nor any sense of failure in the morning's

work. The mood of unreality amid surroundings so inimical to war continued; or was it that happy-go-lucky spirit that has carried the British soldier through unpleasant situations over and over again? Such peaceful surroundings lent the whole business rather the air of a picnic.

There was in the very centre and highest part of Bourlon Wood a large open clearing in which stood three ramshackle wooden huts that had obviously been used by the Germans, partly as a wood-store, partly as a tool-shed, and partly as quarters for those whose business it had been to fell and cut up the trees. One of these huts, the largest, had also evidently been used as a kind of office. It was littered with papers, with advertisements, with portions of German equipment, with oddments, such as a quaint-looking gramophone, a pipe-rack, and the like. On the floor were several recent copies of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, and a whole litter of carefully ruled, neatly kept pay-sheets and accounts. There were also a table, a couple of chairs, and five or six wire-netting beds. This particular hut had been converted into a very temporary officers' mess where everybody forgathered in turn to drink whisky—the one thing that could not be obtained was water—eat biscuits, tinned tongue, or bully-beef, and snatch a short sleep. Of this latter all felt the need, some were practically worn out. Included in the defence of the wood at this time were the remains of a dismounted cavalry regiment which had already been in action thirty-six

hours and lost very heavily, a battalion of the Foot Guards, a number of newly arrived Highlanders, and some machine gunners.

At one o'clock of this same day, three company commanders were gathered together in the hut aforementioned. There had been a conference at battalion headquarters, and it had been decided that the attack on the north-east portion of the wood should be resumed at two o'clock. Time, therefore, pressed. All arrangements had to be completed within half-an-hour, while the attack was to be organised on entirely different lines from the earlier one. There was to be a short machine-gun barrage, no artillery preparation. Then three companies advancing in two waves were to deliver a rapid assault, capture the enemy's machine-gun emplacements at the point of the bayonet, and drive any remaining Germans out of the wood. To those present it appeared to be a clear case of neck or nothing, and so it was to prove.

Before separating, everybody had a stiff brandy-and-soda. One company officer remarked that he "didn't like the look of it"—a significant observation for an individual so usually dour! Did he but know it, his course in this world had exactly nineteen minutes to run. Another said, "Well, we're in for it now," in his usual cheerful tones; whilst a third merely put on his equipment and revolver, picked up his servant's rifle, and walked out.

Out into the pale uncertain sunshine of a typical early winter's afternoon. The blue sky was

flecked with dark and gleaming clouds that, driven before the biting north-east wind, foreboded snow. A bank of leaden grey grew out of the west—men shivered as they met the icy blast. Oaks and beeches were creaking, whining, and whispering together, as they had probably done here since the beginning of time. It was one of those days when Nature is at her cruellest, when she seems to mock us poor mortals —to mock, deceive and scourge.

Quietly and quickly the platoons crept down into the sunken road, and climbed up the opposite bank, which was to be the jumping-off place. Every detail had been explained to the men; and it must be confessed there was no levity now, though all were calm, patient and businesslike. Each platoon commander looked at his watch. There were yet five minutes to go. If one could analyse the feelings of a murderer on the morning of execution they must be similar to our own during those last moments. Few among us—with the experiences and surprises of the morning fresh in our minds—expected to come back alive.

Nor were the surroundings or the elements propitious. Close at hand under the bank lay six tall Pomeranian Grenadiers in various grotesque attitudes of death. The six waxen faces expressed many things, adding greatly to the puzzle which the dead cannot help the living to solve. Upon one was writ surprise, upon another dread, upon a third peace, upon a fourth sleep, upon a fifth terror, upon a sixth—emptiness. One could not help looking back again and again. . . .

Then the sunlight faded out. There were three minutes still to run. A storm of sleet and snow swept up the sunken road, the little snow-flakes danced and tossed as they were driven helter-skelter before the wind. The trees rocked and moaned more violently than ever: the black leaves that had lain so still these many years now stirred and spun and whirled.

The greyness of everything sent a chill to the heart. Now the men, so patient and quiet, fixed bayonets and crept closer up to the lip of the bank. The moment had come: already the machine guns were chattering like demons in hell, and there was an answering fire from a German gun in front.

The first wave of the company on the right went over as one man, and vanished in the under-growth and high brambles. The platoon sergeant jumped up, a small insignificant looking-youth with a Cockney accent—he hailed from East Ham—and a D.C.M. His blood was up: he led the way. "Come on," he kept shouting, "we must get this gun." Dodging and running to this side and that, he was everywhere at once. A machine gun fired uninterruptedly; it seemed to be immediately in front. Away to the right another had opened, the place was alive with them. Rifle-fire had begun to right and left. Somewhere beyond, you could hear men shouting —probably the Germans calling up supports. All together the platoons came to an open space. With a vague feeling of surprise one noticed on the right a group of prostrate khaki figures.

The sunlight which had emerged again was shining full upon them—one in front lying on its back, then two or three, then others. The company commander was there, and the platoon sergeant, though hardly recognisable; they must have been just wiped out.

Three of us rushed across the open space, realising in a flash that the machine gun could not be more than fifteen yards away. It opened point-blank and everybody fell flat. A storm of bullets knocked earth into our faces and furrowed up the ground all round. We crept into the lee of a young oak tree upon which the bullets pattered, the sergeant alongside, a fair-haired young private close against the trunk. After a minute's hurricane fire it was possible to look back. A number of the men were firing from a shallow dip twenty yards in rear. Others, riflemen and two Lewis-gunners—eight or nine in all—were coming on in little rushes, the latter out in the open now—giving steady covering fire just as they had done times out of number on the field range. It was extraordinary to watch these two No. 1 gunners. While bullets hummed and kicked up dust all round, and to be hit was a certainty, each would crawl forward, rest his gun, draw back the cocking-handle, adjust the magazine, aim, and fire burst after burst.

But, give what you will, a light automatic is no match for a machine gun. And first this man fell backwards squirming and groaning, then the other rolled quietly over and lay across his gun. Still the riflemen—half-a-dozen of them

—were coming on, blazing away clip after clip. One simply lay and waited and watched. Each man in turn was hit as he crossed the bullet-swept area—"like rabbits," the sergeant parenthetically remarked. One fellow shot in the ankle spun rapidly round and round shouting with pain till, blindly trying to crawl back to cover, he was hit again. Two men had fallen across each other—one dead, the other mortally wounded. Now and again this latter would make fruitless efforts to rise and crawl. For these two the worst was reserved—that which perhaps none who had not seen it would readily believe. Through the air sailed a little silent spot of light. It descended upon the topmost of the two prostrate figures and immediately flared up. It was a phosphorus bomb. At once the dead man was burning, and the other, with his clothes alight, dragged himself a few yards away, then lay still, face downward. . . . Whether this incident discloses a purpose other than that of sheer cruelty and desire to inspire terror cannot be decided here.

The three of us lying up against the tree were now isolated. It was certain death to try and cross the open sunlit space to where in the shallow dip among the brambles comparative safety lay. Again and again at point-blank range the machine gun swept round. Each felt that it was a question of moments before the inevitable bullet put an end to everything. Then came the helpless feeling that something ought to be done. And still the slim oak tree and a motionless hori-

zontal with the ground proved sufficient protection. Cross-bullets from another machine gun were going high. It was evident now that this portion of the wood was held in great strength. With a curious and absolute disregard of his own life, the sergeant suggested a flank attack. Had the men been available he would certainly have attempted it, and equally certainly would he have failed. The one remaining question was how to get away the Lewis guns. That bright patch of sunlight looked a death-pit. It seemed as if we should have to wait till dark. Presently, at any rate, the German gunners would slacken fire. . . . The minutes dragged by more slowly than hours, and what period of time we lay there it was impossible to say. The machine gun was now firing spasmodically, and the fair-haired private decided to make a dash for safety.

Stomach on the ground, propelling himself along by his elbows, he scuttled across the intervening twenty yards like an animal. A hail of bullets followed and struck the earth around him, but—he reached the shelter of the brambles and was lost to view. Five minutes went by and the gun had lapsed into silence. The sergeant offered to make for the nearest Lewis gun. He reached it, touched it . . . immediately his arm was shattered from wrist to elbow. He managed to scramble back.

Half-an-hour later he was being carried to the dressing-station on a stretcher. His face was bloodless, utterly and strangely changed. Also

it was twisted with pain. A few minutes ago a virile, daring man, he was now weaker than a baby and more pitiful. They had given him morphia, and he was conscious. He kept on talking to the stretcher-bearers, and this was the burden of his remarks, repeated over and over again: "It was awful, wasn't it? What happened to the officer?—what happened to the officer? My Gawd, I wish we 'ad got that —— gun. But it was impossible, wasn't it? . . ."

He died at daybreak the following morning.

Thus the curtain rang down upon Bourlon Wood. "The President of the Immortals (in Æschylean phrase) had ended his sport" for the day. Soon the velvety sky was twinkling with stars. Everybody tried to improve the half-finished trenches, many dug for themselves round or coffin-like holes in the freezing ground, and lying down endeavoured to sleep. But the battle-field is never quiet. The Germans, growing bolder, crept down to the edge of the sunken road: and now a bomb would be thrown, and now a sudden alarm would cause every man to seize his rifle, and every gunner to stand to his gun. The star-lights would go up all round, a strange glimmer illuminated the frosty trunks of the trees. Then in a gust of anger the firing started all along the line, and the metallic snap of the bolts vied with the crack of the rifles and the rattle of Lewis guns and machine guns. After a while these died away into comparative silence. Once all the German batteries opened like a roll

of thunder, and for half-an-hour the sky was alight with flashes, and the shells came racing overhead. But sleep is master of all; and except for the sentries, who were always peering into the shadows, each man lay down with his thoughts, slept, or became a victim to the merciful drowsiness of those utterly worn out.

About the middle of the night a sound more strange than any other came to the ears. "Honk, honk, honk!" and there was a roar as of a mighty rushing wind. "Honk, honk, honk!"—the sound came nearer. It was the flight of the wild geese into the autumnal north. Few had heard that sound before in France. It seemed as if the souls of the departed were fleeing from a distracted world to the remotest solitudes.

Sleep came at last, or that mental drowsiness which is nearest to sleep. Dreams and fancies stole upon the mind, those merciful dreams which clothe reality in happiness and peace. After all, it seemed, the curtain of night had rung down, not upon a tragedy, but only upon an episode in the everlasting human drama of love and pain. Why and whence and whither? . . . We could not say. They knew perhaps who lay rigid now in the heart of the wood; but not we. One certainty only emerged from the tangle of doubts and impressions; there was in the world something greater by far than fear or grief or mental agony or physical pain—some human spirit that triumphed over these and surpassed civilisation itself. . . . There came to the mind then the sergeant and the two Lewis-gunners who lay

near by. A fragment of each personality presented itself in turn: the plain unremarkable faces, the Cockney accent of one, the Scotch gruffness of another, the unfailing gaiety of a third. These knew nothing of God, they never thought of themselves, they never approached in imagination their own sublimity. Yet out of the humble simplicity of their lives had been achieved the greatest of all things. . . .

The last reflection was a sad one. Where was the place of beauty in a distracted world? Bourlon Wood must have been fair enough in the spring-time, the summer, and the early autumn. Even now it held the pleasant contours, the russet and mahogany colouring, the warm red and black tints of the winter woodland. The little community of birds and beasts had fled. Its immemorial silence, its dim and secret places, its wind-rocked solitude that had remained unbroken for generations, where were they now? . . . Even Nature, it seemed, had been ravished by man.

A sound of talking disturbed these dreams, a long file of men came stumbling down the shadowy path.

"Who are you?"

"We are the relief."

IN AN OLD FRENCH CITY

UNTIL past spring the city was within a mile and a half of the German lines; but since then there has been an advance, and now it is a good six miles distant. Considering its vicissitudes, the two great battles fought so close to its walls, the desultory and sometimes violent bombardments, the place has suffered surprisingly little.

Entering the city by one of those great national roads which, tree-bordered, stretch as straight as a ruler across the rolling plain, you come to a couple of railway-tracks followed by a brickyard and factory and a row of rather dingy-looking semi-urban houses. The outskirts of the place, like those of most European towns, give no promise of the character to be found within. The road speedily becomes a "faubourg," and houses border the pavement on either hand. Steeply up to the left is the way to the prison. Despite the echo of many footsteps, the ceaseless activity of men going and coming, the prison retains its character at once austere, gloomy and pitiless. One would not linger here, though in it happens to be an officers' mess. The passages are all of stone, echoing and cold, with bell-ropes hanging at intervals along them. Rooms of varying size open off on either hand, whose massive doors have each a peep-hole. When night comes all the echoing rooms and passages are plunged into absolute darkness. War blunts the imagination or one might see, fearfully passing in procession before one, the faces of generations of French

criminals who must have lingered and possibly died here. Was a guillotine ever raised in either of the two dingy central courtyards now abandoned to the twittering sparrows? Possibly.

The main street that leads into the city is remarkably free from damage. This is the quarter furthest from the enemy and almost every house is whole. On the right stands a magnificent example of (I believe) Franco-Spanish architecture. Only can one conjecture the history of these places, for guide-books are not obtainable. And this grey-stone delicate ornate-looking building must surely have been a monastery or convent; near by, intricate with splendid architecture, is a chapel as fine as anything to be found in the city. The former seems to be occupied by soldiers, to judge by its cheerful sounds after nightfall.

It was a place of military importance. There are three barracks, two for the infantry and one for the artillery and engineers. The largest of the former is a great red-brick modern structure; the last-named is the more interesting. It is older and close to the citadel; and looking at its broad open barrack-square, one can even now picture the splendid parades of the brilliantly uniformed engineers and artillerymen in days gone by.

In one corner of the parade-ground is a dreary little chapel—the engineers' military chapel. It is barred and wind-blown, having been stripped of its glass and all furniture. Only there remain the gallery at the western end, one or two tawdry effigies of the Virgin and Child, the peeling, faded

plaster on the walls, and the steps that once led up to the altar. There are three or four tablets on the walls. "Jacques," "Anthony," "Marcel," "Renée"—these commemorate the heroes of 1870–71 of Sedan and Spicheren, of Gravelotte and Mars la Tours.

A girdle of earthworks encircles the town. How obsolete and picturesque they look! The wars of the past must have come very near. Here drank, quarrelled and loved Dumas' heroes, *The Three Musketeers*. Penetrating the interior of the city, one is struck more and more by its essentially foreign and distinctive aspect; like so many towns, it has a personality of its own, and that an attractive one which gives play to the imagination. There are long broad streets of almost stately houses, tree-bordered and with a kind of garden down the centre. There are narrow, crooked and winding streets consisting of blank walls and high white houses with Venetian shutters that remind you of nothing so much as Southern Italy. There is a broad amiable-looking fish-market and wide round open places or squares in one of which is a bandstand, in another a statue of the contemplative Victor Hugo. There are several gardens, public and otherwise.

There are also many churches and more than one fine modern public building, such as the Prefecture and the Musée. Despite ruined and empty houses, of which there are a number, and the warlike unnatural atmosphere of the place, there is about this city none of that depressing squalor and flimsy pretentiousness which charac-

terise many towns near the front. One feels that it would be a place to visit in summer, when the noonday sun is blazing down upon the broad squares, when the trees of the boulevards and public gardens are green and shady, when the streets are alive with hurrying French people and gay with shop-awnings, when from the by-ways and the fish-market and the churches there arises that curious combination of sounds—a mixture of busy murmurs, quaintly intoned cries, and the incessant ringing of church-bells—which is the distinguishing and attractive feature of so many foreign cities.

The cathedral is a sight to see. Not standing well, because too closely pressed in by houses, but rising by flights of broad stone steps to a majestic height, it is the mere shell of what once must have been an impressive building. The mere shell! The gigantic pillars lead gracefully and solemnly up to the altar, which save for a bare slab of marble is no more. The pulpit remains—a piece of ornate driftwood—so do the several chapels which lead off the side-aisles. Here and there hangs an image or a crucifix, while at the head of the cathedral still depends the great figure of the Saviour. For the rest, bareness and ruin. A long colonnade leads away to grass-grown cloisters and courtyards, and an atmosphere of those who in vestment and cassock must often have lingered here, reading, meditating and praying. A huge forecourt, with entrance archway, a many-windowed majestic building, such as one sees in Paris, tall, old-fashioned, iron-wrought lamp-posts,

and a wall surmounted by railings—it is the Bishop's Palace. Nothing is lacking to impress one with his Eminence's importance.

The main street that leads down to the railway-station has no particular character, but it must obviously have been a busy shopping centre. Half-way down is a fine gloomy Gothic building; further on a central square—doubtless the resort once of many fiacres and idlers—with a large white-fronted hotel standing in its own courtyard just opposite. Many of the shops are still doing business and display in their windows most of those shoddy cheap-looking goods that appear to appeal to the British soldier in default of anything better. As you approach the station, things become very bad. Not a house is left standing, not a house left whole, not one that has escaped a breach in its walls, and is not fritted with shrapnel. Extermination! It is the most shelled portion of the city, that nearest the enemy, and to-day the most dangerous.

The once-impressive glass-roofed railway station is a skeleton of iron girders and the home of empty echoes. Waybills still cling to the walls, denoting the hour of the Paris and other expresses; large sign-boards proudly announce the name of the station. But the steel railway lines are twisted and grass-grown.

Of the general appearance and atmosphere of the old French town little need be said. It is all the same in this part of France. Everywhere the British soldiery interspersed with a few French troops and a certain number of civilians.

The latter seem to increase, and prosperously dressed men and women of the bourgeois class are often seen; also those whose living is earned by supplying the troops. One afternoon there was considerable excitement. A big touring motor-car containing four civilians, two men and two ladies, drove down the main street. Everybody turned to look—it was so unusual. The military life of the place centres round the various shows, excellent of their kind, and the officers' club, which consists of two large huts, warm and well supplied with food, filled to overflowing, morning, noon and night. French parties are often to be seen tramping down the stately streets; there is a constant coming and going of troops; military bands play vigorously at times. Aeroplanes are always circling overhead.

One other feature should not be forgotten. At all hours of the day you are apt to meet walking in the streets a picturesque and distinguished figure. Here he comes, an old man with white hair and a white moustache, much be-ribboned and wearing the uniform of a General of France; on either side of him walks an adjutant. One presumes he is the French Commandant. With his smart figure, his fine handsome face, his dignified bearing, and proud manner of acknowledging a salute, he seems to typify the chivalrous army to which he belongs.

THREE DAYS

In the London night the rain splashed down upon plane trees and upon roof-tops. It was one of those many squares situated between Victoria Station and Hyde Park Corner whose gardens in summer lend a brighter and a hopeful touch to London; where the respectable and dull rub shoulders with the disreputable and gay beneath a universal antimacassar of mid-Victorian correctness; behind whose varnished and burnished front-doors the most extraordinary people live the most extraordinary lives and the most ordinary people live the most ordinary lives, and queer things sometimes happen; and folks make a point of not knowing their neighbours. It was upon such a square, filled by darkness, that the rain plashed down on a certain steamy night and the pavements glistened under the dim lamps, the horses' hoofs took on a new ring, whilst with every passing moment the mud grew yellower and more greasy. There were few if any passers-by.

But there remained one—and only one—house in this square which was not shuttered, blank, silent as the grave. This house, on the contrary, revealed a hardly-subdued blaze of electric light, its windows and front-door stood open, whilst from them came a babel of conversation pierced by shouts of feminine chatter and anon the tinkling, jangling strains of a rag-time band. Thus the onlooker had a glimpse—more than a glimpse, a vision—of whirling, always-moving

and gaily-coloured figures against a background of white in a stage-setting of concentrated light. It was not a big house and in it were not a great many people; but quite certainly it could not have contained any more.

A ball was going on or, as the saying went, a "boy-and-girl dance"—that incidental product of the European War. For a long time—from a sense of decorum or what-not—ladies and gentlemen had restrained themselves; but they could not restrain themselves indefinitely. And so all at once in the London world they burst into a passionate furore of "boy-and-girl dances." And if any dispassionate observer had wished to gain an insight into one of the freaks, one of the symptoms—possibly even one of the disorders—of the time, he would have gazed long and deep into this house that was so blithe and gay though long past midnight and all other London slept.

If a double-dealing sort of person, he would have pointed to the lemonade and rather weak-looking cakes (there was whisky and champagne under the table): to the absence of chaperons: to the numerous young men on leave (even if there weren't any): to the extreme youth and limited number of the guests; and would have muttered vaguely something about "young people must be amused" or "what's the use of sitting down and crying over it?" If, on the other hand, a plain-dealing sort of person, he would say, "Voilà! a dance. Take it or leave it."

What after all does it matter? The central fact is that although barely two o'clock the thing

is going with a swing; that the floor is a good one; that the nigger-band is already three-parts drunk; that everybody knows everybody else to the point of Christian names; and that all the children—the prettiest children, the best-dressed children, the best-mannered, best-bred and most amusing children—are perfectly happy. Not only happy but excited, thrilled. For here is one of the last of a long series of similar entertainments that have extended all through a London summer; and although there have sometimes been four or even five a night, the thing has not palled. Rather has the flame been fanned, and beneath the free-and-easy surface, the perfect flippancy, there may perhaps be discovered a note almost fierce, a kind of hunger, a kind of reckless craving and endeavour.

The faces of the girls are simply suffused with laughter—the girls in their beautiful satin and chiffon gowns, white, black, pearl-grey, and so forth, the colours strikingly slashed and intermingled; those of the boys less expressive . . . but in all eyes there is a gleam of uncontrollable excitement. In their dark blue uniforms with the broad scarlet stripe, gold buttons, and stiff collar, the young men look exceedingly smart and fancy themselves not a little, whilst those in evening attire, ostensibly the *raison d'être* of the affair, are (perhaps) the ones on leave. In a variety of contortions, in a medley of twirls, twists, runs, turns, half-turns, dips, side-walks, rushes, and reverses, the thirty or forty couples foxtrot or one-step round a fair-sized drawing-room, which

after the London fashion can be divided into two by folding doors. The musicians—black fellows and drunk—make all sounds but those of harmony or music. They shout, they sing, they stamp on the floor: play madly, madly on their banjolines and castanets. Then they thump the drum, thump each other, make sounds like fog-horns, whistle—dramatically throw the sticks away and stop. Everybody stops. Some are caught up in the midst of a dream, some, thinking intensely of each other, are hoping it will never end. Some steal away up the stairs or down the stairs, into corridors or quiet rooms or remote premeditated places, sofas and arm-chairs. Many, clapping their hands, call out for more. And the band begins again.

Who are these people? What is the meaning and purpose of it all? And the sparkling eyes, the feverish excited faces, the animated gestures? . . . Night after night it has gone on; and even in the afternoon. And on the river and in the quiet gardens at week-ends and at the tennis-parties. . . . The pulse beats quickly, the blood races, perhaps it is the champagne coursing through the veins? Not a boy or a girl there but has had a "flutter," some trifling *affaire de cœur*, but cherishes some little one to whom the heart (for a while) returns.

Well, boys, keep it going! Your course is not yet run. . . .

You find them on the backstairs in plenty and in the parlours or alcoves so common in London

houses or even in the bedrooms that have been thrown open for the occasion. Above the swish of the rain without you can hear the whispering, the suppressed giggling, the occasional exclamation or rebuke. Nearly always in couples, occasionally in fours. How superbly at ease they are! The girls so conscious of being pretty, the boys so ardent, so keen on winning the girls, so anxious to make a good impression. Truly the world is a wonderful place!

Downstairs, the dance being over, they stand thronging the hall and dining-room in their smart uniforms and wonderful frocks. The conversation is animated.

"Have you heard the latest?" (It is Margot speaking—Margot all untidy, noisy, and beautiful.) "Not about Harry and Sybil? About their going off hand-in-hand at Ranelagh, leaving everybody, disappearing for hours, and turning up at half-past eleven saying the boat got stuck at the end of the lake (ahem!) Isn't it a scream? There's going to be the devil's own row. It's the talk of London."

But, friends, there are more important matters afoot than the *affaire* of Harry and Sybil. What about Charley and Rose? Maisie—saucy, down-to-date, and knows everything—can tell you all about that. "It's serious," says she with the air of an Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. "It's serious. I didn't think it was. But it is. They're in love with each other. You know when it all began. Oh! don't you? Well, never, *never*, NEVER pass it on—promise me!"

(lowering an eager voice). "It was the Playfairs' dance. Archie and I went up to the top of the house to try and find sitting-out room. We saw them through the bannisters. They didn't hear us. Archie thought it'd be such a rag to watch. They . . . But you'll never tell a soul, will you?"

Again—"It's been broken off. Oh! Violet's done it. Rather rottenly I think. After all he's a good sort in his way though deadly dull."

The next dance begins. All file out.

Now the dawn is breaking—so far as the dawn can break on a day so dark and grim. Many depart, but the Inseparable Friends hang on until the last note of the last ragtime tune shall force them away. The leave-takers, it would seem, cannot tear themselves from the irresistible intoxication of dancing, from the thrill of personal magnetism, from the lure of the never-to-be-forgotten night. After all they will not know these things again for many a month—if ever. The rain pours down. The watery light of dawn faintly tinges faces from which the excitement, the *joie de vivre* have faded, which are no longer hallowed by Youth but now are wan, ordinary-looking and tired. Crying good-night and shaking hands, they rustle away on foot in twos and fours.

The leave-train does not depart till eight o'clock. There is just time to stroll home, have a bath, change into uniform, pack the haversack, eat some breakfast and get to the station. This weariness will pass away. . . .

How silent, glistening and unspeakably melancholy the streets! Scarcely a footfall! The pavements are like deeply-polished metal. The roofs too are glistening and everything looks amazingly dreary. Now and then a lorry rattles by and anon a horse-drawn waggon lumbering on its way to Covent Garden. An early workman hustles past, keeping close to the railings and hugging himself under an overcoat and umbrella. A charwoman in cape and bonnet creeps by on her way to drudge. A man is doing something to the water-hydrant in the middle of Knightsbridge—as if more water were necessary! Except for a couple of standing taxi-cabs and two policemen, Piccadilly is absolutely deserted.

These people have a set and definite air. For them, the day's work and supper—perhaps the Cinema—a night's repose. For us, blowy Folkestone, a green and heaving Channel, Boulogne overcrowded, an interminable journey in an execrable train, and after that—God knows!

Well—put a brave face on it! . . . The house sleeps—only one of the servants has arisen. Things are lying about as they were left with that air of frowsiness so unpleasantly reminiscent of "after the night before." But the household is soon astir, the blinds are drawn, a taking off and a putting away of clothes. And so into khaki again.

Good-bye to that familiar room! Good-bye to that familiar house! They are no longer dull and commonplace, they are infinitely precious. Until next leave——? Ah! Next

leave! How many have dwelt upon that unspoken thought.

The streets are crowded now, crowded with folks hastening to their daily task from outlying districts. The cries of the town are rising from that labyrinth of life. Already one has a feeling of detachment—as if one had no part with these and no concern. Victoria station brings a man back to earth. He is in the army again, he is going back to the front. There are hundreds like him, with the living world their last remaining ties are those who cling to them or, handkerchief in hand, silently weep beside them. If only the train would go——!

. . . . .

Thirty-six hours have passed and the same rain that in the early evening swept over London from the direction of Wimbledon and Richmond —the same rain that all night long plashed down upon the plane trees of the London square—still falls coldly. It falls now upon a bleak mud-patch of Flanders—a place that would be hard to describe because it has no features and no contrasts. There are a few stunted wind-blown trees, a few husks of buildings scattered about, a landscape that is intersected by ditches, mud-tracks, pools of stagnant water; in the foreground the ghost of a great church-tower set amid wind-riven poplars; for the rest, a mere waste of nondescript weed-grown fields, grey and colourless as the sky—and mud, mud, everywhere.

Evening approaches, and upon this mud-patch set amid makeshift bivouacs and two or three

tin-roofed huts, a fine company of men is paraded for the trenches. As the rain sweeps across in violent gusts and its raw quality penetrates to the marrow one cannot but pity these patient soldiers covered only by a light cape in full fighting order —loaded haversacks, 170 rounds of ammunition, rations, rifles—no mean burden. Some even carry a sandbag full of extras or of bombs or grenades while the Lewis gunners are greatly burdened by the magazines.

Of officers there are only two. This little one —delicately-made, vivacious, slightly stooping— has much personality. Well liked by all and however youthful-looking—having barely reached the twenties—he appeals especially to the men, who admire so brave and capable a child and are proud to be led by him. Something exceptionally appealing there is in this fragile figure, in this almost effeminate face. And there, repute has it, are the makings of a fine soldier. Of such stuff was the great Volunteer Army made!

We start off in file, labouring through a quagmire and a kind of marsh, wet-footed already, and then across a waste of mushy grass. We drag ourselves in face of an ashen sky and wild gusts of drenching rain. It takes a long time to cross the quagmire and so up the further slope, over a light-railway and on to the main Elverdinghe-Boesinghe road. Now, of course, the pavé roadway is greasy and slippery, and the highway crowded with traffic. For it is only a matter of three days since the battle began in a whirlwind of smoke and flame, and on this part of the field

the British, crossing the Canal, drove the Germans back at the double. There had been no trouble here. Many said it was the easiest battle of the war—some described it as a "cake-walk." So now, the British are pushing on, rushing up fresh troops, guns, ammunition and material of all kinds.

And it is the hour—just before sunset—when these masses choke the roads, crowding one upon another in an interminable slow procession. For so much traffic the way is narrow and the military police at Elverdinghe cross-ways have all their work cut out, since many different streams meet there. And what if the enemy shells this main artery! Only a few minutes ago he threw half-a-dozen explosives close to the camp. Before the battle began Elverdinghe Corner was an impossible place to linger at. This advance of four miles has made all the difference.

Leaving Elverdinghe behind, the road stretches ahead straight as a ruler, often pitted by shell-holes, and on either hand abutted by grass-fringed trenches, ammunition dumps—countless piles of shells—old battery-positions, heaps of solder, shell-cases, all manner of litter, ruins of houses and relics of camps. The long ammunition column in front impedes progress and during the numerous halts there is no lack of time to observe. Soon the Pilcken Ridge comes into view—a ridge beyond a ridge and beyond it again the Germans. It is grey and brown in colour surmounted by a few haggard skeleton trees and small patches of broken wood. Thus you look

towards a world of unfathomable desolation with the Canal—Charon's river—lying between.

And now the rain thins, the clouds try to break in the west and there is prospect of a clear albeit stormy sunset. Everybody is heartened at the prospect. We plod onward. We halt. A gun, waggon or something has been overturned across the road just this side of Boesinghe and the whole column of traffic is held up for half-an-hour. It is difficult to sit down—everything so sopping and muddy. From the parapet of a disused trench, however, we watch the sun break out and dart his ray laterally to Elverdinghe Church, changing in a moment the whole aspect of that God-forsaken country. "One ray of sunlight makes a world of hope."

We at length push on again at foot's pace only to halt once more in the main "street" of Boesinghe. In the confusion of traffic the Lewis gun limber has got stuck somewhere behind. It has to be unloaded and consequently waited for here. Not that the delay makes much difference. For nearly an hour yet it will be too light to cross the ridge. But Boesinghe with its so sinister reputation is an unwholesome spot at which to halt. Here ruin and wreck can go no further. Signs can be observed of a once-considerable village in the solid masonry that lies piled up by the way and in the tumbled remains of the château which amid a few trees and behind iron palings once reared itself at the head of the main street. Very little transport comes as far as this, the reason

being discoverable in the dead horses which lie at intervals along the road. Many and grim are the stories told of the place. Whole platoons and fatigue-parties have been wiped out in the streets when the enemy has suddenly started shelling. Formerly, of course, when the English or Belgians faced each other on either side the Canal, Boesinghe formed part of the front line. At the moment, fortunately, the enemy is quiet and only a few British batteries grouped on either side the Boesinghe–Elverdinghe road can be heard fitfully banging. Fortunately, too, because at this hour the place is a mass of troops—ration-parties, fatigue-parties, Engineers, orderlies, not to speak of the incoming and outgoing reliefs. The men, however, are taking no risks, but clamber into trenches which intersect the ruins on either side the road.

At length the limber arrives, the guns are lifted off and the company proceeds on its way with an interval between platoons. We come to the Canal crossing. A temporary wooden bridge has been thrown across by the ever-resourceful Engineers, but this is reserved for wheeled traffic and the infantry cross by the old broken-down one. On the other side we are immediately among the German front-line trenches of three days ago—spumed and up-churned in a chaos of shell-holes. Only here and there may be perceived little low-water sections of shelled trench. Everywhere the debris is tremendous. Broken rifles, bits of equipment, shreds of clothing—the usual jetsam of the battle-

field. Not a square foot of ground but has been turned up by a shell.

There is a place a short distance beyond the Canal made conspicuous by a great balk of timber which, jutting out and upward towards the sky from a mass of heavy debris, looks as if it might have been deliberately felled to impersonate an immense dummy gun. Here many guides and runners are collected; and here the first shell falls close. It comes with a roar and a crash, bursting on the bank some fifty yards away. Another swiftly follows, but further off. At the same time a party from the front line early relieved comes tramping past, depressed, nervy and utterly worn out.

At this point and beyond this point one seems to lose contact with civilisation. The road rises steeply, and apart from its many holes is floored with timber. A little further on a newly-laid duck-board track strikes off to the right and immediately one is in the nether world. In the nether world of Ypres, on its battle-fields fought over and fought over again, in its grassless, grainless waste of stink-ridden soil and green slimy water—here are to be found the abomination of desolation, the world of which Dante wrote. Even the battle-field of the Somme will not compare with this nor any other tract of ground on the Western Front unless it be Verdun. One has the feeling that whatever else befall this is hell.

Socket-like shell-holes whose sunken eyeballs are the coloured glistening pools, gape and grin

on either hand. We pass through a wood and the trees are skeletons, all of them, skeletons of giant men, maimed, killed and rotted where they stood—stark upright: except those that have fallen, crushed down by inhuman force, fallen by the way. The duck-boards are slippery and it is necessary carefully to pick one's steps; then the men so heavy laden are constantly calling out for a halt. "Halt and close up!" "Pass down the word when you've closed up!" During the frequent pauses the eye lights upon one of those tableaux so common on the battle-field which the mind—as it were brought up short—never forgets. Some few yards away a dead British soldier lies in a shell-hole—the most perfect picture of human loneliness that eye of man ever looked upon. He has been forgotten—the burying-parties have passed him by. He lies there precisely as he fell, backwards—the deep golden light of a stormy sunset full shining upon his face—the arms thrown out—the legs slightly apart—the fighting order meticulously exact even to the respirator at the "alert" and the grenades sticking out of his pockets—the rifle lying a few feet away as it dropped from his hand—the steel helmet on its crown as it rolled from his head. At this distance there can be perceived no sign of a wound. The long sunbeams piercing the nether world so desolate, so devoid of pity or of hope, light up features at once solemn, unreal, and of the quality of marble.

And as we trudge on the mind goes back (as so often), dwells upon that figure, tries to call it

back to being, tries to recall its beginnings and its personality, to envisage the things that once made it human, to rekindle, as it were, the cold ashes of its life. Was he a lively man perhaps, much given to laughter; was he a great talker or a wag, townsman or countryman—the latter to judge by build and features; a peasant perhaps from some remote English village where the hills watch, steeped in the age-long passion of the soil; had he those—a father or mother, sweetheart or wife—who through five-and-twenty years, perchance, had doted almost fatuously upon that once-mobile face, upon every hair of that bare bedraggled head, upon that once-eager body now of the clay, so soon to return to the soil again? Held he but a few hours since in his living heart, this solitary figure, the hopes, the lookings-backward, yes, the solemn terror of ordinary men? And as the dark drew on, and as the midnight before last drew towards dawn, had he said to a comrade, "Well, if I come out of this alive . . .?" Thus the mind works—these are the thoughts that always return.

It is a long journey. The dusk creeps on apace. The duck-boards end and we wade through almost solid mud. The guide is not certain of his way, and who shall wonder in that trackless waste? But the Germans are quiet and the night promises to be fine. For a long time we halt in a kind of meadow—a mysterious place enclosed by a thin hedgerow and gaunt, leafless, armless trees. At one time it must have been part of a farmstead, for close at hand lies a heap

of rubble near to a derelict rust-bound cultivator, and a wall stares white as a skeleton out of the gloom. At every other step a stumble and a grunt. A bright moon is rising and soon the foreground will be as plain as day. At present the guns are almost silent, but an occasional rifle-shot or short burst from a machine-gun punctures this silence, indicating that we must be very near the front line now.

The caution is passed down to go quietly. The men continue audibly to swear in their reckless way and an N.C.O. goes so far as to raise his rifle to one of them. Queer fellows! Always the same until somebody gets hurt! Soon we are out in the open traversing a downward slope, full bathed in moonlight. Now and again a stray bullet whips across. Strange there are no starlights though miles away behind you can see them at the southern edge of the Ypres Salient.

Quite suddenly—a little ditch full of men. Our fellows, whispering and quiet now, lie down on the top of the ground so as not to be seen in the bright moonshine whilst the others clamber out. Nobody quite knows where the enemy is, but probably not more than a hundred yards away. The situation is hurriedly explained, the relieved company files out. The half-dug ditch is in three sections. There is not room for all. Some will have to stay outside till the digging begins. It is difficult to discern anything at first as must always be the case in taking over a new battle-line. Only the row of trees ten or twenty yards in front discloses the whereabouts

of a small stream. A main road glistening white descends the slope behind and seems to cut our line. Some 200 yards in rear a little German pill-box does duty for Company Headquarters. It is a mere cell, stoutly built of concrete but facing the wrong way and on its narrow seat barely offering room for two.

Not a moment to lose. Already midnight approaches. It is necessary at all costs before daylight comes to make trenches of the ditches, to deepen and connect them up, to find out the lie of the land, to get in touch with the companies on right and left, to find out just what is in front. The Germans, not wishing their whereabouts to be discovered, are absolutely silent; contrary to custom they even send up no lights, nor do we wish them to know we are working. There is a bridge-head immediately in front. It is necessary to go out and investigate it.

What a fearfully vague and mysterious world! Moonlight and starlight, it is true, but these are the playthings of the great shadows which like a magician's curtain hide the real world. It is what one knows to be there—near—somewhere but cannot see that makes the mystery. Clear fields of moonlight and then those tremendous shadows! We crawl out of the trench by the side of the road that shines white. The ground is shaggy with tussocks of coarse grass and pitted by shell-holes. Not a sound as we approach the bank of the stream, yet the Germans, one knows, are somewhere the other side of it. The tall trees stand solemnly in a row, clearly showing

the line of the bank which, peering ahead and looking round uneasily, the three of us now reach. Nothing could be more malevolent-looking, treacherous and sinister than those trees which gaze at one so fixedly; than this stream which does not flow or even move, but lies stagnant, black and twisting; than these alders and dwarf oaks and willows which, all contorted, grin at you, threatening, like dogs' teeth with cats' eyes. And beyond the stream! A low bridge still stands. Then the road, grass-grown and increasingly dim, fades away into moon-misty meadows. Might they not be the outskirts of some English home-farm? But one must not enter those sleeping fields on penalty of death.

Having lain there awhile and chosen a shell-hole from which to cover the bridge-head, we crawl down to the trench and the post goes out. In a shadowy strung-out line of stooping figures, the men work hard at their ditch. The clink of the spades is heard. They work all night, they know that everybody must have cover by morning—the more cover the better. But what about the flanks? We seem to be an isolated sector—nobody in touch. "Let's walk across and find out!" On the left it is not far to go. We have not covered fifty yards before some little distance away the figures of men can be discerned digging phantom-like, in the silvery light. One can mark their position by yon lone twisted thorn tree. And coming up we find that they are digging towards us with a will, so that in a couple of nights' work the two sectors may be nearly joined.

On the other side it is different. For a long time we wander here, there and back again, seeing no sign of man or trench and fearing to lose ourselves in that trackless waste. Nothing emerges but the vague line of the railway embankment beyond which is ruined Langemarck. Here the enemy is reported to be on the hither side of the stream whilst the English line bends back. Once more we set out. Let us bear half-left this time and make for the railway. Steady! What's that? Isn't it a man half-lying, half-crouching? "Did I hear something?" Down! Let's crawl. With elaborate care in the classical manner of Fenimore Cooper we creep on. Ah! It's only a tussock of grass! We repeat these proceedings several times, feeling at first thoroughly frightened and anon thoroughly foolish. At last we give it up. Progress is too slow. We push boldly forward. Hark again! A rustle. No mistake this time. Two figures spring up out of the grass immediately in front like startled hares on a downland pasture. "Was ist tasse?" One of them half turns, a revolver-shot rings out. Somebody fires, but to no effect. They are vanished back into the shadows. A moment's pause, another shot—the orderly staggers, crying out that he is killed. He moans on the ground. We drag him back, sending the other man for a stretcher. But presently he is able to walk supported on either side. Only a bullet through the thigh, it seems. "You're for Blighty. You're all right." A friend has come to talk to the lucky fellow. He is prostrated by shock, for

when the two Germans started up nerves were strung to the utmost and—as often happens—snapped. And for himself he is nearer the mark. One sees it sometimes—this instinctive clutching at death in the moment of agony. Though the wound seems to be a mere puncture in the thigh, there is something more—shock perhaps or the bullet has penetrated further. Anyway three days later we learn that the orderly is dead.

Contact is obtained at last and by now it is daylight. Scarcely one notices the stealthy approach of the summer dawn. Overcome by weariness, after the routine reports have been sent off, both fall into a deep sleep on the hard narrow seat of the little pill-box. When we awake it is to the full light of day. The cool quiet of the night has given place to great heat, the buzzing of bluebottles and the exhalations of a vile soil. It is not the usual stench of the Ypres trenches, of the nether world, but something much more profound, something from which one cannot escape. And the guns seem to be all talking at once. They are tuned to different pitches and different rates of firing—the rapid bark, the deep-toned echoing report and so on. So with the shells which never cease to whistle and race overhead. They strike all keys, now whining and almost plaintive, now creaking and hollow in sound, now roaring like an express train. The German shells bursting close at hand are often scarcely noticed amid this din. Only when one bursts within forty or fifty yards a crash is heard and the earth

quakes, the pill-box of unsupported concrete trembles.

From this infinite weariness of sound there is no rest. All day long the banging and barking, the wail and the whine, the occasional crash. No respite. Only now and then it becomes a bombardment reinforced by the hum of the aeroplanes overhead so that one cannot hear oneself speak.

After a while we peep out. The little door which is screened at a distance of two or three feet by a thin fence of brushwood looks across the river towards the German lines (wherever they may be), towards the railway embankment and the ruins of Langemarck on the one hand and some miles away the Forest of Houthoulst on the other. It is a perfectly desolate prospect in which are to be found no hope and no alternation. A world of trenches, cesspools and shell-holes, and in the midst of it the stagnant stream, the ghastly grey-white and contorted trees, the grinning undergrowth, beyond these again the mud-brown fields sloping upwards to a lightly-wooded crest about 2500 yards away. Such is the prospect that confronts us, and even as we peer through the chinks of the brushwood, a couple of bullets "zip" merrily past, giving fair warning that the little shelter is in full view and range of the snipers in Langemarck and is probably, as a fact, the most conspicuous point in all that part of the battle-field.

The Germans think so too. After all it is their pill-box! Before mid-day big shells of 5·9 in.

calibre begin to fall around, sending up fountains of moist earth and shaking our dubious refuge to its foundations. Lesser shells intermingle with them. The pill-box would not keep out either of these. It becomes a question whether to crawl round behind, in lee of it, and lie up with the Company Sergeant-Major, the servants and orderlies. We decide against this course at present. But man must live and even straitened nerves do not destroy hunger.

It is a ludicrous attempt at a meal and yet a grateful one if only because the making of it takes one's mind off other things. An awful meal! Have you ever tried making tea and boiling eggs in the same hot water (in a mess tin), that water (a pint or less) having been previously heated on a spirit cooker? Have you ever been in such a situation that all your provisions of whatever kind are done up in one sandbag divided into different compartments by string tied tightly round at intervals? The sugar and the salt have cruelly mingled, the tea has changed places with the marmalade. Bully-beef has to be carved out of its tin with a pen-knife, the bread has assumed a delicate sulphur shade owing to one corner of it being soaked in mud. Tommy-cookers, one comes to the conclusion, are man's salvation. Who invented them? But to think that in peace-time one could have done this sort of thing by way of amusement!

The consummation nevertheless is a triumph and with much merriment and strong language we achieve a meal. That meal, however, is twice

interrupted. The water in the saucepan is nearly on the boil when the opposition begins earnestly to shrapnel the shallow trenches, to hurl high explosives all around our little den. At the same time, a German aeroplane sails over, flying low. He descends still lower, paying scant heed to the fire of Lewis guns and rifles. He drifts casually down the line, firing his machine gun so that a number of bullets come whistling past. What of the men in the trench? The aeroplane is flying absurdly low. Will they escape? It is impossible to see them from here. Our reflections are disturbed by two heavy shells landing almost simultaneously within thirty yards. So the aeroplane is signalling to the artillery as well!

The German batteries are obviously shooting at the pill-box—an uncomfortable sensation. A direct hit, and if not blown up we shall surely be crushed by the weight of concrete. Better get outside and risk being shot from Langemarck in the exit. So we bolt round with more of speed than dignity; and there, while many explosives during a quivering period of twenty minutes burst close as may be, while bits fly around in every direction and one is distressed by the terrific crack of German shrapnel over the trench—there we all lie in a heap together.

But the strife is presently over though renewed at intervals for the rest of the day. In rare pauses between the almost ceaseless clamour of the guns, German and English, one becomes more than ever conscious of those other concomitants of the trench-world—the buzz of the

bluebottles and the stench of the soil. That stench would seem to derive from human bodies and the poisoned earth, from a mixture of mud, old sandbags, stale food and stagnant water. But in this case it can be directly traced. Out of a green slimy pit at the back of the pill-box a German boot and a German leg protrude like a limb of the devil himself—mute reminder of that which is part of the sucking mud beneath. As with many of these isolated defence-works captured by the British after a bloody fight, this one and its immediate surroundings are littered with the sodden dead. Here the lethal gas reached them, hither maimed and failing they dragged themselves to die, here at the last the British bayoneted or shot them down as like terrified rabbits they darted out, throwing up their hands (too late) and screaming for mercy. The knowledge of this does not increase a man's liking for the place.

Nor is it long after re-entering our refuge before a small party can be observed climbing the slope towards us. Rash fellows! They will be shot at and hit! But somehow they escape notice. No one has been wounded by the aeroplane, but two of the party have caught bits of shrapnel, one in the back, the other in the arm. Though not dangerously hit both are in great pain. Of course they cannot be got away till dark, so there must remain moaning pitiably on stretchers for the remainder of the afternoon.

It is an afternoon to be remembered. The guns never cease to boom, bang, bang, boom

and bark, nor the shells to race overhead. It is one of those times when one curses one's own artillery—curses them for hell let loose, for the torment of noise, something which has to be endured, from which there is no escape though every nerve be a-quiver; curses them for throwing their shells behind our own line and even just behind company headquarters. Of course such things must happen in battles where the gunners cannot know the exact position of the line from time to time. And this, too, has to be grinned at and endured since there are no means of communicating with the rear. Here, save in the last emergency, we are cut off from the world. There is no telephone and no runner could survive even a crawl across the stark rising ground behind.

So all through the interminable afternoon, huddled each in his corner to escape chance splinters and bits of iron, we talk together, smoking, drinking a little, often cracking a joke or telling a story to take our minds off the monotony of shelling. And of the future we talk. The youth in the corner you cannot but admire. He has no fear in the sense that is compatible with one's own safety. To have no fear is to court death, and the reckless ones always pay the penalty in war. But here you have the direct product of our much-abused public-school system, of that class in England which is said to be effete and worn-out. It is true that physically he is of a fragile and delicate build; that he looks as much like a girl as a boy. Nevertheless, the small frame is wiry and the heart vigorous and great.

Nor is a quick intelligence lacking in one whose patronymic is coupled with an Empire statesmanship. This young man is not a soldier by profession; like many another he was not intended for the Army. In a larger sphere equipped with charm of manner and with talent—in diplomacy, his chosen profession, one might predict success. For here in embryo is a personality towards which one might look for a career in the tortuous world of politics and of affairs: coupled with ambition something of the larger touch.

Is that to be? We talk much of the future—as men did in those days—qualifying every forecast and intention with some such remark as, "If one has the luck to get through this business," or "whenever the war ends."

And in these topics so pregnant with interest for both there is also much that is of the moment. "How are things in London?" What of the gay life there whose echo even has reached these sodden fields? What of the latest revues and dances? "Margot, Sybil and Rose—I hope they're well?" And "Harry, Archie and the rest—how are they?" Conversation, next to sleep, is the best tonic for man's nerves. It demands less concentration of will than reading. Thus the mind is carried into the abstract, forgetting circumstance for the time being, assimilating perhaps something of the other's thoughts.

But not for long. About the middle of the afternoon the bombardment of Langemarck begins. Now the English shells race—race, roaring and hissing as if fearful of not reaching

their goal in time. All calibres, all sizes. How they hurry, how grimly they pursue one another! Great iron casefuls of explosive—12-inch calibre and even larger—plunge into the ruins of the village, sending up as many as a dozen tall columns or fountains of brick-dust, dust, masonry, and earth at one time. These columns reach a surprising height—fifty or sixty feet—and are of many colours. Here a bright copper-red, there a dull sulphur-yellow, whilst now and then flames shoot up through slow bulging eddies of greyish-white smoke. Amid this whirlwind of destruction the tower of Langemarck church, like some early Christian martyr, points its scarred white finger to God, defying as by some miracle smoke and flame, friend and enemy alike. Nothing seems able to touch it.

The Germans reply spasmodically, their shells bursting on or near the front line as do some of our own. Other men come back, one or two at a time, variously wounded. It is necessary to let the artillery know as soon as possible. And as the evening shadows lengthen one of the runners, with that *sang-froid* peculiar to the Scotch, volunteers to make a dash as soon as the sun shall be down. Twice he has to be restrained; then as the sun has set and the light begun to fade from the sky he is up and away with his message. How splendidly khaki matches the dun-coloured ground! He scuttles across the 300 or 400 yards of open country on all-fours like some animal. He's in full view of the Germans now. Will he be spotted? Fortunately they are some

distance away. Gradually, never looking back, he straddles his way across without even being fired at. He disappears over the rise and is safe.

So soon as it shall be dark we will get to work again—every man with pick or shovel. In anticipation of a long night, we cook another precarious meal. This time the margarine has completely melted by reason of the great heat: the water too tastes pungently of the petrol-can in which it has been kept, thus tainting the whisky, the soup and the *café au lait*. For all that, cooking is an amusing game. Anything to pass the time!

As soon as the gloaming is sufficiently blue and deep we make our way downhill to the trench. The men are stretching themselves, thankful to be released from their cramped quarters in which the enemy has not allowed them to sleep. They are even anxious to start digging and fall to with a will. The post goes out to the bridge-head, the wounded are carried away.

The trench world rests in daylight. Night is the time when that world gets busy, when thousands of dim figures steal out, sometimes to find and fight each other, sometimes to work. On every hand hard breathing, the clink of a spade, whispering or talking in undertones or that subdued suggestion of near-by humanity which is conveyed by sense rather than by sound. The moon gets up, mists rise from the dark river-valley. Once again the world is veiled in impenetrable mystery. The noise of the guns

has died down now; nevertheless, every hour or so the Germans send over shells in quick salvoes that are intended for our front line but fortunately fall behind it. About midnight a larger party than usual makes its way along the trench. We do not recognise the figures at first in steel helmets and ancient uniforms. It is the Brigadier on his nightly round, in the course of which he pays a visit to every trench and to every post.

Now and then the men give each other a "spell," but at one o'clock the work is at full pressure. Silence has descended upon a universe in which everything listens. Standing just outside the trench, we talk quietly together of many things to be done before morning comes. Then something happens. Three or four bullets "zip" overhead close, too close, causing everyone to stop working and to look up. More follow and suddenly rapid firing begins away to the right. Each goes to his section of trench, part of which lies beyond the intersecting road, to see what may be happening. The crackle of rifle-fire and spurts of flame show that the Germans are firing from the further bank of the stream. What are they doing there? What firing at? What's it all about? . . . The men are getting lively, beginning to shoot back. All digging has stopped, everybody has rushed to his fire-position. "Fritz is coming over!" "Let's hope he does!" . . . Two figures come scurrying, phantom-like, through the moonlight. They are from the post at the bridge-head, both very excited. "They're trying to get down to the

bridge," they exclaim, "a lot of 'em. We heard them talking first and then saw them crawling up through the fields." The post is brought in. . . . A shout. A corporal comes running down the shallow ditch, "The officer's hit, sir! The officer's been shot on the road." We hurry back. Two stretcher-bearers are half-dragging, half-lifting a helpless figure into the trench. Out in the middle of the road a soldier lies flat on his back, showing the whites of his eyes and gazing fixedly at the moon. There is no mistaking that look. Somebody takes his pay-book from the place where his heart had beat.

As for the other, he is moaning feebly. He lies at the bottom of the trench, this mere boy, two minutes ago so vigorously alive.

"Where are you hit?"

"In the back, I think. It hurts like hell. Give me morphia."

The face is dead white. This one is done for.

"Give me morphia and put an M on my forehead."

The words are repeated again and again.

It is necessary to leave the young man to the stretcher-bearers. For by now there is heard a furious crackle of rifle-fire. Bullets are coming through the thin parapet. Looking over the top nothing can be seen but the shapes of the tall trees rising dimly out of the misty moonlight. Then—what's that?—a heavy explosion. Too heavy for a bomb nor gruff nor deep-intoned enough. It is at the bridge-head. Ah! they're trying to blow up that bridge. At this instant

a renewed burst of firing. All peer anxiously over the parapet, not without fear of bullets, and seem to see figures of men moving quickly, dancing as it were between the patches of moonlight and the great shadows beyond meagre strands of wire. Only two distinctly—there may be more. Everybody fires. Then the puppet-figures, it seems, dart to this side and to that, finally melting into the mist. The troops are delighted. They think they have killed many Germans, and may be heard discussing the dubious point for a long time afterwards. A period of silence succeeds. No more bullets come over. It looks as if the fight is finished, and it is possible to turn to the stricken one who lies still in the bottom of the trench, tended by his runner. The stretcher-bearers have dressed the wound in the back and have laid the frail form upon a stretcher.

What agony! What pain is expressed in this weak, querulous voice which repeats again and ever again, "Give me morphia—morphia—and put an M on my forehead." There *is* no morphia. A little brandy. It is with pain only that the head can be lifted to enable the sufferer to swallow. A gulp; ah! it is so difficult. That's better. . . . The face cannot be seen. All is in shadow down there in the trench. All is in shadow, but this spirit is going—you can tell by the agony in the voice, by the position of the wound. He grows wearier. "Morphia—give me morphia! . . . And put an M on my forehead." . . . Quiet reigns now. The moon bathes all in a misty radiance. . . . Get him away quickly—

it is the only chance. But it is hard lifting the stretcher out of the trench. The moans are pitiful. Gently—gently. Up on to the gleaming track—step over the dead man—carefully, or that ashen face will never forgive. The long sweep of the road stretching rearwards over the crest of the hill, fading at last into the silvery sky, seems to point the way these two must travel, not together but at an interval, one behind the other, as travellers pass in succession along a well-worn turnpike heading towards a common goal.

"Good-bye!" With that word the failing voice loses itself in eternity. Panting, they carry the stretcher away. . . . Life, Death and Pain—nothing upon the battle-field! They pass, they pass—come a space, go like figures on a sunlit wall—fade, fall like autumn flowers. One by one—they are gone. Only the night remains, the ghosts, the monstrous shadows, the watching stars. . . .

A patrol files out, spades clink, the labour of the trenches goes on as before.

And in the London night the rain plashes down upon plane trees and upon roof-tops. Listen! . . . It is the familiar music of ragtime. The children are dancing madly, madly. The pulse beats quickly, the blood races, perhaps it is the champagne coursing through the veins.

The music stops. Everybody stops. Some are caught up in the midst of a dream, and some, thinking intensely of each other, are hoping it will never end. . . . Listen! The children play.

Above the swish of the rain without you can hear the whispering, the suppressed giggling, the occasional exclamation or rebuke. Truly the world is a wonderful place!

And downstairs they throng the hall and dining-room in their smart uniforms, their wonderful frocks. It is Margot speaking—Margot the untidy, the noisy, the beautiful. "Have you heard the latest . . . ?"

A VISION OF PARIS

(JUNE 1918)

I

ON a fine summer's evening the Abbeville road is a pleasant one to travel. After leaving Doullens by easy gradations and gentle stages it follows the meandering course of the River Authie, and for many a league accompanies that slow-flowing stream on its journey to the sea. Yes; after passing through heavily-timbered meadows and skirting the edge of a forest it joins its undulating fortune to a wide and charming valley—that valley which to the Englishman cannot but recall the Vale of the Kennet and the stretch of the Bath Road between Newbury and Marlborough. This road of ours follows the northern slope, so that from a wooded gently falling hillside you look across the well-timbered and cultivated vale—with occasional glimpses of the winding river—towards a similar slope some two miles distant.

On this calm, hot and somewhat hazy June evening the windings of the highway as a motor-car speeds along, the placid scenery, the white and pale grey villages grouped at intervals of three or four kilometres beneath tumbling woods, the lush green and rich yellow meadows, the contented grazing cattle, the quiet and peculiar wayside incidents, even the provoking call of the cuckoo occasionally heard—all these are sheer fascination to a mind long attuned to the ceaseless banging

and barking of batteries, the whistle of shells, and the infinitely wearisome sight of trenches, used, disused and half-used. There is found in this glimpse of a landscape bathed in failing and dreamy sunshine, in this playing of the wind among graceful poplars and scintillating willows, a sense of infinite reaction, of curiosity, and of profound peace. You seem to enter a new world, and all things in it are fresh, clean and beautiful. The life of the villages—though half asleep—is surprising: so many people, so much doing! And how happy everybody looks! Here the cows being driven in to milking, there the children wandering home from school. Of course the soldiery are everywhere. At one place it is the Americans; at another the Army Service Corps or Air Service; somewhere else signs of cavalry; and then a great lorry park or tool depot. Here you have the band of one of the famous Welsh regiments playing *retraite* in the village street, headed by its famous silky white billy-goat, which, led by the drum-major, provokes the unspeakable admiration of a vivacious crowd of onlookers.

Nor in the evening sunlight can one fail to admire the white, green-shuttered and cool-looking châteaux which, surrounded by their lawns, orchards and background of woodland, so numerously accompany the Abbeville road. These are not old, not in the smallest sense architecturally striking, yet somehow they greatly please the eye, seeming completely to belong to the leisurely and smiling aspect of that countryside. Nor is the highway without surprises. At

Saint-Ricquier, for instance, one comes quite unwittingly upon a magnificent ornate Gothic church, rising immensely out of the trivial village, with its jackdaws, pigeons, a square piazza in front, and, clinging to it, some dim legend of the enthroned Joan of Arc. And almost immediately you are at Abbeville.

II

Abbeville station at ten o'clock of a sultry morning, waiting for the Paris express, is a busy place. All now is noise, clamour and vociferous energy as might be expected of one of the chief railway centres behind the Western Front. A hooting of sirens, a blowing of horns, a backing in and out of long supply and troop-trains, a shouting and a crying of railway officials, a wild bustling and wrestling with luggage, R.T.O.s and the Mission Militaire. And what a crowd on the station platform! The uniforms of all the Allies seem to be here in one representative gathering: and your photographer, your cinematographer—where are they? Certainly the predominant note is khaki—the khaki of the heavy and solid English, the square, thick-set English with their unromantic, imperturbable calm: of the Americans, lithe and slim, rather like keen commercial travellers, with nasal voices, odd cynical faces, and an air of being perpetually amused: of the Belgians, bearded, learned, new-looking, too new-looking according to our ideas, with their bright yellow boots and belts. The requisite dash

of colour is found among the French officers, who in sky-blue of the smartest rush wildly hither and thither. And there are many *poilus* in steel helmets and rather battered uniforms going on *permission* or returning therefrom. On the platform opposite is a group of Portuguese in grey uniforms, whose dark sallow complexions speak of Oporto, orange-groves, and the sun-baked South. There are Australians and Canadians, quite another but equally well-known type, and standing by himself a little Japanese of the Staff. Behind all these the background of the crowd—the demure-looking V.A.D.s, grip in hand, the severer hospital nurses. A motley collection, a curious *spectacle* in the fierce morning sunshine.

Then the Paris train comes in. The scene is indescribable—the confusion, the rushing to and fro, the perilous shifting of luggage on trucks, the blowing of horns and of whistles. In a first-class compartment are found a middle-class Frenchman and his wife, the owner of a factory and brickfield near the coast—a prosperous-looking couple with charming manners and execrable clothes—who are returning from a visit to their property; a reserved, white-haired civilian Englishman, for twenty years resident in Armentières as agent of a big British firm—thoroughly commercial; a French *jeune personne*; and a British officer.

Through all that long and sultry day the train rolls on its circuitous way towards Paris—faster, mercifully, than of yore. First it touches the sea—and there our British officer gets out—then

turns inland, passing through a rather monotonous country whose broad marshy valleys, traversed by streams, are bounded by low and often wooded hills. The meadows are richly clothed with cowslips, buttercups and marigolds, on the folding woods is a still spring-time green, the corn ripening visibly waves in the wind, whilst flippant magpies—those typical birds of Northern France—flit from tree to railway embankment and back again. The journey, though wearisome, is not without diversion. At *déjeuner* in the restaurant-car, a French infantryman sits opposite reading *La Revue de Paris!* (Can one imagine an English Tommy reading the *Hibbert Journal?*) He has been gassed, this erudite fellow, in the fighting at Kemmel, has just been discharged from hospital, and is on a week's leave to his home in the Midi. Every hour or two the train stops at some station of mediocre importance, whereupon everybody clambers out to walk up and down, talking and smoking, beside the line.

At Abancourt many descend. At Beauvais the remainder make an exodus to the dining-car. In our compartment there remains a solitary young lady at once elegant, very pretty, mistress of her English, and willing to use it to the best advantage. And as afternoon wears into evening the journey becomes so burdensome that it is natural to fall into a conversation even though this attractive creature is obviously of the strictest and the most exclusive. At first the conversation is of books, of writers, of Napoleon (this girl's

peculiar passion), of travel; then of affairs and of life in general. There is to be found in this bloom of the French *noblesse* (at most twenty-one years old)—as in so many well-educated French-women to-day—that peculiar blend of hard and matter-of-fact worldliness and common sense with the exquisiteness, the *spirituelle*, the semi-detachment, the almost fatalism of the still first and proudest class in Europe.

This sentiment, for instance: "With the shams the tea-party ladies, the bazaar ladies, the ladies whose work is done in motor-cars, self-advertisement, and rushing from place to place—with these I have no patience." (In the mid-Victorian era she would have stamped her foot.) "We have no time for such people. There is work and for everybody."

She speaks with conviction. For two solid years she has buried herself in a bleak sand-dune village on the sea-coast, doing the routine work of a French hospital, and during that time only once revisiting her home. It is her first visit to Paris for twelve months, now she is going to buy her trousseau for the wedding with an Englishman. Here is one who in spite of all has never lost her character of the Parisienne—her instinct for wonderful clothes, her passion for the ballroom and for dancing, for the life of restaurants and theatres, for gaiety, for being amusing and being amused. Yes, this young lady (unlike the world in general) has preserved her intuition—her sense of humour, of tragedy, of delicacy, and of discrimination. She can laugh with Dickens

and with Pickwick, cry with Turgenev, satirise with Wilde, adore Loti, talk well of Kipling, like Ian Hay, condemn imperiously Balzac, Zola and the materialists; she can englamour her Napoleon, she can defend her Clemenceau, and discuss (with conviction) the politics of France, of England, and of Europe. . . . And she can tell you exactly how many glasses of champagne a well-behaved young lady can imbibe without showing the effect!

Your Englishwoman pales by comparison, not for lack of ability, but by her insularity, her lack of a point of view, and of the "cosmopolitan sense." She is interested in her luncheon, but the other is interested in literature—and champagne. And on a long railway journey these latter often carry one farthest.

But there is a view-point which seems to unite the young femininity of all aristocracies of all races of all generations!

"Ah, one's family! They are impossible! With them it is always the same. It does not matter whether I wear open-work stockings, wish to stay late at a ball, or choose for myself a husband—they raise a scandal no matter. And always one must be attended. Now I go to face them and I know there will be a scene. My father, he won't be so bad, but my *maman* . . .! It is not she who is going to marry; it is I who am going to settle myself for life, and surely I may choose the man. But one's family—they are impossible!"

III

Paris!

Paris in the gathering dusk of a sultry June evening. The German armies are forty miles away. . . . Is there any sign of this in the roar and bustle of the Gare du Nord, in the whirl of humanity that seems to press convulsively without in the surging tide that sweeps through the swing doors and besieges every mode of conveyance and stands in queues and waits patiently in throngs and crowds? Yes, there is. One portion of these crowds and throngs is seeking a way out of the threatened city; but by far the larger portion are immigrants, refugees, who, hurriedly evicted from villages and farms in secluded country places, are cast high and dry upon the metropolis by the current of war, roughly handled, swirled in the whirlpool of humanity they know not whither. Oh such is this group of old women and children marooned amid their baggage; these nuns, sad-looking in their silent resignation, sitting on little packages, clasping old-fashioned shabby umbrellas; these middle-aged women and youths rushing frenziedly between soldiers and officials in vain search for transport and information. What a pandemonium! What a world of dreariness and weariness beneath the dim arc-lights that compete with a fading sunset under the great vault of the station roof!

Yet Paris remains essentially the same. It is the same crowd that on this summer evening sways and crushes upon the pavements of the squalid streets near to the Gare du Nord as swayed

and crushed there months or even years ago. Taxis—though not many of them—dash hither and thither, each one assailed by a ravening mob; throngs and mobs of idlers stand at the exits to the station just out of their curiosity watching others press out and in; hundreds of *poilus* stroll by with hatless girls hanging on their arms; a mingled roar of train-whistles, motor-noises, and human chatter, even snatches of song; old women darting across the road with the evening milk, newspaper-sellers shouting and selling, waiters shutting up the outside cafés, and the everyday life of the city going on apparently the same.

As you pass out of the station into the now dim and purple dusk, a glowing orbit of electric light enclosed by a mob of interested faces detains you. It is like a glimpse of some episode on a brilliantly lighted stage. Within the blaze of electricity the refugee children and the parentless babies are being tended by nurses, Samaritan-like, in miraculous white. There are cots and beds and an atmosphere of eager solicitude. At least so it seems—but the crowd presses ruthlessly on, and it is possible only to treasure gratefully in the mind this vision of American charity.

Out in the streets there is felt something of that electric atmosphere which brooded over the streets of London on the evening of August 4, 1914. The people ebb and surge, there is an indefinable air of crisis, of expectancy, so that the mind goes back wonderingly to the rippling Authie river and the stricken streets of Abbeville, where last night scarcely a footfall echoed.

IV

Morning again, and in its bright light the garden of the great hotel in the Place Vendôme looks cool, exotic and exceedingly peaceful. The hotel is all white, and smiles at you in the gay sunshine. There is a glimpse of a glass veranda, a gravel walk and one or two beds of flowers, and groups of palms and orange trees in boxes, and a fountain playing; and of numerous little green tables set about in shady places. With its twittering sparrows, its trickling flow of water, its patternwork of light and shade, one could find no pleasanter spot to look down upon at this early hour. And there are two waiters. There are two waiters dusting tables, rearranging chairs, tidying the place up—and a head waiter superciliously looking on—in such a manner that they somehow create for themselves an atmosphere of lazy peace quite peculiar to the waiter-world.

It would be difficult to find a more pleasant experience than such extreme luxury after months of plain living or of hardship. There is nothing more delightful than a French breakfast in a comfortable bed, a feeling of *abandon* and of liberty to lie long, a looking out into the cool courtyard, a leisurely getting up, and a leisurely dressing. A hot bath—no! That is impossible. In Paris they bathe only on Saturdays and Sundays.

Then the streets—everything twinkles, laughs and shines this summer morning. The great hotel itself is strangely quiet. It is almost empty

save for a gorgeous concierge, a polite mysterious gentleman in a tail-coat, a hovering waiter, and one or two American officers sauntering in and out. None of the swarms of English khaki that were here a few months ago. That same note is lacking in the streets. These do not want for movement, animation, colour, for motor traffic, and for shops fully and brilliantly open. But they lack a kind of mainspring, a kind of dynamic energy, a characteristic *joie de vivre* that was of Paris in days gone by. Appearances, nevertheless, are deceptive. They say Paris was shelled this morning, but in the illusive palace one knows nothing of such things. . . . This city of spires and towers, of great hotels, museums and magnificent monuments, of boulevards, squares, wide streets, parks, huge buildings—a fairy place!

At Les Ambassadeurs, quite the usual crowd. Only where Englishmen used to reign supreme Americans and Frenchmen now preponderate. Under the spell of the midday heat when the streets and the open spaces are impossible, there is no place in Paris more delightful—unless it be Armenonville's. In London, alas! we have none of these summery restaurants. The airy flower-scented room opens on to awning-covered spaces where numerous tables invite the thirsty and the weary to partake of iced cup, mayonnaise and strawberries. Under the awning one rests in a suffused glow, in a kind of cool and delicate gloom. Conversation floats out into clotted sunlight and leafy shade: beyond the awning is a vista of green, of the Bois and its gardens, flower-

beds and deep pools of shade. From these gardens comes the noonday murmur of birds and insects: one has a glimpse of children and governesses playing or reading under the trees. Not far off an old man is working a mowing-machine whose purr-r-ing note is attuned by memory to the height of summer.

The place is nearly full. The usual fat untidy-looking Frenchmen, napkin under chin—artists or literary men, one imagines; three English officers; a sprinkling of French airmen attached to the Paris defences; a number of Americans and their gay friends. Then Lola and Renée—together as of yore: and not far off Ninette and Gabys drinking champagne cup with a few boys. (Evidently they've made it up, those two.) By herself, wonderfully attired in pink and mauve, sits Mollie, who has a past—Mollie, the Franco-American, alone with her gay frock and her mirthless artificial smile. Only she, who has known—perhaps too well—the Bohemia of London, of Paris and New York, is without friends; nor is there much *joie de vivre* in this carefully made-up yet lined face with its setting of yellowish, once golden hair; but there's irony in it, a subtle pathos to those who know.

Lola and Renée, on the other hand, are always lively. One may say, except—as not infrequently happens—when roused to jealousy or anger, they have never been known to fail in that respect. Life for them is all insolence and repartee in their daily round of the restaurants, the cafés and the music-halls. Do they know, have they ever

known, another world? One doubts it, except perhaps in August the very same world of Trouville, Deauville, or Dieppe (and, for my part, I doubt—despite their own animated accounts—whether either of those fashionable resorts has seen much of the couple since the war). Well, they're true pleasure-seekers, these two. Lola tall and slim with violet liquid eyes such as one sees in the South, a warm complexion, a little nose, a cruel mouth—a face *almost* beautiful, you would admit, but marred by the look of vindictiveness and treachery. One would not, one feels, care to trust a lifetime's happiness to Lola. Renée, on the other hand, is a commoner type, with less of character than the other, just the little fair-haired blue-eyed, *piquante* Parisienne, amusing and of quick intelligence, mistress of the arts of winning men and of wearing her clothes.

A good luncheon. Coffee and liqueurs amid the usual banter and blowing of straws, pidgin-English and worse French. Then the couple are mad for a drive in the Bois, followed by Armenonville's. Well, it's a day for that. The Place de la Concorde, the Rue de Rivoli and Rue Royale, the Champs Élysées, are a furnace of heat and dust with the sun beating down on arid pavements, with the whirligig motor-cars and taxis twinkling like bright toys, and the workaday world of little people rushing about on its manifold business—no rest for them, poor devils! It is grateful to turn aside into the leafiest depths of the Bois and to draw up presently, in that divinest of restaurant gardens, the Pavillon d'Armenonville.

Albeit it is deserted—except for two ultra-up-to-date Frenchwomen drinking coffee with a couple of bejewelled, expensive-looking young Jews. Here amid deep groves and shrubberies one listens to the hushed song of chaffinches and linnets, and through wreaths of cigarette smoke watches the flycatcher darting back and forth from his perch on the opposite railing. The Bois sleeps. Old men sleep on seats, head on breast, newspaper lying unheeded on the ground; nursery-maids sleep on the grass beside their perambulators and babies; middle-aged ladies, beggars and slum-children sleep in cool places under trees. Even the waiters sleep, some of them beneath the striped umbrellas which shade Armenonville's tables.

But in the Champs Élysées the current of life revives, and the finest "prospect" in the world is awhirl with motor-cars, taxis and many other conveyances. The same, only more amazing, frocks are to be seen. (The leading note of fashion must be given to the world even though the Boche is forty miles away!) Once more the mind refuses to attribute this mid-afternoon scene to a city threatened with imminent destruction. For in the rippling surface of life one can detect no flaw. To reach the hard core of things one must go to the railway stations, to the churches, to the heart of the middle-class homes.

Yet towards evening a certain staleness, a certain dusty emptiness and dreariness, seem to fall upon these streets. At tea-time Rumpelmayer's is stark empty. In the Rue Royale, the

Faubourg Saint-Honoré, the Avenue de l'Opéra, a few chic little milliners, a few officials and business people are hurrying homeward. There is a pause between the heyday of afternoon and that other mysterious spell which transfigures the streets of Paris after dark. At Ciro's, in the warm gloom of a great white room whose electric lights are cunningly concealed, many officers and not a few beautiful ladies are trifling with champagne cocktails and coffee. Maurice, coal-black, grinning, paternal, with his native air of fatalism, proffers people coffee and cigarettes on an Oriental tray. It would seem, unchanging and still grinning, he will do that unto the end of time.

V

The hour of the pleasure-seekers has arrived And the pleasure-seekers are crowding in as they do every evening to the restaurants and cafés. The Café de Paris is nearly full. Its white and mirrored interior is brilliantly lighted; its yellow satin settees all round the walls are crowded, and so are the tables in the centre. People are still coming in, nevertheless, pushing along to the end. A confused murmur of sound, in which the knives, the forks and the plates conduct their own conversation as against the chattering voices, the treble laugh of the women, the sharp cries of dissent or of interrogation, the eating, drinking and amusing, the intensely eager, breathless business of humanity.

It is a typical Parisian war-time crowd—many uniforms, all the women in hats, the civilians in day clothes. Waiters frantically dart and run. That florid, red-faced, fair-haired fellow there in short coat and black tie, who looks like an English bookmaker—he is the proprietor. A man of influence, this, sought after, and making himself affable to his guests with especial favour to some of them! The usual couples are there—Lola and Renée with two friends, Ninette and Gabys with two friends. All are perhaps a little drunk, gesticulating one at another and laughing heartily. How they hate each other, those girl couples, how they hate each other in their jealous rivalry! Yes, and they hate each other individually, these bosom friends! It is not from sisterly love that Lola goes with Renée and Gabys with Ninette. No, these are friendships *de convenance*, though they cover, it is true, a multitude of sins.

And all the girls—how they hate each other! What a world of spite, of backbiting, of passionate jealousy behind those painted faces, those enamelled eyes, those ever-ready smiles and laughter! . . .

Little Yvonne is there—little Yvonne in smart black with a tricky velvet hat tied under a pert chin. Nothing but the latest for her! A pretty face, a bad figure, a world of fun and drollery and somewhere deep down—yes!—a heart. Only nineteen and a finished Parisienne! But she too—when she is not making *mots* or making sucking noises or blowing straws at old men—she's full of her grievances and her tales and her professional

venom against the sisterhood. "Louise—ah, there's a bad girl! It was she . . . " (whispering and looking daggers at the enemy). "Yes, and she was forbidden Maxim's. Any more insults and I will speak to Georges. Georges likes me. He will have her turned out."

A mistress of Franco-English, this little charitable one!

Melon, crème de Saint-Germain, homard mayonnaise, escalopes de veau, strawberries, Kung '04, coffee, liqueurs, cigars, cigarettes. No butter, cream or sugar. Otherwise everything the heart of man can desire.

Thus the meal is finished.

VI

The scene changes. An immense round building packed from floor to ceiling, every Allied and many neutral nationalities crushed into that auditorium and those boxes, all the *crème* of vice and the fine art of sin to be found in the world compressed between those circular plush and gilded walls and that high dome, all the dancing bubbles of life, all the drunken frolics of fancy boiled together in that astounding cauldron of a music-hall. An atmosphere pungent with cigars, stale scent and human beings. Alternate spasms of violent mirth and equally violent emotion ripple over the crowd like wind on the wheat-field in autumn. A dazzling stage crowded with human figures, footlights, elaborate scenery in garish

colours, a lantern shooting at the stage violet beams. Women, all women, in all colours, in many patterns, wheeling, weaving figures, interweaving streaks, a veritable kaleidoscope, ogling, grinning, smirking, how fatuously, how complacently! Hush! A pause. A stillness. The *entr'acte*. The dim and swelling music and a frail distant voice singing something—all alone, pallid and weak—some song that is familiar: idiotically sentimental words set to a tune at once wistful and full of memories. Music that plays upon the mind, waking unsuspected chords, stirring pulses long since dead. "Roses of Picardy," "A Broken Doll"—these songs are old, but in their familiar strains and in the upraising of the frail and distant voice this bizarre study in plush and gilt and turgid humanity fades into the memory of bygone things. . . .

The lights are on again, the marionettes are dancing

> Like strange mechanical grotesques
> Making fantastic arabesques,

mincing and marking time in a whirl of idiotic painted faces and gorgeous bewildering costumes.

VII

The curtain has fallen. It is the interval. And all the motley crowd promenades in couples, in threes, fours and fives, some arm in arm, some rollicking round the great foyer of the

music-hall. In nine months, in nine years the first sink-hole of Europe has changed but little. It is a temple consecrated to the Daughters of Joy. All the world of Lola and Renée are there (in boxes), all the world. Ninette, Gabys and Yvonne (in boxes), and the world beneath theirs, and the underworld again. All the twisted and saturnine faces; all the flabby, gross and sensual faces; all the expressions of vice and malice, of cruelty and evil; all features seared by passion, painted, rouged, wrought by the devil; all meanness, furtiveness, sordid craving and grasping lust are written there. Never a woman's passing face—and there are hundreds—never a pair of woman's eyes, but on them are stamped this nameless sign, plainer than the mark of Cain. How expressive of evil, more expressive than a man's by far, is a woman's face! Paint, powder and rouge, these cannot hide it—nor youth nor age.

And over all, among the palms, among the little tables, in the pale blue half-light, in the yearning, quasi-romantic music of the band—they are playing a pathetically banal London air, "Hullo, my dearie"—at the back of it all is a vast weariness. In this nightmare procession of faces one can discern, not only the sins of the whole world, but its pitifulness, its suffering and its retribution. Look into the sad eyes—for among the Daughters of Joy there is no mirth—and pray that the *bon Dieu*, gazing down from above, may see there but the weariness of self-willed, passionate children who have played too long and too well.

Some call it Bohemia and some the world of

Sodom and Gomorrah. No matter; at this same hour in London, Berlin, Vienna, New York, the pleasure-seekers are diligent at their self-imposed task—always searching, never resting. It is the world that has revolved in its changeless never-ending circle since the beginning of Time—this restless world of the pleasure-seekers—a race eternal, like the gipsies and the Jews.

And over that world war itself has no power....

Snatches of conversation come out of the crowd. A man's voice says:

"Well, *chérie*, what'd you do if the Boche came day after to-morrow?"

A girl's voice impatiently:

"Oh, what do I care? Let 'em come!"

Outside it is black night. In the centre of Paris the Eiffel Tower soars up into the sky. From it you may see the flickering of the guns, the rising and falling of the star-lights where, towards Compiègne, the German armies lie.

VIII

After dawn the Boulevard Montmartre is peopled with ghosts. They walk singly and in couples, they walk noisily with men, they slide by in the shadows peering up at you, they loiter under street lamps and stroll aimlessly in front of you, they sidle round street corners and dart out of the dim recesses of shop doors. And if they see a man alone they creep up beside him, whisper to him, pluck him by the elbow, even call out to him at a distance of several yards. To one from the

trenches, it is a strange experience, this great formless, nameless company of spirits—pursuing, importuning—here, there and everywhere—so many and so hungry.

It would seem they steal out with the shadows, these ghosts, swarm out to meet the pleasure-seekers at the hour when the lamps are lit and the curtain of mystery descends upon Paris. Imagination calls a man to raise this curtain, to investigate this mystery. For while the dim streets are restless and the taxis rattle by, and the tide of subterranean life runs strong, it is impossible to go to bed. . . . Get a breath of God's good air—clear away the cobwebs from the fevered brain! . . .

So the rickety fiacre rattles slowly down the Rue de Castiglione, under the great archway of the Tuileries, through a courtyard, across the Pont des Beaux-Arts which spans the Seine. Along the Boulevard Saint-Germain, past the listening statue of Voltaire. How silent and dark the river, how immense the overpowering mass of the Louvre on the farther side! Then into a labyrinth of old and narrow streets, tortuous lanes between high walls, vast buildings, courts and alley-ways, many churches. It is impossible to recognise anything. . . . We are lost. No, the driver knows—that old man who must have driven a lifetime through these streets. Ah, we're in the Quartier Latin! And there is the Sorbonne, and there, after more tortuous windings, the dim rounded shape of the Panthéon seen dimly against a lightening sky.

The chimes of Notre Dame strike midnight. Midnight, and the world asleep! A pale moon gazing down upon Paris—and loneliness and the screaming of cats. The pleasure-seekers have vanished back into the shadows, so have the puppets and the ghosts. A nameless figure rustles by hugging the wall like one ashamed. A light burns in some student's window—some student poring over his books or keeping late company in his little attic. Otherwise the city sleeps, and, sleeping, waits.

Ah! This Paris! It is like a woman in its mystery, its waywardness, and its passion; its pride and beauty and its joy of life; its comedies and tears, its magnificence and wickedness; its tremendous past and eternal future; its laughter at the destinies of men.

PILL-BOXES

EVERYBODY knew what a pill-box was—a handy little article of circular shape, easily carried in the pocket, easily mislaid; a mere trifle, gentlemen, hardly to be noticed.

But if the Great War upset a good many preconceptions, it upset a good many other things too—pill-boxes among them. It upset the whole theory of pill-boxes, the whole ethical relationship of pill-boxes, the very insignificance of pill-boxes in our daily life. It knocked the lid off pill-boxes, at the same time showing how important they really were. It magnified and even glorified pill-boxes, for in the winning, the capturing of such an one, was not lustre added to our British arms?

And how did this transformation come about? Who would have believed it? Pill-boxes! The very words have a round-the-corner-chemist sort of sound. And yet three years ago to-day we were going tooth and nail for pill-boxes, waylaying and side-tracking them, creeping up and surrounding them, battering and assaulting them with bombs and mortars and gas and grenades and heavy artillery, going out in full panoply of war against them, slaughtering their inhabitants with the utmost gusto, then dwelling in them, if you please! Yes, sitting down inside the dreadful things and thanking our lucky stars for them. That was what the war did about pill-boxes. And more than that. Victory depended upon pill-boxes. The destiny of Europe hung

upon pill-boxes—and that peace, gentlemen, which was to make the world safe for democracy. . . .

Is it surprising then that the reek of them hangs about one to this day? You can't take a pill-box out of the medicine cupboard without being reminded of those handy little articles of circular shape, etc., etc., and without there being recalled to your mind a deplorable afternoon on the banks of the Steenbeek river when pill-boxes—even pill-boxes—proved to be nothing short of a delusion and a snare. It was an altogether abominable place—so unlovely, so depressing. Why, the very scent and savour of its surrounding *pot pourri* was enough to take your breath away. But—it was safe. It had the air of being safe. The two young gentlemen huddled unhappily within nourished a firm prepossession, a convinced optimism, with regard to safety. Would they have been there else? A concrete pill-box! Shells shook everything, but not their faith. The Germans, it is true, had been thrown out of the pill-box much more dead than alive; but that was gas—and British valour. Every now and then a large mulberry-coloured face—one of those faces to which the *bon Dieu* has given good humour, but whisky its fire—peered in at the narrow opening and said, "Don't you think you'd be better off outside? This place won't keep out a whiz-bang." To which the young gentlemen replied in chorus, "No, sergeant-major—no. We'll stop here for the present. And, if you like, there's room for you." But, no, the wily

bird, he knew a shell-hole or two—he wasn't having any.

And so it went on. Everything grinned. Everything grinned and mocked at the two young fellows sitting tightly together—who grinned themselves (by force of habit), because, after all, a grin's a great thing on a battle-field. "Grin and bear it," "Keep on smiling and you'll win the war"—that's the grand old British spirit. So they grinned. Especially they grinned—but, no, gentlemen, they smiled—when the shells came: a sort of pallid propitiatory smile as though to placate the shells or pacify the Germans. And often the shells came very close and burst damnably, shaking the pill-box to its (alleged) concrete foundations, shaking your inside like a box of bolts. And bits of iron actually flew in hissing hot. And then what grins there were! My word! The mulberry-coloured face promptly peeped in and said, "Wouldn't you rather come outside, sirs? It won't keep out a whiz-bang," etc.

There was a leg which grinned—a preposterous, an impudent German leg cased in a high German boot sticking out of a bed of green slime. And, gentlemen, how a leg can grin! Have you noticed it? How a dead German's leg can grin, revile you, insult you, sticking out of slime at an impudent angle as who should say, "Ha! You've got the pill-box, but you haven't won the war! Ha! ha!" And so forth.

And the trees—the naked trees along the Steenbeek—they grinned too. And the rusty German

rifle—that grinned. And Langemarck church-tower—that grinned. And as for the sun, it dared to grin on such a place. And the blue-bottles were always grinning: their bluebottling was insufferable.

And the reek of the place. . . .

The two young fellows decided to partake of luncheon. That was the biggest grin of all. They sat surrounded by moist mud, rubbish, old newspapers, notebooks, equipment (new and old), weapons, rockets, coats, and goodness knows what else. The luncheon was done up in a sandbag tied at intervals by some Machiavellian cook who, inspired by the devil, had devised this means of dividing up the different sorts of comestibles. And who had been detailed to carry up the officers' rations? Some ill-conditioned fellow—that was obvious. Horror after horror revealed itself. The salt and the sugar had merged as one; the tea and the marmalade had joined forces; the sardines had untinned, so had the tinned tongue; the margarine had formed an improper *liaison* with the candles; the bread had assumed a delicate sulphur shade as a result of intercourse with Flanders mud. . . . And the young officers grinned. They didn't swear. They didn't moan. What they said in their hearts, God alone knows. But they were British—they grinned.

They went even farther. Wrenched by the pangs of hunger, torn inwardly by a certain hot defiance, they tackled the Tommy-cooker with incomparable resolution. (They thought they'd

do something knowing with the eggs.) But are you acquainted with Tommy-cookers, gentlemen? Are you aware with what contempt Tommy-cookers regard human nature and even human life? They will laugh in your face, gentlemen; they will dare you do your worst. And so in this case. The Tommy-cooker had got a bit damp. They lit it—it flickered—went out; they lit it again and the same thing occurred. They tried a series of Tommy-cookers. Perseverance always wins in the Army and eventually the two young officers won—or thought they had.

When the crash came the eggs were boiling nicely. The water was bubbling and there was every prospect that the water would boil other things besides eggs. Then came the sound of a mighty, rushing wind, a roar, a crash, upheaval. Dust and a horrible whiff of gunpowder. And the pill-box? One end of it was on a level with the ground. And the other? . . . grinning.

Everything grinned.

The leg, the boot, the trees, the sun, the gun—above all, the sergeant-major, with his confoundedly good-humoured mulberry-coloured face.

He helped them up.

"Come along, sir. Here's a shell-hole. . . . I told you so."

He was right. What can you expect of a handy little article of circular shape, easily carried in the pocket, easily mislaid, a mere trifle, gentlemen, hardly to be noticed?

THE BRIGADE OF GUARDS

I

EARLY in the Hundred Days, the battalions of the Guards lying in Belgium after the campaign in the Peninsula were formed as a Division. Major-General Cooke commanded. There were two Brigades, the First consisting of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions First or Grenadier Guards, the Second consisting of the 2nd Battalion Coldstreams and the 2nd Battalion Third (or Scots) Guards. These battalions were not new to each other. Nor was the Division which marched from Enghien to Quatre Bras and fought at Waterloo without consciousness of tradition, without consciousness of peculiar responsibilities to the Army and to the Sovereign. The Peninsula after all lay behind these troops. Did they not already look back to Schellenberg and Fontenoy, to Blenheim, Ramillies and Malplaquet? They had often succeeded; they had not failed. And already their history was the history of England for a hundred and fifty years. And we cannot hope in this brief review to do more than trace the growth of that tradition with its prime responsibility for steadiness and order which Sir John Moore epitomised at Coruña. It was ever a particular rôle. And we may no more than glance at it in the light of history, in the light too of modern achievement.

II

The First or Grenadier Guards, originally the Royal Regiment of Guards, was formed under Lord Wentworth for the protection of the person of Charles the Second in 1656. It was formed of the loyal officers and men of the Royalist Army who following upon the battle of Worcester had escaped with their Sovereign to Flanders. It first saw service a year later in alliance with the Spanish against the French, and in the battle of the Downs was highly distinguished.

The origin of the Coldstream Guards was of an opposite character. In 1650 Monk took five companies from two of the best regiments of the New Model Army and amalgamated them under the title of Monk's Regiment. A decade later it began its famous march south, starting from the Border village of Coldstream and finally occupying quarters about St. James's. At its leader's behest the " Rump " was dissolved. After the accession of Charles the Second and the death of General Monk (Duke of Albemarle), it became known as the Coldstream Guards, having precedence next below the Royal Regiment of Guards which throughout had remained loyal to the King.

In November 1660 the newly-restored monarch commissioned the Earl of Linlithgow to raise for him in Scotland a Regiment of Scottish Foot Guards which took part in the battles of the Pentland Hills and Bothwell Brig. Not till the Union of England and Scotland in 1707, however,

can the Brigade of Guards be said to have come into being. It consisted of the First Regiment of Foot Guards, as the Royal Regiment of Guards had become known, of the Coldstream Guards, and of the Third Guards, which was the title given to the Scots regiment.

Although the First and Coldstream Guards took part in the suppression of the Duke of Monmouth's rising and the battle of Sedgemoor, it was not till the outbreak of the French war in 1689 that the Brigade saw important Continental fighting. Steenkirk, Landen and Namur followed within a space of a few years, and the Peace of Ryswick brought but a short respite in hostilities. War broke out again almost immediately, and the colours of the Guards Regiments adequately record the great battles in which they took part during the next half-century. Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenarde, Malplaquet, Dettingen—all are enrolled. It is possible, however, that those engagements in which the fighting of the Foot Guards outshone all others are not among the battle honours. Such were the desperate fight of Schellenberg and the defeat of Fontenoy. At Schellenberg, though shattered, the Guards pressed their long uphill attack home in face of determined counter-charges with the bayonet. The popular fame of Fontenoy largely rests on the picturesque incident recorded of Lord Charles Hay of King's Company, First Guards, who coming face to face with the French Guard at thirty paces is reported to have stepped forward, flask in hand, and doffing his hat, to have drunk

politely to the confronting enemy. "I hope, gentlemen," he is said to have shouted, "that you are going to wait for us to-day and not run away as you did at Dettingen." And turning to his own troops: "Men of the King's Company, these are the French Guards, and I hope you are going to beat them to-day." It was a peculiar manner of conducting battle; the young gentleman fell desperately but not mortally wounded. Ingoldsby had made many mistakes, the Duke of Cumberland not a few, and late in the day the British advanced for 800 yards without firing a musket, the Guards being on the right of the line. It was after climbing the last ridge that they came face to face with the French and the foregoing incident occurred. It was followed by volley after volley from French and British alike with wholesale slaughter to each side, but in the upshot the British broke through and went so far as to occupy the French camp. They repelled a charge of cavalry, were compelled to retire owing to the failure of the Dutch, but returned successfully to the attack, and only on finding themselves still unsupported in flank fell back to their original lines. Discipline had the last word. The three battalions of the Guards were mainly concerned in covering the retirement which threatened speedily to become a rout, the men in perfect order turning at every few paces to fire volley after volley into the furiously charging French cavalry.

Fontenoy was perhaps the first noted occasion of the protective rôle of the Guards on the grand

scale, to be so often repeated in later military history.

Nor is the protective rôle in a losing battle as at Fontenoy the sole though it is perhaps the principal mission of the disciplined flower of an army. There is the function of the Reserve, which seems generally to have been assigned to Guard troops in attack or counter-attack, as witness Napoleon's Old and Middle Guard at Waterloo, which were not thrown in until the last stages of the battle; Gravelotte, where not till evening did Prince Augustus of Württemberg hurl the Prussian Guard at St. Privat, with results well known; Ypres in 1914, where it was a month after the battle began when the Emperor directed a final onslaught of the Guard against the English; and many other instances could be given. The first impulsive *élan* of attack is found in all well-trained, well-fed and well-led troops. The specific value of Guard troops to a Commander-in-Chief may be defined as dependability in defence or offence, reserve of power, and last but not least *moral*. March discipline and moral example on the part of the Guards went far to saving Moore at Coruña; march discipline brought them from Enghien to Quatre Bras, twenty-seven miles in fifteen hours, before Waterloo. March discipline and other drill are the basis of Guards' training to-day. In the course of every protracted, hard-fought war, a period of moral decadence sets in—generally at a season of pause or comparative calm—than which there is no more insidious attack. It was the danger of the British Army

during the siege of Burgos, when discipline fell away under monotony. Sir William Napier in his *Peninsular War* sums up the whole matter by saying:

> The reserve and Foot Guards in Moore's campaign, the Light Division and Foot Guards in Wellington's, gave signal proof that it was negligence of discipline, not hardships, that caused the losses in the other regiments.

Insidious contagious decline in *moral* was never more clearly seen than in the German Army between 1916 and 1918—as one looks back upon it. And experience seems to show that stagnant rather than active warfare such as a state of siege or again long-continued trench life is at least as high a test of disciplined troops as battle itself. In battle men are upon their mettle and up to a point realise that discipline may be their salvation; in repose, they are at the mercy of gnawing thought and contaminating discontent.

Classic examples of the unyielding fighting of Guards are, of course, the defence by the Light Companies of all three Regiments of Hougomont Farm at Waterloo. This, according to Wellington, was a key-position; and without cessation the fight swayed the livelong day in and out the orchard, through the wood, into the courtyard almost, and around the house until countless bodies lay heaped in the orchard alone; until Lieut.-Colonel Macdonell and Lance-Sergeant Graham of the Coldstreams closed the great gate upon the French. The ordeal of the First

Guards Brigade upon that famous day was scarcely less, for they were repeatedly attacked and finally charged by the greater part of the French Imperial Guard. But they counter-charged; and under direction of the Commander-in-Chief himself, drove the enemy back at bayonet's point and won the day.

Discipline, and discipline alone, of the parade-ground, implicit, and of drill, could successfully have borne fighting so various, so prolonged. The troops awaited orders and, when ordered, did as they were told. Their conduct was not forgotten. By command of the Prince Regent the First Guards became "The First or Grenadier Regiment of Foot Guards," and are so known to this day.

In the line of Hougomont—not less tenacious and even more of the common soldiery—was the defence of the Sandbag Battery at Inkerman forty years later, and the advance to the Alma. There is resemblance between Inkerman, with its grey masses of Russians looming through a thick morning mist, its point-blank firing, its desperate encounters with pistol and bayonet, and the great misty attacks of Prussian infantry in our own day; both attained the same degree of ferocity and both the same result. And the Alma by the precision and regularity of the advance of the Guards as upon a field-day but under devastating fire carried its tradition, as we shall see, as far as the rolling plains of the Somme and the stark slopes of Hill 70.

III

Indeed, the story of the Brigade of Guards through the Peninsular War, through the Seven Years' War, through the Dutch Wars, through the American War of Independence, through the Napoleonic Wars, through the Crimea, through Egypt and South Africa, looked back upon, is one accumulating, accumulated tradition. It is an epic worthy only the pen of a Homer, of a Tolstoy, of a Napier; the brush of a Verestchagin, of a Detaille. But it is more: it is the tradition of the Keep, of the Hold-fast, of the Rock, of the Rearguard, of the Reserve.

With regard to history we need go no further. It was reserved for the twentieth century to attain the climax of war—a climax that the veterans of Craufurd and Hill, of Picton, Ponsonby, Campbell, might scarcely have visualised. The Guardsman of 1914–18 was not, however, one is inclined to believe, intrinsically different from the hero of the Crimea and Peninsula. He was merely better educated, he was merely modernised. The Brigade of Guards, for its part, had changed no whit, being probably on the whole the most conservative institution in twentieth-century England, firm, unmoving as a rock, and holding vice-like to its customs, privileges, identity, individuality. There is perhaps nothing more remarkable about it than its power—a power shared only by one or two of the oldest and greatest Public Schools—of defining and producing a type, of welding the individual into the whole,

of claiming the individuality as part of an organism, body, soul and spirit, of imprinting upon all who came under the grip of its indefinable force the hall-mark of its training, discipline and point of view. That was the heritage, as we have seen, of a tremendous tradition. There had to be, however, something more. This was not discipline, though discipline was the sometimes hard and sometimes pleasant school in which the finished Guardsman had to be wrought. Discipline was not, however, the real motive-power, the ultimate instinct of the fighting-machine as it was in the old Imperial Guard of France, as it certainly was in the Prussian Guard at St. Privat and Ypres. There was always behind its fighting strength from the time of the forming of the Royal Regiment of Guards out of Charles the Second's loyalists onwards, a strong social sense, a spirit of camaraderie and friendship, a sense of separateness, of adhesion to a body politic or commonwealth not founded mainly on binding ties of discipline but actually based on common interest and mutual good-will. You may call this narrowness. You may say it was the spirit of the old British Army in its extremest form. Narrowed it certainly was in the sense of being a solid *bloc*. To the world no mediæval rampart ever presented a more stony, impassive face. Whatever rivalry or schism within—and in centuries of warfare there were such—to the world without was presented a united, solid whole not less impenetrable than its own wall of steel. It remained essentially self-contained—itself.

The popular name of this spirit is *esprit de corps* —*esprit de corps*, perhaps, in a very powerful form, the extreme example of *esprit de corps* perhaps known to the institutions of this country. It derived before everything from tradition and from a sense among officers, non-commissioned officers, and men (especially the second named) of corporate individuality. It derived in the second place from the inevitably peculiar relationship of the Brigade of Guards to the Sovereign. It originated in a corps of officers narrowly derived and on the whole narrowly maintained, as may be judged by a list of names constantly recurring from the reign of the Georges onwards.

But though pre-eminently English, welded by discipline yet mainly social, it was not a merely sentimental attachment as for instance the typically English "Public-School spirit" is; nor, on the other hand, was it merely politic. The Army recognised it: recognised it as, ready to hand, a weapon of great power, a thing of indispensable force, a thing to be improved, to be sharpened and pointed, to be encouraged, a weapon two-edged upon the battle-field. However the officers might be imbued in upbringing, it was not a thing that came naturally or immediately to the soldiers who came often enough—and made the best troops —from civil life at its worst. Here it had to be implanted and the *régime* of the Guards Depôt was the first means towards that end. There can —there need—be no equivocation about this. They were a mentally and a physically hard type of men who were accepted as recruits by the Brigade

of Guards. They were accustomed to hard knocks and they expected them; they were not accustomed to discipline, and they had to learn it. They learnt it admittedly in a hard school, for War (which was to be their profession) is a hard taskmaster; and it was the school after all which saved Cumberland at Fontenoy, which served Marlborough at Blenheim, which saved Moore at Coruña, Wellesley before Burgos, and largely vanquished Napoleon at Waterloo. Its anvil was Sebastopol, Inkerman as we have seen, and the Alma. Its immediate objective was the next great war—how great, how exacting none could say. Its unfailing necessity was the practical interpretation of the special and specific rôle of Guard troops. This was in no sense a merely heroic conception. To those who directed, who ordered, who drilled, it meant that for the next Commander-in-Chief in the field there must be at hand a striking force, a protective force, a *reserve* at least as efficient as it had proved indispensable to Marlborough and Moore, Cumberland and Wellington.

In all the great continental armies there was no school harder than the recruit-training of the British Foot Guards except that of the Prussian Imperial Guard at Potsdam. And this latter was based upon mechanical discipline, upon the idea of the private soldier as an automaton, as a slave, as a sacrifice on the altar of the military Sphinx, as a mere cog—and barely that—in the German military machine. Total submergence or even loss of individuality was one of the first

aims. It was a system that depended largely upon awe. It extended far beyond the confines of the barracks or the parade-ground. To the private soldier who was a nonentity the officer was always the officer, and the non-commissioned officer always the non-commissioned officer: neither was a man but steel backed by steel.

In the British Foot Guards, the system, though equally dependent on discipline and drill, led to something entirely different. The Guards Depôt is a place not externally beautiful, entirely four-square, where on six days out of seven all the year through a babel of shouting rules—and where is heard the tramping of many feet. The noise represents nothing so much as a kennel of human hounds. And on any mid-morning or afternoon may be seen the spectacle of numberless squads going through the very limited movements and evolutions of squad drill at that quick-step which the Depôt ordains. Or they may be seen practising the "balance-step," or by way of variety doing the first motions of arm-drill by numbers, or doing aiming and loading practice, or at the tripod or answering questions, or at beck and call of a squad instructor scampering from point to point like a lot of chickens. The first impression is absorbingly interesting, the second mainly amusing, for the adjurations of the squad-instructors are commonly facetious and the language of the barrack-square being mainly that of the recruits themselves not too refined; the third perhaps is, on the whole, of routine and monotony. And there may have been many who

from time to time have tramped these barrack-squares, who have turned about again and again in quick time, who have uncountedly formed fours, and unaccountably formed on the left or the right, marked time, shot the foot out on the command "left foot front," and so forth—many who have asked themselves the meaning of it and cursed very liberally the monotony of it. They must have cursed, too, the barrack-room life, the impolite admonitions they received part in earnest and part in jest, the subjection to the lance-corporal or the old soldier, the eternal responsibility for a score of unconsidered trifles or details apart from mere personal appearance. And yet the thing gained upon a man. Proficiency gained upon him, emulation gained upon him, pride gained upon him. Expertness, he found, excused him from blame and gained for him praise not the less important because stinted. He may have hated his life when on parade, but when off he discovered himself suddenly to be a smart young man, capable of something, self-reliant; and, moreover, that even his instructors were human—off parade. There was no good soldier but came to know it; there was no bad one but was made to feel it. It was largely a question of competition alike between recruits and instructors. Smart squads passed out quickly; the rest had to go through the mill a bit longer. In four months or so, each man was a finished Guardsman, broken to obedience, an automaton at drill, and lacking only that final training with his regiment which should give

him a sense of personal interest and of distinctiveness from other regiments. And when he came to look back upon the breaking-in process from civilian life, those months during which his heart, body and soul had to be given to soldiering, he learnt how necessary it was; how it had served previous generations successfully; how that particular thing could be done in no other way. He may have reflected also that mere brains are a nuisance to ordinary soldiers; that intelligence is necessary; that concentration and alertness are everything. It is comparatively rare to find inveterately stupid men in a squad; it is invariable on the other hand to find a few who cannot concentrate, who cannot fasten the mind on dry mechanical detail in, for instance, musketry or the fine distinctions of handling of arms.

It is a mere commonplace to say that smartness, parade and drill are the essence of Guards training. The fact is exemplified every day in the mounting of the King's Guard and every year in the trooping of the King's Colour. Still, many people think of these ceremonies as of so much show designed to please the eye: why not more practical soldiering? they ask. They do not realise what a world of practice and patience and pains of precision, and devotion to detail is involved in these two ceremonies: that "braces wrongly crossed" may earn a man a couple of drills, that the movement of a finger whilst standing to attention under the Adjutant's eye may lead to an extra parade ("You've *got* to learn to

stand still!"), or that the heel of the rifle-butt a few inches in advance of the right foot will bring a reprimand. Nor are the majority of those who stand idly around the Horse Guards Parade on sunny mornings watching battalions of the Guards at mass-drill impressed by what they see other than as a pretty or interesting spectacle. The fierce shouts of drill-sergeants and company sergeant-majors, the corrections of or by officers, the deliberate evolutions so exactly performed that the onlooker can detect no flaw but instinctively wonders how automatically it happens—every one of the many seeming to know the thing to do next—and how to do it: what is the meaning of it all? Will this much help to win battles? But the soldier after a while, after a period of inward contempt and ridicule perhaps, comes to understand—certainly after experience of actual war. What he understands is that the word of command, the instinctive response, the unceasing vigilance of attention and correction, and the degree of concentration, of implicit obedience required of rank and file are the very making of good infantry. Attention and obedience become a second nature. Care of arms, uniform and equipment becomes a second character.

It has often been said that the backbone of the Brigade of Guards is its non-commissioned officers. And this is certainly true in so far as the greater part of the executive power of a battalion is vested in their hands. A heavy burden of work falls upon their shoulders. The non-commissioned officer acts and knows, the

officer directs, supervises and inquires. It is not the rôle—nor is it in the tradition—of the Guards non-commissioned officer to be on terms of familiar equality with the men of his company, platoon or section; nor do the men respect familiarity of that kind; it is his business to "get things done," and upon his temperament it depends whether he does this by rough-and-ready methods or by mild methods. No more is it the business of the company officer to stamp, to curse and to swear. But the officer who knows his company or platoon stands between the private and the N.C.O., and any abuses of authority that occur are in despite of this supervision. The private soldier has the right of complaint to his company officer; yet it is as a rule only the idle or troublesome men who would avail themselves of the privilege, since a good soldier is a real saving of trouble to the non-commissioned officer and not likely to "get across him." The relationship between officer and Guardsman is essentially a friendly one, not sceptical or retributive though of necessity a little aloof. The non-commissioned officer is the mainstay of discipline as of internal economy; but the Guardsman must always feel that there is something beyond discipline even and beyond the authority of the N.C.O., *i.e.* his officer's impartiality and good-will.

In peace time the relationship between officer, non-commissioned officer and private soldier was largely formal and of routine. But when the War broke out, the relationship immediately

became a much closer one, and for all its efficiency as a fighting machine and its rigorous adherence to the forms of discipline, the essential spirit of the Brigade was that of a large and always self-sufficient society in which each man co-operated in his own particular sphere towards the common purpose. The importance of the warrant officer and of the senior sergeants in the general scheme immediately became self-evident; it was of transcending importance as in former wars, and as time went by and the more experienced officers were killed, disabled or promoted and recruits took the place of old soldiers in the ranks, it grew to a degree of responsibility which at the time perhaps was hardly realised. The warrant officer of the Guards has ever been the prototype of the British Army, but with his smart figure, his cane and his tremendous voice people inclined to think of him purely as the lion of the parade-ground, the drill-automaton. The ignorant were even inclined to make mock of him, as at a music-hall turn or show performer. But the very qualities that served him in peace served him incomparably in war; and they were great qualities. He stood on the whole alone, in himself the justification and exemplification of the system which had produced him and through which he had risen rank by rank and step by step—the hardest physical school perhaps in the world. He may have seemed a hard man; men do whose business is efficiency. His mentality may not always have been a wide one, circumscribed as it was by the type of material he had

to deal with and the routine nature of much of his work. But personality, intelligence, courage, good conduct and sheer ability won him the Royal Arms which he kept by the same qualities plus disregard of unpopularity. His functions upon the field of battle or in the trenches were relatively the same as upon the parade-ground, and he performed them as well: until it began to be realised in the later stages of the War that his life was becoming indispensable to the Army, never to be lightly risked. In the long period of trench warfare from 1914 to 1918, many regiments tended to laxity of discipline or at any rate self-respect. It happened not on one or two occasions that the visitor found trenches looking like pigsties and their occupants resembling animals rather than men, the conditions of life in winter being held to extend licence to almost any neglect. The wash-and-shave was optional, saluting ceased altogether, and a happy-go-lucky existence shared in common by all ranks was saved from contumacy only by a very admirable sense of duty. In the Brigade of Guards the reverse was the case, the very conditions of life being held to demand added pains in the direction of cleanliness and smartness. And there was not infrequently seen the spectacle, half-comic yet all serious, of some orderly or sergeant well over six feet in height seeking correctly to salute on appearance or exit in a dug-out barely five feet in height.

The greater part of the responsibility for maintaining this exemplary standard of discipline after

the old manner fell upon the company sergeant-major, whose duties included, in addition to the accurate keeping of a company roll, the detailing of parties, a turn at trench-patrol, and the care of trench-stores. The Guards' Sergeant-Major was characteristically seen perhaps at that hour of evening or early night so familiar in trench life when the ration-parties, fatigue-parties, working-parties and working-material were detailed. In the gloom and tortuous difficulty of the trenches how easy it was to get flustered, muddled or confused, and so to throw out the night's arrangements! That rarely happened: the all-powerful could tell off a wiring-party as he could tell off a King's Guard. He had the faculty of rapid handling of men through experience which the officer could only laboriously acquire, though indeed he seldom had to. And here the Guards' system differed from the Line.



IV

These months and years of trench warfare were demoralising. They were more demoralising, more deadening and dispiriting by almost common consent—in the winter months at any rate—than brief fiery days of battle. So monotonous were they, and so featureless, that the story of the long trench life has already sunk into the background of half-forgotten things and by posterity no doubt only the brief heroic hours will be remembered. For this reason partly, and partly because an impression prevailed in the

Army at one time that the Guards Division was held in reserve as shock or mobile troops—as certain French and German Divisions were—it may be worth while briefly to outline the course of its history in the trenches. It may be said that, except for a period of five months early in 1917, the 1st, 4th, and 20th Guards Brigades, and latterly the Guards Division, were continuously in line of battle throughout the War. But the four years of trench warfare divided themselves naturally into two periods: that preceding the Third Battle of Ypres, and that succeeding it. They gave rise to two widely differing sets of conditions, the earlier system being typified by the Fleurbaix line (1914–15), by the Fauquissart line (1915–16), and by the holding of the Ypres salient (1916). This for the greater part involved a fairly continuous front-line trench held by three companies of a battalion with one in close support, for a period of four or two days, a distribution of companies in support about a mile behind the front line, the battalion in reserve being about a mile still further in rear. Two Brigades of the Division were maintained in line, the third spending a period of eight days in Divisional reserve some miles back, and with three battalions in a Brigade at that time the troops were by no means overworked.

The routine of this type of warfare will serve as a skeleton for all, since only in dispositions and a consequent modification of method did the two main systems differ. The salient features of trench life were always "Stand-to" before daybreak

and dusk. The one ushered in the day, the other the night. The cardinal principle of trench warfare was an unceasing vigilance by means of sentries and an unceasing supervision of those sentries by officers and N.C.O.s. The application of this principle is perfectly directed in "Guards Division Trench Standing Orders."

At the hour of morning "Stand-to," all assembled on their fire-steps in fighting order, bayonets were fixed, and for practical purposes every man became a sentry. It was the one time when company commanders could see their dispositions at a glance, when they could so dispose of their men that every fire-bay was occupied without being overcrowded and yet a field of fire could be covered by every rifle. Bombs and grenades could then be inspected, so could the trench itself with a view to cleanliness and a sound programme of work. Immediately after "Stand-down," which was given at broad daylight, breakfasts came up and it was a fortunate condition of "peace warfare" that the cookhouse could frequently be established in the front-line trench or warm cooked rations be carried up in the dixies a few hundred yards and still be hot. Immediately after breakfast the cleaning of rifles began, and it was customary to have an officer's inspection—also of dug-outs—before 9 a.m. Then in quiet and good trenches the work of the day began—for most of the men had had a night's sleep—and lasted till twelve noon. In the very best trenches there is an incessant wear and tear. Dug-outs and traverses fall in, the parapet

crumbles, drainage becomes blocked, communication trenches need repair. The Brigadier invariably came round the trenches of a morning. Single sentries with periscopes were posted at an interval of about twenty-five yards. After dinner the men slept till two o'clock, or if night-work was being done, all afternoon; otherwise they worked on till evening stand-to. Tea arrived about four. At evening stand-to the night dispositions naturally come into force, double sentries being posted and the standing trench patrol starting its round. During the day it was customary to have one officer and two non-commissioned officers on trench-patrol duty, but these arrangements naturally varied with different units. After dark a non-commissioned officer to each platoon came on duty, with one officer always out in the trench and another superintending any work that might be going forward. Ration and fatigue-parties were generally detailed by 7 p.m. If no work had to be done, the men could get down to rest till stand-to next morning with no further disturbance than that required by sentry-go. On most nights in the front line some kind of patrol went out into No Man's Land. Offensive action in normal circumstances was not common. Most of the lights sent up and occasional shooting were the work of the enemy.

Sentries were of course the vital point in the ordinary night life of the trenches. Constant supervision was the only way of ensuring that one of a pair was always looking over the parapet. The same applied to non-commissioned officers.

After the period opened by the Third Battle of Ypres—copying perhaps the German system—defence was organised in depth, and instead of a rigid, strongly-held front line closely and numerously supported, a system of outpost warfare with advanced groups, a picquet (trench) line of resistance some distance behind, and further back again a reserve took its place. A time came when instead of six companies of a Brigade in the front line there were at the most 1½. This greatly altered the situation by (1) making approach to the picquet or outpost line in daylight impossible, (2) involving increased hardship on garrisons, (3) causing considerable distances to be travelled, (4) increasing the amount of work to be done. Whilst the whole day was spent in rest—often, however, under unfavourable conditions—night was the season of hard and exceedingly dangerous work. A company frontage extended sometimes to as much as 500 yards. Wiring, therefore, and the digging of communications occupied every working hour, and to conform to an often changing situation, dispositions were constantly being altered. Hot rations could not as a rule be sent to the outpost line, but a two days' ration would be carried and cold cooked meat be sent up from the cooker, which generally came as far as battalion headquarters. Much and dangerous offensive activity was shown at night, and by reason of isolation the nerve tension of troops holding the advanced lines was naturally greater.

The chief differences, however, lay in the fact

that during many months before the final British advance all battalions of a Division were permanently in line at once, that Brigade reserve instead of being something of a rest was often by reason of shelling more dangerous than the front line itself, and that respites of any duration for the men were few and far between. A system of rest and relief was, it is true, established by bringing battalions up to full strength and forming a nucleus of details or depôt at some village many miles in rear. Little doubt can be entertained, however, that life for the man in the trenches became harder as the War went on, and that throughout the whole of 1918 conditions were at least as exacting as they ever had been.

V

A Guards Division was formed for the second time in the neighbourhood of St. Omer on the 30th of July, 1915. It was very much stronger than the first Guards Division which had marched from Enghien to Quatre Bras and Waterloo exactly a century before. The second Guards Division at first included three brigades of four battalions each. (Early in 1918 one battalion from each of the original brigades was attached to the 31st Division.) There were four battalions of the First or Grenadier Regiment, four battalions of the Coldstream (including a Pioneer battalion), and two battalions of the Scots Guards. The regiment of Irish Guards had been raised in 1900, and of this there were two battalions.

There was one battalion of the Welsh Guards, which had been raised in February 1915. In February 1917 the Division was augmented by the Machine-Gun Guards, afterwards known as the Guards Machine-Gun Regiment.

The 20th (Guards) Brigade, including the 1st Bn. Grenadier Guards and 2nd Bn. Scots Guards, left for Zeebrugge with the 7th Division in October 1914; the 4th (Guards) Brigade, together with the 1st Coldstream and 1st Scots Guards, 1st (Guards) Brigade, served from the beginning of the War. And it would be useless—indeed mere redundancy of recent history—to recount the battles in which the several regiments took part. With the exception of the Second Battle of Ypres, the offensive Battle of Arras (April 1917), and the capture of the Messines Ridge, the Guards Division or some part of it was engaged in all the major battles of the War. In this respect, it was not different from some other famous Divisions—though only a very few—but again in the tradition of the British Army there was to be expected of the Brigade, as we have seen, a peculiar standard of hard, disciplined and tireless fighting.

The classic battles in which the Brigade of Guards took part were by common consent the First Battle of Ypres and the Battle of the Somme. Both are, of course, immortal and will pass for ever into the annals of the Brigade of Guards as into those of most units of the British Army. The First Battle of Ypres is a national battle, as Inkerman was, and belongs to all the soldiers.

It was, so to say, the battle the British Army had trained for and existed for through half a century of European peace. It has been said—and by no less a person than Lord French—that on the 31st of October and the 1st of November 1914 the vital interests of the British Empire were endangered. On the latter date the arrival of the 16th French Army Corps saved the situation; on the former it was the action of Brigadier-General Fitzclarence, V.C., Irish Guards, commanding the 1st Guards Brigade (1st Division), that averted a break-through and a rolling-up of the Army. All to-day know the story of the counter-attack of the 2nd Battalion Worcester Regiment acting under his orders.

> . . . Then a little later, when General Fitzclarence found out how badly things were going on the right of the Scots Guards, he at once decided that an immediate counter-attack was to be made, and sent me off with orders to get hold of the remaining three companies of the Worcesters, and instruct the C.O. to counter-attack on the Scots Guards' right; the latter were holding the château. . . .[1]

The counter-attack succeeded and the rest of the story, so far as the Brigade of Guards is concerned, is recorded in the number of the survivors:

1st Bn. Grenadier Guards, 5 officers, 305 other ranks.

2nd Bn. Grenadier Guards, 4 officers, 150 other ranks.

[1] From account of Captain Andrew Thorne, Staff Captain, 1st Guards Brigade.

1st Bn. Coldstream Guards, no officers, 180 other ranks.

1st Bn. Scots Guards, 10 officers, 370 other ranks.

2nd Bn. Scots Guards, 5 officers, 305 other ranks.

In like manner the Battle of the Somme was a national battle—as an offensive battle, perhaps, comparable alone to Ypres and Verdun as defensive battles. On the other hand, it was not perhaps in the same degree a struggle of the soldiers. Offensive fighting seldom is. Its success depends to a greater extent on the courage and skill of subalterns and company officers. The attack of the Guards Division from Ginchy to Lesbœufs on the 15th of September, 1916, is a classic because of the machine-like precision with which it was conducted in face of a massed enemy fully prepared. It was shortly after 6.20 of a misty morning that, preceded for the first time by Tanks, the 1st and 2nd Guards Brigades swept over the Ginchy ridge in successive waves and took the first objective in their stride. Cool leading and careful direction took them speedily to the second. Even the third was reached; the fourth never was, for by this time the 3rd Guards Brigade had been drawn in from reserve and the Division had lost nearly three parts of its effectives. And here again the measure of its losses is the truest indication of the nature of the fighting. The leading Brigades, by skilful handling, missed for the most part the enemy barrage, but advanced

in face of a storm of machine-gun and rifle bullets; the reserve Brigade lost mainly through shell-fire.

This attack, and also the later one of the 25th of September, are acknowledged as examples of disciplined co-ordinated fighting such as was at that time just beginning to be understood, in which all arms played their allotted part, be they riflemen, Lewis gunners, bombers or grenadiers, and in which communication was maintained more or less with the Royal Flying Corps. Loos, another of the greater engagements, though chiefly famous for the storming of Hill 70 by the 4th Grenadier Guards and 1st Welsh Guards, supported by the 1st Grenadiers and 2nd Scots Guards, was to the student perhaps interesting rather in its preliminary aspect. The Guards Division, newly formed, marched up through Nœux-les-Mines and Sailly-la-Bourse — with bands and bagpipes playing as though proceeding to a review, and with H.R.H. the Prince of Wales not far from his battalion. Approaching the battle-field and, as we believe, whilst still marching in column of route, the debris of two unseasoned Divisions fell back across the road, disorganised and reeling under their baptism of fire. Brigade after brigade, battalion after battalion of the Guards doubled out into diamond (artillery) formation with that precision, that absence of confusion, which are the very essence and purpose of Guards training. It is the type of drill that may any day be seen practised in Hyde Park, Windsor Park, or on Wimbledon Common. And the advance was continued

under ever-increasing shell-fire towards a canopy of smoke and flame: many of the officers still riding their horses, the groups of men close-packed at even intervals, arms at the trail; so that the spectacle spread over a wide tract of country was said by those who witnessed it to have been a magnificent one.

And it was two years later, amid circumstances (it must be said) of demoralisation, that the same spectacle was repeated. Not many who took part in the one episode were present at the other. Cambrai had been attacked by British troops and Tanks and the enemy pressed back to within four miles of the city. But on the morning of November 30, 1917, the Germans in surprising strength counter-attacked along the entire front of battle, broke through the British lines, taking great numbers of prisoners, and for a while threatened catastrophe to the whole Army. The Guards Division, being at rest by Havrincourt after the violent fighting in Bourlon Wood, was immediately called for; called upon to support its historic rôle; and through congested rearward-moving transport, amid which shells were bursting, and infantry streaming in unformed bodies to the rear, marching, stolidly up by way of Metz-en-Couture and the open country, again spread out into artillery formation. Strange things were seen upon that day; and over all the rolling country groups of soldiers came and passed and wandered ever westward, lost to their units and their officers, conscious only of the advancing Germans. And when the dawn came

it was once again the three Guards Brigades in long lines of men extended, amid the slow grind of Tanks and the metallic crash of massed machine guns ahead, that plodded a mile downward—strewing, it is true, with their bodies the grassy slope where corn grows now—but driving the enemy out of Gouzeaucourt and stemming the tide of retreat.

Nor can the name Bourlon Wood be passed over without mention of a minor drama which (all in secret, as it were) happened there. It was on the 29th of November, 1917, that a battalion of the Guards,[1] marching up by night to reinforce, came upon men worn out with fighting tumbling back. Black woodland lay around—and black dark; rifle-fire echoed from end to end with loud, hollow reverberations of sound; some quality of the hour or of the place—so full of shadows, instinct with uncertainty—seemed to press upon men's minds. Panic smirked afar, but these well-worn troops, pressing on and pressing stragglers back, found their alignment in the drip of the trees. And when morning came, it showed a woodland russet and black and curiously quiet, full too of the beauty of the fading autumn, so that none could believe an enemy at hand. No enemy showed. . . . Two attacks were delivered this day. The first failed; the second failed, but in the following manner: three companies in line advanced with the bayonet against camouflaged machine-gun emplacements, designing to relieve the wood of

[1] The 2nd Battalion Scots Guards.

Germans. All had rehearsed this wood fighting. The training had impressed itself, for when in open glades officers and sergeants fell, the Lewis gunners continued to ply their weapons and, with the riflemen, to come on in short lying-down rushes according to instruction. There were two left to each gun. Point-blank fire, slightly masked, came from a German machine gun at twenty yards' range, death appearing certain. No. 1 gunners are lance-corporals, and these were seen to aim, draw back the cocking-handle, fire with all the precision of the field-range; whilst the No. 2 gunners, with a similar precision, lifted off the magazine and jammed the next one on the magazine-post. Each man fell over dead in turn. The attack failed. This incident was not in itself extraordinary, but appeared to the observer as the consummation of weeks, of months, nay, of years of patient training—in the handling of the Lewis gun not only but in the spirit of the men fighting, who *automatically* performed their particular task under circumstances of extreme desperation and even of justifiable retirement.

It was after all merely the desired cumulative effect of drill and training. The same spirit in junior Guards non-commissioned officers was again, though differently, seen in the fight at Ney Wood, on the Broenbeek River, during the Third Battle of Ypres (September 1917). Here was a lonely post in a copse of naked trees thirty or forty yards from the Germans and separated from friends by a stream. It was a notably

perilous spot; and on a night when garrisoned by a lance-sergeant and twelve men of the 2nd Battalion Irish Guards, Germans creeping up through the trees rushed the post, throwing a shower of bombs. They were beaten off. Other posts were captured. The bridge across the Broenbeek was broken down. No relief or succour arriving, for ninety-six hours the post hung on. Food, ammunition, bombs failed; they finally cut a way out with the bayonet and, swimming the river, won home. The heroic aspect of this incident is obvious, and was rewarded with two Victoria Crosses. It was not less interesting from a disciplinary point of view. Any but the highest disciplined troops would have surrendered or, creeping back one by one after dawn, would have evacuated the post before too late. In this case, however, the lance-sergeant in charge was not so minded, his training at the Guards Depôt, and afterwards, having apparently affected him in such a way that his verbal orders to defend his post to the last had impressed itself upon him as a reality.

Several cases of this kind occurred; of necessity, only two have been instanced. To name only three more, the spirit of Bourlon Wood and Ney Wood was all-decisive in the defence of Arras in 1918, at Vieux Bercquin during the great German onslaught in the north, and finally, conspicuously at the crossing of the Canal du Nord. All these will repay study. The Third Battle of Ypres was a great and long-drawn-out contest, and for the Guards it was more especially

an inter-allied battle. At dawn on the 31st of July, 1917, the 20th French Corps—known as the Iron Corps—attacked alongside the 3rd Guards Brigade, advancing in short rushes by groups at incredible speed, whilst the British trudged steadily forward in extended order. So far as that part of the battle-field was concerned the attack was completely successful; and it is interesting to recall that a few weeks later General Anthoine, commanding the 1st French Army, reviewing the 3rd Guards Brigade near Poperinghe, after referring in burning language to the night of the 31st, offered the brigade the honour of the cord of the Croix de Guerre, one never before conferred upon a British unit. Dictates of military policy at the time had to prevail and the honour to be refused.

Great as was their record in the protracted offensive of the Third Battle of Ypres, however, it can hardly be denied that the most typical fighting of the Brigade of Guards in the war was seen on the defensive, in the offensive-defensive, and, as the saying is, " with the back to the wall." This may have been due not alone, though mainly, to discipline but partly to pertinacious adherence to the oldest principles. " A man's rifle is his best friend "—this ancient maxim was shouted to every platoon on the drill-ground again and again and again until the young soldiers cried out at it. But they remembered in battle; and in the Brigade of Guards the rifle was never eclipsed even by the Lewis gun—let alone by the phase of the bomb, the grenade, or the bayonet.

Outside the line, there was drill—drill—interminable drill. There were always experienced officers. There was a magnificent body of warrant officers and non-commissioned officers. There was a magnificent *esprit de corps*. These, and these pre-eminently, carried the Brigade of Guards without lapse or tarnish from Mons to Cologne.

VI

The Guards Division returned to England in January and February 1919. Though arriving quietly, it was received with thanks and thanksgiving by the nation. The total casualties throughout the European campaign had amounted to 43,505 of all ranks. Songs were sung, and verses made and many stories told of these famous troops. In a day to come a second Hardy may write some such epic poem as *The Dynasts* of their lives and deaths. In our day—so near to events—it is better to go back to the Great Masters, there seek an epitaph; among whom it was Sir Arthur Wellesley wrote (after the Passage of the Douro): "The Brigade of Guards are in every respect the example and the object of admiration of the whole Army."

AFTERMATH

TRAGEDY came to the Plain.

Tragedy came with the coming of holocaust to Europe, with the advent of war and death. It was strange how the war set its mark upon the uttermost corners of the world. And that which was clean and fair was soiled. And that which was wild and free came under the strangle-grip of Man.

Towards the western districts of England there stretches an upland country seldom visited by the wayfarer. It is a land that for centuries has been given up to the roving sheep, to the bustard, the hawk and the plover. Strange signs are found upon its face; and, if perchance, the traveller turns aside from the great westward roads, it is to see in the groups of vast grey stones set lonely-wise upon the Plain that which he may not understand. Baffled, he betakes himself to the highways again, hastening back towards the haunts of men. The great spaces weary him, he becomes aware of a certain loneliness and fear. There is that to be found on Salisbury Plain from which men shrink in common kind—solitude, the melancholy of distance, the mysterious grandeur of sobbing wind and open sky.

That quality of loneliness and melancholy remains to this day. But in the course of years a subtle change came to the Plain. First, the vast sheep-walk gave place to acres of waving corn. It was that moment when with maturity change and light—expression—come to a woman's

face. Instead of the illimitable expanse of virgin turf whereon the changing flow of sunlight and shadow made a solitary contrast, there appeared patches and then oceans of corn, flowing, rustling, now a pale green, now full green, then yellow, copper-gold and shimmering white. The gorse, the furze, the thorn tree, and the wind-blown fir no longer alone clothed the steeps of the downs. Clumps of beech were planted on the hilltops, belts of fir appeared along the skirt of the sheep-walks. Yet these did not, as might be supposed, disturb the essential spaciousness of the country, but rather served to increase it, for the beech clumps, more than all else, emphasise distance and the eye is often appalled by the aloof remoteness of black dots which may be as many as twenty-five or thirty miles away.

Save at the seasons of the spring and autumn ploughing Man was no more common upon the Plain. The shepherd and his flock, the ploughman and his yoke of oxen—these were of the Plain itself. To the eternal tinkle of the sheep-bell was added alone the song of the ploughboy. There were yet—and are to this day—rude tracts of solitary hill pasture upon which none but the shepherd ever set foot. It is true the bustard disappeared. The kites and merlins, the peregrine falcons, were no longer seen, but the kestrel and sparrow-hawk in ever-increasing number took their place. Rabbits multiplied in the beech clumps and there was to be observed no decrease in the number of the hill foxes. The sport of the hawker gave way, but the racehorse

came instead. Far out on the highest downs they were seen in the early morning. Little posts marked their gallops, but the virgin turf and the midday silence remained.

Soldiers invaded the eastern marches of the Plain. They came with their tin barracks, their artillery ranges, their big guns. To the lover of solitude, the eastern marches were irretrievably lost, but still a vast emptiness was left. There were the great sheep-walks southwards of Salisbury; there were the sweeping expanses of the downs above Warminster, where one so minded could lose the world of men.

But at last came tragedy. A scar was set upon the woman's face. And when the world was plunged in war, the stigma of its turmoil and its suffering lay not only upon the pleasant lands of Northern France, not only maimed the prosperous fields of Belgium, and scarred even the rolling plains of Central Europe, but struck at the quiet heart of England which beats in the Great Plain.

In the evening a traveller came to that valley which, opening upon the Vale at Warminster, then strikes back into the utter loneliness of the downs, and by way of Heytesbury, Codford, Fisherton, Steeple Langford, Wishford and Stapleford, makes its winding progress finally to Salisbury. The stream of the Wylye flows from the heart of the Plain and through many past summers has been the home of those who dream and think and dream and toy with the ripples of life. It is the home of the artists and

of those other artists, philosophers, the anglers. All around, the silence and space of the upland world, the Great Ridge Wood looks down on the valley from afar, chalky lanes on either hand climb the side of the hills. But here a kindlier atmosphere, a calmer and more leisured thing. Willow and alder and clumps of spiral pale green poplars accompany the slow-moving stream. Clean gravel and silvery trout can be seen in the clear water from the numerous plank bridges. The villages of old thatch and lath and plaster cottages cluster at intervals of a mile or two along the road that follows the foot of the downs. Near Warminster the tinkle of the sheep-bell comes often from their smooth green slopes. For seclusion, old-worldliness, and for a certain quality of placid English beauty, there is probably not such another valley in the southern counties.

To it a man might come who had suffered infinite things.

But on this evening of the first war summer all was changed. Tragedy had come to the Plain, tragedy lurked in the sunlight, by the wayside, in the song of the stream. War, like the mark of Cain, had scarred the face of this beautiful thing. Leaving Warminster, columns of white dust rose from the once quiet road. White were the hedges, white the wayside grass, and white the gaily-coloured flowers in the cottage gardens. Even long white trails of dust betrayed themselves on the green hillsides. Leviathans rattled, clanked, roared, grated, creaked, panted along the high-roads—strings of motor lorries, each of

which raised its cloud of suffocating dust behind. The air, the hedges, the grass, the trees reeked of the fumes of petrol and oil. Motor cars and motor bicycles whirled and spluttered past. Overhead was heard the constant hum of flying machines. Everywhere khaki—the yellow, dingy, dusty colour—took the place of the varicoloured garments, the broad straw hats, the brown arms and faces of the peasants. On bicycles and on foot, and in carts and waggons and in groups on the village street and in the inns, the cottages and the lanes, soldiers were everywhere seen. A new population seemed to have arrived where the old scarcely appeared. The ancient character of the country had given place to some other cruder thing.

Guns were heard muttering among the hills.

And at Codford the " new city built by man " began. On every hand were shanties, rows of wooden huts, wide square spaces of sun-baked ground that had once been lush green meadow; amid the whirl of dust and the roar of the traffic the carpenter's hammer, the builder's trowel were heard. No more the call of the cuckoo, but the blare of bugles near and far. Gangs of men came and went—navvies and imported labour. Women, too, strange-looking women, never before seen hereabouts. Shops and post-offices and other offices sprang up everywhere. The native villages were drowned in a world of wood and khaki. There were canteens, coffee-bars and cheap cinema shows. There were shanty-rigged stores and shops. Outside the cottages

appeared encouraging signs of beer, mineral water and whisky. The inns became "pubs," inviting the passer-by to come in and get drunk. By day, a whirlwind of human activity; by night, a great carouse that floated out upon the still air of the downs.

Nor could the wanderer escape. It was like a presence haunting him, like the ghost of things gone and things to come, this grim, desolating, violent thing—this personality of war. He turned aside, struck south-east, deep into the Plain. He found only Larkhill, the great artillery range above Imber, the park of guns and transport on the Tilshead Road, and the ceaseless buzzing of the aeroplanes at Upavon. Even at Imber the wireless telegraphists were at work, and a camp lay around the hamlet which in other days none went near. The haunts of the plover were broken and the form of the hare; at the dew-pond were horses drinking, men shouting—as well as the bark of the sheepdog and the tinkle of the wether's bell.

And it was the same wherever he went. He struck eastward and in the upland wilderness by Shrewton, where in years gone by the bustard, last of his race, roamed at will, was found the camp of thousands. Redholm Turnpike, which for half a century had stretched an utterly deserted streak across the vast emptiness of the Plain, the grass springing up where once the old coach wheels rolled, was now gashed and pitted by the endless passage of lorries and tractors. Amesbury resembled Bulford. Stonehenge became a

second Tidworth. The great expanse of sky alone remained.

Time went by and the war starved men's hearts. More and more they were denied peace of the soul and hope—that denial which is the retribution of mankind. Avon, Wylye and Nadder flowed on. The lives of men flowed on like Ebbesbourne and Winterbourne to their appointed goal. Tragedy stole into the face of the Plain, whose expression was no longer open, clean and free under the sky, but bespoke something of the obscure destiny, the illimitable sombreness, the ugliness and cruelty, of modern life. Who could look out into the winter's day and not see that? Who that has ever seen the setting of the winter sun on Salisbury Plain could help but feel that; or as Tess lying on the altar-stone watched eastward the coming of the white-barred dawn, her happy hour spent, her day's work done . . .?

But with the spring came the dawning of another larger life. And as the cloud of death passes from the face of men, so tragedy has brought to the Plain a peace deeper than it knew before. The wooden towns have already begun to vanish from the valley and the tin towns from the open downs. The great skeleton observation frames have gone from the hilltop and, one by one, the wireless telegraph posts have begun to disappear. With them go the dust and roar of war, the motor lorries, the guns and the armies of men. The Bustard Inn will soon be a lone speck once more in the midst of its infinite solitude.

Stonehenge sinks back into the dimness whence it sprang, and on the downs above Imber the tinkle of the sheep-bells and the cries of the nesting plover will be the only sounds heard.

So will it be with the world in the summer days of 1919. Hotfoot upon the greatest of all tragedies springs hope suddenly in men's hearts. The boom of the guns on Salisbury Plain is succeeded by the morning scent of the wild thyme.

A PILGRIMAGE

It was morning. Flooding October sunshine, cold and gold, kindled the roof-tops of London, making anew and almost beautiful that old, familiar world; whilst across the hard blue of the early sky clouds, boat-shaped and dark, drifted, light, wind-riven. Sunshine streaming through the great glass roof of the station lightly touched Fiona's hair that was itself of the golden quality of autumn. She sat in an outer corner of the carriage: she whose slender lines barely betokened the passing of girlhood into womanhood: whose face contained something gay yet evasive and far-away. Her dress was plain to severity. In her hands was a parcel tightly clasped. . . . Outside the carriage the bustle of the departing Continental express went forward. There were many people—people in sables and fur-coats and astrakhan collars, gentlemen in tweeds and wrappers, Jews defiled by too-palpable riches, red-capped British officers and wives and families, King's Messengers enthroned in first-class carriages surrounded by bags; foreign couriers, and the peculiar travelling type of waiters and cooks and repatriated refugees sandwiched in the third-class carriages of the second train.

From the subdued glow of the station the train moved out into the brilliant sunshine. Smoke was a-blowing. London flitted past—London, which is for ever turning on its own axis, where no one sits still: where housewives hang out

washing in back gardens, where children scrape out dishes for grimy fowls, where, on every station platform, crowds of brisk-looking workers await their early train. What a cinematograph of life! Then the suburbs—so eloquent of our mortal respectability—and then the common English countryside burnished in the colours of the resplendent autumn. The ploughman was at work, rooks hovered above the stubble, and the still green of the oaks and beeches mingled with the saffron of elms and the deeper orange of the chestnuts, that were a background to the ethereal yellow of feathery birches upon silver stems. There were to be seen oast-houses warm red among the hop-fields, while from tumbling orchards the streaked thatch and dull brick of old farmhouses often peeped.

To Fiona's features, too, had come something of these warm tints. Not Time, it was seen, but some obscure, tragic hour had set its mark there; and the expression of her face, for all its tender fairness, contained that suggestion of depth in experience and of suffering not long past which easily outruns the years. "How I love the autumn!" she said. "It takes off the rough edges. It makes the world look kinder." And the spirit of the russet woods, the brown and yellowing fields, contemplative, quiet, was wafted in through the open window, so that even the Jews became comparable to the peasants, and the too-luxurious Pullman car a simple thing. And closely Fiona clutched the parcel in her lap.

Humanity huddled together on a boat. But

it was all the same to the children who, flushed, with hair adrift and tense spindly legs like birds', revelled in the blow of the wind and their first sight of the sea—and the salt of it—crying out for joy, and praying the parents to walk, to run, run about the deck. Folkestone smiled—and the green-fringed cliffs and headlands of England. The crane ceased to clank, the sea-gull to cry; and there was presently only the sea, now blue, now green, little wave-tossed but never rough, and smiling—smiling too. And the clouds went billowing overhead like ships of the air, like gossamer shadows of dreams. The sunshine called to youth. The children danced for joy and called, playing their games of hide-and-seek among the coils of rope, the funnels, the narrow gangways between the deck-cabins. Soldiers smoked stolid pipes; old ladies glowered amid wraps; gentlemen (in caps) strode manfully up and down the deck two at a time, disdaining chairs. The crew did nothing. The King's Messengers and couriers took their ease in cabins.

No destroyer-escort; no tactical courses; no issuing of life-belts or excited pointing at inoffensive buoys. No mass of soldiers tightly wedged, with laughter on their lips and dread of battle in their eyes. That tableau had passed. The sea smiled at Fiona; Fiona smiled at the sea. . . . It was the most familiar scene in the world.

There were the Customs at Boulogne. But if the English became abusive, the French were

coldly rude. Nor was there any diminution of the life of the place. Only the great hotel on the quay—once instinct with khaki activity—seemed to be in the way of an early demise. But along that quay the motor-cars raced, the dull khaki War Office cars and the French grey ones; and there were women in khaki and British girls driving British officers; and a stream of humanity crossing and recrossing the bridge; and a mass of fishing-boats in the basin; Red Cross ambulances; even yet a lingering suggestion of war. French girls, accompanied by English officers, tripped along the Paris train; French girls in frocks of the shortest, with broad hats oddly tilted, with parasols carried head-first insinuatingly under the arm. . . . What a chapter of life that was too!

No waiting hours or days for a troop-train; no philosophical farewell to civilisation or outlook upon a journey of uncounted length to an unforeseen destination in a vehicle that might break down. But a seat in a restaurant-car. . . . And Fiona, looking out upon the French country, clasping still her parcel in her lap. She spoke again of the autumn: "How wonderfully it touches everything! Look at that pale green light on the poplars! Look at that silvery shimmer of the willows in the wind! I love poplars and willows; they're queer and sad. And the sunshine on that grey church tower. Tell me, will it be like this . . . there?"

Yes—the wavering sunshine made it a thing of Corot. For did it not kindle the whole of the

broad river-valley with its low hills crowned by stubble, its lush valley-bottom, marsh-yellow and grey-green with trembling aspen and shimmering willow, where snipe fed and wild duck rose in the dim of the evening? The poplars stood in rows; magpies fluttered down to the railway embankment and back again; in orchards, peasant girls and children were still gathering the fruit; light and shade trembled like chords of music in that wistful pleasant scene. . . .

We passed through sand-dunes, and heard not even the surge of the sea: only the twisted pines stood on their crests, by their protesting attitudes seeming to whisper of the bitter winter that was at hand. But we—we pursued the river-valley, and so came to Amiens in the waning afternoon. Crowds filled the station. They were black crowds of women carrying large bags and bundles, with many soldiers. Outside the station, on which builders were at work, dusk was already falling. It was as though Winter himself had suddenly appeared. And the trees of the boulevards of Albert and of Paris were sere and leafless, and from end to end of them the cold, stony figures of Conscience and of Renée Goblet gazed upon the crowds moving in the main street, while lights began to wink among the houses, and the workers to go home. And above the city rose the great mass of the cathedral, beside which the clangour of the tram-bells and the stir of the streets in the falling dusk were as the tinkling of children's toys.

There was desolation in the heart of the town

—open spaces of flattened ruins where houses and shops and gay cafés or restaurants once had been. Yet in the life of the place, which had three times been broken, there was now no pause. An advancing enemy had come and gone, an army in flight had stumbled through its echoing streets of deserted houses, bombs and shells had lit it up with the slow glare of impending doom, while the impact of vast explosions had shaken its foundations from end to end. But now the lights shone, the shop windows sparkled, clangour of trams was the speaking voice of the city; and from the overfull cafés long after dark came music of dancing feet and violins.

Morning light shone upon the cathedral—pale through the mist of the rain-storm, its slender spire upward pointing above the mass of the Gothic: that so great monument to the majesty of God and the humility of man. And it was cold out upon the Albert road. That road runs straight as a ruler to the gates of Bapaume, following the adjacent valley of the Ancre with the rolling plains of Picardy on either hand. There is neither relief to the eye nor satisfaction in such monotony of distance. Little of life was to be seen, but a bitter north-east wind swept across the uplands, whispering ever to the heart of coming winter. Black rooks tossed above the fallows. Leaves anon came fluttering down from wayside trees. Fitful sunshine gleamed from grey cloud-drift. A man and a woman were sowing in a field, the man slinging the seed broadcast, the woman, in drab garments with a

shawl over her head, dragging from an adjacent waggon the sacks full of grain : it was the woman's part : on both their faces the dull, dead look of the French soil. There was little traffic on the road, save where a high, springless peasant cart or a French army motor lorry or slow-moving dray rumbled past. Patient German soldiers worked in gangs at the surface in bright green jackets—the surface of the road that was a series of steep holes—and by the wayside could be seen rusted wire and stakes heaped up, and old dugouts in the cuttings. Ploughmen and their teams dotted the high lands beneath which Albert lay in view. Here all the once-familiar houses and streets shared the common ruin, and were indistinguishable. It was as if a giant had walked over the place. The great new red-brick church with its garish frescoes and barrack-like interior had fallen almost in a heap ; and the sole reminder of the leaning Virgin was a twisted iron bar jutting out at right angles from the tower. Strangest of all, many of the inhabitants had returned to the place. A number stood talking and purchasing in a butcher's shop ; in a hastily rigged wooden shanty a chemist had resumed his trade. Human beings might be observed passing to and fro like jackals among the ruins—chiefly old women and young children. German prisoners were at work here also, French army lorries rattled along the *pavé* road. The fringe of the great battle-field was marked by skeleton fingers of blasted trees on the edge of the plateau that seemed to warn the stranger not to approach the region of death.

The unbending highway of Bapaume stretched ahead as lifeless and deserted as the vast cemetery on either hand. The penetrating silence of the scene was at once felt. Desolate it had always been, that stretch of country, but never so utterly silent. One brief year ago motor vehicles of all kinds had streamed endlessly along this broad high-road, parties of men were for ever moving backwards and forwards, while overhead aeroplanes never ceased to hum. For months at a time guns were never silent; shells might be heard bursting in the distance with a peculiar hollow sound, and all one winter's day, when the surrounding plains were covered by a mantle of snow, shells went droning overhead to explode in Albert. But now a silence, remote and brooding, had succeeded, and already the battle-field seemed wrapped in a sort of after-death.

At La Boisselle the road turns off to Contalmaison. It was necessary to slow down, unfilled shell-holes and holes made by heavy traffic spoiling the surface of the road. On every side, as far as the limits of the horizon, a gloomy moorland stretched, dark green or brown, overgrown with the red sorrel, vetches and the long rank vegetation. A little farther on appeared a large coolie camp in the flat space between roads. Those grinning, bronze, unnatural-looking denizens of another world—they were of a piece with the battle-field: its colour was their colour, and they gaped at you as grotesquely as the gaping shell-holes. There was an almost complete absence of natural life. No lark sang, no rook or plover

tossed above the waste, no pigeon soared. Nothing was seen in all the vast stretch of heath but an occasional rabbit, a covey of partridges, a whinchat, and a few finches flitting ahead. Rarely the figure of a man appeared. Nothing was heard but the keening of the wind through the high-growing grass.

> But strange that I was not told
> That the brain can hold
> In a tiny ivory cell
> God's heaven and hell.

After all, Fiona—she was so small, so fragile, so infinitesimal beside this crude, dynamic, blasted thing: she whose rusty-black was the sackcloth and ashes of her own blasted life: she who had blithely danced her way through the pampered elegance of existence. The laughter had faded from the blue eyes that had always laughed: the lips wore no smile, but the rose had not died from her cheeks, nor the gold from her hair. How inadequate she was—unequal in years to the burden of sorrow: her sorrow itself so inadequate! After all—yes!—she had danced, won love and held, been gay, lived for the joy and the quick music of things, known two immortal years, and never yet the deadening pulse of Time—nor Death—but borne a great man in her heart. . . .

It was clear she had never expected this—this world that was of the fibre of an earthly hell: she who had only lived for to-morrow, and this was the yesterday of all time. She had never

expected this. Upon the face of the battle-field, as upon no other thing, is inscribed the very character of war: the naked fear and fury of struggling humanity, the conflicting ghosts in the minds of men, the reflected passion of the last moments of uncounted human beings. As sin prints itself upon a man or a woman's face, so was crucifixion expressed and printed here.

She said: "I never expected this. I have tried to think of it, and of him in it, and of what hell looks like. But I never imagined such loneliness and dreadfulness and sadness in any one place in the world. One cannot imagine it. I thought I knew what it was like, but I only thought. I never felt until now."

It was simple and straightforward after this. There were no tears. All that was inadequate to the immensity of the tragedy printed here upon earth. The earth which was contorted into a hundred different shapes, which was riddled with holes, scarred with the handiwork of man, and hid in its breast a thousand secrets; flecked with the grey wooden crosses, ribbed with the ruins of hearths and hearts; hiding in its breast —how tenderly, how bitterly!—the last clothed emotions, the apprehending agony of a countless sleeping dead. . . .

The aspect of the country was that of a face contorted beyond recognition in a furnace of pain. By one unknowing, it would undoubtedly have been mistaken for the scene of some colossal crime.

Fiona searched. Another was already search-

ing among bricks and bits of masonry. She was a peasant woman, unkempt with straying hair, mahogany-featured, slatternly, depressed-looking as French peasants are. To the strangers she paid no heed nor even raised her head. But a short distance away the sawing of wood was heard, and there could be seen a low wooden shanty at the cross-roads above the village. Beside it was the great crater of a 12-inch shell; behind it rose, on high, a rough-hewn crucifix flanked by crosses. A dirty child peeped out from the shanty, at the door of which hung a card almost illegibly inscribed with the words "*Estaminet. Café et bière.*" Then the sawing ceased. A grey-haired, grizzled, middle-aged man, in cap, blue blouse, and soiled white linen trousers, appeared. In an almost unintelligible *patois* he began explaining or offering something. The interior of the home he was building, it was possible to see, consisted of two compartments, the one opening into the other, their floor the rough ground. In the first of these a fire was burning on the hearth of roughly laid bricks; there were a couple of benches, and a table knocked up of deal planks. It was obvious that the work had just begun. Outside was litter of wood and shavings, a cart lay at hand, while a short distance away was a pony grazing.

Talking volubly, the man led a way down the road, upon either side of which a few bricks and an occasional household relic or block of masonry showed where a village had been. Strange things protruded from the chaos of ruins. A

low brick arch, yet standing, was the portal of his former home. Amid a heap of rubble and greenery he drew attention to a large kitchen range rusted red; that, too, had belonged to the village inn. His life-story then appeared in a series of unconnected phrases and snatches of words. Early in the war he had been evacuated by the Germans, and had been sent as a labourer into Germany. At the Armistice, with his family, he was shipped to England, and for many months had made his abode between the Strand and Leicester Square—he, a common peasant who could neither read nor write.

"And there," he said, pointing, "was the school and there the orchard and there the church and here—at the feet—my home. *Toujours les Boches*. . . ." He spoke in a sort of melancholy singsong, with many shakings of the head.—"But what is this?"—A little cavern opened into the ground; a white wall above it; among the loose earth a French painted radiator of superior type.

"The château stood here. . . ."

With that we dismissed him, knowing the end of our pilgrimage was at hand. We looked around for the other landmarks we sought. They were there, every one. We stood at the opening of a little valley, completely shut in and circumscribed. A row of derelict iron huts, black, rusted red and yellow, twisted into peculiar shapes, stood at some distance up the valley, as though contaminated and shunned by every living thing. Close to the ruins of the château

two grass-grown roads met, winding down the valley and losing themselves ultimately in the grey-green waste. Naked, shell-stricken slopes, already high in coarse grass and every kind of weed, rose on either hand. In the middle of the valley an apple tree pointed two twisted limbs toward the sky. Rank upon rank of greyish-white poles of trees stretched far along it, and stood nakedly against the horizon like fingers of ghosts or rigid corpses standing upright. Just within the wood was a forest of grey German crosses, all alike, but leaning to this side and that. Up above were the tumbled ruins of the village, grey also, and falling about the crucifix beneath which a man was rebuilding his home.

It was to this spot, then, that the pilgrimage had led us. And after three and a half years all was as had been related: the village, the wood, the German graveyard on the hillside, the ruined château, the parting of the roads, the apple tree. . . . It was simple and straightforward. There were no tears. It only remained to go to the cross that would be close to the apple tree. Rain began to fall. The north-east wind drove it out of the scudding clouds. The sound of the wind and the creaking of the derelict iron huts and the flapping of their frayed canvas were, indeed, the only sounds in that solitary place. Fiona undid her parcel, took out her bundle of tattered letters and her laurel-wreath whose parent tree had come from Athens. We together went straight to the apple tree. There were shreds of khaki, wet and draggled and discoloured and black, lying around.

Several square yards of earth had been disturbed. A dugout had fallen in. A spade lay. A rusted rifle was half buried in a shell-hole: a steel helmet in a pool of water. Of a grave there was no sign nor any cross near.

All was complete—but that. We searched. The rain steadily fell. Wayward rotting crosses "To an Unknown British Soldier" were found, hidden amid the high grass and the rank vegetation, among the brambles of the wild rose, the trailing campion and the common cornflower; but of that we sought—no sign. There had been some mistake! Our information had been exact, but nevertheless we had come to the wrong place! . . . But no! There they were, as they had been three and a half years before: the village, the wood, the German graveyard on the hillside, the ruined château, the parting of the roads. Here even was the apple tree and there—yes, distinctly enough—a trench.

Even the last letter truly spoke: ". . . It is very cold for the time of year. I am wearing your woollen scarf which keeps me warm. It is raining, but I am crouching under a piece of corrugated iron. Will you ever be able to read this? . . . The Germans are about a hundred yards away, but I can see nothing except an apple tree just above their trench. Our line cuts across a road into a wood where there are a lot of German crosses. Just behind are the remains of a village, with a château sort of upside down. . . . Shells are buzzing overhead. We go for the apple tree at dusk this evening. I wish it

was all over. I am afraid, not so much of what is coming, but that I may not be equal to it. But after all I think I shall be. . . . There is only one more hour to go. Already it's getting dark. I think of you again and again—I know you'll give me strength—and of the little Fiona, though I've never seen her, and of the day that must come when we three shall be together. . . ."

Yes—the evening was closing in. The rain began to sweep up in gusts, and a grey, drab light to blend with the sombre landscape that now became a monochrome in grey. Grey-green the slopes of the valley, grey-green the soil at our feet, greyish-white the stumps of the shattered trees, grey the German crosses and the crosses of the unknown British soldiers, grey the ruins of château and village, grey the sky above. A grey figure stood watching us at the parting of the roads—that of the solitary peasant—like the spectre of Ruin itself.

Fiona knelt down beside the apple tree and, making the sign of the Cross, laid at its foot the laurel-wreath whose parent tree had come from Athens. It is probable she felt some prayer, for vaguely, disjointedly, Fiona believed in God. Rising, she said: "If only one could know—if only one could *know*—that some day we three shall be together again. . . ."

It was the question that very many years ago a woman, not less bitterly the sport of Fate than she, had asked beneath the monolith on Salisbury Plain in the closing hour of her own life. There was no answer given then; there was no answer

given now but that of the crucifix, flanked by its two humble crosses, standing high above the ruined village, clear and distinct against the evening sky.

With that we went back into the world again. And the world was bright, and in high morning the city of Amiens sparkled and shone. And pleasant it was to see the children playing upon the boulevard, while in the windy sunlight autumn leaves came falling, falling, yellow and crinkled, eddying, eddying, fluttering down. (How wintry already were the trees upon the boulevard!) And pleasant it was to know that there were gay feet and laughing voices in life—life in the keen air. And pleasant it was to see the rich light on the Gothic carving of the cathedral, that made of it so splendid and so beautiful a thing. And good it was to hear the bells, and to know that there were yet those among the faithful who answered them: and good to feel around, to hear, to touch the pulsing beat of life on every hand. And better far that the dumb pain of the world, the grief that may not be healed nor ever stilled, should throb on lightly—all unknown and all unknowing.

For the rest—well, it was ended! Of that Fiona spoke no more. She laughed—her little pretty face all over. She chattered blithely all the way to London. Her mind was her own, and it was possible that none should ever peep into it again. Women are deep; covering-up; deeper than the stillest, deepest pools. She went laughing into the world again: and people say,

Does she care so very much ?—for she dances and sings, dances to sound of piano and violin. Nor has the dancing light ever left her gay blue eyes. Her heart responds; she loves; she lives. . . .

One other knows of what is written there.

AUBERS REVISITED

In revisiting the battle-fields of the war one is confronted by a choice of places at which to stay. A great many people, confining themselves to the Ypres area, have stayed at the Château Trois Tours, near Elverdinghe; others have stayed at Poperinghe, which boasts a sort of anglicised hotel; others, with varying degrees of comfort, at Hazebrouck, Amiens, Cambrai, Arras, and so forth. For my own part, I should choose Lille—first, because it is within an easy day's motor journey of any important section of the old British front; secondly, because its hotels are habitable.

My own object in a recent journey was to renew acquaintance with some of those places between Cambrai in the south and Ypres in the north, where the Guards Division or its units had fought and rested. There are not many excusable forms of reminiscence in a swift-moving world; this seemed to be one of them. And the idea was to approach these places from the German side, to use the lateral German roads, and to see as a German did such vantage points as the Forest of Houthoulst and the Aubers Ridge, which from the British side had so long intrigued one's imagination.

Fromelles and Aubers are no more than a dozen kilometres from Lille, and it was a curiously satisfying experience, after turning off the main road to La Bassée and Bethune, to follow a side-road which brought one to the summit of the ridge.

The broad valley of the Lys lay spread before one, Mont des Cats and Kemmel in the hazy distance, Merville in the middle-ground (hidden), in the foreground the familiar features of Fauquissart and Laventie. Familiar? But there were changes here, and it was difficult to determine what they amounted to. For one thing, the white husk of Fauquissart church lacked—an almost indispensable landmark. Then it was gradually borne in upon one that a very little cultivation, a growth of roots or patch of plough, or, on the other hand, a few new roofs transmute the face of a landscape. It was so here, and had it not been for the easy siting (by the map) of the triangle Aubers–Fromelles–Laventie, it would have been a difficult matter to identify the trenches occupied by the Guards Division during the winter of 1915–16, or those of the 20th (Guards) Brigade during the winter 1914–15.

There they were, however. And it was hard to believe, standing at the cross-roads by Aubers church—whose tower also has disappeared—with the racket and din of a great tile factory that was being raised near by, and the shouts of its workmen in one's ears—it was hard to believe that German ration-parties, fatigue-parties, and reliefs had nightly passed this way, and that it was to this spot one had looked over a period of some months.

Not but what the villages of Aubers and Fromelles show every sign of our artillery's regard—certainly not less than Laventie does. The striking point is—and the same thing might be noted all down the front, especially from the little

hill opposite Roeux in the Arras sector—that a man standing here looks point-blank into the British trenches and along the roads beyond to l'Epinette, Winchester Farm, Gough's Corner, and the Rue Bacquerot, espying every movement and every human figure. The wonder remained, not that frontal attacks on the Aubers Ridge repeatedly failed, but that the British Army held to its lower—no, its lowest—ground for so long.

Taking the road to Fauquissart and Laventie, one was immediately in the German front line—No Man's Land—and the old trenches of the Guards Division. It all at once became perfectly clear. There beside the road itself, upturned, a derelict mass of concrete, was the remains of a machine-gun emplacement—that same emplacement, no doubt, so repeatedly the subject of raids, mentions in Divisional Intelligence, and reconnoitring patrols. Was it called Red Lamp? The depth and permanence of the German front-line trenches, scarcely fallen in, struck one forcibly, and the immense mass of revetting material which lay about them. Other signs of trench life still lay there too. When you turned to No Man's Land, you were at once confronted by, on the right of the road, that row of dwarfed and stunted willows which grinned at you diabolically by night, and by day seemed to assume a sort of defiant impassivity. Where Germans and British met at the stream on Christmas morning, 1915, turnips grow, turnipfully regardless of their predecessors. These trenches are easily identified abutting on the road, and though fallen in at places are nowhere

filled in, but only overgrown with unruly vegetation. In fact, so stout is the stake-and-wire revetment in some places that it yet holds, though bulging inward; and whether to ascribe that to the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards or to the Welsh Guards, who alternately held this sector, or to somebody else altogether, is a matter beyond present judgment.

Away to the right along the Rue Bacquerot, now hardly less deserted than of yore, though more tidy, is the battle-field of Neuve Chapelle. And here, too, though overgrown with high rank grass, the likeness of a battle-field remains, masses of shell-holes being everywhere found, and there having been, for obvious reasons, little attempt to cultivate it. A peasant working with a horse or pretending to, led me across this waste of grass to the site of the Min. de Pietre—that final objective of the 20th Brigade in the attack of March 11, 1915. The tall chimney has vanished, but the nest of the German riflemen can be identified, and there is no difficulty in tracing each stage of the advance to the point where it was held up, and where even now a few stray strands of rusted wire linger.

Those interested in the battle are recommended to visit this spot, where to-day a certain atmosphere may be recaptured—for the last time, since to-morrow it will be gone.

AFTER FOUR YEARS

THE OLD ROAD TO YPRES

It is necessary to project oneself into a particular condition of mind in order to acquire *something* of the atmosphere and significance of Ypres: in order to acquire that serenity of feeling and spirit in which one should approach the fulfilment of a mission. Unless, of course, you are a "tourist" who goes to gape at a battle-field (from a charabanc) as he would gape at a cathedral or a criminal, his soul being packed in behind with the luggage. There are such people—morbid people, inquisitive people. But they are rare. If one thing surprises more than another in the battle-areas to-day it is the absence of English tourists and the presence of English soldiers. Of the former, I saw not more than a score either at such places as Lille, Cambrai and Ypres, or actually on the battle-fields. One thanks God for that—not indeed for the absence of those who come of a set purpose, but of those who in a jolly spirit "run round" to "have a look."

But from Calais to Ypres and in the greater part of the old British area there are many soldiers. One met them on the roads, travelling by motor-car or motor-bicycle, in the streets of the towns, and very occasionally in hutments "up country." What were they all doing? Guarding salvage-dumps, guarding each other, making salvage-dumps, doing Graves Registration work, "cleaning up." The Military Police get a fortnight's

leave in three months. Nobody seems overburdened with work. One man I talked to in Ypres had been on duty there since the early part of 1916. How long will it be before the last British soldier leaves the soil of France?

For the pilgrim there is no time to lose. That atmosphere of which I speak and that spirit which is necessary to it are transient impalpable things—things not of the mind only but of a changing physical order, of a very brief transitional phase. The atmosphere is there now but life encroaches, activity multiplies and increases in these waste places. The bitterness and majesty of them diminish, and with every month, with every year, they lose reality and imminence, trending toward their final shape—a legend. . . .

I crossed the Belgian frontier near Neuve Eglise on the old road to Ypres. Very soon I came within sight of the Hill of Kemmel and, mounting a long straight stretch of road, found upon the summit a small circumference of ruins with, in the centre thereof, a white stump of masonry, perhaps a dozen feet in height, surrounded by a few stones. There was a baker's shop near at hand, a temporary erection obviously, and amid the ruins one or two miserable-looking wooden shanties of a sort to which one had become accustomed. It was evident that a group of houses—not more than half-a-dozen at a guess—had once stood upon this windy hill-top.

The aspect of the place at that hour was exceedingly impressive and formed the setting of such a scene as Time himself does not obliterate. Even-

ing was closing in—I had travelled from Lille —and the ominous tones of the cloud-racked sky were strangely reflected in the greenish-black hue of the landscape, which was a battle-field, inscrutable and vast. Mount Kemmel dominated this landscape, not alone by its isolation in the flat plain of Flanders but by its personality, which is that of some presiding Evil Genius or one of those sinister human beings—a murderer perhaps —from whom all men flee. To the lowering tones of oncoming night, coupled with those of the dismal herbage and barren soil, were added near the summit ghastly scars, gaping wounds, and the grey ashen fingers of trees which would never be green again, would never know another leaf, and if weep they can, must weep there above the dead until some storm in future years shall strike them down.

What I had not hitherto noticed—but now did notice—was a signboard immediately in front, upon which was written the word "DRANOUTRE." It was the name of the village and, accustomed though I had long since become to the ruination, nay annihilation, caused by war, surprise and horror in quick succession possessed me. I had seen this village but once before when seeking the grave of a friend, on a wet afternoon of December 1915. The grave was among those of other British in the little churchyard on the hill-top around which, it being the centre of the main square, guns and transport rumbled. Then, too, it was Christmas week, and the sense of that was present within the great church, where an after-

noon service was coming to a close. A priest was intoning at the altar, which glowed with candles, whilst the numerous sacred figures, tawdry and even pathetic as they might appear, were likewise adorned with candles and with flowers. A hymn was chanted kneeling; and I remember being struck by the rapt devotion of the congregation, who, although it was a week-day, seemed nearly to fill the church, and by the shadowy effects of the candles wavering upon the rough Flemish faces, chiefly of women and children, while the occasional boom of guns from without hallowed with a kind of bitterness their Christmas singing. That was the church of Dranoutre four and a half years before—one of those picturesque steepled churches which greet each other from the scattered hill-tops in this part of Flanders. . . . The congregation then poured out into the wintry afternoon through which rain lashed in streaks; and I was again struck by their humble and patient faces, black garments and devotional aspect, so that, had a painter of the old Dutch School been present, one felt he would have seen in these figures a symbol of Resignation amid the sufferings of war.

Where were these folk now? I could not tell. The holocaust had come in April 1918 during the desperate German onslaught on Kemmel; the great church was blown up, the dead—with few exceptions—blown out of their graves. I talked with a Belgian family, bakers, who until that fatal March had lived here in comparative peace and considerable prosperity. One of them, a girl of

sixteen, spoke fluent English of that peculiar brand which has been grafted on to French and Belgian peasants by British and Colonial soldiers, and the main characteristic of which is that the crudest slang passes as the "real thing," while such expressions as "and what all" or "cheerioh" survive as flowers of our language. After their evacuation the family was conveyed to Bourbourg in the Pas de Calais, and thence to Paris. "How did you like Paris?" I inquired, expecting enthusiasm or regret; but in face of her home on the desolate hill-top the girl replied, smiling, "I'd rather be in Dranoutre."

You may say that the tragedy of such a village bears no comparison with the grander Epic of Ypres. Yet upon many it would make a profounder impression, for Ypres is synonymous with sackcloth and ashes, but this village one knew as peaceful, human and picturesque—and can to-day recognise only by a written name.

From the shoulder of Kemmel I saw miles away the lights of Ypres in that void of gathering dark where had been no lights before except of star-shells. When, in the dusk, I reached the centre of the city by the Cloth Hall, I had the impression of standing in the dim outskirts of some far vaster town. Electric arc-lamps at intervals lit the thoroughfares: there were few people about; but from a brilliantly illuminated white-fronted restaurant near at hand came the thumping notes of a piano playing ragtime. Being hungry, anxious about a bed, and seeing no other hostelry in sight, I entered by a side-door

and was bowed upon by an exceedingly fat Belgian in short evening coat and white shirt-front out of which an astonishingly large and false diamond scintillated. In fact, the whole place scintillated. Madame scintillated with combs and finery and jewellery behind the counter, mirrors innumerable scintillated behind Madame, whilst the ragtime scintillated from (as I discovered) a pianola in the faces (or feelings) of the guests.

I sat down unwillingly in this "Temple of Joy," seeing vaguely the tragic outline of the Cloth Hall through the window. There sat near me a prosperous-looking Belgian and his wife—what Belgian is not prosperous-looking?—who applauded ecstatically, crying "Bravo! Bravo!" and clapping hands. An Englishman sat opposite his wife, eating but not speaking for half-an-hour at a time. Two officers in plain clothes, bent on some errand similar to my own, pored over maps, wrote up note-books, and argued about the respective sectors of Divisions. Outside, the mysteries and memories of Ypres—too recent yet to be laid to rest—gathered fast around the brand-new white-painted door, and when the strains of "Down on the Farm" floated out to them, must have smiled! . . .

Somewhere a clock struck ten, and I went forth into the dark. There was nobody abroad and no sign of life except the electric arc-lamps. And the strains of "Down on the Farm" pursued me as far as the Menin Gate. . . . Beyond the Menin Gate curtained lights showed that a new town had sprung up. But I turned along the

ramparts in which had been passed so many fitful nights and weary days. Here all was dark and silent. Blank narrow entrances of dug-outs gloomed; from a great arched cavern a dog growled furiously and a man growled furiously at the dog. Ruins stood solemnly at my right hand.

It was that hour about which in former nights working-parties, reliefs, and ration-parties were wont to pass up to the front line. Through the Menin Gate, ghosts had shuffled all night long, string after string of them, party after party, carrying their appointed burdens, carrying their secret thoughts, with heads bent in the manner of Giotto's "Two Apostles." Over the hollow-sounding bridge they tramped and out into the flare-lit Salient that had so regularly taken its toll of them. . . . I now came to the entrance of a dug-out which through some weeks I had occupied —the last one on the left from the Menin Gate. From it I had set forth about this very hour and to it had returned in the freshness of the first daylight, seeing the broken city spread before me, its greenery of wasted gardens hiding like tear drops among the ruins, its twittering sparrows, its half-tame pigeons crooning from stony pinnacles of a present that was strange to them and of a past they did not understand. I here saw dawns more beautiful than any I have ever seen, the morning star setting in azure blue above the ramparts—the dread night fading westward—that which is spiritual and miraculous in Nature striving with the material horror of mankind so

that in the fleeting hour men dreamed of Paradise. The entrance to the dug-out had been filled in or had disappeared, the pale-blue legend on the wall opposite, "Chocolat Menier, Dunquerque," by which one had identified it in the dark—that had disappeared too. It was as well. One cannot regret a nightmare, even the lucid intervals of it; and at the same time one cannot regret having experienced the nightmare.

I come to the Lille Gate and am aware—as often before—of the silent sucking water in the moat beneath and of the faintest shimmer of moonshine upon the water like a silver plate gleaming in darkness. The road stretches white and straight into the dusky spaces of the Salient. Away to the left I can see the great ruined outline of the Girls' College; far out in this old dead world an occasional light shines. The gate itself has resumed its former spaciousness, the sandbag barrier is cleared away, and where a guard squatted around a candle in bygone nights are now freedom and space.

I fall to thinking of the peculiar hollow banging and barking the field-guns had made when firing in night-bombardments from among the ruins; how they had lit up those ruins with a sudden glare; and how from the Lille Gate it was possible to see the shells bursting like dancing pin-points of flame along the German front line a couple of miles away. Then there was the faint intermittent "tack-tack" of machine-guns from that direction, the sharp "crack" of a rifle, and the occasional muffled reverberation of a "minenwerfer" bomb.

I start at the sound of a shell coming, seeing a red glow that travels very rapidly towards me. . . . But it is only a brilliantly lighted train steaming into Ypres from the direction of Lille.

By morning light the old town showed in a different aspect. It lay prostrate there in the cold truth of day. Scaffolding was set up around the Cloth Hall—they are establishing it as a "ruin." I soon perceived a fundamental change in the character of the place—one that was to be expected but leaves nevertheless a different Ypres. Naked walls with window-squares like sightless eyes, and fragments of buildings, and above all the greater number of the wild pitiful little gardens have disappeared, giving place to Belgian hutments and "restaurants," "hotels" and cook-shops, and to areas of "collected" ruins. To the old sorrowful silence of the place has succeeded the barking of dogs, the raucous cries of children, the hoots of motor-cars and whistling of railway-engines, the passing to and fro of numbers of people. You may here see a city in ruins—but it is not the Ypres of the Great War.

This morning was a Sunday, and from an early hour numbers of people and many motor-cars passed in through the Menin Gate—later, charabancs. The majority of these people were Belgians church-going in their Sunday garments from the "new town" of wooden shanties and huts without the gate that reminded one of a mushroom mining-village in some newly prospected area. There were among them British soldiers, but it became more and more difficult to

associate the place with that gate above all others whose name is sinister and which it was ever dangerous to linger near.

I took the road to Vlamertinghe, passing by the new red-brick railway-station, near to the site of which the "Ypres Express" had nightly unloaded its passengers in bygone times. All signs of former aridness have departed from the fields, which are once more under close cultivation. Vlamertinghe must have its normal pre-war population: along that stretch of the Poperinghe road so often shrapnelled about sundown, a girls' school was marching in procession to church. The laughable Goldfish Château raises its spiral head once more; at Machine-gun Farm pigs grunt and cows re-enter their appointed place. Tracing the familiar road to Brielen and the Château Trois Tours—the road which then passes on to Elverdinghe—I became immersed in thoughts poignant and very real. The country—though here and there a field of corn has sprung up—is not greatly changed: many of the old cross-country tracks remain, as do the old road-signs pointing to "Essex Farm," "Bridge 4," "Blighty Bridge"—and I am plunged back more speedily, more truly than at Ypres itself, into the atmosphere of these places. Up an avenue of small limes I pass to the Château Trois Tours, to which all came back periodically from the trenches, usually at break of day. It is secluded amid greenery, its toy moat surrounds it with the ornamental bridge, its toy turret still surmounts it. Somebody was in occupation—I retired within the greenery. A

couple of deck-chairs were set in the portico, on one of which a book lay. . . .

I paced slowly towards the farm behind, from which in the precious intervals out of the line we had so often watched those great night *spectacles* of the Ypres Salient—the bombardments that preceded a raid or inducted a battle. It was summer then, too, and a wilderness of greenery, of grass, surrounded the farm from which we would set out in the breathless evening (about seven o'clock) toward that velvety horror which the name of the Ypres Salient conjures up in men's minds even to-day. And would return four days later so many fewer, so much more appalled by the cold ironical processes of Fate. It is true that men did not often talk of these things at the time but passed through them stolidly—unless nerve or brain gave out. But they thought. The inner struggle went on. And as I turn down the shady by-road to Brielen, I think of those many whose eyes here for the last time looked upon a green and leafy place. . . .

Of one especially I think—a very ordinary young Englishman who had given up a career in the Far East to do as he deemed right—and of a golden summer's evening, a Sunday also, when we strolled along this road. It was an evening especially active with aeroplanes, the pop-popping of machine-guns overhead and the shattering quick-fire of pom-poms. But we were too deeply immersed in conversation to take much heed of these except when our voices could no longer make themselves heard. We talked of the war,

of the future, and of that sense of impending doom which, it seemed, all equally shared at the time. But the voluntary confession surprised me, coming from an apparently phlegmatic young man. It was made in these words: "I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know how I'm going through with it. It's the filth of the place itself and the thought of one's body lying *there*." On the Friday following he lay a corpse in the place he had feared, but I have often recalled these words as a sort of epitome of the time, no less than as a record of the thought that passed through one man's mind. . .

And the Canal. I passed by Essex Farm, the earthworks of which are now obliterated by either vegetation or cultivation, and came to Bridge 4. The mere appearance of this famous entrance to the Salient has changed but little. A fine road of brand-new *pavé* now runs parallel with it from Ypres to Boesinghe. Between this road and the high bank there is a cemetery as of yore—but greater than of yore. Through the opening in the bank you have the same brown embrasured glimpse of the distorted world beyond with one or two gaunt stumps of trees before your vision is bounded by the rise in the ground. The change is in the Canal bank itself. Instead of a kind of miniature Venice hiving with a queer unreal waterside life—men washing, men reading, men sleeping, men drawing water—you have a green and overgrown emptiness. Even the entrances to the once-innumerable dens in the bank I could rarely find: they are overgrown or

filled in. But a wooden cottage has sprung up just at that sinister point where the road passes out on to the bridge and the whole of the Salient lies before you. How many have hurried past that spot! . . .

As I stood there a peasant emerged from his cottage, carrying a shot-gun.

By night Cambrai looks like a mining town of the Far North-West. Rows of brilliant electric lights dazzle at a distance. You expect to find the frontage of an immense Emporium or Palace of Varieties: you find instead a shoddy little wooden shanty with a couple of plate-glass windows, selling toys and picture postcards. The wreckage is still great, the central part of the town being a gaping void. Many of the principal residents seem to live in the hotel. Cambrai is in that state of revival when the superficial rises to the surface and tries to persuade you that things are better than they are. In the said hotel you have electric light but no carpets on the floor. The public gardens announce themselves boldly but are neglected and forlorn.

At Douai, the opposite is the case, the contrast between the two towns being remarkable. Douai in the war was said to provide the official retaliation for the shelling or bombing of Arras. It shows few traces of either, but with its shops and crowded pavements has the hale and hearty appearance of a busy market-town. The road from Douai to Arras is utterly uninteresting until one approaches the Scarpe, leading as it does across those wide rolling plains which are neither downland nor pastoral. But it was along this road that day after day in summer "much traffic activity towards evening" was reported in Divisional Intelligence, whilst from time to time clouds of dust might be seen rising above it from the front

trenches. Gradually, away to the left, the willows and poplars of the Scarpe Valley come into view. A couple of shattered houses and the remains of a high chimney-pot stand at a short distance from the roadside. They seem familiar. I look across the rolling plains north-westward and there's something familiar in their configuration too. On Greenland Hill I stop. I look down on Gavrelle. Thousands of Englishmen will remember Greenland Hill. They talked about it, they gazed across at it for months—they never set foot on it. It is the hill that was always going to be taken—but nobody wanted the job. Did I ever expect to stand where I stood now? Greenland Hill was always the barrier beyond which—Germany lay. It hid the land we never knew. And in the winter afternoons how bleak it looked: how bleak that stretch of road whereon I rest now, climbing eastwards over the hill into the frosty dawn! . . . I stand in the road by the broken houses. The midday sun bakes the dust at my feet, beats down upon the shadeless fields, quivers above the poplars of the Scarpe valley. But I—I am alone with the still cold and the mud and the boredom of it. The mud! We are unable to remain in our trenches. Near at hand is the outpost line, a handful of men are baling out water with scoops, swearing prodigally by reason of discomfort and filth. The rest are outside, on the top of the ground, filling sandbags. . . .

I look across to Greenland Hill. Within a couple of hundred yards a German is slowly walking along the parados of his trench carrying

a plank or something. He walks with that slow deliberate plodding step of the German soldier, his grey uniform barely showing against the brown background of the hillside. On the hilltop—just to the left of the houses—a number of Germans are working at a concrete dug-out or emplacement of some kind. Their figures are silhouetted against the sky and they work continuously, ploddingly — harder than Englishmen. The whole of Greenland Hill is alive with grey Germans as our lower ground is alive with khaki British—all within easy rifle shot of one another; and it has been so for a couple of days. What is the explanation if it? Mud—mud the equaliser. Mud's master now, but to-night perhaps there'll be a raid—who knows? . . .

All the same it was difficult to make out how the land lay. A sprung-up field of corn, a couple of new cottages, a landmark removed from a once-familiar landscape and—you are all at sea. Where two lines of trenches lay, a field of corn in stook, a wide acreage of cabbages. Rœux, which had been a small heap of ruins, the screaming-place of abandoned cats, the blank-wall receptacle of bullets—Rœux, so to say, is disfigured by new scarlet-roofed cottages and wooden shanties. Everybody knows the sugar-factory—that was a landmark, if you like. But it took a quarter of an hour to discover it, flanked as it now was by new houses and a road. Yes—and all the bricks had been taken away so that there remained to view only a big boiler-like concern, a tangled mass of iron.

I strolled further along the ridge—the German ridge—towards the Scarpe. Why hadn't the wretches given us a rougher time of it while they had the chance? I came to the little mound-like hill—a sort of miniature Greenland Hill—with its white chalk scars where the pits and trenches were, and on the shoulder a mass of shell-holes. Through the whole long winter it had looked down upon us—a regular observation-post—and not only down upon us but far beyond to Fampoux, to Feuchy, to the verges of Arras. Why didn't they shell us all to death—why not "minenwerfer" us out of existence? It is certain they must have seen us cooking breakfast every morning—and only a trench-mortar bomb now and then. There were hardly a dozen casualties the whole of that winter.

I spent a long time poking about on that contemptible little hill looking at things from every point of vantage. (It would have been easy to do so once too often.) I found, as it happened, a gentleman in corduroys taking his ease in a shell-hole—having a nap—surrounded by bombs, German and English, trench-mortar bombs, rifle-grenades, piles of shells of every calibre up to 9·2 inch, and, in fact, every missile known to the modern armoury. Awakening, the fellow, a peasant, explained that he was supposed to be extricating these treasures whilst a friend of his, not far off, was engaged in exploding the same. I heard detonations at this moment and straightway descended from off the hill.

My investigations became increasingly interesting. What should I find among the tangled

masses of vetch, thistle and dock but an old light railway track two or three hundred yards behind the German trenches, leading towards the Scarpe and eventually back to Pluviers beyond the hill! And when I say that night after night from the outpost line we had listened to the rattling-up of trucks along a track we knew to be there but which by day was invisible from the lower ground —an incident of 10 p.m. as regular as clockwork, frequently accompanied by the light-hearted whistling of individual Germans, by the barking of their pleasure-dogs, and once by loud cries of "Heinrich! Heinrich!" on a still starlit night—will its significance be appreciated? It was an interesting discovery. And there, sure enough, a little further on—just where you would expect to find them—the old German overgrown trenches—the outline of them, shall we say? Here and there a bit of wooden revetting sticking out, a revetted fire-step bulging through vegetation into the trench. One knew exactly where one was now. I had a pestilential friend who seemed to stand sentry here for a week at a time. I can see that youth's face, pale and clean-shaven, at this moment, peering from under his steel-helmet over the tip of the trench, his sturdy German figure—all. He had an impertinent way of lighting a cigarette; once a trench-mortar bomb fell very close raising a rare dust, and that time he disappeared—only to pop up again a moment later. "Why not kill him and have done with it?" somebody might ask. You couldn't. You shot at him and the fellow never even "ducked."

The explanation of that, of course, might be simple: the real fact is it was "indirect fire"—you could only see him with a binocular. . . . And what is that young person doing now? Alive?—inevitably. A baker's assistant, perhaps, in some German provincial town—or a Bolshevik. You never know. A funny lot. . . .

I then proceeded to look for the caves. It was of no use puzzling out the old British line which is here filled in, but masses of coiled and rusted wire and large shell-holes indicate its immediate proximity. Corn and cabbages grow in "No Man's Land" except towards the bank of the Scarpe where the land is not cultivated. A number of people are already settled in the front-line village of Rœux; and it was a young woman lately engaged in the domestic occupation of hanging out washing, who now showed me the entrance to the "cavernes." And it was now only that one realised the subterranean character of the life one had led—how one's sense of direction and of geography was controlled entirely by the turning and twisting and by the names of the passages and how the boundaries of one's world fortuitously consisted of a ruined factory, a hillock, or the entrance to a cave. If there was one place more than another one should have been able to find a way to, it was these caves of Rœux. They had many entrances, but to-day these are almost choked up by infalling chalk. The young woman led me to one of them—I was unable to recognise it. There had been names to the entrances—Ceylon, Malay, Mount Pleasant, etc.

—there were none now. One day her brother crept down and found all clear underground. The caves are very old and originated in what manner I know not: it is said they used to form a subterranean connection of five miles with Arras. The great dynamo, the electric lighting plant presumably remain and will so remain until Time dissolves them—or some contractor more enterprising than Time. But what visions those dark entrances conjured up! Something implicit to the war, something of its grotesqueness and insanity. You came from the upper ground, from its bleakness, greyness: you found yourself in these grottoes and galleries, lit mysteriously by electric lights, incurably reminiscent at times of Earl's Court: where everything echoed. Here eternal night reigned. Here the clangour of machinery never ceased or the driving of the great dynamo. Water dripped. All day long and all night men tramped back and forth, Dostoyevskeian figures in rough garb—and slept there, rested and ate there, held services even. . . . And now silence reigns, damp, dismal, and possibly eternal.

I went on my way to Arras, noting everywhere the increase of cultivation, building going forward, carpenters at work, whilst on the Arras–Douai railway-line near by a "halte" had sprung up and a gang of men was improving the embankment. A train from Douai had just puffed in, one family in black descended armed with parcels and umbrellas, having just arrived evidently from a morning's shopping in the town. The father

and mother walked sedately and the children capered towards home. It was the sort of scene you might happen upon any day in any English village.

Yet here and upon this very ground, morning by morning in March—two and a half years before—we had awaited the German offensive. An hour before dawn everybody stood to arms in the freezing cold. Would it come to-day, to-morrow? During the same daily period the artillery rolled and thundered furiously. Warning messages came in every hour. All was in suspense. War had never seemed so insane as in those gold and crimson daybreaks when the air and earth trembled and tornado impended.

I passed on to Arras. The cemetery by the railway-crossing has not been touched, but instead of the old red house a railwayman's hut has sprung up. No gas lingers along the road to Feuchy now, no gas-shells whine and grunt in pursuit of you. Fampoux rapidly raises her head among bridges, poplars and willows. It seemed to me the Scarpe has broadened out, has widened into reedy lagoons. I heard the croak of moor-hens, the subdued murmur of duck. The dug-outs in the great banks have been encouraged to fall in. Farm-carts, any number, and officials driving traps ply between Fampoux, Blangy and Arras. The ghostliness of the journey through the willowy swamps is no more, and when you come within a kilometre or two of Arras there is no longer the appearance of an old battle-field. Cultivation is in full swing, only a few zinc-roofed

wooden huts inhabited by poor people remain to tell of what once was.

But Arras! It is for me little changed. From the eastern outskirts to the heart of the city, reconstruction is going forward, new buildings are rising, the sound of hammer and hod is heard in the land. Yet the newness is not noticeable; how much still remains to be done! Business and snorting of engines reign in the railway station where one knew nothing but débris and desolation. The main street is no less lively than it was in those not unpleasant afternoons of 1918 when it swarmed with British troops. The element of khaki does not lack, though it is the sky-blue of the infantry of the line (2nd Division) now in garrison which predominates. Spanish, Italian, French, Dutch—all seem architecturally to dispute in the birthplace of Robespierre. Nothing lacks for dignity—even the dignity of ruin. A sort of Harrods' Store has, it is true, sprung up on the main street where all through the war an enterprising chemist sold you Roger et Gallet soap, which was priceless. Where you took your bath (up a side-street), a laundress reigns now. The prison is closed—perhaps because it is once more a prison. From the ramparts you look down into the moat where, it is to be hoped, the Lewis gun will never be heard again; but the bullet-marks are still on the walls of the rifle range. Near at hand a great park of French army lorries is made while a sentry rests on his rifle outside. Breezes blow across the racecourse where British officers no longer ride races or jump. Silence

reigns in the barracks by the Porte St. Pol, for, like the Académie des Beaux Arts, these are closed, forlorn and quiet. The old quay looks deserted, pondering no doubt upon its earlier activity. The numerous shady squares and boulevards have so far regained their native somnolence that plenty of people are now to be seen dozing away a sunny afternoon over newspapers, as if nothing had ever happened or was ever likely to. In the public gardens many children shout and play, but where the Officers' Club stood and the first shell of the great March bombardment fell, some work seems to be in progress, for there a board fence is set up; and not even a breath survives of its former hospitality.

I walk about the town. Ghosts accompany me. For me Arras has always been a city of ghosts—amiable and pleasant ghosts—ghosts whispering of a full and contemplative past. Here's Clemenceau whose arrival I watched at the St. Pol gate on a March afternoon when the fate of all hung in the balance. An old farmer in soft hat and leggings steps out of a pale blue motor-car; a band plays the *Marseillaise*; a magnificent kilted guard present arms. Few people stand about—it is cold. The old man walks round the guard, a retinue of soldiers following. . . . The old man walks away.

I stroll round the once-familiar billets. I come to the uninteresting house on the Doullens Road where we cowered in the winter weather—where Christmas found us—and glance at an upper window behind which we lived sad and happy

moments and where I discovered a ghost I have never seen. "Have courage!" the letter in the dusty drawer ran: "the Germans will not reach you. We need all our faith in these hours. . . ." The date of the letter was the 2—th of August 1914.

I have my companions abreast of me—those gay fellows who trod these pavements, cracked bottle and jest, and made of life, that might have been a sorry jest, a not ignoble thing. They, too, are ghosts—some from the grave sprung, some in remotest corners of the earth, most Englishmen in England for whom the ordinary will never be supplemented again, whom Arras streets and squares and houses will never know again. . . .

There are no regrets for me in this city. I think of my freedom, of my happiness and full life at home; am not disposed to quarrel with Fate's repeated intervention in my behalf. I look at the Grande Place with its colonnade, its noble over-leaning houses of the Spanish period little better than dust, its shell-holes yet: at the cathedral, listening to busy jackdaws, and see the vista of its steps and length and height and the greenery everywhere clinging—no attempt at repair to stone or pillar—not a thing changed. I look at the ruins beyond the Grande Place, a wide space of utter ruin—and realise that Life holds better things than this. I grasp again the atmosphere of the place, I know that it has a soul and that, unlike many another town in France, we understand one another and are not at enmity. When I enter the L'Univers through the court-

yard and see the white-clothed tables and obsequious waiters in place of the old bare boards and soldier-servants, I touch again for one moment the communal spirit—it was here the Christmas feast was held—and recognise there was a charm in that too, but a charm with a sinister background and a sometimes bitter taste.

When it grows late and cold as September often does, I see this Arras in another aspect. It is snowing quietly, silently, or the rain falls; it is a bleak drear evening and the wind blows out of the raw east—and darkness falls. But the stove shines bright and warm—for the incomers. A bed looks soft and inviting—for the incomers. Clatter of cups and saucers or glasses is heard—for the incomers. The noisy crowds drift along the street outside between the *revue* at the theatre and the cinematograph halls. We sling our haversacks and march off. We mount the train east of the Lens Road and glide silently, silently beside the death-like Scarpe to Fampoux. Soon we tramp, tramp through rain or snow towards the rising, falling lights above Greenland Hill.

. . . . . .

At a distance of two kilometres along the road to Calais I looked back and saw the city of Arras bathed in a golden mist of evening sunshine. Smoke rose from tall chimneys on the outskirts of the city, the white smoke of steam-engines lent it an air of energetic activity. Out of the uncertain aggregation of houses and buildings over which the filmy veil hung, the tall *campanile* of the cathedral rose—in retrospect and death a nobler

thing than life unhallowed and a near acquaintance could ever have made of its modernity. Near to it, amid greenery, it was possible to distinguish a white portion of the Bishop's palace.

I had so looked back years before when the hollow drum of far-off bursting shells lent to the scene a present reality. It was like thinking over a dream in the morning now; not, as elsewhere, a nightmare. Here on a page of suffering, its inner self, its broken temple of architrave and chapel and shrine was laid open to the sky; but now the greenery climbs and climbs and multiplies and grows until it covers up and makes even the scars beautiful. And all around the life of men goes on, humming, humming like the threshing-machine in autumn; and, like a halo of benediction, the golden mist hangs above the city and slowly, by degrees, weaves its way back into the city's life. . . .

RETURN TO PARIS

I

ALTHOUGH spring had barely come to the Bois, and although the crocuses had only just begun to flame in the gardens bordering upon the Champs Élysées, it was as mild and soft as many nights in June can be. It had been a day, moreover, of more than springlike sunshine, so that the air was already warmed and lovers were to be seen sitting on seats as in midsummer, many of the passers-by had left off their coats. A suggestion of dust even rose from the broad roadway along which an interminable procession of motor-cars and taxi-cabs whirled between the Étoile and the Place de la Concorde. Night life was beginning. A serene moon sailed in a palish sky. Lights gleamed everywhere. The chestnut trees did not stir, but a restaurant sparkled like fairyland on the Élysée side, and through open windows came the sound of violins.

The Théâtre Femina stands, as everybody knows, at the upper end of the Champs Élysées on the right. But Paris had only just begun to discover the Théâtre Femina. Having discovered it, Paris flocked to its doors in motor-cars and taxi-cabs and on its flat feet. Paris had suddenly discovered that she wanted the Chauve-Souris. Balieff made the discovery too, and stood in the yellow *foyer* smiling all over his rough, quasi-humorous, Mongolian face, and wearing unmistakably the air of a man who has " brought

it off." No wonder Balieff was pleased. For the Russian Colony the experiment had been a risky one. *Was* Russia so very popular at the moment, and how many among the audience would survive the language of Moscow? Nikita has his answer. Paris prefers art to politics—always has. And the Chauve-Souris motto, "Faire de chacune de ces créations un joyau ciselé" is no mere pious aspiration.

What budded in Moscow years ago as the sacred circle of the Art Theatre has blossomed in the Champs Élysées. What began as the holy of holies of the artists who sought entertainment among their exclusive selves has become an open forum in the artistic centre of Western Europe. And it is strange; it is unique. When the curtain rises upon *Les Tabatières des Grands Seigneurs russes* you see a Cossack and his girl in brilliant colours and head-gear, nodding, bowing and smiling to each other. They sing very happily a duet. You make up your mind that they are about to be married when it turns out that they are about to say farewell. And the curtain gives way to—Voltaire. A long white beard, wild hair above yellow horned spectacles. Just a scraggy figure in a nightshirt, you think, when—an imitation Kaiser jumps up and you have to adjust your mind to a cocked hat, a manipulating moustache, a comic verse.

There you have the Chauve-Souris. All dissimilarities, all surprises. . . . "It was in the month of May!" An old gentleman in an eighteenth-century costume and an old lady in a

print dress and a bonnet dance a slow gavotte; love comes back in May! The sentiment is that of an old-fashioned music-hall or a "popular entertainment" in the village schoolroom. The setting and the music save the situation, and they are perfect. Then Balieff comes on—as he does between every "turn"—makes a neat speech and introduces three photographic tableaux. *Un avocat et sa fiancée*, *Une famille de marchands moscovites*—why has it never been done in the kaleidoscope of an English revue? For the grinning faces, the wooden postures, the air of best clothes and best behaviour, you need go no further than the photographer's in High Street!

We are still in Russia. It's winter and in the dim room of a log-cabin in a lonely outpost settlement, in a room lit only by the pale flame of a cooking-pot, eight black-and-silvered young officers of the Houzards Noirs sing of their loves and longings, their loneliness and comradeship in the wilds. Outside, a moon sails above a snow-capped mountain; a spruce-bough, snow-laden, brushes the window so that you can almost hear it whispering. Russia broods and shivers. Some yearning of the spirit touches you. You want to cry and don't know why. . . .

Before the Entr'acte it is only necessary to speak of Katinka; Katinka dances, Katinka sings, Katinka is herself and nobody else; nobody else would wear such a very diminutive straw hat perched on the side of such a very diminutive head, or such a very diminutive frock of blue, pink and white. On either side of Katinka sit

her papa and mamma—a bearded mouzhik, a mahogany-faced wife. And Katinka has a yellow background (all to herself) and two birds in a cage.

When Katinka sings, the parents smile and beat time; when she dances they stamp their feet; when Katinka works herself into a pet and, uttering shrill cries, falls down and pretends to be dead, the aged couple deplore the fact in a dirgeful song; but when Katinka rises and shouts for joy, they too rise and jump up and down—because of Katinka.

Rimsky-Korsakoff is played and there's leisure to observe the curiousness of the theatre. You sit at a table in a kind of hall whose walls are green-painted wood, liberally ornamented with bunches of roses in cubes. There are pillars painted yellow, and around the top of the room painted rows of white teapots. As you sit at your little table, a waiter in a white over-dress like a *chef* brings you iced drinks and preserves. Balieff at the top of the stairs leading to the stalls greets his audience with a bulldog grin—now a pale-faced young man in a short evening coat, soft white cricket-shirt, and black felt hat, now an elderly " intellectual " of the type pronouncedly seen in Paris—grey-haired, wearing glasses, quizzical. And is Balieff saying that the Chauve-Souris will one day come to London?

From the Femina to Marivaux and Molière at the Vieux Colombier might seem a far cry; but the two theatres have something in common. Both have individuality, both have character.

The Vieux Colombier is in the Quartier Latin; like the Théâtre Femina, its character depends on simplicity and "tone," on the artistic quality of its productions. And what a setting there is to that entertaining trifle of Molière's, *La Jalousie du Barbouillé!* The stage, with its yellow background, its doll's-house front and grass-green door, its green balcony and six pink geraniums in green pots, the whole set off by pearl-grey curtains. Here we have the diverting scene in which Angélique comes home late from a party to be hailed as a "hag" from the balcony by the infuriated Barbouillé.

Barbouillé: You don't say! Upon my word, you may go and sleep where you came from, or if you prefer, in the street. I shall not open to a hussy like you. The devil! Alone at this time of night! I don't know if it is my imagination, but my forehead seems to me already rougher by half.

Angélique: Well! Why do you scold me for being alone? You scold me when I have company; what am I to do?

Barbouillé: You should stay at home, give orders for the supper, take care of the household, of the children; but it is no use talking so much; good-bye, good-night, go to the devil and let me alone.

Angélique threatens suicide inconveniently because immediately, unless her husband opens. His answer is to refuse with oaths. She falls to the ground, crying "Farewell then! . . . Ah! I am dead." Whereon Barbouillé descends to investigate, the "corpse" leaps up, the green door slams, Angélique's voice is heard at the balcony:

. . . Where do you come from, you drunkard? Indeed, my parents will soon be here and will learn the truth about you. You infamous wine-bibber, you don't stir from the tavern, but you leave your wife and little children at home waiting for you the livelong day. And you don't care to know if they need anything.

Whether the greater part of Paris rushes to the Chauve-Souris or the Vieux Colombier is open to question. The Vieux Colombier is the creation of Jacques Copeau and had its first season in 1913. There were then produced fourteen pieces, among them *Twelfth Night* and Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, Dostoievski's *Brothers Karamazoff*, Musset's *Barberine*, whilst among Copeau's ambitious projects were productions of Æschylus, Euripides, Racine, Corneille, and Ibsen. The nearest thing in London to the Vieux Colombier is the Everyman, against which, of course, its remoteness militates; but it has much to learn, too, in the way of production, acting, effectiveness. The Vieux Colombier has been almost from the first a great popular success, a fact partly due, at any rate, to its obvious sincerity.

The Marquis de Sade was a leap in the dark after that. The Grand Guignol was filled not as the Vieux Colombier had been by the most thoughtful audience in Paris or as the Femina had been by the most sensitive, but it was filled by elements comprising Boulevard, Montmartre and *demi-mondaine* life. Here butchers and seamstresses rubbed shoulders with Americans, English and flash young Jews. Whether or not

they came to welter in horror, or to see good acting, *The Marquis de Sade* provides both. An elegant apartment, all satins and brocades, after the manner of 1779. An aristocrat of the period, bowed, silk-stockinged, grey-haired, clean-shaven, handsome, of necessity sardonic. Two beautiful ladies *à la Pompadour*. Two thick-set varlets in black velvet who stand like sphinxes and move like automatons. Enter a " simple " girl, terrifyingly beautiful, beautifully terrified. There are " words." She pleads. She cries out. An altercation. The fine ladies intercede at first reasonably, then passionately. The Marquis's smile never relaxes. He makes a sign to the two lackeys. The village maiden is seized, laid full-length upon a table. The Marquis examines his finger-nails; the victim's bosom heaves. Very slowly, very deliberately, gloating, M. de Sade produces a sharp instrument that might be a lancet or a surgeon's knife. Very slowly, very deliberately, feeling its point with his forefinger, M. de Sade makes an incision in the neck. A shuddering scream—shrieks from the fine ladies who rush out—palpitating silence. The sinister-looking lackeys spring forward at a sign from their master. The prostrate figure is borne out. The ladies rush back—expostulate, supplicate. Low moans from the next room. M de. Sade smiles coolly. Presently a dishevelled figure appears in the doorway, fingers clasping throat on which a scarlet stain. There are gurgling sounds. The girl staggers, collapses upon the floor. The curtain falls.

Next—the Bastille. A motley crowd in a stony cell, including M. de Sade, saturnine in tattered elegance. The two fine ladies also among the condemned, a priest praying, maniacal faces grinning through the barred gate. Death on every countenance. A hag leering fiendishly in a corner. The Marquis's victim, resurrected but hardly recognisable, storming at the fine ladies. The crowd bursts in. A struggle between the women. Cries, imprecations, exultant laughter. A grovelling followed by a strangling. Revenge! The condemned herd together, the curtain falls upon the Marquis de Sade's sardonic smile. . . .

What a relief to discover fatuity at the Casino de Paris! Ladies dancing in the briefest of garments, a comedian in a grey hat and a check suit pattering out low French like a machine gun, and—Mistinguett. Whether indecency has reached its limit on the Parisian music-hall stage or whether it can be carried an inch or two further remains to be seen. It is difficult to discover talent in Mistinguett or youth, or many signs of beauty other than that of bare limbs and a lithe figure. But there she stands at the finale of the first part of the performance, gleaming in a shred of pink surrounded by maidens and male admirers. When she comes on a little later as a prancing white steed with ostrich plumes for a tail, a proud head-dress, and the mien of the noblest of carriage-horses, attended by Harry Pilcer attired as a coachman—and when they prance around the stage-circus together with an

effect of tossing head and cracking whip and the most emphatic high-stepping ever seen—and when the audience roars its applause—then you wonder at what point humanity begins to grow up!

II

Have you ever been to Père-Lachaise? Have you ever been there on a still February morning when floods of sunshine englamour the vast panorama of buildings below, making of the hard angles and crudities a beautiful and enchanted land? You leave the boulevards; you leave the din of the tramcars and the motor-traffic and the street-criers; you leave the atmosphere of a precocious summer. You are in a quiet grey place on a hill, in a city within a city, and you look from afar, as it were, upon the surge of everyday life. It is so very quiet that the chattering of sparrows dominates everything, the utmost movement being the wisp-like sound of an old man brushing a path. Who, having the choice, would prefer Montmartre to this—Montmartre where tombs and graves litter the sides of a dingy hollow and there's no peace for those who want it, for the viaduct conducts an endless stream of hurrying life to and from the city's heart?

In Père-Lachaise the paths lead upward in parallel rows. There are ilexes; there are formal and kindly cypresses; there are numbered divisions according to plan so that it is not difficult to

find a particular grave. Yet to reach this one you have to climb the hillside from top to bottom, passing little masuoleums, tombs and monuments, each one different from the other. The place is deserted at this hour of the morning except where a young widow and two old women are engaged at the open door of a little shrine, transferring three pink plants in pots from a wheelbarrow.

How ugly most of the tombs are! The Sépulture Fallempin, for instance—a ghastly stone figure in grey granite swathed like a mummy or a corpse. Why? It is the question you ask after seeing the Grand Guignol. . . .

A white marble child leans over to kiss a mother. It is the habitation of one, "Josephine Verazzi née Faniel, fu sposa e madre Modella—1875." "Stanislao D. Komav, Poland," lies near. And after the name, "Optimo Civi, Conjugi, Patri." One does not find such names in Bethnal Green! Then a gaping grave, then the monument to the gallant defenders of Belfort, and one to those who fell in the bombardment of Paris, March 25, 1918. Where the paths meet, an inadequate female figure reminding passers-by of those municipal workers of Paris who in the same day perished. And the only impressive thing about it is a tawdry little card on which somebody has written:

Repose en paix dans ta triste demeure, pour moi sur la terre, il n'est plus de bonheur.

Balzac rests not far off but he's difficult to find—and ugly when you find him. Not, that is

to say, the dark bronze bust of his head, though it is expressionless enough, but the formality of the grey stone railed-in monument with its two amiable but aimless vases. The only distinctive thing about it is a book and a quill pen beneath the pedestal.

Masséna, Suchet, these lie near together a short distance beyond the chapel; and that other—last—companion of Napoleon, Baron Gourgaud.

You mount. You breathe heavily. The strangeness of the place grows on you. Paris murmurs, and sings in the distance. But here——! An effigy, a monstrous leonine Egyptian figure by Epstein, stridently assertive, cynically defiant of the world and of the world's after-thought. These lines:

> And alien tears will fill for him
> Pity's long-broken urn,
> For his mourners will be outcast men,
> And outcasts always mourn.

Somebody, as it happens, has slipped a bunch of violets in the ring of the sepulchre's door.

III

There is the breadth of Paris between the Quartier Latin and Montmartre. There is as much difference between them as there is between the Luxembourg Gardens on a fine winter's

afternoon when the fountains are playing and that bare space on the hill of Montmartre beneath the church of the Sacré Cœur at a summer's noon. In both the children play riotously and in extraordinary numbers. But the former has a spontaneous gaiety, a certain spacious beauty, and, when the old men play their foolish games of croquet under the chestnut trees, a sort of mellowness which makes one feel that this in itself is a precious facet of a peace-time Paris. In Montmartre you find squalor—a squalor, self-evident by day, cloaked by night, mitigated only by electric light and the fumes of wine. Nevertheless, it is a side of Paris that cannot be forgotten if only because it is a fair imitation of a once superabundant Bohemianism.

One has here found vice; one has here found joy and distraction and entertainment; one has here in the company of one's friends found forgetfulness; but also as in no other place a measure of the pity and puerility of the thing called "pleasure." A haunt like the Bal Tabarin or l'Abbaye is simply painful. Patchouli and electricity! Syrup and skirt-dancing! Does anybody enjoy it:—the foreigners and Jews who sit at tables round the floor, sipping beers and liqueurs, the waiters who wait hungrily—for tips, the *filles de joie* who hover from one table to another restlessly, the twelve girls in next-to-nothing who "throw the leg," twirl, pirouette, simper, jazz together, and do "splits." It is only fair to say that puff and blow and perspire as they must after every one of these efforts, they

laugh and look as if they really did enjoy it. Night after night . . .!

But there is something characteristic about gala nights at the Bal Bullier or any of the little dancing-clubs in the Latin Quarter. At the Bal Bullier you see shop-girls and milliners—whom we call Parisiennes. There are no "dancing-girls"; there are on the contrary ladies who do not dance. There are young ladies who look on and bring married sisters. There is a group consisting of two young Frenchmen in American jackets and bow ties—the latest thing: of two young women, presumably sisters, one of whom is authoritatively married, the other questionably. The married one sits through the evening quietly elegant, discreetly dull, without smiling—she might be the daughter of an English peer. To each aspiring partner who bows—and she has a large acquaintance—she says bluntly "Je ne danse pas." There is no more to it. But the sister! A little creature in a white waistcoat, a striped skirt, and a close-fitting yellow hat very diverting. This one dances nearly all the time, but she is more interesting when she is not dancing. She is more interesting when the young men come up and rally her. She has a perfectly doll-like complexion—a face of indescribable mobility—and mischief. Her eyes are blue and her hair so flaxen as to be almost white. She smiles, looks coy, looks cross all in the same moment. She bewitches—and at first you can't say why. Then you know—it's her mouth. Such a mouth one rarely sees except in very

sporting and very amusing men. When she smiles it tilts up sideways, giving a twist to the whole face—an appearance that would be sinister in an older woman or one less obviously good-humoured. Is it a trick, you ask yourself, a kink, or just—Nature? After close and protracted observation—in the course of which *you* smile (involuntarily) every time *she* smiles—you come to the conclusion that it really is Nature. You come to the conclusion that the Almighty in His comprehensive Providence has put upon the world this night a bewitching little angel who is probably a milliner; that her name is almost certain to be Ninette; that she is probably a sinner. . . .

There's no end to the queer faces you see in cabarets and dancing halls. In the Cabaret Bruant long after midnight a young man and a young woman were frankly making love. You observe such episodes (with some distaste) on the roofs of London omnibuses of an evening, but not, for instance, in the middle of a crowded restaurant. Here it is open and unabashed and, on the whole, not strange. For one thing, Bruant himself, a man with the clean-shaven face of an artist or an actor, attired in a black velvet coat, scarlet sash, black cravat and diamond-pin, gold watch-chain, and high boots like a German soldier's—this curious individual is singing to the self-accompaniment of a violin:

Ah! l'amour, c'est un' bell' chose!
Tout l' monde en cause
Sans savoir c'que c'est.

He is trying, you see, in a soothing melancholy tenor to explain the nature and the meaning of love. And the couple on the bench take him at his word. No doubt they are a little drunk; there is music; there is sentiment. *Ce que c'est que l'amour!*

In the Cabaret Néant you find a different sort of entertainment. If somebody tells you that it is designed for the uptake of guileless foreigners, don't altogether believe them! There are no foreigners this night, only a noisy party of young Frenchmen who are celebrating in top-hats and opera-hats (goodness knows why) their acceptance for military service. Here the attendants with dark ill-shaven faces wear skull-caps and cassocks. They conduct you to a seat—nay, a pew. It's a dim mahogany room and you have an immediate impression of skeletons—skeletons on the walls, in cases, in pictures. In the nearest picture, two lovers gaze down at a pellucid stream, the youth playing a guitar; they see—two grinning skeletons. An old man—on the further wall—sits alone with a tallow candle, a bottle of wine, and some spectre that might be Time or Death. A cupboard-door flies open suddenly: a skeleton jumps out. You look up and on a little stage a youth has entered a coffin. One of the attendants swathes him in a shroud. Slowly—and slowly to the strains of funereal music upon an organ—the young man changes into a skeleton—a smart, well-set-up skeleton—to reappear presently with a dazed look as though he had been mesmerised. . . . "Allons, mes frères!" We

proceed through a cavernous passage which might have been hewn out of rock to a chamber that looks like a vault. Here we sit while the recruits laugh uproariously. In front is a stage with an effective dark green background; on it a straight-backed carved mahogany chair, beside the chair a pedestal. What next? The only lady in the audience, amid volleys of wit, is called upon to mount the stage. She is a stout merry girl carrying a brown handbag. Before you can count six she contrives to become a skeleton; before you can count six again she is in a chemise. That perhaps is inevitable. . . .

At the Quat'z' Arts and the Chats Noirs they only sing and dance. The latter is more interesting because it is more characteristic, less cosmopolitan. Among rows of chairs a small boy sits alone in the front row. A widow is present, there are Jews and Jewesses, a bourgeois family complete, and a white-haired old gentleman wearing the ribbon of the Légion d'Honneur. You can drink bock at 75 centimes or liqueurs and cerises at two francs. As to the place itself, you have a room like the section of a tunnel on the underground railway. There is a sanded floor, rows of chairs, and seats along the wall. At the far end is a high mantelpiece supporting brass teapots, candlesticks and warming-pans. There is a piano in front of an imitation fireplace, a little platform, a little bar and a shelf; in one corner, red check curtains screen a staircase. Wherever else you look cats and bric-à-brac. A frieze of black kittens on green grass (right);

playful cats against a blue sky-line with a windmill in the distance (left); cats *couchants* and cats rampant, cats mild and cats in a rage; cats everywhere. Not forgetting a stuffed peacock and some eighteenth-century lanterns, not forgetting some grotesque faces carved in wood and a wooden shrine stuck against the wall among caricatures of celebrities. A regular hotch-potch.

And the entertainment? It consists of melancholy songs sung by a middle-aged lady in black; of lively songs sung by a romantic-looking person wearing a D'Orsay bow; of M. le *patron*, a red-faced gentleman who bawls out witticisms between "turns"; and of a perpetually recurring chorus of "Ah-yah! Ah-yah! Ah-yah!" They all sing "Comme Louis Quatorze avec la Pompadour," then a blind is let down behind the stage and the lights go out. Shadow-figures operated from behind enact a comic scene in the square of a country town; the only question is as to how much meaning the mind can extract from the pantomimic performance. It stops in time. It just falls short of Charlie Chaplin. . . .

Such is the Chats Noirs. You have only to look in at the Dog and Duck in Soho of a Saturday night to realise that the Entente will not be cemented by any kindred sense of amusing oneself.

Down in the Quartier Latin, a stone's throw from the Boulevard St. Michel, there is an odd place of amusement. It is called "Les Noctambules." You go to it after dining at the Café Harcourt or some other Bohemian restaurant in that neighbourhood, and to be quite amused it

is necessary to be a little drunk. It is, of course, full of students—and ladies. There are rows of "stalls," boxes and a stage. It is a very little music-hall rather than a cabaret, and describes itself as "le plus chic et le plus mondain de tout Paris." As a fact, the "atmosphere" is appalling, the stage much too garishly lighted, the leg-and-elbow space limited. There is an orange background with a red border, the lower half being a black frieze with certain intoxicated figures dancing (appropriately) amid dots and dashes. The players enter through an arched doorway beyond which you see a faint resemblance to the near-by Panthéon. Against the curtained wall hang three very bad oil-paintings, one of a landscape, one of a milk-and-watery lady in reverie, and one of a lady who appears even now to have emerged from her bath. As for the body of the theatre, it is dark green, the walls being covered with caricatures and black-and-white drawings of artists and artistes signed by themselves.

In the approved manner, the *patron* before each "turn" makes a speech which he concludes by raising his voice and shouting "Attendez, Luc-Noel!" or "Attendez, Yon-lug!" or "Attendez, Vincent Hyspa!" Whereupon the gentleman named springs forward and sings his song—which almost invariably brings in Lloyd George or Briand or both—gives his recitation or imitation. The curious part about the artistes is that nearly all are elderly, bearded, stout though full of *bonhomie*, and, it may be judged, of wine.

At the end there is a little *revue*, the only difference being, however, that all the company including three stoutish ladies sing the songs, mimic each other, and indulge in short, sharp bouts of repartee. The puzzle still remains why such elderly performers are selected to play to such an essentially juvenile audience. . . .

There are other accessible aspects of this student life when you have exhausted the Café Harcourt and Les Noctambules; and it is true to say, despite the war, that it is still segregated and still picturesque. Yet the crowd of young men and women which swarms out through the courtyard of the Sorbonne at noon are curiously unindividual and curiously like most other students the world over. But they still produce and they applaud, or at any rate they tolerate their eccentric figures—young men who imagine themselves to be artists, philosophers, or (in any case) geniuses and whose allegiance to tradition is at least an agreeable affectation. Carlo, for instance! Carlo is the son of a Senator and a member of the School of Political Science. It is to be apprehended that Carlo's papa is everything that spells rectitude, everything respectable, bourgeois and probably self-important. But Carlo aged twenty-one stands for Revolution. Carlo is Bolshevik—in politics, in art, in morals. Carlo, in short, is this sort of thing: you are walking in the Boulevard des Italiens about 11 p.m., Carlo approaches with a young woman on each arm, attired in black velvet with a large black sombrero, the only note of colour in his costume being a

scarlet neckerchief. He is singing at the top of his voice, twanging a guitar, and he is followed by half-a-dozen student friends, all laughing, singing and shouting. Whenever he meets an acquaintance or if he passes a girl he likes the look of, he stops playing, turns round and waves his hat. It is the simplest possible way of attracting attention.

If you enter the School of Political Science about seven o'clock you find the reading-rooms full of students poring over their next day's work or reading the newspapers and reviews, among which you observe the *Nineteenth Century*, *The Times*, *Manchester Guardian* and *Westminster Gazette*. If you enter the restaurant down in the basement, which reminds you of the Bastille in the Grand Guignol, you find students eating three-franc dinners or playing draughts or dominoes. In the large hall where stage-plays are sometimes performed you a little later find a concert going on—a concert, perhaps, exclusively devoted to the works of Louis Aubert or some modern composer, preceded by a lecture on the same by one of the professors. The audience is composed of students and their sweethearts and their families. Demure young ladies perform upon the violin or the piano, accompanied by the correct amount of applause. It is all very correct. . . .

One cannot at once make out the typical Paris student of to-day. One suspects him in turn of being a *flâneur*, a cynic, a debauchee, an "intellectuel" and a sportsman. One discovers eventually that he is something of each—the cynic predominating. One discovers that his inclina-

tion is towards puffing at a cigarette and saying what is considered clever between puffs. That he despises enthusiasms he himself would probably be the first to admit. Politics, art, work, the war, the future of his country—all meet with an indulgent smile. One suspects him of being an egoist; one suspects that he is not in particular a respecter of persons or of institutions but of the social, superficial side of things and people. It is a phase, of course, and one as different from that of Oxford and Cambridge as an orchid is from a sapling. And it is largely expressed in the art, literature, politics and social life of post-war France. . . .

Here we enter upon debatable ground. Every Englishman meeting Frenchmen, watching French life at close quarters, forms his own final impression of it. And one cannot do this without realising that for all the "decadence" and for all the evident after-war reaction in twentieth-century France there are still groups of people, especially in the younger life of Paris, capable of ideals and inspired by a very earnest concern for the future of their country. One such circle meets weekly at the houses of its members in the neighbourhood of the Bois de Boulogne. It meets, not for political discussion only, but for intellectual relaxation, for music, for reading aloud, and, incidentally, for tea. Throw in a dash of ultra-refined flirtation, a sort of playful retaliatory wit, and you have an idea of one little niche of Parisian society.

In summer the sphere of activities is transferred

to the open air, to tennis lawns, to people's gardens. But it is spring now, and the evenings are short. We forgather at three o'clock—young ladies carrying 'cellos and violins in canvas cases, young gentlemen with pale, clever faces. In England such people contrive to be artistically untidy, the men wear flannel collars and bow ties, the ladies draw their hair back in unfashionable knots. But here the ladies wear elegant frocks and are if anything ultra-up-to-date. The men are "polished"—if anything too much so. The point of view, you see, is different. To be interested in politics and "affairs" is for these a matter of course, but with us (at this age) you begin to flatter yourself, to distinguish yourself from your neighbour.

So when everybody assembles up in the gallery and somebody is played in the big hall below, the young men standing in a group whisper anxiously to one another "Who is it—what is it?" "Ah, Debussy!" One can contemplate no worse fate than to be caught out over Debussy! . . .

A *Volga Polonaise* was played on the harp. Everybody listened with rapt attention, the young men sitting on the floor. A kind of warm glow suffused the large hotel with its brocades and damasks and its curious collection of Oriental figures and vases and Empire and Louis Quatorze furniture. There was clapping at the end—modulated, genteel clapping. Then a girl read a chapter from a modern novel. There were tea and sandwiches, condiments and cakes, and the

conversation took a political turn. It was a confused, verbose, gesticulatory discussion in which everyone said what he or she had a mind to say, without reference to order or precedence. Certain facts clearly emerged: that the "circle" divided itself into two groups, the one reactionary and cynical, the other idealistic, towards the Left; that, moreover, the reactionary group was composed of the older "young persons," those who had known the war at first-hand, whilst the idealists and Liberals were boys and girls who had grown up to witness the war's conclusion. Yes, "cynical" is not too strong a word to use of the reactionaries nor "pessimistic" of the hot-bloods. A young man with a sharp face and hard grey eyes that forbade a hint of dreaminess was seconded in the discussion by the dark girl who had played the violin. He had fought through the war—and bled. "And now," he said, "let France settle down, every man to his own business, let us make up for lost time, revive trade, resuscitate the country, make secure our frontiers, extract every extractable franc from Germany. Let us before everything be pro-French in the years to come, leaving nothing to chance." Hot as fire, a youth, a political student of Touraine, aspiring *protégé* of Briand, challenged across the tea-table: "France dead! You speak of a France without a soul, Robert. What would you have—each man for himself, each country for herself? A return to 1914, in fact! Oh, goodness gracious! What are we coming to?"

He proceeded to discourse—in this vein—to

declaim. We were a nation of egoists—we French—each out for his own hand; if you went to the play everybody yawned, shouted or spread his legs just as he felt inclined, without reference to his neighbours. Everybody cheated you whenever he got the chance; you, in turn, were suspected of cheating. And with the nations it was just the same. Imperialism ruled, commercial jealousy was once more raising its head. Look at politics and the class of politicians in France to-day! Ignorant bourgeois ambitious for importance! The background of politics rotten with intrigue, the foreground occupied by two or three men and—puppets. Where the Wilsonian principles, the principles of self-determination, the brotherhood of Labour, altruism, new ideas? Where the hegemony of peoples, the subservience of politicians and diplomats to the popular will? Could anyone honestly say that Germany alone brought about the war? Wasn't it rather the financiers, the exploiters, the Imperialists, the statesmen of all the Powers who brought it about? And how much further along the road of progress were we to-day? . . .

The League of Nations! . . . A failure already? Perhaps—perhaps not. But he, for his part, had looked for something more substantial, more definitely engaging than that. An international Council of bankers, of Trades Union leaders, of statesmen, yes, of intellectuals too, and of artists—these should meet periodically and through their concord rule the world. The

guild principle to be extended beyond frontiers—in the interests of whom, this, to what end? In the interests of world-peace and of humanity. . . .

It was inevitable that the only Englishman present should intervene at this point. Could our Left Socialists, our Communists or Bolsheviks be visualised sitting in the same delegation as our Fabians, our middle-class Liberals, or our Tory reactionaries? And could it be said otherwise of any other country? Dissension begins at home and has to be cured at home. . . . Such elastic discussion could not continue indefinitely over tea and cakes; it drifted inevitably into the particular issues. Lloyd George was the very first name mentioned; Ireland the second; and we passed in review, politely but very distinctly, the whole field of British foreign policy with its dominant Imperialism, its insular regard for the road to the East, its puzzling makeshifts in Egypt, its wobbling jazz with Russia, its flat *denial* of self-determination, its lightning grabs at oil, fig trees, and palms. "What are we to make of it?" There were queer—well, embarrassing—interludes in this conversation: when you heard Mr. Lloyd George spoken of with bated breath yet with a catch in the voice that betokened something more—or less—than reverence. When you heard Clemenceau, whose name in an Englishman's ears stands for France, France triumphant, and France all the time—the Tiger, the virile voice of Versailles—jested about in terms of senile decay—it is true, by the Left. When President Millerand's weakening since the Leygues collapse was dwelt

on and America's riches and aloofness and withal unwillingness to cancel a grievous debt spoken of with bitterness.

And Ireland! There is no doubt of the reality of this feeling about Ireland in Paris. Such a cause will always attract a mass of sympathisers, everyone, in fact, whose intelligence is ruled by his heart or his sentiments. The question is, Can we afford to ignore the strength of it, fomented as it is by propaganda and supported tacitly by practically the whole Parisian Press, or can we do nothing to counteract it by placing the Empire standpoint before foreigners?

There was nightly found in Marius', that odd little restaurant close to the Chamber where at noontide and eve scores of deputies forgather for wine, dinner, dominoes and conversation, a passionate—the word is not too strong—a passionate advocate of the cause of Ireland. One of those strange, vagrant beings whom Fate throws in one's path and who make café and restaurant life interesting in Paris—a tired, unbeautiful creature nearing the fifties. A curious charm exhaled from her—you find it in the soft voice of the Pole. We talked about the price of dinners—even the cheapest! We became confidential. Born in Warsaw, her life had alternated (in Banks) between Poland, Japan, China and Bristol! From Bristol it is only a step to Ireland. Well—we never left Ireland again. Self-determination! Self-determination! Self-determination! The rights of small nationalities—the right of self-government—Versailles—President Wilson—the

ideals of the war—suffering, the down-trodden! Could you get a word in edgeways, you were overwhelmed with pity, courage, sympathy, support, and the story of Poland fired at you like bullets from a machine-gun. How prodigious, how enthusiastic she was! And the Lord Mayor of Cork and the Easter Martyrs—not forgotten! The thing had gripped her woman's imagination: it was her obsession. Really—it was Poland.

Then again—this dead soul of France. The meetings near the Avenue Kléber always ended on that note. It was a note of pessimism, far away from the virile intensity of Oxford and Cambridge where men—and women—are still plotting a new world. Is it the note of France to-day or a passing phase or a youthful one? . . . Pierre and Robert led their girls off in cars to the Bois, there, no doubt, to cool their fevered brows. It was a mild spring evening, thrushes singing, sparrows twittering. Nothing much seemed to matter—really. Only one reflected: how funny it all was—or how pathetic!



IV

Then Sunday. And you couldn't help seeing the city dance in the old way—dance in the sunlight, dance in the clear air. And that was the impression you wanted—you were *determined*—to take away.

What frocks there were! How many beautiful ladies and how many extraordinary men walking between the Dauphine and the Étoile!

You were tempted to generalisations and you were tempted to comparisons—notably with that other parade of elaborately dressed people which circulates in a kind of endless chain between Grosvenor Gate and Hyde Park Corner at the same hour. You were tempted to this generalisation: that Englishwomen are not less well dressed (nor less beautiful) than Parisiennes while they stick to what is conventional "good taste." But let them stray ever so little from the beaten track of elegant ordinaries, let them once approach eccentricity, and you have vulgarity. These women, however, who sun themselves in the Bois—each creates her own taste, her own fashion, yet never (or seldom) a jarring note. The explanation? Not "taste" as we understand it, but some sixth artistic sense, some inspiration or adjustment of the mind lacking to our inartistic London.

And Auteuil! How naturally the French—or Latin—character expresses itself at a race-meeting! Nowhere is the contrast with ourselves more emphatic: the crowds are so typical. Say what you will, no aspect of English life is so sordid, so disadvantageous in the mass as a crowd at one of our London racecourses. In the rings, as outside them, there seem to congregate the lowest types of humanity as expressed in face, manners, conversation. But at Auteuil, Longchamps, Enghien, or St. Cloud, the reverse is the case. If it is a brilliant afternoon, everything and everyone is gay, happy-go-lucky. The totalisator has much to do with that clarity and that decency; the absence of bookmakers and rings, and the

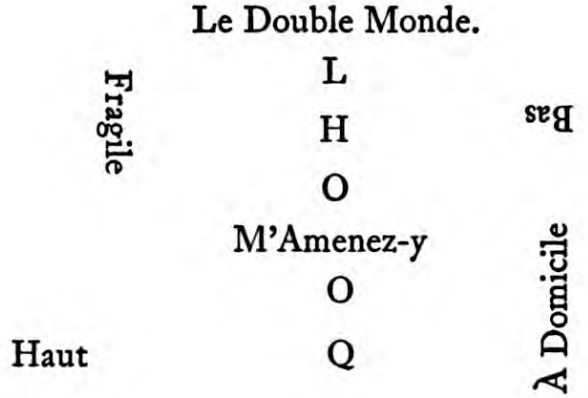
little world of intrigue that revolves around them is no incentive to the riff-raff. And where is it? Fashionable society in uniforms and gorgeous frocks disports itself on lawns; the crowd consumes cocoa, citronade, and munches sausage rolls. National characteristics express themselves during the running of the race. There is no self-imposed phlegm, no cult of indifference to the ordinances of Fate. "Il tombe! Il tombe!" or "Il gagne! Il gagne!" Every man, woman and child, rushing frenziedly from side to side of the open ground, yells exactly what is in his or her mind as the instant prompts, without restraint, with accents of despair or of whole-hearted enthusiasm. It is amazing; and it is infinitely amusing. It is an education in enjoyment. . . .

You look at that, you look at the fashionable people, at the Ritz and Ciro's by night, at the dance-halls, at the theatres, at the eternal pleasure-hunt, at the apparently superabundant life. And you hear this talk of the dead soul of France! How is one to reconcile them? On some sunny morning you pass out of the Louvre with its grave treasure of all that mortal man can, or has, achieved and, braving the perils of the Rue de Rivoli, smiling back at the Place de la Concorde, confronting the European sweep of the Champs Élysées—enter the Grand Palais.

You are at the heart of modern life. Gallery after gallery of greens, reds, yellows, blacks, mauves, greys—hard, brilliant, metallic—executively able perhaps, but curiously reflective as art

should be, of the tone and quality of a contemporary world. Unmellowed by time, to an English eye untinctured, let us remember, even by familiarity—yet what an unforgettable impression of the thing that passes!

Is one a pessimist upon leaving the Exhibition of the independent artists? You have paused, remember, a long while in the room of the ultra-Moderns, where you have regarded *Niggers playing on banjos* and a *Woman in grey smoking a cigarette* with amazement tempered by vague intimations of insanity. And something like this:



Is it then a picture or a puzzle or in some newer sense a picture-puzzle? "Oh! well," you think, "it's no use bothering"—and you turn to view a nude female who has the misfortune to be seized by a brown bull against a green background, assured that you are gazing upon "The Abduction of Europa."

"Well, well," you think again, "never mind!" —and as you pass out you catch sight of a pink

triangle against an orange background, ornamented with green, red and a few of the lesser composite colours.

An Expression of Simple Happiness. . .

That's Paris; that is the world!

WITH PEACE REGAINED

YOUNG MEN OF ENGLAND

I

THE dramatic tradition of England—and the variety stage—and the comic cuts—have, it may have been noticed, evolved two conventional types of English manhood. The one is "aristocratic": drawls; carries a cane; wears a monocle; appears frequently intoxicated; says "haw-haw," "hee-hee," but most frequently "hee-haw"; has a "pal": "old bean," "old thing" calls him; simpers with the air of a dancing master or—a chorus-man; "gets off" with the barmaid over a cocktail. A young gentleman of England. . . . And the other we also know: our cheery irresponsible "sub"; leaps upon the stage wearing loud socks; laughs boyishly, plays the gramophone before breakfast, rides a motor-bicycle with a "flapper" on the back, dines splendidly at the Troc. and forgathers at the Cri.; noisy, sporty, full o' fun: has a "way with the gurls." We shake our heads, smile, and say, "Ah! well. Boys will be——"

We know them—backwards.

And there is the third (but lesser) type. Our "Public School man." He lounges: correct in a "lounge suit": lives in the "lounge"—was possibly born there. He is perfectly respectable, always "gentlemanly," nice to know, socially and absolutely correct. It is writ upon his richly-chased silver-headed walking-stick. It is expressed in his slightly superior manner. He might flirt—but not with barmaids. Oh! no.

When he held her hand he would say "Excuse me." He reminds you of his "college days"; his college colours; his old "college chums"; has a perfect way with "the ladies." You may know him at a glance. He walks upon the stage —enters the lounge—gloves and cane in hand, (slightly) "raising his hat" and saying (deferentially) "Excuse me."

Do they yet live—these three?

Somebody said that the war had killed them. But did they ever live? Rumour said that they had been seen again: that they were resurrected: that they had emerged after hibernation. Somebody saw them on a Saturday afternoon in Tooting. It was rumoured that they had been run to earth at Richmond on a fine Sunday: that they had been spotted at the pictures Leicester Square way and espied on Blackpool pier; distinctly seen one sunny evening on the "prom" at Brighton; finally discovered all together in the lounge of the Midland, Manchester.

They are not dead.

But the tradition that gave them birth is dead. Did they live? They lived in caricature and the great public gave them credit for reality. They were the caricature of a futility, of a phase. They were not even good caricature. Something came—came and smashed them: smashed the monocle, the irresponsible sub, the perfect gentleman. They survive and will be always with us —exposed, discredited, shown up: not the discarded legend of an Englishman but the perfect example of what an Englishman should not be.

II

From what did these types derive; or rather from what type did these illusions derive?

Not from the strong and silent Englishman; not from the heavy commercial Englishman. They sprang from a specialised, prejudiced, definite class; from the class that was evolved out of half a dozen Public Schools; from the class that went to Universities; from the class that sent officers to the Army and the best regiments in the Army; from the class that filled the Diplomatic Service and the Foreign Office; and entered trade as a concession to democracy; and smiled at art. A narrow, conventional, traditional, prejudiced class. A class which could not see itself for the mirror within; a class which never has rubbed shoulders with democracy yet which democracy admired; a class sufficient unto itself, exclusive, repelling; a class which found no true reflection, no illumination in the perhaps impoverished drama and literature of its time.

Well—it was said to be rotten. It sprang from a mid-Victorian thing, from, let us say, a world of Shibboleths, of pretences, of make-belief, of snobbery ill-disguised. It had led the nation: led the nation in tone, in politics, in conservancy: over-awed the nation. With air of superiority, with high and mincing gait, the Victorians looked out upon the world. . . . And that tradition survived. To what inheritance were young men born in the latter part of the last century? To

the still animate tradition of, it was said, a perishing aristocracy. It was a society of phrases and of appearances: you judged your acquaintance by the words that were said, by the way they were said, by what was left unsaid: by their appearance of manner, of habit, of garment. You battened on them. You were unmerciful. You set up an arbitrary conventional standard which the term "gentleman" implied. You defied common-sense. You insulted intelligence. You outraged truth.

A supercilious point of view. A Sir Willoughby Patterne point of view. A man was too proud to confess his superiority in culture and "tone": for that matter he dare not; secretly he was ashamed. The thing would not hold water: it was out of touch with the "trend of the age."

There were the Public Schools. What was inherited, they reinforced. A man learnt how to furl his umbrella; about mixing cocktails; about making love; about manners. He learnt on which side of the street to walk as well as how to cook muffins. He became part of a self-contained community whose standard of conduct became his standard of conduct, whose point of view became his point of view. It was a rough-and-ready community: it discouraged individuality; it encouraged personality; it preferred the good sportsman, the athlete to the scholar, the gay adventurer to the steady fellow; it bullied, licked into shape and rounded-off square corners; notoriously it condemned snobbishness—but the

snob is in the nation. The exceptions suffered. Adamant in its judgments, it achieved the ideal through a queer kind of hero-worship. That ideal was always the Man—the leading personality—the dominating figure on the cricket or the football field, never the brilliant and precocious brain. Character was made by the reaction upon individuality of the common-sense in every-day life. Personality, it may be remarked, was born out of internecine strife. The prig stood no chance. You had to be human.

It will not be averred that the greater and finer things came to the top. Those who lacked self-confidence and "push" lagged behind: the sensitive, the weak, often fell by the wayside, the thinker bided his time. The Public School was not after all the nursery of the greater and the finer things whose expression was ultimately found in life itself. And this—this finite period of the Public School—was but the curtain-raiser, or rather a preliminary act to the wider drama. It is so possible to visualise an English gentleman's progress through the perplexing world of his making: as a stage-play in which the curtain rises upon a small boy leaving home for the first time. All is obscure; the plot unwoven; even in the child's own mind is felt no indication of the sort of weather he will make or the sort of journeying he may experience upon his voyage. This leaving home is the formal entry into life. External forces get to work; internal budding forces react to them. In this preliminary act of the private school, subtle indications are given

of the nature of the piece. Is it to be comedy, tragedy, or farce? In the Second Act of the Public School the very drama of life itself is played in small. But the die is not definitely cast nor the materials set; and the Dramatist may yet change the course of his plot. A form, however, has been given to the individual character —the Public School form. In the phase of the University the full forces of grown manhood come into play. It is an Entr'acte rather than a significant part of the individual history. Act III until marriage is the rough-and-tumble of existence, all previous experience thrown into the melting-pot, the hall-mark set upon character, the future made or marred.

III

It was, then, through these several phases and with these experiences behind him that your Englishman came to maturity. It was such a course of education, such a formative process that produced the nice young gentleman of 1914. He was a clean, neat fellow, well set up, with straight features and clear wide-open eyes. His personality was distinctive as his limitations were. He lacked the imagination of the Frenchman; the grossness of the German; the originality of the Russian; the supine languor of the Spaniard; the insubstantial fire of the Italian; the hard pessimism of the Scandinavian; the Austrian's fastidious elegance. Good or bad, he was apart

from these. . . . It was a careless and an easy point of view—his: a point of view deliberately adopted, deliberately the outcome of that unique institution, the English Public School; in itself unique. Generous, sporting, capable of taking chances, uncalculating, sensible, good-humoured, valedictory, kindly, critical, true. It was the point of view of the cricket match and the hunting field: it breathed the genial and the handsome atmosphere of English country life. Cynicism was foreign to it; cynical Englishmen are rare; the nature of the Englishman being not quick but warm; diffidence, a very dread of emotion are the hall-mark of the Public School. These Englishmen were not emotional; they had a way of laughing at things; their ready humour bubbled up, except when they lacked humour, but made up for it by an added stolidity and a living sense of the ridiculous. To the foreigner they were apt to appear fools—the fool that masked the knave; and cynical. When the foreigner discovered that after all they were shrewd, he exclaimed "Perfidious Albion!" He never discovered that himself was at fault. It was so later with Bethmann and his Emperor: do they to-day appreciate that their own perception lacked? These Englishmen failed in ideals: they must be materialists.

There was, it is true, an almost total lack of ideals; of imagination; of originality. Where these were, they sprang from the upper middle-class. Brains did not typify the average English gentleman—which does not mean to say he lacked

intelligence. Philosophy, romanticism, ideas would not claim him as though he had been a German, a Frenchman, or a Russian. Political theorising had no charms for him. He preferred the game of golf, the sport of fox-hunting, the pastime of fishing or of lawn tennis. No League of Youth as in Scandinavia, no discursive life of the café or the debating-room as in Paris or Dresden, no wealth of revolutionary idea, no glory in words for words' sake as in Moscow, Warsaw, or Geneva. The English were a prosperous people, solid, stolid—and of course insular. No dreams; no visions of a stronger, less ephemeral world, of a wider scope for the individual life, of a higher happiness, larger communion among men. No force of English youth leapt out to these. There was a passionate voice in Ireland. The English were passionless, inarticulate as yet. The Irish voice was drowned in sorrow. The English looked on.

Well we know their conventionality and their limitations. Victorianism and the "aristocratic idea" lingered far into the twentieth century. Small circles were obsessed with the importance of the symbol and the phrase. Whole families of Englishmen rose up in that faith, unthinking, thought for, clamouring that what was might remain, that hunting might grow no worse nor taxes higher nor estates less nor incomes more uncertain; that their knowledge of the proletariat might be no greater than the gathering of the proletariat vote. There was something a little contemptuous, aloof, patronising in that attitude

—the attitude of the ordinary English gentleman before 1914; conceived as it was in a declining hegemony, they, born after their time, suckled at the breast of a washed-out political faith, nurtured upon the prejudices and limitations of an ancestry inconceivably remote. Was it their fault? A few protested. The gesture of a Charles Lister ten years or so ago in his meteor move to the side of Keir Hardie was a protest though a futile and perhaps a too spectacular one; he gave his life instead—a sort of apology for failure. Saner was the Liberalism of the youngest Gladstone. Charles Mills and M'Laren might have voiced the protest of the dawning twentieth century if the deluge had not struck them down.

For the rest all was dull, indifferent, voiceless, negative. The young gentlemen of England passed their lives between Knightsbridge and Pall Mall; in their clubs; in the hunting field and on the moor; in the restaurants, the ball-rooms, and even in the vicinity of the stage doors; within the circle of their regiments, their offices, or their country homes. It was an air-tight world. It was a world gay and gallant in its way, full of a certain generosity and courage, without much ambition, amusing, passably immoral; and, paradoxically enough, almost wholly selfish. For it was out of touch with humanity. It knew nothing of the masses: never heard the clamour of the forge, the roar of the factory, the sirens that proclaimed far and wide the eternal warfare of the industrial North. Of the mean streets it knew nothing; or of the drab monotony in

poverty that was to itself anathema. It recognised no comradeship of classes. There was this world betwixt Knightsbridge and Pall Mall—and that other world. . . . A gulf between which tradition could not hope to bridge.

Tradition had killed thought and murdered truth. Where was no knowledge could not be understanding. The heirs and inheritors of the Victorian tradition saw through a glass darkly: rarely or never face to face. Deaf to the roar of the factories, they were blind and deaf to the onward movement of the times.

It was a world that could not survive. It was the relict of an earlier state civilisation, its ideals those of a defunct feudalism; its aspirations uncompromising and idle pulled no weight in the mission which Youth must ever bear towards the onward progress of the world. By the masses, even its manliness was suspect. Its obstructionism became too palpable. Born to transition, it clung to a bygone thing. Youth cheated by Old Age! . . . Something had to happen.

IV

The European War came at this very hour of transition and uncertainty. It was the opportunity as it was the tragedy of Youth. The young men of Europe were to become engaged in the killing of an old Phase and the making of a new. A Phase—because new worlds are not born in a day. The European War was after all

the incident of a moment in the Universal Plan: the coming years will be its contribution to eternity. It happened to be the affair of the young men, as wars generally are. . . . Nor is it necessary to repeat the old platitudes, however right, the familiar truisms which have arisen out of this present time. In the end, does it greatly matter whether it was the ambition of an Emperor, the death of an Archduke, the opportunism of a Berchtold that precipitated the conflict? There were those in every country who saw it coming. In the last event, it meant inevitably the expurgation and the downfall of all that was old, effete and out of place, the uprising of the new upon the shoulders of Youth; and through the travail of these five years the opening of a new Era in the onward progress of the human race.

The young men of England had their part to play in this world-emancipating drama. And because they fought ultimately, and suffered, in the cause of that vaster, that infinite thing, it seems unnecessary to pretend that they took up arms in the exaltation of an ideal which they scarcely even understood. In our hearts we know it was not so. In our hearts we know that it was not even in the abstract cause of national right against international wrong and of justice against violation that the individual Englishman took up arms. Englishmen are not idealists. It is doubtful even if they are the willing apostles of a chivalry that is not backed by reason. Withal they are humble men: men given to doing their duty in that state of life to which it hath pleased

God to call them, men whose watchwords are the home, the fireside, self-respect, honour in a queer twisted code, liberty, before all common-sense. They hated the Germans, it is true; of the Treaty of 1839 they severally knew nothing; one cannot pretend they deeply loved the Belgians. It was a good political cry: the cause—yes! the cause was just. But of what were young men thinking towards midnight on the 4th of August, 1914, when the roar of the crowds in London streets was so great that Parliament chimes could scarce be heard? Not of Belgium, not of the cause of Right *versus* Wrong, not consciously of the crushing of militarism, nor pre-eminently of their hatred of the German nation: rather that their "Day" had come for which a century of peace had tended to prepare them.

Their liberty was in danger.

Was it the primal instinct of the animal to defend its sanctuary and its family, the combative instinct, jealous regard for the duty of the male in the crude economy of Nature, and in fact the supreme cause of Common-sense that caught them up in those first days? In a nation less virile that call might not have been heard; a challenge less flamboyant might have passed unheeded. Men flocked to the Colours, and the innate soundness of the nation proved itself within two months. . . .

The young men of England met for the first time upon the battle-field. They met in the ranks, upon the parade-ground, in the camp—these stout and hearty fellows whose cleavage

had become a class war; and the growing schism of a quarter of a century was healed in that hour. This was the first effect of the European war upon the nation. The second was the proving of the officer class based on the Public School system, deriving from the old "aristocratic idea," depending utterly upon the survival of what the English call a "gentleman." The third was the raising of a volunteer army lacking nothing in numbers, lacking much in discipline, depending utterly upon mutual good-will, selflessness, the respect of the soldier for the officer and for the officer class. It would be idle to say at this time of day that no part of the British Army ever broke down; it would be wrong to deny that Lord Kitchener's Volunteer Army was the greatest improvised instrument of war the world has ever seen.

In that Army was to be found the flower of the young men of England who in due course perished.

V

Nor was the tradition of the officer class abated. All its anomalies, all its queer kinks, all its contradictions and absurdities, and odd code of manners and life remained. And where they held strongest, there the best officers and the best troops were found. It's of no use to apply the ordinary moral standards and conventions to such things. They will not stand it. Facts are facts, and war before all things a test, a terrible test, an iron test, of character and of men.

How ruthlessly it treated them! How mercilessly it dragged out their very souls, smashed their everyday selves, exposed them naked, stark, to the gaze of—each other! How men regarded one another in the trench, on the battle-field, in the camp! By standards how elemental, with an eye how searching, with a judgment how pitiless in its sincerity. "Is he a stout fellow? Is he all right? Is he the man for the job? Or would he be better at home?" Well, there were failures: failures so tragic, so grotesque even in the ranks of the professional army as to make a cat laugh salt tears. There was jobbery, "readying," trickery, and malice: there was jealousy and "scrymshanking" and "boot-licking." But what besides! All the *esprit*, the *esprit de corps*, the intense loyalty, the gay tolerant optimism, the sterling common-sense, the generous sporting instinct to which the English Public School gave birth, which the English University nurtured, and which the British Army made good. That was the English spirit. And, of course, there was a lot besides.

The spirit of the British Volunteer Army was friendship: friendship between officer and private, friendship between officer and brother-officer, friendship between commanding officer and ensign, friendship between units whatever they might be. It was the friendship of a profound humanity in a community of danger. All were of the common human stuff: full of the foibles, the weaknesses, the distresses of ordinary men: full of the warm blood, the eagerness, the

quick impulse of their prime—as we would have them; full of contempt for merely conventional morality; instinct at times with a greatness that, judged by human standards, almost passed belief.

But they were not God-like. They were not of the stuff of the heaven-born race. They were not of the stuff of the novelist's hero or of the maiden aunts'. It is of no use to pretend that their lives seen under a microscope would have commended them to the care of the Catholic and Apostolic Church. It is of no use to pretend that the qualities which shone upon the battle-field were necessarily those of pure, austere and high-souled men. They were the qualities of common ordinary men. They were even the qualities of morally bad and dissolute men. For war revealed the depths as well as the heights, the follies not less than the triumphant sanity of mankind. In the neighbourhood of the battle-field the preacher had no place; the parson as such became a mere commentator, a dwarf. For every hour was shown the divinity of human nature as well as the surpassing futility of each little life; and the moral grandeur of Armageddon arose, not from the triumph of right over wrong or of the forces of light over those of darkness, but from the triumph of the common human stuff over that which was more than humanity had been calculated to bear.

In that lay the one divine thing. In that lay the solitary hope and pledge and proof of an existing pitiful God; of a world higher and better than this world; of the conquest of the

material by the spiritual and of the merely human by the Eternal. When everywhere the shadows gathered thick and fast and the star of civilisation itself seemed about to set, that tiny divine spark in men shone; far above the obscurity, miasma and turgid emotion of the time, it burned bright and never wavered out.

For only by such an interpretation and not by common standards of manliness or patriotism can be explained the superhumanity of ordinary men. They little stood to gain. And the mind was filled with wonder not merely or so much by individual acts conspicuously performed and inspired with the genius of a prodigious presence of mind as by united courage, patient endurance and faithful friendship. There were occasions, as is well known—and notably in the earlier battles of the war—when owing to Staff or Artillery errors attacks had to be delivered in face of quite certain death. In such circumstances the human mechanism might well have refused to perform its task. It were against Nature. On those occasions there was fear, terrible fear—but no hesitation. . . . In every company of men were found certain toiling individuals whose fate it was to go through battle after battle unscathed, knowing that in the nature of things a bullet or shell some time awaited them, who plodded on year after year through summer heat and winter cold and all the burden of uncertainty until the inevitable claimed them at last. . . . And finally were those for whom their friendships were a touchword, who, fearful themselves, found a

strange and inexplicable courage in the mysterious realm of human attachment.

Inexplicable! The spirit that sustained them was too steadfast for lust of conflict, too impelling for mere discipline, too self-less for patriotism, too strong and high for desire of glory. It was the divine spark—the remote, mysterious, mighty, super-human thing.

VI

For the rest, they remained—common ordinary men.

They were the men of the factories and the forges, of the coal mines, the cotton mills, the shipyards, the quiet English fields. The drab unremarkable English stuff, the husky commonplace people whom one passes daily on the street unnoticing and unknowing.

And they were of the Public School class, the University class, the so-called educated class, the leisured class, inspired by their own peculiar tradition as we have seen. That tradition they clung to. As the war went on, and through force of circumstances the rank-and-file and the middle-class became more closely mingled with the old officer class, that tradition survived through regimental standard and custom. It may have weakened but it was never lost; and in the vast new armies that sprang up it became embodied as a definite example. This was to be seen in the Army Schools which were modelled socially—and theirs was not alone a technical mission

upon the old standards of the narrow professional service.

It could not be otherwise. Again and again the private soldier had expressed his preference for being led by a "gentleman" in the field; and when so led and ably, had never been known to fail. This arose partly from the fact that the relationship between officer and private was not that between non-commissioned officer and private. In the latter case it was dictatorial, aloof, masterful; in the former, entirely friendly, human, confidential even, based upon the *camaraderie* of common-sense. There was no condemnatory attitude on the part of the officer; he merely administered discipline, as was his duty to do. It was his pleasure to be able to reason with a man rather than to rebuke him; to treat him as a comrade and a friend rather than an inferior in so far as the spirit of discipline would allow; always to be human. And there was perhaps no greater type of failure in the volunteer or conscript army than the officer promoted from the non-commissioned ranks who lacked appreciation of the subtlety and yet immensity of that distinction.

With all its peculiarities and anomalies and shallow prejudice, the point of view of the officer class remained a human one. Men judged their fellows as men, holding that it was the first duty of a man to be a man, to be a good friend, to do his job as best his abilities allowed. Also he must have a sense of humour and preserve his sense of proportion. A detached and leisurely

attitude to the duties of the Army prevailed. An attitude even of ridicule and light-heartedness in the junior ranks. It would never do to take your soldiering too seriously: never do to forget how funny it really was. Real keenness had (somehow) to be *camouflaged*, it must not be obtrusive; then it earned respect. Efficiency must simply happen—without words and without noise. For the flamboyantly zealous young officer, there was never much use; the kind of efficiency that smacked of earnestness asked for ridicule. Fussiness was a thing to be dreaded; and those two types made for fussiness. . . . It was the proper, the sane point of view.

Soldiering came natural to the young men of England. They evolved of themselves this odd, detached code of indifference, this easy-going, careless and almost contemptuous attitude to their work. They notably combined with it a remarkable efficiency. That code of contradictions and fictions derived from the old Army extended to the social sphere. The citizen in khaki became tolerant, gay and communal. He got drunk, not shamefacedly and apologetically as in civil life, but openly, gloriously, and in all good fellowship. It was as if he were suddenly set free: told to go and play. A capital thing, this getting drunk—at the proper moment, of course, in the proper place; it did you good, took you out of yourself, made you merry in a difficult time, and added to the entertainment of the community generally. Getting drunk (tactfully) never did anybody any harm.

There was a friendly feeling about swearing. You swore for the sport of the thing, because it relieved the feelings, because it was the custom. There is a peculiar smack and ring about English swear-words. Gambling went without saying. Continence was not appreciated; it was unnatural in a man. The subject of women was inexhaustible, inexhaustibly amusing and full of possibilities. Respect your friend's wife but not a stranger's. Immorality had always been the custom; it was the natural pastime of a sturdy manhood.

You judged a man by his force of *camaraderie*, by his capacity for friendship. Normality was the touchstone of popularity. The strong virile point of view counted; well—the loud voice did too. The English have always been susceptible to the loud voice. Intellect was not conspicuous in any given society; originality dare not raise its head. These retired thwarted into the background; were still-born; perished half-starved. Religion played a shy part in that loud communal life. There may have been a conventional belief in Something; good manners demanded respect—for Something. Religion was too inhuman, too remote, too abstruse, too—inconvenient. It lacked a sense of humour. God was another matter.

Withal there was never anything didactic, bigoted, condemnatory, or on the whole intolerant. A man who by his nature was radically abnormal or not easily understood might be labelled mad; but you extended to him the

charitableness properly bestowed upon lunacy. Sham and pretentiousness and crookedness and sleight of hand and insincerity alone were condemned. The still small voice of prudishness had no place there. Morality, in the artificial sense, went by the board. Its place was taken by a set of conventions founded upon the elementary instincts of human nature and in their crudity not out of harmony with the conditions of the time. Virile manhood was the criterion and the centrifugal force; courage and an extraordinary loyalty in friendship took the place of the cardinal Christian virtues.

This is not the place to analyse the Army system or to offer judgment, moral or otherwise, upon its tone, upon its relation to the individual. Individuals were unfortunate. The sensitive, the impressionable, the imaginative went down in the common struggle often enough by reason of the defects of their qualities. These others—the great majority—were common and ordinary men. Their commonalty was the most palpable thing about them. They could be divided into classes, and the classes spoke as one man with one voice. Given a class, it was possible accurately to forecast the attitude of that class to any given subject or topic. Women, sport, champagne, comedians, battles, boots, "shop":—they were the legitimate topics of normal healthy young men. "Ragging"—it was a lively and amusing pastime.

If they were unanimous in their interests and attitude to life, they were none the less competent and even brilliant in that unexpected

sphere to which it had pleased Fate to call them. Amateurs though the great majority were, they shone as soldiers, and even, it is safe to say, sometimes outshone professional soldiers. There lurked among them great men—boys already great in bravery, in judgment, in capacity. There were seen company commanders of nineteen and twenty whose mature perception in things military qualified them for the leadership of hundreds. It is now known that the Army is not a highly technical profession and that the art of war consists mainly in a universal application of the faculty of common-sense. This truth proved itself upon the battle-field, where, in the later stages of the war, companies of troops were ably led not by soldiers in the accepted sense but by young men and boys dressed up in khaki for the occasion.

And if judgment had to be passed on the system of education and sport which produced those young men, it was to be found just upon those battle-fields. The critics have been silenced for all time. War is the great and final test, and the struggle of a nation in defence of its liberty the end to which all education, all training, and all preparation of a nation's manhood should ultimately tend. In defence of its liberty was seen the triumph of the spirit of the English life.

VII

We stand upon the threshold of a new time.

It is one of those moments—could imagination only grasp it—when the world begins a new volume of its history, when each nation sets out to write a fresh chapter of its story. Much that was old and effete and exhausted and outworn perished, as we knew it would perish, when Armageddon came. But not all.

Even now we see the rising spirit of the new time. We see it in the ferment that stirs in every country of Europe; like the sap in the spring trees, stirring, rising, rising; it will not be kept down; it will break forth and find its expression some day if not now in a stronger and a higher civilisation. We have seen something of it in this country during the last few weeks in the labour unrest, the strikes, the incessant recurring demands for better wages and a higher standard of life, in countless minor complaints and friction and dissatisfaction hardly uttered. We shall see it to-morrow and the next day and the day after until we feel it—or it is satisfied.

Nor is it an unhealthy thing in itself nor of necessity revolutionary nor merely aggressive; but, unperverted, the rightful protest of the young men of England returning again to the forge, the factory, the coal mine, the shipyard, and the mill against the strangle-hold of old industrial conditions and the dead weight of existence as they once knew it. It is more than

that. It is a yearning long suppressed and oft-recurring for a truer equity of human beings, a larger share in the possibilities of human happiness.

The class conflict in England had as we have seen already begun in 1914. The European war drew all classes together in defence of the essential liberty; and the young men of the Public Schools, the Universities, the professional Army, and the leisured class fought side by side and for the first time came to know the young men of the forge, the factory, the coal mine, the shipyard, the mill, the industrial class. They grew to like each other in the course of that life-and-death struggle. The wide divergence, the complete divorce of understanding which was so pronounced between the years 1910 and 1914 as to lead to a social cleavage whose only outcome could be rabid class war, was healed in a pact that the battle-field consecrated.

The war, then, was the triumph of the English Public School system and the English ideal of sport for all the narrowness and aloofness of the first and all the—how shall one say?—lack of mentality of the last. But if the war was their triumph, in peace their inherited ancient defects become manifest again. Is the old attitude of the young men of England born in the Victorian tradition, educated at the Public Schools, adequate to the needs of the new time? The old easy nonchalant conception of life lived between Knightsbridge and Pall Mall, lived in clubs, in the hunting field, and upon the moors, in the

ante-room or the office; the Victorian attitude to the working class and the problems of the working class as to things remote, curious, but of no concern; the traditional attitude of the English town or country gentleman far removed from the nastiness, the crudity, the squalor and the ugliness of life—so benignant, so well-meaning, so easy-going—towards his poverty-stricken fellow beings; the attitude of the monocle and the cane, the "haw-demme" attitude so monstrously caricatured in the old dramatic tradition of England—and yet with a grain of truth:—are these adequate to the needs of to-day or to-morrow? Are they even tolerable or possible; can they be reconciled with the common-sense of the twentieth century? Is the mental backbone of these young men of the "leisured class," warped and conventionalised and undeveloped as it is, capable of unbending, of reorientating itself, of thinking for itself, of readjusting itself to the conditions of that better civilisation which by its own bloodshed and suffering it has striven to form?

Before us always is the sinister spectacle of Young Russia; whilst in every corner of Europe are seen to be rising new States, inspired by young men, instinct with the new life and insurgent hope of Youth. And everywhere the young men of the world are thinking, thinking, studying, thinking, planning, watching, preparing, on tip-toe, on the *qui vive* as though in the womb of some great new and coming thing. A strange half-veiled wave of idealism, inspired by the

young men of almost every country which has passed through the melting-pot of the war, sweeps around the world, carrying upon its shoulders a League of Nations at which the old bureaucracy laughed, bearing in its train—who shall say?—a Universal League of Youth no less aspiring and hardly less immense.

In England alone (who has suffered, who too is scarred and maimed) there lingers yet the semi-feudal, unplastic "aristocratic" idea, great and splendid in its way, full-written upon the most dazzling pages of English history but—of the things that pass.

No perceptive and thinking man however idealistic or however optimistic wants to see the leadership of this country pass into the hands of a race of experimentalists; of political theorists; of clever young egoists; or of brilliant dreamers. Good enough for the majority is the sane, the steady, the able, and the great-hearted race of young Englishmen, bred though it be of a bygone tradition, that proved itself upon the battle-fields of the last five years. A race it will have to be, however, enlightened through its bitter experience, willing and anxious to unbend, willing and anxious to reach down from its high estate, willing and anxious to think out for its own part the greater problems of its time; to meet half-way, to extend the hand, to mingle with its gaiety and love of sport a sincere consideration for the wider happiness, rights and interests of the community; a race not unworthy of the momentous hour to which it was born.

YOUNG WOMEN OF MODERN ENGLAND

I

To men there is no more engrossing subject in thought or conversation than that of women. Whether the converse is the case cannot be said with authority. Probably. Here is a whole chapter, a whole book of life: one that is always beginning and never ending, one that is of the eternal, universal, international—eternally unexplored. It is national, too, because expressive of character—nothing so much as the collective attitude to women.

With us, it is a challenge to be facetious; a temptation to say arch and knowing things. In the smoking-room, in the club, in the public-house, they always come back to it. Sooner or later, somebody says the word . . . they all look up; they all sit up and take notice. The well-brushed, well-oiled young gentlemen—cocktail drinking—smile: "Not much up on me!" they seem to say; say not much but smile—confidentially—to themselves. The middle-aged married military gentlemen smile—cock the eye—look up sideways—what a twinkle! Guffaws are heard. "Well, I'm not too old to understand legs, thank God! . . . I know a pair of ankles when I see 'em. I'm young enough to quiz a pretty face." . . . Major Higgins slaps himself. Mr. Bull congratulates himself. And (mentally) they put the filly up to auction. . . . And

behold! there are the sly fellows looking on all the time—the lowering, watching, waiting, fellows, the parasitical ones, the designers, the vampire, single, elderly, the one-eyed cynics with their sixty minutes' sympathy and a bottle of champagne.

. . . Girls! . . .

Each face simpers, each eye smirks sideways, each foot is raised in front of the delighted audience, and, all sugar and sweet-stuff, they prance through their entertaining antics.

Your French friend, notice, exclaims: goes pell-mell into rhapsody. Love a jewel of endless scintillation, romance its setting: eyes of beauty, lamps reflected in still summer pools. In the beginning, the *bon Dieu* inspired—Eve. Eve was a delight—to Adam. Women remain: toys, yes, all toys but to be cherished! . . . But may one say such things in twentieth-century England? Is it permissible, is it wise? It is the antidote (or half-way) to U.S.A.—merciless, material, matter-of-fact—who looks them up and down as if they were bales of perishables, "Is love worth while?" asks *sotto voce*, and holding his watch, decides "The whirlwind courtship's best." . . .

Warmly, ardently, fastidiously, and in a mood of stimulated exaltation, they from Italy devour—where love is art and art to be worshipped; with studied appreciation of artistic movement, with delight of pose, with longing of grace. Born *dilettante*, the Spaniard, who is only not too idle to make love. What perfect nonchalance of criticism, what perfect nonchalance of inconstancy, what dallying of the butterfly flower to flower

through life—nothing hurried, nothing disturbing, given the blessing of the sun! Yes, one cannot excuse the Northerns, whose admiration is so appraising, so calculating, scientific almost—whose ultimate conception is gross, being of the housewife, the helpmate, the useful merely, the purely domestic economy of marriage, and so forth.

But these English with their girls—and chocolates! The human equation somehow vanishes. You have only a picture on the outside of a magazine. We are obsessed with twentieth-century cults. Flowers and chocolates and a little champagne! We cultivate young women like young turkeys. We feed them up and decorate them and kill them off when they cease to be interesting. It is man's modern attitude—man's little condescending vanity. And one may never become sentimental; one may never take oneself seriously. That is the tragedy. It is more fashionable to be cynical—and much more difficult! (Cynics are rare but the pose effective.) The age of the poetical period is past and it is heavy to pay compliments—except by accident. One may not make a declaration on one's knees—even if to do so were comfortable. Water your ecstasies with flippancy well and good; speak your mind straightforwardly and you are for ever damned. Make curds and whey of the cream of youth and you won't taste the sour milk of old age. Knock the prunes and prisms off the old Victorian sideboard; nobody will trouble to pick them up. Be daring, dare all, brave the ancient barriers and

bowl over the old conventions. Love is the next thing to Bolshevism, all being equal. The respectable conception is dead—yes, woman as the celestial riddle died with the last century. You no longer worship at a distance, blush, bluff, shilly-shally, dilly-dally, feign adoration (meaning admiration), and play a game of hide-and-seek around the *embonpoint* of a *chaperon*. Modesty, false or otherwise, ceases to be the watchword; "getting off" is the modern password. You cease to avert the eyes; you even forget to pretend. . . . It is common, of course, low, and extremely vulgar; but elegance, excellence died with '99—and there are few survivals. Our century is doomed to vulgarity if not to open sin. There may be a reaction—one must not anticipate. Sloane Street has unmistakably made a move towards Bohemia.

II

But what of Sloane Street? These are dubious things; cover them up. Sloane Street did and does linger well on into the century; Sloane Street defied America once, wore a grim, stiff lip and put up a grim, stiff fight; but Sloane Street lost ground visibly, quailed and went down for a count of nine when Lady Astor got in for Plymouth.

Sloane Street embodied the latter phase of Victorianism, which is a thing everybody rails at. It was a thing, young ladies acquiescing were born to in the 'eighties and the 'nineties; an institution.

More than that, it was a gargoyle, a Gargantuan threat and presence, a Guardian Angel of peculiar views, a sort of limited liability company, a kind of formless being who took due note of your birth, watched over your upgrowing, jealously checked your slightest tendency to rebellion, saw you reaching timidly out towards the light, and finished you off, killed you dead at the age of twenty-two or thereabouts.

There were the allies of Sloane Street—an awe-inspiring hierarchy. There were footmen and butlers and governesses and ladies'-maids and nurses and all the retinue of "good old-fashioned servants." There were Pretence, Pomp, Pride, Snob, Exclusion, and the rest of them. Vulgarity was the devouring monster. The vulgarity of words, of customs, of middle-class intelligence. That was the prime bugbear of existence—the prime humbug. Vulgarity! Not the vulgarity of Johnson or Brown; not even the vulgarity of Johnson-Brown. But the implication of make-belief, of nice discrimination, of fine distinction, of an arbitrary standard set up and supported God knows why or whence.

It was the first definite concrete impression—shall one say?—of that generation of young women who rose within the limitation of class in the closing decade of the nineteenth century and who are come to maturity now. It was an impression that could not and never did leave the mind. Allied with it, essentially, inseparably of it was the patronage of class to class, the intangible, insidious sense of superiority that brooked no rivalry but sur-

reptitiously battened upon what was outside itself —and rejoiced. What an artificiality it made for! It swamped the sense of proportion, warped personality and materially narrowed the outlook and the future. It was a taint. It sprang from the age of four, five, or five and a half.

Who could blame the young things? Who would? They proceeded to grow up. Peeping over the sides of their perambulators, they saw—Sloane Street. They learnt smatterings of French. They began to be naughty. They learnt smatterings of other things, including German, mathematics, history, geography, music, drawing, elocution, dancing, of course, political economy perhaps, golf, science, lawn tennis—not necessarily spelling. They learnt above everything how to pretend—which is essential. They all had well-brushed, glossy, flowing, shiny hair and long, thin, spindly legs and wore "sensible" clothes. They spent much time in Hyde Park but came back to Sloane Street, where on bright mornings they might be seen in couples and threes with dogs and maids and chains and governesses. They became precocious; they became assertive; they became observant; or they became dull. There is perhaps nothing quite so dull as the dullness of Sloane Street, as there is perhaps nothing quite so dreary as commonplace London. These are bred, it would seem, of the same London streets, of the thwarted—how shall one say?—narrowed atmosphere of the straitened London life. London produces bitter people, critical people, impatient

people, intolerant people. You may nearly always tell a London man or a London woman at the first time of asking. The point of view discloses itself in a few words, and for all its added sharpness and sometimes piquancy and deeper interest it belongs still, you feel, to the warped, ungenerous plane trees of the London squares.

And all this time there were other lives going forward. There were growing up scattered over England, in boarding schools, attending secondary schools and high schools, in parsonages, country houses, in suburban villas and in villas on the outskirts of North-country manufacturing towns, the race of the young women who to-day are the wives and the mothers. There was something, it might seem, entirely unadventurous in the prospect and looking forward of these many. None of the glamour of Sloane Street, none of Sloane Street's illusive importance. It would be wrong to say purposeless or negative, for all was set forth and clear-cut; the future resembled nothing so much as a long straight stretch of railway line. There was the period of school, the period of awakening, the period of intense new interest and activity, marriage finally and children, and then the remaining set-fast unalterable round of middle-class existence. Society resolved itself at the most into "at-homes." There were also washing-days. Society resolved itself into the "down-town gossip" of professional gentlemen's wives over cake-stands, scandal, domestic intimacies, London's doings, servants, second-hand fashions, and the matrimonial prospects of the

Royal Family. One would hardly suggest that it did not suffice. There was nothing more asked or wanted. There was content—too much content perhaps—interlarded with the usual English grumbling over cups of tea about the weather and parlour-maids and prices. A whole lifetime of that. You bought a cottage piano or a gramophone, put a fern in a coloured and coruscated vase on a bamboo stand in the parlour window, you established a menagerie of brand-new furniture and velvet chairs and—all was over. They were your trade-mark; you were ticketed and labelled after that. You went in for antimacassars. You were satisfactorily middle-class for life. You were respectable. No one could touch you.

It was all very well. It wasn't quite Sloane Street. It was—Kensington High Street; if not Hornsey Rise. Young and fresh, it was often beautiful—without inspiration, without expression, without originality. And how quickly, how utterly it collapsed! How soon its brief vision of enterprise and possibility gave place to the dead level plane of conventional mediocrity! There was—there is—a whole great human world called the "business girl," whose breath is the tubes and the trams and the insides of omnibuses, whose atmosphere the shop or the office, whose adventure the occasional "glad eye" on Oxford Street, whose ante-room to Paradise the Regent Palace Hotel. Her reigning goddess is some stage or Society beauty, her home life the nightly bathing of the family baby, her solitary relaxation the playing of "His Master's Voice" in the hermetically sealed

sitting-room on a Sunday afternoon. But that must always be! Must it though? Events speak in long telepathic phrases. Let us look back. What was in '99 is not now—is not true; what was in 1910 could not be quite true of 1914. New life everywhere had begun to stir. A new intelligence had begun to awaken and voices spoke of class comparison, of a new *motif* in all the classes of this country. Say what you will of the Women's Suffrage Movement—implacably oppose it—there was something behind it, something purely human or purely social, something spontaneous, neither political perhaps nor truly agitatist, which could not be ignored. . . .

Therefrom grew the type—essentially of the second decade of this century—of the Compton Mackenzie heroine; of Gilbert Cannan's and of H. G. Wells's women; and Arnold Bennett's. The novelists began to deal with them; they were real and all of the same school; they were pulsing human beings fighting a way out of a dead or dying or stagnant world; they sprang from mediocrity and reached out to Life; of contemporary life they were contemporary things; goods and chattels of suburban nonentity, they were bent on progress in a scheme of existence that made to hold them back; fired with imagination themselves, they have fired many since. They scorned chocolates; ate chocolates, it is true—(audibly sucked them, in fact)—but never lived for or on them. To the emancipated, chocolates are an incident, not an obsession or a Life-purpose. One thinks, one *knows* they would have scorned

the appraising eye of the languid youth and the physical advances of the physical men. To the *grande passion* they grandly gave way. How nearly they approximated to a type—they who sprang from an embracing class! Yet they were individuals, instinct with personality, forceful, capable of suffering, bound to experience, strongly humorous, passionate, self-giving. Out for wickedness, you will say. No. Out for knowledge and for seeing and for hearing and for judging—for themselves.

III

That—all that—was far removed from Sloane Street. It signified Kensington—everything between Kensington and Hornsey Rise. It drifted steadily, some will say, in the direction of the night clubs. It was the individual's protest in the dawn of the twentieth century as the Women's Suffrage Movement was the collective protest. It originated; it defied. Sometimes it failed—gave up with the grand gesture, having got no further than a boarding-house or a service flat. Of failure, nothing—or of fallen pride.

But Sloane Street on the whole went forward. And Sloane Street risen to maturity went its accustomed round as far as God's year of grace 1914. Sex—you cannot get away from it—sex was the dominant thing. Sex evinced itself more and more in louder guise—it was *the* outward symptom of the new century. One could not say of

what these women were made. They were good-looking, amusing, intelligent in the English way; well-balanced, on the whole, well-dressed, of engaging manners; they had a refinement, a certain rarity, and reserve of outlook and of habit, un-foreign, rather distinctively substantial and of England. They talked well, lived well, and were up to a point accomplished; accomplished in the English games, in a language or two, in the performance of dancing. They were not well versed in art, politics, literature, or affairs; not "clever" in the merely academical dialectic sense—as the French are; not peculiarly apt at stating a case or originating a point of view. Was it necessary they should be? But—how admirably they oiled the wheels of life! How admirably they conducted a conversation and at a dinner-table, in a ball-room, in a drawing-room contrived to maintain the priceless illusion of romance in modern England! They sparkled under the electric light, they were unmistakable anywhere. The astonishing *sang-froid* of the "cultivated," how often it saved situations, souls, reputations! They wore too, and wore well, the air of daring and of suggestion even if they hankered only for a superficial impropriety. Their thoughts turned to actresses, to adventure, to advance. It was an idiosyncrasy, perhaps, and perhaps a harmless one, a reaction from stability, the conservatism, the insularity of the 'nineties. A lively Court set a lively tune. All danced to it.

They had their indiscretions. They had their "little flutters," their amazing aberrations. The

diaphanous frock, the cigarette-smoking and the spirit-drinking, the glaring Americanisms, the cult of the ultra up-to-date! They had to have their diversions—perhaps the world (of Queen Victoria) had been populated with ladies and gentlemen too long. The semi-demi *mondaine* had its chance and flaunted itself and flourished. A touch of the music-hall crept in, of the bizarre, of the rococo; charm and beauty sometimes gave way to eccentricity, but wit audibly increased.

It was a world of water-tight compartments—all large human societies are. Dull and clever women appropriated dull and clever men respectively, and rubbed shoulders but rarely mixed. A woman's ambition was a social ambition and at times it came perilously near the vulgarity which all abhorred. There were those who, independent of social ambition or condition, tended to the accomplishment of originality and talent, of culture, knowledge, the "fine arts" and introspection; and they formed in their studied liberality of belief a society more critical, more fastidious, less tolerant, more intricate and less simple than any other. It became the fashion to deride and to defy conventions—the old conventions, the Victorian conventions. But these people formed of themselves, of their thought and their atmosphere and their character, conventions no less adamant and no more expansive. There were "cults." The sense of humour became a cult, just as ragtime did or suède shoes or Aubrey Beardsley. There was an intensely critical attitude towards personality—towards humanity in

general. There was a lot of nonsense; there was a lot of talent. There was a lot of make-belief, and a grand ignorance of reality and a grand divorce from national moving currents. A world of pleasure, you will say—all aristocracies are. But no! A world of selected, self-selected human beings whose vanities, limitations, attributes, follies, failures, triumphs, pleasures and pains were not less vital in Sloane Street than in High Street or in Hornsey Rise; where hearts beat as warmly, as coldly, as wearily, as strongly, as weakly, as livingly and lovingly in the one as in the other.

But even in those brilliant, secure, unanticipatory years up to and before 1914, Sloane Street sometimes protested; refused to be idle, merely pleasure-loving and—discontented. Society, or whatever you like to call it, had its Ann Veronicas, its Sylvia Scarletts too. Yes, there were still small voices even then in the world of make-belief and it was at such times you saw a crack in the mirror, a flaw in the else perfect sauvity. You saw a whirl of people rotating in a vicious circle, brightly coloured, all colours yet the same colours coming round and round and round, over and over again. You saw how bored they were with the colours and how fearful of illusion in colours they were and how they yearned and ached for new colours and how afraid at heart they were lest one day the ball itself might stop rolling and the music abruptly cease. It was always a world poised like a boulder on the edge of an abyss. What zest, what agony of pleasure—and what satiety! It was a curious study. Reality lurked somewhere

behind. The muffled bells of Sarajevo rang louder than the loudest Viennese valse—then died away. Night after night Lichnowsky's sombre face wandered amid diamonds and satin—and none took heed. Ambitious women read up Ireland—and forgot Europe. Hornsey Rise went its way, hard-working, looking not beyond the evening of its present day, unconscious, pathetically unconscious, of the forces working towards its pending convulsion. At last the big guns broke in as a sort of *grand finale* and the first chapter of the Twentieth Century closed like the harlequinade at the end of the pantomime with Columbine whirling around . . . and the devil peeping out of the wings.

IV

And they were glad of it. It was beyond comprehension—immense. And therefore thrilled the mind at the outset—those strange feminine chords which respond to the touch of sense or sensation like the surface of a still pool to the wind, that queer kink in human nature which calls for change and variety always. It was such a reaction! It was such an—event. Europe in a blaze and the force of every man became magnified in that tenderness to hysteria which is dormant in most women. In a world whose concern had been puerilities overlong, in a world whose tinsel and glitter were the measure of its experience, and whose mental attitude was not adjusted to the proximate simplicities of life and death, war was

at least a dynamic emotional experience; nor with the best will imaginable could people grasp what it meant. Hornsey Rise said "Oh dear!" Kensington High Street "Dreadful!" The "business girls" talked of nothing else (for a week), telling each other the most incredible stories, and sucking sweets. Sloane Street rather enjoyed the first excitement—and the soldiers—and the newspaper thrills. There was a lot of talking on telephones and a good deal of sentimentality. The living moving sentiment of the war came later, much later, after casualty lists, many and long. Women's part in the war came much later. Opportunity offered; tragedy drove its nails in one by one. It took a long time for anyone at home to acquire a sense of *personal* reality. That was natural. The opening phase of the war was essentially the season of excitement, of sensation. The "capital woman" came into her own. The "capital woman" led the way in all things that pertained to the British soldier short of training for battle. Canteens and hospitals sprang up like magic: the "capital woman" saw to them. She saw to the socks and the supplementary underclothes and the packets of chocolate and the cheap books. She was business-like, practical, relentless and on the spot. Peculiarly an English product, she appeared in a very remarkable manner wherever and whenever wanted. It was extraordinary how every little circle of English society produced her at a moment's notice. In every village, big or small; in every parish; in every township, county, or group of

persons gathered together: there your "capital woman" magically appeared. She inspired, organised, administered; she begged; she ordered. We sometimes detested her, but there she was and there remained—getting things done.

Everybody tried to throw themselves into something; there was work for all. The little fluffy dressed-up things wrung their hands; it wasn't their fault; they had to learn and to wait; meantime, the husbands and the rest were disappearing. The nice young things quiet and uninteresting somehow became curiously useful while remaining quiet and uninteresting. There were surprises too, as the war went on. The vague and dreamy ones, the "joy-girls," the noisy sporting ones appeared in a new light contrary to all tradition. They early became efficient and subdued; a kind of stolid, uncomplaining, unvaunting, methodical public spirit crept in and transformed them. They played out of hours. They sought distraction within and without; but from the soldier's point of view, as he took his ease in bed and looked on at the proceedings, there were few more remarkable phenomena in the human aspect of the war than the willing adaptability but still more the willing self-effacement of the hospitals. These Voluntary Aid Detachment workers, these bottle-washers were not brought up to it; they had never contemplated it. Sloane Street had never thought about the insides of hospitals (or of people) or of washing-up or monotony or drudgery; Kensington High Street had never contemplated anything like a W.A.A.C. Hornsey

Rise had been brought up on epithets, "lovely" and "dreadful"—nothing between. But for all the inadequacy, make-belief, unreality that existed, public spirit insisted; and in spite of conventional expostulation, succeeded—in spite too of itself. It is even possible to believe that a brief sharp battle was fought in those days, though no man shall say how great or how small a battle: in behalf of common-sense as against tradition, in behalf of utility as against futility, in behalf of enterprise as against usage, in behalf of public spirit—call it patriotism if you will—as against mere gentility. All the old *finesse*, all the old drawing-room prisms, London starch, elaborate structure of convention, all the "tea-and-titter" and "order-the-carriage-and-call" *régime*, all the routine and limitation and intimidation of the working world—or nearly all—went by the board in the first year of the war. Sloane Street lost; Kensington and Hornsey Rise triumphed over themselves; and the young women of England went blithely on their self-appointed way.

Common-sense won—easily. Nor as time went on did the capital women and the good plain practical women and the bustling managing women have it all their own way. The gay and elegant young ladies from the big smug houses or the country-houses or the genteel North-country villas had a look-in too. Starting humbly, they acquired a mysterious efficiency: from washing-up they rose to executive positions, from being on probation they qualified as nurses. This was the lesser concern of the man in bed, however, who

before all else valued the human element; personal charm; a sense of companionship, understanding, or humour; and common things like good looks. The man who had spent months or years in unrelieved contact with his own kind, with the earth, with the elements valued these the most. They were a possession; femininity a measure in itself. Sloane Street had a habit of laughing at Red Tape; Kensington High Street (which lacks humour) held it in awe. Nobody wants dry-as-dust in hospitals; nobody wants bald efficiency or solemn importances flung at them in unprotected bed. You want efficiency that can laugh at itself and somebody to nurse you with the air of playing a good game well. . . . The really tiresome people in the war were those, men and women, who took the *trappings* of war over-seriously.

Self-effacement comes hard on women, on individual and attractive women, on distinctive women. It is sometimes hard, if intensely individual, to be one of a crowd and of a system, disciplined, organised. Queer, too, for the pleasure-lover, the *dilettante* to become the pantry-maid. All very well for a time, but the chilly deliberate monotonous mundane acts of the pantry and the housemaid are outside the purview of the gay life. The great majority, it is true, found their unexpected *métier* in the realm of washing-up, of carrying trays of food up flights of stairs, of cleaning surgical instruments, waiting on doctors, giving blanket baths, and being at everybody's beck and call. A few never did. It does not greatly matter. The man in bed

watched the monotony of it, the lack of glamour, the common unheroic drudgery of ill-favoured tasks, the materially unrequited effort of it all; and on the other hand the unflagging cheerfulness of every day, the lightness of touch, the strong principle behind it, the *esprit* that kept things going and that far rarer *esprit de corps* among women of working together.

They triumphed over many difficulties if not over all. Their moral triumph was the physical and moral triumph of the young men of England on the battle-field—effacement of the individual, negation of self. It did not prevent them having a game at the side of the sink, holding hands while the bath ran over or playing skittles behind the door. The sex interest was always there of course —a compensation—a subdued pulsing study. Of greater power, one believes, was the sense of strong personal satisfaction in participation of newly-conferred liberty. All these made for happiness and the hospitals were for many men as for some women a wonderful interlude in perhaps the saddest time of all history. They had never known such luxury of consideration and attention as they there received. It is a platitude at this time of day to say that war sounded the deepest depths of human nature; yet never before was revealed on the one hand the almost childishness of stricken men and on the other the calm, patient, intelligent sympathy of ordinary women. It is a thing not seen in everyday life; it is akin perhaps to the pre-eminent social quality of women, their perfect adroitness and directing power, the instinct

to put people physically and mentally at ease; it gleams out—and that most strongly in the most feminine women—when men are made futile and all the little vanities and foils and foibles of everyday life at a discount.

War brought the sexes to an equality. Strange friendships sprang up. Strangely the veil was lifted, the barrier of sex hostility broken down, and men and women saw each other in the simple untravestied light of an elemental time. There was neither pitying strength on the one hand nor jealous reticence on the other. Adam claimed Eve again and together joyed, sorrowed, loved, tended, sympathised, protected. Kisses and chocolates seemed inadequate on the one hand; bright eyes and a good complexion merely on the other. The sexes no longer looked at each other across a gulf but were vitally necessary to each other, physically, emotionally, morally; found their mutual complement; found a sort of basic relationship in face of the mortal peril in which all then stood. Armageddon was the searching test of the fibre of nationalities which in the last resort was the fibre of their youth. There had been those in England a couple of years before who, professing to see the insidious decadence of pleasure at work in every class, spoke gloomily of the future. Selfish, weak-beating (they said) was the heart of the younger generation. Courage, stamina were lost since the days of Florence Nightingale and Waterloo. . . . But in the event it was not so. The young men of England proved themselves on the battle-field a competent

race; the young women of England of classes the most leisured, the dullest, slaves to convention, to pleasure and to routine, made their place very cheerfully in the sphere of drudgery, in the cold inconspicuous background of the body politic. Theirs was little less an essential part. . . . In point of fact, the heart of the nation beat true. The blood coursed never weakly. All seemed to realise the rôle to be played with a curious humility and deliberation and power of effacement, characteristic only of the most virile peoples. In the price that had to be paid blood commingled with tears, few complaining. . . . It was after all such a test of nations as no other age had known.

V

One need not labour the triumphant note. In doubt at first, it was so self-evident at the last. In France and Germany the same spirit was found; more eloquently, heroically in France, more dully, tragically in Germany. Curious indeed the Gallic spirit of those days! The emotional stress of war producing reactions, aberrations if you will, and in France, queerly exposing the stern hard core of one of the most temperamental nationalities in the world. It was at the time—in the summer of 1918—of the second crossing of the Marne by the German Army when the threat to Paris once again appeared pressing that this quality nakedly expressed itself. Rarely has been seen a thing so gleaming, so cold, deadly, unyielding, passionless

to all appearance yet quivering with the passion of nationality. Under the burning sun of those June days the life of the Paris streets, of the cafés, of the parks went its usual glittering round with no obtruding discord; in the sultry nights, the music-halls and restaurants, women crowded, paid their tribute to eternal gaiety whilst always German lights rose and fell against a black eastward sky. In the churches and in the heart of the middle-class homes, women and old men prayed and took counsel together, and, it may be, wept over personal sorrows. Sitting in the corner of a carriage of an express train making rapidly towards Paris, a child of a girl seemed completely to embody the spirit of the women of France. It is true she was of the aristocrats who are finely-tempered steel. She was of the *salons*—such as are—of the greater restaurants, of the ball-rooms, of the dressmakers' better custom, of the Parisian life essentially—a Parisian. For two years she had not seen Paris. On the sea-board, at the hospital, it was a negation; no dancing, little distraction, no light or ripple or music of life but sand-dune and sea. She, the devotee of the French poets, victim of the romantics, herself a romantic! And no comment upon war. It must have been a fatalistic one. . . . But such speechless faith, such power of certainty in the ultimate destiny of France! . . . So that it was possible after all to laugh. And the conversation through those sultry poignant hours could be of other things than war, of—the things that do not matter!

In England the outcome of emotion showed

itself differently. There was not the same suppressed exultation in moments of trial, suffering, or triumph on the one hand; nor upon the other the steely, bitter, adamant spirit of deathless, implacable offence to the enemy that one saw in France. Nor withal that cold, intellectual appraisement coupled with an awe-inspiring scornful laughter at catastrophe that distinguished before all else the young women of France. The French are a strange nation, as their many-sided history shows. The spirit of England is palpably less imaginative, less barometric, less incisive, though on the other hand always gathering weight and in the end dynamic. Emotion was perhaps on the whole less disciplined in England than in France, less hysterical than in Germany, less convulsive than in Russia, less effusive than in Italy, less morbid than in Austria. The great body of Englishwomen had, as we have seen, their work to do and did it happily and gladly as partaking of a privilege. But large circles there yet were to whom a sense of reality never came, who never even dimly apprehended and indeed dreaded to apprehend the nature of the times in which they lived; for whom the war was a fearsome monster from which one hid, from which one at all costs turned; from whom the fact of horror was a thing at all costs to be hidden. No estimate of the time would be complete without these. And there were circles strong in the sense of tragedy as women are, haunted and possessed by the sense of something impending, of something ever-present, threatening, and disagreeable. They

recoiled from it. They could not face it, they could not pause to think things out. It were as though they rushed hence to the bosom of satiety, there to lose themselves, there by all means to forget the presence of the shadowy spectra. In so doing they lost a sense of proportion, lost utterly a sense of the actuality and significance of that which was happening beyond their physical ken. They wanted to. They shrank. Imagination here was not balanced by common sense or by sense of proportion or of inevitability. They kept only—and very preciously—their sense of humour; and were lucky at times if they did not lose their sense of decency.

VI

Anything for distraction! Sex during the war hung like a heavy perfume upon wide circles of London and the great provincial cities—more cloyingly, more intently than before. Night after night the dancing went on; the musicians played wildly, madly, ragtime calling to dancers afternoon and evening and early morning like the mocking laughter of the world. Never probably was so much drunk in proportion to supplies and opportunity; never in certain classes was such effort to amuse and be amused. Every joy-place was over-filled and in many private houses the same furious zest of enjoyment went forward. Gaiety! The sombre hush of the first year of the war gave place to a gradually increasing spirit of recklessness; and what began on the smallest scale

ended in something like an orgy of uninterrupted amusement. Women reacted to it more than men. Nor would one care to say whether that phase was in itself good or bad: in keeping with the brief but terrible facts of that brief day or human nature inevitably trying to recoil. Distraction was good in itself and needed—by the women at home as by the men who came from the front and went back to it again. Gaiety was a tonic. But one may doubt whether this was gaiety in its later phases, whether it was not rather a furious *danse macabre*. For did one not see faces pale and haggard with dissipation, eyes dark-ringed and without light? whilst in latter days the expression of the faces taken as a whole was not of laughter or mirth, but of an intensity, of a concentration that fell little short of caricature.

Such an impression may perhaps have been tinged by the sombre background of events. It was indeed difficult to see spontaneous enjoyment, let alone romance, at a time when tragedy in many forms was being forced home to the hilt day after day. Certain it is that the movement of rush was in the air; that an intense electric current pervaded the world of women, more especially the London world; that there was abroad an irresistible passion for movement, novelty, change; that there was little real happiness; and that the nervous reaction became at times overwhelming. Nobody can even estimate the burden of surcharged emotion carried in those days; it never could be told. The commonest phrase to be heard was: "What's the matter with one? One can't sit still." It

expressed the whole feeling of the time, the inability to settle down and remain, the inability to sit down and think, the irresistible craving for distraction. Not that this restlessness was an original product of the war; it had been noticed years before; but it had never attained such lengths nor ever produced such reactions to nervous prostration, illness and despair.

It was a time of violent contrasts. But none so violent, nay so bizarre, as this spectacle of exuberant mirth-making against a background tremendous in its pathos. There were the greatest possible tragedies. There were episodes in people's lives which ought to have been tragedies but whose incidence was carried away on the swift-running stream of the hour and (kindly perhaps) lost in something else; and there were the merciful dispensations of God which hid the "unwanted" from our sight. It is no part of truth to disguise at this time of day the crudities, the anomalies, the strange hard excrescences of indifference—call them what you will—that manifested themselves in some types of women during the war. Death after all became a commonplace thing. Imagination and will to grief are limited, the war played queer tricks with human nature, and at the front, under stress of tortured emotions, men for their part sometimes behaved like beasts. The ethics of sorrow changed, many people following simple instinct rather than the dictates of convention or of principle. Marriages were quickly remade and for the best of reasons. These were matters for the individual to decide. Nevertheless, a tendency

of evidences and symptoms went to show that the sense of reality in human nature is more limited, that loyalty born of tradition is more ephemeral and superficial, less fundamental, than might have been supposed, and that the notion of Death itself in the abstract becomes habitual as anything else.

Still the dominating note was tragedy. And if the war showed human nature at its least, it brought out, too, astonishing heights of faith, strength and courage in women as it did of "heroism" in men. The divine human spark burnt bright in each case—that unquenchable spirit which parts man from the animals and goes far to explain so much that was puzzling, wonderful, and extraordinarily hopeful in the war of nations. There was seen upon the battle-field the super-human will of ordinary men rising triumphant above its horrors and its sufferings and its appalling disillusion, enabling them to defy the power of Death himself. There was seen in profundity of Despair—which is loneliness, for none can help there and none share, no power of kindred mind can even touch—the strange spiritual strength and force of belief in women that enabled them to fight their way out and carried them ultimately through darkness to a new if subdued light of knowledge and of hope. In this we are at any rate entitled to believe. In believing it, we are almost entitled to think that after all the war was worth while.

An age of materialism, of commercialism, of self-seeking, of superficiality and of artificiality had long obscured that which is, at the back of all,

spiritual and of the very essence of relationship 'twixt God and Man and Life. The war came and smashed down barriers and plumbed into veriest deeps of individual character, exposing it cosmically, catastrophically as to eye may be exposed the naked foundations of a house. Here, terror, unforeseeing blankness, unrepentant horror —and despair. It was one long travail. . . . But there was refound in its *via dolorosa* this mortal faith in things immortal which saved the sanity of many women and maintained to the end the faltering strength of many men.

VII

Easier it is to turn to a future which gleamed never so opportunely—for the women of England as for the rest of civilisation. Differ among ourselves as we may—and were in fact certain to do—in regard to the ideal aspect of a world-peace which is at any rate not merely the *cul-de-sac* of materialism or the blank futility of opportunism; agree or not as to the failure of a great Ideal Policy which has at any rate implanted a tangible aspiration in the minds of men; differ as to this apportionment or that, this boundary, this racial sovereignty or another in the new world scheme; few will dispute that the moment breathes hope of intense constructive and reconstructive activity, of new ideas, and of the new application of old ideas such as this earth has never before known.

Already in this little England which is itself the

heart-beat of a world, an event momentous and incalculable in politics, pregnant with new fortunes for the whole community—and therefore for communities beyond our surrounding seas—whose significance is perhaps inadequately realised at present—has happened. We may dispute—and we undoubtedly do—as to the sphere or the rôle or the pertinence of women in the natural scheme, in the body national: question their adaptability to statecraft, question the originative, the judicial, the inductive faculties of the feminine mind; yet remain convinced that women have a rôle, new, indispensable, solving, salving in the constructive future. Nor can any man deny—the strongest sceptic, the uttermost conservative—that with the election of the first woman Member of Parliament in our history has come to concrete effect, what the younger women were here and there whispering in the 'nineties, what stirred and agitated in the first decade of this century, what broke finally into outspoken revolt, undisguised ambition, defiance almost and culminated at last in the great efforts of women in the bygone war.

Sylvia Scarlett has multiplied exceedingly. Ann Veronica has come into her own. Ruth Hobday lives to-day what she so long outlived in dreams.

Sloane Street struggles out and up, content no longer with her rôle of emptiness, but seeks with the better of her brains to find or to make a way. The new-found activity of Sloane Street in the war will no longer support what went before. The doors of Parliament stand ajar. One notices

a slump in chocolates and flowers. And Kensington? And Hornsey Rise? These murmur when shops and offices are closed, of their condition to-day, to-morrow, of the future position of women in the workaday world.

Nor is that all. What are the special problems that confront women now—moral, social, of education and of work—and the special qualities women can bring towards their own better future, towards our whole future; what the true scope and range of women in the remaking of twentieth-century England? Never as to-day was needed among the masses of the working girls and women of this country less material help than sympathy, encouragement, humour, distraction, purpose, and, so to say, a new showing of existence. The conditions of life in our greatest industrial towns are straitness, grime, distortion, limitation, perversion, materialism, negation, monotony and the sheer "cussedness" of entities still-born. Education misconceived or misdirected leads to thwarted aspiration. Imagination stimulated and then unsatisfied makes for unhappiness. Expectation awakened, then unguided, means dissatisfaction. Men have too long handled the women-problems of to-morrow. A community whose heart has not been found and whose soul is mis-esteemed makes play with the great tragi-comedy of human existence, uncontrolled and unforeseeing. . . . What does the stranger see in modern congested England?

VIII

Near midnight in a great Midland industrial town. White-staring arc lamps refract breathless heat from houses and roadways of a market square. Fingers of tall chimneys dimly point to a smoke-shrouded sky. All the reek and rack of a busy city in its hour of rest rise up in comparative silence, in comparative cool. The clangour of the trams is the strident speaking voice of the city that not yet sleeps.

Crowds—how they drift and aimlessly drift, how they murmur, tattle, hum, with what a patter of measured slow-moving feet! All women—girls—girls—girls. At the street-corner boys and young men stand; the girls occasionally pause to titter and joke but go on walking up and down, up and down, three, four, five abreast. They are dressed gaily, laugh and chatter, push and giggle and now and again burst into snatches of song. They appear reckless, happy—but are they? It is the hour of the workers' promenade. Some lurch, some laugh hysterically, and some accost. One grandly dressed in feathered hat and bright colours comes lurching alone—the light finds her face and shows it white and imbecile, the eyes mirthless but silly, the head rolling from side to side, and makes the tawdry clothes appear indecorous. Fifteen or sixteen—a child's face—not more! . . . The boys titter and point, laugh aloud. "She's drunk," they say; "all seas over." She doesn't know where she's going, or what she's

doing. But wait! A dim sense of being ridiculous comes to her. She ambles down a dark side-street, lurching against the closed shutters of shops. A man steals up behind, takes her by the arm. He appears friendly, supplicating. She gibbers, murmurs something, lets him walk arm-in-arm a few yards, then half-conscious pushes him away, turns back, evades him blindly. Instinct defending, she faces again the white arc lights, the jeering boys and the laughing girls; and with her imbecile grin resumes the promenade—lurch and roll, lurch and roll—up and down, up and down. . . .

From the crowd a girl's shrill voice, half-fearfully and half-angrily, "Are you my pal, Cis—are you my pal? Stay along o' me then." A crowd collects. She also drunk. Hopelessly, hysterically, drivelling drunk but with the same blind instinct clings to her friend. A man comes up—exhorts, pleads, abuses loudly. The friend tries to drag her away, the man gets angry. A sharp scuffle ensues, scream upon scream pierces lamplight and shadow.

Nightly affairs these. Progress, emancipation, education, rehabilitation! . . . Better look the other way in twentieth-century England.

IX

It was found in the Army during the late war that influences the most powerful, morally, spiritually, intellectually, came from within rather than from without; that the Army chaplain as

such was rather commentator than moving force; that sympathy camouflaged and advice wrapped up in tact, and discipline in the guise of friendship were more powerful, more helpful than any amount of dogma or command: that to these the loosest nature kindly responded; that one potent example or personality in the ranks went for more than all the Church's teaching; that such was always hungrily, urgently called for. Nor is this reflection, real or implied, on the Church's selfless work. It is the lesson of a thousand years during which men and women have struggled sometimes vainly and sometimes weakly but always hopefully towards one Supreme example.

In the governance of a world so profoundly imperfect, doctrine and dogma and form alone will never suffice. There must always be something more vital—some sense of a wider humanity, tolerant, knowing, feeling, thinking, based as much on friendship as on vision and understanding. Vision it is surely, imagination, insight, equability, *friendliness* applied to legislation that are needed before everything in grappling with such problems. Human beings dealing first-hand with human beings and bringing to bear upon their distresses something more than the rigid morality of the Church, the cold judgment of the Law, or Society's unforgiving verdict: namely, that common sympathy with common people about common things which must in the end be at the root of social order and ethics. That way lies a whole realm of exploration: that way lies, it well may be, the rôle of those young women

of modern England who claim to be a national entity, a human force, and who claim above all the right to make or to mar their own lives. It is the rôle of women to women—and often to men—who in this century's difficulty brought to our saving the endowment of their compassion, light, humour, instinct, and courage. Permissible, then, to believe that these qualities have their mission in the good forming of the new time not alone—or mainly—in the sphere political but in the sphere social rather; and that hereby lies the future of Englishwomen in the great dream of the After-War.


BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

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