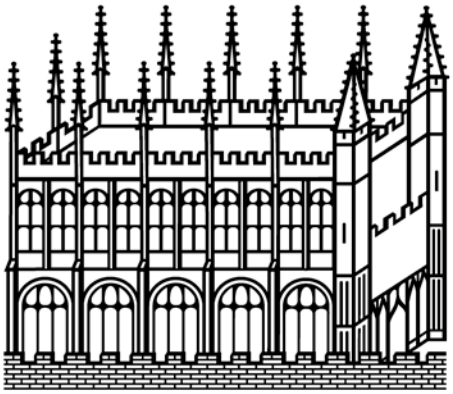


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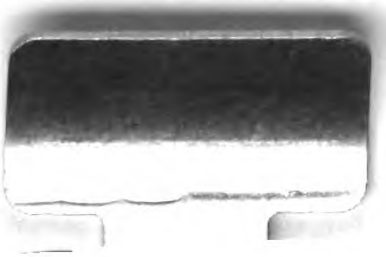
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SCOTS GUARD

By the Same Author

Way of Revelation
When Armageddon Came
Impressions and Reactions
A Journey in Ireland 1921

SCOTS GUARD

by

WILFRID EWART

LONDON
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1934

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SCOTS GUARDS,

PAST AND PRESENT,

AND TO THE MEMORY OF

FOUR BROTHER OFFICERS:

LIEUT. SIR EDWARD HULSE

LIEUT. HON. G. W. E. ELLIOT

LIEUT. A. R. W. MENZIES

SECOND LIEUT. L. A. JARVIS

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PROLOGUE

Wilfrid Herbert Gore Ewart was born on May 19, 1892. He was descended on both sides from a race of distinguished soldiers.

His father, Herbert Brisbane Ewart, is a son of the late Lieutenant-General Charles Brisbane Ewart, R.E., a Crimean veteran, afterwards Governor of Jersey and grandson of Lieutenant-General J. F. Ewart, C.B., whose younger son, General Sir John Ewart, G.C.B., 93rd Highlanders, was father of Lieutenant-General Sir Spencer Ewart, K.C.B., Cameron Highlanders, G.O.C. Scottish Command during the Great War.

His mother, Lady Mary Ewart, was the youngest daughter of the fourth Earl of Arran, K.P., and granddaughter of General Sir William Napier, the historian of the Peninsular War, by his marriage with a daughter of his cousin, General Henry Fox, youngest brother of Charles James Fox. Sir William Napier was a younger brother of the general famous in India, Sir Charles Napier, and of General Sir George Napier; their mother and the mother of Charles and Henry Fox being daughters of the second Duke of Richmond.

Wilfrid Ewart's boyhood was marred by delicate health, which prevented his entering a public school, and on leaving his preparatory school, St. Aubyns, Rottingdean, he was sent to a private tutor at Parkstone. At this time he spent long and somewhat unconventional holidays with his father in Tyrol, where he would lie for hours in the mountains surrounded by wild birds, which he used to attract by some mysterious

magnetism. Ewart's affection for birds extended also to the farmyard, and at the age of sixteen a work of his written in collaboration with J. Stephen Hicks, *The Possibilities of Modern Poultry Farming*, was published, having first been serialised in *Farm Life*. Three years later, in 1911, Ewart and Hicks followed this with another booklet, *Practical Poultry-keeping for Small-holders*. With these works to his credit and numerous articles on poultry being published in the press, Ewart between the ages of sixteen and nineteen often made as much as £100 a year by his pen.

In the summer of 1914 he was offered a post as secretary to Princess Dolgoruki at her house in Berkshire. But the War breaking out, he could not accept the appointment. Although bad health and eyesight quite unfitted him, he joined up; Lord Ruthven, his cousin, then a Major in the Scots Guards, suggesting his joining that regiment. A handsome, tall young man, Ewart was destined to be an officer popular with his men. However, the front was not to see him immediately on his becoming a soldier, for, in the few days' holiday granted him to clear up all his personal affairs, he met with a bicycle accident which delayed him six weeks. He then endured training at Caterham, went to Wellington Barracks, and was detailed for guard at Buckingham Palace. He was warned for draft, warned again, and yet did not go. He spent Christmas 1914 at home, saw the old year out, was warned again, and finally in mid-February 1915 (it is believed on Monday, February 15th), in charge of a draft, he left London.

It is at this point that his narrative commences.

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CHAPTER I

LONDON TO THE FRONT

We left London for Havre one brilliant sunny morning in mid-winter. It was ten o'clock. The blue mists had scarce lifted from the river, and the station was nearly empty save for the friends and relations of the two hundred and twelve men of my draft. Handkerchiefs were waved and the train steamed out just as a hundred other trains steam out week by week. We rattled through the smiling English countryside, through the commons and dark green pinewoods, through the open uplands and snug valleys, past a score of well-known, well-loved places.

Southampton was reached about two o'clock. The business of detraining and embarking took but a short time, for there was practically no baggage. But there were formalities and already other troops—one draft—aboard the little paddle-boat, which in normal times was a pleasure-boat on the Clyde. All afternoon we waited for the third and last draft to arrive. It came on board about four o'clock. And at about five-thirty in the early hours of a grey evening we glided down the harbour. The sun had long since disappeared and a nasty wind had begun to play with the sea. Past the bell-buoy, which rocked and tolled amid the rising waves, bidding farewell to every outward-going ship, we went, and so left the shore lights behind. The forts and lightship disappeared. The dim, swift-moving out-

line of a destroyer took their place against the darkening sea. There was a more than perceptible swell and the ship rolled dismally. Soon it became almost an obligation to feel sick. And presently five melancholy officers sat around their cabin—a veritable biscuit-box of a cabin—awaiting the end! To crown all, I was in supreme command, the senior officer on the boat! I was given a code-word, and in the midst of this nightmare had to decipher messages.

What a night! What sheets of rain! What a violent wind! It was a relief at last, after sleepless hours packed like sardines, with no cabins for the troops, to ride at anchor in port again. It was the middle of the night and had been a rough trip. We thought it would never end. A hulk of a French steamer, very low in the water, was towed slowly in through the driving rain and drifting sea-sand as we waited. She had been torpedoed two nights before. By degrees, and as, with anchor up again, we edged in towards the quay-side of Havre the men recovered their spirits—the poor wretches who had spent the night on deck, on the stairs, in the gangways down below, everywhere *in extremis!*

We landed after a considerable delay at about half-past ten of a rainy, windy morning, and had a five-mile march through the crowded streets to the camp at Honfleur on the hills behind the town. Past crowded wharves and yards and docks, great mountains of stores and lines of the A.S.C. wagons; past French Territorials, who presented arms; past smoky hideous factories, whence the workpeople were thronging to their midday meal. So through divers difficult streets

to the straight French *pavé* road lined with poplars, which led by way of various suburbs to the base camp.

Such a brand-new town of canvas huts and white tents clinging to the hillside! None would believe that so vast an accumulation of dwellings could spring up in so short a time. The officers, it appeared, slept in canvas huts. I was drafted to one with a fellow subaltern, Jarvis, a very nice fellow, and we found it comfortable enough with our warm sleeping-bags and a canvas bucket that did duty for a bath between the two of us. The men were put in tents. The camp was bleak, but otherwise bearable. But the officers' mess was less so; it was a rare draughty place, with a tin roof and a long table on trestles, and we had to scramble at the board, nay, beg and pray for food. But there was no time to worry about anything, for the next day there was an inspection by the O.C. and the Medical Officer and various other parades. Ammunition had to be issued and deficiencies of kit made good. We were very busy and had not a moment to spare. Afterwards we worked all day at censoring hundreds of the men's letters, of which there seemed to be no end.

The second night there was a concert in the big tin Y.M.C.A. hut. The concert-party consisted of Lena Ashwell and four other well-known "stars," whom a few weeks before I had seen behind the brilliant foot-lights of the London stage. In Honfleur they were less brilliant to look upon, being in gum-boots and rough country clothes, muddy and somewhat dishevelled. They sang popular and old-fashioned sentimental airs, "The Chocolate Soldier" and "The Little Grey Home

in the West," which brought down a "house" crammed from end to end with khaki. Afterwards they dined in our mess.

For five days we led a life of censoring, inspecting, and being inspected. Then—it was Saturday—the order came to be off. We were bound for the Front, which was a two days' journey, mainly in cattle-trucks, as I learned, so that it was not much to look forward to. However, neither was it much fun stopping at Honfleur. In Havre I had got the last few things I wanted and was at last fully equipped for the fray. It was time to be moving.

It was a sunny winter's afternoon, this Saturday of February 20th, 1915, and at about half-past three—I having made my requisite short address—we all marched with other drafts to the number of three thousand men four miles along the pretty valley road which led to the wayside entraining station. It made a very vivid impression on me: the cheering, shouting, singing march through the frosty sunlight, the tiny French town nestling at the end of its own valley, the quiet evening sky, the blue smoke lazily rising from the houses—these last things I remarked as we waited for the train to start. There was a buffet managed by two friendly ladies from Yorkshire, who doled out coffee and bread to the men. Then the troop-train—at least half a mile long—moved off very slowly, very cautiously, and, having proceeded about four miles, halted for as many hours. We slept along the seats. Once, about midnight, the

train stopped on a bridge with a terrific jerk, and some French Territorial guards shouted incomprehensible observations from the road beneath. The morning, brilliantly fine, found us at Abbeville. And all day long we rolled on and on, moving, stopping, jolting. Now by the seaside, now by the sandhills about Calais, now through illimitable marshes, then through the ordinary undulating countryside, with its grey farms and green fields and venerable church towers, and at last among the flat, cold lands of Picardy. Nor was there any sign of war except an occasional Red Cross train and an uncommon military activity along the main road that ran beside the railway. Even at the rail-head ten miles from the Front there was no sound of guns, no particular stir in the air, except in the station yard where the three thousand troops detrained. It was about five o'clock, Sunday, and after dark. A guide led us through the narrow streets of the town of Merville, ill-lit and cobbled. We filed into a disused and dilapidated tobacco factory, where on the hard floor of lofts and storage-houses the men were to billet. It was a place of rats and shadows and creaking boards. Having made the necessary arrangements, Jarvis and I adjourned to our own billet in the house of a worthy citizen of the town. The old couple, wizened and bent and shy, having doubtless spent all their years in this backwater of civilisation until the war came, showed us politely to our rooms and beds. We slept snugly this night, but not before I had repaired to the headquarters of the Army Corps on a matter of urgency. Unlike the traditional headquarters of an army, the atmosphere of the little inn, before which a

sentry stood and a red flag hung, was essentially tranquil. Only the sound of typewriters and the presence of a few waiting orderlies indicated that anything was astir. I was ushered before the General. Brisk and businesslike, he was seated at a table, smoking a cigar. His Chief of Staff and aides-de-camp stood in front of the fire, doing likewise. All had just finished dinner. No time was wasted. My business finished, I went out into the dark street. Not a sound. A silvery moon shone down upon the little sleeping town. Could this be war, I asked myself, this calm and tranquil atmosphere? So puzzling, I went to bed.

Next morning found us lined along a road leading out of the town—a variegated column fifteen hundred strong, for at nine o'clock we were to be inspected by the General. He spoke a few words, and the column moved off, through a dense grey mist that hid the fields on either hand, on a fifteen-mile march to the Battalion. The highway was of *pavé* and trying to the feet. A Staff officer rode in front, and after an hour's trudging called a halt. The men were glad enough to fall out. It was their first march carrying packs and full weight of equipment. It was also my first march with full equipment, but I got through it better than I expected and found a friendly officer who took me into his billet and gave me food and a drink. But what a desolate country, such squalid people, such squalid straggling towns and tenements! Opposite the halting place was a house with a gaping hole in the roof where, a few days before, a German shell had burst. This was our first taste of the war. Henceforward many of the houses by the roadside

were similarly damaged, albeit they seemed to be occupied; for besides soldiers, women and children swarmed in the streets. And this first impression of mine, the one and only impression, that of unutterable squalidity, was further borne out as we proceeded. They were so dingy, these towns, with their mud and their smoke-stains and their depraved-looking inhabitants. We halted once again in a dirty street. By now our limbs were aching and tired. Then, turning off along a lane, we struck out into the open country. Presently we came upon a line of guns—4·7's—cleverly concealed. The whole thing, the whole journey until we halted at about two o'clock in the afternoon before the farmhouse where the Staff of the Battalion was awaiting us, conveyed to the mind a sense of hopeless unreality. Surely this could not be a real war, I thought repeatedly. Surely this must be a dream, or an exhibition, or some kind of excursion, or a moving picture! Yet, no—it was war right enough—the trenches were only a mile away.

CHAPTER II

BILLETS AND THE FIRING LINE

I am writing this now in a farmhouse a mile from the German trenches. An occasional gun goes off, otherwise nothing comes out of the damp mist but the bark of a dog or the sound of our men chopping firewood outside. It is the strangest thing to see life running its normal course within a mile of the fighting line—children playing outside the cottages, peasants ploughing and threshing and so forth. Since our arrival yesterday the Battalion has come out of the trenches a little to the east of Sailly and we (also of the Second Battalion of the Twentieth Brigade of the Seventh Division) do not go in for four days. The rule is seven days in and seven days out. After that we may go into Divisional billets, which are really comfortable and outside shell-fire.

My Company Commander is a chap called Warner, who seems very decent. And, besides Jarvis and myself, there is a very pleasant fellow named Teddy Hulse. Seymour, whom I know slightly, is with us here too, but he has just gone on leave. Our farmhouse is well within range of the German guns, but I don't think they worry much about it. Warner has just been telling me of some things I shall want, and it appears I stand in need of gum-boots, a periscope, carriage candles, matches, a bottle of port, a plum cake and a box of cigarettes.

This afternoon we had an inspection by Heyworth, the Brigadier, who is a very efficient officer. The guns

go on more or less all day. There is a battery of 7·7's close to this farm, and the German field guns reply. To-night I have to take a party to dig within a hundred yards of the German trenches, so shall probably hear something of them. I have got a foot a bit blistered owing to marching on the *pavé*, but feel otherwise as fit as a fiddle. There seems to be plenty to do here, even if one is in billets.

My brief visit to the trenches last night with my digging party was not very eventful. We started at five o'clock in the afternoon and got back at ten o'clock at night. Some of my men caught it from a Maxim gun, but no one was hit and only a few stray bullets came over, but it was quite exciting crawling down there and back. It seemed strange to be sitting within a hundred yards of the German lines and to hear them talking, shouting and singing and our people doing the same; big guns going intermittently all the time, with bursts of rifle-fire and a machine-gun tapping away at intervals. The Bosche snipers were also constantly cracking off, and every now and then we would see a star rocket shoot off in the distance. For a mile or two in view of the trenches everything is laid waste—ruined farms and great shell-pits in the ground. And very ghastly it all looks in the moonlight.

We go in the trenches to-morrow, Thursday, night for four days to relieve the First Grenadier's Battalion. Maurice Darby, a friend of my youth and incidentally a nephew of Sir George Arthur, is with them. Perhaps

I shall run into him. We come out on Monday night, March 1st, and in our turn go into Divisional billets some way back for a week, and then back to the trenches again. The weather has become miserable—cold and wet; this is the only similarity, it seems, between this spot and London.

I have never been so reluctant to leave a squalid place as I was this evening. How warmly the firelight flickered on the walls and beams of that wayside farm-kitchen in Picardy! How comfortable even the filthy farmyard looked amid its enclosing lofts and byres! And the two misshapen rooms where we billeted those four more or less peaceful days since Monday. Dirty they were and difficult and cavernous, yet to-night so enticing. Outside there had sprung up a little chilly evening wind when we ventured forth. But yesterday I should have sat by the window, reading. And to-night there lay before us the walk to the trenches, a long night's watching, four days and four nights in the firing-line.

We marched off.

Into a wintry sunset; the road yet muddy after recent rains; the dank fields lying cold and uninviting on either hand. Approaching the cross-roads, we quickened step, for were not they marked by the German artillery?

And of all the dreary places in all the dreary lands that I have seen I picture that group of wayside houses as the saddest. Always—except when the working-parties hurried by—an unnatural stillness reigned.

Roofless skeletons of houses and houses broken in a score of places; people creeping in and out, French peasants who cling pitifully to the relics of their homes; children peering out of the windows and doorways, too scared to play; heaps of ruins; and everywhere a great lonely emptiness.

We turned off into the fields. Yet the sunset was still in the sky, and it was too light to cross the open lands. We had to wait. The men smoked cigarettes and fell to talking after their inconsequent fashion about the prospects of the night, also of professional football, and —their suppers. Then darkness crept up and the sun dipped beyond the grey rim of the Flanders plain. It was twilight. We moved on across the ploughed fields. Not a sound, not a murmur of war. Until of a sudden we were in the road again, a road congested with troops. Battalion headquarters lay before us, and many transport wagons were unloading by the wayside. Long files of men in hoods and capes and heavy equipment, the rifle slung over the shoulder, moved slowly along towards the trenches. There were orderlies on horseback, sitting their horses like statues silhouetted against the evening sky.

We crawled forward presently at a snail's pace until clear of the congested trench-parties, then turned off to the left down a path, following a light ammunition railway. On the one hand were overhanging trees, on the other ghastly wrecks of houses. Soon we came to the little cemetery where our comrades lie amid the shell-pits and the ruined houses, under white wooden crosses. Nor could I pass by that spot, melancholy as it was,

without recalling the company sergeant-major's sly humour. Never would he bring the nervous newly-joined subaltern down that way, I had heard, but he showed him with unction, with emphasis—and a twinkle in his eye—that little cemetery of nameless graves.

The occasional bullet pinging across our path told us how near we were to the trenches. Some desultory rifle-fire in front gave additional warning. Soon we were in the machine-gun zone and, stooping low, we hurried along the ditch beside the white strip of road, then across an open bit of ploughland towards the shelter of a parapet. Suddenly a machine-gun opened. We fell flat on our faces, and the bullets whistled overhead as the devilish thing swept round. But one man caught it and did not rise with us. Then we crept along behind the parapet which led rather steeply to a ruined barn. Here the troops in reserve were crouching over the fires they had kindled, cooking their supper. The fires cast a strange glare around. It was a place of shadows and passages and creeping armed men. The company whom we were to relieve filed out of the trenches and we filed in.

I placed my sentries. I laid down my pack and equipment in my dug-out. Carrying only my revolver, I walked along the line of the breastwork, noting here an improvement that had been made since my former very brief visit, and there a defect. Climbing the rear face of a little hill, I sat down behind the machine-gun emplacement, which was safe and a vantage-point. From there towards the enemy I could look across the plain.

And there you find me.

I see a wide and shadowy country. The moon is rising out of the calm night. A little wind whines and whispers among the sandbags. I see dimly a land of poplars and small trees (dwarf oaks), orchards, and plentiful willows. I see flat fields and ditches and stagnant water, and red farms whose roofs are gone, stark skeletons in the moonlight. I see broad flat spaces and then a ridge—the ridge of Aubers. Only the German lines are hidden from sight.

No sign of life. Silence and desolation reign. But here and there the faint glimmer of a fire indicates the presence of the enemy. Afar off, rockets, red and green and white, shoot up to the sky; star-shells bursting above our trenches cast their baleful light around. Strange twisted figures of trees stand out against the horizon. There is no sound but an occasional home-like mating-call of partridges in the fields and the peculiar laughing cry of the little speckled owl which here, as in England, dwells among the orchards. Creeping into the little den which I share with Warner, after a brief attempt at making things ship-shape, I fall asleep.

I woke this morning—it was my first awakening in the trenches—to hear the sizzling of bacon in a pan. A ray of light came streaming in through the opening of the dug-out. It was nine o'clock. Warner was still asleep, breathing regularly. I turned over and, according to a lifelong habit, indulged in a little leisurely contemplation previous to waking up properly. I

remembered how infernally cold my feet had been in the early hours of the morning when I had crept in to sleep. But now they were warm and comfortable, wrapped around with empty sandbags and covered over with a rug and great-coat. The interior of the dug-out was moist and clammy. It was also exceedingly untidy. For the coverings and equipment of my companion and myself were strewn about the ground, grievously intermixed with straw, mud, newspapers, books, notebooks, and ration tins. The night before we had hastily rigged up little shelves, each in his corner, upon which we set those smaller things, such as matches and pencils, that are so apt to get lost, so that in parts there was a semblance of tidiness, but we had not been able to do much, for a candle stuck to a board by its own grease was the only illumination of our dug-out.

Then, while I was still contemplating, a face was pushed in through the dug-out opening, a hand prodded my lower extremities, and a voice said, "Breakfast is ready, sir." At the same moment *le capitaine* woke up. Smith, our faithful cook and my servant, began to pass in the food and the knives and the plates. First a plate of porridge, most welcome, and milk in a dark green bottle. This was followed by bread, and Belgian butter on a piece of paper, and marmalade from Piccadilly. Finally, steaming hot bacon and a poached egg on a plate. These we poised on our laps and ate voraciously. In fact, we didn't fare badly.

Feeling like nothing on earth, we didn't talk, but Warner read the *Westminster Gazette*, while I had a copy of the *Weekly Times*. Presently our invaluable Smith

produced some of Warner's port, after drinking which we felt better, and one of us swore down the telephone for about a quarter of an hour, finding the field telegraph useful in more ways than one; letting it act as a kind of safety-valve for our humours. Disentangling myself by degrees from the rugs and the coats and the sandbags, I then crawled outside. There is a narrow passage-way under the front parapet between our own dug-out and that of the servants. Here Smith, and Warner's servant Walter, had lighted their fire, over which they crouched, eating their own breakfast.

I climbed over this, and turned to the right into the fort, where a number of men were sitting around smoking, mending their clothes, and cleaning their rifles. It was a sunshiny morning with a sharp little wind, and the country behind looked quite attractive with its fields and farms. There was no shooting or sound of war, since the Germans, barely eighty yards away, were doubtless as leisurely engaged as we. I exchanged a few words with the artillery observation N.C.O. and took a look through the periscope, which, however, disclosed nothing beyond the white facing of the enemy parapet showing here and there amid the irregularities of the ground. It was then about time to go down to the other end of the section held by the company, since in half an hour the Brigadier and C.O. were due to inspect it.

Being somewhat above six feet in height, I had to bend low as I passed down the line. In places, too, the breastwork is lower than in others, and there are often bits without any protection at all. The whole section,

which is bordered at the further end by a road, is about five hundred yards long. At intervals of about one hundred and fifty yards there are "forts"—*i.e.* small walled-in areas of ground containing a machine-gun emplacement or observation post. I crept along rapidly from one to another of these, since it was not advisable to waste much time in between.

At one point there has not been an opportunity of building up sandbags, so hurdles have been put up instead, with the earth banked up behind them and a shallow ditch dug on the inside. There was more than one plank bridge to cross. About half-way along, after emerging from a muddy pit, the path dips down into a veritable maze of deep narrow trenches, boarded at the bottom, with numerous communication trenches running out from them. Here and there are open spaces where the fires are lit, and around these are the dug-outs, which made the place look like nothing so much as the exposed section of a rabbit-warren.

Through all these difficulties the Brigadier had to make his way—minus the gold lace, the red cap, and the Staff. For he, well known as a model of well-groomed smartness, was just like the rest of us, clad in gum-boots and an old uniform without a hat. At other times Heyworth has been known to ride horseback down the road to within a few hundred yards of the enemy, red cap, aide-de-camp, and all; and, as it happened, not a shot was fired. The inspection did not take long, and presently we were back again in the dug-out, making arrangements for to-night's work. Reports and diaries had to be written up, and there was much tele-

phoning to headquarters concerning the strength of the working-parties about to be detailed. Then it was luncheon-time, which important event was preceded by an appetising whiff of cooking from the crackling fire outside.

Luncheon was followed by a long and deep sleep, which, however, was disturbed by the conversation of the guns. I woke up with a start to find the ground quaking with their detonation, while boom after boom proclaimed that an artillery bombardment was in progress. In the midst of it from the recesses of the next dug-out I could hear the business-like voice of the artillery N.C.O. reporting the result of each shot to his battery as it was shouted across to him by the observation officer with the periscope. Going outside, I learned that this affair had been in progress for an hour or more and that our own guns were just beginning to find the range of the enemy's fire-trench. Almost yard by yard the observation officer brought them down to it, until presently a shell evidently landed right on the trench, for the explosion was followed by a great upheaval of earth and stones, in the midst of which there sailed upward a German's trousers.

During this time the air whined and whistled with the passage of shells, and I felt almost surprised that I could not see them hurtling through the air. Desultory rifle-shots punctured this monotony of sound, while British aeroplanes came constantly circling and whirring overhead. It was not long, either, before the enemy shells began to burst not so far away, and the languid interest shown by the men in these proceedings was considerably

livened when a shell landed on the parapet a couple of hundred yards away, knocked it down, and blew a number of sandbags sky-high, without, however, doing any more serious damage. The Germans were not really trying for us, but for our batteries farther back.

As the afternoon wore on I lost interest in this little display of temper by either side, and the next entertainment afforded me was the persistent efforts of an enterprising sniper to knock down the telephone-post above the dug-out. Probably he thought he had spotted an extra large periscope. It was amusing to hear the bullets pinging overhead and smacking or flattening themselves against the parapet while we ate our tea comfortably behind it. Nor did the sniper, persistent as he was hour after hour this afternoon, hit his mark. As dusk is now descending he is delaying further effort until to-morrow.

I have now had four days and nights in the trenches and seen, I suppose, nearly the whole gamut of war at its present stage. Except for the one man who was killed on our way in, I have had no casualties in my three forts, although our line has been constantly enfiladed by Bosche machine-gun fire.

Last night, it being Sunday, the Germans made a devil of a row with mouth-organs. I could hear them singing too—the Austrian National Anthem—all along my front. It was very strange seeing right away down the German lines and watching the heavy fighting far to the right—the glare and flash of the big guns, the

shooting of star rockets, and the fires lighted along the German lines. Other times it would be very quiet and I could see the Germans (like ourselves) creeping about in the moonlight, building up their barbed wire, digging and so forth. And in a way I shall miss it, for to-day, it being the auspicious Monday, March 1st—as soon as it is dark—we move out of this mud into billets. All the morning the sun has shone placidly—and the majority of us slept—and this afternoon our guns began a concert which reached a crescendo about four o'clock. The enemy replied, but in a minor key, and it seemed rather doubtful whether either of us did the other any damage in particular. Then, as the bombardment was dying down, there arose a thunderstorm accompanied by lightning and mighty gusts of wind and rain, through all of which the guns boomed continuously. Such a crashing and rolling and booming one had never heard. The snipers and machine-guns all joined in, it was a blessed inferno, but we were all right behind our breastworks. Finally the setting sun peeped out upon a wet world, and we came swarming forth from our dug-outs and shelters like so many rabbits from their holes. It is packing-up time.

All the small litter that had accumulated during our days in the trenches we then threw upon the fires, the dug-outs were cleared of their contents, and the men began to get dressed. And what a collection of things some of them had—all their worldly goods! Some of them carried sandbags full of valued trifles, and others

were decorated at every vantage so as greatly to resemble a Christmas-tree. Once ready, they formed up in file along the support trench, only the sentries remaining on the watch, and awaited the arrival of the relieving party.

Silence was enjoined—no smoking. Dusk had not long fallen when stealthy footsteps were heard approaching along the road. Presently the familiar muffled forms of soldiers appeared, each figure showing momentarily against the sky as it clambered into the trench. One by one they filed in and silently took their places alongside our men. When the sentries have been relieved and the incoming officer-in-charge has been shown the results of the work done on the trenches, wire entanglements, and parapets, we begin to move out in the same silent way. First along a deep ditch half-full of water, then behind a stout sandbag breastwork which presently crosses the road. Much encumbered with mud and weeds, in places it is a mere pathway. Tonight we have the advantage of a deep blue gloaming, accompanied by a light veil of mist rising from the ground. Not a shot is fired, though everybody takes care to hurry along in small groups.

The fields lie dark and uninviting on either hand. The white skeleton of some ruined building which may have been a cottage or farmhouse stares out of the gathering darkness. The ground rises slightly, and presently we are at the cross-roads, where numerous bodies of troops, just relieved like ourselves from the trenches, are moving this way and that. Here the company is formed up and told off, while the remainder

of the Battalion with the transport takes its place in the rear. As soon as possible the column moves off in fours, the men light their cigarettes and talk. It is now pitch dark. Little can be seen on either hand but a foot or so of mud. But suddenly, as we emerge from the houses on to higher ground, a great glare in the sky ahead confronts our eyes. In the midst of it, though far away, one can discern through the various obstacles of distance a suggestion of bright flames leaping upward.

Evidently it is a village burning, set alight no doubt by the bombardment of the German guns this afternoon. For they had been firing at long range, and it was hard to tell what, if not our batteries, their objective might be. As we advanced so the glare in the sky became broader and broader, and presently we could distinguish the bright spot of flame in the centre of it where the fire actually was.

At this moment we ran into a great body of troops. Halted along the road they were in column of route, long lines of infantry, guns and transport. As may be supposed, the narrow country byway and the cross-roads further on were terribly congested, and it was all we could do to make any headway. Mounted orderlies were constantly riding down the column shouting to "Make way! make way!" while the Staff motor-cars and transport wagons occupied a great deal of space. We pushed on by fits and starts.

For we had run into part of the Canadian Division marching down to the trenches for the first time. To-night they would go into billets just behind the trenches and to-morrow take up the line.

All this busy scene, with its kaleidoscopic effects of bronzed faces—dark and almost Indian some of them—very strange dialects, horses, guns, vehicles, and men, was lit up magnificently by the glare of the burning village. I should think that Detaille or Verestchagin would rejoice could they have recorded such scenes as these, the little incidental cameos of war. They would have painted the faces half-turned, showing the full and rounded profile so typical of the Canadians; the smiling faces, the faces set and grim, the tired, mud-stained faces in endless succession from front to rear; they would have made a feature, perhaps, of the men on horseback whose figures—the rifle slung across the back, the collar of the great-coat turned up—silhouetted picturesquely against the red glare on the horizon; they would have shown the artillery-men grouped around their guns, and the long wet streaks in the muddy road, the tall upright poplars here and there, and beyond all the brilliant spot of flame where the homes of the peasantry burned.

It is a picture, I am sure, with an historic significance not soon to be forgotten, although at the time there is much cursing among the soldiers on account of the delay in our journey "home." "Hullo! kiddo," say the Canadians, and much chaff passes between the two bodies of men. By degrees we thread our way through the columns of troops which are converging from various roads, and then are held up by an almost interminable train of motor-lorries, whose brilliant head-lights dazzle the eyes. Once beyond these, we swing along again, and the men break into their favourite marching songs:

"Who's Your Lady Friend?" the song about the high road and the low road, "On the Mississippi," and so forth, alternating with the eternal question, "Are we downhearted?" and the inevitable answer, "No." Always ahead of us, nearer and nearer, beckons the burning village, so close now that we seem to be walking into it, until presently we turn sharp to our right down a side-road. We have come four miles.

Half a dozen friendly pipers from a Highland regiment come out from their billets playing a complimentary air on their bagpipes; and so we march into supper—and bed.

The morning light comes filtering in through the closed shutters of the farmhouse where we are billeted. And Walter, in the next room, is heard saying to his confederate Smith, "We'd better wake them up, 'adn't we?" and Smith is heard to reply, "Yes, or there'll be trouble." Now, Smith is a rough, burly fellow, who has a habit of violently jogging one's elbow when half asleep and whispering in his hoarse way, "Time to get up, sir." The usual reply to which is, "For Heaven's sake, go and kill yourself." Walter, on the other hand—he has been a valet—is the sort of man who goes quietly about his business and announces it is time to bestir just three minutes before the hour for parade. Good fellows as they are—and, as servants, none better—they contrive to do some extraordinary things. When, the other night in the trenches in the early hours, I had to transfer to a new dug-out at the farther end of the line,

Smith and Walter found me. Through the bright moonlight they came, an unmistakable mark for the German bullets, plodding happily along together, Walter carrying his friend's pots and pans and cooking apparatus, Smith burdened with several newspapers, a brown-paper parcel, a cake, a bottle of gin, a blanket, and a rifle. So they had been wandering about, jumping ditches, climbing fences, and struggling through the trenches, at imminent risk to life and limb, until—as usual—they found their destination in the end.

But now let me say a little more about Warner, with whom I live and mess. He is my kennel companion—for only so can one describe it—and at the present moment he is washing himself in a little canvas pail. He is naked to the waist, his skin being very white, like a woman's, and he has a childish, pink face. His braces hang loose by his sides. He is swearing quietly to himself because it is very cold—and no one has a mightier vocabulary. A peculiarly urbane and agreeable young man, there is none more gallant or more capable. He does not "tell people off"; he does not fuss; but he gets things done. Which is the highest tribute one can pay to a soldier. In peace-time he had been an A.D.C. or some such *attaché* to the Aberdeens.

Presently together—having breakfasted—at an inconveniently square table—we go out to the company parade, which happens in an orchard. It is a lovely morning. The brilliant sunshine makes even the sad land look fair and almost attractive. Not a sound comes from the direction of the trenches, though an aeroplane —one of our own—is slowly buzzing its way across the

sky. The singing of innumerable larks is the only other sound. We go round the billets and walk about for a time, feeling more like exceptionally peaceable farmers than soldiers on active service. How pleasant it is after the great strain of the trenches! The courtyard of this French farm presents a scene sufficiently typical of the war in the West.

The British soldier is lounging about with all his accustomed *négligé*, the stump of a cigarette in his mouth; the cocks and hens (with crested heads) and one or two fat black pigs are scratching and burrowing in the somewhat pungent and very plentiful manure of the farmyard. *Madame*, wizened and old, with two rubicund daughters, is heavily committed in the matter of washing linen outside the kitchen door. *Monsieur le père*, who has an imperial and a short white pipe which he never ceases to smoke, leans contemplatively on the door of a cowhouse regarding the unwonted scene. Who would think that the opposing lines of trenches, locked together in the grim death struggle, are so near? Yet hardly has the thought occurred when in the middle distance a gun booms ominously.

After transacting certain business with the company sergeant-major, a square, thick-set man with a non-committal manner and a gruff voice, we proceed to battalion headquarters, first, however, inspecting the billets of the men in lofts, barns, and cow-byres. On the whole they are very comfortable, bedded down on dry straw, with a bundle of hay for head-rest. At battalion headquarters orders are transacted, punishments for misdemeanours awarded, and future operations, either

in or out of the trenches, discussed in detail by the Commanding Officer, the Adjutant, and the company officers. After which we go our several ways to the midday meal. Our own billet is about half a mile distant down a long, straight bit of road, bordered on either hand by flat fields and ditches, willows and dwarf oaks. There is no traffic on the road but an occasional wagon rattling past. Only a few groups of gunners are visible here and there. The one notable sound is the busy humming of a threshing-machine at the neighbouring farm.

A midday meal, more ample than elegant, awaits us: beefsteak, with bacon and many potatoes, steaming hot; slices of stout plum cake sent from home—for this is pudding ready-made; and much ration bread with very white Belgian butter and jam. And through the half-open doorway we catch a glimpse as follows: the worthy Smith and his crony Walter are seated on biscuit-boxes by the fireside, balancing their cheese on the edge of their knives. They are surrounded by the whole French family—*père et mère et filles*—from whom frequently come peals of laughter at the sallies perpetrated by our faithful satellites in Glasgow–Cockney *parlez-vous*. And, truth to tell, the good people never cease to laugh and jest though the enemy are at their very gates. Which is the way of their country. Nor can I write that the Germans behaved badly when billeted here; neither was it otherwise the case in the other billets known to me. First in September last year came the Uhlans to this wayside farmhouse; and later a detachment of Hussars. They paid for everything they

took and all behaved respectfully. Which is one of the few things I have heard so far to the credit of our enemies.

After luncheon there is a musketry parade, and afterwards we stroll down to a field to watch a football match. The battalion team is playing an artillery eleven. Everybody is there to watch the game: much excitement. No one notices the incessant boom of the German guns and the scream and the bang of their shells, which are exploding as regularly as clockwork around a farmstead not three hundred yards away, until attention is momentarily distracted by a shell bursting unmistakably in the very next field. Then someone bethinks himself of the threshing-machine, which, sending up a column of black smoke, offers an ideal target to the German artillery. At the same time our own guns take up the challenge, and the game of football goes calmly on beneath an unending procession of Jack Johnsons. So accustomed is everybody to this comparatively harmless demonstration that no one takes the smallest interest in it until a shell chances to crash the roof of the little inn which stands at the cross-roads near by.

It seems advisable to go home to tea. A busy evening awaits us. A great pile of at least two hundred letters have to be censored. Each must be glanced through before being officially stamped. This, though a privilege, is one of the most onerous (and tiresome) duties of company officers at the front. But Seymour is just back from leave to help us. Meanwhile the Germans have ceased shelling, as have our own guns, and all is

quiet outside. We work by the light of candles thrust into the necks of empty bottles. Presently the post arrives—the greatest event of this and every day—and it has to be answered. Writing letters home is a pleasure second only to that of receiving them. Also the English newspapers come to hand. And there is a bottle of port done up tantalisingly in straw, and a new cake, not to mention a beautiful boneless chicken in a glass case. Perhaps the thought is a little degrading—I mean that one lives for one's stomach these days, and the invariable source of quarrel between man and his friend is that the latter has better food or more of it!

After dinner the men have a concert in the big barn. There they all gather, serried masses of them, lying on the piles of straw and hay, ranged along the beams, and squatting in rows upon the floor. And Jock, who has a concertina, performs upon it; and Bill, who is a bit of a wag, sings funny songs; and Alf provides a sentimental ditty (chiefly about the girl he left behind him); while Warner tells the most outrageous stories in the drollest manner possible; and everybody smokes and claps and jests and roars to their heart's content. So that for this brief hour we all forget the war—which, I verily believe, is the chief ambition of every honest soldier at the front.

What is this?

"Fall in! . . . Sergeant-Major!"

Although we have been here only a day we are bound for new billets eight miles away at Vieux Berquin, to be in Army Corps reserve probably for a week, after which we may move anywhere. Why is this? Nobody knows.

"Hurry up there. Hurry up."

About a mile away there is a motor-lorry burning. It lights up the whole countryside.

The march late last night was rather trying, as none of us were in much condition for that sort of thing. We are in quite comfortable billets in a farmhouse by the road, and where we are there is something definitely in the wind, probably a big attack. There are masses of troops about. And two new officers have arrived. We have to mess by companies, such is the congestion.

I have just seen the Prince of Wales riding down the road on his way from General Headquarters.

The weather has turned very nasty—cold and wet—so I suppose we are in for a bad time.

We move again this afternoon, Sunday, March 7th, (having been here but five days) to Estaires, a town about five miles away—into other billets!—and then back into the trenches, I am afraid, to-morrow, Monday, night; a different part of the line though from where we were before. It is a great nuisance, as since late Tuesday night we have been in very comfortable billets. We have done little here except clean up and practise attacks and censor letters. Yesterday afternoon I walked about a mile over to the First Grenadiers' billets and saw Maurice Darby. He seemed very fit and jovial and very much alive.

I wonder how much longer this war is going to last.

Everyone who has been out here above a week or two is sick to death of it and praying for the end, and I am not surprised.

Even if the billets are good, the country, the towns, and the people here in Artois are the most miserable I have ever struck. The countryside is something like Cambridgeshire or Essex, but infinitely worse. In general the houses are flimsy, rotten things.

CHAPTER III

NEUVE CHAPELLE

At five o'clock of a wintry morning, that of March 10th, 1915, our war-stained Battalion left its billets at Estaires, where we had rested some three days. It was not yet light. Only the grey opaqueness of the sky suggested the coming of daylight, which presently would filter through the streets and between the shutters of the houses.

Along those streets, among the houses, an icy little north-east wind whined and whispered. Snowflakes drifted down, large and slow, like ghosts of white birds. Snow lay thinly upon the roof-tops, upon the pavements, upon the surface of the road. Men's feet were silent as they moved about. There were no lights but the occasional flash of an electric torch and the beam which shot out from the half-open door of some emptying billet. There were no sounds but the muffled thump of gloved hands sharply brought together, an occasional low exclamation, an occasional query in the darkness.

Lines of men stretched dimly along the side of the road. Mysterious shapes they were in the dim light of dawn, mysterious, indefinite. Many wore hoods and all wore greatcoats with full weight of equipment—the pack bulking upon the back, the rifle slung over the shoulder. Here and there a mounted orderly sat like a statue, his figure and horse outlined against the gradually lightening sky. Now and then a motor-

cyclist, crouching low and heavily burdened, rattled past over the *pavé*. Farther down the road long lines of transport could be discerned—tarpaulin-covered wagons, a machine-gun section, numerous artillery limbers.

The growing daylight revealed these things. So did the growing daylight reveal a curious stir and movement in those streets of silent houses. Now a sharp low word of command, now the champing of bits or the stamp of hoofs where the Brigadier's horses were awaiting him—always the erratic movement of troops which were trying by degrees to make their way out of the town. "Form fours! Right! By the right, quick march!"

The column moved slowly off, only to halt presently at the market-place, in front of the red-brick, artificial-looking French church, where there was a great congestion of transport and artillery. A long pause, while men stamped their feet and clapped their hands for warmth. Then on again along the main *pavé* road. Now the snowflakes had ceased, and the clear steely light of morning grew in the streets. Just as in London or Paris workmen and market-women were doubtless creeping along the pavements even at this hour, so here within a few miles of the guns which were soon to thunder in deadly earnest they were going to their work in peaked caps and blue blouses, the women's heads covered with coloured shawls. Many who would otherwise be in bed are at their windows or doors, curious and rather frightened at the tramping of so many feet.

Past the market-place and the brewery and the rows of insubstantial-looking red-brick houses, with their ornamented façades and childish front-doors and shutters—so across a bridge which spans a sluggish, dirty stream. Then the long column winds away to the right along a rough track, inches deep in mud, which leads across waste land in the rear of a factory. Here are many slag-heaps, acres of black soil and rubbish-heaps, as in the outskirts of Black-Country towns. Beyond them is an open space apparently designed by Nature as a military-exercise ground, for the expanse is unbroken, save by a fence of wire-netting which divides it in half. All around are tall chimneys of red-brick factories.

An entire brigade, including the extra Territorial Battalion, is assembled here; namely ourselves, the First Grenadiers, the Gordon Highlanders, and the Border Regiment. The men are drawn up in close column by Battalions for inspection by the Brigadier, who, with his Brigade-Major and Aide-de-Camp, trots down the lines. Orders rattle out in quick succession. "Stand easy! Pile arms! Packs off!" The men take off their equipment, lay it down, and sit upon their packs. The first refuge of the Tommy is his packet of cigarettes, the second his rations. Everywhere the rank-and-file lie about smoking and eating. The officers, meanwhile, grouped around their Battalion Commanders, are deeply engaged in studying and comparing maps. Here one observes an animated discussion, there a silent, painstaking inquisition, whilst yonder a lively group of subalterns is laughing and joking.

But for the hour and the surroundings one would say the assembly had a sort of garden-party air about it. And just as at some social affair an embarrassing silence often follows a burst of conversation, so now of a sudden everybody stops talking at once. All heads are turned the same way. Everybody listens. A low thunderous roll can be heard, punctured distantly by the bang-boom, boom-bang of innumerable guns. Somewhere beyond that low fringe of trees which tantalisingly borders the horizon the great bombardment of Neuve Chapelle has begun. Nothing can be seen, only that low furious mutter trembles along the horizon. Yet the conflagration spreads, and batteries nearer at hand begin to bang and boom, so that now and again one may glimpse a pale flash of fire against the grey morning sky.

We have been here nearly three hours and it is just after 7.30. The music has begun to the minute. Aeroplanes appear swiftly from all quarters, circling, whirring, droning in the sky.

Suddenly the familiar whistle of a big shell causes everybody to look up. Screaming through the air, it lands with a crash in a piece of waste land close to one of the tall chimneys. No harm is done, but are there more to follow? With a whole brigade massed in the open this is a serious question. Orders are immediately given to cut down the wire-netting which crosses and bisects the field, in order to give the troops a chance of scattering if a proper shelling begins. Those having wire-cutters speedily get to work, but nothing further eventuates.

On the contrary, there is a long and tedious and anxious wait. One munches chocolate and smokes cigarettes, feeling the while that these moments are big with fate for all of us here, and for all those thousands out there in ditches and trenches, along roads and behind hedges, who, like ourselves, are waiting to enter the battle which is now beginning. There is no news. Once the leading battalion moves off, only to come back again in a few minutes owing to the congestion of troops on the narrow roads in front. The regiments in the van have not moved out to attack. Sitting and waiting is the hardest thing of all in anxious times.

The guns mutter and roll, now close at hand, and now faint. It is a misty morning and the wind is blowing away from us; moreover, the country is dead flat, so that it is impossible to judge what may be occurring. All sorts of pictures rise to the mind: one can imagine the Indians, far away to the right, swarming out of their trenches, racing across the open fields, and jumping in with the bayonet quickly and silently—

"Packs on!"

"Get ready to move off!"

It is between 9 and 10 a.m. We march off in column of route and in rear of the Gordons and the Borders, the Grenadiers being behind. We are three miles from Estaires, and we march another three miles along narrow roads. Soon we come upon a dead straight *pavé* road stretching ahead between lines of poplars. The surface is all greasy after the rains, the mud mashed up by the feet of thousands. We march along this highway—it leads to Armentières—towards the sound

of the guns. Orderlies and pioneer officers on bicycles are very numerous.

At the cross-roads a red-capped Staff officer is sitting on horseback by the roadside. The message he gives to us as we pass is that the first two lines of German trenches have been taken with slight loss. A little later another "red-cap" rides down the column on a bicycle, giving the news that the first three lines have been captured. This cheers the soldiers immensely, and, after the manner of his kind, Private Thomas Atkins immediately begins romancing about the quarters he will occupy in Berlin next week; for he is ingenuously under the impression that success here means an early end to the war. Progress is somewhat slow, as the road is alive with troops and movement of all kinds. Orderlies on horseback and bicycles dash past, great grey Staff motor-cars hoot their way imperiously through the mass of men, transport-wagons and Red Cross motor-ambulances in various stages of mechanical difficulty help to block the road.

All the wayside cottages and farmhouses have their quota of troops, who are awaiting their turn to move up to the firing-line. Presently we wheel off into a labyrinth of lanes winding this way and that, and now we are within effective range of the German artillery. Already this morning one section of the road which runs parallel to our front has been liberally shelled, and, as a precaution therefore, we move in artillery formation across the fields. Safely on the road again, the thunder of the guns seems very close.

Right and left as we pass them—concealed as they

are behind hedgerows, in orchards and farmyards—howitzer batteries can be seen firing furiously: a flash, a boom, a recoil, and the little gunners—looking at a distance like so many busy insects—rush forward to re-charge their guns. There they are, with their shirt-sleeves rolled up and braces hanging loose, working like demons at the smoking breeches.

Now we turn aside into a sheltered meadow by a farmstead. Packs are taken off, arms piled, and the men sit down for a rest, since we are likely to remain here some time.

It is now a mild, sunny morning, and the chill 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, heedless of the shells which now and again scream over his head. The greatest battle in the world's history may be raging a mile and a half away, but that is no reason why he should not finish his spring ploughing. Near by a little stream eddies through reeds and water-plants, making tinkling music, and its sunny banks are agreeably warm. Skylarks rise and sing not less vigorously, not less merrily than on any quiet morning of an English spring-time, though their outpourings are drowned at times in the whirr and buzz of circling aeroplanes.

The first tangible indications of the battle are the wounded men of the Twenty-first Brigade who have captured the German front-line trenches. They now come trickling back along the road. Bloody heads and hands roughly bandaged for the most part; albeit, now and then a still figure on a stretcher with chalky, quiet

face tells a sadder story. And they are not in the least cheerful or boastful, as London daily newspapers delight to depict the wounded Tommy; but rather woebegone and very subdued.

"It was hell," they remark solemnly—for where is the sense of pretending that a common mortal feels heroic on coming out of a bloody holocaust?

And presently there comes a procession of German prisoners marching between French Territorials—fine great men of the Prussian Guard, very stolid and expressionless (although a few looked scared), with coarse, typically Teuton faces. There are smaller fry, too, Saxons and Alsatians, rather untidy and unsoldier-like, and looking with no great favour upon their comrades, the Prussians. Yet these Alsatians are the more intelligent, speaking excellent French, in which language they are heard to disparage their officers: they are townsmen, whilst the Prussians are ignorant peasants. One and all admit the completeness of the surprise, to which, indeed, their lack of accoutrements and general disorder bear testimony. Nor would it be far wrong to say that every man-jack of them is delighted to be a prisoner. In one place, I hear, they tried their rotten white-flag truce, but everywhere else were only too glad to surrender.

The morning wears on. Sitting on the sunny bank by the roadside, we watch the aeroplanes, French and English, ceaselessly circling overhead and journeying to and fro. They are like kites or hawks diligently observing their prey. Suddenly a whistling shriek rends the air. We look up instinctively, expecting a

16-in. shell. But no! We are petrified. We catch one glimpse of an aeroplane, already buckled and crumpling, diving to earth from about a thousand feet—then it is gone behind the trees. It is smashed to matchwood, and the two poor chaps in it, Irving and Morgan, are knocked about in a most awful way. They have been hit by a shell from one of our guns and have fallen like a stone.

Nor is it long before another aeroplane descends safely, but by a hair's breadth. The petrol tank has a hole large enough to put your arm in. All the way from La Bassée, where the German shrapnel had burst around it for half an hour on end, it had been leaking furiously. The two flying-men, looking particularly cheerful in their leathern garments and headgear, seemed to treat the whole matter as a joke.

All this time the batteries in the orchards, enclosures, and farmyards just behind had never ceased 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 each by their little crowd of attendant gunners.

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 at breakneck speed to replenish their batteries, nothing in particular happens. Only the farmhouse near by is made the mark of the German guns, and mild interest is aroused when a shell lands on the roof and sets the thatch afire. Just at this juncture, however,

word arrives to move down into the reserve trenches, newly dug. So far only an occasional German shell has come our way, but now we get a taste of them. Immediately behind us the 6-in. howitzer battery pops off regularly every three minutes, as on our right and left do field-gun batteries and behind them 9·2's. There are at least three hundred guns on our front of three miles. Every few minutes comes the scream of German lyddite or shrapnel, which bursts amid yellow and white smoke in the next field. I cannot describe the din and the crash and the smash. It is generally considered the greatest artillery show of the war, and I almost pity the wretched Germans. We are snugly ensconced in our trenches. Lying down at the bottom to escape the chilly wind, we get some sleep.

Meanwhile the men roam about the orchard gathering dry wood and sticks, with which they light their fires and crouch close to them. We, too, light a fire in the alcove of the trench and bivouac. Soon there is much crackling. The inestimable Smith, who has a genius for making tea, produces a tin cup and pannikin from his mess-tin, and presently we are quite comfortable sitting round waiting for the expected summons.

Towards evening the guns die away, and we stand to arms most of the night expecting to attack or be attacked at any moment. But no order comes. By the light of my electric torch I see Maurice Darby for a moment and we exchange greetings. Apart from the star rockets and searchlights and flares which light up the sky everything is quite quiet.

At 4 a.m. (March the 11th) orders come to move in half an hour.

As it is gradually getting light the Battalion advances. At a wayside farmhouse, which for the nonce is Brigade Headquarters, it 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 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 rail way 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 whizz 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 breastwork, occupied by the East Lancashire Regiment in reserve, 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. My half-company was wedged together on one side of this dangerous gap. It was a ticklish business crossing, and we began to lose men.

Thereupon 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. The anticipation is trying. We are ordered to advance in line of platoons. Right flank (my company) leading; Seymour on my right commanding one half-company, Warner in rear.

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. Number one company leads the way along the shell-stricken road. A lane branches off to the left; 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. Directly we get out in the open we come under very heavy rifle-fire and shrapnel. 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 me, 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!

We can only advance in short rushes, taking cover wherever possible, and it is impossible to keep the formation. We are about half a mile west of Neuve Chapelle, and the country is absolutely open, only slight depressions here and there.

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, men following 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 cartridges, pistols, and weapons of all kinds. The tradition of blood and iron has found its fitting consummation in this 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 Grenadier 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 one hundred and fifty yards away, is a group of buildings surmounted by a tall, red-brick chimney—a landmark in all that countryside—known as the Moulin du Piétre. 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 and lie there for three solid hours under a hell fire that seems to come from every side but one. Shrapnel bursts as regularly as clockwork within twenty or thirty yards and scatters earth over one every time.

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 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 and rejoin the Grenadiers who are ahead. We show our heads and the bullets begin to fly as thick as hail.

I had hardly got to my feet and was jumping over a ditch when I was hit in the left leg and took an unceremonious toss down the bank. It hurt a bit for a time, but Warner and Seymour were moving up with me, so there was no confusion among the men. Five minutes later Seymour, as I shortly afterwards learned, got a shrapnel bullet through the head and collapsed, but by then our tide had passed on, out of my sight. My thigh hurt me in such a way that I could not move for at least two hours. Nor, indeed, dared I do so. For in the mill and its group of adjacent buildings only that bare hundred and fifty yards away the enemy still swarmed.

So I lay on my face motionless, listening to the sounds of the battle. They were so numerous that I cannot enumerate them all. It was the shrapnel which caused the greatest dread. How narrowly it whizzed overhead, to burst about thirty yards behind with a deafening bang and a flash of fire followed by the sing-sing of many bullets which buried themselves in the ground. Surely none could escape! The whole sky was dotted with the black smoke of high explosives and the yellow puffs of lyddite, each with its flash of flame. The air stank of powder and the fumes of sulphur.

More terrible—not to be forgotten—were the salvoes of the German batteries close in front, which fired almost together every three minutes. Boom-boom-boom-boom—they threatened to burst the brain, they caused a racking headache, these terrible tornadoes of sound. The machine-gun and the rifle-fire were as nothing after these. The rat-tat-tat, the clack-clack, the ping-ping sent their messages well overhead to the trenches behind and the still-advancing troops. Much other noise came to puzzle the ears, to weary the brain: the faint shouting of men, the clink-clink of the entrenching-tools as soldiers dug themselves in, the great hollow explosions which resounded afar off amid the ruins of Aubers and Neuve Chapelle.

And the groans, the moans, the crying of those who lay around!

I started to crawl back. The dressing-station was at least a mile away, but things seemed quieter. I crawled over the ground ever so slowly, for those riflemen in the mill were doubtless watching. The ploughed field seemed interminable—I could not see the breastwork on the other side, and the only landmarks were the dead and wounded men who lay at intervals along the direction of advance. Now the supports had ceased to come up. Yet suddenly, as happens in modern fighting, the combatants took inspiration, the battle burst forth afresh. One above another common shells and shrapnel exploded above and beside me, earth fell about my ears, bullets tingled past them. Flash after flash, as of lightning, dazzled my eyes. I was barely half-way across. Creeping into a deep

shell-hole, I flattened my face. Close behind the German howitzer double-battery boomed shatteringly. Close ahead the firing of our own guns was so swift, so furious, as to be one continuous roar. Also the rifle-fire freshened along the whole front—it was as though some great dry wood-pile had been newly kindled. The air sang songs with the passage of the shells, the earth trembled under the detonation of such huge guns as had never been used before—shriek and roar, boom and bang and crackle.

For half an hour I lay there, in company with a dead man, thinking the end of all things had come.

But like some gust of human passion the holocaust spent itself at last. And I, leaving my Burberry, crawled on among the shell-pits and the relics of the soldiery, the rifles, the caps, and the helmets, the emptyings of pockets, the equipment and the haver-sacks, the wasted rounds of ammunition, the revolvers, and the scraps of food. Past many an upturned waxen face and shreds of men where shells had done their work—and blood. A head showed itself above the rim of a shell-hole. "Stop, sir," it said; "give me your pack. I'll keep it for you. You'll never carry it all the way." I did not like the face or the voice. I had heard strange tales. There was a marked map in my pack. I crawled on.

And found Grant presently, laying on his back. Poor Grant—he, so weathered and tough, so used to fighting, so sure with the rifle, solid and stolid, so able as sniper or scout! A bullet through the chest had left him in agony. And close at hand the unknown doctor

from the Scots Fusiliers, who, without summons, had doubled across the shell-swept field to tend our wounded only himself to be shot through the body as he knelt beside them.

At last the friendly wall of sandbags is in sight, behind which our supports are sheltering. A deep and broad ditch or, rather, small stream of filthy water runs in front of this. Only at one place is it crossed by a single plank, all slippery, all slithery. Astride it, almost at right angles, blocking the way, lies the body of an English soldier. I make more than one attempt to cross. I slide to this side and that, for the plank is very narrow. My situation is precarious and painful, with the stinking muddy water beneath and the board bending under my weight. And there is the obstacle at the end. But at the moment some brawny lad extends a hand from behind the breastwork and drags me within its shelter by main force. I find three officers of the Devon regiment bunched up together under the parapet. After a rest to recover breath, I pull myself along the line of sandbags, through the mud, which in places is inches deep. Wounded men lie at intervals propped against the breastwork, some unconscious, some nursing heads or limbs, while a couple of doctors and stretcher-bearers are busily engaged attending to them as quickly as may be.

I leave the breastwork behind, having been directed towards the dressing-station, and with frequent pauses for breath cross another field.

I find myself in an orchard.

It is very quiet here, save for the occasional shells

which whistle overhead. Actually I can hear birds—finches, no doubt, and linnets—twittering in the apple-trees, which are planted very close together, after the French fashion, so that a kind of twilight reigns beneath. Yet the lengthening rays of the afternoon sun have found their way in here; they fall in rich golden pools of light upon the green grass.

I rest here. I am all alone. Down the middle of the orchard runs a long straight trench, unscathed, untouched. Around it in serried ranks lies a full battalion of infantry—asleep.

So close to the firing-line! Mystified, yet doubting, I creep round the trench towards the road.

A pool of golden sunshine falls direct upon one of the sleeping figures which lies rather apart, the face upturned, one arm extended—a typically Teuton face. The uniform is grey, the facings red, the belt and pouches and the boots black. The expression and attitude of the young man are peaceful and calm, if a little unnatural. Not a quiver, not a sound.

I glance at the other figures as I creep by. They, too, are very peaceful, very quiet, very happy. Nearly all are Englishmen and, looking at them, I realise that I am in the presence of a great fraternity of soldiers. Nothing shall disturb their rest again: neither shells, nor bullets, nor the call of duty.

In the sunny meadow beyond, a clergyman and two helpers have begun their work of burying the dead.

A dry ditch bordered these orchards where such

desperate fighting had taken place on the previous day. Lurking in this ditch I found two Scots Guard stretcher-bearers apparently none too keen to enter the fray. On the other side of it ran the by-road which led direct to the dressing-station. I was now very tired, and it seemed suitable that the two men should do their bit of work. Between the three of us we applied a couple of field dressings.

I could not have presented a very elegant appearance on this occasion—soaked to the skin with the brackish water of the foul ditches, clothes caked with mud and stained yellow up one side, and putties torn to shreds. Part of my equipment I had discarded at various points; the remainder was unrecognisable under layers of mud.

So presently my ten stone ten was hoisted up by the two stretcher-bearers and borne along the shell-stricken road. All this section to the dressing-station—about a quarter of a mile—had been the scene of heavy fighting the day before. It was a picture that in its stark reality appeared strange and awe-inspiring. Ammunition wagons, rushing up the road, had been caught by artillery fire and overturned or smashed. There they lay, half on the road, half off it. Dead horses blocked the ditch alongside, their legs protruding stiffly erect, their bodies half buried in mud and water, and all around a great litter of tackle and equipment.

The road itself was pitted and furrowed, and upon its surface were little drops and trails of blood where the wounded had been carried past. The milestones

along this *via dolorosa* were the bodies of men who had fallen and died—some in the middle of the fairway and others just beside it, resting on the grass. In the fields and the orchards on either hand the attack had swayed to and fro, and these, too, were littered with relics. No attempt had been made to clear them away, for bullets still whistled past and shells screamed, though harmlessly, overhead.

I observed these things as I was borne along on the stretcher, the bearers of which laid it down in the road now and again to change hands or to rest. A constant procession of wounded passed by. Here and there detachments of troops or Red Cross men were awaiting orders by the roadside.

We came presently to the dressing-station—a ruined farm, whose bright red walls stood out stark and roofless. Here was a busy scene indeed. The place swarmed with activity, the air was alive with the purring sound of motors. Apart from the stream of wounded, on foot and on stretchers, constantly coming in—three-quarters of whom seemed to be hit in the head—doctors and Red Cross orderlies rushed to and fro, and in the open space where the by-road joined the main highway there stood groups of Staff officers, medical officers, motor-cyclist orderlies, and messengers. Two motor ambulances were ready to start off immediately, and in one of these my stretcher was placed.

It did not wait long. Three other stretchers were lifted in, one resting on the top tier beside my own, the others beneath us. The occupants of the ambulance

are a sergeant, who moans restlessly, and a bucolic, bloodthirsty fellow, who loudly proclaims that he has been hit three times and has "done in" as many Germans. A slightly wounded comrade has accompanied him down to the ambulance, and now wishes him a safe journey home and a good holiday. Nor does this precious rascal cease to chatter volubly (to himself) as we rattle along, voicing his own peculiar opinion about the progress of the battle; and when the suffering sergeant presently tells him to "shut his row," the only retort is a volley of amiable blasphemy.

It is a ridiculous situation.

The fourth member of the party is a youthful subaltern in the Irish Rifles, who lies beside me, very still and quiet. His face is white as marble, his eyes are wide open; he seems to be half-conscious. Occasionally he moved his lips, and once clasps the roof-joist with his pallid hand, which presently falls limp across my chest. He does not move again, and when they lift him out he is dead.

The flap of the ambulance is left open, so that I am able to observe many things that happen on the rapidly receding road to the field hospital. There is great activity—Red Cross motors and big grey Staff cars rushing past, orderlies on bicycles and on horseback, Staff officers cantering along and numerous parties of soldiers on one mission or another. All the ruins of farmhouses by the roadside are occupied by troops.

We have not travelled far before we pass batches of German prisoners between armed guards, trudging stolidly along in file, their grey uniforms, little round

caps, and unkempt faces suggesting a party of convicts. Weedy and uneven they are for the most part, and of no account compared with the fine men of the Prussian Guard whom I had seen prisoners just before I entered the battle.

Now we rattle through the streets of Estaires, whence a couple of days ago the Battalion had marched out at full strength. Then, leaving behind the noise of the market-place, we pass under an arch into a quiet courtyard. I ask the name of the place. It is a school for young priests. I glance once more at the composed face of him for whom there is to be no journey home, and am carried across the courtyard to a surgical room. Here a new dressing is applied, and at the same time I am inoculated against tetanus. My label for England is affixed, and I am taken to another room, a large, cool place, where two figures are already lying. One is a Scotch colonel, wounded in two places by shrapnel; the other, the same young doctor of the Scots Fusiliers whom I had found lying in the open that morning, having been shot while attending some of my own wounded.

An amiable attendant in a white suit immediately brings a cup of hot soup, relieves me of my pack and such equipment as remains on me, together with a good deal of mud, and produces a very welcome cigarette. Presently one of the priests appears—a grave man with an austere, sallow face, dressed in a rusty black cassock—and inquires of each whether he belongs to the Roman Catholic Church. Obtaining little satisfaction from anybody, he shuffles out, and

we are left alone on our stretchers with our pains and our thoughts.

The curious silence of the place after the unspeakable din and confusion of the struggle round the mill is one of the strangest reactions imaginable. Not a sound but the occasional echo of a footstep down the cool stone passages comes to disturb our rest for many hours. Only the poor doctor moaned quietly to himself in his darkened corner.

Once an aeroplane sailed across the space of blue sky which could be seen through the open window, and its droning hum drifted in on the still air. Outside, there was a glimpse of a plane tree and a flower-garden, and a red brick wall, upon which, as afternoon passed into evening, the setting sun cast its lengthening shadows. I thought—by way of contrast—of the years and years of sunlit peace which must have lingered in this quiet place and of all the unsophisticated, retiring men who had learnt their lifelong lessons there.

Presently it was quite dark, and we were carried out one by one to the motor-ambulance, which travelled swiftly to the clearing hospital at Merville nine miles away.

It is five days since the battle, and after thirty-six hours at the field clearing hospital at Merville I was removed to Number Two Red Cross Hospital, Rouen, where I now am. Alas! my luck is dead out. It appears although I was labelled for England, I am not

to be allowed home. The disappointment is the more galling because originally it was settled by the people here that I should return by the first convoy from Havre, and the doctor, who had strongly recommended it, told me so: I was only to stay a day or two. Then yesterday some new regulation came out, and a M.C. colonel came round and decreed that I should remain. I believe it is the same with a good many others. And if I had any influence here I could get home at once!

We are well looked after and I have a room to myself which is pleasant, also a very nice nurse and doctor, though otherwise one never sees a soul. I believe I have to undergo a very slight operation to-morrow, and am pretty sure I shan't be fit for the front for a month. I got the old bullet bang through the calf of my left leg; it missed the bone by a bare inch and drilled two neat holes, one on either side of my leg. It seems extraordinary that although chilled to the bone after struggling through streams and ditches chin-deep in poisonous water, still I suffer no after effects from my crawl. I consider myself very lucky to get off as cheaply as I have. I am afraid my company lost heavily, but Seymour, who got a shrapnel bullet through the head, is doing well, I learn. Warner too, when I last saw him, was all right. But Maurice Darby is killed. I know nothing about the rest who were behind us. We certainly had the hottest corner. It is rather difficult attempting to scribble in even a diary in bed, as I have to keep my leg straight, but it is so nice to be quiet again after all the noise and confusion.

To my great amusement, I see that the Paris *Daily Mail* have got me as a casualty with the following supplementary notice in a conspicuous position:— "Second Lieut. Ewart of the Scots Guards is among the list of casualties given out last night. The wounded officer is a son of Mr. Herbert and Lady Mary Ewart of 8, West Eaton Place, London, and is a cousin of the present Lord Arran." Rather droll!

It does seem hard to stay here when London is only twelve hours away.

Two days more have gone, and I am still here in Rouen and no nearer getting home. But I yet have hopes that I may do so. The doctor says he thinks he can manage it in a day or two, and I don't think he would raise my hopes without good reason. If I had had a dog's luck I should have been there by now.

I had my little operation done the day before yesterday. It hurt a bit afterwards, but I feel all right now except, of course, that I cannot move much. If only I was sure of going home, how happy I should be!

I see from the papers that poor Teddy Hulse was killed. I last saw him urging on his company as we left the trenches.

As the Head Surgeon seems determined upon it and

as I have been here a week, I really do think now they are going to send me home—it's over ten days since I was wounded. With luck I may go with the next convoy, but of course I cannot guess with the slightest certainty. It would be absurd if they did not, as I cannot be fit for hard work for a few weeks. My leg is decidedly groggy, though not painful, and my foot is crocked up owing mainly to marching on *pavé* roads. I do not look forward to loafing about here in Rouen, where there is nothing to do. These last few days have been very fine and sunny, and I have got out on to the verandah in a wheeled *chaise*, which was amusing. Here are to be found all the convalescent officers walking about and making conversation to the nurses. The triflings and badinage that go forward! Such jokes and sallies on the part of the young men—one never has heard! The only other alternative is Neuve Chapelle. With the older officers this is a sort of disease. The stories they tell are something shocking. They all try to cap each other with their yarns, until a poor devil is nowhere at all unless he has killed one hundred and fifty Germans with the butt-end of an entrenching-tool. One gets rather sick even of Neuve Chapelle.

I am beginning to wonder what has happened to my kit. I have absolutely nothing here except the uniform I was wearing when hit. My breeches had to be slit up the side and my tunic is a shocking sight, but I suppose it doesn't matter much. Only I hope I shall see my equipment and kit-sack again some day. I shall never see my pack (I relinquished that to fate

at Estaires with my marked map), Burberry, or rug. In all probability this last is covering some mouldy old German at this moment.

And I—at this moment? Well, I shall enjoy a *good* dinner!

CHAPTER IV

CHRISTMAS 1915

I only hold disjunct impressions relating to my six months in England, impressions of days at Princess Beatrice's Hospital in Hill Street, at the Portals in Hampshire, at Broadleas, my cousin Margaret's house near Devizes, and of London and light service at Wellington Barracks. And here I am back in France again and my mind is focussed on realer things.

It is Tuesday, October 26th, 1915, and I have just got to Havre after quite a good journey. The sea was not rough, although there was a slight swell. It was an infinitely better journey than that memorable one of February. From what I can see I am not likely to stay here at Honfleur long before going up to the Second Battalion, for there is almost an over-congestion of officers and men. Nevertheless, the base camp is greatly improved since I was last here. I see a good deal of one, Fuller Maitland, who is a very pleasant fellow.

After having been here three days I am going up the line on the forty-eight-hour cattle-truck trip this evening to join the Battalion in rest billets—not with my own men, but in charge of Grenadiers and Irish Guards. I expect to be with the Battalion by Sunday morning. Except for leaving Fuller Maitland behind, I am not sorry. Honfleur soon proves itself to be a pretty rotten place to be at.

The weather has been quite fine since this morning, but yesterday was most unpleasant, although in the evening I went to Havre with several people in the Brigade to allay the misery. We dined at a strange sort of *café* and afterwards went to a music-hall, which was rather amusing but strangely different from Lena Ashwell's performance eight months ago. I'm off for a bath before starting.

In the last week I have had little to record. We are still in rest billets at Cantrainne with very little to do except go on an occasional route-march. I am keeping very fit, and the weather remains fine if rather cold. This morning there was a hard frost and brilliant sunshine.

We move off somewhere, I believe, three days hence (*i.e.* next Tuesday night, November 9th), and shall doubtless be in the trenches by the end of next week for a time. After that our programme is more or less uncertain, but it undoubtedly includes a lot of shifting about, and there are rumours of our going to a place a very long way from here—in fact, in a different part of the country. My Company Commander returned from leave to-day. He seems very decent—although different from Warner. His name is Arkwright, and he is a great hunting man—an M.F.H., I believe. A number of officers also arrived last night, some going up to the First Battalion, but I have heard nothing of Fuller Maitland. I don't know where he is or what he is doing, but I hope he comes to this Battalion soon. My servant

from Wellington Barracks, Whorley, who left me at the base, since his old master wanted him, I have just replaced with an excellent fellow called Malcolm.

Knollys, who came out with me this time, has just arrived here from the Base. Alas! Fuller Maitland, he tells me, has gone away down the line with a digging battalion. As I suspected yesterday, we *are* moving from here on Tuesday, to a place about eight miles away, and will be in the trenches by the end of the week.

Thursday, November 11th. Four days since I last entered anything! I have been very busy. Our ten-mile march on Tuesday brought us to these billets which are about a mile from Merville (where I was after Neuve Chapelle) and we are close by the First Battalion. Our visit to the trenches is set for three days hence, for Sunday, and we are likely to be under fire for the next month or six weeks at least. I cannot say that I look forward to it, but I hope that the trenches are respectable. J. A. Stirling has succeeded Arkwright as my Company Commander, and at present we have a very strong Battalion, but I expect they will soon start going sick. Arkwright has gone home with a nervous breakdown. He was a nice chap and a good soldier.

My remark of a week ago about going sick seems to have been prophetic, for I am in the Casualty Clearing

Hospital, Merville, at the moment, having been taken queer on coming out after a brief spell in the trenches. I quite enjoyed myself there, having a heart-to-heart talk with the Germans. But on leaving felt very ill indeed. Now I feel better. I am not sure what the disease is, but the doctor says it may be jaundice. If not, I shall probably be back with the Battalion in a week or two.

I have been here in hospital for nearly a week, but go back to the Battalion five days hence on Wednesday, November 26th. I am feeling quite all right, but the doctor thinks I had better be on the safe side. It is certainly not exciting here, but nevertheless is preferable to the trenches. The weather is lovely, but very cold. People are constantly coming in and out. I have an Irish Guards officer with me, and yesterday I went out with him to luncheon in the local inn, which is reckoned a great dissipation.

From the crowded streets and from talk it seems that the whole Division is billeted around.

I have been meaning to record something ever since I rejoined the Battalion a week ago to-day, but somehow it has been *très difficile*. Yesterday, December 1st, I went over to a neighbouring town and had a good talk with an assembly of officers. There were a good many whom I knew there, including the Prince of Wales, who remembered me from Wellington Barracks. Before that there was a great battalion concert one night and a

dinner-party. The Brigadier came and they had the Grenadiers' band. Several people got tight. It was a good concert. And now we are packing up to go into the trenches to-night for a twelve-day stay, which is not a very cheerful prospect, though the weather keeps fine and it is comparatively warm for December. It seems I must continue to *mean* to write.

We have just finished our twelve days in the trenches, thank God! and return to rest billets for six days to-morrow—a nine-mile march.

Our time has been very quiet so far as fighting went, though the Germans shelled us three or four times and our artillery continually strafed. Yesterday afternoon they put a 4-in. shell just behind my new dug-out and very nearly blew up the officers' kits which were lying there all packed up. I write *new* dug-out because about a week ago, a dug-out having fallen on some Welsh Guards, killing one and wounding three, the lot were condemned, among them my old one; and for a time I rested—for sleep was impossible—under a bit of corrugated iron in the fire-trench which I shared with a sergeant and a private. In fact, I have had a fairly hard time; what between Lonely Post, the trenches with their rats and mice worse than ever, and a five-hour patrol at night.

Lonely Post was a beastly place and a responsible one, as I was there all by myself. It was in a depressing part of the line on the borders of the battlefield of Neuve Chapelle. Some of the dead men of the Rifle Brigade still lay out in front, while behind,

to cheer me up, there was a perfect forest of little mud graves and crosses, mostly very rough, and marked "In Memory of a British Soldier, R.I.P." In the distance I could see approximately the place where Seymour and I got wounded and poor Teddy Hulse was killed.

A night or two ago a party of the Fourth Grenadiers, who were next to us, made a raid on the German trenches. We were all on the *qui vive*, not knowing what might happen. Under cover of darkness they crept across No Man's Land, through the German wire, and up to the parapet. At a given time our guns opened fire and the Grenadiers rushed the German trench, scuppered the machine-gunners and spiked their gun. At the same time another lot ran along the German trench bombing every dug-out and bayoneting every German they met. On the blowing of a whistle they all jumped back over the parapet and raced back to our lines, having had one officer slightly wounded. It was a smart job. I watched from our parapet, and it was like a thing in a play, although of course I could not see all that was actually happening. The sky behind was lit up by the flashes of the guns, and presently there was a furious burst of rifle-fire from the German trenches, followed by the flash and boom of their guns from the Aubers Ridge and the flickering glare of innumerable star-lights and rockets which the Bosches sent up. Then all was dead still and dark, as if the curtain had been rung down.

I have never seen a better show in a small way. It lasted about a quarter of an hour, and a good many Germans must have been killed.

Last night, December 12th, we had some Welsh Fusiliers attached for instruction, and it was *très drôle* when they came into the trenches for the first time. They ducked and jumped about, apparently oblivious of the fact that there was a four-foot breastwork between them and the Germans.

To-day a Bosche aeroplane came over and it was shot at ineffectually. The whole affair rather reminded me of the London Zeppelin raids.

We are going back to the trenches to-night, December 20th, after a week in billets, and are rather busy putting things straight. We are going to be in the forts just behind the front line. I have had quite a nice time resting, with nothing much to do except read and go for long walks. I have just finished reading Compton Mackenzie's *Carnival* and am about to begin F. S. Oliver's *Ordeal by Battle*, which I will take with me. I wish there were more of Compton Mackenzie's books here.

It is difficult to realise that Christmas is but five days off.

Nothing exciting is happening except the usual strafing. I have just received an early Christmas parcel of food and a packet containing tobacco, pipes, chocolate, a pound cake, bedroom slippers, and a knitted scarf. I am going to distribute the smoking paraphernalia among the N.C.O.'s of my platoon.

I am writing from a fort about three-quarters of a

mile behind the front line. We go forward again to-morrow night. The trenches on Christmas Eve!

It is Christmas morning. As I gaze over the parapet on the drab landscape before me every feature, every rise or fall in the ground, every knoll, every hideous skeleton of shattered buildings, almost every tree, has its story, so consecrated for ever to the memory of the English race is the Aubers Ridge opposite—an inconsiderable, scarcely noticeable rise in the ground. So are the skeleton trees, the hedgerows and fields that fringe its summit, that climb its slope. So are the bright red and dark red roofs of buildings that cluster half-way up the slope and the tall factory chimney in their midst, that of Aubers itself. In the foreground is a village absolutely shattered. It is scarcely possible to see the brown roofs, the stark walls, and vari-coloured ruins, amid the trees. Then comes the church—a ghostly shell, dominating the flat scene. And behind the trenches is a row of tall elms and poplars, looking monstrous in the mist, these marking the line of a road. Immediately in front of them is a big farmstead with a courtyard and a square little home-field—an untidy heap of red bricks amid four naked walls.

Between the irregular lines of the trenches, with their jumbled white sandbags and untidy earth parapets, is a stream marked by a line of twisted brown willows bent to every conceivable grotesque shape. The stream runs down the middle of No Man's Land, which is itself a place of coarse grasses hiding little mouldering heaps

of grey and khaki—the slain of Festubert, of Neuve Chapelle and late September (heaps of old clothes or fallen scarecrows, they look like), of knobs and unexpected pits, of earthy holes and water-logged ditches. And here our men meet the Germans.

So soon as it grows light this morning, we start peeping at each other over the top of the parapet . . . calling across to each other. And presently, at about 7.50, a German stands up openly on the parapet and waves his arms. He is followed by two in field-grey overcoats and pill-box caps. Then they come out all down the line, stand up on the parapet, wave, shout, and finally swarm forth from their trenches on either side.

A British sergeant is shot dead almost at the outset, as he stands on the parapet. But this makes no difference. It must be an accident. The supreme craving of humanity, the irresistible, spontaneous impulse born of a common faith and a common fear, fully triumph.

And so the grey and khaki figures surge towards each other as one man. The movement has started on the right. It spreads like contagion. Only we officers, the sentries, and a few non-commissioned officers remain in our trench. The men meet at the willow-lined stream; they even cross it and mingle together in a haphazard throng. They talk and gesticulate, and shake hands over and over again. They pat each other on the shoulder and laugh like schoolboys, and leap across the little stream for fun. And when an Englishman falls in and a Bosche helps him out there is a shout of laughter that echoes back to the trenches. The

Germans exchange cigars and pieces of sausages, and *sauerkraut* and concentrated coffee for cigarettes, and bully-beef and ration-biscuits and tobacco. They express mutual admiration by pointing and signs. It is our leather waistcoats and trench-coats that attract their attention; it is their trench-overalls, made of coarse canvas, that attract ours. We shout "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. Even confidences are exchanged in broken English.

"When's the war going to end?"

"After the Spring offensive."

"Yes—after the Spring offensive."

"What sort of trenches have you?"

"Rotten! Knee deep in mud and water. Not fit for pigs."

"Aren't you sick of the war? We are!"

"Not a bit."

And the information is even vouchsafed that our Christmas Eve bombardment had caused the Germans a lot of casualties.

So for ten brief—all too brief—minutes there is peace and goodwill among the trenches on Christmas Day.

Then from the trenches of the Ninety-fifth Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment two officers in black accoutrements and shiny field-boots come out, wishing to take photographs of our Tommies, and offering them cigars. Their request is refused, and presently they say:

"You will have five minutes to get back to your trenches before our artillery will open fire."

And it does. And two or three men are wounded almost at once. But for twenty-four hours not a shot is fired on either side. A common brotherhood of suffering—or is it an act of God, or just human curiosity?—has united Englishman and Bavarian in fraternity on the battlefield this grey Christmas morning which no one on either side who has taken part in this quaint scene will ever forget.

CHAPTER V

INTO THE SALIENT

It is January 1st, 1916, and for winter the weather is extraordinarily mild and agreeable. We celebrated the New Year last night in a simple way. Stirling went out to dinner, but Knollys and I had a Grenadier and a stray artillery officer in for a meal. The servants and orderlies made a sing-song and we made some whiskey punch.

To-morrow night the men are going to have a great New Year's dinner in rest billets in Merville, and so are some officers with, I believe, a lot of generals—the "blokes," as the men call them. The Germans have livened up here lately and have shelled us mildly several times without doing any damage. My company has been garrisoning the forts just behind the line—a rotten job, as we don't get to our reserve billets when the others do. As for companionship, we are reduced to only three officers.

One piece of important intelligence gleaned is that we are really moving off down South very soon—in fact, it is definitely settled, although the exact date is not fixed. We are following Lord Cavan to his new command. I fear that my leave is farther off than ever, since, owing to the fraternisation incident a week ago, all leave in the regiment is stopped indefinitely. It is rotten luck, as I am qualified for it and in fact am, I believe, next subaltern on the list. I fear, too, that when

leave is resumed all the senior officers will make a dash for it. However, I must hope for the best.

Various Army Battalions of Kitchener's have been attached to us lately for instruction, and the extra work they make is a bit of a nuisance. They belong to the newly-arrived Welsh Division.

I see a good deal of the Prince of Wales in this sector. He joined Stirling and myself on the march the other day, riding a bicycle, and he often dines at Headquarters.

I hope we shall have only one more turn of twelve days in trenches before coming out for a long rest.

Three weeks and more since I last entered anything! Well, a brief spell of English leave has intervened. Now I am back again with the Battalion after my journey. I stayed one night at Boulogne at a rotten hotel and left after luncheon the next day. I had quite a comfortable journey up the line with the Welsh Guards' Quartermaster, and he lent me a horse on which I rode out, and I stayed the night with him. I walked down to the trenches at cockcrow the next morning. Stirling was there when I arrived, but Knollys had just left on his leave.

I only had to spend one night in the trenches before we came into reserve billets here last night. The Germans are much more active. Yesterday they put a big shell into one of the forts and we had three men killed and ten wounded. A few minutes ago they put six big shells

into the middle of the village here, and if I can judge by the excitement outside, they seem to have done a lot of damage.

To-morrow we march back for six days' rest. The great move has now been put off a month and we are going back to the trenches, which is rather sickening, as the idea has always been that we were to rest after January 26th, and that eagerly awaited date is now only two days ahead.

In the last fortnight a good deal has happened. I am now with the Seventh (Guards) Entrenching Battalion down on the Somme, and we are stationed in a camp in a wood. I came straight out of the trenches and along the line in a luggage van and also on a motor-lorry. This place is well within shelling range, and the Germans seem to do a good bit of bombarding, but they never actually put any shells in here, and I feel a lot safer than at our last Reserve billets. However, it is a good deal less comfortable, as we live under canvas with no sort of firing or way of getting hot water.

This Battalion is a composite one of Grenadiers, Scots Guards, Coldstream, Irish, and Welsh. There are about six Scots Guards officers, but ones I hardly know, mostly quite late-joined. The work consists of repairing the trenches and digging a new line just behind. It is not very interesting, but then we don't overwork!

The Second Battalion, I hear, is just going away back for a month's rest and after that, I believe, they go

North to Ypres, but not to the Salient. It is hard to tell, for the most extraordinary rumours seem to get about. Recently the Division has not been in action at all.

The weather all the week since Sunday, when I last entered anything, has been simply foul—bitter cold wind and sheets of rain coupled with oceans of mud. Living in tents it has been frightful. Even the officers' mess here consists of a wooden hut. However, I like this place all right, as the men here are a very decent lot and the atmosphere is pleasant.

I have a company of my own—two hundred and twenty men—and they are all Scots Guards. I have also four very nice subalterns.

The Germans shell the roads all round, but miss the camp, not suspecting this wood.

The life is not a bad one, although I anticipate it will become rather monotonous after a time. I wish I could expect leave soon, but at the earliest I could not get any for two months yet.

I have been ill and in hospital. It seems my pleasant life here is not destined to continue, as I am to be recalled to the Second Battalion, since they want a full complement when going North to Ypres. However, the C.O. and the doctor are dead against my going to them for at least a fortnight.

Work is very hard here now, and this morning I

paraded with the Company shortly after seven o'clock, and trekked seven miles in wagons to the Reserve Line, worked on a light railway until four in the afternoon, and did not get back to the camp until nearly five. I am now the only Scots Guards officer here.

The weather fortunately since my return from hospital has much improved, and this camp is pretty now in the Spring. Nightingales abound and sing at night.

I am to report to the Guards Division five days hence, on Monday next, May 15th, and I depart from here the day before. I have had a little leave since going sick, and in the interim a great deal seems to have happened. My Company has been in and out of the line now for two months. They went in to the south of the Potijze Road on the evening of March 16th, and on April 19th were in their first serious engagement. Yesterday, May 9th, Brigadier (Heyworth) got sniped, and we are due at his funeral at Brandhoek.

In some ways I shall be sorry to leave here; in others not. The country is very pleasant, but the hours of work are very, very long and terribly monotonous. The Bosche keeps quiet, but on our side there is evidently something impending before long. The weather has been rotten, but is now better, though still cold.

I have only been here resting with the Second Battalion (who had just come out of the trenches) four days,

but that has been quite long enough to see what sort of a place this is. The first night the Bosches made an aeroplane raid and dropped bombs all round the camp. The second night they repeated the performance. The third night there was a gas alarm from the front line and we all stood to arms. Shelling all day and Bosche aeroplanes constantly over; ours have no chance. At the present moment the Germans are shelling heavily a road about three hundred yards away.

This camp is in the middle of a beautiful wood and the weather is lovely and one can sit out of doors and read.

To-night, May 19th, we go into the Salient for a week to work. The Division is really coming out altogether for a month, but one Battalion in each Brigade has got to do an extra week's work, and by bad luck this takes us. Stirling will be commanding our Company, and Knollys will be with us. The country here is much prettier than I expected from what I heard of it on the Somme, but I believe that Ypres itself and the Salient are unholy Hell, especially in the last few days since the Division marched out here.

When this slow summer dusk begins to deepen, we can begin to stir in the trenches. We have been here now nearly a week, and the procedure is always the same. All day long the men have slept or dozed in the warm sunshine, lain in their dug-outs—little holes in the parados—or nodded on the fire-step in a sultry atmosphere of buzzing bluebottles and occasional shots

from snipers' rifles. For here one cannot move or walk about by day, the sniping (from dominating positions) is too keen. But when the dusk deepens into that pearly-blue light which for a man moving is the most invisible, long files of men start off to join us and the sound of tramping feet is heard on the roads.

Night by night—and all night long—those files of ghostly figures move along the roads towards us. Ration-parties, carrying-parties, parties with working material, engineers, generals and officers of inspection rank, parties with pick and shovel, and many other sorts of workers move along these roads. A little later, and we see them, patiently bending under their loads, silhouetted against the rising moon. Some of the carriers are so strangely silent they seem like ghosts of men tramping across the plain, only their feet go pit-patter, pit-patter, when they are quite near; these are wearing long thigh-boots with rubber soles.

And they have to hurry. For the midsummer night is short, and between the grey twilight and the rosy dawn there is but a space of four hours. God help him who is caught by the sunshine in an open place!

And with the deepening dusk a new life begins with us in the trenches. The buzz of bluebottles and the crack of the sniper's rifle give place to the chatter of machine-guns and the slow glare of the star-lights. Shadow and mystery creep in where was the stark nakedness of shell-holes, broken trees, and lines of battered sandbags.

To take one instance of this life, that of my working-party. Slowly, with many exclamations, pauses, and

much hard swearing, it now moves along the crowded trench, then out into the sap. There is a little narrow ridge between the parapet of the sap and a chain of enormous shell-holes. In these the water glistens. The men are silent now that they are out in the middle of No Man's Land scarcely seventy yards from the German trench. Only when one of them trips over the frequent loose strands of wire or stumbles into a shell-hole do I hear a scuffle, followed by a muttered curse.

It is a question of digging a new trench. Get them lined out quickly, quietly, three yards apart; let each man work his hardest to dig himself in. They know it too, and put their backs into the task. It is surprising how quickly they get into the ground considering the heavy, spongy state of all this water-logged country. Quickly they throw up the earth in front, which gives a feeling of protection, even if a somewhat illusory one. Nor can the task be considered in any way pleasant. A peculiar and horrible stench clings to the ground, thicker and more fœtid in some places than in others, but all-pervading. It is the sickly stench of dead bodies. Strange and sometimes fearsome things are dug out of the ground. All drab and muddy, yielding and soft, so that you could not recognise it as a human thing was the body of a German. There was no head, only the trunk. Someone cuts off two of his buttons as a memento, another finds his rifle, completely rusted and caked in mud. Then they dig up a machine-gun, rusted too, and mud-caked, which must have been buried in the last battle. The curious thing about this is that it is

evidently a British gun converted by the Germans, for the lock is German, so is the barrel. Once cleaned it will be serviceable again and will be re-converted to fire British ammunition.

The night is a fairly quiet one. Yet apart from the stertorous breathing of the men labouring at their trench, the darkness is full of sounds. Now it is the dismal wail of a stray bullet hungrily seeking a billet. Now it is the clack-clack-clack of the machine-guns chattering to each other, like demons in Hell. One of these sweeps round—traverses, the gunners call it—regularly every few minutes, and the terrifying rush of the bullets causes every man to lie flat on his stomach. A machine-gun, when traversing, nearly always sweeps back again, so it is not safe to get up at once. Every now and then a succession of explosions, sharp, yet heavy and dull, unlike that of a shell, proclaims that bombs are being thrown not far off—probably from adjacent saps. Occasionally through the night a terrific explosion causes the atmosphere to reverberate and everyone to start. It is a minenwerfer bomb bursting somewhere away on the right, and it is followed by a succession of sharp reports and heavy explosions from one of our own trench-guns retaliating. In the silent pauses between these sounds may be heard the harsh cry of some bird—I know not its name—which haunts the coarse grass and secret places of the Salient. Occasionally a distant rattle and a harsh grating sound become audible—the German transport on the roads beyond the ridge. A lighter and more continuous grating sound is made by the trolleys rolling along one

of the numerous light railways which run just behind the enemy's front line. Every now and again, too, in silent pauses, the barking of dogs may be distinguished —these are the German pets which they keep in their trenches.

Two or three times in the night the whole horizon is of a sudden lit up by the vivid flashes of our own guns, so vivid that one may distinguish trees and other objects against their background; then one hears a distant rumble followed by the roar of the shells, and observes the quick glare as they burst on the enemies' second line.

Strange figures come prowling through the darkness —one cannot tell for certain whether friend or foe. Ever and anon the star-lights go up, and in their cold radiance one may see those figures standing still as statues. Yet they would be better advised to throw themselves down. They are the covering-parties and the engineers moving out in front. Once the man who fires the Verey pistol can be plainly seen, and then one knows that the Germans, too, are out in No Man's Land. Once three lights go up in quick succession, and simultaneously two shots ring out. These are followed immediately by a loud outcry close at hand, which shows that at least one of the bullets has done its work —"Oh! oh! oh!" Gradually the loud cries sink into a pitiful murmur as a child in pain, and presently this lapses into silence. "Pass the word down for the stretcher-bearer!" They lay him down in a shell-hole —it is an officer of engineers, shot through both thighs. They do not think he is bad, but the moon shines down

upon a face unnaturally still and pallid, and when the doctor comes he is dead.

A fresh feeling in the air and a faint lightening in the sky beyond the German lines suggest that daybreak is not far off. The men have dug their trench, many are resting on their spades, perspiring profusely. They prepare to move off. Suddenly a machine-gun opens and one of them sits down quickly, clasping his ankle with both hands. "Oo-er," he mutters, "I'm hit. It don't 'arf hurt." A comrade takes off his puttees and unlaces his boot. "Is it a Blighty one, d'ye think?" inquires this victim anxiously, and upon being told that it probably is, since he has been shot through the ankle, he becomes quite cheerful despite the pain.

Soon the word is passed down to lead back, and so the men file once more along the sap into the main trench. From the woods afar off comes the call of a cuckoo, and gradually the various points of the landscape appear. Everybody makes tea, and before long is enjoying a hearty breakfast, followed by a long sleep.

That last week in the Salient was an awful strain, and I am glad to be out resting in camp again. We are having quite a good time, but really it is not much of a rest, as Roger Tempest, our Battalion Commander, who has recently returned from leave, works everybody devilish hard, and this morning there was a ten-mile route march. Also we are constantly on the move. We go into billets to-morrow, May 28th, for a short time,

then nearer the line, then back again here for about ten days and go back to the Salient about June 10th, and I am afraid we have the worst part of it this time.

This is a pleasant wooded country. While I was on fatigue the other day in a wood—I had Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* with me—the G.S.O. drove up with the Prince of Wales. I was surprised, as I thought he was (metaphorically) on the other side of the world. I had a long talk with them, and the Prince, looking very sunburnt, was very affable and asked numerous questions.

There are rumours of peace in the air, but I can't say I believe them. I hear a farm where we billeted recently was shelled to pieces yesterday. So that's luck!

I went around Ypres the other day—the Germans were shelling all the time I was there—and saw all the sights of the town, and some very strange things, including two 17-cm. shell-holes. The whole place is razed to the ground, not a house standing except the prison, but some of the neglected, overgrown gardens are very pretty.

We have had lovely summer weather; burning hot days and cool nights. I enter this in at a farmhouse where we have been billeted some four days, about nine miles back from the line—a very peaceful spot indeed, and I am sorry we are going to move off to camp to-morrow, June 1st, with a prospect of a hot eight-mile march.

Yesterday evening I made a very pleasant bicycling expedition with Knollys to a very picturesque town which stands on a hill in the middle of a plain and is one of the oldest towns in Flanders. We started after tea, and got there for an excellent dinner, which we ate on the verandah of the hotel overlooking the plain. Some of the country around is really very delightful, and there are a few handsome châteaux hidden among the woods.

As the front line is said to be a very bad place just now, nobody is looking forward to going back.

I am writing this in some very good billets at Wormhoudt, a good way back and even out of sound of the guns. We had the hell of a march back the day before yesterday, June 8th, fifteen miles. It seems we do not go into the front line to-day, as was expected—in fact, not until the 15th.

The regimental band has come out from London under Minto, who is attached to us, and we also had the bagpipes, which played alternately all the way. They bucked the French people by playing the *Marseillaise* and other patriotic airs going through the towns, and the First Grenadiers with their band came behind. So it was a great show.

Leave has now been reduced to five days in the Second Army, which is a pretty bad business; it takes me, however, for a spell about June 30th.

There has been a lot of fighting going on up here, and is likely to be more by all accounts. We stood to

arms two days and two nights, expecting to make a counter-attack for the Canadians, but were not required. Work is still very hard under Roger Tempest.

It is the 17th of June and we are not yet in the line, but we marched fourteen miles yesterday, the first stage up towards it, and to-morrow we go into Brigade Reserve, which means another six- or seven-mile march. As far as I can see, it will be at least three weeks before we get our eight days' promised rest. The line, from all accounts, is very bad, and at one point only forty yards from the Bosches, who strafe both day and night.

The guns went all last night, to the northward, also the gas sirens. It was one of the heaviest bombardments I have ever heard. We stood to arms in the middle of the night and were actually ordered to move, but a few minutes later the counter-order came. The Germans attacked with gas, but we have heard no details. Altogether the atmosphere is electric, and anything may happen from moment to moment: it is only a question of waiting. I only hope again for the luck of a Blighty wound that I had in March 1915. As for my leave, which is due in less than a fortnight now, owing to the above circumstances, I have very little hope of getting it, I learn, and it would be only five days in any case.

If anything happens to Stirling, I am to be in command of the Company, since I am the senior subaltern in the Battalion, and, I believe, senior in the regiment. It seems strange with only twenty-two months of service.

With a dose of the line impending, I wish I could get some morphine tablets.

We have been here on the outskirts of Ypres for three days, since June 18th, and now, at the hour when rightly I must start out with an engineer on our evening's tramp, our dug-out looks curiously seductive and homelike. There lie the remains of a late supper; there are the two beds and the two sets of pyjamas; there is the book left open at the page half-read; and there are the gramophone records lying in an untidy heap beside the gramophone. The atmosphere is pungent with tobacco smoke, but warm and comfortable. The servants are just going to sleep. Darkness has long since fallen.

Outside the mist creeps in, creeps out, and round about. Like a ghost, like a wraith, it steals along the dim streets whose secrets are buried beneath tons of bricks and masonry, beneath heaps and heaps of ruins. At first I can see nothing in the filmy darkness after the brilliance of the dug-out; instinct alone guides my footsteps. In the dug-out all sound was deadened; one could hear nothing from without. But now I discover that the guns are firing in Ypres itself—fitfully yet frequently their banging and booming awake a thousand echoes. Every time a gun fires, the reflection of the flash lights up jagged ruins, a naked wall, or the skeletons of houses. It is evidently the beginning of a slow bombardment.

Across a desert open space we pick a way, then

stumble over blocks of fallen masonry and balks of timber in the lee of a walled garden. One feels that tom-cats ought to be yowling and spitting on the top of the wall; but even the tom-cats have fled. Silence, moist, heavy, mysterious, settles everywhere between the reports of the guns. At the city gate there are a wakeful sentry and a wakeful sergeant who says "Good-night" in a hearty voice. In the recesses of a kind of cave which does duty as a gate-house he has a noble fire burning, around which I can just distinguish the prostrate forms of his comrades peacefully slumbering. The sentry opens a door and we are outside the lines plonk-plonking across a plank bridge. There is water underneath—I can feel rather than see it—water that lies black and stagnant and seems to listen.

Out in the grass familiar sounds come to the ears. It is only a mile and a half to the trenches, and the machine-guns are chattering busily. No sooner does the Bosche start a steady burst of conversation than a couple of Lewis guns respond with demoniacal laughter. Farther away another Bosche joins in angrily, while the sniper's rifle interjects sharp occasional comments. Thus at times the dusk is full of sounds. Strangely, and for a moment, Verey-lights can be seen above the mists, quickly to vanish; the far-stretching panorama of the front outlined by star-shells is hidden to-night. Southward the great cannon roll in a dim unceasing chorus; near at hand the batteries in Ypres fire at irregular intervals, and the shells, whistling overhead, burst with a quick glare and crash along the German front line. Bombs are exploding, too. Deep, sullen

detonations, three or four at a time, shake the earth and make the darkness tremble.

For us, the night never loses its fears. They creep up with the mists which wreathe and sidle round, now dense, now lifting thinly; they belong to the hideous unknown things which lurk on old battlefields. A sinking moon strives to penetrate the mist, and sometimes it succeeds, so that all the world becomes silvery and opaque. Away to the left I can just distinguish in this delicate gloom the dusky outlines of what has been a noble convent—a girls' school. But I cannot discern more than a very few yards of the ground ahead. It is pock-marked with innumerable shell-holes, and we frequently stumble and lurch forward into the long, rank thistles and nettles. Sometimes we cross a narrow weed-grown path that once has been a main road; sometimes we have to leap an old gun-pit or disused grass-fringed communication trench; sometimes a landmark is missed; and sometimes, when the fog grows dense, we seem to come to a dead end. Then my engineer companion, who knows every pathway, almost every shell-hole, pauses and takes his bearings, partly by the star-lights, partly by the bursting shells on the German front line. A mile behind, a broken city sleeps as one sleeps who can suffer no more.

Climbing a sandbag breastwork, we come to a stretch of hard road bordered at first by twisted willows which convey the fancy of fir trees in an upland country. This road runs straight into the front-line trench and on into the German lines; swept by more

than one machine-gun, it is the most dangerous part of the whole journey. We waste no time, but hustle along, bending low, for every now and then a moonbeam succeeds in piercing the mist and silhouettes our figures far above the level of the trenches. The engineer has run this gauntlet, often alone, night after night, for close upon two years. Then we jump down into the trench, which is obviously new and clean and handsomely floored with duck-boards. The mist has momentarily dispersed and the new sandbags gleam white, washed by the moonshine. At present there is no parados. It was close by here that in the warm haze of a still June morning a short time ago there opened a bombardment as brief and terrible as any even this war has seen. It lasted only four hours, but those holding the front line were wiped out almost to a man. Then the grey Wurtembergers swarmed over at a leisurely walk, and now the château immediately opposite is a couple of hundred yards behind the German lines.

We have not passed more than two of the neatly-made traverses before the rich accents of the Far West are borne to our ears. There they are, a party of "Canucks," working quite unconcernedly outside their trench, putting the finishing touches to an artistic piece of sandbagging. An officer is superintending, and having passed the time of night with him, we hurry on to where a dug-out is being hollowed from the bowels of the earth. To reach this point the quicker, my engineer friend—who by long familiarity with the place has grown venturesome—announces his intention of taking a short cut across No Man's Land. The mist has

fallen again, but no sooner are we out in a waste of shell-holes half-filled with water and much encumbered with loose strands of barbed wire than it lifts like a curtain and the moon peeps out as light as day. Almost simultaneously a German machine-gun opens very close and the bullets seem to sizzle over our backs. A sniper fires four or five shots in quick succession and, half standing, half crouching, as we are on the top of the ground barely two hundred yards from the Germans, we fancy we are spotted. Probably, as a matter of fact, we are not; but probabilities seem doubtful quantities out in the middle of No Man's Land in bright moonlight. So we sink down flush with the ground and lie there breathlessly for many minutes. Shall we be seen when we rise again? I breathe hard and think of home! Then the machine-gun traverses once more with a hurricane rush of bullets, and head to heel we hug the ground yet closer. Bombs are bursting with terrific reverberation not far away—whether hostile or otherwise it is impossible to say—while a retaliating Stokes gun produces a series of shattering explosions. The wail of shells overhead, though British, and their quick flash and burst on the German front line, shake the nerves as much as anything. Most dangers are rather imaginary than real: even more common is it to be not quite sure whether one is in danger at all!

Taking the earliest opportunity to double across No Man's Land to the nearest trench, we arrive eventually at the entrance to the first experimental deep dug-out. And what a feeling of security it gives to descend the

very steep, greasy stairs, down, down, down into the bowls of the earth! Not even a "Minnie" could touch one here. What a moist and clammy heat! Everything is reeking damp. The floor and sides of this completed portion are of wood and very moist. Wavering candles provide the necessary light. In a side chamber opening from the main gallery the off-shift are asleep on eight wire-netting beds arranged like bunks on board ship. Snoring they are, manfully, and also in a similar gallery farther on. Then the woodwork stops, and I come upon the working shift stripped to the waist, sweating away at the earthy wall with pick and shovel or removing the bluish soil in wheelbarrows to the shaft, whence it is hauled up and used for parapet-making. Welsh miners they are, these great damp, hairy, brawny fellows, literally dripping perspiration, and the sergeant in charge—or foreman, as he prefers to call himself—speaks a queer North Country lingo that recalls the first time one went down a coal-mine. Night and day in the warm semi-darkness the gang is working, and so for three days, when they return to the ramparts for a rest or go right back to billets for a week.

After three-quarters of an hour's deep technical discussion and inspection it is time to start back, and once more we find ourselves breathing the night air, which now seems chilly. Close at hand a sentry is humming to himself some queer ditty of the Western world. Voices can be heard gaily chattering where an invisible group is at work building a new dug-out. Farther away a long chain of figures, each carrying a burden, can just be perceived gliding phantom-like through the

mist. It is a carrying-party tramping home along the road. Life stirs on every hand—life, swarming, work-aday, unconcerned. Ant-like activity seethes under the cloak of night. An hour hence the early sunbeams will discover nothing more human than empty trenches, shell-holes, and stinks.

Striking across country, we hurry back before daylight shall make that part of the front a death-trap. The first quarter of an hour or so, when stray bullets zip past the ears or hum drearily, is nervous work. After that we pick our way carefully and in a leisurely fashion among the thistles and the shell-holes. It is with a feeling of indescribable satisfaction—as of a good night's work done and a long day's rest earned—that we cross the wooden bridge again and enter the ramparts. I am conscious, too, of a keen appetite for breakfast. Morning is at hand, and soon the grey daylight will be stealing in among the streets and ruins of the stricken city. How beautiful it will look then! Summer in Flanders, I feel certain, holds a record for wonderful dawns and sorrowful dreams.

Outside the entrance to the dug-out we linger meditatively to smoke a cigarette in the first freshness of the coming day. Sparrows are twittering volubly in a score of shy gardens that, riotous with greenery, hide like tear-drops amid the desolate houses. Pigeons that once were fed by hand in the Grande Place now croon from stony pinnacles, surveying their fallen world. On the opposite wall the legend "Chocolat Menier, Dunkerque," confronts me with the message of bygone civilisation. There is a roseate flush in the sky above

the ramparts, the morning star is jewelled in a setting of palest gold and hard turquoise-blue.

We move up into the front line to-night, June 22nd, leaving our snug and safe dug-outs along the banks of the Canal.

A number of aeroplanes are strafing to-day, and one of ours was shot down close here. We walked up to look at it soon afterwards: it was smashed to pieces and the pilot killed, shot through the face. Last night and this morning five of our aeroplanes went overhead and raided the Bosches. Things are a bit quieter here, but they were very agitated last week and earlier on in this, when big things were supposed to be imminent, and may be still for aught I know.

We had the Prince of Wales to luncheon on Sunday, and he was very cheerful. They let him go up to the front line afterwards.



I have had a pretty lively time here in the front line during the last ten days. A chap with me got knocked clean over by concussion from a minnenwerfer bomb which killed four men, so he has gone down to G.H.Q. on a course.

We are waiting for further news from the South. So far what we have heard is good, as we seem to have done the first job on the Somme all right. The troops next to us made a very successful raid the other night, which was preceded by a terrific half-hour's bombard-

ment. Soon we are due in a rest camp, thank God.

We are kept pretty busy even when out in reserve. We have had seven more or less quiet days in camp, though the Bosches started heavily shelling the only available town, which had to be evacuated, so we didn't stay there long.

I went out riding a good deal, but the country hereabouts is not very interesting. Last night, July 14th, we came down into the Brigade Reserve and go into the front line on Tuesday night, July 17th. We are next door to the French this time, being the extreme left-hand company of the whole British line; there is just the Canal between us. I believe it is much quieter than the lines we have been in. By all accounts, the French spend most of their time sketching and shouting remarks across to the Bosches.

Things still seem to be going very well down South, and our people were evidently very near using cavalry the other day. I hear Haig has sacked several Generals. I also hear from official sources that, although the Bosches have never taken a man away from here, they have now only two Divisions (one at Verdun and one farther South in reserve) on the whole Western Front, and three in reserve on the Eastern Front, also one at Constantinople. So that is encouraging.

Lord Cavan made a speech to the Fourth Grenadiers the other night, from which they deduce that the Allies are going to be in no hurry to win the war, but will let

things take their course for another twelve months, by which time, military opinion says, the Bosches will be in a bad way. For my part I greatly doubt whether Haig will try to push on much farther than he is now, as he has all the best of the ground for the Winter. I do not believe we shall make a serious attempt to break through till next Spring. Judging from this and other sources, one would gather that the earliest anticipated termination of the war is seventeen months hence, December 1917.

Stirling has been away for a few days, so I have had command of the Company. We were inspected by the new Brigadier (C. E. Corkran) on Wednesday, who expressed himself as very pleased on the whole.

All the pipers have gone to a big Allied review in Paris.

Still in Brigade Reserve we are lazing through this dreamy, hot afternoon of July 17th among the leafy surroundings of the Château Trois Tours, about a couple of miles behind the front line. Some sleep, some bathe in the artificial lake; and some read books or write letters, half lying, half sitting in the shade of the trees. It is a modern château such as the *bourgeois* love, turreted, jerry-built, and doll's-house like, but luxurious withal in its greenery and silence.

Save for the constant buzzing of aeroplanes overhead, few sounds are borne on the light westerly breeze which blows towards the trenches. But all afternoon reports keep coming in from the front line; the trenches are being pounded to nothing, nobody quite knows

what to expect. Last night there was a raid, and now the Bosches are retaliating. To-night there is to be a relief. None look forward to it, and the ceaseless roo-coo-roo-coo-coo of the wood-pigeons in their leafy fastnesses makes one long for the infinite peace of an English summer.

The evening comes, and an hour before dusk the men parade for the trenches in the grass-grown farmyard. By small parties, a platoon at a time, they march away, some to follow cross-country tracks towards the Canal, others going by the direct road. It is a calm and lovely aftermath, the sun setting in a golden haze, blue mists creeping up all around; the heat of the day is succeeded by a delightful freshness. Nevertheless clouds of dust rise from the road, for, as dusk falls, the great evening tide of traffic sets towards the trenches. Ration-parties, relieving-parties, fatigue-parties, all moving in file; motor-lorries, ambulances, motor-cyclists, officers on horseback, orderlies on bicycles, quartermasters and quartermaster-sergeants driving mess-carts—all form part of a steady stream that flows through the first battered village. At the cross-roads the main stream ceases, the reliefs turn to the left, heading straight for the Canal bank, and once more I can hear the pit-a-patter, pit-a-patter of trench boots. Queer Chinese figures the men look in their round tin-hats, heavy-laden with kit as they are, the rifle slung on the shoulder.

Now the nervous work begins, for often at this hour of the relief the road is sprayed with shrapnel. Everybody much prefers to travel by the grass tracks, but

there is not room for all. However, the twilight is still and breathless, not a sound but the distant rattle of traffic and the pit-a-patter of the men's feet on the road. An occasional star-light rising and falling in the direction of the trenches, a low rumble far to the southward, and a passing flicker on the horizon which might be the reflection of German guns firing beyond the ridge or merely the playing of summer lightning, are almost the only signs of war. Presently we pass the stark shell of a ruined house, guardian of a rusty railway-line, overgrown with vegetation, and then come to the engineers' dump, where all traffic ceases. A congestion of troops in single file is waiting to cross the bridges. One seems to hesitate here on the threshold of Fate.

A Bosche machine-gun is trained on the wooden bridge which thirty or forty yards ahead spans the Canal. It may sweep round at any moment, but so accustomed are the men to travelling this way that they do not increase their pace by a hair's breadth. Rather are they inclined to pause in wonderment at the most weird and wonderful picture: the Canal by night.

Does it remind one most of a quiet backwater in Venice, or of a scene from the Earl's Court Exhibition, or of the imagined Styx where Charon ever ferries people from shore to shore; this waterway with its countless little lights blinking against high mysterious banks and its sullen, stagnant, lapping water which reflects the lights, the stars, and, sailing above, the cold moon? It looks seductive, exotic, populous, compared to the bleak, perilous world outside. The high banks

are honeycombed with dug-outs. All around is the busy human hum, shuffling, scuffling, mysterious.

The Canal is the clear-cut border-line between humanity and the shadowy nether-world of Ypres. Now the clack-clack-clack of the machine-guns is heard, a stray bullet or two whistles high over the road, and the star-lights seem much closer. An occasional rifle-shot punctures intervening silences. It is night, and with night in the Salient there comes a sense of loneliness and neighbouring death.

All scenes close behind the trenches are much the same, and this one is as others—void, barren, desolate. It is possible to travel all the way to the front line by communication-trench, but perversely the men prefer to walk as far as they are allowed to along the road. Well, the road is quicker even if a stray bullet or two does come that way. But beyond trench-headquarters, a jumbled collection of more or less spacious dug-outs, it would be sheer madness to walk on the top of the ground. Machine-guns are constantly playing across it, and at times the bullets flip through the air like a flight of birds. A number of troops are congregated here, but as long as they keep down they are fairly safe. Here, too, is the field dressing-station, and a row of canvas-shrouded figures lying on stretchers and looking exactly like mummies bespeaks the daily harvest of the trenches. They are waiting to be taken down to the Canal bank —and then carried away to the cemeteries.

It is awful work pushing and shoving along the communication-trench towards the front line, since with full bulk of equipment there is barely room for two to

pass at a time. Hence long halts when everybody shouts "Make way! make way!" The men coming down from the trenches look jaded and worn-out. They have had a nerve-racking day and night, heavy shelling and many casualties. Like the wounded of the Twenty-first Brigade at Neuve Chapelle, "It is bloody Hell up there," they mutter; "the —— trenches are blown to bits." So they are, and far more than the greatest pessimist amongst us dreams.

The first sign of it is when we come to an immense hole right on the line of the communication-trench itself, utterly blotting it out. This hole would easily contain the foundations of a fair-sized cottage, and we have to work round and beyond it to discover where the trench begins again. Somebody grunts, "Minnie-wafer," and somebody else says "No, it's a big trench-mortar." Then I remember that this sector too has a sinister reputation for the most terrible engines of war; not the trench-mortar, which is to be expected, but the minenwerfer, that super-mortar which is one of the most frightful weapons the fiendish ingenuity of man has produced.

Beyond the crater there is a chain of brand-new 5·9 holes, and beyond these two more craters, one running into the other, after which the trench is virtually at an end. Here and there one may come upon a short length of sandbag breastwork still standing and a machine-gun post that remains practically intact. A shining moon reveals the ghostly naked walls of certain farm buildings which in days gone by clustered round a courtyard, and these now are the only key to distance

and direction. Constantly, too, one meets stray parties of men just relieved stumbling thankfully to the rear. By mistake, as it were, one finds oneself in a short remaining section of the front-line trench. The rest—parapets, parados, dug-outs, sand-bags, communication-trenches—are utterly wiped out. One shell-hole succeeds another, clustering round some enormous crater in monotonous confusion; and were it not for the moonlight kindling the pools of water at the bottom, falls and involuntary wettings would be frequent.

The sentries and Lewis Gunners are at last relieved. There is no time to lose. Parties are immediately told off to go back for the rations and if possible to gain flank communication. The rest of the men sink down in one of the saps utterly wearied by their long walk. Everybody dreads stumbling by mistake into the German lines in the mysterious half-light. Fortunately all so far is quiet, but something sombre and foreboding seems to haunt the unusual stillness. Someone in my platoon remarks half-humorously, "The night is yet young, boys!"

We are back again in the line.

CHAPTER VI

DOWN TO THE SOMME

The days we had in the line next to the French were not so bad as our previous turn in the trenches. Indeed we were fairly fortunate in having such a few casualties. On July 18th (the day after we got in) I had one man killed and three men wounded by a shell, but apart from that, the total casualties otherwise for the Company during our stay were eleven men wounded and one man killed.

The Battalion, however, were very unlucky in officers. The Company Officer who got killed was out wiring in the front of the trenches. A star-light went up and, instead of throwing himself down, he stood still and got shot through the head.

Of the three Battalion officers, Lumsden was hit in the foot by a bit of shell, Howard was out wiring when the Germans crept up and threw some bombs and he got a few pieces in him; while Maynard was wounded in the head by a ricochet bullet. They have now all gone to Blighty, lucky devils—I find it is terribly tantalising to see people going off like that, but they had certainly earned it.

I take a particular interest in the Somme battles, as reported, since they are right down where the Entrenching Battalion was, and I know every inch of the country and all the places mentioned. We are

now living in dug-outs by the Canal again—a very sepulchral spot.

The news has just come direct from Divisional Headquarters. The groups standing and lying about on the Canal bank get it first; then, like lightning, it flashes down the Yperlee and reaches the innermost recesses of every dug-out, and is even conveyed to the newly-brought-in wounded who are lying in the dressing-station dug-outs. Near Bridge Four it collects a crowd; at Blighty Bridge quite a number are discussing it half-an-hour after the first whisper has got abroad. By nightfall it has crept uncannily along the three-quarters of a mile of communication-trenches to the front line: it travels faster than any gas-wave. The only people who know nothing of it are the three canvas-shrouded figures lying side by side on stretchers in a *cul-de-sac*. And they will never know it.

"The Division is moving south!"

The news flies from mouth to mouth, and everybody congratulates everybody else. Everybody's heart leaps for joy because the dead weight of doom is lifted from their souls. The Salient is to be left behind, with its brown ditches, its impotence for the defenders, and—its implacable Fate. No more sitting still and suffering. There is to be a pause, at any rate, in the slow procession of the maimed, the dying, and the dead. There is to be a change of country, of scenery, of air, of habits. There is to 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 battlefield on which one fights and lives or dies as men should, not lies in a ditch and waits for the inevitable end like dogs. Give us the first a thousand times! Make no mistake—Ypres gets on the nerves.

Twenty-four hours after hearing the news, and the day has come. A still, misty morning at the end of July resolves itself into brilliant sunshine and great heat. And as the first train leaves the railway siding near the old Poperinghe road, cheer upon cheer goes up to the blue sky. It is the men's farewell to Yperz, as they call it. "To the south!" They know that they are going into action—perhaps in a few days, perhaps in a few weeks—but this matters not a cuss: there is nothing but singing, laughter, and shouting to-day. For with every mile the hated Salient, the treacherous Canal-bank, the death-stricken city are left farther and farther behind. . . . The train rolls on. Its rhythm, its regular clank-clank-clank bursts into the great heat. By ten o'clock a broiling sun pours 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 rise. By road and rail to-day the relieving corps is moving up to Ypres. For many leagues—as far, say, as Wormhoudt—the railway line runs beside the road, and this road carries unending columns of perspiring, khaki-clad troops, unending lines of horse-transport and motor-lorries, unending

columns of artillery—moving north. And they are fresh from the Somme, these dusty, heat-stricken warriors—at least thousands are left behind, and so many thousands are fresh from England—where they have been decimated. They are coming up here—for a rest! . . . God help 'em.

Wormhoudt is left behind, and with it the northward-bending army. One has a glimpse of three white roads converging on a wide, sun-baked square, which is full of troops. It reminds one of an Italian piazza, this Wormhoudt, where we had passed a showery eight days in June. I cannot 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 comes 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 semi-circular 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 is Calais. And Gravelines is not far away, another little cluster of houses and chimneys right on the verge of the sea.

It is wonderful, this panorama, wonderful to us who for so long have seen nothing more spacious than Ypres viewed from the Salient on a clear day.

The detraining point has an unpronounceable name; it is also insignificant, being a mere sun-baked, sleepy railway yard without a square inch of shade. But here for the first time there is no sign of war. For the first

time in many months one seems to leave the war behind, and as we march out into the country—a merry, chaffing, laughing column of schoolboys—no stench of motor lorries and petrol or swarms of troops greet us, but only the heavy silence of the woods and fields and villages, dreaming away their midday rest. A yellow cat strolls across the village streets, dogs lie basking outside the unsubstantial-looking inns—peculiar-looking dogs and very sleepy. Barely can they raise the energy to wag a tail at the flies which everywhere buzz and hum, creating with the drowsy heat an indescribable languor and murmur of summer. We halt in a shady oak-wood, and the men, recklessly happy, throw themselves down amid the long grass, the convolvuli, the straying honeysuckle. Yes, we are happy now, we who have suffered much!

And so at two of the afternoon, smoking, singing, and dust-covered, we march into billets. Everybody's thought is, God grant we stay here a while! For it is a lovely little village, like enough to those that one will find in Devonshire or Dorset, or that one will commonly find in France, with its old-fashioned thatched farmsteads and its cottages covered, many of them, with creeper, honeysuckle, and clambering roses.

In the afternoon the Company are paid in the farmyard in front of our billets, and later, towards evening, we take books and a deck-chair—hero of many vicissitudes this, and survivor of all!—out into the box-arbour and abandon ourselves to the dreamy stillness which steals over country places towards evening. We doze. The air is 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.

After spending two brief days in this peaceful village, we left. 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 we had 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 our 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 we had that it was Sunday, for in our 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, cornflower-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 one 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 Dunkerque, 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 a fine spread awaited us officers (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! It rather reminded me 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 I 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 we 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.

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 over a dozen miles 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 their 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 omelettes 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 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 taxing 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, we 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 this 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 one divined a panoramic study of 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 a morning march) 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 one 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 in 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 battlefields. . . . 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 onwards 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 wagon. 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 court-yard 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, I imagine, 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 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 hillsides which sloped richly down the valleys from their wooded summits. Among the corn-stooks flitted flocks of finches, sparrows, and linnets; the yellow-hammers and 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 blacksmith 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—my 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—my deck-chair. That chair, which had survived many marches, the rigours of Ypres, innumerable moves, substitutes, and evasions, had 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 at Bus lez Artois, which was our destination, 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. 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, one could see a great shimmering in the southern sky to show where the battle raged.

The time that we have spent in this camp has been a time of unsullied enjoyment. There have been parades, marches, practice attacks, drill, physical drill, bayonet-fighting, schemes in the early morning, it is true, but there has been no war. After such parades the day's work was usually finished, except for an occasional evening march.

I have even had a day in Dunkerque, getting over there on a borrowed motor-bike; and a very nice old town I found it, with quite good shops. I had an excellent luncheon, and strolled round the harbour and port, and saw a lot of mine-sweepers, monitors, and torpedo boats, and it seemed quite funny being in a civilised place again.

Earlier this evening (August 9th) I biked over with Knollys to see some of the Bosche prisoners at a village near here. They were a very motley collection—some weedy and middle-aged, some very young, and some

fine strapping chaps. Knollys talked to one or two in German, and they told him they came from central Germany.

The push seems to be going on all right so far, and it is at any rate consoling to know that the Bosches have not got a single division in reserve on this front. However, there is no doubt they fight magnificently and are very far from finished yet.

August 9th. This 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—two faces seemed especially familiar, and everybody stood to attention. It was the King and the Prince of Wales. They stayed about twenty minutes.

It is August 12th and the powers that be saw fit yesterday to move us up to the trenches. As I write we are holding those in reserve, and go up into the front line to-morrow. By everything that I can see this is a very cushy place compared with the Ypres Salient; the trenches and dug-outs are deep and the Bosches quiet. Our artillery strafe unceasingly, but the Bosches do not reply much, though yesterday they sent over some tear-shells, and a lot of men came along the trench with tears streaming down their faces.

Just before we left camp, I had several more talks, *via* Knollys, with German prisoners (Bavarians). They

impressed me greatly by their smartness and discipline, and many are very fine men in the prime of life. I talked, or at least Knollys talked, for some time with a Bavarian *Unter-offizier*. He said they expected Germany to win in three months. This was also his personal view before he was taken prisoner, but now he was not so sure. They disliked the English very much, he continued, but preferred to be taken prisoner by them, as they were treated better by us than by the French.

Rumour has it that Lord Cavan has got the First Army and Munro is going back to India. People seem to have a great and growing faith in Douglas Haig.

The weather remains very August—hot and still.

A fortnight has passed, during which time we have not been able to get any peace or quiet. Bad news has also come to me. I have just heard that my brother-in-law, dear old Jack Farmer of the 60th Rifles, has been killed in a show at Delville Wood. I don't know his Battalion or even his Division, but feel sure they are quite close here. Doubtless to-morrow I shall be able to find out all about it—where he is buried, etc. Poor Jack! He was a proper fine man.

Early last week I had a look round for Jack's Battalion, and found it in the next village. Unfortunately, however, unbeknownst to me it went back thirty-six hours later, so I failed to see the C.O. I am sorry about this, but I don't suppose there was anything of great

value that I could have found out. I met one officer in Jack's Battalion who knew him, but he was attached to the Trench Mortars and had not been in the attack. I also saw the C.O. of the Ninth Battalion, who said they had a very bad time up at Delville Wood, and everybody coming back from there says the same. But I must still try and do my best to find the grave for my sister Angela's sake. Longueval, however, where Jack is buried, is constantly and heavily shelled, so it may not be possible to get up there by day; while by night it would be useless unless one knew the exact whereabouts of the grave.

Yesterday, September 2nd, I went up into the old German lines captured on July 1st. They had some enormous dug-outs. I also strolled around one of their cemeteries, which was not uninteresting.

The weather has been bad, with a lot of rain, but it is finer now, though unsettled.

The Colonel made a very handsome speech to me yesterday on the Battalion parade. He said, "Ewart, I have excellent reports of you, and I hear you are doing very well indeed. I notice you are getting much more self-confidence, etc.," and more likewise. This I suppose because I have been deputising for Stirling lately. We are kept very hard at work.

The cannonade is heavy to-day and there is a big battle on. The one cheering news in these troublous times is that our side is in a far better position now than ever before. There are very serious ideas of the whole German front going back to the line of the Meuse, and it is quite possible that we shall not go into

it until that happens. Next door to us are the two best Divisions in the Army. The whole country behind the firing-line swarms with troops and artillery, and there can be no doubt now that we have a fine fighting army.

There is no chance of leave, I fear, until next month or even November, as there will be continuous fighting. However, ours in any case is a waiting rôle.

Indeed mine is a waiting rôle! In the last five days, while in Le Touquet on a Lewis Gun course, I have developed enteritis (poisoning from eating tinned food) and am in the Liverpool Hospital, Étaples, watching the September rains and accepting ministrations as my due. I am supposed to go back to the Battalion four days hence, on the 13th, but I shall not be fit by then. I feel pretty ill, but this is an excellent hospital; pretty well the best I have struck in this blessed war.

CHAPTER VII

YPRES AND CAMBRAI

How I spent my eleven months away from the front; how after leaving hospital in Étaples I went home, missing our taking of Ginchy Station and Lesboeufs by a few days and the Battalion's eventual return to Ypres; how I recuperated in Derbyshire and how, marked on my return "fit for home duty," I had my third spell of Wellington Barracks, all is of such little interest that I shall not describe it in detail.

I am now back in the Ypres Salient, and that to me appears an event of much greater significance.

I left London on Monday, July 30th, 1917. My journey was uneventful. I stopped only a few hours at Boulogne, and reached the Second Battalion, now commanded by Norman Orr-Ewing (who has succeeded Roger Tempest), on Wednesday, August 1st. The Battalion was in bivouac about three miles behind the line, in a horrible place, the rain pouring down, the earth a sea of mud. I went back to my old Company, G, and found Knollys in command. On Saturday, August 4th, the Battalion, which had come out of action the day I left London, went into the battle line again and I with them. It was my first taste of this lingering third battle of Ypres.

We had to cross the three thousand yards of ground

that had been captured in the former attack, and found the new line only partly dug in. There was a terrific and unceasing bombardment from the Bosches. We got badly shelled by our own people all through Sunday, and this, following the Bosches' bombardment of the night before, gave us a very worrying time.

On the Sunday night the Germans came out at us to try and blow up the bridge-heads across the river in front. They succeeded in blowing up one, and there was a lot of firing. Poor Esmond Elliot was shot through the body and arm a few yards from me, and his orderly killed outright. Esmond himself died about an hour later, having handed over his company to me. He was conscious almost to the last, and did not realise he was dying, though he was in great pain. I was left alone, and had a pretty hot time and several narrow escapes. At daybreak I got another officer up, but we had an anxious wait until relieved the following night by the Grenadiers. Esmond's funeral took place yesterday, August 8th. All the Divisional staff were there and most of the officers of the First and Second Battalions, including Knollys, Howard and Stirling.

We are now in rest camp several miles back—but only for a time—there will be plenty more fighting before long!

I have little to enter, as in the last fortnight since coming out of the line we have had quite an uneventful time. We will be going into the trenches again now almost at once, I hear, and I will command G

Company, as Knollys goes on leave—and commanding a company in the line will be some responsibility!

To-morrow, August 25th, the whole Brigade is going to be reviewed here at Poperinghe by the General Commanding the First French Army, Anthoine, and there is going to be a great show. This is in honour of the Brigade having fought next the French in the last battle, and the old boy is going to hand out Croix de Guerres and Légion d'Honneurs. There is going to be a march past, so we have been doing nothing but ceremonial drill for several days past—rather a pleasant change from the ordinary routine of training.

Two things in favour of this place are that on most afternoons I can go out riding, and that we have had here some lovely weather. It looks now, though, as if it is going to be windy and unsettled again.

I am in Paris! At the Hôtel Ritz, Place Vendôme. I have been trying to record an event or two for a fortnight past now, but owing to strange alternations of fortune it has not been possible. We went up into the line on Monday, August 27th, and only came out on Saturday, September 1st. The following day I got Paris leave, and I had a twenty-four hours' journey up here. Since arriving I have been leading a hurried, not to say hectic life. I return to the Battalion to-morrow night, September 7th.

We had on the whole a quiet time in the line, which was as well, as four days and five nights is a great strain. While I commanded Knollys' (G) Company

we had not a single casualty, but on the contrary took a prisoner—a soldier of the 119th Grenadier (Wurtemberg) Regiment, who wandered into our outpost line and was promptly snaffled by a Lewis-Gun corporal. He was aged twenty-one, a native of Stuttgart, and quite a fine-looking fellow. I have got his watch and ring as souvenirs. We found on him rather an important message from a German outpost to an officer in rear, and he was carrying this when he lost his way.

My Company was given the job of throwing three pontoon bridges across a river practically under the nose of the Bosches, and this was done without being spotted, thanks to a light yet moonless night. F Company, next door, were not so fortunate. Markham, in command of a party, was spotted relieving outposts across the same river in bright moonlight, and the Bosches killed two of his party of four and shot him through both knees—a strong party of them then came out, and our remaining two men had to run back. They tried to hold off the Bosches, but their rifles were clogged with mud and they could not fire. Meanwhile poor Markham was lying propped against a tree between the two sides. A sergeant tried to bring him in, but he was in too great pain to be moved, so we had to leave him. Afterwards a Bosche was seen talking to him, but the following night when a patrol went out they could find no trace of him, so he is either killed or a prisoner.

Directly after coming out of the line, we had to change camp on account of shelling, and on Sunday

night, as I seem to have written already, I left for Paris.

I stayed one night at Hazebrouck, whither the Bosches pursued me, as they made an air raid on the town that night, and I was awakened by furious anti-aircraft and machine-gun fire. Eventually I fetched up here, after travelling by a comic express from Calais. It was chock full of military of all nationalities, and stopped at every station up to Amiens. Here I found a lot of the Brigade and several officers I knew also on Paris leave, so we have all been going about together, and have had a very amusing time, sampling all the different fashionable places.

The weather has been lovely, though there was a heavy thunderstorm last night, and I am afraid the fine spell has now broken up.

On Tuesday we had luncheon at Henry's, where one is supposed to get the best food in Paris, drove in the Bois and down to Neuilly, and had tea at Les Ambassadeurs, which was crammed with a cosmopolitan, and chiefly military, crowd. Here we fell in with some very agreeable officers in the French Flying Corps, and spent a pleasant evening. We dined at Maxim's and went to the Olympia—both filled to overflowing with people of all nationalities. Yesterday we went for luncheon to a charming place in the Bois called Armenonville—tables out of doors and a delightful garden; not very many people, but excellent food. I only miss the bands. After this a drive through the Bois and tea at Ciro's, dinner at Ciro's, which was full, and a box at the Folies Bergères—a very good show with

a lot of English stunts in it. Melville Gideon was there.

To-day, Thursday, I hope to see the American Ambassador hand over the American flag to the President at the Hôtel de Ville. I daresay it will be rather impressive; also I want to have a look at some of the picture-galleries, though I believe the Louvre is shut. The hotels in Paris are crowded, this one especially, but with nobody interesting except people in the Brigade. It is now time for luncheon.

It is very fine and hot here, and as flea-ridden a rest camp as one could find. I have been here now three days, which is to say since Saturday, when I arrived back from Paris. I enjoyed every moment of my leave except the journey each way. It was a very pleasant change. We move up in three days, I hear, but only, I think, to do fatigues. The Germans shell this place a bit, but the most serious thing are the raids at night. The Bosches come over then and drop bombs all round. In fact, they seem to be getting altogether too lively in these parts for comfort. Apart from them, though, there is little doing; one spends the whole morning drilling and in the evening generally goes out riding. To-day there was a drill competition between the companies with the Brigadier as judge, and it caused a good deal of rivalry, but such an event is about all that one can claim here as a happening.

Thursday, September 13th, 1917! It is a year to-day since I left Étaples for home. We are now in Abblingley camp and near the line. We moved up yesterday afternoon, shortly after it had been heavily bombed, so it is not a very healthy spot. When we arrived we found several Irish Guards and Garrison "Gunners" had been killed, and about twenty yards from the camp lay twenty-eight dead mules and horses all of a heap. The remaining wretched beasts kept calling for their friends all night.

We are in Brigade reserve here, and have carrying-fatigues to do up to the front line every other night—not pleasant, as the Bosche is too fond of shelling the roads. At the end of about eight days we are supposed to go back for a week or two, but Gawd knows what will happen after that!

As regards the general situation out here, reading the London papers, I rather gather that people in England have, as usual, got a false perspective of the position. The third battle of Ypres is admitted here to have been a failure so far, and there is now little more than a month of the "biffing" season left. We could hardly have gained less ground than we have, considering our enormous weight of artillery and superiority in numbers. But I am afraid much of our infantry is little better than the Bosches'. The latter have a pretty bad time from our guns, but everything points to the fact that they have plenty of men for the job in hand, or sufficient, and they fight every inch of the way. The Russian news, I read, is terrible. It looks like civil war. French officers have told me that they

expect the war to go on at least two years. Personally I cannot now see how it can possibly be over one day sooner. The Bosches beat us in the air every time. I grow pessimistic, but I believe it to be true, alas! It is a fact that the situation twelve months ago looked actually better than it does now.

After a week of it, we go back to-day and farther back to-morrow. There are rumours of a few days on the sea-coast. The day before yesterday, September 18th, was a bad day here. The Second in Command of the First Battalion was killed by a bomb in his tent. He dined here the night before, and had only come back from hospital that day, after being wounded. The same afternoon an officer in the Fourth Grenadiers was killed by a shell. He was lying on a bank reading a book nearly five miles behind the line when hit. He was not killed outright, but badly messed about, and died shortly afterwards. Both had been out a very long time, so it was doubly bad luck.

Norman Orr-Ewing has just told me that he has recommended me to be made a captain at once, and if Knollys goes home for six months, I am promised his Company. The idea is that I shall command the Company through the winter and that Knollys shall come out again next April and relieve me. It is all a question, though, of what the Regimental Orderly Room in London say about it—and the chances are that they will jib.

I hear there is a chance that in ten days' time, on

September 30th, I may be sent on a Company Commanders' course. What ho!

I have been down here at the Fifth Army Infantry School a week now, and remain for another month, until November 4th. It took two days to get down from Belgium, an awful journey in cold trains crawling along the whole time. Fortunately I met a Grenadier officer I knew, going to a sniping course near here, and we travelled part of the way together. The weather was lovely until the middle of last week, but now has become awful—sheets of rain, wind, and rather cold.

We are well billeted here (I live in a room with three Grenadiers) and, of course, safe as houses; both of which are great compensations, but they work us very hard and the food is filthy, as on all courses. The fellows here are mostly captains and majors from every conceivable regiment, and we are all treated like privates—fall in the ranks, wear equipment, and carry rifles. One goes through practically the whole curriculum of modern infantry training, and we are on parade from 8.45 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a short interval for luncheon.

There are a lot of Yank officers here learning their job—very raw from America and very amusing, some of them; also very unsoldier-like, but not a bad lot on the whole, and much preferable to some of the T.G.'s.

"Our boys" have done well up the line, I see by the papers, and there does not look to be much left to do till next Spring, when, the Americans inform me, they

expect to have one and a half million men and twenty thousand aeroplanes ready to fight in France.

Before leaving the Battalion I heard from Orr-Ewing that as he had heard my name *had* been sent in for promotion with some other people's in London, he expected me to be made a captain at once. This was nearly a fortnight ago, so I should be gazetted any day. About the six months in the Spring and my commanding G Company, I am less sanguine; I don't think now that there is the smallest chance of my getting it, for Knollys does not appear to be going home.

Well, so much for an entry. I must adjourn for dinner, where we shall doubtless discuss with animation how many bottles of beer a man can drink between dinner and breakfast.

This Army Infantry School would not be at all bad if the weather stayed fine. One learns a certain amount, and anyway ought to feel lucky not to be up in the line.

I get occasional trips to Amiens, which even in peace time is, I believe, one of the most agreeable cities in the whole of France. With a light-hearted atmosphere, an atmosphere of good food, good shops, and clean streets, it combines the cloistral simplicity of a cathedral town. It is the sort of place where everybody stays a night.

It is a curiously definite town. It does not straggle, but begins like a compact block of buildings, and ends, as it were, with the last house. One enters it by a long

leafy boulevard full of children and nursery-maids—or rather those merry, hatless, shawl-covered girls who take their place in France, who wheel perambulators and herd babies. Immediately—leaving behind the *malaise* of the trenches, its flies and stinks, its indefinable atmosphere of stale war—one seems to enter there (how shall I say it?) the new zest, the holiday spirit. That—and a kind of friendliness and the renewal of acquaintance with civilisation—is what makes it so attractive to the man from the line. At first when I went there I felt strange, exotic, out-of-place. It was as though—in faded and very disreputable khaki—one had suddenly been dropped by an aeroplane in the centre of a great European city hundreds of miles from the war. It was as though after a long day's shooting one had strolled into a London drawing-room. At the same time, this is a very charming feeling. It is delightful to see men running about in billycock hats and dark clothes—even French billycocks; it is interesting to see trams and fashionably-dressed women and big bright shops. It is extraordinary to hear the sound of the trams—that indefinably civilised sound, with associations of the "Elephant and Castle" and the Vauxhall Bridge Road on wet days—of the *fiacres* rattling past, of the feet tapping the pavement, of the street-vendors selling newspapers and trifles.

Such crowds in the broad main street—it might be Paris in the height of the season, only there are more uniforms here. Everywhere the vivid sky-blue of the French officers; one feels that they might have stepped straight from the pages of *La Vie Parisienne*. It is Sun-

day, and for their visit to town they have put on all their crosses, medals, and what not. Most of them—especially the Flying Corps officers—are wearing four or five decorations. Occasionally I see dark green uniforms with gold facings—probably those of Engineers. *Poilus*, too, are numerous—*poilus* in tin hats, and sturdy little *Chasseurs Alpins*, with rakish tam-o'-shanters. Now and then I meet enormous negroes from the Colonial Corps wearing a kind of fez—great grinning fellows, standing six foot three inches, with broad flat noses and thick red lips; and Zouaves in short jackets and baggy *pantalons*. Belgians there are also, and, of course, a large sprinkling of English khaki. Here comes a Sikh on horseback. To this varied throng, Australians with their slouch hats, and Canadians, all coppery-faced and sun-tanned, bring a suggestion of far-distant climes.

Civilians, smartly dressed little ladies in the latest from Paris, showing plenty of open-work stocking and shapely limb, trip along in twos and threes, naïvely laughing and exchanging jokes—always laughing. Soberly-dressed, comfortable-looking gentlemen carrying heavily-tasselled umbrellas, wife on arm—some wife!—are taking their Sunday morning promenade; they bow to each other solemnly across the road. Doubtless they are the chief tradesmen or municipal officials of the town. The trees of the gardens at the farther end of the main street look green and cool, and a number of people are strolling beneath them or sitting contentedly on the seats. There is even to be seen that delightful and unchanging Frenchman who, since the

beginning of time, has sat under the trees of a public garden, reading a newspaper.

Nor is there any lack of wheeled traffic. The main street simply shrieks with it. Enormous motor-cars, usually containing English or French generals or French Flying Corps officers, constantly rush past at breakneck speed, hooting furiously. *Fiacres* rattle briskly over the cobble-stones; motor bicycles add greatly to the noise of the thoroughfare and do their best to knock everybody down within reach; bicycles—without which no French town would be complete—tear in and out among the other vehicles, creating by their frantic bell-ringing a special frenzy of their own. Although it is Sunday, most of the shops are open, and their coloured awnings in the brilliant sunshine lend a summery aspect to the scene. Already the *cafés* are crammed and—quite in the dear old manner of Versailles or the Avenue de l'Opéra—crowds sit at the marble-top tables amid the little orange trees, or out on the pavement, sipping strange coloured drinks. Hard to think as one looks down the street, so gay, so sunny, that not so very long ago Amiens was in the hands of the invader! Hard to think that not twenty miles away one finds the silent, stink-ridden, death-stricken world of the trenches. Ah, well! they deserve their fun, these *jeunes hommes*. At the same time, one has the fancy that here in this motley cosmopolitan throng—not in London or Paris or Petrograd—is the living hub of the world to-day.

After drawing the necessary amount of money at the bank and indulging in a hair-cut and a shampoo, a friend and I repair to the Mecca of subalterns, the

Hôtel du Rhin. Now, there is a choice of several hotels in Amiens, and some prefer the Belfort or its rival next door. For my part, however, I have no doubt about the Rhin. Here one gets not only an excellent luncheon and excellent wines, but one is amused, which, after all, is the best appetiser. Yes, one gets a luncheon as well cooked as any ever eaten at the Carlton or the Ritz. There are melon, *hors d'œuvres*, fish or *omelette*, beefsteak or *poulet roti*, and *glacé*, or anything one likes to follow. The place is full of officers, French and English, but chiefly the latter. Never was an Amiens hotel so animated in ordinary times. At a table near by sits a merry party; some young Frenchmen have brought out their wives or sweethearts, and they are all chattering at once amid peals of laughter. One or two widows may be seen in the peculiarly becoming black costumes of their country. Not far away a couple of Parisian ladies are sitting; one can pick them out in a moment by their dashing hats, their very short and wide frocks, their indefinable air of enterprising *chic*.

We drink coffee on a verandah that looks out over a pleasant shady garden, then return to exploration. There is much shopping to be done. The chocolate shops in Amiens are irresistible, and one cannot depart in peace without buying some of the delicious "roc" that literally melts in one's mouth. To all outward appearances the town is precisely the same as ever, even to the pigeons and jackdaws which circle about the Cathedral or chatter raucously from its numerous pinnacles. Only when one walks round to the front one discovers that that wonderful façade is completely

sand-bagged up. Within are to be seen the usual small parties strolling round, but most of them now are composed of English or Colonial soldiers. At the side of the great Cathedral, where in a patch of rank green grass lie many lichen-grown slabs of stone, tomb-heads and the like, it is pleasant to watch the play of sunlight on the old grey sacristy and to imagine oneself a tourist again. Such a corner could belong to almost any cathedral close of England or France.

Having seen the chief *spectacle* of the place, we visit the shops again, and then sit awhile outside a *café*, watching the endlessly varied human stream flow by. After tea we hire a *fiacre* and drive ponderously but happily round the outskirts from side to side of the road at the nag's pleasure. It is pleasant thus to clatter through some of the narrow, cobbled, old-fashioned streets where the houses, white, pink, and pale green, huddle together in crooked confusion. Here one has a different atmosphere from that of the Grande Rue. The *gamins* run beside the chaise, calling for coppers, and somehow the green venetian shutters, the snatches of song, and the whiffs of garlic that come from high narrow windows, remind me of Italy. So do the twisting straightness of the streets and the hatless young women strolling arm-in-arm with the sallow dark-eyed young men. Then it is pleasant to pause on the outskirts of the town by the river where the tall poplars stand in rows, and to watch the level evening sunbeams light up the green flat country beyond; boats rock lazily on the river, people are wandering beside it or lying sleepily about on the banks; it is such a peaceful scene

that I might fancy myself in, say, Cambridge, at mid-summer.

Dinner at the Rhin is a gorgeous meal. The place is packed and brilliantly lighted, and the atmosphere one of great hilarity. Most of the people who were at *déjeuner* are here again. The champagne is excellent, and if towards the end of the evening some of the company have obviously had enough of it, well, that is surely the proper spirit in which to face a drive. Nobody feels depressed, therefore, when soon after ten o'clock the moment comes to leave these gay scenes and to go out into the inky darkness. Everything is silent and deserted now, scarcely a footfall echoes along the street, while far away in the eastern sky I see the old familiar flicker of the guns.

The car carries us swiftly towards them.

I leave the Fifth Army Infantry School in twelve days' time, as expected, on Sunday, November 4th; but I do not yet know whether I shall then have to go up to the Battalion or whether I shall get my English leave. I shall not be sorry to leave here. Five weeks of such a strenuous existence is quite enough and it has grown rather monotonous. Three days ago, on Sunday, October 21st, I had a very interesting day with an American. I went up to the Somme battlefield, which is about twelve miles from here, and traversed all the most famous places. It is an awful spot, and even now a lot of stuff is lying about, and it looks like one great cemetery, a regular forest of crosses. I spent a long time

looking for the place where Jack was killed and may be buried, but every landmark—roads, houses, villages—being utterly blotted out, I could only find it eventually by map and compass near sundown. It was then too dark to find his grave among so many, but I now know exactly where to look for it, and hope to go up there again before I leave this region.

News has just come that an officer in my Company was killed in the Second Battalion's last show on the fifteenth. This, following upon Esmond Elliot, is very sad. The First Battalion had three officers killed, one of whom came out with me this last time. It is a toss-up what is going to happen to us next!

It is Saturday, December 8th, 1917, and six weeks and three days since I made an entry. What a world of experience I have had in this short time! Early in November I went on leave—home to London, and on November 22nd rejoined the Battalion. Since then I have been through some arduous, not to say unpleasant times. I have been through the whole of the Cambrai show with nothing worse than sore feet and a few bruises, and though in a fortnight I have only once changed my boots or taken my clothes off, so far I have only had a slight chill as a reward. Here then is a recital of my life and my sufferings.

On joining the Battalion on November 22nd after leave, I found them south-east of Bapaume, just moving up to the battle, having done some long marches from the north. Everybody was full of wild rumours

as to our having broken through beyond Cambrai, and of the Bosches running before the tanks and cavalry; most of them, needless to say, not true.

At daybreak on the 23rd we marched about eight miles, camped during the day in great discomfort, and marched another eight miles that night across the Hindenburg Line (which was captured on the 20th) to some good German dug-outs on the fringe of the battle. In the morning we found ourselves in front of Bourlon Wood and saw the church spires of Cambrai, five miles to the south-east, the Germans heavily shelling the neighbouring villages of Graincourt and Anneux, and our knocked-out tanks lying about in all directions. The wounded were pouring back. At nine o'clock that evening the order came to move up to Bourlon Wood, which we did as a Battalion, getting shelled a bit going across the open. Bourlon Wood was a nightmare sort of place—pitch dark and no one knew its tortuous ways or quite where the Germans were. It is a big wood divided up by rides and summer roads. After going half-way through it, very heavy rifle and machine-gun fire broke out in front on the farther edge of the wood, lights going up all round. Several men got hit, and down the ride there came a surging mob of cavalrymen, infantry, and engineers absolutely out of control, shouting and yelling that the Germans had broken in and were coming through the wood. It was a fine example of New Army discipline. Our men fixed bayonets, lined the ride, expecting every moment a terrific German onslaught. Nothing happened. We then went on through the wood, which was pitch dark,

nobody knowing whether the Bosches had been driven out or not, and eventually dug in. We then found some very windy Highlanders and dismounted cavalry, and we got orders to push on and drive the Bosches out at daybreak. This of course was sheer open fighting, and quite different from anything we had done before except on field days. As soon as it got light the three companies advanced in extended order, and it was not long before the bullets began to fly, and Howard's Company got hung up by machine-guns on the left. Consequently we could not get on. Desultory and sometimes very sharp fighting went on for about two and a half hours. We sniped a lot of Bosches. Then Howard got badly wounded, and it was obvious the Bosches were too strong for us. As a matter of fact we afterwards heard that the north-east part of the wood was held by two Battalions of the Third Prussian Guard Division and must simply have been swarming with them, so we could hardly expect to take it with three companies. Later in the morning we were told the Bosches must be cleared out at all costs, and we had to attack again at two o'clock, with the First Guards Brigade on our right. This was at 1.15, so there was not much time to arrange it, and I had the wind up as never before, feeling certain that it was impossible to take the place owing to the machine-guns which were supposed to be rushed with the bayonet, but which nobody really knew the whereabouts and number of. We lined along a summer ride and went over just at the tail end of a sleet-storm. There was a short and quite useless machine-gun barrage, no artillery. Just after

we had gone over, Tyringham tried to stop us, as the Command realised the hopelessness of it, but it was then too late. F Company got ahead on the right and I heard a lot of firing. Sergeant Fotheringham, a chap I got the D.C.M. for at Ypres, was with me, and he kept bringing the men on in the most magnificent way, and he was wonderful from first to last, and if he had lived would have got a V.C. or bar to his D.C.M. When we got to the more open part of the wood I saw what had happened—just as I expected. Menzies, the Company Commander, and Sergeant Maclean with all the leading men of F Company had been laid out together trying to rush the machine-guns. At the same moment the two machine-guns slewed round on to us, and I realised that we were only about fifteen yards from one of them. Of course we flung ourselves down, Sergeant Fotheringham, a man called Grant—the same that was wounded at Neuve Chapelle—in F Company, and myself; and for the next twenty minutes there was nothing but a young oak-tree between us three and eternity. The machine-gun fired absolutely point blank, but could not quite reach us on account of the tree. Most of the platoon got down in a depression about twenty-five yards behind, but about eight men, including two Lewis Gunners, were almost up with us. These kept on firing for all they were worth, and the Lewis Gunners working their guns in the open until they were killed. Every man was killed one after the other, and Grant is the only man left alive besides myself. Then the Bosches started throwing phosphorous bombs at the dead and wounded, which set light to them and

burnt them up. I thought I had seen most of the nasty things in this war, but this was the nastiest by a long way. By this time the rest of the men had retired, but we three were still lying behind the tree, unable to move an eyelid. However, after about twenty minutes the Germans got tired of shooting, and we decided to get away if possible one by one. Grant went first, and got across the open all right, though fired at from each side. Then Sergeant Fotheringham volunteered to try and get one of the Lewis guns away. He had his arm shattered at once, but managed to crawl back, only to die at the dressing-station. He was a great friend of mine and I feel his loss very much. I waited about five minutes and then did a lightning sprint on my stomach, and by all natural laws ought to have been hit—the bullets were knocking stones up into my face. However, I got back in the end. It was an experience I shall never wish to repeat, and it is no compensation for the loss of people like Menzies, and Sergeants Fotheringham and Maclean to know that what they were asked to do was absolutely impossible. It is little consolation even to know that the Corps General has been sent home.

That night we got relieved by a line regiment and went about four hundred yards back in support. Next day I was transferred to command F Company with one subaltern, who got badly shell-shocked the same night, so I was then left alone. Later, another subaltern was transferred from G Company to me. We were relieved by the Second Irish Guards, who got it in the neck from a 5·9 barrage coming up and we escaped it

by luck. After a day in reserve dug-outs we marched back six miles and had a day's rest.

The next day we were supposed to go out for a month's rest, but about breakfast-time the great German counter-bombardment began, of course a long way off, and within an hour we were on the road again, with men and transport fleeing on every side, roads absolutely choked. No time to get into fighting kit—I had my best uniform on, not the least annoying part of the business. The whole of at least one Division were running for their lives, and the chaos was indescribable. About one o'clock we halted in open country, the whole Third Brigade, got into artillery formation, and the Brigadier, who was on the spot, ordered an advance until we came into contact with the Bosches, who were supposed to be on top of us at any moment. Every ride and rise we expected to meet them. As a matter of fact they had already been held up by the First and Second Guards Brigades on right and left. I think no one will dispute that the Guards Division saved the day on this occasion, at any rate. The rest were nowhere. Well, at midnight the whole Division was ordered to counter-attack with tanks and cavalry. This was afterwards changed to daybreak. We were in Brigade reserve and lost very little; my Company, being the weakest, was in battalion reserve, but the Fourth Grenadiers and Welsh Guards had an awful time. Next night my Company moved up into close support on the railway line, where we got badly shelled and had several casualties. I took over from King's Company First Grenadiers. Though nothing else happened, it was an unpleasant

time, as we expected a counter-attack at any moment and kept on standing-to. The S.O.S. went up twice in one afternoon, and warnings kept on coming from the Brigade that the Germans were coming over the ridge. However, in the end we never got an attack at all. Then, after ten days' fighting and hardship, by far the worst I have had to endure since the war began, we were relieved and came back eight miles, where we waited thirty-six hours for a train which eventually brought us right back here—a journey of twenty-two miles, taking eight hours in cattle-trucks, owing to the line being blown up!

This is a nice quiet village and we are in good billets, but it does not look as if there is going to be much rest as far as I can make out.

Nine days have passed. The weather has turned vile, and at present the ground is covered with damp snow, and it is correspondingly cold. Fortunately we remain in our excellent billets for the time being. Yesterday I went on a motor trip to the neighbouring town of Arras and had a couple of hearty meals, but it was a bitterly cold thirty-five-mile drive coming back.

All the men I recommended for the Cambrai show, I now hear, have got the Military Medal, except their Corporal, who is going to get the D.C.M.

Must now go and inspect rifles—through the driving snow!

Six days now to Christmas. I expect to spend it in good billets, as we are pretty sure to be out of the line this year, not like my other war Christmas, in the trenches after a *rencontre* with the Bosches. The weather at present is still very cold and wintry, but bright.

Several people have sent me things already—a plum-pudding, a tinned chicken, a cake, a diary, a cigarette-lighter, and an Orilux torch;—this last especially will be invaluable.

Lord knows when my captaincy comes. I have given up thinking about it, having only just realised that one's C.O.'s word can no more be relied on than anybody else's. And I saw the original thing in writing!!

We have managed to spend quite a cheerful Christmas. There was a Battalion Dinner with the usual amount of drinking and shouting, and last night, December 28th, we feasted off a goose. There was also a sergeants' concert, a fearsome orgy. They all got blind to a man, and everybody's health had to be drunk in whiskey punch. One blighter kept shouting out: "Good old Mr. Ewitt! Good old Mr. Ewitt! He led me over the top," but personally, I could not remember the occasion.

To-day I went down to Divisional Headquarters, and to-night I have got two Grenadiers coming in to dine. Our rest here will be short-lived, but I am going on a four days' course of Wireless Telegraphy, which will mean my missing the next go of the trenches. Doubtless, I shall have enough visits next Spring—and to spare!

CHAPTER VIII

ARRAS TO THE ARMISTICE

Here—on this Wireless Telegraphy course which is absolutely useless—things jog along pretty quietly. The Battalion is in the trenches at present, but I am left out for the first eight days, it being my turn. I go back, however, on Wednesday. The line—a few kilometres from Arras—is very good and very quiet at present, I hear; but of course our people always insist upon waking things up. I went up to the reserve line to-day (January 7th), and only heard about four shells burst all the time I was there. I am going up for seven days, I think, on the 10th, after which I hope to get Paris leave, though this is not at all certain. It will be expensive, but it makes a delightful change, and is a temptation I can't resist.

The cold is, and has been, terrific for over a fortnight; far worse, I am told, than in England, and there is still snow on the ground. But of course it is dry. I enter this in at the very good officers' club we have here, where most people foregather.

January 15th, 1918. I am writing this in a dug-out in the support trenches, where we are pretty comfortable on the whole, although sixteen days at a time gets a bit monotonous and one gets practically no exercise. The line, however, is very quiet at present, while the weather,

except for occasional snowstorms, has been splendid. But now, I am afraid, it is turning to rain, although it is much warmer.

At the end of the week I hope to get my three or four days in Paris, but this leave is not so easy to get now as it was.

We move into the front line to-night.

I have tried to write for a fortnight, but it has been impossible with so much to do, and I am at present looking after the Company.

Things go on as usual here. My Paris leave did not materialise, as a brother officer was sent on a course at the last moment, which left me in charge of the Company. We are at the present moment in reserve, and go into the front line a night or two hence.

I rode up to the trenches to-day (January 28th) to make the necessary arrangements. They are pretty good, and the Bosche keeps quiet at present, but sixteen days, I still maintain, is a lot to do at a time. Life in dug-outs, indeed, becomes more than a bit trying. During the last "tour" the rain brought the trenches tumbling in, and the mud was so bad they simply could not be used. The Germans and ourselves were walking about on the top in full view of each other, neither side wanting to shoot. The other afternoon I rode up to the Vimy Ridge. It is a steep place on the German side with a wonderful view on a clear day across to Lens and Douai. The weather has been delightful for the time of year, and I am

keeping fairly fit except for an inability to sleep at night.

Last night, February 9th, we gave a dinner to the Fourth Grenadiers, who are leaving the Brigade at once under the new re-grouping scheme. It was a proper orgy, and every one got tight; but it was great fun, and we are sorry to lose them.

Leave has gone phut, and I shall not get mine before the 4th of March at the earliest, though it is really due ten days from now. However, I hear to-day that I have been recommended for six months' light duty in England under the new scheme by which officers who have been out here some time are sent home for a rest. As I have been out altogether longer than any other subaltern and been over the top three times, it takes me first in this Battalion. Whether I shall get it is another matter, as there is some idea that one has to have completed two years, and I have not quite done that yet.

The C.O. sent for me after the last go in the front line, and said he was extremely pleased with the way I had commanded the Company, and that he intended to recommend me very strongly again to be made a captain at once. He thought it disgraceful that I had not been promoted before. I think so, too, as I have been doing chiefly captain's work, and I am a fool not to have agitated before about it—but I intend to now.

At the present moment I have got violent neuralgia and a very slight touch of influenza. However, I expect I shall be all right by to-morrow. Often I feel extra-

ordinarily weary and that they have had the best out of me. I cannot look forward with confidence to any more battles.

I read that the air-raids in England seem to have been rather bad lately and the food situation still worse. I have just heard also that my sister intends becoming a W.A.A.C. I hope to heaven someone stops her. I saw some in Amiens when last there, and they gave me the face-ache. They ought to be warned off the street anyway, for all their noble work.

I feel I cannot stand this life any longer. My leave is a month over-due, and it seems interminable waiting for it. A Bosche attack is expected hourly and we live in a state of great tension—in the line all the time and apparently no prospect of a rest yet. That, like my leave, is long overdue.

We are at last out of the line, but we go back in a day or two. My leave seems farther off than ever. I have had it in my pocket for a week, but am not allowed to go, as I am in charge of the Company and there is still a tremendous wind-up about the German attack. It is pretty rotten luck with everybody going ahead of me, but I suppose I must just bear with it.

The great German attack is supposed to be so imminent that we return to the line in " battle formation." But I daresay it is largely "wind."

The weather still remains lovely.

Five or six weeks passed! The 22nd April! Well, The explanation is that I have been away on leave, missing the fourth battle of Arras. Add to that the fact that I have at last got my captaincy and it appears my luck has changed.

I am at present in a quite nice village, Barly, some miles back, and have not been in the line since my return. Of course we are now liable to move up at any moment. However, the Division had a very long and trying spell in the trenches while I was away, so they ought to give us a week or two's rest. The situation looks dangerous everywhere at the moment. The Bosches are practically certain to attack again down here soon. A very great deal depends on what they do in the next day or two north of Bailleul. If they get the high ground there, Ypres has to go, and we will all have to go back some way. But both we and the French still have big reserves, which I suppose will be thrown in at the favourable moment. At the same time the Bosche has enormous reserves, and we shall have to fight like grim death to hold him.

I hear that there is a chance of my getting the Military Cross for Cambrai. The C.O. told me that I was put in for it in December, but most of our honours were washed out, and he now says I have been put in again, and he hopes I'll get it in the Birthday Honours. This is all news to me, as I have never heard a hint before.

Must stop scribbling to go to a football match.

April 24th. Yesterday I attended a court-martial, a responsible and rather unpleasant business, and to-morrow night I go into the front line for, I expect, a week.

I have just been offered the job of liaison officer with the French. It just depends on how well I can get along with the language. Of course, I can speak very little. However, one can but try, and it would probably be very interesting.

In the last three weeks little has happened. I am still waiting for a "job" to materialise. It appears no easy matter to get one unless one has direct personal influence. The liaison job has come to nothing so far, and in any case I am not sure that I should be competent for it. I am still out of the line, but go up again for a spell two days hence, on May 16th. Warlincourt is a charming village to be in. Very pretty and quiet, not too full of troops. My tent is pitched in an orchard overlooking a wooded valley, and during the fine weather it has been very pleasant lying out all day. An officer in this Battalion who has been some time with us was unluckily killed the other morning—shot in mistake by one of our own sentries: though not the sentry's fault, however. I went to Abbeville for the day recently and got a tolerably good meal, but it is a longish way from here. Otherwise I have little to record. I lead a more or less monotonous life. All leave is

stopped, of course—it was stopped on March 21st—with no prospect whatever of its starting again yet awhile. No Paris leave either. It will reopen when the battle is over—but that is, God knows when.

The situation is stationary at present, but I gather there is no great confidence about the future in high quarters. The Bosche will push at any moment and will take a deal of holding. The Yanks, however, are arriving in considerable numbers.

I have been in the line eight days—since May 16th—and things are fairly quiet at present. It cannot be long now, though, before the battle breaks out again.

As I am last but one in the Battalion when leave starts, I have quite given up any thought of it. I should think October would be my very earliest chance, as even when it starts, it is sure to go very slowly for some time.

Our fortnight before coming here was a delightful rest. Perfect weather, very pretty country, riding every evening. The only fly in the ointment was the bombing at night, which often came unpleasantly close. Indeed, at the next farm to us one night just before we left four Grenadier officers were knocked out—three killed and one wounded, which was rotten luck.

We have had several casualties lately—two officers killed and three wounded.

I seem to be as far off as ever from getting a job. Even the liaison thing has apparently fallen through.

I was wrong in my entry of May 23rd, eighteen days ago; the liaison job has not fallen through after all. I have just been appointed G.S.O.3 (General Staff Officer 3rd Grade) to a Division with the 36th French Army Corps (liaison) and am off immediately. I am pleased to think it will be an interesting job. Am starting for the North to-morrow.

Abbeville station at ten o'clock of a sultry June morning, waiting for the Paris express, is a busy place. All 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 the photographer, the 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, 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 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 myself.

Through all the long and sultry day the train rolls on its circuitous way towards Paris—faster, mercifully, than that of yore. First it touches the sea, 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, I learn, 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 we all clamber 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. I nod. I doze.

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. Of 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 fading sunset under the great vault of the station roof!

I 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 me. 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 4th, 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.

Morning again, and in its bright light the garden of the Hôtel Ritz in the Place Vendôme looks cool, exotic, and exceedingly peaceful. The hotel is all white, and smiles in the gay sunshine. There is a glimpse of a glass verandah, 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 pattern-work 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, re-arranging 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, and 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 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 nine 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 when I was here before. 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!

A good luncheon at Les Ambassadeurs; coffee and liqueurs amid the usual banter and blowing of straws, pidgin-English, and worse French. Then 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 Elysées, 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 Elysées 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 Bosche is only 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 seems 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. This 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.

After dark 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 the 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 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 alleyways, 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 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.

Five days since I left Abbeville station, and here I am (it is June 15th) at an Officers' Convalescent Camp, suffering from a new and up-to-date form of trench-fever. I came over a bit queer in Paris, went to the A.D.M.S., and he sent me straight off here to the coast, where I am likely to be for three or four weeks.

I am not feeling too well at the moment, but the thing will have to run its usual course, and in some ways it is a nice rest after the travelling and rushing about I have had.

The thing that worries me is that I fear I shall lose my very interesting and long-waited-for liaison job down South. There is a chance that they may keep it open, but I fear the M.O.'s here are apt to keep one some time.

July 2nd. After nearly three weeks in hospital, I am now practically all right, and have got a light-duty job in the A.P.M.'s office in Havre for a fortnight. I have only just started it, but it seems a jolly good job, and I like it much better than hospital.

Trench fever is unpleasant in the earlier stages, but these only last about a week. It is a sort of influenza and pulls one down a bit.

I have an excellent billet here, and comparative freedom, not much work, only a bit of letter-censoring

and occasionally one has to walk out the "criminals" (*i.e.* chaps awaiting court-martial). The place is pleasant, and I find I know several people at the Base even now, so I shall not mind if I am here for some time.

As to the liaison job, I have heard nothing more of it, so it is not off yet anyway. Meanwhile, I am having lessons and also working at French by myself, and am improving by degrees.

The weather is lovely, sunny and hot, and a lot of people bathe. I read and write a good deal, but otherwise there is not much doing.

It is the first of August, and I seem to have been terribly slack with my entries lately, but the fact is I have been deeply immersed in work of another sort, and once I start in on anything I almost dare not put it down until it is finished.

I have changed my quarters, being passed fit, and am at the Guards Division Base Depot. I am to stay here until the authorities get a movement order from the Division, which makes me furious, as every day is precious. The red tape involved in these things is considerable. Meanwhile, of course, I do not know definitely whether the liaison job is still going.

There was an attempted air-raid last night, and everybody had to stand about in trenches for two and a half hours, but it came to nothing.

Havre is crowded with people and is not unamusing, but very expensive.

Leave looks absolutely hopeless; the latest G.R.O. is that one is not *eligible* before seven months since last leave, at which rate I would be lucky to get it at Christmas! However, one can only hope something may turn up, and when things look most impossible they sometimes come right.

August 24th! A bare three weeks since I was mooning around Havre, and now I am back again at the front. The Division is in action in the Third Army push. So far I am stout and well, and am acting Transport Officer. I take up ammunition and rations every night to the Battalion on the battlefield; not a pleasant job, but the shelling so far has not been bad. Casualties will, however, I fear, be heavy before the end, although the Second Brigade came off lightly. This morning at daybreak our Brigade went over the top, but our losses so far are uncertain. To-night, as I have to find them, I shall know.

Stephen Graham, the author, acts as my orderly. The whole countryside is alive with troops, and it reminds me greatly of September 1916, just after Jack's death, the battle of the Somme. Flies, heat, and dust are terrible, but they do not matter much as long as the Bosche is going the right way—and he seems to be.

I must get some sleep, having to ride all night.

The last three days have been trying, but I am at least safely through the present stage of the battle

without too much misadventure. We have been lucky so far in the Battalion, losing only one officer killed and one hundred and thirty-five other ranks killed and wounded. The first day we advanced about a mile under heavy machine-gun fire. The second, we captured St. Leger. The Grenadiers caught it pretty heavy, most of King's Company being taken prisoner. While acting Transport Officer during the battle, I have been lucky on my twenty-mile ride each night, since for some reason or other the Bosche has not shelled the roads.

It is the first of September and I have emerged unscathed from the battle, though as an acting Transport Officer I was spared the worst of it. However, on reflection, I think I had quite an exciting enough time going up to the line and back every night. I would start off at about 6 p.m., ride all night, and get back just before daybreak. One night, owing to the Battalion advancing, I rode twenty-six miles.

The Battalion attacked twice, but came off pretty lightly in the show. The first Grenadiers caught it the worst in this Brigade. We were, however, up against the toughest place in the whole line.

I am still on the same job, but there is not much to do when the Battalion is out of the line. However, this will be a very brief spell. What is going to happen to me eventually, goodness knows. Stirling said something to me about going as A.D.C. "here," and that it had been

proposed from "outside," but what he meant I don't know, but must try to find out, also who proposed it. Meanwhile I can do nothing but sit still and wait for something to turn up.

It looks as if everybody will be kept fighting for a long time to come, but of course things are going swimmingly. The Battalion killed a lot of Bosches, the order being "No Prisoners," so they did in everybody, including the blokes who put up their hands . . .

. . . Since writing the above I have had a riding accident and resume my scribbling in hospital. I was galloping along a track near Berles au Bois and went head over tip into a summer road. I got concussion and am battered a bit about the head and face. Indeed, I was knocked out for two hours.

Who knows, with the Bosche running, the war may be over before I'm sent back? They say I may be here anything from a few days to several weeks.

CHAPTER IX

PILGRIMAGE

The clash of arms had long since passed away when my sister Angela and I, one October day in 1919, stood on the highest part of the Somme battlefield—the Butte de Warlincourt—viewing that remarkable scene in the rich light of a calm Autumn morning. Already, it seemed, the aftermath had come—that aftermath which, following upon rage, despair, distress of spirit, brings to the sufferer a dreamless sleep. I had found my own anodyne during the first year of peace in beginning a novel when, after recuperating and being a Demobilisation Officer, I had left the Army.

And now before us the battlefield stretched afar like some wild, undulating moorland; it was only when we looked critically through spy-glasses that we perceived the whole area to be one of complete destruction; that it was too a vast cemetery. In general, the landscape was bounded by the wintry skeletons of trees, ghost-like, shell-wrecked, identifying such ominous spots as High Wood, Delville Wood, the Bazen, and Le Transloy. Only in the distance could be perceived a little hill. There was no sign of life, except where the ruler-straight line of the Bapaume–Albert road cutting across the foreground was dotted by an occasional lorry or whirling motor-car that suggested something of the strenuous paraphernalia of a warfare past.

After all, this Somme battlefield—it was the home of

the dead. And we soon started to pick our way along the sloping side of the little ravine which leads up to the one-time village of Flers, a certain light of anticipation in our faces. Nor could the way be easily pursued, for shell-holes of every size treacherously overgrown with weeds and vegetation, not to speak of wires, staves, and the naturally rough nature of the ground, everywhere beset our footsteps. It was impossible to go far without a fall. Hardly less common than shell-holes were the graves of the soldiers—a greying wooden cross leaning to an angle marked usually by the name on a metal label, sometimes by nothing at all, and sometimes by the inscription *To an Unknown Soldier* in indelible pencil. At each of these we paused. Wreckage of the fighting of 1916 not less than that of 1918 lay on every hand. Here it was a steel helmet, German or English, dented. comical-looking, once set upon a man's head, now a piece of empty steel; there a shred of uniform, musty-coloured, sodden, and often hardly recognisable, such a shred as one sees left by some tramp on a country wayside; again, it might be a completely rusted rifle or a gas-mask strangely discoloured and forbidding, Fragments of letters we found, photographs of women, and the stray names of men who had long since gone to dust. Year-old tragedies lurked on either hand: in this livid green, stagnant pool where a soldier's clothing and equipment, his respirator and rifle, lay adjacent to an oozing, battered grave; in that shell-hole where a blood-stained overcoat and steel helmet suggest what may have happened there.

The village of Flers signifies a handful of grey stones

on a bare hillside rising toward a little knoll where once a church may have stood. Heaps of salvage litter the way—heaps of iron wiring-stakes or pickets, piles of trench-mortar bombs and shells, piles of leather equipment, broken trucks from a light railway, many rifles, dug-out frames, and boxes of ammunition. Presumably there had been neither time nor labour to cart them away. As for the road Flers–Longueval, so clearly marked on the map—it merges hourly in the green-brown world around and is already grass-grown.

Thus we leave the living world behind. We, so laboriously picking our way along the grim and deserted valley, find ourselves without sign or sound of human life; mere specks upon the vast heath; alone with the larks, with the dead, with the silent portents of bygone strife. The larks sing from an atmosphere of calm unclouded blue; all is still and all coloured by the golden sunshine which seems to dwell not unkindly, not even sorrowfully upon the havoc, upon the tumultuous passions of mankind here laid to rest. Only the troughs of the valleys remain in shadow. No aeroplane drones overhead. No more from the eastward comes the fitful murmur of the guns.

We are glad for Jack's sake—and our own. Strange how the horror, the loneliness, the chill, the cruelty of earth can be transfused in beauty by the mellowing sunshine of an autumn day!

Dim shapes of terror threading a way through labyrinthine darkness are viewed by us as a reality for ever fled, so are the waiting hours of pain and of dread, the wanderings by night, the lurid dawns, the stricken,

weary eves that must have haunted his last hours. So, full of recollections, we plod onward, glancing often at the map, which is an uncertain guide, and occasionally correcting our orientation by the still visible peak of the Butte de Warlincourt. For we know that our friend lies near.

Himself is merged in the deepening sunbeams of the early afternoon, in the dreaming peace of this nevertheless solemn scene. So typical a better Englishman, so handsome, and yet so strong a nature! Somewhere he lies near—on that hillside above the shell-stricken wood —this product of an Eton and an Oxford life; this sportsman and man of affairs; this solid and familiar figure on the crowded London stage. . . . What is the satisfaction of our search? What do we expect to find, and what to feel? It is as though some magnet, some occult, refined sense drew us on. This we could not explain. For, after all, the sunbeams are no more than mocking memories: the reality is underground—a skull, a few bones, a wisp or two of hair, a shred or two of khaki cloth. But to that we cling. We reach out to within a few feet of what once was. And with every cross we bend down to, puzzling out letters and numbers which time and weather have reduced to mere ciphers, a quick look of hope starts in the eyes. . . . It is not to be.

And as though to remind us of the futility of men's efforts to reach out for that which Eternity has already claimed—something rustles. We are come to a little wood consisting of almost symmetrical ashen-grey stumps, of many that have fallen, of shell-holes clus-

tered so thick that not a square inch of undisturbed ground remains. A dusky figure now appears and watches us intently, grinning. It wears a kind of turban, a khaki jacket, white drawers, and puttees. Evidently an Indian left in this lonely spot to carry on the work of salvage, for now a small fire is perceived burning without a dug-out. Like the Spirit of Irony itself it mocks us; like some ghoulish denizen of another world it has stolen from its lair at sound of unexpected wanderers.

We continue our search unheeding, but with hope afresh. Heart, mind, the vital energy concentrate upon the search. The blue and gold afternoon waxes and wanes. Solitary, we climb up to a plateau the better to obtain a view, and gaze across to a handful of bricks in a hollow where Ginchy was, to the undulations beyond where Combles and Lesbœufs once existed. To the right lies the empty space of Longueval, with Delville Wood in gaunt nakedness above it, and, unobserved in a hollow, the railway station of Guillemont. All are one with the calm beauty of the October day. Around and in great multitude lie the men of the Manchester Regiment. Captain Stewart of the Black Watch and a brother officer have unfortunately fallen here. A little beyond are the troops of the Irish Division which notably captured Ginchy towards evening on September 14th, 1916. Between this point and the patch of tree-stumps that marks Lesbœufs, the Guards Division swept over the hill shortly after daybreak on September 15th of the same year. There lies in echelon the flower of the British Army, by its battered crosses, by its

rotted bodies and free-given blood marking the milestones of the road they travelled three years ago. . . .

On an old battlefield many strange things are found. Orchard Trench remains much as it was when, in the grey of an early August morning, the 60th Rifles and Rifle Brigade attacked at great cost. Everywhere lies the ordinary *débris* of occupied trenches—bully-beef tins, biscuit tins, traces of half-executed work, and even traces of half-executed meals. An officer's—probably an artillery officer's—dugout remains even as it was left. What happened . . .? A dented enamelled white basin with traces of soapy water stands on a box; shaving tackle all spattered with soil and mud spreads itself upon an improvised table. Something of a meal remains—a marmalade jar with tin plates and rusted knife and fork. A pair of muddy, hardened, boots is set down near the entrance.

So engrossed are we seekers that we do not notice the rapidly westering rays of the afternoon sun or the oncoming of night. We do not even feel the approaching cold. . . . Will we find our friend, or do the dead lie too thick—are the crosses too many? We pause in our search, a profound disappointment upon our faces. Already sundown is here, and it is the hour of the frost. Already great shadows begin to lengthen across the battlefield, blotting out the hollow places, adding infinitely to the vast tragedy of this land.

What bitterness lies there! What bitterness in the heart that cannot break, in the scalding tears that cannot wash away what once was vital, in the mind whose wounds Eternity alone can heal!

With downcast eyes we turn our faces toward the west. The shadows gather. The frost comes down. A partridge calls. All that was mortal we leave. 'Twas not to be. We homeward turn. . . . Presently looking up, we perceive against the roseate sunset glow three high crosses set upon a little hill.

CHAPTER X

GEESE AND GUNS

If there is one characteristic of England that distinguishes it from other countries and other countrysides—the more remarkable in view of the smallness of our island—it is a marked distinctive individuality in each of its component parts. They are in very truth component parts: not like Russia with its vast *steppes*, its vast plains; not like France with its monotonous, compartmented, puny meadows, its poplar groves, its close-planted orchards; not like Germany with its broad tracts of sandy pineland; or Austria and the Balkan countries with their endless fields of millet, barley, and rye; or Belgium with its billiard-table expanses of flat, featureless holdings, and its insultingly ugly houses. England is a mosaic of different shapes, sizes, and tints, each county quite different from the other, as Westmorland from Dorset, Shropshire from Essex, and Lancashire from Derbyshire. In rural England, above all, one gets "atmosphere."

A few months had passed since my pilgrimage to the Somme, when a railway train on one grey lingering afternoon of this winter of 1919–1920, drew out of the old by-water town of King's Lynn along a branch track, conveying me to an atmosphere typical of East Anglia. This seaboard is little known, in winter at any rate, except by stray wayfarers. And it is one which demands to be approached by afternoon light under a winter

sky. Always about the Eastern Counties, even far inland, an atmosphere of "Saxonism," of pre-civilisation, of deadness or stagnancy, of melancholy almost—something hard to explain—seems to cling. One thinks of the remote meres amid fir-belts and clusters of pine and plains of ashen grass about Euston, Brandon, and Thetford which seem to brood unalterably and to contemplate; one thinks of the old derelict churchyards half-buried under nettle, field-parsley, and a riot of weeds that are here and there found; or, again, of the trim, neat churchyards in far-away places secluded from the world of life by solemn cypresses and sentinel yews.

This queer coast-line in the greying afternoon was of a piece with these. It was not the marshes yet; they were farther on. It was not the sea; that remained evasively out of sight. Sometimes, indeed, as around Sandringham, the country merely became English—except, in that particular spot, for the rhododendron-massed woodlands. Here were acres of ploughed land and brown, naked hedgerows, and black, naked copses and spinneys. But as we passed farther on, the true coastline came—a pale, whitish-grey, marram-grown stretch of sandy shore, and against a glimpse here and there of greyish-green sea a long line of derelict bathing-huts and summer bungalows looking curiously out of season. It was melancholy, profoundly East Anglian, desolate. . . . The train puffed on, and now there came to view the true coast border—a flat grassy expanse, two miles wide perhaps, thinly intersected by wooden fences and by dykes of perplexing origin, on the seaward side bordered by an interminable, unbreaking, un-

changing belt of pines and firs. Landward were woods and fields which seemed merely to refract the cold, heavy, clayey soil to the cold, heavy winter sky.

And the very names of the towns and villages express —do they not?—the character of this bleakish corner of England. Heacham, Hunstanton, Blakeney, Docking: who could dwell in such places—and live?

The penultimate wayside station expressed no town or village. It expressed a naked wooden platform and a surrounding expanse of marsh-grass extending to the inevitable pine-fringed sand-dunes by the seashore. I felt—I *knew*—the sea was beyond the pines—a kind of vague opaqueness in the sky, perhaps—without, indeed, knowing.

But hark! while the train stops. A cackling, grating, solemn murmuring beside the railway line, opposite the station? Good gracious! Not wild geese surely! These are yellow birds herding together in small parties; their khaki colour, light build and forehead protuberance suggest that they may be Egyptians. But what of those other great flocks two or three hundred yards away—grey and white, murmuring, too, and grazing? Of the puffing train when it starts they take no heed; they appear entirely complacent and even tame, for, though they are so short a distance off, only the sentinels look up with extended necks. . . . A first surprising glimpse of the wild geese.

Then, through the curve of a cutting, the train wound round to its dead-end: to the seaport town that once had lived, and now, in all human probability, would never live again.

The line travelled no farther: a dead-end: life finished here. And grey and old and bleak and black and red and marooned there on the flat, forgotten coast it looked as the golden knife-like sunbeams of the waning evening struck its roofs, its flagstaff, its sparse elm trees, and its grey, flinty church tower. Lingering on there through the slow winter . . . forgotten!

And the streets that were few, narrow, uneven, up and down hill, did not belie this impressionist character. There were numerous paths between the houses and queer wells in cobbled courtyards among old cottages, and unexpected *culs-de-sac*. There was one long main street bisected by a lesser street and running roughly from the church gate to the quay; and that, one might say, was all except the Square. Except the shut-in Square, surrounded by fair-sized, dignified, grey and dull-red Georgian houses with gates and gardens, inhabited by doctors, solicitors, maiden ladies, and the local owners of maltings. Thereonto the windows of the principal inn looked. And didn't it convey a queer mind-picture under those last gleaming, golden shafts of wintry light: the old shut-in Square, the green grass space of its centre, and in the midst thereof a round pavilioned bandstand rotting to decay.

A bandstand!

What office could it perform there, what had it ever done, or what right could it ever have had to be there? And could there possibly be associated with it, or the place at all, even one spasm of gaiety, however long ago, however utterly buried and laid to rest?

These were the queries that the mind prompted: but they were not all. The "life" of the place began here, now in this waning, slowly, frosting afternoon. Two goalposts set up on the green, and a mob of children just released from school sporting with a football. Is there anything quite so symbolical of the English winter as the English country child in winter—just released from school? One has it in Turner's *Frosty Morning*—and the whole atmosphere of the season and the countryside and the moment in that queer, smug, done-up figure on the frost-bound lane which simply expresses, and mutely, blue and pink and shivering, the early morning cold. And here in late afternoon—the same child. Shouts of the boys kicking their ball cut the evening air. One or two dark blanket-coated figures of women pass, singly or in couples, across the green on this household errand or that. A man wheels a barrow of dead leaves, sets it down, and slaps himself for warmth. The plane trees shiver. . . . And then comes that Turner child, done up in brown, with its red shawl, its blue-and-pink suggestion of a face, its air of so entirely belonging to the place—and to no other place ever—carrying a milk-can!

As night closed in, there occurred no jar in the harmony of its outer aspect: a perfect winter bleakness. A dead, forgotten East Anglian backwater town on the North Sea's verge. To-morrow would reveal its secrets —if any. But for the present there were commercial travellers; and there were fowlers. There were in the purlieus of that inn two or three of those slick, sleek, peculiar men who carry commercialised twentieth-

century England on their persons, and their souls (if they have any) in black-leather handbags. Over preposterous meals they made friends with the fowlers. For the fowlers were not those blue-eyed, fair-haired, fair-skinned natives whose acquaintance we shall make —in blue jerseys and oilskins—upon the marsh, upon the old quay, and by the seashore. No; they were a loud, blustering, exotic race of fowlers recruited from among tradesmen in the prosperous seaside "resorts." Confound the seaside "resorts"! In company with their deplorable wives and their innumerable children, in consort with the commercial travellers and the baser spirits of the little town, they proceeded to create a disastrous nocturne compounded of whiskey and billiards and tall stories and bad jokes. They were the sort of men one would like to drown in a butt of beer-leavings. . . .

But beyond this ribald ferment—so inseparable from modern country life—I had an inward consciousness of far-stretching marsh, mere, mud-flat, and open sea. I thought of the grey geese and the yellow geese out there on the fresh marsh. All was hidden, but the morrow would reveal all. That is the charm of an exploration. The streets of the little town were very dark. One or two flickering oil-lamps and a big flare outside—a cinema! Well—that was indispensable; that had to be. I went on and came to utter darkness beside lapping water. How the wind moaned, how it sighed like a voice crying in the wilderness! Other cries came out of the dark—those of redshank, those of golden plover—quiet, murmurous cries, wild, clamorous cries

at intervals. . . . It became evident that the salt marsh was at hand.

Night yet reigned. There was no earliest streak of dawn or day. All was silent save for the whining of the wind around the house and the occasional heavy tramp of hobnailed boots descending stairs. For it was the hour just before day—when the gunners made their way out to the seashore or fresh marshes on the chance of incoming geese. Without, one or two gas-lamps flickered in the narrow street that led steeply to the quay. The quay was deserted except for a few railway trucks outside the big maltings—innocent of shipping, quite, for no vessel of burden had crossed the bar since 1916, when, for some mysterious reason, a coasting ketch had elected to come up-tide with a holdful of barley. Since that day the life of the seaport town (as such) had died. The maltings themselves, which were large, noisy, and prosperous, were the last lingering vestige of spasmodic activity. As the day went on, they would doubtless begin to clank and grate and rattle. Now they, too—the preposterous square high brick buildings, eloquently purposive—were silent, and only in some obscure office a light burned. At the far end of the quay stood a grey stone pillar surmounting a few steps, set up to commemorate the heroes of the local lifeboat, who, a number of years ago, were drowned, one and all, in some great storm. Near by was an octagonal shelter, also of grey stone, with seats facing every way, where the

water-side worthies had a habit of congregating at any hour of the day. It corresponded somewhat to the village cross or four cross-roads. Thenceforward a causeway or embankment led for two miles dead straight to the sea beach. This, I learned, was the favourite promenade of the inhabitants on fine Sundays. It was raised high above the level of the fresh marsh on the one side and of the salt-marsh and harbour-flow on the other. Now, however, all being dark, there could be seen only a few stray lights to indicate the situation of the town behind, and eastward over the sea a faint opaque grey that suggested the imminent approach of day. Boats, literal "cockle-shells," tied up alongside the embankment and little disturbed by the calm flow of low tide, grated at intervals against the stonework or against each other. And how the wind blew! How the wind blew in from the south-east across the salt-marshes, over the flats! No escaping it up there on the embankment. There were at intervals wooden seats which might conceivably—but at no other time or season—be the resort of those who like to take their ease above the seascape of a summer's evening. A faint cry came now and then from the marsh—always the plaintive, half-sorrowful call of the redshank, cries of gulls and other sounds too far off to identify. Every town and every locality—have you noticed?—has a key sound or scent or sign, a manifestation of personality, of individual expression. Far inland it is the cry of kestrel or plover or swallow's twitter, or the ringing of church bells, or the reek of churning butter or ripening fruit. Here, in the marshland, it was clearly the call of the redshank which fre-

quented every brackish pool. Then blackening trees loomed up, seaward, skyward, and the long dark belt of pines became visible, but among them I could distinguish slender stems of silver birch. It was essentially, as I presently discovered, a marsh tract, a haunt presumably of snipe and woodcock. By the seaside were the sand dunes. No sheer drop, no white chalk precipice here. The inland fields merged in the marshes, the marshes in the sand dunes, then the pebbly beach; then the wide expanse of flat sand to sea's edge.

It was over a sandy spit at the harbour-bar, where an old lifeboat house stood, that the geese came every daybreak—or soon after. There were plenty of hiding-places in round concavities filled with the coarse sea-grass where one could wait on the chance of a shot. By the time this spit or promontory was reached, the dark sky had become barred with saffron and white, and out of the greyness, sea, coast-line, and every neighbouring feature gradually began to emerge. It was cloudy and very cold. At intervals one or two gunners, long-shoremen in blue jerkins, oilskin hats, and serge trousers, could be seen taking up their positions, gun on shoulder, among the sand-dunes. The utterly flat line of the coast emerged with the marshes dim and grey towards Blakeney, and northward the wide expanse of yellowing sand, the whitish sand-hills, and black crest of pines. Birds came flying in to the shore—those which, all night long, had been riding out upon the sea: herring-gulls and black-headed gulls, a few dunlin in close, drilled formation. An odd wader or two could be seen digging out lug-worms beside pools on the mud

flats, for it was low tide. A trio or so of duck flew inland very high. A solitary "cockler" or so, spade on shoulder, made his way out of his digging on the far flats.

Then—at 7.15 it was—the thin "gaggle" of geese could be heard. Nothing to be seen yet. But the "morning flight" had begun. And far up the coast might be heard a quick succession of shots; the fear grew that the wary birds might have changed their course this morning, flying up-coast over the sea and turning inland above a smaller bay or inlet. But it was not so. It must have been only an advance party or stray group whose feeding-ground lay farther to the north. For close at hand now came that strange, harsh, base clamour, rapidly approaching, which proclaims them to be a-wing and gives ample warning to the gunner. And suddenly they were espied—the main flight, a long, thin, eddying line, as though a pencil had been drawn across the background of sky by some unsteady hand. At points, two separate lines of flight converged or overlapped, so that a wedge or phalanx was formed, but for the most part the flight resembled certain formations of rooks—and the birds looked no bigger than rooks. There was not only one line, but a succession of lines, yet before crossing the coast they divided, some passing farther up toward the small bay or inlet referred to, others wheeling in almost level formation high over the pine-belt. As they travelled immediately overhead, it was possible to watch the rhythmical beat of the pinions, the sawing wings, the long, outstretched neck. All the while went on the hoarse clamour of their united voices, toned down by their great height from the earth.

No shot worth trying. The morning was calm. The birds sailed far beyond. Many such mornings pass in winter, and the shore gunners have to be patient. But come a night of storm and gale with a wind blowing out from land and the geese are at the gunner's mercy. To make headway they must fly low, and your low, slow-flying goose is an easy mark. Only you must let him get past you. The breast-feathers will turn even heavy shot. But catch him when he is past and he hurtles to the ground, an unbelievably solid mass. One such morning had come the week before. In the course of a roughish night, the geese, unable to wash and rest on their wonted sandbank, and unable to make headway inland, had been swept down the coast nearly as far as Cromer. Then, about eight o'clock, they came struggling back up-wind over the salt-marshes, over the sand-spit to their feeding-grounds, slowly, lowly, and exhaustedly, only to be met with a regular battery of shots; many fell. One man counted fourteen into his bag, great birds weighing 14 lb. or 15 lb. a-piece. Everybody got two or three. One could not miss them that morning. The town lived on roast wild goose for a week afterwards.

Once over the pine-belt and, as they well know, safe, they alight rapidly in the fresh-marshes not far from the wayside station and fall to feeding without more ado. Something in the quality or kind of the grass attracts them here. Occasionally, but rarely, they move for a day or two over the sleeping town—at night—to the salt-marshes. On frosty, moonlight nights they do not go out to the sea-edge at all, or only for a short spell, but

fly some distance inland and alight in the fields, rooting up and feeding upon the young wheat, to the fury of the farmers.

All through the day, however, they will wander in great parties over the emerald-tinted fresh-marshes. One may see them from the train, a grey line or patch against the greens. In the late afternoon one may creep up to within a hundred and fifty yards of them—walk up, that is to say, behind the embankment which runs down the centre of the fresh-marsh and, crawling up its steep side on the stomach, peep over. And there they are—within easy reach of eye, but not of gun. A great drove of grey legs, with a few yellow Egyptians (from a neighbouring estate) on the outskirts. A short distance away a smaller drove of pink-footed geese, among which, or with the grey-legs, a few white-fronted may at times be identified by the orange legs. One is observed at once. For at intervals in the thickly grazing crowd, spread out in a social line, is a bird which never bends down to feed, but remains with head and neck erect—watching. Keep still, however, and no alarm will be given.

Wild geese are excellent judges of distance and have much common-sense. They feed on and on silently, only now and again a low guttural murmur breaking out, and it is presently noticed that the grey flocks stud the whole marsh. The afternoon wears on and the light begins to fail.

One by one the Egyptians rise and wing their way to their home in the black woods, where they roost in the trees. Vast flocks of rooks rise too, and trail inland. Small flocks of golden plover and flights of duck sweep

across the sky in keeping with the ceaseless correspondence betwixt mere, salt-marsh, and sea. Without warning there is a vast whir-r-r of wings and a resonant clamour. What freedom in those wings, what delight of power! Perhaps it is a rehearsal of the spring flight to farthest north. For is not summer the joy-season of the geese—when, in some hidden loch or fiord, remote from the eyes of men, the eggs are laid, the young reared?

But it is not so now. It is 4.25—the evening flight—so regular that in the town a man says, "The geese going seaward! Tea-time—come along!"

High, loud, strident cries. The pink-feet call highest, the grey-legs loudest. They whirl round, round, they soar and ever soar, and then fly in circles until they are specks against the grey sky. Soon the first detachments are out by the seaside, out where the receding tide leaves sand-banks high and dry, sand-banks that are inaccessible to man or beast. With what a "gaggling" they descend! With what pleasure they splash and bathe in the little low waves all night long—and murmur one to another as the waves themselves murmur—and, placing head under wing in conscious security, take their rest!

But there are many such flocks—the birds rise in countless numbers, in thousands. Once again the shots of the gunners are heard from the direction of the shore. Twenty minutes elapse before all have risen and the dusk is finally closing in. Even then that wild-free clamour goes on among circling flocks above which cannot be seen. In such high solitude and power is something of mystery and more.

Sometimes an echo comes of the November night in Bourlon, when, unseen, the geese were heard above the roll of artillery and crackle of musketry in their southward voyaging—trumpeting and calling, crying out in brazen chorus—like souls fleeing from the thunder of the battle, joyfully passing hence.

The wild geese arrive from the far north at the East Coast town about the end of October and depart some time in March or even earlier. Largely this depends upon favouring or other winds. But the two events are of the first importance in the life of the place. For geese are companionable creatures, and, shot at though they be by the longshore-folk on every possible occasion, are regarded as agreeable acquaintances and seasonable neighbours: their grey forms inspire something more than an ordinary affection. This sentiment was embodied in the words of a native of the place who remarked in his complicating way: "When I got home at the end of the war after servin' four years in the North Sea, the first thing I heard was the ould grey-legs calling, and then I sez to m'self, 'Oh, well!' I sez, 'now I'm really at home at last!' "

Of what type are they, these Norfolk in-shore fishermen, these 'cocklers,' mussel-catchers, and 'whelkers'? They are big, fair men of non-committal and even surly manner, placid, somewhat brooding, and not given to the society of strangers. Their lives, it must be added, lead them apart from the generality of men—along the

seashore, out on the mud-flats and the marshes, and within a radius of a dozen miles or so out upon the sea. No wonder they are taciturn. Long hours they spend alone—alone, be it said, with the sea-birds, the marsh-birds, and the waders, the wide expanse of sea, sand, and sky, and the eternal, unvarying sound of the waves receding and advancing, receding and advancing, all day and all night long. Throughout the life of the little town and through the individual lives of its inhabitants runs a peculiar vein of philosophic calm compounded in part of these natural elements and in part of the leisurely desuetude of the place. At any hour, winter or summer, one may see, lounging about the octagonal stone shelter which stands at the head of the causeway, a group of these brawny men, sitting in sunshine on a bench, standing in the lee of a wall out of reach of the wind, smoking and gazing contemplatively across the mud-flats. Or, at any hour of the day, tramping along sparse tracks upon the salt-marshes or upon the flats themselves, you shall meet one or two of them carrying fork over shoulder and whelk-pot in hand, or, if it be dusk, with some old-fangled fowling-piece in one hand and a bunch of duck or plover or even a goose in the other. A certain rude picturesqueness which these folk undoubtedly possess makes an impression. The evening closing in, the greyish-green marsh vying in sombre tint with oncoming shades of night, waste and solitude as far as the eye can see, only a gleam here and there of stagnant water shot with the sunset, and the solitary marshman, clad in long thigh-boots, jersey and cap, himself perceptibly a part of his surroundings, wending

his homeward way. And should you, accosting such an one, seek to elucidate his past and future, himself, his comings or his goings, you will discover that in this as in all similar lives, the only positive event—actual or ever likely to be—is the war. The very same might truly be said of millions of humble folk in every corner of the world! Such a man will tell you of how, when the war broke out, he joined a mine-sweeper at Lowestoft and was sent off to Queenstown, to Harwich or to Dover; of the rough, monotonous routine with its perpetual dangers; of his strange comrades and narrow escapes, and the nature of his work; of how thankful he was to be done with it, safely to reach home again. He may, before this mighty event came to trouble his small world, have made a voyage or two on a cargo or coasting boat. But you will not extract much information on this point: the fellow, it would seem, is not interested in foreign climes and has only monosyllabic observations to offer. It would appear he takes it for granted that everybody has made a voyage or two on a cargo or coasting boat—more or less to the same place.

Of his earlier experience the tale is best told by observation about the town itself. Upon any morning or afternoon a dozen youths may be seen at a short distance from the quay "mussling." One stands in waders, knee deep in the water, dragging the mussels with a net from their muddy bed. On the beach opposite the quay are big heaps of those greenish mussels being sorted into smaller heaps. The large-shelled mussels are set aside for immediate despatch,

since in the Midland and North-Country towns they will fetch good prices—but they might not so readily do so if the purchasers realised that their bulk and choice flavour arose from a prolonged fattening upon the town sewage. The lesser mussels, those too small for immediate sale, are bedded back again in the mud for a further process of "stuffing." It is not perhaps surprising that some years ago, before certain hygienic precautions were taken, an outbreak of typhoid occurred among those who had been consuming the famous town mussels. This "mussling" is one of the winter occupations of the younger men of the town—those who have yet to serve an apprenticeship at sea. Another is the digging for lug-worms out on the sands, which goes forward all the year round and is even participated in during the summer by visitors who perchance have no better occupation. The job is not a difficult one; it does not require much experience or equipment beyond a fork and a pot or pail. The demand for lug-worms varies, but at such places as Lowestoft, Yarmouth, and Grimsby they are always in some degree needed as bait by the fishermen, fetching about sixteen shillings a hundred.

Winter is, of course, the slack time at the by-water town. There are no visitors, and for long spells the boats cannot go out to sea or lay the lines and pots; consequently there rest on the beach, under the break-water, and upon the quay itself, a number of boats seemingly derelict. Each of these is owned by a long-shoreman, and only awaits the first spell of fine spring weather to glide with motor humming or, if wind and

tide be fair, with sail set, down the long narrow channel between the mud-flats that leads, past the sand-spit with its old boathouse over which the geese fly, to the open sea. In the meanwhile, the quay loungers in blue jerseys and odd caps put in an hour or two most days at painting their boats, overhauling their tackle and their engines. Everybody owns a boat. And every boat has a motor engine. Where does the capital come from for this up-to-date equipment? It is true that the Board of Fisheries will advance the cost and will also execute repairs on credit. But, for some reason or another, not many of the owners here take advantage of the scheme. Some of them do not even know of it. Another reason may be an inborn distrust of "red tape"; but the scheme is an excellent one. Few of the longshoremen have more than a rough-and-ready working knowledge of a motor's "innerds," and yet it is almost indispensable to their profession. In the old days they would lie out hours on a calm sea or in face of a contrary wind waiting for a chance to tack home from the whelking-grounds, but now they can run in and out at any time. The men take great pride in their boats—more especially in the engines. With the spring weather the busy season begins, and for days and nights together in summer they are out on the whelking-grounds, trawling or drifting, "lining out" (with bait) and setting the pots. Quantities of mackerel and salmon-trout are netted, but the whelking is the main occupation.

Since the war a number of new men who had previously been mere "hangers-on," bear-leaders to the summer visitors and so forth, have been enabled to buy

boats—generally two in partnership. Boats and tackle are very much more expensive than they were, and when it is considered that twenty pots are set to a line and that as many as one hundred and fifty pots are often owned, it may still be wondered where the money comes from. The fact probably is that during the hard years they served on mine-sweepers the men contrived to save up money—their pay was good—and they had, fortunately for themselves, little opportunity of spending it.

It is not to be supposed that the war could leave even this remote place untouched. Soldiers were billeted in all the houses and distributed all along the inhospitable coast. One evening Zeppelins came, and there were few nights thereafter when Zeppelins did not come. In the full roseate light of sunset the first one appeared, hovering slowly, lowly above the grey-and-red somnolent port —above the sands, the marshes, the pines—silvery, stately, poising, more like a great fish than a great bird. And none knew what she was or whence deriving until the morrow. That was strange enough. On subsequent nights bombs fell in the locality—mostly in fields. One night a huge Zeppelin drifted burning out to sea: the very coastline was lit up by the glare. A day or two later queer things were cast up by the waves—as many such had been cast up before. Three bodies of German airmen were rolled in by the faithful tide. Nobody knew what on earth to do with them—how to get rid of them. They were carried about in motor-cars to this place and that; were deposited here and there; were argued over and reported upon. Several people had a look at them.

They were drab, unbeautiful, like most things cast up by the sea. At last some bright spirit in that city of boats—some genius—bethought to obtain a steam trawler from Immingham (a hundred miles or so up the coast), and, this being done, with due formality the three charred and wave-tossed bodies were steamed out to sea again and sunk in deepest fathoms towards their native land. . . . And to this day nobody quite knows whether the incident was more in the nature of a comedy, a tragedy, or a farce.



And now the voyage of discovery began to draw to a close. Nearly a week had passed. The fowlers, finding the weather too agreeable for the exercise of their sport and being weary of shooting to bits occasional redshank and plover, departed hence to some place where (presumably) the billiard-tables were of better quality and the beer, as they expressed it, had a "tang." The peculiar fascination and attraction of the place now began to disclose itself: as an expression of Nature, indeed, it was an expression of Life itself. It expressed something bleak, calm, and forgotten—yes: more of the past than of any conceivable future—no doubt. But it expressed much else. The marsh, the sand-dunes, the flats, the shore, the pine-woods and unexpected inland meres; the geese, the waders, the duck, their haunting ceaseless cries; the whole wide expanse of the town and its surroundings made an eternal symphony to which the soul gave instant response. They grew upon the mind

like great music. They struck alternate and contrasting chords. . . .

And in especial there was one walk which alone in its comprehensiveness embraced all the genius of the locality. A footpath led over a broken-down bridge to a long corridor of emerald-green yielding grass which bordered the marsh for some five or six miles, making excellent walking. Another path led out into the salt-marsh, miry, slippery, with pools of water on every hand and innumerable streams of varying size running through miniature canyons. Now and then I came to a channel of deep-flowing water, much too broad to cross. Then a detour, and sometimes a very wide one, became necessary. On every hand the marsh stretched with its coarse grey-green herbage, which in the summer blossoms out into pinkish lavender flowers. Here and there some wooden hut used by the marshmen might be espied and a relic of the bygone military occupation in the shape of a derelict rifle-range. The whitish-yellow sand-dunes with their fringe of marram grass eastward indicated the march of the sea. The accompaniment to this earlier part of the walk was the protesting cries of the redshank, which with a glimmer of white-rimmed dark wings flew up from every pool. Parties of curlew, three or four at a time, came flying with deliberate beat of wing and sorrowful calling from the inland fields to the outer edge of the salt-marsh, where they alighted. Great grey herring-gulls sat enthroned on high tussocks of marsh herbage, while in the vivid emerald patches of fresh-marsh, which here and there supervened, black-headed gulls mingled, a numerous company, with lapwings,

golden plover, and redshank. Bunches of knot and dunlin and tiny stint kept flighting along the fringe of the sandy shore in crescentic or elliptical formation, with perfectly timed and disciplined motion, as though going through some drill. There was never any surcease of movement, but ever a wonderful gliding motion of the closely-packed flocks. Individuals, on the other hand, were hard to distinguish except when all turned unexpectedly or flew at an angle to the sunlight, when the small cloud glinted silver and then white. Among the waders and the sea-birds, however, this was not the more important season of the year. In spring and summer the narrow shingly level between the salt-marsh and the sand-dunes is literally crowded with the nests of terns, common and little, and of ringed plover, redshank, greenshank, shel-duck—most of the waders and even the English and red-legged partridge have their nests among the dry marram grass of the marshy creeks where at this season the Michaelmas daisy, jointed glasswort, and aromatic sea-southernwood mingle with thrift and other of the shrub-like marsh-plants. Life is much more profuse then. But then the winter quality is lacking, and marsh and winter seem to go hand in hand.

The absence of duck, even stray parties, is remarkable. But turning inland beyond the town and leaving the marsh to its own secluded, varied life, one comes by an immediate, an almost abrupt transition to the bare countryside of naked woodland and of sombre plough. The road mounts rapidly from the low marsh level, and at one point one reaches a place whence the whole wide

stretch of coast, with its long creek, sleeping town, mud-flats, and pine-fringed sandy shore, may be embraced at a glance. Then the enfolding woods and a long walk over grassy parkland studded with great elms and oaks. One reaches, of a sudden, a purely inland landscape with no hint of the sea which, in fact, is only a mile and a half distant. Numbers of pheasants are feeding on the edge of the coverts, and from the woods the crow of the cock-birds comes repeatedly, together with such familiar calls as those of woodpecker and jay. One is in the woods again, woods mainly of oak and pine and holly, and has no longer sense of the space and freedom of the mud-flats and marsh. Suddenly, deep in the woodland, the pines open out and an unexpected vista presents itself. A mere—long, twisted, wood-engirdled, islanded, the woods on every side coming right down to the water's edge. In the foreground a large island, and the whole sheet of water, some acres in extent and two or three miles in length, is alive with mallard. There must be hundreds upon hundreds of them in view, sailing upon the wind-flecked water and swimming in ceaseless movement from one part of the shore to another. Many more can be seen sheltering in the lee of the island or on the island itself, while yet others are concealed along the fringe of the shore. What a perfect sanctum—shut in by the trees, remote, undisturbed, and unsuspected by the stranger, who would only come upon the mere by chance! And the duck of many kinds, conscious of protection, congregate here, to remain to nest or merely for a brief sojourn on these hospitable waters. Pintail, widgeon, teal, scaup, and shoveller are

often seen among the mallard, but are more erratic in their comings and goings. The absence of duck from the salt-marsh—only an occasional bird or two being "raised" from the creeks and ditches—is now explained. The handsome mallard rarely leave their home retreat in winter (in any large number) save for a morning or evening flight by way of exercise. It is only when the mere is frozen over or the sea rough that they fly out to the marshes and offer huge bags for the waiting gunners. For the rest, here they float and here nest in perfect security, as is shown by the scant heed they pay to the stranger, who may walk down to the very edge of the lake within a stone's throw of their favourite island; and those who are preening and washing themselves will merely paddle round to the other side with low "quacks" of expostulation.

The brief afternoon, however, already begins to draw in, and, having found the ducks' refuge, it only remains to discover a way across the fresh-marsh to the seashore and by the mud-flats at low tide to the town, so completing the varied experiences of that peculiar land. Once through the woods to their seaward verge, the same broad expanse of green fresh-marsh, bordered by a long fringe of blackish-green pines, as was seen on the afternoon of arrival, appears again under a like sky. It is necessary to cross the railway line by the little wayside station. A short distance away the geese are feeding as usual in a long, grey, irregular line, solemn, stately and slow, and on their outskirts the accustomed number of yellow Egyptians. A kestrel hawks above the marsh. Black flocks of rooks can be seen feeding at some distance

beyond the geese, and farther on again white bodies of gulls among isolated lapwings. A dead straight bit of road leads to the pine-belt and so through it to the sand-dunes. There is something eerie, wind-rocked, but otherwise peculiarly silent about this belt of pines and sand-dunes. Here the voice of the ocean finds an echo. No bird-life is visible, only the rabbits hop and scurry. Peculiarly beautiful in the fading afternoon is the panorama of sea and sky and sand now unfolded. The strange East Anglian coast bares her breast. Nothing so delicate and rare is seen in the most noble pictures: nothing so tremulous, so tender, so wistful as these winter evening contrasts when the sun is obscured by strata of grey, calm, violet, pinkish-mauve clouds, and by imperceptible degrees sea, sky, and sand merge in one monochrome, one quiet and tranquil symphonic poem. Already the gunners are making ready for the evening flight of the geese, and all along the coast their figures are silhouetted against the dull red and grey-ribbed sunset. The sand is now yellow, now grey, paler, and again of a sulphur tint; the sea greyish-green. On its verge a couple of "whelk-boats" have run on the mud till they shall be floated over the harbour bar with the high tide. Their occupants, tiny black specks amid the waste of moist mud and sand, can be seen making their way shoreward, an embodiment of patient weariness and human insignificance. Only two or three boys are left behind to bring in the boats. Wading birds, a perfect poise of Nature's making as between long bill and longer leg and slender body, neat, quick, delicate, and fragile, are probing and darting among the sand-pools,

their figures and their every movement exactly reflected in the mirror of the profoundly still water.

It is a scene at once compassionate and quiet, though not without a certain sombre character, against the low foreground of pine-fringed shore. No one would suspect its latent treachery. Yet the whole stretch of rockless coast is strewn with the *débris* of the spines and the ribs and the skeletons of bygone wrecks, and at this moment the boys left in charge of the "whelk-boats" are hunting around three black ribs of wood that stick gauntly out of the scalloped sand—searching for "black diamonds," as they call them, for coals from the wreck which, old as it is, still yields them up. That wreck was once a noble schooner: it is now the home of crabs. One night, not so long ago, three ketches were lost with all hands. A quite recent wreck—in close view, but a little farther out—is that of a French steamship, name unknown, bound from Sunderland to France with coal, which one dark night in 1914 or 1915, all shore lights hidden, ran upon a submerged bar. Her perilous in-steering to the coast could only be accounted for by the fact that her captain thought he was making Cromer, much farther down. A boat put out, but was swamped, eleven of the crew being drowned.

A yet more sinister memory clings to these tranquil evenings, these faery sands, these veering tides. Of the many curious stories told two are credible. A young man strolling that way at low tide in summer stepped into a pool eighteen fathoms deep—disappeared from human ken. A few days later certain fishermen passing drew out the body in a net. . . . Three sisters, bathing,

were caught by the tide. Splashing and playing, no doubt, in the shallow waves, they did not notice the stealthy up-stealing to this side and to that, along the foreshore, before and behind—and suddenly very quickly round the point. No help near. All three perished. That, alas! is the way of the sea. . . .

But it is time to leave the old backwater town to its memories, to its seeming oblivion. And its inhabitants —those gruff and rough and stolid fair-haired people: time to leave them too. And the geese above the guns and the peeping eyes of men. The waders, too, and the terns, anxious but happy, they are among the nestlings in the high marsh grass—and the duck! Don't forget the mere among the pines! . . . Shall we return? Shall we look again upon the place where sky and sand and sea unite? Who knows? A voyage of discovery ever ends so. Life is overcrowded, isn't it? . . . We may never return.

CHAPTER XI

THE PERFECT DAY

Three months have passed since my Norfolk experiences. My novel is still unfinished, and I have grown somewhat philosophical of late. For one thing, I have suddenly realised that there are days in every year that make life worth while. They come sparsely, it is true; they are among Nature's great deceptions. They are full of an illusive peace, of an illusive gaiety, of an illusive optimism. In mid-winter, in times of gale and autumnal violence, in nights of pitchy, impenetrable blackness or of uttermost storm, one is now and then disposed to think lies the bedrock soul of the woman called Nature. Then come these perfect days: these perfect hours of lingering autumn when, as it might seem, the quiet fragrance of centuries distils upon woods and fields—and cities, too: an alchemy hardly to be expressed. Then come summer nights full of the warm, still scent of clover, corn, grass, and flowers; and happiness born of gardens. But of all these deceptions, the greatest and most precious, because stillborn and evanescent and long-delayed, are the first hot, sunny days of spring which come any time between March and May. They have magic, and leap from the heart of winter or from circumstances the least promising.

One morning recently damp fog yet lay upon the streets and roof-tops of the great city of Sheffield where

I had gone for a few days. Six o'clock had barely struck; and the year was at that stage when apple-blossom was bursting and may whitening in suburban gardens. Nor was it possible to say, mist resolving, whether sunshine might result or chill drizzle of the early North. Black workers clustered about the tram-lines, passing townward to factory or forge. Beyond the tram-lines the road rose and rose, houses or cottages vaguely peering through the thick mist. Somewhere beyond lay the moors that were invisible. Stone wall succeeded hedge and bracken-strewn fields those of sprouting corn. There was no traffic seen upon the road save an occasional farmer's cart making towards the city. Still the fog clung to highland and lowland alike; everything, the very surface of the road, was saturated with damp. On all sides moorland encroached on arable and pasture, and the air grew, if anything, keener and more penetrating. At last the loneliness of all the higher far-stretching moor country began to be felt, the only human figure seen being that of a solitary old man cutting turf-sods by the wayside. An old-fashioned Derbyshire peasant, he had passed all his days in a near-by stone-and-turfed cottage, now working on a farm, now doing odd jobs for the County Council. It was a good year for the grouse, he told me; it was a better one for the foxes, which during the war had thriven and multiplied exceedingly, and with the advent of the cubs preyed unceasingly upon the young birds. Then the opacity of the mist grew lighter, for juniper bushes and thorn trees not far distant suddenly became clear, and a pale luminous glow hung over the

dale that lay somewhere beneath. The mist did not lift, but was parted by waves and broad beams of sunlight. For a moment or two all that world was tinted pale gold—and sparkled. Then the mist closed in again, and a greyness, cold, damp, obscuring, succeeded. But there was seen level, grey-blue sky above. And unexpectedly the mists fell back once more like wreaths of smoke, great banks of vapour clinging only to the broad trough of the vale. Light everywhere spread and crept. Now wide stretches of country appeared many miles away and all that world began to glisten. The sun broke through.

It revealed the whole wide range of the moors a thousand feet up. Dew sparkled on little lawns and patches of vivid green grass; the great banks of fresh bracken, green on pale yellow stems, of fern, and the mauve-pink patches of heather were saturated with it. The brackish-green of land-pools reflected light to mossy depths, and a hundred little runnels of water trickled out of the mossy peat soil through rough-piled stones of the grey roadside wall. Running water could always be heard. Insects began to dance in the sunlight. It was as if, with the conquest of the sun, all life suddenly awoke—became vocal and active and after a while microscopically apparent.

The dominating sound was the crowing of the cock grouse. Everywhere, it seemed, they had suddenly sprung to life. Ck-cr-ruk-ck-ck! Ck-cr-ruk-cuk-cuk! sounded all about the hills—sometimes very near. It was not easy to locate the sound, but after watching a few minutes the erect head and neck could be seen

above a clump of heather. Then the bird ran forward into a green open space and uttered his familiar call. It was answered from a short distance by the low maternal cluck of a hen which was invisible. This happened several times, the cock grouse crowing and running forward, the hen answering with a low cluck, a little nearer each time. Between whiles the cock would peck unconcernedly at the young ling about him and the bronzy-green bracken fronds. But when at length he came to a patch of green lawn beneath an old twisted rowan he stood stock still, as though expecting or sighting something. Thereupon the hen bird appeared from the bracken and heather, accompanied by her brood, which busily and delightedly spread about the green. The old cock stalked forward, and the whole family continued happily to wander about the dew-glistening grass.

That self-same domestic episode was being enacted in half a dozen other secluded grassy spots within a radius of a few hundred yards. On the farther slope of the moorland, however, a new, quick movement caught the eye and held it. There, above a rough wagon-track much used in autumn by the peat and bracken carts, there where some great burrow of rabbits had once been, as was disclosed by the bare earth exposed—a pin-point of the reddish-brown-black moor seemed to revolve, to gyrate. Some minutes and concentration through the field-glass were needed to explain the mystery. A very portion of the moor seemed active. A kestrel hanging far above seemed, too, to be watching the mystery: curlews came crying, piping overhead in

slow-winged, heavy flight from some glistening marsh water down the dale, to their nests on the upper moorland. Strange pipings everywhere heard in place of the cold, damp silence. Cries of the lapwings came to the ear, and the wild, pitiful whistle of two sparrow-hawks which, high up on the side of the brae, seemed in a gnarled and battered thorn tree to contemplate the building of a nest. Then the mystery explained itself: a litter of fox-cubs—active, darting, twisting, curiously deceptive, and puzzling reddish-brown molecules of the moor. Unconscious of observation as they were, it was possible to creep nearer and see all. They numbered four. Up and down the bank, in and out of old rabbit-holes, as far as the furze-brake on the lip of the bank, and then among the encroaching roots of an old crab-apple, they scuttled, twisted, writhed. At a distance it was like watching a pack of stoats or weasels fighting. At times the young foxes would disappear—disappear absolutely within the great burrow, leaving no sign. But something would presently stir several yards away out in the heather. And again a sharp-pointed head would appear, ears cocked; and simultaneously other heads would peep from holes in the burrow, still, intent; and the four, brothers and sisters, would fall to tumbling again, a furry mass, at times indistinguishable one from another.

It went on for some time—until the young foxes tired and sunbeams crept round to where they were, and with absurd *abandon* they laid their little bodies sideways to rest. No vixen appeared. It may be she was watching from concealment in the heather; it is

probable; no human eye could have discovered her stillness. And the dog-fox would be away up in the dry bracken or preparing to sleep through the hot day in some fir clump or larchwood. But what a picture that was! What a picture of circumambient content—this home of the fox-cubs, the moorland stretching wide on every hand, the great dale beneath, with its patchwork of climbing fields, seamed with grey stone walls, and all its harsher lines softened by the girdling blue mist: the fresh and sparkling atmosphere: everywhere the warm, heather-scented inrush of spring! Over the lip of the hill the road now descended towards Baslow. Upon this morning of mist and sunshine and dew and forthcoming heath and impending summer, it seemed a faery way meandering through a faery world. On the one hand moorland, purple, reddish-brown, and green, steeply ascending even to rocks and crags; on the other, falling to a tiny valley of superbly vivid, brilliant emerald-green. And this latter was curiously studded with pines, so as to form a kind of grove or shady little park—a paradise of birds. Here one heard the song of the whitethroat. Tree-pipits, a colony of them, perched on twigs and repeatedly flung themselves into the air, singing, as it were, for sheer joy of the thing. The call of the cuckoo was insistent; in the shady grove, the vivid green of whose grass contrasted delicately with the deeper profound green of the pines, magpies and jays flitted and called. The place gleamed like a beautiful jewel in the ruder setting of the moorland. Through it a stream rippled on the way to Baslow. Beside it a cottage stood

inhabited by a solitary elderly woman. This was a spot to dream in, with the heather-clad hillside climbing up behind and the cock grouse crowing almost down in the kitchen garden amid the apple-blossom. Old purple plum trees stood around; rabbits came out and played on the stream's sunny bank; larchwoods, pale, sensitive, green, clothed the farther side of the dale. . . . It was a spot in which to dream an idyll over breakfast.

CHAPTER XII

IN SECRET WESSEX

It is September 1920. The writing of my novel having progressed well, I am, for the second time this year, in Dorset on holiday, staying at the Royal Oak Inn, Milborne Saint Andrew, near Blandford.

To-day I paid a visit to Thomas Hardy and spent a memorable hour with him and his wife. He is, as I had expected, a small shy man with a nervous way of talking, and his wife a shy woman. The conversation therefore was not animated. I could hardly believe I sat opposite the creator of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *The Dynasts*. When he began to talk about his books, there were so many questions that I wanted to ask that I asked none. But he said much that was interesting about their local derivation. Hardy seemed to think that he would write more poems. . . .

I had written thus far last night when I realised how hopelessly inadequate the above phrases were, and retired to bed. This morning I see they do not express even a fraction of what that meeting with Hardy or this region mean to me. Let me then try to explain, pictorially rather than exactly.

Sheltering in this wide stretch of country which is bounded triangular-wise by the Great Plain to the northward, by the Great Forest to the east, and

by the western sea, there are certain villages whose character, sequestered and peculiarly of England, will, I feel, well repay study. For, if they are an anachronism, they are also a paradox. If they are alike in any one thing, it is that each is different from the other: and yet—alike. If they are beautiful—and all are beautiful—it is a separate physical individual beauty; and yet always part of the character of the whole. Like a cathedral. Like a wondrous foreign cathedral where one has a number of little side-chapels, each exquisite in its period; each a jewel able to shine by itself and yet all a part of the great celestial whole. And if there is one characteristic common above others to these villages, it is aloofness from the world, from the strivings, it might appear, and from the distortions of men, and from the very spirit of the times in which we live. Here humanity and Nature seem to draw very close together, the simplicity of the one giving scope and breadth to the inadequacy of the other; and a great peace under the sky. Here, it might appear, only these links are needed to unify Man with Nature (which is God); the ploughshare, the harrow, the sower, the reaper, the scythe.

Last spring, when I was staying down here before, I noticed that there was one feature in particular which distinguished one of these villages from its brethren, because it dominated the place in every waking hour—the day-long chattering of the starlings and the shrill whistling of innumerable swallows; for, being spring,

the starlings were eternally busy at the grey and green and yellow-streaked thatched roofs—of the cottages, of the post office, of the farmhouses, of the village inn. As to the swallows, they never ceased to hawk for insects above the roof-tops, above the lush-green meadows, wherever water was. They also made their nests close to the starlings'—not in the thatch, however, but under the eaves.

There were two other sounds inseparably a part of the eternal quality in that age-long village life—less universal, though, less all-pervasive than those of starling and swallow. These were the delicate plash of a tiny stream which flowed beside the village street, whose colour was of the summer sky and whose rhythm, it seemed, a quiet diapason with the march of the white, slow-moving clouds that looked so like ships sailing upon the sea. That, clean and pebbly and never silent, sounded fresh and clear as the voice of simplicity itself. . . . And the other oft-recurring sound was the soft mysterious patter of the cows' feet on the dusty road as they were driven in to milking and back to the meadows again morning and afternoon of every single day.

This and the incessant calling and singing of children and the ceaseless chatter of cocks and hens was the life of the place expressed in sound. The inhabitants were a race of slow, uncommunicative, heavy-featured, big-boned, fair-headed men; and of prematurely ageing, brown, gnarled, and on the whole plain, women. They laughed seldom and talked little. They drank little, quarrelled not at all, and appeared to live clean, toiling, and contented lives. If there were unexpected

forces or queer primeval strains (as some said) working within them,' these never appeared upon the surface, nor by the stranger who by chance had come among them would have been suspected.

And what the parents lacked in grace, the offspring amply made good. Blue-eyed and fair-haired, with cheeks tinted like the russet red of the later apples or the turning copper-beech, they appeared to enjoy the happiness of gods within their little paradise; and were more beautiful than angels!

Above the village and overlooking it so that it was an integral part of the secluded landscape was a plantation of larch and fir. And often in the mild spring afternoons I would climb up here: whether to watch the play of light and shade on the far hillsides, on forest, downland, and sea; whether to listen to the soothing, mysterious symphony of larch whispering to pine and pine to fir and fir to yew; whether merely to gaze upon the quiet beauty of the village beneath, its stream, its church tower, its clustering thatch, and blossoming fruit trees, while evening shadows fell—I cannot decide.

The wood itself—as all woods are in spring—was a faery thing. On one side of it, dividing it from a high hedge-bordered lane, was a broad expanse of virgin green turf, soft and springy to the tread, being a relic of that noble downland which this once was. There was a ditch around the wood the banks of which were honeycombed with rabbit-holes. And in the evening,

at any human being's approach, numberless rabbits of all sizes, from the great old does to the tiny baby things, would whisk into the holes or disappear within the shadow of the wood. Its outer sides presented many contrasts in spring. Here the pale ethereal tint of the greening larch, here the deep rich green of the spruce firs, there the wavy reddish trunks of the pines and their twisted stems and their high, wistful, feathery heads. Then hazel-clumps catkin-hung, and pale yellow, and brilliant patches of gorse, and prickly bushes of hawthorn fully out, and some elder and much privet. At intervals in the wall of multi-shaded green came wild cherry trees in full blossom, a cloudy spray of white against the steadfast background; and there stood at a corner of the wood a white-thorn tree of magnetic beauty with its clusters of pinkish-white drops, matchless delicate, and in general the tint of sunrise on an Alpine peak. Along the outer bank in every sheltered nook and sunny corner the cowslip and the dog-violet grew. Bluebells and primroses and the wild daffodil for some reason or other were not found here. But there were masses of nettle-flower and field-parsley and great green dock and such-like vegetation, and the clustering pink of ragged Robin.

Within the wood a cool silence always reigned. Little undergrowth grew, but the twisted trunks of the firs made a network with the hazel clumps, the sycamore, and the bushes of hawthorn, of withy, and of elder. Yews and larches stood solemnly side by side, the one partaking of a statelier and the other of a more

tender sympathy. There were no leaves underfoot, only dried-up cones and pine-needles, but in the storms of bygone years two or three tall pines had fallen and lay, some half-raised and some athwart the path. So that a complicated network had been formed through which I had to pick my way; but here and there in the network were little secret glades or chambers, where sunlight fell in one deep molten pool.

There was life, too, in the wood—a shy, a rustling life. The pit-pat of rabbits might always be heard. From a form composed of over-leaning dried-up boughs of thorn or furze a hare would spring and leap gaily out into the adjoining field of young wheat. Wood-pigeons nested here in scores, and crooned to each other without ceasing. Here, too, nested the stock-dove; in the fallow fields and plough just beyond the wood's shadow plover had their obscure dwellings and cried plaintively all day long. High above the wood a pair of nesting hawks were always whistling and hovering like a perpetual threat; whilst down in the shadows the scream of a snared or hunted rabbit sometimes broke the precious silence.

All such sounds were normal sounds, but were an indefinable pleasure and allurement to me, so that I would spend hours up there listening to them happily and, as has been said, gazing out across the far-flung country and upon the village beneath.

Most men have secrets; all women; and so have many families, old country houses, and even hamlets.

By accident—as such things will—the secret of this village came out. . . .

Two old men filling up a grave in the late afternoon. Someone had fallen into a decline and died. Two old men talking in undertones of what had happened years (how many years?) ago. Two old men telling—and they with the sadness of all life, and of Nature, unconscious-writ upon their faces—of the rabbit-catcher's original sin, of the farm-girl's frailty . . . and of their ending.

It befell in the winter's dusk (how many years ago?)—there is no trace. Upon the pines and firs, near where the white-thorn stands—there is no trace. Covered up, found, dug up, mangled, and maimed like some animal thing, dragged to the light of day—there is no trace. Under the laurel, under the yew, a green grave lies where lain it has these many years . . . and there sleeps she, too frail, but once as fair as those whose shouts came from the meadow now.

"She paid the price," they mumble, "Throw more earth in!" Heap earth upon her!

A score of miles away, he sleeps—in the courtyard under the stone, in the shadow of the high walls, where the sunlight never enters in. Under the damp, under the tramp of penal feet, under the shadow for evermore. . . . He who knew—none better—the hill and the down, the wood and the weather, the sunset and the break of day, the look of the larches in the spring, the laying-up of the hares, and where the partridge nested—he, too, the price paid.

Once, and once only again, I climbed up to the wood and looked out across the far-flung country and looked down upon the sleeping village. Once, and once only again, I listened to the whispering of the larch to the pine and the pine to the fir and the fir to the yew that had become a dirge now instead of a symphony.

And the wild cherry hung her head, and the violets and the cowslips bent their faces to the ground. And the beautiful white-thorn tree seemed to shrink as though awaiting the last trump. And like spectres the rabbits crept into their holes and like a ghost the hare rose from her form and flitted out into the light that shone between the tree-boles.

It was all changed, and I knew that it could never be for me again.

So secluded and quiet, so self-contained, so remote in seeming from the conflicts and the passions of men, so wrapt in the bosom of Nature (which is God) . . . so near to the heart of evil and of pain.

But yet, gazing, at the last a happier thought prevailed. Of this great crime and stain—no trace. Blotted out—blotted out—and absorbed like tears that fall upon a dusty way; but the beauty of the spring remained, enthralling, all-merciful, all-covering. And the Great Plain, the Great Forest, and—beyond this present—the western sea. And soon summer would come, and autumn of russet coat, and quiet silvery winter. And then spring again. And then the delicate passing of uncounted seasons. . . . And all else would pass and all else would be forgotten.

CHAPTER XIII

THE COUNTRY OF *THE WOODLANDERS*

Afternoon was "lazing" to its close—later in this September of 1920—when I at length found *The Woodlanders*' country. It was one of those days bathed in a golden dream of sunshine, hallowed by a pauseful silence, and wrapt in a peace so profound as to seem almost unearthly, which every autumn brings to England. Not Death but the beautiful foreclose of Death enthralled the land. Not life but the after-reflector of life: that point which a man or woman reaches after the turning of the prime, when he or she looks back in calmness and without regret upon spring and summer, youth and middle-life, feeling painlessly the approach of the day's decline.

I had left Sherborne (Sherton Abbas) by the Dorchester (Casterbridge) road, crossing a river, climbing a steep hill, passing along a woodside. My thoughts had been with "the louring evening of a bygone winter's day"—that is, with the opening chapter of *The Woodlanders*:

> At one place, on the skirts of Blackmoor Vale, where the bold brow of High-Stoy Hill is seen a mile or two ahead, the leaves lie so thick in autumn as to completely bury the track. The spot is lonely, and when the days are darkening the many gay charioteers now perished who have rolled along the way, the blistered soles that have trodden

it, and the tears that have wetted it, return upon the mind of the loiterer.

It must have been near to this point that I came upon a by-road and a sign-post pointing through a lodge-gate to "Hillfield and Hermitage." I then knew that I was near to the "Hintock Villages," and following a narrow road through a park, came to a large area of oak-coppices and to a stubble-field on which the ploughman was already at work. The lane turned and twisted through the oak-woods until I reached a five-barred gate opening upon a green on one side of which was a small old church with a super-added lead spire, surrounded by leaning greyish-white gravestones of various shape grown high with grass. The green was bordered on one side by the lane along which stood half a dozen cottages and an inn. A stone's throw from the church was a large farmhouse, from which came sounds of ducks, poultry, and cows. The hamlet lay immediately beneath High Stoy and was completely secluded among the oak-woods, thus fulfilling the characteristics of Marty South's environment, Grace Medbury's and Giles Winterborne's:

> It was one of those sequestered spots outside the gates of the world where may usually be found more meditation than action, and more listlessness than meditation; where reasoning proceeds on narrow premisses, and results in inferences wildly imaginative; yet where, from time to time, dramas of a grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean are enacted in the real, by virtue of the concentrated passions and closely-knit interdependence of the lives therein.

On this day, upwards of a generation after the above

words were written, it seemed doubtful whether the inner life of the place, any more than its physical attributes, had in the smallest degree changed. True, the trees were not yet bare as upon that "bygone winter's day" when the Sherton Abbas carrier set down his load at "the gates of the world." The oaks flaunted all shades of colour between rich yellow and pale green; the beeches all shades between brilliant red and pale saffron; the occasional pines a dark cool green, and the occasional larches an ethereal feathery green. Had not the barber, Percomb, "paced cautiously over the dead leaves which nearly buried the road or street of the hamlet"? And was not this, or some such place, the haven which the poet had in mind when he wrote:

Pale beech and pine so blue,
    Set in one clay,
Bough to bough cannot you
    Live out your day?
When the rains skim and skip,
Why mar sweet comradeship,
Blighting with poison-drip
    Neighbourly spray?

Heart-halt and spirit-lame,
    City-opprest,
Unto this wood I came
    As to a nest;
Dreaming that sylvan peace
Offered the harrowed ease—
Nature a soft release
    From men's unrest.

But, having entered in,
    Great growths and small
Show them to men akin—
    Combatants all!

Sycamore shoulders oak,
Bines the slim sapling yoke,
Ivy-spin halters choke
    Elms stout and tall.

Touches from ash, O wych,
    Sting you like scorn!
You, too, brave hollies, twitch
    Sidelong from thorn.
Even the rank poplars bear
Lothly a rival's air,
Cankering in blank despair
    If overborne.

Since, then, no grace I find
    Taught me of trees,
Turn I back to my kind,
    Worthy as these.
There at least smiles abound,
There discourse trills around,
There, now and then, are found
    Life-loyalties.

The churchyard seemed such a one as Marty South might have entered in the moonlight, when she went "to a secluded corner behind the bushes"—there was such a corner near to the hedge—"where rose the unadorned stone that marked the last bed of Giles Winterborne"; and there, in face of her old rival's defection, laid her flowers and gave utterance to perhaps the most moving declamation in all the Wessex novels:

> "Now, my own, own love," she whispered, "you are mine and on'y mine; for she has forgot 'ee at last, although for her you died! But I—whenever I get up I'll think of 'ee, and whenever I lie down I'll think of 'ee. Whenever I plant the young larches I'll think that none can plant as you planted; and whenever I split a gad, and whenever I

turn the cider wring, I'll say none could do it like you. If ever I forget your name let me forget home and heaven! . . . But no, no, my love, I never can forget 'ee; for you was a good man, and did good things!"

Few signs or sounds of life, as was to be expected, disturbed the hemmed-in place. Leaves fluttered down in perfect silence; some children were playing on the green; a far-off cawing of rooks and the musical drone of a threshing-machine floated serenely through the golden haze. Near at hand, an old man who might have passed for Mr. South himself was carrying faggots out of the shades of the woodland to the out-house in his cottage-garden.

"For the winter?"

"Yes. Us'll need all us can get."

A little farther along the way a young man was mending the road. He was a stalwart, clean-shaven labourer with a dull but pleasant face. Such a one Giles Winterborne may have been, though he was a skilled woodman and this an assistant road-mender, above which humble station the latter seemed to cherish no desire to rise. Conversation elicited that he had been born at Hillfield, had lived there the whole of his life until joining the Army and, on leaving it, had returned to his native village, where—with the exception of a seven-mile bicycle-ride to Sherborne and back on Saturday afternoon, and a dallying there in public-houses—he hoped to remain till the day of his death.

Two years on the Western Front! He had been wounded; he talked of life at Ypres and at Arras. He had not liked the war—or the Army: was not par-

ticularly interested in either. In that he differed from the younger peasants in less secluded parts of Wessex who have been visibly changed by their war experiences and were as self-assertive on the subject as any Cockney clerk—and as distinct from their elders, the old Wessex type, as young and old can be. A crabbed, queer strain appears sometimes; and a savage strain. In the particular village in the heart of Dorset where I have been staying, there dwelt a man, also a road-mender, of surly disposition but stalwart and hard-working. One day he disappeared from his home, and was found on the following Sunday morning drowned in a neighbouring stream with a kitchen-weight attached to his neck, his coat and waistcoat neatly folded on the bank. No reason could be adduced for the suicide: he was in good work and the prime of life, and except for a certain moroseness had shown no signs of insanity. Near another village in that neighbourhood—I have written my first impression of it in the preceding chapter—a savage crime was committed. A local rabbit-catcher lured a village girl to a lonely wood, killed her, and buried her feet-deep in soil under some yews. For this there was a supposititious reason, yet not one sufficient to account for the cold-blooded ferocity of the deed. Something—primeval, or at any rate elemental—seems left to be accounted for in the Wessex character, something that is only exemplified in a type like Henchard. Contact with the world modernises the countryman, brings out what is worst as well as what is best in him, and imposes upon him a knowing varnish that is not knowledge but frequently

proves too much for his intelligence. The young road-mender, however, had remained true to the type of Winterborne and Oak and Yeobright; seeing him there in the heart of his own country, impassive representative of his forefathers, yet separated from them by the chasm of a dynamic experience, one apprehended the significance of the poem, "In Time of 'The Breaking of the Nations'" (1915) which in three brief stanzas seems to epitomise that which is changeless in Hardy's peasantry and in our own chaotic time.

I.

Only a man harrowing clods
  In a slow silent walk
With an old horse that stumbles and nods
  Half asleep as they stalk.

II.

Only thin smoke without flame
  From the heaps of couch-grass;
Yet this will go onward the same
  Though Dynasties pass.

III.

Yonder a maid and her wight
  Come whispering by;
War's annals will cloud into night
  Ere their story die.

Where poetry as a whole seemed so ineffectual, whether of those who took part in the war or of those who did not; where the younger poets strove to express themselves (with few exceptions) by piling horror upon horror in a monotone of dreadfulness and the older ones by clarion calls and sonorous phrases as though their own note had to be keyed to the tremend-

ous din of the battlefield or of the call for men: the finger of the master laid itself quietly but surely on the pulsing beat of that momentous hour. Masefield did so, in his too-little-known "August 1914." Another note was struck, one more intense, more poignant, and agonised, by the young poet, Wilfred Owen, who was killed almost as the curtain rang down upon the war which he detested. Rupert Brooke never knew the war at first-hand, but in two poems at least he got near to the heart of it; there was a poem about Laventie written by a very young officer, the late Edward Tennant, and published in *The Times*, which struck truly the note of contrast between that shattered and uncomfortable place and the undisturbed spaces of the English countryside.

Wherever the quiet and spacious note was struck, wherever fundamentals were touched, poetry (or prose) got home. It seemed of no use for poets and writers to try to express themselves in terms of noise and tumult; what, it seemed, they had to do was to express and stress and exemplify fundamental causes, contrasts and effects, and detach a meaning from them. That was their job, and when they did that they succeeded. A great many men never took to reading (or writing) until the war forced the mind to seek relief from physical actualities and material distresses. And speaking in a personal sense, there seemed to be no established writer of English who so far expressed the then universal sense of impending doom and finality as Thomas Hardy did and does[1]—who so far succeeded, moreover, in impressing upon one a sense of some

[1] Written by W. E. in 1921.—J. F. G.

philosophy in pain, some beauty in pain as well as the bitter irony of a world suffering, some comprehension of inscrutable forces at war behind it all, and of the inevitability of those forces, the uselessness, the futility of evading or defying them.

Popular attitudes were carefully cultivated during the war—if you will, popular fictions. Some of them have been sedulously maintained since the war—adroitly adjusted to suit the necessities of the hour. They had their uses, no doubt—they kept up the fiction of light-heartedness, of sprightliness when, in fact, people's hearts were as heavy as lead. War for the participants was truly defined as: "Months of infinite boredom interspersed by moments of indescribable fear." War was falsely and shamly defined (by the halfpenny press and certain hearty optimists, lookers-on) as young men kicking footballs across No Man's Land, and as a series of Bairnsfather cartoons of muddy fellows who waxed facetious in face of death. Others saw only the drab horror and sordid misery of it; others again a sort of spurious heroism based on a Victorian conception of what ought to be, dating from the Peninsular War and the traditions of Inkerman and the Alma, and ascribing to ordinary men the majestic attributes of superhumans. War, in point of fact and upon a more intimate acquaintance, resolved itself into the moral struggle of ordinary mortals against extraordinary forces—of men who grumbled, who were frightened, who got tired and felt ill, who hated lice and wet feet, who hated cold, mud, tinned food, and discomfort generally, yet were

pitted through four-and-a-half years against an Unknown comprising inscrutable powers of Irony and Fate, a perpetual threat, physical degradation and mental torture, and were enmeshed in a web of Destiny from which some lucky star alone could extricate them.

There was beauty in pain, there was love in death, there was sacrifice in horror, and there seemed very often behind it all a curious, haunting laughter. In these years now past the only philosophy capable of maintaining a man was the watchword: "What must be must be." Once he lost his grip of this, once let himself think that the future could be eluded or fate cheated, and—himself was lost. The war was ordained for mankind, and mankind had to go through with it for larger and undisclosed purposes, to high and beneficent ends as some say, blindly and fruitlessly according to others. Hardy expresses this perhaps negative but necessary attitude for soldiers in the very fibre of his life's work, in his novels, in his poems, and especially in that poem written on New Year's Eve 1915–16:

I.

Phantasmal fears,
And the flap of the flame,
And the throb of the clock,
And a loosened slate,
And the blind night's drone,
Which tiredly the spectral pines intone!

II.

And the blood in my ears
Strumming always the same,
And the gable-cock
With its fitful grate,
And myself, alone.

III.

The twelfth hour nears
Hand-hid, as in shame;
I undo the lock,
And listen, and wait
For the Young Unknown.

IV.

In the dark there careers—
As if Death astride came
To numb all with his knock—
A horse at mad rate
Over rut and stone.

V.

No figure appears,
No call of my name,
No sound but "Tic-toc"
Without check. Past the gate
It clatters—is gone.

VI.

What rider it bears
There is none to proclaim;
And the Old Year has struck,
And, scarce animate,
The New makes moan.

VII.

Maybe that "More Tears!—
More Famine and Flame—
More Severance and Shock!"
Is the order from Fate
That the Rider speeds on
To pale Europe; and tiredly the pines intone.

Was not that the attitude of a world waiting and weeping, in face of anticipations which were to be realised, in a time when no man could call his soul his own?

The poetry of Thomas Hardy in recent years seems to have taken on a mellowed, a tenderer quality, as though Time had fined down the harshness of experience. Its fateful and ironical qualities are more noticeably reinforced by the superabundant pity which makes of Tess a durable literary creation.

A critic has said—I think Professor Lascelles Abercombie in his *Critical Study*—that the environment of the Wessex novels, with their wonderful descriptions of Wessex life, humour, and scenery, is a thing extraneous to the architectural fibre of Mr. Hardy's work, a thing apart from its permanent and spiritual quality. This is, of course, true in the sense that Tess is womanhood, frail, patient, suffering, and that she is the woman not of to-day or yesterday, not the Wessex peasant girl, but, like Shakespeare's characters, a figure of all time. Take away their environment, take away the things and people that mean Wessex only, like the Cantles, the Dewys, and the Poorgrasses, the descriptions of Blackmoor Vale and Egdon Heath, and Hardy's women, Bathsheba Everdene, Eustacia Vye, Arabella Donn, and his men like Angel Clare, Alec D'Urberville, Henchard, and Sergeant Troy—yes, and poor Jude—might have played their respective parts in any surroundings or in any sphere of life. Yet if it were so, Hardy would not be Hardy—England would not be England. What a different thing would *The Return of the Native* convey without its background of Egdon Heath, or *The Woodlanders* without the peculiar environment of the Hintocks, or Tess apart from Blackmoor Vale, or *The Mayor of Casterbridge* if Casterbridge

were any town but Dorchester! In reading Hardy, whether in Flanders or the East, or in the remotest outposts of the Empire, one reads of an England which remains and which never can essentially change, because it is England. And it is worth while at the present day to take a walk through the Hardy country, to follow the fortunes or misfortunes of the people he has made living. Most of the places can be recognised as the Hintock villages can be; one feels that the countryside is no whit changed even if the people are. There are, of course, disappointments—and puzzles. To seek out Tess's birthplace and the scene of the May Day dance in the opening chapter of the book, is to find one of the few uninteresting and even ugly villages in Wessex; one wonders why Tess's early situation was laid here, and not in any of the neighbouring villages or hamlets whose beauty would have been a foil to hers. Yet following the course of her weal and woe through narrow hedge-grown lanes, sign-postless often, and often so tortuous as to make the accident to the bees appear inevitable, as far as Casterbridge, or following her on her first pilgrimage south to "the valley of the great Dairies, the valley in which milk and butter grew to rankness," one realises how integrally a part of the Wessex novels is the particular locality of each. Especially the Valley of the Frome in which Talbothays was situated.

> The world was drawn to a larger pattern here. The enclosures numbered fifty acres instead of ten, the farmsteads were more extended, the groups of cattle formed tribes hereabout; there (in Blackmoor) only families.

> These myriads of cows stretching under her eyes from the far east to the far west outnumbered any she had ever seen at one glance before. . . . The river itself, which nourished the grass and cows of these renowned dairies, flowed not like the streams of Blackmoor. Those were slow, silent, often turbid; flowing over beds of mud into which the incautious wader might sink and vanish unawares. The Froom waters were clear as the pure River of Life shown to the Evangelist, rapid as the shadow of a cloud, with pebbly shallows that prattled to the sky all day long.

And it is so to-day. Talbothays itself one cannot locate, but one can discover a dozen lush farmsteads that might be it, notably one with a great mill-wheel on a secluded reach of the river near Woodford—a rather marshy place populated by wild duck, moorhens, and innumerable snipe. When you come to Wellbridge (Wool), you live word by word and moment by moment the confession and the *débâcle* of Tess's hours-old wedded life: that terrible scene when, she still wearing the gems with which Clare's playful fancy had in a happier moment adorned her,

> the fire in the grate looked impish—demoniacally funny, as if it did not care in the least about her strait. The fender grinned idly, as if it too did not care. The light from the water-bottle was merely engaged in a chromatic problem. All material objects around announced their irresponsibility with terrible iteration.

For the Jacobean farmhouse stands by the bridge as you approach the little town from the direction of Bere Regis, and it is said that the haunting D'Urberville women still look down very faintly from its wall, though a child whose mother had gone out would

not admit me to their inspection. Instead, I crossed the Froom, and turning to the left along a by-road—the one no doubt by which the couple had walked, Tess following "with dumb and vacant fidelity"—came to the site of Bindon Abbey, a shadowy solemn place amid a rectangle of rook-nested trees. Here, fishponds; the ruined choir of the Abbey Church—remains of a Cistercian monastery; and, hidden away in a twilit corner, the stone coffin in which Clare laid the form of his wife. That the site of the monastery is nearly half a mile from the bridge-house is necessarily incidental to the story.

Some time after their separation, it may be remembered, Tess made her way to Emminster Vicarage to obtain news of her husband from his parents. The real place is, of course, Beaminster. On her return journey from this fruitless quest, she stops for breakfast at a cottage at "Evershed"(Evershot), and this cottage —a pretty one smothered in honeysuckle near to the church at the top of the village street—may be identified, as may the Acorn Inn, called in the book the "Sow and Acorn," a little lower down. Over the way is seen a barn which, it is reasonable to suppose, is that wherein she re-discovered Alec D'Urberville making his religious discourse. The unfortunate woman then tramped her way back toward Flintcomb Ash along a high and lonely lane much frequented by rabbits, until she came to the solitary stone called Cross-in-hand, whose strange legend is celebrated in the poem called *The Lost Pyx*. It is a wild, lofty place, from which one looks out across a vast expanse of the green

and fertile Blackmoor to the queer hill about Mere and to the smooth escarpment of the great Plain beyond. Here it was that Tess swore solemnly to D'Urberville never to tempt him again. She then proceeded on her way to Flintcomb Ash—where "the air was dry and cold, and the long cart-roads were blown white and dusty within a few hours after rain." It is a difficult place to identify, and I spent many hours wandering about and beneath the high bluff known as Nettlecomb Tout, which, together with the yet loftier summit of Bolbarrow, Tess saw ahead of her. At length, a short distance above the remains of a village or hamlet, Melcombe Horsey, in a northerly direction, I found a large farm which seemed to answer to the description of Farmer Goby's. It is a drear, wind-blown place, devoid of trees save a near-by plantation, very remote, and recognisable at a distance only by the high zinc roof of its barn. Lingering here, it was possible to visualise Tess and Marian and Izz at their weeding in the winter weather, and the mood of black despair in which the first-named laboured amid those desolate surroundings while awaiting vainly news of her husband.

Has anybody identified the scene of Tess's last sojourning with Angel Clare in the New Forest? "Bramshurst Court" is probably one of those large country houses situated in the deeps of the Forest above the Avon valley near to Ringwood—at least, so its situation on the map would lead one to suppose. Yet does it really matter? We are at this point of the story too horrified by Tess's situation, too fearful of its

sequel, to care for identifications, unless it be for the satisfaction of approaching more really the scene of their brief and last happiness.

The Dynasts has a place in literature which leaves one conjecturing what epic inspiration might have moved its author had recent European events occurred a few years earlier than they did. There is a fundamental quality in Hardy which leads one to believe that he alone among living writers of English could handle adequately the great themes and grand *spectacles* which these later years have offered. Standing one darkening autumn day at the cross-roads of Longueval, which is the heart of the battlefield of the Somme, and speechlessly impressed by the sombre loneliness and majesty of its appearance on that pilgrimage with my sister nearly a year after the drums of war had died away, I searched my memory for some passage in English prose (which I knew existed) that should do justice to the scene. The one which presently came to my mind was Hardy's description in *The Return of the Native* of Egdon Heath. Knowing also the original, I detected their spiritual and physical affinity, so inestimably emphasised or heightened in the case of the former by the travail through which it had passed, by the insignia of that travail in the shape of grey, crooked wooden crosses flecking the battlefield's face, and by the litter of phantom armies which lay about on every hand.

> The heaven being spread with this pallid screen and the earth with the darkest vegetation, their meeting-line at the horizon was clearly marked. In such contrast the heath wore the appearance of an instalment of night which had

> taken up its place before its astronomical hour was come: darkness had to a great extent arrived hereon, while day stood distinct in the sky. . . . The distant rims of the world and of the firmament seemed to be a division in time no less than a division in matter. The face of the heath by its mere complexion, added half an hour to evening; it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread. . . . Then Egdon was aroused to reciprocity; for the storm was its lover, and the wind its friend. Then it became the home of strange phantoms; and it was found to be the hitherto unrecognised original of those wild regions of obscurity which are vaguely felt to be compassing us about in midnight dreams of flight and disaster, and are never thought of after the dream till revived by scenes like this.
>
> It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature—neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly: neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities.

Such, were it not to be ascribed to the stretch of moorland, now considerably broken up, lying between Dorchester and Poole, would be a verifiable description of that battlefield which more than any other to-day preserves its awesome character. Mr. C. R. W. Nevinson, perhaps alone among artists, has struck this larger note in his "Road to Arras and Bapaume." As for Mr. Hardy, he is an old man, and a tired, and has said that he will not again give prose to the world.

But, though he may not visit the battlefields of the twentieth century as he once did that of Waterloo, his description of Egdon Heath is an unintentional yet monumental tribute to the cataclysmic aftermath of our own time.

CHAPTER XIV

SOUTHAMPTON TO NEW YORK

Two years. Two busy—I might almost say successful—years! It is September 1922. My novel, *Way of Revelation*, and a book of sketches *A Journey in Ireland 1921* have been published both in England and America and now I am to write a history of *The Scots Guards in the Great War* for the Regiment. I have had a breakdown in health and am on my way—via New York—to stay with Stephen Graham, who since the war I have seen constantly, at Sante Fé, New Mexico, and work and recuperate.

A whistle blows, we are slowing down . . . Southampton!

The morning, misty at first, turned out sunny and hot. When the 50,000-ton liner, assisted by tugs, edged her way stern foremost into Southampton Water, everything sparkled, everything smiled. The slate roof-tops and church spires of Southampton town, the manifold activities of dock and warehouse, the cranes and steamers with their gaily-coloured funnels, the far Hampshire shore whose verdant meadows rise to the outskirts of the New Forest, even the reedy backwaters far up the Water—all smile. Will it be a fine crossing? Nothing could promise better. The villa-decked cliffs of the Isle of Wight slip by. Rows of yachts tilting

jauntily in the Roads, as much as to say they'd be ready for any big sea devilry on such a morning, suggest bathing at Bembridge and the gay life of Cowes in late summer. Then, radiant blue and white, the open sea appears and that last long strip of land which, westerly, guards the fairway to Southampton.

Already booking their places at table, the passengers begin to settle down. Gentlemen sacrifice hats to caps, ladies acquire deck-chairs and rugs and books, leaning back with that peculiar expression on their faces—have you noticed it?—which, reserved exclusively for sea-travel, seems to say, "Isn't it too good to be true? The sea-breezes——" etc. Becoming acquainted, the passengers wax chatty. . . .

Three hours later the ship stops. Passengers who have been below, arranging cabins and state-rooms, marshalling luggage, now come up on deck. Down there, we haven't felt so much as a warning rock—this particular ship is *so* steady.

But the scene has changed. . . .

It is the bay of Cherbourg in late afternoon. A rising sea, green curling waves, foam-flecked. A rising wind, cold from the south-east, and land a mile off glimpsed dimly through gusts of sea-scud and rain. A few lights on shore—as if to emphasise its remoteness. Riding tumultuously near, three small ships banked with people whose colour is of the prevailing gloom.

A long blast of the siren, a ring of the bell on the bridge, shouts, signals, ropes thrown. The three small ships range alongside.

A hurricane-light high up on the foremast of one of them, fairly epitomises the scene.

Gangways shoot out. Whole companies of English stewards and sailors rush forward to meet whole companies of French stewards and sailors. It might be the days of Nelson on the film. Upon the bridge of the nearest Cherbourg vessel stands a sea-captain in gold lace, peaked cap, and pale yellow boots, vociferating alternately with his voice and with his hands. Individually, the passengers cannot be seen yet from the upper deck of the big ship—their own deck being a hundred feet below.

Then the melancholy procession begins. It's like the aftermath of a funeral on a rainy day—and it can't be helped. The Rue de Rivoli must step across that gangway if it is to reach Fifth Avenue; so must Claridge's in order to change places with the Plaza. Human dignity, the credit of the race, suffers under such circumstances. Again it can't be helped. Acts, not looks, count now. So undoubtedly thinks a big lady who, creditably attired for a garden-party at Buckingham Palace, is also endowed with a fine physique. The latter stands her in good stead, for she is determined to get there first —and she does. Fashion, however, is a stern arbiter who, if misused, takes a speedy revenge; and the light fawn skirt so cunningly divided fore and aft like mats hung out to dry was surely not intended by nature or the dress-maker to trail the boards of a deck. It bears the stamp of parquet floors; it is no more in the picture than a picture-hat. The large lady stumbles, she lurches —and it is not surprising. Instead of sailing, she staggers across the rocking, rain-swept gangway. She falls. . . .

Other ladies follow. The tide of invasion which swept over Europe in July is now in process of receding, leaving only its money behind. There are ladies—and ladies. Some carry grips, jewel-cases, and packages; others, empty-handed, dart across like soldiers expecting to be shot. Some carry dogs. Some are attended by maids. Some make progress by sheer weight of numbers, having pressed into their service a small army of porters, sailors, and stewards. Some, frankly humiliated, huddle together, waiting to be herded; some, frankly sensible, weather the storm in tweeds and mackintoshes. An American gentleman is heard to shout, "Come along now! I've found the ten bags." A French gentleman, mysteriously arrayed in a cap and a series of capes, assists an elderly wife who is suffering from *mal de mer*: shall it ever be said of a Frenchman that he belies the motto of his country—*toujours la politesse*? A Belgian police-dog gets entangled between his chain and his master's legs—and howls. There are hat-boxes. There are mountain-ranges of hat-boxes, black-and-white striped hat-boxes, blue-and-white striped hat-boxes, hat-boxes with pictures of spry little ladies and flowers and milkmaids painted on the lid; and if ever such a word as "dainty" may be used, it applies to them: for amid the confusion and the rain and the rainy people, doesn't each severally, and don't all together proclaim and announce the Rue de la Paix?

And gentlemen. Gentlemen in mufflers, ulsters, spats, knickerbockers, stockings, trousers, hobnail boots and canvas shoes, who resourcefully carry quantities of hand-luggage, looking like boys going back to school.

And the gentlemen's golf-clubs got embroiled with the hat-boxes and presumably the gentlemen mutter favourite oaths in foreign languages; at any rate, the gangway gets blocked. . . .

And the sea grows rougher. Amid palms, marble, and electric light, a band strikes up some soft air which may soothe some, but to others is an exasperation and a mockery. In the falling dusk, passengers still goggle over deck-rails at the empty decks below. Lights wink out on the shore. Gusts of rain make them indistinct. Passengers still huddle in rows of deck-chairs like crows on a branch at the close of a winter's afternoon. Nobody speaks. A joke would seem obscene. The faces say "Will it ever end——?"

Swish of the waves! The liner moves. . . .

When, perched on a hand-rail, Giuseppe began to play his concertina, everybody gathered round and almost inevitably dancing was proposed.

His friend and compatriot, Tino, was in particularly good form that afternoon, hopping about on one leg, chaffing the girls, encouraging everybody to enjoy themselves, and—if the truth were known—doing tricks which no right-minded man ought to do in public. But as the crowd applauded rather particularly these, he did them again, only more outrageously and in such a droll way that one could not help laughing. Dirty, gross, and unshaven as he was, his good spirits infected everyone. Frequently and suddenly, he snatched a kiss off a girl, who, needless to say, was delighted. Sometimes he

simply played the clown, dancing by himself, mincing and mimicking; but sometimes he played the *grand seigneur*, bowing low—albeit with his greasy coat open and shirt unbuttoned—and with exaggerated punctiliousness kissing the hand of an elderly Italian woman as fat as himself.

It was with this lady that Tino (after bowing over her hand) led off the dance, performing a sort of polka in a series of half-circles. The lady grinned, Tino grinned, everybody grinned. The young people were rather bashful at first in face of so much company, and it took Tino as master of the ceremonies literally to throw them together. Presently, however, there were as many as six couples dancing, as many as fifty persons looking on. In fact, nearly all the steerage passengers seemed to have turned out to enjoy the first calm and sunny afternoon of the voyage.

On the promenade deck, they were sleeping, flirting, and reading in deck-chairs. The second-class passengers had chosen a clear space for quoits and other games. Shrill cries of children floated out across the sea, voices were raised in friendly dispute. Sides had been formed; the tall, puffy-gilled Jew partnered the pink-and-white girl with bobbed hair against the sandy-haired Englishman and the daring Chicago lady in striped skirt and canvas-sided shoes. In a corner by themselves the little brown girl who showed an expanse of healthy bare legs beneath a sailor suit announced with cries of exultation that she had for the third time in succession vanquished the rough old fellow in tweeds and hobnailed boots. Even the elderly Jewess and her two noisy daughters

were busy with knitting, only announcing their presence by occasional bursts of raucous laughter reinforced by occasional bouts of objectless slapping. . . .

Giuseppe's concertina was a lure to them all. For as soon as word went round that the Steerage were having a dance, everybody crowded the railings of the upper deck, whence it is possible to look down upon the after-deck.

Tino was still dancing, but he had taken as partner a very young and very small Italian girl with piercing black eyes, who evidently enjoyed the experience as much as he. A Czecho-Slovakian maiden was footing it energetically yet sedately with a young man who might have been her brother, so alike were they in square sturdiness of build, extreme fairness of complexion, blue eyes, high cheek-bones, and a certain mild stolidity of expression which proclaimed them to be of the peasant class. So did their attire. The girl wore a white handkerchief covering her hair, a blue-embroidered bodice, a white skirt, and heavy black boots; her partner a soft Tyrolese hat turned up at the back, a dark green coat, and embroidered waistcoat, breeches and white leggings above heavy boots. An English couple looked rather commonplace, but forgot to be self-conscious in performing the steps of that old-fashioned country figure which, taught nowadays in many English village schools, is danced on village greens, after flower-shows on squires' lawns in summer twilights, and consists of bow and curtseys, of two steps sideways and backwards, then of a succession of turns. Of all the individual dances—and they included French

and Irish besides Italian and Czecho-Slovakian—this was the most characteristic.

Giuseppe, sitting on his rail, would play for five minutes, then rest for five minutes, but, though he undoubtedly enjoyed the performance, his brown face, his dark eyes neither smiled nor showed any particular animation.

From what southern sunny town of high, white, narrow streets and green-shuttered houses had he journeyed: whither was he going; and why? What history of trial and tribulation, of homes sold up, or of livelihood taken away caused these people to embark upon the adventure of a new life across the sea? Such questions one felt impelled to ask of many in that group who carried upon their shoulders the burdens of old Europe. . . . This fair-moustached, middle-aged Russian with peaked cap, brown corduroys and belt around a blouse, and heavy knee-boots has often been seen in pictures; this ten-year-old child in black smock-frock who might be boy or girl, yet whose pallid, lumpy face and frizzed black hair proclaim it to be a Hebrew; these lively *demoiselles* with plaited hair and coloured handkerchiefs and earrings and other ornaments and embroidered dresses—what is the destiny, the destination, the derivation of them all? And the old Jewesses and the venerable bearded men in felt hats?

There are figures too whose ascertained history does not make them less interesting. The tall, lean man with the thin, pallid features and glasses, the most conspicuous passenger in the ship because above civilian trousers he wears a grey uniform tunic with high Prussian collar

and on his breast the Polish Cross of Valour, is Captain Leonard Kaszynski of Poson, late of a German infantry regiment, now chaplain of the Polish Army, on his way to Washington to see his bishop; if you converse, he will tell you of life in the German trenches before Soissons. The young athletic-looking fellow in the broad black hat, dark clothes, and white shirt with scarlet bandana handkerchief is Foster B. Jewell of Michigan, who, after being a lumberman in Oregon and a hobo along the shores of the Great Lakes, has turned artist and through the summer has been painting those unique oxen of Valencia which draw the fishing-boats up the beach; beside him, an older bearded artist, is his partner and friend. Sitting rather apart on the top of a hatchway—as they do every day—and exchanging no word with other passengers, are two interesting figures. Interesting because again different. Where all is rough, these are elegant—simply, not elaborately, elegant as Frenchwomen have the art to be. Both, though devoid of embellishment, are such faces as one sees outside the Café de la Paix at midnight; or in the Olympic amid music, cigarette-smoke, and cross-glances. In the motley throng they remain distinguished. Fine nostrils, delicate complexions (delicate hands too), fine grey eyes and eyebrows—a certain character speaks in both faces. Yes. A young eighteenth-century marquise has stepped from a picture in some forgotten château of Touraine. . . .

"Bravo! bravo!" Laughter and hand-clapping. Tino has upset his fat lady—has picked her up with a grimace to the audience and an obeisance to her.

But they dance. The cloudlets dance, the wavelets dance, sunlight dances on the sea.

It's as if magic lay in the jerks and spasms of Giuseppe's concertina.

Life!

Life in the waves, in the clouds that, full-bosomed and shapely, sail majestically above the horizon; life in sunshine, in the foam-flecked sea whose amethyst and streaks of purple contrast with the turquoise of the sky; life in the stirring breeze, in the motion of the ship, and in the ship itself. . . .

All afternoon the steerage passengers have been dancing, and on the upper deck the other passengers, since resolved into cliques and friendships, have been playing quoits. All afternoon and for several nights and days the liner has been steaming westward through smooth waters. Now comes a new distraction. Yesterday it was boat-stations for the passengers; now it is boat-drill for the crew. The stewards in white, the sailors in blue overalls, the officers in uniform, man the boats, loosen the davits, and stand with oars raised to the perpendicular.

The rest of the ship, leaving its pastimes, lazily watches.

Suddenly a shout:

"Man overboard!"

Several near rush to the side; the majority do not realise what, or that anything, has happened. How

quickly the water rushes past! How fast the ship is travelling, leaving behind it a turbulent wake of foam! How high the decks from the water, quite fifty feet—one has not realised these things till now!

There is nothing to be seen except the pellucid green water. A buoy attached to a rope is thrown from the stern—then another—and another. In a couple of minutes these seem to be left half-a-mile behind. The first thought is, "That man is alone with the Atlantic!" . . .

"I saw it happen. It was a third-class steward. He was pulling at a rope or something and it seemed to give way. He went over backwards. . . ."

Now everybody begins to realise what has happened. The ship itself seems to realise something, for she trembles from bow to stern as the engines are reversed. There comes a long wail from the siren. The rails of the decks rising tier upon tier are lined with people—some staring through glasses, some pointing with arm outstretched, some shading their eyes with their hands, all gazing towards the receding wake which looks like a white scar on the bosom of the ocean.

It is a calm evening. The setting sun makes a path as of golden flags from the western horizon to the ship; it lights up the two red-and-black funnels from which clouds of steam emerge as if the liner protested at being impeded in her forward way. Sometimes people think they see a head bobbing or a man striking out. There are ever cries of "They're lowering a boat!" or "He's safe—they've got him!" The object turns out to be a buoy or—nothing.

Twenty minutes elapse before the ship heaves to. She then cruises around a buoy until it gets dark.

The passenger who witnessed the occurrence is sent for. When he returns from the bridge, he becomes the centre of a group.

"I shall never forget the expression on that man's face——"

One detects a sort of startled surprise in the young Jew's voice.

That night the masquerade ball does not take place. Instead, the first-class passengers walk round the promenade deck, smoking, talking, criticising each other's gowns and jewels amid cigar-smoke and scent. Warm airs steal in from the Gulf Stream. An orchestra plays—something classical. Not too many lights illumine the decks. It's like the sea-front of a Casino.

Next night is the last of the voyage. A concert has been arranged in aid of the families of sailors lost at sea. Later, the masquerade ball will come off.

And after a stout lady in pearls has sung "Crossing the Bar" and a thin lady in white has told of love, moonlight, and a kiss (in proper sequence), the young New York Jew ascends the platform. Within twenty-four hours he has composed a poem of three stanzas which he has already declaimed to the second-class. But in the first-class he will find a more than usually responsive audience. For the moral of his poem is that in the midst of life we are in death; that drowned sea-farers do not return to their wives or sweethearts; that this unfortunate third-class steward in particular will not return to his mother (in Liverpool).

The effort is received with subdued applause. Seafearing ladies raise handkerchiefs to their eyes; whiskey-primed males, clearing their throats, vow that the boy has feelings. The boy, himself affected, sits down—modestly.

Dollar-bills rustle. Spirits rise—they are entitled to. The ballroom is lit up. White paint and rosewood glisten. Motley garments and head-dresses representing or concealing all sorts of characters are reflected in pools of electricity upon a parquet floor. Jass music floats out to the banks of Newfoundland.

In a corner of the steerage deck a lamp burns. Beneath it sit three peasant girls and two young men. A priest with a strange unworldly face stands with bared and bent head before them; has so stood for half-an-hour. The girls sing softly while sewing, one of the young men plays a guitar. There is laughter in a subdued key. There is laughter in the music which finds an echo in the voice of the waves

Already it was daylight. A uniform tone of grey joined sea and sky, for it was that brief half-hour called daybreak, when a stealing uncertain light seems to herald the sun's arrival. The waves rolled lazily. Afar off a sea-bird wheeled. A black object on the starboard quarter revealed itself through glasses as a lightship. Over-night lights had passed or been passed mysteriously—how far or how near, whether stationary or moving, it was impossible to say. The Nantucket was left far behind.

Suddenly the sun rose. It came up round and fiery

above the eastern sea, and, as the arc grew larger, there lay across it a bar of cloud—the bar sinister of bad weather. Wisps and banks of mist lay upon other horizons, so that it was impossible to see more than four or five miles.

The decks were nearly empty, since, apart from getting up early on the last day of a voyage, people like to fuss over their luggage hours before they are likely to want it. In fact, the only living soul at hand was a little German who, keeping his glasses fixed upon the western horizon, was determined to be the first to see America.

And in places the mist thickened and lightened bafflingly, as if it were a shroud concealing material objects. There were black lines in it, and there were white patches which held the eye unnaturally. The ship steamed on, the light grew. It was morning. . . .

The little German was excited as only a foreigner can be about merely intelligent objects. And he was right. In the space of a minute a black line had resolved itself into a long spit of land and a white patch into a house —a house that looked like a bungalow.

Then, quite unmistakably, a tall chimney.

On the port side . . . the coast of America. A long, low sandy shore fringed with white, unsubstantial-looking houses. Smoke beyond—an island crowned, it seemed, by a fort—two or three small steamers puffing seawards—a motor-boat.

By now—it was nearly time for breakfast—numerous passengers had appeared on deck. The land seemed to glide out to meet the ship. Minute by minute the contour of things changed, new things and new aspects of

things appeared as in a cinematograph. A bell rang and the ship slowed down. The great siren boomed three times. While we were still moving a launch came alongside and, ever more slowly, we proceeded on our way.

Imperceptibly almost, we were in the mouth of a river. The banks were so near that on the one hand one could see big villas with wide white verandahs, and on the other a shady road, a public institution, villas amid grass lawns half-hidden by full-leaved chestnuts, and a Ford van that looked as if it was delivering bread. . . .

In the space of two hours one seemed to plunge from the empty sea into life. The very character of the day seemed to change. A stormy dawn had resolved itself into misty sunlight presaging great heat. The very character of the ship changed. She took on majestic attributes. She was no longer a lone vessel forging a track through worlds of sky and ocean, but, as she had started out, among liners gigantic, among surrounding objects supreme.

In her slower and slower motion, in her repeated solemn warnings from the siren, it was as if she became conscious of this. When finally she ceased to move—and she ceased to move for three hours—it was difficult to believe that so huge a thing could ever stir again.

At the Lower Quarantine station mails are taken aboard a small ship, fussily conscious of its officialdom and painted grey. Doctors in military uniform come aboard and ask probing questions, or look at you as if trying to see into your past. A gentleman in spectacles

asks you how much money you've got. The passengers are herded through the saloon and in groups on deck exchange topical remarks, cigarettes, farewells, good wishes, cards, addresses, compliments, and dates.

Early in the afternoon the good ship does move. Henceforward, preceded by two tugs and reverberating blasts of the siren, it is a triumphal progress. The river-side life grows more intense. There is a ceaseless stream of shipping, towing or being towed. Bermudas, Havannah, New Orleans—strange names!

Suddenly round a bend—New York.

Wharves, roofs, low buildings, church spires, factory-chimneys, shipping, smoke streaming at all angles in the foreground. Steam-whistles, rivetting-hammers, sirens, the clank of cranes near and far, frantic cries of railway engines. Already the fair New Jersey shore merges in that of Jersey City. And, dominating because alone in the heart of it, a sea-green woman enthroned on a granite slab holding a torch aloft which by night lights ships out and by day beckons them in—so proud and aloof on her high place, so strange in colour, so expressionless of face, so enigmatic in attitude, that she seems to weigh in her hand the destinies of the world. . . .

The river parts. There is fog. There is a vista of two rivers. Then the outline of a bridge that by its height and scope and immensity of structure seems to dominate the townscape. The eye travels, and the mind realises that it has taken in a bare half. Dim shapes become realities, outlines almost too vast for belief become concrete. One calls to mind first glimpses of the Alps from the eastern plains of France. Only this is not Nature—

and it is not Art. It is an extension of a man's vision of the powers of man. . . .

The Woolworth Building, the Singer Building, the little-looking church of St. John have often been painted, still better they have been photographed; for photography is the only effective way of depicting New York. But the riverside life, the life of the pierheads and bulkheads along that last half-mile of a liner's voyage, has not often been depicted either by painter or photographer. How the energy of the city bubbles down some crowded street to the river's edge; how it pours across, a resurgent stream, from the end of one street to the beginning of another in full view of a ship's passengers; how two negro porters in blue overalls may be seen fighting behind a truck; how the legend "hot-dog" hits you in the face from a coffee-stall; how sky-signs stand out at a height and on a scale never seen before; how columns of drays present the first and the last aspect of horse-life in New York:—these details have seldom been noticed.

Nor can adequately be described the last scene of the liner's voyage: the turning in the river and the berthing; the crowds which collect along the wharf (for everybody stops work to watch the operation); the shouts and cries, the waving of handkerchiefs and flags from the windows of the shipping company's building. And when, as the great ship draws parallel with her berth, twelve tugs rush out upon her like hornets, when six of them fasten their noses into one side of her and push and six grasp at her stern with ropes on the other and pull, and all puff and pant and all let off steam,

and all hoot in unison, until at the end of a quarter-of-an-hour the monster is at right angles to the river's flow—the bombardment which precedes a modern battle can alone compare with the noise in point of volume.

The last move of all is a kind of anti-climax. Very slowly, very grandiosely, the liner enters her berth. Almost imperceptibly she edges against the landing-stage. Gangways rattle up. Friends are united. There begins the long agony of landing—for it is an agony. . . .

It is not, however, until my taxicab whirls out of the Docks into Fourteenth Street and I see before me the lights of New York, its crowds, its racing automobiles, its dusty pavements and barber shops, its rising evening life—and the sun setting in copper over the North River —that I realise I have indeed entered a New World.

CHAPTER XV

TO THE ROYAL CITY OF THE HOLY FAITH

October 25th, 1922.—Another day of glorious sunshine. I work out of doors.

Since landing in the American continent I have had a very eventful time, especially in New York, which is a truly wonderful place. I have spent week-ends at Leonia, New Jersey, and Ossining; at this latter place visiting a Country Club where Mrs. Mallory was playing tennis. But as my publisher met me off the boat, I did not need looking after. I found a letter from Graham putting me in the way of a good room in the middle of town. And from then on I was entertained for the rest of the time I was there. One week-end I spent with my publisher at his house in the country, about sixty miles from New York, and in the city I met a lot of American writers and the English novelist, Hugh Walpole, who was lecturing. Among other activities I dined at Sherry's, and was early made a guest member of five New York Clubs, including the Players. I visited the Ziegfield Follies, the Chauve Souris, three other plays, Sing-sing Prison (including the death-room and electric chair), a black-and-white fight at Madison Square Garden, West Point Military Academy, Chinatown, the Bowery, a Midnight Police Court, a big baseball game, and many other more or less interesting things.

The American edition of *Way of Revelation* I saw everywhere; while *A Journey in Ireland*, Appleton's told me, was doing very well.

On October 8th, Graham, who had joined me, went with me to Chicago, where we stayed two nights. In a bookshop there we were recognised from press photographs.

It was lovely weather and hot in New York, but cold and wet in Chicago and a black fog like London. Although a huge place, it seemed very crude and unimpressive, after New York. We visited some literary people and went to a negro theatre on Sunday afternoon. Thence we went to Kansas City and stayed a night. It is a new town, but typical of the growing West, with a railway station like Buckingham Palace and grass growing in the main street.

We got here, to Santa Fé, in a dust and thunderstorm, so my first impressions were not altogether favourable. It was rather cold and stormy the first day or two, but now every day is perfect—sun from morning till night, clear blue skies, hot in the daytime and cold at night. Rain is almost unknown at this time of the year. The place is seven thousand feet up, with mountains round rising to thirteen thousand feet. The country is sandy desert with sage-brush and a kind of cedar-scrub covering it. It is very wild, populated sparsely by Indians and Mexicans. Everybody rides. I have bought an Indian pony which ambles along, but I intend to get a better one. I have got very comfortable quarters in the house of an American artist, Gerald Cassidy and his wife—at least, I have two rooms in a mud-house, and feed with

them. The Grahams are next door. There is a regular colony of painters and writers here.

I had a tea-party given in my honour soon after I arrived, and to which was bidden all the rank of fashion of Santa Fé—I have also been to two or three evening parties, chiefly given by artists. They have a curious habit at these of handing the food round to you in your chair in the drawing-room—uncomfortable, I think. Afterward charades are indulged in.

My plans are uncertain, but I hazard a guess that I shall be here until about the end of January or until I finish the Regimental History. If funds hold out, I intend to visit San Francisco, certainly the Grand Canyon—and Graham this morning talked of visiting Mexico City!—perhaps I shall go there too. I should like to get back to New York and stay a month in February and March, but it really depends on when I finish the book.

Nicholas Peni and all his family, consisting of a wife, two young daughters, a son, and a male friend, stood outside their mud farm, smiling and exclaiming "*A Dios!*"

Which is not the first chapter—or the last. For already two of the horses had bolted, and had covered six of the miles towards Santa Fé at a gallop. This happened soon after daybreak, when the horses were taken down to water. They were captured by horse strategy, brought back, saddled immediately, which did not alter the fact that the start was thereby two hours late.

But the eternal sunshine of this far western land saved the situation. How could I be annoyed on a morning so bright, so fresh, so clear and uplifting? The air itself was full of vigour. Here the creek loses its dried-up appearance, contains water, and assumes the potentialities of fertilising a pleasant little valley. A grassy meadow fringed on three sides by yellowing cottonwoods and browsed by cows is the most unusual thing. A company of *burros*, or black donkeys, running loose in a paddock, is usual, but characteristic and picturesque. A big villa with lead-roofed pointed turrets, traces of red-brick French windows, and a white American verandah reminds me that not so far away real-estate agents are offering "desirable modern residences" for sale or lease. A great buzzard poised on still wings far up above the plain, on a level, as it seems, with the mountain peaks, negatives that . . .

The mountains—how contemptuously, how immovably, they watch our progress! Baldy, with his white apron, his pine-covered head at one always with the blue sky, stands where he did yesterday. A day's journey has made no difference. The starting point is no farther away. Man and mountain—and the worlds between!

La Cienega is a long village. It is as if the sparse houses, strung out like tired pack-horses, had sat down by the wayside—indefinitely. They are square and squat, with wooden poles projecting about three feet from the wall; they are built of mud, which is hard and neat as concrete, warm in winter and cool in summer, and as durable. Singly they are not picturesque, but

collectively—yes. Sunshine, fading leaves of cottonwood and aspen, sand, mud houses—Wilde's "Symphony in Yellow." . . . And streaks of beetroot-red. Every little house has a verandah; beside the front door of every little house hangs at least one wreath of *chili*, fruit of the pepper-plant, loved by every Mexican.

Cries! Outside Real's store it is hot like midsummer —nay, languorous as a Southern spring. It is noon, and the children stream from school, chattering, the boys chasing each other like chickens, and rolling over in the dust; the girls sucking things, arms linked, heads together, four abreast. It is useless to pretend they are good-looking, these children: they are sallow, black-eyed, mischievous-looking, the boys, grown Mexicans in small, with broad black felt hats and blue overalls braced over the shoulders. The pack tumbles noisily into Real's, presumably for candy. . . . A slate-blue bird with the legs and motion of a plover and the flowing crest of a phalarope darts back and forth in the neighbouring meadows. Crickets chirp. A lizard runs between rock and rock on the hillside. Here to the valley not a breath of wind finds its way. Yes, it is summer. . . .

Following the water-course of the creek is easier than following the trail along its bank. There is never more than a trickle of water, though there is much mud. The gorge narrows and broadens, though it is never less than three hundred yards across. Blue and black rock-walls rise to battlements that are never frowningly high. Sometimes the rock-walls are plain, but sometimes scored into symmetrical architecture of pillars, façades,

cornices, arches, greyish-white and elaborate as the west front of a French cathedral. Sometimes, where the banks are low, cows troop down to drink, and sometimes in shelving meadows Mexicans in broad-brimmed hats are seen loading alfalfa into wagons. Once the horns and bones of a dead cow are passed, and once a shanty under the rock, with rough benches and a fire outside, and the remains of a meal on a rough-hewn table, as if three or four had sat down to it. Mexicans, no doubt, are doing some work of construction or irrigation near by. It is not a grand or terrible gorge. Afternoon sunlight confers upon it a placidity that is almost phlegmatic, a calm that is of the seclusion in which nothing ever happens.

Coffee and crackers in that sunlight, and then a journey across a plain. There comes into view the mountain called Sandia, which means water-melon, and which is a landmark to a hundred miles of country. There are mountains all round. The Jemez frown. Baldy is temporarily hidden. An eagle with brown back and white breast, gleaming and curved beak, rises from his vantage-point on a knoll and wings away into the sunset.

And the trail leads into the sunset, grass and sand and piñon and distances bounded by range upon range of mountains, a sun sinking not beyond the Norman church-tower, the sheepfold, the ridge of plough or stubble, but beyond the deserts of Arizona, the rocks and rivers of Colorado and California, the romance and civilisation of San Francisco, the rim of the great Pacific itself.

The valley of the Rio Grande lies dimly outspread at the feet. There are groves of trees; there are glimpses of water. History rises with the evening mist—and romance: romance of the first Spaniards who set foot upon this soil four hundred years ago, who toiled up this river, now broadening, now swampy, now dry; of generations of Franciscan Fathers who, attacked and often massacred by Red Indians, founded twenty-five miles away that Royal City of the Holy Faith of St. Francis which grows in prosperity at this day; history and a deepening sense of the mystery of this land, which, veiled as yet from the eyes of the world, combines the world's progress and its crudeness with that which is of the past—far past. Spaniard and Indian live side by side; Spanish superstition vies with Indian superstition until at last they are one: superadded comes the idol of America, which, be it of gold or clay, shall overwhelm them both. But the Rio Grande flows on, and the mountains do not change, nor the perennial snows, nor the desert whose secret peeps out at a man in the bright noonday, but overnight shall perish with it. . . .

Lights shine apart, Cochiti across the river, Peña Blanca hither. The Garcias' house is dark, which is natural, for young Garcia is to marry to-morrow, and father and son are probably up at the bride's. However, a clean room, two coloured pictures of the Virgin holding the Christ-Child, faded waxen flowers under glass, an enlarged photograph of the elder Garcia, moonlight austere in purity as a sinner's conception of the Roman Catholic Church, a cat on the window-sill,

hot coffee, a white counterpane, a horse's hoofs muffled by the sandy street . . . bed!

In its dawning the sun projects rays into unsuspected mountain-tops, refracting therefrom a confusion of rose-tinted snow and cloud that resembles nothing so much as the froth upon an ice-cream soda. It is cold, too. The occasional water carries ice. The world is like an ice-cream soda.

Long shadows steal like finger-marks across the valley, across fields of alfalfa and maize, in among the golden flakes of cottonwood and aspen, in among the sandy glades. A flock of birds like rooks, and like rooks strung out, wends across dark snow-clouds piled up westward; eastward an indigo-black ridge stands sharply against the sunrise, and, as if prepared for the painter, a great black cross stands enhaloed by a pale golden sky.

"What is that up there?"—pointing—"the cross?" I ask.

But the Indian in blue, with a red handkerchief round his head, does not understand. A Mexican, also in blue, with black sombrero, does understand. He pulls up his broad yoke of horses, for he is driving a wagon containing a load of alfalfa.

"*Alla?* A religious sect of the Mexicans."

One more is added to the secrets hidden in the heart of this land. Nor shall its significance be revealed here. Out of the faith and blood of the people of the Middle Ages, out of the womb of dimmest Christianity, out of the womb of old Europe, and of time itself, this thing

has sprung. Passion Week hides it; Lent covers it up with cloak of night-stormy wandering; the weals and the scars are hidden beneath habiliments of everyday life—until Good Friday morning.

But the mystery grows—the mystery of a land so silent that the rare chirrup of a pipit causes me to rein in my horse and look around for the author of it, so utterly devoid of life that a glimpse of cottontail or of hare is an event to be chronicled in the diary—or is it that winter's quiet has already descended here?—so ordered that low cedar and stunted pine spot the landscape as trimly and as regularly as oak trees in any English parkland, and even the rocks seem to hold to their appointed place, so sandy that even the horses' hoof-steps are but thuds, so arid that for thirty-five miles not a drop of water is found, so devoid of vegetation that the yellowish dried-up *chimesa* and the ash-coloured nourishing gramma-grass offer almost a relief to the eye. What shall it yield of personality, of intimacy, of the spiritual or the actual? Answer: Nothing, nothing. For the trail winds up and down—and it is always easy, and it is always clear—and beyond this ridge is another just like it, and beyond that another with an occasional broad, flat water-course in which the horses' hoofs sink deep. It is like riding through a sandy, undulating park.

A bitter wind rises. Snow flurries drift-like eddies of smoke across the higher mountain slopes: just as the coffee boils on a fire of stalks and sticks that are brittle as tinder come a rustle and the snort of a horse. Six *Pueblo* Indians have drawn rein. One, a leader, rides a

dapple-grey pony; the others ride bay ponies. They sit still as statues, but the dark, parchment-like faces, the eyes in which smoulders primeval wisdom unchanged, a knowledge of centuries untold—these smile. They drink coffee and accept cigarettes. They joke and laugh among themselves. "*Poco frio! Mucho frio! Nevar!*" We ride on. With heels and raw-hide thong they urge their ponies into a canter, and so proceed, two abreast, like a gay party going hunting or like a troop of cavalry. Soon they leave us behind, but for a quarter of an hour we keep in sight, thrown over their shoulders, their blankets of many colours, striped-patterned, cross-woven, the vivid red and yellow handkerchiefs, knotted at the back, with which the coarse black hair is bound, and the bobbing up and down of equestrian figures which would look meretricious in their fidelity to romance if they did not belong to the dim landscape as natively and historically as the grey-black rocks themselves.

The snowstorm hides them. Snowflakes eddy playfully from an opaque sky, but sunlight glints on distant peaks. Soon the secret land shall be cloaked in a new deception—a dazzling purity that seems to smile. We halt to tighten girths in a little ravine, for saddles slip back during a long ascent. A sound of wheels. A two-horse wagon passes, driven by an Indian muffled in a green-and-yellow blanket, beside him a fat squaw with a baby concealed in the folds of a pink-and-black blanket. The snow ceases. Parties of three and four Indians canter up silently behind, urge their ponies to a gallop, and pass with a greeting or draw in to ask whither we

are bound and whence have come. All are on their way from the Rio Grande valley to a remote *pueblo* in the mountains where there is to be a festival. Once a cowboy passes, in slouch hat and coloured neckerchief and leather "chaps," looking as if the cinematograph had returned him, borrowed but not damaged, to the world he belongs to.

"How do?" says he; "kind o' cold!" But, he adds, he is not bound for the festival; his mission is to fetch over a "bunch o' stock," and he has to make his destination, twenty miles away, before dark.

Fires blaze up close to the trail. Parties of Indians pull up their ponies abruptly and dismount, gather into a heap within a few seconds a pile of sticks and weeds, and stand, a lurid circle, around the blaze warming their hands. The bonfire dies down as quickly as it is kindled; they mount, and with a whoop and a yell continue on their way.

A solitary Indian rides up and enters into conversation. He wears a kind of yellow shirt, an handkerchief round his head, long turquoise earrings, blue trousers, and brown moccasins. His bridle is of horsehair cunningly plaited. Announcing that his name is Lorenzo, and that he is from San Felipe, a *pueblo* on the Rio Grande, he offers to show a short cut through the bush to the way we wish to go. Knowing that as guides Indians are infallible, and that in their own part of the country they will find their way blindfold, we follow, although the trail seems to wander aimlessly through the sand amid low bushes of piñon and cedar. Our guide trots far ahead, but waits on successive ridges,

calls "coo-ee," and beckons the direction with his arm, or, awaiting us on some knoll, his wild and savage figure silhouetted against a stormy sunset, his long hair and that of his horse blown recklessly by the wind, he looks like some Moorish chieftain on outpost in expectation of the approach of an enemy. His wild cry, carried back to us on the wings of the harsh west wind, reinforces this impression.

Stopping on one such ridge, he lets us come up with him. And there is unfolded to view such a panorama—I cannot call it a landscape—as moves us strangely with an awe of Nature. The travels of Paul Fountain in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico were favouritely read by English boys a quarter of a century ago and later; and the descriptions given therein so far tally with what now lies before us that it is as if the page lay open and had just been read. A valley lies beneath with—strange sight!—gleams of water in it; that is, no doubt, the valley of the river Jemez. North-eastward a snow-clad peak rises in lonely majesty to the sky; it is Baldy; south-westward Sandia rises alone, marking the course of the Rio Grande. Between these two points and looking westward as far as the eye can see—which is at least fifty miles—is a succession of gorges and canyons, of rock-strewn precipices, of dried-up river-courses, of rocks that jut up singly in strange shapes and at queer angles, of twisted streams of yellowish lava and of here and there, in a general monotone of bluish-grey, scarlet seams in rock or precipice, and wherever sand predominates of the piñon spotting it with the regularity of roses on chintz window-curtains. The

naturally wild and sombre character of this outlook is enhanced by the wild and sombre character of the evening; fretted bars of red against the cold grey of piled-up snow-clouds intimate where the sun is sinking on his nightly journey to the Pacific. Clouds cling about the mountain-peaks or float before their snowy slopes in such a way that they appear superhumanly remote and aloof. If grandeur and gloom are words that can of themselves describe any great manifestation of Nature, then are they applicable here. But they are not enough. For a soul and spirit dwell in conjunction of cloud and mountain and distance as they dwell also in conjunction of mind and matter; and somewhere there dwells or, as would seem more probable, roves, in canyon and chasm and along precipices, the soul and the spirit of this secret land. At rest? No. Capturable, attainable, tameable? No. The spirit of the ages, perhaps, which is said to wander down an eternal declivity —the ages which have formed this sculpture of rock and fissure, which have carved it, which have preserved it and left it naked and elemental to our gaze as it was in the beginning. . . .

The horses pick a way down the sheer precipice. What so sure-footed as an Indian or mountain-reared pony? The wise rider, however apparently perilous the descent, will leave its negotiation entirely to his mount. And it is at such moments that the communion between horse and man becomes very real. By the time we are at the bottom it is almost dark. Only a few autumnal embers remain in the western sky. The sand gleams white. The trail, however, broadens into a wagon-road.

The piñon bushes on either side take on the character of watchers who guard a secret.

Lights appear. Dogs bark. Horses whinny. There is shouting. There are sounds of barbaric music. . . .

The high, bright morning, the clear sunlight, the keen air, dispel all secrets. The mystery of the secret land, if there is one, recedes; there remains only a bitter little wind, snow glistening on mountain peaks, a broad, mild valley with an attenuated river, Jemez, wandering through it and, amid groves of cottonwood and sparse fields of corn, the mud village San Ysidro. Albeit there are two or three wooden American houses with verandahs to be found in it. But this is the mystery of the secret land: that when its *ego* or its personality, call it as one will, becomes intense, almost palpable, almost terrible, it eludes one's grasp; it disappears as the substance of a dream or of a nightmare does at dawn of day.

Such people one knows. In a journey through life one meets countless people whose character, whose A to Z, as it were, whose beginning and end, is declared in their faces, by their manners and their speech. One meets other people whom long knowledge and patient study reveal at the last—sometimes an unmasking! And one meets a third sort of people, a rare and unhappy sort, whose soul hides and eludes, who until the very end hold to their secret—not always because they have one, not always because they would not unburden themselves of it if they could—but whether they have not or have a secret soul, and whether their personal

mystery happens to be akin to the supernatural or to the material or to both—that the world never knows.

Nature may be kindly, smiling, and happy; or she may be austere and terrible; or, bafflingly, in one expression, in one entity, she may be both.

Such thoughts, it is true, do not occur to me in the warm sunlight that induces a sense of passive indifference, at noon. And the trading-station, however remote, is a scene of life and colour. An incessant coming and going of Indians, vivid oscillations of yellows, greens and reds, a neighing of horses and a barking of dogs, the occasional fussy jargon of a motor-car, wagon-wheels muffled by the sand, a calling to one another of men in terms of Spanish, Indian, and English, the regular clank-clank of a near-by water-wheel—this is the place. A little way down the road some Mexican cowboys are having a "rag," three of them, with whoops and yells of laughter, trying to pull a fourth off a half-broken-in broncho. In the big store, which contains everything from Parisian scent to leathern waistcoats and cowboy hats, there is a crowd. It is perhaps the busiest day in the year. At long counters the Indians offer rugs and blankets woven into patterns and combinations of colour, and crude turquoise and turquoise matrix, and silver bracelets, and cunningly wrought silver ornaments in exchange for bags of flour, bottles of scent, cigars and cigarettes, pocket-knives, matches, print dresses, and all those incidental articles which they, like us, have come to consider articles of necessity.

Nor are they for the most part the same sort of

Indians who came our way yesterday. They do not speak the same language, neither do they look the same. Apaches and Navajos, they are the traditional enemies of the *pueblos*, which means town-dwellers. This tall man standing before the door wrapped in a yellow-and-pink blanket, a brown, broad-brimmed hat with a long feather in it shading fierce eyes, and a countenance at once swarthy, moustached, and proud, is an Apache—the most warlike of the tribes. So picturesque is his attitude, so statuesque his pose, so typically stands he for the war-chief of romance, that, one thinks, he must be aware of the fact. Should I venture to address him, the reply would probably be a surly grunt. That woman in voluminous skirts wearing whole strings of native turquoise and of silver ornaments, which must be worth hundreds of dollars, but which she would probably refuse to sell at any price, is a Navajo, despite her flaxen hair. For flaxen hair, as do albinos, occasionally appears among the purest Indians, thus showing an out-cross in some previous generation. Despite her long skirts, she mounts and bestrides a horse easily. A stocky, square-set man in a black-and-mustard striped blanket and a tousled dark-eyed boy in trousers and a broad hat, romantic-looking as a young Italian, now join her, and all three trot off together. Doubtless they are bound back to their reservation, nearly a hundred miles away. The Navajos, too, are a warlike tribe, and have the reputation of being the most treacherous and the most vindictive of the Indians. A century and more ago they made unceasing war upon Mexicans and village Indians alike, so that the former were driven

to seek refuge in the *pueblos* of the latter, a state of affairs which has resulted in the present trouble over what is known as the Bursum Bill—a measure passed, but recalled by the Senate, which potentially deprived the Indians of a portion of their lands on behalf of those who were originally their guests. The Navajos, however, who alone among the Indians are said to be increasing in numbers, have never dwelt in *pueblos*. They are wanderers and shepherds, like gipsies; they know no resting-place but trail's end and camp-fire; they are prime makers of blankets and ornaments, but yet, coming out of the wild, they go back to it and, it may be, share its secret. They know no community with white men.

In the evening, in the long evening, the half-dozen or so tired men who constitute the trading-station of San Ysidro gather round a log-fire. There has been a supper of pork-and-beans, and waffles, and coffee. The low, oblong room whose mud-coloured walls are sparsely decorated with pictures cut from the Sunday supplement of the *New York Times*, and whose ceiling is supported by beams of pine, is filled with tobacco smoke. On a kind of settle lie a novel and a copy of the *Saturday Evening Post*. A Winchester repeater leans up against the fireplace, a box of cartridges on the shelf above it. And the conversation? There are excursions into world politics and controversial subjects like Prohibition, but it for the most part consists of the coming hunting season, which lasts only ten days, of the likelihood of turkey and deer being found low on the mountain, of the best place and the best plan to obtain good sport;

it goes back, too, as such conversations usually do, to former hunting seasons, and to comparisons among the hunters of bear encountered, brown, black, and silver-tip (grizzly), of lynx and mountain lion and wild cat successfully or otherwise dealt with.

An elderly, bearded face, the young beardless face of an Easterner, a face nervously alive and twitching with an hundred per cent. American energy, the face of one who has known only manual toil, and rough toil at that, the face of one who takes the world as his arena, and as his subject-matter all human life.

The fire burns low. One by one the traders disappear to bed. With every opening and shutting of the door a bitter little wind enters. Outside it is very cold. Moonlight plays upon the fields of snow thirteen thousand feet high, fifty miles away. A coyote howls across the river. . . .

As we sat on the hill above Zia it came and peeped out at us. The hour was noon. A more placid and kindly day could not be imagined. The keen edge of the wind was taken off by sunshine, warm and contemplative; an Italian sky was flecked with high white clouds that drifted across it like ships in full sail. All the morning we had followed rather lazily the sandy course of the Jemez River, passing only a Mexican cowboy who was looking for strayed stock and an Indian herding a flock of goats. We had entered the little church that stands on the hill-top of Zia; and perhaps the decay, the forlorn neglect and abandonment, of the

place had turned the mind into a certain groove. For there is always something eerie, something uncanny almost, about neglect in a church; like a neglected child, it appeals to one as something that before all else ought to be cared for and cherished, so that where one finds plaster peeling, and dust and cobwebs, and the mason's work half done, one seems to have found the negation of human, because a denial of Divine, love.

Piles of boards lay on the earthy floor. The altar of faded painted wood, bereft of all embellishment, and the altar-rails alone reminded me of the character of the place. The wind whispered through and around it. But behind the altar, secret and, as it were, ashamed, lurked what might or should have been a beautiful thing. Torn, rotten, and crinkled with damp, so that the canvas hung in tatters against the woodwork, so far gone in age and decay that three-quarters of the picture was a mere brownish blur of dried-up paint, one face yet appeared, and it was the face of the Virgin. Judging by the poise of the head, she must have been holding and looking down at the Christ-child. On either side had been frescoes painted on woodwork, but they were practically blotted out. The face of the Virgin alone remained distinct, not particularly beautiful, it is true, though said to be the work of a famous Spaniard of olden time, but protesting and forsaken as a voice crying in the wilderness.

It was a relief to go outside into the bright noonday. But it was haunting, too, as if in that dark, forgotten corner behind the altar I had come upon something not to be known of men. And all the rest of that day was

peculiarly haunting. As we sat with our coffee and biscuits on the hill-top, an Indian squaw with white buckskin putties beneath a blue dress, and a mummy-like face, as if parchment had been drawn over the features of a skull, came out on the roof of her mud hut and watched us. And in the mud village that lay beneath us she was the only sign of human life. A dog came and wagged its tail and begged for food. Two or three wading-birds were visible in the shallow river, which, through acres of mud, bounded by low, sandy banks, did not so much flow as crawl through the barren land. In the distance the mountains looked blue and bluer as the afternoon advanced, taking on strange and yet stranger shapes as the eye dwelt upon them—a camel's back, a church steeple, a table, a tombstone, a cenotaph, standing by themselves. And never, though the sun shone undimmed, and the foot-hills northward protected us from the breeze, so that keeping in to the river's bank, it was baskfully quiet—never had the secret spirit of the country so, as it were, come out at one, dogged one, stalked one, looked over one's shoulder at unexpected moments, flaunted its presence in front of and beside one; never had one been so conscious of it, nor so conscious of the orderliness of piñon and cedar when the trail led among them, of their gravity, demureness and silence, and of the clear interval of space and light, about half a dozen yards, which separated one from another. The horses' footsteps were muffled by sand; occasionally the animals would stop to nose among the yellow *chimesa* for the rarer gramma-grass which they devour. At such time the silence would

become almost fearsome, so that one imagined oneself in a vast cemetery planted with cypress. . . .

In the evening about sunset we came to the small Indian village of Santa Ana, which groups around a square, mud-built church on a low cliff or knoll above the Jemez River. The mountain Sandia, ten thousand feet high, stands in full view to the south-east, marking the course of the Rio Grande, which we now approached; while westward the desert stretches to those far-distant mountains beyond Arizona. A vast herd of steers was being driven by Mexicans across a river—a stage in their journey, for, as we afterwards learnt, they were strangers to the Indian *pueblo*. On the outskirts of the latter, as is customary in such places, were a number of stockades or horse-corrals built of upright poles bound together. Dogs at once appeared, together with one or two squaws and some children. The lack of interest of these people in white strangers is worth remarking. Only one male Indian appeared, but he spoke English, and his offer of a room in his house for the night was gladly accepted. The more so was this the case when it was learnt that the deserted appearance of the village was due to the fact that the majority of its inhabitants were away farming, in the Rio Grande valley; that on the day previous we should have found the place entirely empty save for a few old men left as caretakers; and that our friend—whose name, by the way, was José—had only that day returned with his family from the township of Bernalillo.

We were thus in luck's way, and, mattresses having been spread, settled down to spend a hot, uncomfortable

night upon the floor. This was in a room opening out of that of José and his family, which latter appeared to consist of two squaws, a baby, and another youngish man. Upon the walls of the room were one or two devotional pictures of Roman Catholic origin, for the *Pueblo* Indians are, nominally at any rate, ministered to by the Franciscan Fathers whose predecessors entered this country with Coronado four centuries ago. Whether the Indian mentality is capable of absorbing Christianity or whether through observance of its forms and dogma he persists in worship of his own time-consecrated—false—gods, is matter for speculation. Those best acquainted with him aver that the word which comes readiest to the lips of an Indian—doubtless because it is the easiest to pronounce—is "Yes." . . .

Our friend brings in a bundle of wood, lights the stove and a lamp. When we produce our tinned sardines, our butter and bread, from saddle-bags, he sets upon the table a sort of hot and savoury meat-and-potato hash. When we come to cigarettes he takes his seat at table, and one of the squaws, sidling in, takes her seat by the door, mutely and silently inquisitive. Periodically the baby squalls, but we, red and white, are so interested in each other that the conversation is not interrupted. Some time back he (José) was elected twice in succession governor of the *pueblo*; that is to say, he carried a silver-headed staff of office and led in civil and communal affairs, which is not, however, to confuse him with the *cacique*, who directs the dances and leads in religious affairs. The *pueblo* system, it appears, is genuinely communal; *i.e.*, no individual Indian owns

real estate, but upon his application to the village elders he is granted so many acres to cultivate, and should he fail to cultivate them, they are taken away and given to another. They may not be sold outside the *pueblo* to American or Mexican, nor may any other property of the *pueblo* be sold under both Indian and United States law. There is this difference between white man and red—a notable difference—in this twentieth century: the red man works to live, and the white man lives to work (under which heading, be it added, is not included the Mexican, who does not work at all if he can help it!). "Why should I work harder?" asked the cultivator of fifteen or twenty acres. "I have enough. My wife and children have enough. What more is there to work for?"

It is not the point of view of Chicago: that is true; and it is not the point of view Chicago—or Washington —will ever understand. . . .

When a Navajo marries he joins the tribe of his wife. The wife is acknowledged ruler in the household; and should she desire a divorce, she simply puts her husband's property outside the tent.

In course of conversation our friend mentions that he received his English education at the Indian school at Albuquerque. "But," he deprecatingly adds, "my English is bad. I wish it was better. I would have stayed longer at school, only my dad, old-fashioned Indian, thought it was time for me to work." With some pride he mentions how several young Indians joined the United States Army during the war—the reverberations of which are distinctly felt

even here—and were sent to guard the Mexican frontier.

Passing through the kitchen later that evening, the Indian and his family are seen crouching in a circle about their fire, the squaws sitting on the floor, one nursing the baby, wearing their blankets as in Europe women wear shawls, the two men squatting, heels together, knees apart, their coarse black hair falling about their shoulders, their reddish, angular faces ruddily lit by the blaze, their contemplative eyes staring into it as though they read there memories of the past both far and free.

It is a long climb up and over the *mesa*. A *mesa* is a flat-topped hill, but there are moments when the climber, leading his horse, has his doubts about the top. For there is no trail, but a way has to be picked around boulders, along shelves or rock, and over loose stones which threaten momentarily to roll and crash down into the abyss.

But the summit is reached at last, and the landscape disclosed to view is such another as has already been described, the dark green piñon and sand cedar spotting a sandy expanse in which bunches of the yellow *chimesa* and an occasional land-crop or cairn of grey stones do not relieve so much as emphasise the monotony. Once —or twice—there occur deep and unexpected fissures with old sandy water-courses running like sunken roadways at the bottom of them and steep, rocky sides, which have to be descended and again climbed. It is a

long and painful business, but a wagon-trail leading due east must end in a declivity to the broad valley of the Rio Grande. And it does. For from a sort of embrasure of rocky cliff there opens out immediately beneath as complete an Indian village as could be seen in cardboard at Earl's Court. High up on the stony plateau a gale of cold east wind has arisen, and it blows up the dust so that two or three whirling columns rise like water-spouts from the valley to low, dark clouds which have suddenly overspread the sky. The big *pueblo* is as one imagines a North African village to be—sandy streets, houses the colour of sand, an adobe church in the centre of the village, with a frontispiece of pine logs. Here a sort of midday sleepiness seems to reign: there are few people about, there are many dogs. I do not feel the wind, and in the store kept by an elderly Indian, where a stove burns, it is positively stuffy.

But when, an hour later, we start again, what a change has come over the face of the afternoon! Black clouds pile up eastward; the wind bends cottonwood, aspen and willow nearly double, actually stirs the sluggish waters of the Rio Grande to a ripple, actually blackens the face of the country as upon a winter's afternoon in England.

Suddenly it is November.

Autumn comes differently to every place, but her message is the same. In the forest of Fontainebleau, oak, and beech, and chestnut stand in serried aisles, and through an autumnal twilight of naked trunks and branches, of faded and of fallen leaves, there stalk shades of those who, dust long since, symbolise human

decay: of monarchs, of marshals, of pro-consuls, of ambassadors and statesmen who have long since crumbled to dust in mausoleums and beneath tombs of marble and stone; yet they delight to walk together a little once or twice a year towards the close of a November afternoon. It is the same in Windsor Forest, only here browsing deer in groups and couples lend dignity to the landscape as the blue dusk filters between the trees. And in rural districts of England at this time an aged peasant in bound corduroys and low hat may be seen gathering faggots against a background of black, and red, and yellow—a picture which symbolises the husbandry of centuries past and the habit and the effort of centuries.

Here on the Rio Grande autumn again has a different hand. Undoubtedly the scene would please the painter Corot were he alive, or maybe Daubigny. Knife-like sunbeams, piercing the bleak snow-clouds, gild the pale tops of aspen and cottonwood, crumpled by the wind, which, like a golden chain, follow the river's course. The same beams touch into a warmer life the red and white cattle which graze on patches of grey-green alfalfa amid groves of aspen and willow, light up the withered canes of maize and the feathery papyrus growing six feet tall, and settle in deep red patches, shading to purple and mauve, on the sides of the mountains, so that it is not surprising that those which catch the last rays of the setting sun are called in Mexican the "Mountains of the Blood of Christ." But the background is always sandy, and the predominant tint is yellow. It is a study in old gold.

Wintry shadows lengthen. An Indian trudges homeward, dog at heel, carrying a bundle over his shoulder. We pass through a bleak Indian village, where the dusk reveals a number of ponies running loose in corrals. The spirit of mountain and desert, its sorrow and majesty, its profound mystery and unhappiness, steals out again, as if, before the year should die or before we two should part for ever, it pleaded to be known, to be understood. . . .

And perhaps to-morrow—for we have come near to each other to-night—perhaps to-morrow we shall be friends; we shall understand one another; we shall probe each other's secret at the last.

How quietly and innocently they fall, how quickly and completely cover roadway and landscape!

Twenty-seven miles to the Royal City of the Holy Faith! The horses slip on the icy surface: snowballs form in their hoofs and have to be cut out; icicles hang from hat and moustache.

But how quietly and innocently they fall, like a soft, warm blanket, like a shroud, like a white shroud! . .

CHAPTER XVI

MEXICO

November 19th, 1922.—Our eight-day horseback trip being over, I am hard at work at the Scots Guards History, and I do not mean to leave Santa Fé until I finish it. Graham and I, it seems, rode one hundred and fifty miles altogether, and it was infernally cold and uncomfortable, but well worth it. We had a twenty-eight mile ride through a snowstorm, but my Indian pony was very good.

November 26th.—Soon after sunrise figures were seen on the eastern hill. Prayers were doubtless said and, led by the *cacique* or high priest, a procession wended down to the village and, as the day began, dispersed.

Just an untidy group of mud dwellings surrounded by horse-stockades tumbled together beside an almost non-existent river. For after a particularly dry season, the Jemez is nowhere more than three feet deep. And if the place, despite its two stores, had looked insignificant in the falling dusk, how much more was this the case in the cold light of day! In its setting of mountains and cliffs and eternal snows, the sandy desert creeping into its very dwellings, the loneliness of New Mexico in its very heart—it looked pathetically abandoned and forlorn. So a man looks beside a mountain. And it was

not surprising to learn that the Franciscan Father, the Government's Indian Agent and his family, a retired American farmer with a wife who amiably taught handicrafts to those whose ancestors had learnt them a thousand years ago—constituted the white population of the place. . . .

Daylight had not far advanced when parties of Navajos came tramping up the track inches deep in sand from the outskirts of the village where they had encamped in a complication of wagons, horses, household goods, and dogs. They were in their finery, wearing over their shoulders, like bath-robes, blankets of every stripe and hue—but chiefly black, lemon-yellow and fawn—the squaws wearing long voluminous skirts so striped or checked as hardly to be distinguished in pattern from Scotch plaids (whereas, be it remembered, the *pueblo* squaws wore short skirts and buckskin puttees). The men wore gay-coloured handkerchiefs around their coarse lank hair which was coiled up at the back, and invariably big turquoise ear-rings, their ladies masses of turquoise and silver ornaments, necklaces and bracelets. Usually they carried babies pannier-wise on their backs. The children were usually typical little Indians, but sometimes the boys, slightly Americanised, wore blue trousers (braced high over white shirts) and broad Mexican hats. Sometimes the children were like little gipsies as we know them.

Amid the family-parties of Navajos trailing towards the church, very distinct from the placid and smiling *Pueblos* lounging outside their houses, stand tall and dignified figures wrapped in blankets—Apaches.

Outside the church groups of Indians and a few Mexicans gather. It is an adobe building with a framework and a frontispiece of pine. In the lee of its wall on one side lounges a squad of young Indians in American dress—only one of their number wearing native garb—armed with weapons which range from a firelock at least a century old to a heavily silvered hammer-gun, and so on to a ·22 Winchester repeater. The firing-party awaits with jest and gesture the appearance of the Host, which it may announce by collectively firing off its guns. But it does so with evident impatience, and any small bird that happens to flit within a couple of hundred feet of these perilously-handled weapons is greeted by a formidable discharge.

High Mass is being held, and upon entering I am confronted by a church crowded by Indians, each of whom contributes his splash of colour—even to a group standing at the back—by a sprinkling of Mexicans in European dress, by the squalls of babies and uneasy noises of children, of whom there are a number present, and by the harangue in Spanish of a priest in white vestments. Standing on the topmost step of the chancel and speaking with much gesture, his background is of candles and incense, while on either side the altar sit two other priests also in white. A bleak daylight enters through the open door and pales somewhat the evanescent splendour around the altar. Singing follows the discourse, and it is only more raucous because more high-pitched than that of a typical English church.

It is more interesting, perhaps more profitable, standing outside, to watch the passing to and fro of blanketed

Indians, some on horseback, the majority on foot; and to contrast the warm scene within the church, its light and colour, with the wild snow-clouds marshalling like a phantom army about the mountain-tops. A fusillade of shots, however, announces that the Host has appeared, and that the procession dedicated to St. James is about to leave the church door. Three young men lead the way, the centre one carrying a crucifix. They are Indians whose attire savours of a Chicago reach-me-down store. They are also jovial young men who, it must be admitted, try to keep a straight face throughout the proceedings, though obviously finding it difficult. There follow two more young men carrying coloured waxen effigies of St. James. One of these was presented to the Indians by the Spanish Fathers at least three centuries ago. The other was presented by the Franciscan Fathers (metaphorically) the day before yesterday. In fact, it is reported a little unpleasantness arose as between the claims of these two figures, the poor, stupid, and benighted savages insisting upon carrying their time-honoured figure, the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church insisting upon the prior claim of their brand-new and smart figure. A compromise was effected by the carrying of both figures.

The three priests in white vestments follow, chanting, and these strike a dissonant note because they almost alone recognise the occasion as a religious and a serious one. In the crowd that scrambles behind and on either side, it is true, there are those, older people for the most part, who join in the chanting with bared head. But for the rest—it is not dignified. Small Indian boys fight

and scramble, shout and applaud, and in privy conspiracy, with matches and squibs, arrange a little show on their own. Dogs bark. Dogs arrive from every quarter in surprising variety and quantity and enjoy the proceedings as much as anybody. Certain dappled hogs, having taken a fancy to a Sunday morning stroll, now appear upon the scene, and anyone acquainted with the habits of these animals can imagine how far their routings and their snortings and other impertinences interfere with dignity and progress. As if to add to the commotion—for commotion seems necessary—Indian youths and one or two Mexicans establish a sort of shooting-gallery in a neighbouring corral, expending their remaining ammunition upon any object that strikes their fancy—which of course sets the horses stampeding.

The procession halts before a shrine in the main street. The Virgin and Child, amid candles, look out upon a primordial world. After the service, the Indians file before the coloured picture, making obeisance.

Tom—tom—tom—tom!

Snow is falling. All down the main street, whose surface is of sand and whose adobe dwelling-houses are of the colour of sand, stand figures wrapped in blankets; and on the flat roofs of these houses, and constantly appearing on those roofs from within—for the door is in the roof—and ascending and descending ladders, are seen squaws with their children, the baby generally carried in a fold of the blanket or in a little basket

made for the purpose on the shoulders; white against the grey wintry sky, statuesque and significant, stand figures gaunt as the pointer of Fate.

The dance is about to begin. The *cacique*, the Master of the Ceremonies, a terrifying individual with blackened face and brown fluffy wig with a white feather in it, attended on each side by his aides-de-camp wearing a collection of old garments designed apparently to make them appear as ugly or as repulsive as possible, have twice with beat of drum descended from the roof of the *kiva* or temple—a holy of holies into which no visitor is allowed—paraded the village and, according to custom, visited each house in turn to announce the approach of the ceremonies. At the head of the main street, which rises to a sort of knoll—a natural auditorium whereon are grouped numbers of Navajos and a few visiting cowboys—are the two parties which are to lead off the dance. Facing down the street, side by side and about six paces apart, each party consists of about twenty-five individuals.

Tom—tom—tom!

The chanting begins. The left-hand party consists of middle-aged and old men who advance in four ranks, seven abreast, in slow time to the music, preceded by one of their number tapping on an olive-green barrel-shaped drum. The singers wear coloured handkerchiefs around their heads, brightly-coloured cravats, and white or pink or it may be green shirts, or gaily-coloured blankets above buff and blue trousers and moccasins. In the front rank, however, conspicuous by his fervour as much as by his dress, is a

cowboy in leather riding-boots and khaki breeches, a scarlet shirt open at the throat, and a sombrero, who gesticulates in time with the music as represented by the singers and the drum, and constantly casts his eyes devoutly upwards. That is an anachronism which one cannot escape. For in general the older a man is—and there are certainly eighty-year-olds in the chorus—the more devout he is, the more wrapt in emotion of praise and thanksgiving; some of those present, indeed, appear lost in the rapture of raising their voices, in thanking that god, whose face is now so greyly veiled, for the fruits of the harvest.

The second party advances on the right of the first, and these are the dancers. Two young men, lithe and tall and well-matched, lead the procession, which advances in file, marking time with the drum and the singers, and lifting their feet higher than any squad of English soldiers. Their bodies are dyed a rich chocolate-brown, they are naked but for a white skirt reaching from the navel to the thighs. This skirt is bordered with black, red, and yellow; at the back is an elaborate green pattern, coloured tassels decorate it on each side, while below each hip depends a cluster of cords. The black hair hangs loose as a woman's, and like a woman's is circled by a pink scarf; on the head is a bunch of feathers that look like green leaves and are tied with a green ribbon. The cords are the falling rain, the feathers those of the sacred macaw which once frequented the valley of the Rio Grande. The arms are bare except for a silver bangle fastening a sprig of piñon—the evergreen of eternal life. The movement of

dancing is accompanied by a jangle of bells, these being fastened below the knee with a green and a scarlet streamer. A grey fox-skin with a bushy tail hangs at the back, while on the feet are furry moccasins with tan-hide soles. These soles are the symbol of Death.

Each of the young men is attended by a young or middle-aged woman—hard to say which, for the two squaws seem to have been chosen for their portly proportions, for the complete lack of expression in their yellow woodeny countenances, and for the mechanical precision with which, no more than a yard behind, they copy the movements of their *vis-à-vis*. Both are naked of foot and leg, and both carry in their hands sprigs of piñon. There follow successive files of young men and young women diminishing in age if not in stature until the boys and girls of ten and twelve are reached, prancing and marking time no less vigorously than their elders—some thirty in all. A proportion of the men carry gourds containing seeds which rattle in time to the music. They wear vari-coloured moccasins and, many of them, necklaces of beads or animals' teeth or both, which clank uncannily upon the neck or chest.

The garb of the squaws is only a little less decorative. On their heads, as tiaras are worn in a ballroom, are light green frames that look as if they had been cut out of cardboard. A triangle or disc is cut in the centre; at each corner of the base of the frame are two white fluffy feathers. The hair hangs loosely down the back. White lawn sleeves, or print sleeves with rose or blue or green spots, and patterns that remind one of a nursery wallpaper, contrast with a black bodice and skirt.

Five or six necklaces of coral or turquoise are worn, often more, and often silver pendants cleverly wrought, and on the wrists a number of turquoise-studded bangles. Most of the legs and feet are bare, but a few are encased in white buckskin puttees and moccasins.

"Yeh—yeh—yeh! Yah—yah—yah! Yeh—yeh—yeh—yeh! Yah—yah—yah—yah!" rising and falling, rising and falling, a monotonous chant, like that of the wind.

The snow falls. Feathery, winsome, playful, the flakes eddy sparsely down, upon the gay colours, the prancing figures, the rapt and earnest singers. Grey snow-clouds, a blizzard upon the mountain-tops, a cold wind keening. The God, Nature, to whom this is a hymn of Thanksgiving for the Harvest, for the fruits of the Earth, seems to frown. The ceremony goes on as though it were a summer's day. Bare feet on frosted ground, naked, shivering bodies. . . .

Now and then the rhythm changes. Now and then the rhythm becomes slow and the beat of the feet changes with it. Now and then the singing rises to a crescendo, the singers halting and forming a circle in which heads press close together; they seem to lose themselves in the enthusiasm of their vocation, in the excitement of mutual incitements of religious fervour. Then the knees rise higher, the beat becomes faster. Sometimes the singing almost stops—but never quite. It begins again with renewed zest. The drum taps louder. The dancers prance higher and harder than ever. The leading couples wheel and pass back between the succeeding files. They pass and re-pass the Shrine

of Our Lady. They form into two lines and turn inwards a few paces from the group of singers. Every now and then the dancers advance toward each other and change sides, the young men always with a young woman in close attendance copying his every movement. And these young women? They are not beautiful. Several of them are squat and ugly. But there is one who is beautiful, not alone because she stands in emphatic contrast to her companions. She looks romantic—and, it transpires, she is romantic. She is tall and slender, her black hair falls to the waist, her complexion and her face oval, the eyes dark as a Creole's, the features straight and regular, the whole expression as little characteristic of the Indian squaw as a white woman's. "The child of an American father and an Indian mother"—it is the only possible explanation. But the romance does not end here. The American family would claim her, would convert her into a hundred per cent. American, a true and beautiful American with that most interesting asset of a young woman—a past.

The Indian—even the Indian—too has his point of view. And it is that the most beautiful girl in the *pueblo* shall remain in the *pueblo*. Ultimately the young lady herself decides . . .

It is reported that she is "walking out" with a young Indian.

All afternoon the dance goes on—the same chant, the same variations, the same step. When one party of thirty has performed vigorously for half an hour, another, formed up on the sandy rise at the head of the village street, is ready to take its place. The charac-

teristic of this second party is that the men, instead of being stained a rich chocolate, are smeared with a grey pigment, and this grey pales in parts to a livid tinge, so that the general appearance is of an animated corpse. The singers and the drummer, too, rest, a second party taking their place.

And all afternoon the figures muffled in blankets of divers colours and patterns stand in ranks and groups along the sides of the village street, stand in doorways, lean against the walls of the mud houses, stand alone in the picturesque attitudes of Arab chiefs, or upon the roofs of houses pose like statues against a snowy sky. And all afternoon Indian boys in black felt hats, white shirts, and blue linen trousers braced high, fight, shout, and roll on the ground almost under the feet of the dancers, almost between the legs of the singers; for they are as ill-behaved as half-civilised children or as children tampered with by foreign civilisation usually are. And the priests have done their work. . .

Once an old man crosses the street from the shrine carrying a censer, which he doubtless means to fill at an opposite house. He passes through the ranks of the dancers. His moccasins are soundless in the sand.

Sunset is signalised by a lighting up of the yellow village, the multi-coloured figures high and low, and the blood-red streaks in giant cliffs with an almost unearthly splendour—an angry red ray breaking between masses of grey and black cloud. Suddenly the chanting and the drum-beats cease. The dancers are still for a moment; then the squaws begin to take off the *tablitas* from their heads, their young men assisting

them. The High Priest or Master of the Ceremonies with his brown fluffy headdress and blackened face and his two flanking companions appears, and while the sun is setting walks up and down between the facing lines of dancers, muttering a prayer.

When the round disc of the sun has finally and for some minutes dipped behind the mountains, when night is encroaching upon twilight, the prayer ceases, the dancers dismiss. No longer pagan savages, except in their garb, they mingle with the crowd, laugh with their friends, and make their way home.

And with that dusky moment, mystery settles down upon the remote mountain-village. The snow-wind which whines and whispers among the low mud houses and through the scant stockades, is the low voice of it. For doesn't it whisper of the desert with its orderly piñons and stealthy silence? and doesn't it whisper of a land vast as Europe itself, whose moods and distances can only be compared with those of the sea? and doesn't it tell a little eerily too of a people thousands of years old, a thousand years old to-day, whose faith is yet with their fathers?

Towards midnight the village becomes strangely silent. Dogs bark on the outskirts, it is true, horses whinny and cough. But as midnight approaches even these sounds cease. There comes instead the subtle and uncanny sense of a place crowded with humanity, which is yet utterly silent. Moccasins make no sound on sand. The Indian steps quietly and swiftly—he creeps. The broad sloping street appears utterly empty. But should the flash-light be turned on, figures as it seems

muffled in cloaks flit to this way and to that, from this shadow to that, soundless, none speaking.

The *kiva* or temple in which no white man has set foot presents a blank vivid wall. Pine beams jut out from it. The door is in the roof. It too is silent—betrays no sound.

Behind that wall——? Within that long, low building looming large and mysterious as night itself——? Is it the Death Dance in which ashen figures perform, naked, rites around a fire? Or——?

The Indian betrays no secrets.

December 3rd.—I write this at Callip, a small place on the border of Arizona and New Mexico. Good-bye to my good resolutions to stay in Sante Fé and work! I gave in, it was so cold. Graham and I are on our way to the Grand Canyon. We left Santa Fé five days ago, and have visited an Indian village forty-five miles from here, where the extraordinary dances and ceremonies I have described above took place. We motored the forty-five miles in a blinding snowstorm, and had to lift and dig the car out more than once. The road was only a track. Coming back, we got stuck in the mud and had a bad time getting the car out, but it was worth while for the sake of seeing some wonderful country, and what is unique in the world and practically unknown.

The country in this part of New Mexico is interesting and strange. We passed through a forest of sage and yellow pine. The former has a wonderful scent, the latter a yellow-streaked trunk like tortoiseshell. Except

for a ranch or two and a store and schoolhouse, the country was absolutely empty. The red rocks and cliffs against the green sage around Zuni are very striking. We came there to a remote ranch, near a Mormon Settlement called Romah, kept by a German who told us a strange story of a traveller who had disappeared.

The Grand Canyon is only one hundred and fifty miles from here, and as I shall probably never have another opportunity of seeing it, at any rate with such an experienced traveller as Graham, we are making a round trip and plan to be back in Santa Fé in a few days.

The Grahams leave on the 17th for Mexico. I plan to go with them, and shall probably spend Christmas either at El Paso or Chihuahua. I shall then go on to New Orleans, which, being farther south, is much warmer and, I believe, an interesting and attractive place.



December 8th.—I have just returned to Santa Fé from visiting the Grand Canyon with Graham. We walked twenty-five miles to the bottom and slept the night, then climbed up three thousand, six hundred feet next day, and took an eight-mile walk. It is sunny and mild now, but there has been a good deal of snow. Where I shall spend Christmas I don't yet know.

December 11th.—I am still at Santa Fé, but leave in three days' time for New Orleans, which I shall

probably reach on the 20th, via El Paso and Mexico. It is in the latitude of Cairo, so it ought to be warm. I plan to finish the History there.

December 21st.—At El Paso I got a ten days' extension on my ticket to New Orleans, and am now at Chihuahua. I stay here to-day and catch to-night's train to Mexico City. This is a dusty picturesque place, and my day here has been the hottest December day I have ever spent—it is like July in England. I hope to spend a week in Mexico, and take ship from Tampico to New Orleans. I am having some interesting political talks with leading Mexicans.

December 27th.—I have spent Christmas here in Mexico City. I have strawberries and cream at every meal. It is as hot as the hottest days in a London summer—day after day of sunshine. Oranges, apricots, figs, bananas, roses, geraniums—gardens and suburbs marvellous. Mountains seventeen thousand to twenty thousand feet around.

I went to a bull-fight on Sunday, and was interested seeing the bulls kneel down to die.

The place is full of Germans, the cost of living about the same as in the United States.

I go to New Orleans on the 31st, since my baggage and mail are there.

Later.[1]—I have changed my mind. I expect to be

[1] But the same day, December 27th, 1922.—J. F. G.

here some time. I am instructing the Southern Pacific Lines to forward my luggage that awaits my arrival at their depot at New Orleans. I need urgently my black box containing the Scots Guards papers. I may even proceed to Loredo to get it.

Shall we return? Shall we look upon the place
where sky and sand and sea unite?
Who knows? A voyage of discovery
ever ends so. Life is over-
crowded. Isn't it? . . .
We may never return.

EPILOGUE

(From *The Times*, January 6th, 1923)

"MEXICO OUTRAGE

(From our Correspondent)

Mexico City, Jan. 5th.

Mr. Wilfrid Ewart reached Mexico City on December 23rd from Sante Fé (New Mexico), with the object of finding new surroundings and quiet for writing his books, and took a room on the fourth floor, with a balcony overlooking the street, in the Hotel Isabel, in the quieter part of the town, away from the main business centre.

On the night of December 31st he returned to the hotel at 11.30. It is assumed that, attracted by the sound of firing in the street, where rowdy merry-makers were following the local custom and firing at random in the air, he leaned over the balcony and was shot. No suspicion was aroused in the hotel until the afternoon of New Year's day, when his body was discovered; but as it was a public holiday, the Consul and others were not informed until next day, when it was removed from the mortuary for burial in the British cemetery by Dean Peacock. Twenty-four representatives of the British colony, including the Club, Consulate, and Legation, attended the funeral."

NOTE

Some paragraphs of this book, sometimes in a slightly altered form, have appeared in *Cassell's Weekly*, *The Cornhill*, *Country Life*, *The English Review*, *The Evening Standard*, *Land and Water*, *The National Review*, *The Nineteenth Century and After*, *The Spectator* and *The Times*. To the Editors of these journals acknowledgment is rendered. Gratitude is also expressed to Messrs. Macmillan for allowing the three poems of Thomas Hardy's quoted in full in Chapter XIII to be reprinted as Ewart desired.

J. F. G.

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