

WAR'S
DARK FRAME

WADSWORTH CAMP



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WAR'S DARK FRAME





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A BRITISH BATTERY IN FLANDERS

✓ WAR'S DARK FRAME

BY
WADSWORTH CAMP
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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS ✓



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TO
MY WIFE
AND
MY MOTHER

M. G. S. June 2/117



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WAR'S DARK FRAME



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CHAPTER I

THE SUBMARINE ZONE

“CAN'T be a submarine — We're too far out!”

“Keep quiet, it's all right!”

“Don't get excited!”

Exclamations came in men's voices, unnaturally suppressed. From the women arose one or two half choked cries. Feet hastened along the decks. Apprehensive but without panic we poured through the companionway. You admired the women in that moment, because they had an appearance of steeling themselves against dreadful inevitabilities. And the sea was sullen and unquiet.

Many of us, I think, foresaw what we should find at the forward rail — a view of the crew with purposeful faces at emergency drill. Yet the necessity for that exercise, the wisdom of shocking us from our Sabbath somnolence by the raucous alarm of the ship's bell, reminded us how closely

we had approached the incredible spectacle of a civilisation in arms against itself. What would the next day bring? Or the next?

Abruptly we realised that war for the individual has the quality of a perpetual and tragic disaster. Later, in the cities of Europe, in the devastated districts, in the towns under bombardment, in the front line trenches, that truth was forced upon me. So I have remembered chiefly the human incidents and impressions that will have a real meaning for the individual, who has had the foresight to visualise himself, his family, and his friends entangled in the struggle.

For it isn't easy to understand war in America. The entrance to the pier in New York teaches you that. Beyond comes a mental alteration as pronounced as the change from brilliant sunshine to the sombre obscurity of the shed. It is accented by the tight line before the gangway, by the suspicious examination of passports and luggage, by the unstudied talk among the inspectors of bombs, of spies, of the possibility of submarines. And the gangway is the threshold of war.

On all boats bound for Europe these days there is an atmosphere of difficult partings, a reluctance to discuss the future. There are, moreover, people who bring war home to you.

That afternoon of the drill, for instance, I

watched a boy, not twenty yet, reassure two women who counted the hours before we would be off the Irish coast. All along he had interested us in a sorrowful fashion, because he had been wounded in the head at Ypres, and a disability had remained which made him of no more value in battle to his country. Always he seemed older than the old men, as if he could never forget and be young again. A tall, straight, ruddy-faced man, nearly at middle age, joined him. The newcomer, following his custom, wore no hat. We gathered around him, because, since he was on his way to the front from Canada, whatever he said seemed to possess a special eloquence.

"Funny time for fire drill! Splendid nerve tonic though. You know, I wouldn't be surprised if the Huns took a shot at us. It's about due."

"I want to die with my boots off and without fame," a man said plaintively.

We laughed, returning to our cards, our reading, or our naps. The boy who had fought at Ypres demanded a game of deck tennis. He had no difficulty finding three other players, for the growing tenseness was unfriendly to reserve. Already every one knew every one else.

An elderly gentleman from the South wandered restlessly across the smoke-room and interrupted the bridge game.

"They say this boat's loaded so heavily —"

"I bid a heart. We all know she's got a big freight manifest, Mr. ——."

"Think she has! Go down like a shot! I've been talking to one of the officers. Says there's no way to avoid floating mines. No respecters of neutrals. You've heard of the ——"

He listed half a dozen boats recently injured or sunk by mines. The player who had spoken before grew impatient.

"Your lead to a heart."

The elderly Southerner turned away, muttering with a prideful air.

"Just the same, since I got on this boat I've never ceased thanking God I'm a powerful swimmer — a right powerful swimmer, sir."

The incident was funny, because nobody laughed. We glanced at each other and took up the game.

But, perhaps, the one who brought war closest was a pretty American girl, bound for England with her mother. We understood she was married to a Scotch officer. We wondered why she had been in America, and where her husband was, for she didn't wear mourning.

"The girl has a story," one woman after another commented.

To realise it you had only to look at her eyes

and at the convalescent pallor of her face, as striking as that of the boy wounded at Ypres. She wanted, moreover, to talk about her experience. That, too, was in her eyes. Because of the past, possibly because of something she approached, she desired to tell her story.

The last evening as we crept up the channel she yielded to the growing tenseness that fought reserve. She sat with her mother on deck, staring at the boats which had been swung out, listening to talk of the extra life belts that had been distributed — mere italics for possibilities of which the women were, patently, trying not to think.

The sun sank behind a low brown mass on the horizon — the coast of Ireland. We reviewed the crimes and the tragedies it had witnessed since the commencement of the war. We fancied the round backs of indifferent submarines, and black specks of humanity struggling in the yellowish, menacing water. A multitude of fishing trawlers pitched and reeled drunkenly. It was difficult to realise that their only game was submersibles, their only task the protection of such craft as ours.

Groups of people still lined the rails, scanning the dusky water. All afternoon they had seen periscopes. Each piece of driftwood in the forbidden zone had attained an importance never dreamed of in the scheme of things.

The moon appeared and quiet men cursed it.

"They get us against it and we're gone," one and another commented.

The prow parted the transformed water almost reluctantly. It was as if the elderly Southerner had impressed on the boat itself his aphorism concerning floating mines.

As we went on, feeling our way, with a sense of dodging unseen and treacherous obstacles, the pretty girl told her story—a brutal one that brought the war closer.

The first chapter was just a year old—her marriage in Nice to an invalided officer of a Highland regiment. Before his complete recovery he had been unexpectedly recalled to active service. The uncertainties of waiting had appalled them. Therefore they had shocked this watchful mother lounging in her steamer chair. In spite of her panic they had married hurriedly. Their honeymoon had been the swift journey to the base at Rouen. Her voice was fearful rather than reminiscent as she spoke about it.

"He left me at a queer hotel on the main street while he went to report. He didn't know exactly what his orders would be—whether he would stay at Rouen for a while, or whether they would hurry him to the trenches with new troops. The

room they gave me had six doors and none of them possessed a key. It may sound silly, but it was late, and I was afraid, afraid of everything. I wasn't sure he would come back at all, and if he didn't I knew I might never see him again. Strange sounds drifted from the dark street. I heard soldiers marching; queer songs in French and English; far off, a bugle. I was lonely, and homesick, and unhappy. I knew he wouldn't come back, and all those doors frightened me. I tried to barricade them, but I couldn't find enough chairs. Then he ran in, and he laughed at my barricade which he had had to tumble over. He had to go that night, and I walked through the dark streets with him, although he said I'd better not, because it would only make it harder for both of us. But I went, and at the military station there were soldiers everywhere, and confusion, and a train — that waited. I didn't dare look at it, but I knew when it started, for he said good-bye —

“I looked then and saw him climb into a carriage filled with soldiers. He waved his hand, shouting to an officer he knew to see that I got back to the hotel and later to Paris where my mother would be waiting.”

Her mother, good-humoured and middle-aged, laughed resentfully.

"Instead of that she dragged me to Rouen. You need another wrap, my dear."

The girl shook her head.

"So I went back," she continued, "crying through the dark streets with that strange officer. Half way I stopped, remembering. I didn't have a cent. My husband hadn't given me any money. You see we had been married such a little while. We hadn't learned to think of such things."

She spoke of her interminable days of waiting in Rouen. She had been on the point of winning for her husband a staff appointment with its lighter dangers, when the word, hourly expected, had been delivered to her.

"Oh, quite brutally," she said. "I didn't know what it meant, death or a wound. I only knew I must go, so I persuaded a high officer to give me a pass for a military train. I spent a lifetime on that train. During many hours it crawled only a little ways. Finally they told me to get out. They drove me to a small hospital back of the lines. The odour of it! And he lay there, a sister bending over him. She said I mustn't cry, and it was hard, because he didn't know me, because he seemed like one already dead."

Her voice dwindled, the mother stirred, then, as if to spare the girl, explained how she had drawn her husband from the black valley through

months of nursing in France and England. She had broken down. The doctors had ordered her to America, away from the hospital odour and the perpetual reminders of war.

"She's going back too soon," her mother said.

"Naturally," the girl answered, "because he writes he is on light duty again, and he's trying to persuade them he's fit to return to the trenches. I won't have it. I couldn't stand that suspense again. But of course they won't let him. He has a piece of shrapnel shell within an inch of his heart. He's done his bit.

"You know," she went on, "I'll have to harden myself. I've grown soft in America, because it's so far from the war. You can't remain sane unless you are hard in the presence of this war."

Reviewing her story, questioning its final word, you realised how true that was. You shrank from the water flashing by, because you knew it measured your approach towards those fantastic occurrences against which men and women must harden their hearts or suffer beyond reason.

Not unnaturally I thought that was all I was ever to know of the young wife's history, yet the next day there was to be a sequel, read at first hand, cheerless and unexpected.

We sat until late that last night. She spoke from time to time of the approaching meeting.

"He's sure to be at Liverpool. Suppose anything should happen to this boat?"

But for the most part she was silent.

"We will spend the night on deck," her mother said, "in case anything happens."

In the smoke-room I heard men talking of sleeping on the lounges there. An elderly and morose commercial traveller heightened their misgivings with stories of his escape from the torpedoed *Arabic*.

"She went down in ten minutes. Five minutes would see the last of this boat as she's loaded. If you were caught below decks — Good Night! Talk about rats in a trap!"

"Oh, forget it!" a man said under his breath. "I've heard that old fool sink the *Arabic* a dozen times in the last half hour. Once is enough for any boat."

But the morose traveller had been to the women with his premonitions. They wandered restlessly, or stared across the cold and troubled water, rehearsing his warnings. This one man had sewn the seeds of panic. The women didn't want to go to bed. Then a squad of sailors came by with hose, pails, and swabs.

They went to work with quiet confidence. One of them spoke good-naturedly.

"Better be off to bed, lydies. If you don't

you'll get wetter than though a tarpedo struck us in the bloomin' witals."

Some of them laughed then. At least there was nothing else to do, so they went. And in the morning the women weren't alone in surrendering signs of a sleepless night spent in bed fully clothed.

A vast relief shone in the eyes of the young wife and her mother. Only a few hours away the convalescent waited to welcome them back to England.

To most of the passengers, indeed, the brown mass of Holyhead, rising to starboard, appeared a beacon of safety. A deck steward, who had grown communicative, grinned.

"Just as well they think that way," he said.

Without thought for my own feelings, he assured me that the really dangerous part of the trip lay just ahead.

Yet without adventure we raised above the sands the gigantic skeleton of the Birkenhead tower, and swung in across the bar of the Mersey.

Liverpool's suburbs stretched their uninteresting rows as a foreground for the routine activity of a war-time seaport. Remembered steamships lay in the docks or at anchor, painted a dead grey, converted into transports or auxiliaries. One of the best known of all wore a livery of white and

green with red crosses here and there. Bandaged men stared dumbly at us from the rails.

Liverpool had altered sufficiently. From it the war stretched grimy fingers to draw us closer into its lethal atmosphere. A sentry paced the landing stage. No more than a handful of people waited there. As we drew closer we all noticed a tall, straight young fellow in a Highland uniform. He walked up and down impatiently, swinging a little stick, glancing with anxious eyes at the crowd of us by the forward rail. The girl and her mother were near. They cried out. They glanced at each other tearfully. They commenced with jerky motions to wave their handkerchiefs. The young officer, with a piece of shrapnel near his heart, suddenly swung his stick, paused, and stared up at the tear-stained faces.

"Doesn't he look fit?" the girl cried proudly. "But not really fit — never fit for war again."

More intimate affairs grasped us. Sheep-like we were herded into the dining-room to face the alien officers.

While we awaited our inquisitions the young Highlander entered, exuding a naïve pride in his uniform which had won a permit to pass the guards, which had hastened this moment of fervent greeting. He stood close to us with his wife. For a time they spoke softly, then all at

once their voices were raised. The flushed girl exclaimed, as if she had been struck. The husband laughed with an embarrassed indifference.

“Then my letter didn’t reach New York until after you had sailed. They are sending me back to the front. Of course I am well enough. It was good of them to give me leave to meet you —”

He paused, glancing at her curiously. At first she didn’t answer. She turned with a gesture of despair. She walked spiritlessly away.

CHAPTER II

THE STRANGE ENGLAND

DURING several hours we suffered the examination before the alien officers.

With a progressive severity the European ports have made the entrance of neutrals difficult. One by one we faced the little group at a table in the dining-room while the doors of exit were carefully guarded. Some of us were questioned for only a moment or two. Others were grilled uncomfortably while the next on the list waxed impatient. What were you going to do? Where had you come from? What parts of the kingdom did you wish to visit? What was your ultimate destination? Your past was ransacked.

As you stood by the little table, facing the unsmiling men, you felt yourself suspected. You questioned how a person, trying to enter with criminal intent, could stare back without an escape of fear, could answer the searching questions without a revealing tremor. There are spies beyond doubt who survive such ordeals jauntily. It became obvious to us, however, that very few of them these days have an opportunity of attempting

it. For a German spy to slip from New York through such a net would approach the miraculous. Men and women, released after particularly extended examinations, felt themselves aggrieved.

"Do I look like a spy?" one woman demanded hysterically, as she gathered her luggage. "What do those people think nerves are? If I had been a spy I'd have screamed. I'd have asked them to arrest and shoot me, just to get it over with."

The search of baggage was scarcely less minute. You were made to feel again the possibility of bombs, or deadly weapons, or secret documents.

It was, therefore, although we had docked at noon, very nearly dark before we were collected on the special train. And in the carriages, with the suspense of the trip through the submarine zone, with the irritation of the examinations done with, we lay back, anticipating a momentary peace. Instead reminders of war crowded more thickly upon us. The guards were either very young or very old. Prominently exposed in each compartment was a sign commanding us to draw the blinds on request as a measure of safety. While we were in the dining-car a guard came through and gave that order. The midland countryside, flat and placid in the fading light, was shut out. We turned to our meal with a realisation of how

different this trip was from any we had ever taken. We had a sensation of stealth, a personal share in the deception of Zeppelins. The rumbling of the train seemed discreet. When we glanced daringly beyond the edge of a blind we saw clouds banked against a pallid sky. A furnace glared redly. The landscape was sullen, a little frightening. The world was different and wrong.

The women looked as if for reassurance to the mere boys who served us. They had an appearance of going on tip-toe, of discouraging conversation. One of them answered a question.

"We're the only kind they can use. The men are doing their bit, sir."

Yet the arrival of the train at Euston conveyed little beyond the impression of quieter days. The shed was sufficiently lighted, and one experienced, indeed, the remembered scramble to identify luggage at the vans, the pursuit of porters, the snarling of taxi-cabs.

Driving into the street, the alteration sprang upon us. It makes no difference how much you may have read or heard of darkened London, the reality reaches you with a sense of shock, not wholly unpleasant. It stirs your memory, and you can't guess why at first, because you have never seen anything like it. Then you understand as you rattle through the obscurity, as you catch

the trivial illumination from shrouded lamps, as you stare at the glow from shop windows, discreet, a little mysterious, more provocative than the vividest electrical displays. It recalls what you have imagined of Elizabethan London. And the city does have an air of romance. It is very lovely, too, because everything ugly is crushed beneath the shadows, and everything beautiful acquires a meaning new and sentimental.

Under such conditions the city offers exciting contrasts. It is magic to step from the mediæval romance of the streets into the glittering present of hotels, restaurants, or theatres. Within doors the only material alteration is the carefully drawn blinds. As many lights burn. As far as you can judge as many people crowd the world of pleasure. Yet there is as great a change inside, only it isn't physical. The ever-present officer and soldier point it for you. It takes some time to grow accustomed to these splendid men in uniform. You stare at them, observe their unstudied gaiety, and are aware of a vast depression. Some are back from the front on a few days' leave. Others, by the blue uniform of the hospital, or by their pallid faces, or by their missing limbs, advertise their convalescence with a pitiful pride. The greater number, however, are men still in training, on leave from the various cantonments. One

smiles at the talk of a scarcity of men without compulsion. And these fellows are the best of the nation — young, sturdy, handsome, awaiting their baptism of fire with a quiet confidence. They know, too, what that means. This war has left them no illusions. High explosives, gas, liquid fire, are common to their talk over tea table or dinner. They face such things with a stolid determination that surprises. It is the most thrilling phase of London, this procession of youths that have assumed the khaki, symbol of the supreme sacrifice. They wear it too easily, yet in reality there is something ecstatic about their young faces — something quite beyond definition.

As the days passed one wondered that London should be so crowded. At the popular restaurants it was always necessary to engage a table in advance. I heard acquaintances lament that they had had to lunch at cheap tea houses after craving admittance at eight or nine packed dining-rooms in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly Circus.

The theatres housing popular plays shared the same inflated prosperity. London had never known such a season. Yet in spite of its easy chatter, its surface cheerfulness, it was, to an extent, restrained. There was little dancing outside of private houses. Evening clothes were frowned upon. You saw them only among the

vulgar patrons of the most blatant hotels. Khaki was the colour note by day and by night. Those wearing it went about with women soberly dressed. And in nearly every bravely smiling face you caught an appreciation of imminence. The eyes of soldiers and the eyes of wives, sweethearts, and relatives seemed strained to regard an unknown and melancholy prospect.

In a sense, you felt yourself an intruder. Civilian clothing was an anachronism in London. You realised that the soldier was responsible for this city, crowded and a trifle unreal. You wondered if all of England was like this. You felt that you must see the country districts.

For this excursion an American acquaintance and I took advantage of one of the bank holidays. We drove first of all to Cambridge. Even on the road we were taught that rural England was more thoroughly transformed than the metropolis. We passed aviation instruction grounds. We saw practice observation balloons in the air — unwieldy, misshapen objects, carrying boys ambitious to make themselves targets for German anti-aircraft guns. Transport trains rumbled by. In one or two villages we saw artillery parked. Khaki clad figures paced the sidewalks or strolled among the fields. All England, you felt, was in brown.

The alteration impressed us most, perhaps, in the two great university towns, Oxford and Cambridge. We wandered through quadrangles and halls, missing caps and gowns, seeking the familiar atmosphere of undergraduate activity. Instead we found proctors who displayed their brief rolls of foreigners and the physically unfit.

"The others," they explained gravely, "have gone to the war."

And war was here as thoroughly as it was in London and among the hedges. For, although we found few caps and gowns, there was khaki in plenty. Several of the colleges had been turned into training schools for officers. Men of university age and appearance went through evolutions and studied tactics in ancient quadrangles, preparing themselves to replace the Oxford and Cambridge men already killed or rendered unfit for service.

There were hospitals, too. Figures on crutches or grotesquely bandaged, struggled about the grounds, or across the commons, a couple of years ago noisy and active with the play of whole-bodied, careless youngsters.

It was among the convalescents in Cambridge that I found a veteran of those terrific first days — one of the few survivors of the hell of Mons

and the retreat that had followed; of the battle of the Marne; of the deadly turmoil at Ypres.

He stood in the entrance of a garage at Cambridge as we drove up and paused for gasoline. His hair was grizzled. His face had many small lines which gave it an expression a trifle quizzical. His crutches and the blue band about the sleeve of his service overcoat stamped him as still under hospital treatment. His sergeant's chevrons, the Scotch cap, set at an absurd angle, the little black pipe protruding from his mouth, all seemed pointers for the discontent in his whimsical, middle-aged face. While he talked I waited for an opportunity to find out the cause of his irritation. His most fervent description of the horror of the retreat was:

"Oh, mon, but that was warm work."

The same expression did for the Marne and Ypres.

"But when and how were you wounded?" I asked.

He flushed. He puffed rapidly on his stubby black pipe. He no longer looked one straight in the eye. When he answered his voice was low and ashamed.

"Not at Mons," he said, "not at the Marne, not at Ypres."

His voice thickened with revolt.

"It was on a day when there was nothing doing. You understand? As quiet as you please. I lay in a dug-out, reading a letter from my bonnie girl. Along comes a shell and explodes in the entrance — on a quiet day after all my chances. Disgusting's what I say. A fifteen months' job so far, and they took pieces of that letter out of me in France. They took them out of me on the hospital boat. They took them out of me here."

His eyes twinkled.

"And I guess there's some wee paragraphs still there."

But the twinkle died. The discontent returned. This man had a grievance beyond the manner of his wounding. By chance it developed. My companion fumbled in his pocket and produced some small change.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "you'd like to drink to the memory of those days."

The sergeant's discontent exploded.

"A British soldier!" he cried. "A sergeant in his Majesty's army! Me drink! I'm a baby. A blessed, swaddling infant."

He tapped the blue band on his arm.

"Just because I'm under hospital treatment I can't have my glass of beer. That's gratitude

for you! After what I've come through. I've learned my lesson. I've had my dose."

"You mean," I said mildly, "that when you are quite well nothing will persuade you to put yourself in the way of such ingratitude again? You won't go back to war if they need you?"

He braced himself on his crutch. He took one quick puff at his pipe.

"Like to see," he said guffly, "the man that'd ask me that when I'm good and well."

He raised his hand in a simple salute. So they grumble, these veterans!

When one turns from such refuse of battle to the untried material one endeavours not to forecast. By chance we came at nightfall to a town which was the centre of a vast training cantonment. Because of the restrictions on automobile lights it is necessary to stop where darkness catches you. We watched the dusk descend over the green and rolling hills. From the distant hamlets, from the nearer cottages, picturesque, with low thatched roofs, no lights gleamed. The twilight acquired a primeval quality. It encased one as in an armour against an eager and treacherous enemy.

Soldiers, too self-conscious, perhaps because of this primitive projection from their surroundings, guided with sentimental gestures along the road-

side smirking or bashful girls. Sometimes the girls laughed, but not frequently. And the change grasped one tighter than ever because of this pursuit of romance, almost reluctant and a little appalled, through the turmoil of a dreadful reality.

We hurried on. Utter darkness caught us in the main street. We crept the few remaining yards to the hotel we had chosen. A dining-room, brown and black with khaki and the usual soberly dressed women, greeted us. The proprietor was regretful. We could have dinner but no room.

As we ate, our feeling of intrusion increased. These women, it was clear, had left their homes to live in an uncomfortable hotel in order that they might be with their husbands, their sons, or their brothers until the order should be given, until this cantonment should break up, until these officers should leave for Flanders to face the chances of which the newspapers with thoughtless cruelty perpetually reminded them. From their bearing you caught their appraisal of each day's value. There was little laughter. The murmuring voices created a monotone, full of misgivings, pitifully abashed.

It was a relief to go forth with a guide to seek a lodging. Just across a stone bridge we found it in a small, quaint hotel. This, too, was

crowded with officers and their families. In the tiny bar you heard only military talk.

“How are your fellows doing with their patrol work?”

“Jolly well. It’s almost a pity there aren’t Huns about for them to fool.”

Or: “What about Captain Smith, Doctor?”

A laugh from the doctor.

“Measles, of all things! Must have got it on leave. Fortunately no one’s been exposed.”

You travel safely in England these days only with an identity book, furnished after investigation by the police of the district in which you live. It is required that you report yourself and have your book stamped by the local police in every town you visit in the forbidden districts. We set forth, therefore, for the police station. As soon as we had crossed the stone bridge we became hopelessly lost. I had never dreamed of such darkness. There was no moon. The sky was clouded, obscuring the stars. From no building escaped the faintest gleam of light. In the main street you could fancy yourself in a wilderness. The night was like a smothering blanket. It appeared to offer your outstretched hands a palpable resistance.

People ran into you or you ran into others, laughing apologies.

"Where is the police station?"

"Heaven knows. By daylight it ought to be a couple of blocks to the left, if you run into the church first."

"How will we know the church?"

"It is very large, and solid," a wag answered. "You'll recognise it if it stops you."

A constable, met in this obscure and abrupt fashion, kindly took us in tow. With whispered sympathy he stamped our books.

"Now," he asked, "do you think you can find your way back? It's a long time, you know, before daybreak."

He gave us minute directions. We followed them almost wholly by the sense of touch.

It was difficult to go to sleep that night. Until very late I listened to the perpetual shuffling of feet along the sidewalks — the tentative feet of countless young men, condemned to war, groping a course through a complete and inimical darkness.

After that London was no longer black. As we drove in, its few hooded lamps seemed brazenly inviting disaster. We brought back to it one conviction. Rural England is not apathetic. All Britain is heart and soul in the war. Even then it was hard to accept as real the brilliant, careless complacency of our own country. That became a memory from the remote past.

Not many days after, the lesson was strengthened by the sight of heroes marching through an admiring, worshipful multitude. I hadn't realised that the war already had its memorial days. On that morning the few that remained of the Australian and New Zealand troops who made the heroic and tragic landing at Gallipoli were gathered in London for what will always be called in their honour Anzac Day.

It brought the war very close to step into the Strand and to see above the bobbing heads of a nearly silent crowd the brown campaign hats with coloured bands of the New Zealanders. There were so many spectators — women, old men, young girls, and a multitude of youths in uniform — that it was difficult at first to get close to the marchers. At the curb finally, one no longer needed to probe that silence of the great crowd, singular, a little startling. The faces of the soldiers, beneath a bright animation, were serious and full of remembrance. The brisk, round notes of the bugles and the tapping of drums were unlike such sounds as we remember them on Fifth Avenue or in the armouries of a land at peace. With a lithe rhythm the thin brown line came on. It was a survival. With it marched ghosts, an infinite army of shadows — once such men as these, and familiar and friendly to these eyes which

glanced curiously at the human river of the Strand.

Mere boys, here were veterans of such fighting as the world has seldom seen. It was disquieting to forecast. In a few weeks how many more shadows would crowd the thinned ranks!

The Australians joined the New Zealanders. They marched to Westminster Abbey, where the Queen and King came to mourn with them, to share as far as possible in their sombre pride.

The crowd filled the sidewalks and the streets. Men and women bent from windows, clung to railings, sought a precarious footing on the wheels of wagons, or about stalled omnibuses. It was as great as the crowd at a football game. It was as soundless as those who gape at the funeral procession of some imposing personage.

A group of wounded stood on the roof of a low building near the Abbey entrance. The Queen and King paced from the Abbey. The King wore a service uniform similar to the uniforms of the wounded on the low roof. As he stepped into his carriage a single hand protruded from the mangled group. A single voice cried out, piercingly, hysterically, as if the King must be made to hear and understand and perform a miracle:

“Think of my arm! Oh, think of my arm!”

The crowd was too dense to get fingers to ears. Nor would it have been any use, for from the

Abbey deliberately emerged a column whose eloquence was voiceless. Nurses in melancholy grey wheeled incomplete men in invalid chairs or blanket-covered stretchers down the foot-paths between the lawns. Some crawled painfully after, on crutches, or bent over like very old men who can no longer measure their strength. The comparatively sound followed, filling Parliament Square in ranks that awaited the word to march. Policemen spoke roughly, forcing stragglers into the ranks. This picture of a constable, guardian of peace, handling a soldier, instrument of death, created an incongruity that pointed the whole illogical effrontery of war.

Again the bugles blared. Again the brown ranks stepped quickly out — two thousand men, nearly all of whom had been wounded or had suffered from the fevers of camp life. Again the procession of handsome, purposeful young faces moved swiftly by, with groping expressions, as if missing some one. The incomplete wrecks on the stretchers and in the chairs made futile movements, attempted a fragile cheer. The sun continued its brilliancy, untroubled by the smallest cloud. It was like the phantasmagoria of nightmare beneath a heaven crowded with white tempest. One wanted to fling up one's hands and burst into tears for the dead — and for those not yet dead.

CHAPTER III

BATTLE, ZEPPELINS, AND DEMOCRACY

AS far from the front as London it became obvious that the nearer one approaches this war the nearer one visualises a vivid growth of democracy. A number of incidents, at the time apparently trivial, assume in retrospect a very real importance.

I had been interested in the women's share. I had visited hospitals, watching the nurses at their merciful work. I had seen them, with an amusing diffidence, accomplishing men's tasks on trams and busses, even at the wheels of taxicabs. I knew of their labour in the munition factories. I was not prepared, however, for the surprise an English friend offered me when I went to visit him at his home in Surrey. He was a man of wealth and influence.

I was curious when his daughter didn't appear for luncheon.

"I'll show you this afternoon what she's at," he promised mysteriously.

He wouldn't say anything else.

We set off in his automobile, stopping at a

soldiers' convalescent home to pick up two wounded men, for Englishmen don't like to use automobiles without sharing their luxury with the sufferers.

We halted at a neat farm in a hollow. A horsey-looking individual appeared.

"Where's the young lady?" my host asked.

The other took his pipe from his mouth and pointed with it in the direction of a distant rise.

"In summit field with Jerry and Jinny."

"How's she coming on?"

The horsey man puffed thoughtfully at his pipe.

"Better," he said grudgingly, "than I calculated. She knows something about horses."

We went on to the top of the rise. The soldiers, because of their wounds, couldn't leave the automobile, but my host led me down a lane to a broad field. A solitary, dusty figure crossed the field with long strides, calling cheerily to the raw-boned horses she drove, clinging with real skill to the handle of a plough.

"My daughter," my wealthy host announced.

Real pride rang in his voice.

She was a very pretty girl — all the handsomer, one felt, for a thorough coat of tan. Nor could her corduroy skirt or her khaki blouse diminish the grace of her figure. It was easy to understand her father's pride. She talked pleasantly with us

about her work. There was no attempt to make light of it. She didn't define it in terms of sacrifice.

"I'm sorry I missed you this morning," she said in her casual, educated voice, absurdly at variance with her occupation. "But, you see, I must be at work by six, so I leave home at five. I carry my luncheon in a basket, and it's jolly good at noon, even in solitude."

"When do you get home?" I gasped.

"Usually in time for a late dinner. You know I must cover this field to-night, or I'll have no dinner at all."

We watched her as she called to her horses and strode gracefully away.

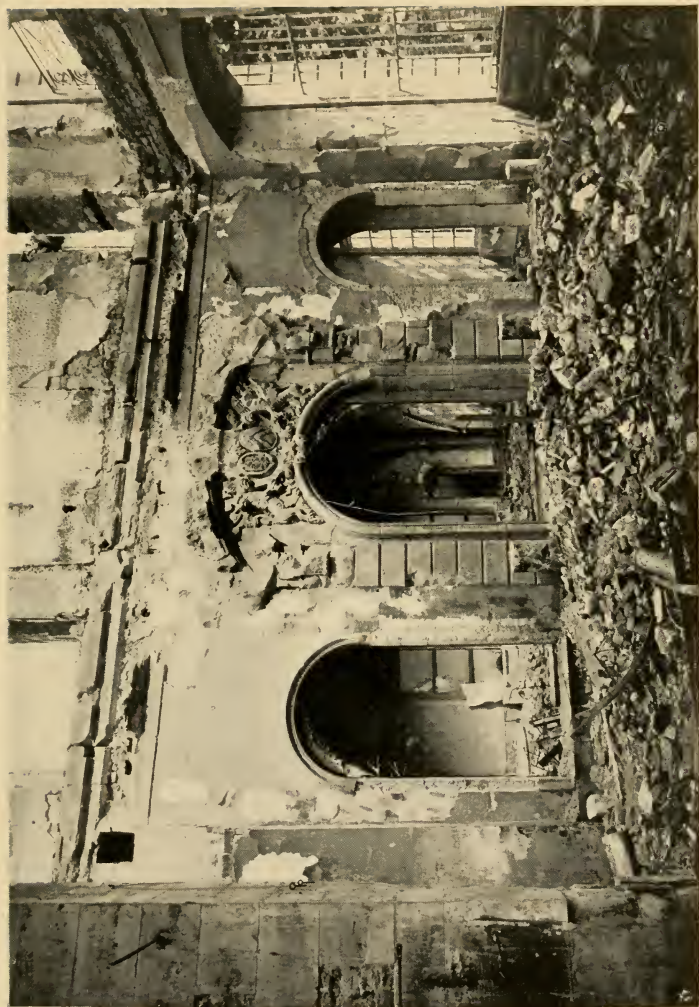
"That's her life," her father reflected, "and, on the whole, I fancy it's better for her than teas and dances and the things girls used to do. She loves horses, so she's capable."

"But why —" I began.

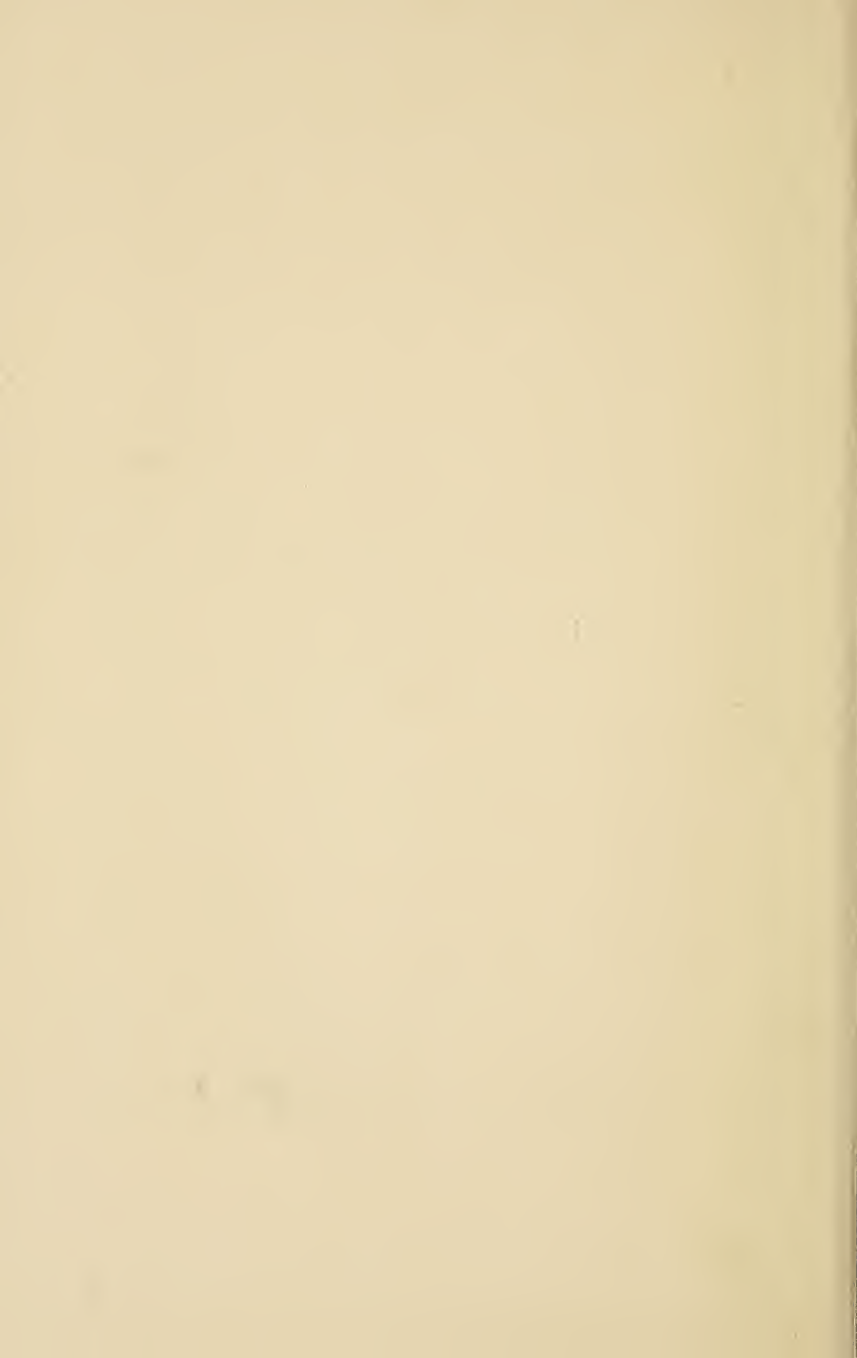
"Don't you understand?" he said. "She releases one man more to go to war."

An aeroplane whirred across the downs towards France. The wounded soldiers welcomed us back to the automobile. I gazed at their bandages and crutches.

Certainly the plough girl was democratic. Yet, you couldn't help thinking, it was a pity her devo-



THE GERMANS MADE A MORE THOROUGH JOB HERE THAN IN LOUVAIN



tion should have no more beautiful object than the release of a man to become, let us say, like one of these maimed fellows who somehow managed to colour their invalid pallor with smiles for us.

At every turning the sign posts of a social change meet you. I remember a middle-aged woman in black who rode ahead of me one afternoon on the top of a bus. A newsboy in Haymarket burst the bounds of propriety with a strident yell. We all had a partial glimpse of the poster in his hand, announcing the sinking of a British ship.

The woman, who in peace times, you felt, would have been in an automobile, turned to me with a cry of fright.

“ Did you see the name of the ship? ” she asked. “ I couldn't.”

I had noticed one of the posters just before mounting the bus.

“ It's the *Blank*,” I answered. “ She was sunk in the Mediterranean.”

The colour rushed back to her face. [The sharp anxiety faded from her eyes.

“ Thanks,” she said, and turned away.

After a moment she looked back. It was evident she felt the need of an explanation.

“ You see,” she said, “ I have lost my brother

in the navy, and my son is with the high seas fleet. One goes about expecting news like that all the time. I ought not to be glad it was in the Mediterranean, for there are many women whose fear will grow when they hear that word. Thank you. You understand?"

"I understand."

I descended, thinking:

"A little more than two years ago this woman would not have spoken to a stranger, no matter what her sudden doubt."

So the perpetual strain, its general distribution, draws people to each other for comfort, because so many of them can say:

"I understand."

Any one will tell you that the Zeppelin raids have encouraged such a community of feeling. They have destroyed in every portion of the population of the London and East Coast districts the comfortable aloofness from actual warfare to which English civilians have for centuries been accustomed. The fact that non-combatants have frequently been the only victims has intensified this impression of a common outrage, and a common sympathy.

The Germans, it is fair to assume, haven't bothered about who might be hurt, but, as a matter

of fact, in proportion to the energy and ammunition expended, together with the loss of Zeppelins and their crews, the results have been nearly negligible. It is, all the more on that account, ironical that the innocent should have been the chief sufferers.

“If they go after a factory,” an officer said to me, “they get a workingman’s house a mile or so away. If they go for a barracks they get a farm. It’s small comfort for the old men and the women and children done in that no real damage has been accomplished.”

No one seems to know what the Zeppelins were after the night they dropped bombs in one of the great inns of law. A house of some peaceful barristers here, the shattering of some ancient carvings and glass in a chapel there, and about the lawns a few gaping holes — that was the extent of the damage. Zeppelin raids have all the casual inconsistency of a tempest.

London, when I was in the city, had learned about as thoroughly as Paris to take care of this menace. With the decline of the moon a little nervousness was apparent, but for the most part people faced the prospect calmly. During one week after the departure of the moon had made the heavens safer for aircraft we had three of these visits in a row. At tea on the afternoon of

the first raid I heard a retired admiral and a famous editor discussing it as one talks of an approaching horse race or a ball game.

"Everything is quite perfect for them. The wind of the last fortnight has died away," the admiral said, rubbing his hands. "Now if you want to lay a wager —"

At the theatre that night, although the audience shared this sense of anticipation, the play progressed cheerfully. When we came out after the final curtain we saw that the heavens were torn by the groping fingers of countless searchlights. From the wide spaces of Trafalgar Square we could watch occasionally shrapnel bursting close to the shafts of light, and we pointed out to each other what we imagined to be the minute shape of a Zeppelin, flying high.

"Mybe the bloke fawncies 'es over Lunnon," a constable said. "If so, Gawd 'elp 'im when 'e tries to fly back."

"Aw, they dawn't get over the 'eart of Lunnon these days," said a cab driver, lounging by in the hope of a fare. Show ayn't worth the price of stying out. 'Ome for you, gentlemen?"

Later, in a room overlooking the Embankment, a party of us watched in darkness. The fingers of light still groped, but there was no more shrapnel. A pretty young girl grasped her father's

arm. She cried out, her voice vibrating with disappointment:

“Daddy! You promised I should see a Zep to-night.”

“Never mind, my dear,” the father said indulgently. “Bobby, suppose you call up Blank at the War Office and ask where the rascals have gone.”

After a time Bobby returned from the telephone. He was apologetic.

“Blank says they’re headed for the home fires.”

Our host drew the curtain and snapped on the lights. We blinked. The pretty girl pouted. She seemed to think her father had somehow failed her.

“A game of bridge,” he suggested, “or is it too late?”

One was rather relieved that the German admiralty couldn’t see London intimately that night. Its chagrin would have been too painful.

Some time later I chanced to see a quotation from a Munich paper which, recalling that very date, threatened London with similar “nights of terror.”

During the same week I lunched with an officer of one of the guard regiments.

“Of course you know the Zeps were fussing about again last night,” he said.

I told him I had seen the lights and had shared a little of the excitement.

“I was in barracks at ——,” he chatted. “I don’t know how many of the things there were. One of them sailed directly over the barracks square. We were crowded in looking up. What a place for a bomb! This fellow dropped a number in some empty fields as usual. You could see their fuses twisting down. Then he showed a red light on his tail — some kind of a signal, I fancy, and swung towards the channel. I think our air guns were spoiling his evening. At least the shrapnel was bursting all about. Last we saw of him. He must have felt an awful fool, but they ought to be getting accustomed to that.”

Before the moon had come again one had nearly forgotten with the Londoners to be apprehensive of the great dirigibles. In such indifference lies the tragedy of Count Zeppelin.

If, however, such considerations as Zeppelins and anxiety for relatives at the front have accented the virtues of democracy, its faults have also fattened through the war. The French and the English appreciated that during the first few months. It challenged me during my brief trip to Ireland during the Sinn Fein rebellion. I have no inten-

tion of taking up the military or political phases of that affair. They have been sufficiently dissected and fought over.

My chief recollection, indeed, is of confusion. It began at Euston where they had no idea whether the boat would leave Holyhead or not. Haggard women wept, and men ran up and down with an anxiety for which the officials had no antidote. A young fellow in the uniform of the naval flying corps came along and held out an envelope and a bundle of newspapers.

"If you get through, please try to mail these in Ireland," he said to me. "I can't go, and my family's in Dublin. I've heard nothing."

"If the Zeps come to-night," a bystander offered, "nobody'll get through. The train won't budge from London."

But the Zeppelins didn't come, and we left, and in the train the confusion persisted. An army officer shared a compartment with another correspondent and myself. We turned out the lights, rolled ourselves in our overcoats, and tried to sleep. But we couldn't sleep. There was too much noise in the corridors, and a monotonous undertone issued from the other compartments where people, full of misgivings for relatives and friends, discussed the future which they approached with uncertain steps. There were black

clouds in the sky through which the moon was like a dying lamp.

"I'm used to roughing it," the officer said. "I've slept often enough less comfortably at the front. It isn't that that worries me. I've been transferred to a regiment stationed at some distance from Dublin. If they tell me at Holyhead the trains aren't running on the other side I'll have to go back to London."

At Holyhead the confusion sent him back to London, because nobody seemed to know anything certainly.

The boat, however, lay against the dock with steam up. During the minute examination of our papers rain added to the shivering discomfort of those black hours before the dawn. Reluctantly we were permitted to embark. We tried to settle ourselves in the midst of a confusion which increased.

There was wild but serious talk of a fleet of new and gigantic German submarines which were supposed to be somewhere in the Irish Sea preparing to co-operate with the rebels.

"They're sure to give us a chase," a man whispered.

Many agreed. You couldn't help admiring these people who went forward in face of such a belief.

Ireland loomed out of a haze touched by the first grey light. The haze seemed a veil for sinister things. The passengers arose and stretched themselves, as if emerging from the shadow of one disaster to gather strength to elude another.

And at the dock the confusion, for us at any rate, culminated. Here it had the whimsical, lovable quality of the country. An officer stopped us at the gangplank.

“Where are you going?”

“Ashore for breakfast, for a lodging, to look around.”

“You can’t land without a pass from the provost marshal in Kingstown.”

“You mean,” I asked, “that we will have to go back on this boat?”

“Oh, no,” he answered seriously, “because you can’t leave on this boat without a pass from the provost marshal in Kingstown.”

By strategy and fair words we got ashore and to the provost marshal. Of the confusion there, as I have suggested, enough has been written already. When I left on a clear, ruddy evening it occurred to me that rather too much undemocratic order was emerging from the hurly-burly, for I had to run a gauntlet of Scotland

Yard men, of the British army, of the Irish Constabulary, of Mr. Redmond's Nationalist Volunteers. On the boat, however, the old state was in evidence. We were crowded by the first refugees from Dublin — men and women with nerves over-taut who knew of that story of the gigantic German submarines. Moreover, the barricades on the water front at Kingstown had seemed to give the rumour rather too much body.

We crept out of the harbour double-shrouded. Canvas light shields were stretched along the sides. The portholes were closely shuttered. Only one entrance, far forward and completely dark, was left open to the lower deck.

There was a dim light in the smoke-room, and we counted the minutes there while the refugees, a trifle hysterical, exchanged experiences.

Suddenly what everybody had feared seemed to spring upon us. The lights snapped out. Through a blackness nearly palpable a cry cut.

“Submarines!”

The thought of panic in this shrouded boat was more oppressive than the sudden night.

“Sit still!”

Then a man spoke wistfully and saved the situation.

“What are you afraid of? It couldn't be any worse than a happy Easter in Dublin.”

Some of us laughed. Gradually the ominous stirring subsided. Every one sat still until by and by the lights came on and we looked at each other and smiled. A man ran in, crying breathlessly: "Holyhead light! I say, I can see Holyhead light!"

A great sigh went up. We all crowded to the front deck to watch that red and friendly greeting.

CHAPTER IV

PARIS AND ITS WAR SPIRIT

EACH trip through the submarine zone, in fact, has its thrill until you grow, to a measure, hardened. When I was ready to leave for France the channel crossing seemed for a number of reasons less pleasant than usual. Only one line was in operation, and that was taking the long route from Southampton to Havre. That the *Sussex* tragedy had had something to do with the choice was obvious. People spoke of the approaching excursion with misgivings. The antidote for most of them, it is likely, was the extended formalities they had to accomplish before they were permitted to risk their lives at all. The police, the American consul, the French consul, local detectives, Scotland Yard agents, and French secret service men — those were some of the obstacles to dishonest travel between the continent and England.

I was amused when I drove with my baggage to the pier entrance in Southampton. I had been conducted that afternoon by the courtesy of the Admiralty through one of the great dockyards.

Therefore, I didn't come down from London on the special train with the rest of the passengers.

At a stated hour the gate was thrown open and I was permitted to drive in after an examination of passports. I found an elderly porter in front of the ticket office. I asked him to take my luggage from the cab. As the result of extended and silent consideration he agreed, apparently against his better judgment. While he worked he shook his head continually.

I turned to enter the ticket office. He grasped my arm. His gesture and his face expressed a desire to spare me an indiscretion. This time he spoke.

"Where you off to, sir?"

"To buy my ticket for France."

I am convinced he was a Wesleyan. I have never seen a longer face.

"Better not do that, sir," he said mournfully, "until you find out whether you're going."

I laughed and walked on. He called after me with the effect of pursuing an erring soul. With each word his voice grew shriller.

"Very often they don't go, sir. I tell you, they don't go. They stops 'em at the dock."

I was tired, so, when I was aboard the boat, I entered my bunk; but sleep was nearly out of the question because of that justifiable care and sever-

ity of which the old porter had warned me. Men and women struggled through until just before dawn. At times they complained loudly. At others they congratulated themselves in equally unrestrained voices. The idea of sleeping occurred to few. The man who shared my cabin went to bed with his shoes on. Perhaps he was wise.

There wasn't much talk after breakfast. The passengers sat or walked about, anxiously scanning the water. The coast of France emerged from the haze. We passed the skeleton masts of several ships, sunk by submarines. We made the harbour entrance, and spirits revived. Such chatter as last night's disturbed the boat again. People wondered if there would be at the dock a new ordeal. There was, for France is as careful and suspicious as England.

It was one of those hot, brilliant days Normandy receives occasionally. The harbour, untroubled by the slightest breeze, was like a mirror for the violent sun.

We were herded in a shed of a single story on the water front. A tall military policeman with bristling moustaches guarded the gate to the examination room. Beyond him we had glimpses of a long deal table, around which sat numerous

inquisitors, in uniform and out, French and British.

Because of the crowd in the little room it was impossible to put down one's coat and hand bags. Their weight increased momentarily as the unclouded sun baked the flimsy roof overhead. Many of us commenced to look as if we were more in need of a physician's certificate than one of entry. Then at a grumbled word from the inquisitors the proceedings opened.

With a commendable partiality the huge military policeman roared:

"Ladies first! Step forward, and don't push abawt so. Now, lady. You got your passport ready?"

There were more women than one would have thought. Because of the increasing heat and the weight of baggage the situation had approached the intolerable when the military policeman cried out:

"No more ladies?"

Suspense! A sigh of relief as the silence persisted! We who were not at the front of the line began to compute the duration of our ordeal. A groan disturbed our ranks, for the military policeman was following evidently an extended order of precedence.

"All with diplomatic passports," came his leonine voice, "kindly step forward."

And, after a number of important-appearing men had been passed through:

"Are there any more with diplomatic passports?"

The case was desperate. I called over the heads of the others:

"Sergeant! I have a journalistic passport."

"What?" he thundered back.

"A journalistic passport," I repeated, less hopefully.

It meant nothing, and I knew it.

"Let that gentleman through!" he roared.

It was, I felt as I struggled forward, his intention to discipline my presumption with some sharp words and a command to take the rear of the line. His frown was ominous, his bristling moustaches unsympathetic.

"Let's see your passport," he growled. "What do you mean? I asked for diplomatic passports."

I handed him the much viséd document. He glanced it over. A more dangerous belligerency coloured his tone.

"You got an office in London?"

"No," I answered meekly. "I have a sort of an office in New York."

The threat faded from his appearance and his voice. He smiled with a childish and excited interest.

“New York!” he echoed.

He swung the gate open.

“Step right in, sir. Make yourself comfortable.”

And as I obeyed:

“Why didn’t you say that in the first place? I’m from New York not two years ago. Expect to go back after the war, if I don’t get killed. I used to run an elevator in the Waldorf. What’s the news from Broadway? Give my regards to Times Square.”

He was too friendly. I was among the last of the sufferers to be released by him into the hands of the judges.

As at Liverpool the narrow mesh of these spy nets was made apparent. As a farther check, I fancy, we were made to spend nearly seven hours in Havre waiting for the departure of the special train for Paris.

I wasn’t sorry, for Havre in itself had plenty of interest. It is the working capital of invaded Belgium. It is one of the great English bases. Consequently the uniforms of French, Belgians,

and British were everywhere in evidence, but the British, naturally, predominated.

From the waterfront I watched transports enter and leave the harbour. On the docks the work of unloading proceeded with a precise efficiency. In the streets, wagons and automobile trucks, to which good-natured Tommies clung, hurried tempestuously. Officers strolled here and there, swinging little canes. Their faces were rather more serious than the faces scanned in London. All at once you realised that you were actually on the soil of war-torn France, within a few miles of the grotesque and deadly battle of the trenches.

And in the train the shadow of the war deepened again. As we steamed inland across a landscape which, for me, had always had an air of sedate pleasuring, we caught glimpses of tents, and the intricate movements of men at battle drill.

Elderly French Territorials in faded blue and red uniforms lined the railroad tracks and guarded the bridges. As our cars flashed past they presented arms or stood at attention. We threaded through great supply trains on temporary tracks in the vicinity of Rouen. The heat was unreal in such a country. It seemed that it must be an off-giving from the great, near-by forge of battle. Then darkness closed over the steaming world, as

if to hide from our eager eyes the elaborate machinery of war.

At St. Lazarre we passed the last examination and scattered to our hotels.

Curiously, arriving at night as I did, my first impression was that Paris was more nearly normal than London. Almost at once I realised that this was due to the contrast between the few but unveiled street lamps, the unblanketed glow from buildings, and the darkened thoroughfares and the curtained windows of England. In addition there was the difference in the Anglo-Saxon temperament, after all, largely our own, and the admirable Gallic intensity of temporary appreciation which even this war has been powerless to destroy.

The terrasse cafés were crowded, and the many soldiers, wearing their graceful steel helmets, seemed undisturbed by what they had already survived and unappalled by that which awaited them at the close of their brief permissions.

By daylight the truer values obtruded themselves. Nearly every woman wore mourning. Their white faces haunted one, because out of the eyes, in which there were no tears, stared a fierce pride that burned up grief.

I talked with one of these women at a simple tea. Her history had been rapidly sketched for

me. She was the widow of a colonel who had been wounded in an early battle, and killed almost immediately after his return to duty. Before the war this woman had lived in a charming apartment near the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, the most expensive quarter of Paris. Like many army officers her husband had spent all of his income. Now with her child, a nine year old boy, she lived in a single garret room, sewing, by odd jobs striving to maintain the shadow of a home.

From the deep frame of mourning her sorrowful face glowed with that pride that has made all Frenchwomen, to an extent, resemble each other. She spoke almost at once, as if there were no other subject worth talking about, of her husband and the manner of his death.

“I was so happy when he came back with his wound for that little time, and when he went I thought the good Lord would let him return again. When they killed him he wasn't painfully hurt, but, you see, the great artery in his thigh was cut. He understood, of course; but his men were in a bad place, so he had them prop him up, and he directed the defence and sent a message to me while he bled to death, knowing all the time, until the light faded —”

She shook her head.

“He shouldn't have gone that way. If Doc-

tor Carrel had only been there! He's saved such cases. He need not have died."

And always one asked, "Why don't the tears come into this woman's eyes?"

One prayed that they would, and that the stiff, stern figure would relax a little. The gesture with which she raised her tea cup was angular, somnambulistic. The boy stared at her with a round, pallid, and expressionless face.

"You may have another cake, little one," the widow said.

He munched it without words until some one asked:

"And what are you going to do when you grow up, young man?"

His voice was as expressionless as his face.

"I am going to be a soldier, like papa."

The widow made a swift movement.

"You see? And I have had nothing to do with it — nothing at all. It is in the blood of the orphans. Must we lose them, too? Why do you want to be a soldier, son?"

"I want to kill the Germans, because they killed my poor papa."

His face twitched into an expression at last, and, as he continued to sip his tea, great tears rolled down his cheeks and fell into the cup. But the widow didn't cry.

In the great munition factories most of the women wore mourning, too, and the eyes of many were disturbingly like the eyes of the widow. It was not easy at first to watch their slender, dark-clothed figures, their soft and pretty faces, bent over tasks of preparing death and mutilation for men. You wanted to turn straightway from the contemplation of their deft fingers pouring shrapnel bullets into completed casings, or from the easy skill with which they moulded and polished ammunition. Then that look and the dryness of their eyes stripped from their labour something of its dreadful incongruity, gave to it a tinge of justifiable revenge. And it was impressed upon the observer more than ever that in the fragile hands of the women lies the power that some day may obliterate war.

It is this grim, matter-of-fact determination of both sexes, of all classes of the French, that arrests one. It is, in a sense, hypnotic. Even from the little boys playing at soldiering in the street it projects itself. For me it found its culmination in a review I watched one afternoon in the Place des Invalides.

Infantry, cavalry, and several batteries of the famous *soixante-quinzes* filled with sober colour the place where many times Napoleon reviewed his brilliant corps. Eyes wandered from the

quiet, helmeted ranks to the dome of the Invalides beneath which the great emperor lay. His tomb seemed to brood over the review, and in neighbouring faces you read a perception, nearly superstitious, of the soul of the inspired leader who had brought so much glory to France. Then the band burst into the Marseillaise. As the ranks swung over the bridge the crowd cheered. I have never heard such cheering. It wasn't a matter of volume. It was a curious choked quality that arrested one. It was as if these people tried to give vent to an emotion beyond physical expression and were angry at their failure. Yet for them the music seemed to express everything.

CHAPTER V

LORRAINE AND THE DEVASTATION

ONE learns to shrink from the great railway terminals in war time. On several occasions I left Paris by rail to visit the front, and each time the excitement of the prospect died at the ticket window. I think it is because these stations have witnessed too many departures for battle, too much of the tearing of warm life from warm life and the definitive rupture of romance, too many broken returns, too many shocked greetings.

My first introduction came not long after dawn of a grey morning. The foreign office had asked if I would like to visit Lorraine, suggesting that I take the day train for Nancy where a staff officer and an automobile would meet me. An elderly English Quaker, who was interested in Red Cross work and the rebuilding of devastated villages, joined me, and together we drove through the scarcely awakened streets to the Gare de l'Est. We entered to present our papers and accomplish the formalities that are necessary before one may take a ticket.

With a pronounced reluctance the dun light penetrated the great hall, which had an air of mourning. Soldiers crowded the wide spaces, shivering. Their uniforms were soiled. Some retained the white marks of the trenches. The young faces were drawn, unhappy, wondering. For the most part these fellows were permissionaires, returning to the trenches after eight days of home and love and hero worship. They had swung their backs on all that, knowing, if they were not hit, it would be many months, perhaps a year, before they could experience such blessings again. They were like a band of men of whom a certain number has been chosen for some violent discipline and who are left in doubt as to the actual selections.

The place was saturated with melancholy. Instinctively we left it. Across the plaza we saw a café whose name was in harmony with the spirit of the station.

“Café du Départ.”

“A cup of coffee?” the elderly Quaker suggested, for neither of us had had any breakfast.

We sat on the terrasse among the soldiers, watching regretful faces above faded uniforms. Accoutrements littered the pavement between the tables. One or two men spoke to us formally, and we answered formally. Beyond that there

was no companionable morning chatter. We all stared at the grey façade of the station. The huge clock mocked us, pacing the minutes too quickly. In the eyes of the soldiers smouldered their doubt. Would they enter at that portal once more? Would they look again upon the familiar and the desirable?

From the summit of the façade gazed back the stone figure of a woman. There would have been no mistaking it even if it hadn't been labelled. It was the figure of Strassburg. It had an appearance of summoning the staring and melancholy soldiers through that portal and on to the East for a violent and necessary redemption.

Our compartment was filled with officers. Even my Quaker companion wore a uniform of the Red Cross. On that long train I was the only one in civilian clothing.

We glided quickly into the district entered by the Germans just before the battle of the Marne. About bridgeheads many buildings lay in ruins. We passed the once charming little town of Sermaize-les-Bains. Scarcely a wall showed more than two feet high.

An officer spoke.

"They say it was because the mayor of Sermaize failed to come out and greet the commander

of the entering forces. That offended the commander. Wherefore —”

His hand made a circling gesture in the direction of the accusing rubbish.

All morning and during a portion of the afternoon we were carried through the war zone, pausing at towns whose names have become immortal. And in the fields between we saw many graves, marked with crosses, here and there supporting a faded cap. About the graves the fields were cultivated, yet no mound had been disturbed. The French have come to look upon the random tombs of the men who fell saving Paris as national monuments. They impress one as the most imposing memorials a nation has ever constructed.

During this trip I received one or two examples of the social justice of compulsory military service as it is practised in France. My Quaker companion and I were gossiping of Japan at luncheon in the wagon restaurant. Next to the Quaker sat a pleasant, middle-aged man, wearing the uniform, made of a sort of overall material, of the transport corps. Suddenly he turned and spoke in excellent English.

“ You are interested in Japan? ”

We embarked on a random conversation. Quite naturally it developed before we were

through, that the man in overalls owned coal mines in Japan, in South America, in Belgium.

"Of course," he smiled, "the Belgian mines must be looked upon for the present as a bad investment."

In overalls, driving soldiers and supplies to the front, this man of exceptional wealth!

"I'm going back after my first permission in more than a year."

"You despise such work?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"One does one's share, and that is arranged according to the best interests of France. My task has its compensations. For instance, at the commencement of the battle of Verdun when things looked rather dark I helped in that marvel of transport. You must have heard. We moved fifty thousand men in motor trucks from Revigny to the Verdun sector in a twinkling."

A little later we passed Revigny. He waved his hand, buttoned his coat of overall material, and left us.

Across the aisle a colonel shared a bottle of wine with a private. They chatted amiably. Yet at work the discipline of the French develops results that more than match the iron bound German system.

We halted at Bar-le-Duc, the base for Verdun.

The third great attempt of the Germans to break through was in progress. The booming of the guns came to us across rolling hills. There was scarcely an entire pane of glass in the station. The squat barrack-like temporary hospitals, filled with the martyrs who had entered the turmoil, to return shattered along the Sacred Way, sent forth an air of suffering and misgiving. For the Germans at that time were in the habit of raiding Bar-le-Duc with their air squadrons. The day after my last visit, indeed, they dropped a shower of bombs, killing and maiming more than thirty civilians.

Beyond we left the main line, taking a tangent to the south to avoid the salient at St. Mihiel.

At the first station west of Nancy the controlleur told us we must alight.

"The train," he explained, "does not stop in Nancy itself, because of the Boche bombardment."

We were greeted on the platform by a stout, hospitable man in the uniform of the Etat Major. He drove us into Nancy whose chief beauties, in spite of the bombardment, have remained intact. There was enough of ruin, however, for the most part in the vicinity of the station, which the Germans have been unable to hit directly. An apartment house in the middle of a block had recently

been struck. All that had survived was a heap of rubbish in a yawning hole. More pitiful, more productive of anger, was the rubble and charred beams that marked the site of a children's school. If it has been the purpose of the Germans to make the innocent suffer in Nancy they have achieved an admirable success. We noticed particularly the wreck of a dwelling house.

"That," our captain explained, "was struck by a great shell, and afterwards bombed by an aeroplane."

Strangely, when I was in Champagne sometime later I met an officer who, when he learned I had been in Nancy, asked me if I remembered this particular ruin.

"It was my home," he said simply. "Fortunately my family was not there when the shell struck."

Close to this circle of devastation lay the hotel, so far practically untouched, in which we were to spend the night.

"Perhaps," our officer grinned at me, "a shell will fall through monsieur's bedroom, and furnish America with a *casus belli*."

I patiently explained to him that I entered the war zone at my own risk, but his wit intrigued him, and each time he repeated his joke we tried to laugh.

Affairs in Nancy, there was no doubt, progressed much as in time of peace.

“Why not?” such inhabitants as I talked to said. “We go along. We merely hope that the next shell won’t fall near us.”

On the walls of many houses we saw, painted in red, the cross of Lorraine.

“Why?” we asked.

“Because,” the captain replied, “each one of those marked houses has a cellar. When the bombardment commences, people caught in the street enter the nearest house marked with a cross, and the inhabitants must receive them and give them shelter.”

The elderly Quaker shook his head.

“Why should Nancy be bombarded in this fashion?”

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

“It might be a little pique,” he answered. “You see, just before the battle of the Marne the Kaiser and the Crown Prince were decked out in all their plumage and waited, mounted on horseback, to make a triumphant entry of the capital of Lorraine. At the last minute they had to change their plans. That was very sad — for them. I think they have never quite forgiven us. To-morrow in the devastated districts I will show you

worse things. Wait until you have seen Gerbéviller."

His eyes held a disturbing promise.

In our hotel, surrounded by shattered buildings, we dined comfortably that night. Other officers came to our table from time to time with the gossip of the sector. One of them, a charming young fellow, a captain in the machine gun service, was particularly pleased to find an American, because he had heard a good story that day about one of my countrymen in the Foreign Legion. Over coffee he told it with much joy.

"You know," he said, "that the soldiers have been in the habit of making finger rings out of the aluminum they gather from shells of the Bosches. They send them to Paris, where they are sold, and lots, I daresay, have found their way to America."

I told him that as far back as a year ago I had seen such rings in New York.

"Then you will understand," he went on, "how eager the soldiers are to get this material, which in good condition isn't very plentiful. They are quite jealous about it. The other night, it seems, this American in the Foreign Legion was on solitary duty in a listening post between the lines. Those places are never very comfortable, as you may learn for yourself some day. The Bosches

try to locate them with their artillery, and when they do they simply blow them to pieces. That night they got the range of this post and turned their guns loose. Your poor countryman thought the end of the world had come. His escape was cut off. The sap, leading out, was obliterated by great shells. There was nothing for him to do except to stay and take his chances, and they were pretty slender. At the end of an hour nothing whatever was left of the post except a heap of formless earth; yet, through one of the miracles of war, the sentry remained untouched. As soon as the fire had lifted, the poor devil crawled back to the front line trench and climbed the parapet. He expected to be greeted as a hero, as the saviour of France. He pictured a deputation welcoming him at the parapet with the Croix de Guerre, with the Military Medal, with the Legion of Honour.

“ There *was* a deputation at the parapet — of poilus, crowding around him with anxious and envious faces. They greeted him in an excited fashion.

“ ‘ You lucky devil! ’ ” they cried. “ ‘ For the love of Heaven, let us see! How much aluminum did you get from those Boche shells? ’ ”

The machine gun officer, in spite of his appreciation of the incident as humorous, expressed

a visible pride in its climax. He sipped his coffee.

"That legionaire," he said, "will be a better soldier for his adventure."

"How," the Quaker asked thoughtfully, "can any one hope to defeat soldiers who take death and war with that blagueur attitude?"

Through the quiet reply of the machine gun officer vibrated an unconditional assurance.

"We do not believe such men can be defeated."

And we thought of the guns of Verdun which we had heard that afternoon, roaring from the German lines their desperation and their anger.

For some time after dinner we chatted. We talked of nothing but war, for that is all there is to talk about in Europe these days.

A general officer strolled in, nodding pleasantly to one and another.

"We must make an early start to-morrow," our staff officer said. "Shan't we go to bed?"

He showed us our rooms. He made sure that we were quite comfortable. He brought a map, the very last thing, explaining the trip he had arranged for the next day.

"Of course," he said, "they might send a shell in here to-night, or an air raid isn't an impossibility."

I hoped he was at his humour again, yet his eyes were uncomfortably serious.

“If that doesn’t happen,” he said, “you will see some things that will surprise you.

Again his face altered with that disturbing promise.

“Among other things,” he added softly as he turned to go, “you will visit the ruins of Gerbéviller — of Gerbéviller-la-Martyre.”

CHAPTER VI

THE SINISTER INVASION

WE started early the next morning, threading a course among the pleasant hills of Lorraine. For brief spaces the idea of war seemed a distasteful imagining. It was necessary to glance for a reminder at the helmet of our military chauffeur. Or we would glimpse in a patch of woods a battery of soixante-quinzes. It was a Sunday, and often the artillerymen would be washing their clothing in a swiftly running brook, or, stretched in the thick grass, would be lost in a book or the re-reading of a letter from home. We might pass a column of infantry, covered with dust, crowding to the side of the road to make way for our Etat Major automobile. And here and there we met lines of the busses that had disappeared from the Paris streets at the commencement of the war. Covered with netting and painted a dull grey, they carried fresh meat for distribution from point to point behind the lines.

We swerved into Lunéville, whose outskirts saw vicious house-to-house fighting during the

first weeks of the war. In a number of streets the buildings were scarred so intricately from rifle and machine gun fire that it seemed incredible a single soldier should have emerged untouched.

Our driver hurried us into the country again. The staff officer, fulfilment of his promise in his eyes, spoke sadly.

"We are entering the devastated district of Lorraine."

And almost immediately we flashed through a village whose simple peasant houses were without roofs or else showed jagged breaches where shells had entered.

"We got as much of the civilian population out of these towns as we could," the officer said; "but it is hard to move Frenchmen who think they have a right to stay, so plenty of them suffered."

As we went on the villages displayed harsher scars. In some only a few walls were left, but we could see rough shelters constructed from the wreckage; and old men and children wandered around with a furtive air, as if in anticipation of another catastrophe.

In the midst of all this destruction we came to a village that was quite untouched.

"Why is that?" I asked.

The staff officer shrugged his shoulders.

“Who can explain the vagaries of the Boches?”

I think we all questioned if the charming hamlet had been spared because one lived there who had been of service to the enemy.

“Spies —” the Quaker began.

But what I learned about the vital work of the spies in Europe I shall relate in another chapter. Moreover, the subject was forgotten at that moment, for we left the village and crossed a broad, flat plateau in whose grass innumerable French tricolours waved lazily, like the fronds of a strange and beautiful plant.

We saw beneath the tricolours mounds varying in size from the grave of a single man to a trench tomb of a hundred bodies. There were mounds from which no flags waved. These were decorated with plain black crosses.

“The German dead?” I asked.

The staff officer nodded.

“As far as possible,” he said, “we have taken care of their dead as carefully as our own. On that cross you will find a row of numbers. The families of those German soldiers can know where their men are resting.”

He pointed to a tiny mound with a small black cross set at an angle above it.

“An officer,” he said. “There is a German



OLD MEN AND CHILDREN WANDERED AROUND WITH A FURTIVE AIR, AS IF IN
ANTICIPATION OF ANOTHER CATASTROPHE



name on that cross. Lieutenant or Captain von So and So."

"In view of those ruined villages," the elderly Quaker said, "such charity is admirable. It is very French."

"We are not Boches," the officer laughed. "In spite of the crimes of the Germans in Lorraine we have no quarrel with the sorrowful families of the dead."

"Both sides fell very fast here?" I asked.

"It was a hard battle," he answered. "You might say the Boches were turned back as they were at the Ourck. It is, as you can see, nearly at the other end of the line. Because these men fell the Kaiser was forbidden to trot into Nancy, and something was repaid of the debt we owe the Boches for Gerbéviller. We are getting very close now. Before long we will see it."

The name had acquired in my mind, and, I think, in the Quaker's, a symbolism of inexpressible wrong. We shrank a little from the fact. The automobile approached the edge of the plateau too quickly for us. There was, however, in our first glimpse of the dead city an unexpected relief.

It snuggled, badly defined because of the pleasant shrubbery, in the centre of a shallow bowl. The charming little river Mortagne wound

through fields and patches of woods, and lingered behind the nearest of the half seen walls.

Then we understood it was the lack of definition that had furnished at first that pleasant deception. The wall against the trees, for instance, became the torn and eyeless front of a factory. Behind it there was nothing, and our hearts sank, for of all the fragments of buildings we could see from that point, the factory was distinctly the largest.

It is the approach of Gerbéviller from the plateau that makes its tragedy insupportable. It has been so far permitted to very few to inspect this record of the German invasion, this monument to the Teutonic campaign of terribleness. To those who have driven down like us from the plateau must have come the thought:

“After all the French have exaggerated. It might have been necessary to bombard the garrison defending the place. And the destruction isn't really as shocking as in Nancy.”

Then, as the shrubbery has fallen away, exposing the skeleton, every visitor must have cried as we did:

“But this is incredible! This isn't bombardment. It is systematic and wanton destruction.”

“There was no garrison here,” the officer said. “When the army retreated at the first shock only

sixty *chasseur-à-pied* were left to guard the bridge at the other side of the town. Only a few shells have fallen in Gerbéviller. It is the work of the incendiary, of the man who destroys property as a child knocks down a house of blocks, because it pleases his unconsidered impulse to be cruel — to smash! — to laugh, as he sees things go Smash! Smash! Smash! *Sœur Julie*, if she will, can tell you better than I, because she was here. She lived through each minute of the dreadful three days, and, since she is a *religieuse*, what she says will not seem so far beyond belief as the story of what I know only by hearsay. But first you should see the *château* and its chapel.”

We entered Gerbéviller, for a short distance threading streets flanked by walls, like the walls of *Sermaize-les-Bains*, scarcely two feet high. They were eloquent with the story of their fall. They seemed trying to explain to us that after the conflagration dynamite had been used, that their skeletons had been torn to pieces by stained and vicious hands.

For a long time we saw no one. Then a child appeared, walking at a demure pace, her eyes downcast as she picked a path among the ruins.

We paused in a weed-choked plaza. To the right a wall rose for two thirds of its original height, but through its empty windows showed the

trees of a broad and luxuriant park. The rear and most of the side walls had been levelled. There was only left enough to tell us that here had stood one of the most beautiful renaissance châteaux in France.

The officer nodded towards the opposite side of the plaza.

"The chapel," he said.

We gazed with a mounting anger at this jewel which had been shattered with repeated and difficult blows. Through the breaches of the façade gaped out at us a desecrated altar, roofed only by the sky.

"There are no shell holes," the Quaker said.

There was a flash of temper across his placid face.

"I am a Quaker, as you know," he went on simply, "but in this place I like to tell you that I have two sons who are Quakers, also, but they are both officers in the British army."

The staff officer smiled,

"Perhaps," he said, "it is as well you, yourself, are beyond the military age."

"It spares my conscience," the Quaker agreed.

"What regiments did this?" I asked.

"Bavarians," the officer answered. "We had always thought, too, that they were rather kindlier than the Prussians. In the grounds of the château

there is a grotto. Piece by piece the mosaics were detached from the ceiling. That is what hurts so in Gerbéviller — the careful, the systematic devastation. It is difficult to understand how men could go to such minute pains to destroy.”

We re-entered the automobile and went on through the ghastly streets of Gerbéviller. Before long the car stopped. A heap of stones blocked our way.

“I can go no farther, sir,” the soldier chauffeur said.

We alighted, made our way around the rubble, and continued on foot.

“It is worse than Pompeii,” the Quaker mused. “That ancient city is more habitable, would be far simpler to restore.”

Ahead was a wooden shack, constructed against a piece of ruined wall.

“The old and the new,” the staff officer said, “but that is about all that has been done towards the restoration of the city. It is so hopeless; but some day we will see, for a few of the inhabitants have clung to their homes. After the war something will be done for them.

“The Germans made a more thorough job here than in Louvain,” the Quaker commented.

“Nothing could have been much more thorough,” the staff man answered. “Where

there were originally four hundred and seventy-five dwellings, just twenty emerge from the ruins comparatively intact, and that is due to Sœur Julie. They are all clustered about the Hospice of St. Charles, of which she is the superior."

We quickened our pace, for we were anxious to meet and talk with this remarkable woman who had saved the little that is left of the city. We knew General Castelnau, after the defeat and the flight of the Germans, had mentioned her in army orders. To decorate her with the Cross of the Legion of Honour, we had read at the time, President Poincaré had come himself to Lorraine and to the hospice. In Nancy the night before we had heard her mentioned with a sort of reverence.

At the head of a narrow, sloping street we saw several comparatively complete buildings. We entered one through an archway surmounted by a cross. We were ushered by a sad-faced sister into a parlour whose walls were freshly splashed with plaster. We didn't need to be told that many bullets had torn through them.

Sœur Julie entered. She impressed us as a short and stout woman, rather beyond middle age. From her pleasant and sympathetic face dark eyes snapped. On her habit of a religieuse shone the Cross of the Legion. From time to

time as she talked she fingered the medal. She greeted us warmly, but at first she seemed a trifle reluctant to speak of that unbearable occupation of her city by the Germans. As she went on, however, her gestures assumed a rapid and varied intensity. At times horror slumbered in her eyes, at others anger awakened them.

“There wasn’t much bombardment,” she began, verifying what the staff officer had said. “The town was little hurt by that. Only sixty *chasseur-à-pied* held the bridge across the *Mortagne*. But, alas, they were too magnificent, for the Germans were so angry at their superb stand that they declared the old men of the town must have helped in the defence. They came in at nightfall — Bavarian troops who had fought hard and marched hard. It seemed that they were tired, and their general thought they should have a little relaxation. He issued orders that in *Gerbéviller* they were to do what they pleased.”

She shook with disgust. She pointed from the window.

“They amused themselves. No bombardment could have been so complete. They used explosives, oil, all the inflammable material they could get their hands on. When a house was burning, they clustered about the cellar entrance to welcome the women and old men who had to come from

their refuge or roast. The men were bound and made to watch the welcome of their women. One finds it difficult to speak of such horrors. Then many of the men — old fellows, for the youngsters were all at the war — were tied in groups of five, and, while they questioned with eyes like the eyes of an animal one has accused unjustly, they were shot down. During many hours we heard the firing, and we muttered prayers for departing souls, while we worked over the wounded. One girl, rather than face such things, hid in the Mortagne with the water up to her neck. She was there all one day. It killed her, but she was more content to die that way.”

We remained silent before the sad conviction of this woman of the church who spoke of what she had seen with her own eyes.

“ In the night they came here. Their work of destruction had progressed so far. I had many desperately wounded men, some German, and a few grey old fellows who had sought refuge at the hospice. The Bavarians came and fired and told us we must leave in order that the hospice might be destroyed like the rest of the town. The officer in charge had a pistol in one hand and a sword in the other. I pleaded with him.

“ ‘ The thought of your mother will not let you commit this crime. The building is full of the



GERBÉVILLER . . . THIS MONUMENT TO THE TEUTONIC CAMPAIGN OF TERRIBLENESS

wounded and the dying, and some old men who are incapable of bearing arms, and I have Germans.'

" 'Point them out to me!'

" And they entered and went to the cots where the wounded Frenchmen lay, and I tried to keep my eyes closed that I might not witness this crime, for they tore the red bandages from the wounds, and the blood flowed again, staining the beds. When I cried out they sneered that it was necessary for them to search for weapons beneath the bandages. Rifles and bayonets beneath bandages! I grasped that officer's arm.

" 'Do no more evil to these poor little ones. Burn no more. See! I care for your wounded, as I care for our own.'

" I pointed out to him the violent, scarlet sky above Gerbéviller.

" 'Save this little corner for sickness and death.'

" And he went. But later when the French returned some of those men came back. We saw our ruddy executioners, our fire-brands, pallid and torn and asking help. So we took them in until the little hospice was like a shambles. The blood! It ran from their resting places on the floor. It ran so thick in the corridor that I arranged a mop as a sort of dam to turn it into

the street. But, angry at retreating, those that were unhurt tumbled over the walls of the houses they had burned. That is why we are not like a city that has been bombarded. That is why so many houses are only heaps of bruised stones."

She arose and spread her arms. On her dun uniform of a religieuse the Cross of the Legion glittered.

"Is it any wonder," she said, "that all the world will forever speak of our beloved dead city as Gerbéviller-la-Martyre?"

We left Sœur Julie and Gerbéviller. We went out of Lorraine with a sense of flight before a sinister invasion perilous to the entire world, of unusual and ruthless creatures, suddenly unmasked by the tearing claws of war.

CHAPTER VII

THE PERSISTENT BOMBARDMENT

ON my return the familiar beauties of Paris acquired a new and precious meaning. It was possible more accurately to estimate the value of that epic moment when Von Kluck's flank was turned and the sinister invasion broken almost within sight of the fortifications. So I got a military permit and visited the region where Manoury's taxicab army flung itself on the extreme German right.

The flags waving over the graves were thicker than in Lorraine. They were like a strange and colourful grain. And irregularly scattered behind the pierced walls of the graveyard in each little village were the sepulchres of soldiers, buried where they had fallen.

Behind an ugly breach in a cemetery wall was the tomb of an officer, set at an angle.

"The captain, you see," one of the natives told me, "was leaning against the wall watching the effect of his men's fire on the enemy when the shell fell just there. We came out in the evening and buried him."

He took me to a flowering tree not far away and pointed out a polished round hole in the trunk.

"That," he said, "was made by a shell nearly spent. It struck its nose in and exploded its entire charge backwards. It killed two lieutenants who were standing in consultation just where you are. Here are their graves, at your feet."

The inhabitants will relate a thousand such intimate details of the battle of the Marne. They understand it in no other language. It is, in fact, impossible for the layman to gaze across the field, sewn with tricolours, and interpret the miracle in any broader terms. But of the most intimate and desirable detail of all there was no one who could speak surely. I looked at a quiet and picturesque farm where Von Kluck had had his headquarters. I wondered what dramatic event had happened there, perhaps during the course of a moment or two, that had urged him to give the command to swing in across Paris. Had he run ahead of his supplies? Had an order been misinterpreted? Was a fit of petulance responsible? Had he lunched too well? There the German structure of forty years' growth had tumbled, and no one could tell what had happened at the pretty farm during that decisive moment. The closeness of

the thing was impressive. As I stared I could hear from ahead the dull booming of guns from the vicinity of Soissons, and only a few miles behind me lay Paris.

Already, by direction of General Galiéni before his death, a number of monuments have been raised on the field of the Marne, yet it isn't the Mecca for Frenchmen one would expect. The authorities see to that. They make a visit almost as difficult as the entrance of a front line trench. There are, it is just to say, military reasons of which it is better not to speak. They will probably keep the Marne closed to the ordinary visitor until the end of the war. I found it necessary to show my pass there more frequently than in the actual zone of operations. Any one who gets actually under fire is too well vouched for to start suspicion. Moreover, if he is a civilian he is always accompanied by a staff officer.

I had a charming young fellow during my visit to the Champagne front — small, constantly smiling, inclined, as far as one might be, to take war as a part of the day's work. He had been severely wounded in one of the early battles. That seemed to be the only portion of his own experiences that he thoroughly resented.

“It keeps me in a staff job,” he mourned.

I asked him what his sensations had been on first hearing the shells. He laughed.

“When the first shell whistled — whoo-ee-ee — I commanded my men to present arms. That amused them, and was good. Then I told them to lie down.”

This officer met a party of us in Epernay and drove us first of all to Rheims. The desecration of the cathedral is by no means a thing of the past. The bombardment continues according to the fancy of the German gunners. We drove in past miles of shell screens, constructed between the road and the enemy of sheets of cheese cloth or masses of dead foliage. A soldier was our chauffeur. An orderly sat at his side. Above their heads were suspended helmets and a rifle. Out of the grey and rainy morning came the rumbling of guns.

The houses of the suburbs were marked with shell fragments. One or two men and women glided silently past us, clinging to the shelter of walls.

We swerved into a vast open space. At first I didn't realise. Then I left the car and, holding my breath, unconscious of the rain, stood gazing upward.

The cathedral of Rheims proves how absurdly conservative photography is. A picture of the

twin towers and the rose window won't give you a sense of unbelievable tragedy, or an instinct to speak not at all or in whispers. That is because the horror of Rheims from the front is a matter of detail. The left hand tower rises in the shade of ashes. The semblance of figures, featureless and stripped, nevertheless have something human about them. They are like victims of the ancient trial by fire. Instinctively one glances at the brave little bronze figure on horseback which miraculously has survived each bombardment. More than ever Joan of Arc belongs here. Her attitude with flag uplifted is one of inspired command. She seems about to lead the wraiths of the cathedral to a stern reckoning.

We entered the desolate structure. I removed my hat. A staff officer shrugged his shoulders.

"That is not necessary," he said. "So many men have been killed in here that the edifice is no longer consecrated."

His comment expressed, perhaps, more than its intention. For there is a depressive feeling within whose source is certainly more remote than the emptiness and the battered walls and pillars. The emptiness reaches you first of all. The aisles are vast, the open spaces apparently endless. Pigeons, flying between the tracery of the eyeless windows and about the roof, accent the sense of

distance. And it is out of this emptiness that the feeling of depression steals. There were with me officers and soldiers hardened to the filth and corruption of war. Some of us had seen devastation more complete and no less excusable than this. Yet no one failed to respond to that sense of suffering which seemed to have survived its physical source. It is, of course, impossible to say how far our knowledge of what had happened here gave birth to such thoughts. It is merely significant that we all experienced them. One visualised rows of bandaged and groaning men, stretched on the straw or crawling about with awkward, incoherent motions, like mutilated insects. The vaulting seemed to retain the echoes of cries and curses. Openings showed where the Germans had sent incendiary shells to burn their own wounded.

Such anguish leaves something behind it.

We went about softly — almost on tip-toe. Through the emptiness we experienced a sense of obstacles. We walked carefully so as not to stumble over the shadows that remained.

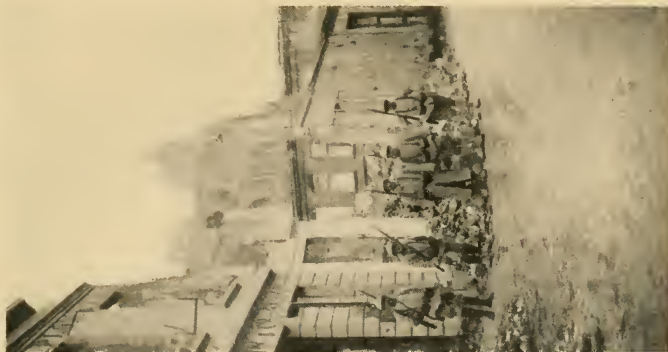
In the Place again we had a moment to appreciate the shattered surroundings of the cathedral. The miracle of the preservation of the statue of Joan of Arc was more impressive. Within the



THE EFFECT OF HEAVY
SHELLS IN RHEIMS



THE NEW AND THE OLD



POILUS BILLETED IN RHEIMS

entire range of our vision it was the only object that had not been violently disturbed. No wonder there were flowers at its base and flags at the pedestal. No wonder the inhabitants had devised a prayer and printed it and placed it on the iron railing at the front. We read it with a thrill.

“Joan of Arc — Pray for us — Bring to France the victory.”

We turned away to be taught under the guidance of our staff officer that the ruin in Rheims isn't limited to the vicinity of the cathedral. We wandered with him through the gardens of the archbishop's palace, staring at the ghosts of that structure nearly as famous as the cathedral itself. Roses were in bloom along the hedges. There seemed a design about their growth in such a place, a mockery of the Prussian spirit of conquest, a reminder of the indestructibility of the soul of beauty.

We wandered sadly through the best residential district of the city. The few houses that were still serviceable were marked with numerals.

“The number of people the cellars will hold,” the officer explained.

While the greater proportion of the population had left or had been killed, those that remained

were quietly illustrative of the extraordinary determination of the French. Two women, met in that mass of the rubbish of homes, remain in my mind.

We had been compelled to leave the automobile. For many blocks we hadn't seen a habitable structure. As we climbed around a corner over a hill of rubbish I heard a feminine cry of surprise. Ahead was a house which by comparison had suffered slightly. The glass had been replaced by boards. The front door could not be closed. Countless pieces of shell had scarred the exterior. A young woman leant from the upper story. The surprise in her face at seeing civilians here matched our amazement at the sight of her graceful figure in such surroundings. We stopped and chatted with her.

"You live here?"

"But certainly. Why not?"

"You have a great deal of courage."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It is my home, is it not?" she said. "Enough is left of it, so I stay at home."

"And the shells?"

She laughed.

"The shells! They follow one anyway, and there isn't much to bring them here now."

Farther on in a less damaged quarter a little

old woman, wearing the universal black, came up and spoke to the staff officer. A basket was slung over her arm. Evidently she was going marketing.

“Pardon me, Monsieur le Capitain,” she said, “I am a little confused. The hour of the bombardment remains the same? The Rue de la — is safe at this hour?”

We smiled, but the captain, who was accustomed to such queries, replied seriously:

“The hour is unchanged, but I wouldn’t advise madame. The Rue de la — is likely to be unpleasant at any time.”

She shrugged her shoulders — that invariable gesture that has acquired a quality of renunciation.

“It makes no difference. Another route will do as well. One must order one’s life according to the clock of the shells.”

And she wandered away, her basket resting comfortably in the crook of her elbow.

CHAPTER VIII

THE AMAZING GARDEN

IT was in Champagne that I accomplished for the first time the much desired experience of entering the front line trenches. Such an excursion isn't without its discomforts. We started on a dull afternoon, clothed for rain and mud of which we had been warned we would find plenty. The officers and soldiers with us were ominously silent. We drove swiftly. We commenced to hear cannon. When it was necessary to sound the automobile horn the driver was cautious, and the discreet response gave us a feeling of danger. Already we wondered how individuals, not unlike ourselves, ordered their lives amid such dangers and discomforts.

A famous novelist was with me. He spoke no French, and he was considered of such importance that a member of the Chamber of Deputies who knew his language had been assigned to accompany him.

While the voice of the cannon grew angrier we entered a deserted and shell torn village. Barbed wire filled the gardens. It was stretched across

the streets, so that we had to zig-zag a course through. The shattered walls were pierced for rifle and machine guns.

"It won't do to go any farther with the cars," the staff officer said. "The entrance to the communication trench isn't far."

My curiosity increased. I wanted to know exactly what the entrance to a communication trench was like. I fancied that the pictures again would be wrong, and so they were.

We were walking, I remember, along a sidewalk in the shelter of some ruined walls. The sidewalk had a stone curb. Then I understood. The curb line ran level straight ahead, but a portion of the sidewalk, perhaps two feet wide, next to the curb, sloped gently downwards. In a moment we were walking shoulder high in an excavation such as one observes about unruly gas mains. Abruptly we were in the communication line.

The next thing was to know when one was for the first time under fire. The trench stretched diagonally across level fields. It was higher than one's head. It was impossible to see anything except the white mud through which one slipped, and the grass overhanging the edges. The guns were a great deal louder. The officer raised himself cautiously above the bank. I followed his

example. There was a railroad embankment ahead, some queer whitish furrows in the distance. One heard curious little gusts of wind.

"When will we be under fire?" I asked.

The officer grinned.

"Don't get up too high. We have been under fire ever since we left the automobiles. Listen!"

One of the gusts of wind had a sharper sound.

"Shells," he said.

I experienced a sensation of nakedness. I was glad when he said:

"We'd better get down."

We walked on through apparently endless lines of trenches with a glimpse at a turning, perhaps, of a bit of brick wall in the shelter of which poilus improvised a meal. In all directions lines branched from the communication we followed. Each was labelled. It was like a hidden city whose inhabitants carried an air of constant expectancy. Covered with mud these creatures slipped by us from time to time.

"How are things in the front line?" our officer would ask.

"Fairly quiet," was the almost invariable reply.

"It is the rain," the officer explained to us.

Yet it wasn't quiet in the language of any other war. The roar of the guns seemed continuously closer. No minute passed without a number of

detonations, and the gusts of wind had a more menacing volubility.

At every turning we found a machine gun emplacement. Directly in front of it was suspended, at approximately the height of a man, a great globe twined of barbed wire, ready to be lowered in the event of an enemy invasion of the trench.

“While they are getting rid of that,” our officer said, “the machine gun attends to their little affair.”

We came to trenches marked:

· “Boyau de la deuxième ligne.”

The poilus we met didn't speak above a whisper. We were aware of an empty road winding along the surface of the earth. A flight of steps led upward. It was nearly barred by a huge sign which forbade pedestrians to use the road under the severest penalties.

“You mean to say,” I asked, “that soldiers have to be threatened from that exposed place?”

“The communication trench, as you can see,” he answered, “is very warm. The men prefer comfort and the German fire. We were losing too many through such foolishness. Even now it is difficult on a warm day to keep them in the communication lines.”

We passed frequent broad flights of steps.

“The units leave that way for an attack or a sortie,” our officer explained casually.

We glanced at these stairways of death with a vague discomfort, an inability quite to comprehend, and hurried on. We paused before a narrower flight.

“We are just behind the first line,” our guide explained. “Now I am going to show you something.”

We followed him up the steps into the most amazing garden any of us, I think, had ever seen.

It was hidden on one side by a half-destroyed building, on two others by brick walls, pierced for defence, on the fourth by a low structure which, from a distance, looked as if it might have something to do with the scientific raising of chickens.

We entered through the archway of the half-destroyed building. Every one spoke in whispers. Cabbages, artichokes, haricots — such vegetables as a Frenchman enjoys — stretched in neat rows.

“Sometimes they get a trifle too much ploughing,” the officer laughed softly. “The Germans, I should think, are not neat farmers, but here they do their work unasked.”

We had not, it developed, been brought to see the garden, but its owner and his home. We approached the building which was like a chicken house. It was less than one story high, and the

white earth of the country had been firmly packed over its roof.

We went down a flight of steps into a corridor, half subterranean, lined with concrete, from which four doors opened into four long, narrow cells roofed with steel arches, painted white. This, we were told, was the headquarters of that sector. The room to the right was occupied by telephone operators. Next was the commandant's apartment, furnished with a cot bed, a bureau, a wash-hand-stand, and a chair or two. Touches as homely as the garden were photographs of a woman and two children. Even in these lifeless pictures the faces seemed watchful, apprehensive.

The room next door, occupied by the majors, was much the same, but in the cell at the end of the passage there was a variation. No one had to tell us for what purpose this shelter was used. The sickly ether odour welcomed us. A crucifix was suspended above a bed improvised from three stained mattresses piled one atop the other. A brown blanket covered it. It, too, was stained with black, wide splotches.

"Poste de Secours," the officer said. "A first aid post, directly at the front, yet thoroughly protected."

The light entered reluctantly. The melancholy of the crucifix oppressed us. As we climbed to

the surface again, a small procession crossed the peaceful garden. Through the stooping, slow-paced files we saw a still form on a stretcher. It was covered with a stained blanket.

We turned gladly to follow our guide through the archway and down another flight of steps deep beneath the surface. We emerged into a tunnel-like room crowded with switchboards before which soldier operators sat, smoking and calling into the transmitters. The wires strayed across the ceiling like the web of a gigantic spider. We were told that from this protected cave one could communicate with any portion of the front or with the *etat major*. From it radiated black passages designed to furnish shelter for hundreds of men. We were permitted only a minute to explore these with a candle, for other plans had been made for us.

“I am going to show you an artillery observation post,” the officer said, “if you are not afraid. You will please not speak above a whisper or make any unnecessary noise.”

We went at his heels down one of the dark passages.

The only light was an occasional flash from the officer's lamp. He paused at the base of a perpendicular ladder which rose beyond the roof

through a narrow shaft until it was lost in the darkness.

"Here we are," the officer said. "You can go up — if you are not afraid."

Now that we were actually at the front that chilling question had become habitual with him. It was possible to do this or that — if we were not afraid.

Such a formula must have its ritual answer. Through the darkness we murmured our delight.

While I waited my turn at the ladder a patrol stumbled near, flashed his light on a telephone instrument against the wall, then went close and took down the receiver. I heard him reporting to headquarters.

"Very quiet — Oh, four or five casualties. Sending them back. No, no. Nothing at all. Everything is very peaceable."

He snapped off his light, hung up the receiver, and stumbled away, continuing his routine.

It was my turn. I commenced to climb the ladder while the water dripped with a perpetual animosity. The succession of rungs seemed endless. Certainly we would emerge at some high point with a prospect magnificent and extended; but such a post, it occurred to one, must, to an extent, be exposed. I tried to calculate how high I was already. Then far above light gleamed.

The officer had opened a trap door. With muttered warnings to avoid a misstep he helped us through into what might have been a little shelter, roughly constructed and too low, arranged on the summit of some lofty monument. Openings on each side were curtained by dark canvas flaps. The officer closed the trap door. He unfastened the flap in front and raised it.

“Look,” he whispered. “Our trenches and the Boche!”

But the first thing we saw was grass, and we couldn't understand. Then it came to us. After that climb we were at the level of the ground. The officer smiled.

“But there is a little ridge here and one can see very well. It is necessary to enter that way in order that the enemy may have no suspicion.”

For a long time we stared across the slowly waving grass at the routine of war. Not many yards ahead of us was a deep wide fosse. At intervals blue-overcoated forms, holding rifles extended across the parapet, were like statues. A hundred yards beyond them white mounds straggled a parallel course. The interval was a jungle of weeds and barbed wire. A few skeleton trees in the distance stretched their branches in gestures of protest. Poppies, scarlet and significant against the white soil and the dun vegetation,

drooped everywhere, even in the jungle of No-Man's Land. There are so many poppies this year in the war zone! They are like great drops of blood.

The perpetual sighing as of wind overhead was accented now and then by tearing screams. The officer looked about uneasily.

"They feel all over the landscape with their shells for these observation posts," he said.

He indicated the row of sentinels in the trench just ahead.

"Besides, I am going to take you now to the very front line."

He glanced at us curiously. His face was enigmatic.

"And, perhaps — if you are not afraid — even beyond."

CHAPTER IX

BETWEEN THE LINES

WE descended, wondering what the officer had meant. It had not occurred to me that I could go beyond the front line, nor was I quite sure I wished such a privilege to develop.

We slipped from a covered communication into a chalky wet space between the parapet and a shell-gouged railroad embankment. In the lee of the embankment blue-clothed soldiers shivered, seeking what shelter there was. Our little party broke the monotony for them. They straightened, and, smiling, spoke to each other with voices that were never audible to us. They were like a party of men playing a game of hide-and-seek, exuding a breathless excitement at the imminence of discovery.

A line captain consulted with our staff officer. His desire to be hospitable shone in his round and pleasant face. The staff man came forward.

"The captain," he said, "wants to do something for you."

We were appreciative and curious.

"He says," the staff man went on, "that it is a very quiet day because of the constant rain."

Coming in, as I have said, I had noticed that no moment went by without shell explosions. As we talked we could hear the whining of shells overhead, and at intervals a number would shriek too close for comfort. You saw heads duck automatically. On such a quiet day we didn't want the captain to put himself out too much to do something for us. We asked what his plan was.

"He suggests," the staff man said, "that it might be possible to take you to a listening post in No-Man's Land — if you are not afraid. You are not afraid?"

To that formula which had grown well-worn we gave the customary reply. Moreover, it was an opportunity permitted to few civilians. So in a solemn file we followed him and the line captain past a dug-out, labelled, after the fashion of a summer cottage, "Villa de Venus." We climbed a flight of steps to the platform against the parapet where the sentinels stood.

"Of course," the staff man said, "if you go we can't promise there won't be a shell or a hand grenade."

We made indifferent gestures. We looked at each other suspiciously. There were no signals of retreat.

The famous neutral novelist had large and dreamy eyes. More than once I had questioned if he fully understood the conditions amid which he walked. He wore a long black cloak, buttoned to the throat. It had been warm work coming through the communication line, and now at the top of the steps he unbuttoned his cloak, throwing the flaps over his shoulders. A group of soldiers near by scattered, laughing silently. Our conductors started, gave the familiar renunciatory shrug, then continued with an air of hesitation. The flaps of the famous novelist's cloak were lined with vividest scarlet.

It was convenient to let him trudge ahead with the hospitable captain. As we passed, sentinels snickered behind their hands and edged away.

"Why don't you tell him to take it off?" I asked the staff man.

"He's too distinguished," the officer replied. "I'll guarantee the captain will make him walk low through the sap."

We watched the captain motion to the novelist, then stoop and disappear. As we came up we saw the opening of a narrow sap that led at right angles from the main trench into No-Man's Land. Ahead the scarlet cloak led the way. We followed at a discreet distance.

Soldiers have written and talked a good deal

about listening posts, yet like nearly everything else at the front the actual thing was unlike one's preconceived notion. The shallow, unfinished appearance of the sap advertised it as a temporary work that could be abandoned at any time the German fire should make it wise. Crouched as I was, strands of the overlapping barbed wire caught at my hat, and the weeds, evidently encouraged to mask the narrow ditch, brushed against my face. The cut debouched into a small square pocket where a solitary figure rested, motionless and sombre. His rifle barrel protruded through the grass. A box of cartridges lay on a dirt shelf to his left, and, convenient to his right hand on another shelf, was a wicker basket such as old women use for their knitting. It was filled with corrugated black objects, the shape and the size of pears. They were hand grenades.

This further proof that we were actually between the lines and within hand grenade throwing distance of the Germans warned us to take our places one by one in the pocket with our guide and the sentinel as stealthily as if we were afraid of awaking a light sleeper. And we looked with all our eyes, for we knew we were seeing one of the riskiest and most unpleasant details of trench work. Here a man watches alone, listening for

enemy miners, alert for the first sign of activity from the opposite trench, not many yards away. As every one knows, it isn't simple to be brave when one is alone. At the front you conceive a thorough admiration for the men who assume the strain and the solitude of such assignments.

Our guide was still inclined to hospitality. He produced a map of the enemy trenches made from air photographs. Each trench was labelled. There was, I remember, the "Boyau Unter den Linden," the "Boyau Bethmann-Hollweg," the "Boyau Bismarck," and many others according to the play of French humour. I was instructed to peer through openings in the grass and the wire at the nearby mounds of white, wet earth that marked the German trenches.

"That communication coming up is the Boyau Unter den Linden. Can you see it?"

Thoughtlessly I answered:

"I am not quite sure. No. I don't see it."

The hospitable captain made a gesture of disappointment, a peculiar clicking sound with his tongue.

"You should see," he said. "It is very interesting. What can I do? Ah, yes. There is another listening post a little nearer the Boches to which it might be possible to penetrate. You would see better there. You are not afraid?"



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A LISTENING POST



So I followed him back to the main trench and crouched along another sap to a pocket whose occupant clearly disapproved of our presence.

Through the grass and wire the confusion of trenches appeared much the same, but when the captain asked me if I could now see the Boyau Unter den Linden I replied without hesitation:

“Perfectly. It is surprisingly distinct.”

Nor did I keep him in suspense about the other objects he pointed out. I recognised all the boyaus with a miraculous ease. So eventually we stole back to healthier regions, both very much pleased. We were all glad enough to thank our host, and commence the return journey.

That was halted almost at the start while we studied a picture that at the time seemed better than anything I saw at the French front to symbolise the waste and the distortion of war.

For background there was the main street of a ruined village almost directly behind the first line trenches. The street made a slight arc between walls which for the most part gave only a sketchy illusion of habitation. Many of them were unsupported, offering views through eyeless windows of emptiness and desolation. Here and there a building maintained a semblance of completeness. Its doors might have gone, its windows have dis-

appeared save for jagged pieces of glass, its roof have been pierced by shells, but by very contrast it was serviceable. From one such survival slipped with a sickly stealth the odour of ether. It was a first aid post whose attendants worked under risks nearly as great as those of the men in the front line. The cold and brutal agony it housed reflected itself in the scarred brick wall and the tile roof from which the rain dripped with a suggestion of inexhaustible mourning. It was good to turn to another structure from which a savoury scent emerged joyously.

At the end of the curving street a tower arose. Even above the debris of the town it presented an abhorrent spectacle. That was because it was the skeleton of a church. Like a mutilated sentry it seemed engaged in the pitiful occupation of guarding that which was no longer worth the trouble. Shells shrieked overhead, and through the heavy air the gross petulance of the guns continued uninterrupted.

Poilus strolled against that background. They were a little wraith-like in their damp blue uniforms. They carried out of the cook house tin pails from which fragrant steam arose, or beneath their arms they hugged great round loaves of bread. As they went they laughed or talked silently. One by one they disappeared back of

the shattered walls or into burrows beneath the earth.

The commander of that sector stood in the middle of the street with a number of his officers. He glanced at the picture which must have become too familiar to him.

"There was hand to hand fighting in each of these houses," he said, "but it was worth it, for it brought one more village back to France."

He pointed to the devastation. He sighed.

"The last village."

"And how," an officer asked, "would they like villages like this in America? Is it possible there is a country which isn't full of villages like this? In such a country they can't understand. They can't understand."

The clouds grew a little thicker. The light faded. It seemed as if the whole world must be like this. These men appeared to know in the past or the future no mode of life beyond this. Stern-faced, physically contented, unafraid, they had an air of guaranteeing the redemption of those familiar fields ahead which reluctantly sheltered the invader beneath a sullen sky.

The officer was right. Even now it is hard to understand such things in America.

CHAPTER X

WITH THE BRITISH IN FLANDERS

I RECEIVED the coveted invitation to visit the British front the morning after my return to Paris from Champagne. The provost marshal started me adventurously enough. I was to report to the landing officer at one of the great seaport bases the next day at one o'clock — daylight saving time. That variation of an hour confused everything.

“You can only make it by the military train at 11:40 to-night,” he said. “You’ll have twelve nice sleepless hours for a journey that ought to take four or five. Then war is never convenient. Good-bye, good luck, and cling to your headquarters pass.”

At half past eleven the façade of the Gare du Nord with its staring yellow clock was sufficiently forbidding. There were no hurrying crowds, no babel of voices, no porters. A gendarme, unreservedly surprised at the presence of a civilian, trundled my bag through. The great shed, inadequately lighted, had an unfamiliar air. A single train of low and antique carriages stretched



“ONE MORE VILLAGE BACK TO FRANCE”

to the north until it was lost in a darkness relieved only by red and green signal lamps, close to the ground, vague in a slight mist, like will-o'-the-wisps.

No one reached the quay without a catechism from the soldiers and gendarmes at the barriers. A khaki clad figure stood with the others — the first Tommy — the extreme rear-guard of the British lines.

He grinned, struggling with what he conceived to be the American idiom.

“Give my regards to the boys —”

The train, crowded with poilus and officers, threatened to be insufferably stuffy. Therefore, until the last moment, I paced up and down the murky platform, hearing subdued voices which chanted popular army airs, oppressed by the wailing notes of an accordeon. Through an open window I had a glimpse of the player. His eyes were upraised. His face was dull with mental pain. His hands on the accordeon swayed apart and came together with slow, caressing gestures. His companions, in dirty blue overcoats, sat facing each other on parallel benches beneath a dim light. They swayed unconsciously in rhythm with the music, muttering inaudibly snatches of words. Eyes and ears were challenged by a sense of despair nearly voluptuous.

I paced on, made very sad, very lonely by this haggard playing, by the instinctive response drawn from its hearers.

A squad of soldiers, solemn and weary, tramped down the platform. Bent beneath full knapsacks, they shuffled along, clinging to the butts of their rifles with an air of reaching out for help. Suddenly with tired motions they swung into a ragged platoon formation and waited dumbly for the command to break ranks.

A thick and unreal atmosphere invaded the melancholy shed. These fatigued and over-burdened figures; the crouched forms in the dusk of the third class carriages; the persistent, following lament of the accordeon; the vapours curling about the few lamps, like dying moons, high in the roof, all welded themselves into a conception of the exotic — of more than that — of the barbaric, of a helpless and primitive fatalism. This could not be Paris. These stooped and soiled figures, sent forth for killing, many of them for death, could not be educated, reasoning men. Then, close by, an officer breathed the word "Verdun," and the unreality dissipated. The picture assumed harder, surer lines. It had grown cold in the shed.

There were four officers in my compartment.

Two others climbed from the platform and lounged in the meagre corridor. It was one of these who had spoken of Verdun. He had, it developed, been there. He sketched his incoherent recollections of its deadly turmoil. He broke off, glancing up with an abrupt reluctance.

“Without doubt you recall so and so?”

The other nodded.

“You may have heard. A piece of one of those high explosive shells — a great fragment, all ragged —”

No dismay at the intelligence, scarcely surprise. From the darkness beyond the shed the locomotive whistle shrieked. That sound alone fitted because it was comparable with the sudden grief of a woman.

The train crawled into the obscurity, writhing through the yards like a gigantic reptile. The two officers moved away. In the close, dim carriage we curled ourselves in corners and tried to sleep. But it was difficult not to watch these uniformed figures, outstretched in awkward attitudes which mimicked the appearance of human refuse on a battlefield. Moreover, the train constantly halted. At each station a stocky little fellow would open his eyes, spring up, crash the window down, and demand at the top of his lungs

if he had reached his destination. Finally an elderly officer stirred and asked with an accent of pity:

“Don't you know, my friend, that you've still twenty miles to go? On this train that should permit you several days' complete rest. Sleep well.”

After that we were quieter and dozed. One by one the officers gathered their baggage and left. The last clambered sleepily out in a grudging dawn at the first large English base. It was clear enough after that that we were behind the British lines. British faces, British khaki, British methods filled the frames of the windows.

At country stations hospital trains lay on sidings, ready to receive from temporary hospitals and ambulances their grim and scarlet freight. Their drab sides were relieved only by red crosses in white squares. But in each car clusters of field flowers splashed colour. The wide plate glass windows were open to the air. Orderlies in white jackets moved about the beds which were slung where the seats had been.

An aeroplane, a swallow-like speck, appeared to the right, flying in our direction. It came up rapidly until its lines were silhouetted against the sky in the east. The track curved. The war 'plane glided gracefully after us. I was on my

feet, about to reach for two sandwiches I had stuffed in my raincoat before leaving Paris. They ceased to interest. Officers stood in the corridor, gazing tensely from the window. Those who boast they can identify war 'planes are invariably uncertain at such a moment.

"Is it a Boche?"

"If it is, he's sure to drop his card on us."

"This train isn't such an easy hit. Hello!"

Conversation became general in the carriages. Some one laughed. Without warning the machine had swooped downwards and had disappeared behind the trees. Those dry sandwiches drew glances of envy.

Before they were eaten the line swung towards the sea, and with the first sparkling of water came the sheen of innumerable tents. This coast, remembered as a mecca of holiday makers, had become a vast encampment for Kitchener's volunteers — the men destined soon to be brought up for the great squeeze.

To the right in a field which rolled broadly towards green and treeless hills several companies of infantry seemed at some incomprehensible game. A hundred yards in front of them stood a series of posts between which cumbersome sacks depended at approximately the height of a man. The arrangement suggested the tackling dummies

one sees on a football field during early fall practice. Then I commenced to understand, for other sacks, equally fat, sprawled on the ground. The soldiers themselves illustrated the rest. Released by the flashing of an officer's cane, they dashed precipitately forward, assaulting the contrivance with their bayonets. Some lowered their points and pinioned the prone sacks. Others chose those representing standing men. Steel gleamed, ripped through canvas, emerged on the other side, and was withdrawn with quick, twisting motions. The sea rolled in with an exceptional placidity beneath a smiling sun. A clean wind blew across the dunes and the fields. But it was clear that these new soldiers saw nothing, felt nothing, beyond the sacks, inert and pig-like, at which they rehearsed with a frantic obstinacy the killing of men.

Farther on practice trenches scarred the sands or were in process of construction. A minute efficiency appeared to have been brought to the training in attack and defence of these men who recently had stood behind counters, or bent over desks, or, perhaps, tilled peacefully such fields as these.

The train drew up before the station of a fairly large town — in the legendary days, a summer resort. Two youthful and attractive Red Cross

nurses entered the compartment. A sub officer, fresh-faced, slender, typical, had come to see them off. They smiled back at him with an attempt at brightness. He didn't quite hide a slight nervousness, an expression in his eyes sadly prophetic.

One of the girls spoke impulsively.

"I *am* sorry you are going up to the front."

He glanced away, tapping at his shoe with his walking stick.

"Stupid, isn't it? And just when I'm beginning to know and like the people here."

Certainly he meant that. It wasn't the familiar English emotional screen, for he followed it at once with:

"I wonder what will get me up there?"

It was symptomatic of a vital evolution in the Englishman who has experienced this war. I have seen many examples since. Such a shift of psychology seemed more important to the Allied cause than the rehearsal of a bayonet charge I had recently witnessed. Nor was there any attempt on the part of the young nurses to shirk the hard facts.

"At any rate you can choose your own hospital," one of them suggested.

The officer's petulant striking at his boot continued.

"Wish I was sure of that," he said, "but I

fancy they send you where it's most convenient."

I looked at him again, straight and unafraid in spite of the prophetic dulness of his eyes. So much youth, so many possibilities tossed among the chances of a war in which death is simple and kind! It was impossible not to forecast, not to question if he was to be the destination some days hence of a bullet or a shell fragment, or a gas attack, or a flash of this improved liquid flame.

To walk into that sort of thing for an indefinite period with your eyes open! No wonder they've largely given over shirking the hard facts in France.

Something lingering, wistful, nearly sentimental, coloured the farewell of one of the women. There was, it appeared, romance here. Some concession from her was to be expected, yet, when the train had started, when he had dropped to the platform after clinging perilously to the step until the last possible moment, she turned to the window with a sigh.

"Poor fellow!"

It was scarcely more than an echo of the sigh!

"I wonder. Oh, dear! I wonder."

No tears, no comfort, from the other woman, no further allusion to him — only an anxious dis-

cussion as to whether they would be in time for the English boat. It seemed rather cruel. Then I remembered the hard facts. These women during many months had worked in hospitals sheltering wounds unbearable merely to see. They had watched young men go forth not to return. They had helped others back to a mutilated, useless existence. The romance in Flanders isn't the old romance. It is there, nevertheless. It is greater than the old romance because it is definable only in terms of undisciplined truth.

Such fugitive experiences are always impressive in the war zone. I, too, carried from that sunlit station a sharp regret. The momentary glimpse of this young soldier had left a sense of acquaintanceship. It seemed incredible there should be no renewal, no knowledge by and by of the resolution of his future which then had appeared so brief and futile.

Those poor girls didn't catch their boat for England. We puffed into the noisy, dusty seaport base an hour late. An excitable porter scooped up my bag and piled it on a truck with their luggage. Before I could stop him he was careering drunkenly along the docks at their flying heels. The military landing officer rescued us. He was sympathetic with the nurses. He promised me an hour for a bath and a noon breakfast before

the arrival of the transport with the rest of the party for the front.

Later, while we waited for the boat, he chatted amiably.

"I'm one Englishman," he smiled, "who knows you don't hunt Indians or shoot buffalos on Fifth Avenue. Several years ago somebody tried to show me all of New York in three days. I'm still convalescent."

He indicated two grey cars rolling down the quay driven by young men in khaki. An officer sprang from the tonneau of one and hurried forward. He was introduced as a staff captain from headquarters who would be my cicerone for the next few days. The anonymity of this war extends even to such a companionship. Captain Williams, to use some name then, was sympathetic about my presence there at such an hour. It sketched for him that interminable journey by night. He would have waited for me. So at once I was made to feel welcome and at home. The English don't ask many to see what they are accomplishing in Flanders, but when you are there they reserve little. They never give you a feeling of intrusion.

Two transports came in to-day. As they made fast to the quay one saw that the decks were cluttered with life-preservers. Some men still strug-

gled from that suggestive embrace. For on these transports every one is compelled to wear a life-belt from port to port.

They commenced to troop off — Tommies, sub-alterns, and generals. It seemed fantastic so many human beings could be crowded into these little boats. There were no smiles on the sun-burned faces. Men coming to Flanders for the first time or returning after leave don't smile easily, but when a boat goes forth for the chalk cliffs of England even the menace of submarines can't kill a breathless gaiety.

Williams collected our party — a man from the foreign office and two Japanese, one straight and slender with a face of a Samurai type, the other short and round with a gentle, nervous manner of speech.

During luncheon in the maritime station Williams outlined his plans. That afternoon we were to see interesting but not dangerous places. Later we might learn the vital mechanism of army service and ordnance. If we wanted to go, he would take us to the front line trenches. We could visit Arras — possibly Notre Dame de Lorette, and other notorious points of the fighting line which for the present must share the general anonymity.

That programme was carried through, and we

saw, I fancy, a little more of war than any one intended. Therefore, the interest of our first afternoon was heightened in retrospect by the peace we were not to know again during this trip.

CHAPTER XI

HOSPITALS AND HEADQUARTERS

FIRST of all we drove to a temporary hospital on the cliffs. The adjective had prepared us for a comfortless and hastily thrown together affair. Instead we found another monument to that admirable efficiency which the English, since the commencement of the war, have developed at the cost of a multitude of traditional fetiches.

Grass plots and flower beds flourished. There was a net work of macadam roads put in by the Royal Engineers. Only one or two of the revered marquee tents survived; for, no matter how the satirist of British tradition may sneer, experience dictates everything in Kitchener's army, and long, narrow wooden buildings of one story have proved themselves more serviceable, more adaptable to cleanliness, and, curiously, less expensive, than the tents which served for field hospitals during so many wars.

A colonel of the medical corps greeted us, offering to direct our exploration.

"Each one of these huts," he said, "is a ward."

The name drew a laugh of surprise.

"Anything," he laughed back, "that we put up of wood in the war zone is christened 'hut.' Don't know how it started, but it's easy to say, and everybody knows what it means."

He opened a door. The long building, filled with a pallid green light from the curtained windows, stretched away in an interminable vista of suffering. Above the beds, set in a double row at right angles to the walls, were arranged odd contrivances of wood, reminiscent of cotton looms. They gave the ward an appearance of a factory whose activity has been suddenly arrested. Then gradually from the mesh of posts and beams drawn faces detached themselves, the stumps of limbs protruded. The faces watched us curiously while the surgeon led us down the aisle, pointing out the elaborate system of weights and pulleys, arranged on the wooden frames to take the strain from injured legs and arms. Some poor devils lay on their backs with both legs and both arms in the slings.

"Several of these frames have been used before," the surgeon said with a little pride. "Others — this one, for instance — have been invented here since the beginning of the war."

He braced his hand against the wood and leant over the patient beneath.

"You tell us what you think of it, Jock."

The soldier grinned. Evidently he progressed, and forecasted a sound escape. He moved his bandaged limbs to show us how beautifully the machinery responded.

"And it doesna hurt much," he said, "and a man can move about a little and go twist like on his side. Watch, sirs."

He did it — a trick as difficult, doubtless, as a contortionist's masterpiece, and conquered with heaven knows what agony secreted behind the features suddenly stripped of their grin.

Certainly one should be grateful for that much. When one has suffered for eight months it must be pleasant to move a little and to go twist like on one's side.

But across the aisle was slung one of those tragic stumps, and the face beyond it was sunken and feverish, and the eyes could not conceal a despairing restlessness.

The surgeon spoke to the man gently, asking him how it went.

"A good deal of fever," the mutilated fellow answered dully, "but all right, I guess."

It became clear that he didn't care, that for him the future held no energetic lure. The horrible stump of scarcely healed flesh quivered in the sling. His eyes closed. We didn't want to

see a man's grief for himself, so we hurried on. It was necessary to call upon a bleak cynicism, equal to the surgeon's; to recall that the most likely end for the youth of Europe is a room like this, or else a common grave, or a resting place unblanketed even by the friendly earth.

In another ward we saw above the bed-clothes of the end cot a young face, square, thick-lipped, a little animal-like.

"A prisoner," the surgeon explained with a smile. "We were afraid we were going to lose him, but he's coming right enough now, and he likes it here. He's a great favourite with the nurses."

The German did, indeed, have an air of contentment, but he glanced at the Tommies in the neighbouring beds, at the pleasant, quiet nurses, at the surgeon who had pulled him through, and his expression held a great question, as if he would ask why he had been commanded to strafe such friendly and lovable people.

We drove across the plateau to a convalescent camp.

The commandant, an elderly grey-haired man in a colonel's uniform, welcomed us for the moment into his official family. He was really like that — a paternal type — a father with a gigantic

brood of children; and the grounds of his camp were his front yard and his fields. Immediately he boasted a little as the heads of thrifty households do. He reckoned pridefully what he expected to get for his crop of hay — much more than last year, so just that much more for the government, for even here efficiency was a deity. It expressed itself in the sight of his brood, working at their own trades, remaking shoes, converting jam and butter tins into pails and sprinklers and gasolene funnels, seeing that no smallest piece of rough material went wholly to waste.

He made us gasp at the sight of that extraordinary process of feeding the British soldier. Assuredly it must be a painful scandal to the German.

It was only a little before tea time, and in the dining hut long deal tables were neatly arranged with plates, cups, and saucers, with huge loaves of bread between, and bowls of jam and butter and cheese. On serving tables arose pyramids of egg cups. The colonel with his air of a thoughtful parent indicated these.

“Any boy that wants it,” he said, “can have a boiled egg with his tea. And look here, if you like.”

He took us into a kitchen as wide as a barn and as clean as a dairy. Pails of tea cooled, sharpen-

ing our own appetites. Splendid rashers of bacon had been brought from the storehouse for to-morrow's breakfast, and legs of lamb beyond counting for to-morrow's dinner. And I've learned since that there was nothing exceptional here. Tommy fights on such food unless his supplies are cut off by an unexpected bombardment, or, in an attack, he is caught for the night ahead of his transport.

The colonel grinned.

"Now and then they complain if they don't get just the type of cheese or jam they're accustomed to. But that sort of thing's looked after."

We followed him breathlessly to a hollow of the grounds where a hut stood reminiscent of the Y. M. C. A. shacks I had seen in Panama during the construction of the canal. The colonel verified that hazard. There is, he told me, a chain of these behind the front, furnished according to the familiar pattern with a store at one end, a billiard table at the other, and often a miniature stage for concerts and amateur theatricals.

"So," he said, "if a boy gets hungry or doesn't like what we give him up there he drops in and buys some chocolate or a cup of tea or coffee and maybe a handful of biscuits."

Somebody ventured the opinion that over-eat-

ing can be as deadly as bullets. The colonel remained placid.

“When you work as hard as these boys do, you get awfully healthy, and you need lots of food. Besides, when you’re going into battle you don’t worry much about your liver.”

Here — and in this respect the camp may be taken as conformable with the ordinary cantonment — the Y. M. C. A. had no monopoly of recreation work. There were two other huts, one furnished by the government, the other endowed by individuals.

There was a garden about this last where two young women, gloved and wearing rough straw hats, toiled with rake and hoe. We paused and, following the colonel’s lead, chatted for some moments about their potatoes and beans and cabbages. As we walked on the colonel laughed a little.

“You know that very handsome young girl with the rake is Lady So and So. The war is changing things rather, don’t you think?”

That admitted no dispute. As I have indicated, its truth is everywhere impressed upon one. The war is changing things rather. Lady So and So has forgotten the interval that formerly gaped between her and Tommy So and So. The hard

facts have really levelled that. The presence of death, its constant threat — for even here the lady and the Tommy are equally subject to an aeroplane bomb or an unlovely Zeppelin attack — make one's recollection of such social rifts a little abashed. And that's the best thing that can be said for this war, the finest thing that can survive it. The individual has learned largely to seek his own level, holding within easy reach a universal and attainable goal.

In this very camp a soldier pointed out a working example. The three recreation huts sift the men into an instinctive classification.

"In one," the soldier said, "you can toss your fags on the floor, lift your feet on the tables, and shout your blooming head off, if you please. In the second maybe ash trays don't grow, but the floor's the place for feet, and shouting's not tolerated. The third, over there, is a regular little club where you behave like a gentleman, and read the papers and magazines, and improve your mind."

He glanced at his neatly brushed uniform.

"I like that place, and it's funny. Most of the men after they've been here a while drift up that way. Anybody likes to be respectable if he gets the chance."

Our party entered the officers' mess for tea and

sat down, blessing the Army Service Corps for all it had placed before us. In the confusion names had been lost, but in addition to the medical officers there were two men whose khaki carried the black facings of the church. The chaplain next to me, tall, slender, a little grey-haired, had spent a good deal of time in America. We discovered common friends. We asked each other's names. Since his is a *nom de plume* perhaps the censor will let it through.

"If you would know of me at all," he said modestly, "it would be as G. A. Birmingham."

The thought of those rollicking Irish stories and plays made his presence here seem an injustice. It gave the lie again to the so-called British apathy. It was one more example of how every social and intellectual class is feeding this monster of war.

While we talked some one produced Harry Lauder on the gramophone, a hymn or two, and a waltz. Williams closed the entertainment with the announcement that we had a forty mile drive to General Headquarters ahead of us.

One goes rapidly in these military cars. There is no speed limit outside of villages where transport parks, cavalry, or billets make it necessary. In each of these, sturdy men whose khaki carried a black sleeve band with M. P. in red, stepped out

and regulated our passage with the assurance of a London bobby at Oxford Circus. Where the traffic was congested and diverse, staff officers and Tommies, truck drivers and airmen bowed with an equal meekness to the mandates of these calm, stern creatures. Yet the military policemen have never once seemed in key with the disorder of war. It is hard to appreciate that such clockwork detail makes that vast disorder possible at all.

For long stretches the drive might have been a pleasure jaunt. A black and yellow board at a crossroads, pointing the route to a Belgian field hospital, was a momentary reminder. The long road, lined with poplars or lime trees, bisected a highly cultivated countryside. Our entrance even into one of the two general headquarters towns that have replaced Saint Omer since the extension of the British line, had nothing to offer of the panoply of war. A brook rippled beneath an ancient bridge. Grey stone houses, half hidden among trees, terraced a steep hillside. A gothic church tower raised its sharp silhouette against a sky already sprinkled with gold.

“This is one half of the heart of the British army.”

Williams' words sounded like a joke in bad taste. Yet the other headquarters town a little farther on was equally rural, quite as picturesque.

In the sleepy buildings officers worked at desks, disturbed by the roar of cannon only when an unusually heavy bombardment conspired with a favourable wind. You pictured Sir Douglas Haig, even farther removed, in an isolated château, seated in a somnolent library, the cradle of every detail of routine and death. Peace at headquarters and horror at the front, but not an ounce of glamour left in war anywhere!

Our own home shared the restfulness of the headquarters villages. We came upon it for the first time on the edge of this golden sunset. Far at the end of an avenue of huge and symmetrical trees stood the red and white façade of a château. Two time-stained gate houses were outposts. A clock stared from the top story, justifying Williams' hurry.

Two dogs ran around the corner, greeting us excitedly. Military servants took our bags. I was led into a comfortable room, and stared from its broad windows at a great park, bounded by evergreens and elms. I saw a sun dial in the centre. Magpies flew with a gentle rustling of wings among the trees. It was difficult any longer to believe in the reason for this visit. And it was always like that at the château. To be sure staff officers came to dine with us each night, and we talked continually of war, for to discuss shop isn't

bad taste in the British army any longer. But the impulse to all this chatter seemed far removed from the dining-room and the quiet movements of the servants. One might talk just so in London or New York. From the first it wasn't reasonable that less than forty miles away lay that open wound in the body of civilisation which we had come to probe.

It was brought nearer as we started for bed the night of our arrival. Williams appeared then with an armful of khaki-coloured bags, slung from straps. He handed one to each of us.

"These are gas masks," he said seriously. "On no account forget them to-morrow."

With an assumed indifference one wanted to know what kind of gas the Germans were using.

"An improved variety," Williams answered.

He lighted a cigarette.

"If you get the alarm," he went on between puffs, "hold your breath until you put your masks on, because three whiffs of this new stuff is certain death, and it isn't a pretty way to go either."

Even with such a prompting utter weariness won't let you dream of war.

CHAPTER XII

UNDER FIRE IN A FLAT LAND

AFTER an early breakfast we started for a point of the line already sufficiently historical, but not to be mentioned here. We glanced regretfully at the château as the cars scurried up the avenue. Williams was with me, and, following his advice, I examined the workings of my gas mask. It was designed to cover the head completely and to be buttoned into one's coat collar. In the brown cloth goggles were fastened. Beneath them a wooden tube with an elastic band was to be taken between the lips for outbreathing. Through the chemical soaked meshes of the cloth itself sufficient air filtered for breathing in. It was an unlovely, uncomfortable, and odorous contrivance. We were careful to keep ours slung over our shoulders as Williams carried his, as every officer and man near the fighting line carried one. The necessity for such a precaution revolted your sense of decency, aroused a sort of anger.

We hurried through the dew-soaked morning,

still a trifle misty, and always there were significant pointers to measure our progress towards the front. Beside the grey lines of old churches modern automobile trucks were drawn up, out of place, grotesque, nearly laughable. We passed many on the road, forging ahead beneath giant loads with a noisy stubbornness. In one village, side by side with a crowded, loquacious native market, stood a travelling motor repair shop. Inside a huge truck machinery whirred and grimy men busied themselves making whole the parts of many smaller trucks clustering around like a lot of patient animals. We had had trouble with our ignition, so we paused and asked for a new spark plug. The uniformed mechanic waited only to know the model of our car. A moment later he was back with what we wanted.

We dashed on towards the trenches with a breathless haste. We had to reduce our speed to pass a long line of lancers, trotting beneath the trees, raising the dust higher than their waving pennons. Everywhere was evidence of the approach of a great squeeze.

"Then they'll use cavalry again!" some one exulted.

The appearance of the villages altered. In each one now khaki clad forms swarmed. Bronzed faces looked at us interestedly. Beside

the entrance of each house and yard a sign had been painted. It might be: "Billets for fifteen men," or "Officers' billets," or "Stabling for ten horses." Restful legends for troops fresh from the trenches. And we didn't have to be told that these men were not of the class in training. The lines of their faces, their air of confidence and pride, marked them for veterans. We were getting very close.

It is a curious fact that always on approaching the front line you experience a sense of reluctance mixed with a desire to accomplish just that from which you shrink. It is possible at one moment to resent each turning of the wheels, and the next to wonder at your good-fortune in travelling in such a direction at all. But long before you reach your goal you are aware of that strain which makes it wise to send men back to billets, and all that day the strain grows and colours the days ahead less alluringly.

Our nearness was apparent when, beneath a bland sun which had routed the mist, we swung into a road along a poplar-bordered canal. A sullen roar, exactly like the distant explosion of a giant cracker on the Fourth of July, disturbed the peace of water and shrubbery. For a moment it deadened the songs of birds. It made it seem natural we should sweep past barges, painted

white and stained with huge red crosses. It rendered quite superfluous Williams' explanation that the wounded who suffer too harshly for ambulance or train are carried in these craft smoothly to the sea and the hospital ship for England. Its repetition, its constant recurrence now, sketched a morbid picture, blurred with smoke — a sort of hell to which men go before they die.

We entered a large village and drew up before the headquarters of a division general. With the stopping of the engines the cannon chorus grew throatier, as if warning us back in a titanic fury. Williams got out.

"I'm going in to report," he said, "and to find out, if I can, what the Huns are up to. I don't want to get you fellows strafed if I can help it."

We sat in the cars, listening to the ugly roar while we studied this nerve centre of the fighting system.

The headquarters was a large brick château, set across a wide and pleasant yard. On the high verendah a group of officers lounged, smoking and with puzzled faces appearing to listen, too. Sentries paced swiftly up and down before the steps. From a wooden shack at one side a brass horn, like an automobile signal, seemed perpetually ready to scream. Any doubt as to its pur-

pose was resolved by a large sign on a house across the street.

“ Gas Post.”

Our driver exposed a friendly intelligence.

“ Men caught in the street by an alarm go to one of these posts and await instructions. We don't take any chances with gas. A few days ago there was a high wind, and people in villages ten miles back of the line were slightly affected.”

Williams came out, looking rather sober. A bright young officer from the headquarters followed him. They climbed in and we twisted out of the village on to a road that crossed open fields. One guessed that it was in view of the German artillery, but we hurried along it towards a hamlet above which a shattered church tower was like a storm-swept beacon. The roar of great guns, no longer muffled by trees and houses, was tinglingly louder.

“ What does it mean? ” some one asked.

Williams didn't answer. The division officer, whose face also was a trifle perplexed, said:

“ Just a little hymn of hate.”

Suddenly he pointed.

“ I say! The Huns have got a sausage up.”

Above the tree-divided fields, seemingly quite close, an observation balloon, the shape of a sausage, indeed, floated at an angle. Two or

three aeroplanes, with the appearance of gigantic, butterflies, drifted lazily about in the sunlight.

"That means business," the division officer said.

You experienced a shutting off of all the wider future. You were merely grateful to get off that naked road and among the trees of the village. When the engines were stopped again at brigade headquarters the roar of the guns was perpetual and close, and torn now and then by heavier explosions. Clearly there was something ahead more exciting than Champagne or Lorraine had offered.

A brigade officer, a charming fellow with red hair and freckles, came out, shook hands, and announced that he was to be our guide for the trenches. He shared the general seriousness.

"I see you have your gas masks," he said to me, "but you'll want helmets."

He waited as if for a reply. It was necessary to say something.

"Yes, thanks. It would add a little to the romance."

No matter what impression you make on other people at the front you have no illusions about yourself.

At a word from him an orderly brought a cluster of round, flat steel hats.

"They're good for protection against small shell fragments," our guide offered.

He grinned.

"They wouldn't stop a forty-two, you know. You've been to the French front? What do you think of their helmets. Both types are good, I guess."

It served. Under fire any trivial topic, once started, is worn threadbare.

It seemed strange that this town, which the Germans must have known as a feeding place for the trenches, wasn't under constant bombardment. As we drove off the brigade officer shifted from steel hats.

"They've a town like this just beyond their lines. If they throw a shell in here we retaliate, and vice versa. So for the most part it's hands off. Since they knocked the church tower about they've been pretty good, but, of course, it's likely to come at any moment."

That contingency ceased to interest, for already we were among the fields again, not immune like the town, and on this side, nearer the enemy, ruined farm houses and ragged trees scarred the landscape.

Suddenly the officer bent towards the driver and whispered. With a startled locking of wheels the car stopped, then turned around, while the driver

with jerky motions signalled the other car back. All at once there was a noticeable tenseness about the uniformed men with us. For some distance we scurried the way we had come. We took a turn around a smashed farm house in the direction of the trenches. Beyond such signs of wreckage, beyond the rising clamour of the guns, there was something about that flat country, basking in the sun, that meant danger. We were in the heart of a vast army, yet, except for ourselves, there was no human being to be seen. It occurred to you then — an interminable uproar in an empty place! The ground seemed to writhe beneath it. The devastated landscape had an earthquake appearance at which the bland sun mocked.

I shouted, asking why we had made that startled turn, why we had chosen this new road.

“Because,” the brigade officer answered, “the Huns are strafing the road I had planned to take. I thought when we started their sausage looked a little close. This seemed safer.”

But was it? It was obvious that the observers in the balloon, if they looked our way, could see us crossing the level fields. But our dash was brief. We drew up at a crossroads, marked by the unusual blasted house. An officer and a soldier sprang from behind the ruin, their gas masks striking against their hips as they hurried towards



IN THE TOWNS UNDER BOMBARDMENT

us. The officer's face, beneath his steel helmet, was troubled and disapproving. He hit at an automobile tire with his cane.

"Get those cars away from here," he commanded shortly. "This crossroads is a nice place for shells this morning."

Several craters near by were sufficient testimony, so we clambered out, and, at Williams' direction, threw our hats in the cars, put on the steel helmets, and made sure that our gas masks were safe. We followed our guide around the ruin while the cars with an air of flight dashed away.

The brigade officer led me down a lane which offered scarcely more cover than the road. The others followed in a straggling line. My guide glanced back, nodding approvingly.

"We're a less tempting target that way," he said.

I looked ahead. Fully a mile away, at the end of the lane, arose another ruined wall — the nearest shelter from the eyes in that distorted balloon. It assumed the remoteness and the desirability of an explorer's goal. Then more than the confusing roar of gun fire pointed its distance. Overhead shells commenced to scream, and as we walked on, that evil sound came oftener and grew louder, until it, too, was near and perpetual.

Sometimes it was only a querulous whine. Sometimes it was like the hurtling of a great sky-rocket. Now and then, because of calibre and proximity, it reminded one of a racing automobile with all its exhausts open, streaking past within a few feet, yet unseen because of some obstruction.

And you looked up, expecting to see the source of that hideous sound. Each steel scream, from its whining commencement, through its crashing climax to a series of receding ululations, was a matter of seconds. Something must be outlined up there against the sun. But always there was nothing, and you walked on, wondering how men could dwell perpetually in such a racket, and you were taught immediately that there are irritants for a soldier's nerves infinitely harder to bear.

Rat-tat-tat-tat.

It cut, apparently close at hand, under the curtain roar of cannon fire. Rat-tat-tat-tat for long periods, a momentary cessation, then a recommencement. It suggested a woodpecker, gigantic and restless. It is the sulkiest and the most abominable sound of this war — a perpetual reminder that machine guns can spray more death and wounds than shell fire. You can't be sure of the source or direction of machine gun fire. It may be after a number of targets, including your-

self. The red-headed brigade officer, experienced in such estimates, walked a little faster and hesitated before answering my question.

"I daresay they've seen a couple of our men coming up with a water cart."

You felt a swift sympathy for those men, a desire to know if the soldiers for whom they had started would have to wait for water, but sharp fire begets selfishness, and just then shells began to drop in the field to our right. The sound of a number of screams did not diminish. They ended instead in fat, puffy explosions, and in the cloudless sky, clouds, snow white and beautiful, were born.

"Shrapnel!" the officer muttered. "What are they after?"

From the rear came Williams' voice.

"What do the Huns think they're strafing out here?"

And above the roar another anxious query:

"Can they see us from their sausage?"

Before any one could answer four roars at intervals of less than a second heralded four formidable detonations, and not far in the field four sable strains belched apparently from the grass and were drawn by the wind into ugly and impenetrable curtains. The fancy of an earthquake landscape was strengthened, for about these sudden

eruptions was the monstrous fortuitousness of nature.

A map that the officer had commenced to unfold was for the moment forgotten. Strangely it was possible to express curiosity, as if these things passed on a cinema screen.

"I suppose they're high explosives."

The ruddy head nodded.

Four more shells hurtled into the field, but only three volcanoes joined the black pall against the sky.

"Hello! A dud!"

The cause of his satisfaction, the meaning of that word, were apparent. Somewhere in the field lay a shell, from the supposedly perfect German ammunition factories, which had failed to explode.

Others came too close for a civilian's comfort. We glanced at each jetty curtain. We studied the innumerable craters on the road. Doubtless, we all wondered if another would be formed too near at hand.

One experienced, even if one made no visible concession to the strain, a reluctance of the mind to grasp or hold details. One recalled with difficulty incidents only a few minutes past. In short, it had become necessary to drive the memory to its task. From officers and men I have learned

that this closing of the mind to everything except the immediate future is nearly universal. For it they express a rather pitiful gratitude.

So we walked on, and nothing came too close.

We reached the goal of the shattered wall and took breath for a moment behind it. A straight highway receded between torn trees. On a split sign-board a name was decipherable, familiar to any one who has motored through Belgium and northern France. There were shell craters in every direction. The machine guns had resumed their hateful petulance. We knew that the communication trench must be near. No one asked. It was easier for the moment not to talk.

The brigade officer folded his map and thrust it in his pocket. He led us around the wall and into a screen of bushes from which a narrow passage sloped downwards. We descended only a little way, to find the walls artificially raised.

"That's the worst of trench digging in this blessed bog," the officer said. "Go down two feet and you strike water. Trench walls have to be raised like these. They're a lot easier knocked over by shell fire, too."

We had no criticism to offer of the communication line. To be sure, its close sides admitted none of the pleasant breeze, and those steel helmets were demanding the price of their pro-

tection. They bound one's temples. Constantly perspiration rolled from beneath the brim into one's eyes. But I had never dreamed what a friendly place a communication trench could be. It was good to touch the yellow walls, supported by rattan work, to know that a shell would have to make a direct hit to limit our progress now. Here and there, as a matter of fact, there were breaches in the walls, but for a little while the crying in the sky was mournful rather than angry, and the explosions were muffled and farther away.

We circled a number of the usual traverses and machine gun emplacements, but the trench was surprisingly short. It scarcely gave us time to smile at Tommy's fancy, expressed on neat signboards at the junctions. These had, it appeared, the official stamp, for our guide spoke of such thoroughfares as Oxford Street, Kingsway, and the Strand, as if he had been conducting us through the peaceful racket of London. The Strand went straight to our destination, and we emerged from it into a wide plaza, terminated opposite by a parapet of interlaced logs and sand bags. A few silent figures, with rifles through loopholes, braced themselves there. We walked with an air of stealth. When we spoke our voices were lower. We were in the front line.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DAY'S WORK OF LIFE AND DEATH AT THE FRONT

FREQUENT traverses, of the same construction as the parapet, stretched at right angles to protect the men as far as possible from shell and grenade fragments and from the enfilading fire of machine guns. We were to learn the wisdom of that precaution before long.

A trench officer strolled around the end of a traverse. He wore a uniform of the same quality as his men's, for the hard facts have been realised here, too, and officers no longer expose themselves contemptuously or in bursts of foolhardy bravery. The German sniper has a little difficulty now in distinguishing officers from men. This fellow with his round helmet had an oriental appearance. He came up, greeting us gratefully. We evidently broke the monotony of his watch. In his eyes was something of the universal strain, but he spoke easily, asking the question that had spoiled our walk and troubled us all.

“What were the Huns strafing back there?”

The fact that we couldn't tell him pointed the

vagueness that surrounds everything for the individual in this war. Out here men even die with a certain vagueness.

"How are things with you?" Williams asked.

"Fairly quiet," the newcomer answered, "just now."

He glanced quickly around as if expectant of something. We walked on with him, subdued by the gun roar and the constant sight of those armed figures, braced against the parapet, peering through loop-holes, quite motionless, yet expectant, too.

Openings to dug-outs made black patches against the sorrel earth at the base of the parapet. The men at the parapet were sentinels. The larger part of the command must lurk in these holes. I entered one. Three forms, quite the colour of the earth on which they lay, crowded a tiny cave. Their log-like sleep suggested the cultivation of a log-like mental attitude or the deliberate encouragement of a fatigue beyond the dispute of nerves.

"What about the rats?" some one asked the trench officer as I emerged. "See any rats down there? At home they say the rats are so bad they actually eat the soldiers' faces."

The trench officer spread his hands.

"I can only speak for my own men," he said.

“ Most of them, when the rats begin to eat them alive, wake up and say, ‘ Shoo.’ ”

There has, perhaps, been as much written about vermin as bullets. Momentarily the subject clung — probably because it kept us from looking too far ahead. It is impossible to exaggerate the bullets. We began to suspect that imagination had played with the other, for these men were fairly clean. While their uniforms were marked with last night's mud and whitened with this morning's dust, they required no more radical antidote than a brisk brushing. Trenches are dirty and uncomfortable, but I couldn't see here such disorder of body and clothing as is observable among any gang of labourers engaged in excavation work.

“ Conditions,” the trench officer said, “ are naturally better than during the winter and early spring, but experience as well as the weather has got something to do with it.”

“ What about the activities of certain unpleasant small life? ”

He paused. Across the plaza we saw a few groups under non-commissioned officers, twining those deadly globes of barbed wire, invented by the French, for the blocking of communication trenches. Others worked with trowel and cement at machine gun emplacements. Some

made repairs where an ugly lack of uniformity in the parapet recorded the entrance of a recent shell.

"Those chaps don't look particularly fidgety, do they?" he asked. "If our little companions have largely left us it's because shorter periods in the trenches, compulsory baths, and a complete change of clothing once a week have made us less enticing for them, and a lot fonder of ourselves."

A harder burst of firing directed his glance towards the parapet. We crowded at his heels in the direction of a periscope.

"Their sausage is keeping them busy this morning," he said over his shoulder. "By the way, any of you fellows heard news of Blank?"

The freckled face of the brigade officer darkened. Williams wanted to know what about Blank.

"Went up in one of our balloons yesterday," the trench officer answered. "A lucky shrapnel shot cut the cord and we could see him from here drifting over the trenches while the Huns shot their heads off."

"I heard this morning," the brigade officer said, "that somebody had seen him cut loose his parachute."

"Not much chance that way," Williams mused.

"The anti-air guns would get him sure. He'd have dropped in their lines anyway."

"Nice chap, Blank," the brigade officer muttered. "We've been hoping for news all morning."

The trench officer put his eye to the periscope.

"I wondered," he said.

After a time he looked up.

"Perhaps you'd like to see the Hun trenches. If you raised your head above the parapet you'd make good practice for one of their snipers. Try this."

In the glass at the base of the periscope appeared a forest of posts rising from a jungle of grass and barbed wire. Beyond, very close at hand, lines of yellow dirt and sand bags zig-zagged across the landscape, curving towards us to the right and left. A trifle puzzled, I glanced back at the British trench walls and saw that to either side they fell away before these sudden swoops of the enemy's lines. We were, it appeared, in the apex of a small triangle, and subject consequently to attack from three sides. Phrases skimmed in the official reports flashed back with a new eloquence. I understood quite thoroughly now the meaning of, "We straightened a small salient to-day." The trench officer grinned.

"That's our line," he said, "great salients and small ones. Little fellows like this breed local trouble. Only comfort is, it's as bad for the Huns as it is for us."

He drew from his pocket a narrow cylinder, not unlike a small telescope.

"It's a hand periscope," he explained, "rather useful thing — magnifies a bit. Want to try it? Put the end over the parapet and squint in the eye hole. That's the notion."

The ugly yellow ridges seemed closer. The waving grass was more distinct and larger. There was no use looking too carefully because of the sinister souvenirs of night attacks and patrol work the grass in No-Man's Land nearly always harbours.

But the ridges fascinated. They were like furrows ploughed by a drunken giant. They offered no evidence of the multitude of men they sheltered; yet, if it hadn't been for the gun roar, we might have called across to them without raising our voices particularly. We could picture a routine within their hollows similar to our own. But at any moment a trivial variation over there might send death stalking close to us —

"How far are they?" I asked.

"Something less than a hundred yards, I should say, from here to their front line."

He shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"You know, they're not bad at potting periscopes."

At that distance they could recognise this mahogany cylinder for an officer's periscope. Just then a machine gun jibed at the heavier roar. Rat-tat-tat-tat — spraying death as a garden hose sprays water. I glanced up at the top of the periscope to see if it trembled.

"I say, that thing was a Christmas present. Move it about a bit."

He seemed relieved to have it back again. The machine gun subsided.

"Might give them some of that back," he said, pointing to a group squatting on heels about a sergeant.

"The hornets seem stirred up enough this morning," one of the others offered.

We joined the group and found in the midst of it a machine gun whose mysteries the sergeant explained with the deportment of an old-fashioned schoolmaster. He was glad to have fresh scholars. He opened and closed the breach. He inserted a belt of cartridges. He commenced to run it through. The trench officer stooped.

"Throw that safety block back!"

The sergeant obeyed with an aggrieved air,

while mutely we thanked the officer for preventing his drawing any unusual attention to that particular traverse.

In place of a practical demonstration, then, the sergeant pressed with both thumbs on a steel plate. The cartridges swirled through, flashed into the breach, and out through the escape-ment.

"As long as I keeps pressin' down on this plate," he said, "she keeps spittin', and somebody don't like it. The water in the jacket boils when she's spittin' hard. You have to watch out for that."

Evidently we showed a little distaste for the brutal perfection of the thing. He was a trifle offended, I think, at our haste to leave his class. Around the next traverse we ran into another scholarly group. A flimsy tripod stood on the trench floor. One of the Japanese, who had observed without saying much, was aroused to a question.

"It will interest you," the officer said. "It's one of the things with which we make ourselves most scandalously miserable in the trenches."

Behind his banter was a wistful seriousness which you understood as he went on.

"It's for throwing rifle grenades."

He picked up a black, pear-shaped object which

differed from the ordinary hand grenade in just one particular. A long slender steel rod protruded from one end.

The hand grenade, it was explained, was satisfactory enough when the trenches were within throwing distance, or for a swift dash across No-Man's Land and a retreat through the night, but there were many hours of daylight in a place like this when it wasn't wise to let the other fellow feel too much at ease.

He passed the grenade around, cautioning us not to release the safety pin.

"The usual pattern," he said with a reminiscent frown. "When you draw the pin the spring flies back and fires the fuse. If you don't throw it then there's general hades. Maybe you've heard. A couple days ago in a bombing school a new man was standing by the instruction officer who was showing him how to release the spring and throw. The soldier had drawn the pin, and, as new men do now and then, got a sudden touch of panic. The instructor shouted at him:

"'Throw that thing away, man! For God's sake, throw it away!'

"Poor devil! You see in his anxiety about the other he'd quite forgotten he'd drawn the pin in his own grenade."

He ended with an exclamatory gesture. Wil-

liams stroked the corrugated surface of the grenade.

“Not so large, yet one of these things will do in a score of men.”

The trench officer took it from him and slipped the end of the rod through the apex of the tripod. A soldier, whose bent attitude was suggestive of worship of the toy-like affair, placed a blank cartridge in a tube at the base. The officer lowered the rod against the cartridge. The soldier stooped closer, manipulating a graded quadrant.

“Range is correct, sir, to drop it straight into their trench.”

Williams started to speak. The brigade officer laughed.

“No, thank you. Our friends over there are jumpy this morning. They’d send a few back in our direction.”

What happened then had the blind irony of chance. It was, indeed, that slight variation of which I had thought a few minutes before. From a point not far ahead came a sharp crack, barely audible and lost at once in the general uproar. Williams seemed inclined to hold us back, but we went on after a few minutes. As we turned the corner of a traverse we saw a quiet form outstretched.

Already some one had flung a blanket over face

and shoulders. Five minutes ago that form must have been alert at sentinel duty on the parapet. Now some one had taken his place, and he lay, exactly the colour of the clay, except for his boots. They were too black, too heavy, the stillest things you have ever seen. Feet held so ought to twitch occasionally. There was an appeal about the multitude of studs on the soles, designed to keep that man, who would never do anything again, from slipping.

We knew why he lay there. A grenade had come in from just such a machine as we had been inspecting. He lay there in order that the other fellow shouldn't feel too much at ease. And how many more lay like him the length of the trenches that morning with studded boots outstretched in a sickening stolidity!

We walked neither slower nor faster. We didn't vary our talk about the catapult we had just seen, about the further clever tricks of trench warfare designed to keep the other fellow from feeling too much at ease. I remember Williams mentioned the whiz-bang — too jocular a name for a shell that drops in and performs multiple explosions — and the trench mortar which tumbles a huge and awkward ball on the opposite parapet, where it either kills directly or buries men alive because of the blasting explosive it carries.

Two thousand casualties, they told me, in this division since December, while the enemy opposite had suffered probably a good deal more, and all from this process of keeping the other fellow from feeling too much at ease.

"I can remember," Williams said as we walked along, "when the sight of a dead man stirred me up most unhappily. Now I don't pay much attention. You can't. Understand? You simply can't."

You can't and keep on at war. That explained, too, probably, the astonishing ease with which one learns to like or dislike men at the front. You can form a thorough-going friendship in a day. That's because a man realises his opportunities may be limited.

Other officers greeted us and walked a little with our party, chatting above the noise of guns. In London I had seen soldiers leave Charing Cross with the trench stains still on their uniforms. They had seemed a little mythical. Out here at their daily task they were quite human, as if the whole world were like this, as if it had never been cleaner or kinder, as if it could never change. So we strolled on, answering to that expectancy which lurked in every one's eyes, not sure that beyond each traverse some sudden and monstrous surprise wasn't waiting for us. I was glad to see

a new man smile as he pointed to the entrance of an officer's dug-out.

"Like a peep at the palace?"

The pride behind his smile was perplexing. We followed him down half a dozen steps into a small chamber of an uncommon neatness. The walls were boarded and adorned with racy pictures torn from a French weekly. There was, moreover, a cot bed, a deal table, and a stove.

Foreseeing at least a general, we searched for him in the dusk of the corners. Two young subalterns, however, alone greeted us, and we recalled that generals don't go to the trenches if their staffs can keep them out. Some one congratulated the subalterns on their stove.

One of the youths patted it as if it had been a pet.

"It *is* a comfort on a cold morning, and it's often quite cold even this time of year."

He, too, let slip a little of that prideful air. We chorused a demand for its source. The man who had brought us in waved his hand.

"You see, when he was on this front, this was the home for several nights of the Prince of Wales."

In a mournful tone a hope was expressed that during those days the racy pictures of scantily draped femininity had not decorated the walls.

One of the subalterns with a meek air accepted the responsibility. We went out, smiling but more convinced than before of the dynamic democracy of this struggle, for there was nothing of the palace about that dug-out. It was not, as we define such things, even comfortable. It was, we found, almost next door to a kitchen. I ventured in there, on my hands and knees, because of the meagre opening. A soldier, bent double as I was, in the shallow, smothering chamber, grinned a welcome. He brushed the perspiration from his face and lifted the covers from three camp kettles beneath which coals glowed. Bully beef steamed appetizingly. Low shelves were filled with such bread and jams and tins as I had seen at the convalescent camp. The cook waited, quite apparently for some congratulatory comment.

"This looks pretty good. And it smells good."

The wet, grinning face broadened.

"I hear mighty little grumbling."

The usual culinary pride in a place like this! If we could have carried it from the firing line that meal wouldn't have offended any of us.

As I backed out I caught the brigade officer's cheery voice.

"Maybe you'd like to see one of the few men

out here who doesn't worry much about his dinner."

We nodded, a trifle mystified; so, cautioning us not to raise our voices, he led us into a protruding section of the trench and beckoned a corporal who was clumsily sewing a rent in his uniform. We waited in front of a dirty brown canvas curtain which veiled a portion of the face of the parapet perhaps six feet wide and three high.

"It's a sniper's post," Williams whispered.

The corporal knew what we wanted. Without words he slowly lifted the dirty canvas, disclosing a nest in the parapet cased with steel plates. A stout young soldier crouched in the heat and the darkness of that place. He swung around as if grateful for the light and the air. His face was wetter than the cook's, but he turned back, replacing his eye at a small loop-hole in the front wall.

"Wait a minute, Owen," the corporal muttered.

The round, young face studied us again.

"What's your bag this week?" the corporal went on.

The sniper's lips opened, showing teeth. The grin coloured his tone.

"My bag? Ten periscopes and five Huns."

Death is such an impersonal thing nowadays.

His pleasure seemed scarcely more out of keeping than if he had spoken of rabbits.

"Pass out the boy that did it," the corporal said.

The grin failed. The rifle was offered reluctantly. While we glanced through the telescopic sights the sniper remained crouched, as if ready to spring upon us if we took any liberties with his treasure. He didn't relax until he had his gun in his hands again. Then he dragged it in front of him and turned away. He was exactly like a child whose favourite toy seems threatened by the incomprehensible curiosity of a grown-up. He uncovered a hole large enough for the sighting of a rifle.

"Not so fast," the corporal warned.

And to us he apologised.

"The Huns are pretty sharp at this game, too. With the curtain up they might put a lucky shot through that hole into one of you."

He dropped the dirty canvas and rubbed his hands. He was as proud of Owen as Owen had been of his rifle. Why not? Five Huns! First and last I have heard a good deal of argument as to the value of this sniping. That did seem a good bag for one man. As a rule, however, some of the French argue such work makes the Germans too wary. It is more profitable,

they think, to encourage carelessness, to foster a sense of security until men gather in gossiping groups. Then a shell from a seventy-five at close range bags more in a second than a week of sniping will drop. The Germans too, I understand, are divided as to which method produces the better result. Either way it also is designed to keep the other fellow from feeling too much at his ease.

CHAPTER XIV

THE APPALLING MINES

WE walked on, discussing this and forgetting the most Gargantuan and terrible practice of all. A serious-faced subaltern, standing with his elbow braced against the corner of a traverse reminded us. At a distance he had an unusual appearance. As we came up we saw it was because of the degraded state of his uniform — worse than any private's we had seen. Yet it wasn't the familiar yellow mud that stained the brown cloth, that had dried on his cheeks and hands. This man was nearly blue from head to foot.

“Where is there blue mud around here?” we asked.

Something of the subaltern's haggard expression was reflected in Williams' eyes.

“Blue mud?” he repeated. “There!”

We could see now, behind the stained man, a heap of bluish, shiny soil from which water still oozed, running blue and shallow across the floor of the trench. Blue mud! Blue water!

Williams introduced the subaltern to us. He

made a wry face and tried to rub the muck from his fingers before shaking hands. He glanced doubtfully at Williams, who drew him aside, speaking quietly. He nodded.

“If you wish,” he said.

With a stealth greater than we had exercised at the sniper's post we followed him along a narrow gully whose walls were heaped with the blue stuff, whose floor was a stream.

“Walk carefully,” he said.

It was really difficult, because of the slimy footing, to remain upright. We constantly caught our balance against the yielding soil. Therefore we didn't see at first the grotesque and uncouth figure that crawled from an opening similar to the entrance of a dug-out. You paused, startled by the fancy of a prehistoric creature leaving his lair and sizing you up for defence or attack. From head to foot he was blue and dripping. The mud was in his ears and thick through his matted hair. Before he could rise the officer spoke to him, and he remained squatted in the opening.

“How deep are you?”

You scarcely expected intelligible words to issue from such a creature, but he mentioned an astonishing figure, and went on with rough good-nature:

"I'll climb down with a candle so you can see."

In that narrow hole there was room for only one at a time, and it was necessary to enter as he had started to emerge, on hands and knees.

"Don't slip," he grunted.

In a moment eyes grew a little accustomed to the light. A wooden platform, burdened with pipes, overhung a pit, apparently bottomless.

"The pipes are for to carry off the water," the creature said. "We have to pump almost from the first spadeful, and it's pump, pump, pump, every foot we go down, and, when we get down, every foot we go out."

He struck a match and applied it to a stump of a candle. He swung over the brink, fumbling with his feet for ladder rungs. I heard him scrape down, holding the candle in one hand. His face was no longer visible. His candle was a mere speck. When he called up his voice was muffled and far away.

"We strike out from here."

Yet no sound of tools came up. In almost complete silence that sap was creeping towards the German trenches a hundred yards away. That it might go at all this uncouth creature and many like him were daily accomplishing a task compared with which ordinary ore mining is pure recrea-

tion. He came puffing up the ladder. The sun and the outside air were pleasant.

"How fast do you go?" I asked the subaltern.

It varied, he answered. Sometimes two yards a day. Sometimes more.

"It depends on the soil and the size of the sap. Usually there is room only to work and pass back in baskets the excavated soil."

That, we saw, was raised to the surface and used to strengthen old parapets or to construct new.

We looked at this officer, who was scarcely more than a boy, with unqualified admiration. The fact that all along the line from the sea to the Vosges other men were performing identical tasks, made no difference. His reminder that the Germans were pushing similar saps in our direction, that one might explode beneath our feet at any moment, was rather depressing. But he encouraged us with a smile that cracked the mud on his cheeks.

"I think we have a better system of listening than the Huns. We like to think we can detect their saps here before they get too close."

His easy talk called up a whole gallery of unhappy pictures — men crouched in listening posts, or creeping towards the German trenches at night, from time to time pausing to lie with an ear to

the ground, in constant fear of a star shell which might point them out to a sniper or a waiting machine gun crew. But more compelling was the recollection of that crouched and filthy creature. It was possible to see him stretched in the narrow tunnel, digging away as stealthily as possible the soil in front of him, quite at the mercy of the German listeners, perhaps breaking through into a rival sap-head and fighting murderously in a narrow hole. When a mischance occurs during mine work a burial isn't often necessary or possible.

We walked on after that with some thought for what might be going on beneath our feet. Certainly mining alone is enough to keep the other fellow from feeling too much at his ease. Fancy trying to protect yourself day after day from all the enemy's noisy devices of death, knowing as well that each moment mines are creeping towards you, wondering each moment if your particular section has been chosen, anticipating each moment the crumbling of the earth beneath your feet, a roar, a disintegration as important for you as the end of the world.

It is necessary to visit the front to put life into the dry-as-dust phrases of the official reports. "We exploded a mine and consolidated the crater"—That line carries more horror than the blackest tragedy ever written.

We were glad to follow the brigade officer up a path marked "Sniper's Avenue," which proved to be a communication trench and led us out of the reach of mines. I wonder if we hadn't all counted the hours in the front line. We had, I know, glanced at our watches more frequently than one does at home. I wonder if every soldier who is condemned to the trenches for days doesn't count the hours, the minutes, until he can walk along a communication trench away from the things that keep him from feeling too much at ease.

At a turning where the wall had been broken down a little by a shell we were greeted by two sharp reports like the snapping of a whip. We had an uncomfortable feeling of having been shot at, but surely the noise had been too close.

"Those were probably our snipers," the foreign office man said.

The brigade officer shook his head.

"Huns, I think," he answered shortly. His freckled face lost its good humour. The puzzle concerned us all, but he would say nothing more.

We climbed a little reluctantly from the communication trench to a shell-torn road, but Williams looked over his shoulder.

"They've pulled their sausage down."

The brigade officer glanced at his wrist watch, saying in a matter-of-fact tone:

"About time they knocked off for luncheon."

He laughed as he read the surprise and distaste in our faces.

"Friend Boche is methodical if anything. He usually has his hour for a comfy feed."

It was evident that the fire from the other side had diminished. In desperation some of us took the insufferably hot helmets from our heads. Trusting to our guide's perfect faith in the German schedule, we followed him across a field and were disturbed by nothing more than an occasional shriek from the sky.

"I told the driver," he said to Williams, "to have the cars at Snipers' House."

If ever a name suggested a dramatic incident of stealthy warfare that one did, but, in common with most of the soldiers' christening of landmarks, its origin was clouded; nor, when we had come to it, did it offer any evidence of its own. It was the familiar roofless quadrangle of shell-shattered walls. Whatever its romantic past it was a prosaic rendezvous now for members of the transport service. Near by, a narrow tramway descended to a communication trench and ambled to the front line.

We scurried from the shelter of Snipers' House along the devastated roads to brigade headquarters.

“With their sausage down,” the brigade officer said by way of farewell, “you ought to find the road to division headquarters comfortable enough.”

We did, but we took it in a rush.

The general welcomed us for luncheon in his château. He drew, there's no question, in every one's memory a firm and impressive portrait. Tall, powerful, yet with an easy manner of movement and speech, it was only his iron grey hair that hinted at his real age — about sixty, some one confided. Although he had retired from active service some years before, he had enlisted this entire division, trained it, and commanded it during six months at the front. He was sorry that a corps conference had prevented his seeing us that morning.

That quiet hour, granted us by the German routine, was happily out of key with the rest of the day. Those of the staff who weren't on duty sat with us around an oval table, skilfully laid and served.

“Any news about Blank?”

The general shook his head.

“His balloon fell in our lines,” a captain said.

“It was riddled.”

“Splendid chap,” some one added softly.

Luncheon commenced. There was tactful talk of America, our position in the submarine controversy, our political conventions, the possibility of our entering the war. There was — as always at such gatherings — an undercurrent of wonder, never quite reaching the surface, that we should have found it to our best interests to have held aloof.

I gathered, not particularly from this conversation, rather everywhere in England and France, that a belief had grown since the beginning of the war in our lack of homogeneity. We were, it was suspected, incapable of direct and concerted action. In those days the men who were actually treading the exhausting mill frequently placed upon us — whether justly, who can tell? — the taint of many races, the incoherence of too vast a variety of creeds and desires and antipathies.

The general called my attention to the officer on my other side. He wore the facings of a major. He was small and of a scholarly type, so that it appeared unlikely any extraordinary experiences lurked behind those quiet eyes. A moment later it seemed a miracle he should sit with us at all. Because he had landed with the first expeditionary force under General French, had fought at Mons, had survived that nightmare retreat which had ended with the officers' corps cut to pieces. He

spoke of it quietly, yet with no false hesitation, no careless clouding of the facts. With the rest of them he had learned out here to face facts for what they were worth. He wasn't surprised at our interest. He wasn't bored by our questions.

“ Individually we didn't know much except that we were going back, turning and fighting Huns without end, and slipping out of the net when it got too tight. The men were mad — through and through mad, because it's harder to fight and die on the run than any other way. At night, black and fagged out as we were, we lost rest asking when we were going to turn. After an eternity one evening the word came. The French commander had visited ours. The next morning the stand was to be made, the great battle fought. Tired as we were, we didn't sleep much that night for the relief and the joy of it. And when day dawned the word came to fall back again, and we went with heads down, sullen and ashamed. It lasted for two days more. You can't know. Then the definite stand was made and the push to the Marne and beyond. It was what we had craved, because we were like people caught in a fog.”

Another inevitable question:

“ How, with the German artillery on the hills,

and the bridges down, did you ever cross the Aisne at Soissons?"

The major smiled. His scholarly face was very pleasant when he smiled.

"I rather fancy they set a trap for us there they never had the strength to spring. Probably we were intended to cross to the other side where they expected to fall on us and finish us off. It's obvious, isn't it, when the men crossed in small boats or walked across stringers of which the Huns must have had the exact range?"

"I paddled over," he went on, "with a squad in a row boat. You know, the tiny tub had *Titanic* painted across its bow. Really gave me a start. It seemed an omen — a properly bad one. But, thank heavens, the omen didn't work. That *Titanic* made a safe crossing — didn't get a shell near enough to make us jump."

He poured thick cream over a fruit compote. He ate the mixture with a visible appreciation.

Later he smoked a cigarette with the same air of a sybarite. Clearly, like so many out here, he had learned to draw from each moment its maximum gift.

After luncheon the general led us to a rear verandah overlooking a formal garden in whose shrubbery portable huts nestled for the housing of his staff. But we were chiefly interested in the

fac-simile on a square table of the entire countryside occupied by his division. Each hill was there, each road, each house, each line of sheltering trees, every slightest branch of the German trench system. Even with modern air scouting such minute knowledge of the enemy's position drew exclamations of admiration. He showed us how it was obtained, summoning one of his staff who brought handfuls of aeroplane photographs which he fitted together end to end, side by side, diagonally, with the minute difficulty of a jig-saw puzzle, until it was possible to foresee a complete photograph of the war-scarred countryside. When the officer hesitated too long or put into his puzzle a piece that didn't fit, the general rebuked him gently with the manner of an employer in a business house or a factory. Men are killed and money is made with precisely the same discipline.

"Of course," the general said, "the Huns know just as much about us as we do about them."

He had that hospitable willingness of all the officers I met to answer questions. He even promised to take us later in the afternoon to inspect some of his hidden artillery.

CHAPTER XV

GAS SCHOOL AND THE ARTILLERY

WE went then to be taught how that other enemy, vermin, is defeated, and we all, I think, congratulated ourselves that the rest of the day wasn't likely to hold any serious threat. We were properly paid out for that momentary confidence. We were shown quite clearly how little in the war zone you can look forward from minute to minute.

We drove to an old factory building, now busy manufacturing cleanliness and health. It was crowded with Tommies in from the trenches for their periodic ablution. Community bathing is, and ought to be, a noisy, cheerful affair. These men were oddly silent against the roar of the guns which had re-commenced at the close of the luncheon hour. They climbed an outside staircase, removed their clothing, and threw it to the ground. Underclothes and uniforms were picked up and placed in a disinfecting vat, from which they were passed for scrubbing to an army of French and Belgian women—many of them refugees—on the lower floor. Under the cir-

cumstances this proximity of men and women should have stimulated a laughing volubility, but the stillness down here was violated only by the swishing of cloth against boards and a perpetual drip of water like the ticking of innumerable clocks. In a corner sat a circle of women who inspected and repaired the clothing passed to them from the steam drying room. They were like a group of religeuses to whom the chatter of the world is a thing forgotten.

Upstairs the men splashed in tubs which they filled according to their fancy from alternate vats of hot and cold water. About this cleansing of bare flesh within sound of the cannon there was something providently funereal. It was as if each silent man understood that his self-preparation might be for a shroud.

From a recreation hut near by burst forth the measures of a lively phonograph record, but no feet twitched in rhythm, no voices caught up the words. As we walked on, the lilting phrases made a brave fight against the pervading solemnity until they were smothered beneath the explosions from beyond the village.

A staff officer joined us — a fellow who ought to have been rowing or playing cricket at Oxford. He had the enthusiasm of extreme youth for a scheme he had carried out to entertain the soldiers.

He took us into a wooden shed, furnished with rows of benches, telling us of the trip to Paris he had made to purchase a cinema outfit.

"Every night they come here in hordes," he cried. "The men pay a penny, and the officers a franc. You know, if the war lasts long enough I wouldn't be surprised if we got back the price of the affair."

His enthusiasm made him close the doors and run a reel through the machine. It chanced to be a review of this division by the Queen before its departure for the front. The long rows swung by, and the officers commenced to recognise faces and to talk. There were some we remembered — the general's for instance.

"There goes poor So and So. The Huns did him in with a trench mortar a month ago."

"Hello! There's Jerry — home, minus a leg."

Or, "The men like this thing because they see old friends, that they won't see any other way now, walking along with them."

It was an abominably depressing performance. Something about the mechanism, stuttered. The light flashed out. The screen was dark. Our active showman was full of apologies as he ran stumbling about the stage.

"They ought to take some pictures of us out



A SHATTERED FARM BEHIND THE FIRING LINE

here," a major said. "How about it, Williams? Where are all the official photographers?"

"I saw Billy Jones the other day at the base. Next time I run into him I'll put him on to you fellows."

"Thanks awfully, but they say Billy's a reckless one. Maybe he won't last."

"You fellows deserve pictures. Never mind. That's enough of this ghastly film. We're off to see what Smith's at."

And Smith, found in an old stable crowded with steel cylinders like oxygen tanks, proved to be another boy of college age and appearance. The buttons of his uniform were black, and his fingers were stained.

"It's the gas," he said.

Through the open doorway we saw a sergeant drilling a squad in a field.

"Those chaps are at gas school," he said. "Care to see my curriculum?"

One cause of the remarkable efficiency at the British front was constantly impressed upon us. When the men weren't fighting they were at school. Gas school! We wondered exactly what that could be. So we strolled into the field and stretched ourselves in the pleasant grass like a party lounging on the outskirts of a ball game.

A line of soldiers, with full equipment, faced

us. For a time the sergeant hurried them through conventional evolutions. Then a new manual, born of this war, followed. The sergeant snarled out the commands as if he hated them, as if the words had to overcome a revolt in his throat.

“Put on! — gas — masks!”

The men sprang into clumsy attitudes. They rested their rifles in the crooks of their left arms. They tore open the bags at their right hips. They snatched off their caps and drew the masks over their heads, buttoning the ends into their collars. With a straggling haste they took up their rifles and returned to attention.

One's first impulse was to laugh. The brown faces were featureless save for round, staring goggles. They retained no individuality, no human semblance. These hideous figures might have been visitors from a far planet, or monstrosities escaped from this earth, too violently disturbed. As they walked through squad formations the voices of the file leaders were choked and tongue-tied.

“Halt! Take off — masks!”

The last word had the quality of a shriek, angry and threatening. You glanced at your own mask, responding to the sullen temper with which it had always filled you.

“They're quick,” the instructor boasted.

"Some of the men need scarcely half a minute. It's wise to be quick at that game. Want to see the gas house?"

He led us to a small unpainted shack in the centre of the field. The joints of its doors permitted it to be hermetically sealed. A single cylinder stood in the corner.

"What the deuce is this for?"

The youthful instructor, who ought to have been at a different sort of class himself, smiled.

"It's a splendid institution. I put every man through this at least once. Go in with him, shut the door, and turn on the gas. He knows he's getting it thicker than he ever could in the trenches. When he comes out he's got confidence in his mask. He doesn't go around mooning and scared to death about the next gas attack. It teaches him to know the difference, too, between gas and phosphorous bombs and smoke pots."

We confessed our own need of preparation.

"This new gas," he said, "is terribly hard to see. If it shows at all it is like a slight mist. It's the other way around with phosphorus and smoke pots. Sergeant, bring up some of those bombs."

Again we settled ourselves in the attitudes of spectators at a game. The sergeant came up with a basket, filled with fat candles and tins of

the size and appearance of tomato cans. The officer picked up one, touched his cigarette to a fuse in the end, and tossed it on the grass a few yards away.

"Don't move," he grinned, seeing our startled expressions. "Only enough explosive to set it off well."

The tin puffed like a faulty firecracker and out of it sprang an unbelievable volume of pure white smoke which formed perfect and beautiful curling patterns as it blotted out the lower end of the field. The sergeant threw one or two more and placed candles near by from which vast clouds of smoke, sooty or orange coloured, hissed wickedly. A thick, velvety curtain banded with yellows and whites and blacks was drawn across the field. In its fringes the form of the sergeant was lost now and again.

"The merry villagers," Williams said, "will picture the Huns at their doors."

We heard one or two shouts, indeed, and, as we walked through the drift of smoke, we saw French children squatted on the fence, pointing and laughing and admiring.

"French children aren't easily alarmed," the instructor grinned. "I'll wager they can tell you the calibre of each one of those guns you hear firing over there. They know just what I've been

up to. It's as good for them as stealing a peep at a cricket match."

I had held my breath, walking through the vapour. I asked if the fumes weren't dangerous. He shook his head.

"They sometimes use a smoke curtain to veil a gas attack, and at home I daresay cinema devotees fancy this stuff is gas. It is useful to veil any kind of an attack. Whenever it appears over the trenches it keeps the other fellow guessing."

We shook his stained hand and returned to the cars to keep our rendezvous with the general.

The general's limousine was waiting in front of his headquarters. He came out and climbed in. The cars wound out of the village. With a sense of shock we recognised that road. The shattered beacon of the church tower was straight ahead. We hadn't realised it would be necessary in order to visit the batteries to return to the brigade headquarters village. And there was a change. Instead of the one we had seen that morning, two observation balloons of the enemy were suspended in the sky like monstrous planets visible by day. The drivers responded as if to a signal. The cars jumped ahead along the naked road. The lull of a moment was lost in a sudden rush of sound. Perhaps we had been seen from the balloons and a range signalled. Above the

roaring of guns we heard shells shriek. Overhead puffs of smoke were born. The roar became continuous. Other puffs appeared.

"Look at that!" the driver of the car cried.

The other cars were far ahead. We sprang after them. The wind shrilled past. We tore from the black curtain that had followed a heavy explosion. Jetty sheets waved close at hand. There was nothing to do except to get every ounce of speed out of the cars. There was no point in leaning forward. The cars were like great beetles, scurrying from a foot that tried to crush them.

In a moment we were skidding to the right among the trees of the brigade village. As we reduced speed I saw a number of French civilians run from an estaminet towards the boundaries of the trees. They stood there, gaping at the rolling black smoke.

"Why aren't they hunting a cellar?" I asked.

The driver snickered.

"Those old Frenchmen! You see they live here. The village isn't bombarded much. Some of those shells came pretty close. They don't want a cellar. They want to see why the Huns are strafing so near their front doors. And say, they don't want to miss anything anyway. But they'll be mad to have their appetiser disturbed."

One felt rather sorry for the Germans, because all along they've thought they could scare the French. That's one of their excuses for being horrible.

The incident was a prophylactic for our own apprehension. We were grateful enough to drive up whole to a battery commander's headquarters on the edge of the village. The general stood in the middle of the road, surrounded by anxious officers. Williams drew me aside. He laughed nervously.

"The general," he said, "has been asking if you fellows know you've been under heavy shell-fire. A piece of one of those high explosive shells, he said —"

"I think I know it," I responded meekly.

But that was past. The immediate future was the vital concern.

A ruddy faced colonel walked from the house, as thoroughly disapproving at the sight of the general as the staff men were. He opened with that question which had become altogether too familiar to-day.

"What are the Huns strafing over there?"

The general no more than any one else could answer.

"They seem to be after a lot of things," some one said.

“At any rate,” the general proposed, “these fellows have been strafed so hard to-day I want you to take them out to a battery and give them the pleasure of seeing some strafing back.”

“Run your cars down the road and back of that shed,” the colonel suggested.

“I’ll have to be getting home,” the general said.

The discontent of the staff officers increased, probably at the thought of his returning on that road, but the general smiled, saying good-bye easily. We saw him go with a real regret. We listened anxiously for a fresh burst of firing from that direction until we knew he had had time to reach his headquarters.

The colonel got his walking stick and led us around the house.

“You don’t mind crossing a field?”

Publicly our route was a matter of indifference, but I think we had all had enough of fields. In the open country the twin balloons were like the eyes of an angry god. Certainly it was all of the mile the colonel had mentioned to a farm which showed amazingly few scars. Within a stone’s throw of it the battery nestled in a scanty grove of trees — a row of log and sand bag redoubts which to us appeared to offer no real protection from scouts in aeroplanes. But every battery I saw, every huge gun brought up for a bombard-

ment, seemed dangerously unreserved. Actually a few twigs, scattered bits of green, make an impenetrable veil against the prying airmen.

We opened a wooden door and descended into one of the redoubts. Half a dozen men, scrupulously clean, unlike the trench Tommies, sprang to attention in a circle about the breech of a howitzer. The gun was as clean as its grooms — wickedly beautiful and capable. The colonel muttered orders to a sergeant who nodded to the artillerymen. One lifted a projectile from a compartment in the wall. Others inserted the charge behind it, and a corporal closed the breech. The sergeant entered a cubicle at one side where a desk squatted beneath a telephone instrument. He bent over a piece of paper pinned to the wall, and from it rattled off a series of numbers like a football signal. In response the neat men elevated the gun's great nose with an impudent ease. The sergeant glanced up.

“All ready? Lower your screen.”

A soldier released a cord. From before the mouth of the gun a shrubbery screen fell away with a slight rustling.

The colonel glanced at us.

“Maybe you'd better put your fingers in your ears.”

I noticed that every one in the small chamber

had his mouth open as if gaping at an unforeseen phenomenon. The sergeant's voice for the first time lost its monotony. It made us jump.

"Fire!"

The sleek barrel sprang outward, then staggered back upon itself as the cylinders took up the recoil. The men's mouths snapped shut as they flung back the breech and prepared the gun for another charge. Ears still sang. The air in the redoubt seemed thin and of an odd odour scarcely like burnt powder.

The voice of the foreign office man was no longer vibrant.

"Where did that one go?"

The colonel smiled.

"The range was for a headquarters, so it's safe to say we stirred up a colonel at least."

"Maybe spoiled his tea," the foreign office man said.

"Do the Huns take tea?"

Quickly you tried to trace the result of that shell — its possible immediate destruction, its effect, perhaps, on a far away household where women and children and old men would weep and put on mourning. The absurdity of such an exercise struck you. Certainly the men who had sent shells in our direction that day hadn't troubled to forecast. They were getting back what they had



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A FEW TWIGS, SCATTERED BITS OF GREEN, MAKE AN IMPENETRABLE VEIL
AGAINST THE PRYING AIRMEN

offered to this army. The sense of a personal grievance is a powerful backer for patriotism in keeping men at war — that, and the impossibility, as in this case, of seeing the result of your shilling a day labour. I wondered what these neat, gentlemanly figures would do, what they would say, if they could witness the death and the maiming and the tears sent forth from their clean and remote hands. Close-in fighting, it was clear, had nothing in common with artillery work. A temporary insanity of self-protection and retaliation lets a man look on what he has done without nausea and stark horror. In the faces of many soldiers you see an eventual understanding, an effort to stifle recollection.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BASE

WHATEVER the custom of the Germans, tea wasn't neglected here. After we had visited the other guns we walked, still tingling from the noise, to a hut in which rows of young men sat at a table between lines of cots, laughing and chattering amid a rattle of cups and spoons. A heavily banked bomb-proof was convenient to the entrance.

"And it wouldn't take long to get there," the colonel said grimly.

Two men and a woman stood in the yard of the farm.

"They're not quite so near," I said. "It's like living on a powder magazine."

The colonel nodded.

"They're probably doomed. Sooner or later the Huns will get them. What can we do? We can't move them. Truly the French are a wonderful people."

That is the most persistent phrase of this war. The woman waved her hand gaily, wishing us a safe walk, as we started back across the field.

We paused at the gate of the colonel's cottage, waiting for the others to come up. A subaltern rounded the hedge.

"Where are the others?" the colonel asked irritably.

"Taking it in a long line, sir," the subaltern said. "It seemed safer that way."

The colonel led me into his dining-room, and, while we waited for the others, ordered tea. Across the wall were spread his range charts and his *tir de barrage* plan like an architect's blueprint.

"It makes an absolute curtain of shells on their trenches," he said. "Where's that tea?"

A private with a startled expression left the room, returning with a huge, blue-patterned tea pot. The others straggled in. We sat down and drank, and ate biscuits, and listened to the gun roar, which, even with the approach of night, scarcely diminished. Suddenly the colonel laughed. He fumbled in his desk and found a clipping from one of London's most revered newspapers.

"Seen this, Williams?"

Williams scanned the clipping and passed it on. It was a letter from an officer to his father, reciting a strange ornithological experience in this neighbourhood. During several nights this young

man had, he declared, heard shells whistling over his billet. They had, however, been preceded by no sound of guns. Investigation of the ghostly incident had proved that the shell whistling had come from chickens in the yard. These clever birds had after many months learned to imitate precisely the distant passing of shells.

The colonel finished his tea and lighted a cigar.

"We've devised," he said, "a letter which I fancy the editor will have to print or else acknowledge he's been made a fool of."

He found the letter, put on his glasses, and read it with an air of satisfaction.

The army in this section, it regretted, was seriously affected by loss of sleep. The crickets had acquired a most annoying practice of imitating machine guns. Constantly they disturbed rest by firing an apparent salvo in a man's ear. The squirrels made a noise like approaching whiz-bangs. Worst of all, a big bullfrog in a pool near his headquarters had caught the raucous trick of the gas alarm.

" 'It's a rare night when he doesn't sit on his bank and call us forth with our masks on. So far he has resisted our best snipers.' "

For a moment in the little room our laughter was louder than the gun mutter. Williams left us to telephone somebody, probably about going back

across that naked road. After a long delay word came to him and he said we might leave. We took the road on the run, and through the twilight sped rapidly out of range. When we could no longer see the twin balloons we felt comparatively safe.

The country had a peaceful appearance. As we approached headquarters the sky was grey save for an ugly, dull red splotch in the west. It was like an old blood stain, like a wound in something already dead.

The peace of the château that night was unnatural. From habit we raised our voices. The silence jibed at us.

We drove into one of the great bases the next morning, and there we heard the news. But bigger than the news itself was the manner in which the officers received it. No clearer example of the shift in British psychology could be asked.

A man from the commandant's staff had joined us. We stood in the yard of an ordnance depot. Williams and this man were whispering. Williams' face all at once shared the expression of the other's — something I had appraised at first as a natural surliness. Quickly Williams beckoned me.

"We've had a nasty smack in the eye off the coast of Denmark," one of them said.

It was our first word of the great naval battle, that garbled report that indicated a sweeping German victory. It was what the army in the field got, and the army took it as these men took it, with a sullen anger, a fear only that it might lengthen the war. If anything it strengthened the determination in the young faces. It made one feel what a hopeless task it is to try to discourage this growing British army. But the most arresting element was this new willingness to face the hard facts, to polish nothing for themselves or for the stranger within their gates.

"Sixteen of our ships gone and only one Hun!" the staff man groaned. "It won't sweep us off the seas, by gad, but it's tough."

One questioned if the heavy fire we had experienced the day before hadn't been the German fashion of expressing joy. If that was so such a celebration wouldn't wear itself out all at once. It made the trip we had arranged for Arras even then less inviting. The day's inspection lost its interest. We went about grumbling.

"When can we get a paper?"

We asked every one we met for papers.

"Transport isn't in yet," was the usual reply.

We commenced to ask everybody what time the transport would be in.

Only once that day did the old attitude creep through, and it was properly squelched. We were lunching in the maritime station with the staff. A very nice, elderly officer said pleasantly:

“In my opinion we lost those ships winning a great victory.”

“Sixteen to one!” a man scoffed. He turned to me. “Did not one of your politicians win a great victory on those figures?”

“Well,” the elderly officer persisted, “we drove them back to their base.”

A quiet chorus of protest arose. The hard facts were stated to him plainly. He subsided, his elderly face a trifle bewildered. Probably he hadn't been here long. Probably he had never been in the trenches. Perhaps he was wondering, too, about the fruits of this new attitude which must certainly grow in economics and politics after the war. He joined our restlessness, however, when some one entered, saying the transport had been sighted.

The official statements in the first papers we saw were cheering, but by no means all the truth. They made it possible for the officers to glance over the list of birthday honours which were

printed that day. They sent us with some interest through the great hangars where provisions and munitions were passed in a constant stream from transport to train. They gave us breath to exclaim at this minute efficiency which had been developed in two years from almost nothing. It expressed itself most strikingly in a great factory building, once owned by a German.

Endless sacks of flour were lifted to the upper floor on chain elevators. Great soft mattresses of dough flopped down steep slides into the hands of a regiment of bakers, white-clothed, covered with flour, with the appearance of clowns half made up. At the entrance to each room a sergeant would remind us that these comic figures were soldiers, regularly enlisted. He would sing out:

“ Bakers! 'Shun! ”

And the long, ridiculous lines would stiffen. Only the staff officer's careless “ Carry on ” would send them back to their labour of turning out more than two hundred thousand pounds of bread before night.

Efficiency stared at us from posters which carried minute instructions to be followed in case of an air attack, and about the occupations most peacefully industrial fell always the tattered garment of war.

In a shoe shop thousands of pairs of stumpy, studded black boots busied an army of workers. Rows of shoes dripped oil after their bath to soften the leather.

“You see,” the officer in charge explained, “these are all old shoes in process of remaking. Dead men’s shoes.”

The odour of oil and wet leather was sickening. From the first glimpse you had known what those rows of dripping, studded, stolid boots had reminded you of — boots, too still, on the feet of dead men.

“You see, we don’t waste anything,” the officer was saying prosaically.

Even among the little children at the Belgian orphelinat where we had tea that afternoon the war dominated. It lurked in the black uniforms, in the young faces where that eternal question was more pitiful than ever, in the heap of hay at the end of the yard which the babies with a perfect seriousness modelled into the semblance of trenches and redoubts.

After dinner that night we heard Williams telephoning in his little room. Afterwards he joined us, laughing with satisfaction.

“Word’s come in from General ——’s headquarters that Blank has shown up. His parachute

was shot so full of holes that it's a wonder it didn't drop him, but the wind carried him inside our lines and he wasn't touched. War's full of miracles. Blessed good thing, too. Blank's a corking good fellow."

We had never seen Blank, but it cheered us somehow a lot to hear him spoken of at last in the present tense.

The prospect of the trip to Arras the next day drove Blank almost immediately into the background. It seemed to be a matter of some doubt. There was a good deal of talk about the city's proximity to the German trenches, about the necessity of walking close to the house walls because the Germans could see down the streets and had the range of each corner. One wondered just what Williams meant when he said:

"It promises to be a pretty interesting programme."

And another encouraged us by adding:

"Oh, you're almost certain to get some shells."

CHAPTER XVII

THE MAD ACTIVITY OF A DEAD CITY

THE next morning was dull and depressing and as cold as early winter. As one does out there, we studied the direction of the wind first of all, and inspected our gas masks. We fancied that with less sun the German cannons might bark less viciously, but as we drove on, huddled in our coats, the clouds promised to break.

Williams left us for a moment at a division headquarters. No officers lounged there. The streets were nearly empty of uniforms. Williams came out, looking as if he had heard something unexpected.

"The Huns are strafing the main road," he said to the driver. "Go the other way."

Outside the village a Canadian Highlander stopped us and examined our passes. He seemed very particular. He had an appearance of wondering what the deuce we wanted inside the lines that morning.

Just beyond we left the main road and twisted through country lanes, while out of the morbid, threatening morning was born the hateful gun

mutter. The foreign office man and I clutched at the trivial. We talked of automobiles and fishing and hunting, but always we were conscious of the sinister and growing chorus. A big gun crouched at the roadside. It would have been good to hear it shout back. Sombre and undisturbed, a Hindoo orderly sat his horse in a field.

"Like a graven image," the foreign office man said.

The increasing roar discouraged talking. We tore past and entered the outskirts of a town. The streets were deserted. Holes gaped in the house walls. Doors were pock-marked, windows mostly gone. A popping noise from the front of our car, not unlike the explosion of a shrapnel shell, and under the circumstances about as discouraging, told us that a tire had gone. The driver sent a startled glance at Williams.

"Annoying!" the foreign office man said.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"Outskirts of Arras," Williams snapped.

He sprang out. At such a moment he was sheer efficiency. Most assuredly he didn't want us to get strafed.

"Pile out," he ordered, "and stand close to the wall. "No, no," he cried to the Japanese in the other car. "Not you."

He directed them to remain in the car while

their driver backed them between two house walls. The two chauffeurs commenced to change the wheel with frantic haste. A military policeman appeared from some hiding place and walked briskly up.

"It's a bad place for that, sir, this morning."

"Things seem pretty warm in here this morning," Williams said.

The military policeman waved his stick.

"Just had a piece of shell through my window, sir. Listen for yourself."

The foreign office man and I lighted cigarettes. About our misgivings we draped a vast indifference.

"No comfort smoking in the cars in this wind," he said.

Williams moved about close to the wall restlessly.

"What's the best way in?" he asked the policeman.

The policeman pointed down the deserted street, half blocked by rubbish here and there.

"Five blocks straight. Turn to your right at a busted lamp-post marked roo dulla hop-pittle."

One asks the route so on an ordinary motor trip.

The military policeman had done his duty. After warning us he didn't linger. The drivers

sprang erect. The jack rattled down. I've never seen a wheel changed so quickly. Racing drivers couldn't be more agile. At a nod from Williams we got in again. We threaded through a dead city, crowded with a noise that gave the lie to its apparent dissolution. The quality of the unnatural ride increased. It shared the incredibility of an hallucination, which, nevertheless, possesses a momentary and terrible reality.

We faced ruins that gaped back at us. At a turning the façade of a hospital had suffered rather more than anything in its vicinity. Its breached and riddled walls had an air of surprise and indignation. Farther on, a bed on the third floor of a house, whose front was gone, hung over an abyss. The bed clothes were tumbled. Pictures, awry, still clung to the walls. A bottle of wine remained upright on a shelf.

"That couldn't have happened long ago," the foreign office man said.

"Every time I come in," Williams answered, "some ruin has been ruined a little more. Not a very prosperous looking town now, is it?"

I had seen Messina after the earthquake. Its disaster was scarcely comparable with this man-made one. And in Messina there had been many women weeping over ruins that were sepulchres. This was sadder, because for a long time there

was no one. The emptiness pervaded everything. It was more shocking than the reverberations of many guns.

We entered a street that was once, I suppose, the pride of Arras. A grass plot in the middle, lined with trees, reminded me of Park Avenue in New York. We drew up. On our side was a high garden wall. On the other, beyond the grass and the trees and the roadway, was an old French barracks, torn to pieces.

"I'm going to take one of the cars and drive to the provost marshal's," Williams said. "I want to find out what we'd better do now we're here. While I'm gone don't move from under the trees. It's the safest place for you."

He was off. One of the Japanese wanted to know if it was dangerous. The driver of the other car, who had joined us by the fence, laughed above the cracking roar. He stooped and commenced to pick from the grass great, jagged pieces of shell casing. He offered them for the Japanese's inspection.

"Sounds like a gigantic fireworks exhibition," the foreign office man mused.

The sun now and then struggled from behind the clouds, but always the atmosphere was dun, and abnormal, and frightening. A sifting dust coloured it.

"Maybe the end of the world would look something like this."

Williams dashed back, a strained and hurried figure in the middle of the rear seat. He had grown confidential and he told me now that the provost had had a shell through his building.

"We might as well walk about," he said. "It's as safe as hanging around here."

"What time do the Germans lunch to-day?"

He looked at his watch. That was evidently of real concern to him.

"I take back what I said about fireworks," the foreign office man cut in. "This isn't the least like fireworks."

Nor was it, for there were detonations louder than the reports of cannon, from the neighbouring streets, and scattered crashes like the crumbling of walls where shells had exploded. There was something wanton about this bombardment of a dead city.

Breathing with distaste the strange, repellant atmosphere, we hurried across a market place whose empty shelters of corrugated iron were half tumbled down. Two officers came swinging by, sticks in their hands, their helmets low on their foreheads. They didn't talk. They moved with smooth haste. The striking of their feet against the paving was inaudible because of the

turmoil. They were like figures seen in a dream.

All the houses were skeletons from which the flesh had been rabidly torn.

We glanced down a narrow street, arrested by the sight of two women emerging from a cellar beneath a heap of ruins. One of them carried two chickens, nicely browned. The other had a tin of fried potatoes. A group of military policemen leaning against the opposite wall moved languidly forward and took the appetizing food. They smiled and the women smiled, but as far as we could tell no one spoke. The entire transaction had an air of good-natured stealth.

"Women in Arras!" we cried.

Williams nodded.

"A few have stayed. It's orders during a bombardment for every one to remain in the cellars."

"The cooks ought to have decorations," some one said.

"They wouldn't think so," Williams answered. "The French are hard to scare, and they love their homes. Last time I was in here I saw a French soldier. I asked him what in the world he was doing. Said as calmly as you please that he was home on his first permission since the beginning of the war. Fancy that! Taking your vacation from hades in the same climate. You bet the Boches couldn't interfere with his

coming home, even if there was only a cellar left. But —”

And Williams laughed and pointed.

“He didn’t come on the *chemin-de-fer*.”

Across a broad, semi-circular plaza arose the wrecked station. Following Williams’ lead, we sidled around the curve, and slipped in through a doorway. Grass grew through shattered floor boards. Rain had come in and mill-dewed the splintered benches and ticket booths. In a doorless closet a girl’s summer cloak hung. There was a card attached to one of the buttons. Williams fingered it, but in the course of two years the writing had become undecipherable.

“Must have been warm that August day she came through here,” he mused. “Maybe on the last train, fleeing from the Huns. Couldn’t have known they were so close or she wouldn’t have left her coat. Hope she didn’t get strafed if she came back for it.”

Like the cathedral at Rheims, the hall was filled with sombre and unthinkable memories.

We picked up some tickets scattered near by on the floor.

“Arras to Douai, par Vitry-en-Artois,” they read.

“A short trip,” I began, “straight across the trenches. When you English take it —”

"The war," Williams broke in, "will be getting on Kaiser Bill's nerves, don't you think?"

Something was clearly on Williams' nerves. He hurried us through and gave us only a moment to glance at the broken girders and the twisted rails in the train shed. Among the splinters of the platforms where crowds had thronged eagerly the long grass waved with a slow melancholy.

"It's not very far," he reminded us, "to the Hun trenches, and they have a nasty habit of dropping whiz-bangs in here. There's no bomb proof. Let's go."

We had scarcely reached the shelter of streets lined with looted shops when a soldier came running up and spoke to Williams. He turned with another of those confidences that made you wonder why you had ever come to see war.

"What I was afraid of. The Huns are strafing the station — dropping whiz-bangs in from the trenches."

Probably the German observers had seen us leave. It was the luck of war that they hadn't caught us going in.

We climbed a small mountain of stones and beams at the end of the street and emerged into the Petit Place, a short time ago one of the finest examples of Spanish architecture in Europe. Opposite us the Hotel de Ville raised a few sec-

tions of interior walls and the stump of its tower, white, formless, ghostly.

"I was in Arras a few weeks before the war began," Williams said. "Had to change trains, and was just too short of time to run down and see this place. Isn't much to look at now, is it?"

Of the old Spanish houses several were completely down. Others retained just enough form to expose the brutality of their wounds. With a sense of sheer gratitude we followed Williams down stone steps into the cellar of one of these. The bombardment was a trifle muffled here. An elderly French woman and her pretty daughter greeted us.

"You're not afraid to stay?" I asked.

The girl tossed her head. The woman laughed. She indicated a cook stove, a table, a bed, a rough counter, half a dozen chairs.

"They've driven us downstairs, but why should we be driven from our home and our business? We are quite comfortable, and we do a little trade with soldiers. Monsieur has seen Arras during the bombardment. Perhaps he would like to see what it was like before. An album artistique might interest monsieur."

She smiled at my bewilderment, fetching a tastefully made up blue book with silk cords and tassels. It was impossible not to buy the thing,

a collection of photographs taken, many of them, at grave risk, and sold under a risk nearly as great to the Tommies to send home to their families.

“And you’ve been doing this — living like this since the beginning of the war?”

“But certainly. Through that door I saw the first bombardment of the Little Place. I saw the shells bring the great tower of the Hotel de Ville crashing down. That was cruel. It was the glory of Arras. When it fell I thought of the judgment day.”

“You mean you didn’t barricade that door?”

“Why? Because the shells came from behind us. If they exploded too close the fragments were likely to fly on towards the centre of the square. Besides —”

With an air of secrecy she opened a door on a flight of stairs leading downwards.

“You see there is another cellar. Come.”

She lighted a candle and led the way down for many steps. The vaulting was ancient. We found ourselves in a labyrinth. Corridors led in all directions. The walls were of a soft limestone. The stone, one guessed, for the Hotel de Ville and many other buildings had been quarried here. But there were fresh breaks, and sometimes the corridors were partly blocked.

“The shock of the shells brings pieces tumbling

down," the woman said. "That's why we find the upper cellar more comfortable after all. Wouldn't we be more comfortable there now?"

We agreed. As we went up she told us how Arras was honey-combed with these cellars. We left her with a real regret for the strange light and the racket outside. We reached the vicinity of the cathedral over a hill of rubbish.

"Palladian," the foreign office man said.

The stark remnants of the cathedral, indeed, were more impressive than the untouched building — a bad example of the late Renaissance — could have been. Its size must have been enormous.

"Usually it's all right to go in," Williams said, "but I wouldn't advise it to-day. Do as you please, but if one of those walls should fall —"

We didn't argue the point. We had learned to believe in Williams' judgment. He glanced continuously at his watch as we went on. We knew he was trusting to the luncheon hour to give us an opportunity to slip out of Arras in comparative safety. By the time we had returned to the market place, in fact, the roar had receded, and the explosions of shells were less frequent. The drivers seemed glad to see us. So we left, dodging new holes and obstructions, casting quick glances at the driftwood of that morning's straf-

ing — torn shell screens, split trees, a twisted bicycle, scattered heaps of stones. We thanked heaven for the German appetite. We prayed it would persist for some minutes longer.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHERE MEN ARE LIKE ANTS

THE last afternoon I spent in Flanders we went on a picnic. It was a most extraordinary picnic, intended to give us a panoramic view of war as it is fought nine-tenths of the time under modern conditions. It took us to a point of the line that saw some of the hardest fighting of the Champagne and Artois offensive. The French had manned it then, and they had progressed in spite of overwhelming odds and frightful casualties. It was still, in the hands of the British, one of the knottiest problems of the entire front. We could understand why, but first we had our picnic. Williams chose the spot after we had left the cars in the shelter of a village behind a steep hill. At his direction one of the chauffeurs carried the baskets up a grassy bank and deposited them beneath a grove of trees. Trampled box hedges straggled here and there. It was a very pretty spot and we congratulated Williams for hitting on it.

“Yes,” he answered, “it’s just the thing,

because the Hun airmen can't see us and disturb our luncheon."

He distributed sandwiches. Lamenting the absence of a corkscrew, he knocked the neck from a water bottle with some skill.

"Isn't much healthier around here than it was in Arras. Have some of this cold ham? This was a kitchen garden once. There was murderous fighting here less than a year ago."

As we ate, Williams' foresight was justified, for we heard the whirring of aeroplanes and, from beyond the hill, the booming of guns.

After luncheon we lounged in the grass, smoking. We wondered, when Williams had lighted another cigarette, why he delayed.

"Of course it's pleasant here —" the foreign office man began.

Williams glanced at his watch.

"I'm waiting," he said, "to see if the Huns are going to give us a strafing. They amuse themselves by dropping shells on this empty hill every now and then."

But, although the firing became general, no shells, as far as we could tell, exploded near us. So, bent like a party of scouts, we went through a fringe of bushes and around a ruined tower which already had the sentimental interest of a mediæval survival. We walked through a house which

had no doors or roof into an overgrown back yard.

Williams stooped, kicking through the long grass at something. We went closer and saw him staring at a faded German uniform coat with sinister tears and stains about the back. An object, long and white, lay near by. In our own minds we hesitated to give it a name.

Williams moved on.

"All that's left of some poor devil," he said. "I told you there had been hard fighting here."

As far as possible we kept out of the grass after that. Grass and weeds grow too quickly in the war zone. They permit too much to remain.

We came to a barn with gaping holes in its sides and roof. Beyond it, half destroyed buildings clustered around a square with a monastic appearance. Between them and a ragged wall yawned an open space, perhaps ten yards across.

"Take that in a hurry," Williams commanded. "The Huns can see us there."

We dashed across and circled the end of the wall into a small enclosure which was all that remained of an outhouse. Wire netting had been stretched across an eyeless window in the front wall. Through that the panorama of war was visible below us. Names rang in our ears that connote almost as much horror as Verdun. Not

far from us stretched a brick wall, pierced for rifle and machine gun fire. Just beyond was a ruined farm, notorious for some of the worst hand to hand fighting of the war.

"From behind that wall, and from the farm, after they had got it," Williams said, "the French went forth to the capture of that network of trenches off there, just behind our present front line."

You stared, not because of the familiar name of those trenches, but because it seemed impossible to you that men could have crossed the several hundred yards of open ground between the wall and the network. Even with artillery preparation such an attempt seemed suicidal.

But, as Williams told us, men had fallen all around here. To the left we could see deserted dug-outs, captured in September. At some distance a spur of land thrust out a broad plateau. It was absolutely bare. Before the war it had been thickly wooded.

The present British and German trenches made yellow scars along a low ridge. The German line was a little above the British. Both passed through a ruined village. As we watched, the bombardment became more violent. We could see the effect of every hit. Shell after shell of high explosives sent black clouds springing from

the yellow earth. The lines were so close that it seemed inevitable mistakes should be made or that an imperfect fuse should shower death on the gunners' own men. But the accuracy of the fire was appalling. Each shell appeared to fall directly in the sorrel ditches, and when the spreading smudge had cleared away we would detect breaches, but the only men we saw were one or two soldiers who ran swiftly along the brown road towards the communication line.

"It's nearly always like that here," Williams said. "Fancy being under one of those Black Marias!"

Our fancy, however, was directed to a danger more immediate. We looked up at a whirring overhead and saw a war 'plane, flying high in our direction. As if born of the air five more appeared, sailed over the trenches, swerved back above us, and circled away again. They were too high to make identity certain, so we crouched as close as we could to the wall while we speculated.

Suddenly the anti-aircraft guns took a hand, and about each machine shrapnel burst, too high for us to hear its fat explosions; and as long as we remained there after that there was always a circle of little, puffy clouds around each aeroplane. The shells came from both sides, so that we knew



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BARBED WIRE ENTANGLEMENTS IN WINTER

Germans and British had taken the air to-day. Some one suggested that it mightn't be a bad plan to go home, but the spectacle fascinated. The rest of us begged for a few minutes more. We wanted, I think, to see one of these airmen show some sign of fear. As long as we watched they persisted in their scouting, contemptuous of the pretty white clouds that appeared as if from nothing all about them.

"It's a marvel they're not hit," the foreign office man cried.

"So it is," Williams answered. "It takes young men for that work, young men in whom recklessness is born."

For a long time we remained, glancing from the scouts to the trenches where black geysers spouted with an increasing frequency, forgetting for a time the possibility of a slight elevation of a single gun which might send a geyser spouting in the midst of our little group.

"Good God!" somebody burst out. "I can't believe there are men where those shells are falling. This thing makes men seem like ants."

We went at last, reluctant to leave this spectacle of death in which the victims remained always hidden.

Driving along the base of the hill we passed a large cemetery. Wooden crosses stretched in

neat rows. The gun roar gave it an appearance exceptionally sinister. Even in their long rest, we realised, these soldiers were far from immune to German shells.

“The trench toll,” Williams muttered. “Sad enough place! Every time I come here that cemetery’s larger.”

And just across the road the living busied themselves so the other fellow’s cemetery wouldn’t fail to grow. Some were practising at a rifle range. A rattling blacksmith shop lurked under a hill. Men fidgeted about two observation balloons, partly hidden by trees — gross, corpulent things, ready to take the air. And always the guns reminded us that this care for the living and the dead was exercised under heavy fire.

Farther on we gazed with amazement at a football game which swept swiftly through its changing phases in a rough field to the left. The shouts of the players failed to reach us because of the pervading roar. They were like pupils in a deaf and dumb asylum from whose open, eager mouths comes only a shocking silence. But there was no question that they were having a good time, cheering clever plays, and jibing at bad ones. Within their easy view, close to the road, lay a dead man. His stolid, studded boots seemed striving to advance towards them.

"The stretcher bearers are coming for him," Williams whispered.

We swung into the long road again, increasing our speed.

If we could get over that next hill without a shell —

When we drove up to the château it was raining. Great drops fell from the eaves like tears.

After dinner, when I was talking to Williams, I challenged the reliability of that new, frank British attitude.

"I'm looking," I said, "for some one to tell me he doesn't mind shell fire."

Williams snorted.

"When you find him you can call him a liar, and the worst of it is you never get used to it. Each time's a little worse than the last."

It was pleasant to look back that night, to forecast nothing on the morrow more exciting than the inspection of passes by military policemen, Scotland Yard detectives, and French soldiers.

I wondered that I had had the effrontery to buy a return ticket.

Doubtless, I thought, Paris would seem like a strange city in a peaceful and sorrowful world.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GRIM GAME OF INTELLIGENCE

THE quiet of Paris, however, did not make it seem as remote from battle as I had expected to find it after such experiences. You looked upon the men in uniform with a new sympathy, a broader comprehension, and you talked of nothing but the war.

It was about that time, I remember, that a German spy was caught under dramatic circumstances and shot with a deserved despatch. Of that case it is impossible to write, but it reminded me that when I had sailed for Europe I had planned to find out something about these men and women — not so much their ciphers and signals and mathematical routine, rather the kind of people they are, and the type of drama they play continuously behind the lines. So I reviewed my own contact with them, and the stories I had heard of their daring.

In the first place, officially in Europe spying has ceased to exist. One speaks of Intelligence, yet it doesn't make much difference under what label a man faces a firing squad or feels the noose

tighten about his neck. For, as a matter of fact, there are more spies than ever, better spies, spies with a lack of fear nearly superhuman.

There is, of course, a good deal that can't be publicly told, but it isn't all tragedy, as you'll learn from the curious case of the near-sighted London clerk. Nor do these men perpetually work in the shadow of death. You may not know that an Entente intelligence officer assigned to New York informed London of the approaching Irish excursion of Sir Roger Casement, but you must have guessed the presence of the spies of both sides in America; you may have suspected that, often in a legitimate way, they are not uninterested in you. Have you ever smiled at a German waiter's bored expression during an after dinner discussion of the war? Since hostilities commenced have you tried to visit England or France? In the latter case you may be sure that both sides know enough about you and your sympathies to exalt your own importance and to justify your admiration of the system.

After docking on the other side, for instance, as I told you in an early chapter, the passengers are virtually imprisoned in the dining-room until the chief alien officer has had his fling. He appears to possess a dossier of each person. In my own case he asked me to fill in a blank, largely

repeating the information on my passport. He attached this to the passport. On the London train I asked other passengers if they had been similarly decorated. Enthusiastically they denied it. It seemed definite, since I was a correspondent, that a check had been placed upon my movements. The American embassy offered that doleful interpretation. When I applied at Bow Street for an identity book the clerk admitted that the slip was a code for the police. So I went to an acquaintance in the intelligence department and threw myself on his mercy.

“What in the name of heaven,” I demanded, “is this soiled piece of paper?”

He smiled.

“They gave you your identity book at Bow Street, didn't they? You know it might be a recommendation on information from America.”

I explained patiently that I had sailed on two days' notice. His smile didn't alter, and from all that happened afterwards I know he was right. It isn't simple to elude a system that works so quickly, and that's the reason the Germans early in the war ceased getting many spies to England or France through New York. They turned, as a consequence, to Spanish America. That menace, too, a distinguished officer of the intelligence corps told me, was well under control. A few

days before, he said, a clever attempt to get a man through had been defeated, partly by accident, for the fellow captured had had a genius for make-up. He had looked like a Latin. He had talked like one. On the long journey from South America he had hoodwinked the crew and all the passengers except one woman who had known him for years and who had penetrated his disguise. Still she had been friendly, and he had had unlimited confidence in his masquerade.

When the boat reached England he was one of the first hailed before the alien officer. He went jauntily because he knew his passport was in perfect order. The alien officer found it so, but he glanced suspiciously at the man and told him to stand aside for a few minutes. That was really only his compliance with recent orders to be careful with Spanish-Americans. As a matter of fact he suspected nothing out of the way. But the fellow hadn't forecasted anything like that. It appeared to threaten more than the fact. In a panic he scribbled a note requesting the woman not to speak to him in any language except Spanish.

When he slipped it to her the sharp eyes of the intelligence men saw. They drew the woman outside and got the note from her. They went back and took the man into custody. He laughed at

them, showing no fear, declaring his innocence with a tolerant air. They hurried him to London and before the official who told me the story.

"I spoke to him in German," the official went on, "and at odd times — suddenly. I couldn't trap him. He said he was a South American merchant on a peaceful commercial enterprise. He didn't know a word of German. I began to doubt, because when I spoke the language his eyelids never moved. It seemed to me he must show some response if he understood. As a last resort I simply shouted out, 'Achtung!'"

The official smiled a trifle sadly.

"His heels," he went on, "clicked together. His chin came up. His hands straightened at his sides. He tried with a convulsive effort to check that mechanical response, but it was too late. I had him and he knew it. He broke down and took his medicine. He was a German reservist. A military command was the one thing to which his whole nature had to respond."

Even if that defence at the ports is overcome, there's an interior net to furnish spies to the executioner. I learned to understand the misgivings of hotel acquaintances that their luggage had been entered although they missed nothing. One man complained that the servants were a badly-

trained lot. They burst into his room at all hours, retiring with the apology that they had not known he was there. I didn't tell him that the refuse of his waste basket and the litter of his writing desk had probably furnished an interesting puzzle for some intelligence officer. Hotel espionage in England and France, however, is a knife that cuts both ways.

It may be indiscreet to call attention to a perfectly obvious fact. The Swiss are a problem for the entente allies. Except for such natives as have been retained through disability for the army the male hotel service is largely in the hands of the Swiss. The sons of this neutral nation must have the privileges, the courtesy, and the protection that other neutrals receive, and because of the nature of their employment and its permanence it is difficult to keep tabs on them. The natives of northern Switzerland often have German names, speak the German language, subscribe, perhaps, to the German idea. It would take unlimited confidence to pronounce one man a northern Swiss and another a southern German. So while the entente gets much valuable intelligence from the hotels, it is safe to guess that the Teutons have found the servants useful too.

I was told that early in the war the top floor of one of London's large hotels had been closed be-

cause of suspected signalling of Zeppelins. That night of which I have written, when the Zeppelins were, in fact, trying to get over us, a British floor valet muttered dark things about the foreign servants as we gazed at the bursting shrapnel and the searchlights. In his less emotional moments, however, he had nothing to say, for it is bad form audibly to doubt neutrals.

But with all that the German spy has ceased to be a terrible and unavoidable curse in Europe. Those in authority have probed his methods and chained his activities. He has even become an object of thoughtful criticism. One day this point was under discussion by some of the men who have made that cheerful situation possible.

“German intelligence is universal,” one said. “Every German, no matter where he is, feels himself a divinely appointed agent of his government. He sends what he can to the Wilhelmstrasse. He is ambitious to impress the Wilhelmstrasse. Consequently he sometimes hits false trails and puts the real agents off on wild goose chases. In the long run it is a weakness to use amateurs in the intelligence game.”

About that time, as if to prove that every rule has its exceptions, the case of the near-sighted London clerk came unsolicited to the department. It was valuable intelligence, because it gave solidity

to the many rumours about at that time of Austria's anxiety to make peace. The official who handled the case told it to me with a reminiscent smile.

"It is hard," he said, "to learn just how much is behind these rumours of a nation's desire to make peace. It seemed likely that Austria would be rather better out of it, but you can't place much reliance on newspaper gossip. Then this youth came shambling into my office, white as a sheet, his eyes red beneath huge spectacles, stoop-shouldered, trembling as if he had a chill. His flashy clothing looked absurd. Mourning would have become him better. I fancy he expected to be condemned to death. He tried to avoid that by telling all he knew.

"He worked in a city office — clerical work in an insufficient light that explained his eyes and his shoulders and his bad complexion. You know how little that type gets. You know how destructive to ambition such work is. He plodded along with no bad habits, with no future, an inoffensive, pitiful little chap. Then the great romance came. A visitor was taken through the office one day. The clerk noticed him because he was so big and handsome and prosperous. He was nearly tongue-tied when this impressive figure paused and chatted with him. It developed that the visitor

had known the clerk's father. He expressed some interest in the young man. He took him to dinner. In many ways he was kind to him. The man declared that he was worried about the clerk. He looked underfed and on the edge of an illness. Something ought to be done about that. After a little thought he slapped his knee. He had just the thing. Business was taking him to a neutral country across the channel for a few days.

“ ‘Suppose you get leave of absence,’ he proposed, ‘and come with me. I’ll pay your expenses because you’re your father’s son, and because I like you.’

“The young fellow demurred. He couldn’t trespass on such generosity.

“ ‘It’s all right,’ the older man said. ‘No charity about it. As a matter of fact I could use a secretary for a few days. There’s sure to be a man or two I won’t want to talk to myself, and that sort I can shunt off on you. Meantime you’ll get a vacation that will give you a fresh start and maybe save you a bad illness. Tell ’em at the office your uncle’s going to give you a little holiday.’

“The clerk, unable to believe in this sudden stroke of luck, arranged it. His friend gave him a new suit of clothes. His studious expression

went well with this new prosperity. They sailed. On the other side there were some aristocratic-appearing men who paced the dock. When the clerk and his host landed these men came up with bows and words of welcome. For the first time the youth realised what an important person his benefactor was. But the men paid an incomprehensible attention to his insignificant self. They were solicitous about his health. They apologised for the poor comforts he would find in this town. The best available had been prepared for him. He had a vague idea that all this was really meant for the other man. At the first opportunity he asked who these people were.

“ ‘They talked to me so strangely, as if I was a lord or something.’

“ ‘You be nice to them, my boy,’ his host said. ‘Treat ’em well. Let ’em give you anything they want, and you act as if that was what you were raised to. They’re friends of mine, and I’d hate to have ’em offended. If you think they’re crazy, keep it to yourself and give ’em their way.’

“ There was a private suite at the hotel, a solitary dinner, more grandeur than the clerk had ever imagined existed outside the covers of a novel.

“ The next morning a servant appeared, an-

nouncing that the gentlemen awaited the clerk's arrival in a remote parlour which they had reserved.

“ ‘Go along, sonny,’ his host said, yawning. ‘I can’t be bothered with these people. You go sit down and have a nice chat with ’em, and let ’em get whatever they have on their minds out of the way.’

“ ‘But what do you want me to say to them?’

“ ‘Say as little as possible, I tell you. You say, “I must return for further instructions to England.” Yes. That’s a nice answer. That can’t offend ’em. You say just that, and now and then you might put in, “Gentlemen, you interest me.”’

“The clerk looked at him appealingly, but his host waved him away.

“ ‘Go on. Don’t ask so many questions. I hired you to talk to people like this. Do as you’re told, and you’ll be all right.’

“So the clerk went to the remote parlour, and at his entrance the elderly, aristocratic gentlemen arose, bowing most profoundly.

“ ‘Will you sit here, your excellency? You slept well? You were not too uncomfortable in those insufficient rooms? You find that chair to your liking? Suppose we speak informally of that which brings us together.’

"The bewildered clerk leaned his elbows on the table. He wanted to smoke a cigarette, but he thought it might offend the old men. He wanted to say, 'What does bring us together?' Instead he murmured:

" 'Gentlemen, you interest me.'

"They smiled at that. They bent closer to him genially. He realised he had made a hit. He determined to use that phrase as often as possible. He had had no idea any one phrase could be so successful. Then his ears tingled. He felt confusion sweep him. He was like a man lost in a deep woods. Some one had said pleasantly:

" 'Then perhaps, you will give us your government's terms.'

"For a long time he kept his head bent. He didn't answer.

" 'Of course we understand,' he heard a voice drone, 'that this conference is quite informal, and that the terms you mention must, to an extent, be considered tentative. Still it is a beginning, an encouraging one. We must begin somewhere. The tentative terms, please.'

"The drumming in his ears increased. He scarcely heard his own voice murmur:

" 'Gentlemen, you interest me.' "

This time there was no good-natured response.

The others stirred and made no effort to hide their surprise. Clearly something else was demanded off him, so he took courage and completed the recital of his lesson.

“‘I must return for further instructions to England.’

“The others sprang up and paced about the room. They gathered in a corner, evidently consulting. One greybeard approached him with an air of timidity.

“‘What has occurred, your excellency? We have heard of no great victory. Yet since you left England something must have occurred. Something must have happened since you arrived last night, when we all spoke of your cheerful attitude.’

“The clerk shook his head. He had only one thought, to escape from that conference about which he knew nothing, yet which was clearly of grave import, concerning matters in which he could have no honest share. He was ready to burst into tears. He arose and made for the door, combining his two phrases in a desperate effort to explain his retreat.

“‘Gentlemen, you interest me, but I must return for further instructions to England.’

“He was aware of consternation and whispered astonishment behind him. He stumbled into the

private suite and with a trembling voice demanded some explanation. But his host was more curious as to what had happened at the conference. When he had got all that from the clerk he rubbed his hands and smiled with satisfaction.

“‘Just the thing,’ he grinned. ‘You did well, my boy. You’ve got ’em guessing. Now you go on home just as you said you would, and we’ll arrange another conference a little later.’

“‘Who are these people?’ the clerk burst out. ‘They treat me as if I was the King or Lloyd-George.’

“‘Friends of mine,’ his host said airily, ‘and they’re giving me a pleasant experience. I’d hate to have it lapse.’

“So the clerk came back to England, but he couldn’t wait to hear from the impressive man. He didn’t want a repetition of his glittering holiday. The cold chills were running up and down his back. He came here and told the whole story. Of course we had to get to the bottom of it. The intelligence department persuaded his flashy host to come here. He’s locked up now, but I doubt if we keep him. You see, he’s a swindler of international reputation. He was a trifle disappointed to be interfered with, but evidently he’d made something out of his game, and, really, I don’t think such a confidence game was ever attempted

before. The Austrian government had been his — what do you call it? — his sucker. He had actually approached Vienna, whispering that Great Britain was readier to talk peace than any one knew on the outside. The British government, he said, would discuss tentative terms, but it would have to be done informally and secretly. He was the man to arrange matters, to put the thing through — for a consideration.

“Vienna, to all appearances, actually took that bait. Money was no object. If the swindler would bring the British representative to a neutral country they would send commissioners to confer with him.

“It became necessary for the swindler to find the British plenipotentiary he had agreed to produce. You know how he got him. Poor little chap! He kept his word. He did come to England for further instructions, and he received them — to go back to his desk and forget all about it. I daresay he’s there now, bending over figures in a bad light, thinking that a diplomatic career has its drawbacks after all. Meantime the aristocratic commissioners — doubtless they are still waiting.”

I knew of two secluded rooms in London about which this business of intelligence centred, and of

two men, quiet geniuses, who largely controlled it. If for nothing else than contrast I wanted to see those rooms and those men, for through their inventions England has been pretty completely purged of the spy terror and Germany has been given a spy terror of its own. The thing was arranged. I walked from the smug respectability of the Embankment into the amazing somnolence of Scotland Yard. In the office of a church society one would have found more movement, more irritability, more anxiety. Except for the bobby who strolled away with my card no one was visible.

The man I had come to see sat behind a littered desk. He wore a light alpaca jacket and his necktie was a trifle awry. He had the pleasantest and the sharpest eyes imaginable, which, however, showed something of that strain I was to notice so generally in men's eyes at the front. It was as if, while risking nothing physical himself, he shared the deadly anxiety of his agents at work far from the safety and the quiet of this place. His squarely-cut and powerful features suggested a secretive mind. That at least was in keeping with one's idea of Scotland Yard. The necessity for it, he let me know, was infinitely graver than ever before in the history of British intelligence.

As I talked with the man with the pleasant,

sharp, and tired eyes, I had to remind myself that a secret service net covering Great Britain, France, and large portions of the war zone was amenable to his hand.

Sir Roger Casement had been secretly spirited here after that dramatic dawn in Tralee. He had stood there beyond the desk, rather proud than worried. It was impossible not to question how many guilty ones had stood beyond the desk, reading in those tired, quiet, questioning eyes their condemnation to the extreme penalty.

The quiet of the eyes, the quiet of the room, the quiet of the building made such pictures seem incredible. The place offered no appearance of an inquisition, no stagey atmosphere of danger. Now and then a clerk tip-toed in and out, as in any office, leaving more bundles of paper to litter the desk. And yet the room was crowded with shadows. It was full of death.

One thing I carried out of it. In such places there is none of the common contempt for the spy, none of the customary aversion for the degradation of his penalty. Such men find in the stealthy and anonymous heroism of the secret agent something sublime, the most perfect sacrifice.

The Admiralty isn't far from Scotland Yard. That other room was there, that other man who within a few months overcame new conditions

and largely laid the foundations for England's success in snaring submarines, in policing the channel, in watching the movements of Zeppelins and Germany's high seas fleet.

One's first impression is quite different over there. The moment you cross the threshold of the Admiralty you face an air of secrecy and mystery. There are policemen to be passed, and you notice civilians who seem to be on some errand, also, but who watch you with too much interest. When your credentials have been examined a guide is furnished, and you need him, for he takes you down steps and up steps, through interminable dim corridors, extricating you from the demands of guards who appear here and there from the obscurity. He leaves you at last in front of a leather-covered door behind which a great silence broods.

The opening of that door alters everything. Dazzling light floods a large room through windows facing the Horse Guards' Parade. A fire burns briskly. There is a solidity about the room and its furnishings that goes with its air of unalterable purpose. Men move about, but immediately one figure catches the attention and holds it. On the padded fender sits a slender, wiry man in the conventional naval uniform. Above his smiling face a broad forehead recedes

between fringes of curling hair. Still he looks young, possessed of an abundant vitality. He springs up, smiling a welcome. He lights a cigarette, pacing about the room as he talks. His smile never hides the uninterrupted anxiety of his eyes. That makes him seem at first like the very different figure in the alpaca jacket.

I spoke, I remember, of the trawlers I had seen in St. George's Channel and the Irish Sea — hundreds of tossing trawlers, fishing for submersibles, and, when necessary, making themselves the bait. I had marvelled at the bravery of their sailors. As I watched the smiling, active figure, as I saw the smoke curl from his cigarette, I realised that there are harder tasks, that the assumption of responsibility may be a greater sacrifice, than the risk of one's life. Through the leather door at any moment might slip a tragic reflection of his system; word, perhaps, of many lives lost through a breakdown somewhere.

Certainly this room was too cheerful. It made it more difficult to picture the details of a story I had recently heard — one of those cases about which little is said, because it involves signalling, and the simple word makes any official tongue-tied. Yet it is obvious that the German spies have used that form of communication under favourable conditions. At any rate, not long before a

trawler's crew had observed a red flash from a distant headland.

Those who man these filthy craft are largely of the naval reserve class — men out of comfortable homes and convenient clubs. Consequently they bring to their work an exceptional intelligence. They didn't dash in shore in the hope of finding something. The light suggested too many possibilities. Instead, they held their patrol and at the first opportunity reported to the Admiralty. There have been many rumours of a German submarine base hidden away on the shores of the British Isles. The Admiralty, therefore, ordered the trawler to keep about its routine work while an intelligence man with the clothing and accent of the vicinity, appeared in the nearest town. He had to work carefully. Often at night he slipped out and crawled through underbrush and behind the rocks, seeking out that base which the signalling had suggested. He found no indication of a base, no likely cache for supplies. He reported the existence of a cove behind the headland. There was a beach, favourable for the landing of a small boat. The neighbourhood was wild. There was only one house within a radius of several miles. It was occupied by an unkempt old man who had consistently turned back his efforts at an entrance, who had snubbed his attempts to

talk. Aside from that there was nothing. Except for the old man, who might be of foreign birth, the people of the neighbourhood were beyond question loyal.

The intelligence officer was recalled, but the trawler was kept on that post just at the edge of the radius of the red light. The commander had a detailed map of the cove and the beach and the headland. He waited.

"That man," he told his crew, "can't know his lamp is visible at this distance. Some fine night —"

And one very dark night the red winking came across the water. The clouds were so thick that the commander knew he could sail close to the headland unobserved. He felt, in fact, when he entered the cove that his presence there was quite unsuspected.

This business of waiting in the dark for the shaping of unknown forces into defeat or victory is the hardest portion of the men assigned to intelligence work. The red light no longer showed. Although the boat was not many yards from the beach there was nothing to be seen. There were no sounds beyond the cries of a rising wind. And the minutes lengthened. The commander had reached the conclusion that the affair was founded on a delusion, or else some trick of

shrubbery through which the wind permitted an innocent light to gleam intermittently. The men lost their caution, murmuring from time to time. The commander spoke to them sharply. Then a sudden sound aroused the crew. It was magnified in the black silence, suggesting the scraping of a hard object on sand, and after a moment came a guttural laugh, followed by a prolonged hiss for silence.

“Hold that searchlight ready,” the commander cautioned. “Not till I give the word. We’ll wait a while longer.”

A stealthy stroking of oars rewarded him. A small boat was making from the beach for the entrance of the cove. It would have to pass close to the trawler.

“Now!” the commander cried.

And the light flashed out, circling the cove with a white eagerness, catching at last at the end of its ray a collapsible boat filled with men. The men stared up at the trawler open-mouthed. One cursed in German. Another laughed foolishly in a feminine note. The commander couldn’t believe his ears, for a third commenced to sing a rollicking chanty.

They knew they were caught. They permitted themselves to be lined up on the deck of the trawler while the commander examined their col-

lapsible. It held nothing except the oars. There wasn't an indication that it had ever been used to carry supplies. The commander turned to the line of prisoners. He noticed that his own men glanced at them with curiosity. He went closer, questioning. He was met by that absurd laugh. The song recommenced.

"What is this?" he asked.

His second in command strolled up to him.

"Most of these men, sir, are drunk. Ah, there goes that light again."

The commander turned sharply. The light didn't flash from the headland. It was far down the beach. It went out. Its purpose was clear. It had warned away a submarine to which these men belonged, to which they had started to row in their boat.

The commander lighted a cigar, relieved to be able to smoke again. He knew, because of the shifting of the light, it might be impossible to implicate the unkempt man on the headland who by this time must have destroyed every evidence. On the other hand the intelligence department would be grateful to the commander for he could say definitely now that there was no submarine base in this secluded cove, that it had never sheltered any serious plot. The amazing truth cried itself from the grinning faces of the line

of prisoners. It wasn't at all funny though that they should risk so much for no graver purpose than to come to a drinking party ashore. It visualised for the commander the suspense and confinement suffered by these submarine crews. No risk was too great for an escape from that, for a momentary stretching of one's limbs, for a little release from the expectation of being crushed like a beetle beneath the gigantic heel of the British navy.

CHAPTER XX

TRAGIC SECRETS

THE stealthy watchfulness that makes such hauls possible is continually with one in Europe these days. Intelligence has very special phases for the French and for the British in France. In the beginning spies actually moved through the ranks of both armies. The siege war of the trenches has made that game impractical. Under these conditions the problem of getting information through is increasingly difficult. Code letter-writing through neutral countries, while comparatively sure, is a very slow expedient. Often intelligence is demanded in a hurry, must be had at any cost. For a time carrier pigeons were used with success. They cried, however, their own warning. There aren't many carrier pigeons in the conquered provinces now. To be found with one on your property amounts to a condemnation to death. I was surprised to learn that Germany and France both experiment with them still. I was told that an airman not long before had come across the lines at night and dropped a basket full of pigeons in

a lonely spot. The conspirator behind the lines was supposed to find the basket, fasten duplicates of his message to each bird, and release them all. The innocent-appearing empty basket would be the only evidence left.

The aeroplane has revolutionised spying as completely as it has scouting. It's a risky business. It's even unpopular among the air corps — as courageous a body of youngsters as war has ever produced. I have shown them to you, sailing through bursting shrapnel, photographing and observing with impudent indifference. In an air battle they will take suicidal chances, but they don't like these quiet rides through the night to lonely places.

It isn't that they are physically afraid. They shrink from the work because it threatens the spy's penalty. The airman, like his passenger, is tried, condemned, and executed as a spy. And these boys, who know less than the quiet, worried men in London, Paris, and Petrograd, or in Vienna and Berlin, have a horror of the spy's work and the spy's death. Still they do it. It amounts to this: Among the British and the French the belief in this war is so general that to ask for volunteers for any task is practically to take your pick of the entire army. This particular stratagem, moreover, must be seen through in the face

of an enemy intelligence system that from the filmiest hint unravels conspiracy and caps it with black tragedy. One pitiful case comes instantly to mind. It's about the boastful indiscretion of an airman, who didn't want a spy's death, nearly got it, then, through his escape, unwittingly condemned the man who had saved him.

After crossing the lines and safely landing his passenger he arose with a sigh of relief and started to return. Through one of those accidents no man can guard against, his engine went bad, and from a great height he dropped swiftly through the night. He failed to right his machine. He fell, evidently unobserved, in a field at the edge of a town. But a native living in a house on the outskirts, had heard enough to draw him to the field. He found the unconscious airman. This native was an old man. Alone he couldn't lift the airman. He returned to the house where he lived with his daughter.

"There's a man out there in the field," he whispered, for they've learned that even the walls have ears in the conquered provinces. "If we don't hide him," he went on, "the Germans will find him at daylight, and he can't help himself because he's injured. He may die. Shall we let a friend die or be taken? You must help me carry him here."

“That,” the girl whispered back, “may mean death for all of us, will probably mean death —”

“A friend!” the old man said.

The girl arose, and went to the field with her father, and helped him carry the man to the house where they hid him. They both knew the risks of that journey even in those quiet hours before the dawn. When they had completed it they glanced at each other and smiled.

“God is with us,” the old man said.

And through the weeks that followed they seemed miraculously protected. The presence of the man was never suspected. They nursed him back to his former ability. They started him on his road back. For there is a road back, out of the conquered provinces, out of the hands of the Germans. The execution of Edith Cavell didn't close it. Innumerable other executions haven't closed it, because that is something the Germans can't do. In every war that conquers peoples such a road persists. It penetrates even the vaunted barrier across the Dutch frontier. So the recovered airman was passed from guide to guide on that road until finally he slipped from the grasp of the Germans and reported himself ready for duty to his own people.

His exaltation demanded expression. He wanted to shout out his contempt of the German

intelligence system which he had so easily mocked. In broad daylight he flew high over the lines and dropped into the town, where he had been concealed, a jibing letter which stated the exact period he had waited beneath the noses of the Germans for the moment of his escape. Of course he didn't think. His pride had overcome his judgment. He had underestimated the Teutonic skill. The sequel slipped to him as more important intelligence slips from beyond the German trenches. That man has lost his exultation. He wonders that his life should have been given back to him. For from the single clue of the note the German agents found their way to the house on the edge of the town. The gossip of the cafés, shrewd guesses, a painstaking process of elimination were their mileposts, and when they knocked at the door and drew the old man roughly from his house they were sure. He stared at them, trying to shake off their hands, with a great surprise, because it had been so long, because he had forgotten to be afraid.

At that moment an acquaintance brushed against the daughter in the market place. She was directed to a friend's house where she was told that her father had been taken. So she, too, was placed upon that underground road of sympathy and patriotism, and during the dawn of her escape

the old man was made to stand, blind-folded, against a wall. While he still marvelled over the miracle of his success in saving the airman he was sent abruptly to probe the greater miracle.

In the early days when there was retreating and advancing, before the neutral zone had narrowed itself to the few sinister yards of No-Man's Land, the aeroplane gathered its intelligence well in advance of the troops. At night, pilots and observers were frequently condemned to strange lodgings, filled with apprehension, where sleep was uneasy. Sometimes they came back with shaken nerves.

I was told of such an experience. A machine was caught ahead of its division by the sudden approach of a storm at nightfall. The darkness possessed a resistive power. The first rain made it like a soggy, smothering garment. The machine descended in a country still smoking from the devastation of war. To struggle back to the blackness and the rising wind would be an invitation to disaster, and with their own eyes the pilot and the observer had seen the enemy retreat beyond this point.

"At least," the pilot said, "we can't sleep in the fields."

The observer indicated a tiny gleam of light not

far ahead, evidently the light of a candle diffused through windows. They walked towards the light and found a small farm house. It surprised them first of all because war seemed to have passed it by. They knocked at the door. A French woman with a pleasant, middle-aged face opened for them. Immediately both men experienced a sense of something out of the way. There was a queer-ness, not at all definable, about the pleasant face. It frightened them, made them want to go where its stare could no longer include them. But they couldn't go. The storm had become violent. They were exhausted by a day of labour and perpetual risk. They told the woman they must spend the night in her house. She continued to stare. At last she shook her head with a mechanical determination.

Were there no men? The men were all at the war.

Her voice had the quality of her face, pleasant, determined — staring.

They explained that they understood that her house was small, but surely it contained two rooms. They called her attention to the storm.

“You must see that it is necessary for us to spend the night here.”

Again her head moved mechanically.

“You cannot spend the night here.”

"You must tell us why."

"You cannot spend the night here. I tell you you cannot. It is quite impossible."

They glanced at each other. They looked again at the woman who stood in the light of the candle just within the doorway.

"Queer!" the pilot whispered.

The observer drew him aside. While the woman continued to stare at them without any apparent interest they consulted about her.

"Looks dangerous," the observer said. "Loyal French are never inhospitable. This woman speaks the language all right, but we're not so far from the frontier. Perhaps she is hiding some one — a German, wounded, more than likely. We know they retreated through here to-day."

The pilot shivered in the rising storm.

"You're probably right, and the danger's for the German and not for us. We'll stay in spite of this woman, who doesn't get angry, who doesn't plead, who offers no excuses, who simply forbids us. Naturally we will protect ourselves. We must search the house."

So they went back to the woman and told her that they intended to enter and search as a preliminary to spending the night whether she wanted them or not.

"You cannot spend the night here," she repeated with her mechanical dulness.

But she didn't resist when they pushed past her. She only turned to stare after them with her pleasant, determined eyes.

There were, as they had guessed, two bedrooms, opening from opposite sides of the hall. They glanced in the one on the left which was clearly occupied by the woman as her clothes lay about in some confusion. They opened the door of the other, evidently a spare room, for the bed was larger and it had a canopy and curtains. They passed on to the kitchen. That, too, offered no signs of life. The fire in the stove was out. They glanced back, startled, for the woman was at their heels, moving with the precise awkwardness of an automaton, while her strange eyes stared at them.

"We're getting close," the pilot whispered.
"In a moment she'll break down."

He questioned her.

"You've had no dinner?"

She shook her head.

"If we light the fire you will prepare our dinner?"

Again she shook her head.

"You cannot eat in this house."

The pilot made a gesture of impatience.

“What is the matter with this house that we can't sleep or eat in it? We will find out. You are sailing pretty close to the wind. That, I suppose, is the door to the cellar.”

He opened the door. With revolvers drawn the two men went down the stone steps, their hearts in their throats, while the woman stood perfectly still in the middle of the room, staring after them.

In the cellar they went carefully. They heard nothing.

“Come out!” they demanded while they held their revolvers ready.

They struck matches and searched the corners. Except for themselves the cellar was empty.

“Queer! Queer!” they muttered.

More afraid than if they had found something, they climbed the steps and looked at the woman who still stood in the centre of the floor, staring at them.

“Clearly,” the pilot said, “we are getting a case of nerves. There is no danger here — nothing at all, except this woman who stares and stares and tells us we can't spend the night. I'm tired. I've a biscuit or two and some chocolate. We'll disturb her as little as possible. We'll sleep in the spare room, and, if you think it wise, watch, turn and turn about.”

They entered the room and lighted a sconce of candles on a bureau. The woman, who had followed them mutely, stood in the doorway. Now she spoke with that mechanical intonation which possessed a certain vagueness.

“ You can't spend the night here.”

This time they laughed at the reiteration of those words which seemed to possess no meaning. Still there was something uncomfortable about their laugh. It did not last long. They munched their biscuits and chocolate.

The pilot brushed the crumbs from his hand. He lighted a caporal and strolled to the bed to make it ready.

“ We'll tumble in here —”

He drew back the faded red plush curtains which shook a little, as the candles shook, in the wind from the door. The woman had come closer. She spread her hands helplessly, as one who is suddenly justified. About the gesture, however, was something of despair.

The pilot bent over the bed. Then he shrank away. The observer advanced. The woman did not move. Her hands remained extended in that gesture of justification.

During many minutes the three stared at the young girl outstretched on the bed. There were stains, now nearly black, across the simple

clothing and straying to the edge of the coverlet. For the young girl's throat had been laid open by a sabre. But the stains and the agony hadn't driven from the pretty face a vague and helpless determination, very like the mother's.

"You see," the woman was saying, with a mechanical hoarseness, "you cannot spend the night here."

With awkward and sympathetic gestures they slipped past her and quietly left that house. In the turbulence of the storm they read a welcome.

Like hotel espionage, the use of one's own people behind the enemy's line has two sides.

During that visit to Rheims, I heard something there that made me ponder pretty uncomfortably.

I knew there must be some explanation of the systematic destruction beyond the fact that the Germans had, for a short time, occupied the town. I remember questioning the cheerful little staff officer. He looked away.

"The bombardment," he said, "is directed from within. Some of the Boches have remained. They direct the bombardment of their neighbours' homes. There have been many and there still are some Boche spies in Rheims. You see great quantities of Boches lived and worked here before the war."

Then I remembered that the Germans had always been active in the champagne industry, that many had been employed in the vineyards and the factories of Rheims. Still it seemed beyond belief.

"This ruined city was their home," I said. "These houses must have belonged to their friends."

He nodded.

"It is hard to handle them," he said. "They are very clever at reporting damage and offering rangles. It will continue to be so until there is not one of these people left in Rheims. Yesterday two of them were shot."

The sound of guns was very loud. He gestured sadly at the ruins.

"Still the bombardment goes on."

And I recalled the authoritative statement of the intelligence officer in London that every German, no matter where he lived, believed himself a divinely appointed agent of his government. And I looked at the ruins, wondering.

During my trip to the war zone of Lorraine I found this give and take of intelligence more pronounced than anywhere else. I have written of the material agony. In addition I was arrested by a mental distress, born of a situation not unlike



THE CHURCH AT M——— HAD BEEN BLASTED BY GREAT
SHELLS SENT FROM GUNS MANY MILES AWAY

that which made our own Civil War so terrible. In these border provinces the population is very much mixed. On the German side there are many men who through forty years of enemy rule have never lost their true nationality. On the French side one hears many German names, sees many Teutonic faces. Here naturally was an opportunity which during all these years the Wilhelmstrasse wasn't likely to neglect. Who is to draw the line? Who is to say that this Teutonic type is a loyal Frenchman or a German spy? And on the other side of the trenches the Germans ask themselves precisely the reverse of that question.

It is a dreadful thing to suspect one's neighbours, to search for guilt behind the eyes of those who, before the war, were one's friends. And no spy could expect mercy from these people. The wantonness of the destruction rankles in the border provinces as it never has in any other war, and when you have wandered through the devastated districts, as the Quaker and I did, you understand why. The church at M—— brought it home. It had no military value since a line of hills rolled between it and the enemy. Yet it had been blasted by great shells sent from guns many miles away, and the neighbouring houses, mere skeletons now, had been blasted with it. Its bronze bells, distorted and silent, lay in a pool of mud at the

entrance. I saw it on a Sunday morning. The officer who accompanied me said:

“Now let us look at the real church.”

He led me to a house comparatively whole. He opened a door. Within were gathered two or three bent old men, many women, and a host of little children. They sat on rough chairs arranged before an improvised altar whose boards had been draped with white cloths. One had a feeling that the simplicity of their worship concealed a desire for the only justice they could understand — an eye for an eye. They glanced at us with that desire in their faces, and with pride and suspicion. I was glad not to stand there uncondemned. I should hate to enter the border provinces at all without iron-bound credentials. It was, I fancy, pride more than habit that had held these people to the vicinity of their desolate homes. There would have been, their stolid faces seemed to say, a special degradation in seeking comfort and whole houses and unsoiled churches at the command of Germany's destructive voice. They seemed trying to tell me that Germany had had nothing to do with this, that they were making the best of matters after a bad fire or a levelling tempest.

I was glad to have seen that, for it offered a solution I had been seeking ever since my arrival

in France. I hadn't been able to understand how the French could develop, largely within two years, their amazingly successful intelligence system. It had seemed miraculous that at the same time they should have brought to so little the German system of many decades' growth. In these faces the answer lay. One saw there an infinite capacity for sacrifice. One read also that alert watchfulness, that greed for justice. And the entire country is to some extent like that, because there are few who haven't suffered personally from this war with its new and intolerable methods. Every man and woman is a potential trapper of spies.

Moreover, as I looked, it seemed to me that on the simple altar before which these determined people worshipped, the supernal and France had become inextricably tangled.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ADVANCE

THE grey and crimson tints of all these phases colour Europe too morbidly. There is no escape. When, on my way back to America, I reached Bordeaux, the gay southern city seemed at first to offer with a smile just that evasion which every one who sees the war with an intimate understanding must narrowly crave. German prisoners, working in the fields and on the roads in the outskirts, were, to be sure, a reminder; but they appeared to have borrowed something from the warm, bland countryside to which they had been transplanted. Their faces were without anger or regret. They seemed happier than the free men condemned to the trenches.

In Bordeaux itself there were fewer uniforms than one sees to the north and less of the eternal military display in shop windows. There was a much heralded theatrical production that night, and, announced for Sunday, an open air performance of "Samson and Delilah."

But almost immediately the black war shadow

showed itself. There was uncertainty as to when the boat would sail; a promise, ever more clearly defined, of an extended delay; a sense of lurking danger at the mouth of the Garonne.

And the next morning, when I stepped from my hotel, I heard the throaty music of bugles, and I saw march past thousands of Senegalese, just landed and about to entrain for the front. Beneath red fezzes their black and childish faces shown with the heat. They swung along with a naïve pride. One questioned if they foresaw anything of the facts.

America, with its lights and its careless pleasure-seeking, attained a visionary quality. Was it possible such a place actually existed? At first one was happy at the prospect of that refuge, but the bugles continued, blaring the truth of this war, and one became ashamed, reading in such a state a vital wrong which sooner or later would have to be paid for.

As the gangway from pier to ship in New York had shown itself to be the threshold of war, so, too, it was apparent, would it prove itself the only exit. For on the boat, sitting in the steamer chair next to mine, occupying a seat at the same table, was a young fellow from Brooklyn, decorated with the Croix de Guerre and the Medaille Militaire. He moved about only infrequently because of the

artificial leg to which he failed to accustom himself.

I tried to sound the impulse that had urged him to leave a broker's office to enlist in the Foreign Legion. He could only express it in this way:

"I wanted a look in at the last war."

One sought to vindicate his anxiety and his optimism.

Moreover, he was very modest about his medals.

There were other soldiers who had been decorated — either French-Americans on *permission*, or poor devils like the boy from the Foreign Legion, cast into the vast and pitiful slag heap of war.

There was a wrinkled Canadian-Belgian in the steerage.

"I am fifty-six," he lamented. "I have been wounded three times, but each time I have gone back to the trenches. Now because they say my lungs are weakened they won't let me fight any more. That is absurd. And it was I who destroyed the bridge at Termonde. The fuse had been cut, and the Boches were coming across, firing their machine guns from behind shields of mattresses. I crawled along inside a metal cask to the point where the fuse had been cut. And I lighted the broken end. Pouf! You should

have heard that! You should have seen that!"

He lifted the medal of St. George which was pinned to his rough tunic.

"The King himself," he said proudly, "placed that there, and there are few who have won it."

So through the tiresome voyage there was no escape. Then one afternoon we steamed into New York harbour, and I saw a city that seemed proud of an incomprehensible ignorance of the meaning of war.

The dusk thickened and lights flashed in a strange extravagance. Through the streets, as I drove uptown, passed laughing men and women, in and out of restaurants, into theatres and dance halls. It was like a city, uninstructed in reality.

After a time the sense of wrong vanished. One watched these men and women with a quick sympathy, limiting the period of their carelessness. For a question had survived through the months in Europe:

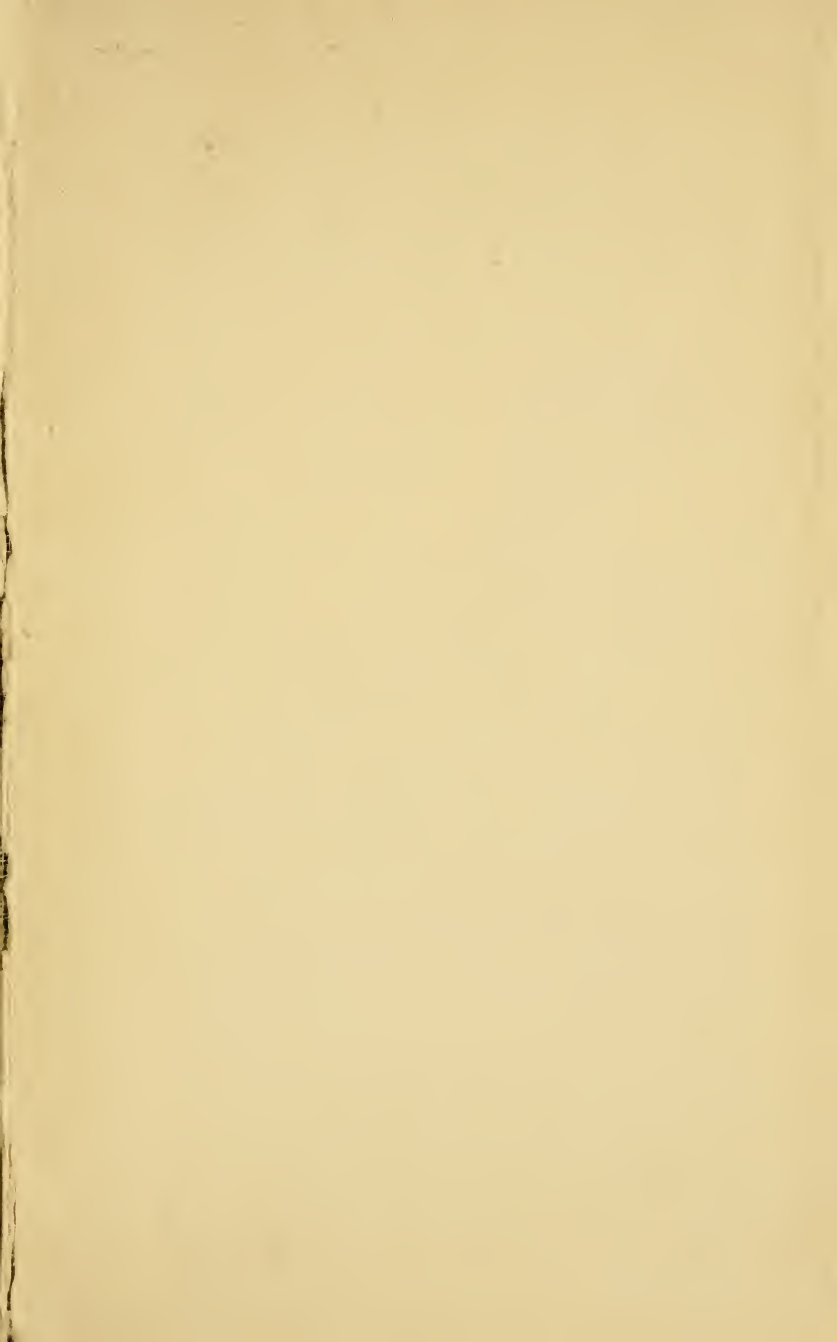
"How long before we, too, will be at war?"

As I drove on the question drifted inevitably into a statement, brutal and unescapable:

"We, too, will be at war. It will not be long."

THE END





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