Towards the Goal

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A Woman's Letter from the Front
II—III

Mrs. Humphry Ward

Fifty Cents net

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A Woman's Letters, II-III, from the Front

By

Mrs. Humphry Ward

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II

Dear Mr. Roosevelt,

My last letter left us starting from General Headquarters for a long motor drive to see an Aerodrome, some forty or fifty miles to the north. The talk at G. H. Q. 2 had been so absorbing that we are late in getting off.

The last twenty-seven kilometres of the road fly by in thirty-two minutes! It is a rolling country and there are steep descents and sharp climbs through the thickly scattered villages and small old towns of the Nord, villages crowded all of them with our men. Presently, with a start, we find ourselves on a road which saw us last spring—a year ago to the day. The same blue distances, the same glimpses of old towns in the hollows, the same touches of snow on the heights. At last, in the cold sunset light, we draw up at our destination. The wide Aerodrome stretches before us; great hangars coloured so as to escape the notice of a Boche overhead; machines of all sizes rising and landing, coming out of the hangars, or returning to them for the night.

Two of the officers in charge meet us, and I walk round with them, looking closely at the various types—those for fighting, and those for observation—while I understand—what I can! But the spirit of the men—that one can understand. "We are accumulating, concentrating now for the summer offensive. Of course the Germans have been working hard too. They have lots of new and improved machines. But when the test comes we are confident that we shall down them again as we did on the Somme. For us the all important thing *is the fighting behind the enemy lines.* Our object is to prevent the German machines from rising at all, to keep them down while our airmen are reconnoitring along the fighting-line. Awfully dangerous work! Lots don't come back. But what then? They will have done their job!"

The words were spoken so carelessly that for a few seconds I did not realise their meaning. But there was that in the expression of the man who spoke them which showed there was no lack of realisation there. How often have I recalled them with a sore heart in these recent weeks of heavy losses in the air-service —losses due, I have no doubt, to the special claims upon it of the German retreat.

The conversation dropped a little, till one of my companions, with a smile, pointed overhead. Three splendid biplanes were sailing above us at a great height bound southward. "Back from the line!" said the officer beside me, and we watched them till they dipped and disappeared in the sunset clouds. Then tea and pleasant talk. The young men insist that D. shall make tea. This visit of two ladies is a unique event. For the moment, as she makes tea in their sitting-room, which is now full of men, there is an illusion of home.

Then we are off for another fifty miles. Darkness comes on, the roads are unfamiliar. At last, an avenue, and bright lights. We have reached the Visitors' Château under the wing of G. H. Q. On the steps stood the same courteous host—Captain R—who presided last year over another Guest-House far away. But we were not to sleep at the Château, which was already full of guests. Arrangements had been made for us at a cottage in the village near, belonging to the village schoolmistress; the motor took us there immediately and, after changing our travel-stained dresses, we went back to the Château for dinner. Many guests—all of them of course of the male sex, and much talk! Some of the guests—members

of Parliament, and foreign correspondents—had been over the Somme battle-field that day, and gave discouraging accounts of the effects of the thaw upon the roads and the ground generally. Banished for a time by the frost, the mud had returned; and mud, on the front, becomes a kind of malignant force which affects the spirits of the soldiers.

The schoolmistress and her little maid sat up for us, and shepherded us kindly to bed. Never was there a more strangely built little house. The ceilings came down on our heads, the stairs were perpendicular. But there was a stove in each room, and the beds though hard, and the floor though bare, were scrupulously clean. In the early morning I woke up and looked out. There had been a white frost, and the sun was just rising in a clear sky. Its yellow light was shining on the whitewashed wall of the next cottage, on which a large pear-tree was trained. All round were frost-whitened plots of garden or meadow—*préaux*—with tall poplars in the hedges cutting the morning sky. Suddenly, I heard a continuous murmur in the room beneath me. It was the schoolmistress and her maid at prayer. And, presently, the house door opened and shut. It was Mademoiselle who had gone to early

Mass. For the school was an *école libre*, and the little lady who taught it was a devout Catholic. The rich yet cold light, the frosty quiet of the village, the thin French trees against the sky, the ritual murmur in the room below—it was like a scene from a novel by René Bazin, and breathed the old, the traditional France.

We were to start early and motor far, but there was time before we started for a little talk with Mademoiselle. She was full of praise for our English soldiers, some of whom were billetted in the village. "They are very kind to our people," she said. "They often help the women, and they never complain." (Has the British Tommy in these parts really forgotten how to grouse?) "I had some of your men billetted here. I could only give them a room without beds, just the bare boards. 'You will find it hard,' I said. 'We will get a little straw,' said the sergeant. 'That will be all right.' Our men would have grumbled." (But I think this was Mademoiselle's *politesse !*) "And the children are devoted to your soldiers. I have a dear little girl in the school, nine years old. Sometimes from the window she sees a man in the street, a soldier who lodges with her mother. Then I cannot hold her.

She is like a wild thing to be gone. 'Voilà mon camarade!—voilà mon camarade!' Out she goes, and is soon walking gravely beside him, hand in hand, looking up at him. How do they understand each other? I don't know. But they have a language. Your sergeants often know more French than your officers, because they have to do the billetting and the talking to our people."

The morning was still bright when the motor arrived, but the frost had been keen, and the air on the uplands was biting. We speed first across a famous battle-field, where French and English bones lie mingled below the quiet grass, and then turn southeast. Nobody on the roads. The lines of poplar-trees fly past, the magpies flutter from the woods, and one might almost forget the war. Suddenly, a railway-line, a steep descent, and we are full in its midst again. On our left an encampment of Nissen huts—so called from their inventor, a Canadian officer—those new and ingenious devices for housing troops, or labour battalions, or coloured workers, at an astonishing saving both of time and material. In shape like the old-fashioned beehive, each hut can be put up by four or six men in a few hours. Everything is, of course, standardised, and

the wood which lines their corrugated iron is put together in the simplest and quickest ways, ways easily suggested, no doubt, to the Canadian mind, familiar with "shacks" and lumber camps. We shall come across them everywhere along the front. But on this first occasion my attention is soon distracted from them, for as we turn a corner beyond the hut settlement, which I am told is that of a machine-gun detachment, there is an exclamation from D. For there—to our left, is a tank—the monster! —taking its morning exercise and practising up and down the high and almost perpendicular banks by which another huge field is divided. The motor slackens, and we watch the creature slowly attack a high bank, land complacently on the top, and then, an officer walking beside it to direct its movements, balance a moment on the edge of another bank equally high, a short distance away. There it is!—down!—not flopping, or falling, but all in the way of business, gliding unperturbed. London is full of tanks, of course—on the films. But somehow to be watching a real one, under the French sky, not twenty miles from the line, is a different thing. We fall into an eager discussion with Captain F. in front as to the part played by them in the Somme battle, and as to what

the Germans may be preparing in reply to them. And while we talk, my eye is caught by something on the sky-line, just above the tank. It is a man and a plough—a plough that might have come out of the Odyssey—the oldest, simplest type. So are the ages interwoven; and one may safely guess that the plough—that very type!—will outlast many generations of tanks. But for the moment, the tanks are in the limelight; and it is luck that we should have come upon one so soon; for one may motor many miles about the front without coming upon any signs of them.

Next, a fine main road, and an old town, seething with all the stir of war. We come upon a crowded market-place, and two huge convoys passing each other in the narrow street beyond—an ammunition column on one side, into which our motor humbly fits itself as best it can, by order of the officer in charge of the column, and a long string of magnificent lorries belonging to the Flying Corps, which defiles past us on the left. The inhabitants of the town, old men, women, and children, stand to watch the hubbub, with amused, friendly faces. On we go, for a time, in the middle of the convoy. The great motor-lorries filled with ammunition

hem us in, till the town is through, and a long hill is climbed. At the top of it, we are allowed to draw out, and motor slowly past long lines of troops on the march,—first R. E.'s with their store-waggons, large and small; then a cyclist detachment—a machine-gun detachment—field-kitchens, a white goat lying lazily on the top of one of them—mules, heavily laden—Lewis guns in little carts. Then infantry marching briskly in the keen air; while along other roads visible to east and west, we see other columns converging. It is a division on the march. The physique of the men, their alert and cheerful looks, strike me particularly. This pitiless war seems to have revealed to England herself the quality of her race. Though some credit must be given to the physical instructors of the army:—who in the last twelve months especially have done a wonderful work.

At last we turn out of the main road, and the endless columns pass away into the distance. Again, a railway-line in process of doubling; beyond, a village, which seems to be mainly occupied by an Army Medical detachment; then two large Casualty Clearing Stations, and a Divisional Dressing Station. Not many wounded here at present.

But what activities everywhere! Horse-lines, Army service depôts bursting with stores,—a great dump of sand-bags—another of ammunition.

And as I look out at the piles of shells, I think of the most recent figures furnished me by the Ministry of Munitions. Last year, when the Somme offensive began, and when I was writing *England's Effort*, the weekly output of 18-pounder shells was seventeen and a half times what it was during the first year of the war. *It is now twenty-eight times as much.* Field Howitzer Ammunition has *almost doubled* since last July. That of medium guns and howitzers *has more than doubled.* That of the heaviest guns of all (over 6-inch) *is more than four as great.* By the growth of ammunition we may guess what has been the increase in guns; especially in those heavy guns we are now pushing forward after the retreating Germans, as fast as roads and railway-lines can be made to carry them. The German Government, through one of its subordinate spokesmen, has lately admitted their inferiority in guns; their retreat, indeed, on the Somme before our pending attack, together with the state of their old lines, now we are in and over them, show plainly enough what

they had to fear from the British guns, and the abundance of British ammunition.

But what are these strange figures swarming beside the road—black tousled heads, and bronze faces? Kaffir "boys"! at work in some quarries, feeling the cold, no doubt, on this bright bitter day, in spite of their long coats. They are part of that large body of native labour, Chinese, Kaffir, Basuto, which is now helping our own men everywhere to push on and push up, as the new labour forces behind them release more and more of the fighting men for that dogged pursuit which is going on *there*—in that blue distance ahead!

The motor stops. This is a Headquarters, and a Staff-officer comes out to greet us—a boy in looks, but a D. S. O. all the same! His small car precedes us as a guide, and we keep up with him as best we may. These are mining villages we are passing through, and on the horizon are some of those pyramidal slag-heaps—the Fosses—which have seen some of the fiercest fighting of the war. But we leave the villages behind, and are soon climbing into a wooded upland. Suddenly, a halt. A notice-board forbids the use of a stretch of road before us "from sunrise to sunset." Evidently it is under German observation. We

try to find another, parallel. But here, too, the same notice confronts us. We dash along it however, and my pulses run a little quicker, as I realise, from the maps we carry, how near we are to the enemy lines which lie hidden in the haze, eastward; and, from my own eyes, how exposed is the hillside. But we are safely through, and a little farther we come to a wood—a charming wood, to all seeming, of small trees, which in a week or two will be full of spring leaf and flower. But we are no sooner in it, jolting up its main track, than we understand the grimness of what it holds. Spring and flowers have not much to say to it! For this wood and its neighbourhood—Ablain St. Nazaire, Carency, Neuville St. Vaast—have seen war at its cruelest; thousands of brave lives have been yielded here; some of the dead are still lying unburied, in its farthest thickets, and men will go softly through it in the years to come. "Stranger, go and tell the Lacedemonians that we lie here, obedient to their will":—the immortal words are in my ears. But how many are the sacred spots in this land for which they speak!

We leave the motor, and walk on through the wood to the bare upland beyond. The wood is still a wood of death, actual or poten-

tial. Our own batteries are all about us; so too are the remains of French batteries, from the days when the French still held this portion of the line. We watch the gunners among the trees, and presently pass an encampment of their huts. Beyond, a high and grassy plateau—fringes of wood on either hand. But we must not go to the edge on our right, so as to look down into the valley below. Through the thin leafless trees, however, we see plainly the ridges that stretch eastward, one behind the other, "suffused in sunny air." There are the towns of Mont St. Eloy—ours; the Bertonval Wood—ours; and the famous Vimy ridge, blue in the middle distance, of which half is ours, and half German. We are very near the line. Notre Dame de Lorette is not very far away, though too far for us to reach the actual spot, the famous bluff, round which the battle raged in 1915.

And now the guns begin!—the first we have heard since we arrived. From our left—as it seemed—some distance away, came the short sharp reports of the trench-mortars; but presently, as we walked on, guns just behind us, and below us, began to boom over our heads, and we heard again the long-drawn scream or swish of the shells, rushing on their deadly

path to search out the back of the enemy's lines in the haze yonder, and flinging confusion on his lines of communication, his supplies and reserves. He does not reply. He has indeed been strangely meek of late. The reason here cannot be that he is slipping away, as is the case farther south. The Vimy ridge is firmly held; it is indeed the pivot of the retreat. Perhaps, to-day, he is economising. But of course, at any moment, he might reply. After a certain amount of hammering he *must* reply! And there are some quite fresh shell-holes along our path, some of them not many hours old. Altogether, it is with relief that, as the firing grows hotter we turn back and pick up the motor in the wood again.

And yet one is loath to go! Never again shall I stand in such a scene—never again behold those haunted ridges, and this wood of death. To have shared ever so little in such a bit of human experience is, for a woman, a thing of awe, if one has time to think of it. Not even groups of artillerymen, chatting or completing their morning's toilet, amid the thin trees, can dull that sense in me. *They* are only "strafing" Fritz or making ready to "strafe" him; they have had an excellent midday meal in the huts yonder; and they

whistle and sing as they go about their work, disappearing sometimes into mysterious regions out of sight. That is all there is in it, for them. They are "doing their job" like the airmen, and if a German shell finds them in the wood, why the German will have done *his* job, and they will bear no grudge. It is as simple as that—for them. But to the onlooker, they are all figures in a great design—woven into the terrible tapestry of War, and charged with a meaning for the world that we of this actual generation shall never more than dimly understand.

Again we rush along the exposed road and back into the mining region, taking a westward turn. A stately château, and near it a smaller house, where a General greets us. Lunch is over, for we are late, but it is hospitably brought back for us, and the General and I plunge into talk of the retreat, of what it means for the Germans, and what it will mean for us. After luncheon, we go into the next room to look at the General's big maps, which show clearly how the salients run, the smaller and the larger, from which the Germans are falling back, followed closely and rapidly by the troops of General Gough. News of the condition of the enemy's abandoned lines is coming in fast.

"Let no one make any mistake. They have gone because they *must*—because of the power of our artillery, which never stops hammering them, whether on the line, or behind the line, which interferes with all their communications and supplies, and makes life intolerable. At the same time, the retreat is being skilfully done, and will of course delay any immediate offensive there. That was why they did it. We shall have to push up roads, railways, supplies; the bringing up of the heavy guns will take time; but less time than they think! Our men are in the pink of condition!"

On which, again, follows very high praise of the quality of the men now coming out under the Military Service Act. "Yet they are conscripts," says one of us, in some surprise—"and the rest were volunteers." "No doubt but these are the men—many of them—who had to balance duties—who had wives and children to leave, and businesses which depended on them personally. Compulsion has cut the knot and eased their conscience. They'll make fine soldiers. But we want more—*more!*" And then follows talk on the wonderful developments of training—even since last year; and some amusing reminiscences of the early days of England's astounding effort, by which vast

mobs of eager recruits, without guns, uniform, or teachers, have been turned into the magnificent armies now fighting in France.

The War Office has lately issued privately some extremely interesting notes on the growth and training of the New Armies, of which it is only now possible to make public use. From these it is clear that in the Great Experiment of the first two years of war, all phases of intellect and capacity have played their part. The widely trained mind, taking large views as to the responsibility of the Army towards the nation delivered into its hands, so that not only should it be disciplined for war, but made fitter for peace; and the practical inventive gifts of individuals, who in seeking to meet a special need stumble on something universal:—both forces have been constantly at work. Discipline and Initiative have been the twin conjurers; and the ablest men in the Army, to use a homely phrase, have been "out" for both. Many a fresh and valuable piece of training has been due to some individual officer struck with a new idea, and patiently working it out. The special "schools" which are now daily increasing the efficiency of the Army—if you ask how they arose you will generally be able to trace them back to some eager

young man starting a modest experiment in his spare time for the teaching of himself and some of his friends, and so developing it that the thing is finally recognised, enlarged, and made the parent of similar efforts elsewhere.

Let me describe one such "school"—to me a thrilling one, as I saw it on a clear March afternoon. A year ago no such thing existed. Now, each of our Armies possesses one.

But this letter is already too long!

III

Easter eve, 1917.

DEAR MR. ROOSEVELT,

Since I finished my last letter to you, before the meeting of Congress, great days have come and gone.

America is with us!

At last, we English folk can say that to each other, without reserve or qualification; and into England's mood of ceaseless effort and anxiety, there has come a sudden relaxation, a breath of something calming and sustaining. What your action may be—whether it will shorten the war, and how much, no one here yet knows. But when in some great strain, a friend steps to your side, you don't begin with questions. He is there. Your cause, your effort, are his. Details will come. Discussion will come. But there is a breathing-space first, in which feeling rests upon itself, before it rushes out in action. Such a breathing-space for England are these Easter days!

Meanwhile the letters from the Front come in with their new note of joy. "You should see the American faces in the Army to-day!"

writes one—"They bring a new light into this dismal Spring." How many of them? Mayn't we now confess to ourselves and our allies, that there is already the equivalent of an American division, fighting with the Allied Armies in France, who have used every honest device to get there? They have come in by every channel, and under every pretext—wavelets, forerunners of the tide. For now, you too, have to improvise great armies, as we improvised ours in the first two years of war. And with you as with us, your unpreparedness stands as your warrant before history, that not from American minds and wills came the provocation to this war.

But your actual and realised co-operation sets me on lines of thought that distract me, for the moment, from the first plan of this letter. The special Musketry School with which I had meant to open it, must wait till its close. I find my mind full instead—in connection with the news from Washington—of those recently issued War Office pamphlets of which I spoke in my last Letter; and I propose to run through their story. These pamphlets, issued not for publication, but for the information of those concerned, are the first frank record of *our national experience*, in con-

nection with the war; and for all your wonderful American resource and inventiveness, your American energy and wealth, you will certainly, as prudent men, make full use of our experience in the coming months.

Last year, for *England's Effort*, I tried vainly to collect some of these very facts and figures, which the War Office was still jealously—and no doubt quite rightly—withholding. Now, at last they are available, told by "authority" and one can hardly doubt that each of these passing days will give them—for America a double significance. Surpass the story, if you can; we shall bear you no grudge! But up till now, it remains a chapter unique in the history of war. Many Americans, as your original letter to me pointed out, had still, last year, practically no conception of what we were doing and had done. The majority of our own people, indeed, were in much the same case. While the great story was still in the making, while the foundations were still being laid, it was impossible to correct all the anxious underestimates, all the ignorant or careless judgments, of people who took a point for the whole. The men at the heart of things could only set their teeth, keep silence, and give no information

that could help the enemy. The Battle of the Somme, last July, was the first real testing of their work. The Hindenburg retreat, the successes in Mesopotamia, the marvellous spectacle of the Armies in France,* are the present fruits of it.

Like you, we had at the outbreak of war, some 500,000 men, all told, of whom not half were fully trained. None of us British folk will ever forget the Rally of the First Hundred Thousand! On the 8th of August, four days after the declaration of war, Lord Kitchener asked for them. He got them in a fortnight. But the stream rushed on. In the fifth week of the war alone, 250,000 men enlisted. Thirty thousand recruits—the yearly number enlisted before the war—joined in one day. Within six or seven weeks, the half million available at the beginning of the war had been *more than doubled.*

Then came a pause. The War Office, snowed under, not knowing where to turn for clothes, boots, huts, rifles, guns, ammunition, tried to check the stream by raising the recruiting standards. A mistake!—but soon recognised. In another month, under the influence of the victory on the Marne, and while the Germans

* [And, before this letter goes to press, the glorious news from the Arras front!]

were preparing the attacks on the British line so miraculously beaten off in the first battle of Ypres, the momentary check had been lost in a fresh outburst of national energy. You will remember how the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee came into being, that first autumn?—how the Prime Minister took the lead, and the two great political parties of the country agreed to bring all their organisation, central or local, to bear on the supreme question of getting men for the Army. Tory and Radical toured the country together. The hottest opponents stood on the same platform. *L'union sacrée*—to use the French phrase, so vivid and so true, by which our great ally has charmed her own discords to rest in defence of the country—became a reality here too, in spite of strikes, in spite of Ireland.

By July, 1915,—the end of the first year of war—more than 2,000,000 men had voluntarily enlisted. But the military chiefs knew well that it was but a half-way house. They knew too, by now, that it was not enough to get men and rush them out to the trenches as soon as any kind of training could be given them. The available men must be sorted out. Some, indeed, must be brought back from the fighting-line, for work as vital as the

fighting itself. *Registration came*—the first real step towards organising the nation. One hundred and fifty thousand voluntary workers helped to register all men and women in the country, from eighteen to sixty-five, and on the results Lord Derby built his group system, which *almost* enabled us to do without compulsion. Between October and December, 1915, another two million and a quarter men had "attested"—that is had pledged themselves to come up for training when called on. And so you come to Mr. Asquith's statement on the 2nd of May, 1916, that the total effort of the Empire since the beginning of the war exceeds 5,000,000 men.

But, as every observer of this new England knows, we have here less than half the story. From a nation not invaded, protected, on the contrary, by its sea-ramparts from the personal cruelties and savages of war, to gather in between four and five million voluntary recruits was a great achievement. But to turn these recruits at the shortest possible notice, under the hammer-blows of a war in which our enemies had every initial advantage, into armies equipped and trained according to modern standards might well have seemed to those who undertook it, an impossible task.

And the task had to be accomplished, the riddle solved, before, in the face of the enemy, the incredible difficulties of it could possibly be admitted. The creators of the new armies worked, as far as they could, behind a screen. But now the screen is down, and we are allowed to see their difficulties in their true perspective—as they existed during the first months of the war.

In the first place—accommodation! At the opening of war we had barrack-room for 176,000 men. What to do with these capped, bareheaded, or straw-hatted multitudes who poured in at Lord Kitchener's call! They were temporarily housed—somehow—under every kind of shelter. But military huts for half a million men were immediately planned—then, for nearly a million. Timber—labour—lighting—roads—everything had to be provided, and was provided. Billeting filled up the gaps, and large camps were built by private enterprise to be taken over in time by the Government. Of course mistakes were made. Of course there were some dishonest contractors, and some incompetent officials. But the breath, the winnowing blast of the national need was behind it all. By the end of the first year of war, the "problem of quartering the

troops in the chief training centres had been solved."

In the next place, there were no clothes. A dozen manufacturers of khaki cloth existed before the war. They had to be pushed up as quickly as possible to 200. Which of us in the country districts does not remember the blue emergency suits, of which a co-operative society was able by a lucky stroke to provide 400,000 for the new recruits?—or the other motley coverings of the hosts that drilled in our fields, and marched about our lanes? The War Office Notes, under my hand, speak of these months as the "tatterdemalion stage." For what clothes and boots there were, must go to the men at the Front; and the men at home had just to take their chance.

Well! It took a year and five months—breathless months of strain and stress—while Germany was hammering East and West on the long-drawn lines of the Allies. But by January, 1916, the Army was not only clothed, housed, and very largely armed; but we were manufacturing for our allies.

As to arming and equipment, look back at these facts. When the Expeditionary Force had taken its rifles abroad in August, 1914, 150,000 rifles were left in the country, and many

of them required to be resighted. The few Service rifles in each battalion were handed round "as the Three Fates handed round their one eye, in the story of Perseus"; old rifles, and inferior rifles "technically known as D. P." were eagerly made use of. But after seven months hard training with nothing better than these makeshifts "men were apt to get depressed."

It was just the same with the Artillery. At the outbreak of war we had guns for eight divisions—say 140,000 men. And there was no plant wherewith to make and keep up more than that supply. Yet guns had to be sent as fast as they could be made to France, Egypt, Gallipoli. How were the gunners at home to be trained?

It was done, so to speak, with blood and tears. For seven months it was impossible for the gunners in training even to see, much less to work or fire the gun to which he was being trained. Zealous officers provided dummy wooden guns for their men. All kinds of devices were tried. And even when the guns themselves arrived, they came often without the indispensable accessories—range-finders directors, and the like.

It was a time of hideous anxiety for both

Government and War Office. For the military history of 1915 was largely a history of shortage of guns and ammunition—whether on the Western or Eastern fronts. All the same by the end of 1915 the thing was in hand. The shells from the new factories were arriving in ever increasing volume; and the guns were following.

In a chapter of *England's Effort* I have described the amazing development of some of the great armament works in order to meet this cry for guns, as I saw it in February, 1916. The second stage of the war had then begun. The first was over and we were steadily overtaking our colossal task. The Somme battles proved it abundantly. But the expansion *still* goes on—goes on! On my writing-desk is a letter received, not many days ago, from a world-famous firm whose works I saw last year. "Since your visit here in the early part of last year there have been very large additions to the works." Buildings to accommodate new aeroplane and armament construction, of different kinds, are mentioned, and the letter continues: "We have also put up another gun-shop, 565 feet long, and 163 feet wide—in three extensions—of which the third is nearing completion. These additions are all to

increase the output of guns. The value of that output is now 60 per cent greater than it was in 1915. In the last twelve months, the output of shells has been one and a half times more than it was in the previous year."

No wonder that the humane director who writes speaks with keen sympathy of the "long-continued strain" upon masters and men. But he adds—"When we all feel it, we think of our soldiers and sailors, doing their duty—unto death."

And then—to repeat—if the *difficulties of equipment* were huge, they were almost as nothing to the *difficulties of training*. The facts as the War Office has now revealed them—(the latest of these most illuminating *brochures* is dated April 2nd, 1917) are almost incredible. It will be an interesting time when our War Office and yours come to compare notes!—"when Peace has calmed the world." For you are now facing the same grim task—how to find the shortest cuts to the making of an Army—which confronted us in 1914.

In the first place, what military trainers there were in the country had to be sent abroad with the first Expeditionary Force. Adjutants, N. C. O.'s, all the experienced pilots in the Flying Corps, nearly all the qualified instruc-

tors in physical training, the vast majority of all the seasoned men in every branch of the Service—down, as I have said, to the Army cooks—departed overseas. At the very last moment an officer or two was shed from every battalion of the Expeditionary Force to train those left behind. Even so, there was "hardly even a nucleus of experts left." And yet—officers for 500,000 men had to be found—*within a month*—from August 4th, 1914.

How was it done? The War Office answer makes fascinating reading. "The small number of regular officers left behind"—200 officers of the Indian Army—retired officers, "dugouts"—all honour to them!—wounded officers from the Front; all were utilised. But the chief sources of supply, as we all know, were the Officers' Training Corps at the Universities and Public Schools which we owe to the divination, the patience, the hard work of Lord Haldane. *Twenty thousand potential officers were supplied* by the O. T. C.'s. What should we have done without them?

But even so, there was no time to train them in the practical business of war—and such a war! Yet *their* business was to train recruits, while they themselves were untrained. At first, those who were granted "temporary

commissions" were given a month's training. Then even that became impossible. During the latter months of 1914 "there was practically no special training given to infantry subalterns, with temporary commissions." With 1915, the system of a month's training was revived—pitifully little, yet the best that could be done. But during the first five months of the war most of the infantry subalterns of the new armies "had to train themselves as best they could in the intervals of training their men."

One's pen falters over the words. Before the inward eye rises the phantom host of these boy-officers who sprang to England's aid in the first year of the war, and whose graves lie scattered in an endless series along the Western Front and on the heights of Gallipoli. Without counting the cost for a moment, they came to the call of the Great Mother, from near and far. "They trained themselves, while they were training their men." Not for them the plenty of guns and shells that now at least lessens the hideous sacrifice that war demands; not for them the many protective devices and safeguards that the war itself has developed. Their young bodies—their precious lives—paid the price. And in the Mother-heart of

England they lie—gathered and secure—for ever.

But let me go a little further with the new War Office facts.

The year 1915 saw great and continuous advance. During that year, an *average number of over a million troops* were being trained in the United Kingdom, apart from the armies abroad .The First, Second, and Third armies naturally came off much better than the Fourth and Fifth, who yet were being recruited all the time. What equipment, clothes, and arms there were, the first three armies got; the rest had to wait. But all the same, the units of these later armies were doing the best they could for themselves; nobody stood still. And gradually—surely—order was evolved out of the original chaos. The Army Orders of the past had dropped out of sight with the beginning of the war. Everything had to be planned anew. The one governing factor was the "necessity of getting men to the front at the earliest possible moment." Six months courses were laid down for all arms. It was very rare, however, that any course could be strictly carried out; and after the first three armies, the training of the rest seemed, for a

time, to be all beginnings!—with the final stage farther and farther away. And always the same difficulty of guns, rifles, huts, and the rest.

But, like its own tanks, the War Office went steadily on, negotiating one obstacle after another. Special courses for special subjects began to be set up. Soon artillery officers had no longer to join their batteries *at once* on appointment; R. E. officers could be given a seven weeks' training at Chatham; little enough, "for a man supposed to know the use and repairs of telephones and telegraphs, or the way to build or destroy a bridge, or how to meet the countless other needs with which a sapper is called upon to deal!" Increasing attention was paid to Staff training and Staff courses. And insufficient as it all was, for months, the general results of this haphazard training, when the men actually got into the field—all shortcomings and disappointments admitted—were nothing short of wonderful. Had the Germans forgotten that we are, and always have been, a fighting people? That fact, at any rate, was brought home to them by the unbroken spirit of the troops who held the line in France and Flanders in 1915 against all attempts to break through; and at Neuve Chapelle, or Loos, or a hundred other minor

engagements, only wanted numbers and ammunition—above all ammunition!—to win them the full victory they had rightly earned.

Of this whole earlier stage, the *junior subaltern* was the leading figure. It was he—let me insist upon it anew—whose spirit made the new armies. If the tender figure of the *Lady of the Lamp* has become for many of us the chief symbol of the Crimean struggle, when Britain comes to embody in sculpture or in painting that which has touched her most deeply in this war, she will choose—surely—the figure of a boy of nineteen, laughing, eager, undaunted, as quick to die as to live, carrying in his young hands the "Luck" of England.

Then—with the end of 1915, the first stage, the elementary stage, of the new Armies came to an end. When I stood, in March, 1916, on the Scherpenberg hill, looking out over the Salient, the second stage had well begun. The Officer Cadet Corps had been formed; a lively and continuous intercourse between the realities of the Front and the training at home had been set up; special schools in all subjects of military interest had been founded, often, as we have seen, by the zeal of individual officers, to be gradually incorporated in the Army system. Men insufficiently trained in

the early months had been given the opportunity—which they eagerly took—of beginning at the beginning again; correcting mistakes and incorporating all the latest knowledge. Even a lieutenant-colonel, before commanding a battalion, could go to school again; and even for officers and men "in rest," there were and are, endless opportunities of seeing and learning, which few wish to forego.

And that brings me to what is now shaping itself—the final result. The year just passed, indeed,—from March to March—has practically rounded our task—though the "learning" of the Army is never over!—and has seen the transformation—whether temporary or permanent, who yet can tell?—of the England of 1914, with its zealous mobs of untrained and "tatterdemalion" recruits, into a great military power, disposing of armies in no whit inferior to those of Germany, and bringing to bear upon the science of war—now that Germany has forced us to it—the best intelligence, and the best *character*, of the nation. The most insolent of the German military newspapers are already bitterly confessing it.

My summary—short and imperfect as it is—of this first detailed account of its work

which the War Office has allowed to be made public—has carried me far afield.

The motor has been waiting long at the door of the hospitable Headquarters which have entertained us! Let me return to it,—to the great spectacle of the Present—after this retrospect of the Past.

Again the crowded roads—the young and vigorous troops—the manifold sights illustrating branch after branch of the Army. I recall a draught, tired with marching, clambering with joy into some empty lorries, and sitting there peacefully content, with legs dangling and the ever-blessed cigarette for company—then an aeroplane-station—then, a football-field, with a violent game going on—a casualty clearing-station, almost a large hospital—another football-match:—a battery of 18-pounders on the march—an old French market-town crowded with lorries and men. In the midst of it D. suddenly draws my attention to a succession of great nozzles passing us, with their teams and limber. I have stood beside the forging and tempering of their brothers in the gun-shops of the north, have watched the testing and callipering of their shining throats. They are 6-inch naval guns on their way to the line—like everything else, part of the storm to come.

And in and out, among the lorries and the guns stream the French folk, women, children, old men, alert, industrious, full of hope, with friendly looks for their allies. Then the town passes, and we are out again in the open country, leaving the mining village behind. We are not very far at this point from that portion of the line which I saw last year under General X.'s guidance. But everything looks very quiet and rural, and when we emerged on the high ground of the school we had come to see, I might have imagined myself on a Surrey or Hertfordshire common. The officer in charge, a "mighty hunter" in civil life, showed us his work with a quiet but most contagious enthusiasm. The problem that he and his colleagues, engaged in similar work in other sections of the Front, had to solve, was—how to beat the Germans at their own game of "sniping," which cost us so many lives in the first year and a half of war; in other words, how to train a certain number of men to an art of rifle-shooting, combining the instincts and devices of a "Pathfinder" with the subtleties of modern optical and mechanical science. "Don't think of this as meant primarily to kill," says the Chief of the School, as he walks beside me—"it is meant primarily to *protect*. We lost our best men—young and

promising officers in particular—by the score before we learnt the tricks of the German 'sniper,' and how to meet them." German "sniping," as our guide explains, is by no means all tricks. For the most part, it means just first-rate shooting, combined with the trained instinct and *flair* of the sportsman. Is there anything that England and Scotland should provide more abundantly? Still, there are tricks, and our men have learnt them.

Above all, it is a school of *observation*. Nothing escapes the eye or the ear. Every point, for instance, connected with our two unfamiliar figures, will have been elaborately noted by those men on the edge of the hill; the officer in charge will presently get a careful report on us. The little museum which stands on the training-ground emphasises this point of skilled observation.

"We teach our men the old great game of war—wit against wit—courage against courage—life against life. We try many men here, and reject a good few. But the men who have gone through our training here are valuable, both for attack and defence—above all, let me repeat it, they are valuable for *protection*."

And what is meant by this, I have since

learnt, in greater detail. Before these schools were started, *every day* saw a heavy toll—especially of officers' lives—taken by German snipers. Compare with this one of the latest records: that out of 15 battalions there were only 9 men killed by snipers *in three months.*

We leave the hill, half sliding down the frozen watercourse that leads to it, and are in the motor again, bound for an Army Headquarters.

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