My Home in the Field of Honour

Frances Wilson Huard

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FRANCES WILSON HUARD

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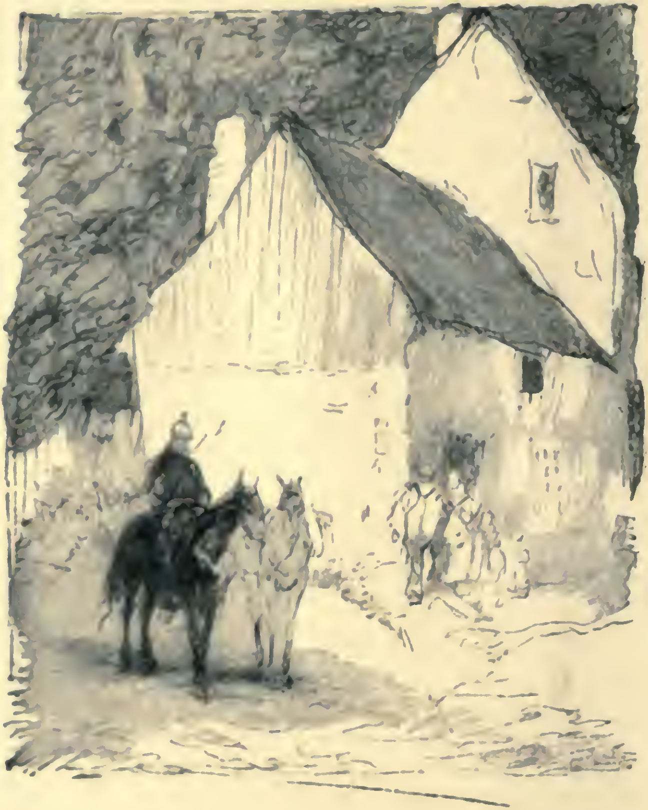

AT THE ENTRANCE TO EVERY LITTLE VILLAGE WE WERE OBLIGED TO HALT [Page 56]

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MY HOME IN THE FIELD OF HONOUR

BY
FRANCES WILSON HUARD

WITH DRAWINGS BY CHARLES HUARD

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To H.

MY HOME IN THE FIELD OF HONOUR

MY HOME IN THE FIELD OF HONOUR

I

THE third week in July found a very merry gathering at the Château de Villiers.

(Villiers is our summer home situated near the Marne River, sixty miles or an hour by train from Paris.)

Nothing, I think, could have been farther from our thoughts than the idea of war. Our friends, May Wilson Preston, the artist; Mrs. Chase, the editor of a well-known woman's magazine; Hugues Delorme, the French dramatist; and numerous other guests, discussed the theatre and the "Caillaux case" from every conceivable point of view, and their conversations were only interrupted by serious attempts to prove their national superiority at bridge, and long delightful walks in the park.

As I look back now over those cheerful times, I can distinctly remember one bright sunny morning, when after a half-hour's climbing we reached the highest spot on our property. Very warm and a trifle out of breath we sought shelter beneath a big purple beech, and I can still hear H. explaining to Mrs. Chase:

"Below you on the right runs the Marne, and over there, beyond those hills, do you see that long straight line of trees?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's the road that leads from Paris to Metz!"

At that moment I'm confident he hadn't the slightest *arrière pensée.*

On Monday, the 27th, Mrs. Preston, having decided to take her leave, I determined to accompany her to Paris. Several members of the house party joined us, leaving H. and a half-dozen friends at Villiers. We took an early morning train, and wrapped in our newspapers we were rolling peacefully towards the capital when someone called out, "For Heaven's sake, look at those funny soldiers!"

Glancing through the window, I caught sight of numerous grey-haired, bushy-bearded men stationed at even distances along the line, while here and there little groups beneath or around a tent were preparing the morning meal.

What strange looking creatures they were; anything but military in their dirty white overalls—the only things that betrayed their calling being their caps and their guns!

"What on earth are they?" queried an American.

"Oh, only some territorials serving their last period of twenty-nine days. It's not worth while giving them uniforms for so short a time!"

"Bah!" came from the other end of the compartment, "I should think it was hot enough in the barracks without forcing men that age to mount guard in the sun!"

"It's about time for the *Grand manœuvres*, isn't it?"

And in like manner the conversation rose and dwindled, and we returned to our papers, paying no more attention to the territorials stationed along the rails.

A theatre party having been arranged, I decided to stop over in Paris. The play was *Georgette Lemeunier* at the Comédie Française. The house was full—the audience chiefly composed of Americans and tourists, and throughout the entire piece even very significant allusions to current political events failed to arouse any unwonted enthusiasm on the part of the French contingent. Outside not even an *edition spéciale de la Presse* betokened the slightest uneasiness.

The next day, that is, Tuesday, the 28th, I had a business meeting with my friends, Mr. Gautron and Mr. Pierre Mortier, editor of the *Gil Blas*. Mr. Gautron was on the minute, but Mr. Mortier kept us waiting over an hour and when finally we had despaired of his coming I heard someone hurrying across the court, and the bell was rung impatiently. Mr. Mortier rushed in, unannounced, very red, very excited, very apologetic.

"A thousand pardons. I'm horribly late, but you'll forgive me when you hear the news. I've just come from the Foreign Office. All diplomatic relations with Germany are suspended. War will be declared Saturday!"

Mr. Gautron and I looked at each other, then at Mr. Mortier, and smiled.

"No, I'm not joking. I'm as serious as I have ever been in my life. The proof: on leaving the Foreign Office I went and had a neglected tooth filled, and on my way down, stopped at my shoemaker's and ordered a pair of good strong boots for Saturday morning. I'll be fit then to join my regiment."

Our faces fell.

"But why Saturday?"

"Because Saturday's the first of August, and the idea of keeping the news back is to prevent a panic on the Bourse, and to let the July payments have time to be realized."

"You don't really believe it's serious, do you?"

"Yes, really. I'm not fooling, and if I've any advice to give you it's this: draw out all the money you can from your bank, and take all the gold they'll give you. You may need it. I've telephoned to the *Gil Blas* for them to do as much for us. The worst of all though is, that every man on my paper is of an age bound to military service. War means that when I leave, staff, printers and all will have to go the same day and the *Gil Blas* shuts its doors. We cease to exist—that's all."

Somewhat disconcerted by this astonishing news, we had some little difficulty getting down to facts, but when we did business was speedily dispatched and Mr. Mortier took his leave. Mr. Gautron carried me off to luncheon.

"You must come," he protested when I pleaded an engagement. "You must come, or my wife and the boys will never believe me."

We found Madame Gautron and her two splendid sons waiting, rather impatiently. We told our news.

"Come, come now. You can't make us take that as an excuse!"

We protested our sincerity, and went in to luncheon which began rather silently.

I questioned the boys as to their military duties. Both were under-officers in an infantry regiment—bound to join their barracks within twenty-four hours after the call to arms.

We did not linger over our coffee. Each one seemed anxious to go about his affairs. I left the Gautron boys at the corner of their street, each carrying his army shoes under his arm.

"To be greased—in case of accident," they laughingly explained.

That was the last time I ever saw them. They fell "on the Field of Honour" both the same day, and hardly a month later.

But to return to my affairs.

A trifle upset by what Mr. Mortier had told me, I hurried to the nearest telephone station and asked for Villiers. When after what seemed an interminable time I got the connection, I explained to H. what had happened.

"For Heaven's sake leave politics alone and take the five o'clock train home! We need you to make a second fourth at bridge." H.'s lightheartedness somewhat reassured me, though for prudence's sake I went to my bank and asked to withdraw my entire account.

"Why, Madame Huard," said the clerk in surprise, "you don't mean to say you are frightened?"

I explained what I had heard in the morning.

"Pensez-vous? Non! We would be the first to be notified. We were ever so much closer to war two years ago—at Agadir! There is no cause for alarm."

He almost persuaded me, but after hesitating a moment I decided to abide by my original intentions.

"I can always put my money back in a week or so if all blows over and I find I don't need it," I argued.

"Certainly, Madame—as you will."

And the twenty-eighth of July the *Société Générale* gave me all the gold I requested.

As the five o'clock express hurried me back home I began to understand the gravity of the situation—for the "queer looking soldiers" were nearer together all along the railway line, and it dawned on me that theirs was a very serious mission—namely, that of safeguarding the steel artery which leads from Paris to the eastern frontier.

At Charly, our station, I was much surprised to see three French officers in full uniform get off the train and step into the taxi-autobus which deposits its travellers at the only hotel in the vicinity.

At the château my story failed to make an impression. The men pooh-poohed the idea of war, and returned to the evening papers and the *procès Caillaux,* which was the most exciting question of the moment. In the pantry the news was greeted with hilarity, and coachman and gardener declared that they would shoulder their spades and *faire la guerre en sabots.*

My friend and neighbor, Elizabeth Gauthier, was the only one who took the matter seriously, and that because she had no less than five brothers and a husband who would be obliged to serve in case of serious events. I felt rather ashamed when I saw her countenance darken, for after all, she was alone in Villiers with two tiny children; her husband, the well-known archivist, coming down but for the week-end. "What is the sense of alarming people so uselessly?" I thought.

Wednesday, the 29th, the papers began to talk of "a tension in the political relations between France and Germany" which, however, did not quench the gaiety of a picnic luncheon in the grove by our river.

In the afternoon the old *garde-champêtre* asked for H. in the courtyard.

"In case of mobilisation," said he, "you have three horses and your farm cart to present to the authorities. Your cart must have its awnings complete. And your horses harnessed with their halters!"

H. laughed and told him that he was giving himself a lot of useless trouble.

Thursday, the 30th, market day at Charly, the nearest town to Villiers. We both drove down in the victoria, and were not surprised to see my officers of the day before seated in the hotel dining-room, finishing breakfast.

"What are they down here for?" I queried of the proprietor.

"Oh, they belong to the *Etat Major* and are out here to verify their maps. The Mayor has given them an office in the town hall. They go off on their bicycles early every morning and only return for meals."

"Oh!"——

"It's rather a treat to see a uniform out here, where hardly an officer has appeared since last year when we had Prince George of Servia and his staff for three days."

The general topic on the market place was certainly *not* war, and we drove home somewhat reassured.

Friday, the 31st, however, the tone of the newspapers was serious and our little village began to grow alarmed when several soldiers on holiday leave received individual official telegrams to rejoin their regiments immediately. Little knots of peasants could be seen grouped together along the village street, a thing unheard of in that busy season when vineyards need so much attention. Towards noon the news ran like wildfire that men belonging to the youngest classes had received their official notices and were leaving to join their corps. Yet there was no commotion anywhere.

"It will last three weeks and they'll all come home, safe and sound. It's bothersome, though, that the Government should choose just our busiest season to take the men out for a holiday!" declared one peasant.

There was less hilarity in the servants' hall when I entered after luncheon. At least I fancied so. The men had gone about their work quicker than usual, and the women were silently washing up.

"Does Madame know that the *fils Poupard* is leaving by the four o'clock train—and that Granger and Veron are going too?" asked my faithful Catherine.

"No."

"Yes, Madame—and Honorine is in the wash-house crying as though her heart would break."

I turned on my heel and walked toward the river. In the wash-house I found Honorine bending over her linen, the great tears streaming down her face, in spite of her every effort to control them.

"Why, Honorine, what's the matter?"

"He's gone, Madame—gone without my seeing him—without even a clean pair of socks!"

"Who?"

"My son, Madame!"

And the tears burst out afresh, though in silence.

"Yes, Madame, I found this under the door when I came in at noon—" She drew a crumpled paper from her apron pocket. I smoothed it out and read:

"Je viens de recevoir ma feuille. Je pars de suite. Je prends les deux francs sur la cheminée. Jean." (I've just received my notice. Am leaving at once. Have taken the two francs that are on the mantel. Jean.)

I cannot say what an impression that brief but heroic note made upon me. In my mind it has always stood as characteristic of that wonderful national resolution to do one's duty, and to make the least possible fuss about it.

At tea-time the male contingent of the house-party was decidedly restless.

"Let's go up to Paris and see what's going on."

"There's no use doing that. Elizabeth Gauthier went this morning and will be back in an hour with all the news. It's too late to go to town, anyway!"

"Well, if things don't look better to-morrow I've got to go. My military book is somewhere in my desk at home and it's best to have it *en règle* in case of necessity," said Delorme.

"Mine's at home, too," echoed our friend Bouteron.

"We'll all go to-morrow, and make a day of it," decided H.

Just then the silhouette of the three officers on bicycles passed up the road.

"Let's go out and ask them what's up," suggested someone.

"Pooh! Do you think they know anything more than we do? And if they do know something, they wouldn't tell *you!* Don't make a fool of yourself, Hugues!"

Presently Elizabeth Gauthier arrived, placid and cool as though everything were normal.

"Paris is calm; calm as Paris always is in August."

"But the papers? Your husband? What does he say?"

"There are no extras—Léon doesn't seem over-alarmed, though as captain in the reserves he would have to leave within an hour after any declaration of hostilities. He has a special mission to perform. But he's certain of coming down by the five o'clock train to-morrow."

We went in to dinner but conversation lagged. Each one seemed preoccupied and no one minded the long silences. We were so quiet that the Angelus ringing at Charly, some four miles away, roused us with something of a shock.

Saturday morning, August 1st, the carryall rolled up to the station for the early train. All made a general rush for the papers which had just arrived and all of us were equally horrified when a glance showed the headline—JAURÈS, THE GREAT SOCIALIST LEADER, ASSASSINATED. Decidedly the plot thickened and naturally we all jumped to the same conclusion—a political crime.

"There's a stronger hand than the murderer's back of that felony," murmured a plain man from the corner of our compartment.

"What makes you say that?"

"Why, can't you see, Monsieur, that our enemies are counting on that deed to stir up the revolutionary party and breed discord in the country? It's plain as day!"

That was rather opening the door to a lengthy discussion, but our friends refused to debate, especially as we could hear excited masculine voices rising high above the ordinary tone in the compartments on either side of us.

The journey drew to a close without any further remarkable incident. It seemed to me that we passed more up trains than usual, but we were not a moment overdue. There was nothing to complain of. As we approached La Villette and drew into the Gare de l'Est everyone noticed the extraordinary number of locomotives that were getting up steam in the yards. There were rows and rows of them, just as close together as it was possible to range them, and as far as the eye could see their glittering boilers extended down the tracks in even lines. Each one had a freshly glued yellow label, on which was printed in big black capitals the name of its home station. That was the most significant preparation we had witnessed as yet. Presently we observed that the platforms of freight and express depots had been swept clear of every obstacle, and the usually encumbered Gare de l'Est was clean and empty as the hand of man could make it.

In the courtyard our party separated, promising to meet for the five o'clock express—"Unless something serious prevents."

I accompanied H. to the *Caserne des Minimes* where he went to see if his military situation was registered up to date in his *livret,* and all along the streets leading from the station we met women silently wiping their eyes.

What a sight the courtyard of that barracks presented! Some five or six thousand men of all ages, classes and conditions who up until that moment had never thought that the loss of a military book entailed the slightest consequence, had one and all been pushed by that single thought, "Be ready for duty." Here they were, boys of twenty and men of forty, standing in line, braving their all-time enemy, the *gendarme,* each silently waiting his turn to explain his situation. To the credit of the *gendarme* and all those in authority, it must be said that contrary to their usual custom they acted like loving fathers with these prodigal sons of the Republic—giving all possible information without the sign of a grumble, and advising those who were still streaming in at the door to come back towards five o'clock, when the line should have advanced a little. It was then scarcely ten A. M.!

H. had finished in no time.

"All I've got to do is to go home and wait until I am called for," he explained as we walked away at a brisk gait.

Like most country people when they come to town I had numerous errands to do, so we set off towards the *Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville,* renowned for its farming implements.

At the corner of the Rue des Archives we met Monsieur Gauthier on his way to his Museum.

"Grave—très grave—la situation, Monsieur," was all he could say.

"What would you advise us to do?"

"Well, to speak plainly, I should advise you to shut up the château, leave a guardian, and open your Paris apartment. You're in the east, you know! I shall go down by the five train and bring back Elizabeth and the children. I'd be easier in my mind if I knew they were in a big city! If you have to leave, Madame Huard would be better off here."

H. was very sober as we left Mr. Gauthier.

"Bah! Cheer up! I'm afraid our friend is an alarmist. You know he has two young children!"

We entered the Bazar, which is the "biggest" of the big stores in Paris. Every day in the week, and Sundays included, it is usually so crowded with buyers and sellers that one has to elbow one's way, and literally serve one's self. To our amazement it was empty—literally empty. Not a single customer—not a single clerk to be seen. The long stretches of floor and counters were vacant as though the store were closed. I gasped a little in surprise and just as I did so a female voice from behind a distant desk called out:

"What is your pleasure, Madame?"

I turned, and a little woman in black advanced towards me.

"Yes, I know the place looks queer, but you see all our clerks are young men and everyone of them has been obliged to join his regiment since closing time last evening!"

"Leave farming alone and come over to Conard's. He's bound to have some news," said H. impatiently.

Conard's is a big publishing firm on the boulevard, renowned as a meeting place for most of the well-known political men.

Conard greeted us in silence. He knew no more than we, and we fell to talking of the latest events and trying to come to a conclusion. Then one of the *habitués* stepped in.

"Eh bien, Monsieur, what news?"

The person addressed kept on perusing the titles of the books spread along the counter, and drawing a long puff from his cigarette and without lifting his eyes, said, "The mobilisation is for four o'clock! Official. Have you something entertaining to read on my way to the front?"

"What?"

"Yes, gentlemen."

"War?"

"It looks very much like it!"

Though almost expected, the news gave us a thrill. We stood spellbound and tongue-tied.

What to do? There were so many decisions to be made at a moment's notice! H. was for our coming to Paris, as all the men must necessarily leave the château.

"Mobilisation doesn't necessarily mean war, man. Besides if it does come it can't last long. You'd better go back to your place in the country, Huard. A big estate like that needs looking after," said Conard.

"Where do you live?" questioned the gentleman who had given us the news.

"Villiers—sixty miles *east* of Paris."

"Well, if you decide to go there I advise you to take the soonest train. The eastern railway belongs to the army, and only the army, beginning at noon to-day."

H. looked at his watch. It was nearly eleven, and our next train left at noon sharp. We jumped into a taxi.

"Drive to the Gare de l'Est and on the way stop at Tarides! We must have maps, good road maps of the entire north and east," said H., turning to me.

It seemed as though he had had that thought in common with the entire Parisian population, for all down the boulevards the bookshops and stationers were already overflowing with men, chiefly in regimentals, and as to the shoe-shops and boot-makers,—there was a line waiting outside of each. Yet there was no excitement, no shouting, not even an "extra."

What a different sight our station presented to that of two hours before! The great iron gates were shut, and guarded by a line of *sergents de ville.* Only men joining their regiments and persons returning to their legitimate dwellings were allowed to pass. And there were thousands of both. Around the grillwork hovered dense groups of women, bravely waving tearless adieux to their menfolk.

After assuring himself that there was still a noon train, H. led me to the restaurant directly opposite the station.

"We'll have a bite here. Heaven knows what time we shall reach home!"

The room was filled to overflowing; the lunchers being mostly officers. At the table on our right sat a young fellow whose military harnessings were very new and very stiff, but in spite of the heat, a high collar and all his trappings he managed to put away a very comfortable repast.

On our left was a party composed of a captain, his wife and two other *frères d'armes.* That brave little Parisian woman at once won my admiration, for though, in spite of superhuman efforts, the tears *would* trickle down her face, she never gave in one second to her emotion but played her part as hostess, trying her best to put her guests at ease and smilingly inquiring after their family and friends as though she were receiving under ordinary circumstances in her own home.

At a quarter before noon we left them and elbowed our way through the ever-gathering crowd towards our train.

"The twelve o'clock express—what platform?" H. enquired.

"The ten o'clock train hasn't gone yet, Monsieur!"

"Is there any danger of its *not* going?"

"Oh, no; but there's every danger of its being the last."

And the man spoke the truth, for as our friend the politician predicted, at noon military authority took over the station and all those who were so unfortunate as to have been left behind were obliged to wait in Paris three mortal weeks. On the Eastern Railway all passenger service was immediately sacrificed to the transportation of troops.

It seems to me that this was the longest train I have ever seen. The coaches stretched far out beyond the station into torrid sunlight. Every carriage was filled up to and beyond its normal capacity. There could be no question of what class one would travel—it was travel where one could! Yet no one seemed to mind. I managed to find a seat in a compartment already occupied by two young St. Cyr students in full uniform and white gloves, a very portly aged couple and half a dozen men of the working classes.

"We'll take turns at sitting, Monsieur," said one of them as H. pushed further on into the corridor.

At the end of five minutes' time the conversation had become general. Although as yet there had been no official declaration everyone present was convinced that the news would shortly be made public, and though the crowd was certainly not a merry one, it was certainly not sad. Most of the men had received their orders in the morning, and had said good-bye to their loved ones at home. In consequence, there were no heart-rending scenes of farewell, no tearful leave-takings from family and friends, no useless manifestations.

Through the doorway of our stifling compartment, which up until the last moment was left open for air, we could see the train on the opposite platform silently, rapidly filling with men, each carrying a new pair of shoes either slung over the shoulders or neatly tied in a box or paper parcel. Then without any warning, without any hilarious vociferations on the part of its occupants, it quietly drew out of the station, to be instantly replaced by another train of cars.

Five times we watched the same operation recommence ere the ten o'clock train decided to leave Paris. Then as the guard went along the platform slamming the doors, a boyish face poked its way into the aperture of our compartment.

"Hello, Louis," said he, addressing one of the workmen. "Hello, Louis, you here, too!"

"Eh bien, cette fois je crois qu'on y va! Hein?"

Our door closed and the trainman whistled.

"Bon voyage!" shouted the boy through the window.

"The same to you," replied the other. That was all.

It was not a very eventful journey. It was merely hot and lengthy. We stopped at every little way station either to let down or take on passengers. We were side-tracked and forgotten for what seemed hours at a time, to allow speedy express trains filled with men and bound for the eastern frontier to pass on and be gone.

At Changis-St. Jean I put my head out of the window and there witnessed a most touching sight. A youngish man in a well-fitting captain's uniform, accompanied by his wife and two pretty babies, was preparing to take his leave. He was evidently well known and esteemed in his little village, for the curate, the mayor, the municipal council and numerous friends had come to see him off. The couple bore up bravely until the whistle blew—then, clasping each other in an almost brutal embrace, they parted, he to jump into the moving train mid the shouts of well-wishers, and she, her shoulders shaking with emotion, to return to her empty home.

Four months later, almost to a day, I again put my head out of the car window as we stopped at Changis. Imagine my surprise on seeing almost the same group! I recognized the mayor, the curate and the others, and a little shiver went down my back as I caught sight of the pretty captain's wife—her eyes red and swollen beneath the long widow's veil that covered her face. That same hopeful little assembly of August first had once again gathered on the station platform to take possession of and to conduct to their last resting-place the mortal remains of their heroic defunct.

Naturally, as they did not expect us before six at the château, there was no carriage to meet us.

"We'll take the hotel taxi as far as Charly and from there we'll telephone home," said H. as we got down from the train.

But there was neither hotel trap nor vehicle of any description at the station. True it was that our train was nearly two hours late! The idea of walking some four miles in the broiling sun was anything but amusing, but there seemed to be nothing else to do. So after a quarter of an hour uselessly spent in trying to get a carriage somewhere about our lonesome station, we started off on foot. We had scarcely gone two hundred yards when we caught sight of a PARISIAN taxi! H. hailed him!

"What are you doing down *here?*"

"I brought down a gentleman who was in a hurry. You see there are no more trains out of Paris on this line since noon! And there are not likely to be any for some time to come."

"Will you take us as far as Charly?"

"If it's on the way to Paris—yes! I'm in a hurry to get back. I've got to join my regiment at the Gare du Nord before midnight, but I'd like to ring in another job like this before that. It's worth while at 150 per trip!"

"You've got to cross Charly—there's no other way to Paris."

So we made our price and were whisked into our little market-town.

The inhabitants were on their doorsteps or chatting in little groups, and we created quite a sensation in our Parisian vehicle. H. went to the Gendarmerie at once to see if there was any official news by wire since we had left town.

"You're the one who ought to bring us news, Monsieur," said the *brigadier*. "What do they say in Paris?"

"The mobilisation will be posted at four o'clock."

A hearty peal of laughter, that was most refreshing in the tension of the moment, burst from all three gendarmes.

"Well, it's five minutes of four now. And if what you say is so, I should think we'd know something about it by this time! Don't worry. It's not so bad as you fancy."

H. shook hands and we left. At the hotel we got the château on the wire and asked for the victoria at once. As the horse had to be harnessed and there is a two-mile drive down to Charly, we stopped a moment and spoke to the proprietress of the hotel.

"How does it happen that your motor was not at the station?" said H.

"Oh," she replied, "our officers hired it early this morning and my husband had to drive them post-haste to Soissons. He hasn't got back yet!"

Before going farther in my narrative I shall say here, lest I forget it, that two of the supposed officers were caught within the fortnight and shot at Meaux as German spies—the third managed to make his escape.

Hearing the carriage coming down the hill, we walked towards the doorway. At that same moment we saw the white-trousered *gendarme* hastening towards the town hall. Catching sight of H., he held up the sealed envelope he held in his hand, and shouted, "You were right, Monsieur. It has come!"

We jumped into the victoria, but as we crossed the square the *garde-champêtre* caught the bridle and stopped our turnout.

"One moment, Monsieur."

Then the town-crier appeared, instantly causing the straggling groups to cluster into one. He had no need to ring his bell. He merely lifted his hand and obtained instant silence, and then slowly read out in deep, solemn, measured tones, which I shall never forget until my dying day:

"Extrème urgence. Ordre de mobilisation générale. Le premier jour de la mobilisation est le dimanche deux aôut!"

That was all! It was enough! The tension of those last two days was broken. No matter what the news, it was a relief. And we drove away 'mid the rising hum of hundreds of tongues, loosened after the agonising suspense.

The news had not yet reached Villiers when we drove through the village street. We turned into the château and found Elizabeth Gauthier, her children and almost all the servants, grouped near the entrance hall. They looked towards us with an appealing gaze.

As H. opened his mouth to answer, the sharp pealing of the *tocsin,* such as it rings only in cases of great emergency, followed by the rolling of the drum, told them better than we could that the worst had come.

The servants retired in silence and still the bell rang on. Presently we could hear the clicking of the sabots on the hard road as the peasants hurried from the fields towards the *Mairie.*

I can see us all now, standing there in the brilliant afternoon sunlight—Elizabeth mur-

muring between her sobs, "O God, don't take my husband!" little Jules clinging to her skirts, amazed at her distress, and happy, light-hearted, curly-headed baby Colette, chasing butterflies on the lawn in front of us!

I

August first.

The *tocsin* ceased, but the drum rolled on. In a moment we had recovered from the first shock, and all went out to the highroad to hear the declaration. To H. and me it was already a thing of the past, but we wanted to see how the peasants would take it.

At Villiers as at Charly, it was the *garde-champêtre* who was charged with this solemn mission, and the old man made a most pathetic figure as he stood there with his drumsticks in his hand, his spectacles pushed back, and the perspiration rolling down his tanned and withered cheeks.

"What have you got to say?" queried one woman, who was too impatient to wait until all had assembled.

"Rien de bon—" was the philosophic reply, and our friend proceeded to clear his throat and make his announcement.

It was received in dead silence. Not a murmur, not a comment rose from the crowd, as the groups dispersed, and each one returned to his lodgings.

We followed suit, and I went with H. towards the servants' hall.

"Give me the keys to the wine cellar," said he. "And, Nini," he continued, addressing my youngest maid, aged ten, "Nini, lay a cloth and bring out the champagne glasses. The boys shan't go without a last joyful toast."

There were four of them; four of them whose military books ordered them to reach the nearest railway station, with two days' rations, as soon as possible after the declaration of mobilisation. H. had hardly time to bring up the champagne before we could hear the men clattering down the stairs from their rooms. Their luggage was quickly packed—a change of underclothes and a second pair of shoes composed their trousseaux—and Julie came hurrying forward with bread, sausages and chocolate! "Put this into your bags," she said. Though no one had told them, all those who remained seemed to have guessed what to do, for in like manner George, one of the younger gardeners, had hitched the horses to the farm-cart and drove up to the kitchen entrance.

A moment later Catherine called me aside and tearfully begged permission to accompany husband and brother as far as Paris. The circumstances were too serious to refuse such a request and I nodded my assent.

"Come on, boys," shouted H. "Ring the farm-bell, Nini, and call the others in."

Their faces radiant with excitement, they gathered around the long table. H. filled up the glasses and then raising his—

"Here's to France, and to your safe return!" said he.

"To France, and our safe return!" they echoed.

We all touched glasses and the frothy amber liquid disappeared as by magic. Then followed a hearty handshaking and they all piled into the little cart. George cracked the whip and in a moment they had turned the corner and were gone.

Gone—gone forever—for in the long months that followed how often did I recall that joyful toast, and now, a year later, as I write these lines, I know for certain that none of them will ever make that "safe return."

Elizabeth Gauthier bore up wonderfully under the strain. She was the first to admit that after all it would have been too trying to say good-bye to her husband. H. and I then decided that it was best for her to bring her children and maid and come over to the château where we would share our lot in common. There was no time for lamenting—for the sudden disappearance of cook, butler, and the three most important farm-hands, left a very large breach which had to be filled at once. There was nothing to do but to "double up," and the girls and women willingly offered to do their best.

Julie, the only person over thirty, offered to take over the kitchen. To George and Léon fell the gardens, the stables, the horses, dogs, pigs and cattle. Yvonne, aged seventeen, offered to milk the cows, make butter and cheese, look after the chickens and my duck-farm, while Berthe and Nini, aged fourteen and ten, were left to take care of the château! Not a very brilliant equipment to run as large an establishment as ours, but all so willing and so full of good humour that things were less neglected than one might imagine.

The excitement of the day had been such that after a very hasty meal we retired exhausted at an early hour. The night was still —so still that though four miles from the station we could hear the roar of the trains as they passed along the river front.

"Hark!" said H. "How close together they are running!"

We timed them. Scarcely a minute between each. Then, our ears becoming accustomed, we were soon able to distinguish the passenger from the freight trains, as well as the empty ones returning to Paris.

"Listen! Those last two were for the troops! That one is for the ammunition. Oh, what a heavy one! It must be for the artillery!" And we fell asleep before the noise ceased. Indeed for three long weeks there was no end to it, as night and day the Eastern Railway rushed its human freight towards the Eastern frontier.

Sunday morning, August second, found us all at our posts as the sun rose. Elizabeth and I drove down to Charly for eight o'clock mass, and all along the road met men and boys on their way to the station. The church was full, but there were only women and elderly men in the assembly; why, we knew but too well, and many wives and mothers had come there to hide their grief. Our curate was a very old man, and the news had given him such a shock that he was unable to say a word after reaching the pulpit and stood there, tongue-tied, with the tears streaming down his face for nearly five minutes—finally retiring without uttering a sound. Not exactly the most fortunate thing that could have happened, for his attitude encouraged others to give way to their emotions, and there was a most impressive silence followed by much sniffling and nose-blowing! All seemed better, though, after the shower, and the congregation disbanded with a certain sense of relief.

Before leaving home H. told me to seek out the grocer, and to lay in a stock of everything she dispensed.

"You see," said he, "we're now cut off from all resources. There are no big cities where we can get supplies, within driving reach, and our grocers will have nothing to sell once their stock is exhausted. We're living in the hope that the mobilisation will last three weeks.

What will you do if it lasts longer? It never hurts to have a supply on hand!"

"All my salt, sugar and gasoline has been put aside for the army. I was ordered to do that this morning—but come around to the back door and I'll see what I can do for you," said my amiable grocery-woman.

"That's pleasant," thought I. "No gasoline—no motor—no electricity! Privation is beginning early. But why grumble! We'll go to bed with the chickens and won't miss it!"

Madame Léger and I made out a long list of groceries and household necessities, and she set to work weighing and packing, and finally began piling the bundles into the trap drawn up close to her side door.

Our dear old César must have been surprised by the load he had to carry home, but Elizabeth and I decided that a "bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," and one never could tell what astonishing "order" to-morrow might bring forth.

How H. laughed when he saw us driving up the avenue.

"I didn't think you'd take me so literally," said he. "Why, war isn't even declared, and here we are preparing for a siege!"

"Never mind," I returned, "you must remember that there are twelve persons to feed, and we'll soon get away with all I've got here."

The afternoon was spent in arranging our apartments. For convenience sake, we decided to close part of the château and all live as near together as possible in one wing. The children and younger servants seemed to consider the whole as a huge joke—or rather, a prolonged picnic party, and the house rang with peals of jolly laughter.

Monday, the third, Elizabeth and I tackled the provisions which were piled high on the table in the servants' hall. A visit to the storeroom and a little calculation showed that there were sufficient groceries already on hand to last the month out.

"Very good," said I. "Now, the rest we'll divide into three even parts—that makes September, October and November assured. By that time we'll know what precautions to take!"

"Well, I should hope so!" came the smiling reply. And we set to work. It all recalled the days of my childhood when I used to play at housekeeping and would measure out on the scales of my dolls' house so much rice, so much flour, so much maccaroni, etc. I could hardly believe I was in earnest.

We were right in the midst of our task when our gardeners appeared bearing between them a clothes basket full of plums.

"Madame, they can't wait a day longer. They're ready to cook now."

It was almost a disagreeable surprise, for we were already as busy as we could be. But there was no way of waiting, or the fruit would be spoiled.

"Is that all the plums?"

"Ah, no, Madame, there are fully two baskets more. And in a day or two the blackberries and black currants must be picked or they'll rot on the vines."

"Heaven preserve us!" thought I. "Will we ever come to the end of it all!" But by four o'clock the first basket of plums was stoned, the sugar weighed, and a huge copper basin of *confiture* was merrily boiling on the stove.

"Where are you going to hide your provisions now you've got them so beautifully tied up?" enquired H., his eyes twinkling.

"Hide them?"

"Yes!"

"What for?"

"In case of invasion."

We all simply shook with laughter.

"Well, if the Germans ever reach here there won't be much hope for us all," I returned.

"No, but joking aside; suppose we suddenly get the French troops quartered on us, are you calmly going to produce your stock, let it be devoured in a day or so, and remain empty-handed when they depart? You see, it isn't the little fellows who'll suffer. A big place like this with all its rooms and its stables is just the spot for a camp!"

That idea had never dawned upon us, and we set to thinking where we could securely hide our groceries in three different places. Finally it was agreed that one part should be put back of the piles of sheets in the linen closet; the second part hidden on the top shelf of a very high cupboard in my dressing-room with toilet articles grouped in front of it; while the third was carried up a tiny flight of stairs to the attic and there pushed through a small opening into the dark space that leads to the beams and rafters. It was all so infantile that we clapped our hands and were as happy as kings when we had discovered such a good *cachette.*

Night was coming on as I stood pouring the last of the plum jam into the glasses lined up along the kitchen table. Berthe had counted nearly a hundred, and I was seriously thinking of adopting jam-making as a profession, when with much noise and trumpeting, a closed auto whisked up the avenue and stopped before the entrance. I hurried to the kitchen door, untying my apron as I ran, arriving just as an officer jumped from the motor, and before I had time to recognise him in his new uniform, Captain Gauthier rushed forward, exclaiming:

"I've come to fetch Elizabeth and the children!"

The others, too, had heard the motor, and in an instant there was quite an assembly in the courtyard.

"I had great difficulty leaving Paris at all. My passport is only good until midnight," the captain was explaining as his wife and H. appeared, and almost without time for greeting—"Make haste," he continued, turning to Madame Gauthier. "We must be off in a quarter of an hour, or our machine will never reach town on time."

I hurried with Elizabeth to her apartment, where we woke and dressed two very astonished children, while the little maid literally threw the toilet necessities and a few clothes into a huge Gladstone bag.

"Léon evidently doesn't think us safe down here! You'd better come, too," murmured Elizabeth as we went downstairs.

In the meantime, H. had questioned our friend as to what had transpired in Paris within the last twenty-four hours.

"England will probably join us—and there is every possibility of Italy's remaining neutral," he announced, as we made our appearance. And then—"You must come to Paris. You're too near the front here," he continued, as he piled wife, babies and servant into the taxi.

And so, with hardly time for an adieu, the motor whisked away as it had come, leaving H. and me looking beyond it into the night.

When I returned to the pantry, I found Nini weeping copiously. Imagining she had become frightened by the sudden departure of our friends, I was collecting my wits to console and reassure her, when she burst forth, "Oh, Madame—Madame—the *patés—"*

"Well?"

"The lovely *patés!*—all burned to cinders! Such a waste!"

In our excitement we had forgotten to take from the oven two handsome *patés de lièvre* of which I was more than duly proud. And as Nini expressed it, they were burned to cinders. How H. chuckled at our first domestic mishap.

"Fine cooks, you are," said he, turning to Berthe and Nini, who hung their heads and blushed crimson. "And it's to you that I'm going to entrust Madame when I leave!"

Tuesday, the fourth, the drum rolled at an early hour and the *garde-champêtre* announced the declaration of war. It was not news to anyone, for all had considered the mobilisation as the real thing.

We were breakfasting when we heard a strange rumbling up the road. It was such a funny noise—midway between that of a steam roller and a threshing machine—that we both went out towards the lodge to see what was passing by. We were not a little surprised on perceiving our *gendarmes* sitting in an antiquated motor, whose puffing and wheezing betokened its age. They stopped when they saw us, and after exchanging greetings, laughingly poked fun at their vehicle—far less imposing than their well-groomed horses, but the only thing that could cover between seventy and eighty miles a day! From them we learned that the mobilisation was being carried out in perfection, and in all their tours to outlying villages and hamlets not a single delinquent had been found—not a single man was missing! All had willingly answered the call to arms!

Between the excitement and all the work that had to be done at Villiers, time passed with phenomenal rapidity. As yet we had had no occasion to perceive the lack of mail and daily papers, and though I had always had a sub-conscious feeling that H. would eventually receive his marching orders, it was rather a shock when they came. Being in a frontier department he was called out earlier than expected. And instead of being sent around-circuit way to reach his regiment south of Paris, he was ordered to gain Château-Thierry at once, and there await instructions.

Of course I packed and unpacked his bag for the twentieth time since Sunday, in the hope of finding a tiny space to squeeze in one more useful article—and then descending, I jumped into the cart and waited for him to join me. In spite of the solemnity of the moment I couldn't help laughing when he appeared, for disdaining the immaculate costume I had carefully laid out, he had put on a most disreputable-looking pair of trousers, and an old paint-stained Norfolk jacket. A faded flannel shirt and a silk bandanna tied about his throat completed this weird accoutrement, which was topped by a long-vizored cap and a dilapidated canvas gunny sack, the latter but half full and slung lightly over one shoulder. Anticipating my question, he explained that it was useless to throw away a perfectly new suit of clothes. When he should receive his uniform, his civilian outfit ought to be put in safe keeping for his return. This was customary in time of peace, but who could tell?—he might never even get a uniform, let alone hoping to see the clothes again.

And then, when I began examining the paltry contents of his sack, he made light of my disappointment, saying that his father, who had served in the campaign of 1870, had always told him that a ball of strong string and a jackknife were sufficient baggage for any soldier. I supposed he ought to know, and was just going to ask another question, when—

"Listen," he said, as he put his foot on the step. "Listen—before I forget. My will is at my notary's in Paris, and on your table is a letter to your father—if anything happens to me you know what to do."

We drove away in silence.

. . . .

I let the horses walk almost all the way home and my thoughts were busy, very busy along the way. Here I was alone—husband and friends had vanished as by magic. My nearest relatives over five thousand miles away—and communication with the outside world entirely cut off, for Heaven knew how long. Evidently there was nothing to do but to face the situation, especially as all those in my employ save Julie were under twenty, and looked to me for moral support. This was no time to collapse. If I broke down anarchy would reign at once.

But what to do? Go on living like a hermit on that great big estate? The idea appalled me. It seemed such a useless existence—and in a few moments' time I had decided to turn the place into a hospital. But how and to whom should I offer it?

I stopped at the *Gendarmerie,* where our friends were able to give me information.

"The nearest sanitary formation was Soissons—the Red Cross Society. The president would probably be able to help me—" So I thanked the *gendarme* and left there, having decided to drive thence on the morrow.

Soissons is but twenty miles as a bird flies, but almost double that by the winding roadway, and I was calculating what time I should start and where I would rest the span, as I entered the yard.

"Anything new, George?" I said, as he took the bridle.

"Nothing, Madame, save that we have received orders that all the horses must be presented at Château-Thierry for the revision to-morrow before ten."

"All the horses?"

"Yes, Madame, with full harnessing, halters and the farm carts."

That was a surprise! Suppose they are all taken, thought I, I shall be almost a prisoner. And my trip to Soissons?

"Don't unharness!" I called, as George drove towards the stable. "I'm going back to Charly."

In our little township I managed to buy a lady's bicycle. "It may come in handy," I thought. It was the last machine that was left. From the shop I went to the hotel.

"Where's your husband?" I said to the proprietress.

"Why, he's gone with the chauffeur to take our motorbuses and taxi to the requisition committee."

"What?"

"Yes, Madame."

"But I wanted him to motor me over to Soissons to-morrow!"

"Well, if he gets back to-night and they leave him a single machine, I'll let you know, Madame."

In the afternoon the drum beat anew and I learned that all the bakers in the village (there were three of them) having been called to the front, we were likely to be without the staff of life. In the presence, therefore, of the impending calamity, the village government had decided to take over the bakery—it had found an old man and a very young apprentice who would do the work, but each citizen was requested to declare the number of persons composing his household and in order to economize flour, so much bread would be allowed per head and each family must come and fetch his supply at the town hall between eleven and twelve o'clock!

Needless to say, it must be paid for in cash, though the Board reserved the right to look after the village poor. In like manner, all the salt had been reserved for the army, and we were to be rationed to seventy-five grammes a week per person! It all sounded rather terrible, but when put into practise it was proved that the rations were very generous and no one had reason to complain.

By four o'clock the next morning there was a perpetual stream of farm carts down the road leading towards Château-Thierry. I dressed and went to the stables where George and Léon were already harnessing. More than once I had a tight feeling in my throat as I patted the glossy backs of dear old César and my lovely span.

The girls had decorated the carts with huge bunches of poppies, daisies and corn-flowers and in addition to these tri-color bouquets, a little branch of laurel was stuck up over each horse's bridle. There was a generous distribution of sugar, and each horse was kissed on the tip of his nose, and then the boys joined the procession on the highroad.

I watched them out of sight. "Shall we ever get through saying 'good-bye'? When will these departures cease?" thought I, as I turned from the gate. But I was given no time to muse, for a most amazing clamor arose from a gateway a little higher up the road, and glancing in that direction, I saw old father Poupard leading his horse and cart into the open. He was followed by his wife and daughter-in-law, two brawny peasant women, who were loudly lamenting the departure of their steed!

"No, no!" literally howled mother Poupard.

"This is the last straw! Both sons gone, and now our horse! Who's going to bring in our crop? The Lord is unjust."

"And brother's babies—poor motherless things—in an orphan asylum at Epernay! How can we get to them now? Oh, no! Oh, no—" wailed Julia.

"Poupard!" exclaimed his wife, drying her tears on the corner of her apron and fixing her sharp blue eyes on her husband, "Poupard, no loitering! If they pay you for your horse, remember, no folishness. You hustle back here with the money—we need you to help in the vineyard."

"This is no time for sprees," wept Julia.

"Father Poupard," admonished his irate mate, brandishing a spade, "Father Poupard, mind what I say!"

And then in a more moderate tone, but which was distinctly audible some thirty yards away, "I've put a bottle into your lunch basket. You won't need to buy anything more."

There was a distinct emphasis on the word *buy,* which told me that mother Poupard, evidently accustomed to her husband's ways, had provided plentifully for his journey but had carefully emptied his pockets before he started.

I went back to my preserves, but as the day wore on the lack of all communication with the outside world began to prey on me. Towards four o'clock I took my bicycle and started down to Charly. A quarter of a mile from our gate, in front of the town hall, a mason had driven two huge posts into the ground on either side of the road, and was swinging a heavy chain between them.

I looked askance at the schoolmaster who stood in the doorway surveying the work. He explained that he had received instructions to the effect that all passers-by unknown to this village were to be stopped and asked for their papers. The men and boys who remained were to take turns mounting guard, and thus to help to eradicate the circulation of spies. Two suspicious motors and a man on a bicycle had already been signalled. Should they appear and fail to produce their papers, immediate arrest would follow. Should they offer the slightest opposition or attempt escape, the sentinels had orders to shoot.

I enquired if it would be necessary for me to have a *sauf-conduit,* being bound for Charly, and possibly the station at Nogent, where I hoped that the soldiers of a passing train would throw me a newspaper.

Mr. Duguey replied that he would gladly present me with the first passport, and seemed wonderfully taken with my idea about the papers. He admitted that living in darkness was beginning to get on his nerves, too, and asked me, in case my plan should prove successful, if I would be willing to put it on the public sign board so all could see the news. I acquiesced willingly, and after he had asked a few questions as to names, age, characteristics and destination, he stamped the seal on my paper, and I departed.

At Charly the same preparations had been made, and two elderly men, leaning on their guns, smiled as I presented my paper for their inspection.

At the hotel, the proprietor had just returned after having waited nearly twenty-four hours in line to present his machines. All save one had been bought for the army. But with his double-seated taxi he promised to drive me to Soissons the following morning.

I continued my road, and reached Nogent to find that I was not alone in my idea about begging the papers. Several others from neighboring villages, so I heard, had already succeeded in obtaining a sheet, and had driven off hastily with their trophies. My proceeding was very simple. It consisted of crossing the rails to the up-train platform, to stand in line with the other women already assembled, there to wait like birds on a fence until a train coming from Paris passed by. Then as it whizzed through the station, we shouted in chorus, *"Les journaux! Les jour-naux!"*

It worked like magic. We had hardly been there two minutes when a train was signalled. As it approached, we could see that engine and cars were decorated with garlands of flowers, and trailing vines, while such inscriptions as, *"Train de Plaisir pour Berlin,"* and numerous caricatures had been chalked on the varnished sides of the carriages.

Our appeals were not in vain. With joyful shouts, the boys gladly threw us the papers which were welcomed like the rain of manna in the desert. I managed to collect two, *L'Action Française,* and *Le Bonnet Rouge.*

Until others and fresher were procured, the Royalist and the Revolutionary sheets hung side by side on the public sign board at Villiers, proving that under the Third Republic, *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* are not vain words.

The news of the violation of Luxembourg and Belgian territory created less sensation than one might have expected. In the circumstances news of any kind seemed a blessing.

There was still quite a gathering in front of the town hall when the first carts began to return from the revision. They were few and far between, compared with the double line that had driven past in the morning. My heart leapt with joy, as I saw George, driving César, turn into the court.

"Too old, Madame," he said, his eyes shining. "Though still so game that they nearly kept him. He's reserved for a second call."

"And Florentin and Cognac?"

The boy put his hand into his pocket and held out a slip of paper. I took it and read, *"Bon pour 1,200 francs, prix de 2 chevaux, etc."*

"Well, thank God, we've got one left anyhow," thought I as I entered the hall.

Just then the gate creaked and I could vaguely distinguish in the deepening twilight the forms of mother Poupard and Julia hurrying towards the stables. I followed.

"George! George!" called Julia.

"Well?" came the answer from within.

"George—where's the old man?" queried mother Poupard in excited tones.

"How do I know?"

"Was our horse taken? Can you tell us that?"

"I think so; yes."

"Then why didn't Poupard come back with you and Léon in the cart? Did you see him?

"Yes."

"Where was he?"

"In front of a café—as we drove past."

"Oh, the old villain! The wretch! Oh, *mon Dieu,* what shall we do! Oh, the wicked old man—if I had him here, I'd thrash him good!"

And mother Poupard began brandishing a pitch-fork with such violence that I commenced to fear that failing her delinquent spouse, she would fall upon George to wreak vengeance.

"Oh, the old devil! Oh—"

"Look here, I'm not his nurse—now clear out, the lot of you!"

The injunction served its purpose, for remembering they were "not at home," the two women retired in high dudgeon, wailing and lamenting in such audible tones that their neighbours came out to see what was the matter, and laughed at mother Poupard's threat of what she would do if ever she got *le vieux* into her clutches.

By six A. M. on the Friday I had breakfasted and was ready to leave for Soissons. The taxi from the Hôtel du Balcon made its appearance a few moments later, and after a visit to the town hall, where we secured the necessary passports, we set off on our journey.

At the entrance to every little village we were obliged to halt and exhibit our papers—after which formality the chain would be let down and we allowed to go our way.

Half an hour later as we crossed Château-Thierry we could see the rows of horses that had not yet been examined lined up along the square. The commissaries had worked all night and their task was still far from finished.

Until we reached Oulchy-le-Château, the chains were the only outward signs that betokened the belligerent state of the country, and even then as those who mounted guard were not in uniform, it seemed rather as though we were passing a series of toll-gates. However, as we ran along the splendid roads between the great fertile plains, I observed that the harvesting was being done chiefly by women, and that the roads themselves were empty of any vehicle. Evidently only those who had an important errand were allowed on the *routes nationales,* thus kept clear for the transport of troops or ammunition.

At Oulchy, half-way to Soissons, we halted at a railway crossing to let a long, lazy train drag out of the station. When at length the bars were drawn up, much excitement reigned on the little platform which we had been unable to see from the other side of the rails. Young girls with pails and dippers in their hands stood chattering with women in wrappers, whose dishevelled appearance told plainly that they had been hastily awakened and had hurried thence without thinking of their *toilette.*

"What is it?" I asked of the *garde-barrière.*

"Wounded!"

"Wounded?"

"Yes—the first. Not badly wounded and they are able to travel, but unable to hold a gun. And they were all so thirsty!"

Poor fellows, thought I, already out of the ranks and the first week is not yet passed.

More persuaded than ever of the utility of my mission, I did not stop longer but pushed on towards Soissons. Half a mile further up the road, an elderly man carrying a package, hailed the motor. We slowed down, and hat in hand he approached.

"I beg pardon for the liberty I'm taking," he said, "but might I ask where you're bound?"

"Soissons."

"You would be rendering a great service to the municipality if you would allow me to ride with you in the empty seat. You see, the youngsters who are left to reap the crops have broken the only machine in the community, and we can't go on harvesting until it is repaired or replaced. There are no mechanics left, and moreover, no horses that could take us to Soissons to find one, so I've offered to go on foot—but that means at least two full days lost before we can continue our work."

"Get in at once," I said, and we rolled off.

It was not long before I had drawn his history from this village alderman, an Alsatian by birth, and his tales of the war of 1870 helped to wile away the time we were obliged to spend idling along the roadside while our chauffeur repaired our first puncture. The emergency wheel clapped on, we were soon *en route* again. My companion duly uncovered as we passed the monument to the soldiers of the Franco-Prussian War, almost hidden in a lovely chestnut grove, in the heart of the forest of Hartennes.

On the outskirts of Soissons we came upon a squadron of the Ninth Territorial Regiment, resting after the morning exercises. These soldiers much resembled the "bushy-bearded" creatures whom I had seen guarding the Eastern Railway, save that they were even more picturesque, for most of them wore straw sombreros. As we passed the captain on his horse, my companion lifted his hat and the officer replied with a salute.

"A friend of yours?" I ventured.

"No. Never saw him before."

"But you bowed, I thought."

"Certainly. He's an officer on duty in time of war, and all civilians owe him that courtesy."

I liked that and fancied it were old-time urbanity, though often since I have seen it proved that the custom is not obsolete.

A little further on we came to a very jolly squadron, the cooks, who were peeling fresh vegetables and pouring them into immense wash-boilers, which, when filled, two privates seized by the handles and carried towards a big barracks some hundred yards distant.

Presently we hit a cobbled road which must have been a joy to all heavy machines, but which nearly jolted us out of our light vehicle. Patience and good humour were very rapidly disappearing when we rounded a curve, struck the good macadam, and I saw the twin spires of St. Jean rising majestically against the clear blue summer sky.

At our right I noticed the entrance gate to a château over which hung a big Red Cross, such as I coveted for my home, and then in a moment we were already in a *faubourg* of Soissons. It was not unlike the entrance to any other provincial city in ordinary times, save that there were many red-trousered men mixed in with the other population. There were no chains across the road, but four soldiers in uniform mounted guard. We showed *patte blanche* and proceeded to ask for the Red Cross headquarters.

"Madame Macherez is the president. You must go to her. Cross the city and go out east towards St. Paul. Her château is there."

Naturally we headed straight for our destination, but were stopped every other minute by police who side-tracked us into back streets. The big thoroughfares must be kept clear for the army!

I set down my old friend near the town hall, and told him that I should be returning about noon. If he were ready, I would be glad to give him a lift. Would he meet us in front of the *Hôtel du Soleil d'Or?*

He was delighted, and promised to be on time.

We crossed the Aisne; I must say rather heedlessly, little dreaming that in so short a time it would be the object of such desperate and bloody disputes—nor so historically famous.

The Château de St. Paul sits, or rather, sat back from the road, surrounded by its lovely garden and a high wall. I left my motor and entered the grounds, preceded by a servant who had opened the gate. In a small drawing-room I presented myself to a very charming young person already installed behind a desk, though it was scarcely half-past eight, and explained the object of my visit.

"Madame Macherez will be delighted. I'm her secretary, and I can assure you she will do all she can to further your plans. Would you mind waiting just a few moments? She'll be down presently. You see," she continued, "we have been up all night. We suddenly had part of a regiment quartered on us, and the officers who slept here were coming and going most of the time. I beg you will excuse the dust, but they haven't been gone long enough for us to make things tidy. There were twenty here, and two hundred men in the outbuildings—which makes quite a *remue ménage.*"

Just then the president of the *Association des Dames Françaises* came in.

Madame Macherez, a fine looking, elderly woman with iron-grey hair and clear blue eyes, is the widow of former Senator Macherez. Her keen understanding and wonderful business ability have won her the respect and esteem of two entire nations; both friend and enemy are united in their praises of this wonderful person.

I was not long in explaining my intentions —I could supply sixty beds, with room for the double; would take all the management of a hospital, gladly help with the nursing, but must have a doctor and other professional aid.

Madame Macherez accepted my proposition, knew just the person I needed, and taking off her badge pinned it on to the lapel of my coat and made me a member of her society.

"Now, then, let's get through with the formalities at once. Here is your *carte d'identité*. You must paste your photo on to it. With that and an armlet stamped from the War Department you will have free access to all the roads and you won't have to be bothered with other papers. Let us go at once to the city hall, where they will stamp their seal on your card, which makes it valid for your identity. From there we must hunt out the colonel in command and get his seal. That makes it valid with military authorities."

The president's motor was waiting outside the door.

"How long shall we be?"

"Ah, an hour at least."

I turned to my chauffeur who was tampering with his punctured tire.

"Go and see if you can't find a new inner tube, and meet me at the *Hôtel du Soleil d'Or* where I will lunch, at eleven."

"But I just put in a new inner tube."

"Have you got an extra one?"

"No, but I've my emergency wheel—"

"Never mind. Another inner tube may come in handy."

"Very well, Madame."

Madame Macherez was waiting, so I jumped in next her and we drove to the town hall. Though the war was scarcely a week old her office was already installed in the Hôtel de Ville, and several hospitals were well on the way towards complete organization. In a big room white-capped women (the first I had seen of the kind) were counting bandages, linen and underclothing, laying out huge piles for such and such a hospital.

While Madame M. was answering numerous questions which besieged her on her entrance, her secretary took note of what was lacking in my *ambulance,* promised to forward it at once by motor, and gave me an agreement to sign.

In the meantime, someone had carried my card to the mayor who affixed his seal, and my armlet appeared as though by magic.

Now, then, for the colonel! And we hastened away again at a moment's notice.

As we drove through the quaint little city, my eye was attracted more than once by a splendid bit of Louis XIV architecture. The college, the convent, the churches and even some private residences were wonderful examples of that exquisitely decorative period. As it was my first visit to Soissons I regretted not having brought my kodak, but when I spoke of this to Madame Macherez she expressed her delight at my admiration of her native city, but was extremely glad that I had not ventured out alone with a camera. Unknown persons with photographic paraphernalia were suspicious these times. It was best to leave such things at home.

Just then we were winding up a narrow street and the chauffeur was tooting in vain, trying to persuade a half-dozen soldiers carrying bales of hay on their backs, to make room for us to get by. With much evident reluctance the first man drew a bit to the right, the second vociferated something in a picturesque patois, and just as we passed the third, I leaned forward and grabbed the driver by the collar.

"Stop, stop a minute!" I gasped.

He must have thought I was mad, and Madame M. probably imagined I had suddenly lost my wits, when she saw me plunge out of the motor, race towards one of the bales, tear it from the carrier's back with a violence that nearly upset the man, and then, throwing my arms about his neck, embrace him.

"You? Already?" gasped H., and then as we realized that we were making a public spectacle of ourselves, the color rose to our cheeks.

A hasty explanation followed, in which I told my plans.

"And you, what on earth are you doing here?" I questioned.

"Well—just what you see. All of us from Villiers have been sent to bring horses to the front, and a fine job it is. I wish you could see the nags! None of them rideable!"

"But after they're delivered—what?"

"I wish I knew myself."

"And when can we meet?"

"I'm afraid that's impossible. We're off again to-night for— God knows where!"

And H. seeing that he was already far behind his companions, threw me a hasty adieu and was gone!

The colonel was absent, but would return *tout de suite,* and Madame Macherez and I lost nearly an hour waiting. When he appeared, however, he was most gracious, excused himself very politely and immediately stamped my card. Then having all the necessary papers, I begged Madame to drop me at the hotel, and to return to her *bureau,* where I knew there was work enough for a half-dozen such as she. She did as I requested, and we parted—she promising to visit Villiers as soon as she could dispose of an afternoon.

I was the only woman in the hotel dining-room for luncheon. The food was good, but the service impossible, as there were some forty men, mostly officers, very hungry, and only one decrepit waiter to do the work. Good humour prevailed, each diner making allowances, and here for the first time I heard that expression, destined to become so popular as an excuse for almost anything: *C'est la guerre!*

My chauffeur kept me waiting, but my friend the alderman was on time. Finally the motor made its appearance. Something had happened on leaving St. Paul in the morning and the poor *hôtelier* had searched the entire city for a mechanic, but to no avail. All were *au service de l'armée.* Finally he had had to patch up things as best he could. As to an extra inner tube—such a thing didn't exist. We would have to take our chances with the wheel he had.

We started, but hadn't gone two hundred yards when a back tire blew off!

Well, thank goodness, we hadn't left town. So I returned to the hotel, and while Huberson and the alderman were fixing up damages and adjusting the emergency wheel, I had time to read all the back numbers of *Illustration,* which the *Soleil d'Or* possessed, and commence a conversation with the proprietress, who sat in the court shelling peas for dinner. She was certain that the war would be over in three months at the utmost!

At length I went out to see if I couldn't be of some assistance in the motor business, but Huberson said it would be ready in a few moments. As far as I could make out, my alderman friend was mostly a decorative personality, for he stood there with his hat on the back of his head, gesticulating vehemently, but never deigning to help my chauffeur in the slightest manner. When I asked him if he knew Soissons well and inquired if he could direct me to certain grocers where I could perhaps obtain a few provisions, he insisted on *showing* me the shops, with an alacrity which proved his incompetence at motor repairing.

During that short promenade on foot, we encountered the whole Ninth Territorial Regiment—not under arms but *au repos.* The men were seated in front of the barracks read-ing the papers or idly smoking their pipes, and all yearning for "something to do." Their wish, I fear, has been more than satisfied.

Start number two proved successful and we sped along very comfortably until we hit that long cobbled road. The day was exceedingly warm, the stones sun-baked, and after the first mile or so I saw Huberson looking nervously at his fore wheel. His anxiety was well founded, for half a minute later, whizz!—I could feel the rubber splitting!

We stopped and all climbed out.

"It's all up!" he exclaimed. "Not one—but two tires are burst, and the shoe of the emergency wheel is flapping like an old dirty rag!"

"Now, in my time—" began the alderman.

"Never mind about your time, old man. If you want to get back to Oulchy and that mowing machine before Christmas, you've got to pitch in and help," cut in Huberson, whose nerves could no longer stand the strain. Our friend took the hint and began stripping off his coat. We were eight miles from Soissons, on the upgrade of a cobbled road, full in the sun. It was three P. M. on a stifling August day!

The men must have spent an hour trying to make impossible repairs—they knew it was no use walking back to Soissons where aid had already been refused, and it was evident from the condition of the tubes that there was no hope of mending them.

What to do?

"I'll tell you," said I (and I must admit that I spoke for the sake of saying something), "I'll tell you! Suppose you take out the inner tubes and stuff the shoes with grass!"

The men looked at me as if I had suddenly gone out of my mind. Their contempt was so apparent that it wilted me.

"Yes—I'm serious."

And then arose a series of protestations which common sense bade me heed, but which didn't advance our cause in the slightest. When we had lost a full half-hour more arguing the question, I once again proclaimed my original idea.

The driver glanced at me in despair and shrugged his shoulders. "The least we can do is try."

So saying, we fell to work tearing up grass and weeds. And that is how I came to ride over thirty miles on three grass-stuffed tires, which, thanks to the heat, towards the end of the journey began sending forth little jets of green liquid much to the astonishment of all those who saw us pass.

III

THE next few days following my eventful trip to Soissons were spent superintending the installation of my hospital. For convenience's sake I decided to utilize the entire ground floor, first because there were fewer and more spacious apartments, each one being large enough to hold ten or twelve beds, thus forming a ward; second, because it would be better to avoid carrying the wounded up a flight of stairs. The rooms above could be used in case of emergency. All this of course necessitated the moving of most of my furniture and *objets d'art,* as well as the emptying of H.'s much-encumbered studio—I having determined to keep but a small apartment in the east wing for private use. It was really a tremendous undertaking, far worse than any "spring cleaning" I had ever experienced, especially as I was but poorly seconded by my much-depleted domestic staff, already more than busy trying to keep the farm going.

From the boys—George and Léon—I

learned that old father Poupard had not yet put in his appearance since his departure three days before with his nag, and that mother Poupard had abandoned her belligerent attitude and had resorted to tears. She could be seen three times a day, on her return from the fields, standing by the bridge corner, wailing her distress to any passerby who had time enough to stop and listen. Poupard now possessed all the qualities of mankind and it was probably through his noble soft-heartedness that some ill had befallen him. What a misfortune, especially as the vines needed so much attention.

Sunday, the ninth, I was preparing to go to early service at Charly (our own curate had been called to join his regiment) when on crossing the bridge, a bicycle whisked by the victoria.

"He's coming—he's coming!" called the rider, as he passed us.

"Who?" I said, rising, as George drew up.

"Father Poupard!" called the boy. "I'm going to tell his wife!"

It was evident that the news had spread like wildfire, for looking up the street, I could see the villagers hurrying from their cottages. Already the hum of voices reached my ears, and anxious not to miss what promised to be a most dramatic meeting, I told George to drive to one side of the road and stop, and there we would await developments.

In less than a minute mother Poupard appeared. She was as good as her word, for now that she knew her lord and master was no longer in danger, she had cast sentiment to the winds and was actually brandishing that "big stick!"

"Ah, the good-for-nothing old drunkard!" she vociferated as she ran. "Just let me lay hands on him!"

Around the bend of the road came the excited peasants. They pressed so closely about someone that until they were almost upon us I could not distinguish who it might be. Then as mother Poupard pushed her way through the crowd, it parted and displayed her husband; drunk, but with pride; delirious, but with glory—proudly bearing his youngest grandson in his arms, leading the other by the hand.

"Oh, Joseph—" gasped his astonished wife, every bit of anger gone from her voice.

And then followed a very touching family scene, in which the delinquent was forgiven, and during which time one of the bystanders explained that father Poupard had walked from Château-Thierry to Épernay, to fetch his orphan grandchildren, and had returned on foot, carrying first one and then the other—accomplishing the hundred miles in not quite four days! A heroic undertaking for a man over seventy!

The sun rose and set several times ere my interior arrangements were completed and nothing extraordinary happened to break the monotony of my new routine. On Tuesday, the eleventh, the strange buzzing of a motor told us that an aeroplane was not far distant. Our château lies in the valley between two hills, so to obtain a clear view of the horizon, I hurried to the roof with a pair of field glasses.

Presently a tiny black speck appeared and as it grew within the scope of my glass, it was easy to recognize the shape of a *Taube*. That was my introduction to the enemy.

Without waiting a second I rushed to the telephone and asked central at Charly (the telephones now belonged to the army) to pass on the message that a German aeroplane had been sighted from the Château de Villiers, and was flying due west, head on for Paris. The noise had grown louder and louder, and when I returned to my post of observation, I found most of the servants assembled, all craning their necks. On came the *Taube,* and there we stood, gaping, never realizing an instant that we were running the slightest risk. The machine passed directly over our heads, not low enough, however, for us to distinguish its contents with the naked eye.

"There's another!" shouted someone. And turning our backs on the enemy, we gave our entire attention to a second speck that had suddenly risen on the horizon.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon and the armoured head of the ever-on-coming aeroplane glittered splendidly in the golden rays of the afternoon sun.

"C'est un français!" cried George.

"Non!"

"Oui!"

Allowing that an aeroplane flies at the rate of a mile a minute, one can easily imagine that we had not long to wait before number two sped over us. Through my glass I was able to recognize the tri-color cockade painted underneath the plane, and when I announced this there went up a wild shriek of joy.

At that moment a loud report in the west announced that the Germans had begun their deadly work on undefended territory.

"That's a bomb for the railway crossing at Nanteuil, I'll bet!" said Léon, and while I was realizing that that projectile might just as well have been for us, the others were gesticulating and howling encouragement to their compatriot some few hundred yards above them, as though he could hear every word they said:

"Go it, old man!" "Bring down that cursed blackbird!" *"Vive la France!"* and other similar ejaculations were drowned by the noise of the motor.

The chase was on! It was more exciting than any horserace I ever witnessed. The Frenchman was rapidly gaining on the other, but would they come into combat before they vanished from our horizon? That was the question that filled us with anguish.

On, on they sped, growing smaller and smaller every second. Presently it became impossible to distinguish them apart, but we knew that they had come within range of each other, for the two specks rose and fell by turns—now soaring high, now dipping precipitately, seeming almost to touch at times. Then, just as they were about to disappear, one of them suddenly collapsed and fell! Which one, we never knew.

Towards dusk the *garde-champêtre* appeared and left orders that George and Léon must take their turns at mounting guard. Four hours right out of the sleep of a peasant boy especially when he is overworked, is likely to leave him useless the next day. It provoked me a little, but then it was duty and they must obey. The boys came on at eleven and having decided it would be better to get in an hour or so of rest beforehand, they retired to the hay loft. I promised to look in on them in case they should fail to waken, and at the appointed time I put on my sweater and went down to find, as I had expected, both youths slumbering peacefully, blissfully unconscious of the time. Poor little chaps, it seemed a pity to wake them, but what was to be done? Presently an idea of replacing them myself dawned upon me: a second later it so enchanted me that I wouldn't have had them wake for anything. The whole thing was beginning to be terribly romantic.

Slipping quietly away, I went to my room and got my revolver, and then going to the south front of the château, I softly whistled for my dogs. Three big greyhounds, a shepherd dog and a setter responded immediately, and just as I was about to shut the little yellow door, old Betsy, my favorite Boston bull, came panting around the corner of the house. With these five as bodyguard I sauntered up the road in the brilliant moonlight, arriving in front of the town hall just as the clock was striking eleven. I must say that my appearance and announcement rather shocked two elderly men who had been on the watch since seven o'clock.

Monsieur Demarcq protested that such a thing as a woman mounting guard had never been heard of, but I swiftly argued him out of that idea. What was required of me? That I stop every passer-by and every vehicle? Didn't he think me capable of doing so? And I pointed to my dogs and my revolver. The weight of the argument was so evidently on my side that they had nothing to do but to submit, and laughingly Mr. Foeter put me in possession of a heavy old gun, three packages of cartridges, and the lantern. Then once again they asked if I couldn't be dissuaded, to which I jokingly replied that I would set my dogs after them and drive them home if they didn't make haste to go there at once. That admonition proved more efficacious than I had dared hope, and assured me that my faithful beasts rejoiced in a ferocious reputation.

All sorts of fantastic ideas flitted through my brain as I took possession of my post. I began, however, by setting the lantern in the middle of the road, exactly in the centre of the chain, as a warning to any oncomer. Then by the moonlight, I proceeded to examine my gun. It was a very primitive arm, and after carefully weighing it in my hands, I decided to abandon all thought of stalking up and down the road with such an implement on my shoulder. That kind of glory was not worth the morrow's ache, so I deposited the antiquated weapon in the hallway of the school house and resolved to rely on my Browning.

Afterwards I came out and seating myself on the bench with my back against the wall, waited for something to happen. My dogs seemed to have comprehended the gravity of my mission, and crouched close to my feet, cocking their ears at the slightest sound.

Little by little the great harvest moon climbed high behind our old Roman church, perched on the embankment opposite, bathing everything in molten silver, and causing the tall pine-trees in the little cemetery adjacent to cast long black shadows on the road. Down towards the Marne, the frogs were croaking merrily—somewhere in the distance a night locust buzzed, and alarmed by the striking of midnight the owls who nested in the belfry, fluttered out into the night and settling on the church top, began their plaintive hooting. Still no one passed.

Such calm reigned that it was almost impossible to believe that over there, beyond those distant hills, battle and slaughter were probably raging.

Presently a shiver warned me that I had

been seated long enough; so, marking a hundred steps, I began to pace slowly up and down, watching the ever-changing firmament. The first grey streaks of dawn were beginning to lighten the east when a growl from Tiger made me face about very abruptly. I must admit that my heart began beating abnormally, and the hand in my pocket gripped my revolver as though it were a live animal and likely to escape.

A second later all the dogs repeated the growl, and then I could hear the clicking of a pair of sabots on the road. The noise approached, and my guardians looked towards me, every muscle in their bodies straining, waiting for the single word, *"Apporte!"*

"Couchez!" I hissed, and awaited developments.

The footsteps drew nearer and nearer, and in a moment the stooping figure of an old peasant came over the brow of the hill. The gait was too familiar to be mistaken. But what on earth was father Poupard doing on the highroad at that hour?

When he was within speaking distance I came out from the shadow of the wall and put the question. If he had suddenly been confronted with a spook I do not think the old man could have been more astonished. He stopped dead still, as though not knowing whether to turn about and run, or to advance and take the consequences. Realizing his embarrassment, I hastily proffered a few words of greeting, and then he chose the latter prerogative.

"Vous?" he said, when at length he found his tongue. *"Vous?"*

"Yes—why not?"

"Who's with you?"

"Nobody. Why?"

He seemed more embarrassed than ever. Evidently he hadn't yet "caught on."

"What can I do for you?" I continued.

He still hesitated, looking first at me and then at a bottle he carried in his hand. Finally he resolved to make a clean breast of it.

"Why," he said, "I didn't expect to find a woman here, least of all *une châtelaine*. It rather startled me! You see, I've got into the habit of coming round towards dawn. The boys begin to get chilly about that time, and are glad enough to have a go at my fruit brandy. They say I'm too old to mount guard, so I must serve my country as best I can. Will you have some—my own brew?"

I declined, but he was not offended; yet he seemed reluctant to go.

"Sit down," I said. "It won't be long before some of the men will be passing by on their way to the fields, and then you won't have made your journey for nothing."

Père Poupard gladly accepted, and after a generous swig at his brandy, began telling me about what happened at Villiers during the German invasion in 1870. As he talked on, night gradually disappeared, and when the clock in the belfry tolled three A. M. my successors came to relieve me. I blew out the lantern and walked home in broad daylight.

The boys looked very sheepish when they heard what had happened, but as I did not boast of my exploit, merely taking it as a matter of course, they had no way of approaching the subject, and like many other things of the kind, it was soon forgotten in the pursuing of our onerous daily tasks, and the moral anxiety we were experiencing.

There seemed to be no end to the fruit season that summer. The lengthy table in the servants' hall was literally covered with glasses containing jam and jelly of every description, awaiting their paper lids. Nini said there were over five hundred—to me it seemed thousands, and I was heartily glad of a lull before the hospital should open. And I remember distinctly that the last thing I prepared was some thirty quarts of black currant brandy; that is to say, I had poured the raw alcohol on to the fruit and set the jars aside to await completion—six months later! Shortly afterwards I received word by a roundabout route from Soissons that I might expect my trained nurses and supplies at any moment. In the meantime I was without word from H. since that eventful meeting a week before.

Saturday, the fifteenth of August, was as little like a religious fête day as one can imagine. At an early hour the winnowing machine rumbled up the road to the square beside the château. Under the circumstances each one must take his turn at getting in his wheat and oats, and there was no choice of day or hour. Besides, the village had already been called on to furnish grain and fodder for the army, and the harvest must be measured and declared at once. This only half concerned me, for my hay was already in the lofts before the war began, and two elderly men who had applied for work as bunchers, had been engaged for the last week in August.

After service at Charly, I walked across to the post office. The post mistress and telegraph operator, a delightful provincial maiden lady, always welcomes me most cordially, and at present I fancied she might have some news that had not yet reached Villiers. (Mind you, since the second of August we had had but two newspapers, and those obtained with what difficulty!) The *bureau* now belonged to the army, and for a fortnight Mademoiselle Maupoix and her two young girl assistants had hardly had time to sleep, so busy were they transmitting ciphered dispatches, passing on orders, etc. It was to this physical exhaustion that I attributed the swollen countenance of my little friend when she opened the door to her private sitting-room. It was evident she had something to tell, but her exquisite breeding forbade that she go headlong into her subject, before having graciously inquired for my health, my husband and news of us both since last we met.

"And the war, Mademoiselle, do you know anything about what has happened?"

Two great tears swelled to Mademoiselle's eyes, which, however, bore a triumphant expression.

"Madame— the French flag is flying over Mulhouse—but it cost fifteen thousand lives! That is official news. I cannot give you further details nor say how I obtained what I have told you."

Then the armies had met and war was now a bloody reality!

I shuddered. Here was news of a victory and all we could do was weep! Once again the sons of France had generously shed their blood to reconquer their righteous belongings!

I left Mademoiselle and rode home in silence. Should I tell the villagers? Why not? But how—

The question answered itself, for as we approached the town hall I saw the school master and a number of elderly men seated on the bench beside the chain. When we pulled up to give César breathing spell, they all came clustering around the carriage. Did I know anything? Had I heard anything?

"Gentlemen," I said, with a decided huskiness in my throat, "the French flag flies over Mulhouse, but fifteen thousand men are *hors de combat!*"

Joy, followed almost instantaneously by an expression of sorrow, literally transfigured all their faces. Tears sprang to the eyes of several, falling silently down their furrowed cheeks, and without uttering a word, as one man they all uncovered! The respect for the glorious dead immediately abolished any desire for boisterous triumph.

There was no necessity to add any comment, so I continued my route to the château.

. . . .

One night towards the end of the following week, I was awakened by the banging of doors and the shattering of window panes. A violent storm had suddenly blown up and the wind was working havoc with unfastened blinds and shutters. There was no use thinking of holding a candle or a lamp. Besides, the lightning flashed so brightly that I was able to grope my way through the long line of empty rooms, tighten the fastenings, and shut the windows. I had reached the second story without mishap and without hearing the slightest footstep within doors. All my little servants were so exhausted that even the thunder had not roused them. Presently, however, the sound of the gate bell broke on my ears.

"Pooh," thought I. "Some tree or branch has fallen on the wire. Catch me getting wet going out to see what it is."

The ringing continued, but more violently and at regular intervals. I went down to the middle window and stuck my head out. At the same moment, my dogs made one wild rush towards the gate and a woman's voice called, *"Madame Huard, ouvrez, s'il vous plait!"*

By the light of another flash, I could distinguish a dripping figure in white. "Bah! someone is ill or dying and wants me to telephone for a doctor!"

So I pulled the bell communicating with the servants' quarters, threw on a few warmer clothes, and went below. At the foot of the stairs I came upon George and Léon much dishevelled, but wide awake.

"There is someone in distress at the gate," I hurriedly explained. "Call off the dogs and go and see who it is. I'll light up in the refectory and wait for you there."

They obeyed, and in the course of three or four minutes returned, bringing with them a much-bedraggled but smiling woman on whose coat was pinned the Red Cross medal.

"I'm the trained nurse. Madame Macherez sent me here to help with your hospital."

"Oh! I'm sure you're welcome, Madame—"

"Guix is my name. I received my orders to join you here three days ago, and communications are so bad that I've come most of the way on foot. I humbly apologize for arriving at such an hour and in such a state."

I hurried Madame Guix off to her apartment, told the boys to wake Julie and have her send us a cup of tea and some refreshments in my little drawing-room. Though it was the middle of August, the rain and dampness were so penetrating that I did not hesitate to touch a match to a brushwood fire that is always prepared in my grate. In a short time my guest reappeared and as she refreshed herself, I busily plied her with questions concerning the events of the last two weeks.

Madame Guix, a woman but little over thirty, came from Choisy-le-Roi (the city of famous Rouget de l'Isle). *Mercière* by trade, on the death of husband and baby she had adopted the career of *infirmière,* and at the outbreak of the war found herself in possession of her diploma and ready to serve. She had enlisted at the big military hospital her native town had installed in the school house, and for three long weeks had sat and waited for something to do.

"Are there no wounded there?"

"Not when I left."

"Have you ever yet had occasion to nurse a soldier?"

"Yes, of course. Four days after the declaration when the Forty-ninth Territorials came through Choisy on their forced march to the front, we were suddenly filled up with cases of congestion. You see, that regiment is composed of men mostly over forty, and what with the heat, their guns and their sacs, and unaccustomed to such a life, many of them couldn't stand the strain. My first patient was a sad little man named Bouteron.

"Bouteron? What Bouteron?"

"Marcel Bouteron."

"No!"

"Why?"

"Is he dead?"

"No."

I breathed again. Thank God! Bouteron, Bouteron, our jolly little Bouteron, gaiety itself, who three weeks ago was the very life and soul of our last house party! Was it possible? Already "down and out!" And to think that this strange woman should bring me the news. I drew my chair nearer to Madame Guix and for two long hours we talked, as only women can.

From Choisy she had sought to exercise her *métier* to better advantage by approaching the front, so had addressed herself to Madame Macherez in Soissons. From there she had been sent to me. Did she think there was any possibility of nursing wounded in our hospital? We were so far south.

She was confident that we would not be empty long. Bloody battles were being waged from Alsace throughout the entire north. Belgian territory had been violated and Liège was putting up a heroic defense.

But our doctor and the pharmaceutical products? From where and when would they arrive? Food and bedding would go a long way, but were hardly sufficient to start a hospital!

We were to count on Madame Macherez for both. She had promised to do her utmost to reach us with our supplies, but the rules of circulation on the roads were so severe that even Red Cross supply cars had to stand in line and await permits. In the meantime we must organize as best we could.

The following morning a few moments' intercourse proved to me that Madame Guix's competence extended far beyond the bounds of her *métier*. She was a splendid worker, and no task was too difficult, so long as it furthered our purpose—namely, that of being ready in case of emergency.

By noon we had decided that it would be useless to count upon my servants to help in the hospital. They already had all they could do. So I went and asked our mayor if he knew of any women who, *de bonne volonté,* would come and assist us. Madame Guix volunteered to teach them the rudiments of bandaging between two and five on the coming afternoons, and we would establish a *roulement,* so that the little time that each disposed of might be properly and efficiently utilized.

The drum beat and made the announcement, and at two the same afternoon we had the satisfaction of welcoming some twenty women. In the meantime every bit of old linen I possessed was brought down and put on the dining-room table, then measured and torn in *formes règlementaires* ready to be sterilized and put aside. Half a dozen bands were left out as models and it was with these that Madame Guix commenced her demonstrations. She soon put her listeners at ease, and presently all were anxious to try a hand at bandaging. The naive clumsiness of these poor souls was extremely pathetic, but such was their patriotism that they never considered themselves ridiculous for a single instant, and stood there fumbling the long linen rolls with hands that were far more accustomed to wielding a spade or directing a plough. Again and again they would recommence certain difficult proceedings, taking turns at playing the dummy, and offering as models calves and biceps of which many an athlete might have been proud.

Of the score of women but two or three really acquired any facility, but we considered that sufficient, for in time of need the others could easily be put to work at necessary matters which were of less vital importance.

From the windows of the dining-room where the *cours* was held, we could look down the driveway and see all the children of the neighbourhood standing on the wall of the moat, craning their necks in the hope of catching a glimpse of what was going on in the château. It was evidently an interesting diversion, for every afternoon they reappeared, in spite of George's threats to send for the *gendarmes*. The little demons seemed to know that the *gendarmes* were too busy to give them any attention, and I assure you, they profited by their liberty. Little John Poupard and his five-year-old brother were the leaders of the band, and I trembled lest some day their curiosity lead to a tragic end!

Nor were my fears in vain, for one afternoon we heard a shriek and a splash, followed by cries of terror, and we knew for certain that someone had fallen into the moat. The embankment is not eight feet high, and at that season of the year there is more mud than water in the river, so I was certain that whoever had fallen in was in no danger of drowning—but nevertheless I hastened with the others to the spot.

George, who had also heard the noise, reached the scene of action before we did, and on our arrival we found him knee deep in the mud, preparing to hoist a little limp body on to the bank.

Johnny Poupard!

"Good heavens!" thought I. "Decidedly that family had no intention of letting the village rust for want of dramatic situations!"

"He's merely fainted; more frightened than hurt," declared Madame Guix, who had literally pounced upon him. "Now then, ladies," she said, turning towards the women who stood gaping at us, "now then, here's a splendid opportunity to distinguish yourselves."

And so little John Poupard was carried into the infirmary. As first patient you may be sure that he received every attention. Some ammonia was held under his nose. This soon brought him around and after carefully sounding all his bones, Madame Guix decided that there were no fractures. And the bandaging began!

It makes me smile when I think of it all now—for the only wounds Johnny possessed were a few scratches on his hands, knees and head, caused by his sudden contact with a patch of stinging nettles which had sprung up on the river banks.

Under ordinary circumstances, the child would probably have picked himself up and walked home, forgetting his woes an hour later. But real live models who are actually in pain, are few and far between, especially at "courses" such as ours, and the amount of professional skill that was expended on that little urchin ought to have cured six of his kind. But it all made the women so happy!

At the end of half an hour, Johnny Poupard looked more like an Egyptian mummy than a human being, so much so that when his grandmother arrived upon the scene of action, she very nearly fainted and all but became patient number two at Auxiliary Hospital No. 7!

We had some little difficulty reassuring her, but when her prodigal grandson sat up and asked for bread and jam, she forgot her anxiety and began scolding him for daring to give her such a fright, and us so much trouble.

. . . .

Towards the end of the third week in August the mobilisation was considered finished and the Eastern Railroad opened again to the public; its time tables of course being limited and subject to instant change, the company refusing to be responsible for delays. To us at the château this meant very little, save that we would receive our mail and the daily papers more frequently. However, several friends who fancied I was unsafe alone and so far from the capital, kindly ventured to start to Villiers to try to persuade me to come up to town. It took them seven hours to reach Meaux (thirty miles from Paris); they were obliged to sleep there because it was suddenly announced that their train went no further—and worse than all, they were eighteen hours getting home.

"Weren't people furious?" I questioned, when afterwards they told me of their adventure.

"Not in the slightest. Everyone bore it patiently as part of his tribute to his country. 'The army first' was their motto."

The first batch of mail brought me any number of stale letters, which had arrived and been held in Paris over three weeks. Invitations to a house party in Belgium and things of that kind that seemed so strangely out of place now. The two most important documents, however, came, one from my cousin, Marie Huard (Superior at the Convent of the Infant Jesus at Madrid) and the other from Elizabeth Gauthier.

My cousin had taken upon herself to locate and communicate with every member of the Huard family called to arms (and they are numerous, when one considers that H. has no less than twelve married uncles!) and she enclosed me a sort of map, or family tree, indicating the names, ages, regiments, etc., of some fifty cousins, begging me to write and encourage them from time to time.

Elizabeth Gauthier's letter bore a black border—and I trembled as I opened it. She was in Paris alone, and mourning the loss of her eldest brother, killed at the battle of Mulhouse, the ninth of August. Her solitude preyed upon her, and she announced her departure for her sister's château in Burgundy.

That was the first real sadness that the war had brought me so far. It quite upset me, for Jean Bernard was not only a delightful friend, but one of the most promising engineers of the younger generation in France. Both family, friends and country might well deplore such a loss.

Even the making and hoisting of a huge Red Cross flag over the château failed to arouse my enthusiasm all that day. The blow was too cruel and had stimulated fears which heretofore had lain dormant within me.

The next day, however, I was not permitted to brood over my grief, for Yvonne (she of the poultry farm) fell ill with a severe attack of sciatica, which kept her in her bed, every movement producing a scream of agony.

Of course Madame Guix was there to lend a hand, but that hardly altered the situation, so I was obliged to ask the boys to give another "pull" and try to be equal to the work. Léon accepted with such alacrity that for the first time it dawned on me that perhaps he had a soft spot in his heart for my pretty little goose girl, and this unsuspected romance, interwoven with the joys and anxieties of the moment, seemed all the more charming.

To cap the climax of misfortune, old César had run a nail into his hoof and Madame Guix spent most of her time between injections of oxygen on the first floor, and iodyne and flax-seed poultices in the stables. This of course meant that all errands outside the village must be made on bicycle, and George was "mustered into service." Towards noon on the 27th he made his first return trip from Charly, bringing the mail and the papers, and a very excited countenance.

"Madame, I've seen one!" he shouted, as I appeared in the doorway.

"Seen what?"

"Un casque à point!"

"A what!"

"Yes—a pointed helmet. I was standing by the post office in Charly when a long line of motors passed by on the road to Paris. I recognized the Belgium uniform, and one of the soldiers leaned out and held up a German helmet! What a trophy!"

"The Belgians! What on earth are they doing down here?" thought I. And George guessed my question.

"Oh," he continued, "you see their regiment was cut in two by the Germans at Charleville and those who escaped managed to get motors and are on their way home—by a round-about route to Antwerp via Hâvre. The hotel keeper said so. She offered some wine to one motor full that stopped."

If that were true it was an amazing bit of news! Then things were not going as well as the now very reticent papers led one to suppose. But it all seemed so very distant that I refused to worry.

However, I was about to seek out Madame Guix and tell her what George had reported when an amusing sight caught my eye.

From her open window, towards which she had asked that we push her bed, Yvonne amused herself by calling her ducklings.

"Bour-ree—bour-ree!"

Then from the farmyard a good two hundred yards distant, would rise the reply, "Quack! quack! quack!"

Big and small recognized the call of their little mistress and hastened to respond.

"Bouree—bour-ree—bouree!" called Yvonne again and again.

Evidently the ducks decided to hold a consultation and send delegates to see what on earth prevented their friend from caring for them in person since they could hear her voice. For as I looked across the lawn towards the door, imagine my surprise on catching sight of some thirty or forty Rouenese ducks of all sizes waddling up the steps and into the vestibule.

"Bour-ree, bouree!" Yvonne continued. "Quack, quack, quack!" came the reply, and when I reached the entrance hall, I found them all clustered together at the foot of the staircase, their heads cocked on one side, awaiting a decision of their drake before undertaking to mount the marble stairway.

That same afternoon the *cour d'infirmières* transported itself to the lawn in front of the château. It was too splendid weather to stay indoors. The demonstrations were finished and most of the women had retired, when one of those who remained lifted her finger and asked for silence. "Listen," she said, "the cannon!" She didn't need to go any further. In less than a second's time we were straining our ears towards the east!

"There!" she said, "there it goes again!"

Three of us had heard a sound which strangely resembled the popping of a cork at a very great distance. Remembering my grandmother's Indian stories, I stretched out on the grass with my ear to the ground. This time I heard the rolling so distinctly that my face must have altered, for two of the women shuddered and took hasty leave.

In a second I guessed that they were off to tell the news—so I made light of it by declaring that it must be the trying-out of some heavy artillery at Chalons; but when Madame Guix and I found ourselves alone, we looked at each other with interrogation points in our eyes.

We thought of our hospital, of our supplies, of our perfect uselessness unless Soissons could yet reach us—and I resolved to go down to the druggist at Charly and see what could be done.

The following morning, Saturday, the twenty-ninth—I betook myself to Charly and there managed to beg the elements of a rudimentary infirmary from the old pharmacist, who must have thought me crazy. Absorbent cotton I was able to procure in small rolled packages from the draper, and promising to send the boys down in the afternoon with a small hand cart, I returned home, without having observed anything abnormal save the frequent passage of autos towards Paris—all going top speed and loaded with the queerest occupants and baggage.

On my return great excitement reigned around our gate, for a private automobile containing wounded had halted on seeing our Red Cross flag, and Madame Guix welcomed them in.

They were *petit blessés,* all able to travel, probably suffering more from heat and privation than from their wounds. They had no orders to stop, but hoped we would let them rest a bit before going further—and could we give them something to eat?

All this was very fortunate considering our precarious situation and we gladly did the best we knew how. There were six poor chaps belonging to different regiments, but all so tired that it seemed cruel to prevent their snatching a rest by plying them with questions. We could do that later on.

The lads were hardly stretched out when another motor drew up before the gate. This one contained besides three privates a young officer with his arm in a sling, and he asked if we could give them water. Léon told them that they would be very welcome if they would care to come in and rest—there were already a half-dozen wounded asleep in the house. At these words the lieutenant jumped down and asked for the *médicin-chef*. He was rather startled when I appeared, and told him that there was no military authority as yet installed at the château.

"Then I must take all the responsibility of the men," he said very kindly but firmly. "I'm sorry, but they cannot remain here. I must deliver them safe at some big centre outside the zone of operations."

The time had come for questions—and I learned with amazement that Liège had fallen, Belgium was invaded, and that hard fighting was going on at St. Quentin, but eighty miles away. "The cannon of yesterday was no target practise," thought I. The men all seemed so hopeful, though, that we never felt a qualm.

"As you will, Monsieur," I said, and the weary boys were wakened and hurried off before we had time to ask names, addresses or any further details.

All this had transpired so rapidly that we had had no time to call in our assistants, and presently Madame Guix and I found ourselves alone in the empty vestibule.

IV

Nothing further happened that afternoon. Madame Guix's course went on as usual, with perhaps a little more animation in the conversation, and much speculation as to when and where those who had stopped at the château had been wounded. No one really knew. To tell the truth, though later Madame Guix and I had asked them, the soldiers themselves had but a very indistinct idea of time and date or whereabouts.

That night I was awakened by the low rumbling of heavy carts on the road in front of the château. Fancying that perhaps it was artillery on its way to the front, I put on my dressing gown and went as far as the gate. There in the pale moonlight I beheld a long stream of carriages and wagons of every description piled high with household goods, and filled with women and children. The men walked beside the horses to prevent collision, for as far as eye could see, the lamentable *cortège* extended down the hill.

What did this mean?

"Who are you?" I called to one of the men as they passed.

"Belgians—refugees."

Refugees! My mind flew back to descriptions of the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror, when so many people fled for their lives! What nonsense! Were we not in the twentieth century? Wasn't there a Peace Palace at The Hague? My thoughts became muddled.

Opening the gate, I went out and accosted another man.

"Won't you come in and rest?"

"No, we can't. We must make our twenty miles by dawn—and rest during the heat of the day."

"But why do you leave home?"

"Because the savages burned us out!"

Bah, the man must be dreaming!

I turned back and addressed myself to another:

"What's your hurry?" I queried .

"They're on our heels!" came the reply.

Surely this one was madder than the other!

A third did not deign to reply, sturdily marching ahead, his eyes fixed on the road in front of him.

On top of a farm cart half filled with hay I saw the prostrate form of a woman with two others kneeling beside her ministering to her wants. In the trap that followed was the most sorrowful group of old men and middle-aged women I ever hope to see. All were sobbing. Beside them rode two big boys on bicycles. I stopped one of them.

"What's the matter with her?" I questioned, pointing to the woman on the cart.

"She's crazy."

"?"

"Yes, lost her mind."

"How, when, where?"

"Two days ago, when we left X. (Try as I may, I cannot recall the name of the little Belgian town he mentioned.) She was ill in bed with a fever when the Germans set fire to the place—hardly giving us time to hoist her on the cart. Her husband lingered behind to scrape a few belongings together. In spite of our efforts, she would stand up on the cart, and suddenly we heard an explosion and she saw her house burst into flame. She fainted. Outside in the woods we waited an hour, but her husband never came. Perhaps it's just as well, for when she woke up her mind was a blank!"

Ye gods! I rubbed my eyes. It couldn't be possible that all this was true! I was asleep! It was merely a horrible nightmare. But no—the carts rolled on in the pale moonlight carrying their heavy burdens of human misery.

It was more than I could stand. All thought of sleep had vanished, so I went and woke Madame Guix. We dressed and descended to the kitchen, where with a few smouldering embers, we soon managed to light a good fire. Water was set to boil and in half an hour's time we carried out to the bridge two huge pails of hot coffee, a pail of cold water, and one of wine. No one refused our offerings, and the hearty "God bless you's" of those kindly souls brought tears to our eyes more than once.

Dawn, Monday, August 31st, found us still at our posts. I rang the farm bell, assembled my servants, and told them we would abandon all but the most necessary farm work and minister to the wants of the refugees. By eight o'clock they had peeled and prepared vegetables enough to fill two huge copper pots, and the soup was set to boil. And still the long line of heavy vehicles followed one another down the road: moving vans, delivery wagons, huge drays, and even little three-wheeled carts drawn by dogs, rolled on towards the south.

When asked where they were going, most of the people replied, "Straight ahead of us, *à la grâce de Dieu.*"

By the morning the heat had grown intolerable and a splendid looking man got down from a cart and came towards me. Might he turn his party into the drive and rest a bit in the shade?

I was only too willing, and gladly offered hot soup and stewed fruit to any who would accept.

Two long heavy drays each drawn by a pair of the handsomest big bay horses with creamy manes that I have ever seen, pulled up in the courtyard. Impromptu seats had been arranged in the wagons and from these climbed down some twenty or thirty old women, children and men, worn out by the fatigue, anxiety and want of sleep. My heart went out to them, and in a generous moment I was about to offer them my beds so they could get a good rest before starting off again, but on second thought it dawned on me that I must keep them for the army! What a pretty thing it would be if another auto full of wounded suddenly appeared and found all my wards occupied!

I explained my position. They grasped it at once. It was too good of me. They were all well and needed no beds—would I let them sleep in the hay for a few hours?

But better still, I suggested, if the boys would carry a dozen or so extra mattresses I possessed into the harness room, the women might lie there, and the men could take to the hay.

They had food, plenty of it, bought on the way from village dealers who had not yet been seized with panic and shut up shop. So I told them that instead of building individual fires they might cook their noonday meal on my huge range. They might also use my kitchen utensils and china if they would wash up, and thus save unpacking their own. Apparently this was unheard of generosity and I cannot tell you how many times that morning my soul was recommended to the tender protection of the Blessed Virgin.

While the women prepared the meal, George had taken the men to the wash-house, where soap and water worked miracles on their dusty faces; one by one all the members of the group disappeared in that direction and when they gathered around the long table in the refectory, it was altogether a different company to that of an hour before.

As they sat down it came over me that none of us had eaten since the night before, and dropping onto a chair, I suddenly realized that I was tired. Berthe and Nini, however, wanted to know where I would lunch, and were rather startled when I informed them to lay a cloth on the kitchen table and to bring out all the cold meat, cheese, bread, butter and jam in the larder. It would be a stand-up picnic lunch for everyone to-day, and what was more, it was very likely to be picnic dinner; so Julie was ordered to put two chickens to roast and some potatoes to boil—both needed but little attention and would always be ready when we might need them.

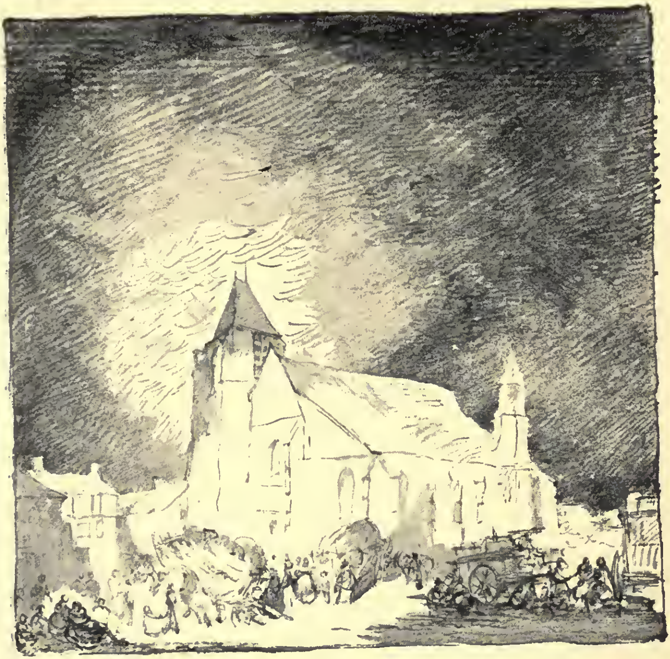
The meal passed in silence in both rooms, and the "washing up" was done in no time. Then as they all retired to take their naps, the man who had first asked me if they might turn into the château, and who seemed to be the leader of the party, came into the kitchen and, hat in hand, begged a word or so with me.

He had come not only to express the gratitude of his compatriots, but also his astonishment that I should welcome strangers so cordially. I tried to side-track the conversation which was very embarrassing, but he would hear none of it.

"We are not gypsies, you know, Madame." I smiled and told him that that was more than evident. "Look at our horses and our dogs!" And the good fellow proceeded to inform me that he was the keeper of a big estate that belonged to Madame Pyrmé (sister of the senator of that name), situated in the little village of Hanzinell, Belgium. He even offered to show his papers, but I shook my head. His open-hearted sincerity and frank countenance were sufficient.

But why had they come away? That was what interested me.

Because their country was invaded and one by one the towns and villages had been bombarded, looted and burned until little or noth-



ONE BY ONE THE TOWNS AND VILLAGES HAD BEEN BOMBARDED, LOOTED AND BURNED [Page 126]

ing remained. Because all men under fifty were carried away as hostages or prisoners; because he had seen little children slain, and young girls tortured; because anything was better than falling helpless into the hands of such an enemy.

"Madame, at Charleroi I've seen the blood running in the gutters like rain after a storm—and that not a week ago!"

It was impossible not to believe him. His eye was not that of a coward. He told his story simply; he was almost reticent, and I had even to encourage him at times to make him finish a phrase. Finally I asked him where he intended going, and why so far away. Didn't he think he was safe here?

No—*jamais!* Yesterday in the night they had heard the cannon growing closer and closer. They knew the sound. The Germans were advancing. It was Paris they wanted—and nothing would stop them till they reached their goal.

"Except the French army," I said, with pride.

"God grant you speak the truth, Madame!" But in the meantime he seemed to consider that one was far safer in the way of some gigantic mowing-machine than on the path of the German army. He had come to tell me the truth and to warn me that I ought to make ready to leave.

"You are helpless here, Madame. Three women, three little girls, and two boys! It's tempting fate."

I couldn't seem to see it his way, however. The papers though very mysterious, had given us no cause for alarm. As yet we had not seen a single trooper. If it were true that the French were retreating we would leave when the army appeared. That would be time enough.

"Why, my good fellow," I said reassuringly, "if the Germans ever reach here Paris is doomed—and the war will be over!"

"Perhaps—"

"Besides, I can't go. I've got a hospital on my hands, though the wounded are lacking. Haven't you seen our Red Cross flag? And if that isn't sufficient, I can prove that I'm an American born. That ought to be protection enough for anyone!"

I must admit that the incredulous smile that rose to his lips rather angered me, and I sought still another excuse.

"Furthermore, one of my little maids is too ill to move, and I don't see us walking off with folded arms, and that's what would happen if I followed your advice, for the only horse the army has left me is over twenty and so lame that he can't walk ten steps. If he could I'd have had to present him for the second inspection at Château-Thierry on Wednesday."

The poor fellow shook his head at my apparent foolhardiness, but was too polite to argue any further. He said that his party would be off in an hour and asked me if I possessed a road-map that he might consult. I gladly showed him the one we had bought with H. the day of our hasty trip from Paris, since then pinned to the wall of the refectory. I noticed that he studied it very carefully, noting all the little sidetracks where he thought his drays could pass, and thus avoid following in line behind the thousands of other vehicles that encumbered the main roads.

Again he thanked me for all I had done, caressed my beautiful greyhounds, and left me his card so that we might meet when all was over. Afterwards when I went into the court, I heard someone in the stable with George, and looking in, I saw my friend of a few moments before examining my horse's hoof and telling my boy what would make the sore heal quickly. He was bound to do his best for me!

By five o'clock the stables and grounds were empty, and our friends from Hanzinell had joined the column which had slackened a bit during the heat of the day, but had redoubled in volume since the sun had gone behind the hills.

We had a moment's breathing space, during which we gave our entire attention to Yvonne, who was writhing with agony on her bed next my room. For three days now Madame Guix had administered mild doses of morphine, but that treatment could not continue very long. Water bags, friction and massage had proved fruitless against sciatica, so we resolved to try a warm bath, with the result that our patient was almost immediately eased but too weak to support the heat. She fainted in the tub and had to be carried back to bed. We were still working over her when Nini appeared and said I was wanted below. When Yvonne's eyelashes began to flutter I left Madame Guix and regained the kitchen, now become the headquarters.

More refugees! Would I let them come in? They were traveling without map or guide and dared not venture along the roads at night.

Of course they were welcome, and the same hospitality that had greeted the refugees from Hanzinell was offered to those from Thuilly. Thuilly—the whole village was there!—mayor, curate, smith and baker, all accompanied by different members of their immediate families, driven from home by the cruel invaders. Terrified by the horrors they had witnessed, exhausted by their perilous journey, they were disinclined to talk; and as for myself, I was so busy, preoccupied and thoroughly spent, that curiosity was forgotten. Here were people in need of what comforts I could offer. I gave and asked no questions.

What was most evident at present was the fact that rations were shorter among this party than among those who had stopped in the morning, and certainly not for the lack of funds. All of them had money—gold a-plenty.

They had found less to buy—*voilà tout.* They were glad to accept the vegetable soup, rabbit stew and cooked fruit that we had prepared—but insisted on paying for their portions, which of course I refused, much to their dismay, and I am certain the servants were well repaid for their trouble.

And what were their plans? To go as far south as possible. Perhaps they would eventually cross to Morocco or Canada. Why not? The whole village was there—all the men had their trades. They would colonise, for it was useless to think of going "home." They no longer possessed one, and who could tell—the war might last a year or more?

At that assertion I protested. A year? Never! Why, the finances of the country couldn't stand it, and I went on to state how, when in England during the Agadir crisis three years previous, I had heard competent authorities state that three months was the very limit for the duration of hostilities! That somewhat cheered them—especially as I announced the Russian advance, and on the map we noted the rapid progress of the famous "steam roller," which, if it continued as it had begun, would certainly reach Berlin by Christmas! (I offer these statements without comment.)

Before they retired Madame Guix asked if there were any who felt the slightest ill, for it were better to nip sickness in the bud, and she cheerfully lanced festers and pricked blisters, bathed, powdered and bandaged the feet of some dozen old and decrepit men and young children unaccustomed to such forced marching and unable to take proper care of themselves for want of time and hot water! At that moment I felt she was heroic and I must say I admired her patience and endurance, for the sights witnessed were anything but agreeable. Poor souls! And they hoped to reach Marseilles on foot. . . .

The Kaiser and his entire army might have ridden over us rough shod and we would have felt nothing, so soundly did we sleep for the first couple of hours after we touched our beds. By two A. M. (September first), however, there was much moving about in the barns and stables, and my dogs, who were restless, began scratching at my door to be released. Anxious that no one leave without a cup of hot coffee, Madame Guix and I repaired to the kitchen as dawn broke, and an hour later we bade farewell to our "lodgers for a night." I bethought me of my kodak, and as the sun peeped through the clouds I caught a snapshot of my departing guests as they turned the corner of the château.

They joined in behind the stream of other carts which we were now accustomed to seeing. In fact, this general exodus no longer astonished us. It seemed as if the panic had spread over the whole of Flanders like a drop of oil on a sheet of paper. To us, who consider ourselves as living in the suburbs of Paris, Belgium is so far away!

I wound off my film and was returning towards the house, when two very distinguished looking girls stepped off their bicycles and asked for directions. I gave them with pleasure and in turn ventured a few questions.

They were from St. Quentin! That startled me. They had been *en route* two days. They had not seen the Germans, but the town had been officially evacuated. A man on a bicycle had sped by them the day before and announced the bombardment and destruction of their native city! Hard fighting at La Fère.

St. Quentin! Then the Germans were on our soil! The Belgians were right—they were evidently advancing rapidly. But why worry? We were safe as long as we had the French army between us and them.

Though as yet the day was but a couple of hours old, I was weary. This business of hotel-keeping on so large a scale with so little assistance was beginning to tell on my strength. I opened the gate and told George and Léon to welcome any who wished to come in, and then repairing to the kitchen, I sat down and began helping the others prepare vegetables. The discovery that in spite of all their good will my guests had necessarily left many traces of their passage, brought me to my feet again, and we were all hard at work when a haggard female face looked in at the kitchen window.

"Is there a doctor here?"

"No,—but—"

The woman burst into tears. Madame Guix and I hurried out into the court. "My baby—I can't seem to warm her," moaned the poor soul. "She hasn't eaten anything since yesterday."

And stretching out her arms, the woman

showed us an infant that she had been carrying in her apron. It was dead.

I had difficulty in overcoming my emotion, but Madame Guix took the poor little corpse into her arms, and I helped the mother to an arm chair in the refectory.

A cup of strong coffee brought back a little color to her wan cheeks and she told us she was from Charleville. The *Taubes* had got in their sinister work to good advantage among the civil population but they were merely the forerunners of another and heavier bombardment. The townspeople had fled in their night clothes.

"Are you alone?"

"Yes—I'm not a native of Charleville. My husband and I have only been married a year. He left the second of August and the baby was born the tenth. She's only three weeks old."

No wonder the mother looked haggard—one hundred and fifty miles on foot, with a newborn infant in her arms, fleeing for her life before the barbarous hordes!

I pressed another cup of coffee with a drop of brandy in it upon her. She looked appealingly at both of us and then drank.

"Was your husband good to you?" asked Madame Guix.

"Ah, yes, Madame."

"Do you love him well enough to endure another sacrifice like a true wife and mother that you are?"

"Yes."

And then we told her that her baby had gone—gone to a brighter Country where war is unknown. She looked at us in amazement, and burying her head on her arm, sobbed silently but submissively.

"Come, come, you must sleep—and when you are rested we will help you to find room in a cart which will take you towards your parents."

She cast a long, loving look at her first born, and let herself be led away.

All we could do was to make an official declaration of the death at the town hall. A small linen sheet served as shroud, a clean, flower-lined soap box formed that baby's coffin, and George and I were the grave diggers and chief mourners, who laid the tiny body at rest in the little vine-grown churchyard. War willed it thus.

When I got back from the cemetery I found another load of refugees installed in the courtyard. This time they proved to be a hotel keeper and her servants from the Ardennes. They, however, had foreseen that flight was imminent and had carefully packed a greater part of their household belongings and valuables onto several wagons, taking care that all were well balanced and properly loaded so as to carry the maximum weight without tiring the horses. They needed less attention than the others had required, for when I explained that the house was theirs, they went about their work swiftly and silently, getting in no one's way and attending to every want of their mistress, who sat in her coupé and gave orders.

Later on they were joined by the occupants of numerous other equipages, all from the same district—but with whom I had but little intercourse. From one poor woman, however, I learned that her two daughters, aged sixteen and seventeen, had been lost from the party for two days. They were in the cart with the curate who had stopped to water his horse, thus losing his place in line. When they had reached the spot where the road forked, which direction had he taken? What had become of them? She pinned her name and route on the refectory wall, begging me to give it to them if they ever inquired for her. To my knowledge they never passed.

At luncheon Madame Guix announced that Yvonne was better. Far from well, but better. That was a load off my mind.

The mother of the poor little infant we had buried was peacefully slumbering on a cot in the hospital, and presently Léon came in to say that old César had put his hoof on the ground for the first time in four days. Bravo! I felt much relieved.

And still the carts rolled down the valley, their noise echoing between the hills. To-day there was no respite: right on through the heat of noon they rumbled past, thicker and faster it seemed to me.

"Bother them!" I thought. "They make so much noise that we couldn't hear the cannon if it were only a mile distant." And hoping that perhaps I might seek some assurance from that sound, I was about to set off for the highest spot in the park to listen. At the door, however, I was accosted by one of the two men who for several days had been bundling my hay in the stable lofts. He pleaded illness. Would I pay him and let him go? He would come back to-morrow and finish if he felt better.

As there was nothing unusual in his request, I settled his account and told him to go and rest. I now know that he was a German spy, and have recently learned that a fortnight later he was caught and shot at Villers-Cotterets.

I wonder what possessed me to make that long weary climb. Evidently I found out what I wanted to know, but the news was anything but reassuring. I heard the cannon distinctly: so distinctly that I was a trifle unnerved. Not only had my ears caught the long ever-steady rolling (already observed three days since) but I had been able to make out a difference in the calibre of each piece that fired, and added to it all was a funny clattering sound, as when one drags a wooden stick along an iron barred fence. *La Fère* is putting up a heroic defense, I thought, blissfully unconscious of the fact that it is utterly impossible to hear a cannon at that distance—at half, no, even a quarter of that distance. Judge then for yourselves what was its proximity to Villiers!

For two days now the course in nursing had been abandoned, not for lack of enthusiasm but because each housewife had more than she could attend to at home. The château was not the only place where refugees halted, and all the villagers had done their best to make the travelers comfortable. From where I stood overlooking the two valleys, I could see the interminable line of carts on all roads within scope of my view, and in every farm yard as well as on the side of the main thoroughfares, vehicles were drawn up and thin columns of blue smoke rising heavenward, told that the evening meal was under way.

The population of my own courtyard had quadrupled by five o'clock. People from St. Quentin, Ternier, Chauny—each with a tale of horror and sorrow—sought refuge for the night. Madame Guix was permanently established in the dispensary, and a line was formed as in front of the city clinics, each one waiting his turn, hoping that she might be able to relieve his suffering. At dusk a cart turned into the drive and a grey-haired man asked if we had a litter on which to carry his son to the house. "What was the matter?" I inquired. "A cough—such a bad cough." I went with him towards the wagon, and there beheld the sad spectacle of a youth in the last stages of tuberculosis. Thin beyond description, a living skeleton, the poor boy turned his great glassy eyes towards me in supplication. I drew the father aside. It was best to be frank. I shook my head and said it would be useless to move his son. We had no doctor, and his illness was beyond our competence. Cover him well, and try to reach a big city as soon as possible.

As I turned away, a sturdy youth tapped me gently on the arm, begging shelter for his great-grandmother, a woman ninety-three years old, whom he had carried on his back all the way from St. Quentin. A cot in the entrance hall was all prudence permitted me to offer, and it was charming to see how tenderly the young fellow bore the poor little withered woman to her resting-place. She was so dazed that I fear she hardly realized what was happening, but tears of gratitude streamed down her cheeks when her boy appeared with a bowl of hot soup, coaxing her to drink, like a child, and finally curling up on the rug beside her bed.

Five times that evening the great refectory table was surrounded by hungry men and women; five times I ladled out soup and vegetables to forty persons, and five times we all helped to wash up. So when all was finally cleaned away, and Madame Guix and I fell exhausted onto two kitchen chairs, it was well onto eleven P. M.

My clever nurse informed me that she had arranged for the departure in a cart of the mother whose baby we had buried, and I in turn told her of my climb in the park and the approach of the cannon. It was evident that the Germans were bearing down on us, and swiftly. When we looked at the map and saw the names of the cities, towns and villages whose populations had succeeded each other down the road, it was clear that the French must be beating a forced retreat, or (and this was unlikely) panic had spread so quickly that the whole north of France was now moving south on a fool's errand. We cast this second hypothesis aside. We had heard too many tales of woe and seen too much misery to believe anything of the sort.

Well, and then what? Our case was simple

—either the Germans would be stopped before they reached us, or the French army would put in an appearance, in which latter case it would be time enough to leave, unless we were officially evacuated before! Having adopted this simple line of conduct, we retired, quite satisfied and not in the least uneasy.

In the cool grey dawn of Wednesday morning, September second, when I opened my shutters and looked out into the little square that faces the château, I was amazed to see that the refugees who had halted there were in carts and wagons whose signs were most familiar. They came from Soissons!

"Hello," thought I, "I'll go and see what they have to say! Things must be getting very bad if a big city like Soissons suddenly takes to its heels." (Soissons is but little over twenty miles from Villiers.) As I came down stairs I heard the drum roll, and George, who just then appeared with the milk, announced that the requisition of horses which should have taken place at Château-Thierry that morning, was indefinitely postponed. That was hardly reassuring, especially as it was the first official news we had received in a long time.

So busy were we helping those who had slept at the château to depart, that I had no time to put my first intentions into execution, and when finally I had a moment, I looked out of the window and saw that my friends from Soissons had vanished. They, too: well, well, well!

I was not astonished; in fact I gave the matter but little heed. We had taken our resolutions the night before and had no time to stop every five minutes and question as to whether we were right or wrong. At noon, however, when an old peasant woman called me through the kitchen window and announced that all Charly was leaving post haste, I must admit that I winced, but only for a second. If I had listened to all the different rumours that had been noised abroad within the last week I would have been a fit subject for a lunatic asylum by then!

Resolved, however, to get at the core of the matter, I sent George to Charly (our market town, four miles away) to see what he could find out. He returned on his bicycle at luncheon time, bearing the following astonishing information.

The hotel keeper and his wife, alarmed by the arrival of the Soissonais, had taken their auto and started for that city in quest of news. They had returned an hour later, having been unable to pass Oulchy-le-Châtẹau, fifteen miles from Charly, where all the bridges were cut or blown up! They were making their preparations for departure.

"And," continued George, in an excited tone, "as I came past the *Gendarmerie* the *brigadier* called to me and said good-bye. All the *gendarmes* had received orders to leave at once for their depot at ——— ." (The name of some town the other side of the Marne, which I cannot remember.)

Instead of frightening me this information stimulated my nerves, which were beginning to be depressed by much work and little news.

"Good," I said. "Now then, we can expect the soldiers at any minute. Poke up the fire, Julie, and we'll fall to work to have hot soup ready when our boys arrive."

Then we were really going to be in the excitement. How glorious to be able to help —for in my mind ours was the only solution possible to the question.

I set to work with renewed vigor and, as on the day before, we were constantly in demand by refugees requiring treatment and attention. How well I remember a group of four, two men and two women, who staggered into the court and timidly knocked at the window. Three of them were glad to accept soup and wine, but the fourth, a middle-aged woman, sank down on the steps and buried her head in her hands.

"Why doesn't one of you men relieve her of that heavy parcel she has strapped to her shoulders?" I asked.

"She won't let us touch it. She's never put it aside a minute since we left home six days ago!"

"Is it as precious as all that?" I queried, eyeing the huge flat package which might have been the size of the double sheet of some daily paper.

"It's her son's picture. He's gone to the army and she's alone in the world."

"But why on earth is she carrying frame, glass, and all? It must be nearly killing her in this heat!"

"Madame," said the woman's friend solemnly, "she worked six months and put all her savings into that frame! Do you wonder she did not wish to leave it behind!"

I opened a side door and showed them a foot path across the hills, a short cut which carriages could not take, and was just turning the key in the lock when the telephone rang.

That was the first time since the second of August! What could it mean? Probably the arrival of wounded. I literally flew to answer the call.

I had some little difficulty recognizing Mademoiselle Mauxpoix' voice: it was trembling with emotion. She greeted me politely and then begging me not to be too alarmed, she announced that she had just received official orders to put all her telephones and telegraphic apparatus out of working order—to damage them so that repairs would be impossible.

"I have ten minutes more left," she continued. "A government motor is coming at four o'clock to take me, my employees and my books to Tours."

"But, Mademoiselle——"

She did not heed my interruption. "You

cannot stay, Madame Huard! You must not! No woman is safe on their path. I know this better than you, for I have been receiving official reports for more than a month! The worst is true! For the love of heaven, go—you've still got a chance though there's hard fighting going on in the streets of Château-Thierry! For God's sake, don't hesitate. Adieu."

She was gone! And I stood there dazed!

"Hard fighting at Château-Thierry! That's only seven miles from here." I counted.

Go? Go where? How? Go and abandon my post, with Yvonne still too ill to move, and all the others depending on my help! Go? By what means, when my only horse was too lame to cross the courtyard! It was far better to stay and defend one's belongings!

And then as I slowly returned through the corridors, it occurred to me that in spite of my desire to stay I might be forced out. Suppose the château should suddenly become the target for the German guns? Well, we could all take to the cellars, as the others had done in 1870. But—and here was the point—suppose the French took possession and gave us women but a few minutes to leave before the battle began. Then what! Here was food for reflection. I resolved to take Madame Guix and the two boys into my confidence. Four heads were better than one!

They received the news calmly, and I almost caught a glimpse of a twinkle in George's and Léon's eyes. The excitement pleased them.

If what Mademoiselle Mauxpoix had said was true, the Germans were now on their way to Villiers. It was evident that the French were putting up a stubborn resistance, but there was little hope of their stopping them before they reached our vicinity. Battle meant destruction of lives and property. Well, since we still possessed the former, it was high time to think of saving the latter. The sun was fast sinking behind the pine trees. In an hour it would be dark. What I decided to do must be done at once.

"George and Léon, bring down my two big trunks, and tell Nini to hitch the donkey to his flat cart and drive to the side door." I had resolved to save what I could of H.'s work, and going to the studio closet, I began selecting the portfolios containing mounted drawings and etchings. It was useless to think of the paintings. They were too big. The trunks were full in no time. I had no other receptacles, so reluctantly closed the but half empty cupboards, consoling myself with the thought that all this was possibly useless preparation, and praying Heaven that I had made a good choice among the portfolios in case the worst came.

The boys put the trunks onto the cart and set off in the direction of a sand quarry, where I knew we could dig in safety, and easily cause a miniature landslide, which would cover all traces of our hidden treasure. I promised to join them in an hour—the time I judged it would take them to make so large an excavation, and returning to my room, gathered my jewels and papers into a little valise, and put them beside my fur coat and my kodak. A few other trinkets and innumerable photographs and letters were locked in my desk, and perceiving that it would be utterly impossible to carry them with me, I wondered how on earth I might protect them. Suddenly I bethought me of a tiny silk American flag that my mother had given me years before, when as a child I left home for my first trip to Europe. I found it where I hoped, and shutting one edge of it into the drawer, I let the stripes hang downward and pinned the following inscription into its folds:

"I swear that the contents of this desk are purely personal and can be of value to no one but myself. I therefore leave it under the protection of my country's flag."

I felt very proud when I had done this and then hurried into my dressing-room where I hastily filled my suit-case with a few warm underclothes, a change of costume, and an extra pair of shoes. I had about finished and was heartily glad that this useless job was over, when on glancing out of the window I caught sight of fuzzy-haired Madame La Miche driving up the avenue in her dog cart.

Madame La Miche and her husband run a big stock farm near Neuilly St. Front, some fifteen miles from Villiers. I had often seen her at poultry and agricultural shows, where their farm products usually carried off any number of prizes. It was she who sold me my cows hardly a year since.

"You?" I said, as she drew up to the steps.

"Yes. En route—like all the others. Our entire fortune is in live stock and I'm going to try to save as much as I can. May we come in?"

Certainly—and a half-hour later one of the largest farms in France had been moved bodily into my pasture land! The whole thing was conducted in a very orderly manner by M. La Miche, who on horseback drew up the rear of this immense cavalcade composed of some two hundred white oxen, hitched two abreast, seventy or eighty horses, as many mares with young colts, and heaven knows how many cows and calves; all accompanied by the stable hands. Poor tired beasts, how greedily they drank the cool water of our spring, and how willingly the cunning little colts, whose tender hoofs had been worn to the quick by their unheard-of journey, allowed the men to tie up their feet in coarse linen bandages with strips of old carpet for protection.

Madame La Miche had been officially evacuated at noon, so I did not hesitate to tell her what I had heard. She was not surprised, and said she intended leaving at midnight, but her animals, unaccustomed to such exercise, must have a few hours' rest.

In the kitchen I found George and Léon, who had accomplished their task sooner than I expected. Relying on their word that it was impossible to tell where they had buried the trunks, I did not go back to the sand quarry. Half a mile was a distance to be considered, under the circumstances.

While all this had been going on, Madame Guix had taken Julie into her confidence and asked her if she would follow us if we were obliged to leave. Julie is a native of Villiers, and her husband and children live in a little house near by. She had consulted her lord and they were willing to lend their big dray horse if they could all join our party. Of course we agreed and while it was light, we decided to put some bags of oats into the bottom of our hay-cart, to cover these with hay, and then all the servants could pile on, the boys taking turns at walking since Yvonne must have room to be stretched out.

How I hated all this business! Madame Guix then counted the number of persons composing our party, and sent Nini to fetch as many blankets and pillows. These, with a box containing salt, sugar, chocolate, and other dry provisions, a valise packed with a few bandages and a little medicine, were put onto a little light farm-cart to which we might harness César in case of great emergency.

The two vehicles when loaded were run into an empty carriage house, whose door I locked, rather ashamed of my precautions.

Night had fallen and the incoming stream of refugees demanded our every attention. Madame Guix was occupied with two women whose physical condition was such that it was impossible to refuse them beds, come what might—and as I crossed the vestibule in search of some instruments, the shadow of a woman and two little girls came up the steps. "Could I give them lodgings?" begged the poor soul. I looked at her—she was so frightened that it was most pathetic, and the two curly-headed children clung to her skirts and shivered.

"I've never been alone before," she explained, and her teeth fairly chattered with terror. "I can pay, and pay well—I've thirty thousand francs in gold on me."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, don't let anyone know it!" I said, very abruptly. "I don't want money, but there are others who may. Be careful—a fortune like that may lead to your destruction. Hide it!"

She stared at me in amazement. Evidently the idea that dishonesty existed never occurred to her. She thanked me for the advice and hoped she had not offended me, and begged me to take pity on her.

"Did anyone see you come in here?"

She thought not.

"For if they did I fear you will have to share the common lot. I have no reason to give you preference. The others might protest."

I stuck my head out of the doorway. When I turned around, those three helpless creatures stood clinging to one another in the big empty vestibule, making a most pitiable group.

"Go up two flights of stairs—turn to your left and follow the corridor to the end. The last door on your left opens into a room with a huge double bed. It was too big for our hospital. That's the only reason we didn't bring it down. It's at your disposal. Don't thank me. Good-night."

When I got a moment I went to Yvonne's

room. "Did she think she could get up a little: long enough to take some dinner? Perhaps she might put on a few clothes and make an effort to walk around her room." Ten days in bed had made her very weak. She must try to gain a little strength. She promised and I departed. The idea of carrying her out bodily was anything but encouraging!

At six-thirty the public distribution of soup recommenced. Who my guests were I have no idea. There were more than a hundred of them. That was clear enough from the dishes that were left. Just as the last round had been served, George came in to say that the village was beginning to get uneasy—people from Neuilly St. Front and Lucy-le-Bocage and Essommes had already passed down the road, and the peasants looked to the château for a decision!

I went out to the gate. Yes, true enough, our neighbors from Lucy (five miles distant) had joined the procession. Then there was a break, and a lull, such as had not occurred for two days, and in the silence I again recognized the same clattering sound that had caught my ear on the hill top the afternoon before. This time it was much more distinct, but was soon drowned out by the rumbling of heavy wheels on the road.

Surely this time it was artillery!

I wrapped my shawl closer about me and sat down on the low stone wall that borders the moat, while little groups of peasants, unable to sleep, clustered together on the roadside.

Nearer and nearer drew the clanking noise and presently a whole regiment of perambulators, four abreast, swung around the corner into the moonlight.

Domptin!

Domptin, our neighboring village, one mile up the road, had caught the fever and was moving out wholesale, transporting its ill and decrepit, its children and chattels, in heaven knows how many baby carriages!

I had never seen so many in all my life. The effect was altogether comic, and Madame Guix and I could not resist laughing—much to the dismay of these poor souls who saw little amusement at being obliged to leave home scantily clad in night clothes.

They passed on, without further comment, and the last man had hardly turned the corner when a scream coming from up the road drew us to our feet, and sent us running in that direction. Almost instantly, the figure of an old white-capped peasant woman appeared in the distance. She was wringing her hands and crying aloud. When we were within ear shot, I caught the word, "Uhlans!"

"Uhlans! Where?"

"Dans le bois de la Mazure!" (A half-mile from Villiers.)

"How do you know?"

"Saw their helmets glittering in the moonlight!"

"What rot! They're Frenchmen—dragoons. You don't know your own countrymen when you see them! Did you approach them?"

"No."

"Then what in the name of common sense sent you flying down here to scare us like that? You've got no business spreading panic broadcast. If you don't turn around and scamper home, the way you came, I'll have you arrested. *Allez!*"

My nerves had stood the strain as long as possible. This false alarm had roused my anger and in a jiffy I could see how thousands of people had been deceived, and were now erring homeless along the roads of France!

"You can do what you like," I said, turning to the others, "but I've had enough of this for one day—I'm going to bed. Good-night, gentlemen."

"The *châtelaine* is going to bed, the *châtelaine* is going to bed!" "Let all go to bed," and similar phrases were echoed among the groups and presently we all separated, after many cordial *à demain.*

The clock in the village church was striking midnight when I finally retired, after calling my greyhounds and Betsy into my room, and assuring myself that they all had on their collars, and that their leashes were hanging on my bed post.

Nini, the little traitor, had evidently told Yvonne of my preparations for departure, and the two girls, whose beds were in the next room to mine, had been unable to close their eyes, for as I blew out my lamp, I could hear their childish voices repeating the rosary:

"Hail Mary full of Grace—the Lord is with Thee . . ."

. . . .

I may have slept an hour. Then I can dimly remember hearing a wild yelp from my dogs, and when I found myself in the middle of my room rubbing my eyes, Yvonne was calling, "Madame! Madame!" in terrified tones. My pets were mad with excitement, and the sound of the farm bell was ringing in my ears!

"Silence!" I yelled.

Everything but the bell ceased.

Heedless of my attire, I rushed to a back window and repeated my command.

The bell stopped.

"Who are you that you dare wake us like that!" I scolded.

A boy between eighteen and nineteen let go the rope and stepped beneath the window. I could see his blond hair in the moonlight.

"Are you Madame Huard?"

"Yes."

"I've come with a message from your husband."

I grew cold as ice. Good God, what had happened?

V

In a bound I was down stairs and had opened the front door.

"Is H. wounded?" I gasped.

"No, Madame."

I breathed again.

"Where was he when you saw him?"

"On the road between Villers-Cotterets and La Ferté Milon."

"What's your message?"

The boy put his hand to his breast pocket and drew forth a slip of paper. The full moon shining on the white façade of the château threw such a brilliant reflection that I recognized a sheet from a sketch book, and could distinguish the following words scribbled in pencil:

"Give bearer fifty francs, then in the name of the love you bear me, evacuate now; go south, not Paris."

The last words were underscored three or four times.

"What time was it when H. gave you this?"

"Noon or thereabouts."

"How did you come? On foot?"

"No, bicycle."

"But it's after midnight!"

"I know, but I got lost and had three bad punctures."

Here were marching orders for fair, and if I intended obeying enough time had already been lost. To stay in spite of everything was to be responsible for all the young lives that looked to me for protection. Could I promise it? No. Then go it was!

At that same moment and as though to reinforce my decision, the strange clattering noise I had observed growing nearer and nearer during the last two days broke on the night air.

"Hark!" said the boy. *"La mitrailleuse!"*

"The machine guns!" I echoed.

"Oui, Madame."

That sufficed. "We'll be leaving in ten minutes. Go to the kitchen. I'll send someone to look after you and we'll go together."

All this had transpired in less time than it takes to tell it. Awakened by the bell, the refugees in the stables came pouring into the courtyard. A second later, George, lantern in hand, came running towards me.

"Tell Léon to harness César—then go and wake Julie and say that we are leaving in ten minutes. I expect her, and her family, with their horse, to be ready. The courtyard in ten minutes. Mind!"

On the landing I met Madame Guix already fully dressed.

"Nous partons," was all I said. She understood and followed me towards Yvonne's room.

The two children, their teeth chattering, looked towards us in terror.

"Nini, put on the warmest clothes you possess and help Madame Guix to dress Yvonne. Then go to the kitchen and wait there without moving."

My own toilet was brief, and five minutes later, lamp in hand, I was pounding on all the doors of the long corridors, fearful lest some one be forgotten and locked in the house. When I reached the second floor I bethought me of the woman and her two children, and as I advanced I called, "Don't be frightened. This is merely a warning!"

The poor soul must have been dreaming,

for when I touched her door she screamed, and as I opened it and held the lamp over my head, I could see the two little creatures clinging to their mother, who on her knees begged, "Take me, but spare my babies!"

I had some difficulty in reassuring her, but finally succeeded, and left her to go below to the hospital.

At the first alarm, the women who were sleeping there had fled in terror, and when assured that all were gone, for safety's sake I went into the vestibule and standing at the foot of the stairs, called, "All out! All out! I'm closing up and leaving!"

No one answering, I judged that my summons had been obeyed, and so hurried back to my own room to fetch jewels, kodak and pets. On my way down I opened H.'s wardrobe and grabbed several overcoats, confident that the boys would forget theirs and need them.

In the courtyard I found Julie and her family already perched on the hay-cart, where Yvonne had been hoisted and lay moaning, well covered in a blanket. Both horses were hitched and my servants waiting orders. Beside ours, other big drays were being prepared for flight, yet there was no confusion—no loud talking—no lamenting. I then told the boys to hurry to the farm yard and open all the gates so that the poultry and cows could have free access to the entire estate, which is closed in by a wall. I was thus certain that though they might feel hungry they would not die for want of food or water during the short time I intended to be gone.

This done, I went to the kitchen where I found Nini, who had obeyed orders not to move but who had presence of mind enough to lay out bread and jam and wine for the famished youth who had brought the message.

In the lamplight I caught sight of my road maps on the refectory wall, and setting my jewel box on the table I began unpinning and carefully folding them and put them in the pocket of my motor coat. Almost at the same instant, the lamp flickered and Léon came in to say that all the dogs were found save the beagle hound and three fox terrier puppies, who, frightened by the bell and the commotion, had hidden in the hay lofts. We went out, and I called and whistled in vain—none of them appeared.

All this had taken more time than I expected. The wagons full of refugees had disappeared, and we were alone.

"En route!" I called, climbing into the *charette,* a big lump rising in my throat.

"En route!" called George.

Once again I counted our party to be sure all were there, and then slowly the heavy-laden hay-cart pulled out of the courtyard onto the high road.

The first ten steps that my horse took he limped so painfully that my heart sank in my boots.

What nonsense, this departure! The poor beast would break down and we'd have to shoot him by the wayside, and other similar cheerful thoughts fled through my brain as we jogged up the narrow village street.

In front of the town hall I halted, first of all to rest my steed, secondly to await George and Léon, who had remained behind to shut the entrance doors and bolt the gate, and finally because I was astonished to see all the windows illuminated.

I jumped down and approaching one of the panes looked through and saw the entire municipal council seated in a semi-circle, their faces grave with anxiety. Presently the boys, accompanied by H.'s messenger, rode up on their bicycles and handed me the keys. I entered the room where Mr. Duguey, the schoolmaster and town clerk, greeted me.

"Gentlemen, I've come to give you the keys to my estate. I've received a message from my husband begging me to leave at once."

"Then make haste, Madame, while there is still time. We are just about to beat the call to arms and warn the population that those who hope to escape must leave at once. Though we have no official orders to do this we have taken it on ourselves, for we now know for certain that the Uhlans have surrounded the village and are awaiting daylight to take possession. They are probably bivouacking on the heights in your park."

Then the old peasant woman had not lied! Those were really Uhlans she had seen in the *bois de la Mazure.* Ye gods, and here I was trying to get away with a lame horse! Thank heaven, the Marne was not far! I would cross it and then await developments.

The clock in the little church struck two and an owl hooted mournfully in the belfry as silently our *cortège* plodded up the steep incline. When we reached the summit I could not resist turning around and casting a long affectionate glance on my lovely home—shining like a fairy palace in its setting of wonderful trees. Who could tell? I might never see it again!

George, too, must have been penetrated with the same sentiment, for he rode up close to the cart and grasping the mud guard, turned on his saddle and wistfully shaking his head, gave vent to his feelings by the following very inelegant but extremely expressive ejaculation:

"Quels cochons! vous chasser d'une propriété pareille!"

A long shiver of emotion crept down my spine, and though it was but the second of September I instinctively drew the fur collar of my coat closer about my throat.

In front of me I could hear the wheels of our heavy-laden hay-cart creaking as the big farm horse plodded on. Its occupants were silent, and thanks to the moon and the lantern which hung up high behind, I could see Julie and Madame Guix nodding with sleep.

My own poor beast limped on and besides thinking of all that I had left undone at the château and planning how and where we could go, I had the constant vision of his silent suffering in front of me. At every little incline I would get down and throwing the reins over the neck of Betsy, my bull dog, who occupied the seat beside me, I would give César his head and take my place with the boys behind. He seemed to be grateful.

Let it be said, however, that as our journey advanced the hoof, at first so tender from much poulticing, became firmer and firmer, and instead of increasing, the lameness rather grew less.

We crossed our little market town of Charly amid dead silence. Not a light in a single window, not a sound anywhere. We seemed to be the only souls astir, and the foolhardiness of this midnight departure when everyone else was tucked up snug in his bed, angered me. I was seized with a mad desire to turn about and go home.

Just then George asked me which direction I intended taking, and remembering H.'s imperative *"Go south,"* we turned sharp and headed for the first bridge across the Marne.

High in front of me rose the dark wooded hills of Pavant, descending abruptly to that narrow strip of fertile plain which borders the river on both sides, but now half-veiled in a heavy blue mist. Below me the swift current sped onward like a silver arrow, and before so impressive a spectacle I could not help thinking how meagre is the art of the scene painter and dramatist which tries to depict a real battlefield. For battle field I felt this was, and my overstrained nerves no longer holding my imagination in check, I could already see human forms writhing in agony, and hear the moaning of souls on the brink of Eternity. As though to vivify this hallucination, the dying moon suddenly plunged behind a cloud, lighting the landscape but by strange lugubrious streaks, and in the distance behind us a long low rumble warned me that my dream might soon be a terrible reality.

The Marne crossed, a weight was lifted from my shoulders, and settling back against the pile of blankets in my rig, I let the horse follow his own sweet will and we started to zig-zag up a steep incline. At the end of five minutes' time I was so benumbed by the cold that sleep was impossible, so I left my seat and joined the others who, all save Yvonne, had been obliged to descend to relieve their horse. What a climb that was—seven long kilometres from right to left, winding around that hill, as about a mountain, ever and again finding ourselves on a narrow ledge overlooking the valley. The fog had spread until literally choked up between the hills and I could hardly persuade myself that it was not the sea that rolled below me. Even the signal lamps on the distant railway line rose out of the labyrinth like a lighthouse in mid-ocean, making the illusion complete.

Dawn was breaking as we reached the summit and pausing for a moment's breath, we could see people with bundles hurrying from cottages and farm yards, while the fields seemed dotted with horses and carts that sprang out of the semi-darkness like spectres, following one another to the highway. In less than no time the long caravan had re-formed and was again under way.

We brought up the rear, preceded by five hundred snow-white oxen. There was no way of advancing faster than the *cortège.* It was stay in line or lose your place, and as the sun rose over the plains, I was so impressed by the magnificence of our procession that I forgot the real cause of our flight and never for an instant realized that I now formed an intimate part of that column which but a few hours since inspired me with such genuine pity.

As we passed through a small agglomeration of houses that one might hardly call a village, I recognized several familiar faces on the doorsteps, and presently comprehended why Charly was so dark and silent the night before. It was empty—evacuated—and the greater part of its inhabitants were here on the roadside, preparing to continue their route.

Where were we going? I think none of us had a very definite idea. We were following in line on the only road that crossed this wonderfully fertile country. The monotony of the landscape, the warmth of the sun, added to the gentle swing of my cart calmed my nerves and I fell back into a heavy sleep.

When I opened my eyes I could hear water running over a dam, and see below me and but a very short distance away, a river flowing through a valley. Someone said it was the Petit Morin; another announced that we had come seventeen kilometres and a third proffered that it was 6:30 A. M.—time for breakfast. We ought not to attack the opposite hill on empty stomachs.

Accordingly we crossed the Petit Morin and broke ranks in front of two little cottages that bordered the river at the entrance of an electric power house. At the same time, a small covered gig halted beside our big cart and from it descended the mother of the two little girls—she who had so much gold.

Did I mind if she followed in our wake?

Of course not.

She was still as timid and frightened as the night before, and it didn't take much questioning to learn that she had never had a pair of reins in her hands before in her life.

The boys took all the horses down to the river and carefully bathed their knees and legs. In the meantime, coffee had been found and ground, someone had scurried about and found a house where milk could be had, and on an iron tripod that I had sense enough to bring along, water was set to boiling.

It was very amusing that first picnic breakfast, and my! what appetites we had. The summer lodgers in one of the cottages gazed upon us in amazement—all save one little girl who, so it seems, had had a presentiment that some ill would befall her and for two days had not ceased weeping.

The meal over, each one went to my cart and taking possession of a blanket and pillow, rolled up in it and went fast asleep in the brilliant sunshine. How we blessed those warm, penetrating rays, for we had suffered much from the damp cold all night.

Left alone, I overhauled my wagon and made the discovery that my jewel box was missing. That did not alarm me much, for I was confident that I had left it on the refectory table, and would find it—like my silver chests—just where I had left them.

My road map showed us to be at La Trétoire, midway between Charly and Rebais, but as there were no provisions to be had in so small a place, I decided to push on to the township where we might be able to get lodgings.

This, however, must be done before noon, or we would be obliged to sleep out of doors again, for it would be impossible to travel through the heat of the day. Accordingly, at half past eight, I roused the boys and we started up the hill, bag and baggage.

It was much the same kind of scene as at Pavant, only we were less excited and far more exhausted than at the outset of our trip. Each one stalked on, gritting his teeth and wiping the big beads of perspiration from his brow. By ten we reached the top and calling George, who had been walking beside the leader since we left home, I told him to take my place in the charette and I would mount my bicycle.

Leaving orders to follow the straight road to Rebais, I pushed on ahead, promising to do my best, and an hour later found myself on the outskirts of the little town—very weary and almost overcome by the heat. In the hurry of my departure from Villiers I had wrapped a scarlet chiffon scarf about my head, never thinking that a hat would be a very useful article in the daytime. For sixty minutes, then, as I had pedaled along that endless road, the sun had beaten down upon my head and shoulders, and when I came upon a public pump, I dropped down in the grass beside it, after wringing out my handkerchief in its refreshing water and bathing my burning face and arms.

When I finally made my entrance into Rebais, I found that thousands of other persons had probably had the same idea as I and it took but little time to discover that all rooms, whether private or public, were occupied. The place was overflowing with refugees. The line outside the baker's shop warned me that I had a dozen hungry mouths dependent upon me and yesterday's supply of bread was well-nigh exhausted, let alone being stale. I took my place among the others and stood for a good hour waiting for the second ovenful to finish baking.

Certainly no greasy pig at a county fair was ever more difficult to manage than that long nine-pound loaf of red hot bread. There was no way of handling it—it burned everything it touched. No sooner did I put it under one arm than I was obliged to change it to the other post haste. Add to this the fact that I had not ridden a bicycle since a child, and realize that whether walking or riding the bread was equally hot and equally cumbersome. It was too long to fit into the handlebars, besides how could I hold it there? Too soft to be tied with string that I might buy. At one moment I thought seriously of picking up my skirt and carrying the bread as peasant women do grass and fodder, but alas, a 1914 skirt was too narrow to permit this. At length when almost disheartened and I had stood my loaf against the side of a house to cool, I recognized a familiar voice back of me, and George appeared on his wheel to announce that my party had camped in a young orchard two miles outside of Rebais, neither man nor beast being capable of going any farther. We clapped our loaf into an overcoat that was strapped to the back of his machine, and swinging it between us, soon joined the others.

Our noonday repast was composed of cold ham and fried potatoes. I think I never ate better, though I must confess that the latter were stolen from a neighboring field. By two o'clock a dozen weary inhabitants of Villiers were stretched out on their rugs and peacefully dreaming! We had decided to rest before determining what to do for the night.

I was awakened by a stiff feeling in my neck, and opened my eyes to find that the sun was rapidly disappearing in the west. I had slept soundly four hours and was much refreshed, though the bumps in the ground had bruised me, and I could hardly move my head.

Yvonne had stood the journey so far very well though unable as yet to walk, but as the cool of the evening came on I began to worry lest a night out of doors set her screaming with pain. So as I laced my boots, I decided to go back to Rebais and make another desperate attempt to lodge her at least.

"Did Madame see Mâitre Baudoin this morning," asked Léon, to whom I imparted my plans.

I gasped! What a fool I was! My mind was so upset that I had forgotten that my own notary was a prominent personality in Rebais.

A quarter of an hour later I turned into the public square and beheld Mâitre Baudoin and his wife standing on the doorstep watching the exodus of numerous refugees.

"Madame Huard!" they exclaimed. "You? What on earth has happened?"

I explained in a few words.

"Why, come right in. We were just going to sit down to dinner."

I said I was not alone, and must first look after the others. Without waiting a second, Mâitre Baudoin crossed over to the town hall and soon returned with a key in his hand.

"Here, here's the key to a bakery—there are rooms above. Your people can lodge there and you come in with us. All this will be over in a day or so; the news is good to-day. The Germans will never reach the Marne!"

I went and fetched our delighted caravan, and after safely depositing them in their new residence, I was crossing the main street to join my friends, when a big military auto whisked into the middle of the square and halted. Ten seconds later it was followed by a dozen others, and by the time I had reached the Baudoins' the *Place* was literally lined with motors, containing officers and orderlies. We were just sitting down when some one pounded on the door and a deep authoritative voice called out, "You're to lodge a general and two officers!" And we could hear the man hastily chalking the names on the door.

Madame Baudoin looked from me to her husband, her eyes wide open with astonishment. The meal was forgotten and we hurried out into the twilight to seek news. The *Etat Major* of a cavalry division was to bivouac at Rebais, would be leaving at midnight.

My friends understood, and they who had not as yet seen a soldier since the war began, realized for the first time that they were now in the midst of the retreating army. I begged them to make ready for flight and they hurried homewards while I returned to the bakery to hold council.

As I reached the door, someone touched me on the shoulder and an officer, pointing to the Red Cross armlet I was wearing, said:

"Go to the hospital at once. We need your services. Wounded."

"Very well, sir," I replied, and stepped inside.

"Madame Guix! Madame Guix!" I called in the stairway from the shop.

The others came clattering down all excitement, saying that Madame Guix had been recognized by her uniform and sent flying to the hospital.

Just then a shadow barred the entrance door and turning I saw an army chauffeur standing there.

"A piece of bread for God's sake," he begged.

"What?"

"Yes, I'm nearly dead of hunger. We've had no time to cook our food, and bread has been lacking for two days."

I looked about me—the bread boxes were empty. I had no right to do so, but I opened all the cupboards. The least I could do was pay, if the bakers appeared. I found a stale loaf and chopped it in four with the big knife near the counter. The way that poor fellow bit into it brought tears to my eyes.

"Wait a minute," I said as he turned away, and I rushed out to the court where my cart was standing. In a moment I was back with a slice of ham and some sweet chocolate and Julie came up with a glass of water.

I was about to ask questions when another form appeared, followed by still another.

"Bread—oh, for heaven's sake, bread!" they implored. Apparently there was no reason why I should not go on with my new trade until all the hungry chauffeurs in the army were satisfied. But remembering the wounded, I turned over my job to Julie, with orders to deal out the bread as long as it lasted and to go lightly with the chocolate, as my provision was not endless.

What a different aspect the main square presented to that of an hour before! Motors were lined up four deep on all sides, and I was obliged to elbow my way through the crowds of gapers, refugees, and officers that thronged the street.

"Have you come for the wounded?" questioned a white-capped sister as I closed the convent door and strode up the steps.

"Yes, sister."

"Heaven be praised! Come this way, quickly. Your nurse is here, but cannot suffice alone. We're of no use—there are only five of us to look after the almshouse, and a hundred refugees. We know nothing of surgery or bandaging."

All this was said sweetly and quietly as we hurried down a long corridor. In the middle of a big, well-lighted room stood Madame Guix bandaging the arm of a fine looking fellow, who shut his eyes and grated his teeth as she worked. On a half-dozen chairs sat as many men, some holding their heads in their hands, some doubled in two, others clenching their fists in agony. Not a murmur escaped them. The floor in several places was stained with great red patches.

"Quick, Madame Huard. We must stop the hemorrhages at all costs. The wounds are not bad, since the men have come on foot, but one never can tell with this heat."

A sister tied a white apron around me and in a second I had washed my hands and begun.

The first shirt I split, my heart leapt to my lips. I was neither a novice nor a coward, but the sight of human blood flowing so generously and given so ungrudgingly, gave me a queer feeling in my throat. A second later that had all passed over and as I worked I questioned the young fellows as to home and family—and finally at what place they had been wounded. Some did not know, others named unfamiliar corners, but *La Trétoire* startled me. Our morning halt! Then the invaders had crossed the Marne? For these were not wounds from exploding shell but Mauser bullets and pistol shots!

Meanwhile the sisters brought iron beds and soft mattresses into the next room, and each boy in turn was put to rest. Fortunately there was nothing very serious, for we had no doctor and knew not where to find one. When we reached our last patient he was so limp that we feared he would faint. Imagine, if you can, what it is to cut away a stout pair of trooper's boots, and undress an almost helpless man whose clothes are fairly glued to the skin with blood, dirt and perspiration.

"Hold the ammonia closer to his nose," said Madame Guix, tugging at a wire that served as boot lace.

"I'm afraid he's exhausted. There he goes—" I had just time to catch the body as it slid from the chair.

Madame Guix grasped his wrist.

"His pulse is good. Hold fast till I get my needle."

The boy's lips parted and a familiar sound filled the room.

"He's not fainted!" I gasped. "He's asleep! Snoring!"

Poor little fellow, a bullet in the shoulder and one in the shin, and yet fatigue had overcome the pain! When we finally had to wake him, he apologized so nicely for the trouble he had given us, and sighed with delight when he touched the cool linen sheets.

"You must have found me a pretty mess. I haven't been out of my saddle for three weeks, and we've been fighting every minute since we left Charleroi."

Our patients all asleep, Madame Guix and I sought a moment's rest in the open. A door in the corridor led out into a lovely old-world garden, surrounded on four sides by a delicately pilastered cloister. The harvest moon shone down, covering everything with a silver sheen, and such quiet and calm reigned that it was almost impossible to believe that we were not visitors to some famous landscape, leisurely enjoying a long-planned trip.

We were given no time to dream, however, for hasty footsteps in the corridor and the appearance of a white-robed sister carrying a gun, told us that our task was not yet finished.

On a bench in the cloister, his head buried in one arm, the other tied up in an impromptu sling, we found a blue-coated soldier. He was the image of despair, and though we gently questioned him, he only shook his head from side to side without answering. Finally I sat down on the bench beside him and gently stroking his well arm, pleaded that he would tell us his trouble so that we might help him. He drew his head up with a jerk, and turning on me with an almost furious look in his big black eyes, he snapped, "Are you married?"

"Yes."

"Then you know what it is. My God, my wife and babies, shut up in Valenciennes. It isn't this that's killing me," he continued, slapping his bandaged arm. "It's only a flesh wound in the shoulder. But it's the other—the other thoughts. I've seen them at their work, the pack of cursed cowards! but if they ever touch my wife! Perhaps they have, the dirty blackguards, and I'm not there to defend her. Curse them all!"

And he beat his fist on his knees in rage. Then anger, and agony having reached a paroxysm, his lips trembled, his mouth twitched, and brusquely throwing his arm around my neck, he buried his head on my shoulder and burst into tears.

The first instant of surprise over, it would have been stupid to be offended. The circumstances were such that it was impossible not to be moved.

I had never seen a man weep before; I never want to again. For a full quarter-hour he sobbed like a child—this great sturdy fellow of thirty-five, and through the mist in my eyes I could see that my companion had turned her back on us and was fumbling for her handkerchief in her pocket.

Then little by little the choking sound disappeared, his shoulders ceased to heave and shake, and a moment later our soldier lifted his head and blubbered an apology.

"Forgive me—you've done me so much good. I know I'm a fool, but it had to come—I just couldn't stand it another minute—" and other similar phrases, which we nipped in the bud by asking if he would like a cup of hot soup, or come into the dispensary when we could bandage his wound.

"Anywhere where it's light. I want you

to see her picture—she'd think you're great."

And so before he would let us touch his wound, we had to feel in his breast pocket and draw forth a wallet from which he produced the cherished photographs.

At length we completed his bandaging and I left Madame Guix to add the finishing touches and went to the kitchen where Soeur Laurent was standing over a huge range, ladling soup from two immense copper boilers. There were men, women and children holding out cups and mugs, a half-dozen dusty cavalrymen were skinning two rabbits in one corner, and as many other soldiers were peeling vegetables which they threw into another pot full of boiling water.

This was no time to ask permission. The poor sister was already half distracted by the demands of the famished refugees and combatants, so taking a ladle from the wall, I dipped into the pot and strained some bouillon into a few cups that I found in a cupboard. I intended giving this to our patients should they wake and call for drink, and I was just lifting my tray to go when a loud thumping on the front door made me set it down in haste.

I looked at Soeur Laurent, who was preparing to answer the summons, much to the dismay of the soldiers.

"I'll go," I called, and hurried out into the vestibule and down the wide white marble steps. As I threw back the huge oak door someone brushed past me, calling "Two men and a stretcher," and there in the brilliant moonlight I beheld the most ghastly spectacle I had as yet witnessed.

Thrown forward in his saddle, his arms clasped about the horse's neck, was the form of a dragoon. The animal that bore him had once been white, but was now so splashed with blood that it was impossible to tell what color was his originally. Both man and beast were wounded, badly wounded, and how they had come here was a miracle.

The alarm had reached the kitchen and hurrying forward, the troopers soon lifted their comrade from his mount and carried him in. A lance had pierced his thigh and the horse's flank, which meant that it had been a hand-to-hand fight, and the blood still flowing freely, proved that the combat was not an hour old!

Madame Guix and I were doing our best when the white faces of my notary and his wife appeared at the door of the dispensary.

"Madame Huard, we've come to tell you you must go!"

"Go?"

"Yes, it is two o'clock and the general who was quartered on us slept four hours and has gone. When leaving he warned us that the battle would be on here by morning. We who have a motor are safe, but you who have but horses must flee at once!"

"But I can't leave the wounded!"

"But you must. The worst that can happen to them is to be made prisoners—more than likely they will be carried away by one of our emergency ambulances. But think of all the young people who look to you for protection! You cannot desert them; you must go!"

I looked at Madame Guix.

"Go, Madame Huard, you must. You owe it to the others. None of you need me and I can be of service here, so if the sisters will keep me I'll stay."

Reluctantly I shook hands with my nurse, and hastened down the steps. Mâitre Baudoin and his wife took leave of me at the corner, and I elbowed my way between the horses of a cavalry regiment, whose riders were sound asleep on the hard cobble pavement beside them.

On the further side of the square noisy rolling sounds told me that the artillery was crossing the city, and mounting a doorstep, I beheld battery after battery of the famous Seventy-fives clattering out of sight over the road we had come by in the morning. When I got down, I found my way blocked by the 18th *Chasseurs à cheval,* who, four abreast and lance in hand, were setting out for battle. They were anything but a beaten army—most of them were softly humming some popular song, while others were calmly filling their pipes and still others catching forty winks in their saddles. One or two I noticed wore no caps, and their heads were bound in blood-stained bandages.

There seemed to be no end to them and I was beginning to get anxious about our departure. Plunging my hand into my coat pocket I touched a piece of stale bread and a bit of chocolate, forgotten since the day before, and hunger having seized me, I began gnawing my crust.

"Say, sister, give us a bite," called one young chap from his horse as he passed.

"Are you really hungry?"

"You bet!"

Without hesitating I offered my crust.

"Hurray for the girl with the red scarf!" called another. "Come on with us. We'll make room for you." "We need a mascot," and other similar jolly phrases passed from mouth to mouth as gaily the flower of young France went forth to death.

When finally they had disappeared I rushed across the street to find George and Emile (H.'s messenger) engaged in a conversation with the driver of an army supply wagon drawn up within an inch of the bakery steps. Beside him on the seat sat a huge dragoon, his head done up in a blood-stained towel.

"We're lost," he was explaining. "Been cut off from our regiment for three days."

"Poor regiment!" I murmured, and calling the boys, I told Emile to wake the others and come down quickly to help hitch the horses. He was only gone a second, and I could hear him calling.

"Allons, allons, Madame part de suite."

Then he reappeared carrying a lantern.

"Where the devil did you get the light?" growled George.

"In their room."

"Then how in the name of heaven do you expect those people to dress and roll up their belongings in the dark?" I scolded. "Here, George, go back with the lantern."

George obeyed orders, and Emile, rather sheepishly, skulked away in the direction of the stable yard. I heard a sliding door pushed open, followed by a long low whistle, and a second later Emile reappeared, his eyes popping out of his head with astonishment.

"There's a horse missing—been stolen!"

"No! Impossible!"

"The stable's empty!"

I hurried to the spot, and found that he told the truth.

"George!" I called, as my boy came around the corner of the house. "George, César's been stolen!"

"Who says so, Madame?"

"Emile—the stable's empty."

Calmly and easily George walked over towards Emile, and taking him by the collar, shook him violently. "Look here, you! What do you mean by frightening Madame like that? Are you her servant? No! Well, then, mind your own business!"

And opening a second door alongside the other, we found César and Sausage munching their oats.

It was no easy job harnessing in the dark and backing the heavy carts out of the narrow yard into the still narrower street. But in ten minutes our caravan was again en route.

We crossed the public square, now almost empty of men, horses and motors, and took the only road leading south.

The first grey streaks of daylight lighted the east as we turned the corner, and we were obliged to pull suddenly to the extreme right, for a heavy Parisian motorbus swung round the bend and rushed on past us.

Straining my eyes, I perceived that there was not one but hundreds of them, following each other at top speed down the hill. There were armed men standing inside them, armed men on the platforms and steps, armed men even on the roofs and it was indeed a strange sight to see *Madeleine-Bastille* and the *Galeries Lafayette* out here in the open country, jammed full of grim infantrymen preparing for the fray.

Suddenly a tremendous explosion rent the air and shook the ground so that the horses stopped and trembled.

"There goes the bridge at Nogent!" cried George. "No—the power house at La Trétoire!"

"En avant!" I called, knowing that the signal for battle had now been given.

VI

We had gone about two miles when the sight of my greyhounds tied behind the farm cart made me think of my little Boston bull.

"Where's Betsy?" I asked of those perched on the hay.

Julie, Nini and Yvonne grew white.

It took little time to discover that no one had seen her that morning. It was evident she had been forgotten—left to die tied to the brass rail inside an abandoned bakery, for it was there I had fastened her on arriving the night before. Pedaling ahead till I reached Léon who led the procession—

"Keep straight on this road. If it should fork, take the direction of the La Ferté-Gauché. I'll be back in no time." Then turning about, I started a parallel race with an autobus, much to the delight of the occupants.

Useless to say that my adversary gained on the up-grade, turned the corner, was gone, and was followed by another long before I reached the public square, breathless and full of anxiety.

Rebais was empty—not even a tardy refugee straggled by the wayside, and before I reached the bakery I could hear the plaintive howls of my little brute.

What a joyful welcome I received. What hilarious waggings of that little screw tail! But there was no time to be lost, for the problem now was how Betsy was to catch up with the procession. She was too heavy for me to carry under my arm, and too old and puffy to be expected to follow a bicycle—but it was one or the other, and tying her leash to the handle bar, off we started, after an encouraging pat on the head and the promise of a lump of sugar if she would only "be a good girl."

On we sped, past the huge lumbering motor-buses, which terrified the poor animal who tugged vehemently at her string, at times almost choking herself.

In half an hour we had caught up with the caravan, and as I lifted poor exhausted Betsy on to the hay, Nini roused from her dozing and pointing to the east, said, "Oh, look! what a big fire!"

"You silly child, it's the sun rising; go back to sleep," I said, terrified by what I had seen, but unwilling to alarm the others uselessly.

At the skyline of an immense plain that stretched on our left, huge columns of flame burst heavenward, covered a moment later by dense black smoke. Fortunately, however, the sun peeped over the horizon almost instantly, thereby diminishing the intensity of the conflagration. But Nini was not to be thus hoodwinked.

"See," she continued, "what funny little fluffy clouds those are!"

"Nini, if you don't go to sleep at once you'll have to get down and walk, and let one of the boys take your place. They'll be only too glad to, I know."

Nini obeyed instantly. She had come away with but one pair of shoes (in spite of my admonition to take all the footwear she possessed) and that pair of shoes pinched.

Funny little fluffy clouds indeed! The shaking of the earth beneath my feet and a second of reflection told me they were not clouds, but shells—and how long it would be before they would be directed westward was a question that chilled the blood in my veins.

The town we were heading for—La Ferté-Gauché—lay southeast. Though I had no glass, it was evident that it was now under the enemies' fire, and we might just as well run our necks into a noose as keep on in that direction. It was southwest—or nothing.

Without offering any explanation I rode ahead and told Léon to follow me. Then turning abruptly to the right, I took the first sidepath that was wide enough for our cart wheels, and in and out, up and down, we followed it for over an hour, until coasting down a steep incline, I found myself in the midst of a delightful little village, nestled between two hills on the border of a river.

The shops were just opening and people were going about their work as if nothing unusual were happening. They gazed in astonishment at this hatless bicyclist, who wore a Red Cross armlet, and when I went into the baker shop, I was filled with joy at the sight of all the crisp loaves lined up in their racks ready for delivery.

Refugees?

They hadn't seen any. Someone had heard an unaccustomed movement of wagons during the night, that was all.

A signpost, as I turned into the square, told me that I was at Jouy-sur-Morin, and a few moments later, I came upon a group of gentlemen in frock coats standing talking on an embankment below the church. If it had been in the afternoon instead of five A. M., I should have thought this assembly perfectly in harmony with the landscape. In fact they looked so much like H.'s caricatures of his provincial compatriots that I couldn't help smiling as I passed. This matutinal gathering of the municipal council was the only outward sign of anxiety to be found in this picturesque township.

The arrival of our caravan produced quite a sensation among the early risers at Jouy, though the enthusiasm for telling their story had somewhat subsided among my servants. They were footsore, sleepy, and hungry.

The gentlemen in frock coats were too busy in their own affairs to give us much attention, and I was about to leave when one of them called me over and asked a few questions. Anxious to be off, I answered briefly. The man probably took me for a poor demented female; how could he think otherwise down here in his little valley, where not a sound of gun and shell had penetrated as yet?

History will tell you how, a few hours later, Jouy-sur-Morin was the scene of one of the bloodiest battles of the Marne.

At the dairy, my appearance aroused much curiosity, and when I brought out the money to pay for my milk, the woman held up her hand. "No, never; I couldn't take pay from such forlorn creatures as you!"

This unexpected pity brought the blood to my cheeks. I was hot with indignation. Until now we had wanted for nothing, and with gold in my pocket charity was an insult. I straightened my tie, looked at my dusty boots, and realized for the first time that my face was drawn with fatigue and anxiety—that my hair, though tidy, was sadly out of curl. Leaving my change on the table, I turned on my heel and departed. Explanations were tiresome and useless.

We crossed a railroad track and then the river—the Grand Morin—and in a grass-grown granite quarry halted for breakfast, sheltering ourselves from the blistering sun in the shade of the immense rocks.

The boys took the horses down to the river to drink and bathe, and a few seconds later came back for towels and soap.

What a happy idea! A quarter of a mile higher up the bank I found a well secluded spot, and plunged into the refreshing current. It was the first time I had had my boots off since leaving Villiers. Thanks to a small pocket glass and a fresh white blouse, I made myself quite presentable and as I approached our camp, the appetizing odor of fresh fried country sausage tickled my nostrils and made me glad to be alive.

Hot coffee accompanied by buttered toast had been prepared by the girls during my absence, and we needed no coaxing to persuade us to do the meal justice. Already accustomed to this gypsy life, George's dry humor began to show itself, and now and again the silence would be broken by peals of laughter, caused by some quaint joke.

We lingered lovingly over the repast, and I was trying to decide whether or not we would push on at once or wait and rest until afternoon when suddenly my question was answered for me.

While we had been clearing up and loading the carts a long train of freight cars had noiselessly glided down the rails opposite our quarry, and had halted without pulling into the station. There was nothing abnormal in this, and from where we sat a trifle below the level of the track, we could see but little of what was going on on the opposite platform. Standing upright in my *charette,* carefully folding a blanket so as to take up the least possible space, my eye was attracted by several red specks scurrying up a steep incline. A moment afterwards my gaze drifted downward and I realized that from the innocent looking freight cars hundreds of armed soldiers were disembarking and spreading themselves out, *en tirailleurs,* preparing an attack in ambush. I had seen this same pretty feat successfully accomplished at the *grand manœuvres,* the year before, but it was another thing entirely when one grasped that these men were in dead earnest.

Just then a buggy, containing a dishevelled woman and collarless man, galloped over the crossing and sped westward. The occupants, whom I hailed, did not deign a reply, but beckoning with their arms, enjoined me to follow them.

"It's time to break camp," I said, "if we intend to reach the next town before it gets too hot."

So off we started, preceded by a heavy delivery wagon, a *Familistère* from the north, which crossed the rails just as we were pulling onto the road. It was a big covered affair, filled to overflowing with bedding and household utensils—and even the top was loaded with huge boxes and baskets of provisions. Behind it walked, or rather trotted, three stout women and a man, the former half-crazed with heat and anxiety, mopping their brows and their tears as the *cortège* advanced.

An hour and a half of steady climbing quite exhausted them, and when we reached the level, the three graces collapsed by the roadside, still weeping copiously. I observed this as I approached, and presently saw their companion mounted on the high hind wheel of their wagon, gazing intently towards the east through a pair of field glasses.

"What can you see?" I asked as the *charette* passed by them.

"Come and have a look. It's worth while. My wife and family are too frightened."

I halted, and climbing up by the spokes reached the top, and steadying myself with my left hand, took the proffered glass with my right.

From one extremity to the other of the wide plains, from which we were separated by the valley of the Grand Morin, those same long columns of dense black smoke rose lazily in the brilliant sunlight. Into some determined spot the enemy was pouring a perfect rain of shot and shell, and the dust rising after each explosion formed a curtain that blotted out the rest of the landscape. Below, the *Sénégalais* had disappeared in ambush, but now and again the distant clattering of the *mitrailleuse* told us they were at their deadly work. And to think all this was happening on ground we had traveled over only a few hours since! And I had been fool enough to go back to Rebais alone to recover my dog!

I shuddered as I got down. What was the use of trying to hurry? We couldn't go any faster than the horses, and if we overworked them now we would have to rest longer later on. So, urging our poor old nags, we trudged along the sun-baked roads between the high grown wheatfields of the Brie country.

Still another couple of hours and we had reached Choisy-en-Brie, found a stable for our animals, and we ourselves stretched out on our blankets beneath the friendly shadow of the big stone church.

I had finished luncheon and was just dozing off when a motor horn roused me from my lethargy. A second later I recognized Mâitre Baudoin and his wife, the latter holding their four-year-old daughter on her knees, her grandmother sitting alone in the back seat which was piled high with important documents, and their maid strapped to the steps of the car.

We set up a shout which stopped them. "We stayed until a shell burst on the house next door, then we thought it was time to go," explained Mâitre Baudoin.

"What time did you leave Rebais?"

"Forty minutes ago. You'd better be moving, too."

"Sorry, but I can't. The horses must rest."

"Well, don't wait too long. Adieu."

"Adieu," and they were off.

I returned to my blanket and again was just closing my eyes when the unexpected sound of Gregorian chant made me sit up. Nearer and nearer it drew, louder and louder rose the priests' voices, and then a much-befringed and flower-laden hearse, preceded by the clergy and followed by the mourners (the men in evening dress and the women in their Sunday clothes), rounded the corner, passed in front of us, and halted before the main door of the church.

I couldn't help smiling. The incongruity of this pompous *enterrement de première classe, en musique,* when the city was imminently menaced by a German bombardment, bordered on the pathetic and the ridiculous. However, the family of the defunct did not think so, and their deceased parent was chanted to eternity with all the rites and ceremonies that his will had provided for.

Personally I was delighted at the idea of going to sleep to the sound of the organ, which pierced the thick granite walls and almost drowned the rumble of the cannon, to which we had now become so accustomed that we had ceased to be alarmed.

"Des soldats!" cried someone.

In a second I was on my feet.

"Where?"

"Two—on bicycles, going into the hotel opposite."

I reached there as soon as they did. Their story was brief.

"We're the forerunners of a cavalry depot, being transferred to Rozoy from Montmirail. It's getting too hot down there! How far is it to Rozoy?"

I pulled out my map.

"Seventeen kilometres."

"Oh, Lord!"

And the poor fellows wiped the great beads of perspiration from their dusty necks and faces.

"Bring up a bottle of wine. I'll stand for the drinks," called a man from a corner of the café.

"What regiment do you belong to?"

"L'Escadron du train."

My heart leapt with expectancy.

"Do you know a man named H.?"

"No."

My disappointment was even greater than my joy.

"How many horses are you taking to Rozoy?"

"Two hundred and some."

"At what time will they pass here?"

"They're due in half an hour, if they don't get cornered by the *Boches* on the way. We had a close call ourselves." And swallowing their glasses of white wine and water, they were on their bicycles and gone, before we could get any further details.

I had now had enough experience to know that it was high time to take to the road if we didn't wish to be captured. Yet it seemed unfair to go and leave some two-score innocent people praying for the soul of their dear departed to a long drawn-out musical accompaniment. So while the boys were harnessing I entered the sanctuary and approaching the chancel by a side aisle, beckoned an altar boy and whispered in his ear words to the effect that the curate would better hurry his mass and thereby give his flock time to escape the invaders.

I said this calmly, and hoped he would follow my example in delivering my message, but imagine if you can the effect produced by this frightened individual, who, lifting his hands in the air, cried out in terror, *"Vite, vite, Monsieur le Curé! Voilà les Prussiens!"*

I didn't wait to see what happened, but went out and joined my group, which was making ready to start. How far advanced was mass when I entered the church I did not observe, but what I do know is that it finished abruptly after my warning, and the poor hearse horse never before galloped towards the cemetery of Choisy at such a pace nor in such an undignified manner. As to the mourners, they fairly flew beside it, greatly diminished in number, the others scattering like chaff before the wind.

The half-hour's interval allowed by the cyclists for the horses to arrive was far overlapped by the time we once again took the road, but the sound of the cannonade had gradually grown closer.

Wearied by this constant changing of camp, I made up my mind to go far enough in this next move to be able to really rest for a day or so. Consulting my map, I discovered Jouy-le-Chatel to be at what I judged a safe distance—nearly thirty kilometres and considerably south of Paris. The afternoon was still young, so we would have time to make the town before dark. At any rate, I told George to accompany me and explained that he and I would ride ahead full speed, and arrange for beds and a dinner by the time the others should arrive. They were instructed not to let the dark halt them, but to come on. Secretly I hoped that this would be our last stretch and that we would be able to remain at Jouy until it was wise to start homeward.

It was an uneventful trip from Choisy to Jouy. The roads were excellent, though very undulating and the only incident that marked our journey was an intoxicated individual who jumped across our path and, putting his hand on my handle bar, demanded tearfully what I had done with his wife and children.

I declared myself innocent in the matter, which angered him considerably.

"Now I know you're a spy! Get down——"

George did not give him time to finish the phrase, but with a well-measured blow, sent him sprawling in the brambled ditch and we beat a hasty rereat without looking back.

It was night by the time we reached Jouy, and at the entrance of the city I enquired for the best hotel.

"Le Grand Turc—but the proprietress is closing up, making ready to leave."

"What! Here? You don't mean to say the scare has reached this place, too?"

"Well, we've had so many refugees these days that the women got frightened and want to go."

George and I parted company, he to see what he could find since the best hotel was denied us, and I, undaunted, started off to try to persuade the proprietress to let us in.

After much rattling at the door handles and pounding on the shutters, an acrid female voice enjoined me to be gone.

"I'm closing up and leaving."

"Leaving? What for?"

"To escape the Germans!"

"How foolish! They'll never reach here.

I've just come from the Marne and expected to find board and lodgings for my staff until the war is over."

That encouraged her and cracking the door, she put her head out.

"I belong to the Red Cross. Here's my badge and my *carte d'identité.* Don't you think you could find room for me?"

"Well, we're packing up, but we'll have to wait for our horses, which are at a farm seven miles from here. The farmer said he'd come if there was any danger."

"Well, you see there isn't or he'd be here by now."

My hostess seemed convinced and opening the door a little wider, let me pass.

"How many of you are there?"

"Fourteen."

"Good heavens! Fourteen rooms? Never!"

"I don't ask that, my good woman. If you can find a bed for me and happen to have a hay loft or covered shed, the others will be glad enough to sleep there. As to the meals, we have our own provisions and will cook outside. It's a little late to-night, however, so if you could manage to give them a cup of hot soup and an omelet when they arrive, I'd make it worth your while."

She consented to the compromise, and sent one of her daughters to prepare my room. I then dispatched George, whose bicycle bell I heard ringing in the street, to the city gate to await and conduct the remainder of our party. In the hour that elapsed before their arrival I gained in the hostess's good graces by lancing a festered finger and bandaging her small daughter's skinned knee.

When the others arrived, George, who had not been idle during his wait, told me that Jouy was almost empty of inhabitants, and that most of the people from Méry-sur-Marne, a village near Villiers, were lodging for the night on bales of hay in the school house and town hall.

Our meal over, none of us needed persuading to retire and the idea of a bed lured me early to my room.

Naturally a light sleeper, I was constantly awakened by the coming and going and the conversation of our proprietress, who kept on packing right through the night. Another time I was roused by a bell ringing up and down the street, which passed beneath my window, and a deep masculine voice that enjoined all the people from Méry to hurry to the town hall. The wagons were leaving in a quarter of an hour.

"Poor fools," thought I, and rolled over in my bed.

As it grew light, I could see the interminable stream of refugees passing up the road, and when I had dressed and hastened to the courtyard I found the others had already kindled a fire and tea was awaiting me.

"At what time should we start, Madame?"

"Start where?"

"?"

"I haven't the slightest intention of going any farther. Haven't you all had enough of this kind of traveling?"

The reply was affirmative and unanimous!

"The noise of the cannon is hardly audible this morning, which is a very encouraging sign, I'm sure, so we'll try to make ourselves comfortable until it's safe to go home."

And leaving Julie in charge, I set off by myself, glad of a moment's solitude.

In my wanderings I found the church door open, and entering, rejoiced in the peace that reigned within. It calmed my anxiety and as I withdrew my thoughts were clearer, and the burden of my responsibility seemed lightened.

On my way to the hotel I was accosted by a woman who, with a baby in her arms, was leading a cow behind her.

"Don't you want some milk?"

"I hardly think so."

"Please take it. You see, I've only saved my baby and my cow, and I have to milk the latter twice a day. I can't carry all she gives, so I keep what's necessary and throw the rest away. It seems like such a waste."

I agreed with her, and directed her towards the hotel court. She would take no remuneration and thanking me, hastened on her way.

As I watched her go someone touched me on the arm and asked me if I would go to the town hall; there were two refugees who needed assistance. There I found a very old couple—brother and sister, the eldest aged ninety-two, the other two years younger. They were from Méry, had lodged in a private house in Jouy, and were so decrepit that they had not arisen in time to catch the wagons which bore away their fellow townsmen the night before. This had so upset the old man that he had broken down and lay moaning on the straw, while the mild little woman explained that the being left behind was not what troubled her, but it was her purse and belongings that had been carried off in the carts.

I comforted them as best I could, promising to send them hot milk and biscuits, and wondering what else I could do for them. Any way they should not starve, as long as we remained in Jouy.

Luncheon was well under way when I returned to the hotel. In a pot, standing on an iron tripod in the middle of the paved court, a rabbit was gently stewing. In another, a fricassee of chicken smelled temptingly good. The women and girls were peeling potatoes and onions, which were to cook in the sauce and a peal of laughter went up from the merry group when a few moments later George and Emile appeared, covered with flour and dough from head to foot, and each bearing a bottle of white wine under his arm.

"What on earth have you boys been up to?"

"Behold in us the city bakers!" said George with a wave of the hand and he and his companion struck an attitude which again drew forth much hilarity from the onlookers.

"It's no joke—there wasn't a baker left in the place, so we found an old fellow who said he'd show us how, and the dough is now setting. By three o'clock we'll have fresh bread, you see if we don't!"

From the window the proprietress and her daughters watched our impromptu kitchen with interest. We formed such an amusing group that, handing my kodak to Léon, I told him to catch us as I bent over to taste the sauce.

Snap went the shutter!

At that same instant a shriek rose from the interior of the hotel. Looking up I saw that the proprietress and her two daughters had disappeared.

"Au secours! Au secours!"

The boys and I made a rush for the house. As we entered the *grande salle,* we saw a man bearing a human form in his arms staggering through the door. Through the blood and dust that smeared the unfortunate boy's clothing, I recognized the uniform of a chasseur. Not even an emergency bandage stopped the stream that was flowing from his cheek.

"Quick—a mattress!" I shouted.

The proprietress stood as though nailed to the doorway leading to the kitchen.

"Is he wounded?"

"No matter—a mattress!"

"But he might soil it—"

"Then I'll pay for it—but for the love of heaven, be quick!"

Just then the boy's head lurched forward and the blood poured from his mouth. Léon jumped to help the old man who was holding him, and I had just time to catch the proprietress as she swooned on the floor.

"Put the boy on the billiard table and stuff this blanket under his head," I said, grabbing the article mentioned from the top of a bundle near by. "Come in here!" I called to the two daughters who were blubbering in the next room, terrified at what they had seen. "Come in here—lay her flat, loosen her clothes, and dash some cold water over her. She's not dead—and I've no time to bother with her."

While others laid the wounded man out on the table, I rushed for my emergency case which I had fortunately thought to bring along.

With a sharp pair of scissors, I cut away the bloody garments and with a little warm water washed my patient so I could see what was the matter. He was but half conscious, and his eyes rolled wildly and his hand grasped mine and wrung it in agony.

I discovered a tiny cheek wound and was congratulating myself that perhaps the bullet had lodged in the flesh, when on turning his head gently to one side, I was almost nauseated by the terrible wound that greeted my eyes.

Either a Mauser pistol or an explosive bullet fired at but short distance had entered the cheek and gouged its way through the lad's head, carrying away part of the ear and well—let us not go any further.

"Is there a doctor in the place still?" I called to the cook who stood looking in at the door. "Run and see if you can get him—for I'm incompetent here. Quick! It's life or death!"

And while she was gone I stuffed cotton and iodine into the tremendous cavity, hoping to stop the hemorrhage. As I bandaged, I questioned the man who had brought him.

"Where did you pick him up?"

"Amillis—a mile and a half from here. The Uhlans fired into me, too, when they saw me help him. Look at the sole of my shoe! They're following close on behind."

I stepped to the window. "George and Léon! Quick! Drop everything. Hitch and get out of here like lightning! I'll follow in this man's cart. Hitch and I'll tell you where to go."

Fricasseed chicken and rabbit stew were forgotten and I could hear my people running wildly about the court, obeying orders.

The doctor appeared. I explained. "Shall I unbandage?"

"Useless."

"Then don't say so out loud, as he's not yet unconscious."

The poor fellow gripped my hand as proof. The physician blushed scarlet.

"I'll give him an injection of ether and then you take him in your cart to the nearest hospital—it's Provins—twenty miles from here."

He jabbed in the needle, and then handing it with a phial to me: "Here—take this. I'm clearing out. Got a wife and baby to save. Keep his heart going—there's a ghost of a chance. Adieu!"

I stood petrified.

"Take him away, I'm closing up! Take him away—" screamed the hostess, who had recovered from her swoon.

I looked at the old man who had brought the boy.

"Where are you going with your cart?"

"To Coulommiers—to save my sister-in-law and her children."

"Good God, man! Can't you see that if this boy was wounded at Amillis your road to Coulommiers is cut off!"

"It may not be."

"There's no time to argue. My wagons are full to overflowing. Are you going to let this boy stay and be finished by the Germans, or are you going to let me put him in your cart and drive to a hospital?"

"But Provins must be occupied by this time. It's east of here."

"I never had any intention of going there. I'm heading for Melun."

"Melun?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens! That's seventy kilometres! My poor sister-in-law! my horse!" wailed the old fellow.

"Now then—one, two, three—" said I, gently patting my Browning which I had drawn from my outside pocket. "Will you do it gracefully? That's right. Now stop your crying. I'll release you as soon as I can find someone else to take me on. The important thing is to get out of here and quick! It may be too late now."

The boys had fetched a mattress, had found pillows and a sheet, somewhere, and gently we laid the dying man on the old farm cart.

"You boys take your bikes and go ahead. Tell the refugees you meet to pull to the right and not encumber the whole road. We're rushing a wounded man to the hospital. When I think you've got the way clear I'll drive on full speed. Tell our carts to head for Melun and keep on going till they get there. I can't bother with them. We'll meet at the first bridge over the Seine."

They departed, and climbing in beside my patient, who writhed in agony, now lurching from one side, now rolling to the other, I tried to make him as comfortable as possible. All the other carts had departed ere we got away, and my tearful driver kept on grumbling and lamenting.

Two hundred yards from the hotel, where the road makes a sharp turn, we halted abruptly, for we had come upon a group composed of my boy George and three French *chasseurs*. Two were on horseback, their naked swords glittering in the sunlight; the third on a bicycle—and all three, as well as George, were shrieking excitedly at a phlegmatic Tommy Atkins who, seated on a milestone, was calmly smoking his pipe. Behind him, his horse was peacefully nibbling grass. At the sight of my armlet and the agitated white sheet in the wagon, the chasseurs approached in haste.

"What have you got there? Our comrade, Ballandreau?"

"Yes." (I had seen the boy's name in his military book.)

"Is he dead?"

"No."

"Badly wounded?"

"Yes."

"Parlez-vous anglais?" they fairly bawled, all three at once.

"Yes."

"Then, for God's sake, tell that blockhead sitting on the stone and whose horse has gone lame, to seize the bicycle of that peasant standing there, and follow us."

I translated politely.

"Why?" queried the Englishman, drawing on his pipe.

"Why?" I demanded of the chasseurs.

"Why? Do you see that?" said one on a bicycle, wheeling around and pointing down the road behind us. "Do you see that? That's the Uhlans. The ones that got Ballandreau a half-hour ago, the ones that got my horse and the ones that will get us all if we stop here much longer."

"The Uhlans!" I cried to Tommy, showing him the advancing forms of a half-dozen cavalrymen, whose black leather helmets shone in the sun a mile up the road.

"There are seven of them—on patrol—seven hundred following! Come, old fellow, it's now or never!"

"And I—where shall I go?" I said, jumping into the cart, George following.

"To the devil if you like, but quick!"

The warning came none too soon. We had been seen, and sharp, whizzing noises in the grass, and over our heads told us that our German pursuers had no intention of letting us get away.

"Down on your knees, man!" I yelled, pulling the old fellow with me as we ducked to the level of the dashboard. And unfastening a breastpin, I jabbed it mercilessly into the flanks of our nag, who bounded forward, nearly throwing us out.

Whizz! Whizz! Whizz!

It was as if a cloud of locusts were humming about us.

Then when I lifted my eyes, on top of the steep incline we were ascending, I could see several uniformed horsemen and back of them a huge column of smoke.

"Heavens!" I gasped, "we're caught this time—but it's too late now to turn about. We're prisoners for sure!"

Two cavalrymen then appeared and calmly started down the road in our direction. A second later I recognized the British uniform and breathed again.

"Go back!" I yelled. "Go back! The Germans are on our heels!"

Astonished at hearing their native tongue, the men approached.

"Thank heaven, here's someone to direct us," they said as they came alongside and saluted.

I replied with a nod.

"We're lost," they said, "cut off from our brigade."

"That's nothing. How many of you are there? Enough to fight? The Germans are coming on hard and fast."

"We're only two and our horses are done for. We were driven out of Coulommiers this morning."

My driver threw up his hands and sobbed.

"Our friend John's horse went lame and we left him at the bottom of the hill while we came up to reconnoitre. We can't leave him down there all alone."

"He's gone—gone—I swear it. Followed

the French *chasseurs* on my bicycle, leading his mount!"

"Thank God!"

"Now then, how far the Germans will come is a question. They'll probably go in and occupy the town, and there's just one thing for us to do—bolt."

Whizz! Whizz! Whizz—the lead fairly splashed around us!

Léon and Emile rode back to say that the road ahead was clear.

"Les Boches," I said, pointing down the hill.

"Come on, you cowards!" yelled my boys defiantly, George brandishing the rifle of my wounded man.

"Oh, Madame, ask the Englishmen for their revolvers. They've got their rifles—that's five of us armed, and Monsieur's revolver makes six! It's almost man to man. Ah, please, Madame!" they implored.

In the excitement of the moment I nearly lost my head and consented. I was worked to such a point that any solution would have seemed a relief. The Britishers saw me put my hand in my pocket.

"No! No!" they pleaded. "You can't. If we're caught you won't be killed—but murdered, tortured! We're the only ones who have a right to fire—"

"But they've been peppering my cart regardless of my sex!"

"That's perhaps their way of waging war, but not ours. Now then, off you go—quickly."

We disappeared behind a clump of trees and tore down the clear road as fast as our horses would carry us. George sneaked back on his wheel to see if our aggressors were following, and came back radiant to announce that after coming halfway up the hill, they had turned about and were cantering to take possession of Jouy—as I had predicted.

"Where's our nearest barracks?" enquired one of the Scotsmen. (I now saw that I had to do with the Scots Grays.) We slowed down a little.

"How on earth do you expect me to know? Up until I met you I hardly realized there were any British troops on the continent!"

"Where are you bound for?"

"Melun. There's a big French garrison

there in time of peace. You'll always be sure of getting orders there—unless we meet someone on the road."

They thought that was the best idea, and fell back, cantering behind my caravan with which I had now caught up.

On we trotted—up hill and down dale for several hours, my poor wounded boy still writhing on his bed of agony.

Towards four o'clock we had reached a long smooth stretch where we could see right and left for several miles over the plains. Presently, on a crossroad that ran perpendicular to ours, I spied a motor wagon. It was soon followed by another and then another, and pressing forward we reached the crossing in time to see Harrods' Stores, Whitley's, Swan & Edgar, and an interminable number of English Army supply motors coming straight towards us.

Knowing that it would be impossible to pass before the whole long line had gone by, I crossed over and now saw that the Scots Grays would soon find friends. I called Léon and pulling out a card, told him to pedal back and dig out a bottle of champagne I had hidden in our hay cart, and to present it to our soldier friends as a bracer and a souvenir. And then we pushed ahead.

Two minutes later, to my utter surprise, a heavy motor horn tooted on the road behind me and looking back, I saw a private car emerge from behind one of the English motors, and whirl down in our direction. It was a four-seater affair with but two occupants, a chauffeur and a woman wearing a streaming white veil.

"Quick!" I shrieked, grabbing the reins and pulling our cart full into the middle of the road. "They've got to take me and the boy to Melun!"

Seeing his deliverance so near, my old friend obeyed at once.

The motor, stupified by our actions, slowed down.

"Get out of the way!" yelled the chauffeur. "Are you crazy! Out or I'll run you down!"

"Never! Look here. I don't care where you're bound for, but you've got to make room for me and a dying man in your machine. It's Melun—or nothing!"

"Wounded! Heaven, the Germans! We're

caught! Go on, quick, quick, I say!" shrieked the woman.

The chauffeur made a movement as though to skid past us.

"No, you don't," I said, once again producing my trusty Browning.

The woman hid her face in her hands.

"Now then, either you can make room for us or I'll blow off your tires and you'll have to get down and walk like all the rest of us!"

My grey-headed driver was jubilant.

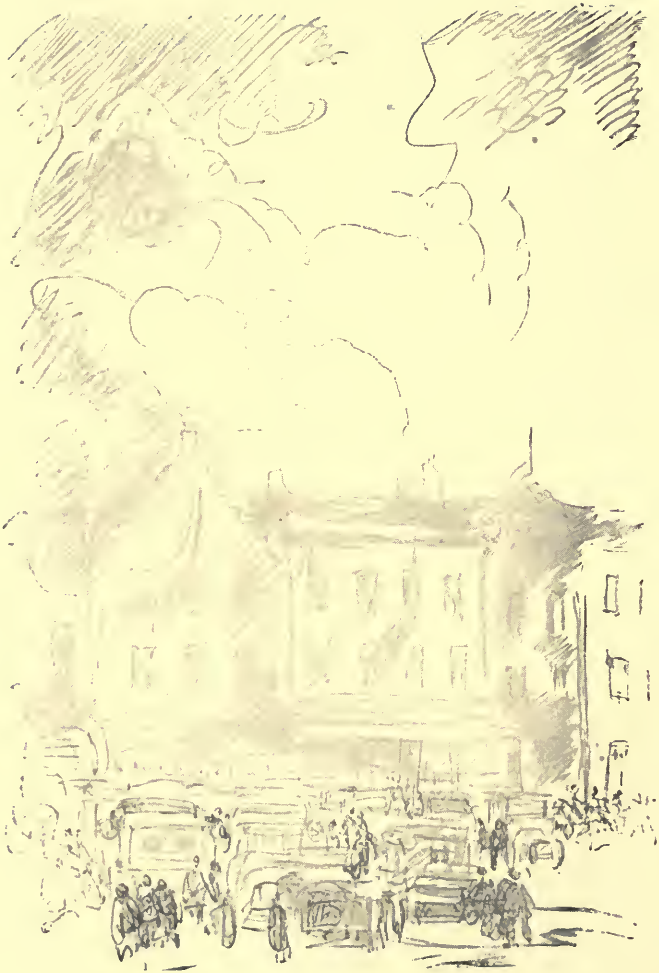
"That's right, Madame, you've hit it!" he encouraged.

There just wasn't any choice. The chauffeur got down and began piling the gasoline cans behind on the back seat to one side. Then, each of us grabbing a corner of the mattress, we hoisted the sufferer onto the machine, covering him with a sheet. Try as we would, though, we could not get him to bend his knees, and in consequence all during the trip the poor chauffeur received constant kicks from the agonized soul we were rushing towards surgical aid.

"Now then," I said, turning to my old driver. "Thank you for your cart, and *bon voyage* to

Coulommiers. George, tell my people to meet me in Melun."

And hatless, coatless, with but one golden louis in my pocket (I had confided my bag to Julie when the wounded man had arrived at Jouy), I started on our record-breaking trip to Melun.



AS WE CROSSED THE PUBLIC SQUARE THE AMBULANCES WERE LINING UP IN BATTLE ARRAY [Page 235]

VII

It was an exciting trip, that race for life and death—for every moment I knew my wounded boy was growing weaker, and every convulsive kick meant the disappearance of so much life blood. During the numerous adventures which befell us between the time we left Jouy-le-Chatel and our encountering the motor, my hypodermic needle had received such violent treatment that it refused service. So when we turned into Mormont at top speed, I was obliged to ask my driver to slow down and inquire for a doctor. We were directed by a couple of gaping women on the borders of the little city, who didn't quite understand our mission. However, they must have been soon enlightened, for as we crossed the public square the British Red Cross ambulances were pouring in and lining up in battle array. Behind them came a steady stream of ammunition wagons, both horse and motor trucks, and from Mormont to Melun the line was unbroken.

The doctor was absent, but his wife willingly filled his place and with new hope dawning we backed out of the yard and sped southward.

What was the landscape we passed through I really couldn't say. I had a dreamy sensation of having run down a refugee's dog, and hearing its owner wishing us in warmer climes —as well as the feeling that my blood-stained apron and the agitated white sheet beside me created much curiosity among the drivers and occupants of the A. S. C. motors that took up all one side of the road.

One by one the mile posts whizzed past and finally we came into Melun.

"Where's the nearest hospital?" I enquired of a group of soldiers loitering outside a barracks.

"Give it up! All evacuated!"

Our driver needed no more—and so we pushed on into the town, while I pantomimed to those behind that I had a wounded man in my arms.

In front of the city hall stood a noisy gathering, and in reply to our questions, a middle-aged man jumped on to the step.

"Go ahead—I'll guide you. All the seven

hospitals in Melun were transferred to Orléans this morning. The mixed hospital is all that is left."

After what seemed an interminable time we finally pulled up a long hill and after much parleying I succeeded in turning over my patient to the medical authorities.

Through the half open door of the little stuffy office where I was conducted I could see a white-aproned doctor and a nurse properly bandaging my boy. When my *compagnons de route* had departed, I walked out into the ward and straight up to the bedside.

"Is there any hope?"

"Not one chance in a million! Would to heaven we had the right to spare them such suffering! Morphine is no longer helpful in his case!"

It was a shock to hear this. The lad, who a couple of hours before was unknown to me, suddenly became very dear. I turned about to hide my emotion, but was startled out of it by the double line of white beds on which were writhing men and boys in the most awful agony, yet not a sound broke from their lips. In the middle of the room a second doctor, a slight man with a pointed beard, stood washing his hands and then began drawing on a pair of long rubber gloves. He crossed over to a basin and, after sterilizing his instruments, looked around for an aid.

"Can I do anything for you, doctor?"

Not in the least surprised by my audacity, he asked, "Are you a nurse?"

"No."

"Have you ever seen an operation."

"Yes."

I lied.

"Have you a good temperament?"

"Yes."

"Then come over here and hold this basin."

I obeyed, and then Doctor Jean Masbrennier began a series of operations which will remain graven in my memory forever.

As he worked he talked—and informed me that the Red Cross Society had been hastily evacuated in the morning, doctors and all. Only those who were unable to be moved had been left behind, and only two civilian doctors were left to attend them. But one nurse remained to do all the bandaging. That was why I had been rung into service. It took but little time to find a mutual acquaintance in the person of Elizabeth Gauthier, and the doctor had long been familiar with H.'s work.

It would be useless to describe the horrors that I witnessed, or try to do justice to the heroic way those first glorious wounded of this lengthy war accepted their fate. I cannot, however, resist mentioning the endurance of a big black Senegalais, who won the admiration of both doctors and neighbors by refusing morphine or cocaine, and insisting on having the seven bullets that were lodged in his neck and throat withdrawn thus—never uttering a murmur!

When it was over, and we finally laid him back on his pillow, the tears were rolling down his cheeks and he squeezed my hand in his big black paw and then gently drew it to his lips.

How many wounded were there? I did not count. All I remember was that I promised to come the next day and write letters to wives, mothers and sweethearts of at least a dozen men and boys.

It was late when the last basin was emptied and Dr. Masbrennier untied his apron.

As we were washing up, I asked if he would be good enough to guide me out of the hospital and tell me where there was a respectable restaurant to which a woman might go alone.

"I have neither hat, coat, nor gloves. They're coming in the carts."

"That's so; perhaps you haven't had anything since lunch and I've been making you work on an empty stomach!"

"Worse than that!" I laughed.

"What?"

"Nothing since breakfast at Jouy-le-Chatel."

"Good God, woman!" And taking me by the arm, he hurried me down the hall.

As we passed out of the entrance door, a superior officer stopped Dr. Masbrennier and though I advanced out of earshot the words, "evacuation" and "to-night" were distinctly audible. A second later my companion caught up with me.

"So sorry I can't accompany you, but the whole hospital goes to Orléans immediately. Must make room for the new-comers! I'll 'phone home. The *gouvernante* will make you comfortable." And he continued to give me explicit directions how to reach his house.

"You'd better come to Orléans where we can look after you."

"Sorry, but I've gone far enough south."

"Alors au revoir et grand merci."

"Au revoir."

And a second later I found myself outside in the chilly darkness.

For the first time in my life I had the sensation of being utterly alone. No one on earth knew where I was and if I had not had faith in Dr. Masbrennier's promise of a warm dinner, I should gladly have indulged in a little fit of despair. And so I wandered on down the dingy, black streets of Melun, where not a lamp post nor shop window was lighted, not a human being seemed astir. Where was my little troupe? How and when would we all meet?

Thus ruminating I came to a bridge. A sentry flashed a pocket lamp in my face.

"On ne passe pas!"

I showed my armlet and he stepped aside.

Halfway across I distinguished two human forms leaning over the railing, and following their example I perceived a half-dozen *hommes du génie* hard at work mining the foundation of the centre arch. So these bridges were to be blown up, too! What was I to do? Stay on the other side and wait for my caravan or cross over and risk my chances alone? A reflector from below swung upward, illuminating the bridge.

"George!" I gasped.

One of the two figures straightened abruptly! In a second the boys had recognized me. "What are you doing here? Where are the others?"

I poured out a dozen eager questions, not giving them time to reply. When almost breathless I stopped and they explained that the caravan had been halted on the outskirts of Melun. No refugees were allowed in after nightfall. Fortunately the boys bethought themselves of my wounded man's clothes and arms, and thanks to these they were allowed to pass and deliver them to the *gendarmerie*. Remembering that I had friends at Barbizon they had sent the others there by a round-about route, and had come on to find me.

"But how did you get here?"

"César brought us."

"Where is he? And Betsy?"

"Oh, we found a dentist who had an empty stable. He took them in. Betsy refused to leave the cart. She's never had such a picnic in her life: been traveling all day in a ten-pound box of lump sugar!"

All worry had vanished, now that I found my line of conduct traced for me. The chief thing at present was to get something to eat. So we pushed ahead up the hill in the ever-deepening obscurity. We walked on in silence for what seemed an interminable distance. Once I fancied I had mistaken directions and was about to despair when the tramp of feet coming toward us revived hope. A second later a brawny arm turned a lantern into my face and a huge police dog growled close to my heels.

"Are you the person who is going to Dr. Masbrennier's?"

"Yes."

"*Très bien.* Are these boys with you?"

"Yes."

"Then follow me. We're closing up the doctor's house, but I'll look after you."

Without further ado we trudged on behind our guide, who after another hundred yards, turned into a gateway and led us up the stone steps of a sumptuous dwelling. Opening the door, he lit the electric light and stepped into the vestiblue.

"Come in," he said. "I'll be back in a moment." And he disappeared.

There we stood, Léon, George and myself, waiting for something to happen, for someone to appear. Five—ten—fifteen minutes must have elapsed—still not a sound anywhere. I was just beginning to wonder if we had not been the dupes of some practical joke, when from a room opening into the vestibule a light shone forth. The curtains parted and our friend of the highroad appeared.

" 'Tisn't much—but such as it is you're welcome. Sit down and make yourselves comfortable." And again he disappeared.

On a snowy white table cloth three covers were laid and a tempting supper composed of bread and butter, cheese, a bottle of white wine, and a huge basket of most luscious hothouse grapes and pears—gladdened our hungry gaze. We did not need a second invitation! We fell to with a vengeance and at the end of a quarter-hour hardly a crumb remained.

"When you've finished, come upstairs;

Madame will take the first door to the right. You boys come up a flight higher," called a voice from above.

We obeyed, and before retiring I waited a good half-hour hoping our friend would reappear. But no one came—so bolting my door, I offered up a prayer of thanks and was soon fast asleep.

Sunday morning, September sixth, the sun was high in the heavens when I peeped from beneath my lace-bordered sheets and cocked my ear at the familiar sound of the cannon. It was a long continuous roar, and now that I had become accustomed to distancing I estimated that the battle was on at Mormont. And I was not mistaken. A little later official news confirmed my guess.

Finding no bell in my room, I opened the door—to see a pitcher of hot water sitting before it, and on a chair beside it, a new comb, a clean linen duster, and a pocket handkerchief. A brief note told me that I would find breakfast in the dining-room, and requested that I leave word on the table saying at what time I would be in for luncheon. Decidedly the mystery deepened—for not a sound could be heard save in the garden where I spied George and Léon, who informed me that the house was empty, and "a gorgeous house, Madame!" they ejaculated in admiration.

Though partially abandoned, Melun was full of life, thanks to the presence of numerous British troops and that same long line of A. S. C.'s now quadrupled on the highroad—two lines going, two lines coming.

As I picked my way between them, and crossed the street, my attention was arrested by a French peasant who was conversing by means of the sign language with the handsome driver of one of those vans, while several children were clamoring to be allowed to sit on the seat a moment, "just to see how it seemed."

"Can I be of any assistance?"

"Rather! Seems good to hear English, thank you."

"Really?"

"Yes. Might I ask where you come from?"

"The States."

"Do you know Cleveland?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've got a mother and three brothers buried in that cemetery. Colonials, you know.

I'm English—from Bath—oldest son. Couldn't see things their way. Done better perhaps if I'd joined the others out there."

I smiled at this unexpected and impromptu confession. The boy saw it and reddened.

"Is there anything particular you want me to say to this man for you?" said I quickly, to cover his embarrassment.

"No, thank you. But there's one thing you might be able to tell me."

"What?"

"Do you think we'll be 'home' in time to eat Christmas dinner?"

"Rather!"

"Thank you so much! Good-bye."

"Good-bye and good luck to you."

And after snapping his photograph I started on down the street in haste, for I could see George and Léon, who had gone on ahead, now running towards me.

"*Vite,* Madame. They need you!"

"Who?"

"The English. They can't make people understand."

I pressed forward, and came upon a crowd of gapers standing outside a shop. Within two English officers were arguing in their native tongue with an irate butcher, who waved one arm wildly in the air, and brandished a huge knife in the other, shouting frantically all the while,

"Là voilà—là voilà!" said George and Léon, almost dragging me forward, proud to exhibit my accomplishments. *"Là voilà! Vous êtes sauvés."*

My greatest desire was to turn about and run, but the crowd parted to let me through.

"Would you mind, Madame?" pleaded the lieutenant. "We need your assistance to make this man understand that we're drafting meat for the army. We'll pay cash, but he might just as well give it gracefully, for we have the right to force his ice box if he refuses."

I explained gently, and when things were calm was about to slip away. The officer touched me on the shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Madame, but I'm afraid we'll have to draft you, too. Our time is limited and if a scene like this happens at every shop we'll be punished for tardiness! Here's my order to draft an interpreter," and he put his hand into his pocket.

I was somewhat abashed.

"Might I ask when you will release me?"

"Just as soon as we've the supply we need."

"Will you give me ten minutes to arrange my affairs here?"

"Certainly. But remember you're on parole!"

Outside I explained the situation to George and Léon, and scribbling a note to friends in Barbizon, told the boys to drive over and reassure the others—make them comfortable at the *Clef d'Or,* and tell them to expect me that evening.

"Whatever happens, wait there until I come. There's no danger of the Germans reaching Barbizon, I fancy!"

And that is how from nine in the morning until late in the afternoon I sat perched on the front of a British Army Supply truck, much to the amusement of the other Tommy Atkins we encountered in Melun and the neighboring villages.

My officer friends very courteously drove me to the hospital where I learned that my poor wounded *chasseur* Ballandreau had passed away in the night, and towards five o'clock, when their task was completed, they offered me tea and proposed to drive me to Barbizon. As we jolted down the hill towards the railway crossing our attention was attracted by a huge gathering of citizens and soldiers, and above the roar of our motor, we could hear the rolling of a drum. Silence reigned instantly and an officer in uniform in the middle of the group read out a short message from a paper he held in his hand. What he said we could not hear, but the mad shout of joy that went up when he had finished made us eager to learn the news. Like lightning "Paris saved—the Germans retreating" ran from mouth to mouth, and the delirious excitement that seized that crowd was absolutely indescribable. Young and old, English and French, peasant and bourgeois, fell on each other's necks and exchanged a joyous embrace. The awful tension of the last month was broken and the word *victory* was uttered by thousands of throats, suddenly grown husky with emotion.

My arrival and the news I bore created a sensation among my servants and the remaining inhabitants of Millet's famous village. Barbizon was dead—literally deserted, for not a single member of that delightful summer colony remained, several hotels were closed, and the others as empty as in the heart of winter. The proprietress of the *Clef d'Or* made me a very tempting offer for a *séjour,* but I judged, and rightly, that since the German retreat had begun, we would best follow on close behind the victorious army, for if we waited until order was restored, patrols would be organized and we who had no papers to identify us would not be allowed to pass.

Before retiring I announced my intention of starting homeward, and the joy that illuminated those anxious faces somewhat calmed my own misgivings, for now that our adventure was safely over, I couldn't help worrying about the absent.

When I touched my bed, I bethought me of my lodging the night before, and realized that I knew neither the name nor address of the generous person in whose sumptuous domicile I had been so cordially received and graciously cared for. How and whom was I to thank?

Léon, Emile and a sturdy butcher boy from Charly who had joined the others on the road, had now determined to enlist—so I could but encourage their patriotic sentiments, and went with them to the recruiting office to furnish proof of their identity.

Evidently many other youths under military age had been inspired with the same idea, for there was a long line outside the door, and as we stood and waited, we examined with interest the mounts of the English cavalry regiment lined up in the street awaiting their riders. George and Léon were eagerly fingering a long coil of rope thrown on the pommel of one saddle, when a deep voice from behind them ejaculated,

"Guess you ain't ever seen the likes of that before. That's a lasso."

I explained, and then looking round, beheld a long, lanky individual, his hands on his hips, literally taking us all in.

"Do you think you can tell 'em what that is, sister?"

"I fancy so."

"Then you must be from home!"

"If you mean the States—yes."

"To h— with the *States!* *The* State—Texas!"

I didn't find it necessary to translate that.

"Say, you haven't by any chance got a razor about you?" he inquired. I replied that I was not in the habit of carrying such articles on my person.

"No offense meant—but since you speak this d— language, perhaps you could persuade one of them kids to go and buy me one."

I said I thought I might, and my compatriot producing an American double eagle, enjoined Léon to be quick and he'd make it worth his while.

"You see," he explained, "a razor is all I need to complete my outfit. Got a Winchester, two revolvers, a Bowie knife, a lance and a lasso. Razor's flat and easy to carry. Might be useful, too. Nothing like being properly armed. If I've got to sell my hide you bet I'll sell it dear!"

Léon returned and I was about to ask my friend to give us a little exhibition of his skill with the rope, when the call to arms obliged him to leave. So enjoining me to give his regards to Broadway, he departed much pleased with the world in general and himself in particular.

From various sources, though none of them official, I learned that the road as far as Coulcmmiers was clear. That was all we wanted to know, so after seeing the boys off for Orléans, a very much diminished caravan started on its homeward journey. The horses, after two days' rest, were quite giddy, and the carts being light, they carried us on the new road north as far as Pezarches with but few halts. The country we passed through, though abandoned by its inhabitants, showed no traces of invasion. The Germans had not been able to push so far west. I counted on making Coulommiers to sleep, but night closed in early and with it came a chilly drizzle, which sent us in search of lodgings. Not a soul was to be seen anywhere, and as all the houses were shut, I deemed it unwise to force a door. So we pushed ahead into the border of the forest, hoping that the rain would soon cease.

Presently someone discovered an abandoned hermitage, through whose low doorway we crept, and spreading out our blankets on the floor, prepared to make a night of it—glad of shelter from the dampness.

"Hark!" hissed George, just as we were dropping off to sleep.

We all sat up.

"There! That's the third bullet that's landed on this roof!"

Ra-ta-pan—Ratapan! There was no mistaking the sound—even through the wind and rain that raged outside.

George crawled on his knees toward the opening, and a second later jumped back, clapping his hand to his head with a low shriek.

"He's shot!" cried Julie.

I leaped forward, grabbed the lantern, and holding it to the spot, opened the boy's clenched fingers. As they parted, a heavy horse chestnut burr fell to the floor with a loud thump!

We were too nervous to appreciate the humour of the situation, and had some little difficulty composing ourselves to rest.

As we approached Coulommiers the next morning the horrors of war became more and more evident. On both sides of the roadway the fields were strewn with hay and straw. Every ten paces the earth was burned or charred, and in some places the smoke still rose from dying camp fires. Bones, bottles and tin preserve cans in extraordinary quantities were strewn in every direction, and a half-mile before we reached the town itself, a dead horse lay abandoned in a ditch.

At this point we were hailed by a party of bedraggled refugees who warned us that it would be useless to try to enter Coulommiers.

"We're from Neuilly-St. Front, on our way home, but there doesn't seem much chance of our getting any further. The place is in the hands of the military authorities—with orders to let no one pass."

We halted, and George went on ahead and interviewed a sentry, returning with a negative reply, and the information that Coulommiers was in a pretty mess after the looting.

"It can't be worse than La Ferté Gauché." And above the almost deafening roar of the cannon an elderly man told us how his caravan had been caught by the Germans, stripped of everything they possessed, separated from their women folk, and with armed sentries back of them had been forced to work at the building of a temporary bridge to replace the one the French had blown up.

"I got off easy—with only a few welts from a raw-hide," he murmured, "but my brother (and he pointed to a very stout masculine figure rolled in a blanket and sitting motionless on the steps of an abandoned road house) —"my brother's nearly done for! You see he's near-sighted and not used to manual labor, and every time he missed his nail with the hammer, the German coward would jab him in the ribs with the point of his bayonet. Seventy-two wounds!"

"And your women?"

"God knows what they did to them! My wife hasn't stopped sobbing since we met. She's dazed—I can't make her talk."

As he rambled on with his haphazard story, glad of fellow sympathy, I spied a line of British Army Supply carts advancing up the road. The leader came to a halt and getting down, the driver entered the first of the abandoned dwellings before which we were standing. Presently he reappeared.

"Just my luck! I say"—(and this addressed to our group with a sort of blank, hopeless expression) "I don't suppose any of you Frenchies know where I could get a cup of tea!"

I laughed outright, much to his astonishment.

"Not anywhere around here, unless you're willing to wait until I can build fire enough to make you one!"

The man blushed crimson.

"Ah—I couldn't think—"

"No trouble. Get one of your men to make a blaze, and, boasting aside, I'll brew you a cup such as you haven't had since you left England."

No sooner said than done, and quarter of an hour later, a half-dozen Tommy Atkins were sipping hot Kardomah with sugar and condensed milk, from tin mugs.

"You're certainly right—the French don't know how to do it, at least in these parts. I had a teapotful yesterday morning that was as near a mixture of stewed herbs and Hunyadi water I ever hope to taste. And now, isn't there something we can do for you?"

"Tell me where you're bound for?"

The man brought out a note-book and pointed to a name.

"La Ferté-sous-Jouarre?"

"Yes, that's it. I wouldn't dare tackle it."

"Is the road clear? Can we go there? It's only fifteen kilometres from my home."

"I don't know if they'll let you by—but if you're clever and follow on close behind us with your Red Cross armlet, there's just a chance—that's all."

I didn't need a second bidding and after warning my people not to talk if we met sentries but to have faith in me, we pushed ahead. Our army friends with better horses soon left us in the rear, but undaunted we proceeded, finally reaching the heights that overlooked La Ferté—and led into the village, Jouarre, perched on the side of the hill running towards the Marne.

Oh, the pitiful sights that met our gaze as we wended our way along those glorious roads, now full of ruts and knee-deep in mud! As far as eye could see the entire country had served as a huge camp for the invader, and when forced to flee he had sacked and destroyed everything within his reach. The wonderful fertile fields had been soiled, polluted, and among other damning evidences of their fury, the smoking ruins of every farm house stood like spectres in the brilliant sunshine.

At the entrance to La Ferté our road was barred by two sentinels, elderly peasants, by their looks. I played mum and tapped my Red Cross armlet.

"Non, on ne passe pas!"

I beckoned them and fumbled among my papers for my *carte d'identité.* They approached the cart, but as they did so, my faithful Betsy let forth an angry growl.

"Down!" I commanded in English. "Down, I say! They're not going to hurt me!"

Those phrases were my undoing!

"Oh, ho!" said my interlocutors. "And after that you think you're going to get past us? We've had enough Boches in this place. You can come in—but between us!" And jumping up on either side of me, one of them took the reins and started forward. This being taken for a spy was an altogether new and very disagreeable sensation.

"But, gentlemen," I protested calmly, "I'm known in this place. If there's an inhabitant left I'll be identified in a second. How green you'll feel if you drag me before an officer and find you're mistaken!"

They were unrelenting.

I invoked my identity card.

No, they had heard me speak in a foreign tongue and all foreign tongues to them were German!

And so we entered La Ferté.

Doors and windows no longer existed—the former had been dashed to splinters by the butt ends of guns, while the latter were shattered to powder and from their apertures swung bed clothing, personal adornment and household belongings in shreds and tatters—all wilfully soiled by mud and filth.

It was useless to try to drive our cart up the main street, so calling a passing comrade, my detainers bid him hold my horse until they returned after having *fait leur affaire,* as they expressed it.

The plate glass windows of every store lay in thousands of pieces below their sashes, and the entire stock of merchandise whether furniture or drapery, groceries or dairy products, had been hurled through them into the middle of the thoroughfare. Above these were piled pell-mell bedding and chairs, wardrobes and wash basins, all splintered and broken—the whole making the most pitiable conglomeration

I ever hope to witness. One plucky dealer was already boarding up the great yawning cavities that were once show windows, and here and there a frightened female face peeped out from behind the ruins of her commerce.

"Madame Huard!" cried a familiar voice behind me. *"Mon Dieu*—you!"

I turned and recognized my pastry baker's wife.

"Oui, moi; arretée."

"Arrested!"

"Yes, unless you will be good enough to inform these gentlemen who I am?"

"Est-il possible! Est-il possible! Why, of course, I know you—how dare they!"

"You see," I said, turning to the *auxilaires.*

But they were inflexible, bidding my friend follow on if she could swear to my identity. She obeyed, but our group had attracted the attention of a couple of small boys who darted out of an alley way like rats from a cellar, calling, *"L'espionne—l'espionne!"*

Thank fortune, at that instant we came upon an officer, whom I accosted at a distance, explained my case and produced my card and my pastry baker. He understood in a moment, and hastily discharged my custodians.

"I cannot scold them. They're over zealous, but we've been so horribly betrayed all along. You understand, I'm sure. Please accept my apologies, Madame!"

I bowed and he departed. Then I turned to my friend.

"You've heard the news, I suppose, Madame!"

"No—what?"

She suddenly grew white.

"Quick—out with it, woman!"

She hesitated.

"Is H.—?"

"Non, not that, Madame, but a quarter of an hour ago it was noised about that the enemy are still retreating, and that we were pounding into their headquarters—*le château de Villiers."*

I felt myself whitening. The woman saw it, and catching me by the arm, "Come, come," she said. "You're tired; perhaps it isn't true, so many false alarms have been launched. Come and have a cup of coffee—you'll excuse our back room—it's all we have left."

I gladly followed her, picking my way through what had once been one of the most enticing of provincial pastry shops, the good soul apologizing all the time, as if she had been responsible for the damage. As she prattled on, though my own brain was swimming I now and then grasped such phrases as three days of looting, two days' bombardment. As she passed me a cup of coffee, she explained that the invaders had not been satisfied with violently appropriating all personal articles which they had found to their liking, but after having drunk all the wine in the cellars, they had wilfully cut open the bags of flour and thrown it pell-mell in every direction.

"And, Madame, they got into my reserve of eggs—five thousand of them—" she wept—"five thousand! All my winter's store. I wouldn't have minded if they had eaten them—but to see them purposely crushed and wasted. Two of those wretches spent half a day bringing them up from the cellar in their helmets, and then dragging me out, would hurl them at the walls and windows, savagely rejoicing in my distress!"

I couldn't remain indoors—I had but one

thought—get to Villiers or see someone who knew for certain what had happened there.

Again I crossed the shop, paddling through that sticky yellow slime in which bits of furniture and clothing floated like *croutons* in a gigantic nauseating omelet.

Outside, towards the end of the street that opened on to the quai, great animation reigned. A bugle sounded and I could hear the tramp of soldiers' feet.

"Look!" cried my friend. "Look, all that is left of the Institut St. Joseph, the pride of La Ferté."

Across the river between the broken spans of the bridge, my eye fell upon the gutted remains of what had once been a most exquisite bit of eighteenth century architecture. The mansion which had sheltered Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette on their eventful return from Varennes, was now a smoking pile of ashes!

"And to think we had to do it! Oh, curse their hides!" muttered an elderly man close to my elbow.

"We?"

"Yes."

"?"

"Why, when they had to get out of here they crossed the Marne, destroyed the bridge and entrenched themselves in the houses along the bank. The English caught them like rats in a cage, but at what a price! One fellow that's rowed across says he can hear them moaning, but you bet they can rot there before we'll go to 'em. Begging your pardon for the language!"

A dozen men of the *génie* were busy constructing a temporary arch between two spans, and just as soon as a plank was laid a regiment from Cherbourg (almost all reservists) filed over one by one. The population gave them an ovation, and it was a curious sight to see these care-worn, haggard-faced people simply going mad with joy, while around them was heaped desolation.

"I hope you haven't come for your tea service, Madame?"

I turned and recognized my china dealer, who smiled cynically as he motioned towards his shop.

"It doesn't pay to be a glass merchant these days. It only took two shells to send twenty years' earnings into splinters! There's not a whole goblet or plate in the entire establishment! But I wouldn't have cared if they hadn't maltreated the women. I—"

"Come and see!" cried another. "Durant's house has tumbled down and his wife and family are smothering in the cellar. Quick!"

There was a general rush in that direction, but I pushed on towards the bridge. It was evident my carts could not cross, but there was just a hope that they would let George and me through with our bicycles.

I accosted the sentry who stood mounting guard beside a motor which was thrown up on the side of the road, twisted and distorted like a tin toy one has walked on.

No, the bridge was for the army only.

I insisted.

An officer came to my rescue, but could only confirm the sentry's orders.

"You're not safe even here. This is the firing line. We don't know yet for certain whether we are going to hold the ground we gained. Villiers? Still in the Germans' hands."

I sighed and was about to turn away. "Then where's the nearest bridge across?"

"Meaux."

"But that's thirty kilometres west! I'm only fifteen from home here!"

"I wish I could help you, but there's no use trying to leave here unless you go that way."

Then Meaux it must be, and though our trip was considerably lengthened, anything was better than inaction.

VIII

It was with much reluctance that we turned our backs on La Ferté the following morning and headed our horses westward.

Naturally the right of way was reserved for the army, and the roads bordering the Marne were now lined with soldiers, guns, ambulances and supply vans rushing to the front. After being side-tracked and halted no less than two score times, we finally reached Trilport, where the invaders had done but little material damage. The terrified civil population was even exultant, for two nights previously an automobile containing four German officers sped through the town, in the direction of Paris, and ignorant of the fact that the English had destroyed the bridge, had been precipitated into the river. The affair seemed to be considered as a huge joke, and the chief amusement now consisted in hanging over the broken side and contemplating the gruesome spectacle of a half-submerged motor, and four human bodies lying inanimate on some rocks, rapidly swelling, thanks to heat and the current.

"When we're sure they're good and dead, we'll bury 'em," explained a man whom I questioned.

As I write this phrase, now that more than a year has elapsed, it seems cruel and heartless, but on the spur of the moment, and after all that each one had endured, it was but justice.

Though barges were being rapidly brought into position so as to form a temporary bridge, I felt it would be a good two days before we could get across, and so following the course of the river, we wended our way in and out, round about, this time through peaceful country, until we reached Meaux.

My heart leaped with joy when on approaching I saw the cathedral standing unharmed, like a guardian above the peaceful little city.

The Germans had made but a brief stay here, merely an *entrée* and *sortie,* and had been received by Bishop Marbeau, in such a fashion as is likely to be recorded in history and place his name beside that of his famous predecessor, Bossuet.

One or two stray shells had fallen into the place, but the harm done was insignificant. The most picturesque and melancholy sight was along the river front, where to head off the enemy's approach the French had been obliged to blow up those ancient bridges—landmarks of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, for, like the Ponte Vecchio at Florence, they were lined with houses and mills, whose pointed roofs and apparent beams had weathered nearly five hundred years! Strange as it may seem, it was they that resisted the most, and, though the dynamite had severed their connection with land and shattered their pale-blue window panes, not a house had collapsed, and as they stood in the sun's dying blaze, they seemed to say, "Touch me, if you dare!"

Washboats, rowboats, barges and every available means of navigation had been sunk or put out of working order and though the enemy was hardly ten miles distant, men and women were busily engaged in setting them afloat.

Once again all we could do was to stand and gaze at the opposite bank and after assuring ourselves that there was no possible way of crossing, we hastily departed for Lagny.

That night we slept in a shed hospitably offered by a lone peasant woman, and the next morning triumphantly crossed the river and set our faces homeward.

Branching northward into the open country we chose all the by-roads and short cuts where our carts would pass, in order to avoid the long streams of ambulances and ammunition vans, as well as in the hope of finding better thoroughfares. A drizzling rain had set in the night before, making the roads, which up until now had been covered with a thick layer of dust, slippery and uncomfortable. Highways which heretofore had been seldom trodden, were full of ruts and bumps, and from Langy to Villiers there was hardly a corner but what showed signs of the invaders' passage. Over these green and fertile fields whose crops had proudly waved their heads about the lovely Marne, were strewn straw and empty bottles in unimaginable quantities. Thousands of blackened or charred spots dotting the countryside, told of campfires and hasty bivouacs, and as we silently plodded on towards Charny, the growing evidences of recent battle met our saddened gaze.

Here a shell had burst on the road, in the midst of a bicycle squadron, scattering men and machines to the four winds of Heaven. A little mound, a rough-hewn cross, marked the spot where some sixty soldiers lay in their last peaceful sleep, while the *mêlée* of tangled wire and iron which had once been machines, as well as blood-stained garments, bits of shell, and even human flesh, made a gruesome and indescribable picture.

Souvenirs? The idea never entered my head. And my kodak, which I had been so prompt to use to commemorate various events, seemed a vulgar, inquisitive instrument, and was left unheeded in the bottom of the cart. Each step brought us face to face with the horrors of warfare. Towards Villeroy a number of battered Parisian taxicabs gave us the first hint of General Gallieni's clever manœuvre which helped save the capital—and then the wind brought towards us a nauseating odor, which paralyzed our appetites, and sent us doggedly onwards: the stench of the battlefield.

The girls in the cart drew closer together, shivering, though the air was warm and muggy. Even old César seemed to feel the awe of that Valley of Shadow, and no one murmured as we passed the first bloated carcasses of dead horses and came upon that far more horrid sight—human bodies—swelled to twice their natural size, lying as death had met them—some in piles, others farther apart—all unrecognizable, but once proud mothers' petted darlings. I think they were our enemies. I did not stop to investigate; the flies bothered us so terribly, and long low mounds with red *képis* piled upon them told of the graves of France's defenders. Far ahead I could discover groups of men with shovels, hastily burying those who remained. To the right a lazy column of dense smoke rose reluctantly in the heavy air. I fancied it came from a funeral pyre; we certainly smelled tar and petrol. The ground beneath rocked with the thundering of the distant cannon, and as one peal burst louder a flock of jet black crows mounted heavenward, mournfully cawing in the semi-twilight.

So we continued, a silent, foot-sore, rainsoaked community. With the growing remoteness of imminent danger came the reaction of all we had passed through, and deep down in our hearts we welcomed the idea of entering a village.

A village! Alas! As we reached the road leading to Barcy, there was a rift in the clouds, and a long golden ray shot through an enormous breach in the church tower, flickered a moment upon a group of roofless houses, and was gone. Night closed in.

Our spirits sank. Yvonne began to moan with agony, her sciatica had returned with the dampness, and Nini for some unknown reason, began sobbing as though her heart would break. I could see the moment not far distant when our whole party, seized with fear, would become panic-stricken, and that idea, together with the one of camping in the sodden fields surrounded by grim death, was anything but reassuring.

"Come on," I urged. "Surely Barcy is not entirely deserted."

What mud! What a road—sometimes entirely gutted, sometimes so obstructed with gasoline cans, hubs of wheels and scraps of iron, that I was obliged to lead César by the bridle, while the others would walk ahead and clear a passage. Their progress was snail-like, for there was little oil left in our lantern and they hesitated before casting the refuse into the ditch for fear of profaning some unknown hero's grave.

And so, stumbling and halting, we came into Barcy. As we passed in front of the battered church we could see the huge bronze bell lying amid a pile of beams, at the foot of the belfry. The *cadran* of the clock tower was midway between the ruins of the edifice itself and those of what had once been the town hall. Not a living soul was to be seen anywhere. Stay—yes—there in front of us was a masculine figure.

I called "Monsieur!"

He halted an instant. Then shook his head and skulked away.

Through an oiled paper that had replaced the panes of a shattered window in a house which no longer had a second story I caught sight of a flickering light. I boldly knocked on the door.

"Qui est là?" asked a high-pitched, trembling female voice.

"I, Madame H. of Villiers."

"I don't know you—go your way!"

"But we are refugees."

"I have nothing left. *Allez-vous-en!*"

That was categorical, to say the least. So on we went, past the charred ruins of one-time happy homes.

As we rounded a corner our lantern cast a dim glow on to the drawn shutters of a half-collapsed structure.

"Stop a moment," said Julie; "there's something written on those blinds."

I approached, and holding the light as close as possible I read the following sign, chalked in huge white letters:

"Attention. No Loitering. Looters will be shot on the spot!"

That was the last straw, and though it was obvious that the warning was intended for the troops now miles away, it sent us ahead with uncanny celerity.

Our advance was short-lived, however, for it soon became evident that our horses were fagged out. Yet where to go became an agonizing question, for though we were still within the limits of the village, not a roof was to be seen. There seemed to be but one thing to do, and so, halting, I fumbled in the bottom of the cart and brought forth a handful of dry straw, and my precious bottle of brandy. Thanks to these, a match and a sheltering wall, a flame managed to blaze up, and from somewhere in the vicinity Julie procured a bundle of brush and an old broom.

With the heat our spirits rose. The girls dried themselves as best they could before the welcome fire, and though still awed by our surroundings, we nibbled a crust of dry bread and some stale cheese.

Then silently Nini and Yvonne crept back into the cart, covered themselves with hay and a blanket, opened an umbrella above their heads, and soon were fast asleep. The others begged me to share their bed beneath the cart, but tormented by the thought of what had become of H., racked by the anxiety of what the future held in store, I could not resign myself to rest, and the first grey streaks of that cool September dawn found me seated on a stone, staring at the glowing embers of our watch-fire.

Again the wind shifted in our direction, bringing with it that same loathsome smell. I shivered and pulled myself together, and after carefully scrutinizing my road-map, decided that there was just a chance of reaching Villiers before night, but only if we started at once. This living in suspense was beginning to tell on my nerves and anything, even the assurance of dreaded misfortune, would have seemed a relief. After the state in which we had found Barcy there was little doubt that our part of the country had been treated the same way. Perhaps it was still in the Germans' hands; we had no way of knowing to the contrary.

I roused the servants and told them of my intention, and in a few moments a pot of coffee was boiling on the tripod. In spite of the early hour I did not hesitate to add a little brandy in each cup, for after twenty-four hours of continual rain a stimulant was not only necessary but welcome. I tried to coax the dogs to take some, they seemed so wet and miserable, but they spurned my offer, and stood looking at me with most pitiful and mournful eyes.

Presently Tiger disappeared behind the wall, and a second later we heard a low growl. With childlike temerity Nini jumped up to see what was the cause of his alarm, and then almost instantly I heard her gasp, *"Un mort!"*

That brought us to our feet and in a bound I was on the spot just in time to see her fearlessly approaching the prostrate form of a German soldier, the upper extremity of whose body was hidden beneath the top of a tin wash boiler. The child raised the lid, beheld, as we did, a headless human trunk, and fell into a swoon.

We were well on our road before she came to her senses, and there were moments when I almost wished she might remain dormant until we had passed beyond the gruesome plain that stretches between Barcy and Vareddes—now a historic battlefield.

What a weird and wonderful sight it presented that gloomy September morning. Behind us Barcy, whose every edifice was decapitated or so degraded as to look like a gigantic sieve. Around us and on all sides fields fairly ploughed up by shot and shell, and every fifty yards it seemed to me rose a freshly covered mound, extending as far as eye could see. On these new-made graves were piled hundreds of red soldier caps, and here and there a hastily hewn wooden cross bearing such inscriptions as these, scrawled in lead pencil on a smooth space whittled by a jack knife:

Aux Braves du 248

When an officer was found and identified, he was buried alone and his name was carefully written on the cross, but more often we saw graves marked thus:

Ici reposent deux officiers et quarante hommes du 28 . . . ième.

Sometimes the tomb was in the ditch (to save digging) and once we saw the Parisian *pompiers* burying some German corpses in the very trench they had dug and died in.

Overhead tangled electric wires swung dangerously near the road, the poles shattered or knocked agog, while in the distance the stumps of a once-majestic row of poplars made the horizon look like a grinning toothless face.

Time and again we were obliged to leave the road to avoid accident by passing over unexploded shells, and I shall always recall a gigantic oak tree which though still standing was cleft in twain by a 77-shell embedded intact in the yawning trunk; the impact, not the explosion, had caused the rift.

The farther we advanced the more evident became the signs of recent conflict. Hay stacks seemed to have been a favorite target as well as refuge. One we saw was almost completely tunneled through, and the blood bespattered sides of the opening told that the occupant had been caught as in a trap. Around these stacks were scattered the remains of old boots and shoes, scarlet blood-soaked rags, dry beans, bits of soap, playing cards and *songs*. Oh, light-hearted sons of France, it can be truly said that death held no terrors for you, since from Barcy to Soissons the ground you loved and so valiantly defended was strewn white with hundreds of thousands of tender ditties and *chansons de route*.

From Vareddes we passed on to Congis, the only living soul we met being a little old white-haired parish priest, who had set himself the task of blessing each new-made grave.

"If this rain continues some of them will be so effaced in a fortnight that we shall never find them. See—this cross is but two bits of straw, bound together by a shoestring!"

And he held up the fragile ornament for my inspection.

"These are more durable," and he showed another relic made of a bayonet sheath, crossed on the blade itself!

"And you—Monsieur le Curé—how is it you are here?"

"Alas—would to God they had taken me in the place of our boys! Seven of them, Madame, carried off as hostages. I was too old to be of use!"

"And the women?"

The poor little man hung his head.

" 'Twere better they had died!"

I understood and shuddered.

"God speed you, my daughter, and never cease to thank Him for preserving you!"

Again we went our way.

Lizy-sur-Ourq, which we reached in the late forenoon, presented a more animated, though hardly more pleasing spectacle. On the tracks in front of the station dozens of flat cars and freight trains had been purposely run together. Some had telescoped, others mounted high in piles, one upon the other, their locomotives as well as their contents being smashed and damaged—the whole scene presenting the aspect of a gigantic railway wreck.

On the steps of the station, seated gun in hand, three soldiers sat playing a game of cards. Across the street a sentry mounted guard in front of a large door over which floated a Red Cross flag.

"What's in there?" I asked.

"Prisoners and wounded."

"Can I be of any assistance?"

"Hardly—only flesh wounds."

I peeked into the courtyard.

In one corner lounging upon the ground were a dozen untidy, unshaven men, whom I recognized by their uniforms to be Germans. One man cast an insolent glance toward me and turned his back. Two others smiled and pointed toward the bread they held in their hands. On some straw in a couple of drays lay five or six individuals, their arms in slings, their heads bandaged.

"Nothing serious," explained a sergeant. "We're waiting for our men to clear up the tracks and the *génie* to throw a bridge across the canal. Then we'll evacuate them."

He was neither sad nor triumphant.

"Were you in the battle?"

"Rather!"

"How did your regiment come off?"

"We're all that are left—forty-four of us," and he pointed toward the station where work was rapidly progressing.

From them I procured some *singe* or army beef, and we halted an hour to rest the horses and eat our luncheon. We were beginning to reach familiar territory and the idea of getting home put new life into our tired limbs, and made each moment of delay seem uselessly long.

From Lizy ours was a straight road and we made rapid progress. The depressing signs of battle became fewer and fewer. It was evident that the rush had been northwest, for while we encountered numerous proofs of the armies' passage, graves and shells, trenches and corpses gradually began to disappear. At Cocherel, however, the enemy had burned a grocery shop when they had failed to find what they wanted. The few men who remained had suffered much from ill treatment and passing by the open gate of a splendid estate I cast a glance up the long avenue and saw a sight which gave me a pang at the heart.

On the green in front of the château lay a battered billiard table and a grand piano, both turned on end, and much the worse for having served as a defense against a rain of shot. Around them were strewn broken furniture, pictures, linen and bottles in such a sorry mess that I dared not even think what Villiers might now look like.

Curiosity was quenched. We cast a second glance, and turned our faces eastward.

The afternoon was well advanced when we reached Montreuil-aux-Lions, our home country. We found that here less damage had been done from heavy artillery, but all the edifices had suffered from close-range rifle fire. An English sentry was pacing up and down in front of the town hall. Over the entrance was nailed a Turkish towel on which a Red Cross was stained with human blood!

"Prisoners?" I asked.

"All wounded, thank you," was the courteous reply.

I sought out my friend the inn-keeper who held up his hands in astonishment, bade us enter and made us partake of a warm meal. The first we had had since we left home!

"But how did you come to be spared?" I queried.

"Because I was good to them."

"Bah! How could you?"

"I didn't intend to, but, you see, they tricked me. It was early morning when half a dozen officers on horseback rode up to the door.

" 'Where are our Allies?' they asked.

"I thought of course they were Englishmen. The uniform was unfamiliar to me, but they all spoke perfect French. Unwittingly I gave them the requested information, and they asked me to bring up some good wine. Then they threw a gold piece on to the table, and when I had poured out my Burgundy, they begged me to touch glasses with them.

" 'Ah, gentlemen, it is a pleasure to offer you the best I have. Thank God, it is not for German stomachs!'

"To my surprise, an uproarious laugh greeted my statement and brought my glass down with a shock.

" 'Poor fellow!' they tittered. 'Come, drink to our success and the Kaiser's health!'

"I think they realized my fright and agony.

They did not force me—but laughed anew, drank and were gone."

"What regiments drove them out?"

"The English. *Quels gaillards!* And clean! Well!"

"What do you mean?"

"Yes, they nearly used up all the water in Montreuil washing!"

"Do you know anything of Villiers?"

"No. I spent most of my time in the cellar during the fight, and since they've been gone I'm living in terror lest they return."

"Have you seen no one from down there?"

"No, not a soul."

"Do you think Villiers was bombarded?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I know the English troops that were here headed in that direction."

This suspense was too agonizing! I fear I so abbreviated my stay at Montreuil that the good inn-keeper was offended. I jumped on to my bicycle and knowing that the roads were now familiar to all, abandoned my little party, bidding them hurry to join me at home.

On, on I sped, through the slippery mud, looking neither right nor left, but straight ahead in the hope of recognizing a familiar face or form.

Twilight was deepening when I entered Bézu-le-Guéry (our nearest home town), which seemed to show apparently but few signs of pillaging. I did not even dismount to make inquiries, but pedaled on till I reached the summit of that long, long hill that leads straight down to my home. Excitement lent a new impulse to my energy, and my heart thumped hard as I recognized familiar cottages still standing. This raised my hopes and sent me rocket-like down that steep incline.

Still not a soul in sight—no noise save that of the guns roaring in the distance.

But what was that in the semi-darkness ahead of me? A dog? Could it be true? I back-pedaled and whistled—a long, low, familiar howl greeted my ears and brought the tears to my eyes.

And then my poor old beagle hound came trotting up the road to welcome me—his tail wagging joyously and a long frayed cord dangling from his collar.

This was a relief and somewhat steadied and prepared me for what was to come.

Through a gap in the trees I caught a glimpse of the roofs below. And so I rounded the corner and started on my last hundred yards.

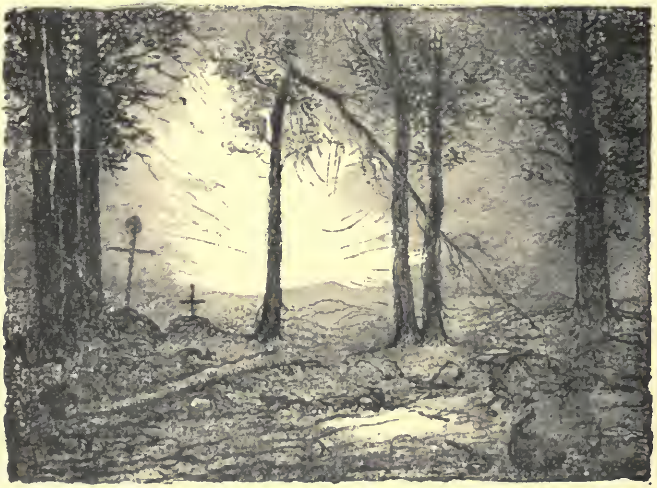
The broken and tangled grill of our stately gateway told of the invaders' visit. A few paces further and the château come into full view.

Yes, it was standing, but only the shell of that lovely home I had fled from but fourteen days before.

Dropping my machine I rushed towards the entrance hall, cast one glance through the broken panes into the vestibule, and turned away in despair.

All the wilful damage that human beings could do had been wrought on the contents of my home.

The spell was broken. My nerves relaxed and heedless of the filth I dropped on to the steps and wept.



A HUGE BLACK CROSS STOOD FORTH IN THE SEMI-DARKNESS [Page 291]

IX

I THINK it was the stench from within that first roused me from my grief and made me realize that this was war and no time for tears. I tried to comfort myself with the thought that at least I had a roof to cover me, but this was poor consolation.

Pulling myself together, I started across the lawn towards the village in search of aid, for a second glance told me that it was useless even to think of entering the house, so great was the filth and disorder.

Slowly I pushed onward, my head bent, my heart heavy with sorrow and worry. Twenty paces in front of me I discerned a low mound and then, horror of horrors, a huge black cross stood forth in the semi-darkness. A grave—a German grave. Some poor souls interred on my greensward; but why, since our little cemetery is but a couple of hundred yards up the road?

Villiers is not a cheerful village even in time of peace, but on this particular evening (September 14, 1914) it was even darker than ever. My eyes growing accustomed to the obscurity could see that most of the houses, though damaged from the battle, were still standing and in one or two windows the glow of a light gladdened my gaze.

I went straight to the town hall where I pounded on the door and called my name. A familiar shuffling of feet told me that Monsieur Duguey had remained faithful to his post as town clerk (the only acting official since the army was mobilized) and when he opened the door and saw me, his eyes lit up with joy. Holding a candle high over his head, he smiled and then his face fell.

"Pauvre Madame," he said. "Have you seen the château?"

I nodded.

"Ah, the vandals! Not war, but highway robbery, I call it. We poor peasants had little to lose, but with you, Madame, it is different."

And then he told me how but a few hours after I had left the Germans took possession of the château and how for five nights and days in a ceaseless stream the flower of the

Prussian army had poured down the road towards the coveted capital.

At dawn on that eventful September morning an officer had ridden up to the town hall, called for the mayor or his representative, and on Monsieur Duguey's appearance, had demanded so much fodder for the horses, so much champagne for the officers, and Charles Huard!

M. Duguey was taken hostage to respond to the first two demands and on having sworn on the cross that both my husband and I were absent, he was ordered to lead the way to our home, where for forty-eight hours he was detained as prisoner in the kitchen, while a staff of German noblemen raised riot in our home.

Taunted and insulted by the soldiers who mounted guard in the kitchen where a *chef* prepared the general's food, he was bid hold his tongue and his temper by this same *chef,* who, for eleven years, had cooked at a well-known hotel on the rue de Rivoli! No wonder he spoke good French.

"*Pauvre Madame!* Perhaps you've come back too soon! If we only knew they would not return!"

The cannon in the distance shook the house as though to corroborate his statement.

"Is there anyone left to help me clean a place to sleep in?"

"I'll go. There are only one or two women who remained behind, but I presume they're sorry they did! What a God-send you got away!"

I understood and was thankful.

Monsieur Duguey put his candle into his lantern, shouldered a broom, and taking a blanket, led the way towards the château.

Want of words to express our fears and distress sealed our lips as we picked our way into a filthy, can-strewn, bottle-littered courtyard, towards a wing of the château where I had chosen to sleep.

I hardly know what we plodded through in the corridor. My companion pushed things into heaps in one corner of the room, and when I saw him sweep off a mattress and throw his blanket upon it, I realized that my bed was made.

"You are not afraid, Madame?"

"No."

"Then, *à demain*. I will come and help you.

I fear, however, that I must leave you in darkness, for there are no matches in the village. We have to borrow light for our fires, and our stock of candles is nearly gone. They are only the butts the Germans left behind!"

Exhausted I fell asleep, to be awakened with a start towards dawn by the clatter of horses' feet on the paved court beneath my window.

Cavalry?

I listened.

Yes, surely. But what cavalry? Ours?

Curiosity got the better of me, and I put my head out of the empty sash to behold a most pathetic sight. There in the pouring rain stood some twenty shivering horses, once fine animals, but now wounded and broken. The lamentable little group, left-behinds of the invaders, was headed by my old grey donkey, who had gathered them together and was now leading them towards warmth and shelter. This sympathy among animals moved me deeply, and I started down to see what I could do to alleviate their suffering.

I am ashamed to say, however, that I never reached the stable, for the sights of filth and horror that I met on the way so distracted me that I pushed on through the whole house, anxious to see really how much damage had been done.

I was still making my disheartening rounds when the others drove into the yard, and the wails of lamentation rose long and loud from their lips.

How can one describe it? It seems almost impossible. Too much has already been said, too little is really known, so I shall content myself with a few brief statements.

Above all I would have it understood that the château was first occupied by General von Kluck and his staff. The names crayoned on the doors of my bed-rooms in big red letters bear testimony—as well as some soiled underlinen and a *glassentuch* marked v. K.—and numerous papers stamped with the Imperial seal. These latter are all orders or reports belonging to the third army corps, and were left behind in the precipitation of the flight!

As I now am able to see the matter in a cooler frame of mind, I realize that not only was efficiency carried out in warfare but in looting—for it seems that everything we possessed was systematically classified as good, bad or indifferent—the former and the latter being carefully packed into huge army supply carts, which for five long days stood backed up against our doorstep, leaving only when completely laden with spoils.

Then what remained was thrown into corners and wilfully soiled and smeared in the most disgusting and nauseating manner.

A proof of the above-mentioned efficiency can be given in a description of my husband's studio, where I found all the frames standing empty—the canvases having been carefully cut from them with a razor, and rolled for convenience' sake.

Useless to mention that tapestries, silver, jewels, blankets and household, as well as personal linen, were considered trophies of war. That to me is far more comprehensible than the fact that our château being installed with all modern sanitary conveniences, these were purposely ignored, and corridors and corners, satin window curtains and even beds, were used for the most ignoble purposes.

Everywhere were sickening traces of sodden drunkenness. On the table beside each bed (most of them now bereft of their matresses) stood champagne bottles, and half emptied glasses. The straw-strewn drawing-room much resembled a cheap beer garden after a Saturday night's riot, and the unfortunate upright piano was not only decked with empty champagne bottles but also contained some two to three hundred pots of jam poured down inside—glass and all, probably just for a joke. Oh, *Kultur!*

I think that and the fact that most of my ducks and small animals had been killed and left to lie and rot, were the things that most angered me, and every time the guns boomed I prayed ardently for revenge!

And 'twas I, who believing in Teuton chivalry, had imagined my love-letters, protected by my country's emblem, would be respected! My poor little rosewood desk had been mercilessly jabbed with bayonets, and its contents strewn from one end of the village to the other. As to the Stars and Stripes, when we finally disgorged the pipes of certain sanitary apparatus that one does not usually mention in polite society, they were found there in a lamentable condition and carried to the wash-house with a tongs.

What a destitute little village we were. Mine was but the common lot, for each one had lost in proportion to his fortune. Yet there was no lamenting. There was work to be done, for the vintage season was coming on and the vines in most places had been respected. The German officers had even announced the fact that our country was already annexed, and that this was to be the champagne to commemorate the triumph of the Fatherland!

My little servants took hold of their filthy job and worked unceasingly though it was a thankless task—for soap and soda did not exist, and food, save the vegetables and a little pork, was hard to get.

A week sped by, and then one afternoon a military auto drove up to the door. As I saw it enter the yard, I trembled lest it bring bad tidings of H., but a kindly officer reassured me, by stating that though he brought only word of mouth, my husband was still in the land of the living. He also announced that it was his duty to requisition my property as a French emergency hospital and that he would be obliged if I would put all the beds I owned at his disposal. A doctor and some *infirmiers* would be sent immediately to put the place in working order. Would I help? And did I know of anyone I would care to have with me?

"You will be voluntary prisoners, you know, for this is the *zone des opérations,* and you will not be allowed to leave."

I bethought me of Madame Guix. Was she still alive?

My friend said he would be glad to accompany me to Rebais, as that was as near as any place for recruiting a nurse.

And so again I whisked across the Marne. This time *en grande vitesse,* and in little over an hour was greeted by the gentle superior who 'mid the ruins of all the neighboring houses was quietly continuing her work in the convent.

Yes. Madame Guix was there—a heroine, so I learned, loved and respected by every soul who had been obliged to remain in that unfortunate town. I found her ministering to twenty-six severely wounded men—French, English and Germans—quite alone to do all the work, an eighty-year-old doctor coming in but once every two days.

"I cannot leave them," said she, pointing to the soldiers, when I asked her to ally forces in the reconstitution of my hospital. "But just as soon as they are able to be removed, I will come! I promise."

In the parlour below, the Sister Superior told me of the invasion, while I waited the return of the military motor which was to bear me home.

"She is wonderful," said Soeur Laurent, referring to Madame Guix. "Wonderful—afraid of nothing. Once at the beginning of the invasion she was put against the wall and a brute of a German aimed and pulled the trigger of a gun he had found in a corner. She had accidentally covered it with a wounded man's great coat! He accused her of hiding arms! Then in the thick of the battle, she went out into the German lines and sought a doctor for our men—feeling herself incompetent. The whole German medical staff came in and felicitated her on her courage and devotion, before they left. I tell you all this—because she never will!"

A couple of days later a doctor and the

infirmiers arrived, the latter not picked men, since in ordinary life they are a tax collector, a super at the Théâtre de Belleville, an omnibus painter, a notary's clerk and a barber! But they are all "good fellows," ready to work with no choice as to the "job."

Madame Guix duly made her appearance, and our hospital was declared open.

From loans and requisitions we accumulated a hundred beds, and for fifteen months now, by begging and strictest economy, we have managed to keep alive and to care, as best we can and in our primitive way, for all those of France's brave sons who come to us, sick or wounded. With God's help, we shall go on doing so until the day of our complete victory.

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