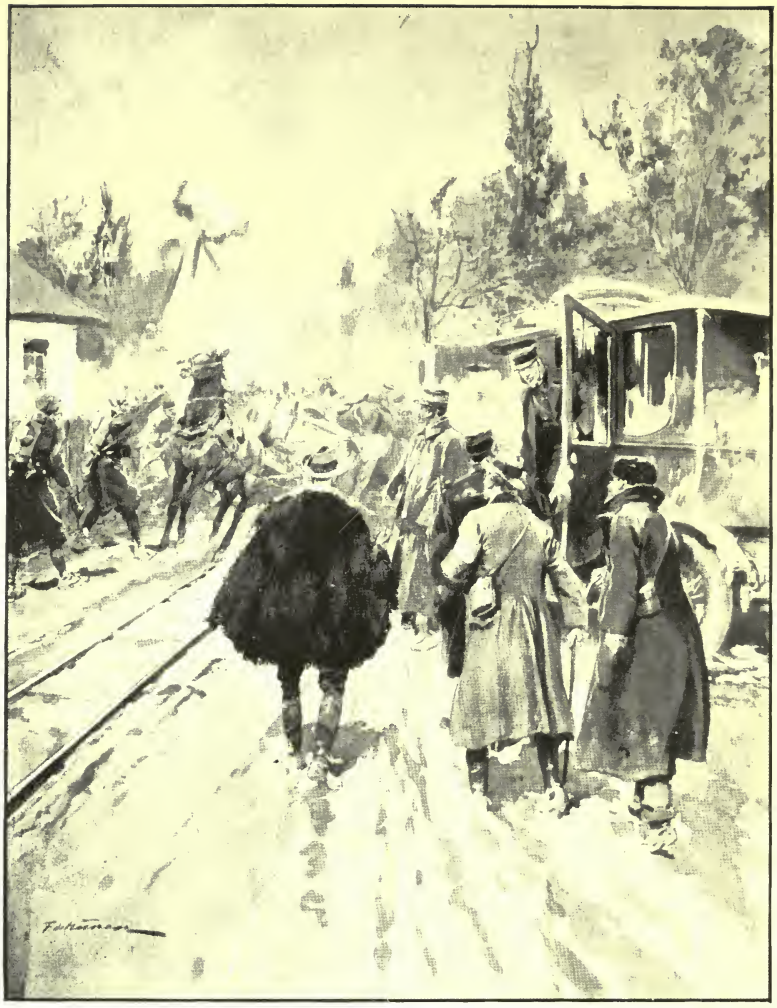
...RIES TO THE SCHEMES AT THE FRONT

GEORGE ADAM

BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE FRONT



WAR CORRESPONDENTS NEAR YPRES. (SEE CHAPTER III.) FROM A SKETCH MADE ON THE SPOT BY FREDERIC VILLIERS.

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BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE FRONT

BY

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WITH A FRONTISPIECE

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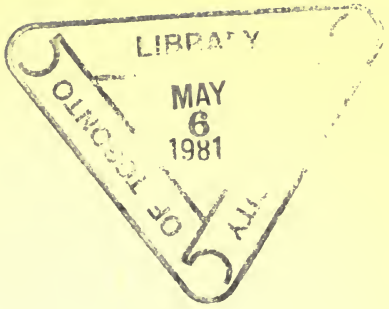

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PREFACE

This book describes the political conditions in France on the eve of the outbreak of the war, and endeavours to give a picture of the period of siege warfare which began when the race northwards from the Aisne brought the Allies and the Germans face to face throughout the whole length of Southern Belgium and of France. The choice of the material of the book has been dictated by personal experience. Those are the two phases of the war with which the author is most familiar. As correspondent of *The Times*, he was invited to pay a series of visits to the front in France and in Belgium during the five winter months. This book is the result of those visits to the lines. Its object is not to attempt the hopeless task of furnishing a history of this period. If it gives to the reader some small idea of the splendour of the British effort in Flanders, if it conveys but a hundredth part of the author's admiration for the army and the people of France, it will have attained its object.

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BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE FRONT

CHAPTER I

I.—GERMANY'S PAST OPPORTUNITY

NEVER before in history has a war been so clearly foreseen, so much discussed, and at the same time so little anticipated, as that which now scars the face of Europe with its trenches. To the French, with memories of 1870, war with Germany had become an idea just as familiar as death, and they regarded it as a thing inevitable, but nevertheless too remote to require any place in the day's preoccupations. In England the voices of warning were many, but they remained almost without an echo. The public ceased to take anything but an academic interest in the matter. We had the Stamp-Licking Outrage, Ulster, or the Suffragettes, to keep us busy. In France conditions were different. The German ascendancy imposed upon her in 1870 had kept from her for nearly thirty years the full rights of

a first-class Power. The effects of this were noticeable even in the smallest details of French public life.

Gambetta told his countrymen after the surrender of Alsace-Lorraine that they would do well always to think of the lost provinces, but never to speak of them. Even in recent years, since France had regained through Russian and British friendship her proper weight in European questions, no speaker would have dared to use in the French Parliament, when dealing with Franco-German relations, language approaching in vigour that constantly employed by official and non-official speakers in the Reichstag. The same discretion was imposed upon the Press. In the handling of important issues between the two countries, the French Government—at any rate until after the conclusion of the Entente Cordiale—had to observe an attitude of still greater caution towards Germany. German bluster had upon the French a greater effect than it could possibly have had in England, for the French had sad memories of what lay behind it. They had heard the first thunderous advertisement given to Krupp guns in 1870, they had seen the whole gaudy structure of the Second Empire crack and collapse beneath the giant German blows. Some who are to-day prominent in the conduct of French affairs had made the first pilgrimage of mourning to the statue of

the lost city of Strasbourg in the Place de la Concorde, and to them the constant humiliation placed upon France by Germany during the last forty years had a very special significance, and every change in the internal and external policy of Germany a vital importance.

These men among the younger generation sought to keep alive the memory of defeat and the desire for a revenge, but in France, as in England, the finger of history was unheeded. The French have a paradoxical genius for clear thinking and for self-deception. The logical beauty of an idea dazzles them and obscures to their eyes the brute nature of a fact. While the new German Empire was making its sword ever sharper, while it was exacting from its peoples as the price of their prosperity an ever-increasing discipline, an ever-increasing shareholding in the great war industry of the country, France was bathed in the artificial brilliance of new social theories and fallacies. The spirit of defeat, with its desire for victory, faded away, and its shame and ardour were only kept alive for more or less political reasons by the Monarchist Nationalists.

No country has shown greater rashness in the making of political experiments than France, and fortunately no people is more adaptable than the French to the constantly changing Governments and forms of government imposed upon it. They accept, or at any rate tolerate as a

people, methods of government which as individuals they nearly all deplore. The spirit of individuality seems to make them almost desirous of placing upon the shoulders of others all the collective duties of the State. There is, or at any rate used to be, a prevalent idea in England that the average Frenchman spent his time in cafés in the heated discussion of politics. The truth is that the average Frenchman pays a few hundred deputies to take from his hands the whole management of what he calls "those dirty politics." The public is profoundly indifferent to nearly all political matters, and it shows its indifference by wholesale abstention from voting during the General Elections. Almost up to the outbreak of war, save in one or two critical moments such as the period of Boulangism, there has been no public interest and no public control. The Panama scandal, the Dreyfus affair, and the mistakes in the separation of Church and State, were the logical result. Upheavals such as these are practically the only form of an appeal to the country provided for by the French constitution. Dissolution is tantamount to a *coup d'état*, and the country, which regards with malicious and contemptuous indifference the posturings and peculations of its politicians, finds itself dragged into the fray only when there is violent disagreement in which personalities and politics are inextricably mingled.

The appeal to the country is not that of the polling-booth. There is no General Election, but rather an organized campaign of pandemonium, the instigation of riots, the stirring up of public and private scandals; every journalist becomes a cuttle-fish, and ejects inky clouds of accusation and counter-attack, until the whole country is plunged into the darkest and wildest confusion, under cover of which one party either strengthens its hold upon the Government machine, or finds its control of it wrested from its hands.

The effects of this system and of the constant changes of Ministry which it involved can easily be imagined. The public services became the politician's privy purse, out of which he rewarded faithful personal service or stopped the mouth of a dangerous adversary.

This political anarchy was accompanied by a corresponding mental chaos. The quality of curiosity in all Frenchmen has made of them the thinking pioneers of the world. The quality of curiosity develops in different minds credulity or scepticism. The anti-clerical legislation had, as M. Viviani phrased it, "put out the lights of heaven," and, at any rate for the lower classes of society, some other form of illuminant was necessary. Some accepted the torch of revolution, others the somewhat artificial light of a vague socialistic humanitarianism, which was to put an

end to wars, which led Jaurès to address his German friends in their own tongue at public meetings, which led the French Socialists to discuss Alsace-Lorraine with their German colleagues, which led to a widespread propagation of the doctrines of internationalism which were heard everywhere—in the professor's chair and in the public-house.

II.—THE AWAKENING

On March 21, 1905, the French Parliament, in sympathy with the prevalent pacific feelings of France, reduced the term of compulsory military service from three to two years. Ten days later the German Emperor landed at Tangier, and from that moment on the chain of circumstances which led to the present war may be clearly traced link by link. The Tangier demonstration was followed by the withdrawal of the Foreign Minister, M. Delcassé, from office at the behest of Germany. It showed France that, although it may take two to make a quarrel, it only required one to make a war; that she might be as pacific as she pleased, but that if she let her army run to waste, her stores and ammunition become depleted, and her fortresses antiquated and out of repair, there was one Power in Europe ready to pay the price of

Empire and to wrest from France by blackmail or by force her position as a great colonizing Power.

The shock acted like a douche upon the enervated body of the country. In the Chamber of Deputies during one of the debates on the Three Years Service Bill it was evident that the House was becoming restive, and the Socialist-Radical opposition was extremely uneasy. The Minister at the Tribune had a temper, but no tact. The grip of the Government over the House was rapidly relaxing, and it seemed, when the Minister had finished, that the result might be fatal to the Government. The next speaker was an old member whose whole speech had its effect in the first sentence: "I have seen 1870." The House was stilled as if by magic, for it was one of the rare moments in which it heard the voice of France.

The effect of the Emperor William's speech upon France was exactly the same. In 1905 France found herself again. Even the Chamber itself was made to feel what had long been apparent to the whole of France, that it was not worthy of the country. How far Germany may have foreseen the moral result of 1905 upon the French cannot be estimated, but the Germans realized with bitterness of spirit in 1911, after the "coup d'Agadir," that the French—whom they had imagined to be mirrored

in the successive Ministries, whom they judged by superficial political signs, by a misleading stage and Press, to be corrupt and decadent—had again found a bond of national unity. The Germans had seen in the French attitude of *m'enfichisme* to politics, and in the politicians' apparent indifference to France, a cheap insurance against the Franco-Russian alliance and the Entente Cordiale. In the Agadir discussion they discovered that M. Caillaux by no means represented his countrymen. They heard French statesmen speaking with a new voice, which had not been heard in France since 1870. The nation whose decay had for long formed the subject of smug German moralizing, whose frivolity threw into shining relief the virtues of Prussian piety, whose anarchy formed such a pleasing contrast to German discipline—"this second-rate nation" suddenly refused to recognize the supremacy of Germany in Europe, Asia, and Africa, forgot all its dreams of universal peace, and, while still remaining ardent in its hatred of war, frankly and fearlessly faced the possibility, even the probability, of a struggle with Germany. The German Government realized then that the internal rot in France had been stopped, that it could not count upon the destruction of France from within, that another huge military effort would be necessary before German domination of Europe could be achieved.

III.—FIRST FRUITS OF THE AWAKENING

The French are in some respects the most voluble individuals in the world, but politically they are among the least articulate. It is only in very rare moments that the opinion of the country is clearly expressed or even indicated to its rulers. The humiliations of Tangier and of Agadir, with its sordid story of Caillaux diplomacy, made Frenchmen acutely aware of the fact that the affairs of the country were in very bad hands. The great mass of Frenchmen is Republican. Even the Monarchists realize that any return to the older form of government must be preceded by a miracle. The change which men desired to bring about after the Agadir crisis was one rather of men than of methods. The Bill for proportional representation, which aimed at destroying the power of the parish pump politician, at rendering possible the entry into politics of the disinterested patriotic Frenchman, at freeing the Deputy from the tyranny and place-greed of his elector, was defeated with the aid of politicians who recognized in the measure the death-sentence of their own personal ambitions. But the chief supporter of the Bill, the man who had presided over the inquiry into Caillaux's Agadir intrigues, who throughout the Balkan crisis had endeavoured to gain for

France what even some of his friends thought was too important a diplomatic rôle, became the centre of the vague desire for something new.

To M. Poincaré's election to the Presidency of the Republic there attached a quite unusual significance. The French are allowed by their constitution no direct voice in the choice of their chief magistrate, who is elected by the two Chambers sitting in National Assembly, anything like a plebescite giving too many opportunities for the organizing of the personal ambitions of a dictator. The two previous Presidents were admirable representatives of the type of President dear to the politician. They were good, safe men who could be counted upon to do nothing startling or disturbing to the politician. After the crisis of 1911 the French sought, as they always have done in time of crisis, for a man. They were indulging in no dreaming; they wanted no *coup d'état;* they hoped for no spectacular trotting down the Champs Elysées; they desired merely to relieve the undistinguished mediocrity of the Presidents of the Third Republic by the return of a man rather than of a puppet, of a statesman rather than of a politician.

The new spirit of France prompted them to feel that they were destined again to play a decisive part in the world's history, and they wished to be worthily represented at the world's

council table. For the first time for many years the public made the politician listen to its views. Very clearly it was pointed out to Parliament in the Press in which direction lay its duty at Versailles. Defying Republican "discipline"—or, in other words, refusing to make way for the genial nonentity whom Radical policy and suspicion desired to place at the Elysée—M. Poincaré maintained his candidature, and, with the support of the moderate Radicals and of some sections of the clerical parties, returned from Versailles to Paris in triumph.

His election gave unbounded satisfaction to the country, which saw in him a man of culture (he was an Academician) and a man of tradition (he was a son of Lorraine), who would be able by his conduct of affairs to spare the country a repetition of Tangier and Agadir, and who would, if necessity arose, be strong enough to force the attention of his Ministers to the urgent questions of national defence. It would, however, be a mistake to imagine that he was a candidate of La Revanche. Striking confirmation of this view is to be found in the fact that, since the first premature advance into Alsace in the earliest days of the war, Alsace-Lorraine has ceased to have any special significance to the great body of Frenchmen.

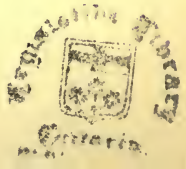
It became apparent even before M. Fallières had made way for his successor that the opening

years of M. Poincaré's Presidency were likely to be eventful. His election in the teeth of fierce Radical opposition had inflamed the bitterest hatred among the extremist parties, who feared that the long years of their prosperity and undisputed power in the Chamber might be drawing to an end. It became evident that the Socialists and Socialist Radicals had by no means accepted their defeat, but intended to initiate a vigorous political campaign, having as its object to render M. Poincaré's tenure of office intolerable.

These threats of commotion within were accompanied by warnings of even greater trouble from abroad. A month after the Presidential elections Grand-Admiral von Tirpitz, speaking to the Budget Committee of the Reichstag, used words the meaning of which was clear then, but which subsequent events have made still more emphatic. Briefly, he announced that Germany intended to devote more attention to her military expenditure and reorganization, and to stay for a moment her growing naval preparations. She had resolved, in fact, to grasp undisputed military supremacy on the Continent before striving to wrest the trident from Great Britain. France knew what to expect. Each step she had taken along the path of disarmament and peace had led to more rattling of the German sabre, to the military laws of 1911 and 1912, and she would have played the traitor to herself and to the

world had she not taken immediate action to meet the threatened German increase of military strength. Although the measures she adopted were considered and discussed before M. Fallières had left the Elysée, the Three Years Service Law which embodied them was largely due to M. Poincaré's qualities of patience and perseverance. The adoption of that law was without doubt a bitter disappointment to Germany, who has proved herself incapable in France, as in England, either through her diplomacy or her secret service, of judging anything but material factors.

Blind to the dangers abroad, the Socialists and Socialist Radicals saw in opposition to the Three Years Service Bill a means of prosecuting their campaign against the President. They fought the Bill with the utmost ingenuity, but without effect. The fight was renewed over the financial measures which the new law necessitated. The opponents of "Poincaréism" had two weapons, the income-tax, and the necessity for placing upon the shoulders of the rich much of the burden of the new taxation. They had in M. Caillaux a leader of brilliant financial ability if of damaged reputation. M. Caillaux saw the Government's weakness on the question of finance. He overthrew the Barthou Ministry on it, and obtained the portfolio of Finance in the new Government, of which he was leader in all but name, by defeat-



ing the loan proposal, the execution of which would have prevented the terrible financial confusion in France on the outbreak of war. His chief preoccupation, once he had arrived in power, was to remain there long enough to control the General Elections. In spite of attacks vigorously led, in spite of a ferocious campaign against the income-tax in the Press, carried, notably in the *Figaro*, into the personal field, he seemed certain to win through until the elections, when his wife's revolver shot tragically changed the whole aspect of affairs both at home and abroad.

IV.—THE MOMENT

The murder of Gaston Calmette, the editor of the *Figaro*, and the Rochette scandal which it revealed, gave France a glimpse of the political disorder in which she still struggled. Behind the placid, ornamental front of public life, she saw a coterie of men fighting their way to power by means of blackmail, by the purloining of private correspondence; they saw ignoble bartering over the honour or dishonour of women, and the spectacle only served to encourage the country in its distaste for all things political.

The day before the Calmette murder I returned to Paris from a month's tour in provincial France undertaken with the object of studying electoral

conditions. Everywhere on that tour I found a growing spirit of indifference towards politics, and the whole scandal only served to strengthen the contempt of most Frenchmen for the proceedings in the Palais Bourbon. Among some sections of moderate opinion disgust was so pronounced that it threatened to lose its negative character, and to exert a positive influence in the approaching elections. This feeling seemed to offer a lever to any man strong enough to fashion it into something definite. M. Briand, who certainly at one period of his career appeared to stand head and shoulders above the Parliamentary ruck, made a belated effort to utilize this current of opinion. His campaign was attended with a certain amount of success in the country; the Radical income-tax policy and the opposition to the Three Years Service Law failed to obtain popular endorsement, but the Socialist Radicals, by an alliance in the Chamber with the Socialists, completely nullified the political effects of their comparative non-success at the polls.

The Ministry formed as the result of the elections was composed mainly of opponents to the Three Years Service Law, all of whom, however, on their arrival in office, proclaimed its absolute necessity. M. Caillaux disappeared for a moment from the political stage while awaiting his more sensational appearance at the trial of his wife at the Seine Assizes. At a moment when

the international outlook was growing steadily darker, the chief concern of the Government, or at any rate of the parties which supported it in the Chamber, was to bring the trial of Mme. Caillaux to a satisfactory conclusion.

Germany's moment was indeed well chosen. Her active preparations for war were hurried on while the Caillaux case was proceeding, while in France the whole attention of the public was riveted on the astounding and unwholesome proceedings in the Palais de Justice, where apparently the whole political world of France was on its trial, while riotous scenes were being enacted night after night on the boulevards, and a period of complete internal chaos appeared to have been reached. The President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, M. Viviani, and the political director of the French Foreign Office, M. de Margerie, were absent on a State visit to Russia with two of the most important units of the French Fleet. There was, in addition to these more or less accidental factors, another reason which undoubtedly had a great effect in stiffening the determination, at any rate of Austria-Hungary, to push matters to extremes. The work of remedying the havoc wrought in the French Army between 1900 and 1905, when Radicalism reigned supreme, was by no means finished.

Large sums had been voted by successive Parliaments, but in no case had France kept

pace with the German programme, and, at any rate in some departments of war, she still lagged dangerously behind. About a fortnight before war broke out, a series of startling disclosures was made in the Senate as to deficiencies of organization and administration in the army. During the crisis of 1905 it first became apparent that France, with her weakened army, was for the moment unable to protect herself against attack. The plan of the French General Staff aimed at the French Army taking the offensive upon the outbreak of any European war; and when the necessary military renovations were discussed, it was naturally decided that the requirements of the troops in the field—that is to say, of the offensive forces—should be met before those of the defensive organization (forts, stores, and engineering material) could be considered. A great deal of money was spent in strengthening the field artillery, machine-gun sections, aeronautic and railway services; but, as was declared in the Senate by M. Humbert just before the outbreak of war, the eastern frontier forts were dangerously weak, some of the works upon the Upper Meuse dating from as far back as 1878. Even the more modern fortresses were not linked up with each other by telegraph. The stock of shells was inadequate, there was a shortage of two million pairs of boots, the military wireless installations were so inferior that when the

German station at Metz was working the French station at Verdun had to retire from action.

All these shortcomings, important though they were, faded into insignificance when compared with the situation of the French artillery. In their field-gun, the now famous "75," the French had a weapon which was greatly superior to the German field-gun, but with heavy artillery France was very badly provided. The German guns numbered 3,370, while France only possessed 2,504. In engineering material the same state of affairs existed, and no money whatever had been forthcoming for three years for bridging requirements. Provision was being made to remedy these defects; thus, according to estimate, by the end of 1915, 200 115-millimetre guns would take the place of 84 guns of an obsolete pattern. At the end of 1917, 200 howitzers were to have strengthened the artillery. By the end of 1915 the stock of shells was to be brought to three times the size of that which existed in 1906. Old types of heavy field artillery were being modernized, and a number of new types were being tested.

These disclosures undoubtedly had an important effect upon Austrian diplomacy, and Germany saw with reason, in the preparations which were being made to make up the ground lost, an argument for striking at once while the work of reorganization was still in progress.

The diplomatic effect of these disclosures in the Senate was immediate. Two days before they were made, on July 11, 1914, the French Consul-General at Budapest reported a distinct improvement in the tone of the Hungarian Press. The official newspapers in particular were adopting a more reasonable attitude, and, as the Consul remarked, "Officially for a quarter of an hour everything is for peace." The debate in the Senate on French army defences took place on July 13 and 14, and on the following day the French Ambassador in Vienna informed his Government that the Austro-Hungarian Press, which is perhaps the most rigorously controlled Press of the world in foreign affairs, represented France and Russia as being unable to have their say in European affairs owing to their military disorganization. One important newspaper, indeed, stated boldly: "The moment is still favourable for us. If we do not decide upon war now, the war we shall have to make in two or three years at the latest will be begun in much less propitious circumstances. Now the initiative belongs to us." The coincidence of all these arguments in favour of a German attack only appeared after the blow had been struck.

On July 25, when Germany was making her first known preparations along the French frontier, the whole attention of France was

given to the prospect of a duel between the presiding Judge at the Caillaux trial and one of his colleagues on the bench. The news of the rupture of diplomatic relations between Austria and Servia caused some little stir in circles where foreign affairs were known to be possessed of more than an academic interest, but the gravity of the hour was completely lost to general view. A remark made to me in the luncheon-room of the Palais de Justice by a Socialist Deputy illustrated the general indifference to the foreign situation. He said: "The news from Vienna looks bad. I am afraid that we Socialists may not be able to hold our International Congress there, and shall have to seek a home elsewhere." In official circles there was, of course, none of this blindness. They knew with whom and what they had to deal. The visit of Baron von Schoen, the German Ambassador, to the Foreign Office on July 25, when he informed the French Government, firstly, that Austria could not have acted in any other way in her dealings with Servia; secondly, that the dispute must remain localized between Vienna and Belgrade; thirdly, that any intervention would have the gravest consequences, was recognized at once as being a repetition of the Tangier and Agadir diplomacy; and the despatches from the French Ambassador in Berlin in 1913, since published in the Yellow Book, had warned France that

from blackmail and bluff Germany intended to proceed to blackmail and action. In the Note regarding the strengthening of the German Army, also published in the Yellow Book, they were informed in what manner action would be taken, and to what end. German diplomacy sought throughout the last few days of peace which remained to create between Russia and France the feeling of aloofness which she at the same time was endeavouring to manufacture between France and Great Britain. The French Government refused, however, to join the German Government in making any representations to St. Petersburg with a view to her abandonment of Servia. Had they accepted the proposal, they knew that it was doomed to failure unless it was accompanied by German representations to Vienna, and that its failure might have made Russia appear responsible for any hostilities.

French diplomacy, once war had become inevitable, had to devote much of its energy to proving to British public opinion the sincerity of the French desire for peace. In order to do this France made heavy sacrifices, and, indeed, ran the risk of jeopardizing the success of her whole plan of campaign. The French General Staff had decided, in making its plans for a war with Germany, that it would be better, in accordance with French temperament, to take the offensive from the start; a plan which, in

the event of success, would have had important political results in Germany, where initial victory was considered to be absolutely necessary to national unity. In spite of this plan to take the offensive, when war had been forced upon France the French Government, after prolonged and anxious consideration, gave instructions that the troops were to be kept eight miles from the frontier, so as to avoid any possibility of the guns going off by themselves.

They did this in order to convince British opinion of their pacific intentions, and they did it in spite of the knowledge that Germany, thanks to the special measures of secret mobilization provided by her legislation, had stolen a four or five days' start; in spite of the knowledge that the troops of the Metz garrison, strengthened by troops from the interior, had moved up to battle positions within a stone's-throw of the frontier posts; that the fortresses themselves had been placed in a state of defence; that trees which obstructed the field of fire had been cut down, and entrenchment and battery emplacements constructed and wire entanglements strengthened. The 16th Army Corps, a portion of the 8th from Treves and Cologne, and the whole of the 15th from Strasbourg, occupied strategic positions right along the French frontier from Luxembourg to Switzerland.

On July 30, when M. Abel Ferry, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, was discussing this news with me at the Quai d'Orsay, his telephone bell rang, and the Minister of War informed him of the first overt acts of hostility, of the seizure of French locomotives by the German authorities, the cutting of the telegraph wires, the tearing up of the permanent way at several frontier stations, and the mounting of quick-firing guns upon the frontier. I remarked to him, "C'est la guerre," and even then he had not abandoned hope, since he replied: "Je crois que c'est la guerre." This news, taken in conjunction with the diplomatic correspondence of Belgium and of Russia, really left France no other alternative but to proceed at once to mobilization, which had, in fact, been delayed more for diplomatic reasons than with any hope of saving peace.

CHAPTER II

I.—A NATION IN ARMS

When the little slip of paper with the words, "Ministry of War—Order of Mobilization—Extremely Urgent—First Day of Mobilization, Sunday, August 2," was posted throughout France, it became immediately apparent how superficial had been the evidence upon which German diplomacy and the German Press had proclaimed to the world the decadence of France. Much has been said and written of the spirit in which Frenchmen of all classes responded to their country's call: too much cannot be said. All the old shibboleths were swept away; men who had spent their lives in preaching peace and internationalism could not reach their depots fast enough on their way to war and the defence of their nation. In some ways one of the most striking manifestations of this *volteface* was to be seen in the paper of Gustav Hervé, the old anti-militarist, *La Guerre Sociale*, which after mobilization appeared with an issue devoted entirely to the letters of the members of the staff who were

off to join their regiments. All those letters burned with most ardent patriotism. Gustav Hervé himself volunteered for military service. This general feeling was in no way due to excited Jingoism. Without a doubt, the French felt that they were entering the struggle in very favourable circumstances, with the support of Great Britain and of Russia; and, although they are an essentially and intensely peace-loving people, there was nevertheless a sentiment of relief. They had been living for years under the German menace, and now at last they were going to test what lay behind it, and to test it with good chance of success.

It is difficult to explain to a people unacquainted with the claims of universal military service the tremendous message which was conveyed to the people of France by the small notice of mobilization. Within less than three weeks nearly every man fit to bear arms was taken from his family and from his business. The railways were given up almost exclusively to military transport. The shortage of labour made itself felt at once; thousands of industrial establishments came to a standstill; newspapers which in ordinary times appeared on six or eight pages were reduced by lack of compositors and printers to publishing news of the greatest event in modern times on little sheets, in some cases barely larger than a fly-sheet. Everywhere in

the streets of the capital the shuttered shop-windows bore a notice informing customers that the establishment was closed, the proprietor and all his staff having left to join the colours.

The most noticeable outward sign of the change in the streets of Paris was the disappearance on the first day of mobilization of all the motor-buses, which were taken off to act as meat-carriers to the army. Practically the only vehicles to be seen were taxicabs conveying reservists and their friends up to the eastern and northern railway stations. By the end of three weeks Paris appeared to be drained of most of its male population.

The mobilization worked smoothly and rapidly. It was a period of excitement and of strain, which aroused more commotion in the streets, more tumult and shouting, in London and Berlin than it did in Paris. The theatres and cafés were closed at night; there was none of the singing of the Marseillaise by beautiful actresses, there was none of the delirious enthusiasm with which Paris in 1870 sped her troops on to disaster. Now and again, it is true, little bands of youths paraded almost deserted boulevards with the flags of the Allies and those of the neutrals in whom the politician of the pavement saw a future ally, raising unheeded cries of "À Berlin!" The new France had little doubt that it might reach Berlin,

but it knew that the way would be long and the cost of victory heavy.

If the men of the new France required no stimulating excitement to send them on their way, the women showed their spirit in the matter-of-fact farewells they took of their menfolk. There were troubled faces and wet eyes to be seen everywhere, but the sorrow was controlled, and the women did their utmost to make the parting easy.

During the period of mobilization I motored many hundreds of miles in the provinces, and met with countless proofs that the provincial Frenchman was in no way behind his Parisian brother. Some of the forms which this zeal in the national defence assumed were embarrassing. It had been realized that on the outbreak of any war the enemy from without, and even perhaps the anarchist enemy from within, might endeavour to impede the progress of mobilization, by blowing up important railway bridges and damaging other means of communication. The military, of course, had taken their precautions against this danger, and every important point along the railway or the highroad was guarded by the elderly troops of the Territorials, a class which does not correspond to the Territorials at home, but consists of middle-aged men who have arrived at the end of their liability to military duty. In addition to these official safeguards, there sprang up in

pretty nearly every village of the North and East local committees composed of schoolmasters, the mayor, and one of the village greybeards, who unasked and unrewarded erected barricades with embarrassing frequency along every road in the country.

No village which respected itself had failed to string two or three heavy farm carts across its high street, where, lantern and antiquated fire-alarm in hand, the schoolmaster or the mayor kept a trembling watch, waiting for the all-penetrating German spy. One night the journey of 180 miles, which the car usually accomplishes in some three and a half hours, took more than double that time. Perfectly straight roads, devoid of any side-roads running into them, had five or six of these amateur barricades to stop progress. The whole of France that night was looking for motor-car No. 152 BB. It was conveying three Germans and a supply of melinite varying from a dozen pounds to as many tons; they were disguised as French officers; they had tried to blow up the Amiens viaduct; they were masquerading as nuns, and had stolen the French plans of mobilization; they were, in fact, doing everything expected of the spy villain in the most sensational novel.

All this amateur activity, although extremely irksome to the innocent traveller, was an admirable sign of the temper of those left behind.

Every man determined that he would do whatever he could to keep order at home, while his son was fighting on the frontier. They accepted with marvellous stoicism the complete silence which covered the early operations of the war. France had indeed learnt the lesson which even her best friends feared that she would never learn—that of discipline. France had made up her mind to trust her rulers, to put up with silence, to support initial defeats along the northern and the eastern frontier, to listen unmoved to tales of Russian reverses, and to wait with confidence, for she saw victory at the end.

II.—SUCCESS AND FAILURES

The first victory of France over the traditions of 1870 was seen in the quiet, resolute spirit with which the outbreak of war was greeted. That was a civil victory. Her first military success, the smooth working of her mobilization, showed what enormous progress had been made since the days of appalling muddle which led to the mislaying of army corps during the last war with Prussia. The mobilization worked well, but it was late. Therein lay German's first victory. It was a victory of treacherous secrecy; it was the victory of autocracy over

democracy. With a submissive, firmly-ruled people, Germany was able to gain a start, the extent of which will not be known with any accuracy for another thirty or forty years. It certainly amounted to four, and perhaps it amounted to five, days. Another triumph for German treachery was gained by the onslaught through Belgium. In spite of the repeated warnings of her diplomats, France clung to the plan of mobilization based on the campaign of 1870, which brought the main body of her defences down upon the eastern frontier. The German frontier was to be protected, not the Belgian. Whether political reasons—namely, the desire to influence German opinion by inflicting a decisive defeat upon the German troops at the outset of the campaign—dictated this decision, or whether too much reliance was placed upon the staying powers of the defences of Liège and Namur, cannot now be disclosed. It undoubtedly strengthened Germany's hand.

The Germans had two enormous factors of success upon their side. They had wanted war, they had prepared for war; they had chosen the moment for it; and since they were the aggressors they could reasonably hope to force their own strategy upon their opponents. They chose to attack through Belgium; the defence of Liège stayed them but a moment, and Namur

fell with a rapidity which may always remain a mystery. The initial French deployment, which had placed the First Army on the line Belfort-Luneville, the Second from Luneville to the Moselle, the Third between the Moselle and the line Verdun Audun-le-Roman, the Fifth northwards from there to the Belgian frontier, and the Fourth in reserve in the country around Commercy, had to be changed when Belgium appealed for help.

The French Staff had taken into account the possibility of two alternatives—that of a decisive battle between the Vosges and the Moselle, or that of a big engagement north of Verdun. The invasion of Belgium and the rapid progress of the Germans through that country forced the French Staff, while attacking vigorously in Upper Alsace with a view to retaining there as many German troops as possible, to extend the line held by the Second Army up to the Verdun district, to thrust the Fourth Army (held in reserve at Commercy) in between the Third and the Fifth Army on the Meuse, and to push the Fifth Army towards the north-west along the Belgian frontier as far as Fourmies.

The operations in Alsace, conducted with great vigour and success at the outset, led to the French occupation of Mulhausen, which, however, owing to faulty leadership and to the bad behaviour of some of the southern French troops, had to be

abandoned in defeat. These Alsace operations were resumed under a new leader, but they did not succeed for the moment (owing to the magnificent method with which the Germans had organized the defence of this section of the front) in retaining any very important number of German troops, and the enemy was enabled to bring the full force of his blow to bear in the first big battle of the war, the Battle of Mons-Charleroi.

On August 20 the modified concentration of the French armies was effected, and the French centre, consisting of two armies, and the left, consisting of a third army strengthened by two army corps, a corps of cavalry, reserve divisions, and the British and Belgian armies, were ordered to take the offensive, with a view to preventing the seven or eight German army corps and four cavalry divisions from extending to the west. The attack was made in circumstances which warranted the French General-in-Chief in hoping for victory. He launched ten army corps upon the centre, but, owing to factors which only the test of war can reveal, what ought to have been a victory was turned into a defeat. The blame for the failure of the Allies is to be distributed among all ranks. The men exposed themselves in most foolhardy manner to fire ; the Reservist officers showed by their company-leading that they had forgotten many of the lessons of their

training; battalions were launched across fire-swept fields to attack impregnable positions; there were premature advances and premature retreats. Many of the general officers showed themselves incapable of holding their commands. The attempt to crush the centre having failed, there remained only the hope that on the left matters would go better; but as the French plan had been to smash the German centre, and then to fling every available man upon the German left, with the first object unaccomplished there was not much hope of achieving the second. After sustaining heavy losses, the enemy succeeded in getting astride of the Sambre, and the French left army two days later retreated under the impression that the enemy was threatening its right flank. The British Army was therefore forced to follow suit or to risk being cut off and annihilated.

The problem which faced General Joffre at the close of his first general engagement in the north was whether he should face the risk of envelopment and annihilation of his defeated troops along the northern frontier, or whether by the prudent sacrifice of some of the richest territory of France he should retire until he could choose his own time and place for a resumption of the offensive. He decided on the latter course, and determined to carry it through to the last margin of safety, to retreat almost to

the walls of Paris, and during the retreat, under cover of a series of counter-attacks delivered by constantly turning upon the pursuing Germans whenever opportunity arose, to effect the necessary work of reorganization, so as to be able to take the offensive with an army unbroken in spirit, and with Generals more alive to the requirements of modern strategy. During this period there was a series of engagements which terminated successfully for the French, one of which was, indeed, so striking and complete as to lead the General who had attained it to voice his desire to stop the retreat and to turn his face again towards the frontier. He was ordered, in a telegram which, when published, will place on record the voluntary nature of Joffre's retreat to the Marne, to remain on the ground for six hours so as to check the rapidity of the German advance, and then to resume the retreat.

The extreme limit of the retreat was fixed by General Joffre on September 1, on a line which went through Bray and Nogent-sur-Seine, Arcis-sur-Aube, Vitry le François, and the region north of Bar-le-Duc. On September 5 the factors of success, of reorganization, and of position, desired by the French General Staff for the resumption of the general offensive, were found along the Marne. The French left had occupied the line Sézanne-Courchamps, and could no longer be enveloped; the French forces between the Seine

and the Marne were linked up with the rest of the French Army, and were protected on their left by a new army composed of two army corps, five reserve divisions, and a Moorish brigade. "The hour has come," as General Joffre declared in a message ordering the commanders of his armies to take the offensive, "to advance at all costs, and to die where you stand rather than give way."

III.—CAUSES OF VICTORY

It is not within the province of this book to give a detailed description of battles. That is a task which can only be undertaken some years hence by Staff historians. It is, however, possible to indicate some of the less obvious causes for the success of the Allies on the Marne. General Joffre, in the Battle of the Marne, revealed himself as a superb strategist. The manner in which the army commanders interpreted the wishes of the Generalissimo showed that they understood that military discipline was worthless unless it was accompanied by intellectual discipline, that they had learnt the definition given by General Foch at the École de Guerre, when he said: "Discipline for a leader does not mean the execution of orders received, in so far as they seem suitable, just, reasonable, or even possible. It means that you have entirely

grasped the ideas of the leader who has given the order, and that you take every possible method of satisfying him. Discipline does not mean silence, abstention, only doing what appears to you possible without compromising yourself. It is not the practice of the art of avoiding responsibilities. On the contrary, it is action in the sense of orders received."

The armies, advancing step by step, moved in complete unison, fitting in one to the other with the machine-made precision of the teeth of a pair of horse-clippers. There was none of the bad handling of divisions and brigades which brought about the reverses on the northern frontier. The causes of that check had been removed. A famous professor of the art of war has told me that, in his opinion, the Germans ought to have won through to Paris. He attributes part of their failure to the surprises which were constantly thrust upon them by the ruthless justice with which General Joffre removed any proved incompetent from his command. During the retreat from the north no less than forty-three general officers were removed from the posts which they had occupied in the Battle of Charleroi. A further indication of the drastic manner in which General Joffre changed his collaborators is to be found in the fact that after the first six months of the war the average age of Generals in com-

mand had been reduced by ten years. All who were physically incapable of bearing the strain of operations in the field, either through old age, illness, or temperament, had to make way for younger and better men. This delicate work of "unsticking," as the French call the process of getting rid of Generals, has been accomplished with very little friction.

There have been one or two cases in which the sufferers have not suffered gladly. There has been the case of General Percin, to whom the defence of Lille was for a moment entrusted. General Percin has been shot for treason; he has been imprisoned for life in a fortress; he has a German wife who forged an order in his name; he forgot an urgent order he received, and left it lying unheeded in his pocket for eight hours, during which time Sir John French found no support for his flank; his wife purloined the order while he was drunk or while he was asleep. All these stories, as I can personally testify, have no foundation, save in the fact that Lille was not defended. History will determine if anyone was at fault.

Any business man of ordinary strength and will can get rid of an incompetent manager; but it takes a man of unusual quality to discover the proper substitute. General Joffre is a judge of character; discernment is, indeed, one of his most shining virtues. He does not proceed

blindly on the "too-old-at-forty" principle. He is himself a proof that many a good tune is played on an old fiddle. Most of the men he has appointed are very young. Some who are at the head of divisions, or even army corps, to-day, were Colonels when the war began. Others have been brought from old-age retirement to positions of infinite honour and responsibility. At the outset of the war nearly all the Generals were well over sixty years of age; six months afterwards there were many army corps commanders below fifty. There remain, however, one or two shining exceptions to this rule of youth.

It is a matter of the utmost importance that an army should know by whom the army it opposes is led. The Generals on the other side have been closely studied in the time of peace. Their training and their military record are known down to the last detail. With these data to go on, the Staffs are able, if they possess the psychological sense, to estimate with some degree of accuracy what nature of policy would be adopted by the opposing General in given circumstances. They are or should be able, if there are two alternatives open to an army—the one, perhaps, requiring a dashing policy of risk, the liberal use of cavalry and the white arm; the other requiring caution, scientific use of artillery, the methodical preparation of attack—

to judge by the character of the opponent which of the two courses he is most likely to adopt. Thus, the first alternative would probably be taken by the Southerner who had come from the cavalry, whose military writings showed imagination and boldness of thought; the second would be preferred by the Northerner, the gunner and the mathematician.

The Germans had two factors to reckon with during the period of the Marne, which did not enter, and could not have entered, into their calculations. At one section of their line they had before them an army demoralized by retreat, whose officers had the greatest difficulty in preserving that most necessary military virtue—optimism. They had been pressed hard by the enemy throughout their retreat. Forced marches had availed them but little. After each terrific effort on the road they hoped to regain for themselves time to breathe, to re-form, and to recover; but always a very few hours after the bivouac the Germans, rushed up by motor transport, were again at them. One of the officers of this army admitted to me that at one moment most of them thought that the day of irretrievable disasters had come again, and that memories of the defeats of 1870 crowded their days and their nights.

At six o'clock one evening the General in command was relieved of his post. The new

General, an alert, vigorous officer, whose service had been done with the quick-stepping Chasseurs, issued an army order resembling a four-line whip in its business-like brevity. He spent the night inspiring his staff with renewed courage, and he fanned the dying embers of hope among his men with such success that the next day they turned upon their pursuers, and delivered a smashing blow upon a General who was quite justified in feeling that Fate had indeed played an unexpected and a scurvy trick upon him. They had been faced with a surprise in the mentality of the new General.

The fallacy that the French could never recover from reverses fell to the ground. The falsity of this idea was further demonstrated during the Marne period by all the armies engaged, but in particular by that of General Foch, which occupied the portion of the centre from Sézanne to Mailly. General Foch on the Marne put into practice his own teaching at the École de Guerre—that "a battle won is a battle in which one will not admit one is vanquished."

The French centre was formed by a new army, the organization of which was completed on August 29, and by that of General Foch, which had fought throughout the retreat from Belgian Luxembourg. The first held the line south of Humbauville Château—Beauchamp—Bigincourt—Maurupt le Montoy. The German right having

been stopped, and the enemy's attempted enveloping movement stayed, the invader endeavoured during three days of ferocious fighting to batter in the French centre west and east of Fère Champenoise. The attempt began on September 7, and by the following day its partial success was shown in the retirement of the right wing of the new army on the centre. The next day that success was emphasized, and the French withdrew to the south of Gourgancon, a movement followed by the other army corps, which retired on Allemant and Connantre. General Foch on three consecutive days was "defeated," but he refused to admit it by taking the offensive after each "retreat." After retiring at six o'clock in the morning of the 9th, he ordered a general offensive on the same day, and his men, who had known practically nothing but retreat since the outbreak of the war, showed that their spirit was unaffected by successfully resisting a terrific attack of the Germans on the left, and then, profiting by the enemy's mistake, by taking the Guards Corps in flank and delivering a smashing blow, which forced the Germans to a precipitate and disorderly retreat. The German General Staff may well be pardoned for having underestimated the recuperative power of the French soldier. It was greater than they had foreseen, and their whole plan of battle was brought to naught by it.

There was another factor of still greater surprise in the leadership of the new army—the Sixth—which along the Ourcq played such a decisive part at the critical moment of the battle. For the command of this new army General Joffre went, not to youth, but to age. General Maunoury, who received this all-important appointment, was a man who might have expected that his fighting days were over. After a steady career, distinguished by no particularly brilliant service, he had reached the post of Military Governor of Paris, usually given to soldiers before their retirement, years before war broke out, and in due course retired. He was brought from that retirement to play a leading part in the battle which in all probability has changed the face of Europe. The possibility of his appearance could not have entered into German calculations; and even had they known of it, there was nothing to show them that General Maunoury would be capable of putting up the superb and dogged fighting of the Ourcq. His action and that of General Foch gave the British Army its chance, for by their vigour the Germans were forced to bring heavy reinforcements from the south to the north, and in doing so the enemy exposed his left to the attacks of the British Army, which immediately faced northwards, together with the French armies which extended beyond the English lines to the right.

It was this British attack which finally clinched the victory and forced the retreat along the whole line.

With the arrival of the retreating Germans on their carefully prepared positions on the Aisne, the first signs of the general siege war that was to follow became apparent. After a period of comparative inaction the Germans again resorted to their favourite manœuvre of outflanking the Allies' left. This development had been foreseen, and preparations had been made to meet it. The two armies started off like runners from the tape in a neck-to-neck race northwards. In spite of the fact that the Germans, by their concentric position, were favoured in the speed of their transports, the French and the British arrived in time. Fighting all the way up the Oise, they slipped day by day farther northwards. The operation brought nearly nineteen new German army corps into the fighting. Three fresh French army corps were formed on the other side, and the British Army from the Aisne and the Belgian Army from Antwerp were transported into the northern zone. The German flanking movement stopped only when it reached the sea, and then began the terrific attempt of the enemy to break through in the neighbourhood of Ypres and Armentières.

CHAPTER III

I.—THE FRENCH AT YPRES

My first official visit to the Allies' line took place at the end of November, when the German effort to break through had been beaten down, when the siege warfare had definitely begun. Save in a few places on the eastern frontier, there was hardly a break in the ditch dug by French and Germans from the North Sea to Switzerland.

At the headquarters of General Foch, the operations, which were just dying away in a final blaze of heavy artillery fire, were explained to me by officers of the Staff. The German attack in Flanders was intended to retrieve the losses on the Marne, to cut the British Army from its base, to force it back upon Havre, or even a westerly port, for its communication with England, and to give the Germans a base on the Channel itself for submarine and aerial operations. The significance which they themselves gave to the fighting emphasizes the importance of the defeat they suffered. Everything had been done to encourage the men to the expenditure of their last effort.

The Crown Prince of Bavaria appealed to his troops "to make the decisive effort against the French left," and "to settle thus the fate of the great battle, which has lasted for weeks." General von Deimling issued an order declaring the thrust upon Ypres to be of decisive importance. The Emperor himself arrived behind the lines to encourage his men by his presence, and to wait, as he waited in vain at the gate of Nancy, to ride in triumph into Ypres, the capital of what was left of Belgium. They aimed, in fact, at nothing less than a decision in the west before the hardships of winter set in, which would enable them to deal radically with the unsatisfactory position of affairs in Poland.

The first effort was directed to the north of Ypres, and particularly upon Dixmude. The French forces at this point were spun out to dangerous thinness. The Belgian Army, after its withdrawal from Antwerp, was unable to make any great effort for the moment. In order to overwhelm the forces of the Allies, the enemy had collected no less than four cavalry corps, with fifteen army corps under the orders of Prince Rupert of Bavaria, General von Fabeck, General von Deimling, and the Duke of Würtemberg; while from the south the British Army, the armies of General Maudhuy and General Castelnau, were being moved as rapidly as rails and motor transport could shift them. The duty of holding

the Germans back was placed in the hands of a couple of cavalry corps in the neighbourhood of Ypres and Roulers. Farther to the north, Nieuport was defended by General Grosetti, Dixmude was protected by Admiral Ronarc'h with 7,000 marines. These two divisions, fighting in every circumstance of discomfort, succeeded by dogged persistency in keeping two German army corps at bay for several weeks. This defence frustrated the attack along the coast, which had as its object the capture of Dunkirk; it gave the Allies time to move their armies northward, so as to meet the second stage of the battle for Calais, which began with the onslaught on Ypres.

The Battle of the Yser and the Battle of Ypres-Armentières really constituted one vast battle of the north. This fighting has come to be regarded as almost exclusively British. We had more men engaged and suffered greater casualties than we have done at any previous time in our history. In the same fighting to the north of Ypres the French lost three times as heavily as we did. They fought with the spirit of the old revolutionary soldiers, and no distinction whatever can be drawn between the courage of commanders and that of the men.

In the ruined village of Pervyse I was able faintly to appreciate the calm, genial bravery which has made of General Grosetti a popular

hero in the army. General Grosetti is a man of almost phenomenal girth, and he has a strong objection to walking or standing. There are countless anecdotes about his behaviour under fire. On one occasion he and his staff while examining a piece of the country were seen by the enemy, who at once started shelling them. General Grosetti, who was sitting on the camp-stool he had brought with him, seemed to be quite oblivious of what was occurring, and when one of his staff suggested that, as they had seen all they need see, it was running a useless risk to remain in the open, General Grosetti remarked that he would rather be killed by shrapnel than start walking again for another five minutes. At the end of the five minutes his campstool was folded up, and the General strolled back to cover.

At Pervyse during the rush towards Nieuport he was also seen seated, this time in an armchair. The village was being smashed by heavy explosive shell, shrapnel was scattering all over its streets, and the enemy had chosen the moment for bombardment with great good-luck, for through the village were marching important bodies of troops. To pass through shell-fire of the intensity directed upon Pervyse required a very high collective courage. The place was pounded to pieces. It exists now practically only in geography. The church is a ruined shell. The graves in the churchyard have been torn open by

"marmites." The central square of the village is a rubble heap of brick and plaster, blackened here and there by the flames of the incendiary bomb; and in the middle of it, opposite the churchyard, sat General Grosetti in his chair for two hours, shouting jesting words of encouragement to the troops as they passed on towards the firing line.

The encouragement of heroic example during this epic fighting in the north is, however, by no means confined to officers. There is the case of the French private, a reservist and a peaceful bourgeois, who for many years had had no other care in life but to keep the zinc counter of his bar near the Gare du Nord in Paris well polished and well patronized. This man responded to a call for volunteers in the dangerous work of trench scouting, went off in the darkness, and returned mortally wounded, but with sufficient strength left to ask for something to be given to him so that he might live to make his report. There is the case of the French prisoner who, with other companions in captivity, was being driven in front of a German attacking party towards the trenches. The French, seeing their own men advancing, held their fire, until one of the prisoners shouted out: "Tirez, Nom de Dieu, ce sont les Boches!" Collective heroism was shown in this splendid chapter of the war by the lowest scum of the French population, by the

apaches and other criminals who, as part of their sentence, have to serve their time with the dreaded disciplinary battalions in Northern Africa. These battalions are formed by a very thorough set of ruffians. "Les Joyeux," as they are ironically called, were ordered to storm an entrenched and entangled position in front of them at Nacelle. They had to cross the appalling, clogging mud of Flanders. They had to cut their way through barbed wire woven into the most intricate of patterns. Their advance was continually being checked by the obstacles of Nature and of the enemy's engineers, and all the time the enemy's batteries were pouring shrapnel over them and there was a withering fire from the trenches. Men drawn from a better class, animated by higher ideals, might well have been pardoned for faltering in the face of the terrific fire. In spite of their toughness and their discipline, "Les Joyeux" paused for a moment irresolute; then one of them, wiping out all his past record with a song, began the Marseillaise. The magic music fired all his companions; they laboured on, and captured an almost impregnable position.

The arrival of reinforcements, after the heroic resistance of General Grossetti and Admiral Ronarc'h had broken the coastal attack upon Calais, by no means deprived the Allies of further opportunity of testing to the uttermost

the resisting and enduring powers of their troops.

The front then consisted of a straight line from the North Sea at Nieuport down to Bixschoote, and it then bulged for 12 kilometres to the east of Ypres, until it continued the straight line from St. Eloi to the south. This line was not dictated by any reasons of strategy. The British had been brought to a standstill by superior numbers in their advance from Ypres towards Roulers. They had been obliged to evacuate Zandvorde, Gheluvelt, Messines, and Wytschaete, and the line had been hammered into a shape which was extremely difficult to defend. The bulge to the east of Ypres gave the enemy an opportunity of cutting in vigorously at the two points of the semicircle at Bixschoote and St. Eloi, and of nipping in to the rear of the forces operating within the semicircle. Nevertheless, in spite of the difficulties of that line, it was defended with the most superb spirit and success.

Ypres was the last big town left to Belgium. Although fallen from its ancient burgher state, although much of the still flourishing cloth trade had been captured by Roubaix, Tourcoing, and Lille, it was still the capital of Southern Flanders. To-day it is still the capital of free Belgium. Its retention by the Allies is the sign that the old spirit of obstinacy which drove the Spanish down

from Flanders still walks the world, that the Belgians, beaten and cruelly ransomed for the neutrality imposed upon her by Europe, are still as dogged as their forefathers. The safeguarding of Ypres was considered necessary as an earnest of the Allies' intention to win back Belgium. The intention of the German Emperor to proclaim the annexation of Belgium at Ypres had been heralded abroad. This was a moment of pride which his troops were unable to win for him, close though they came to victory. At one time they had succeeded in piercing the iron hoop at a small place almost directly south of Ypres, at Zillebeke. It was during the days when the line was critically thin, when reserves were a luxury only remembered from manœuvres. A regiment had carried an important portion of the breastworks and trenches, supports were hurrying up behind it to bore through the gap, and it looked as though the whole German flood, widening the hole already made, might succeed in breaking in the dyke and flooding the country.

Brigadier-General Moussy arrived at Zillebeke while the German attack was still being pushed through. His urgent appeals that support should be given him from neighbouring regiments met with the reply that they were using their last reserves in the firing line themselves, and could not spare a single man. As a forlorn hope, the General sent off the corporal of his

escort with instructions to bring every individual he could find unoccupied in the rear. The corporal returned with a force of some 250 men, some of whom were road-menders, some of them cooks, some belonging to the cavalry, some to the infantry, others were transport-drivers. General Moussy added to this strange ready-made regiment the sixty-five men of his escort of cuirassiers, and led by him, with his corporal as lieutenant, this regiment of camp-followers and dismounted cuirassiers had the impudence to charge straight into the flank of the German regiment which had pierced the line. The very appearance of their assailants may have had something to do with the confusion caused in the victorious German ranks. The desperate nature of the attack, the knowledge of each man that, although in this anonymous war he might gain no glory in the event of triumph, he would certainly in the event of defeat gain death, gave to their onslaught a dash and fury which the Germans, flushed though they were with the excitement of victory, could not withstand.

What the Germans attempted to do to the south of Ypres, at St. Eloi and Zillebeke, they tried to accomplish with even greater determination at Bixschoote, the northern salient of the line. The village of Bixschoote is now "neutral." It has been occupied by hundreds

of French and German soldiers for many months. There they observe the neutrality of death. From the French line you can see the gaunt ribs of the roofs. Here and there a red tile has survived the successive bombardments. The village was taken and retaken time after time. The trees around are scarred and shattered by the fire, the remaining walls of the houses are spattered and pitted with bullet and shrapnel, and the streets are choked up with the dead. Here the situation was even more critical than to the south of Ypres, for through the town lay the last communications of the Ypres forces with the rest of the army, the Germans commanding with their fire the bridges over the Ypres Canal. The ferocity of the German attack and the splendour of the French defence are testified by the fact that in one day at this one little spot upon the map three entire German regiments were wiped out. The remaining regiment of the attacking division was annihilated on the next day.

The German effort at St. Eloi and Bixschoote ended on November 15 or 16. The human dyke opposed to their progress there had been as effective an obstacle as the water defences which eked out the strength of Grosetti's and Ronarc'h's troops to the north of Ypres. The road along the coast was barred, and the attempt to create one by a diversion via Ypres had ended in

defeat. In the Battle of Ypres alone the German losses must have amounted to over 150,000 men. During three weeks of battle over 40,000 German corpses were found upon the field. Even the German military mind had to refrain from further sacrifice. The argument of artillery and concentrated shell-fire proved itself sound here during the Battle of Ypres, as it did in a still greater degree later on in the engagement at Neuve Chapelle. Upon the restricted front of the struggle the Allies had crowded nearly 300 guns, whose shells shattered and slaughtered the German troops as they advanced in their favourite massed formation to the attack. The defeat they had sustained was decisive; or, in other words, the German General Staff had been unable to realize its aims, even though upon the attaining of them they spent lavishly in human lives. The Allies had obtained all that they could hope for—the strength to repel the colossal battering their thin line received, and the endurance to remain where they had dropped in the mud of Flanders, at some points where they had advanced a few kilometres, at others where the line had yielded and sagged, presenting a concave formation to the enemy.

There, where their tired troops had first feverishly thrown up a little mud barrier with their trenching tools, their victory gave them the time, while their spirit gave them the

strength, to dig ever deeper into the Flanders clay, to sink ever deeper into the mud, until the regular period of trench or siege warfare began, by which time they had become rooted in the soil they had so well defended. What happened in Flanders had occurred practically along the whole immense front. No Staff previsions, no military science, no genius, selected the line of trench; it was hammered out between the two opposing armies. In the fields where they dropped in retirement or in advance, to push home the advantage or to stem the retreat, the men remained, having accidentally discovered their winter-quarters. There is no more curious indication of the spirit in which this war is waged than is to be found in the tacit refusal of Generals in command, of Staff officers, regimental officers, and the men themselves, to give up even the most unwholesome line of country for a position slightly to the rear, but from the point of view of comfort or of strategy infinitely preferable. The armies on both sides had come to the bulldog grip, and neither would yield up an inch of what he had.

Broadly speaking, the northern section of the front by the end of November, when my visits to the lines began, extended from Nieuport, through Dixmude, along the Furnes Canal to Boekinghe; then in a semicircle round Ypres to St. Eloi; from St. Eloi to the west of Wyts-

chaete; then almost due south, to the west of Messines, along the fringe of Ploegsteert Wood; south to the east of Armentières; thence in a south-westerly direction along the river des Layes, to the west of Neuve Chapelle, turning due south in the neighbourhood of Richebourg l'Avoue, and cutting across the railway from Bethune to La Bassée, through Cuinchy; thence in a general southerly direction to the north-east of Compiègne. This northern section of the line is destined to replace the field of Waterloo as the spot of pilgrimage for all Britons. There is much mud there, but still more glory.

The lines which circumstances forced upon the Allies in this portion of the front defended a country as rich in associations as it was devoid of amenities. The Royal Scots, as their Colonel informed me, as the windows of the regimental head-quarters resonantly shook with the concussion of a neighbouring battery, is the oldest regiment in the army. They have fought three times in their history over the same fields of mud and clay, which they have learnt to hate in this campaign. They were fighting for France then as a mercenary body, and under somewhat different political conditions. It was at a later period, during the wars of the Great Duke, who gave to France its most splendid marching song, "Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre," that our army, up till then presumably composed of mealy-

mouthed pietists, learnt to swear. It certainly was an admirable school. It was there, on the hill which is crowned by Cassel, that the Duke of York, having marched his men up the hill, could find nothing better to do with them, or nothing worse, than to march them down again. It may well have been at the moment when his army again wallowed in the plain that our soldiers acquired their historic fluency of language.

The Duke of York's action has always been a puzzle to schoolboys and to soldiers. Now that our army has again become acquainted with French Flanders the mystery is deeper than ever. There are very few hills in Flanders. There is the height of Cassel, there is the Mountain of the Cats, there is the hill of Kemmel, each of which rises like a miniature Mount Sinai above the flood of mud which covers the flat plains below. They command a view over the most cut-up country in the world. The map of Flanders is a tangled and intricate mass of road, canal, railway, ditch, and dyke. It is dotted so closely with houses that the highroads in many places form one long, continuous village street. Here and there a church-tower rises above the red-roofed collection of farmhouses. Here and there is a cluster of tall factory chimneys or the high, gaunt structure of pithead machinery, the bold pyramid outline of a black slag heap, the rounded contour

of a huge store of beet. The whole countryside, with its occasional coal-mines, its jute factories, its sugar factories, its canals, railways, and roads, seems to have become the vast western suburb of the city of Lille, with Armentières and Ypres playing the rôle occupied by Tourcoing and Roubaix on the north-east of the great industrial city of France.

When I first saw Ypres, it was at the end of a dark November day. We had been labouring along the slippery, muddy causeway, turning off every now and again in order to avoid a portion of the road rather too much in view of the enemy. We had been stopped for about twenty minutes by the usual mishap of the road. Our little convoy of motor-cars, in attempting to pass a battery of horse artillery moving round to another position, had slipped off the tightrope of causeway into the four-foot-deep canal of mud which ran along on either side. While, with the help of a couple of artillery horses, our car was being dragged out, the enemy's shells started bursting a couple of hundred yards away to our right, and the bright, rose-coloured flame which flashed from the heart of the green fumes of the bursting shells burned more brightly against the grey lowering sky than it had done half an hour before, when, gazing through the loophole of a trench, we had seen what war looks like six days out of seven. The short November day was

drawing rapidly in, and it was under cover of darkness that we entered Ypres in a jumble of ammunition and supply carts which had awaited the night before moving through the shell-exposed entrance to the town.

In August last this black, grave-like city was the happy home of 18,000 prosperous and industrious men and women, who are now scattered as ruined refugees throughout France and England. In November already but few remained. Passing along the pitch-dark streets, with our footfalls arousing echoes where but a few months before there had been the jostling bustle of the Flemish burgher life, we heard an occasional muffled voice—even the cry of a fretful child coming from behind an iron-shuttered window or from the vent of a cellar. The railway-station had been reduced to an irregular scaffolding of twisted iron. In the square in front of it lay the water-filled crater of a Jack Johnson. The streets leading from it were marked only by the façade of houses, the interior of which had been smashed to pulp, or by mounds of rubble, where even the walls had been battered to the ground.

In some places it appeared as though a gigantic battering-ram had been thrust right through the town. Off the Rue du Buerre there was one new avenue opened up by shell-fire, with a completeness of destruction which would

have been envied by the housebreakers who made the path of Kingsway. There all semblance of building was absent. This section of the town had been laid so low that it looked as though scarcely one brick remained sticking to another. This devil's work represented the ruin of replaceable things. The vanished houses, although they represented home to their scattered occupants, possessed no æsthetic value save that of association. Man's happiness cannot reside in the banal red-brick and red-tile dwelling of Flanders. But in Flanders more, perhaps, than in any other part of Northern Europe they have had a race of master-builders who have known how to embody in the high-reared arch and the massive open beam the traditions, history, and ideals, of a race. All such edifices —and at Ypres they were many—are ruined for ever. At any rate until the last sustained bombardment of Rheims in February, the cathedral there might almost have been described as "restored" in comparison with the havoc wrought at Ypres.

The Cloth Hall in its architecture had much of the roomy comfort of the fat Flemish merchant, blended with much of the delicacy and grace of the Spaniards whom these same full-bellied traders threw out of Flanders. In its wide hall, the walls of which glowed with the colour of frescoes underneath its high-flung

vault, the modern Flemish cloth merchant in July last strolled up and down discussing markets, the price of wool, the drought in Australia, and its effect in Flanders. Out in the square in front, under the shade of their wide canvas-topped stalls, the women of Rembrandt clacked gossip when they were not selling ginger-nuts to children, butter to housewives, or ribbons to the beauties from the villages around.—The Cloth Hall of Ypres is blasted and scorched, the square in front is black and empty, and in its centre yawns a pit where a heavy German shell, breaking its way through the cobbles in the earth, struck and blew open the great sewer of the town.

I have been to Ypres twice since the war began. My first visit, at night, showed me the scarred ribs of the Cloth Hall, with the moonlight occasionally glancing through the empty arched windows, with the same effect of mystery and horror produced by the white, sightless eyes of a man. Even amidst this desolation there were signs of life. There were several homeless, hungry dogs snuffling along the streets in search of food on the Grande Place, there were the two lights of a motor-car belonging to the Anglo-Belgian ambulance, who were removing from the town those who, bedridden from old age or infirmity, had been left behind when the great exodus began. As I passed before the

shattered fabric of the cathedral I saw far into the interior of the ruin, as the massive gates had been charred to cinders, and high up above the aisle there glowed a soft red light.

Bombardment is the most brutal of weapons, but at times it has a most singular discernment. In the Argonne, in the district where everything had been laid waste, where the villages looked as though some infuriated mammoth had stamped upon them in a frenzied rage, I have seen intact among the ruins the white statue of Our Lady of Sorrows. Before the flame-darkened front of Rheims Cathedral the gallant figure of Joan of Arc remains astride its horse, defying the enemies of France. The dull, soft light within the aisle of the ruined Cathedral of Ypres made me wonder whether here again the shells had been tactful, whether the altar light, lovingly kept aflame through centuries, had been spared. Clambering over the débris which littered the threshold of the church, climbing over the first mound of fallen bell, broken glass and splintered statue, I was confronted, not by the veilleuse, but by another heap of masonry and timber, the point of which was still alive and glowing with the fire started by the incendiary shells which on that night were being rained upon the town.

I was at Ypres again four months later, and by daylight gained a more detailed appreciation

of the havoc that has been wrought there. The façade of the Cloth Hall, which when I had last seen it remained more or less unharmed, had two huge circular holes cut upon it, as though with a gigantic compass. In every corner of the town fresh devastation had been wrought, more vistas of destruction opened up. A high wind now at Ypres is able to complete the work that the Germans had begun, and every now and again the tottering walls of a wrecked building crash down into the street at the push of the breeze.

If Manchester and the men and women who get their living there in the deft weaving of cloth could picture their city possessed, in addition to its wealth, of the cloistered beauty of Canterbury, they would gain some idea of what Ypres was. If they could see Ypres as it is to-day, they would realize the lesson which all Continental nations have learnt in the bitter school of experience—that no price is too heavy, no effort or sacrifice too great, if by the glad giving of them the entrance of the invader can be barred. This country of Flanders is one the fate of which should appeal more especially to the textile workers and miners of England, Scotland, and Wales.

Armentières, the other town of importance in this northern front, has its affinity in Dundee, for here the Dundee factory hand will be able to

find many an empty bleaching-tub, many a drying-room grown cold, and a weaving-room stilled into non-activity by war. Some, it is true, are bustling with life, but the tubs are bleaching Tommies and not jute, the drying-rooms are drying khaki, and in the weaving-rooms there is the sound of the wringer and the mangle, and not the click of the shuttle.

Jute, sugar, and coal, have been replaced by the killed and the wounded as the chief products of Flanders. It is no longer the smoke of the factory, but the fumes of the shell, which hang about the air. The chief characteristic of the countryside has ceased to be its bustling activity. The crack of the carter's whip has been replaced by the buzz of motor transport. The digging of trenches has taken the place of the tilling of the soil. The jute sacks no longer serve to carry the produce of the sugar factory to distant markets. They are now filled with earth, and build up the day's dilapidations in the trenches. War has become the great industry of Flanders, and a very flourishing industry it is. It has a master way with it which in time of peace would fill the breast of every Government with envy. It builds new local railways in a week for which rural councils and deputies have fought in vain for years in Parliament. It has a wealth of labour at its disposal for the making of new roads, for the execution of vast works of excava-

tion, and the signs of its activity have scarred almost indelible marks on the earth's surface.

In that book of rattling sea-adventure, "Tom Cringle's Log," there is a passage in which the hero describes the fortifications of Hamburg, in which he says:

"It surprised me very much, after having repeatedly heard of the great strength of Hamburg, to look out on the mound of green turf that constituted its chief defence. It is all true that there was a deep ditch and glacis beyond; but there was no covered way, and both the scarp and counterscarp were simple earthen embankments; so that had the ditch been filled with fascines, there was no wall to face the attacking force after crossing it—nothing but a green mound, precipitous enough certainly, and crowned with a low parapet of masonry, and bristling with batteries about halfway down, so that the muzzles of the guns were flush with the neighbouring country beyond the ditch. Still, there was wanting, to my imagination, the strength of the high perpendicular wall, with its gaping embrasures and frowning cannon. All this time it never occurred to me that to breach such a defence as that we looked upon was impossible. You might have plumped your shot into it until you had converted it into an iron-mine, but no chasm could have been forced in it

by all the artillery in Europe; so that battering in breach was entirely out of the question, and this, in truth, constituted the great strength of the place."

What the eye of that simple sailor, Tom Cringle, perceived at Hamburg in 1813 was overlooked utterly by the great fortification engineers, such as Brialmont and Vauban, until Liège was falling, until the heavy German shell, rending, tearing, and scattering, the concrete and steel of the forts, and converting the fragments into so many pieces of shrapnel, made defence impossible save in the very type of earthwork which Tom Cringle saw and admired at Hamburg a hundred years earlier. What had been forgotten in the art of fortification was overlooked or scorned in the science of field fighting. The old lessons of the Crimea had faded from memory, and, although entrenching and digging have always formed part of a soldier's training, the lesson of trench warfare taught in the long period during which Japanese and Russian remained at deadlock outside Port Arthur was not sufficiently grasped by the moulders of military thought in Europe.

To the man in the street the trench came completely as a surprise. He pictured it, perhaps, as a ditch or a parapet some 2 or 3 feet in height, behind which kneeling men blazed away at their

opponents' heads. He may have thought of rifle-pits or of breastworks, but the possibility of a line of highly organized and deeply delved field defences stretching from frontier to frontier, from the sea to the gorges of the Jura, defying all attempt at manœuvre, forbidding all hope of a flanking movement, was a possibility which perhaps many a military man, together with the man in the street, had failed to realize. "Peace, Entrenchment, and Reform," will undoubtedly be the rallying cry of patriots in every country at the conclusion of this war. It is by the spade and the sap that defence and offence are effected, and there can be no more welcome addition to the British Army than that which will be made by the Navvies' Battalion. The number of pick-axes, spades, and builders' tools of every sort, which are issued day by day from the Royal Engineers' park behind our lines would stagger the chief storekeeper of Cubitt, Carmichael, John Allen, or any other of our big building contractors.

The mansions which these pickaxes and shovels go to build cannot be described as the dwellings of the blest. Even the most optimistic auctioneer's clerk would find a difficulty in steeling himself to describe them as eligible residences. They are by no means free from damp, their drainage system would scarcely meet the requirements of the public officer of health, they are draughty,

and in some cases by no means in a good state of repair. But when it is remembered that the barracks of our armies in Flanders are sunk some 6 or 7 feet below the mud-level, the success of the enterprise and ingenuity of the builders are seen to be wonderfully complete. No man can feel quite happy when he spends his night propped up between two walls of clay, the damp of which runs in a broken rivulet through the wire netting or twig hurdling with which the earth is kept from collapse, and with his feet resting on the top of an upturned bucket, so that he may be raised above the 2 or 3 feet of mud which constitute the basement of his dwelling. A bundle of straw scattered on the rough boarding of a dug-out is but a poor substitute for the nice freshness of white sheets, the cosy warmth of woollen blankets. The savoury stews of the field-kitchen, the crisp fatness of army bacon, the succulent juices of excellent meat, have but a faint echo in the occasional cup of hot soup or coffee which the trench brazier gives to the men. But these discomforts and privations are as nothing compared with those suffered by the troops at the beginning of the great siege which constituted the wonderful operations of the western theatre of war.

CHAPTER IV

I.—AT BRITISH HEAD-QUARTERS

The trench line is the last manifestation of a gigantic amount of thinking; it is the finished product of the huge factory of war. All the daily life of the army, whether it be on transport, in reserve, in billets, or in the trenches themselves, is determined and dictated by the General Head-Quarters Staff, the thinking department where every detail of the organization has been entrusted to specialists. The head-quarters of our army in the field have, indeed, something of the quiet of Harley Street about them, something of the decorum which should surround the great issues of life and death. The Generals and their Staff officers have that air of restraint and control which is the mark of the professional man. The great pictorial moments of war have changed. In that sleepy French town a hundred years ago the streets were filled with gorgeous Generals surrounded by glittering staff officers, all superbly mounted, forming a splendid subject for the historical painter. Of the gold and scarlet of war

all that remains is a band round the cap, and the little tab of red with the golden rank-marks on the collar. No longer does the General see from his head-quarters the passing of convoys of wounded; no longer is he cheered by his men riding into action.

The clatter of the war-worn steed of the despatch rider has been replaced by the hum of the motor-cycle; the orderly, instead of reining up with a gay commotion outside the General's house, now stills his panting motor with a lever and delivers his message to a post-office. The pageantry of war is gone, and the General, instead of making his head-quarters in the tented field, remains far behind the actual line of operations, in an atmosphere as quiet, peaceful, and orderly, as human ingenuity can make it. Now and again a strong east wind may bring to our head-quarters in Flanders the low rumble of the distant guns, but the murmur of battle is too faint to disturb the provincial peace in which the town is steeped. Yet it is a beleaguered city; it is besieged as definitely, if not as apparently, as are the trenches. There is in the atmosphere the same sensation of conflicting and invisible forces as there was in the Beleaguered City of Mrs. Oliphant.

In the study of the Commander-in-Chief, a large, low-ceilinged, rectangular room, the chief piece of furniture is a big table covered with maps. In this room and at this table—in some

similar room and at some similar table miles away behind the German trenches—the ideas of strategy take their form, the nature of the enemy's philosophy is weighed and discussed. There the war of brains is waged. It is a war which demands of our Generals and Staffs, in addition to knowledge almost encyclopædic in its range, very special qualities of character and knowledge of themselves and of those whose energies they control. The thinking administration of the army in the field has transformed the town it occupies in Northern France into a seat of government. Every want of every man in the field is considered and catered for at General Head-Quarters. The General Staff has, indeed, to order the lives of hundreds of thousands of men in every single detail of their daily existence. This task would require great talents of method and organization if it were simply a question of feeding and of clothing the numbers engaged; but for everything that is done, for everything which is given to them, for everything they are made to do themselves, for everything that is denied them, there is an external reason, whose validity has been threshed out and considered by experts, with the one aim that the whole energy of every man in the field may be brought to bear at its greatest, and in the best conditions, upon the chief purpose of all armies—fighting. Only a visit to an army in the field reveals what an

extraordinarily complex being man is; how varied are his wants, even when they are cut down to the point of efficiency. To take one instance of the detail in which every question has to be considered: the army rations have been drawn up after consultation with a scientific board, and in the food given to the men the quantities of pugnacity-forming foods, resistance-forming and brain-forming matters, carefully studied.

The result of this minute attention to detail is to be seen in the varied callings to be found among those at General Head-Quarters. There are financiers, schoolmasters, engineers, map-makers, photographers, traffic-managers, Oxford dons, diplomats, scientists, linguists, chemists, and chiropodists. Upon the work accomplished in the various Government offices of the military Whitehall in Flanders the whole well-being of the army depends. Mistakes breed mistrust, and the Generals in command of armies, army corps, divisions, and brigades, cannot possibly furnish of their best unless experience has taught them that the machine at work behind them at General Head-Quarters works efficiently and in the right direction. The company commander may find himself led to disaster if the maps which reach him from the cartographical department of the Staff have a single error of distance or location. The Colonel responsible for the defence of a certain section of the trench line will do no

good, will lose his confidence in the general direction of the campaign, if through any failure of the Staff work, through the misdirection of a telegram, through the slightest break in the complex channels of communication, the supply of sandbags necessary for the repair of his trenches does not reach him. For all this he is dependent on Staff work, the chief duty of which is to concentrate, to boil everything down into essentials, to direct the power of England to the most profitable spot with the greatest effect. Each bullet, each aeroplane dart, each shell, fired in the war, is a concentrated expression of our national efficiency, of what genius we may possess for organization and for the utilization of the social and economic factors of our national life.

The process of concentration has already begun before General Head-Quarters is reached. One may illustrate this by a triangle, the broad base formed by a number of factors such as our traditions, our social organization, our political and economic system, from which the raw material of war is directed in the shape of men and munitions out into the field. By the time they have reached it the lines of the triangle are narrowing down, and its apex is reached at the trench-head. The Staff not only has to receive, to accommodate, and to maintain, the troops which reach it from home; it has to direct the general scheme

of operations, for, with the gigantic numbers which modern war brings into the field, it is obviously impossible for one General-in-Chief and one General Staff to do more than dictate the very broadest outlines of the strategical policy to be pursued. The General Staff, in addition to controlling thus the movements of the armies in the field, has sometimes to act, in accordance with diplomatic or political considerations which are pressed upon it from home, as a military embassy to our allies the French. Day in and day out it has to keep in the very closest contact with the French and Belgians operating on the north of Ypres and those operating to the south of La Bassée. The work of the General Staff may be divided roughly into three sections: there is the fighting part of the work; the comfort department, or the work necessary if the men are going to be able to give their utmost in the field; and the military-political part of the work, which, arranging with our Allies after consideration of the state of affairs, not only on the western front, but also along the Dardanelles, the Carpathians, Poland, and the Eastern Prussian border, gives to the effort of our men its best result.

The friendly eye with which the G.H.Q. Staff officer of to-day is regarded by the staff officers of the armies with whom he has to work, and the cordial relations which exist between the

army staff officers, the divisional staff officers, the brigade staff officers, and finally between these and the regimental officers themselves, are a proof that the staff officer of to-day has learnt his business in the field with as much keenness and ability as have the recruits for the new armies. Among civilians, at any rate, there used to be a very definite feeling that, while the naval officer was always a hard-working, cheery, nice fellow, who knew his business inside out, the army officer—and more particularly the staff officer—was a bit of a snob, who took to soldiering as a pleasant social pastime rather than an earnest business of blood and war.

We have been reproached in the past by the French, and we are reproached at present by the Germans, on account of our mercenary army of professional soldiers. At any rate, long before this war began our staff officers merited the title of professional soldiers. At one time we were treated to a series of ragging scandals in the army, in which it appeared that young officers, who perhaps were rather objectionable, had finally earned the condemnation of their fellows in the regiment by an excess of military zeal, much as a boy at school may create hostility against himself for being a "swotter." They are all "swotters" in the army to-day, and any armchair critic who imagines that a billet on the staff is just a nice soft job reserved for a

social celebrity who wishes to cut a figure in the world is very wrong in his estimate of what is required of a staff officer nowadays.

The staff mess, whether it be Sir John French's or that of a Surgeon-General, is distinguished mainly by its simplicity. When you have heard the members of a General's mess talking with envy of C mess, where they've got six pots of marmalade, you realize that, while a staff appointment may be all jam, it is not all luxury. I have met in the field staff officers of every military grade, drawn from nearly every social rank. They all have one subject in common, and that subject is "shop." They talk it from morn till night, and they dream of it from night till morn. It is a shop which appears to have only human activity as its limit.

The Chief of Staff, whose functions are perhaps only second in importance to those of the Commander-in-Chief himself, presides over all the questions which affect O.A., or the Operations Section of the General Staff. When you think that classified under these two letters there is work to be done which requires linguists, secret service agents, spies, aviators, and photographers, to mention one or two things, you will realize that each officer on the General Staff has a little world of his own to manage and explore. Then there is the Adjutant-General's department. There "discipline" and "strengths" are the two

words which summarize the manifold activities that range from chaplains to gaolers, on the discipline side, to questions of horse care and fodder, casualty returns, and reinforcements, under the second heading. The Quartermaster-General is the military universal provider. He deals out permanganate of potash to stain grey horses dark, shells, mouth-organs, and anything and everything else which by any conceivable stretch of imagination can be supposed to be necessary or advisable for an army in the field.

The relations between the G.H.Q. Staff and the army staff may be shown clearly in one instance. It is the duty of the Quartermaster-General at G.H.Q. to lay down the broad scheme of transport for the armies in the field. He chooses the railhead points to which the various stores of an army are delivered. It is the duty of the Deputy Quartermaster-General of each army to arrange for the collection of those stores at railhead, and their distribution by motor vehicle or transport cart to the various units of the army to which they are destined. In this work the Quartermaster-General of an army is represented by a special transport officer, who maps out the country into traffic routes with as as much system and care as are shown by the General Omnibus Company in establishing the lines of buses through the London streets. Even with the most careful management, with the

establishment of definite circuits, along which traffic may only go in one direction (and many a policeman reservist is controlling traffic in Flanders in exactly the same way as he did at home on point duty), there are inevitable blocks upon the road, so constant is the stream of motor-buses, motor-lorries, which go up from the railhead, where the stores arrive, to the refilling-point, where for safety's sake they are transferred to horse waggons, or, in the case of the Indian troops, to the handy little iron-ribbed mule-carts. This transport officer will talk to you for hours on the comparative merits of causeway and macadam; he has studied weight-saving in harness till you would think there was not another point left unexperimented in the leather equipment of the whole army; he knows motors inside out; he will point out that one make has a chassis too long for the abrupt turning of the narrow Flemish roads, that in another there is so much underhang that there is danger of an accident if one of the wheels slips off the causeway into the mud at the side of the road; everything there is to be known about road transport apparently fills his mind to the exclusion of almost every other topic.

The same process of specialization goes on with every branch of the service. One doctor has made a name for himself in the army by discovering that the frost-bite which filled our

hospitals with hundreds of cases in the day was not frost-bite at all, but a gross and ostentatious form of the homely chilblain. He found out that it was unnecessary to force upon the unwilling Tommy the use of evil-smelling tallow for his feet, and that all that was really necessary to prevent "the crippling and the anguish" of "frost-bite" was that the men while in the trenches should take their boots off at least once in every twenty-four hours. Another doctor spends his existence in running an elaborate lice-killing machine. He is just as ready to talk of lice, their manners and customs, as the head of the Intelligence Department is to discuss the psychology of prisoners, or to tell you of some of the extraordinary channels through which information regarding the enemy's movements and intentions drifts into his hands. He will tell you that a prisoner caught hot from the battle, dazed by the din of shells, depressed by defeat, and perhaps demoralized by fear, is quite likely, in the first half-hour of his captivity, if properly handled by the linguists of the Staff, to blurt out useful information as to what is going on in the enemy's territory. After the first half-hour or so the man usually recovers his soldierly pride, his spirits are revived, he realizes that, although his share in the war is at end, his own capture and his own little misfortune are not likely to affect the issue;

and with that realization comes the dogged determination to answer no questions, however innocent they may appear to be.

The great charm of all this shop talk lies not altogether in its intrinsic interest, but partly, at any rate, in the keenness of the men who use it. The Colonel in charge of a casualty clearing hospital, when showing me over the monastery in which he had provided 900 beds, confided to me that his great ambition was to be able to install another operating-table. He deplored the fact that of his 900 beds only about ninety were in occupation at the time of my visit, and added cheerfully that he hoped they would soon be full up again. It annoyed him to know that he had in his hands a perfect instrument and organization for dealing with the products of the battlefield, and no opportunity of putting it to a triumphant test. His keenness is the keenness of every man at the front. Each man is rightly certain that the job he has been given to do could not have been done better by anybody else; but at the same time, when the machine, as has been the case during the greater part of the period of siege warfare, has been running slow, each man has endeavoured to paint the lily. This is no feeling of pride; it is just the satisfied consciousness of the good artisan that his work has been well done, of the trader that the

goods he sells are honest wares, of the servant that the service he gives is worthy of his master.

The speed of a squadron at sea is that of the slowest ship in it. The same principle applies, though perhaps not to quite the same extent, to an army. Happy is the Commander-in-Chief who knows that his troops do not consist of some extremely well-trained, courageous, and efficient soldiers and some badly disciplined shirkers, for the average of the army which is thus formed, while mathematically true, is of little use for the purposes of command. It is well to have tried and finely led troops available for the holding of positions of particular peril or responsibility; it is better that a Commander-in-Chief, when he desires to make a movement, should be able to do so without too much examination of the moral of the troops he is going to employ, but can depend upon the average quality of his men along the whole front. What applies to the men applies to their regimental officers, to the various staff officers, and to every single part of the machine they are looking after. It is, obviously, no good to have the best troops in the world gathered at one point when their services are needed at another, and, owing to faulty transport work, there are no motor-buses available to hurry them to the desired point. An army may be

a splendid fighting machine, and yet prove utterly worthless if the commissariat department fails, if its health suffers, or epidemic disease breaks out; the greatest strategist the world has ever seen would be as powerless as the prosiest armchair General if the signals department were unable to transmit his orders to the armies in the field. It is towards this all-round efficiency that the work of the General Head-Quarters Staff in Flanders is directed, and directed with such success. The spirit which fills the fighting branches of the service animates the less directly bellicose departments of the army. Every man in the field knows that the activities of every other man, whether he be Army Service, Royal Medical, or Chaplain, whether he be translating German newspapers or capturing German trenches, all help to swell the great sum total of the army's value and achievement.

II.—KEEPING FIT

There never has been such fighting, and there never has been so much comfort, or at least so much done to fight discomfort; the British Army is better fed, better equipped, and better off in health and in pocket, since the war began, than it has ever been before. The men fight like heroes,

and it is as much like heroes that they are treated as is possible in the extremely desolate country in which they are fighting the trench war. Those trenches in Flanders were the result of accident rather than of foresight, inasmuch as they were made there where the men dropped to cover in the fighting. Many of the lines were established in dry weather, in the ready-made trenches made by the dykes in the valley of the Layes River. Shortly after the construction of those trenches the river overflowed, and the dykes filled up rapidly. The discomforts of this and of the mud which resulted have become historic.

The peasants of French Flanders are not noted for the extreme cleanliness of their dwellings. There is too much coal-mining and industry mingled with the farming for the cleanliness of agriculture to prevail. The whole countryside is under intensive culture both in its industries and in its farming. It has therefore all the dirt inseparable from intensive culture and the consequent density of population. In the farm billets all does not smell of milk and butter. The custom of the country decrees that the farm buildings encircle a large dung-pit. The standard of domestic sanitation thus revealed applies also to the larger drainage of the countryside. The drainage engineers, confronted with so much to drain, appear to have abandoned the task in a far from finished condition. Ditches are filled with

evil-smelling mud covered with sinister green scum. The cleaning of the country itself was one of the first jobs the British Engineers had to take in hand before any hope of sane comfort could be entertained. Health is the chief factor of happiness, and it has been the work of the Royal Army Medical Corps which has successfully counteracted all the depressing influences of the Flanders plain, and has made the army happy and as contented with its lot as an army can be. The Royal Army Medical Corps did not always enjoy the esteem which is now gladly given to it by the troops. Its work in Flanders has obliterated almost the memory of the days when it had a bad name. The system and the men which permitted a small army, such as the British Expeditionary Force during the Ypres fighting, to handle nearly 18,000 wounded with such expedition that most of them were placed in their beds in hospital at home forty-eight hours after they had been hit, is obviously entitled to admiration.

The wounded are, however, by no means the greatest object of the doctors' activities. We have learned the lessons of the Japanese War, and in spite of our national care for the susceptibilities of the crank we have decided that prevention is better than cure; that inoculation is preferable to disease. The results of inoculation, I was informed by a Surgeon-General, are in

every way remarkable, and the health of the army is better now, after nine months of war, than it has ever been in the piping times of peace. Inoculation against typhoid, cholera, smallpox, and tetanus, are by no means the only form of preventive medicine I saw in practice at the front. The most rigid watch is kept over the water-supply and the general sanitation of the country. The cleanliness of billet towns is looked after by regular sanitation squads, whose word is law in all matters connected with the cleansing of drains, the destruction of refuse, and the general scavenging work of the army. Mobile laboratories are stationed at various points in the billeted area, from which they scour the countryside in search of germs of every sort in the drinking water, in the drains, everywhere that germs do congregate.

The greatest preventive work of the Royal Army Medical Corps, and certainly that which is most popular among the men themselves, lies at first sight rather outside the range of doctoring, and would appear to belong more rightly to the nurserymaid than to the army doctors. Shortly before joining the British forces in the field I was looking at some contemporary sketches of the Napoleonic campaigns. The veterans of the great Napoleon were a shaggy, grimy-looking band of villains, with scarce a complete or repaired uniform among a thousand men. Our

army, except when it is in the trenches, is as smart in appearance as it was when it left home. The importance of spit and polish may at times be exaggerated. It would be impossible to overestimate the value of the polish which is put upon our men by the Royal Army Medical Corps. It is due to the old spirit of pipeclay released from the trammels of tradition, and working not merely to provide the Colonel of a regiment with the æsthetic joy of beholding on parade a set of well-groomed men, but to give back to the men the pride in their personal cleanliness which they may well lose after a spell in the trenches, and to armour their spirit against depression and their bodies against disease. It would be interesting to hear the comments of a General of the old school upon the practice of giving an army hot baths once a fortnight under fire, of providing the men with convalescent homes, chiropodists, barbers, and mouth-organs. He would probably declare that an army which required all this mollycoddling was going to the dogs. It would not, however, take him long to realize that the conditions of modern warfare, the active prosecution of the campaign throughout the winter months, the strain of trench life, and the nerve-shattering effect of heavy shell-fire, would lead to tremendous wastage if every moment the men are out of the trenches were not given up to restoring what the trench has deteriorated. It is in this

work of restoration that the greatest preventive activity of the army doctors has been exerted.

In this the doctors have, of course, had on their side the fact that for many months the army has been more or less stationary. They have had the time to utilize to the full all the resources of the country, and, naturally, much more can be done in this direction now than may be possible later on.

The most complete example of what their organization and method can accomplish is perhaps to be found at No. 4 Stationary Hospital, which has become a sort of Field Palace Hotel. There an enthusiast has made a hospital of a type entirely new in war. Towards the end of November a large single-storied jute factory, with a floor space measuring 150 yards by 75 yards, was handed over to him in which to carry out his ideas as to the new type of hospital required for the new type of warfare. It was an ordinary red-brick factory, well lit by a glass roof, heated by steam, and fitted with electric light. The concrete of its floor space was covered with heavy machinery. It was a most unromantic and prosaic building. To-day it has become a rest-home capable of accommodating 1,000 exhausted trench fighters at a time, and of turning them out again ready for anything. Since December, when it first opened its doors, up till the beginning of March, 5,798 soldiers had

passed through it, suffering from minor disease, pneumonia, bronchitis, bad feet, or just exhaustion, of whom no less than 2,682 have been returned to the firing line after less than a fortnight's absence. Canvas sheets have curtained the floor space into dormitories, reading-room, dining-hall. In the outhouses of the factory bathrooms have been established, and machinery for thorough disinfection of all the men's clothing has been installed. There is a tailor's shop, where repairs are carried out. Among the inmates, barbers have been found to clip the heads and the beards resulting from a spell in the trenches. A skilled chiropodist, who for some reason had enlisted in the army before the war broke out, and who was brought to the hospital as a patient, now remains there, doing much more useful work with his knives and his scissors on the feet of his compatriots than he would be able to accomplish with his bayonet in the bodies of the enemy, while as he pares away at a corn or puts an ingrowing toenail to rights he gives Tommy a little course on foot-care which will serve him in good stead when he gets back to his regiment. There is a chapel, also formed by these canvas screens, which is used by all denominations in turn, and is open all day to any of the men who wish to go to it. Here in the bright wards of the field rest-home the R.A.M.C. is doing preventive work of a kind

that was never before attempted; for they are getting hold of men, some of whom perhaps, in other wars, would have remained on with their regiments until they had gone seriously sick, giving them a fortnight's complete rest, splendid attention, the most generous and varied diet, building them up in so thorough a manner that they can return to the trenches fairly confident that, whatever else may happen to them, they are not likely to suffer again in general health. Others of the men treated there would under the old system have been evacuated down to the base, and probably sent over to England and lost to the army for months.

An instance of preventive work at an earlier stage is to be seen in the baths which have been provided for the men as they come out of the trenches, in areas some of which are actually under shell-fire. For many of these also the jute industry has provided homes. It is an object-lesson in efficiency to watch the different stages of the men's progress from mud-caked figures until they become once more the smart soldiers of the recruiting posters. They undress in a room which is isolated from the rest of the establishment, and, leaving their clothes behind them, they dash into the factory, to a platform; then, with many manifestations of delight, fourteen at a time they plunge into the huge bleaching vats, which are filling up with hot

water. After a few minutes of energetic lathering, "the squirmy change from hot to cold" drives them out of the baths to the drying-mats, where, with much rubbing and some Swedish exercise, they regain the elasticity of limb lost in the trenches. Then they file through the store-room, receiving an equipment which has been cleansed from top to bottom.

Their discarded clothes meanwhile have been going through a process of a much more drastic nature. They have been put through the great Thresh disinfecting machine. In an adjoining room in the factory some hundred Belgian refugee women have been washing their underclothing with every type of improved laundry apparatus. The clothes then are passed into the drying-rooms, and finally, before going into store for reissue, the seams of the coats, the pleats of the kilts, have been searched in the detective department, in case any abnormally resisting vermin may have managed to survive the series of shocks administered to it. This process of cleansing the troops has almost kept alive the industrial aspect of the zone of country behind our lines exposed to German shell-fire. One of the most curious sights to be seen in the field, one of the most curious sounds to be heard, is the sight of long lines of factory girls, used to handling jute, waiting outside the factory door for the beginning of their spell of duty in cleaning

the British soldier—is the sound of the factory whistle calling them to this work. This enterprise saves many a man from swelling the numbers who go farther back to the field rest-home, just as the field rest-home economizes the numbers which have to be evacuated down to the base. The two institutions form part of a comprehensive, business-like, and successful endeavour to rid war of one of its worst terrors; to free a General from one of the biggest hindrances upon his action, by reducing as much as possible the minor ailments both of body and spirit, which, if unchecked, work more havoc in the efficiency and strength of an army in the field than a small epidemic. It seems quite superfluous to state that the better an army is looked after, the more results you will get from it; but never before has the importance of caring for every single detail of the men's bodily comfort been so splendidly recognized in practice in the field. Cure is good, but prevention is better, and the doctor has for ever abandoned the idea that he need only concern himself about the sick and the wounded. In many ways his first attentions go to the healthy.

In war there must always be waste or want. It is beyond the power of the greatest organizing genius to calculate with absolute safety the needs of an army in the field either in food or in ammunition. This war is being run on the

principle of generosity. The man who is employed in clerical work in the army, or whose only exercise, perhaps, is driving a motor-lorry about the countryside, is unable to get through his army rations every day; but it is infinitely better that there should be waste with the rations of the few than want with the rations of the many. The food of the army is based upon the conclusions of a committee, upon which sat several eminent scientists. Its various qualities have been attested in every possible way, and the different ingredients, in the opinion of that committee, form the most desirable combination of heat-, energy-, and pugnacity-producing qualities. So that he may fight at his best, a British soldier is called upon to consume the following rations every day:

- 1¼ pounds of fresh meat, or 1 pound preserved.
- 1¼ pounds of bread.
- 4 ounces of bacon.
- 3 ounces of cheese.
- ½ pound of fresh vegetables or 2 ounces of peas, beans, dried onions, or dried potatoes.
- ⅝ ounce of tea.
- ¼ pound of jam.
- 3 ounces of sugar.
- ½ ounce of salt.

$\frac{1}{20}$ ounce of mustard.
$\frac{1}{36}$ ounce of pepper.
He also gets 2 ounces of tobacco or cigarettes and 1 box of matches a week, and 2 ounces of butter twice a week.

In the trenches there are additions even to this menu. They get 2 ounces of pea soup twice a week, the tea ration is increased to $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce, the sugar ration to $3\frac{3}{4}$ ounces, and they get $\frac{1}{2}$ gill of rum if the Brigadier or Divisional Commander thinks fit. Although Tommy is inclined to grumble at the fact that he gets too much plum and apple jam, even the most confirmed army grouser is unable to declare that he does not get enough to eat, nor is he able, save perhaps in very rare instances, to criticize the quality of the food. Officers and men have the same type of food. There is no better. The meat for the English Army is all frozen, and the only slaughtering done within our lines is that of the meat for the Indians, who have their special slaughterers down at railhead, so as to be certain that the animals have been killed in full accordance with the caste ritual required. The Indians, like our own men, are better fed than they are at home. Their diet naturally presented special difficulties. Their native flour for their chupatties has to be brought from the East. Some

cannot eat beef for religious reasons, and have to be provided with goats. They have taken very kindly to jam, which is not in their rations at home, and which some of the regiments had not tasted before their arrival in Europe. In some cases the regimental officers had to reassure them that there was nothing in the composition or manufacture of the jam that would offend their religious susceptibilities, and now the Indian, with the Oriental love of sweet things, has become an admirer even of plum and apple.

III.—IN TRENCH AND WOOD

Flatness and mud are the two great obstacles to fighting in Flanders. The first has obvious disadvantages, for except at one or two rare points it is impossible to gain even a restricted view over the country. Nowhere in Flanders has a General an observation-station from which he can command a view over the entire length of the front, as is the case upon the Aisne. Nowhere can the artillery commander see with his own eyes the effect of his battery's fire. For all this information they are forced to rely upon the observation of others. For trench work, of course, the drawback is not very great, for in the trenches the advanced artillery observation officer is able to report with the greatest

accuracy the ranging of the guns. He is in constant telephonic communication with his battery, and things go so quickly that, if he reports the presence of a convoy of motor-cars moving across Section AZ 12 23 of the map, before the convoy has passed over the intersecting lines thus indicated the guns are already at work upon it. For results well to the rear of the enemy's trench line the artillery are dependent entirely upon their airmen's observations. The aeroplane, indeed, has to supply the elevation which Nature has not furnished. Admirable as has been the work done by the air service, it cannot entirely make good the natural deficiencies of the country. This unrelieved flatness makes a tour along the trench lines an absolute necessity if any notion is to be gained of the nature of the defence lines.

Such a visit to the actual front is also necessary if an adequate idea of what mud can be is to be formed. The roads within the transport area have had placed upon them since the beginning of the siege war a strain which no roads in the world could stand. In spite of the constant road-mending activity of the Engineers, they have in many places been churned into mud; but the mud of the roads is as nothing compared with the mud of the fields and the trenches, which can never be adequately sung. The volumes of soldierly expletive with regard

to it which have appeared in soldiers' letters from the front fail to do it justice; the education in profanity which our army received in Flanders in its previous campaign was not sufficiently comprehensive. The mud here is not just one of the incidents of the countryside, it is the countryside itself; it is not just one of many factors in the soldier's daily life, it is almost the basis of his existence. It has become in Flanders as decisive a strategic value as the winter in Russia. Marshal Mud has proved himself, indeed, to be an even doughtier fighter than Generals Janvier and Février. To those who are impatient of delay, to those who picture a charge upon a trench as being formed by a wavering line of figures springing alertly from their own trenches and racing hunched up across the intervening field, all that has been said about mud has not said half there was to say. In the fields the harrow strikes water, and ground which has been shelled and fought over for months becomes nothing better than a mire. To walk a hundred yards over a Flemish potato-field represents more physical effort than a five-mile tramp along an English country road. Progress has none of the swing of movement about it. Your one foot sinks down into the clinging clay, and you have to use it and the firmness with which it is embedded as a leverage point with which to extricate your other foot.

But this is only the mud you find upon the fields. It conveys but a very faint impression of the glutinous substance which has spread like lava over the whole front trench lines and the country immediately behind them. The trench, according to the diagrams of military handbooks, is a neat, mathematical affair, with its sides and bottom apparently constructed with the aid of the plumb line and the levelling board. In the military handbooks it is always beautifully drained. Its parapet is covered with nice velvety grass. Outside the military handbooks the trench is not at all like this. Indeed, the trench as it is in Flanders to-day seems likely to become a more powerful agent in the propaganda of peace than the millions of Carnegie and the peace-making machinery of The Hague. It is not the exhilaration of the fight, it is not the long fatigue of the march, the possibility of death or wounds, but the terrible total of dirt and discomfort which the trench has produced, that has given to this war its special character of misery.

The approach to all trenches is impressive. As you work your way up towards them from head-quarters, you leave the comforts and normality of ordinary life behind you, and pass through villages whose streets are busy with soldiers going about their ordinary affairs—washing, shaving, moving stores, mounting

guard, playing with Flemish children; you go along roads heavy with the motor transport, buzzing with despatch riders, ambulances, Staff motor-cars; and then, towards dusk, you enter the zone where horse transport has taken the place of the motor, where you meet companies falling in, the men wearing their trench equipment—their waders, their gumboots, with their packs increased by the weight of pick and shovel; finally you come to the grey empty road. The trenches I visited in the British lines were neither good nor bad. The road which led to them was like all the roads which lead to trenches. In the dusk it looked as though it led nowhere. It seemed as though in the billets behind we had left the last of mankind, that out there in front of us in the night there was nothing but mud and emptiness, filled with strange rumblings, sharp staccato knockings, following so fast one upon the other as to merge into a chaplet of sound. The order to split up into small detachments as we went along the road gave a significance to the growing noises, which was impressively strengthened by the passing of a stretcher-bearer party going back with wounded, carried shoulder-high, to the hospital. There was no moon, and as the night settled down the road upon which we were trudging, the fields through which it passed, the horizon beyond, all became part of it,

through which high above sped the fiery messages of rockets, out of which glanced every now and then the watery eye of a searchlight. Suddenly from the dark came the challenge of a sentry, and as he stepped aside the light of a brazier showed the entrance to the trench.

We had struck straight into the trench, and were spared the tedious tortuous approach down a zigzag communication. My first step landed me with one leg up to the knee in mud. I put out my hand and leant against the face of the trench, and extricated it, and, guided by the flash of an electric torch, started along the wooden tight-rope which zigzags in different forms for nearly 500 miles at the bottom of the trenches on the western front. Sometimes it is composed of huge armfuls of brushwood or of twig pavement. In this particular trench it was the top plank of a large rectangular box, the bottom plank of which rested some 3 feet below the surface of the mud on the top of a similar box, or it may be of several similar boxes, which had been sucked down by the voracious mud. It takes some little time to get your trench legs. Your feet become as erratic as the wheels of a motor-bicycle upon a grease-covered causeway. Every now and again a sideslip lands you—or launches you—in the mud, where the planking is a little out of repair, or at the corners, as it follows the

perpetual zigzag of the line. After about ten minutes you get accustomed to the going, and reconciled to the fact that mud really does not matter. Then you are at leisure to take stock of your surroundings—to gain some idea of the labour and materials which have gone to their making. The tribes of Israel, the great workers of the Pharaohs, could not have accomplished more, for, great though may be the labour of digging a ditch some 6 feet deep for 500 miles, the initial work of excavation is but a fleabite compared with the daily task of repair and improvement.

The mud has to be fed day by day on a wonderfully assorted diet of rabbit wire-netting and hurdles, which serve to keep the walls of the trench from the effects of gradual disintegration. Vast quantities of brushwood and timber are used in keeping the men out of the mud, and in the construction of dugouts and splinter-proof shields overhead. Millions of sacks have been thrown into the mud ditches. The damp earth is continually crumbling away, breaking off into miniature landslides, and the damage has to be made good with sandbags. The trench every now and again is subjected to bombardment, and the gaps in the defences of the parapet have to be repaired, the security of the narrow cut restored, the protection of the traverses made good again. Forests have been thinned down to

provide the stumpy supports for the wire entanglements in front of the trench line. The wire and the supports themselves require constant renewal. Machine-gun or, indeed, sustained rifle fire will destroy the efficacy of the wire as an obstacle. The wire severed by bullets may serve to trip a man or two here and there, but unless it is very solidly entwined around its wooden supports, and unless the damage done to these by shell-fire, bombs, or trench mortars, is constantly repaired, the wire will offer but a slender barrier to a hostile rush. The trench has to be drained; it has to be pumped if the mud and the water are to be kept down at all; when they win the upper hand, a new line has to be constructed. There is the continual war of mine and counter-mine. Much of this work of repair is done during the day, with the materials brought up under cover of the previous night, for in the trenches there is not much room for the storage of reserve supplies. Some of it has to be done in the dark, and perilous work it is repairing wire in the No Man's Land between trenches, when the chance wanderings of the searchlight may reveal the men to the enemy a couple of hundred yards away, and lead to their being pinned down to the mud while the machine-gun sweeps with its leaden scythe the air above their heads.

This is the domestic side of trench life. By these means the men keep their line strong and

habitable. It is the "comfort" department of the trenches.

In the fighting there are strange new devices; old tricks have been revived. There in the trench line the inventors' devices are put to the last crucial test. Here the chemists' formulæ are converted into casualty lists. In many respects this modern war has reverted to almost forgotten weapons, the tradition of which only lingered in the names of some of our regiments. Thus, the Bombardiers, the Grenadiers, have come into their own again. Artillery is at work in the trenches beside which the first gun fired in France would appear a finished scientific instrument; there are also guns whose working would appear to the first artillerymen of history to be due to nothing short of magic, for they are noiseless, and with compressed air they fling into the air a flying mine, a cylindrical aerial torpedo which, owing to the low velocity at which it leaves the gun, turns and twists in the most drunken manner in the air before bursting with the force of some 125 pounds of high explosives on the trench parapet, or, as is perhaps more frequently the case, in front of it or beyond it. There are, to compare with these terrifying engines of German invention, the little home-made mortars which any regiment is capable of manufacturing for itself, apparently, out of any sort of iron tubing that may be handy. The French have

been using catapults of the schoolboy variety for bomb-throwing, and have done so with good effect. Harpoons are employed for ripping up the enemy's wire. You hurl your harpoon well over the wire, and, by pulling and jerking with a will at the rope or the wire to which it is attached, you can tear away, or at any rate weaken, the obstacle of the entanglement.

The strangest figures of the war are the bombers. The bombs they throw are attached to a stick about 1½ feet long, around which floats a skirt of white streamers, the mission of which is to restore the direction of the bomb when thrown, and bring it down head foremost on the percussion cap. The bombers carry their bombs on a belt round their waists, and the falling cascade of white ribbons gives them a grotesque appearance, which does not seem to belong to this world, but to be that of some strange fighter of the future. The task of these men is one requiring the greatest bravery. In an attack upon a trench, when the bomber has reached the enemy's wire, he has to raise himself sufficiently to get the throwing purchase required to cast his bombs over the enemy's trench parapet. To do so he has to expose himself to the full view of the trench occupants, and to as deadly a fire as those occupants, shaken by attack, are able to direct upon him. Once a portion of the trench lines has been rushed, the bomb-throwers have

to set to work to assist in dislodging the enemy from the shelter of the traverses on either side of the captured section, and in this part of the business he frequently runs into the enemy's bomb-thrower. Then from the clouds of green smoke streaked with shrapnel, and the flying clods of earth lined with the angry flash of rifles, the side which has the best bombers will emerge as the winners of the battle. If the attack has been successful, the bombers then proceed to cover by their activity the work of blocking up the enemy's communication trench, and the transference of the enemy's parapet from one side of the trench to the other.

In this work with high explosives the Germans started ahead of the Allies. For a time their trench artillery, their bombs, their mines, were alone in the field. Now we have caught up with them, and are rapidly establishing our ascendancy in this as in the other departments of warfare. The trench I have described and the activities I have detailed are typical of those along nearly the whole of our line. In the crude light of the day the trench is as unlovely a spot as the prospect which it commands is usually uninteresting. Through the steel-screened loophole there is not much to be seen. The country is completely empty. Away on the horizon there is perhaps a battered belfry; a line of poplars marks a canal in the middle

distance, with the zigzag German parapet, whose outlines fade into a mist of wire entanglement. The intervening ground more often than not is a maze of old, abandoned, and shell-tumbled trench burrowings. Here and there at some points of the front the dull foreground of the picture is lined with the dead, who mark where they fell the skirmishing formation in which they attacked many months before. The ground is pitted with shell craters, laboured deeply with every form of high explosive, and terrible in its desolation and upheaval. Night, however, shrouds all this horror.

In the trenches the unlovely drab of the clay and mud glows with the warm reflection of the trench brazier. From the dugouts there comes the cheerful, homely glow of candlelight, a pleasant smell of heating soup or infusing tea, in the midst of which the bronzed or ruddy faces of our Tommies shine with health. Those on duty stand immobile at their firing stations peering out towards the enemy's line for any indication of movement, on the lookout for the revealing flash of the rifle which will betray the whereabouts of a sniper, very statuesque and black against the sky. To our right and to our left the machine-guns are chattering away, warming up to a dispute which may bring in a peremptory remark or two from a deeper-voiced gun. Every now and again there are the crack and the whistle

of the rifle, in the desultory manner which makes you wonder if you are not out on the Stickledown watching the last stages of the King's Prize. Right along the line the heavens are blazing with fireworks, some conveying with their different hues messages to the rear, most of them bursting with the white brilliance of magnesium over our lines. High they burst, and slowly the light, after hanging for a while in the sky, floats down to earth, throwing everything upon it into dark relief. It is well to stand still when you are caught full in this glare, for if motionless you may pass as a tree-stump to the watchful eyes away over there, and if you do not you may add to the hospital admissions of the day.

The trench is the slum, and Plug Street is the country. Plug Street is the name given by the army to the little wooded portion of our front which on the map is called Ploogsteert Wood. There Tommy enjoys himself after a spell in the trenches with almost as much abandonment as the slum child out on a Fresh Air Holiday. There, instead of being cooped up in the mud between two walls of clay and sandbags, a man can move about, when necessary, at any rate screened from view. It is true that the springy earth of the self-respecting wood has been conquered by the all-pervading mud, but there are trees and birds, and freedom to enjoy the daylight and the very

occasional watery glances of the sun. It is the one break in the monotony of the trench line, and it is famous throughout the British lines in Flanders. There the British soldier has installed himself so comfortably in spite of the mud, and has given to his dugouts and bomb-proof dwellings such an air of solidity, that it looks almost as though he intended to remain there permanently. He will, however, certainly know less comfortable quarters before the campaign is ended. In the meantime what his cheery sense of improvisation can do to create an atmosphere of home from home has been carried out in this little marshy stretch of wood. Here, as along the rest of the line, the first preoccupation of the men was to cling on grimly to what they had got. A line of trenches, now filled to the brim with water, cuts a canal at some little distance from the eastern edge of the wood, and marks the line where Tommy held on desperately to what he had got in the first early weeks of the winter. Since then he has pushed forward to such purpose that the wood is entirely in British hands ; he has erected so strong a defence of breastworks that he has been able to set about the second task of all soldiers at the front, that of lifting himself above the mud-level. Here in Plug Street it has been a comparatively easy matter. Protected by the veil of the trees, the men have been able to work even in the daylight hours. Their supplies

and material have reached them without any difficulty, and they have been able to see what they were about. You will meet with many kinds of roads in Flanders to-day, and Plug Street contains an unusually varied collection of improvised highways. There is the brick path, built on the soggy meadowland leading to the wood, where the ground is a little firmer than it is under the trees ; there is the brushwood road, formed simply by huge bundles of twigs and brushwood ; there is the plank pavement ; and there is the corduroy. Plug Street once had roads of its own ; these are now nothing better than mud canals of so absorbent a nature that only the lightest sort of structure could be placed upon them without danger of its disappearing after a week or so. It is therefore the corduroy road which is the most in favour in Plug Street. Light though it is, even it is constantly being trodden down into the mud, and is in constant need of renewal. Its construction is primitive.

The men, who since their sojourn in this spot have become expert woodmen, are adepts at this. Twigs and branches are chopped to lengths of about a yard, and nailed on to parallel saplings about three-quarters of a yard apart ; the resulting product is laid down over the mud, and resembles in appearance the twig bridges which are slung across the gorges of Burmah and the North-East Frontier of India.

The network of roads thus formed has been converted into a map of Central London by the use, without too much attention to geography, of familiar street names. Thus, although the Haymarket runs into Piccadilly Circus, at Piccadilly Circus branch off, not only Regent Street, but an intrusive Fleet Street as well. There are one or two names of purely local origin, for Plug Street has traditions of its own. There are Spy Corner, Essex Farm, Dead Horse Corner, and the Moated Farm. The spirit shown by the christening of these various avenues is further revealed in the house pride with which all the men look after their dugouts. At some spots, if the names neatly inscribed on wooden labels were taken as the only indication, the passer-by might imagine himself to be in those portions of Suburbia where the humblest dwelling becomes The Lodge, the most cedarless domain Mount Lebanon.

The men's humour peeps out in numberless ways. The orderly-room bears over its lintel not only the words "Palais de Justice," but also the Latin expression of the orderly officer's determination to do justice even if the bomb-proof roof does fall in. The villas have a great many of the appurtenances of villas. Before nearly all of them there is a boot-scraper, made of the side of a corned-beef can nailed to timber posts. The men can be seen gardening after their day's work, planting primroses over the roof of their bomb-

shelters, just as the city worker of villadom plants out pansies in the front garden. There is a little bridge in the evening, and, as befits an imitation of Suburbia, music all day long. The men whistle and sing as they chop away at the corduroy, and one section at any rate possesses quite a good saucepan and mouth-organ orchestra. Sentimental Tommy, if given a little time for study, would, I think, manage to produce sentimental melody out of a motor klaxon. In the saucepan and the mouth-organ he has found an admirable combination for the utterance of all the inmost yearnings of his soul. A very jolly group they looked, fooling away the time until the bacon that was sizzling over the wood fire round which they sat was done to a nice crisp brown.

At first sight Plug Street looks almost as though some kindly General had invited a battalion or so of his old regiment down to his estate for a jolly good picnic. In Plug Street there has been a little pheasant-shooting! The trim and beautifully kept regimental cemeteries in clearings in the wood are reminders that there has been shooting of a graver nature; the occasional whistle of an "over," the flying white of a splinter as a bullet whacks into a tree, that the German frontier is nearer the Piccadilly in Plug Street than it is to the Piccadilly of London. When you leave the Haymarket behind, and have crossed over Hunter Avenue, the wood

becomes very still. Through the tree-trunks you see a line of peculiar mounds, which, as you get nearer, resolve themselves into walls of sandbags, streets of dugouts and shelters. Farther back you may, at your own risk, take certain liberties, but here among the sandbags it is well to be circumspect. You have left the suburbs behind, and have got to business.

At the sandbag parapet there stand the watchers, some gazing with their eyes on a level with the top of the parapet, others peering into the trench periscope, which lifts its mirror above their heads and shows the reflection of a maze of forest undergrowth ahead, heavy thickets of bramble and of briar, and beyond them the ruins of one or two red-roofed Flemish houses. The fantastic lavishness of the barbed wire which festoons the picture is the origin of the name given to this portion of the enemy's front. There in their "Birdcage" the enemy sings and whistles as cheerfully as any canary; for whatever may be true as to the depression of the Germans at other points along the front, there has been no very great sign of sorrow among those who are opposed to our own troops.

IV.—THE OLD MEN AND THE NEW

Such, in the trench, upon the plain, and behind the breastwork of the wood, are the life and conditions of our men. One might be pardoned for imagining that it is a life which would take the polish off the brightest metal. The topic was discussed by the Colonel as we sat in the best parlour of the Flemish farm which formed his head-quarters, drinking coffee after lunch. "It's difficult to know. Must say my own men wear well. Of course, we're a good lot anyhow" (all regiments are good lots to their Colonels), "but we don't know how their shooting is getting along. There's no room in this country to try them out, either, and they're getting no marching to do at all worth speaking about. It would take a harder man than I to turn my men out for a long march after a spell of trench work. Besides, you'd choke the roads up, and they have plenty to carry with the transport as it is. Of course, even the best troops in the world (no need to mention the regiment) will get trench-tired if they get too much of it, but I must say our men wear well."

Then the talk glided off to the necessity of forming a Lowland Association in Scotland which would serve to correct the impression that Highlanders (and particularly Highland regiments) were the only real Scotsmen.

It is recognized by all that special effort is required if the effects of the trench are to be combated. The cavalry feel the matter most. Our cavalry are paying the price of their own excellence. In the early part of the war they showed their superiority over the enemy in the most decisive fashion. The German cavalry may be very bold and skilfully used when it is a question of scaring a countryside with its ubiquity, but with British cavalry they never once stopped to argue matters. When called upon during the trench period of war, our cavalry adapted itself in a wonderful way to trench conditions. All cavalrymen have a natural distaste for infantry work, and when that infantry work leads them to the trenches in a waterlogged and heavily enclosed country their fate is indeed hard. I had the pleasure of visiting one of our crack cavalry regiments in its billets, where it had arrived the day before from a spell in the trenches. The straggling street of the village was busy with men at work on their horses, for when a regiment of cavalry goes off to trench duty it leaves behind it to look after the horses a number of men well below the average, and the first desire of the Colonel is always to get his horses fit again; for all cavalrymen are born optimists, and awake every day with the prayer in their hearts, if not on their lips, that this day they may have a dart at the enemy. If hard

work and devotion to animals can do it, the day when it does come will find the horses fit for anything that may be asked of them. What will be asked of them no man can tell. There are some who incline to the belief that the cavalry may have to see the war through to the end in the mud of trenches in Flanders or elsewhere; that, of the many weapons with which they are now equipped, the sword alone will never be used. The cavalryman dreams of the day when he will get a dash "with clanking bit and bridle-bar," and while he does his bit in the trenches as well as the infantry, while he manufactures trench artillery and practises bombing, he spends all his spare time at the agreeable task of keeping fit for the special work that is his. I was able to judge of the success with which this task has been accomplished both by the British and by the Indian cavalry.

Standing at a cross-road, I saw a division of Indian cavalry go past on a route march. It was a superb spectacle. The Indian has not taken unkindly to the fighting in Flanders. It is strange, no doubt, for them to have to face the high-explosive shells, to have to delve down into the earth, to lie crouching in the clay, but it is a strangeness which they have begun to understand. They see the reason for many things that were lost to them before, and appreciate that this, at any rate, is a fight worth taking

part in; and though they form but a small part of the British Army in Flanders, the experiment made in bringing them to Europe has been justified. They suffer but little from home-sickness, and get on in the most admirable manner with the inhabitants. The men are billeted in the barns and farm buildings, and there in straw litters they have succeeded in making themselves extremely comfortable. In their billets you will find them hard at work, learning the new, and polishing up the old, lessons of war. They have fought extremely well in very trying circumstances, and their success at Neuve Chapelle is a proof of their efficiency, and of their ability to stand the strain even of the heaviest form of bombardment. The cavalry of the Indian Army have the same prayer as their comrades of the British Army.

In that prayer there are now joining the voices of many new accents, for the infantry is as anxious to get a move on as the cavalry, and the new troops which have gone out to Flanders since the beginning of the year are full of the ardour and impatience of the young. Still, a little waiting and a little more learning will do them no harm. Of the Territorials you will hear nothing but praise from the general officers under whose notice they have come. Some battalions, of course, are better than

others. Some are as good as any regular regiment, and the worst are good and capable of improvement. They are drawn from classes of men very different from those who join the regular army, and are, on the whole, above the intelligence level of the regular private. By the mere fact that in time of peace they have taken the trouble to go into regular training, and have devoted what holiday they got to the learning of war, they have shown that they had a higher conception than many of their friends of a man's duty to the State. This gives them a keenness and a desire to learn which the old stager in the army, remembering the days of his own training as a recruit, marvels at and respects. The regular private welcomes the Territorial as one would a friend who, in a moment of crisis, came to one's side and offered to help you through. The regular officer has none of the amused tolerance for his brother of the Territorials which used to be lavished upon the Volunteer officer by *Mr. Punch.*

The officer's trade is naturally a difficult one to learn as a hobby. The Territorial officer has no long line of tradition behind him. He does not as a rule belong to a family with a long connection with the service, and, however successful he may be as a business or professional man, the habits of the counting-house or the Bar do not of necessity teach him that habit

of command which betrays his complete confidence in himself and in those underneath him, and which in turn breeds the confidence of the men in their leaders, and will carry them through anything at the order.

"The officers," said one General to me, "have in some cases the air of not knowing how good they are. They're a bit afraid of themselves. They've no need to be, and they'll soon get over the habit of excessive modesty." The first Territorials went out in a hurry. They were the regiments which everybody knows and hears about—the London Scottish, the Queen's Westminsters, the Artists, the H.A.C. They were sent into the fighting line at a time when many matters were in doubt, and they emerged from their first ordeals with colours flying. Since then they have been joined in the field by many Territorial regiments who possess no special fame in the Press. The days of stress are over, for the time being at any rate, and now Territorials are taking their place in the army as divisions. It is recognized that there is not at present any necessity to throw these Territorial divisions straight into the trenches, and the comparative quiet of the front is being utilized to accustom both officers and men gradually to the conditions of active service. The officers are detailed off for a spell of duty in the trenches, and shown the ropes by brothers in the regulars,

and so on. The work already done by the Territorials is an earnest of what is to come. The shooting of those regiments which have been in the trenches has shown a remarkable level of excellence. In some places where the regulars had been unable to establish the ascendancy of their fire (anglice: where a German might put his head above the trench occasionally without being killed, but where an Englishman was risking more in the same adventure), the Territorial has put an end to enemy sniping, and has been able to indulge in some very pretty practice on his own. The quality of the men may be judged from the fact that it has been decided to turn the whole of the Artists into an officers' training regiment, and the success of that scheme has justified itself already by the fact that less than 10 per cent. of the men who have been granted commissions from this school of officers have failed to meet all the demands made of them. The new arrivals in Flanders, whether they be Territorials, men of the new army, or colonials, will find only one standard of criticism applied to them. The regular realizes, as perhaps no one else can so fully, all that the men who have come and are coming out have sacrificed, and only the standard of efficiency will be applied to them. There is no jealousy in our army, whether it be among Generals, staff officers, regimental officers, regiments, regulars, Terri-

torials, or colonials. They are all fighting for the same cause, and with the same determination to succeed.

V.—THE AEROPLANE

"If anyone had told me that so many of my friends would be alive after six months of it, I shouldn't have believed him. With the ordinary flying risk in time of peace, it seemed a certainty that the Flying Corps would furnish the largest casualty list. But it isn't so. We started off badly by losing two men on the advance from Amiens before the fighting had begun, but since then the luck has been so consistently good that the air is the safest bit of Flanders to-day." Thus spoke a member of the Royal Flying Corps, one of whose officers had but shortly before applied to be sent back to his line regiment "because it doesn't seem the game to be enjoying one's self in complete safety up in the air, having a jolly good time, with all the other chaps having a devil of a go in the trenches." On the way up to the flying-ground I had been shown one or two things which explained the miracle of this comparative freedom from accident, and the things I had seen impressed upon me this fact: that through war flying has passed from the groping, experimental

stage, in which each flight was more or less of an adventure, to the state when it will shortly be as safe and as ordinary as the motor-car. It has needed the imperative necessity of war to give to the study of flight and the organization of machines the money and talent demanded.

Each army aeroplane which you see skimming with as little apparent effort as the swallow in its flight has at its back tons of organization and method. It is the effort in the workshops and storerooms at the flying head-quarters which serves just as much as the air and the engine to keep the machine afloat in the sky. It is the store of spare parts of every imaginable nature to keep the aeroplane fleet constantly renewed which prevents the dangerous straining of a weakened strut, the fraying of a wire. The Air Corps provides, indeed, a very compact example of the whole internal economy of the army. They have their special stores of petrol, of canvas, of specially seasoned timber for repairs, of ammunition, and of food; they have their own signals department, where messages are taken in. They have their artillery work, the seeking out and notification of the hostile batteries. They have their own fighting to do, not only with machine-gun and revolver against hostile aircraft, but also with bomb and steel dart against gun emplacements, strategic points such as railway-stations, bridges, lock-gates, upon observation points used

by the enemy for artillery control, upon buildings used by head-quarters—in fact, upon any point the destruction of which is likely to inconvenience the enemy in any way whatever —always excepting buildings used as hospitals. In the bathing establishments there are men who are earning a war medal, who are helping to win the war, just as directly as the men in the trenches, who spend their time in hunting for lice, the great breeders of disease. In the aeroplane workshops there are men winning the medal with sewing-machines and the needle. There is a tailor's squad stitching away at aeroplane wings, strengthening here, repairing there.

In another shop the plane and spokeshave are the instruments of war. There on the carpenter's bench are the delicate damaged bones of the flying machine, the work of a German bullet being repaired. In yet another room the wings of the machine lean against the walls, newly covered with strengthening solution, and giving to the shed the appearance of a theatrical scenery store, an appearance which is emphasized by the fact that in time of peace the building serves as some sort of parish hall, and is decorated with the gaudy plaster statues of village piety. Overhead, garlands of brightly coloured paper strung on wires through the air mingle with ingenious ventilating chimneys

designed to carry off the liverish fumes of the strengthening solution on the aeroplane wings. On the walls there are notices of village festivities side by side with stern prohibitions as to smoking or eating in the workshop, a juxtaposition which reminds one that here, in spite of the completeness of the Air Corps installation, nearly everything is improvised. Here science is occasionally put to rude tests and strange shifts. "It's wonderful what you can do after a bit with any old scrap of copper or iron you happen to have handy," remarked the bespectacled khaki expert, adding, "Why, I can even get distilled water out of an old petrol can now!"

It is all this specialized work on the ground which keeps the airman up in the air with but few mishaps of an accidental character, and enables him to act as the eye of the army. In this mission our Army Air Service has performed wonders—much more, may it be said, than was ever expected of it. We have all been told of the performances and exploits of the naval airmen, whose special qualities as seamen, we had said to ourselves, fitted them in a peculiar degree for the work of the air. The army airman, although he may not have been entrusted with the execution of special raids along the coast, the destruction of submarines, of airship sheds in inland German towns, has done con-

sistently well. His work goes on day after day. He is always aloft in one of the two zones into which the air in Flanders may be divided. He is either patrolling the strategic area some thirty miles behind the enemy's trench line, in search of signs which will indicate some large movement of troops with their parks of transport and supply, or he is hovering over the tactical area ten miles to the rear of the Germans, on the lookout for the purely tactical surprise, and in the endeavour to spot the enemy's artillery. In this area and above the enemy's trench line he works in the closest co-operation with his own artillery.

Much has been said about the arrival of the aeroplane having altered the conditions of war completely. It has been declared in haste that the General of genius defined by Wellington as being the man who could know what was going on on the other side of the hill had no longer any opportunity of displaying his instinctive talent; that, all things being known to both sides, war simply became a matter of big battalions, of sticking power and shells; and that in the use of those materials genius could not play as decisive a rôle as organization. Much of this may be true, but from other causes. Most of the British Generals with whom I discussed this question believed that there was but little change in the essentials of war, and that good generalship was

still as important a factor of success as before the arrival of the air machine ; that surprise—at any rate tactical surprise—was still a frequent possibility.

VI.—THE MOTOR

Just as all new weapons of offence have produced a corresponding weapon or armour of defence, so the discovering instruments of war have spurred the mind to effective countermeasures of concealment. The aeroplane, if it desires to fly in comparative safety, has to keep at a height from which it is by no means able to discern everything upon the countryside beneath, even when there has been no attempt at concealment. The discovery of a battery of artillery is an extremely difficult matter. All armies have become adept in hiding them away and in concealing the flash of the big guns. You can leave a long column of transport drawn up underneath the trees along a roadside quite confident that only an extremely bad bit of luck will reveal it to the enemy. When a hostile aircraft is passing over a battery, any men who may be in the neighbourhood of the guns stand as still as statues till the eye has passed, and a man standing still is a very small thing to look down on from a few thousand feet. The aeroplane can, of course, report large collections of rolling stock, or

important movements of troops, when those are visible by day. It is, however, quite powerless as a scout by night, and it is by night that works the great obstacle to the complete success of the aeroplane, that great instrument of surprise, the petrol-driven motor.

The British aeroplanes received the highest praise for their reconnaissance work just prior to the Battle of Mons; the excellence of their performances did not prevent the British Army from being faced the next morning by Germans in thoroughly surprising strength. During the Battle of the Ourcq large numbers of General Maunoury's army surprised the Germans by the rapidity of their arrival on the scene. During the Battle of Ypres the French managed to move 87,000 men in record time. The Germans were completely taken by surprise at Neuve Chapelle. Their airmen had not seen the gradual accumulation of artillery along the line, the collection of huge reserves of shell, the massing of large numbers of men, on the one point. They were taken by surprise just as surely as the olden General was caught unawares by some stroke prepared on the other side of the hill.

It was the petrol-driven motor which made all those coups possible. At the front you meet them in their thousands; they are of every type, of every size. They come from the big delivery companies, the drapers' shops, the brewers, the

bus companies, the motor firms. They are now all disciplined. The different types have been drilled and drafted off into columns, of which each is as much a unit of speed and efficiency as a squadron of the fleet. You meet them toiling along the greasy road with heavy loads of shells or food, their gay advertisements of Bass's Beer or Crosse and Blackwell scarred and dirtied by the war. On the road at night you will pass huge convoys of motor buses packed more closely to the square inch than the London County Council might altogether approve. The battalion has "embussed," as the orders now phrase it, "at X, and will debuss at Y." The battalion meanwhile is resting. Thrusting your eye past the khaki-clad conductor, who sings out cheerily as he passes, "B'nk, B'nk, Charing Cross, B'nk," you see in the interior of the bus two lines of huddled sleeping men, each man's head resting on his neighbour's shoulder. The windows of the bus are covered with paint or boards to prevent the gleam of sunshine on their glass revealing the presence of the column to the inquisitive airman, and to dull the light from the interior.

The motor has defeated one of the chief reasons for the aeroplane; and if the conditions of warfare have been radically changed, it is the effect of the motor and not of the air machine. The motor is used for every imaginable purpose. It

hauls big guns; it distributes meat; it supplies men and ammunition to the firing line, power to the workshops; it is used by the despatch rider and the staff; it becomes a weapon of offence in the armoured motor-car; it mounts mitrailleuses; it has almost completely ousted the horse from the British ambulance system. The motor alone makes possible the manipulation of the enormous armies which these days of national service fling into the field; and at the same time it multiplies the forces engaged, by the ease and rapidity with which they can be hurried from one point of the line to another, and by reducing the time wasted in long marches along crowded roads; for if the roads immediately behind our army are busy with motor transport, the space that traffic occupies, the confusion into which it is occasionally thrown, are as nothing to the muddles and delays which would inevitably result from the use of horsed transport sufficient to shift the same amount of men and material. The motor alone makes it possible to feed the men in the field with any degree of regularity. When you have a front of the density required by trench fighting, it is obviously impossible for an army to find in the resources of the country, be it ever so rich, enough meat and flour to keep it going. All the food of the army is run by motor, and most of it comes from England.

The system of distribution varies a little in

accordance with local geographical conditions. To the north of the British lines, the regimental horsed carts collect their stores straight from the railhead; but in the British area, although railways are plentiful, they mostly converge upon Lille, and therefore run through our lines, and not parallel with them. The system adopted in the field is, broadly, the following: Rail bases are formed at some little distance from the shell area, and from them the stores are sent up the line to some convenient point, preferably the centre of a knot of roads, beyond which railway traffic is not as a rule continued. At railhead a fleet of motor transports awaits the arrival of the stores and conveys them along regular traffic circuits to refilling points, where they are once more transhipped, this time into horse vehicles, for detailed distribution among the units. The power of the motor transport obviously ceases within a certain distance from the firing line, for, quite apart from the danger of running big motor convoys in too close proximity to the enemy, where one shell would destroy more stores in one motor than in several horsed carts, the great wear and tear on the roads in the immediate vicinity of the trenches, the narrow lanes through which these are approached, and sometimes the complete absence of any real communicating road, make horse transport a necessity. The new system enables

the supplies of food to reach the men fresh every day, and the motor, by its increased speed capacity and greater carrying power, has cut down both the length and the number of supply columns.

Ammunition and shells go forward along practically the same routine, with this difference, that the food requirements of an army are a known factor, and its wants in ammunition vary from day to day. Therefore the word which releases the stream of food and general stores from the base to the front is uttered from behind the line, while for ammunition supplies the word goes back from the trenches to the reserve points; and they fill up at once from the advanced base in their rear with such rapidity, thanks to the motor, that, blaze away as they will, the guns and the men in the trenches may be assured of having all the ammunition they want if it is to be had at all.

The armoured motor-car is having a period of rest during the period of trench war, and the motor Maxim detachments no longer know the fierce joys of careering about debatable territory in search of something to shoot. The motor-cyclist, however, goes on for ever. For him there has been no rest since the war began. The picturesque line of army signallers, flag-wagging from hill-peak to hill-peak, from field to field, has utterly disappeared. Their place has been

taken by the telegraph, the telephone, and the motor-cyclist. The old name of Army Signals still exists, but flag-wagging is to Signals what Euclid is to mathematics—purely an educational affair, with but rare opportunity for practical demonstration.

In the transmogrified counting-house of a Flemish coal-merchant's office are Signals. The calendars, the pictures of collieries, the glass case with the specimen lumps of coal, have gone, and the walls are covered with neat diagrams of telegraph and telephone wire. At the desks round the wall are the army telegraphists, attentive to the instruments through which the army chatters all day long about its business. Strange, unearthly-looking individuals, clad in oilskins and clotted up to their eyes in mud, buzz up to the door on machines which appear themselves to be composed of the all-pervading element. They are the motor-cyclists. How they ever make any progress at all along some of the roads is a mystery. They dodge in and out of long transport columns, sideslip into the mud ditches which line the causeway of the highroad, get the innards of their machines jolted out of them by the holes or the repairs in the road; and through it all they keep up a steady eight or ten miles an hour, and, at least with one Division, boast that, in spite of tremendous difficulties—even during the days of the retreat from Mons—they never

failed to deliver the messages entrusted to them. Theirs is a record of which they may well be proud; it is a further triumph for the petrol-driven motor, for even the best-organized system of telephonic communication may at times break down; even the threefold telegraphic strands of the wire get cut by some chance shell; and with coloured rockets it is not easy to convey very much of a message, or to convey it with a reasonable certainty that it has been noted and understood.

In ambulance work of every kind the motor has proved itself indispensable, and, great though the supply of ambulance motors has been, it would seem that at the front they can never have too many of them. Without them it is difficult to see how the enormous number of wounded, resulting from the large numbers engaged, could possibly be evacuated from the advanced dressing-stations to the casualty clearing hospitals from which they reach the railway. Our field hospitals and our base hospitals in France would have been crowded to overflowing for weeks during the heavy fighting around Ypres had it not been for the motor.

It seems a simple enough matter to fit up a motor ambulance. As a matter of fact, the ambulance transport officer finds within the simple limits of car construction as much field for shop talk as the keen cavalryman will find in

an attempt to cut down the weight of harness without causing sore backs. There is too much overhang or too much underhang. The first brings the stretchers and the wounded man right over the wheel, and leads to too much jolting; the second is fatal along the causeway roads, because, if the car gets off the causeway with one set of wheels in the two-foot-deep mud on the side, the underhang will inevitably get smashed up on the causeway camber of the road. Internal fittings, sideways and endways methods of loading cars, provide other points for expatiation.

Verily, the man of knowledge is the man who knows one thing; and the charm of the army on active service is the fact that each man, whether he be an army corps commander, the man in the trench, the engineer, the flying man, or the doctor, has one cabbage-patch to keep in order, one particular corner of the machine to keep running and oiled, one thing to know, not superficially, but down to the last letter. At the front itself they worry but little about the war in its general progress. They are glad to hear that the "Russians gave 'em a biff at Przemysl," but their anxiety for news is not tremendous, and extends much more to what the "other fellows are doing" in the North Sea, along in the Champagne country, down in the Dardanelles, than to events within the area of the British lines

in Flanders. There they have their job to do, and the doing of it gives them plenty to think about and heaps of fun in the process. Of "the other fellows," the French, they do not now see very much, except where the trench lines and their shoulders touch.

CHAPTER V

THE EASTERN GATE

FLANDERS lies nearest to our shores and to our hearts. It was also well to deal with it first, for in its flat plains there is to be seen the pure type of trench warfare without relief of any sort. The operations and the country around Verdun may well come next, for there is considerable contrast between the Hauts de Meuse and the flat Flanders plain.

At Verdun it is the real siege operations of modern warfare which are in progress, and Verdun, like Nancy, has disappointed the enemy's calculations. The army defending Verdun was pushed up to the Belgian frontier when it became apparent that the French mobilization and concentration had been effected too far down to the south. It did its share of the fighting in the neighbourhood of Longwy, and retired in accordance with the scheme of general operations which was adopted after the reverse suffered by the Allies in the great battle along the Belgian frontier. While the British and the French

armies were hurrying back, turning every now and again upon their pursuers, the Verdun army was able to withdraw, in more leisurely style and untroubled by the enemy, to cover the fortress of the Meuse Heights. The movement came to an end on September 10, when, with its line running from Verdun to Bar-le-Duc, General Sarrail's army threatened the flank of the Crown Prince's army, covered Verdun, and acted in a measure as the pivot of the Battle of the Marne. It was the menace of this army which contributed to the precipitate retreat of the German Crown Prince's army, when his men seem to have been seized with something of the blind spirit of despair, so wholesale and purposeless was the destruction they wrought as they moved through the countryside of the Marne seeking a way to the Argonne. The army and the line of fortifications stood a series of very heavy assaults. Fort Troyon stood firm against the Crown Prince, but at other points the enemy managed to push through, and on the last day of the Battle of the Marne he drove a wedge through from the east right to the Meuse at St. Mihiel.

The achievement was important, for if it had been pushed a little farther the Germans might well have succeeded in cutting the Verdun army in two and in enveloping the stronghold and a large portion of the troops defending it in the field. Reinforcements in the shape of two

cavalry corps stemmed the German onslaught on the centre, and for all practical purposes the Germans may be said to have failed in the object they had in driving down the wedge to St. Mihiel. Their presence there has been extremely awkward, and all attempts to dislodge them have been beaten, as have their efforts to cross the Meuse. Once having corked the hole at St. Mihiel, the French had leisure to look about them and to survey the position around Verdun. General Sarrail, although opposed by the 3rd, 10th, 16th, and 13th Würtemberg Corps, and five or six reserve divisions, met the German attack elsewhere with such determination that, although he did not manage to defeat them in any wholesale or decisive manner, he nevertheless, although in weaker strength, staggered the 3rd German Corps, and reduced it to a state of extreme weakness, forcing it to retire and to abandon many prisoners and large amounts of stores.

General Sarrail had two duties to accomplish with his army: he had first of all to maintain his touch with the other armies and to contribute to the general scheme of operations. The possession of Verdun was vital to the plan of campaign, and it was also, therefore, his duty to protect the fortress in the field to the utmost of his ability.

Liège, Antwerp, Namur, Maubeuge, Lille, Longwy, Laon, Fère, and Rheims, had by this

time taught their lesson. All those fortresses had either been forced to surrender after brief resistance, or had been deemed impossible to defend, or not worth defending against the heavy siege train of the Germans. The truth of the old saying, "Ville assiégée, ville prise," had been very triumphantly demonstrated, and the great truth vividly proclaimed, that the great, and indeed the only, way of defending a fortress was never to allow the enemy to come within shell-fire distance of its forts.

The approach to all fortified towns, once they have been prepared for defence, is impressive. The sentries along the road multiply in numbers and increase the severity with which your safe-conducts are demanded; the network of railways grows more dense; the roads broaden out and increase in number; there is a bareness on the hillsides where woods have lately been felled to clear the field of fire; and all these indications betoken the existence of some great purpose: you do not build new roads and railways for nothing. Verdun itself is a fortified town of great antiquity. It is, and has been within the memory, one of the bolts on the eastern portal of France, and its walls and surroundings form a compact course in the history of fortifications. You reach it over many a bridge and canal, and penetrate the castellated walls of the town through a portcullis.

When I visited Verdun as the guest of the French General Staff the town was already besieged; the outer forts guarding the eastern road to Etain had already fallen; the German heavy batteries were already established some few miles away from the battlements of the place; the inhabitants were reduced to their last gasp; they were already fighting for the possession of sewer rats and other titbits of the regular siege menu; the Crown Prince, in fact, was on the point of scoring another triumphant victory. Such, at any rate, were the main lines of the picture drawn for the credible neutral by the masters of imaginative fiction who rule at Wolffbureau, the great official German news-agency.

The streets seemed well populated with civilians, and bore no visible traces of the work of "Jack Johnsons" when I arrived there. The hotel at which I was lodged was scarcely habitable on account of the almost overpowering stench of the cheeses which filled the whole of the restaurant and the cellars. A stroll through the town soon showed me that, whatever hardships the citizens of Verdun had to bear, hunger was not among them. Jewellers' shops and boot stores vied with the regular charcuterie establishments in their displays of York hams, cheeses, condensed milk, sausage of every kind save the German. There was so much plenty, and the

prices were so astonishingly low, that I sought an explanation. When the war broke out, the people of Verdun, confident though they were in their army, reasoned with some justice: "A place is not fortified unless an attack is expected, and an attack on a place like Verdun means a siege. It will be a long siege, for we shall not give in this time to the Germans. We should join Alsace and Lorraine if we did. So let us go and buy provisions."

In a day or two the provision-dealers realized the truth of the saying about ill winds. This ill wind of war certainly brought them customers in numbers they had never known before. The whole civilian population of the place, and a good many men of the garrison too, provided themselves with hams and other sustaining and long-lived forms of nourishment. Prices naturally went up with a will. Still the Germans did not come, and still people clamoured for more hams at the shops. Traders in other commodities, such as bedroom suites, grand pianos, jewellery, scents, and other neglected merchandise, watched the growing prosperity of the provision-dealers with some envy, and finally they determined, since their own goods were not saleable or likely to find purchasers for many a long day, that they had better follow the immortal advice and "buy hams and see life." They sent up to the markets of Paris for supplies of food, and in the plush-

furnished fittings of the jewellers' shop-window soon sprawled the product of the pig. When the supplies of the town had thus been augmented by amateur and by professional enterprise, the Governor decided that the time had come to fix prices. He did so with some vigour, and at the same time at last made up his mind to the step which he had foreseen would be necessary—the evacuation of all useless mouths from the fortress. In other words, the town having become filled with food of every nature, he fixed prices, and then banished 7,000 of the 12,000 prospective customers of the provision-dealers. It was a cruel blow to the speculators in precious hams, and to their dying day they will never know just how far ahead the Governor of Verdun had foreseen the turn of events, for to the Governor of a fortress threatened with a siege the pig question is as serious a matter as it is to any Serbian Prime Minister.

Certainly Verdun did not seem to be seriously threatened with hunger. I had an opportunity of enjoying a siege menu at the Military Club, which included lobster and chicken and chateaubriand, and that final proof seemed conclusive to one who had spent the best part of a week motoring in the fresh air. Even with my appetite, I could not get through the whole menu. As I wandered back to the cheese-laden atmosphere of my hotel, I paused for a moment on the

old bridge over the Meuse, and faintly louder than the ripple of the water I heard the low growling of the guns which I was to see in action the next day.

Verdun lies in the Valley of the Meuse almost due west of the great German fortress of Metz. Between the two towns there is the great barrier of the Meuse Heights. Upon these heights, in the valley contained between them and the wooded ridge of the Argonne to the west, and down south to St. Mihiel, the siege of Verdun has been in progress for months without the inhabitants of that town being really aware of any such operation. Occasionally the airship has left its shed underneath the hill and floated off upon some mission, occasionally the Taube has come and dropped a few bombs in the streets of the town; occasionally the firing of the guns has become so constant as to constitute a rumble. But of a siege in the whole sense of the word Verdun has seen nothing. A mile or so out of the town, however, the siege operations become immediately apparent. As my motor climbed up through the tree-carpeted valleys towards the advanced artillery positions, the noise of the hatchet, the intense blue of wood smoke rising from russet-coloured trees, told of great woodland toil. Along the roadside we passed fatigue parties of French artillerymen and infantry in blue and red uniforms, who stood at attention,

axe in hand, as the first motor of our convoy came within sight, the broken lance-head it bore with the colours of France denoting the presence of the Commanding General. The forests were filled with these gangs of woodcutters, and resounded with the sharp blows of the axe and the occasional hurtle of a falling tree. Along the road jingled the transport sections, conveying cartloads of twig baskets which, filled with sand, strengthen the defences of a fort or of a breast-work; long lengths of timber for the roofs and floors of trench and shelter; masses of spruce greenery for the concealment of batteries upon the bald hillside. Then, leaving the wooded slope beneath the road, we climbed to the bleak skyline, from beyond which came the prolonged rumble of guns.

We left our motor-cars below, so as not to attract the attention of the watchful enemy, and toiled up the hillside to the top, where in a bower of trees was installed one of the chief observation stations along the French lines around Verdun. To the right the country rolled away into the distance in great billows of wooded hill and vale, each hill a fort and bristling with concealed guns. On the extreme right of the view were the wooded twin heights, the Jumelles d'Ornes, the nearest position of the enemy to Verdun, 13 kilometres away. The plain below stretched out westward until it faded into the dark forest

barrier of the Argonne. In the brilliant winter sunshine the countless little lakes formed a silver setting to the green turf and fields. It is an extraordinary plain, this plain to the north and to the south of Verdun. Its fields are so fretted with water that, seen from a height, it resembles the skin of some miraculously beautiful lizard. Here and there a red-roofed village glowed upon the background. In the far distance uprose the village of Montfaucon, over which hung a wisp of smoke veiling the base of the pointed village church spire.

In the immediate foreground the roads, stretched like tapes upon a green running track, were dotted with the black dots of moving troops and transport. The artillery fire has slackened, the storm centre has moved far away to the south, from which the sound of the guns floats slowly to us, muffled by much travelling over sound-absorbing forests. In the distance ahead of us the sun has touched to silver the framework of a hovering aeroplane; bobbing grotesquely just over the neighbouring hill-top on our right there arises the great sunlike orb of a yellow captive balloon. It is a good afternoon to be alive on, and there is pleasure in seeing the cloud shadows cutting soft dark arabesques upon the plain below. Then, without apparent reason, there come from the ground beneath our feet four quick, tremendously

emphatic coughs. "Now watch along that white wavy line down there in the centre," said an officer quickly. And as he finished his remark the earth along the German trench line spurted up into a fountain at four spots. The 75's were at it in the battery below us, and the aeroplane ahead or the captive balloon beside us saw the effect given to their information. Then floated back to us the duller thud of the bursting shell. Before it had stopped vibrating in our ears four more shells were on their way. Then a battery of deeper tone joined in with its more weighty throat-clearing. Soon the whole country seemed to tremble with the noise, and after half an hour it had been noted down for the composition of that day's communiqué that there had been an artillery duel in the Hauts de Meuse, in which the French guns had gained the ascendancy. At the end of that time the smoke overhanging Montfaucon was heavy, and it had in it the glow of fire. The German guns were silent, and the French aeroplane was again circling over the German lines, this time to report upon the damage done.

We went down to the battery. The men tumbled out of the countryside and lined up for inspection by the General. Clear of eye and clean of skin, they were not suffering from the hardships of winter in the mountains of the Meuse. To the French soldier one of the most

amusing features of this war has been the pity lavished upon him by civilians, and the terrible pictures painted by poetic journalists of the hardships and anguish the troops have to undergo. What people at home fail to realize is that all the troops are not in the trenches, and that, at any rate during this period of trench war, the infantry have their regular shifts of trench service, very carefully arranged, so as to expose them to as little strain as possible. The artilleryman of course escapes, save when he is an observation officer, nearly all the discomforts of the damp trench life. In a country of rolling hill the gunner's days are by no means unpleasant. He has the leisure to busy himself with the building of a comfortable home, and in this kind of gay-hearted improvisation he has shown himself certainly the equal of his British allies. In the Meuse many villages have been destroyed by the guns, but the gunners themselves have shown as much ability in building up as they have in destroying. The villages they have built for themselves outdo in their rustic quality the finest examples of garden city architecture. Unaided by their officers the men have set to work, and from the trees in the neighbouring woods, with a few odd bricks taken from a ruined village near by, with spruce branches for thatching, they have erected the kind of house which Marie Antoinette no

doubt had in her mind when she first formed the wish to live the milkmaid's life at the Trianon.

One entire village of this sort that I visited would have formed the *clou* of any exhibition at Earl's Court, it was so neat, and so cosy were the interiors, so ingenious the whole structure. To one you entered through a rustic veranda, over the porch of which hung a fine old beaten brass clockdial, the hands of which pointed permanently to eleven o'clock, the welcome hour when the French soldier gets his soup. The living-room had brick flooring, sprinkled with a cleanly white sand; in a large open brick hearth leapt the many-coloured flames of a wood fire; upon the walls were pictures of Père Joffre and Sir John French; around the room were the rifle-racks and sleeping bunks of the men, filled with warmth-retaining straw; the windows were veiled with white curtains, gracefully looped back with tricolour ribbons. It was the clock over the door, and that alone, which justified this cottage in feeling prouder than its neighbours.

There are villages of every sort in this part of the country; for wood and brick are not always obtainable, nor is it always desirable that the dwellings should be above-ground. At one spot the men have scooped out for themselves in sandstone a subterranean city to which, no

doubt with some feeling of appropriateness, they have given the name of Montmartre, the great underworld of Paris. Here they have their public gardens. A white expanse of sand has been planted with twigs of evergreen, formed into ornamental beds; the paths are scrupulously raked every day, and a rope hung round the six trees which constitute the garden's boundaries keeps the men "off the grass."

At another spot the moving spirit seems to have been some grown-up boy who, like youth all the world over, has been brought up on the tales of Fenimore Cooper. The village here would delight the heart of every schoolboy in its reproduction of the Indian wigwam. Clay has taken the place of skins and canvas for the wigwams, but three pointed sticks at the top of each conelike dwelling give to the whole place its air of dusky romance. In this village they have no antique clock to boast of; but the last thing reserved for the delectation of visitors is the kennel, where the battery pet, a poodle, of all unlikely animals in the world, has a little clay wigwam of his own, on the top of which, as a protection against aircraft, a little spruce sapling has been planted.

Just as the British soldier has christened everything about war that there is to christen, from big guns to dugouts, giving to the bap-

tized objects some name taken from family or home surroundings, so the French soldier has christened most of his belongings—with this difference, however, that the names given by the Frenchmen cover a wider field. "Villa de la Victoire," "A la Bonne Alliance," are the type of names the French soldier delights in. France has already in the ranks the men that we are only sending there—men of every class and calling; and here and there in these artillery villages the visitor will see a beautifully drawn sign-board above a house, or a tablet bearing verses of great merit, summing up the battery's opinion of the Prussian. It was my good-luck to be with a battery on the day of Ste. Barbe, the patron saint of the French gunner. The guns were in reserve, and the men had been given full opportunity to celebrate the saint to their hearts' content. The festivities were already in progress when I poked my head through the door of a dugout, and found quite a number of the gunners assisting the cook in the roasting of a remarkably succulent-looking leg of mutton.

He was just dishing the repast, and had paused for a moment to seize the joint at the knuckle, and was waving it vigorously round his head with a shout of "Vivel a Ste. Barbe!" when my strange civilian head coming round the doorway so astonished him that for a moment

the joint remained high above his head. He was a bit of a wag, this cook, and as much a cook as he was a wit. Discovering that I was English, he immediately burst out into a series of complicated sounds, from which I gathered that he had been chef in the house of some great English nobleman who lived in Upper Baker Street. Thanks to his easy manners (due to his native politeness, and not to the education he had received at the hands of the Upper Baker Street nobility), I was soon made to feel quite at home. I quickly gathered that it was my honour and good-fortune to have visited upon the day of Ste. Barbe the very best battery in the whole French Army; for not only were they better guns than anybody else, but they were far ahead of the rest of the artillery in their devotion to the patron saint, and in their determination to make a jolly day in her honour. I was shown, in proof of this, the advertisement poster which announced on the "village" square the programme of the day's events, not the least important item of which was contributed by my good friend the cook.

Upon the blackboard in the square had been chalked the programme of the excellent evening's entertainment the battery had organized in honour of its saint. In its style and in its contents it imitated in great detail, and with much solemnity, the real poster of the boule-

vards. The " village " square became that night the Casino du Bon Espoir. Private Gillet left the army for a few hours to become music-hall manager. M. Charles Martel exchanged his seat on the limber for the chair of the *chef d'orchestre*. The programme, furnished entirely by the talent of the battery, was certainly as good as, and infinitely more varied than, that to be found at any first-class music-hall ; for many of the men who contributed to it remembered for that evening the violin, the conjuring tricks, and the songs, which gave them their living in times of peace, and made their reputations as civilians. For the violin was played by a man who, two years before, had won the Premier Prix du Conservatoire in Paris ; the conjurer had a name to conjure with in the Parisian music-hall world ; and the songs that were sung by the writer of them have long ago made him known throughout the whole French Army, when the men were in need of a lift on the road and a lilt to keep their tired legs swinging. In the open square of the " village " the men from many miles around gathered to listen to the music of peace, to which the guns supplied an orchestral bass. Ste. Barbe was honoured right royally, and the inhabitants of the ruined villages in the countryside reaped the benefit of the 50 centimes charged for admission.

To return to the General's inspection. The men were of the artillery type—stocky, well-set fellows, with the broad backs and the long arms of the weight-lifter, and with faces alive with the alert intelligence required of men of their arm. When the General had passed on the men fell out of rank, and I stayed behind to chat with them awhile, to distribute a few cigarettes, and tell them the latest news. Of cigarettes they would take none. "We're lucky here, just close to the main-road. Keep them for the forward batteries and the trenches. There they're scarce, and you will be greeted like a god." "What do they say at Paris, eh? Give my love to the boulevards." ("Give my regards to Leicester Square"). He was the only Parisian in the battery, and he confessed to me that "bons types" though all his comrades were, and although the war was "très rigolo," he did occasionally long for the "pavé de Paris," for a saunter down from the Place de la République to the Madeleine, for a gossip with another man from the same "pays." The territorial mixture among the men is very varied. Among our party was a Deputy who wanted information on this point in order to confirm a theory. He questioned the General as to the provenance of these men who are defending Verdun. The General said they came from all over France. No, he didn't think it made much difference

nowadays whether a Norman or a Lorrainer was defending Lorraine. Frenchmen were first for local patriotism, he admitted, but they all had the larger patriotism of France.

We were up in the billets of an infantry company which had been rather badly tried the previous night. There were several missing from the ranks, and men do not like to ponder upon those things. The General, in order to show the broad area from which the men were drawn, went up to the line, and, affectionately patting each man on the shoulder, asked where he came from. It was a long time before he found a man who came from a neighbouring village. It was only about six miles away. "When did you last hear from the village?" asked the General. "Not since I left, the first day of mobilization," was the reply. He didn't know what had happened there. The man, saluting "mon Général," stepped back; but the General, bidding the others be off, kept him. "Wait a minute, and I'll find out what's happened over there at your village, my friend." The Chief of Staff stepped up. "What's happened there?" "X. ville, mon Général, is still ours. Our trenches are just east of the place." "There you are, my man," said the General to the waiting peasant; "they're not there yet, and if you go on fighting up here as you all did last night they'll never get there." "Oui, mon Général."

And the man returned, to wait, to hope, and to fight.

Such is the modern equivalent of the ear-pulling method of the Little Corporal. Fired with the knowledge that, whether they be Bretons or Normans, they are fighting for their homes and for their existence as Frenchmen, the French Army, handled sympathetically and yet led with great discipline, has fought round Verdun with the utmost gallantry. It is the siege of Verdun in which they are participating, although Verdun is some 12 kilometres away; but so fierce is the struggle for advantage that to whole divisions the importance of Verdun is lost completely in the immediate siege operations of a village, or, indeed, of one house in that village. Inch by inch since August the army in the field before Verdun has edged the Germans farther away from the inner forts; inch by inch, trench by trench, sap by sap, the outer fortifications of the town have been pushed farther and farther afield, and breathing-room has been given to the city which they defend. Inside the bigger siege there have been furious minor siege battles against the village strongholds of the Woevre and the plain to the east of the Argonne. Villages ruined by shell-fire have been converted into fortresses capable of standing any amount of battering. With sandbag and barbed wire, barricades of

carts and stones, they have defied capture for weeks, in spite of the full fury of the French assault; for whatever else may be said of the Germans, whatever change may have been effected in the class of troops, there are few to be found in the field who will not readily admit that, at any rate during the first six months of the war, the German soldier fought with bravery worthy of admiration.

I have frequently heard the opinion expressed by French officers, during a discussion as to the merits and demerits of the German system, that, while it was quite comprehensible that the troops should be led in massed formation to the attack of strong positions, what was astounding was that the men should obey their orders. Assaults such as these have been launched time after time against the French pocket strongholds in the Meuse, only to be beaten back with terrible loss from machine-gun and artillery-fire.

General Joffre, in reply to a question as what he thought of the situation, is reported to have replied, "Je les grignotte" (I am nibbling them). This is certainly the course events have taken in this area of the operations. The general line has not changed much, it is true. There has, however, been almost consistent progress along the whole semicircle of the position, which runs from Vauquois through the Bois de

Montfaucon to the north-east, from Flabas to Azanne, south to Ornes, out away east to Etain, south-west thence to Eparges, and finally through Amorville to St. Mihiel. Along this front the trench line is not unbroken. There are two or three neutral zones where in the woods the rival patrols still find work for cavalry to do, where the opponents watch and wait for the other fellow to try and advance. Here and there definite progress, to be expressed in terms of geography rather than of a number of metres, has been achieved, in the capture of the village of Vauquois, or the driving of the Germans out of the village of Les Eparges, where they had established their footing on the Meuse. These gains are more than morally valuable, for they give to the French armies around Verdun a new outlook. They place the French at the top of the hills from which their view stretches away into Germany. Similar progress has been made in wearing through the neck of German-occupied territory which enables them still to occupy St. Mihiel. The "nibbling" is continuous and sure. At the end of six months of siege the Germans have not succeeded in throwing a single shell into Verdun. They brought a heavy gun into position in the neighbourhood of the Ornes at the end of March, and managed to put a few heavy shells into the Fort of Donaumont, the farthest advanced work of the old fortification

scheme, which was modern at any rate up till the month of August last. What importance the French may now attach to this ring of forts I cannot say, but so long as the German semi-circle around Verdun grows slowly but surely wider the bombardment of an outer fort is not likely to affect the persistent optimism of the armies in the field before the town, and of the civilian inhabitants of the town itself. The arrival of the heavy siege artillery which has laid low the pride of so many fortresses since the beginning of the war, the report that the Crown Prince himself has now assumed command of the German armies operating against Verdun, may indicate that here the enemy is going to seek some other objective. Perhaps the Crown Prince is to be given yet another opportunity of repairing his damaged military prestige. Since he could not enter Paris at the head of the triumphant armies, he may hope for a minor state entry through the battlemented walls of Verdun. The name of Verdun, if that be the intention, will be added to the growing list of German failures—Paris, Warsaw, Calais, Verdun.

The whole country has the greatest confidence in the armies of the east. It has seen the famous Iron division at work in the Grand Couronné de Nancy. It perceived with some amazement, it may as well be admitted, that the town of Nancy, the fine capital of Lorraine, undefended though

she was by any girdle of forts, close to the frontier though she was, and apparently at the mercy of the first bold German raider, had not fallen like a ripe plum into the capacious Teuton maw, although the menace came very near. The town itself was bombarded pretty severely; but the courage and the skilled obstinacy which the armies in the field displayed resulted in a complete check to the enemy, and to-day the only menace comes from the air. At Verdun the feeling of confidence now felt at Nancy prevails. There is good reason for it, for if ever an army has taken kindly to war, if ever men were certain of their leaders, or officers could rely upon their men to struggle on with every nerve of their minds and bodies, it is in the army which I saw in the Hauts de Meuse.

A pipeclay enthusiast accustomed to the well-trimmed appearance of our peace army—an army *de luxe*—might well find some points of criticism. You cannot tailor the uniforms for an army of millions; the French soldier does not shave, he is not brought up in an atmosphere of spit and polish; to German eyes his discipline would appear queer, for to the Germans there is only one way of treating everybody; and he is quite unable to understand—as, indeed, we are perhaps ourselves—that in France discipline is not only enforced by the shouted command, but may with different people and different customs be better

brought into play by whispered persuasion. The French soldier keeps his spit and polish for his rifle and his bayonet. He may occasionally show an inclination to smoke on duty, he may forget to take his cigarette out of his mouth while speaking to a superior officer, but he fights like a polecat and will follow his officers anywhere.

CHAPTER VI

GENERALS ALL

In the debates upon the Three Years Service Law, Jaurès, the great Socialist leader, thunderously appealed to the House to reject a military system which would take the youth of the country from its occupations and keep them for three years in the unproductive barracks. He fought hard for the introduction into France of a system somewhat resembling that of Switzerland, whereby each man in the country would have received a short training in the use of the rifle, and would then be dismissed to his home in readiness for the call. This Utopian idea was christened "The Nation in Arms." Jaurès did not live long enough to see his idea realized by the system he condemned, but even he, bitter opponent though he was of the military system of conscription, would have been forced to admit, had he lived to see the mobilization of the army, that here was in fact the nation in arms. The French Army, strange though it may sound, is perhaps the most democratic institution in

France. The obligation for service is universal upon everyone physically fit to bear arms. It applies to all in exactly the same degree. There is nothing in the French Army which corresponds with the German Ein-Jährige system, whereby the man who has reached a certain educational standard has the period of his service as a private soldier reduced by a year. There are none of the wholesale exemptions to be found in Germany; everyone has to serve alike.

The result could only be achieved with success in a country in which democracy has become more than a political platitude. The French are profoundly democratic. Each Frenchman is so individual that class and caste distinctions fade before the distinction of individuality. This is best to be seen in peace-time in the relationship that exists between the servant of a middle-class family and her employers. It resembles rather the household arrangements which obtained in England in the days of Pepys, and even later, if one may judge by the Varden family in "Barnaby Rudge," among other examples, than the present condition of domestic employment in England. The servant is more a member of the household in France than she is with us; and although a definite division of class exists, it does so naturally, and by force of its own weight, as it were. It is neither de-

pendent on nor expressed by the artificial and cramping conventions which turn out that famous but almost uncanny product, the well-trained English servant, whose face, hair, voice, and very walk, are wholly different in the presence of her employers. The French servant is inclined to join in conversations, to take an interest in the affairs of the household, to claim an interest in her own—in fact, under French democracy she is always herself.

It is this atmosphere which, on mobilization, enables the Viscount to find himself under the orders of the son of his concierge without any feeling of ill-ease on either side. A friend of mine, whose special work in Paris has given him the use of a military motor-car, not having been through the army himself owing to ill-health, experienced a certain awkwardness when he discovered that the chauffeur allotted to him was a poet and an old friend. He felt a certain *gêne* at leaving his old friend seated in the motor-car outside the restaurant where, in time of peace, they had so frequently dined together. The poet, having been through the great army school of democracy, found nothing at all awkward about the matter. What exists between the men is also to be found among the officers. For many years it suited the politician to describe the officers' corps of the army as a hotbed of reaction. To listen to the politician,

one might have imagined that it was composed almost exclusively of the scions of the old nobility of France, that the political backwardness of their views was only equalled by the extreme bigotry of their religion. The French officer, since the Dreyfus affair, has been scrupulous in abstaining from any manifestation of opinion either on political or religious matters.

It is true that during the troubles aroused by the anti-clerical legislation of the Government one or two officers found their consciences did not allow them to carry out the orders they received in connection with the taking of the Church inventories. A case of this sort happened in Brittany, and the Catholic General in command of the district placed the officers under arrest and had them tried by court-martial. General Galliffet, on hearing the news, telegraphed to his brother General, expressing his sympathy, and also the general opinion of the army, by adding, "Dura lex, sed lex." For a time the officers found themselves condemned to act as though they were not an integral part of France.

Worse paid than the officer of any other army, the object of the suspicions and the manœuvres of politicians, the French officer continued, silently and steadily, to seek no reward or recognition of his services other than

that of the efficiency of the army. The change in the attitude of the public, the growing popularity of the army, in no way affected this sage and sober attitude.

The regular French officer is usually drawn from families possessed of more tradition than means, which have behind them a long record of service for the State. The work they have done in time of peace has been but ill rewarded, and with them social advantage has not come to compensate them for inadequate pay. The military caste enjoys none of the privileges given to it in Germany, none of the social advantages it enjoys in England. They are a set of hard-working, unassuming men, whose only object during the last forty years has been to place the country in a position of dignified defence. In the accomplishment of this work the whole character of the French officer has changed. He is no longer the waisted elegant, the *beau sabreur*, the mustachioed military man. The theatrical element, the desire for drama, latent in every Latin heart, has been rigorously suppressed. The General of old, who rode prancing steeds, flashed his sword, and showered long-winded eloquence upon his troops on the eve of battle, has gone. The type of Brigadier Gerard has given way to that of Père Joffre. The eloquent platitudes of the former Order of the Day have been replaced by "The hour has come to

advance at all costs, and to die where you stand rather than give way."

The General commanding the group of armies of the Republic in the north might be expected to be rather a dazzling personage, to wear a fine uniform, to ride a fine horse. We ourselves pay tribute to our monarchical tradition by leaving to our Generals, even in these days of khaki, just a little more of the gold and the scarlet than is worn by any other rank in the army. The French pay tribute to their republican tradition by making the General one of the least noticeable persons in the army. His field uniform has not a touch of gold upon it; there are no coils of silver braid upon the arm, no splendid embroideries upon the collar. Three dull metal stars upon his cuff alone reveal his rank. His Staff officers are far more splendid than he. They, with the common soldiers, are fighting the war which is hardest for the Latin temperament—the war of silence and anonymity. In France to-day I doubt whether the names of more than perhaps three or four of the Generals in whose hands lies the fate of France are known to the great public. They have heard of Gouraud, the Lion of the Argonne, who by his youth, by the splendour of his bravery, his brilliantly acquired reputation in Morocco, has become a public character. They have heard of General Maunoury, the victor of the Ourcq,

the grey-headed, gentle man who played so large a part in the saving of Paris. They may have heard one or two stories of the tireless energy of General Fronchet d'Esperey, who served in the Chasseurs, and makes his whole army work at the famous quick-step of his old corps. They know of Foch, the brilliant leader of the Iron division which saved Nancy from generally awaited capture, who now commands in the north; of Pau, the one-armed septuagenarian, a hero of 1870; of Castelnau, the tactician. But of the armies they command there is ignorance; of the deeds they have done, merely the faintest outline is known; as to what manner of men they be there is no knowledge. Of the rest, even the names have not reached the public ear.

I have in my mind a very pleasant gallery of Generals I have met along the front, installed in country châteaux, in town-halls, leaving their offices for an hour or so to conduct their visitors along their portion of the front; of luncheons and the discussion and the toasting of victory; of the Generals' praise of their men, their admiration for the splendid instrument of war entrusted to them; and of many a little incident showing the affection and respect of the men for their leaders. Some eighty-seven Generals have been changed tince the war began. Those who remain know that when their judgment begins to fail

them, when the strain to which they have been subjected since the outbreak of hostilities begins to affect their value in the field, they will have to make way for fresh minds. They are the first to recognize that this must be so, for never has there been a vast army, such as that along the western front, in which there has been a more wholesale sinking of personalities among the many commanding officers. Jealousy is a thing unknown. When General Gallieni, in face of the expected onslaught of the Germans upon Paris, was appointed Military Governor of the city in place of General Michel, who had held the post since before the outbreak of war, this spirit was excellently shown in the fact that General Michel, far from feeling resentment, promptly applied for a post under his successor.

The French Generals and the staff officers have replaced the glitter and social distinction of their class in former times by solid culture and brains. I was much struck in December to see on nearly every General's table an open copy of the then recently issued Yellow Book. The causes of the war interested them intensely. I had the honour of lunching with General Maunoury and his staff at Soissons. The table talk turned, not upon the progress of the war, not upon stories of the field, but upon the origins of the struggle. Each man in the room had apparently studied the causes deeply, and had gained from that

study the sure comfort and the conviction of the justice of the quarrel. Many of them had travelled in Germany, and appreciated the enormous strides in material matters made there since the war of 1870. They discussed the terrible moral deterioration which had accompanied the acceptance of the materialistic philosophers. General Maunoury remembers 1870 well, and the contrast which he draws between the German of those days and the methods he is employing in the field to-day is an indictment of the race.

In 1870 the theory of frightfulness was put into practice for the first time as a philosophy of war. There may be something in the idea that, if war is made with the most terrible ruthlessness, the resistance of the enemy will be shortened and the suffering in the long-run curtailed. This theory may hold in dealing with an uncivilized people, upon whom only material arguments can prevail. To adopt it in waging war against the French is ghastly and criminal folly. Methods of frightfulness have been tried before, in one form or another, for periods of many years against small and half-crushed nationalities, which to-day carry on the fight against their oppressors with as much fire as before. The Germans are most certainly the only people who could dream of crushing the spirit of the French by these methods. The French know that they have at

stake in this war, not only their existence as a first-class nation, but also their ideas of liberty; they know that they have in their keeping the whole splendour of Latin civilization. They know that, if this war is lost by them and by their Allies, that civilization will gradually but slowly disappear from the earth, and become the academic food of peoples instead of their life's blood. The French have always fought supremely well for an ideal. The Germans have supplied all their enemies with ideals to fight for. It was the failing of the French in 1870 that they had nothing to fight for. The difference in 1914-1915 is apparent. Only the Germans could believe that frightfulness, the smoke of burning villages, the cries of the slaughtered, the havoc of shell, would weaken the defence, by the people which made the French Revolution for a theory of government, of the ideals at stake.

These and similar topics furnished the luncheon table conversation. In the old days, when wars were conducted with a few hundred thousand men on each side, when the only concern of nations was in the results of war, philosophy and psychology could be left to the people at home. To-day, when the sword is in the hands of nations, these are become matters of vital moment, for they form the thoughts of armies. Carlyle expressed his preference for fighting on the side of the convinced man. In the old days

it did not matter much what was the origin of the quarrel. The enemy was in front, and it was the duty and the pleasure of the army to give him as sound a trouncing as was possible. To-day the origin of the quarrel is all-important; for although an army of men who are soldiers for the love of soldiering will fight for the fun of the fighting, and because it is fighting that they have made the purpose of their lives, no nation can be expected to go to war unless it has a very clear idea of the issues at stake, and no nation of the spirit and traditions of the French is likely to have its ardour quenched or its resistance shortened by exhibitions of German culture, no matter how full of frightfulness they may be.

To have conviction without leading, however, is to have the fighting without the thinking quality. The French have both, and in General Foch, the General commanding the group of armies in the north—those of General Maudhuy and General Castelnau—they are most splendidly combined. To the British, General Foch, after General Joffre, has been the most important figure during the period of siege warfare, for it is in conjunction with the armies he controls that our men have been fighting in Flanders. General Foch has for long been well known to our own staff officers. He has visited England, and has followed our own manœuvres. He has received many travelling parties of British

officers at his former command in the east at Nancy. He has a still greater claim to the acquaintance of our staff, as some of them are the product of his own teaching at the École de Guerre, where for five years he lectured on strategy and tactics. His stay at the École de Guerre was short, but in that time he acquired such authority that his lectures were stimulating the whole military thought of France, and left indelible traces of their influence in the whole teaching of tactics. He has the calm face of the thinker, and the slim carriage of the well-exercised man. His eyes are the most significant feature of his face, and, were it not for the firmness of his chin and the decisive clip of his thin lips, he might be taken for the pure type of the thinker, the man with the brain to plan vast strategic movements, to co-ordinate effort along the western front in synchronization with events in the east, to hurl armies about the map; but not for the fighter, the man with the obstinacy and decision, the strength of character, necessary for the actual translation of strategy into action.

Before the outbreak of the war there were many of his closest friends and greatest admirers who wondered how he would acquit himself in the command of the Marches of the East at Nancy, where the troops are the pick of the French Army, and each fresh batch of conscripts

which goes there has to be disciplined and drilled as no others on the soil of France. It was a post requiring the exercise of qualities not usually to be found in the thinker, in the student and professor of tactics and strategy. The excellence of General Foch's work at Nancy exceeded the best hopes of his friends. The saving of the Lorraine capital from the invader was one of the finest feats of the opening period of the war; just as assuredly it was one of the greatest disappointments suffered by the Emperor William, who in gorgeous array, at the head of glittering cuirassiers, was in readiness to make triumphant entry in the about-to-be German city. General Foch's work at Nancy led to his selection for the most important command in the field, that of the armies in the north, upon whose shoulders was to fall the heavy burden of the defence of Ypres, the barring of the road to Calais—a post for a fighter if ever fighter was required.

I met General Foch at his head-quarters in the north. The square of the beautiful Flemish town, in which the architecture of many a building bore traces of the dominion of proud Spain, was filled with motor-cars arriving or departing with French staff officers, British naval flying men, British liaison officers, whose daily duty brings them to General Foch for consultation.

The old Burgomaster's house was blazing with

light—you can't worry about Zeppelins when you are in the field—and there was an air of activity and bustle which the town has probably not known since Marlborough was there on other business of the same kind. Away from the east came the faint reverberation of big guns. They were the dying echoes of the great thrust to Calais. They marked the beginning of a pause in the great battle of Flanders, in which General Foch again triumphantly proved what he had demonstrated on the Marne—that he could fight as well as he could think, could act as well as he could plan.

People are fond of declaring that, with the entry of motor transport, aeroplanes, and wireless telegraphy, precise artillery war has become, not only a science, but an exact science as well. General Foch, although he possesses a scientific —indeed, a mathematical—mind, refuses to admit that war has this purely scientific character.

The requirements of the scientific instruments with which war is waged demand a higher degree of scientific attainment from each combatant, a greater degree of scientific intelligence. They also place upon the fighters, whether they be officers or men, Generals or private soldiers, a greater burden of horror to bear, and call for a display of greater moral qualities than did the war of the past ages. Just as the material factors of war have grown in complexity and in

variety, so have the psychological and philosophical equipment of the army been forced to keep pace with the new developments in the other field. General Foch is a believer in philosophy. He has shown his faith in the psychology of strategy in the best way possible, by action in the field. He is one of the few professors who has had the opportunity and the ability to practise what he has preached.

At the École de Guerre he was given to quoting a saying of Joseph le Maître which summed up the psychological factor of defeat: "A battle lost is a battle which one thinks lost, for battles are not lost materially." To this military summary of the doctrine of Christian Science General Foch added this formula of victory: "Battles are therefore lost morally, and it is therefore morally that battles are gained; and a battle won is a battle in which you refuse to admit yourself beaten." During the most critical moment of the Battle of the Marne, when the Germans, foiled in their attempt to stretch out round the Allies' left, hurled themselves upon the centre with the object of cutting it and dealing subsequently with the two shattered wings, General Foch was in command of the army between Sézanne and Mailly. The first day of this huge engagement ended unfavourably for him: he had to retire. The next day the same thing happened, and again on the third

day a further withdrawal became necessary. After each retirement General Foch refused to admit defeat. He and the men under him had the moral strength, in which science plays no part, to refuse to know when they were beaten. On the third day the retirement began early in the morning. In the course of the day General Foch once more took the offensive, and by nightfall he had delivered the decisive blow on the flank of the Germans which led to the final precipitate retreat all along the line.

CHAPTER VII

THE POILUS OF FRANCE

The French have surprised their best friends by the vigour of their attitude throughout the war, by the stoic calm with which they endured the long period of silence and reverse at the beginning of the campaign in France, when fort after fort was abandoned without a fight, when the tide of battle rolled over the fairest and the richest of her provinces, even to the gates of the capital. History is very quickly forgotten, and it is always the last impression which bears weight.

In estimating the fighting value of the French, it was always the standard of 1870 which was popularly applied. It was forgotten that in 1870 the whole régime was corrupt, that the people were left without an ideal and with the worst leadership in history. Above all, it was forgotten that the French have a military history the glory of which is most certainly not exceeded by any other people. The "New France" has revived to the full all the glories of the old, and

the shopkeepers, the bourgeois, the young men who have been called to the colours before their time, are fighting with the gaiety and grimness of Napoleon's veterans.

To the eye accustomed to the rigid line of the Guards either in England or in Germany, the march-past of French troops may appear slightly short of mathematical perfection. The men are small, and their stature varies. Their uniforms are not tailored; the baggy breeches give to them a somewhat untidy appearance. Seen strolling about the streets with cigarette in mouth, laden with the paper parcels which all French soldiers in time of peace seem for ever to be carrying, with the tails of their blue overcoats hooked up behind, they look the reverse of smart.

The way in which private soldiers and officers hobnob together in the streets and in the restaurants and cafés is strange to the eye of the British officer. To him it argues a certain lack of discipline. But if you have once seen the French soldier on active service you realize at once the superficiality of all these signs. There is nothing finer as a spectacle than the French regiment on the march on active service. I have seen them in Morocco; I have seen them in France. They have retained about their ceremonial much of the fine pageantry of old. Their bugle marches are the most inspiriting

music in the world ; their marching songs, grown up by regimental tradition, keep alive the memory of past glories. The men are alert, and their marching is a revelation. You realize then that there is a difference, as the men go swinging past, between these gay, alert-looking fellows and the privates of any other army, and the difference is that each man, while merged completely in the regimental machine, remains nevertheless more of an individual than does the private in any other big army.

He has a quality expressed by the French word "débrouillard" which it is difficult to convey in English. He can pull himself out of an awkward corner by daring shifts and quickly-thought-out strategem. When things have gone wrong with the commissariat, he can find something to eat where another man would starve. This is a quality of enormous value in a war of extended formations, in a war of siege where each section of a trench may become the centre of the fortress, in a war of heavy casualties where a private may be called upon at any moment to pull what is left of the company out of a bad corner or lead them on to a worse one. With it goes the great military virtue of cheerfulness. The Latin lives more upon his nerves than does the Anglo-Saxon. He is more liable to extremes of gaiety and depression. The French soldier does get depressed. He hates

the trenches. The whole nature of trench warfare is repugnant to his natural desire for quick solutions, for rapid movement, for change, and for the exhilaration of the fight in the open and the sunshine. But even the damp inaction of the trench, the long months of waiting, have failed to quench the gay-heartedness of the "little soldiers of France."

From the mud of the trenches it bubbles up with all the sparkle of fresh spring water. It is shown in the countless nicknames given to all the implements of war. "Rosalie" is the pet name of the French infantryman for the bayonet, and "zigouiller un Boche" is to bayonet a German. "Boulot," a log of wood, has come to mean good work, and "les artiflots ont fait du bon boulot" is Trench, if not French, for "the artillerymen did fine work." In many of the trenches newspapers—some of them of great merit—have been produced. There is the *Écho des Marmites*, "marmite" being the French for the shell which our own men have christened "Jack Johnson." There are the *Réveil des Tranchées*, the *Rigolboche*, *Le Poilu Enchaîné*, an imitation of the new title of M. Clemenceau's paper, *L'Homme Enchaîné*. There is the Entente Cordiale newspaper produced by a telegraphists' section under the title of the *Télé-Mèl*, a phonographic rendering of the French pronunciation of the *Daily Mail*.

They have a hundred and one ingenious ways of amusing themselves, and of making their life in the field as much like a picnic as possible. They also have a hundred and one ways of fighting and of dying. The *Journal Officiel*, which records only some of the instances of heroism and splendour which go to make up with the gaiety the life of the French soldier, has stories in it which a thousand Homers could not adequately sing. In their feats poets and dreamers have become the men of action, and the men of humble birth and no education have died the death of poets; have said ere they died, to the comrade leaning over them, "Tell my mother that it was for France—that I die happy." This may be foreign to our temperament. We feel those things; it is, perhaps, a pity that we do not say them. They are not the evidence of femininity or supersensitiveness. It was a French General—General d'Amade, the leader of the French Expeditionary Army to the Dardanelles—who wrote the following letter about the death of his eighteen-year-old son:

"He fell mortally wounded on the threshold of the enemy's trenches, which, although he had arrived in that region only three days before, he had been ordered to reconnoitre. Two German Generals who witnessed his brave and courageous conduct have spontaneously mani-

fested to me their admiration, and have informed me where our poor child lies buried. Needless to say, it is a great grief. We could not have offered to God and to France anything more beautiful, more pure, or more generous, than that child; but after the war we shall mourn him until our death. I take with me on my new mission that sorrow engraved upon my heart as an example of courage and as a glorious reason for hope."

It was a French General, General Joffre, who remarked, when he was told of the inevitable sufferings of the marines in the water-logged trenches of Dixmude: "Well, they can't complain; they are at any rate in their element." The French frame of mind, the Latin temperament which leads to a freer expression of the emotions than is customary among us, has not by any means led the French soldier to magnify the tragedy of his fate.

At the beginning of the war it is true there were some regiments of French Territorials, men not to be confounded with the men who form our own Territorials, but men getting on towards their fiftieth year of age, who had to be flung into the battle during the first critical days of the German rush from the Belgian frontier, who rather bewailed their lot. They were subjected to a sudden strain such as it had

never been anticipated they would have to bear. They stood the test triumphantly, but they were conscious of the fact that they had been through a terrible strain. I met some of them in the march. They were going back into reserve after weeks of strenuous fighting. "I have grown sixty years older since the war broke out," one of them complained to me. "We are 'pères de familles,' and we can't stand it." They did, however, and as time went on the old power of the French reservist has exerted itself, as the strength of Napoleon's older men did on other fields. The "père de famille" fights as well as the youngster of twenty-one—perhaps not so gaily, but with a fiercer determination to end war. I have met them since the first days of the rush marching along the straight roads of Flanders on their way into the trenches, singing as lustily about the "blonde" they have left behind as the fresh young men of the *actif*.

Down in a dusty barrack square of the South of France I saw a squad of the 1914 contingent of conscripts called up a year before their time to join the colours. They had been under drill for but a few weeks. Already they turned and wheeled, under the eyes of a few curious German prisoners lazing at the windows of the barrack buildings, with the precision of the Guards. Their instructor, a wounded non-commissioned officer, told me that there never had been such

material in the army before. They had arrived at the regiment, not the usual contingent of recruits inclined to get through their period of training with as little trouble as possible to themselves, but a band of youths as keen as they could be to reach the stage of proficiency which would lead to their being sent to the front. Many of them were already the products of the new France. Anticipating their term of military service, these had joined the societies for military preparation, and arrived with a fair knowledge of shooting and of drill. Instead of having spent the opening years of their manhood loafing round cafés, smoking cigarettes, and indulging in precocious talk about women and the world in general, they had trained their bodies in athletics or in football.

Napoleon, after the first disastrous days of his Polish campaign, drained France of her youth. The young soldiers who were hurried across Europe to swell his armies who fell by the roadside from disease, or filled the hospitals on their arrival, were known to the army as the Marie Louises, from their girlish, tender appearance. There is nothing of the Marie Louise about the young soldiers of France to-day. They are supple, strong, and virile. I met them afterwards marching along through the inundated area in the north of French Flanders, on their way to the trenches. Even

there in the mud and desolation their march had something of a swing about it, and their backs were straight under the heavy pack of the regular, swollen though it was with trenching tools. They, too, sang, but not of their "blonde." Their rifles were gay with sprays of spruce, the tricolour floated from the rifle of the section markers, and the Marseillaise kept their feet swinging as they moved forward with the business-like air of veterans. France has every reason to be proud of her infantry, the "poilus" as they have been called in this war, as an indication of their sturdiness and exploits.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BLACK BUTCHERS AT SOISSONS

The infantryman is the great middle class of the army. It is he alone who can snatch success which others may prepare. Upon him has fallen the burden of the trench discomfort, the strain of terrible marches, the hand of Death. Compared with his brother in the artillery his lot is not a happy one.

But there is no one who has more opportunities or more cause to admire the French artillery than the French infantryman. To the whole of France the 75 mm. gun has become as much a symbol of victory as Joan of Arc. It is, however, regarded with more positive affection than can ever be lavished on a distant saint. The "75" is almost become a person, and great is the war waged as to the paternity of this remarkable weapon, the birth of which was, no doubt, assisted by quite a number of ballistic midwives. It is the instrument of victory, the tool of revenge, the black butcher, the avenging god: it is anything you like to call it. With

it the French artilleryman daily repeats the exploit of William Tell. The performances of the great steam-hammer are as nothing in their precision to those of the French field-gun. The affection in which the gun is held by the nation is as nothing to the love with which the gunner treats his weapon. To him it really is a person. Nearly every gun in the army has been christened by its servants. There is many a gun emplacement which has stuck up upon a signboard some lines of poetic eulogy addressed, by the battery poet, "à mon beau canon." The men are worthy of their gun. I have seen them in all sorts of positions and at varying moments. I have seen them after a long day's work attended by success. I have seen them after reverse, when they have been engaged in bombarding from a new position the hill which they had occupied a week before. Nothing can shake their conviction in victory or their devotion to the service of their beloved weapons.

The artillery have, of course, a much better time of it than the infantry. Removed well to the rear of the trench line, their lives are not underground throughout the daylight hours. They can move about freely and order their daily life in a normal manner. Nor are they constantly on the lookout and under fire.

The most interesting artillery position I visited

was near Soissons. I went there just after the fighting which turned a successful French offensive into a reverse and a retreat. It led to the abandonment on the eastern bank of the Aisne of much of the ground won by our own troops during the retreat from the Marne.

When I went to Verdun the Germans declared that place to be besieged and starving. I lunched there to the confusion of the fiction writers of the German General Staff. When I went to Soissons, if the German telegrams to the Italian Press were to be believed, I went to a German town.

The town was under bombardment by the Germans ; so much was true, and so much only. Over on the other side of the river there still was a considerable French force strongly entrenched, occupying a semicircle of the country at the end of the two bridges left by the floods, and thus guaranteeing to the French the passage of the river at any time they might deem fit to resume their old positions on the other side.

The Battle of Soissons was of peculiar interest to the gunner, for it was one of the few engagements during which most of the guns were working on direct and visible targets, instead of blindly at a given spot upon a map. The battle which began on January 8, by a French offensive which carried Hill 132 on the farther side of the river, was a very thorough illustration of the

danger of operations with water in the immediate rear. Standing on an eminence the sides of which bristled with the barbed wire of the third or fourth organized line of defence, in the barn which housed the Controlling Staff during the battle, I was able to gain a wide view over the country. The Valley of the Aisne at this point is deeply cut. The hills rise up with some abruptness from the water's edge on each side of the river, and then roll away in broadly undulating plateau land on either side, the edges of which are lined with avenues of poplars. The hills are mostly free of wood. Here and there on the hillside there is a dark green square. Below in the valley are strung a few villages, an occasional factory, and the flood-broadened silver of the stream. To the right of one of these clusters of houses and chimney-stacks behind the village of St. Paul rises the rounded Height 132, and still farther to the right, in the distance, Height 151. It was for the possession of Height 132 that the battle raged, and the finest artillery work on the French side was accomplished on Height 151 by the "75's." Immediately the French had carried Hill 132, the Germans counter-attacked in great force. In spite of enormous losses—for here, although the nature of the country exposed the men to terrific artillery fire, massed formations were adopted by the Germans—the Germans returned

again and again to the attack, and finally, on January 12, the almost overwhelming force brought up dislodged the French from the crown of the hill and from the eastern hillside. With a great tenacity they clung on to the western face for a time.

Then the weather came to the assistance of the enemy. Throughout the fight there was a heavy downpour of rain. The concussion of artillery ripped open the low-flying clouds and unloosed a deluge upon the country. The conditions thus created became alarming on the day of the first definite German success, the day when they managed to dislodge the French from the eastern side of Hill 132. To the Staff watching the fight from the barn on the other side of the river the state of affairs began to cause great anxiety. The strategic purpose of the first French offensive was not one upon which any very great importance rested. It was just part of the general principle of "nibbling them" announced by General Joffre. The Germans, however, were desirous, either for military or for political reasons, to score a success. They launched two army corps into the attack against the three brigades of the French. The great War Lord was in the neighbourhood, and the people of Germany had to be reassured. The game had reached a point at which General Maunoury had to consider whether he would

not be well advised to cut his losses, when the rain settled the matter decisively for him. The rising river overflowed its banks, and the floods threatened to sweep before them the temporary and permanent bridges over which the French forces engaged on the other side received reinforcements and munitions. By the 13th—that is to say, the second day of success for the enemy—only two bridges were left. There were three courses open to the French commander. He could decide to gamble on the falling of the waters; he could leave his forces on the other side, with the intention of holding a smaller strip of the river-bank; or he could retreat.

The first two of these alternatives might well, and indeed would, have led to disaster. The river remained in flood for many a day, and any considerable forces left upon the other side would have been in the greatest danger of shell and ammunition famine. General Maunoury decided to withdraw the bulk of his forces, and to leave only, on the other side of the river, sufficient men to organize and hold in strength the two bridge-heads.

The retirement was effected in perfect order. The Germans do not appear to have been aware of what was going on underneath their noses in the night. The urgency of withdrawal was shown when the artillery began to cross over by

the pontoon bridge still left, for the weakened bridge was already giving under the pressure of the flood, and it was with the water up to the guns that the horse artillery came across the river. The secrecy with which the movement was effected was all the more remarkable as it was delayed until the very last moment. Indeed, one battery of field artillery did not abandon its position until the French infantry had actually fallen back upon its position, until the enemy was only some 500 yards distant.

I have called the Battle of Soissons a gunners' engagement. The skill with which the guns were removed during the retreat would alone give to the affair a special interest to the artilleryman, for many of the guns had to be man-handled down the steep hillside within rifle range of the enemy's infantry. There were guns lost; but that occurred during the fighting, and not on the retreat. It was done with such success that the Germans did not become aware of what had happened until the following afternoon, nearly twenty-four hours after the event. They then attacked with great fury the troops left in the village of St. Paul, and after a stern struggle turned them out. That was, perhaps, the most critical business of the whole battle; for unless the French had succeeded as they did in recapturing the village, they might have lost the bridge-head and the

power to debouch upon the farther bank of the Aisne. This result would indeed have been a victory for the Germans, almost justifying the lyric language of their communiqué issued with regard to the battle, likening it to St. Privat.

Throughout the fighting the artillery were called upon to furnish a terrific effort. They worked their guns almost without ceasing for six days and six nights while the French assault on Hill 132 and the German counter-attacks were in progress.

I visited the battery which remained to the last, and saved its guns when the German fingers were practically upon them. This battery was posted throughout most of the fighting on Hill 151, from which it poured a stream of explosive and of shrapnel upon the dark masses of the Germans as they advanced up the hillside to the attack. They were moving forward in massed formation, and more than one of the gunners admitted to me that he had never seen anything so stupidly and fantastically brave as the way in which those men, many of them (as was known afterwards) new soldiers, young men just arrived at the front, streamed in serried ranks to the attack, only to be broken time after time by a withering downpour of shrapnel from the black butchers. The French system of fire by arrosage simply covers the entire field of

fire with a storm of projectiles. The slaughter was terrible; but still more men were hurled on to the attack. To the artillery observers the spectacle presented was of solid masses of men pouring up the hill, disintegrating, scattering, falling to cover under the terrible fire, whirling about in rapidly moving clumps, then splintering up into dots, finally running in confusion, leaving behind black mounds of dead. Still more men were launched into this inferno, until finally a wave bigger than the others, more resolute or more desperate, swept through the fire and over the hill. The French were defeated.

But it was not the men of defeat that I met upon their new position on the western bank of the Aisne. Even though they were engaged in bombarding the position they themselves had occupied the previous week, the gunners were as confident of success as ever. The loss of comrades had not affected their gaiety or their resolution. This battery position differed from those I have described in the Hauts de Meuse, inasmuch as around Verdun nearly all the fire is indirect, the gunner firing over intervening hills at an invisible target. On the Aisne the fire is direct, the target clearly visible.

A battery is the most compact fighting unit of the army. It has a closer family life than the regiment even in time of peace. In time of war

the artillery are thrown entirely on themselves. Posted high upon a hill, their visitors are few. They are cut off from the world. They get no supplies of newspapers from passing trains; they hear no news save from an occasional staff officer. The civilian passer-by would entirely fail to notice that the hill contained any inhabitants. This particular battery was stuck away at the top of a hill slightly wooded upon its eastern slope. Over the bare back of the height the passing of men with stores and shells had worn the ordinary path deep into the hill. One of the precautions adopted by the wily battery commander to prevent the location of his guns from becoming known to the inquisitive aeroplane is to avoid a multiplication of paths over the bare countryside. A network of newly worn footpaths is too clear an indication of activity and occupation to pass unnoticed by the trained observer in the air.

Higher up the hillside was pitted with shell craters, and at the fringe of the wood was the battery cemetery. The graveyards at the front are a pleasant proof that in all the callousness of war, in all the present profusion of death, the dead are respected, and their resting-places tended with touching care. The graveyards vary from the trim beauty of the regimental graveyard in Plug Street Wood, with its solid marble tombstones, to the few mounds of earth

within the exposed fire area, where no stone or wood is available to mark the resting-place or the names of the fallen, and rows of bottles with the names of the fallen men on pieces of paper within them are all that can be found to preserve the record of the dead. Here the battery graveyard is gay with flowers. The battery carpenter is a carver of no mean artistic merit, and in his spare time he has fashioned from a birch in the grove on the hill a beautiful cross, which bears the simple words upon it, "Pour la France." This large cross dominates the little cemetery, and upon each grave there is a smaller cross bearing the dead man's name and the date of his death. Officers and men when they pass the graveyard salute those who have fallen "Pour la France." There is no sentimentality about the action. The Frenchman's attitude to death is free of such frippery. Death is too constant a visitor along the front for him to be anything but an old acquaintance. On this hillside space is cramped, so the men of the battery exercise themselves on the horizontal bar, and the tall men as they make the circle on the bar have to take care to avoid hitting the cross with their feet. The living and the dead are close bedfellows on this hillside, for but very few feet of earth separate the graves from the dugouts.

These are most cunningly concealed. Where the trees were sparse new plantations have been

formed in which to conceal the guns and the rabbit-warren in which the servants of the battery lived. The concealment of guns has been carried to the pitch of art by the gunners of all armies, and it almost requires the deductive methods of Sherlock Holmes to trace the presence of a battery from a distance. Thus, smoke upon a hillside, heavily marked tracks, or the line of the telephone wire, would indicate to the traveller along the road that the hill was an artillery position. From the air, however, but very little is to be seen, and on foot you can walk almost on to a concealed battery before you notice the glint of shell-cases or the dull grey of the gun underneath the cover of spruce branches.

The scene inside the wood reminded me of illustrations to stories of the gnomes. As our feet, crackling on the carpet of twigs, gave notice of our approach, the silent wood became alive. From holes just large enough to allow of the entrance of a man, the population of the hill clambered up from its dugouts to see the visitors and to do the honours of their city. Nice, comfortable, roomy caverns they were, these dugouts, protected against bombardment by a roof of some feet of solid sandstone, and a very necessary protection, too, if one judged by the numbers of shell-splintered trees in the wood. Although the quarters were new, the battery had already got everything comfortable and ship-

shape. The dugouts were well protected against damp by walls composed of brushwood and of sand, well furnished with rough battery-made chairs, and rendered homelike by a few pictures.

The most interesting of them was the observation dugout on the side of the hill exposed to the view of the enemy. It was just large enough to take three men, who, seated on a plank, obtained, through a long narrow window cut at the level of their eyes, a splendid view of the enemy's positions. Away on the right, on the bend of the distant railway, three or four explosive shells fell rapidly one after the other, covering the line for a few brief moments with a dark cloud of smoke and earth. Elsewhere there was complete calm. "They're up to something by that railway," the battery officer remarked, "for we have seen lights there at night, and we think they are organizing a pivot of defence. Last night the men from those trenches you see on the hill in front of us were working in the village down below."

The village in question lay between the opposing trench lines, and up till then had not been occupied by the enemy. The only indication that they had decided to put its shell-smashed ruins to some purpose, and had been working there during the night, was the appearance at dawn of a well-worn path down the hill-side from the German trench line.

By day and by night, along the whole front, there are in these observation stations men trained to notice the slightest indications of activity of this sort. That it requires, at any rate, keen eyesight is shown by the fact that one of our party was unable to distinguish the line of German trenches on the hillside opposite even with the aid of a powerful field-glass. The battery commander, therefore, remarking that his guns had not yet done their *tir de réglage*, called out, "Four thousand explosive, twenty-five, fourth piece!" From the entrance to the dugout came the repetition of his words over the telephone, and then, with a bang, three shells were speeding on their way to outline with the smoke of their explosion on the ground the line of trench which the shortsighted member of our party was unable to see.

With its mechanical fuse-setting arrangement, its rapidity of fire, its system of recoil, absorption by means of pneumatic buffers, the "75" is undoubtedly the best gun in the field. The deficiencies of the French with regard to their heavy artillery have been made good with great rapidity since the outbreak of war; for in France, perhaps because of the fact that the labour market was entirely depleted by the claims of universal military service, the work of organizing and controlling the productive activity of the French factories was taken over by the State in

quite the early stages of the struggle. The guns are good. With the best field-gun in the world, and with heavy artillery which enables them to compete with the long-prepared enemy, the French are happy in possessing in their gunners and their officers a set of men whose character and qualities cannot be excelled by any other army in Europe.

The French gunners are fine men, and are doing fine work. The brunt of the battle, the burden of the casualties, the most of the misery, fall upon the infantryman walled up in the trenches. It is with him that rests the final thrust. But he loves to see the gunners' shells bursting on the trench ahead, for they speak to him of security; they remind him, as he stands in his water-logged hole, of the huge machine which lies behind him, and he knows that without his artillery his existence would be entirely intolerable and victory impossible. Infantry are the men of the problem, the gunners supply the shells, and the whole solution of the war, as has been said before, and cannot be said too often, lies in men and munitions.

The shell, indeed, resumes the whole theory of war, which General Foch, as professor at the École de Guerre, declared to be contained in three fundamental ideas—preparation and formation of a mass, and the multiplication of that mass in its use. The mass of shrapnel is formed

and put into the prepared casing, and multiplied in its use by the charge which scatters it upon the countryside. What explosives do for metal motor transport has done for men; but with a long front, every section of which has to be closely held, motor transport cannot do all that might be required of it, and unless a General has ready at his call large bodies of men which can be flung into a threatened area, or pushed forward to strengthen an attack without drawing upon and weakening the trench line in other parts, victory will be impossible. Anyone who has wandered among the maze of trenches which constitutes the first line of defence, who has passed through several other lines more to the rear which constitute the preparation for any possible reverse, who has seen the density of barbed-wire entanglement, who has heard machine-guns chattering away their messages of death along the front, would deem a forward movement an impossibility had he not also been able to see the guns at work.

An avalanche of men can do but very little against a triple avalanche of bullets, and, broadly speaking, it would avail neither side to collect an army, of no matter what size, for the attack, unless, together with this concentration of men, they carried out a corresponding concentration of munitions and of guns. This is the lesson of Neuve Chapelle, of Vauquois, of the fighting

round Cambres and Les Eparges, of the advance of the French in the Champagne. It is a lesson which no doubt will be repeated time after time before the signature of peace. It is one upon which the world of labour might well ponder, for it is only by the accurate and prodigal use of shells that casualties can be kept down to anything like reasonable limits during an attack. If it be true that the Battle of Waterloo was won in the playing-fields of Eton, it is equally true that a speedy peace can only be forged in the workshops of England, for without their devoted co-operation the man in the field will be disarmed. The man behind the gun is as important as the man in front of it, but without the man far from the battlefield the struggle will be lost.

CHAPTER IX

DESTRUCTION

Looking through an American magazine published in February, 1915, I found under a photograph of the Cloth Hall at Ypres the remark: "Said to have been destroyed by bombardment in October and November last." This caution in describing a building which since November has been nothing but a charred ruin is, I suppose, due to the workings of neutrality. It would have been well if it had been found possible to conduct parties of eminent neutrals round the battlefields of the Marne, the Argonne, Flanders, and the East. It would have been better if the military authorities had managed to show our own people what horrors lie behind the phrases of the communiqués, what is the punishment of national weakness.

In the course of my journeyings along the front I have seen enough with my own eyes, and through the lens of the aerial photographer, to be able to state with certainty that there runs right across Western Europe, for some 500 miles, a

belt some ten miles wide of misery and ruin: of villages pounded to pieces by high explosives, burned to charred fragments by incendiary shells; of towns with battered squares and crumbling churches; of isolated, unroofed, desolate farmhouses. In attempting to convey an impression of this ten-mile belt I shall be careful only to describe what I myself have seen; and if my descriptions differ from those which have already been published, they do not call into question the accuracy of other records. To those who witnessed the flames shooting up over the roof of Rheims Cathedral there can have been no doubt at the time that the cathedral was destroyed. A very eminent French statesman informed me, indeed, that it had been razed to the ground. Seen a week or so after the fire had consumed the outer timber roofing, both descriptions seemed to be very far from the reality. To use the word "destruction" in giving an account of the state of the cathedral is to leave one's vocabulary beggared in recording the work of the Germans in many other towns and villages. The mark of the incendiary, the havoc of shell, is to be seen in much greater completeness at Ypres and the villages we still defend in Belgium; at Gerbevillers, in Eastern France; and, above all, in the country through which the inflamed and defeated army of the Crown Prince retired after the staggering punish-

ment it received during the Battle of the Marne.

In the big towns the desolate streets will be peopled again almost immediately after the freeing of France from the invader. The big capitalists will get the big industries working once again; the municipal machinery will spring once more into activity; the gaps in the streets will be filled up, public buildings repaired or rebuilt; and soon it will be as though war had not been. It is in the small country towns, and particularly in the villages, that the Germans appear to have destroyed more than bricks and mortar. The French peasant is attached to the soil by ties of sentiment and tradition even stronger than those of our own agricultural population. France is the country of the small-holder; the land, by the law of heritage, has been parcelled out to all the sons for many generations, and largely on account of this the village life in France is much more of an intimate family matter than it is in England, save to the landlord. It is the rule and not the exception to find two, and sometimes three, generations of the same family occupying adjoining houses in the village, tilling adjoining ground in the fields. From this there arises an intimate communal feeling which no amount of Government inspiration or outside influence can bring into existence.

There are many villages so battered and smashed as to have, perhaps, no more than the framework of two or three houses left standing, where the peasants and farmers, on their return to the village after the passage of the Germans, have for a time been unable to locate with certainty the sites of their own homes. In these spots something has been destroyed which it will be difficult to replace. Sentiment, association, and interest, which centred on those villages, have been scattered as though they were dust before the wind. The tragedies there did not afford the grandiose spectacle of the red flames shooting up over Rheims; they did not wring a cry of horror from the world; they were intimate, small, and infinitely sorrowful. The glories of the rose-window of Rheims may have belonged to all the world, but the clock which was snatched by a marauding Bavarian from an old woman's cottage at Vassincourt meant more to her than the whole of Rheims Cathedral to the lovers of beauty all the world over.

In Clermont-en-Argonne the Germans carried their work of incendiarism to the highest pitch of cruelty. The town, a stronghold of medieval days, lies at the eastern entrance to the Argonne. The opening of railway communication deprived the road which it defended of its strategical importance, and the town, after long years of decay, had just begun to realize, when the war

broke out, that its picturesque position in the heart of one of the loveliest stretches of forest country in France, its terraced streets, had a value to the traveller in search of beauty. It had its little devices for spreading the fame of the loveliness of Argonne through France; its 1,200 inhabitants hoped at a later date to go still farther afield, and bring the foreigner to admire its charms. Then the foreigner came, in the shape of the 121st and 122nd Würtemberg Regiments, under the command of General von Durach and Prince Wittgenstein.

My own observation leads me to believe that the Prussians have been completely outdone by the Bavarians and the Würtemberg troops in the genial German work of sacking and incendiarism. It would be unfair to place upon the two German noblemen who were in command at Clermont the responsibility for beginning the scenes which attended the sack of the town. It was carried out without method, and apparently without instructions. A brutish soldier, having made himself a cup of coffee over a methylated spirit stove, apparently thought that it would be rather amusing to burn the house down. He started by upsetting the stove, and then, presumably anxious for more light, obtained the assistance of one or two kindred souls in spreading it. The idea seemed good, and soon all the fire-lighting machinery of the German Army was in full

blast. The place was besprinkled with the little black patches of gunpowder which have figured in nearly all the big German bonfires, and with petrol. The kind-hearted Würtemberger, so far as can be ascertained, was good enough to allow the inhabitants to leave their burning houses. They were, at any rate, not shot down as they ran for refuge. While the town below was getting well alight, some earnest churchgoers climbed up the hill to the beautiful old church. One with a musical soul sat down to the organ while his comrades danced crazily up and down the aisles. This did not end their fun. A church, of course, could not be allowed to escape. Having set fire to their dancing-hall, they hurried down the hill again to join in the pillaging that was going on.

I found one of the inhabitants of Clermont. She was an old woman, scavenging along the ruined street for any little object which might go to the rebuilding of her home. As my car stopped, she raised herself slowly from the heap of stones over which she was bending, and turned the uncurious face of utter misery towards me. The heap she had been turning over was her house. She had been proud of it, with all the pride of the old peasant woman whose savings in life were represented by a son with the army, the stone and mortar of her dwelling-place, her handwoven linen, two clocks, a breviary with

a silver clasp, and a few sticks of furniture. She had at first thought that her decent old age had won her favour in the Würtemberger's eye, for before putting the torch to her home they had removed the furniture, the clocks, the breviary, and the linen. But once the fire was well alight she saw her mistake, as the soldiers went through the pile of her household belongings in the street, tucked the clocks under their arms, tore the silver clasp from the breviary, and then threw the book back among the furniture, which before they left was blazing away merrily. They appear to have been on the move, and, fearful lest they might not be able to return to complete their work, as they passed the baskets of linen they shoved their bayonets through them.

The inhabitants of Triaucourt have also had dealings with the Würtemberger—in fact, with no less a person than the Duke of Würtemberg himself. They were not so lucky as the people of Clermont. At Triaucourt, of course, the Würtemberger had just cause for grievance. A young French girl had resented the beastly proposals of an officer, and had carried presumption and ignorance so far as to complain to the man's superiors. There the village was burned, and as the inhabitants fled from their dwellings they provided shooting for the sport-loving soldiery. Two old women, one over seventy, the other

over eighty years of age, finding that if they tried to leave their burning house by going out into the village street they would be massacred, tried to escape with the girl who had brought all this misfortune on the place, by climbing over the hedge into the neighbouring garden. The battue was well organized, however, and the two old women were killed in the middle of their climb; but the young girl, flattening herself down among the cabbages, managed to escape observation until the frenzy had passed, until the piano, which they played among the corpses, had soothed their savage breasts.

At Villers-aux-Vents, a charming village clustering round a beautiful old church tower, there is one house which has been left in a more or less habitable condition. That is to say that, although all the windows and some of the roof have gone, there still are wall and covering. Here, in spite of the complete destruction of village life, although the mairie, the notary's, the school-house, and the doctor's house, were in ruins, and all official personages had long since disappeared, there persisted the primitive form of communal life, which arose out of the necessity for self-protection and self-aid. In the one remaining house four families of greybeards, young women, and children, had taken up their abode, and discussed and settled the affairs of the village between them. Pooling their forces,

they were making an heroic effort to get their fields in order for the sowing, trying to save the heritage of their sons with the army. When I visited them two months after battle had scorched their countryside, they had already passed from the stage of numb despair to that of furious resentment.

It is to be doubted whether anyone ever realizes war. These people tried to apply to it the standards of reason and of humanity. They wondered how they could be expected to go on tilling the soil, raising crops, and feeding children, if these Germans were allowed to come along, burning and blasting everything. In some respects their complaints were rather like those of the burgled householder against the inadequacy of his police protection. There were in all about twenty people left in the village when the Germans entered it, composed of the courageous, who had determined to stick by their houses and protect their goods to the end; and of the timid, who were unable to take the decisive step of departure. Both had been assured by the gendarme and other representatives of the Government that, if they remained quietly in their homes and obeyed the orders given them by the German officers, their houses would probably be respected, while the belongings of those who had fled would in all likelihood be pillaged. They had been particularly warned against indulging in

any fine but futile outburst of anger, and, above all, against any shooting.

To make sure of matters in this last respect, all the weapons in the village had been collected at the mairie. They were still there when I passed that way, some hidden under fallen masonry, the charred stocks of others showing their iron bones above heaps of débris in the ruins of the mairie, for the precautions were of no avail. I talked with one of the peasants who had stayed behind, trusting that the decency of men would save his home from destruction. The only indications left of his house were mounds of brick and heaps of rubbish, littering the tiling of the ground-floor. Here and there a bottle, the leg of a chair, the metal springs of a mattress, fragments of china, alone showed that the spot was not a housebreaker's yard.

That tiled ground-floor had become the roof of the man's house. At the top of the steps leading down to the cellar was a bucket filled with glowing coke, upon which the midday meal of potatoes was being fried. In the cellar bundles of straw marked the bedroom of the old couple. The man came in from the fields as I was talking to his wife. Over his shoulders he had a sack, at the bottom of which lay a few potatoes, the result of a morning's gleaning over the neighbouring fields. All the food they could then get was army bread after a six or seven

mile walk, and what little stuff the Germans had left behind them in the fields.

The tiled floor, the fragments of china on the site of the house, and the man's solid clothing, proclaimed him to be a good type of the prosperous peasant of France, hard-working, and thrifty to the point of greed. His bitterness against the system which had allowed his whole world to be smashed about his head wrought him into passion. It was the passion of the land-owner for the soil. It was difficult to convince the people whose homes had been shattered, even during the German retreat, that there could be any comfort in victory. All this man wanted was to be given the means to do his sowing. "Unless we get that," he said, "there are some of us who will get a gun and take to the fields and the highways, and use it."

It is the fate of all church towers within the battle zone to be bombarded. In most cases there is for this action the excuse that they may serve as observation stations for the control of artillery fire. At Villers-aux-Vents the church received a shell or two, the bells had been hurled from the belfry down into the aisle, and had embedded themselves in the floor of the church. In the graveyard tombstones had been splintered and resting-places disturbed. But this damage may be regarded as inevitable in war. The church, however, bore proof of deliberate incen-

diarism. It was not enough that the tower had been made unsafe for observation purposes; a heap of petrol-soaked straw had been placed against the wooden door in an attempt to burn the church down, and the charred semicircle in the panels remains as evidence.

A little way behind the main street of the village, at the foot of the garden of one of the destroyed houses, there is a large pit, covered above with stout beams, reinforced by a solid mound of sods 4 or 5 feet deep. From the security of this "front seat" his Imperial Highness the Crown Prince William watched the merry sight of the burning of Villers-aux-Vents.

The townsfolk of Senlis, the beautiful country place some sixty miles from Paris where an organized massacre of civilian inhabitants was carried out, where the main street was burnt down as a punishment to the town, and a hundred and six houses were thus destroyed, regard their misfortunes as affording the finest example of the inhuman methods of German warfare. If they could see Gerbevillers, where there are only twenty houses out of four hundred and seventy-five—if they could see Sermaize-les-Bains, where only three houses remain of a flourishing inland watering-station —they would realize that they have matter for congratulation. Mathematically it would be incorrect to state that there is not one brick

left sticking to another in Sermaize. The expression is, however, true as a record of the impression made upon one by the spectacle of so much ruin. Timgade and Pompeii were not more effectively obliterated. The last thing in a house to fall is the brick or stonework of the chimneys. The main street of Sermaize is, as it were, a clearing where everything has been felled to the ground. Out of the ruins of the rest of the town there rise occasional chimney-stacks, like trees in a thinned plantation. It was only possible with much difficulty to form a picture of one or two of the houses thus destroyed, and then the materials for mental reconstruction had to be sought for among the débris.

There were only two houses the occupation of whose former inhabitants could be determined with accuracy. In the one case the clue was provided by an enamel tablet with the words "Night Bell," which indicated the site of the doctor's house; in the other the evidence was more copious. It had been apparently a flourishing ironmonger's store. The walls had fallen outwards, and the house itself was levelled to the ground. In the backyard there was a mass of twisted iron, a heap of still smouldering coal. In the front the shop was very easy to reconstruct. Evidently around the walls the smaller articles of the ironmonger's merchandise

had been stored in drawers or boxes. All the woodwork had been consumed, the walls themselves had dropped to pieces, but the packets of nails, picture-hangers, curtain-hooks, and wire, had fused under the red heat into strange spongelike bricks of brass and iron, and formed a low square rampart outlining the limits of the former shop. No one knows what Sermaize had done to merit this punishment, which was meted out to almost every inhabitant of the place. The big building at the springs escaped destruction solely because it was occupied by the German Headquarters Staff. The house of a grave-eyed Frenchwoman, her face beautiful with the strength of tested courage, was also spared. The church was smashed utterly to pieces, and they put a shell through the house next to hers, which stood next the church.

Her dwelling was not actually in the town, and so did not catch fire, and nobody came along to set it alight. She does not know why, but, from what I saw of her and gathered from her account of what had passed, I imagine it was that they respected her too much. As she told me, she was an old woman, and nothing mattered very much to her. She had the courage to complain. She sent a message to the staff, pointing out that the dead horses and dead men who were lying in front of the church near her house were becoming a danger to

health. As no notice was taken of this, she went out and commandeered the services of a batch of German soldiers, took them to the place, and told them to clear the bodies away! She retained her calm spirit, although she herself was a witness of one of the most heartrending incidents of terror in the whole heartrending history of German frightfulness in France. An old man was being removed as a hostage for the good behaviour of the town. He had been torn from the agonized farewells of his wife and daughter-in-law, who suspected with only too much reason the euphemistic nature of the term "hostage," and as he was marched away between his captors the two frenzied women rushed from the road and flung themselves into the river. The old man wrenched himself free and ran to their rescue. His escort caught him before he got to the river-bank and dragged him away, leaving the two wretched women struggling in the water. Their bodies came to land a little lower down, each with a bullet-wound in its head.

In the ruined church of Sermaize, surrounded by masses of fallen masonry and charred wood-work and twisted iron, there stands untouched the triumphant, joyous figure of Joan of Arc. This case has become so frequent that the Maid has become more than ever the symbol of victory to France; her constant survival in the midst of

destruction resembles the country's quiet spirit of confidence in success. In the grey, blackened square of Rheims Cathedral, in the devastated Place of Ypres, the graceful equestrian figure points with her pennon the way to victory.

The German book of war, translated by Professor Morgan, the writings of many military apologists, explain and seem to justify these methods of ruthlessness. We are asked to believe that if you only make war with sufficient savagery it will not last so long, and will become less frequent. Even the Germans, masters though they be of frightfulness, have not yet found the means terrible enough to stamp out the Frenchman's passionate patriotism, the horrors great enough to leave him cowed and sullen, with his heart and mind so emptied by despair as to be free from the desire for retribution. They have not even found among their own people a perfect tool for their designs. The whole history of frightfulness in France is lacking in any connecting principle. Some armies have been worse than others; some districts, such as the region round Epernay, have escaped unscathed. In some places the maddened act of a civilian may have furnished the Germans with an excuse sufficient in their eyes for the deeds that have been perpetrated. Both discipline and the lack of discipline have played their part in the wrecking of the French countryside. In

some places, at Revigny for example, the work of destruction was effected on orders from headquarters in the rear, and the inhabitants were warned by the soldiers saying, to them as they passed them in the streets: "Demain! Malheur à vous!" that orders had been received for the destruction of a fresh block of buildings. The motor "fire-engine" drew up in the doomed street the next morning and squirted petrol into the houses marked down for burning. Thus, with much the same method as the guns in bombarding the city will work over certain squares in the map, half the town of Revigny was burned down.

In another village a foreign officer entered a cottage shortly after the French had retired. The woman, whose little boy, frightened by the appearance of the stranger, was hiding his face in her skirts, mistook the man for a Belgian or a British officer at first. While she was answering the questions he addressed to her in a kindly manner, she saw beneath the open window the spiked helmets of German troops. The officer turned away for a minute to give some instructions, and the woman, seized with panic for the safety of her boy, hid him in the cellars. When the officer turned back, he noticed the terrible agitation of the woman, and seeking to put her at her ease, he said: "Was that your little boy who was here just now?" The woman

replied: "There was no boy." The officer insisted; she obstinately denied that there was anyone but herself in the house, until finally the German, puzzled as to the reason for this lying, fearing that the boy might have been despatched to convey a message to French troops hidden in the neighbourhood, had the house searched. When the boy was discovered the officer realized the cause of the woman's action. He appears to have been a reservist officer and a kindly fellow. He was horrified, and apparently sincerely so, to think that the stories of the martyred children of the invasion were believed. Taking the boy on his knee he reassured the mother, telling her that nothing would happen to him or to her; that he himself had a wife and a boy about the age of hers at home in Germany. Two days afterwards that woman's house—in fact, the whole village—had been burned to the ground.

If the intimate tragedies of the riven villages pluck at the heart, the desolation of the great city of Rheims stirs the imagination to a dim understanding of the gigantic forces which ambitions and misunderstandings have unloosed. The village scenes are humble in their tragedy, and concern humble folk. In the villages it is the shrine of family traditions which falls prey to the flames; in Rheims it is the cradle of a nation's history which is imperilled. There is the difference of appeal which exists between the homely

poems of Crabbe and the classical tragedies of Shakespeare.

On my way to Rheims I stopped the night at Epernay, where I was billeted on one who had had the misfortune to be forced to entertain Prince Friedrich Wilhelm during the German occupation. The town of Epernay was the busiest, most bustling spot I have seen in France since the war began. It was filled from attic to cellar with refugees from the city over the hills, who clustered in knots round each fresh arrival in hope of gaining information as to the safety of their own friends and homes. Rheims was spoken of in the bated breath with which the advance of the plague or cholera is discussed in eastern countries. From an active and beautiful city it had become a sinister place of horror and of death.

I reached it on a perfect winter day. From the western height the bowl in which it lies was clear as crystal. There was no haze to soften the atmosphere, no smoke rose from the city, and this absence of the mist which normally floats above the living place of 120,000 people was the only indication of the horror brooding over the place. From a distance there were no signs of damage in the streets; the twin square towers of the cathedral appeared to be untouched, the guns away to the north and east were silent, and there were no white clouds of bursting shrapnel

to fleck the blue sky. The city lay undisturbed in the bright sunshine. Dropping down the hill we passed a few isolated houses wrecked by shell-fire, the numbers of which increased as we passed through the solitary streets, until, as we drew near the centre of the town, a house which had not been hit became a rarity. As I got out of my car at the hotel a crowd of beggars surged round me clamouring for sous. They were joined by the pedlars of shell-fragments, for begging and shell-peddling have become the chief industry of the poor who remain in Rheims. The city had been left in peace for four days, but while we were finishing our coffee after luncheon the first shell of the renewed bombardment shook the glass of the conservatory, and I went out upon my sightseeing.

The thirty thousand odd people who remain in Rheims, in spite of all the persuasions of the authorities, have become quite accustomed to their existence. Shell-fire has been added to the things which constitute the background of their lives, but they carry on with their usual affairs in a very normal manner. One of the citizens of Rheims, who remained there during the first hundred days of the bombardment, allowed me to look at his diary. He was a carpenter by trade, and in the early entries his business and his patriotism are curiously mixed. After narrating the departure of the Germans from Rheims

and the arrival of the victorious French troops, he wrote in his diary: "I wish I were a poet to describe to-day's events. Vive la France! The stairs of M. X—— have been badly damaged by a shell. I have told him that it will take me four days to repair them." The quiet spirit in which this man kept about his business, in circumstances which were so thrilling and extraordinary as to make him wish to be a poet, evidently inspired most of his regular customers; for there is hardly a day in the diary which has not an entry recording a visit to repair broken shutters, to patch a roof or mend a door damaged by the more or less continual bombardment.

The first shell of the fresh bombardment sent some of those abroad hastening back to their cellars. Others, not provided with cellars, or fearing that even their cellars would not be an adequate protection against the Black Maria, were hastening along the road to the top of the western hill, where they would be in safety. The few shopkeepers whose establishments still remained open were out in front of their shops putting up their shutters, preparatory to a period in the cellars. A shell is a rigorous early-closing legislator. The tenacity of the people of Rheims on their homes is so strong that even families with children have refused to move out of the zone of danger. The schools have been reopened for the children remaining in the town,

and the cellars of the champagne firms have become the educational establishment of the town. Here, too, Christmas Mass was celebrated, on an altar of packing-cases, with the congregation kneeling in aisles of champagne-bottles.

Our footfalls rang out with distinctness in the still square of the cathedral. From a little distance it seemed as though the fabric were untouched. There was an untidy air about the square, it is true. Part of the approach to the cathedral was boarded off, and the roadway in front was littered with crumbled stone and broken glass. Inside, at first sight the nave seemed most remarkable on account of its emptiness. Then you realized that the greater part of the famous choir-stalls had gone. The tinkle of glass beneath the feet drew attention to the shattered windows, and gradually the sum of the damage done to the cathedral soaked in.

My visit was made in the winter, and I have not seen the building since the last heavy spring bombardment, when some 1,500 shells were sent into the town. This latter bombardment has done more damage, the gravity of which is indicated by the fact that for the first time the stone-vaulted roof has been holed. The first shells fell upon the building on September 4, the day the Germans first entered

the city. Little damage was done, and as the bombardment was carried out by the Germans when their own troops had already entered the place, it may safely be assumed that it was due to some blunder, or, as has been suggested by the Germans themselves, to the jealousy of a corps which had been deprived of the honour of entering the fallen city at the head of the troops. The town enjoyed immunity for ten days while the guns roared down on the Marne and along the Ourcq, and it was not until the Germans had evacuated, on September 14 and 15, that the shells again began falling in Rheims. On the 17th the cathedral was hit again, one shell falling on the apse and another on the north transept. On September 19 the building suffered a sustained bombardment, and towards evening the fire, which caused more damage than the shells themselves, started on the northern tower among the scaffolding which had been erected for repairs before the outbreak of the war. The flames burned themselves out after about an hour, during which time the timber roof was set alight by another shell, which the priest who conducted me round the building is convinced was an incendiary bomb, so quickly did the flames spread. The timber roofing was totally destroyed, and the fire on the scaffolding, spreading downwards, burned through the north door, destroyed the beautiful

wooden screens, or drums, inside the door, and set alight the straw which had been placed in the interior of the cathedral for the accommodation of wounded. There were German wounded lying in the straw when the bombardment began, a fact which had been notified to the enemy by the flying of the Red Cross flag above the cathedral. When the bombardment became intense, the French removed the wounded to a place of greater safety. At least one of the wounded, however, perhaps hoping to make good his escape, covered himself up in the straw, and was left behind to be burned to death. In the blaze caused by the burning straw half the choir-stalls were destroyed. The remarkable reliefs decorating the interior of the western wall, irreplaceable since they were carved out of the stone and not applied to it, were calcined by the flame, and crumble to the touch. Outside, the same fate attended all the romantic tracery of the façade, the clerestory, the flying buttresses and the turret crowning each of them, and the north tower. The tapestries and the treasure were removed from danger. There is blackness in the nave, where the splendid glory of the glass has gone. In the apse some glass still remains.

It is one of the curious facts about the modern fortification and the modern shell that some of the old church towers of Gothic construction

have stood the battering of heavy shell very much better than the ferro-concrete of the scientific fort-builder. If Rheims Cathedral exists to-day it is not the fault of the Germans, but the glory of those master-builders of the Gothic day. Opinion in France is divided as to the wisdom of restoration. It is, perhaps, early to speak of its possibility when the Germans are still encamped with their heavy guns upon the circle of hills to the north and east of the town. The damage done can be repaired. There is a lover of the cathedral who has devoted his life to the minute adoration of every stone in the vast fabric. He has a photographic record of such detail that even the almost Grecian splendour of the sculptured front has been planned out and reproduced by his camera. Whether the age of blood and destruction can produce the men with the art and with the feeling necessary for restoration is another matter. There are many Frenchmen who feel that it would be better to leave the cathedral as it is, as a monument to the glory of the French, and the eternal shame of the German, races.

The fate of Rheims has overshadowed the importance of the other fine buildings in the town which have suffered, some of them, such as the Archbishop's Palace, to a greater degree than the cathedral. It, with the Archæological

Museum and the Apartment of Kings, has been destroyed, together with the whole quarter of the town in which it lies.

As we passed through this stricken area the shells increased in frequency, as though the gunners were anxious to throw as many as they could into the city before the failing light went altogether. While we retraced our steps towards our waiting motor-cars, the sing-song alarm of the fire-engine told us of an outbreak of fire, and as we strayed for a moment at the top of the western hillside, among the hundreds who were watching the bursting of the shells over their homes, heavy columns of smoke were rising from four parts of the city. The last picture that I bore away from Rheims was that of a sea of grey masonry gathering into a triumphant towering wave in the Cathedral. The red rays of the sunset had caught the glass of the apse and streaked the grey fabric, and the colour of blood glowed against the black smoke of the fires in the background.

The villages in the north have suffered in exactly the same way as those in the east, and there is yet no telling what will be the fate of the fair towns and rich countryside the Germans have yet to abandon. The French soldier hates war. French civilization has worked on other lines than those of blood and iron, and the taking of human life is not pleasant to the French intellect. They were,

before the war broke out, perhaps the most pacific great nation in Europe. Now they have become hardened to war, and have the soldier's pleasure in the life of the field. Nothing, however, can harden them to the sights they have seen and those they are still to see when they march through the rest of invaded France. In the Marne the soldiers of France have seen what the German can do. They have marched through the flaming villages, and in each man's mind arose the thought: "What have they done in my 'pays'?" Some of them do know what has been done in their village, and the knowledge has made them iron in their determination to exact retribution. The French soldier is, I am firmly convinced, incapable of any frightfulness approaching that of the Germans. But he has a keen wish for justice, and the only justice which can meet the case is that of the old Hebrew law. It is to be doubted whether Dr. Lyttelton would have made his plea for soft treatment for the enemy had he seen what is to be seen in the Argonne. It is still more to be doubted whether there would have been any trouble with our labourers had they been given an opportunity, either through the Press or through the eyes of their own leaders, of realizing what invasion means, how close the hour of defeat came, how stern and unrelenting is the struggle still, what manner of wild beast culture

would dominate Europe if the Germans won. The French are fighting that the Germans may be made to pay for all that they have done, that they may never again be able to fling the torch into the world's life. We have Scarborough and Whitby and Hartlepool. The French have a band of blasted country ten miles broad, and so long that it only just fits into the map of Great Britain.

CHAPTER X

FRENCH AND BRITISH

During the days when British participation in this war hung in the balance, British people in France were filled with an almost shameful anxiety, for they knew that to the French the vague formula of the Entente Cordiale had conveyed more than was contained in the letters exchanged between Sir Edward Grey and the French Ambassador at London, which formed the only solid documentary basis of Anglo-French friendship and possible co-operation. Technically, we were not bound to come to the support of France, even were she attacked. Sentimentally, at any rate, the French had seen in the speeches of our public men, in the leading articles of our Press, and, above all, in the attitude of Great Britain at the time of the Agadir crisis, an understanding which amounted to an alliance. British neutrality would have revived the tradition of *perfide Albion*, and would to French eyes have branded us for ever as traitors to our word, though in reality no word

had passed. During those first few days an Englishman in Paris was besieged at every hour of the day by his friends, and even by complete strangers, for information as to what England was going to do. The hesitancy of our attitude, our refusal to give to France the pledge that we would support her, and to notify Germany of our intention of doing so, in the opinion of many Frenchmen prevented the possibility of peace. It was felt then that a clear, emphatic statement by Great Britain, such as that made by Mr. Lloyd George in his famous speech at the Mansion House in 1911, would have made Germany realize the hopelessness of the struggle she was trying to provoke. Now it is recognized that if events had taken this turn, the war would only have been postponed, that Germany would have continued with patience and perseverance to sap Franco-British friendship, and still further to strengthen her army and her fleet.

It was known in France that there were powerful political and financial personages in England who deemed it well that Great Britain should stand aloof. In spite of this knowledge, France held, and rightly held, that Great Britain could not thus be blinded to the necessity for her intervention, that she could not fly completely in the face of the whole of her traditional foreign policy, which throughout

ages has aimed at preventing any one State upon the Continent of Europe from acquiring a predominant position. The violation of Belgian neutrality clinched the matter, and gave to the waverers at home the urgent push that sent them from neutrality to war. Even without this push acute French statesmen are of opinion that the British people would have realized that the war upon France formed but the preliminary to the greater and even more ardently desired struggle against England. Frenchmen of all classes have had more reason in the past than British people to pay attentive heed to foreign politics. They have all been quick, while appreciating to the full the services we have rendered to the cause of France, to the ideals which have united our people in our championship of the Belgian cause, to realize that we went to Flanders, consciously or unconsciously, to fight for the protection of our own homes just as much as we did for the protection of France and the independence of Belgium. Their appreciation of our services has not suffered from this clearness of vision. The reception accorded to our troops when the first few regiments landed at the Channel ports was rapturously joyful.

Over the Channel there floated the golden tubbiness of one of the British dirigibles, and on the horizon we saw the cloud of smoke of the

first transports. They had arrived at last. Hurrying into Boulogne, I was in time to see the Argyll and Sutherlands marching through the streets of the town to the camps which had been prepared for them upon the neighbouring hills. The population of Boulogne rushed to the unaccustomed sound of the bagpipes, and it was through lines of the old Boulonnais fishwives, who had that morning bade tearful farewell to their fisher-sons off to the depôt, that our men stepped gaily along, with a cheery grin and a smile for the words of welcome shouted out to them. The fishwives searched through their heads for odd scraps of English with which to make their welcome more intelligible to the *braves Écossais.* While one sought to give a note of welcome to the two words of English she had heard in constant use upon the quayside —"Portaire, Sire?"—another exclaimed, in accents of the wildest enthusiasm, "Daily Mail! Daily Mail!" The opinion of the town was summed up by the remark made by a brawny veteran of the sea as he watched the sturdy Scotsmen swinging past in their war-kilts of khaki, "Ça au moins, c'est du solide!"

It was the first of many similar scenes. The town gradually became swamped with British, who poured out of the docks from the ships which had come across escorted by submarine and airship. Then they vanished up-country,

and for a time all that was seen of the British was the machinery of the base.

I met them again, those cheery Argyll and Sutherlanders, billeting themselves upon a village in Flanders on the eve of the first fighting of Mons. I had got caught in a great stream of motor-cars filled with stores and with officers moving northwards. They passed through an almost continuous lane of cheering peasants. Their motor-cars underwent a regular floral bombardment, which grew in the country towns to the intensity of a flower engagement at a southern carnival. By the time the end of the journey was reached, and the men had entered the zone of operations, there was many a one of them who smilingly and ruefully was rubbing a bruise raised upon his cheek by a tightly bound peasant bouquet, which had caught him with the force of the thrower added to the speed of the car. Men who got off their cars were immediately the centre of a struggling mass of villagers, old and young, male and female, anxious to shake them by the hand or to coax their regimental letters off their shoulder-straps. They were given a right royal reception, and right royally have they deserved it.

In spite of the inevitable friction caused by the requisitioning officer, and the countless restrictions which the army has naturally placed upon the ordinary course of civilian life

in the country it occupies, the men get on in the most splendid way with the French peasant. They are firm friends, and there is many a Flemish youngster to-day who, if he had not been born a Frenchman, would most certainly elect to be British at his second incarnation.

It is very jolly to see Tommy at his ease in a French farmhouse—playing with the children, helping the old people with the work about the house, and occasionally giving a hand with the plough. Contact such as that which brings the French and British together in the field breeds mutual respect, born of the knowledge of what is being done and suffered by both. It is one of the misfortunes of military requirements that they prevent that knowledge becoming widely diffused among the whole masses in Great Britain and in France. The military censorship rightly forbids any mention of the accurate number of troops engaged, or of any detail which might furnish information likely to be useful to the enemy. The drastic way in which it has been enforced has had political disadvantages.

The French know that we are making an effort such as has never been made in the world's history. They know it because they have been assured of the fact in countless leading articles. We know that the French have got large armies in the field because we have

been told it in leading articles. Both peoples fail to realize to the full what the other has accomplished. It is only by the constant stream of descriptive articles that the great body of French people can be really brought to grasp all the difficulties with which we have had to grapple.

There are many, many Frenchmen who do not know that we have as yet no system of conscription, who imagine in consequence that we had at the outbreak of war an army as large as the French to throw into the scales. There are many, many English people who cannot understand what France has done, who cannot possibly be blamed for not knowing what universal service means to a nation. Naturally enough our eyes are turned most eagerly upon the doings of our own troops; it is their fortunes that we follow with eager heart, and the paucity of news regarding the doings of the French in our own Press leads to an almost undue emphasis being given to the doings of our army. It is not the fault of the Press; it may not be the fault of the censorship, but one of the things inevitable with the secrecy of war.

The Germans have seen in this secrecy a political lever which their wonderfully organized system of propaganda has been endeavouring to use in France. The treatment meted out to British prisoners is in contrast to that given to

the French, the hereditary enemies of Germany. The French prisoner of war is better treated on the whole than his ally in misfortune. The German explains this to him by pointing out that it is England alone whom she hates, by quoting Herr Lissauer's Hymn, and by declaring that the reason Germany so hates England is because it is England which has forced this war upon the world for her selfish ends. The propaganda is carried out along the same lines in the German and in the neutral Press. No method is too minute to escape use.

I was shown recently a letter received by a French lady living in Switzerland, in which she was informed by a German officer of the death of a relative upon the field of battle. The letter was couched in the most correct and respectful terms. The writer expressed his regret at having to be the sender of the bad news, and tempered it with a tribute to the heroic death of the Frenchman in question. The sting and the object of the letter were revealed in a postscript, which declared that French people could lay the blame for their dead upon the hated English.

A band of strange Anarchists working for the arch-Anarchist have been slipping circulars underneath the doors of Paris houses, in which the same order of ideas was developed. All this and many other forms of German propaganda

intended to destroy the confidence of France in her Allies, to undermine the trust all Frenchmen have in the purity of British motives, appears as foolish and as futile as the similar work carried out by Herr Dernberg's Press Bureau in the United States; but both activities deserve to be watched. The mind of all Frenchmen is already made up, and all the protestations of Germany that she really rather admires the French now that they have proved themselves such doughty fighters will not succeed in convincing France that this sudden desire for French friendship is anything but the mask of further treachery; nor can it ever lead France to regard the Germans as anything but the murderers of her sons, the wreckers of her homes, and the ravishers of her women.

I have heard English business men ask what France is about. They have found that the financial and commercial system of France has been utterly upset by the war, and they have pointed with some satisfaction to the better way in which we have ordered these things at home, at the motto of "Business as Usual" displayed on our shop windows.

The Frenchman admires the spirit with which the John Bull of tradition determined to allow the war to affect the daily tenor of his life as little as possible. Yet he was quick to perceive the contradiction to be seen sometimes on two

posters plastered on the same premises, the one declaring "Business as Usual," and the other stating, "Your King and Country need you."

To the Frenchman who found the great mineral district of the east, the huge textile district of the north, the wine-growing and agricultural country of the Champagne, in the hands of the invader, the only business worth attending to as usual was that of getting rid of the invader. To French ears the new motto, "Victory as Usual," has a worthier sound. It is less in accordance with the Napoleonic view of British nationality. The French have turned a somewhat wistful glance at the spectacle of England, with her foreign trade practically unimpaired, her shipping busy, her streets filled with traffic, and her shops all open and full of customers, when they have thought of the silence of many of their factories, the closed shutters of their big commercial establishments, unable to do business because the requirements of military service have removed not only their staffs and their labour, but their customers as well.

They have guessed, if they have not known, some of the difficulties with which we were faced. They knew that armies cannot be improvised in a night. They saw with pride and astonishment, it may be added, the wonderful response made freely by all classes at home to the call of the recruiter, and they said to them-

selves: "The British effort is for later on. They are not ready yet, and we must hold the line with what admirable assistance they can afford us at this early stage of the war until their preparations are complete.

That time has come. Our army in Flanders has been greatly reinforced, but the great effort we have still to make. When, as our casualty lists grow longer, as they undoubtedly will, when the sorrow of the war has come home to ever-widening circles of society, and the price of peace to ourselves mounts up, it will be well that people in England shall remember that our allies in France have borne the burden we shall then be bearing ever since the first day of war, and are still bearing it; that to them, although no casualty lists are published, the cost of victory has become their daily knowledge.

The French have abandoned the drinking of absinthe many months before we started to consider the advisability of giving up whisky. This is a minor sacrifice; but the date of it is an indication of the fact that France has had to bear the full force of the pressure of war at an earlier date than we have in Great Britain.

We may be prepared for an attempt in England to do what German propaganda has failed to accomplish in France. It will not be at all surprising if English people are told by disguised German voices, when we are giving

our most in killed and wounded on the battlefield, when our industry and finance are suffering from the continued strain and drain of war, that if the French had only fought well in the early days of the war, all this might have been avoided. We shall be often told in the anxious days of the Peace Conference many things the acceptance of which might lead us to look askance at the French attitude towards the final settlement. We shall be told that if we allow severe or just terms of peace to be forced upon beaten Germany, we shall destroy the great buffer between ourselves and the Slav flood. The whole megaphonic clangour of the propagandists' bureau will be in full blast, and we shall do well to prepare now to stop our ears to all this babel.

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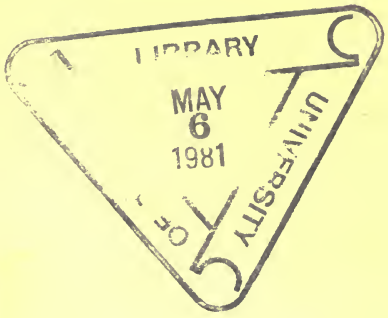
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