CAPTIVITY AND ESCAPE

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[*Frontispiece.*

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LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

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By M. JEAN MARTIN

A FRENCH SERGEANT-MAJOR

TRANSLATED BY MISS V. A. RANDELL

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1917

TO HER

THE THOUGHT OF WHOM BROUGHT CONSOLATION TO ME

IN HOURS OF SUFFERING, MOURNING AND SADNESS

TO HER

WHO PROVED MY STRENGTH AND SAFEGUARD

THROUGHOUT DAYS OF TRIAL AND DANGER

TO MY FIANCÉE

I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME

PREFACE

We have hitherto had many volumes of the doings of British soldiers at the front and in captivity, but few of our French Allies.

The experiences of Monsieur J. Martin, written originally in French, give such a vivid picture of prison life in Germany, that they have an interest far beyond the mere personal one which his friends and countrymen attach to his name.

Brought up in France, amidst all the charm and culture of the best French-Protestant traditions, he was educated at Rouen, and he finally took his degree in 1912. During his studies he spent much time in England, where his charm of manner and chivalrous spirit made him many friends. Moreover, his love for games brought him in close touch with our people, and he won great credit for himself in the football field.

Before the outbreak of war, while staying with friends in a country village, near one of the garrison towns in Ireland, he made acquaintance with some of our Irish soldiers quartered there

at the time; little thinking how soon he would meet them again in very different circumstances, for, by a strange coincidence, he not only found them sharing his captivity in the first prison camp in which he was interned in Germany, but also, owing to his knowledge of the language, he was appointed as interpreter to the British soldiers.

His first thoughts were to help them, by informing their friends of their terrible condition. In this he succeeded, and it was through his post cards that the British public first heard of their most pressing needs.

Many long months elapsed in the prison camp which he so graphically describes, and the intimate details which he gives of the life must prove of intense interest to all who have relations and those dear to them still suffering in captivity.

The reader may imagine the joy of his friends when his telegram reached them one day in July 1915—"Escaped, safe in Holland." Arrangements were hastily made to enable the escaped captive to travel to London without a moment's delay.

Worn out and exhausted, he was granted leave to recuperate in Ireland, and in less than a fortnight from the moment of his escape, he alighted from the train at Tipperary, and realised that he

had accomplished the "Long, long way" which he had so often joined in singing with the Irish soldiers in the camp.

He was awarded the Croix de Guerre, with a clasp, and his services were honoured by a *citation à l'armée*—in the following terms:

CITATION.

Le Général Commandant la x^e^ Armée cite à l'ordre de l'Armée:

Le Sergeant Martin Jean . . .

"Blessé au début de la campagne en cherchant à ramener dans nos lignes deux pièces de 75 qui avaient été abandonnées. Fait prisonnier, s'est évadé. Traqué par l'ennemi, se cachant le jour, marchant la nuit, a réussi à gagner la frontière hollandaise puis à l'Angleterre, à bout de forces en raison des privations subies et des marches pénibles.

le 24 octobre 1915
le Général Commandant la x^e^ Armée,
signé: D'URBAL."

After a brief period of recuperation, M. Martin was able to enter again into the service of his country, where our best wishes go with him.

HILDA SANDERS.

Charleville Park,
Co. Cork,
September 5, 1917.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE following is an extract from the Author's Introduction to the French edition of this book:—

With but few exceptions the incidents and scenes described in this book were actually witnessed by the author, although he was not always one of the *dramatis personæ*. As regards the rest they were all reported to him by personal friends whose good faith is beyond question.

The authenticity of all—even of the strangest—situations here described, as well as the truth and accuracy of the pictures, may be accepted without hesitation.

At the same time the author feels in duty bound to warn his readers to be on their guard against a very common and very human fallacy, which has, in his opinion, given rise to much prejudice in the minds both of prisoners and of their relatives. The world has been too ready to generalise from the complaints or praises of returned prisoners, and to infer from one report—the truth and exactness of which was beyond a doubt—that it was the same at every place throughout Germany.

Such a conclusion is most mischievous and injurious to the interests of those most nearly concerned. The inevitable result is either a fresh access of misery and apprehension on the part of the relatives of the prisoners—or a deplorable falling off of the help sent to those in captivity.

The fact that the author survived those trying days on the field of battle; that in the course of his removal he had the benefit of comparatively humane treatment; that he was kindly tended in a good hospital, must not lead any one to the conclusion that in no case was a wounded man finished off or tortured; or that he never was subjected to grievous privations and brutality during his time in hospital.

The barbarities of the Germans are too well known to call for any further confirmation. Beside the kindnesses occasionally experienced at the hands of Teuton soldiers, must be set innumerable assassinations perpetrated by these savages at the instigation of their officers. The devotion of some hospital nurses must be set against the crimes of violence on French prisoners, as they passed through a railway station, after the battle of the Marne, of which certain German "ladies," who professed to be members of the Red Cross, were guilty; while certain majors displayed a kindly solicitude, on

the other hand, to the deep disgrace of the German people, is the experience of unmitigated and inexcusable brutality.

The aim of the writer has been to set forth some samples of the life of a prisoner, and, above all, to show the French prisoner in his struggle against the two predominant evils, common to all his fellows, hunger and depression—with a weapon which is characteristically French and is the only one of which his jailer is powerless to deprive him—namely, chaff (*raillerie*).

Harassed by hunger, tortured by the cold, weakened by privation, depressed by misery, overwhelmed by sorrow, persecuted by the relentless hatred of his executioner, the French prisoner always kept his heart up. In spite of all these forms of oppression he is the victor. Under torture he laughs at his executioner: a prisoner, his spirit gives him the mastery over his jailer. His pluck is a thorn in the flesh of the man who strikes him. His laughter sounds like a knell in the ears of the Boche, who cannot understand it, and whose chief characteristic is, as the English say—a complete lack of humour.

With all the energy of their stolidity, those fossilised brutes, the Germans, are carrying on a struggle with this volatile, mocking, mischievous,

caustic spirit which they cannot understand. All their attempts to get rid of it are fruitless. The battle of the Marne enabled us to retain unimpaired our old Gallic spirit, and the prisoners cling to it jealously.

In depriving him of liberty and life, the Hun has taken off the clapper of this pure crystal bell—the gay mockery of the Frenchman. He makes him a slave and starves him, and, exulting in this outrage, he thinks that he is safe and rejoices accordingly. The Frenchman will cease to laugh at the doings of the learned bear. The Boche can continue to take himself seriously and the Frenchman cannot chuckle over him, but all of a sudden, to his consternation and profound stupefaction, there comes, he knows not whence, the reckless, bewildering, irritating sound of that accursed bell.

The nimble-witted Frenchman, tricky as a monkey, has got hold of the bell. Without the clapper and with his cheery shout and reckless laughter he has made it ring by swinging it down on the hard head of the Teuton.

I trust that my friend the reader may catch in a favourable spirit some faint echo of this ringing which, although "Made in Germany," is peculiarly French.

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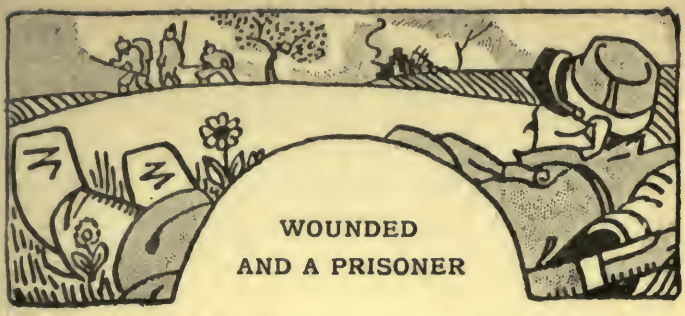


WOUNDED
AND A PRISONER

CHAPTER I

I WAS hit, I was conscious of being hit, and yet had not heard the bursting of the shell that caused my wound. I had an impression of my feet being violently swept from the ground, and then of my falling down heavily. I was overcome with a sense of paralysis. My legs were stiff and powerless. I felt them tingling.

I did not lose consciousness, however, and saw all that was surrounding me; there, a few paces away, was a dead horse, shattered by the shell that had struck me. Convinced that I was cut in two by the shell and hit in the region of the stomach, I believed I was destined to die where I was in a very short while.

The shells and bullets continued to rain, to whistle, to burst all around me, till at last I wished one of them would come and put an end to my sufferings, shortening the agony under which I was powerless. I had, nevertheless, kept the use of my arms, and after a long and painful effort succeeded in unbuckling the straps of my valise, the weight of which was crushing my back. Re-

lieved by this, I began, to the sound of the shrapnel, to think of those dear to me, to whom I felt that I must in spirit say a last good-bye. That I was going to die, I had not a shadow of doubt. I must be frightfully wounded, and it was impossible for me to reach the small packet of first-aid dressing that perhaps would have stopped the hæmorrhage that was weakening me.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon. I tried to imagine what my own people were doing at that hour. I thought of those who had been living close to where I had fallen—of those whose sons were being sacrificed—of those who, farther away and unaware of the French retreat, were still enjoying the soothing spectacle of a calm, blue sea—of all my relatives, parents, friends, and I rejoiced to think I should not have lived in vain, if the gift of my life served to protect them against the fury of these barbarous hordes, and spared them the sight of the atrocities of this war, which our enemies have wilfully made so horrible. Then my anxiety increased in regard to my young brother, who fought in my section. I had lost sight of him at the beginning of the engagement. From a plain soldier I had been promoted to section-leader, and had taken the place of our lieutenant who was disabled.

I could still hear the cries and groans of my wounded comrades, but, at least, I had no longer the terrible sight of those boys whom I loved and with whom I had lived for a year or two, who, wounded, had been obliged to remain under fire in a bare, unsheltered plain, without any relief to

their suffering. What had become of my brother I did not know. At each advance made by our soldiers, it was possible for me, by throwing a rapid glance behind, to note the thinning of the line, but I was unable to say who had fallen and who remained.

I do not know why, but, being wounded myself, it seemed to me that, in spite of the great losses sustained by my section, my brother must be safe and sound. I made the following reflections: "The chances of falling or of escaping seem to be equal. I am wounded; therefore my brother is not"—absurd reasoning, but I wanted to believe in it. And I was glad, as much as it was possible to be glad while life and strength were ebbing away with my blood, that it was I who was stricken.

How long these reflections lasted I do not know, for a minute seemed centuries, and what I took for a long train of reasoning perhaps passed through my troubled mind in a second.

Suddenly, as in a dream, I heard voices, and a French section arrived on the height where I had fallen. Very plucky, despising danger, the men knelt, and with careful aim fired.

A sergeant approached me. "Wounded, old chap?"

"You are advancing, then? All the better. You must try to take me away, won't you?"

"Yes," he answered; "reinforcements are coming, and here's a stretcher-bearer."

It was true. A stretcher-bearer was close

beside me. Helped by the sergeant, he looked to see where I was wounded.

They cut the legs of my trousers, took off my boots; no trace of anything. They raised my overcoat and saw the blood flowing abundantly. I did not see them, I did not hear them, but I felt their looks condemned me. They lightly dressed my wound.

"It is nothing," said one; "wait a little; they will take you away in a moment."

The battle continued, the bullets whistled around us, ricochetting from the stones in the road, cutting the branches of the trees. The enemy could not be far away, for their artillery was silent.

"Your rifle is all right?" a man asked me.

"Yes; take it."

"Thanks; the butt of mine is broken."

"I say," said another, "let me have your glasses." Stooping, he removed the glasses on which I had fallen and which were hurting my side. Standing beside a tree, this soldier, glass in hand, watched the enemy and gave orders with the coolness and air of a Marshal of France certain of victory.

The sergeant was just then wounded. Our supply of cartridges began to run short. Within reach of my hand lay a few. I occupied myself by passing them on to my comrades, who continued their fire.

"Are the reinforcements coming?"

"Yes, old fellow, don't worry; we are not going to leave you," and he signed to the reinforcements to approach.

But, suddenly, I no longer saw the stretcher.

"They are coming back immediately," said my neighbour; "our sergeant has been hit, they are taking him to the rear."

The struggle was not equal. The French ranks thinned and received no reinforcements, the munitions were running short, they were obliged to retreat to avoid being surrounded.

"Poor chap," said a man to me, as a sort of good-bye, as he reluctantly retired after firing his last shot. This time all was over; there was no more hope! The Germans were coming. It was impossible for me to see them, but I could hear their shouts and the vile noises they made as they advanced. I was lying on the ground at the mercy of the enemy who were hurrying to the assault, exasperated at the resistance of those who had sown death in their ranks, for the French had given way only at the last moment. In a few seconds the Germans were upon me.

. . . . . .

They had so often told us the Boches finished off the wounded, that not for an instant did I entertain the hope of escape. The end was approaching; after all, it only hastened by a few moments the death which I judged inevitable. Mentally I saw with horrible clearness all the possible movements of him who was to finish me. In anticipation I felt the cold point of his bayonet piercing me, his iron heel crushing in my skull, the butt of his gun beating my face. Finally, deluding myself with the hope that I might be permitted to choose the form of my death, I was deciding that it should be with a bullet in my head, when two

soldiers in uniform of greyish-green stood before me. One, a man of prompt decision, about thirty years of age, fair, with a crisp moustache and a face tanned like a labourer of the field, noticed my stripes. "Corporal, corporal," cried he, and seizing his rifle by the barrel, began to describe a circular swing destined to send the detested non-commissioned officer into the other world. It was a blow from the butt-end of a rifle that was to finish me! I shut my eyes and . . . waited with clenched teeth.

The blow did not come, but I felt strong hands fall on my shoulders, forcing me to rise. "Hoch hoch, get up!" said a voice. The soldiers soon saw I could not stand, so they let me fall back into my old position. The one who evidently had prevented his comrade from killing me, bent down and gave me water to drink from his flask. Then looking for my weapons, which they could not find, they passed on their way silently and disappeared. It is to this man, to this adversary, whose features I did not see, that I owe my life. The enemy was trampling the soil of my native land, and I had fallen, powerless, wounded,—how severely I did not know,—liable to any act of German brutality, as I had just realised. In any case I was in the hands of the invaders.

Patrols were now searching the conquered ground. By an effort, I suppressed the groans which pain was forcing from me. To lie hidden seemed to me the best policy. Having successfully lived through the past few hours encouraged me to think of the possibility of not dying. Ah!

if only the French would come back, as they would come back most certainly. Hope lingered in my heart.

A German patrol visited me. The soldiers searched my valise and a corporal placed within reach of my hand some bread and chocolate found there. Then he went off delighted, a loaf of bread under his arm, and carrying a pot of jam, which a comrade and I had vowed to eat in German territory in the evening of our first fight. Before he went, the Teuton threw over me some things he found in my valise, which protected me against the damp already beginning to fall. Abruptly the night had displaced the day, almost it seemed without transition. . . .

On that lonely road, cut up by shells, with trees torn by shrapnel, vehicles were slowly passing in silence. They must have been the enemy's ambulance corps looking for the wounded, which, alas! were not wanting that day. A few blasts of the whistle, a few orders issued by a hoarse and angry voice, the confused sounds of corporals calling from memory the roll of the men of their squad, and a section assembled. Again more blasts on the whistle, shouts in the night, the noise of heavy boots running across the road, and the section must have been complete. "Alles da." Then, to get them in order, the voice of a young officer was heard in the darkness: "Gewehr über! Gewehr ab!" The whole thing was perfect; the vigour put into their movements was such that it seemed impossible they could have done a hard day's fighting. At the command "March!" the

legs were stiffly raised and the boots came heavily to ground, marking the time of the goose-step. So the section, almost invisible to me, defiled past, with a faultless precision as in a dream: rifles firmly held on the left shoulder, heads stiffly raised, right hands in line. Later on, keeping time to their step, the men broke into a marching song.

Hours passed. I was not sleeping; yet it seemed to me I was not awake: for weakened by the loss of blood I was incapable of realising my situation. From time to time, frozen by the cold of the night, I shivered violently.

Steps approached; and I heard, as in a dream, the sound of strange voices. Suspecting danger, I held my breath and with closed eyes lay still. Light was flashed on my face, a hand was placed on my forehead, and then in German a voice, hollow enough to make the flesh creep, said, "He is still warm." Another had seized on my shoulder and shook me: "Monsieur, monsieur." I opened my eyes, and by the light of an electric lamp saw a revolver pointed at me. . . . This, then, was to be the end, in the darkness. The doctor, for such he was, questioned me in French. He withdrew his weapon and looked at my wounds, then he informed me that he would have me taken to the temporary hospital. The light was extinguished. The men bending beside me went away. For some time afterwards the sound of their voices disturbed the calm of the night. A few revolver shots fired at long intervals roused me from my torpor and made me tremble. Was it perhaps some unfortunate so gravely wounded that they could not

think of trying to save him, and the doctor was finishing him off, in order to shorten his agony? or was it a wounded Frenchman they were killing? These questions remained unanswered.

The ambulance cars continued to pass along the road, and I remained on the ground. Germans had the right of precedence.

The first rays of daylight lit up the sky and the battlefield became alive. Companies of Germans filed past, marching to their outposts, or seeking contact with our troops. It was almost broad daylight when two stretcher-bearers came to look for me and took me away on a tent canvas. We passed the troops which were marching to new combats. Very soon I was placed in an ambulance car and carried to a neighbouring town, whose ruins bore witness to violent struggles. The wounded filed past to the temporary hospital installed in the local castle. Here the care and attention, given indiscriminately to French and Germans, were bestowed with great professional skill, humanity and devotion.

On my bed of straw in the garage, between two wounded Germans, I cherished without ceasing the hope of being rescued by my comrades. I listened anxiously to the noise of battle, which had recommenced with the daylight. I thought at first that the noise was approaching; was nearer, more deafening; then little by little the firing became a rumbling—the rumbling grew less definite, less intense—and again silence reigned, silence more dreadful than the uproar of battle, for it isolated us from our brothers. Black despair seized me!

I had taken part in the fighting in Belgium, in the sad and painful retreat; I was weak from my wound, the privations and sufferings. I had seen a disciplined army, superbly equipped and strong as a tidal-wave, pass before me. Saddened by defeat, I wept for unhappy France. The thought of those who were dear to me, of the suffering they would have to endure, the agony they would experience, still further increased my depression. I remained where I was, confused, overcome, despairing, like a wounded bird that, powerless, witnesses the destruction of its nest by a malevolent beast.

There we rested on sheets over straw, getting what repose our wounds permitted, suffering, dreaming, dozing or talking with our companions in misfortune. It was the same bad luck that united us, the same need of telling our miseries urged us towards mutual understanding and goodwill. I succeeded in keeping up a conversation with my neighbour, a tanned, fair-haired boy, who was wounded in the thigh. We discussed the question of "pay," as that was the thing which appeared to interest him most. His astonishment knew no bounds when I spoke of the daily "sou" of our soldiers. Then we spoke of our families; the numbers were what seemed to strike his peasant's intellect. He wanted to know how many brothers and sisters I had; their ages and my own. This information took time, until, tired, weakened by pain and loss of blood, the conversation soon carried us drifting to the gates of sleep.

. . . . . .

The doctor came to see us. He was a tall, fair,

stout man, with powerful shoulders, thin hair, light eyes and round, clean-shaven face, marked with numerous scars which bore witness to the activity of his student days. Draped in an immaculate apron, he went about good-naturedly and quite at his ease, juggling with arms, legs, heads, cutting off this, sewing up that, looking at the most horrible wound with an air of knowledge which showed the professional joy of the expert surgeon.

The first day his round was speedily made. A few words thrown to right and left, a few friendly stops, a few witty sallies and jokes, followed by a loud laugh, and there he was already liked by all of us. He looked after the wounded French with equal care; for to him the wounded had no nationality.

The doctor was helped by an attendant, a soldier wounded in the foot, who could not keep still, but went eagerly hobbling along, amongst those who were suffering. Undoubtedly the particular pains he took would not have been approved by all of the faculty; but he put so much devotion into it, and his big hands tried so earnestly to be gentle and kind, that one found strength to smile with him before making the grimaces caused by his clumsiness. Moreover, he was very valuable, and provided us with eatables during the first two days. His prolonged absences were a good sign. From these excursions, goodness knows where, he would come back smiling, excited, noisy, bringing in his pockets, in his hands, under his arm, dusty bottles of old wine. Every one shared in the distribution,

and the little aluminium noggin made the tour of the room. At other times it was a bucket of milk still warm and frothy, with pears, biscuits, sweets. Where did he get them all? I pictured shop-windows burst open by blows from the butt of a rifle, houses half burnt down, pierced with shell-holes. It must be there he prowls about, pillaging for his wounded and needy comrades. He was convinced that his deeds were good; and if ever he defrauded a woman of her bucket of milk, as she returned from milking, may he be pardoned for it on account of the pure kindness of his intentions.

For some time the ambulance cars had ceased their rumbling. The castle must be full, the organisation was complete. Late in the evening they gave us a bowl of vegetable soup, slightly burnt and strongly spiced. I think this was due, despite his resourceful mind, to the limited cooking capacity of our attendant, for he excused himself for having kept us waiting.

At the hour when silence fell on the country, sentinels came on duty at the door of the garage. They occasionally glanced inside to question Karl, Fritz or Wilhelm. Night fell, and its first hours seemed interminable. Towards morning the moans were less frequent, less violent, the noise of the rustling of the straw less constant; the ravings of the delirious gradually subsided; sleep overcame us, giving relief to our bodies and balm to our souls.

In the morning, our attendant, good-natured fellow as he was, brought us, with a few of his

coarse jokes, a quart of very hot black coffee. Then the doctor appeared and almost immediately went into a little room close to the garage where he could see his patients successively. One after another we passed into that little room, carried in on a stretcher by two attendants. Already there was camaraderie amongst us, and we chaffed him who was about to enter, pretending to believe he would cry out under the doctor's scalpel. Thus it was a point of honour with each of us not to utter a sound while our flesh was probed and our blood ran. The exit of the Frenchman who was to pass first "on the billiard-table," as they say among the "Poilus," made a sensation. The Germans pretended to groan, to cry, to call out "Mamma." But they were disappointed. The French determined not to utter a sound. With sweating brow and teeth clenched on the cloth of the stretcher, they gave themselves with courage, even with stoicism, to the operation. They proved that, although vanquished, they were men and knew how to endure suffering. In their turn they might have made fun of the Germans who returned almost fainting with pain; but we showed them that we French did not take pleasure from such sources as the Boches did, and that suffering, especially the suffering of an enemy, was, with us, no subject for derision.

I remember that I scored a success, completely unexpected but well deserved, I must confess. When, after the operation, I was brought back dressed in a woman's smock of fine cambric, even I found myself such a comical figure that, forgetting

the knife that I had just experienced, I joined in the laughter with the others.

Owing to the weakened condition in which we were, the hours which followed passed in semi-torpor, a torpor disturbed at times by sharp jars of pain, physical or mental.

. . . . . .

Some days later I was sent to the general hospital to wait for a motor ambulance.

How lonely that hospital was! There, in spite of its thousand occupants, reigned the stillness of death! One felt that force, the brutal hand of the conqueror, had fallen upon the establishment which formerly had been ruled by the gentle laws of meek nuns. The sisters, hiding their bent heads and humiliated faces under frilled caps, were still half distracted from fear of the fighting and the entrance of the invaders. Their features were drawn and pinched with weariness, caused by over-work of a rough and hurried nature, by want of rest and the constant nursing they were obliged to do. Terrorised by the threats of the Teuton soldiery, they walked about dumb, with set lips and hearts oppressed, swallowing the tears which choked them, not daring to address a word to us, troubled and terrified as they were by the sight of the uniform of a fellow-countryman in those circumstances. They went about the wards noiselessly, aimlessly. Feeling themselves watched, they had the appearance of trapped animals, and mad with grief, thinking of their God whom they could no longer serve at the accustomed hours, of the God who seemed to have abandoned them,

they threw looks of compassion on all these men, alike in misfortune, who, side by side, pell-mell, French and Germans, so that one could no longer distinguish which was which, were lying on straw mattresses on the ground, breathing similar groans, assailed by similar ills, similar sufferings. Kept in sight and watched all the time, the poor sisters were not free to administer the consolations of their religion to a man tortured by fever, or even to one dying. They passed by, it seemed with indifference, their bodies stiffened, their eyes fixed on the ground, a prey to despair and terror, not even seeing the misery which later, when calm had come back to their tortured souls, they would learn to soothe again.

Confused and bewildered, unemployed in the midst of an endless task, not knowing what to do, in that house where now they were strangers on whom suspicion rested, avoiding one another they went slowly from ward to ward, stunned, disgusted by the disorder; no longer recognising, in that place where confusion reigned, the dear hospital formerly so well kept. Useless, incapable of rendering the slightest service, they wandered about—bodies without souls, trembling, terrified at the sight of a German uniform.

They took no rest. Perhaps they had been turned out of their rooms, or dreaded to be alone with their misery, fearing that the familiar prayers which would come to their lips might rise without warmth, be bitter and profane, full of the incredulity of despair and blasphemous doubt.

Piled in the yard were knapsacks, nose-bags,

equipment, arms, boots, tents, all the belongings of the wounded Germans. Here the sight of the blood and mud reminded one of the horror of combat and of crime. Heavy boots thudded on the polished floors where formerly women's slippers had glided, lightly and silently. The peaceful little chapel, so full of the sweetness of the Virgin, as well as of memories of hours of ecstasy and prayer, had been profaned. The *prie-Dieu* were overthrown and pushed away into corners, giving place to mattresses for the Teuton soldiers, whose hoarse moans and cries profaned the sanctity of the place.

The enemy within those walls had driven God from His sanctuary. The sisters had themselves been hustled, threatened, frightened, their sacred calling barely sufficing to protect them. They could not escape in pious meditation from the agony of the battle, for the din of combat still shocked their ears, and great numbers of wounded had begun to flow in, displaying their hideous wounds, soiling the floor with blood and mud, staining the sheets, blankets, even the mattresses.

Nurses, doctors, officers, men even, succeeded each other, demanding and requiring to be taken in and tended immediately; and the poor sisters had lost their heads on account of the threats and the sight of this terrible work of death and destruction.

Sometimes, while rapidly crossing a ward from which the jailer was absent, one, with her great, sad, despairing eyes full of compassion, would look for a moment stealthily at one of her dear French soldiers and shake her head. Then, without saying

a word, in her anguish of heart and soul, she would press her hands to her lips to repress a sob, and wipe the tears from her eyes.

But these sufferings were not deemed sufficient; the sisters had not yet come to the end of their long ordeal of torments. One fine morning they were enlisted in a German sanitary corps and placed under the orders of a "Superior," a German who had just arrived. She took the reins of Government in hand with a strong grip, and from that time on the sisters were obliged to obey this stranger in matters spiritual as well as material. Their country and their God were taken from them; they were obliged to bend the knee before the God which the Germans brought with them in their savage invasion, and from whom they never part. Written in relief on the buckles of their belts was the arrogant device: "Gott mit uns."

. . . . . .

We were crowded before the doors of the hospital, cherishing our thoughts, different, no doubt, according to our nationality. The "grey-greens" did not hide their joy at being removed, persuaded that they had done with the war, and that it would not last long. The poor "red trousers" had, generally, not the strength to think of their fate, as, tired, stupefied, confused and worn by suffering, they seemed to live in a dream which had no vision of the future. For hours we had been awaiting the arrival of the convoy; some were standing, some lying down, others on the ground or on stretchers, for all the French who could bear the journey were to be conveyed elsewhere.

Far away, civilians with bended heads were walking about the bombarded and burnt town. The greater number of the men had been requisitioned to carry the wounded or remove the dead, and wore the red cross on the left arm.

Some women ventured to approach them and distribute apples, pears and slices of bread and butter or jam. Others brought wine and beer, but none of these dared to open their lips. And what could they have said, poor wretches, unless they had spoken of their terror during the bombardment, their despair at the arrival of the enemy, their stupefaction and distress at finding themselves prisoners, powerless in the hands of an enemy whose exactions were already too well known? What could they speak of besides their keen anxiety on account of their husbands, or children, or relations who had fled before the invasion?

A few of them—the most timid, doubtless—declared they had not suffered too much. They had left them their cattle, they had not entered their houses; with a few rare exceptions, only the deserted houses had been pillaged and burnt. One felt that these women were afraid of something still worse; and, in speaking thus, hoped to charm away future misfortunes by not cursing the invaders too much. Almost all of them had a wounded soldier at home to nurse, almost all had been employed night and day in collecting for the hospital bedding and bedclothes from the deserted houses, from which the greater number of the inhabitants had fled in haste. Their faces were hot, their appearance exhausted, their hair

in disorder. One felt that they had not dared to rest, to wash themselves, to arrange their hair; that terror tortured them; that they had watched over their own during the night while the drunken cries of the Germans, giving themselves to their orgies, had hidden the roaring of the cannon and the noise of the guns.

The sentries allowed them to converse with us; and little by little they came in greater numbers and were more communicative. Just then the convoy of motors ran into the square at a rapid rate, jolting and jumping over the uneven stones of the paved streets. They packed in the wounded. *Væ victis!* There was nothing left for the French but the waggons intended for the supply of munitions for the artillery. They stowed us in anyhow, in and between the wicker baskets, where the German placed, in layers of three, their 77 shells.

We set off. Jolting, bumping, falling heavily against the baskets which bruised us, covered with dust, we saw fleeing behind us the large, leafy trees of those beautiful roads of France, which we were leaving. . . . For how long? No one dared think of it.

Convoys passed each other on the way. Motors, waggons carrying troops, light motors conveying generals, followed each other rapidly in a whirl of grey dust. Germans everywhere, not a single Frenchman! In the fields, not a trace of the battles that had taken place. All the dead had been removed. Sometimes, however, an aged peasant passed us, his whip on his shoulder, driving a little cart drawn by an old horse, and

in the straw one saw the body of a French or German soldier, pale as a corpse—a solitary wounded man found by the peasant after the battle, dying on his land and now being taken to the hospital.

Night fell; motor lights flashed past to the noise of horns. Our motors stopped at the entrance of villages which, melancholy, silent and gloomy, seemed wishing to hide their sadness under cover of the night. Then the chauffeur would give the password to a sentinel who advanced towards us, making the heavy butt-end of his rifle ring on the pavement, and we started again. Our driver never stopped to ask the way; he seemed to know the country wonderfully well.

In the distance a light such as one sees over cities. It is Fourmies, lighted by electricity and absolutely peaceful. A few patrols were marching about—their heavy boots sounded on the paved streets, their naked bayonets shone in the light. The station! Halt! They laid us down on a little straw, which we shared with comrades who had already arrived.

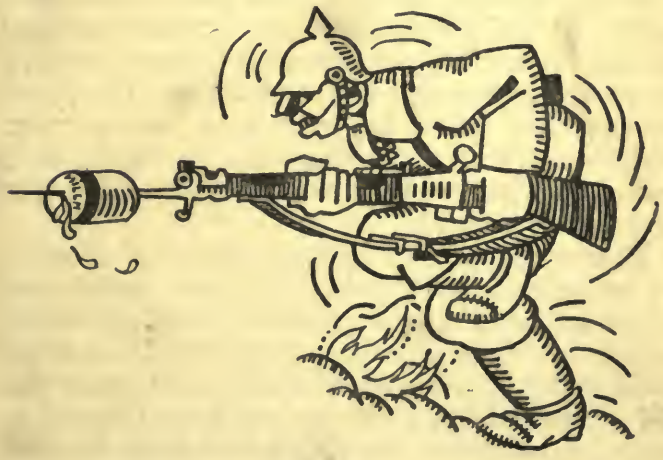
There was a terrible odour of festering, uncared-for wounds, cries of pain were heard, interrupted or accentuated by the ravings of some wounded soldier in delirium. A draught, powerless to chase away that odour of a slaughter-house, was yet strong enough to freeze our bodies placed in immediate contact with the asphalt of the waiting-room floor.

Outside on the platform there was a ceaseless coming and going; troops arriving, locomotives

whistling, puffing and departing. We were blinded by the glaring light of the electric lamps. Sleep could not come to us.

We were devoured by thirst; our throats were parched by fever and the dust absorbed on the road, and we were bruised by the jolting of the waggons. The displaced dressings fretted our skin, our wounds were uncovered and were suppurating. Enervation and fever did not allow us a moment's repose.

Fourmies is on the frontier. They were tearing us from our native land.



CHAPTER II

MORNING dawns at last; its pale rays dim the blinding brightness of the electric lights. It brings with it a breeze which raises the dust on the platforms and blows about the straw that litters the station.

The wounded wake up, stiff and cold. The dressings are hastily done by young unskilled German nurses, who have just arrived and are only at the beginning of their profession. Nervous, agitated and worn out by their journey, they look whiter than their new aprons. Their hands tremble as they hold the basin or apply the cotton wool to our bare wounds.

From a pail from which rise clouds of steam a priest ladles out coffee, which he distributes to all. He is followed by a sister whose duty it is to offer a "Butterbrot" to each of the wounded. This done and breakfast swallowed, we are entrained. It is seven o'clock, that is to say, five minutes past six in France, for the Germans—whose love for clocks is well known—change all the clocks of the towns that they have just taken to Berlin time. It is their way of setting up their standard!

On the platforms the authorities bustle about; their faces are purple from the excesses of the night before, their eyes are half open and their walk is unsteady. After an hour we start.

A few turns of the wheel and we shall have left France.

In the third-class carriage where I have been placed are two other Frenchmen. Many of our comrades have been crowded together on straw in waggons, and are under the guard of an armed German sentinel. We are lucky—we are alone and we have seats.

Scarcely have we left the station when one of my companions draws forth a bottle of champagne from under his cloak. He has taken it from the Germans, who the evening before were dead drunk in the hotel where they were being looked after. The cork pops! This bottle at least the Boches shall not have, and we drink to our speedy return to France. The wine takes effect; a few minutes later I go off into a sound sleep.

I wake up worn out, and, thanks to the help of my companions, am able to sit up on the seat.

Under the burning September sun Belgium flies quickly past me; it is a Belgium inert and dead, where the vast plains are deserted and where the tools lie abandoned in the midst of the fields, speaking of the fright of the people who have fled before invasion and murder.

Along the side of the railway a military bake-house has been erected by the Germans; it is a veritable ant-hill, scores of chimneys are sending out smoke. Farther on rise up the three burnt

walls of a deserted station; the fourth has fallen in, enabling us to see the interior, with the beams carbonised, the furniture broken and burnt. Will any one be alive after the war to relate the crimes committed in that house? A freshly dug mound of earth surmounted by a wooden cross and a helmet breaks the monotony of the Belgian plain! New houses will replace those that have been destroyed, the grass will grow again, children will take the place of those who are dead, time will heal our troubles, our grief will be less intense, but, facing the centuries, this grave will remain witness of the barbarity of the Teuton, who has deliberately spilt the blood of his own people and that of other nations to satisfy the indescribable passion of a single man, of a monster dazzled by the pride of his sceptre. This tomb, like so many others, will perpetuate the great lessons and solemn warnings of this war, and to the warrior eager for blood, to the pacifist obstinate and blind, to the ambitious who dream of conquest, to the easy-tempered inclined to forget, to those who for love of lucre or other passion might be persuaded to make overtures to the enemy, it will cry out "Remember!"

We pass villages burnt to the ground. Truly misfortune has fallen on this region.

The soldiers of the "landwehr" who are in possession of the stations, the look-outs, the guard-houses, already begin to be impatient; and the absence of news weighs heavily on them; they envy those who are marching yonder on the roads of wealthy "Frankreich" where good wine flows in

abundance. They greet their comrades with friendly signs as they pass by in trains decorated with green branches and flowers on their way "nach Paris." It is for those who come from their beloved fatherland that they have written in large letters, black, red and green, on the white walls near the points and on the approaches to the stations: "Nachrichten Bitte" (News, if you please). Let them not forget the old men, who stay behind to guard the railways and the people; let them not forget to throw out their old newspapers telling of the advance in giant strides of the vast armies of the conquering Kaiser.

Numerous trains rush onward towards France; at the windows men in uniform salute their wounded comrades as they pass, shake their fists at us and disappear, carried on to the combat by a throbbing engine. So they come in their thousands and by thousands invade our country. Trains carrying before their funnels the flag of the Red Cross, and on their coaches the distinctive marks of sanitary transports, are also caught up in this giddy whirlpool which hurries troops from east to west. They are crowded with armed men, helmeted, ready for the fight; the trucks carry heavy naval guns. That train has nothing to fear; it is protected by the Conventions of Geneva.

Namur! Here they take out the wounded who cannot stand a longer journey.

A young lieutenant, an effeminate dandy, who, apparently, has not yet heard the whistling of bullets, or the sound of a bursting shell, has our carriage pointed out to him. He approaches and

orders a soldier to open the door. He has just been shaved, his moustache is cut in such a way as to show his sensual lips, his carefully manicured hands are loaded with rings, his tunic fits him like a glove, his collar is high and cramping. He takes pleasure in causing his new gaiters to creak; he stands as stiff as a poker in order to make the most of all his inches.

He mounts the step and in a high falsetto voice and mocking tone begins to speak to us. We growl out a reply; it does not seem to satisfy him. But one could not expect wounded Frenchmen to behave like trained dogs before a German officer, as the Boche soldiers do.

However, it is not curiosity only that has brought him; he has a mission to accomplish, so sharply, jerkily and with a pronounced German accent, he brings forth a sentence, which he must have been preparing a long time, even before our train was signalled: "You use explosive bullets!" I fire up then and answer: "It's false." But he thrusts in my face a packet of cartridges labelled: "Ammunition for practice" ("Get out, idiot," I murmur), and peremptorily he continues: "You lie, you use explosive bullets; but we shall bring Paris to ruins!" I shrug my shoulders and he goes off stiff and haughty, and as proud of himself as if by his sole energy he had taken a whole transport of able-bodied soldiers prisoners. He has insulted the wounded and defenceless; he has thought it a fine thing to probe an open wound. He seems to be satisfied. Poor cad! have you succeeded yet in destroying Paris?

After a long wait the train starts again. The Belgian peasants, with bent shoulders and a frightened air, watch us pass, without making a movement, without speaking a word; you might think they were rooted to the ground. How different they are from those who, a month ago, welcomed us so heartily. Poor Belgium! The iron foot of Germany has passed there and terror reigns. Any demonstration must have been severely forbidden. The train goes ever onward. Night comes. We have had nothing to eat except a bit of bread and raw bacon that some German soldiers have thrown into our compartment by mistake, as they passed our convoy. We were lucky, for afterwards I met comrades who had had absolutely nothing between their lips during the fifty-five hours of our journey.

We are carried onwards. It seems as if a veil surrounds me, and even in my waking moments I am still in a dream. The train stops, starts again, jolts us terribly; it increases our sufferings, jerks off our bandages. On the platforms we hear raucous voices. We shudder at the noise of the piercing whistle of an engine, rushing full speed ahead, which cuts through space and shakes us on its passage. Then numbness seizes us, weariness of mind and body. Sleep overtakes us now and then and it is difficult to distinguish between our sleeping and waking moments. It is only after the sun's rays have transformed our compartment into a veritable furnace, and the heat and the flies have made sleep impossible, that we shake off the torpor into which we were plunged.

We throw off our coats. It is now afternoon and there are signs of our approach to a large station. The train slows down, passes the points, makes a winding curve and stops.

Herbesthal! I grind my teeth with rage and powerlessness. It seems as if a great door had been shut on me, separating me for ever from those I love. Herbesthal! it is the threshold of our prison. This name grates on my ears like the grinding of heavy bolts on the doors of a dungeon. Herbesthal! it is the ruin of our dreams of a providential release. Brutal, positive, overpowering reality forces itself upon us, in spite of our hopes. Herbesthal! it is the ugly doctrine of facts, which comes to curb smiling fancies, dear to the hearts of the French. It is the boundary which separates the Republic of liberty of spirit, goodness and inspiration from the realm of brute force, of willing slavery, of servitude of intellects, of crimes ordered by an authority before whom all tremble. Herbesthal! The threshold is crossed, we are in Germany! Prisoners.

Only the end of the war will give us back our liberty, and we dare not wish that end near, for the triumph of the invader is still before our eyes.

Yonder on the left, under some trees at no great distance, is the terrace of a café decked with flags and filled with a crowd of most excited people. They are wild with joy, and make a deafening noise; then, suddenly, as with one movement, they spring up and stand motionless and silent, with heads bared. An orchestra hidden among the trees has sounded the first notes of the German

anthem. Corpulent men stand with a stiffness at attention which seems suited neither to their age nor their size; they hold their cigars in their hands and leave their beer to get flat without regret. Stout women in light dresses, which seem too tight for them, stand beside them; they are red with excitement; the children remain motionless in an attitude almost religious. It is a veritable uproar, where the shrill notes of the fifes and the low interrupted roll of the drum impress on these grey citizens the staggering successes of their arms. They experience a joy beyond all bounds in staining their starched white shirt fronts with beer and cigar-ash in an inn where everybody is crowded together. There they have come to comment on the news of the day, enforcing their remarks by blows which make the tables tremble. They are still visibly excited by the burning words of patriotism in the sermons preached by their ministers—men in the pay of the bloody Emperor. These words still ring in their ears telling them of the destiny of the all-powerful German race, a race elected, chosen by their god before all to be the salvation of the world. They are intoxicated by their own excitement, the music, the beer and the sun, and listen in a religious frenzy to the music which places them above other nations—"Deutschland über alles." At the end of each stanza, tired with so long repressing the feelings that burn in their hearts, they break forth into uncontrolled cheering, and shout themselves hoarse bellowing out the admiration that they feel for themselves. They wave little flags, sticks, hats, handkerchiefs, beer-

mugs; it is pandemonium. With purple faces, eyes starting out of their heads, swollen veins and wide-open mouths they shout, they vociferate, without any regard for those who are so near them. They see red, and in the sky at which they gaze, the apotheosis of the Teuton race appears to them, sublime, emerging from a river of blood. Unwearied the orchestra begins again, dominates the tumult of the crowd, that, after a bar or two, has recovered its calm, like a mechanical toy wound up anew and set in motion. In Germany there is order and respect for music; they do not have two concerts going on at a time. Strains, feverish, passionate, played with vigour, float on the air. Each musician blows, beats, scrapes, strikes with all the power of a Boche, as if he hoped that the sounds he gave forth, drowning the others, would go ever to the field of battle and inspire with a force of "superman" the unchained wild beasts whose mission it is to show to the astonished world the power of Germany and the Kaiser.

And down there the battle of the Marne was beginning. These men, who by their laws wish to purify and civilise the world, have not passed the stage of cannibals and Red Skins, who dance round the stake to which their captured enemy is bound.

This joy of delirious madness, this colossal display of all the passions suitable to savages, this deafening cacophony, these frenzied shrieks make me feel painfully the sadness of our state. The sight of this unbridled crowd, that has no human feeling and so insults our defeat, fills me with rage and despair, a feeling of powerlessness and an agony

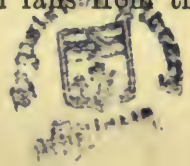

Nachrichten-
bitte!

that chokes me; tears rise to my eyes, it is with difficulty that I stifle a sob. However, I make an effort to restrain my grief and stare through the window with an air of indifference to what is going on, braving the crowd. The German bourgeois shall not have the joy of witnessing the weakness of a Frenchman.

Alternately the music sounds and shouts burst forth. These people are tireless. Like automata they go on playing, blowing, striking, shouting at regular intervals; they begin and they leave off at the signal of the conductor's baton. The Boche cannot rejoice on his own account; for his happiness to be complete these demonstrations must be carried out to order. His servile nature appears even in this manifestation of joy, which with us is always spontaneous. This great organisation of exultation reveals the Germans to me as they are—hearts of savages in automatic bodies.

The fête, however, is not yet over. The programme is not yet finished. The French prisoners have had their reception; it is now the turn of the Germans.

A train of soldiers of the Marine infantry has just come into the station. Every one's attention is fixed on them. All applaud them. Attracted by a sort of fascination, these people invade the platforms; at the sight of the naval uniforms, which seem something new to them, there is an outburst of delight. A "Mädchen," expressing by a gesture the general admiration, throws them a bunch of flowers she was wearing in her belt. It is the signal for a rain of flowers, which falls from the



terrace on to the eager soldiers. On the rails, on the platforms, the men seize the presents offered by the German women. These women admire them, these big fellows whose ferocity and brutality are known to all. One can count on them to carry to Frenchwomen all the hatred these heavy, servile Teutons feel. May the German soldiers, far away in that detested France, treat the Frenchwomen as cruelly as they, the good, the placid, the gentle German women, with their pale complexions, wish!

Flowers, chocolates, sandwiches, cigars, cigarettes continue to be poured upon them. Impetuously the soldiers scramble up the banks, catching hold of the grass, pushing each other roughly, and uttering cries like wild animals when springing on their prey. Nothing holds them back any longer. It is a heart-breaking sight where the boldness and folly of the women rival the greed and brutality of the men. With an air of disdainful pride and mocking smiles on their lips the officers look at these men, whom to-morrow they will send to their death; at these women, whom they despise; at the crowd of civilians, good enough only to give them gold and their sons for the army of the Kaiser, who alone is worth the whole humanity of the German army.

At last the inn seems to have been cleared of all eatables, drinkables and tobacco. The soldiers begin to be tired of the game, they are surfeited, their pockets are crammed with cigars. The girls have almost broken their arms throwing gifts until, hot and untidy, they struggle back into their jackets.

Little by little the people grow quiet. Without variation the orchestra, a veritable instrument of torture, continues its everlasting grind, soulless, imperturbable.

Then on the platform young girls and women appear carrying baskets and escorted by well-dressed men. There sandwiches, fruits, chocolate, tobacco, cigarettes, bottles of lemonade are piled up. Other women follow with cups and enormous jugs of coffee, glasses and jugs of beer, and large juicy plum tarts. The distribution is renewed; it is chiefly intended for the wounded Germans who have stayed in the train. The guards will not let the women approach the wounded French, who have no right to kindly treatment. The women, moreover, cannot bear to hear the name "Franzosen" pronounced. They turn their backs on them, filled with disgust for their contemptible enemies.

In some places the soldiers give themselves up to shameful pillage, emptying the baskets, and the young girls emerge, panting and dishevelled, from a circle which has surrounded them. Disputes take place among the Marines.

Absent-mindedly a "Yungfrau" approaches our compartment, a smile on her lips, a pitying look in her eye, for she has not recognised in these unfortunate men in their shirt sleeves the enemies of her race. Suddenly, while one of us leans out of the window to seize the proffered sandwich, she sees the belt of his red trousers. Taking a step backwards, frightened, indignant, furious, with a voice full of hate, she cries: "Franzosen." Angrily

she turns away; but a German soldier standing on the platform with his arm in a sling has noticed the incident; he has recognised one of my companions as his neighbour in hospital. Passing by, he says in a friendly manner: "Guten Tag, Emile" (Good day). He goes up to the young girl and expresses his indignation in no unmeasured terms. She protests, turns red, becomes embarrassed, then, obediently retracing her steps, holds out her basket, avoiding our eyes. With his hands full, the German soldier distributes food and dainties to us, while the young lady in dulcet but artful tones lightly gives expression to feelings of humanity with a sincerity that makes us smile. "We are all men, after all." (That was also the declaration of the German socialists before the war; we shall doubtless soon hear it again.)

From that time forth this soldier did not forget to recommend us to the care of the distributors, who dared not refuse for fear of hurting one of their own wounded men. He himself came from time to time to see that we wanted for nothing, and to leave us some of the food and cigarettes he had received and did not know what to do with.

We were doubtless the only French of all the convoy who did not suffer from hunger during the journey.

The day had been perfect for them. The Boches swam in a sea of happiness! They are "Satt"—satiated with beer, cakes, sweets, saturated with joy, excitement and the sounds of music; they are full of their Germany and their Kaiser; they have seen their forces-of-war pass by, and the weakness

of their enemy has been established in a manner evident to their eyes!

What a splendid day! "Gott sei Dank."

. . . . . .

Officers shout orders on the platform. The German soldiers take their seats. *En route* for Aix-la-Chapelle, Cologne, etc. . . . We are prisoners in earnest!

CHAPTER III

It was right at the beginning of hostilities. The prisoners had been sent to an instruction camp, the buildings of which were still occupied by German recruits.

The men, guarded by sentinels, were at that time herded together on some waste land surrounded by barbed wire; shelter there was none. We dug ourselves holes in the sand as best we could. Some green branches formed a roof; and there, exposed to the rain, we remained night and day, even without straw to lie on or coverings to protect us from the severity of the nights, which were already very cold. The wounded were visited from time to time by a German army doctor; there being no hospital, they suffered still more from the exposure than their comrades did.

Twice a day, at a fixed hour, officers and men filed before the doors of the kitchens. For some time even a French General was to be seen, joining this long line of starving people. He had come to receive with his own hands

the bowl that the German cooks refused to give to any but himself. However, a room had been prepared for him in some neighbouring barracks.

The men slept in the open. The tents were not put up till much later; but at the end of a fortnight or three weeks, after an American official had visited the camp, they consented to house the prisoners in stables, considered too unhealthy for horses! Our soldiers were frequently twelve in a box. The Germans, who seem able to foresee everything, did not attach sufficient importance to the question of prisoners, or perhaps imagined these arrangements would do well enough for the two months the war was to last.

Now there came a day when the German General, who commanded the camp, arrived to visit the first prisoners. Of a height above the average, broad-shouldered and upright, he must have been in his time a fine man, one to command the respect of his men. His head was bent with age and he kept it sunk between his shoulders like a wrestler. His light blue eyes, which must have been piercing when he was younger, had become dulled, but they were still penetrating enough and showed that the years had not weakened his will when occasionally they shone suspicious and hard from under his bushy brows. A thick grey moustache hid his lips. On his left cheek was a deep scar, made, I was told, by a French bullet in 1870. His bearing was noble, his step slow and dignified. He went about, whip in hand,

followed by two bloodhounds that kept close to his heels.

The General had for the French a fierce hatred, which he showed whenever an occasion arose. Perhaps he had suffered in the campaign of '70, and his wound had soured him; perhaps also his education, directed by those above him, had taught him to detest our race. As he was too old for active service he was given the organisation and direction of a concentration camp.

Our soldiers, a few from all classes, but mostly from the territorials, were drawn up in two lines by German non-commissioned officers. An interpreter translated to them the orders and commands of a fierce German officer. The clinking together of a sentinel's heels getting into position announced the arrival of the superior officer. A thundered "Achtung!" pealed forth and the General reviewed our soldiers, who were standing at attention. "Frenchmen," he said, fiercely pulling his moustache, "forty years ago your fathers came here; you are here now, and your sons will come in another forty years! It is good for the French nation to come from time to time and spend a period in Germany. But, after all, you won't be here for many months: our armies are at Paris, and the war is coming to an end. It was you who declared war; you will repent it. That's all!" And as the simple wave of his hand was not sufficient to make the assembled prisoners disappear from his sight, he turned round and rode away.

Could one possibly speak more wickedly? What pleasure could this officer find in making

[*Page* 38.

our prisoners sadder ? Was not their state already bad enough to make it necessary for this old man, with his irony and lies, to come and sow discouragement in the hearts of the fighters of yesterday ?

But he was carrying out an order—instructions from headquarters—to demoralise those in Germany for whom the fight was over ; they must destroy their vitality, their constancy in trial, their living hope, the confidence in victory which is the glory of the French. And our jailers would have been happy if they could have demoralised us, if they could have made us apathetic blocks without moral pluck ; so they tried by every means to make our captivity as painful as possible. But those pinpricks, those numberless petty vexations, the false reports put up each day in the camp, could not attain the success on which our jailers counted. The being forbidden to smoke, the punishment of being bound to posts, the long waits standing motionless in the rain, the privations of all sorts, the propagation of news of disaster to our side, and our miserable condition : none of these could touch our spirit. The Frenchman has this to the good, that he keeps a certain youthfulness of character. A trifle may amuse him, because he knows that a comic element, that a grain of folly and gaiety is found in every human creature and in every situation. He is constantly on the watch for this comic element, and is past-master in the art of discovering it. It is, so it seems to him, when he is the most wretched, the most exposed to emergencies, that his eye becomes more acute,

so that he seizes still more willingly on the gay and light note which keeps him atune with laughter.

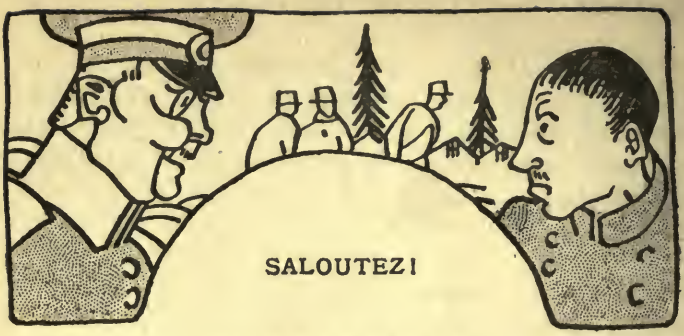
So it was that the General who understood us not at all was offended by the mood that he judged provocative, and, unwilling to be worsted, he decided to put an end to it.

The prisoners were reassembled. An hour's waiting in the rain did not succeed in making them look sullen. Already jokes and speculation ran riot: "The war is finished"; "We are going to be sent back to France"; "There is to be an exchange of prisoners"; "Germany is dying of hunger, and Switzerland has consented to feed us." Some, less respectful, suggested that the General was going to hold a foot review.

At last that important personage appeared, and his entrance on the scene cut short our speeches. He addressed the men who were drawn up in a circle round his white horse. "Messieurs," he said, "going through the camp I noticed that you amuse yourselves, that you laugh, that you are gay. You ought to remember that you are prisoners. You ought to be sad. 'Tention! Be sad!" Having spoken, he wheeled his horse about.

The success of such a speech was instantaneous. A few of our prisoners were thunderstruck; others with difficulty hid their smiles, through fear of what might happen, while the rest could not contain themselves, but frankly burst out laughing.

A new German defeat was thus registered. From that day the mention of the simple expression: "Be sad!" was sufficient to dissipate the "blues" and transform a face of sadness into one of mirth.



CHAPTER IV

He had been wounded at the beginning of the campaign, at the time when nothing could stop the invading hordes, and much too soon for his liking. Powerless to escape from the field of battle, he soon saw himself a prisoner in the hands of the enemy. He was a sergeant, still young, and on active service when the war broke out. He was taken to a hospital in Westphalia, where he remained too short a time, considering the gravity of his wound. But as the German wounded from Ypres were coming in, in great numbers, he had been turned out and sent to a concentration camp. He arrived there worn out and still suffering from his wounds, but happy to be able at last to hear news of the war—news he had eagerly longed to hear, but which had been jealously kept from him. There he learnt of the battle of the Marne and its happy result for our armies, and his heart rejoiced greatly. If he still remembered the cruel days of the retreat from Belgium, it was to recall pictures which permitted him to imagine the Boches a prey to the sufferings that their too precipitated retreat would

bring upon them. Thus the rage he felt in his heart at being made prisoner was slightly calmed. As hope and confidence came back to him our sergeant regained assurance and raised his head. He reasoned in the following manner and found consolation therein: "I am a prisoner, it is certain; but I have done my duty, therefore I need not be ashamed of myself. My countrymen at the present time fight successfully against an enemy superior in numbers and one who has been preparing for a long time to invade; consequently I may be permitted to think of them with pride. I don't belong to a nation debased by defeat. The French Army guards its rights and prerogatives. Since my soul can never be imprisoned, my thoughts are with those who fight for the good cause, my body alone is captive. And yet, not completely so, since it will never consent to do what my conscience does not approve of."

So from deduction to deduction he almost persuaded himself that he was free. He was exceedingly proud of being a Frenchman, and, what is more, a French soldier. From this time on, in spite of his wound, he forced himself to walk without limping, holding his head erect. And thus he marched with a noble, almost arrogant air, straight on, without anything being able to stop him, disdainful of the German uniform and its chiefs, for he had sworn to himself never to salute the officers of a nation at war with his country, and one that had permitted such crimes in Belgium.

Orders, however, were strict on this matter, and the heads of the barracks did not fail every day to

inflict punishments in the pillory, which punishment certain of our soldiers had incurred for not having saluted a German officer. The punishments imposed for this neglect were announced in huge printed letters in four languages, and revealed to the prisoners the rigours of the German military law.

But our sergeant paid no attention to that. He kept his marks of respect for the French doctors, the only officers sometimes seen in the camp.

But one day it happened that he was walking painfully and slowly on the light sand, into which one sank ankle-deep. He was speaking of one thing and another, with a comrade of his regiment, whom he had had the good luck to find. They recalled the happy times they had spent together in the barracks—for, thanks to a happy forgetfulness, the memory has not kept account of the bad times. They talked of their captain, a brave fellow, who had died courageously, perhaps a little rashly, but nevertheless as a true-hearted man should do. They spoke of their lieutenants, of the different ranks of the company ; nobody was overlooked. In imagination they saw gay French uniforms with their golden stripes, before which one stood proudly erect at " attention." The sergeant confided to his companion the firm resolution he had made never to salute a German officer. For example, as soon as he saw the General, that old savage who detested the French, he turned about and showed him his back. " Till now you have been able to escape," his friend said, " but take care, one day you will get into trouble." " It is all the same to me," replied the other, " and then

I shall tell him that I had taken him for a French artilleryman, because of his dark blue trousers with red stripes. He will be flattered; don't you think so?"

At this moment the two friends passed a German lieutenant, a big man, tall and broad in proportion. The monocle stuck in his right eye enlarged it to the disadvantage of the left one, which appeared small and almost lost in the folds of fat of his ruddy, shaven face. With riding-whip in his hand the officer advanced, proud, no doubt, of his new grey-green uniform, which laced him in tightly at the waist and emphasised the squareness of his massive shoulders. His heavy, creaking boots sank at every step into the powdery sand. Dominating the group of French soldiers he was passing, he looked at them straight, so that they were forced to salute him. At his passing, all put their hands to their caps; and he returned their salute, bending the whole of his body stiffly, as if he were laced in corsets.

While his comrade saluted properly, the sergeant with an air of indifference pursued his walk. He kept his head slightly turned towards his companion, with whom he seemed to be having a most exciting conversation, which absorbed him so that the presence of an officer could not distract his attention.

Did the German guess the Frenchman's intention, or did he think his distraction culpable? I don't know, but he approached and, looking vexed, planted himself in front of the two, who were obliged to stop. Fresh salute from the French soldier, this time unnoticed by the officer.

A pause.

With a scowling expression, the officer looks at the sergeant from head to foot; he, however, does not stir. Another pause, in which the German finds the word he was trying to think of: "Saloutez," says he, in an imperative voice; "Saloutez!"

"I beg your pardon," says the sergeant politely, with a most puzzled look.

The lieutenant, whose French was not faultless, but who hesitated to confess it, even to himself, seemed to be confused for a moment; his face flushed when, in a voice still more imperative and as if trying to persuade himself of the excellence of his accent, he repeated: "Saloutez, mossié."

"I don't understand at all; what does he mean?" said our Frenchman, turning, as if in question, towards his companion. "You understand German. Well, answer him. 'Saloutemossié! Saloutemossié!' I don't understand."

But the man in the pay of William began to get impatient. He lost his temper, his face grew purple. Nervously striking his boots with his whip, he reflected, calling up all his linguistic knowledge and repeating to himself: "Salou . . . Salou: Saloutez . . . Saloutez mossié," after the manner of a careless pupil repeating the parts of a Latin irregular verb. It must be very disagreeable when one wishes to exercise one's authority to give the impression of a scholar stammering over his lesson. The Boche began to look grotesque. But our sergeant still went on talking with his compatriot over the meaning of his questioner's words. His eyebrows contracted, his forehead wrinkled,

as in the effort of intense intellectual strain; he seemed to take as much trouble to understand as the German took to be understood. His face remained impassive and showed the distress of a man who cannot find what he seeks. With imperturbable coolness he went to extremes. In despair at not being able to understand, he shrugged his shoulders, struck his forehead, shook his head and repeated: "No, no, I don't understand." Then pointing with his finger to the German "Burô"[1] visible in the distance, he said, "Interpret that—Burô." "Yes, 'dolmetscher, burô'—they will understand." As for him, he could not make it out, and regretted greatly not to be able to help the officer better.

The situation became impossible. The German dared not any longer insist, for fear of making himself ridiculous. He had the sense to understand this, and was angry with himself. He went away furious that his knowledge of Bossuet and Joffre did not enable him to tell the sergeant what he thought. Because of his *amour-propre* he still wished to believe in French stupidity.

Our friend stayed there, looking puzzled and stupid; he scratched his head and repeated in the most idiotic manner: "Saloutémossié," and looked with a questioning, wondering glance at his comrade, who whispered to him: "You've got hold of a very young bird!" But with a fresh shrug of the shoulders he turned anew to the officer, who had gone some paces when, to make sure they were not laughing at him, he

[1] Probably the modern German version of *Bureau*.

glanced back. With his finger he pointed in the direction of the Commandant.

Then the Boche, with that persistence which is the attribute of his race, returned to the charge, repeating, in order to make himself better understood, always the same words: "Saloutez, mossié." Then suiting the action to the word, and to show by example, he raised his hand to his cap. Then the sergeant, with a gracious smile, as if he wished to cut short the transports of gratitude of the Boche: "Ah, I beg you, don't mention it, my signpost," said he, and, with a vague flourish in the direction of the Burô, dismissed the officer, but did not salute him.

All the same, he waited till he had got far enough from the enemy's ears before giving vent to the laughter that shook him.

However, from that day he judged it better to yield to the desires of the Teuton officers, and he "salouta" them every time that he could not avoid doing otherwise.

CHAPTER V

EVENING enfolds the camp in its gloomy mantle, and like a heavy tapestry dulls the sounds and renders uncertain the movements of human beings.

It is scarcely five o'clock, but the night has almost come. The camp is invisible in the darkness, the silence becomes absolute. In certain parts nothing reveals the existence there of an enclosure containing thousands of men.

A dim murmur, however, rises from the regions of the kitchen, where the lamps give scarcely any light. No one makes a noise, but the silence of every person, an individual muteness imposed by the sadness of the monotonous day just drawing to its close, the sound of steps which the sand deadens, all is transformed into a dull hum, like the murmur of a distant ocean.

In the almost total darkness the men, one by one, in their companies file past the kitchen doors, to take the basins of soup allotted to them. They are narrowly watched by their non-commissioned officers, who try to prevent one man coming twice

to the disadvantage of his comrades, for no basin is given beyond the number of men in the company. The soup, alas! is quickly swallowed; what takes the longest time is to form the lines in front of the kitchens. There you flounder about in deep mud, sometimes for an hour, and when your turn comes to be served the pot is perhaps empty and you are obliged to go and join another company in front of another door. Once in possession of their rations, the men, basins in hand, go a little way beyond the waiting lines and, standing, drink their soup, for there is no other place where they can go. Indeed, the sentinels, whose bayonets from time to time gleam, watch that no one goes to his tent taking a basin with him, for the number of these utensils is very limited. Some men, in order to receive a supplementary ration, pass their evening in picking up from under the feet of their comrades the basins thrown negligently down, when once they are emptied. These, collected together near the boilers, are again used after being summarily washed.

This evening meal is lugubrious. The men in the semi-darkness have the feeling that they are swallowing their pittance like beasts of burden. They experience cruelly the full force of their misery. There they are, eating from a basin of rough metal, with greasy, rusted brim, food which the dogs at home would turn from in disgust. Like animals, they must lap up their soup, for they have neither spoon nor fork. Light also is refused them; and as there are no benches, it is not possible for the prisoners to sit down to the meal.

[*Page* 50.

Poor fellows, they even envy the pig, who may without shame gobble up a mixture less objectionable than what is offered to them, the soldier-prisoners.

Their courage begins to fail! Every one is demoralised! Confinement weighs on their shoulders. The sky is black, hearts are heavy. There is not a star in the sky, not a gleam of hope in the soul!

. . . . . .

Suddenly, piercing the darkness, a dazzling light has flashed out, flooding the camp with its brilliance. This light, cast by a gigantic lamp hung at the top of a raised pole, flickers, flares, wavers, then is finally fixed.

At this signal, which all seem to wait for, the place round the kitchens is instantly deserted. Every one hurries to finish his meal and to hurry away; the life of the camp, fleeing from the darkness, is in a moment transported towards the part bathed in a warm brightness, under the incandescent globe, whose kindly light expels the shadows and, for the moment at least, drives sad thoughts away.

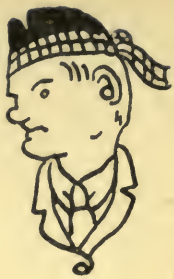
The open space which stretches away under the violet lamp is some two hundred metres long. It is bordered by thin, leafless trees, their gaunt branches standing out, the colour of dead wood.

It is shut in at both ends by the artificial means of protection which German ingenuity knows so well how to get together. To right and left are

tents, their yellow canvas flapping in the wind; farther on stand out the more definite outlines of huts, now being built. At regular intervals there are drinking fountains with wooden shelters, at the present time used by prisoners to do their washing. Here is the Forum of the inhabitants of the camp; here is what they call their "Flea Market."

The coal fires that are crackling in the neighbourhood of the pole, deserted a few seconds ago, are now crowded, as if by enchantment, by a dense and noisy throng. Men arrive, running at full speed. Their haste recalls the madness of moths that on a summer's evening hurl themselves blindly against the glass of a lamp. Greedily they dispute every inch of the lighted ground. From the earth, suddenly flooded with the violet light, a pale-faced populace seems to have sprung. Tables are set up, bending under the weight of goods of all kinds, piled up in a moment by active hands; gaming-tables are prepared, and already hawkers go about offering their provisions or their knick-knacks to all comers. There reigns the animation of a fair in a crowded quarter of a town. One meets Frenchmen with red or blue caps, Belgians with bright-coloured ones, Englishmen in khaki, Zouaves and Algerians in their turbans.

In rivalry, one with another, the merchants, shouting in different languages, try by their own shrill cries to dominate the deafening noise of their competitors. It is the hour when the greater number of the Boches have gone to their barracks or home, leaving the prisoners to themselves. The camp,



guarded on the outskirts by a few sentinels, who warm themselves at a glowing brazier, is now in the possession of the prisoners. They have no corvées to fear, the day of work is over, the enemy has disappeared. Reaction comes abruptly, suddenly, completely, even with passion the crowd goes like a whirlwind towards the light, with a noise like mad schoolboys invading the playground.

In the mud, in the puddles, all splash good-humouredly. In places, one has to accomplish marvellous feats to keep balance on the few bricks thrown over a deep puddle, where the awkward sometimes sink in, leaving their sabots behind them, to the loud joy of the spectators.

A passive item in this feverish movement, the prisoner goes on, pushed at the pleasure of a varied and cosmopolitan crowd, which moves along noiselessly, without definite direction. The pressure is so great that you cannot choose your way, you are just carried on.

Towards the centre of bustle and light, with its crowd going to and fro, everybody hastens, impelled by the desire of movement, of society and clamour. Penniless or not it is good to be at the Flea Market. There you are plunged back again into life, you get away from yourself, and the sight of this animation puts to flight the last inclination to sadness. When all day long your soul has been lonely, melancholy and wandering, it is sweet to mingle with the crowd, free from care, which, indifferent to trouble, gives itself to the experiences of the moment. The prisoner who wanders about in the market

seems mentally bewildered; he is deafened by the din of voices, dazzled and stunned by the ever-changing spectacle of bright colours that moves around him. He finds no opportunity for his own thoughts. He is caught, body and soul, in this tumultuous machine, is a part of this crowd, which finds its sole joy in the fact that it is a crowd. Here is the heart of the camp, pulsating with life till the hour of curfew.

The preparations have been rapid, and now the market is in full swing. They sell from stalls, they sell in the crowd. Buyers and venders mingle together.

Here is an Algerian sharpshooter with a swarthy face and splendid large brown eyes, shaded by long lashes, a merry fellow, but a bit of a knave. A broad smile shows his teeth, magnificent white teeth, glittering like pearls in his copper-coloured face. Under his short cloak—how is it that he has not yet sold it?—he holds carefully hidden a loaf made for civilians, that he has probably taken from a baker too busy to protect his goods. To likely customers he shows the best golden-brown corner, the crustiest part of his loaf. You are weak in face of the temptation; even if a few seconds ago, when making up your accounts, you made a vow not to be led into expense, you feel you are about to yield. "You want bread, Sidi?" "Me have bread good." "How much your loaf?" "Eight penny, Sidi." "Go on, it is too dear." The smile fades, the eyes darken, the face of the Arab expresses indignation. Ah! if he could he would strangle this Sidi, he would tear this Frenchman's

face with his long sharp nails for insulting him by thinking his loaf too dear! But he cannot even dispute, knowing too little French. He passes on, or rather the pressure of the crowd separates the two. If, later, chance brings them together again, the Moor, recognising his man, refrains from offering his wares again, but gives a gracious smile and winks his eye at the man whom he admires, as if to say: "You more clever than me," and also: "Me find buyer."

The question of bread takes precedence of all others. From the opening of the market, we hasten to know the price for the day—a price which varies according to the demand and the supply of the stock.[1]

The bread costs fifty pfennigs the kilogramme outside the camp, and its price within varies from sixpence to eightpence, according to the quantity for sale or the success of certain speculators who, hiding their bread in the early hours, sell at the maximum price.

The entrance to the shops is congested. The buyers form a line, examine the goods, bargain, buy, pay and go away. The curious watch this strange commerce.

The wretchedly poor, those who since the first day of their captivity have not had a sou to spend, and who have had to be content with the repulsive and insufficient food meted out by the German

[1] It is to be noticed that this took place at the beginning of our captivity. From the month of January 1915 it was impossible to introduce the smallest parcel of bread, the system of bread cards being then in force.

administration, look with envious eyes at these provisions that they will never taste: the golden-brown loaves, pots of artificial honey—better than the real honey—fancy jams made of glucose, cubes of margarine, butter made from plants, tins of condensed milk, chocolate and lumps of sugar that help to make the bitter morning coffee more palatable; packets of tobacco, cigarettes, cigars. . . . Cries of all sorts resound in your ears. It is an international emporium, where all moneys have currency — English or French copper, Belgian or German nickel. Prices are quoted in sous.

Between the close ranks men glide, a camp saucepan in one hand, a quarter-litre measure in the other. "Milk chocolate, all hot, all boiling, two sous the quarter litre." Tempters! they take off the wooden lid. The steam rises hot, thick and fragrant in the sharp evening air. What a glorious smell! If you have only two sous in your pocket you must yield. It is the soup that has left a disagreeable taste in your mouth, it is hunger that torments you; it is the herring that has made you thirsty, or the freshness of the night that has dried your throat. In short, your two sous pass into the seller's pocket, and, in the midst of the crowd that jostles along, you put your lips to the burning tin pot, where so many others have been before.

Farther on, a jolly Englishman, who, on a rustic table that can be taken to pieces, has traced different figures—a king, a queen, the Jack, a diamond, etc., for dice—is shouting: "Come on, come on, my lads!

Where you like and where you fancy! The more you put down, the more you pick up! Who says the Jack? Who says the lucky diamond? Who says the King?"

He has rattled his dice in a wooden cup and turned them out. "Up she comes! No luck!" and, always smiling pays out or pockets his money according to the chances of the game. There is a crowd round his table. You might think you were at Monte Carlo. "You come here barefoot, you go away in a motor!" There are players of all nationalities. Here one meets Frenchmen from the North, Frenchmen from the South, Frenchmen from all our provinces. One sees Britons from all parts of the United Kingdom, Belgians—Flemish and Walloons; natives of Tunis, Morocco and Senegal, each one playing with the passion peculiar to his race. All try to forget in the excitement of play their cares and the sadness of their exile. "Up she comes!" The banker is getting rich and the poor fellows, stupefied, see their last sous vanishing. On some of them fortune smiles, and if they are sensible at once go away to exchange their gains for bread, chocolate or tobacco. Costers go round offering goods to all who pass—this one a cloak, another puttees, another knives cleverly made out of nails flattened between two stones, sharpened on a flint and finished with a bit of cord for a handle. Some go so far as to sell their rations of bread or the herring they have received, for they would sooner go without food than tobacco. An Englishman who is barefoot tries to sell his boots, a Moroccan his cloak, his belt and a shirt that he has filched

in the afternoon while it was drying in the sun. Some shopmen have only a single plank, on which are exhibited the knick-knacks made in the camp: knives, scarf-pins, post cards, shoes, and forage-caps cut out of the military blankets that come from Maubeuge; mandolines made from a cigar-box and strings bought in town by a kind-hearted sentinel.

Some thousands of men wander round or lounge about. The pickpockets have a good time and give themselves to their work with a will. You are pushed and jostled. You meet friends on the way and stop to chat. Some—always the same men—bring information of a sensational character, the truth of which they vouch for. Gatherings take place, talkers raise their voices, the crowd gather round to listen to a speech. When the orator has finished the movement begins again, and thus it goes on till bedtime.

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Nailed to a post stuck in the ground a huge wooden sign announces in artistic letters that there exists in the camp a "Café Biard. Coffee, chocolate, at 1d." The finger of a hand painted black shows the way.

There, behind the tents, fires are lighted, which glow in the darkness. In their flickering light, human figures move to and fro. Approaching, one hears a voice crying, "Coffee, chocolate, all hot, all boiling; two sous the quarter litre at Café Biard!" The establishment has a good name. It is there that the *élite* in the camp meet, for the

drinks are of the finest quality and the installation is luxurious. The proprietor exhibits with pardonable pride the four cups of coarse china which he alone possesses. Cups in the camp! Imagine such a thing! Just think a little what that means! The table—made of a few planks, cleverly abstracted from those destined for the building of the sheds—is kept very clean, and the china is plunged into water and carefully wiped each time it has been used.

The opener of this "saloon" is making a fortune. Because of the prosperity of his establishment he has been obliged to engage assistants, whose duties are strictly defined. One has to keep up the fires, another to fetch water, a third prepares the drinks in the saucepans or cooks the food, a fourth serves the customers, while a fifth washes the cups. The boss, a genial man, receives you kindly, so that he has no lack of customers.

As under the Regency, it is at the coffee-house that one has rendezvous; here one discusses the war and politics, and the meetings are of the most animated character. It is a thoroughly French corner.

Of course there are imitators, but the "Café Biard" has not been touched by its rivals; it remains incontestably the first of its kind.

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Suddenly a shrill whistle is heard, more piercing than the noise of the assembly. Others answer, men come running in, and by their cries sow con-

sternation and confusion in the market. "The Patrol!"

Armed German soldiers have been signalled, entering the bounds of the camp. They approach the ground. The news spreads like wildfire, and after a few moments of rushing, hustling and distracted flight, the market remains under the flickering light with its long, open space, bare, silent, clear of people. Tables, games, merchandise, sellers, buyers and loafers, all have disappeared, with the same fairy-like rapidity that brought them there. The prisoners find themselves huddled together in disorder inside the neighbouring tents, where they wait patiently till the danger is over. Some clever plunderers have turned this moment of panic to account, and found the means to enrich themselves at the cost of their comrades with pots of honey, jam, packets of tobacco, etc. It is necessary for every one to live!

In step the Teuton soldiers come out from the dark on to this empty space and are dazzled by the light of the swinging lamp. They arrive just in time to see the heels of the last fugitives. The attack has failed!

It is strictly forbidden to civilians to sell the least thing to the prisoners, and as a natural result the prisoners must not sell any food bought in Germany. All other commerce is equally forbidden. Therefore everything found at the market has no right to be there, and must be seized and considered as a lawful prize.

But they arrive too late, and for all the spoil

they can seize, they are obliged to content themselves with some planks left by the tradesmen in their flight. With these under their arms the Huns make the tour of the tents like conquerors.

Over there, however, the sellers of hot drinks have not been warned. Peacefully they continue their commerce. Their fires, still burning, attract the attention of the patrol. With shouts as if they were attacking, the soldiers rush towards the fires, on which some pots are steaming. They kick them over with their boots, seize them and burn their fingers with the handles.

Hampered by their rifles, the ponderous Germans cannot easily give chase, and the men run lightly away and escape. Certain merchants, the cleverest, succeed in saving their goods. The patrol continues its march, and the spoil is enriched by a few tins of condensed milk and some packets of sugar, chocolate and ground coffee and pieces of wood used for burning. Savagely obeying their destructive instincts, the soldiers stamp out the still smoking fires with their iron-shod boots. Groping in the darkness they have rendered more complete, they rapidly collect in a heap the spoil that has fallen to them.

Victorious, in single file, preceded by their corporal, they advance by a dark, narrow passage between two tents. In the darkness the sentinels stumble over the pegs, get entangled in the stretched cords, fall, and in their fall drop the dishes and saucepans with which they are encumbered.

From this narrow way, where it is as dark as the grave, a tumult arises, the dull sound of falling bodies, the oaths of those who have been thrown down, and of those they have knocked against. They are cursed and hustled as "stupid geese," who could not pay attention and who hurt the others with their weapons. It is a deafening noise, and causes indescribable joy to the prisoners huddled in the tents.

At last the little detachment has gained the lighted part. Once united, the Huns continue their progress in silence and good order to the guard-house. They do not look like conquerors. Inconvenienced by the food they carry, encumbered by kitchen utensils, embarrassed by the wood under their arms, they walk with hanging heads and woeful faces. They have burnt their fingers, they have floundered through puddles, in their fall they have covered their uniforms and helmets with mud. The condensed milk flows from the open tins, making their hands sticky, staining their things ; the saucepans leave traces of soot on their tunics and trousers, the half-burnt wood blackens their chests and sleeves.

Dirty, grotesque, their helmets on one side, made more ridiculous still by the rage they feel, furious at returning without a prisoner, ashamed and vexed like marauders caught in the act, they defile under the mocking eyes of the prisoners, who do not hide their amusement and begin to jest at these underlings who rob the poor.

The next day the market will drive as good a

trade, the customers will be just as numerous; the Café Biard will peacefully continue its flourishing business.

The Huns will scarcely care to renew their escapade; they have only gained a Pyrrhic victory.

THE PILLORY

CHAPTER VI

It was the middle of winter. The glorious dark blue sky glittering with stars shed a soft light, such as one can see on frosty evenings even when the moon is hidden. Not a breath! The fir-trees stood darkly in the distance, their motionless shapes outlined against the horizon. The men were happy to come out of doors this calm and frosty night to take deep breaths of the life-giving air, and by rapid walking to bring their blood to a glow. What more delightful for a captive than to walk in the pine-scented night, under the azure sky, the contemplation of which called up memories of the dear homeland. In the frosty air, that whipped the blood and warmed the body, he could forget the present and turn freely to thoughts of happy times in other years, to the joyful Christmas Eves and the endless pleasures of the first days of January. Talking in groups of twos or threes, or alone wrapped in thought, with rapid steps the prisoners overtook or passed each other on the path that surrounded the camp.

Avoiding the too-frequented way for fear of

being accosted by a comrade in search of a companion, a Frenchman, eager for solitude, walks up and down the space in the centre of the camp. He recalls memories of happy days, and the well-beloved faces of friends, and lives again through the sufferings he has endured. From time to time he looks at the infinite stars, and the thought of the free constellations of heaven calls forth a despairing sigh; he laments lost liberty and this forced inaction.

Suddenly his attention is attracted by a silent shadow which stands before him. It is the pillory, an instrument of torture which civilisation has not yet been able to abolish, and which still exists in German barracks for corporeal punishment. It is a high, solid post firmly fixed in the ground, and surmounted by a large white board on which a square of paper is fixed, showing the nationality, name and fault of the delinquent and the length of his punishment. This varies from two to twelve hours, according to the fault. In principle, two hours of the pillory are equal to a day in prison, and the duration of two hours must not be exceeded in a period of twenty-four hours. The culprit has his hands fastened together behind the post; his ankles are bound and kept immovable by a rope which fixes them to the base of the instrument of torture; another rope is tied round his body, rendering him incapable of a move. It is a punishment of which the intensity of suffering is very variable, according to whether the weather is fine or rainy, temperate or cold, according to whether the executioner has more or less animosity against

the victim or his race. However that may be, even on a fine day, with the ropes loose and under the most favourable conditions, to stand motionless for two hours is a painful punishment.

The faults for which prisoners are condemned are for the most part trivial; and the punishments are so liberally given that a second post has been put up opposite the first pillory. One man had smoked in a tent, another had omitted to salute a German N.C.O. that he met, a third had escaped from fatigue duty or missed a parade, a fourth was caught carrying on an illicit trade in artificial honey, margarine or chocolate. One, tortured by hunger, had succeeded in eluding the vigilance of his commanding officer and had obtained a second basin of soup; another had visited the doctor and not been recognised as ill; still another had started some game of chance; and last of all, a man had moved while his company was at attention. What need have I to say more? Everything is an excuse for punishment. So punishments follow uninterruptedly from morning till night. But this evening —or rather night—the pillory seemed strangely large at the base. Could it be that some one was bound there at this hour, and in such weather? The man approaches in the darkness till he touches the unhappy comrade, who, at six o'clock in the evening, and with the thermometer at 6° below zero, is still fastened to the post of torture. He speaks sympathetically to him. The other replies in low tones, furtively, as if afraid of being heard, just a hasty word. It is a Scotsman, his accent reveals his nationality. What does he say?


FÜMOIR

Luckily the Frenchman happens to be the interpreter for the English company. He understands. Now that his eyes have grown accustomed to the darkness, he distinguishes the kilt of the wearer, and the Scotch cap placed on the side of his head. The interpreter asks question after question, but the Scotsman only replies shortly, and begs his questioner to go away, for he fears he also will get punished if found talking to him. But the unhappy man speaks in vain, the other will not obey his entreaties.

"Have you been here long?"

"Since two o'clock this afternoon. What time is it now?"

"It is past six. They must have forgotten you, for they have not the right to leave you tied up for more than two hours."

"I know. An adjutant who was passing gave the order for me not to be set free, saying he would have me untied when he thought proper."

"Horrible! Why?"

"Because in the crowd of soldiers who surrounded me, pretending to read the reason of my punishment, one, out of kindness, let me have a few puffs at his cigarette."

"And why were you punished?"

"I was caught smoking near the tents."

There is, in fact, within the camp a rough space between two tents, reserved for smokers, and every man is likely to be punished who dares to smoke outside that place, indicated in a conventional manner by four posts stuck in the ground on which may be read in large characters

" Smoking-Room." It reminds one of the staging of a play in the time of Shakespeare.

" You know, the Germans don't like us," continues the Scotsman. " Go away," he says; " you will be punished if they find you here."

" So much the worse for me. I will not leave you like this. Come what may, I am going to untie you."

" No, I pray you! Don't do that, for God's sake. They know my name, and to-morrow I shall have a double punishment. Do go away."

" Then I shall run to the German guardroom and intercede for you."

" Don't do anything, it will do no good and you yourself will run the chance of being punished. And you know it is not good to be in the pillory."

While speaking, the poor man could scarcely restrain the trembling of his voice. He shivered in spite of himself. For four hours he had been bound to this post in the terrible cold. His hands, the circulation of which was arrested by the cords too tightly drawn, were violet and swollen. His feet must have been in the same state. For four hours he had been there in the same position, motionless, his body contorted, his limbs imprisoned by ropes that cut his swollen flesh. The minutes must have seemed like hours of agony, but, inured to suffering, courageous, stoical, proud, he hid his feelings and did not utter a complaint. Motionless, on the frozen earth, he waited patiently for the end of his torture.

The interpreter, who knew enough of the misery of these poor British,—at the beginning of their captivity they received nothing from home,—bent

down to look at the sufferer's boots. As he expected, they were in shreds, and probably had no soles. Without saying a word he left the Scotsman and went.

. . . . . .

A few moments later he came back.

"Lift up your right foot. That's right. Now the left. That's better, isn't it?"

"What have you done?"

"Oh, I have only put a little piece of wood to separate you from the ground and keep the cold from freezing your feet."

"Ah! thank you! But you will get into trouble! If any one has seen you!"

"Well, cheer up! Good-bye for the present." He went on towards the office.

"No, don't go there. I am very well now and it won't be long before I am released. Leave me."

But already the Frenchman was out of earshot. He went to the office, not many steps from there, where the light from the windows was piercing the darkness. His indignation was great and he felt his anger rising. What! there were men—executioners—so cruel as to order that one of their own kind should be tied up like a packet and fastened to a post, his limbs bound so that the normal circulation was impossible! There were men so unworthy of the name as to make such a horrible punishment last for over four hours in that deadly weather! And they wanted people to cease calling them Huns and barbarians! The interpreter was so furious that he almost knocked over a figure coming in the opposite direction. In

a moment he perceived him. It was a German, an adjutant. His anger was so great that he forgot to salute. He found himself face to face with the adjutant who had the worst reputation among the French, and yet the hate that this man had for the French was like " sweet milk " in comparison with the hatred he nourished for the English. Without preamble the interpreter accosts this churlish man.

" Adjutant, I wish to bring to your notice a case of gross neglect. It is six o'clock ; it is 6° or 7° below zero and a man is still tied to the pillory."

With a smile the jailer replied in a light mocking tone :

" I know ; it is an Englishman. And it is by my orders he is there."

" Impossible ! You have never given such a barbarous order, to have a man tied up for four hours in this cold weather. They have not understood you, and, moreover, I am convinced that your rules—inhuman and incomprehensible as they seem to us—do not authorise——"

" Hold your tongue ! You forget that you are a prisoner ; you have not the right to speak to me like that."

" I think it is my duty to let you know that a man is being tortured more than your rules allow, and I thought to spare your conscience the remorse of homicide . . . through forgetfulness."

" A man ! Come ! It is an Englishman ! What interest have you in defending an Englishman ? It is only an Englishman ! "

" I know, but he is, nevertheless, a man. He

suffers as we do, even more than we French do, since the lot that you reserve for them is more painful than ours."

"The English are pigs!"

"Allow me to tell you that I have many good friends among them, and a long stay in England has enabled me to know that one meets among them certainly less of those animals than in another country I am acquainted with."

"What! You insult me! You call the Germans pigs! Very well; you shall come with me to the lieutenant."

"One moment! you mistake me. I did not say—— But, after all, let us go and see the lieutenant. Perhaps he still has a little human feeling."

There was a short distance yet to go to the office of the lieutenant who commanded the camp. The interpreter, although shocked by the sight of such barbarity as he had witnessed, and excited by this lively discussion with the Boche adjutant, had nevertheless kept cool and knew quite well that he had got himself into a bad scrape. Already he saw a war-council sitting and judgment given; the door of the prison that would open to admit him, and especially—even before the meeting of the war-council—the long days of detention in a dark, dirty, icy cell, badly ventilated, where solitude and privation would wreck his nerves.

Well, so much the worse for him; he would go on to the end. His case was serious, he had no doubt about it; and the adjutant, wounded in his dignity, would demand the full penalty. Already proud of his prize the German was enjoying in

advance the sufferings of his captive; he smiled to himself, and his little grey-blue eyes, sunk in fat, glittered wickedly.

They arrived in front of the wooden shed which constituted the office. The adjutant was just going to knock at the door when it opened. A brilliant light flooded the ground and dazzled those who were outside. In the centre of this brightness a massive form appeared. It was the lieutenant, about to hurry home.

The adjutant immediately recognised him, drew himself up smartly as if he were worked by a spring, brought his heels noisily together and stood at attention in a faultless manner, bringing his right hand to the peak of his cap and bending his whole body obsequiously forward. The Frenchman had quickly saluted and advanced in front of the adjutant, who, silent and deferential, waited for his superior to speak to him first.

Without letting the lieutenant have the time to question his inferior, the Frenchman, whose coolness amazed the Boche, had spoken to the commander of the camp and explained what he had at heart.

By error, assuredly, an Englishman had remained for four hours tied to the pillory. It was freezing hard, and the unhappy man would surely receive his death-blow. He must have been forgotten; but as German discipline was well known, nobody, not even the adjutant who was present—whom he indicated with his hand—nobody had thought it proper to take upon himself to set free this man, who was undergoing a punishment inflicted by the orders of the General. It was, however, evident

that a word from the lieutenant would be sufficient to rectify the mistake, and hinder the punishment being prolonged; for it would be regrettable if, by excess of discipline and a too literal respect for the orders given, a man should be forced to suffer excess of torture, which to all appearance no one wished to inflict on him.

The officer listened without saying a word. The adjutant was raging, and would have annihilated the Frenchman if his glance had possessed the power. He bowed respectfully every time the officer looked his way, burning with impatience to say a word to change the state of affairs. The darkness, which prevented the lieutenant from seeing the adjutant's anguished expression, saved the situation. The commander of the camp no doubt thought that the N.C.O. came to present the interpreter and support his request.

The weather was cold, the hour late and the lieutenant wanted to get home; perhaps at the end of the day, when he was going to see his wife and children, he felt a little kinder-hearted, and so it was that, cracking his whip, he went off saying: "Schneider, see that this man is set free." Heels clacked together, and the two men saluted the departing officer. In the darkness they stared at each other, not daring to give expression to their feelings. One of them would have liked to show his joy and relief, but he was a prisoner; the other, by a rude blow with the butt-end of the musket, would have loved to show the Frenchman that one dared not mock at a Prussian with impunity. But the law stood

there, rigid and menacing. Sulky, calling down imprecations on himself, swearing at the lieutenant, the Frenchman and the Englishman, the French and the English, all the Allies in general and all his superiors, the German made sign to the interpreter to follow him. They went towards the pillory. "Undo this man." But the Frenchman wanted his victory to be complete, and the humiliation of the Boche to know no limit. He tried feebly to undo the knots; he did not succeed.

"You have tied them too tightly," he said to the Teuton, "and my hands are frozen with the cold; I cannot undo them."

"Come, try again. You must untie this man. You wished to do it."

"All right!" The interpreter took his knife from his pocket and began to cut the almost new rope, when the German, swearing, stopped him.

Then one might have seen a sight, the contemplation of which would have been sweet to every prisoner. In the black night a German adjutant undoing with his own hands and by the orders of a superior officer the bonds of a hated Englishman, whom he would have liked to see perish with pain and cold, and this under the contemptuous eyes of a Frenchman whom he had hoped to summon before a war-council, and to send to shiver on the straw of a cell.

The work finished, the Boche, full of rage and shame, rolled up the rope. Then he went away, and the dark, frosty night swallowed him up.

The unhappy Scotsman, worn out and frozen, could scarcely stand. The pains caused by the

returning circulation were intolerable. The interpreter offered him the help of his arm and insisted on accompanying him to his tent.

Both were astonished and delighted at the happy end to this adventure, which might have been tragic. Phlegmatic, the Scotsman seemed already to have forgotten his sufferings. At the door of his tent he shook hands heartily with the interpreter, assuring him of his gratitude, and offered him a woodbine, concluding with the words, "All's well that ends well."

REVENGE ON
BRITISH SOLDIERS

CHAPTER VII

NIGHT spreads over the camp, not a star is to be seen in the sky; gloomy, lugubrious, heavy darkness envelops it, rendered still more dismal by the rain, which, fine as a mist, falls fast and silently, penetrating our shabby garments.

It is nearly nine o'clock. Silence reigns, broken occasionally by the howling of the wind. The tents—which the Germans had not yet taken the trouble to light up—formed an indistinct blot on the darkness, their existence revealed only by the flapping of the canvas shaken by the gusts of a cold and bitter breeze. Some of the tents, lit by a few candles which the prisoners had succeeded in procuring outside the camp, with their dim, hazy outlines, gave relief to the gloomy night, which appeared to suffer from the misery she was hiding. The lights will waver here and there for some time, and then one by one will disappear when the bugle has sounded the dismal notes of the "Curfew," which sends a shiver through the soul and starts the dogs howling. Till then the occupants of the tents still out of bed assemble around the

feeble glimmer which, twinkling and lost in the shadows of the big place, gives light to about thirty men grouped in a circle about it. Some are playing cards, some writing diaries or reading over again the letter of a loved one, a letter received perhaps a fortnight ago. Others again are polishing rings or carving wood or simply thinking of past happiness—of the joys of the family, or of a good table, or the comfort of an arm-chair in one's study, club or café. But perhaps this poor light suggests mournful memories, evokes only the picture of tapers burning at the four corners of a bier in which some beloved being is enclosed.

From time to time the flame flickers and, almost extinguishing the cotton wick, plunges the tent into semi-obscurity, giving the shadows more gigantic proportions. It is because some one has just opened the door, and an icy wind rushes in and chills every one in its way. Brr—brrr. It is not good to be outside. This rain penetrates and freezes one in the twinkling of an eye. The last prisoners, loitering to talk with their comrades in the neighbouring tents, come in one by one, and rejoice to find themselves under shelter, for he must be insane who remains outside in such weather.

Nine o'clock! We hear the discordant notes of the bugle. Blow out the candles, the patrol is passing. Every one creeps shivering under his blankets; the mattresses seem soft! How good it is to escape such weather. A feeling of pity goes forth to those who are obliged to pass the night outside, on the roads or in the trenches.

Silence and darkness envelop the camp, bringing sadness and repose.

Over yonder, however, a lamp is still burning; it appears to hurl defiance at all rules! Oh! don't be afraid; no one would risk being sent to the pillory, for no one would dare to transgress orders in such a manner. This lamp, which is the only one burning in the camp, belongs to the kitchen, where the work is not finished. The cooks, tired by a long and hard day's labour, sigh for the rest their comrades are already enjoying, and hasten as speedily as possible to finish their task. One can see their hurrying shadows flitting to and fro.

Near the kitchen, in a particularly dark spot, about thirty men are herded. They have been there almost a couple of hours, pressed one against the other and shivering in the rain which soaks them to the skin. Silently and feverishly they knock off from their numbed and badly-shod feet the black liquid mud with which they splash each other; they are spattered right to their knees, and the legs of their trousers—stiff as if starched—rub the flesh till the blood comes. The smoking lantern suspended from the ceiling of the kitchen and swinging in the wind, from time to time, seemingly with regret, throws a yellow, fleeting light on this still crowd. Here the khaki uniform predominates. Here they are, those fine English soldiers, whose superb carriage, exquisite cleanliness, bold warlike air and powerful muscles, excited the admiration of the crowds at Havre and Rouen. Here they are, poor beggars, without

shirts, their jerseys in rags, their trousers in holes, jagged, torn and thin as a spider's web, their worn shoes down at heel, letting in water on all sides. Their faces, once clean-shaven, fresh and smiling, now emaciated, wan and dirty, are covered with rough, bristling hair; their cheek-bones protrude, their eyes are hollow and haggard. They were accustomed to substantial and abundant food. A quart of hot, greasy water, wherein the vegetables are few and the meat absent, now composes their "Menu," and replaces the half-pound of beef, potatoes, cabbage and pudding of former days. They were accustomed to a bath every day, to frequent change of linen, to careful shaving. Here they are without soap, towels or change of linen, having no razor and often deprived of water. They let them die of hunger, rot in their dirt, overrun by parasites, and subject them to the most repugnant and terrible drudgery. On them the Teuton revenges the help given to France by their country and the supremacy of their flag upon the sea.

There are men of all sizes among them: giants whose shoulders are bowed with misery, beardless youths with the bearing of Ephebus, veterans wearing on their breasts the ribbons of the Transvaal.

Men are there thin enough to frighten. With caps pulled down over their eyes, hands in their pockets, their shoulders bent under the soaking rain, they stamped the ground with their broken shoes, without uttering a word. From time to time there is a slight bustle, a little altercation;

it is a soldier who tries to creep forward and get a better place, and who is put back quickly and by brute force to the left of the column.

The English know how to be calm and patient while waiting for anything, but once they are roused nothing stops them.

In silence these men wait patiently. What do they want? What dark conspiracy are they hatching in the shadows with the help of the silence of night. Who will be the victim of this horde of half-starved wretches in rags, despairing and ashamed.

They wait.

Suddenly a ray of light flashes abruptly into the trembling darkness, betraying the opening of a door. "Here they are."

Muscles harden under the ragged garments, chests swell, bodies are poised ready. A formidable, savage struggle, accompanied by a hoarse roar, transforms the peaceful and silent crowd into a threatening hurricane, from which soon cries and oaths arise.

The light, swinging backwards and forwards, shows for a second angular profiles, criminal faces, stamped with ferocious brutality, twitching hands, and arms knotted and tattooed. Sinister sight!

The noise increases; they push; some struggle to advance; others to draw back. Helmets are flying; the uproar and the cries destroy the peace of the night. They come to blows, fists fall at random in the gloom with a dull sound. The fight becomes furious. It is a battle of demons in a hell deprived of light.

Those nearest the kitchen stoop, making wild and savage gestures; they seem to want to finish an invisible enemy already brought down, and it is with exclamations of joy and triumph and glee that they add their voices to the cries of their comrades, who, from behind, catching on to anything they can, try to force themselves forward and throw themselves on the long-awaited victim. From time to time one hears the groans of some man in pain, whose hand is being crushed under the nailed boots of those who are advancing without looking where they are going.

The uproar causes the sentry on guard at the kitchen to appear, armed, ferocious, yelling, gesticulating, sweeping them before him here, there, everywhere, with blows from the butt of his rifle and kicks from his heavy boots, bestowed with so praiseworthy a generosity that it approaches prodigality. They do not give to his entrance on the scene the importance it demands. His blows are added to the blows already given, his cries to those already uttered, and only serve to increase the tumult and uproar. The men who have been hit remain there insensible and angry, with clenched hands and staring eyes full of violent purposes. They remind one of ferocious dogs who have sprung on one another, and that nothing can separate.

A few succeed in getting out of the arena, and disappear noiselessly in the darkness, creeping along by the tents like night thieves; and the lantern swinging from the rafters of the kitchen, seemingly ashamed of showing up such poor wretches, spares them the indignity of revealing

their incognito, and swings backwards and forwards in such a manner as to deprive them of its smoking light.

At last the cries die out, the movement becomes less intense. Silently they go away one by one, till only the sentinel remains. His shouting ceases; breathless but victorious he marches over the conquered ground.

"The combat is over for want of combatants." The last prisoner to slip away is a wretched young Englishman in rags. In his hands, covered with blood and mud, he is carefully carrying his cap upside down. Arriving opposite the kitchen he stops in the light, and from the greasy pocket of his ragged trousers he draws out a handful of white sticky stuff which he puts into his head-gear. Slowly in this manner he empties both his pockets. One can see his poor features, stamped with suffering, suddenly light up at the contemplation of the contents of his cap; he is smiling at his theft. Poor devil; hunger cries with an imperious voice, and behold, our young Englishman fills his mouth with handfuls of the slimy, sticky stuff that has just been in the mud, then in his greasy pockets and smirched hands, and lastly in his cap shiny with dirt.

In spite of the fatigue of a day's drudgery, in spite of the terrible weather, risking the rudeness and blows of those stronger and more hungry than himself, he has remained there patiently for two hours, waiting for the cooks to come and throw away into a tub the remains of the cod soup which was left in the saucepans. That poor

English youth is happy to be able to eat those salty and disgusting remains, composed for the greater part of the bones, skin and eyes of the codfish, which he has had the privilege of picking up under the blows of a Prussian soldier, and is now greedily eating.

Satisfied, he returns to his mattress. To-morrow he will be happy to find under his straw, dirty and full of parasites, at the bottom of his greasy cap, the remains of to-day's feast.

Every evening, at the time when their comrades are resting, these starving men go to the same place ! Every evening a similar distressing scene is enacted.

Sometimes the sentinel on duty laughs and lets them take what they can get. How good it is to see one's enemies suffer from hunger, when one feels the gentle pressure of a tunic over a well-filled stomach.

Brutes ! The darkness has too long hidden your wickedness ; your time is coming ! Strike those who are dying of hunger, laugh at those who are struggling not to fall from exhaustion ! The hour of your punishment has struck !

CHAPTER VIII

Slowly but with terrible certainty the work of encircling us went on day by day. A month ago we had seen experts wandering round the barbed-wire fence which enclosed us. Then the surveyors had followed, and here and there, at regular intervals, had dug up spadefuls of earth. A certain inactivity followed, which, in spite of every experience, raised a faint hope in the heart of the prisoners.

But when some of our comrades appeared in the camp carrying pickaxes and spades, hope vanished.

Slowly, very slowly, as if to show their regret, the squad went to the first landmark. There they halted, and the tools were thrown on the ground. The sentinels, dressed in brown overcoats, ornamented at the collar by a black number on a red background, stood with their guns slung on their shoulders, and shivered as they filled their pipes.

Already those who were curious hurried up, and, recognising some of their comrades amongst the workers, began to talk to them, in spite of the sentinels who, from fear of disturbances, kept the

two groups apart. From one side and the other exclamations burst forth. To show their sympathy for their comrades forced to work, some teasingly congratulated them on the haste they had shown to go and work for the Boches. The others described their efforts to get out of the group of able-bodied men, their various adventures and finally their capture. In any case they assured their questioners of their firm determination not to outrival the German workman! The gaiety, the vivacity and the wit of these men were in striking contrast to the heaviness and sour looks of the guard. Then the idlers asked for "tips," but even the workmen who knew the most could tell them nothing; they only knew one thing, that which brute force taught them—they had got to do the work. But all of them shook their heads sadly, as if to say: "It's a bad job." Nobody indeed was ignorant of the object of this work, for it had been long talked about. Some weeks before an interpreter had got wind of it, and the news that he brought back spread through the camp like wildfire. At first all cried out at such an invention, for good sense and humanity revolted against it, and maintained it was impossible. Electricians amongst us discussed it, and could not believe in it—it was impracticable. To begin with, the installation would cost too much, and then it would be a crime to leave at hand a constant danger of death. The Germans were brutes, it was well known, but even they would never dare to encircle their prisoners by a current of 5000 volts. The rumour was, unfortunately, true.

Only the evening before, a well-known man in the French colony had somewhat reassured the timorous by his learned arguments, and now the nightmare had become reality. The jailers, jealous of their sandy soil, begrudged a few feet to our prisoners, already cramped in a place whose narrow limits were terribly oppressive. All round the perimeter the Germans were going to cut off three or four metres to make an impassable barrier; inside a double enclosure of barbed wire they were going to install a third line of electrified wire which would ensure death to any one touching it. Everybody lamented the loss of this narrow run of earth, which was the promenade, the boulevard, the forum. There we walked as far as possible to the outside of the camp, our eyes turned towards the neighbouring forest, into which we gazed longingly, and the sight of which enabled some of us to enjoy the illusion of liberty. The eyes which turned from the hideous tents, where we lived crowded together, lit up sometimes with a brighter glance at the happy remembrance of a walk with our dear ones in a similar forest far away. This illusion, this shadowy remembrance, was to be taken from us! We had been able until now, by approaching near enough, to overlook one barrier, but the presence of three lines of barbed wire between us and the forest would destroy its lure, and increase the weight of our chains and the misery of our captivity.

It was on this promenade surrounding the camp that we met in the morning when work did not claim us. It was there that we walked, to and fro

chatting with friends about the probable length of the war and our chances of victory. Optimistic speakers, in discourses backed by irrefutable arguments, with well-founded reasonings, succeeded in keeping up hope in the hearts of the discouraged. There it was, that at the end of the day, when it began to get dark, we assembled, and in low voices, like conspirators, commented on the news contained in our letters from France, made out like so many puzzles from ambiguous sentences, and the news learnt from the men who worked outside the camp. And last of all, in the evening, before fires were put out, when the greater number of us had gone to seek forgetfulness in sleep, came those who sought for a moment's solitude, to calm the anguish which tortured the soul. We kept our gaiety for our comrades during the day; but in the evening we could, without being cowardly, give ourselves up to the discouragement that overwhelmed us. And again it was there that we came to mourn for those who had fallen. We ground our teeth in thinking of the crimes of the Hun and our powerlessness at not being able to go to the help of the oppressed or the avenging of the dead.

These few feet of sand were sanctified to us by the noble feelings that we had had there. They belonged to us, they formed our temple. It was a sacrilege to deprive us of them.

To those who had planned flight, this work was the ruin of their hopes, and each blow of the pick-axe sounded as the last turn of the key by an unfeeling jailer to him condemned to die. Never had the men been a prey to such agony as they now

felt, for before hope had sustained them ; now the last chance of escape was gone.

There were other prisoners who, with sad eyes and looks of gloom, watched anxiously the preparations. Our poor humanity is not exclusively composed of dreamers and visionary lovers of liberty ; it includes practical people who enjoy bodily comforts, and when they cannot enjoy the hot rays of the sun, like to warm their numbed limbs at a flaming fire. For them the electric barrier meant simply a lack of fuel.

Once this barrier was finished they would no longer be permitted to approach the enclosure and drag in, between the barbed wire, the dead branches which the kindly fir-trees shed each day. And the winter was here, each hour grew colder ; the future might well look gloomy to those poor devils, who were clothed in a ragged shirt with trousers and coat in pitiable condition, reduced to finding in a litre of hot water, drunk twice a day, the amount of heat necessary, according to the German staff, to keep their emaciated bodies in health.

Everywhere consternation reigned, and despair. It was in vain for their kind and more clever comrades to talk about the fun they would have in playing tricks on the Boches. Nothing was more easy, said they, than to throw a simple bit of barbed wire, which would hook on to the electrified fence, and by its contact with the earth establish a short circuit. In vain our orators talked about the trouble that that would cause the Germans, the exploded leads, the painful searching

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all along the line, the momentary interruption of the current and the expense that would follow. One optimist held forth that he saw in this development an excellent sign, an indication of undeniable weakness in the German Army. Its losses had been such that already they were short of men. The electric installation would permit them to spare 50 per cent. of the sentinels. Moreover, the information lately received backed up his theory. Had not one of the sentinels just told them that he was going off that evening for the Russian front? Perhaps also they feared the rising of the French prisoners, when they heard the thundering of their friends—the 75's—in the far distance. And these times were near! In any case they must conclude from it that our arms were successful and "Gaudeamus igitur." But these speeches were of no use. With all their subtleties what could they do against the brutality of visible realities and palpable facts? They were going to be encircled. So one of us regretted the beauty of the forest, another his liberty that vanished just when he hoped to regain it, a third the comforting fire which was to take the place of a meal and warm clothes.

To the last speaker a wag replied: "But, my dear fellow, you won't be cold. It is to warm us that the Boches have installed this apparatus. They are blockaded by the Allied fleets and have no coal. Electricity, you know, can be produced by waterfalls; that will cost the Boches nothing. You see! Throughout the camp there will be warmth. The days will come when we shall be too

hot, you will be obliged to leave off your overcoat. Then just see how practical these Boches are! They place at a certain distance from these electrified wires a kind of barrier. It is the drying ground. On these lines we shall hang our linen. They say that electric heat kills the eggs of parasites. You see how fine it will be. In the morning you can also toast your K. bread or your herring by holding it at the end of a stick. Just consider a little how great are the advantages of the installation. This fence that they are making round the camp may be called an 'Outside Central Heating Apparatus.'"

It was indeed all very fine, but the simple doubted, and, in any case, preferred the flames which scorched their bodies and in which they saw pictures of home.

. . . . . .

Exclamations were heard. We distinguished the words "Los," "Weg," and "Arbeiten." We saw the imperious gestures, and the workmen having picked up spades and pickaxes, went slowly towards the marked-out holes. The tools were lifted painfully, with a fine sweep of the arm. They struck the earth without energy. But numbers prevailed in spite of goodwill, and the nothing done by each nevertheless came to something by the end of the day.

The next day and during many days the men laboured. The holes were deep and the posts solid enough to resist anything.

But here we must do justice to our fellows; they attacked their task with a most praiseworthy

moderation. One might have thought that, like the Trappist's fathers, the prisoners were digging their own graves, for their ardour was such as would have made a road-maker of Paris turn pale with scorn.

The day dawned at last when, all round the camp, stakes two metres high stood white, shining and aggressive against the dark trunks of the sweet-smelling firs so soothing with their beauty. The electricians, recruited from our professionals, were told to lay the wires which were to surround and support the electrified fencing. Pataud counselling a strike was never more listened to, never more obeyed, than were our friends who encouraged the engineers to waste time. For a long while one might have thought that the installation would never be finished, and again the hope sprang that peace would find this barbarity still in its first stage.

But one fine day to our horror we saw the ends of the wire being joined. The circuit was complete, the prison was shut for ever.

For one moment there was consternation amongst the wood-gatherers. They could no longer get near the firs, and all stood there, with mouths open, like sleepers rudely awakened from their dreams.

Then, as in all difficult circumstances, in the time of need a man was found, "the man of the hour," Claude, a timid collector of twigs, a man so shy that he only dared to warm one hand at a time, rose up and showed what was hidden in his heart.

Inspired by a flash of genius, and helped by an

indomitable will, he prepared to act. With an authority never suspected till now, he grouped around him some of those who only yesterday had pushed him on one side and looked at him disdainfully when he asked for a little of the heat for his frozen limbs—heat that was in principle for all, but in fact was the right of the strongest. One scarcely knew anything of him. All day long he used to go searching for wood, and it was only towards evening that he came with his load. And his load was always the heaviest; it was a sort of insult and reproach to those who stayed all day in the best places and warmed themselves with the wood that their comrades had gathered. It was a little too strong for this small puny man to want to teach them a lesson. The strong are made thus! They cherish an unutterable contempt for those who serve them, and a sovereign disdain for those who, out of love, become their slaves.

Well, Claude put himself at the head of a handful of men, who followed him meekly. Like a captain sure of victory he led the phalanx. Near a shed he stopped and leaned down under a window.

For one instant he sought for a mark, then he began to dig a hole in the sand with his hands. Soon something glittered. With a glance round, Claude made sure that his associates kept good watch, then he triumphantly exhibited a small hand-saw in a perfect state. This tool—between us, be it said—had been looked for by the Germans some days before, as they were hastening to finish the huts. However, an earnest and clamorous

search by the authorities had brought no information as to the lost tool. Only one man could have cleared up the mystery, and he had determined to keep silent.

With the saw in his hand, and escorted by his bodyguard, the leader continued his march. They halted near one of the new boundary posts, and Claude who, from his serious air, might have been a field-marshal at least, took a folding measure from his pocket. The importance of his mission gave him added stature. He no longer resembled the suppliant of yesterday begging for a corner near the fire. With skilled hands he measured the part of the post above the electric wire. As he was on the point of making a mark immediately above the isolators, he stopped and murmured something about "making a good job of it," and made the groove five centimetres higher. "Five from twenty-five," he murmured, "leaves twenty."

Some passing German officers stopped to watch the men at work, astonished and at the same time pleased at seeing our soldiers diligent and serious, not at all their usual behaviour.

For a long time Claude measured, for a long time the saw worked, and one by one the tops of the posts fell. These twenty centimetres of strong post would certainly make a splendid log, so the men worked as hard as possible, one sawing, another carrying. Depots of firewood were organised, and till the evening they worked without stopping, hoarding the precious logs, which after all were fully equal to dead branches.

It was only the next morning, when the foreman of the work arrived, that the deed was discovered.

There was a fearful row. The fires were immediately put out by order and the ashes scattered to the four winds. For several days a strict guard prevented attempts to relight them. But soon the watch became relaxed, and the sentinels, tired of pursuing abortive fires, ceased to go their rounds. It was not long before the natural result followed and the sparks of the first new fire were flying upwards. The logs were dug up as they were wanted and gave our comrades pleasant warmth and a feeling of well-being, of which for some time they had been deprived. They were once again able to make hot drinks. The joy they felt in having " done " their jailers added to the pleasure they felt in being able to warm themselves.

When the sentinels were questioned on the subject they confessed to having seen everything, but having noticed the apparent regularity and good order of the men, they had not been suspicious, and confined themselves to admiring the sense of economy which imbued all the enterprises of their Kolossal administration. In their inmost hearts they had doubtless chanted " Te Deum Laudamus " to the glory of their omnipotent Kaiser, who knows and foresees everything.

This act of indiscipline on the part of the French was incomprehensible to the German mind. They could not imagine another reasoning otherwise than they did: " One must never do anything

without an order, and if one does something, then it must be because one has received an order; moreover, the order can only come from a superior, who in every case is right." Therefore, if some one does something, it is well. But they are too dull to realise that German logic is not universal logic and far less French logic.

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Once again our soldier-prisoners had gained a victory over their thick-skinned guardians.

And that is how the encircling heating apparatus became central heating!

CHAPTER IX

It is a wet winter morning at about 6.30. The huts are deserted. The men, led by the sergeants of their companies, have gone to the kitchens and await the distribution of their "half-pints."

Carrying a bucket from which rises a thin column of steam, two prisoners come back from the boilers. Their appearance is signalled to the impatient crowd. At last!

The black drink for which the prisoners long is called coffee, an hygienic beverage made of an infusion of roasted barley. It is drunk without sugar and constitutes the whole of the meal, "Frühstuck" (breakfast). It is with the utmost trouble that the N.C.O.'s can keep in their places these frozen, impatient men. The distribution begins. Each man passes between two sergeants, who count and recognise those in their company. The ration is exactly measured, and the intrusion of soldiers belonging to another company, or an attempt to secure a second portion by those who are not satisfied, is frustrated. It is not that the beverage is agreeable to the taste or that those who take

it are greedy, but it has the advantage of being boiling, and the heat it communicates lessens the early morning cold and relieves the parched throats. Few of the prisoners possess a drinking vessel. Some by ruse have succeeded in keeping the bowl in which the evening before they received their soup. Two hundred and fifty men are present, some with a half-pint measure, others with a bowl; one has a preserved meat tin, another a jam jar; these receptacles are exchanged and pass from hand to hand. Two hundred and fifty times the distributing sergeant has plunged his measure into the bucket, which now seems empty. Disappointment appears on the faces of those who hope to obtain an extra drop. Thus ends the first meal!

Now we must parade for the roll-call. Under a fine and penetrating rain, which soaks and makes us shiver from head to foot, with a cutting wind entering through the holes of our ragged clothing with a keenness which makes our eyes water, the assembly takes place.

The companies are deployed in lines of five rows, each before its hut. Everybody, even the sick, must be present.

It is now scarcely seven o'clock. The French sergeant on duty counts his men; the head of the company, an adjutant, does the same; then an "Achtung" resounds in the greyness of the morning—it is a German non-commissioned officer come to verify the numbers. They are not right; each counts again. But they never agree. They count, they verify line by line, they recount, all

to no purpose. Some men are missing. It is never-ending! Quick! At the suggestion of a German, they borrow from a company on the left the number of men necessary to complete the effective force. It is the only way to shorten the ceremony.

At last "Es stimmt." All present. The Boche is pleased with himself. The French always make mistakes. He alone knows how to count. "Ruhe euch!" (At ease). While the German authority turns his back the men from the left run back to their own company.

This trick is played every day and as often as there is roll-call. One must not indeed try to reason, to show that the number given by the officer is not exact. The idea of criticising the orders and the numbers of the higher command has never entered, or ever will enter the skull of a German. Even if he does not understand them, he still will use his efforts to make the given orders respected. Even if he is willing to listen to you, if he knows how to reason, if he follows your argument and agrees with your opinion, he will none the less remain obstinately true to the error; for it is not his, it comes from his superiors, and the fact of its coming from a superior makes it no longer an error; it is the Truth, that one must accept and cause to be respected. So there is nothing to be done! The company counts as its effective force two hundred and fifty men; it is put on paper and the head of the Boches' company believes he sees the full number in the ranks; they are his "Stück," they have been confided to him,

he wishes to have them numbered, before accounting for them as " alles da " !

The men stand at ease, but the inspection is not yet finished. The French stamp their feet in mud indescribable ; each moment becomes more liquid as the stamping and the falling rain continue. The unfortunate men who have colds, cough enough to make one's heart break. Those who are ill, those who are wounded, even those who have lost limbs, are kept there standing in the pouring rain. What for ? The orders for fatigue duty for the day. At last these arrive.

At the approach of an officer every one immediately gets back to his place and stands at attention.

An interpreter accompanies the officer and transmits his orders to the chief of the company. The number of men to be furnished by each company is fixed. The turns of fatigue duty are decided beforehand, and the prisoners, called by name, go in fours, and form column at some distance from the parade ground, where they are immediately surrounded by Boche sentinels.

Thus the general fatigue work is arranged. The men are then counted. This done, the sentinels bestir themselves and raise their hoarse voices, crying, " Pâquâtrre " (Par quatre). At last the men start off at the command " Los-march ! " (March). Slowly the long line, flanked by Boches in yellow cloaks, makes its way towards the exit of the camp. Then, and then only, may the invalids, the men exempted from service and those who are free, break ranks and seek shelter in the

huts. There they shiver in the dripping garments that they cannot dry, as they have no others to change into.

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In the mud through which they paddle and with which at every step they are splashed, our prisoners continue their route. From time to time one or other is obliged to stop and draw out a sabot from the cold, black mud.

Poor compatriots, sad survivors of a glorious army. Look at them marching with bent heads through the soaking rain. Most of them have tied rags round their necks to protect them from the drops that fall from their caps. A few—and these are indeed happy—have succeeded in keeping their military clothes in fairly good state. Their great overcoats can still protect them. Many are dressed in gay-coloured Belgian coats, reminding one of the Opéra-Comique—short jackets which come a little below the waist. A few of the more privileged have received from the German administration civilian overcoats of a very inferior quality, ornamented the length of the back with a green and yellow or red and green band, to distinguish the interned from the civilians, and to betray them in case of escape. The knitted helmets, due to the generosity of a Swiss society, are worn by many to replace the ordinary cap. The trousers are generally the worst part of the outfit. If certain kinds of patching show ingenuity, at the same time they reduce the material. One man has cut off the end of his trousers to mend a weak place in another part, another has put on a patch

with a piece of linen. You might fancy you were in "la cour des miracles."

Shoes are rare; sabots, granted by the Germans only to those capable of working, are the kind of footwear that one sees the most. A few wear khaki puttees bought for a few sous from a poor Englishman. Others have pieces of linen or rags, which indifferently protect the calves of their wearers, obliged to remain long hours exposed to the rigours of the weather.

Until fatigue duty is over—that is to say, till about four o'clock—the men will work out of doors without stopping, and till their return to camp an hour later they will only have had for food the single drink of coffee taken at réveillé. Thus these unfortunates remain from six o'clock the evening before till five o'clock the next day without a bite of solid food—twenty-three hours at a stretch without eating. On their return to camp they swallow, one after the other, at an hour's interval, the broth of midday and the evening soup.

This diet, is it not enough to ruin the strongest digestion!

Often blinded by the icy rain, which cuts their faces, the workers go away slowly like a troop of sheep led to the slaughter. They are silent. As for the Huns, they don't say a word. With long green porcelain pipes between their lips, their heads covered by their cloaks, they only think of one thing, and that is to protect their rifles, hidden under their mackintoshes, from rust. The heavy silence is, however, troubled, as with a sort of moan; it is the rubbing together of soaked trousers, it is

the sound of the sabots splashing through the puddles. From time to time a man plunges to his ankles in a rut, or a hole full of water, and lets forth an oath, which finds no echo. Every man remains isolated, lives within himself. No one wishes to confide his sadness, his weariness, his despair to a neighbour. Amongst these men who pass like a procession of ghosts is there one who feels assured about the fate of his family, is there one who does not curse his enforced separation from those he loves, or one who can satisfy his hunger every day, and preserve intact his constancy and strength of mind amid such adversity? Who, even among the most debased, has been able to become used to this brutalising life? Who has not suffered in his self-respect, or has not—for a moment at least—felt degraded, when he has seen himself, with his companions, herded like cattle, put in a cage like a wild beast and fed worse even than they? Who of them will ever speak of the physical, and above all the mental, sufferings of our prisoners, their bitter reflections, their blasphemies, their deep despair, their hatred of life? On their return to France they will wish to get rid of such remembrances, as one washes oneself from a stain.

Thus they go on, their heads bent, their hearts full of bitterness.

Suddenly the first ranks stop short, and the rear not being warned are thrown against them. The guards have made a sign. The four kilometres to the destination are covered.

The fatigue party, consisting of from seven

hundred to eight hundred men, has to level a vast space of sandy soil. It is the site for a camp, the plans of which are already drawn, to which the new recruits of the next class will come to be mobilised.

They will be better off than in barracks. The position—an immense clearing in the centre of a pine-forest—is healthy. Nothing will be wanting: there is abundance of water, electric light will be installed, large windows will give light and air to the huts, the roofs will be thick and the walls made of bricks lined with wood.

Later, when the camp is on the point of being finished, the General who commands the district will let neutral notabilities and journalists visit it, and will present it to them as the future residence of those poor French prisoners over which Germany watches with a mother's love. And these notabilities and these reporters, who in a motor have covered the distance so painfully trodden by our compatriots, who have visited the camp where one finds every modern comfort, will go back befooled by the obsequious Germans, and in good faith will relate to their countrymen how royally the French prisoners are treated in Germany.

The prisoners stop for several minutes motionless in the rain which a bitter east wind brings; the men scarcely warmed by the march, freeze again, for in the limits permitted to them there is no shelter, and it is impossible to sit on the muddy ground.

At the signal to begin work, the men, with an aspect of indifference, go towards an improvised

shed, where the tools are kept during the night. Nonchalantly each takes any tool that happens to come his way—one a spade, another a pickaxe, another a wheelbarrow. The guards form a circle around the workers and the long task begins.

For several days already they have been busy filling a vast depression, and the hundreds of barrow-loads thrown in daily seem not to have made any difference. It is a painful task to push over this sodden land, where the mud sticks to the wheels, these barrows laden with sand.

But who is then this man, this Zouave, who, indifferent to the trouble that his companions are giving themselves with pickaxe and spade, stands motionless and idle in the midst of this activity? Leaning on the handle of a spade fixed in the earth, he seems to be lost in a dream. Half an hour has already passed and he has not yet touched the sand. The German guards have noticed him and his idleness. His inaction puzzles them; it must be put a stop to. A sentinel approaches and by a gesture makes the soldier understand that he must work.

Impassive, the Frenchman replies by a shake of the head, and shows by a shrug of his shoulders that it is not possible. The Boches think the moment has come to interfere and to support their comrade; two or three others go towards the Zouave. In a raised voice and with fiercer words the sentinel repeats his demand. He grows angry, and it may be a bad business for the Frenchman. But the threats do not terrify him. The spade on which he was leaning falls to the ground,

and with his left hand taking his right from under his short Zouave coat he shows it to the Boches who stand round him, lifeless, numbed, purple from cold and the want of circulation. The guard regrets his harshness, and would willingly make excuses, if he could make himself understood. The sight of the wounded man fills him with pity. He gives forth a few "Achs," followed by "traurig," makes a sign to the Zouave that he can rest, and returns to his post of observation.

The Zouave is pleased to have puzzled the Boche; it is a game he loves to indulge in. He is indeed one of those usually on fatigue duty, in spite of the rule that forbids the wounded to be sent to work. But if this invalid daily braves the fatigue of a painful march, of a long wait on open land exposed to the inclemency of the weather, if he is willing to suffer from the wind and the rain, it is because this wearisome day assures him his daily bread. He answers to the name of one of his comrades chosen to go on fatigue, in order to receive the sum of threepence. With this money he buys a ration of bread from a needy Englishman, who can go without food more easily than without tobacco. To such extremities is this unhappy lad, just out of hospital, reduced. He braves a march of eight kilometres and a wait of ten hours in an icy downpour which brings on him a fever, to have 300 grammes—scarcely a slice of K. bread, which is black, indigestible and made of bran, starch of potatoes and sawdust.

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Amongst the workers who labour without

ceasing, a skilled eye quickly detects those who in civil life are not used to this kind of work. They are awkward, their tools seem too heavy for them.

Here, for example, is a young man, a budding soldier, who pants and perspires while pushing before him a heavily-loaded barrow, the wheel of which grates at each turn. The vehicle never will go straight, in spite of the despairing efforts of its wheeler, who, however, works with as much care as if the salvation of his country and his own deliverance depended on the safe arrival of the load. He is a little man, puny, with a humble, frightened air and a reserved manner, but his eyes have the sharpness and the malice of a monkey. He goes on, absorbed in his work, without deigning to notice those who surround him, whether allies or enemies. You would swear that all his faculties are concentrated on the work that he is doing. It is strange; for, after all, what interest can a prisoner have in working for the Huns with so much energy and conscientiousness? One feels that he wishes to remain unnoticed, but his want of skill and his ardour call attention to him. Painfully, after numerous prolonged stops, he gains the planks, where at last the wheelbarrow can roll freely; he will wheel it to the side of a hole. There he will empty his load. Then back again slowly, as much embarrassed, it seems, by his empty wheelbarrow as he was when it was full. After several journeys he gains sufficient skill to pass unnoticed amongst the workers. He is a little Parisian of the class 1913. A typewriter in an office before doing his service, he had never in his

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life come into such close contact with a wheelbarrow. In the camp he has the reputation of being gay, careless, full of spirits. He is a wag who brings a smile on faces that are aged and tortured by suffering. But there, on fatigue, he has an air of not knowing any one and only being interested in his work.

But look! There he is coming back with his hands empty. Some kind and charitable companion has undertaken to bring back his wheelbarrow.

Many times in the course of the day he is seen to come back with arms idle and his expression pensive. No one pays attention to him.

But, sentinels, you make a mistake in trusting this young man as you do. With all his simple looks he is playing tricks on the German Empire, the all-powerful Kaiser and the fierce black eagle; tricks worthy of being hanged for! This is his stratagem. To the extreme edge of the platform that hangs over the hole he pushes his wheelbarrow, makes sure that he is not observed by any one, and bang!—in a moment, with a skill that one would not have expected from a person so puny and awkward, he hurls into space barrow and all!

Three times, four times, five times, as opportunities occur, he repeats this little game, and then goes off slowly, with the assured step of a good workman at peace with his conscience, to seek another wheelbarrow in the shed, which will soon meet the fate of its predecessors. Thanks to him the number of barrows diminishes rapidly. One

day an inventory will show the disappearance of twenty or thirty of them. Where can they be? They are marked with the imperial arms and cannot have been stolen! Puzzle!

It is a devil's trick that no one can explain. A stricter watch reveals nothing. The land has indeed been levelled for several days, and the sheds are already covering that cemetery of wheelbarrows.

I know, however, a certain delicate-looking Frenchman, of innocent aspect, who could teach much to the officer of many stars in charge of the supplies. Let the Boche rack his brains, let him be plunged in despair—the Frenchman will not speak and the authorities will only lose their time.

In the evening, on returning from work, our wag will say to himself, rubbing his hands with the satisfaction which is the right of a conscientious worker, "To-day I have given five wheelbarrows to France"; for it is quite just to say that what one has taken from Germany has been given to France.

In some thousands of years, excavations, undertaken by these horribly learned, spectacled Boches, will bring to light in a good state of preservation the frames of the wheelbarrows that a French prisoner made such good use of. The learned doctor, excited by such a find, will dress up in a Latin name these rediscovered objects, and, writing in that language a long and learned treatise, will prove that the wheelbarrow existed at the time of Cicero, and with fierce invective will denounce the Frenchman Pascal, who claimed the invention

of this means of transport. He will make a gift of the least beautiful specimens to the museum of the province, and will send the rest to the Imperial Museum at Berlin, in recompense for which the eminent doctor will be admitted to the Boche Institute and be profoundly reverenced—unless between now and then the name of Germany will have taken its place in legend beside those of Troy and Carthage!

THE COMPANY COMMANDER

CHAPTER X

CERTAINLY Bitter, the head of the 11th Company, could not be counted among those who cherished cordial feelings for the French. The authority who had put into his hands the fate of two hundred and fifty men might rejoice that he had never shown culpable weakness towards any of the prisoners. He was a small man, with a worn face; he had a weak heart, and before the war was exempt from military service; he had only been recalled a few months since. His illness made him sometimes as pale as death, and sometimes purple. His wicked little eyes were black, his hair, reduced to the least possible limit by a military hair-cutting machine, and his bristling moustache was also black. He was a private soldier. He had never been under fire, and therefore was far more pitiless than those who had been to the front. It is generally agreed that the sufferings endured in fighting, far from filling the hearts of the combatants with bitterness, bring them together through the remembrance of common hardships.

One of Bitter's habits was to break into the huts in the early hours, when the men were still in bed, and make the place noisy with his angry voice. His company held the record for punishments, and it was a torture to be put into it. Bitter insisted that all the N.C.O.'s, the adjutant included, should salute him and stand at attention in his presence. Blinded by the position of authority into which he had been put, he exercised on those in his power a veritable tyranny.

In consequence, disagreements sprang up and violent scenes, for the commander knew no moderation, and his anger was terrible. For some time he terrorises his company in this manner, treating each man as he pleases, and giving punishment whenever he finds the shadow of a pretext. He does not show the least interest in the men entrusted to him. Anything is good enough for the French ; they have no need of clothes, and never share in any way in the things distributed from time to time by order of the military authorities among the neighbouring companies.

The men under Bitter can neither rest nor profit from the hours of leisure to play together, read, write or mend their clothes. At every instant he falls upon them like a bird of prey and sends them on fatigue duty.

The French, braving punishments, take a delight in missing musters ; they go and mingle with the men of a neighbouring company, hide themselves at the hour of roll-call, escape from fatigue, stay the least time possible in their cantonment, where they run the risk of being caught. But when there

are rainy days a permanent watch is placed at the door, whose duty it is to signal as soon as Bitter is seen in the distance. A whistle, and the hut is empty.

One day, tired of opposition, Bitter decides to employ force to recruit men for fatigue duty. He is preceded by three sentinels, whose duty it is to guard the doors and prevent any one from going out. The sentinels, looking fierce and sullen, have been at their posts a few minutes. The Frenchman on watch, who has seen them coming, signals their approach. The men are puzzled. They hold a council, then all go towards the exits to verify with their own eyes the truth of what their companion says. At this moment Bitter bursts in. This time there is no chance of escape. Some try to rush through a door. Too late! They see the way barred, and are obliged to retreat before the threatening bayonets of the soldiers. They re-enter and find Bitter like a veritable sheep-dog, chasing the French towards the exit by the central door, shouting at them and swearing. There these men are immediately surrounded by other soldiers, who undertake to conduct them to the fatigue. Bitter is at the end of his strength, his face is bloodless. He has the men formed in fours, and the march begins. The French are crestfallen at having been thus caught. This time Bitter has won and is exultant.

But that is not the end, for the French are never finally at a loss. The comrades of a neighbouring camp, when they learn of the affair, undertake to play a trick on the detested brute and to lend a

helping hand to the prisoners. On the road the fatigue party follows they gather in a dense crowd round the notices posted up by the Boches. They block up the way and make it impossible for the column to pass; there is hustling. Disorder reigns; the sentinels, who shout, swear and curse, no longer control the men under their charge. A great number succeed in mingling with the ranks of the loungers. When it leaves this human whirlpool the column is diminished by half. The French counter-attack has succeeded!

The next day, the same business! The hut is again raided. Happily the alarm is given in time. Then might be heard the tramp of many hundreds of shoes, of men running away in all directions. There is a frantic rush for the windows; it resembles a pigeon-house from which the birds have all been frightened by the shot of a gun. Bursts of noisy laughter greet the falls of the awkward, who in too great a hurry miss their footing and tumble in the ditch which surrounds the huts. In a twinkling all have fled—the healthy and the sick, the young and old, the nimble and the wounded, whose suppleness and quickness astonish us.

A few red trousers disappear through the windows with the swiftness of lightning, and from the outside comes the noise of the last sabots falling heavily on the ground, when Bitter, a smile on his lips, makes his entry. No one shall escape him. He begins to shout to terrorise the men of his company, when he stops, stupefied. Absolute silence reigns. Not a living soul in the hut. The attack has failed!

The shouts of laughter coming from the neighbouring cantonment reach his ears. They must be listening to the account of that commanding officer's ill-luck. Beside himself with rage, he nervously makes a sign to his men to reinstate the guard. There will be no fatigue that day. Woe to the man who makes a mistake!

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The next day one sees round the huts two rows of barbed wire, which prevent the windows from serving as means of exit. Force has succeeded. Thus it is that the fight continues without truce between the commanding officer and his company, with varying success on one side or the other. As weapons, the one side uses punishments and tasks, the other there is only ridicule which cuts, and practical jokes which exasperate.

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One day, however, Bitter arrives paler than ever, but changed. To the astonishment of all he crosses the hut without shouting or making a scene, and actually looks almost amiable. Every man gazes at him in astonishment. He must be ill, say some. He has received a reprimand, suggest others; he will be less of a bear. And the tongues begin to wag! He goes on his way and soon reaches the small room of the sergeants. They, faithful to the habit that force has compelled them to adopt, rise and salute; but already he makes a sign to them to sit, not to disturb themselves. Amiably he addresses himself to the interpreter, and in a gentle voice, his lips parted in a smile, begins to speak of one thing and another. He declares loudly that he,

Bitter, never wanted the N.C.O.'s to salute him, but that he was obliged to respect the orders given him. The interpreter did not know what to think. His relations with Bitter—on which he prided himself, moreover—had always been restricted to details of service, and here was the company commander talking of the war and seeming to be interested in its duration, in the privations and sufferings that the combatants must endure. Two sergeants who were playing chess, and who till that moment had always professed not to understand German, so as to avoid being bothered, could not believe their ears, and little by little left off their game and followed with interest the conversation to which they were not accustomed. The German had lost his stiffness, he had become talkative, friendly; he seemed suddenly seized with a need to unbosom himself, he questioned, and little by little gave himself away. The interpreter scarcely replied, and when he was obliged to say something spoke almost regretfully; he was not one of those to forget the vexations they had been forced to endure, and he could not pardon the Boche for having made his comrades suffer. He would willingly have kept silence altogether, but he scented vengeance, and felt that if the German became confidential, he would perhaps gain something by listening, and thus be able to help his comrades. In any case it denoted a weakness on the part of the Boche, and it was necessary to profit by it. But the German had soon finished smiling, and his face took on a serious expression. The conversation was certainly not about pleasant

things, but it did not serve to explain the anguish so clearly shown on the fellow's face. Bitter seemed uncomfortable and fearful, like one who wants to ask a favour and is ill at ease about it. At last, having thrown away his dignity as chief of a company, he announced with a groan that he had just been ordered to leave for the front. The news, as soon as it was translated, spread like wildfire, and was commented on by the French with enthusiasm that would have been edifying to the German, could he have understood it. I do not yet know what feeling of delicacy restrained the N.C.O.'s, and kept them from lifting the roof off with the prolonged and frantic cheers and cries of: "Bitter is going away." But it was a serious matter, and the Boche searched in vain for some sign of pity on the faces of those who surrounded him. However, the astonishment that he read there sufficed; he took it for interest, or rather he wished so to imagine it, for he wanted to be communicative and to gain information; it was a matter of self-interest to him. Now he felt that the prisoners he guarded were men like himself. A certain feeling of respect must have sprung up within him for these Frenchmen who had seen death near, had been in danger under fire and had conducted themselves as brave men do.

He shuddered on hearing them speak calmly of the horrors of war, of the sufferings of a soldier's life, of the tortures of hunger and thirst, of the noise of the guns, of the bayonet charges, of the hand-grenades, of mortal wounds. Nothing that could terrify him was spared, and horrible detail

followed horrible detail, each more realistic than the last. Every man improved upon his neighbour's story, and those who, a few hours ago, needed to have recourse to the interpreter to understand the orders given, were suddenly found to have enough knowledge of the language of Goethe to be able to sow horror in the heart of this future warrior. A convulsive movement of his maxillary muscles clearly showed that Bitter was making a strong effort not to be altogether cast down, and to hide the anguish that was choking him. All the same, it was a poor creature that the French N.C.O.'s had before them in the place of him who had been for weeks their nightmare and terror.

Mockingly the Frenchmen praised his spirit of order and method, his undoubted authority, which could not fail to make him an excellent chief, if only his warlike qualities were equal to his qualifications as a jailer. A bright career was opening before him. Bitter listened; he would have liked to escape, having had his fill of horrors, but he was obliged to empty the cup to the dregs if he wished to gather the fruit of his visit, which was to have a favour granted that he still hesitated to ask.

"You are in luck's way," said a sergeant; "if you are made prisoner, you will be with the French. You will at least be treated as a human being, and you will have as much as you want to eat, while we continue to die of hunger."

A Parisian wit utters a wish: "If you are a prisoner I hope you may have a chief who will

have as much consideration for you as you have had for us."

The astonished Boche looks at him searchingly; but he wasted his time, for he could not find on that sergeant's face the trace of a smile.

The thought that he might be made prisoner forces him to examine his conscience. He realises that he has not been a "father" to the French under his charge, so he hesitates. Then, as it was the subject on which he wished to touch, he decided not to let it drop.

With the most innocent air he inquires of the French the least dangerous and the surest way to be made prisoner.

The N.C.O.'s are more and more surprised. The Boche inspires them with growing repugnance which every minute becomes almost unbearable. Before them they have the spectacle of a shameless coward who is already preparing to cry "Kamerad," and to yield at the command of "Hands up!" The sight of this German preparing for treason had amused the French for a moment, at once thereafter to fill them with disgust.

This revolting and ignominious scene was not, however, yet over; this poltroon had not shown the full extent of his baseness. He had the audacity, he who, during his rule over two hundred and fifty Frenchmen, had in a way martyrised them, and treated them worse than he would have treated animals; he who had been rough, violent, brutal, pitiless and severe, actually he had the audacity to make a request, to beg for the meanest of favours from those whom he had downtrodden.

He now began to cringe, and he inspired us with supreme disgust when he begged the interpreter to be so kind as to give him a letter of recommendation which he could use in case he fell into the hands of the French.

There was general consternation among the N.C.O.'s on hearing this request. Some of them in disgust proposed to kick him out of the room. He understood well the scorn that he excited, but still he sat there, insensible to shame, swallowing the opprobrium his demand had aroused, provided that he obtained satisfaction.

All protest; they cry with all the strength of their lungs the judgment they would like to see meted out to the Boche for his conduct; they insist that one ought not to give anything to safeguard the life of this shameless tyrant, who had done everything to bring suffering on his men.

But already a sergeant was standing up, holding in his hand a piece of paper on which he had just been writing something.

"What is it?" some one asks him.

"The desired letter of recommendation."

"No, you are joking. You will never have the 'face' to recommend that animal to the French."

But the sergeant gravely replies: "I do what I think I ought to do. Let me alone."

All the N.C.O.'s were astonished; the sergeant was a man respected for his high moral qualities and the position he had held in the civil world. He enjoyed the best reputation of all the sergeants for

his kindness, humanity, his pity for the sufferings of others. Many times he had had the courage to champion his comrades unjustly punished. Often they had heard him deplore the deaths of the heroes the war was carrying off, whose efforts united might have brought about universal goodwill; but they had never thought him sensitive to the extent of protecting the life of a man whose brutality and cowardice were so notorious.

Addressing the interpreter he said: "Will you translate? I must speak to the Boche."

The other did as he was asked.

The Boche had understood, and already began to feel happy at the success of his demand.

The words of the sergeant were translated:

"Monsieur, for the two months that the company has been under your orders I have had the opportunity of appreciating you at your full value, and I should be sorry, and my companions also, if the chances of war should reserve you a fate that in all justice should not be yours. I am convinced that the wishes expressed by me, and written on this paper, will be fully and literally carried out, if one day you should fall into the hands of my fellow-countrymen and should be obliged to have recourse to my certificate." And to forestall an expression of thanks from the Boche: "Do not thank me. I have only treated you as you deserve, and I am happy to have acted as my conscience bids me, and to think that humanity will have reason to be grateful to me for what I do. No;" said he, as the Boche advanced to shake hands, "let our relations remain as they were in the past."

Bitter was standing ready to leave the room.

"Just a moment," said the sergeant, "while I read to my friends this note, which they will certainly approve of."

With a pale face, but in a clear, firm tone, like a judge pronouncing sentence, the sergeant began:

"An order is given to the French soldier into whose hands the soldier Bitter, the bearer of this note, may fall, to give him no quarter. Bitter has had under his command a company of French prisoners, and has done all in his power to render insupportable a captivity already too painful.

"(Signed) T——."

Bitter took the note, folded it carefully and slipped it into his letter-case.

All trace of anger and indignation had left the the faces of the French. Gravely they saluted the German as he went out, with the respect that they would have shown in the presence of death. But even more than the man who went out it was the sergeant whom they saluted, for they felt how much this death-sentence had cost him.

Bent down, worn out by this scene, in which he had had to bear the scorn of the French, Bitter gained the door. He was no longer the Bitter that had entered even twenty-four hours ago, arrogant, with head erect and flashing eyes, the uncontested master before whom all must give way. This time he was going to meet his destiny, the miserable man; that on which he had built all his hopes, that bit of paper, to possess

which he had degraded his soul; those few lines contained his death-warrant.

. . . . . .

History does not tell what happened to Bitter—if he is still living, if he finished his race as a hero with an unknown death, or if, after having shown himself a coward of cowards, he was killed like a dog while begging for a life which was not worth the meanness he committed to preserve it.

THE FIRST OF MAY, 1915

CHAPTER XI

At this time the N.C.O.'s were not forced to do fatigue work (it appears that is changed now), and as it is human nature never to be satisfied with the lot that falls to one, the sergeants complained bitterly of this favourable treatment. Ungrateful beings, they forgot how they had rejoiced in the winter, when, sheltered in the huts, they had gathered round the fire while their comrades, at the mercy of the elements, passed days in the rain. It is true that now it was different; the spring had come, it was fine, and the fresh and tender green, seen in the distance like a light mist over trees and shrubs, made the sight of the sand, which stretched away grey, dirty and monotonous, still more painful than usual.

For those who for two months had been harbouring plans of escape, it was necessary to get out of the camp. It was the first step they had to take. They would thus find an opportunity of familiarising themselves with the civilians, of studying the surroundings of the camp, of seeing how it was guarded, of learning the lie of the land.

For the others, boredom and the need of movement, the spring constituted the chief and only motives. And what good it would do us all, tired out with our long confinement. Moreover, we felt curious to see what the men had been admiring so much every day.

The spring had come with its charm, as it comes every year, and had filled our hearts with an irresistible desire to wander, a need to stretch our muscles, to fill our lungs with the sweet-scented, life-giving air. We wished to go out to enjoy the sunshine freely, that is to say, far from the barbed wire; we wanted to rejoice in newly awakened nature; to see a stretch of water, a stream, cultivated lands, houses; to hear the warbling of birds and the silvery notes of a chime of bells pealing from the belfry of a church. We longed to look at the smiling face of a child full of grace and health.

We were unanimous about going. Our company had to supply a fatigue party; we decided to take part in it. We were six good friends. Together we prepared our provisions; one supplied sardines, another a pie, a third white bread,—that delicious white bread that came from France,—a fourth jam, gingerbread, etc. The menu was fixed. Then each of us managed as best he could to get a coat without stripes.

Altogether excited by this event to which we looked forward, like children anticipating a long-promised picnic, we did not go to sleep till late, for we were troubled by the thought of a thousand interruptions, which might put an end to our

pleasure-party outside the camp. If the commander should forbid our departure, if . . . and then . . . ! ! This day, so much longed for, was also awaited with a certain apprehension; would the work be too much for our strength, weakened as we were by too long a period of idleness?

Early on the appointed day we were ready, and closely reviewed each other's equipment. Not a stripe was to be seen; our knapsacks were crammed full, as if for a journey of several days. Everything went off as well as could be wished.

We set off, escorted to the gates by the men of our hut, who were astonished and amused. "The N.C.O.'s going on fatigue!"

It was the first of May. The day gave promise of being glorious. In lines of four, between two rows of sentinels, we left the camp.

The march was slow, desperately slow; but the ordinary workers knew that the few minutes gained on the way there were so many minutes taken from work, so we were obliged to restrain our impatient steps. Oh that stirring sound of marching feet on the firm high road! What recollections it called up, what marches in the company of friends, alas, no longer living! What joyful stages towards the enemy whom we wished to drive back! What hours of weariness also, when, our shoulders bruised and bowed by the weight of our knapsacks, we were obliged to go on, day and night, fleeing before the invader!

The high road! At last for the first time for long months we were marching on firm ground. No longer did our feet sink into the soft sand of

the camp. Our walk was lighter; it was as if chains had fallen from us. And the road which stretched in front gave us the illusion of liberty.

The hedges were clothed in tender green, the young crops were springing up in the fields, the sky was an intense blue; hidden in the trees, the birds poured out their souls in song.

This joy, this feeling of liberty, quickly takes possession of us. The smile of a rosy-cheeked, fair-haired child, who walks barefooted beside the "Franzosen," proud and happy to hold one of them by the hand, the voice of a young girl singing, the sight of an inn shining cleanly with its red tiles and green shutters, strike a gay note; the cool refreshing air, the bird that suddenly rises and flies away, the calf that starts on a mad race across the field, all these things make us feel free, and seem to us like a hymn of gratitude to the Creator in which unconsciously we take part, till the moment when our joy, having reached its height, is brusquely turned into grief and our happiness is dispersed, leaving us with our sadness.

But let us drive away gloomy thoughts—the day is made for joy. Now see the Frenchmen outrival each other in making fun of a Boche who passes, of an absent-minded sentinel who stumbles, of a "Mädchen" who looks at us with a broad, sheepish smile, and then suddenly frightened casts her eyes on the ground between her dusty shoes. Then it is a joke on an exceedingly stout Teuton woman, a snatch of a song, a call to a cock in its own language, or to a duck, a cow or a pig seen on the way. It is the boisterousness of schoolboys

at liberty, of a contagious exuberance of spirits. Life sparkles and even takes possession of our heavy guards themselves, whom these demonstrations amuse.

We pass a bridge guarded by the military. Here a broad winding river, bright and rapid, flows through fruitful plains. It was into this river that two of our comrades had plunged, while trying to escape, although they did not know how to swim. One was captured and killed on the spot. The other . . . Let us be silent! Our thoughts go out to the unhappy man, who saw his efforts of no avail, when he had felt the joy of liberty for a quarter of an hour, and who died the victim of the useless brutality of a German patrol at the moment when he surrendered. And that after having lived for twenty-four hours in mortal terror.

We meet few people on the road. In the fields are women and children.

As we skirt the town we see huge sections of pipes in concrete. One of our men with a very serious air asks the sentinel if those are the 420 guns: "Kanonen? vier hundert und zwanzig?" and the sentinel replies gravely, "Nein," in the learned manner of a spectacled professor.

We are taken across a drill-ground where recruits in dark-blue uniform are standing in line, motionless and as stiff as the tin soldiers of Nuremberg. Farther on an artillery recruit, who does not lie down quickly enough to please his "Feldwebel," hears a torrent of oaths poured on him; they sound like the grating of a rusty chain. Each of the

imprecations is accompanied by a kick or a cut with the flat of the sword, both destined to inculcate quickness into the stupid head of a trooper . . . and so on!

Now we have arrived at the timber-yard, where is a sawmill. We must cut, saw, chop and carry enormous tree-trunks which are piled as high as a house.

Just as they come to hand a workman distributes saws, hatchets, crowbars to the hands stretched out for them. What are we going to do? At last here is our chance. They ask for six men to work without tools. With a jump we rush out of our ranks, all six of us. What luck! We follow our guard, who walks off. After having traversed the factory we arrive at a place which looks on the river. This is to be our workshop. A workman has joined us; he explains to the sentinel what we have to do.

Just the time to place our knapsacks out of the sun, to take off our coats and turn up our sleeves, and there we are ready to work—in appearance at least, for we have firmly decided not to over-fatigue ourselves.

At first we let the sentinel try to explain the nature of the work we are to do. We listen without understanding to the poor man, who speaks and gesticulates in vain, and our faces are impassive and empty of thought. At last in despair he puts down his gun, mounts a truck and makes the action of discharging the four or five tree-trunks that are there. This mimicry recalls the game of "trades," which was the joy of our childhood.

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We have understood! Now that the Boche has exhausted his breath, exerted himself, put himself in a perspiration to make us understand, one of us, who knows German perfectly, sums up his instructions in a few words, to the great astonishment of our sentinel. Our comrade explains to him what is to be done; the Boche nods his head. Yes, that is it, he understands perfectly; it would not take much to make him take off his coat and help. As for us, we have no great desire to begin, so we engage him in a long conversation concerning the rights and prerogatives of socialists.

It is the first of May; he is a workman. A democratic socialist? He confesses it timidly. He knows perfectly well that one does not work a stroke on that day. Already, tired of standing, we sit on the trunks in a ring round the Teuton, who tries to reconcile his socialistic theories, which he cannot give up, with his duty as a German soldier. Seriously brought to book he capitulates. After all, he is there to guard us and not to survey our work. Let us do what we like. He prefers, however, that we should not get him into trouble, for the General is severe.

Then we take the waggon by assault, and we try to unload the heavy trunks from it. All in vain. We have soon been there an hour, and the trunks repose in peace in the same place where we found them. The workman comes back. With a glance—that professional glance which nothing can deceive—he sees that we are not men of the trade. We set about it so badly that the best will in the world does not succeed in moving the

smallest of the trunks. The workman acknowledges with pity the uselessness of our united efforts. Ah, these French ! They have no energy ; they don't know how to work.

He takes hold of a crowbar, gives a heave here, a heave there, and behold, a trunk leaves the waggon and falls by its weight on the earth. Exclamations of admiration without reserve on our part : " Ach, Wunderschön, Kolossal ! " The workman is proud of himself !

Now that we are initiated into the business, the waggons are unloaded fairly quickly.

But how hot it is ! With common accord we make our way to our knapsacks. The astonished sentinel advances. We stop him, calling out that we have worked enough, that it is the first of May, that we are going on strike. He shakes his head in despair, and turns his eyes another way not to witness our reprehensible want of discipline. Then we sit down. " Frühstück," we say, and we break the bread. Overcome by curiosity the guard approaches and casts his eyes on the box of preserves which we take out. He enjoys the sight of our " Delikatessen," which he nevertheless refuses to share with us, although we invite him, as a brother socialist to do so.

After an interval of about half an hour the work begins again. At any moment we risk grazing our hands, crushing our feet and leaving some fragments of our epidermis on the rough bark of the trees. But it is nothing really, and we enjoy ourselves hugely. The landscape which stretches before us is glorious. How lovely it would be to

plunge into the limpid stream that flows at our feet!

Eleven o'clock. All the waggons are empty. While waiting for others to arrive let us play a game of Bridge—and there we are sitting down with one of our coats to serve as table. The sentinel approaches and without understanding the game watches us play. To the great joy of his simple soul he has recognised the figures on the cards and finds that the French cards are like the German ones.

The arrival of several loads does not trouble our quarter of an hour's repose. The sentinel gets impatient, walks round us ill at ease, then at last remarks that it is not yet time to rest, that we must go on working till dinner-time. Then gravely and with the air of a grand-duke one of us declares to him that we are not forced to work, that we are "Unteroffizieren," that we have come out to amuse ourselves, and that we shall work only when we feel inclined. The Boche is disconcerted. Respectful of rule and yet curious, he asks what rank each of us has, so as to know if we are really N.C.O.'s. "All," and with a look round he takes in with bewilderment such an imposing group. He does not know what to say, and dares not ask us to go on with work which we could not be forced to do. We get up, however, and, joking all the time, go back to the unloading.

Midday. The sound of a whistle, cutting the air like the bursting of a shell, announces the hour of lunch.

With good appetites gained from the fresh air and the unaccustomed work, we do credit to our

food. All the time our guard remains near us, curious to see what we are eating.

Time passes rapidly and we are soon back again at work. We go on happily till something happens to check our zeal. An enormous trunk has fallen so awkwardly that it is difficult to displace it. We unite our efforts and try to move it to the rhythm of our voices, shouting, "One, two, one, two." The echo in the distance sends back these French cries that Germany has to put up with. And, after all, the utterance of these numbers is the only result of our united efforts.

However, the sentinel, who thinks these efforts sincere, lays down his rifle and comes to our help. His energetic efforts would have been enough to move the tree if some of us had not by a counter-pressure destroyed the effect. The sentinel redoubled his exertions, and we had all the trouble in the world to prevent the tree from rolling. It *was* hot!

The civilian workman providentially enters on the scene at the critical moment, a true *Deus ex machina* of the ancient tragedies. He understands our difficulty, and thinks it his duty to come and help us. Without apparent effort he succeeds in displacing the heavy piece of wood. Our astonishment knows no limits. One by one we pull ourselves upright, we let go our hold, and we contemplate with an astonished air this enormous trunk which seems quietly to obey the charm of the crowbar that the workman manipulates.

But how tiring and fatiguing it is to admire standing; we go and sit down on the neighbouring

trunks, pretending to wipe our faces, which are shamefully dry. By our exclamations of praise, we encourage the sentinel and the workman, who think it a point of honour for them alone to hurl into space the trunk they have set free from an awkward position. We rest and fan ourselves.

The scene is worth a sketch, which should be entitled, as one of us cynically remarks: "French prisoners at work under their guard of the German jailers."

The tree falls heavily down the slope. The two Boches triumphantly draw themselves up, they alone have been able to do what six Frenchmen were incapable of doing. How hot they have made themselves! While they take breath, they allow us to rest also. We enter into conversation. We go into admiration over their strength and skill. The workman, full of contempt, declares that he saw we were not accustomed to that kind of work.

It was then that the sentinel told him who we were, and they questioned us a great deal about our professions, and were greatly astonished at the positions we occupy in France. Full of timid respect they repeat each one's occupation, pointing us out with their finger as they do so.

The disdain of a short time ago is transformed into admiration, which they can scarcely contain. Then the workman disappears. But like the good Boche that he is, he goes at once to the manager of the sawmills and tells him that men, highly placed in the commercial world and in the university world are working at his mill incognito.

The manager, who is a simple fellow,—he is a self-made man, and curiosity is not the least of his faults,—comes hurrying to us immediately. We are just getting up to go back to our work, but he signs to us to remain seated. He is a nervous little man, with a face like a weasel; his restless, mobile physiognomy is lighted up by two piercing grey eyes. On his head is a bowler hat covered with sawdust. He wears an old coat much frayed and darned all over, the pockets are bulging with notebooks. The end of a folding measure sticks out from his trousers pocket. Gaily, without preamble, he begins by pitying the prisoners for the fatigue they must feel in doing manual work to which they are not accustomed. With the perspicacity, delicacy and tact of a *sergent de ville* making an inquiry, he asks us if it is really true that we are all "Unteroffizieren," and then with a tear in his eye he speaks of his son who is also a N.C.O. and who has not come back. It gives him pleasure to talk of the missing man to "his colleagues." He is proud of it. He holds forth and soon tells us about his troubles, his moral torments, his business trials, the scarcity of men, the terrible price of food, etc. etc.

When he has given vent to his feelings his curiosity gains the upper hand. He questions us and does not disguise his admiration and his astonishment. "Kaufmann! Ach! So. Buchhändler! Schön! Oberlehrer! Professor!" Here he is a little puzzled. He looks in vain for the spectacles that tradition has fixed on the noses of the learned. In order to convince him, one of us

declares that this ornament, this symbol of learning, was left on the battlefield where our "Herr Professor" was wounded and captured. A half-timid respect takes hold of this simple man, for whom titles mean so much. Very soon he will thank us for having condescended to honour his sawmill with our august presence. His admiration is greater than his love of gain, and he begs us not to overtire ourselves. We must not work more than is enough to distract us by a little healthy exercise, we must take care of ourselves. Then the conversation turns naturally on general politics and the war. The manager is thunderstruck by the splendid confidence which the Frenchmen profess, and who—the *Gazette de Cologne* in their hand—nevertheless certify that the victory is on the side of the Allies, and who prove it too in a clear, peremptory and conclusive manner. The poor old man's confidence begins to be shaken. Should he doubt his Kaiser! *Potius mori!*

After having offered a cigar to each of us, he makes us promise to come back the next day, and goes away proud that the French N.C.O.'s have deigned to discuss things with him, a poor "Holtzhändler."

Four o'clock. A break allowed of a quarter of an hour.

A young workman came and hid a little osier basket, covered with a white napkin, behind some tree trunks. After having placed it carefully in the shade he went away without saying a word. Then the sentinel tells us that the contents are

for us, that it is bread and butter that the manager sends us. (The gods are kind!) He, it seems, was much impressed by our gentlemanly manners and wished to allow us some small privilege. But we are warned to show discretion, and not to let any one know we have been the object of special attention. If the authorities should learn that he had favoured the prisoners there would be trouble, and they would withdraw his gang of workers.

Hidden from curious eyes, we sat and ate our "Butterbrod" and drank our "Flaschebier," that beer of which the prisoners were, by Draconian decrees, deprived from the first day of their captivity. At the bottom of the basket we found packets of cigarettes.

The Boche had treated us well!

However, we could not say that kindness was his only motive, for we knew with what harshness he treated our comrades.

This German had simply forgotten for a moment that we were enemies and prisoners. He only saw that we were superior to him in position and education, and it was with the customary subordination of the Teuton that he felt obliged to observe the laws of hospitality.

Thus it is throughout the social scale. The Boche is an animal to whom humiliation is a happiness. As he is pleased to bow down before a superior and lick his boots and grovel, so he finds joy in brutality, disdain, arrogance and haughtiness towards his inferiors. He alternately serves out or swallows disdain, blows, vexation, injuries and insults. In every Boche there is at once a Pasha

and a dog. The hierarchy must be recognised in civil as in military life. Every one finds above him a superior, whom he flatters and fawns on, whose hands he licks, even though they strike him, and finds below him a scapegoat, patient and servile to the same degree.

The secret of success in Germany is for a man to let it be known that he is a degree above his neighbour in order to impose on him. It is a victory of this kind that we shall gain one day.

. . . . . .

In the young mists of the evening we regained the camp, but this corvée of the first of May had no morrow for us!

CHAPTER XII

THE sound of the axes has ceased. The prisoners throw their coats over their shoulders, and taking their tools—that they must place at the feet of the sentinels—their knapsacks, bowls and tins, they wait for the roll to be called. Every one is there. At the order of the commander they go towards a clearing where the men can be easily watched during the break which lasts till 1.30.

Our soldier prisoners have quickly finished their meagre repast which the parsimonious German Government doles out to them. Then almost all of them stretch themselves on the ground in the genial rays of the sun and give their bodies a well-earned rest. Soon their eyes are closed; sleep overtakes them.

. . . . . .

Seated on the trunk of a felled oak, two young fellows listen to a third, who is translating an article from a German newspaper, brought that morning by a kindly jailer. While eating they talk over the news and criticise the *communiqué* of the German staff at Berlin. All three—the interpreter

of the fatigue party and the two who were listening to him—had come of their own accord to this fatigue work in order to escape the monotony of the camp, and, by working, to seek a palliative from the ennui that was killing them.

The sentinel who was on duty while his comrades were taking their meal approached the little group and deferentially asked: "What news?"

The German *communiqué* that day was very concise. The interpreter pointed it out to the sentinel, curtly enough to make him understand that he had no wish, for the moment at least, to enter into conversation. He was occupied in translating a long and subtle article about the torpedoing of the *Lusitania*. But the German took no notice; he wished to talk, to hold forth; he broached another subject, and inquired about the quality of the food.

"Schmeckt es gut?"

A cry of horror and indignation greeted this question.

"It is pig's food, it is shameful to feed human creatures with such stuff."

"Oh, you French, you are hard to please!"

"You think we are hard to please not to like rotten food?" asked the interpreter.

Decidedly this subject of conversation had no more success than the other.

Silently our prisoners continued their meal; but the German did not go away. He stood there motionless in front of them, with a stupid air, watching them open a box of preserves and cut up

a French loaf, the whiteness of which called forth his admiration.

"You have good bread," said he.

"In France we don't make any other. Even the poorest eat this bread. Just compare it with your K. bread. You will have a nice stomach at the end of the war, you and your children."

"Ah yes! The children, it is very sad for them."

"You have some? Many?"

"Seven," replied the sentinel.

"And how do you manage to feed them?"

"The allowance that my wife receives is not enough; everything is beyond our means. It is misery."

"In France the wives of the soldiers receive a much higher sum, and yet the food is cheaper and more plentiful than here. Look at the white bread and the preserves that we receive. France is rich, and we can still fight for a long time."

"Yes, indeed, it is a sad war for us, and when shall we see the end of it?"

"The end!" A boisterous laugh rang out in the peaceful air. "The end! but we are not ready to see it yet—the end!"

"But they tell us that in two months the Russians will ask for peace, and that then we shall beat the French."

The interpreter slowly shrugged his shoulder as though with pity.

"Have they not always been telling you since the beginning of hostilities that in two months' time the war will be finished, and during the year it

has lasted you are always there open-mouthed, swallowing all the newspapers tell you—the newspapers that are under the control of a severe censor. And you still believe it; you really are naïve. The war is only beginning."

"Ah, you say that because you are well off here. I understand that it is all the same to you. The war is finished for you. You will not be 'Kaput.'"

"Indeed we are not. You think that we are well off here? What, in this depressing tranquillity, in this state of uselessness which makes our hearts revolt when we think of our comrades who from the very beginning have been and are risking their lives at every moment. We prefer the painful and risky experiences at the front. We would much rather be on the other side of the trenches with our rifles in our hands watching you come on."

The Boche opened his eyes in astonishment, but incredulous he broke in with:

"Das glaube ich nicht."

"But in spite of everything we prefer our place to yours, for the victory will be ours. The longer the war, the greater and more certain our success. We were not ready in France, we did not believe in the war. We are only now beginning to be organised. The English are doing the same. For months we have been holding out, but behind terrible things are preparing. Then the seas are not shut to us as they are to you. We can continue our commerce and get richer, while you . . . well, if the war lasts much longer it is your finances

that will be 'Kaput.' Then with a formidable army, well equipped and well fed, we shall enter your country and you will suffer the fate of Belgium."

The unfortunate sentinel bit his pipe and seemed embarrassed. He must have regretted coming to speak to the prisoners. Perhaps he thought that his conversation with depressed captives would have given him the courage of which he had great need, for he was soon to return to the front. His blue eyes wandered towards the horizon; they were full of fear, as if they saw the horrible visions that our comrade had called up.

The three speakers had recognised in this sentinel a victim whom they were unwilling to let go, so they became talkative.

What rôle could they play in that land of exile? First of all, to keep themselves and their companions courageous and strong. They must not let themselves be cast down by adversity, by imprisonment, by being far from their own people, by the anguish they felt for their family and country, by their privations and the petty tyranny of those who guarded them. They ought, as much as they could, to comfort their companions in the misery of captivity. They must inspire those who by themselves were unable to find the moral courage without which man fails.

But this trio seems to have felt that its mission did not end there. If they could sow seeds of terror and cowardice in the hearts of those who guarded them, they would have worked for the benefit of their country; a prisoner could not wish

to make himself more useful. Therefore they tried to implant doubt, terror, confusion and discouragement in the minds of these simple and credulous Germans.

To-day they had found their victim, and did not let him go till they had accomplished their purpose.

"You have already been under fire?"

"Yes, in Poland against the Russians; there I was wounded two months ago."

"Then you will be here for a long time?"

The German, who did not wish to appear too feeble before his conquered enemies, pulled himself together and in a tone which he tried to make firm confided to them what was troubling him.

"I leave this evening."

"What, you leave this evening? so soon as that?"

"But you are scarcely set up again. That was just what I said to a comrade yesterday, pointing you out to him, that you must have been terribly wounded. What? You are going away this evening? Your country must be very short of men. They are sending you to fight the Cossacks. Well, to tell you the truth, I am glad it is you instead of me."

"Ah yes!" sighed the German; "they are terrible, they burn everything on their way."

"Well, there is this much good about it, you need not fear the cold, since it is summer."

"You have not the cold to fear," said the youngest Frenchman, "that is true, but in your place I would rather have one or two frozen feet,

or even die of wounds, than be carried off by typhus. It is a terrible illness, that kills those that catch it without exception. You know that your soldiers are dying like flies there ? "

" I have been vaccinated."

" Vaccinated ? Go along with you! You know as well as I do the uselessness of inoculation. It doesn't make you immune. It has only a moral effect. Your troops would refuse to go to the Russian front if they had not confidence in this vaccine, the efficacity of which is, alas! nothing. They would not go there to seek a terrible and fatal death. Your officers and doctors know it well."

" In any case I am not going back to the Eastern front."

" You are lucky. I congratulate you."

" Lucky ? " replied another. " Well, perhaps. As for me, I confess it frankly, if I could choose I would rather go and brave the typhus than our French 75's. You have not yet seen them at work, it is true ; you don't know anything about it. But your comrades must have spoken of them to you. Ah, you will quickly learn to recognise their ' boom, boom,' and you will give me news of them. May I be hanged if you return whole."

The sentinel, with a frightened air, looked at them one after another.

Yes, certainly he had heard of the 75. His comrades had told him enough of the ravages it made. Only the other day the *Cologne Gazette* had said that such weapons ought to be forbidden, that the 75 was an engine of the devil, that it was inhuman to make use of it.

"Come, don't you Germans speak of inhuman things, when you have ravaged Belgium with fire and sword; when you have sunk ships that carried peaceful citizens—women, children and old men; when you have invented asphyxiating gas!"

For the first time, no doubt, the Boche had a feeling of pity in his heart for the innocent victims that war has cut down. He shook his head sadly and exclaimed:

"Das ist traurig."

For the first time the Boche saw Belgium in flames, its women and children tortured and assassinated, the peaceful ships sunk on the high seas and their innocent charges the prey of the waves. He heard the heart-rending cries of mothers, the moans of the children whose hands had been cut off, and who, mad with fright and pain, and weeping bitterly, looked at the bleeding stumps. For the first time he was ashamed of his nation. In order to quiet his German conscience he, in his turn, tried to reproach the French for crimes committed by them and their allies. Perhaps also he hoped that the prisoners, by denials, would calm the terror that the name of "Moroccan" called up in his heart.

"With you," said he, half aggressively, "you have negroes who are terrible, so one says. They are barbarians."

If he expected to be reassured he was cruelly deceived. With an indifferent air the interpreter answered him:

"Ah yes, the Moroccans; yes, indeed, they don't take prisoners! What can one do? It is

their law. But you know they only slay the combatants, they have never raised their hand against civilians. Their savagery is excusable, for they have not . . . what do you call it ? . . . Kultur. If they cut off your head, be sure it is not from cruelty, but simply because their priests have taught them that a man is not dead so long as he has his head on his shoulders. What one has difficulty in understanding in a European, a German, for example, one excuses in a negro, because he is not civilised. For my part, and I am sure you are of the same opinion, I don't see any harm in a Moroccan cutting off your head when you are dead or even wounded."

The Boche shuddered. Did he feel at that moment the cold steel piercing his flesh ? He did not say.

Wishing to chase these dreadful pictures from his mind, and as if to deceive himself, he continued :

" There is a rumour that we shall be sent to France towards La Bassée. There we shall not see the negroes, but more likely the English."

" I hope so for your sake," said the youngest prisoner ; " though, according to all accounts, La Bassée is a bad corner for you, if you remember the losses you had there six months ago. The English are splendid shots, so I will give you a piece of advice as a friend, don't let them see the top of your head above the parapet."

" But, I say," interrupted the elder Frenchman, " what about the Hindoos ? "

" What does he say ? " asked the sentinel.

" Ah, it is true ! How unlucky you are." (The

"Hindoos" was immediately translated to him.) "You don't know that the English have recruited a formidable army in India? And the Hindoos are much more to be feared than our peaceful Moroccans. Indeed, with them it is never safe to shut your eyes through the night or the day either. Their cunning, their agility, their suppleness is something extraordinary, and they manage to get into your lines without being seen or heard. Do you know how they proceed? They undress completely and rub their whole body carefully with oil, then, taking a long cutlass between their teeth, they creep over the ground. Not a tuft of grass trembles, not a sound betrays their approach, they are on you and strangle you before you have an idea of their presence. They are marvellous soldiers. They have been seen to take hundreds of metres of trenches and massacre all the inhabitants without a cry being heard."

"It is horrible," groaned the sentinel; "one ought not to send savages to Europe."

"Bah, some Europeans are not worth more than they. The hand-to-hand fight amongst savages is frequent."

Then, to rub things in, one of the prisoners repeats:

"You understand; they arrive naked; the oil permits them to creep without being heard, and as they also take the precaution of rubbing their bodies with earth, they cannot be distinguished from the yellowish stretch over which they glide. And to think they have disembarked twelve million at Marseilles."

"What! What do you say?"

"I said twelve million," answered the Frenchman phlegmatically and with assurance. "It is official. Don't you read your papers? It was written in capital letters in the *Cologne Gazette* a few days ago. They have been drilled in India, and last winter in Egypt; they will come to France and stay till the beginning of the cold weather. There are twelve million. You know that Marseilles is universally noted for its soap, and that there are very important factories there. Well, the Hindoos are there, and are already anointing their bodies with the soap of Marseilles. They will soon be ready, and will probably arrive at the front at the same time as you. I wish you joy."

"Ach Gott!" The sentinel goes off with his head bent. His pipe had gone out, his cheeks had still a little colour, but his eyes were mournful, full of unspeakable sadness.

Twelve million Hindoos, negroes, the 75's, and the typhus! Certainly he would never return. The Hindoos were already a nightmare to him, he saw them creeping over the soil from which they were not to be distinguished, standing up, threatening, behind trees. It was horrible! He was going off that night never to come back. He would fall a victim to the Hindoos before he had time to say a last prayer for his family. Ah, why had he not died in Poland? It was terrible to go and meet this death, which he felt was coming and yet which would take him by surprise. Ah, it was a bad war!

. . . . . .

The sentinel who came to relieve his comrade had to strike him twice on the shoulder before he roused him to tell him to go and eat.

He jumped as though he had been in a dream; he looked at his colleague without understanding, mute and terrified, for between the speaker and himself he saw standing the fatal Hindoo in whose hands lay his destiny.

. . . . . .

When he sat down to his frugal meal the Boche had to own that he had no appetite.

MY ESCAPE

CHAPTER XIII

I HAD been transferred in April from a camp 150 kilometres from the frontier to another much nearer to it. I had scarcely arrived at my new abode when the idea of escaping took firm hold of me, and from that moment I was careful to neglect nothing that might be useful to me later on. I soon got to know some of the men who had been at the camp from its start, and made them tell me about the escapes that had been attempted, whether successful or otherwise. In all the stories I heard I found matter for reflection, and I gained from them hints and details of information that helped to swell the stock that I possessed, and should be able to use when need arose.

I heard about the famous attempts of some ingenious fellows who, under the noses of their keepers, dug in closets they had condemned as insanitary on their own authority a tunnel about forty metres long. This tunnel passed under the protecting network, and beneath the very feet of the sentinels, to a place outside the camp. Everything failed at the last moment. I learned

of the happy success of some, of the lamentable death or weary imprisonment of most of those who had endeavoured to escape. These stories tended to keep my impatience within bounds, and caused me to make up my mind not to attempt anything until I had the best possible chance of success.

I spent long hours, by day and night, studying the camp enclosure, the coming and going of the men on fatigue duty, the manner and uniform of the sentinels, and the change of guard. I thought over a hundred ways of escape, each more ingenious than the others; but finally, in spite of the few cases I had heard of, I came to the conclusion that it was practically impossible to get away from the camp, and that it would be unwise to be waiting there in culpable idleness for a chance of flight that would perhaps not come for months.

The gate of the camp was, in fact, strictly guarded during the day by a group of sentinels. At night it was closed, and was charged by an electric current. Sentries were always on the watch. Even supposing that, by some fortunate stratagem, a fugitive succeeded in deceiving for an instant the vigilance of the soldiers, he would still have to pass in front of huts occupied by German infantry. These would not fail to arrest on suspicion any man not in German uniform. It was best not to cherish false hopes, but to give up all idea of getting out through the gate.

As for getting over the barricades, it would have been mad to think of it. Only rats and birds could have done it. The camp was surrounded

not only by a trellis of barbed wire two metres high, but also by an electric current of 5000 volts, and again was guarded by a network of barbed wire. Behind this wicked arrangement sentries were placed fifty metres apart. They kept strict watch. Beyond the line of sentinels a deep ditch, four metres deep and five wide, encircled the camp, and beyond that again, running parallel with it, was a mound five metres high and six wide at its base. It was consequently useless to dream of crossing this organisation of defence.

There remained the fatigue duty !

Every day some hundreds of men were taken into neighbouring districts to work either in the fields or in industrial enterprises of various kinds. I went several times instead of one of the others, and that gave me the opportunity of getting familiar with the neighbourhood and the habits of the civil and military population. I discovered that there were no able-bodied men under about fifty years of age left in the district. The railway lines and the bridges were guarded by the military. Several plans came into my mind. I thought of disguising myself as an old woman, then as a Boche soldier, after having relieved one of my keepers of his uniform by a process that still remained to be discovered.

But all was idle fancy ! The men on fatigue duty were carefully watched, and remained absent from the camp too short a time for a fugitive to get far enough away before his disappearance was noticed.

Still, as I had no choice, I resolved to turn my

efforts in that direction, and I tried to obtain civilian clothes.

Those were not easily to be found in the camp. The clothes received from France were rigorously kept back by the Germans, and were only given to their owners when they had been adorned across the back by a wide, coloured stripe, sewn in the place of a band of cloth which as a precautionary measure had been cut away. The trousers were trimmed with yellow braid. In spite of my active search I could not find a coat that had not been cut.

One day notices were posted on the walls of the Kommandantur asking for voluntary workers for different duties outside the camp. That seemed to me an excellent chance for getting away, and I set myself to watch the notices until I discovered a duty that would take me into the country in the direction of the frontier. An opportunity occurred. I gave in my name, and one morning, carrying on my back all my earthly possessions, I took my place among forty men who were starting off to a neighbouring forest to cut down trees.

At that time officers were not accepted for these duties, so I took care to get rid of my stripes.

I could scarcely control my excitement when, as a simple private, I left the camp which contained many of my friends, and to which I hoped I should never return. I felt like a criminal. I imagined that all eyes were fixed on me, and that the sentinels were watching me with special attention. I tried to look as insignificant as possible.

I should have liked, before setting off, to have in my possession a watch and a compass, but I did not succeed in getting them. Maps and compasses had been carefully confiscated by the Germans in the course of the numerous searches and examinations to which they had subjected us.

My first attempts at wood-cutting were not fortunate, and attracted the attention of the sentinels and the contractor. I had to put a brave face on things, and after a few days, when my letters had revealed my rank, I made no secret of the fact that I was "Unteroffizier," and that wood-cutting was not my usual occupation. Then I set myself to win the confidence of my jailers by talking to them in German. They understood the motives that had made me take up the work, for I told them that the camp was unhealthy on account of the proximity of the Russians, and that it would become still more so in the heat of summer; that I was deadly sick of the monotonous idleness in which we were forced to stagnate; that work would be a healthy occupation for a man inclined to gloomy thoughts; that fresh air and the contemplation of nature would do me good, and that, finally, in my opinion work was liberty. These reasons seemed to them sufficient, and from then on we got along very well together.

All agreed that the present fatigue duty was a good one. The work demanded from us was not excessive. We were satisfactorily lodged in a loft, and we slept in hammocks. The food was about as good as we had in camp. Our keepers did not consider it a matter of duty to make them-

selves disagreeable, and discipline was not severe.

Our pay was three pfennigs a day more, and we were allowed to arrange for articles of food and other wares to be bought for us in the village. Moreover, as the result of claims we made on the strength of conscientious and organised work, we succeeded in obtaining a daily allowance of a litre of milk for our midday meal. All these considerations brought it about that after some time my comrades considered me a dangerous being, whose escape would certainly lead to a change in the way they were treated, the withdrawal of certain privileges, and the inauguration of a more rigorous régime. As a matter of fact, the rumour got abroad that the " sous-off." intended to escape, and the French seemed to fear this event even more than the Germans.

I realised that I had to set to work in absolute secrecy, and so I did my best to calm these fears in order to be able one day to get away unnoticed. My comrades soon regained their confidence, and as time went by without anything occurring to spoil my reputation, I succeeded in withdrawing myself from notice among the crowd of workers.

In spite of the extreme prudence that I observed with every one, I never missed a single opportunity of getting information as to the direction of the frontier. I tried to get details about the lie of the land separating me from the country of my dreams, about the population and its distribution, and the names of the towns and neighbouring villages.

It was our keepers especially who, unconsciously in the course of their conversation, furnished me with these facts.

After a week spent in working in the forest, to which we went every morning, I was set to work with five others to do some haymaking in connection with an important agricultural enterprise. We found it hard work, and I discovered what it was to get hay into barns. At midday we used to have our meal in the shade of a haystack in the meadows beside a stream. I succeeded in persuading our sentinel that a bath would be an excellent thing for us, and each day I disported myself under the complacent gaze of the German. I knew that a river separated me from the land of liberty, and I wanted to make sure that my wound would not prevent me from swimming.

This lasted for about a fortnight.

I had for a while thought of the possibility of getting away by the river, swimming by night and hiding by day in the tall grass on the banks. But considering the distance to be covered I realised the difficulty I should have in bringing off successfully such a plan. How should I be able to escape the vigilance of the mounted patrols who kept passing along both sides of the river? How could I pass without being noticed through the one or two fairly important towns? I had to abandon the plan.

Then I thought of getting on board one of the barges that used to make their way along the river, but I learned that at the frontier the examination by the customs officials was so thorough that

that way of escape offered not the least chance of success.

My only way, decidedly, was to get away by land. I realised this, and turned my attention in that direction.

At the farm where I was employed labour was scarce, so most of the workmen came from the neutral country near by. I talked with them, and got them to tell me things that I wanted to know. For a little while I even thought that one of them, a young fellow who was actively engaged in smuggling (not to call it horse-stealing) would consent, for a pecuniary consideration, to guide me at night across the frontier by roads that he knew were safe. I should no doubt have managed to persuade him, but we were unfortunately recalled to the forest, and replaced in the agricultural work by others who had recently arrived from the camp. These were mere common farm-labourers who could not claim the title of wood-cutters. My plans fell through, and I felt furious.

From that time forward I had to rely on myself alone. Time passed, and our keepers had recovered from their mistrust. Little by little I got them used to not seeing me at the woodyard, first of all for a few minutes at a time, then for nearly an hour. When, after a long absence, they found me sitting in the shade of a heap of brushwood with a book in my hand, they merely came and talked to me about something or other, and then made me get back to work. They understood quite well that I was not accustomed to continuous hard labour. At times I thought how cruelly they would be

undeceived when they knew of my departure, and discovered that I had tricked them. But how could I act otherwise? I had to lull their suspicions, calm their fears and abuse their confidence if I wished to succeed.

Days passed. I often said to myself: "It will be to-morrow." But I still needed a civilian coat. I could not dream of escaping in uniform.

Finally Fortune smiled on me. I managed one day to get hold of a thin cotton coat. I already had a waistcoat, and a cap made at the camp out of worn-out clothes, so that my wardrobe was sufficient. I resolved to set off the very next day if an occasion that was at all propitious presented itself.

I cannot attempt to describe in detail my last day of captivity. To make matters worse it was a Sunday, a day of rest. As a consequence my thoughts, not being distracted by any manual labour, would persist, in spite of all my efforts, in returning to the very subjects I should have liked to avoid, to the journey I had resolved to undertake. Now that I had made up my mind, my escape seemed to be fraught with infinite danger and peril. I tried to shake off my thoughts in the company of my comrades and the amusement of their games; but I could not succeed. I had continually before my eyes a picture, remarkable in its clearness, of my home people, who at times smiled and encouraged me in my adventure, at others reproached me with sad looks for being too rash. Painful moments! My will proved firm, and yet I was oppressed by fear, anguish and

apprehension. Had I the right to risk my life? Was I not yielding to the impulse of the moment? Was I the victim of hallucinations, of my daily "auto-suggestion"? A moment of silent communion with those dearest to me made me realise clearly that the hour of action had at last come, that I must not let it pass, that it was a question of a strong effort of will, and that I was as ready then as I should ever be. I firmly decided not to put it off any longer, but to try my fortune the next day.

My heart was beating with unusual emotion when I wrote to my people a letter that should be given to them in case I lost my life in the attempt. Then I began my preparations, and stuffed some things into my bag. When that was done I went down, and in order not to awaken the suspicions of my companions I spent the remainder of the day in playing and chatting and joking with them. But it seemed to me that my smile was somewhat forced and my laugh unnatural. Night came, and soon in our loft I was the only one awake, thinking over my project.

Only a few hours more! I examined myself to see if I really had the courage and energy necessary for the enterprise. I found myself more doggedly determined than ever, and I pictured, far away, the joy and delight of those who were holding out their arms to strengthen and welcome me.

Sleep surprised me in the act of weaving fantastic plans.

. . . . . .

I woke on Monday morning long before the

others, long before the sentinel came at five o'clock to call out in his muffled voice, "Auf stehen." As a precaution against the coldness of the nights that were to come, I put two shirts on, one over the other, with a woollen coat in between. I got into two pairs of pants and wore two pairs of socks. At six o'clock we started. That day I was told off to go and take part in clearing some land. I considered it providential, for the new work would take me two or three kilometres nearer the frontier. I realised, however, that on account of the bareness of the land I should find it more difficult to get away than I should have done in the forest, where the trees would have sheltered me from observation.

I marched among my comrades, with my thoughts elsewhere and apprehension at my heart.

With seven other Frenchmen, under the strict guard of a sentinel, I started work with an ardour unknown before. The sentry was at our heels, and took care to count us frequently. He was a newcomer who, imbued with a feeling of his own importance and of the responsibility that had devolved upon him, took his work very seriously. I kept my eye on him, and watched his slightest movements in the hope of discovering an instant's inattention which would favour my flight. No occasion presented itself during the morning. At about eleven o'clock a countryman came to ask for our help in turning his hay while the sun was shining. We floundered about in a swampy meadow, and I felt the water coming through my worn-out shoes. I fumed at the idea that my

feet would soften, and that I should be less able to bear fatigue. Should I succeed in getting off? There seemed to be no sign of it. At length noon arrived, and, abandoning our tools, we went to the place chosen for our meal.

Our sentinels went off half at a time to have their *déjeuner* in a neighbouring farm. The prisoners were now all together, so that it became more difficult to see at a glance whether the number was complete. My time was approaching. I decided to wait for the return of the first sentinels before leaving. In the meantime I forced myself to swallow some food, though I had difficulty in getting it down. I felt no appetite, and it was only by persuading and reasoning with myself that I could manage to swallow an egg and a few sardines.

The first group of sentries came back. They went and stretched themselves at full length in the sunshine to digest their food. I strapped my bag over my shoulder and then lay down on my coat, quite close to the keepers. Under the caressing rays of the sun, yielding to the influence of the beer they had absorbed, and made drowsy by their meal, the German soldiers, with heads nodding, closed their eyes in spite of themselves and gave themselves up to a state of semi-consciousness. I determined to take advantage of this relaxed vigilance and get off at once. I gradually edged farther away, and managed to crawl to a little hollow in the ground.

My heart was beating as if it would burst. I wanted to go, and yet I felt as if an invisible chain was holding me back. I was running no risk so

far, for even if it had been noticed that I was farther away than the others, this would not yet have caused suspicion. I reached a little bush that hid me from the sight of our sentinels. The next minute I made a complete change in my appearance. I had now broken the laws and was really an escaped prisoner. In a moment I got into my coat, put on the civilian's cap that I had brought, and with a rapid movement I tore off the braid that was fastened by a few stitches only to the seams of my trousers. My toilette was complete. I was no longer a prisoner. I had passed the Rubicon, and was on my way towards prison and death—or liberty.

Hastily through the foliage I looked to make sure the Germans were not disturbing themselves. Then I drew myself up, and with the steady ordinary walk of a workman returning from his work, set off quickly. The chains were broken. I went off without casting a glance behind. A minute's walking brought me behind a ridge, and soon I could no longer be seen by our keepers, though it seemed to me as if they must pursue and arrest me. . . . Feeling myself free, I was tempted to rush along madly and joyfully, so as to put kilometres between me and my pursuers. But for a long time past I had been preparing for this moment, and I knew I must not yield to the impulse; I forced myself to walk more slowly than I wished, for it was prudent not to awaken the suspicions of the workers in the fields.

I soon reached a little village, which I crossed at a slow pace, limping as I went along. I thought

thus to baffle pursuit, for a young able-bodied civilian could not fail to arouse suspicion. My wisest plan was to avoid towns and villages, so I made my way to a wood that I saw a little to the north. But there again I met women and children gathering whortleberries, so I abandoned the paths and made my way through the undergrowth.

After an hour's walking, directed so far as possible towards the west, I had the impression of being followed by dogs, whose barking was certainly coming nearer. I crawled into a close thicket, and crouched down in the darkest part of it under the bracken. I heard a dog bark close to me, and I clenched my teeth at the thought that I was tracked. But it must have been simply the dog belonging to a ranger who lived a little way off, for I could soon distinguish the noise of the animal's chain and the crowing of a cock in the poultry yard. I should have to wait now till nightfall, and I spent long hours there listening anxiously for the least sound.

I was an escaped prisoner. I had succeeded in deceiving the vigilance of my keepers. That was a great deal, but I did not fail to realise that the most painful and difficult part was before me.

For some weeks past I had managed to get our sentinels to talk, and even the non-commissioned officers who were guarding us. They had confided to me the following details: the frontier was a dozen kilometres away as the crow flies; news of a prisoner who had escaped would be transmitted all over the neighbourhood by one hundred and fifty telegrams and three battalions of Landsturm stationed at X——; and in another town a search-

party would be organised, with police dogs to help. Civilians themselves, on the demand of the military authorities, would have to give up to them their own bloodhounds. A certain sum of money was promised to any one who should bring about the capture of the fugitive. More often than not it had been women or old men who had prevented our escaped comrades from getting successfully away. The punishment, always carefully announced in camp, was, in case of capture, forty-two days' solitary confinement, during which the prisoner only received one platter of food (and that a prisoner's portion) every two days. Often an "accident" happened and a man was killed. An adjutant who had escaped was one day fired at point-blank and killed as he was peacefully returning, surrounded by the sentinels who had caught him.

I had neither map nor watch nor compass. Geographically my position was as follows: to the north-west a railroad, to the west a river to cross, then a railroad; X——, the last German town, was a little way this side of the frontier. The river Z—— was a little beyond the frontier. Once, then, I had crossed this river I should be safe.

I had hoped to get over the ground straight away in twenty-four hours at most, taking advantage of the surprise of the Germans, and so I had not troubled to bring much in the way of food. My estimate was at fault, as I discovered later to my cost.

As provisions for my journey, my pockets contained a pound of chocolate, a box of kola pastilles, some meat lozenges and some lumps of sugar.

I had started work in the forest wearing a long beard, the cut and colour of which were described on my description-slip. I shaved off this beard a little while after, and the day before my escape I sacrificed my moustache. Through motives of prudence, not of vanity, I had slipped into my pocket a glass and a comb, with which to perform my toilette.

My absence must apparently have passed unnoticed until an hour and a half after my disappearance, at the time when work began afresh.

My life as a hunted beast began.

Even for those who have no taste for violent emotion, this life presents a certain charm. It allows you to enjoy the majestic calm of the forest, to observe at close range the birds who, mistaking you perhaps for the trunk of an old tree, come flying round without fear and twitter and sing before going to sleep.

As night fell gently in the quiet forest I allowed my thoughts to wander towards the dear land of France that perhaps I should never reach, towards the loved ones I might never see again. They were sad thoughts, it is true, but my will gained from them new strength and energy. Homeland, parents and friends seemed doubly dear, and I hoped with all my heart that no one over there would have any suspicion of the risks I was running, to which I had voluntarily exposed myself.

Night had now come; the sky was starry, all was silent in the sleeping villages. There was no sound except that made now and then by a half-awakened bird fluttering his wings. I made up

my mind to start; the thick undergrowth of young firs was not favourable for walking, and the displaced foliage made a noise as I made my way through it, so I had to creep along under the lowest branches. I went on for about a hundred metres, and then found myself at the edge of the wood. The coldness of the wind made me shiver. The Great Bear was shining brightly, and the Pole Star showed me which way I had to go for the west. I went cautiously on, feeling a little uneasy at the noise of my steps over the fields of beetroot or potatoes. I often stopped to listen; a sound would startle me; I would discover that it was a crackling branch, or a frightened hare scuttling off; then I would continue my way across fields and pasture-land, climbing over fences and crawling under hedges. I carefully avoided habitations where the barking of dogs would draw attention to me as I passed, and so I had to go rather slowly. At one time I had to cross another wood, which soon became very dense. It was a thorny thicket that was almost impossible to get through. Suddenly a sound similar to that which my own feet were making on the dead leaves attracted my attention. I stood motionless for a few minutes and listened. The sound stopped. Feeling reassured, I started off again, but immediately from the same spot I heard the same crackling noise. I peered into the darkness and then saw, a few metres away behind a thick bush, two phosphorescent eyes fixed on me. It is a dog that is watching me, thought I, and his master cannot be far off. All is up. Then, as all was

still again, I decided to go on, and left the wood without being pursued.

Day was beginning to dawn, and I could already hear men in the farmyards harnessing their horses. It would be dangerous to continue, so I stopped in a wood about two kilometres farther on. During the day I received a visit from a wild cat. It was he, no doubt, who had given me my little fright the night before.

The place I had chosen was near the edge of the wood, so that during the whole day I could hear the peasants working in the fields. I was even afraid sometimes, when the sound of their voices came nearer, that they were coming into my wood, where there was scarcely anything to hide me. I was lying in the bed of a dried-up stream.

The day seemed long, and towards evening I was continually annoyed by mosquitoes, which took a malicious pleasure in alighting on my hands and face and biting them. Later on there was a heavy storm that lasted about two hours. The rain began to drench me. From that time I felt as if I had not a dry thread on me. It was Tuesday evening.

At nightfall I should have liked to go on, but I was troubled by the sound of people talking near me. Were they on my track? At last there was absolute silence. I came out from my hiding-place and continued my way to the west. In the meadows the long grass wetted me to my knees, inquisitive cows came to look at me as I passed by. All at once I heard the iron wire of a fence creak. I stopped uneasily in the middle of a field of pasture-

land and saw a man getting slowly over the fence. I thought that perhaps a signal had been sent and that some one was waiting for me there. I did not feel much more easy in my mind when I heard the man jump on a bicycle and go off at a great speed. I wanted, nevertheless, to continue on my way, for I met nobody; still, as I heard noises in the distance, I thought it more prudent to hide in a potato field. I remained there some time, flat on the ground, feeling very anxious. Then, getting on to the high road, I walked along it without meeting a living soul.

Towards morning I left the road and entered pasture-land again, in the middle of which there was a small thicket which offered shelter until the evening; it was terribly wet there, and I often regretted having stopped in that place, near which some shepherd boys kept constantly passing.

The day seemed interminable. I suffered from time to time from cramp in my legs. Then for the first time I could hear the German soldiers who, sent out in pursuit of me, were firing blank cartridges into the undergrowth. Several times I heard them a little way off in different directions talking. I waited motionless, weighing the chances I had of remaining undiscovered.

It rained again, frequently and heavily. I had had nothing to drink, since I started, and I was beginning to feel thirsty. In the evening a few birds came and sang over my head, and their warbling helped to pass the long hours that still separated me from night.

On Wednesday evening, when it was quite dark,

and when all sounds of voices were stilled, I came out from my retreat and crawled to the edge of the little wood.

There again I heard a wire fence creak. I went cautiously forward and discovered that the noise was made this time by a poor cow, who, frightened by my appearance, had started rushing madly off. I made my way once more over meadows, cornfields and beetroot fields, with pauses more or less prolonged at each disturbing noise. I succeeded in getting past the farms without making any noise, without even waking the watchdogs; but in the fields it was different; suddenly some pheasants, disturbed in their sleep, rose from under my feet, flying heavily away and uttering loud cries. Would they betray me?

I had the impression of walking towards my death in the darkness. Each rick of oats seemed to me to be hiding a soldier whose cold bayonet would nail me to the earth without a sound. The night was cold, and I kept shivering as I lay with my ear to the ground, anxiously listening till all sound of rustling had ceased. I walked on slowly, peering into the darkness as I went, for the few stars there were did not shed much light. Going at right angles to the Great Bear, which I left on my right hand, I kept on my way towards the west. I thus reached the edge of a stream. As it was not deep I took off my shoes and stockings and crossed it easily. There at last, for the first time for two days, I was able to quench my thirst. Then followed meadows upon meadows. A light mist covered the ground, which looked like silver. It

was getting light. Where should I find a hiding-place in the flat fields without trees or bushes? Having got through a hedge, I found myself on a high road. I was going to cross it when I heard, quite close to me, about fifty metres away, sounding mournfully in the grey morning light, the melancholy notes of the German réveillé. These sounds, made by lips that were only half-awake, caused my knees to give way under me. I had thought never again to hear the German bugle. An indescribable terror took possession of me, and I felt that I was going to be caught. To avoid the barracks I bore to the right. A hundred metres farther on a stream barred my way; there was no possibility of hesitating, and so, at four o'clock in the morning, without taking time to remove any of my clothes, I plunged in. I was out of my depth almost immediately, and swam to the opposite bank, a distance of about forty metres.

Had I been noticed by the sentinels on duty along the banks or by some one in the neighbourhood who liked early rising? Out of breath through swimming and with my clothes weighed down with water, I tried to hurry along in quest of shelter. I should have liked to continue walking so as to warm my chilled body, but I soon had to stop. I was in open country. I heard the voices of peasants going to their work, and I could not risk meeting even a civilian, for my soaked clothing would have betrayed me. Carefully moving aside the ears of corn, I got right into a cornfield and lay down in the middle of it. It was sunrise on Thursday.

I was wet to the skin, and I shivered in the cool morning air. My first care was to empty my pockets; blades of grass and leaves were sticking to the packets of chocolate; water had penetrated to the meat lozenges; instead of sugar I found nothing but sweet water. My stock of sugar was gone.

In my inner pockets I had some little photographs, the only things that I had brought with me in my flight. I drew them out in a pitiful state. I spread out the chocolate, the photographs and my handkerchief in the warm rays of the rising sun. All round me men, women and children were busy reaping. I hoped they would not have the unfortunate idea of cutting the corn in the field where I lay hidden. Then the Boche soldiers came out from their barracks and went off singing. As on the previous day, they organised a search, and I felt as if their nets were closing in around me. A few men on patrol came to speak to the harvesters. At one time I heard one of them whistle to a dog in the next field. I trembled every instant at the thought of being discovered.

It was a good thing that I had crossed a river, for it was thanks to that that the police dogs had lost my track. There is no doubt but for that blessed circumstance I should certainly have been discovered. I lived through agonised moments, imagining every minute that I heard steps in the cornfield or saw the head of a hound rise above the yellow grain. Then noon came, and in its heavy heat I slept, unconscious of all around me.

. . . .

Towards evening the search was renewed; shots were frequently fired. The sun, warm when it succeeded in piercing the clouds, dried my clothes; but suddenly a fresh shower soaked me once more. I began to feel weary. I had cramp in my legs, and I reckoned that my provisions could not last longer than till Sunday evening. I should have to reach the frontier some time during Monday at latest. Until then I had to content myself with two tablets of chocolate, ten meat lozenges and a few kola pastilles each day. I became feverish with thirst, the approach of night made me shiver with cold, and I waited impatiently for darkness and silence so that I could start off again. I was just going to get up when some German soldiers left the barracks singing. I could not think of starting until I knew which way they were going. One party went towards the west in a direction where I could hear the rumble of trains; the others went southwards. They fired for a long while and the noise echoed through the quiet fields. I heard in the distance the church clock strike the hours. Midnight, one o'clock, and still the Boches did not return. Finally, towards morning, after having been cold all night, I dozed and did not hear them come back. A night had passed and I had not advanced a step. Moreover, the cold and my wet clothes had cramped me and I could not manage to get warm.

Friday passed much as Thursday had done. Towards evening there was a heavy storm which again drenched me, but I was thankful it came; my thirst was such that I was glad to open my

now empty sugar-box to catch the big drops that were falling. I succeeded in getting in this way a little water that refreshed me; I sucked, too, the wet ears of corn. But I began to feel ill, my teeth were chattering violently; I was trembling all over and my head was aching.

I felt then that I could not stand another night out of doors; I had to get free the next day or else give up the hope of leaving Germany.

I waited impatiently for night. It came at last, but the soldiers who had set out in the evening had not returned and were still scouring the country. To move would be dangerous. Long hours passed. Should I have to keep still until the next day, as I had done the night before? At last, towards midnight, the patrol returned, shouting hoarsely into the night; but the moon was up and I had to wait until it had set. It went down with provoking slowness. When it had disappeared below the horizon I resolved to continue on my way. It was about two o'clock. My limbs refused to obey me; I kept saying, "Now I must get up," but I did nothing. I was a prey to fear greater than any I had ever before experienced. My imagination was so excited that I seemed to feel Prussian bullets piercing my skull at the very thought of raising my head above the quivering corn. But at last, feeling ashamed of my cowardice, I drew myself up to my full height, making my joints crack, started off across the fields, and soon reached the high road leading to the last German town. Just as I was getting into it I heard steps behind me. I did not dare to turn

round, but I gradually slackened my speed so as not to seem to be running away, and also, I might say, so as to be taken up as soon as possible if it really had to be. It was too unnerving to feel oneself followed. The heavy step came closer; soon the man and I were on a level. I saluted him with a rather husky "Guten Morgen"; he replied and went on. It was not he who would arrest me.

I continued on my way for several kilometres. I saw a bicycle left in a ditch. I had a great mind to jump on it and set off, but judging that it might belong to some one stationed to look out for me who had gone off to get help, I went on without yielding to the temptation.

Later, I crossed a railroad, which luckily was not guarded just there. Farther on, in the moving mist, rose the houses and church towers of a fairly large town. It was X——. I had to avoid the town, and started going round it, some distance away, by lanes and paths.

At a corner by a hedge I turned and saw two men some way behind me; half a kilometre farther on they were still following me. Was I caught? I tried to walk in a natural manner, not hesitating when I had to choose between two paths. I went through sleepy villages where I saw very few people. Then I had to get into a more frequented path, and already I kept meeting cyclists, mostly young men who were going to their work at X——. I even met some of the customs officers and a forest ranger. I spoke to them as I passed as if they were old acquaintances. To give myself a more jaunty look I had between

my lips a piece of honeysuckle, gathered from a hedge as I came along. It hid the lines furrowed by fatigue and made me look more confident.

I can't think why I was not arrested. My clothes were drenched and covered with mud from my having had to sleep in the fields. My face was that of a man absolutely worn out, as I could see from my glass. My feet, that had been wet for five days and were cut by nails in my shoes, were swollen and hurt me, particularly at the ankles; my gait could not look natural. Anyhow, it seems as if the Germans are not very keen as detectives.

My road led me through a little village whose doors were only just beginning to open. A peasant woman was walking along a few steps in front of me. On leaving the houses we came both at the same time to a kind of turnstile. It creaked mournfully as the woman passed through. I was following directly behind her when I saw coming towards me an armed sentinel of the frontier guard. I had the feeling that there my journey would end, that this man was the one destined to put an end to my wanderings. I had been seen, so that it was useless to hide myself, and dangerous to run away. I could have overcome the man with a blow, no doubt, but others would hear his cries, the alarm would be given and I should not be able to escape. I did not know how far I was from the frontier, and, to tell the truth, I was so tired that I had not the strength for a violent physical effort. If my legs had had their strength of former days the Germans would not have caught me, but as it was, it would have been impossible for me

to go far. The woman passed without seeming disturbed. The sentinel was about ten metres away. All the plans that came into my mind seemed useless and had to be rejected one after the other, so I just behaved quite calmly. Arriving level with the sentry, I looked him coolly straight in the face and said "Guten Morgen" to him in my best German. He replied and stopped, thinking I was going to do the same. I continued on my way, however. He did not speak, but walked along close behind me. I thought he was there simply to cut off my retreat and that later on I should fall into the trap. For about fifty metres he followed me; then my regular and leisurely walk inspired him no doubt with confidence, and he turned and let me go on.

The description had probably been given of a Frenchman with a brown beard, and the poor sentry, meeting a polite young man in civilian clothes and close-shaven, walking along as innocently as possible, was completely deceived and did not even think of following his instructions.

It is not a pleasant thing, when one's conscience is not quite clear and free from reproach, to feel oneself being eyed by an enormous soldier armed to the teeth. It is scarcely more pleasant to be followed by this same individual without daring to turn round. It is a test of strength that I should be incapable of undergoing a second time. I feel sure that the very appearance of a sentinel in similar circumstances would result in my complete demoralisation. My determination to succeed must have been great for it to have given me the

strength to walk on, and to walk on without trembling.

It was about six o'clock in the morning, and this last German village was, as I discovered afterwards, about three kilometres from the frontier. Continuing my journey, I came, at a cross roads; to a sentry-box, whose occupant ought to have been guarding the roads, but it was empty. Another sentry at fault; fortune was favouring me.

Next I had to pass by footpaths through a wood. In order not to wander in the wrong direction, now that I could not see the stars, I had to keep turning round to guide myself by the light of the rising sun.

I passed a woodman's hut, then a gipsy caravan. From that time meadows took the place of woods and I hoped I was out of danger. I saw in the distance windmills on the summits of little hills. I found a piece of a newspaper printed in a language that was not German, but I did not yet dare to take that for a sure sign.

I had come to the end of my strength. I could scarcely breathe, and I felt a sharp pain in my chest and back. An iron band seemed to be pressing on my brain. I stopped and lay down, completely dazed, under a hedge. I remained there a little while, and then, coming to myself, I realised that it would be too stupid to let myself be captured there, for the frontier could not be far off. I must be certain that I was safe, and for that I had to reach the river. I rose, but when I came to the end of the meadow I did not have the strength to get over the hedge, and lay down

again in the grass, enjoying the genial warmth of the sun. But suddenly, at the other end of the meadow I had just crossed, beyond the hedge, I saw shining the helmets of horsemen. Were they Germans, and was I to be retaken so near my goal? No, not while I had any strength left.

So, stimulated by what I had seen, I made a last effort and succeeded in hoisting myself over the hedge. Once on the other side I hurried forward for a few hundred metres over beautiful green meadow-land. Then suddenly I saw flowing peacefully before my delighted eyes the sign of my liberty—the river bordered with posts bearing neutral colours.

It was difficult for me to understand that at last I was free, and that all danger was past. Free! I was free!

On the other side of the river was the ferryman's house. I hailed him and made signs that I wanted to cross. Soon a boat came alongside, and with a few strokes of the oar I was on the other bank in perfect security. The German patrols could not get as far as that. I told the ferryman who I was. With a kindly smile lighting up his tanned face he joyfully took my hand in a hearty clasp. When I wished, in payment for crossing over, to give him a few small coins, he refused them, muttering hatred for his neighbours across the water and a blessing on me. Dear old fellow! I shall never forget his kind, smooth, smiling face.

The village was ten minutes' walk farther on. From the banks I could see the church tower and

the houses in a nest of green. The Mayor, to whom I went, did not seem quite to know what to do with me. He sent me to the police station. There I again nearly fainted and asked for a doctor. The corporal's wife, while I was waiting, gave me a cup of warm milk. The doctor was not long in arriving. He was a charming man, who congratulated me; and after he had sounded me he expressed his sympathy for France. He found my lungs in excellent condition, and said that the pains I felt were due entirely to fatigue. He offered to keep me for a few days in a hospital; but I thanked him and refused, preferring to set off the next day, at any rate if I was better.

I went to the hotel, where I was made very welcome. Some refugees came to visit me. The kindly doctor who had greeted me so warmly thought, no doubt, that my dirty and untidy clothes would attract undue attention to me, for he was good enough to send me one of his suits. I no longer looked like a tramp. I got a new pair of shoes to replace those worn out that hurt my feet. A collar and a tie enabled me to take a decent place among civilised people. I was free!

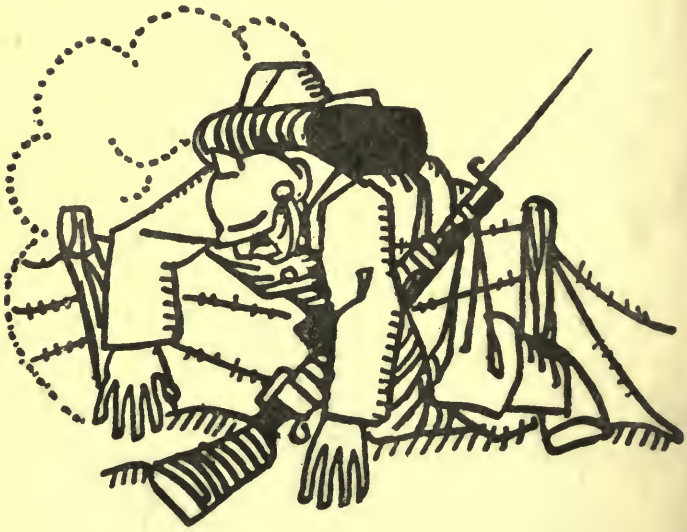
A telegram carried the good news to parents and friends. I sent, out of politeness, a card to the German General in charge of the camp telling him that, to my great regret, he could not count on me in the future. I hoped that he would have an apoplectic fit on reading my missive, and that my comrades would thus be relieved of this tyrannical individual.

He received it, but survived.

The next day I took the train to go and report myself at the Consulate as having returned. Everything seemed strange, and life in civilised regions astonished me immensely. It was with great difficulty that I managed to persuade myself that I was not dreaming. How delightful it was to be free after long months of captivity! Oh, if only my friends could also be breathing the air of liberty!

In a few days I should see my family. In a few days I should set foot in my own land.

The nightmare was over.



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