

*Life In the War Zone*

by

*Gertrude Atherton*

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GERTRUDE ATHERTON



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# LE BIENÊTRE DU BLESSÉ

(In France)

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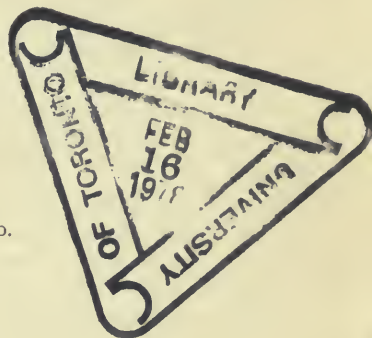
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## INVADING THE WAR ZONE

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PARIS, August 8, 1916.

**F**RANCE to-day is sharply divided into two sections; within the greater you can come and go almost as freely as before the war. All that is necessary is a *sauf conduit* easily obtained from your *commissaire de police*, which you are never called upon to exhibit. But the other, the *Zone des Armées*, in common parlance the war or military zone! There is only one thing in France more difficult of contact, and that is a member of the middle or lower bourgeoisie.

For nearly three months now I have felt like an inverted snob trying to ingratiate myself with, or even to meet members, of that curious caste which exists only in France; a caste reserved, proud, suspicious, intensive, detesting foreigners only less than it does the aristocracy, and averse from variety of any sort. If you bring even one letter to society, either in France or any European capital, all doors are open to you, for society is accustomed to strangers and variety, and is often bored with itself; which the bourgeoisie, of France at least, never seems to be. So, if in the course of these and other letters, I allude, however casually, to princesses and duchesses, spare me the ready democratic sneer; but if, with affected indifference, I mention now and again a name without territorial significance, then, if you like, exchange derisive glances and exclaim: "Aha! So she has 'got there' and would have us believe she takes it as a matter of course." However—to return to the war zone.

I made no attempt to enter this proscribed region for six or seven weeks after my arrival, having the thousand and one phases of woman's work in the war to examine. But when these researches drew to a close I began to plot to get to the front—no other word is applicable unless a woman happens to be a Red Cross nurse. At first I applied to a number of eminent Americans on more or less intimate terms with the powers. I quickly found that, amiable and interested as they were, their own powers had a limit. It was comparatively easy in the beginning of the war to go to the front, but the barrier grows deeper every day.

One referred me to a Frenchman of great influence who has a special liking for Americans. He told me in the friendliest manner that when I obtained permission to go to the front he would provide me with the necessary letters, but that as I was an American I must obtain that permission through my embassy. This I did not even consider. I have spent a good part of my life in Europe, and long since came to the conclusion that all American embassies feel they are created for is to look solemn and important and give receptions. They never by any chance do anything for other Americans except in times of extreme danger, and then they behave very well.

I tried one or two members of the *haute bourgeoisie* without avail, and then took my troubles to a duchess. There I was more fortunate. The young Duchess d'Uzès has turned her castle near Amiens into a hospital, the sixth or seventh she has established since the beginning of the war, and is therefore on friendly terms with the *Service de Santé* (the Military Hospital Service Board). She asked one of its principal Secretaries to meet me at breakfast, and I was able to disabuse his mind of any suspicion he might have that I merely wanted to "do" the front, assuring him that it was my solemn duty to visit the base hospitals in behalf of a new oeuvre just formed (*Le Bien-être du Blessé*), founded by Countess d'Haussonville, President of the first division of the *Croix Rouge*, to supply convalescents in the military hospitals at the front with delicacies they would be able, in their weakened condition, to retain.



I told him that, as I had agreed to do the publicity work for this oeuvre, I felt I should see things at first hand, if only to be able to make my articles of appeal interesting. He agreed that this was a most reasonable argument, asked for my *permis de séjour* and my immatriculation, and promised that I should have my *carnet rouge* the following week and go with the duchess to Amiens.

I waited nearly a month. I received consolatory promises and nothing more. Meanwhile I could not go outside of Paris, as without my *permis de séjour* I was unable to obtain a *sauf conduit*. (If you lose your *permis de séjour* you cannot leave Paris until the end of the war.)

Finally one of the Vice-Presidents of *Le Bien-être du Blessé* (the well-being of the wounded) sent in a petition, and I received a note from the Ministry of War asking for two photographs similar to that of my passport, and inclosing a paper to sign. Two days later I was summoned to the office of the *Service de Santé*. I had engagements, but I broke them ruthlessly. We all do when the War Office summons. Royalty itself would not be considered.

The Vice-President of *Le Bien-être du Blessé* who had asked them to hurry, went with me, and after we had wandered all over an immense building in the Boulevard St. Germain we finally found ourselves in a reception room on the top floor. It was filled with patient people, but we sent in our names and were not kept waiting. There two charming gentlemen (and no people in the world are as kind and charming as high officials in France when they are gentlemen) told me I could go to Rouen and Meaux.

This was a joke. It was like the labors of the mountain to bring forth a mouse. Rouen is entirely given over to the British, and much as I admire the British I came to France to write about the French. As for Meaux, although the battleground of the Marne at any of its points is interesting to good Americans as the scene of the definite finish of German hopes of world dominion, my ambition was the "front," not a slice of the future tourists' paradise.

I made known my desires with firmness, and all the eloquence at my command, being able, fortunately, with these accomplished gentlemen, to employ my native tongue. "I want to go to Amiens, and at once," I concluded.

Alas, if it were only a month earlier—before the battle of the Somme began. Now it was quite impossible. The *Grand Quatier Générale* (brief for *Joffre*) would never consent. Amiens was too close to the big guns. I replied pertinently that I had made my application nearly a month ago. Alas! it took so long for an application of that sort to progress along the winding ways of *Le Ministère de la Guerre*. But, of course, I must see something besides Meaux (I flatly refused to go to Rouen), and if I would make out a list of other names they would do their best to get me the necessary permission. I asked my companion to make out the list, as she knew what base hospitals it would be best for me to visit in the interests of the oeuvre. She dictated *Châlons-sur-Marne*, *Vitry*, *Révigny*, and *Bar-le-Duc*. The last was the only name with a quickening quality, as it is shelled by taubes every few days. I added that on my own account I should like *Verdun*, *Nancy*, *Rheims* and *Thann*. My new friend was most sympathetic and considerate. He would do his best, but *Verdun*—an American lady! He feared the *Grand Quatier Général* would not take the responsibility. He was sure, however, he could get me something much better than Meaux.

So I went off with my *carnet rouge*, that precious little red book full of blank permits, only one of which is filled out at a time.

A French friend, *Mme. Camille Lyon*, went with me to Meaux. The battlefield of the Marne is one of the most impressive sights in the world. Imagine vast fields of waving grain broken irregularly, but with pathetic frequency, by drooping and faded

flags marking the graves of the fallen. On the crosses below the flags there are no names, merely figures, ranging from fifty to three and four hundred. A small trench was dug and filled with bodies covered with quicklime, but, in spite of haste, the mound, the cross, and the flag were not forgotten, and the identification disks were carefully preserved.

There are also three or four cemeteries, one new, and filled only with the identified dead—officers, of course; and older graveyards half filled before the war. These, being surrounded by high walls, had been used as intrenchments. There are rough holes on all sides, showing that the little company had been surrounded by Germans, and had crouched, firing their mitrailleuses through the sheltering walls. The church of Barcy is a ruin and three or four of the houses, but considering that it was under fire so many days, it is surprising there should be anything left of it. The Mayor told us that he and his family and all of the village people that did not run away had not left his cellar for six days; and during that time the shells never ceased to shriek overhead. "However," he added philosophically, "it was not so bad as '70."

A few days later I was summoned once more to the Ministère de la Guerre, and my polite and charming friends told me that I was graciously allowed to go to Châlons, Vitry, and Bar-le-Duc. As for the others, well, perhaps later. Perhaps—also—when I was inside that Chinese wall I might persuade some General to take me closer to the front. I sniffed and grumbled, but received nothing further but sympathy. The particular official to whom I was turned over for these interviews, and who is the politest man I ever met, looked up the trains for me, calculated how much money I had better take, was inspired (fortunately, as it turned out) to write out a letter asking the military authorities of the zone I was about to visit to show me every civility, and sent it to receive the imposing stamp of le Ministère de la Guerre; and then assured me that he would do his best to get a military automobile for a trip closer to the lines.

As I am more susceptible to manners than to anything in the world (I think that is one reason I hate the Germans so, theirs being the worst in the world), I went away quite happy, and determined to make the most of this trip. After all, something was sure to happen at Bar-le-Duc, and Châlons had once been shelled by a long-range gun. I had no yearning to come to close quarters with big guns, or even taubes, but I did want to see and hear something after enjoying the comforts of Paris for three months. During the first week of the battle of the Somme I could hear the guns distinctly night and day, but otherwise, were it not for the blind and legless men one meets constantly in the streets, there would be no external evidence here of war.

I was obliged to go on this trip alone, but although I regretted that my former charming companion could not accompany me, I reflected that it did not much matter; the unique experience would suffice. The great station—Gare de l'Est—was crowded with soldiers as usual. I have now been on a number of trips outside of Paris and invariably these stations are packed with men in uniform, all looking healthy and contented. One passes, also, hundreds of military trains, out of whose windows are hanging rows of soldiers in "horizon blue." One wonders if the whole front is not off on a vacation.

The soldiers travel second and third, the officers first. As my carriage was full of officers, and the trip to Châlons lasted two hours, I once more had time to observe at my leisure these men who hold the destinies of France in their hands. Again I was struck by their height, not one being under five feet ten, and many six feet and over. Some few are lanky, weedy, but for the most part they are well knit and very erect, the result not only of military training but of the outdoor sports which for the last generation have been more in vogue than ever among country gentlemen. In coloring they were fair rather than dark, but seldom blond. They talked very little to one another, unless standing out in the corridor. I was the only woman on the train, and no doubt they took me for a spy and observed the warning printed at every turn: "Taisez-vous. Méfiez-vous. Les oreilles ennemies vous écoutent."



They were all on their way to the front, and might not be alive on the following day. They looked like men on their way to a week-end party, and when they did not read magazines and novels went to sleep. It struck me more forcibly than I have ever received any impression that this was a race of men of strong nerves. In fact, I doubted if they had any; certainly not at times when nerves were undesirable occupants. The Frenchman has arranged his brain in watertight compartments. When he is at the front or on the way to it he is a fighting machine, businesslike and unemotional. During his six days' leave he enjoys himself as thoroughly as if war had never been; either in his family or otherwise. Even the poilus, having exhausted their first joy of reunion, sit down and examine their books, if they happen to be shopkeepers, or mend the furniture, or plow the fields. I believe it was early in 1914 that some German General said the war would be won by the stoutest nerves. After two years of the hardest fighting the world has ever known, and the most terrific strain ever put upon human endurance, the French have nerves of pure steel. They are not a fat race, either, like the Germans, and do their own thinking. What the matter was with Frenchmen in '70 is beside the question. They are invincible to-day.

Châlons looked promising. There were cabs at the station, and a tram. Having shown my carnet rouge, I was permitted to leave the dépôt, and the officials stationed there to examine papers directed me to a hotel with a resounding name: "Haute-Mère-Dieu." This was situated in a large square in which there was nothing to be seen but a line of gray military automobiles and three or four cabs. The upper windows about the square were all closed. The shops looked very quiet. It was a gray scene, and the stillness was oppressive, sinister.

However, the hotel was not unattractive. As I entered the vaulted passageway I saw that it was built about a court, and caught a glimpse of a pleasant tearoom. Entering a door on the left, I found myself in the office of the concierge, and its chair was occupied by a girl of about twenty-two who was reading a novel. If she had been an American she would have been chewing gum. I asked her if I could have a room for the night and she asked me if I had been to the Bureau de Place and received permission to remain in the town. I could not have a room until my carnet rouge had been stamped by this dignitary. Could I have a cup of tea (it was 2:30 and I had missed lunch) and then leave my bag in the office while I ascertained if I should graciously be permitted to remain overnight, or be sent back to Paris? She yawned, nodded, touched a bell, gave an order for tea, and returned to her novel.

I had a very good cup of tea and then went out and hired a cab by the hour, as I had a letter to the Préfet from M. Joseph Reinach and also wanted to see something of the town. At the Bureau de Place an imposing official read my carnet rouge, looked at my picture and record on the first page, and then turned to me with narrowed eyelids. I drew a short breath and shifted from one foot to the other. Frenchmen have very keen eyes and when they half close them you feel as if blinking aside a knife-blade. If I had had a guilty secret during that trip into the war zone I should have given it up. Indeed, so often did I encounter this glance that I began to wonder uneasily if there were not something wrong with me, if there were not depths of treachery in me that I so far had not suspected, if I really had not in some moment of aberration committed a wrong against France. Such is the power of suggestion, of moving constantly in an atmosphere of suspicion. But I reminded myself that I had heard a few days since that there was a price on my head in Germany, and took courage.

"What had I come to the war zone for?" "To visit the base hospitals." "Ah?" "No, I was not a nurse. I was inspecting in behalf of my oeuvre, *Le Bien-être du Blessé*. I was also writing a book about the women of France in war time." "Ah!" Again that steel blade between narrowed lids. I bethought me of the letter from the

Minister of War. The atmosphere cleared as by magic. My carnet rouge was stamped, and I was bowed out not only with the politeness to which I was accustomed, but with frank pleasant eyes, wide open, and some practical information regarding the formalities of departure.

After I had called on the Préfet and driven about the gray, silent, shuttered town, and seen practically no evidences of life but hundreds of army wagons (there are trenches just outside of the town, but no permit would take me there), I wondered what I was to do with myself until the morrow. My object in stopping at Châlons was to make it a headquarters from which I could visit the other towns, but this, I had found, was impossible; I could go nowhere that day and return for the night. It was only 3:30. I had no intention of visiting the hospitals at Châlons, as there were two at Bar-le-Duc to which I had personal letters. I told the coachman to drive to the shopping street, if there was such a thing. He drove to a street in which there were a few shops. In one I found a Dumas novel and bought it—"Le Collier de la Reine!" Then I went back to the hotel and once more interviewed the young lady at the desk. She was still reading the novel, but condescended to inspect my carnet rouge and to give me her own permission to pass the night in the hotel. I could not have a front room, however; they were all taken by officers. She rang her bell, and a servant escorted me across the court, which contained a stable under one side of the hotel, and up a rickety staircase to a sombre room on the first floor. I immediately inspected the bed—I had brought a bottle of turpentine—but the maid announced with pride that the sheets were washed after every guest and that the hotel was famous for its neatness. I asked her if the natural color of the blanket was gray, and she nodded with a reassuring smile. The linen certainly was clean, and, as a matter of fact, the turpentine was supererogatory. However, I still harbor doubts about the blankets.

What was I to do in this war town seventeen kilometers from the soundless front (I had been told that when Verdun was thundering people rocked in their beds)? It was too hot to walk and there was nothing more to see. There was, indeed, no resource but the necklace of Marie Antoinette.

The room was dark, with a window in one corner. I carried the least uncomfortable chair to this window, and there, amid the silences of the tomb and the aromas of the stable, I read a story of 1784. This was the war zone which it took weeks of plotting and the most powerful influences to reach.

However, there was still the morrow and Bar-le-Duc.

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## HORRORS OF THE HOTEL LIFE IN THE WAR ZONE

PARIS, August 8.

**L**OOKING from the windows of the train between Paris and Châlons, I had seen little evidence of war beyond the rigid sentries with their upright guns standing beside the track at intervals of two or three hundred yards—two beside the bridges which have been rebuilt and are once more of stone. But on the following day, after passing Vitry, the crosses among the wheat became abundant, and between Révigny and Bar-le-Duc there had evidently been no attempt to till the fields, which had a curious burned look. This, I was afterward told, was due to the poisonous gases and frequent bombardments. More than half of Révigny is in ruins, and wrecks strew the way to the far more important town, which is intact.



Once more the train, which had started at Paris and was bound for Nancy, was crowded with officers and soldiers, but a great many descended at Bar-le-Duc, no doubt to go by automobile to Verdun or by branch lines to other points near the front. At all events, I left the train with such a mass of blue uniforms that it was a long time before I could reach the exit gate, and then, as I was the only stranger, I was held up until a more important official could be found to inspect my carnet rouge. As he was very amiable and passed me on promptly, I asked him to tell me the name of the best hotel in Bar-le-Duc. He threw his hands up. *Mon Dieu!* The best! There was a place called *Hotel du Commerce*. But! Well, I had been told at Châlons that it was the "least bad," and started off with resignation. After all, one is not trained to expect luxuries in the war zone, and the hotel at Châlons had been endurable.

I emerged into the large open space behind the station. It was filled with that curious surging mass of soldiers who in time come to seem almost like "properties." There were also two or three gray army automobiles, but not a cab, not a tram, not a porter. I inquired if it were possible to find a boy to carry my bag. No. Visitors were unusual. Boys did not come down to the station in the hope of picking up a franc. Where was the *Hotel du Commerce*? A vague sweep of the hand toward the straggling gray distance. Fortunately, my bag was light, as one takes the least possible on these incursions, but American women hate carrying things, and I had also a book and a parasol. However, there was no alternative and I started off, down a long, winding, dusty road without trees—the thermometer was about 80, and it was half-past 12—toward the town.

Like all French towns, it swept about itself in circles, coiled upon itself, abruptly uncoiled and wandered off into nowhere. As far as might be possible I kept straight ahead, every soldier of whom I asked the way replying that he was a stranger also, and knew naught of the *Hotel du Commerce*. Finally I met a short fat man in civilian clothes, who interrupted himself—he was gesticulating violently to a friend who had arrived on the train—and told me to turn into the long street just above and keep on. It was a very long street and so many similar streets branched out of it that it was difficult to know which was which. And it was dull and dirty and gray and deserted, save for the strolling poilus.

Nevertheless, it had a character of its own! Every hundred yards or so along the base of the houses I noticed a pile of sand bags and a poster printed in heavy black letters and numbers: "Cave voutée, pour 100 (or 50) personnes." It was very hot but my brains were not addled. Bar-le-Duc is subject to frequent air raids and many have been killed by the bombs, which do not bury themselves in the earth, by the way, but explode as they touch and scatter death far and wide. These were the famous stone cellars into which the population tumbles pêle-mêle the moment the whistles shriek. I wondered if it would be my lot to spend a few hours in one of those damp "caves" with a mass of sweltering humanity. Almost I would brave the taube.

I must have walked fully a kilometer from that station, when, asking once more to be directed to the *Hotel du Commerce*, I was told that I stood before it. I looked up and saw faded letters confirming the fact, and then along its lower front in search of a door. The only mode of ingress, a large archway, apparently led to the rear. As I dislike asking too many questions, I explored this vaulted passageway and came upon a door at the side. I opened it without ceremony and found myself in quite the dirtiest cashier's office I have ever seen.

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The girl was even more impertinent and indifferent than the one at Châlons. As girls are now scarce in the war zone, no doubt the few left become spoiled with too much attention. There was a dining room beyond, and I determined to banish my midday

hunger before entering upon further adventures. There are two things that the French, no matter of what degree, morals, manners, or disposition, invariably understand, and those are politeness and formality. You gain nothing by sharpness or hauteur; on the contrary, you stand to lose all. When Americans attempt familiarity with strangers they receive contempt. Bearing this principle in mind, one can never go wrong in France.

As the dining room beyond and, no doubt, the hotel itself, was crowded with officers, there was a manifest intention on the young woman's part to treat me as if I did not exist. I, therefore, inquired in my best manner if I could leave my things in the office and have *déjeuner*. She nodded and I went into a long, low, crowded dining room, which, had it not been for the uniforms, would have looked exactly like a Western eating shed. There was a seat vacant at one of the longer tables, to which I made my way unescorted. The entire company was waited on by two boys of about 16. They looked distracted. The tablecloth was soiled, but I was prepared to accept trifling variations upon ordinary standards with equanimity. I secured the attention of one of the boys, and, being left to my own devices for some time, my eyes, after wandering up and down the room, fell once more upon the table. I made another discovery. It was covered with flies. Large, torpid, viscous flies. I had a vision of these flies rising in a dark cloud from the battlefields of Verdun and traveling to Bar-le-Duc on top of the hundreds of covered army wagons that go back and forth daily.

While I was digesting this horrid fact a plate of potatoes swimming in oil was placed before me. I waved it away. Oil to me is more abhorrent than milk. It was succeeded by a dish of tripe. I covered my eyes and shuddered. *C'est la guerre*. Oh, yes. But—*Mon Dieu!*

I managed to make a spare meal of mutton that tasted as if killed an hour before, and dry potatoes, but dared not touch the water, and rose from that table in the least possible time, determined to accomplish the object of my visit during the afternoon and return to Paris that night. I did not even want to look at the upper rooms. Turpentine I felt would avail not in this hotel, which looked a thousand years old and resurrected from the dead.

I returned to the office. There was now an older woman there, and, chastened by years and the rivalry of youth, she answered my questions amiably. No, there was not a conveyance of any sort to be had in the city. How, then, was I to find the Commissaire of Police and have my *carnet rouge* viséd, how visit the hospitals, which were out of town? She could not say. Then I bethought me once more of the letter given me by the War Office. I would go straight to military headquarters and ask them for an automobile. She vaguely directed me, and once more I started forth, leaving my things in her charge. The woman had told me to turn to the right. As I was leaving the girl called out that I must turn to the left. I revolved with that helpless feeling one has occasionally in the war zone, and they both began to talk at once, as is the habit of French people of that class when giving advice. If they had been ten they would all have talked at once and advised me differently.

I escaped to the street and, seeing a white-haired man standing in front of a provision store, I went over and asked him to direct me. This he not only did intelligently, but ran a block after me bare-headed to tell me of a better turning. I walked quite half a mile and finally reached a fine building situated in a park. I entered the grounds without hindrance, but a soldier barred the way when I attempted to pass under the arch that leads to the offices about the courtyard. He looked amazed. I showed my *carnet rouge*. He drew his eyelids together and I encountered the familiar steel. I was not to be overawed by a common soldier, but to save time I showed the letter. He had been quite polite, but now he relaxed his military mask and smiled. The entire staff was out for lunch and I could not enter until their return, but if I would graciously sit under the trees——.



It was cool under the trees and I was glad to rest. The soldier sent me an encouraging smile occasionally and finally made a triumphant signal indicating that the military nabobs were coming. A moment later several imposing figures marched past. They were chatting amiably and I was thankful that destiny had so arranged matters that I was to ask my favors of them after lunch. I knew they had not déjeuned at the Hotel du Commerce.

I was summoned to the presence immediately. They acted exactly as I had anticipated, for they were Frenchmen, and gentlemen, and of exceeding importance. Of course they read the letter at once; in fact, I shoved it under their noses before they had time to say "How do you do?" and when I asked for an automobile assented promptly.

"Will you give your man orders to get me back to the station for the 5:20 train?" I asked. "I will not sleep in that hotel or eat another meal there if I have to walk back to Paris." They laughed sympathetically and assured me that I should accomplish the object of my visit in comfort and take my train. The chauffeur would take the best of care of me.

So it proved. I visited both of the great hospitals, Savonières and Hôpital Central, inside of an hour, for a military automobile goes like lightning and turns aside for no one. The former hospital is situated in a beautiful park some distance from Bar-le-Duc, and the greater one in a cup of the hills, and looks like a new Western mining town. There are some twenty or thirty barracks, two of concrete; but it is so unmistakably a hospital and nothing else (in France) that a taube recently had no difficulty in picking out the main building and dropping a bomb in the operating room. It killed two men on the tables.

It is not my purpose to describe the hospitals here. I visited them in behalf of Le Bienêtre du Blessé, and later, when writing more fully of that oeuvre, shall describe these and other military hospitals which receive the wounded straight from Verdun. There had been few during the last two or three days, they told me, and the guns were still silent.

My amiable chauffeur then took me for a drive within the city limits, and once more I saw a silent shuttered town. No doubt the greater part of the population had been evacuated (military euphenism for turned out), but I saw thousands of military wagons (camions) and a signpost with an arrow painted on it and the words "à Verdun." It brought it pretty close, but I reflected that this was about as close as I would get. As we approached the station I observed that the roof looked as if it had been through a hurricane, and my driver nodded. Yes, they dropped a bomb there every once and a while. They usually came about 5 o'clock. It was now 3 and I had two hours and twenty minutes to wait in that station.

However, it was easy to get out of, the sky was so blue and clear that the taubes could be seen a long way off, and I certainly did not propose to wait until 5:20 in that hotel. I had retrieved my belongings, visited the police, and there was nothing to do but make myself as comfortable as possible and read Dumas.

The station was already packed with soldiers waiting for various trains. They move so constantly, these poilus, they produce an impression of indescribable confusion. I have never seen them betray the least excitement, any more than I have ever surprised an expression of anxiety on their cheerful faces, but the repose of their officers is unknown to them. Their bodies and their tongues never cease from movement. I often wonder if they ever feel tired. They look as if they could endure Verdun for the term of their natural lives.

There was a small first class waiting room and I took refuge in it. An officer was asleep on a bench. Another was talking to his mother and there were two other women in the room. Presently there entered a drunken Algerian soldier. He was very drunk and he carried a gun almost as tall as himself. As he was out of place in a ladies' waiting room two poilus entered and attempted to induce him to leave. He shouted

defiance and, lifting his gun, flung it to the floor with a crash. It made such a noise that the soldiers without surged to the doorway. It is to our credit that not one of the women jumped. He repeated this performance four times, and we sat quite still and looked at him with curiosity.

If any one had told me a month earlier that I should sit unmoved while a drunken soldier flung a loaded gun on the floor in front of me—twice it pointed directly at me—I should have dismissed him as a contemptible flatterer. But there is something about this military area—well you simply experience no sensations at all. You are in the zone of death. Human life has no value whatever. You, too, suddenly become as callous as if inoculated.

He was led out, and I opened my book. But the room was very warm. I asked the doorkeeper to let me wait for the train on the platform beside the tracks. Of course he refused. Petty officials never deviate from their cast-iron rules. However, he was a réformé, with one arm, and I determined to take a base advantage of him. The next time he had occasion to open the door I was behind him, and I walked out and seated myself on a bench in the fresh air. "Now," I said, "here I am, and here I shall stay. What are you going to do to me?" For a moment he scowled at me, then shrugged his shoulders and walked away. A few moments later the other women followed my example, and we sat and talked, occasionally glancing up through the shattered glass roof; particularly as the hour of 5 approached.

One of the women, who looked like a farmer's wife, judging by her dress and the large basket she held on her lap, told me that she had come from the south of France to the Hôpital Central just too late to see her boy, who was dead of typhoid fever. Once or twice she looked as if she were going to cry, but did not. The mothers of France are stoics these days.

No taubes appeared, and I slept in Paris. The next day I took my wrath to the War Office. I now have a promise of a military automobile for a trip to Révigny, Nancy and Remiremont. No Rheims, no Verdun—unless we can cajole some General within the lines. It is astonishing the high value the French place upon the life of a mere woman. James M. Beck visited Amiens on his way from England to Paris, and within two days of his arrival went off on a tour of the immediate front. The day after his return, off he went again with Owen Johnson, to call on General Joffre. I reminded my friends in the War Office that men were as easily killed as women, even American men. But they seem to think that the explosion of an American woman, especially if she happened to be "of a prominence," would make too much noise in the world to be agreeable. They have trouble enough on their hands.

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## THE WAR ZONE BY AUTOMOBILE

PARIS, August 18.

**O**NCE more I was summoned to the War Office, this time to be informed that although they wanted me to feel satisfied and really see something of the great drama, they would not take the responsibility of sending me so far into the military zone unless I obtained the personal escort of an American Army officer. And where, I demanded, was I to find an American Army officer in Paris? They suggested the American Clearing House.

I took my troubles to Mr. Beatty, through whose hands, expert and generous, so many millions' worth of donations have passed for the benefit of afflicted France, and who

seems to respond automatically to the most unreasonable demand. For me he produced an American Army officer six feet high, very imposing and distinguished, and the matter was settled.

We started on the following Tuesday—Major C., Mme. Lyon, a mechanician, and our driver, Monsieur G. B., whom I shall call the Lieutenant to avoid confusion, although as a matter of fact, and to his natural chagrin, there were no stripes on his sleeve. Refused for the army on account of an accident to his shoulder in boyhood, which prevented him from handling a gun properly, he had offered his services as driver at the outbreak of the war. Like many others, he anticipated a short war, or he would have gone as interpreter to the British Army (he is an Oxford man); that way lies promotion, and for the driver there is none. As he is a young man, wealthy, pampered, living his own life in his own way up to August, 1914, he is now no doubt enjoying the novel experience of hard and incessant work, constant danger and unremitting discipline, with no hope of reward. It was our gain, for he was altogether charming, and it was impossible to pity him, as, gay and grim, he certainly was determined to do what he could do for his country.

The Marquise d'Andigné (who was Miss Goddard of Providence), the President of *Le Bienêtre du Blessé*, was to have been one of the party, but as she was detained at the last minute I was asked to visit the hospitals in her place and ascertain which had received supplies and what each needed most. We started at 7:30 from Paris in admirable weather.

Traveling by automobile in the war zone is far more complicated than by train. Even in a gray military car, with two men in horizon blue on the front seat, you are held up at the entrance and exit of every town and hamlet, and often half way between, by the sudden appearance of a sentinel in the middle of the road, holding his gun horizontally above his head. He is accompanied by two others, who examine your papers, and if they possess the average quick intelligence of their race they make short work of it. If the first in authority happens to be slow, conscientious, and suspicious, he will pore over the papers for five minutes, and not infrequently disappear with them into his hut. Once they held us up so long in the blazing sun that our Lieutenant, who was not a patient mortal, poked his head into one of these tiny headquarters and demanded what was the matter, while even Major C. had visions of being turned back. They would give no answer until the Lieutenant made a second invasion, and then they informed him that they could not understand why the papers indicated four men and one woman in the party and the automobile contained two women. Mme. Lyon's first name is Martin! Why they could not have come out and asked instead of wasting their time and ours can only be explained by the fact that to a Frenchman time is nothing.

All this, save for the heat, concerned me not at all. I had not a second's responsibility on this trip. Major C. and the Lieutenant carried the papers, and although I am a feminist and admit no inferiority to man except in the matter of physical prowess, personally, when I have a man to take care of me, I am as meek as a lamb. He is welcome to all the responsibility and all the work. I never worry him by a suggestion. Our American officer in his khaki uniform, sitting like a ramrod on one of the single seats of the tonneau, inspired both curiosity and respect and spent a good part of his days returning salutes.

Our adventures were almost too insignificant to mention. I, alas! am a mascot. If I were taken to the front and given the hospitality of a trench I am positive that the guns for some inscrutable reason would be paralyzed. It has always been as if some mysterious force surrounded me, permitting me to see all that is necessary for my work at a safe distance, but saving even my nerves from shock. During the San Francisco earthquake I was in Berkeley! It is very annoying. I should have liked an adventurous life.



Nevertheless, the trip, which lasted four days, was more than interesting. It was as unlike traversing the war zone by train as possible. In the first place the roads, which I expected to see (and feel) cut to pieces by the enormous amount of artillery and heavy camions that have rumbled over them constantly during the last two years, were in perfect condition. I don't know when they work on these roads, but while we were in the war zone there was but one short stretch under repair, and they were as dusty as California roads in Summer time. We must have passed during these four days no less than several thousand of these covered army wagons, great and small, which convey to the front every war commodity from soldiers to beef. I asked our Lieutenant how many of these camions France possessed and he said that, although he had never seen the amount stated, each was numbered and he had seen numbers as high as 130,000. This, of course, included every sort of vehicle, and we saw many kitchen wagons. The cooks, by the way, are among the heroes of the war and perish in large numbers.

If I was forced to complain of an unnatural calm during my first two visits into the war zone I had my fill of noise and incessant motion on this trip. Aside from the gray lumbering camions in their clouds of dust, there were, every few miles, "parcs" of artillery, the famous seventy-fives, hundreds of them, either undergoing repairs or awaiting demand. Of course, these parcs were filled with soldiers and their officers, and, indeed, before the end of those four days, it seemed to me that there must be as many men in the further precincts of the war zone doing practically nothing as there were at the front.

In certain of the larger towns, which for obvious reasons must not be named, the streets were so packed with soldiers that the car was obliged to crawl. All of these men were frankly loafing. Some of them were resting after the prescribed number of days in the trench, but as many more had never been to the front at all. They were ordered into the war zone that they might be on hand when needed, but meanwhile they were amusing themselves as best they could, and the majority looked bored. In one beautiful little town through which the Germans did not pass during their retreat from the Marne, I saw a number of soldiers seated on the banks of a stream fishing. Their only excitement they owe to the frequent visits of the taubes, but whether they avail themselves of the cellars hospitably marked "Cave Voutée," I forgot to ask. Probably not.

Every estaminet, every restaurant and the "terrace" before it with the little round white tables, was crowded, as well as the twisted streets and the frequent "place," with these soldiers in their faded blue, which, at a distance, seems to melt before your eyes. They hung from the windows, they gossiped at the pump, they mused on the bridges, and they were lined up in the fields just outside the towns, practicing arm exercise, one, two, three, four. Officers also strolled about, three and four in a party. Even in the villages, those old gray villages consisting of one long crooked street, widening to a "place" in the centre and embracing several "farms," there were often many soldiers home on leave, smoking in front of their houses or playing with their children.

On the other hand, we passed through many more of these villages without seeing a man. The women sat out of doors sewing, and the children swarmed. It is the bourgeoisie which has reduced the birth rate in France. The aristocracy and the poor have large families. Ever since my arrival I have heard almost daily of working class families of anywhere from five to sixteen children. In the great valleys through which we passed these children played bareheaded, but in the Vosges, where it rains most of the time, all the little boys wore military caps.

I also saw a large number of soldiers in the peaceful fields beside the noisy roads, and was told they had been sent by the authorities to help with the harvesting. I shall always be glad that I have seen "with my own eyes" something of the immense number (and I saw but one small section of the zone) of men that France still has at her disposal,

and has not yet been able to use. And, as I have said before, they are nearly all big fellows. It is only the men of the south, of the Midi, that are small, and by no means all of those.

An amusing story came from Bulgaria while I was in Paris, and was sent by Joseph Reinach to Figaro. The Crown Prince of Germany invited the two older sons of the Bulgarian King to visit his headquarters before Verdun and be present at its downfall. The young men accepted the invitation, remained a month, then, very much bored, excused themselves and went home. "What impressed you the most?" their father asked. They replied simultaneously: "The resistance of the French."

The fields devoid of soldiers were a picturesque sight with the women in blue print frocks and white sunbonnets. Old and young, they were hard at work harvesting, and the children played among the stacks. In some of the hotels where we stopped either overnight or for luncheon we saw officers and their families, who had joined them here to save two or more precious days of their short leave. And there was more than one bride and bridegroom. Strange honeymoon, within sound of the guns that promised a quick disunion. The faces of the older wives looked philosophically happy, but those of the young women were drawn and pale. Life was beginning in tragedy; and no doubt twenty years hence they will be as torn with anxiety for their absent sons.

It was in a large and handsome hotel in Nancy (the less said about the average hotel in the war zone the better) where we spent the first night of our journey that I saw so many of these couples and reunited families; as it was as admirably run as in times of peace, I should like to give its name, but forbear lest it incur the just wrath of the enemy.

Nancy is little over five miles from the front, so that the roar of the guns may be heard plainly. It is bombarded by cannons now and again, but I missed one of these delicate attentions by two days. The "caves" are indicated by the double cross of the House of Lorraine, for Taubes are among the daily commonplaces in Nancy.

Major C., our Lieutenant and I were at dinner in the dining-room about eight o'clock (Madame Lyon had gone to bed), when the iron shutters were hastily lowered and the maître d'hôtel came to our table and said solemnly: "It is my duty to tell you that there is a taube over the city and to ask you to go to the cellars." "Are you going?" I asked my companions. "Certainly not," they replied simultaneously and without raising their eyes from their excellent meal. I concluded that the bright restaurant with two men to protect me was infinitely preferable to a dark, damp, rat-infested cellar and sat tight. In a moment we heard a fusillade; the guns were searching out the invader. But whether the taube dropped a bomb or not no one remembered to inquire!

The next morning at six, Madame Lyon, hearing a noise, opened her window and looked out. A group of people were staring upward, and following their gaze she saw a taube surrounded by five French airplanes, which finally drove it off. I, alas! missed this thrilling sight, for although I was awake I was listening so intently to the guns at the front, only nine kilometres away, that I heard nothing else.

## STONE VICTIMS OF "THE MARNE"

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PARIS, August 15.



IN Nancy we met Miss Polk and Miss Ethel Crocker of California, who are associated with Princess Poniatowska (also a Californian and sister of Mrs. William Crocker, but who has lived in France for many years) in a projected work of reconstruction. It is her aim to raise a large amount of money in her native State and rebuild a certain number of the wrecked towns and villages in the war zone. This is a truly great idea, and will redound to the glory of California, which, with the entire West, lags far behind New York and other Eastern States in practical sympathy for the sufferers of this war; but all the same I hope they will let the ruins alone and build the new towns beside them. In the first place, these ruins should be a source of revenue to France from tourists after the war is over, amounting to many millions of francs (Arras by moonlight is said to be the most beautiful sight on earth), and, in the second place, a certain type of smug American, who, without experience or imagination, has refused to believe in the attendant horrors of war, should be encouraged to visit these deliberately wrecked towns and hear at first hand far worse stories than even Lord Bryce has printed. This is the type that always asks: "Now, did you ever meet anybody who really has seen these things, or did somebody hear it from somebody else?" &c. Well, let these self-righteous citizens, who have grown fat on the European war, take a motor trip through the ruined district a year hence and spend an hour or two with the survivors.

It is, of course, legitimate to bombard any town during a battle, if care is taken to spare great monuments, but not deliberately to set fire to it, house by house, when retreating in fury after having missed victory by a hair. When traveling through stark fire ruins of whole towns like Sermaize and Gerbéviller, to say nothing of countless villages, and cities half destroyed, like Révigny and certain sections of Nancy, it was natural to remember the prophetic words of Heine about his own country: "Christianity has in a certain degree softened this brutal martial ardor of the Germans, but it has not been able to destroy it, and when the Cross, that talisman which keeps it enchained is broken, then the ferocity of the ancient combatants will break forth anew. Then—and, alas, this day also will come—the old war gods will arise from their mythical tombs and wipe the dust of centuries from their eyes. Thor will rise and with his gigantic hammer will demolish the Gothic cathedrals."

They would not let me go to Arras, as, although deserted, it is under constant bombardment, while Nancy these days only gets an occasional attention from the big guns, and nobody minds taubes. So far, therefore, although Sermaize and the others are impressive and shocking enough, the most interesting and beautiful ruin I saw, in spite of its sadness, was the little town of Gerbéviller, between Nancy and Remiramont. Situated on a steep hillside, its irregular streets leaving the ridge to dip and rise again, and two years ago one of the prettiest and most thriving of the smaller towns of Lorraine, it is now a mass of broken walls against the sky, already mellowed by time and creepers.

The automobile was obliged to make its way slowly between the débris that lined either side of the narrow streets, and I noticed that families had set up housekeeping once more in the cellars, and even opened shops. Before the war it had a population of about 2,000 (although, as is often the case, large enough for double the number of actual inhabitants). All the men who were not mobilized or did not take flight at the approach of the enemy were shot upon that terrible retreat; but I saw a few smoking philosophically in the shade of the walls before their shops. The business here as else-



where, however, is carried on mainly by the women. One old woman seemed to be doing well with post cards, although, as outsiders are few, no doubt her main support is derived from the soldiers on march. Here lives the heroic Soeur Julie, decorated with the cross of the Legion of Honor, for saving her hospice in the face of Prussian fury. But her story must be told elsewhere. About eight hundred people have returned to Gerbéviller (it was a relief to hear that most of the young girls escaped before the invasion) and are living either in the cellars or the few houses surrounding the hospital saved by Soeur Julie. There is ample room in all directions for their new homes without sacrificing one of the most picturesque and significant ruins of the war.

I think it was at Sermaize that after driving through a number of streets as completely wrecked as Gerbéviller, we came suddenly upon a terrace of houses quite intact. We inquired the meaning of this odd forbearance and learned that these mansions had been the property of Germans, who had been warned before the outbreak of the war and fled. Naturally their homes were spared by their loyal countrymen. Germany not only knew who owned every square inch of ground in France, but where every work of art great and small was installed. One woman who lived in an unpretentious flat in Paris showed me her one rare possession, an ancient silver censer, which was on the German list when they advanced upon Paris. If the French Army surrendered and they spared the city, they purposed to loot it, and their spies had been for years locating every object worth seizing.

Even before the German case became utterly hopeless it seems to me they must have felt very sad at times while looking back over the past and recalling the many objects of desire they just failed to grasp. Outside of Nancy one may see a high hill where one fine morning in September, 1914, the German Emperor and his Staff sat their horses, clad in long white mantles and glittering helmets, a truly superb sight, waiting for the news that the French Army was in full retreat and the hour had come for their triumphal entry through the historic gates of Nancy. But General Castlenau, as all the world knows, reversed this theatrical dénouement, and they made off in hot haste for Strasburg.

We slept at Remiramont the second night, after a moist trip through the Vosges, a mildly pretty range of mountains, so far as we were permitted to penetrate. They are formidable enough closer to the front. Before the American ambulance men conquered them with their little Fords, the wounded were carried out on mule back and generally died. Remiramont is a headquarters for supplies, and we saw a number of officers but few poilus. Major C., knowing that I wanted to go to Thann, a town in that little strip of Alsace retaken in the first days of the war, spent the morning at the military headquarters, where he had friends (he is one of five American officers in France by order of the United States Government), waiting for the return of the General. As it was raining the rest of us spent the time gossiping in the little hotel parlor or strolling under the arcades of the principal streets. When Major C. returned and said that the General, refusing to take the responsibility, had telephoned to the Grand Quartier Générale I knew it was all up. They had said positively that I could not go to any town under constant bombardment, and a military mind once made up is like a steel mask with the key lost.

There is but one way by which a woman can get into any of these bombarded towns, Rheims, Thann, Verdun. After she is in the war zone, if she happens to know one of the Generals there, knows him quite well, so that he feels a certain degree of friendship for her, and if he happens to be in a very good humor, and if the bombardment at that moment happens to be weak or non-existent, as it was when I was at Châlons and Bar-le-Duc, then he will put her in an automobile and whizz her through the famous target. She will hardly have time to experience the expected thrill before she is out again, but at least she can say she has been there.

I, alas, did not know any General, and although Lord Northcliffe had written me that I should have a letter to General Joffre whenever I applied to his Paris office for it, I had not felt like bothering the hero of the war with one more American, particularly as he had been written to death. Nor had I been in France long enough to form ties of friendship with any of the others; therefore I had entered the war zone resigned to a route which, after all, few women were allowed to traverse.

But Major C. was hopeful, and very much crestfallen when word came that he might go to Thann if he liked, but I must remain in Remiramont. Of course, he was too gallant to go without us, even if it had not been his duty barely to let me out of his sight, but he hardly would speak for two hours. Nothing annoys an American man, a real American of the good old stock, more than to fail in the endeavor to get something for a woman that she especially desires and he has pledged himself to obtain. Our charming Lieutenant was almost equally annoyed when I called his attention to this fact, and said that no one hated to disappoint a woman as much as a Frenchman did, but that if he appeared philosophical it was because he had never had any hope. Major C., undaunted, made another attempt at Bar-le-Duc to induce the military authorities there to let us go to a little town named Dugny, within four miles of Verdun, but with the same result. They were on the point of consenting when they decided it was safer (for themselves) to telephone General Joffre, and when I heard that I left the car with Mme. Lyon and went in search of something to eat.

Nothing would have induced me to enter that hotel again, and after my description Mme. Lyon was equally reluctant, although the men were not daunted in the least. So we went to a bakeshop and bought bread and cheese and cakes, and after some persuasion she consented to sit in one of the chairs, sacred to customers, outside the Hotel du Commerce. The French, with all their mental suppleness and activity, are intensely conservative. No one was permitted to sit at those tables but customers; it would not be allowed. And who, I inquired, is there to stop us? Those two boys waiting on some fifty officers, or that girl at the desk who would not move while there was an officer inside the hotel to look at? But it wasn't done. Americans had too little respect—I replied by sitting down and eating a cup cake, and finally she, it being hot, followed suit. No one disturbed us, and in any case it would have been a simple matter to secure the table with a cup of coffee. However—conservatism knits a nation together.

A newspaper gamin of eight, who looked five, had such an engaging little visage that I gave him a penny. His taller companion looked so wistful that I gave him one also. In five minutes I was encircled by at least eight newsboys, all looking at me with ingratiating smiles or deprecating eyes. Not one of them begged. They were far too independent, but they had all the charm of their race and knew how to get what they wanted without sacrificing their pride. I was struck with their dissimilarity in everything else. No two of these little gamin faces were alike, and I recalled that I had made the same observation when traveling in the trains with the officers. There is really no type in France. It is a race of individuals.

It was shortly after we left Bar-le-Duc that Major C., consoled by my assurance that I really had not cared in the least to go to either Thann or Dugny, and was delighted at the prospect of reaching Paris that night (this was not true, but never mind), told us an amusing story of one of his former visits to the front. He was very close indeed and the bombardment was incessant. Nevertheless, he was given a dinner party at headquarters, which, owing to the exigencies of the moment, were in a certain large cellar. The vaulted roof which makes these stone "caves" such safe resorts was hung with Chinese lanterns in his honor, all the high officers available were present, and it was one of the gayest functions he ever attended. This did not surprise him, but the dinner



did. It was exquisite. He had tasted nothing like it in France. It was not the viands that were remarkable, for naturally, in this small outpost, viands were limited. It was the treatment that reminded him of certain stories whose style disguised the paucity of ideas. Finally, after he had produced his contribution to the feast, a box of superfine Havanas, he asked to have the phenomenon explained. He was devoured with curiosity, for he had dined at headquarters before, and many of them. "Oh," said his host, "that is easily explained. We have here the chef of Prince von Bulow, whose table, as you may have heard, was famous. The man is an Alsatian, and French at heart. Shortly after the outbreak of the war he managed to escape through the lines and asked permission to enlist. We accepted his services, and—there you are!"

During the afternoon our Lieutenant invited us to stop at his house in Epernay for tea, and here we were introduced to a singular incident. While we were in the dining-room his maître d'hôtel entered and handed him a slip of paper which, he informed him with that casualness born of war, a Bosche had dropped that morning from a taube. It was dated Berlin, July 26, and had been seventeen days on the way. As no one in Epernay had the enterprise to send it to a Paris newspaper, I give it here for the first time, although in brief; it was Teutonically redundant:

Frenchmen! Your aviators, throwing bombs far from the front, in Germany, have killed many civilians, men, women and children. In Karlsruhe on June 22, 1916, there were forty-eight deaths, among them thirty innocent children. Mulheim was bombarded on June 22, Fribourg July 16, &c. In all these attacks the number of victims was deplorable both in dead and wounded. All of these towns are of no military value, as you can see by looking at your map.

The German military authorities hesitated to believe that the French Government and military authorities were capable of such culpable and barbaric acts which have nothing in common with the conduct of war. It was believed that your aviators had made a mistake in execution of their mission.

Frenchmen! Your aviators did not make a mistake. We have learned to-day that the raids were instigated by President Poincaré whose ear has been open to the base counsels of the English.

Here comes the familiar assertion that the Germans know how tired the French are of war, and are but the miserable victims of diabolical Albion. Then, in another burst of self-righteousness:

Germany wars against the armies of France, not against the civil population, the women and children. She hopes that this remonstrance will be sufficient to prevent any future attacks of this barbarous nature. In case of the opposite she will feel obliged to make reprisals in kind.


You know now, Frenchmen, that that slave of England, M. Poincaré, will be responsible for blood shed by innocent victims, and that it is the barbarity of the English which will oblige us to bring destruction and death to your cities far from the front.

Strange, muddled brains, victims of overtraining that have left whole tracts completely atrophied. This document would be merely funny were it not for the terrible problem which confronts the civilized world in dealing with this abnormal species which has grown up in its midst and can never be exterminated root and branch.

While we were laughing over the ultimatum, read aloud by our Lieutenant, we heard a loud noise at the foot of the hill behind the house, and went to the window. A military train was passing. It was decorated with green boughs, and all the windows were filled with soldiers, singing and waving their caps. They were on their way to the Somme.

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## LE BIENÊTRE DU BLESSÉ

T was during the latter part of May that a number of ladies met at the house of the Marquise de Talleyrand-Perigord in Paris to found an oeuvre on the grand Countess d'Haussonville, President of the first division of the Red Cross, presided, scale for the greater comfort of convalescent officers and soldiers in the war zone, and of that original group those who accepted official positions were the Marquise d'Andigné (Madeline Goddard of Providence), Mme. de Talleyrand (Elizabeth Curtis of New York), Countess de Roussy de Sales (American), Princess Poniatowska (Elizabeth Sperry of California), Mme. Ernest Mallet, wife of the President of the Bank of France; Mme. le General Pau and Mme. Waddington, who, as all the world knows, was Mary King of New York.

Mme. d'Andigné, who has established a reputation for executive ability and conscientious application to whatever she undertakes, was elected President, and Mme. Poincaré became Honorary President.

On the council are thirty-nine names, French, French-American, and American. Among the last are Mrs. Bliss of the American Embassy, Mrs. Ridgley Carter, Mrs. Mrs. Herman Harges, Mrs. Lawrence Slade, Mrs. William Crocker, Miss Crocker, Mrs. Bell, Mrs. Lee Childe, Mrs. Potter, Mrs. Harper, Mrs. Hyde and Mrs. Samuel Watson, wife of the American clergyman in Paris. The French names are among the most distinguished in France, and no list of any oeuvre was ever more carefully chosen both for its effect on the public and for usefulness; coming as it did, late in the day, it was felt to be under a certain handicap.

It was christened "Le Bienêtre du Blessé, Société Franco-Américaine pour Nos Combattants" (The Comfort, or Well-being, of the Wounded; French-American Society for Our Soldiers), and is to exist throughout the war and for six months after fighting ceases. Men in high places, according to custom, became its sponsors, the War Office gave it a "barrack" out at the Entrepôt des Dons, where all the big oeuvres have their storehouses and a central bureau. The Paris banking house of Munroe & Co. accepted the office of Treasurer and receives all donations. *The address of this firm in New York is 30 Pine Street, and any one who is kind enough to answer this appeal with a donation will please send it there.*

I will confess that I wandered in upon that preliminary meeting quite by mistake, being under the impression that I had been invited merely to have a cup of tea and some lively conversation, and that when I found a committee was in process of formation I would have escaped if I could. I had gone to France to write about the work of its women in the war and in the hope of doing something for that great country in my own way, but with the firm intention of not being drawn into any organization. Possibly

no one ever lived who hates sitting at a committee table as I do. However, escape was impossible then or later; and, by degrees, I became infected with their own enthusiasm. After my visits to military hospitals in the war zone I promised Mme. d'Andigné willingly enough that I would do what I could to put the thing through in this country.

No oeuvre since the beginning of the war has been more important than this. When a man has lost a quart or so of blood, after an exhausting period in the trenches, or has undergone a severe operation, the nerves of his stomach are in a supersensitive condition. But in military hospitals the dietary kitchen contains nothing but milk and eggs. Many people have a violent antipathy for both. Personally, I would lie down and die before I would drink a glass of milk, and a recent illness made me appreciate the fact that all the doctors in the world could not have saved me if I had had no convalescent diet offered me but milk and eggs.

Military discipline is inexorable. There are many hundreds of these hospitals in the war zone, and there must be one rule for all. Thousands can drink milk and eat eggs whether they like them or not, and no exceptions may be made for those who would rather die of inanition than touch either. A delicately built man in a trench receives no favor; he must do his part or be dismissed as a Réformé Numero II., and in the hospital a man must take the same chances. At the date of this writing France is still expending two billion francs a month, and to impose a further tax in behalf of an advanced dietary kitchen would possibly lead to a misunderstanding with a large stolid class more than likely to confuse "delicacies" with "luxuries."

The French are the most economical of races, and the peasantry and bourgeoisie have a fundamental antipathy to the word luxury. The lower classes particularly have been too long accustomed to living on the smallest possible amount and putting the rest into the family stocking to sympathize with capricious appetites. Other nations are not altogether dissimilar in this respect, and in all previous wars groups of ladies have supplied military convalescents with the delicacies which save so many lives and hasten recovery. But this war is on too vast a scale. Beneficent ladies take care of the hospitals in Paris and the provincial cities, but in that great district known as La Zone des Armées, crowded with hospitals, but where so many of the towns are half in ruins and largely evacuated by the inhabitants, where few if any of the shops are open, it becomes a problem at times to find an orange to satisfy the last craving of a dying man. No one who has not been in those gray barren towns and villages of the war zone can imagine how sad a tarrying place they are for wounded men too ill to be sent to Paris.

But if the military machine was forced to appear callous, individually it recognized the necessity for a supplementary kitchen, if many of its best men were to be saved to France. Last Spring the Service de Santé (Health Department of the Ministry of War) asked Mme. d'Haussonville to form a great oeuvre by whose means all the hospitals in the military zone could be supplied by voluntary subscription with the necessary delicacies. When one reads the list of these articles demanded one may see plainly enough that they are delicacies, not luxuries—chicken or beef broth, cocoa, farina for gruel, sugar, biscuit, rice, canned fruits, jellies, preserves, oranges, sardines and ham. Condensed milk, as it is in some cases more digestible than the primitive, is also a welcome article.

No one knew better than Mme. Haussonville the mournful necessity for these simple articles of diet, for she goes periodically into the war zone on tours of hospital inspection. In many places a million francs would not buy one of these things, although the nurses in chief (Infirmière Majors) often sally out in desperation and try to buy out of their own purses something that a sick man craves. One told me that she had only two days before tried in vain to buy a few lumps of sugar in Bar-le-Duc, a town of over 17,000 inhabitants before the war and noted for its preserves. But sugar is scarce in France and very dear.



It was in July that I visited the beautiful hospital, Savonières, near Bar-le-Duc and it had just received a consignment from Le Bienêtre du Blessé. Mme. Faure, the Infirmière Major, told me that nothing had ever been more welcome, and that the spirits of the men had gone up with a rush. Above all things the French convalescent craves preserves, under the impression, no doubt, that it is his weary palate alone that longs to be tickled, but as a matter of fact his system craves the stimulation and energizing qualities of the sugar.

This hospital is on a splendid estate leased by the Government shortly after the beginning of the war. More or less sheltered by trees from the indefatigable taube, eight or nine "barracks" have been erected, and down their long sides are rows of cots that look as comfortable as they are neat. As many of the patients as could be moved were lying on long chairs under the great oaks and lime trees. At the entrance to the park was a row of low buildings built for the ever-necessary "bureau," chemist shop, surgical dressings stores, &c., all run with the method and precision characteristic of the French. It was a quiet and sylvan scene when I saw it, but when guns at the front are thundering reminding these men that their comrades in arms are falling momentarily, or taubes are drumming overhead searching out the barracks, it seems to me that sustained optimism must be a difficult feat. If the delicacies always craved by the sick will raise the spirits of men who have been wounded and perhaps mutilated in the service of their country and break the sad monotony of their lives, those in the enjoyment of health and freedom cannot work too hard to raise the necessary money. And let it never be forgotten by those whose slogan in giving, as in other things, is "America first," that had it not been for the military genius of the French at the battle of the Marne there would be no such thing as freedom in the world to-day.

I saw nothing more interesting at these hospitals than the bathtubs for the wounded brought straight from the front. Even officers who have been in the trenches for several days are no clean, to say the least of it, and the first thing to do before the operation is to give them a bath. If they are grand blessés they must receive as little handling as possible. Consequently they are transferred from their own stretcher to one that covers the top of a very large bathtub full of warm water. This stretcher is lowered mechanically from the head down without jarring the wounded man. As soon as he is both clean and refreshed the stretcher is elevated and he is transferred to still another and wrapped in a sheet; then when dry he is carried to the operating table.

One of the many infirmières majors with whom I talked told me there was a second and imperative reason for a private kitchen. Military discipline closes every hospital kitchen in the war zone (both the grand régime and the petit régime) promptly at 6 P. M. and does not open it again until 7 the next morning. If a blessé is brought in after 6 there is not so much as a teaspoonful of milk to give him, and if, as sometimes happens, he is passed on to another hospital early in the morning, he leaves without having had sustenance of any sort. It is difficult for a non-military nation like ours to realize the dry conservative discipline of a nation that has been military for centuries, and has worked out an economy in money, food, time, and men to a point so fine that there is practically no waste.

Witness the immortal tactics of Joffre, who has destroyed the maximum of Germans with the minimum of Frenchmen. But, as I have said before, there has never been a war on such a scale as this, and it is the first time the authorities, always relying upon civilians to do their part, have been confronted with a new problem in the dietary kitchen.

Now, however, if the nurses have private supplies it is a simple matter to make a cup of broth or cocoa over a spirit lamp for a man brought in after 6 o'clock and faint from pain and loss of blood. It is done in five minutes and may save his life. In other



respects I saw nothing to criticise in these military hospitals, although I am told that some of the smaller and newer ones are greatly in need of pillows, which seem to be scarce in France. But those I inspected were clean, airy, run like clock work, and the ordinary kitchen (*grand régime*), for those well on the road to recovery, was abundantly supplied. In one hospital outside of Remiramont I even saw a woman occupying a large room by herself. There are no doctors left in this small town and she had been brought to the military hospital for treatment. When I looked in at the door and saw her gray face surrounded by scattered gray hair I could not imagine for a moment what it was, so little did I expect to see a woman after having gone through some twenty wards filled with men; most of them, by the way, with their legs elevated in wooden frames—an invention, I was told, of Dr. Blake. I never saw any one look more ill. She had had thirteen children and now had a floating kidney. Several of her sons had fallen and more were in the trenches. I have often wondered if she survived.

The Hôpital Central is beautifully located in a high valley just outside of Bar-le-Duc and looks like a new mining town. It is laid out in streets and there must be thirty of the wooden barracks besides two pavilions—long structures of stucco painted white. They are fine targets for taubes and I can't think why they are not painted brown. All of these buildings but one are in charge of Mme. d'Haussonville's division of the Red Cross, Société Française de Secours aux Blessés Militaires; the exception is run by the second division, Société des Dames Françaises. These women, both of the noblesse and the haute bourgeoisie, give their services and work like slaves.

The infirmière major, Mlle. de Sézilles, and the médecin chef walked me through every one of those buildings except those devoted to infectious cases. The day was hot and I had walked miles already, but the doctor was inexorable. He had not wanted to show me the hospital, even although I had brought a personal letter to Mlle. de Sézilles, but had surrendered when I produced my letter from the Ministère de la Guerre in which the privilege of visiting the hospitals in the war zone was extended to me. So he determined I should have my fill.

However, every foot of the way was interesting. Here men were brought to remain until they were well enough to return to the front or be transferred to Paris, the blind until their bodies were strong enough to give them courage for delicate operations or to face life once more. The men in bed were protected by netting from the loathsome flies which swarm in this district, and every counterpane was as white as the crisp gowns of the infirmières. The advanced convalescents in the pavilions were sitting in the corridors that traverse the front, reading or gazing at the charming scenery; if blind, merely sunning themselves. They alone, of all the maimed, look sad.

Mlle. de Sézilles showed me her barrack with great pride, and it certainly was an unexpected sight in a base hospital. Its corridors were set with palms and flowering shrubs, every window had its boxes, and there were pictures above the beds. Each ward, in fact, was a revelation of the taste or purse of its infirmière major. Some were austere, but in many an attempt had been made to relieve the barrenness of a military hospital ward, where the men must lie for weeks, or months, with little to do but stare at a glimpse of the hills, and during long silence unbroken by any sound but the raucous voice of war. There is no question that the wounded in the decorated wards looked more than commonly cheerful, for not only has the Frenchman a passion for beauty but he is the most grateful of all the wounded soldiers. And he would answer politely the most inane question if he were being disemboweled at the moment.

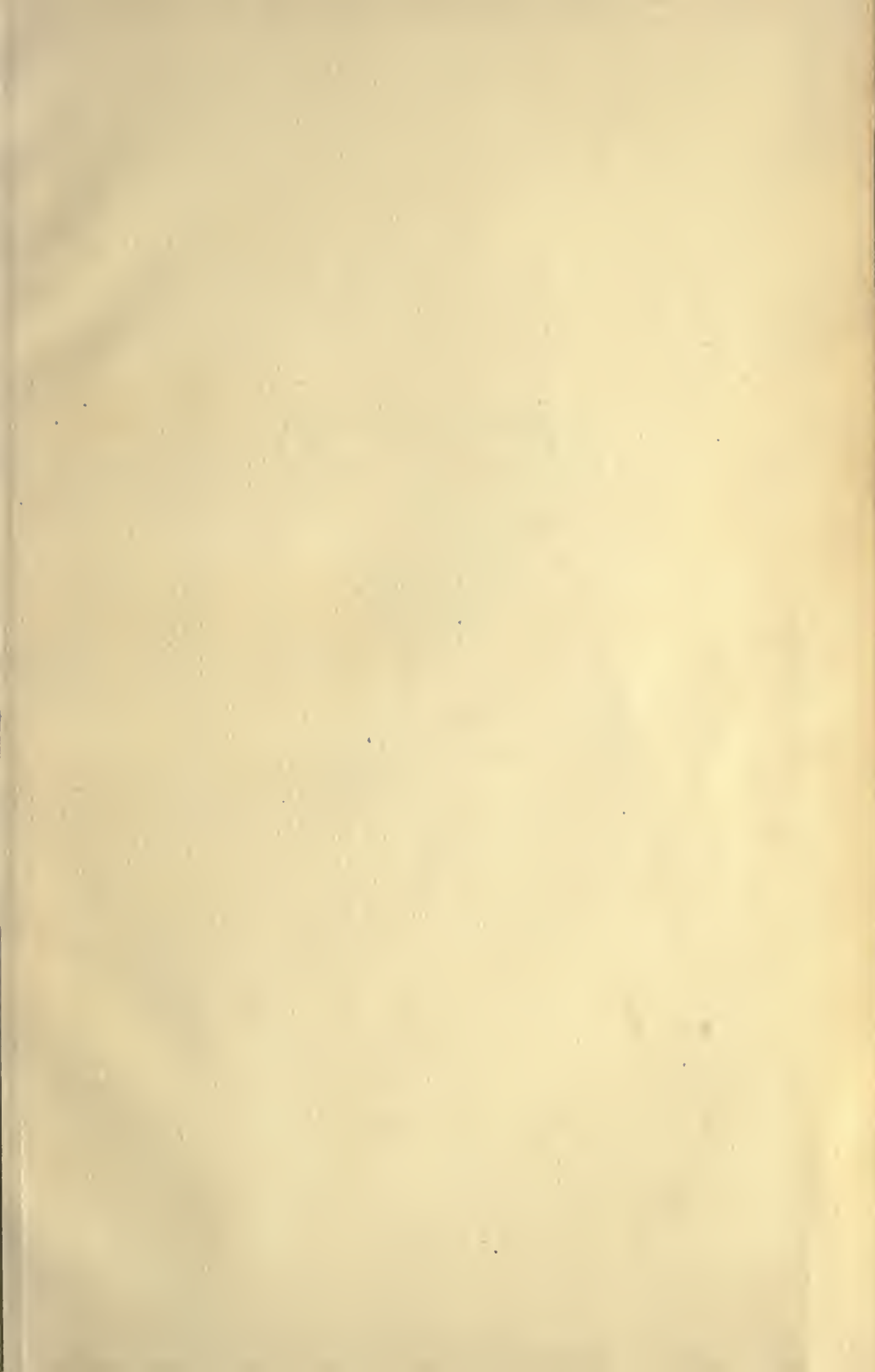
Mlle. de Sézilles showed me a cupboard stocked with the first consignment from *Le Bien-être du Blessé* we had been able to send, and once more I heard how welcome it was. "It is good for the morale of the men, also," she added. "The poor fellows,

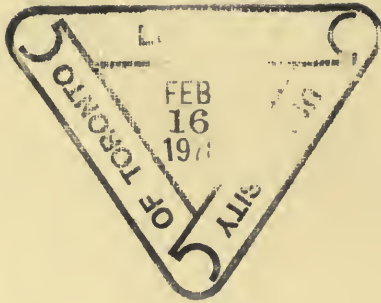
courageous as they are, and gay by temperament, are often depressed. There is nothing like appetizing food, both immediate and prospective, to raise the spirits of a convalescent. No medicine so hastens recovery, and they never looked forward to the pleasures of health as they do to a cup of broth or cocoa, or a slice of ham and a dish of preserves." Then, like everybody else I met in France engaged in any sort of relief work, she spoke with the deepest gratitude of the practical sympathy of the Americans, of their enormous generosity. I told her that the Eastern States had borne the brunt so far, and that California had done well, but that I was waiting for the West to wake up.

Several Americans have asked me why the rich people of France do not run this oeuvre themselves. The answer is simple enough. There are no rich people left in France, not as we estimate riches, at all events. Between the moratorium, which has cut off their rents, the mobilization of their farm hands or workmen, taxes, the increased cost of living, and the constant demands to which they have responded since the first day of the war (I know one woman who runs three hospitals in the South of France out of her own pocket), they find themselves at the beginning of the third year with little to spare. Some have shut up the greater part of their beautiful apartments or *hôtels*, and live in the fewest possible rooms, on the smallest possible sum, giving away every penny they can squeeze out of their depleted incomes.

Take the case of one Frenchman, of the old noblesse, married to an American girl. She brought him a large dower, but he was wealthy and it was a love match. The French trenches run through his northern estate, and he will not be permitted to set foot on it before the end of the war unless his regiment happens to be ordered there. It is ruined in any case. His southern estate is intact, but he receives no rent from his tenants, and all his able-bodied men are at the front—or dead. To be sure the women and boys work in the fields, but so they did before the war, and there is no one to take the place of the absent men. Out of his invested capital he must pay high and ever higher taxes, he is asked every day in the week for a subscription, and I believe he runs a hospital. He would smile at hearing himself called a rich man to-day.

There are so many kind hearts and intelligent minds among the readers of a newspaper like the *Times* that I have not attempted to be eloquent or to make a sentimental appeal. I have merely endeavored to make the case as clear as possible in the hope that all who can afford to give one dollar, or many thousands out of their new prosperity, will respond to the far subtler appeal of the distant soldier suffering in grateful silence for "The Eternal France."





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