



### "They Throw Themselves on the Food"

(An Extract from Henri Barbusse's remarkable book, "Under Fire.")

OUR ages? We are of all ages. Ours is a regiment in reserve which successive reinforcements have renewed partly with fighting units and partly with Territorials. In our half-section there are reservists of the Territorial Army, new recruits, and demi-poils. Fouillade is forty; Blaire might be the father of Biquet, who is a gosling of Class 1913. The corporal calls Marthereau "Grandpa" or "Old Rubbish-heap," according as in jest or in earnest. Mesnil Joseph would be at the barracks if there were no war. It is a comical effect when we are in charge of Sergeant Vigile, a nice little boy, with a dab on his lip by way of moustache. When we were in quarters the other day, he played at skipping-rope with the kiddies. In our ill-assorted flock, in this family without kindred, this home without a hearth at which we gather, there are three generations side by side, living, waiting, standing still, like unfinished statues, like posts.

Our races? We are of all races; we come from everywhere. I look at the two men beside me. Poterloo, the miner from the Calonne pit, is pink; his eyebrows are the color of straw, his eyes flax-blue. His great golden head involved a long search in the stores to find the vast steel-blue tureen that bonnets him. Fouillade, the boatman from Certe, rolls his wicked eyes in the long, lean face of a musketeer, with sunken cheeks and his skin the color of a violin. In good sooth, my two neighbors are as unlike as day and night.

Cocon, no less, a slight and desiccated person in spectacles, whose tint tells of corrosion in the chemical vapors of great towns, contrasts with Biquet, a Breton in the rough, whose skin is grey and his jaw like a paving-stone; and Mesnil Andre, the comfortable chemist from a country town in Normandy, who has such a handsome and silky beard and who talks so much and so well—he has little in common with Lamuse, the fat peasant of Poitou, whose cheeks and neck are like underdone beef.

Our callings? A little of all—in the lump. In those departed days when we had a social status, before we came to immure our destiny in the molehills that we must always build up again as fast as rain and scrap-iron beat them down, what were we? Sons of the soil, artisans mostly. Lamuse was a farm-servant, Paradis a carter. Cadilhac, whose helmet rides loosely on his pointed head, though it is a juvenile size—like a dome on a steeple, says Tirette—owns land. Papa Blaire was a small farmer in La Brie. Barque, porter and messenger, performed acrobatic tricks with his carrier-tricycle among the trams and taxis of Paris, with solemn abuse (so they say) for the pedestrians, fleeing like bewildered hens across the big streets and squares. Corporal Bertrand, who keeps himself always a little aloof, correct, erect, and silent, with a strong and handsome face and forthright gaze, was foreman in a

case-factory. Tirloir daubed carts with paint—and without grumbling, they say. Tulacque was barman at the Throne Tavern in the suburbs; and Eudore of the pale and pleasant face kept a roadside cafe not very far from the front lines.

We are waiting. Weary of sitting, we get up, our joints creaking like warping wood or old hinges. Damp rusts men as it rusts rifles; more slowly, but deeper. And we begin again, but not in the same way, to wait. In a state of war, one is always waiting. We have become waiting-machines. For the moment it is food we are waiting for. Then it will be the post. But each in its turn. When we have done with dinner we will think about the letters. After that we shall set ourselves to wait for something else.

Hunger and thirst are urgent instincts which formidably excite the temper of my companions. As the meal gets later they become grumblesome and angry. Their need of food and drink snarls from their lips—

"That's eight o'clock. Now, why the hell doesn't it come?"

"There's the grub!" announces a poilu, who was on the look-out at the corner.

"Time, too!"

And the storm of revilings ceases as if by magic. Wrath is changed into sudden contentment.

Three breathless fatigue men, their faces streaming with tears of sweat, put down on the ground some large tins, a paraffin can, two canvas buckets, and a file of loaves, skewered on a stick.

Paradis, having lifted the lids of the jars, surveys the recipients and announces, "Kidney beans in oil, bully, pudding, and coffee—that's all."

"Nom de dieu!" bawls Tulacque. "And wine?" He summons the crowd: "Come and look here, all of you! That—that's the limit! We're done out of our wine!"

Athirst and grimacing, they hurry up; and from the profoundest depths of their being wells up the chorus of despair and disappointment, "Oh, Hell!"

"Then what's that in there?" says the fatigue man, still ruddily sweating, and using his foot to point at a bucket.

"Yes," says Paradis, "my mistake, there is some."

They throw themselves on the food, and eat it standing, squatting, kneeling, sitting on tins, or on haversacks pulled out of the holes where they sleep—or even prone, their backs on the ground, disturbed by passers-by, cursed at and cursing.

One sees even Farfadet smiling, the frail municipal clerk who in the early days kept himself so decent and clean amongst us all that he was taken for a foreigner or a convalescent. One sees the tomato-like mouth of Lamuse dilate and divide, and his delight ooze out in tears. Poterloo's face, like a pink peony, opens

# Earthmen Again

**M**OST War Books—and there are thousands—record only impressions. The drama is admittedly too vast for more, except to a chosen few; among whom must be accorded a high place to Henri Barbusse, author of *Under Fire*. Here we have a combination of Zola-like realism, savage in intensity, in spots a near-Hugo breadth of conception, frequently a Rabelaisian sense of humor. Behind it all, we suspect, is the soul of a Socialist, of a man who, under fire himself, has seen and felt, and heard and tasted, and almost more than all, smelled what this war is like. There is in it the note of the rebel who under other conditions might be a revolutionary. Volpatte and his lot are fighting for France, or they would be up in arms against any war government in any country which compels men to revert by millions to the conditions of the beast. The passage quoted as follows is one of those containing the three elements—realism, breadth, humor.—The Editor.

out wider and wider. Papa Blaire's wrinkles flicker with frivolity as he stands up, pokes his head forward, and gesticulates with the abbreviated body that serves as a handle for his huge drooping moustache. Even the corrugations of Cocon's poor little face are lighted up. While we wait for our drink, we roll cigarettes and fill pipes. Pouches are pulled out. Some of us have shop-acquired pouches in leather or rubber, but they are a minority. Biquet extracts his tobacco from a sock, of which the mouth is drawn tight with string. Most of the others use the bags for anti-gas pads, made of some waterproof material which is an excellent preservative of shag, be it coarse or fine.

Silence. Then from the depth of their destitution, these men summon sweet souvenirs—

"All that," Barque goes on, "isn't worth much, compared with the good times we had at Soissons."

"Ah, the Devil!"

A gleam of Paradise lost lights up their eyes and seems even to redden their cold faces.

"Talk about a festival!" sighs Tirloir, as he leaves off scratching himself, and looks pensively far away over Trenchland.

"Ah, nom de Dieu! All that town, nearly abandoned, that used to be ours! The houses and the beds—"

"And the cupboards!"

"And the cellars!"

Lamuse's eyes are wet, his face like a nose-gay, his heart full.

"Were you there long?" asks Cadilhac, who came here later, with the drafts from Auvergne. "Several months."

The conversation had almost died out, but it flames up again fiercely at this vision of the days of plenty.

"We used to see," said Paradis, dreamily, "the poilus pouring along and behind the houses on the way back to camp with fowls hung round their middles, and a rabbit under each arm, borrowed from some good fellow or woman that they hadn't seen and won't ever see again."

"There were things that we paid for, too. The spondulicks just danced about. We held all the aces in those days."

"A hundred thousand francs went rolling round the shops."

"Millions, oui. All the day, just a squandering that you've no idea of, a sort of devil's delight."

"Anyway," Tirloir goes on, "we've not got a dead set on the men, but on the German officers; non, non, non, they're not men, they're monsters. I saw one once, a prisoner. A Prussian colonel, that wore a prince's crown, so they told me, and a gold coat-of-arms. He was mad because we took leave to graze against him. I said to myself, 'Wait a bit, old cock, I'll make you rattle directly!' I took my time and squared up behind him, and kicked into his tailpiece with all my might."