

Perspective

our lot compared with that of the men in, say, the Somme advance, might appear a peculiarly easy one; but my wounds and the illness that succeeded them seem to have enclosed the whole experience in a ring of agony and terror. Perhaps I was too old—I was some months past my 38th birthday when I went to France—or it may be that men of my temperament cannot endure the shock and threat of life in the trenches. I hope, in any case, that my feelings were not typical. For I can tremble now to think of the horror of reluctance that might have overcome me if I had not been incapacitated by my wounds; if I had had to go back. . . .

Even now I cannot describe my experiences to Judith, and yet I have always been conscious that some lurking danger awaits me if I attempt to forget too completely. I am undoubtedly mastering my horror by degrees, and I have had it in my mind to begin a quiet examination of my feelings during those critical five weeks by writing some sort of account of them—not for publication. After I have done that I may be able to speak more freely.

But when I began this book in January, I did it in order to forget. I was in danger of becoming insane then, and I found relief by plunging myself back into the past. And I can see—though I doubt whether anyone else would notice the change unless it were pointed out—how my gradual recovery has affected both my style and my method. I began with almost pure reminiscence and with a strong inclination to trace the subjective rather than the objective trend of my life. But as I grew stronger and less nervous I began to take a delight in the telling of a story; I invented conversations to fit my memory of actual events. Sometimes I was strongly tempted to invent incidents also,