

La Guerre et la Paix and Zola's *La Débâcle*. We must remember that nothing is more modern than modern warfare. The adoption of long range weapons of precision, and the development of rapidity in firing, have brought totally new factors into play on the battle field, and have developed absolutely new sensations and experiences in the soldier of to-day. After all, it is not death but life that is "the Great Perhaps." We all vaguely expect to play many parts before we leave this stage: to see ourselves in many situations, besides the familiar role we know so well, and the inward query ever is "What would it feel like?" "How would I act?" There are few documents in the case, as yet, to tell us how a soldier feels on a modern battle field. Zola gives us a nauseating catalogue of the horrors of war that we feel may be scientifically, but that we are sure are not humanly, true; while Tolstoi paints vivid pictures but spends too much time in trying to prove his own theories of life. To Stephen Crane belongs the distinction of having first told us what civilized warfare means to the average man. The story is a short one—a little over two hundred pages—and it deals with the incidents of two days heavy fighting during the Civil War. It tells the experiences of a young private, his acts and emotions, and as we read we feel the author has, for the first time, given articulate voice to the agonies and hopes and fears that were born during those years of blood and that ever since have lived, dumb and expressionless, in the hearts of thousands of men.

Henry Fleming "had dreamt of battles all his life, of vague and bloody conflicts that had thrilled him with their sweep of fire. His busy mind had drawn for him large pictures, extravagant in colour, lurid with breathless deeds.

"One night as he lay in bed the winds had carried to him the clanging of the church bell as some enthusiast jerked the rope frantically to tell the twisted news of a great battle. This voice of the people rejoicing in the night had made him shiver in a prolonged ecstasy of excitement.

"Later he had gone down to his mother's room and had spoken thus: 'Ma, I'm going to enlist.'

"'Harry, don't you be a fool,' his mother had replied. She had then covered her face with the quilt. There was an end to the matter for that night."

But the next morning he did enlist, and now for some months his regiment had been in camp, and the army had done little but "sit still and try to keep warm." The belief in the reality of a battle had faded from his mind. He grew to look upon himself as "part of a vast blue demonstration" and to spend his leisure time in looking after his personal comfort and exchanging chaff with the only foes he had seen—the pickets along the opposite river bank. This peaceful existence is interrupted by the news that the next day the troops are to engage, and as he lay in his bunk a serious problem faced him:

"He tried to mathematically prove to himself that he would not run from a battle.

"A little panic fear grew in his mind. As his imagination went forward to a fight he saw hideous possibilities. He contemplated the lurking menaces of the future and failed in an effort to see himself standing stoutly in the midst of them. He sprang from the bunk and began to pace nervously to and fro. 'Good Lord, what's the matter with me?' he said aloud."

In the days that followed—for the battle did not come at once—he tried to find his counterpart among his fellows.

"He occasionally tried to fathom a comrade with seductive sentences but all attempts failed to bring forth any statement which looked in any way like a confession to those doubts which he privately acknowledged in himself. And it was often that he suspected his fellows to be liars.

"'How do you know you won't run when the time comes?' asked the youth. 'Run?' said the loud one, 'run? of course not!' He laughed. 'Well,' continued the youth, 'lots of good-nough men have t'ought they was going to do great things before the fight, but when the time come they skeddaddled.' 'Oh that's all true I s'pose,' replied the other, 'but I'm not going to skeddaddle. The man that bets on my running will loose his money, that's all.' He nodded confidentially."

Then after days of weariness and nights of self-torture the moment arrives.

"One grey morning he was kicked on the leg by the tall soldier, and then, before he was entirely awake he found himself running down a wood road in the midst of men who were panting with the first efforts of speed. From the distance came a sudden spatter of fire. . . . As they climbed the hill on the farther side artillery began to boom; the youth forgot many things as he felt a sudden impulse of curiosity.

"He expected a battle scene.

"There were some little fields girted and squeezed by a forest. Spread over the grass and in among the tree trunks he could see knots and waving lines of skirmishers who were running hither and thither and firing at the landscape. A dark battle line lay upon a sun-struck clearing that gleamed orange colour. A flag fluttered."

The story races through a hundred pages and we follow with breathless attention. Some of the scenes are as realistic as a battle piece by Verestchagin, and Zola himself has not often surpassed the terrible detail of the tall private's death, but the whole is given with an air of reserved strength that speaks volumes for Mr. Crane's art. Neither oaths nor blood bespatter the pages as they would in the writing of a weaker man who was trying to tell the same tale, though, as we read, we feel the wounds described twitch our own nerves and are made to realize the position of the lieutenant who, trying to keep heart in his men, "still continued to curse, but it was now with the air of a man who was using his last box of oaths." The battle engages many troops but we are only told the story of the "raw regiment."

"Here they come! Here they come!" Gunlocks clicked. Across the smoke-infested fields came a brown swarm of running men who were giving shrill yells. A flag, tilted forward, sped near the front. . . . He got one glance at the foe-swarming field in front of him, and instantly . . . before he was ready to begin—before he had announced to himself that he was about to fight—he threw the obedient, well-balanced rifle into position and fired a first wild shot. Directly he was working at his weapon like an automatic affair."

The first attack is repulsed, the enemy retreat.

"The youth awakened slowly, he came gradually back to a position from which he could regard himself. . . . So it was all over at last! The supreme trial had been passed. The red formidable difficulties of war had been vanquished."

"But of a sudden cries of amazement broke out along the ranks of the new regiment. 'Here they come ag'in! Here they come ag'in!'"

The man who had sprawled upon the ground started up and said "Gosh." This time the new regiment break and run. Fleming finds himself in the wood, "shambling along with bowed head, his brain in a tumult of agony and despair." He joins a procession of the wounded making their way to the rear and wishes that he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage, but he leaves them as one after another goads him to madness by asking how he has been hurt. At night fall he rejoins his regiment, and the next day they are called on to take part in a forlorn hope.

"As the regiment swung from its position out into a cleared space the woods and thickets before it awakened. Yellow flames leaped towards it from many directions. The line swung straight for a moment. . . . The men pitching forward insanely had burst into cheerings, mob-like and barbaric, but tuned in strange keys that can arouse the dullard and the stoic. . . . Presently the straining pace ate up the energies of the men. The regiment snorted and blew. Among some stolid trees it began to falter and to hesitate."

The charge falters, and the lieutenant, the youth, and the loud soldier try to rally the regiment.

"In front of the colours three men begin to bawl, 'Come on! Come on!' They danced and gyrated like tortured savages. The flag, obedient to these appeals, bended its glittering form and swept toward them. The men wavered in indecision for a moment, and then with a long wailful cry the dilapidated regiment surged forward and began its new journey. Over the field went the scurrying mass. It was a handful of men splattered into the face of the enemy. . . . The youth ran like a mad man to reach the woods before a bullet could discover him. . . . Within him, as he hurled forward, was born a love, a despairing fondness for this flag that was near him. . . . Because no harm could come to it he endowed it with power. He kept near, as if it could be a savior of lives, and an imploring cry went from his mind."

It is impossible, by extracts, to show, as Crane does with remarkable skill, how the two days ordeal by Fire changes the morbid braggart,—how his tinsel bravado drops off, his courage develops, and he leaves the battle-field a man.

"Travail and heavy sorrow
Come to the making of man."

War does this for Fleming, and yet, we close the book with a conviction that war, to-day, is an anachronism. We feel it is so, although we remember that war has stood in the past for much that was finest and strongest in Human Nature. But no one can read this story without feeling that the machine-governed, long distance, impersonal fighting of to-day makes for different and lower emotions than were bred in the hearts of men by the hand-to-hand fighting of a hundred years ago. We think of war still with the emotions we have inherited from our forefathers!

The cry to arms may yet sound in our ears—and to the summons there would be no laggard response—but we could wish that the men who on this Continent talk so gaily of war would ponder this book and realize the sickening mechanical Inferno through which a nation now gropes toward "the red badge of courage."

E. G.