

II

THE SPIRIT OF THE ARMY

THE poser suddenly put to me, as an English officer (put by one whose own thoughts move like lightning and who is accustomed to obedience as swift as the movement of his thoughts), was to give my impression in a sentence of the key-note to the character of the French soldier of all ranks. Any reference to the bravery of the soldier of France would obviously have been both trite and out of place; for that would be to assume ignorance in one's interlocutor, not alone of history, but of all the events of the past two and a half years. And so, without reference to the amazing powers of endurance and resistance, which their enemies, as well as the rest of the world, have been forced to recognise during the present war, I said I thought the key-note quality was a sort of quintessential politeness; and I think my attempt was comprehended; though, of course, it was inadequate, and, certainly, it might easily have been

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