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WORKERS HAPPY AND CONTENTED

Everybody Doing "His Bit" For the Glory of France—Many Women and Boys Are Employed

(By H. J. Greenwall, London Daily Express Correspondent.)

LE CREUSOT, France, Sept. 30.—If the final victory of France depends on human endeavor backed up by machinery, then the issue cannot be in doubt. Almost superhuman efforts to forge the sword of victory engage night and day the hands and brains of many thousands of men, women and children, who are all striving their utmost so that France shall emerge victorious from the titanic struggle that now rages in her territory.

I have been for four days the guest of the Minister of Munitions, and have visited the workshops of Chateaufort, Bourges, Montlucon, Commeny and Le Creusot. How many thousands of shells I have seen, or how many miles of workshops I have traversed, I do not know, but the mass of metal which during that time was cast in the form of guns and shells must eventually weigh down the scale; and the same activity is being displayed in other workshops throughout France.

The first time that one enters the workshops at Le Creusot one experiences a certain feeling of mental sickness. One knows that every blow of a hammer, every turn of a screw will help to destroy life. Furnaces sizzle and crackle; great lumps of red-hot metal obstruct one path. Enormous iron vats tip up and send molten steel blazing through gutters into receptacles ready to receive them, from which rise a cloud of red sparks, filling the air with fire that vanishes into dust before the eye can grasp the beauty of the spectacle.

Metal strikes metal. All round is the grinding of wheels and the hiss of water as the flaming ignis drops into cooling baths. A steam hammer adds its quota of noise to the devil's chorus. Travelling cranes, with great arms of fantastic shape, sweep down from the roof, poised for a moment as if seeking their prey, and then seize masses of incandescent metal in their tentacles and whirl them away.

For a moment I believe myself to be in the midst of a Maritan nightmare; a phantasmagoria imagined by H. G. Wells. I look up and behold a human boy, a small urchin, whistling merrily, who sits in a wire cage and pulls shining levers; he touches one, and the crane and himself are whisked away to another part of the building.

The Iron Hand.

Climbing an iron staircase, between two furnaces, we pass along a gallery to visit the furnace feeder. An object that looks a cross between a steamroller and a locomotive rushes towards us, stops suddenly, and shoots out an iron hand towards a furnace door. Just for a moment it seems to fumble, then it opens it, and draws back in order that a companion arm may thrust in a great shovelful of coal; and then it rakes away the ash! This piece of ingenuity feeds twelve furnaces, and moves from one to the other with extraordinary rapidity.

We do down another staircase, and enter the House of Fire. Flames, blood red, or smaller ones tinged with blue, leap around one's feet. The heat is terrifying. Enormous doors open and display lumps of white-hot iron or steel.

When one becomes accustomed to the glare, and can note impressions one sees men, or silhouettes of men, standing before glowing orbs of fire. The guide invites me to look through a piece of smoked glass, and then I see that each man is thrusting shells into red eyes—which are holes in an iron door, behind which a furnace scorches. When the shell is red hot it is withdrawn and whisked away to be hammered.

Across the workshop is a tremendous iron shutter; a pull at a lever, and the curtain rises to disclose the Devil's Bakehouse. Here shells are baked to a white heat. Before the furnace a man crouches; his eyes are protected by a shade, and he wears a straw hat such as coolies use. Night and day the furnace roars; night and day shells are thrust into the oven; piles and piles of them. When they are baked they are taken away to be put under the presses.

I have seen dozens of these presses during the last few days; some that

have a pressure of a hundred tons, but are so delicate that they can be adjusted to crack a nut; others that pound sheets of armor for battle-ships, or hammer the tops of shells for the eleven and fourteen-inch guns, and others which press shells for the famous "seventy-fives."

Anvil Of Victory. The blow from all of them are blows on the anvil of victory. There is something awe-inspiring in the forging of the shells. They come red-hot from the furnaces, and are twirled round by men with long hooked sticks, who seem to play with them as a child with a toy.

But the shells are not the only produce of the House of Fire. Every few seconds an iron curtain flies up and rolls out a platform, on which is displayed red-hot ingots. "These are the guns," shouts the guide in my ear amid a noise which is deafening. A crane drops an arm from the roof, and a cannon in embryo is swung through the air, and carried away to be pressed. It is crushed as easily as a grocer presses butter.

Along comes another arm, which lifts the steel and drops it in a tank of water, bathes the huge sizzling mass as gently as a mother washes her child, and then swings it softly to another part of the workshop.

Other oven doors open and vomit bars of steel. From the ground appear two almost human but really giant iron hands, which push the steel bars between rollers; backwards and forwards they push until the bar has acquired the necessary elongated shape. Further on a sheet of armor is being rolled by a machine that has supplanted workmen.

"Come and see Hell," says the guide. I turn a corner and behold a sight such as Gustave Dore might have painted had he lived to see Armageddon. For the moment I am stunned by steam, smoke, and fire. Strange, weird shapes fit across my vision; all shouts are in my ears. A hissing and spluttering, and then a moaning like the cry of a thousand souls in torment arises from the pit beneath my feet.

My attention is drawn to a sheet where a man is raking grooves in the earth. I turn again and see a curtain



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of liquid metal pouring from a vat to the ground where it slowly winds itself in sinister fashion through the earthen channels, until the ground is covered with a criss-cross pattern of molten iron.

We cross more miles of workshops to a point where men wearing iron masks are driving holes through steel bars, the first mechanical process in the making of a cannon. In a corner by himself a man crouches before a lamp of steel. He wears a respirator, and the blue light from the sparks of his high-power drilling machine make him look a fairy figure. What is he doing? If his experiments are successful, . . . but that is a story that may not be told. It is sufficient to note that Messrs. Schneider have 16,000 workpeople employed in munition making, and that the output has reached a stage sufficiently high to allow them to supply Italy, Russia and Serbia.

We note the coalfields as we pass to the shell-making workshops, where we trace the process backwards. In one room boys are packing the finished shells to be sent off to be filled; they go away packed, almost like eggs from a farm. In an adjoining room women are varnishing the exteriors; in another great workshop each shell is going through a machine which automatically rejects the bad ones. I watched it for some time but did not see any shells rejected.

Ceaseless Work.

At Chateaufort, a Government factory, munitions are being turned out with astounding speed. In normal times 1,000 workpeople are employed, but now there are 5,600 men and women, and Colonel Jacquot told me that he hopes to increase the number to 7,000 before the end of the year. Here they turn out machine guns by the hundred, gun carriages, fuses, brakes for the "75" cannon and rifles.

I found the workpeople employed under the happiest conditions. Day and night the factory works, and, of course, two shifts are employed. The first begins at 6.30 and works to 11.30, when they break off for an hour and a half, at four, there is a quarter of an hour's interval, and then work is resumed until 7.30 when the night shift begins.

Some of the most delicate work in making the fuses is done by women. I must have seen many thousands of them; all cheerful, bright, fresh and hardy no without a photograph of husband or sweetheart in a locket suspended from a chain round the neck. Many tables at which the women work, had vases of flowers on them, and these neat, trim little women smile as brightly as the flowers.

One aged woman especially attracted my attention. "How old are you?" I asked her. "I am eighty," she replied, "and I am doing my little bit for France."

Apart from the money they can earn, which, of course, is a godsend while "the man" is away, the "going-my-little-bit-for-France" spirit among the women is undoubtedly achieving much, both for the morale of the population, and on account of the extra amount of work that it entails. At one factory the manager told me that the quantity of electric power consumed is a sure guide to the mental condition of the workpeople. When the news arrives that some one has fallen on the field of honor—and some of the factories have a long list—the workmen seem to put on an extra spark, as if they would avenge their fallen comrade.

Unlimited Rifles.

Rifle making, which I saw at Chateaufort, is too well-known to need description. I saw a machine that makes a noise like the squealing of a thousand pigs, but which turns out rifle stocks almost too quickly for the eye to follow. Blocks of wood are put in at one end and emerge finished at the other. "How many rifles do you turn out a day?" I asked the officer. "That I mustn't tell you," he replied, "but I can say that France will never want."

At Bourges I found that the normal number of workpeople, which is 2,000, has been increased to 11,000 and numerous new workshops are being built, which, when finished, will house many thousands more. It was here, too, that I saw shells for "seventy-fives" being turned out by thousands. Pyramids of them fill many sheds. The work of filling these shells is all done by women.

The filling of the big shells is, of course, more complicated. This is done in underground vaults with bombproof roofs. The shells are taken down in a lift, are filled with explosive matter, and are then placed under a hydraulic press which finishes the work. If an explosion takes place, and this is a rare occurrence, no lives are lost. As a matter of fact during my tours I saw only one man who had been injured.

When at the next baseball match, whether as spectator, player or umpire, try a stick of Coca-Cola Gum. If you are a spectator, it will add to your interest, and if you are a player it will help you to play a better game.—au30,liw,fi

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