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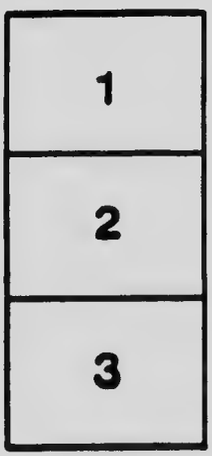

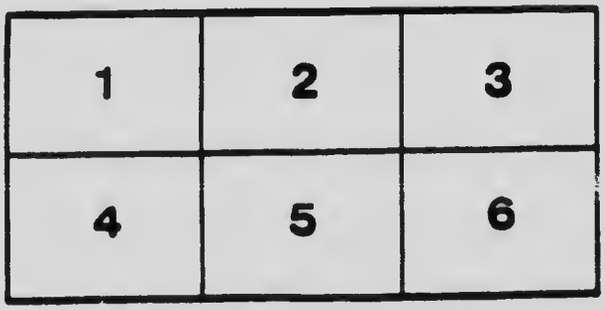

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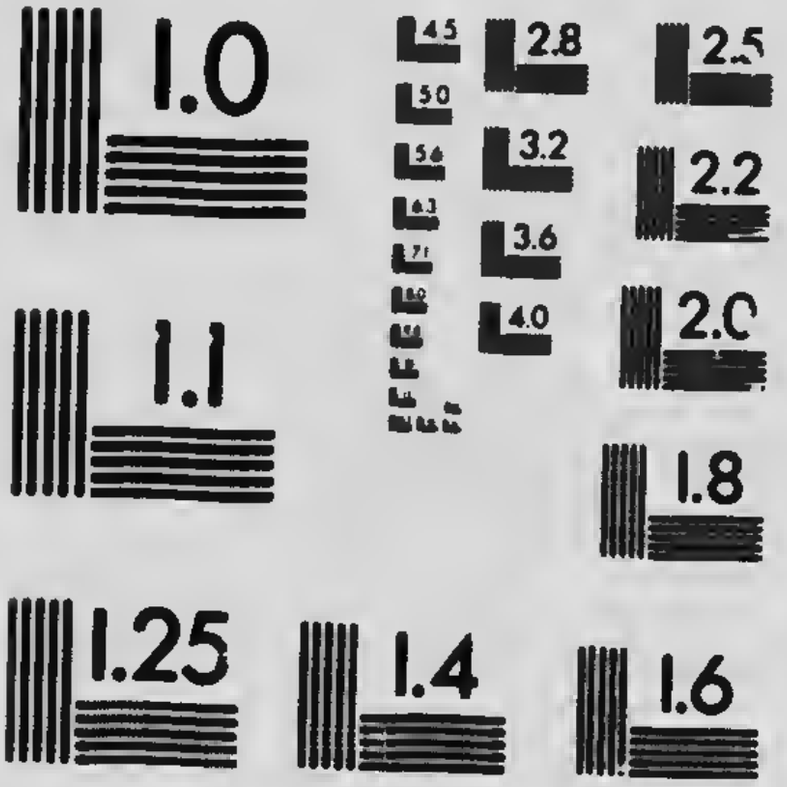

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C'est Doux
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FOR FRANCE

All hope abandon ye who try to enter here.

FOR FRANCE

("C'EST POUR LA FRANCE")

Some English Impressions of the French Front

WRITTEN BY

CAPTAIN A. J. DAWSON

DRAWN BY

CAPTAIN BRUCE BAIRNSFATHER

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

PREFATORY NOTE

FRANCE inspired this little book, but yet is in no sense responsible for it, or for the idea of its production, or for any of its blemishes and shortcomings.

There is here no attempt at comprehensiveness, and no pretence that these pages are in any way conclusive, definitive, or authoritative. No other claim is made for the pictures, drawn and written, which are presented here than that they record a few of the entirely independent and unbiassed impressions formed by two English officers who were very kindly permitted by the French authorities to see something of the French Army in the field. Naturally, such personal notes cannot be really adequate or worthy of their subject from the point of view of any Frenchman. But the unprejudiced outsider's view is sometimes not without its uses among other outsiders; and if these cursory impressions of a few aspects of France in

war-time, as seen through uninformed English eyes, should anywhere prove provocative of real study of the great part played in the war by France, they will have served a worthy purpose.

A. J. Dawson,
Capt.

Bruce Bairnsfather,
Capt.

London, 1916–17.

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I

THE SPIRIT OF THE NATION

C'EST pour la France !

During the unforgettable great days of 1914 a single phrase proved more potent throughout France than any edict ever issued from Versailles. It consisted of four little words, by comparison with which all other words were as empty air ; in response to which the impossible was hourly and as a matter of course forthcoming ; in opposition to which no circumstances or considerations of any kind whatever could for an instant prevail. These four words were :—

" It is for France."

In France these words are still the most potent in the language, after two and a half years of stress and strain more terrible than any ever before known in Europe. The magic words still mean all that they meant in 1914 ;

but to-day they mean also a great deal more. By force of circumstance and the development of the world war this phrase, whilst retaining every particle of its old invincible and wonder-working power, has taken on a wider scope of meaning and has come to signify even greater things—far greater things—than it connoted in the heroic days of autumn, 1914.

The Boche, in his savage onslaught upon the cherished ideals of our civilisation and chivalry, has succeeded in infinitely enlarging for every Frenchman, and for every Frenchwoman, the meaning of "France." All the money in the world, all the skilled organisation ever evolved in Prussia, could not purchase that which since August, 1914, has been freely given, given with a smile and without a question, in response to those four simple words: "It is for France."

In 1914, "It is for France" meant precisely that; and the world needs no explanation now of the effort, the sacrifice, the heroism which these words called forth. The imminent peril of Paris; the pressure of the ravening horde of Germans afire with the lust of blood, conquest, and plunder; the stemming of the tide of invasion; the defeat—complete and final, be it said—of the German plan of campaign matured through forty years of calculated preparation;

For France!

these things are not forgotten. "It is for France" was then a sufficient quittance for the last gift the manhood of a nation can offer: its life-blood; a demand which no man or woman in France would question.

"Greater love hath no man than this"—We all know the sacred passage. In a spirit of glad and proud sacrifice France offered her all in 1914. But in the stark procession of bloody months through which we have lived since then it has fallen to the criminals of Europe, to the Boche, to the Kaiser and his Generals and Ministers, to perform the miracle of enlarging beyond all recognition the practical and spiritual meaning for ev man and woman, aye, and for every boy a. girl, in France, of the words: "It is for France." From out the infernal, flame-torn murk of a great crime—judged either by its motives or its results, or by both, there can have been no more dreadful crime in history than Germany's murderous advance through Luxembourg and Belgium to France—has arisen the beacon light of a great glory. To herself and to the world France has discovered her own soul, as neither the Revolution nor 1870 discovered it for her. She has risen to heights unapproached in those days. And this miracle by which a

monstrous crime has been most nobly answered may be described very briefly.

In 1914, as has been said, the words: "It is for France" were sufficient to move the people of the great Republic to offer their all for their country; for France, and for that alone. Since then, and since the world has had an opportunity of learning just what German *Kultur* really represents, "It is for France" has come to mean for the French people: "It is for Humanity, for Liberty, for Justice, for Civilisation; it is for the sake of the little people whose lives are all before them, and the children as yet unborn." Potent though the word "France" may have been in 1914, it is far, far more potent to-day, for among all the French people it has come to stand for the hopes and ideals of modern Christendom.

For the instant yielding up of life in the cause of patriotism the old meaning sufficed. For the power of unwavering endurance; for the maintenance by day and night, month in month out, and for any period of years that may prove necessary, of the sort of active sacrifice, the stark, unceasing heroism which is typified for all time by France's achievements at Verdun and on the Somme; for this, an ideal even greater than the service of France was

needed. The Kaiser's legions supplied it; *Kultur*, as expounded in Belgium and in northern France by the Huns of the twentieth century, provided the needed expansion of the old intimate and cherished ideal embodied in the phrase: "It is for France."

To-day, as the writer has found for himself in the French trenches, from Nieuport to Belfort, there is not one soldier of France but knows himself to be fighting for a cause even greater and nobler than that of national patriotism. For that, the *poilu* would face death readily enough. But now he will do far more. He will steadily face life, as it must be lived in those foul jaws of death: the muddy, bloody front line trenches of France and Flanders; and face it, if need were, till, not wounds, but old age brought release—for the sake of the France which now has come to mean for him the redemption of mankind; the safeguarding of civilisation and morality, of decency, gaiety, beauty: the things that have made life sweet for all of us who are Allies; against the unendurable threat of the brute savagery of *Kultur*; the dominion of mere force, mechanism, and Prussian organisation.

"It is for France" easily called forth the swift, heroic sacrifice needed to write "Failure"

across the plans of the German High Command in 1914. "It is for France," with its later, more spiritual, and infinitely enlarged significance, will sustain for whatever period may prove necessary, no matter what its duration, France's great part in the complete effacement of the German peril. A greater cause arose, a greater need than even France in all her inspiring history has ever faced; and with the greater need there came a greater, more far-reaching, and more nobly selfless effort than chivalrous France had ever made before. Sure and true as steel in the hand of the master swordsman, the new appeal pierced right down through all the intricate and complex surface coverings with which our sophisticated twentieth century life envelops us, to that secret spring of chivalry which, active or passive, fully developed or dormant, is still, and far more emphatically so to-day than before the war, the very core and kernel of the French character from the highest to the lowest.

This central cause, this motive—apparently quite beyond the comprehension of the Boche—must be recognised by all who seek to understand and appreciate to-day the spirit and attitude of the French nation and the French Army. It is fundamental; it permeates, rules, and

explains every department of French life. The writer, though a foreigner, looking about him in the French trenches with the uninformed eyes of the stranger, yet could no more avoid consciousness of the existence of this great motive force than he could have closed his ears to the reports of the Boche guns. It is as much the mainspring of daily life and conduct for every *poilu* in the trenches, as for the Commander-in-Chief and his Staff at G. Q. G. The cause of the Allies in this war is as an actual fact the cause of humanity and civilisation, of the liberty of Christendom. In France to-day that literal fact is intimately understood, realised, and acted upon, not by this section or the other, but by every man and woman, by every boy and girl in the land.

The French people are not merely *at* war. They are *in* the war. Each man and woman, for all he has and is, is pledged to the service of the Allied cause; the cause of liberty and civilisation. That to-day is the precise meaning of the words which open all hearts and all doors in France, and carry the sons of France smiling into the presence of Death himself: the only enemy to whom they ever will surrender:—

C'est pour la France!

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

misunderstood. Some much greater word is needed for this pervading essence of chivalry; but, even though one may lack the adequate word, I do believe the idea was perfectly sound and correct.

On a wet and moonless night not many weeks ago, when the only available starlight was the ghostly, intermittent sort which comes from Boche star-shells, soaring and hanging over the gruesome wreckage of "No Man's Land," the writer had occasion to make his way from one French company headquarters to another along a much-battered firing line, "somewhere in France." As guide, one had been fortunate enough to borrow the services of a corporal who had some little English. Himself, in civil life, the trusted servant of a Paris bank, this corporal had a brother acting as deputy manager in a famous London bank. My guide had never, himself, been in England, but as we threaded our way behind the watchful sentries and around the shell-scarred traverses of a line which was too close to the Boches to permit of the use of an electric torch, we spoke in whispers of Paris, of Algiers, of British rum and French wine, of the curse that came with the building of the Tower of Babel, and of other things equally varied.

Presently, we came to a spot where the parapet had been badly smashed by a Boche shell that evening, though the darkness was too black to permit of my realising that till the point was passed. My guide called a halt here, and I heard him groping in the wet blackness before me.

"Now," said he, after a few moments, "if you will put your left foot on my shoulder, here, and let your right foot get a bit of a grip on the side of the parados, the next step forward will clear you. Then please wait a moment for me to get in front again."

Those were not his precise words, because his English was only a little easier for him than my French for me. But that was the gist of it. It is characteristic of trench life that it quickly teaches everyone to recognise and obey superior knowledge. I obeyed my good guide before realising what he was doing. In obeying him, I learned that he had calmly placed himself in a hole in which the water reached his waist, to make sure of my getting past an awkward corner without inconvenience. He could not have done it otherwise, without the exposure for me of climbing out of the trench and going "overland"; and there was considerable dropping rifle fire from across the way. He had a

long night's duty before him in the fire trench, whilst I should shortly reach the comparative comfort of a company headquarters' dug-out.

No aristocrat playing host in his own home could possibly have been more charming than my corporal guide in his laughing belittlement of the sacrifice he had made. When, too late to prevent it, I realised what he had done, and tried to thank him, his touch in seeking to convince me that he was just as wet before, or would have become just as wet if I had not been there, was as delicate and light as the most polished master of the art of hospitality could have made it. It was not a question of a corporal's civility to an officer, either; but rather of a French soldier's hospitality to an English soldier in a French fighting line.

But one is oppressed by a sense of impotence in writing of this thing. The fault is no doubt the writer's if he can find no words in any sense adequate to convey the impression made upon him by this thoroughly characteristic little incident. Yet I am not sure if any writer could find words that would do it justice, since it concerns an essence, a spirit too fine to be imprisoned within the rigid confines of mere words. At least, it will be understood and appreciated by those who know of their own

personal experience the life of the front trenches. And that so fine a spirit should survive, and indeed thrive and develop, as it certainly does among French soldiers, in the savage surroundings of the firing line, is to my thinking a marvellous tribute to the height, quality, and sincerity of France's civilisation.

There is nothing new in all this, though its bearing upon France's part in the war, and its triumphal emergence from the bloody and terrible tests imposed by this war are new, and of vital significance. But the spirit these things illustrate has been long enough inherent in the French people. It has always been recognised and honoured by the real seers, the men truly gifted with vision, in other lands. Robert Browning, writing half a century ago, voiced this finely in his "Incident of the French Camp." The lines are worth quoting, and rereading, for the spirit to which they pay tribute was never more alive in France than it is to-day.

"You know, we French stormed Ratisbon:
A mile or so away,
On a little mound, Napoleon
Stood on our storming day;

* * * *

"Just as perhaps he mused, 'My plans
That soar, to earth may fall,
Let once my army leader Lannes
Waver at yonder wall,'——

Out 'twixt the battery-smokes there flew
A rider bound on bound
Full galloping; nor bridle drew
Until he reached the mound.

"Then off there flung in smiling joy,
And held himself erect
By just his horse's mane, a boy:
You hardly could suspect——
(So tight he kept his lips compressed,
Scarce any blood came through)
You looked twice ere you saw his breast
Was all but shot in two."

The lad gives his Emperor the news that they have won him Ratisbon, and that his flag has been planted in the market place. The Emperor's hopes soared again.

"The Chief's eye flashed; but presently
Softened itself, as sheathes
A film the mother-eagle's eye
When her bruised eaglet breathes;
'You're wounded?' 'Nay,' the soldier's pride
Touched to the quick, he said:
'I'm killed, sire!' And his Chief beside,
Smiling the boy fell dead."

No soldier, French or British, could read those lines of the English poet without a quickening of the pulses. None, I think, who has been privileged to serve beside French troops in the present war but will admit that the invincibly chivalrous spirit to which Browning

paid tribute may be found animating every unit of the Army of France to-day.

Lacking altogether the poet's mastery, let me tell quite baldly of a single typical instance that came within my own knowledge not many weeks ago.

All ranks in a certain Zouave battalion now proudly wear the aiguillette which in the French Army is the tangible reward for a unit's special mention in despatches for distinguished bravery in the field. One company of that battalion is commanded by a captain who bears one of the great names of France, a name to which he has added lustre since the first of November last. At a certain stage in the process of re-taking Douaumont that captain found himself with his company separated by a strip of fire-swept, coverless mud, some two or three hundred yards in width, from his commanding officer. It was essential to get messages back to his senior, even though the carrying of them looked like certain death. Several orderlies were employed upon this task, as necessity demanded, during the day; and all save one were killed or wounded, either in coming or going. One, the youngest of these runners, actually succeeded in making the return journey four or five times, without sustaining any more serious wounds

than scratches from shell splinters, and bruises caused by being thrown violently as the result of the concussion of heavy shells.

Finally, this young runner crawled into the shell-hole occupied by his captain, and handed over the scrap of paper on which some necessary instruction had been scribbled by the colonel at the rear. Looking up as he finished reading the message, the captain noticed that the runner's face was paper white under its splashes of mud and blood, and that his head was newly bandaged. Looking further, he saw that an evacuation label had been fastened to the man's tunic. Clearly, he had been through the doctor's hands, and had been ordered to the rear, as a casualty.

"But you are wounded, my child," said the captain.

"A trifle in the head, my Captain."

"The medical officer has bandaged you, and I see you must have been ordered to the rear. How came you to make your way out here again, after so many escapes, when you were set aside for hospital and treatment?"

"But surely my Captain does not suppose that I would have gone back without seeing him for permission, and to take my leave! Now, with your permission, my Captain, I will get back, because my head——"

But he had no further strength for speech, and never could have won back through that hell of mud and blood and whizzing bullets and roaring projectiles but for the assistance of a comrade who was unhurt.

Three weeks later, in hospital, that runner was still in a very critical state, by no means out of danger, with a big jagged hole in one side of his head. This is mentioned to show that it was no slight disability he had to face in his entirely voluntary return journey for the purpose of saying good-bye to his captain. He had been told by the medical officer to hand his message to another man for transmission, and himself to wait his turn for a stretcher so that he might be taken to the rear, he being totally unfit to stand, not to mention scrambling and fighting his way across three hundred yards of shell-holes under a devastating barrage.

This may be poetry, in essence, like the lines of Browning. But it also is literal fact, naked and unadorned. I have been over the ground during the past few weeks, and spoken with those primarily concerned. It happened on the Verdun front, early in November, 1916. But I cannot pretend to think it an isolated or very exceptional incident. One knows of many others like it. It is mentioned here because it

is typical, and because it serves to illustrate the characteristic quality which I have inadequately described as quintessential politeness—not being a poet.

Like every other officer who has ever held a section of trench opposed by Boches, I am acutely conscious of the extreme efficiency of the German military machine. Far be it from me to dispute the statement that Germany started this war possessed of the most deadly engine of destruction in the shape of an army that the world has ever known. Even now, when in France and in Flanders the Boches have learned that, man for man and hand to hand, their infantry cannot stand up against the infantry of France or that of Britain; even now, one readily admits that they possess a wonderfully deadly and formidable fighting machine which will probably not be broken for many long months to come. One can even imagine that many great leaders of the Boche armies would dismiss with a contemptuous smile the incident of the Zouave runner with his broken head, crawling out over the corpse-strewn, blood-soaked mud to say good-bye to his captain. They are not greatly concerned with the individual feelings, mental attitudes, and spirit of the " cannon fodder " they command.

And that is why I venture to assert they must in the end be beaten to their knees, despite the potency of their organisation and the cold completeness of their plans. That is why they failed utterly in the autumn of 1914. That is why their finest troops have been beaten back yard by yard on the Somme. That is why their vast concentration before Verdun failed them; not in the effort of a day, but in the continuously repeated and increasingly reckless struggles of the bigger part of a year. Their organisation can command and obtain the orderly sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of machine-like troops, the most devastating avalanches of projectiles, destruction upon a hitherto undreamed-of scale; but there is one thing which not all the mechanism nor all the General Staff ingenuity of the Fatherland can produce—or, as I believe, in the long run, withstand—and that is any equivalent in the individuals who compose their armies to the unconquerable, indestructible spirit of chivalry which enables every soldier of France to-day to resist even unto death, with a smile on his lips and with pride in his heart.

III

PAUL DUPONT, GROCER

Most stories are told with a view to the recording of something singular and out of the ordinary, the portrayal of a character remarkable because in some way rare and unusual. The simple story of Paul Dupont is placed on record here for precisely opposite reasons, and solely because it has nothing in the least singular about it, but, on the contrary, is typical to the point of commonplaceness. There is nothing whatever special about the good Dupont. He is a standard sample whose replica you shall find by the hundred in every regiment of the French Army. He is a lovable fellow, blessed with not one fraction more or less of any sort of endowment than the general run of his comrades; and his circumstances are merely typical. That is why he is mentioned here.

Paul Dupont was born in the year 1886, and in the town of Dijon, where his father carried

on a small grocery business. Childhood brought him no more serious adventure than the scalding of his right foot (which was bare and tender at the time) as the result of a surprise raid on the domestic hearth, in which he succeeded in upsetting a large pot of coffee. He carries the only moderately honourable scars of that escapade to-day, along with a few of more recent date.

At school, the son and heir of the Duponts earned no particular distinction; but neither was he ever in any serious disgrace; and well before the end of his schooldays the boy had begun to make himself quite useful in the grocery shop.

The first big event of Paul Dupont's life came when he attained his majority in the year 1907 and entered the Army for his three years' period of service, thus accepting in the ordinary course the responsibilities of every normal citizen of the French Republic. Paul did not in the least desire the soldier's life. It seemed to him that the grocery business in Dijon, with the various interludes of amusement and social intercourse which it permitted, held superior attractions. But he no more thought of discussing or seeking to evade the common lot of citizenship than an English boy would expect

to evade schooling, vaccination, the change from knickerbockers to trousers, or his own share in that primal legacy which imposes upon most of us the need to earn our own living by the sweat of our own brows. It was obviously more desirable to be a citizen of France than to have been born in any other land; and, equally obviously, one could not be a real citizen of France without learning how to defend France in case of need; just as one could not be a real, grown-up, twentieth-century man without the rather boring process of learning how to read and write and add up columns in the grocery account books. And, naturally, one wanted to grow up. One wanted some day to take unto oneself a wife, and be the master of a household. You cannot expect to keep your cake and eat it too.

Whilst never having experienced the least desire to take up the profession of arms, and, to tell the truth, having looked forward with some secret qualms of trepidation to his period of service, Paul Dupont found the life (in 1907) by no means wholly unpleasant. For the first time, he was introduced to the world outside the narrow confines of his parents' circle in Dijon. Among his comrades were men of many different grades and kinds, including some who

knew Paris as well as Paul knew Dijon; a few who had been in Algeria, one who knew Morocco, and several who already had seen England, Canada, and other lands. A few there were of whom the respectable grocer's son felt that they were dangerous customers, clearly to be avoided off the drill ground. But there were quite a number, including one or two intimates of his own section, whose horizons, mental and social, appeared to Paul to stretch out to fascinatingly remote distances, and to embrace whole worlds of interest beyond the ken of Dijon folk.

Paul Dupont did very creditably well during his term of service, and finally reverted to Dijon and grocerdom an acting corporal, possessed of the confidence of his sergeant, and the respect of his section; not to mention a much larger share of self-respect and confidence, of resourcefulness and adaptability than had been his before.

That was in 1910. Towards the end of that year Paul lost his father and, under the guidance of his thrifty mother, took upon his own shoulders the proprietorial cares of the grocery shop. Thinking things over of an evening, in the little living room behind the shop, Paul often told himself that his three years of military

service had perhaps done a good deal more for him than simply teaching him the necessary citizen's knowledge of how to help defend his country in case of need. He might not even now be quite so accomplished a man of the world as some good fellows he had met in the Army; but what an infinitely wider knowledge of men and affairs, what a much firmer grasp of things he had than in those innocent days before his twenty-first birthday, when he had done no military service, and his world was definitely circumscribed by the environs of Dijon! Then he had been a mere grocer's lad; but now—now Paul felt that he would at least know how to comport himself if he should ever be called upon to interview the President of the Republic; and, what was perhaps of greater practical moment, life being the workaday business that it is, how to conduct himself in the company of some confidence trick swindler from Paris, or some perfectly respectable, if hardly less astute and wily, person representing a pushing firm of grocery wholesalers!

It was at about this time that Paul Dupont began definitely and of set purpose to ponder the whole extensive question of matrimony, with special reference to Mademoiselle Berthe Lapierre, the only daughter of a farmer in the

district, with w[illegible]m he had continued to carry on the regular business dealings begun long since by his father. Paul's mother, a stern and somewhat exacting judge where her son's choice of a mate was concerned, admitted in due course, and after searching and prolonged investigation, that there probably were less capable as well as less comely maidens in the locality than Mademoiselle Berthe. Later, the good woman allowed her feelings to run away with her to the extent of admitting that, upon the whole, since that Admirable Crichton, her son, was in any case likely to marry somebody sooner or later, men being the weak creatures they were, she really saw no very urgent reason why that fortunate somebody should not be Berthe Lapierre, who, if she could handle and sell butter, for example, as well and deftly as she made it, would perhaps, in the fulness of time, prove not wholly unworthy of a practical share in the administration of the grocery business. But before Madame Dupont reached this, for her, almost effusive stage in her relations with pretty Berthe, it is perhaps needless to say that she had had long and serious talks regarding the practical aspects of the contemplated marriage with Monsieur and Madame Lapierre; discussions which, it may be added,

resulted eventually in Mademoiselle Berthe bringing with her into the quiet little Dijon *ménage* a dot which enabled Paul to enlarge the grocery business quite considerably, and to make his bride in every sense a partner in a concern which now promised quite to outgrow the master's youthful recollections of it.

For Paul Dupont and his young wife marriage brought a smooth and placid happiness. Their joint life, ministered to and discreetly watched over by Madame Dupont, was full of sufficing little interests and moderate prosperity. Its salient events were, first, the birth of their little daughter, before the end of their first year as man and wife, and then, when the little Blanche (Madame Dupont's baptismal name was Blanche) was just two years old, the passing of Paul's mother, after a sudden attack of pneumonia in February.

This was a severe blow, and one which brought home to the young couple a fuller realisation than had been theirs before of the very active and helpful part which the old lady had played in both their lives. Very strange at first the little house seemed in the absence of the dominant personality which had ruled it so thriftily for five and thirty years. But Paul Dupont learned now to his satisfaction that

Berthe, his wife, had not earned his mother's critical approval without good cause. Himself, he had but the poorest sort of a head for figures, and in the matter of the business accounts had always relied implicitly upon his mother. Berthe now displayed a quite remarkable proficiency in this and in sundry other directions; and the business showed no signs of suffering seriously from the family's loss; neither was the little Blanche neglected for a moment. The bride who had been able to win Madame Dupont's approval was indubitably a good and thrifty wife.

Napoleon said: "Every soldier carries a Field Marshal's baton in his knapsack."
(He also carries a few other things.)

IV

A COMMONPLACE SOLDIER OF FRANCE

So the spring of 1914 came and passed in quiet Dijon; and when, towards the end of June, M. Duchemin, the tailor, came to measure Paul Dupont for a new black suit—the previous best suit having been taken into everyday wear since February—he asserted with waggish gravity that the grocer was laying on flesh, and would presently have to be charged more for his clothes. The Duponts were not great readers of newspapers, the Dijon news seeming to meet the most of their needs in this respect; and the events of late July fell upon them like a thunderbolt from a cloudless sky. Then came the mobilisation proclamation, and it knocked, as with the cold knuckles of Destiny, at Berthe's gentle heart. As for her husband, though he put a brave face upon the matter, as became a Frenchman who had served in the Army of the Republic, yet he naturally was not glad to

be called from his young wife and little daughter, or to contemplate the shutting down of his business.

"It is for France," said Monsieur the Mayor, in a stirring speech; and that, of course, is a claim admitting of but one answer. Also, it was obvious that the barbarians across the Rhine, with their extraordinarily swollen heads, meant nothing less than the destruction of France; and it would clearly be necessary to demonstrate to them that mere brute force, however grossly concentrated, could never accomplish that. All the same, Berthe, though she tried her best, could not altogether keep back the tears. Still, she smiled bravely when Paul wrote out in bold, flowing script his notice to be posted on the shop shutters: "Closed until the return from Berlin," and was glad to accept her man's cheery assurance, backed by that of every woman whose husband was too old to serve, that the whole thing would be over in three months.

And so the shop was cleaned and closed, barred and bolted, and Berthe, with little Blanche and two trunks, went out in one of her father's farm carts to stay with her parents, whilst Paul, with glistening eyes and a broad, if slightly tremulous, smile showing under his fine mous-

tache, went swaggering off to join his regiment, full of patronage and good counsel for those less thoroughly versed than himself in the military arts. If Paul nursed an aching heart in his now somewhat fleshy bosom, at least he allowed no sign of it to dim his frank French eyes, to subdue the cheery good-fellowship of his voice, or to reduce materially the normal number of occasions per hour in which he permitted his evenly-set white teeth to gleam through his moustache—like scampering rabbits' sterns seen through dark undergrowth—as his lips parted in laughter, or in his characteristic smile; quick as a flash to arrive, leisurely as summer twilight to disappear.

As with so very, very many Frenchmen, the first essentials for the genuine campaigner were his by nature and inheritance; in his temper and disposition lay the root and fibre of the good soldier, who knows very well how to die, but persistently refuses to learn how to be beaten; who will find food for his humour in the pursuit of the forlornest of forlorn hopes, but is apparently incapable of learning how to surrender. Paul Dupont, in these and other matters, was a thoroughly typical Frenchman, rich in those inborn qualities which make the French the most resilient and unconquerable of

peoples. (It must never be supposed that the French people, as a people, were conquered in 1870. Their condition a dozen years later clearly proved them unconquered.)

"France is decadent, and England negligible," said Germany; "the people of the one country so soft and frivolous as to be incapable of fighting; those of the other country too deeply immersed in their shop-keeping and their pleasures to face battle."

Was there ever in history an example of solemn priggishness more bat-eyed; of pompous self-inflation causing more complete blindness in its victims to the character and qualities of everyone outside their own immediate purview? These bespectacled pundits of Prussia cast myopic, lack-lustre eyes upon the jests and amusements of Frenchmen, and oracularly opined that:—"This people cannot be serious." They solemnly weighed in their balances statistics about English football and British trade, and, with ponderous fatuity concluded that:—"This people will never sacrifice its sport and its business in the interest of any other people. Therefore, we can conquer the French in a few weeks. Britain we can ignore. Russia we can deal with at our leisure, after our Heaven-ordained troops have occupied Paris. Vorwaerts!"

During the first three months of the war we all learned a good deal; and the German High Command learned that the most shameful exhibition of savage "frightfulness" the modern world ever saw had not availed to save its plan of campaign and of conquest from complete failure. No matter what might follow later, the original Boche plan, upon the success of which Germany staked and lost (among other matters) her honour among the nations, was entirely broken and defeated. All manner of details remain to be analysed, classified, and explained by the historians. This one fundamental fact stands out plainly for all the world to read, and has so stood, writ large in letters of blood and fire all across northern France and Belgium, since the last weeks of 1914. The aggressor, the self-confessed modern Hun, has since called Heaven and the neutral nations to witness that he wages war only in self-defence. And so perhaps he does—to-day. But no amount of propagandist jugglery by German professors can ever erase from the world's history that page upon which the Boche plan of invasion stands recorded, with all its bestial savagery, its shameless "frightfulness"; and, over against it, in French and British and Belgian blood, the words: "Defeat" and "Failure"; the answer

of civilisation to the Hun; the sure promise of that penalty, that punishment for the Boche, short of the uttermost fulfilment of which no soldier of France, or of any one of the Allied nations, will ever relinquish his rifle to any lesser potentate than Death.

Paul Dupont also learned a great deal during those first epoch-making weeks of the war. Incidentally, he escaped death narrowly several times a day, and apparently by a miracle on four separate occasions, the second of which brought him full corporal's rank, while the third earned for him a coveted decoration in bronze and the chevrons of a full sergeant. So that by Christmas Dupont had become an officer, albeit non-commissioned; and, be it said (especially in matters connected with the commissariat), the father of his platoon.

V

THE LINE BEHIND THE FRONT

By the time the stage of trench warfare was reached, and the Boche's murderous onslaught finally checked, Sergeant Dupont was a veteran campaigner. The Frenchman, always a connoisseur of comfort and good living in his civilian capacity, qualifies as a veteran campaigner with quite amazing rapidity. Alert, thrifty, ingenious, and a past master of adaptability, he will extract a semblance of rude comfort—and less rude at that than anyone else would expect—out of a muddy shell-hole, before the average slow-thinking Boche soldier has realised that the place is occupied at all. In a trench, having secured tolerable comfort by the swift utilisation of every possible contrivance which can be conjured out of his surroundings, he will proceed, between bombardments, to the work of decoration and furnishing. This may, at first sight, appear a trivial detail. It is not. It is a vital fact;

one of several which will be found to have an intimate bearing upon the final overthrow of the Boche.

Whilst Sergeant Dupont and his surviving comrades were qualifying as veterans, the French authorities behind the lines were bringing similar talents (more highly developed) to bear upon the gigantic task of providing those facilities which make it possible for the French soldier to retain his high standards of decency and civilisation, even in the thick of this most terrible war, in which the whole weight of German skill has been brought to bear in the scale of decivilisation and the sort of savagery the Boche calls "frightfulness." Thus, Sergeant Dupont was now receiving a letter every day from his wife in Dijon. No postage stamp was required for this letter; and there were few days indeed during which the sergeant in his Soissons sector trench did not send a letter, also post free, to his wife.

The lover and compiler of pure facts—say, a German professor—would doubtless be able to set forth here the precise figures of the French Army's daily mail-bag, from front to rear and from rear to front; and having tabulated the figures would feel that he had satisfactorily disposed of that detail. The present writer has

been negligent enough to omit to obtain those valuable figures; but he did not omit, while in the French fighting lines, to note the vitally important part played by free postage in the life of the French Army to-day. There are comparatively few soldiers in the lines who do not write and receive one letter every day. Deadly spots there are, of course, where letters, like rations, must take their chance of being held up at any time by persistent barrages of enemy fire. But the writer has seen dug-outs set aside in the French trenches, with rough little lean-to tables, for the express purpose of letter-writing. In the same way, he has taken over front line trenches from French troops, where the prevailing conditions as to mud, weather, and enemy trench mortar and other forms of fire have been quite deadly, and where, none the less, he has found most noteworthy attempts, not alone to secure decency and rough comfort, but artistic effect, in the lattice-work revetting of dug-outs, and forms of ornamentation recalling quaintly the earliest, prehistoric forms of art, when civilians and fighting men alike were cave-dwellers.

Broadly speaking, the letters come and go every day, to and from the bullet-swept observation and sentry-posts of the front line and

the soldiers' homes in every corner of France, and of Algeria, too. And they are a great factor in that wisely-thought-out, ingeniously maintained humanising process by which the soldiers of France, defying all the cold savagery of Boche methods, are enabled to preserve for themselves the decent amenities of civilised French life, and the sane jollity and good humour of their twentieth-century French outlook, even in the midst of conditions a good deal more horrible than any that their mediæval ancestors were called upon to face.

From the farmhouse outside Dijon, Sergeant Paul Dupont in the trenches received, on a certain bright early winter's morning near the end of 1914, a letter which gave him more than the usual amount of food for reflection. All the letters that came from his wise little wife gave him something to think about. They were very typical, very French, and very helpful. There never was lacking in them the pleasing proportion of sweetness and sentiment which an affectionate husband desires. But, by the same token, not one of them was without two other features of first-rate practical value and importance: First, a full, true, and particular account of the health, daily doings, and general outlook of wife and little daughter; and, secondly,

some kind of obviously sincere exhortation to the sergeant himself on no account to let his home interests worry him, or give him the smallest anxiety, since the writer was perfectly competent to watch over these in his absence, and the first essential, of course, was that he, the fighting man, should be able to give unreservedly and of his best to the national cause of beating back the invader and restoring peace and security to France, so that there should never again be any breaking up of the little home they loved so well.

If the German General Staff could read, with imagination and understanding, an average day's sample of the letters received by her soldiers in France's fighting lines, the experience might carry them quite a long way toward realisation of one lesson they have to learn: that all their military science, and all the wonderful and quite ruthless organisation of their own man-power (and that of their unfortunate prisoners) can never possibly serve to crush the fighting spirit of France; still less, to defeat her Armies on the Western front, interwoven as these are with the continually growing Armies of Britain, backed up by the inviolate might of Britain's Navy, and an output of munitions far greater than any that the world has ever known before.

Such letters would provide instructive reading, even for a people so curiously blinded by their ambition and egoism as the Boches are, especially if they were compared with the sort of epistles of which hundreds have been found in the pockets of German prisoners on the Somme and before Verdun. It is apparently an every-day matter for the Boche in the firing line to receive letters from his womenkind which are one miserable wail over the conditions prevailing at home; a sort of whining assurance that: "If you have a bad time in the trenches, you are to remember that we at home are in many ways just as badly off, and perhaps worse."

It is not too much to say that in the French fighting lines, as in the British trenches, such letters are absolutely unknown. I would go much farther, and say that among the millions of letters daily distributed in French trenches, there are very, very few which are not of directly stimulating and incentive value. There are very few which are not an active spur to the French soldier, exhorting him to be ever striving; encouraging him to singleness of purpose and invincible good cheer; inspiring him to constantly redoubled efforts and never-failing resistance, for the honour and glory of France, for the cause of humanity and civilisation, and for

"Where are you living now?" "Well, since they knocked the Casino about such a lot I'm living in the Hotel."

the sake of his own home and women and children.

In this, as in many other matters, there is a fighting line behind that French fighting line which the Boches know. It is occupied by the wives, mothers, sweethearts, sisters, and daughters of France. Rarely, indeed, is even the briefest interruption tolerated in the marvellous network of communications between this second fighting line and the soldiers of France at the front. And the sustaining value of the system of mental and emotional reinforcement furnished by this second line is something too great for figures to indicate. It may be a thing beneath the consideration of the war lords and professors of Germany. (It certainly would seem to be beyond the scope of their understanding.) Yet, in the humble opinion of the present writer, after careful observation of its outworking in the French trenches, it is far from being the least among a variety of factors which, regarded in combination, have convinced him that, if this struggle were to last for twenty years it would still leave the Kaiser's armies as far as ever they were from defeating the "exhausted" armies of "decadent" France. The soldier who has once observed their influence in the fighting line cannot but salute the women of

France with deep-felt admiration, gratitude, and respect. In theirs, the second fighting line of France, there is a deal more of genuine, individual, and spontaneous will to resist and to conquer than the writer has been able to discern in any portions of the Boche front line which it has been his fortune to face. Germany's "cannon fodder"—the brutal phrase is their own—are finely drilled, scientifically disciplined, splendidly equipped, and ably directed soldiers. As individuals, regarded in bulk, they have not a tithe of the steadily burning, alert determination to endure and to conquer which animates the rearward fighting line that is so finely held by the women of France.

VI

ENDURANCE FOUNDED ON A ROCK

It was said (before the last and perhaps most unconscionable digression) that on a certain bright winter's morning, in the trenches near Soissons, Sergeant Paul Dupont received a letter that gave him more than the average allowance of food for thought. In this letter the sergeant's wife reminded him of certain minor elements of the stock they had left in the Dijon shop which would not improve by keeping. "My wish is," she said, "that you should permit me to reopen the shop, for a few weeks at all events, for the purpose of selling off any oddments of stock which might suffer from being any longer kept." But several pages of close writing were required to present the proposal in all its special and general ramifications.

Sergeant Dupont turned the matter over and over in his mind whilst inspecting all the rifles

of his platoon; he then reconsidered it at leisure whilst eating his midday meal; and, later, he went over it all again, methodically, from start to finish, and with due regard to every atom of grocery and every possibility of domestic wear and tear involved, whilst supervising the construction of a little observation and sniping post, which was so artistically concealed by means of an admixture of brushwood, wire, and earth that it survived for months unsuspected by the Boche observers, and produced an almost daily crop of Boche casualties of very considerable dimensions.

Almost, the good Dupont was moved so far to depart from his own custom and that prevailing among his comrades as to discuss this purely domestic and private question with a fellow sergeant or two. But it did not actually come to that. French soldiers in the trenches have long, long talks, and, as with their good comrades in the British lines, their range of subjects is infinitely varied. But it is rarely, indeed, that a man's domestic affairs are ever put forward for discussion. These matters are strictly reserved for the sanctuary of the French soldier's inner mind.

(The writer has overheard in the slimy depths of an exceedingly muddy bombardment shelter

one soldier carrying on two arguments as nearly as might be simultaneously with men on both sides, whilst overhead big shells crashed and bullets sang; one argument, conducted throughout with decorum, on the Immaculate Conception, and the other on the relative merits of Boche and British hand grenades, with occasional dissertations on the Vickers-Maxim. The theology may have been a trifle mixed in parts, but the case for the British bomb was triumphantly established.)

Sergeant Dupont wrote one letter home in which he evaded the vital issue; and then, with the deliberations of forty-eight hours behind his pen, he wrote welcoming and agreeing to the good Berthe's proposal; pointing out that he considered it very admirable in her to have conceived so sound a project; that he warmly appreciated her watchful care of their joint interests; and that she was to remember that on no account must the proposed work be continued for an hour if she, his dear wife, found it taxed her strength unduly.

And then, having sealed this up for the post corporal, he went out over the parapet, with a small patrol of five men he could trust, and visited a certain Boche sap-head, in the murk of a misty winter evening, with results entirely

satisfactory to himself and disastrous to the four Boches who were at work in the sap. Sergeant Dupont and his friends had marked the spot down carefully before dark, and reserved their bombs for a fifteen-pace range, so that all that was left of those Boche sappers consisted of remains of too fragmentary a nature to be of practical value to the cause of the Fatherland; albeit certain scraps of equipment which descended from above upon Sergeant Dupont and his men, as they backed cautiously away from the scene of their little triumph, did lead to a rather unkind muttered reference from one of them to: "Deutschland über Alles!"

From that day forward the correspondence between the sergeant and his wife took on a substantial new interest. You are to remember that there are (fortunately) very many replicas of Paul Dupont in the French Army, and very many Berthes in that fighting line behind the front which has already been mentioned. The same change that set in now in the correspondence between Sergeant Dupont and his wife was at the same moment taking place in the correspondence of hundreds of other French soldiers of all ranks, and has been going on ever since. Like Sergeant Dupont himself, it is absolutely typical, pertaining to the foundations

of France, and ministering daily to the unequalled endurance and resisting and recuperative powers of the French Army.

Within the month Madame Dupont was able to report that she had successfully disposed, without loss, of all the perishable or semi-perishable stock in the little Dijon shop, and that customers were asking for more. Their old friends and patrons had no wish to take their custom elsewhere, and it would be a sin, the good wife thought, to think of keeping their shutters up during the whole of whatever period might be required for Paul, assisted by his comrades, to complete the task of driving out the hated Boche. M. ——, the traveller for Messrs. —— & Cie, had called that morning and offered to supply Madame Dupont with an excellent line of such and such a saleable stock, upon terms the most proper and even generous. Madame had not clinched the bargain, however, preferring to await her good man's approval; for she remembered, of course, that little matter of the odd seven and a half francs in which M. —— had not altogether shown to advantage in the month before the war. It was possible that the traveller for Messrs. ——, due in Dijon two days hence, might have something even better to offer; but for her part, Madame Dupont

felt compelled in justice to say that, judged upon the sample she had seen, the first offer was one not lightly to be rejected.

In any case, she awaited with anxiety her good Paul's consent to her placing orders in one direction or the other, and keeping the shop open, if she should prove competent, as she very well knew she would. Her man must on no account fear the work being too much for her, or causing any sort of neglect of the little Blanche. On the contrary, the business greatly interested her, and would help to make the period of their separation pass less slowly; whilst as for their little daughter she never had been better in health or happier in mind since her dear Papa went to the war than she was now in playing at helping mother behind the counter, and keeping make-believe accounts on a newspaper in the snug little room behind the shop. Incidentally, as Paul would note from the copy of accounts enclosed, the net profits had shown a beautifully steady, if slight, increase each week, so far. Madame could not hope, of course, to do as much with the business as her good man would do if he were there; but, what would you? The pay of a soldier of France, even when a full and highly respected sergeant, must necessarily be small; and apart from the pleasant usefulness of weekly profits, a business

kept even moderately warm was better than one absolutely shut down.

The sergeant's reply was, of course, a foregone conclusion. Yet it took a full three days to ripen into written words, and meanwhile afforded its writer in the trenches much agreeable food for cogitation. Again Berthe was warned against allowing her strength or peace of mind to be strained in any way, and warmly commended for her wifely care and industry, and for the thrift and ability she had already displayed. The characters of the different commercial travellers and their principals were minutely analysed on paper for Berthe's information, and opinions given on this and that detail of business routine. So the correspondence waxed steadily in practical interest, until, as regards all serious and major decisions (matters of policy, so to say, as distinguished from administrative detail; for a grocery business, look you, to be adequately conducted, calls for both policy and administration), Sergeant Paul Dupont was in a sense carrying on a business in Dijon from the firing line near Soissons.

This again is both typical and indicative of very much. One can easily imagine a narrow-minded and short-sighted leader raising his eyebrows over these things, and claiming that Sergeant Dupont might have been of more prac-

tical service to his company and to France if he had given no thought to a grocery business far behind the lines, and had been allowed no opportunity for sustained correspondence about domestic and civilian details with his wife. Fortunately for herself and for her Allies, France has been blessed with leaders neither narrow-minded, short-sighted, nor wanting in imagination. Knowing well their compatriots, they realised the overwhelming importance to every Frenchman of what may be called the currency of civilisation—the amenities, "the little things he cares about." They realised also that what our cause in this war demanded was, and is, not alone swift strokes of heroism, but, and above all, infinitely resilient and tireless powers of endurance and resistance, in face of prolonged and bitter strain. Having all this in mind, the French authorities, with that invincible admixture of humane kindliness and logical shrewdness which is the Gallic birthright and prerogative, so far from opposing it or checking it, have devoted tireless skill, ingenuity, and forethought to making possible and easy precisely that sort of development in the lives of their soldiers which came to Paul Dupont.

If there should be critics of such a policy, if any would question the soundness of this emi-

THE DREAM.

Owing to the frequent recurrence of this dream, the worthy Herr Fritz von Pickelhauber has practically decided to abandon looking at illustrations of French African troops.

nently French attitude of mind, which may be traced in most of the military regulations in force in France to-day, and in the spirit which prevails from end to end of every sector of the French trenches I have seen, there is one reply that I can offer which has the merit of exceeding brevity; for, whilst it will stand for all time as a monument of heroic endurance, and an irrefutable evidence of the superb resisting powers of the French Army, it consists of but one word :—

Verdun !

VII

TRIFLES

THE first incident that drew the attention of any individual officer to Paul Dupont in this war was the merest trifle, hardly worth mention, perhaps, save that the incident, like the man, possesses the interest which attaches to all things typical. It was truly a commonplace of French army life since August, 1914; just as Paul Dupont is a commonplace, average type of French soldier.

It happened before Dupont won his stripes that the soldier detailed to act as orderly for the service of the officers' meals in his battalion headquarters' dug-out in the support-line trenches was killed by a chance bullet through the head. Dupont's company was called on to supply a man for this duty for the time being, and, perhaps by chance, or possibly because his healthy good looks and rather particular care of his appearance had been noted, Dupont was detailed.

(It should be said that Dupont began the war as a private soldier, although in peace he had reached acting corporal's rank. He was a sergeant, however, well before the end of 1914.)

The cooking was done in a little bit of a shelter some thirty or forty paces from the dug-out in which the officers messed.

It is to be noted that, however barbarous and primitive the immediate surroundings forced upon them by this war, the officers and men of the French Army invariably strive to introduce into their lives every possible makeshift that ingenuity can contrive to represent those amenities and refinements of civilisation which are so dear to all Frenchmen. The German officer, as we know, will take considerable pains to secure his personal safety and bodily comfort, and to supply himself with an abundance of food. The French soldier, of any rank, will take greater pains and use far more ingenuity over securing some of the minor amenities and suavities in the midst of the enforced barbarism of the front lines; and the fiercest strafing that Boche gunners can put up is never permitted to absolve the Frenchman from the sacred responsibilities of hospitality. The arrival of a brother officer at a meal-time means the provision of an extra course or so, and, sometimes, a hurriedly written menu card, even

though a Boche shell may have unroofed the dining cave.

It happened that the Boche gunners were specially full of hate on the morning of Dupont's first day in the officers' mess. It happened also that the colonel and adjutant of the regiment then stationed behind the line arrived in that sector of the trenches just before the midday meal on a tour of inspection. The battalion medical officer was acting as mess president, and, after consultation with the cook among the drugs and bandages of his first-aid dug-out, the doctor produced a little menu card that would not have discredited an artist's cabaret in the Latin Quarter of Paris. There were comic cherubs bestriding flying shells, and a quite imposing list of dishes, beginning with the battalion's one and only tin of sardines and ending, with a noble flourish, upon a box of dates hurriedly "borrowed" from a company officer who still possessed some remains of a recent parcel from home.

A really choice thing in omelettes preceded the only meat course, and as Paul Dupont was hurrying along the trench with this dish a shell burst close behind the parados with a thunderous crash. The waiter and his burden were well spattered over with wet earth, and a jagged shell splinter drove its malevolent way clean through the

fleshy part of Dupont's left arm. Fortunately, the precious omelette was safely covered, first by a dish, and then by a sandbag tied over all. Paul stumbled, and fell on one knee, but retained his hold upon course number three of the *déjeuner*. Pulling himself together, he shook off the worst of the mud and succeeded to admiration in serving the omelette all round the packing-case table.

The last officer to be served was the doctor, who noticed with a start that the waiter's left sleeve dripped blood. With a word of apology to the company, he withdrew with Dupont to the trench outside, examined the wound, and bound it up securely with a field dressing, at the same time giving Dupont a message to the cook to send a substitute waiter, while the Dijon man went to the rear for further treatment.

But, much to the doctor's surprise, the rest of the meal, right down to the coffee, was successfully served by the same Paul Dupont. And then, while the other officers were smoking, the doctor seriously tackled Dupont outside, not without some pretence at sternness.

"Did I not tell you to send another waiter, and yourself go back to the dressing station?"

"Yes, my Lieutenant; but there was no other waiter to be found, and the cook could not leave his pots."

"But surely, my lad, you must be suffering a good deal of pain with that arm of yours? There is a hole clean through it. It's no use you pretending you don't feel it. And you are the colour of paper. Come, now, don't tell me you are not suffering!"

"Ah, no, my Lieutenant, I would not say it. But surely it is for that I am here. It is good to suffer in the service of France, and it was necessary that your guests should eat."

"Eh, well!" said the doctor. And again: "Eh, well; but that is true, my child. Well, get you back now to the dressing station."

That was how Paul Dupont won his first wound stripe, and incidentally, perhaps, his first friend among the officers. He did not in the least suppose that there was anything out of the way about his attitude in this episode. And he was right; for the incident and the man are both typical commonplaces of the French Army to-day. That Paul Dupont saw nothing at all out of the way in his conduct is sufficiently shown by the circumstances of his second wounding, which was a deal more serious, and came considerably later on.

There had been a successful though costly attack, in which the Boche was very severely punished, whilst the French also suffered heavy

losses. Paul Dupont was sprayed down one side of his loins by shrapnel, and found himself lying helpless in the mud at the bottom of a shell-hole, his right side cruelly lacerated. It was impossible for him to move, and that perhaps was as well, since at that time the surface earth was being swept by a hail of machine-gun bullets. After a time Dupont saw a figure sway for a moment on the edge of the crater and then fall, staggering in the mud, within a couple of yards of him. Directly afterwards he recognised the captain of his own company, who had just been caught by two machine-gun bullets, one in the left knee and one in the thigh. Dupont essayed to speak to his captain, and very probably his speech had some semblance to a moan, for he was badly hurt. All that the captain was able to make out was that Dupont said something to the effect that his side was badly torn.

"Eh, well," replied the captain, gritting his teeth; "you must not complain about that. It is the war. Many are hit. Doubtless we shall get some help from stretcher-bearers when night comes."

"Ah, my Captain, I was not thinking of that," Dupont managed to explain (as the captain has since told me); "but I would not have you think that I lay here when you were hurt, if I were able

to move. I would not like you to think, my Captain, that I could remain in the shelter of this hole if I could move to get out of it, either to go forward with my section, or to bring some help for you. It was for that only that I spoke. As for my wound, it is a little thing indeed if I should die, since the battalion has won this fight, and is in the Boche line now."

I may not have got the words quite right, and in a different language they must in any case seem different. But they are given here as I wrote them down in talking with the captain; and well I know, by the light in his eyes as he told me of that day in the shell-hole, that Paul Dupont spoke with all sincerity, and in the spirit of simple, cheery bravery which is characteristic of the whole Army in which he serves.

VIII

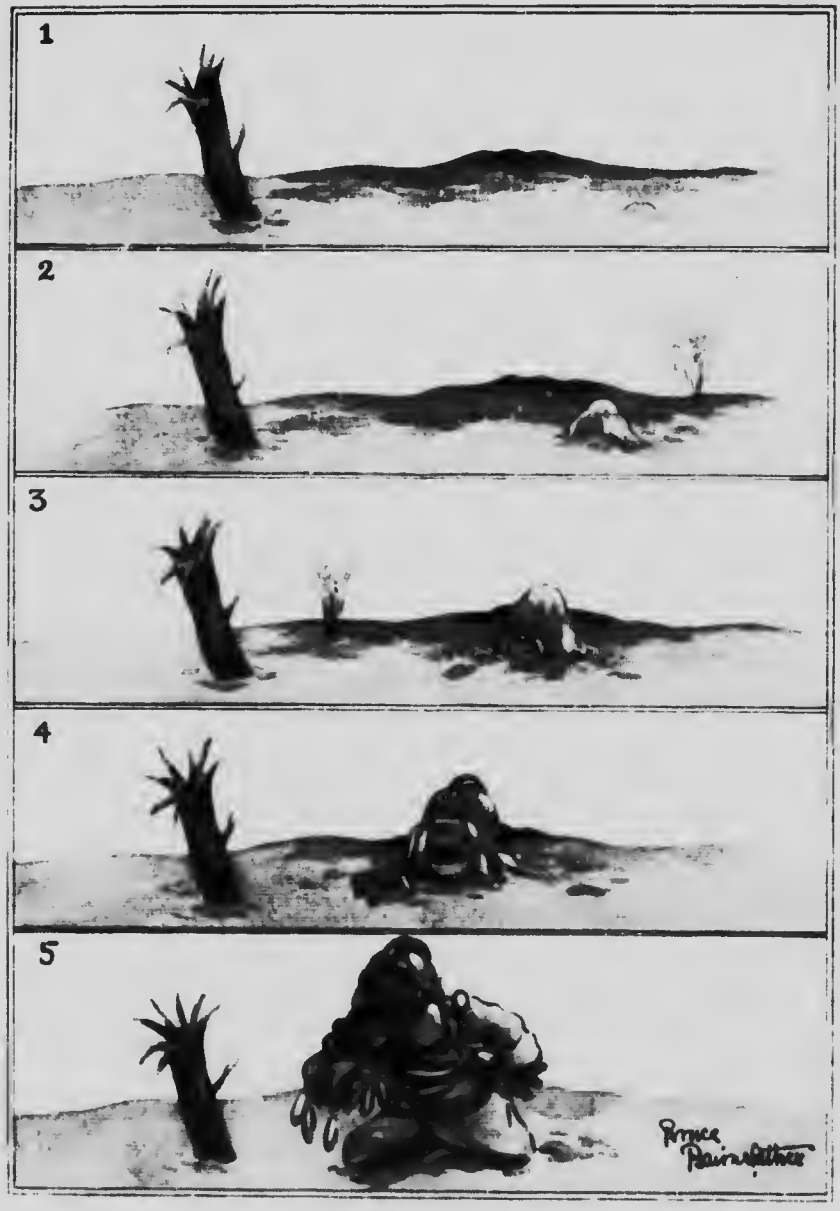
ON THE WAY TO PARIS

SOMEWHERE along its great length there were probably a few first-class carriages in that train. A few General Staff Officers may have succeeded in reserving one. But it is more likely that any there were were packed full from door to window, like the rest of the train. The corridors offered standing room only, and very little of that; and Paris was distant perhaps nine or ten hours—with luck. Having in view the vigorous offensive then in progress both on the Somme and at Verdun, the activity on other parts of the line, and the vast war traffic of men, munitions, stores, animals and the like to be handled continuously by day and by night, we thought ourselves very lucky to have secured seats, at an earlier stage of the journey, in a second-class carriage.

Now, the hour being just short of ten at night, the train was momentarily at rest; one portion of it no doubt between the platforms of some

station where it had been expected for an hour or more. The part we occupied was stranded in a "No Man's Land" of wet, gleaming rails, bounded by mysterious black mounds that might have been the parados of trenches, divided from us by *chevaux de frise* of signalling wires. Somewhere in the mysterious outer gloom one heard a *poilu* bidding adieu to his wife, with sounding embraces, and the voices of little children bleating forlornly in the wet darkness. Clearly, then, our train carried soldiers returning trenchward after leave, as well as the other kind: the soldier bound for Paris on "permission."

There came a peremptory knocking, as with a stick or whip-handle, outside the corridor facing our compartment. The door was flung open by one of the cheery soldiers crowded together in the corridor, and one was grateful for that, the place being very hot and steamy. With the welcome inrush of raw night air came a box of sorts, perhaps a uniform case, which two of the *poilus* hoisted into the corridor. Then both leaned forward and, with the same good-humoured, rough-and-ready vigour, hoisted in a young officer, who thanked them in friendly style, while they, having saluted, resumed at once their gossip among themselves. (It is one of the characteristic qualities of the soldier of France, not



Impression of a Poilu going on leave from the Verdun sector.

without its bearing upon the life and spirit of the French Army, that in whatsoever off-duty circumstances they may happen to find themselves, a group of average *poilus* will always be genuinely and perfectly at their ease in the presence of officers of any rank, and that without any breach of military etiquette or the slightest evidences of any kind of disrespect.) The young officer, in his horizon-blue greatcoat, stood leaning in the doorway of our compartment, filling it completely—he was a fine figure of a man—after apologising courteously for presenting his back to an elderly lady in widow's weeds who occupied one corner seat.

In our compartment the corner opposite the elderly widow was occupied by a typical French matron, aged perhaps eight-and-forty, or a little more. She also wore the dress of mourning; but there was a world of outdoor robustness in her apple cheeks, and of inextinguishable good-humour in the puckered lines about her eyes. Her baggage in the rack overhead was a medley of odd-shaped parcels and little bundles, and upon her lap she nursed with watchful solicitude a large, very light package, covered over with muslin or calico, which somehow suggested a bird in a cage, or a pet kitten in a basket; something cherished and shielded with the nicest particularity.

For a minute or two this good woman eyed with thoughtful interest the horizon-blue figure in the doorway. You are to remember that not less than nine hours of travel lay between us and Paris. The foot-wide strip of metal running along the centre of the carriage floor was outrageously hot. One schemed laboriously to keep one's boots from it. The heavy train jolted and jarred throughout its length at fairly frequent intervals, as it was pulled up, or run into sidings to make way for urgent war traffic. In peace time a train of half its length might have been given double its engine power. To-day, power could be expended lavishly in one direction only: the prosecution of the war. Suddenly Madame gave a quick little jerk of the head which set nodding all the black ornaments on her bonnet. She plucked at one sleeve of the officer's greatcoat, and, using great care in the balancing of the precious package on her lap, rose to her feet.

"My Captain will please to be seated," said she; as the young officer turned upon her in polite inquiry.

Naturally he protested. He could not think of such a thing. Indeed, he was very comfortable where he was; after the trenches it was luxury to be standing in a carriage bound for Paris, and so forth. But Madame had not spoken without

taking thought. (She came of a type which is nowhere in the wide world to be excelled for its thrifty, obdurate determination.) It was her wish and resolve. She had had three sons in the Army. Two were still in the trenches; and the third, he was with the good God. The Captain would please to be seated. It was her pleasure, which he surely would not deny to one who, if it had been so willed, might have been his mother. It was such a very little thing, this satisfaction she demanded, this tiny scrap of assistance to the Army of France. She desired that the Captain, when he reached his journey's end, should not be too tired to begin at once the enjoyment of his leave. He would please not discuss further so unimportant a matter. In short, it was for France!

Meanwhile the officer had been far from silent (The rest of us, an amiably interested audience, vaguely sympathised with both sides.) By kindly, laughing words of protest, and by gestures of appreciative deprecation, he endeavoured to make clear the impossibility of his accepting the proffered seat. Finally, seeing the look of genuine distress in the good woman's eyes, he turned half round, and beckoned to one of the *poilus* behind him; one quite unlike the others, in that he was silent. This lad showed none of the boisterous

high spirits of his comrades in the corridor, being apparently dominated for the time by extreme weariness. One looked at him and realised that at the age of twenty the life of the front-line trenches may sometimes be even harder to endure than it is for the man of twice that age; certainly than for the man of seven-and-twenty or thirty.

"Very well, Madame; since you are so generous as to be determined to sacrifice yourself for our comfort, let me beg you to give this lad a seat. He is far more tired than I, and, as you say, it is for France. Come here, my lad."

So the exchange was made, and Madame, flushed but triumphant, uncomfortable perhaps, but happy certainly, stood balancing herself in the doorway, one foot on either side of the overheated hot-water plate, her birdcage, or whatever the carefully guarded trophy was, clasped closely to her ample bosom. She had airily refused to entrust it to the tired young *poilu* in her seat.

One had noted a quick exchange of glances, and a downward movement of one hand clearly asking for a little delay, between the officer and a full-figured sergeant-major who occupied a seat in the compartment. After it may have been a quarter of an hour, this sergeant-major rose from his seat just as the train was once more slowing to a

standstill. He removed his haversacks from the rack overhead, bade everyone a cheery good-night, beckoned Madame to the seat he was vacating, and, finally, wormed his way out into the crowded corridor with all the air of a traveller who has been fortunate enough to arrive safely at his destination.

"Eh, well!" sighed Madame, as she lowered her substantial person into the newly vacated seat, thus making way for the officer to take up his old place in the doorway. "Every journey has its appointed end. Good-night; and a good leave to you," she added to the disappearing sergeant-major.

Naturally, one had one's suspicions, and a little later one found an opportunity of wriggling a way down that corridor, upon the pretence of a desire for hand-washing in the lavatory. Well out of sight from our compartment, sure enough, there was the sergeant-major, bound, not for any wayside station, but for Paris, and now contemplating with perfect good-humour a journey of some eight or nine hours in a crowded corridor, with no chance of a seat.

What would you? The ladies, after all, must be humoured; and she was clearly a very good sort, this mother with the birdcage. He was a good judge, too, one gathered, this same sub-

stantially built sergeant-major, for he had a wife and a little daughter in Dijon, and, until a few months before the war, had been distinguished above all other men in possessing the best mother in all France. It was certainly very natural that the good mother in our compartment should wish to serve France; and how could one find a better way than by helping the soldiers of France? Ah, yes!

The sergeant-major was not proceeding to Paris on leave, I gathered. When leave came his way he spent every moment of it in Dijon, where, as it happened, he was distinguished above all other men in possessing the best and most capable little wife in France. But his peculiar good fortune went beyond these things. He also had had the luck to serve under the finest colonel in the French Army, and he now had been given a job connected with transport and rations which would keep him for the most part behind the front lines. It was in this connection that he now was proceeding to Paris for two days, on duty. The sergeant-major was good enough to accept a cigar, and I smoked one of his cigarettes. His conversation was modest, and the reminiscences I obtained from him were mostly of the doings of his comrades in the fighting line, rarely of his own. And yet, before we parted, the conviction was

borne in upon me that here was a soldier who assuredly had earned the comparative security of a job behind the lines, just as I was very sure he had richly earned the medals on his breast. Withal, I was to learn later on that the same might be said of the vast majority of his fellow soldiers, and that this sergeant-major was a thoroughly average and typical soldier of the French Army.

The occasion is specially mentioned here, because this was the way of my first meeting with Paul Dupont, the grocer of Dijon.

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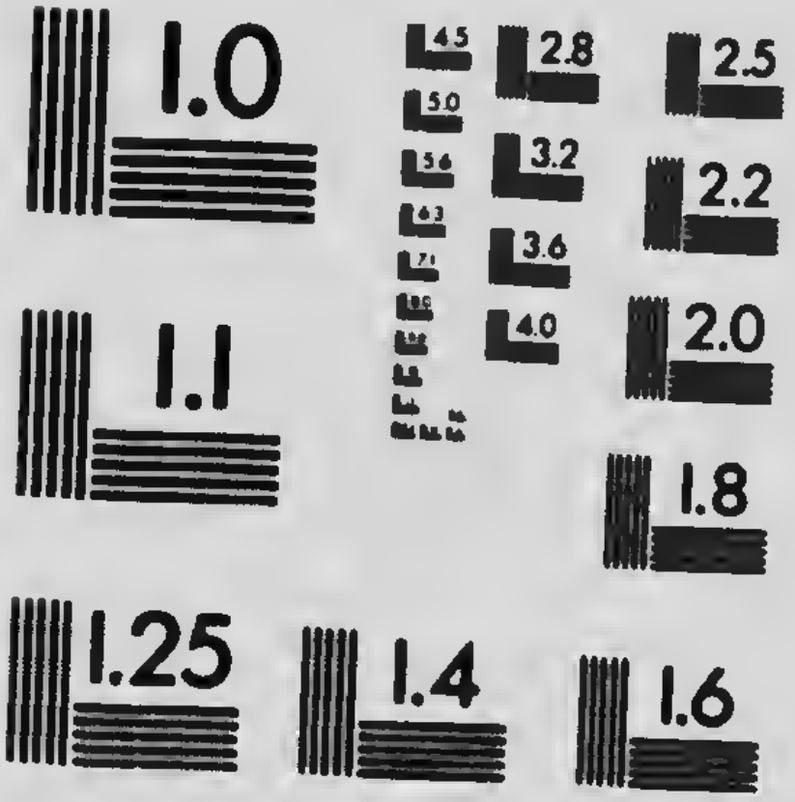

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IX

THE JOURNEY'S END

One did not spend all the rest of the night in that corridor, but one paid it a good many visits ; (once with a bottle of wine and a few of those rough-barked, split-roll sandwiches which seem to have been designed by giant cooks to fit the jaws of mastodons) and every time one found Sergeant-Major Dupont as cheery and affable as in the beginning, though in his part of the corridor there was no chance for a man to sit down at all, and—the night was not short.

There were two *poilus* outside our compartment who, with that deft and ready adaptability to circumstances which is so characteristic of the French soldier—in the trenches one soon learns that it is one of the qualities which makes him so finished and so formidable a campaigner—had discovered that, by careful manipulation of their legs and feet, they could so arrange the scrap of floor space at their disposal that one of them

Going on Leave.

could squat on the floor. The upshot was curious, and sticks in one's recollection as a kind of pivotal episode in the impressions of that night journey. Squatting on the floor was a rest from standing. But it speedily induced muscular ache in the legs, owing to the extremely cramped position it entailed. None the less, it was pleasing to squat for, say, four or five minutes. As one *poilu* declined into the squatting position it was necessary for the other to elevate himself, without movement of the feet, into an erect position. If someone's haversack or water-bottle fell on the squatter's head or neck during his rest turn, he let it lie there till the time came for him to rear up again, and took the opportunity then of suspending it from some window-fastening or other projection. The see-saw took on a resemblance to some kind of mechanical toy, the joints of which became increasingly in need of lubrication as the night wore on. It continued without variation for a full nine hours.

It is perhaps worthy of note that increasing stiffness of joints brought no slightest diminution in the prevailing level of high spirits. Certain slabs of bread and meat, unearthed from the recesses of tightly packed haversacks, figured in the programme, but no alcohol appeared at any stage. At no period was there a complete

absence of story-telling, and at times several *raconteurs* were at work together. There was some singing, but it was of a quietly happy kind; never boisterous. The lady in widow's dress and the younger matron with the birdcage appeared to doze during considerable intervals. Whenever they woke they smiled at the soldiers, some of whom were men of forty years, with that sort of good-humoured indulgence which characterises a busy mother's occasional glances at the children playing about her feet. The train might jolt, and wheels or engine whistle screech, but in that crowded train, so far as all its passengers were concerned, a quietly cheerful harmony ruled; cordiality and good-humour were supreme.

And soon after the winter's dawn began its chilly work of substituting outline and fact for mystery and hints, the long train drew slowly, as with a kind of exhaustion, to a standstill, and hundreds of tired voices murmured in unison the single word: "Paris." Our part of the train was remote from any platform. The ladies must be lifted down to the track; their various packages carefully handed out. There was a general interchange of farewells and good wishes; and we found ourselves striding along between the shining rails—a straggling regiment of soldiers with a few camp followers—to where the great span of the

station roof loomed remote, dim, and rather ghostly, arching the doorway by which we entered Paris.

Inside, under that great roof, was a mighty bustling to and fro; the horizon-blue coats of officers and men on leave dominating in their numbers as in their colour the dark clothing of the city workers, who were flocking in now from their suburban homes to the offices and shops of the metropolis. Outside, on the broad pavement facing the station hotel (into which we presently retreated for the little breakfast and a few hours' rest), the scene was extraordinary and very stirring. Here a few lordly Renault and Panhard limousines with softly purring engines formed a rallying point for the friends of certain officers of high rank, whose appearance was the signal for a subdued cheer and some hearty embraces. There a group of working women with black shawls over their heads, some with a child or two clinging to their skirts, watched anxiously for the appearance of certain expected *poilus* to them far more important than the most distinguished General on the Staff.

The whole business was infinitely touching, though to the suburban ticket-holders, of course, a thing of daily occurrence. But one would wager that some at least of the station officials (including

those with sons in the trenches) never become *blasé* where this home-coming of the soldiers on leave is concerned. They are so courteous and kindly in the information and the guidance they give. Hundreds of poignant domestic dramas one saw enacted in that crowded place during the few minutes required for the clearing of one's baggage. The soldiers were of all ranks and many different regiments; from the grey-haired Territorial fresh from useful constructional work—invaluable work, almost always well done—to the smooth-chinned youth of twenty, straight from his first experience of the deadly hazards of the front line trenches. Among the different kinds of headgear—soft blue forage caps, red and gold soft-crowned, stiff-peaked caps, rakishly worn tam-o'-shanters, the scarlet fezes of the Zouaves, and many another sort—the horizon-blue steel casque predominated, with its mixed associations with the flying splinters of the most deadly projectiles the world has ever seen, and stories of the ages of romantic war, of cavaliers and cross-bow men.

Mothers who had lost one son in some blood-soaked, shell-torn sector of the line, embraced now another son, more fortunate, if no whit less ready to make the last great sacrifice for France. Wives whom the war has widowed smiled, though with

wet eyes, as their arms met round the shoulders of stalwart sons. Sisters, sweethearts, cousins, brothers (on crutches, some of these latter) and white-haired fathers; all were there to taste one of the rare moments of real joy that war permits, in welcoming soldiers on leave.

All alike, by foot, by tram, by underground, in taxis, in carts, and in big battleship grey cars; all left the station with full hearts, eyes aglow, and faces bright with happiness and gratitude. All save one, a little elderly body in clogs, with a black shawl that draped her figure from head to knee. She had watched in vain, and——. One would have given very much to be able to set her anxious mind at rest. Her face was puckered into lines of care and dread; but no tears were there, nor any sign of tears. No. "It is the war!" one heard her murmur, with brave philosophy, in answer to a good-humoured inquiry. And if the disappointment should prove not minor but major, not temporary but final—as God send it may not prove!—one knew from the steady light in her patient old eyes precisely what her only comment would be; a comment which epitomises the spirit ruling all France to-day; a spirit no German organisation can ever possibly overcome or conquer:—

"It is for France!"

X

PARIS

And what of Paris, the City of Light, toward whose gates these soldiers on leave come flocking from every quarter of their far-flung battle-line? What is Paris like to-day, two and a half years after the date fixed upon by the German High Command for its occupation by the Kaiser's troops?

It is a hard question to answer; impossible, perhaps, for any such uninformed foreigner as the writer, if only because, more than any other city in the world, Paris had, before the war, such a multitude of different meanings for different people. It may well be that to the understanding and well-informed Frenchman, Paris has not changed at all; or, if at all, then only in very superficial ways. It may well be that to such a one Paris has always been understood and known as the good wife, the devoted mother of her children, and of France. To certain others,

including many foreigners, Paris has figured ever as the gayest and most delightful of holiday companions. There are coarser, less intelligent, more ignorant points of view. But these are hardly worth consideration.

The present writer cannot pretend to offer anything more than the impression produced on the uninformed mind of the foreigner by Paris after two and a half years of war. To me it would seem that most of the changes wrought in France by the war are crystallised and typified by the change I think I see in Paris. But it may be that the Frenchman who really knows could make it clear that the real change lies in the observer's vision rather than in Paris; in short, that the war has made her true character visible to uninformed eyes as it never was before.

Be that as it may, the stranger within her gates is moved to-day to salute Paris, as he might salute a queen-mother holding in her hand a casket containing the very essence of the unconquerable spirit of France; the invincible spirit of chivalry which tells every fighter in her trenches that, in offering himself in the cause of France he gives himself to the cause of humanity, civilisation, and freedom. The Frenchman fighting for France has always been a formidable foe. The Frenchman, who is convinced, as every *poilu* from

the North Sea to Switzerland is to-day, that fighting for France means fighting for the women and children, the ideals and the progress and the liberty of the world, is a soldier who cannot be beaten. That is the real explanation of Verdun; though it has not figured once among all the ingenious and elaborate calculations of the German strategists and leaders who, from time to time, have sought to account to the world for this and other Boche failures.

There is no melancholy in the face that Paris presents to the fighters who enter her gates on leave from the trenches. There are softness and weakness in melancholy; and there is no hint of any kind of weakness in Paris to-day. She smiles in the faces of the uniformed crowds that stream into her streets by day and night from the great railway termini which feed the Somme, Verdun, the northern sector guarding Calais, and the wooded southern lines that run down to the Swiss frontier. It is a gracious and kindly welcome she gives them all, with every cordial invitation to enjoy their holiday; but, if one may use the simile, it is the greeting of the good wife and mother, with never a hint of the coquette's wiles. One reads of scenes of turbulent excitement, of feverish gaiety, hectic dissipation, hysterical rejoicing, and black depression, in Berlin. The

critical observer can find no trace of these things in Paris.

Asked for a single word with which to describe the atmosphere of the French capital to-day, I should not hesitate to offer this :—" Domestic." At every turn one meets with evidence of calm fortitude, settled determination, of a fidelity and endurance passing the love of women, which have gone far beyond all speculation and liability to variation. In her proud place as capital of the Republic of France, Paris, like the French nation, is not *at* the war, but *in* it. The French people are not passengers on board the ship of war ; they are part of its crew. And you may stand still to-day in the centre of Paris and feel the pulse of the French nation beating as you never could have felt it before, in all its great and stirring history. Paris the good wife and mother moves me to a deeper respect, as I believe she moves all her own sons to a deeper devotion, than ever was won by Paris the beautiful mistress, the sparkling pleasure companion.

But, like every other great city in the world, Paris holds dangers ; in the early days of the war there were doubtless many pitfalls in her streets for the unwary. Recognising this, the French authorities, after their logical, practical fashion, took certain steps in the interests of their fighting

men. It obviously was not well for an unsophisticated, country-bred *poilu*, straight from the trenches, to find himself alone and friendless in the streets of Paris for a week's leave. That would be bad for the soldiers of France, and therefore bad for France. From recognition of this, one step carried the French authorities to the point of making it impossible. And so, of all the streams of soldiers on leave which trickle continuously into Paris, giving more than a hint of camps and fighting lines to its great termini, not one single *poilu* is alone and friendless in the city. Every one of them is a man whose family circle is established in or about the metropolis, except in the cases of a few men whose own homes are in remote parts, or in districts occupied by the enemy. In such cases, if a soldier particularly wishes to spend his leave in Paris he may do so, always providing that some reputable householder in the metropolis undertakes to care and answer for him. All other soldiers on leave are drafted at stations perhaps a score of miles outside the city into leave trains bound for their own home districts.

Like other considerations bearing upon the preservation, so far as may be, of the humanities, this whole question of leave for fighting men has been most carefully weighed by the French

authorities. Its importance to the individual soldier is clearly recognised, and every French soldier now has leave three times during the year, for seven clear days. If his home should be in Algeria, he gets leave twice a year, for eleven clear days.

The soldiers on leave, whose journey to and arrival at Paris in the early morning has been described, may safely be imagined devoting the forenoon to rest and indoor comfort. Soon after the dispatch of the midday meal, you will meet them setting out for the afternoon promenade; and that, in winter time, and for a man fresh from the trenches, is apt to mean the Grand Boulevards. Often you will meet some fresh-coloured young *poilu* whose proudly displayed War Cross was won amid scenes of incredible horror on the blood-soaked ground before Verdun, marching along one of these broad pavements in the dusk of early winter evening, his favourite sister clinging to one of his arms, his sweetheart to the other arm; a cousin or two somewhere in the offing, and fluttering around them it may be, often separated by the pressure of the crowd, a younger brother, due for service in another six months, and full of obvious hero-worship for the wearer of the medal. The thronged streets are full of such sights, and very moving they are for the observer who takes

the trouble to listen and watch, and, so far as he can, to understand.

Such a group will turn into one of the big *cafés*, and gather together round a table. A syphon appears, some glasses of highly coloured syrups, and one or two of coffee. Two of the party may call for a draught-board and start a game, which is pretty sure to be neglected in favour of listening to some story from the hero of the occasion. There is a prevailing note of simple and innocent enjoyment, with never a hint of excitement, extravagance, or feverishness of any kind. This is typical. Excess probably exists somewhere in most cities. I saw none of it in Paris.

If every man in one of these crowded boulevards were suddenly to be clothed in some disguise which should be universal and uniform, you would be able without the smallest difficulty to pick out the soldiers on leave. Their colouring, their bright eyes, clear skin, and alert look of robust good health is so marked. The physique of the French Army was probably never finer than it is to-day. The "exhausted" soldiers of this "decadent" nation, as the Boche scribe loves to depict them, are all alike, men who stand out among city-dwellers by reason of their ruddy good looks, and hearty, out-of-door robustness.

Paris, including its sky-blue-coated visitors

from the trenches, still dines at the usual hour, and with much of the zest of other days. (Given the smallest shadow of a chance, the French soldier will dine, as apart from mere feeding, even in a trench dug-out; and, if he has but one dish, he will manage by his deftly calculated manipulation of its contents to give it the semblance of a meal of several courses.) If there is little drinking, there is plenty of glass-clinking and good cheer. If Paris has abolished ostentatious extravagance, she has admitted no niggardliness, and neglects none of the accessories and refinements of civilisation.

After dinner there will be gossip over coffee, or a visit to a picture theatre or a music hall; but the wholesome domestic atmosphere prevails throughout, and a would-be midnight reveller is likely to find himself alone in a deserted and darkened Paris, in which everyone else has gone to bed. The City of Light is, of course, much less light of an evening than it used to be, for economy's sake; but its streets are not really dark, as London's are, and the Zeppelin threat is so far from being a live issue as to have been almost forgotten by the populace generally, thanks to a well-nigh perfect system of aggressive anti-Zepp defence, the thoroughness of which is never for a moment relaxed.

The great railway stations of Paris are absorbingly interesting just now; and each has its own distinctive atmosphere. There are points of departure for comparatively inactive sectors of the line which soldiers call rest cures, and others for health resorts which actually are used as places of cure and convalescence. Again, there are points of departure at which every man in uniform is bound for the Verdun front or the battlefields of the Somme; and here the air is tense with studiously restrained emotion. Abandon, incontinence, hysteria, feverishness; these you cannot find in any part of the French capital to-day. The wives and mothers, sisters and sweethearts, in Paris, as throughout France, in their comportment set a pattern for all nations at war. For their menfolk they have only sustained cheerfulness and confident smiles. Their lips smile bravely, even where bereavement has cast its shadow over their frank French eyes. If you would catch them showing care and sadness in their faces, you must find them away from their men, and in some interval between one piece of work and another. Then, occasionally, by their eyes you may know they carry in their minds such a picture as they are able to conjure up of some front line trench, some bullet-swept sector of the front in which their men are face to face

with the invader, and with all the devilish devices which he has introduced into this war. Somewhere in France there may be some idle women; querulous, complaining, depressed; or some who are preoccupied by that most depressing of all objectives: the feverish pursuit of pleasure for themselves. I have seen none of them in Paris, or in any place behind the lines, from the North Sea to Switzerland, that I have visited.

To sum up, there is no hint of the mistress of pleasure in the Paris of to-day; nor any slightest suggestion of depression, fear, or want of confidence. Paris impresses the visitor from outside as the busy, kindly, cheerful good wife and mother of France, calmly and thriftily preoccupied in the task of providing to the very best of her ability for the comfort and well-being, the simple jollity and good cheer also, of her extensive family. As though by way of example to the whole country, she has not simply set herself to put up with the war, as an unavoidable excrescence, but has thrust herself heart and soul into the war, made herself part of it, and adapted herself, as almost perfectly as a city might, to all its changing needs, vicissitudes, and demands.

A calm and set determination, cheerful and good-humoured, but absolute as the workings of

the solar system, is the light which illumines Paris to-day; and to my thinking it extorts a greater, deeper measure of affectionate respect than did the glitter of the city's most brilliant phases in peace time.

XI

IN AND OUT THE FRONT LINE

ALL through that day we had tramped along front line and support line trenches; in and out of ingeniously contrived little sniping posts within thirty yards of the Boches; peering out through the artistically screened mouths of saps into "No Man's Land" and the enemy's wire entanglements; into the front line dug-outs of N.C.O.'s and men, and into the craftily contrived emplacements of very deadly trench mortars. Boche bullets had been falling about those lines all day, occasionally grooving sandbags within a few inches of one's head. But such "heavy stuff" as the Hun was distributing had all sailed well over our heads to some destination in rear of the fighting lines. One gathered that Fritz was just then wasting a good deal of ammunition in this sector, and that our French hosts preferred to reserve theirs for real targets. That is an agree-

able condition of affairs always welcome to soldiers on the Allied side.

Our lunch—most admirably cooked and served within a couple of hundred yards of the Boche sentries—we had enjoyed in a headquarters dug-out whose earthen walls were papered throughout with visions of feminine loveliness from the pages of *La Vie Parisienne*. (The atmosphere of cheery geniality and gay, fraternal good-fellowship which pervades every one of these subterranean messes in the French trenches is something which must be felt to be rightly comprehended, and is certain then to be appreciated at its right inestimable value to France and her Allies. This vital essence of the spirit of comradeship is worth many guns, and doubles or trebles the practical fighting value of every man in the lines.)

Now at the end of a long, instructive day we were enjoying, as an excuse for protracted gossip of an informing sort in a big support line dug-out, with a medical officer and others who had served at Verdun, on the Somme, and beside the North Sea, the fact that Boche shells were falling rather briskly round about the track we purposed following to the rear, where, after leaving the trenches we were to make our way to Divisional Headquarters. After a while the artillery commander present rose from the ammunition box on which

he had been sitting, glanced at his wrist watch, stretched his sinewy arms as high overhead as the roof of the dug-out permitted, and delivered himself of the French equivalent of the following :—

"Afraid we shall have to stop 'em, or you'll never get up to Divisional Headquarters by seven. It always seems a pity to interfere with the Boche's evening recreation, because it uses up quite a lot of his heavy shells and does not the slightest harm to anything. He's only churning up mud. However, you've a good way to go yet, and we know exactly what guns he is using. Now you listen. I'll telephone my battery to give those two emplacements of his just six rounds. That will settle Master Boche for this evening."

The telephone bell tinkled in the rear of the dug-out.

"Allo! Allo!"

The neeessary instructions were given, and we listened. Within three minutes the French battery spoke. It was a concise, meaningful sentence of three words. Again we listened. Crumph! Crumph! Two more Boche shells had hurtled over, and exploded in the same old waste of mud to our rear. Another interval of two minutes, and then the French battery repeated its three-word sentence, with peremptory crispness. Then we waited another three minutes, and the medical

officer rose to his feet, buttoning his trench coat about him.

"All over, gentlemen!" said the artillery commander, with a smile; and we set out with the doctor on the last stage of a long tramp.

An hour or so later, when we had finished dinner two or three miles behind the line, the General startled one by saying very casually :—

"Well, gentlemen, what do you say? Would you care to go to the theatre?"

The star-shells rising from the Boche front trench were clearly visible, and the dropping rifle fire of both sides was plainly audible when the door opened.

A few minutes later we all stepped out from two motor cars which had carried us somewhat nearer to the trenches, and halted at a barn-like structure, with a sentry outside who presented arms smartly as he recognised our host. A knot of *poilus* from half a dozen regiments, Zouaves, Spahis, Tirailleurs, Territorials and others, who were clustered about the door like bees at the entrance to a hive, jumped aside and to attention as the General led the way, under crossed flags, into the wooden hall, which was crammed with soldiers of all ranks. Whispers had gone ahead of us. The audience rose to its feet like one man, and the orchestra tossed out at us the first bars

of the "Marseillaise," as the acting manager—a lieutenant—escorted the General and his party to a group of chairs in front. Then the conductor of the orchestra, a *poilu* in a dinted casque and trench-worn uniform, noted English officers among the General's party, and a moment later everyone was at the salute to the first notes of "God Save the King."

Everything about that entertainment was interesting and pleasing, but the writer has no hope of being able to convey on paper any conception of the sense of the semi-magical and miraculous which ruled the whole thing. Outside, the star-shells, and the crack of rifles; with every now and again a boom of heavier "stuff" to one side or the other. A couple of hundred yards in rear of this theatre was a house, the half of which had been shattered by Boche heavies. Inside was—the theatre; not a barn being used for the purposes of a soldiers' impromptu concert, but the theatre. The French soldier will have artistic verisimilitude and rejoices always in *piquante* contrasts. Everything here—footlights, proscenium, drop-scene, wings, prompter's trap-door, lithographed programme, with a clever trench sketch on it—everything was complete; the atmosphere of artistic illusion, of the theatre, had been provided down to the last detail; and wherever one kind of

material was for any reason not available, another kind of material was deftly disguised into serving the same purpose and conveying the same suggestion.

One handsome corporal who sang, extremely well if rather hoarsely, a romantic love ditty, belonged to a unit which had been relieved in the front line less than two hours earlier, after six pretty strenuous days and nights. He had had no time to remove more than the outer crust of trench mire from his uniform, and the stubble on his chin was that of the veritable *poilu*; but, after its first phrase or two he entirely lost himself in his song, and his gestures, like his throat notes, were full of passionate abandon. The joy of the creative artist, instead of being the rare monopoly of the few, would really seem to be the shared possession of nine-tenths of Frenchmen, and a rather larger proportion of French soldiers.

In this particular performer's face, for example, one could plainly see the lines of weariness, of the enforced deprivation of sleep. The occasional lapse into hoarseness which marred the mellow richness of his voice conjured up for one pictures of the clotted horrors of "No Man's Land," where he had very likely been on patrol the night before; its loathsome, stagnant pools, beneath whose greenish surface nameless things rotted in

the shell-pitted mud; its devilish strands of dripping barbed wire, with dreadful rags fluttering among them; its indescribable atmosphere, dominated by the thought of keenly pitiless eyeballs, for ever straining in watchfulness over gruesome relics, with intent to add to their number, and by the deadly z-z-zp of bullets, the sudden, swift tack-tack-tack of the unseen machine-gun, and the occasional murderous whiz-z-bang of the small shell that makes so horrible a mess of what, a moment earlier, was a brave man striving to serve his country; the whole illumined and made infinitely more ghastly by the intermittent pale gleams—like the phosphorescent radiance of putridity—of Boche star-shells. One saw this man, as he had been a couple of hours earlier, waiting beside a traverse gashed and scarred by shell-fire, laden to the ears with all his kit, his feet planted in eighteen inches of foul, liquid mud, waiting for the arrival of the men of the battalion due to relieve his own. (So many of one's worst, as well as one's least bad, trench hours are spent in waiting; so many of one's comrades have gone down for ever under the blind malignancy of some projectile, spent it may be, whilst waiting!) And now, two hours later, he was singing on this lighted stage of the loves of a hot-blooded southern cavalier and his lady.

One conjured up these pictures—if one were handicapped with a mind having that sort of bent—but do you suppose the singer had a single shadow of an after-thought for trench mud or whizzing bullets? Not he. Or, if he had, then, in his French artist-soldier fashion, he hugged it to him jealously, as your gourmet might turn under his tongue the memory of Barmecidal meals, whilst savouring the bouquet of a vintage wine over the steam arising from some ragout of surpassing excellence: for the sake of the piquancy of the contrast. But my theory is he was removed by hundreds of miles from all such dank desolation as ruled the scene two hours behind him. His fine eyes, his olive skin, his magnificent moustache, were all of the warm South lands; and my impression is the good fellow was enjoying some sun-bathed meridional landscape, where maidens with a dusky bloom on their warm cheeks laughed and danced among the vineyards, while he sang to us in that crowded little theatre behind the lines.

His ease, I think, epitomised and typified the objective and purpose of the wise French generalship, and the capable, jolly, hearty French spirit which between them have served to provide this sort of recreation in the immediate rear of every sector of trenches, no matter how violent the

That Leave Train. "Come on, here's a carriage!"

fighting going on in front, in the entire French line. It is all as much a part of the carefully thought out humane and practical policy of training and recuperation as the baths, the regular leave, the postal arrangements, the physical drill in rest camps, and the wholly delightful and admirable atmosphere of good-fellowship between all ranks which are part and parcel of the entire French Army to-day.

In one of the intervals the orchestra happened to play a fragment of the soul-stirring march which I think is called the "Sambre et Meuse." The applause was thunderous and insistent. Later, came an operatic selection, from "Carmen," quite excellently played. The audience insisted on an encore. I saw dusky Spahis with the mystery of the African desert in their dark eyes, soldiers who never had set foot in Europe before this war, who rocked in their seats from enthusiasm as they insisted on a repetition of the operatic number. The conductor, in his battered casque, wiped the moisture from his forehead as he sat down on his small arms ammunition box and lighted a cigarette at the end of the encore.

The programme was a long one, and nobody in that audience would get to sleep before midnight. But, especially for certain temperaments, there are some restoratives more blessed even than

sleep, most precious though that is to every soldier in this war. I would that I could place on record a real description of each item in that entertainment so that all who read might realise the inwardness of the whole thing as if they had been there. I would that a select body of the Staff of the German High Command could have been there. They may lack imagination, but one fancies they could not have avoided learning something in that place. But for that matter, the feeling is always borne in upon me in French trenches and behind the lines, quite as much as in the British lines (and, perhaps, rather more so, because the French spirit is more articulate, and leaps to the eye far more than does the rather sardonic, often almost melancholy-seeming and wholly indomitable spirit of Tommy) that if the really brainy men of the Boche General Staff could once see the life of the French and British Armies behind their parapets, they would almost inevitably realise that there are here organisations of national man-power which quite certainly can never be beaten by any combinations of strength which the Central Empires could conceivably arrange; not though the present struggle endured for ten years.

One or two bald little facts, before we salute the strains of the "Marseillaise," "God Save the

King," and the "Brabançonne," and make our way out into the darkness which is punctured only by occasional Boche star-shells.

Every living creature, on the stage and off it, was a soldier. Nothing there had been produced by other than soldier hands. Not a single item in the programme had in it a spark of viciousness or vulgarity. There was not one in the execution of which one found no artistry, no notion of technique. The visits of the General and his Staff to the little theatre were frequent; but nobody ever knew till they arrived when they were coming. All ranks in the French Army participate wholeheartedly in these reunions. The little theatre was crammed to its utmost capacity, with an overflow gathering at the door; and often a performer would address a question to, or invite a comment from, his audience. Not once during the entire evening did the need arise for any call for silence; not once did I hear a boot scrape the floor during the performance of any item of the programme. If the *poilus* in that hall, including the dusky stalwarts from the Algerian hinterland, were not more truly civilised human beings than the men who have shaped the destinies (and ordered the bestial "frightfulness") of Germany during the past few years, then may God preserve the world from civilisation!

XII

THE JOYOUS ONES

In a certain very interesting sector of the French line one frequently heard references to the doings of a unit generally known as the "Joyeux." One morning one put the question to a certain commanding officer: "Who are the Joyeux?" The answer came, with a smile: "The 3rd Battalion d'Afrique."

This was informing, yet hardly very enlightening. "And what is their speciality?" one asked. The question brought another smile, and: "Well, I am going to lunch with their commandant to-morrow. His headquarters dug-out is only about a mile along from here. You had better come with me."

The Censor might take exception to it if one entered into any descriptive detail as to the precise whereabouts and character of the section of trenches we visited next morning; and, in any case, there is an extraordinary sameness about

trenches, wherever one happens to be: from the sand-dunes of the north, where one has seen the familiar barbed-wire entanglements which front every fire-trench, running right out into the waves of the North Sea, all along through Flanders, past Ypres, the Somme, Verdun, and the wooded Vosges to the Swiss frontier. The country differs, of course; though even landscapes are apt to become pretty much standardised by the strafing of big guns; and I have seen what once were farm-lands and villages away down on the right of the line looking precisely like the one-time villages and farm-lands of the northern end of the line; each alike having been saturated in human blood, pulverised again and again by bursting projectiles and high explosives, and indescribably *littered* with remains human, animal, vegetable, and mineral. It is the mechanics of this war which render its effects so infernally devastating that it would make a hideous Golgotha of the Garden of Eden in a few weeks—as our comrades in Mesopotamia are painfully aware.

With regard to their immediate surroundings, then, one found nothing in the least remarkable about the sector of the Joyeux. The trenches themselves were full of ingenious contrivances to mitigate the discomfort of trench life. But that is characteristic of every sector in the French line.

It is part of the French character, and one of the things which makes the French soldier an ideal campaigner—a fundamental part of his astounding endurance, his fine spirit, and his cheerfulness in the face of appalling difficulties. One not only sees no gross waste in the French trenches, but one sees no waste of opportunities. And that is to say a very great deal, for the typical French soldier will find opportunities, possibilities of usefulness, in a broken board, a derelict shovel-handle, a strand of wire, or a heap of shell-splintered bricks and rubble, which are a source of continual wonder and admiring pleasure to the observer from outside. Cut him off utterly from all the ordinary resources of civilisation, and in a few hours, if there is no very violent fighting toward, he will produce you a series of serviceable little makeshifts for the customary amenities and accessories, the ingenuity of which, combined with their essentially thrifty simplicity, is not less than amazing.

One found the Joyeux exceedingly good company, very alert, smart, soldierly, and busy as beavers in the protection, maintenance, and improvement of their line. From some of their N.C.O.'s one heard remarkable stories of the coolness and "fantastic" daring of their commanding officer, who quite obviously held the

utter devotion of his men. A sergeant waxed eloquent over the deeds of the battalion's medical officer, who had verged upon actual insubordination in the matter of refusing to leave his post and his work after sustaining severe injuries. Almost blinded, and injured in other ways, he had crept about the front line string of shell-holes, under a deadly fire, tending the cases of men too badly hurt to be moved at once—himself led and supported by a devoted stretcher-bearer, for the simple reason that he could not move unaided. This officer himself had tales to tell of his own Red Cross sergeant; a remarkable example of the type of man who is said to have a charmed life. Many times this sergeant saved the doctor's life; and on very many occasions, entirely alone, on his own initiative, and even in defiance of repeated warnings, if not of actual orders, he has been out into "No Man's Land" through deadly barrages of fire, and bandaged and carried in helpless men.

One man of the Joyeux with whom I had some talk, who, like so many of his comrades, had earned special distinction, both at Verdun and on the Somme, had occupied a good and profitable position in Quebec Province, Canada, at the time the war came. The reader is asked to bear in mind that this man was under no obligation to

serve, and that he had established himself well in Canada. Within a week of the Declaration, he had thrown up his position, with its various ripening interests, and was on his way across the Atlantic to offer himself for service in the ranks of the Joyeux.

Some considerable time ago, when things were bad on the Verdun front, this battalion came out of the line for a week's sorely needed rest. Next morning, a sudden military necessity demanded their return to the front line, to take the place of a terribly decimated battalion. Three of their four companies were detailed to take over the sector generally; the other, with a machine-gun section, being sent to hold as best they might a certain deadly gap regarded as part of this sector. As they approached the gap the moon, with a kind of pitilessness which is well known to every front line soldier in this war, emerged from its previous obscurity, inviting Boche attention to the luckless company. The result was a furious burst of firing that reduced the company strength to seventy all told by the time they reached the gap; which, by the way, consisted only of a string of shell-holes, quite unconnected, so that the men who held one hole were unable to see those who occupied any other, and movement from one to another meant almost certain death,

by reason of the barrage concentrated on the whole gap.

With the help of the moon, and a liberal supply of star-shells, the Boches were able to detect the terrible havoc their shell fire had wrought in this company before its survivors reached the partial cover of the shell-holes. In view of it, they were emboldened to attack with a strength of between two hundred and three hundred, without allowing the seventy Joyeux any breathing time in which to organise their defence. They were repelled, however, leaving many dead before the shell-holes, who fell, at first to the bombs of the devoted seventy, and then, directly they were able to bring these hastily to bear, their machine-guns. But, when the badly beaten Boches retired to their own line, only forty men were left alive of the Joyeux company, and many of these had to devote the next half hour or so to the bandaging as best they might of one another's wounds.

Knowing the situation, the Boches directed a continuous barrage fire between these few scantily held shell-holes and the trench occupied by the rest of the battalion ; so that the battalion neither saw nor heard anything further of its fourth company.

Four days later, a badly wounded man of that heroic little company crawled at night into the

trench occupied by the rest of the battalion, to ask for a little wine and some bombs. He was one of seven survivors of the company, he explained; each being in a separate hole, unable to communicate with his fellows. Fortunately, they had had splendid supply of machine-gun ammunition; but their bombs were now practically exhausted. The whole ground in front of their forlorn position was thick with German corpses. And among the Boche dead were now some living Boches, who had crawled close in shell-holes, and in an old sap, and could not be dislodged without bombs. These Boches, through a sergeant or other N.C.O. of their own, had offered the seven survivors of the Joyeux company every safety and comfort if they would surrender, and had tempted them with offers of the food they needed so sorely, but quite without success.

The captain to whom this little epic was told explained that in the then situation of the rest of the battalion it was absolutely impossible for him to send a single man to reinforce the tiny garrison of those shell-holes, and that therefore the position must be evacuated. The messenger was to make his way back, and bid the others return with him at once, under cover of the darkness. He asked for wine, to give his comrades a little strength; and, laden with this, crept off

through the greenish fumes and smoke of the barrage.

At the end of three-quarters of an hour, six incredibly tattered scarecrows crawled into the trench, all wounded in three or four places, their clothes in ribbons, themselves at the last stage of exhaustion, but perfectly cheery, and somehow managing to drag between them a machine-gun, though its last round of ammunition had been duly delivered to the enemy.

"Where is the seventh man?" asked the captain.

"Well, my Captain," he was told; "that fool, Georges, he is very badly wounded; worse than we are, and one of his legs was smashed by a shell. He cannot live. We might have managed to drag him, but he would not leave his machine-gun, the madman; though it is almost as much broken as he is. It was hopeless for us to try to fetch it as well as him, so we had to leave both. You see, my Captain, we are not quite fit for carrying work. That Georges, he still has a belt and a half of ammunition."

Half an hour later, something moved that captain, against all right and logic, really, to crawl out from the trench, in a slight lull of the firing, towards those shell-holes. At the end of twenty or thirty yards, he met the seventh sur-

vivor, painfully dragging a broken machine-gun and his own utterly smashed right leg, which had subsequently to be amputated close to the thigh. Georges had only half a gun, really, and he most earnestly apologised for the fact that the other half of it had been blown out of his hands, one of which was shattered to a pulp. He lived, and lives now, this one of seven survivors of the fourth company of the Joyeux.

At a certain infernal point above the Somme, the dressing station of the medical officer of this battalion came under heavy shell fire. All the ground near it was being torn and tattered by shrapnel, and the interior of it was filled with the nauseating fumes of high explosive whilst full of badly wounded men. Some of these poor fellows, distracted by the pain they suffered and by the maddening noise and foul gases of that place, were moved to the extreme length of indulgence in some growling and complaints. Just then, the medical officer himself, who had been crawling about near the front, dressing cases who were too bad to be moved at once, returned to the dug-out, half carrying, half supporting a man of the battalion whose right arm had been literally torn off at the elbow. At one time, this lad had been employed as a singer and entertainer in one of the lowest-class types of *café* in all Paris. As he was

supported into the dug-out to have his wounds bound up, he heard some murmurs of complaining about their sorry state from the men lying there, whom one could not see for smoke and shell fumes.

"Eh, well, my children," he shouted to his unseen audience, "and what in the name of a name have you to growl about, here in your comfortable smoking divan? Don't you know the show goes well for us? Haven't you heard the Boches are lying dead out there in heaps?"

And then, with a dramatic wave of his bleeding stump which sent its hastily applied field dressing flying off into the gloom, this hanger-on of low *cafés* began to sing, with immense fire and verve, the first lines of the "Marseillaise." Before this, every sign of a murmur from the others had disappeared; and now the doctor saw every one of his torn and fevered patients struggling to their feet, leaning one against the other, one fellow with a shattered foot erect on his knees as though praying, all, after their fashion, strictly at attention, and joining at the top of their voices in the singing of the famous hymn.

It would be very easy to fill the remaining pages at my disposal with accounts of similarly typical incidents in the recent history of the Joyeux.

But spaee cannot possibly be spared, and one or two other details demand mention.

As regards its rank and file, this battalion is reeruited entirely from the ranks of eonvieted eriminals. The French offieer who supplied me with the faets was amazed to learn that the British had no equivalents in their Army to this battalion. The view he took was that this seemed eruelly severe to our eonvieted eriminals. "Beeause a man is eonvieted of forgery, theft, manslaughter, or even of murder, in eertain eireumstances, as these fellows have been convicted, that does not prove that he has no manhood left, or that he has forfeited all right to be regarded as a fellow-countryman. No, no; a man may commit a erime, or even a number of erimes, as many here have done, and still be a man; and even, in some eases, and in many respeets, not a bad man either. I have seen it. Would it be fair to let sueh men lie hopeless and helpless and useless inside prison walls, whilst all the manhood of France fought for Franee outside? They have to be punished for their erimes, and they are punished; but God forbid that, at sueh a time, they should be denied the elements of French manhood. They have eommitted erimes, and so cannot be given the privilege of serving alongside the flower of our race in the ordinary regiments of

Pinard !

France. But they may serve. Oh, yes! And they may earn remission in part of their sentences. And they may win distinctions; for bravery is bravery, no matter what a man's past record. Oh, yes, the administration of the regiment is precisely that of every other regiment in the line; rations, treatment, everything, all the same. When they come to us these men come as soldiers, and are treated as soldiers, so long as they play their part. If they break our laws, if they offend here, the penalties imposed may be rather sharper than they would be in an ordinary regiment. For the man who goes straight, as almost all do, the life is precisely the French soldier's life; no more, no less.

"As a fact, many of them are magnificent soldiers. In the fighting line they could not be beaten. In the life of the camp and the billets, some of them are apt to require more attention than ordinary soldiers need. In the front line, I would not ask to lead better fighters. And do you truly mean to say that in England big, able-bodied young men, if they happpen to have committed a crime and been sentenced to imprisonment, must lie behind prison walls and eat the bread of safety, whilst all the best men of your race are in the fighting line? Fantastic!"

I shall not readily forget the day spent among

the Joyeux; and I would that space permitted for the setting down here of some more records of their reckless bravery, their great loyalty one to another: to their officers and to their corps. They have been known angrily to attack one another, and to inflict severe punishment, rather than permit the smallest infringement of the stringent rules laid down as to the generous treatment of enemy troops who offer surrender. They may be criminals, these Joyeux, as indeed the law has proved them; but, my word for it, they not only have more bravery, greater *esprit de corps*, and infinitely more of devotion to their officers than I have seen among those sections of the Boche Army which it has been my lot to face in the trenches, but I submit that, in appearance, as I saw them, in speech, as I spoke with them, and in their conduct in this war, they have shown themselves far more truly civilised human beings than very many of the Huns, of all ranks.

XIII

THE DOGS OF WAR

It may be common knowledge to other people, but the writer had no idea until he came to see it for himself that every French Army Corps has its completely organised, fully staffed and equipped camps of dogs, administered like any other recognised arm of the Service. The thing impressed me as being typical of French thoroughness in this war, and of their supremacy in attention to detail.

It has become the habit of many people—a sort of mental labour-saving device—to label different nationalities with different qualities. Everyone has heard of French gallantry and dash; German thoroughness and efficiency; British stubbornness and endurance, and so forth. Nobody who has made any study of the French fighting lines is likely to dispute the dash and gallantry of the soldiers of the Republic. But, possibly because one knew of these things before, I am bound to say that they have not stirred my wonder and

admiration so deeply as have the qualities of thoroughness, efficiency, stubborn resistance, and invincible endurance, as exhibited by the French Army of to-day. The resistless dash and gallantry were never more emphatically there; they were never in all history more brilliantly displayed than they have been on the Somme, before Verdun, and in certain never-to-be-forgotten earlier phases of the war. (Thirty men of a Zouave battalion put to flight a battalion and a half of Boches at Douaumont in November; killed great numbers and utterly routed the remainder.) But, in my own humble opinion, the master impression produced upon the observer's mind by the French Army to-day, overruling all else, is that of thoroughness, efficiency, smooth organisation, comprehensive attention to detail, and, above all else, calm and settled determination and unvarying endurance.

Take, for example, this detail of the camps of dogs established in each corps area, and conducted with the same methodical precision of military routine as you would find in, say, the cyclist corps of a British Division.

The dog camps consist of huts, as in the case of the men's camps; but there is no front wall to these huts, and along the inside of the hut are neat kennels, all numbered, and looking like

miniature stalls in stables, except that each is separately roofed. The dogs have their drill, parade, and manœuvring grounds, just as soldiers have; their administrative centre or orderly room; their cook-house, dressing station and hospital, supply and equipment store, and all the usual accessories, with the possible exception of the canteen. I would not suggest that the war dogs of France are total abstainers in the matter of alcohol, but I fancy excessive drinking is unknown among them, and that it is the rarest thing in the world for any of them to over-stay their passes or wander out of bounds. The general level of discipline among them is quite obviously very high—so high in fact that there would seem to be no need for any system of punishments and penalties—official reprimands proving amply sufficient to meet such small derelictions of duty as do from time to time occur. There are, of course, black sheep in every family; and occasionally it is found, after a dog has passed successfully through his period of military training, that he displays hesitancy, or even open cowardice in the fighting line, when straffing is toward. But, in view of the high general level of bravery and devotion to duty that is shown throughout the corps, the authorities have found it possible to treat such cases with leniency, and no early morning firing party is

requisitioned, but the offender, if not obviously qualified for some useful work in the rear, on lines of communication or the like, is simply dismissed the Service and no more said. But such cases are quite exceptional, and do not really detract from the deservedly high reputation of a very fine fighting unit.

With these four-footed fighters, as with their masters, the first lesson to be learned is that of implicit obedience. They are spared the monotony of squad and section drill, and may turn to the right or left in one, two, or three motions, according as the fancy strikes them and convenience dictates. But they very emphatically have to learn, and at once, the meaning of "Attention!" and the absolute necessity of adhering rigidly to that state when ordered thereto, until the "Dismiss!" or the "Stand easy!" is given.

Perhaps the very first lesson the French war dog has to learn is that of obedience to the simple order: "Still!" or "Stay there!" At first, it is merely to sit still at his commander's feet; but before the day is out he will learn to sit still also, whilst his instructor walks away across the drill ground. Having acquired a reliable measure of proficiency in this, the dog really has learned a good deal, and is entitled to the beginnings of a military swagger which he forthwith introduces

into his gait and general deportment. He begins then to think a good deal of himself; though in reality he probably has acquired a good deal more than he knows or can comprehend.

Having learned to stay in a given position on a given spot when ordered, the war dog is then taught sentry duty; that is, not alone to stay in a given position on a given spot when ordered, but, while there, to keep a sharp look-out in a given direction, and in that direction only. To this end, he sits erect in a sort of shooting butt, looking to his front, his view to either side being hemmed in by bare boards. The instructor stands in rear, and every time the neophyte turns his head round the instructor's voice sharply recalls him to his "Post!" until very soon the word "post" comes definitely to mean "duty" to the dog; and the whole round of his daily life is teaching him all the time that duty is the one thing which quite certainly may not be neglected. A tour of duty at the sentry post may last no more than five or ten minutes, to begin with; but, before ever he sees the trenches, the war dog has learned to watch out to his front with the eyes of a lynx, and without a turn of the head, for several hours on end; and he does it, not only with efficiency and thoroughness, but with great and very evident pride.

The writer happens by chance to be not entirely without experience in the breeding, rearing, and education of dogs, and, in view of what he had previously seen of French Army administration and discipline generally, he was in no way surprised to find the same factor of human wisdom and practical kindliness dominating the camps of dogs that he had seen controlling all the organisation of the camps of men. More, perhaps, than any other army in the world, the French Army of to-day is the antithesis of the German Army. It is not a question of being unlike; it is the opposite of the Kaiser's fighting machine. And in no other way, perhaps, can the contrast more clearly be shown than in this: that whilst the German rank and file are admittedly regarded as "cannon-fodder"—the phrase is their own—the rank and file of the French Army are always, in name and thought and feeling, the "children" or the "sons" of their leaders and of France. The difference is not verbal; it goes to the uttermost roots of the French Army and the French character. French Army policy and administration are based four square upon humanity and civilisation; those of Germany upon mechanics, "frightfulness," and the savage faith that force must rule, and that might is right.

There are various grades to be passed through

in sentry work alone by the French war dog, apart from the other soldierly duties he learns to perform. Having thoroughly mastered the look-out duty, so far as his vision is concerned, his outlook on "Post" is blocked in by boards, and he must learn to perform the same duties with the aid of scent and hearing, and of each sense independently of the other. (Scents on the battle-field are apt to be very confusing to the best-trained dog; and the wind may be against him.) He must learn also never to bark, however much his suspicion may be roused, but only to growl, soft and low, with nostrils all aquiver and ears erect. That is his appointed means of passing on a warning to the nearest two-legged master sentry in his part of the trench. Mere common, civilian dog barks would, of course, warn the enemy, as well as one's own side, and so are strictly forbidden.

It is a strange and impressive sight to see one of these so carefully trained dogs of war on his sentry post, his view entirely cut off by boards, his hackles and ears slowly rising, his sensitive nostrils wrinkling in watchful wrath; and then, slowly, when he has verified his suspicions, to hear the low whisper of a vibrating growl as it were leaking from between his tightly clenched jaws. Climb out then over the

barrier of his training place, and in the misty distance of a winter's evening, a couple of hundred yards away, you will see the crouching figure of a trainer, disguised in padded leather overalls, carrying a club like a rifle, and creeping from fold to fold of the ground, taking all the cover he can and generally behaving like a prowling enemy patrol. Needless to say, he has made no sound that any human ear could possibly have caught from the sentry post. But the dog's ears are a deal more sensitive, and have been carefully trained. As to the why and wherefore of the padded leather overalls, something more than disguise is wanted; for the war dog must be trained to use his teeth on occasion, and where necessary, as certain marks on this leather armour plainly show.

Then there are the liaison duties; an important part of war dog training, this. Attached to the liaison dog's collar is a tiny cartouche, into which a despatch rolled into a spill may be introduced. Carrying this, the liaison dog is liberated from a sentry post by one master, and bidden to travel to his front, belly to earth, to find his other master. Off he flies, like an arrow from the bow, and, if he has had his training, he travels warily as any old campaigner, though at top speed; taking advantage

A suggestion for those trenches near the Yser.

of every fold in the ground for cover from fire, and making swift detours to avoid the proximity of any stranger he should encounter. Half a mile across the rough, undulating ground, he races up to his other master. The despatch is read, the precise time noted on it, the paper returned to its cartouche, and off goes the war dog on his return journey to the sentry post, streaking along in the hollows like a fox, and studiously avoiding any figure that appears between himself and his destination.

There is Red Cross training to be done, too; and the dog who has mastered this will scour the country in quest of recumbent men. If they can send a message by him, well and good; but, failing that, he will snatch the cap from such a man's head, or any loose thing that lies about him, and go racing back to his headquarters with that, ready to guide a stretcher-bearer to the spot at which he found it.

They are real soldiers, these war dogs of France; cheery and enduring in their work; jolly and sportive in their leisure; and devoted body, soul, and spirit to the officers and men who train and lead and direct them. Rewards they have in plenty, not only in the pride and delight they take in their work, but because the human soldiers with whom they are associated

are as fond of them as they are of the men, and as generous to them as they are to one another. It would not be easy to devise a system of honours or decorations to be conferred upon the members of this corps who specially distinguish themselves; and as yet one has heard of no suggestion of wounded stripes for war dogs; but I have seen dogs at work in the French Army who have already been wounded twice, and who, after being nursed and cared for till healed, like any other wounded fighter, have returned to the line as keen as ever upon their work.

The attitude of the dogs towards the men who manage them forms a tribute to the humanity and good nature of each one of those men; and the whole system of their training and use in the war is a striking evidence of the thoroughness and grasp of detail which characterises the French Army to-day.

XIV

ONE TRENCH AND ANOTHER

THE sameness of trenches, no matter what part of the front you enter them, has often been commented upon; and there is undoubtedly a certain key-note similarity between the whole of them. But, also, there are vital differences. And in the life of the trenches in certain sectors there is almost as great a variety as there is, say, in the life of different quarters of such a city as London. The difference between trenches in clay and trenches in sand is, from the point of view of comfort, greater than the difference between a house and a stable.

If, from Switzerland to the North Sea, the entire Western front were all exactly like, say, Ypres, the Somme, and Verdun, all the soldiers in Europe would hardly be numerous enough to man this one front. The civilian will get a truer picture of the Western front and its conditions if he thinks of it as one long frontier,

guarded on both sides by soldiers in trenches—front line, support line, reserve line, rearward systems of back lines, all inter-connected by countless communicating trenches and byways—with certain definite areas, such as the three mentioned above, in and about which are to be found enormous concentrations of fighting men, guns, and munitions, for the simple reason that, in those particular sectors there is almost continuous and violent fighting.

Even in the quietest sectors, of course, there is intermittent firing, and men are killed and wounded every day and every night. This is because, even in these quietest sectors, where you may look abroad through your field-glasses for an hour without seeing one single sign of human life or movement—even there, one kind of strain is never for an instant relaxed by day or night, and that is the strain of men's watchful vision. There are some fire-trenches in which you could stand watching with glasses in some little screened observation gap, and neither hear nor see anything at all for a whole hour. Yet, if in that quiet spot you were to crawl out upon the parapet in daylight, twenty bullets would whiz past you, and two or three through you, in as many seconds—and your study of the front would be ended.

Or, again, supposing in one of those silent stretches of the front a hundred men were suddenly to spring forward over the parapet, as for an attack, not only would a hundred rifle bullets instantly come whistling about their ears, but, before they had gone many paces, thousands of machine-gun bullets would be traversing that particular hundred yards of earth with such intensity that nothing there could live a foot above the surface of the ground.

But, the knowledge of all this being common property, and the conditions governing both sides being identical, such things do not occur. The business of the occupants of those quiet trenches is the business of frontier guards; their aim, not so much aggression, as the prevention of aggressive action from the other side. Over and above the guarding of the frontier which the fire-trenches define, there is, of course, the dominating fact of the war, which means that in addition to watching and guarding against possible attack, the front line men on both sides are watching always for a chance to strafe—to destroy an enemy. There is a certain point in the enemy line where his parapet has been grooved and not repaired, or where a mound of fallen earth in his trench raises his head level as he passes that spot in his comings and goings;

or there is a spot at which he has fallen into a careless habit of taking a look out into "No Man's Land," because a bit of wood lying there forms a convenient elbow rest. The alert sentry or sniper gets to know such spots very quickly and has their range to a nicety. Several times he looses off a round or two in these directions and misses his mark, or is not quite quick enough. Then the luck changes, his bullet gets home, and there is a casualty over the way.

Again, an observant watcher (whose eyeballs ache from persistent staring through the cold mist and over the horribly confusing lines of barbed wire) detects the throwing up of earth, it may be from a trench some hundreds of yards in rear of the enemy's front line. An officer is warned and brings a powerful glass to bear upon the spot. By careful observation he is able to deduce the probable presence there at work of a considerable party of the enemy engaged perhaps in making a new dug-out or a gun emplacement. Not a living creature can he see, but so many shovelfuls of earth fly into the air between such and such points, at such and such intervals. A precise bearing is taken at once, with chart and compass; the exact relation of the spot to certain landmarks is measured off to a nicety; a message travels rear-

ward along the telephone lines to a battery behind the lines; and, shortly afterwards, the silence of that sector is suddenly rent asunder by the roar of artillery. Now shrapnel shells are bursting in the air all round and immediately over that stretch of enemy trench from which the shovelfuls of earth were seen to rise. Swift death falls among the workers there; and after that, it may be, a few heavy H.E. shells are landed in the midst of the place of their work, scattering the work itself to the four winds, and blowing to pieces dead and living alike among any that remain there. Then silence again. There is not a company commander upon either side who has not time and time again been responsible for such small diversions as that in the quietest sectors of the front. They may represent anything from two or three to half a hundred or more of casualties. But they do not occupy a line in French or British official *communiqués*, or vary in any way the stereotyped: "All quiet," or "Nothing to report," on "the rest of the front."

Neither, from the point of view of the soldier in this war, do such incidents affect the estimate of a given sector as being a "good," "safe," "quiet," or "cushy" station. His standard of comparison, you see, is very different from

anything that the home-staying civilian can even imagine. The British front, for example, consists mainly of open fighting trenches, as distinguished from the fortified strong places and elaborate earthworks which make some sectors of the front to all intents and purposes impregnable fortresses. In contrast with such strongholds, I have been recently in parts of the line where French soldiers are practically under unceasing fire; where there is practically not a minute, by day or by night, in which their own and enemy projectiles are not whizzing over their heads; places in which, all day long, the lines are spouting black mud, like volcanoes, from the continuous explosion among them of heavy shells; where the air is always full of rifle bullets, machine-gun bullets, and the deadly vertical hail that falls from shrapnel shells. But fortunately there are many very different sectors.

For example, on a recent bright winter's morning we left one sector of front line trenches, which were dominated entirely by mud and water, to pay a visit, for the midday meal, to the next sector but one; and the difference between the two sectors was not less than extraordinary. One may, perhaps, defy the Censor and make bold to say at once that the sector visited was

a certain point between Switzerland and the North Sea. The journey along the front line would have been needlessly toilsome and slow, and so we made first for the rear of the sector we were in, and there were able to secure the use of a motor car for the run to a certain point in rear of the sector we were to visit. We left the car on the edge of an open space of purely waste ground. We made promptly in one direction, the car, as directly, in another, where it awaited our return in perfect safety.

It may have been chance, or it may have been good observation, but five or six minutes after we left that car, Boche shells began to arrive all about that piece of waste ground upon which we had descended. They continued to land there for quite a considerable time, and thoroughly to plough and harrow ground which had already been turned over by the same machinery many, many times, without doing two-pennyworth of harm, or good, to anyone in the world. Not less than about one hundred pounds' worth of German ammunition was wasted over this operation, greatly to the amusement of the sentry at the opening to the tunnel from which we watched the process.

We were now perhaps a little over a mile and a half in rear of the particular trenches we wished

to reach, and the Boche gunners were making good and accurate practice on the perfectly empty and useless piece of waste land behind us.

"Eh, well," said the French officer with us. "Let the Boche go on storing his ammunition there. There's plenty of room for it, and it's better there than in his reserve stores. We will proceed."

So we started on our walk of a mile and a half, in which, notwithstanding the Boche trenches less than two miles away, and the bursting shells in our rear, we were in about as much danger as one faces in walking along a clean, well-lighted subway between one underground railway station and another in London or Paris; and about as much, neither more nor less, in need of trench boots. As a fact we were walking along a subway with an evenly bricked floor, well lighted by overhead electric lamps, and snugly lined on both sides by clean boards and regularly spaced joists. Along those cleanly boarded sides ran very many neatly suspended telephone wires, properly labelled at intervals for convenience in tapping and repairing, establishing communication between the numerous headquarters and remoter ramifications of an underground city. At certain well-screened intervals one saw daylight; and there were plenty of observation and

sentry posts, loop-holes, and gun-emplacements though our tunnel was entirely outside the ken or vision of the enemy.

An army corps could have been handled and moved with dispatch in the underground world we traversed before we emerged at last into the support line and communication trenches, which were so sited as to yield admirable cover both from observation and from fire, though the support trench and the fire trench both afforded a perfect field of fire across "No Man's Land."

Let it not be supposed that this wonderful network of underground communication was part of some old fortification or citadel. The picturesque little old town outside has been reduced absolutely to splinters by Boche "frightfulness" during the present war; and two years ago there was not one vestige in existence of any portion of this underground city. You may walk (if you do not mind taking your chances in the matter of the sudden, unmeaning little bursts of shelling which come without warning and accomplish nothing, because there remains nothing further to be destroyed) through the ruined streets of that town, and see the climax of desolation; more impressive, of course, than any devastated village on the Somme or before

Verdun, for of those nothing stands erect; whereas here almost every house has one wall standing, though few have more than two. The orderly French instinct for tidiness is responsible for the streets being kept clear of rubble, fallen bricks, and masonry; and there is another reason why all such material is so methodically stacked along the bases of the ruined houses. The ground, floors, and pavement which previous inhabitants trod underfoot now form roofs for the habitations of the present dwellers in this place. Head cover good enough to withstand the shock of really big shells is w'at they want; and they have it here in plenty. Above ground is a scene of utter desolation and empty ruin. Below ground all is animation and activity—warlike activity, combined with practically perfect safety.

At every turn in this underground maze one is tempted to stop, to examine and re-examine the striking evidences which meet one everywhere of French ingenuity, French patience, French thoroughness—of that French mastery of detail which in effect makes the French a nation of craftsmen. The complete organisation of the whole place, the perfect adaptation of means to ends is most extraordinary. The troops one found thronging this underworld had not made it;

they had arrived there but recently from quite another part of the front. Yet they strode here and there about their different underground affairs with the air of men born and bred precisely where one found them now.

For reasons best known to himself, the Boche prefers to reserve most of his hate in this sector for ruins and waste spaces behind the lines, and directs comparatively little fire upon the front lines. This suits the French very well, all their rearward communications being underground; and one result of it is seen in the wonderful neatness, cleanliness, and comfort of their front line trenches—full of every sort of ingenious little device which can be utilised to make life in a ditch easy to tolerate. There is no question here, as in certain German trenches one has seen (after their capture), of sumptuously fitted chambers and banqueting for officers. That would be clean contrary to the spirit and practice of the French Army, which is one of the most genuinely democratic institutions in the world. One has in different sectors met French officers of the highest rank serving in this war, some of whom are possessed of sufficient private means to provide themselves with almost anything that money can buy. But never once have I seen one hint of luxury in the quarters of French

officers of any rank on active service, any more than among the officers of the British Army, nor any sign of preventable squalor. This is not a detail, but an important factor, greatly to the credit of both Armies; for the demoralising effects of selfish luxury and indulgence, upon the one hand, and gross neglect and abandon to savagery on the other, are swift and deadly; and there is ample evidence to show that the rank and file in the Armies of Germany, and yet more of Austria, have been materially affected in their *moral* by the attitude of some of their officers in these directions.

But whilst thrift and simplicity rule among all ranks of the French Army it is a real pleasure to see the high standard of comfort and security which has been attained in such sectors of the French trenches as that now under consideration, where conditions have permitted free play for the campaigning ingenuity of the French soldier. The whole place is a triumph of method and system; and yet, in every essential detail, and in spirit, how radically different from the system glorified by the machine-loving, machine-driven Boche!

"Nothing very temporary about this," I said to a French officer, in one of those wonderful tunnels constructed in 1915. "This was never

constructed with a view to a quick end to the war."

"Eh, well," came the quick, smiling reply, "if an end comes soon nobody will waste regrets over this work; and if it should take twice as long or ten times as long as we suppose, still the Boche will never get past this. Meantime, our men are safe and comfortable; which is good, mark you, for men who have known what it is to go out to occupy strings of shell-holes for a week or more on end, with no communication with the rear. Oh, yes, it is good for them. They know that we shall waste no time; but they also know that if ten years are needed to break down the Boche machine—well, ten years will be given to it. They do not mean that their children should have to fight the same sort of war, these *poilus* of ours. They are very firmly set in their minds about that."

"Very firmly set in their minds"—Yes; I think that conveys the impression they produce upon one, these cheery, laughing, chatty soldiers of France. A great reserve force of settled determination, that, I think, is the something behind their equable good cheer which gives such an impression of solidity.

"It's a dirty job, the war," said one of them to me. "They forced it on us, and there's

no getting out of it. But, by God, we'll take good care it never has to be done again."

And in a way that *poilu* (a leading foreman in a considerable engineering works in civil life) may be said, I think, to have voiced the ruling sentiment and guiding faith and belief of the French Army of to-day.

XV

TYPICAL THINGS

In that particular sector of the French line, Divisional Headquarters was situated some three or four miles behind the trenches, and on this particular winter's morning—by good luck, it was bright and dry—it was evident from a quite early hour that special happenings were toward. The population was, of course, exclusively military, and we may take it that one half the Division was detained, by an unavoidable prior engagement, in the trenches. The other half, the resting regimental officers and men, and the Headquarters Staff, not to mention visitors from other neighbouring parts of the line, were much more than usually in evidence, and the smartness of everyone in the matter of clean boots and best uniforms, shining equipment and full display of medals, was quite festal, and almost embarrassing to anyone in the drab service kit of an English officer.

In due course the whole of the available troops

were paraded in line, and the full band, stationed on the right flank, played a stirring march. A troop of Spahis, born horsemen every one, and splendid in their turbans and flowing draperies, cantered off at the word of command to a point distant several hundred yards from the parade ground. Shortly afterwards, a couple of motor cars reached that same point, and the word went round that the General Commanding the Army Corps had arrived, and was being welcomed by the General Commanding the Division with the escort of Spahis; perhaps the most picturesque and striking mounted escort that any army can provide.

No doubt spare horses were in waiting at the point of arrival. The motor car has won deserved honour and renown during this war, in which it has played an enormously important part; but it has not quite that weight of tradition behind it as yet which would enable it to take the place of the horse on such occasions as this. And so the Generals, attended by their splendid escort, rode slowly forward to the outskirts of the parade ground.

In another moment the order for the "Present!" went reverberating down the long line, and the band played the opening bars of the "Marseillaise" with great vigour and spirit, as the

white-haired Commander of the Army Corps, on foot now, strode out before his troops, his right hand held high at the salute. The inspection was swift and soldierly, and the few words spoken to the representatives of each unit, always dramatically *à propos*, delighted everyone by showing that the General carried in his mind the special records of each individual branch of his extensive family.

Then came the more personal second act, in which a little group of officers received the insignia of the Legion of Honour from the General's hands. A fanfare of trumpets preceded each individual award, and in the dead silence that followed the blare of the instruments the General himself read out in ringing tones the record of the special act of bravery for which each distinction was awarded. Each recipient was embraced by the General, and then, with a vigorous clasp of the hand, congratulated in a few words.

At one stage, the General Commanding the Corps returned, and the notes of "God Save the King" rang out from the band. After a most felicitous little speech of tribute to the courage of English comrades, the General awarded the War Cross to two British officers, for acts of signal gallantry in that part of the line.

Then came a march past to the stirring strains of the "Sambre et Meüse," and after some hand-shaking and friendly talk among the group of leaders at thc saluting base, the ceremony ended. Throughout it had been dramatic, impressive, and picturesque, and thc whole thing had gone with a rhythmical swing and a complete absence of stiffness. All was in order, every detail went smoothly; yet—and this is where the artistry of the people shows itself—you would have said there was no mechanism, and you might easily have believed the whole affair to have been impromptu—a sort of happy accident.

Withal, it falls to be notcd that anything in the way of unhappy accidents was thoughtfully guarded against. A couple of aeroplanes—fighting 'planes—were circling far overhead between that parade ground and the Boche lines, throughout the function; and a third, a big triplane, swoopcd down upon us at frequent intervals, looping the loop and indulging in other aerial gymnastics by way of marking its pilot's instant readiness to deal adequately with any curious intruders who might venture from "over the way."

Such little behind-the-lines ceremonies as this decoration parade arc doubtless fairly frequent

on all fronts during this war in which so many millions of men are engaged. They certainly are a part of France's wise policy of humanising the whole savage business, so far as it may be humanised. This is partly because the French are an eminently humane and highly civilised people, and partly because they are very practical and logical. Swift action may be very well, and in certain conditions highly necessary, but, very clearly, very surely, France has recognised the supreme importance in this war of the factor of human endurance, long sustained and unvarying. One gets the impression that this end is never for a moment lost sight of in her military calculations; that very many of her ordinances are framed largely with a view to the continuous nourishment and support of this quality of unending endurance, and that no conceivable combination of circumstances will ever shake the endurance of the French Army and the French people, even though the war she wages, for herself and for the interests of humanity and civilisation as these are viewed by the Allies, were to last for twenty years.

There is not the smallest doubt in my mind that the French Army from top to bottom is ruled and dominated by one common determination, which is just as big a factor in the daily life

of the average *poilu*, as in that of the General. The fundamental idea in life of every soldier with whom I talked, quite irrespective of rank, is to get this war over—*once and for all;* to fight it out to a finish which really will be a finish. They have been not merely at, but in, this war from the start, for they have fought it on their own soil, and know all there is to know about it. They know a good deal about war generally; for every Frenchman who cannot remember a previous war in France has learned of it from his parents, which is a very different matter from learning about it in books. The French soldier knows all about it, and has made up his mind once and for all to finish it, so far, at all events, as his own beloved country is concerned; and he cherishes pretty strong hopes that he will finish this war, in conjunction with his Allies, in so effective a style as to make it the last of wars. The fathers of France are fighting side by side with their own sons and the sons of their elders; and all alike will continue to fight, no matter how long the operation lasts, till they reach the point at which they feel that their children, and the unborn children of France, are absolutely secured against the risk of being called upon to face again the same sort of outrage upon their cherished civilisation.

To an English officer of high rank, who has spent much of his life in close connection with the French Army, I put a question regarding its discipline. His reply struck me as interesting. He said :

" French Army discipline is the most wonderful in the world. You have to be almost a Frenchman really to comprehend and appreciate it, and the casual observer from outside is apt to see very little of it. As a fact, it concerns itself less with the surface of things than does the discipline of most other armies. That is why it is harder for the outsider to understand. But, after years of study in it, and with regard specially to active service conditions, it is my deliberate opinion that French Army discipline is the finest in the world. Next to it, I would rank the discipline of the British Army ; and, a good long way down the scale, I would put the machine-made and utterly inelastic discipline of the German Army, which cramps soldiers, instead of developing them. But French Army discipline is unique and wonderful. The men and their leaders are one. I hardly know how else to describe it. They are one. Naturally, your French officer can get his men to go anywhere, do anything ; just as you can make your right arm swing in one direction, and your left in

the other; both being parts of your one person. French Army discipline is all gingerbread and no gilt; all egg and no shell; all reality and very little ritual—the finest discipline for a fighting army that the world has ever seen."

Talking to a French General who has served with distinction at Verdun and on the Somme, as well as in other parts of the line, I asked for an example of individual bravery and devotion on the part of a French soldier, which had come under his own notice. The General smiled.

"To tell you of one means ignoring so many," he said. "One sees so many hundreds of acts of dashing bravery; the enduring kind, too, for that matter. Well, now, take the case of Cobigo. I was then a Colonel, commanding the ——th Infantry Regiment. Cobigo was a corporal in charge of a section of my stretcher-bearers. I have often seen him at work among bad cases out in the open under heavy fire, a consistent and conscientiously good worker. At Lorette, on the 23rd May, 1915, there was hot fighting all day long. Our men had advanced, in the face of a withering fire, and even reached the Boche front line. But the concentration of strength there was too great, and we were obliged

to retire, leaving a good many wounded on the ground. As darkness came on the wounded crawled back to our trenches, and all possible help was given to them, of course, though the Boches kept up a withering fire on wounded and stretcher-bearers alike. Presently we came to the conclusion that there was nobody left alive in No Man's Land.'

'It was then that I saw coming towards me down the trench Corporal Cobigo, who asked permission to speak privately to me. Knowing something of the man I did not hesitate, of course, but took him into a shelter. 'It is a case of conscience, my Colonel,' he said, 'and a serious one, or I would not trouble you. I have been at work out there. Well, I know there is still one Frenchman alive out there. He lies in a shell-hole, very near the Boche line. He is so badly injured that he could not possibly move. Neither could I move him, unless I had two men with me. The Boches are close to him, in a sap, and when he so much as stirs one hand or lets out a little moan, they fire. Naturally, if I could get him by myself, my Colonel, I should have gone, and would not have troubled you. But I cannot shift him without help, and to go there is very nearly certain death. The point that troubles me is, knowing that, have I, a mere

corporal, the right to order anyone to go with me? My life is my own to dispose of, and I want no advice there; but the case of the others——I am troubled about that, my Colonel; so I came to you.'

"Well, I could see what it meant. The man out there was almost certainly dying. It would very probably mean the killing of three others if I let the corporal go out. And so I decided the point for him, as you would suppose; told him he had done well to come to me, and that the circumstances did not warrant anyone at all going out to that particular spot.

"Cobigo thanked me, saluted, and went out again into the trench, looking very sad. From his sergeant I learned afterwards what happened. He went straight from me down the trench and along to the part of the parapet facing the spot where the dying man lay. There he crawled out, entirely by himself, with field dressings, of course, and wine. But long before he got across, the sweeping fire stopped him, and he was forced back; fortunately, not dangerously wounded. I promoted Cobigo and made him a sergeant; but I was just too late. He never wore his sergeant's stripes, because on June 12th he was killed in trying to save another wounded soldier

"They'll be starting to bombard us in forty minutes from now"

at Angres. I think he had the real, cool bravery that you call the two-o'clock-in-the-morning kind, that Cobigo."

To one distinguished French General I put this question: "What would you say of the present spirit and attitude towards the war of the troops under your command?" Here is the General's answer, as I scribbled it in my note-book:—

"Every soldier in the French Army has in his heart the active and absolute conviction that, individually, he is greatly superior to the German soldier. Up till now, the enemy's advantage has been in his machinery, his 'scrap-iron,' as our lads say. He will not always have that advantage, and he will quite certainly be forced presently into the open, away from his mechanism. Every French soldier, no matter what his rank, is absolutely certain that when that time comes we shall overpower the Boche. We know it. Everything that we think of the enemy is, for our men, summed up in the word 'Boche.' They never use any other word for the German. It is a word born of German infamy in France and in Belgium. And it is a word which will remain—a word that history will affix to the German, even as the fleur-de-lys was burned into the shoulder of the convict:

an indelible brand of shame. That is what I would say of the spirit and attitude towards the war of the troops under my command; but it would be equally true of the entire French Army and, what is more, it would be equally true of the entire French nation. In these matters, at least, we are all one."

Everyone who has served in France during this war has noted the fact that Private Thomas Atkins is very popular among his brothers in arms of the French Army. I asked many French soldiers about the causes of this popularity, and from all ranks, generally without hesitation, the reply came that the main reason of Tommy's popularity was that he appeared to take everything in life good-humouredly. Well or ill, victorious or defeated, hungry or feasting, the French soldier finds that Tommy is extraordinarily good-tempered. They like him for that, and for his sportsmanlike readiness at all times to share, not alone dangers and hardships, but any good things he may chance to possess with any comrade, French or British. One French officer said to me:—

"All my countrymen think highly of your countrymen; they admire and trust them greatly. They believe that your countrymen may be slow sometimes, and may make mistakes—who

does not?—but that, having set their hand to any task, the British never leave it unfinished; that they will 'stick it,' you say—eh?—for ever. But, mind you, the great majority of our people, though they like and admire your people for what they do know about them, don't understand in the least the real immensity of Britain's effort in this war. They cannot see the naval part. They know that the part of the Western front held by the British is an active and difficult line. But they are not really in a position to judge even of the dry land part of the British effort, because they lack the knowledge which gives correct standards of comparison. Some simple method ought to be adopted of conveying bare facts to the great majority of our people. They have no conception of the gigantic progress represented, for example, by the fact that your Army in France now has as many officers as it had privates when the war began. But, even without knowledge, you have seen how our people feel towards the British. Never again after this war can there be the same sort of division between your people and mine. Our youngsters will all learn English, and yours will all speak French. The Channel—we shall, how you say? Sap it—no? And so cross without the affliction of the seasiek!"

Even in England there are hundreds of thousands of people who do not know and understand the immense, many-sided British effort. It is a vast business for any individual mind to comprehend in its entirety.

XVI

RAILHEAD FOR VERDUN

HAVING left Paris at about eight in the evening, we climbed out of the train at something after three o'clock of a black winter's morning, along with a dozen or two of French officers and several hundred *poilus*, apparently bound for the line after leave. This was not one of those places where the railway runs comparatively near to the trenches, and where, in consequence, one finds something of the atmosphere of the fighting line right outside the station. There was no sound of gun-fire here, nor anything much else connected with the fighting line, except the throng of sky-blue-coated men, and an accumulation of trains loaded with war stores.

When the throng of soldiers had melted away, we discovered an elderly man with some leisure on his hands, who appeared to think that, in our interests, he might be able to raise a hand-barrow upon which to place our valises, and a

few minutes later we were following this guide out across the puddles of the station approach, and into the impenetrable gloom beyond. We crossed a bridge presently, and heard beneath it the murmur of a stream one knew to be historic. Dimly, too, by hard peering, one made out the forms, erect as guardsmen, of a few of its sentinels: the high pollards that line its banks on both sides. Then we wheeled to our right down a main street as silent as the grave, and our guide presently halted outside a great sparred gate in an archway. One saw him groping for the hanging handle of a bell, and when he tugged at it there came reverberating echoes from the courtyard within, with a chilly suggestion of hollowness; of something monastic or penitential, not altogether in accord with our hopeful mood and thoughts of warm beds.

One of the big gates swung open in due course, disclosing a girl whose face wore an almost more than womanly expression of gravity and responsibility, and whose head and neck were swathed in a black woollen shawl. With her was a magnificent person with an impressive hat and an astrachan-collared ulster. Despite his magnificence, one instinctively ignored this gentleman in approaching the serious business

Beloved of his comrades, he is a terror to the Boche.

of obtaining rooms in the Hôtel du Commerce. Theoretically, he might be ever so imposing and splendid; but our serious objective was practical comfort; and it was the girl-woman with the black shawl to whom we addressed ourselves. And she, with her practical woman's outlook, more or less ignored us—who could be dealt with at leisure later—and bade the patriarch who had led us there convey our valises within. This done, and the patriarch suitably rewarded, we all trooped in through the courtyard to the hotel office with our natural leader and superior: the girl with the shawl.

The gentleman with the overcoat said not a word, but, as evidence of the universality of his calling and its trappings, it may be mentioned that my companion identified him without hesitation as the advance agent of some theatrical company, on the strength of his coat, his walk, and his face. Face to face with Destiny, in the form of a girl-woman in the hotel office, we learned, without too great a shock, that there was not a single bedroom available in the house, and explained that, this being so, we would stay where we were till daylight, having no desire in the direction of promenading. Having pondered this idea in her brooding, motherly way for a few moments, the girl-woman lighted

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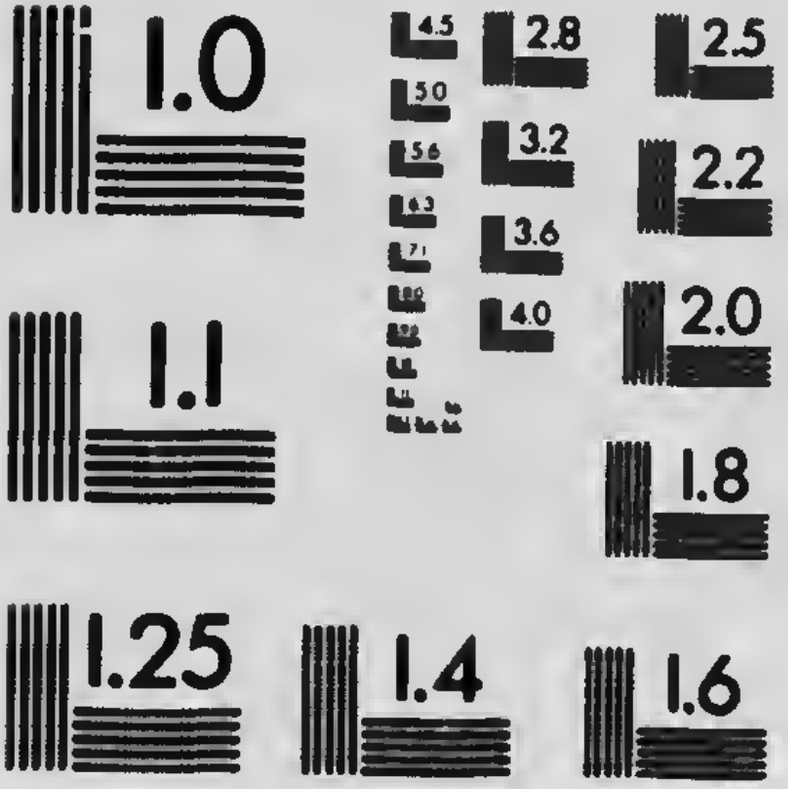

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a small hand-lamp and bade us follow her, rather with the air of a kindly parent who murmurs to herself: "Ah, well, I suppose one must humour these children at times; it is not as though they were altogether bad or naughty children."

So she led us out and through the sepulchral courtyard to the big gateway. Was it possible that, despite her maternal airs, she was about to consign us to the cold and sloppy streets? A Klaxon horn screeched hoarsely outside as we reached the gate, and, quite dramatically, as one big door was swung open before us, two big cars came to an abrupt standstill outside, under severe brake pressure, and began to discharge a considerable cargo of passengers. There was a man here and there, too insignificant to be noted among that press of veiled, cloaked, and well-wrapped feminine figures who dominated the picture, the title of which, by the way, would necessarily have been: "After the Ball," or something of that sort.

So far from being in any way overpowered by the newcomers, our girl-mother merely nodded curtly to the first of them, leaving all else to the gentleman in astrachan, who had apparently followed us out for that purpose. Us she led, with a peremptory gesture of the hand, across

the wet street to an apparently empty house opposite. It was a still night, and the little lamp burned bravely. We mounted several flights of uncovered stairs behind our guide, and finally were introduced to a small bedroom containing an enormous bed, a minute cupboard, and nothing else. However, the bed was the main thing, and we were well content to see it. In bidding our hostess good-night—it was then about four o'clock—and asking that we might be called betimes in the morning, one ventured an inquiry regarding the recent arrivals over the way. They were the members of a theatrical company, and had just been brought back in the cars we had seen, after giving a performance for the soldiers behind the lines at Verdun. The performance had ended about midnight; but after that had come a supper, and then the run in the cars of perhaps fifty kilometres.

So that was why the Hôtel du Commerce had been unable to accommodate us. And, in any case, one gathered that it was generally full these days, there being very much coming and going round about railhead behind Verdun.

Three minutes later, before stretching oneself on the big bed, one went to the window overlooking the street. A huge motor lorry was grunting on its way through the town, carrying

the major part of an aeroplane. This vehicle was the advance guard of many, and its passage marked the end of the silent portion of the night which, one gathered, lasted from about one to four a.m., at the utmost.

XVII

VERDUN

WITHOUT ever having made an inquiry on the point, one would imagine that there is a good deal of iron in the earth round about Verdun. That is the impression one forms. The whole place has a look of iron about it—jagged, enduring, stern, unbreakable.

It was interesting to note that, from such points as they still command, the Boche gunners continue to waste heavy ammunition upon the actual citadel of Verdun. Their shells have about as much effect upon that citadel and its garrison as a small boy could achieve by stone-throwing or pea-shooting.

If the Boche had been capable of smashing his way through the outer defences of Verdun, he might, of course, have surrounded the citadel, and, eventually, have compelled its surrender. And yet, I greatly doubt the surrender, whilst any of the garrison remained alive. In any case, the Boche has learned now that even the greatest

concentration of military strength under the Crown Prince of which the German Empire is capable will never serve to carry the outer defences of Verdun. The soul of France is indubitably a very much greater, finer thing than the soul of Germany; and, since the beginning of 1916, Verdun has been fortified by a great deal of that spirit; by more of the soul of France than all the might of Germany can conquer. But one would be sorry that any word one wrote should have the effect of reducing in any way the amount of ammunition the Boche is still prepared to waste over the citadel of Verdun. Having slept comfortably in the citadel under Boche shell-fire, I am prepared to testify that that particular place forms an excellent depository for all the ammunition the Boches can spare.

With regard to the ancient city itself, as apart from the citadel, every typical Boche, every "true German," as their leaders might prefer to put it, will probably be glad to learn that a great deal of damage has been done by the guns which have been so carefully trained on the magnificent cathedral of Verdun, with its fine mediæval iron work and noble eleventh-century masonry. The apostles of *Kultur* may safely add to their fine records a good deal of

destruction here of things sacred and lovely. The handiwork of craftsmen who laboured lovingly in Verdun many centuries before any German Empire was dreamed of has been reduced to dust in this ancient town, by the concentrated and prolonged efforts of "true German" enlightenment and civilisation. But, withal, the old city, like the spirit of its defenders, remains somehow miraculously intact, erect, "bloody, but unbowed," scarred and torn as though some bestial maniac had been permitted to work his mad will with it, but, in essence, unbroken. It is very wonderful the way in which, tangibly and physically, Verdun seems to epitomise and represent the dauntless and unbreakable heroism, the unconquerable resisting force of the spirit of its defenders. I lack the ability to explain this phenomenon, and indeed am not certain if adequate words exist for that task; but, in sober truth, it seemed to me that commune with these scarred and wounded walls—some of them dating back farther than the antiquarians and historians can follow them—assured one of a truth no words or calculations could alter or remove: that there is a definite limit set to the triumph of might over right; that there are some barriers which mere brute force and soulless mechanism cannot break

down, no matter how ruthlessly they may be driven and exploited; and that Verdun and its defences represent one of those barriers.

The soul of a people blocked the Crown Prince's path to Verdun, just as, in 1914, the souls of three peoples blocked the path of his perjured sire to Paris and to Calais; and neither the Krupp family nor the German General Staff nor the military caste of Prussia have yet been able, or ever will be able, to forge a weapon strong enough to break the souls of the peoples who face them on their Western front. If Germany, as she now pretends, had truly entered upon this war in defence of her Fatherland, the matter might be otherwise. But, entering upon it as she did, aggressively, as bully, brigand, and thief, her greatest concentrations of force must needs lack, as they have lacked at Verdun, that steady, inextinguishable flame of righteous anger and determination which lights the path of the defenders of Verdun, and makes them invincible.

Going to and fro along the subterranean highways and byways of the citadel of Verdun, the observer having English standards in mind might easily imagine himself in some of the clean, well-lighted subways of the "Tuppenny Tube," except that the general artistic level of the advertisements and posters on the walls is

perhaps rather higher at Verdun than in Piccadilly. Perhaps the Metro in Paris would be a better comparison. The theatre inside the citadel is going on nicely; but the city theatre outside is perhaps a greater source of pride, and a priceless joy to *poilus* returning from a turn of duty in that other theatre whose footlights are supplied by the Boche, and called star-shells. The spirit of resistance in Verdun is of iron; iron will, iron determination, iron rigidity in the face of any onslaught, iron indifference to wounds; iron dominates and is the key-note. But it is all very French, and if I have written a word suggesting melancholy, depression, or sullenness, I have inadvertently libelled Verdun. It is all very French, and I have seen as much humour and appreciation of humour, and heard as much hearty laughter in Verdun as anywhere in France. That is all a part of the barrier which the Boche has found impregnable at Verdun, at Ypres, and on the Somme. Amid the ghastly horrors of his own creation, he has utterly lost such sense of humour as German education may have left him before the war began. Amidst the same terrible scenes, the soldiers of France and Britain have developed a keener sense of humour than they ever had before. This vital factor is worth very much mechanism. It is partly due to

racial and temperamental qualities; but primarily, perhaps, to the basic difference between the Boche cause and the Allied cause. You cannot fight for the creed of Super-manism and *Kultur*, and retain a sense of humour. But, given a sense of humour to begin with, there is no reason why you should lose it in fighting for freedom, justice, humanity, civilisation and the kindly decencies of life. There is no reason why you should lose it, in those circumstances. And if in the midst of all the gruesome frightfulness the Boche can impose you are able to develop that same sense of humour and strengthen it, then you go far towards climinating whatever chances the "Superman" ever had of overcoming you and of imposing his ugly and mechanical philosophy upon Christendom.

It is probably safe to say that Verdun has supped as full of horrors as any city ever did, in our time or in any other time. Yet I should be glad to wager that, per head of the population (which, of course, is strictly military, all serving soldiers), you would have found to the full as much innocent merriment, jollity, and good-humour on Christmas Day, 1916, in Verdun, as in any city in the world, not excepting those of the countries which have known no fighting in this war.

In the different theatres of this war may be found many scenes of stark desolation and ruin from which, at first glance, it would seem that the last vestiges of human influences have long since been removed; in which you would suppose it impossible to meet with any more active opposition to your will than might come from rats or other vermin which remain after all humans have deserted a place. There are times when an utter and deathly silence pervades such scenes of ruin; and then they do seem as forlornly derelict and remote from human effort and influence as any water-logged hulk drifting among floes in an empty, arctic sea. Withal, upon a given signal, such as the threat of an attack, those same apparently deserted heaps of ruins can suddenly become more deadly in their activity than a powder factory or an arsenal. Then, as you begin to trace out some of the hidden cavities from which their guns belch forth death and destruction to the enemy, you realise something of the minute precision with which these seemingly useless and deserted ruins have been organised.

Verdun is, of course, far from being an example of the complete ruin, despite the colossal amount of "hate" the Boche has lavished upon it. But the efficiency of its organisation is marvel-

lously complete, and full of wonderful surprises. If, instead of the humiliating failure which has been his portion; if, instead of being beaten steadily back to the line on which his operations began in February, 1916, the Crown Prince had succeeded in forcing his "cannon-fodder" close up to the ancient walls of Verdun itself, the slaughter of German soldiery would have been something entirely without parallel, even in this giant-scale war. So much one may be permitted to say, though, naturally, one has no thought of attempting to describe those wonderful defences. It is part of the set determination which rules France to-day that nothing should be left to chance; and that where so many thousands of valuable French lives have been yielded up in the service of the State, no single hazard should be run that can be avoided. Accordingly, even whilst her gloriously victorious troops were seizing trench after trench of the Boche positions miles in front of Verdun, one found the elaborate defences of Verdun itself being still further elaborated, and the sure certainty of the ancient gateway's resisting power being made yet more certain, day by day. There may have been a time when, at a terrific and murderous price, the Boche might have taken Verdun, given a sufficiency of driving power from the Crown Prince

or from those who minister to that ill-fated leader. But it is impossible to spend many days in the neighbourhood of Verdun now without having the conviction borne in upon one that, as matters stand to-day, the conquest of Verdun is a thing entirely outside and beyond the enemy's greatest powers. Once and for all, iron-hearted Verdun has repelled the Boche's most virulent malevolence.

And beyond Verdun; the trenches, the miles of pulverised valleys and hills, the Verdun battle-front; obviously, the time has not yet arrived for the publication of descriptive detail where that area is concerned. Having climbed, toiled, and scrambled to and fro upon the torn and ravaged face of that Gethsemane, one may make one statement regarding it, without indiscretion and entirely without fear of contradiction. It most assuredly is sacred ground. If any portion of this earth is hallowed and sanctified, the words may safely be applied to the ghastly terrain before Verdun.

For thinking men and women in France, as in Britain and in Belgium, there must for generations to come be many sacred tracts of earth between Nieuport and Belfort. There is no need to recapitulate the place names that have made their marks on all our hearts, when, so

recently as during the Somme offensive, single little villages have absorbed more human blood than was spilt in the whole of many a considerable war of bygone days. But for those, irrespective of nationality, who once have set foot on the ground lying between Eix, Damloup, Vaux, Souville, Douaumont, the place where Fleury was, Vacherauville, Cumières, and Le Mort Homme, there never can be any doubt about the supreme sanctity of the Verdun front. Eloquent tributes have been paid to the sanctity of sites upon which individual martyrs have been done to death for their faith. Here is ground upon which thousands of Frenchmen of all classes and grades immolated themselves gladly in martyrdom the most absolute and complete, for their faith in France, and in the cause of humanity and civilisation, justice and decency as espoused by France. With vehement forethoughtful gladness and determination they yielded up their lives to save their children, and the children that are to come after, from a like fate; to rid Christendom of the most brutal and deadly menace it has known in modern times.

It is one vast grave, that churned and pulverised sea of mud; and you shall not traverse any portion of it without walking over the bodies of heroes. Ghastly it assuredly is, as any nightmare

vision of a prehistoric landscape or an extinct planet; as any mediæval seer's dream of a future state for sinners. And yet, for men and women on the Allied side, there is nothing here for tears, though much, very much, for reverence, for pride, for gratitude, and for inspiration to unconquerable resolution. In countless cases here we know that the German soldiers were driven like beasts to the slaughter. There has never been an instance of such tactics on the French side. Of the thousands who have given their lives to save this gate of France, there was not one but went to his death gallantly; gladly making the supreme sacrifice for the supreme cause; led always (until his leaders fell, and he went on alone with a cheer for France), but never driven. Let no theorist tell a soldier of France, and least of all a *poilu* of Verdun, that one of those lives was sacrificed in vain. It is the pride and privilege of the survivors to see to it that not one sacrifice is wasted; and finely, finely they have discharged their obligation during the past few months.

If ever a piece of Mother Earth was brutally and savagely violated by human agency, this Verdun front has been ravaged and violated by the Boche. But for the French, and for their Allies, I repeat that there is nothing here for

tears; or not, at all events, for the tears of grief and tribulation. In connections quite other than warlike one has read of "pious tears"; and one would not say but what the Verdun front might moisten the eyes of the bravest soldier in France with tears of that sort; though all I have seen in the eyes of soldiers there has been the steady light which comes of certain confidence in victory, of unalterable determination to pursue to its end, no matter what obstacle may be encountered by the way, the track so superbly blazed for them by the heroes who have fallen in the unforgettable defence of Verdun.

The Return to the Trenches.

XVIII

SACRED GROUND

THE Voie Sacrée is the name by which it is known to every *poilu* in France; and I suppose there are few civilised people in the world to-day who have not heard of the sacred road of Verdun; the road that saved France, as those say who know it best.

Germany may for some time yet cling to her dismal illusion that force and mechanism rule the world, that might is right, and that brute force is the only thing that counts. And yet, how many things there have been in this war alone, how many products of her own ruthless brutality, which, rightly understood, most positively give the lie to any such morbid fallacies!

How much was known of the King of the Belgians in the remoter parts of Christendom before the war? The Kaiser, by means of an attempted demonstration of his brute force policy of "hacking through," conferred deathless fame upon King Albert and all his people, in a

few short weeks. By the assertion of his barbarous belief, in Belgium and in Serbia, he called into being among the Allies the mightiest engine of resisting power and of punishment that the world has ever seen. What did the name Verdun signify to the great mass of people of Christendom before this war, or even before the 1st of February, 1916? And who would doubt that to-day its fame is greater, its significance far more universally appreciated than the name and fame of the capital of the German Empire? To-day, the words Verdun and heroism are synonymous. The heroism of unfaltering endurance, of invincible resistance, is now associated for ever with Verdun and its Voie Sacrée. The world hails Verdun as the most glorious and inspiring pledge that Fate and Civilisation have vouchsafed us, of the inherent falseness of German profanity, and the fundamental truth and vitality of our own basic ideal; that Right still is greater than Might, and shall prevail, if men will but be true to themselves; aye, even though all the raging forces of hell itself be loosed on the other side—the side of savagery and mere brute force, the side of the Boche and his anti-human *Kultur*.

There is now a light railway which runs all the way up to the lines before Verdun for the

carriage of munitions and supplies. Yet even now the sacred road from Bar le Duc carries an immense volume of war traffic: from the flying cars of General Officers, who are always hurrying, and the whizzing motor cycles of despatch-riders, to the huge covered motor lorries, an apparently endless succession of which is carrying soldiers, stores, munitions, and the like. Imagine, then, what this wonderful road must have been like in the early part of the German Crown Prince's great and historic failure; when there was no railway line; when those splendid workers, the Territorial soldiers of France, lined the highway on both sides, feeding from their shovels the holes torn by an endless moving chain consisting of thousands of three- and five-ton motor lorries (apart from the necessary swifter vehicles), running no more than sixty yards apart, and running absolutely without check or break, by day or night, to feed the men and the guns that saved Verdun and broke the German hopes.

Many thousands of wounded men have travelled that road; and there is the blood of many heroes in it. Scarcely less heroic, as one looks back upon their truly wonderful work, were the men who held that sorely strained highway together, and those who, without pause or rest, hurried back and forth over it to feed the men and the

guns. It may be doubted whether in all the world's history any stretch of road in any country ever sustained such a traffic as that which flowed to and from Verdun during the early months of last year. The whole might of Germany was concentrated upon the task of breaking down French resistance once and for all, by smashing through this historic French gateway, which was an old stronghold, the students say, when Julius Cæsar walked the earth. Here, France was to be "bled white" —like all the most brutal phrases of the war, the words are those of the Boche writers—while the Crown Prince's vast hordes of men hacked through their road to Paris. Here, Boche guns were massed so thickly as to fill the air with their projectiles, that they might be sure of sweeping away resistance, by obliterating a whole countryside.

Well, they accomplished all that mechanism can accomplish. They shifted whole landscapes. They obliterated villages, so that upon the sites where once they stood I have been unable to find any one whole thing as large as a brick. They slew thousands of brave men; and they sacrificed their own brutally so-called "cannon-fodder" in swathes, in thousands and in tens of thousands. And, so far from bleeding France

white and breaking through her heroically held lines, they stimulated France to a great new offensive elsewhere, in conjunction with her British Allies, and themselves have been gradually, surely beaten back, yard by yard, to what is almost the line they held before the beginning of their savage onslaught, with its wholly unparalleled concentrations of guns and munitions, and its wholly unprecedented and quite reckless sacrifices of their own deluded and herded troops.

And still, not alone among the Boches (who, of course, are too far gone in their slavery to the obsession to find cure this side of utter defeat), but also among the writers and so-called experts of other lands, many may be found to pronounce this war "a war of mechanism pure and simple," and one in which mechanism only can give victory. A few French and English writers have been betrayed into the same fundamental error, by lack of first-hand knowledge. A well-known English writer quite recently made this blunder, and based a clever though entirely fallacious argument upon conclusions drawn from this initial mistake. The Boche has based all his calculations upon the same short-sighted assumption, which, had it only been correct, would have brought him victory before the end of 1914, in place of the defeat which actually was his

portion before he had been three months at war. If it were really a war of mechanism and no more, the Boche must inevitably have been in Paris well before Christmas 1914; the retreat from Mons would have meant annihilation for the Franco-British forces; or, to come down to the later stages, the Boche must have swept triumphantly through Verdun in early March, 1916. If it were no more than a war of mechanism there would have been no second battle of Ypres, for it very certainly was not mere mechanism that held the Boche back in the first battle.

It falls to be noted that outside the land of the Boches, this fundamental error about the war being one of mechanism pure and simple has not once betrayed a soldier, least of all a soldier who fought during 1914 or 1915. They have seen too much of the other side of the shield. It is, perhaps, a natural enough blunder for the arm-chair critic. It is an impossible one for the man who has lived in trenches opposite the Boche, and met the Boche face to face in "No Man's Land," or in his trenches. To all such men—perhaps in recompense for some of the devilish hardships they have suffered—it has been given quite certainly and surely to comprehend the vital fact that, essential as the provision o

adequate mechanical resources may be, and is, there is another and an overruling factor which in the past has enabled the Allies to meet and defeat the most carefully matured and elaborate plans of the Boche, and in the future will enable them to bring the Boche finally to his knees.

The clever critics in civil life must not tell the survivors of Mons, the Marne, Verdun, Ypres, and the Somme that this is a war of mechanism pure and simple; they must not tell the men who know Fleury, Souville, Vaux, Douaumont, Poivre Hill, the ground between Cumières and Eix, with all i[illegible]netity of martyrdom, heroism, and tragedy, th[illegible] only mechanism can give the victory. The notion may be unanswerable in a [illegible]ortable study, or in one of the rhetorical outbursts [illegible] the Arch-Boche. But it will never do for the men who really know, and who have paid in blood and sweat and agony, in blanched hair or broken health, for their knowledge. It is not mechanism —but, rather, perhaps, it is blind faith in mechanism—which makes the Boche cry "Mercy, Kamerad"; and it is not mechanism which prevents any equivalent cry from ever being heard on the lips of a *poilu*, or of one of his British brothers in arms. It may at once be granted that, lacking mechanical resources, no army could possibly survive in this war. It may further

be admitted that, the more abundant our mechanical resources the less terrible the price we must pay in human blood for victory. But mechanism alone could never have saved Verdun, and to suppose that the whole business of this war is a matter of mechanics is to borrow the grossly heathen philosophy of the Boche—the very creed which will bring about the collapse of his ambitions and the downfall of his dominion.

I went through a field ambulance behind the Verdun lines to see some of the heroes of the last triumphant French advance by which they regained the ground the Boche had paid such a monstrous price to wrest from them long months ago. They reconquered by the kilometre; the Boche had acquired it by the yard, paying a fearful price for every foot he gained. The men I went to see were those whose injuries had been too serious to admit of their being moved farther back, with safety, for a little while. I wish that all the apostles of pure mechanics and the mailed fist could (without disturbing for an instant one of those wounded heroes) have an opportunity of learning the sort of lessons which that field ambulance had to offer. One could devote many pages to the attempt to describe and pay tribute to the spirit of Verdun; and one would need to be far more skilful than the present writer

In a Field Ambulance behind the Verdun front, November, 1916.

to give the attempt much chance of success. But, when one was on the spot, one felt that a man might perhaps more readily learn the meaning and significance of this spirit, there in the field ambulance (providing that he approached the task with all proper humility), than he could in any other way acquire the same knowledge, outside the trenches, or, rather, the shell-holes of the actual Verdun front line itself.

Short of absolute disintegration, of annihilation, German mechanism had spent its worst terrors on these men; and the spirit of them remained as pure and bright a flame as I have ever seen. Truly, these shattered heroes epitomised in their own broken persons the deathless spirit of resistance which has proved Verdun a gate of France that not all the might and all the mechanism of the German Empire could break through. Even when too weak to turn his head upon the pillow, not one of those brave fellows lacked the invincible strength of spirit to move his lips in a smile as one drew near, and to draw one's gaze, with a flicker of his own tired eyes, in the direction of the Croix de Guerre or other medal at his bed's head, which he had won in this his latest sacrifice for France. Gladness, pride, confident assurance of ultimate victory, and cheerful readiness to endure while life should

last, for France and for her sacred cause ; nothing less could one detect in the mind and heart of even the most cruelly broken man there.

You would step up to the bedside of a soldier whose temperature chart showed a line more crooked than the hind leg of any dog. Wounded in head, shoulders, and loins by fragments of a shell, and blown by the force of a great explosion from one shell-hole into another, at the end of five or six days of the cruellest sort of exposure, culminating in a most exhausting attack ; you found this lad, with smiling lips and shining eyes, distressed only because, for the moment, it seemed his hands were somewhat too weak to extract from the little cloth bag on the coverlet beside him the medal he wished you to see : France's recognition of his prowess in the last attack. When found, he held it out before you in the hollow of two trembling hands, so that, for an instant, you cursed the weakness that forced you to turn aside from the gaze of his brave, simple eyes, to hide the sudden moisture in your own. For all your whole limbs and power freely to walk abroad, he with his torn and lacerated body and fever-lowered vitality had greater strength than you.

Side by side, you found the desert-bred Arab and the office man from Paris, both with two

limbs amputated, and both absolutely unscathed in heart and mind and spirit. And as they told of the storming of Poivre Hill, the recapture of the ground the Boche had bought so dearly, they made you feel that they felt, simply and without any exaggeration at all, that the loss of their limbs was nothing, that the loss of their lives would have been nothing; nothing at all, in the light of success achieved in the effort made for France.

I have seen greater, truer strength and bravery displayed by broken soldiers on hospital beds in France th- I believe the finest regiment in Germany can to-day put forth upon the field of battle. It had nothing to do with mechanism; but it was part and parcel of a certain spirit, in their possession of which the Allies are rich beyond the dreams of German Generals; the same spirit which has made Verdun impregnable, a name that conjures willing tribute of honour and reverence from every thinking man in the civilised world—I say "civilised" advisedly—the same spirit which in the end will quite certainly exact complete reparation for every violation of the soil of France and Belgium.

In the grim presence of Death; in the face of tragedy vaster than was dreamed of by the classic writers of old; fresh from the contemplation of

sacrifices on a greater scale than any recorded in history, one should not be, one need not be, suspected of exaggeration or extravagance. One may even, perhaps, be permitted the suggestion that experience of the task of commanding men in the firing line in France, whilst well calculated to give humility and regard for his fellows to any man who thinks at all, most certainly makes for sobriety of thought and outlook. At least, the writer well knows that he has no thought in his mind of any such light thing as compliment or partisanship, when he makes the deliberate statement that France, the nation, and (as the very type and incarnation of her spirit) those hundreds of thousands of her soldiers who have fought at Verdun, have earned the reverence and the everlasting gratitude of all the men and women and children of the civilised world.

This is gladly admitted and well understood by every man who has learned for himself what it means to face the war machine of the twentieth-century Hun; who has seen with his own eyes the foul and dastardly work of Boche militarism and aggression in France and Belgium. It ought to be known and understood by every man and woman, and by every child at school, not alone in the countries of the Allies, but in the remotest townships of America, and in every

neutral land whose people cherish the ideals of Christendom and civilisation. (Though less immediately, their homes being farther from the present fighting line, they and their ideals are just as surely threatened by the Boche as any of the Allies; it is for them, as surely as for France, that the defenders of Verdun have fought and died and triumphed.) All, all who have any care for the liberty of the individual and the sanctity of the home, for the administration of justice, and the maintenance of the standards of humanity, kindliness, decency, and morality; all alike, no matter what their country, owe a debt of gratitude and honour which should never be forgotten to the French nation of to-day, and to those heroes—unconquerable in death as in life—who, month after bloody month, have held the gates of France, though each day brought an age of horrors, in the face of the most monstrous and devastating concentrations of brute force and scientific mechanism in attack that the world has ever seen.

France has indeed discovered her own soul since 1914. And, tested for two and a half long years in the lurid flames of a great ordeal, it has proved itself a spirit too fine, too vital, and too potent ever to be mastered by the scientific savagery of the nation which sought, and still

seeks, to impose upon all Christendom its philosophy of brute force and gross materialism, as a substitute for that kindly and upstriving civilisation in whose service our forefathers lived and died.

THE END

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