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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SQUARE JAW ***

HENRY RUFFIN AND ANDRÉ TUDESQ

THE SQUARE JAW

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THE SQUARE JAW

BY
HENRY RUFFIN AND ANDRÉ TUDESQ.

Translated from the French.

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PART I.

THE BATTLE OF THE ANCRE.

CHAPTER I.

THE IMPROMPTU VICTORY.

The Ancre Front, 13th November.

You read the reports. The names of the places that have been taken, the calculations of the gains, the numbers of the prisoners, leave you cold. Words! words! It is on the field of battle, amidst the thunder of the guns and the magic glow of fires, that one should read the bulletins of victory.

This evening a heady, irresistible joy took possession of the Army. The prisoners were pouring in. The men were singing in their quarters. Upon a front 3-1/2 miles wide and nearly 1-1/2 deep our Allies had broken the German lines on both sides of the Ancre.

They have been giving me details of the battle. From hour to hour, here, in the midst of the troops, I am being told the incidents of the fighting. A risky privilege!

The despatches which come to us; the despatch riders who, at the utmost speed of their motor-cycles, bring us reports through the ruts and mud of the roads; the messages of the telegraph—everything has assumed a heroic quality. A feverish joy quivers in every face. Even the bell of the telephone follows, strangely, the measure of our heart-beats.

"We owe this victory to our quickness," a Colonel tells me. "This battle was an *impromptu*." The word is a picture. It is absolutely right.

At six o'clock—that is to say, in the grey light of the morning—after a short but annihilating artillery preparation, the divisions posted in the first line dashed forward through the fog and drizzle. The objective was three villages—Beaumont-Hamel and Beaucourt on the North bank of the river, and, on the South, Saint Pierre-Divion.

Let me tell you something of the country and its difficulties.

Swamps, soggy undulations formed by the trenches and the convoys, a wet, clayey soil, into which one sinks to the waist. Mud everywhere. Slime everywhere. One must slide down the funnels and holes that the shells have made. Thus the waves of the assault gather for their onset. The Germans had constructed defences formed of five lines of trenches, each alternated with at least three rows of barbed wire entanglements. The *chevaux de frise* and other obstacles covered, in places, a space over 200 yards wide.

On the one hand and on the other the banks of the Ancre ran up into bluffs like buttresses. Since his failure of the 1st of July, the enemy has cut among these natural protections deep trenches which wind along parallel to the course of the river. He has also set up on the slopes powerful machine-gun emplacements and blockhouses with mortars.

The English advance went like clockwork. The secret had been well kept; the evening before, the troops of this sector were quite unaware that an advance was to take place.

An absolute determination inspired both officers and men. The result of the attack was never in doubt. The trenches were taken by storm, together with those who manned them. It was a veritable harvest of men. The fourth line was taken at the point of the bayonet in *eighteen minutes*.

At eight in the morning we attacked the outskirts of the three villages. Beaumont-Hamel was the first to be taken, with its garrison. Before Beaucourt we were brought to a halt by machine-gun fire. Saint Pierre-Divion was outflanked. The artillery increased its range and cut short all counter-attacks. [Pg 9]

1. IN BEAUMONT-HAMEL.

By nine o'clock the objective was gained with complete success. The fog grew thicker. The fire of the heavy guns and the barrage fires followed one another without pause.

Through twilight gloom and the mists of low-lying clouds monstrous lightnings flicker across this spectral landscape. The smallest hill is a Sinai. In a leap of nearly 1-1/2 miles the batteries have advanced at the same pace as the troops, taking such cover as Heaven sends them. All this sector smokes and roars to its farthest extremities. It is as if there were dragons squatting everywhere by the hundred and spitting flame. Fires break out, blushing palely through the fog. Stores of munitions explode behind the villages. It is like the brute thunder of the earthquake.

The fiercest fighting developed at Beaumont-Hamel, where the ground is full of great caves that run into one another. In these there was plenty of room for four companies.

Next, the centre of interest shifted to the South bank of the Ancre, where Y Gully commands the passage of the river and the road to Beaucourt. This ravine, upon which three months' work had been spent, was a positive arsenal. Every 20 yards along it there was a machine-gun. The Germans believed it to be impregnable. This evening the English had their own guns in it.

Victory everywhere! Three villages taken; more than 2,000 prisoners counted already! I have just been to see them. They are encamped along the edge of an immense bivouac. All about them the heaviest of the guns spit out, minute by minute, their delicate ton-weight mouthfuls. The prisoners are identified, questioned, and searched. A dazed stupor is all that their terrified faces declare. They have suffered very little damage, for most of them have been surprised in their caves and dug-outs. Many of them are still wearing their helmets. Their officers have accepted their bad fortune, one would say, gladly. There is nothing of bravado in their carriage. The Tommies surround this encampment curiously. With a friendliness that is very touching they offer, some cigarettes, others food. Generosity on the one side; a growing astonishment on the other. The German soldiers, nearly all Silesians, accept these things with a sort of childish gratitude. [Pg 10]

The motor-ambulances move here, there and everywhere over the clayey fields, where the wheels of the ammunition wagons have drawn mighty furrows, like those that peaceful toil once made here. One hardly sees the faces of these men. They are blanks, for their thoughts are elsewhere, within. On the other hand, one's attention is seized by such things as their feet, mere lumps of clay, that at times the red touch of a swathed wound enlivens. Motor-'buses—as in London—run upon the roads. Those who are lightly wounded crowd to the top. One of them wears a pointed helmet, where shines the two-headed eagle. Others hang the Iron Cross upon their caps. They are all laughing and joking like schoolboys.

The road to Bapaume, to the north, is almost all free. From to-day begins, on this side, the siege of that town, which the Germans have converted into a stronghold. All over the plain the English are lighting camp-fires: and in perfect safety, since the enemy's line has retired about 1-1/2 miles. The skirl of bagpipes, the scream of fifes, the choruses of the men, rise into the foggy night. It proves the truth of the saying: "To live truly is to live perilously."

Victory! And the battle goes on.

CHAPTER II.

[Pg 11]

IN FRONT OF THE MUNICH TRENCH.

Beaumont-Hamel, 15th November.

That two-hour tramp through a few kilometres of trenches was a heart-breaking business. We floundered through holes, we were swallowed up in bogs, while the mud that fell from the parapets gradually spread itself over our oilskins. A steel helmet becomes wonderfully heavy after an hour or so, and a dizzy headache soon tormented us, from the constant right-angled turns which we were obliged to make, like so many slaves at a cornmill. But what a reward has been ours since our arrival!

Here we are, seated at the horizontal loophole of a quite new observation post, in the front line, in the very trench from which, the day before yesterday, the English launched their attack.

In front, towards the left, is Beaumont-Hamel. Out of this heap of rubbish start up three-cornered bits of wall, which give to these ruins the look of a dwarf village. On the hillside a mangled copse looks like those guileless charcoal strokes which one sees in a child's drawing. To the right—Beaucourt. Here the ruin is absolute. I have hunted in vain for any trace of man's handiwork. Even the dust of the stones has blown away.

A few hundred yards ahead of us the men have just rushed forward. With rifles held high they spring from the parapet into the open. They look like an army of ants, that now moves along in a stream, now closes together like a vice, now marks time, now plunges into vast funnels, and again, at racing speed, surges up the gentle slope. The barbed-wire entanglements cover acres of ground; they are the eleventh line of the German defences. In many places the wires are so closely bunched together that the balls cannot pass through them.

[Pg 12]

At least a brigade is engaged. One can see the company leaders quite plainly. The shells are bursting everywhere, throwing up furious fountains of black smoke with which bits of earth and iron are mingled. The rolling clouds of the shrapnel seem to frame one regiment.

Ah! Bad luck! That one was well timed which burst over there on the right, just above the company that was lying down there. The damage must have been serious. Men lie on the ground who will never pick themselves up again. A cloud, the colour of absinthe, hangs sullenly over those little khaki spots.

On the right, on the left, in front, behind, with a disquieting skill and precision, the Germans pile barrage upon barrage. Meanwhile, without a pause, the troops advance across this hell. I can follow, with the naked eye, every movement of an active young officer, who is wearing a light yellow overcoat, and who is charging at the head of his company, with a cane under his left arm and a revolver in his right hand as calmly as if he were strolling along Regent Street or Piccadilly.

The human wave, breaking through the barrage, disappears suddenly in the earth. It is as if a chasm had opened to swallow all these men at a gulp. And now, listen! For the gunfire is punctuated with sharp detonations. It sounds like a shrill drumming, swelled by furious shouts and cries of agony. The Tommies have entered the enemy's lines. After a short period of bombing, they advance, yard by yard, with the bayonet. Round the blockhouses the machine-guns rattle. We listen anxiously to these thousand voices of the attack. Every man has vanished. The field of vision is empty. Only the variegated smokes of the different shells spread themselves slowly abroad. The uncertainty is unbearable. Half an hour later we learn from the telephone that the attack has succeeded. The brigade has done its work. We have just witnessed, on the north bank of the Ancre, the capture of an important trench, or rather redoubt, nearly 450 yards away from Beaumont—the Munich Trench.

2. PRISONERS.

[Pg 13]

Here again there has been a famous haul of prisoners. More than 300 unwounded soldiers have been compelled to surrender. In a short time the first of them cross in front of our observation post. They are haggard, covered with mud, and their eyes are the eyes of trapped beasts. Two of them, converted into impromptu stretcher-bearers, are carrying a wounded officer on a stretcher that is soaked in blood.

And now the battle increases everywhere in violence. We hear that on this side of Beaucourt some strong reserves, collected there by the Germans, have just been surrounded and taken prisoners. A whole brigade staff has fallen into the hands of the English. More than 5,000 prisoners have been counted already. It will take at least two days to count all that have been taken. A genuine victory!

The "tanks" have played an honourable part in the battle, and I have just seen two of them at work. My impressions may be summed up in these words: a huge amazement and satisfaction.

One of them, which has been christened *The Devil's Delight*, did marvels at Beaucourt. This deliberate leviathan, having placed itself boldly at the head of the advancing flood of men, took up its position at the entrance of the ruined village. At first the Germans fled. Then, one by one, they came back. With machine-guns, bombs, rifles and mortars they endeavoured to pierce its double shell. Nothing availed. Squatted on its tail, the terrific tank lorded it there like a king on his horse. It made no objection whatever to being approached. Some sappers tried to place bombs under it, to blow it sky high. Inside it the crew shammed dead. The Germans took heart. Ten, twenty, thirty men, armed with screw-jacks and mallets laboured to overthrow it. But what could even two battalions have accomplished against this patient mastodon, whose skin was steel and whose weight was 800 tons? A colonel, mad with rage, fired the eight barrels of his revolver at it, point-blank. If the tank could have laughed it must have burst with delight. Its sense of humour is a strictly warlike one. [Pg 14]

After a full quarter of an hour of silence the Germans, believing that the crew had been destroyed and that the monster was helpless, surrounded it boldly and in considerable numbers. Thereupon, unmasking its machine-guns, and opening fire from its sides, the terrible creature began to hack them in bits, mow them down in heaps, drill them full of holes and slay them by the dozen.

A giant miller, grinding death!

An hour later, when the larger part of the English troops succeeded in reaching Beaucourt, they found the Germans, dead and dying, piled around the tank. The tank says little, but to the point.

Three cheers for Mademoiselle Devil's Delight!

CHAPTER III.

THE REAL SUPERMEN.

"*We are consolidating our positions.*"

(English Communiqué, 16th November.)

Here is a story.

Some time ago, on the North bank of the Ancre, in the Beaumont-Hamel Sector, everyone was affected with a curious boredom. Nothing happened: very little artillery fire; not so much as a pretence at an attack. It was a dead calm. The bombs were all asleep. Muscles grew slack. Enthusiasm staled. Boredom, that worst misery of trench life, reigned supreme.

One evening this slackness among the troops—and it was as bad on one side as on the other—produced a curious result. Among the Germans, a homesick Silesian began to sing some of the carols of his own country. His voice rose freshly into the fresh night. At the same time on the English side, a Highlander, stirred by the sweetness of the autumn evening, blew a few shrill notes upon his fife. The voice of the man and the fife supported one another, and so a concert began, a concert of old songs, the simple happy songs of the peasant. The English shouted to the Germans, "Give us Gott Strafe England!" and the Germans obliged with the "Song of Hate." "Encore! Encore!" cried the Highlander, whose fife was seeking to catch the air that the enemy was singing. The song began again, the fife supporting it. Then it was taken up by all the English. But to what sort of a rhythm! The "Song of Hate," slow as plain song, had suddenly become, as it crossed the trenches, a crazy, jerky, rollicking ragtime, a tune for the *can-can*. The Germans supposed that they were being chaffed. By way of applause, they let fly a shower of bombs. To this compliment the English replied in kind. Then the night closed down upon a boredom more dreadful than ever. [Pg 15]

I have told you this story as a sort of commentary upon the epigram in which a certain colonel explained this very successful two days' battle: "Our attack, like our victory, was an impromptu."

To capture three villages and eleven lines of the enemy's defences upon a front 3-1/2 miles wide and nearly 1-1/2 deep, is pretty good. To take a haul of nearly 6,000 prisoners out of their dug-outs and caves and other quarters—that is not to be sneezed at either. But to organise the territory that has been taken and to consolidate it, working night and day under the constant fire of the enemy—that is perhaps a less glorious business, but it is a thing more difficult to accomplish than any attack.

For two long hours of the night my friend Ruffin, of the *Agence Havas*, and I, conducted by our guide, the major, tramped it through the trenches in order to reach those which lie under Beaumont. Steel helmet on head, first-aid equipment and gas mask under arm, we went on between the two walls of this roundabout road, our feet sticky with mud and our eyes continually [Pg 16]

dazzled. Rockets soared into the air to burst and then go out like those Roman candles which blossom into sprays of slowly moving stars. One might have thought that some unseen juggler, over there on the blazing skyline, was manipulating huge fiery plates.

The trenches were swarming with soldiers, the reliefs who were going back to billets, and the reserves who were taking their places; the sappers and pioneers, with their picks and shovels, who, protected by the machine-guns, repair the shelters wherever they have given way; the ambulance men and the stretcher-bearers; the grave diggers; the supplying sections, who bring up the cases of grenades, before ever they appear with food. This crowd of dim men, ten feet underground, moved like a silent river.

One hardly thought of talking. To-night, when they are consolidating the conquered positions, the opposing artilleries were engaged in a terrific duel. The barrage fires of the Germans followed one another every quarter of an hour, each one lasting seven minutes, and each minute an eternity, when, every second, there fell not less than 100 shells. To protect those who were at work the English artillery set up curtain fires, which smashed every preparation for a counter-attack. Marmites, shells, shrapnel, hurtled from either side of the single line which had been snatched from this Inferno.

An odd scent of roasted apples catches us by the throat; our eyes begin to stream in a detestable fashion. "Look out for the acid drops!" cries our major. We know this bit of soldiers' slang, which means the lachrymatory shells. We quickly put on our masks. In perfect safety, crouched against the wall of the trench, in the company of a hundred unknown comrades, we wait until the poisonous gust of yellow smoke has blown away. Through the eye-pieces of our masks everything seems to be enveloped in some fabulous steam; the pale lightning of the guns, the ghastly discs of the English rockets, the red stars of the German. But one sound: the clatter of the machine-guns near us, a muffled thunder as of a rising sea.

In this muddy ditch we are like some lost gang of divers.

And in the meantime, 100 yards ahead of us, in the midst of choking gases and the tempest of the machine-guns, soldiers—heroes—have never ceased their work.

They hammer nails, they drive in stakes, they sink piles, they knot together into spider nets the tangled strands of the barbed wire. All honour to them! These are the Supermen.

CHAPTER IV.

SURPRISES OF A MOONLIT FROSTY NIGHT.

A true Walpurgis Night of heroes and warriors. It is not on the summit of the Brocken that I have witnessed it, but, looking out over the plain of the Ancre, from a tree. This tree, every evening, is wreathed with the fumes of asphyxiating shells. Its woolly streamers of shrapnel smoke are like the foliage around a heraldic crown.

As soon as twilight is come, aeroplanes cross the neighbouring lines and attack this tree with their machine-guns. It is treated like a combatant. Herein, perhaps, lies the secret of its clumsy strength and beauty. It stands upon its hill, solid and straight. It holds its ground as few men could do. It is a French ash that stands upon the field of battle in the very middle of the British Army.

It has become an observation post. One climbs it by a straight ladder 160 feet long. In its highest fork one of the engineers has made a wooden box, bound together with barbed wire, with a little canvas to hide it. Field-glasses, maps, range-finders are there. All the gusts of the autumnal breeze blow through it. Up here, too, men are pitched about as if they were in the mizzen-top of a cruiser. Strange nest for war eagles!

"Perfect weather for flying," the major tells me.

A clear, frosty, moonlight night broods over the black distances of the plain. The river and its swampy edges glisten like silver coins. No sign of life. Only the guns, all round the horizon, roar beneath their crests of lightning.

Imagine that after blinding yourself with a very tight and thick bandage you suddenly open your eyes. Glowing discs, will o' the wisps, haloes, flashing rainbows, a whole ballet of lights spins upon your retina. Up here, that is the spectacle that each night brings. The battlefield appears to be electrified. At one moment, sharp, stabbing flashes, cold arrows of light. It is the English guns shelling the enemy. The next, radiances which divide, spread out fanwise, or blossom like flowers. They are German marmites or crapouillots.

The sounds of the guns intersect one another. They are hard and dry, when some battery, near by, opens fire; dull, soft and muffled, according as the distance becomes greater. A stroke upon a gong, followed by a long metallic shriek, high in the air, announces a heavy shell. After a hoarse scream a machine-gun begins to crackle, rending both air and men.

It is all one vast intermittent hurly-burly, lightning flashing low down, V-shaped sheaves of red fire. And all is, each time, unexpected, cruelly inconsequent, magnificent and devastating.

Thousands of men are there, and thousands upon thousands, all over this plain of the Ancre. There they lie, buried in their trenches, their nerves like stretched wire, ready to spring forward

on the instant.

From here we can see one of the last sectors to be conquered.

It is land over which the offensive has passed.

And our hearts ache as we remember that down there, near this swamp, it is not even in ill-made trenches that the English sections are keeping their watch, but, simply, in shell-holes, where the water lies deep, holes whose sides have been hastily shored up—veritable human hells. [Pg 19]

The fireworks did not keep us waiting. About ten o'clock, a certain unwonted nervousness becoming evident among the Germans, the two English trenches of the first line let off a bouquet of rockets. Balls of light, red, blue or green, climbed 90 feet into the air. For a moment they rose, hesitatingly, like toy balloons at the end of a string, then burst into stars or sheaves, lighting up, as with a ghastly daylight, this neutral ground, this "no man's land," which the scattered corpses of the patrols alone inhabit. After each flight of rockets the guns came savagely to life, and, below our watch-tower, even in greater numbers, even more furious, other batteries, and yet others, proclaimed their presence. "Barrage!" one of the short-lived fire-balls demanded over to the west. The firing increased, pounding the sector from end to end. This light from fairyland, then, was nothing but a cry for help! In a moment the Ancre and its swamps were blushing.

The moon began to veil herself with small round clouds. "Watch out for the aeroplanes," our staff-major told us again. In a quarter of an hour his warning was justified.

The snarl of engines filled the milky spaces of the sky. Two squadrons against two. The English searchlights found the enemy for a moment, then lost him. Then from every crest and from smallest hollow the anti-aircraft guns began their barrage. In the sky nothing could be seen but the commas of flame and blazing curves, which marked where the shrapnel and the shells had burst. The machine-guns chattered like an applauding crowd.

A few planes succeeded in crossing the barrage. It was magic—of another kind.

One, two, five incendiary bombs were thrown by the enemy. The eye was dazzled as by a sudden appearance of the aurora-borealis. The night became a ghastly day. Thick columns of smoke rose into the air, then, half-way to the clouds, swelled up like the tops of palm-trees. And thus they remained, twenty minutes after the explosion, without dissolving, steady against the wind, turning themselves into canopies and domes and a preposterous hedge of giant parasols. [Pg 20]

One might have thought that some fabulous forest had just sprung up, filled with domed palaces of fantastic shape.

A night very fruitful of surprises—barrages, rockets, anti-aircraft firing, a battle of aeroplanes, incendiary bombs. Truly the Great Game, this!

I left my watch-tower tree like a man who has saved his soul from the black powers of sorcery.

CHAPTER V.

THE BATTLE REOPENS.

18th November.

The Battle of the Ancre, which for a moment had died down, began again this morning, at dawn, with a new violence.

The English had only paused just long enough to oil the vast machine, which has now resumed its regular, methodic movements; and the latest news permits us to anticipate a fresh and substantial success.

The scene of these last events has been rather different from that which witnessed the English advance of the 12th and 13th of November. This, one may say in passing, proves the elasticity of the British offensive.

If the eye travels, on the map, to the right, beyond the positions in which the last battle was fought, it follows a line almost parallel to the valley of the Ancre. To-night, then, the English, not pursuing this theoretically correct line, inclined their front slightly to the South, to the centre of a line drawn between Thiepval and Le Sars. This re-entering angle formed an obvious obstacle to the domination of the Ancre valley upon the whole of this part of the British front. For this reason General Sir Douglas Haig decided to abolish it. [Pg 21]

Hence the movement of this morning.

The attack was elaborately prepared, and with the utmost secrecy, and was launched at dawn.

At the moment of writing this telegram the reports that are coming in from the scene of action show that the operation is being carried out, within the limits assigned, very successfully. To employ an expression coined by one of their own number, the Boche prisoners are "pouring" to the rear.

This morning the weather, so fine during the last three days, was extremely unfavourable to any movement of troops. There had been heavy snow during the night, and for the first time this winter our Allies fought in the snow. About 8 o'clock, the temperature having risen, a thaw set in. After that it was in foul mud that they did their fighting.

In order to understand properly the British manœuvres on the two banks of the Ancre, we must remark that yesterday, the 17th of November, the English had executed a movement which obviously aimed at assisting to-day's operations.

Shortly, by outflanking the village of Beaucourt to the East, they had carried their foremost positions, by yesterday evening, as far as the little wood of Hollande. Now it is clear that any advance in this direction seriously menaces Grandcourt and those positions on the north bank of the Ancre, which the British troops attacked this morning.

A superior staff-officer remarked lately in my hearing that the German line, throughout the recent fighting, has exhibited points of varying strength. He attributed this circumstance to the work of the English artillery. The resistance which the enemy had been able to offer had varied directly with the effectiveness of the English gunfire.

It is also noticeable that the German losses in killed, prisoners and missing are considerably greater than the corresponding losses among the English. This result is apparently due to the fact either that the Germans surrender more readily than the English, or that the British artillery causes the enemy to sustain the heavier damage in dead and wounded, or else finally that, unlike the English, the Germans do not include their lightly wounded in the total of their losses.

Whatever the causes may be, that the issue of this battle has been disastrous for the Germans becomes daily more evident. It appears now that they are thinking of shortening their line where it is opposed to the British Army between Puisieux-les-Monts and Grandcourt. Under the increasing pressure of our Allies, the Germans, who are convinced that Grandcourt must soon fall, are entrenching themselves with feverish haste upon a new line, which unites Puisieux with Miraumont.

The enemy, using Puisieux as the pivot of his retiring movement, would thus describe an angle whose depth, from Puisieux to the Ancre, is about 2 miles, and whose width, between Grandcourt and Miraumont, is about 1-1/4 miles.

It is possible, however, that the British offensive may to some extent disorganise the beautiful and geometric symmetry of this new "strategic retreat" of the Germans.

3. THE ANCRE VALLEY.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE EDGE OF THE FRAY.

19th November.

Yesterday was a good day for the English. Our friends were successful on nearly the whole front which they attacked. The only difficulty which they encountered—and this was not serious—was on their left centre; that is to say, to the South of Grandcourt. Thereabouts the ground favoured the defence, for it is cut up into a number of deep gorges, where the Boches had constructed redoubts and "nests" of machine-guns.

But, on the other hand, the Canadians did wonders on the left, pushing their patrols right up to the Western outskirts of Grandcourt.

The advance of the British troops on the North bank of the Ancre to the East of Beaucourt has caused the fortified village of Grandcourt to be menaced on more than one side.

They say that yesterday the German artillery made a very weak reply to the fire of the British guns. This is certainly not due to any shortage of material or ammunition suffered by Prince Rupert in this quarter. It is well known, on the contrary, that he has concentrated against the English an enormous quantity of these things. This weakness of the German reply must be due either to the destructive precision of the British fire, or to the formation of that line of resistance, about which I told you yesterday, in the rear of the present front.

The German prisoners who have been taken during the day say that the Boches suffered comparatively little damage, during the attack, from the British fire, since they were in dug-outs of great strength and depth. But when the infantry arrived they found themselves hemmed helplessly in on all sides, and were forced to surrender *en masse*.

The same prisoners cannot sufficiently praise the performance of the tanks, about which they speak with a kind of awful admiration. They always use the same word when they describe these armour-plated monsters: "Marvellous! Marvellous!"

They say that the German troops in the first line are well enough fed, but that as soon as they go into reserve or are given a rest their diet is at once restricted.

EPILOGUE.

THE CHARNEL-HOUSE.

19th November. Evening.

On this November Sabbath the belfries of Contay, Warloy, Senlis and a dozen other villages of Picardy are sending forth through the fog their regular summons to vespers. It is very cold, and the snow which fell the other night has become foul mud, in which men, beasts and wagons flounder and splash.

The Tommies in their quarters have made a rather more careful toilet than usual, and are now gathered, in some neighbouring field or under some shed out of which a church has been improvised, to listen to the words of their chaplains. Peace, it would seem, reigns everywhere.

Only, alas! in appearance. For overpowering the voices of priests and sound of bells the guns begin their booming out a few paces away. Peace has not dwelt, this many a day, either in Englebelmer or in Mesnil, which offer to the eyes of the passer-by the spectacle of their desolated ruins, their silent belfries, their indescribable sadness. Nor does Peace dwell, assuredly, on this battlefield where you see these quagmires, these dead, bare fields that, one would say, have been trampled by generations of men; these deserted trenches that have fallen in here and there; these networks of barbed wire, to-day, happily, no longer of any service; these shattered wagons, these rusting weapons; these gun shelters which dart lightning; these parks of munitions and materials; these strayed horses; these lines of muddy, brooding men—in a word, all this wretchedness—and, over all, covering everything as with a veil, this sky that seems heavy with threats, with *hostility*.

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Yet, before the war, few of the countrysides of France can have breathed a more sweet and perfect spirit of peace. A soldier who was here last spring, before ever men had come hither to destroy one another, told me of the delight which he took in this pleasant corner of Picardy. "It was," he said, "a landscape by Claude Lorraine."

We were halted at the head of a small valley which runs easily downwards, near Mesine, towards the Ancre, and we were looking out across the country. At our feet the river, coming from the East, turned in a gentle curve towards the South, and was lost to sight in the direction of Avelun and Albert. The stream, considerably swollen by the recent rains, wound slowly between marshes and flooded fields.

The tall poplars of the valley, stripped of their leaves as much by the bullets as by the rough weather, moved gently in the breeze. Yesterday a dozen villages saw themselves reflected in the Ancre, and clothed the neighbourhood of the river with a share of their own prosperity. They were, among others, Mesnil, Hamel, Beaumont and Miraumont on the North bank. Thiepval, Saint Pierre-Divion and Grandcourt on the South. But the same devices of man that have massacred the trees of the valley and stripped Thiepval of its forest, have levelled these fortress-villages with the ground, and it is in vain that to-day we may hope to distinguish them from the rest of this dismal country. Even as we looked, the shells of the opposing artilleries blotted out the last traces of Grandcourt. The guns, for ever the guns! They are the only sign of life in all this land of Death.

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The little cemetery at Hamel, which we passed on our road, was not likely to dissipate these gloomy thoughts. In what a condition the battle has left it! It lay, unfortunately for itself, just between the two lines, English and German. But, indeed, it is no more and no less sad a sight than all that surrounds it; no more, no less than Beaumont; no more, no less than Beaucourt, to which we have now come.

A little in front of Beaucourt is a small hill, a sort of spur, lying towards the South-west. On the morning of the 13th of November it faced precisely in the direction whence the British attack was about to be launched. Even in its present state one can, from the lie of the ground and from the débris which is found scattered everywhere about, form some faint idea of what the Boches had made out of this natural fortress.

The British infantry, however, never hesitated a moment to storm the place, and their impetuosity was such that in 18 minutes it was in their hands.

If you do not know the price at which the English, like ourselves, bought this victory, go out upon this advanced work of Beaucourt. Take your courage in both hands and look about you. See there that group of fallen soldiers, the glorious victors of the Ancre, who lie still untouched, by the side of the Boches whom they have dragged down with them to death, after hand-to-hand struggles that no words may describe. Looking like pilgrims clothed in homespun, the English stretcher-bearers, now grave-diggers, "tidy up" the field of battle.

Poor and dear Tommies! They have fallen with their faces to the German trench. They fought with their heads, as do ours, for there is not a shell-hole of which they have not taken advantage during their advance against their enemy. They have fought, also, like lions, since they have gained the victory.

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One of them, a great, athletic-looking fellow with black hair, has fallen head forwards into a shell-hole. His poor, shattered body is drained of blood, but his face is a fiery red, as if his rage had risen there as he died.

Another, of slighter, more fragile frame, lies on his back, his legs apart, with a ball through his forehead. Close beside him are the bomb which he was about to throw and a tiny French-English dictionary. May we not say that he has witnessed with his blood to the friendship of two great nations?

Beside another, who has been hideously wounded, the wind turns over the leaves of a soldier's Bible.

But enough! My eyes can bear no more. And I hasten away from this scene, over which, like the sound of mighty organs, the great guns chant their huge and terrible chorus.

To free ourselves from this nightmare we went to visit the gunners in their shelters. It was three in the afternoon, and we had only just discovered that we had not yet lunched. A big fellow, who chattered like a magpie and was built like a Hercules, lit two candles for us, stirred the fire which was crackling in an earthen stove, spread a newspaper for our table-cloth, and offered us a seat on a case of jam-jars. Our sandwiches seemed delicious; our tea, the best in the world; our hovel, a palace; our candles, an illumination.

A joy, hitherto unknown, in being merely alive gave a priceless quality to the smallest pleasures of existence. We listened with the most intense interest and an unaccustomed delight to the talkative soldier, while he instructed us about the price of sugar in England.

Meanwhile, his battery, just beside us, went on killing Germans.

The spirit of Dickens hovered over that wretched hut.

Suddenly I noticed that my companion had fallen into a brown study, and I fancied that he was back upon that hill by Beaucourt. "Come, come!" I said. "What are you thinking about now?"

"I am thinking," the Englishman replied, "that we are bound to avoid war if we can, but that when war comes we are bound to meet it like men."

4. A FRANCO BRITISH RELIEF.

PART II.

THE SQUARE JAWS.

CHAPTER I.

THE WELDING OF FRENCH AND BRITISH.

Not all things can be welded together. There are metals which are wholly unsympathetic, and even for those which are not we require the services of the plumber and his solder.

It is the glory and the good fortune of the British and French Armies that, from the first day of the war, they have shown themselves fitted—and eager—to become one; and that they have discovered, to this end (and continue daily to employ them), plumbers of the first class and lead in abundance.

Let us understand one another. To say "joining," "soldering," is not to say "fusion," and the theory of united action upon a united front does not necessarily imply that out of two friends a single individual is wrought. A *poilu* might say that it is possible to be very good comrades without sleeping in the same bed.

For Germany such fusion would have been a danger, and she has always avoided it. Although she has carried her partnership with her allies to the length of making them her slaves, she has been very careful to allow nothing like a mingling of breeds in the forces which are at her disposal. The German Army has, for instance, resisted every temptation to admit into its ranks any of its Austrian friends. For it believes that it is possible to be too friendly.

Germany has confined herself, where this is in question, to giving her weakened allies no more help than can be obtained from her officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, or from the specialised activities of her artillery and engineers. Beyond this she has but one thought—at any cost to insure unity of action between her forces and those of her allies. [Pg 32]

From this it follows that to bring about a real fusion of two or more allied armies upon one front is a tactical achievement of the first importance. Such a fusion—the essential condition of all united effort that is to possess a real value—becomes, from its very nature, the principal object of the enemy's attack. The history of this war shows, if one may say so, nothing but a series of attempts, upon one side or the other, to prevent or destroy the cohesion of the opposing forces. (Mons; the first and second Battles of Ypres; the Russian-Rumanian Armies and the Army of the East; the junction of the Italians near Vallona with the Army of Salonika, etc.) But it is not enough that this fusion should exist. It is also vital—as we shall presently see in the case of the Franco-British forces—that it should be both elastic and solid.

Since it is agreed that in war-time each month counts as a year, we may say that it is now two months since the French and British Armies celebrated their silver wedding. Age has weakened neither the strength nor the love of the partners to this marriage. We can say confidently that, since the day when "the contemptible little Army of General French" first shook hands with our *pioupious*, the friendship has never been interrupted. For all his passionate desire to accomplish the destruction of the bond which the two countries have willingly exchanged for their individual liberty, the enemy's efforts have been fruitless.

Even during the gloomy days of the retreat from Mons and Charleroi the union of the two Armies remained unimpaired. While one of them, overwhelmed by numbers, found itself compelled to retire, the other, without any proper understanding of the reason, and with no thought for anything but the maintenance of the connection, complied at once with the manœuvre, though not without exacting a heavy toll from its enemies. [Pg 33]

A few days later the victory of the Marne was to reward these mutual sacrifices for the common cause.

A cloud had passed. Others followed. Again and again the enemy, furious at the perfect understanding which existed between his opponents and dreading what the consequences of it might be to himself, determined to make an end of it. The two battles of Ypres were the fruit of this resolution, to shatter the unity of the French and British Armies.

For one moment they believed that they had succeeded.

This was on the 24th April, 1915, when, by the use of asphyxiating gas, till then unknown to us, they had driven in one corner of the Ypres salient. We know that it was the gallantry of the Canadians that saved the day and closed the opening breach.

Since then the chain has never been weakened. Nay, in the North it has never been so much as stretched.

This, however, has not been the case with the connection between the British Army and the main body of the Armies of France. The continual addition of new units to the British forces was bound to cause frequent changes, here, in the geographical distribution of the adjoining troops. Can France ever forget the day when she learned that silently, without a hitch, and under the very noses of the Germans, the British front had suddenly been extended from Loos to the Somme? A mother who meets, after years, the son whom she has last seen as a child, must feel a surprise not unlike that with which France discovered that the Armies of her Allies had become so large. Who knows but that we may soon be again delighted in the same way? I say "delighted," not "surprised," for our Allies have taught us to forget to be astonished by anything they may do.

And so, every time that the British front is extended, this elasticity of the fusion of the Armies is to be observed. [Pg 34]

It is clear that these rearrangements can in no way affect its solidity, since it is this very fusion which has made possible not only the terrific offensive of the 1st July last, but also its uninterrupted prosecution.

Only a very happy combination of circumstances could have brought about this miracle—for it is one—which to explain is to show that it must last as long as the war shall go on.

First of all, it is due to the perfect understanding which exists between the General Staffs of the two Allied Armies. It is, indeed, an achievement to set men of different races, if of equal courage, side by side. But this is not enough. Much more need is there of a unity of command which shall see that the best use is made of all this determination, brought together from sources so widely sundered, so that the utmost measure of mutual support and cohesion may result from the efforts of units which, though they work alongside of one another, are strangers. Now it is this very thing which is evident in the combined operations of the British and French Armies, at all times and particularly since the opening of the offensive in Picardy. The Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig, and General Foch—whom one may perhaps describe as the keystone of the combination—have shown themselves, in this connection, to be as good psychologists as they are tacticians.

The troops of neither nation—and this should be made very clear—have in any case experienced the smallest embarrassment in following out the commands of their leaders. Whenever either English or French have been able to give one another any kind of support, they have done it faithfully and readily. The "fusion" is not a thing of maps; it is not to be found in this place or that; it is a spiritual verity.

Living side by side, dying under one another's eyes, English and French are acquiring a mutual respect and confidence which cannot fail to strengthen their fighting power. [Pg 35]

5. GENERAL BIRDWOOD TALKING TO A GROUP OF BIG AUSTRALIANS.

"After all the proofs of their resolution and intrepidity," wrote Field-Marshal French in a report, of June, 1915, upon the gas attacks, "which our valiant Allies have given throughout the campaign, it is quite unnecessary for me to dwell upon this incident, and I will only express my firm conviction that if there are any troops on earth who could have held their trenches in the face of an attack as treacherous as it was unforeseen, it is the French divisions that would have done it."

Which is the more admirable—the General who speaks of his Allies in such generous terms, or the soldiers who inspired such words?

CHAPTER II.

HOW THE AUSTRALIAN CONTINGENT VOTED IN FRANCE IN FACE OF THE ENEMY.

8th December, 1916.

What Frenchman has not met, at least once, in Paris or some other of our large towns, one of these stout lads who wear the uniform and carry the equipment of the British soldier, but are to be distinguished from him by that khaki-coloured, broad-brimmed felt hat, which the Boers have immortalised?

Of a height generally above that of the average Frenchman, with broad shoulders, an alert glance, a free and easy air; a skin that is often tanned; a horseman from boyhood, slow to tire, reckless in battles and of a hot temper—such is the Australian soldier, one of the world's foremost fighting men.

His courage, which the enemy regards with a peculiar distaste, has earned him heavy fighting everywhere throughout the war. Let us recall, shortly, some of his chief performances. [Pg 36]

The first division sent by Australia to the assistance of the Mother Country towards the end of 1914 was employed on the defences of Egypt and the Suez Canal. These sterling horsemen did splendid work in this field of operations, and for four months lived in the desert, exposed to continual attack.

Next, the Australian troops, augmented by certain units of New Zealanders, disembarked on the Gallipoli Peninsula at the left of their English comrades. Hardly were they on shore before they began a series of battles which never stopped for a week. They held, at very great cost, the bit of ground which had been taken from the Turks, and during four months two divisions of them lived, Heaven knows how, on a space of less than a third of an acre.

Then came the Evacuation of Gallipoli. The Australians returned to Egypt, there to rest between December, 1915, and the 1st of April, 1916, on which day they made their appearance on the Western front.

Since that time the Australians have fought on French soil.

They have to thank their splendid reputation that they are always to be found wherever the most glory is to be won. It was they who took Pozières, during the Somme offensive, and the farm at Mouquet, and measured their strength, throughout those epic days, against that of the Prussian Guard.

Such is the Army which, quite recently, has held its Elections under the very guns of the Germans.

For this Army, whose valour is already almost legendary, is also among the most democratic Armies of the world. No one is more jealous of his independence than the Australian. If he loves

and admires his comrades-in-arms, the French *poilus*, it is, no doubt, because, having long misunderstood them, after the fashion of strangers towards all things French, he cannot to-day find words enough to do justice to their military qualities and their unselfish courage. But it is also, and, above all, because his heart goes out naturally to the French people under arms, to this democracy which in so many ways resembles his own country, Australia the Free. Like the French soldier, the Australian loves his fun; like him, he is light-hearted, always singing. And each of them glories in the knowledge that beneath his soldier's uniform is a citizen and an elector of a noble country.

These reflections will help us to understand why the Australian Government has been led to hold a referendum of its Expeditionary Force in France.

As you know, the people of Australia were concerned with the business of deciding for or against the introduction of compulsory military service into their country. Mr. Hughes, the Premier of New South Wales, who did France the honour to visit it at the beginning of this year, was the originator of this referendum. The result, for reasons which I will presently mention, was a majority against conscription for Australia.

To enable the Australian contingent to vote was the simplest thing in the world. Voting booths were prepared at Contay, a small village between the Ancre and the Somme, close to the firing-line. As fast as the sections left the trenches to go back into billets, each officer, non-commissioned officer and man was given two voting papers. On one the word "Yes" was printed; on the other, "No." The voting lasted a month—the time between reliefs—at the end of which period about 100,000 papers had been collected in the ballot-boxes at Contay. It is strange that the majority of the Australian contingent voted against compulsory service for Australia.

Why?

 Let no one imagine that it was because these heroes have become opponents of the war; nor is it even because they think that their country has done enough.

They have voted against compulsory service, first of all, for a reason of a general nature, which applies to the whole of this body of Australian electors—namely, because the Australians have a horror of all moral compulsion and a burning love of liberty. These soldiers have also been influenced by another objection: they fear lest to introduce a professional Army into Australia may be to infect their nation with a spirit of militarism which is not at all to their taste.

And the proof that the negative result of the referendum has in no way weakened the determination of Australia to pursue the war to a victorious end and in complete accord with the Mother Country, is that, on the one hand, the Australian contingent persists, after, as before, recording its vote, in splendidly performing its duty at the front; and that, on the other hand, Australia continues to send to the battlefields of Europe thousands of fresh volunteers.

Hurrah for Liberty! Down with the Boches! In this motto the quality of the Australian troops is perfectly expressed. This quality one meets with again in the war song, the species of *Marseillaise*, which the Australians sing to-day when they are on the march in France.

Here are its words in full:

AUSTRALIA WILL BE THERE.

1st Verse.

You've heard about the Emden
  That was cruising all around,
Sinking British shipping
  Where'er it could be found,
Till one bright Sunday morning
  The Sydney came in sight—
  The Emden said good night.

Chorus.

Rally round the banner of your country,
Rally round the banner of your King.
    On land or sea,
    Wherever you be,
    Keep your eye on Germany.
    For England, home and beauty,
    Have no cause to fear.
    Should old acquaintance be forgot?
    No, No—No, No, No.
    Australia will be there,
    Australia will be there.

2nd Verse.

With Kitchener in our Army
  And French in our cavalry fine,
You bet those German bandsmen

Are in for a lively time.
And there's Winston Churchill
To guide our Navy grand;
With this fine lot we'll make it hot
For the poor old Fatherland.

Chorus.

3rd Verse.

We don't forget South Africa
When England was at war;
Australian Light Horsemen, my boys,
Were always to the fore.
Archie Norris and Billy Cook
Have now all kissed the Book.

Chorus.

CHAPTER III.

BOELCKE'S LAND OF PROMISE.

On the 28th of October, six Halberstadters and Aviatiks attacked two English aviators in the neighbourhood of Pozières. During the fight six fresh enemy machines came to the assistance of their friends. At the end of five minutes of furious fighting two German machines collided. Pieces of the machines fell, and one of them descended toward the East. The fight lasted 15 minutes, at the end of which time all the enemy machines were driven off.

It is probable that it was during this fight that Captain Boelcke was killed. It was, in fact, at this date that the German wireless stated that Boelcke had been killed owing to a collision in the air.

In a letter which he wrote to a friend a few days before his tragic and still unaccountable death, Boelcke, the best-known and most successful of the German aviators, said:

"The Somme front is a positive land of promise. The sky is filled with English airmen."

Boelcke expressed, under the guise of a kind of sporting self-congratulation, the astonishment of his fellows at the way in which the British flying service had developed.

A large number of documents found upon German prisoners give evidence of a no less striking kind upon the same point.

"Our air service," says one of them, "practically ceased to exist during the Battle of the Somme. At times the sky seemed black with enemy machines."

Another says:

"We are so inferior to our opponents in our air service that when hostile machines fly over our own lines we have no recourse but to hide ourselves in the earth. Now and then a few of our machines attempt to go up, but it is only a drop in the bucket."

6. A BRITISH AEROPLANE.

Finally, for one must not pursue this subject too far, a General Order has been issued to the German Army to the effect that when troops are marching they must halt and take cover whenever a British machine is known to be in their vicinity; for the English are in the habit of flying sufficiently low over the invaded territory to use their machine-guns against moving troops and convoys.

To this evidence from enemy sources I may perhaps add my own. I assert, then, as definitely as it is possible to do it, that one of my most agreeable surprises, during my visit to the British front, was the discovery of the great numbers and unceasing activity of the British aeroplanes. Whether I was in the firing-line or behind it, my attention was being constantly drawn to the movements of the British air service.

On the 15th of September the total number of hours during which flying was carried on upon the British front was 1,300. Reckoning that each aviator flies, on an average, for two hours, it is possible to form an idea of the number of machines which were in the air on that day.

During the last Battle of the Ancre the British planes of every kind, for bombing, fighting and directing the gunfire, seemed always to be over the German lines; and on one fairly still day I was able to count as many as 30 of them in the air at once, and this on a comparatively narrow sector.

Behind the lines I went to see numerous aviation camps, instruction camps, depôts of munitions, etc. They were like so many beehives, models of organisation, order and method. The pilots, the observers, the mechanics, everyone, seen at close quarters, gave me an impression of a very unusual power and intelligence, and inspired me with the same confidence with which their own mastery of the air has so long filled them, ever since, indeed, they wrested it from the enemy.

Perhaps it may not be labour lost if, in order to get a right understanding of the present very satisfactory and praiseworthy position, we review shortly the history of British military aviation since the beginning of the war.

England had not wished for war, nor had she prepared for it, and while aviation seemed to her a marvellous achievement of the human brain, she was far from thinking that she was bound to make use of it in order to injure mankind. This is why her military air service, like her whole Army, was in no more than an embryonic condition when she found herself faced with the grim reality of this war.

Far more than the exigencies of the campaign on the continent, it was the repeated raids of the Zeppelins over England which caused her to devote herself to the development of her aviation.

The undertaking bristled with difficulties. We should be wrong, were we in France, to suppose that we are the only people the story of whose aviation has been marked by crises. Our Allies, though their practical nature is proverbial among us, were forced to experiment and grope their way for a long time before they could arrive at a solution of the many knotty problems of aerial defence.

A complete lack of any central authority, a division or responsibility between the various staffs,

nobody to decide as to how machines should be employed or how built, waste of every kind—the English have experienced all these troubles. But how admirably they have surmounted them! The proof is that now the only resource of the Germans is a servile imitation.

This spirit of imitation among the Germans has shown itself most markedly in these last weeks, during the process of the Battle of the Ancre. The Germans set out by collecting a large number of aeroplanes on a very narrow front. Then they began to show some signs of taking the initiative with a daring to which we were little accustomed. [Pg 43]

Did they really hope to wrest the mastery of the air from the English? I do not know. In any case their attempt began badly; for when, 40 in number, they met 30 of the British machines, they could discover no better way of saving themselves than by flight, after a quarter of their number had been put out of action.

It was about this time that General von Groener, a man of energy and resolution, called upon the German aeroplane factories to increase their output; and that Mr. Lloyd George in England, while giving publicity to this new effort of Germany, exhorted his fellow-countrymen not to allow themselves to be overtaken by their enemy.

Boelcke may rest in peace. His land of promise can only grow greater and breed birds more rapidly.

After this, what need one say more of the technical skill and the often heroic courage of the British aviator?

The French and British airmen form, indeed, one great family of heroes, and our men have, in King George's Army, cousins who are as like them as brothers.

At this point I will do no more than offer for your consideration a document and a story.

The document is a letter, sent from Germany to his friends by an English aviator, Lieutenant Tudor-Hart, on the 25th of this July. I should blame myself were I to alter one word of it.

"I was," he writes, "with Captain Webb at between 12,000 and 15,000 feet above the German lines, when we saw eight German machines coming towards us from the South-west. They were higher than we were, and we went towards them to attack them. Two of them passed about 300 yards above our heads. I opened fire on one and they replied together.

"I signed to Webb to turn so that I might fire at the other machine, behind us; but he made a spurt forward with the machine. I looked round to see what had happened, but Webb pointed to his stomach and fell forward upon the controls. I fancy he must have died almost immediately. His last thought had been to save the machine. [Pg 44]

"It at once began to swing in the direction of the German lines, and I was compelled to return to my machine-gun, in order to fire on a plane which was getting too close. The other machines never stopped firing at us. My only hope was to make for our lines, but I could not manage to push Webb out of the pilot's seat, and I was obliged to manœuvre above the hood.

"I had to fire so often that it became impossible for me to guide the machine. At last, constantly under fire, I planed down towards a field near by and tried to land. I saw a number of men with rifles, and I thought that I might be killed before being able to set the machine on fire.

"One wing having struck the earth, the machine was smashed, and I was thrown out. I got off with one side paralysed, one ankle and one rib broken. I was very well treated, and the German flying men behaved towards me like sportsmen and gentlemen."

It is in this way that the paladins of this war both conduct and express themselves.

And now for the story.

There was once in England a rich man who interested himself in Art and Politics. His name was Lord Lucas. Life had always smiled upon him, and he had returned her smile. Had he wished it, he might have spent his life in slippered ease and lived from day to day without a care.

Choosing, rather, to become a soldier, he joined the Expeditionary Forces during the South African War. He was wounded and lost a leg, but this in no way deterred him from being of service to his country.

When the European War broke out, Lord Lucas was the Minister for Agriculture in the Asquith Cabinet. [Pg 45]

He felt shame to be engaged in such a vapid business as Politics now appeared, and he resigned. Next we find him volunteering for the British air service. In spite of his artificial leg, he went through his training, was hurt, got cured, and returned to his work and never rested until he had flown over the German lines. One day Lord Lucas, millionaire, artist, ex-Cabinet Minister, and, above all, soldier, failed to return to his squadron. The Boches alone know whether he is dead or a prisoner.

The man who told me the story of this splendid life was the best friend of Lord Lucas, and he was worthy to be it. I asked this soldier, a peer himself and himself wounded, if in England, as in France, commissions in the air service were much sought after. In reply, he pointed to two great birds, and said: "We admire them, Monsieur, as you do, and, like you, we envy them."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SQUARE JAW.[A]

[A] Of the two articles which follow, the first ("The Square Jaw") was written on the 9th of December, during the crisis caused by the successive resignations of Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Asquith.

The second ("The Moral of the British Armies") was written on the 19th of the same month, the day after Germany made her official offer of peace.

The British soldier does not concern himself with Politics. It is not in his character to do so; moreover, any such conduct is against the rules of his profession. And so, since discipline "is the first weapon of Armies," the British soldier respects it above everything else.

The Englishman has a passion and a profound respect for method. Method requires that Politics should be the business of Ministers and Politicians, and that war should be carried on by soldiers. [Pg 46] Method, says the Englishman, demands that everyone should stick to his own work and his own place. Without this, anarchy must ensue. Now there cannot well be anything less anarchical than the British Army.

It is their order and discipline which most powerfully and most quickly impress the Frenchman who is permitted to live for a time among the Armies of England. These qualities, let me hasten to add, are also the least superficial, and thus afford the surest test of the value of these Armies.

Observe that it is not by collecting together a body of indifferent natures, passive temperaments and personalities more or less irresponsible, that this order and discipline have been infused into the British Army. The level of capacity of this Army is, moreover, by no means a low one; for it is one of the most intelligent Armies in Europe or in the whole world. The common soldier is not of one class, to the exclusion of all others. He does not represent one section only of British opinion. His corporate mind is therefore in no way a limited one.

As a volunteer, he thronged into England, at the beginning of the war, from every quarter of the globe, and by this voluntary act at once proclaimed his intelligence. To-day, as a conscript, he represents, more than ever before, the completeness of his country's will.

As for the officers, who differ from our own in their essentially aristocratic character, in them we see the direct expression of all those qualities of brain and heart which distinguish the leading elements of British society.

And so, if this army does not concern itself with Politics, if it is thoroughly disciplined, if it contents itself with "making war," it is because it prefers to do these things.

It is, moreover, excellently informed of everything which happens outside itself, whether in England or elsewhere, and in this respect differs considerably from the German Army which lies [Pg 47] beyond its trenches. A Boche prisoner, recently taken, owned that neither the newspapers of his country nor any letters ever reached the German troops in the front lines. As each day comes, its history is told to our enemies by word of mouth only; that is to say, after the fashion which best suits their rulers.

Among the English there is very little heard or said about peace, or about the objects for which they are fighting; but they read, and they read continually. The soldier follows the course of events as well in his letters as in his newspaper.

And in what does his knowledge consist? What does he know?

He knows that the Army to which he belongs owes much to that French Army which he admires so deeply, and by whose side he is proud to fight for the interests which their natures share. He knows that to the British Army is secured, from now onwards, one of the chief factors of invincible and victorious strength—numbers. He knows approximately the number of his effectives, and he would gladly, by crying it aloud, shake the confidence of the enemy and confirm that of his friends.

He knows also that the second factor of his strength—material—while it is already considerable and probably equal to that which his opponents possess—does not represent a quarter of what the coming year will produce. He knows, from having done it again and again since July, that not only can he resist the enemy, but defeat him; and he awaits confidently the hour of triumph.

Hence his firm, his unshakable determination to obtain victory on his own terms; hence, also, it follows that no thought or hope of a premature peace ever disturbs his mind.

And if no one else remained to fight, he would go on, for—he says it himself, and one cannot but [Pg 48] believe him—he has "a square jaw."

It is important, in the present condition of affairs, that the French public should make no mistake as to the opinions of the British soldier concerning the war and its sure conclusion.

About this no one can be under any delusion. Everywhere on the British front there is but one opinion—that the war must be carried through to the end; that is to say, till the inevitable victory of the Allies has come to pass; and that it would be a crime against the Homeland, the Allies and those comrades who have fallen, to listen to proposals for a peace which would be consistent with neither the intentions nor the interests of England and her Allies.

During my visit of two months I have seen the larger part of the British front from the Somme to the Yser. Everywhere I have met with the same spirit of determination. This state of mind may be

explained in various ways; the perfect confidence which the British Army feels in its Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig, "the lucky," as the soldiers call him; the regular growth in the numbers of the effectives, which, though I may not disclose these figures, exceed the estimates of them usually made in France; the tremendous development of material and in the output of munitions; the magnificent successes gained on the Somme and the Ancre, which have given rise to the certainty of being able to defeat an enemy formerly said to be invincible; etc., etc.

Without doubt, the war goes slowly. Tommy admits it, but he begs you to observe—and justly—that on every occasion when his infantry has come to grips with the Germans it has invariably beaten them.

"Besides," he thinks, "perhaps it is not absolutely essential, in order to win the war and place England and her Allies in a position to dictate their own terms, that our Armies should hurl themselves forward in one final and costly advance over the shattered lines of the Germans." The British soldier is fond of comparing the Western battle front to an immense boxing ring, of which the complex systems of barbed wire which stretch from the North Sea to Belfort form the ropes. The war, on the West, has been fought within these limits since the Marne. It is possible that it will see no change of position up to the end.

7. CANADIANS FRESH FROM THE TRENCHES.

But, as in a boxing match, it is not necessary, in order to win, to drive one's opponent over the ropes and out of the ring; in the same way it may happen that the German Army is "knocked out" in the positions where it is fighting to-day.

That, at least, is the opinion of the British soldier.

It is, indeed, no more than a paraphrase of that dictum, pronounced not long ago by General Nogi, and as true of the ring as it is of war: "Complete victory is to him who can last a quarter of an hour longer than the other fellow."

Tommy has no intention—no more than has his friend the *poilu*—of playing the part of "the other fellow."

CHAPTER V.

THE RELIEF.

The scene is an old trench of the French first line. It is midday. It is raining. It goes on raining. It has always rained. The sector is fairly quiet, and has been for an hour or so. Tommy sees a chance to write a letter.

Here in his dug-out—a miserable shelter which oozes water everywhere—squatted on the straw that becomes filth the moment it is thrown down, he is telling his friends in Scotland all his small sorrows and hopes; he is wishing them "A Happy New Year."

Suddenly his pen falters; the writer considers, stops writing, and, addressing the second-lieutenant as he goes by: "Beg pardon, sir," he asks, "may I say that they have moved out?"

"Certainly not," says the lieutenant, apparently horrified by such a question. "It is absolutely forbidden to say anything about this business. Do you understand, all of you?"

"But—but," someone ventures to say, "everyone in England knows about it already. The papers ..." and they show the lieutenant some newspapers which have come that morning. The officer takes them, glances at them, smiles, and says: "Oh, these journalists!"

On the front page of the paper a striking photograph is exhibited, showing an incident of the taking over by the British of the French front. Underneath is the following description:

"Tommy takes over the French trenches. French soldiers looking on at the arrival of British troops who are relieving them. This important operation took place at the front, at Christmas-time, silently, secretly and with complete success. The enemy, who was in many places no more

than a few yards distant, never had any suspicion of this change, which has greatly extended the British lines and eased the strain which our gallant Allies have endured upon the Western front.

"This military manœuvre affords the best reply to the manœuvres of Germany in the direction of peace."

And so Tommy continues his letter in some such fashion as this:

"Now that the thing is done, I may tell you that we have left the sector of —— in order to come down farther South, where we have relieved the French. It has been a fine chance to see our brave Allies at work, and I am tremendously proud to have taken their place in the lines.

"The thing has been done very well, although it wanted a lot of care and was very dangerous. You can imagine that if the Boches had had any notion of what we were at, they would not have failed to do their level best to stop us or make it difficult for us; for it must make them very savage to see our 'contemptible little Army' always extending its flanks, without wearing thin anywhere, and so setting free first-rate troops for the French to use elsewhere. [Pg 51]

"We came among the Frenchmen on Christmas Day.

"The roads were all as busy as on the day before the offensive on the Ancre in front of Beaumont-Hamel. We never stopped meeting French troops and wagons, which were going back towards the railway.

"We exchanged civilities with the *poilus* which neither they nor we understood the least bit. But I may tell you that it was pretty clear to me that they were not sorry to be giving up their places to us.

"On the 25th of December, after supper, we left our last camp and marched through the night for many hours, till we came to this French trench where I am writing to you now.

"The *poilus* were at their posts. It'll be a long time before I forget that sight.

"Although they were far dirtier and more tired than were we, the French, as they themselves say, 'had the smile.' If we had been allowed to make any noise, we should have cheered them. But we were only 38 yards from the Boche line.

"The officers and the non-commissioned officers gave the orders in whispers. They had interpreters to help them.

"As for me, I was at once told off to do sentry in the place of a great French chap, with a beard, who was a good 15 years older than I.

"As I understood a bit of French, I was able to make out most of what he said to me.

"'Good evening, my lad,' says he. 'You're a good fellow to come and let me out of this. Shake hands, won't you?'—I didn't understand everything; French is so difficult—and he added: 'And now, young 'un, open your eyes and keep them skinned.' [Pg 52]

"Then he gave me a great deal of very sound advice, showing me in which directions I must keep a good look-out, and telling me to have a care of a blackguardly German machine-gun which never has done sweeping their parapet.

"When he had finished with this he took his rifle out of the loophole, and I put mine there in its place. And that's how the big relief was carried out on Christmas night."

At this point Tommy was forced to interrupt his long letter, for the Germans had at last got news of the relief and were attacking the sector. In vain.

Next day Tommy finished thus:

"My *poilu* was right. This corner can hardly be called a quiet one, and Fritz is a bad boy, there's no doubt about it. Thanks for your Christmas parcel. The pudding was A1. Good-bye.

"TOMMY."

PART III.

[Pg 55]

THE ARMIES OF THE NORTH.

Flat calm on both sides of the Ancre; calm—or something like it—on the Somme. Let us take advantage of this apparent truce to get into rather closer touch with the British Army.

By this eight-day tour (though it has seemed, while we have been making it, a kind of intermezzo between two acts of the offensive) we had intended, particularly, to demonstrate to ourselves, by our study of the events and those who have enacted them, the dauntless determination with which our Allies, not satisfied to defend the heroic heritage which these battlefields of 1915 have bequeathed to them, now prepare for the future.

In telling these experiences, one has to play the Censor over oneself. And so we may say nothing of the most important things of all. Everywhere throughout this countryside mighty Armies, in the most perfect secrecy, are doing their business, scattering, with prodigal hand, the seed of future victory. And the harvest will surely be gathered. And if, at this time of heart-breaking uncertainty, our journey enables us to do no more than declare that great things are assuredly preparing, this alone will make it worth our having undertaken it.

We did not set out, we three, with our permits from the General Headquarters, to make a sentimental pilgrimage over the battlefields that lie between Lorette and the trenches of French Flanders. No; it was a reconnaissance that we made—into the Future. These sketches of the British Armies are, thus, no more than a study of latent forces.

CHAPTER I.

THE PREPARATION OF THE CANADIANS.

We spent the first two days among the Canadians. Let me recall a few of their performances. They sustained, in front of Ypres, the first great gas attack launched by the Germans. During the offensive in Picardy, being sent into the front line on the 15th of September or thereabouts, they stormed Courcelette and Martinpuich, and consolidated their forward positions on one side towards Grandcourt, on the other towards Le Sars. The rest of them kept the enemy contained.

To sum them up—an Army full of robust qualities, an Army of young athletes, inured by their own home-life to the physical hardships of the trenches, regardless alike of cold, fog and mud. An Army, too, of formidable size, since to-day its numbers are greater than those of the whole British Expeditionary Force of 1914.

We saw them in their lines—in camp. Our guides were certain young officers from Quebec, who spoke an archaic, melodious French, that was most pleasant to hear. Their names also sounded oddly in our ears; more than one of them recalled the old sailor names of Cherbourg, Saint Malo and Lorient. They told us what joy they found in fighting for their two Homelands—England and France.

While we were crossing a wood near A——, one of them told me, gravely: "I have been here since our good God made the little apples to grow, but I have known neither regret nor weariness. Rather has this life in France this springhead of my race, made me know myself each day more truly."

These men and their leaders, indeed, do neither their training nor their fighting from any other motive than duty. Their fighting has a kind of mystical quality, the passion of a young people, which makes them, behind their battle lines, a family of brothers, and, when they engage, an army of warriors who will lay down their lives for one another.

A few miles from the enemy, behind a redoubt, where thousands of French graves lie scattered, one of their divisions occupied some huts which our engineers had built. Almost everywhere the notices were written in French. In one immense system there were trenches of a hundred shapes all jumbled together. We saw, here, a demonstration of a surprise attack against a machine-gun emplacement on a redoubt of the German pattern. This manœuvre was no more than an illustration of theory. The captain who had charge of it had, during the previous night, himself led an attack against the Germans. From it he had returned with three things—a slight wound, two prisoners and the Military Cross.

Elsewhere, at the edge of a mine-crater, we listened to a lieutenant grounding his men in the art of trench-digging. A trench should be made irregularly, in accordance with the natural variations of the soil. All of which the lieutenant summed up thus: "To do this job well you must do it badly."

A company of Canadian gunners were practising with a trench-digging machine, invented in England, which had done well on the Somme. Suddenly one of them, to his horror, perceived that a shell which stood among a hundred others was smoking. By some unaccountable means its fuse had caught fire, the match was burning, and in a few seconds, perhaps in one, the shell would burst. Were it to do so, the whole of this store of ammunition must go aloft, with the gunners and us and all.

And so this gallant little Canadian who has seen the danger, gives the alarm, and while we flatten ourselves into the mud, picks up the shell in his plucky hands and throws it with all his strength out in front of the battery, where it bursts—and no one a penny the worse.

We could have fallen, for very joy, upon the neck of the gallant lad who had just saved all our lives. It would have been so silly to be killed in such a fashion, miles away from the enemy!

Farther on they were learning to handle a new trench-mortar. We were privileged to observe a little *barrage* fire. It made a noble shindy in the fog and a magnificent disturbance of the soil. These guns have been only recently introduced, but they are installing great numbers of them along the whole British front with a view to the winter campaign, for they have been an immense success. The Germans, in this field, at least, of experimental operations, have acquired this information at considerable cost to themselves.

In the same way we followed the open-air training of the machine-gun men. More or less every man has to go through it, so that if necessary he may be able to do this work. It is the picked gunners, who have shown what they can do in actual fighting, who teach the beginners the use of this terrible weapon, and it is with a most entertaining air of "the old soldier" that they give their instruction.

We saw the periscope rifles at work, the bomb-throwing and grenade-throwing rifles and other strange and terrible weapons of which one may not tell. What a rare museum we will be able to make up after the war! The collections of arms from the Middle Ages will sink into insignificance

beside it. It would appear that for inventing ways of killing his fellows, the imagination of Man knows no bounds.

We came upon some sturdy Canadians, their hats stuck in their belts. A stout band of leather was round their heads. Slung across his shoulders one carried two heavy boxes loaded with shells; another, without any effort, carried one of his comrades. These exercises were explained to us in this way. "It is the method of the Red Indians that the Canadians have cleverly adapted to the purposes of supplying their trenches or carrying their wounded. With it, one has no need to be a Hercules." With this system, strength yields to skill. They showed us a man who can in this way walk easily with a piano on his back. "It would come in handy for shifting a broken-down tank!" said our guide with a grin.

Here we are at the Canadian Headquarters, an 18th-century château whose walls are hung with early Flemish masters.

"France sends us welcome guests."

The man who gives us this genial reception is none other than General Byng, Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian detachment in France. He is a handsome fellow, slender, solidly built. In him an immense strength is found united to an exquisite courtesy.

Hardly have we become his guests before he is showing his confidence in us by permitting us to share in his secrets.

He has brought us in front of a huge map representing the field of his operations. On it he shows us, with a most worthy pride, the dispositions of all his divisions, brigades and battalions.

While we are chatting, an officer of the Intelligence comes in. He has an unfortunate piece of news for the general, and so for us—the fall of Bucharest.

"At dawn this morning," he says, "the Boches began cheering in their trenches. Then they pushed up above their parapets placards which told us that the Rumanian capital had been taken. Also, one of our listening-posts got a German wireless put purposely into English, which said: 'Bucharest is taken. Hurrah!'"

For a serious moment or two we are silent.

Then someone ventures: "That's a nuisance!"

Another silence. The square jaws set a little more firmly. Then: "Carry on!" says our host.

CHAPTER II.

ARRAS, THE WOUNDED TOWN.

While I was in the British lines I visited Arras.

Everyone knows that since February of this year this ancient town has been included in that part of the front which is held by our Allies.

Soldier or traveller, whoever enters the ruins of Arras, is subject to the strictest regulations, which have been imposed for the sake of the security of individuals and the preservation of the general order. The steel helmet is obligatory, as is the gas mask.

Numerous notices instruct us "not to move about except upon the footpaths and hugging the walls. It is absolutely forbidden to use the middle of the roadway." A useful precaution in a town whose outskirts are held by the Germans.

The town is divided into districts. On notice-boards are posted various directions such as, "Rendezvous Place No. 1." For there is no longer any Grande Place or Petit Place or any other spots whose names are known to the people of Arras—only Place 1, 2, 3, and so on.

I have noted, in this connection, the following, as a novel example of organisation and forethought:

"To civilians. You are not required to concern yourselves with military matters. If you talk about such things, you may come under suspicion."

A civilian warned is a civilian armed.

Such was Arras when I saw it in November, 1914, after the first bombardment, and so it was, or nearly so, when I saw it yesterday. And it was the same sorrow that I felt as I passed along those empty streets, where not one house is to be seen that has not received its wound, more or less mortal. The dismal impression may have been strengthened by yesterday's wretched weather.

8. ARRAS.

We often say of some provincial town: "It is a dead-alive place." The phrase should be changed, or else it should be used henceforth only about such towns as Arras, Ypres or Verdun.

For two years not only the Germans but the weather also have been active to help the work of destruction; the Germans with their never-ceasing bombardment, the weather by destroying without hope buildings which might, till lately, have perhaps been saved. Everything rusts and crumbles under the rain, and in many places the wind has finished their work for the guns. Grass sprouts among the ruins; moss grows on stone and timber. The work of Death goes on, slowly but surely.

It is not a little astonishing to meet civilians now and then in Arras. Here and there the white head of some old man or woman appears from a cellar or from behind a bit of wall. There are some hundreds of such French people, who have refused to leave their homes.

They have sent away the "*jeunesse*," as they say, so that the Boches may have no more children to kill. They, the old folk, propose to stay and look after their ruins.

Yesterday I saw a woman come out of the half-open door of a little shop. She may have been 65 years old. Over the door was the sign, "Washing done here." She was a washerwoman.

I spoke to her.

"My dear lady," I said, "are you not afraid to stay here?"

"Bah, Monsieur!" she replied. "A little sooner, a little later. What does it matter at my age? [Pg 62]

"I had a grandson," she went on. "He was just 20 when the Boches came. They killed him close by here in 1914. My girl died of grief. The father is fighting somewhere or other. And so I came back. Here at least I can go now and then to pray for my boy. But not beside his grave. The Boches are *there*. That's where it is, Monsieur, on the other side of the road."

And she pointed to where the enemy lay, close by.

He is there, close by. You feel him; you hear him. For two years he has held the suburbs of Blangy, Ronville and Saint Sauveur. You hear his firing as if it was beside you. It is all street fighting here. In one place, indeed, there is no more than the width of a little street, four or five yards, between the trenches.

For the moment, however, this sector is quiet.

The chief amusement of the Boches is incendiarism. On regular days and at regular hours of the day it pleases them to light great bonfires in the town. This is how they manage it.

First they throw a few incendiary bombs at the prey which they have singled out. When the fire has been started and the firemen have come running to fight it, the Boches enliven the situation with shells, in the hope, I suppose, of feeding the flames with some human victims.

It is vastly entertaining!

As we came back we made the acquaintance of some very noteworthy British soldiers. They call them Bantams.

The distinguishing feature of these men is their height, which is below the average. There was a certain number of men in England who had been rejected for service in the ranks because of their shortness. As they were very keen to fight, somebody thought of forming them into a special division. [Pg 63]

And so the Bantam Division came into being. And these little cocks can fight to the death, like those in whose battles the villages of Northern England used to delight; and, little though they are, they grow, if one may say so, at once to the size of Titans.

CHAPTER III.

THE GROUND OF HEROIC DEEDS.

Last year the ground that we are treading, this cold and rainy December day, saw played out one of the most terrible acts of this terrible war. It shook for weeks together during May and June, 1915, to the thunder of vast opposing artilleries. Thousands of men moved over it and drenched it with their blood.

This ground has seen the French Army, in a transport of courage, bind for an instant the wings of victory; it has seen our battalions burst at racing speed over trenches that were deemed impregnable; it has seen Petain's men storm the Vimy Ridge and win a sight of the plain, the goal of their desires, their promised land....

It has seen that!

I own frankly that, as I write these impressions, I am in the grip of an emotion which I do not even try to conquer. Perhaps it is because these events of May and June, 1915, are already so distant that time has magnified their tragic splendour till they have acquired a sort of legendary quality.

We reached this battlefield through the wood of Bouvigny, which lies to the North-westwards of the crest of Notre Dame de Lorette. In this wood, which is all close thickets and has few large trees, just before the attack of May, an entire French division succeeded in gathering without being discovered by the enemy. [Pg 64]

You can still see clearly, at the Southern edge of the wood, the first French trenches, in front of which, in October, 1914, after the evacuation of Lille, the German hosts were stopped in their march to the West. The breaking flood has eaten deeply into the slopes, as the sea has done along the Breton Coast.

Two years will soon have passed over this devastated spot. The grass and the moss have begun to take possession of the abandoned trenches, to conceal the shell-holes and the dug-outs, to cover up the vast wreckage of the battle, the dear relics of our soldiers. Nevertheless, we see everywhere evidence of the madness with which they fought hereabouts in May and June, 1915. Years, centuries, I believe, must pass before every sign of these things will be gone.

No doubt the bones that one often finds scattered here and there, refused by the ground, will crumble away and will return little by little to the dust from which they came; these little nameless crosses, made out of two sticks of different lengths fastened together, will vanish; but on the spurs of Lorette, as at Carency, or at Ablain Saint-Nazaire, there will always be something that will speak of the spring of 1915—the ground.

We were anxious to see the ruins of the chapel. We found them only with great difficulty. At last at the angle of a trench we came upon its brick foundations and a small monument, set up since 1915 by some pious hand. In a frame of wood and corrugated iron are three plaster figures, the Holy Family, which were formerly in the chapel, with this inscription:

> "Memorial of the Holy Family of the Santa Casa of Notre Dame de Lorette. August, 1916. The Guides and Protectors of valiant soldiers."

[Pg 65] This monument cannot be said to be erected—since it is buried—but it hides itself away in that part of the spurs of Lorette whence the eye looks out beyond over the whole district. In clear weather one sees the whole panorama of the German and French lines. One can trace their windings by Angres, Lievin and Lens, and good eyes can follow them right up to Lille. It is quite common, at any rate, to see the people of this invaded piece of France going about their business in the streets of, for example, Lens.

Opposite, to the East, are the chalky heights of Vimy, a little higher than the ridge of Lorette, on which we are standing. Their summits are at present held by the enemy.

We could not fail, while we were at Ablain, to compare the effect of the 1915 gunfire with that of 1916. This comparison can, indeed, be made wherever fighting had taken place before the Somme offensive.

In the sector of Ablain, Carency and Souchez our artillery had delivered a weight of shell, in May and June 1915, such as had never been known before. The enemy had been stunned by it. Yet, what a different effect was wrought by the artillery during the Somme offensive. At either Ablain, Carency or Souchez it is still possible to see that there is a village, and even to rebuild it in imagination. The skeletons are still standing.

But in Fricourt, Mametz, Thiepval and all the other villages which were under fire in 1916, not one stone remains upon another. In 1915 it was destruction; in 1916 annihilation. The advance made in the construction of artillery is written in the soil in unmistakable characters, and no one who is not an expert can conceive how the science of levelling things with the earth might be brought to any greater perfection. Our further advance along these lines must, one would say, be made downwards.

[Pg 66] It is with deep regret that we leave these immense cities of the dead, where so many Frenchmen sleep under the sympathetic wardenship of our Allies.

CHAPTER IV.

This evening on our return from the lines we found the following invitation:

> "Dear Sir,—The General in Command will be very happy if you can dine with him at eight o'clock."

We were, to tell you the truth, in such a state of dirtiness, so horribly muddy and so tired, that at first we wondered if it was possible for us to accept. But an invitation from a General—a General in Command—amounts to an order. And so we made a quick toilet and betook ourselves to the Head Quarters.

They had been established a mile or two from the little Flemish town, in a *château* built in the style of the Italian Renaissance, which we were able, unfortunately, to admire by moonlight only.

The General, who was surrounded by a brilliant company of Generals and Colonels, received us in the drawing-room. He made us welcome in the purest French, saluting us as the representatives of the Press of an Ally.

General Horn, commanding the 1st British Army, is a man about 60 years old. In this command he has succeeded Sir Douglas Haig, who is now Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces. He is a tall man with a youthful carriage. His whole person is instinct with the force of a great leader. [Pg 67] His eye is cold and stern, while thick, grizzled brows add to the severity of his glance. But he is a ready and an agreeable talker. It is clear that this leader, who holds in his hand the lives of 200,000 men, is, also, a splendid gentleman.

Once at table we are overwhelmed with attentions. Our hosts vie with one another in showing kindness to the Frenchmen. Here are men whose names are already famous throughout Great Britain; one day this war will make them known to the whole world.

We meet again, particularly, a number of faces which we have already encountered during our travels. General Byng, for instance, whom I have already had the honour to introduce to you; Curry, a General of Division, a square-set John Bull in uniform, with eyes that are peculiarly quick and intelligent. A man of business in time of peace, he won his General's scabbard during the first Battle of Ypres. (An English General is to be known by the crossed scabbard and sword, in gold, on his epaulettes.)

He said, speaking of this sector of his:

"I am proud to command my men in positions which you have made glorious." Brave heart! He has wept for his men. Here again is Brigadier Kitchen; 45, fair, blue eyes, well set up, a kindly face; he looks like a younger Kitchener. He has a career behind him, for he fought in South Africa. Full of fire, he should be a wonderful leader of men, of the order of Gouraud or Mangin.

Yet others——

And we talk. We talk as one talks round a table, that is, a little about everything. Our hosts listen with a lively interest to such news—it is fresh for them—as we can give them of the changes that have recently taken place among the military and political leaders of France. They are careful to keep their opinions on these matters to themselves. At the most one can see that certain names [Pg 68] are in good odour among them.

It is impossible also not to speak of Rumania, whose capital has just been taken. There is no doubt that what is happening in Rumania is vexing to our Allies, but they are not disturbed. My neighbour, without intending to do so, comforts my heart by proving to me mathematically that the misfortunes of Rumania cannot bring any happiness into Germany. He speaks of these things with a confidence in which sentiment has no part, but rather the scientific knowledge of the war —if one may say so—which is his.

It is from him that I glean this comforting detail—that the Germans have organised special companies to serve during the days on which the advances are made. Their troops in the front lines have now so little willingness and, indeed, power to fight, that it has been necessary to form special companies which the enemy moves hither and thither to meet any particularly strong attacks.

"Perhaps when we get to that point," said one of the Generals near us, "we shall begin to hear them bleating for peace."

"You are very certain of your men?" one of us asked him.

"They are full of beans," said he.

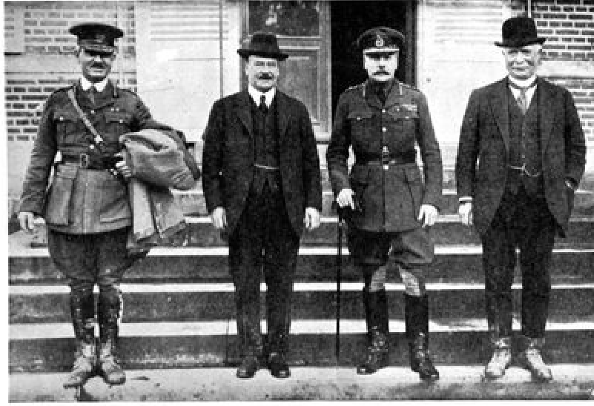
CHAPTER V.

WAR IN THE BLACK COUNTRY.

Trains follow each other every quarter of an hour—endless trains, 60 truck-loads and more, all bearing the mark of five big French companies.

Some of these convoys seemed to have been borrowed from a museum of obsolete railways. The couplings rattle, the buffers are out of joint, and the brakes squeak. Others come from Belgium. [Pg 69] One can easily see by the repairs that they have undergone all the horrors of war. Others, again,

emblazoned with the arms of Essen or Alsace-Lorraine, red in colour and cumbersome, are obviously prisoners of war.



9. THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF.

A Minister has actually dared to bring about a real mobilisation of transport. He has ordered the seizure of all trucks in good condition, and the captured have gone to the front. All of them are overflowing with every species of coal. Coal! When one thinks of the shortage in Paris and the provinces of France, one can appreciate the sight of these millions of tons being rushed back from the front. Coal is the black bread of war. At the level crossings the British regiments going up into the line naturally give way to the greater urgency of these supply trains.

We have just come back from visiting, under the guidance of a Staff-Major, the land of shafts and mines. Certainly, war is being waged there, but in a curious way, as if it were added on to ordinary existence. B——, N——, les M——, V—— are so many stages in our sooty pilgrimage!

In front of V——, after having wandered in these endless streets with houses of miners' dwellings, all exactly alike, we come upon a huge slag heap, 800 yards high, like some black pyramid. The neighbouring pits, with their sheds, lifts and air-shafts, are working as usual. We pass a party of miners, solemn and resolute-looking people, their ages varying from 16 to 40, who are going to relieve the workers in the galleries 200 yards below soil.

These civilian workers have just decided to do another hour a day. They, too, have behaved like heroes.

The smoking pits are not a stone's throw from the smoking cannons.

The howitzers concealed in the Black Country alternate their "boom!" with the sharper "crack!" of trench mortars. A London motor-'bus, ingeniously disguised, crowded with soldiers inside and out, is carrying a whole platoon of armed men to the shelter of one of these slag heaps which line the roads.

Here, owing to the nature of the soil, the trenches cannot be dug down. Thousands of pumps would be wanted to dry this sector alone.

The Royal Engineers have overcome the difficulty by having recourse to the old system of breastworks. Here redoubts, facing all ways, strong points with sloping parapets, buttresses, bastions, half-moons, etc., are made with sandbags—the triumph of improvisation like the inventions of a Pacciotto or a de Vauban. But more numerous than the Tommies are the groups of women carrying baskets of provisions for their menfolk.

Under the guidance of the General Commanding the Artillery of the Army, we visited some batteries of 9.2 howitzers, those magnificent weapons of destruction. What ruses! What profligate conceits are used to hide these monstrous treasures from the enemy aircraft! After the war we must consecrate a whole chapter to those obscure painters, designers of "take-in's," who, working in the open country, succeed in faking the skyline and every aspect of the earth—nay, all Nature herself.

A forward observing officer hidden somewhere on the ridge, which used to be called the Hohenzollern Redoubt, has just rung up to say that he has spotted some enemy transport moving in the mist behind their lines. The map reference is immediately verified and the range ascertained. A junior subaltern blows his whistle. In a second N.C.O.'s and men are in position. Then they open fire, disturbing the peaceful landscape. Just beside the battery was a beautiful pond with two swans—the most unwarlike thing in the world. Five minutes later we hear that the shooting was good and the transport was scuppered.

 In these miners' dwellings and allotments, where war and humdrum life are so strangely intermingled, there are many alarms. Aeroplane bombs, gas attacks and hostile bombardments. When the siren starts, everyone—women, children, old men and soldiers—go quietly into the cellars and come up again when it is all over, as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

Such is the life in the coal country. The Tommies in the trenches, the artillery in the fields and gardens and the workmen in the mines. Endless strife above ground, endless labour below, each night, each day, the same.

France should honour these miners of Artois and Flanders just as much as her soldiers.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ART OF SAVING.

Our hosts were very anxious to show us their Base at Calais, and, the visit being over, we fully realise their reasons. The fact is they have achieved miracles of hard work and organisation, of which they are justly proud.

Dare I say that we had not taken full advantage of the port previous to the war? It is possible that in this matter, as in so many others, the war will have taught us useful lessons.

Why should Germany have consented to make such bloody sacrifices on the Yser if Calais had not been a prize of great value?

A complete study of a base like Calais would require days and days. We had only a few hours, and we only saw a few things, but things of the utmost meaning, as the reader will see.

Everyone knows that the wear and tear of an army in the field is not merely concerned with losses in men. There is a huge combustion of materials which is almost as important. Even when there is no actual offensive there is considerable wastage of material, as also of men. [Pg 72]

But just as the commanders of fighting units have taken appropriate measures to spare the human animal, such as sending troops back to rest for a certain time, so the heads of army administration have devised means of saving every article of "war-soiled" material. It is this organisation that we have seen at work in Calais. Nothing could be more instructive.

There exists in each British division at the front a divisional salvage company, whose duty it is to clear up a battlefield and collect somewhere behind the lines all damaged equipment—rifles, uniforms, bayonets, guns, empty cases, machine-guns, helmets, leather waistcoats, boots, etc.

This poor material, dirty, rusty, even blood-stained, is sorted out at the salvage dump and sent down to the base by train. We saw one of these trains arrive at Calais, and we were able to see some of the ingenious devices invented for dealing with this curious hotch-potch. All this takes place in an old sawmill, which has been enlarged to five times its natural size since the beginning of the war. A thousand skilled British workers and two thousand French women are now employed in the workshops. Most of the women are, in normal times, lacemakers in the town.

The men, skilled labourers in uniform, work by time, not by the piece. They earn eighteenpence a day—i.e., 6d. more than the ordinary Tommy in the trenches.

The women, of all ages, are used for light and not very exhausting work, and they earn on the average 3 francs a day (the trades-union price). What miracles take place! In the "snob-shop," the ammunition boots, glorious souvenirs of the front, which come back in a shocking state, are examined and repaired. Twenty thousand pairs a week. The hopeless pairs are made into laces. One woman can make 150 per day.

At the saddlery, harness and leather, covered with mud and blood, are cleaned as good as new. At the forge, wheels and couplings of gun-carriages are repaired. Elsewhere the essential parts of the guns are examined and all missing sections replaced. [Pg 73]

In another place the dixies and camp-cookers, all dented and rusty, are cleaned and re-soldered. Old petrol tins are made into trench braziers. Steel helmets recover their form, picks and shovels their handles, and all the iron that cannot be made use of is sent back to the foundry to be melted down for ammunition.

Over the door of this war factory might be inscribed the motto of Lavoisier, with a slight addition:—

> "Here nothing new is made, but nothing old is wasted."

The science that is taught and practised is the science, hitherto too little known, of economy.

That is the reason why many men of the world (and others) should, like us, visit this base.

CHAPTER VII

"BROTHERS IN ARMS."

The Times, through the medium of its distinguished representative with the British Army, Mr. Robinson, has recently published a very laudatory and somewhat flattering article on the attitude of the French soldier and the civil population of France towards the British Expeditionary Force.

"It must not be forgotten," said the great journal of the metropolis, "that we are foreigners in France. Thus the spectacle of good-comradeship which we witness every day is altogether honourable to our French hosts."

We must be allowed to say in our turn that never before has it been so easy to practise the military virtue of comradeship, for my countrymen are fully alive to the tact and perfect courtesy of the officers and men of King George. [Pg 74]

There is nothing to add to what has been known from the beginning about the relations of the soldiers of both countries. Even before the military prowess of Great Britain had been proved on

the field of battle, her collaboration in this war was desired by our soldiers and civilians alike. We will always remember with emotion the fateful days of 2nd and 4th August—when we asked ourselves, "Will England fight with us?" Then, when that foolish Emperor of Germany talked of General French's "contemptible little Army," we had in France the presentiment that the British Army would be able to take its revenge.

Recent events have confirmed the early promise of fine achievements; the battle of the Marne, the two battles of Ypres, Neuve Chapelle, Loos, the Somme, and the Ancre have sealed the friendship of the two armies.

Equally courageous and loyal, sharing the same ideas about the original aims of the war, enduring the same hardships, patiently bearing common misfortunes, and jubilant alike over common victory, the Tommy and the "Poilu" have become "chums" that will be difficult to separate.

Two sorts of "*agents de liaison*" have helped in the good work—these are the French interpreters and the Staff officers of the French Mission to the British Army.

The former, a goodly number, well chosen, well-bred, and well educated, have been, each in his own unit, sowers of the good seed of Franco-British friendship.

The latter, a very small number (the result of careful sifting), having a consummate experience of war, most of them possessing honourable wounds, highly educated, some writers of reputation, known all over the world—such as the author of "*Quand on se bat*"—deserve our utmost thanks for their work with our Allies which they have carried out so brilliantly.

The question of the relations of the British Army with the civil population is delicate in appearance only. As a matter of fact, a mutual goodwill from the very start has removed all suspicion of awkwardness and strain.

The danger was obvious. In the records of history it is impossible to find a case of a country tolerating without a murmur the presence of a foreign army, even an allied army. This miracle has been rendered possible by the goodwill of the French, fully understood and recognised by our friends, and by the tact and common sense of the British.

Far from assuming an attitude of conquerors, which would most certainly have estranged the sympathies of the patriotic inhabitants of North-West France, the British have rigorously respected our manners and customs.

Our administrative organisation has been maintained. We have still our prefects and sub-prefects, our tribunals, justices of the peace, savings banks, postal services and schools, living in absolute independence in the midst of the British war machine.

Better still, our own military organisation still exists. In every part of our country occupied by the British our Army has its representatives, such as workers on the roads, Army Service Corps units, and military police.

All this crowd, civilians and soldiers alike, "carry on" without the smallest hitch or quarrel with our British guests. This occupation of our territory, carried out with so much understanding and discipline, could not possibly cause any discontent among our peasants.

Over and above the protection of a rich district, the British Army has developed commercially a great number of ports and inland towns, has created industries hitherto unknown, increased the railways, put to the utmost use the resources of the country, and, in fact, has improved local commerce in every respect.

Those who listen to the vile insinuations of the Germans and impute to the British the desire of remaining in France after the war, little understand the love of every British citizen for his native soil and his respect for our own independence.

In order to divide our two friendly nations the Germans must find another trick. Some money, great sympathy, and, alas! many dead, are all that will be left of our friends in France after the war.[B]

[B] From the last despatch of Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig:

"I cannot close this Despatch without alluding to the happy relations which continue to exist between the Allied Armies and between our troops and the civil population in France and Belgium. The unfailing co-operation of our Allies, their splendid fighting qualities, and the kindness and goodwill universally displayed towards us have won the gratitude, as well as the respect and admiration, of all ranks of the British Armies."

10. THE PRINCE OF WALES.

PART IV.

IMPRESSIONS OF "NO MAN'S LAND."

CHAPTER I.

AS IN A PICTURE OF EPINAL.

Yesterday I met the Prince of Wales in the lines. The Prince of Wales! What does that name not say to a Frenchman!

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. A small, soaking rain was falling over the dismal plateau where once stood so many smiling villages and fair woods, now ruined, whose names, immortalised by British valour, must live forever in history.

It was close on nightfall. Through the sticky, heavy mud troops and wagons crawled towards the firing line. The men, with naked chests that defied the bitter cold, sweated furiously under the load of their equipment. Horses with huge, hairy feet, mounted by Australians like so many cowboys, struggled, foaming, to drag the huge lorries through the deep ruts of the roadway.

Men from the pioneer battalions, directed by Engineers, worked with pick and shovel to drain away the water, to rebuild the fallen embankments, or to fill up boggy places. So while the guns roared, methodically and in silence the Army prepared the soil for Victory.

Suddenly, into this microcosm of the war, came a body of horsemen, climbing towards us up the slopes of the plateau. At their head rode a lad whose features were so refined and so delicate that I could not choose but remark him.

I have already met in the British battle lines several faces of this kind. They are almost feminine. They are like miniatures.

My eyes—may I be forgiven—dwelt upon this boy with a complete lack of respect. He looked between 18 and 20 years old at the most. He had cocked his cap a trifle over his left eye, and his fair head was cropped close as rabbit's fur.

"Did you recognise him?" someone asked me.

"Who?"

"The Prince of Wales."

The Prince of Wales had gone by.

It was only then that I noticed the British soldiers standing to attention and saluting the Prince

with "eyes right" as he went along amongst them. The officers, too, saluted him with more ceremony than is usual. And he, as he rode slowly past, very charmingly acknowledged the salutes.

I have learned only this morning that a little farther on, at the highest part of the plateau, the Prince left his horse and—this is a thing that he is very fond of doing—joined a relieving party for a piece of its journey. He returned in the evening to the simple quarters which are his.

A Staff Captain at twenty-three, the Prince, heir to the Crown of the British Empire, is a pattern of the best soldierly qualities. He can only live happily among the soldiers, with whom he is prodigiously popular.

It is said that he would have liked to do still more.

One day he asked permission of Lord Kitchener, who was then Secretary of State for War, to perform the ordinary duties of an officer with his regiment, the Grenadier Guards. He proposed to lead his men in an advance.

But Kitchener refused absolutely, and we can imagine the valiant argument which ensued between Prince and Sirdar—the one all youth and pluck, the other concerned alone with the welfare of the Empire.

The Prince ultimately was obliged to yield to reasons of State. It was a soldier's first victory—over himself.

CHAPTER II.

A HERO AFTER THE MANNER OF ROLAND.

December.

General Vaughan Campbell, Brigadier of the —th Infantry Brigade, having done us the honour to pay us a visit, invited us, for this Thursday, to share his meal.

The General has made his winter quarters in a country house, beside which there is a duck-pond. An English breakfast awaited us; that is to say, a hearty welcome, no ceremony, and food of the best.

Outside in the park, under the trees that the hoar-frost loads, the brigade band favours us with the liveliest melodies from *Bric-à-brac*, *The Girl in the Taxi* and, above all, those *Bing Boys*, who seem fated to eclipse *Tipperary* itself in the general favour. It is three degrees below freezing-point. All round the band they have had to set a circle of braziers. I am on the General's left, a particular distinction which I purchase at the cost of sitting with my back against an open window, where I become the sport of a whole battlefield of draughts. But it is a cheap price for the company of General Vaughan Campbell.

This is one of the most popular men in the British Army. He must surely be the youngest of its Generals, for he is not yet 38. This very month King George has still further swelled the number of his orders by giving him the Victoria Cross. Only 250 men in the whole Army can boast of this honour.

The man's quality is evident. He is strength and good nature personified. With his rider's legs, his broad, short body, muscular yet supple, he is the picture of a sporting Englishman. The merry eye betrays the simple heart. The wind and the open-air life have tanned his face like a seaman's. He wears, moreover, an odd little cat's moustache, two red, bristling tufts, which makes one think of the traditional musketeers of Louis XIV. A little time ago I saw him run in a two-mile race against some of his younger Staff Officers.

This General is a hero; a hero in that great style which glorifies every gallant action with the touch of chivalry. One evening in the trenches he performed a feat worthy of Roland.

The story is well known. In September last General Vaughan Campbell was a Colonel in the Guards. His regiment held the first line, immediately next to the Germans.

One evening the order came to attack at midnight. It fell to the Coldstreams to undertake this dangerous business. It was a sweet and tranquil autumn night. The men fought with sleep, harder to resist than any pain. But the hour for the attack had come.

This Colonel has a knightly soul. He perceives that his men, far from their home, living for ever in holes, and mud and fog, sometimes lose their vision of the true meaning of this war. It is their souls that must be stirred. And the Colonel, who used to be the keenest Master of Fox Hounds in Shropshire, recollected that he had among his things a hunting-horn whose call was clearer than any cornet's.

He got his men together, gave them the word to "go over," and then, jumping on to the parapet, blew "gone away" with the full strength of his lungs. As if in this fierce summons they heard the very voice of their own country, the Coldstreams, wild with delight, charged madly on the heels of this new Roland. The call of the horn sounded weirdly through the night above "No Man's Land." It is to these men like the bagpipes to the Highlander; a voice from the Homeland and the call of the Empire.

Colonel Campbell is the first man in the enemy's trench. His cat's moustache has become a

tiger's. Even with his horn he lays about him. With it he stuns the first Saxon he meets, to whose dazed eyes he seems like some spectre from another age. And two lines of trenches are taken. [Pg 83]

FORRARD AWAY!

The Dream

The Reality

11. A DRAWING IN "PUNCH" INSPIRED BY GENERAL CAMPBELL'S HEROIC ACT.

Reproduced by special permission of the proprietors of "Punch."

All England has heard the tale. The Guards, whom the Colonel left but yesterday to become a General, have presented him with a silver hunting-horn, inscribed, in commemoration of his deed, with an account of it and this glorious motto: "Nulli Secundus." The King has rewarded his magnificent exploit with the rank of General. And the Empire has awarded him unhesitatingly that for which the bravest soldiers of this brave race rejoice to die—the Cross that bears the words "For Valour."

A little time after the splendid action which I have recorded a young girl, whose name is not known, sent the following letter to General Campbell. This touching message alone would be enough to illustrate this Book of the Friendship of France and Britain.

"Paris,
"8th December, 1916.

"I send you the thanks of a French girl for the gallant deed—the deed *à la française*—which you have performed. We do not know one another, perhaps we never shall, but in the sky there is many a meeting between the stars. Why should not souls on earth come sometimes, then, together?

"General—Paladin, should I not say?—I knew your country very little. I thought that the Divine Pity and the Greatest Beauty were unknown to you; that through your fogs the light could never find its way. And then you put your hunting horn to your lips; you were inspired so beautifully to go to your encounter with Death, your head held high, the music of your homeland sounding your advance.

"My ancestor fought at Fontenoy, and I can appreciate the refinements of chivalry. And so I beg you to receive my apologies. You have conquered much more than a horde out of Saxony. You [Pg 84] have disclosed to France the fabric of your soul, and you know that my country values above all the courage that can laugh and the dazzling chivalry that meets Death, as we say, in white gloves.

"And if, now and then, you are ever sad, think, I pray you, of the fair little twenty-year-old French girl whose ignorance you have enlightened, whom you have shown how to judge England. And if you have no love of your own, no woman's tender care to warm your heart with its genial kindliness, permit me to embrace you with all my soul. And smile, sometimes, to think that the daughter of an officer of France, the Land of Chivalry, is thinking of you.

"'A Happy Christmas. A Glad New Year.' I wish you a great victory and a great love."

"Copy of a letter sent to General John Vaughan Campbell by favour of Monsieur Tudesq. Will you have the very great kindness to bring this expression of my admiration to the General? Accept also my congratulations upon your truly heart-stirring narrative.

"J. F."

CHAPTER III.

MIDNIGHT IN THE FRONT LINE.

7th November.

"So you knew those people that have just gone by in the carriage, Lovel."

"How should I know them?"

"Then why did you let them past you?"

"It's true, I wasn't strict enough. But they roared out such a G.H.Q.[C] at me that I didn't dare to stop them."

[C] General Head Quarters.

"Wave your lantern, Lovel. Here's another carriage."

So chatted, during this night of 7th November, on the road to Bapaume, two of His Majesty's Tommies. They were two scrubby little Scotsmen. Each wore his tam-o'-shanter falling over one eye.

The night was almost beautiful; the sky covered with fleecy clouds, among which, like a great liquid eye, the moon showed herself now and then. We were going to spend the night in the English lines.

Very few sounds are to be heard. The farmers' dogs have long abandoned this unpeaceful country, and the crowing of the cocks, those earliest victims of every war, has even longer been stilled.

Silence reigns.

How is it, then, that this silence seems menacing? It only seems so. Stop a moment and listen. Do you not now hear in the darkness a host of little sounds? An invisible world is moving about us. Listen!

Yes, there is the sound of many feet on the road—not the brisk tramp of the parade ground, but the steps of the poor souls who are fighting their way through the mud. It is as if ten thousand little wings were flapping.

All lights are out. The long stream of motor-cars moves upon the road in perfect order. Midnight. Now the preparations for the advance are at their height. Now is the time when the reliefs come up, the blessed hour, so long expected by those who quit the trenches, by those who go into them so bravely met.

In their English helmets, which look like basins upside-down, caked with mud—already—to the eyes, with their rifles shouldered, slung, or carried in the hand, but each one carefully protected by its canvas cover, smoking their pipes, their chests thrown forward against the weight of their bursting haversacks, steady of step and bright of eye, the Tommies go forward to relieve their friends.

When they feel the need of a rest the men in khaki, quite regardless of the mud, throw themselves down on the sopping earth, and man, clothing, and soil become one. In this country of the dead you may hardly distinguish shadows from the objects which throw them.

Every now and then a despatch rider passes us—day and night, it is all one to these links in the chain of communication—a motor-cyclist, crouched over his handle-bar, hands and nose frozen, eyes red, his nerves on edge, skirting the side of the road, and sometimes remaining there, stuck. Or perhaps it is a horseman, leading his exhausted beast by its bridle, but determined, though he kill his horse, to get his work done before morning.

But now the horizon, black hitherto, lights up with flashes that seem to be lightning. These are followed by dull thuds. The British artillery has chosen this moment before the dawn to reawaken the Boche to the realisation of his own abominable existence.

Shall we climb this tree for a better view? Up there we shall see marvellously. We grope our way upwards. The wind, which has risen and now blows strongly, rocks the great tree and us with it in the darkness. It is delightful. Think of all the brave fellows who climb up here at all times of the day and night, to sit for hours in constant peril of their lives! A stimulating thought!

And what a fine seat for the fireworks! One doesn't miss a thing. See that blue light! And the red fire on the right! What's that glow—look!—over there?

"An eighteen-inch," says somebody. He means that they have just fired one of the great eighteen-inch guns. It is, of course, an English gun.

We continue our journey through the night, coming ever nearer to the firing line. Our guide knows every smallest path of this section like the palm of his hand—better, indeed, than his own

London streets.

Here, lately, he got his first wound. There—where that anti-aircraft gun is lurking—he saw his best friend fall. And this place is not safe even yet. All round us the guns, great and small, sing their chorus to the night. Was not that short thud, a moment ago, a 75? Odd, how things get mixed up nowadays! A 75 with the English! Hullo, there! Can you tell us what that was just now?

And now we are amazed to see an immense light which, how I cannot tell, has suddenly flooded the whole sky with a red glare. Our guide, who has passed months on end in the trenches, tells us that he has never before seen this appearance. It seems like an *Aurora borealis*, pierced to the zenith by a perpendicular ray, like an L, of a still fiercer red. And now upon this weirdly-lit background rise thick spirals of vapour. And the picture is miles long. Mysterious, deadly beauty, that the bursting of the shrapnel seems to applaud!

There is no mystery. A squadron of German war planes has crossed the first lines in the darkness and dropped incendiary bombs where it has supposed a store of munitions to be. The perpendicular beam—a stripe upon that red cloth—is the ray of a searchlight, probing the dark sky. This *Aurora borealis*—this Northern Dawn—is the work of man, and will soon be put to flight by the dawn of the coming day.

"And what's that, Major?" one of us asks, pointing to a star.

"One of the good God's aeroplanes," says the Englishman.

CHAPTER IV.

THROUGH THE MINE AREA.

In Picardy, November.

A nobleman, with blue eyes and the haughty carriage that tells of ancient blood, presented us to that diabolical young creature who is making such a stir in the world to-day, and will make a good deal more before she is done: Mademoiselle Crème de Menthe. Observe the "de." She is a noble of the 1916 creation. Nothing less than a Peer and a Staff Officer might fittingly act as Master of Ceremonies to a young person of such quality.

We made our bow with a civility which bordered upon that terror which nightmare alone can inspire. Consider how it would be, some mild, foggy morning, to come plump upon a Diplodocus. The scene of this presentation was an old mansion, with courtyard and park, whose gates were made illustrious by the arms of the La Rochefoucaulds.

This was our first experience as war correspondents with the British Army.

Our account of to-day's adventures will be no less fantastic.

Programme: A Journey to the Land of Mines.

We have had rain. Moving in opposite directions, the two streams of the traffic plough up the road. Commissariat lorries, motor ambulances, artillery ammunition wagons, despatch riders, the motor-cars of the Staff, and then, in the middle of this mad torrent of traffic, some country gig, creeping along at a jog-trot. The roads are a river of mud. We wallow in it frantically; we drown in unsuspected lakes. We suffer the modern equivalent of the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah. At once we find ourselves being changed into clumsy statues of clay. It is not more cars that are needed to get forward, but those Venetian boats that glide along the canals before the strokes of a curved oar.

One does get on, however. And here we are at Albert already.

Ah! these little towns of Picardy! The German shells have no surprises left for them. Their houses gutted from roof to cellar, their churches that the guns have chiselled to new shapes, their farms that have neither roof nor wall, and seem, with their bare beams, like huge empty cages—these sorrows no longer count. Yesterday Albert was once again bombarded. What of it? The fronts of a few more houses have crumbled into dust. The great golden Virgin, who, 100 feet in the air, leans with crossed arms from her belfry over the ruined town, has fallen forwards at a rather dizzier angle!

12. A MINE CRATER.

As in London or Paris, the police direct the traffic at the cross-ways and the corners of the lanes. The streets have been re-christened of late. One reads: "Oxford Street," "Cannon Street." We are here in the heart of the war zone. And in this strange country our little old French towns rub their eyes in wonder to find themselves, heretofore so insignificant, now in the very moment of their utter destruction, wakened to share the dignity of *capitals*.

Still more miles of mud. We leave the road and, with the heavy gait of sewer-men, move through the fields.

Far ahead, on the winding ridges, we see great white marks, like the letter "Y." They are the German trenches, dug in the solid chalk at the beginning of the offensive. It is as if someone had made chalk drawings on those slopes to amuse the aeroplanes. In front, following their lines, are walls of sand-bags, so high and so deep that they appear to be a citadel: the English trenches. It is a stiff climb. We hop from puddle to puddle like sparrows. Everywhere the earth is in heaps. Holes filled with water—shell-holes, you understand—have turned the whole place into a chessboard of sunken squares. Here, there and everywhere, sole lords of this "No Man's Land," stand the shells of the two-hundred-and-tens or the two-hundred-and-forties, like terminal gods, red painted. But the real surprise still awaits us.

Here may I ask you to recall to your most particular remembrance the landscapes of the Moon as Wells and Jules Verne have pictured them for us. Or if chance has offered you the privilege of leaning over the lip of Etna or Vesuvius, summon now your best recollections of the experience. We are on the threshold of a chaos for whose description the tongue of man is poorly equipped.

A plateau, according to the geographers, is a dome, flattened or rounded, in the direction of Heaven; these plateaux, as war constructs them, are gulfs that lead down towards hell. Over hundreds of yards between the opposing trenches surges a sea of vast funnels. One stands amazed before them as before those abysses which open at one's feet among the Alps. Here the destructive genius of man has nothing to learn from the dreadful wrath of Nature.

It is raining. Bogs, where the grass is already sprouting between the yellow pools, lie in the low places, like those cold lakes that fill the tall craters of Auvergne. Here yawns an opening, propped with beams, and three-quarters covered with the continually sliding earth. A sap. There again stands a notice, posted too late: "Poison!—Danger!"

Wreckage of every kind—rusty tins, heaps of cases bursting with rotten bags of powder and saltpetre, litter these strange craters. And what an amazing efflorescence of old iron, grenades and bits of shell!

In this Land of Mines we find a symbol of the savage splendour of this war. All these carefully prepared horrors, all these apocalyptic monstrosities, for the conquest of an acre or two! One can understand why King George came here, as a wooden tablet records, to the edge of this fabulous, petrified tide race, to salute the victorious courage of the Empire's soldiers.

Beast-like around us roar the guns. Lightnings flicker through the haze. A line of skeleton trees jags the horizon—Delville Wood. To the West vague clouds of smoke from camp fires, vague heaps of bricks. This is all that we can call Mametz and Montauban. A sausage balloon rises jerkily—over there, towards Maricourt. One cannot speak these names with a steady voice. They are the foretaste of Freedom. And it is here, in the Land of Mines, that the foundations of Victory have been laid.

CHAPTER V.

THE MENACE OF THE GOLDEN VIRGIN.

I have now to tell of the reconquered ground, and I own that the description, which I cannot claim to have invented, more nearly than any other suggests the reality. Indeed, there are not in the French language, nor can there be in any other, for the imagination cannot conceive such things, any words that can give a just idea of so much wretchedness and desolation.

So I have thought a score of times, while, during these last days, I have been making my way

over the plateau which lies between the Ancre and the Somme, a quite narrow section of the battle front. What would be my difficulty had I to describe the land that the French have retaken!

We had set out on our pilgrimage from Albert.

"Albert! That's an old story—ancient history. Tell us about something else," say those who look for new sensations.

Not so. We may not yet forget Albert, that ruined outpost of Picardy, for her sufferings are not ended. Within the last few days the Boches bombarded her from an immense distance. They only succeeded in knocking over ruins, since all is ruin at Albert, but "if one can't get thrushes one eats blackbirds," eh, friend Fritz?

"Well, Mother So-and-So," said an old fellow to an old dame the other morning in a street in Amiens, "when do you think the folks will get back into Albert?"

"Indeed, Father Such-and-Such, you know that as well as I do. When the Golden Virgin falls."

For a superstition runs in this country that the war will be near its end when the Golden Virgin, who hangs suspended—by what miracle?—between Heaven and Earth, from the top of the belfry of Albert, shall fall to break in pieces upon the ground. But the trouble is that the Virgin "holds on."

From Albert to Fricourt, going via Bécordel-Bécourt, the road is hardly 1-1/2 miles long. By this way one skirts in an almost straight line the South-western slopes of the plateau. A few steps beyond the German line that was taken on the 1st July, and we are in Fricourt.

You will look a long time in the guide-books that were held in esteem before the war ere you will find the smallest mention of Fricourt. Fricourt, Mametz, Montauban, Contalmaison and a dozen other villages that now can never be forgotten, did not exist for the tourist. He got on most happily without them.

Well, to-day all these villages can be found on their own soil no more than in those guide-books. That, Fricourt! This grey blotch in front of the wood of the same name! That, the Public Square, that rectangle of tree-trunks!

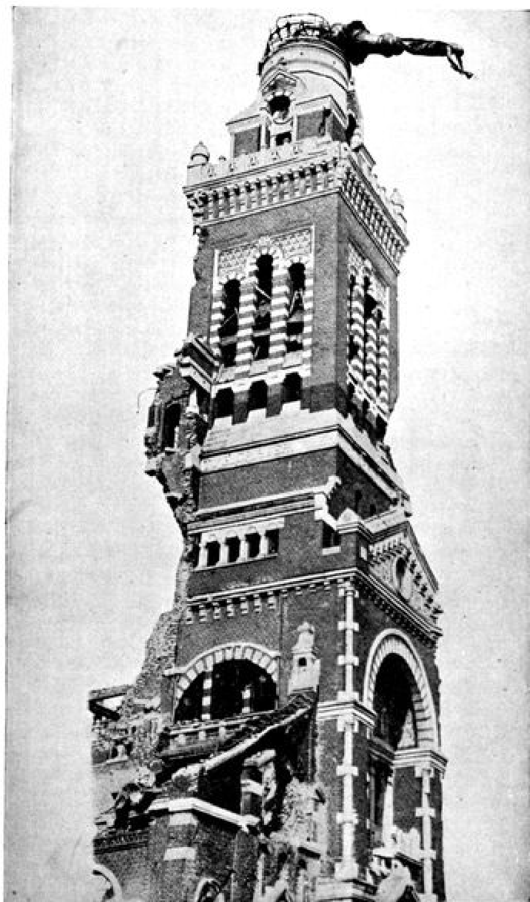
That? Yes, that is very surely Fricourt. All the villages are like that.

Let us get on and you shall see for yourself. A short climb, but a stiff one, and we are in Mametz.

You look about you and you see nothing at all. Believe me, I am not joking. The number of mounds and wooden crosses of every size that border the edges of the road tell us plainly enough at what a cost to both sides these ruined hamlets were captured.

Another fight with the mud and we are in Montauban de Picardie. Montauban looks over all this plateau that lies between the Ancre and the Somme. In clear weather one can see everywhere around, and towards the North-west the houses of Bapaume are visible. To-day the clouds are too low and the rain too heavy for us to try to see anything at all.

One can, moreover, look at nothing but the earth, for it is here that the story of recent events is most clearly to be read.



13. THE MADONNA OF ALBERT.

The first thing that one finds on entering Montauban is the little cemetery on the left. To enter the village it was necessary first to cross this cemetery; and to cross it, they had to "make jam" of it. Will you be so good as to consider what a cemetery is like when it has been made into jam? Grave-stones torn up and smashed, crosses thrown down, Christs crucified again, iron railings twisted grotesquely, vaults burst open, corpses.... Out of such a chaos, who shall ever retrieve the dear graves of his dead? [Pg 93]

And see these gaping holes where once were houses, these cellars laid bare, the bellows of the blacksmith, bits of the trough where baker Moulin kneaded his bread, splintered pieces of the chemist's bottles, the whole stock of the draper's at the corner—ribbons, thread and remnants—a fragment from the porch of the town hall, and on it the word "*Égalité*."

Equality in suffering, one would say.

But perhaps we may find some sign of peace beyond the village in the little wood of Bernafay, which in other days offered a calm retreat to the weary and a shelter to lovers.

No! The wood of Bernafay is a wood no longer, and so it is with all the pretty woods of this neighbourhood, Trônes, Belville and Foureaux. How is one to describe this ghastly picture of roots, clayey soil freshly ploughed up, shattered trunks of every size, and dismal stumps, among which, none the less, the birds persist in their vain search for food and cover?

These trees will bud again; Nature will clothe herself once more in green; even the earth that lies about us will yield new fruits. But the villages? What magical power shall call them back to life, unless it be the marvellous vitality of France—France, who refuses to die?

CHAPTER VI

[Pg 94]

"RONNY."

This is not a Christmas story.

His real name was P——, but his name must not be mentioned on account of the family who mourns for him in a corner of the County of Surrey. We will simply call him "Ronny," as his school friends, and, later on, his brothers-in-arms, used to call him.

"Ronny" was barely eighteen years old when war broke out. He was full of spirit, and already had a knowledge of soldiering, so he volunteered immediately, and soon got his commission.

His appearance was incredibly young. Fine features. A well-bred nose and a child's eyes. When he first appeared in mess he was bombarded with amiable chaff, all of which he took in good part and replied with witty retaliation. He could exchange a joke without malice, like the good sportsman that he was.

Above all, "Ronny" was fond of his job. He threw his whole soul into the work of glory, which he accomplished with ease and grace, for he had rare gifts of leadership. You should have seen him on the barrack square with his men, this wisp of a boy. "Company, properly at ease everywhere." The moment he spoke, discipline and obedience reigned. The fact is, "Ronny" was "some" boy.

His Colonel thought him too good a soldier to leave behind when the battalion was ordered abroad, even though he loved him as his son. Then followed two long, weary years of fighting, which only served to draw these two (master and pupil) closer together.

On 3rd September, 1916, during the Somme offensive, the battalion was in action on the Ancre, and did gloriously. The day was won, but at roll-call there was no "Ronny." At first he was said to be dead, then wounded, but no trace of him could be found, either among the dead or in the hospitals. So Captain P——, 20 years old, appeared in the official lists as "Missing."

14. "MULTIS ILLE BONIS FLEBILIS OCCIDIT."

One day the Colonel received a letter from "Ronny's" parents. They had seen his name in the lists. "What does this mean? They said 'Missing.' Can we still hope?"

Between men of the same county and lineage, whose heart and blood have but one pulse, there is no need to dissemble. "Your son was as my own," said the Colonel. "Our sorrow is the same."

So they mourned for "Ronny."

On 19th November two men, the Colonel and myself, visited, with heavy hearts, the field of the Ancre (a further edition of the same fight), still teeming with the heat of battle. The dead lay scattered around, some horribly mutilated, some struck down in the very act of fighting, with gestures of defiance to the enemy and their weapons—even to Heaven itself. Alas, for the vanity of all human ambitions!

As for me—you remember, dear Colonel—I was distraught and beside myself, and could only murmur, "Poor devils! Poor devils!" You were calmer, more familiar (is it possible?) with these horrors. Yet your sad eyes were a proof to me that even soldiers do feel.

I remember, as we turned to leave the field of death and honour, you looked back, and I noticed that just in front of you, right in your path, was a human head, already fleshless—a skull.

I seized you by the arm. "Stop!" I cried. Too late! Your heavy boots—— The thing crushed like a broken egg-shell. I heard you say, "God, if it were him!" "Who? What? Him?" I said. You didn't answer. You were on your knees. The decaying cloth of the collar yielded to your searching hands. The disc? Yes, there it was! ... I hear you now! I shall never forget your cry: "Ronny, my Ronny!"

CHAPTER VII.

PIPING OUT THE DAY.

14th November.

It is just before sunset—the most impressive moment of the day in these British lines. Now, wherever the British soldiers meet their bands, the following picture may be seen.

We were returning from the trenches, a few evenings ago, at about four o'clock. The sky was cloudy; the ground heavy. As the night fell, a cold, penetrating fog enveloped the whole countryside. We were walking thoughtfully along, our minds busy with those impressions of the war which had greeted us, without pause, since morning. We said little, for we were very ready for our beds.

Suddenly, as we were entering the village, the sound of music reached our ears. It was the bagpipes. Music in this poor village, at this time of day, and in such weather! Here's a bit of luck! Hurry up, there! We hurry up; nay, we run. At last we reach the scene of action, where a most pleasant sight awaits us.

In front is the principal street of the village, with its double row of whitewashed houses. At the distance of a few hundred yards the fog swallows it up. That is the town hall, hardly bigger than the biggest of the houses, there where you see the *Journal Officiel* posted, and Abel Faivre's picture, "*On les aura!*"

The band is halted in the very middle of the road, facing the East. In front, twelve pipers; behind, eight bugles and side drums; between them, the big drum. The men wore the kilt flapping above their bare knees, the khaki tunic closely belted at the waist, the plaid on their shoulders, and the plumed tam-o'-shanter. They are magnificent men, with deeply-bronzed faces; and they are as grave as sphinxes.

At a word from the bandmaster the four bugles leave the ranks, and two by two, with measured steps, fall in at the head of the procession. Slowly and in perfect time they put their instruments to their lips and sound a retreat, or something of the kind. The air is very much the same as the "lights out" of our own infantry regiments. The bugles having gone back to their places with a repetition of their ceremonial, it is the pipers' turn. The twelve Scotsmen blow like one. What are they playing?

The unaccustomed ear of a Frenchman is puzzled to put a name to such music. Is it a dance? Is it a lament?

The song of the pipes swells out louder, and now the bugles and drums are to give it their support. But before touching their drums, the drummers, with the derision of automata, bring their heels together, throw out their chests, and then, raising their elbows face high, cross the drumsticks behind their necks.

Only then may they begin to play.

The Scotsman who handles the big drum hits it first on one side and then on the other, and each time whirls his free drumstick like a windmill. He is not perhaps a musical virtuoso, but there can be no question about his ability as a juggler.

And now the bandsmen, who have stood, hitherto, motionless in the middle of the village, bestir themselves, and, marking time to their own music, move forwards with a slow and majestic step.

The sadness of the music, the gravity of the Scotsmen, the falling night, the homeliness of the place, and a certain indefinable flavour as of some pagan rite, stir one's heart strangely.

Meanwhile, the village street has become filled with soldiers.

Various detachments, just back from their work, fall in along the sides of the roadway. The men, with their steel helmets and leather coats, their breasts exposed to the wind, look like the legionaries of Rome. Nothing is lacking to this picture but the incense and the altar and the victims.

The short, sharp words of command and the clink of weapons mingle with the wailing of the pipes, while at their cottage doors the lonely wives of French soldiers look on calmly at all this bustle in their street. A little fair-headed girl beats time to the music with her left hand.

The night has been saluted by the armies of Britain.

The night may now come.

CHAPTER VIII.

Y GULLY.

Between Beaumont-Hamel and Beaucourt, near the bend which the Ancre makes where it turns to meet the Somme, there is a deep gully, about three hundred yards across, which the Tommies have christened—probably they were a trifle short of words that day—with the last letter but one of the alphabet. It is called Y Gully.

Up to the very last fight on the Ancre the German lines ran in front of this gully, to the West. The enemy made use of this most valuable hollow to conceal there his reserves of men and ammunition. Its western cliffs could easily afford cover to a full brigade of infantry—and, indeed, they did so. At the bottom of the ravine runs a railway, in peace time of the ordinary gauge. The Germans, however, had found occasion to substitute for it a Décauville, and this was used, under the protection of the little valley, by the three German lines which defended the summit against the British troops. The position seemed to be one of tremendous strength.

One could almost detest Nature, so often and so terribly does she seem to make herself the confederate of our most formidable enemies. But mankind, in the person of our British Allies, has revenged itself upon her for this undesirable amiability, and out of a pretty winding valley, over whose blossoming soil the feet of lovers were wont to stray, has created this blasted gorge, this Gorge of Death, this Valley of Jehoshaphat, where one expects at every turn to meet with some mourning Jeremiah.

The Tommies who have opened the road for us to this abode of misery had to overcome the greatest difficulties. I have already described this battlefield at the very moment of the offensive, while it was still covered by its dead. I could not find, on this my second visit, a trace of those poor bodies which the grave-diggers had just finished hiding out of sight. The Tommies who fell

in this fight were collected into vast common graves, which kindly hands have marked out with frames of pebbles. As for the German bodies, they were buried in their own trenches—to fill them up was all that was necessary—or in the shell craters where the machine-gun had dropped them. And so in this ravine Death is on every side, and the ground has, in many places, taken the shapes of the bodies that lie beneath it.

The eyes of all the "poilus"—the real ones, the men of Douaumont, and Vaux, and the ravine of La Caillette, and many another of these lunar landscapes—have rested upon similar scenes, which remind one a little of those undistinguished districts in the suburbs of Paris where the dustmen come to shoot their rubbish.

The earth, which one might take to have been brought here in ten thousand carts, is nothing, so far as the eye can carry, but little dusty craters, so thickly scattered that their overlapping sides break into one another.

They are of every size, according to the calibre of the shells which have made them. Inside these innumerable volcanoes are scattered, pell-mell among the hardly-covered bodies, all the small possessions of the soldier, with shells that have not burst, bombs, books, letters, bandages, blood....

Such is the Gully in all its tragic beauty, with its heaped-up soil, its road destroyed, its few trees in splinters, its scattered graves, its scent of death, its heavy silence, its sides pitted with shell-holes and smashed dug-outs, its dead horses and their carrion flesh.

On the right, the Ancre, swollen by the rain, flows, indifferent and peaceful, beside its slaughtered poplars; and on the left bank the houses of bombarded Gueudecourt, the ruins of Thiepval, and all the mourning landscape that surrounds us, seem to advise us not to let our eyes linger upon the ravine, and to tell us that all Nature is worthy of our pity and that the earth has become indeed the great valley of tears of which the psalmist sings.

CHAPTER IX.

CHRISTMAS NIGHT IN "NO MAN'S LAND."

The setting is not a Biblical one. If, indeed, this cursed spot can possibly recall the Book of Books, we must search the chapter of immortal horrors in the Book of Revelation.

No vegetation will grow there within the next ten years; no ghost of a tree or shadow of a house; the moon reveals the troubled earth whose chalky mud is as a festering sore.

There is universal destruction, as though a huge tidal-wave, overrunning the plain and the valley, had been struck by God's anger and checked in the full force of its rolling waters. The evening of the last day could bring no greater melancholy. Three horrors rule this strip of land—Fright, Death and Frost. A bitter cold night with a starry sky—such was Christmas in "No Man's Land."

And what of "man"? Here we have a Scotsman from the mountains, gaunt, dour, wiry, with lynx-like eyes, the lusty chest of a woodman and the soul of a hermit. Like hundreds of thousands and tens of hundreds of thousands of his brother-soldiers, he had held the line in front of Ypres, Loos and Arras. Like the soldiers of England, Ireland and Wales, he had known the mist of Flanders, the marshes of the mine country, the mossy peat of Artois. Like his fellows, he is weary. With his grey-steel helmet, the leathern, fleece-lined waistcoat and the leggings of buffalo-hide which show up the muscles of his legs, you might think he was a centurion of the Roman Empire. Like all the others, his name is Tommy.

15. NEAR THE Y RAVINE.

This Christmas Night Tommy has a care. The "bonnie Highland lassie" whom he was courting in the good old days, when Highlanders had not yet earned the ferocious nick-name of the "square-jawed," had written to him that morning asking for a souvenir. A souvenir!

Those of you who have not seen Tommy, notwithstanding the certainty of punishment, bartering his regimental badges or buttons in exchange for a kiss from some village beauty, can hardly understand this superstitious worship of "a souvenir." That word sums up all the dangers, hardships and glories of war, and is considered the surest of love tokens. But for soldiers of His

Majesty's Guards the real souvenir is the one snatched from the enemy in mortal combat. The day after the Battle of the Ancre—that is, the day after the attack and victory—I saw little groups of men scattered over the battlefield indifferent to hostile barrages and machine-gun fire. These men, crawling from shell-hole to shell-hole, looked only on the ground. *They were souvenir hunting.*

Now for our story. Tommy is in a listening post—a crump-hole between the two trenches surrounded with barbed wire. The Germans are 30 yards in front and the British 10 yards behind him. He hears the enemy's observers behind their loopholes stamping their feet to keep them warm. Small clouds shade the moon. A heavy silence pervades the frozen earth. This Highlander is alone in "No Man's Land." [Pg 102]

Is he thinking of the Christmas turkey, brown and crackling in its juice, which has been carefully fattened at the farm at home; of the plum-pudding, aflame with brandy, done to a turn by his bonnie lassie? Is he thinking of the dying embers and the midnight kiss, stolen or given—who knows? No; Tommy is simply thinking of "souvenirs."

Twice already, but in vain, he has searched his crump-hole. He can't find the smallest relic. Creeping under the knife rests, and separating with care the ring of wire which the British call "trench concertina wire," he drags himself on his stomach through the wire system. These iron blackberries catch hold of him and prick him. He likens himself to one of those great trench rats on a poaching foray.

Suddenly his hand falls upon a human form. The body is cold—a corpse! He remembers, a week ago, an evening patrol was caught by our artillery fire, and this is one of them. "No Man's Land" in this sector is not particularly healthy, and grave-diggers are dispensed with. This dried-up corpse was so much part of the landscape that Tommy had not noticed it. He now looks at it with a friendly eye. "Poor old Boche! Poor old lump of souvenirs!" Tommy is a simple fellow. He goes straight for what he wants. He first thought he would take the identity-disc. That would be a fine souvenir; but the corpse has no arms, so he gives up that idea. "D——d artillery that spoils even corpses!" he grumbles, and then feels for the legs. Perhaps the old Boche keeps a knife in his right legging. "Damn again! There is no right leg—nor left either!" If only a sharp breeze were to lift the clouds from the moon, the wide-open eyes of the observers would discover in "No Man's Land" a great lusty Highlander, white as a sheet or as the whitest of white Pierrots. [Pg 103]

Suddenly our Highlander is seized with a mixture of horror and rage, added to which there is a feeling of weird pride. The living and the dead have made a ghastly Christmas bet.

Tommy hovers over this wreck of a man. He seizes the Boche's head—of course, the helmet, badges and bandolier have disappeared.

The corpse, as though from the depths of the other world, gives a horrid laugh. Tommy forces his fingers into the grinning mouth, but the jaws shut with a spring—like a mousetrap. False teeth! Tommy, exasperated, seizes the grim trophy.

The bonnie lassie will receive shortly a gold brooch inscribed with her name and Tommy's. She will wear it proudly at church. She will make her friends jealous without anyone ever suspecting the real history of the souvenir. Perhaps it is as well!

Now this is not a Christmas story, but a real fact, which happened on the evening of "Everyman's" Christmas among the outposts before Grandcourt.

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Transcriber's Notes:

Retained inconsistent hyphenation of sandbags vs. sand-bags.

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