R. Ellis Roberts.

CIVILISATION

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1914-1918

BY

GEORGES DUHAMEL

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

T. P. CONWIL-EVANS

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

WITH the exception of, perhaps, "Le Feu" by Henri Barbusse, no book made such a stir in the France of 1914–1918 as Georges Duhamel's[1] "Civilisation." Its success was as immediate as its appeal was universal. Like "Le Feu," it was awarded the Prix Goncourt, and ran to an enormous circulation.

There is no doubt, too, that posterity will acclaim it as a remarkable work. For it is something more than a human document of the war. One feels in the poignant experiences of the few French soldiers, depicted by M. Duhamel, the tragic fate of twentieth-century man—the Machine Age man—in the grip of the scientific monster he has created for himself. These intimate

[1] Georges Duhamel, born 1884, poet, dramatist, and doctor of medicine. His poems include "Des Légendes," "Des Batailles" (1907), "L'homme en Tête" (1909), "Selon ma loi" (1910), "Compagnons" (1912); and plays: "La Lumière" (played at the Odéon, 1911), "Dans l'ombre des Statues" (Odéon, 1912), "Le Combat" (Théâtre des Arts, 1913), "La plus grande joie" (Théâtre du Vieux Colombier); and several critical works on poetry. "Vie des Martyres," 1917; "Possession du Monde" (Essays), 1918.

pictures have the cumulative effect of an epic in which the experiment of humanity is menaced by man's own inventiveness and heroism.

This impression is the creation of the particular style of M. Duhamel. It is not by the vigorous simplicity of a Guy de Maupassant that he achieves his effects, nor by the exact observation which one might expect of him as a doctor of medicine. His strength lies in the violent imagery with which he intensifies his descriptions, giving the impression of life and feeling to inanimate objects. He thus often produces the effect of a monstrous dream or nightmare.

Emile Zola was a past master of this method; but, in his case, too often, the subject did not lend itself to such treatment. M. Duhamel does not lay himself open to this objection. No style could be more appropriate than his for expressing the cold precision of the machinery by means of which this so effectively organised war has ruined our world.

Like Emile Zola, M. Duhamel does

not shirk any detail however unpleasant. Differences in language and point of view make it impossible to reproduce all of these. But with the exception of "Les Amours de Ponceau" all the tales comprising "Civilisation" are included in the translation.

I am much indebted to Miss Eva Gore-Booth for kindly reading the proofs.

T. P. C.-E.

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A FACE

A COMMANDING and almost gracefully shaped brow, a look that was at once childish and profound, a dimpled chin, a rather flaunting moustache, a bitter expression about the laughing lips: that French face I shall never forget, though I saw it only for a second in the flickering light of a match.

It was an autumn night in 1916. The train which runs from Châlons to Sainte-Menehould was making its return journey, with all lights out. The Champagne front, on our left, was then calm, sunk in volcanic sleep: a sleep of nightmares, sudden alarms, and sharp flashes. We pierced the darkness, slowly crossing the wretched country, which seemed in our mind's eye to be even more wretched and distorted by the hideous machinery of war. The little train, with cries of weariness, hobbled along with a rather hesitating gait, like a blind man traversing an accustomed road.

I was going back, my furlough being over. Feeling rather ill, I lay on the seat.

Opposite me, three officers were chatting. Their voices were those of young men, but in military experience they were veterans. They were rejoining their regiment.

"This sector," said one of them, "is fairly quiet at present."

"Certainly, there will be nothing doing until the spring," replied the other.

Silence followed, broken by the restless clatter of the wheels running on the rails. Presently we heard a young, laughing, satirical voice saying, almost in a whisper:

"Oh! we shall be compelled to do some mad thing before spring."

Then, without any connecting remark, the same man added:

"It will be my twelfth attack. But I have always been lucky. I have only been wounded once yet."

These two phrases were still echoing in my ears when the man who had uttered them lighted a match and began smoking. The light gave a furtive glimpse of a handsome face. The man belonged to an honoured corps. The insignia of the highest awards

that can be given to young officers gleamed on his yellow tunic. A quiet and discreet courage emanated from his personality.

Darkness once more enfolded us. But would there ever be a night black enough to extinguish the image which then flashed before me? Would there ever be a silence so complete as to stifle the echo of the two little phrases murmured amid the rattle of the train?

Since that time I have often thought of the incident whenever, as on that night, I have turned, with love and anguish, towards the past and towards the future of these men of France—my brothers who, in such great numbers, have given themselves up to die and are not ashamed to utter the thoughts that lie nearest the heart; whose nobility of soul, and unyielding intelligence and pathetic simplicity, the world appreciates too little.

How could I not think of it at a time which saw the long martyrdom of a great people, who, across a night without bourne, search solely for the paths along which they may at last find freedom and peace?

REVAUD'S ROOM

ONE never got tired in Revaud's room. The roar of the war, the rumbling of transport waggons, the spasmodic shocks of the gunfire, all the whistling and gasping sounds of the killing machine beat against the windows with a spent fury, as in the shelter of a creek resound the echoes of a storm raging in the open sea. But this noise was as familiar to the ear as the heart-beats of the miserable world, and one never got tired in Revaud's room.

It was a long, narrow apartment where there were four beds and four men. It was, notwithstanding, called Revaud's room, because the personality of Revaud filled it from wall to wall. It was just the size for Revaud, exactly fitting like a tailor-made coat. In the beginning of November there had been all kinds of nasty intrigues hatched by Corporal Têtard to get Revaud removed elsewhere; and, the intrigues succeeding, the poor man was taken up to another storey and placed in a large dormitory of twenty beds—a bewildering desert,

no longer homely, but ravaged by a raw, cruel light. In three days, by an involuntary decision of his body and soul, Revaud had got worse to such an alarming extent that he had to be carried down with great haste and placed behind the door in his own room, where the winter light came filtering in, full of kindliness.

And thus things remained; whenever a seriously wounded man, an extraordinary case, was brought to the division, Mme. Baugan was asked to go and see Revaud at once and "sound him on the question."

Revaud pretended to make things rather difficult at first, and ended by saying:

"Very well; I am quite willing. Put the man in my room. . . ."

And Revaud's room was always full. To be there, you had to have more than a mere bagatelle of a wound: a broken foot, or some trivial little amputation in the arm. It was necessary to have "some unusual and queer things"—a burst intestine, for example, or a displaced spinal cord, or yet cases in which "the skull has been

bent in or the urine doesn't come out where it used to before the war."

"Here," Revaud used to say with pride, "there are only very rare cases."

There was Sandrap, "who had to have his needs satisfied through a hole in his side"—Sandrap, a little man from the north, with a round nose like a fresh apple, with beautiful eyes of a delicate grey colour of silk. He had been wounded three times, and used to say every morning: "They'd be surprised, the Boches, if they could see me now."

There was Remusot, who had a large wound in the chest. It made a continual Faoo aoo . . . Raoo aoo . . . Faoo . . . Raoo . . .; and Revaud had been asking from the first day:

"What a funny noise you're making! D'you do it with your mouth?"

In a hoarse voice he wheezed:

"It is my breath escaping between my ribs."

And lastly there was Mery, whose spine had been broken by an aerial torpedo, and

who "no longer felt the lower part of his body, as if it didn't belong to him."

All this little world was living on its back, each in his place, in a promiscuous atmosphere of smells, of sounds, and sometimes of thought. The men recognised each other by their voices rather than by their faces; and there was one great week when Sandrap was seen by Revaud as he was being carried to the dressing-room in a stretcher on a level with the bed, and the latter exclaimed suddenly:

"Hallo! is that you, Sandrap? What a funny head you have got! And your hair is even funnier."

Mme. Baugan came at eight o'clock, and at once she began scolding:

"There's a nasty smell about. Oh! Oh! my poor Revaud, I'm sure you have again——"

Revaud avoided the question:

"Very fine, thanks. I've slept very well. Nothing more to report. I've slept quite well."

Then Mme. Baugan drew back the sheets,

and, overcome by the sad and ignoble smell, she muttered :

" Oh ! Revaud ! you are unreasonable. Will you never be able to control yourself ! "

Revaud could no longer dissemble. He confessed phlegmatically: " Ah, it's true enough ! But whatever you say, nurse, I can't help myself."

Mme. Baugan came and went, looking for fresh linen and water. She began to wash him and dress him as if he were a child.

But suddenly overcome with shame and a kind of despair, he moaned :

" Madame Baugan, don't be cross with me. I wasn't like that in civil life."

Mme. Baugan began to laugh, and Revaud without more ado laughed too, for all the lines of his face and his whole soul were made for laughing, and he loved to laugh even in the midst of the most acute pain.

This reply having pleased him, he trotted it out often, and, when confessing to his little infirmity, he used to tell everyone

"I wasn't like that, you know, before I joined up."

One morning, in making Mery's bed, Mme. Baugan startled the room with an exclamation. The paralytic lad had not been able to restrain himself.

"What! Mery! You, too, my poor friend!"

Mery, once a handsome country lad with a splendid body, looked at his dead limbs and sighed:

"It is quite possible, Madame. I can't feel what's going on."

But Revaud was delighted. All the morning he cried, "It isn't only me! It isn't only me!" And no one grudged him his joy, for when you are in the depths of despair you are glad to have companions in your misery.

The most happy phrases have only a short-lived success. Revaud, who had a sense of humour, soon felt the moment coming when he would no longer find comfort in the remark that "he wasn't like that before he joined up." It was then he received

a letter from his father. It came unexpectedly one morning. Revaud's face had just been washed, and his great Gallic moustache had been cut—from caprice—according to the American pattern. All the hospital filed past at the corner of the door in order to see Revaud who looked like a very sick "English gentleman."

He turned the letter over with his fingers that were deformed by misery and toil; then he said uneasily, "What does the letter mean? Do they still want to kick up a row?"

Revaud was a married man; but during the six months in which he had remained without news from his wife he had got used to his loneliness. He was in his room, behind the door, and sought no quarrels with anyone. Then why had a letter been sent to him?

"It must be they want to make a row," he repeated; and he handed the letter to Mme. Baugan, for her to read.

The letter came from Revaud's father. In ten lines written in a painstaking hand, with thick downstrokes and fine upstrokes,

with flourishes and a dashing signature, the old man announced that he was going to visit him one day in the near future.

Laughter came back again to Revaud, and with laughter a final justification for living. All day he toyed with the letter, and used gladly to show it and say:

"We are going to have a visit. My father is coming to see us."

Then he began to be rather confiding.

"My father, you know, is a fine fellow, but he has had some hard knocks. You will see my father—he's a fellow that's up to a few tricks, and, what's worse, he wears a shirt collar."

Finally he ended by restricting his comments on his father's character to this statement:

"My father!—you'll see—he wears a shirt collar."

The days passed, and Revaud spoke so often of his father that in the end he no longer knew whether the visitor had come or was yet to come. Thus, by a special providence, Revaud never knew that his father

did not come to see him; and afterwards, when wanting to make allusion to this remarkable period, he had recourse to a very ample phrase, and used to say:

"It was the time of my father's visit."

Revaud was spoiled: he never lacked cigarettes or company, and he used to confess so contentedly: "I'm the pet of this hospital."

Besides, Revaud was not difficult. Tarrissant had only to appear between his crutches for the dying man to exclaim, "Here's another who's come to see me. I told you I was the pet here."

Tarrissant had undergone the same operation as Revaud. It was a complicated business, taking place in the knee. Only, in the case of Tarrissant the operation had been more or less a complete success, and in the case of Revaud, more or less a failure, because "it depends on one's blood."

From the operation itself Revaud thought he had learned a new word: "His knee had been 'dezected.'" He used to look at Tarrissant, and, comparing himself with the

convalescing young man, he came to the simple conclusion :

" We are both ' dezected ' men, except that my old woman has left me ; and, too, I have been overworked."

It was the only allusion that Revaud ever made to his conjugal misfortune and to his toiling past.

But really, why think of all these things ? Hasn't man enough to do with a troublesome leg, or this perpetual need which he cannot control ?

Every evening each one prepared to face the long night with little preparations, as if they were about to set out on a journey. Remusot was pricked in the thigh, and at once he was in a dreamland bathed in sweat, in which the fever brought before his eyes things he never would describe to anyone. Mery had a large mug of some decoction or other prepared for him, and he had only to stretch out his arm to get it. Sandrap smoked his last cigarette, and Revaud asked for his cushion. It was a little cotton pillow, which was placed against his side. Only

when this was done was Revaud willing to say, "That's it, boys! That'll do."

And from that moment they went off into a sleep that was horrible and teeming like a forest waylaid with snares, and each of them wandered in the pursuit of his dreams.

While the mind was beating its wings, the four bodies remained still. A little night-light relieved the darkness. Then, in slippered footfalls, a night attendant came and put his head through the door and heard the four tortured respiratory movements, and occasionally surprised the open but absent look of Remusot; in contemplating these patched-up human remains, he suddenly thought of a raft of shipwrecked men—of a raft tossed by the waves of the sea, with four bodies in distress.

The window-panes continued to vibrate plaintively with the echoes of the war. Sometimes, in the course of the long night, the war seemed to stop, as a woodcutter pauses to take breath between two blows of his axe.

It was then that, in the deep and sudden silence, they awoke with queer painful sensations; and they thought of all the things that happen in battle—they thought of these things when not a sound could be heard.

Dawn broke reluctantly, those days of winter. The orderlies scrubbed the floor. They blew out the spluttering night-light which stank of burnt fat. Then there were the morning ablutions, and all the pains and screams of wound-dressing.

Sometimes, in the middle of the trivial duties of the day, the door was solemnly opened and a general entered, followed by the officers of the staff. He paused at first on the threshold, overcome by the unwholesome air, then he made a few steps into the room and asked who were these men. The doctor used to whisper in his ear, and the general replied quite simply:

"Ah, good! Excellent!"

When he had gone, Revaud always used to assure us:

"The general wouldn't think of coming

here without seeing me. He's an old pal."

After that, there was something to talk about the whole day.

Many officers used to come as well—of the highest rank. They read the papers pinned on the wall. "Frankly," they said, "it's a very fine result."

One of them began one day to examine Mery. He was a doctor, with a white-bearded chin, very large and corpulent, his breast decorated with crosses and his neck pink with good living. He seemed a decent fellow and disposed to show sympathy. He said, in fact :

"Poor devil! Ah, but you see the same sort of thing might happen to me."

More often than not, nobody came, absolutely no one, and the day was endured only by being taken in small mouthfuls, like their meat at dinner.

Once a great event happened. Mery was taken out and placed under the X-rays. He came back, well content, remarking :

"At least, it isn't painful."

Another time Revaud's leg was amputated. He had murmured when giving his consent: "I'd done my best to keep it, this old leg of mine! Well! well! So much the worse, so get on with it. Poor old thing!"

He burst out laughing once again; and no one has laughed, and no one will laugh again, as Revaud did that day.

His leg then was to be amputated. The noblest blood in France flowed once more. But it took place between four walls, in a little room white-washed like a dairy, and no one heard of it.

Revaud was put back to bed behind the door. He awoke, and like a child said:

"They've set me back quite warm and 'comfy' with this leg."

Revaud had rather a good night, and when, on the next day, Mme. Baugan came into the room, he said to her, as he now was in the habit of saying:

"Fine, Madame Baugan. I've had a good night."

With this, his head dropped on one

side, his mouth opened little by little, and, without further remark or movement, he was dead.

"Poor Revaud!" exclaimed Mme. Baugan. "Oh! he is dead."

She kissed his brow, and at once began to lay him out, for a long day faced her and she could not afford to waste time.

As Mme. Baugan dressed Revaud, she grumbled and scolded good-naturedly because the corpse was difficult to manage.

Sandrap, Mery and Remusot said nothing. The rain streamed down the panes, which never stopped rattling because of the gunfire.

I HADN'T the heart to laugh, but sometimes I felt vaguely envious. I thought of the men who were carrying on the war, in the newspapers—those who wrote: "The line has been pierced; why hesitate to throw in fifty divisions?" Or: "we have only to bring our reserves right up to the line. A hundred thousand men must at once fill the gap."

I longed to see that brave set compelled to find between Fouilly and Maricourt a little corner as secure as their little heaps of paper plans, on which a purring cat might find repose. I swear they would have found it rather difficult.

I thought abstractedly about my work as I went along; from time to time I glanced round at the scene, and I assure you one hit upon some queer things.

Beneath the rows of poplar trees that stretched along the valley a huge army had taken cover, with its battalions, its animals and wagons, its iron and steel, its faded tarpaulins and leather trappings that stank,

and its refuse heaps. Horses nibbled at the bark of large decaying trees, that were stricken with a premature autumnal disease. Three meagre elm trees served as a shelter for a whole encampment: a dusty hedge threw its protecting shadow over the ammunition train of a regiment. But the vegetation was scarce and the shelter it afforded most scanty, so that from all parts the army overflowed right on to the bare plain, tearing up the surface of the roads and leaving a regular network of tracks, as if great hordes of wild beasts had made their passage along it.

There were roads that marked off the British from the French. There you could see marching by the splendid artillery of the British, quite new and glistening, fitted with light-coloured harness and nickel-plated buckles, with special rugs for the horses, that were well fed and gleaming like circus mounts.

The infantry were also filing past—young men, all of them. They marched to the wild negro music of the flutes and gaily-coloured drums. Then cars fitted with beds, tier upon

tier, came slowly along, jolting as little as possible, carrying the wounded fair-haired boys with wondering eyes, looking as placid as a touring party of Cook's.

Our villages were packed to suffocation. Man had got everywhere, like a plague or a flood.

He had driven the cattle from their shelter and fixed his abode in hutches, stables and cowsheds.

The shell depôts seemed like pottery fields full of earthenware pitchers. Barges floated on the slimy water of the canal. Some carried food and guns: others served as hospital-boats.

From the movements of this heaving mass of beings and the creaking of their machinery, the panting of a giant seemed to issue forth and fill the silence. The whole scene suggested a sinister fair, a festival of war, a gathering of Bohemian clans and dancers of evil repute.

The nearer you got to Bray the more congested the country appeared to be. The motor-riding population held tyrannic sway

over the roads, forcing the lowlier horse-wagons to drive across the fields. Little trollies running on rails clanked along pompously, showing great independence, hugging the ground with their small wheels, and their back loaded with millions of cartridges: in amongst the boxes some fellows were squatting, half asleep, proclaiming to the world in general the pleasure of being seated on something which does all the walking for you.

When I got above Chipilly, I beheld an extraordinary scene. An immense plain undulated there, covered with so many men, things and beasts, that over vast stretches the ground was no longer visible. Beyond the ruined tower which looks upon Etinehem lay land of a reddish-brown colour. I saw later that this colour was due to a great mass of horses closely pressed against each other. Every day they were brought to the muddy trough of the Somme to slake their thirst. The tracks were turned into sloughs, and the air was filled with an overpowering smell of sweat and manure.

Then, towards the left, stood a veritable

town of unbleached tents, whose top coverings were marked with large red crosses. Farther on, the ground sank down, only to curve up again suddenly towards the battlefield quivering on the horizon in a black fog. From different points a burst of discharging shells sent up white clouds, side by side, in quick succession, like rows of trees on the roadside. In the open sky more than thirty balloons formed a ring, giving one the impression of spectators interested in a brawl.

The Adjutant, pointing out the tents, said to me, "That's Hill 80. You will see more wounded passing there than there are hairs on your head, and more blood flowing than the water in the canal. All those who are hit between Combles and Bouchavesnes are brought to Hill 80."

I nodded, and we relapsed again into silence and reflection. The day gave out in the unclean air of the marshes. The English were firing their big cannon not far from us, and their roar crashed along the alignment like an enraged horse dashing

blindly away. The horizon was so thick with guns that you could hear a continuous gurgle as of a huge cauldron in the tormenting grip of a furnace.

The Adjutant turned again to me. "Three of your brothers have been killed," he said. "In one sense you are out of the business. You won't be very badly off as a stretcher-bearer. In another it is unfortunate, but a good thing for you. It's hard work, stretcher-bearing, but it's better than the line. Don't you think so?"

I said nothing. I thought of that devastated little valley where I had spent the first few weeks of the summer in front of the Plémont hill—the deadly hours I spent looking at the ruins of Lassigny between the torn and jagged poplars, and the apple-trees blighted with the horror on the edge of the chaotic road, and the repulsive shell-holes full of green slime and swarming with life, and the mute face of the Château de Plessier, and the commanding hill which a cosmic upheaval alone had made capable of giving rise to grim forebodings. There

during long nights I had breathed the fetid air of the corpse-laden fields. In the most despairing loneliness I had been in turn terrified of death and longing for it. And then some one came along one day to tell me that "You can go back behind the lines. Your third brother has been killed." And many of the men looked at me, seeming to think with the Adjutant, "Your third brother is dead. In a sense you are lucky."

Those were my thoughts as I entered upon my new duties. We were walking along the plateau, which stood out before heaven, erect as an altar, piled with millions of creatures ready for the sacrifice.

It had been dry for several days, and we lived under the rule of King Dust. The dust is the price we pay for fine weather: it attacks the fighting pack, intrudes upon its work, its food and its thoughts; it makes your lips filthy, your teeth crunch, and your eyes inflamed. But when it disappears the reign of mud begins, and then we passionately desire to stagnate again in the dust.

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Far away, like idly moving rivers, large columns of dust marked all the roads in the district, and were filtered by the wind as they flowed over the countryside. The light of day was polluted with it, as the sky was ravaged by great flights of aeroplanes, and the silence violated and degraded, and the earth with its vegetation torn and mutilated.

I was not that day by any means disposed to be happy, but all this plunged me into the deepest gloom.

Looking all around me I found the only places where I could rest my eyes were in the innocent looks of the horses or on some unfortunate timid men who worked on the roadside. Everything else was nothing but a bristling gesture of war.

Night had fallen when we arrived at the city of tents. The Adjutant took me to a tent and found me a place on some straw which was strongly reminiscent of the pigsty. I took off my knapsack, lay down and fell asleep.

* * *

I got up with the dawn and, wandering through the mist, tried to find my bearings.

There was the road leading from Albert —worn, hollowed, and terribly overrun. It bore the never-ending stream of wounded. Alongside of it stood the city of tents, with its streets, its suburbs, and its public squares. Behind the tents, a cemetery. That was all.

I was leaning on a fence and I looked at the cemetery. Though it was overflowing, its appetite was insatiable. A group of German prisoners were occupied in digging long dark pits that were like so many open and expectant mouths. Two officers went by: one was fat, and looked as if at any moment he would be struck with apoplexy. He was gesticulating wildly to the other. "We have," he said, "got ready in advance 200 graves and almost as many coffins. No, you can't say that this offensive has not been planned."

As a matter of fact, a large number of coffins had been already completed. They filled the tent where the corpses were to be unceremoniously laid out. Outside in the open,

a large gang of joiners were engaged in cutting up planks of pinewood. They were whistling and singing innocently, as is usual with those who work with their hands.

I realised once again how a man's opinion of great events is determined by his vocation and aptitudes. There was a sergeant there whose views of Armageddon varied with the quality of the wood which he had to use. When the wood was bad he used to say, "This war is damned rot." But when the wood was clear of knots his view was: "We'll get them licked."

The heavy and responsible task of running the hospital was entrusted to a nervy and excitable young man. He appeared at every moment, his fingers clutching bundles of papers, which he passed from one hand to the other. I had few opportunities of hearing him speak, but, when I did, each time I caught the same words: "That's not my business—I am getting crazy with it all. I have enough worries of that sort."

I knew then that he had to think of many things. Almost all day a procession

of motor cars, heavily laden with a groaning mass of wounded, came along the winding road which was being hastily metalled, looking like the ravenous gullet of this vast organism. On the top of the bend the lorries were unloaded under a porch decorated with flags, bearing no small resemblance to the festooned arch which on wedding days is erected at church doors.

From the first day I was ordered on night duty to deal with the ambulance cars as they arrived. A dozen of us were grouped under the porch for this purpose.

Up to that time it was only in the trenches that I had seen my comrades, wounded beside me, starting out on a long and mysterious journey of which little was known to us. The man who was hit appeared to be spirited away—he vanished from the battlefield. I was going to know all the stages of the suffering existence he was then only beginning.

The night I went on duty there had been a scrap towards Maurepas or Le Forest. Happening between two days of tremendous

fighting, it was one of those incidents which seldom call for a single line in the communiqués. Yet the wounded streamed in all night. As soon as they were lowered from the cars, we got them into a large tent. It was an immense canvas hall lit with electricity. It had been pitched on ground covered with stubble, and its rough soil was bristling with anæmic grass and badly pressed clods. Those among the wounded who could walk were directed along a passage railed off on both sides, as is done at theatre entrances to make the crowd line up into a queue. They seemed dazed and exhausted. We took away their arms, knives and grenades. They let you do anything to them: they were like children overcome with sleep. The massacre of Europe cannot proceed without organisation. All the acts of the play are based on the most detailed calculation. As these men filed past, they were counted and labelled; clerks verified their identity with the unconcerned accuracy of customs officials. They, on their part, replied with the patience of the

eternal public at government inquiry offices. Sometimes they even ventured to make a remark.

"Your name is Menu," one cavalryman was asked. "Isn't it?"

And the cavalryman replied in a heart-rending tone:

"Alas! it is, unfortunately."

I remember a little man whose arm was in a sling. A doctor was looking at his papers, and said:

"You have a wound in your right arm?"

And the man replied so modestly:

"Oh! it is not a wound. It is only a hole!"

In one corner of the tent they were giving out food and drink. A cook was carving slices of beef and cutting up a round of cheese. The wounded seized the food with their muddy and blood-stained hands; and they were eating slowly and with evident relish. The inference was plain. Many were suffering primarily from hunger and thirst. They sat timidly on a bench like some very poor guests at a buffet during a garden party.

In front of them there were a score of wounded Germans who had been placed there indiscriminately. They were dozing or throwing hungry glances on the food and the pails of steaming tea. Hitting on a popular slang expression, a grey-haired infantryman, who was munching large pieces of boiled beef, said suddenly to the cook :

" Hang it all ! Why not give them a piece of bully-beef ? "

" Do you know them then ? " said the cook jocularly.

" Do I know them ! The poor devils ! We have been punching each other the whole blessed day. Chuck them a piece of meat. Why not ? "

A frivolous young man, short-sighted, with a turned-up nose, added in a tense voice :

" Ought to be done, you know—our honour . . ."

And they went on gravely chatting and gulped down cupfuls of a hot brew which was poured from a metal jug. From another angle in the tent the scene was very different. The men were lying down : they had grave wounds. Placed side by side on the uneven

ground, they made a mosaic of pain stained with mud and blood, the colours of war; reeking with sweat and corruption, the smells of war; noisy with cries, moans and hiccups which are the sounds and music of war.

I shivered at the sight. I had known the bristling horror of the massacre and the charge. I was to learn another horror, that of the *tableau*—the accumulation of prostrate victims, the spectacle of the vast hall swarming with human larvæ, in heaps, on the floor.

I had finished my work with the stretcher and hastened to make my round of the wounded. I was so deeply moved that I was rather hindered in my work. Some of the men were vomiting, suffering unutterable agony, and their brows streaming with perspiration. Others were very quiet and could be more or less rational: they seemed to be following the internal progress of their illness. I was completely upset by one of them. He was a fair-haired sergeant with a slight moustache. His face was buried in his hands and he was sobbing with despair and what seemed like shame. I asked him if he was

suffering pain. He scarcely replied. Then, gently lifting his blanket, I saw that he had been terribly hit by grape shot in his virility. And I felt a deep pity for his youth and his tears.

There was also a boy who used to utter a queer plaint, current in his locality. But I could only catch these syllables: "Ah! mon . . . don . . ." A doctor who was passing said to him:

"Come, come! a little patience! Do not cry out like that."

The child paused a moment before replying: "I'd have to lose my voice first if I'm not to cry."

His neighbour was a big, rough, good-natured fellow with a powerful jaw, strong and massive features, with the peculiar shape of the skull and growth of hair that characterise the folk of Auvergne.

He looked at the boy who was groaning at his side, and, turning to me, commented, with a shrug of the shoulders:

"Rotten luck being hit like that, poor child!"

"And what's the matter with you?" I said to him.

"Oh, I think I have lost my feet; but I am fairly strong and my body is solid." . . .

It was true! I saw that both his feet had been torn away.

Round the electric arcs, luminous rings were formed by the sickening vapour. On the sides of the tent, in the folds, you could see the flies sleeping in big black patches, overcome by the cold freshness of night.

Large waves rolled on the canvas, passing like a shudder or violently flapping, according as the wind or gunfire was the cause.

I stepped carefully over some stretchers and found myself outside, in a night that roared, illuminated by the aurora borealis of the battlefield.

I had walked, with my hands held out in front of me, until I came upon a fence. Suddenly I knew what it was to be leaning against the parapet of hell!

What a human tempest! What explosions of hatred and destruction! You

would have said that a company of giants were forging the horizon of the earth with repeated blows that filled the air with countless sparks. Innumerable furtive lights gave one continuous great light that lived, throbbed and danced, dazzling the sky and the land. Jets of iridescent light were bursting in the open sky as if they fell from the blows of the steam-hammer on white-hot steel. To me who had only recently left the trenches, each of these firework displays meant something —advice, commands, desperate calls, signals for slaughter; and I interpreted this furnace as if it had expressed in words the fury and distress of the combatants.

Towards Combles, on the left of Maurepas, one section above all seemed to be raging. It was just there that the junction was made between the English and the French armies; and it was there that the enemy concentrated a tumultuous and never-slackening fire. Every night, during many weeks, I saw this place lighted up with the same devouring flame. It was at each instant so intense that every instant appeared to

be the decisive one. But hours, nights and months went slowly by in the eternity of time, and each of these terrible moments was only one intense outburst out of an infinity of them. Thus often the agony of wounds is such that you would hardly think it could be endured any longer. But death comes not willingly at the desire of men: it strikes at will, when it likes, where it likes, and hardly permits itself to be directed or coaxed.

Morning came. Those who have seen the daybreaks of the war, after nights spent in fighting, or in the bloody work of the ambulance, will understand what is the most ugly and mournful thing in the world.

For my part, I shall never forget the green and grudging light of the dawn, the desolating look of the lamps and the faces, the asphyxiating smell of men attacked by corruption, the cold shiver of the morning, like the last frozen breath of night in the congealed foliage of large trees.

* * *

CIVILISATION

My work as a stretcher-bearer was over. I could return to carpentry. I made heavy planks of green wood and thought of all sorts of things, as the mind does when robbed of sleep and overwhelmed with bitterness.

Towards eight o'clock in the morning the sun was hailed by a race of flies as it was emerging painfully from the mist; and these animals began to abandon themselves to their vast daily orgy.

All those who were on the Somme in 1916 will never forget the flies. The chaos of the battlefield, its wealth in carrion, the abnormal accumulation of animals, of men, of food that had gone bad—all these were factors in determining that year a gigantic swarm of flies. They seemed to have gathered there from all parts of the globe to attend a solemn function. Every possible kind of fly was there, and the human world, victim of its own hatreds, remained defenceless against this horrible invasion. During a whole summer they were the absolute monarchs and queens, and we did not dispute the food with them.

I have seen, on Ridge 80, wounds swarming with larvæ—sights which, since the battle of the Marne, we had been able to forget. I have seen flies dashing themselves on the blood and the pus of wounds and feeding themselves with such drunken frenzy that, before they could be induced to leave their feasting and fly away, they had to be seized with pincers or with one's fingers. The army suffered cruelly from them, and it is amazing that, in the end, victory was not theirs.

Nothing had a more lugubrious and stripped appearance than the plateau on which stood the city of tents. Every morning heavy traction engines went up the Etinehem hill and brought water to the camp. Several casks placed in amongst the trees were filled with water of rather a sweet taste, and this provision was to suffice, for a whole day, to slake the thirst of the men and clean away the impurities and emissions of disease.

Except on the horizon line, not a bush was to be seen. Nowhere a tuft of fresh

grass. Nothing but an immense stretch of dust or mud, according as the face of the sky was calm or stormy. To relieve this desolate scene with a little colour, someone had had the happy idea of cultivating a little garden between the tents. And the wounded, on being lowered from the cars, were astonished to see, in the midst of the ghastliness of military activity, the pale smile of a geranium, or juniper trees uprooted from the stony ridges of the valley and replanted hastily in the style of French gardens.

I cannot, without being strangely moved, recall the tent in which about twelve soldiers were dying of gaseous gangrene. Around this deathly spot ran a thin little border of flowers, and an assiduous fellow was calmly trying to bring into bloom crimson bellflowers.

Sometimes the earth, torrid with the month of August, seemed to reel with the satiating deluge of a storm. At such moments the tents used to crackle furiously and seemed, like great livid birds, to cling to

the earth in order better to resist the blast of the south wind.

But neither the gusts of rain nor the galloping thunderclaps, none of these tumults of Nature, interrupted man from his war. The operations and the dressing of wounds continued on Hill 80 as, on neighbouring hills, the batteries ploughed up the disputed ground. Often it seemed that man insisted on speaking more loudly than Heaven, and the guns and the thunder seemed determined to outbid each other.

Once, I remember, the thunder had the last word : two sausage-shaped balloons took fire, and the artillery, stricken blind, stammered and then became mute.

In a few days, I was given the job of furnishing the tents with little pieces of joinery, benches and tables. I worked on the spot, taking my tools with me, and I did my best not to disturb the patients, who were already exhausted by the din of battle. This was very painful work, because it made me a helpless spectator of unutterable misery. I remember being greatly

touched on one occasion: a young artillery-man, wounded in the face, was being visited by his brother, a cadet in a neighbouring regiment. The latter, very pale, was looking at the face of the wounded man, of which only an eye could be seen and a stained bandage. He took his hands, and bent down quite naturally to kiss him; then he shrank back, only to come near again, victim of an emotion of mingled horror and pity. Then the wounded man, who could not speak, had an inspiration that was full of tenderness: with outspread fingers he began to stroke the hair and face of his brother. This silent affection told how willingly the soul gives up the spoken word and yields to its most intimate gestures.

In the same tent Lieutenant Gambin was dying.

He was rather a crude, simple-hearted man, who had been engaged in some obscure civilian employment, and who now, solely by dint of his stubborn courage, had gained a commission. His large frame lay exhausted from hæmorrhage, and for two days he lay

dying. The breath of life took two days to quit his ice-cold limbs, from which exuded large beads of glutinous sweat. From time to time he sighed. At last, leaving my screw-driver and iron nails, I asked him if he would like something. He looked at me with wide-open eyes, full of memories and sadness, and said :

" No, thank you. But oh, I've got the hump ! "

I was almost glad to see him die : he was too conscious of his long, dragging, terrible death.

Little Lalau who died the same day was at least unconscious, though delirious, to the last.

He was a country lad, and had been struck in the spinal cord by a piece of shell. A kind of meningitis ensued, and, at once, he lost his reason. The pupils of his eyes swung to and fro with sickening rapidity ; he never ceased moving his jaw, apparently chewing like a ruminant. One day I found him devouring a string of beads which had been hung round his neck by a chaplain.

An orderly kept his mouth open while we removed several pieces of wood and steel. The poor wretch laughed softly, repeating: "It's a bit hard. It's a bit hard to chew"; and the lines of his face twitched with innumerable spasms of pain.

Delirium upsets and wounds the spirit. For it constitutes the uttermost disorder—that of the mind. But it perhaps betrays benevolence on the part of Nature when it deprives man of the consciousness of his misery. Life and death have it in their power to confer these mournful blessings. Once I saw a soldier struck in so many places that the doctors decided he was beyond the resources of their skill. Among other wounds there was a long splinter of steel driven like a dagger through his right wrist. The sight was so cruel and revolting that an attempt was made to remove the steel. A doctor gripped it firmly and tried to loosen it with sharp, short pulls.

"Is it giving you pain?" he said from time to time.

And the patient replied:

"No; but I'm thirsty!"

"How is it," I asked the doctor, "that he can't feel the pain you are giving him?"

"It's because he is in a state of shock," replied the surgeon.

And I understood how the very extremity of pain sometimes obtains for its victims a truce which is, in a way, a foretaste of the sweets of death—the prelude to extinction.

At each end of the large marquees one of those small bell tents had been erected to which the soldiers had given the name of "mosques." They served as death chambers. There were placed the men who were lost to human succour, in a loneliness that presaged the tomb. And some of them were aware of this. There was a soldier with a riddled abdomen who asked, on entering the tent, to be dressed in clean linen.

"Don't let me die," he pleaded, "in an unclean shirt. Give me something white. If you are too busy, I'll put it on myself."

Sometimes, unutterably wearied by so much suffering, I asked for work outside the camp, in order to sort out my ideas and renew

the theme of my reflections. It was always with a sigh of comfort that I got away from the city of tents. I contemplated, from a distance, this sinister agglomeration, which certainly bore comparison with an itinerant fair. I tried to distinguish amid the white canvas and red crosses the tops of these little "mosques." I gazed also at the cemetery where hundreds and hundreds of bodies had been buried; and, realising the sum of the misery, despair and rage accumulated on that spot of the earth, I thought of the people who, far away in the heart of France, were crowding the concert cafés, the drawing-rooms, the cinemas, the brothels, finding brazen enjoyment in themselves, in the world, in the weather; and, sheltered by this quivering rampart of the sacrificed, will not share in this universal anguish. I thought of these people with more shame than resentment.

The excursions in the open freshened me a little, and I found some comfort in the sight of healthy men spared by the battle.

Sometimes I went as far as the English

sector. Masses of long-range artillery were to be seen there. The guns were served by soldiers in shirt-sleeves and long trousers stained by oil and cart-grease. They looked more like factory workers than soldiers. You felt then how war has become an industry—an engineering business devoted to mechanical slaughter and massacre.

One night, walking along the Albert road, I overheard the conversation of some men who were sitting on the upturned earth of a pit. By their accent they were peasants from the north and must have belonged to the regiments which had just been under fire.

"After the war," said one of them, "those who are going to dabble in politics, they'll have to say they had a hand in this confounded war."

But this frank opinion, caught in passing one night along a road in the front—this inconsequent, unanswered comment was lost in the tumult of the gunfire.

* * *

I gained much by being stretcher-bearer. I came to know the men better than I had ever done until then—to know them bathed in a purer light, *naked* before death, stripped even of the instincts which disfigure the divine beauty of simple souls.

In the midst of the greatest trials our race of peasants has remained vigorous, pure, worthy of the noblest human traditions. I have known them—Rebic, Louba, Ratier, Freyssinet, Calmel, Touche, and so many others whom I must not name if I am not to mention the whole country. It cannot be said that pain chose its victims, and yet, when I used to pass by their beds where their destiny struggled—when I looked at their faces, each one of them, they all seemed to me good, patient, energetic men, and all of them deserved to be loved.

Did Rebic, that grey-haired sergeant, not richly deserve that a loving family waited longingly for him at home? One day we came to dress the big gash in his side, and we hastened to bring him white linen and made him a warm bed; he began to weep,

good and simple man, and we asked him why, and he made this sublime answer :

" I cry because of the agony and misery I am giving you."

As for Louba, we could not expect to hear him speak : a shell had smashed in his face. There remained nothing of it except one immense cruel gash ; an eye displaced, twisted ; and forehead—a humble peasant forehead. Yet one day, as we whispered some brotherly words, Louba wished to show how pleased he was, and he smiled to us. They will remember, those who saw the soul of Louba smiling faceless.

Freyssinet, child of twenty, often lapsed into delirium, and was aware of it in his conscious moments, and asked pardon of those whom it might have disturbed. The hour came when he sank into the peace everlasting. A much-decorated personage was making the round of the wards attended by an imposing suite. He stopped at the foot of each bed and uttered, in a fitting voice, words conferring whatever honour

which they represented in the minds of the patients. He stopped before Freyssinet's bed and began his speech. As he was an important and methodical man, he said what he had to say without noticing the many signs that were being made to make him desist. Having spoken, he nevertheless asked those who were looking on :

" You wanted to tell me something ? "

" Yes," replied someone ; " it is that the man is dead."

But Freyssinet was so modest, so timid, that the very attitude of his corpse betrayed respect and confusion.

It is there, also, that I made the acquaintance of Touche.

He came to us, poor Touche ! his head broken, having had to leave a temporary hospital owing to its catching fire. I saw him turning out with his groping hands a bag which contained all his possessions.

" No, no," he was saying, " they are all lost, and I'll never find them."

" What are you looking for ? " I asked.

" I am looking for the little photos of

my two boys and of my wife. Unfortunately, they are lost. I shall miss them."

I helped him in his search, and then I saw that Touche was blind.

Poor Touche! He easily recognised me by my voice and always had a smile for me. He was awkward at table, as a man would naturally be who is not yet accustomed to his infirmity. But he tried to manage by himself, and used to tell us in a quiet voice:

"I am doing my best, you see: I scrape my plate until I feel there is nothing more."

Could I forget the name of the man who was brought in, one night, with his two legs smashed, and who murmured simply:

"It's hard to have to die! But come! I'll be brave."

But Calmel, Calmel! No one who knew him will ever wish to forget him. Never did a man more passionately desire to live! Never did a man attain greater nobility by his endurance and resignation! He suffered

mortal wounds which at every moment the light of the life within him repudiated. It was he who, during a night bombardment, addressed his hospital comrades, exhorting them to be calm, with his authoritative moribund voice.

"Come, come!" he used to say; "we are all men here, are we not?"

Such is the strength of the spirit that these words alone, uttered by such a man, were capable of restoring order and confidence in the hearts of everyone.

It was to Calmel that a plump civilian, entrusted with some business or other with the armies, said one day with jubilant conviction:

"You appear to be badly hit, my brave man. But if you knew what wounds we inflict on them, with our 75! Terrible wounds, old boy, terrible!"

Each day brought visitors to Hill 80. They came from Amiens in sumptuous motor cars. They chatted as they traversed the great canvas hall, as if at a prize exhibition of agricultural produce: to the

wounded they addressed a few words that were in keeping with their personal station, their opinions and dignity. They wrote notes on memorandum-books and sometimes accepted invitations to supper from the officers. There were foreigners, philanthropists, politicians, actresses, millionaires, novelists, and "penny-a-liners." Those who were looking for strange sensations were sometimes admitted to the "mosque" or the operation-room.

They went away, well content with their day when the weather was fine, in the sure knowledge that they had seen some queer things, heroic fighters, and a model establishment.

* * *

But silence! I have pronounced their names—Freyssinet, Touche, Calmel—and the memories which they leave in my heart are too noble to be mingled with bitterness.

What has become of Hill 80 deserted? The battle has advanced towards the east. Winter has come; the city of tents has furled

its canvas, as a fleet of sailing ships which must prepare for new destinies.

Often, in imagination, I see again the bare plateau and the immense burial-ground left derelict in the fields and the mists, like the wreckage of innumerable ships down in the depths of the sea.

RÉCHOUSSAT'S CHRISTMAS

RÉCHOUSSAT repeated in a shrill, strained voice: "I tell you, they're not coming after all."

Corporal Têtard turned a deaf ear to this. He was sorting out his stock on a table: lints, oil, rubber gloves reminiscent of the fencer, probes enclosed in a tube like vanilla cornets, a basin of enamelled sheet-iron resembling a big bean, and a bulging vase with a wide gaping mouth, looking like anything at all.

Réchoussat affected an air of indifference. "They needn't come if they don't wish to. Anyway, I don't care."

Corporal Têtard shrugged his shoulders. "But I tell you they will come," he said.

The wounded man obstinately shook his head. "Here, old boy! nobody'll come here. All those who visit downstairs never come up here. I'm only telling you. I don't really care, you know."

"You may be sure they will come."

"Really, I don't know why I have been placed here alone in the room."

" Probably because you must have quiet."

" Whether they come or not, it's all one to me."

Réchoussat frowned to show his pride, then he added, sighing :

" You can begin now with your bag of tricks."

As a matter of fact Corporal Têtard was ready. He had lighted a candle-end and in one movement drew back the sheets.

Réchoussat's body was revealed, extraordinarily thin, but Têtard scarcely noticed it, and Réchoussat had for three months now been fairly accustomed to his misery. He knew quite well that to have a piece of shell in the back is a serious matter, and that, when a man's legs and abdomen are paralysed, he is not going to recover quickly.

" Feeling better ? " asked Têtard in the course of his operation.

" Yes," he replied. " Now it's six o'clock and they haven't come. Good thing ! I don't mind."

The corporal did not reply ; with a weary expression he rubbed together his rubber

gloves. Riveted to the wick, the candle-flame leaped and struggled, like a wretched prisoner yearning to escape and fly up alone in the blackness of the room, and beyond, higher, higher, in the winter sky, in regions where the sounds of the war of man are no longer heard. Both the patient and the orderly watched the flame in silence, with wide-open vague eyes. Every second a gun, far away, snapped at the panes, and each time the flame of the candle started nervously.

"It takes a long time! You're not cold?" asked Têtard.

"The lower part of my body does not know what cold means."

"But it will, one day."

"Of course it will. It's dead now, but it must become alive again. I am only twenty-five; it's an age when the flesh has plenty of vigour."

The corporal felt awkward, shaking his head. Réchoussat seemed to him worn out; he had large sores in the places where the body rested on the bed. He had been

isolated in order that his more fortunate comrades should be spared the sight of his slow, dragging death.

A long moment went by. The silence was so oppressive that for a moment they felt their small talk quite inadequate. Then, as if he was continuing a mental discussion, Réchoussat suddenly remarked :

"And yet, you know, I'm so easily satisfied. If they came for two minutes only."

"Hush!" said Têtard. "Hush!"

He leaned, listening, towards the door. Obscure sounds came from the passage.

"Ah, here they are!" said the orderly.

Réchoussat craned his neck. "Bah! No, I tell you."

Suddenly a wonderful light, rich in reflections of gold and crimson—a strange fairy light—filled the passage. The wall in front stood out; ordinarily as pale as December woods, now it suddenly exhibited the splendour of an eastern palace or of a princess' gown. In all this light there was sound of happy voices and of laughter. No

one could be heard singing, yet the light itself seemed to be singing a magnificent song. Réchoussat, who could not move, stretched his neck the more vigorously, and raised his hands a little above the sheets, as if he wanted to feel this beautiful sound and light.

"You see, you see," said Têtard. "I told you they would come."

Then there was a big blaze. Something stopped before the door: it was a tree—a real fir-tree from the forests, planted in a green box. There were so many Chinese lanterns and pink candles hanging from its branches that it looked like an enormous torch. But there was something grander to come: the wise and learned kings now entered. There was Sorri, a Senegalese gunner, Moussa and Cazin. Wrapped in cloaks from Adrianople, they wore long white beards made of cotton wool.

They walked right into Réchoussat's room. Sorri carried a little packet tied with ribbon. Moussa waved aloft two cigars, and Cazin a bottle of champagne. The three of them

bowed punctiliously, as they had been told, and Réchoussat found himself suddenly with a box of chocolates in his right hand, two cigars in his left, and a glass of foaming wine on his little table.

"Ah, boys! No, no; you're joking, boys."

Moussa and Cazin laughed. Sorri showed his teeth.

"Ah! boys," repeated Réchoussat, "I don't smoke, but I'm going to keep the cigars as a souvenir. Pass me the wine."

Sorri took the goblet and offered it as if it were a sacred cup. Réchoussat drank gently and said:

"It's some wine! Good stuff!"

There were more than a score of faces at the door, and they all smiled at the gentle naïve Réchoussat.

Afterwards, a veritable sunset! The wonderful tree receded, jolting into the passage. The venerable kings disappeared, with their flowing cloaks and their sham beards. Réchoussat still held the goblet and gazed at the candle as if all the lights

existed there. He laughed, slowly repeating, "It's some wine!" Then he continued to laugh and never said a word.

Quite gently the darkness entered the room again, and lodged itself everywhere, like an intimate animal disturbed in its habits.

With the darkness, something very sad insinuated itself everywhere, which was the odour of Réchoussat's illness. A murmuring silence rested on every object, like dust. The face of the patient ceased to reflect the splendour of the Christmas tree; his head sunk down, he looked at the bed, at his thin ulcerated legs, the glass vessel full of unclean liquid, the probe, all these incomprehensible things, and he said, stammering with astonishment:

"But . . . but . . . what is the matter then? What is the matter?"

LIEUTENANT DAUCHE

IT was in the month of October 1915 that I made the acquaintance of Lieutenant Dauche.

I can never recall that time without deep emotion. We had been living, before Sapigneul, through weeks of fire. The Champagne offensive had for long been rumbling on our right, and its farthest eddies seemed to break on our sector, as the waves scattered by a hurricane that spends itself in the open sea. For three days our guns had made reply to those of Pouilleuse, and we had waited, rifles at hand, for an order which never came. Our minds were uneasy and vacant, still reeling from that kind of resonant drunkenness which results from a prolonged bombardment. We were glad at not having to make a murderous attack, and at the same time we worried over the causes which had prevented it.

It was then that I was wounded for the first time. Some chance evacuation took me to the Château de S——, which is, for the Rheims country, an indifferent piece of architecture. It stands in the midst of soft

verdure and looks, across the slope of the hill, upon the delicate valley of the Vesle.

My wound, though not serious, was painful enough. It made me a little feverish and long for silence and solitude. It gave me pleasure to remain, for long hours, in the presence of a pain which, while endurable, made me test my patience and reflect on the vulnerable nature of an organism in which, up till then, I had placed an unshakable confidence.

I occupied a bright room, decorated with Jouy tapestry and delicate paintings. My bed was placed there together with that of another officer, who walked silently up and down the room, and who respected my reticence. The day came, however, when I was told to take solid food, and that day we began chatting, no doubt because the most ancient human traditions dispose those who eat together to enter into conversation.

In spite of the moods which I then experienced, this talk was a pleasure and gave me what I must have needed.

I was absorbed in melancholy reflections,

and brooded over the misery of the times. Lieutenant Dauche from the first appeared to me to show a serenity of mind and a quiet cheerfulness of spirit. Later, I saw that he deserved to be greatly admired for maintaining such an attitude in the face of an unending misfortune which had not spared him any trials.

We were both natives of Lille; it gave us a point of contact. The event of an inheritance, and the requirements of his position, early led Dauche to settle in the Meuse district and set up a home there.

His marriage was happy, and his young wife was mother of two fine children. A third was about to be born when the German invasion swept over the face of France, unsettling the world, ruining a prosperous industry, violently separating Dauche from his children and his pregnant wife, of whom, since, he had only heard uncertain and disquieting news.

I, too, had left in the invaded country those I loved, and also my possessions. I felt, therefore, in the presence of Dauche

the effect of that solidarity which is aroused by a common misfortune. I ought, however, to admit that my comrade had suffered more terrible calamities than mine with greater fortitude, though he was more sensitive, as I observed on several occasions.

Of pleasing height, Dauche had the pink complexion and the fair hair characteristic of my country. A delicate beard adorned and prolonged a face full of gentleness and life, like those young men whom Flemish artists have portrayed, often so happily, wearing a frilled collar and a heavy golden chain gleaming on a waistcoat of dark velvet.

A light bandage passed over his forehead. He seemed so little disturbed by it that I did not trouble for some time to talk to him about his wound. Besides, he never referred to it himself. I saw him once change the dressing, and it was then that he explained to me in a few words how a piece of grenade had struck him during a skirmish. He seemed to treat the incident with the most perfect indifference.

" Nothing draws me away from the front,"

he added, with a melancholy smile, " and I was intending forthwith to return to my corps ; but the doctor is flatly opposed to it."

He confessed it was not without pleasure that he looked forward to spending the period of convalescence in the Château de S——, which autumn adorned so nobly.

From the second week, in spite of the state of my wound on my shoulder, I was given permission to walk a little. Dauche helped me with a brotherly tenderness, and it was through his encouragement that I was able soon to venture in the avenues of the park.

The doctor who looked after us both said to me in rather an embarrassed tone :

" You are going out with Lieutenant Dauche ? See that you don't go too far."

This doctor was of a reticent nature. I did not ask for explanations ; I was confident in my recovered strength. It never struck me—naturally enough—that the doctor was in fact thinking of Dauche.

Several days went by, blessed with all that is warm, young, affectionate in a growing

friendship. The war, among a thousand other miseries, has compelled us to live occasionally in the company of men whom in time of peace we should have carefully avoided. It was, then, with a trembling joy that I recognised in Dauche those qualities which would move my nature to love and affection—a nature which had ever perhaps been unduly difficult and uneasy. I thought that a deep predestined purpose operated there: the men of this age who can become my friends are marked, and determined, in the universe with the same mysterious sign; but I may not know them all, and perhaps I shall never be fated to meet my best friend.

The times when it did not rain we passed in long conversations on the hillside, under a plantation of pines and beech trees. My young friend perceived and judged natural objects with the innocence, freshness and originality of a child. He spoke of his scattered family with a stubborn faith in their safety—a faith that usually is found only in religious fanatics or in men unbalanced by fame or success.

In the evening, when the approach of darkness tended to bring back to the mind the awful things one had experienced and made one withdraw into oneself, he used cheerfully to ask me to have a game of chess, and this game of skill took us on to the threshold of sleep.

* * *

The pleasure I had in the company of Dauche led me one day to tell the doctor how much I admired his character.

The doctor, who was ceasing to be young, was tall, rather bent and bald, with a sad, timid, and kind smile on his face half-hidden by a straggling beard.

"Fate," I said, "is no respecter of victims. It is terrible to find it striking down natures so generous, and it is a marvel that it has failed to produce worse effects than it has."

We began chatting as we walked with measured steps along a narrow pathway hidden away among the hazel trees.

My companion made a queer little movement with his shoulders and looked round to make sure that we were alone.

"You appear to take great pleasure in Dauche's company," he said to me, "and it is very natural. But I have already begged you never to prolong your walks with him too far from the Château, and I must repeat the warning."

The tone of his voice at once made me rather anxious, and I did not hide my amazement.

"Dauche," I began, "seems to me to be convalescing slowly but surely. Can there be anything serious in that scar on his forehead?"

The doctor had stopped. He was trying to dislodge, with the tip of his boot, a stone embedded in the road.

"This scratch," he said very quickly, still looking down, "is very much more serious than you imagine."

A painful silence ensued, and as I remained quiet, the doctor went on, with frequent pauses:

"We are beginning to understand these injuries of the skull. Your friend does not know, and must not know, how serious his condition is. He doesn't even know that we have failed to extract the projectile which struck him. And even if the thing was possible . . ."

Then suddenly the doctor went off into a philosophical dissertation in which he seemed to be both at his ease and at a loss, as in a familiar labyrinth.

"We have accomplished much—very much. We have even restored the dead to life; but we cannot restore all the dead to life. There are a few very difficult problems. . . . We think we have solved them. . . . I do not speak of God. The very idea of God seems to be detached from this immense calamity. I do not speak of God, but of men. They must be told quite simply: there are wounds which we cannot cure. Therefore, let them stop inflicting such wounds, and the question will not arise again. That is a solution; but the members of my profession are too proud to make that

suggestion to the world, and the world is too mad to listen."

My respect for this digression prevented me from interrupting; when, however, he had finished, I whispered:

"Really, you say this missile——?"

"You can't get at it, you understand. Beyond reach! It's rather degrading for a proud man to admit it, but at least it's honest. And, besides, it's a fact. Man placed it there; and it is beyond his power to remove it."

Though embarrassed by the presence of the doctor, I was deeply moved by his words.

"Yet, in spite of it, one can live——"

"No," he said in a grave voice, "one can only die."

We walked as far as the edge of the wood. The clear light of an open meadow seemed to bring the doctor back within the bounds of professional etiquette; for he said in a different tone:

"Excuse me, sir, for having made you consider things which must seem strange to

a man with your point of view. I do not regret having taken this opportunity to speak to you about Dauche. He hasn't, I believe, any near relations in uninvaded territory. You are interested in him, and I must warn you: he is lost. I'm going to add, since you seek his friendship, that at any moment something will happen to him, bringing death rapidly in its train."

I had only known Dauche for a short time, but I was overwhelmed. Some meaningless words came to my lips. I said something like "How terrible!" But the doctor, with a pale smile, ended by saying:

"Alas! sir, you will do as I and many others have done: you will get used to living in the presence of men who yet share our world, but of whom one knows without a shadow of doubt that they are already dead."

* * *

I could not get accustomed to such a thing. The conversation had taken place towards noon. I spent the rest of the day in avoiding

the sight of Dauche—cowardly conduct which found justification in my inability to conceal my thoughts.

Night found me deprived of sleep, but it was doubly useful: it gave me time to get the better of certain impressions, and enabled me to plead sickness for my changed disposition.

As I was getting out of bed, Dauche suggested that we should both go for a walk in the woods. I was on the point of refusing; but his smile was so affectionate and engaging that I hadn't the courage to pretend illness. Besides, the weather was radiant.

The brilliant sunshine in which some vigour still remained, the delicate tints of a landscape rich in the mists of early morning, and perhaps a healthy desire to be cheerful and forget—all that suddenly led my thoughts away from the depths into which they had sunk.

Dauche began running amid the tall grass, which was slowly fading to a pale amber. His laughter, you would have said, was that of a boy. Recounting all kinds of

anecdotes and sayings, he played the games loved by his own children, and sometimes he used to stop suddenly and speak with respect and affection of the child he did not yet know, and of the mother who waited for him in exile.

No natural thing seemed too trifling or unworthy of attention: he delighted in the scent of the flowers, spared a momentary glance for every object, rubbed the fragrant herbs between his fingers, and tasted the blackberries and hazel nuts from the thickets.

He made me notice a thousand things whose existence until then, I blush to think, I was scarcely aware of. He dragged me after him through an endless series of adventures, and I could only follow him, awkwardly and grumbling, like an old man forced to dance a *ronde*.

We were returning to the Château, congratulating ourselves on our appetite and on the good time that we had had, when, in the bend of a path, the words and the warning of the doctor burst with a shock upon my consciousness. It was like a sharp imperious

rap of the knuckle against a door. I was aware then that I had never ceased thinking of it in my subconsciousness. But looking once again at Dauche, sturdy and blond like an ear of corn in the splendour of noon, I shook my head, saying decidedly, "This worthy doctor is mistaken."

And, during the whole of that day, I remained happy.

The next day, as I took a long time getting up, and, musing idly, counted the gay flowers on the curtains, I caught, not far from me, the regular breathing of Dauche, who was still sleeping. Immediately a voice whispered in my ear, "That man is going to die."

I turned over on my other side, and the voice repeated, "That man over there is a dead man."

Then I was seized with a desire to go away, —far away from Dauche and from the Château, and to bury myself in the noise and activity of civilian France.

I was completely awake, and began to reason the matter out with cold deliberation.

"After all, I've known this man for so short a time and can do nothing to help him. He has been in the hands of skilled surgeons who have exhausted all the resources of their art for him. . . . I would forget his terrible fate, as I had every right to in view of the fact that it was shared by a large number of young men equally worthy of attention. My presence could be of no use to him, and to be with him must indeed often draw upon those reserves of moral energy of which I was strongly in need."

These arguments ended in my asking the doctor, when I found myself alone with him that same morning on some pretext or other, to hasten my removal to another hospital.

"From the present state of your wound," he said to me, "I see no objection to it. I'll see the thing is done."

This ready assent, though so gratifying, caused me some surprise. But my eye meeting the doctor's, I found him looking so sad and perplexed that I was ashamed.

I was, indeed, so upset by my weakness that at the end of a quarter of an hour I went

again to the doctor and asked if it wasn't possible for me to change my mind, and to remain at the Château de S—— until I had completely recovered.

He smiled with a queer satisfied expression and assured me I could stay as long as I liked.

My decision, arrived at after so much delay and evasion, brought calm to my mind. I passed most of the day in my room and found diversion in reading. Towards evening a soldier from a regiment stationed near us, taking French leave, came to see us and invited us to hear two musicians of his regiment who were giving a concert in an orange garden.

Though I had no precise intellectual understanding of music, I highly appreciated it. And at that time I was, surely, in a position to remark how a succession of notes and chords can interpret one's prevailing mood and quicken its emotions.

A violin sonata of Bach was being played with piano accompaniment. Several times I felt as if an invisible and unknown person

touched me on the arm and whispered, "How can you forget he is going to die?"

I got up as soon as the concert ended and went quickly away, suffering veritable torture.

"What is the matter?" asked Dauche, running after me. "You seem ill or unhappy."

"Both," I replied, in a voice I could no longer control. "Didn't you hear the music of the violin?"

"Yes," he said musingly; "it was pure joy."

I looked at him furtively and withdrew nothing. But that evening, alone with my thoughts in the dark, I understood that chance had reserved for me a strange rôle to play in the fate of my friend—Dauche was doomed: he had to die: he was about to die; but some one else, in some kind of way, had to suffer his death-agony. . . .

* * *

I am not, I protest, different from other people. The war had severely tried me, but my imagination remained unclouded, and my

wound was not of such a kind as to impair the normal working of a healthy average brain.

I am, therefore, thoroughly persuaded that the tense experience I was to undergo, from that day, would have equally afflicted any man confronted with the same calamitous circumstances.

In spite of the sinister life of the battlefield, I was to be in the presence of a form of death new and terrible in its duration. It is hardly possible to live without at every moment visualising what is going to happen at the next; and it was tragic to bear in one's consciousness a certainty which froze, at birth, every plan and intention. Illness creates, in ordinary life, like conditions; but their misery is tempered by hope, or even by the relief which comes from resignation. On account of the war I was to undergo an agonising experience that was unique, and to live by the side of a man to whom I knew the frightful day of reckoning would suddenly come, and who had no future except that which existed in hope and ignorance.

This ignorance of ourselves is extremely precious, and makes us envy that sovereign ignorance of the beasts and plants. It enabled Dauche to live cheerfully on the edge of the abyss. I was there to assume the burden of the tragedy, as if it were alien to the human rightness of things that so much suffering should take place without a conscious victim.

The first days of November had come. Autumn was growing less resplendent. We had not given up our walks. I was forced to continue them in spite of myself, for dying Nature seemed to be giving intense expression to our tragic friendship.

We often climbed the hill which looked over the plain of Rheims. Military life seemed, like the sap of the plants, to be getting stiff and cold and withdrawing into the earth. The armies were preparing for their winter sleep. The guns boomed wearily and without vigour. The bareness of the trees revealed the signs of war which during summer were hidden beneath the foliage.

Autumn made me feel more acutely the

fate that was to strike down my friend, and Dauche himself made me realise with a cruel relentlessness the fate of all men. The thought that this man was going to die weighed so much on my mind that I was left without courage, weak and useless. And, in fact, it was the helplessness of man which seemed to me to be solely evident as I gazed at the curtain of poplar trees lit up with an elusive glory.

Then I was powerless before the terrible thought which haunted me: "He will never see all this again."

There is in the memoirs of Saint Simon a frightful page on the death of Louis XIV. The historian cannot describe any of the gestures of the dying monarch without repeating, with a persistence inspired by hate: "And it was for the last time."

In the same way I constantly thought, when I saw my friend admiring the beauty of autumn: "It's for the last time. . . ." But my thoughts, on the contrary, were full of pain and compassion.

After long hours at our outpost on the

hill, we used to make up our minds to return when the light of the rockets began to adorn the twilight with pale constellations.

Dauche appeared calm, cheerful, almost happy, as if he were having continual glimpses of hope.

He used to make plans: that was unendurable, and I felt so irritated that I once said :

" How happy you must be to dare to make plans at such a time as this ! "

The phrase was quite vague and general ; but as soon as it was uttered it appeared to me cruel and malevolent. I was trying to think how to re-say it when Dauche replied :

" As long as your heart beats isn't that an adventure in itself ? And, besides, you must defy the future if you are not to fear it."

These words, so full of wisdom, perplexed me without affording me any comfort. They only gave rise to another cause for anxiety. Did Dauche have any inkling of his position ?

My mind was at that time so acutely affected by the secret that haunted me that, for several days, the question tortured me.

To-day, when the lapse of time enables me to look at things with the necessary perspective, I can state that Dauche was unaware of the calamity awaiting him. In fact, I never saw anything which made me suppose he ever felt a twinge of uneasiness. I cannot recall any word, allusion or weakness which, had he been aware, would not have failed to escape him and reveal to me the depths of his consciousness.

But on one occasion I was again assailed by doubt. A fellow-soldier in my regiment, rescued by the Red Cross, lay dying, fatally wounded in one of these numerous little scraps which have made Hill 108 the open wound of our sector. We went to see him on his death-bed, and at once I hastened to get Dauche away from the room, in which he was inclined to linger.

"He is, after all, better so," I remarked, to break a painful silence.

"D'you think so? Do you really think so?" the young man replied.

A mysterious impulse, which was not mere chance, made us look into one another's

eyes; and in those of my friend, usually so clear, I was aware of something that quivered, elusive, frantic, like a wreck of a ship lost in the desolate wastes of the sea.

I endeavoured to change the conversation, and I succeeded. Dauche turned back towards life, breathing deeply, and soon breaking into shouts of laughter, in which I joined quite genuinely.

In spite of this alarming incident, I had to recognise that Dauche suspected nothing. What I saw in his eyes that day I would have, without a doubt, surprised in every human look. Moreover, the flesh is aware of things of which the mind is not, and the sharp anguish behind that look was perhaps like one of those mute cries of the animal, which are uttered without the inspiration or recognition of consciousness.

* * *

Dauche's wound was now healed over. Mine required very little attention. There was no difficulty about my recovery. I was

waiting for something else. I understood that perfectly when one day Dauche asked me why I remained so long in the fighting zone. I hit upon a reply in which I pleaded our great friendship and that I had few attachments within the country. But when I faced the question myself I saw quite well what was the real motive of my stay at S——. Always I was waiting for that something to happen.

In spite of these moods, the affection I had for Dauche continued to grow. It had deepened with my pity, and the certainty that death would shortly claim him contributed not a little to exalt it. I was by nature inclined to be emotional, and I became passionately devoted to him. I experienced all the apprehensions of a woman who tends a sick child, and is filled with despair on the slightest symptoms or movements.

There was in the park a tennis court, on which a few worm-eaten wickets were lying. Dauche hit them often with some worn bowls which the moisture was fast

rotting. One morning, as he was throwing one of these bowls, it crumbled into pieces between his fingers, causing him to turn and stumble. At once he raised his hand to his brow, and I thought he staggered. Already I was upon him, and I caught him in my arms.

"What is the matter with you?" he said, seeing my discomposed features.

"I thought your head was giving you pain."

"No," he replied smiling; "not at all. I was readjusting my bandages."

Another time, when I dropped a book I was running through very abstractedly, he bent down, with his usual alacrity, to pick it up. I thought he was slow in rising again, as if he was trying to master an attack of giddiness. Leaning forward, I at once took the book from his hands. His eyes were veiled with a thin reddish film. Perhaps I imagined that, for it did not last a moment.

"I forbid you," I said, making a painful effort to be jocular—"I forbid you to play any other part than that of a convalescent."

He looked at me, amazed, and asked:

"Do you want me to believe that I am ill?"

This reply showed me how tactless I had been, and I saw that I must carefully take myself in hand if I were to hide the anxiety which obsessed me.

Henceforth I was never free from it. I noticed everything my friend ate or drank, not daring to advise him, and itching sometimes to do so.

I got clear away by myself and read in secret some medical treatise which tended rather to lead me astray than instruct me. I made a thousand resolutions and plans and rejected them in turn. They would all have been ridiculous, or even comic, if death had not been at hand, sacred and solemn.

That night I awoke startled several times, and I listened to the breathing of my companion, convinced, with the slightest pause, the slightest change in the rhythm, that he was dying—that he was dead.

We had not given up our walks, but I had abruptly shortened them, without saying why. I discovered a thousand round-about

ways in order to avoid a rocky or slippery road; I pushed aside the branches that grew across the paths with a care that could not fail to arouse suspicion. Sometimes, in the course of a little excursion, feeling that we had gone far from the village, I suddenly experienced an overpowering terror which made me silent and stupid.

I had given up chess, excusing myself on the ground of fatigue, which soon indeed was no longer feigned. A time came when all these emotions seriously affected my health. I kept my bed for several days without being at all rested. I would rather have been left to myself absolutely; but the thought of Dauche going out alone and not able to take care of himself was unendurable. I could not imagine that the fatality was to take place without my being present, because I was always expectant, waiting. . . .

So he always stayed with me, and used to pass the time by reading out to me. I often wished to stop him and, being unable to say that I felt anxious on his

account, I complained of my head. The thing is unbelievable. It was I who looked like the man who was doomed, and it was he who seemed to be in full possession of his strength. I was right in what I said: I was undergoing on his behalf the pangs of death.

One night, during his first sleep, he uttered a kind of moan so strangely animal in quality, that at once I was on my feet, and I gazed at him for a long time in the glow of the night-light.

The emotion I felt that night was mingled with something like an intense desire for freedom. I was horrified to discover that my sick soul not only waited for the inevitable thing, but was dominated by a longing for the end.

* * *

I got up about the beginning of December, and our first walk was in the pinewoods that clustered on the sandy hills south of the main road from Rheims to Soissons.

CIVILISATION

The afternoon was coming to a close. A wild west wind raged through this war-scarred valley which, from ancient times, had borne the ravaging ebb and flow of invasion.

We were walking side by side, feeling rather chilled and silent, given up to those formless thoughts that find no expression in the spoken word and which are of the very colour and fabric of the soul.

We got rather warm in climbing a hill, and when we got to the top I suggested we should sit and rest ourselves on the trunk of a beech tree that lay mutilated on the ground, and from which oozed a yellow liquid streaked with purple.

I was worn out, without hope, without courage, having lost all interest in my doings, in the condition of a man whose will fails him and who gives up the agonising struggle.

Is it possible that there can be, between two beings, relations so mysteriously intimate? Is it true that it was I who on that day gave up the struggle?

Overwhelmed with misery, I stood up

quite involuntarily, and, with unseeing eyes, I gazed towards the horizon at the leaping flight of hills bristling with trees.

Was it really a queer noise that made me turn round? Wasn't it rather a shock or a lacerating sensation taking place within me? The fact is that, all of a sudden, I knew that behind me something was happening. And then my heart began to beat violently, for it could only be the thing—the frightful and expected thing. . . .

It was!

Dauche had slipped from the tree-trunk. It was some time before I recognised him; his whole body was shaken by convulsions—hideous, inhuman, like an animal struck down by the butcher's mallet. His feet and his hands were contracted and twitching. His face was purple and forced round towards the right shoulder. He foamed at the mouth and showed his white eyeballs.

I feel a kind of shame in describing this scene. I had often been in the presence of death, and the war had made me live in horrible intimacy with it; but I had never

seen anything so frightful and so bestial. I, in my turn, began to tremble, as if the shiver of the victim was contagious, and my feeling of despair and nausea grew more intense.

That lasted for an eternity of time, during which I never moved. I let death do its work and I waited until it had finished. Gradually, however, I became aware of a lull, and the grip on the victim seemed to relax.

Dauche's body remained rigid, inert. A feeble moan escaped his lips.

At the same moment I recovered from my stupor and, in spite of my paralysed will, I set about removing from this place what had once been my friend.

In raising him from the ground I suffered terrible pain. His muscles were contracted and he was terribly heavy. I caught hold of him with my arms round his body and carried him with his breast on mine, like a sleeping child. A thin stream of frothy saliva oozed from the corners of his mouth, as from the snouts of cattle in harness. His head began to sway heavily.

Night was falling. I had to put my

burden down every few yards, then take it up again.

My wound caused me acute suffering, but my mind was benumbed and my movements almost involuntary.

I do not know how I came within sight of the Château. On reaching the foot of the hill, suddenly, in the bend of an avenue, I met the doctor, who had been taking a solitary walk. It was almost dark; I did not see the expression on his face.

I placed the body on the ground, kneeled down beside it, my face streaming with perspiration, and said, "Here he is." Then I began to weep.

There were cries, shouts and lights. They carried away Dauche's body, and I was carried too.

* * *

It was really two days later that Dauche died. I did not wish to see him again. I had been placed in a room far removed from him, where I lived in a kind of semi-delirium,

asking from hour to hour, "Has the end come? Has it ended?"

But I knew when the end came before I was told, and I let myself fall into a dark dreamless sleep, of which I still retain the most despairing impression,

It appears that Dauche was buried in the little cemetery skirted by the birch and dead fir trees that are to be seen at the village of C.... in an arid field of white sand. I never could get myself to visit him there. But I carried away with me a more sombre grave that time will not efface.

I left the Château de S—— towards the middle of December. I was weak and enfeebled, weary with the thought that it was now my own life I must live, and undergo for myself the struggle of my own life and death.

COUSIN'S PROJECTS

WHENEVER I had a minute to spare I went and sat at the foot of Cousin's bed. He said to me :

"See, there's room for you now that they've cut my legs off. One would think they'd done it on purpose."

This man of forty had a young and delicate face. On "shaving days," when the razor had done its work, it did one good to see the everlasting, trustful smile of Cousin. It was a wonderful smile—rather delicate, rather ironical, rather candid, rather convulsive ; the very smile of the race, made with lips discoloured by the loss of blood, and features drawn by long and weary effort. In spite of everything, Cousin had a confiding look—the air of one who trusted absolutely the whole world, and especially himself, because he lived, because he was Cousin.

One leg remained to him which, to speak frankly, was worth nothing at all. The joint of the knee had been smashed by the explosion of a torpedo. It was a bad

business, of which people spoke in low voices, shaking their heads.

But, what matter? Cousin did not put his trust in his legs. Already he had abandoned one; he did not seem to care much about a leg more or less. Cousin, I think, did not put his trust in any particular part of his chest, or his head, or his limbs. With or without legs, he was himself, and in his clear green eyes burnt a generous flame that was the expression of a pure soul.

Whilst I was sitting on his bed Cousin told me all about himself. He always took up the thread of events at the point where the war had broken it off, and he had a natural inclination to unite the happy past of Peace to a future not less delicious. Across the troubled and bloody abyss he loved to stretch the life of yesterday until it touched the life of to-morrow. Never a verb in the past tense, but an eternal and miraculous present.

"I am a dealer in *objets d'arts*," he told me. "It's a profitable business when one understands it. I trade mostly in cande-

labras and chandeliers. I work with Cohen and Co., with Marguillé, with Smithson, with all the great houses. Now, I have my own special way of working: I keep my client to myself, and I undertake to make him understand what he wants and to deliver the goods.

"Suppose that a M. Barnabé comes and asks me for a drawing-room chandelier. I say, 'Right! I see what you want'; and I jump into a taxi. I get to Messrs. Cohen's. 'It's 25 per cent. commission. Is that understood?' Let us imagine that Cohen makes difficulties. Right! I run downstairs, jump into the taxi again, and go to Smithson's. . . . Certainly it can be an expensive game. Supposing that Barnabé goes back on me—well, then, I am left with the taxi to pay for. . . . But it's interesting! It's a trade that keeps you going; it amuses you; you need to have discrimination."

Looking at the animated face of Cousin, I smiled. His cheeks were like imitation marble, not very good; he had the swollen eyes of a man who had lain too long in bed

with fever, and whose "inside" was not very healthy. At forty one may feel one's heart young, but one's flesh does not react from the effects of a torpedo as it does at twenty. I looked at the legless Cousin with astonishment while he explained to me how, in his trade, one rushed upstairs at Cohen's; how one jumped about at Marguillé's; how one ran down Smithson's stairs.

A day came when Cousin's leg began to bleed. The blood filtered through the bandage in great drops, like scarlet sweat, or like morning dew on the leaves of a cabbage. During four or five days Cousin's wound bled nearly every day. Every time he was carried away in haste; they put all sorts of things into his wound, and the blood ceased to flow. Every time Cousin came back to his bed a little paler, and he said to me as he passed:

"There, you see . . . one never gets any peace."

One morning I went to sit beside Cousin, who was making his toilette. He was out of breath. In spite of the puffiness of his

face, one felt it had grown thin, formless, devoured by an internal malady. Really, it reminded one of a fruit rotten with vermin.

"I have," he told me, "good news of my boys—twelve and thirteen years old. They're getting on! Didn't I tell you? I am thinking of taking on, as well as the candelabras, clocks and chimneypieces. With the connection that I have, I mean to do great things. One must always aim high. *Dame!* I shall have to get a move on. But I'll manage, I'll manage. What one needs is to know the styles. . . ."

I tried to smile, without being able to control a contraction of the heart. Cousin seemed uplifted by a sort of lyrical ecstasy. He brandished his towel in one hand, and his soap in the other. He described his great future career as if he saw it spread out, written in big letters on the whiteness of the sheets.

On the sheet, which I was just looking at, there appeared suddenly a blot—a red blot which enlarged itself rapidly into a terrifying and splendid stain.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Cousin, "it's bleeding again. One never gets any peace."

I had called for help. A waterproof sheet was folded round Cousin's thigh.

He said, "It's all right; it's all right. No need to worry."

He said this in a voice that was emphatic but very weak—a voice made with the lips alone.

The blood ceased to flow, and they carried Cousin once again to the operating-table. There, he had a moment's peace. The surgeons were washing their hands. I heard them consulting in low voices on Cousin's case, and this made my heart beat and dried the tongue in my mouth.

Cousin saw me a long way off, and made me a little sign with his eyelids. I came close to him. He said to me:

"One never gets any peace. Ah! what was it I was saying to you? Yes, I was talking to you about styles. My strong point is that I understand the different styles—the Louis XV, the Empire, the Dutch, the Modern, and all the

others. But it's difficult. I want to explain to you——"

"Go to sleep, Cousin," said the surgeon softly.

"I will explain all that to you when these gentlemen have done with me, when I wake up."

Then, submissively, he began to breathe in the ether.

It is now a year since all this happened. I often think of the explanations that Cousin never gave me—that he will never give me.

THE LADY IN GREEN

I DO not know why I loved Rabot. Every morning as I went to and fro at my usual work in the ward, I saw Rabot, or rather Rabot's head, or less still Rabot's eye, hiding in a hurly-burly of sheets. He was a little like a guinea-pig that rubs its nose in the straw and watches you anxiously.

Every time I passed I made a familiar sign to Rabot. This sign consisted in shutting the left eye energetically and pressing the lips together. At once Rabot's eye shut itself, digging a thousand little wrinkles in the withered face of the sick man. And that was all; we had exchanged our salutations and our confidences.

Rabot never laughed. He had spent his babyhood in a foundling hospital and had not had enough milk. This under-feeding in infancy can never be made up for afterwards.

Rabot was sandy-haired, with a pale complexion splashed with freckles. He had so little brain that he looked like a rabbit or a bird. Directly a stranger spoke to

him his underlip began to tremble and his chin wrinkled all over like a walnut. You had first of all to explain to him that you were not going to beat him.

Poor Rabot! I would have given anything to see him laugh. Everything, on the contrary, seemed to conspire to make him cry: there were the terrible endless dressings that had to be renewed every day for months; then he was compelled to lie so quiet and motionless that he was never able to play with his comrades. And after all, the fact remained that Rabot had never learned to play at all, and really was not much interested in anything.

I was, I think, the only one who became at all intimate with him; and, as I said before, this intimacy consisted chiefly in shutting my left eye when I passed near his bed.

Rabot did not smoke. When cigarettes were handed round he would join in with the others and play with them for a moment, moving his great thin fingers, deformed and emaciated. Long illness seems to rob the

fingers of manual labourers of all beauty and significance: directly they lose their hardness and their healthy appearance they look like nothing at all in the world.

I think that Rabot would have willingly offered his good cigarettes to his neighbours; but it is so difficult to talk sometimes, especially to give something to some one. The cigarettes got slowly covered with dust on the table, and Rabot lay flat on his back, quite thin and straight, like a bit of straw carried away by the torrent of war, and understanding nothing of what was happening all around him.

One day a staff officer came into the ward and went up to Rabot.

"That is the man," he said. "Well, I have brought him the Military Medal and the Croix de Guerre."

He made Rabot sign a little paper and left him alone with his playthings. Rabot did not laugh. He put the case out on the bedclothes in front of him, and he looked at it from nine o'clock in the morning till three in the afternoon.

At three the officer returned, and said:

"I made a mistake. The decorations were not for Rabot, but for Raboux."

Then he took the jewel-case, tore up the receipt, and went away.

Rabot cried from three o'clock in the afternoon till nine o'clock in the evening. Then he went to sleep. The next morning he began to cry again. M. Gossin, who is a good Director, went to Headquarters and came back with a medal and a cross just like the last; he even made Rabot sign another paper.

Rabot stopped crying. But his face was still haunted by a shadow—the shadow of a constant dread, as if he feared that one day or other they would come and take away all his treasures.

Some weeks passed. I often looked at Rabot's face, and I tried to imagine what laughter would make of it. I imagined and looked in vain; it was obvious that Rabot did not know how to laugh, and that his face was not made that way.

It was then that the lady in green arrived.

She came in one fine morning through one of the doors, like everybody else. On the other hand, she was not like everybody else: she was more like an angel, a queen, or a doll. She was not dressed like the nurses who worked in the wards, or like the mothers and wives who came to visit their wounded husbands and sons. She was not even like the women one meets in the streets. She was much more beautiful, much more majestic. She made one think of the fairies of one's childhood, or of those splendid forms one sees on great coloured calendars under which the artist has written "Reveries," or "Melancholy," or "Poetry." She was surrounded by well-dressed, good-looking officers, who attended to her slightest word, and who lavished on her the most extravagant compliments.

"Come in, then, Madame," said one of them, "since you wish to see some of our wounded." . . .

She made two steps into the room, stopped short, and said in a deep voice:

"The poor things!"

Every one in the ward opened his eyes and pricked up his ears. Mery put down his pipe; Tarrissant changed his crutches from one hand to the other, which, with him, is a sign of emotion; Domenge and Burnier stopped playing and pressed their cards against their bodies to hide them. Poupot did not move, because he is paralysed, but one could easily see that he was listening with all his might.

The lady in green went first to Sorri, the negro.

"Your name is Sorri?" she asked, reading his card.

The negro moved his head; the lady in green went on in a voice as sweet and melodious as an actress:

"You have come to fight for France, Sorri; and you have left your beautiful country—the fresh and smiling oasis in an ocean of burning sand. Ah, Sorri! how beautiful are the African evenings, at the hour when the young woman returns along the avenue of palm trees, carrying on her

head an aromatic pitcher full of honey and cocoanut milk!"

The officers murmured their appreciation, and Sorri, who understands French, repeated, nodding his head, "Cocoa! cocoa!"

Already the lady in green was gliding away over the tiled floor. She came to Rabot, and sat down on the end of his bed, like a swallow on a telegraph wire.

"Rabot," she said, "you are a brave man!"

Rabot did not answer; but in his usual way he blinked his eyes, like a child who fears a blow.

"Ah, Rabot!" said the lady in green, "what gratitude do we not owe you, who have guarded safely for us our dear France! But, Rabot, you have already gained the great reward. Glory! The joy of battle! The exquisite agony of plunging forward, your bayonet shining in the sun! The pleasure of plunging the iron of vengeance into the bleeding side of the enemy! And then the suffering—divine suffering to be endured for the sake of all; the sacred wound which,

of a hero, makes a god! Ah! wonderful memories, Rabot!"

The lady in green ceased, and a religious silence reigned in the ward.

Then something unexpected happened.

Rabot stopped looking like himself. All his features contracted, changing in an almost tragic way. A hoarse noise burst forth in spasms from his fleshless chest, and all the world realised that Rabot was laughing.

He laughed for over three-quarters of an hour. Long after the lady in green had gone, Rabot was still laughing—in fits, as one coughs, with a rattling noise.

After that the life of Rabot changed a little. When he was on the verge of tears and misery one could sometimes distract his attention and get a little laugh out of him if one said at the right moment:

"Rabot! they are going to bring the lady in green to see you."

IN THE VINEYARD

BETWEEN Epernay and Château-Thierry, the Marne flows through an exquisite valley, whose gay hills are rich in orchards and vine plantations, and crowned with verdure like woodland goddesses, and abundantly adorned with those plants which have made France a country without price, beautiful and noble.

It is the valley of rest. Jaulgonne, Dormans, Châtillons, Œuilly, Port-à-Binson—those old smiling villages can never be repaid for lavishing such hours of forgetful repose, that refresh like spring water, on the exhausted troops leaving Verdun for the once quiet sectors of the Aisne.

During the summer of 1916 the —— Corps was once again concentrated on the Marne, ready to take its share in the immense and bloody sacrifice on the Somme front. Our battalion was patiently waiting the word which would send them up the line; as they waited, they passed the time in calculating, from the top of the hills, the number of waggons that could be seen

struggling along far down in the valley, and as usual they made all sorts of conjectures.

Most of the time we passed in the fields with our friends, avoiding serious thought as much as possible, and letting the body enjoy to the full the repose which offered itself far from the murderous struggles on the front.

There had been a few days of dazzling heat, then the storm had come with a thundering sky, the clouds wildly charging, and a wide sweeping wind carrying along with it the dust or the mist.

Late one afternoon we happened to be on the road which rises gently from Chavenay to the copses of the south.

There were three of us. Conversation flagged, and, imperceptibly, we had each fallen back on our secret thoughts—thoughts that were full of pain, and which the climbing road seemed to make harder to bear.

"Let's sit down on this bank," said a voice softly.

Without replying, we found ourselves all at once lying in the silver-weed. We

tore it up abstractedly, like men who are obliged to work their muscles in order to think more freely.

A little grape-vine was growing at our feet and reached, with two graceful efforts, a ridge of earth gleaming with the freshness of wet grass. It was a neat, pure little vine of Champagne, bursting with juice, cared for like a divine and sacred thing. No wild plants; nothing but the stubbly vine-stock and the soil—that rich soil which the rains wash away and which, each season, the peasants carry up again, on their backs, right to the summit of the hills.

From amid this blend of green herbage we saw suddenly emerging an old thin woman, with a rusty complexion and hair white and disordered. In one hand she held a pail full of ashes, and with the other scattered handfuls of it on the feet of the vines.

On seeing us, she stopped, and adjusted with a dusty finger a coil of hair blown about by the wind. She stared at us. Then she spoke:

"What's your regiment, you others?"

"The 110th line, Madame."

"Mine did not belong to that regiment."

"You have boys in the army?"

"Ah! I had once."

There was silence, broken by the cry of animals, the gusts of the high wind, and the hissing murmur of the shaken foliage. The old woman scattered a few handfuls of the ashes, and then came near and began in a stumbling voice that often lost itself in the wind:

"I once had boys in the army. Now I have none. The two youngest are dead. I have one remaining—a poor wretch, who is hardly a soldier now."

"He is wounded, perhaps?"

"Yes, he is wounded. He has lost both arms."

The old woman put her bucket of ashes on the ground, removed some grass from her waist-belt and tied a wayward vine branch to a supporting stick, and, standing erect again, she exclaimed:

"He has been wounded as few have been.

He has lost his two arms, and in his thigh there is a hole big enough to contain a small bowl of milk. For ten days he was on the verge of death. I went to see him, and I said to him:

"'Clovis, you are not going to leave me all alone?'—for I must tell you they had been for a long while without a father.

"And he always used to reply:

"'I'll be better to-morrow.'

"No one was gentler than this boy."

We remained silent. One of us at length murmured:

"Your boy is brave, Madame!"

The old woman, who was looking at her grape-vine, turned her dim eyes towards us and said in an abrupt tone:

"Brave! of course! My boys could not be anything else!"

A laugh escaped her—a laugh almost of pride, a strangled laugh that lost itself at once in the wind. Then she appeared to talk absently:

"My poor unfortunate son will some day be able to look forward to marriage, for there

is no one so gentle as he is. But my two youngest, my two little ones! It's too much! Oh, God, it's too much!"

We could find nothing to say. There was nothing to say. With hair flying in the wind, she began again to scatter the ashes, like a sower of death. Her lips were compressed, and in her face there was a mixture of despair, bewilderment and defiance.

"What are you doing this for, Madame?" I asked, somewhat at random.

"You see, I'm mixing the ashes with the sulphate. It's the season. I shall never finish: I've too much to do, too much to do."

We had got up, as if we felt ashamed of disturbing this tireless worker in her task. Moved by a common impulse, we took off our hats to her.

"Good-night," she said, "and good luck, too, you others."

We climbed up the hill to the very edge of the wood without saying a word. Then we turned round and had a last look at the valley.

There on the hillside, in a mosaic of plots,

as it were, the vine plantation could be seen, with the old woman, ever so small, who was still sowing the ashes in the wind heavy with rain clouds. The gentle country maintained in face of the stormy heavens an attitude of innocence and resignation. Here and there, humble villages that glistened seemed to be set like coloured jewels in the earth. And right in the fields that were dressed for the needs of August, small specks that moved could be seen : a race of old men were at grips with the soil.

THE RAILWAY JUNCTION

TO die is simple enough; only you should have the good taste to die in some selected spot—unless, of course, you are in China, where the dead are supreme and exercise almost more authority than the living. But in our country you have got to die properly, otherwise the living will look askance at you and say, "What does this corpse want? There's no room for it here."

In 1915 I was going through a kind of probation period at the railway junction of X., and I went on duty two or three times a week. Going on duty meant being on the spot and doing small insignificant jobs, being on guard or making a note of what was passing. Usually the man in charge used to be found in some gloomy place leading to the lamp-room. There he endured the long weary hours without interruption, and watched the military trains passing, full of men who had undergone six months' campaigning. They sang while they journeyed from one hell to another, because in

war men do not let their thoughts travel far; as soon as they have got away from the guns they abandon themselves without restraint to the joy of being alive.

One Saturday night I was lying on a thick mattress which served as a bed. It was alive with mice. I felt these amiable little beasts at a finger's length from my ears, and I listened with wandering attention to the noises coming from the junction. They were the sounds of a great railway station: whistles, shrieks, puffing engines, cries of the winches and the cranes, the vibrations of the taut iron rails, the sharp clatter of the signals, the repeated clash of the buffers of colliding trucks; and in the midst of it all, the clamour and the rhythm of military movements, the swing of a detachment on the march, the challenges of the sentries, commands, bell-ringings—all those things which indicate the forcible possession by armed might of the industrial organism.

My thoughts were running along these lines when I saw Corporal Bonardent entering

my dug-out, blinding me with the flare of his acetylene lamp.

"Lieutenant!"

"I'm all attention, Bonardent."

"Some poor devil in the food transport has just got himself done in, on the semi-permanent way 17. I'm told it's a dreadful——"

"Let's go there at once, Corporal!"

Two men were waiting for me outside with a stretcher. It was a glorious night, upon which the pale and flickering lights of the station hardly made an impression.

"It's at La Folie," said Bonardent: "it's rather far from here."

La Folie is a road-crossing, about a mile off. I asked a porter how to get there, and we started.

What is really amazing, in a large station, is that the organising imperative will which directs the rush of moving things lies hidden behind an apparent state of chaos and entanglement. We began to walk along lines of trucks that never ended. They seemed to have been left there and forgotten

since the beginning of the war—rolling-stock that appeared to have had its day, with stiffened axles and couplings devoured by rust ; but suddenly our lamp would light up an open door, and some soldiers were seen in a heap, sleeping on the straw, or there were cattle with stupefied looks. A few compartments had been turned into travelling offices, where clerks drudged through a mass of papers in a light reflected from a drawing-room lamp-shade ; one felt that the terrible grasp of the administration had closed over the railways, just as its monstrous grip was in possession from the deep-dug trenches to the outfitting shops far away in the Pyrenees. Sometimes, crossing wide, dark spaces, we slipped between two trains that seemed petrified with eternal sleep ; but all at once, though no one could be seen, the trains began to move towards each other, their ends clashing with a terrific clatter. Farther on we had to stop while hospital trains were passing. They afforded little comfort then, and there came to us, as the trains went by, a broadside of heart-

rending coughs and puffs of the saturated chloride air with which the hospitals reeked. In addition, there were masses of fat mortars lashed on trucks, heaps of kitchens on wheels, and machinery whose uses one could not possibly guess, and all sorts of munitions of war, which night made fantastic. Heavy circular armour protected the cowering engines snorting in the pale light of the arc lamps. There were also, reminding one of former times, suburban trains that bore along drowsy passengers and express trains that swept over the intricate lines swift as a lash of the whip. In a word, a tumultuous roar, in which military movements clashed with the routine of civilian life.

At last we arrived at La Folie. It was an inextricable network of railways, discs, switches and metal cables. Three aged railway workers were living there in a shed. They were in shirt sleeves, and were turning the cranks, pulling the switches, directing with an orderly calm born of experience all the whirling forces which accumulated in that spot. They made me think of the foremen

in past times who used to carry on when the managing directors were indulging in the pleasures of social life.

Above the rumbling noises a telegraph bell could be heard patiently ringing.

"We have come for the A.S.C. man," said Bonardent.

"Oh! for that poor devil. He is there, under the sack and all around. My God!"

We entered the zone occupied by the corpse. I say "zone" deliberately, for the poor wretch had been cut up and scattered like a handful of grain at seed-time.

"God in Heaven!" said a railwayman with white hair; "why did the poor man come off the truck without looking round first? He made a terrible mistake. Here there is too much traffic for anyone to leave one's post."

The face of the dead man was intact, but sixty trucks had passed over his body, splitting it diagonally from the feet to the shoulders. We picked up, in one place and another, the remains—bleeding pieces of flesh, intestines, and, as I well remember, a hand

clutching a piece of cheese. Death had struck the man as he was eating.

The extraordinary thing was that his overcoat remained whole: it concealed from view the hideous annihilation of the body. Lifting it slightly, I saw his discipline book, on which one could decipher the name Lamailleux.

"I think," I said, "we've got him all now."

An electric lamp, perched high up, gave a fitful light and seemed to be suffering from irritating twitches.

I decided that we should take a short cut back across "The Artillery"—a huge siding where munition trains had been shunted. But, as we got near the railways, a sentry appeared:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

None of us had thought of the password. The territorial barred the way with his rifle. He was adamant:

"I am sorry, Lieutenant, but you must go another way: those are my orders."

A long turning brought us before another sentry.

"The password, please! You can't go through 'The Artillery' without it."

"My friend, we are taking away a dead body."

I raised the corner of the sacking and uncovered the bluish face. In the light of the acetylene a portion of the pale skin with some tattooed marks could be seen through the chaotic heap of clothes that were saturated with blood. A look of horror passed over the guard's face, but he said again:

"Lieutenant, go along the main line! It's not possible this way."

We plunged back again along the network of rails, disturbed by the clatter of the signals and the rumbling convoys. Sometimes the exhausted stretcher-bearers stopped and placed their burden on the stony embankment and carefully spat on their hands. Trains went by, and we could see, in the bright compartments, women reading, tightly clasping beautiful children who had fallen asleep.

At last the station lights came into view.

"Where are we taking the corpse?" I asked Bonardent.

"I don't know, sir."

I finally decided to present myself at the *Petite Vitesse*. A room there had been taken to receive the wreckage cast off from the swirling activity of the railway station—lost trunks, unemployed men, riderless beasts, stores with no destination, and, when necessary, corpses. A gendarme was smoking a cigarette in front of the door.

"Lieutenant, there's no room here to-day. It's full of fugitives from the north, with their kids and packages."

I uttered a few words of encouragement to my men, and made up my mind to try the "draft-pavilion." It was occupied by detachments that were rejoining their corps. The men were sleeping in heaps on the straw.

"Oh! you must see it's quite impossible to put it here with the men," said an adjutant, shaking his head. He added, as if to excuse himself:

"Put yourself in my place, Lieutenant. I

have no authority . . . I can't take charge of a corpse without orders. . . ."

I sat down on a stone. The stretcher-bearers, worn out, mopped their brows and uttered the word "Drink!" I looked at the shapeless mass of Lamailleux, which seemed quite indifferent to this last cross it had to bear, and it waited for its eternal resting-place with the sovereign patience of death.

"I don't suppose you are well acquainted with the station," said the Adjutant to me; "but there's a guard-room there for the transport men stationed here. I'll go and see."

I let him go and began to smoke, contemplating the night, which was warm and glorious. The tranquillity of the objects seemed, like the agitation of the men, to say distinctly: "Why is this man upsetting us all with this useless corpse?" And an insect, ecstatic in the rare grass, emitted a sharpening crescendo of sound like a little being who imagines that the whole earth exists and was made for him.

The Adjutant emerged from the darkness.

"It's most unfortunate. A man is locked up there for drunkenness: he has been sick all over the place."

"Well, all right! Let's go and see the station-master."

He was asleep. His deputy was reading the illustrated papers. While I stated my case he asked me to advise him what pictures he should cut out to stick on the walls from among the little women of the *Vie fantaisiste*, of which he seemed to be an inveterate reader. As I remained surly, he said, as if in parenthesis:

"As for this dreadful business, it is an awful pity that the hospital is at the other end of the town. You can't go there at this time of night. Put the thing in a truck until to-morrow morning, old chap!"

Having, by this wonderful suggestion, relieved himself of all responsibility, the young man stuck his nose again into the illustrated paper.

At that time they had not erected at the railway stations those large hospitals of wood and cardboard which are to be seen every-

where now. The idea of the truck I did not entertain for two seconds. In imagination I saw this improvised mortuary starting out during the night and taking away the corpse. It was a mad idea!

I went to the postmen: they were sorting out the letters. They were humming: "It is I who am Nénesse." There wasn't room for a rat in their hutch, and at once they regarded the question as quite beyond their jurisdiction. . . .

I came out overcome with a kind of annoyance. Really, nobody took the slightest interest in my dead man. I muttered to myself: "Why, why, Lamailleux, did you let yourself die in a place where corpses are not wanted, and at a moment when no one has time to deal with them?" But even as I said that, I felt none the less a kind of link being established between me and this wreckage, and I looked at it as at something which puzzles you, but which belongs to you in spite of everything.

"Where shall we put the poor man?" said Bonardent.

Then the simplest solution struck me.

"Follow me," I said.

Quietly we went back towards the lamp-room.

"There's no room there, Lieutenant."

"Proceed, Corporal."

I got the stretcher carried into the room reserved for my use.

"Now, put it there, alongside my mattress, and go to bed."

The men went out, shaking their heads with amazement. I remained alone with Lamailleux and lay down on the sheets. War had already taught me to live and to sleep in the company of the dead, and I was surprised that I had not, from the first, thought of so natural a solution.

For a long time, in the light of a candle, I looked at the frightful heap which was my night companion. There was no smell yet. I blew out the candle and could think at leisure.

From the stretcher there fell softly every second a drop of something which must have been blood. For a long time I counted the

drops, thinking of many things that were as mournful as the epoch I lived in. Loud whistles pierced the blackness, and I had already counted several hundreds of the drops when I fell into a sleep that was like that of my comrade—undisturbed by dreams.

THE HORSE-DEALERS

THEY have all been summoned to report at noon, though many of them will not be wanted until evening.

There they stand round the entrance—like a dark puddle, one would almost say; others are scattered about in the garden, gloomily walking up and down.

It is an afternoon of February. The heavy and anxious sky is surcharged in one limitless stretch. It appears to bear no relation to the little events that happen down here, so melancholy is its mood. The wind is surly. It must know what they are doing far away, but it says nothing; not even the deepest rumble of the cannon is borne along the breeze; we are far away, and must forget. . . .

The wind swirls in between the buildings, sweeps back on itself, enraged like a wild beast caught in a trap.

The men pay no attention to the sky, or to the wind, or to the chilling light of winter; they are thinking of themselves.

They do not know each other; they

have been brought here by a cause which is common to all of them. They are so bewildered and exhausted that they cannot even pretend to be indifferent.

On a closer view, there is about them something that sets them all into a class apart: a lack of physical vitality, a sickly look about the body, too much flesh or too little, eyes blazing with fever, sometimes an obvious infirmity, more often a wan skin faintly coloured with very poor blood. Never a joyous relaxation of healthy muscles: all of them have the slow, dragging movement of the snail.

Finding themselves herded together an unendurable thought, some have started a conversation to satisfy their pride; others are silent, too proud to talk.

There are wage-earners there, professional men, and long-haired intellectuals whose bitter looks are veiled by spectacles.

Everybody smokes. Never has it been so clear that tobacco is an anodyne for soul sickness.

From time to time, two or three men

reach the garden gate and disappear for a few minutes. They return wiping their mouths, their breath reeking with wine.

Every few minutes the door opens. A gendarme appears and calls out some names. Those who are called push their way through the crowd, as if drawn by threads.

Their mouths twitch a little at the corners. They affect a detached, bored, or chaffing expression, and they vanish under the arch.

They no longer see the February sky; no longer do they breathe the cold odorous wind: they are pushed one against the other into a filthy corridor, from the walls of which—painted Heaven knows how!—oozes a thick, slimy sweat.

They remain there herded for some time, until another door opens. A gendarme counts them off by the dozen, like fruit or cattle, and hustles them into a large hall where the Thing is to take place. . . .

At once a sickening smell of man makes them gasp. They cannot at first see very clearly what all the movement going on

there is about. But they are left no time to think.

What indeed is the good of thinking at a time when an immense lamenting cry escapes from the entire stricken nation—a desperate call, the death-rattle of a drowning people?

Why think? Does that frenzied, roaring whirlwind which lays waste the old continent, does *that* think? No, it is not indeed the time for thought.

The men have to undress quickly and fall in—in rows.

The hall is huge and forbidding. Its walls are decorated with texts, and there are busts of unknown men; in the centre a table, as at a tribunal.

Some big-wig, white-haired and rather arrogant, is enthroned there; he seems exhausted, but pertinacious. He is assisted by some obscure supernumeraries.

In front of the table, two doctors in white overalls—one old and wizened, the other still young, with a preoccupied, listless look.

The men advance in single files towards each of the doctors in white: they march one behind the other like suppliants proceeding to the altar of an angered God. They do not know what to do with their arms.

They are not the flower of the race: for a long time now the finest men in the land have been living up to their waists in mud, alert as cats to the dangers threatening them. It is long since the farmer found any, thing in his winnow except chaff and dust, and it is there still that he searches with an avaricious hand for a few scattered grains.

The men are not cold: hot blasts of air come rushing along the floor from a blazing heating apparatus. Yet many of the men shiver. Balancing sometimes on one hip, sometimes on another, they fold and unfold their arms, then drop them, failing to strike any attitude. They are ashamed of their nakedness.

In the corner, near the door, a gendarme is pushing and hustling a thin, frail little worker who is too slow in undressing: he

thought he need not pull off his socks and pants. He is forced to do so, however, and he discloses two unwashed feet.

The men in overalls work with feverish haste, like scene-shifters on the stage.

They ask short, succinct questions, and at once they feel and press with their quickly moving hands.

The victim is rather pale. A warm dew comes out in beads on his temples. He mumbles and speaks entreatingly. Then, examined once again, he replies with more assurance.

"You only suffer from that. Do you cough?"

"Yes."

"You are sure you suffer from palpitation of the heart?"

"Oh, quite sure, quite!"

"Then you have pain in talking?"

"Yes; that above all."

"Your digestion is not good?"

"No; it never has been."

The man seemed quite reassured. He replied with a kind of enthusiasm—like some

one who is at last understood. But, all at once, the old doctor shrugs his shoulders and reveals the trap:

"You've got everything wrong with you —that's quite clear. Well, you are classed A1—the fighting line."

"But surely you are aware——"

"You have too many illnesses; there's nothing wrong with you. Get out! The fighting line for you!"

Sometimes somebody coughs, and at once a storm of coughing breaks out among the men gathered there.

A big grey-haired fellow comes out of a dark corner. Everybody shrinks away from him, with a kind of disgust. Then he remonstrates with his neighbours:

"Hang it! D'you think that spots on the skin . . ."

Behind him, collapsed almost on a bench, a tall man who might be anything between twenty and sixty years of age is carefully undressing. His face makes you feel very sorry for him: he seems plunged in the depths of human despair. He takes off an

incredible amount of clothing, knitted vests and woollen things; and then there appear some very touching articles: satchels, flannel fronts, scapularies, objects of devotion. All these he places on the bench. The men next to him shift suddenly, and his clothes slip on the floor and are trodden upon by those who have just come in. The man is very pale, as if people were trampling upon his intimate life and his self-respect.

A discussion suddenly breaks upon the silence. The old doctor was exclaiming in a furious tone:

"I tell you I can hear nothing!"

With both hands he was pressing down the shoulders of a poor weak wretch as thin as a poker, and who looked terrified.

With one word the poor devil was ordered into the fighting forces, and he went away, more upset, trembling and panic-stricken than he would ever be in the trenches in front of the machine-guns.

But at the other end of the hall something unusual was happening.

"I tell you I can walk," protested a

rasping voice, eaten away by goodness knows what disease.

"No," replied the young doctor, "no; be reasonable, and go home. We'll take you later when you've recovered."

"If you don't want me, I shall do myself in. . . . But I tell you I have reasons for going to the front. I am not going to stand any more insults day after day."

A short silence takes possession of everyone in the room: the echo of a tragedy is felt. The man is obviously very ill. His chest is horrible, distorted by violent breathing. He can hardly stand on his swollen legs, which are marked with large purple veins.

"Rejected!" cries the judge.

And the unfortunate creature returns to his rags, with lowered shoulders, his eyes dazed like a bull that has been felled.

The man who followed was a fatalist: he refused to discuss his position.

"That won't prevent you serving."

"Bah! just as you like."

"Then, the fighting line!"

"As you wish; I don't care a damn."

And he withdraws immediately, liberated like a man who stakes his future on a mere throw of the dice.

All those who go away leave behind them something of the heavy smell of unwashed bodies. Curious thing, they all have a fetid breath; for that day they have eaten too quickly, badly digested their food, smoked and drunk too much. From all these mouths comes the same warm, sour breath which betrays the same emotion—the same breakdown of the machine.

The atmosphere of the room gradually thickens. The lamps, which had been lit quite early, appear to be lined with a heavy clinging moisture that affects all the objects in the room. But above all hovers something more elusive and discordant—the air seems to be charged with nervous energy, the fragments of broken wills, the wreckage of the thoughts abandoned there by men who had to strip themselves naked, who were afraid, who yearned and did not yearn, who measured with anguish their powers of

resistance and the sacrifice they had to make, who fought with all their might against the forces of destiny.

The men in overalls continue to move about among these human bodies. They do not stop feeling, manipulating, judging. They sink the ends of their fingers into the flesh of the shoulders and sides; they press the biceps with their thumb and middle finger, move joints, examine teeth and the inside of eyelids, pull hair, and tap chests as customs officers do casks. Then they make the men walk from left to right, and right to left. They make them bend, straighten themselves, kneel down, or expose the most secret parts of their person.

Sometimes a breath of fresh air seems to come into the room: two well-built young men are asking to be enlisted. One hardly understands why they are there. . . .The whole tribunal looks at them with astonishment, as at pieces of golden ore in a handful of mud.

They pass with a proud, rather forced smile. Again the procession begins of pathetic

ugliness, terrors, despairs, incurable and ravaged fears. The tribunal made one think of a jagged cliff against which persons are dashed like sea-birds blown by a storm.

The doctors show signs of exhaustion. The oldest, who is rather deaf, throws himself doggedly into his work, like a boar into the thicket. The young doctor is obviously suffering and irritated. He has the shrinking and uneasy look of some one engaged in an odious task and who finds no relief.

And always human flesh abounds ; always from the same corner of the room comes the long row of wan bodies, who walk gingerly on the floor.

Sacred human flesh, sacred substance which serves thought, art, love, everything great in life—it is now nothing but a vile, evil-smelling lump of suet which one handles with disgust to find whether it is yet ready for the slaughter.

Everybody begins to suffer from an insistent headache.

The work goes on as in a dream, with the silences, the dragging movements, and the

dark gaps of bad dreams. Two hours more pass in this way. Then suddenly some one says :

" Here are the last ten."

They come in and undress one after the other. They have waited so long they seem exhausted, emptied, crushed. They accept the verdict listlessly and mechanically, as if felled by a blow ; they go away in haste, without speaking, without looking round.

The doctors wash their hands, as once did Pontius Pilate ; they sign some papers ceremoniously and disappear.

Night has come. The wind has fallen. A fog that absorbs the factory smoke still hangs over the town. Leaning against a lamp-post one of the last men examined vomits, after excruciating efforts, the wine he drank in the afternoon. The road is dark and deserted.

The whole place reeks with the stench of the vomiting and the fog.

A BURIAL

AS we seated ourselves at the table M. Gilbert asked :

"What time is Lieutenant Limberg's funeral ? "

"Three o'clock, Doctor," replied the faithful Augustus ; "an infantry platoon will come from his own regiment, which is at the moment leaving the firing line and is billeted at Morcourt."

" That's right ; send for Bénezech."

And we began to enjoy the piquancy of a cucumber salad. September was fading slowly, but the furnace on the Somme was getting ever fiercer. The roar of the cannon seemed to fill the immensity of the heavens, as if a great tragedy was happening in the heart of the world. We were slightly stupefied through having spent many nights without sleep—nights passed in trying to stem the torrent of blood, and save some of the wreckage that swept down with it.

Lieutenant Limberg was one of the saddest cases : for two weeks we tried to drag him out of the swirling eddy, when, all of a

sudden, he sank rapidly, attacked by virulent meningitis, stammering and uttering aloud fantastic things, which gave his death a monstrous atmosphere of comedy.

Nothing gives greater offence or greater pain than to witness the torture and delirium suffered by men injured in the brain. How many times have I wished, when confronted with these terrible sights, that our indifferent rulers should be forced to look at them! But it is useless insisting on this. If people have no imagination, they can never learn. I had better go on with my tale.

We were struggling with a tough piece of beef when Bénezech came in.

The Abbé Bénezech, a second-grade hospital orderly, combined various functions, including those of a secretary and chaplain. He was a plump, slow-witted man, with a formidable jaw. He grew a large unkempt beard, and he badly felt the want of those cares and attentions which a devoted flock had showered on him. Much too holy a person to attach any importance to cares of the toilette, he had gradually degenerated

into a slovenly old man. But it was with patience that he waited for his return to the sweet amenities of his living.

"Bénezech," said M. Gilbert, rather familiarly, "what time do you bury Lieutenant Limberg?"

"Three o'clock, sir."

"The body has been taken out?"

"It should be in the mortuary shed."

"Good! Was the lieutenant a Catholic?"

"Oh! yes; he most certainly was, sir. Thank God! He took the sacrament yesterday."

"Then everything is all right. Thank you, Bénezech."

The chaplain went out. Relapsing again into our somnolent state, we returned to our unappetising dish of vermicelli. As we were finishing, an orderly came in and handed a card to M. Gilbert.

"The officer," he added, "insists on seeing you at once."

M. Gilbert repeatedly looked at the card with the strained attention of a man who feels he is falling asleep.

"Oh! well," he sighed; "show him in."

And he added, turning towards us:

"Second Lieutenant David? Do you know him? You don't?"

The Second Lieutenant was already at the door. Over his frizzly hair he wore the small cap distinctive of the light infantry. He had big lips, a faint, twisted moustache, the magnificent dark eyes of a Jewish trader, a hint of corpulence, short fat hands.

"Monsieur," he said, "my battalion is going up the line, and I'm taking advantage of my passing here to get permission to see one of your patients—Lieutenant Limberg, a friend of mine."

M. Gilbert, who had rather an expressive little nose, showed by a convulsive movement of that organ that he was much upset.

"Give the lieutenant a chair," he began, with the calm good sense of a man who knows how to break bad news. Then he proceeded:

"My dear friend, the news I have to give you of Lieutenant Limberg is very sad:

the unfortunate man had a serious wound in the skull, and——"

"He is dead?" asked the officer, in a strangled voice.

"Yes, he is dead. We are burying him to-day at three o'clock."

Second Lieutenant David remained for some time without moving. A nervous twitch began to work one side of his face. He looked stunned, and wiped his temples, that suddenly began to sweat profusely. We showed our respect for this evident pain. In a moment or two he got up, saluted, and was about to take leave of us.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "he was my best friend . . ."

In an absent way he gave each of us his plump clammy hand to shake, and he was going out, when he stopped on the doorstep.

"One word more, Doctor. My friend Limberg was a Jew—I am too—I thought it was better to tell you. . . ."

He was gone. A short silence intervened, then M. Gilbert began to strike the table

with the handle of his knife—a succession of rapid knocks.

"What did he say? Limberg a Jew? It's really too much! Call Bénezech."

M. Gilbert was a stubborn, explosive man, given to violent reactions. He seemed to forget the heat, his exhaustion, and his digestion. He began to throw little pellets of bread-crumbs wildly all over the room. He had the intense, expectant air of a cartridge the fuse of which has been set alight. Bénezech came to an abrupt stop at the door, overwhelmed by the might of the doctor's vocal organs, which left no one in doubt as to what he felt.

"Ah! it's you, is it? A fine mess you were going to get me in!"

"Doctor!"

"Listen! Lieutenant Limberg was a Jew, and you were going to give him a Catholic funeral."

"A Jew!"

"Yes; I say a Jew!"

The priest smiled, supremely incredulous.

"He was not a Jew, Doctor, because I

administered the sacrament to him yesterday again."

M. Gilbert stopped short, like a horse who shies at a wheelbarrow. Then he whispered absently:

"Then you don't believe a word I say!"

"Oh, Doctor!" protested the priest, and he raised his hands, the palms outwards, with an unction that was surprising in a soldier who arranged his putties so dapperly in corkscrew fashion from his ankles.

"Yes, you may quite well have given him the sacrament," said M. Gilbert; "but what did he have to say in the matter?"

"I'm sure I don't know what he could say," interrupted Augustus, "when, as you know, for the last ten days he has been quite delirious."

"That's true," remarked M. Gilbert. "What have you got to say to that, Bénezech?"

"I don't know what to think, Doctor; but I can't believe that a young man as well educated as Lieutenant Limberg was

not a Catholic. He took the sacrament twice with me."

"That may be; but did he tell you he was a Catholic?"

"But, Doctor, how could I insult him by asking him, especially when he was in such a sad state. Besides, he came here wearing crosses on his neck. I gave him several myself, which he willingly took."

"Evidently there is something wrong," said M. Gilbert. "You tell me that Limberg was a Catholic; well, we have just been told that he was Jewish. You had better send first for the rabbi of the division. Then, to make sure, send me a despatch-rider from Limberg's battalion. We shall find out from them."

Bénezech went out, raising his hands several times, his fingers spread apart, looking perplexed.

"Let's go to the mortuary tent," said M. Gilbert, getting up from the table.

It was a disused tent where coffins were placed on biers ready for burial services.

Wrapped in an old flag, Limberg's coffin

had been placed on two boxes. A ray of sunlight broke obliquely across the shadow, revealing a glittering swarm of mosquitos. Some hens were pecking at the fine gravel. This place of death seemed like a haven of rest on the edge of the tempest of war.

An orderly came in, placed two candles on the table, lit them, and stood a crucifix between them.

"Damn!" muttered M. Gilbert between his teeth; "it's very tiresome, all this fuss."

As we were coming out of the place, we saw Bénezech and the despatch-rider. Bénezech's beard seemed to bristle with triumph. With his fingers on his *képi*, he saluted as if he were pronouncing the benediction, and he said in a celestial voice:

"Information from the battalion, Doctor: Lieutenant Limberg was a Catholic."

"Confound it all!" cried the doctor. "Have you a written note?"

"No," replied the cyclist. "The officers only discussed the matter among themselves, and they said he was a Catholic. You will see them yourself presently: they are

coming to the funeral with the infantry platoon."

M. Gilbert stamped on the ground. He was very red, and the unruly movements of his nose showed that a decision was about to be made.

"Can I get ready for the service?" asked Bénezech, with the innocent and measured tone of a man who does not press home his victory.

"What!" said M. Gilbert. "The service? As you please—get ready as much as you like. I have my own idea now."

Our devoted Augustus, who had left us for a few minutes, came back with a packet of envelopes.

"I have been looking into the private correspondence of the lieutenant. I find nothing conclusive, except perhaps this post-card, signed by a Mr. Blumenthal, who calls Lieutenant Limberg 'his cousin.' Blumenthal —that's a Jewish name."

"Perhaps so," said M. Gilbert; "but I don't mind now. I have my own idea."

"It is true," said Augustus hesitatingly,

"that you could still—have the coffin opened."

"No! you mustn't think of it!" M. Gilbert firmly replied; "and I repeat, I have my own idea. Let's go back to our work."

We returned then to work; and that lasted about two and a half hours. Then the orderly reappeared.

"Monsieur, the Jewish chaplain wants to see you."

"I'm coming," he said.

He put on his four-striped *képi*, took off his overalls, and disappeared.

Looking through the window, I saw the rabbi of the division arriving. He got out of a pedlar's cart drawn by a crook-kneed mule. With his black skull-cap, his flowing beard, his long coat, his cross-hilted stick, his tall bent figure in the distance, he seemed to me like the Polish Jews one reads of in popular novels. He appeared a man of mature age, and got off the step with the dignity of a patriarch.

My curiosity was aroused, and I went out to see what was going to happen. Twenty

steps from the cart, in the bend of an avenue, I again saw the rabbi, without at first recognising him : his beard was black, rather frizzly, he had a very slight tendency to corpulence, his smile was that of an Assyrian god, and there was something in his looks of the Eastern calm of the Mediterranean Sea.

I skirted a shed and found myself face to face with the doctor and the Jewish chaplain. I saw at once that I had been twice mistaken. He was a man of the world, not old at all, wearing pince-nez, with a studious, attentive appearance, aloof and erudite—the "distinguished" air of a university graduate. He spoke the rather cosmopolitan French of a man who knows six or seven languages, but who has not perfectly mastered the correct accent of any of them.

"Really, Doctor," he was saying, "we have many Limbergs in the East. I know several families."

"I'm sure you do," replied M. Gilbert courteously. "But I have finally decided what to do. Will you come along now, sir?"

We walked slowly to the tent. As we got near, the ground vibrated with the rapid tread of a small company on the march, and the infantry platoon appeared. Some officers followed, a little distance off.

Everybody stopped before the tent, and we saw Bénezech coming out. Over his jacket he had thrown an ancient surplice, which seemed to have seen service not only in the present war, but in every war of the past century.

"Gentlemen," said the doctor rather emphatically, "an unfortunate thing has happened. We cannot tell with certainty what was Lieutenant Limberg's religion. The information you have sent us would tend to show he was Catholic."

"A practising Catholic," added Bénezech, taking advantage of a pause.

"May I ask you," continued the doctor, "on what you base your judgment?"

The officers looked at one another, as if they had been caught unawares.

"Why!" said one of them, "he never told us he was a Jew."

"But——"

"Oh! I have definite evidence," said a captain: "he went to Mass several times with me."

"But, hang it!" said M. Gilbert to this obtuse soldier, "that proves nothing. Why! I go myself to Mass sometimes. . . . It's true," he added, "I'm not a Jew. As for Limberg: to-day I saw one of his intimate friends, who informed me that the lieutenant held the Jewish faith."

Another pause intervened. The soldiers had piled arms in the avenue. All present seemed perplexed and hesitating. The two priests had not looked at one another yet, and seemed to be examining the uniform of the officers with the greatest care.

At that moment two stretcher-bearers came out of the tent carrying the coffin draped with the French colours. They took three paces forward, and the priest and the rabbi found themselves suddenly one on each side of the corpse.

"Gentlemen," said the doctor, in a voice a prophet would use when thinking of Solomon

—" gentlemen, because of the uncertainty, I have decided that Lieutenant Limberg shall be buried according to the rites both of the Roman Catholic and of the Hebrew Church. There will then be no possibility of a mistake being made; at most, one superfluous service. We know that God recognises his own. These gentlemen will proceed in turn. I believe I am doing a wise and just thing."

The officers nodded their heads, without betraying what they thought. The two priests, for the first time, looked at one another. They looked at each other over the coffin, and bowed as if they had only just arrived. Moved by the same impulse, they both affected a curious smile; but their eyes had no share in it. They confronted each other like two members of a family who have a feud of centuries behind them, and who meet in the presence of a man of the world.

Between them, the stake was, not a soul, but a box containing a stiff body, distorted by a death-agony of ten days—a box wrapped

in a symbolic shroud which a light breeze ruffled.

The two priests looked at one another with interest for one long moment. On one side, the country priest, with an ungainly peasant build: on the other the cultured and cosmopolitan rabbi, with the sophisticated smile, old as the Bible.

"Really," whispered Augustus in my ear—"really, Bénezech has done it often enough in his time; he might let the other have a chance."

"You be quiet!" said M. Gilbert, who had overheard him; "You are a fool to talk like that. This is no laughing matter."

Bénezech was just very slightly shrugging his shoulders; he lowered his eyes and stammered:

"Monsieur, if Lieutenant Limberg was really of the Hebrew faith, I would prefer to withdraw."

"Do as you think best, Bénezech," said M. Gilbert.

The rabbi continued to smile. He had the patient look of a believer who knows

that the Messiah once failed to appear at the appointed time, and that one must continue to expect him for thousands of years again.

" Then," said Bénezech, quite low, " I withdraw, Doctor."

He made a few steps, and we heard him murmur as he withdrew :

" The chief thing is that he should receive the sacrament. And he has—twice."

The rabbi was still smiling, as if he was thinking : " As for me, I remain."

M. Gilbert made a sign. Commands rang out, and everybody stood at the salute.

NO, my dear fellow, the war hasn't changed everybody.

You didn't know M. Perrier-Langlade?

He was what we should call a great organiser—a man who might, for instance, hit upon a spot where everything was going on all right, and everyone knew his job and was busy at it. But to M. Perrier-Langlade, who had very original views as to what was practical, everything was going quite wrong. Objects had at once to be moved from their places and jobs had to be exchanged. He walked with a stick in his right hand—*his* working tool—which he waved like a fencer or an orchestral conductor: he tapped everybody with this annoying stick, and commands fell from him like hail from a cloud. One works-section which his genius had reorganised was several weeks before it could be set going again with anything like its old smoothness. M. Perrier-Langlade had ideas: and that is an event of momentous importance. For ordinary mortals, you know, can never

pretend to ideas: these are the preserve of the great. And the height of M. Perrier-Langlade's ingenuity was to think that the suggestions we had all been wanting to work out were entirely his own. But that again did not lead to efficiency; for this rare mind was ever open to the latest thing in ideas—showing, let us admit, a very generous disposition. He bent to every gust of wind. He was indeed so unpractical that his sense of the relation between thought and action was of the haziest. But that of course is the penalty of an exalted position, and in other respects M. Perrier-Langlade was a great organiser.

He loved figures. Let us do him this justice: he handled them with the freedom of an expert. He saw in them a deep meaning which always escaped our unmathematical minds.

M. Perrier-Langlade I had only seen from a distance—and on rare occasions; but at last I was to talk to him. What am I saying!—I am presuming a great deal: you know what my rank is—well, then, I was at last to be admitted to the presence of

M. Perrier-Langlade, to hear him discourse, to profit by the kind of education which the most insignificant of his utterances and movements were able to bestow.

It occurred last winter, during the weeks of intense cold. For a fortnight it had been blowing—a sharp, despairing, cold east wind.

The cold and the wind had given rise to an epidemic of fires on the front. The little stoves had been stuffed to their fullest capacity, and they crackled and smoked convulsively, and the corners of sheds sometimes caught their fever. A flame stuck its nose outside: the wind snapped at it, twisted, stretched it, swelled it like a sail, and most often it cost five or six thousand francs in wood, paper, canvas, and other materials. When the Germans saw it happening within gunshot distance, they despatched a few explosives with the charitable object of helping on its sinister designs. It's what you must expect, you know. You either make or you don't make war. And the miserable world has made it—there's no shadow of doubt about that.

We had lost in this way many huts, which were happily cut off from the others, and it had been a useful warning to us when, one night, about one o'clock, a fire—a terrible fire—broke out in Hut 521, which could be seen on the plain three or four miles away from us.

We had just put on our boots and had gone out to watch it. What a sight it was! The huge furnace with its tongues of flame, the bluish country benumbed with frost, the wind which seemed to ripple like water in the moonlight, and the reflections of the fire on the Siberian landscape, honeycombed with the old trenches of 1915.

We were horrified at the thought of what was happening there; but we did not dare to leave our post.

And we did right; for towards 3 A.M. a long line of motors came hooting before the door—some of the wounded rescued from the fire were being brought to us.

We got them out of the cars. How patient they were, poor things! Two with fractured skulls, one with an amputated leg,

and another with a broken leg, and several less seriously wounded. They had lost in the fire all the possessions which, as soldiers, they were allowed to have—the linen bag you see hanging on the bed, containing a knife, a box of matches, three or four old letters, and a small lead pencil. I repeat, they did behave well; but they were pitiful to look at. They really looked like people who for one awful moment had lain helpless in their beds while the flames surrounded them, and who were conscious of only one agonising thought: "If help doesn't come at once, in five minutes it will be too late."

We put them into bed, and got them warm again: they needed it. I well remember seeing icicles glistening on the bandages of the man with the broken leg. It was a sorry business. The whole night long we looked after them; and only in the morning were we able to chat round the coffee-pot. The wounded were dozing. The hut was almost warm. We had made them wear cotton caps and woollen vests, and drink a cupful of boiling milk. They were in a

half-dozing, half-waking state and seemed to be thinking: "Lord! what a narrow shave! And it's the second one too. We had better look out for the third."

It was then, old fellow, that M. Perrier-Langlade arrived on the scene.

I had gone out—I don't remember why—and I was kicking my heels on the frosty ground, when I saw a sumptuous motor-car come to a stop on the road. The door clicked open, and M. Perrier-Langlade came out, staggering under a heavy, luxurious fur cloak.

I at once thought: "Ah, good! Here's M. Perrier-Langlade coming to cheer up my poor patients."

I had a hundred yards to cover. I leaped over some dizzy gratings, and I arrived, rather out of breath, just in time to spring to attention before the door. M. Perrier-Langlade stamped with annoyance.

"What!" he said to me. "There is no one here to receive me!"

"I ask your pardon, Monsieur——"

"Hold your tongue! You can see for yourself there is no one here. You have

to-night taken in some of the wounded from Hut 521. I went to see the fire myself—at two o'clock in the morning—risking an attack of pneumonia. I'm not bothering about that, though; but it is my wish that some one should be here to receive me—here—when I come out of the car. If you hadn't come there would have been no one, and I will not be kept waiting these very cold days. In future you will have an orderly permanently stationed here."

"But you understand, Monsieur——"

"Hold your tongue! How many wounded did you take in to-night?"

"Thirteen, Monsieur. It is true that——"

"Enough! Thirteen! Thirteen!"

M. Perrier-Langlade began to repeat the number, presumably for his own benefit. It was quite clear that this number suggested to his mind thoughts of a deep and wide significance. I don't know what foolish impulse made me then open my mouth.

"But note, sir——"

"Be quiet!" he said angrily. "Thirteen! Thirteen!"

I felt extremely confused and took refuge in complete silence. That didn't last long. Ravier was approaching as fast as his legs could carry him: he had seen the motor, and had galloped. . . . He stopped dead at five paces, his two heels stuck in the crunching snow, and saluted.

"There you are," remarked M. Perrier-Langlade—"not too soon either. How many wounded have you taken in to-night that you wouldn't have ordinarily?"

Ravier gave me a despairing look. I showed him my open hand, holding apart my fingers, and Ravier, in spite of his discomfiture, replied:

"Five, sir."

"Five! Five!" said M. Perrier-Langlade. "Then it is not thirteen, but five!"

I jumped as if some one had stuck a hatpin in me.

"But note, sir, that——"

"Hold your tongue!" he said, with an authoritative calm. "Five! Five!"

And he began to repeat this word, with an air that was at once Olympian and indulgent,

like some one who cannot reproach men who are too ignorant to enjoy the supreme delights of arithmetic.

We looked at one another, astounded, when we heard the tread of a pair of hobnailed boots, and M. Mourgue appeared, his nose blue with cold, his little beard quite stiff, and emitting, as he panted, a cloud of steam.

"Ah! at last!" cried M. Perrier-Langlade. "Here you are, Monsieur Mourgue. Will you be good enough to tell me how many men you have at present in your huts?"

M. Mourgue appeared to sink into himself before replying, in a preoccupied tone:

"Twenty-eight, sir."

M. Perrier-Langlade this time laughed a bitter, discouraged laugh.

"Well, well! it is not thirteen, nor five, but twenty-eight! Twenty-eight! And I was suspecting——"

"But, sir——" we cried all together excitedly.

From beneath the cloak of fur he thrust out his hand, which, in spite of its velvet glove, was none the less a mailed fist.

"Be silent, gentlemen! You do not understand. Twenty-eight!"

We looked at each other as if we had suddenly gone mad. M. Perrier-Langlade, carried away by sublime meditation, walked to and fro repeating, "Twenty-eight! Twenty-eight!"

I noticed his voice had almost a provincial inflection, and was not without geniality. For a few moments he repeated, first shaking his head, then with increasing joy, "Twenty-eight! Twenty-eight!" And I was convinced that to him figures did not mean the same thing as they do to you or me.

Then he abruptly saluted, with a supreme, imperious courtesy.

"Good-bye, gentlemen! Twenty-eight! Twenty-eight!"

And he went off to his car, rubbing his hands together, with the savage joy of a man who has got hold of some absolute truth.

DISCIPLINE

FRANKLY, I do not regret those four days' imprisonment. True, they cost me a terrific cold—and perhaps I may here be allowed to say that the guard-room was anything but clean—still, I learnt some very useful things. Indeed, I can hardly cry out against the injustice of it in view of the inestimable benefit I received and the insight it gave me. No, I am not sorry for having experienced, at the age of forty-six, the straw of the prison cell that every one admits to be damp and unhealthy.

When the sergeant, who is not at all a bad fellow, though afflicted with a painful disease, came and told me, "Monsieur Bouin, you've got four days guard-room," I was at first amazed and incredulous. At the same time, it was early in the day, and the sergeant, who never joked before his morning operation, added with a doleful expression :

"Some one named Bouin ought to have been on duty last night in the hospital. But no one turned up. It wasn't perhaps you, my poor Monsieur Bouin, who cut your

job, but it's certainly you who have four days' imprisonment."

The sergeant stopped. I felt something gripping me in the pit of the stomach, and a heavy blush added to my discomfort. Right up to the first weeks of the war, my life had been peaceful and happy: there were some emotions I had not until then experienced, and I could not get accustomed to them, so that I was acutely conscious of the indignity I now had to suffer.

"Sergeant," I said, "it can't be true. I was on hospital duty the day before yesterday, and I am to-morrow again. It wasn't my turn last night, I am quite certain."

I must have been very red and trembling, for the sergeant looked at me for a moment or two, evidently feeling very sorry. Then he said, "Just wait a moment. I'll go and see the orderly officer"; and he went out.

I went back to my scrubbing. That is very tiring work for a man who has spent his life studying mathematics; but in September 1914 a spirit of determination and of sacrifice had aroused all Frenchmen worthy

of the name. I had volunteered to serve my country humbly, proudly, within the extreme limits of my strength; and as it was upon my physical strength that the demand was chiefly being made, I used every day to scrub the floor with enthusiasm. On that morning I threw myself frantically into the job, with such a will indeed that heavy drops of perspiration undid my work. I suffered, but was quite content: we water our native soil with what we can. Don't you think so?

The sergeant came back.

"Monsieur Bouin," he said, "it's you all right. You've got four days' clink, and it's a dirty trick they are playing on you. Quite lately a doctor joined up who has the same name as yours, but he hasn't yet been given his rank. As he does the work of a major, he hasn't to stick it on night duty. But the clerks, who never know anything, put him down for duty, and that's how no one turned up. You understand? Then the colonel ordered four days' imprisonment. But the orderly officer got him to see that he couldn't punish the doctor,

who's got his job to do! But you see the punishment has been posted under the name Bouin; and as some one has got to be punished, I suppose it's got to be you. . . ."

I was holding one of those scrubbing-sticks at the end of which a piece of wax was usually fixed. I was so astounded that I let the thing fall. The clumsy clatter seemed to be cruelly emphasised by the echoing walls of the room. It sounded like a smack. I felt so wretched.

"Go yourself and see the officer," said the sergeant, rather touched, shifting from one leg to the other. "I have now to see about the signatures. . . ."

I let him go; for when this good fellow talks of signatures, he is tortured by a very necessary need, which he cannot satisfy without suffering those shooting pains. . . .

I placed my scrubbing implements in a corner, and I hastened to the office, buttoning my little jacket with trembling fingers: my equanimity was never real, and I felt some difficulty in controlling my emotions.

I knew the officer: he was an old Alsatian

whom the war had dragged out of a *mairie* where he was spending the days of his retirement. He had not, up till then, appeared to me a difficult person, nor needlessly fussy; and I did not despair of being able to make him unbend and to acknowledge himself in the wrong.

"Ah it's you, Bouin," he said coolly. "Well, you've got to do four days' imprisonment. You begin at noon."

"But, sir," I said, "while my name is Bouin—Bouin, Léon—and——"

He cut me short.

"It doesn't matter what your Christian name is. There was no Christian name on the list. You have seen the name Bouin: you've only got to carry out——"

"But, sir, the times I go on duty have been definitely fixed for the last two weeks. I haven't noticed——"

The man jumped to his feet, and I saw he was short—almost ridiculously short. He came towards me angrily, sputtering into his moustache.

"A punishment has been ordered. Some

one has got to take it; and it's you who've got to do so. What is your profession?"

"A teacher of mathematics, and a volunteer."

He added in a tense voice:

"It doesn't follow that because you are not a conscript you're going to be cock of the walk here. Besides, men of education like yourself ought to be an example to the others. Follow my advice, and do your four days, my boy."

"But, *Monsieur l'officier*——"

"You do as I advise you. This is not the moment, when the enemy is hammering at the gates of the capital—this is not the moment, I repeat, to scatter germs of indiscipline."

"But, sir, discipline——"

Lines appeared on his brow and round his mouth. Then he muttered in a tone that was at once arrogant, sad and sententious:

"Discipline!—why, you don't know what it is! You can't teach me anything about that. Do your four days."

I understood from the gesture accompanying these words that I must depart. An unexpected reply escaped me.

" Sir," I said, " I shall send in a complaint to the colonel."

The dwarf brought down his fists on a pile of documents.

" Good ! good ! Another row ! And we think we are going to win with such people ! Get out of my sight, will you ! "

I thought he groaned, and I found myself in the passage. Midway between the floor and the ceiling ran a water-pipe, making a babbling noise. It seemed to have been installed there in the silence since the days of Adam.

I went staggering back to my work.

The doctor of the third division at that time was a man named Briavoine. What a delightful and sympathetic person he was ! He had such a jolly way of feeling convinced about everything he said. And how I loved to see him smile, with the wrinkles on his wide bare forehead and round his eyes !

M. Briavoine was in his office when I

arrived; but on that day no smile lit up his face, which was frowning and majestic.

"No, no!" he was saying to those around him. "Dufrêne is a general, but I—I am mere Briavoine."

A silence full of respect greeted this firm avowal. The reputation of M. Briavoine was more than European. He had distinguished himself in the delicate art of making child-birth a less difficult and painful process, and many princesses had benefited by his care.

I was so obsessed with my little affair that I began to wander over the room without any real or apparent aim; and, in doing so, I very clumsily knocked up against M. Briavoine.

"Be careful, my friend," said this kind and courteous man.

The urbanity of M. Briavoine, the gentleness of his voice, his correct and exquisite gesture, soothed my violated self-respect. I retired gratefully and with modesty to a corner where papers were being classified. And I thought: "How very polite he is, from every point of view! . . ."

Gradually I regained my equanimity and

took an interest in the conversation of the officers—an interest which soon became very keen.

They were expecting, that very day, a visit from the Chief of the Medical Staff of the Forces—General Dufrêne. The imperious and diligent visits which this weighty person paid to the armies were worthy of the highest praise, and were, too, occasions for keen criticism.

M. Briavoine took off his braided tunic: gold and silver stripes adorned the sleeves.

"Give me my overalls," he said. "Monsieur Dufrêne wishes to be received by his subordinates in full-dress uniform; but the needs of our profession require a coat like this."

A breath of rebellion disturbed the atmosphere. Those standing round M. Briavoine were understood to murmur their assent, in which there was at once something of bitterness, irony and defiance. Dressed in white, the great doctor looked at himself contentedly.

"I am going to receive Dufrêne," he said, "as I am now, in overalls, without my

képi; if he takes it into his head to object, he may find that though I may be a subordinate, I am a man who has a right to some independence. That I serve my country disinterestedly no one can dispute, and I am not going to be lorded over. What have I to gain? My work in civil life is worth all the honours that I could ever get here."

These sensible views were hardly uttered before Professor Proby came in. He was a very tall man, with straw-coloured hair, and a look that expressed a seriousness bordering on stupidity. He used to bawl in talking, cutting up his sentences with all kinds of interjections and expletives which completely altered the sense of what he wanted to say. He plunged into a conversation with as much good manners as a buffalo.

"What! What are you telling me? But I don't care a hang. . . . Him! Why he knows quite well that—what! I am Paul Proby! And I am a member of the Academy; and I . . ."

It was true: Professor Proby honoured the Academy with his contributions. He

beat his foot on the ground, jingling his glittering spurs, and the rather showy parts of an accoutrement that had remained unused in a cupboard until the outbreak of war.

"Dufrêne! that man!" he said again. "I've always been on good terms with him. But one mustn't . . . how annoying it is . . . that man!"

M. Briavoine, who had tact, thought the conversation was getting incoherent. With one turn of the rudder, he brought the ship back to its course.

"It's not a question of personalities, but a question of principle. We are not, like our enemies, a race that has been brutally enslaved. . . ."

This generalisation seemed to bring an atmosphere of philosophy into the sunlit room. Everybody began to listen attentively, and the spirit of revolt became measured and serious.

Since my interview with the orderly officer, one single word leaped and danced in my head. I repeated it mechanically. I dissected its syllables, obsessed and anxious.

Suddenly I felt that the word was going to be uttered; that it was ripe, fertile, bursting; that it was going to spring out of my head—escape—and alight, in turn, on every mouth that was speaking there.

"You cannot," said M. Briavoine, "ask Frenchmen to accept without question an authority that has no bounds. I will even admit without any shame that our race is the least disciplined in the world."

"Authority, like alcohol, is a poison which makes man mad," said a spectacled young man with sharp looks.

"I thoroughly agree," cried the doctor. "As for discipline . . ."

A sigh of satisfaction escaped me. It was done. The word had come out, and I saw it disporting itself outside of me with a feeling at once of deliverance and curiosity. I gazed at the celebrated doctor with a very real gratitude. My satisfaction was indeed so great that in spite of my low rank I vigorously nodded to show how completely I agreed with Dr. Briavoine. And approval being always acceptable from any one how-

ever insignificant, Dr. Briavoine gave me in passing one of those generous smiles of his that were half-hidden away in his beard.

"Discipline," he was saying, "is not perhaps a French virtue. But, God be praised! we have others; and our critical spirit alone, so subtle, incisive and delicate, is worth all the heavy qualities of our enemies."

Doctor Coupé had come in almost unseen in the midst of the general interest. Taken to task by his colleagues, this excellent old man looked like a late-season leaf which the storm was trying to tear away from a bough. For a few seconds he hesitated between his innate terror of authority and his love of mischief. The vehemence of the views, however, that prevailed left him no option; and the dry leaf sped away, swirling in the gale.

"We are ready to shed our blood, if we are called upon," the doctor said, stating a principle; "but, in God's name! they should ask us politely."

"The very least! Manners!" muttered

Professor Proby. "I am disciplined enough —on condition . . . what? . . . We ask for some consideration."

"You know what Dufrêne did, the day before yesterday?" ventured an important-looking person, who was trying by a clever adjustment of his collar and movement of his chin to keep his beard in a horizontal position, and who acquired in this way an air of extraordinary majesty. "Listen then . . ." And in the middle of a chorus of protestations and laughter he began to tell the latest little scandal invented by imaginations which are not content with the reading of the communiqués of those glorious and tragic days.

There were about a dozen doctors in the room. Four or five were indeed princes among doctors. The war had given me a unique opportunity of knowing these distinguished personalities, and I assure you I felt a not unnatural emotion in hearing them speak freely before me. My conversation of the morning with my orderly officer had very much upset me.

DISCIPLINE

Mathematics impose on the mind stubborn habits of order. I am unfortunately a bachelor, but I have quite rational, serious views on the family and society, as you would expect from my tastes and my profession. I know that very learned mathematicians have been able to imagine triangles which did not have three sides, or parallel lines which ended in meeting in a point. . . . I cannot follow these masters on such a path: perhaps I am too old to follow such tracks. Anyhow, I am satisfied with what I do know. When looking at my library, and turning over the pages of my lecture note-books, I always experienced a pleasant sensation of order and discipline. Besides, the study of mathematics makes you logical. And what had happened to me that morning was not logical—in other words, was not just. And the thought that the demands of order required an illogical action even in the midst of the chaos of war, appeared to me the wildest incoherence.

You can then imagine the relief, even enthusiasm, I felt on hearing these eminent

men justify my rebellious attitude. I listened to their words, marking them with approving nods of the head. I felt a keen, almost trembling enjoyment, mingled with pride and a kind of superstitious terror.

Gradually I became aware that the last emotion was becoming the dominant one. I feared I was relying too much on reason; without knowing my position, these gentlemen were too excited and earnest in their approval. This verbal exaltation of indiscipline made me feel an exquisite uneasiness, almost of pain. Forced to be quiet out of respect, I nevertheless mentally and repeatedly begged them to be calm: "Take care, gentlemen! Be calm, sirs!"

Such were my thoughts when, in the general uproar of voices, a bell was heard ringing: it was the visitors' office bell. Immediately the room was strangely quiet.

"*Monsieur le principal!*" said a sergeant who had just appeared at the door; "the motor-car of the Chief of the Medical Staff is at the gate."

"Good heavens!" said some one whom

everybody called familiarly Father Coupé. Then automatically he adjusted his *képi* on his head, and stepped towards the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Professor Proby in a voice that was arrogant yet without much self-assurance.

"I'm going to receive him at the entrance," replied the old fellow.

"What! There are other people for that. We can wait for him here while we work."

"You mustn't think of it," said M. Coupé. "The custom——"

"Why, I used to call that fellow Dufrêne, without the Mr., in civil life," muttered Professor Proby. "And I contend that . . . ha! the idea!"

"It's a question of courtesy," commented M. Briavoine. "Let's go to the door. Give me my tunic."

"Don't you wish to keep on your overalls, my dear master?" said the young man with the sharp look.

"Of course. But I'm afraid of catching cold. Give me my *képi* as well; I can't

walk across the garden with nothing on my head."

M. Briavoine turned towards me.

"My friend," he said, "look for the registers, and be so good as to come along with me."

Then he repeated, putting on his hat:

"There is no point in catching cold."

A warm ray of sunlight entered by the open window! I thought M. Briavoine had no reason to fear colds, and I took the registers.

The group of officers were now going down the wide stairs, in a tumult of voices and footsteps.

A feeling of uneasiness, it seemed to me, gave a slight chill to the conversation. As we arrived under the arches, I heard M. Briavoine saying to M. Coupé:

"It's the first time, since the war, that I meet the Chief of the Medical Staff, General Dufrêne."

He added, not without a certain gravity of tone:

"Vernier, go back and see if they have

swept the subalterns' room. Some cotton was lying about there just now."

"Hang it!" mumbled Proby; "he must not come and interfere with us. And he's going to be received like this! We'll tell him—what!—we'll tell him a thing or two."

"We will tell him, right enough," said M. Briavoine with decision. "We'll tell him that the hospital is badly lighted; the gas-pipes and water-pipes are innumerable; that the food is not as it should be——"

"I shall not stick at anything," interrupted Father Coupé: "I shall insist on the important improvements I want for my work."

As we got to the steps of the entrance, Professor Proby became suddenly irascible, and, taking on one side one of the attendants who was wearing a white coat, said to him:

"You, there! Get yourself into uniform. It looks better."

The motor-car of the Chief of the Medical Staff was coming to a stop in front of the door. It opened like a dry fruit, and shot out its contents on the pavement.

What an impressive personage! He was

tall and, it seemed to me, of enormous proportions. A typically military face—no one could mistake it—deep features over which the fingers and the nails of the sculptor must have passed again and again; on the nose, too, the sculptor's thumb must have been at work, pressing and moulding delicately the lumps of flesh; a bristling white moustache and imperial, of the kind specially reserved for soldiers advanced in age. He wore an old general's uniform, which many give up with the greatest difficulty, like old ideas. Gold, jewellery, velvet, and silk facings adorned his body with such refulgence that the imagination could hardly conceive that, beneath this barbarous splendour, there were lungs, muscles, bones and a shrivelled skin covered with grey hair.

A look escaped from beneath his bushy eyebrows, which was at once violent, questioning, and suggestive of unutterable pride.

He came forward in grave silence.

I expected a scene; but from that moment what took place has remained mysteriously veiled in my memory.

In one single movement everybody there took up a certain position, and they made a correct military salute according to the rules taught so patiently in barracks to recruits from the country.

Faces imperceptibly became rigid. The light in one's eyes became dull and fixed. Ten centuries of a habit imposed and accepted petrified tongues, muscles and minds.

Some thistleseed flew away with the breeze. As I saw it fluttering, white, woolly, without weight, I thought—I don't know why—of that subtle, fine, delicate, critical spirit. It vanished in a gust of wind. A big insect loaded with pollen could be heard buzzing around.

I felt stupid! A long pause; then the white-moustached gentleman decided to let these words fall from his lips:

"Good-day, gentlemen!"

The visit began in the rooms which had been packed with the wounded from the Marne front. There young men were lying who had been face to face with War, and who had calmly recognised it as the old Devil

of the Species. From that time they spoke of it just as they always will, now that three years of blood, suffering and torture have decimated, maimed and broken them.

But nobody bothered about their thoughts. Sheets were drawn back, bandages were undone, wounds were left open to the air. It was now a question of "cases" and of lesions.

A scientific discussion was commencing, to which I listened with an eager curiosity. As I have said, doctors were present who were princes in their profession. They came on the scene with minds, I thought, which were profoundly independent—even aggressive. And I looked forward to an interesting controversy.

M. Dufrêne was closely examining some one's thigh, in which a dark, quivering hole had been made by a shell.

"What do you put in it, Proby?" he said.

Professor Proby began a detailed explanation of the way in which such wounds ought to be treated.

"It has been my habit," he said, "for

thirty years to put in some cotton wool—I lectured to the Academy of Medicine—what! And nothing gives me such good results, because——"

At that point the Medical Inspector-General struck the sick man's little table drily with his pencil.

"Hurry up, Proby," he said, in a calm, cutting voice.

Proby started a little, and mumbled again:

"For thirty years I have always used cotton wool——"

"Believe me, Proby, that's enough. You will not put any of it in the wounds. You understand."

M. Dufrêne turned his back and began examining the next wounded man.

I watched Professor Proby's face. I was sure the honoured academician was going to burst in again. The much-expected scientific controversy was at last about to take place before my eyes, and ideas would cross to and fro like glittering swords. I waited, holding my breath.

In grave silence, the academician replied:

"Very good, *Monsieur le médecin inspecteur-général!*"

I looked at everybody in turn. It seemed to me that a glove had been thrown down, and that some one was going to pick it up with polite audacity. But everybody looked vague and attentive. Professor Proby went up to the Medical Inspector-General, and repeated mechanically:

"Very good, *Monsieur le médecin inspecteur-général!*"

The experience of thirty years' practice vanished like a light that went out.

M. Dufrêne went from bed to bed, heavy and majestic. "You made a mistake in operating upon this man: you would have done better to wait," he said. Sometimes he approved: "Here is a result which justifies our theories." Most often his criticism was unrestrained: "Why didn't you use my apparatus—the Dufrêne apparatus? I wish to see it used here."

Then murmurs of assent and promises were heard. To everything Proby replied

invariably, "*Oui, Monsieur le médecin inspecteur-général.*"

Doctor Coupé got red and confused in trying to express appreciations of the Inspector's methods that seemed like excuses for his own.

I was watching M. Briavoine: he was nodding his head unceasingly, and murmured in a dignified way:

"Obviously, *Monsieur le médecin inspecteur-général. . . .* Of course, *Monsieur le médecin inspecteur-général.*"

These words were always being repeated by everybody. They were repeated as a refrain to almost every syllable and pronounced with a mumbling mechanical promptitude, so that every sentence, and every reply, seemed to end with this ritualistic rhythm: "*Mossinspecteurjral.*"

M. Dufrêne, more and more, gave expression to a kind of triumphant lyric. He spoke of himself, of his works, with a growing volubility and frequency. I thought he was disposed to qualify as "quite French," or "national," and sometimes as "a work of genius," methods and ideas which were

strictly his own. But this attempt to objectify things had a very slight connection with modesty.

At one moment this towering personality came towards me without seeing me with such vehemence that I nimbly got out of the way, as I would before a train. I uttered hasty words, which were :

" I beg your pardon, *Monsieur le médecin inspecteur-général.*"

I had never, in the obscure life of a teacher, had the good fortune to be in the presence of a military man of high rank and hear him speak. I had only imagined, or come across in my reading, the virile outline of the real old soldier. As I looked at this doctor in his military boots and listened to his comments, I repeated to myself: " At last! the real thing!" I was overwhelmed, crushed, but in spite of that I was able to enjoy a feeling of security and confidence, and I always ended by thinking: " The sheer impudence of it! Still, it takes some doing to carry it off like that with such fellows as those doctors."

DISCIPLINE

The Medical Inspector-General had seized a fountain pen and was covering the walls with prescriptions. He explained in emphatic sentences what decisions ought to have been made and what action must be taken. After each diagnosis, those who attended him chanted the liturgic refrain: "*Oui, Mossinspecteurjral.*"

"You must," he was saying, "remember that you are soldiers before everything. In putting on the uniform, you have put on responsibilities. The independence of science has to yield before the necessity of a uniform method. Personal experience has to give way to discipline."

With this simple injunction, personal experience yielded to the sway of discipline. In one voice the least disciplined race in the world replied:

"Of course, that is quite understood, *Monsieur le médecin inspecteur-général.*"

The spectacled young man was standing near me, his arms rigidly at attention and eyes front. I heard him whisper a strange thing to his neighbour:

"Times have changed: every dog has his day."

But his neighbour made a slight gesture of impatience, and the young man took up again his stiff attitude of respect.

His remark was quite out of place, I thought. Yet it got me out of my trance, and I began to reflect painfully on the incredible phenomenon which was then occurring before my eyes.

And it was now entering upon a critical phase. The inspector was examining the room where wounds were dressed.

"This room," he said, "is large and well arranged. It was altered according to instructions I made in 1895 when I was reorganising this hospital. In fact, the whole place seems fairly satisfactory. Have you any complaints to make, Coupé?"

Doctor Coupé blushed, was rather upset, and ended by saying:

"Nothing at all, *Mossinspecteurjral.*"

M. Briavoine, when asked in his turn, appeared to ponder, and then replied that everything was as he wished.

Professor Proby, recovering from his coma, hastened to stammer:

"Ha! here everything is all right, *Moss-inspecteurjral.*"

I remembered something M. Briavoine had said. I seemed to see him again buttoning his linen coat and saying, "What have I to gain?" Then I looked, greatly astonished, at his attentive face and respectful bearing. In the same way I observed his colleagues and, thinking of these men who had nothing to gain from their effacement and who had given way so completely, so hopelessly, I experienced a great admiration for them, and I had an insight into the meaning of discipline. But the perceptions of the intellect are often betrayed by other less noble impulses, for at the very same moment I could hardly restrain an inclination to laugh.

M. Dufrêne had stopped in the middle of a dormitory. Fifty wounded men were lying there: some talked in low voices, others groaned from time to time, and others again were delirious. The Inspector-General clapped his hands: at once the silence was

complete. The least disciplined race in the world stopped moaning; they ceased from their delirium.

"Soldiers!" he said in a formidable voice, "the Government of the Republic has sent me to you to see how you are looked after. See how the Government of the Republic cares for you."

From one end of the room to the other heads were raised, necks were stretched, and all those who had any breath left in them replied together:

"Thank you, General."

M. Dufrêne was going out. Behind him, the least disciplined race in the world followed in good order down a staircase leading to the gardens.

I followed too, bringing up the rear.

I was enveloped in the shadows of the stairs, and before my bewildered eyes interrogation marks began to dance multicoloured. They vanished, and I then imagined a theatre where men appeared in their turn, said what they had been taught, and arranged themselves in good and proper order, some

to speak again, others to dance, some to carry heavy loads, and others to die. Across the top of the stage a word was engraved which I could not make out, but which suddenly became luminous when I heard the spectacled young man on my right whisper to his comrade :

" It is a convention—a great convention in the midst of all the other conventions of life. It's very queer, but not more so than that which compels us to arrange the words of a conversation in such or such an order."

We were now in the garden. The green and amber glow of late summer put an end to one's dreams.

The inspector had grouped his audience and was saying :

" You, Coupé, I congratulate you heartily. And in so doing I am conscious of the real pleasure I am giving you."

M. Dufrêne was making no mistake, for the excellent doctor felt so pleased indeed that he blushed to the roots of his white hair.

There were other congratulations too, and also criticisms. Those who had been praised were surrounded by courtiers. Those who had been blamed were humiliated and left alone. Thus Professor Proby could be seen withdrawing, alone and abashed, like a schoolboy sent into a corner.

M. Briavoine closed the door of the motor-car with his own hands. As the vehicle was about to start, the phenomenon of the salute was witnessed once more: left arms to the sides, right arms raised simultaneously.

The most undisciplined race in the world stiffened itself into the regulation attitude.

The motor-car started off with a hoot.

"All the same, he's a very remarkable man," said Doctor Coupé, who seemed to be still half-asleep. And he repeated: "Yes, all the same——"

"He behaved well," said M. Briavoine.

I noticed the person with the horizontal beard. His fine growth seemed to point down towards his chest, but he readjusted

it by a voluntary movement of the chin, and said :

" Certainly, very well ; but I would never hesitate, on occasion, to tell him exactly what I thought."

" Certainly," said M. Briavoine, " obedience should never go to the length of surrendering your reasoning powers."

Everybody looked as if he had been doped with a subtle poison, but was gradually getting back to consciousness.

The sweet-smelling breeze played over the grass. I saw fluttering before my eyes the flighty thistleseed, winged and fleecy. With a neat little movement M. Briavoine caught it as he would a fly, and looked at it absently as he ended his sentence :

" Discipline," he said, " does not imply, with us, the suppression of our critical spirit."

And I saw, in fact, that the critical spirit had returned.

The group was disappearing. I was contemplating the tips of my shoes. The registers weighed heavily on my arm, and

I tried to understand—to understand it all, when a hand struck my shoulder.

"Well! you are not in the guardroom, my boy! Good! That's right!"

Purple, apoplectic, the orderly officer looked at me furiously, but there was also in his eyes a sad, pleading expression. He added:

"You make your complaint. You'll see what'll happen."

I raised my eyes towards the hospital. A clock adorned its front.

Then, clicking my heels together, raising my right hand to the height of my *képi*, I replied quite simply:

"Sir, I am not going to complain. It is five minutes to twelve. At twelve I shall be in prison."

The bulldog face relaxed. I thought he was going to thank me. He was finally content to mumble:

"That's a good thing!"

He went away. I proceeded, without laughing, to the guardroom.

You know the rest: I passed four days

and four nights there. It was in the middle of September. At that time the flower of the French army were accomplishing such deeds of valour that an immense feeling of gratitude seemed to stir the whole country from end to end. And it was in a prison that I was fated to offer these men my humble thanks.

During those four days I thought of many queer things. But of them I will tell you another time.

CUIRASSIER CUVELIER

THE Cuvelier affair made a deep and lasting impression on me. M. Poisson is not a bad man—far from it! But he is too old, you know.

All these old men ought not to have been allowed to take part in the war. You know what it cost us. And the curious thing was, sir, that everybody admitted it; for in the end all these old fellows were sent out of harm's way to Limousin, one after the other. But let's talk of something else: this is almost politics, and is no business of mine.

Talking about M. Poisson, he has one great fault: he drinks. Apart from that, as I have told you, he wasn't a bad sort. But the stuff a man is made of soon degenerates by being soaked continually with small doses, and often large ones too. M. Poisson drinks, and that's unfortunate in a man who fills a responsible post.

What makes him even more peculiar is that he is not made as we others. He is in himself a unique type. The world, as

M. Poisson sees it, falls into two classes. On one side, all those who are above him. When he is facing that way he salutes and says, " I understand, *mon général* ; of course, colonel." On the other side, all those who are below him. And when facing them, he gets purple with shouting, " Silence, will you ! " and things of that kind. At bottom, I think he is right, and that he is bound to behave like that in his work. I repeat he isn't a bad man—only timid. He shouts in order to convince himself he is not afraid.

But after all, that is a question of army administration, and it's no business of mine. Let us talk of something else. It is a principle of mine never to speak of these things : it's forbidden ground.

But I have a personal grudge against M. Poisson for having put me in the mortuary—I who can write in round hand or slanting hand, in Gothic or flowing hand, and a dozen others, and would have made such a capable secretary.

Just imagine how I was received : I

arrive with my helmet, knapsack, and all my rig-out. I am shown into a hut, and am told: "The doctor is in there."

At first I see no one. M. Poisson is buried up to his hair in papers: I can just hear his asthmatical breathing, like wind blowing through keyholes. Suddenly he comes out of his hiding-place, and considers me. I see a rather heavy old man, short-legged, not very clean, with black-lined nails, an excess of skin on the back of the hand, a freckled skin that overlaps. He examines me carefully, but behaves as if he does not see me. I, on my part, look straight at him and observe him in detail: on his nose he has little varicose veins, his cheeks are rather blue, and under his chin hangs some loose skin, like the snout of beasts, and beneath his eyes two pouches that are never still, and brandy-coloured, which you feel like pricking with a pin.

He looks at me once again, spits, and says:

"Yes. . . ."

I reply immediately:

" At your service, sir ! "

Then he begins to shout in a hoarse voice :

" Speak when you are spoken to. Be quiet, will you ! You see I'm up to my neck with this offensive, the wounded, and all these things here."

What could I reply ? I stand at attention and again say :

" Yes, sir ; at your service, sir ! "

He lights a cigarette and begins to wheeze, as you may have noticed, from the effects of alcohol on his chest.

At this juncture an officer comes in. M. Poisson exclaims :

" It's you, Perrin ? Oh, my dear fellow, let me alone, will you, to get on with this job ! You see I am tired out with the work. Just look at my list : nineteen ! I'll never get to the end ! Nineteen ! "

The officer takes me by the arm and says :

" Oh ! but this is the extra man that has been sent to us."

Then M. Poisson comes nearer, looks at me closely, and bellows, his breath reeking with alcohol :

"Send him to the mortuary! Some one is wanted there. He can help Tanquerelle. To the mortuary! And no more nonsense!"

Ten minutes later I am stationed at the mortuary.

* * *

I became, sir, very wretched. I am fairly cheerful as a rule, but moving corpses about all day long cannot be called life. And such dead! The flower of the country, degraded to a depth which imagination cannot fathom.

Tanquerelle is an old butcher's assistant. He too drinks. He is always given the most unpleasant work because he drinks, and his unpleasant work is an excuse for giving him more drinks. But I am not going to expatiate on that. The drink question is not my business, unfortunately.

Tanquerelle is no company: he is a calamity, a scourge, a breed apart, so to speak. When he is hungry, he never speaks; but he never is hungry. Usually he indulges

in small talk—the comments of a drunkard, painful to hear in the presence of these corpses.

We are told, sir, that dead bodies mean very little to one after a time, and that when you habitually live with them they become nothing more than stones to you. Well, that's not my experience. Every one of these corpses, with which I pass my days, ends in being a companion to me.

I get to like some of them, and I am almost sorry to see them taken away. Sometimes, when I carelessly hit up against them with my elbow, it is with an effort that I do not say, "I beg your pardon, my friend." I look at them, with their blistered hands, and their feet covered with corns after long trudging over the roads, and my heart understands and is touched.

I note a flighty ring on a finger, a birthmark on the skin, an old scar, sometimes even tattoes, and finally one of the things which man does not leave behind him: his poor grey hair, the lines of his face, the relic of a smile around his eyes, more often

traces of terror. And all that sets my mind thinking. From their bodies I can read their history: I imagined how much they had worked with those arms, the many things they had seen with their eyes, how they had kissed with those lips, how proud they must have been of their moustache and their beard, on which now the lice were crawling, away from the cold, dead flesh. I think of these things as I sew up the corpses in the sacking; and the emotion I feel rather startles me, because mingled with my misery is a feeling of pleasure.

But I am wandering off into philosophy. Not being a philosopher, I haven't the right to bore you.

I think I was speaking to you about Cuirassier Cuvelier. Well, let me return to the story.

It takes us back to the May offensives. I assure you, I wasn't idle in those days. What numbers of dead passed through my hands! The poor unfortunate widows and mothers need have no anxiety: in my way, I did my duty. All of them were taken away

with their mouths tightly closed with a chin-cloth, arms crossed on their bodies—that is, of course, if they still possessed mouths and arms—and I carefully wrapped them in the sacking. I do not mention their eyes: it was beyond my power to close them. It is too late, you know, by the time they arrive at the mortuary. Oh, I took good care of my dead!

One day they brought me one with no identification mark at all. His face was crushed in; bandages everywhere on his limbs, but no ticket, no disc on his wrist, nothing at all.

I placed him on one side, and the doctor was informed.

In a moment the door opened and M. Poisson came in.

His deportment was always good after he had some drink; you could tell it too from his manner of coughing and spitting and fingering his cross, for, you know, he was an Officer of the Legion of Honour.

"You have one too many here," he said.

"Sir, I don't know whether there is one too many, but there is a body here without an identification card."

"It isn't only that," replied M. Poisson, "I see you have eight bodies here. Just wait a moment. . . ."

He took out of his pocket a rumpled piece of paper, looking at it from every possible angle, then he shouted:

"Seven! Seven only! You ought only to have seven! You fool! Who brought this corpse here? I don't want it. It's not on the list. Where in the world did it come from?"

I began to tremble, and replied stammering:

"I didn't notice which section brought it here."

"Ah! You didn't notice! And what do you think I'm going to do with it? Now, what is the man's name?"

"But, sir, that's just what I want to know. He hasn't been identified."

"Not identified! Now we're in for it. You'll hear again of this from me. It simply

won't do. To begin with, come along with me at once ! "

We go from hut to hut, M. Poisson asking at each door :

" Did any of you send us a body without identification papers ? "

You can well imagine that when asked in this way all M. Poisson's men took cover immediately. Some laughed secretly : others were alarmed. All made the same reply :

" A dead body without identification papers ! Certainly not, Doctor ; we never brought it."

M. Poisson began to breathe heavily.

He spat everywhere ; he was so angry that his voice was no longer human—it was hoarse, ragged and torn. In spite of his insufferable temper, I actually felt pity for the old man.

Back he goes to the office, I following close at his heels. Dashing to his papers and documents, he shuffles them about like a spaniel in the mud. Then, shouting angrily, he says :

" Here you are !—1236 came in ; 561 have

gone out. Do you understand? Six remain at present. That's it: one is missing, and it must be the one. And nobody knows who he is! We are in a mess! We are in a mess!"

I confess that M. Poisson's assurance made a great impression on me. Especially was I surprised at the accuracy of his figures. It is wonderful, sir, to note the efficiency of military organisation. We learn, for instance, that twenty-three stretchers out of a hundred have been lost—not one more, not one less; or 1000 wounded were brought in; 50 died; therefore 950 are still alive. To maintain this mathematical order, it is therefore clearly well worth while taking the trouble to make a list of everything that comes in and goes out. Listening to M. Poisson making his calculation, I saw, too clearly, how my poor unfortunate corpse was one too many.

The doctor repeated, "We are in a mess," and added, "Now, you there! Come along with me."

M. Poisson bustled off again in all

directions, to the left and to the right. I followed him, my head lowered, having been gradually seized by the fever that tortured him. He stopped all the officers.

" I'm fed up with this job ! Go and see if the body wasn't sent out from your huts."

He entered the operating theatres and asked the surgeons :

" You didn't send me an unidentified dead body ? "

And every time he took out his rumpled piece of paper and added a cross, a number, with his pencil.

Towards evening he fixed me with another look. There were red patches underneath his eyes as highly coloured as raw ham.

' You !—go back to the mortuary ! You'll hear more of me yet ! "

I went back, and sat down, feeling very wretched. Three fresh corpses had been brought in. Tanquerelle was hoisting them into coffins with the help of the carpenter.

On the table, temporarily shrouded in tent material, the unknown dead man was waiting his fate. Tanquerelle was completely

drunk and was singing "The Missouri," —not exactly the thing to do in the midst of corpses. I went and drew aside the shroud and looked at the ice-cold body. His smashed face was covered with linen bandages. A few locks of fair hair could be seen. As for the rest, just an ordinary body, like yours or mine, sir.

Night had fallen. The door opened and M. Poisson, accompanied by another officer, appeared with a lantern. He seemed calm and replete, like a man who has dined well.

"You are an idiot," he said to me. "Why couldn't you see that this was the body of Cuirassier Cuvelier?"

"But, sir——"

"Oh, shut up! It's Cuirassier Cuvelier."

Coming up to the table, he noted the size of the corpse and exclaimed:

"Of course! He's tall enough to be a cuirassier. You see, Perrin, Cuvelier was brought in the day before yesterday. According to the register, he was not taken out. As he is no longer under treatment,

he is dead, and this must be he. That's clear."

"Obviously," said Perrin, "it's he right enough."

"Yes; don't you agree?" replied M. Poisson. "It's Cuvelier; that is quite plain. Poor devil! Now we can go to bed. . . ."

Then he turned towards me:

"You!—you will put him in the coffin, and stick on the lid: 'Cuvelier, Edouard, 9th Cuirassiers.' And then, you mind! no more pranks of this kind."

When the officers had gone, I put Cuirassier Cuvelier in a coffin, and then I lay down for a few hours on my mattress.

* * *

The next morning I was preparing to nail down the coffin of Edouard Cuvelier, when I saw M. Poisson coming up once again. His face was not so calm as on the previous evening.

"Wait; don't bury that man yet," he said.

He walked round the coffin, and nibbled the end of a cigarette; he appeared indeed so uneasy that I knew at once he had not yet decided to thrust Cuvelier out into the abyss. It was not going to be done: the dead body was getting in the way and refused to be swallowed up. I don't know whether M. Poisson had a high idea of his duty, or merely was afraid of complications; whatever it was, I sympathised greatly with him at that moment.

He turned towards me and, as he did not like to be alone, "Come along with me," he said.

Off we went again, making the round of the huts.

"Hut No. 8?" began M. Poisson. "The seriously wounded are here, aren't they? Is Cuirassier Cuvelier here?"

The men there made inquiries, and replied "No."

We went on to the next.

M. Poisson began again:

"Hut No. 7? Have you here a man named Cuvelier, of the 9th Cuirassiers?"

"No, *Monsieur le médecin-chef.*"

M. Poisson was delighted with his success.

"Of course! They can't have him, because he's dead. I am doing this to satisfy my conscience. I'm made like that."

We met M. Perrin.

"You see, Perrin," said the doctor, "in order to be quite sure, I am looking in every hut to see if a Cuvelier may not be anywhere. And I can't find a man of that name. Of course, I only look where the seriously wounded are quartered. I am not a fool. If he is dead, he must have been seriously wounded."

"Obviously," said M. Perrin.

After we had been to all the huts, M. Poisson held himself very proudly, causing many folds in the loose flesh under his chin, and he concluded by saying:

"It's Cuvelier, sure enough. Now you see what it is to have order. With me it's not the same as with Ponce and Vieillon, who are awful bunglers."

"Perhaps," M. Perrin said, "you would be wise to inquire among the lightly wounded."

"Oh! well, if you think so," said M. Poisson, rather indifferently.

And we proceeded to the huts of the "quick removals." We went in, and asked the usual question. No one replied. On going out, M. Poisson repeated:

"Cuvelier isn't here?"

Then suddenly we heard some one shouting:

"Yes; Cuvelier, present!"

And a tall, curly-headed man jumps off a bed, raising a hand that was very lightly bandaged. . . .

Things take a tragic turn. M. Poisson turns dark purple, like a man stricken with apoplexy. He spits two or three times. He smacks his thighs, and says in a choking voice:

"God! he must be alive then!"

"I am Cuvelier," the soldier remarks.

"Cuvelier, Edouard?"

"Yes; Edouard!"

"Of the 9th Cuirassiers?"

"That's right: of the '9th Cuir'!"

M. Poisson goes out like a madman,

followed by M. Perrin and myself. He goes to the mortuary, and he stands before the coffin, dribbles on his tunic, and says quite shortly :

" If it's not Cuvelier, we have to begin all over again."

* * *

Ah, sir ! what a day it was !

The offensive was going on during that time. The dead were filling the place which had been reserved for them. But the very life of the service seemed to have been held up.

You have seen ships come to a stop in the middle of a river and holding up all the traffic ? Well, this unknown corpse gave that impression. It was stranded right across our work and began to upset everything, beginning with the health of the unfortunate M. Poisson, who suggested taking sick leave.

Every hour he came and glanced at the body, which was beginning slowly to decompose. He stared at it stolidly.

During the afternoon I had a moment's rest while M. Poisson took his siesta. About six he came again, and I hardly recognised him. His hands were almost clean, he wore a white collar, his beard was trimmed, and his breath like that of a man who has just rinsed his mouth in *vieux marc*.

"What!" he said, "you haven't yet closed down the German's coffin! You are an incapable ass!"

"But, sir——"

"Hold your tongue! And write this inscription, and be quick!—'An unknown German.' D'you understand?"

M. Perrin had just come in. The two officers had one more look at the corpse.

"It's obviously a Boche," said M. Poisson.

"Yes; look at his fair hair."

"Perrin, you ought to have thought of it sooner," added the doctor.

The officers were about to go out, when M. Poisson turned round and said:

"Take the thing out of the coffin; since he's a German, put him in the earth as he is, with all the other Huns."

CIVILISATION

I MUST know first what you mean by civilisation. That is a question I can well put to a man of understanding and intelligence like yourself; and then, too, you are always boasting of this famous civilisation.

Before the war I was an assistant in a commercial laboratory; but now I swear that, if ever I have the doubtful privilege of surviving this horror, I will never take up the work again. The country—the pure, fresh country for me! Anywhere away from these filthy factories—far from the roar of your aeroplanes and all the machinery in which formerly I took an interest when I did not understand things; but which horrify me now because I see in them the very spirit of the war—the principle and the cause of the war.

I hate the twentieth century as I hate this degenerate Europe—as I hate the world which Europe has polluted. I know it may seem ridiculous—this high talk. But what do I care! I'm not speaking to the

crowd, and besides I might as well be laughed at for this as for anything else. I repeat, I shall fly to the hills, and I shall see to it that I am as much alone as I possibly can be. I had thought of escaping among the savages, but there are no real savages now. *They* are all riding bicycles and clamouring for medals and honours. . . . I am not going to live with the savages—we have done our best to corrupt them: I have seen it done too well at Soissons.

In the spring of this year I was at Soissons with the G.B.C. I see that G.B.C.[1] rather mystifies you, but you must blame civilisation for that: the Tower of Babel is being rebuilt by it, and soon we shall have so debased our mother tongue that it will be nothing more than a telegraphic code, ugly and colourless.

The retreat of the Germans had taken the line back towards Vauxaillon and Laffaux, and there fighting went on pretty vigorously. In one sector there was a spot

[1] G.B.C., abbreviation for *groupe de brancardiers du corps* (the corps ambulance division).

—the Laffaux mill—which was a veritable thorn in a wound, keeping it always inflamed. About the beginning of May a great attack was launched on the mill, and nearly the whole of my division had to turn out on field duty.

"You, sergeant," said one officer to me —"you will remain at the hospital and take charge of the A.C.A.[1] section. I'll send a number of men to help you."

I was by this time thoroughly conversant with the subtleties of military speech. When I was told that a number of men were to be put under my charge, I understood perfectly that there would be no one; and in point of fact I was given four miserable outcasts—weak, half-imbecile creatures of no use to any one.

From Saturday onwards the wounded arrived in batches of a hundred. I got them arranged as methodically as I could in the wards of the A.C.A.

But the work was not going on at all

[1] A.C.A., abbreviation for *ambulance du corps d'armée.*

well. My absurd stretcher-bearers, unable to fall in with each other's movements, stumbled like broken-kneed, miserable nags, causing the wounded to scream with pain. In a nibbling, haphazard sort of way, they tried to deal with the waiting masses of the injured, and the whole A.C.A. seemed to stamp with impatience. The effect was rather like a human meat factory which has its machinery going at full strength without being fed with oil and materials.

I must really describe the A.C.A. to you. In war slang it means an automatic hospital ("autochir")—the latest thing in surgical invention. It's the last word in science, just like our 400 m.m. calibre guns which run on metal rails: it follows the armies with motors, steam-driven machinery, microscopes, laboratories, the complete equipment of a modern hospital. It is the first great repair depôt which the wounded man enters on coming out of the destructive, grinding mill on the extreme front. Here are brought the parts of the military machine that are most spoiled. Skilled workmen

take them in hand at once, loosen them quickly, and with a practised eye examine them, as one would a hydro-pneumatic break, an ignition chamber or a collimator. If the part is seriously damaged, it goes through the usual routine of being scrapped; but if the "human material" is not irretrievably ruined, it is patched up ready to be used again at the first opportunity, and that is called "preserving the effectives."

My stretcher-bearers, with the jolting clumsiness of drunken dockers, were bringing to the A.C.A. a few of the injured, who were at once swallowed up and eliminated. And the factory continued to growl, like some Moloch whose appetite has been whetted by the fumes of the first sacrifice.

I had picked up a stretcher. Helped by a gunner who had been wounded in the neck, and whose only desire was to be of some use while awaiting his operation, I led my crew in amongst the heap of men that lay on the ground. It was then that I saw some one passing along wearing a high-grade officer's hat—a sensible sort

of man who smiled in spite of his solicitous bearing.

"There is something wrong with your ambulance work," he said. "I'll send you eight negroes. They are excellent stretcher men, these fellows from Madagascar."

Ten minutes afterwards the negroes had come.

To be exact, they were not all natives of Madagascar: they were types selected from the 1st Colonial Corps which was at that very moment strenuously fighting before Laffaux. There were a few natives of the Soudan, whose age was difficult to tell, sombre and wrinkled, and concealing under their regimental tunics charms that were coated with dirt, and smelling with leather, sweat and exotic oils. The negroes of Madagascar were of medium height, looking like embryos, very dark and silent.

They slipped on the straps, and at my command began carrying the wounded with quiet unconcern, as if they were unloading bales of cotton at the docks.

I was content, or rather reassured. The

A.C.A., surfeited at last, worked at high pressure, and hummed like well-tended machines that drip with oil, shining and flashing from every point.

Flash! The word is not too strong. I was dazzled on entering the operating hut. Night had just fallen—one of those warm beautiful nights of this brutal spring. The gunfire came and went in short spasms, like a sick giant. The wards of the hospital overflowed with a heaving mass of pain, and death was trying to restore order there. I breathed in deeply the night air of the garden and, as I was saying, I entered the operating hut.

It had been partitioned off into several rooms. The one I suddenly stepped into made a bulge in the side of the building. It was as hot as a puddling-oven. Men were cleaning, scrubbing, and polishing, with scrupulous care, a mass of shining instruments, while others were stoking fires which gave out the white heat of soldering lamps. With never a pause, orderlies were coming and going, carrying trays held out rather

stiffly at arm's length, like hotel-keepers devoted to the ceremonious rites of the table.

"It's warm here," I murmured, in order to say something.

"Come over here: you'll find it all right," said a grinning little chap as hairy as a kobold.

I lifted a lid, feeling I was opening the breast of some monster. In front of me steps led to a kind of throne on which, seated like a king, the heart of the thing was to be found. It was a steriliser—an immense pot in which a calf could easily have been cooked whole. It lay on its stomach and emitted a jet of steam that stupefied one, and its weary monotony made one hardly conscious of time and space. But suddenly the infernal noise stopped, and it was like the end of eternity. On the back of the machine a load of kettles continued to spit and gurgle. A man looking like a ship's pilot was turning a large heavy wheel, and the lid of the cauldron, suddenly unbolted, rose, exposing to view its red-hot bowels, from which all sorts of boxes and

packages were taken out. The heat of the furnace had given way to the damp, crushing atmosphere of a drying-stove.

"But where do they operate on the wounded?" I asked a boy who was washing a pair of rubber gloves in a big copper tub.

"Over there, in the operating-room, of course. But don't go in that way."

I went out again into the freshness of the night, and proceeded to the waiting-room to find my stretcher-bearers.

At that moment it was the turn of the cuirassiers to be brought in. A division of "foot cavalry" had been fighting since morning. Hundreds of the finest men in France had fallen, and they waited there like broken statues which are still beautiful in their ruins. Their limbs were so strong, and their chests so solid, that they could not believe in death, and as they felt their rich healthy blood dripping from their wounds, they held at bay, with curses and laughter, the weakness of their broken flesh.

"They can do what they like with this flesh of mine," said one of the two;

" but to make me unconscious, damn me! I'm not having any."

" Yes, whatever they like," said another, " but not amputation! I want my paw; even done to the world, I want it! "

These two men were coming out of the X-ray ward. They lay naked under a sheet, and carried, pinned to their bandages, papers of different sizes and shapes, rough sketches, formulæ, and something like an algebraical statement of their wounds, the expression in numbers of their misery and disordered organs.

They spoke of this their first visit to the laboratory like clever children who realise that the modern world would not know how to live or die without the meticulous discipline of the sciences.

" What did he say, the X-rays major? "

" He said it was an antero-posterior axis."

" Just what I feared."

" It's in my belly. I heard him say *abdomen*. But I am sure it's in my belly. Ah, damn it! but I'm not going to be put to sleep. That I won't stand! "

The door of the operating theatre opened at this point, and the waiting-room was flooded with light. A voice cried :

" The next lot ! And the belly chap first ! "

The black bearers adjusted their straps, and the two talkers were carried off. I followed the stretchers.

Imagine a shining rectangular block set in sheer night like a jewel in coal. The door closed again, and I found myself imprisoned in that light, which was reflected from the spotless canvas of the ceiling. The floor, level and springy, was strewn with red soaked linen which the orderlies picked up quickly with forceps. Between the floor and the ceiling, four strange forms that were men. They were dressed completely in white, their faces hidden behind masks which, like those of Touareg, only admit the eyes to view. Like Chinese dancers, they held in the air their hands covered with rubber, and the perspiration streamed from their brows.

You could hear the muffled vibrations

of the motor which generated the light. Filled up again to overflowing, the steriliser disturbed the world with its piercing lament. Small radiators were snorting like animals when they are stroked the wrong way. It all made a savage, flamboyant music, and the men who were moving about seemed to perform rhythmically a religious dance—a kind of austere and mysterious ballet.

The stretchers glided in between the tables like canoes in an archipelago. The instruments were set out on spotless linen and sparkled like jewels in glass cases; and the little Madagascar negroes, alert and obedient, took great care in handling their burden. They stopped on the word of command, and waited. Their dark slender necks yoked with the straps, and their fingers clutching the handles of the stretchers, reminded one of sacred apes trained to carry idols. The heads and feet of the two wan and enormous cuirassiers stuck out beyond the limits of the stretchers.

A few gestures that were almost ritualistic, and the wounded men were placed on the operating-tables.

At that moment I caught the eye of one of the negroes, and I experienced a feeling of extreme discomfort. It was the calm deep look of a child or a young dog. The savage was slowly turning his head from left to right and looked at the extraordinary men and the extraordinary things all around him. His dark eyes stopped lightly on all the wonderful parts of this workshop devoted to repairing the human machine. And those eyes, which betrayed no thought, were on that account even more disquieting. For one second I was fool enough to think "How astonished he must be!" But the absurd thought soon left me, and I was overwhelmed with unutterable shame.

The four negroes left the room. That afforded me a little comfort. The wounded looked dazed and bewildered. The ambulance men hastened to bind their hands and feet and rub them with alcohol. The masked men were giving orders and moving about the tables with the deliberate gestures of officiating priests.

"Who is the head here?" I whispered to some one.

He was pointed out to me. He was a man of medium height and was sitting down, with his gloved hands held up, dictating something to a clerk.

Fatigue, the blinding light, the booming of the guns, the rumble of the machinery acted as a sort of lucid drug on my brain. I remained fixed where I was, in a veritable whirl of thought. Everything here worked for one's good . . . it was civilisation finding within itself the supreme reply, the corrective to its destructive excesses ; nothing less than this complex organism would suffice to reduce by the smallest degree the immense evil creation of the machine age. I thought again of the indecipherable look of the savage, and my emotion was a mixture of pity, anger and loathing. . . .

The man who, as I had learnt, was in charge of the operating theatre had finished dictating. He remained fixed in the position of a heraldic messenger and seemed to be absorbed in thought. I noticed that behind his spectacles gleamed a look that was solemn, tranquil and sad, though full

of purpose. Scarcely anything of his face was visible, the mask hiding his mouth and beard; but on his temples could be seen a few fresh grey hairs, and a large swollen vein marked his forehead, betraying the strained efforts of a tense will.

"The man's unconscious," said some one.

The surgeon approached the table. The man had indeed lost consciousness; and I saw it was the very one who swore he would not take the anæsthetic. The poor man had not dared even to make a protest. Caught, as it were, in the cogs of the wheel, he was at once overpowered, and he delivered himself up to the hungry machine, like pig-iron devoured by the rolling-mills. And then, too, he must have known it was for his good, because this is all the good that is left to us in these days.

"Sergeant," some one remarked, "you are not allowed to remain in the operating theatre without a cap."

On going out, I looked once again at the surgeon. He hung over his work with an assiduity in which, despite his overalls,

his mask and his gloves, a feeling of tenderness was plainly marked.

I thought with conviction: "No! No! He, at least, has no illusions!"

And I found myself once more in the waiting-room, that smelt of blood, like a wild beast's lair.

A dim light came from a veiled lamp. Some wounded were moaning; others chatted in low voices.

"Who said tank?" said one of them. "Why, I was wounded in a tank."

There was silence, brief and respectful. The man, who was buried in bandages, added:

"Our petrol-tank burst: my legs are broken and I am burnt in the face. Oh! I know all about tanks!"

He said that with a queer emphasis in which I recognised the age-long torment of humanity—pride.

* * *

I went out into the night to enjoy a smoke. The world seemed to be dazed,

bewildered, tragic; and I think that in reality . . .

Believe me, sir, when I speak of civilisation and regret it, I quite know what I am saying; and it is not wireless telegraphy that will alter my opinion. It is all the more tragic because we are helpless; we cannot reverse the course which the world is taking. And yet!

Civilisation—the true civilisation—exists. I think often of it. In my mind it is the harmony of a choir chanting a hymn; it is a marble statue on an arid, burnt-up hillside; it is the Man who said, "Love one another," or "Return good for evil." But for two thousand years these phrases have been merely repeated, and the chief priests have too much vested interest in temporal things to conceive anything of the kind.

We are mistaken about happiness and about good. The noblest natures have also been mistaken, for silence and solitude are too often denied them. I have seen the monstrous steriliser on its throne. I tell

you, of a truth, civilisation is not to be found there any more than in the shining forceps of the surgeon. Civilisation is not in this terrible trumpery; and if it is not in the heart of man, then it exists nowhere.

THE END

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