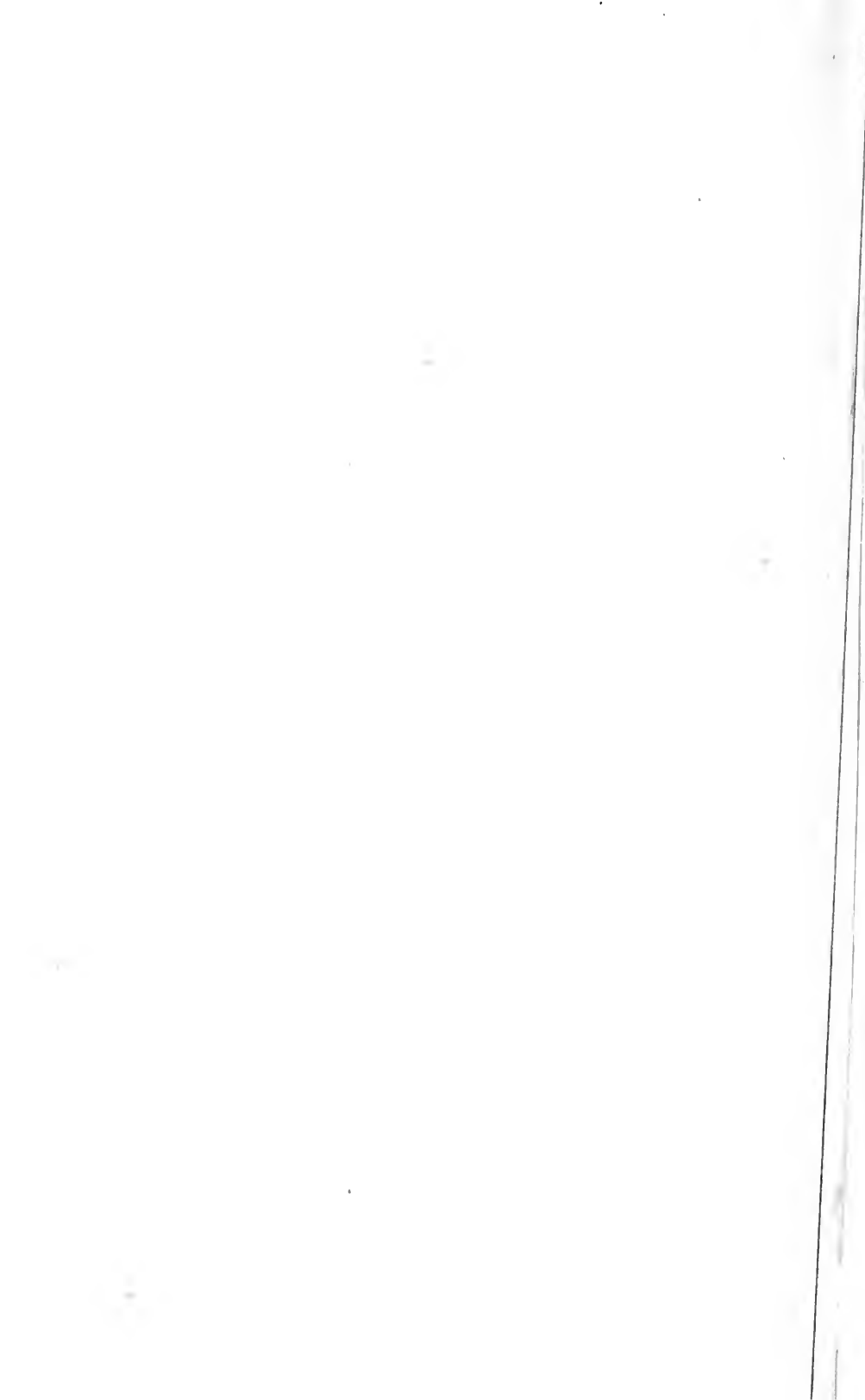




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**(LINES OF COMMUNICATION)**





**L. OF C.**  
**(LINES OF COMMUNICATION)**

**BEING THE LETTERS OF A  
TEMPORARY OFFICER IN  
THE ARMY SERVICE CORPS**

**BY**  
**CAPTAIN JAMES E. AGATE**  
//

**LONDON**  
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1917



TO  
FRITZ EDWARD DEHN  
ARTHUR BROOK ASPLAND  
AND  
ALLAN MONKHOUSE  
TO THE LAST OF WHOM  
THE LETTERS WERE ORIGINALLY WRITTEN  
THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY AND  
GRATEFULLY DEDICATED



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ABOUT one - thjrd of these letters appeared originally in the columns of the *Manchester Guardian*, to the Proprietor of which newspaper my best thanks are due for permission to republish.

I have tried to arrange the letters in an order which will give the reader some idea of logical sequence, and by sorting them into chapters to give them the appearance of a book.

There is neither attempt at portraiture nor reference to individuals in the letters.

J. E. A.

FRANCE,  
*September 25th, 1916.*

“ MAN comes into life to seek and find his sufficient beauty, to serve it, to win and increase it, to fight for it, to face anything and bear anything for it, counting death as nothing so long as the dying eyes still turn to it. And fear and dullness and indolence and appetite, which indeed are no more than fear's three crippled brothers, who make ambushes and creep by night, are against him, to delay him, to hold him off, to hamper and beguile and kill him in that quest.”

*The History of Mr. Polly.* H. G. WELLS.



## CHAPTER I

### JOINING UP

On the idle hill of summer,  
Sleepy with the flow of streams,  
Far I hear the steady drummer  
Drumming like a noise in dreams.

Far and near and low and louder  
On the roads of earth go by,  
Dear to friends and food for powder,  
Soldiers marching, all to die.

East and west on fields forgotten  
Bleach the bones of comrades slain,  
Lovely lads and dead and rotten ;  
None that go return again.

Far the calling bugles hollo,  
High the screaming fife replies,  
Gay the files of scarlet follow :  
Woman bore me, I will rise.

A SHROPSHIRE LAD.

**S**UPPLY and Transport I sing, but before singing let me make admission concerning no less a matter than the vanity of pure reason. The humiliating thing about pure reason is its inability to hold its own against the merest dollop of sentiment. Take my own

case. Alive to the folly of heroics, of heroical leanings even, I have yet found myself strangely and wonderfully elated since the first putting on of uniform. I have gone about my first day and a half of soldiering spouting all the recruiting songs I can remember, the most exquisite of which I have pressed into the service of this, my first letter. I have been thrilling to these little verses like the veriest youngster from school. They have helped me to survive what might have been the sharp disillusion of a first eager glance into the new "Whole Duty of Man," the "Army Service Corps Manual, Part II." It is good, unreasoningly good, to be some kind of a soldier.

What matter if little be found in the Manual having to do with glory? What if it belong essentially to the books that are no books, if it be less exciting than "Mrs. Beeton" or the novels of George Eliot, who, as some wit averred, ought to have been a policeman? I am out for romance, adventure and "to keep the passion fresh," as George Meredith urges. It's a great game this soldiering, or it can be made into a great game. And therefore one glorifies this epic of the slaughter-house, looks kindly on carcase-weights, finds passion in field ovens, and zest in the life and works of that good fellow Maconochie. Don't think me flippant. My hero was ever Mercutio with his

light-hearted end and impatient "Why the devil came you between us? I was hurt under your arm." So ought a man to take the last that can happen to him, and to do him justice such is the immemorial temper of the English soldier.

However we may be minded to take our endings it is surely a mistake to take the beginnings of soldiering too seriously, to blaze away at Patriotism to the exclusion of all the other fine, trivial, muddlesome motives that may have gone to the joining up. There was *camaraderie*, wasn't there, and the sense of fairness? There was duty, love of adventure, the itch to teach the braggart a lesson, the conviction that it wouldn't do to be out of it. Then the desire to prove manhood, and the mere fling of it all. For myself I am not sure that the determining factor was not the playing of national airs in Trafalgar Square by the band of the Irish Guards on a sunny morning in June.

In for it anyhow, whatever the jumble of motives, I give you warning that soldiering is not going to change civilian standards. To give up books and the theatre in favour of doing something utilitarian and "rendering" a report on that something with the imagination and feeling for style of a chartered accountant—to drop the amateur and looker-on and

begin "hoping to merit by prompt attention to business, etc. etc.," in the circularising manner of a Sam Gerridge—all this is an adventure in fresh matter, but not in fresh standards. To take on new fights is not to go back on old victories nor yet on old defeats. . . . We'll return to this again. As a precaution against over-seriousness I have enlisted that good friend and comrade-in-arms "Sense of the Ridiculous." The tricks of self-reliance, self-assurance and the genial "You-be-damnedness" of the Army I hope to pick up reasonably soon, but until they come along I feel like a new boy, very shy of his school. In the meantime I am much hampered by these new trappings. "The set of the tunic's 'orrid." It is good to think that there are still two clear days before the plunge into the Aldershot middle of things. Two days in which to practise buckling and unbuckling, donning and doffing. Two days in which to eat, drink and sleep in the new armour, as we are told Irving did in the mail of his sinister, fantastic knights. After these two days of strenuous respite I am to "proceed" to Aldershot to report. To whom? How? At what time? Do I tackle Orderly Room in full marching order, with water-bottle? And should the water-bottle be full? What, if it comes to that, *is*—"Orderly Room"? I picture to myself a kind of polite

police court, suave and well-mannered à la Galsworthy. . . . I have spent to-day strutting up and down Regent Street returning salutes without knowing the way of it. I note that that past-master of etiquette, the private soldier, salutes with the hand furthest from the officer. Should I return the salute with the hand furthest from the soldier? I tremble to think that this is only one of many thousands of pitfalls into which I propose to take the gayest of headers. How I've laughed at the martial innocents of *Punch*. Well, it's my turn to be laughed at now, and I hope I'm game!

## CHAPTER II

### THE 'SHOT

Devise, wit! write, pen! for I am whole volumes in folio.

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST.

HAVING "proceeded" hither I propose to give you my experiences in order of relative importance. Well then, food has become quite vital. One eats four huge meals a day, and drinks more cups of tea to the ten minutes than ever Dr. Johnson achieved in the hour. Next in order comes the longing for sundown, and the sense of relief when we break off. A minor gratitude is that up to the end of the first day feet seem to be fairly sound. One doesn't drink here for drinking's sake, water being warm and brackish, but because throats are parched and choked with the sand of the parade ground. After tea one sits in the sun until dinner-time, imbibing lemon-squashes by the half-dozen. Aeroplanes glinting like jewelled dragon-flies in the evening gold drone in the still air. Even at eighty miles an hour they would seem to hover. Next in remembered sensation comes one's annoyance at not being able to drill a squad of recruits of a trivial ten days' standing.

They mark time when you give the order to double, completing the movement in defiance of you and on a word from the drill sergeant, most tactful of diplomats. Very real the physical fatigue and Ruskinian exaltation in the fitness of body! Then the sense of terror at the possibility of being late for any one of ten scheduled duties—the old awe of the headmaster. Last and most significant item in this sentimental review, we have ceased to think about the war. What is the fall of Constantinople to the fact that we cannot unravel our squads? Indeed we have become reconciled to the commonplace and live for the moment. Mr. Polly said—and I add him to Mercutio as my favourite hero—that if you didn't like your life all you had to do was to alter it. We've altered ours, and got rid of irksomeness. Nobody cares a jot about the higher patriotism, but everybody cares a great deal about not being the least competent officer in a mess of one hundred and ten. As for the brutalising tendency of military training (see our peace-cranks), you visualise an enemy as a kind of abstract ninepin, that is if you bother about visualising him at all.

*A week later.*

No! You do not address me as "Lieutenant." Plain "Mister," please. I hesitated to write again too soon through fear of losing

first raptures. I have wanted to be able to reaffirm them, and to be quite honest about it. The beginnings of disillusion—for I had them, you know—turned out to be merely physical, and it is physical ill which makes the spirit quail. High thinking is a poor game when you are hopping about in agony on alternate feet. There is no sand of the desert hotter than the sand of the Aldershot parade ground, and I have been reduced to such condition that I had to drive into the town to buy boots two sizes larger than I had ever previously worn. Even then I had to take the largest pair off surreptitiously at mess, quite failing to get into them when we left the table, and drawing down upon my head and feet the wrath of anathematising mess-presidents. How, too, can you think nobly when you can only walk straddle-legged and sit down with precaution? But I want you to realise that these preposterous, insignificant worries are to the soldier in training a thousand times more important than Zeppelin raids, the fall of Przemysl, or the Great War itself. Physical agonies apart, we contrive to be immensely happy.

I wonder if it interests you to hear my day.

5.30. (Ugh!) Rise.

6.30. Parade (this means being drilled).

7.45. Breakfast.



- 8.45. Parade (this means drilling people who know more about it than you do).
- 10.0. Lecture (telling you how to write out a cheque or give a receipt, wrap up a parcel, make out an invoice, sharpen a pencil, etc.).
- 12.0. Break Off.
- 12.30. Lunch.
- 1.45. Parade (more drill).
- 3.45. Parade (ditto ditto).
- 4.45. Tea.
- 6.0. Retire to study. This means wallowing in a bath, greasing your feet, cursing your boots, skylarking with brother officers, quarrelling about the towels, and generally behaving like boys in the lower school, until
- 8.0. Dinner.
- 9.0. The port goes round.
- 10.0. Intellectual conversation. Which means yawns, snores, etc., until
- 10.15. BED. This is an unpleasant arrangement of blankets smeared with the various greases you have been anointing your-

self with, but remarkably resembling Paradise, until 5.30. (Ugh) Rise. And so *da capo*, as we used to say in civilian days when we had a little music.

We spend our spare time instructing one another in the really simple mazes of section drill. With matches, draughts, a candlestick for a marker, patience and good temper you can achieve wonderful results. Only on parade unfortunately, under the cold glare of the C.O., with no bits of paper to help you and no sympathetic friend to whisper "To the *inner* flank, you silly fool," it isn't so easy. It is a grim experience to be told to line the squad up facing the church, and to find them grinning at the abattoirs; to bear with the delight of some thousand souls or so, and to hear from the sergeant-major that you haven't the brain of an anæmic fowl. You reflect that if the C.O. addresses you it will probably be in displeasure, and that you will crawl before him on your belly. Hence, after office hours—what *am* I saying?—I mean of course off duty, the merriment and the colossal flippancy of us all. Nobody, from whatever high-souled motive he enlisted, is any longer imbued with the spirit of rushing to his country's side in her hour of direst need, or at least he takes jolly

good care to keep quiet about it. We grouse and grumble half the day and spend the rest in a perfect ecstasy of amazement at the astonishing fools sane, ordinary, fairly 'cute, averagely quick-witted individuals can on occasion make of themselves. To crawl before the C.O. on your belly is momentarily distressing. To laugh about it afterwards and to go on laughing is the part of a wise man, and crawling and laughing all day long is making very wise men of us indeed.

## CHAPTER III

### HUTMENT AND CANVAS

Thou think'st 'tis much that this contentious storm  
Invades us to the skin. . . .  
Pour on, I will endure.

KING LEAR.

#### § I

THIS place, somewhere in Yorkshire, is nearly Heaven, or will be if ever it stops raining. We are in camp in the loveliest of dales, in what in untrampled days was a daisied meadow surrounded by giant fir trees against which the smoke curls up blue and acrid. One thinks of all the gipsy lore one has ever read from Borrow to that charming book of one's childhood, "A Peep Behind the Scenes." Did you ever have this pathetic story read to you on Sunday evenings by an old nurse; or any other melancholy yarn about caravans and circus-mongers, golden-haired children and pathetically ill-used mothers? If you did you will remember that caravanning is very much akin to soldiering. Contact with ground and grass, keen sun and tempering wind, the physical content, hard work and perpetually recurring fatigue do simplify life wonderfully. Your pay may be a pittance, but the work is

honourable. You are proud of it whether it be streets of tents nattily erected, stacks of hay neatly tarpaulined, or carcasses all in a row. The ground was bare; you have made it a village, with canteens, living places, latrines, horse lines, rows of transports, officers' and sergeants' messes, butcheries, bakeries, cook-shops; and there was no profit in it, only satisfaction and a wage . . . I grant you we must not have too naked a simplicity. There are times after dinner when I would sell my soul for a decent cup of coffee and a really good cigar. The route from Aldershot to this place lying through the grill-room of the Piccadilly Hotel, I had a bottle of the

“ Fizzy sort that leaps  
Bubbles, and price, to catch the eye,”

just in case the best brands should not be found to grow on gooseberry bushes in these wilds, which indeed they don't. “ Eyes look your last,” one said as one turned one's back upon civilisation. And that's the end, for a time I suppose, to a life that no enforced *villegiatura* will ever make one entirely renounce. I have always maintained that the most sumptuous apartment in the world was the cloak-room at the Café Anglais, ruinous in its proud simplicity. Now one washes in a bucket, the last word in makeshifts, but I

shall never be able whole-heartedly to declare the bucket first and the famous cloak-room nowhere. I think, by the way, you might send me a cheap copy of Walden's "Thoreau," or Thoreau's "Walden"—the fellow who lived in a wood. It is just the mood, or what I feel ought to be the mood. And *per contra*, as the accountants say, send me also a cheap copy, if you see one lying about, of Maupassant's "Bel Ami."

"Bel Ami" will look well on my bookshelf—a strip of wood raised to protect the books from the grass—between "Field Service Regulations" and "War Establishments of New Armies." One will look up from the hot pavements of Paris, their *flâneurs* and discreditable adventurers, to the abutting woods; and then one will be quite sure that, whatever the philosophers say, the fairest of meadows with daisies pied and violets blue and the most picturesque and insanitary of country villages will not be able to claim mind and soul for ever. Whoever has condoned the marriage of Bel Ami and not deplored that hero's eleventh-hour nostalgia of old loves, whoever has the courage, in reading, of that triumphant, infamous close must find these green fields a purgatory. . . .

But to get back to pastoral matters. An

Irish youth has just interrupted me to say that he has found a gorge with "wonderful fishing in it, pheasants as big as ostriches." He is a romantic youth, something homesick for Ireland and quite unable to understand why Dublin should not be angry with "The Playboy of the Western World." I like him for his worship of the lady whom you and I have so often seen as Pegeen. This boy will have it that she is the most wonderful actress since Mrs. Siddons, "if indade that lady was anny actress at all," and the most beautiful woman since Helen of Troy, whom he goes so far as to admit never having seen. I suggest that the lady might be content with one or other pinnacle, but my young friend will not have it.

There is something rather wistful about hearing all these brogues and twangs and country tongues. Harry Lauders abound, and an argument between a Glasgow Highlander and the genuine article from Tipperary is well worth listening to. It is only the English, I think, who have no sense of humour. I ask a pompous N.C.O. what his red ribbon is for. He replies gravely :

"Eighteen years of undetected crime, Sir !"

Our marching songs, if not always humorous, are at least quaint. There is one of which the

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lilt will be with me to my dying day. The libretto is artlessness itself :

“ Wash me in the water that you  
Washed your dirty daughter  
And I shall be whiter than the  
Whitewash on the wall.”

I have marched to this for hours and can get no forrader with the plot. There are other songs of less reputable character, and it is a thing to be pondered over by parsons and bishops and all high functionaries ignorant of human nature that the more ribald the song the shorter the march. Perhaps some day our intellectuals will discover that wars are not won by the Emersons and Matthew Arnolds. (Why I have always regarded these two eminent authors as the type of the Perfect Prig I don't know.) Wars are won by men with (1) good feet, (2) good digestions, (3) good teeth, (4) a sense of humour and (5) strong appetites of all sorts. The man who enlists for his sweet country's sake is a bit of a nuisance ; he should have been born a leading article. The fellow who does it for a lark, or because everybody else is enlisting, or for a jumble of reasons, or for no reason at all, is the man we most want. The men here don't know there is a war going on. They eat, drink, sleep, smoke, and make love to the village



girls. You can't run an army like a secondary school, and it's no use trying.

§ 2

Thanks for your letter, refreshing as yourself, calm, collected, but a shade regretful. You envy me here—and indeed I am immensely to be envied—but you must realise that even this war is temporary and accidental and must come to an end and release us all, if you can call it release, to return to buying and selling at a profit. When you have been in the army for a little while the word “profit” stinks in your nostrils. In the army we buy the things we want because we want 'em. That is genuine demand. We do not buy to sell again. That is not a genuine demand. As for taking advantage of a seller's need to pander to a buyer's greed, those of us who come out of offices are amazed that we can ever have engaged in traffic so indescribably base. We have quite decided that our return to civil life shall see a simplification of trading. The producer shall deal direct with the consumer with a kind of Carter Paterson delivering between the two, for hire without profit. Fascinating project, isn't it?

I am sometimes not quite sure whether this simple life of the camp is quite the complete existence—whether it is very much more than

a glorious picnic with, for the fighting units, the risk of death and hurt thrown in. I sometimes think I am going to long again for a world where the mentality of people is above the age of fourteen. I know I am going to long some evening for the Palladium and Little Tich. Last night I actually found myself thinking I had dined more comfortably than sitting on a plank that was rapidly giving in the middle, and bringing one's chin to the level of one's plate with one's feet in a pool of water, and a steady trickle of rain down the back of one's neck. It's no use shifting your seat. So many places, so many holes in the roof. It is strangely cold at nights, and although a camp bed makes an exquisite couch, and a sleeping bag is an adorable contrivance, it is a nuisance that three blankets and a couple of great-coats cannot always be relied on to keep your toes from freezing. I am not grumbling. I am "keeping the passion fresh" right enough. Nothing can be more exhilarating, nothing can be jollier than a damp tent with a layer of blessed dew spread over all one's belongings, sticking the leaves of books together and taking the condition out of such cigars as these warlike times afford. For the rest of our pastoral advantages see Shakspeare's exiled Dukes *passim*. It's my solicitude for you which makes me suggest that we are not

having all the fun of the fair. Then again, you stay-at-homes have got a function too. It's your job to keep a sane end up through all the shocks that are to come, shocks that will affect the thoughtful citizen more than the fighting soldier. It will be your job to restore balance when we come home, to give us something to hitch to at the end.

Although in so far as his command is concerned a Lieutenant is Omnipotence, I am not quite so tremendous a person as I would have you believe. I cannot, for instance, put a drunken private to death, King's Regulations leaving even less choice than is enjoyed by a High Court judge. My men are cheerful old birds from the London Docks, averaging fifty years of age. They look down on soldiering and call me Boss, Guv'nor, or even Gaffer.

"You are Robinson?" I ask one man.

"Yes, Sir, *Mister* Robinson, Sir," replies that worthy with a purely civilian tug at his forelock.

Gone are my dreams of a regiment smarter than the Guards—of a crack lot of gentlemen-rankers or genteel blackguards in hiding for the period of the war. The detachment consists of labourers, cabmen and cab-washers, with an occasional window-cleaner or brick-layer. They are all equally willing, good-natured, devoid of guile and irreclaimable.

In a word they are just human. Between us we handle the most amusing things, sides of frozen beef sweating in the sun, to be kept well to the leeward of one's nobility ; firewood, tons of it, and clay for oven-making. As Lady Tree says in the play, "What fun men have!" Then we unload bread, ten thousand crisp, crackling loaves daily.

I am afraid I am giving you these details in very disorderly fashion, but you must understand that this is not an Army Service Corps Text-book, but merely an account of the work as it presents itself to the beginner pitchforked into it and told to "carry on." The rule in the army when confronted with a job is to get it done somehow. This applies more particularly to the impossible jobs which, alas ! abound. Issue your order with the utmost conviction and authority, prepared to take the wiggling if the method has been wrong. But if you get the job done you may be sure the wiggling will never come to hand.

### § 3

I begin this sitting on a couple of railway sleepers in the coal-yard, immensely fascinated by the coals and they tumbling into the chute, as my Irish friend says. As it threatens to be another magnificently wet day, with the straightest of straight rains and the most

ferocious of tiger-skies, I may have to return to my tent and transfer my writing to a courtesy-desk, a wonderful affair of soap boxes. Much time has been taken up lately in (a) paying court to that fickle jade the "Pay and Mess Book," and (b) lending a hand in the private affairs of my rascals. "My gallant crew, good morning," said the Captain in the comic opera. "Sir, good morning. We trust we see you well," replied the gallant lads. Such are the relations between my little mob and their C.O.

The "Pay and Mess Book" is the account kept between the soldier and his Government in the matter of pay and rations. A private gets one and twopence a day and sixpence Corps pay, one and eightpence altogether. Seven times one and eightpence is eleven and eightpence, and the man either allots money or he doesn't. It sounds absurdly simple; but it is in reality more complicated than the War Loan. Men have a nasty way of straying to other units and remaining on your pay sheet, or they go sick, or indulge in leave, and all of it plays old Harry with the ration allowances. Then they borrow. They are called home, say to Aberdeen or to Penzance. The fare is thirty shillings at the cheaper rates, and of course the man wants a few shillings to spend. Equally of

course no soldier ever has a penny. So you advance him the money and arrange to stop it out of his future pay. Then one of two things happens. Either he comes back, and you feel a blackguard for deducting five shillings a week out of eight (in the case where the fellow allots) for what must seem to him incalculable æons; or he doesn't come back, in which case you are done in and pay out of your own pocket.

Two of my friends went away this morning for a week-end, both of them with the genial assurance that whereas the penalty for desertion had no terrors for them, the idea of doing their officer in for their railway fares staggered them utterly. In their way these old rascals are gentlemen. One of them, aged fifty-four, has gone to be married, the clergyman having promised to perform the ceremony free of charge.

“For the sake of the child?” I query.

“No, Sir, children, Sir! Three girls and a boy, Sir!”

The other goes to town, Hackney or Islington, I forget which, to see a sick daughter and explain to an ailing wife whose allotment allowance has not yet reached her that the negligence if any is none of his. There must be these little hitches, he will explain to her, in so colossal and new-born a concern as these

New Armies. I who have now been connected with the Army for about ten minutes am more and more amazed at the miracle it all is. The thing for you civilians to realise is that a new world has been created out of nothing. It is all a masterpiece of improvisation, a *bravura* achievement, a *tour de force* of rising to occasion.

Knotty points of discipline are always cropping up. A man in my lot whom two "beers" make quite silly has just completed a stretch of twenty-eight days' field punishment, No. 2, which means amongst other things the loss of twenty-eight days' pay. The orderly officer finds him drunk on guard. Should we send him forward to the higher majesties who will break him altogether, or should we try an appeal to reason? Sober, he is an extraordinarily good man, the best driver in his company. Another hefty dollop of punishment and he will go wrong and cease to care. It isn't easy. And yet to be lenient seems hardly fair to the next sentry, a smart, energetic, spry little chap, proud of being a sentry and guarding a few tarpaulins as though they were Crown Jewels. I know he tramps his two hours at a real smart pace, and stands to attention like a figure of stone, even in the dark with no one looking on.

"But for the grace of God——" should be written up in every Orderly Room.

It is terrible to think of the things one, too, might be brought to book about. At the present moment I have mislaid ten thousand loaves, and can't account for some fifty trucks of coal I have got surplus. In civilian life I should balance the two and be well content to call it quits. The bread failing to arrive by the usual train this morning, some two thousand ferocious Highlanders set forth on their route march breakfastless, giving me the hungriest of "Eyes right!" as they passed. Eighteen bags of oats are missing from my store-tent and I am accused of priggish another regiment's tarpaulins. Last night I redoubled and lost five hearts handsomely, with the C.O. for partner. . . .

In spite of all this mischancy business one asserts that the Army Service Corps is the brain of the army. Infantry work is mere foot-slogging—money for nothing in the pockets of whoever does the army's boots. I may be biased, but it seems to me that leading an army is child's-play—feeding it a work of high imagination, romance even.

#### § 4

Sometimes one catches a glimpse of romance—the Stevenson sort—in this strange existence. I felt absurdly the touch of it the other night. The meat had got lost, and we had to motor



sixty miles for it—22,000 lbs. of prime cuts. We found it at a mining junction, where we had dinner and went to a theatre! How's that for a debauch of civilisation? I have forgotten the name of the play, a well-known comedy. It was all about a foundling bush-ranger who dined unsuspecting and unsuspected at the house of his own mother, and was waited on by his foster-brother, and sat opposite a swell detective whose horse he once stole in the bush. I found this tosh of really absorbing interest, and the theatre a renewed joy. All the same I was so tired that I fell asleep in the eighteenpenny stalls. Then came the Stevenson bit, the long night drive back to camp, the glare of the lamps, the frightened rabbits scampering across the road, and the intoxication of being held up by real military on the look-out for headlights that might show the way to a Zeppelin. We got back in the early morning drunk with the air and fatigue. It sounds uneventful on paper, but we had the world to ourselves, and for forty miles saw nothing but sentries and sleeping camps. The moon was at full in a sky of pale and brilliant blue. I think it must have been the signpost "To Edinburgh" that set my imagination going. I am sorry to make so poor a botch of it in the recollection.

Little things move one strangely when life

is so much simplified. There was church parade last Sunday, for instance, and the march to the old country church, which held just 350 of us. There was no other congregation, and the men sang well-known hymns with great sturdiness and plentiful thoughts of home. Extraordinary the concord between the rough, not untender walls of the old church and the rough, not always uncouth faces of these lads in brown! They did good work at the canteen later on, showing little disposition to sentimentalise once the service over, which is to their credit.

Since my last letter I have had a tumble, a ludicrous fall from a horse, and a knee the size of a football keeps me in bed. It is Sunday, and the whole crowd of officers has called, from the C.O. to the youngest sub., all of them offering drinks as the best of remedies for big knees, so that there is danger of befuddlement. Between visits I have a go at old books. The man in the next tent has lent me his Rabelais—Urquhart and Le Motteux's wonderful translation—another fellow lives on the Shaw plays, the next fellow to him dotes on Dickens, and we all borrow. By the way, if you come across a cheap Browning send it along; it's good to be in the healthy vein. And of course there's always Shakspeare for wet days. Although one is pretty well plunged into a "real"

existence, an existence composed of getting up at five o'clock, drilling, shovelling coal, examining sore feet, obeying orders and giving them — both unimaginatively — nosing about the camp for unsavoury odours, prescribing chloride of lime and disposing of refuse-tips — in spite of all this books go on, and Falstaff remains more real than life itself.

Have you ever tried living under canvas, and counting yourself as much the king of space as you always were, while being more or less literally bounded in a nutshell? It is a fascinating experience, but I am not at all sure that after a time it may not begin to pall. Perhaps the only way to be happy in camp is to find out what you have in common, not with picked spirits, but with every blessed fellow in the mess. You have got to get hold of some great common measure of humanity. Begin with the principle that everybody likes a gin-and-bitters before lunch, or its equivalent. Study the equivalents! Try to realise that everybody likes a whisky-and-soda after dinner, or its equivalent, which may be a walk in the gloaming. Everybody likes chucking a pretty barmaid under the chin or, say, reading Herrick. We all want to keep fit, if some of us are keener on mental fitness than the other sort. It is extraordinary how elastic you can make your equivalents, and it is just as well to remember

that your own whims and idiosyncrasies, your own equivalents, may need some sympathetic translating before they are acceptable to every member of the mess.

In case you are inclined to jib at trite moralisings, jejune quotations and tags from the poets, you had better realise here and now that camp-life leads to the rediscovery of all the old adages and proverbs. A companionable fellow at mess is worth more than your blue-blooded, unneighbourly sort, "kind hearts," etc. You tumble into bed, not too dissatisfied with yourself—"Something attempted, something done." An evening walk turns into a Gray's *Elegy*. The marching of troops with their bands, the skirling of pipes, and all the "pomp and circumstance" set one wondering whether somebody or other was not right about the "crowded hour." In fact, you can see for yourself that this sudden simplification of living turns the mind into the trail of old truths discovered afresh and verified anew.

### § 5

To-day has been August Bank Holiday, and it has rained as though it were the Clerk of the Bad Weather's last chance. My tent is on a slope of at least one in five, the office half being divided from the bed-sitting-room half by a river rising in the horse-lines and falling, via

my apartments, into the dingle at the bottom of the field. My bātman, wet to the skin and garnishing his operations with strange Gaelic oaths, is doing elementary trench work with no more success than to turn what was a peaceful stream into a brown succession of muddy spates reminiscent of the canvases of Clarence Whaite. My defences against boredom are wearing thin. I am taking the last few pages of a novel by Percy White in careful nibbles, like a shipwrecked sailor reduced to his last biscuit. The simile is not bad, since in the matter of interest we are well marooned here. One's job by becoming less problematical becomes less interesting. The loaves and sides of beef, the coals, groceries and firewood, which at the beginning were a full day's occupation, have taken to getting themselves unloaded of their own accord and I to twiddling my thumbs in sheer inanity. To whatever degree of attenuation one spins out one's work, holding a boot parade one afternoon and a sock parade the next, there is little to do after midday.

I wonder if you have ever counted the hours between breakfast and dinner. There is an appalling succession of 'em. By this time everybody in camp has told his best stories ten times over and his worst five ; one thunderstorm has come to be very much like another :

and it is borne in upon one with damnable iteration that a bugle has only five notes. Our bugler, by the way, is apparently content with four. The wretch hides himself for evening practice in a thicket in the rear of my tent. Oh! villainous nightingale that would pipe his lays on four whole notes and a fraction of a fifth! Darkling I listen, and call him names "in many a muséd rhyme."

Soldiers, when they join, bargain for everything except boredom. Hardships one understands, and it is agreed that the other fellow will be up to whatever heroism is going. But to eat in a field, and sleep in a field, and work in a field, and play in a field, and always the same silly field, day in and day out, makes a stiff call on the higher patriotism. For, *pace* Wordsworth, a field is a field when all is said and done, and a damp place at that. Of course, you must understand that to grumble is the amateur soldier's new-found privilege, and you are not to run away with any impression of serious discontent. The food may be declared "rotten"—it is, by the way, excellent—we may decry the beauties of Nature—who is here in her loveliest mood—we may trumpet our grievances about being stuck in a hole with no picture-palace, no pier, no pierrots, and no girls—that is the men's great weariness, the severance from Romance—but if boredom and

the capacity to endure it are going to count in this war, then we shall all stick it cheerfully without sight of girl or promenade until—well, until it ceases to rain, which is the longest period our imagination is capable of. I do very distinctly sympathise with the fellows who work hard all day and haven't anywhere to go at night; with nothing to read, no games to play, no music to hear, and nothing to look at except grass, and trees, and green things growing. It sounds like Keats, but it's dull. . . . Do you remember the poem in which Baudelaire prays for Something New—heaven or hell?

“Verse-nous ton poison pour qu'il nous réconforte !  
Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,  
Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe ?  
Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau* !”

. . . Don't take all this too seriously. One is morally entitled to a grumble at the persistence of the rain and the plumminess of the jam, the awful plumminess of the jam and the everlastingness of the rain. Life here is very little heroic. It is a monotonous round of food and sleep and weather, weather and food and sleep.

Two trivial entertainments are there of which we never tire—the C.O.'s charming pair of dachshunds, “Rolls” and “Royce,” almost human in their folly, and the early morning Swedish drill, would-be sunbaths, and bare-

foot dancing of a very young subaltern with a Taste for the Beautiful. Sometimes we pay a surprise visit to a neighbouring camp in a schoolboy attempt to catch them with their refuse-tips and cattle-lines to windward of the kitchens and above the water-supply, or with the abattoir in full view of the road, or the wood-stacks up against the bakery fire. These little catches seldom come off, and one is generally chagrined to find the camp set out rather better than one's own.

The C.O. has come in as I write with a piece of news. We are under orders for Salisbury Plain. This is, I hear, the last lair and fastness of the Spirit of Desolation and Feldeinsamkeit, so I suppose all we shall have to do will be to lie on our backs in the grass if it is dry enough and hum that nasty fellow Brahms. But we shall only be two hours from London. So that's that!—In the meantime for dinner and bridge.

I reopen this to record a tremendous moral snubbing I received last night. Scrambling to bed through the slush, after a "swarry" consisting of hot soup, a topping steak-and-kidney pie, suet dumpling, cheese and coffee, winding up with liqueurs, an excellent cigar, and goodish hands of cards, I stumbled into a half-drowned sentry about the size of nothing at all, with



a ferocious cold and hardly enough voice left to challenge, but ever so gamely defending his hundred yards of beat. I asked him if he was not sick to death of his job, to which he replied cheerily, "Not by no means, Sir! Quite dry underneath, Sir! Mustn't grumble at nothing, Sir! Army discipline, Sir!" So I gave him a bob for a drink in the morning, probably against all the rules of the aforesaid army discipline. Here was a lad wet through, with his last meal six hours behind him and another six till he breaks his fast, a sea of mud to plough through and a swamp to sit him down in—and withal perfectly contented. And here had I been grumbling and grouching, with a good dinner for the eating and a warm or warmish bed to go to. True, the irrigation system of canals laid out on my bedroom floor makes a fool of Schiaparelli's network on Mars, but I've no right to grouse. If last night's sentry had been an Artist he would have been able to regale himself with all the luxuries of self-commiseration. But the probability is that he was only an ordinary decent fellow and not troubled with the Higher Squeamishness.

## CHAPTER IV

### LEAVE

#### § I

I AM full of a Baudelairian Spleen this morning, the result of leave, a miserable weekend leave, just long enough to make one's soul, in the hackneyed phrase, desperately unquiet within one. I had made the most strenuous resolutions to have no further traffic with that fair-seeming wanton, Mistress Furlough, to resist all her importunities. But the adjutant, who was in an unusually good temper, betrayed me by saying that our move to the Plain was not yet and by throwing out a "Saturday to Monday any good to anybody? Room for one in the car." And of course I managed to shout a little louder than the rest.

It was with little pretence at dignity that the C.O., the Senior Supply Officer and myself climbed into the car which was to take us to the London train forty miles away. The whole Divisional Train stood round us punctiliously saluting the C.O. and jeering enviously at the other two. How could we be dignified after the half-lunatic frenzy with which early that morning we had performed our ablutions out-

side our tents singing "Who paid the rent for Mrs. Rip van Winkle?" and treading on the sward measures that would have put to shame all the tangoing, fox-trotting, barefoot-dancing and art-capering that ever made the fortune of an illustrated weekly? It was exactly like a trio of fourth-form boys going home for the holidays. We played havoc with the railway lunch, a meal of quite unusual delicacy. Like that Bohemian banquet at which the host announced that there would be plates, it is to be recorded that at this banquet of the permanent way there were knives and forks. We played three-handed bridge all the way to town, at which I lost eight hundred points, arriving at King's Cross the poorer by two days' hard-earned pay. In case you do not know how to calculate the cost of week-end leave, I will tell you. It is quite simple. You make careful calculation of all possible expenditure, double it, add a sovereign, only to find yourself borrowing to pay the bill for Sunday night's dinner.

On arrival in town, we were careful to avert our eyes from the gay butterfly who, we pretended, was to await the C.O. on the platform. Schoolboy-like we had always credited the C.O. with unimaginable gallantry, concocting the most incredible yarns. You remember how glibly Stalky talked of the Head being thrown

out of a West End music-hall, after hacking the chucker-out on the shins? In the same way we had peopled King's Cross with legions of fair women ready to fall on the neck of our gallant C.O. Nobody, we felt sure, would believe us if we had to go back with some lame tale of a little old lady with white hair and quiet voice, and an old-fashioned mothering way with her.

Strange that one should find life in camp beyond all the ecstasies and at the same time ecstatically embrace the first opportunity of getting away from it. Well, people are built that way, and lovely though Yorkshire hill and dale may be, one wearies of perpetual exile and hankers for the sociabilities. Better a dinner of herbs in Soho than in these unpeopled wilds perpetual cuts off perpetual beeves—or so one thinks after a couple of months of dining out with Nature. And of course leave means London. We tell our provincials that their cities are romantical places and we produce one of Mr. Muirhead Bone's idealisations of canal-bank and factory-chimney to prove it. But no one seriously suggests that provincial towns are amusing places o' nights, or that their humdrum streets cannot be improved upon for an afternoon's airing. No! the provinces won't do for leave. London is the soldier-on-furlough's spiritual home.

After dinner—and what a dinner!—with plates, knives, forks, napkins, finger-bowls with water in 'em, champagne-glasses with champagne in 'em, to the brim and flowing over, the result of weeks of economising—one sent for an evening paper for a look at the theatres. One called to mind that excellent and learned dramatic critic, now most excellent and regimental of sergeants, who won his third stripe after competition with an ex-liftman from the Hotel Metropole. This erudite personage admitted that once, during a week-end in London, when he had the choice of two French comedies, a flamboyant Sardou with a great French actress, a Shaksperian revival on new-art lines, the latest Russian dancer, and the latest Pinero, he went bravely and unashamedly to the Follies, twice. So did not I bother my head about the Intellectual Drama or any sort of Repertory superciliousness, but plumped for the Palace. Bang went eleven and sixpence—more than a day's pay—but the performance was the last word in “man-about-town, brandy-and-soda smartness,” as Mr. George Moore once said of Arthur Roberts. I've forgotten all about the theatre now and should hardly know good acting from the high-brow'd intellectual stuff, but Nelson Keys struck me as the very genius of mimicry, a kind of pocket Galipaux, even smaller than the great little Frenchman.

On Sunday we had a kind of Pals' luncheon party. There was a lawyer turned stretcher-bearer and an author, who had been printed, from the Artists' Rifles. The Sportsmen's Battalion sent a painter of some repute, whilst the good ship "Crystal Palace" released a most excellent Hamlet masquerading as a sailor. Later on round the piano we got a bit sentimental singing choruses from revue and cursing our luck and the midnight train that was to take us back into exile.

And now comes the sting of it all, the Baudelairian Spleen, the sublime discontent. London on leave, however exquisite, isn't all gold. One is too much given to counting the minutes like a small boy at the Pantomime. Then there's no real appetite; one resorts too willingly to the adventitious *apéritif*. Neither is there any air or atmosphere and the beds are too soft. One misses the friendly beetle and the enquiring earwig. And thus it comes about that the midnight departure from King's Cross—once you have got over the dismay of it—the returning crowd, the long, silent night-journey, the grey dawn, the grey towers of York Cathedral, the view of the crowded, sleepy, silent train speeding north after dropping you at five o'clock in the morning in these quiet dales—so it comes about that these things are all to the good.

Still I am unsettled this morning and not at my best ; I don't like the effect of London on the Yorkshire Dales. I am unimaginatively indenting for a " table, soldier's, six-foot, tops, one," and a " table, soldier's, six-foot, trestles, pairs, one " ; also for " axes, pick, head,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  lbs., one," and " axes, pick, helves, 36 inches, ferruled, one," which means that the detachment is in need of a table and pickaxe. As I scribble this meaningless jargon, momentarily shorn of its glamour, I curse London and wish I had paid you a visit instead. There is something about your Albert Square and Victoria Station, Plymouth Grove and Alexandra Park that is solid, unemotional, purposefully normal and as little unsettling as the poems of passion of Miss Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

Most bitter sting of all, I have now exhausted all my stored-up leave and must set to work to get in credit again. After all the *sky* here is splendid and for the moment it doesn't rain. But what a consolation !

## § 2

One recovers fairly quickly from the day-after-the-party feeling, the leave-depression, as the Germans would call it. An hour's fretting and one buckles to again, to find renewed charm in the life of the camp for which London is so royally unfitting. Imagine that the train has dropped you at five o'clock

in the morning at the little station in the dales. Your fellow-travellers, soldiers all, wonder drowsily what stoppage this can be on a journey which was to be plain sailing all the way to Edinburgh, but before the train is under way again you see them settle down once more to their uneasy slumbers. Before you, ensconced in the greenest of hollows, lies the little camp—row after row of trim tents, so many pagodas in some story-teller's dawn. From the slopes of the hills and the tops of the dark firs unseen fingers are plucking away the shrouds of wreathing mist, which cling a little yet, reluctant to leave this tiny Paradise. You catch your breath as you think of these quiet dales and the garish city only seven hours away. There is no one on the station and the gates are locked. You throw your kit over the palings and climb a fence a few yards away by the signal-box. Not a soul stirs as you creep through the ghostly lines, brushing the dew from the streets of this grassy village. You unlace the door of your house, striking damp after the close, hot joys of London. Your blankets invite you as who should say "This is indeed a bed." In two hours it will be day and you alone of all the camp know how gorgeous the promise of that day.

Breakfast finds you reassuring your little world that London stands where it did. You



describe what sort of food is being eaten in the restaurants and what new songs are being sung at the revues. You find that there are two new subalterns in the mess, Londoners both, born within sound of Bow Bells, Cockneys to their innermost core and being. Like Henley's news-boy they are all dart and leer and poise, irresistible within their sphere. There is about them a cocksureness that is at once sparrow-like and overwhelming. The most charming, nicely-mannered, well-groomed, well-intentioned young gentlemen that ever adorned the counters of a bank, their plight in this purely pastoral setting is pitiful. Never a bar to lean over, nor yellow-haired radiance to be chaffed across marble tops meticulously swabbed. They enliven the mess with tales of the West End in which the Empire figures as quaintly and as recurrently as in the frothy little ditties of Miss Vesta Tilley. But in less than a week even these modish, wide-awake young men will have begun to leave town behind them and to succumb to the fascination of life in the army.

The fascination of life in the army! Of course it's fascinating, even if the beginning is a trifle humiliating. It is humiliating to find that you, a person of some cultivation in your own walk of life, have not yet mastered the

art of ordering a pair of boots, paying for the week's groceries, or even writing a report on some infantile matter of business. Heedless of formula, ignorant of the existence of any set of rules governing official correspondence, you fall into the trap of writing your C.O. a civil note as from one gentleman to another. Never shall I forget my first report—having to do with the choice subjects of latrines and incinerators—which I began according to the more or less polite usages of civil life “Dear Major Tompkins.” Nor shall I ever forget the punctilious Tompkins' receipt thereof. The whole difficulty is of course that whereas in peace times the young officer grows to his work, the exigencies of the present war demand that untutored and inexperienced young gentlemen should be conducted on the morning of their arrival to their offices, to wit one tent, and after being advised that the unlikely-looking mob of ruffians now getting in the coal is their squad should be abandoned to their own uninformed devices with the general instruction to “carry on.” But after one or two days of mishap and bungling, light breaks in and the army way of doing things is seen to be fool-proof. In a week one sees through the rigmarole, and the complicated and involved become sun-clear. One reckons it absurd, for

instance, that anybody in need of a hammer and tacks should not know that the thing to do is to sit down and invite the D.A.D.O.S., on a jolly little form specially invented for the purpose, to issue to you forthwith—

“Hammers, claw, 32 oz., one,” and  
“Nails, iron, clout, wrought, counter-sunk, No. 104, lots of.”

Of course it is not really quite so simple as all this. I happen to have stumbled on the Army Form giving this romantic description of the habits of the Hammer and the Nail—(It sounds like a song out of “Patience.”) The initial difficulty is to discover the original Army Form on which to apply for all the others. You might imagine that this form would be labelled quite simply A.F. 1 (Army Form Number One). But the game is not by any means so easy as this would make it. I had been begging, borrowing, and stealing Army Forms for many weeks before I discovered that there was a legitimate way of getting hold of them. The novice’s pursuit of the original Army Form is the finest hunting known to human intelligence. The chase may be long and stern, but there is a kill at the end of it.

After a time you begin to have a suspicion that the essential thing in Supply work is not so much supplying as accounting for having

supplied, or for not having supplied, as the case may be. Take the case of my immediate friends, the bacon boxes. From the moment a bacon box is filled with bacon and forwarded by the consignor to the day it is received by the consignee and returned empty it is saddled with a way-bill in quadruplicate. Take a long breath while I explain.

A way-bill is what civilians call an invoice, and there are always four copies of it. One is kept by the consignor, two copies go to the consignee, one of which he keeps as a "receipt voucher" or the authority for bringing the goods on his charge, the other copy being signed by him and returned to the consignor as that consignor's "issue voucher" or proof of issue. The fourth copy is for the civilian carrier, for example, the railway company. I hope that is perfectly clear, as I have copied it all out of a text-book, not having, as the exquisite said, the tapster's mind for these reckonings.

Now wherever the wretched bacon box is sent it cannot escape its birth certificate, always as I have already told you a quadruplicate affair. But the fate of bacon boxes is to be commandeered by officers. (You give a corporal in the Supply Section half a crown to steal half a dozen for you and hand them over to the wheelwright.) They next reappear

as wardrobes or washstands or chests of drawers—this time it is a five-shilling piece which changes hands—with the disconcerting result that there is often no bacon box to give sense to the pile of minutes which have been enquiring after its health for some weeks past, and are now marked by an insistent and semi-offensive tone. And better for a Supply Officer that a whole battalion should go forth on its route march baconless than that a single bacon box should be returned as missing. No wonder our elegant little subalterns are inclined at the beginning to regard life in the Army as store-keeping on an unusually vulgar scale.

Life in the Supply, then, is a whirl of missing bacon boxes and defaulting meat bags, rather than of the handsome dashing affair one's spurs would have indicated it to be. Farewell the pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war, but not farewell, alas! to the neighing steed, to the rearing, biting, shying, stumbling, kicking, bucking, jibbing sort that are served out to us. The charger allotted to the more pedestrian of our two new subalterns, an excellent fellow on a walking tour but no horseman, takes four men to hold him and a rough-rider two hours to get up. The horse is officially "nervous," but not returnable to Remounts, and our little gentleman has to overcome equal

quantities of the animal's nervousness and his own. It is thought probable that in a day or two one at least of our new subalterns may begin to see something of a more adventurous side to store-keeping. We shall see.

## CHAPTER V

### CORPORAL SIMPSON

WE have all been through something of an ordeal, and as Corporal Simpson seems to be bound up with it I shall tell you about both at the same time. We have been through nothing less than a general inspection which, as everybody knows, is a kind of Inquisition, taking one back to end-of-term examinations and putting everybody in camp into a state of schoolboy funk. Junior officers who are really middle-aged men of business are harried and badgered about all sorts of unfamiliar lore acquired long after the mind has got set. Memory holding none too firm a seat in these rusty brains of ours we fill the air with agonised enquiry as to the composition of Brigades and Divisions, the exact meaning of the words "First-line Transport" and "Base Details," the constitution of a Divisional Train, the number of G.S. Wagons (*a*) mobilisation, (*b*) on concentration; the amount a mule (*a*) can eat, (*b*) must eat according to regulations. Alone the Majors walk about tolerably at their ease—theirs the composure of sixth-

form demi-gods not easily to be ruffled. As for the C.O., no need to be nervous on behalf of a genius who can combine a mastery of the big things of soldiering with an encyclopædic knowledge of the little ones.

Neither had I too many anxieties on my own account. The coal-yard of which I am supreme dictator had been swept and garnished to such a point that any inspecting General might dine pleasantly off its floor. I had at my tongue's end the exact number of pounds of oats to a bag, had made sure about maize growing on trees or being of the macaroni order of things, knew exactly how many soldier bakers we had lent to the civilian bakery a hundred miles away. All kinds of knowledge, pertinent and otherwise, were to be had from me for the asking. Fully forewarned and forearmed I prepared to bestow thought on the state of poor Simpson, my corporal, who may know his right hand from his left, but is in perpetual doubt about his squad's. It had just occurred to me to ask him for suggestions how to get his men from the coal-yard to the level crossing *with his left leading* in case so fiendish a trick were played on us by the General, when I saw him approaching with the air of one inviting conversation.

Had I considered the suitability to present occasion of the great passage in "Samson



Agonistes" beginning "Oh, how comely it is and how reviving"? Did not the phrase "the brute and boist'rous force of violent men" seem to me worthier of Englishmen with their inheritance of great speech than "Hun" or "pirate" or even "baby-killer"? Making a mental note to look up my "Golden Treasury" before the next parade so as to get on terms of debatable equality with this poetic corporal, I bade him, brutally and boisterously, move off the detachment from the left and disentangle it at the level crossing in rehearsal for the General on the morrow.

Well, the Great Man came, saw and had all his thirst for knowledge overcome. He inspected the kitchens, interviewed the more tractable of the horses—the permanently obstreperous having all gone sick, strange to say—saw us harness up and despatch a column. After lunch he made a speech at once critical and encouraging, dropped hints as to the more economical disposal of the camp dripping and expressed a candid opinion as to the riding capabilities of our N.C.O.'s, preserving a complete reticence as to the horsemanship of the officers. But to my intense chagrin he never came near the detachment, nor cast an eye upon the yard.

We said good-bye to the General with something of the sensation of relief—"speeding the parting with a vengeance," was Simpson's

version. The General's last word had been something about reaching before nightfall another camp a hundred miles away. And this is where Simpson, who is a dab hand at poetry, pulled off the one common-sense achievement of his career. He had wormed it out of the General's chauffeur—that they came from the same town may explain the lad's expansiveness—that the General was going to pay us another visit on the morrow, "one of his surprise-packets." Six a.m. next morning therefore found me in my coal-yard feverishly loading and unloading nothing in particular. At five minutes past the sentries I had posted gave warning of the approach of the big grey car, and at ten minutes past I was meeting question with answer, pat, with all the old sensation of scoring off one's form-master. One awful moment I had of almost irresistible temptation.

"Do you know where your hay comes from?" asked the General.

"Yes, Sir!" said I, and at that moment the thought of Mr. Arnold Bennett's immortal Card flashed through my mind.

"Do you!" trembled on my lips. It was an awful moment. Simpson considered when he approached me about it afterwards that I should have had the courage of Denry's "cardishness." I felt that up to that time

my henchman had credited me with this literary insolence and that I had fallen in his esteem.

I am not surprised at Simpson, having long known him for a kindred soul entertaining relations with the Muses. I first recognised the *littérateur* in him the day when I told my squad of navvies that though there may be six-and-sixty ways of writing tribal lays, there is only one way of shovelling coal and that way my way.

“From Mr. Kipling, I think, Sir,” put in Simpson.

Simpson may not be much of a practical soldier, but he makes up by being more than a bit of a poet. I discovered that before the war he was a railway clerk with a passion for the cinema. He confessed to having “written” many of these soul-stirring films, and to having had them played all over America and Australia at a profit of over four guineas per drama. He outlined some of the plots and even gave me one or two of the scenarios to read. “Her Only Son” dealt pathetically with the lad who steals the widow’s last mite. “A Noble Deception” concerned a hero who unwittingly made love to his brother’s girl. To wean her affections from him the hero had to sham drunkenness. (Simpson never goes to the theatre proper, and had never heard of “David

Garrick"!) "Pals" was all about a pavement artist and a flower-girl, with a moral that the poor as well as the rich may know true and faithful friendship. Simpson is strong upon the domesticity of the picture-play. Once, in the columns of a theatrical newspaper he had it out with a famous dramatic critic who knew no better than to fall foul of the inanity of the cinema drama. This impudent fellow would, according to Simpson, have pigeon-holed the film-drama into: (a) The lovers meet, have trouble and come together again. (b) Blackguards turn up trumps. (c) Prodigal sons restore to glory their mortgaged ancestral homes.

"But I filled his slate!" said Simpson. "If the cinema was not to use this sort of plot, I challenged him to say what sort of plot the cinema was to use! And he had no answer."

Simpson's favourite poets are Byron, Mrs. Browning, and Henry Kirke White, and his pet hobby musical comedy. The theatre proper has no interest for him. It lacks go, he declares.

I first made Simpson's acquaintance through borrowing him when I was short of a lance-corporal.

"He is the biggest darned fool in the camp, and you can have him with pleasure," said his officer, who before the war was used to dragooning coolies, and had not too much patience with

poesy. Simpson was a full corporal at that time, and as the strength of the detachment only allowed a lance-corporal, the fellow, scenting a kindred spirit, volunteered to lose a stripe. I accepted this, and Simpson took to looking happy instead of mooning about the camp. We talk "Shakspeare and the musical glasses," and when Simpson has a quotation to throw off his chest he chooses me as the victim. Incidentally he works like blazes, inefficiently perhaps, but in an ecstasy of zeal and always at the double. To-day I saw the unusual sight of Simpson walking. He explained that he had just been inoculated.

"To do a great good do a little harm," he suggested, nosing a discussion.

Perhaps my friend has rather too great an affection for polysyllables and a florid, tonsorial style of speech that is strangely reminiscent of the society diction of our leading playwright. I ask Simpson if there are any letters for me. He replies :

"It would appear, Sir, that there are four."

Once when he was telling me with some emotion of a friend killed at the front and expatiating on the ties between them, I hazarded, in language which I thought would please him, Mrs. Cortelyon's famous "twin cherries on one stalk."

"Exactly, Sir," said Simpson, adding, "and

if you will permit the liberty, Sir, I should like to say that I have often admired your figures of speech, not so much, Sir, for their accuracy, as on behalf of their elegance.”

A few weeks after I had accepted Simpson's sacrifice of a stripe, instructions came through to add a sergeant to the strength of the detachment. Simpson has accepted the two additional stripes with the same equanimity with which he discarded one.

“It's not the stripe that makes the soldier” is his equable philosophy.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PLAIN

WE'RE off, and the fever called waiting is ended at last! Here have I been for two months without a line to you and now at the last minute I could write reams. But that would be wearisome and there's time only for essentials. What then shall I tell you about the Plain before we go? I could do an admirable guide-book about Old Sarum, with stories of the Canadian vet. who thought Salisbury Cathedral "nobby" and Stonehenge "real smart." Perhaps I should tell you that Stonehenge really is impressive in spite of the silly little guide-book which flaunts a photograph of a local country seat cheek by jowl with a view of the Great Trilithon. In spite, too, of the iron railing and the stolid policeman—whose stolidity melts at a shilling. Nor must you be put off by rows upon rows of tin huts lining and ruling the horizon for all the world like the mean streets of Mr. Morrison's novels. You declare for a city of the dead, a shell, a husk, so silent is it and so motionless. And then you begin to realise the immense

distances. This little world is miles away, its inhabitants are no bigger than flies; their incomings and their outgoings are hardly remarkable and fail to break the silence. Sometimes on quiet evenings you can hear the blowing of faint bugles, recalling you from the grave and certain past to the fretful mirage of the present. Stonehenge may well claim a place among the Great Monuments, since it can face Time undaunted and suffer no shrinkage in its immense setting.

Something there is about life on the Plain that puts me out of patience with minor grumblings, something that is more than the consciousness that the period of training is at an end, more, even, than the sense that a great adventure is about to begin. I am more conscious of England here than I have ever been outside literature, and in actual terms of soil and stone and landmark. Salisbury, Winchester, Bath, this is England with a vengeance, the histories come to life again. Those pictures in the primers, of rounded arches, vaulted roofs and traceried windows, those quaint woodcuts of recumbent knights gravely asleep—how the old school-books come back to one! And here am I in that part of England where you may stand in the light of these actual windows, peer through these very arches, finger curiously the lineaments of these carven



knights, their stone pillows and quiet swords. I swear that either I was dreaming yesterday or did in very sooth see over a shop front in Salisbury: "Hengist and Horsa, Haberdashers." I dined at the "Haunch of Venison," an old-fashioned hostelry of slanting ceilings and warped floors, secret passages and unsuspected alcoves. The landlord has in his time done much digging for treasure, unearthing coins and fabulous pottery. He shows a gallon jug with a false bottom permanently in favour of the host to the tune of a full half-pint. A crumbling wainscot yielded him a slipper of Charles the Second's day, and the whole house is the sort of thing which we up north would be proud to reconstruct in an "Arts and Crafts" exhibition as a titbit of Mediæval England. But down here people put the Beautiful to its proper use and live in it. If the very stones of Salisbury prate of the past, so do the hedgerows breathe out its spirit. . . .

There are occasions when the least introspective of us must take stock of his sentimental position. An evening on the Plain in war-time is one of them. Men are here from all the ends of the Empire for all sorts of reasons. Some for the "sweet punishment of their enemies," some that they may be "honour-

ably avenged," some for the adventure, some through the loss of their jobs ; some hating it, some unutterably bored, many inspired, a few who will never find their feet, but not one, so far as I can gather, who would turn back if he could. " Man comes into life to seek and find his sufficient beauty, to serve it, to win and increase it, to fight for it, to face anything and bear anything for it, counting death as nothing so long as the dying eyes still turn to it. And fear and dullness and indolence and appetite—which indeed are no more than fear's three crippled brothers—who make ambushes and creep by night, are against him, to delay him, to hold him off, to hamper and beguile and kill him in that quest." This is neither Ecclesiastes nor yet Bunyan, but a great living novelist. This passage seems to me worthy to be printed on a little card and served out to every soldier with his Pay Book. Each of us here, surely, has his " sufficient beauty." It may be a family tie, or a grand passion, an art or a friendship, a religion or even an ideal of politics. At the last, it may be love of country. What each man's " sufficient beauty " may be, it is no man's business to enquire. Enough that each man here is ready to fight and to face and to dare for it, and is already putting dullness and fear, appetite and indolence behind him.

There are times when one is a little doubtful of this, when one wonders how high thinking, or the best that we may contrive in that line, can go hand in hand with pettifogging drudgery, the unimaginative routine, the annihilation of initiative, and the stamping into a single pattern that must necessarily be the kernel of army training. But each man, having the problem to solve for himself, solves it in his own way. There is much human nature abroad, and perhaps too much of the small and mean side of it to be encountered. I have come across a few great gentlemen and some bullies, much nobility of disposition, all the meannesses and most of the vulgarities. Then, too, when one thinks of one's own slender achievements and meagre attainments in actual practical soldiering one fights shy of proclaiming so grand a text. I suppose I have learnt just about enough of musketry not to be too safe with a rifle; the words of command come to me just that incalculable fraction of a second too late for perfect confidence; I have obtained such mastery of the mysteries of Army Forms as would qualify me for the position of post-boy in a business office, and here I am mouthing about the sufficient beauty of life! It is in the evening, when one goes back to one's quiet office to finish a little work over a vile cigar, that one is most sure about the finer

issues. It is dark, the stars are out, a sentry passes calmly a hundred feet away. The camp is silent, save for the distant din of trivial tunes on trivial instruments, the soldier's evening melody. In the next hut the regimental sergeant-major is twanging a mandolin, the companion of many years. Further down the lines a gramophone is sentimentalising "Johnny O'Morgan, with his little mouth-organ, playing 'Home, Sweet Home,' " and from half a dozen huts, in all manner of keys, resounds the ever popular "Keep the Home Fires Burning." Even that most mannerless of unlicked cubs, young Jones, is making the officers' mess melancholy with his untrained, beautiful voice and sentimental air. As I relight my cigar for the tenth time—they are sixpence each and must be relighted—I know that unto each man in this camp, from the waster in the ranks to the least heeding sub., there is a "sufficient beauty." And in that faith we leave these shores to-morrow.

## CHAPTER VII

### GETTING READY

Hope déferred maketh the heart sick.

PROVERBS.

#### § I

ALAS that at the eleventh hour a telegram should have come to hand informing my gallant gang of navvies and their zestful C.O. that we were not for France after all, but for absorption at the Depot !

I proceeded then to hand over and pay Aldershot the *visite de cérémonie* usual on a re-posting, next receiving orders to hold myself in readiness to proceed to, let us say, the coral strands of "Patagonia." I should have preferred "Peru," with its antiquities, memorials of a bygone civilisation and serpents of old Orinoco, but "Patagonia" would do. Anywhere to get out ! Anywhere ! And to hold oneself in readiness seemed the affair of ten minutes.

It is not very heartening, however, when one's first step on the Patagonian road lands one back again in yet another and remoter part of the Plain. Our national poet's recurrent "Another part of the field" must have been a

reminiscence of postings and re-postings to the Warwick Territorials of the period. Be that as it may, the first stage of the Patagonian expedition found me less than thirty miles from my previous billet on what is rapidly becoming the plainest of plains, decanted as it were at a tumble-down shanty at the end of a single-line railway at a very late hour on a particularly dirty night, with an unknown camp three miles away on roads more darkling than Piccadilly at midnight. The porter is asleep, the cloak-room closed, there is no sign of a cab. Impossible to get into touch with the Barrack-warden, whose landlady, reminiscent of Mrs. Micawber in her faded dressing-gown and brown kid gloves, declines to wake him at that hour of the morning. However, one shakes down somewhere, and next morning a famous Brigadier to whose staff I am attached, without tabs, confirms the news that "Patagonia" is genuinely and definitely at hand.

Then begins all over again the "getting ready" that has been our constant preoccupation for a twelve-month, the revision of clothing on tropical lines, the discarding, for my own part, of a particularly handsome sheepskin coat with leather facings, the result of a lifetime's savings and the wonder of the camp. I am not going to say a single word about the

revision of purely military plans involved in the change from Flanders to "Patagonia," the question of flying wings foraging at "Aden," of mechanical transport coming along at "Ceylon," of mule trains joining up at "Vancouver." All matters of the higher strategy, the use of native troops, the relative advantages of a frank coastal landing or a surreptitious invasion from the Back of Beyond, which is supposed to be friendly to us or at least neutral, the likelihood of gas—all these matters we leave for the Higher Command. What we discuss o' nights round the fire at Head-quarters' mess is kit—our own and the men's, but principally our own. The men's kit will be all laid down in a wonderful document called a mobilisation store table, of which more hereafter, whilst the personal luggage of officers is allowed to remain more or less a matter of individual taste and fancy. Men *must* take, officers *may* take—all the difference between the "may" and "must" in the rules of that ancient and meaningless game of golf we used to play in the days of long ago. Besides discussion of kit there is a desire on the part of officers to pool their stocks of knowledge, or shall we say conjecture? The Signalling Officer hazards the view that "Patagonia" is a great country for buffalo and the lassoing thereof. He is met with the objection that Patagonian

grass is notoriously man-high, and inimical, surely, to sporting proclivities, but the Staff Captain, who confesses to basing his knowledge on recollections of a book of his boyhood called "The Wild Horseman of the Pampas," supports him whole-heartedly. The Captain has the alternative theory that the natives do their lassoing from platforms erected on bamboo poles on which they live after the manner of Peter Pan or the ultra-rational gentleman in Mr. Chesterton's tree story.

The Brigade Supply Officer contemplates taking a ton of coloured beads, in the belief that if you are sufficiently lavish with bits of glass and discarded top-hats the native chiefs will give you half their kingdoms, and the most ebony of their daughters to wife. The Brigade Major, a "picked man of countries," talks bush-fires and biltong, pemmican and mocasins, tsetse fly and the burrowing flea, snakes-rattle and strokes-sun, thorn-proof drill and sun-helmets, blackwater fever, sleeping-sickness and malaria, the antics of the mosquito and the prevalence of big game. A subaltern holds the view that the Patagonian lion, though small, is the fiercest of his species, with a bite very much worse than his bark. He has been known, however, to take fright at the sudden opening of an umbrella. The Brigadier is severely non-speculative. He understands that we may



have to rely on yaks or donkeys for our heavy draught and the native for our private luggage. The native load, carried on the head, is sixty pounds. "You are a careless fellow," says the local phrase-book under the heading "Conversation with natives"—and one suspects reference to the loss of half one's luggage—"take care lest I dislike you again to-day." The General goes on to advise the study of pack-saddlery and the purchase of tin boxes to defeat the white ant. The Machine Gun Officer and the Requisition Officer (myself) lie very low and say nothing, the former because he is on the eve of a momentous discovery about indirect fire and doesn't care a rap what country he is for, so long as he has somebody to pot at on the other side of a hill, the Requisition Officer because his knowledge of "Patagonia" is confined to "King Solomon's Mines" and the book in which Stanley says "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" Towards bed-time talk dies away in terms of colonial allowances, banking facilities, postal arrangements, the proper dose of quinine, the nice question of tobacco.

Let it not be thought that the men are forgotten. The exact amount and style of clothing they are to take is laid down beyond appeal and is not within our control, but the officer who should neglect to see that his men are

comfortable in their outfit would be a scoundrel. And so we have endless boot and clothing parades, and much discarding, altering, adapting, fitting—but it is one's own outfit that provides the mental torture. Alone the General remains calm. He has gone through a year of the present war, the South African Campaign, and whatever small scraps in India he has been able to get himself ordered to, on an iron constitution and a couple of shirts. Now he lets fall a hint that it will be quite time for us to get Patagonian kit when we drop anchor at "Antananarivo." His staff are rendered thereby vaguely uneasy, and the opinion is held that, being a Brigadier, he may know something. What is called Patagonia may only be a euphemism for somewhere nastier.

More disconcerting than a bolt from the blue, but not altogether unexpected, comes the stolid, emotionless telegram informing all our eager and passionate starters in the great race that they are not going to be allowed to start after all. Follow ejaculations loud and deep. The Brigadier himself gives a little squeak of disappointment. I am sent round to the more downcast to tell them that they also serve who are only transferred from one mudheap in Wiltshire to another, and to look as though I believed it. "And thus from hour to hour we ripe and ripe," quotes a cynical schoolmaster

and bachelor of arts—a poor hand at scrubbing a floor, by the way. I can only agree that after seventeen months' training troops should be ripe enough. . . . I return to the mess and find them full of lead, but trying to smile, pretending to get up enthusiasm for our next ordered destination.

“You'll wear your beastly sheepskin yet,” the Brigadier snaps. And so to bed, but only moderately cheerful, to dream of opening umbrellas in the face of Patagonian lions, in full marching kit of sheepskin, pugaree, and mosquito net.

Disappointment endures for the night only, joy coming along in the morning in the shape of an official letter expanding and amplifying the telegram. Our destination has been changed to “Peru.” Peru after all! Where's your Patagonia now?

The geographical indications contained herein must not be taken too seriously. Natural ignorance and a calculated obscurantism are happily coincident.

§ 2

“Not gone yet?” This now general greeting to the subaltern home on one of his recurring penultimate “last leaves” contains a ring of

scepticism calculated to jar on youthful ardour held in durance yet as eagerly aflame as on the great day seventeen months ago. The poignancy of the most tremendous partings becomes blunted by iteration. The high Roman, laying upon the lips of his royal mistress of many thousand kisses the poor last, is in the tragic vein ; our modern type, with its "insane farewells" protracted to banality, leans first to tragi-comedy and topples comfortlessly on anti-climax at the last.

One wonders whether the subaltern straining at the leash has adequate conception of the complexity of the non-military preparation that must precede the actual slipping of the dogs of war. Let me explain, not talking in Armies, nor yet in Divisions : lesser magnitudes, a handful of five thousand, are more my weight.

Let us assume that officers and their men are at their physical and mental best, that they have mastered the most complicated systems of drill and the fine arts of musketry, that they are experts at bayonet-fighting and bomb-throwing, trench-digging and map-reading, semaphore and heliograph. The skill of their machine-gunning is as entrancing as the ingenuity of their wire entanglements is devilish. The tone of the battalions is high ; the men can endure all things with serenity, they are, in a

military sense, ready. Now comes the order for immediate concentration at Camp X, *en route* for "Patagonia." A day or two to get into camp, say the units; a day or two to make each other's acquaintance, a day more for the grand march past the Brigadier, and in a week we are off! . . . Two months later finds the Brigade still marching past the Brigadier, sadder soldiers probably, none the wiser, certainly, as to when, if ever, they are to get out. No civilian knows as the belated soldier knows, what it is to be "fed up."

It was just two months ago, coincident with our concentration, that the Mobilisation Store Table made its first insidious appearance, and Delay looked spectrally forth. The Mobilisation Store Table (generally called Mob. Table) is Procrastination's *âme damnée*. It is the last word in human ingenuity and dovetailedness. More comprehensive than the "Encyclopædia Britannica," more compendious than the 'cutest pocket dictionary, it contains the bare necessities of living, and the minimum of the simple comforts after which the town-bred are going to hanker. Now you may have a very good idea that "Patagonia" is the last place to which the Powers that Be intend that you really shall proceed; you may believe that they are marking time and waiting upon international events which you, in your know-

ledge of high strategy and Weltpolitik, decide will take you to "Peru." You know, too, that nothing can be more divergent from the Patagonian Mob. Table than his Peruvian brother, and you hesitate to send out your colossal indents. It is as though you were ordering dinner for Wednesday when the guests may be bidden for Thursday. Take warning therefore from a sad little story. There was once a wily old Colonel who, though in receipt of orders for "Labrador," got a tip from high places that he was going to "Bolivia." With insidious cunning the Colonel committed himself only to such items as were common to the tables for both countries. But how much of unwisdom did he discover in this vacillation between furs and cashmeres, preventives of frostbite and palliatives of sunburn, when the order came along actually to proceed to the destination originally foreshadowed! The battalion, provided with a modicum of authorised raiment, was, from an official point of view, practically naked. The rest of the story is painful, and has no place here.

The clothing and arming of the individual is the least of the trouble. You can change tropical kit for Arctic and the Japanese rifle for the Lee-Enfield in the twinkling of an Ordnance Officer's eye. Nor is there much bother about miscellaneous stores. The axes-

pick, and the hooks-reaping, the belts, rubber and lunatic-restraining, and the knives opening-tins—once learn to ask for these by their right names and Ordnance is all docility and expedition. The fun begins with the formation of the “first line transport” and the arrival of the mules. Brigadiers who have won distinction on a hundred fields may blow in as they list, Brigade Majors with fifty famous fights to their credit roll up as the fancy takes them, Staff Captains of the top-hole order push in and push off, ordinary Colonels tumble over each other in the scramble for commands—these things are of little moment. It is the descent upon the Brigade of its complement of mules—some hundreds of jolly little fellows with strongly marked personalities—that stirs the camp to its vitals. Half the mules are unmanageable, whilst the other half have never been tried. Nor will any of the luckless young gentlemen condemned to ride them have ever been on horse or mule before, whereas to ride postillion on a self-opinionated mule and drive its recalcitrant partner with rein and whip and voice is an equestrian feat. To drape the curious entanglements—alleged harness—round a pair and hitch the result to a G.S. wagon is a thing the untrained imagination of the new Transport Officer boggles at. Next to arrive are the officers’ chargers, where-

upon ensues a display of *haute école* to turn old Astley in his grave. The Brigade Signal Company, probably Welsh, is the next to turn up, and every hill and hummock for miles round is capped with gnomish figures beating the air with true Celtic fervour. Then the Field Ambulance, and lastly, always beyond criticism, a company of A.S.C. Remember, O youth of England, on fire for the duration of the war, remember through all your urgency of hot blood, that Head-quarters, the four battalions, the Signal Section, the Ambulance, the A.S.C. Company with its saddlers, wheelers, farriers, butchers, bakers, issuers, clerks, are each an individual organisation with interior economy of its own. At the striking of the great hour all these units must be keyed to concert-pitch together, no mean feat of synchronisation.

Of a sudden the order is telegraphed to abandon thought of "Patagonia" and to gird up our loins for "Peru." Hot on the heels of this diverting wire comes the Peruvian Mob. Table, bearing to the Patagonian Table no more than the faintest of family likenesses. Ordnance is made to sit up while strengths and establishments are ecstatically revised, excitement running fever high. And now we inform the authorities that we are nearly, nearly ready. We have a grand field day;



the procession of transport in all its wonder, variety, and colour, though stragglesome, is yet a procession. Even the mules begin to have an inkling of the meaning of the word precision, and when that happens it is odds upon their drivers, who are the real trouble, getting some sort of a glimmer of it, too. And now it appears that during all these endless, dragging weeks, when the whole of Headquarters from Brigadier downwards is strung up, through strain, almost to the point of relying on the reports and figures submitted by those little ants their indefatigable clerks—it now appears that we have never for a moment been lost sight of by the authorities. Telegrams enquiring as to our “state” rain down upon us. The last vaccinations, inoculations, and eliminations of the unfit are through. Then comes the day when the Brigadier, having confidently challenged the authorities to show cause why he should not now be sent out, is seen to draw his Brigade Major apart and engage him in deep converse. In answer to our mute enquiries there is much shaking of the head, nodding, and histrionic air of “We could an we would.” They look wiser, do these great ones, than even we could have thought possible who rate them above all other Brigade Majors and Brigadiers. Is rumour about to justify herself at the last? Can it be

true that getting ready is over, and that our fiery subaltern may renew his farewells, this time in all seriousness ? Even now he doubts it.

### §3

It is a long lane which has no turning, and in the fullness of time even the most dilatory of brigades "pushes off." At the long last embarkation orders do actually arrive, and straightway the camp is swept from end to end with rumours concerning "Ecuador." And "Ecuador" it positively turns out to be, not "Patagonia" nor yet "Peru." True that these most secret orders are sent in triple envelope at dead of night. Equally true that next morning the same orders are whispered from hut to hut. Before nightfall they are the brazen gossip of the camp. Rumour is even rife that the Brigadier and his staff will not accompany the Brigade : "They get squiffy at mess, old man ; not to be trusted with our valuable lives," is the reason generally assigned by the troops. Rumour is indeed justified, though perhaps not for the reason assigned. It is only too true that our famous Brigadier is to leave us, to be translated to a higher place.

"Never has Brigadier been more greatly looked up to by his men," declares the Colonel of our best battalion at a final sing-song given

in the Brigadier's honour. This to the General's face.

"A damned good sort, a topper!" is the expression more often used behind his back.

The quality of the cheering which greets the fine, spare figure with greying hair, now rising to address his men for the last time, is proof that affection for a leader is no fiction of the sentimentalist. So upright a soldier might well have stepped out of the pages of our strong and silent novelists, some such forceful, uncompromising honesty must have inspired the playwrights of the trumpet-blowing regenerative drama. As for considered courtesy, let us say the suave and polished *raisonneur* of a Le Bargy or a Wyndham, a George Alexander at his least-mannered. The Brigadier begins by telling the men that he has commanded few finer battalions. He is careful not to say that they are the best, the very best of his experience, but he implies that he is satisfied with them—measured praise more valuable than glib extravagance.

"'E never did 'old much with soft-soaping, did 'e, Bill?" says a hushed voice which I recognise as belonging to the General's servant. "Never was much for 'anding out the *ne plus ultras*," replies his pal, one Private Jackson, a mess-waiter, who in his time has suffered education.

“I am sorry you are to go abroad without me,” the Brigadier continues. “It is a grief to me that I shall not command you in your new field of enterprise. You have done well at home ; you are going to a new country”—which country the General of course does not specify—“and I am sure when you get there . . .”

What the General is sure about nobody will ever know, for—

“Where ?” interrupts a voice in excited whisper and admirable simulation of suspense. For of course the boys know just as much about it as the Staff. The Brigadier joins heartily in the roar of laughter which ensues, bringing his speech to an end with formal complimenting of the Colonel and Officers.

The day of the Brigade’s departure is a day of weariness for a Head-quarters presently to be divorced and left behind. There is the tedium of leave-taking, the ceremonial visiting, the multiplicity of indifferent farewells. But there is a good deal of very genuine regret. Good-byes, it seems, can be said in a hundred ways. A cheerful soul will recommend you not to forget the night when a distinguished Head-quarters Staff, armed with sticks and a couple of inexperienced fox-terriers, failed to take the measure of a fine rat delivered to them by the mess-cook. Yet another will bid you think of

those early days when advantage was taken of your military innocence to persuade you that a "muzzles horse" was the very latest thing in "helmets anti-gas." Yet another is still harping on the Brigadier.

"Do you remember, old man, what a down he had on string?"

String was the Brigadier's one obsession. Mules whose harness was pieced with string were to him what donkeys were to Betsy Trotwood. Just as that intrepid lady would cry out "Janet! Donkeys!" what time she advanced to the assault, so the General with a shout of "String, by Gad!" would upset the mess table to threaten some luckless driver, whose only sin had been to supplement the remissness of Ordnance, with a liberal allowance in this world of Field Punishment No. 2 and in the world to come the pains of eternal torment. At this stage even the least popular among the officers take on warmer shades of desirability. This arrant snob, that irascible old fool, such an arch-nepotist as yonder old fox who, raising a battalion from his home-acres, has thought fit to officer it from his own dynasty—even these are tinged with a departing glow. Then there are the minor pangs ever so much more acute than the major woes. That nervous horse of yours who, when first you had him, was wont to plunge at a carrot

and now eats out of your hand, goes back to Remounts. Your groom, mysteriously collected from the cavalry, returns thither. Last pang of all, your servant rejoins his regiment. You have established some kind of relationship with the faithful fellow, setting many diligences and assiduities against his poor skill in valeting.

“Under-handed, Sir, I calls it, all this chopping and changing; under-handed, Sir, that’s what it is!” was the final farewell of my most excellent and aggrieved of servants. So you shake hands with him and wish him well; he to attend some less experienced sprig of the New Armies, you to acquire some feckless loon.

It is melancholy to hear the “So-longs!” of the subalterns who twenty years ago might have peopled the pages of Rudyard Kipling and to-day are so many heroes of Ian Hay. Unemotional, not too imaginative, not too highly gifted outside their jobs, shy of theorising, fonder of a bit of rattling, these young men have a very real genius for getting things done. What does it matter that they have no language outside the jargon of their sports, that perilous adventure and certain death are just so much standing up to fast bowling? They are the “clean-run, straight-going, white men, good fellows all” of their pet author—the best of our race, in a word.

At one o'clock on a cold, wet, and cheerless morning, with half a gale of wind blowing, the first half of the first battalion entrains at the shored-up wooden platform of the camp siding. Bugles have been blowing and now the first detachments file down the little platform in ghostly silence, looking strangely wan in the fitful light of the flares. They wear sun-helmets on this night of wind and weather, and squatting by their baggage gaze with Oriental indifference on the great setting out. There is little enthusiasm, little jubilating, no hint of "Tipperary," and one wonders how departure can be so little heroic. Doors are shut and blinds lowered. A pause of five minutes, and at the bidding of the R.T.O. the train glides silently away. At intervals of an hour other trains move off, eight times in all.

And now the last of the troops are gone. It is a raw, chill morning and a tired Brigade-Major turning to a weary Staff Captain asks him in the special brand of Cockney we keep for our extremes of depression :

"Wot abaht it, old son?"

"A fair knock-aht, gives me the pip!" is the reply.

Not down-hearted, perhaps, but a shade thoughtful, we wend our way to breakfast, servantless, groomless, and unhorsed. The Brigadier has gone betimes to his new com-

mand. The camp, yesterday a teeming city, is to-day the abode of desolation. There is none to command and none to obey. Tomorrow will see us, who have lived so long together, strangers even to one another. We are homeless, stranded, shelved, up-ended, once more returnable to store. The brigade has "na-poo'd."



## CHAPTER VIII

### SOLDIERS AND SONGS

“HERE we are again!” varied to “Here we are still,”—the time-honoured phrase of the Harlequinade is the burden of many a letter from the training camps. It had been all Lombard Street to a China orange on my going out with the Brigade, but the Powers that Be had other plans, although those plans have not yet been divulged. One has the old “left behind” feeling. It is the feeling one used to have as a child when it was one’s turn to stand down from a treat. . . .

What shall I write you about, since write I must to cloak disappointment and the baffling sense of being held in leash, more or less uselessly? No need of a reminder that I am not precisely of the greyhound build, nor yet expecting to be slipped to any very martial purpose. The point is that whilst the youth of England has laid silken dalliance and all the rest of it in its wardrobes I, at least, have left an old jacket and a favourite cleek in a dusty locker—“Cleek” is by way of being a *phrase*

*d'auteur*, or the proper thing to say, as I could never manage the beastly club, and used to slog with an iron—but that is by the way. The real grouse is that everybody else has been drilling and preparing and getting ready for ever so long, and to such apparent good purpose too, since they're gone—good luck go with 'em!—to adventure and heroism, discomfort and being afraid, leaving the very air behind them full of ardour and resolution, whilst the handful of us who are left have only our stocks of patience and the national poets to draw on. Poetry was always a good prop, you know, and music a sufficient stay, if it was the right sort of poetry and the right sort of music. I've been thinking a good deal lately about the adaptability of the arts, and wondering whether, if we can't persuade the great arts to unbend, we can obtain for the little ones a trifle of more courteous recognition. Take popular music, and the songs the soldier likes to hear sung. I do not mean the unsingable stuff that ought to be popular, the chanteys, folk-songs, and other erudite nonsense, but the rowdy chorus and plaintive anthem with which we are all made genuinely jolly and pleasantly sad. For the first time in the history of this country our æsthetes and intellectuals have had to do a little mental slumming, have been brought into actual contact with vulgar intelligence and

popular feeling ; and the intellectual mind has discovered that you cannot grub out of a common dixie, wash at a common tap, pig in a common tent, and ignore common discomforts without sharing the simple emotions and ways of expressing them that are common to the crowd.

The first and last thing to note in connection with our new attitude towards popular music is our supreme unconcern as to whether we are in the presence of an Art or not. Great Art, we know, can transfigure dung-heaps ; Popular Art has to do with things that resent transfiguration, leave-takings, home-comings, simple heroisms, and uncomplicated dyings. Let us be perfectly clear about this. It is not denied that great music can deal adequately with these themes, for people with educated ears to hear. What great music can do is not the question. In this new art it is the themes themselves which, given a modicum of skill in the handling, provide our stimulus and our exaltation. I have seen an audience of the New Army, clever and simple together, held in ecstasy as whole-souled as any amazement of the expert for the latest bloom of a Delius or a Stravinsky. It will be argued that the comparison is vicious, that this is the old affair of triangles versus blueness again, that the one is art and the other what Mr. George Moore

wittily calls an alternative form of bicycling—that, in short, you must not measure the exhilaration of a “Sea Drift” against the non-æsthetic emotions of “Till the Boys Come Home.” I quite agree. Surely, however, we want to find a more understanding attitude towards these non-artistic patterns in rhyme and non-æsthetic arrangements in sound. Music possessing so great a power over the emotions of so vast a number must be the concern of sympathetic and not supercilious criticism.

Let me describe a Soldiers’ Concert on Salisbury Plain. You must realise, first of all, the cardinal difference between the hours of leisure of the civilian and the warrior in training. The civilian, though his job be as tedious as tallow-chandling, has yet a few evening hours in which he may seek out the excitement or interest for the sake of which he has endured the day. The soldier is denied all interest in his hours of ease, and is confronted from Retreat to Reveille with intellectual vacancy. There is nothing for him to do, and the most ardent volunteer cannot fill the empty hours for weeks on end with a sense of the Heroic, however sublime, or a feeling for Adventure, however romantic. And surely Wordsworth monopolised for all time all the fun there is to be got out of the Sense of Duty.

Into this abyss of boredom and Wiltshire

mud where we all sat gnawing our fingers, something after the way in which, according to Flaubert, the primeval monsters of the earth's earlier mud were wont unwittingly to devour their feet, fell the welcome news that a Concert Party, headed by Mr. Courtice Pounds, would entertain us at an early date. On the appointed evening everybody in camp struggled through the mud and waded to the Y.M.C.A. hut. The "hall" was full to door-jamb and window-ledge, and never could a more expectant audience have faced the sympathetic soprano, the gay soubrette, the tenor and basso, heroes of a thousand gramophone triumphs, the professedly comic fellow, and Mr. Pounds. The entertainment began with a little song about Ireland, trumpery in pathos and infantile in wit. This at once met with a reception rarely accorded at classical concerts to the most wistful of German "Lieder." Next a song by the tenor, with the burden "When You Come Home at Eventide," floats us down the stream of melancholy. The verse steers a deft course between the muses of Mr. Stephen Phillips and Mr. Albert Chevalier: "One must go first. Ah, God, one must go first"; whilst everybody knows the old coster's prayer, "And when we part, as part we must. . . ." Every eye in the hall was bright and shining, and the tenor, who used the utmost

simplicity, seemed to understand that "More matter and less art" may be the very stuff of right-mindedness. A further exercise in elegiacs brought the audience to unashamed tears. The music, save for a dying fall, had little interest. I suppose the tune laid claim to no sort of "melodic line" or whatever the jargon may be, but the words beginning

"Sometimes between long shadows on the grass  
The little truant waves of sunshine pass"

had a ring of sincerity about them, bringing nostalgia to the officers and simple memories of home to the men.

Mr. Pounds himself began in a vein of regret. He sang one of the many settings of "Mandalay" and managed to convey so much of the silence which in the poem "'ung that 'eavy" that the audience hardly ventured to breathe. "There ain't no 'buses runnin' from the Bank to Mandalay," and we realise that neither are there any running from the Plain to our homes. At the conclusion of the song there was a moment of silence and then the audience broke into overwhelming applause. This brought up the singer again, now with the kindly relief of some rollicking humour. Mr. Pounds reeled off some of the best of his Touchstone—a wonderfully good performance it is, too, as all play-goers will remember—and then on to a

series of imitations—bananas back-firing and other quaint phenomena. Mr. Pounds has nearly as many countenances in his bundle of masks as the greatest of French comedians, and certainly Coquelin never achieved anything more realistic than this actor's "Earwig nibbling his bedding." A subsequent song entitled "They've shifted mother's grave to build a cinema" was hailed with shrieks of delight untempered with misgivings as to feasibility. Then a very arch young lady sang a very arch ditty about another arch young lady who intended to "side-track" seaside flirtation and stick to somebody for keeps. "Good-bye, boys, I'm through!" was the expressive title, calling up visions of straw hats and socks, bands and pier-heads, Brighton and Margate, Blackpool's Empress Ballroom and the sweep of the promenade at Douglas. Then we all fell to thinking of Miss Florrie Forde and the choruses of that lady, testifying to the sunshine of each other's smile till it was time for "God Save the King."

There had been fun at the concert, but the dominant feature was a simple emotion. The audience wended its way home a shade thoughtfully, thinking not so much of supper as of sweethearts and wives. We would have had the concert an hour longer—and what amateur of the classics can say more, or as much?

Two days later I noticed at church many of the faces I had seen at the concert. The organist, a musician of not too considerable attainment, invoked the spirit of devotion entirely successfully in sounds of the faintest musical significance. Meaningless modulations meandered fitfully round the walls of the old church, and I would not have exchanged them for all the ordered wealth of Bach and Palestrina. They did their job, lying lightly on our soldier-spirit and bringing us to serious mood. Great art may easily become a vexation to the simple mind ; to many a soldier it is simply unintelligible. As for these unpretentious contrivances in tunefulness that catch and hold our simple taste, and for which we have as yet no adequate name—shall criticism after the war be content to lump them all together as rubbish of no value ?

What answer, I wonder, have the Academics ? They must be soldiers as well as Academics, or they will be out of court.



## CHAPTER IX

### A CHOICE OF BOOKS

**H**AS it ever occurred to you that we don't so much choose our books as read those which are chosen for us? Publisher and bookseller are in a conjurer's league to "force" books upon us as if they were cards in a trick. A publisher of my acquaintance once told me that his output was divided roughly into good, profitable sellers, books that were too poor to sell, and masterpieces that were too good. And do you know how he got rid of both sorts of undesirables? By the simple expedient of saying to the shopkeeper, "My dear fellow, you want a hundred copies of 'Through Blood to Berlin' or 'Hand and Heart for Haig,' do you? Oh no, you don't! You'll just take eighty copies of either of those and ten of a stumer I've got stuck with. And the balance'll have to be So-and-So's latest, and I assure you it's the best Sonnet-series since Wordsworth. So cheer up and look happy. I've let you off cheap." And the bookseller cheers up and looks happy, for he knows that within reason he can sell a certain number of copies of

anything. But he would rather have eighty per cent of a known seller and twenty per cent of rubbish. It's the masterpiece he's up against.

Now I have made up my mind to go to the front, or as near as I shall ever get to the front—if ever I get ordered to the front at all, of which I begin to have grave doubts—attended by a dozen or so of books of my own choosing. Not books that some old wiseacre has chosen for me and that I am to like for decency's sake; nor books picked up haphazard; nor yet books urged upon my sensibility by some pretty lady on the cover. "Watch for the dicky-bird!" used to be the admonition of the photographer to the two-year-old infant. "Look at pretty lady!" says the present-day publisher to his fractious public, fighting shy even of "David Copperfield" unless reassured by a picture of a present-day Dora in curls and a hat, playing with a snarling little Jip and a hundred years out of date. No publisher's tricks for me! I'm out for the masterpieces and no compromise. All that is wanted in the way of second-rate thinking and slipshod, careless writing I can do for myself. And I entirely decline to believe that if ever I get into a tight place—which Heaven forbid!—I shall get out of it any more easily or acquit myself any less shiversomely for having, say,

“The Scarlet Pimpernel” in my pocket instead of “Esmond.”

Here is my round dozen of books.

1. The Bible and Shakspeare.
2. David Copperfield.
3. (a) Balzac's “La Cousine Bette” and  
(b) “L'Éminent Gaudissart.”
4. Flaubert's “L'Éducation Sentimentale.”
5. Maupassant's “Bel Ami.”
6. H. G. Wells' “History of Mr. Polly.”
7. Conrad's “Lord Jim.”
8. The Oxford Book of English Verse.
9. The Oxford Book of French Verse.
10. Whitaker's Almanac.
11. A volume of G. K. Chesterton's Essays,  
or “Les Liaisons Dangereuses,” by Choderlos  
de Laclos.

So far so good. In case you object that these are not the eleven best books in the world I reply that they are my best eleven best books. I append retorts to any other objections.

1. Admitted that this is another case of Hamlet's “That's two of his weapons.”  
As I cannot get in all I want in any other way this cannot be helped.

2. The biggest-hearted novel written, except perhaps "Bleak House." The former wins on a vote by virtue of Micawber.
3. (a) Balzac's greatest.  
(b) This is open to the same objection as 1, but as it is hardly fair that "La Cousine Bette" should be in one volume only, seeing that so many of the "Human Comedy" are in two, I am allowing myself another. Besides, was not Gaudissart a commercial traveller like some soldiers I know?
4. Not only is this Flaubert's masterpiece, but in my opinion after Ecclesiastes the greatest of all sermons on human vanity. In this book is contained the famous passage on the funeral of M. Dambreuse, "dout il ne sera plus question sur cette terre," that passage which, Mr. George Moore informs us, there are not in the world more than forty people capable of appreciating. This delightful and impulsive critic imagines these forty superior beings as meeting once a year in Paris to recite the passage to one another under the lilacs of the Champs Elysées.
5. Perhaps this is where the courage of one's convictions comes in.
6. I do not attempt to defend this.

7. The finest story in the world.
8. Obvious.
9. Not for the ballads of Villon, the sonnets of Ronsard and du Bellay, the courtliness of Corneille, the frigidity of Racine, the grandiloquence of Hugo, the brassy splendour of Leconte de Lisle, the terror of Baudelaire or the *malaise* of Verlaine, but for the epitaph on a little sixteenth-century dog. Beginning

“ Dessous ceste motte verte  
De lis et roses couverte  
Gist le petit Peloton  
De qui le poil foleton  
Frisoit d'une toyson blanche  
Le doz, le ventre, et la hanche.”

the poem goes on to enumerate the little fellow's amiabilities and social graces.

“ Peloton tousjours veilloit  
Quand son maistre sommeilloit,  
Et ne souilloit point sa couche  
Du ventre ny de la bouche,  
Car sans cesse il gratignoit  
Quand ce desir le poingnoit ;  
Tant fut la petite beste  
En toutes choses honneste.”

Note the parells between this fanciful little threnody and our own great poetry.

“ Car la mort ayant envie  
Sur l'ayse de nostre vie,”

“Envyng earth’s good hap,” Death de-  
spatches Peloton,

“Qui maintenant se pourmeine  
Parmi ceste umbreuse plaine,  
Dont nul ne revient vers nous ”—

in a word, to that undiscovered country  
from whose bourn no traveller returns.  
Poor Peloton,

“qui estoit digne  
D’estre au ciel un nouveau signe,  
Temperant le Chien cruel  
D’un printemps perpetuel ”—

worthy, when he should die, to be cut  
out in little stars like our own romantic  
hero!

What charm and good sense in a col-  
lection which can find place for the grand  
sonnet series *Antiquitez de Rome*, and  
this other tiny miracle of fancy and  
regret!

II. A toss-up to be decided later. Aubrey  
Beardsley confessed in his last terrible  
letters of alternate hope and fear that  
he read passages from the *Lives of the  
Saints* or a page of *Laclos* as he felt ill or  
well.

The last place, like all last places, takes a  
deal of filling. I have almost decided to  
plump for—

12. A volume of W. W. Jacobs' stories, probably "At Sunwich Port."

"There is no news," interposed Mrs. Kingdom, during an interval. "Mr. Hall's aunt died the other day."

"Never heard of her," said the Captain.

"Neither had I, till then," said Mrs. Kingdom. "What a lot of people there are one never hears of, John."

The Captain stared at her offensively. . . .

And if that is not sufficient justification, I can only quote the following :

"I wouldn't put a ticket marked '*Look at this*' on that coat," said Mr. Smith severely, "it oughtn't to be looked at."

"It's the best out o' three all 'anging together," said Mr. Kybird evenly.

"And look 'ere," said Mr. Smith, "look what an out-o'-the-way place you've put this ticket. Why not put it higher up on the coat?"

"Becos the moth-hole ain't there," said Mr. Kybird.

When, if ever, great literature should fail us, there must still be virtue in this excellent fooling.

I am afraid the thirty-five pound kit allowance is going to be something of a difficulty.

But it is a well-known Army maxim that difficulties exist for the express purpose of being circumvented. Such part of my library, then, as cannot be got into the valise will have to be dependent from my person, and any odd volumes left over stowed away on my devoted *bâtman*. In addition to the pockets, patch, for helmets anti-gas, I am inventing a "*poche aux langues étrangères*" after the manner of the addle-pated student in the *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*. Some thought-out scheme for securing a reasonable supply of reading matter is essential. In the days of our small wars it used to be left to each officer to contribute a book apiece, until on one occasion every single one of them turned up with the works of Adam Lindsay Gordon! There is a danger that under such a system to-day "*The First Hundred Thousand*" would be the only book in the camp! And how good it is! Almost am I tempted to cut out the Shakspeare in its favour. Positively I cannot make up my mind whether Hamlet or Private Mucklewame would make the better companion for a campaign.



## CHAPTER X

### MY FRIENDS IN THE RANKS

The land where I shall mind you not  
Is the land where all's forgot.

A SHROPSHIRE LAD.

I WONDER whether I can make you realise how happy a family may be contained within the establishment of a *Depôt Unit of Supply*. It is giving away no military secret to say that the strength of a *Depôt Unit* is laid down as fourteen men, including one officer and one warrant officer, this latter always to be addressed as "Mr.," and a very pleasant fellow when he doesn't bother his head about his status, the little more and how much it would be.

What sort of fellows, then, are the rank and file in the A.S.C., the men upon whom depends much of the efficiency of the officer's job and a good deal of his personal happiness? For you must realise that the officer's job is permanently with him, never to be left behind as you leave a business in the city. Were a generalisation of the rank and file to be attempted it would be Mr. Wells' "Bert Smallways" all over again—the clerk, the shop-boy, the draper's assistant.

Now there is little that is common and everything that is likeable about the shop-boy who really is a shop-boy. His manner of smoking a fag may be the manner of his class, he may be suspected of taking a disquieting interest in social questions, of possessing views concerning the dignity of clerking. But the chances are that he knows what life is like on thirty shillings a week, that he has the pluck to take that life cheerfully, the wit to ignore its limitations and the courage to persuade some pretty simpleton to share that life with him, limitations, economies, the whole anxious bag of tricks. How, after the war, is one going to drop all acquaintance with these honest, likeable fellows, and how is it going to be practicable to keep up all the friendships which one has made in every corner of the land?

Disbanding at the end of the war is going to be a scattersome affair, a bigger upheaval than enlisting. I cannot quite see an end to the friendships with butchers, bakers, candlestick-makers, the clerks and issuers who talk to their officer of their sweethearts, wives and children, and make him a partner in their joys and sorrows.

Three months did I have, during the period of vagabondage known as training, of perfect companionship with my little staff. We were rather more than a baker's dozen all told,

always under orders for the remoter theatres of the war and always being left behind. We had, in the picturesque army phrase, "damn-all" to do. To please the Brigadier we stole cinders from a neighbouring railway siding and drained the swamp all around the Wiltshire farmhouse in which Brigade Head-quarters condescended to lay its head. To smooth the way for the immaculate feet of the Brigade Major we constructed elegant footpaths raised above the mud with the aid of the aforesaid cinders. To entertain the Staff Captain and incidentally the Staff Captain's terrier, a mangy little beast, we caught rats and got plentifully bitten by ferrets for our trouble. We put out, and were suspected of engineering, a fire at the Supply Details billets which secured for us some much-needed equipment. As one of our new soldiers remarked, if the fire was not authentic it was of the *ben trovato* order of things. Sometimes it fell to one to give a hand in the preparation and revision of those gins and snares for adjutants, the *dossiers* of District Courts-Martial. "You wear the stripes on your sleeves, you ought to wear them somewhere else, or words to that effect," was a bowdlerising for the tender ears of the court of which I was enormously proud.

To me would fall the paying of the Brigade's ceremonial visits. On behalf of the Brigadier

one had something civil to say to elderly ladies gushing about the influence of classical music on the soldier. In reply to letters on pink and Paris-scented note-paper one called—Romance being a shy bird down Wiltshire way. When the note-paper was stout and well-to-do Brigadier and Staff would call in person about lunch-time—good feeds never coming amiss on top of Government rations.

There was a fine opportunity for making friends on the day when I had to overhaul a gang of drivers unloaded on us with a record none too favourable. Fifty strong they were, fifty ill-favoured, shiftless, brow-beaten, sullen ne'er-do-weels. Not an ounce of vice in the lot so far as one could discern at a rough-and-ready stock-taking. Their crime-sheets, which averaged a yard long, revealed nothing more heinous than an inability to keep sober and a mania for indiscreet observation as to the appearance and manners of their N.C.O.'s. I shall never forget the kind of shamed bravado with which this flock of black sheep took their shepherding into the presence. Uncertain as to what to do with their hands, half snatching at caps, they appeared to know nothing about the ritual which prescribes that the arms should hang loosely by the sides, the thumb in line with the seam of the trousers. One man, the possessor of as pugnacious a coun-

tenance as ever I set eyes on, stood smartly to attention. Turning up his record I found it to contain every variety of ingenious dare-devilry, with a very fair leaning towards assault and battery.

“Davies, Sir. Driver Davies, No. T4, 999999, goes by the name of Kid Davies, Sir, from Lambeth. Only wants matching to keep him quiet,” was the whispered *précis* of the sergeant in charge. “Give him something to occupy his mind, Sir.”

On the spot I made up my mind to match Driver Davies at the next inter-regimental boxing-tourney for a shade of the odds against any pick of the Staff Captain's. This would at least give the fellow something to keep himself fit for. Between the forty-nine others of as unruly a gang as ever did twenty-eight days' Field Punishment No. 2 in their own country or were tied to a cart abroad, it was not possible at this early stage to make nice discrimination. Facing them one realised once again that discipline, untempered by discernment or kindness or sense of humour, unmakes as many men as it makes. Finely used, discipline braces and toughens, unimaginatively used, it hardens and brutalises. “But for a public school education and some profane patronage I should be ‘for it’ as certainly as the poor devil on the mat,” in a cheap frame

to match the calendars and inkpots, were a worthy fitting for any C.O.'s desk.

A simple question of English had been at the root of all Private Davies' persistent misdemeanours.

"It was all along of the missus bein' took bad—'er wot I lives wiv, Sir—an' me 'oppin' it, and arsking for no leave. Of course I cops out and Colonel, 'e says, speaking very quick, 'I suppose, my man,' ses 'e, 'I suppose you realise the gravity of wot you was doing?' Thinking as 'ow he wants to know if I sees *now* wot I done I ses, 'Yessir,' meaning as 'ow I sees now as I ought to 'ave put in for leave and 'opped it if leave didn't come orf. 'O, you did realise it, did you?' says the ole man. 'Yessir,' ses I. 'That makes it ten times worse,' ses 'e, 'twenty-eight days detention!' Corporal on p'lice tells me as 'ow I ought to 'ave sed 'No, Sir!' me not realisin' nothin' at the time. But 'ow was I to know wot 'e meant?"

From that day he had realised a certain hopelessness in trying to understand an officer or to get an officer to understand him. Consequently he had given up trying to soldier or go straight.

All this I learnt from Davies later on. At the time it was a question of getting into some sort of personal relation with the gang. So

I made an impromptu speech, which had the merit of being entirely unconsidered. I told them that I fully appreciated—of course I didn't use any long words like that—the valour of their famous mutiny at their last station, that I considered the way a mere handful of them held their hut against a whole company of A.S.C. worthy of a corps more pronouncedly combatant than ourselves. Followed suggestions as to the advisability, however, of keeping "rough houses" for brother Boche. Warming to one's subject one made confidences.

"I understand that you have openly declared that you don't care a blank blank for whatever officer is put in charge of you. Now I have asked to be put in charge of you because there is a devil of a lot of hard work to be done down here and you look a likely lot. There is a hundred tons of muck to be shifted for a start, and at least forty mules that nobody can get into harness. Now we are just going to get the place ship-shape, straighten up the blessed mokes and give the General the surprise of his life."

Then for a peroration.

"Get the blooming work done and you chaps shall have a 'cushy' time. But shirk or grouse, and, by Gad, I'll twist your tails till your eyes drop out like ruddy dormice!"

So strong is the old habit of trade unionism

that the men, shuffling out, held a meeting to consider the situation. In less than half an hour they returned a deputation to announce that they had decided to soldier and how much muck did the officer say there was to shift? Whether addresses such as I delivered are laid down in the text-books for officers I don't know. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and the fact remains that until the Brigade broke up there was not a serious crime amongst the lot, nothing at which one could not honourably wink. A more amiable crew of rascals I never desire to meet. Hereafter, in a better world than this I shall desire more love and knowledge of them.

“'E's a bloke as any other bloke can fetch 'is meaning,” was conveyed to me as a candid criticism.

My career as the guide, philosopher, and trainer to Driver Davies was of short duration. I matched him successfully at the inter-regimental tourney against the Staff Captain's fancy, a burly youth who turned it up in the first round. The terms of the wager were my week's pay and allowances against the right to take out either of the Captain's horses. All Davies got out of it was ten bob, which he accepted under protest, and the privilege of an extra horse to groom, about which he made no sort of demur whatever, and as soon as I



had licked him into some sort of shape he was transferred to another Unit, which is the Army way.

Among my other friends in the Supply Details was Staff-Sergeant Smethurst, butcher by profession, and cattle dealer by inclination. He confirmed the generally accepted theory that you had only to get a job as buyer to a concern founded on the principle of mutual benefit, to exchange a business doing three beasts a week for half a dozen rows of houses and a stake in the country.

Next, Corporal Withers, an anæmic, bespectacled individual of despondent mien, in reality a human stove of warm-hearted cheerfulness. In private life an income-tax collector, he confessed that in his hours of ease he has been known to gather his children on his knee and play to them upon the flute. Withers always reminded me of that pathetic figure, Dickens' Mr. Mell, his fellow-flautist, and I liked him for it.

My transport sergeant, as dashing a chap as ever ruined a horse's mouth, was too much given to the tender passion. I mistrusted from the beginning that frank, open countenance which always characterises the emotional ruffian. I was not altogether surprised when one day he asked me to explain how it was that he preferred the young ladies who

wouldn't have anything to say to him to those who would. I read him a little lecture on the French theme: "Les seules femmes à désirer sont celles que l'on n'a pas eues," and advised him to cease taking an amateur's interest in the passion and get married. To my great astonishment get married he did no later than the following week to a young woman of very determined character. I hope she kept him in order, but I have no sort of belief that he ever quite settled down.

Private Alexander McDonald McNicol—I write the name with real melancholy—was of Scotchmen the dourest and most uncompromising. Clerk in an Aberdeen warehouse he was five times rejected. Dodging the doctors at the sixth attempt, he crept into the Army a martyr to rheumatism. On the mornings following wet days he would keep his "bed" in such pain that he could hardly bear the weight of the blanket on him.

"It juist gets a wee bit unbearable," he would say, "but I'll juist stick it, man, I maun juist stick it!"

Never a "Sir" and hardly ever a salute, but I realised that his surliness had nothing to do with being willing or unwilling. Before ever I knew he was ailing I took him a twenty-mile tramp in full kit and, as I afterwards learnt, as much agony as may be endured

without falling out. He nevertheless led the singing all the way, enlivening the march with some extraordinarily non-humorous Scotch ditties, only to take to his bed for a week afterwards. I tried my hardest to get him to apply for his discharge, but without success. The stubborn fellow resisted to the point of insubordination. There is no pathetic ending to his story, or if there is, thank goodness I never knew it. The last I heard of him was that he had been taken to hospital at Aldershot with an attack of rheumatic fever. I have never been able to learn how it fared with him. . . .

As for my four schoolmaster clerks, I find it almost as hard to differentiate between them on paper as it was in the flesh. These were fellows that you were proud indeed to wear in your heart of hearts. They were schoolmasters from the Midlands with a mania for supposing that as an officer I should know more about, let us say, igneous rock formation than they did. I learnt a good deal from them on our route marches and they enjoyed the Gilbertian position as much as I did. It is not often that wit goes to the carting of manure and it was my boast that my two Bachelors of Science, my Bachelor of Arts, and the low fellow who had no letters of any sort after his name wielded their shovels more

amusingly than any other four soldiers in the camp. And I'm willing to bet that they displaced as many pounds of muck per man per minute as the most brainless sons of toil in the Brigade. For you know the Army judges entirely by results, and something which at school we used to call "foot-pounds," and not amusingness, is the standard.

"What are you in private life, Moorcroft?" I asked one of them on the first morning of our acquaintance.

"Science Master, Sir," answered the fellow with a grin, looking up from the scrubbing of a floor.

"Then let's have a little more blooming science about this scrubbing job," said I. "You've missed all the corners. Cleaning a floor doesn't mean shifting matter from one wrong place to another, which is just about all I know about science."

"Well, it's something to know that much, Sir," said Moorcroft more than respectfully. He is, I understand, the author of several formidable treatises on trigonometry, the binomial theorem, and other educational wild-fowl. But he and I could never quite agree as to his capabilities as a scrubber of floors. In my opinion he always made a poor job of it, and I had the pluck to tell him so.

I do not want you to suppose that all the

geese of my detachment were swans. There were one or two determined scallywags whose interest in life was confined to getting as much food, drink, and sleep as possible in exchange for the minimum amount of work. Of them I can find nothing to report. My little list shall be concluded with Private Muggridge, an extravagant, wildly improbable fellow with a shock of flame-coloured hair and the appearance of having got up in a high wind. There was about him a blend of owliness and hilarity which was reminiscent of Traddles and might have been induced by reading too much Chesterton. A ferocious lepidopterist, nothing that flew or crawled or had too many legs had any secrets for him.

What jaunts we went on when we had finished our scavenging! "Route marches," I called them, "war-symposia," according to Muggridge—lepidopterist and linguist, "bright, bloomin' picnics," according to the bakers and issuers. What farm-house teas did we not devour, what distances did we not cover! What did we not see of Wessex! Stonehenge we visited and Old Sarum, the Chapel at Marlborough College, the Church at Lambourne! We got to know every foot of the Downs between Salisbury and Devizes. We talked seriously of the war and of our several attitudes towards it, a thing which in an

officers' mess would be considered bad form. We talked of their wives and their kids at home. And often in the long trudge down the avenues of the forest which was our favourite route we would feel the silence as of cathedral aisles. The light thickening to dusk we would reel off the last few miles to the soberness of Cardinal Newman's well-known hymn, as little mawkishness going to the singing of it as to the rousing choruses with which the day's march would be begun. Then at last we would see the cheerful farm-house windows beckoning us, showing a welcome cheerier than any palace, and we would know the content of tired bodies and minds at ease.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE RETURN TO SCHOOL

*UNDER War Office Authority you will proceed forthwith to Woolwich.*

And to Woolwich forthwith the wanderer proceeds, trailing bag and baggage, camp kit and Wolseley valise. To the Army Service Corps officer proceeding to Woolwich, the Arsenal is the least noteworthy object of his pilgrimage. His Mecca is the A.S.C. Depôt, the repository of his Corps' secrets, the lair of its archives. As Charing Cross and Port Said to the globe-trotter, so the portals of Woolwich to the A.S.C. In the Mess, if you wait long enough, you will encounter the whole Army Service Corps world. Time, Chance, and Design converge here and campaigns end in old friends meeting. The warrior handsomely home, his job cleaned up, the invalid for light duty only, the tyro chafing to get out, the officer with Supply at his finger-ends impatient to pick up Transport—all these forgather at Woolwich.

Woolwich, where next my caravan came

momentarily to rest after the departure of the Brigade, was full of heroes invalided from Anzac and Suvla, amazingly casual gentry these, lacking all outward and visible sign of the extraordinary. Their manners at mess turned out to be not finer than anybody else's, their calls at Bridge not more daring, their handling of a cue not more brilliant than a mere civilian's. We tendered our ears, but they opened not their mouths. Or if they did it was not to talk heroics, but to goad at one another with a fine fourteen-year-old gaiety and zest.

"Awful dirty fellow, Jones," says some monocled splendour of the Public Schools, "had all the Straits to bathe in, and preferred to sit on the shore and scratch!"

To which the immaculate Jones will reply :

"Remember the day, old man, when you marched past H.Q. wearing that beastly eyeglass of yours and every man-Jack of your lot had his identification disk in his eye?"

And the monocled one grins.

Strange race they must seem to our more emotional Allies, this race of well-bred Englishmen with their reticence, their scorn of the journalistic instinct, their adhesion to the shibboleths of silence and under-statement.



Ply them as skilfully as you may, the conversational catch is negligible.

“I tell you what, old man, they fairly put the wind up me that day!” is their way of recording some unendurable terror, whilst, “they weren’t liking it much” has to do for the panic of the enemy.

“Were you in the war or only in Flanders?” is their way of impressing upon you that they consider Gallipoli to have been of two unhealthy places the less desirable.

And yet it would be unwise to judge the temper of these boys by their cult of the inarticulate. There is Mather, for example, a fair youth with a childish face, blue eyes and expression verging on the simple. He retailed to me the innumerable dodges to which he had recourse before succeeding in hoodwinking the doctors. It had been, as he phrased it, “some” hoodwinking, seeing that at one time of his life he had been partially paralysed, at another had lain six months in bed to humour a heart, and had for years been deficient of half a rib. The Dardanelles gave this weakling the D.S.O. Beneath a smile that might have graced Tom Brown’s too angelic chum, there lurked, his pals told me, a malignant ferocity and flame of hate belonging more to racial hysteria than to any sense of patriotism.

Merridew, Mather's partner in butchery, a lean and hungry personage, a veritable Smee with his air of pistols and piracy, did his killing, when he had any to do, with an air of aloofness and detachment. Of murderous demeanour, he is never happy save in the bosom of his family.

To Woolwich, then, to join that penitential scheme of things, euphemistically known as a "School of Instruction"! No matter that you have helped history to record impossible landings, you will conduct a squad on its peregrinations round the back-yard which serves Woolwich for a parade ground. It may be that it is only a few weeks ago that you gave the order to swarm up cliffs on which there was holding only for your men's eyebrows; nevertheless you will drone away with the monstrous "Squad will Retire! Fours-Right!" Your standard floating in the breeze will be the washing of the poverty-stricken tenements which surround the Barrack Yard. It was perhaps horse-mastership of no mean order which in Flanders kept your transport on its legs; no matter, you will attend a lecture on the horse and differentiate in chorus with a dozen others the point of the shoulder from the angle of the haunch. You will take off belt, spurs, and tunic, and with sleeves

rolled up and braces dropped, learn to clean a charger, whilst the driver whose job it should be openly grins. Nine o'clock each morning you will attend a function called Company Office; ten-thirty finds you at C.O.'s Orderly Room.

It may be weeks, it may be only a single day before a telegram whisks you away as it whisked me, to a still more arduous House of Correction, to wit, our old friend Aldershot, there to join the —th Division "shortly proceeding overseas." This meaning any time within the month, twenty-four hours' last leave is graciously accorded. Time then to run up town and back, but not always time for a run home. Nothing remarkable to be found in town on the occasion of my last leave save and gloriously excepting Miss Genevieve Ward's triumphant flicker in the evening of her days. "What's brave, what's noble, let's do it after the high English fashion," this valorous old lady would seem to proclaim by her war-time carriage. Seldom on our stage so rare, so brave a spectacle as this of old age infinitely gay, rounding off life high-handedly with a full smack of Meredithian gusto. . . . But this, however glorious, is again by the way. We are for Aldershot and a sterner theatre. In the meantime, and till we go, the punctiliousness of parade, the small

subserviences, the unwilling shepherding to school, to answer names in class and shout in chorus round a blackboard.

Aldershot and Woolwich, like everything else in this world, are very much what you make them. It may irk you to be treated like a small boy at school, to conform to fantastic decrees as to dress, to subscribe to mysterious fetishes and taboos. Woe to the temporary officer who has had too good a time at some too genial Head-quarters, who has hob-nobbed with Brigadiers, moved among "Brass Hats" as among social equals and nodded affably to simple Colonels. It is humiliating to find rules taking the place of ordinary good manners, to be forbidden the chairs round the fireplace, to be confounded with the unlicked cub of the New Armies, to be suspected of horse-play, of pouring whiskey down the piano and drumming on the keyboard with your field-boots. But these are after all the merest pin-pricks of a self-consciousness which should have been long ago laid aside. Aldershot and Woolwich have their compensating greatness, a seemliness consonant with the portraits and regimental plate of the mess. A day or two of its strictness and something of the initial keenness steals over you again. Your year's round of training is nearly over. Aldershot, the Yorkshire Dales,

the Plain, the Wiltshire mud, Woolwich and now Aldershot once more "shortly for embarkation"—surely some sort of realisation must be at hand? Surely it is to prove worth the waiting!

## CHAPTER XII

### A FALSE START

We'm powlert up and down a bit  
And had a glorious day.

THREE JOLLY HUNTSMEN.

H AZLITT'S apology for a famous essay, you will remember, was a partridge roasting on the spit and an hour to spare before dinner. My excuse for the present letter is an excellent *déjeuner* at a cheap and popular *brasserie*, somewhere in France—for I have actually got to France at last—a Café Boulestin, the last of the cigars brought over from England, and an hour to wait whilst our S.S.O. (Senior Supply Officer) who led us up to the front and brought us back again, after the manner of the famous Duke of York, finds out the orders. We have at last succeeded in getting out of England, have been up to the front, and finding ourselves *de trop* have discreetly returned to the Base. But we are still "Somewhere in France," and that is something.

After months of postings and re-postings to commands, of which the upshot has invariably been absorption or elimination, the old familiar

“ wash-out ” in a word, I and seven other inveterate hopefuls were appointed Supply and Requisition Officers to a Division actually in France and existing on its boot-laces till such time as our most competent selves could be hurried up to its relief.

Now the duty of Brigade Supply and Requisition Officers is to ascertain from the quartermasters of the Brigade exactly how many rations each Battalion is likely to require three days hence, and having ascertained the amount required, to deliver the goods. This is simplicity itself, what is not quite so simple is the secondary line along which all Supply work must move—the line of accounts. Feeding troops is child’s play, it is the accounting for having fed them which is the very devil. There is a complicated system of apron-strings, called in the text-books a Chain of Responsibility, by which you are bound to the petticoats of (a) the D.A.Q.M.G.<sup>1</sup> (nobody very tremendous, you have probably dined with him in civil life), (b) the D.A.A. and Q.M.G.<sup>2</sup> (rather a stickler, this fellow), and (c) the A.A. and Q.M.G.<sup>3</sup> (a very big gun indeed). These people should be learnt by heart after the manner of the Kings of England.

<sup>1</sup> Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General.

<sup>2</sup> Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General.

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General.

The linking up of responsibility is done by forms, your bane of existence or very present help in time of trouble, according as you have let them get out of hand or have acquired complete mastery over them. You will do well to realise from the start that never can you receive so much or so little as a ration of mustard (one-fiftieth part of an ounce) or a ration of pepper (one thirty-sixth part of an ounce) without taking these amounts on your charge. Never must you be so ill-advised as to reissue these quantities to the next fellow without seeing that he takes them on his charge and so clears yours. For to take on charge is to assume responsibility, and everybody in the Army knows that the proper thing to do with responsibility is to shelve it, or if you can't shelve it, to pass it on. In other words, when you unload your pepper and your mustard on the other fellow, unload them on the proper form, and see that you get his signature.

So that you may have an idea of what a very important part of the machine a Brigade Supply Officer is justified in considering himself, let me tell you that it is his job to look after the requirements of a brigade, which is roughly four thousand men strong, or a heterogeneous mob, seven thousand five hundred strong, of Artillery and Ammunition Columns, Engineers, Signallers, Cyclists, Motor



Machine Guns, Cavalry Squadron, Transport Train, Ambulance, and Oddments. He looks after the wants, then, of a fourth part of a Division, a twelfth part of an Army Corps, the forty-eighth part of an Army. Supplies for the Brigade come up by rail from Base to Rail Head, are there handed over to the Motor Transport Lorries, to be dumped down at Refilling Point, loaded again into the Horse Transport Wagons, to be finally handed over to regimental quartermasters who take them away in their own regimental Transport and distribute them to the troops. And here ends the technical part of this Brigade Supply Officers' Manual Without Tears.

Eight of us, then, nine with the S.S.O.—picked men, we flattered ourselves, from Flanders and Gallipoli, Egypt and Salonika, the Plain, Woolwich, and Sick Leave—forgathered on the square at Aldershot, to take to ourselves our "Details," Butchers, Bakers, Clerks, and to draw our "Technical Equipment"—Saddlery, Stationery, Cleavers, Pick-axes, Scales, Lanterns, Flag-poles—all the paraphernalia of a gipsy's caravan. An hour to draw, an hour to pack, and we are ready. But such eagerness would leave altogether out of account the inevitable delay arranged for our annoyance by the Powers that Be, because they know it teases. Whether our Division

starve or not, for a whole fortnight do we miserably mark time. Submarines in the Channel, mines washed down the Gulf Stream, the temporary indisposition of some mythical A.D.V.K.<sup>1</sup> are alleged as reasons. But all things come to the officer who hangs on, even embarkation, and at the long last we are bidden to pack up and discharge mess bills. There was one rowdy corner of the mess that night, champagne-corks popping defiance at the table reserved for Senior Officers, independence turning to frank foolhardiness with the smoking of eight colossal cigars. Then did the occupants of eight of the Ante-Room's best chairs gaze at truculent Majors as man to man. We had left school and were, as Stalky said, "*Mister Corkran, if you please!*"

Now a journey to the front is not the straightforward affair you might imagine. In civil life one seems to remember going to a ticket-office, asking for a ticket, and devoting one's personal attention to getting to the place printed thereon. In the Army things are arranged differently. To begin with you are not supposed to know what place you are going to. Your first step on the journey is an order to report yourself at a particular time to your local R.T.O. (Railway Transport Officer) who, it is understood, will hand you

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Director of Valises and Kit Bags.

your "Movement Order." This is a chit carrying you as far as the port of embarkation, where you are taken in hand by the M.L.O. (Military Landing Officer), who puts you on board a vessel of sorts. Here, for the first time, you are supposed to get some sort of inkling of the country of your destination. Even the name of the port at which you are to land is vouchsafed. Arrived in port you are again handed over to the M.L.O., who passes you on to a series of R.T.O.'s. When finally the train pulls up at a wayside station not bigger than a coffee-stall, and you are unceremoniously bundled out into the rain, you feel that at last you have reached the end of the world, which is indeed very nearly the case. You have reached what is to all intents and purposes and for the moment, the end of the civilised world. Before you lies the territory of the unspeakable Hun.

I will not bore you with too detailed an account of our departure from Aldershot, the formal review in the early morning and a blinding snowstorm, the day-long railway journey, the crowding on to a tramp steamer, the bartering of half-crowns for berths, the night passed at vingt-et-un in a stuffy saloon. Morning brings us into a port not a thousand miles from the field where Shakspeare's great Harry threw off his chest the first of the world's

greatest series of Army Orders. Nor will I worry you with the details of our land journey, how we were first despatched to an alleged rest camp, dank, mouldy, and yet delightful, since it was abroad, how we spent sleepless nights in unlighted and unwarmed troop trains, making acquaintance with every siding in the north of France and a philosophy of shunting undreamt-of on the most dilatory of home systems. Troops in France travel by stealth, blushing to find their movements famed. The day is devoted to washing and brushing up, to lounging about station-yards, to idling in recreation rooms where you may drink coffee and bang on a piano. Tommy, in these hours of ease spent in French goods-yards, bears a charmed life, sitting on foot-plates, lurching across lines heedless of whistles and warnings. Tired, bored, half his kit lost, his good temper is unshakable. He is indifferent alike to comfort and discomfort, impervious to exhilaration and depression, no nearer heroics now than he was behind his counter or at the pit-head.

The men are always confined to the yards, the officers are privileged to stroll as far as the Cathedral, the Hôtel de Ville, the Palais de Justice, the Joan of Arc statue, which are the four sights common to every French town. And often a bath, breakfast, and a good lounge,

careless of the sights, contents our souls for the day.

Officers and men entrain again at night-fall, and again we jog uneventfully along. At last, and entirely without the air of doing anything extraordinary, the train pulls up and we are arrived. Can these acres of uneventfulness be really *the front*? A few empty fields, a stunted bush, a couple of *estaminets* of a squalor unknown to Zola, a handful of poverty-stricken cottages, half a dozen clay-pits, sand-banks, rushes, weeds. No trenches and no troops. Only a hundred or so of navvies—an A.S.C. Labour Company—loading sand into railway trucks.

“Say, Bill,” says a cheerful private, “this ’ere blinkin’ war won’t last another six months.”

“An’ w’y not?” demands Bill, shifting his quid in anticipation of a discussion along the lines of Mr. Belloc’s theories of attrition.

“’Cos we’ll have the ’ole of blinkin’ France in blinkin’ railway trucks afore then.”

The truth of the matter is that we are still some seventeen miles behind the lines. There is nothing here except desolation, and letters from this place, if letters were ever sent, would be indeed News from Nowhere. No matter, we are where we would be. No matter that we hear that there is billeting accommodation

for 5000 men and that the area already contains some 75,000. No matter that we look like being lodged *à la belle étoile*, we are where we would be.

But something noteworthy is to happen after all. Word has preceded us by telegraph that our Details only are to remain in this most romantic place. The officers will return by the next train, the authorities having other views for us. A hurried good-bye to the Details, and in less than twenty minutes we are in the train again. . . .

Of the return I am not tempted to write much, the flame of adventure which had burned so brightly flickering disconsolately and threatening extinction. We notice discomforts now which escaped us before. Travel by goods-train at the rate of thirty-six miles in nine hours is not exhilarating. Why the devil, we ask one another angrily, are not the carriages heated or at least lighted? We discover that we have not had a wink of sleep for four nights. The wit of the party, who amused us so on the way up by ordering *Eau de Ricqlés* as an *apéritif* and *Eau de Javel* as a liqueur, perseveres with what is now seen to have been a poorish joke. We undress and make up some sort of a bed on the floor of a goods-truck, on the word of the R.T.O. that we shall not be disturbed till morning.

Shortly after midnight, and just as we have succeeded in falling into an uneasy sleep, we are rudely aroused by an uncouth railway official, who gives us the choice of being left in a siding for, say a week, or of getting dressed and shouldering our kit through half a mile of unknown railway line to an undiscoverable platform. There are, of course, no porters on hand at this absurd hour, and we struggle ineffectually with valises whose weight approximates more nearly to a ton than to thirty-five pounds. We look round the sleeping trains for a soldier or two with the torso and mien of an amiable blacksmith. A couple of Hercules roused from their slumbers look kindly upon our offer of five francs. They haul away at our kits, and land them after great effort on the wrong platform. We miss the connection comfortably. . . .

The prospect in front of us is pretty gloomy. There is apparently no choice save as between a Base Supply Dépôt or yet another School of Instruction. What a Scylla! What a Charybdis! Nor is our fate in our own hands, or we might hope with the lady novelist by steering for both, successfully to miss both. We shall know our fate when the S.S.O. returns with the orders.

In the meantime don't take this grumble

too seriously. Quite between ourselves, I never had a jollier time than during this abortive journey to the front. Wrapped up in a magnificent sheep-skin—the one the Brigadier swore I should succeed in pressing into service—with the whole of one side of a first-class carriage to sprawl full length on, pockets crammed with pasties, fruit, French bread, and bottles of wine, a case of decent cigars, and a more than decent fellow to share them with, one slept and ate and drank and talked one's bellyful. And what more can one desire ?



## CHAPTER XIII

### IN THE PAS DE CALAIS

C HARYBDIS it turned out to be—in other words a School of Instruction, and for a special torment *Scylla to follow*, as you shall hear. But really, whether I went from the School of Instruction to the Base Horse Transport Depôt or the other way round, I am not now quite clear. You will have to take the letters as they come for a bit. Often I begin a letter and have to break off, and don't get the chance to resume until I've been moved on a couple of Depôts or so, which is the best explanation I can offer for a muddling of tenses almost as wilful as Conrad at his best. The rest of this present letter, for instance, was written nearly a month ago.

To beguile the tedium of a course of lectures on baking in the field—and I feel it in my bones that I shall never command a Field Bakery—let me tell you something of the Pas de Calais as it is in war-time. (I am jotting these notes down under the nose of the lecturer and the cover of a text-book, just as we used to do at school, so you must not look for the *beau style* or the *mot juste*.)

The Pas de Calais, or so much as I have seen of it, is entirely given up to the prosaic business of making bullets for the heroic to shoot, and it is perhaps hardly fair to debit this devoted and hard-working department with dullness when we should be praising it for strenuous and successful endeavour. Not even the fairest of towns, not even Rouen, with her dreaming towers, looks her best at five o'clock in the morning after a night spent in a baggage-train in the middle of winter. What do cathedrals matter when your prime needs are breakfast, bath, and bed? Leaving the station you encounter droves of factory hands. Now the factory hand going to work in the morning is a very different person from the *petite ouvrière* of the French novels who spends most of her time trotting about the pavements of Paris for the delectation of the *flâneur*. The work-girl of the North is, in point of fact, very little different from her Lancashire sister, of both of whom it may be suggested that their charm is predominantly a matter of rude and rugged simplicity. Abbeville struck me as remarkable for its factories, palatial goods-yard, and phenomenal squalor; Amiens less for its cathedral than for its air of *bourgeois* comfort. This town is surely the Paradise of the small shopkeeper. My recollections of Havre are concerned chiefly

with a pertinacious cold in the head traditional to the place. For the rest the town struck me as being as dreary as one of those thriving manufacturing centres around which the Manchester school of dramatists would seek to weave some sort of textile glamour.

But then I have my reasons for disliking Havre. It was there I discovered that French hotel proprietors increase the *Régie* price of cigars, which at best are in villainous condition, by 125 per cent. Of course no one but a lunatic ever orders drinks or smokes in the hotel in which he is staying, wisely *en pension*. For the bland, benevolent lady who presides at the *caisse* and charges you at an inclusive rate of 11 francs a day *vin à part* is invariably a harpy of the deepest dye. Her chief accomplice, the *maître-d'hôtel*, is always a finished brigand and the Boots a palpable cut-throat. The trio are in league to lure you from the safe territory of inclusive terms to the zone of the perilous "extra." There a bottle of beer costs a franc, a cup of tea with a couple of miserable biscuits a franc and a half, a bath two to three francs, a smoke anything you like. (I find I am always thinking and talking and writing about cigars. They are the one civilian luxury I have not been able to drop.) A week's sojourn in a French hotel is a life-experience in rapine. It

would take a Rothschild to afford both the morning tub and one of his eponymous cigars. Personally, I did not wash.

“How many tons of dough, then, must we reckon on for a Division?” asks the lecturer suddenly.

Distract I answer, “Three weeks, Sir,” to be told I have not been paying attention. . . . But to resume, as a famous comedian used to remark in happier days.

The only relief from war and war-thoughts which the Pas de Calais would seem to afford is to be found in the theatre and the Tournée Charles Barret in “Primerose.” Never have I been able to achieve the time, the place and the well-known actor altogether. Either I have forestalled him by a week or lagged a day behind. At Rouen I was lucky enough to catch up with a music-hall of sorts. Of the many famous descriptions of the French music-hall in peace times the best perhaps is to be found in Huysmans’ “*Sœurs Vatard*,” a piece of realism to double the good citizen’s subscription to his local Vigilance Society. But the war-time music-hall is for a more “serious” pen than Huysmans’! I think that the little show at Rouen might have amused you. To begin with, the *salle* has the air of a school-room, smacking in this respect not a little of our own Repertory Theatres. The audience

at the afternoon performance at which I assisted was composed entirely of soldiers and children, the *militaires* by far the more easily amused. The first turn, a song by some gawky innocent concerning Easter violets, Swiss lakes, and a forsaken maiden, showed that the English music-hall has not, as has been generally supposed, a monopoly of the inane. The second turn, a song by a motherly body with a strong bias in favour of the domestic virtues, established the fidelity of the "poilu." The English, it would seem then, are not alone in their insistence on the association of heroism and the proprieties. Followed an impersonator of celebrities, a large-nosed, heavy-jowled Italian with a mask like Coquelin's from which all expression had been sponged. The impersonation consisted, as in England, in the donning of a wig, whiskers, and moustachios—"face-fittings," Mr. Frank Richardson would for once be justified in calling them—and in the enunciation of a trite and suitable epigram. Marat is rhetorical, Danton proudly mum. An ex-president shakes hands paternally. "Ce que j'adore dans la fleur" declares a commonplace Zola, "c'est le fumier que l'on met autour." Then comes a string of allied monarchs, with much playing of National Anthems and standing up on the part of the audience. The Tsar of Russia, King George of England—the

impersonator used the same set of features for the two, only varying the uniform—King Albert of Belgium, King Peter of Servia, some allied potentates whom I did not recognise; the line looked like stretching till the crack of doom. General Joffre, standing firm on the road to Paris, had a magnificent “*On ne passe pas!*” Napoleon, following, declared amid thunders of applause, “*Il est malin, le père Joffre. Dire qu’à la Marne il m’a chipé mon plan!*”

After this blaze of patriotism we are further cheered by a troupe of young ladies bearing the mark of the English professional dancing-academy and attired like an ultra-coquettish brand of boy-scouts, bare knees, sashes, lanyards, sombrero hats, all complete. The programme announces them as “*les tommy’s, uniform’s correct.*” They are hailed with frantic enthusiasm by the French soldiers, and the English officers present are constrained to smile. As the afternoon wore on, the programme became a trifle more grown-up. There was *Mdlle. Denys*, as to whose charms the programme became lyrical.

“*Elle est jeune, elle est gentille,  
Comme on chantait autrefois,  
Vous aimerez son minois  
Car c’est une belle fille.  
Elle eut séduit le roi d’Ys  
Notre charmante Denys.*”

This use of the poetic announcement would appear to be fairly general in French provincial programmes, since the appearance of the next artist is also heralded in verse.

“ Exquise, adorable, charmante,  
Un vrai bijou du grand Paris  
La jeune Pauline Lisery  
Viens recueillir, très rougissante  
Au pays de la Bovary,  
Un très gros succès qui l’enchanté.”

As who should say a London star descending on the Potteries to receive the congratulations of the Hilda Lessways. At the very end of the programme a typical piece of French buffoonery, a loony in terms of our ally's characteristic excitability! The cream of this artist's performance was his *dernière création* “ Proserpine ! ” (“ Prière de chanter avec lui ”). I give you the words of the chorus which, agreeably to demand, we all shouted together.

“ Ah ! Proserpine (bis)  
Donne-moi ta rate et ton foie gras  
Tes cheveux carotte et tes pieds plats,  
Ah ! Proserpine (bis).  
J's'rai ton mandarin et tu m'donn'ras tes mandarines,  
Ah ! Proserpine.”

Idiotic though the words are, seldom if ever have I heard so infectious a refrain. We shouted and yelled the chorus, stamped our feet, and yelled again. The swing of it

whirled us off our feet and into the street, and I left Rouen half-an-hour afterwards, divided between dazzling memories of the cathedral and the lilt of "Proserpine." Come to think of it, France is perhaps not too unhappily summarised in these extremes of the *propos grivois* and dreaming stone. . . .

Perhaps of all French towns Boulogne has seemed to me to be taking the war most seriously. The sight of maimed humanity lying in the grounds of the Casino, distorted, twisted, curiously listless and awesomely still, is a sufficient silencer of impatience. One should not take it amiss, it would seem, if Directors of Personal Services do appear to forget all about one's existence. These maimed bodies would seem to counsel patience, though the waiting be undistinguished, even though it be not much more than hanging about.

"Look what we bear," these poor bodies seem to say, "so carry on, though your job is in no way distinguished and your names will not be blazoned across the sky."



## CHAPTER XIV

### A QUESTION OF PROPERTY

THE theory that appetite grows with what it feeds on does not hold good of the romantic appetite for the present war. It is not easy now to recall the first fervours and high ardours that were ours in the late summer of 1914. The war was of reckonable size then; the sixpenny reviews wrote in noble strain about heirs to peerages rubbing shoulders with their own plough-boys—Duke's son, cook's son, and all the rest of it. The *Times* sold broadsheets of the nation's literature at a penny. The London streets, parade ground of jaded sensation, wore an air of expectancy: you would have said a country town with a fair in progress. Flags were flown out of sheer light-heartedness and love of bravery; one went easily to church. For all this superficial seriousness, war was for the leisured classes a new emotion and a new luxury. Or if this is too hard, let us say that in the beginning the war came to them as a new and strange tonic.

The wonder and passion of war in its beginning are but words ; the world is soon engaged in a business that takes poorly to a gloss of fine sentiments. And yet it would seem that, in spite of the nobility of common cause and universal effort, there is danger when romance turns to too grief-laden a reality, when the first lump in the throat has ached itself out, and one no longer senses the beauty of sacrifice, becomes conscious only of the fullness of pain. It is then that the will to victory by force of arms is in danger of yielding to talk of victory by silver bullets. From this the easy transition to the mean vindictiveness of an industrial campaign. We shall be a nation of shopkeepers indeed if we are to let victory peter out in under-selling.

I was stationed at one of the Channel bases when the news came through that a British passenger boat had been torpedoed and could barely keep afloat. People were playing Bridge in the hotel smoke-room. At one table soldiers, at another the Senior Service were taking odd shillings out of each other. A knock at the door, and a youthful Assistant Paymaster, burdened with responsibility out of all keeping with his cherubic appearance, entered the room and with a rather bored air handed the Senior Naval Officer a slip of paper.

“Zepps again?” queried a commander, a mountain of a man addicted to holding villainous cards with unimpaired cheerfulness.

“Not this time, old son,” replied a gallant officer, of whom it may be predicted that at no emotional crisis whatsoever will he find the phrase “old son” trite or inadequate. “Channel steamer torpedoed. Only women and children on board.”

“Only women and children!” The phrase on the lips of a British officer is significant of the times. Let peace be declared to-morrow and this gallant sailor will send his ship’s company overboard for a child’s toy. Let peace be declared and this officer will risk his life for a dog. But we are at war, and women and children are perforce become “only women and children.” It is some solace to realise that this reasonable and logical sailor will not hesitate to throw Reason and Logic overboard should the question ever arise of the rescue of a single infant in arms. It is of some comfort to know that the British Naval Officer has strong and chivalrous ideas of his own as to when expedience should be jettisoned and healthy unreason taken on board.

And yet there is something in the encroachments of callousness. Let me confess that my own visit to an ill-fated boat was dictated

less by considerations of sympathy than by the need for distraction after a particularly wearisome lecture on Standard Divisional Pack Trains. One had vague anticipations of the sensational and the bizarre; one went to gape, in a word. It was a long and not too enlivening walk from the Lecture-theatre past the docks where loading and unloading was proceeding languidly, the checkers checking not for dear life but listlessly, stifling a yawn. (I am conscious that this is a travesty of methodical labour kept up hour after hour, and that it were ridiculous to demand the feverishness or the crowded confusion of the "Work" and "Labour" of a Madox Brown or a Brangwyn.) Nobody knew exactly where the British boat was berthed. "Là-bas," vaguely was all that could be indicated.

Suddenly one came into view of three-quarters of a steamboat, to crib from the playwright's "half a milkman at the level crossing." It was not till one got alongside and saw the ragged edges of a mortal wound that she seemed a stricken ship. A small crowd of twenty persons was gathered at the end of the jetty gazing idly, with an apparent absence of any sense of tragedy. There she lay, a dingy, ill-kept Channel steamer, her decks littered with orange-peel, umbrellas, handbags, shabby cloaks and seedy travelling bags, odds

and ends of baggage proclaiming the second-class passenger and the refugee. Through the portholes the remains of untidy meals, greasy plates and unrinsed glasses. Forward the crude truncating of the vessel, broken off as you snap a twig. Still no sinister indication, no tragic hint. Twisted and tawdry metal-work and splintered matchwood painted and varnished to the handsomeness expected of saloons, was all that was to be seen. The bowels of the ship had apparently discharged no worse horrors than velveteen seatings, lace curtains reminiscent of lodging-houses, odds and ends of lacquer and imitation bronze. The last of the victims had been taken ashore twenty minutes earlier. Poor vestiges of humanity, they were the least of the concern of busy officialdom. For were not the mails on board, the precious mails, vital to our trade?

A detachment of British soldiers had been sent for to unload the letter-bags—a change of fatigue unattended by any sense of melancholy. The lads from an English farming county went about their work gaily, skylarking, the eternal fag between their lips, and that marked determination to impose the manners of their country which makes for the supremacy of our race. There was some little unpleasantness, even, over a particularly uncouth

yokel's non-recognition of a French officer. I intervened, and had all the difficulty in the world to get some sort of apology out of the lad, who, after satisfying the French officer with a half-hearted salute, offered me for all excuse,

“ 'Ow could I tell 'e was a bloomin' orficer, Sir, seein' 'as 'ow 'e don't look like one? 'Is legs ain't much to write 'ome about, are they, Sir? ”

It was a strange, incongruous scene of wrangling, etiquette, formalities, commonplace anxieties, preoccupations. A stout, foolish-looking woman, whose daughter had been drowned, was in a state of agitation over a missing hand-bag containing money and trinkets to the value of forty pounds. True that the tragedy was fourteen hours old and that the woman must have eaten and drunk and dried her clothes in the interval. Nevertheless, there was something ignominious and baffling in this concern for a hand-bag. . . . The captain of the ship being injured, British officials had taken charge. Mindful of the exigencies of property—the dead are not to be pilfered, less on their proper account than for the avoidance of subsequent explanations with legal representatives—they allowed no one to go on board, handing umbrellas and minor objects over the side after “proof of identity” had been fully established.

Then with enormous circumstance the ritual of bringing up the mails was gone through. How well one knew those mails and their commonplace contents. Regrets that goods sold on joint-account had resulted in a loss to the seller. Astonishment that after recent purchases the market should have declined so heavily. Suggestions that customers should "buy down" and so "average up" prices. Forecasts as to a rapid and immediate rise. Assurances that the raw material had actually achieved a couple of points in an upward direction. Denials that the green stains complained of in the calicoes could by any possibility be mildew. Surprise that the untutored mind of the poor native should lead him into the belief that he is being cheated. Dismay at hearing that stocks have never been so heavy. Anxiety at the continued drought. Congratulations on the rains. Statement of accounts showing . . . Faugh!

I was roused from contemplation of this mass of verbiage and insincerity by the voice of a young French sailor crying,

"C'est salaud, quand même!"

The cry was wrung from him after long contemplation of the boat, but the exclamation was strangely in accord with one's conjectures as to the mails. I know well that you are going to ask, sensible fellow that you are,

whether there must not be business correspondence, and how otherwise I would have such correspondence conducted. There is no answer, and that's the irony of it.

Next I fell a-listening to a gentleman who wanted to talk Insurance. It was immoral, he held, nay worse, it was financially unsound, for Governments to insure. Were not such premiums so many bribes to shoulder risks which should be the common burden of the nation? It seemed that he was the author of a treatise on the subject which had appeared in the columns of some technical journal. Did I think the ship was worth patching up? What was my idea of her value as she lay there? Did I imagine that the possibility of European war had been sufficiently taken into account in determining the scope of sinking funds? Like Dr. Johnson who, when prattled to by some offensive bore, "withdrew his attention," I answered vaguely, and thought of those fifty unhappy victims whose fate seemed to be no man's concern. The insurance gentleman, finding me unworthy of his professional acumen, moved away.

It was getting dusk, and I walked out on to the breakwater. Outside a magnificent sea was running. The sun, red and fiery, shot a last glance from beneath lids heavy and swollen.



A final ray, glorious and sinister, lit up with the distinctness of a photographic negative a hospital ship making her way slowly between the pier-heads, and the masts of a sunken cargo boat, an earlier victim of the war. In some strange and subtle way the anger of sea and sky quickly restored a sense of dignity and tragedy to the scene of baggage-rescue and insurance-mongering I had just left. One could think again in terms of the momentous, of sea and sky incarnadined for a generation by the red hand of an amazing Emperor.

And yet it is not to be wondered at that one begins almost to be sorry for this monster figure. Is there not something small in the clamour for human punishment? Is there not something tragic in this fate which pushes from murder to murder? "I am in blood stepp'd in so far,"—you know the rest. Surely we do wrong to deny greatness to the man? It is not to be thought that the world has been plunged into war by a mere charlatan, that it is a mere whipster who has got the world's swords. I have just seen an exhibition of Raemaeker's cartoons, in all of which the Emperor is shown as a figure of iniquity, malevolence, murder, as a man impious, treacherous, base. And yet dignity is left—the dignity of isolation. There is even an approach to pity in the spectacle of the murderer of innocents shielding seared

eyeballs from their upturned gaze; there is pathos in this figure of woe cut off from all human intercourse. This Emperor's conscience should be this Emperor's Hell. Let us not sink below the level of so great a revenge.

## CHAPTER XV

### GENTLEMEN'S GENTLEMEN

The noble lord who cleans the boots.

THE GONDOLIERS.

SERVANTS in the army are an integral part of an officer's life. I don't know how, after it is all over, I am ever going to get up o' mornings without an encouraging cup of tea, an early paper, shaving water enticingly to hand, and a voice suggesting in an uncompromising Scotch accent that "it'll be juist about the noo you'll be getting up, Sorr." I shall be lost without that friendly shadow pursuing me, recovering pencils, note-books, handkerchiefs, always at hand with *Daily Mails*, cigarettes, whiskey-and-sodas. A sturdy independence goes with these small attentions, which are to be acknowledged in the spirit in which one takes the salute—a very different affair from the touched cap or tugged forelock of your groom or stable-boy.

True that no civilian may be a hero to his valet, and perhaps the civilian who should deliberately pose before his man would cut a singularly sorry and unheroic figure in those

critical eyes. In the Army, however, there exists a definite obligation to put up an appearance worthy of the Blue Bell and Soldier's Friend, Kiwi and Cherry Blossom expended by your servant on your heroic behalf. For one has the feeling that the private in the New Armies would be "demeaning" himself, in the old-fashioned below-stairs phrase, if he consented to turn valet on the strength of the weekly half-crown alone, rather than for the honour and glory, the spick and spanness of the commissioned ranks. Like the simpering gentleman with the weak legs at Mrs. Waterbrook's dinner-party, who would rather be knocked down by a man with Blood in him than be picked up by a man without, your new and enthusiastic Tommy would rather be "on the mat" before an officer who looks like an officer than approved by the entire civilian world. So much has the new soldier taken on of the spirit of the old.

"Bruised pieces, go; you have been nobly borne" was once an officer's farewell to heroic harness heroically put off. It would be within the scope of the present enquiry into the ways of *bâtm*en to ask whether Antony had always worn the "sevenfold shield of Ajax" to the satisfaction of his servant. Did he never spur to Egyptian banquets without waiting for that last little bit of polish and elbow-

grease with which Eros used to turn him into an officer and gentleman of the period ?

“ You do me no credit, Sorr, rushing off in all your swarth and sweat,” was the complaint of a *bâtman* who took the right view of his responsibilities.

However much of the well-dressed hero you may be to your man, however magnificently the beau-ideal born of his pains, it never does to fish for compliments in these dour waters. The best you will land will be a home truth. A friend of mine once showed the photograph of a pretty sister to his servant, and asked whether he could trace a likeness.

“ Indeed, Sorr,” replied that worthy, “ indeed, Sorr, I can *not!* The young leddy’s varra guid-looking ! ”

Then after a pause, and by way of amends, “ Kind o’ makes a fellow want to be at home again, Sorr.”

Officers’ servants have a curious way of being Scotch, and consequently of being taciturn to the point of being morose. One fellow I had whom I judged by mien and aspect alone to be a past master of the Gaelic. Once only did I succeed in provoking him to speech. It was on the occasion of my ignominious fall from a horse, resulting in a damaged knee and experimental massage on the part of my

attendant more distinguished for vigour than for subtlety. I was constrained to remark, biting my lip after the manner of the midshipmen of Collingwood's day undergoing amputation between jokes,

"It's not really as painful as you might suppose, McGill."

No answer.

"I should think it will be all right in a week?"

No answer.

"What about putting in for sick leave?"

No answer.

"I don't see how I can go on parade tomorrow."

Still no answer. Would nothing induce the wretch to speak?

"It's a damned nuisance not being able to walk, anyhow!" This in desperation and entire unsuccess. At last the sulky brute, best and most patient of fellows at heart, having concluded his ministrations, and arranged the tent in the order beloved of good servants, decided to break what must have been a lifelong vow of silence.

"And you'll no be able to r-r-r-un either-r-r!" This was the only remark I ever heard him make. I used to call him "Man Friday," a nickname in which he silently acquiesced. At least, whenever I shouted "Friday" he

would put in an outraged but mute appearance.

To tease the fellow into speech I tried giving him a shilling less at the month-end than was due to him, only to find it added to the next month's account for boot polish. Then I tried a shilling too much, only to discover it next morning on the dressing-table under my collar-stud. So I gave up all attempt at intercourse by speech and resigned myself to signs, in which language we got on very well indeed, till he obtained what in France is called a *surcis* to go hay-making in the congenial and doubtless conversationless solitudes of Argyll. He sent me a picture post-card of his native village, with a view of the manse, but of course there was nothing added to the printed matter. He had successfully resisted even the printed invitation to "Write Here."

Once when I was attached to the tiniest unit in the service, I had a clerk for a *bâtman* and a *bâtman* for a clerk. This is a round-about way of saying that a command a dozen strong does not run to a servant for the officer.

"How much is one hundred and seventy-eight fivepence-halfpennies?" I asked my *bâtman*-clerk.

"Couldn't say, I'm sure, Sir," came the prompt reply.

“Work it out, then,” a trifle sharply. Then, after a long pause,

“I must confess, Sir,” said the lad, without any trace of embarrassment, “I must confess, Sir, that that’s where you ’as me!”

Then I, “Did you never go to school, Boy?”

“Yessir!”

“Didn’t they teach you arithmetic?”

“No, Sir; only sums.”

“Then why can’t you do this one?” (Then very slowly) “One hundred and seventy-eight times fivepence halfpenny—how much is that? I don’t ask you to do it in your head. Take a piece of paper and a pencil and work it out.”

Then to my surprise the boy began to look like crying.

“It ain’t the amount of the sum, Sir, wot’s the trouble, it’s the sort. Now if only you was to ask me ’ow many ha’pences in the two shillings . . .”

It turned out that the poor wretch had been a pawnbrokers’ assistant so long that he could only reckon in that most ignoble scale.

It was the same gentle youth to whom I gave careful instructions overnight to call me at four o’clock the following morning, seeing that I had to be on duty at the rifle range. When I awoke my thoughts ran in some-



thing like the following order: That I had held uncommonly good cards the previous night; that I had signed an unusual number of chits; that the forthcoming weekly mess bill would testify to that fact; that it was a good job I was Mess Secretary and could owe myself the amount; that it was likewise a good job that the papers who run the war didn't get to hear of such enormities as fifteen bob changing hands at a deal; that the smell of frying bacon went very well with the scent of burning pine; that—Snakes and Thunder—it must be nearly nine o'clock, with range-practice started a good two hours ago.

At that very moment an orderly put his head through the flap of the tent.

“The Colonel's compliments, Sir, and would like to know how you've slept!” This with a grin. “I should look pretty lively if I was you,” he added commiseratingly, “unless you are thinking of going sick, Sir.”

My *bâtman* in hurried attendance, very white and very assiduous, proffered excuses adequate to his simple mind.

“I come in, Sir, at five o'clock has directed. and I 'as a good look at you, Sir. As 'ow I didn't think as you ought to be disturbed, Sir. Very 'ot and flushed you looked, Sir, very tired, if I may say so. So I ses to meself, 'Let 'im 'ave 'is sleep out. Do 'im good!’

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which is beggin' your pardon, Sir, if I've done wrong."

The subsequent interview with the Colonel cannot, I think, be of any particular interest. All the same, I received further confirmation in a pet theory of mine that delinquents should be allowed a little more freedom of excuse. I have often thought that if a civil prisoner were able to say, "I ask your Lordship to grant me the favour of five minutes' private conversation," and if his Lordship had the sense to fall in with the suggestion, many a little matter of forgery, house-breaking, wife-beating, or breach of promise, might be brought to more equitable if less formal settlement. And if such a system were in vogue at Orderly Room it is probable that I could have cleared up to the Colonel's better satisfaction that little matter of being some three hours late for parade.

It was still the same youth who gave me one of the most unpleasant quarters of an hour of my life. He it was who put me in the position of having to solve the following awkward problem. "A is an officer who foolishly leaves money lying about. The only possible person who could have taken it is his servant, B. B is a fool, but A trusts him implicitly. What should A do?"

Throughout the whole of riding-school I

debated within myself what the plague A should do. Should A tell B that two pound notes had disappeared, and give B the opportunity of saying that he had put them away for safety? Should A ignore the theft? Should A ignore all the laws of deduction as laid down by Gaboriau and Edgar Allan Poe, Sherlock Holmes and Father Brown, and convince himself that he had never lost the money?

What A did was to prepare a dignified little speech with which to receive the confession of B, duly tackled. A few words of censure, a trifle of exhortation, rounding off with a pat on the shoulder and a recommendation to B to wipe his eyes and chuck playing such silly-ass tricks in the future. For A had decided that to let the matter slide would be so much moral cowardice.

Judge then of A's discomfiture when B countered absolute proof with the stoutest of denials, asseverations of honesty that nothing could shake, offers of reference to all the pawnbrokers in the country, protestations of vast sums of money handed over counters in exchange for rings, watches, tea-services, petticoats, all the currency of the trade; and never a penny wrong in the accounts, never a halfpenny missing from a score of tills.

Of course one crumpled up immediately,

all the stories one had ever heard of wrongful accusation and miscarriage of justice running through one's head.

"You don't expect anybody to believe this, about the lady and the sovereign, do you?" said the constable, and poor Jo replied,

"I don't know that I do, Sir. I don't expect nothink at all, Sir, much, but that's the true hist'ry on it."

So, with Dickens in my head—I was reading "Bleak House" at the time—I decided to withdraw the accusation.

When, later in the day, I found the two notes safely stowed away in my cigarette-case, I can assure you that never did A, in any Hard Case that ever I heard of, feel such a perfect fool. In reply to my profuse apologies the boy said,

"Can't say as how I feel no pertickler relief, Sir, now you've found the notes. I've always served you well, Sir, and wouldn't do no wrong for two pounds no'ow. I never felt no guilt, Sir, so of course I don't feel no per-tickler innercence."

I think you will agree that the boy scored. And I begin to have the conviction that neither Sherlock Holmes nor Father Brown are much good when it comes to concrete cases.

One *bâtman* I had who "gave notice"—as they say in domestic circles—on the ground

that the duties were derogatory and beneath a disciple of Karl Marx, Mr. and Mrs. Webb, and other advanced people. Coming down to actual grievances I gathered that Private Jenkins had not enlisted to clean spurs. I retorted that I had not joined to count sides of bacon. After a good deal of discussion I admitted that there was a lot to be said for a reasoned Socialism which should embrace the apportioning of jobs according to ability, and there and then offered to clean Jenkins' boots for him if he would undertake to get my Pay and Mess Book ready for the Paymaster. Jenkins did not see his way to accept but reiterated his demand to be sent back to his bomb-throwing squad, having been originally chosen as a member of that "Suicide Club" on account of his fame as a bowler of Saturday afternoon googlies down Hammer-smith way. . . . And of course I released him.

Incredible, isn't it, the change in this war from the suburban to the heroic, from the long summer afternoons in cheap flannels, the bottled beer, the turn-in at the local Palace—the blood stirring to some chastely-leering middle-aged temptress in peripatetic contemplation of her rosary? Incredible the change to all that war means! Surely nothing the old Greeks and Romans wrote about their imperishable heroes ill becomes our heroic

shop-boys. For all their quaint manners, their American snub-nosed boots, their eternal decoration of the half-smoked fag, the breed has joined the immortals, without *forfanterie*, without fuss. My socialist friend is not at all out for the heroic. All he wants is "An over or two at the blighters." . . . Well, in his own phrase, may the wicket suit him and may he bowl unchanged!

The most extraordinary gentleman-in-waiting fell to my lot down Wiltshire way. It so happened that the fellow declared himself a typist and a passionate devotee of high-class literature. In a weak moment of mis-giving such as, I take it, may have attacked John Milton in the middle of "Paradise Lost," I asked the youth whether some of the scribbling which I had got him to type for me was any damned use at all.

"I shouldn't say it was as bad as all that, Sir," was his respectful reply, "not but what I should like to make a few suggestions. On paper, Sir, after due consideration." To which my astonished consent.

I can see the scene now—a Head-quarters on the Downs, a bare unfurnished cottage, a trestle-table in the window, a gale of wind and rain blowing, a black curtain of night hiding mile after mile of bleak dreary plain, a guttering candle and a fitful fire: on the

bare walls not a nail "pour faciliter le suicide." The hour is midnight, for you must know that though the Muse may be an exacting mistress the Army is a jealous and ever-watchful wife, from whom you may not steal many minutes of the day.

So far as I could discover, my *bâtman*-typist, and as it turned out collaborator, spent such part of the night as he did not sit up typing for me, sleeping on the office table with his feet in the waste-paper basket and his head in the safe. The suggestions which he produced on paper, diffidently, as the result of much study, were all of the nature of objections.

"This passage reads very pleasingly with its reverence for Nature, but suggest deleting the word 'latrines,' which brings one's thoughts down to the humdrum of life." Good taste, the fellow had.

"'To be read for ever and ever, interminably, every Sunday evening!' Delete 'for ever and ever,' which implies continuity whilst 'every Sunday evening' suggests faithful recurrence at regular intervals." A logical mind, as well!

"'Preposterous, ignominious, infinitesimal, Wearisome! Delete without hesitation.'" Methought the young man did delete too much, but I invariably deleted. Once only was I

annoyed with him, and that was when he mistyped a passage on which I prided myself very considerably. The passage was about Sarah Bernhardt, and should have run "The rare hand of the ageing artist." The villain made it read "the safe hand of the agency *artiste*." But when he made "eagerness spread over the General's face" read "a Guinness spread over the General's face," I merely pulled his ears.

My present *bâtman* is of the surly, tyrannising sort, half childhood's nurse and half golf-caddy. I go in dread and fear of him. I eat when he thinks I should be hungry and sleep when he thinks I should be tired. In the daytime he stands on guard, a self-imposed fatigue, outside the office door, keeping mere importunacy away, and letting in the genuine grievance. His "flair" for the idler and the busybody is unerring, but he bullies me into seeing people in whom he takes an interest.

"You'll juist be seein' this puir body," he'll say, "her man's awa' at the front and she's fower bairns." Whereupon, without waiting for an answer, he ushers in the good lady and all her tribe. And then I know I'm going to consent to something or grant something, or waive something—of course on the proper forms for consenting, granting, and waiving



—which I shall have all the difficulty in the world in justifying later on. But by the time the question of justification crops up, let us hope that the war will be over, and that we shall be private gentlemen again, officer and servant too.

## CHAPTER XVI

### OFF AT LAST

“Malbrouck s'en va-t'en guerre.”

OLD FRENCH SONG.

WHENEVER, in the New Army, your fate takes a flagrantly outrageous turn in the way of postings to the unheard-of—the counting of tarpaulins or enumeration of odd bits of string—it is safe to assume that the many excellencies fitting you for a vastly superior job have been thrust upon the Authorities at a time when there are no superior jobs going. For the moment they, the aforesaid Authorities, have not the vaguest notion what to do with you. Will you therefore be so good as to content your soul in peace, till like Sentimental Tommy they “find a way”; and will you in the meantime, please, consent to inhabit such Rest Camps, Schools of Instruction, and all the rest of it, as shall be indicated to you? There you will find the Senior Officer out of a job, the convalescent, the derelict, the lost and strayed. Cynically deceptive though these resorts may be—there is no rest in Rest Camps

but rather an exceeding strenuousness ; phenomenally non-recuperative also the bestowal of humanity sardine-wise into canvas summer-houses, draughty, ill-ventilated, close, and clammy—these Rest Camps are the most temporary of afflictions. Officers are literally there to-day and gone to-morrow. Rest Camps are the Army's Left Luggage Office, and the individual is nothing more nor less than a human parcel, deposited to-day, withdrawn under the week. Let no parcel despair ; of a surety it will be called for. It is the safe, uneventful job, the adequate performance of some useful drudgery, which is the very devil. Let him abandon hope who is set to count bacon boxes towering pyramidally to a roof, or to attend the loading with biscuit, bacon, and jam, jam, bacon, and biscuit of the early morning Standard Divisional Pack-train. "Money or no release!" said Mr. Gulpidge darkly, to the gloomy Spiker. There is no money minted which can secure release from the Detail or Bulk Issue Store of the Base Supply Dépôt. Hope only for the cessation of hostilities, you counter-jumpers pro tem., you luckless guards of Dummy Trains. You are in the category of the lost parcel and the dead letter ; you will never be redeemed.

It was not with unmixed dismay therefore that I found myself about this time condemned

to that worst of immediate fates, a Base Horse Transport Depôt. The manifest absurdity of putting the experienced soldier—ten months' service, if you please!—through recruit's drill on the square; the obvious impropriety of asking the trained officer of nearly a year's standing to "muck out" stables and groom the mounts of half-fledged transport drivers—the preposterousness of such treatment argued a swift release. And, bless you! my stay at this particular depôt has not yet amounted to more than five days. Transference, it is obvious, must become once more the order of the day.

I think I could perhaps support the tedium of a Depôt if it ever got beyond being lectured to and resulted in an actual job. There is a certain fascination in calculating that from a tale of a hundred bacon-boxes received and fifty issued there should be remainder fifty, and a certain excitement in dashing up to the pile and seeing with your own eyes that the fifty are there in very sooth. In this way the Higher Mathematics are brought home to one. It is the eternal lecturing which sticks in one's gills. One wants to see whether one is any sort of a hand at doing an actual job, and the war is getting on. . . .

I am a shade more hopeful to-night: I have been transferred to yet another School

of Instruction. There I have been asked about my proficiency in the French tongue, and have admitted to an astounding fluency therein. I even gave an undertaking to master any *patois* inside three weeks. There is some question, I understand, of the South of France, old Provence, the Riviera.

Now would not this suit me exactly? Did I not once in the days when one bothered about art and literature, review the works of one Mistral? Since that time have I not considered myself a master of the Provençal? Do I not dote on "Tartarin de Tarascon"? To be billeted at Nice and roam the Côte d'Azur. . . . *Fuyez, douce image!* as the sentimental gentleman in "Manon" has it. In plain English, it's a deal too good to be true.

And yet this is a job that would suit me down to the ground. It can only have to do with the fruits of the earth, olives, almonds, figs, thistles, corn. And have I not served apprenticeship with farmers; am I not steeped in low cunning; and, what is more, have I not kept as pretty a piece of horseflesh as any in the Stud-book;—a fellow that hath had losses in the selling thereof, go to!—and one that hath had the law of corn factors, hay and straw dealers, and all the riff-raff of a countryside; a soldier that hath still a pony at grass, three acres, three tunics, and

everything handsome about him? An they know their Dogberry they'll give me the job!

Later. I am ordered to report for duty to-morrow night not a thousand miles from Marseilles. "Malbrouck s'en va-t'en guerre,"—or perhaps you'll say he is going still further away from it. Anyhow, "orders is orders," and I am glad to be off at last.

## CHAPTER XVII

### SPECIAL PURCHASE

I WONDER if I can explain to you the mixed feelings with which one sets out on one's first real job in the Army. Imagine that you have been cooped up in a School of Instruction for ten days, during which time you have been conscious of closer scrutiny and appraisal than has been your lot since you were a boy at school. The Commandant of the School is there not so much for the purpose of instructing you as for finding out your capacities and defects, and deciding which of the many jobs which come into his office you are likely to make the least mess of. It is the personal equation all over again. I know exactly how small boys feel when they are being engaged to tie up parcels and run errands at six shillings a week. One has an almost irresistible craving to pick up pins from the floor of the lecture theatre to show the economic mettle of which one is made. This, the traditional way to the hearts of Bank Managers, Financial Magnates, and Secretaries of State, should be a good Army

stunt too, since a pin saved is a pin gained in the Army as much as anywhere else. A School of Instruction, then, is nothing less than a Labour Exchange of the more elegant sort, the labour therein being rated at never less than 7s. 6d. a day plus allowances. Let us suppose that vast quantities are required of a particular commodity. Word is sent to the School that an officer is required to "proceed" to the locality in which this commodity may be presumed to abound, and there to devote the whole of his heart, soul, brain, mind, energy, inclination, and occasionally cash—personal out-of-pocket expenses being a matter of ticklish and belated adjustment between self and Paymaster—to the purchase and despatch of prearranged quantities at prearranged prices. Actually this boils down to the officer sending forward as much as he can lay hands on at the best price he can get.

I wonder if I can make you realise the elation with which one learns that one has been chosen as an expert in say, Vegetable Marrows, or Marrows Vegetable, as we call them. I wonder if you can realise the profound satisfaction with which one receives one's Movement Order for that part of France in which that succulent fruit most liberally flourishes, the feverish impatience with which one turns



up the Army Service Corps Manual, Part II, to find out what shape, size, colour, weight the perfect model should be. With what ecstasy does one turn up Melons Water, the kindred subject to Marrows Vegetable, for such hints as may be further vouchsafed! A good half of my journey was shared in company with that very advanced young playwright of the violet sunsets and the purple passions—or the purple sunsets and the violent passions, I forget which—K——. I was glad to see that the war has altered nothing in K——’s eyeglass, the shape of his nose, or the extravagance of his opinions. I found him still full of the exuberant wit and profound logic of the best of his *bon mots*. It was uttered, if you remember, on the occasion when the guarantors of a famous series of classical concerts squealed at having to put their hands in their pockets. “The function of a guarantor,” said K—— “is to guarantee.” Whereat the guarantors squealed more loudly than ever. How we laughed over old memories of nights at the theatre and soi-disant intellectual supper parties; at old opinions and the two o’clock in the morning courage thereof. “I am not so foolish,” said an old German philosopher, probably Goethe, “as to be ashamed of changing my opinions.” We agreed, did K—— and I, in all the un-

repentant exhilaration of a journey South, that our opinions had never been so foolish as to need changing. One thing only marred the perfect pleasantness of a never-to-be-forgotten journey, and that was K——'s persistence in talking Potatoes when I wanted to talk Marrows Vegetable.

I left him in Paris. As my train moved slowly out of the Gare St. Lazare, K—— adjusted his eyeglass and said,

“About gathering the beastly things, old man. You fasten a string round the tree, retire to a safe distance, and pull like blazes. And then you get a little boy to pick 'em up for you. It's fine exercise and should suit you. So long!” He turned away before I could get out any retort, to engage in conversation with a porter with all the exquisiteness and choice of words which mark the true barbarian.

You can have little idea of the awful responsibility attaching to one's first job, or of the awful loneliness of that responsibility. There was once a young lady in a play who declared that whenever she saw a spade she was in the habit of calling it a spade. To which her uppish friend replied, “Ah well, I have never seen a spade, which shows that our social spheres have been widely different.” It may very well be that the officer in charge

of Marrows Vegetable has never moved in their world, has never been on terms with these delightful creatures, has never met them till they were dressed for dinner. It may very well be that, expert or no expert, you could fob him off with a pumpkin or good-sized pomegranate. It may be, and I say this in the smallest possible voice, that all the military training he has undergone, the Parades and the Orderly Rooms, the marches and the counter-marches, the buckling on of swords and the putting on of spurs will have taught him very little of the proper conduct of a greengrocery business on a colossal scale. Dumped down in the middle of Provence with the order to produce not in the air nor on paper, but on an actual railway wagon, within the week one million Marrows Vegetable, the officer will have nothing to rely on but his own natural common sense. Let us take it that he is to some extent a master of the lingo, that he can at least get about without the aid of a conversation book. You remember the experiment with a German-English conversation book in "Three Men on the Bummel," and the fate of George, who went into a bootshop where boots were visibly stacked on shelves, piled in corners, and hanging in ropes from the ceiling, and blindly asked the proprietor, "One has told me that you have here

boots for sale?" All the way from Paris and throughout the whole night journey, I was oppressed with the feeling that I should enter my first farm-house and exclaim in my best Provençal, and pointing to a field of the waving fruit, "Has one perhaps here Marrows for sale?" Taking the existence of the Marrows for granted, I felt sure that I should require to exercise the utmost care in my selection, and I could think of no better way than that of taking the good lady of the farmstead into my confidence. "Would you, Ma'am," I proposed for a formula, "consider this a good Marrow, a sound Marrow, a Marrow that nobody need be ashamed of, a Marrow that will give satisfaction to your Allies, that will bring credit on yourself and family?" And then I should proceed, I determined, to rattle the Marrow, and satisfy myself that there was nothing wrong with it inside. If it emitted a juicy sound and if there were no signs of the pips being insecurely fastened on, I should know it to be a good Marrow and a trustworthy, and I should take it to my bosom. All of which indifferent facetiousness covers a very genuine nervousness and anxiety not to make a mess of the job confided to one.

There is rather more in buying than the mere matter of selection. There is the question of price, and it is likely enough that you,

as representing the British Government, and the good lady, as representing her husband in the trenches—which, to do her justice, she does uncommonly well—may not in this matter of price see precisely eye to eye. There is behind you the mysterious power called Requisition, about which the farmer's wife knows at least as much as the Purchasing Officer. She knows very well, for instance, that the first condition of the Power to Requisition is that you must leave the farmer sufficient of the commodity to satisfy the normal needs of himself and family. The first thing, then, that the good lady does on being requisitioned is to dry her eyes and prove to you that her present crop, being the poorest she has had for many years, is very much below her reduced family's need, not counting the bunches of the fruit which she intends to send to her good man. No, Requisitioning is only to be resorted to when the arts of wheedling, cajoling, bullying,—very little of this—have completely failed.

The first week's supply of Marrows gets itself bought somehow or other, and then comes the grand question of delivery, there being fewer slips 'twixt cup and lip than between farm and wagon. But difficulties exist only to be conquered, and Saturday night, your first Saturday night in France

finds you a worn-out wreck, jaded, lunatic, and half-dazed, but with your million Marrows—you know there are a million, neither more nor less, because you counted them yourself—safely and snugly ensconced in their wagons on their long journey to Paris.

Of course the business is not quite as smooth sailing as it sounds. Remembering the difficulty you had to comply with the official regulations governing the provision of groceries for a command eighteen strong—your first command—you will have very great doubts at the end of your first week as to whether you have successfully divined, complied with, or circumvented the million regulations which you know must exist for safeguarding the despatch of a million Marrows Vegetable. For a week, for a month perhaps, all goes well. Then suddenly a cloud no bigger than a man's hand is seen upon the horizon, coming from the direction of your Supply Directorate. It is only a very trifling matter, a polite, even courteous, enquiry as to whether you have a reason, and if so what, please, for buying a penny india-rubber from the little shop round the corner, when it is, or should be, known that this article is a Stationery Issue. "Attention is drawn to the fact, please," and "Will you kindly note, please,"—the word "please" is cheap in the Army—"that

you must do nothing of the sort in the future." As who should say Breakers Ahead! This little note is only the precursor of a score of others descending upon you like an avalanche, all of them "Wanting to Know Why." You answer them with what inventiveness you may, but the sum of your replies is that a million Marrows were asked for and a million despatched.

And then there are the Reports. You come in at the end of a long day, during which nothing has gone right and everything has gone wrong. You have not succeeded in buying a single Marrow, your loaders, carters, and checkers have gone on strike. You realise that you have overlooked a little lot of seven hundred and fifty thousand, which has gone unpleasantly rotten, and that your accounts will not balance by ten thousand francs or so. You have just had word that through some faulty loading, for which you are personally responsible, there has been a spill and a derailment on the main line. Nothing, it is thought by the local station-master, can save the Paris express. You realise that your bâtmán is in a filthy temper, and are more than ever confirmed in the opinion that your clerk is half-witted. With a sheepish grin the latter hands you a letter in which you are requested to state on your word as

a British Officer, and without any hanky-panky or beating about the bush, how many Marrows Vegetable you have bought, intend to buy, have reasonable probability of buying ; how many you have delivered (*a*) green, (*b*) yellow ; how many you have got in stock of each colour upon the farms, on the railway stations, and in transit. And you will divide into (*a*) ripe, (*b*) unripe, (*c*) over-ripe. And will you state the average length, width, and breadth, weight and succulence to two places of decimals, please ? And will you state, please, what religion your staff professes, and whether there are any expert ratcatchers among them ? The day has broken, and country people are about again, before you can begin to think of bed. At 4 a.m. you find you have nearly completed the first item of your report. You go to bed. At 6 a.m. you rise again to find in the English mail a letter hoping the life of a country gentleman suits you. . . .

The great compensation for an extremely unheroic, but let us hope useful, job is the charm of the faithful simple-souled peasantry among whom one moves. Of course they are cute ; he would be a poor farmer indeed who did not know how many Marrows make five. You realise, as you go round the farms, that the price of Marrows Vegetable, although of great importance, is yet not of the highest



importance. The one great thing that matters in the farmsteads is the safe return of their men-folk. I have not the least intention of sentimentalising over this, their heart's desire ; it is strong enough to stand without any words of mine, behind all the querulousness of old men finding the war a shade too long, of mothers and wives who say little, of children who vaguely understand.

Saturday is the day when the officer stays at home to settle up accounts for the business of the week. Outside the office door a long queue of weather-beaten old gentlemen, of dames wrinkled and bent, of young mothers with a couple of children tugging at their skirts. Inside the office a scene like Wilkie's "Rent Day." They are not particularly good at their numbers, these simple country-folk, and after a short experience of the British Army's habit of insisting on paying for what it has had, they are content to leave their reckoning in the officer's hands. And yet, despite the pleasantness these Saturdays can be long. With country-folk conversation is apt to be more of a habit than an art, and Saturday, the conversational "day out," is their only chance. There is a secret exit to my office, and I am proud of the fact that up to the present on one occasion only have I made cowardly escape, leaving the clerk to inform the tail

end of the queue that the bank was closed and the audience terminated. I have reason to believe that he delivered himself as follows :

“ Mossoos, the Lootenant has footed the camp ! ”

But this was on one occasion only, and the tail-end contained some really terrible bores.

P.S.—I expect you are all agog to know what I really am dealing in. I am afraid that you must master your curiosity and go on thinking Marrows Vegetable.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### EN PROVENÇE

La Prouvènço cantavo, e lou tèms courreguè ;  
E coume au Rose la Durènço  
Perd à la fin soun escourrènço,  
Lou gai reiaume de Prouvènço  
Dins lou sen de la Franço à la fin s'amaguè.

FROM THE PROVENÇAL.

OF all the towns in Southern France Arles, the centre of Marrows Vegetable, is the most celebrated, the oftenest visited, the most notably discussed. It is the Paradise of the cheap philosopher. Does not the thunder of the Paris express shake to its crazy foundations the ancient palace of Constantine? Is not the peace of the Alysamps, that burying place of Roman dead, violated seven days a week by the clamour of the goodsyard and the clang of the giant workshop? Is not the sleepy Rhône bridged as unromantically as the Menai Straits? How reconcile antique beauty with electric light? And in these latter days how reconcile the Arlesienne of the pure Greek profile with the bullet-headed prisoner of war?

Leaving this easy philosophy to take care

of itself, let us at least say that Arles, the sentimental capital of Provence, is old in a sense undreamt of by those new-comers, the English. Henry James was wont to tease his American countrymen with our stately houses and immemorial butlers; well might he have used the cobble-stones of Arles, along which he hobbled so painfully, to pelt us in our turn. We are, come to think of it, so desperately new.

But Arles has no misgivings on the score of pedigree; her line comes down unbroken. The historian will tell you that through Arles Hannibal's Numidians marched to the sack of Italy, that within her walls a Roman Emperor had his palace, that during the governorship of Decimus Junius Brutus, a Greek designed and built the exquisite theatre, still to be seen. He will go on to tell you of the Amphitheatre, of the thickness of its walls, its diameter, its seating capacity. He will compare you the Coliseum at Rome. He will reconstruct you the *Vénus d'Arles*, and discuss whether she may not be a reproduction of the lost *Aphrodite of Praxiteles*. If your historian have imagination he will tell you of the seas of blood that have flowed within the walls of the arena and of horrors that belong more properly to the nightmare pages of a Huysmans than to sober history.

If he have sentimental leanings, he will talk of Petrarch and Laura, Aucassin and Nicolette, and others of the world's famous lovers. Then will he grow lyrical over the famed Arlesienne beauty, and rhapsodical over the inability of alien blood to debase its coinage. "At Marseilles the Phocœans may have planted their arsenals, founded their markets, trained their sailors. But at Arles they loved and bred. Here was the bosom upon which the weary seafarer reposed, and here paid back to posterity the debt he owed the woman of his choice."

Though every stone in the town cry Romance, it is to be confessed that for the unromantically-minded interest is scant. Even the compiler of guide-books has to make excuses for this dullness which can be felt. "As for the town," declares one otherwise enthusiastic French writer, "she remains wrapped in her mantle of profound peace. No change has power over her; satisfied with past glory she is content to exhibit that glory to the passer-by." And again, "As for the town, she is not dead but slumbers; the artist may dream here undisturbed."

But there are those who are not artists and who nurse a more or less legitimate grievance. What is it to them that the Greek theatre slumbers on the hill? All they know is that the French theatre in the town is awake

one night in fifty. What to them that the mighty dead sleep in the Alyscamps? All they care is that the living go to bed at ten. There is, to be sure, the cinema, but I must confess to a reluctance to mingle with the faint hauntings and shadowy whisperings of Arles, the lurid "Mysteries of New York." Besides, on five nights out of seven, does not the cinema announce "*Relâche*"?

In the jargon of a town clerk, Arles has only two "centres of activity," the *Café Malarte* and the *Place du Forum*. Once a week, each Saturday morning, the countryside forgathers at the *Café Malarte*, across the way from the Alyscamps, where, one repeats, sleep the mighty dead. There, drowning the odour of garlic in innumerable *petits verres*, the farming community gathers to chaffer and outdo each other in the matter of sheep and oxen. After the *déjeuner* the crowd reassembles in the *Place du Forum*, there to rogue one another amiably in the matter of Marrows Vegetable. On Sunday morning the grandiose *Place du Forum*—it is really the village square—is alive for the hiring. If you want neatsherd, goatsherd, shepherd, wagoner, or labourer in your vineyard, loader or checker for your Marrows, it behoves you to engage him betimes. For we are at war and labour is scarce. Of French

labourers there are but few, and those few old men and striplings. Spaniards there are in plenty, in all the bravery of red sashes, sombreros, and espadrilles. A few Italians, a handful of Arabs, and a lost Serb or two make up a motley crowd whose tongues are legion. One gets on well enough with ordinary French, a smattering of Spanish, a few odd phrases culled from Italian Opera, and an instinct for the Provençal.

It is worthy of note that the curious version of the French tongue affected by "the Parisians," as the provincial in magnificent scorn calls the dweller in the capital, is here a dead language. In the Rhône valley the final "e" must always be sounded.

"Quand est-ce que finira cett-e malheureus-e guerr-e ?" is the form the universal query takes.

"C'est Vénus tout-e entièr-e à sa proie attaché-e."

Thus the great line will have to run in the future or I shall have no inkling what the fuss is all about. Vile though this pronunciation is, you have to use it to be understood. There is plenty of time to regret the purity of "Parisian" French during the stagnation which descends upon the town at midday on Sunday till it wakes again for another week's hiring.

During that week you may wander about Arles and ignore your century. It is not the show relics of the place which make for forgetfulness, but rather the unrecorded carving over a forgotten doorway, the pagan homage to some careless god or wayside shrine of gentle saint. If the present intrude at all it will be at the glimpse of some innocent going to first communion or at the show of priestly obsequies. There do the horses go steeped in crêpe to the very nostrils, a phenomenon accusing the improbability of the present day. Let me describe to you the village square, sulky in its blaze of heat. Eight trees define the market-place, a playground within a square, fenced round by eight toy victorias surmounted by eight giant parasols and hitched to eight sufficiently sorry nags. At one end of the square is pedestalled a bronze Mistral, wearing his impresario's hat with wide curling brim, dignified, courteous, very much the grand poet. There are sixteen establishments in the square, to which lead eight by-streets. Two hotels, three *coiffeurs*, two warehouses entirely given up to the sale of picture postcards, one *bureau de tabac*, and two antiquarian strongholds. And then the bars. Eight of them, almost a Scriptural adhesion to a mystic number. The apprentice in every trade is his own master



since the patron has been called to the war, and Figaro takes his ease at any one of these eight hospitable retreats, casting an eye on the shop whenever he thinks he will. Customers can wait, says Figaro, and the docile Provençal attends the boy's pleasure accordingly.

Shop windows suggest that you may supply yourself with everything that you cannot possibly want. One supposes that the natives must wear out their boots and clothes, but there is no evidence of any possibility of renewal. The whole populace would seem to live by cutting each other's hair, by selling each other cups of coffee, by an interchange of picture postcards and *immortelles*. Bric-a-brac, oddments, and perfumery rule the market, and in the matter of taste the capital is not consulted. Our gay little scents are far indeed from the ultra-sophisticated *Trèfle*, the smart *Fougères*, or the well-bred *Peau d'Espagne*. We like the innocent *Rosée de Jasmin*, the courageous *Etoile de Napoléon*, the faithful *Cœur de Jeannette*, and the candid *Frimousse d'Or*. But, mind you ask for *Frimouss-e d'Or*, or you will not be understood. The jewellers' ware is in the Arlesian mode—gold wafer-thin but cumbersome and over-elaborate, studded with stones that cannot be diamonds and are not bright enough for paste. Then there are the trinkets and

charms, heads of Jeanne d'Arc, profiles of Arlesiennes, rings with the affecting legend "Plus qu'hier, moins que demain," cigales with the motto "Lou soulèu me fai canta," which I leave you to translate for yourself. Of "serious" commodities I note vermicelli of the kind known as "Angels' Hair," tooth-powder made by the Pères Chartreux at Tarragone, and all manner of liqueurs in bottles of rare, fantastic shapes. And last the post-cards. The "portrait d'un beau tommy," wearing his stripes the wrong way up, ogles one of our fair allies. Pendent to him the French lover, curled and scented, whispers doggerel into the shoulder-blades of some prepossessing damsel. And in these post-cards there is France. France is the country of the sentimentalists.

## CHAPTER XIX

### EN PLEINE CRAU

Un grand gaillard, les cheveux bouclés, la barbe en pointe longue et inculte, avec une face de Christ ravagé, un Christ soulard, violeur de filles et détrousseur de grandes routes. . . .

LA TERRE.

I AM out of patience with Zola and Zolaism. Has it ever struck you that France lacks the realist to deal as faithfully with the peasant as with the shopkeeper? What a picture there is still to draw of the narrowness and charitableness of the countryside, of its close-fistedness and large-handed generosity, of its shrewdness and *bonhomie*, of its low cunning and childish stupidity! The owners of the pleasant vineyards of this sunny country will not sell their produce a day earlier than has been the custom of their fathers, though the whole world, made thirsty with war, cry out for the thin trickle of their grape. And how they stick to their Marrows Vegetable I am too weary to tell you. But we need our faithful novelist for other passions and obstinacies than those

of buying and selling. We need a novelist, who, without sentimentalising, shall see the peasant less grossly and less ignobly than the great French realist. Maupassant's gibe that before tackling "La Terre" the author took a victoria to see the peasants may not have been meant for more than a witticism, but it contains the germ of truth.

Never was there a greater libel on the peasant than this romantic piece of inaccurate reporting, or so one feels after contact with the soil of Provence, richer, redder, of a greater fecundity than the soil of the Loir. If ever earth should take for its expression the passions of her teeming humanity, then surely in full Provence, *en pleine Crau*, that voice were heard at its most primitive. Yet you may wander in these pleasant fields and chat with the labourer without gleaning any hint of that which Zola would tell you is passing through his mind. You may shelter from the sun behind the curtained doorway of any *mas* you will without the consciousness that incest and outrage are at your elbow. You may walk the roads and talk with gipsies, pedlars, harvesters, teamsters, rejoicing in all the bravery of gay shirts scantily covering brown skins, the finery of aluminium rings and the reddest of roses in the thick black locks of their hair. In none of their voices

will you hear the Zolaesque baying of the beast. If, to adopt the phraseology of the arch-realist these *grands gaillards* have the face of Christ—and it is true they remind one of the early Italian masters—it is the face of a Christ eminently *bon enfant*. . . .

In my last I tried to describe the sentimental atmosphere of Provence, its harking back to Crusaders and to Cæsars, its tales of fighters and lovers. The very names of the towns make appeal to one's sense of history and fable. Avignon, with its Popes and old-world nursery rhyme, Tarascon, with its genial braggart, Arles, with its fame of lovely women. Then there are the towns of which one may know nothing, but of which the very names are enticing. Such are St. Remy and Vaucluse, Les Saintes Maries de la Mer and Aigues-Mortes.

Home-keeping Englander that you are, what picture do you make to yourself of Provence? A Romantic *mise en scène* of Tennysonian retreats, where never wind blows loudly—shade of the mistral and sirocco—and where poppy, lotus, and mandragora are the staple fare? A land something more westerly in temper than our own West Country, a land of orchards and setting sun? A land of golden melon and indolent peach? . . .

To be perfectly candid, Provence is not at

all like any of the exquisite descriptions of it which one reads. Provence, or that little bit of it which I have come to know, is a jumble of three of the most matter-of-fact types of country you can imagine. There is the country of the Alpines, exaggerated mole-hills scarcely more hazardous than the golf course at Windermere, the soil a gritty yellow dust. At the foot of the Alpines a rich plain wonderfully irrigated and cared for. Through this rich belt of cultivation runs the scorching roadway, shaded by mile-long avenues of plane trees, linking village to village, and serving as standards for the sublimely incongruous service of electric light. Not an inch of ground which is not under the most jealous cultivation; the village lads, denied a green, are driven into the roadway thick in dust to play at their crazy game of bowls. To this belt of astounding fertility there succeeds a tract of marshland where the reeds grow man high, giving place in turn to a red and sandy plain entirely barren and strewn with countless millions of round smooth pebbles, the munition factory of a David. Across the Rhône the Camargue, an annexe to this desolate region, a wilderness of swamp, morass, and river. Wild bulls inhabit here, or are maintained to supply the peace-time *mises-à-mort* in the arenas of Arles and Nîmes. They are

tended by a ragged little girl of some fourteen summers, who drives them with the butt end of an old umbrella. A herd or two of really wild horses is to be seen, sturdy, thick-necked, short-legged little fellows, of a dirty white or doubtful grey, typical trappers, for whom "no day too long" as they say at the Repositories. In their natural state they are an admirable imitation of the pictures of Rosa Bonheur. A stork, a heron, and a certain army motor-car stuck in the mud complete the flora and fauna of this comfortless tract of country.

Never in the rich belt of the Crau any real orchard-sense despite the Kate Greenaway ladders ranged around the cherry trees. Never in Provence any promise of pleasant deviation in roads logical as the French mind, leading straightly and unswervingly to a fixed goal. There is in this brilliant, too-explicit country none of the half-lights, mists or decline of day which make for romance. The sap bursting the leaves of the plane trees against the morning sun is without mystery, is visibly and actively red, like the blood of fingers held to candle-light. Nor have the fields any thought beyond production and reproduction. So obsessed are they with the trick of a Zolaesque fecundity that I ache at times, positively ache, to put them to an English

use, to dot them with white figures set for fast bowling.

Figures of graver moment to the French mind than our players at cricket are the old men gathering what may very well prove to be their last crop. They give you to think sometimes, do these old men bent with years and burnt with the sun. All here is work and thrift. You may talk with a Spaniard cooking his meal by the roadside, and you will smile to think how the ill-kempt beard, matted hair, mild brown eye, and gentle expression have misled a prying novelist into talk of a "*Christ ravagé*" and a "*Christ souldard*." The manners of the young man may be rustic, his breath smell distressfully of garlic, his lowering fringe heavy with sweat hang like a curtain over his dark eyes, but you are to know that he drinks water, lives frugally, and rolls into the hedge to sleep an honest, light-hearted sleep. He is a very fairly civilised, ordinary, well-behaved young man. You may be sure that, having made up my mind about all this, I have not let the occasion pass for some pretty philosophising. "How little did you really know, old Zola," I have found myself saying, "of the real peasant, of the sunny, open-hearted, open-handed child of this straightforward land! Drunkenness, pilfering, and the petty vices



may still keep a lingering hold over us, but we shake them off pretty much as we will. We may rob hen-roosts, but we have at least secured the Beast within us." And much more in the same strain. . . .

## CHAPTER XX

### IN PARENTHESIS

#### § I

I 'VE been doing a considerable amount of theatre-going lately and wondering if I should confess it to you. Those excitable busybodies, the Germans—to put 'em no worse—have started all sorts of disputatious hares with their letting off of nonsensical crackers and silly banging of guns. How far right are we to continue to take a moderate interest in the amenities of life now that these madmen have tuned all table talk to the tremendous themes of battle, murder, and sudden death? You can't quite realise perhaps how immensely far off the war seems to us down here. One gets in the way of regarding the soldier as a distant consumer of Marrows Vegetable. . . . Nothing of late has happened to me of greater excitement than a dispute as to roads with my particularly Scotch, dour, and unyielding chauffeur. As you know, I loathe and detest every form of motor-machinery and cannot give you any indication of the

particular make of scrap-iron I ride about in except that it is a long, low car painted grey. Equally you know that I have profound faith in specialists and experts of all kinds, holding that the ignoramus should in all circumstances be mum. The lad insisted that a certain road would save ten miles of the way home. I contented myself with pointing out meekly (*a*) that the road was chiefly under water and (*b*) that I was expected to dine at seven with the mayor of the village. Totally cowed by that particular stare of contempt and indulgence affected by Scotchmen who are also motor experts I gave way. It was turned nine when a diligent scouring of the desolate country-side succeeded in producing a farmer who possessed the mules, the tow-rope and the goodwill to extricate us from the slough of unmetalled road and flood into which we had sunk axle-deep. And it was past midnight—summer time or no summer time—before the heir of Bannockburn owned he was beat. I, of course, had been beat from the start. Why can't they invent a waterproof engine? I make you a present of the suggestion.

Never a word of apology from the expert, though I think I did right to construe his repeated offers to carry my heavy coat at least some part of the weary fourteen-mile

trudge home as so many expressions of regret. We made up some sort of supper at the hotel out of scraps of meat, ends of cheese, grapes and a bottle of wine belonging to a civilian. "You'll no be bearin' me a gr-r-rudge for all this?" said Scottie, fortified by food almost to graciousness. And as he wished me good night, "It's no so terrible air-r-rly you'll be wantin' the car the morn, efter your exer-r-rise?"—in which I recognised the inveterate optimism of the professional mechanic hopeful as to a broken-down car fourteen miles away—and that within three hours of daylight. By some marvellous means known only to Scotch chauffeurs we were on the road again by ten o'clock, but I have reason to believe he took a French mechanic into his confidence.

I had plenty of time for thought then, in that mosquito-haunted vigil while my expert driver tinkered unavailingly away. And my thoughts took shape more or less as follows, punctuated of course by offers of vague help and futile suggestion.

The Germans, drat 'em! had broken in upon a world progressing in an orderly and self-respecting way—Insurance Schemes, Proportional Representation Schemes, Town Planning Schemes, the recognition that there might be practical value in the dreams of H. G. Wells, . . . and a great deal more which you will

find ever so much better put in that great writer's earliest book, . . . *Repertory Theatres*, . . . then a sudden switch on to the doubt as to whether "Art for Art's Sake" had ever been a creed going deeper than the artist's smug self-sufficingness. . . . Whether, sound or unsound, this creed hadn't been sent down by the German onslaught for a generation or two, as you send' down a boxer for the count. . . . That it was all very well for a Gauthier to say that he would rather his boots leaked than his rhyme, but that to-day we might have to choose between the rich texture of fine verse and the poor nakedness of Belgium and Serbia. . . . That, on the other hand, the only mental stimulus of which one had been conscious during the last three months in this sleepy, out-of-the-way, old-world Provence, was not the unreal, slowly-filtering war-news, but—now for a confession!—the occasional distraction of the local theatre. Perhaps I had been more interested than another. The retired cobbler will to his old last, you know, and there is the example of the busman's holiday. Anyhow, I determined that my next letter to you should be about the theatre of these parts. Honestly, I don't know that I can connect it with the war in any way, or that I shall try to. And if you think I am trifling, then imagine I have put up a notice-

board, "Theatre-Lovers Only. General Public Warned Off."

## § 2

## SOIRÉE DE THÉÂTRE EN PROVENCE

It had been a morning of real hard work and I had forgotten to lunch. Column after column of self-opiniative French figures there had been to add up, and much wondering as to the capacity of one's pay to make good arithmetical blunders and the handing out of a thousand franc note in place of one for a hundred.

"C'est trop fort de vouloir déjeuner à trois heures, le jour même où l'on attend des artistes!" grumbles the amiable Italian waiter at the country town's best inn.

"Quels artistes, mon brave?" I ask him.

"On ne sait pas trop. A ce qu'on dit, des Parisiens." And he goes off grumbling to interview the *chef*. In less than five minutes they produce between them an *omelette aux truffes*, a *bifteck à l'anglaise* (no English cook ever sponsored such a dish), a cream cheese, a basket of peaches, half a bottle of a very drinkable rose-pink wine of the country, and an admirable cup of coffee, the whole not dear at three francs fifty. Over the Maryland cigarette—the cigars are finished and the

cigarette is all one's nerves permit in these, I beg you to believe, overworked and shaky days—I fall to wondering what manner of Parisian players these may be who judge so small a town worthy of a visit and do not fear compare with the shades of Greek actors haunting the ruined theatre on the hill. It is now the very witching hour of the siesta; the waiters from the rival hotels forgather at a neutral café to talk over their clients and smoke a rank cigar. A great peace broods over the sunlit square. A dog finding the golden pavement too hot crosses to the violet shade. There is no other movement. From far away down the absurdly narrow and crooked street leading to the station, the source of all our news of the outer world, comes the faint rumble of a ramshackle fly. An elegant phaeton in the days of the First Empire, this broken-down ruin makes a stately tour of the square, stopping finally before my hotel. I gaze idly at the single figure which is its occupant. The lady, preparing to descend, throws back her long blue veil. Then to my indescribable astonishment and unutterable delight from the carriage descends . . . RÉJANE! I rub my eyes, but there is no mistaking the buoyant walk, the careless insolent carriage. The “Parisians from all accounts” means Réjane! It has always struck me as foolish that in

the daily press one has to use the belittling prefixes. What have artists to do with being called Monsieur and Madame or what have these minor courtesies to do with them? The weekly reviews manage these things better. Arthur Symons could write unrebuked "Sarah Bernhardt prepares the supreme feast; Réjane skins emotions alive; Duse serves them up to you on golden dishes." I am too far from my books to verify the quotation, but I would go bail for "Réjane skins emotions alive." There has always been fascination for me in the mere letters of a great artist's name. DUSE on a hoarding is more than Duse; it is all the sad grace of La Gioconda. BERNHARDT brings back a hot afternoon of late summer many years ago, a wait of hours outside the door of a provincial pit, a long pale poster in white, silver, and mauve, and an ineffably wistful Lady of the Camelias, trailing glamour and more than mortal radiance. RÉJANE stands in my mind for all the insolence of Paris, the arrogance of great courtesanes, the crude manners and crude sorrows of the *femme du peuple*.

I shall never forget the first time I saw Réjane. It was one sultry evening in Paris and in spite of the great actress the house was thin. I forget the title of the play, some comical-historical, historical-comical drama *à la mode*.



Coquelin, I remember, had a tirade on behalf of the dignity of the actor's calling, and he and Réjane played together a scene of peasant jealousy. I had a solitary seat in the front row of the almost empty stalls. (It was my first visit to Paris and I had saved up for the treat.)

It seems to me now that the great actress had not been averse that evening to overwhelming with all the splendour of her art this obviously foreign little greenhorn gazing up at her. She may have felt the need of someone to play to. The fact remains that never have I since seen on any stage the like of that peasant agony. It gave one the impression of torture and vivisection, of an animal dumb despite the torrent of words. Symons was right; this was indeed emotions skinned alive. . . .

I tried to say something of this in a letter to the artist, conveyed with the compliments (unofficial) of the British Army and a *gerbe* of flowers some five feet by three. I am sentimental enough to think that it must be something, even to artists the most weary of success, to know at first hand that their success is real. A singularly conscientious and sensitive actor once told me that whenever he went on to the stage jaded or listless he would pull himself together with the thought that he might be

about to unlock the door into the world of beauty to some poor devil stumbling on the threshold. Perhaps it was foolish to write the wildly extravagant letter I did, but the temptation was strong. It is not often given to the marooned—for one is marooned here, you know, in the matter of streets and theatres, restaurants and people, all that go to make up town,—to have the isolation so surprisingly relieved.

There was none of the stage-managed success in this visit of a great actress. There descends from a rickety hired carriage at an unpretentious hotel “*une artiste, une Parisienne, à ce qu’il paraît.*” At the stuffy little theatre a crowd of farmers, shopkeepers, and apprentices assembles. There is one row of stalls only and in the well of the orchestra the *chef* and *sous-chef*, the waiter, boots, and chambermaid from the hotel. The play is “*Madame Sans-Gêne*,” and the audience take play and acting without very much ado. This is Parisian acting, *à ce qu’il paraît*, but nothing, their apathy would seem to suggest, so tremendously out of the way.

After the performance I make a frugal supper of biscuits and a bottle of Vichy in the half-lighted hall of the Hotel, which is the only sitting-room. It is the hour when all good dramatic critics revise the essay which they have written in intelligent anticipa-

tion. I find myself wondering whether any of our best instructed critics have pointed out that whereas Ellen Terry in the English version of the play was simply mannerless, Réjane is magnificently *sans-gêne*—a very different matter. Or that our great and dear actress had her revenge in the matter of pathos, inasmuch as when the French Maréchale spoke of following her husband in the field, one marvelled at the justice and cleverness of the actress's emotion, but that when the English Duchess made her declaration, a lump in the throat would come that defied analysis. My contribution to criticism would have been that the excellent actor who played Napoleon could never have seen Irving or he would surely not have omitted to point his remarks to the Queen of Naples by banging the backs of pricelessly-bound volumes with the tongs as our great actor used to do.

In the midst of these musings there is a ring at the door-bell; the sleepy porter goes with an ill grace to open and Réjane enters, filling the dingy place not with a legendary radiance, but with a bustling air of business-like competence. She instructs the porter to see that her bill is ready betimes in the morning. Then a few gracious words to me, who have nothing to say in return, a pleasant acceptance of the flowers, a kindly passing

over of the letter, a bow, and the actress disappears. At ten o'clock the next morning she has left the town and we go about our normal affairs with what appetite we may. There is somehow or other a certain sameness in this business of Marrows Vegetable.

### § 3

#### A FRENCH VERSION OF SALOMÉ

I want you to imagine yourself in one of the Roman arenas of Southern France. I want you to imagine a gorgeous night of late June, the sky a deep blue, so blue that you can look up past the arc lamps into a vault that is not darkness but colour. Over the rim of the last of the tiers of stone the moon rides as it has ridden for a thousand years. Moths that might have fluttered in the folds of a decoration by Aubrey Beardsley hang on the curtain of night. The centuries fall away and we feel humiliated, grotesque even to our dress. Entering from the street we pass through what we must suppose to be the pit, to what we must equally suppose to be the stalls. The stage is an immense distance away. Vaguely one perceives by the barbaric costumes of the actors, their excess of jewels, the long red tresses of the women

twined about with pearls, the raven beards of the men, that the play is Eastern. But for the moment neither the traffic of the stage, the tinkle of the orchestra, nor the simulation of passion in the air holds our attention. Alone the walls of the theatre tease our brain and spirit. Of what passions, crimes, cruelties are they not eloquent! What butcheries have they not seen, what debaucheries have they not sheltered! The imagination will not have it that yonder dark stain is not of yesterday. The immense crowd which has assembled is as little distracting as the play of the stage. At one end of the crescent emerging into the light thrown from the stage is to be seen a young peasant lying at full length on his stomach, his brown chin supported in his brown hand. A small child plays quietly on the broad ledge by his side. At the other end of the crescent a soldier on leave talks earnestly to a young girl. Half a dozen recruits are laughing and joking. The auditorium is so vast that these interruptions do not amount to a disturbance.

Twenty thousand souls are listening to the rise and fall of Massenet's "*Hérodiade*," not too momentous in a French opera-house, mightily unequal to the task of stilling the echoes of the past thrown back by these grey walls. The stage setting is gaudy and fantastic,

blue cypress against yellow rocks. The actors, arrayed in all the colours of a child's box of paints, declaim, gesticulate and go about their operatic business to no very great purpose. The triviality of rehearsed emotions has become obvious in this setting of grey stone. How can old walls which have drunk their fill of actual tragedy take seriously the rhyme and the jingle, the cardboard pretence? What can they make of this sham Tetrarch mouthing a sham passion, this Hérodiade bringing off *roulades* and *fiorituri*, this Salomé winning and spritely with the click of French heels under her Eastern robe?

Now I have no intention of going back on our old love, the theatre. We hold, don't we, you and I, that the stage can better mere portrayal, can heighten passion. We hold that no theme is too big to be contained within the box of tricks which is the theatre. But let us agree that it is a box of tricks of which we must respect the conventions. You do not ask your conjurer to bring off miracles in the absence of an apparatus, nor should you ask your actor to perform his wonders outside the mimic scene. The actor bestriding a couple of cardboard boulders becomes an English king; topple them over and there is a breach in a fortress walls. Furnish the same actor with a first-class set of battlements

reproduced from the architectural records of the period ; give the scenic artist and the stage carpenter their unimaginative fling, and you will have neither Harfleur nor Henry the Fifth ; you will have only an actor and a piece of acting to applaud.

How much more destructive of illusion, then, when you carry actuality a step further, from stage realism to the very bricks and mortar of a setting which has known tragedy. Plant your actor on the platform of Elsinore, let him tread the Rialto of Venice or the Forum of old Rome, and you will have stripped him of his conjurer's apparatus, of his legitimate appurtenances, his rightful box of tricks.

Diderot tells of a visit to the studio of Pigalle, then at work on his monument to the Maréchal de Saxe, and of a beautiful courtesane who was sitting as model for the figure of France. "Mais comment croyez-vous qu'elle me parut entre les figures colossales qui l'environnaient ? Pauvre, petite, mesquine, une espèce de grenouille ; elle en était écrasée."

So were the actors in "Hérodiade" crushed, dwarfed by their surroundings. Excellent artists in a theatre, they shrank to inconceivable littleness when their stage swelled to the Roman Empire. Herod, most sinister of personages, became a middle-aged *noceur* in red velvet, Hérodiade a commonplace virago,

Salomé, a feather-brained young woman sobered by the fear lest the attentions of the prophet might not prove "serious." To be fair to the actors one cannot maintain that this was entirely their fault. The cypress trees insisted on pointing to heaven instead of to perfectly acceptable flies, the yellow background of the desert would dissolve into the mocking walls of grey stone instead of into *coulisses* taken for granted. These actors were condemned to enact their tragedy, as a wit said of an overweighted Hamlet, like rabbits with thunderbolts tied to their tails.

If I were writing this letter in the Diderot manner, I should make you break in here.

"There must be something very wrong with your art of the theatre," you would say, "if it cannot rise to the level of history, if it is not capable of being stimulated and inspired by pregnant scenes."

And perhaps we have got to the heart of the mystery. Perhaps opera at its best can never be, for the play-goer as distinct from the musician, a sufficiently serious art. I have often wondered what Charles Lamb would have had to say to the spectacle of kings, confronted with their dishonour, mute until fiddles and bassoons had recounted their life histories; at lovers bleeding to death through whole acts—who would have thought tenors



to have had so much blood in 'em?—at stout sopranos waving shawls in obedience to a stick wagged at them by a manikin on a stool! . . . But let us assume that opera is a feasible medium for the highest emotion of the theatre. The fault of non-effectiveness then must lie in the choice of opera, in the positively uncanny preference of Massenet to Strauss. What though the shudder in the German Opera, the pale ardour in the play of Wilde, the leer in the drawings of Beardsley are so many distempered elaborations redeemed only by genius? In the hands of Massenet the simple story is become travesty. Genius were better.

“St. Jean-Baptiste est poursuivi par Salomé qui, éprise de lui, finit par lui faire partager son amour.”

I quote from the programme. Hérodiade demands the head of the prophet very much against the will of Salomé, who has her vengeance thwarted by the belated discovery that Hérodiade is her mother. Nothing is left for the young lady but a pathetic suicide which she accordingly effects. What monkeying with a text! Well may the apologetic programmist call the character-drawing *dénaturé!*

Let us leave the operatic stage to its *impresarios* and *chefs d'orchestre*, its *prima donnas* and *premières danseuses*. What actors, simple

straightforward actors, are there or have there ever been capable of holding their own against the stones of the Arena? Would one invite Duse to court so grand a disaster? Would not Réjane be the first to declare the entrepreneur mad who should propose so hare-brained an adventure? Was not Mounet-Sully too consciously sublime, and would he not have turned the Bible into Hugo? Our own Irving would have achieved a failure tremendous as his Lear. There remains one only of the great artists of our time, and we are still too near her to judge.

A little anecdote. A great actress was giving a lesson to a pupil on the bare stage of her theatre. Said the pupil, who could not manage a sufficiently desperate "Au secours!"

"But, Madame, will you not show me the proper way to cry for help?"

"My child," replied the actress. "Were I to cry for help those decorators of mine up there in the ceiling would come rushing down on to the stage!"

And this intense power of conviction is due not to an excess of spirit or superabundance of soul, but to the perfect recognition of the theatre's lath and plaster and a perfect mastery of its tricks. Amazing paradox of this theatre of ours, that it should be the conjurer, the conscious manipulator, the calculating and

contriving artist who speaks most eloquently to our souls! But I cannot bring myself to believe that even the great artist who is rapidly becoming my King Charles's head could hold her own against the ghosts of the Arena. Which is a heresy for which I shall probably be very sorry in the morning.

## § 4

## AN OPERA OF ROSSINI

Away she went over the smooth turf at a canter.

EDITH VERNON'S LIFE-WORK.

What do you think of the discovery that the actor may escape annihilation by declining to take his art too portentously? There's daylight for you! The scene of this piece of critical perceptiveness was again the Arena, the time last Sunday afternoon, the occasion Rossini's bombastic, twaddlesome "William Tell," vulgar from the first bar of its rowdy music-hall overture to the last of its fatuous top notes. And yet one revelled in the noisy rubbish. There wasn't, you see, the faintest pretence at illusion. "On chante comme on peut," said the *bourgeoise* when her daughter took too much pressing. One shouts "William Tell" as loud as one can and there's an end.

Does it not strike you as rather curious that a person not altogether ignorant of the French language, nor of the conventional idiom of the opera-singer, and with a two-franc stall well to the front should still be unable to decide with whom the gentleman in the sky-blue breeches slashed *à la* Holbein is in love, and what the obstacle to his suit? For an act or so this round-faced, oleaginous hero, half brigand, half butter-merchant, now Tupman, now Chadband, now Mr. Charles Hawtrey's farcical make-up many years ago as the fancy-dress Duke in "Lord and Lady Algy," bleated his passion into the void. After a time attention was drawn to a depressing young woman attired *en amazone* and given to patrolling the chamois-haunted glades of what looked like the more expensive parts of Switzerland. This personage took one straight back to the pork-pie period of du Maurier, and reminded me insistently of a book of childhood's days, one "Edith Vernon's Life-work." Failing throughout the whole performance to gather the name of the heroine I called her Edith Vernon, after the equestrian heroine of that lachrymose romance. It was Edith Vernon then who seemed to have nothing whatever to do in life except to wear strawberry velvet and to wander up and down green swards tapping a green gauntlet with a

jewelled riding-whip. After two acts, during which the sky-blue gentleman had been as dumb before this lady as Romeo in the presence of Rosaline, we were suddenly astonished by the ecstatic announcement "Sa flamme répond à ma flamme," set to the vulgarest tune I ever did hear. But one had all along been taking the lover for William Tell himself since he was the possessor of the loudest voice in the cast and was obviously out to break the back of the opera. What, one began to wonder, would Edith Vernon make of the small boy who was to prove the son of this middle-aged philanderer? One foresaw expostulatory recitatives of enormous length and arias of a heart-rending sentimentality.

To everybody's relief a baritone looking absurdly like Wotan hereabouts presented himself, and proceeded to establish his claim to be considered the rightful owner to the title of the opera, although for a long time one had taken him for Gessler. But by a subtle process of elimination one made up one's mind that this last could only be the fellow with the picric-acid beard who looked as though he had made-up for "Aïda." But the characters did not come properly into their own until the scene of the apple, when everybody who was anybody forgathered on the stage at once. It was now definitely determined that

Boy Blue could not by any possibility be William Tell, but who he really was and who the strawberry-coloured, one will never know till one drops across Rossini in the shades.

Once again one noted that Italian Opera, of which this is a particularly flagrant specimen, has no mean between the highly diverting and the extremely lugubrious. Whatever the shade of sentiment in the libretto, whatever the level of the passion, needs must, when a *maestro* composes, that the music perch on one or the other of these two stools. "Mon père est mort ; je l'ai vu pour la dernière fois" was positively chortled by the smirking, bowing, scraping brigand. After another equally sensational aria, the last, as it turned out, of the afternoon, the loud-voiced hero bowed himself off into the wings for good, and emerging from the other side buried his round and beaming face, in full view of the audience, in a mug of foaming beer handed up by an enthusiastic admirer.

And yet in spite of the farcical plot, the trumpety music and the naïve interpretation, there was an amount of theatrical illusion considerably bettering the fiasco of "Hérodiade." On this sunny afternoon there had been no attempt to rivalise with great surroundings, to shout down the voices of ghosts. The actors making no claim beyond the legitimate

pretensions of their art, the puppet show and the box of tricks came into their own again. Boy Blue and Edith Vernon, well within the Operatic convention, not even trying too wholeheartedly to avoid the ridiculous, left more for the imagination to take hold of than that other Herod with all his mouthing. And in the theatre imagination works the better the more it has to do.

## § 5

## A PERFORMANCE OF GOUNOD'S " FAUST "

Verdi, Verdi, when you wrote " Il Trovatore " did you dream  
Of the City when the sun sinks low,  
Of the organ and the monkey and the many-coloured stream  
On the Piccadilly pavement, of the myriad eyes that seem  
To be litten for a moment with the wild Italian gleam  
As *A che la morte* parodies the world's eternal theme  
And pulses with the sunset-glow.

THE BARREL ORGAN.

Again the Arena, which might lead you to suppose that A.S.C. officers spend their time gallivanting round the country-side at the heels of play-actors. But there you would be grievously mistaken. It does not follow that you do a job any the worse for choosing a day on which the little town is *en fête*. There is a gala night in the Arena and you are invited by a hospitable French merchant to dinner.

Of the dinner no need to say much. You know what French hospitality is—the *soupe*, the unknown fish out of the Rhône, a malevolent, ill-mannered fish, “*pas gentil du tout*,” the old lady who cooked him averred, seeing that it had bitten her while she was cleaning him alive under the tap, the *grillade*, the *haricots verts*, which have so little in common with our own French beans, the *poulet*, the *salade*, the cheese, and the dessert, greengages, peaches, apricots, the whole *arrosé* with a small white wine, a famous Bordeaux, a Châteauneuf-du-Pape from the Rhône valley, and an unknown champagne, alas! *demi-sec*.

But you cannot know what it is to drink French coffee on the balcony of a fifth-floor flat gazing at a famous monument to a bygone civilisation literally on the other side of the way. One gets so used to the romantic in Provence that to stroll across the street into a Roman Amphitheatre is not more remarkable than to dine at Hammersmith and turn into Olympia. Except that from my host's the distance is so short that the transfer from dinner-table to stall may be effected “without the trouble of drawing on one's gloves,” as our foremost playwright, always well dressed in the matter of dialogue, makes his noble lord say.

At this my third performance in these old



arenas, I was conscious of being less staggered by antiquity, of being able to compute that fifteen thousand souls even at a franc a piece is a goodish "house." Attention, then, was not too awesomely distracted from Gounod's masterpiece, always an amusing opera, rising almost to seriousness when the Faust is as arresting a personage and as magnificent an actor as he was on this occasion. Imagine a Faust with the brow of a Siegfried, and the mouth and chin of an Apollo. Imagine a radiance more than healthy, the renewed *éclat* of some *vieux marcheur* turned Greek god. Imagine a chevelure of amber curls parted gloriously and descending to the shoulders in cascades infinitely well arranged. Imagine eyes of which the flame has been relit by the pencil, of which the lids are heavy with passion bought at the chemist's. There is something of Little Lord Fauntleroy in this velvet-suited hero, something of that great male, the Marquis de Valmont in Choderlos de Laclos' "Liaisons Dangereuses," a hint of the opera-singer in Beardsley's "Venus and Tannhäuser," a trace in the hips and carriage of the exorbitant gentleman who demands too much from life in Picasso's "London Music Hall." What Marguerite could have resisted *ce beau ténor* of the fascinating ways, as we know she didn't? The very make-up of which the actor had so

magnificent a courage was a whole Conte Cruel of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam.

Even the orchestra came under the influence of the strange spell. The first violin, bespectacled, middle-aged, fiddled away with passion. "Et Ego in Arcadia" quavered and insisted the thin trickle of his *obbligato*. In the stalls a "modish little lady" kept closing and unclosing her jewelled hand; at her side an "old and haggard demirep" moved uneasily in her seat. And now that I have slipped into these phrases I know what it is that has been stirring me so intensely.

It is not the parody of passion in the music, it is not the passion emanating from these old grey walls. It is the recollection of the passion of London, of its many-coloured stream, myriad eyes, pavements, theatres, restaurants. It is the old passion of the street and the crowd, to which this well-worn music has sent one harking back. A circumscribed London too, not much bigger than a barrel organ's beat. Who would not exchange the whole of Provence for a world of no bigger radius than the Elephant and Castle where the buses are, the Waterloo Road with its touts and rogues, Vauxhall where the lilacs bloom, Hammersmith where in Horse Show Week the little ponies go round and round. Though the music's only Gounod there's London to make it sweet.

That night over a last cigar on the balcony overlooking the now silent Arena one grew philosophic. Said my host, breaking a long silence,

“A bien regarder, la vie ne vaut pas grand'chose.”

“C'est un foin secondaire,” I replied, knowing his agricultural leanings.

“Je vous comprends. Très secondaire même ! Mais, que voulez vous ?” This with the familiar shrug of the shoulders. Then, after a time, “Pardi !”

Finally I. “La vie, voyez vous, ça n'est jamais si bon ni si mauvais qu'on croit,” which is my favourite quotation from Maupassant. Then reflecting on the poverty of mind which has nothing less trite to offer on the twin subjects of Life and Death than a feeble witticism and an outworn quotation, I bid good night to my friend and walk slowly to my hotel.

## CHAPTER XXI

DUNSCOMBE

I CAN hear you saying, in spite of my warning, that my last few letters are all very well, but that a soldier should have sterner doings to relate than going to the play, to which the retort that, quite between ourselves, A.S.C. Officers are sometimes engaged less in soldiering than in the conduct of a large and responsible wholesale business with rounds to make and market-places to attend, and we must have some recreation. I am beginning to forget military terms and have now only the very vaguest recollection of drill. In the beginning of things my bedroom was my office and one worked and breakfasted, and worked and lunched, and worked and had dinner, and worked until bedtime all within the same four walls. But now that the business has grown and the turnover has increased from one million—Marrows Vegetable, I think we agreed to call 'em—to two million a week, I have been authorised to take a *bona fide* office with a room for the clerks, of whom

I now have two. Also I have taken in a partner, one Dunscombe.

Now taking in a partner in the Army is by no means a matter of choice. An officer receives orders to "proceed" to take up a partnership with you whether he wants to or not, and you will arrange, please, to take into partnership, somebody of whose very name and existence you were unaware till you opened the telegram. How diffidently he takes up his position and how cordially you try to make him feel he is the one person you would have chosen! You have your first meal together and it is as well to realise at once that for six months, perhaps for twelve, you will breakfast together and lunch together, and take coffee after lunch together, and dine together and take coffee after dinner together, at the same little table in the same dull little café across the road. There is no danger of a quarrel over anything that really matters, but there is every likelihood that you will fall out because you do not like the shape of each other's noses. So it is as well to lay in a good stock of the small courtesies and minor forebearances.

From the first moment of setting eyes on old Dunscombe I knew we should never fall out. (I call him "old Dunscombe" because he is so preternaturally young.) And yet I

do not think that we have a single interest in common. So much the better. As some wit said, a bishop and a jockey get on together far better than two bishops with different shades of gaiters. Which of us is the bishop and which the jockey, I will leave you to decide for yourself.

Dunscombe is the very best type of young Englishman, extraordinarily cute in everything that relates to affairs, and extraordinarily simple in everything that doesn't. To him one tune is very much like another and everything that appears in print equally good to read. In comparison with Kirchner and Bairnsfather, Michael Angelo and Titian are very small beer. You would not ask Dunscombe to choose a book for you, but you would trust him unhesitatingly in a tight place or in any matter of honour or friendship. Sound on all questions of money and women, he will have nothing to do with any complicated notions of morality. Many writers have had a shot at the young Englishman. He has been idealised in "The Brushwood Boy," and set forth perhaps too nakedly in his manly, commonplace self-sufficiency, in the civilian novels of Mr. Ian Hay. It has been left to a Frenchman to draw Dunscombe perfectly, and you will find him in the second lieutenant of Abel Hermant's "L'Autre Aventure du Joyeux

Garçon." There is the perfect hitting-off of the well-bred, clean-living Englishman, immemorially endowed with the *fougue* of perfect condition, the temper of a boy, and the heart and brain of a child. If anything is wanting it is a dash of the "guileless fool" of the legend, and of the artlessness of Kipps.

Dunscombe's method of making himself understood by the French peasant is of a rare simplicity. He will muster up what he can remember of his schoolboy French, add a flavouring of Whitechapel, round off every sentence with a "Vous savez," and serve up hot and strong. And when the poor Provençal "compres" but indifferently, "Gaw-blimey!" says Dunscombe, "the blighters don't understand their own language." The knowing thing, according to Dunscombe, is to *engueuler* the native on every possible occasion. That is why the poor waiter who knows not our English humour has to suffer a bombardment, at every meal, reminiscent of the Tottenham Court Road on Saturday night. "Look here, you spawn of Pompeii, you leanin' disgrace to Pisa, if you don't activvy that bloomin' om-y-lette I'll topple you over for good an' all, s'welp me if I don't!" The poor Pompeiiian smiles foolishly, doubtless reflecting to himself that the English have a wit all their own. But to the timid little woman who also waits

at table Dunscombe is gallantry personified. "Donnez-moi le droit de vous aimer tout le temps" is the meaningless pleasantry, derived from recollection of old music-halls, to which the poor girl has to submit daily.

Dunscombe is at his very best in diplomatic parlance. Having demanded ten million Marrows Vegetable from an arrondissement only capable of producing eight, we received a visit from the perturbed but always courteous Maire. "But how, Messieurs, how, explain me that, am I to provide you with an of them so enormous quantity?"

"La réponse, M. le Maire," said Dunscombe gravely, "c'est un citron!" And I was too greatly overcome by laughter to offer an adequate interpretation. To this day the Mayor of that little town regards the pair of us as exceptionally bereft of reason even for Englishmen.

It goes almost without saying that Dunscombe is a practical joker for whom other people's pyjamas exist only that they may be sewn up and bedroom slippers that they may be stuffed with sardines. Given the combination of a *bâtman* who is a barrack-room lawyer, short-sighted and a devotee of Woodbines, together with a Saturday night's good dinner and a wopping big hare presented by a kindly farmer, and the trick is as good as



done. Invading our bătman's quarters—a kind of cubby-hole and larder combined—we turn down the old boy's bed, your sober friend aiding and abetting, and instal Puss therein, spectacles on nose made out of a bit of wire which ought in these self-denying times to have come off a soda-water bottle, but didn't, a "fag" between his or her teeth, the head propped up by pillows, paws on counterpane, and intent on *Field Service Regulations—Part II. Casualty Section*, for all the world the image of our servant in expository mood. All this happened last night by the way. Going to bed after our weekly battle at Picquet, at which I was the winner by some 1200 points or no less a sum than three francs, my head had scarcely touched the pillow when I was roused by a frantic yell from the next room, followed by a crash of glass and a hurtling thud. Rushing in to see what was up I beheld Dunscombe trembling from head to foot and waving a pair of hare's ears at me.

"It came off in my hand," said Dunscombe. "It" being the body of poor Puss found at the bottom of his bed and now lying, via the window, in the courtyard below.

I explained to the shaken joker that he mustn't make use of a phrase consecrated entirely to housemaids exhibiting vestiges of handles to housekeepers minus a jug.

"I'll teach the blighter to play practical jokes on me!" went on the boy, with that sense of fairness which makes the British officer so popular with his men. But I persuaded him not to make an Orderly Room matter of it, foreseeing a defence of the "You began it, Sir, please" order. So we condemned the ruffian to a Jugged Hare fatigue next day, and to parade with the Red Currant Jelly at seven precisely. All of which sounds very subversive of discipline, but isn't really.

Besides, the incident gave rise to a literary and philosophic discussion of the highest interest, lasting till the early hours or rather the late hours of the morning, the morrow being Sunday. The hare propped up in bed had reminded me too insistently of the mannerless hare in "Struwelpeter," which, when shot at and missed, rudely put its fingers to its nose. We debated whether the best book for children ever written had a right to be German, and whether Beethoven's symphonies were up to much after all. I urged that it would be a pity if "The Mastersingers" and "Rosenkavalier" should turn out to have been performed in London for the last time. Dunscombe didn't know about that, but admitted that "The Merry Widow" was "pretty decent," and that it would be "jolly rough luck on Strauss if they never give it again."

A good fellow, Dunscombe. It's he and his like who are winning the war. Hats off to his simplicity!

We have hit upon an amicable division of the work. First of all we divided it into two parts as nearly equal as possible. Then we tossed up which of us should choose; the winner to pay five francs into the kitty. Dunscombe won the toss, forked out the five francs, and chose the out-of-door job. Since that date I have blossomed into a first-rate accountant. I who formerly through sheer funk used to pay cabmen twice as much as they asked, now haggle with a tenacious peasantry for half a centime. In the old days I should have been tempted to squander sixpence or five shillings or five pound ten—after the Harold Skimpole manner—anything to get rid of the bother of discussion. To-day I am become an arithmetician, and as a rate-payer you will be glad to know that your money is in safe hands. We indulge in childish games, do Dunscombe and I. At the end of each week we have a grand sweep and whoever has lost the most Marrows Vegetable pays for drinks. On Saturday last Dunscombe came rushing back to the office in a state of the wildest excitement; “Your turn this time, old man,” said he, “my field-stock balances to a marrow.” “What of that?” said I,

with superiority, " my book-stock balances to a pip."

So we both paid for rounds, for which I can only offer as excuse an unparalleled zeal in the administration of the nation's affairs and a temperature of 102° in the shade. Besides, were we not both in the condition described by Mr. Mantalini as that of a " demn'd, damp, moist, unpleasant body " ?

## CHAPTER XXII

A BREATHING SPACE. AT THE MOULIN DAUDET

THE bank clerk gets his day off by Act of Parliament, the factory hand by virtue of his Trade Union, let the champions of a soft-hearted capital prate as they will. The labourer has his Saturday afternoon, the shop assistant his half-day, the sewing-maid her night out. It is apparently only the Army Service Corps officer who officially is never off duty. Laborious as the ant, steeped in the spirit of diligence, cast in the mould of the late Dr. Brewer, made after the image of the indefatigable Smiles, this strenuous officer will, however, if taxed, admit to an occasional stand-easy.

It was during some such breathing space that I bethought me of the "Moulin Daudet." Little difficulty in finding this "Object of interest"—see local guide-book—since the streets hereabouts are plastered with instructions to the sightseer. The thriftiest people in the world, the French show a wise economy in spending royally of their intellectual treasure.

Not a halfpenny squandered which may be legitimately saved, these delightful niggards increase their wealth in spending it. Never was a race more lavish of the renown of its illustrious dead. Street after street bears the name of a great man, his dates and the category of his genius. In the Provençal towns so much beloved by Daudet you can read "Gounod, compositeur," "Blaise Pascal, philosophe," "Corneille, tragédien," "Diderot, encyclopédiste," "Molière, auteur classique," "Voltaire, prosateur français." "Favorin, orateur, philosophe arlésien" suggests a prosy gentleman holding forth in the cafés. Balzac and Hugo are big enough to call for neither dates nor data. Daudet's street, a parched and dusty lane in a tiny village on the edge of the crumpled hills, also wears without comment the name of the poet, but this is perhaps because there is no single word to describe the poet and boulevardier. And are not the house and windmill close at hand for him who walks the lanes to read?

One takes the windmill first. Not a very imposing ruin, this overgrown pepper-box with its inexplicable stumps of wings. In some moods the visitor will find it entirely commonplace, in others he will see in it the dwelling of dwarfs from a fairy tale of Hans Christian Andersen, or the abode of Sugar-Plum Fairies

from a *Suite de Ballet*. Over the doorway a mauve plate bears in gold lettering the inscription :

“ Je revenais au moulin  
songer au livre que j'écrirais plus tard  
et que je daterais de ma ruine  
aux ailes mortes.”

A. DAUDET.

The mill is perched on a tiny eminence. At your feet the landscape, dusty scrub and stunted almond tree, spreads to the steel-blue Rhône. The distant hills are blue too, but it is a blue without hesitation, the turquoise and sapphire of an opera-singer's jewels. The roads, which in a less logical country would be winding their way to the heart of some mystery, gleam here like the explicit streamers of a *prima donna's* bouquet. Of haze and middle distance, doubt and surmise, nothing ; the horizon is as well defined as a saucer's rim. The sun dipping below this rim will plunge the world into brilliant obscurity, into night without languor. There is too much that is uncompromising in the glory of the Provençal day. Even though it rain, which is unthinkable, the country will but blossom into purple and red like the heart of Maud's lover. Only it will be the purple and red of the peasant's immemorial umbrella, the peacock sheen, the unreasonable iridescence of

village panoplies. At sundown all living things go to a concerted rest with the precision of an orchestra: the day's piece is played. From this decided country twilight has been banished, day surrendering to night without parley. The sentiment of evening is become strange, we know nothing of the day's close and the dusk, the moods of *sagesse* and *recueillement*. He was no poet of Provence who wrote:

“ Ma Douleur, donne-moi la main ; viens par ici, .  
. . . Vois se pencher les défuntes Années,  
Sur les balcons du ciel, en robes surannées ;  
Surgir du fond des eaux le Regret souriant ;  
Le Soleil moribond s'endormir sous une arche,  
Et, comme un long linceul trainant à l'Orient,  
Entends, ma chère, entends la douce Nuit qui marche.”

The southern night moves with too precipitate a stride for this Parisian; descends like the quick and brutal curtain of the stage.

From the mill we take the little path to the château, imposing, elegant, and untidy like all French châteaux. The façade is delicate-tinted like the best note-paper, but the drive is choked with weeds, and tall rank grasses climb the pale blue trellised gates. Though the house is now a hospital the present owner will show you the room in which Daudet actually wrote the famous letters—dated with so innocent a fiction from the tumble-down



windmill—the grotto, *le cagnard*, to which in moments of weariness and lassitude, *la cagne*, the author would repair to meditate, think out a sentence, drop off into a doze. On the front of the house the inscription—again gold lettering on a mauve ground :

“Maison Bénie! Que de fois  
je suis venu là, me reprendre  
à la Nature, me guérir  
de Paris et de ses fièvres.”

Thus writes Daudet, and one wonders. . . . Did Daudet in very sooth desire to be cured of Paris and its fevers? How much of sincerity was there in this craving for repose? Or rather how much more nearly was it not akin to the feverish villegiaturas of neurotic poets, of grandiloquent poetesses harrying their lovers into romantic solitudes, of courtesanes working themselves up into “a state” at the very mention of the words *pureté, campagne*. How long before Daudet began to hanker after his beloved Paris? How long before each of us would be up and packing, sick for the town, sick for the spectacle of other men’s fevers, though we be shaken by no ague of our own?

Hear Daudet himself on his sickness of soul! He is apostrophising a soldier on furlough who, countryman though he be, has

lost the taste for hedgerows, and dreams of Paris, drumming to while away his leave.

“ Rêve, rêve, pauvre homme ! . . . Si tu as la nostalgie de ta caserne, est-ce que, moi, je n’ai la nostalgie de la mienne ? Mon Paris me poursuit jusqu’ici comme le tien. Tu joues du tambour sous les pins, toi ! Moi, j’y fais de la copie. . . . Ah ! les bons Provençaux que nous faisons ! Là-bas, dans les casernes de Paris, nous regrettions nos Alpines bleues et l’odeur sauvage des lavandes ; maintenant, ici, en pleine Provence, la caserne nous manque, et tout ce qui la rappelle nous est cher ! . . . ”

And as Gouguet François, dit Pistolet, drummer of the thirty-first regiment of the line, drums his way down the hill, Daudet cries,

“ Et moi, couché dans l’herbe, malade de nostalgie, je crois voir, au bruit du tambour qui s’éloigne, tout mon Paris défilé entre les pins. . . . Ah ! Paris ! . . . Paris ! . . . Toujours Paris ! ”

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A USE FOR THE BEAUTIFUL

A thing of beauty, etc.

JOHN KEATS.

IF the south of France is one vast retreat from the actualities of the war, it contains remoter fastnesses yet in the way of store-houses of the antique, unshakable by destructive agencies other than Time. Of such is the little Musée Lapidaire one stumbled into on a scorching afternoon in late June. . . . Tired out with the heat, weary of kicking my heels about waiting for a telephone call, I have to confess starting back for the office in a state of exasperation with the world in general and old Dunscombe in particular. It is the complication of minor worries and not the great tragedies which drives the unstable to suicide. I am afraid my stability has not been proof of late against the airs of station-masters, the mulishness of carters, the vagaries of railway wagons, and the almost human disobligingness of tarpaulins. There is something un-English about the unreliability of these latter.

Imagine that on Monday I received from England one hundred and five of these graceful objects, that I counted them myself, that on Tuesday I issued sixty-two, on Wednesday three, on Thursday twenty, on Friday three more. Going to the station to-day full of confidence in my arithmetic to claim the remaining seventeen, I find nine! I hold a drum-head court-martial on everybody in the village from the Mayor downwards, it being the pleasing habit in this part of the world to have no use for lock and key, so that he who loafs may steal. Everybody of course is acquitted and leaves the court without a stain on his character except the President, who finds that he has lost, or cannot account for, which comes to the same thing, eight tarpaulins. But this is not all. I have had a silly, meaningless row with Dunscombe, who complains of my not having done an hour's honest work since he came here. I retort with an offer of a certificate as to his having put in sixteen full working hours out of every twenty-four, all of them to the wrong purpose! A childish quarrel worthy of the ushers in "Stalky." Then there has been an annoying post-bag this morning, allowances apparently not having come to hand, and my banker's version of recent drawings not in the least tallying with my own ideas on the matter.

Then there is Private Tompkins, who having enlisted under the name of Jenkins, and having been known by that name for many moons, has now no more sense than to want to revert to his original name. I point out that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, and that in my opinion Jenkins is a very much better name than Tompkins. I lecture him on the folly of being in any way connected with two such absurd families. "Pickwick" lying handy on my desk—being part of an issue of books sent down by an O.C. with a regard for the literary comforts of his men, and consequently absorbed into the office—I read him the passage in which the learned judge confounds Mr. "Phunky" with Mr. "Monkey." Tompkins laughs, thinks I read well, and persists in his demand to be known by his proper name. This is all very well for Tompkins, but what about Tompkins' officer? Has he not now to wade through a *dossier* composed of some twenty-six separate and distinct minutes? Must he not decipher, learn, mark, and certify to having digested all that Woolwich Dockyard, the A.G.'s office at the Base, the O.C. Advanced Base, and half a dozen other nebulous functionaries have been thinking about the matter, think at the present moment, and are going to think for some considerable time to come? What is all that to Tompkins?

Is not his officer there for the express purpose of (a) doling him out ten francs whenever he is hard up, (b) recommending and passing on his applications for leave, and (c) filling in long statements of particulars as to the colour of his hair, his height, age, chest measure, changes of posting, date of embarkation, promotions, reductions, rate of pay, changes of rate of pay, allotments, ailments, and any little preference in the matter of a name? As the French say, *c'est trop fort!*

Anyhow, I was in no sort of mood for the magnificent doorway of the church of St. Trophime, so crossing the road to avoid it I turned into the Musée Lapidaire, where at least it would be cool, and one could sit down, and there would be nobody to talk to, and one could shut one's eyes for ten minutes.

It so happened that this large room, with its air of a Nonconformist chapel, contained other humanity than its stone gods and goddesses. There was an English lady and there was the guide, both of whom, I grumbled to myself, had attained the age when they might reasonably be expected to have got past the desire to look at such frippery as Centaurs and Venuses. I was annoyed with both of them, and could have wished them and their chatter anywhere else. After a

little time, during which one tried not to listen to what must obviously be the most trivial of criticism, one was forced to the disagreeable conclusion that they were two remarkable women, a conviction most annoying to anybody in a pet. The English lady, obviously a bachelor, was wearing a mannish costume in which she might have played golf, done the galleries at Florence, or gone shopping. I gathered that she was passing through Arles, acting as chauffeuse to an inspectress of a society for providing wounded French soldiers with English comforts. The car she drove, washed, garaged, and repaired whenever it wasn't running, which I gathered was pretty often, was, I afterwards heard, an old lumbering omnibus that might have been the latest model in 1904. And yet here was this little lady who had spent the morning in overalls under the car—an excuse for ill-temper if ever there was one—now natty and fresh as paint, talking sculpture against the enthusiastic guide. It seems from what the little lady said that she was herself actively engaged in that art, one of the few living artists left to work directly in the stone. Stone was her passion, and I listened with interest and a vanishing sulkiness to theories about it being entirely wrong to look at statuary as stories in relief. It is proper, she held, to look at a

statue as a mass, a pattern or, simply, a lump in stone. The guide, a little wizened creature who might have stepped out of the pages of Henry James, was for a more anecdotal interpretation.

Did not the gross curves of a Silenus lacking head and feet betray sloth, torpor, and debauch? "Il est dégoûtant, ce vieux monstre!" Then of a fragment of a dancing girl: "Voyez comme c'est beau, ce mouvement, Madame! Hein? Oh, là, là, c'que ça vous à l'air d'avoir été une chouette petite personne."

Greatly to my disappointment the artistic little lady left soon afterwards, the indefatigable guide turning to me with the intimation that the accumulated lore of centuries was now entirely at my disposal. Still something surly, I consented to walk round her gallery of marvels. We began with Augustus and Constantine, whose effigies provoked from me the suggestion that to a historical ignoramus all dead and gone Emperors are pretty much alike. Still under the influence of my Tompkins-Dunscombe depression, I opined that Nero and Caligula were a much ill-used pair and probably the best of the imperial bunch. The old lady insisting on the historians, I objected that both Emperors were probably too nimble-witted for the serious people who, cocking a suspicious eye at amusingness, prefer to write



intelligent men down as scoundrels. In this way do the stupid justify themselves. The old lady then led me up to the *Vénus d'Arles*, surely the *Penelope* among *Venuses*.

“She is but half unclad” is the guide-book apology, to which I feel like retorting with *Beardsley's* design for a ballet-dancer flounced and frilled from head to foot. “She wears, as is her right, the highest charms of mortal woman, yet she has not quite stepped down from *Olympus* to the earth.” As who should say, Touch me if you dare! “More human than the proud and severely simple goddess from *Melos*, more dignified than the subtly and delicately sensual *Venus de Medicis*, this exquisite statue holds a middle place.” A *Venus*, in other words, upon which even *Dickens' Mrs. Snagsby* might have allowed her spouse to gaze. I vaunt the praises of the less highly-prized *Venus* of the rival museum at *Nîmes*. Not in the least grave, not in the least tender, not in the least sentimental, with nothing of the grand pose about her, neither banal, nor tedious, nor halo'd with any crown of domesticity, this “*gueuse parfumée de Provence*,” this *Venus* of the *Quarter* has me at her knees. (This is really a crib from *R.L.S.* and *Elizabeth Bennet*.) If a goddess, then assuredly goddess of a dainty sham divinity; if an *Esther*, then many a *Rubempré*

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had hanged himself for love. A *chef-d'œuvre* of the frivolous, a delightful flippancy, a piquancy as of those early Latin poets of whom it is so very difficult to get an ungarbled translation.

In reply to this declaration, my outraged cicerone exclaims :

“ Mais je la connais, cette Vénus-là. C'est elle qui a l'air d'avoir été une fameuse coquine ! D'ailleurs c'est un peu dans son métier. Les Vénus ne peuvent être que des garces, Monsieur, allez ! ” Which remark shows how much superior in mentality is my guide to those dragonsome horrors, throated and wristleted in white muslin, who at home show you through the palaces of the great, fearing to raise their eyes to heaven lest they should encounter the rose-pink Amours trafficking on the ceiling.

It is a pleasure to argue with this combative old lady. Finally she shows me the magnificent sarcophagus called the Death of Hippolytus. On the front panel is the unhappy Phèdre, to give her the more familiar French name, seated in an attitude of abandon. The old nurse leaning towards Hippolytus is the *entremetteuse* indignantly repulsed by that incensed young man. Besides the moral score he is holding his horse on an impatient rein and would be off hunting. A tiny cupid reaches

up over Phèdre's knee and inserts his arrow into her bosom. So far so good ; the old lady and I are agreed upon the story. But in the middle of the panel we come upon a difficulty, or rather two difficulties—a magnificent pair of male figures to whom the figures of Phèdre and Hippolytus are significantly subservient. The guide-books have it that these are the Dioscures, Castor and Pollux, supposed to have become enamoured of the skill in hunting of the owner of the tomb, and to have snatched him from earth to become their celestial huntsman. The old lady will hear nothing but that one of the figures is the outraged Theseus, without being provided with a rôle in the story for the other. I point out that to make one of two equally outstanding figures into a principal in a world-wide drama and the other into nobody at all, is like going to the theatre and expecting to see one only of the Brothers Griffiths. But I am in the wrong country and the allusion misses fire.

Upon one thing only do we agree, and that is the charm of the head of a boy some nine or ten years old, neither Roman nor Greek, but French of the eighteenth century. The head rests on a collaret of stone, and it needs very little imagination to visualise the high blue collar affected by Napoleon's officers, and to see in the delicate brow and tumbled hair,

chiselled nose and determined lips, a little hero who, growing up, was to lead brave men against us at Waterloo.

Refreshed by my brush with the old lady, and having vented on her and her really exquisite monuments all my quite unnecessary spleen, I resumed my way to the office singularly refreshed. How slight, indeed, in the light of half an hour of old beauty do present worries appear. Perhaps I really did put into the Field Cashier half a dozen more appeals than I had made mental note of. On the office steps I met Dunscombe, who informed me gaily that he had discovered in our hotel a particularly obnoxious brand of champagne in which he proposed that we should bury the hatchet, a flight of rhetoric which is the kind of thing Dunscombe indulges in when he is in high spirits. The bottle, it was to be distinctly understood, was to be at his expense ; it being likewise understood that I was the most industrious fellow alive. I accepted as to the first bottle, insisting that the second should be mine, it being understood not only that I withdrew all that I had said about the quality of Dunscombe's work, but everything I had ever said on any subject whatsoever. After dinner, in the confidential mood engendered by a couple of bottles of really villainous

champagne, I made confession of the loss of the wretched tarpaulins.

"I shouldn't worry about it, old man, if I were you," said Dunscombe. "After all, what's eight tarpaulins? You can easily steal them from old Johnson. He's half asleep most of the time and won't miss 'em. And if he does, and there's a Court of Inquiry, and you have to pay for 'em, it'll only run you a hundred and sixty quid, a matter of ten months' pay! And as for that blighter Tompkins, he can change his name to Dunscombe for all I care."

"Well, but," I objected, "it says in K.R. that he has to make a declaration before a J.P., and there ain't no blooming J.P.'s in this part of the world."

"Don't need any," said Dunscombe. "Just write 'Declared before me in the absence of a competent military authority.' Sorry, old man, you know what I mean! By the way, there's an old girl here driving a car on some hospital job. A beastly old crock it is too. Driven it all the way from Paris, by Gad! A jolly plucky sort. Says we are the first English people she's seen for a month, and wants us to take an hour off to-morrow afternoon and she'll drive us round the sights."

The rest of the evening was spent in genial recrimination as to which of us should go, I urging Dunscombe that he is looking a bit

fagged and could do with a half-holiday, Dunscombe winning on the declaration :

“ It’s only ruins and romance of sorts, so you’d better go. I’ve no sort of use for the bally stuff.”

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE FOURTEENTH OF JULY

I COUNT half an hour well spent to-day in doing homage to France. We were commanded, Dunscombe and I, to attend the grand review of troops to be held *sous les lices*, i.e. in the shade of the one and only boulevard of this overgrown village. There are not more than a handful of coloured troops, *tirailleurs marocains*, to be reviewed at this particular moment. (This does *not* mean that France is short of men, but that a Depôt is a Depôt, and that on occasion a Depôt sends out more men than it receives.)

It was a particularly gorgeous morning, and the crowd had turned out in all its bravest colours. As we walked up the road along the lane of smiling faces it seemed as though their owners made up one large family rather than a populace. Acutely conscious of being the cynosure of all eyes, the British Army, drawing on two pairs of faded brown gloves which would have been the envy of Mrs. Micawber, threw out its chest, drew in its

waistband, and marched to its appointed place on the grand stand twelve foot by ten, to the excited whisper of "Les Angliches!"

To our places then with much calculation and discretion in the matter of saluting, bowing, nodding, shaking hands, and being shaken hands with. The degrees of deference due to the military are easily determined by their badges of rank. It is the civilian big-wigs who call for the finer tact. Sous-préfet and Mayor, Mayor's Secretary and Commissaire de Police, Parliamentary Deputy and Justice of the Peace, have each their separate rank and expect a nicely-graded civility. Hard cases in social etiquette called for instant and discerning solution. Can it be that we have just snubbed Dogberry and humbled ourselves to Verges? Was the gentleman with the three-cornered hat and the silver braid who looked so surprised when we shook hands with him really the Sous-préfet, or only the Mayor's coachman who shall hand round the sweet champagne at the conclusion of the proceedings? One is conscious of having committed a "gaffe" and a full-sized one at that.

On the little platform everybody is wearing "blacks," with a rusticity and curve of brim unknown even in Drumtochty. Or,



to change countries, one looks round and half expects a Homais to rise to his feet and address the villagers in a flood of Flaubertian mockery.

A droning fanfare on the *nouba*, and the ceremony begins. The *Médaille Militaire* and the *Croix de Guerre* are pinned on to the breasts of half a dozen cripples from one of France's colonies. They hear unmoved the record of their heroism read out, hobbling away cheerfully on what is left to them of legs. In the cafés afterwards these African children are to be seen chattering and gabbling away as pleased as Punch. Next the decoration of ex-soldiers invalided out of the Army. And last the saddest and most moving of all public spectacles to-day, the presentation of medals to the relatives of dead heroes. A father, a brother, a widow, two little girls in deep mourning are lined up facing the stand. In complete silence the Commandant hands them the reward of valour. With faces strangely transfigured the family ascends the steps leading to the little platform on which we are all assembled. In proud humility the father and brother raise their hats and we stand up in silent acknowledgment. The tension is broken by a march past of the troops. A little cloud of Arab horsemen on grey and white steeds, their white cloaks floating on the wind, whirls

romantically by. The *noubas* drone once more and the review is at an end. We salute the Commandant and mingle with the crowd melting into the cafés.

It is the fourteenth of July and in honour to France we stifle our desire for work and decide to take a holiday. At Dunscombe's suggestion we drop into chairs outside a café. Hardly have we ordered, still in honour of France, the most pernicious drink we can think of, or that is now allowed to be sold, when there appears on the kerb an old, old man with a shock of white hair falling over his shoulders after the manner of the Abbé Liszt and a face all whelks and bubukles. Under his arm he carries a violin; in his eyes the far-away look of the dreamer who has kept spirit unsullied and taken no care of the spirit's case. Coming to the halt in front of us the old gentleman asks if we are Serbs.

"Angliches!" we reply. Then to our confusion does he put fiddle to chin and produce a quavering version of our National Anthem. The fourteenth of July, stirring France to her depths, has moved even this crazy brain. Dunscombe thinks we ought to stand to attention, I am not quite sure, so we compromise; Dunscombe standing up at the end and gravely saluting. Before we can consider the propriety

of offering alms, the old man with immense dignity has moved away. It is not till he has well turned the corner that he resumes the forgotten operas which are his trade.

## CHAPTER XXV

### OUR OPTIMISTS

IN this pleasant land of Provence one could almost be tempted to do without newspapers. The communiqués are posted in the cafés at night and in the morning one gets the London papers of the day before yesterday. What more could any reasonable man want? Every evening however, at half-past ten a late edition of a Provençal newspaper announces itself in the darkened square by the blowing of a toy trumpet. Since the town has gone to bed a whole hour before, there has to be a general unlocking of doors and darting hither and thither in the queerest apparel before the news can be secured. I imagine that every night the householder, realising that an edition printed at least six hours earlier cannot possibly contain anything which he has not already seen in the telegrams of his café, retires to bed in the full determination to resist the blowing of the little tin trumpet, but that the itch of sheer curiosity overcomes him.

I have never been able to decide to what particular shade of French politics this little

paper belongs, but I do know that it and its morning colleague are the two most joyous and optimistic little sheets in the world. "They" are always on the point of being smashed, of having "their" front pierced, of being starved, of undergoing spontaneous combustion. A vigorous onslaught on our Western front is evidence that "they" must have depleted "their" Eastern lines, and vice versa. Nor are these cheerful prophets in the least hampered in their forecasts of to-day by the miscarriage of their predictions of yesterday. The war is always going to end to-morrow. No matter that distinguished experts contradict each other in the same column; the war will end next week. No matter that Berlin, Vienna, and Budapest remain intact; the war will end next month. No matter that arrangements are being made in men and money to provide for a campaign next year; that only means that the war will be brought to an end in this. Never have I read anything so heartening. Away with melancholy!

On topics other than the war these little papers preserve their unimpaired cheerfulness. What do we care that every day a column is devoted to "Our Assassinations," another to "Our Thefts," and a third to "Our Conflagrations"? Is there not compensation in the numerous little acts of honesty and restitution

occurring daily and recorded with quaint ceremony ?

“ Act of probity. The young M. J.— and R. T.—, eight years, have found each on the public way a bank-note of one franc which they have hastened to hand over to the police. We felicitate them on this good action.”

runs one inspiring paragraph.

“ There has been found on the public way a watch and chain by Mr. D. J.—, mobilised at the powder works, who has hastened to deposit them, the watch and chain, at the police station, to be handed over to their rightful owner. We felicitate this honest soldier.”

is yet another. Or you will read :

“ Arrestation. The police of our town has yesterday put under arrest the named L. T.—, aged thirty-three years, porter, without fixed abode, and his mistress F. V.—, without profession. This joyous couple has been sent to the lock up.”

Joyous couple indeed, without a home and without a profession ! Or :

“ The service of the *fourrière* has captured yesterday eleven dogs. We wish to believe

that the escape of six of them will not be facilitated as happened on the last occasion."

Then I cull the following charming account of what we English would consider a very ordinary attempted suicide.

"Dolorous instance. A certain Mr. X. of our town was fatigued with life. The nostalgic charms of the Delta of Trinquetaille having no longer any attractions for him, the strong voice of the Rhône which passed in grumbling close to his dwelling no longer brought to his mind other thoughts than those of the nothingness of terrestrial existence : a charming and enticing nothingness which he wished to taste more fully. But it was not in the Book of Destiny that Mr. X. should quit this earth on the 20th May, 1916, or on any other date chosen by him. In the unrecognisable garb of humble labourers, two guardian angels were watching over him. At the moment when, having launched himself into the void, but still clutching hold of his self-erected gallows, the hung one cried out 'I strangle! cut me down!' Messieurs V.— and C.—, two robust fellows who were passing, broke open the door of the despairing one and cut down the dead-alive, who has promised to no more begin again."

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A light is thrown on amenities of life in Marseilles by the following, under the heading "L'Arabe boxeur."

"It is a quite young negro, curly-headed, who has permitted himself one night to thrash a belated wayfarer. Result: four months imprisonment."

These non-Puritan little journals' sheets are full of delightful stories which might be by Maupassant, illustrative of life in Marseilles. They are mostly of the nature of Awful Warnings and have for headings "The Bad Encounters" or "The Elegant Young Man Who was only a Scoundrel." They begin almost invariably with an *apéritif* too gallantly offered and too lightly accepted, ending up next morning with everybody in the story complaining to the police of missing reticules and bank-notes gone astray.

Examples are not wanting of the *esprit gaulois*. Take for instance the capital little paragraph headed "The Butter of M. Hübner." I translate.

"M. the Professor Hübner of Berlin amuses himself with researches of the highest possible interest. Having remarked that German maid-servants are obliged to wait in a queue for four hours in order to receive 100 grammes of butter, the Professor has the brilliant idea



to calculate the loss of vital energies provoked by this long standing.

On leaving the house the girl has her grand complement of vital energies. She takes her place in the file of the beseeching ones. Her Butter-Karte is in the hand. From that moment the energies commence to escape! In proportion as the fatigue increases the loss increases. M. Hübner, spectacles on nose, observes *avec passion* the phenomenon. At the end of her four hours' wait the girl has disposed of a respectable quantity of energies. Poor little Slavey!

The learned one takes his notebook and calculates. So many energies are equal to so many grammes of butter. . . . Finally the learned one finds that the girl has lost as many energies as would correspond to fifty-two grammes of butter. *C'est beau la science!* It is obvious, then, that after this prolonged stationment the poor exhausted one does not receive her 100 grammes of butter, receiving in reality only forty-eight grammes of the precious delicacy since she has previously consumed fifty-two grammes without suspecting it. *C'est admirable!*

Nor is this all. The Professor has pushed his deductions still further. If the girl instead of exhausting herself on the pavement had remained quietly in bed she would

have gained, it appears, an amount of energy greater than the forty-eight grammes of butter obtained after four hours' painful quest.

Let us salute this super-learned Berliner. He has perhaps found the solution of the food problems the most *kolossal*. Sleep! counsels the Professor. *Restez couchés! Ne bougez pas!* During this agreeable repose, your energies will increase and as they are convertible into butter, you will enjoy an excellent *cuisine au beurre*, confectioned in the mysteries of your inside. . . .

*Doux pays!*"

"Doux pays" is magnificent! But it is not more magnificent than the wealth of scorn reserved for "their" Emperor and "their" princeling, by the poetasters of the little *Gazette Rimée*. The poem "Les Morts-Debout" is full of a shattering contempt:

Or, le kaiser sur une cime  
Avec son fils numéro un,  
Le fameux généralissime,  
Guettait son entrée à Verdun.

Celui-ci disait à son père :  
"Surtout pas de conseils. Je sais  
Dieu merci! comment on opère  
Avec ces cochons de Français."

La-dessus son artillerie  
Ouvrit, sur notre front, un feu  
Tel, qu'on l'entendait jusqu'en Brie,  
Et que l'espace en était bleu.

Après cet action savante,  
" Il ne doit plus—j'ose espérer—  
Rester là-bas âme vivante . . .  
C'est le moment de se montrer.

" Montrez-vous—dit-il—à sa garde,  
Et puis n'oubliez pas surtout,  
Que votre Empereur vous regarde,  
Et moi, votre Kronprinz, itou."

Et, comme ce polichinelle  
A de la lecture, il cria :  
" Maintenant, à la Tour de Nesles !  
A Verdun si tu veux Papa ! "

The puppet-prince then orders his battalions to the advance, shoulder to shoulder in that close formation which is the best recipe for Dutch courage. In a few seconds he levels his glasses to observe progress, but the battalions have come strangely to the halt. The prince sends one of his *entourage* forward to make enquiries, but the Staff-Officer replies,

" Too late, prince ! They are dead where they stand."

I do not know which is the more admirable, " Son fils numéro un " or " Et, comme ce polichinelle a de la lecture." But the whole poem is of a fiercer, more tigerish quality than

anything we English can contrive in the way of humour.

“ Et moi, votre Kronprinz, itou ” is *Punch*, edited by Villiers de l’Isle-Adam.

These little French newspapers are wonderful. They let conjecture and prophecy take the place of news, but it is conjecture and prophecy cheap at a *sou*.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### CRICKETERS ALL

My Hornby and my Barlow long ago.

FRANCIS THOMPSON.

Whatever happens you will know I batted well.

LAST LETTER OF AN ENGLISH OFFICER.

SO it seems that you in England have decided to do away with this year's August Bank Holiday, and that yet another year is to go past without those old-time battles of the giants—Lancashire versus Yorkshire and Surrey versus Notts. Will you be very greatly shocked if I confess to you that not the news of the Retreat from Mons, the Battle of the Marne, nor yet the Great Push itself holds half the excitement for the grown-up man as the news of the cricket field once held for the boy. How far will you take this to be evidence of an imperfect sanity, how far an unusual admission of the more or less normal? Is it conceivable that at the front itself, in the actual trenches, the whacking of the foe is to some stunted intelligence of less intimate moment than the sound correction of presump-

tuous Chelsea by heroic Fulham? Is it not conceivable that all human intelligence is "stunted," that it is only a matter of degree, and that we ought none of us to be ashamed of the truth about ourselves, however improbable and however grotesque?

I am not ashamed then of the admission that present-day communiqués are awaited with less eagerness than the bulletins of the cricket field were awaited by a small boy some thirty years ago. Perhaps this is only another way of saying that as one grows older the world grows less magical, and that the biggest things in life begin to look as though they were not so very big after all. When I read the letters of officers saying that the pitch is the queerest that they have ever played on, that the German bowling is deadly accurate and that whatever happens it may be known that they batted well, I see in the mind's eye a bumpy pitch in a croft on a Yorkshire farm and a family of small boys scoring fours to a boundary forty yards away, fielding for dear life, and bowling desperately the holidays through. Each morning would bring with it the excitement of the newspaper posted from home, with its alternating joy and depression according as Lancashire were doing well or ill. The news of Monday's cricket would reach us on Wednesday; Saturday's on Tuesday.

Monday, you may easily calculate, was our *dies non*, this being the era when Sunday papers were to be read surreptitiously, if read at all, and were not even potentially forwardable by any self-respecting housekeeper. My father, always the most unselfish of men, would put off his curiosity as to the world's affairs, or the little corner of them regulated at St. Stephen's, until we youngsters had slaked our more impatient thirst. To-day I cannot help thinking that the players of that far-off time were better cricketers than any we have now. Those were the days when K. J. Key led out to battle Abel, Lohmann, and W. W. Read, when Peel and Ulyett bowled to Shrewsbury and Gunn; when Grace faced Steel, Spofforth and Turner played skittles with our best, and Pilling in revenge showed Blackham how to stand up to fast bowling. It were well that our schoolboys of to-day should realise that there was cricket and famous cricket too before the days of Hobbs, of Hirst even; when bowlers swerved without making a fuss about it, googlies were unknown, and famous batsmen running out to Humphries were bowled by a lob.

In a corner of a society paper sent recently from home I came across an account of a fashionable horse-show at which a well-known animal, a big black, hulking, string-halted

*fainéant* of a horse, too slow for a funeral, a horse I always disliked, had at last been soundly whacked. Hardly do I like to tell you of the time I wasted over that unimportant paragraph, the brown study I fell into of sun-burnt rings and grand stands, of well-known whips and famous judges, of gay ponies and proud horses, of strenuous duels and momentous decisions, of anxious settings out and triumphant home-comings, a reverie not to be disturbed by any echo of guns on far-away frontiers.

It was at Bakewell Show that I caught the fever of the show-ring. It was there I first saw the late Mr. William Foster's ponies, *Mel-Valley's Flame*, *Mel-Valley's Fame*, *Mel-Valley's Fume*, and *Mel-Valley's King George*. I write down the names in an effort to recapture the first wonder of these marvellous little heroes of the ring, actors in bronze and amber bettering, in *verve* and "attack," any stage-player that ever I did see. Straightway I decided that I too would show a pony. The following year at the same show I was the delirious exhibitor of a marvellous three-year-old filly. "In some perfume is there more delight," says the poet, "than in the breath that from my mistress reeks," but no boudoir ever reeked more agreeably than that filly's box! We sat up the greater part of the night before the show washing her four white stockings and doing



up in approved show-ring fashion her charming little mane. "My mistress when she walks treads on the ground." Not so my pretty. She was fire and air at home, and was to be fire and air in the show-ring on the morrow. She was to go mountains high, with dash, pace, poise, balance, rhythm, to be pulled in after a single tour of the ring unquestionably and indisputably the winner. It was my first show.

As the shiversome little beast stood outside the ring ready for the fray, the lad and I, trembling with pride, stripped the rugs off for the inspection of a well-known and friendly critic.

"She would look well," said the great authority, "in a pie!"

Before I could fathom the profundity of that dictum we were in and out of the ring, seventh in a class of seven.

Now in case you are going to find it difficult to reconcile all this chatter of cricket matches and ponies with the most stupendous of all wars, I beg to call your attention to the phrase which, I would once have agreed, should stand first on the list of tags to be avoided by the fastidious writer. I mean the phrase about the playing fields of Eton. But the war has obtained for this old tag a new lease of life, giving it occasion once again to prove its superb and

universal truth. I have never yet met the regular soldier who was not at heart a school-boy, who did not regard the war as an affair of sport. For three months I was the only amateur at a Brigade Headquarters' Mess, where the Regulars, from Brigadier downwards, were just so many large-hearted children. The Brigadier, coming down to breakfast and opening his morning paper to find the Great Offensive still hanging fire, would roundly declare the whole Cabinet to be in the pay of the Germans, and hope for a long-nosed, bespectacled, dressing-gowned, Heath-Robinsonian spy under the table to mark his words. The Brigade Major was full of ghoulish little pleasantries to beguile the captivity of "Brother Boche," while the Staff Captain bubbled over with fun in which slow fires and toasting forks bore their part. Of the peril and heroism and "all that sort of rot," never a word. "The friendly Hun fairly put the wind up me that morning," was the nearest any of them ever got to seriousness. And they would fall to cheerful descriptions of comrades dying quaintly, even comically. Never a hint that deep down these men were full of gentleness and pity. . . .

And always when they were not joking about death and danger, they would be talking of their dogs and their horses, of critical holes and innings well-played, of bisques well-

taken and matches snatched out of the fire, of Wimbledon and Queen's, of Wilding and "Punch" Fairs. The first official letter that came into my hands out here was a circular thanking everybody for keenness and efficiency in the despatch of troops. I have little compunction in mentioning myself in this connection as the particular operation referred to had been concluded before I left England. "It is gratifying to think," the letter ran, "that everybody, officers and men, 'played for the side.'" And never did writer show finer sense of what we English can stomach in the way of praise.

Some talk of Alexander and some of Hercules, but they are not the English sort. When we get tired and worried, and thoroughly sick of it all—which *does* happen, you know—we go back to thoughts of our hobbies. Many a fellow's spirit in this war has soared, not to a very great height perhaps, not very perceptibly above the ground—has moved its wings to soar, if you will, at the thought of a loft of pigeons, a whippet, a muddy field, a couple of goal-posts. Many a butcher-boy's courage has been renewed, unconsciously if you like, at thought of his pony's pluck, and how he could always trust the little beast to hang on and lick the other fellow's down the street. When I am tired or down in the mouth or worried by

a "stinker" or have had a row with old Dunscombe, I don't go turning up the great speeches about St. Crispin's Day, and precious stones set in silver seas. I am a thousand times more likely to think of an old pony and the way he would pull out a spurt at his fortieth tour of the ring when, by all the laws of the game, he should be dead beat. Am I then to be shorter of courage than my horse? God forbid! Let's get on with the job again.

I am not sure that in an earlier letter I did not write rather uppishly about the mania for metaphors drawn from sport. I do repent me. They are the natural expression of the temperament of the average British soldier, Regular and Occasional, a brave man, a sportsman and a gentleman. I am not ashamed if at times I find myself thinking less of the war than of the cricket-field. I am not ashamed if hardly a day passes without a thought of *Flame*, *Fume*, and *Fame*, of *Kitty Melbourne* and her marvellous action, *Bauble*, pre-eminent in grace and beauty, *Véronique*, heroine of a thousand rings. As to you, *The Swell*, old enemy whom we could never quite beat, though we did get the decision on occasion, staunch and trusty foeman on many a Saturday afternoon, here's to you! And to that little ball of fury whom you could never quite conquer, *First Edition*, gay in victory or defeat, the best of Fortune

and a gay old age! And you too, my old ponies, *Tray*, *Blanch*, and *Sweetheart*, good luck go with you! You are not forgotten.

What's that you say? I never owned ponies with such names! Where's your literary sense gone to, man, that you must look for Stud-Book accuracy in a peroration?

## CHAPTER XXVII

### IN THE MATTER OF COURAGE

All the lads in khaki are as brave as brave can be. That is axiomatic.—DAILY PAPER.

“ I ALWAYS thought that he was a great soldier, not from any lust of battle or hatred of the enemy, but from sheer devotion to duty. When orders came through for our last move into the firing line, after we had finished our packing and the rest of us were pacing about restlessly, he took out a pocket edition of La Bruyère’s ‘ Les Caractères ’ and continued to read it until we actually moved off. He could hold himself singularly aloof. I remember his reading ‘ Le Cid ’ and a book on Napoleon in those last days, also Shakspeare.” (Commanding Officer’s letter to the family of a subaltern killed in action.)

“ How should I bear myself if roped into the thick of it ? ” is a question which must constantly recur to the most sheltered, reading of the incredible bravery and fantastic heroism which has descended, as it were a common mantle, upon the “ lads in khaki.” Two classes

of soldiers are there whose courage we may very well agree to take for axiomatic. They are the soldiers made out of the best stuff our land affords, whose motto, were such things ever spoken of, would be the old-time *Noblesse oblige!*, and they are the simple fellows, the common ruck of our fighting men, who would want the Norman phrase translated into the very rudest Saxon before they had any inkling of its meaning.

*Noblesse oblige!* Was it not the most English of our novelists who a century ago wrote half-ironically of the painter's trick of depicting our old nobility on horseback with a battle, a spring mine, volumes of smoke, flashes of lightning, a town on fire, and a stormed fort all in full action between the horse's legs, all to show how little nobility makes of such trifles? Now hear your Socialist. Is it not the least, he will say, that the young sprig who in his life has done nothing for his country except shoot over it, ride to hounds over it, represent it at its games until such time as he may legislate for it with a crowd of other sprigs similarly equipped—is it not the least you can ask that blue blood will give its country value and fight and die when occasion serves? And your honest Socialist will be the first to admit that the English blood has paid its debt unquestioningly and in full. But the

ploughboy, the factory hand, the miner, the "men of grosser blood" to whom your young sprig is to be the "shining copy"? The scion of Mr. Wells's later Bladesover and the Blade-soverian world finds his courage in an instinct born of heredity; whence the inspiration of Bladesover's gardener boy? I can only think that the stream of inspiration from which the old Greeks drew their delight in the "sweet punishment of enemies," is not yet dried up. "Giving the blighters hell" may very well be our modern variant.

Courage has never been, can never be, a class matter. Peer and ploughboy, and every intermediate grade in the community, have found that courage which so amazes the world. But there is a not too accountable race of men now roped into action for the first time, the spectators of life, the dilettantes, the preferers of shadow to substance, *nuance* to colour, the dream to the waking. They are the poets now faced with sterner work in the earth than the digging for medals of dead Emperors; sculptors now to realise that the bust which was to outlive the city may literally perish with it. I have called them an unaccountable race, and yet they are the descendants of our national poet's most intimate heroes. The poet will clothe a career of murder in a haze of twilight regrets and wistful hankerings after honour;



a weakling will wind Melancholy off a reel, setting talk of worms and graves and epitaphs against kingdoms thrown away. A boggler and a strumpet's fool will brag more eloquently in defeat than in victory. Such an one would "mock the midnight bell," would "call together all his sad captains," would "force the wine peep through their scars"—the Nelson touch in disgrace. True that these arch-sentimentalists, to do them justice, had as pretty a knack as any non-introspective one of us of falling on their swords when the proper time came. But their present-day successors, harmonical fiddlers on the strings of sensualism, as old Meredith calls them, whence do they draw their courage? Is it unthinkable that they draw their resolution from some remembered colour, from some *leit-motif* recalled, from some great writer's phrase? "Le courage," said a very shaky hero of Balzac on his way to execution, "c'est un costume à prendre." How many cowards have dressed for battle with a better heart through the comfort of some phrase?

Do you remember the creed of Mr. Shaw's artist-scoundrel, "I believe in Michael Angelo, Velasquez, and Rembrandt; in the might of design, the mystery of colour . . ." ? I forget how the exquisite nonsense goes but it is something in that strain. It is the strain

abhorred of the subaltern with all his dislike for fine phrases, which he cannot believe to be sincere and of which he is afraid. Were the subaltern to enunciate a creed, you would find it concerned with the smartness of Kirchner and the mysteries of Revue. The difference between the sentimentalist and the soldier is that whereas the sentimentalist lives on fine phrases, without conceiving an obligation to translate them into fine deeds, you can never be sure what magnificent action the inarticulate soldier may not keep tucked up with his handkerchief in his sleeve. You know how every French bric-à-brac shop contains the statuette of a whistling peasant boy? After the war some British sculptor must give the world the type of British Subaltern, not much older than the peasant boy and not more serious, laughing at danger and whistling, positively whistling, on Death.

“What’s that rubbish you’re always writing?” said Dunscombe to me one night. “Expect to make money out of it or what? Chuck us over some of the stuff and let’s have a look.” I think I ought to say here that Dunscombe has done his twelve months in the trenches and wears the ribbon of the Military Cross.

“Lumme!” said he, after I had chucked him

a few sheets. "It's plain you've never been within a thousand miles of the front. Thinking's no use at that sort of game; and if you were Shakspeare and Julius Cæsar rolled into one it wouldn't help any. You can't tell beforehand what sort of a show you're going to put up. It isn't the question of being a decent chap or being a blackguard. It's just how it takes you, like vaccination. And by the way, that *Noblesse oblige* idea of yours is all bally rot."

"Well, but," I replied meekly, "it's what I can't help thinking down here."

"It's not what you think down here but what you'd do up there, my son, that 'ud be more to the point," Dunscombe retorted. "Thinking's no sort of a way out of it. You'd just get into a hell of a funk same as everybody else. We all of us get the wind up, only some show it more than others. Even those artist fellows you talk so much hot-air about get through all right. In fact they damned well have to. The bravest chap I ever met used to cry himself to sleep every night. Sheer nerves! I've even seen a lawyer fellow—and you know what skunks they are—go over the top and fetch a chap in. But he said it wasn't to be taken as a precedent. In fact, you never can tell and it's no use jawin'. Let's talk about something else."

So we fell to discussing the last revue we had seen at the Palace. And we agreed that the show had been top-hole and the girls ripping. . . .

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### NOSTALGIES DE CASERNE

IT would be equally a mistake, I suppose, to write of war as an unmixed tale of horror as it would be to insist on a romantic pæan of Pomp and Circumstance. I write a little diffidently here, having known little more than the *camaraderie* of the training grounds. And yet . . . and yet one must affirm that, to the truly valiant, life can never have been so full as when it was held most cheap. Never again will men throw for so desperate a stake, all adventure to come being but gambling within one's means, the most contemptible wagering of all. I have heard men declare that though under shell fire they shake as with an ague, they have come to miss the fascination of the guns. . . .

I know you are laughing at me now ; that you think the high-falutin strain and a job on Lines of Communication five hundred miles from the front in the highest degree incongruous. I agree. I am reminded of the wounded Tommy who, pestered by pertinacious Duchesses, replied,

“ Am I anxious to get back to the trenches, lidy? In course I am! Just a-languishin’ for ’em. Kind o’ pining for them perishin’ blighters wot busts in your ear-’ole. Good arternoon, Mum, and thank you kindly! ”

One is on safer ground in asserting that after the war the ex-soldier will have days when he will pine for his time of bondage, for the schooling and the comradeship of the camp. The Germans are sure to have a mouthful of a word for this hankering; the French have the charming phrase “*nostalgies de caserne.*” Hear one of their writers in this strain :

“ Oh! le bois de Vincennes, les gros gants de coton blanc, les promenades sur les fortifications . . . Oh! la barrière de l’Ecole, les filles à soldats, le piston du Salon de Mars, l’absinthe dans les bouisbouis, les confidences entre deux hoquets, les briquets qu’on dégainé, la romance sentimentale chantée une main sur le cœur! . . . ”

I do not suppose that the soldier of the New Army is much of a hand at any one of this formidable list of recreations, which smack too much of the Ville Lumière in time of peace. Not one per cent, I suppose, of the New Armies has been cooped up in the capital, whereas hundreds of thousands will have passed through

the purgatory of the 'Shot to the paradise of the open-air training grounds ; will have endured North Camp till the heaven of Borden and Tidworth, Warminster and Codford, have been reached. Dreariest, starkest, muddiest, most desolate villages of the Plain, how agreeable in recollection, how infinite your charm ! I should be guilty of an outrage to the truth if I claimed 'Aldershot as an Elysium. Let me not deny that it is a trifle distressing to be roused from one's slumbers, sore labour's bath, great nature's second course, and all the poetic rest of it at something after five. It is, then, admittedly a trifle wearisome to pad round the square hour after hour ; to pursue day after day the tedious routine of "Carry on with your squads, gentlemen." It is a trifle humiliating to have to sink your identity ; to defer to an expert on tinned meat, carrying a superior number of stars, about subjects other than tinned meat. It is wearing to be doubled round the cricket-field ; to be tumbled off horses. It is exasperating to crawl to bed at nine o'clock because one may not "upon the rack of this tough world stretch him out longer." . . . Yes ! Aldershot is a tough proposition, but I would not for the world have entered the army through an easier gate. (I am conscious of a diplomatic hedging here, since Aldershot is a wood out of which no

temporary officer may be said safely to have emerged, until at the end of the war he emerges altogether.)

Wherein, I have often wondered, lies the charm of those desolate barracks on the Plain? Can it be the guards, inspections, parades, fatigues, coarse meals, small discomforts, minor privations, the ennui, the doubtful blanket, the mud? And yet my thoughts go back over and over again, even in this exquisite sunshine of Provence, to tramps along the liquid Salisbury Road, over the squdgy Wiltshire Downs, through the muddy Yorkshire Dales. In fancy I hear once again the drip, drip, of the rain. In imagination I shiver in my tent and fail to get so much as a glimpse at the crowded and insufficient stove. And yet a thrill of pleasure goes scooting down my back at the recollection of the carelessness, the joviality, the light-heartedness of it all. Here's a nostalgia of the mud for you healthier than the Frenchman's! Oh, for the life of the camp again with its acrid scent of wood fires and thin blue trickle of smoke curling to the tops of the pine-trees, the rhythm of the tattoo beating in your ears! Oh, for the lassitude of the camp, the weariness that is half physical and half spiritual, the peace to be enjoyed without question or trouble of the understanding!



## CHAPTER XXIX

### RE-BIRTH

Versed in the weird *grivoiserie*  
Affected by Verlaine,  
And charmed by the *chinoiserie*  
Of Marinetti's strain,  
In all its multiplicity  
He worshipped eccentricity,  
And found his chief felicity  
In aping the insane.

And yet this freak ink-slinger,  
When England called for men,  
Straight ceased to be a singer  
And threw away his pen,  
Until, with twelve months' training  
And six months' hard campaigning,  
The lure of paper-staining  
Has vanished from his ken.

Transformed by contact hourly  
With heroes simple-souled  
He looks no longer sourly  
On men of normal mould,  
But, purged of mental vanity  
And erudite inanity,  
The clay of his humanity  
Is turning fast to gold. PUNCH.

The war may bring fresh subjects, it will not bring fresh standards. . . .—DAILY PAPER.

I REALLY find it hard to have patience with those root-and-branch enthusiasts who threaten after the war to carve out of the drill-book a new heaven and a new earth. These

passionate reformers would refashion our pre-war ways of thinking, and remodel our simplest pleasures. We are to become "serious" in the French sense. He who in melancholy mood affected the Muses must now shoulder a rifle. He who was wont to challenge the morning or, more prosaically, go down to business in the City humming the opening phrase of "Rosenkavalier," must keep his thoughts on getting and keeping fit. They will have nothing to do, these super-regenerative ones, with the non-utility of the careless arts. So many Betsy Trotwoods, they will have no meandering. The whole energy of our race is to be devoted to beating the German in the war which is to succeed this, and to underselling him in the intervening peace. Even the simple pleasures of life are to be reformed, and reformed altogether. No more the "throwing hey-jinks, the filling of bumpers, the rolling out of catches, the calling in a fiddler, the leading out everyone his lady to dance." This is not the "seriousness" which is to characterise the nation.

A soldier, it is said, may have no politics and equally, I suppose, he should have no views on Militarism. He may be permitted, however, to hold that War is but a phase in the world's evolution, and that civilisation has her face set steadily towards Peace. He may even

be permitted to hold that the best way to breed fine soldiers is to breed fine civilians, and if evidence in support of this proposition were needed, to cite the regiments which sent the Prussian Guard packing. There is not a history of the war which will not relate how the young civilians of England took their pens from behind their ears, their yard-measures from their shoulders and the paper from their cuffs, and jumped over the counter to teach Arrogance its lesson. But the hot-gospellers take too much for granted when they assume that we shall never again go back to the wearing of pens behind our ears and the measure round our shoulders. These ultra-hopefuls make too little of human nature, take into too little account its persistent return to normal. They are going to do wonders in the way of changing spots for the leopard and remaking beds for the clumsy. And yet it all comes back to the old problem of the sincerity with which old leaves may be turned down. Perhaps it is well that simple people should have their simple creeds, and perhaps it is very well indeed that the world should contain as few as possible of the curious race of artists who are indifferent to the morality of black and white, and care only for the matter of their interest. According to our moral reformers this bothersome breed of amateurs

and lookers-on is in for a thorough washing, cleansing, scraping from head to toe, to be rigged out, after disinfecting, with a brand-new suit of morality and a nice, clean, moral pocket-handkerchief on which to wipe the smuggest of noses. I read in my daily paper :

“In the days before the war the unreal was supplanting the real in art and letters. An unclean cult was rising, distorting mirrors were being held up to nature, and a form of artistic insanity was creeping through the art world. The irresponsible Bohemianism with its child-like faults and God-like gifts had given way to a cold-blooded perversity which destroyed the souls of men and withered the hearts of women. The blast of war was the trump of doom to this world of bad dreams. Faced with the terrible reality of primitive force the artificial gods tumbled from their crazy pedestals and in the agony of war men were born again.”

I rub my eyes and wonder if I am gone crazy.

And yet . . . and yet there is something in all this. These last few days I have been meeting in a little café of this old-world town, taking their *apéritif* before dinner, an actor and his wife. They may not be in the very first flight of actors, but they are from Paris and

in time of peace have a certain success. Their occupation gone and their interest in the war but languid, they are, Oh, so desperately out of everything that matters to-day. The actor gives his hat a rakish tilt, waves his thin hands, toys with a cane a shade too handsome, yawns, and tosses fifty centimes to an old woman selling war-news, rejecting the paper proffered in return. The war has gone past him and he has found no interest in it. The woman never speaks at all, her daytime art gone to the forcing of her features to an expression of childlikeness, an elaboration of the ingenuous. She drums on her teeth with her long and over-manicured nails—an odious mannerism! She is bored. Her eyes are as weary as the Monna Lisa's, but you would do wrong to credit their owner with excess of soul. And yet on an evening when they condescended to play to us in some anecdote of the war they moved even the clods of the village to tears. *Ce sont des artistes.*

Let me tell you a story, as Sir Arthur Pinero's radiant young man in the forties would say. There was once an English lord who took for mistress a French actress. As his lordship lay dying he divined that the woman bending over him was memorising for reproduction in the theatre the *rictus sardonius* of his agony. "Take away that woman," he said to his

attendants. Then in a farewell of ineffable contempt, and turning his face to the wall, "Une artiste . . . vous n'êtes que cela!" You will find the story in Goncourt's "La Faustin."

"And the point of the yarn, Jesson?"

The point of the yarn is that the actor, genius or mere *cabot*, is not going to be overawed by any matter of fisticuffs, however exaggerated and colossal. Life and death, living and dying, come they never so close, are but so much grist to his mill, so much "material." He may go back on his art and play the man, but it will be against the grain.

The public has never had any very clear appreciation on this score, their misapprehension being twofold. First, that poets of the sickness of Verlaine, actors of the *victus sardonius* order, cannot be sincere. Second, that before the artist can attain to fine deeds he must forswear fine words. Both these doctrines find me in the profoundest disagreement. I would rather maintain that the exquisite artist may be the veriest poltroon, and, if you like, that there lies the pity of it.

The sum of all this is that the war, although it may bring fresh subjects will not bring fresh standards, nor change by one jot or tittle our attitude towards the good and bad. Beauty will be found as of old in strange places and

in humdrum ; in strange happinesses, strange melancholies ; in ordinary joys and sorrows. The war, though it may heighten emotion, will not change its quality. "Above all, no emphasis!" was Heine's advice to a nation addicted to *Schwärmerei*. "Above all, no high-falutin!" might be a word in season to our own. And therefore I am going to confess that after the war I hope to find fresh joy in the simplest things of life ; in rounds of golf and tramps over the moors, in the smell of stables and the lore of grooms, in deep chairs and fireside talks, friendships and good books—which means the books that to me are good—in country lanes and mean streets, in theatres, music-halls, gin palaces, and crowds.

It has been good, old friend, writing to you. I have tried to keep the passion fresh in an adventure of which the incidents have been unexciting and the *dénouement* tame. It is not easy to keep the passion fresh in a world of vegetable marrows. But the beginning was good. . . . I have tried to keep up the exaltation of the soldier-music playing in Trafalgar Square that June morning more than a year ago. What was it the little girl said about a brass band making people feel happier than they really are ? I know it to be true that five minutes of the Band of Guards may make a

man feel more of a soldier than the rigours of the Army will effect in ten years. I wear a civilian's heart on my sleeve, you know, as well as my stars, of which a third comes surprisingly to hand even as I pen this. . . .





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