My Home in the Field of Mercy

Frances Wilson Huard

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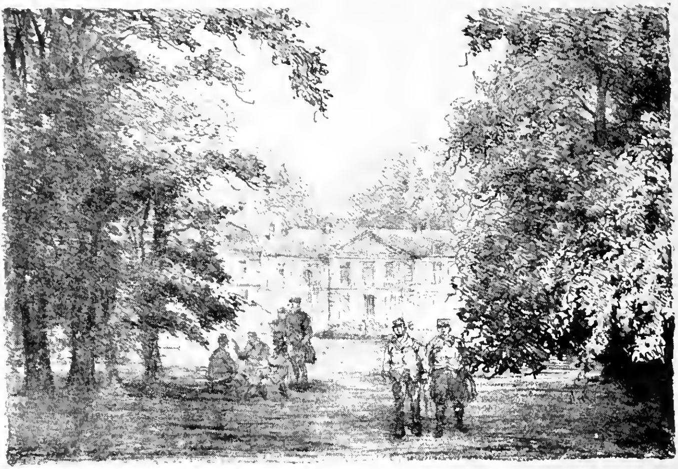
MY HOME IN THE FIELD OF MERCY

FRANCES WILSON HUARD

R. N. Burgess.
Diablo.
California

Jan. 1918.



THE CHATEAU DE VILLIERS

MY HOME IN THE FIELD OF MERCY

BY

FRANCES WILSON HUARD

AUTHOR OF "MY HOME IN THE FIELD OF HONOUR"

WITH DRAWINGS BY CHARLES HUARD

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To
My Dear Friends
Mr. and Mrs. David Z. Norton
IN REMEMBRANCE OF WHOSE TRULY
PARENTAL AFFECTION THIS BOOK
IS LOVINGLY INSCRIBED

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MY HOME IN THE FIELD OF MERCY

MY HOME IN THE FIELD OF MERCY

I

Triumphantly we hoisted the Red Cross flag. George had found it and dug it out from beneath numerous layers of filth in the cow-stable, Yvonne had washed it (without soap—we had none) and all of us had taken turns coaxing it to dry so that it would float proudly when finally pulled to the top of the mast which with great difficulty had been made fast to one of the pinions of the château.

It was no easy task this re-instating a hospital at a moment's notice. To bring order out of the chaos that had been wrought by the Hun, especially as we had neither utensils, washing soda nor matches, was not only fatiguing but at times disheartening. And it was, therefore, with no undue pride that we crowned our successful efforts by raising the banner of Mercy.

Despair, that had seized us all on our return from a rather nerve racking, adventurous fortnight spent on the highroad as refugees, gave way to a mad desire to eradicate as quickly as possible every trace of the invader. A new life surged through our veins when it was announced that the Château de Villiers was actually to become a military hospital. Then we were really going to serve our country! At last! The loud and persistent rumbling of the none too far distant cannon told us we could be ready none too soon.

Up until the moment that an officer had driven into the yard, and informed me the military authority needed my home, I must confess that I had viewed my situation in rather a doleful light. Ten days of superintending the shovelling out and burying the filth that had been my most cherished possessions had a bit unnerved me, and the very rough food we had to nourish us somewhat aggravated a long suspected case of appendicitis.

In spite of my every reproof Yvonne would continually and audibly mourn over the wanton destruction of my poultry and cattle, while George's profane vocabulary augmented daily in volume and picturesqueness. As to Betsy, the Boston bull, she of the sugar box fame, one morning she tiptoed on three legs into the kitchen, rolled a wistful glance over the unsavoury concoction with which we were essaying to remove grease from the tiled floor, gave one resentful sniff, and retired in high dudgeon to the rabbit holes in the sand quarry accompanied by the old fox hound who evidently thought that vicinity more propitious for the recounting of his experiences during our absence.

And now I come to think of it I believe it was Betsy who brought to mind the fact that I had buried two trunkfuls of H.'s etchings and drawings. She would wander in each evening at dusk and begin a series of contortions on what remained of the greensward, trying vainly to remove the sand that had stuck to her eyelids and made them smart. It was while helping brush it away that I thought of the quarry. So the next morning, armed with the most primitive instruments (the Germans had appropriated everything in the way of farming implements) we sallied forth in quest of our belongings.

On that eventful night some four or five weeks since, when I had been ordered to evacuate my home, to flee before the oncoming German hordes, I had taken with me Madame Guix, my nurse sent from Soissons in the early days of the war, to help establish my hospital: George and Léon, farm hands under military age: Emile, who had brought me marching orders: Yvonne and Nini, two youthful maid servants in my employ, and Julie, an older woman of the village who with her family had followed in our wake.

At present my household was somewhat depleted. Madame Guix had remained in Rebais to care for the wounded: Emile and Léon had left us at Melun, journeying to Fontainebleau to enlist, and Julie, finding her own home in as sorry a plight as mine, was obliged to devote her every moment to setting it to rights.

So now this morning it was rather a meagre staff that trod up the hill towards the quarry. There were only four of us; Yvonne and Nini, George and myself. The two former mere children incapable of exhausting labour.

A glance at the quarry told us that either our hiding place had been discovered, or others had had the same idea as we about burying things in the sand. Our curiosity stimulated, we set to digging with ardour in what George indicated as the proper locality, I pausing only to wipe the beads from my brow or to remonstrate with George whose verbal qualifications of his hastily hand-made shovel, while novel, were hardly fit for our ears.

Presently the boy plunged the spade deep into the moist sand, and then after a second's pause during which he bent over the excavation he lifted his head and I noted that his face wore a queer expression.

"Was one of those trunks we buried made of leather, Madame?"

"No! Why?"

"Hum; well I have hit something that resists, and don't you smell that funny odour?"

I sniffed in that direction. A second later a nauseating whiff greeted my nostrils, and dropping my spade I jumped clear of the quarry bidding the others follow. The girls had guessed my thoughts and we stood there gaping at each other while uncanny ideas commenced whirring through my brain.

"George!"

"Madame?"

"Fill in that hole and come away at once."

"Why?"

"Why? Can't you see that someone is buried there? Be he French or German we have no right to be poking about in his grave."

The boy cast another shovelful aside.

"Have the Germans got cloven hoofs?" he queried.

"No. But they ought to have."

"And long hairy tails?"

No longer able to restrain my curiosity I jumped beside the lad, cast my eyes downward, and beheld—a cow's hoof and tail protruding from the earth.

I breathed again. Thank God, that was all. Much relieved I soon realised that the debris of the quadruped had been hastily interred here to prevent disease spreading, and the next thing to be done was to discover at just what angle the animal was buried, so that if possible the trunks might be got at by digging further away. Presently we had made our calculations and in a couple of hours' time the objects of our quest stood high and dry on the grass.

George and I were not strong enough to lift them into our cart, so they had to be opened on the spot and their contents transferred to the waggon. And while audibly congratulating the boy for having buried them so deep that no harm had come to the drawings, I inwardly berated myself for having made such hasty choice among them, and a big lump rose in my throat as I thought of all those that left in the studio cupboards had been destroyed or stolen.

In the meantime the emblem of mercy was proudly waving in the wind and sunset found the excavating party weary and exultant, but having accomplished little that day towards the immediate installation of a hospital.

As far as we were concerned the actual preparation for receiving wounded men was limited. Our task consisted in scouring the apartments and getting into line such of my beds as had been left with mattresses, and the sorting out of every odd and end that might be of service.

Every sanitary arrangement had been destroyed beyond repair, likewise the electric light plant, the furnace and even the kitchen stove. The latter being of great importance, however, we managed to patch it up with some half dozen bricks and lived in the hope that we might be able to obtain coal.

In fact every turn, every step, during those first awful weeks had brought a surprise of one kind or another: some disheartening, some comic—the latter only when one could get away from the personal side of the question long enough to appreciate the minute and systematic working out of minor details to make a campaign of frightfulness and destruction complete.

It was thus when things had been practically set to rights that I found myself wondering why certain unmentionable articles of female attire had alone been chosen to remove the pot-black from the kettles employed by General Von Kluck's *chef*. One by one we had fished them out with a stick from a little recess behind the stove, indescribable bundles of tattered embroidery, ribbons and filth, and one by one we had dropped them into the ash can on its way to the great gaping dunghole.

Why not my night robes? I wondered. There is infinitely more cloth in them. They would have been far more practical for the purpose.

The latter had disappeared *en masse;* not a vestige of them was to be found anywhere.

A couple of days later I had a visit from my neighbour Mother Poupard, who with her husband and two little grandsons had remained during the invasion. She had managed to hide a couple of hens under an empty barrel in her cellar and had come to offer me her first fresh eggs. I accepted gladly and we talked.

Mother Poupard was loquacious, at times almost eloquent in her qualification of the invaders' actions, and when I asked her if she had an inkling as to what they had done with my missing *lingerie* the question brought forth a stream of aphorisms which bordered on the humorous.

"Your nightgowns, Madame? Ah, *Sainte Vierge Marie* protect us! ah, the vandals! I saw them. They needn't think I didn't. I would like to have one of them right here this minute. I would make him tell you how after they got through washing in the river they went in and robbed your cupboards. All Monsieur's shirts first, and after that your nightgowns. Yes, Madame, the Lord is my witness. They put them on and went strutting up and down the village with those Irish lace collars that Catherine spent so much time making, hanging out over their dirty uniforms. Ah, Madame, the pity! and when one of them came over 'To borrow' some brandy from Father, I up and said what I thought. And what do you suppose he answered?"

"What?"

"He came right out in French and remarked that it was a pity all the women in France were not as big as Madame so the whole German army could have clean shirts every week."

I laughed. After all this was harmless amusement. But brawny Mother Poupard failed to see the humour of the situation and went on extolling her losses at great length, in fact to such length that a bit hardened by my experiences I fancy I lent but one ear to the conversation and my mind wandered to many little homes in the village where innocent women had remained and borne the brunt of invasion otherwise than by the loss of their household belongings. Alas, must war be ever thus. . . .

My attention was caught anew by Mother Poupard's last phrase:

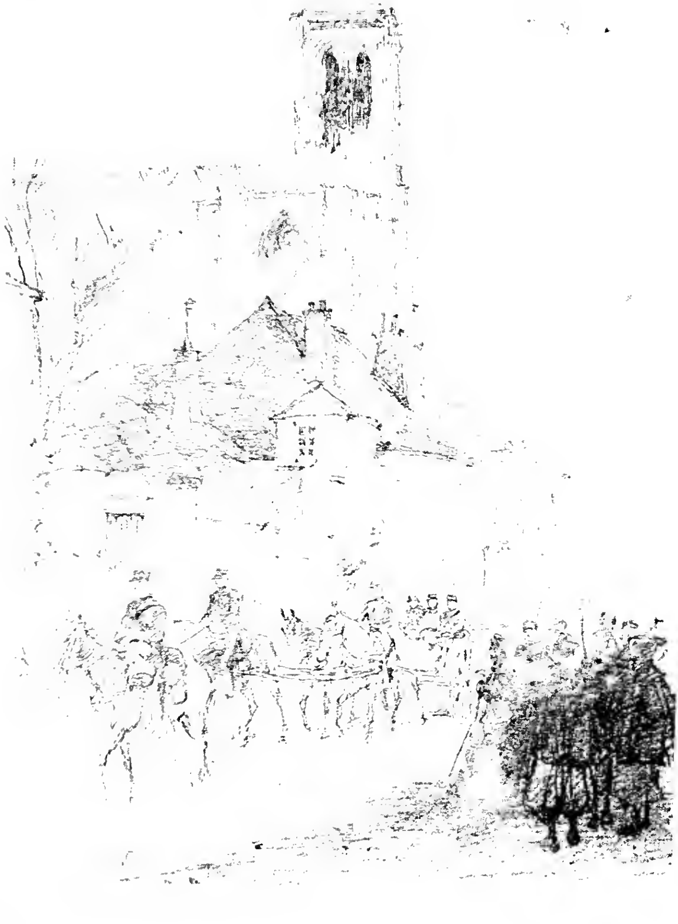
"You can't trust any of them! Not even the best. They are all alike. Those quartered on us played so nicely with little John. We had confidence in them. He wasn't a bit afraid. They took him on their knees just as they did me in 1870. He liked them, poor darling, he didn't know who they were. He used to bring in his toys to show them. One day he asked for his jack-in-the-box, the lovely one Madame gave him two years ago Christmas. I treasured it in the *armoire;* such a lovely toy, I used to bring it out when we had company. It was such a distraction. I cannot think what made the child want it. I had hidden it. Well, he went on so that finally I had to go and get it—it was against my will though. They put it on the table and *Polichinelle* jumped up and down on his long spring delighting them all. Then that innocent lamb in the midst of his excitement called out *'C'est un Boche!'* Ah, Madame, Madame! they shook the poor little soul until I thought his head would drop off and throwing *Polichinelle* on the floor they stamped on it, all the while shouting so loud and so roughly and pointing to Johnny. What a misfortune, what a loss! such an expensive toy!"

How useless, I thought.

From what has already been said it is easy to perceive that prospects in general were scarcely encouraging, but as the fine weather still continued our spirits rose and our desire to render ourselves useful sharpened our wits and taught us to make the best of the situation. We all knew from sad experience that it might have been far worse.

So arduous were our daily duties that we had little time for reflection, and for this I heartily thanked heaven. The days were beginning to grow shorter and shorter and I seemed to dread the long Autumn evenings when nothing save the huge open fireplace, which served at once as range, radiator and light, sent forth its kindly glow, and hushed the tongues of the youth clustered about it, making all the more solemn the booming of the great guns through the darkness.

I fully realised now, what a wonderful, nay almost sacred thing was our confidence in our men, our army. For though living in total ignorance of what had befallen my husband, all of us torn by the greatest moral agony for those we loved, alone, unprotected, isolated from the entire world in the army zone of



IN THE ARMY ZONE OF FRANCE

France, scarce a score of miles from the scenes of ghastly carnage—never, never for a single moment did we fear lest we had returned too soon. We seemed to know that we had come home for good.

Our humble evening meal was almost invariably composed of vegetable soup and a few ripe grapes, the former ladled from the steaming kettle that hung on a tripod in the chimney. And then afterwards how often have I crept away to bed drawing a pair of damp sheets about me in the chill darkness of my room, totally indifferent to existing conditions, only mindful of the Kind Destiny that had so shaped my ends as to earn me the right to say "We" when speaking of the French.

Slowly but surely things were beginning to get into shape. There were only a few more beds to be set up and the day fixed for the arrival of the military motor which was to whisk me to Rebais in quest of my nurse, was rapidly approaching. "A few beds to set up" may not mean much to the ordinary human being, but I assure you I quickly realised it was by no means a one man proposition.

George had promised his help but it seemed to me I could never put my hand on him. Just when I needed him most the kitchen garden (such of it as remained) apparently required his immediate attention, or else it was the quinces to be picked, or the mangles to be brought in. Always some good excuse to be away from the château a couple of hours each day.

I paid little attention to the matter, but early one morning as I looked through the paneless sash of what had once been my bedroom window and glanced down the long driveway I caught sight of George coming in the gate, heavily laden with some queer trappings and tenderly bearing an indistinguishable object in his arms. He cast a furtive glance towards the château, which aroused my curiosity, so I determined to question him at once, but on my way downstairs to breakfast my attention was diverted, so the morning passed and the matter slipped my mind.

A moment before luncheon, however, I happened to turn the handle of the door leading into what had formerly been our tool room. I stood spell bound at the threshold every hair on my head fairly rising in terror. On the floor and shelves of the entire place were strewn unexploded shells of every kind and calibre, a perfect arsenal, and in the midst of it all on an empty upturned gasolene can sat my farm boy, hugging a German 77 mm. shell between his knees and struggling vainly to insert his jack-knife between its steel bindings.

"George!" I gasped, when I had sufficiently recovered to find my voice. "What on earth are you doing?"

"Opening a German shell."

"But—"

"It is the easiest thing in the world. I saw an artillery man at Melun do it, and yesterday I managed this one beautifully."

He held up the butt of a German 77 mm. Visions of how we might all have been rapidly blown to another world through the careless slip of that boy's knife flitted swiftly through my head.

"But it is madness, George."

He didn't seem much impressed and while collecting my faculties I cast a rapid glance around the room. From pegs driven into the wall dangled military harnessings and trappings of every description; the place was a perfect museum, and as I advanced towards the shelf beneath the window I caught sight of a battered can half full of what seemed to be dried tea leaves.

"What's this in here?"

"German powder."

Ye Gods! Residence atop an active volcano would surely have been as safe as was the Château de Villiers under existing circumstances. I put my foot down firmly.

"Where on earth did you get all this stuff?"

"Out in the fields around here. Every boy in the place is making a collection but mine is the most complete up to date," was the proud reply.

"I know, but these things don't belong to you. They are not even French", I retorted, my eyes fixed on a wheel belonging to a German gun carriage that had been rolled in to join the other trophies.

"Don't belong to me?" the lad's eyes kindled. "Did anything in this place belong to them? No! But they took it just the same, didn't they? Everything that pleased them and more too. So what's a handful of relics like this in comparison?"

The argument was clear. There was no answer. So I entrenched myself behind the powder question, soundly scolding the boy for his imprudence, in daring to bring so much dangerous stuff into the house.

"But George," I argued, "what on earth did you intend doing with them supposing fate had permitted you to open these shells unharmed?"

"Save enough powder to make a handful of cartridges in case I could patch up my gun, and then with the rest mine the gate over the moat."

"What?"

"Yes! Do you think I would let any German force me to take to the highroad a second time to escape him? Not much! If ever they were to break through and reach this place again they might start over our bridge, but I'll bet you not many of them would arrive whole inside the gate. I might have to go up in the air with them, but a hundred to one is a pretty good proposition."

All this was said without the slightest trace of boasting either in the lad's speech or manner, and proved to me how deeply even this carefree, lighthearted boy had been impressed by the savage vandalism of the Prussians.

Gently then did I try to persuade him that it were better to leave such thoughts of revenge in more competent hands, and I was about to propose that an isolated barn would be an excellent place for trophy museums in general, black powder and unexploded shells in particular, when a cry of joy arising from the kitchen sent us hurrying in that direction.

"Madame, Madame", called Yvonne and Nini. "They've come back! they've come back!"

"Who?"

"Emile and Léon."

Through the doorway I caught sight of the two lads who had left us at Melun to enlist in the army. Ragged and footsore, thin as rails but beaming with joy at our cordial welcome, the tired travellers stalked in.

"How did you come? Why didn't they take you? What's the latest news?" were only a few of the numerous questions that were hurled at them in a breath.

And from their replies I gathered that they had been sent from Fontainebleau to Orleans (at their own expense) to a recruiting station. Once there, so many were the applicants that they had to wait two days in line. Board and lodging had quickly consumed the meagre sum they possessed between them, and when finally their turn came they were refused because they had no papers, no way of identifying themselves. So empty handed, they had started home on foot, a distance of about one hundred and eighty miles, and from the way they partook of our dry bread and unsweetened stewed fruit I judged they had not fared too well during their hike. In the midst of their story which bid fair to be interminable, George carried them off to his trophy room, and through the partition I could hear vigorous exclamations of delight and admiration.

The following day a member of the Engineer Corps who had been sent out to explore the fields and set off any unexploded shells, called on me and in the course of his conversation expressed his surprise that so few projectiles had been found in our immediate vicinity. I smiled and led him to the old barn.

"*Je comprends*," was all he said.

I had not the heart to hand the trophies all over to him without first telling George. The boy took the news like a man and promised to deliver them the following morning. And though I have never questioned him I have a feeling that years hence we will unearth in some obscure corner a German helmet or shell, remnants of his collector's mania.

Nor were Teuton relics the only kind to be had in our neighbourhood. Every once in a while the boys who spent each available moment in the garden, would come in bearing some souvenir of the passing Moroccan troops, some reminder of the British occupation. Among others was a package of letters mailed to a gunner in the Royal Artillery and found scattered on the floor of the greenhouse. Each envelope was addressed in a clear, upright feminine hand, and on the back where the flap closes were numerous little crosses, tokens of affection such as, when children, we used to put at the conclusion of letters to our parents. Poor little missives; how had they come there? Why had they not been delivered? What was I to do with them?

At the extreme end of the driveway I could hear Johnny Poupard and his brother trotting down the highroad calling *"Une auto! Deux autos! Des officiers!* They're stopping!"

I put the letters in my apron pocket. An automobile? Officers? Anything come from the outside world was an event and was hailed by loud verbal acclamations from any individual who happened to be on the spot. By the time I reached the gate I could see quite a group had gathered around four large open motors that were slowly winding their way down the village street, and two breathless peasant boys came running toward us.

"They're English", they panted. "Come quick, do! Perhaps you can understand them."

I hurried across the moat just as the motors pulled up to the gate. A British Captain jumped from the front seat.

"Could you tell us the shortest road to Paris?"

"Certainly."

And as I explained all the officers in the cars sat forward in their seats at hearing their native tongue spoken so fluently. As I talked my eyes took in every detail and from their uniforms I realised that I had to do with the

British General Staff. When I had finished the Captain thanked me.

"You don't belong here, do you?"

"Yes. I am the *châtelaine.*"

As I said this I thought how little my attire bore out my statement, for I was wearing a faded crimson sweater and a soiled velveteen bicycle skirt, the only things I possessed. But to add to my embarrassment, when I looked down I found that in my haste I had come out with a filthy dust cloth in my hand. I put it quickly behind my back. The Captain saw my movement and smiled. I smiled too.

"You didn't stay here during the invasion?"

"No, I managed to get away the night before they came in."

"I thought so. Because I was with the British when they drove them out of here. It was pouring with rain and we hoped to find shelter in your house, but Lord! the filth in the place! We preferred sleeping in the wet. I see you have a hospital now."

"No, not yet, but we are expecting one."

"Who did the cleaning up?"

"We did."

"I congratulate you."

He might have added "You look it," but he was too well bred.

"Didn't leave you much, did they?"

"Not much, but enough to offer you gentlemen a cup of English tea if you don't mind the absence of linen." As I said that the officer in the further corner of the second motor removed his goggles and I recognised General Sir John French.

"Thank you for your courtesy", he said. "But I fear we are a little late now. Is there anything we can do for you?"

"No thank you, unless—"

"Unless?"

"Unless you would care to see that these letters are turned over to proper authorities", said I fumbling in my pocket. "I have no way of delivering them."

"Certainly, with pleasure. Anything further?"

"Nothing, I thank you."

"Then, gentlemen, let us be off."

And as the motor rolled away the General leaned out and called back, "Just wait until we get into Germany. We'll send you back their loot."

So we returned to work, encouraged by this little glimpse of those in whose hands lay our destiny.

Another day was absorbed by my trip to Rebais where I sought and found my nurse, who had been in the city to look after the wounded and who had experienced many exciting adventures at the hands of the Germans who were in possession of that vicinity for a week. Our tongues wagged, as only women's can, all during our trip, but at dusk as we passed through Charly (our market town) I was astonished to see the red and green lights shining forth from our pharmacy just as in normal times. How strange—I thought. I don't believe there is a handful of people in the town. And what on earth has he to sell?

But presently my curiosity was turned to practicability, and imagining that pompous old Monsieur Leveque had contrived in one way or another to put his stock beyond the reach of the invader I resolved to investigate as soon as possible in order to lay in a few necessities for our hospital.

As I approached his shop the next morning, I noticed that the plate glass window was one mass of cracks, the whole thing holding together by long strips of adhesive plaster and the Grace of the Almighty. A hand printed sign which read as follows, was neatly pinned in the centre of the pane:—

"Monsieur Le Pharmacien Leveque has the honour of informing his numerous customers that he is in measure to respond to their demands and that business will continue as usual."

"Bon jour, Monsieur Leveque."

"Madame, j'ai l'honneur de vous saluer."

"How fortunate to have been able to save your stock. Will you kindly give me as much tincture of iodine, peroxide, and absorbent cotton as you can spare?"

"Madame, nonc of these articles is available at present."

"Ah?"

"No, and it may be quite a while before I shall be able to procure them. May I take your order?"

I thanked him and shook my head. I should have come sooner, thought I—he has been bought out. I continued reading down the long list Madame Guix had prepared. As I mentioned each and every article the old man waxed eloquent on the particular reason for which the medicament had been carried off in entirety.

"Then if I were not presuming, might I inquire what you have for sale?"

"What they left me; liver pills, Hunyadi Water, and a little bit of magnesia."

I couldn't help smiling. Monsieur Leveque frowned.

"But why do you bother to keep open, especially in the evening?"

"Because some one might need liver pills and Hunyadi Water and it would not be honest to deprive them, and besides it is the duty of every pharmacist to stick to his post to the last!"

Evidently Monsieur Leveque had been much impressed by the conception of his own bravery. He had launched that long-thought-out finishing phrase regardless of how appropriate it might be. I was apparently the first one on whom he had occasion to try it. How awful should it have been wasted! I appreciated his sentiments but they did not help my hospital work a bit. So during the succeeding afternoons Madame Guix and I spent our time driving about in our old farm cart, knocking at the door of every inhabited cottage begging the peasants to lend us a bed, a mattress, a sheet or two, if they still possessed any, to swell the number of patients our hospital was listed to receive.

It was not so simple a matter as one might imagine, for under the circumstances, the peasant could not "give", he could only "lend"; in most cases the bed or its furnishings belonged to a son or husband absent fighting for his country. Each article had to be marked and a form of receipt given to its owner and then they were carefully piled into the back of our trap that was drawn by my twenty-one-year-old nag.

We were returning from one of these expeditions when on reaching the home road late one afternoon we heard the tramp of feet and excited voices calling; *"Des Boches! Des Boches!"*

Germans? Where? How?

I whipped up Cesar and coming around the curve we caught sight of three German prisoners stalking down the street between our Gendarmes.

Long, lean, lank; gaunt, graceless and glum —what a hideous spectacle these three defenceless human beings presented. One of them was apparently so weak that he had to be supported by the Gendarmes and the excitement caused by their arrival was evidenced from the number of people that appeared upon the scene, sprung up as though by magic. Yet there was no noise, no confusion, much less hostile demonstration of any kind. They were a curiosity, that was all.

"Where did you get them?" I queried of the Gendarme when we had come within speaking distance. The little column halted in front of a tiny grocery shop and the weak lad (he couldn't have been more than nineteen or twenty) seemed grateful for the pause. He was almost panting.

The crowd gathered about them.

"Rounded them up in the woods. They are scouts. Got lost during the retreat and have been in hiding for three weeks. God knows on what they have been living."

"But one of them is very weak. Aren't you afraid he will collapse before you get to Charly? It is three miles from here."

The words were barely out of my mouth ere the pale youth lurched forward. The crowd parted and he sank down in a heap.

"He has fainted", I called. "Stretch him out and run for some water."

The group stood spellbound, helpless. One old peasant shrugged his shoulders and turning on his heel walked away.

"We can't let him die like a dog, even if he is a German", grunted the store-keeper as she stepped indoors.

"He is hungry, they're all hungry, dying of hunger", I explained as I elbowed my way through the crowd. "Here, catch hold of him, some one. We cannot let him lie in the dust. Move him indoors."

The spell was broken. Twenty hands stretched forward and we lifted him onto the floor of the store. The proprietress came up with a glass of water. A moment later some one had brought in a flask of brandy.

"I'll take care of this one, but how about the other two?"

The women looked askance at each other.

"Tant pis! j'y vais", said one, and the store-keeper echoed her sentiments. A second later she appeared with a steaming bowl in her hands.

Heaven knows it was little enough she had to offer; a plate of soup and a crust of bread, but as long as I live I shall never forget the light in those men's eyes when the great nine pound loaf was placed on to the table. Pray God I may never see it again. They fell to with a greed that was appalling, even the weak one. The very smell of the soup seemed to revive them.

When I felt they were a bit restored, I put a few questions in broken German.

"Not Prussians! Not Prussians!", they fairly shouted in chorus. "Bavarians!"

I wonder what particular torture they thought we held in store for their compatriots of the North. From a word now and then I gathered we had guessed correctly. They had got lost during retreat and had been in hiding for three weeks, eating only raw beets and turnips, licking the dew from the leaves to quench their thirst.

By the time the soup had disappeared, boiled potatoes, baked apples and a bottle of white wine had been brought in, and I left them to the tender mercies of the Gendarmes who for once fell short of their reputation for severity.

"Don't ever let Poupard know I brought that wine", whispered Mother P. as together we walked homeward. "I'd never hear the end of it. But our boy's out there fighting too and I couldn't bear to think he'd ever come to want because he was an enemy."

II

On the fifteenth day of October, at a little after eleven in the morning an army supply waggon with tightly drawn and buckled curtains rattled down the main street of Villiers and drew up in front of the château. The noise and the large red cross painted on either side of the cover, attracted the attention of a score of peasant women, who imagining the wounded were arriving at our hospital, hastened down the street and stood gaping in the roadway awaiting the pleasure of a red-headed driver who calmly prepared to leave his seat and make known the contents of his cart.

By the time I had come downstairs and gained the entrance hall excitement had reached concert pitch, and when I stepped outdoors I was confronted by an awe stricken group of people silently elbowing each other and craning their necks to get a better view.

The driver leisurely rolled up his sleeves, moistened his hands in a most inelegant manner, parted the curtains and disclosed four wooden boxes containing pharmaceutical supplies and a half dozen soldiers knapsacks. That was all.

Disappointment was audibly expressed and he of the fiery whiskers after having calmly deposited his goods on the lowest step was making ready for immediate departure when I accosted him.

"I say driver, are the wounded on the way?"

"What wounded?"

"The men to whom those sacks belong. The soldiers we are expecting."

"Don't ask me, how should I know?"

"But I thought perhaps—"

He interrupted me.

"In my *métier* what's the use of thinking? None! You do what you're told, *un point, c'est tout!*"

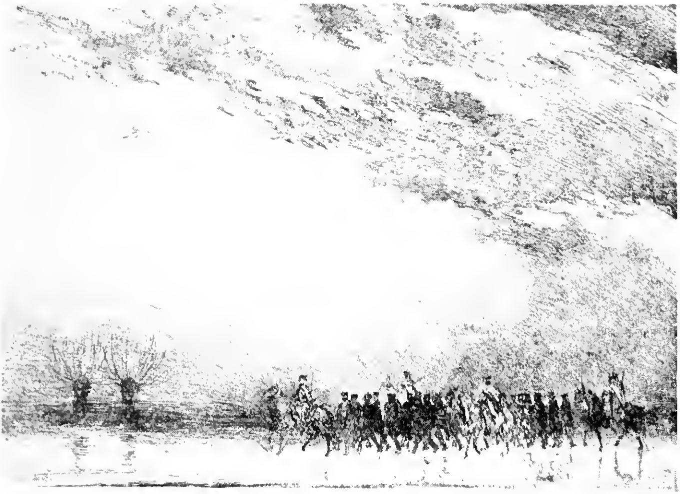
But evidently his *métier* had nothing to do with bridling of vocabulary, and my questions had set him going. A good quarter of an hour later I left him in the midst of a dissertation on military grandeur and servitude, and the disappointed peasants were surely well repaid for their trouble if words count for aught.

His eloquence was interrupted by the even tramp of feet and hastily buttoning his coat he whipped up his nags and departed just as some soldiers headed by a Sergeant turned into the drive. This time it was the real thing, and from an upper window I watched Madame Guix greet our Sergeant-Infirmier and his four assistants.

They certainly were a weird looking quintet: beginning with Sergeant Godec himself, round ruddy, middle-aged, almost bursting in his uniform, his well waxed mustache giving his face the appearance of bristling with importance.

He drew his men up to "Attention" with a voice that could have been heard above the roar of a dozen nearby guns, and then saluting my nurse awaited her orders. A second later, "Break ranks", he shouted in stentorian tones. The command was hardly necessary for even at "Attention" the quartet of men from the "Service Auxiliare" was the most unmilitary looking unit I had ever perceived, in fact as I gazed at them I could not repress a smile.

On one end stood a great, gaping blonde headed fellow, his hands which strangely resembled shoulders of mutton hanging at his



THE RETREAT FROM CHARLEROY TO THE MARNE

sides, his mouth open, his eyes vacantly staring at six columns of smoke that were rising from as many chimneys of the château. Next to him was a dark, tight featured peasant whose ambling gait had attracted my attention as he slouched rather than walked up the avenue. In fact one could not tell whether he was tall or short so elastic were his movements.

Third from the end was a genial looking chap with clear blue eyes and a kindly smile, and last but not least, was a nervous little fellow who was struggling with innumerable packages that were hung about his person with several different bits of string. Every movement he made to disentangle himself only complicated the situation which was already none too simple when one considers that he was terribly near sighted, and the perspiration which trickled from his nose made the latter so slippery that it refused to hold a pair of gold circled *pince-nez* that were attached by a flowing gros grain ribbon.

After a moment's parley the whole group moved towards the refectory where they quickly made acquaintance with George and

Léon who showed them to their quarters and bid them make ready for luncheon which was but half an hour distant: it was useless to think of beginning any new job before.

During our meal my nurse and I made verbal note of all the tasks which needed masculine attention and decided that we would commence by scraping and polishing the floor of one of the wards where our feeble efforts had as yet been unsuccessful. We lingered a trifle longer than usual over our brief repast to give the men time to get accustomed to their new surroundings and at one o'clock sharp Madame Guix departed to give her orders. It seemed to me I had hardly had time to fold my serviette ere she reappeared out of breath with eyes as big as two franc pieces.

"Madame Huard, they've gone!"

"Who?"

"The soldiers!"

"What nonsense. Gone where?"

"Disappeared, evaporated! I can't find a trace of them."

"What do you mean?"

"I am not joking, I have looked all over for them."

"Did you ask Julie?"

"Yes, she says they bolted their luncheon and then followed George and Léon out toward the barn. That's the last anyone saw of them. They're not there now, I have just come from there."

"Well, don't let's worry, they will turn up in a few minutes. If they don't we'll ring the farm bell for our boys."

A quarter, then half an hour slipped by as we busied ourselves around the house, and at ten minutes before two when I looked at my watch no soldiers had yet reported for duty.

The farm bell was rung, the emergency call, but as Nini pulled it I observed that the wind was due East, in consequence carrying the sound away from our property.

To organize a searching party in quest of five soldiers and a couple of farm boys, lost in some of the numerous buildings dotted all over my one hundred and eighty acres of ground, would not only have been fatiguing, but ludicrous. That idea was abandoned at once, and I sent Nini on a bicycle down as far as the village café to inquire if they had seen anything of my boys. The idea that perhaps they had all decided to clinch their friendship in a drop of wine seemed feasible.

Nini returned with a negative reply.

Madame Guix and I looked askance of one another and then laughed. The situation was too ridiculous.

We went to work on our floor and so earnest were we that the short afternoon wore away in no time, and at half past four we had forgotten that the château had once been the proud possessor of four orderlies and a sergeant.

We were mopping our brows and taking a second's breathing space when Nini, whom I had sent to Tresnel in search of a few fresh eggs, broke in upon us, all excitement.

"Madame—Madame Guix—the soldiers—George and Léon—they're all up on the hill bagging rabbits. I saw them as I passed from the road, and on my way home Father Poupard came out of his yard grumbling about its getting dark and it was time they brought back his ferret."

I sat down on a chair and laughed until I cried. Here were five serious minded orderlies sent out to prepare beds for their suffering fellow men and the idea of a rabbit hunt, "La chasse" so dear to the heart of Frenchmen had completely obliterated all conception of war, militarism and duty. Even the prospect of ten days in the guard-house apparently held no terrors. It was so human that it was really pathetic. But my companion whose legs and arms must have ached as did mine from our exhausting labor, did not see the amusing side of the situation. After wiping her face and straightening her cap she left the room and a second later I could hear her footsteps crushing the dead leaves in the long alley leading towards the *rond-point.*

I followed in her wake, but stopped when I saw that she had come up with the hunting party, triumphantly returning home with the spoils of their afternoon wriggling in two laundry bags.

Madame Guix took the sergeant aside. I was beyond earshot, so what she said to him I never heard. He hung his head and looked very sheepish all the while. A moment later he called his men to "Attention" and then man-like proceeded to wreak on them the vengeance that had just fallen to his lot.

Twenty minutes later there was such a

grating and scraping in that ward that I feared lest nothing of the floor be left to polish, and poking my head in I caught sight of Sergeant Godec in the middle of the room a long lithe branch in his hand, proudly surveying his menials, who on their knees were humbly obeying his orders to scrape *"Tous ensemble et en mesure"*, under penalty of having the military code as constant diet for the next week to come.

Supper was a mute meal and the entire *Corps d'infirmiers* instead of retiring at once burned much of my precious kerosene apparently applying themselves to some arduous task that was accomplished by the aid of pen, ink and paper on the long table in the refectory.

At nine o'clock we rang *Le coucher* and five minutes later the only sound that broke the complete silence of the night was the screeching of an owl and now and again the booming of a distant gun.

The next morning I discovered that every corridor in the entire château had blossomed forth with the intricately printed signs stating distances and directions and forbidding everything under the sun. *Défense de flâner dans ce couloir—Défense de cracher par terre—*

Heures des repas—Reglement de la chambre—Enough rules to make any sick man want to lie down and die at once. All of which had been carefully compiled by Sergeant Godec and faithfully executed by his slaves who had been so lax as to have nearly permitted him to fall from grace.

A telephone call from Headquarters at Château-Thierry announced that ten occupants for our beds would come down by a military train as far as our station, from whence the supply waggon would transport all it could hold to our door, making as many trips as necessary unless I had some means of conveyance to offer. There had been some difficulty in finding a doctor—they hoped to have one on the way by the time the men arrived.

Here was news indeed, and when I announced that our battered coupé would be sent down to Nogent to bring up the men, George and Léon nearly came to blows trying to decide who should have the honour of driving the first load.

And so they arrived; six in the van, four in the coupé.

It was something of a disappointment and a great relief to find that they were not wounded heroes. Illness was much less appalling under the circumstances. Some were coughing, some limping with rheumatism, while others showed no external signs of malady other than a strange brightness in the eyes, a dark furrow on their cheeks.

For a second they stood there helpless in the marble paved vestibule, tenderly clinging to their guns and cartridge cases as though loathe to give them up, their mud-stained uniforms and boots sadly betokening their inability to do anything that required a physical effort.

We quickly put them at ease, leading them into the drawing-room, converted into a ward, where a cheerful fire welcomed them to its hearth. They clustered about it and willingly drank long draughts of linden flower tea, yet even the warmth and soothing beverage did not loosen their tongues. I was at loss to know what to do to cheer them.

Presently the sergeant appeared, pen in hand, and one or two made an effort to struggle into line. I said it was not necessary and he proceeded to take the names, addresses, regiment numbers, etc., terminating with the illness for which they had been evacuated. These proceedings brought to light the fact that my guests were almost all from the northwestern part of France, country then, as now, in the hands of the enemy. And their illnesses proved to be rheumatism, asthma, bronchitis, dysentery. Apparently none of these was chronic, but in the absence of any medical authority Madame Guix and I decided that bath and bed were very good prescriptions on general principle, and in spite of several looks of protest, the order was given and the sergeant stayed to see that it was executed.

An hour later a double row of mummies lined my drawing-room and as I entered I heard an exclamation that went straight to my heart—

"O, God! no draughts and a real hot water bottle!"

Orders were given that no one was to get up until after inspection the following morning, and when I made my appearance I found the *infirmiers* hurrying through the corridors bearing bread, butter and hot coffee on improvised trays. Their fatigue costume was the funniest thing imaginable, for having cast aside their long military top-coats and boots, they had donned the queerest looking civilian togs which together with the red trousers of their uniforms made their appearance most ludicrous.

The man with the goldrimmed glasses who caused me so much amusement on his arrival was certainly a poem to behold. He had replaced his army jacket by a long-tailed, shiny seamed, black frock coat buttoned right tight up to his neck, around which was tied a variegated bandanna handkerchief. The dark blue *bonnet de police* tipped jauntily over one ear, a pair of soiled white canvas sneakers and a checked gingham apron completed this extraordinary costume.

"Ohé—la petite Jaquette", called one of the patients, beckoning him as he entered the room.

"Oui, c'est ça! la petite jaquette," called all the others quick to grasp the humour of the situation.

It was thus he was christened, and *"Petite Jaquette"* he remained as long as he was with us. In fact no one ever realized he had another name.

Breakfast disposed of, the sergeant presented me with the first daily bulletin, a masterpiece of penmanship and rhetoric, which informed me that we had eleven patients and three orderlies. I lifted my eyes in inquiry.

"Quite correct, Madame", was the immediate reply.

"But your fourth man seemed all right yesterday."

"He was. But this morning he cannot get out of bed. He has got bad varicose veins."

"I understand, overwork no doubt?" said I glancing at the smoothly polished floor.

"Quite correct, Madame," was the rigid reply.

What an excellent beginning—thought I—especially as we have no doctor; and what was more, no way of ascertaining how soon one would appear. Headquarters could communicate with us by telephone, but as we had no officers as yet, we had no authority to communicate with them.

By ten o'clock the men were clamouring to get up, and since they felt so inclined we saw no reason why they should be made miserable. So all save two who had a slight temperature arose and after carefully shaking up and making their beds gazed wistfully out of the window onto a cold drizzling rain that had set in. I quickly provided pen, ink and paper of which I had been fortunate enough to procure a stock while in Rebais, and manna in the desert was certainly not received more gratefully. Each one seized this first opportunity to send his exact address to loved ones behind the lines; to say that it was *Rien de grave* that had brought him for a moment's respite beyond the reach of the enemy's guns.

It was during that first morning that I received a visit from an inspection officer, who seeing our hospital flag came in for a word with the "Médecin-Chef". Great was his astonishment when I informed him that we had none, in spite of the fact that ten beds were already occupied. From his attitude I could see that trouble was brewing.

"There must be an error", he explained. "Those men were never destined for you; it would be far better to send them further on to another hospital. I will go down to the station and make arrangements to have the cart come and get them at once unless we can make arrangements to get a doctor in here by nightfall; headquarters has blundered. It is nothing." And noting all this in a small leather book he departed leaving me feeling decidedly uncomfortable.

Visions of my hospital being closed through misunderstanding; of these poor tired fellows being jogged in another direction just as they thought they were going to get a little rest, kindled my anger and made me resolved to find the doctor before nightfall or perish in the attempt.

I took Madame Guix into my confidence and we decided to alarm no one but quickly make our resolutions and act on them immediately. The telephone was useless. Communication with headquarters would only lead to complications. There were just two courses left. One was to drive to La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre, twelve miles south where I knew there was a big sanitary formation, already full to overflowing, so there was no danger of their wanting our men. But here we could get a doctor who might possibly consent to pay the necessary visit, thereby proving our efficiency, saving the situation, and giving Headquarters time to redeem itself.

The second plan was to go down to Charly and throw ourselves on the mercy of an elderly civilian doctor, the avowed enemy of the *médecin militaire* who had been left with no less than fifty-four townships to look after through the mobilising of his confrères. He spent most of his time, therefore, on the high-road drawn by a knock-kneed, bony old horse in the only conveyance the military requisitions had left him—a queer high-wheeled buggy that could be heard rattling miles off.

Madame Guix chose the mission to La Ferté, and she and George departed in one direction with old Cesar, leaving me to tramp down to Charly in a weird frame of mind. It was rather a delicate thing to ask a favour of this tired old physician whom up to now I had ignored, giving preference to a much younger and more brilliant colleague every time I had had need of medical assistance before the war. Doctor Véru had little by little lost his practice and until August, 1914, spent most of his declining years compiling a literary masterpiece which was destined to refute a much talked of thesis on the folly of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Doubt seized me as I rang his bell. I stood little or no chance of finding him home. I stammered something to Madame Véru who opened the door and didn't seem the least surprised at my visit. Yes, the doctor was visible; would be down in just a moment.

My story was brief and I was most fortunate in finding the doctor in excellent humour. He not only saw my embarrassment but was so anxious to save me any further ennui that half an hour later found us in my drawing-room with my shirtless patients standing at the foot of their beds awaiting medical inspection.

"Nothing really serious, Madame," was the verdict he pronounced. "A little cupping, some tincture of iodine, and plenty of rest." The sergeant had taken notes.

"No special diet, doctor?"

"Plenty of clean, wholesome food, that's all. I will call to-morrow and see if anything has developed. Good-bye, Madame."

I tried to thank him but he turned a deaf ear. I stood on the door sill watching him drive away, and by the time he turned the corner a military motor with Madame Guix in the seat of honour swung into the yard. Then she too had been successful!

I dashed indoors calling loudly for the sergeant. He appeared.

"Tell your men if they want to stay here, to make ready for medical inspection and to hold their tongues! *Vite, vite!*" I called.

The fellow looked at me as though I had suddenly lost my mind.

"Do what I tell you and lose no time. Here comes the military doctor." The sergeant vanished. Since this man had taken the trouble to come all that distance, what was the use of quenching his enthusiasm, and seeming ungrateful?

A stout middle-aged major entered the vestibule, greeted me politely and proceeded at once to the ward, where once again our "poilus" patiently endured the ordeal of thumping and listening, not a murmur rising from a single mouth.

The sergeant followed in the Major's wake, and Madame Guix gave every attention to instructions.

"*Rien de grave.* Paint them with iodine, one or two poultices, and give them plenty to build them up; I'll come back day after to-morrow unless you advise me to the contrary," and he proceeded to sign a sheet which Godec held out to him attesting his visit.

It was scarcely a half hour since Doctor Véru had pronounced the selfsame words and signed identically the same paper, yet not a person in the room winked an eyelid though I am sure more than I appreciated the comedy.

I accompanied the Major to the door and had barely seen him out ere Nini announced that two officers were waiting for me in my office.

"We are the doctor and the pharmacist sent to take charge of your hospital."

"Poor patients," I gasped, mentally, as the idea of a third inspection raced through my brain.

"Certainly, gentlemen," I said, "won't you be seated? I am delighted to welcome you, I am sure."

Someone rapped on the door.

"Come in," I called. Sergeant Godec entered and saluted.

"Madame, the inspector is outside. He says he has made all arrangements. . . ."

"You show the inspector your two signed sheets," I cut in. "And if he wants any further information tell him to ask for an appointment with the Médecin-Chef who has taken over authority here. Otherwise we will consider the incident closed."

The morrow brought another ten men to Annexe No. 7, and Sunday night found the downstairs wards almost completely full. Our patients were all men of the younger classes who had seen the retreat from Charleroi to the Marne; the advance from the Marne to the Aisne, and were most of them suffering from physical breakdowns. Three days, however, had done much towards making the lads feel that ours was a home rather than a hospital, and evening inspection became more a moment to be looked forward to than dreaded. I used up pints of iodine painting chests, pounds of flax-seed making poultices, and the quantity of *tizane* that was absorbed without a murmur was most astonishing.

Our most genial inmate was a blondheaded miner from the North quickly nicknamed "Chou" or "Chou-Chou" and our treatment for his little hacking cough was a source of amusement to his entire ward, all of whom were simple peasants who had never before had need of care. The doctor had ordered cupping, both on his chest and back, and as we had no regular glasses, we were obliged to use thick kitchen tumblers. The boys clustered around Chou's bed to watch Madame Guix whisk the little pieces of ignited cotton into the glass which was promptly placed on the skin. Chou didn't mind it a bit; in fact he used to grin and treat the whole thing as a *partie de plaisir* begging *encore un! encore un!*

The remedy not producing the desired effect as rapidly as desired we were ordered to double the dose and let the cups remain on longer. So next evening we commenced our rounds by Chou's bed and when we had visited the entire wards, returned to him to remove his *ventouses,* only to find that he had calmly fallen asleep; dozed off with twenty cups drawing the blood to the surface of his skin for nearly half an hour. And what is still more astonishing is the fact that we raised him up and removed them all without his ever opening his eyes.

Monday morning brought consternation in the kitchen for the amount of meat required staggered the two country butchers who had guaranteed to scour the neighbourhood and furnish us with what we desired. As to the vegetables, well, our meagre staff which had been swelled by volunteers from among the village women, peeled and peeled and continued peeling, it seemed to me that they had never finished.

A glance at the refectory told of the famished condition of our patients, for Sergeant Godec had been obliged to pin up signs which read as follows:

DON'T BE GREEDY. THE DISH WILL BE PASSED TWICE. THE FIRST SERVED KINDLY REMEMBER THERE ARE THIRTY-FOUR OTHERS TO BE FED.

Poor lads my only worry was that we outstretch our credit, for the Government allowed us but thirty-six cents a day per man, and my bank account was closed up tight at the Crédit Lyonnais, in Paris.

At first I refrained from visiting the refectory during mealtime for fear of intimidating the boys, but the peals of laughter and shouts of joy that arose from that direction were so enticing that the third day I could no longer resist and arrived just as Yvonne placed a huge steaming platter of stew in front of Sergeant Godec. His neighbour leaned towards him, sniffed the appetising aroma, then turning towards his comrades exclaimed with a strange huskiness in his voice—

"Boys—it's veal! ! !"

And two great tears of joy sprang from his eyes and trickled down his sunburned cheeks. My own grew misty as I turned away.

We had been running on thus for about a fortnight without anything new or startling having occurred. All Saints' Day came and went, followed by All Souls' Day, *"le jour des morts."* It had dawned in a most depressing fashion with rain tinkling against the paper that replaced our window panes, and the mournful tolling of the church bells in memory of the Faithful Departed aggravated my every doubt. Alas, there were so many to pray for this year, and who could tell what another day might bring forth.

It was a positive relief when the bell rang for supper, and I could hear the joyful voices calling through the corridors: *"La soupe! La soupe! Vive la soupe!"*

My nurse and I were resting a moment before our own meal, silently meditating in front of the fire. Our reverie was short lived, however, for someone knocked at the door and announced that the widow X— from the Black Farm was downstairs and wanted to see me. It was urgent.

I knew of many but could think of no pressing reasons why the woman should demand me. I had seen neither her nor her ten year old daughter since our return after the invasion. Perhaps she was short of funds. Madame Guix said she would go and attend to the matter.

As I passed my office on the way to supper a sob attracted my attention and as I opened the door I could hear Madame Guix saying, "There, there, I am sure he'll go."

The haggard looking woman hastily brushed the tears from her eyes and stood up.

"She says her little daughter is ill; has been for some time. Wants to know if our doctor won't go and see her."

"What's the trouble with her?" I asked.

This brought forth new tears.

"I don't know—I don't know," sobbed the woman. "O, do come, do come!"

Already well acquainted with the primitive methods of caring for the ill still so prevalent among the peasants in this particular district; realising that often for economy's sake medical assistance was not summoned until too late to be of any use, I judged that this case must indeed be urgent.

I sought out our doctor and laid the matter before him. He expressed his willingness to make the visit, and the woman having refused our offer of something hot to stimulate her, patiently waited until we had finished our evening meal. Then the four of us set out together, leaving the pharmacist in charge of the hospital.

What a wild night it was. The wind howled most dismally through the pine trees and drove the rain in sheets against our faces. We chose a short cut down our avenue, and as we plodded along through the layers of moist leaves each footstep added another noise to the tempest. There were moments when it was hard to tell whether it were guns or thunder that rent the air, and as now and again we would emerge into the open, I fancied I saw lightning—or was it the flash of distant searchlights seeking out enemy's aeroplanes?

At the little iron gate which marks the extreme limit of our property, we clustered together and I held the lantern closer to enable my nurse to better insert the key. A tremendous gust of wind that sent the frightened night-birds screaming from their perches, blew out the light and left us in total darkness. We were now nearly a mile from the house; it was useless to think of retracing our steps. To try to light a match was hopeless. There was nothing to do but continue.

What a mad, ghastly tramp we had, our doctor, Madame Guix and myself, following in the path of that sorrow stricken mother, slipping and sliding on the steep inclines, the noise about us such as to make one wonder whether God or man were not doing their utmost to shatter poor old mother earth.

After nearly an hour's climb, puffing and panting, dripping with rain and perspiration we finally reached an isolated farmhouse. Our guide entered first and we followed close behind to see an old white-bonneted peasant woman crouching in the corner of the hearth, her face lighted by the glow of the dying embers.

"Mother, he's come", said Madame X— rousing the dozing figure.

"God be praised, God be praised", mumbled the little old woman bustling about to light a candle.

"Where is the child?" asked the doctor after having removed his raincoat that had covered his uniform.

He followed the woman to a doorway and over his shoulder I could see stretched out on a humble bed a puny, emaciated child. Surely her visage was familiar. Of course I knew her! She had been in my catechism class that year and had made her First Communion in June. Could it be possible? What a change had come over her! The mother bent over her and gently called "Elvire, Elvire". At the touch of her hand the child started and shivered.

"Elvire," called the woman, "here's the doctor and Madame Huard. They've come to see you."

The girl cast a glance in our direction, her eyes falling on the doctor in uniform who stood nearest her. With a wild yell she caught at the covers and in one bound was in the other corner of the room.

"I am afraid! I am afraid!" she shrieked. "Don't come near me! don't, don't!" Her little body was quaking, tortured by her spirit.

The old grandmother darted into the room and seizing the doctor by the arm motioned him to come away.

"Elvire," pleaded the broken-hearted mother, "Elvire, he's gone."

"But he'll come back! no! no! I'm afraid, no, don't let him come, don't let him touch me."

"Elvire," I called, my voice shaking with horror and emotion. "Elvire, don't you remember me? Surely—Madame Huard? Don't you remember how we used to sing together last Spring."

A queer choking sound came from her throat. Her eyes softened but no tears came. There were none left.

Then followed the hardest moral struggle I ever hope to experience; a full half hour in which I sought to convince this little fearcowed animal of my integrity. And when at last I held that tiny heaving body against my breast, saw the eyes close peacefully, I knew that I had won a victory.

Elvire slept, slept for the first time since the fifth of September. We had already guessed the woeful truth but to corroborate our direst suppositions, the tales of German cowardice and brutality that mid tears and lamentations we wrung from those grief-bowed peasant women made me feel that war might pass and peace might come again, but I could never pardon.

III

"FOURTEEN more soldiers and an Arab", announced Nini as she pushed open the shutters and prepared to pour the steaming water into my improvised bath-tub. I rubbed my eyes. What was the child saying?

"*Oui, Madame*—fourteen more soldiers, and such a lovely Arab—he's got the military medal too."

"When did they come, why didn't you wake me, you knew"—

"They got here about five o'clock. The Doctor gave orders not to disturb anyone. They're almost all bathed now."

Fourteen more, that made forty-four, and already the butchers had encountered difficulty in providing sufficient meat for thirty!

At breakfast which consisted of coffee and bread, the latter held on a long twig before the flame of our dining room fire if we wished it toasted—the doctor confirmed Nini's report.

There was no question of taking time even to say a word of welcome to the newcomers.

The doctor was there to attend to their sufferings, if they had any, and Madame Guix had found a very able assistant in the person of Mademoiselle Alice Foerter, saleslady in one of the big shops on the Avenue de l'Opéra, and whom the invasion had surprised spending her vacation with her parents at Villiers.

When suddenly overnight one finds one's family augmented by fourteen hungry mouths, there is only one thing left to do—hustle!

I gulped my coffee and started down the kitchen corridor. Suddenly at the other extremity the door opened and an unfamiliar military figure wearing the red cloth bloomers of a Zouave, emerged from the culinary regions. His face was unknown to me, but in a twinkling my eye had recognised the topcoat of an artilleryman, and the Alpine soldiers' bonnet! High in the air above his head, balanced on one hand was a tray full of dishes.

I was surely more disconcerted than he, for he continued his approach, and as he drew up to me made a most dramatic pirouette, saluted and said—

"Lambert, the new orderly—at your service, Madame."

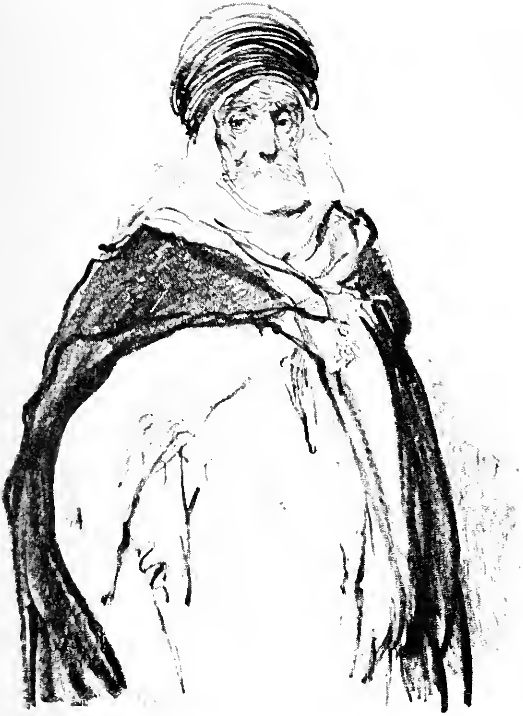
I murmured a word of welcome, and for want of something better to say asked him to what branch of the service he belonged.

"The Light Infantry, Madame", he replied, continuing his way.

If he had said the "Kaiser's personal suite", I shouldn't have been more astonished—for nothing about his bearing or uniform betokened in the slightest degree, the service he had mentioned.

Some poor, harmless lunatic—I'd find out more about him later on: just at present it was luncheon that was worrying us.

A few days before it had been an easy thing to solve the food problem, but added to our troubles of the moment was the rapid disappearance of the little coal that remained in my bunkers, after the invasion, and which our large kitchen range was now consuming with alarming celerity. For this there was but one thing to be done, admonish those in charge to "Go easy"—and then set about getting someone to saw wood into several even lengths—because, once our coal supply exhausted there was no way of its being replenished. Even in peace times it had to come by rail to Nogent—eight



AMED-BEN-MOHAMED, NINI'S ARAB, WHO BELONGED TO OUR MOROCCAN TROOPS

miles away—and at present there was no railway—at least for civilian, or even hospital needs. Heaven help us if it ever grew cold enough to need a furnace!

As to the food supply it was now a question of canvassing the whole outlying vicinity—of getting not only our own, but butchers as far as fifteen miles the round, to help swell our rations. This was doubly difficult because in most cases the butchers themselves were at the front and had left only their wives to replace them. To their lot then fell the procuring, the killing, the actual chopping up and delivery—a heroic job when one considers that there wasn't a single horse under twenty years of age left to haul the carts that could be improvised—and doubly meritorious when there were young children to be looked after.

It was raining, as usual, a nasty cold drizzle that discouraged one from the start! I fancy one never really gets accustomed to paddling about in heavy wooden sabots, or having one's every covering permeated almost immediately one stirs abroad. It was like living in an aquarium. Nevertheless it had to be braved, and I spent that and a number of the following mornings arranging a regular daily routine, which if carried out as promised would save further complications.

It was not until after luncheon that I made the acquaintance of the latest arrivals, who occupied a ward on the first floor. In such cases there can be no introduction, one merely passes from bed to bed, with a word of encouragement for each and every newcomer, and later on the perusal of the sergeant's sheet tells from whence they hail, and what is their calling. During the entire time the Château de Villiers functioned as a hospital we never had a patient of culture or refinement; ours were children of the soil—and it is constant contact with such souls as theirs that gives one an insight to the heretofore undreamed of qualities of the French race.

In all the long dreary months during which hundreds of these humble, uncouth peasants who ranged from eighteen to fifty years of age, came and went from my home; mid their sufferings and joys, I never heard a vulgar oath, an unkind word, and yet I knew that with us they felt they were under no restraint.

Of the men who composed the upstairs ward, those whom I recall the best were Amed-ben-Mohamed, Nini's Arab, who belonged to our Moroccan troops, and Lambert, he of the Zouave bloomers—who evacuated for chronic asthma, had elected the kitchen as the best place to proceed with his cure. Besides, what could the Doctor say—a Red-Cross sleeve band which was the chief adornment of his extraordinary uniform, and which I forgot to mention, stamped him as stretcher-bearer on the battlefield, orderly in a hospital—and pray where was the proper place for any self-respecting orderly if not in the kitchen!

Our doctor closed his eyes a trifle to such proceedings. We were in need of all the help we could get—and any voluntary assistance in the matter of carrying trays and washing dishes was not to be discouraged.

Amed-ben-Mohamed, quickly dubbed "Sidi" —whose entire French vocabulary consisted of three words—*Boche, salaud, capoute*—had some little difficulty in explaining to our doctor for just what reason he had been evacuated. Fever, he certainly had—but not sufficient to prevent him from raising himself on his elbow and leisurely smoking a package of cigarettes a day. And just as we had diagnosed appendicitis the pain would suddenly shift, and become congestion of the lungs, and every symptom was there! The days that his malady permitted him to take his meals in the refectory with the others, his chief occupation was to discover whether or not he was being served with pork, which is forbidden by his creed.

Lambert, who, among other things, had elected to wait on his fellow men at table (thereby reserving for himself the privilege of eating in the kitchen with my own domestics), took Sidi under his special tutelage, and when the forbidden viands appeared on the menu, always had some specialty dished up for him. I can see him now leaning over Sidi who had stretched out his hand towards the dish—pulling him by the sleeve and shouting *"Aloof, aloof*—not good—no, no".

"Where did you learn Arabic?" I queried.

"Picked it up when I was with the Colonial troops in Africa," came the quick reply that made all the men prick up their ears, and wonder how this pale faced sapling had ever stood the strain.

It was with the first comers that we became most quickly acquainted. They had been allotted the ward in the drawing-room, where the broad hearth with its brilliant pine wood fire was most inviting, and the groups that clustered about it gradually lost their shyness, and at the end of a week were freely discussing the one and only topic of the time—the war. Not that any of them ever spoke, or even alluded to the individual part that he had played therein. Personal narratives had to be extracted piecemeal, and yet many among the lads wore the cross for bravery.

It was more like a house party than anything else, and little by little the men from the other rooms would come down bringing their chairs, to spend an hour or so mid this genial company.

A touching attention which won my heart immediately was the fact that I could come upon them at any time of the day or evening, and always find my favourite armchair vacant, awaiting me. The presence of a woman amongst them never created the slightest shyness, nor awkward feeling. We were all partners in the same great struggle—and we knew it. I must admit, however, that mine was the only place respected, for time and again I have watched a boy sit near the kindly blaze—literally steaming in his clothes—loath to give up his favourite spot—knowing that a breathing trip to the window would lose him his seat for the next hour at least!

Now and again the doctor was called to Château-Thierry to make his report, and each time he returned he would bring the daily paper. What a rare treat it was. One of us women would seize it and immediately read the news aloud to all assembled, and then the little flimsy, single sheet would pass from hand to hand—and when finally consigned to the waste basket was nearer pulp than paper!

If the news were favourable tongues wagged almost gaily, planning future advances, most of the men foreshadowing the time when home and loved ones would be liberated from the oppressors' heel. If the news were not so good, far from discouraging its readers, it seemed to stimulate their ardour.

"Ah, la, la! what's fifty yards of trenches—let 'em look out for themselves to-morrow!" And almost invariably the next day the cannon would roar in our immediate vicinity.

"What did I tell you! they're pounding on the cathedral at Soissons, that means they've lost somewhere up the line!"

At first I imagined that this was merely supposition but later on I found it to be true; and long before we could procure the *"Communiqué"* we were able to judge the success of our troops from the more or less heavy bombardment inflicted by the Germans upon our nearest open city.

"What good can it do 'em to waste their shells like that?"

"They're just mad—they've got to break something."

"Mad, well they'll be madder yet before we get through with 'em! It'll take 'em a hundred years to recover. We gave 'em a taste of what we could do at the Marne—didn't we?"

"Just give us time and—" . . .

"When do you think it'll all be over?" timidly inquired "La Petite Jaquette," who like Cinderella was always to be found bending over the fire, stirring some mysterious remedy.

"Over! how can I tell—but I don't see what you've got to growl about—isn't this place good enough for *you?"*

That November there seemed to be no end to the bad weather. It rained on and on hopelessly and ceaselessly, housing the men for weeks at a time, and making it necessary to invent amusements, for once the home letters written, time hung heavy on the hands of these twoscore patients who were making rapid strides towards complete recovery.

From somewhere in the ruins a battered chess board had been extracted, and a clever cabinet maker turned us out a hand-made set of men. This, however, was distraction for a half dozen at most—the two players and their nearest neighbours, who used to bet their week's dessert on their favourites.

Someone found a chromo-lithograph, which was ironed out, glued to a board, and then sawed into a hundred pieces, making an entertaining picture puzzle.

Last, but not least, Lambert produced a pack of cards which might have been carried through the war of 1870, if one were to judge their age by their colour!

"Where'd you get them?" inquired a delighted devotee.

"In Belgium, when I was with the Lancers!"

The interlocutor scratched his head.

"I thought you said you belonged to the Colonial Infantry?"

But Lambert had already discreetly retired beyond hearing.

It seemed to me that every one of these men had a different way of telling fortunes—and between *séances* the pack would be borrowed by ardent lovers of "Ecarté" or "Manille".

I tried to introduce poker, but not being an expert at the game myself, my efforts were fruitless, and I was gently but firmly informed that if one really wanted to gamble for buttons or pebbles, Baccarat far surpassed any American invention.

Another favourite pastime was singing. Native talent was not sufficient to permit us to graduate even to two part songs—but each and every man, no matter what his vocal qualities has some favourite ditty—some patriotic, some sentimental—but for the most part dear old folk songs characteristic of the realm from which the singer came. It is really extraordinary in what rapt silence forty men will sit listening to a long drawn out story, whose primitive musical accompaniment becomes more than wearying after the twenty-second verse; and it is stranger still when one considers that the French soldier usually so modest about displaying his talents can be called upon for a *chanson* at almost any time or place—and willingly complies—standing up and pouring out his heart, absolutely unconscious of his surroundings.

It was thus that a sad faced, sallow cheeked, middle aged man called Lebras, insisted upon getting in his turn every time our impromptu concert began. And after the third or fourth stanza—each one of which commenced—"The snow is gently falling"—he would be obliged to gasp for breath owing to his rundown physical condition.

"Don't strain yourself old man", gently hinted a companion a bit bored.

"No danger, I'm all right now", replied the singer, grasping the rail of his bed to steady himself, and literally growing purple in his attempt to keep on key.

"Don't overdo, it isn't worth while. Plenty of time to-morrow", suggested another confrère, guessing my mental agony.

"I'm still game", would come the reply, and as though storming an enemy position the fellow would valiantly stick to his post—only to fall panting on his bed mid thundering applause from his audience.

"Awful ordeal for you, Madame", whispered little wide-awake Sergeant Lorrain by way of apology, "But he's such a good fellow we can't let him down. He's got a wife and three kids, and he won that medal for going out and fetching in his captain who was agonising twenty yards in front of his trenches. We can stand a lot more from him if you can."

I once mentioned this extraordinary willingness to vocalise in public to an officer friend of mine, a captain. He smiled at my story and in return told such an amusing illustration of this particular propensity, that I cannot resist quoting it here.

"It was Christmas and the sections who behind the lines were awaiting their turn to go to the trenches, asked my permission to organise a concert in a tumble-down shed at the extreme end of the village. The whole thing was superintended by a shoemaker—jack of all trades—under whose direction a stage was rigged up and a couple of acetylene lamps actually made to burn."

"The concert went off splendidly and the next morning the participating artists packed up their kits and ambled forth to the trenches, their extra terrestial faces still beatified by the intense jubilation of the night before."

"These two sections relieved two others who came back to the cantonment with brows knitted and hearts swelled with bitterness at not having been able to attend the party."

"Naturally the others had put aside their share of the refreshments. The tables were again set up, and each one got his orange, his cigar, his piece of cheese, his nuts and a cupful of champagne. When the bottle had gone the rounds there was a general demand for a song and several volunteers rose."

"About eleven o'clock that night", continued the captain, "I was making a round when I caught sight of the lights in the shed, and quickly hastened in that direction. I opened the door and at the other extremity of the hall, mounted on the brilliantly lighted platform was a soldier, who, one hand on his heart was singing—

"*Quand les lilas fleuriront—ont—ont.*"

"So engrossed was he by his song that he didn't perceive my presence, and the second glance showed me that the fellow was singing to empty seats. All his companions, dead tired, had rolled themselves up in their blankets and were peacefully sleeping at his feet!"

The greatest sensation of the month was the arrival of a real wounded man. The little temporary hospital at Rebais, where Madame Guix had taken care of so many cases during the invasion, was closing its doors for lack of patients. One alone remained, a chap named Paul Coutin, who had had a leg amputated but was hardly sufficiently recovered from the operation to be dismissed from the army and thrown helpless upon the world. He had been a great favourite with Madame Guix who was delighted to have him finish his convalescence at Villiers, so, thanks to my notary who acted as intermediary between the two military doctors, we finally obtained his permission, and Paul was duly transferred in mâitre Baudoin's little wheezing motor.

His arrival was a triumph and the boys clustered round him, almost envious of his misfortune, which had no doubt won him the military medal.

Appreciating that he was no longer "In the game", Paul made light of his affliction, and willingly told us of his campaign. It was doubly interesting to me, for after making the retreat from Charleroi and reaching Château Thierry he had covered practically the same ground as I in my flight to safety, and it was a joyful surprise to find that he belonged to that same cavalry regiment that I had watched from a street corner in Rebais, setting off to battle at two in the morning with smiles on their lips and joy enough to appreciate my invocations of good luck.

"You never saw such a mess in all your life", explained Paul to a group of admirers. "We got into a hand to hand fight with the Boches, on the top of the hill overlooking Château Thierry. It was dusk, when we started and before we knew it, it was pitch dark, the darkest night you can imagine. Of all the rows you ever heard, this was the toughest—but the worst of it was we couldn't tell our men from theirs. You'd hear a horseman coming down on you, and I'm blessed if there was a way of finding out whether he was friend or enemy. Finally in the midst of it all the German bugle blew "Stop the fight"—and someone yelled in French "Go to it fellows!" and you bet we went. Cleaned house thoroughly. Half an hour later when we got orders to draw off, and I came up with Joseph, our bugler, he was still laughing over the good joke he'd played on the Boches."

"But our Adjutant didn't think it was a joke at all. Most of us had left more or less of our equipment on the battlefield, and all the way to Rebais we scrapped with him about what the Captain would say next day when we were lined up."

From Rebais Paul had participated in the battle of the Morin, and it was during the French advance that he had been picked off by a German sharpshooter, hiding in the bushes. His horse slightly wounded had cantered away leaving Paul sprawling on the ground with a bullet through his knee.

He probably fainted, for when he woke up it was night, and his faithful steed was licking his face. His first movement afforded much agony—but nevertheless he determined to look at his wound as soon as possible. He managed to find a match in his pocket, and striking it, he was horrified at the condition of his leg, which was swollen so he could not remove his boot. While wondering what was going to become of him, dawn broke and through the mist he could see a horseman advancing in his direction. A second later he recognised a Uhlan coming head-on, his lance lowered! Paul made a desperate effort to reach his gun, which had fallen not far from his side, but his pain was so great that he could not stir.

In his picturesque language the lad told how he thought his last moment had come when the Uhlan dashing upon him, raised his lance, and then to Paul's utter surprise, instead of running him through—suddenly let his arm drop, dismounted and offered our wounded hero a drink of water and a couple of cigarettes!

"The next thing I remember was some peasants hoisting me into their cart, and when I woke up Madame Guix was cutting off my boot."

Once strong as a young ox, just as soon as he was able to be about, Paul began exercising so as not to become soft. He had been a turner of steel pieces in a motor factory, and had every intention of returning to his old trade. He very shortly became expert at getting around on his crutches, and his effort to convince himself and us that he was not physically inferior because he was one leg minus, were heroically pathetic.

I have seen him kick off a base in an improvised foot ball game for which we made new rules, and once when he was standing in the courtyard, George led out old Cesar to harness. His remembrance of the animal who had so faithfully borne him through the fight, rushed like blood to his head. Dropping his crutches with a superhuman effort, he gave a spring, arriving safely on Cesar's back, and triumphantly cantered to the front door.

Strange as it may seem the boys had no horror of Paul's infirmity. The exhibition of his stump, and the measuring to see if enough had been left to assure him a wooden leg, were a source of great merriment to his entire ward.

Through some physiological phenomenon,

for which I do not recall the English technical name, the stump itself rapidly became covered with an abundant growth of hair. One morning after the visit, Paul asked Madame Guix what she thought was the cause, and too busy to enter into details, my nurse replied that she supposed it was all the iodine she had used as disinfectant.

The matter was dropped there, but the next morning I was astonished to see Sergeant Godec and Martin with their heads tied up.

"Severe toothache", replied Godec to my inquiry. Martin didn't even say as much—but rocked himself to and fro in his armchair, the perspiration trickling down his cheeks.

Fancying there was something amiss, I went to the doctor, who with a twinkle in his eye, and at the risk of violating the professional secret, informed me that both Martin and Godec, who were bald as bats, had overheard Madame Guix informing Paul about the abnormal growth of hair on his stump. So that same evening on retiring, each one had painted the other's unadorned head with sufficient iodine to raise a tremendous blister, and in the middle of the night so great was their agony that they were obliged to rouse the doctor, and sheepishly avowing their vanity, supplicate him to ease their pain—and above all *not* to tell the others.

This same Martin was the oldest of all our patients. Over forty, he belonged to the territorials, and had not weathered the Fall campaign very well. Rheumatism, asthma and bronchitis had laid him low—but not sufficiently to require his remaining in bed. A builder by trade, he used to wander around all over the place, and at night by light of the lamp would make plans for reconstruction when the war should be over.

Much to his annoyance the chimney in his room drew very poorly, and in the middle of the night would often send out puffs of suffocating smoke. Martin stood it as long as he could, and then finally having raked up a plank, at the price of much puffing and blowing, climbed up three flights of stairs and pushed his board out a window onto the roof. These extraordinary proceedings were observed with much interest by all those who were able to be abroad, and any quantity of good advice as to what to do to prevent slipping or falling, was offered by the admiring spectators.

Martin's appearance, pulling himself through a little round window that was scarce bigger than a port hole, was greeted by a roar of applause from below. Quick to see fun he replied by removing his cap and making a profound bow.

Peals of laughter from the audience, and then almost breathless silence while Martin consolidated his plank and tried it with one foot. Then he returned to the window and drew forth a long pole, to which was tied a broom. Everyone guessed what he was going to do with it, and after he had successfully reached the crest of the chimney and the tight-rope act was no longer a novelty, the men began talking in groups, while Martin poked away for a good five minutes.

"Is it as full as all that?" called someone, just for the sake of saying something.

"Shh!" returned a neighbour in a loud whisper, "He thinks he's in an observation post. Don't disturb him."

This was followed by general giggling among the boys.

"Something's let go," cried Martin triumphantly, and at the same moment a fearful shriek arose from indoors. Everyone made a dash towards the entrance, and following in their wake I arrived just in time to see "La Petite Jaquette" emerge from the doorway, sputtering and spitting and literally covered with some clear, slimy liquid.

"I'm drowned, I'm suffocating—what a dirty trick to play—if ever I get hold of the rascal who did it!" gasped Cinderella junior.

"Did what?" they all shrieked in chorus.

"Threw that pot of nasty, sticky stuff down the chimney on my head!"

"Sticky stuff?" The boys looked at each other and then at Betsy, my bull dog, who having followed "La Petite Jaquette" in his flight, was calmly licking the ground surrounding him.

"It's honey, I do believe—of course it is!"

In the meantime Martin was wildly gesticulating from the roof.

"Get a jar, get a bowl, don't lose any of it".

Unfortunately when we arrived it was too late—the lovely honeycomb had received too severe a shock and lay burst wide apart mid the ashes and soot in the fireplace. In its fall it had smeared the sides of the chimney, and for weeks afterwards one could smell caramel whenever Martin's fire gleamed most brightly.

One of the most interesting things about my hospital from a psychological point of view, was the rapidity with which the occupants acquired the sensation of possession. Within a fortnight after their arrival the hospital was no longer called "Hospital number seven," but *our* hospital—then presently, *our* château—our Villiers. Shortly after we had been established the convent in our market town, some four miles down the road, was drafted by the military authority and used for similar purposes. When there was a lull in the eternal drizzle some of the poor fellows at Charly who were literally cloistered, would take a constitutional, pushing as far at times as our village. Seeing our Red Cross flag one or two of them ventured into the park, but were promptly ejected by our men.

"This is private property", I heard them say.

"I know", timidly protested the other, "but it's a hospital now".

"What if it is, that doesn't make it public, does it?"

"No, but"—

"There is not any but about it, we don't come down to Charly snooping around in your business, do we? No! then don't you come snooping around up here!"

What they said was perfectly true, for though there was a ten foot wall and a moat around the entire property, we never dreamed of closing the gates, even at night. Aside from promenades in the park when weather permitted, the boys did not seem to care about tramping on the high-road, visiting the country round. They probably realised that they'd have more of that than they bargained for just as soon as they left us.

Presently our doctor announced that our patients were doing so well that two medical inspections a day were useless, henceforth there would be but one, at eight in the morning. Not long afterwards Madame Guix discovered that around five P. M. few of the boys could be found indoors, and that at bedtime many of them had a high color, bright eyes and very glib tongues. From the housekeeper's totals it was easy to discover that there was a decided falling off in appetite at the evening meal.

Something was amiss, but what? Who was doing it? How was it done? We set our brains to working, and very quickly we supposed that because of an attractive seventeen year old daughter, Monceau, the one and only inn-keeper in the town, had lured the boys into his café. I even went the length of making a surprise visit that cost me a bottle of peach brandy for which I then had no use whatsoever. All of no avail.

It was Lambert who let the cat out of the bag. For some unknown reason he got into a dispute with George who peasant-like, did not make much choice of terms, and told Lambert he was either crazy or drunk.

Resenting both insults, but sufficiently master of himself to realise the punishment if he were proven intoxicated, the chap who had bragged about belonging to the Colonial Infantry, and to the Belgian Lancers almost in the same breath, decided to act the madman. Falling on the floor he began wriggling about, calling for his wife in most endearing terms, and literally frightening to tears the women in the kitchen who ran out screaming for the doctor.

Madame Guix appeared and was just about to be taken in by the comedy, when the doctor himself, returning from his walk an hour earlier than usual, loomed upon the scene.

Lambert's delirium redoubled. It was indeed high art. But our doctor was not to be fooled. He ordered a dash of ice cold water, and then that Lambert be put to bed.

Half an hour later, in spite of his every effort to seem wild and wandering, his eyes closed and he dropped to sleep. And it was while Madame Guix and I sat near him wondering when and how all this had come about, that our patient began mumbling in his sleep. At first I paid no attention to his ramblings, but presently when the words "Père Poupard" were repeated again and again, I began to listen more closely.

"I've got it", I said, and leaving the room I threw a shawl about my shoulders and started straight for Poupard's cottage.

Darkness was coming on, and something told me to look through the window before knocking at the door. Shading my eyes with my hand, I gazed and beheld—Father Poupard at one end of the table, surrounded by a full score of my patients who were gently sipping from *tumblers* different qualities of the old man's home brew. Such generosity they had never encountered in all their lives.

What was the use of making a fuss? I confided my discovery to the doctor, saying I would be responsible for the boys if he would interview Poupard.

Next morning, all I said to the whole hospital assembled was—"Gentlemen, it would be wiser to discontinue your afternoon tea parties."

They understood and obeyed.

IV

"MADAME, I no longer believe in God."

This startling confession which literally took me off my feet was made in my office by a pale faced, placid looking little man called Batiot, who had asked for a private interview and was hardly seated before he burst forth with the statement as though anxious to relieve his mind.

Batiot was one of our latest arrivals, and known to me as suffering from nervous breakdown. My particular attention had been drawn to him through the fact that when able to get about, he had seemed so keenly afflicted at being obliged to put on his soiled military togs, that for our own moral welfare, as well as his, we had scoured the village and finally managed to rig him out with a threadbare blue serge suit, two sizes too large, and a queer little knitted tamoshanter, which clung to his head like a scull cap. Thus equipped he had a strange, vague resemblance to the late President Carnot, which his room mates had not failed to observe, and from then on he was known as none other.

"What do you mean Batiot? Surely you are jesting", said I sparring for time.

"No, madame, I was never more serious in my life."

"Hum! well much as I'd like to be I fear I am hardly the person to come to under such circumstances. Were you a Christian?"

"Yes."

"A Catholic?"

"Yes."

"Then, I should advise you to have a talk with our priest down at Charly. If you are not well enough to go, I'll try to make arrangements to have him come here. Does that suit you?"

"Le President" said it did, but with no apparent enthusiasm, and our conversation ended there.

Not even my onerous daily duties drove that interview from my mind. It worried me. Here was one more proof that the spirit of unrest was gaining foothold in our midst. Various insignificant incidents, together with the "Tea parties *chez Poupard*" were sufficient indication that the boys were chafing for the want of something to amuse them. But what? We had racked our brains and invented every plausible pastime for grown-ups that our limited means permitted.

Deciding that two heads were better than one, I went to Madame Guix about the matter.

"They're just longing for something to do," she said.

"I quite agree with you. Can you suggest something? You know they're not strong enough to take up military training of any kind, otherwise they'd have been dismissed from here long ago and sent to their barracks."

"Surely, but perhaps there are other less fatiguing things. You see they've been civilians so long here that their remembrances of their military campaign have become misty, and their ordinary occupations are what they crave. I don't believe any one of them ever had so much time to be ill in all his life."

I smiled, realizing that my companion was right. But how to go about it? We had men from every branch of the trades, and the prospect of opening up a blacksmith shop, or a glass factory seemed hardly feasible at the moment, and I said so.

"Mercy"! exclaimed Madame Guix, "I don't mean anything of the kind is necessary. Most of our boys have probably some homely domestic talent that they are ashamed to display unless we prove we are all in need of it. They're far too timid to volunteer."

"Do you really think so?"

"I'm sure of it, and you would laugh if you were in the drawing-room this minute and could see Paul and 'Chou' winding off my skein of wool."

"What's the president by trade"? I asked her.

"I don't know but I'll find out at once."

In a few moments she returned bearing the news that he was a tailor!

"What luck—the sergeant has been boring the doctor to death for the last week begging permission to go to headquarters and ask for a pair of trousers. His are all worn out. Do you think the president would object to putting on the patch?"

We called him and put the question. From the way his eyes brightened, I felt we were not mistaken.

"All I need is a thimble, needles, thread, a table and the material, and I'd make you a suit if you'd like to have me."

The thimble, needles and thread were easy enough to procure, but an empty table, in a place where furniture was already so scarce gave us food for reflection—and when we had solved the problem by sacrificing our own dining-room board between meals, the question of the material out of which to make the patches proved to be a puzzler. It was useless to think of going to a store. There were no drapers at Villiers and at Charly, Madame Maury had had her place looted and burned by the Germans.

"I'll tell you", suddenly piped up the president, "You get Lambert to give us his Zouave bloomers; there's enough in them to make him a fine pair of ordinary trousers, and there'll be plenty left over to do all the patching we need."

What a brilliant idea! We acted upon it immediately, but evidently counted without Lambert, for if we had proposed to rob him of his soul, I hardly think any mortal could have been more indignant. He flew into a rage.

"What, take my bloomers to make patches! Never! I'd rather go out and throw them in the river than let you put your scissors into them—you sacrilegious, white livered, jelly-fish!" he screamed at the helpless tailor who had politely made the demand. "Trousers that have seen every battle front in France and in Africa", he continued. "Not much! These bloomers go where I go, and the only person that stands a chance of getting them is the fellow that picks up my dead body!"

His anger degenerated into tears on my appearance, and the proud owner of the "Culotte de Zouave" offered us his wedding ring, his jack-knife, a soldier's most cherished belongings, if only we would leave him his bloomers. It is useless to insist, in fact I had no right to, but as by dinner time we had found no other way of procuring material, I confided my dilemma to our officers, and jokingly recounted our fruitless efforts to deprive Lambert of his possessions.

They were greatly amused and laughed heartily. Presently the doctor sat bolt upright.

"Lambert"? said he, "Lambert? Why if

I recall aright he doesn’t belong to the Zouaves at all”! He rang for the sergeant.

“Godec”, said he, “I believe you’ve got the men’s military books in safe keeping.”

“Yes sir.”

“Well then, just bring me in Lambert’s, will you?”

“Certainly sir.”

In a few moments he returned. The doctor took the book from him, and bending over to the light carefully read through the first page.

“That will do”, said he. The sergeant disappeared, and he had hardly closed the door before the doctor turned about to us, his eyes bright with amusement.

“Lambert”, said he, “‘Lambert doesn’t any more belong to the Zouaves than I do. He’s a simple private in the *x*th Infantry, that’s all! Heaven knows where he got those trousers, but he hasn’t the slightest right in the world to them. You needn’t look any further for your patches.”

Anxious to avoid any imperative scene between officer and private, I suggested we send our night-watchman to see if he couldn’t find them hanging in the proper place. But the man returned to say that, suspicious of our plans, Lambert had retired entirely clothed.

I was absent the next morning when the sacrifice was made, but about ten o'clock when I came into the dining-room the president was proudly perched cross-legged on the table, inserting a "piece of pie" into his own red broadcloth trousers.

"It may seem selfish to do my own first", he explained, a radiant smile lighting up his face. "But you see when I can put on my own uniform, I can lend my civilian clothes to another fellow so he wont have to go to bed while I'm patching his."

So popular was the president's tailor shop that a long waiting list had to be established, and his example stimulated a cleaner to steam and press the battered kepis of his friends, who were so proud of their new uniforms that on Sundays they marched to mass two abreast, the president leading, instead of slinking out one at a time in the hope of not attracting attention.

The haberdashery department was not the sole beneficiary of this streak of enthusiasm.

Once the president had set the pace the others quickly followed suit, and in a couple of days the happy humming and whistlings that came from all quarters, denoted that each one had found a congenial occupation.

By applying to the wife of a mobilised mason, we procured lime and plaster, and under the supervision of Martin, a building squad worked two hours each pleasant afternoon repairing the damage inflicted by the Hun on the façade of the château.

Chou and his ward neighbour and boon companion, Thierage, had been particularly singled out by the doctor and the pharmacist, and just as soon as their condition permitted they were removed from the drawing-room ward, promoted to officer's orderlies, and allotted quarters in the servants' wing, which was not so easy to heat. They were especially privileged mortals, and I am glad to say that they never for a moment sought to take advantage of their situation. They literally ferreted the house from cellar to attic in search of whatever their daily occupations convinced them they required, and to this day I can see them in the court-yard cleaning the officers' sabres with fine sand and lemon rinds. Their own guns underwent the same strenuous treatment, after which they were carefully greased and put away. But with the sabres it was quite different, and fear that they should rust set Chou to thinking. A couple of hours later I came upon him begging the president to sew together long strips of variegated rags, which more resembled a kite-tail than anything I could think of. I said nothing, but watched, and presently when the tailor had complied with his request, I saw Chou sit down and start to entwine the doctor's scabbard, imitating to perfection, Madame Guix's movements and gestures when she was bandaging up an arm or a leg.

I had little or no occasion to visit the servants' quarters, and a leak, I think it was that summoned my presence to that vicinity. So I profited by the occasion to see how the "Heavenly Twins" were installed and if they needed anything I might be able to lend them. I could hardly believe my eyes when I opened the door for no *chambre de jeune fille* was ever more invitingly arranged.

From damaged rolls of paper that had been thrown out by a hanger at Charly, whose stock had been wrecked, Chou and Thierage managed to pick out enough of a kind to cover their room. With infinite pains they had measured their window, and begged Mademoiselle Alice to put a hem into two lengths of cheese cloth, which they explained they needed for personal use. Two small, neatly-made-up iron hospital beds occupied one side, and between them, and as sole ornament on that wall, a lithograph of General Joffre, extracted from a back number of "L'Illustration".

The other wall was a wonder to behold. Exactly in the centre was a marvellously constructed panoply composed of their guns, bayonets, knap-sacks and minor military trappings, together with what German trophies they had been able to retain unobserved, and on every other available square inch of space was hung a clock! Such ticking you never heard!

Watch repairer by trade, Thierage in his rummagings had unearthed different parts of my various time pieces, had soaked them in kerosene, and finally put them together. Some fifteen or sixteen wrist watches, hung up by their straps, made a regular fringe to a shelf, and not satisfied with regulating all he could procure in the entire château, he had been out in the village and solicited everything from grandfather to alarm clocks.

A couple of Southerners had investigated the interior of my piano which was much the worse for two hundred pots of jam that the Germans had seen fit to pour over the strings. They rolled the instrument into a back room and during the next week used everything from rakes to monkey wrenches trying to make the thing play. They succeeded fairly well, the upper notes responding to treatment. But the bass was hopeless. Only three notes survived the cure and they formed the C major chord.

"Never mind", cheerily ejaculated a lyric artist from Béziers. "The bass never counts anyhow. There are enough notes left to do all I need." And he was as good as his word for everything from "Carmen" to the "Machiche" was played and sung with the same accompaniment.

On days when they were obliged to remain indoors, the piano was going from dawn until bedtime, and there were moments when I thought I should go mad. But the boys didn't seem to mind it in the least.

I wonder who it was that first inaugurated the brilliant idea of teaching "Sidi" the French language. Probably Bressy, a tall artillery trumpeter, his neighbour in their ward. Straightway of course all the others offered their services as professors, and the different methods that were employed were sufficient to muddle a far clearer brain than that possessed by Amed-ben-Mohamed. The oral system, by syllables, rapidly became a favourite because every one could participate therein, and rainy afternoons one could hear the entire convalescent hospital repeating in chorus, for hours at a time, "Ba, be, bi, bo, bu", "Da, de, di, do, du", etc.

They cut out the entire alphabet from the headlines of old newspapers, pasting the letters in order on a strip of cardboard. This primitive sheet was rapidly replaced by a highly ornamented affair, made by Sergeant Godec in person, who was so interested in the progress of *the* pupil, that he actually neglected a cherry wood pipe he was carving in order to provide Sidi with proper material. The poor Moroccan would repeat the letters one after another, and then with a pointer someone would indicate a certain capital. Nine times out of ten Sidi would make an erroneous reply; there were moments when I wondered if he didn't do it on purpose. For when perchance he articulated the proper sound, the whole room would turn to me for applause of their triumph.

Amed-ben-Mohamed was not ignorant by any means. Aping his fellow men he used to write long pages of neat hieroglyphics and put them carefully away in his pocket.

"To Fatma"? mischievously inquired a wag, pointing to Sidi's letter.

"Oui, oui, oui", was the prompt and joyous reply. "Fatma, wife Amed." At which there was a general shriek of delight and Godec exclaimed, "You see how his French is improving."

From somewhere in the attic Chou and Thierage brought to light my very dilapidated tapestry frame with a half finished canvas still stretched upon it. Our cabinet maker at once offered his services, and the damage to the spindle-legs was quickly repaired. So each day, in the half hour that preceded dinner, Madame Guix amused herself by continuing the work I had already begun. The boys clustered around her, fascinated by the little even rows of stitches and the gradual development of the intricate, multi-colored design tickled their artistic sense, so keen even among the most uneducated in France.

"I'll bet I could do that almost as smoothly as you", finally declared Paul, who from the very start had been aching to get in his hand at it.

"Do you? Would you like to try it?"

"Rather! I'll pull it out if I go wrong, I promise."

"Oh, it's not very difficult."

Laying aside his crutches the lad took Madame Guix's seat. After a trifling hesitation he soon caught the manner, and so intent was he on doing well that the great beads of perspiration rolled from his brow. At the end of three rows he looked up, wiped his face and exclaimed, "Gee, this is great. Something I can really do to help."

"Can't you put a chair on the other side of the frame, I'd like to try too?" This from a young shaggy haired miner.

"Surely, as many as you like, or rather, as many as the frame will accommodate."

A precedent was created, and for weeks afterwards the boys had regular hours at the frame, each more than critical of the degree of smoothness attained by his neighbour's needle. We watched their progress, which was really remarkable and when bedtime came, they were loath to put the frame aside.

Presently I became so busy that three days elapsed before I had time to give their tapestry a moment's attention. Paul, alone, was seated at the frame and as I leaned over his shoulder I was surprised to see that an often repeated motif which on the entire canvas had been worked in blue was in two places done in pink.

"Whose fantasy is this"? I queried with a smile.

"The sergeant's."

"Godec's? Has he been working at it too?"

"Yes, but all wrong", was the disdainful reply. "I nearly had a fight with him about it. I think he's gone queer because when I told him that wasn't the right colour, he informed me I didn't know what I was talking about, and to mind my own business. He even went over to the window to match the shade, and came back and worked that scroll in pink!"

I laughed. "He is not queer, just colour blind", I explained.

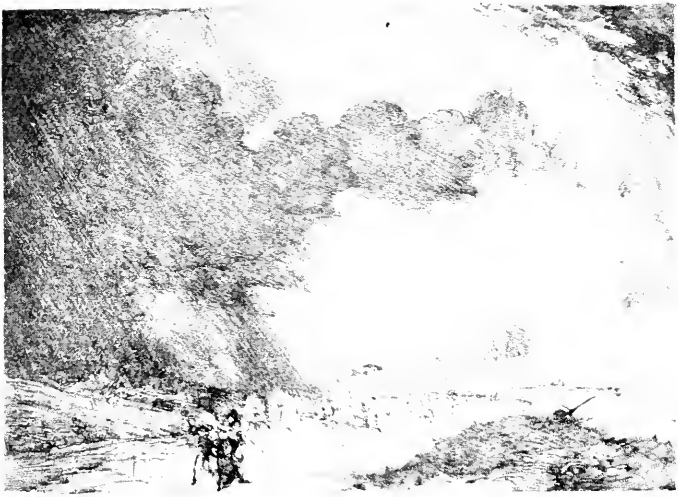
Anyone interested in the study of physiognomy would have had ample examples at hospital number seven during those first months of the war. Mail service which had to be organized according to the new conditions of the country was rather incoherent, but when the letters did come the boys' faces were marvels to behold. Expectancy quickly changed to delight or disappointment, gleamed from all eyes as the military post man drove into the yard.

At first we used to assemble the men and the sergeant would call out their names. But I quickly put a stop to that proceeding when I realised how many had their families in invaded territory and would look in vain for news. My own feelings made me sympathise for it was now well into November, and since the first week in August I had had but three letters from my husband. Thereafter mail was sorted and placed on the hall table and it was surprising the amount of correspondence received by certain silent men about whom we knew little or nothing, and fancied for some reason that no one else did.

Presently the parcel post packages began arriving and the boys never failed to share their contents with their bed neighbours, and often with their entire ward, when size permitted. Eventually, as weeks went by, arose the delicate question of accepting when one was certain of never receiving anything with which to return the compliment. Oh, what wonderful charitable work could have been, and can still be done in this field, by way of anonymous packages and trifling money orders that cost little or nothing. It made my heart ache not to be able to wire some kind friend and feel sure of a substantial reply by return mail.

Oftentimes there was great rejoicing when in a round about way someone got news that his family had fled during the invasion and was safe and sound in some remote corner of France, patiently awaiting the time to return home.

Coming into the drawing-room quite late one morning I was surprised to see Paul stretched out on his bed with his face buried in his pillow.



SOMEONE GOT NEWS THAT HIS FAMILY HAD FLED DURING THE INVASION

"*Eh bien,* Paul, what's the trouble? Are you ill?"

The only answer was the heaving of his shoulders.

"Has anything happened?" I hastily inquired of a soldier who put his head in at the door.

"I couldn't say, all I know is that he got his first letter this morning."

I returned to Paul's bedside. As I approached, without lifting his head the boy stretched out his hand and poked a soiled, much post-marked envelope into mine.

"Read it, read it; it's from my brother," was all he said.

Turning to the window I drew the missive from its cover and read. When I had finished, I wiped my eyes and read it again. And here follows a humble translation of an original, which in spite of many faults in spelling, to me is scriptural in its primitive but noble simplicity.

"My dear Brother:

I hasten to write you for I have just found out where you might be. I have thought of you so much, and I have asked myself again and again, and everywhere on the road I have asked if anyone knew the Coutins.

I have found Louis—but dead. Let me tell you;

I met some of the ninety-first Infantry. I spoke to one of them whom I had seen before near Charleville. I asked him where he was wounded. He said, "I've got a bullet in the arm". Then he told me of his campaign. He said, "What I regret the most is my dearest comrade who fell at my side with a splinter of shell in the stomach." Then he named Louis Coutin who lived in La Cachette.

When he named our brother I did not know what to say. I listened. Then he told me that he had fought like a lion—afraid of nothing. Then he said, he spoke often of us. Then I told him I was his brother. Then he embraced me for us all. That, dear brother, is the way Louis died.

The sergeant in his section took all his papers and sent them to his wife.

Paul you must answer me at once. I know that you have been wounded. I hope you are better, and that this will find you about again. Don't fail to write me.

I am in the trenches, not thirty yards from the Boches. So many as I can lay hands on, so many less. I shall avenge Louis.

I am so glad to have found Blanche and

Remond, we will write to each other often now.

I close wishing you a prompt recovery. Your brother who embraces you with all his heart,

Alfred Coutin
332 Inf. 17th. Comp.
61st. Div.
Postal Sector 103.

And to Paul's prompt reply came the following from the valiant father of five small children, left motherless through grief to be cared for in a foundling asylum, then within the enemy's lines.

Monday, November 9th, 1914.

Dear Paul:—

I am sending you a line to say that we are to be relieved to-morrow. As soon as I get to cover I will write you. It is much easier. For with the nights we've just been through, drenched to the skin, and bombardment all day long, it's an infernal place to work in. Those pigs of Germans sow their shells all over the place without doing any damage. I think if they are artillery men at all, they must belong to the class of 1915, for my kid could do as much as they with their guns. More noise than harm. Let me tell you I had the nerve to go fishing right under their noses. At night—

rain. I made a fine catch. You can bet the next night I went back, each time with much precaution. You must really love fishing to throw a line within twenty yards of them. I caught a "Rosette" that weighed over a pound. It made an infernal racket. I saw the moment when I'd have to drop it and quit. I stayed on just the same, my rifle beside me; that's the only friend I know.

Later.

Dear Paul:—

I hope my line will find you. As soon as I get to cover I'll write. I will tell you everything since my departure from Rethel. I've been some distance; at least twice around the world. You will see, it's very interesting. We've been very lucky.

Send a word of greeting from me to all those who write you. Blanche writes me that she is going to send you something. I don't know just what. I close with an embrace,

Your brother Alfred.

Three consecutive bright days put the finishing touches to the convalescence of many men who did not realise that health could return so rapidly. The air was crisp and bracing and there was no need of coaxing them abroad.

They went gladly, seeking occupation to keep them stirring, anxious to be of use.

All the leaves were swept from the immediate vicinity of the house, and a fatigue party was organized to eliminate them from the eight hundred yards of driveway that leads to our farthest gate. George, as head gardener, supervised the work, and it was while accomplishing this task that the idea of setting up a steeple chase in the *grande allée* and inviting my greyhounds to participate originated in the heads of these French sportsmen.

Accordingly boards and brushwood were collected, and hurdles grading from two to seven feet were established at even intervals all along the line. Both dogs were sadly out of training and Tiger balked at the high jumps. But Clarice, daughter of Jumper, delighted our eyes by the graceful way she accomplished the feats. Even Betsy, the bull dog, wanted to be in the game while the dignified old foxhound only sniffed at these unheard-of proceedings and took his way into the woods, unmolested.

Decidedly Tiger must be limbered up, so he was put through a course of training and coaxed to accomplish another foot each day.

One afternoon he was in the act of clearing the sixth hurdle, when from the distance the voice of the old fox hound warned us he had located something, and ten seconds later a long, lithe hare darted from the bushes and leaped to the other side of the road.

Tiger had seen him and needed no persuasion to take the seventh obstacle. All the boys had caught sight of him as well, and steeple chase was forgotten in the pursuit of a much more important sport—real live coursing in the open country.

Not since that eventful day when Godec and his men had nearly lost their places, had the word "hunting" ever been mentioned. But now the movement was so spontaneous that it would have been folly to try to suppress it.

They were off!

What a wild merry chase that animal led them. Up hill, down dale, at one time almost into a stable door, at another through the toughest thicket at the extreme end of our grounds. As though previously arranged it took its homeward course straight down the long avenue, and literally bumped into little Betsey, who true to the traditions of her race, struck her teeth into whatever came her way, and held on. It happened to be the hare's ear, and while she hadn't strength enough to pin him to the ground she refused to let go, and he was unable to shake her off. He had to carry her with him in his flight, which, however, was considerably impeded by the fourteen pounds of bull dog that was rolling by his side. This gave Tiger a chance to redeem himself and pouncing upon his prey he raised him in his mouth, and with Betsy who still refused to let go, madly clinging to its ear, he proudly laid the fruit of two hours coursing at my feet.

That night as we clustered about the fire and waited for the chestnuts we had buried in the ashes to roast, I gazed at the then vigorous faces of our patients and decided once and forever that fresh air and exercise are really wonderful remedies when properly administered.

V

Three times during the same week our doctor was called to headquarters. Each time he returned his face was grave and anxious looking, and on the evening of his third visit I could no longer refrain from asking questions. I feared lest he had heard some ill news of our armies and hesitated to alarm us.

"No bad tidings from the front, doctor, I hope?"

"No. No indeed."

"Nothing new as far as we are concerned?"

"If new means the evacuation of our present contingent, yes."

Though I had daily expected word to this effect, it was something of a shock when it came. One cannot live in constant contact with such good humored lads as ours, have cared for their every want, brought them back to health, besides participating in their joys and sorrows, without feeling a pull at one's heartstrings on receiving word that they are considered fit to rejoin the ranks.

"When are they to go?"

"Within the next day or two."

"And what is to become of us, our hospital, afterwards?"

"That depends entirely on you."

"On me."

"Yes."

"How can it? I'm at the disposal of headquarters."

"Well, my instructions to-night are to ask you to pay a visit to the 'Médecin-Chef' to-morrow. I've brought you back a passport and the pass word."

Seven o'clock the next morning found me on the front seat of our little farm trap, with Chou as driver and companion. Not that there was any danger should I have chosen to go alone. Chou's presence on this occasion was due to the fact that during the night he had developed an ulcerated tooth, and his face was swollen beyond recognition. The nearest dentist was at Château Thierry, so naturally I had not hesitated to take him with me.

How strange it seemed to be jogging along in this primitive fashion on roads we had so often and so comfortably travelled in our motor. How strange never to meet a vehicle other than an army supply cart, or a wood truck.

This was my first visit to the city of Jean La Fontaine since it had become a hospital centre, and my ride along the river front showed me that not a single house had been exempt from shell fire during the battle of the Marne. But one could see that each proprietor was doing his utmost to repair the exterior damage, at least, and six weeks later on another visit I found everything apparently restored to its normal condition.

Headquarters was at the Hôtel Dieu, and it was there that Chou deposited me shortly after nine o'clock, with instructions to return for me within an hour, he driving off in quest of a dentist.

To reach the doctor's office I crossed the court and on entering the establishment was surprised to find myself in the presence of the wounded immediately on stepping into the vestibule. I was hurried down a little dark passage at the end of which I was ushered into a dingy, ill-lighted hall room occupied by the doctor and his three secretary-orderlies.

Doctor L. apologised for receiving me in

NOT A SINGLE HOUSE HAD BEEN EXEMPT FROM SHELL-FIRE

such humble quarters—explained that every other available space was necessary for hospital needs, and then went straight to the point of my visit.

"Madame Huard, I sent for you to tell you that we are going to evacuate your entire hospital."

"Very well, doctor."

"But that is not the chief reason why I have asked you to make this tiresome trip. I am very well satisfied with the way Annex Number Seven has functioned, but I want to ask you personally to make a bigger sacrifice for our country."

"Certainly Doctor, what?"

"Take contagious and infectious cases."

"Which kind?"

"Typhoid."

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Well, it's not the most agreeable thing in the world to ask a woman to sacrifice her home, her linen, and perhaps her life in order to care for contagious diseases. But I throw myself on your mercy. The quantities of wounded alone far surpass any calculation, and inoculation against Typhoid was rare three months ago when the war broke out. In consequence we are deluged. As you have no doubt observed, every available corner has been utilised and this is a hospital. In a few moments I will go with you and show you how really necessary it is that some one come to our assistance."

"But, Doctor I am not protesting, I'm here to receive orders."

"Good, how many beds have you now?"

"Forty-five occupied, we might be able to make it fifty."

"Could you make it sixty without any material assistance from us? We have nothing to offer to set up the establishment."

I said I could; under such circumstances one must never say "I'll try".

I followed the doctor through the narrow hallway. A second glance at the vestibule told me that not only was every bed occupied, but there were men on stretchers in every corner. My guide led the way down the hill, and then we climbed the steps of the Municipal theatre, where we came upon the newest evacuated, perhaps two or three hundred of them, reclining on the straw which had practically turned the place into a stable.

"All typhoid cases, Madame Huard, and doctors are so scarce! We need every one we've got to operate on the wounded, so what are these poor devils to do? Most of the school-houses and public buildings in this town are full to overflowing, and more are coming in all the time."

So many pairs of wistful, yearning eyes were turned in my direction—so many stifled cries of "Water" "Water", came from lips that belonged to inert bodies stretched out, without even the possibility of removing their boots!

The doctor saw I was touched.

"Could you double your number of beds?", said he, turning about sharply. "Sixty patients are too few for one doctor, considering the emergency."

A hundred and twenty typhoid patients! The space I possessed, but what about the beds, linen and so forth? In a second I imagined that perhaps we might beg such things in our vicinity—and experience had taught me that anything one can conceive is realisable.

"Yes, I can make it one hundred and twenty beds, but I cannot guarantee to furnish the necessary help to run the establishment. It can be done if you will send us some more *infirmiers.*"

The doctor shook his head.

"Impossible, we've not enough here now."

"I realise that", said I. "Madame Guix and I stand willing to do our share, but if you take all our men from us you, best of anyone know that there is a limit to human endurance."

"How many orderlies have you now?"

"Four good ones, and a sergeant."

"They can remain."

"Surely, but they hardly suffice for forty, much less three times that many patients."

The doctor wrinkled his brow.

"Among those I am going to evacuate, are there any whose chronic condition will send them back to their barracks rather than to the front?"

"Yes, three or four."

"Then keep them; use them."

And holding up his hand to prevent my thanking him—

"No, don't tell me about them, I don't want to know. I'm not supposed to know. I've even got to pretend I don't know. Each of us has got to do what he or she can do to help. If I find we can spare anyone from here later on, I shall remember you. Evacuate all the best to-morrow, and I'll give you three days to prepare. Expect fifty men by Saturday noon. Good-bye Madame, you know how grateful I am!"

I walked out into the street, fairly dizzy from what I had seen—dazed by the thoughts of the responsibility I had just assumed.

The street was empty. Chou was not at his post. I shook myself a trifle and gazed right and left. No, I was not dreaming, there was no one to be seen.

Perhaps he's had to wait his turn and there are many to be treated before him. So soliloquising I started down the hill. At the bottom I questioned some one as to the whereabouts of the dentist.

No civilians' dentist left. They had never had occasion to need the military specialist—and like phrases greeted my various inquiries, and at the end of a half hour I was no wiser than before.

I returned to the Hôtel Dieu where a sister informed me that he was at Barracks A.

I crossed the city only to be sent in another direction, and finally on the opposite side of the river, in a little, dingy street, I came upon my horse and trap, drawn up in front of a solemn building, over the door of which floated the tricolor.

Without hesitating I entered. On my appearance, Chou who was seated at the other end of the hall, jumped up and greeted me as though I were a long lost parent, fairly shrieking;

"I knew you'd come, I knew you'd come!"

"What's the trouble, can't you find a dentist? Why didn't you meet me as I told you?"

"They wouldn't let me", and he pointed to a sergeant who, à la Godec, was scribbling labouriously on some neat looking registers.

"Is that so, sergeant?" said I addressing the person in question, who promptly rose after carefully wiping his pen.

"I was merely explaining to this chap that we have received word that your hospital is to be evacuated to-morrow, and that our station trap is to help in the moving. Now, if he stays here that makes one less for the horses to drag. I hardly see the necessity of his returning."

How could he? How was it possible for him to appreciate Chou's feelings at being torn from his friends, *his* château, without a parting word. How could he have guessed that if I had been allowed but one orderly, I certainly would have chosen Chou among all the rest.

"I see", said I.

Chou's face fell, his great, round blue eyes took on such a pathetic expression.

"That's all very well", I continued, "But how am I going to explain his absence to our doctor, and how are you going to account for the missing evacuation ticket that must be given to the men in person?"

Chou's expression was a marvel to behold. The sergeant's was one of disgust; he evidently didn't care to have his authority questioned. If it had not been risking complications, I fancy Chou would have clapped his hands and jumped for joy.

"I shall report this to my superior at once."

"Certainly, but mind I don't do likewise, and get you reprimanded for assuming too much authority."

The sergeant was stunned. He looked at me from head to foot and decided that argument might lead to disturbance, so jerking over his shoulder the words "Released", he returned to his papers. Chou joined me and together we started homeward.

A long wail of despair rose from forty pairs of lips when the announcement of departure was made after dinner that evening. Of course, they understood and accepted the situation, which had been a foregone conclusion for some time now.

"Pity I couldn't get typhoid", lamented one.

"If I'd been born ten years sooner, I'd be fit for the auxiliary service by now!" declared some one else for the benefit of Godec and his acolytes.

I dared not tell them that I had permission to keep four. Chou and Theirage, Jeantot and Dubuis had been informed of my intention, but under penalty of being dismissed with the others, had been told to hold their tongues. In making out his list the sergeant was to reserve them for the last waggon load which, of course, would never go.

Luncheon next day was a dismal meal, and before it was finished we could hear the rumble of the approaching carts. There was an extra cup of coffee for each and the whole repast topped off with a sip of peach brandy, which came in most appropriately.

Adieux were affectionate but not effeminate. I procured a blank book which I turned into a guests' record, each one proudly inscribing his name and address, so that to-day I treasure it as one of my proudest war souvenirs.

"Good-bye, good-bye!" they called. *"A la victoire!* Don't forget to write to us."

We stood and waved them out of sight.

The next couple of days we were deluged with affectionate greetings on picture post cards. Some wrote letters which I fondly cherish, and for nearly three years I have been in constant correspondence with a dozen or more of the boys. Now and again a regular letter ceases to come. The first week I am not anxious. Then perhaps a month slips by—still nothing appears. I need not seek the reason, I know it but too well!

From the Dardanelles, from Monastir, from Russia as well as from the battle fronts of Verdun and the Somme have come reiterations of undying appreciation. Their unstinted gratitude has repaid us a hundred fold for the little we did for them.

Sergeant Godec and his men returned successful from their expedition in quest of beds and bedding—but anyone who had ever visited a modern equipped sanitorium, or to whom the word hospital might mean long rows of small white enamelled beds, would certainly have laughed if he could have seen the assortment that fell to our lot. Most of them were wooden. Some hand carved and dating from the eighteenth century. The majority were of heavy red mahogany, and varied tremendously in width, so that our most careful arrangement could only produce an uneven unsatisfactory appearance in the wards.

Every available space in the château was utilised; the doctor and the pharmacist agreeing to share the same room, since they were all large, and partitions few.

On Friday afternoon we were in the act of counting and marking sheets when a telephone call from headquarters announced the immediate arrival of forty men; almost a day sooner than we expected.

They came just as did the others, but when the army carts had halted and the curtains were pulled aside, they remained motionless in their seats—poor human wrecks—unconscious of time, place or surroundings—so accustomed to being jostled and jolted, first in one vehicle then in another, that they could hardly believe that they had stopped for good. We were obliged to help them down.

They came without knapsacks or guns, which followed in an open rig, and from the colour of the tags tied to their buttonholes we knew that we had to do with severe cases of typhoid, though to prevent discouragement, the description on the card ran:—

"Embarras gastrique aigu."

Not a sound from any mouth, not a smile on any lips—the vacant stare in their eyes betokening their total submission to the malady that had gripped and strangled their every effort to resist. Gently we led them in.

It would be useless to try to depict their unshaven, unkempt condition; as long as they had a spark of fight left they had remained in the trenches, unwilling to complain, living in hope of being "Better to-morrow", and, as is generally the case, lingering until medical assistance could no longer prevent, but merely witness the rapid development of their sinister ill.

One or two amongst them were chewing vaguely at the unlighted butts of cigarettes. A certain very youthful chap was staring wildly at an orange which he shifted from hand to hand, uncertain what he should do with it, too tired to make the mental effort necessary to find out; while others laying eyes on the chairs in the vestibule, quickly seated themselves, vainly trying to gather enough strength and courage to "Move on" should we so desire.

It would have been futile to attempt medical examination, or to let them even approach their beds before having been subjected to Chou and his partners who had chosen to superintend the baths—no easy undertaking when one considers that all the water had to be heated in huge clothes boilers on the kitchen range, or over the open fire, and then carried some hundred yards to the only bath tub that had remained intact.

Shoes, caps, top-coats and shirts were dropped in tiny heaps outside the bathroom door, to be gingerly removed for disinfection—perhaps disposed of altogether. And then the patients were gently deposited in the lukewarm, disinfected water, without removing another stitch. Those who find these details too disgusting, pray jump to the end of the paragraph, but now that war has become a *Métier,* and organization and efficiency are no longer vain words, it seems unfair to those who willingly laboured against such tremendous odds, not to state exactly the situations with which they had to cope. Here were men come to us in November with typhoid already developed to its worst stages, and before we could even take their temperature it was necessary to remove with pincers the underclothing they had put on before the battle of the Marne!

Night closed in, and the dinner hour came and passed unheralded, unheeded, before the four wards containing ten patients each, were carefully inspected and their numerous treatments methodically noted by the sergeant. In most cases the men were so weak that they had to be raised up and propped during the examinations, and when finally we found ourselves alone in the vestibule, Godec could not help exclaiming—"

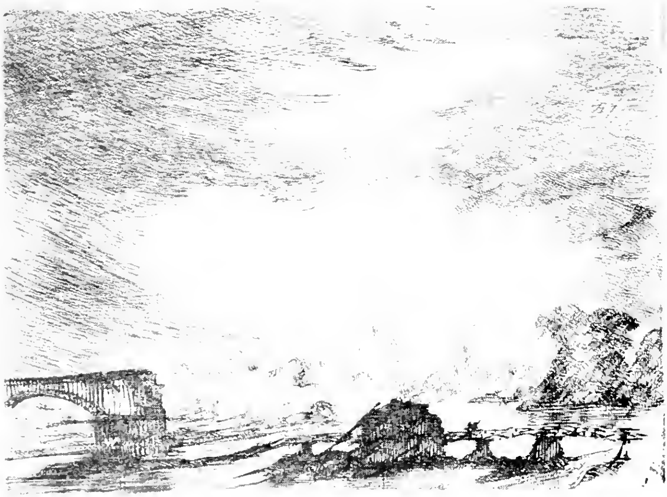
"What a difference from day before yesterday!"

What a difference indeed!

It did not take us long to find out what real hospital work meant. The forty men to whom we had wished such cheerful *"Bon voyage"* two days since, had been as forty guests at a house party. Now we had real patients, incapable of the slightest effort, to whom we had to be everything, for whom everything had to be done.

During the first nights at least it was decided that scrupulous watch be kept, and the pharmacist and one orderly assumed the guard of the two upstairs wards, while to "La petite jaquette" and myself fell the vigil of the drawing-room and the library. Madame Guix and the doctor would alternate with us so that none should have two consecutive nights without sleep.

At ten o'clock when I took my post, almost all the men had fallen into that heavy, unrestful slumber that betrays utter exhaustion. For the sake of economy, as well as for their comfort, the room was lighted only by a small *veilleuse*—or night lamp, and the glare of a crackling grate fire, our only means of heating. Our supply of wood for the night evenly sawed



VIEW OF SOISSONS FROM THE
PONT DE VILLENEUVE

and carefully stacked on either side of the chimney, looked most formidable.

The drawing-room and the library communicate by two large double doors, which when thrown open made it quite possible to hear everything that was going on in either room. From sheer force of habit I elected place in the former, and went to work putting my table in order, arranging the medicine glasses, and carefully noting the exact hour at which the first dose was to be given. "La petite jaquette" after arranging the coals and having made a round to assure himself that all was well, took place opposite me on the hearth, snuggled down in his chair and in less than no time had dozed off.

Presently the only sound in the room was the ticking of an alarm clock on the mantle, the embers falling in the hearth and the heavy, uneven breathing of forty sleeping men.

"Water, water", faintly called a thin rasping voice at one end of the ward.

I complied with the request, and in spite of my every effort to be as quiet as possible, the man in the next bed stirred, rolled over, and said "I, too".

I raised them and held the refreshing liquid to their lips, and as soon as they had drunk they fell over as though lifeless, on their pillows.

On the way back to my table to replenish my glasses, one lad sat bolt upright and in imperative tone demanded that his thirst be quenched.

"Water, I say, give me water!"

In a few moments silence again reigned save for a long, low groan, an incomprehensive murmur, which soon died away.

The unexpected roar of a heavy gun, which seemed to be much nearer than ever before, surprised me somewhat, and aroused "La petite jaquette", who rubbed his eyes and stared about him in an uncertain fashion.

"Pauline, Pauline", wailed a high pitched voice in the other room—*"Pauline, ma petite Pauline"*—

"Water—water—quick—I'm suffocating."

"I believe one of them is talking in his sleep", volunteered my companion, rising in the semi-darkness to take up his duties in the adjoining ward.

Time slipped by rapidly, so busy was I attending to the various wants. Suddenly I was alarmed by a sharp cry and a crashing sound behind me, followed by an indignant oath. I made a dash in the direction from which the noise came and arrived on the door sill to see "La petite jaquette" standing staring at the floor, while in every bed a shaggy haired individual was sitting up looking wildly about him.

"That's the first, boys", called one—"Look out for the second! There it comes. Can't you see it? Quick, to the right I say! Run, run! Where's my canteen? Who took it? My canteen, give it back to me, I tell you."

"What started this", I asked of "La petite jaquette". "That noise, that crash a moment ago, what were they?"

I was obliged to talk out loud to make him hear, the delirious men were carrying on so.

"Only a glass that slipped out of a fellow's hand onto the floor. He insisted on taking it."

Quickly we passed from bed to bed, smoothing a brow, patting a hand, gently persuading them to regain the reclining position. Some resisted a bit, while others literally snapped back on to their places like puppets on a wire.

This ordeal over, we returned to our places by the fire.

"Pauline, Pauline"—murmured in low agonizing tones, the same tenor voice. We had become accustomed to it now.

A wild shriek of coarse laughter rent the air and brought me to my feet with a bound.

"Ha, ha, ha, that's good! Now then boys, we're off! *En avant, en avant—Vive la France—oh, oh!"* Then lapsing into a sort of hiccough, "Mama, Mama; Mama, don't you hear me?" it sobbed.

"Water, O God how thirsty I am!"

Again I began my rounds, and having finished I was obliged to replace the tiny wick in the night lamp which had flickered and gone out. As I turned to the table for a match, I was startled almost to screaming by the sight of a tall, gaunt figure draped in white, standing close beside me, his finger raised to his lips, enjoining me to silence. In all my life I had never seen anything that so resembled a ghost or a vision. The fire dancing in the grate gave out a queer, lugubrious light, which augmented the pallor of the face and gave a supernatural look to a pair of glassy blue eyes that were staring into vacancy.

It took me a good quarter minute to pull myself together, steady my trembling hand, and light the match. The figure did not move.

"Madame", hissed "La petite jaquette" in a forced whisper, peering into the room, "One of them's gone". He halted a second when he caught sight of the great, lanky black haired man, who did not move at his approach.

"Oh, so there you are", exclaimed my aid in normal tones which brought me to myself.

"Now then, right about, face—forward, march!", he continued. "No sleep walking allowed here. Into bed you go."

I wiped the perspiration from my forehead and leaned against the table for support.

But there was no respite. The same plaintive voice went right on calling that same woman's name! Some one tried to sing a French version of "Tipperary", and in the midst of it all would come strident cries of *"Attention! Bayonnettes fixes! No! No! No camarade! Sale Boche—"*

Almost all degenerated into troubled groanings and moanings.

A strange scuffling sound, mingled with curses and an indefinable ejaculation, sent me quickly towards a bed on which was writhing and wriggling a patient I had left calm but a ten seconds since.

"No, you can't have me, you dirty German no! Gad, no." And the bed clothing which had hampered his movements suddenly giving way, he fell with a dull thud on the floor at my feet.

"He's charging—hand to hand, living it all over again", whispered "La petite jaquette", as we picked up the unconscious mass and laid him gently on his cot.

I returned to my table and looked at my watch. A quarter of two. Three hours more at least before dawn. My companion was kneeling on the hearth, setting some water to boil. The agonizing, heart-rending, soul wracking cries had redoubled. As though to drown their agony, the great guns boomed louder and louder. My eyes wandered to the window. Only darkness outside. At the same time, and without turning my head, I stretched out my hand to grasp the back of my chair, snatching it away instantly, my very heart ceasing to beat from terror. I had touched something warm and clammy.

"Jésus", shrieked "La petite jaquette",

scrambling to his feet in such haste that he overturned the kettle on the fire, and a sizzling sound accompanied by a puff of smoke, quickly filled the room.

"Lord, how he frightened me", gasped the *infirmier,* and at that moment I looked up and beheld the same white draped figure standing between us like a statue. It was his hand I had touched a second since.

My teeth were fairly chattering from fright. I mopped my face, ground my teeth, and tried my best to control myself. Our ghost was no sooner put to bed than we could hear his bare feet walking on the hardwood floor.

"He frightens me", blubbered my little helper. "There's something uncanny about him! Oh, there he comes again."

This was more than I could stand. Like a thunderbolt the sensation of my loneliness, my utter isolation from anything familiar, burst on me, enveloped me. I was afraid. The room seemed suddenly to have become very warm and stifling, everything whirred in front of me. Air, air, I thought as I hurried toward the door leading into the vestibule.

I turned the knob, took a step forward. My feet encountered something that resisted. I was conscious enough to know that whatever was there was moving, alive! The cold air rushed in upon me—gave me strength enough to react—a second later, a long, thin tongue was licking my hand.

Tiger!

Tears of joy rushed to my eyes and rolled unheeded down my cheeks as I gathered my faithful greyhound into my arms. My empty bed, no night lamp in my room, had told him something was amiss. He seemed to feel I needed a friend, and he had come.

It was all over in a moment. My brain cleared up, and I hurried back into the room, ashamed of my puerility, mortified at having abandoned my post and my companion, anxious to find out whether or not my absence had been perceived. What had seemed hours to me, must have been a very brief space of time for "La petite jaquette" was stirring up the fire exactly as though nothing had happened. With joy in my heart I leaned down and patted Tiger, confident that he would never tell.

Such was my real initiation to the career of military trained nurse. I fancy he who receives the baptism of fire must undergo something of the same sensation, and I wonder sometimes if it were not easier for the soldier, for seldom or never under such circumstances does he find himself alone.

I slept late into the morning. When I came downstairs two more waggon loads of the same dilapidated looking soldiers had been disembarked and were patiently waiting in the vestibule their turn to be made clean.

While sipping my tea, Yvonne announced that Father Poupard was in the kitchen and had asked to see me in private.

"He won't tell any of us what it's about. He's been over here asking for Madame three times since seven o'clock this morning."

"Show him into my office."

The old man rose and jerked his cap from his head when I entered.

"Good morning, Madame."

"Good morning, Father Poupard. In what way can I be of service to you?"

Pére Poupard fumbled with his cap, evidently embarrassed, searching for words with which to begin.

"Madame Huard", he blurted out at last. "Perhaps you'll be hard with me, but I hope you won't. But I've been watching pretty closely what's going on over here at the château, and though nobody says anything it strikes me there's a good deal of contagious disease in the air. Now, it isn't right for you not to be protected, so I've brought you over a bottle of my home-brew disinfectant."

Here he fumbled for the buttons of his waistcoat, and produced from beneath his outer shirt, a dust covered bottle of brandy.

"With that I saved everybody in the village during the cholera siege in '85. Just ask anyone, they'll tell you whether or not I'm speaking the truth. Thanks to this there wasn't a single death in the place. Would you do me the honor of accepting this bottle?"

I smiled an assent. How could I refuse?

"Half a glass in the morning before breakfast", he continued. "A drop or two before and after each meal—and just before going to bed—and I'll guarantee you'll be fit as a fiddle."

VI

It was not many days before every bed in hospital Number seven was occupied, the château filled to capacity. With three times as many patients as before, and the staff remaining the same it was necessary to put the greatest efficiency into the regulating of all service, no matter how trifling.

To begin with, each one was allotted his special task, and from the doctor down to the kitchen maid, regular hours for performing regular duties were established. Under no circumstances was anyone to overwork one day just because he didn't *feel* tired, and in consequence be laid up next day. We could not afford it.

In due time our patients were classified according to their degree of illness. There were light cases, cases where the malady was still in the stage of development, and there were severe cases. Not that typhoid at all times is not a serious proposition, but by severe cases, I mean actually alarming. There were eighteen or twenty of the latter, and for convenience sake they were kept in the downstairs wards. It goes without saying, that it was here Madame Guix and I spent the greater part of our time. Upstairs it was merely a question of giving a spoonful of medicine at a stipulated time—and Mademoiselle Alice Foerter was quite capable of superintending such matters.

I had never taken care of contagious disease before, in fact apart from certain elementary rules of hygiene born in the Anglo Saxon, I had no training save the little Madame Guix offered in the few days that preceded our evacuation before the enemy, and what dire necessity had taught me when on the highroad. I am, therefore, no judge of the methods we employed in our treatment. The results obtained were phenomenal. This then speaks for their efficacy.

It must also be taken into consideration that we had at our disposal but the contents of two pharmaceutical kits; that headquarters could send us little or nothing; that certain conveniences, such as agreeable disinfectants, were almost totally lacking. For personal use we had Javel water, and considered ourselves lucky; for soaking all our sheets, pillow cases, handkerchiefs and underwear before giving them out to be washed, we had a solution of iron perchloride. That was all.

It was the question of linen that became an almost continual source of annoyance. From the peasants in the entire outlying vicinity we had managed to beg or borrow two hundred and fifty pairs of sheets. Calculating thus, each bed had its pair, a pair for change, and then little or nothing was left in reserve. This would not have been so bad if we had had a fully equipped drying room, but we hadn't. Everything was hung out of doors, and at this season of the year in the North Eastern part of France, it is not unusual to have rain every day. Besides, what is one extra pair of sheets in a malignant typhoid ward? With despair in our hearts we used to watch the mist rise very early in the afternoon, or observe the weather-cock gradually turning to "Unsettled". Practically all our outdoor exercise consisted in a hurried visit to the drying paddock, and he who returned with some article whose moist state could be terminated comfortably before an open fire, was lauded to the skies. Why didn't we use our numerous empty stables? For the good reason that open air was far better than damp interiors. My stock of coal was fast diminishing; even the dry wood in the big shed was beginning to dwindle, and green wood only produced smoke—not heat! We tried it.

But to return to our patients; few, if any, of the twenty men in the downstairs wards had the slightest notion where they were. Delirium, which commenced almost immediately they fell asleep, was constant and continued for several weeks. To their appeals for water we replied promptly at all times, but never gave it pure, always one third red wine. Besides the wine four drops tincture of iodine diluted in water and taken internally as disinfectant, the "Potion de Todd", which I fancy contained some spirituous stimulant, figured very largely in our treatment. In cases where the heart weakened, hypodermic injections of camphorated oil were administered frequently.

The most important feature of our régime, however, was the baths. We were fortunate in having spring water piped into the house, and certain cases demanded that cloths wrung out in the icy liquid, be placed at regular intervals on the abdomen: other patients had to be entirely enveloped in cold, damp sheets; while still others were placed in a bath-tub and kept there until a shiver was visible on the skin.

The cloths and the sheets were an easy task, but it takes more than two women to lift the average man from a reclining posture, even when he is willing—and certainly two nurses and two orderlies were none too many to carefully transport ten, and sometimes fifteen, limp bodies three times a day from bed to bath, from bath to bed. There are other and simpler means, I know, but they were not at our disposal. We did as we were ordered and with what we had. This rapidly developed me a strong pair of biceps, but I have serious doubts as to its benefit for chronic appendicitis. My how my back ached the first few days!

Naturally, other and graver complications developed; things that I am not at liberty to discourse upon here, but of such alarming nature that one morning after his visit, the doctor on leaving our last ward, shook his head in a desultory fashion.

"Better tell the sergeant to look up the addresses of their relatives in their military books."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"Yes."

"Must the sergeant do it?"

"Why not?"

"Because I should hate to receive the kind of letter he is capable of writing!"

"I'm afraid you're sentimental, Madame. This is war you know."

"Surely, but is there any objection to one of us doing it if we can find the time?"

"Not the slightest, so long as it is done rapidly. I dislike telegraphing, it frightens people so."

"Then what exactly must I say?"

"Tell them that soldier so and so is under treatment at this hospital. That should they feel inclined to make him a visit, we urge it to be done at once, and to use this letter as a passport to enter the army zone. Heaven knows by what means they will reach here. It seems only fair though to give them a chance to try."

As I walked down the hall I heard the pharmacist give an order to have our round tower near the moat entirely cleaned out, and the downstairs room carefully white-washed.

"We'll use it for a mortuary chamber," was his last somewhat indifferent remark.

My blood ran cold. To pass away on the "Field of Honor" with the din of battle, and the cries of victory ringing in one's ears, that was glorious! But to slowly flicker out from illness in a God-forsaken emergency hospital; that was ghastly.

It should not be! We would redouble our efforts, strain every nerve to help the men fight for their lives by which they seemed to set so little store. They were too tired.

Madame Guix and I wrote eight letters as directed. There should have been nine, but on looking into his military book we found that one poor little chap, a volunteer because of his youth, had no parents, no near relative. Only his boarding-house keeper. We would wait until the crisis was över before communicating with her.

We hardly hoped for replies. I was therefore much astonished when three days later, a tall, fine looking woman dressed in black was ushered into my office. I held out my hand.

"I am Madame Godefroid. Martin Navez is my brother", said she looking fearlessly into my eyes. "You wrote me to come. Am I too late? Do not be afraid to tell me the truth. I am strong."

What a blessing to be able to say he was still alive, though, of course, far from being out of danger.

Madame Godefroid gulped a sob, and two bright tears of joy trickled unheeded down her cheeks. "Thank God!", she said. "It is almost too good to believe. Tragedies in our family have been so frequent since August, I was prepared for the worst. Poor brother, he's all I've got left."

"Had you other relatives in the war?"

"Yes, four brothers."

I did not have to ask the next question, the woman's expression told me that they had made the Supreme Sacrifice.

"Martin is the oldest. They all did well but myself. He was a rich farmer. I, unfortunately, am only housekeeper for the Curate of Nogent-sur-Marne. That's not far from Paris. Monsieur le Curé got me a passport. I came in a cattle car."

"You're not afraid of typhoid?"

She shook her head—"No indeed".

"Would you care to go into the ward and see your brother? I fear he will not recognise you to-day. Perhaps you can come again. Will you stay and have luncheon with us? I apologise in advance for its simplicity, but such as it is you are very welcome."

Madame Godefroid accepted, and then disappeared accompanied by Madame Guix.

When we had finished luncheon, and the others had left us, I detained her a moment over our coffee cups. It was a treat to come in contact with such a simple, well-bred, kindly soul. Interest in a common cause, mutual apprehensions, quickly created an intimacy, and from her I learned that at the outbreak of the war, Navez and his four brothers, all wealthy farmers, were living comfortably in the suburbs of Charleville. Four of them went to the front at once. Navez being fifty, was not called, but his only son, a lad of eighteen, enlisted almost immediately. Brought up during the war of 1870 with a keen hatred of the Hun, Navez could not resist the temptation to join the colors, so, leaving a wife and two daughters he took service in the motor transports and had seen a hard campaign.

Overworked, underfed, mentally tormented by fears for his family, bowed with grief at the loss of his brothers, he was a fit subject to fall victim to the typhoid scourge.

"But", pursued his sister, without the slightest trace of bitterness in her voice, "Perhaps he'll be sorry the Lord let him live when he knows."

"Knows what?"

The woman looked straight into the fire.

"Knows that since he left the front his son has been made prisoner, and that a German shell not only destroyed his home, but killed his wife and both daughters; I am a poor woman, I am all that he has left!"

A gentle knocking at the door broke the tense silence which followed Madame Godefroid's last words. At my summons Yvonne entered and said that a woman with a little girl awaited me. My visitor looked up and smiled.

"Don't let me detain you, Madame. I wish I might stay and make myself useful, but it is impossible. I will come again if I may".

"Surely, pray do not worry too much. I fancy the crisis is over."

Against my will, she caught my hand and kissed it.

Quite another sort of person had been shown into the office. I no sooner opened the door than a woman whose pent up emotions could no longer stand the strain, burst into tears, and sobbed, "Pierrot, my husband, my dear Pierrot, he was so good to me. Oh, oh, oh!" The little blonde headed child that clung to her skirts, seeing her mother's distress, suddenly hid her head and wailed—"Papa, my papa!"

The whole thing was most distressing, most annoying. The woman, who belonged to the well-to-do working class, couldn't even pull herself together sufficiently to tell me her name and from whence she had come. I saw the moment when I should have to become severe.

"Forgive me", she sobbed. "Forgive me, Madame. It's too dreadful."

"But if you would only tell me the name of the patient you have come to see."

"Parent, Pierre Parent, my husband. Oh, poor, poor Pierrot", she hiccoughed. "Forgive me, Madame, I cannot help it."

I glanced at the list of names which the sergeant had placed on my desk. Alongside each name was a note stating the degree of illness.

Parent—Pierre Parent. I found it. Thinking it was useless to be otherwise than frank, "Yes", said I, "He is here. Very ill but not despaired of. We have every hope of saving him."

"Oh, thank you, Madame, for those kind words." And her tears flowed afresh.

"But, calm yourself, do, since you have come for his sake, you mustn't let him see your face all swollen. It will only worry him and we cannot allow that."

"Yes, that's it, I mustn't cry", and she wiped her face and the baby girl's, all in the same breath and with the same handkerchief.

"I brought Suzanne with me. She's our only child. I wanted her to see her papa again, perhaps it'll be the last time. He loved her so!" And in spite of every effort the tears flowed anew.

"I wouldn't take such a tragic view of the case", I urged. "While there is life, there is hope. And we will do everything in our power to save him. Now go and wash your face and come back again."

In a few moments she reappeared, a sight to behold, for in spite of the cold water her face was all puffed up, and in the hope of hiding it she had added a thick layer of white powder. At the sight of the long clean linen robe I offered her, and which, for safety's sake, must be abandoned before leaving the sick room—there was a new deluge—and if her anxiety had not been so intense, I should have been surely tempted to smile. The tears rolled down her cheeks, leaving great furrows behind them.

I rang for an orderly, and told him to conduct my guests to Madame Guix who was then on duty. In less than two minutes my nurse returned, saying that it would be impossible to admit the child to a ward where there were twenty typhoid patients.

I had never given the matter a thought. How stupid of me!

"Pierrot, poor Pierrot, it would do him so much good. Forgive me, Madame,—poor Suzanne"—and then followed an argument in which I came out ahead only because I entrenched myself behind "The doctor's orders". It was so hard to seem relentless.

The visit over, Madame Parent felt much

relieved. She said her husband had recognised her. While she was preparing to take her leave we discovered that by the way she had come, there was no return train that night, and I couldn't bear to think of her riding fifteen miles in a cart only to sit up all night in a little lonely way-station. But she didn't seem in the least to dread it. She was calmer now and so ashamed of having lost control of herself. Fearing, however, that the frail little girl might not be able to stand the strain, I sought a means of detaining them until morning. Nini and Yvonne needed no begging to "Double up" and offer one single bed to Madame Parent and her daughter, who couldn't find words enough to express their gratitude.

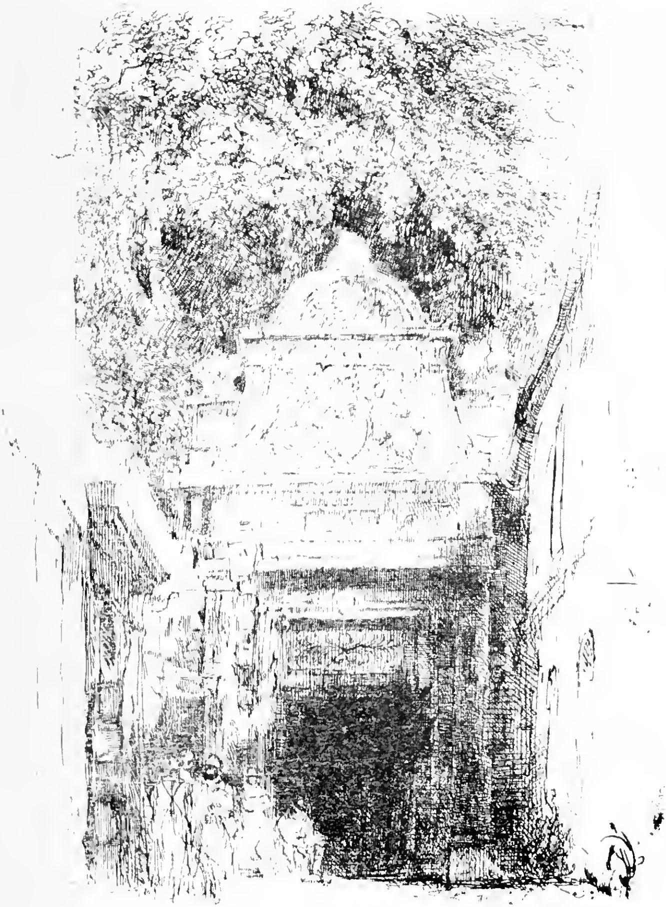
It was a different woman who greeted us the next morning. Two nights and a day in a third-class compartment together with the agonizing moral suspense had completely unnerved this plucky little person, who was so embarrassed at her unseeming behaviour that she blushed scarlet while trying to explain it to herself and me.

"We were so happy, Pierre and I, before the war came. He and my brother were associated in business. We are packers and shippers at Le Mans. I have tried to keep things up, my father and an old workman have done what they could to help me, but it is quite a load. Then Jean was killed at the Marne and the burden grew doubly heavy, and when I got your letter I imagined Pierre was dead, and you didn't want to tell me. But that's all over now, he smiled at me. I told him not to worry, only to get well quick, and when he gets back he'll find that things have gone on just the same. They must, Madame, no matter what happens, else who is to look after the babies if the women don't do their part?"

Simple, heroic words, so often repeated that they no longer seemed extraordinary. But it is such women as this that have made France what she is!

The days succeeding these two visits were filled with tense anxiety. Five or six of our patients, among them Navez and Parent successfully passed the much dreaded crisis. The condition of most of the others remained stationary, but three or four took a decided turn for the worst. A little middle-aged man called Cru, from Dunkerque, who on account of his round shoulders, and long hooked nose resembled a human interrogation point, threatened congestion of the lungs; Léon Lecucq, the very young lad who had no one in the world but his boarding-house keeper, and Jules Mackerey, a handsome blonde headed fellow, developed numerous sinister complications. Mackerey's symptoms were particularly alarming on account of the rapidity with which they developed. As to Bonson, the tall, gaunt, artilleryman who had so frightened me the night of my first vigil, nothing in the world could keep him in bed, and I heartily thanked Heaven his ward was on the ground floor, for several times we caught him opening the window and preparing to wander away, clothed but in his nightshirt. When put back, he would murmur something in Basque (as I learned afterwards) and stare at a fixed spot just beyond our heads.

Monsieur Cru, as we all called him, (he was the only one we ever addressed other than by his christian or surname, why I cannot tell) was less delirious than the other and extremely easy to care for. We had no difficulty whatever in getting him to submit to our very heroic



THE COLLEGE DOOR, SOISSONS

treatment. I can still hear his high pitched tenor voice wavering—*"C'est pour mon bien"* —it's all for my good, whenever we did anything that was particularly disagreeable to him. Happy philosopher!

Léon Lecucq, on arriving and while waiting to be bathed had caught up a novel that happened to be lying on the vestibule table, and from that moment throughout his entire illness refused to let go of it. What he imagined it was, I really couldn't say, but when we would approach his bed and uncover him for his bath he would draw himself up into a little bunch, and putting his book beneath him, sputter some indefinable phrases at whoever tried to take it from him. It was almost pitch-battle three times a day.

The arrival of Bonson's mother was the only thing that for an instant distracted our attention from our somewhat gloomy situation. The little, dark-skinned Basque woman, wearing her native costume and carrying a heavy market basket on either arm, had journeyed all the way from the Spanish border to embrace her only child. She spoke little or no French, but if one were to judge from her expression, she was entirely master of her sentiments. They were hidden deep down in her heart, and not meant for public display. She gently kissed her big, suffering boy who failed to recognise her, emptied the fresh eggs, butter and apples from her baskets, put them at my disposal, and then went her way leaving behind a very agreeable impression.

The gravity of the situation demanded the constant presence of our doctor who never went beyond the gates of our property for nearly six weeks. His reports were telephoned to headquarters, who in return sent us news of all kinds, the chief item of interest being the announcement that a new orderly, an extra, was shortly to join the contingent already at the château.

The arrival of a recruit such as Barbarin was to us much like a gift from the Gods. He put new life and spirit into our overworked staff, who for the moment were somewhat worn out by long vigils and our ever increasing demands upon their strength.

Short of stature, quick of movement, with a pair of bright eyes and an exceptionally mobile countenance, Barbarin with his many gestures made us think of those masks belonging to the famous "Comedia dell' Arte."

"Where do you come from?" I questioned.

"Paname", was the brief reply.

I still looked askance. That particular point in France was unknown to me. Barbarin saw my quandary.

"Eh bien, quoi—Pantruche!"

I was no wiser than before, and he knew it, so bursting with a rippling laugh,

"That means Paris, of course."

I might have guessed it. Who in the world but a Parisian could possess that love of intrigue.

"What is your trade?"

"I don't belong to the trade."

"You have sufficient fortune not to need one?"

That was indeed a diplomatic stroke on my part, and a surprise even to Barbarin. He put one hand into his pocket and with the other stroked his beardless chin, and wondered whether or not I was chaffing him. He decided to try me out.

"That depends on what day it is."

"Oh, I see", said I catching his thought, "Then you follow a liberal career?"

"Yes", came the answer accompanied by a broad smile.

"Which one, might I ask?"

"The stage."

"Ah!"

"Yes, just before the war broke out, I was chief super at the Théâtre de Belleville."

I had great difficulty controlling my countenance. One reads about such people in books, of which Private Gaspard is a brilliant example, but seldom or ever hopes to come into actual contact with the real thing.

"Are you married?"

"Yes."

"And your salary as super is sufficient to keep a wife, perhaps a family?"

This may seem like a very bald interrogatory, but to the average *"poilu"* of Barbarin's class, it is on the contrary an appreciable mark of interest.

"Ah, I couldn't live on that alone, but one must be versatile in this age. I used to do a very good business in toy rabbits."

"What do you mean?"

"You know those little rabbits that jump when you squeeze a rubber ball."

Of course, I had seen them many times sold by hawkers beneath the arcades on the Rue de Rivoli. I nodded my assent.

"They were good for a while, but last year trade was running low, and nobody seemed to invent anything new that was just as good, so in the daytime I took to doing wrestling matches with a friend on the public squares up by Belleville."

"I see."

"In July he got a sunstroke which laid him up, so I taught tango for a while, and then the war came along and I didn't have to look for another job."

"Have you been to the front?"

Barbarin proudly displayed a right hand on which the index finger was lacking.

"Battle of the Marne", he continued glibly. "'Only time I ever regretted being born with legs! Wheels would have made it so much easier."

His sincerity was as amusing as his good humour was infectious. He didn't seem to require any instructions. In two hours' time he had visited the château in detail, joked with the help in the kitchen, and pronounced his opinion on the final issue of not only the war, but each and every case of typhoid in our wards.

Gentle in his movements, performing the most obnoxious duties with a smile and a caustic remark, he soon endeared himself not only to the officers and the staff, but to the sick men themselves, on account of his apparent intense interest in their individual cases. He had a kind word for all and was unsparing in time and pains so long as they aided in procuring the slightest pleasure to a patient.

"Barbarin, give me a cigarette", pleaded a semi-convalescent to whose similar request the doctor had made a negative gesture.

"You're too young", was the amiable reply, far less aggravating than a flat refusal.

"Barbarin, did you ever have typhoid?", questioned a long, thin man whose feet stuck out beyond the iron bars of the bed.

"Surely, three times when I was a kid, that's why I never grew any taller. You've got nothing to worry about!"

"Barbarin, my bed's so hot, can't you do something for it?" wailed another.

"Just wait till Spring comes, old man, and then we'll put you out on the lawn", was the cheerful response.

And so it went, day in and day out regardless of atmosphere or surroundings, a really admirable untarrying source of good humour. But it was in ward number three, our desperate cases, that Barbarin was at his zenith. He began by carefully scrutinising, first the name cards tied to the foot of the beds, and then the persons to whom the designations belonged. Evidently deciding that the two did not go harmoniously together, he rebaptized every patient according to his own peculiar fantasy, and presently, in spite of ourselves, we were using his terms in preference to our own.

Monsieur Cru became "the bric-à-brac from Dunkerque", Lecucq was tenderly dubbed "Dudule", Bonson "The Basque", and Mackerey "The suspect".

The human interrogation point, who had left his sense of humour behind him, in his china-store when he joined the ranks, probably only half relished Barbarin's somewhat disrespectful levity, but as we tolerated it, he was too polite to complain.

As long as I live I shall see Barbarin standing holding a basin of cold water into which Monsieur Cru was plunging his burning, emaciated hands and arms.

"Think of all the heat that's wasted with these fevers and coal is so dear too", rambled on the Extra as he absently surveyed his patient. Then suddenly looking down he continued, *"Oh, la, la,* you couldn't have been any too handsome as a civilian, our uniform probably didn't add much to your beauty, but as a patient you're a fright. For the Lord's sake hurry up and get well."

When he found out Lecucq's isolation in the world, he was immediately drawn towards him, and his voice would change to a caressing falsetto as he would bend over the half conscious body that the relentless fever was slowly consuming.

"Poor kid", he would murmur. "Hardly out of his swaddling clothes, let alone knowing how to take care of himself", and then as our treatment demanded that none of these men be left lying long in the same position, Barbarin would gently put his hands beneath the boy's body and lift him high into the air, while he smoothed his sheets.

"That's it, come to Mother. Now then be a good boy, nobody's going to hurt you", and similar phrases were literally cooed into Dudule's ears.

Mackerey's heart was one of his numerous weak points, and was only kept in motion by means of stimulants such as caffeine, alternated with hypodermics of camphorated oil, and each time one of us would approach with the needle, Barbarin's presentiment told him that the man was slowly sinking, and instinctively he used every physical and moral effort to snatch him from the brink of eternity.

"Whoa there!" he would say, as he dabbed a spot with iodine in preparation for the prick. "Whoa there, isn't our company good enough for you that you're so anxious to leave us? Hold on a minute, we need you to cheer when the boys come home victorious. This is no time to let go the banisters."

But his efforts, as well as ours, were useless. Mackerey grew slowly weaker and weaker, resistance was less and less evident. On the doctor's advice a telegram was transmitted through headquarters to his family who lived near Arras, urging some one to come. From the religious medals and his rosary we knew that our patient was a Roman Catholic, so the priest was sent for, who gave the dying man absolution and offered up a prayer.

In spite of all, I could not believe that we would not save him, and the doctor, Barbarin and I never left his bedside for a moment. It was evident Mackerey was unconscious for the lines in his face softened; I even imagined a faint smile was on his lips. In the stillness of the midnight hour his breathing grew easier, and I turned to the fire for an instant's repose. Barbarin took my place, and a second later when I faced about I could see the little comedian who seating himself on the dying man's bed, half raised him to an upright posture, and putting his hands on his shoulders gently shook him while he said in short impassioned tones —"You shan't go, old man, you shan't, do you hear! We need you, France needs you!"

At three o'clock I was relieved. I went reluctantly, but nothing, not even the menace of court martial would persuade Barbarin to leave his post.

"Ce n'est pas chic—ce n'est pas chic", he remonstrated, and so he remained.

I could not rest. At six o'clock I dressed and went below. It was still almost dark but when I entered the ward I could see that the sheet on Mackerey's bed had been drawn close up to the head board. Neither doctor nor nurse was present. Over by the fire, his elbow on his knee, his head resting in the palm of his hand, sat Barbarin, gazing steadily into the dying embers. He turned about as I entered.

"He left us just after you went", was all he said.

VII

For many reasons it was deemed advisable to hold the funeral next morning. It would then be December twenty-fourth, and it hardly seemed right that Christmas for all those who remained, no matter how mild the celebration, be overcast by the shadow of Death.

Late in the afternoon a little old white-haired peasant, wearing a long-out-of-date frock coat was admitted to my office. He was Mackerey's father. It was a difficult thing to tell him he had come too late, and though no sound escaped when I broke the sad news, the glance that darted from his clear blue eyes, made me feel like an executioner.

We escorted him to the round tower where the mortal remains had been transferred, and both Madame Guix and I were moved to tears by the old man's silent grief. Drawing down the sheet he kissed the dead lad on the forehead and murmured.

"He was all I had."

These were the only words that ever escaped him.

To our offers of finding room for him until the morrow, he only shook his head. Even the invitation to be present when the coffin should be closed, was refused. He seemed to have a subtle horror of the place, as of everything that had witnessed the passing of his son, and disappeared down the village road without informing us whether or not he would ever return.

Contrary to its usual custom, the sun rose clear and bright in the morning sky. It seemed almost to mock our sorrow, to urge us to look forward to the glories of another day, not backward upon sufferings now past. It made the hoar frost glisten like diamonds in the rare leaves still clinging to the trees, and the majestic pines stood out black against the brilliant blue, forming a velvety background for the façade of the château nestling almost at their feet.

The ceremony was set for eight o'clock, but by half past seven the court yard was full of villagers who in their Sunday clothes had come to pay their humble tribute to this unknown son of France, anxious to show in any way they could their appreciation of his great sacrifice.

Flowers, we had none, nor was there any way of procuring them. Not a green house existed in the army zone, so Madame Guix and Mademoiselle Alice, twined a large wreath of ivy which they gathered from the wall. Later on some little girls brought in three or four half blown geraniums, the only fresh flowers in the village, gathered from the window-box at the schoolhouse.

Monsieur Duguey, schoolmaster and village clerk, loaned the flag from the town-hall to cover the coffin, and we were all astonished at his uncontrollable emotion as he placed it on the bier. Great tears streamed down his cheeks, it seemed as though he were forewarned that his only son who had just gone to the front, would one day be buried with like ceremony.

On the flag was placed the soldier's topcoat and képi, together with our wreath, and the tiny bunch of flowers. For the occasion, our four orderlies who still belonged to the active service, abandoned their aprons and after burnishing up their guns and trappings, constituted themselves guard of honour.

At ten minutes of eight we could hear the even tramp of soldiers' feet on the highroad, and George came in to announce that one hundred convalescent, or slightly wounded soldiers from the convent-hospital at Charly, had asked and obtained permission to march four miles to our gate, in order to conduct their brother in arms to his last resting-place.

Sharply at eight the little bell in our Church began tolling the dirge, and as our officers appeared on the steps a wounded corporal stepped from among the visiting troops and conferred a minute with the guard of honour who stood on either side of the steps leading into the round tower. As the door opened and the flag draped coffin appeared, the corporal's voice rang out clear in the morning air.

"Present arms!"

The boys' rifles clicked into position.

Slowly the coffin was borne down the step and carried towards the gate, followed by the dead man's father who had mysteriously returned. Behind him our officers walked erect the sun catching in their gold braided uniforms, while directly succeeding them the three nurses, Madame Guix, Mademoiselle Alice and myself, took our places. Our long dark capes and flowing white head-dress gave a mediaeval touch to the picture, making it almost theatrical in its effect, and as I looked back I could see the villagers two by two had fallen into line behind the soldiers, while from the windows leaned the orderlies left in charge of the hospital.

The little church was filled to overflowing, and at the graveside the troops once again rendered homage to the glorious defunct. "Requiescat in pace", murmured the priest, as the first shovelful of earth was cast in. At the same moment the little black coated figure swayed pitifully. Madame Guix and I bounded forward, each one catching him by an arm; but he had mastered himself.

Now that all ceremony was over the soldiers were ordered not to stay any longer on the damp ground. And presently the only ones remaining to see the grave covered over were the boy's father, Madame Guix and myself, to whom he clung pathetically.

"We'll go back to the house at once," said I when finally we moved away. "I'll give you something to brace you up before you start on your journey."

The old man shook his head.

"Why wont you come?"

He refused to give an explanation but remained firm in his decision of leaving at once. Seeing this, Madame Guix pulled from beneath her cape the little personal trinkets which had been found in Mackerey's pockets; his military book, a photograph or two, together with his rosary, and a lock of his hair which she had cut off and added to the neatly done up parcel.

"Will you carry these to his mother?"

The little old man nodded assent, took the package and without another word turned and started up the road. We stood and watched him out of sight.

At the château life continued much the same as before and apparently I was the only one sensible of any difference in the situation. Our failure to save Mackerey's life, the reproachful look in his father's eyes made me feel as though I had been personally responsible for his case, and now that the tension was over, I could not find courage to go on from where we had left off.

In the afternoon I ached to get away from it all, and by careful changes in our diagram, managed to obtain two hours leave. Taking the dogs, every one of them, I started down the long alley, my thoughts travelling even faster than my feet, and though at the outset I had no determined destination, I unconsciously found myself visiting the favourite spots where H. and I had spent so many happy hours together. Now I was seated on a marble bench gazing up at the skeletons of lime trees that touched each other cathedral like above my head; now I found myself wandering down by our tiny river, scanning the every contour of a giant oak he had so often planned painting, and presently I was climbing to the very summit of our grounds, the dogs capering and yelping before me. Why I abandoned the regular path, I cannot tell. I seemed to be running a race with the pale yellow sun that was fast sinking behind the hills. Struggling, panting, gloriously victorious physically, but mentally tortured by fearful misgivings, I reached the top of the hill just as the sun shot its last resplendent rays from the West, bathing me in a pale gold sheen, and transforming every ripple on the far distant Marne into a tongue of light. It was like a fleeting glimpse of Eternity and I stood motionless for many minutes as the fast rolling dark blue clouds swiftly swept the vision from my view. A long rumble in the distance, a vivid reminder of stern realities brought me to myself. I winked hard, and then looked about me, literally unconscious of where I was. In a second the spell was broken, and drawing my cape closer I hurried towards a beaten path, anxious not to be overtaken by the darkness. Suddenly I stopped. What was that just before me? A mound? No such thing had hitherto been there. Leaning forward, my eyes piercing the twilight I gradually discerned a humble wooden cross.

A grave, a soldier's grave right here on my own property, and I had not known it. Instinctively I felt it was not a German. Who were the gallant defenders of my home? In an instant I could touch the cap that swung from the apex of the cross. Beaten by every element for more than four months now, it no longer had a shape, all that I could tell was that it was British. I strained my eyes to read the inscription that had been written in pencil. It was blurred beyond deciphering.

To-morrow, I planned, we would come again and try to read it, and bring with us a humble token of our gratitude, a wreath of ivy.

Night had enveloped me in darkness before I reached home, and coming towards the refectory wing, great peals of laughter greeted me from that direction. Lamplight gleamed through the uncurtained windows, and loathe to break in upon the merriment I hesitated before opening the door. From where I stood I caught sight of Barbarin perched on the long dining-room table juggling with a handful of oranges, much to the delight of my entire domestic staff, and the "Heavenly Twins" who were off duty. A second later, the inside door opened and Yvonne and Nini appeared with a turkish bathrobe in which they promptly enveloped the juggler, while Chou and Theirage handed him a beard and moustache wrought out of a roll of absorbent cotton.

"Père Noël! Père Noël! Santa Claus!" they all shrieked with delight while assisting him to glue on the beard with the white of an egg, and to hoist a grape picker's basket full of oranges to his shoulders. Barbarin danced from one end of that long refectory table to the other, and when finally exhausted, they helped him down and started him on his rounds distributing the meagre presents they had been able to procure.

I met him in the vestibule on his return trip, his robe dragging on the floor behind him, his basket empty, his countenance radiant with the joy of success. My presence must have suddenly recalled the anxious hours of the night just past, for his face dropped as he approached me, and with a seriousness that was most ludicrous when one considered his attitude and garb, he explained—

"It seemed my duty to cheer them up a bit, otherwise they'd all have died of gloom."

Save for a little impromptu merry-making in the kitchen Christmas came and went unattended by any happening of note. The guns on our immediate front rolled longer and louder than I had ever heard them before. At moments it was really alarming: what little china and glassware we possessed, danced on their shelves in the cupboards, and such of our window panes as remained, tinkled and fell to the ground, later to be replaced by sheets of oiled paper.

A half dozen patients in the upstairs wards suddenly developed disquieting symptoms, while below we had a hand to hand struggle with death, which seemed destined to carry off little "Dudule". It might be truly said that Madame Guix literally forced the breath of life into his slender delicate body, too exhausted to carry on the combat. Night and day she worked over him as though resentful of the other's slipping beyond her control, and we were well into the new year before the danger mark was passed, and our patients entered upon their convalescence.

It was after this happy stage had been reached that I cast aside my nurse's garb and assumed the housewife's apron. Until now the domestic side of hospital life had demanded but trifling attention. It had been easy for our cooks to procure sufficient food for the household and the staff; our patients had taken little or nothing solid, but forewarned of their oncoming voracity, I realised it was high time to prepare.

The rapidity with which we had become a typhoid hospital had hardly permitted us to ascertain for just which post the four men I had been allowed to retain, were best fitted.

Luckily they were intelligent and readily adapted themselves to their surroundings. The "Heavenly Twins" developed into excellent general houseworkers, "Chou" even going so far as to darn the officers' socks. Dubuis, though it had been some time since he had stood over a stove, had once been chief steward in an Officers' Club at Noyon, so naturally his tendencies were towards the culinary department, where he was seconded by Grantot, an engraver of silver, and Maria Colin a one time Parisian charwoman, who hearing of my plight had secured a passport and come straight out "to do her bit", refusing any remuneration for her services.

Decidedly Dubuis had a genius for organising, for when finally I took over the reins I found there was nothing left for me to do but follow out his well laid plans. In fact he had far surpassed anything I had ever hoped to attain, his past experience, not only as a steward, but as proprietor of a dairy products shop in the immediate suburbs of Paris, fitting him wonderfully well not only to deal with the local tradespeople, but even with the wariest of peasants.

Unwilling to worry me at a time when he knew I most needed encouragement, but angered by the dealings of one of the provincial butchers, he resolved it would be wiser for us to raise our own cattle. There was plenty of room in the stables, besides hay in the lofts and mangles in the cellar, so writing to his wife to send him sufficient funds, he gladly risked them against my displeasure, and his own competence as a buyer.

Making arrangements to be gone overnight, he took old Cesar and descended into the Brie country, returning the next day with a surprising number of bullocks and sheep, two milch cows and a half dozen pigs.

His great forte lay in the buying, selling and exchanging of our cattle and their products, besides making the hospital independent of any dealer.

Milk, butter and cheese soon became home produce, and what we could not consume was either marketed once a week for cash at Château Thierry, or exchanged for fresh vegetables or eggs.

Oranges and salt fish were bought at wholesale in Paris by his wife, shipped direct by rail to Headquarters where they were met by our cart, unloaded, reloaded and dragged eleven miles to Villiers. It was a great deal of work but so well systematised that we barely felt the strain, and were deeply grateful for his varied bill of fare.

Everything was done with a smile. Those who worked with him adored and feared him; those with whom he dealt were the same. It was thanks to Dubuis, that I was one day offered the pleasing spectacle of our chief steward, our far famed, vice hardened poacher, and our gendarme (his sworn enemy) coming down the road arm in arm, discussing recent events as though twenty years of enmity and hatred had never existed.

New Year's week witnessed a great improvement in all of the wards. Several of the lighter cases entered into the convalescent period, while upstairs our anxiety was greatly relieved by a decided turn for the better. As to our severe cases, while the actual crisis was passed, our patients were so feeble that complications were still to be feared, and as time went on and their conditions ameliorated, it was intensely interesting to see them open their eyes and look about them as though in a totally strange place, while in reality they had been in the same wards for weeks.

Monsieur Cru was the first to put order into his mental state, and one morning asked us the day of the week and month we were in. His astonishment when we told him it was January, 1915, was such that I feared for a moment lest he question his own sanity.

"But my wife, what on earth will she say to me? I promised to write her every week. Maybe she thinks I'm dead."

"No, she doesn't old man", cheerfully responded Barbarin, "We saw to that."

The next moment he began feeling all over his body as though he had lost something, and then nearly burst into tears.

"They've stolen her picture and my watch", he moaned, "How dreadful, she'll never forgive me."

"Hold on, not so swift my lad," retorted Barbarin. "You seem to forget that for nearly a week every time we put them under your pillow, you pulled them out and threw them on the floor. If you'll wait just a second I'll come over to your night table and get them for you." Monsieur Cru was much abashed and relieved.

"I? I did that", he murmured, "How disrespectful."

"A darn nuisance I thought at the time", rejoined Barbarin producing the much cherished articles.

The "Bric-à-brac from Dunkerque" carefully scrutinized all the "Bibelots" and murmured, "Yes, they're all here, both her picture and the girls."

"Where'd you suppose they'd be? Did you think I took 'em? What on earth would I want with your wife's picture, I've got one of my own."

"I didn't mean that, I didn't mean that", promptly protested the little man, "No offence intended, really." And then by way of making peace he held up the photograph of a woman and invited Barbarin's attention.

"Don't you think she's handsome?"

What on earth could the poor man do but reply in the affirmative?

"And here are the girls," continued the thin wavering voice. "Such lovely children."

Barbarin looked once, then again, and finally took the picture in his hand for closer inspection.

"How old are they?", he queried at length.

"Eighteen and twenty-two."

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-four."

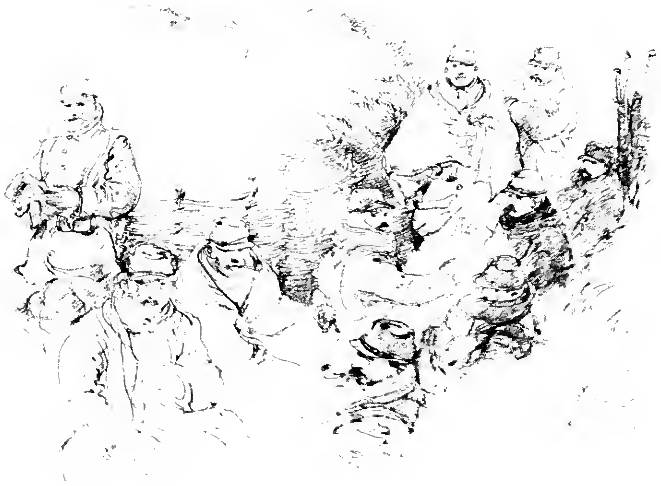
Barbarin shrugged his shoulders in dismay. Until that moment he had rejoiced in Monsieur Cru's return to health, but now convinced of his mental inefficiency, he didn't even try to argue.

"Don't you think you'd better lie down? You've talked enough for to-day. No use overdoing."

"I know you think I'm crazy, but I'm not", he gasped as Barbarin gently pressed him back on his pillows, "If you'd given me time I would have told you. I married a young widow three years ago." Monsieur Cru laid special stress on the word *young*.

Barbarin could no longer contain himself, his hands on his sides, he laughed until he cried, much to his patient's dismay.

With the gradual return of his appetite Monsieur Cru became more and more exacting in his demands. It was evident the young



"YOU UNDERSTAND, MADAME, YOU ARE
IN THE TRENCHES, YOU ARE HUNGRY,
THE DINNER IS LATE IN COMING"

widow had realised his fondness for food, and had very cleverly taken advantage of it. The necessary simplicity of our diet was a constant source of distress and dissertation. He would sit for hours talking about "Tasty dishes", sometimes smacking his lips in apprehension, but always philosophically concluding—

"What's the use of talking about it all? This war has completely ruined my digestion. I'll never be the same again."

"It's a pity about you", murmured our "Extra".

Evidently our patient was seeking to work out the exact, direct cause of his illness, which he finally traced back to his irregular meals.

"You understand, Madame, you are in the trenches, you are hungry, the dinner is late in coming. You just get nicely started when Bing! another attack. By the time you get back, your food is cold. The only day we were lucky enough to have chicken, a four inch shell burst right over us. Killed two and wounded two more. You can say what you like, but a thing like that takes your appetite away. I couldn't eat a mouthful until night. Ah, war is wonderful, but it does change our habits so. At home my wife used to bring me my chocolate in my bed—"

A repressed, but audible, giggle arose from the corner where our orderly was busy with another patient.

Monsieur Cru continued, ignoring the insult, "On the front at the time you usually expect chocolate, you get tinned pork and beans, or sardines."

"What's the use of expecting? You should worry. The first three years of the war we'll have to get on with indigestion, after that when we're thoroughly organised, both sides'll agree to knock off an hour at noon for luncheon. I promise you if I'm there then I'll see that it is done", was Barbarin's irrelevant reply, which silenced the "Bric-à-brac" who went on nodding his head and thinking in silence.

Dudule's first sign of real consciousness was evinced the morning he threw his much cherished novel from the coverlet where Barbarin had carefully placed it.

"What's this you're trying to put into my bed? No wonder I'm sore." He laughed faintly when we told him how much store he had set by the now abandoned book.

"Well, I'll read it just so soon as my eyes get strong enough. There must be something worth while in it since I hung on to it so tight."

The youngest of all our patients, he who had been the least resistant. The malady had ravaged his physique, he was merely skin and bones, his great brown eyes standing out in his countenance like those of a young swallow still in the nest. But he was prompt to react, and thanks to daily hypodermics of a wonderful new serum sent down from Headquarters, he was soon able to be about.

"Ah, la, la," sighed Barbarin, who now had a moment's leisure to stretch himself in front of the fire, "I used up a new pair of slippers just running for you."

The timid boy blushed scarlet and murmured an apology. He was grateful, infinitely grateful for everything we had done for him, and never missed an occasion to say so.

"And Marguerite, what the devil is her address?, I couldn't find it anywhere. For the Lord's sake hurry up and write her you're still in the land of the living."

"Who told you her name is Marguerite?",

snapped Dudule, thereby betraying what he most wished to hide.

"Who told me? You did."

"When?"

"Why you've been screaming about her for over a month now. There's only one thing left for you to do. Just as soon as your pins get steady, go and marry her. Better not let her come to see you right away either, or she'll never consent. You're still more dead than alive. Why, two weeks ago to-day they took your measure for a coffin."

This was pushing the pleasantry a little far but Dudule was equal to the situation. Turning to me, he demanded—

"I'm too young to be a corpse, am I not, Madame?"

I nodded my assent. I could not believe it possible that the war would not be over by the time he had been entirely restored to health. But who can prophesy?

A year later a black bordered letter signed Marguerite Lecucq, told me that Dudule had passed on the Field of Honor during the battle of the Somme, leaving his nineteen year old widow with an infant son to support.

Once again the food question loomed in the distance. For the moment, however, we were obliged to keep very strict watch to prevent the convalescents from infringing on our diet laws. It was most difficult for an appetite is a hard thing to curb, and I feared lest pressure be brought to bear upon one or another of our orderlies, who ignorant of the gravity of the situation, might procure some long craved edible, thereby causing a catastrophe.

Naturally unsuspicious, I was, nevertheless, surprised to see a soldier whisk something beneath his counterpane, when I unexpectedly opened the door into a ward.

"What is it?" I queried, shaking a warning finger. "Sweetmeats?" It was just possible that a parcel had arrived and been distributed uncensored.

"No, Madame, really".

"Then what?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" I put my hand onto something lumpy that moved a trifle. In an instant I had whipped off the coverlet much to the sick man's dismay, and my surprised gaze was met by a pair of round brown button eyes that belonged to Betsy—my Boston bull.

"Oh, please don't take her away", pleaded the soldier. "Gamant had her yesterday. It's my turn to-day. She's been such a comfort to us all. She seems to understand everything we tell her. This room has planned decorating her for devotion, just as soon as we can get about", and that is how Betsy became a heroine, the proud possessor of a tin-foil medal!

In certain wards the men gradually began helping themselves, leaving us a few hours breathing space each day. I was all for sending Madame Guix on a vacation, she was terribly run-down and suffered agonies from an abscess beneath her arm, though, of course, she never mentioned it.

Her reply to any such argument was that my condition was not much better than her's, that it was my turn first, and so forth, to all of which I naturally turned a deaf ear.

So accustomed had we become to our work that we missed the strain under which we had laboured, and our relaxation was most fatiguing. We had not long to wait though, for quite unexpectedly we received a visit from the médecin chef, who descended upon the hospital without a moment's warning.

This caused quite a flurry among the military "Infirmiers", Godec among others, for whom the word *efficiency* must have been synonymous with *smell*, for he dashed upstairs and snatching our precious bottle of disinfectant from the shelf—distributed its contents so generously on the floors of the wards that all my patients were coughing when the doctor arrived.

We were approved of. We had done so well that on leaving, the *Grand Chef* informed me that I was to choose forty men who could travel, and he would make arrangements to have them finish their convalescence in the interior of France.

"You must make room for others who need your care more than these do now."

Two days later the list on my table bore two score new names and the hospital registered *complet*.

VIII

As I look back through the few hastily jotted notes that compose my diary, I realize how exceptionally fortunate was our hospital in finding the proper people to fill the various posts —almost without effort on our part! This, naturally, relieved my mind of a tremendous burden, and permitted me to enter whole heartedly into whatever duties I undertook.

There were two questions, however, which soon became problems, and we seemed helplessly handicapped in finding a solution. They were apparently beyond the domain of our possibilities.

First of all, the shortage of coal. By dint of unparalleled economy, the burning of one third dry and one third green wood, together with a few lumps of the precious mineral, Dubuis had managed to make my stock last till the first week in January. From the very beginning we had not once thought of using it for heating purposes, our supply wouldn't have lasted a week under such circumstances.

By applying to Headquarters, from thence to the Colonel in charge of the city's welfare, and finally to the Prefet of the Department, we actually managed to get half a ton, which at the price of great labour was dragged in our farm cart from Château Thierry to Villiers, my horse making three round trips of twenty-two miles each.

A second demand was immediately refused; coal was not to be had even with a *permis*. Decidedly the matter took on an alarming aspect.

Wood, of course, we had in any quantity, but green wood. We made a careful inspection of what dry stock remained in the shed, and Dubuis decided that by merely lighting the fires in the wards with such material, and covering them with green logs, we could get a considerable degree of heat. This would leave enough for the kitchen range until railway facilities permitted easier transportation, which we calculated would be about a month or six weeks at the longest.

In the meantime parties composed of not only our orderlies, but a good many of the townspeople who willingly lent a hand, scoured the woods in our entire district in quest of dead limbs and branches that would make excellent fuel, but the French peasant is so thrifty that not much was brought in to swell the pile that was carefully locked in the shed, Dubuis in person distributing the necessary pittance each night and morning. It was not long, however, before we discovered that despite our careful reckoning, our supply was literally melting away, so officers and staff willingly made the sacrifice of fires in their apartments, replacing the lack of heat by a few more warm clothes. But we had counted, alas! without the humidity, never unusual in the Eastern part of France during the Winter season. Almost immediately it penetrated the apartments, an I can even now recall a certain day in February when the thermometer registering a little below 32° Fh. outside, we were obliged to open the dining-room windows to keep warm during luncheon. The gravy on my meat turned solid before I could get it to my mouth.

The second all absorbing question was, tobacco. Much has been said of its necessity to the fighting men in the trenches, but I fancy few realise the moral effect of a cigarette on a convalescent in a typhoid hospital. The day a man can sit up in bed, clap his soldier's cap on one ear, and puff waves of smoke into his neighbours' faces, there is no longer any doubt as to his recovery. He is cured.

The little stock that a village tobacconist had been able to lay in, was quickly exhausted, with no means of replenishment in view. At Charly all was in reserve for the three or four hundred wounded men at the local hospital. I had written to friends in Paris, who all had their own special charities to look after, and during the past weeks railway and parcel post service had been extremely intermittent and unsatisfactory. I received two packages of two hundred cigarettes each; a mere drop in the bucket, disposed of in half an hour's time.

Headquarters alone remained: I made my appeal and received one kilogram, a little over two pounds. I had a right to so many grammes per head every ten days, as had every other sanitary formation, but Headquarters could not give what it did not possess. It could promise—that was all, *"Patience et longueur de temps . . ."*

It was more than annoying, it was sickening, to see the disappointment that greeted each of my futile attempts to procure the much demanded *perlot.* I decided to carry my appeal to a higher court. I went to the Commandant de la Place, in whose absence I was referred to Monsieur le Préfet. To him I explained my numerous futile endeavours.

"Madame Macherez ought to have some", he said after quite a long silence during which he had been thinking. In passing let me explain that the lady mentioned, is the President of the Red Cross Chapter in our department, the Aisne.

"Yes, she certainly ought to have some. On account of daily bombardment it has been decided to evacuate two hospitals at Soissons, but the tobacco is probably still there. Why don't you ask her for it?"

"Monsieur le Préfet", I replied, "I should be delighted, but Soissons is the front; I have no possible way of communicating with the city as you know."

"Yes, quite right, I had forgotten."

"How soon do you need your tobacco? I am going to Soissons next week, I might see what I could do."

"A week is a long time when a hundred men are aching for a smoke. To-morrow would not be too soon to suit them."

"The great difficulty is to get a military motor to accept such an errand. They're so busy. They might transmit the order, but be sent somewhere else instead of returning by this direction."

"If you could find a place for me in one of them I'd go myself and take a chance on getting back quickly."

"Would you?"

"Certainly", I replied as demurely as possible though I must admit that suddenly my heart began thumping so loudly in my bosom that at times I feared it could be heard. It was difficult not to seem too anxious and by an apparent desire for adventure thwart a plan that had suddenly germinated in my brain and made such rapid strides within half a minute that I now found it absolutely imperative I go to Soissons. It was a purely selfish idea, I am ashamed to admit. But once in the early stages of the war I had met my husband in that city quite unexpectedly, and after having said good-bye to him forever. Recently he had been promoted and his last letters led me to believe he was again in that vicinity, so though my chances of encountering him were slight, I was willing to risk anything to procure the possibility.

It seemed to me the Préfet was an extremely long time coming to a decision. Yet I dared not say a word. Presently he shrugged his shoulders.

"It isn't done ordinarily, you know."

I'm sure my face fell and he saw it.

"However, this is not an ordinary situation, be here at seven o'clock to-morrow morning and I'll do what I can to find a place for you in whatever goes through from here to Soissons."

I thanked him profusely and started down to the quay where my horse was to meet me; it seemed to me I was walking on air, and I am confident joy radiated from every pore of my countenance.

On my way I met the "Médecin Chef", to whom I confided my triumph, and much to my dismay he didn't at all approve of my being allowed to go to the front, and he didn't hesitate to say so. I argued, but while he admitted the tobacco question was a grave one, he also reminded me that I had quite a responsibility on my hands in the hundred and twenty men who looked to me to keep the hospital open, etc. I was sorry I had spoken. This was a lesson; another time I would be more discreet.

On my way home to Villiers, Chou drew my attention to the fact that the big guns were more active than in quite a while, and by the time we had reached the château, the din they made was terrific. You could hear not only our guns, but those of the enemy.

"We must have made some very important gains somewhere on the front", asserted the doctor, "or else there's an attack in preparation. I've never heard them shell Soissons quite so methodically."

No permission for me to-morrow, thought I. If such be the case I'll never get beyond Château Thierry.

The noise raged all night. Now accustomed to the cannonading it did not prevent my sleeping, but once or twice I awoke, sat up in bed and weighed my chances of the morrow's success.

It was still dark when I arose and put on what warm clothes I possessed, and again taking place beside Chou on the front of our cart retraced the road Eastward. As dawn broke it seemed to me the cannonade diminished in intensity, which, of course, argued well for my trip.

I was deposited at the city hall where I had my passport viséd, and once this formality accomplished, I was ready to start. On leaving home Maria had provided me with a lunch box which I accepted rather ungratefully. Soissons is only an hour and a half's run from the château in a good motor, and arriving at Headquarters by seven, I hoped with luck to be back home for luncheon, failing which there could be no doubt about dinner!

The morning came and went and still I sat and waited. Every motor that had passed through the city was for military purposes only; not even the possibility of standing in the back of one of these covered trucks.

At one o'clock I thanked Heaven for my lunch box, and though ravenously hungry, prudently ate but half its contents; it was just possible I might need the remainder later on.

Two, three then four o'clock dragged by and still I was a fixture. Several private motors had passed but with superior officers occupying the back seats, so, of course, that didn't further my departure in the least. In the meantime the bombardment had begun with renewed vigour, and with each detonation my hopes of making the boys happy, grew dimmer and more remote.

I was standing looking out the window of the town hall, idly thrumming on the panes with my fingers and watching the mist from the Marne slowly envelop the sharp outlines of the houses, making things more mysterious every moment.

"Vite, vite", called a town clerk from the doorway. *"Vite, vite,* now's your chance, a limousine going up to Soissons to fetch some officers. Quick and they'll take you."

As I opened the outside door the powerful headlights of a motor, whose engine I could hear throbbing, shot into my eyes and blinded me. The clerk went forward and began parleying with the drivers, who seemed little pleased at the prospect of having a woman for a passenger.

"You're not getting us in wrong", I could hear one of them say.

"No", the clerk reassured them. "No, her papers and permit are *en règle*".

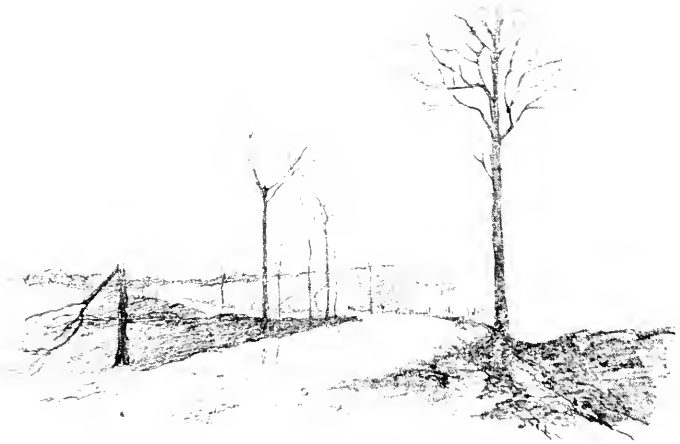
"All right".

"Thank you".

In the meantime I had clambered into the back seat of a most luxurious car, the door slammed and we were off for the front! Every turn of the wheel was bringing us nearer and nearer to the theatre of war. It awed me a bit.

I soon composed myself, however, and set about noticing every detail as we went along. I was fully alive to the fact that trips to the front are not likely to befall the same woman twice, and I was anxious to make mental note of anything out of the ordinary that might come under my observation.

On leaving Château Thierry it was still light enough for me to see that the fields on either side of the road were much the same as in normal times. In fact I was a bit disappointed that the damage to farm houses had been repaired so soon. The only thing that seemed different since I had last travelled in this direction was the loneliness of the roads—in peace times always alive with traffic and pleasure cars.



THE LONELINESS OF THE ROADS—
IN PEACE TIMES ALWAYS ALIVE
WITH TRAFFIC AND PLEASURE-CARS

I leaned forward and asked one of the drivers why we didn't meet more army supply carts, and he replied that the direct line from Paris to the front was through Villers Cotterets, and that though a national thoroughfare this one was reserved for emergencies, or communication with the hospital centre at Château Thierry.

As we approached Ouchy-le-château, which is about half way between Villiers and Soissons, it was still light enough for me to see that the noise made by our car had drawn a sentry from his box. He was standing in the middle of the road, barring our path, his hands holding his gun extended high above his head. This was a signal for us to stop.

We slowed down, and jumping from the front seat one of the drivers (they always go by twos in case of accident) went up to the sentry and whispered the password into his ear. Immediately he lowered his weapon and accompanied our man to a little impromptu hut from whose lone window streamed a ray of lamp light. Presently both returned preceded by an under officer who asked for my papers. I produced them, handed them out the window, and then watched him slowly return towards the hut. At the end of five or ten minutes our man came out and asked me if I would have the kindness to step inside for a moment. Wondering what complication could have developed, I gladly complied with the demand, and as I entered the door the rays of the lamp from which the shade had been removed, made me wince a trifle.

"That will do, thank you", said a voice as I blinked and opened my eyes, "I only wanted to be quite sure you corresponded with the photograph on the passport. Sorry to have inconvenienced you."

"Not at all, sir," I replied as I retraced my steps toward the car.

On leaving Ouchy although it was almost pitch dark, we were forbidden to use our headlights—in fact any lights whatsoever. There was no need to demand an explanation, the roaring, crashing sounds made by the heavy guns on our immediate left told us we were in their neighbourhood, though as yet quite a distance from the first lines.

Our speed was reduced considerably, and to add to the drivers' discomfort, a driving rain had set in. It was nearly seven o'clock when we were again halted at Hartannes.

"You'll not get into Soissons to-night", was the comforting remark of the sentry as he returned my papers.

"Why not?"

"Can't you hear all the music that's in the air? I'll bet the shells are dancing in the streets. This is the worst bombardment yet."

The drivers looked askance at me.

"Go ahead until some one stops me definitely", was all I said. The men threw in the clutch and we bounded forward.

It must have been most annoying to drive that huge, high-power machine at a snail's pace. All the time it reminded me of a thoroughbred animal tugging to get loose from its harness, and ready to leap ahead at the slightest provocation. But in our case prudence demanded that we keep a tight rein.

Emerging from a long avenue and turning sharply to the right we came upon an open road, and here it was that night that I caught my first vision of warfare. It was black night but looking behind me as the noise of an explosion rent the air, I could now and again catch sight of a spark whizzing through the sky as a shell took its course towards the enemy's trenches, scarcely three miles ahead of us.

The sound of the German guns was almost as distinct as ours and it was with something of a quiver that I realised my position—between our artillery and theirs.

Presently a terrific racket announced the departure of a heavy German shell, and not many seconds later we heard a crashing sound accompanied by a huge blaze that shot heavenward.

"They're trying to locate some particular spot", the driver informed me. "They're shelling with *'Bombes éclairantes.'* Look there goes another."

True enough, another and still another followed each other in rapid succession, illuminating the distant sky line in a most gruesome manner. I don't think I really appreciated the gravity of the moment, though the quickened beating of my pulse betokened my unconscious nervous condition. Once and once only had I ever seen anything that I could compare with it. As a child, while living in the suburbs of New York, I had been awakened during a hot

Summer's night by the breaking of an electric storm. The quick flashes of chain lightning, followed by immediate close rolling thunder, had so terrified me that screaming with fright I had sought refuge in my mother's arms, where I had cried myself to sleep. Such had been the will of our Creator. Now what I witnessed was the voluntary work of man. I shuddered. Still the motor went resolutely forward.

Our pace was so slow that presently, through the din, I recognised the familiar tramp of feet on the road, and guessed our men were overtaking some soldiers. In a few moments we came upon a company, advancing probably to relieve their comrades in the trenches. They were laughing and joking with one another, the only thing visible in the darkness being the burning tips of half a hundred cigarettes. The column parted to let our motor pass ahead, and while in their midst another rocket-shell burst, lighting up the road, and allowing them to catch a glimpse of my white head-dress in the back of the car.

"Hi there, give us a lift", called one or two.

"Look out for my toes", shrieked another.

"Tell us where you're going and we'll call and leave our cards."

This unexpected joviality was most welcome, and a smile relieved the tenseness of the muscles in my face. It was unbelievable that such good humour could exist right in the very jaws of death.

We crept on stealthily, bumping from side to side over the ruts in the road, now and again literally ploughing through muddy slime that came close up to the wheel hubs.

Suddenly as we were passing between a row of houses, a voice that could be heard at a much longer distance, cried out—

"*Qui vive?*"

"*France!*" was the immediate reply from the front seat. My blood was racing through my veins. The moment was more exciting than any drama I had ever witnessed.

"Stop your car, no one can pass here", said the voice as a tall dark figure loomed in the darkness.

"But our papers are all in order", protested our driver, "I'll get down and show them to you."

"Sorry but those are my orders."

"We're only going to Soissons", continued the chauffeur.

The sentry was merciless.

"Pull over to the side of the road", he ordered. "I'll let our officer take care of you as soon as he comes."

We obeyed blindly—there was nothing else to do.

"Where are we?", asked the driver.

"Vauxbuin," came the reply. "Right on the station square."

"Where's Vauxbuin?" growled number two.

"The last village on the road before you get to Soissons", said I, proud of my knowledge. Then leaning my head against the cold window frame, I strained my eyes in hope of recognising the landscape. In a very few moments things began to take shape. Yes, there was the station, the fountain in the middle of the square.

"What's this motor doing here?" asked an abrupt, unfamiliar voice.

The sentry explained the situation, and producing an electric lamp from his pocket, an officer of the Gendarmes, or army police, turned it on to us.

He asked us for our papers and after carefully scanning them, shook his head.

"Soissons! Impossible! You can't stay here though; roads must be kept clear."

No one from within murmured.

"Do you know where the distillery is on the right of the road, about quarter of a mile from here?"

"No Sir", replied our driver.

"I do", said I.

"Can you guide them?"

"Surely!"

"Then off you go. Mind now, no further. Turn into the court yard and wait orders."

I felt relieved, at least we were going forward. In one awful moment I had feared lest we be turned about and sent homeward. It would have been such a pity, now that I was within sight of my goal.

We crawled along, finally reaching the gate of the distillery where another sentry halted us and asked our mission. On explaining, we were allowed to come in and back up against a shed.

The rain had ceased and the cannonade had redoubled in violence. It was quite evident that I stood little or no chance of entering the city under present conditions, for it was being subjected to a perfect rain of steel.

Across the courtyard, the main building I could see was occupied. Though every window was carefully closed and covered with dark shades one felt that the place was inhabited.

We had not been in our position many moments when a horseman swung into the yard, galloped up to the side of the house and throwing the reins over the neck of his horse, entered the door, which as it opened let out a flood of light. Two minutes later another man followed him, and he in turn was succeeded by another. It was a perfect stream of soldiers, silently coming and going.

As we sat still and waited for something more to happen, a masculine figure sauntered leisurely across the court and up to the front of our machine. As he drew nearer I could see he was munching a crust of bread, and presently smelled the odor of garlic.

"What's in there?" asked our chauffeur pointing to the distillery.

"Offices of some kind, I think", came the muffled reply.

"Don't you belong here?"

"No, just waiting for the chance to deliver my munitions."

With his jack-knife the speaker cut himself a piece of bread and a generous slice of sausage. As I let down my window in order not to lose a word, the wind wafted a spicy odour in my direction and made me remember my own hunger.

"What's the matter with them to-night?", queried our man, nodding his head in the direction of the enemy. "I never heard them so noisy in this sector."

"Oh, it won't be long now", calmly replied the other. "They probably got news we were moving troops and they've been shelling the main road for two days steady. Boys are all going up by the masked lanes, laughing at them. Let 'em waste their munitions all they like!"

"Is that the reason we've been held up?"

"I suppose so."

At this point my attention was directed to a rosy glow behind me, and turning about towards the other end of the long open faced shed, I caught a glimpse of a fire that was struggling into existence. A second glance showed me that for safety's sake it had been kindled beneath the cover of the shed itself, and as gradually the light grew in volume, a strange scene was revealed to my wondering gaze. As though in a dream I could see long draped oriental figures gradually taking shape. Reclining on the ground, their heads covered by huge tan colored turbans, they had turned their faces towards the welcome blaze, their shining brown eyes catching and reflecting every stray luminous ray.

Slowly and with measured gestures each one lifted a cigarette to his mouth, and let the smoke fall leisurely from his lips. Silence reigned. Their thoughts seemed to be going outward with their smoke.

Then, and as though prearranged, a tall figure with flowing white robes evolved from the shadow in the background, his immaculate turban and iron-grey beard setting off his noble brow and flashing eyes. As he gradually approached the group, and his whole person was flooded in light, I could see the Legion of Honor hanging, a scarlet splash, against the white bernous of this Moroccan Chief.

Following my example, both chauffeurs and their munching companion had turned about, and remained speechless at the unexpected vision that met their eyes. Then, and as though incapable of finding words to express the emotion this wonderfully peaceful oriental scene had produced in his brain, our friend of the sausage moved away, but as he went nodded his head in the direction of the Arabs and murmured—

"They should worry."

Suddenly, and when we least expected it, the bombardment ceased; both sides halted a moment as though for breath. The cannonade was now far distant on our left, a mere echo of what we had endured. Immediately in front of us the ceaseless tac-a-tac-tac-tac of a machine gun was the only sound of strife.

The supply waggon guided by our friend rolled out of the court and headed for the front, and almost immediately we were informed that we could pursue our course.

"Hurry up now", continued the man who brought us our instructions. "Hurry up and get in and get out again. Turn to your left at the first sentry—use only the masked roads. Good night and good luck."

We thanked him and followed his advice, turned to the left into a newly made winding lane that zig-zagged through private property, and in the daytime is hidden from the enemy's view by a screen of evergreen trees cleverly disposed for that purpose. Up hill, down dale, we journeyed, our chainless wheels slipping one yard to every two we advanced. At one moment we reached the summit of a small incline and a dilapidated mill came into view. The road led almost against the building, and as we advanced a soldier sprang from the darkness and came running towards our car.

"Hold on a moment", he called, waving us back. "Hold on."

At the same instant a struggling horse dragging a heavily laden cart appeared over the opposite side of the hill, and was guided towards the building.

"All right, go ahead," called the same voice, and again we started on our way. Looking backward as we passed beyond the mill, I caught a glimpse of the open court-yard dimly lighted by the rays of a lantern. On the ground lay masses of mud-stained human forms, while a soldier and a white aproned doctor were gently lifting limp bodies from the cart, the toll of the day's battle arriving at the Dressing Station.

On our downward path we were obliged to make room, even in the very narrow roadbed, for a long line of stragglers,—men who having been slightly wounded, were dragging themselves, and helping others to the Poste de Secours.

Our next halt was on the very outskirts of the coveted city. The Gendarmes once again, and for the last time, examined our papers. We had almost reached our goal and I was exultant.

"Go on in", were the final injunctions, "But no further than the Place de la Bourse. Mind what I say."

In less than ten minutes our auto came to a halt at the spot designated, and a sentry came up to see who we were.

"No vehicles allowed to circulate after dark", was his reply to the questions put by my chauffeurs. Reluctantly I climbed down and bid my drivers good-bye.

"It's not far now, I'll proceed on foot."

"Hold on a moment, Madame", called the sentry. "Where are you going?"

"To Madame Macherez's."

"Why that's half a mile from here, straight down towards the river front."

"I know it."

"Have you got the pass word?"

"No."

"Well then you won't go twenty yards. You know it's after ten o'clock. Nothing but officers allowed in the streets."

My heart fell into my boots. Here was a predicament. Should I ask to be driven back now that after fourteen hours of weary waiting I had almost reached my terminus. Never!

"Can't one of you men accompany me then?"

"Wish we might, but we'd be very severely punished if we were caught. You can't monkey with rules in war time."

I replied I supposed such was true, and stood there helpless, wondering what on earth I should do.

"Why don't you go to the hotel for the night?", suggested another soldier who had come upon the scene.

"A hotel?", I said out loud, "Didn't know there was one! Is it open?"

"Never been shut to my knowledge, has it Louis?"

"No."

"How can I get there?"

"Oh, it's only across the square. I'll be glad enough to go that far with you."

Through a thick layer of sand that deadened the sounds of our footsteps but made walking most uncomfortable, we trudged over to the Hôtel du Soleil d'Or. As far as I could perceive in the darkness, the place had suffered little or none in spite of the many bombardments, and I said so to my companion.

"That's because you can only see the outside—not the in!"

I was obliged to take his word for it. I would have time to verify in the morning.

We knocked at the door. In response we heard a long angry growl.

"Who's there?", called a man from within, as he laid his hand on the latch.

"I'm bringing you a guest. I'll vouch for her. You can take her in."

The door whisked open, an arm stretched

out and grabbed me. A second later I stood inside, face to face with the proprietor of the hotel, who as sole means of lighting a large vestibule, held in his hand a tiny oil lamp. To his wife who came hurrying up the corridor, I introduced myself, and recalled a visit during the very first days of the war.

"Yes, I believe I do remember you. Would it be impolite to ask you what brings you here now?"

I explained my mission which they thoroughly comprehended.

"Plenty of time for that to-morrow morning", said the woman as I finished. "Come right upstairs. You're probably as tired as we are. It's been so noisy we haven't slept a wink for two nights. Have you had anything to eat?", she inquired as she led the way to a room on the first floor.

"Not very much", I admitted. I was hungry.

The woman went to the railing and called "Céline, Céline".

"Oui, Madame."

"Make a ham sandwich and bring it on a tray with a glass of milk to number six, at once, please."

That sounded tempting, and certainly most luxurious under the circumstances.

I sat down on the edge of the bed in a humble hotel room, whose immaculate scrubbed floor and spotless coverlet were its only redeeming features. I began to remove my boots.

"I'm sorry we can't make a fire, but naturally it is forbidden. The house is very damp."

I said I would not remove my underwear.

"That's perhaps more prudent in case the bombardment should recommence during the night."

"How far are we from the German lines, here?"

"About eight hundred yards!", was the calm and casual answer from this woman who spoke of the enemy just as the proprietor of a Swiss summer Hotel indicates the direction of a celebrated glacier or mountain peak.

The sandwiches appeared on a tray, and as I consumed them I plied my hostess with questions. When they had disappeared she took her way towards the door.

"Look here", said I as she was about to retire, "I see that you have a heavy pair of curtains pulled over each window."

"That's to prevent the light . . ."

"I know, but after I've put mine out, may I part them for a breath of air? I promise not to do anything foolish."

"Promise me, won't you, because you know it's very serious. A ray of light from this window would not only get me arrested as a spy by our own people, but probably mean bombardment by the enemy who is always watching out for some signal or other. I hardly think you'll need to open them", she continued, "They're as much to prevent air as light. There isn't anything but a hole in the place where the windows used to be."

I pledged myself to obedience and she left me.

All of a sudden and in spite of the bitter cold, I suddenly felt a drowsiness settling on me. I finished a hasty toilet and climbed into bed.

When just dozing off, mid the most complete silence, a sharp rap on my door roused me to a sitting posture.

"Come in", I called.

In response to my summons Céline turned the knob and entered. I noticed that she carried a wash basin in her hands.

"In case it might rain again", she explained. "You see there is no roof left on this end of the house and it would be very disagreeable to paddle around in the wet tomorrow morning." Setting the basin in one corner of the room she departed.

Five minutes later I was sound asleep.

IX

Suddenly I found myself sitting up in bed rubbing my eyes. The room was pitch dark. I only had a very vague notion of where I was. Had I dreamed it, or was that horrible noise a reality?

A long ghastly, screeching sound rent the air. Whizz - - - Bang!!

The detonation came from my immediate vicinity. It rocked the house, and a strange clattering unlike anything I had ever heard before arose from the street, just below my window. It was as though some one were dumping a load of stone and bricks from the roof across the way. Still not a human voice was heard; not a cry of any kind.

Whizz - - - - -

Instinctively I drew the covers around me and snuggled closer to my pillow.

When the shell burst I could hear hurried steps in the corridor and a loud tapping on my door.

"Madame, Madame, wake up!"

As though anyone could sleep with such a tumult.

"Madame, Madame, make haste, the bombardment is beginning again. We're all going down into the cellar."

I stretched out my hand towards the night-table where I had laid the matches. As I was about to strike one, I recalled my promise and remembered the curtains were open. It was not until that moment that I fully realised where I was, and under what conditions.

Groping about in the darkness I found one stocking. The other, where could it be? Ah, at last. Presently I slipped into my corduroy skirt, and throwing my heavy motor coat about my shoulders, opened the door and stepped into the hall.

The voice that aroused me had continued its rounds in the corridor, and evidently the hotel was full of guests, for it still went on calling even after I had ventured as far as the head of the stairs. Below on a table I could see a little oil lamp flickering miserably, sending out puny rays of light that only half dispelled the darkness.

At the sound of steps approaching from behind, I turned about and beheld the dishevelled proprietor of the hotel, candle in hand, followed by a half dozen masculine figures hastily buttoning on the different parts of their attire as they hurried forward. It was the most ludicrous nocturnal parade I ever hope to behold.

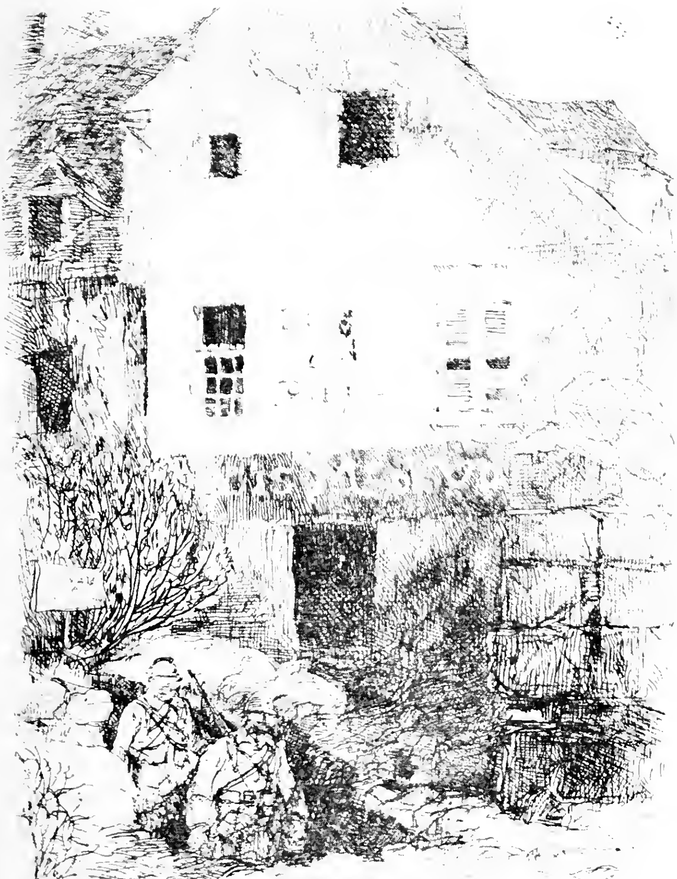
"Swine", murmured a demure looking officer while vainly fumbling for his trappings. "Why couldn't they hold off for an hour or two! This is the first night's sleep I've had in a month!"

Two others, civilians, said nothing, but evidently accustomed to the ways of the enemy, speedily made themselves presentable.

Single file we walked down a long flight of stone steps leading into the cellar. I doubt if many Americans appreciate what a fortress such a place really is; perhaps more so nowadays since learning through the newspapers that life and occupations in cities like Soissons and Rheims have been conducted almost entirely underground during incessant bombardment for nearly three years. The cellar in the Hôtel du Soleil d'Or was no exception to the rule. Dug deep into the ground, say twenty or twenty-five feet below the level of the street, it had been built to preserve an even temperature for fine wine, and was admirably suited for a refuge from the enemy's shells. Daily assaults having become customary, at the end of a short time the proprietors decided that guests who cared to risk their lives by stopping at their inn, ought to be allowed to finish their night's rest in peace. Accordingly the red plush covered benches from the café had been brought down stairs and stood in place along the wall, a row of iron tables in front of them, indicating that one could obtain anything he cared to order, just as above.

A green shaded brass chandelier illuminated by a kerosene lamp, hung from the middle of the vaulted ceiling, while a stove whose pipe extended out through the coal hole into the street, was kept gently burning during the entire Winter.

In little stalls bricked on either side, and in which the different kinds of wine are usually kept, quite separate from each other, beds had now been set up. The Germans had drunk this cellar dry of wine during the twelve days they had occupied the city, early in September, 1914.



ENTRANCE TO THE TRENCHES NEAR
THE PONT-NEUF, SOISSONS

It was towards one of these beds that the proprietress led me, assuring me that I need have no fear, and that it would be wiser to sleep since I was so tired. She drew a curtain across the front of the little stall in order to convince me that it was quite private.

But I had no desire to sleep. My teeth were chattering a bit with cold and emotion, and the bombardment continued to rage without, growing every moment in violence.

I took a chair and seated myself by the stove. Two officers had not spurned the offer of beds and retired almost immediately, while a couple of civilians opened the board, shook the dice, and began a game of back-gammon, while in a few moments a bright-eyed, clean shaven little old man brought out a pack of cards and asked the proprietor to join him at Piquet.

All at once, mid the most fearful crashing racket, every person in the room breathed forth a prolonged and grateful sigh! Ah!

I looked at the proprietress for an explanation.

"Our guns have begun firing. They've probably just got the range."

She was right, the sounds were now quite different, and the players went on with their games, the anxious wrinkles gradually disappearing from their brows.

What peculiar satisfaction, I thought, as I pictured the astonishment of my friends when I would recount the details of a night spent in a cellar with the French and German armies trying to annihilate one another almost immediately above my head!

"This is the way we have been living for over four months now", explained the proprietress pulling her chair nearer to mine. "At the beginning it seemed awfully queer, but now we're used to it we don't mind a bit." She had brought some mending and was busy plying her needle as she talked.

"Does it pay to keep open?" I asked quite anxious to engage her in conversation.

"Oh, yes indeed! Why what would a big city like Soissons be without a café? When you set out to serve the public you can't always think of yourself first," was Madame Poirot's simple, philosophical reply.

"We've been particularly fortunate", she continued. Up until now we've never been closed, and all the other hotel keepers have been literally shelled out of business. Of course, we have not come off without a knock or two, but that's nothing. Our stables have been completely demolished but we have no more horses. So what's the odds?"

A detonation more violent than anything we had yet heard burst on the air, and even Madame Poirot halted before taking another stitch.

"There, they've begun shelling the hospital again", said she, turning her eyes in the direction of the gamesters.

"No, not quite so close", returned one of the civilian players without putting down his dice box. "That's only the station. Hospital next time, and our turn next."

Madame Poirot resumed her sewing, and with it the thread of her story. I must admit that her calmness annoyed me a trifle, and I paid little attention to what she was saying, being more interested in verifying the elderly gentleman's prognostics.

The second crash came! Closer and louder than its precedent.

"Now, am I right?", asked the old man shrugging his shoulders. "Was, or wasn't that the hospital?"

Madame Poirot nodded her assent and continued her work.

With a strange numb feeling in my limbs, and a sudden dryness in my throat, I awaited the third arrival.

A long, low, whining sound, then a thud that made everything sway, and finally a tearing, rattling din that forced me to duck my head unconsciously, and even caused the other occupants of that cellar-café-salon to cease their various occupations and look at each other with surprise. At the same instant a noise as of shelves of china and glass being precipitated to the ground, greeted our ears.

"Dufayel's again", remarked the same old man. "That'll give 'em work for the next week to come. You'd think the Boches knew they spent all their time fixing up the damage after each bombardment. That's the sixth time this Winter."

"Seventh", corrected Madame Poirot.

"Good Heavens, Madame", said I as soon as I could collect my wits. "How can you live here under such nervous strain?"

"And pray where would Monsieur le Préfet sleep every week when he comes if we were to close up and go away? And who'd take care of our regular boarders?"

Argument seemed futile. Now that the tension was over, my nerves relaxed and the warmth of the stove presently set me nodding. As my head pitched forward I caught myself, and with a supreme effort sat up straight on my chair.

My movements, however, had not passed unnoticed by the old servant Céline, who from the very beginning had been calmly peeling potatoes in the opposite corner of the room.

"It's almost over, Madame", she called. "They're bursting in another quarter altogether. Pretty soon you'll be able to go upstairs and finish your night in peace."

"Hope to Heaven you're telling the truth", enjoined the officer who had bemoaned his broken rest.

"You'll see I'm right sir, in a few moments."

We had not long to wait, the firing became more and more distant, so gathering my possessions together I started up the stairway. On the first step I was halted by the touch of a hand on my arm.

"I beg your pardon, Madame, but I forgot to ask whether you would have coffee or chocolate for breakfast?"

When at length I awoke much refreshed, I could hear a great gabbling of female voices just below my window. Looking out I caught sight of some two score of women, who, market baskets on their arms, were gathered together discussing the events and disasters of the night just passed.

"You can't prevent it", explained Madame Poirot when I came downstairs. "Monsieur le Préfet has threatened to lock them up—the military authority has warned them that any gathering is likely to draw fire from the enemy! Huh! do you think they mind? They're so glad to be alive that they've just got to stop and talk about it, and nothing will ever keep them from it."

As I tranquilly sipped my chocolate, the proprietress informed me that fortunately there was no civilian death to deplore, and after paying my bill, I started immediately in quest of Madame Macherez. Since the Germans had occupied her Château on the right bank, she had elected domicile in her son's home, just opposite the City Hall, and scarcely a hundred yards from the river.

As I passed through the café on my way out, I could see that in spite of the early hour, business was flourishing. There was even a game of billiards well under way.

In the courtyard Céline was sweeping up a quantity of debris, and grumbling as she worked.

"What's the matter?", I asked.

"Matter", she snapped back. "How on earth's a person to keep a place looking respectable with those dirty Boches knocking stuff about every night? I've used up three brooms this year! I don't know what Madame Poirot will say if I ask for another one just now!"

The street, though not deserted, hardly presented its peacetime aspect. Once or twice a woman with her market basket could be seen coming or going, but what lent the greatest animation was some fifteen or twenty soldiers busily engaged in neatly piling up the wreckage that had been plunged there during the night. The thoroughfare at all times must be kept free for the passage of troops.

One store in every five was open, while across the shutters of others was written the words "Dwelling Inhabited". Most of the shops, as well as little outdoor counters, showed displays of fresh vegetables or dry groceries, while others, such as the Bazaar distinctly demonstrated the proximity of the troops to whom this "Big city" must have been a paradise. Only wrist watches, engagement rings and accordions were on exhibition.

The walls in either side were literally covered with posters and public notices, dating before, during and after the German invasion. One which I halted a moment to read particularly impressed me with the tyranny of the Hun towards children and their mothers.

Half a block further down I smiled as I caught sight of a white chalked sign which read—

"Safety cellar for the troops in case of bombardment.

Safety cellar for civilians also.

Key to be obtained on demand from Madame Lebé—61 Faubourg de Rheims."

That Avenue was nearly half a mile distant!

Pursuing my course down the long Rue du Commerce, I finally came to the public market, which though covered with glass, had yet miraculously escaped the enemy's shells. As I looked across the square I caught sight of ten or a dozen soldiers hobbling or limping, while behind them military nurses pushed little two-wheeled handcarts, whose contents were covered by a bit of canvas.

"Wounded on their way to the hospital," a kindly soul informed me, easily recognising that I was a stranger.

A moment later a soft swishing sound as of someone crushing a large piece of taffeta silk, made me suddenly look above me. A sharp cry of alarm rang out in the street, and sent humans, like rats, scurrying to their holes.

I had barely time to step into the first shop, whose open door offered shelter, when with a bang and a crash, a German shell burst on the other side of the city.

"Good morning, Madame", cooed a little gentle white-capped woman, by way of welcoming me to her store.

"They're at it again", said I indignantly, almost ignoring her salutation.

"Madame is not from Soissons?"

"No, but the suburbs"

"Ah, this is rather a bad time to have come to town. But you needn't be afraid here, my little back room is as safe as any cellar."

"How long do you suppose they'll keep it up?", I demanded, fully realising how inane was such a question, but putting it merely for want of something better to say.

"Ah, that I couldn't tell", was the polite reply. "I've heard that if they continue this much longer the city will have to be evacuated. It isn't safe, even for a hospital at present."

"Shall you go if they do?"

The old woman shook her head.

"Who would take care of my pets if I did?", said she, stroking the head of a fine Gordon setter, and motioning to an alley-way where from a half dozen bird cages the occupants sent forth a cheerful twitter.

"No, no", she continued half aloud, half soliloquizing. "I'm an old woman now. My husband's buried in the cemetery here. These are all I've got. I couldn't leave them. I'd surely die without them."

The sight of a blue uniform followed by another, and then another, drew me to the door in spite of the imminent danger. Indian-file, rifle in hand, a company of soldiers was literally scraping the walls on either side of the street, rushing rapidly in the direction I had been headed. Their intrepidity stirred me to do likewise. I had enough of waiting around, I should be absent a week at this rate.

Decidedly the bombardment was increasing in violence. It was now or never. The old woman had guessed my intention.

"There isn't much danger, Madame. If you stay on the side opposite where the shell strikes, there isn't any danger at all!"

Just what the opposite side might be, I didn't take the time to ask. Throwing her a hasty adieu I started running down the narrow side walk much as had done the soldiers a few seconds before. I never had been calmer in all my life, but obeying a natural instinct for protection, I could not resist reaching back to turn the bottom of my motor coat over my head and shoulders. I was sufficiently master of my feelings to realise that this was much in the order of the ostrich and the sand-heap as far as real reasoning was concerned, but it afforded me an infinite sense of security, and helped me to span the remaining hundred yards that lay between the door I had just abandoned, and the Public Square opposite the Rue du Coq-Lombard.

It was with a decided sense of relief that I turned into the little narrow street just as our guns sent over the first morning's greetings to the Boches on the opposite side of the Aisne.

Whizz! Whizz!!

I fairly jerked the bell cord from its socket.

The measured tread of sabot clad feet slowly crossing the court-yard irritated my overstrained nerves.

Whizz - - - Boom!

I could hardly wait until the door opened. At last I breathed again! For though no more protected from the rain of shells than I had been during the past twelve hours, the idea of having successfully attained my goal, blotted out any other feelings.

I followed the maid across a square paved court, and was ushered into a small drawing-room, where save for the fact that the window panes had been replaced by paper, nothing in the world would have made one think that the German trenches were scarcely five hundred yards distant.

Each thing was in its place, not a speck of dust to be seen, and over on a small table near the light stood a tiny vase filled with Winter flowers. It was here I was received by Madame Macherez, the woman whose name, coupled with that of Mademoiselle Germaine Sellier, has long been on the tongue of every man and woman and child in all the broad land of France. She and her companion are national heroines, long since decorated with the War Cross for bravery; honoured by the French Academy with the Prix Audiffred, and now on the threshold of the fourth year of the war, it is wonderful to think that they have stuck to their posts, caring for the wounded, ministering to the sick, through a thousand days of constant bombardment. So long as the annals of Soissons survive, their names will be graven thereon in letters of gold.

Time and events have on several occasions procured me the privilege of visiting them since my hurried call on that momentous morning preceding the Battle of Crouy. I have always found them in the same dwelling, gradually reduced to two rooms, with nothing but smouldering ruins in place of the majestic buildings that once surrounded them.

Yet demoralisation is unknown. A faithful servant serves meals regularly on a spotless linen cloth. The centre piece at no matter what season is always ornamented by a bouquet (token of gratitude from some soldier or civilian) and though oft times we have been obliged to take our coffee in the cellar, we have never ceased to laugh in derision of the Boches who hoped to spoil our appetites.

Of medium height, portly in demeanour, with snow white hair and piercing blue eyes, Madame Jeanne Macherez, the widow of our former senator from the Aisne, is a woman well over sixty years of age.

In direct contrast is the svelte figure, high colored oval face and flashing black eyes of her companion, Mademoiselle Sellier, a young woman still in the early twenties.

The outbreak of the war found Madame Macherez, President of the Local Chapter of the Association des Dames Françaises (French Women's War Relief) which, however, had been a leading charity for civilians for many years past.

With Mademoiselle Sellier as secretary and companion, she organised any number of hospital units sent directly to the front, and up until the last of August, 1914, busied herself with the ever increasing number of wounded occasioned by the great retreat.

On August thirty-first, a Government decree ordered every valid man between the ages of fifteen and fifty to evacuate the city to escape capture by the oncoming German hordes. Likewise all persons holding office were invited to decamp, taking with them their books, papers and other valuables.

This practically emptied the place of men, but it was astonishing the number of women and children that remained.

Quickly realising the gravity of the situation, Madame Macherez saw that, invasion or no invasion, something must be done to forestall the dilemma of those who had been left behind. As the only remaining official of any kind, she betook herself to the town hall, and it was there before closed doors that the German commander awaited her pleasure on the entrance to the city, September 1st, 1914.

"We want the Mayor", was the brutal demand, as the woman opened the door.

"I'm the Mayor", was the simple reply.

The officer was nonplussed but quickly recovered.

"This is no time for pleasantry, Madame. If what you say is true we shall deal with you as with a man."

"After what they say you do to women, I'd just as soon you would," was the prompt courageous answer.

The officers pretended not to understand and lead the way through the empty offices, audibly expressing their disgust at finding them all empty of their precious papers. After installing their men in the vacant places at the end of a short time, Madame Macherez was presented with a paper.

"Here is the list of what we wish to levy upon the city. Since you and your companion have volunteered as officials, we shall consider you as hostages, and if what we have asked for is not delivered here in the public square by five o'clock this evening, both you and she will be shot!"

Mademoiselle Sellier goes on to tell how Madame Macherez calmly adjusted her spectacles, and not in the least unnerved by the threat, proceeded to scan the paper from top to bottom, making pencil notes on the margin. She read and reread it several times. Then rising she went over to the officer, and in the coolest manner possible proceeded to inform him that there was just one thing he had forgotten on his list.

"And what may that be Madame?"

"The moon", was the daring reply which startled the man who could hardly believe he understood aright.

"It would be just as easy for me to procure you the moon or stars", the woman continued, "as to reply with my life for such provisions as you demand. Believe me sir, I have lived in this city sixty years. I realise that in normal times it might just be possible—but considering that hardly a valid man remains, it were hopeless to think of obtaining half you ask."

The officer realised her sincerity, and not being a fool, asked what she might suggest.

"I propose that you allow me to make a list, which will be a personal appeal to every citizen in my city. You shall verify and I will sign it, and in an hour's time every bill-board in Soissons shall bear witness of my willingness to protect my compatriots by serving you."

Her advice was carried out, and needless to say, long before the appointed hour the little Square in front of the City Hall was piled high with the spoils that war gave an invading army the right to levy on humble French toilers.

Among my trophies to-day is a much weather beaten poster which I soaked carefully from the wall during my last visit, and shall always cherish as a remembrance of a French woman's courage.

Inch by inch she wrestled with the obnoxious invader, ceding her rights only under the menace of instant death, and never hesitating to say frankly what she thought of their barbaric ways.

It is little wonder then that she is adored by the entire civil population for whose welfare she risked her life. On the return of our glorious troops she took her mission of mercy among them as quietly as though nothing had happened, untiring in her efforts to procure them the necessary comforts.

Up until the last few weeks (June, 1917) real hospital work has been almost impossible in the martyr city, but the refugees, who as stragglers or in bands, have been returned to our territory through gradual or monster offensives, all know the way to the Rue du Coq-Lombard, and all are unanimous in their praise of its lone inhabitants.

Such was the woman who greeted me on that cold January morning.

"Delighted to see you, Madame Huard, although I imagine that it is dire necessity which procures me the pleasure. What made you choose this day of all days? Everything leads us to believe that a big battle is beginning, and I have just received orders to evacuate my hospital in the college. The civilians may possibly be obliged to go too."

I explained my mission.

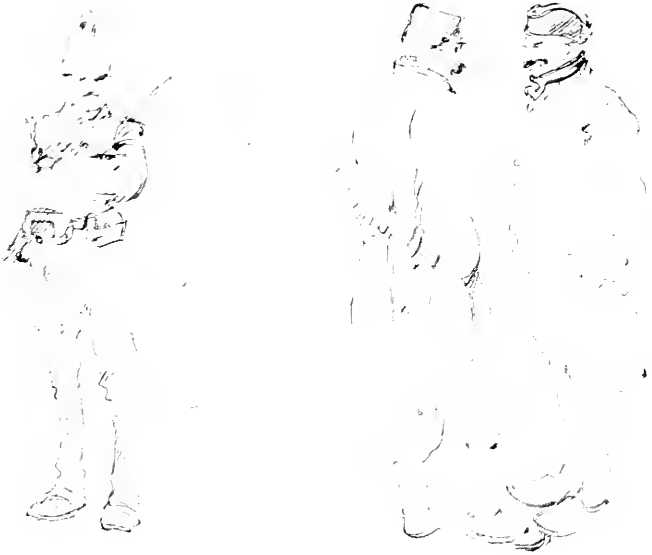
"Yes, surely, you can have all our tobacco now. Come over to the College at once and we will make arrangements for your return trip."

X

What a mad dash we made to reach the College. The shriek of shot, and screeching of projectiles as they passed none too far above us, made it impossible to hold one's head erect. Shrapnel pattered like rain upon the roofs, while without the slightest warning shutters and chimneys would disintegrate and fall into the street before us, blinding us with the debris. As each new detonation announced the departure of a heavy shell we would flatten ourselves against the wall, clinging there in terror until a few seconds later we realised that our last moment had not yet come.

Most of the firing seemed to be aimed at our unfortunate Cathedral, which stood broadside to the enemy, though from the clouds of dust that arose after each explosion, one could tell they had fallen wide of their mark, doubtless annihilating some minor building completely.

The courtyard in the College presented a wild scene of animation. A shell had just fallen in the very centre smashing an ambu-



CALM AMID THE GENERAL TUMULT

lance and digging its way into the ground so as to form a crater. On every side other cars were backed up and being filled with white faced wounded men whom the *infirmiers* carried out on stretchers and thrust into the vans.

Officers, calm amid the general tumult, stood and verified the contents of each ambulance, which as soon as filled was cranked up and rushed out of the city.

Another shell had exploded in the Chapel, and half a hundred men were vainly struggling to save their comrades, who pinned beneath the wreckage, were shrieking with pain and despair.

Madame Macherez looked worried, and indeed there was cause. I almost regretted having come for my presence had only added to her anxiety.

"Follow me", she said gathering her skirts about her and hurrying down the long hall. At the very end she turned abruptly and entered a darkened room which seemed surrounded by cupboards.

"Where's Gilbert?" she demanded of an Infirmier who hurried past the door.

"Caught in the Chapel," came the reply, as the fellow sped on his way.

"Stop", cried the woman imperiously. The man obeyed.

"Get me two men with guns to break in these doors. Gilbert probably has the keys on him so it's useless to wait."

As we stood there neither of us spoke and the roar of battle even drowned our thoughts. I feel certain, however, that neither she nor I had the slightest fear. We were merely anxious to accomplish our tasks as rapidly as possible.

The soldiers appeared, and in spite of the gravity of the moment I could not help regretting the circumstances that made necessary the destruction of those wonderful oak panelled doors. It was particularly distressing to have to do it ourselves when the Germans had already caused so much damage. A spark of anger kindled in my breast at the apparent joy with which the soldiers set to their task.

In a short time mid splinters of oak a hole revealed the neatly packed tobacco.

"Go and ask Albert for four canvas bags, ration bags, and don't be gone an hour", ordered Madame Macherez. The wreckers disappeared returning promptly with the sacks.

"Now then, pile them full", said she, designating the tobacco to the soldiers, who lost no time complying with the request.

"You can't possibly get away with more than four", explained my companion. "As it is I can't quite see how you're going to get away at all, but then . . ."

We retraced our steps in the corridor, the soldiers dragging behind them the bags which they had firmly closed by a bit of string.

The same excitement was prevalent everywhere as the evacuation rapidly progressed, but to the din was now added the lamentations of the civilians who were being hurried into huge ten seated motors drawn up below the College wall. The Sous-Préfet was on the spot to see that all obeyed orders, but his presence did not diminish the cries of those who had but a moment's warning, and were given no time even to collect even their most precious belongings.

"Where are you sending us? How long shall we be away!", wailed one woman with a baby on her arm.

"Freddie's gone for the milk, can't leave without him. He's my only child," shrieked another.

A young girl and a very old woman appeared bearing a cripple in their arms. The tears were streaming down the old woman's face.

"No animals allowed", growled a sentinel as an elderly woman sought to take her place with a bird cage and a cat. She climbed down and walked away.

In one corner a couple silently bid each other adieu. The man remained behind.

"En avant, en avant", urged the soldiers. "Push up now, there is room for another. Never mind if you're crowded. The essential is to get away."

The car started only to be replaced by another.

Madame Marcherez after a moment's parley with the Sous Préfet came back to where I stood.

"Quick", said she turning to the soldiers, "Hoist those bags on to the front seat", and then to me. "This goes by way of Château Thierry. They'll drop you there."

I grasped her hand and a second later clambered into my seat, along with forty other weeping, vociferating humans.

The engine sputtered and slowly we left the scene of desolation, which was repeated again and again at every street corner, on every Public Square until we had left the city of sorrow far behind.

As the morning advanced the occupants of the bus grew calmer, all save an auburn haired girl who sat next to me, had regained their natural state. But the poor child's shoulders heaved and heaved, and her suppressed sobs told of her distress.

"What's the matter?", I queried gently, lifting her head from her damp handkerchief. A pair of big brown wistful eyes set in a pink and white baby face, looked up in wonder at my question.

"I couldn't find mamma to say good-bye, she won't know what has become of me." And the tears flowed afresh.

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know."

"Have you no friends or relatives elsewhere than Soissons?"

"No."

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"Have you any money?"

"Not a *centime.* I didn't even have time to take my warm coat." A shiver ran up and down the child's back. I unfastened my muffler and wound it around her neck.

"But what shall you do if you are dropped in some strange place?"

"I don't know. Seek work or starve!"

The case was exceedingly pathetic.

"Have you ever worked before?"

"Oh, yes, my mother taught me how. I used to help Madame Macherez."

Ah, here at last was a bond between us. A new light came into the girl's frightened eyes as I told her I knew our common friend.

"I don't live far from here, would you come home with me, and help in my hospital? It's little I can promise."

"Gladly, Madame."

"Very well then, get down at Château Thierry when I do."

The cannonade, which had redoubled in force together with the arrival of the first omnibus filled with dishevelled refugees, had created much excitement in Château Thierry. On leaving Soissons something had happened to the machinery of our car, and it was well into the afternoon when we crawled into our hospital centre. The crowd gathered round the motor pressing each one with questions.

"Where are they taking you?"

"We don't know. Somewhere out of the army zone without doubt."

"Has the whole place been evacuated?"

"Yes . . . no."

"And our men, are they holding the front? A few moments ago it seemed as if the noise was advancing in this direction. Do you think they'll break our lines? It won't be another retreat of the Marne will it?"

The Préfet elbowed his way through the crowd, and was astonished to see me step from the motor.

"I've adopted this child," said I pointing to my shivering companion. "There's no reason why I shouldn't take her home with me, is there?"

"No indeed. Have you got your tobacco?"

"Yes."

"Good."

"May I ask you to telephone for my cart to come and fetch me."

"Surely."

Our horse had been sent on an errand to La Ferté and for five hours Marcelle and I sat and waited in the dingy hallway of the prefecture, the four huge sacks of tobacco being the only things that consoled me for the time lost. As night came on the booming of the guns became more and more intense. A frightful battle must now be raging, and I trembled for Madame Macherez and her brave helper.

Weary of inaction I went and stood on the Public Square where our 'bus had halted, eager as were the others for news from those who had left Soissons since my departure.

"They've cut the dykes."

"The whole of St. Vast is flooded. The city is in flames."

This and other similar encouraging information spread through the crowd and made us shiver.

The drive in our rickety old farm cart seemed interminable, and I was surprised at finding no one to greet me on my return from so perilous a journey, so depositing my new maid and the tobacco in the kitchen, I hastened to the wards, when a glance showed me why my nurse had not been able to leave for even a second.

"The sound of the guns has crazed them. Some one started a panic by shrieking the Germans had broken through our lines. They imagined they'd been forgotten."

From the next room a hoarse voice called out—

"Are you all deaf boys, can't you hear? They're bearing down on us, don't let's stay and be slaughtered. If I lead will you follow? Where are our guns? Who's taken my shoes?"

All during the night we went from bed to bed comforting and consoling, arguing and affirming that of which we ourselves were none too sure.

Two days later the papers announced the victory of our arms at Hill 132.

Weeks sped by and nothing further seemed to mar the regularity, or particularly enliven the monotony of our hospital routine.

With plenty of tobacco and the days growing longer and brighter the lads seemed to grasp themselves more firmly, to be more willing to make a fight for their existence. From what I could learn the epidemic itself was now well in hand, and we would probably be allowed to keep our patients through their convalescence later on.

Several changes took place in our domestic staff. The Heavenly Twins being now considered fit to join their regiments, left us mid the general lamentations of the entire hospital, both promising to abandon their former careers to return and work for us at Villiers when the war should be over.

This set Barbarin to thinking, and in a burst of emotion he confided to me that he had had enough of the "Free life", and would now be content to enter the domestic service as major-domo, or head butler to some kind American.

The calm after a storm told swiftly on my physical condition and I realised I had been living on my nerves. I was pronounced a fit subject for the operating table, and to my dismay was informed that it was not at home, but in a private hospital in Paris that my annoying appendix was to be removed.

I had planned my departure so as to disturb no one, but when the motor that had called for me at a little side gate passed over the bridge onto the main road, I looked back and saw them all standing on the steps waving me a fond Adieu, and for want of something more appropriate shrieking,

"Vive la France."

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