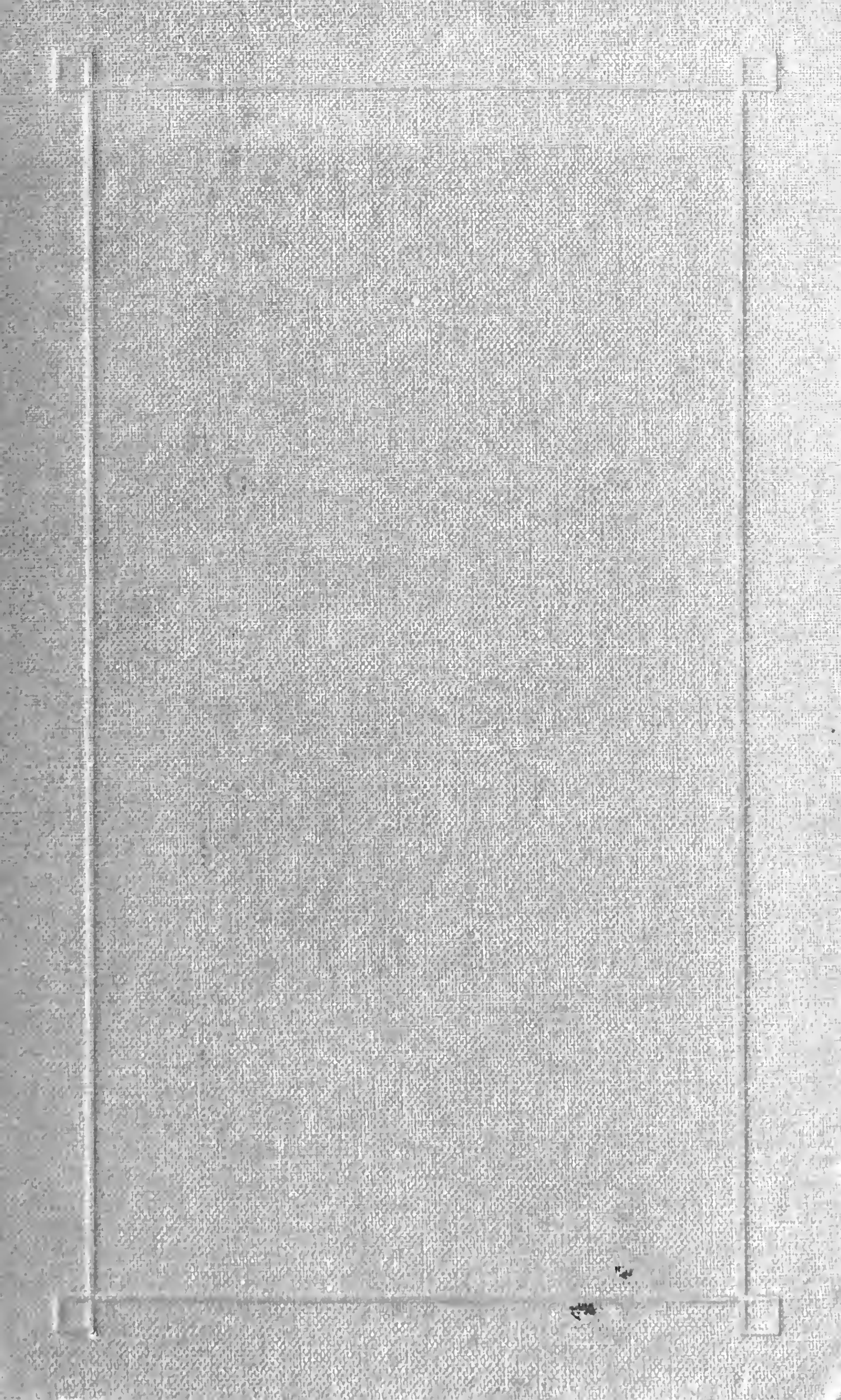

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ON THE PATH OF ADVENTURE

WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

FROM THE ARCTIC OCEAN TO THE YELLOW SEA

THE LAND OF GOLD

FROM EUSTON TO KLONDIKE

DAME FASHION

MY BOHEMIAN DAYS IN PARIS

MY BOHEMIAN DAYS IN LONDON

SIX MONTHS ON THE ITALIAN FRONT

THE AUTHOR (X) WITH HIS JAILOR AT REVIGNY
(A POLICE PHOTOGRAPH)

ON THE PATH OF ADVENTURE

BY JULIUS M. PRICE

WAR-ARTIST CORRESPONDENT OF THE "*ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS*"

ILLUSTRATED WITH JOTTINGS FROM THE AUTHOR'S SKETCH BOOK AND A MAP

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PREFACE

I DESIRE to state right here that this humble literary effort does not in any way claim to be an addition to the formidable array of books on the technical side of the war. It is, on the contrary, merely a narrative compiled from the notes in my diary of a period during the early days of the war when I was "out" to get all the material I could—without, as will be seen, concerning myself overmuch with the regulations laid down at that time by the authorities "for the observance of war-correspondents."

As my wanderings were entirely within the zone of operations, it is obvious that the incidents I have described were always more or less connected with the theatre of the war—but they were happenings rather behind the scenes than on the actual battle-front.

It will be gathered I went through these early days in a very unconventional manner, so that from

the very start I was asking for trouble, and soon got it.

I was constantly being reminded of the tale of the tramp somewhere out in the Far West, who climbed up on to a passenger train going in the direction he was making for; he was discovered by the conductor and as he had no money to pay his passage, he was unceremoniously chucked off. But he was evidently a persevering fellow, this tramp—one who was not easily to be denied. The train was proceeding leisurely, so he caught it up and climbed back—only to be re-discovered a little later and again pitched off. Yet again he incontinently managed to get into one of the cars, to the enraged amazement of the conductor, when he found him.

As he was being jettisoned for about the fourth time some distance from where he had first boarded the train, some one asked him where he was trying to get to. "Slocan City, if the seat of my pants holds out," was his terse reply.

Well! If I could only keep going I felt sure I should be bound to see something, and I didn't intend to be discouraged by any little rebuffs, and I certainly did manage to get an insight of conditions in the war zone.

If I did not see all I had hoped to see, I undoubtedly had a far more interesting time than would have been the case had I been content to remain in Paris awaiting official orders; for it was not until six months after the war had started that

the existence of war-correspondents was officially admitted, and a small party was taken for a few days on a sort of "personally conducted tour."

In conclusion, I desire to express my humble apologies for any annoyance my escapades may have caused the French Military Authorities.

JULIUS M. PRICE.

SAVAGE CLUB, LONDON.
August, 1919.

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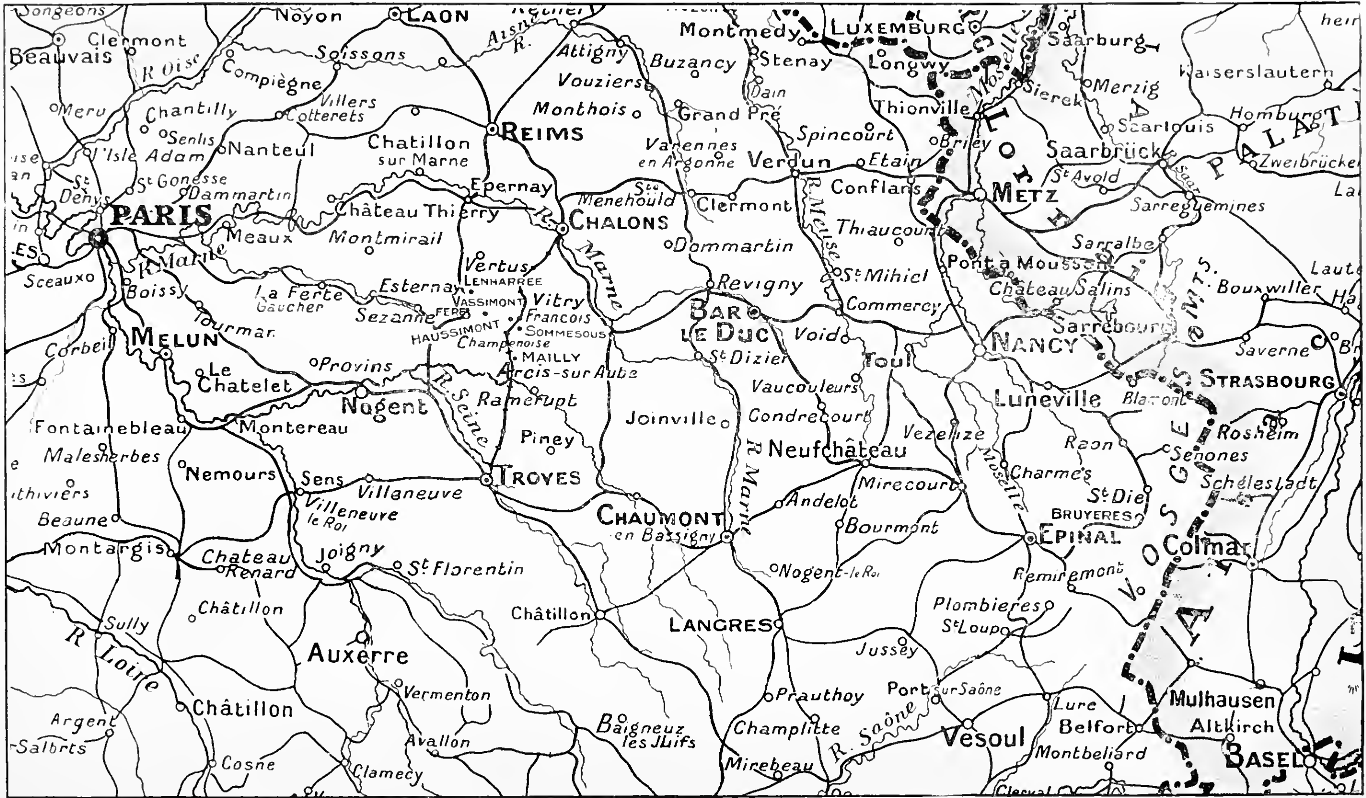
ON THE PATH OF ADVENTURE



MAP SHOWING AREA COMPRISED IN THE AUTHOR'S NARRATIVE

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ON THE

PATH OF ADVENTURE

CHAPTER I

Charing Cross Station, Aug. 2nd, 1914—"À Berlin, à Berlin"—My Editor's joke—Strange difficulty getting change—Fred Villiers and Seppings Wright—My brother-in-law, Charles de Rossi—Motley crowd in the train—Arrival Dover—A five-pound note for three pounds ten!—Physique of Frenchmen to-day—Arrival Calais—Difficulty getting into Paris—Spy fever—Lord Kitchener's special train—En route for Paris—Englishmen "on probation."

CHARING Cross station was packed to suffocation that hot Sunday night of August 2nd, 1914, at the departure of the Paris train. The expected general mobilization of the French Army had been ordered for the following day, and all the *reservistes* living in England were hurrying over to join their regiments.

The atmosphere was as if charged with French patriotism—on all sides one heard snatches of the Marseillaise intermingled with vociferous cheering, whilst now and again bands of young fellows elbowed their way through the throng chanting in march time the stirring battle cry "À Berlin—à Berlin." The enthusiasm was infectious, and even the staid station-policemen and the porters seemed to catch it and looked as though they would have liked to join in.

The latest news was of the gravest character—from all accounts troops were being rapidly dispatched to the frontier and war appeared to have already commenced.

I had only received my instructions from the office the previous day, so had lost no time in getting under way; but it had been a bit of a rush, as there were so many things wanting when I came to overhaul my campaigning kit. The menace of Armageddon had sprung so unexpectedly into existence that there had been no reason for making preparations for the contingency of a big war. Now I only had a few hours to get anything I wanted, and there are always various odds and ends, trivial in themselves but all important when you are on the road and find you have forgotten them.

I had to get off, however, without undue delay, so recalled a little remark made to me on one occasion by my Editor—I was leaving London at a moment's notice for somewhere abroad, Petrograd I think it was, St. Petersburg then—"When will you start?" he queried. "It's no use going unless you can get off at once." It was not quite so pressing as all that, I thought. I had in my mind a cosy little farewell dinner with some pals in my favourite Soho restaurant, so I replied evasively, "As soon as I possibly can," and mentioning casually that I had several indispensable purchases to make, such as shirts and so forth. "Don't they wear shirts in Russia?" snapped out my chief impatiently. I took the

hint and decided to postpone the dinner rather than my departure.

On this occasion it was very different; whatever shopping I might have desired to make was effectually and definitely knocked on the head by the quite extraordinary state of affairs that had arisen since the war crisis had loomed up. There was a sudden inexplicable difficulty in getting change after the banks had closed on the Saturday. I was dumbfounded to find it was the same everywhere. At the club the head waiter positively smiled when I, cleverly as I thought, put down a fiver in paying my lunch bill.

"Can't manage it, sir. You'll have to pay another time."

"But I'm going away and may not be back for months," I insisted. "Well, it will have to hold over till you come back," was the reply. Here was a pretty predicament, so there was no help for it but to hunt around and try everywhere even at the risk of having to buy something I didn't want. But everywhere was the same story, and I realized at last the curious fact that in London that week-end with plenty of banknotes in one's pocket and no small change one was practically hard-up.

I must mention here that I was to act in a dual capacity—as in addition to my usual credentials as "war artist correspondent" of the *Illustrated London News*, I had a roving commission for the London *Evening News.*

Two of my colleagues, Fred Villiers and Seppings Wright, were also proceeding to France for the *Illustrated*, and the last words of our chief had been, "Don't get yourselves 'bunched up' together; there will be plenty of room for you all." One had a sort of feeling in consequence, that in order not to risk running into each other it was better to settle beforehand where we would each make for.

In the light of all that happened before war-correspondents were really permitted to go into the war zone, it makes one smile to remember the number of arrangements we made as to our routes which were never carried out.

Villiers said he had decided to get off that evening, and left us at the office door with a cheery "Good luck to you." It was several months before we met again. Wright and I settled to travel as far as Paris together, on the understanding that once there neither asked the other in what direction he proposed going.

I had quickly made up my mind as to what was to be my itinerary, and decided it should be as much off the main route as possible, so I felt pretty sure that I should have it entirely to myself without fear of running into the arms of my confrères of the Press.

I must mention here that I have a sister who is married to a French officer of artillery—Charles de Rossi—and at the time he was stationed close to the frontier, not far from Épinal; provided, therefore, I could get to him, there would, I felt, be a good chance

of his being able to help me to get attached to his own division. In any case, there were certain to be plenty of subjects for my sketch-book and my pen, and doubtless a few adventures to boot before I got back to London again.

As the long train slowly pulled out of the station to the accompaniment of deafening cheers from the crowd on the platform and the hundreds of young fellows hanging out of the carriage windows, the whole scene struck one as almost unreal—it had come about so swiftly that one had not yet had time to realize its full significance.

A week ago there had not been a rumour of war, and here we were on the eve of such a conflict as had been long anticipated by all thinking people, though all had constantly and perhaps selfishly hoped it would not come to pass in their time. Now the die was cast, the pleasant times of peace were gone and unknown horrors were in store for the world.

Wright and I had managed to squeeze ourselves into a first-class compartment, already so full that one wondered how so many men and such piles of luggage had been packed in and the door closed.

It was indeed a strange crowd of all sorts and conditions of young fellows, not the least curious part of it being that it was quite unforeign in appearance, most of them looking like Englishmen and even talking French with an English accent. The explanation of this I found was, that the majority of

them were born in England and had lived there all their lives.

In fact, so Cockney were some of them that it seemed a joke almost their being classed as French *reservistes*, and they admitted it themselves. But one and all were in the highest possible spirits at the chance of getting even with Germany at last. At Dover a boat from France had just arrived with a big crowd of people hurrying back to England from the Continent, and there was a long delay.

There was a great scene of excitement when it was realized how strained was the monetary position and the difficulty in getting change.

At one moment a man ran frantically about the platform asking every one he met if they could change him a five-pound note—of course without success. At last he got desperate, said he hadn't a shilling in his pocket to go on with, and actually offered to sell the note for three pounds ten.

It was the chance of a lifetime, yet there were no takers. Although my confidence in the stability of England's credit being as safe as ever was unshaken, I did not feel disposed to risk parting with any of my scanty hoard of gold, even for so sound an investment.

I recall that the porter who took our multifarious baggage on board displayed quite unexpected good feeling towards us—he positively refused to let us pay him anything.

"I know how difficult it is to get change to-day,

gentlemen," he said, " so you'd better stick to what you've got; maybe you'll want it all later."

There were only a few civilians on the train, so the boat was to all intents and purposes a French troopship, and one now had an opportunity to form an opinion of the class of men going over.

One could not fail to be impressed with their general physique, which was much above the average; they were in fact a splendid crowd of young fellows, as different as chalk is to cheese in comparison with the old generation of under-sized Frenchmen.

One is tempted to wonder what had brought about this striking change, doubtless the modern tendency to athletics in the shape of football and boxing one notices to-day in France. Anyway, you felt that if the French Army came up to this sample, an eye-opener was in store for the Kaiser.

At Calais, where we arrived in the small hours of the morning, there was a hitch. The *Reservistes* left us here, and we were informed there was no train going on to Paris; perhaps there would be one later in the day, but it was very uncertain as the mobilization had stopped the regular train service.

There was nothing for it, therefore, but to hunt round for a room in the town—not an easy matter at that hour, not yet daybreak. However, we luckily found a small hotel open where they could put us up.

In the morning warlike preparations were noticeable on all sides, and the place presented a curiously

animated aspect. Horses were being brought in in great numbers from the countryside and the best of them requisitioned for the Army, whilst groups of townsfolk were discussing the situation at every corner.

Suddenly cries were heard, and we saw a crowd of people running excitedly, whilst well on in front was a dishevelled individual evidently trying to get away. "A German spy—a German spy! Stop him, kill him!" shouted the mob. But the fellow was a fine sprinter and had a good start, so we soon lost sight of him as he dodged down a side street with his pursuers in full cry at his heels.

Whether they caught him or not we could not find out, but this was only one of several similar incidents that morning, for the people were in an ugly mood and already had spy-fever badly.

In fact, I was made personally aware of this soon after, when I took out my sketch-book to make a jotting of something. "Put it away quickly before you are seen, or you will get into trouble," whispered in English a gruff but friendly voice in my ear. I looked round to see who had given me the well-intentioned advice, but my unknown friend had already disappeared in the crowd.

I took the hint though, and did not take my sketch-book out again. I didn't want to start the campaign by being arrested in Calais the first day, and perhaps being shipped back forthwith to Dover.

We made our way to the railway station on the quay to find out if there was a chance of a train to Paris.

Our friends the *Reservistes* from London were there being rapidly transformed into French soldiers. The procedure was simplicity itself. They were lined up in one of the long corridors of the station and one by one disappeared through an open door, emerging a few minutes later by another door further down, completely clad in brand-new uniform and with their civilian clothes over their arm.

The effect reminded one of a conjuring trick, as they appeared to be coming out in a continuous stream as fast as they went in. Their buoyant spirits had not in any way deserted them, and they appeared to be even more keen in uniform than in " civies."

In the station, which was quite empty on our arrival, a long train composed of first class carriages only was now drawn up ; it was evidently waiting to start at a moment's notice.

It then transpired that this was a special train for Lord Kitchener, who was expected from England on his way through to Egypt.

Here was our chance of getting on to Paris, as there would be plenty of room unless he had a regiment of staff and personal attendants with him. But the station master could not give permission : it would rest with Lord Kitchener to take us if he pleased, and there would be no other train till after

the mobilization was finished, at least ten days ahead, so we waited events.

Then an interesting incident occurred which proved conclusively that hostilities had already commenced. A big German barque was brought into the harbour by a fussy little tug. A little thing in itself but the first naval exploit of the war.

Shortly after this "event" the Dover boat arrived, but without Lord Kitchener, who it appeared had been recalled to London at the very last minute, in order to take command at the War Office—in fact, just as he was going on board.

Well, to cut short a long story, it was announced that his special train would now be available for passengers to Paris, and within a few minutes of this being known people turned up from all parts and it was crowded from end to end. Smug bourgeois with unwieldy baggage rubbed shoulders with homely peasants carrying their household belongings. It was our first glimpse of war conditions, and enabled one to realize how completely the life of the nation was already transformed by the events of the last few hours.

As may be imagined, there was only one topic of conversation—the awful suddenness with which the war had been sprung upon Europe. Of dejection there was no sign. That the long-expected day of reckoning with Germany had at last arrived after forty years of waiting seemed to be the general feeling, and the burning question now was, whether

it found France in readiness for her ordeal ? as until the Army was mustered on the frontier, it was, of course, impossible to form an opinion as to its efficiency.

But there was yet a graver question, which one could not fail to hear on all sides—What would England do ? Would she leave France to take care of herself, or was there more in the Entente Cordiale than conventional words of friendship ? The next few days, or possibly hours, would decide this. Meanwhile, as an Englishman one felt in the uncomfortable position of being as it were " on probation," and could only hope that all would turn out for the best.

A big crowd was awaiting the arrival of the train in Paris, doubtless in the expectation of seeing Lord Kitchener. An uncanny silence, that was quite in keeping with the seriousness of the situation, seemed to dominate all. The shadow of war was already overhanging the gay city.

CHAPTER II

Irksome restraint on war correspondents—The Press Bureau—I determine to make a dash for the war zone—Difficulty leaving Paris—A "brain wave"—The Commissaire of Police—My *sauf conduit*—Identification notes—My passport—Photographs on passports—Trains under military control—I leave for Langres—A strange crowd—A little "incident" before starting—An offensive passenger—A successful "dressing"—The eternal topic.

DURING the early weeks of the war the life of the "Special Correspondent" in France was scarcely worth living, as for unexplained reasons the authorities were one and all determined he should see as little as possible of what was going on, with the result that, unless he was content to fool away his time in Paris waiting for permission to go to the front, he might as well have returned to London forthwith.

After a very short time this irksome and apparently needless restraint got on my nerves, and the daily scenes in the streets of troops passing through gaily decorated with flowers, only served to increase my impatience.

At the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, where a Press Bureau had been established, the officials were courtesy personified; but you soon realized that this was only a polite method of putting you off,

"VERS LA VICTOIRE"

and that they had not the slightest intention of letting you go where you pleased. As Lord Northcliffe has so aptly put it, "War correspondents were treated at that time as reprobate camp followers." So at last I determined to risk kicking over the traces and decided to take French leave, since I saw no chance of getting it given me, and to make a dash for the war zone.

The principal difficulty, however, that presented itself was how to get out of Paris, for the officials were particularly on the alert and inquisitive in respect to the movements of the War Correspondents, and although the English Pressmen were in the very zenith of popularity, they were not exempt from this vigilance. One could leave Paris, of course, in any direction except that leading to the eastern frontier.

I went and sat in a quiet little café and with the aid of a railway map tried to evolve some likely route by which I could get away. To attempt to do so without the necessary permit was, I felt, out of the question; in fact, it would have been idiotic to attempt it, as it would have only landed me in trouble with the authorities and "spot me" unfavourably at the very commencement of the war.

Suddenly I had a "brain wave." That morning I had received a letter from my sister—who, as I have mentioned, is married to a French officer—to tell me that Charles, my brother-in-law, would very much like to see me before he left to join his battery,

and could I not manage to spend a few days with them in Langres where they were living? My brother-in-law, luckily as will be seen, added a few lines in her letter in French to this effect.

I have much regard for my brother-in-law, but I must admit that the letter had not at first aroused in me any very pressing desire to rush off all the way to Langres to see him, as my sister suggested.

My "brain wave," however, put the matter to me in a very different light now. Why not try to get a permit to go as far as Langres? There could surely be no objection to my visiting my family, and if I got this permission Langres was in the war zone within easy distance of the frontier, so there were certain to be lots of opportunity of getting about and seeing something, besides which my brother-in-law would doubtless be able to help me.

I determined to act on the inspiration at once, as there was no time to lose. I had been doing the tourist in Paris too long already, and was fed up with loafing from café to café and reading of the exciting doings at the front, so I went to see a French friend and without letting him know what I proposed doing, asked casually what French people had to do to leave Paris if they wanted to visit relatives in the country, as it was not believable they were looked upon as prisoners in the capital.

"They go to the Commissaire de Police of their 'quartier' with their identification papers and crawl on their hands and knees before him and beg humbly

to be permitted to buy a railway ticket for the place they want to go to," he told me jokingly. "But it is not easy, as travelling anywhere in France is not looked upon with favour as you know," he added. I had found out all I wanted and without giving myself away.

Early the following morning I presented myself at the Commissariat de Police of the Madeleine, and producing the letter from my sister, asked if I might have a permit to go to Langres. I should mention incidentally that I speak French fluently, having spent many years in France. After a few questions as to my identity and glancing at my passport, to my joy he made no difficulty about granting it. He seemed a very decent fellow and evidently did not think it strange that I should desire to see my family, or that I should have so much affection for my brother-in-law, so I left the Commissariat armed with a police *sauf conduit* for Langres via Troyes and Chaumont.

On the document was written a complete description of myself: age (which I had given more or less accurately since I was not on oath)—colour of my hair and eyes—various personal characteristics noted by the Commissaire himself—and last but not least, my profession, which I had given him briefly as "artist," deeming it unnecessary to add the extra information that I was a war correspondent also, since that would probably have aroused doubts in his mind and made him query

whether it was within his power to grant me an ordinary civilian permit.

From this moment, therefore, I felt that my connection with the Press was nominally finished, and I realized that this brief but impressive slip of official paper was of more value to me on the risky "stunt" I was undertaking than all the British five-pound notes I had in my belt, and the mere thought of the predicament I should be in if I were ever to lose it whilst I was away, made an unpleasant thrill pass through me.

It is of interest to recall here that in those early days of the war passports though useful were not yet obligatory. I happened to have brought one with me that I had used in the Russo-Japanese war ten years previously; but it was quite obsolete, and had nothing in the way of identification notes or details on it.

The regulation requiring a photograph to be affixed to one's passport was not made until some months later, and I believe it was a suggestion of my own that started it, as a result of the many irritating scrapes I had got into in consequence of having no real *pièce d'identité* on me.

When I got back to Paris I made a point of asking at the Consulate if I might as a favour be permitted to attach a small snapshot of myself to my passport; and this was not only allowed but the photograph, at my request, stamped by the Consul as well.

In my particular case this precaution amounted,

HOW THE WAR WILL BE WON: A SKETCH IN A PARIS CAFE

as will be seen, to locking the door after the steed had been stolen, as I had just returned from four months of wandering along the eastern frontier, and was fully aware that I owed this glorious time to the incompleteness of my passport, and that had it not been so most of my "adventures" would never have happened. However, to return to my preparations.

Naught remained now but to find out the times of the trains and to get off as soon as possible without letting any of my colleagues know I was going. There were only four trains a day to the frontier and they were under military control, starting every six hours to the minute, and only hand baggage was allowed, so my packing was soon done.

Wright, who was staying in my hotel, happened to be out at the time, so I left a note for him saying I was starting on a little "stunt" of my own which might mean my being away from Paris for some time, and wishing him the best of luck in case we did not meet again. There was a suggestion of mystery and adventure in these few lines which I felt would arouse a lot of curiosity as to where I had gone, and as it turned out it did so effectually, as I afterwards learnt.

I had also another reason for getting away as quickly as possible. Although I knew that my *sauf conduit* was quite in order, I was just a little bit nervous in case the fact I had been given it might become known at the Press Bureau before I started, and I should be stopped at the last minute.

Luck, however, was with me and I got to the Gare de l'Est without seeing any one I knew. The *sauf conduit* was a veritable open sesame, and I had no difficulty in passing the sentries on guard and getting my ticket.

It was indeed a motley crowd I found myself in on the platform. There were two companies of "*riz-painsels*" of the *Intendance Militaire*—the equivalent of our Army Service Corps; quite a big muster of officers in full campaigning kit of gorgeous appearance, hung about like Christmas trees with field glasses, compasses, map cases, water-bottles, and other odds and ends all painfully new; several smartly dressed ladies unaccompanied, probably wives—or others; a group of grim-visaged Algerian Spahis, stolidly indifferent to their surroundings; some sailors with rifles and bayonets; and many civilians with coloured armlets on their sleeves, giving themselves great airs of importance.

The train itself was quite a curiosity: it was of immense length, and comprised several waggons filled with horses, trucks loaded with transport lorries, gun caissons and other military paraphernalia. Every compartment of the passenger portion was already full up or reserved, and there appeared to be no distinction of class, so one got in anywhere one could, and I managed after a long search for a seat to squeeze into a second-class carriage.

It was a blazing hot afternoon, and wedged in the perspiring crowd, one experienced an awful sensation

of suffocation, so much so that the prospect of a long journey under such conditions was almost terrifying ; still it was some compensation to feel that I was at last en route for the front.

In order not to run any risk of missing my train in case by chance the hour of departure was suddenly altered, I had taken the precaution of getting to the station well on time, so as there was no necessity to remain in the stuffy carriage, I got out and strolled up and down the platform, making mental notes of the interesting and novel things around me, as I could not venture to take out my sketch-book.

I may have unconsciously evinced more than the casual curiosity of a dawdling passenger, or perhaps my somewhat sporting attire attracted undue attention—I was wearing a soft felt hat, Norfolk jacket, breeches and gaiters. Anyhow, whatever the cause, I suddenly became aware that I was being stared at, that every movement I made was being noticed. This continued for some minutes until at last to escape it I thought I would get back into my carriage.

Just as I was climbing up I felt a hand on my shoulder, and a voice called out—

"Pardon, monsieur, just wait a moment; I wish to speak to you."

Looking round I saw a couple of gendarmes, while a little group of officers stood close by, evidently taking a keen interest in the proceedings.

"Kindly let me see your permit to travel," said one of the gendarmes gruffly.

"Certainly, and with pleasure," I replied, taking out my *sauf conduit*, and handing it to him. He read it over very carefully, then returning it to me, turned to one of the officers and said, as I thought with a certain *pique*—

"He is an Englishman and his paper seems to be quite in order, and he has permission to proceed. The officer shrugged his shoulders and walked away, muttering something to his companions about its being extraordinary that civilians should be allowed to travel these times.

Although the incident, if it could be so termed, had only lasted a few moments, it had not escaped the attention of my fellow-passengers, and I noticed they were none too civil as I pushed my way in; nor was this to be wondered at, my being spoken to by the gendarmes was sufficient to arouse a certain amount of suspicion as to my bona fides. I quite ignored their black looks, however, and forcibly wedged myself into my seat.

Exactly to the minute the train crawled out of the station and then every one began to make himself as comfortable as possible, which was a difficult matter, for we were packed like sardines, and there was scarcely room to move.

In the compartment there were two portly middle-aged civilians wearing armlets indicating they were on war service, a sailor and six soldiers with a sergeant, their cumbersome overcoats, knapsacks, haversacks, rifles and accoutrement completely

THE DEPARTURE OF RESERVISTES: A SKETCH OUTSIDE THE GARE DE L'EST, PARIS

filling up the little space that was available when the ordinary hand baggage was stowed, so it may be imagined what it felt like in such tropical weather.

We had scarcely started when one of the civilians—a big bearded chap sitting opposite me who had, I noticed, particularly resented my forcing my way in—began glaring at me in a very offensive manner, and started making significant remarks about me in a stage whisper to his neighbour, who smiled in agreement.

As I showed no sign of understanding what he was saying he became emboldened to talk somewhat louder for the edification of the others. What with the heat and the incident with the gendarmes my temper was not of the best at the moment, and my back hair began to bristle. I felt that unless I took some notice of his innuendoes I should have a very unpleasant time during the long journey. It is very annoying to find oneself involved in a brawl when you feel peacefully disposed towards every one, but there are times when, unless one is content to be even as the worm, there is no alternative but to chip in. I was in this position and made up my mind instantly and not in favour of the policy of the worm.

The fellow continued his remarks and at last said something that I did not quite catch, but which appeared to be so contemptuous that even his neighbour took objection to it.

This was my opportunity, and here my familiarity

with the vernacular helped me considerably. Leaning forward and tapping him smartly on the knee I said loudly, whilst looking him straight in the eye: "Perhaps, monsieur, if you have anything further to say about me you will say it to me direct, and let me have the benefit of it in common with these gentlemen."

There was a moment of tense silence in the carriage and every one waited to see what would happen. The fellow gave a start and turned colour.

"I don't understand you, monsieur," he replied in a mild tone of voice. "I was not addressing myself to you at all."

"Oh, you understand me well enough," I retorted, "and if you don't I shall have to put it more plainly. I don't know you and don't want to, but I have as much right to be in this carriage as you, and I don't intend to allow you or any one else to annoy me in any way."

To my surprise—for I quite expected him to bluster a bit—he replied meekly that he regretted if anything he had said had displeased me, but he had not been aware I understood French so well.

"The incident is closed then," said I, using the hackneyed French Parliamentary phrase, which made the other men laugh; and taking up my paper I began to read it with studied nonchalance, whilst feeling very cock-a-hoop at the successful "dressing" I had given him.

Scarcely a word was spoken for some time after this, and for reasons best known to himself the fellow

left us at the next station. Almost immediately the tension in the carriage was relieved, and the eternal topic of conversation—the war, and the iniquities of the Kaiser—started at once, as every one had the latest edition of the evening papers.

It was beginning to get a bit monotonous and I was feeling drowsy, when some one referred to the splendid appearance of the English troops. Up till then I had thought it advisable not to join in the conversation, as I did not know how they would take it. But now I felt was my opportunity. The civilian said that he was in Boulogne when a transport had arrived from England, and every one was amazed at the completeness of the organization of the British—nothing seemed to have been overlooked—they had even brought over cases of jam and typewriting machines. This appeared to have impressed them more than anything else.

"And General Sir French!" exclaimed one of the soldiers enthusiastically. "I saw him arrive at the Gare du Nord last week—what a welcome he had—if he had been a King it could not have been different." Whereat they all agreed that it only was what a great general like Sir French merited.

I could not refrain at this juncture from joining in, and thanking them as an Englishman for their wonderful opinion of the British Army. The ice was broken, and now that it was plain that I was not a Boche or a doubtful neutral, they all became as friendly as possible and overwhelmed me with

flattering questions about England and the number of men we should surely send over to help France.

The British Navy was then referred to with a sort of awed admiration, and the sailor, a sturdy Breton, had something to say about it, and what he himself had seen on different occasions. Then to crown it all, in course of conversation with the sergeant who was sitting next to me, I learnt that he was an artist and had been a pupil of the *École des Beaux arts;* and when I told him that I also had studied there, we instantly became comrades and even "thee-thoued" each other as is the wont among students.

Bread and sausages, wine and fruit were produced from various receptacles, and what might have easily been a long and trying journey considering how unpleasantly it had commenced, ended by being quite a delightful experience for me, and when our party gradually began to disperse, it was almost like parting with old friends.

CHAPTER III

Arrival Troyes—Warlike scenes in station—Last chance of getting supper —The sergeant on duty at exit—"Some" sandwich—The sergeant again—A little contretemps—The courteous general—From Troyes to Langres—I oversleep myself—Marooned—We *are* chefs!—Arrival Langres—State of isolation—Absence of war news.

WE reached Troyes, where there was to be a long wait, late at night. The station was crowded with troops, long trains loaded with artillery and material were constantly passing through, and on all sides were extraordinary scenes of animation. Every branch of the service seemed to be represented, for Troyes was not only a big railway junction connecting Chalons, St. Dizier, Chaumont and Belfort, but also an important concentration centre.

Everywhere the greatest good humour prevailed, although most of the soldiers looked dog-tired, and many were sleeping on the bare stone platforms. I fancied, though, that there was less of the exuberant enthusiasm which had before been so noticeable; probably because it was realized that the war zone had now been reached, that we were on the very threshold of the operations, and that only a few hours' journey would bring them within sound of the guns.

I had to change here for Langres, where I was not due to arrive till the morning. I found that I had an hour and a half to wait before my train went on. It was my last chance of getting something to eat that night; there was no time to lose, I learnt, as the cafés closed at ten o'clock, and it was then a quarter to, so I hurried out of the station to try to get some supper, the buffet in the building not being open.

At the exit I was stopped by a sergeant on duty, and had to produce my *sauf conduit* before he would let me go out. My railway ticket didn't seem to matter at all.

The nearest café-restaurant was just closing, but the proprietor told me he would let me have something to take with me all the same—he would see what he could manage, but they had been very busy, and there was scarcely anything left in the house. He came back and said all he could let me have was a sandwich and a bottle of white wine—would that do? I had been looking forward to something rather more inviting in the way of a meal, but it was a case of "Hobson's choice," since there was no chance of anything else till the next day.

Although it was now after closing time the café was still full, so I sat down and had a chat with the proprietor, whilst madame went to prepare the sandwich. She soon returned with a huge packet which contained a large loaf of bread cut in halves and generously buttered, and at least half a pound

of ham in between—some sandwich—with this and half a litre of white wine, I felt I need have no fear of feeling faint from hunger during the night.

When I got back to the station encumbered with my provisions, I had to pass the sergeant to whom a few minutes previously I had shown my permit. Either he did not recognize me or he wanted to be nasty, anyhow he insisted on seeing it again. There was no use arguing the matter, so I had to produce it.

This time to my surprise he scrutinized it minutely, as though he had doubts as to its genuineness, whilst I waited impatiently. Suddenly he exclaimed almost triumphantly it seemed to me, " Your *sauf conduit* is not in order."

" Not in order," I retorted angrily. " What's wrong with it ? It was all right ten minutes ago, as you know."

" It should be dated to-day," he replied, with the air of a man who has made a discovery and was going to take every advantage of it. Immediately I had visions of being sent back to Paris, or worse.

In vain did I endeavour to point out to him that it was not likely the Paris police would make such a mistake, and that I had travelled all the way there, and shown it already several times and no question had been raised before ; that I had left all my baggage in the railway carriage, and so forth.

He was obdurate: I could not enter the station with that permit, and that was the long and short

of it. He had nothing more to add, and I'd better move on as I was blocking the entrance.

Attracted by our altercation a crowd immediately gathered round me and, as a crowd always will do, began to snigger with amusement at my discomfiture, and I heard several jocular remarks on my appearance as I stood there with my parcel of food and a bottle of wine sticking out of my pocket.

I was quite boiling over with rage by now at the pig-headed officiousness of the man, and remained dumbfounded for a few moments wondering what was the best thing to do, as there was no time to lose.

The doorway guarded by the sergeant was at the entrance to the big booking hall of the station, which was full of officers and soldiers. At this moment I espied a full-blown general coming along, and an idea occurred to me. Without an instant's hesitation I made a dash past the sergeant and rushed up to him and much to his astonishment explained as rapidly as possible who I was and the predicament I was in. The sergeant, who had hurried after me, stood at attention close by.

The general courteously listened to what I had to say, then asked to see the *sauf conduit.* He gave a glance to it and turned to the sergeant and asked abruptly—

"Why did you stop this English gentleman?"

Realizing he had made a mistake and was likely to get into trouble, the man began to explain nervously why he thought my paper was not in order.

"You had no right to think; your duty was to use your intelligence. This *sauf conduit* is quite correct." And turning to me he added: "You are entirely at liberty to proceed on your journey, monsieur."

I thanked him profusely for his courtesy.

"It is the very least we can do to be of assistance to an Englishman when the opportunity presents itself, and I am happy to have been able to be of some service to you," he replied with courtly politeness, as he bowed to me and passed on.

The sergeant meanwhile was standing stiffly at the salute. I was about to hurry away when he blurted out awkwardly—

"I present you my excuses, monsieur."

"That's all right," I said, and offered him my hand. "You only did what you thought was your duty."

"Merci, monsieur," he replied simply.

With two adventures already in the first few hours of my "stunt," I realized that I was probably in for some exciting times during my attempts to reach the front, and that it was unlikely I should always get off so pleasantly—nor was I far wrong, as will be seen.

I had a first-class carriage to myself from Troyes on, so I was able to enjoy my rough but ample supper in comfort, and then settled down for the night, as I was not due to reach Langres until early in the morning—exact time uncertain.

The white wine must have been exceptionally potent, for I slept like a top and did not wake till six o'clock, when we stopped at a tiny wayside station. I inquired casually at the window what time we should reach Langres? To my intense annoyance I was informed that we had passed it an hour previously, and that I was only a few miles from Belfort. As my *sauf conduit* would not carry me there, and I was not looking for trouble, there was nothing for it but to get out and take the next train back.

It was pouring with rain, and as the train steamed away leaving me marooned in this out-of-the-way place, my thoughts may be guessed.

I found that luckily I should only have about three hours to wait, and as there was a little café opposite the station I went across to it. There was no sign of a village or another house near.

The place was full of soldiers, there must have been half a company, and they had quite annexed the premises. I went into the kitchen as there was no room to sit down anywhere else, and managed to get some excellent coffee with milk and bread and butter, and afterwards a bowl of hot water and a clean towel for a wash and a shave.

Two of the soldiers were busily engaged preparing a *déjeuner*, an *omelette au lard* and a mayonnaise salad of tinned lobster. It looked so appetizing, and they were going about it in so deft a manner, that I remarked to them jokingly that they would make good chefs.

"We *are* chefs," was their reply.

I was only charged forty centimes (fourpence) for the coffee and bread and butter and hot water and towel, which struck me as quite a record in cheapness.

Langres was only on the fringe of the war, and no actual military operations were taking place near it, although there was a constant movement of troops along the railway line that passed it. It might easily, however, have developed into a position of considerable strategic importance, as was the case in the war of 1870, when the Germans got quite close to it; for it is described as a *place forte* and the perimeter of its outlying forts commands the direct route from the frontier to Paris.

On the opening of hostilities, three *Zones des Armées* were fixed: the first being the frontier, the second comprising an area extending some distance behind it in which were the fortresses of Belfort, Epinal, Nancy, and Verdun, and a third in which were Langres, Toul, and Vesoul.

It is almost needless to point out that the attack on France through Belgium had the effect in a great measure of outflanking these last-named positions, but at the time of which I am writing the menace of invasion was apparently as serious in the direction of Belfort as at any point along the frontier. Consequently Langres was for some time in a state of suspense, and for that reason especially most interesting to be in.

The rain had ceased when I at last arrived, and it had turned out a sweltering hot day, one of those days when one feels like doing nothing but lolling about in the shade. The picturesque old town is situated on the summit of a high bluff which dominates the country for miles. A quaint creaking little *funicular* railway, known as the "*Cremaillère*," for a few sous saves one the awful exertion of walking up from the main line railway station.

There was no one to meet me, as my sister had given up hope of my coming, since I had not arrived by the Troyes train, so leaving my baggage at the station to be sent on later in the day, I made my way to the town. Being the only passenger in the *Funicular* I was subjected to many inquisitive questions when I asked the way to my sister's house, as she was the only Englishwoman living in Langres.

The narrow tortuous streets were now almost deserted, and a Sabbath calm prevailed; in fact it was all so quiet and peaceful in appearance that it was difficult to realize one was actually in the war zone.

I had been quite expecting to find myself here in the midst of the turmoil of military activity, considering how close is Langres to the frontier, but very few soldiers were about at that early hour, and there was nothing to indicate that the place was in reality a closely guarded citadel of first-class importance, and that there were no less than 40,000 troops quartered in the town. In the brilliant

sunshine of that summer morning Langres looked but a sleepy little provincial town far removed from the war.

I was very disappointed to find that my brother-in-law had already left to join his regiment. He had, I learned, postponed his departure as long as he could in the hope of seeing me, and as it was very uncertain what his movements were likely to be, it did not look as if we would meet for some time. I saw that there was nothing for it therefore but to remain in Langres for the moment, and chance something turning up that would give me an opportunity of getting right up to the front.

I found a comfortable room waiting me in a delightful old-world house, and knew that I could have remained there indefinitely, but I was on the war path, and felt no inclination for the everyday amenities of life. I fancy had I known how I was going to rough it during the next four months I should not have been so impatient to get away.

There was, of course, much of military interest to see every day in and around the town, for Langres, far from being the sleepy and deadly dull little provincial town I had imagined it on the morning of my arrival, was in reality a very busy garrison town, and the depôt of a crack regiment—the 3me Chasseurs à pied. Its grass-grown, cobble-paved streets resounded to the strains of martial music and the tramp of armed men, and one was continually seeing flower-bedecked regiments leaving

for the frontier. A new life had been infused into its drowsy cafés and gloomy shops, and an era of prosperity such as had never been even dreamed of had almost miraculously come about.

One heard on all sides of fortunes being rapidly amassed, whilst France was on the verge of invasion, and only a few miles away the sound of the guns could be heard. It was not this sordid aspect of war I had risked leaving Paris to see, so my one idea was to get a move on as quickly as possible. Apart from this was the unsatisfactory feeling of being cut off from all that was going on. True there were almost hourly one-sheet special editions of the local "journal," but these only gave the official *communiqués* and the usual provincial gossip—no outside news.

As an instance of the state of isolation we were living in it will perhaps be of interest to mention that I never heard or read a word about the Mons retreat till weeks later.

No interest apparently was taken in anything but what Joffre chose to tell us, so the doings of the British Army attracted no attention here. Even the daily *communiqués* were only of the vaguest character, and I recollect what an awful shock it was to every one when Joffre suddenly sprung upon us, as it seemed, that "The front was securely held from the Somme to the Meuse."

"But the Somme is a long way the wrong side of the frontier: surely this must be a mistake, we

MORE CHEERFUL NEWS: A SKETCH IN LANGRES

cannot have had to retreat already," was the general topic of anxious conversation everywhere, till what had really happened became known and we learned how narrowly Paris had missed being captured. Verily we had been living in a fool's paradise !

CHAPTER IV

In Langres—Gloomy forebodings—Deadly monotony—Heartrending incidents—Thrills of excitement—The postal service—Spy fever—Sketching in the street—A trivial "incident"—Arrival of two fugitives from St. Dié—Harrowing tale—I obtain permit to go to St. Dié—My multifarious baggage—Early hour of starting—The train of refugees—The first firing I heard in the war—The French Red Cross Society—Pathetic little scene.

IN Langres at this time French "successes" appeared to come to hand every day, so much so in fact that the early date of the end of the war was discussed by the civilian element with unbounded confidence.

The knowledge of the true state of affairs brought about a remarkable revulsion of opinion, which thereafter resolved itself into gloomy forebodings of a long and desperate struggle, with even a possibility of Langres itself being menaced.

The deadly monotony of the place ended by getting on one's nerves—the curious characteristic of the daily life was the stillness which I have already referred to. Although there were so many regiments in the town there was quite a noticeable absence of noise at all times.

No bugle calls except "reveillé" and "lights out" disturbed the quietude of the old streets;

AN ANXIOUS MOMENT

even when the men were off duty in the evening and invaded the principal thoroughfares they struck me as being remarkably silent and quite different to what one would have expected to find considering the vivacity of the French nation.

One was constantly hearing of heartrending incidents in connection with the departure of men who belonged to Langres.

A curé told me that the most pathetic of all was the rush to get married before they went away. In three weeks there had been more marriages, he said, than usually took place in a couple of years; in most cases this being prompted by the desire to "do the right thing towards their *maîtresses*." This touching idea was not, however, confined to Langres, but was, I afterwards learned, the same all over France at this period.

Occasionally there would be a mild thrill of excitement when perchance an aeroplane was seen flying towards the town, and there would be anxious moments till it was made out to be a French one and not a "Taube;" and sometimes when the wind was in the right direction it was asserted that the sound of the guns could be heard, but this I was never able personally to verify.

A great redeeming feature of this daily monotony was the fact that the postal service was still working without restraint. I used to send by registered post my sketches to the *Illustrated* or my articles for the *Evening News* in the flamboyant red

"Press" envelopes these journals provided, without any questions being raised. It was said that all letters to Paris and elsewhere were held up at the post office for five days in lieu of censorship; of this, however, I had no confirmation.

At Langres as elsewhere spy fever was rampant, and you could never tell if you were being followed and watched, so if I wanted to make a sketch or note of anything I found a good method of getting over this difficulty was to take my niece with me as a sort of human screen, and she would stand carelessly in front of me, and thus hide my movements.

One had always to be on the alert, however, and as an instance of this, I recollect one morning just before *déjeuner* it occurred to me that I had forgotten whilst out with her to make a note of a corner of a street close by that I wanted in the background of a drawing I was making. Thinking there was no risk, as it was only a few yards away, and as I was frequently walking round there and probably known by sight, I went out alone.

There was not a soul about apparently, and I was busily engaged making the sketch when an officer came across to me from a house and asked me if I had permission to stand there.

What I was doing was, as he could see, of so trivial a nature that at first I treated his question in a jocular manner, and asked him if any permission was necessary to make a few notes of the corner of an ordinary building.

It did not, however, appear to him at all a joking matter. "That is the Bureau of the Commandant de la Place," he replied, "and I must request you to accompany me there, when you will be given an opportunity to explain your business in Langres."

I saw it was useless to discuss the matter, so without demur I went with him and was ushered into the presence of a stern-visaged official seated in a sort of office. "This, mon colonel, is the man I told you about, who has been watched loitering round here for some days, and I have just caught him making a plan of the building," said my captor, while I fairly gasped with astonishment at his unblushing distortion of facts.

"What have you to say to this?" said the colonel severely.

In as few words as possible I explained who I was and with whom I was staying; as a matter of fact, it was not a hundred yards away.

"Accompany him there and ascertain whether his statement is true," directed the colonel in a judicial manner.

So we went along to my sister's house, the officer watching me narrowly the while in case I showed signs of bolting. It was almost needless to add it did not take long for my sister to convince him that I was not a suspicious character after all; but before he went off he strongly advised me not to risk making sketches in the street again.

The incident was trivial in itself, but it showed

what one was up against, and how careful you had to be at all times no matter where you were.

A few days after this little adventure the opportunity I had been patiently waiting for to push on towards the front "presented itself," as the French say. A well-to-do wine merchant of St. Dié arrived unexpectedly with his wife in Langres, where they had relatives. He gave a harrowing tale of the sudden bombardment by the Germans of the undefended town. There had been, it appeared, a wild rush of inhabitants to find shelter from the bursting shells, and at the first sign of a lull all who could get away from the town had done so.

He and his wife had fortunately met a friend with a powerful car, and thus had been able to get out of the district safely; but it had been a long and terrible journey, as the roads were under fire and blocked with troops and artillery being hurried up to stem the advance of the Germans, and they had been stopped to bring along two badly wounded officers.

So hurried had been their departure that they only had the clothes they stood in. The man was enraged at the thought that his house, warehouse, and valuable stock of wine in the cellar were perhaps already in the hands of the enemy, whilst to add further to his anger he remembered having left a pocket-book containing a couple of thousand francs in a coat hanging in his office.

With his wife now in safety he was burning to

make an attempt to return to St. Dié to see if his place was still intact, as it was rumoured the town had not yet been definitely occupied by the Germans.

He proposed starting on his return journey on the following day, so I asked if he would allow me to accompany him, and he willingly consented as he was going alone, but pointedly reminded me of the Kaiser's threat to shoot all English correspondents who fell into his hands, and adding with a knowing smile that doubtless this included artists as well.

Through the medium of a friend of my brother-in-law I had no difficulty in obtaining a *sauf conduit* to leave Langres and proceed to St. Dié, although I was warned that it would only ensure my getting a railway ticket and was no safeguard against my being stopped at any point of the journey by the military police.

I could not help feeling just a little bit anxious on this score, as I was fully aware that a pass issued by the civil authorities did not carry much weight in the zone of operations; however, I had to chance getting through with it, as I was told it was quite out of the question for me as a civilian to be granted a military "laissez passer."

We arranged to start the following morning, take the train to Epinal and thence push through as best we could to Bruyères in the Vosges, if the line still remained open, and spend the night there, as my companion hoped to find a friend who would

lend us his car. Failing such luck we would have to tramp across country the remaining fifteen kilometres to St. Dié, if—and it would be at this point where the doubt came in—we were allowed to pass through the troops.

The train was timed to leave Langres at four o'clock—an unholy hour, as it meant starting from the house a little after three.

It was pitch dark when I staggered out into the deserted street, completely weighed down by my multifarious baggage, as I had decided not to leave any of it behind, and there was, of course, no one to carry it for me at such an hour. It makes me smile even now when I recall the grotesque figure I must have cut under my extraordinary load, which gave me the appearance of a railway porter.

My companion was waiting for me at the station, and I remember well his look of astonishment when he saw me arrive thus encumbered, as all the luggage he was carrying was a small ruck-sack slung over his shoulder. Until then I had been under the impression I was travelling "light," but this was a useful lesson to me, and I mentally decided to jettison most of my impedimenta on the first opportunity and carry in future only what was strictly indispensable.

In this respect also one of the first things that was brought home to me from now was the importance of attracting as little attention as possible, for to attract attention was to arouse suspicion, and you were bound to be "spotted" if you had a lot of

unnecessary stuff with you. But this war was young then, and one had a little forgotten one's former experiences.

Our train was fully an hour late in starting, but there were scarcely any civilian passengers, so it did not much matter. There was no supervision whatever; you took a third-class ticket and got into any carriage you fancied.

Apart from sentries at the stations and bridges, the only indications of military activity along the line for some distance were the traces left by the troops in the shape of empty sardine tins, broken bottles, paper and other debris which littered the permanent way.

The first real reminder of the nearness of the war was a long train crowded with refugees drawn up at Laferté-sur-Amance, a small station where we waited an interminable time. The carriages were packed with old folks and young women and children; at first sight one might have thought it was a school treat, but the look of despondency and hopeless misery on most of the wan faces peering out of the windows quickly dispelled the illusion.

We learned they were all from villages in Alsace, and were being taken to a concentration area in the south of France, where they would be looked after till they could return . . . some day. Several of the women leaned out of the carriages and told us of the terrible events that had driven them from their homes.

It was the already familiar story of rapine and atrocity, but listening to it thus first hand as it were from these simple peasants, it made a far deeper impression than any newspaper report however graphically written. At Darny the first station in the Vosges we came into still more direct touch with events, for the sound of heavy firing was plainly heard, and we learned that a big engagement had been in progress for some hours. It was about ten kilometres away, so the officer commanding the detachment here told us; but in the still atmosphere it appeared much nearer.

I make special mention of this as it was the first firing I heard in the war.

The war was still further brought home to us here by a touching sight. A party of ladies of the Red Cross Society from the town close by were seated on chairs on the unsheltered gravel platform, knitting and sewing busily, whilst waiting the arrival of trains with wounded from the front. They were mostly in dainty summer attire with Red Cross badges on their arms, and made, I thought, quite a symbolic picture of tender womanhood.

In the shelter of the tiny station were baskets of freshly picked fruit covered with muslin, bottles of champagne, white and red wine, milk and boxes of biscuits, whilst on a table with a spotless white cloth were glasses, cakes, chocolates, cigars and cigarettes. All this was, I learned, but a counterpart on a small scale of similar thoughtfulness of the

"LA CROIX ROUGE"

ladies of the Society in all the stations along the line.

The memory of this pathetic little scene and the bright sunshine at that wayside station long haunted me, and even now the sight of the French Red Cross uniform always recalls it.

CHAPTER V

En route for St. Dié—Troop trains—*Camaraderie* in the French Army—A little anecdote in point—A rough sketch of a perambulator—I am arrested—The Military Commandant—Amazing evidence—A narrow escape—We reach Épinal—A worried official—The line to St. Dié blocked by the Germans—In Épinal for the night—No profiteering—My companion to return to Langres—I decide to attempt to go on to St. Dié alone—The train to Bruyères—My lucky star in the ascendant—The *Inspecteur de la Sûreté*—First batch of German prisoners—War "trophies."

FROM now on we heard the sound of the guns the whole way; at times, in fact, so close by that we thought we should be under fire.

At several stations we passed long trains closely packed with troops and horses, drawn up in the sidings; the vivid colouring of the men's brand-new uniforms clashing harshly with the delicate tones of the summer landscape.

One could not fail to notice the friendly relations that exist in the democratic French army between officer and private; military etiquette seemed to be scarcely observed at times, especially when en route.

An interesting instance of this *camaraderie* occurs to me. A regiment was entraining for the front;

the men were, as usual, packed like sardines in the goods waggons. The colonel, who was worshipped by his men, came along the platform to see if they were all fixed up as comfortably as was possible. He noticed the overcrowding and probably contrasted in his mind this discomfort with his own luxurious first-class compartment. Going up to one of the waggons he asked: "Is there any room in here?"

"Only for one more, mon colonel," was the reply of the sergeant in charge.

"Well, I'm coming in with you. What's good enough for my men is good enough for me," said the colonel, and up he climbed.

In any other country this would not have been considered conducive to discipline, but in France quite the contrary view is taken.

At a somewhat important place where we stopped for some time a little incident occurred which might easily have broken my journey, as it was I only got out of it by the skin of my teeth.

We were standing on the platform waiting for the train to start; my companion had met some one who had just come from the neighbourhood of St. Dié, and was having an interesting conversation with him. I was joining in by asking a few questions about the fighting and the arrival of the troops there, when I saw a stream of refugee peasants crossing the line, and as our train showed no signs of moving yet I strolled along to get a nearer view of them.

It was a pitiful spectacle, mostly women and

children, old and young, weak and strong, and it occurred to me what an interesting picture this would make, so without reflection I pulled out my sketch-book to make a few notes of detail. There was in particular a child's perambulator of curious shape which it would have been difficult to draw from memory.

I had just finished making the roughest sort of sketch, but quite sufficient for my purpose, as I always add a few verbal notes if I have not time to finish anything, when a soldier with rifle and fixed bayonet came across the line and said that the military commandant of the station wished to speak to me.

I immediately scented trouble, and visions of missing the train arose before me; however, there was no help for it, so I followed the man to the commandant's office after looking round to try and attract my companion's attention, so that he would know where I had gone.

A middle-aged officer of smart appearance was awaiting me; standing by him was the man from St. Dié with whom I had spoken on the platform.

To my amazement, without the slightest preamble and in the manner of a policeman giving evidence, the fellow turned to the commandant and said—

"This person came up whilst I was in private conversation on the platform with a gentleman from St. Dié, and after listening attentively for some minutes he began asking me a lot of questions about

"POUR LA PATRIE"

the disposition of our troops there, and wanted other information of importance, all of which of course I refused to give him, mon commandant; then he left us and proceeded to make notes of what I had told him in his pocket-book."

"Faites-moi voir ça, monsieur," said the officer abruptly.

I handed him the book without hesitation open at the page I had been drawing on. Nothing could have been more innocent than this sketch of a child's perambulator, but the marginal notes scribbled in English gave it, I will admit, a certain appearance of mystery.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked sternly, after a moment's examination.

"I hope it looks like what it is meant for—a voiture d'enfant," I said, with an attempt at jocularity I did not feel; adding, "I am an artist, and this is an ordinary sketch-book, and here is my *sauf conduit*," producing the document.

"That may be so, but I am not prepared to accept your statement that this is merely a sketch; in any case you have no permission to make sketches here," he replied. "So you will have to remain until I receive instructions from Épinal."

"Remain here!" I exclaimed, my temper rising rapidly; "but you have no right to detain me; there is no harm in this silly sketch."

Just at that moment, to my intense relief, my companion hurried into the office. "You will lose

the train if you are not quick," he called out impatiently.

In a few words I explained what had happened.

"But I know this English gentleman," he said, addressing the officer, "and I will vouch for his integrity. He has been specially recommended to me by General ——, whose letter I believe I have on me now;" and fortunately he happened to have it still in his pocket. "We are travelling together, so what more natural than that he should be interested in my conversation with this man, whose suspicions are unjustifiable? As for his sketch I will answer for its innocence, and I know him to be an artist."

In the face of such testimony the commandant had no option but to return me my sketch-book and let me depart, but it was a close thing catching the train, as it was actually moving when we jumped into our compartment.

"It was very lucky I saw you being taken to the commandant's bureau," said my friend laughingly, "or there is no knowing what might have happened." And I agreed readily, while mentally resolving that, however tempting the subject, I would not be seen with my sketch-book in my hand again while I was in the war zone, unless I was accompanied at least by a gendarme.

It was late in the afternoon when, after interminable delays, we reached Épinal. It had taken

practically the whole day to do a journey usually made in four hours.

The station was so blocked with troops that it was not an easy matter even to get out of the carriage, this therefore probably explained the reason of our belated arrival. A big operation was evidently pending, and the wildest rumours were flying about. Meanwhile the guns were booming ceaselessly a short distance away.

After some difficulty we found a worried-looking official, who informed us in disjointed sentences, for he was being harassed with questions from all sides, that it was impossible to get on to St. Dié, as it had been occupied by the Germans since the morning. The line was only sure as far as Avelline for the moment, but there would be no train in that direction till the following day, if then, for no one could tell what the next few hours would bring about. The situation was very serious, that was all they knew.

This intelligence, of course, upset all our plans, so there was nothing for it but to remain in Épinal for the night, and I was not altogether sorry, for I was dog tired as may be imagined.

My companion had friends in the town with whom he proposed to stay, so we arranged to meet the following morning and see if we could make a fresh start. I was therefore left to my own devices.

By great luck I found a man to carry my luggage and help me look for a bed. This proved no easy matter, as every hotel and house near the station

had been requisitioned for officers, and it was only after considerable difficulty and much walking about that I hit on a room in a small hotel-restaurant near the market-place.

Considering the crowded condition of the town there was certainly no profiteering in this establishment, for I was only asked two francs fifty for a very clean and cheerful room, nor was the bill of fare by any means extortionate. There was a mess room, the habitués of which were chiefly ex-officers of the Customs of the Alsatian frontier, and at the suggestion of the proprietor, a very genial fellow, I was invited to join them. For a really excellent lunch or dinner with wine unlimited and coffee, I was only charged the usual mess tariff of one franc fifty ! This mess was such a cheery little affair that it almost made me regret I was not staying longer in Épinal.

I left instruction to be called early, but this proved unnecessary, as shortly after daybreak I was effectually awakened by the din of a furious cannonading which lasted for some hours and precluded all idea of lying in bed trying to sleep.

I met my travelling companion as arranged. He was very dejected ; there was heavy fighting all round St. Dié, he told me, and although it was uncertain if the Germans were still there, it was completely unget-at-able, so he feared his house and warehouse were lost. Under the circumstances,

therefore, he did not feel inclined to attempt to get there, and had decided to return to Langres.

I was naturally very disappointed, as he was an interesting companion, but there was no help for it, and I had not known him long enough to venture to discuss his decision. But my mind was made up instantly. I was not going to return to Langres, and I told him so bluntly. I had started with the intention of getting up to the front, and unless I was absolutely prevented, I intended going on, even though I had to go alone.

He tried for a few moments to dissuade me, pointing out the risks I ran, and more especially as I had not got a military pass. Seeing, however, that I was obdurate, he said he would give me two letters to an employé he had left in charge of his house—one of these dealing with business matters, the other to tell him to give me a room and make me comfortable for as long as I cared to stay, and adding as a postscript that the best wines in the cellar were to be offered to me, or words to that effect. As to food, he told me jokingly that if the cuisinière were still alive he was sure I should be well looked after, as she was an excellent cook.

It was very friendly on his part doubtless, but I realized that the chances of my being able to avail myself of his hospitality were vague indeed, and depended entirely on the Germans. In an impulsive, good-hearted fashion, before leaving me he attempted

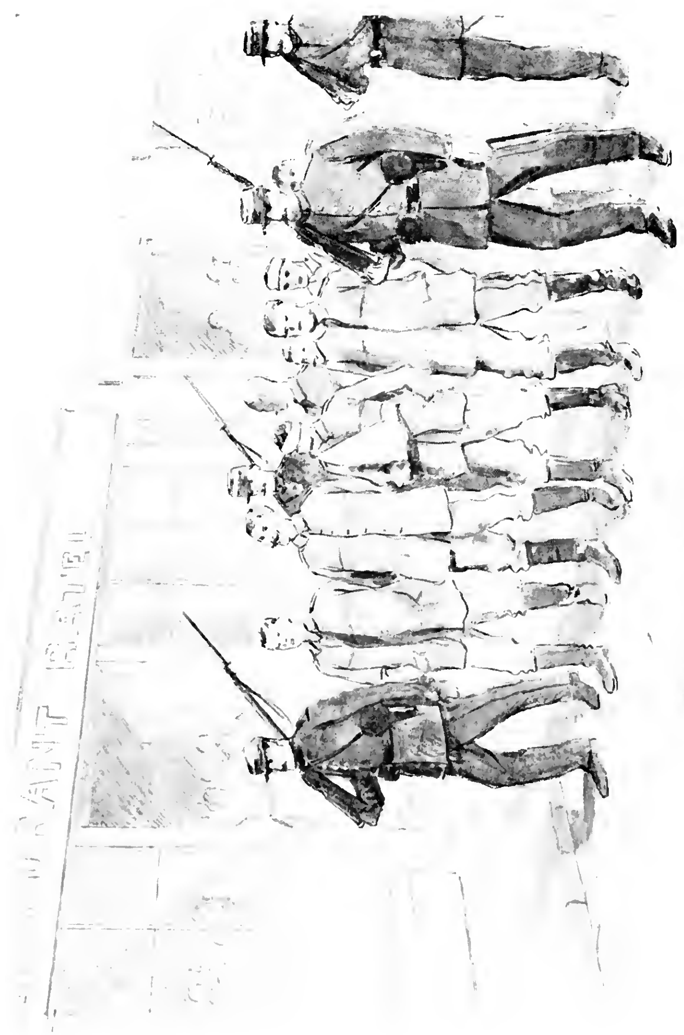
once more to dissuade me from going on. but I would not listen to him.

I will confess that I felt just a little lonesome after he had gone, although he was only so new an acquaintance, for I was now quite on my own, and entirely dependent on my luck to get through.

It has been said that a person can feel as lonely in a London crowd as he would in the midst of a desert, and I experienced that feeling in Épinal with thousands around me and not knowing a soul. However, it was no use giving way to it, the best thing to do was to get off as soon as possible.

At the station I learned that conditions had considerably changed since the previous day, and that I could now only get as far as Bruyères, and that there would not be a train till the following morning. I settled to go by it and chance when there getting on further towards my goal. I have always found that hazard is a big factor when one is on an expedition of this sort, and that it is usually the best way to make one's plans as one proceeds.

At Épinal I could ascertain nothing as to the conditions of the country beyond Bruyères, which to all intents and purposes was off the map for the moment; but it was certain that in Bruyères I should be able to learn something of what was going on, and if I were fortunate I might perhaps even get a



lift of some sort towards St. Dié if the road still remained open.

I may mention that I have always had a Micawber-like confidence in the probabilities of "something turning up at the right moment." And it has seldom failed me. It was to happen again at this juncture.

As I came away from the station I suddenly recollected a letter I had brought from Langres, and which I had been asked to deliver personally in Épinal. It was for one of the professors at the technical college, so there was no difficulty in finding his address. I was fortunate enough to catch him just before he went out. He received me most cordially and insisted on my lunching with him and his wife.

On learning I was going to Bruyères he gave me a letter of introduction to the mayor of the town, who happened to be a great friend of his, asking him to do all he could to help me. So my lucky star was evidently in the ascendant and I no longer felt like a lost sheep.

During the afternoon I went back to my room to pack. Luggage, I had realized, except what one could carry on one's back, was out of the question, so I bought a ruck-sack, which with my sketching bag would hold just indispensable requirements. It took some time to decide what I could do without really to travel "light," and I was surprised what a lot I could leave behind. The landlord, however,

kindly undertook to take charge of my big baggage.

I was busily occupied, when there was a sharp knock on the door, which I had locked, and on my opening it, in walked a tall, stern-faced man in civilian attire.

He glanced round the room, at my things scattered about, then produced a sort of pocket-book, and showed me a photograph of himself pasted inside.

"I am an Inspecteur de la Sûreté," he said gruffly, "and I have come to ask what you are doing in Épinal, and where you are packing up to go to from here?"

His manner was aggressive and unpleasant, to say the least of it, but I instinctively felt it was no good losing my temper. So for all reply I produced every paper of identification I had, and spread them out on the table. My *sauf conduits* from Paris and from Langres, my passport, the letter of recommendation to the Mayor of Bruyères, and a photograph I fortunately had with me.

He examined them all carefully one by one without saying a word till he came to the Foreign Office passport which, as I have already pointed out, was an old one, and almost covered with official stamps, then his manner changed and he apologized profusely for intruding, said that everything was quite *en règle*, and that I was at liberty to go in whatever direction I desired. "Épinal is infested

WAITING TO ENTRAIN

with German spies," he added, "and we are bound to be suspicious of strangers."

While at dinner there was a bit of excitement that made every one run out into the street. A batch of German prisoners was being brought along—the first that had been seen in the town. There were only eight, in charge of four gendarmes, with rifles and fixed bayonets.

As might have been expected at that early stage of the war their uniforms looked quite new, but what struck one as curious was, that they were all bare-headed, and that there was no sign of a regimental badge amongst them. On my remarking this to an officer standing by, he told me that helmets, caps, and badges were always annexed as "trophies of war" by the captors.

The collecting of trophies of war was, however, not confined to helmets and such like.

There were two grim yarns told of the Senegalese black soldiers—most ferocious fighters as is well known. It had been noticed how jealously one of the men guarded his haversack, as though he had something of great value he was treasuring up. One day it was discovered that this consisted of a parcel containing twenty-three human ears, in various stages of decomposition. They were all from the left or "heart side," which it appeared gave them more value, as it indicated he had captured them from the enemy, and he explained he was going to take them home as "souvenirs," to make a necklace with.

The other story was still more gruesome, as in this instance it was actually a German's head that the black warrior was carrying in a cloth attached to his belt, and which he likewise proposed to take back with him as a "war trophy."

CHAPTER VI

From Épinal to Bruyères—Arrival Bruyères—Wonderful spectacle military activity—Sad procession of refugees—Scenes in the streets—The mayor of Bruyères—Finding a lodging—"Memorizing" sketches—Unwelcome attention—The Commandant d'Étape's office—Into the lion's mouth—The headquarters of the 21st Corps d'Armée—The surly major—I am put under arrest—The Anglo-French interpreter—My *déjeuner* at Bruyères under observation—A long and tiring afternoon—The decision—In the custody of gendarmes—Unpleasant experience.

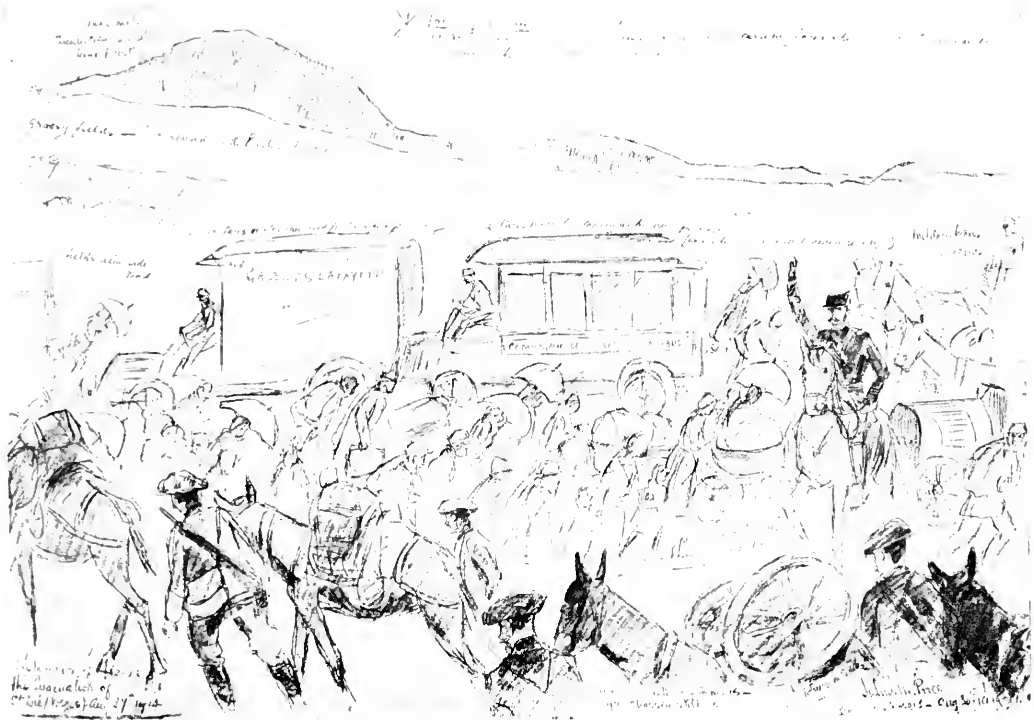
I STARTED for Bruyères early the following morning, with a delightful sense of freedom at having no luggage to trouble about. And as it turned out it was very fortunate I was unencumbered, as the train was crowded and it was difficult to get a seat.

The line from Épinal eastward runs through the most beautiful scenery of the Vosges, which before the war was always greatly frequented by landscape painters; but now it was being laid waste on all sides, trees ruthlessly razed in front of the forts that crowned the hills, whilst bivouacs of troops, convoys passing along the road, and above all the distant thunder of the guns rudely dispelled all suggestion of sylvan tranquillity. Yet strangely enough at one spot near a charming little village, we passed a merry party of boys and girls bowling along on their bicycles, out holiday making evidently.

It took some hours to reach our destination, the train crawling along from station to station as though there was some apprehension it might be under fire at any moment, for we were nearing the operations, and close to the *première ligne.*

Round Bruyères military activity became more pronounced, and when at last we arrived a glance was sufficient to satisfy me that, even if I could not proceed any further that day, there was sufficient to keep me busy with my pencil for some hours. The place was alive with troops and it was difficult to make one's way through: an important movement was afoot. I learned that a famous Langres regiment, the 21st Infantry, had just come in after its sensational march on Mulhouse and was being hurried through to Avelines close by. But it was not so much this that immediately attracted my attention as the extraordinary spectacle all along the road leading from the town. It was an interminable procession of refugees coming from St. Dié: a motley concourse tramping wearily by, regardless of the munition convoys, motor lorries and cars going forward.

Many of the people staggered along with household effects on their back, while others pushed perambulators, hand-carts, and bicycles loaded with every imaginable object. It had evidently been a question of what could be saved and getting out of the range of the guns as quickly as possible. I saw one little girl carrying a kitten in her arms.



ON THE ROAD TO ST. DIÉ

It had started to rain heavily, yet all along the pavement of the main streets hundreds of people were seated stolidly munching food that had been provided by the townsfolk. It was a scene of misery I shall long remember, and the pathos of it all was heightened by the continuous booming of the guns in the distance.

I made my way to the Mairie to present my letter of introduction, deeming it advisable to put myself right with the authorities, in case I had been "spotted" by some over-zealous police official.

At the entrance to the building I ran into an elderly man in his shirt sleeves. This was the mayor, and he looked so hot and worried that I was quite sorry to trouble him with my trivial business. He was very affable, however, and after reading the letter told me I had better find a room to sleep in first of all, and then come and see him—adding, he was so busy he didn't know which way to turn and hadn't been to bed for two nights. It was no time for ordinary conversation, so I hurriedly left him.

It was not an easy matter to find a lodging, and I thought people looked somewhat askance at me for asking. At last, however, at a small café they agreed to fix me up somehow for the night. With this vague assurance I had to be satisfied, so leaving my belongings in the charge of the proprietor, I went out to have a look round the town.

There were subjects galore for pictures, and I was much tempted to risk making some sketches;

but there were so many people about, that on reflection I thought it more prudent to try and memorize them, and jot them down at the first convenient opportunity.

I was soon drawn to the conclusion, however, that "memorizing" also attracts attention, for I presently became aware that I was being looked at rather more than I liked. The idea then occurred to me that I would ask the mayor if he could get me an official permit to do what I wanted openly.

As I was retracing my steps to the Mairie I happened by good fortune to meet him again. "I personally cannot do what you ask," he said, "but if you go to the Commandant d'Étape, and tell him what you want, and say that I suggested your calling on him, no doubt he will arrange it for you."

I thanked him and without hesitation went off there at once.

The Commandant d'Étape's office was on the first floor of the Mairie. A sentry at the foot of the stair allowed me to go up without any difficulty. An attendant indicated a door on the landing, and opening it ushered me in without any ceremony.

I expected to find myself in the presence of some elderly officer who would probably be alone or perhaps with a secretary, instead of which I was in a spacious council chamber, round a long table in the centre of which were seated a number of officers in Staff uniforms. A general was seated at the head of the table.

REFUGEES FROM ST. DIÉ

In an instant I realized that I had made a mistake in coming there, and had practically put my head into the lion's mouth. But it was too late to retreat, the door was closed behind me, and I stood stock still not knowing what to say, as all eyes were turned on me in astonishment.

The general broke the silence, saying genially, "What can we do for you, monsieur ?"

Stepping forward I produced my papers, and handing them to him stood at attention whilst I explained that I had just arrived at Bruyêres, and I would be glad if I could be granted permission to make sketches round about the town.

He glanced at the passport. "You are English ?"

"Oui, mon general," I replied.

"You speak French remarkably well for an Englishman."

"I lived several years in Paris, mon general."

Turning to one of the officers, he said in a lower voice. "You know English, have a chat with him and see what you make out of it."

The officer without rising from his seat began asking me a lot of questions as to who I was, where I came from, and so on. He talked English about as well as the proverbial "Vache Espagnole," but that was a mere detail. I could just make out what he was driving at, so I replied unhesitatingly and at much length, though I don't think he understood half of what I was saying.

When I had finished he had a whispered

conversation with the general, several of the officers leaning forward to get the gist of it. I was not supposed to hear, but I could not help catching the ominous words: "Correspondant de guerre."

As I had not said a word to my interlocutor which I thought could give the slightest hint of my connection with the Press, it can be imagined how uncomfortable I felt, journalists being still absolutely taboo in the war zone.

After a little further parley *sotto voce*, the general turned to me in a most friendly way, and said that he personally could not grant my request, but if I would go to the Headquarters of the 21st Corps d'Armée, which were not far off, and ask for a certain colonel, whose name he gave me, doubtless I would be given every assistance. I thanked him and said I would follow his advice and go there at once, and an officer then pointed out through the window my nearest way to walk there.

As I came away I felt mad with myself for not having chanced remaining in the town without coming into contact with the military authorities; but there was no help for it now, I had to see it out.

For a moment the idea flashed through my mind, supposing I didn't go to the Headquarters after all. I was not forced to follow the advice the general had given me. But somehow I had an uncomfortable feeling that it was not exactly "advice."

Something prompted me to look back. A tall

man in civilian attire of unmistakable military bearing was strolling nonchalantly behind me.

The Headquarters were in a large building standing in its own grounds on the outskirts of the town. It had probably been a college or something of the sort before the war. Now it was occupied by General Legrand, who was in command of the Bruyères sector at that time.

As might be expected there were sentries everywhere: gendarmes were on duty in the big open space in front of the house, their horses picketed close by, and there was a continual coming and going of officers and cars and dispatch riders on motor-cycles. The sentry let me pass without demur when I told him the name of the officer I had come to see, and I made my way to the main door. A gendarme took my card in, telling me to wait outside.

After a little delay I was ushered into an office, where I found myself in the presence of the most surly, ill-disposed officer I have ever met in France or elsewhere. He was in rank a major, and in appearance a middle-aged man with a bristly red moustache, and evidently in a chronic condition of spleen. He had bully written all over him, and in his eyes a civilian was evidently little more than dirt.

"What do you want here?" he snapped out. "Let me know as briefly as possible, for I have no time to waste."

Seeing the sort of individual I had to do with, I

realized that if it rested with him any chance of friendly treatment was out of the question. There was, however, the hope that he was only a subordinate, so I produced all my papers and handing them to him explained the object of my visit.

He glanced at them, then without comment took them into an adjoining room. In a few moments he returned and said roughly—

"You will be given your answer presently. Go and wait outside."

It is very seldom that I find myself at a loss for a reply if I am treated with discourtesy, but I will admit that for once I was nonplussed. The malevolence of the fellow was so unexpected and so uncalled for that for the moment I was speechless with anger, and could think of nothing to say.

The rain had left off and it was blazing hot in the garden, but fortunately there was a chair under the shade of a tree, and so I went and sat down in it and lit my pipe. A little while after, an officer came out from the house and strolled across to me and offering his hand said in perfect English: "Pretty warm here, isn't it? Awfully sorry to have to keep you waiting, but I don't suppose it will be for very long."

His whole manner, his appearance, and tone of speaking were in such marked contrast to that of the man I had just left, that they dispelled my ill humour at once.

He was a young fellow—tall, slim, and good

looking, in the uniform of an interpreter attached to the Headquarters. I agreed with him as to the heat and expressed the hope I should not be detained many minutes, as it was getting near luncheon-time and I was beginning to feel just a bit hungry.

"Well, I am afraid you won't find a Carlton or a Savoy *déjeuner* in Bruyères," he said with a laugh.

He evidently knew London well, and his English was so good that I asked him if he were really French. "Well, half and half," he replied jocularly, "as my mother is English, and I was educated in England at Eton."

We were gradually drifting into quite an interesting conversation when it flashed through my mind that he had been sent to find out all he could about me, and if I were really an Englishman. I had, of course, nothing to conceal, apart from my connection with the Press; but I was not going to let this youngster cross-examine me, so made up my mind to tell him just what I wanted him to know and nothing more—however much he might "pump" me. All the same we had quite a long chat about "dear old London," as he called it. And it turned out that we had several mutual friends there, so when he left me to return to his bureau, he could have had no doubts at all as to my genuineness.

I must have been waiting just on two hours, and was getting very "fed up" with it all, when another officer came out of the building and beckoned to me

to go over to him. It was then just on one o'clock.

"You can go and get some lunch," he said, "but kindly return here immediately afterwards; we have telephoned to Épinal for instructions respecting your application, and should have the reply by then."

I thanked him and said I should be back again without fail within an hour.

As I went out of the gate, a gendarme who had been reading a newspaper close by, got up and lounged casually after me. Knowing of no other place in the town but the café where I had left my belongings I made my way there. Something again prompted me to look back as I turned a corner. The gendarme was following leisurely in my footsteps.

Before leaving Épinal I had fortunately taken the precaution of putting some bread and sausage and a few apples in my bag, in case there was any difficulty in getting food anywhere, and this foresight saved me from going hungry now, as there was nothing to be had at the café. With half a litre of wine I had quite a decent repast, which as it turned out was all I was to get till late at night.

I was just commencing my meal when I happened to glance into the street, the door of the café being wide open. On the pavement just outside, leaning against the lamp-post, was the gendarme who had followed me.

I went out to him and said: "There is no need for you to hang about in the heat, you will get

sunstroke. Come inside and have a cup of coffee and a cigar while I eat my lunch."

He looked at me with astonishment for a moment, then blurted out, "I don't understand you, monsieur."

"Well, never mind if you don't," I replied. "I know very well that you are watching me, to see that I don't run away, so you might as well do it sitting down in the café with me as standing about outside."

He burst out laughing and said, "How original you English are!" and followed me in.

"I won't keep you waiting long," I said as we sat down.

"Oh, don't you worry, monsieur. Take your own time, I am quite at your service," he replied politely.

Feeling no desire to enter into conversation with him, when his coffee and cigar arrived I passed him a newspaper and, getting a book out of my bag, started reading myself.

Although he had said he was in no hurry, he had evidently instructions to follow, as no sooner did he see I was finished than he rose saying: "We will go back now if it is agreeable to you, monsieur." So we strolled back side by side in quite friendly fashion, many people looking round at us, no doubt wondering what I had done to be thus accompanied by a gendarme.

I resumed my seat in the garden and awaited events. For quite an hour not a soul came near me; then the interpreter came out for a few moments

to let me know, as he said, that no reply had been received as yet from Épinal.

"Why have you telephoned about me at all?" I asked.

"Because," he replied with a laugh, "you have not got permission to be at the front, and we have asked for instructions whether you can remain."

"Am I then so close to the operations?" I asked in feigned ignorance.

"Close," he answered: "why, we are only a few miles from the première ligne, as if you didn't know," he added jokingly in his excellent English as he left me.

The afternoon dragged wearily on; I dozed and smoked and smoked and dozed and would have given anything for the book I had left in my bag at the café. The life and bustle of the place had quietened down by now, and there was nothing to occupy one's mind.

I ventured once to stroll further into the garden, but was recalled by a sharp "On ne passe pas par là, m'sieur," from a watchful sergeant who was close by all the time.

At last at about five o'clock an officer, a colonel of gendarmerie, whom I had not seen before, came out with a paper in his hand. He walked up to me and said abruptly—

"I have received these instructions with reference to you: kindly give them your attention. Your application to be allowed to remain in the zone of

operations is refused, and you are to be directed (dirigé) without delay and under arrest to the South of France. You have understood ? "

"I am to be sent to the South of France," I repeated in amazement. "What have I done to be treated in this summary fashion ? "

"I have not to argue with you, monsieur," he replied, with an impatient shrug of his shoulders, "but to carry out my instructions; and I therefore hand you over to my men to take you to the railway, where an escort awaits you."

"And where am I going then?" I ejaculated helplessly.

"Either to Macon or to Lyons," he replied. "That will be decided later."

"But I have left all my belongings in Épinal. What shall I do about them ? I have nothing with me but what I stand up in," I exclaimed impetuously.

"That is your affair, monsieur," he retorted coldly; "but doubtless you will be able to get them after the war."

In vain did I protest. He was obdurate. "But the things I left at Bruyères, can't I have them now ?" I insisted.

"You may go with the gendarme and fetch them," was his gruff reply, in the manner of a man unwillingly conferring a special favour.

Then turning to the sergeant he handed him the document he had with him, saying : "Here are your instructions, and your *feuille de route :* you will go

to-night," and went off without addressing another word to me.

To say I was absolutely staggered was no exaggeration, but the sergeant left me no time for soliloquizing.

"Allons—partons," he ordered. So off I was marched through the town with guards on either side with rifles and fixed bayonets. As may be imagined a crowd was soon following; I was evidently taken for a German spy, and it was anything but a pleasant experience, as at any moment I might have got struck on the back of my head with a stick by some patriotic and excited citizen.

On our way we met the mayor. He stared in amazement on recognizing me and wanted to stop and speak; but the sergeant hurried me on, and I was only able to call out to him as I passed: "I have been arrested for coming here."

At the café one of the men went in and fetched my traps; what the proprietor thought of me I do not like to think. Then I was taken through side streets to the gendarmerie station.

Here was another officer, and I was about to be put in the lock-up, when it was suggested that as it was such a hot afternoon I should be left outside, as there was no fear of my getting away; so a stool was brought and I was harshly told to "sit down."

The sergeant and his men then left me to my reflections. Close by some women—wives of the men probably—were seated sewing and chatting, and

several little children were playing around, to whom I was evidently a source of much interest.

After a little while it became irksome remaining still so I got up to stretch my legs. Instantly the sergeant came over to me and said roughly : " You will remain seated—until you are told to move, and don't let me have to tell you again," he added significantly.

I saw there was nothing for it but to obey. I had always heard that gendarmes are not pleasing folk to deal with—that they only know one word " duty," and I was now getting a proof of it, and there was more still to come.

To while away the time I took out my sketch-book and started making some notes of the women sewing and the children around. This fortunately did not arouse the ire of the sergeant, for he said nothing, although he looked hard at me, as though turning over in his mind whether there was any regulation against it.

Meanwhile supper was being cooked by one of the men, and soon the aroma of a *soupe à l'ognon*, to which I am particularly partial, was wafted my way, and I began to wonder whether I was to be given any of it.

At last it was ready and the sergeant served it out with great chunks of bread ; the men eating the savoury stew out of their mess tins.

I anxiously waited to be at least asked if I would like some ; but not a word was said, although there

appeared to be ample and to spare. They finished up their meal with a piece of cheese and a good swig of red wine. My opinion of the gendarmerie went down to zero.

But all gendarmes are not of the same character, as I found later.

CHAPTER VII

Bruyères—Still in custody—A feeble attempt at hilarity—Am marched across country to the railway—A debonair cavalryman—The sergeant loses his way—Arrival at station—Am handed over to military escort —En route—The men's supper in the train—The kind-heartedness of youth—We reach Épinal—The friendly Commissaire—My parole—I am set free—I return to Langres—Events shaping rapidly—Evacuation of Langres ordered—"Bouches inutiles"—My *sauf conduit* to Troyes—In Troyes—The commissaire of police—I decide to make for Mailly-le-Camp.

"GET your things together, we are going to start," said the sergeant, coming across to me, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, and evidently very contented with his meal.

"I am quite ready if you are," said I. Then suddenly, I can't tell why, the humour of the situation struck me, and I held out my hands to him saying, "Voilà."

"What does this mean ?" he asked gruffly.

"I thought perhaps I had to be handcuffed," I replied, with a feeble attempt at hilarity.

"There's nothing to joke about," he retorted, "and if you are not careful you'll have them on."

Comment was needless, and I did not say another word to him from then on. I just did what he ordered,

with the satisfaction of knowing that it could only be for a very short time.

Another gendarme accompanied us, and off we started along a road which led away from the town and which was new to me. Curiously enough as we did so a heavy cannonade commenced, apparently quite near, and our route lay straight in the direction from which it proceeded.

It was a glorious evening and under ordinary circumstances the walk would have been enjoyable, for the countryside was very beautiful. But now the horizon was plumed with bursting shells and the God of War reigned supreme.

We tramped for several miles along what was apparently a main road, but which was strangely deserted, though now and again we met wounded soldiers being brought along. At one place we caught up with the most debonair cavalryman I have ever seen outside a picture.

He was a chasseur à cheval, a good-looking, long-legged, devil-may-care fellow with cigarette hanging on his lip, seated loosely on his horse in quite rakish fashion with one hand resting on his hip. As he moved along, his lithe body swaying in rhythm to the horse's slow steady plod, he reminded me of one of those *preux chevaliers* so beloved by Meissonier, and I should have liked to have made a sketch of him.

He seemed to be very much interested in my plight, for as we came up with him, he had a whispered chat with the sergeant as to who and what I was and

where they were taking me to. As we passed on ahead, to my astonishment he called out to me in perfect English—

"Good luck to you, old chap; keep your pecker up; see you some day in London."

I looked back and waved my hand in grateful recognition.

A little further on a cart track tempted my guards to make a short cut across country. But it was evident neither of them knew the way, and at last we came to a broad ditch, which barred further progress, and they pulled up and had a long discussion as to the best direction to take.

The sergeant went on to reconnoitre, but before he left he told me peremptorily to sit down and not attempt to move. He was obviously very peevish when he returned and admitted he had come the wrong way, and that we should have to go back and continue by the main road.

Night was on us, and a dark one at that, when we reached the station we had been making for. A train was waiting at the platform. My escort took me to what appeared to be the officer in charge and handed him the document concerning me. He read it by the light of a lantern, then called out for a sergeant and two men. The paper and a few verbal instructions were given, and I was then marched off to a third-class carriage and told to get in, and the train started.

It was decidedly uncomfortable and smelly in

the carriage, as it was full of tired dirty soldiers sitting and lying about in all sorts of awkward positions, and their muddy overcoats and rifles and accoutrements appeared to fill every particle of space. They managed, however, to find me somewhere to sit when I had pushed in.

A corporal leaned forward and asked the sergeant in a whisper what I'd been doing; and I fancied I caught the word "espion" in the low reply. After this they all seemed to regard me with suspicion, and there was a long silence.

There was the merest glimmer of light which precluded all possibility of reading, and the seat was so hard that even to doze was out of the question.

After a while the men began to get food out of their haversacks, and started what was probably their supper. The sergeant and the corporal hob-nobbed with a box of sardines, a big sausage and two loaves of military bread.

The recollection of the gendarmes' meal came back to me, but these youngsters were of a different brand and generation to those stiff-lipped veterans. The corporal cut a slice of bread, put a chunk of sausage on it and offered it to me.

It was an act of spontaneous kind-heartedness of youth, and made me for a moment forget the pickle I was in. I accepted it and thanked him heartily, telling him at the same time how grateful I was as I had had nothing to eat or drink since mid-day. It was then past ten o'clock at night.

The others stopped eating and looked at me, and I heard one of them whisper to another: "*Le pauvre bougre a faim.*" Almost at once wine was produced, a tin mug filled and given me. Mysterious newspaper parcels were brought out of grimy canvas bags, and cheese and meat and other eatables were pressed on me.

Suddenly as though a thought had struck him, one of the men asked me abruptly: "What are you?"

"I am an Englishman," I replied.

"An Englishman," he repeated: "then why are you a prisoner? The English are our friends."

"Simply because I am an inquisitive artist and came up here without permission to see the fighting, and am being sent back again."

The sergeant pulled out the paper he had received with me and read it carefully by the light of a match, and then said it was quite true.

"Pas de chance," some one remarked.

"En effet," agreed a voice from a corner.

"They are sending you far enough back," said the sergeant with a grin, still looking at the document.

"Somewhere in the South of France," I added, to let him know I had some idea of the direction.

He nodded as though not liking to tell me the worst.

"And where are we going to-night?" I asked.

"Only as far as Besançon, where we stay till to-morrow and receive our instructions.

I then learned that this was one of the *trains d'approvisionnement* which bring up food to the première ligne, and these men corresponded to our A.S.C., being solely employed on this particular duty. I soon found myself chatting with them all, and found them a very interesting and intelligent lot of young fellows, so the time slipped unnoticed in spite of the hardness of my seat.

At length the train pulled up not far from a big station.

"Where are we now ?" I asked the sergeant.

"This is Épinal," he replied to my surprise, as I did not know we were going in that direction. "I shall have to see whether there are any instructions awaiting me. I don't suppose we shall remain here many minutes. Please don't move, will you ?" in a most friendly fashion, and of course I understood.

Whilst waiting his return I sat and reflected on the irony of my ill-luck that brought me back here where all my belongings were without the remotest chance of getting at them.

But my luck had not deserted me after all, as the sergeant came back in a few moments and told me, to my joy, to get out as the train was not going any further that night, and I was to go with him to the Commissaire of Police in the station.

It was some little distance from where the train had stopped, and it was very tiring walking over the innumerable lines and along the permanent way, but to me it seemed quite a pleasant stroll, although

I had a soldier on either side with rifle and fixed bayonet.

The commissaire recognized me, as he had seen my *sauf conduit* that morning before I started on my unlucky expedition. The sergeant handed him the fateful document, but he appeared to know its contents already. He was polite but firm.

"You will remain here till the train leaves in the morning." Then turning to the sergeant he said, "You will fetch him at nine o'clock." The sergeant withdrew.

An idea occurred to me: the commissaire seemed a decent sort of fellow.

"Monsieur le Commissaire," I commenced, "I want to venture to ask you a favour."

"What is it?" he replied, in a not unfriendly tone.

I then told him how I had left all my belongings in a room in the town and what a fix I should be in without them. Would he let some one go with me to fetch them?

He looked at me for a moment, and then said that he himself would go with me. I sat down and waited. Suddenly as though he had just thought of it he said—

"If I allow you to sleep at your room to-night, will you give me your parole to be here at nine o'clock in the morning?"

"Monsieur," I replied, "I cannot thank you sufficiently for your courtesy, and you can rely on

my word as an Englishman that I shall be here at that hour."

"It is just as well that I am accompanying you," he said as we went along, "as otherwise you might have found a difficulty in getting admitted at this late hour. There are very strict police regulations here."

Needless to add I got in without any trouble, while fortunately the room I had vacated that morning was unoccupied. It was with a curious feeling of relief that I found myself alone once more, and although I knew that I was still under arrest I slept like a top.

At nine o'clock to the very minute the following morning I presented myself at the Bureau du Commissaire de Police with all my belongings. The Commissaire was at his table writing; he looked up as I entered, glanced at the clock and said with a smile—

"Vous êtes à l'heure militaire, monsieur."

"Well, there's nothing like being punctual, even for an unpleasant job," I replied.

He continued his writing for a few minutes, then after blotting it with careful deliberation he turned towards me and said: "I have the pleasure to announce to you, monsieur, that I have just received instructions to liberate you, and to inform you that you are free to go in whatever direction you like provided you leave Épinal at once, and do not attempt to return to the Vosges."

I need not say that in my relief I had no thought of cavilling at the terms, indeed I had no option in the matter, so without hesitation I agreed to this.

"Alors," he continued, "decide where you wish to proceed to from here, and I will make you out a *sauf conduit* and give you a railway pass." I settled, therefore, to go back to Langres for a few days,as I had a lot of work to get through, and when there to think over my further movements.

There happened to be a train shortly after, and he courteously sent for a porter to carry my things to the carriage, and then cheerily wished me bon voyage. He was, as I had summed him up on the previous evening, a very decent fellow, but I somehow had the impression that all he was doing for me now was on "instructions."

I had plenty of time while on the journey to reflect on the untoward termination of my first attempt to get up to the front; but when I put the pros and cons together, I came to the conclusion that, in spite of all the unpleasantness I had been through, it had been a very interesting experience, and I did not feel the slightest regret in having risked it.

I may here mention incidentally that the adventure, if I may so call it, had a curious sequel. Several months afterwards, when I had almost forgotten it, I received a postcard from the young Franco-English interpreter of the Headquarters at Bruyères. It was written in English and said: "Suppose you have

returned to England by now, so I thought it would interest you to know that up to the present, you are the only correspondent who has succeeded in getting here."

It had therefore evidently been known all along what had been my errand, and I had been pluming myself at the time in having so successfully disguised my journalistic calling.

Upon my arrival, I need scarcely mention how surprised my sister was to see me and to learn the cause of my sudden return, though she admitted that she had been very anxious about me, when the St. Dié merchant returned from Epinal, and told her of my decision to go on alone.

Much, I learned, had happened during the few days I had been away, and there had been great military activity in the district around Langres.

Events were shaping rapidly : it was evident that the brunt of the operations had shifted from the North-Eastern and Belgian frontiers to the vicinity of Paris. Everything pointed to the next days or possibly hours being fraught with fateful issue.

My first impulse was to get on as quickly as possible in the direction of the capital and attempt to get into the thick of things, as it was clear that it was there that all the interest centred. I soon learnt, however, that this was out of the question, as for the moment no railway tickets were being issued there. They wanted no more superfluous inhabitants within the circle of the Paris forts. I therefore reconciled

A PROCLAMATION OF THE GENERAL THROUGH THE TOWN CRIER — LANGRES

myself to remaining where I was for a few days and getting on with my work whilst waiting an opportunity to move off.

Langres, with its Vauban ramparts and ancient streets, appeared very quiet and peaceful after the military life and bustle I had just left, and I was not over-joyed at the prospect of perchance being forced willy-nilly to remain in the town until the railway became again available.

After a few days, however, events came to my rescue in quite an unexpected fashion. Whether it was the advance of the German armies necessitated big strategic displacement of troops in directions not comprised hitherto in the zone of operations, or for other reasons which obviously could only be surmised, a *mandat* was issued unexpectedly by the Military Governor of Langres to the effect that the town was to be evacuated by a certain date.

To give the exact words of the proclamation, which had quite a mediæval smack to it, the "Bouches inutiles," which meant all non-combatants, had to leave. The wives and children of officers were to be sent to Clermont Ferrand, and the remainder of the superfluous population towards the South of France.

Amongst others particularly specified were "All strangers in the town," and of course I came within this category, so I had to make arrangements to take my departure forthwith, whilst my sister, being the wife of an officer, started packing up the house prior to leaving it for an indefinite period.

An officer with whom I had become very friendly came to my help at this juncture and procured me a *sauf conduit* as far as Troyes, which would bring me in fairly close proximity to the fighting on the Marne, and also a special letter of introduction to the commissaire of police there, who was from all accounts a very complaisant fellow, and who could be of great assistance to me. So off again I started on the war-path.

I had been recommended to a very well-known hotel at Troyes, and on the strength of it got a room without any difficulty, and although it was a very old house everything was very up to date, in fact a little too much so, as it was a bad prelude to the rough time I felt was ahead of me.

Troyes is a paradise for a wandering artist, and had it not been that I realized it was no time for loafing about I could have spent days in its quaint nooks and corners and wonderful old churches. As I have already mentioned, it was at that time a big military concentration depôt, and I found it presented quite as busy an appearance as Épinal, though of course it was very much larger.

I lost no time in calling on the commissaire of police. He received me with the greatest cordiality, and I knew at once I had got a friend in him, and as it turned out I was not mistaken.

The battle of the Marne, which was to have so cogent a bearing on the whole course of the war, had just commenced, and I had learned that the line from

Troyes to Chalons and Rheims passed close to the area of operations in the Champagne Pouilleuse at several points; if, therefore, I could manage to get a permit to go in that direction, I was certain to see something of the fighting.

The commissaire agreed that this was the route I should take. Unfortunately, however, the line was not working for the moment, it had been cut somewhere; but he promised to give me a *sauf conduit* directly it was notified it was open again. I had perforce but to bear my soul in patience, as there were no other means of getting there otherwise—and a car was out of the question. Meanwhile he good naturedly told me to keep in touch with him and he would let me know as soon as it was possible for me to go.

He was certainly the most affable commissaire of police I had ever met, and he was also as good as his word, for the following morning he informed me that if I was still of the mind to get out to the zone of operations there was an opportunity that day in a relief train that was going through to Sommesous. Needless to say I jumped at the chance, and he made me out a permit enabling me to get a railway ticket to any part of the line with which communication would be open.

I managed to find out in a vague sort of way that probably my only likelihood of finding a lodging and food anywhere near the battlefield would be at Mailly-le-Camp, which, although the scene of much

fighting, had not been occupied by the Germans, it was therefore supposed it was not entirely destroyed and abandoned.

So I decided to make for Mailly and started off that evening with nothing but my ruck-sack on my back, and a stout stick in my hand.

I may mention that I had been strongly advised not to take a revolver with me, in case by any chance I had the ill-luck to fall into the hands of the Germans.

CHAPTER VIII

From Troyes to Mailly-le-Camp—Disadvantage of travelling first class in the war zone—An uncomfortable journey—I arrive Mailly—The deserted station—I find a guide—Ruins on all sides—The only auberge in the village—A truculent-looking crowd—My oratorical effort—A *bienvenue*—A well-ventilated bedroom—Awakened by gun-fire—Flies everywhere—Procession of refugee peasants—The Chief of Gendarmes—I am lent a bicycle—Off to the battlefields of the Marne—Harrowing sights—The village of Sommesous—Bestial malignity of the Hun—The dying Saxon officer—The "Territorials" a cheery crew—Two good yarns.

ONLY a few soldiers were going by the train, so it was practically empty, and having therefore the choice of carriages I naturally jumped into a first-class compartment—only to discover that I should have been better off in a humble third, as all the cushions had been removed from the seats. This I learned subsequently was frequently the case, as they were useful as beds for wounded soldiers, so one always fought shy of unoccupied first-class carriages in the zone of operations.

There was no light in the compartment, and it was therefore as uncomfortable a journey as could be well imagined.

I had taken the precaution to ask a soldier who was acting as guard to the train to let me know when

we got to Mailly, as I had not the remotest idea how far it was or how long it would take to get there; and it was fortunate that I had done so, for when at last he opened the door and told me I had arrived, the place we had drawn up at was quite unrecognizable as a station in the pitchy darkness of the night.

The sound of heavy firing reached my ears as I clambered down gingerly from the carriage on to a heap of rubble which was part of what had been the platform.

With much screeching and snorting of the locomotive, the train rumbled slowly away, and I found myself marooned in the gloom.

I shall long remember my impressions of that moment. The sense of utter loneliness that came over me was positively uncanny, and for a moment I felt absolutely helpless.

Gradually, however, my eyes became accustomed to the darkness and I was able to distinguish the outline of the station building badly damaged by shell-fire. A little way up the unsheltered platform stood a sentry immobile as a statue, with a lantern on the ground beside him, the only signs of life and light in the place.

I walked up to him and inquired the way out and to the village.

"The village," he echoed: "there is not much left of it, but what there is, is that way," indicating the direction with a jerk of his thumb. Knowing that talking with him might land him in trouble, as

sentries are, of course, not allowed to carry on a conversation, I left him and groped my way out.

The road outside was ankle-deep in sticky mud and there was no sign of a footpath. It was raining fast, and I was standing wondering what on earth I should do and thinking what a fool I was to have come, when suddenly a light appeared moving in my direction, and as it got nearer I saw it was an aged peasant with a lantern, plodding stolidly through the mire.

As he came along I stopped him and asked if he could direct me to an auberge where I could get a night's lodging.

He started back as though he had been hit—as he evidently had not seen me standing there, then holding up the lantern peered at me steadily for an instant. Civilian strangers were doubtless unusual in the locality, and I could see he did not know what to make of me.

In order to reassure him and to let him know I was not a German spy, I told him where I had come from and my nationality.

He hesitated a moment as though in doubt as to whether he was doing the right thing, then said abruptly, "Suivez-moi." As I saw he was not inclined to be communicative I merely thanked him and let him lead the way, floundering along as best I could in his tracks, guided by the uncertain light of the lantern.

As we went along the flickering rays lit up a weird

spectacle of desolation on either side of the road, tottering walls, charred timbers, heaps of smoking rubble and here and there an ominous glow from some smouldering ruin.

We proceeded in silence for about half a mile till we reached the corner of what appeared to be a main road, when my guide stopped and turning to me said, "Voilà," and without another word left me.

I stood watching the light from his lantern till it gradually disappeared in the distance. I then looked round me. It was so dark that for a moment I could not discern anything, and scarcely dared to move for fear of falling into a shell hole.

All of a sudden I espied a slight ray of light, and venturing towards it discovered I was just outside a house, the beam coming through a crack in a shuttered door. I could hear voices inside.

This was evidently the auberge, so I rapped sharply with my stick. The talking ceased abruptly, but no one came. I rapped again still more loudly. Then I heard footsteps approaching and a voice called out, "Qui est la ?"

"I am an Englishman," I replied, "and I want you to put me up for the night."

There appeared to be a muttered conversation, then there was the sound of bolts being drawn, the door opened slightly, letting out a ray of light that for an instant dazzled me, and then I saw that the place was full of soldiers.

The man who had opened the door stared at me very hard for a moment and then said, "I cannot let you have a room, the whole place is in a state of confusion and ruin."

"Well," I answered, "I am very sorry for your trouble, mon ami, but I don't propose to remain out here in the rain and mud, so you will have to do the best you can for me." And with that I pushed my way in.

It was an ordinary peasants' café with three large tables in it, and round them, drinking wine and smoking, were about thirty territorial soldiers—men of anything up to fifty years of age, many of them grey-haired fellows, whose military duties would consist of guarding the railway lines, culverts, bridges and other work that did not call for the hot ardour of youth.

It was as rough and truculent-looking a crowd as could well be imagined, and their muddy uniforms and general unkempt appearance, did not tend to soften it.

My abrupt entrance caused somewhat of a sensation, as may be guessed. They all turned round and stared at me with surprise, which struck me as not altogether friendly.

There was an awkward silence. I felt instinctively that unless I made a favourable impression at once I should have an unpleasant time. Under ordinary circumstances I am horribly nervous at the mere thought of having to make a speech, but now

I realized that there was nothing for it but to say something.

My thorough knowledge of French and Frenchmen helped me out. Advancing to the centre of the room I raised my hat and said: "J'ai l'honneur de vous saluer, messieurs. Pardon my intrusion; I am a wandering English artist and have been sent from England to make sketches of the glorious French Army, of which you all form part, and I was told that round about Mailly I should find splendid subjects for my pencil. It is, I feel, a bit of real luck that has dropped me here amongst all you good fellows, and I hope we shall be great friends, as my heart and soul are with France."

There were loud exclamations of approval on all sides at my oratorical effort, and then a burly black-bearded sergeant, who looked like an artist, strolled up to me and gripping me warmly by the hand said in the fraternal slang of the "quartier Latin":

"Tu es un brave, et nous sommes contents de te voir ici."

"Then," said I, "let me lose no time in celebrating my arrival. Permit me to pay a *bienvenue*, as we used to do when I was a student in Paris." And turning to the proprietor, who was looking on, I ordered drinks all round, and then of course they drank to La vieille Angleterre, and I to La belle France, and in less than an hour I was "one of them" and felt I had really dropped on my feet here. It

was all done in double-quick time, but it had to be done impulsively, or it would have missed fire altogether.

And so started a far cheerier evening than I had anticipated. But duty is duty, and the *Territoriaux* are second to none in this respect, and after a time, at the command of the sergeant, they all put on their accoutrements, took up their rifles and filed out into the darkness, to disperse to their various *postes*, wishing me a cheery "Au revoir, à demain" as they went.

The cuisine adjoined the café, and here madame was superintending the cooking of supper for the men about to be relieved. I already felt on such friendly terms that I strolled in with my pipe in my mouth and asked what she was going to do for me in the shape of a room.

"Mais, monsieur," she said, "I know not what to do; we have only just got back here and have had no time to see to anything. There is not a pane of glass left in any of the windows upstairs, and all the rooms are in a shocking state."

"Never mind," I replied, "*à la guerre—comme à la guerre*, I'll manage somehow."

But when I went up to have a look I found what she had told me was no exaggeration—a shell had burst on the corner of the roof and had done a tremendous lot of damage.

However, I lent a hand, and we managed to clear up one of the rooms sufficiently for me to sleep in

that night, and nailed some stuff over the sashless windows to keep out the weather.

When I returned to the café I found awaiting me a plate of steaming stewed beef, flanked by a bottle of excellent vin gris, the only wine the Germans had left in the cellar ; and whilst I was doing justice to the meal the proprietor came and sat opposite me and poured all his woes into my ears just as if I had been one of his old habitués.

The following morning shortly after six o'clock I was awakened by the most terrific gun-fire I had yet heard, so dressed hurriedly in order to be ready for any emergency.

On going outside I found that the village was only partially destroyed, many houses being completely untouched, and there were quite a lot of inhabitants about. The café was deserted at that early hour and looked very dirty and dilapidated in the daylight, whilst the flies swarming everywhere did not improve matters and considerably interfered with my café au lait. I don't think I ever saw more flies to the square yard than here, and the knowledge of the proximity of the battlefield suggested horrible thoughts of their origin.

The broad highway outside the café presented an extraordinary spectacle of war—a long line of artillery and munition caissons was passing in one direction, whilst in the other was an endless defile of refugees from neighbouring villages, with their goods and chattels piled high on every description of vehicle ;

the incessant thunder of the guns in the distance adding to the impressiveness of the scene.

The battle, I learned, was still raging, but the Germans had been driven back everywhere and were in full retreat all along the Marne.

The nearest point of the fighting at that moment was about five miles away, so I was all impatience to get up as close to it as possible. But it was not to be done as easily as it seemed. I had first to interview the chief of the local gendarmerie, and show him my papers, or I should be asking for more trouble.

Then the question arose as to how to get out to the battlefield and back again. I had already decided to make Mailly my headquarters, as it was practically certain there was no chance of finding anything in the way of food and shelter further on. It was not a very long distance to walk, even there and back, but every hour was of importance, as the operations would be getting further and further off, so I should have to think of a way to get a lift along the road.

The chief of the gendarmes was a man of a very different stamp to the martinet of Bruyères; although he was a gendarme to the backbone, he seemed human. Curiously enough he recognized the signature on the *sauf conduit* as that of an old colleague, so this rather broke the ice. He made no difficulty about my staying in Mailly, and even evinced a certain interest in my work.

As I came away from his house, a bicycle standing

against the wall outside suggested an idea. Why not bike out to the scene of operations ?

I had done a lot of cycling in my younger days and it would be an easy matter to take it up again, and I should thus be independent of every one for getting about. But the difficulty, of course, would be to find a machine, as it was scarcely likely there would be any spare ones in the village.

My luck, however, was still in, and during the morning I came across a man who had one he could lend me. There was only one slight drawback, which was that it was a lady's bicycle, but it would answer my purpose very well, so I took possession of it at once. Immediately after *déjeuner* I set off on a quiet spin to Sommesous, the next village to Mailly, and which had just been cleared of Germans.

There was a glorious feeling of freedom as I bowled along, for it did not take me many minutes to get into the ways of my unaccustomed mount, and luckily I had a straight level road for some distance and pretty well all to myself. High trees on either side shut in the view ahead of me. The thunder of the guns had meanwhile gradually diminished, and was now but desultory firing, giving one the impression of a storm that had expended its fury for the time being, but which at any moment might start afresh with renewed fury.

Gradually there were signs around me that the scene of the fighting was close at hand: shell holes—broken telegraph poles—shattered tree-trunks, till

at length the road emerged into open undulating country with cornfields and grass land. A short distance ahead were the smoking ruins of the picturesque village of Sommesous in an oasis of sheltering trees.

From here on the battlefield extended on both sides, and there was grim evidence everywhere of the fierceness of the fighting: crops trampled down, sheaves of corn rotting in the fields. The countryside was positively littered with the awful débris of war: broken rifles, shattered caissons, accoutrements of every description, fragments of big shells.

The war was in its early stages then and trench work was in its infancy, so it was pitiful to see the poor little attempts that had been hastily made to get shelter against the rain of projectiles in the more exposed parts of the ground, and how advantage had been taken of the very smallest hillock.

Most of the trenches were but shallow furrows scooped in the loose soil, and would scarcely have given cover to a rabbit, leave alone a man. I ascended a slight eminence just off the road overlooking the village, where the struggle had evidently been particularly acute, and it was doubtless the gallant holding on at this exposed point that forced the Germans to retreat from the place.

There were many harrowing sights here: bloodstained surgical bandages, broken rifles, torn overcoats and other things that told their own tale. But the most impressive of all was the number of small

hollows dug hastily to serve as shelter pits, most of them were no bigger or deeper than a washtub; many were black with coagulated blood and full of empty cartridge cases. The ground was quite honeycombed with these gruesome little hollows.

Ambulance men were to be seen in all directions searching among the bushes and copses for the wounded and dead.

I made my way down to the village to find that the troops were still there and all access barred, and I deemed it advisable not to linger too long in case I was asked if I had a military permit to be there; but with this exception one could apparently wander where one chose.

As I was retracing my steps it occurred to me to take back a broken rifle as a souvenir, so picked up a good specimen—there were hundreds to choose from—and tied it on my handle-bar.

A little further on, as I was passing a group of soldiers, a sergeant stopped me much to my horror, as I immediately thought I was in for arrest at least, but to my great relief it was only to ask me if I was not aware it was strictly forbidden to take away a French rifle. As I did not know it was a French one I had annexed, I told him so. Very good humouredly then he advised me to throw it away at once before the gendarmes saw it. Needless to add I did not require a second hint.

We got into conversation and he strolled along

A GRUESOME SEARCH—AFTER THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

with me, and I learned some interesting details of the German repulse during the previous days.

We were then on the outskirts of the village, and he took me into a delightful villa that had been wantonly wrecked by the Huns. Unless I had seen for myself what they had done here, I should never have believed it possible for human beings to have been capable of such bestial malignancy. The principal bedroom, which had evidently been exquisitely furnished, was defiled in a manner that I dare not describe, and the other rooms were almost as bad. Nothing that could be smashed or torn up had escaped their attention; it was as though raving madmen had been let loose in the place.

At the railway station close by was a painful spectacle. In the little waiting-room a Saxon officer, mortally wounded, was lying on a stretcher dying. He had probably been left behind as being too terribly injured to be moved in an ambulance train. The whole of one side had been blown away, and he was quite unconscious, while his life was ebbing rapidly.

The place he was in was completely bare and he was quite alone. There was nothing to show he had been tended at all after being deposited there, except a washhand basin full of water and an empty sardine tin to drink out of, on the floor beside him. He was a fine handsome young fellow with a fair beard, a typical Saxon, and his being abandoned like this struck me as unutterably sad.

There was a strange fascination in wandering around, even amongst these horrors, that made me lose count of time, so I had to make a very determined effort in order to get back to Mailly before dark. However, I managed it without incident and found all my Territorial friends of the previous evening gathered together at the café, where I received a pleasing welcome.

A mess for the men had already been organized, and considering that the proprietor and his wife had only been back three days, it was surprising what a dinner they gave us, the more especially when one remembered it was all made up with ordinary army rations. We had, I remember, a "Bœuf Bourgignonne" that was simply perfect.

The news in was glorious, and every one in the highest spirits consequently. Being among all these cheery souls quite recalled my old Bohemian days in Paris. Most of them I found were men of good position in civil life, and the sergeant who had first spoken to me on the previous evening turned out to be an *avocat*.

Their roughness of manner and appearance was, I soon discovered, largely "put on." Many of them, the older ones especially, liked to pose as "poilus," and to fancy themselves youthful again because they were in uniform. It was after all but a harmless conceit, and did not in the least detract from the conscientious and enthusiastic manner in which they carried out their strenuous and often perilous duties.

Patriotism is second nature with a Frenchman, and I was constantly being reminded of this during the time I was at Mailly amongst these men, for I never heard a word of "grousing" from any of them, however unpleasant the weather or the work they had to do. It was "for France," and they did not disguise their delight at being considered "fit" enough to do it. I raise my hat to the Territorials!

However, to return to that night at the café.

As may be imagined there was any amount of good-natured badinage going on, of which I had to receive my share since I was accepted as one of them. There were also some very funny yarns going round. I recall two that are worth recounting.

On one occasion during the mobilization a party of them were unloading sacks of forage at a small railway siding. It was a terrifically hot afternoon which called for a siesta rather than for arduous labour. The sergeant had been called away for a few hours, and had left the senior private in charge.

The men were not long in taking advantage of this respite from his supervision, and soon the unfortunate private had all his work cut out to prevent the men from lying down and going to sleep. He was a fussy, pompous individual, and quite fancied himself in his temporary rank, bustling round, giving orders incessantly.

Suddenly he espied a man fast asleep in a shady corner on a heap of sacks.

"Come on—out of this; you've got to work, not sleep," he called out.

The man opened his eyes drowsily and looked up at him; then seeing he was only a private like himself, he replied tersely in the manner of Cambronne, and calmly closed his eyes again.

"I'll soon make you get up," yelled the other, fairly fuming with rage. "Don't you know I'm acting sergeant?"

"I don't care if you're acting Cyrano, I don't intend to stir for you," replied the delinquent, settling himself down more comfortably.

The other yarn was told by the sergeant-major. It appeared that in his company at one time he had had a middle-aged man who was particularly nervous and unsoldierly. Thinking to rouse him up a bit and put a little spirit into him, he had detailed him one night for a sentry job, and sending for him explained that he had chosen him for the duty, as he was sure he could do it well, and then proceeded to tell him carefully what he would have to do in the event of any one approaching him during the night. That he was to call out, "Halt! Who goes there?" three times, with an interval between each challenge, and then if the person did not reply "Friend" and give the password, he was to fire at him without hesitation.

The man did not seem over-enthusiastic about it, but said he would do his best.

During the night the sergeant thought he would

go and see how he was getting on. It was very dark, and he had approached quite close without having been observed, then suddenly the man saw him, though of course he could not recognize who it was, and as quick as lightning raised his rifle to his shoulder and called out like a frightened girl as fast as he could utter the words, "Who goes there, who goes there, who goes there," in rapid succession, and without giving him time to reply fired at him point blank, only missing his head by a few inches.

After this, he did not put him on sentry duty again.

During the evening the landlord brought up a young fellow of about seventeen years of age, and said that if I was thinking of cycling out to the battle-field again the next day, here was a companion to accompany me, as he intended riding over on his bicycle to see what had happened to some relations of his at Lenharrée, a village some miles beyond Sommesous. As he knew the country well, of course I jumped at the chance, and we arranged to make an early start.

CHAPTER IX

Mailly to Lenharrée—Skirting the battlefield—Grim reminders of warfare—The villages of Haussimont and Vassimont—The man from Lenharrée—A grim spectacle by the roadside—In the village of Death—A veritable vision of Hades—The two old women—Across the battlefield—Dead hares—The bivouac of the Prussian Guards—Life-like postures of the dead men—"Souvenirs" for the picking up—The officer with the watch bracelet—Horrors everywhere—Souvenir grabbers—The Mayor of Lenharrée—A gorgeous trophy.

IT was a brilliantly fine morning with only the occasional booming of a big gun in the distance to remind one that fighting was still going on. We took the road I had ridden along the previous day, but just before reaching Sommesous we made a detour in a direction which landed us in another part of the battlefield.

The district now seemed deserted—there was not a soul in sight. The wounded and dead had already been taken away, but lines of primitive trenches in the fields and sometimes along the sides of the road, shell holes, wheel tracks of artillery, and smashed trees bore eloquent witness to the desperate nature of the fighting here.

In the brilliant sunshine these grim reminders of warfare in the quiet rural surroundings seemed strangely unreal, and this impression was accentuated

at Haussimont, the first village we came to. There was no sign whatever of destruction here, and all looked so peaceful that one scarcely noticed the absence of inhabitants, as of course the place had been evacuated. The tide of battle had somehow missed it, while at Vassimont, only a few kilometres further on, there were ruins on all sides.

We were now close to our destination, and the air was so balmy and the road so delightful for cycling, that had it not been for the gaunt smoking ruins of a big chateau on a hillside close by, one might have imagined oneself on a holiday jaunt. Suddenly we saw a man in the distance coming towards us—not an unusual sight on a country road, but as he was the first human being we had seen for miles, it was sufficiently remarkable for my companion to comment on it.

He stopped on reaching us and appeared eager to have a talk, so we dismounted. I then noticed he was white as a ghost.

Were we going to Lenharrée ? he asked; and on learning that was the case he told us in a faltering voice that we should see sights there so awful that he hardly dared to think of them.

The streets, he said, were full of dead—French and German; the burying and ambulance parties having either overlooked the place or being too busy elsewhere—there must be so many thousands still to bury all over the district. There did not seem any exaggeration in what he stated, although his

appearance indicated a state of the most extreme mental tension. We left him and rode on in silence, my bicycling companion being evidently much impressed by what he had heard.

Soon we came to a slight rise in the road from which we caught sight of the village nestling in a picturesque hollow and surmounted by a quaint old church on a hill. A swift little stream ran noisily through a meadow under an archway of overhanging trees; it would have been impossible to imagine a more delightfully secluded or sylvan spot.

My attention was suddenly attracted by the appearance of a French soldier in some bushes at the side of the road ahead of us. He was apparently waving his arm as though signalling; close by was another man in a reclining position.

On getting up to them and dismounting we were horrified to discover that they were both dead, the one in the bush having been killed as he was climbing through. In falling back his belt had caught in a branch, and his outstretched stiffened arm swayed with hideous semblance to life with every puff of wind.

I then noticed that the meadow by the stream was literally strewn with bodies of French and German soldiers—several also were lying in the water.

My companion remarked in a hoarse voice that we had better be moving, so we walked on without comment.

On entering the village we found it was but a

A GRIM APPARITION

heap of blackened ruins, only one or two houses intact, the rest burnt out and still smouldering; a weird, uncanny silence reigned over all.

As we walked through the street I felt a strange, prickling sensation of horror come over me. The roadway and side walk were crowded with bodies in every conceivable posture, just as they had fallen fighting, or had been killed by the shells.

Fragments of rifles, bayonets, swords, bits of uniforms, even shirts and boots were scattered everywhere, as though the men in their last moments had tried to tear each other to pieces.

In the centre of the village was a little grassy slope with a roadway leading to the church. There was a fine chestnut tree there, which curiously enough had not been touched either by fire or shell.

Underneath it on the grass was positively the most ghastly and blood-curdling spectacle I have ever seen in my life, or could ever have imagined. Never shall I forget it.

The fight had evidently been more ferocious here, if possible, than elsewhere, and there were dozens of bodies in the street and in the deep shadow cast by the tree; together with all sorts of blood-stained weapons, képis, and helmets.

Judging from the wildly clutching hands and the expression on the faces, it had been a man-to-man struggle, and no quarter given or asked. Words failed me to describe the scene. I will not dwell on it—it was a veritable vision of Hades.

Close by on a stretcher was a big German stripped to the waist. He had evidently been shot dead while his wounds were being attended to, as he had a surgical dressing partially wound round his body. The remains of a French officer lying near, with the head blown off, had been reverently covered with an overcoat—perhaps by some comrade. I got out my sketch-book, but felt it was almost a sacrilege to make a sketch among all these brave, dead warriors.

The village had seemed deserted at first, but to my surprise we came across two very old women in what remained of a house. One wondered how they could have returned to such a place. They had actually to step over a corpse to get inside the door. I am not "nervy," but I fancy nothing would have induced me to spend a night in such surroundings.

One of the women was engaged in some ordinary household occupation as calmly as though everything around her was quite normal. I stopped and made some remark to her about the hideous sights in the village.

"You have only seen a little of it all," she told me. "Go up and have a look at the back of the church."

She was right—we had only seen a small proportion of the horrors.

In and around the picturesque little graveyard bodies were lying in heaps. The French had entrenched themselves in the fields just beyond, and the Germans had lost heavily in trying to rush the

THE VILLAGE OF DEATH

position. The ground was torn up by shell fire, and the church itself was much damaged.

In the corner of a smiling little meadow close by a party of four French non-commissioned officers had been eating a meal, when a shell had burst in their midst, leaving nothing but a confused mass of blue uniform and mangled flesh. The sight was so terrible that we could only glance at it for an instant.

My companion suggested our going across the battlefield to where the German position had been, about a mile away. It was a relief to get out into the solitude of the open country for a short respite from the scenes in the village, but it was very rough walking, as the ground was pitted with shell holes everywhere, a curious fact emphasizing the intensity of the shell fire being the number of dead hares lying about.

The Germans in their retreat had abandoned many guns and their emplacements filled with undischarged shells, standing ready in the wicker basket holders used for conveying the ammunition.

"Souvenirs" were to be had for the picking up, and although I knew what an encumbrance anything of the sort would be on my bicycle, I could not resist the temptation of making a collection of odds and ends; amongst others a fine, brand-new Mauser repeating pistol with a leather holster.

My companion had not the collector's temperament, and his notion of a "souvenir" took the utilitarian form of a pair of good substantial German

boots to fit him, and he eventually found a pair, which he told me he had exchanged for those he was wearing.

Hundreds of dead Germans of the Prussian Guard lay here and there in the undergrowth in the woods—huge fellows most of them, and at first sight they almost appeared to be sitting talking, or lying on the ground asleep, so natural were their attitudes.

On the fringe of the wood facing the French positions were many hastily improvised rifle-pits, evidently for the crack shots of the regiment, as the range must have been nearly two thousand yards.

In some of these shallow holes dead men were lying prone, rifle at shoulder, as though in the act of taking a long-distance shot, their postures being so life-like that one almost hesitated to walk in front of them. They had been killed evidently instantaneously, and without any outward sign of injury. One had almost the impression of looking at a waxwork show.

There had been many rumours going round for days previously that the French were using a shell containing "turpinite," a mysterious explosive, of terrific power, that killed everything without wounding within a big radius of its explosion by shock only, and this awful spectacle seemed to give emphasis to the rumours.

The shell-fire had apparently surprised the Prussians in the midst of a bivouac, for the ground was strewn with all manner of hand-baggage, and

where the officers had been this was frequently of a most elaborate and luxurious character—dressing-cases with silver-mounted fittings and full of personal belongings and letters, photographs in frames, thermos flasks, and what-not. But it had rained heavily during the night and everything was sodden and very pitiful to look upon.

I had been hunting round for a rifle in good condition and a helmet to take away, when I espied an officer with the very sort of "pickelhaube" I wanted.

He was a giant of a man with gold-rimmed spectacles over wide-staring eyes that seemed to defy me to touch him, but I relieved him of his helmet all the same. On his wrist he had an elegant gold watch bracelet set in diamonds; to have taken this would have, of course, amounted to "looting;" but the thought, I remember, struck me afterwards that in all probability the fellow had stolen it from some unfortunate French lady, and perhaps I ought to have taken it and handed it over to the Military Police Commandant.

We made our way back to the village by a detour to endeavour to avoid the gruesome sights round the church again, but only to find that the horrors were everywhere.

On the straw of a barn which had escaped destruction was an improvised first-aid dressing station; half a dozen French soldiers lay there. At first sight they also appeared to be alive, their

bandages looked so white and their uniforms so unsoiled, but a glance at their faces was sufficient.

We were indeed in a village of Death.

. . . . .

During the afternoon an infantry regiment arrived to commence burying operations, and several squadrons of hussars to bar all access to the district and the battlefield.

It was advisable not to be found within the cordon that the cavalry began at once to draw round the area, as civilians, and especially strangers, were certain to be suspect and liable to be detained. My companion had, perhaps, a legitimate cause for being there, but I could only plead morbid curiosity. It was better, therefore, to take no risks and get away as soon as possible.

Both our bicycles were pretty well loaded up by now with mementos of our excursion, and we had to stop when we got outside the village to fasten them on securely. While doing so we were joined by quite a band of young fellows, also riding bicycles, and who were going in our direction. Where they had come from I could not ascertain, but several of them had bulky sacks containing "souvenirs" on their handle-bars. One of them in particular had a bundle of peculiar shape which led to a somewhat amusing incident.

A little way along the road we saw a carriage coming towards us, and in it were two gentlemen

dressed in black and wearing tall hats. The vehicle stopped as we got up to it, and one of the occupants made signs for us to halt.

It then turned out that this was the Mayor of Lenharrée and his *adjoint.* They began asking a lot of questions as to the state of affairs in the village, and for obvious reasons I thought it as well not to be mixed up in the conversation, or rather cross-examination, as it seemed likely to be, so unobtrusively moved away a few yards.

After a few moments the bundles of " souvenirs " appeared to attract the attention of the mayor, and he evidently wanted to know more of their contents than was pleasant to the possessors, with the result that several names were taken down.

Then the *adjoint* espied the curiously shaped package I have referred to. This at his request was handed over and opened, when it was found to contain a magnificent silver helmet, surmounted by a gilt eagle, truly a gorgeous trophy. The mayor took it and examined it closely for some moments, then turned pompously to the young fellow in whose possession it had been and said with magisterial decision—

" Mon jeune ami, I cannot permit you to retain this; it must remain in the keeping of the municipality of Lenharrée for the present." And suiting action to the words, he rolled it up in the sack again, placed it between his feet in the carriage and ordered the coachman to drive on.

CHAPTER X

In Mailly—The two "mouchards"—Another prowl across the battlefields—The Champagne Pouilleuse—Significant heaps of uniforms—The Solitude—Recalling the Australian bush—Lost on the battlefield—My territorial friends' encampment—I accept invitation to stay night—The pot-au-feu—Twelve men in tent—A wet night—Awakened by heavy gunfire—The bombardment of Rheims—The blazing cathedral—A "gardening job"—Tide of battle receding from Mailly—The original scheme of German advance in this direction—The wonderful stoicism of the French peasant women—With the fugitives from the villages—A harrowing incident—The battalions Sanitaires—I return to Troyes—I sketch my friend the commissaire—A *sauf conduit* to Rheims—I leave for Chalons.

THAT evening at dinner two civilians I had not previously seen turned up and sat next to me, whether intentionally or not I could not make out; anyhow, as was only natural, we got into conversation. They were of quite ordinary appearance, over the military age, and I put them down as engaged on some Government work.

Soon a word or two they let slip made me smell a rat, and put me on my guard at once, and sure enough they turned out to be detectives—"mouchards"—who were detailed specially to entrap looters and battlefield ghouls. They remained some days in Mailly, and during that time we became

quite friendly, and gradually they told me a lot about their dangerous job.

Our meeting was particularly fortunate for me, curiously enough, as before they left one of them gave me his card and said that if I ever happened to be in Rheims I should generally find him at the address he had written on it, which was that of a brasserie in one of the principal streets, adding that if he happened to be away, and I gave the landlord his card, I would always be given a room and the best of food and wine at "police" prices, as this was one of their rendezvous, and was kept by an ex-sergeant of the detective force.

Although I had no intention at the time of going to Rheims, I put the card by carefully, and as it turned out it was lucky for me I did so, as it afterwards proved useful.

The following day I was obsessed by a morbid impulse to have another prowl across the battlefield, so started off by myself after *déjeuner*. I biked out again till I came within sight of Sommesous and then wandered into the direction of the area known as the Champagne-Pouilleuse—a wide expanse of country, the soil of which is too poor to be of any use either agriculturally or for vineyard growing.

Here the fighting had evidently been more scattered and the evidences of warfare not so frequent, although I came across several abandoned guns in emplacements, with shells neatly stacked around, and a very ingenious portable observation post in

the form of a tall galvanized iron ladder with a platform on top, mounted on a sort of trolley.

Here and there I discerned amongst the low shrubs that dotted the ground on all sides, some significant heaps of what at first sight appeared to be discarded uniforms, but on closer inspection afforded proof that the burying parties had not yet operated here, or had carried out their duty inefficiently.

There was something uncannily impressive in the calm that reigned in the solitude here, recalling to me somehow the Australian bush.

Wheeling my bicycle and wandering on aimlessly, I took no notice of where I was going, and when at length I looked at my watch and saw it was time to retrace my footsteps, it suddenly dawned on me that I had lost my bearings and was uncertain which direction would lead me back to the road again.

Here was a ridiculous fix to be in—lost on the battlefield; what a story it would make; and to add to my plight it was beginning to rain and looked like setting in for a wet night.

I plodded on for some distance, chancing to luck in finding my way, and feeling very annoyed at having forgotten the first precept I had learned when in Western Australia: Never to leave the road and go into the Bush unless you make certain of your bearings beforehand. It had been rather late in the afternoon when I started and it was now getting near dusk, and I began to have visions of sleeping

in the open, when I saw a light in the distance. It was some little way off, but it reassured me, as I knew it meant that there were human beings there who could direct me.

On getting nearer I saw it came from a large bell tent at the commencement of a cutting on the railway line, and to my pleasant surprise I found the tent was occupied by some of my "Territorial friends."

I could see they were genuinely pleased at my turning up, and laughed heartily when they learned how I had got "lost," and such a short distance away. They insisted on my remaining the night with them, and as it was still raining I accepted their genial invitation without hesitation.

There was a *marmite* boiling on a cheery fire close by, and soon we were having a really excellent *pot au feu* for supper, one of the party being quite a chef in his way. This was washed down with some of the Mailly *vin gris,* and we finished up with black coffee as only a Frenchman can make it. Only a Frenchman, too, who could have made such a *pot au feu* out of army rations.

After supper many of the men had to go on duty, and I could not help noticing how wonderfully cheery they were as they got ready to start, although it meant many hours out in the rain on the exposed part of the line.

Then the relieved guard came in, dripping wet and looking cold and tired, yet even they had

humorous remarks ready to let off at their comrades, and there was no sign of depression or grumbling at the weather, as they fell to hungrily on their well-earned meal.

It was some years since I had last slept in a tent, and I did not quite look forward to this experience, and the more especially as there were a dozen men to share it with; but by the time preparations had been made for turning in I felt so tired that I could have slept on a telegraph wire. The floor of the tent was covered with a thick layer of straw, and there was a blanket for me to roll myself up in, so it was fairly comfortable and I was soon sleeping like a log.

I was awakened by what at first I took to be a terrific thunderstorm, and the rain pouring on the canvas added to the illusion; but in a few seconds I realized it was not thunder but the crashing of artillery, and that a heavy bombardment was taking place a little distance away, the flashes of the guns giving the impression of continuous lightning.

Then gradually a glare as from an immense fire lit up the interior of the tent. My companions were now all aroused and opinions were being exchanged as to whence it proceeded, when the sergeant opened the flap of the tent and came in and told us the Germans were bombarding Rheims, and that the glare was from fires that had started there. As a matter of fact, as one learned later, it was the blazing tower of the cathedral that lit up the sky that night.

Sleep was almost impossible after this, and I

only managed to doze fitfully until daybreak, when the rain having ceased I got up and had a sluice in cold water and a stroll round while some one got some coffee ready.

While we were having it two men came back from duty, and as they took off their accoutrements one of them remarked casually to the men who were succeeding them: "There is a little gardening job for you fellows over there," pointing in a certain direction, and proceeded to give exact details as to locality. The others said simply that they would see to it, and went and fetched shovels which they took out with them.

Somewhat mystified, I asked what he meant by "a gardening job"? and learned that it was his delicate way of saying there were two dead Germans to plant. I asked if I might accompany them and witness the burial; and the reverence with which the ceremony was conducted was in marked contrast with the flippancy of the conversation leading up to it.

In recalling my souvenirs of those early days of the Great Struggle, I find it hard to realize it was part of the same war as that just ended. Everything was so novel then, and so much more picturesque. It was *la Grande Guerre* truly, but I was always being reminded of the paintings of de Neuville or Detaille—possibly to no small extent because the red trousers, the blue overcoats, and the képis had not yet been replaced by tin helmets and horizon blue.

There was certainly no lack of subjects in and around Mailly, and naturally enough I enjoyed the freedom of movement that was almost bewildering after my previous unpleasant experiences. I felt I had fallen among friends, even to the gendarmes, who always saluted me politely when they met me on the road.

Mailly, interesting though it was, was now little more than an incident in the terrific battle of the Marne, and was already passing into history as the tide of battle receded from this quarter.

Still to me it presented a study of poignant interest, and whenever I had a few moments to spare from my work, I would cycle up to the famous camping ground and endeavour to visualize those fateful hours when the advance of the Germans was on the eve of being definitely stopped. Their scheme had been undoubtedly to turn the right wing of the Anglo-French army by an advancing force via Compiègne.

This proving impracticable, the only alternative consistent with the movement was to pass through Mailly, and this was evidently decided on at once, in spite of its hazardous nature, for Mailly is famous throughout France as an artillery training area, and to the veriest tyro of the German staff officer it must have been obvious that every yard of it was familiar to almost every French artillery officer. As a matter of fact, the very distances for practice always formed part and parcel of the annual artillery manœuvres,

and sham fights were constantly taking place here.

It would, therefore, have been impossible for a battle to have been fought under more unique conditions of advantage to the French commander. Yet, in spite of all this, or perhaps with the boundless confidence in himself so characteristic of the Hun, the advance on Mailly was undertaken.

It is, of course, possible that the German general may have thought that since he had succeeded in passing through the "camps" of Chalons and Sisonne that of Mailly was not worth seriously taking into consideration. If so he reckoned without his host, for this time he had overstepped the limits of discretion, and Mailly marks the extreme point of the German advance in this direction.

The French commander was not caught napping. The twenty-first Corps d'Armée, which knew the ground thoroughly, having frequently done its annual training in the locality, was despatched from Nancy, Toul, and Chaumont to check the movement. It was somehow delayed six hours on the road, a respite which enabled the Germans to occupy the village for a few hours, and to entrench themselves in the area of the "camp" itself, but their success was short-lived.

Pushing forward without pause via Remerupt and the left side of the valley of Huitrelle, the batteries of the famous 60th and 75th Regiments of artillery at length got into touch with the invaders. The

issue then was never for a moment in doubt. Round the farms of Peinbreaux and de Nivellets the slaughter was absolutely terrific, for so unexpected was the arrival of the French that the Germans were actually taking it easy—eating, playing cards, or writing letters in the trenches.

Mailly-le-Camp had indeed upheld its reputation as an artillery training area.

Now all was once again quiet, if not exactly peaceful in the region. The Germans were retreating towards the Aisne, and for the moment Rheims was the centre of interest. The range of action covered by my *sauf conduit* was therefore becoming of less service to me, since my one and only idea was to be as near the scene of operations as possible, and there was no one here who had the power to extend it.

A great change had gradually come over Mailly since my arrival on that eventful night. The villagers were beginning to return almost daily, whilst the attempts were actually being made to patch up and render habitable some of the less-damaged houses, and the long processions of refugee peasants passing along the highway were now returning, and presented a wonderful spectacle of philosophic imperturbation—the women especially.

If I were asked what impressed me most whilst wandering with my sketch-book round about the country within the zone of the battlefields of the Marne, I should unhesitatingly reply, the wonderful and undemonstrative fortitude displayed by the

"ALL WAS QUIET"

women of the small towns and villages under conditions of inconceivable misery and helplessness.

A national trait more poignant in its intensity than any hysteric weeping and wailing had again come to the fore after lying dormant since 1871. It was the stoicism of the Spartans revived—silent and uncomplaining—accepting without murmur the cruellest blows of Fate.

The separation from their loved ones—father, husband, son or brother, on the day of the mobilization, had to be perforce borne with resignation; but the compulsory exodus from the homes and the weary pilgrimage to districts distant from the German peril came as quite unexpected, and therefore additional, hardship to the already distraught women, and under the stress of which tears and lamentations would have been pardonable.

More honour, therefore, to the stout-hearted French peasant women for bearing up so bravely and hiding their grief, and so in no small degree helping to allay the fears of the younger folk.

While I was staying in Mailly, I had many opportunities of observing all this for myself, for I would often trudge along with them for the purpose of having a talk. The tide of battle had turned and the danger of permanent German occupation was averted. For days there was an endless procession passing along the roads, of fugitives making their way back slowly and wearily to villages from which they had been driven a few

weeks previously. There were whole families of peasants—old men, women, and children, and anything more pathetic than this defile of countryfolk it would have been impossible to imagine.

With the fear in their minds that their return to their homes was but a doubtful contingency, and that even if they ever did get back it would only be to find devastation everywhere, they had taken away with them in their flight everything that they cherished, and now they were returning along the same war-worn roads with everything, that could be packed or stowed anyhow on the waggons, or in whatever vehicle they might possess, even young calves and crates of poultry; while ensconced in the midst of this conglomeration of household belongings were grandfather and grandmother, and all the womenfolk and children.

Alongside, trudging through the mud, were the poorer people with their children in perambulators, or trundling their humble goods and chattels on handbarrows, trucks, or anything in fact running on wheels.

I saw one woman pushing along a perambulator packed high with bedding, on the top of which was a cage of canaries, by her side a little girl carried a kitten, and close at their heels were their two dogs.

Old men, leaning heavily on stout sticks, staggered along under the weight of the heavy bundles on their shoulders, and bicycles were to be seen everywhere, no family seemed to be without at least one; if they

REFUGEES—A SKETCH AT MAILLY

were not being ridden they were hung on to the waggons. I counted five on one cart alone.

Many girls, bedraggled and mud-splashed, were wheeling their machines.

The trek was towards home, but nevertheless made as melancholy a spectacle as could well be imagined; yet the women bore up with a resignation that was little short of marvellous, and which one could not fail to observe.

Although glad enough to be returning to their villages, they told you they were dreading almost what was awaiting them after all they had heard; but it was so difficult to ascertain anything for certain—all they were told was that the Germans had been driven back, and that was why they were allowed to return to their villages.

I never cared to inquire which villages they were bound for, in case I happened to know the condition the Germans had left them in. Sufficient, indeed, for the moment that they were making their way back, very slowly certainly, for it was a long way, and the poor faithful beasts in the shafts of the cumbersome waggons were sore tried with their heavy loads.

To watch the almost endless defile of vehicles and unkempt throng of people dragging its weary way along the muddy road, was indeed an object-lesson of the horrors of the war, and of the extent of suffering it was entailing on the women and children.

Of course each one did his best to help alleviate

the tribulation of those in want of assistance, but there were so many. In all the towns and villages, even along the road, kind hearts were always ready to do all they could for the mothers, and provide them with milk for the babies and food for the older children.

The barns, granges, schoolrooms, and even the churches were utilized as shelters, and filled with clean, sweet-smelling hay and straw.

But in spite of all this the suffering was intense, and with it was the added anxiety as to the safety of the dear ones at the front. "I have not had a line from him since he left, nearly two months ago," is what you were constantly hearing, and it made your heart bleed, for too often no news meant bad news, and the poor women realized this while buoying themselves up with hope.

I remember an instance of one young woman who had the courage to send a reply-paid telegram to the War Minister, asking for news of her husband, and shortly afterwards receiving the welcome intelligence of his whereabouts and of his well-being. But there were not many who would risk this. In too many cases they were the happier for living for a time in blissful ignorance.

Not the least of the terrors stalking the land these sad days were the many instances of members of families getting separated and lost in the dreadful moments of confusion when escaping pell-mell from the advancing German hordes.

If it happened, perchance, to be a young and good-looking woman who was "missing," the anguish and suspense were infinitely increased, for it had not taken long to learn what was likely to become of such a victim fallen into the clutches of the Hun. Death would be more merciful than her certain fate.

Many were the heart-rending tales of outrage and infamy I heard as I tramped along the dusty roads with the unfortunate fugitives.

It has often been said that the strength of France lies in the character of her peasantry, and I was constantly being reminded of this in those black days when the fate of the nation hung in the balance.

One might have quite expected to hear on all sides, howls of execration against the *Ame damnée* of Potsdam who was answerable for all this untold misery and suffering; but instead there was apparently a calm resignation, which foreboded more to the hated Boche than all vituperation.

Still there is a certain limit to human fortitude, and I learned of several unutterably sad cases of suicide, where minds had given way under stress of grief and trial beyond endurance.

One instance of this I witnessed myself, and it will never be effaced from my memory. It was certainly one of the most pathetic and tragical incidents I came across even in those days, replete with tragedy and pathos.

One afternoon I was plodding along wheeling my bicycle with one of the processions of weary fugitives.

It was very hot and sultry, and there was not much talking; children were sleeping peacefully in their mothers' arms and the silence was unbroken save for the occasional creaking of a heavily laden waggon and the continuous rumble of wheels on the dusty road.

Suddenly in the distance we heard hoarse shouting, and looking back saw a wild-looking, unkempt man racing towards us. When he caught us up his appearance was positively terrible.

He was a good-looking man but he was so covered with dirt and dust from head to foot that one could only surmise his age. In his eyes was the wild look of terror of a hunted animal, and he was evidently in the last stage of physical exhaustion.

Without pausing he rushed madly along the line of vehicles, peering into every waggon as though in search of some one, and every few yards calling out despairingly a woman's name.

Murmurs of mingled horror and commiseration were heard on all sides, when it was seen that the poor fellow was demented.

But he took no notice of any one, nor did he appear to know where he was. When at length he reached the head of the long procession and realized that the object of his quest was not there, he made for the side of the road and flinging himself down on a heap of stones buried his face in his hands and bursting into tears called out passionately—

"Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, que vais-je faire? Ma pauvre chérie, où es-tu—où es-tu?"

Then he started up wildly and a haggard look of demoniacal fury came over his face as he vociferated at the top of his voice—

"Oh, les Scélérats—les sales Boches—s'ils t'ont prise!" and rushing at a tree he seized it with both hands and gripped it with mad rage for some moments as though he were strangling some one.

Then came the reaction, and he sank to the ground exhausted and whimpering like a beaten child. It was a dreadful spectacle and brought a lump into one's throat.

The waggons were stopped and a crowd of sympathetic peasants gathered round, gazing in awestruck silence at the grief-stricken, recumbent figure.

Some one then began trying gently to question the poor fellow, and gradually he became more lucid and we managed to learn through his disjointed phrases that he was from some village in Luxemburg.

We gathered that when it had become known that the Huns were approaching, there had been a wild stampede of the villagers to get away, and somehow in the confusion he had got separated from his wife, who was so—so beautiful! he kept on repeating: and he had not set eyes on her since.

He had been told that it was thought she had been taken by some neighbours in their waggon, but no one seemed to know for certain, nor in which direction they had gone, and so he had been looking for her everywhere since.

Then his madness suddenly returned, and he began to shriek with frenzy that perhaps the Boche had captured her, and he must save her at all costs, and jumping up he started running away up the road, waving his arms frantically.

We all stood in silence watching the retreating figure till it had disappeared round a corner, then an old woman remarked hoarsely, " Voilà ce que c'est que la guerre," and there were low mutterings as every one returned to their waggons, and the women appeared to hold their children still more closely to their breasts.

The *dénouement* was as tragic as anything one could conceive.

The following day I was cycling along a quiet road when I saw ahead of me a military motor-lorry drawn up, and close by a little group of soldiers.

On approaching the spot I perceived what appeared at first sight to be a heap of dusty rags lying on the ground just behind the lorry, and to my horror on a nearer inspection I saw it was the lifeless body of the poor demented individual of the previous day.

It appeared from the statement of the driver that he was going at quite a reasonable pace, when the man, who must have been concealed in the bushes, rushed out into the middle of the roadway holding up his hand and shouting incoherently.

It happened so suddenly that before he had had time to jam on his break, the heavy vehicle had

knocked down the unfortunate fellow and passed right over him. Death must have been instantaneous. But to resume my narrative.

The gruesome scenes I have described in the previous chapter of the dead remaining unburied for days in villages, fields and woods after the battle of the Marne were not to recur.

A special contingent of infantry was organized, *bataillons Sanitaires* I believe they were named, whose sole duties were to consist in following the army and thoroughly searching the battlefield and clearing it up. And these duties were to be carried out in so methodical a manner that it would be almost impossible for any wounded or dead to remain undiscovered many hours.

A commencement was to be made at once, and the entire area as far as Épernay was arranged in sections, and detachments of soldiers allotted to each. The column was to be accompanied by gendarmes on horseback and on bicycles, as there were some ugly stories going around of robbery of the dead. The officer in command had power to order the summary execution of any suspicious character on or near the battlefield.

The column rendezvoused at Mailly, and presented quite the appearance of a little expeditionary force. I tried very hard to get permission to accompany it, as I was anxious to make a move in the direction of Rheims, and Épernay would be a big step on the way; but the colonel in command was

not to be persuaded to allow a civilian to go with him, so I had to give up the idea.

There was nothing for it, therefore, but to return to Troyes and try my luck again with my friend the commissaire.

It was with quite a feeling of discontent that I decided I must leave Mailly, as I had spent some very pleasant days there, made several good friends, and above all had got an invaluable insight of the *moral* of the French peasantry in the war zone in the hour of their trial. I had the pleasing impression also that there was some little regret felt at my departure.

The victory of the Marne had brought about no untoward change in the life of Troyes, except perhaps that it appeared less congested with troops, though the hotels were still crowded I found, so I congratulated myself on having kept on my room whilst I was away. As may be imagined, the contrast in the life here with that in Mailly—in cleanliness and quality of food particularly, was most marked; but I nevertheless found myself at times wishing I could go through my first experiences there again, in spite of the hardship and discomfort.

The Commissaire of Police seemed so pleased to see me back that I invited him to lunch with me, which he did, and he was much interested in my experiences, the more especially as I reminded him that it was entirely through his help that I had been able to get through.

M. LE COLONEL

This, of course, led up to some question of where I now proposed wending my way, so I threw out the hint that perhaps, since his signature was good enough to get me to the battlefield of the Marne, it might have equal effect in the direction of Rheims.

To which he replied he was quite willing to give it me afresh if I had an idea it might be of assistance but that he very much doubted whether the military would let me through, as Rheims was very strictly barred to civilians at that moment.

I said I would risk it, so there I was fixed up again for another "expedition," and as some small recognition of his kindness I suggested after dinner his sitting to me for a little sketch portrait, which he might send to his wife, who was not at the time living in Troyes. To this he gladly assented, so we adjourned to his office and while smoking a cigar I was lucky enough to get a good likeness of him. The following afternoon, with a *sauf conduit* to Rheims *et retour* in my pocket, I took the train to Chalons, where I should have to spend the night, from there go on to Épernay, and then try my luck at getting into Rheims.

CHAPTER XI

Arrive Châlons—The old working man—Pathetic little incident—The hotel de la Haute Mère Dieu—An inexplicable incident—A little contretemps of the usual sort—An unpremeditated bluff on the gendarmes comes off—From Châlons to Épernay—The difficulty to find a room—Souvenirs of the Hun occupation—A wine-bibbing incident—"Kultur"—Harvesting the grapes within sight of the troops—The principal café in Épernay—Another "incident"—My friend of the *train des Equipages*—The Commandant d'Armes—Am given a military *laisser passer*—With the Transport Convoy—I make a theatrical change in my appearance—The distributing depôt—The waggon-load of sacks—Into civilian attire again—Arrive Rheims—The Brasserie in the Rue Chanzy.

ALTHOUGH only a comparatively short distance it took hours to get to Châlons, and it was one o'clock in the morning when we arrived.

The station is a long way from the centre of the town, but I did not know it then and I had not the slightest idea where to go to look for a room, and there was no one about at that hour of the night to ask. I walked to the corner of what appeared to be the main road, and was wondering which direction to take, when I chanced upon an old man who looked like a working-man slouching along with his collar turned up and his hands buried deep in his pockets.

I stopped him and asked where I could get a bed, but he replied that he was in the same fix as me, and didn't know what to do. He had, he said, just been to the municipal night shelter for which he had a ticket, but it was closed, so he supposed there was nothing for him but to walk about till daylight.

The centre of the town, he added, was about a mile and a half away, perhaps I could get a lodging there, but it would be very dear. He then suggested, very politely, carrying my rucksack and showing me the way, so we walked on together.

Something in the old fellow interested me, he looked so hopelessly despondent, and as we went along I managed to " draw him out."

It appeared he was seventy-five years of age, a peasant of one of the villages bombarded by the Germans, and his wife had been killed by the shell that had destroyed his cottage. Now he was trying to make his way to Meaux near Paris, where his daughter lived. But it was a very long way to walk, especially when one was old and had no money. He had lost everything he had got in the world, but he was not going to beg ; he would rather finish with it in the river than that.

I knew from all I had already seen that his case was but one amongst thousands who were suffering through the war, but somehow this poor old man, all alone and penniless through no fault of his own, stranded in the middle of the night in a strange town, struck me as being unutterably sad. I felt

a lump in my throat and I could find nothing to say.

At last we reached the centre of the town and he stopped, and handing me my bag pointed up a street where he thought I might perhaps find a lodging.

"And where are you going?" I asked.

"Je n'en sais rien!" with a shrug of his shoulders. "I shall continue to walk," he replied quietly. "I cannot afford a bed."

"Yes, you can," I said.

"How do you know?" he retorted somewhat sharply.

"Because I am going to give you five francs to get one and to help you along a bit on your way to-morrow."

"You are going to give me five francs, monsieur," he repeated in astonishment. "What for? I have done nothing to earn it."

"Yes, you have; you have carried my bag and shown me the way here, and you are a brave old Frenchman;" and suiting action to words I thrust the coin into his hand.

I saw a tear roll down his furrowed cheek as he stammered hoarsely: "Je ne sais pas comment vous remercier, monsieur;" and I hurried away.

There were two hotels, side by side, the Renard and the Haute Mère Dieu, both very ancient and famous hostelries. At the first they were *complet*, but at the second I was just in time to get the last unoccupied room.

The following morning, as I made my way downstairs, something happened so mystifying and so inexplicable that I shall ever retain it in my memory. The hotel is, as I have said, a very old house and dates back several hundreds of years probably. I had never in my life been in or anywhere near Châlons before. But as soon as I left my room, which was on the third floor, the whole place seemed quite familiar to me in the daylight, and I had the strange feeling of having been there before at some remote period of another existence.

Then on one of the landings I saw facing me a dimly lighted corridor that I quite remembered, and I knew that at the end of it just round the corner was a very tall eight-day clock, and a little beyond a narrow flight of stairs going up into a gloomy passage.

It must be a phantasy, I thought, but nevertheless I felt impelled to go and see; and sure enough there it all was exactly as I had thought! Luckily the hotel was very quiet and none of the maids about at the moment, or I fancy they would have been a bit suspicious had they seen me standing there quite transfixed with amazement.

I returned to the hotel during the day, specially to come to this spot, and my impression was as vivid as before—as in fact it was when I stayed there on a subsequent occasion. I am not a believer in the supernatural, but I must admit that incident has always completely mystified me and I leave the

explanation of it to those who have made a study of such phenomena.

Châlons was full of troops and there was considerably more movement than at any place I had as yet visited in the war zone. The Germans had only just evacuated the town, and had looted anything of any value to them in the shops, with the result that such luxuries as tobacco, cigarettes, matches, to say nothing of everyday necessities, were quite non-existent.

Many of the private houses had been "burgled" in quite professional style, and the marks of "jemmies" were to be seen on doors everywhere. Otherwise no material damage had been done in the town; but the canal outside had been emptied and presented a curious appearance, as of a broad deserted road inches deep in liquid mud.

There was nothing to do in Châlons and nothing to see beyond its busy main street, and as I wanted to get on to Épernay as soon as possible, I decided to leave that same afternoon.

Of course, in a town of such military importance and so completely occupied by troops and containing but a mere sprinkling as it were of civilians, it was only natural that as a stranger of un-French appearance, I attracted a certain amount of notice. In fact, I could not fail to remark this during the first stroll I took down the crowded main street, for it was a Sunday and there were probably more *flâneurs* than there would have been on a week-day.

After an hour or so, this attention became so

THE LATEST COMMUNIQUÉ—A SKETCH IN ÉPINAL

embarrassing that at length I became convinced that something unpleasant would happen unless I hurried up my departure, or at any rate did not show myself too much until it was time to leave ; so I returned to my hotel to make my preparations. But I was not to get away from Châlons without an "incident" of sorts.

I was now so accustomed to these little contretemps that I should have probably not remembered it at all, nor would it be worth recounting, had it not been for the somewhat curious way it ended.

As far as I was concerned, it was a triumph of what I might term unpremeditated "bluff," in which I certainly scored. It came about in this wise.

I had not taken long to realize that when on the road it was always advisable to guard against accidents by providing myself with food and drink, so I never started on an excursion, however short, without some sort of provender in my haversack. It was probable that every officer had determined upon a like precaution, as I found in Châlons it was no easy matter to obtain anything in the shape of cold meat or sausages, the few shops that sold such comestibles being "sold out" in a very short time after opening, while tinned rations were completely unobtainable anywhere in the town.

There was quite a crowd in the only *charcutiers* in the main street, attracted doubtless by a modest display of *galantine*.

I was fortunate enough, after pushing my way in,

to obtain a share of the small quantity remaining of the coveted delicacy, and as it was being put up in paper, a man who appeared to be edging next to me for some time remarked, "Ça m'a l'air d'être très bon;" adding, "Monsieur va en voyage?"

Under ordinary circumstances I should barely have noticed his remark, or might have replied in jocular vein; but somehow, just then, I experienced the unpleasant sensation that this was a part of the "surveillance" to which I had a very shrewd notion I had been subjected all the morning, so for all reply I gave a sort of grunt, which might signify "yes" or "no" as he chose to take it, and incontinently left the place.

I then went round to an unpretentious little *marchand de vins* to get half a litre of white wine to take with me. The place was pretty full, so I had to wait my turn, and whilst standing at the counter, I noticed two gendarmes come in and seat themselves at one of the tables.

As I was strolling back to the hotel, which was close by, I saw people on the opposite side of the street stop and look across as though interested in something behind me, and looking back I found the two gendarmes close at my heels. I sauntered along as unconcernedly as was possible under the circumstances, and when I reached the hotel, walked straight in under the *porte-cochère* and up to my room without pausing.

My window faced the street and I looked out to

see what had become of my two followers. They were waiting on the pavement, and to my surprise there was quite a little crowd of people in the roadway and more were arriving. Word had probably gone round that something interesting was about to happen.

Fortunately I had plenty of time to spare, so it did not much matter whether I remained in my room and read a book or went out.

After about a quarter of an hour I had another look. The people were still waiting.

There was nothing to be gained by not going down; I had to see it through anyway, and I might miss my train if I left it too long. Moreover, I was so much exasperated at having so much unasked-for notoriety thrust upon me, that I was ready for anything that might happen.

I made my way out, nonchalantly filling my pipe, and then standing in the doorway, lit it very slowly. I fancied I heard a murmur as though of excitement, but this was probably my imagination, and the crowd drew nearer.

The two gendarmes were standing on the curb. One of them immediately came over to me. I pretended my pipe was not well lighted, so produced another match and puffed placidly as though I had not noticed him.

"Vous avez des papiers, monsieur?" he asked without preamble.

"Oh!" I exclaimed at the top of my voice, throwing away the match and feigning great indignation,

"that is the reason, is it, why you tracked me here from the *marchand de vins*, and put me to the indignity—me, an Englishman—of being seen by every one, followed by gendarmes as if I were a criminal or a German spy!"

The man raised his hand deprecatingly at my unexpected tirade, as though to deny they had any such thought concerning me, and said in a placating tone—

"Mais, monsieur, there is no need to get angry, we had no intention of causing you any annoyance; we were simply carrying out our duty."

I cut him short.

"Yes, I knew what you would say—your duty. That is what all you gentlemen always tell me. But your duty was plainly to ask me at once when you saw me in the *marchand de vins*, where I would have immediately satisfied your legitimate curiosity, and not to hunt me through the streets and lie in wait for me at the door of my hotel, and attract all these people. Do you suppose I should be such an idiot as to come to Châlons if I had no papers on me? I have a good mind to report you both."

My simulated indignation had a most extraordinary effect. The man stepped back, saluted me gravely and repeated that they had no desire to wound the susceptibilities of an Englishman; then turning to the crowd called out—

"What are you all standing there for? This is no affair of yours—disperse at once."

The people moved away slowly and almost reluctantly, it seemed: they had evidently expected a more exciting *dénouement*. The two gendarmes followed them.

I had half a mind to call out after them that they had forgotten to see my papers, but thought it best to leave well alone; it was a pity to spoil the "bluff"; so I fetched my ruck-sack and made my way slowly along the main street to the station and caught my train without further incident.

Épernay was in the same condition as Châlons: it had been completely looted by the Germans, and many of the better-class houses befouled in a way that cannot be described.

It was extremely difficult to find a room as the place was crowded, and the principal hotel was not yet reopened. It had been left in such a filthy condition by the "Boche" officers that it would take weeks to cleanse. After wandering about for hours, I had eventually to put up with the roughest accommodation I had yet struck. It was better than nothing, and that was about all that could be said for it. But I was only asked one franc a night, so the people had evidently judged to a nicety its utmost worth!

Of all the places I have been to, Épernay struck me as one of the dullest and most uninteresting, surprisingly unattractive, indeed, considering I had heard it spoken of as a city of millionaire champagne owners.

It is certain, nevertheless, that the Huns had a very shrewd idea of its importance, for their entrance into the town was attended by all the pomp and circumstances of a triumphal procession. Massed bands headed the troops as they marched down the Rue St. Laurent, doing the "goose-step" in parade order.

Most of the inhabitants had decided to remain, and those who did were unmolested; the only houses that were broken into were those that had been left unoccupied.

Of course, a clean sweep was made of everything in the shops; as at Chalons and elsewhere nothing remained in the shape of cigars, tobacco, cigarettes, matches, sugar, etc. A list of requisitions was made out by the German commander, which had to be complied with to the smallest detail; protestations were unavailing: so the town, to all intents and purposes, was veritably sacked.

The officers and men drank champagne and other wines to their hearts' content—needless to say without paying for it, but it must be recorded that some of the officers were delicate enough to give "bons" for what they took! As, however, most of these were illegible and undated documents they were only so much waste paper for what they were likely to be worth fiscally after the war. Many of the inhabitants, I was told, were keeping them as souvenirs.

In connection with this wine-bibbing, I was told

a somewhat curious story of an incident that took place at a farm in the outskirts of the town. It conveys a good idea of the summary methods of German military discipline.

The farm in question was taken possession of by the troops, and the proprietor (who, by the way, himself told me the story) under the menace of a revolver had to provide food and wine for the officers, who installed themselves comfortably in the best room of the house.

A sentry with rifle and fixed bayonet was placed on guard at the entrance to the cellar, to prevent the soldiers going into it. By some means the attention of the man was diverted for a few moments, or possibly he had been promised that if he looked the other way he would not be forgotten, and would get a bottle for himself when the time came. Anyhow, when the farmer at the command of the officers went down again to the cellar to fetch some more wine, he found to his surprise a soldier busily engaged filling flasks at the tap of one of the casks of his best wine.

Without hesitation he returned to the officers and informed them what was taking place, whereupon one of them, a huge fellow, jumped up in a violent rage and rushing down the steps into the cellar seized the delinquent and dragging him up into the room battered him unmercifully with his fists all over the head and face until the man's eyes were blackened, his nose bleeding, and he was almost

unrecognizable, the officer finishing up by kicking the poor devil out into the courtyard, where he fell groaning in the mud.

The brute then turned his rage on to the sentry. Going up to the fellow he shouted something in German, and grabbing him by his moustache, which was a fairly long one, he *twisted one side of it completely off*, then threw the man outside, yelling with pain, to rejoin his companion.

Meanwhile the other officers remained seated at the table, looking on with indifference, and not offering the slightest protest at this exhibition of brutality. Most probably they would have done likewise had the opportunity presented itself.

Such are the methods of the Teuton officer, by which he shows his superior " kultur " and his authority over his men. No wonder that so many of the dead German officers were found to have been shot in the back.

The exit of the German troops from Épernay was neither so theatrical nor so impressive as their entry, and there were no bands playing that day, and no " goose step."

As a matter of fact, they all left in such a hurry that they overlooked all manner of trifling military objects that might have been of subsequent value to them, such as rifles, bayonets, cartridge-belts and so forth, which will doubtless make nice trophies in the houses of the inhabitants after the war.

It was said that not a few officers and men who

had partaken too freely of the generous wine of the country and were not in a condition to take their departure with their comrades, were detained by enterprising citizens in cellars and other safe but somewhat undignified places, to await the arrival of the French troops.

In the country outside Épernay, while I was there, was an interesting and instructing spectacle. War is full of strange contrasts, but I fancy it would be difficult to imagine anything more curiously anomalous than what was to be seen here.

Within sound of the guns and actually in sight of the movements of the troops, the grape harvest was in full progress, as though nothing whatever was going on, and I was informed this was the case all over the vineyard districts as far as Rheims.

Such energy under existing conditions was surely not only a tribute to the wonderful fortitude of the French, but a further proof of the courage which animated the whole population.

It was at first feared that the entire *récolte* that year would be lost: that either the Germans would devastate the vineyards, or that sufficient labour would not be forthcoming for getting the grapes at the right moment.

Both anticipations happily proved wrong. No fighting took place in the vineyards.

The Germans argued presumably that all this wealth was practically theirs for the taking, and

refrained therefore from pursuing their depredations in this direction.

Curiously enough there turned out to be a superabundance of labour, brought about by the large influx of refugees from villages in the Ardennes and other districts, and all these poor people were only too willing and happy to have the opportunity of earning a little money, even at a certain amount of risk.

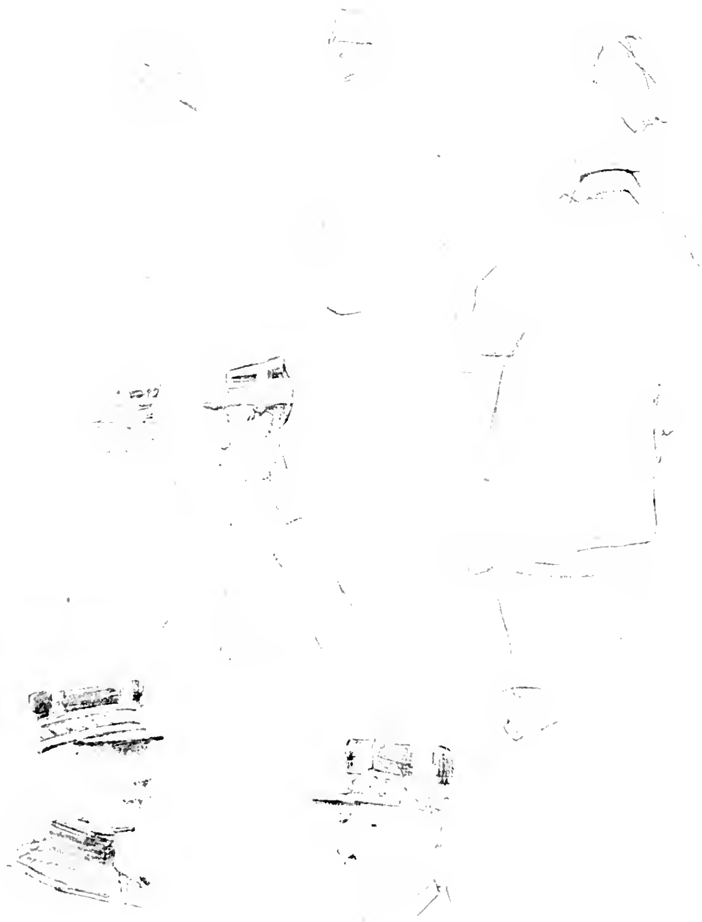
The grapes of 1914 were as it happened of exceptionally fine quality, so it may be reckoned a real slice of good luck that it was found possible to harvest them without mishap. Had the Germans remained here another week the whole *récolte* would have been lost, I was told.

The magnificent vintage of 1870 has always been spoken of as the "War vintage," and it is probable that that of 1914 will prove equally renowned.

But to return to happenings in Épernay.

I soon learned that my *sauf conduit* was valueless beyond Épernay, and my only chance of getting to Rheims was if I could wangle a military pass out of the authorities. This at first appeared out of the question, so there was nothing for it but to remain in Épernay to await events, as there was no inducement to go far from the town; so one seemed to pass one's day at the restaurant or in the principal café, with perhaps a little stroll up the main street between times to stretch one's legs.

There was a very popular restaurant run by an



JOTTINGS IN EPERNAY

old man who had a young and good-looking wife. It was always crowded as the cuisine was excellent, the old fellow having been formerly a chef; though I fancy madame was the real attraction to the dashing young cuirassier officers who were the usual habitués of the place.

The principal café was the rendezvous of all the élite in Epernay, and at *l'heure de l'apéritif* in the afternoon every table outside was occupied, and one often saw a magnificent array of Staff uniforms and decorations galore.

It was apparently tacitly understood that only officers sat here, but of course I could not guess this, so one afternoon I ensconced myself in the pleasantest corner and settled myself comfortably with my pipe and a long drink, till dinner-time.

Gradually the tables round me filled up and I found myself completely hemmed in by officers, mostly of high rank. I noticed then that furtive glances were being cast on me. I took no notice at first, but at last this threatened to become irritating. I knew something was going to happen.

At the table nearest me a fierce-looking major who had evidently been making remarks about me, suddenly leaned forward and asked me if I could give him a match. As I had seen him only a few moments before with a full box in his hand, I said, "Certainly, monsieur, if you desire it, but you have already some of your own."

Without noticing my reply he said abruptly—

"You speak very good French, monsieur. Of what nationality are you ?"

"So that is why you have been looking at me so hard," I retorted in a loud tone, and addressing them all. "Well, to satisfy you gentlemen I am not a German spy, but an Englishman ; you will perhaps allow me to prove to you my identity." And taking my passport and other documents out of my pocket, I spread them out before them. The effect was electrical, and the fierce-looking major was profuse in his apologies.

The incident was trivial enough, but it showed the atmosphere one was always more or less up against.

In the meantime I had made friends with an officer of the *Train des Équipages* (Motor Transport Convoy) that went every day with stores from Épernay to a distributing depôt a few miles from Rheims.

He genially offered to give me a run out there in his car any day, if I could get permission to go with him, and suggested that perhaps the Commandant d'Armes would give me the necessary permit.

So I went and interviewed the gentleman in question, and curiously enough he turned out to be one of the officers in the café incident I have just related.

After some demur he consented to my having a *laisser passer* which allowed me to proceed to several places along the line of communications—Ormes, Champfleury, Montbré, Verzenay, Petite-Loges, Livry, la Cheppe, and as it happened one of these places was

the destination of the Transport Convoy. I ventured to hint that while he was about it Rheims might be included, since it was only a few miles further on—but to no effect. If I could get permission from the *prévôté* (*i.e.* the gendarmerie) to go there, well and good, but so far as he was concerned he could not grant it. My transport friend was as good as his word. On seeing my *laisser passer* he agreed to take me with him the following day.

The convoy left Épernay every morning at seven o'clock, and I was advised not to bring any bulky luggage, as the car was only a small one. As I had only my rucksack with me, this did not trouble me much. When I turned up, my friend informed me that to his regret he would be unable to accompany me, so he would put me on the leading waggon, which was driven by the sergeant in temporary command of the convoy.

It was a bit of a disappointment, after looking forward to a jaunt in a luxurious car, the more especially as I should be with men I did not know at all; but there was no help for it, and no time to lose, as punctuality was strictly observed. So up I climbed on to the box seat, and off we went.

The convoy consisted of every description of motor-waggon and some Paris motor-omnibuses, about a dozen in all, packed full up with army stores, forage, etc. There were three soldiers, including the driver, to each car, so it made a pretty tight squeeze, as I soon realized. But my companions

had a peculiar sense of humour and treated my presence as a huge joke; in fact, we were speedily on the best of terms.

It was a dull, grey, autumnal morning, with a sharpish wind that cut through one like a knife, and I found myself very cramped and uncomfortable on the unsheltered seat of the waggon. I was wearing breeches and gaiters and a Norfolk jacket with only a light "Burberry" waterproof as overcoat, so before we had gone very far I was chilled to the very bone. Almost needless to mention, my companions were wearing their heavy army greatcoats.

A few miles along the road we stopped for some reason or another, and I profited by it to endeavour to make myself a bit more comfortable. The sergeant stowed my rucksack under the seat, and kindly got a man to fetch a blanket to go over my knees.

Suddenly it seemed to occur to him that my waterproof was not very warm, and he insisted on my getting into a spare great-coat that was in the waggon. It was very big for me, and came well down below my knees, and thus hid my breeches. The greatcoat of the French soldier is practically his entire uniform, as he always wears it summer and winter.

I could only guess the transformation in my appearance by the laughter it produced. "He only wants a *képi* to look a typical reserviste," some one remarked. "Then lend me one," said I, "and I shall not look out of place on the waggon." This was

agreed to nem. con. In a few moments a cap was found that fitted me, and that fortunately, like the great-coat, had no regimental number on it. I pulled the cap well down over my eyes, turned up the collar of the coat, and felt that my best friend would have failed to recognize me.

As I clambered back to my seat the thought flashed through my mind what a mad thing I was doing, and that there would be the very devil to pay if I were caught masquerading like this; but the thrill of the adventure and the humour of the situation soon made me feel at my ease again, and as we passed several officers I took the cue from my companions and, to their great amusement, saluted as they did.

"Where is it you want to get to?" asked the sergeant suddenly, as though an idea had struck him.

"Rheims," I replied, "if the gendarmes will let me."

"You need not trouble about that," he remarked. "I will drive you on there after I have got rid of my cargo. I don't suppose we shall be very long unloading, and then I am free for a few hours."

"It won't get you into any trouble, taking me there?" I asked, for I did not want to take advantage of his good nature.

"Not in the least," he replied. "I want to get a few things one can't buy in Épernay, and it will be an excuse to try and get them in Rheims. And at the same time we can have an *apéritif* together, if

there is a café left." So it was arranged that I should remain in the waggon while it was being unloaded.

I felt I should be showing nervousness if I made any objection, besides which we were now quite close to our destination, and I had no chance to alter my mind and get out of the uniform, even if I had so desired.

The distributing depôt was a sort of junction where several big roads converged, and it would have been impossible to picture a more animated scene of military activity. Officers and men of apparently every branch of the French army were there; military vehicles of every description were drawn up awaiting our arrival.

"I shall have to leave you for a little while," said the sergeant, as he pulled up, "but you just stay where you are and no one will take any notice of you;" and without giving me time to reply he jumped down in the throng of soldiers. Meanwhile his companion had hurried off to the back of the waggon and started unfastening the flaps. So I was left quite alone.

As may be imagined I felt anything but comfortable. I realized now the risk I was running, for round about I could see several gendarmes, and it was not difficult to imagine what would happen if they "spotted" me. A military officer might look on my escapade as a joke, but a sergeant of gendarmerie would have no such sense of humour. I had had experience of his views on duty, as will be remembered,

and the mere thought of getting into his clutches again produced a cold shiver down my back.

Since no one seemed to take any particular notice of me, I lit a cigarette and assumed as nonchalant an air as possible.

A little incident, however, occurred which even now makes me shudder when I recall it—for I was within an ace of being discovered.

A load of empty sacks had just been dumped on the ground in front of me. Then a big empty "camion" drew up alongside. At this moment an excitable captain of dragoons, who was evidently looking around for something to find fault with, noticed a soldier standing idly by my waggon with his hands in his pockets.

"What are you doing there?" bawled the officer.

"Nothing for the moment, mon capitaine," was the reply.

"How nothing? Then set to work and do something! Pick up horse-dung—anything; but, N—— de D——, don't stand there doing nothing!" Then suddenly espying the empty sacks, to my consternation he called out to me—

"Where are these sacks to go—in this camion?" indicating the one that had just drawn up.

I could not risk a complicated reply in case my accent might betray me, so without the slightest hesitation I saluted smartly and replied—

"Oui, mon capitaine!"

To my relief he took no notice of me, but in less

time almost than it takes to relate, he had got the soldier hard at work piling the sacks in the van. In a few minutes it was loaded up: "En route!" the officer called out to the driver, and off went the waggon with the sacks. Where they got to, Heaven only knows—perhaps they are still travelling.

Meanwhile the distribution of stores had been proceeding rapidly, and the various regimental waggons were starting on their return journeys with their loads. The throng was thinning out. The day's routine of our convoy was ended.

At last the sergeant turned up. "Well, they haven't shot you," he exclaimed jokingly, as he accepted a cigarette I offered him. "How have you got on? No one took any notice of you? I told you they wouldn't. I am sorry I was away so long, but there was a lot to see to."

I told him the incident of the sacks, whereupon he gave a long whistle, and then roared with laughter at the dénouement. He evidently thought it was a capital joke.

"And now for Rheims and our *apéritif!*"

It was a run of about eight miles, and once past the depôt we seemed to leave the military zone for the time being. It was a delightful country road, typically French, and for the first mile or so, had it not been for the distant booming of the big guns, one might almost have forgotten the war. But a turn in the road brought it back in all its reality. One saw the cathedral of Rheims standing out in

sharp silhouette against the sky. All around were significant columns of smoke—the destruction of the city was continuing with unabated fury.

The guard at the Porte de Paris took no notice whatever of us. No doubt hundreds of military transport waggons passed through the gates every day.

The sergeant knew his way to the place where my "detective friend" in Mailly had told me I could get lodgings, and drove to an unfrequented lane, where he pulled up and advised me to get into civilian attire again. The sense of relief I experienced when I got out of the uniform can be better imagined than described. I felt I would not have gone through the experience again for a pension.

. . . . .

The house I had been recommended to turned out to be quite a nice brasserie in the Rue Chanzy. On my presenting the card of introduction the proprietor, a typical ex-police officer, received me with great cordiality, shaking hands and telling me that all his friend's friends were welcome, that the best he had was at my disposal, and that he and his wife would make me as comfortable as possible, under the circumstances. Adding with a laugh that happily the Germans had left him a few bottles of wine, so there was no need to go thirsty when taking refuge in the cellar—a remark the meaning of which I did not fully appreciate till later. Of course, my friend

the sergeant and I had our much looked forward to *apéritif*, and I tried to persuade him to remain to lunch with me; but it appeared the bombardment often started afresh about that time, so he thought it advisable in case of accidents not to delay getting back to Épernay; and as though to warn him to get moving the boom of a gun was heard in the distance, followed a few seconds later by the crash of an explosion in a neighbouring street.

"Ils commencent de bonne heure, aujourd'hui," remarked the proprietor casually. Then turning to his wife added: "We had better have déjeuner a little earlier."

I realized at once that I was likely to have all the excitement that was good for me while I was in Rheims.

CHAPTER XII

In Rheims during the bombardment—Weeks of excitement—The optimism brought about by a few peaceful hours—Short respite from the shells—Impulse to bolt for cover—Demoralizing effects of bursting shells in streets—A nerve-racking incident—Explosive force of the "Jack Johnsons"—Ruins everywhere—The unexploded shell in front of post office—Aspect of streets during a lull—Overwrought nerves—The terror of the guns—Safety underground—The extraordinary scene in the vaults of Pommery Greno—Danger in cellars of private houses—Tragic discovery—A city of the dead after dark—The desire for companionship when in peril—The drastic lighting regulations—"Firework Signallers"—Hun espionage, a fine art—Two spy incidents—Souvenirs of the Hun occupation—Arrogant proclamation—Living in state of siege—Curious scenes.

AMONGST my many and varied experiences, I can recall nothing which, for sheer excitement, can compare with those three weeks I spent in Rheims.

Although I will admit I should not be keen on going through such an experience very often, there was a sort of weird fascination about it all that makes me look back on the times of which I am writing as containing some of the most interesting episodes of my life. Everything that happened while I was there is vividly impressed on my memory. Life was at extreme tension every hour, and the feeling that something sensational might occur was ever present.

A couple of days or so of comparative immunity from bombardment would serve to inspire a certain amount of hope that the terror of the big shells was past. The streets began to wear a more animated aspect, and extra daring shopkeepers would even venture partially to open their premises—that is if they had anything left of their belongings; whilst added to the optimism brought about by a few peaceful hours, there were always rumours that we had seen the last of the bombardment, and that the Germans had removed their big guns from Berru and Nogent, the positions from which they had shelled the city for so many terrible weeks.

Alas ! the respite never lasted long, and our hopes were always rudely dispelled. Without the slightest warning, and when we were least expecting it, a big shell would suddenly burst in the city, usually the prelude to a veritable hail of huge, death-dealing projectiles which would continue for hours and cause all around conflagrations, which added to the general ruin.

In a very few minutes after the first explosion, the people would disappear as if by magic. Then there would be another spell of desolation, during which the outdoor life of Rheims would be restricted to one or two places which, for no very definite reason, had come to be considered, more or less, as outside the immediate danger zone. But in reality there was no quarter that was immune, for the shells dropped all over the city.

It was as though the German artillerymen were determined to show again and again what Teuton "frightfulness" meant, and to demonstrate how completely they had Rheims at their mercy.

The change that would come over the city once the bombardment recommenced was positively remarkable. A veritable stampede for shelter would be witnessed, not infrequently bringing about quite humorous situations and much laughter. Tears are closely allied to mirth in overwrought nature.

The first impulse, as soon as the screech of an approaching shell was heard, was to make a bolt for the nearest open doorway, though immediately one was under cover it always struck one how absolutely senseless it was to have hurried to reach such a frail shelter, for no house ever built could offer the slightest protection against projectiles of the dimensions the Germans were sending us. It was merely a question of blind luck whether one was hit or not.

A man I knew told me he used to say to himself at these moments: "Mon garçon, if your number is up, nothing can save you." So he never bustled in the least, although the majority of people are not apt to take such a philosophic view of peril. Hence an exploding shell always resulted in a mad rush in all directions.

One may get somewhat reckless of shells dropping in the open country, where the soft soil circumscribes the effect, and frequently prevents the explosion; but among buildings or on stone pavements, it is

a very different matter. In closely-built towns it is a very rare occurrence indeed for a shell to miss fire, so, added to the risk of casualty from flying metal, there is the danger from falling masonry.

There is no doubt, too, that the demoralizing as well as the material effect of a big shell is increased enormously when it explodes against a house or in a street, and in this connection I can recall nothing more nerve-racking than an incident that occurred to me one afternoon.

Everything had been tranquil for some hours, so I was out exploring among the ruins. Suddenly I heard overhead the shriek of an approaching projectile, and a shell burst unpleasantly near to where I was standing. In the deserted street the detonation was deafening, and the ground actually shook under the force of the explosion.

As I stood still for a moment, uncertain which way to go, I heard another shell coming, and then another. The Germans had the range to a nicety, for all the shells burst within an area of a few yards.

Then, just in front of me, the corner walls of what had been a tall building began ominously to lean forward, and, with an appalling fracas of falling stone and brickwork, collapsed into the roadway with a deafening crash. A cloud of dust arose that almost blinded me, and for a few minutes obscured everything around.

It appeared to me that another explosion would bring down all that remained of the side of the street,

and as I had no desire to be buried alive, it did not take me long to decide that the neighbourhood was too warm for sightseeing that afternoon. I confess I did not breathe freely until I felt I was well outside the danger zone.

The explosive force of the "Jack Johnsons" was terrifying, one must have seen the craters they made to realize it. In one street there was a veritable pit. It could not have been less than forty feet across, and four horses could have been buried in it easily.

One of these huge shells exploded in the theatre—a fine and imposing building—and wiped out the whole of the interior so completely that not a vestige of the four galleries remained. The walls and a heap of shapeless rubble alone bore silent witness to the destructive power of the explosive, though, curiously enough, the exterior of the edifice was not in the least damaged, with the exception of one window through which the shell had entered. Stranger still, the curtains to the window were undamaged and still hung on the framework.

Ruins were, of course, to be seen everywhere, though more especially in the neighbourhood of the cathedral, which was the central point of the bombardment and a favourite target of the Hun batteries. In this quarter whole streets had disappeared, and every day the area of devastation was windening. So that we had the growing conviction that if the business went on much longer Rheims would eventually

cease to exist. There was no distinction in the wanton destruction: rich and poor quarters all suffered alike. Sometimes as many as four hundred shells fell in one day.

There were instances—though, unfortunately, very rare—when a shell, although it fell in a street, did not explode.

A curious instance of this was to be seen in front of the temporary post office, where a huge projectile had dropped without bursting, but had made a terrific hole in the roadway. The shell, which was lying quite exposed to view, had been hastily fenced round, and notices put on the four sides of the barrier: "Don't come too close; extremely dangerous."

As may be imagined, every one gave the place a wide berth, and there was not much demand for stamps just then.

The shell was removed shortly after by the special squad of artillerymen who are taught how to handle unexploded projectiles, and have a special instrument for the purpose—a huge pair of velvet-lined shears on a trolley, and a big padded receptacle to take the shell away in.

It would be difficult to give anything like a word picture of the aspect of the streets even when there was a lull in the spell of intense bombardment. To describe them as silent and deserted would be sufficiently accurate, but underlying this calm there was, one felt, a "méfiance" that obsessed every one—a feeling that the respite was perhaps but a dastardly

ruse on the part of the enemy to attract the inhabitants into the open and thus make more victims.

This uncanny silence was actually oppressive, for although it should have come as a welcome relief after the terrifying din of the explosions, there was always present the sensation that at any moment the calm would be broken by the screech of a projectile overhead.

Nerves were wrought to high tension, and when out of doors the slightest noise irritated beyond measure, for the curious reason that it distracted attention from sounds up above in the sky.

Although one felt oneself absolutely helpless if a shell did come along, there was an insistent desire to hear its approach, and on that account the silence produced a weird fascination of its own which it is difficult quite to analyse.

For instance, one morning, during one of these lulls, when I was taking a cautious stroll, prepared to make a bolt for shelter at the slightest warning, a man wheeling a barrow along the street would, so it appeared to me, persist in keeping level with me, in spite of my stopping continually and doing my best to let him get on ahead. The rattle of the wheels on the cobble-stones ended by getting on my nerves to such an extent as to make me feel positively murderous towards him.

The proprietor of the place where I was staying, told me that the mere whirr of an approaching car would upset him altogether during these short lulls

in the bombardment. If it affected him, an old soldier, and an ex-police-sergeant, how much more nerve-racking must it have been to the general population!

As has been said, living under such conditions of constant peril involved a big strain on the nervous system. The women and children suffered severely, though even some of these got accustomed to the ever-present danger, with the result that scarcely a day passed without deaths in the street directly caused by negligence to take cover.

To a great number, however, the very mention of the German guns inspired such terror that on the slightest suspicion of a renewal of the bombardment they immediately made for places of safety underground.

In cases where poor people had no place of their own in which to take refuge, the municipality had given permission for the vault under the Hotel de Ville and other buildings to be opened to the public, and this permission was eagerly taken advantage of by old and young at all hours.

All the champagne merchants allowed their vast cellars to be utilized as permanent refuges for the families of their employees. I visited the vaults of the famous firm, Pommery Greno, in one of the suburbs, and witnessed a most extraordinary scene.

Over twelve hundred old men, women and children were living in the semi-obscurity, for only a few candles and small lamps illumined the gloomy tunnels,

IN ONE OF THE CELLARS OF POMMERY-GRENO AT RHEIMS

which had been converted by means of canvas hangings into dormitories and living apartments.

Here with forty feet of solid chalk above them, the terror-stricken women and children could feel absolutely safe. Many of the scared occupants of these cellars never ventured above ground—in fact, a little underground colony had gradually come into being, with schools, church, etc.

How near they actually were to the danger was proved by the spectacle of ruin above ground, for little remained of the splendid factory, office buildings, and ornamental grounds. They happened to be directly in the line of fire of the German batteries, and consequently suffered heavily. In fact, this particular quarter was considered to be in the very worst of the danger zone.

I went out there with one of the managers, who was, by the way, a very genial Englishman named Sandford, and we had the greatest difficulty in getting a vehicle. It was only on our offering double fare and promising not to take him further than a certain point, that we got a man to drive us. He had a wife and children to consider, he told us.

In many of the houses of the wealthy class, where there are cellars, these were prepared against emergencies, and often fitted up with makeshift beds, and provided with eatables, candles etc., in case of the necessity for a prolonged occupation.

It was beginning to be known, however, that it was often more dangerous to take refuge below

private houses than to remain upstairs, and this was brought home by a tragic discovery under the ruins of a house in the Rue Colbert, where fifteen corpses were found in the cellar. The unfortunate people had been asphixiated.

An incendiary shell had burst in the house, which had collapsed and taken fire, and the only exit from the cellar in which these people had taken refuge was blocked up. Doubtless many lives have been lost under the ruins of the city under similar conditions.

As may be imagined, every one who was able to get away from Rheims had left at the commencement of the bombardment, so that the streets during the daytime, even when the guns were silent, presented for the most part an aspect of Sabbath calm. After dark it was a city of the dead. Gas and electricity had disappeared, and all was in gloom.

At eight o'clock all lights in houses had to be extinguished, and no one was allowed out of doors under any pretence. This practically meant going to bed at that hour, and being in complete darkness till morning.

It was this drastic regulation that increased to a great extent the general sense of nervousness, as evening approached.

In time of peril there is no doubt a desire for companionship, and this was especially noticeable in Rheims towards the hour of the curfew. People would invent all sorts of excuses to remain together as long as possible.

IN A CELLAR IN RHEIMS DURING THE BOMBARDMENT

This of course was quite comprehensible, for to be shut up in one's room alone, and in darkness, while the big guns were booming and shells bursting near by, with the apprehension that at any moment the house you were in might catch fire or come tumbling about your ears, was not calculated to engender a condition of mental placidity.

Soldiers who were obliged to remain in the city after dark told me that in spite of being in comfortable quarters they often wished they were back with their comrades in the trenches, for at least there they could get into shelter of some sort, if only in a rough dug-out, and defend themselves against attack, while they were only running the risk of one kind of death, whereas here, it was not only the menace of high explosives but of falling houses and fire to boot. In Rheims there was the awful sensation that you might be caught like a rat in a trap if anything happened to the house you might be in.

To attempt to evade the lighting regulations was of course asking for very serious trouble, but now and again when there was good news in the official *communiqué* one was tempted to risk sitting up with friends, enjoying an extra bottle of wine in the dim light of a well-shaded candle and with the curtains carefully drawn.

The merest glimmer, however, that could be seen outside, would be almost certain to be noticed by the vigilant watchmen who were constantly prowling around, on the look-out for any infractions of the

regulations—and to disregard the stern warning of a passing patrol " il y a de la lumière là haut—éteignez de suite," would mean immediate arrest with dire consequences to the delinquent, for the city was under martial law and a locked street door was no protection if orders were not immediately obeyed.

The fact that the city was infested with spies was the principal reason for these precautions. There were plenty of men and women who were untiring in their efforts to convey to the German lines intelligence of the disposition of the troops in and around Rheims. I was continually hearing of arrests and executions.

The brasserie I was living in was the rendezvous of the military plain-clothes police, who would be out all night on the roofs of the houses trying to catch " firework signallers." It appeared that Roman candles were being constantly used at night for signalling.

That the Germans have made of espionage a fine art has long been recognized, and it was undoubtedly one of the most serious factors the Allied Generals had to contend with. The ramifications of the veritable army of spies seemed endless, and almost compelled admiration for its organizers. There seemed to be no risks these spies would not take to achieve an object.

Whilst I was in Rheims, two incidents in particular came to my notice, which struck me as being perfectly inimitable in their sheer reckless audacity.

One afternoon a powerful car, driven by a French

trooper of dragoons, arrived at one of the entrance gates of the city. In the car were two gendarmes with a handcuffed German prisoner between them. So far this was a very ordinary everyday spectacle, and attracted very little attention from the public.

The car was stopped in due course by the guard at the gate, and the password demanded. This was unhesitatingly given, and the chauffeur was about to drive on when something about the car aroused the suspicion of the brigadier on duty, and he refused to allow it to proceed without examining the papers of the gendarmes.

His suspicions were fully confirmed when he discovered that the most essential document of all—the official permit to drive a car in the war zone—was wanting.

Of course, the occupants were immediately taken before the Commandant d'Armes, and it turned out that they were all Germans even to the dragoon chauffeur! They had disguised themselves thus in order to get through the French lines into Rheims. It is needless to add what was their fate. Justice for spies was summary at the front.

On another occasion, where the top-floor flat of an apparently unoccupied house had aroused suspicion, a forcible entrance was made, and in a bedroom, a man was discovered seated by a bed on which was lying a woman gasping for breath—her head enveloped in a heavy blood-stained bandage and to all appearance *in extremis*.

The man was apparently distraught with grief and at first sight it seemed to be a very sad case, as no doctor appeared to be at hand. He protested vehemently at the unceremonious visit, saying that it was cruel to thus disturb the last moments of his dear wife.

It all looked so real that the police were genuinely sorry for having intruded so roughly, and almost ended by actually apologizing for their inopportune visit. They were withdrawing on tip-toe so as not to cause any unnecessary suffering to the poor woman in her last moments, when the hawk-eye of their officer was attracted by a trifling detail that gave the game away—a pair of unmistakable German boots lying in a corner of the room.

In an instant he was back at the bedside, and before the man could prevent him, with a quick movement flung back the coverlet, revealing a fully dressed man underneath.

The "dying woman" and "her husband" were two German spies.

How they managed to get possession of the room and live in it undetected till then was a mystery that could only be explained by the knowledge that there were occasionally to be found renegade French men and women who would sell their country for a few hundred francs, and miserable traitors of this description had possibly connived at the couple of Huns taking up their quarters here, at the top of the house where they had easy access to

the roof, and from which they could send up signals at night.

Naturally, both the men shared the fate of the other gang in the car.

With the knowledge, therefore, that close at hand was a cunning enemy, ready and willing to run such risks to get into the city, it may be imagined that the police and the inhabitants were suspicious of every one they did not know personally, and this atmosphere of mistrust on all sides helped in no small degree to accentuate the danger one ran in remaining in Rheims during the bombardment.

To be seen with a sketch-book in one's hand would be "asking for trouble," and to make notes in it would mean certain arrest and endless formalities before the military authorities were satisfied as to one's bona fides. I had had enough of this already, so was not inclined to take any risks in a city like Rheims, where I had the feeling that I was "spotted" as a stranger, and therefore suspect, and that wherever I went I was being watched all the time from early morning till late at night.

The Remois had "Boche" on the brain, and little wonder, for it was not only the spectacle of the devastation and the booming of the big guns that reminded them of their hateful proximity.

The streets still displayed ocular evidence of the recent Hun occupation of Rheims, in the form of big green "proclamations" posted on the walls in prominent positions. One of these issued by the

mayor—"by order of the German Military Authority" —threatened to burn the city to the ground and to put all the inhabitants to death by hanging if they took part in any combats with the German army or molested or obstructed the soldiers by barricading the streets. The proclamations in some cases concluded with a long list of the names of hostages held by the Germans in guarantee that the particular order to which it referred was carried out.

On reading these cruel, arrogant notifications one's mind was carried back to the Middle Ages—although it is doubtful that even in those days barbarism was so deliberately vindictive in its inhumanity. It certainly could not have been more so.

These placards afforded a far more convincing insight of German methods and character than any newspaper report. They formed a conclusive and irrefutable indictment, which required no further substantiating evidence.

It is to be hoped that the city of Rheims preserved as many of them as possible; they will prove documents of intense historic interest in years to come when "Kultur" will have become a forgotten byword.

Although the great victory of the Marne had driven the Huns out of the city, we were living in a comparative state of siege all the time.

Yet curiously enough although such everyday luxuries as tobacco and cigarettes were quite unobtainable—the Germans having requisitioned

A FLOWER IN THE WILDERNESS

everything during their stay—actual living was no dearer than elsewhere.

In a large measure this could be accounted for by the fact that the majority of the inhabitants had left the city, and only one hotel and a café or so were open; but it was quite remarkable how, on the slightest return of confidence, the market-place became quite animated, and one saw the stalls well provided with all kinds of foodstuff at practically ordinary prices.

It was always a distinctly nervous crowd however, and you could not fail to notice the furtive glances towards the sky and the tense look on the women's faces at the slightest untoward sound, such as the slamming of a door. Every one realized that at any moment a "Taube" might come over or the batteries open fire.

Most of the poorer people, whose homes were in the danger zone, would get away early in the morning to a distant quarter of the city where they thought they ran less risk, and there they remained until nightfall. The Faubourg by the *Porte de Paris* especially used to be crowded, and almost resembled a fair, and hawkers of food and fruit did a big trade.

Here the bombardment could only be faintly heard, so a general feeling of cheerfulness prevailed, especially if the day were fine; but as night approached, the return journey had perforce to be made, for there was no evading the military

regulations, even if shells were still falling in the danger zone. The crowd dispersed sadly, little groups of people making their way homeward through the growing darkness and ruins of the streets, lit up intermittently by blazing buildings and bursting shells, wondering, perchance, whether their own homes had been spared during their absence; while the terror of another night of bombardment obsessed them all.

CHAPTER XIII

Rheims to Épernay—The steam tram to Dormans—Early start—Taking advantage of lull—The railway accident at Bouleuse—A bad collision—Inexplicable impulse that saved my life—The dead and injured—A romantic little adventure—A vision of the Bois de Boulogne in days of peace—A pleasurable surprise—" Like two tramps "—A jolly little lunch—Her departure—Épernay afterwards—A disagreeable incident—Its unexpectedly pleasant ending.

THREE weeks of Rheims under bombardment were sufficient for any one who was not a glutton for high explosives, and I was beginning to think I had had about enough of it, when the proprietor of the brasserie informed me of his intention to shut up the place and take a holiday with his wife in a more restful part of the country. So as there appeared no chance of finding other lodgings, I had no option but to pack up and leave before I was locked out. I decided, therefore, to return to Épernay and have a few quiet days there to get on with my work before going further afield.

The Germans in their retreat had blown up a bridge on the main line, and there was only one way by which one could get out of Rheims, a small line—a sort of glorified steam tram was still running,

bombardment permitting, to Dormans, where one could pick up the main service again and get to Épernay by a circuitous route.

We were timed to leave early in the morning, but it was quite a toss-up at the last moment whether a start could be made, as shells had been bursting all over the city since daybreak. Advantage, however, was taken of a lull to get away, and I must confess I was not altogether sorry when at last I got a move on.

The carriages were of course crowded, and every one in high spirits at having found room, for the train had been literally besieged every day by people who wanted to get away from the city, and it was pathetic to note the look of relief that came over the faces of the women who had children with them when we were out of the danger zone.

The journey, however, was destined to be an ill-fated one for some of the passengers, as it was broken by a terrible accident.

Just beyond Bouleuse, only a few miles from Rheims, through some fault of a signalman we ran at full speed into a train coming from the opposite direction. The crash of the impact was so terrific that at first it was thought that a shell had burst in front of us.

Thetrain stopped dead, and for a moment nothing was heard but the hissing of escaping steam; then there arose the cries of women and children, and every onescrambled out on to the line to find that the

two engines were inextricably locked together and the leading carriages completely demolished.

By some inexplicable impulse I had changed my seat at the last moment before starting from the first carriage to the end one, and this probably saved my life.

Several soldiers were at hand fortunately, who helped to extricate the unfortunate people pinned down under the wreckage, and it was then found that three men and an old lady had been killed outright, and fourteen other people seriously injured. I will not dwell on the harrowing sight.

In ordinary times this accident would have doubtless excited some comment, as it was almost incomprehensible for it to have happened on such a small line; but within sound of the guns and with thousands of men being killed every day it passed as insignificant.

It struck me, however, as being pretty hard luck for the unfortunate victims, who had escaped the perils of bombardment only to lose their lives or become maimed in a tramway accident.

This, of course, entailed remaining at Bouleuse till the line could be cleared and a relief train sent to take us on, and this occupied the entire day. Meanwhile the dead were taken away and the injured removed to the nearest hospital.

The village was quite an unimportant one but there was the usual hotel-restaurant, where we were fortunately able to get something to eat ; and it

was quite remarkable how soon the impression of the accident seemed to wear off. I suppose it was that after living in Rheims one became inured to horrors.

This may perhaps also account for my having met with a little adventure of quite a romantic character, which one would hardly associate with a railway accident.

Among the passengers I had espied a very pretty girl, who seemed strangely out of keeping with the rest. She was simply but exquisitely dressed and had all the chic of the Parisienne, but what had particularly drawn my attention to her, was that she had a dog with her—one of those pointers so beloved by the French sportsmen. It was a strange encumbrance to travel with in the war zone. In the bright sunlight she was like a vision of the Bois de Boulogne in days of peace.

Somehow during the long hours of waiting for the relief train to arrive, we came together, and chatting on one thing or another we gradually sauntered away from the crowd, and at last found ourselves in the open country out of sight of the railway line and the little station and the wreckage of the train beyond.

Our conversation, as may be imagined, soon drifted into subjects not connected with the war—Paris, of course, as she was a Parisienne, I learned, and returning there, and old Bohemian haunts that we both knew well and loved, for she

FOOD FOR THE GUNS

lived near the Sorbonne; until at last I almost inclined to rub my eyes to make sure I was really awake—it seemed so unreal, after the horror of the accident and the recollection of the life in Rheims, to find oneself strolling with a pretty girl and a friendly dog in this secluded lane, the larks singing overhead and all around so tranquil in the sunshine of the summer morning.

But my thoughts were rudely brought back to earth and realities, for suddenly in the distance there was a crash like a thunder-clap, in the direction of Rheims, and this was followed by a violent cannonading, which effectually dispelled all poetic illusions.

Whilst we stood still, listening to the portentous sounds, we heard a rumbling, rattling noise approaching rapidly, and a battery of artillery dashed past at full gallop towards the inferno beyond the hills—a magnificent spectacle that sent a thrill of enthusiasm through one.

At length the relief train turned up, and we were en route once more.

At Dormons, where we arrived late at night, there was a wait of several hours, but to my pleasurable surprise, instead of having a miserable third-class compartment to travel in, there happened to be a luxurious first-class corridor-carriage attached to the train, and we got a compartment all to ourselves, so it did not matter to me how slowly we travelled or how long it took. I had some food and wine in my bag, so we had a sort of picnic supper, and I made a

sketch of her as a souvenir of a delightful incident of my wanderings in the war zone.

We reached Épernay at the ungodly hour of five in the morning, long before any café was open, so had nothing to do but to walk about, like two tramps, "Comme deux chemineaux," as she put it, until it was possible to get a wash and some breakfast. Then the dog had to be disposed of, as she had only brought it from Rheims to leave with friends here.

Her train for Paris did not start till the afternoon, so we had a jolly little lunch together, and when the time came for her to go, it cost me a very strong effort not to accompany her.

As may be imagined, Épernay for the next few hours seemed duller and more unattractive than ever after she had gone ; I consoled myself, however, with the knowledge that I should see her again when I got back to Paris from my wanderings.

The town was not so crowded this time and there was no difficulty in getting a room, but I was told I should have to go to the *Mairie* and get a *permis de séjour,* that is a permission to remain in the town. This, of course, was only a matter of form in my case, as my military permit from the Commandant d'Armes was sufficient authority.

It was by then *l'heure de l'apéritif*, so it occurred to me to hunt up my friends of the Motor Transport Convoy at the café they usually frequented ; but there was no sign of them, and the square where the

EN ROUTE

lorries usually drew up was deserted. I had my *apéritif* alone, then aimlessly loafed about feeling very much like a fish out of water, while my thoughts would persist in wandering in the direction of the Paris train.

I was wondering where I should dine, when it occurred to me that I might find some of my transport friends at a restaurant where I had fed with them a few times.

It was an old-fashioned sort of *Bouillon* with a congerie of rooms leading from one to the other and mostly frequented by the working class. But my friends were not there and the place was crowded, so I was making my way out when I noticed a seat just vacated, and decided that I might as well feed there as anywhere else.

It was not the sort of place I should have chosen to dine in by myself, as I like a little more luxury when I can get it; but for once it didn't matter, so I sat down, ordered some food and began reading a newspaper I had with me.

Meanwhile I had not taken much notice of the people sitting round me, but gradually I began to have the unpleasant feeling that I was the subject of the conversation of a group of men sitting at the next table, and at last I could not avoid hearing what they were saying, and it flashed upon me that I was in for another of the awkward situations I now knew so well.

There was a narrow gangway between the table,

and the man seated next to me was beginning to raise his voice for the benefit of the other tables—while his friends appeared to be egging him on.

At last I caught the words, "Bien sûr, c'est un Allemand." I felt my back hair starting to bristle. It was impossible to let this remark of his pass unnoticed—every one was looking at me.

Leaning over I touched his arm and said: "I advise you, mon ami, to be careful what you are saying about me, unless you want to get yourself into trouble."

He looked me up and down for a moment and then said roughly: "You are not a Frenchman, so what are you doing here?"

"It is no business of yours what I am doing here," I replied; "I am an Englishman and expect to be treated with courtesy."

"You an Englishman," he retorted with a sneer; "well, you don't speak or look like one and I don't believe you."

"You can believe what you like, but keep your mouth shut," I replied, looking him straight in the eyes.

One of the other men bent forward at this moment, and said something to him which had the effect of silencing him, just as he was about to answer me back.

The party did not appear to discuss me again, and shortly after left the restaurant.

I continued to read my paper, then having finished

my meal, paid the bill—making a point of giving an extra good tip to the garçon, who had witnessed the incident—and walked out with studied deliberation, as I felt instinctively I was in hostile surroundings.

It was quite dark outside and the street looked deserted, but I had scarcely gone a dozen yards when I felt a sharp tap on the shoulder. Looking round I saw two civilians with tri-colour armlets on their sleeves; just behind them was a little group of individuals, amongst whom I recognized the men in the restaurant.

"I want to see your papers," said the man who had stopped me. I felt myself boil up.

"Who are you that I should show you anything?" I vociferated.

"Will you produce your papers?" again demanded the fellow.

"F—— moi la paix," I shouted at him, lifting my stick menacingly.

In an instant I was pinioned from behind, and before I could even attempt to struggle I was hurried along the street. Not a word was said, and it dawned on me that I was in for a serious adventure.

After we had proceeded some distance, I asked the man who had accosted me where they were taking me.

"You will know in good time," was the gruff reply.

"I shall make you regret this treatment of an Englishman," I remarked, with as much calmness as

I could assume, considering the way I was being hustled along.

"We shall see," he answered.

I was wondering where the jail was situated, when I noticed we were going towards the Mairie, and sure enough it was there they were making for.

By this time there was a big crowd following us, and I heard sinister mutterings. Past the sentry we went, across the courtyard and up the steps of the main entrance.

I now felt sure of my ground, and with a sudden wrench I got free from the grip of my captors, saying, "You can follow me; I know the way here as well as you do."

I opened the big door and dashed in, with all the fellows like a pack of hounds at my heels.

The sight that met my eyes was a great relief. There was a table in the main hall itself, with a lamp on it. Seated round the table were several Staff officers, and on the side facing the door was the Commandant d'Armes.

They all turned round with amazement at my unceremonious entrance, and I heard one of them exclaim—

"Tiens, c'est l'Anglais."

Going quickly up to the table I blurted out: "Monsieur le Commandant, I beg of you to be so good as to inform these people that I am an Englishman and not a German spy."

There was a sort of growl of dissent amongst the

men who had crowded in behind me, and a movement as if they wanted to get at me.

There was a moment's pause, and then the Commandant laughed heartily.

" Messieurs," he said, " you have made a mistake. I know this gentleman, he is an English artist; his papers are quite *en règle*, and I have myself given him a permit to remain in Épernay as long as it pleases him."

There was a dead silence for a moment, and then the murmurs behind me started afresh, but now they had a very different sound—they meant friendship, not enmity. Then the man who had arrested me came forward with true French impulsiveness and offered me his hand, saying how much he regretted the mistake, and that he hoped I would forgive him.

I replied there was nothing to forgive—they had only done their duty; and adding grandiloquently that I would rather be arrested a dozen times than that one German spy should go free.

Turning to the commandant, I thanked him sincerely for his courtesy, and earnestly expressed the hope that I should not have to trouble him again.

When I got outside I was received in most startling fashion. All the men were waiting for me, and I had to shake hands all round; then they insisted on my returning to the restaurant with them to have a glass of champagne, to show I bore them no ill feeling—and we finished up the evening in quite unexpectedly festive fashion.

CHAPTER XIV

Troyes to Vitry-le-François, Bar-le-Duc and Verdun—I return to Troyes—The Commissaire genuinely pleased see me again—Decide make attempt enter St. Mihiel salient—A *sauf conduit* to Bar-le-Duc—A joke in the train—In Vitry-le-François—Another irritating incident—The two commercial travellers—A startling occurrence—Locked in my room—Curious sequel—The Sous-Prefet de la Marne—Determine to risk continuing my journey—The amusing method of a journalistic confrère—En route for Bar-le-Duc—The Hun bully catches a Tartar—Bar-le-Duc—The genial Commissaire of Police—Am granted a military pass to Clermont-en-Argonne—My big adventure commences—The Petit-Meusien—"No one allowed to go to Verdun"—Banzée, the junction for Verdun—I have a brilliant idea—On to Verdun—The complaisant station-master—The truculent sentry—A sergeant comes to my rescue—My cyclist guide.

I HAVE always when campaigning had the feeling that there is an element of adventure in being somewhere where one has no right to be, and it was this feeling which again prompted me to risk continuing my wandering.

For some time past in the direction of the Meuse, there had been much conjecture with regard to what was taking place in the St. Mihiel salient. There were rumours of the Germans having made it a veritable fortress with ferro-concrete defences and trenches, from which the French would never be able to dislodge them; whilst Verdun had been quite outside the ken of civilians for weeks.

So I made up my mind to have a shot at getting to one of these places, or at any rate at approaching as near one or the other as possible.

With the aid of my map I made a careful study of the region and the various routes of access to it; finally deciding that my best course would be to return to Troyes, and consult my friend the commissaire and see if he could not help me again.

Straightway, therefore, I went back to Troyes, and was welcomed at the hotel as an habitué of the house, as in fact I might almost consider myself, since I had been going there several times now; while the commissaire appeared genuinely pleased to see me again, and listened to the story of my adventures in Rheims with his usual interest.

When I told him of my new plans he did his utmost to dissuade me, pointing out the risk I ran of serious consequences if I ventured too far in that particular direction I had in my mind; but seeing I was quite decided, he said that he would give me a *sauf conduit* as far as Vitry-le-François, and an introduction to a friend of his, the Sous-Prefet de la Marne, whose official residence was there, and who alone could, if he chose, grant me facilities for proceeding further afield.

So off I started again with as usual only my rucksack on my back to encumber me.

It was a glorious autumn day, and I felt in high spirits. In the train I was seated opposite an elderly civilian, who started talking to me on some important

news just in from the front. After discussing the latest battles, the weather and other topics for some little time, I began to notice he was getting a bit "intrigué," as the French say, as to my identity. At last his inquisitiveness got the better of him and he asked—

"Are you Belgian, monsieur?"

"No. I am English."

There was a pause, then he returned to the attack.

"Officer?"

"Retired Field Marshal," I replied, without hesitating.

He looked a bit surprised.

"I compliment you, monsieur—you still look comparatively young."

"Yes," I answered. "In my country they always retire Field Marshals while they are young."

He didn't say much after this; I fancy he had an idea I was taking a rise out of him.

Vitry-le-François, which is about halfway between Troyes and Chalons, was a dull and uninteresting little provincial town, which had at one moment been the headquarters of General Joffre, but had only a sprinkling of troops when I was there. The tide of war had left it high and dry and unscathed, in curious contrast to the ruined state of Sermaize-les-Bains, and Revigny, close by.

The Sous-Prefet happened to be away for the day, so there was nothing for it but to await his return

A WAYSIDE JOTTING

with the patience I was gradually learning was the most essential virtue of a correspondent in this war.

Under ordinary conditions a small French provincial town is not usually a wildly exciting place to find oneself in, and if you know no one living there, and there is no particular attraction to induce you to remain, your visit is usually as brief as possible.

A couple of hours easily exhausted the few sights of Vitry-le-François, and its deserted cobble-paved old streets were very depressing, so after getting an indifferent déjeuner in a little restaurant, I esconced myself in a corner of the principal café, a big barn of a place dating back from Napoleonic days, and set to work writing up some of my notes while I took my coffee.

I had the place almost to myself at that hour; the good folk of Vitry evidently did not patronise the establishment till later in the day.

The garçon appeared to be somewhat unnecessarily interested as to my doings, and in my rucksack, which was on the seat beside me, though this I put down to his having nothing much to do. But there was probably more in his curiosity than I imagined, and it may have had some connection with the strange incident which occurred later.

In recalling my impression of those days it has often struck me how many times I must have been risking serious misadventures without realizing it, by reason of my casual disregard of the most ordinary precautions. I was too disposed to forget the state

of extreme mental nervous tension the war had brought about, and that, therefore, it was not necessary for people to look at me askance to be ill-disposed and suspicious.

I knew and liked France and French people so much that I took it too easily for granted that where-ever I went I should always be amongst "friendly Zulus," and this doubtless explains much of my impulsive recklessness in doing things at that time that a few moments of calm reflection would have convinced me were only likely to lead to trouble; though perhaps had I not so frequently acted on impulse my wanderings would have been very monotonous and uneventful. One thing, however, is certain, I never regretted any of the little resultant "incidents."

Well, as I have said, the garçon—who, by the way, was an elderly man—appeared to take a friendly interest in my movements, so I had a bit of a chat with him on the one and only topic, the war and how it was progressing. It was perhaps a bit injudicious, but after all it was only what one was reading about in the papers every day.

Suddenly in the usual familiar French fashion he asked me how I came to be in Vitry, and where I was going from there. To which, of course, I gave a non-committal reply, merely mentioning I was an artist, and had no plans for the moment, so long as I could find subjects to sketch and could see something of what was going on near the front.

Then changing the conversation, I asked if he could tell me where I could get a room for the night. He said he was a new-comer in Vitry but would ask the *patronne* ; and going over to where she sat at her *comptoir* he had a talk with her for some minutes, and returning, gave me the name of a little café-restaurant, where it was almost certain I could get fixed up. He then left me to my note-book.

I stayed on a little longer and then strolled round to the other café. It was a very unfrequented and clean little place, and I got a room without difficulty. There was evidently no lack of accommodation in Vitry, although it was so near the scene of operations.

I dined there, and seated next to me were two well-dressed men, and as we had the café almost to ourselves, we naturally got into conversation, and I learned they were representatives of a big commercial house, and were on their way to see the general of the division with a view to obtaining permission to open a store near the front.

They appeared to be quite genuine, and I felt quite at my ease with them, in fact we shared a bottle of *vin supérieur*. One of them then asked me in a pause in the conversation—

"Eh, vous, monsieur, vous êtes journaliste, n'est ce pas ?"

For a moment I felt inclined to ask him what business it was of his, when I thought it better to let it pass, and replied evasively—

"Je suis peintre."

"Well, you must find plenty of subjects round here," he answered. "No doubt you have seen a good deal. Where have you been?"

It was as plain as a pikestaff what he was driving at—they were suspicious of me. I could see the usual irritating questions coming, and I wasn't in the mood for it; besides I had a perfect right to be in Vitry, and the letter I had in my pocket for the prefet was a guarantee in itself.

A few words would have proved my bona fides, when it suddenly occurred to me to "pull his leg" and mystify him a bit in return for his curiosity.

"Yes," I replied, "I have seen a lot, and hope to see more if I have any luck." Adding, "Well, I must turn in now, as I am off somewhere early to-morrow," and with that I abruptly left them.

I had a very clean and well-furnished room and wonderfully cheap into the bargain: if I remember rightly I only paid 1.50 for it. I had intended going to bed at once, but there was a comfortable armchair that invited me to sit up for a little while and have a read, as I had an interesting book with me.

The uncertain light of the candle must have made me drowsy and I fell asleep. Suddenly I was awakened by a creaking noise—some one was tampering with the door-handle. I was at once wide awake, and waited without moving to see what was going to happen.

But there was no further sound, so I got up and went across to see if I had remembered to lock the

door when I had put my boots out, and to my amazement, found it was *locked from the outside.* I was a prisoner!

My first impulse in my indignation was to shout and rouse the house. Then like a flash came the reflection, what was the good of kicking against the pricks? If I made a fuss, it would in all probability end in my being removed from my room, where at any rate I was comfortable, and having to pass the night in less agreeable quarters.

So I decided not to take any notice of what had happened, but go to bed and see what the morning brought forth.

It was broad daylight when I awoke. In an instant I recollected what had occurred, and jumping out of bed I rushed to the door and tried it. To my pleasant surprise it was unlocked. It had evidently only been considered necessary to imprison me for the night.

I dressed and went down to the café for breakfast. My two companions of the previous evening were there and greeted me, as I thought, somewhat ironically.

"You won't get away as early as you intended," said one.

I thought it best not to risk any further attempt at mystification. "No," I replied; "I overslept myself. But anyhow I have to see the Sous-Prefet before I leave, so it does not much matter."

I had the impression they exchanged glances as

I told them this, but they made no remark and shortly after went out.

I finished my coffee and made my way to the Sous-Prefet's which, as I have said, was close by. I did not look round, but felt convinced I was being shadowed the whole way.

The Sous-Prefet had returned and received me in the most friendly and informal manner, but I could see at once that he had an intuition that I was connected with the Press, for he went out of his way, as I thought, to inform me that he had at one time been a journalist himself.

With genial candour he then told me that if he had anything to say in the matter he would turn me back there and then, as he did not believe in correspondents being in the zone of operations.

I thought it advisable to say nothing to this, in case he really knew all about me, though I realized that my silence practically signified my acquiescence, and that henceforth I could scarcely hope to be regarded merely as a wandering artist.

His bark, however, was worse than his bite, and in consideration of my being an Englishman, as he put it pleasantly, he gave me a note of recommendation to a high official at Bar-le-Duc, though he warned me I was asking for trouble in attempting to get to the Argonne.

The outlook therefore did not look very promising; but after all, I had come out to take chances, and if the worst came to the worst, I should, with any luck,

be bound to see something; even if it meant being turned back more or less promptly, and with more rather than less scant ceremony, as seemed extremely probable.

The authorities might be very alert, and the official eyes might very soon pounce upon me, but nothing could, I reflected, prevent my own eyes remaining open in the meanwhile.

This thought suggested itself to me in the recollection of a very amusing and intelligent method always adopted by an enterprising journalistic confrère in a former war, under like circumstances.

If he decided to go in a certain direction where he knew too well it was "Verboten," and that he was bound to be stopped and sent back sooner or later, he would hurry along as fast as he could without glancing right or left to take notice of what he was passing, in an endeavour to get just as far as possible before the inevitable "hold up" came.

Then, when as he had anticipated, would ensue the usual "trouble," he would assume a bland and childlike ignorance of any regulations forbidding his presence in the prohibited region, and in the sometimes considerable delay which almost invariably followed, he reckoned on ample time to see all he had come out to see.

He would then be told he must go back again; and this he always did in such leisurely fashion as would give him every opportunity of having a good look at the scenes of interest he had neglected when

hurrying forward. Nothing could be said to him then—he was returning, not going!

But to return to my narrative.

I thanked the Sous-Prefet for his courtesy, and said that I was sure the letter of recommendation to so important a personage could not fail to help me, and that even if it did not obtain me permission to go to the Argonne, at any rate I knew that the Sous-Prefet would have the satisfaction of knowing he had done his level best to assist an Englishman in distress. Adding jokingly that perchance this self-same letter might be the means of saving me the inconvenience of having to face a firing party at dawn!

So I left for Bar-le-Duc that morning.

At one of the stations on the way, an exciting incident had occurred just before we arrived. It appeared that a train with German prisoners, amongst whom were several officers, had stopped there for a short time. As an act of courtesy the officers were permitted to get out and stand on the platform.

When the signal was given that the train was about to start, all got in at once except a burly, truculent-looking major, smoking a pipe, who took no notice of the warning, but continued to puff away regardless of the calls of the station officials. "Tout le monde en voiture—l'on part."

A little soldier, who was on sentry duty close by, went across to the officer and touching him on the shoulder told him politely that it was time to get back into his compartment.

The Hun turned round with an exclamation of rage and hit the soldier a back-hander across the face.

It was as unprovoked and cowardly a blow as could well be imagined, but the bully had caught a tartar, and with a vengeance.

Without a moment's hesitation, the little chap made a spring backwards, then with a swift lunge drove his bayonet clean through the fellow.

I could not ascertain the dénouement, but it is pretty certain that the soldier was exonerated.

At Bar-le-Duc the official to whom the Sous-Prefet had given me the letter of introduction flatly told me that he could not help me, and when I suggested that perhaps I might have a permit to go in the "direction" of Verdun, he simply shrugged his shoulders—"Verdun?" I might as well ask for a ticket to the moon, and with about as much chance of getting there.

There was thus no help for it but to remain in Bar-le-Duc and trust to luck, and this I came across in the person of the Commissaire of Police, quite a delightful fellow, who spoke English fluently, and being fair and clean shaven looked so much like an Englishman that there seemed nothing remarkable in his speaking as well as he did and with so little accent. He was affability itself, and promised to help me all he could if it lay in his power.

In the meantime, there was plenty to interest one in the town—military movement everywhere, and no lack of animation. Here, as in all the other

big towns within the zone of operations, business was flourishing.

The war was now well on into the third month, yet the soldiers still seemed to have plenty of money to spend. Here, also, as elsewhere, one was struck by the orderly spirit prevailing, and the universal cheerfulness of the troops.

In spite of the crowded state of the town—for it was difficult to get a room at most of the hotels—living was not expensive; probably this was due to the fact that Bar-le-Duc was one of the fortunate places that had escaped occupation and sacking at the hands of the Germans, who, however, had got very near.

My acquaintance, the commissaire, turned out to be a very obliging fellow who actually went out of his way to induce the Commandant d'Étape to give me a military *laisser passer* to Clermont-en-Argonne, a most important position in the Verdun sector, where he said I would be likely to see a good deal of interesting military operations; though he warned me that it was at my own risk and peril that I undertook the journey, and that there was no certainty of my getting there.

From this moment my big adventure, if I may so call it—commenced.

One goes to Clermont by a small local railway, the Petit Meusien, which serves to connect outlying villages not on the main line with Bar-le-Duc and Verdun. In ordinary times it would be considered

A SCENE OF RUIN

as a sort of steam tramway similar to the one between Rheims and Dormans, but now it had assumed some importance, and passed through the scenes of much of the recent fighting in the region.

For civilian purposes it was ordinarily used by farmers and the inhabitants of the small farms around, and only those who could prove they were of the district and had some valid reason for travelling by it were granted permits. I was, therefore, particularly favoured.

In big letters over the booking office was a significant announcement to the effect that no one was allowed to go to Verdun.

Although many of the villages through which the line passed were in ruins there seemed to be no lack of passenger traffic, and there was such a crowd in the carriages and so much baggage in the shape of market baskets and so forth, that one could scarcely move. There were two trains a day, and the country folk evidently made the most of them.

The scenery in this part of the Argonne is depressing—flat and uninteresting plains for miles, a typical battlefield, in fact, as indeed it proved.

On either side one saw abundant evidence of the recent fighting—long lines of trenches, huge shell holes and the usual weird debris. Whilst still further to emphasize the actualities of war, dotted about here and there and everywhere were newly made graves surmounted by primitive crosses.

It was a scene of unutterable melancholy which

the weather did nothing to dispel, as it was a soaking wet morning, and the passengers gazed through the streaming windows in gloomy silence.

At a station named Bauzée, nearly every one got out. It was the junction where the line branched off to Verdun.

I was standing in the carriage waiting while the passengers were removing their innumerable baskets, and pondering the notice in the station at Bar-le-Duc about no one being allowed to go to Verdun, when like a flash the idea occurred to me—

"Why not go there *by mistake?*" All I had to do was to remain in the train and I should be taken on, and then if I had any luck, I might at any rate see Verdun and perhaps even enter it: anyhow I should be the only journalist to have got so far. I could not be shot for the attempt, so why not risk it? The "copy" I saw ahead was well worth it.

There was no time to lose in making up my mind as the guard had already given the signal, so without hesitation I determined to chance what might happen and resumed my seat.

The carriage now was empty with the exception of a soldier sitting opposite me. Some little distance on, I thought it would be as well, in case I wanted a witness, to follow up my idea of coming on *by mistake*, so I asked him casually whether we should soon arrive at Clermont.

"Clermont!" he ejaculated with surprise. "Why,

you are coming away from it. You should have changed at Beauzée."

"Mon Dieu!" I exclaimed. "Then where does this train go to?"

"Verdun," he replied; "and we shall be there in five minutes. You had better go direct to the chef de gare as soon as you arrive and explain your mistake, and he will probably tell you to go across to the main-line station, and take the first train back to Clermont."

Thanking him I gazed out of the window in silence, as though much annoyed. At last we reached Verdun, and I saw I was the only civilian in the train.

Without any delay I found the station master and showing him my pass, explained how I came to be there. Without making any comment he said I had better go across at once to the other station, which was quite close by, and take the train for Clermont, which would be leaving in a few minutes.

This was certainly disappointing, and not exactly what I had reckoned on. However, there was no help for it, and I had no possible excuse for non-compliance with his suggestion. But my old friend chance had not deserted me all the same.

At the entrance to the main-line station was a sergeant to whom I explained my predicament, and he let me pass without parley; but posted by the booking office was a truculent sentry, who absolutely refused to let me take a ticket unless I had my *sauf*

conduit viséd to leave Verdun. I tried to explain what had happened, but he refused even to listen to me.

"I can't help that—it's no business of mine. I shall not allow you to pass here without a permit," he said roughly.

I saw it was futile to attempt to reason with him, and was wondering what on earth was to be done, so I went and tackled the sergeant again, and he told me I could easily obtain the *visé* at "la Place," just inside the entrance to the town.

"You have plenty of time, since you can't possibly go by this train, as the town is quite a mile from here."

I asked if a soldier might accompany me, as I felt that as a civilian it would be a bit too risky going by myself. He did not, however, seem to attach the importance to it that I did.

"I have no man I can spare to send with you," he replied. "Besides, it is not necessary, as you are only going just inside the gateway."

I was hesitating, as I did not feel quite so confident about the matter as he did, when at that moment a soldier cyclist came along.

"Which way are you going?" called out the sergeant.

"To the town," was the reply.

"Well, you will accompany this Anglais to 'la Place' and get his *sauf conduit* put in order, so that he can remain in Verdun till his train for Clermont

leaves, and obtain another permit for him to travel by it."

I was so elated at this possible chance of perhaps being allowed to stay in Verdun at all, that I almost forgot to inquire what time my train would leave. "There is one to-night if you care to catch it, and another at five-forty to-morrow morning. There are only two a day for the moment," he told me, apparently quite unconcerned as to my movements.

It was then about eight o'clock in the morning, I should, therefore, have practically the whole day to look round, and even if forced to leave the same evening I should at least have seen something of Verdun.

The cyclist did not seem overjoyed at having to walk instead of ride, as it had turned out a terrifically hot day after the rain; but the offer of a cigar, which I fortunately had on me, put him in a good humour at once—as tobacco in any form was practically unobtainable up at the front at that time.

As we walked along I discovered he was an architect-student and lived in Paris with his mother in the Rue Pigalle, at Montmartre, close to where I had myself lived as a student for several years, and this put us on a very friendly footing at once, and he offered to help me find a room for the night, taking it for granted I was not going to catch the evening train.

When I hinted that it was perhaps inadvisable

my being seen walking about Verdun, he quite pooh-poohed the idea, saying that no one would interfere with me once I had a permit to remain, and he was sure there would be no difficulty on that score, now I had managed to get here.

CHAPTER XV

Verdun—Impressions of town seen from distance—Get the official visé to my *sauf conduit*—My guide offers to show me round—Air of enthusiasm and confidence everywhere—Prosperity and confidence within sound of the guns—A reconnoitring "Taube"—Amusing incident—An unexpected repast—Verdun always as a sealed book—A hive of military detectives—Perfidy at instigation of German agents—A sad example—The dead renegade—The fortifications of Verdun—Impossibility to get near them—Living on edge of a volcano—My cyclist friend takes me to a *pension* for lunch—The siege of Verdun in 1870—A chat with a veteran—I decide not to risk remaining too long—Take room for the night—The officer who spoke English—Not perhaps a chance meeting—Away from Verdun before daylight.

SEEN from a distance, Verdun gave the impression of a quaint old provincial town, such as one sees all over France, rather than of an up-to-date fortress. Closer inspection brought to view the citadel and its old-world setting of frowning battlement and bastion, which appealed to the artist within me with indescribable charm.

I can recollect nothing more imposing in this way than the Vauban ramparts and the double archway with moat and drawbridge facing it, through which one enters the city. There is probably no more interesting specimen of the military architecture of the fifteenth century to be found anywhere than the Porte St. Paul.

It presented a remarkable contrast to the up-to-date motor traffic on the road. Of military importance in the imposing old fortifications there is obviously none. They are interesting archæological relics of times when warfare was very different from what it is these days; nothing more; and this is probably why they have been left standing as a monument to the genius of Vauban.

Inside the ramparts the change was somewhat startling; one found oneself in a quite commonplace, ordinary-looking French garrison town, its narrow streets crowded with soldiers and civilians.

I easily got the official visé to my *sauf conduit*, and as I came downstairs, out of the office, I thought it seemed easier to remain in Verdun than to get permission to enter it. But here I was much mistaken.

My guide, to my surprise, then invited me to have an *apéritif*, and volunteered to show me something of the town before *déjeuner*.

It was a chance of seeing the place I had not reckoned on, so I gladly accepted, and leaving my rucksack in the guard-room we started off for a stroll round. With my *sauf conduit* in order, I now had nothing to worry about. After all, I was merely a wandering English artist-scribe, and meant no harm.

Although it was well known at the time there might at any moment be a big attack in this sector, one might have been hundreds of miles from the

front for all the difference the proximity of the Germans seemed to make. There were no signs of any apprehension on that score so far as it was possible to judge from what one saw—there was indeed quite an air of cheerfulness everywhere, which was somewhat bewildering.

The delightful *promenade de la Digue* had its contingent of *flâneurs*, nursemaids and children, though, of course, there was no longer any music, and it is certain that neither the Rue Mazel nor the Rue de l'Hôtel de Ville could have looked livelier in peace time.

All the shops appeared to be doing a roaring trade, thus confirming the impression of a flourishing business place rather than of an important military position. In fact, I learned that the only obstacle to the making of large fortunes out of the boom was due to the difficulty of obtaining fresh supplies of goods rather than of any difficulty in selling them—and this applied to everything. Even the *fabriques de lingerie*, for which Verdun was famed, were unable to cope with the sales; while for the celebrated bonbons, known as *Dragées de Verdun*, there was a continuous demand with which it was impossible for the makers to keep pace.

All this prosperity and confidence within sound of the big guns was a positive revelation, and had I not seen it for myself I could never have believed it.

As an instance of the cheery optimism prevailing, I recall something curious that occurred whilst we

were walking round. A wandering reconnoitring "Taube" came over without attracting much more than casual glances skyward, for it was evidently looked upon as quite an ordinary occurrence. Suddenly the loud report of an explosion was heard close by. A little crowd, of course, started running towards the spot to see what had happened.

It was then discovered that a bomb had dropped in the river. Beyond, however, a few panes of glass round about being broken by concussion, no damage had been done; but the consequences had been dire for the fish, and hundreds of them, stunned by the force of the explosion, were to be seen floating on the surface of the river.

In quite remarkably quick time, amid much laughter and merriment, boats appeared full of women and children with basins and baskets to take advantage of the unexpected repast that presented itself. Meanwhile, all eyes were on the novel scene on the river, and the "Taube," which by this time was being chased by a French machine, was quite forgotten.

In spite, however, of this apparent insouciance, there was the usual atmosphere of suspicion of perambulating foreigners, which made one feel very chary of being seen taking too much interest in what was going on around you.

That the authorities had to be constantly on their guard against unauthorized visitors was, of course, only as might have been expected, but it struck one

that an actual spy, even if successful in getting inside the town, would have been able to find out very little in Verdun itself, for the reason that even to the inhabitants themselves the place and its surroundings, from a military point of view, have always been as a sealed book.

That treachery did exist in many places that were near to the German lines is well known, but Verdun was such a veritable hive of *agents de la Sûreté Militaire* that it seemed as though it would have been almost an impossibility for any stranger to get into the place and remain there for even an hour without the fact being known at headquarters.

There were, however, I learned, occasional instances of perfidy at the instigation of German agents; sometimes, indeed, for the sake of a paltry few hundred francs; which by reason of peculiar attendant conditions the police were powerless to cope with. A volume, I was told, could have been written on the stratagems tried by the highly paid agents of the Kaiser in order to obtain some knowledge of the situation of the defences of Verdun. Some of them might never have come to light but for some fortuitous occurrence such as is illustrated in the following incident.

One day a "Taube" dropped several bombs on the town, and one of them exploded in the centre of a street, killing a little child and inflicting frightful injuries on a young woman who was with it.

She lay groaning and writhing in agony in the

roadway while an ambulance was being fetched to carry her to the hospital. But on its arrival a strange thing happened: she struggled with all her fast-waning strength against being taken, protesting that she was not seriously hurt, and wanted to go to her home. No heed, however, was paid to her delirious ravings, as they were thought to be, and she was taken direct to the hospital, where she lost consciousness on arrival, and died shortly after.

On searching her for some clue as to her identity a number of papers were found concealed in her dress, which established beyond the slightest doubt that she was a spy; the saddest part of the story being, as it turned out, that she was of French nationality, and had been living in a state of affluence for some time previously on the proceeds of her infamy.

Knowing how little had been allowed to transpire with regard to the disposition of the troops or the defences of Verdun, one could not help wondering what sort of information it was this renegade had contrived to obtain and sell to the enemy.

Verdun itself presented no features of interest apart from the citadel; here and there was a picturesque spot, especially along the river-banks, where were some quaint old houses, but of buildings of historic interest there were none of importance. The cathedral and Hôtel de Ville were of some antiquarian interest, but both had been much restored. The Bibliothêque, which was said to

AT A STREET CORNER IN VERDUN

contain many valuable manuscripts, was comparatively modern.

If, therefore, a considerable portion of the town has been destroyed, its loss from an artistic point of view is not to be compared with that of the cities of Belgium, and it will surely arise Phœnix-like from its ashes, as it did after the siege of 1870, but under different conditions.

I was not long in making the discovery that unless something of an interesting character chanced to happen by accident whilst I was at Verdun, there was really very little actually to see in connection with the military operations taking place in the vicinity.

This absence of any parade of military strength was to me very disappointing, as I had hoped to get some interesting sketches; but it was this placid appearance that has, I have since learned, always been a distinguishing characteristic of the famous fortress.

The immense strength of the modern fortifications was not *en evidence*, for the simple reason that these were mostly some distance from the town, hidden along the hills of the Hauts de Meuse towards the frontier, and so skilfully concealed as to be indistinguishable from their surroundings.

Yet all these works were connected in some way, and formed part and parcel of one vast line of defences, though one had to rely on hearsay as to the nature of these, it being quite out of the question

even to make an attempt to get anywhere near, so I was told, unless one was not pressed for time in regard to getting away again! Civilian pedestrians were not exactly hail-fellow-well-met in the zone of the Verdun forts in those days.

I must confess, moreover, I was not particularly anxious to try my luck too far. It was already something to find myself in Verdun at all; and I was resolved that in case I was being shadowed, as was quite possible, I would do nothing to raise any doubt as to my bona fides as an Englishman, and therefore a friend.

I walked about, it is true, with my eyes open, being careful not to evince anything but the most casual interest in my surroundings; though I will admit I was devoutly hoping all the time for something to happen that would give me the chance of remaining some time in Verdun. If only the Germans would start their expected attack, then it might be impossible for me to get away.

One felt that underlying all this apparently casual everyday life there must be a good deal worth studying, the more especially that one was practically living on the very edge of a volcano which might burst into eruption at any moment.

I had the sensation one has upon visiting Naples for the first time, and when gazing with fascination at the everlasting column of smoke rising lazily from the summit of Vesuvius, one hopes for the good fortune of witnessing the sudden bursting into

activity of the volcano. But the smoke always continues to ascend into the blue sky, a reminder of the pent-up force below, but with no further indication of anything terrible going to happen at once.

And so it was with Verdun. The big guns continued to boom in the distance ceaselessly, like the beating of surf against a rock-bound coast, with no visible change in their volume of sound, till one almost wondered at the necessity for all this apparently aimless expenditure of ammunition; for which, however, there were doubtless very solid reasons, which one could not ascertain in the town.

After wandering round for some time, and seeing practically all there was to see, my cyclist friend suggested taking me to a little quiet restaurant, where he usually lunched, and where he said I should not attract too much attention.

It was a sort of pension where the same men, mostly Government employees, foregathered twice a day for their meals. He introduced me to the crowd—there were about a dozen men there when we arrived—as an English artist, and I was at once made welcome and told that I could come there to feed whenever I chose.

The lunch and wine were quite excellent, proving that Verdun was not suffering from any lack of supplies or even luxuries, while the prices were as low as they could ever have been in pre-war days.

As we sat over our coffee and cigarettes afterwards, the conversation naturally reverted to the war and the imminent peril of a massed German attack on Verdun, and I had a long and interesting chat on the subject with my neighbour at table, a veteran who was among Verdun's defenders throughout the 1870 investment. He told me that whatever happened to Verdun now could not well be worse than what its defenders suffered forty years ago. There were not three thousand troops in the garrison when the place was invested by the Prussians, and all hope lay in relief being sent by Bazaine from Metz.

As the days wore on it gradually leaked out that Metz had surrendered, and all chance of relief was gone, so there was nothing for it but to put up as good a defence as possible. It was known that the Prussians had announced their determination to capture Verdun within three days; but it took them three months to break down the resistance of its gallant defenders, who endured terrible sufferings from hunger and the continuous bombardment. Every man and boy able to shoulder a rifle had taken his share in the defence of the town.

It is recorded that the old King of Prussia, who was present when the end at last came and the resistance of Verdun was over, was so impressed by the heroism of the garrison that he sent word he was prepared to grant exceptional conditions; and it was agreed that the garrison should march out with

all their accoutrements and belongings, that on the conclusion of peace Verdun should be returned to France, and that no indemnity should ever be claimed from the town. This was practically the only redeeming feature of the 1870 war, which was, as it is to-day, one long record of Prussian inhumanity.

A whole day in Verdun quite exhausted all there was to see of interest there, and the more especially as it was, as I have pointed out, but a very ordinary provincial garrison town.

There was thus no excuse for my remaining much longer, since I had not come to ferret out military secrets.

I felt intuitively I should be burning my boats with a vengeance if I ventured to go to the authorities and ask for a permit to remain a few days in the town. It almost made me shiver to think what would happen if I did anything so foolish.

As a matter of fact, I had been on tenterhooks several times during the afternoon, when walking round, although my companion assured me I had no cause to be at all apprehensive if people looked at me with curiosity at times, the reason being merely, he said, that they were not accustomed to seeing foreigners at that time.

I did not, however, feel at all comfortable, and whenever I saw a gendarme coming towards us my heart jumped into my mouth.

Since nothing was to be gained by my staying on, I decided, therefore, to take a bed for the night

and to leave for Clermont by the first train in the morning.

To find a room was not difficult, and I invited my friend to dine with me; but as he had to be back in barracks by eight o'clock, he was obliged to leave me afterwards in charge of some one to show me my way back to my lodging, which was at a modest café in a back street of the centre of the town.

When I got in I saw an officer reading at a table. He looked me up and down with obvious interest, and I returned him the compliment. Suddenly, to my surprise, he began to speak to me in excellent English, asking me in a free and easy style if I was an Englishman, and telling me that he had lived many years in England, and was always glad of a chance of speaking to a Britisher again.

We had quite a long chat together, and I gave him my card, and he promised to look me up some day in London. But when I got up to my room it dawned upon me that he had been skilfully cross-examining me all the time, and that our meeting was not such a chance one as it seemed to be. However, confident in the value of the visé on my *sauf conduit*, I felt no apprehension.

Still something prompted me to give instructions to be called earlier than I had at first intended, as I thought it advisable to get away before daylight.

It was still quite dark when I furtively left my lodging, and rapidly wended my way towards the

railway station. The Porte St. Paul was just being opened for the day.

To my intense relief the sentry on guard merely glanced at my papers and allowed me to pass through the frowning portal without raising any difficulty.

At the booking-office my permit secured me a ticket at once. Very few officers were about at that early hour, and apparently no one took any particular notice of me. The train was almost empty, and I got a compartment to myself.

As we steamed slowly out of the station I somehow had the feeling that I had not yet entirely done with Verdun.

CHAPTER XVI

At Clermont-en-Argonne—A little unpleasantness with a big gendarme—The quarters of the General of the 5th Corps d'Armée—The Commandant of gendarmes—Inflexibility of general; I must leave at once—A sudden diversion—The duel in the air—A measure initiated by the Germans—Exciting moment—Am "conducted to rear of troops"—St. Menéhould—Courteous gendarme officer—A friendly action—My custodian—Lunch at the hotel—A little episode—Leave St. Menéhould—Arrive Revigny—Decide break journey here and remain night—Another little episode—An unexpected meeting in the morning—A "Commissaire Special de Police"—Learn I am his prisoner—Geniality of my gaoler—The telephone message—A snapshot—Arrival Bar-le-Duc—On parole—The decision of the Conseil de Guerre at Verdun—Am to be taken back to Paris under arrest.

THE guns were booming close by, when we at length drew up at a small wayside station at the foot of a hill on which one could see the ruins of a big village. This was Clermont-en-Argonne.

There was no one to worry about my ticket, and I was hesitating as to which way to leave the station when a huge gendarme wearing a helmet came up and asked me roughly what I was doing there, and if I belonged to the village. For reply I produced my *sauf conduit*, telling him at the same time I was an Englishman.

"I don't want to see it," he said; "I'm not going to argue with you, you can't stop here, that's all I've

got to say. So you will have to get back into the train again and be off at once."

I made up my mind instantly that I was not going to get back into the train if I could help it, so I waited where I was till it had gone. Then walking up to the big man, I touched him on the arm and asked softly, "If he would be so complaisant as to direct me to the headquarters of the general?" The look on his face when he saw me still there was a picture.

"I thought I told you that you could not remain here," he almost shouted at me.

"Yes, I heard you say something about it," I replied; "but as my permit is quite in order I should at least like to show it before I leave."

At this juncture two officers came along, and asked what the trouble was about, and what I was doing there.

After examining my *sauf conduit* and asking me a few questions, they told the gendarme to take me up to the *État Major.* So he had to go with me whether he liked it or not, and I could not help laughing to myself at his discomfiture.

Up the hill towards the village we went.

The scene on either side was as busy as an ant-heap with warlike activity, and presented a *coup d'œil* that would have delighted a painter of military subjects. I could have found sufficient to fill my sketch-book several times over; but, of course, I could not stop for the merest jotting.

More than half the picturesque village was in ruins, but in one of the biggest houses which was undamaged, a seminary I think it had been before, were the quarters of the General of the 5th Corps d'Armée. I was received by the Commandant of Gendarmerie and several officers who were standing round the doorway with the utmost cordiality.

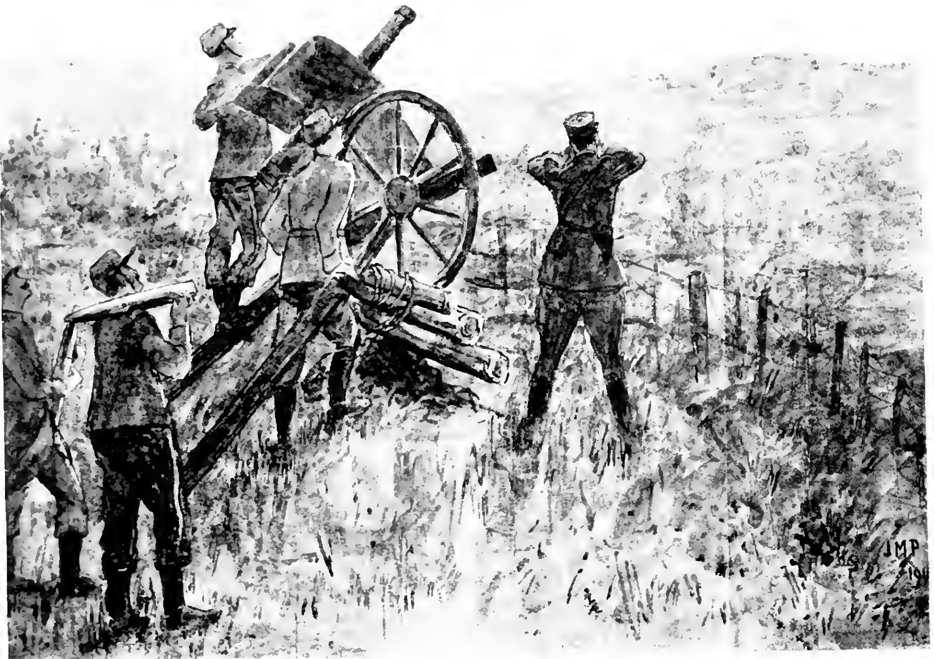
I explained to the commandant my object in coming there, and after he had examined my papers and passport he said he would take them to the general and speak to him about it. Whilst awaiting his return I had an interesting chat with the official interpreter, a young officer who had been at Oxford, and spoke English perfectly.

I was not kept long in suspense. The general's reply was courteous but inflexible. He could not allow me to remain at Clermont: I was to leave by the first train.

Suddenly the report of a gun close by was heard, and a "Taube" was seen coming over with a French biplane in hot pursuit.

A train of ammunition caissons was going by at the moment. An officer rushed out into the roadway and, holding up his hand, shouted a command.

The horses were pulled up and the whole column stood stock still—it might have been suddenly turned to stone. All the officers and men standing around me either dived into the nearest cover or remained immovable and flattened against the walls, spread-eagle fashion—and, of course, I followed suit.



AN ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUN IN ACTION

This manœuvre, I was informed, was initiated by the Germans and given out in one of their early orders to troops, " On observing an enemy aeroplane coming towards you, every movement has to be instantly stopped, and everything has to remain stationary till the machine has passed out of sight."

Meanwhile the " Taube " hovered placidly high overhead, apparently quite unperturbed by the shots from the biplane and the bursting shells from the guns. It gave one a wonderful impression of the coolness of the pilot. Unfortunately we were not long able to follow the phases of the combat, as the two machines soon went out of sight and disappeared behind the hill, but not before the " Taube " had dropped three or four bombs, which, fortunately fell among ruins, where they exploded harmlessly. For some minutes the firing of the guns became fainter and fainter, everything remaining motionless in the roadway until the sound of the duel had died away in the distance.

I learned that the interpreter was going in a car to St. Menéhould during the morning ; this was on my way back, and on my expressing the desire to accompany him instead of waiting for the train, he said he would gladly take me if the Commandant of Gendarmes had no objection to me passing through the lines.

The commandant was geniality personified, and made out a permit accordingly. It stated, however, unequivocally that I was being " conducted " to

the rear of the troops, and this was my first intimation that I was not a free agent in the matter.

It was a pleasant and interesting run, as there was plenty to see on either side of the road; but my companion was not disposed to be talkative—perhaps he was acting on instructions, so I had perforce to refrain from any comment on subjects connected with the troops we were passing. I managed, however, to "memorize" a pathetic little spectacle I witnessed.

The funeral of a soldier who had, I learned, died of his wounds in hospital. There was no coffin: the body lay on some straw in a peasant's cart and was covered with a flag. The priest was an ordinary soldier and had a surplice over his uniform. (It may be of interest to mention in this connection that thousands of erstwhile priests were serving in the army, and many of them accomplished gallant deeds in the fighting line.) Two ambulance men with reversed rifles followed the cart, and a peasant was leading the ox drawing it.

At St. Menéhould there was a slight formality to be gone through; I was handed over to the officer in command of the gendarmerie there. He was as courteous and amiable as his confrère at Clermont.

It was just upon one o'clock, "You will want some *déjeuner*," he said, "and if you will give me your parole not to talk to any one, soldier or civilian, you are at liberty to have it in the hotel where all the officers go." Of course I gave him my parole,

A SOLDIER'S FUNERAL

but pointed out it was quite unnecessary, as he could rely on my discretion. Whereat he replied significantly, "It is your business to be indiscreet, monsieur."

He then sent for a non-commissioned officer to show me the way to the hotel, giving him instructions that he was to wait for me till I had finished, and then to conduct me to the railway station, as I was to catch a certain train in the afternoon.

"I am putting you in charge of a Custom-House non-commissioned officer," he added with a friendly smile, "as I do not want to expose you to the indignity of being accompanied by a gendarme; no one will pay any attention to you thus."

My novel custodian, who turned out to be a very decent fellow, allowed me to enter the hotel by myself, and announced his intention of waiting for me in the street.

The restaurant was packed with officers, and as I could not find a seat in the main room, a table was placed for me in the entrance lounge.

There was not the slightest suggestion of any pre-arrangement in this, but I had scarcely sat down when an officer, a major I think he was, came up and asked me politely if I had any objection to his sharing my table. Of course I could not refuse, though somehow it struck me that he was not sitting with me by mere accident, and the idea that my parole was being tested irritated me to such an extent that when, as I expected, he commenced

to open a conversation he must certainly have gained a very unfavourable impression of the manners and sociability of my countrymen, as I purposely made my replies as curt as I could possibly make them.

During lunch, therefore, I had ample time to consider what my later course of action should be. Adventure is all very well if one achieves the object aimed at; but it ends by palling if you have to be constantly on the *qui vive*, and getting no "forrarder." Moreover, I was tiring just a little bit of living as it were in an atmosphere of continual suspicion.

It was now a question whether I returned to Bar-le-Duc or went back to Troyes to spend a few days there in the comfortable hotel, where I should be able to get on with my accumulation of work. I decided to toss up for it by calling "head" or "tail" to the first coin I pulled out of my pocket, and Troyes won.

After lunch, as there was no need to hurry, I sauntered slowly to the station with my guard. Evidently he had received instructions to treat me with the utmost deference, for he insisted on carrying my bag, took my ticket, found me a corner seat and waited on the platform till the train started. As far as I was aware I went on unshepherded.

At Revigny there was a wait of two hours, so, as I wanted to have a look at the place, and it was rather late, I asked the station-master whether I

might break my journey by remaining there for the night, and catching my train the following day. He made no objection, so I went to the Café-Restaurant de la Gare just outside the station to get some dinner, and found they could let me have a room.

This was fortunate, as the village was practically in ruins, and this was the only café intact. I had a stroll round after dinner, but there was very little to see beyond heaps of rubble and charred timbers; certainly nothing to induce me to prolong my stay, nor even to remain up late, so I turned in in good time.

I was undressing leisurely when I heard my door open, and turning round to see who it was entering so unceremoniously, to my astonishment I saw an officer of gendarmerie. Without beating about the bush, or apologizing for his intrusion, he walked straight over to me and said abruptly, "You have papers with you, I presume? Let me see them."

"Certainly," said I, "and with pleasure." Going over my pocket I produced all the documents which had already seen so much service, and which were now beginning to show evident signs of wear and tear.

He took them up and examined them one by one without making any comment, then to my surprise he folded them up carefully and coolly placed them in his pocket.

"They will be returned to you to-morrow," he said curtly.

"But I am leaving to-morrow morning for Troyes."

"Indeed? By what train?"

"The 9.30."

"They will be returned to you before you start. I have the honour to salute you," and with that he turned on his heels and left the room.

Needless to add, I could do nothing in the matter; I was completely helpless, but it may be imagined how irritating it was to feel that I had not got a single paper of identity on me, although I felt pretty confident that unless there was some reason for depriving me of them, they would be returned to me as promised the following morning.

Any glimmer of doubt I might have had on that score was set at rest fortunately, for at eight o'clock, as I was getting up, there was a knock at the door, and a man came in and handed me the precious documents. They were not even in an envelope, and might have been "scraps of paper" of no importance whatever. It was certainly very unconventional, especially as any one in the house might have read them, although it is true it would not have mattered very much, probably, if they had.

When I came down to my breakfast there was a smartish-looking man seated in the café reading a paper.

He hailed me with a cheery "Bon jour, Monsieur Price."

I was quite taken aback for a moment. Although I seemed to remember his face, for the life of me I could not place it. Then I suddenly recollected that I had seen him in the office of the Commandant d'Étape at Bar-le-Duc on the day when I had been given my *sauf conduit.* I had not the remotest idea who he was, but it somehow struck me at once as a remarkable coincidence that I should meet him here again of all places, and he must have noticed my surprise.

He did not leave me long in doubt, as will be seen.

"Who would have thought of meeting you here ?" said I, as he shook me cordially by the hand, and I sat down at his table to take my café-au-lait.

"Yes," he replied with a laugh, "it is rather curious. I had a sudden fancy to spend a few hours in Revigny, and see what the Boche had left of it. And you—what are you doing here ?"

"Oh, I'm going by the 9.30 to Troyes," I replied.

"Catch a later train, and we will have a pleasant morning down here together."

I told him that I had already seen all that there was to see in the place, and there was really nothing worth missing the train for.

"But if I say I should like you to stay and have lunch with me—won't you ?"

His insistence aroused my suspicions. Suddenly it flashed through my mind that perhaps his being there was not so adventitious as appeared, so I

asked him straight out if I was obliged to stay with him.

"To put it frankly—yes," he replied.

"Suppose I refuse?" I asked.

"But you will not, I am sure, when I explain the reason. You were surprised to see me?"

I admitted I was.

"Well, I may as well tell you at once that I have come expressly to ask you not to write or mention anything of what you saw in Verdun or Clermont—for the moment at any rate; there has been some misunderstanding about the *sauf conduit* given to you at Bar-le-Duc."

I naturally started to question him, and then elicited the particulars of the mystery of my arrest. It appeared, as far as I could make out, that the Commandant d'Étape forgot to tell his colonel that he had given me the permit.

My movements after leaving Bar-le-Duc had aroused suspicion. Headquarters had been communicated with, and the colonel called upon to explain on what ground I had been given a *sauf conduit.* He naturally replied that he knew nothing of it; so an order was at once telegraphed all over the district "to arrest as soon as possible a so-called English correspondent travelling with forged passport and papers."

In proof of this my friend, who turned out to be a "Commissaire Spécial de Police," produced his telegraphic instructions, which gave my age and

general description. "Of course," he added, smiling, "I know there is nothing against you, as I was present when you were given a *sauf conduit*, but I must obey orders."

"And those are?"

"To detain you here pending instructions by telephone from Verdun."

"Then I am your prisoner?" I said.

"Well," he replied amicably, "we won't put it like that. Let us say we are going to be good companions for a few hours. Now let me offer you a cigarette, and we will stroll up to the telephone office and find out if anything has come through."

It was certainly duress of the most friendly character, but I felt instinctively there was no nonsense about it, I was a *détenu* all the same.

The telephone was in the post-office, one of the very few buildings that had escaped the bombardment.

My companion went in, leaving me outside. A minute afterwards he returned and said, "No news yet, but don't wait out there—come in. It doesn't matter if you hear what I have to say, it is no secret." So I stood at the door of the telephone box.

He asked to be put through to a certain bureau in Verdun, and without any delay got through. He turned round and looked at me facetiously, as though the whole thing was a joke.

"Is that you, mon commandant? . . . Speaking . . . from Revigny. . . . I only rang you up to tell

you I've got him . . . found him here. . . . He's with me now. . . . Quite a nice fellow: I already knew him at Bar-le-Duc. . . . We are getting along capitally together . . . and he is going to lunch with me. . . . Yes, I am waiting further instructions. . . . Bon jour, mon commandant," and he put back the receiver. Then turning to me said, "Well, that's done. Now we'll have a look round the village and then go to lunch. Probably I shall get a message later and shall know when we can leave."

We lunched very leisurely, since there was no object in hurrying, and afterwards had another walk round, when some one he knew at the telegraph office, who happened to have a camera, took a snap-shot of us standing side by side.

I have often wondered whether this was merely as a friendly memento of our day spent together, or as a possible future record to be placed in the criminal archives of the Prefecture of Police!

It was late in the afternoon when my companion informed me that I was to be taken to Bar-le-Duc to await further instructions. By this time we were quite like old friends, and had passed a really very pleasant day together. Whether he had received orders to the effect, or whether it was his natural amiability, of course I could not know, but his one idea seemed to be to render my detention as little irksome as possible.

When we got to Bar-le-Duc he told me I might stay at the hotel I already knew, if I gave him my

word not to put pen to paper or speak to any one about my position; to which, of course, I agreed; and he asked me also particularly not to go too far from the hotel if I went for a walk in case he wanted me suddenly. It appeared they were waiting the decision of the Generalissimo as to what was going to be done with me; so I was, therefore, left on my own at Bar-le-Duc with the unpleasant feeling that I was no longer free—invisible chains held me.

I had been loafing about aimlessly for a couple of days, seeing my "gaoler" only occasionally, and feeling very fed up with it all, when at last he turned up and told me some one was being sent especially from Verdun to take me to Paris to get me identified at the Embassy or the Consulate, and then to the Conseil de Guerre at the Invalides. So the matter had not lost anything in importance by being delayed, and I must admit that I now began to feel just a trifle uncomfortable as to what would be the result of my adventure.

CHAPTER XVII

From Bar-le-Duc to Paris in custody—My new gaoler—His courtesy with regard to my baggage—A cheery *déjeuner*—At the station—The greatness thrust upon me—Farewell to the Commissaire Special of Police—A little memento of my duress—En route—Humorous incident—The lost revolver—Supper at Troyes—My old friend the commissaire turns up—The fateful telegram—I am described as a "German spy"—Friendship of the two men towards me—I do my custodian a good turn—Arrival Paris—"An Englishman will not break his word"—Taken to the Embassy—Sir Henry Austin Lee—At the Invalides—On parole for eight days—Major Brett the Provost Marshal—Free once more.

"I'M going to take you to lunch to-day at a little restaurant I usually go to, as I want to introduce you to your new travelling companion," said the Commissaire de Police genially, as we sat over a vermouth in the café attached to the hotel. "He's a very good fellow, and I feel sure you will get on well together."

As we waited in the restaurant for him to turn up I could not help wondering what sort of man he would be, picturing to myself a typical *agent de la sûreté*—hard and unbending, who would not be in the least likely to understand my position, and be prepared only to carry out his instructions to the very letter—when a tall, good-looking young fellow in a smart motoring costume and a heavy fur coat

came in, and spotting the commissaire came over to our table.

My anxiety as to what sort of person my new gaoler would be like was immediately dispelled, for he was as unlike one's conception of a plain clothes officer as could be imagined; and as it turned out his looks did not belie him, and my journey to Paris in his custody proved quite as pleasant a little episode as my day of detention in Revigny.

It was arranged that we should leave by a train that arrived at Paris at 4.30 in the morning, when I suddenly remembered that I had left all my baggage at Troyes.

On consulting a time-table we discovered that by going by a different route there was a stoppage at Troyes long enough for us to have supper there and get my belongings, arriving in Paris about six o'clock in the morning, a much more sensible and convenient hour; so I suggested going by the later train if it would not make any difference in the arrangements for my journey.

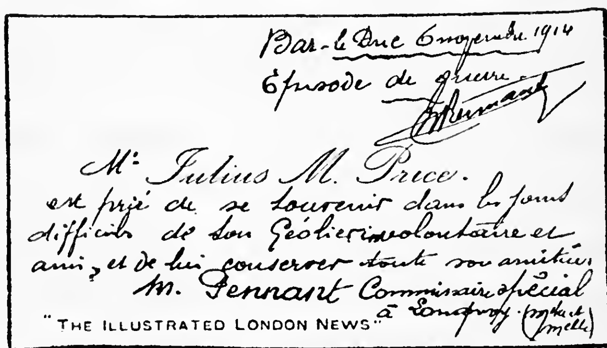
My new custodian fell in with this proposal without the slightest demur, in fact, he was so nice about it in his evident desire to please me, that I could not help contrasting in my mind his courtesy with my experiences on one or two of the similar occasions I have described.

Our *déjeuner* turned out quite a cheery little affair, and the excellence of the food and the wine helped considerably to make it rather a festive event

than a prelude to a very serious matter. No reference whatever was made to my position, or what was likely to happen at the end of my journey, and we finished up with coffee, liqueurs, and cigars in quite the usual friendly fashion.

At the station I had a lively feeling of the greatness that had been thrust upon me: a first-class compartment with the blinds drawn down had been reserved for me, while pacing the platform in front of it was a sentry with rifle and fixed bayonet.

Of course the commissaire came to see us off, and I believe he was genuinely sorry to see me go, as we had become quite *camarade* during the few days we had known each other, and the friendly words he scribbled on my card at parting remain an interesting memento of a few days in the hands of a very courteous gaoler.


Bar-le-Duc 6 novembre 1914
Episode de guerre
Mr Julius M. Price.
est prié de se souvenir dans les jours difficiles de son Geôlier involontaire et ami, et de lui conserver toute son amitié.
M. Pennant Commissaire spécial à Longwy (Meurthe et Moselle)

"THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS"

As soon as we were started my companion said, "There is no reason why we should not have as

pleasant journey as possible," and suiting action to words, he proceeded to divest himself of his heavy fur coat and a huge revolver he carried on his belt, placing the revolver carefully on the rack just over his head.

This quite ordinary occurrence would not be worth mentioning, but for what happened a little further on when we had to change trains. We had scarcely settled down in our new carriage when my companion discovered he had forgotten his revolver.

Of course, he was very much annoyed, as it appeared it was a brand new service one, and at the next stop he rushed out and telephoned to intercept the other train. But he never got his revolver back again. In those early days of the war it was far too useful a "find."

The humorous side of the incident particularly struck me, and while condoning with him on his loss, I could not refrain from pulling his leg; assuring him on my word of honour he had nothing to fear from me, notwithstanding my knowledge that he was unarmed and that I was a desperate man, prepared to stick at nothing!

We had over two hours to wait at Troyes, so there was ample time to go to the hotel, have supper as arranged, and collect my baggage.

We were halfway through the meal when the proprietor came in and told me that my old friend the Commissaire de Police was outside, and wished

to speak to me privately on a most urgent matter, and would I come to him at once.

It struck me as curious that he should have got to know I had arrived in Troyes, considering I had only been there about a quarter of an hour. However, I told my companion what a good friend of mine he was, and asked if he would mind my inviting him to come in and join us, to which he readily agreed.

I found the commissaire waiting in the corridor with an open telegram in his hand. He seemed somewhat constrained in his manner, and not so pleased to see me as I had expected him to be.

"I regret to interrupt your supper, but I have something most pressing to tell you," he said, without even offering to shake hands with me.

"Oh, never mind that," I replied; "you had better come in and tell me whatever you have to say in front of my companion—or, rather, my gaoler."

"What do you say, your gaoler?" he repeated in surprise. I then in a few words told him what had happened to me, and how I came to be in Troyes.

"How extraordinary!" he ejaculated: "this is what I have come to see you about;" and then he handed me the telegram. "Read that," he said; and in it I read that he was instructed to arrest me at once if I came that way. In the wire I was described as *Julius M. Rice, a German spy, travelling with forged English passport and papers.*

"I warned you what would happen if you would persist in going where you had no right to go," he said, with the first gleam of a smile.

Then he came in with me, and I introduced him to my companion, and they talked over the whole business as confrères.

"Of course," said my Troyes friend, "I know that Mr. Price is neither German nor a spy." And my travelling companion acquiesced, saying, that of course everything would turn out all right; that he personally was quite enjoying the journey, and that he hoped he was not making it too irksome for me, as he had received official instructions to treat me with every possible consideration.

Then when the time came to return to the station, the hotel porter being away, the two of them insisted on carrying my luggage between them to the train, where I was again put into a first-class compartment with the blinds drawn.

This little interlude had the natural effect of putting my companion and myself on still more friendly terms than before, and as we went along I learned from him that he had only been married just before the war broke out, and had spent but a few days with his wife when he had had to leave her to go to Verdun on service, and had not been able to see her since.

This trip to Paris was, therefore, a big stroke of unexpected good fortune for him, and he had wired her that he was coming home, and was eagerly

looking forward to spending a day with her; but he only had forty-eight hours' leave, and would not have much time to spare after he had done with me.

This confession of his suggested to me a way of doing him a turn, for he was really a very nice young fellow, and had done his utmost to be agreeable to me; so I asked him point blank what he proposed doing when we reached Paris, and he replied that, of course, he would have to remain with me until he had carried out all his instructions and handed me over finally to the officials at the Invalides.

"Well," I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do if you will agree to it. You would, I know, like to go straight away to your wife, since every hour counts. I propose staying in my usual quarters in the Rue Tronchet; if you care to trust me, I give you my word that I will go straight there from the Gare de l'Est, and wait for you until you come to fetch me during the morning."

He looked positively delighted at the suggestion, and I could see he was genuinely grateful to me for having thought of him. After a moment's hesitation, as though weighing in his mind whether he dared take the risk, he said, "Yes, I will trust you. I know you are an Englishman, and an Englishman will not break his word."

So it was arranged: I went to my hotel, and at ten o'clock he turned up to take me to the Embassy to be identified.

The Ambassador happened to be away, and I

sent in my card, and we were received by Sir Henry Austin Lee, to whom I was already known. He was naturally very much surprised when I told him of my predicament, and who it was accompanied me, and for what purpose I had been brought to the Embassy.

Turning to my companion, Sir Henry, without a moment's hesitation, made some very complimentary remarks in reference to my identification, which I will not repeat. He then gave me a letter of introduction to a French Staff Officer at the Invalides, who could, he said, help me out of my trouble if the authorities did not take too serious a view of my escapade.

At the Invalides the letter had a magic effect, and I was told I should be released provisionally on my signing an undertaking giving my *parole d'honneur* not to let a written or spoken word escape me for eight days, on anything I had seen or heard in Verdun. Needless to add I signed this unhesitatingly.

I spent the time working up some sketches and writing a short narrative of my adventure, which I took to the Invalides to be censored when the eight days had expired.

No difficulty whatever was made in passing them, and the official censor's stamps were duly affixed. I was then taken to the office of Major Brett, the Provost Marshal, for the addition of the British stamps. Then I was free.

As I was about to leave the room Major Brett

asked me if I had made any plans for my future movements. I replied that I had thought of going to the English front. He looked at me for a moment, and then said grimly—

"I wouldn't if I were you—unless you are looking for more trouble!"

It was just over four months since I'd left Paris, and feeling a bit "fed-up" with adventure for the moment, I took the hint.

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