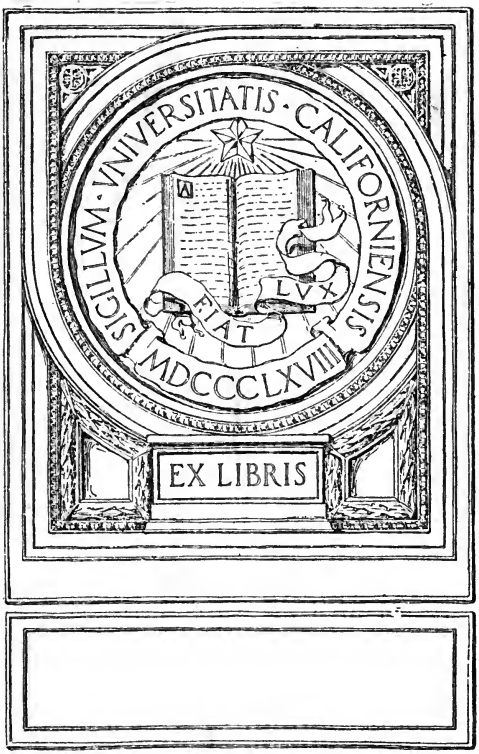
ROUND ABOUT BAR-LE-DUC

SUSANNE R. DAY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BY

SUSANNE R. DAY

AUTHOR OF "THE AMAZING PHILANTHROPISTS," ETC.

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TO

CAROL

FOR WHOSE EYES

THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN

PREFACE

TO CAROL

DEAR, you asked me to write for you the story of my work and adventures in France, and through all the agonising hours of incubation and parturition you have given me your unfailing sympathy, encouragement and help. You have even chastened me (it was a devastating hour!) for my—and, I believe, for the book's—good, and when we discovered that the original form—that of intimate personal letters written directly to you—did not suit the subject matter, you acquiesced generously in a change, the need for which I, at least, shall ever deplore.

And now that the last words have been written and Finis lies upon the page, I know how short it all falls of my ideal and how unworthy it is of your high hope of me. And yet I dare to offer it to you, knowing that what is good in it is yours, deep delver that you are for the gold that lies—somewhere—in every human heart.

Twenty months in the war zone ought, one would imagine, to have provided me with countless hair-breadth escapes, thrills, and perhaps even shockers with which to regale you, but the adventures are all those of other people, an occasional flight to a cellar in a raid being all we could claim of danger. And so,

instead of being a book about English women in France, it is mainly a book about French women in their own country, and therein lies its chief, if not its only claim to merit.

Humanness was the quality which above all others you asked for, and if it possesses that I shall know it has not been written in vain.

SUSANNE R. DAY.

London,
January 1918.

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ROUND ABOUT BAR-LE-DUC

CHAPTER I

MAINLY INTRODUCTORY

Relief Work in the War Zone. It did sound exciting. No wonder I volunteered, but, oh dear! great was the plenitude of my ignorance. I vaguely understood that we were to distribute clothes and rabbits, kitchen utensils, guano and other delectable necessaries to a stricken people, but not that we were to wear a uniform and that the uniform would be made "by post." If I had there might never have been a chapter to write nor a tale to tell.

That uniform!—shall I ever forget it? Or the figure I cut when I put it on? Of course, like any sensible female woman, I wanted to have it made by my own tailor and in my own way. Strict adherence to the general scheme, of course, with reasonable modification to suit the individual. But Authority said NO. Only by one man and in one place could that uniform be made. Frankly sceptical at first, I am now a devout believer. For it was certainly unique; perhaps in strict truth I ought to say that several specimens of it were unique. There was one—but this is a modest tale told by a modest woman. Stifle curiosity, and

be content with knowing that the less cannot contain the greater. And then let us go hence and ponder upon the sweet reasonableness of man, or at least of one man who, when asked to produce the uniform hats, replied, "But what for, Madam?"

"Well, to try on, of course."

"Try on? Why ever should you want to do that?"

Perhaps you won't believe this? But it is true.

Oh, the agonies of those last days of preparation, and the heartrending impossibility of getting any really useful or practical information about an outfit!

"Wear pyjamas, a mess-tin, and a water-bottle. And of course you must have a sleeping-bag and a bath."

This was at least encouraging. Were we going to sleep *à la belle étoile*, a heap of stones our pillow, our roof the sky? You can imagine how I thrilled. But there was the bath. Even in France. . . . I relinquished the stars with a sigh and realised that Authority was talking learnedly about the uniform, talking swiftly, confidently, assuredly, and as I listened conviction grew that once arrayed in it every difficulty and danger would melt away, and the French nation prostrate itself before my blushing feet in one concentrated desire to pay homage and assist. One danger certainly melted away, but, alas! it took Romance with it. As a moral life-belt that uniform has never been equalled.

And then there was the kit-bag. Ye gods, I KNOW that villainous thing was possessed of the devil. From the day I found it, lying a discouraged heap upon my bedroom floor, to the day when it tucked itself on board ship in direct defiance of my orders and invited the

Germans to come and torpedo it—which they promptly did—it never ceased to annoy. It lost its key in Paris, and on arrival at Sermaize declined to allow itself to be opened. It was dumped in my "bedroom" (of which more later), the lock was forced, Sermaize settled itself to slumber. I proceeded to unpack, plunged in a hand and drew forth—a pair of blue serge trousers.

Wild yells for help brought Sermaize to my door. What the owner of the trousers thought when his broken-locked bag was flung back upon him, history does not relate. He had opened what he thought was HIS bag, so possibly he was beyond speech. He was a shy young man and he had never been in France before.

If the thing—the bag, I mean, not the shy young man—had been pretty or artistic one might have forgiven it all its sins. Iniquity should always be beautiful. But that bag was plain, *mais d'une laideur effroyable.* Just for all the world like a monstrous obscene sausage, green with putrefaction and decay. What I said when I tried to pack is not fit for a young and modest ear. I planted it on its hind legs, seized a pair of boots, tried to immure them in its depths, slipped and fell into it head foremost. It was then the devil chuckled. I heard him. He had been waiting, you see—he knew.

It is some consolation that a certain not-to-be-named friend was not on the hotel steps as I stole forth that torrid June morning. Every imp of the thousand that possess her would have danced with glee. How she would have laughed: for there I was, the not-to-be-tried-on-uniform-hat, a grotesque little inverted

pudding-bowl of a thing, perched like a fungoid growth on the top of my head, the uniform itself hanging blanket-like about my shrinking form (it was heavy enough for the arctic regions), a water-bottle which had refused point-blank to go into the kit-bag hanging over one shoulder, and a bulging brown knapsack jutting blasphemously from my back. What a vision! Tartarin of Tarascon climbing the Alps with an ironmonger's shop on his back fades ignominiously in comparison. But then I wasn't just climbing commonplace tourist-haunted Alps. I was going "to the Front." At least, so my family said when making pointed and highly encouraging remarks about my will. That the "Front" in question was twenty miles from a trench was a mere detail. Why go to the War Zone if you don't swagger? I swaggered. Not much, you know—just the faintest æsthetic suspicion of a swagger, and then. . . . Then Nemesis fell—fell as I passed a mirror, and saw. . . . I crawled on all fours into France.

I crawled on all fours into Paris. Think of it, PARIS! No wonder French women murmured, "Mais, Mademoiselle, vous êtes très devouée." I am a modest woman (I have mentioned this before, but it bears repetition), but whenever I thought of that uniform I believed them.

If Paris had not been at war she would probably have arrested me at the Douane, and I should have deserved it. Fancy insulting her by wearing such clothes, and on such a night—a clear, purple, perfect summer night, when she lay like a fairy city caught in the silvery nets of the moon. And yet there was a strange, ominous hush over it all. The city lying quiet and, oh, so still!

It seemed to be waiting, waiting, a cup from which the wine had been poured upon the red floor of war.

Wandering along the deserted quays, wondering what the morrow would bring. . . . What a night that was, the sheer exquisite beauty of it! The Conciergerie dark against the sky, the gleaming path of the river, and then the Louvre and the Tuileries all hushed to languorous, passionate beauty in the arms of the moon.

Don't you love Paris, every stone of her? I do. But I was not allowed to stay there. Inexorable Fate sent me the next morning in a taxi and a state of excusable excitement to the Gare de l'Est, where, kit-bag, mess-tin, water-bottle and all, I was immured in the Paris-Nancy express and borne away through a morning of glittering sunshine to Vitry-le-François, there to be deposited upon the platform and in the arms of a grey-coated and becomingly-expectant young man.

CHAPTER II

EN ROUTE—SERMAIZE-LES-BAINS

I

LIKE Bartley Fallon of immortal memory, "if there's any ill luck at all in the world, 'tis on meself it falls." Needless to say, I was not allowed to remain in the arms of that nice young man; and indeed, to give him his due, he showed no overwhelming desire to keep me there. The embodiment of all Quakerly propriety, he conducted me with befitting ceremony to the station just as the sun began to drop down the long hills of the sky, and sent me forth once more, this time with a ticket for Sermaize-les-Bains in my pocket. My proverbial luck held good—that is to say, bad. The train was an OMNIBUS. Do you know what that means? No? Then I shall tell you. It is the philosopher of locomotion, the last thing in, the final triumph of, thoughtful, leisurely progression. Its phlegm is sheerly imperturbable, its serenity of that large-souled order which cataclysms cannot ruffle nor revolutions disturb. A destination? It shrugs its shoulder. Yes, somewhere, across illimitable continents, across incalculable æons of time. The world is beautiful, haste the expression of a vulgar age. To travel hopefully is to arrive. It hopes. Eventually, if God is good, it arrives.

And so did we, after long consultative visits to small

wayside stations, and after much meditative meandering through sunset-coloured lands. Arrived—ah, can you wonder at it?—with just a little catch in our throats and a shamed mistiness of vision, for had we not seen, there in that little clump of undergrowth outside the wood, a lonely cross, fenced with a rustic paling, an old red mouldering *képi* hanging on the point? And then in the field another . . . and again another . . . mute, pitiful, inspiring witnesses of the grim tragedy of war.

And then came Sermaize, once a thriving little town, a thing of streets and HOMES, of warm firelit rooms where the great game of Life was played out day by day, where the stakes were Love and Laughter, and Success and Failure and Death, where men and women met, it might be on such a night as this—a night to dream in and to love, a night when the slow pulse of the Eternal Sea beat quietly upon the ear—met to tell the age-old story while the world itself stood still to listen, and out of the silence enchantment grew, and old standards and old values passed away and a new Heaven and a new Earth were born.

Once a thing of streets and homes! Ah, there lies the real tragedy of the ruined village. Bricks and mortar? Yes. You may tell the tale to the last ultimate sou if you will, count it all up, mark it all down in francs and centimes, tell me that here in one brief hour the Germans did so much damage, destroyed so many thousand pounds worth of property, ground such and such an ancient monument to useless powder, but who can count the cost, or appraise the value of the things which no money can buy, that only human lives can pay for?

One ruined village is exactly like every other ruined village you may say with absolute truth, and yet be wrong. A freak of successful destruction here, a fantastic failure there, may give a touch of individuality, even a hint of the grotesque. That tall chimney, how oddly it leans against the sky. That archway standing when everything about it is rubble and dust. That bit of twisted iron-work, writhing like an uncouth monster, that stairway climbing ridiculously into space. Yes, they are all alike, these villages, and all heartrendingly different. For each has its hidden story of broken lives to tell, of human hopes and human ambitions dashed remorselessly to earth, of human friendships severed, of human loves torn and bleeding, trampled under the red heel of war. Lying there in the moonlight, Sermaize possessed an awful dignity. In life it may have been sordid and commonplace, in death, wrapped in the silver shroud of the moon, it was sublime.

As we passed through the broken piles of masonry and brick- and iron-work every inch of the road throbbed with its history, the ruins became infused with life and—was it phantasy? a trick of the night? of the dream-compelling moon?—out of the dark shadows came the phantoms of men and women and little children, their eyes wide with fear and longing, their empty hands outstretched. . . .

Home! They cried the word aloud, and the night was filled with their crying.

And so we passed. Looking back now, I think the dominant emotion of the moment was one of rage, of blind, impotent, ravening fury against the senseless cruelty that could be guilty of such a thing. For the destruction of Sermaize-les-Bains was not a grim

necessity of war. It was a sacrifice to the pride of the All-Highest.

In a heat that was sheerly tropical the battle had raged to and fro. The Grande Place had been torn to atoms by the long-range German guns, then came hand-to-hand fighting in the streets, and the Germans in possession. The inhabitants, terrified, for the most part fled to the woods. Some remained, but among them unfortunately not the Mayor. He had gone away early in the morning. He was, perhaps, a simple-minded person. He cannot have realised how inestimable a privilege it is to receive a German Commandant in the "Town Hall" he has just blown to infinitesimal fragments. It may even be—though it is difficult to believe it—that, conscious of the privilege, he yet dared to despise it. Whatever the reason the fact remains—he was not there. What an insult to German pride, what a blow to German prestige! No wonder the Commandant strode into the street and in a voice trembling with righteous indignation gave the order, "Pillage and Fire."

Oh, it was a merry game that, and played to a magnificent finish. The houses were stripped as human ghouls stripped the dead upon Napoleonic battlefields; glass, china, furniture, pictures, silver, heirlooms cherished through many a generation, it was a glorious harvest, and what was not worth the gleaning was piled into heaps and burned.

There are certain pastilles, innocent-looking things like a man's coat button, round and black, with a hole in the middle. They say the German army came into France with strings of them round their necks, for in the German army every contingency is provided for,

every destructive device supplied even to the last least ultimate detail. Its organisers take no risks. They never throw the dice with Chance. Luck? They don't believe in luck. They believe in efficiency and careful scientific preparation, in clean-cut work, with no tags or loose ends of humanity hanging from it. The human equation is merely a cog upon the machine, and yet it is the one that is going to destroy them in the end.

So they brought their pastilles into France just as they brought their expert packers to ensure the safe transit into Germany of all perishable loot. And if ever you see some of those pastilles framed at Selfridge's and ask yourself if they could really be effective—they are so small, so very harmless-looking—remember Sermaize and the waste of charred rubbish lying desolate under the moon. Some one—I think Maurice Genevoix, in *Sous Verdun*—tells how, in the early days of war, French soldiers were sometimes horrified to see a bullet-stricken German suddenly catch fire, become a living torch, blazing, terrible. At first they were quite unable to account for it. You see, they didn't know about the pastilles then. Later, when they did, they understood. I was told in Sermaize that a German aeroplane, flying low over the roofs, sprayed them with petrol that day. If true, it was quite an unnecessary waste of valuable material. The pastilles were more than equal to the occasion. But so was the French hotel-keeper who, coming back when the Germans had commenced their long march home, and finding his house in desiccated fragments, promptly put up a rough wooden shelter, and hung out his sign-board, " Café des Ruines ! "

II

No one should go to Sermaize without paying a visit to M. le Curé. He stayed with his people till his home was tumbling about his ears, and even then he hung on, in the cellar. Driven out by fire, he collected such fugitives as were at hand and helped them through the woods to a place of safety. Of the events and incidents of that flight, of the dramatic episodes of the bombardment and subsequent fighting—there was a story of a French officer, for instance, who came tumbling into the cellar demanding food and drink in the midst of all the hell, and who devoured both, M. le Curé confessing that his own appetite at the moment was not quite up to its usual form, howitzer shells being a poor substitute for, shall we say, a gin-and-bitters?—it is not for me to speak. He has told the tale himself elsewhere, and if in the telling he has been half as witty, as epigrammatic, as vivid and as humorous as he was when he lectured in the Common-room at Sermaize, then all I can say is, buy the book even if you have to pawn your last pair of boots to find the money for it.

A rare type, M. le Curé. An intellectual, once the owner and lover (the terms are, unhappily, not always synonymous) of a fine library, now in ashes, a man who could be generous even to an ungenerous foe, and remind an audience—one member, at least, of which was no Pacifist—that according to the German code the Mayor should have remained in the town, and that he, M. le Curé, had been able to collect no evidence of cruelty to, or outrage upon, an individual.

That lecture is one of the things that will live in

my memory. For the Curé was not possessed of a library of some two thousand volumes for nothing, and whatever his Bishop's opinion may be on the subject, I take leave to believe that Anatole France, De Maupassant, Verlaine and Baudelaire jostled many a horrified divine upon the shelves. For his style was what a sound knowledge of French literature had made it. He could dare to be improper—oh, so deliciously, subtly improper! A word, a tone, a gesture—a history. And his audience? Well, I mustn't tell you about that, and perhaps the sense of utter incongruity was born entirely of my own imagination. But to hear him describe how he spent the night in a crowded railway-station waiting-room where many things that should be decently hidden were revealed, and where he, a respectable celibate divine, shared a pallet with dames of varying ages and attractiveness . . . and. . . . The veil just drawn aside fell down again upon the scene, and English propriety came to its own with a shudder.

Yes, if you are wise you will visit M. le Curé. And ask him to tell you how he disguised himself as a drover, and how, when in defiance of all authority he came back to Sermaize, he himself swept and cleaned out the big room which the Germans had used as a hospital, and which they had befouled and filthied, leaving vessels full of offal and indescribable loathlinesses, where blood was thick on walls and floor; a room that stank, putrid, abominable. It was German filth, and German beastliness, and French women, their hearts still hot within them, would not touch it.

And ask him to tell you how nearly he was killed by a shell which fell on an outhouse in which he was taking shelter, and how he was called up, and as a soldier of

France was told to lead a horse to some village whose name I have forgotten, and how he, who hardly knew one end of a horse from another, led it, and on arriving at the village met an irate officer.

"And what are you doing here?"

"I do not know."

"Your regiment?"

"I haven't one."

"And the horse?"

A shrug, what indeed of the horse?

Three days later he was wearing his cassock again.

Once, when escaping from Sermaize he was nearly shot by some French soldiers. There were only a few of them, and their nerves had been shattered. Nerves do give way sometimes when an avalanche sweeps over them, and the Germans came into France like a thousand avalanches. And so these poor wretches, separated from their regiment, fled. It was probably the wisest thing they could do under the circumstances. "Sauve qui peut." There are few cries more terrible than that. But a village lay in the line of flight, and in the village there was good red wine. It was a hot day, France was lost, Paris capitulating, and man a thirsty animal. A corporal rescued M. le Curé when his back was against the wall and rifles, describing wild circles, were threatening him; finally, the nerveless ones went back to their regiment and fought gloriously for France, and Paris did not capitulate after all.

III

With a howl of bitter anguish Tante Joséphine collapsed upon the ground, and the earth shook. For

Tante Joséphine was fat, and her bones were buried beyond all hope of recovery under great pendulous masses of quivering, perspiring flesh. And she had walked, *mais, pensez donc !*—walked thousands of accursed miles through the woods, she had tripped over roots, she had been hoisted over banks, she had crashed like an avalanche down trenches and drains. She was no longer a woman, she was a bath—behold the perspiration !—she was an ache, *mon Dieu !* not one, but five million villainous aches; she was a lurid fire of profanity. For while she, Tante Joséphine, walked and fell and "larded the green earth," Grandmère lay in the *brouette* and refused to be evicted. At first Tante Joséphine tried to get in too. Surely the war which had worked so many miracles would transform her into a telescope, but the war was unkind, and Pierre, *pauvre petit gosse !* had been temporarily submerged in a sea of agitated fat from which he had been rescued with difficulty. And Grandmère was only eighty-two, whereas she, Tante Joséphine, was sixty.

All day long her eyes had turned to the *brouette*, and to Grandmère lying back like a queen. No, she could bear it no longer. If she did not ride she would die, or be taken by the Germans, and her blood would be on Grandmère's head, and shadowed by remorse would be all that selfish woman's days. The wood resounded with the bellowings, and the green earth trembled because Tante Joséphine, as she sat on it, trembled with wrath and fatigue and desolation and woe.

Grandmère stirred in the *brouette*. At eighty-two one is not so active as one was at twenty, but one isn't old, *ma foi !* Père Bronchot was old. He would be ninety-four at Toussaint, but she—oh, she could still

show that big soft thing of a Tante Joséphine what it was to be a woman of France. She was always a weakling, was Joséphine, fit only for pasturage. And so behold the quivering mountain ludicrously piling itself upon the *brouette*, Pierre, a pensive look in his eye, standing by the while. He staggered as he caught up the handles. The chariot swayed ominously. The mountain became a volcano spurting forth fire. The chariot steadied, and then very slowly resumed its way. Half a kilomètre, three-quarters, a whole. Grandmère was strangely silent, for at eighty-two one is not so young as one was at twenty, and kilomètres grow strangely long as the years go by.

Tante Joséphine snored. Pierre ceased to push.

"Allons, Allons. Pierre, que veux-tu? Is it that the Germans shall catch us and make of you a stew for their supper?" Tante Joséphine had wakened up.

"I am tired."

"Ah, paresseux." The volcano became active again.

Pierre looked at Grandmère. How old she was! And why did she look so white as she trailed her feet bravely through the wood?

"Grandmère is ill. She must ride!"

What Tante Joséphine said the woods have gathered to their breast. Pierre became pensive, then he smiled. "Eh, bien. En route."

The kilomètre becomes very long when one is eighty-two, but Grandmère was a daughter of France. Her head was high, her eye steadfast as she plodded on, taking no notice of the way, never seeing the deep drain that ran beside the path. But Pierre saw it. He must have, because he saw everything. He was made

that way. And that is why Tante Joséphine has never been able to understand why she dreamed she was rolling down a precipice with a railway train rolling on top of her, and wakened to find herself deep in the soft mould at the bottom of the drain, the *brouette* reclining on—well, on the highest promontory of her coast-line, while Pierre and Grandmère peered over the top with the eyes of celestial explorers who look down suddenly into hell.

So and in such wise was the manner of their going. Of the return Tante Joséphine does not speak. For a time they hid in the woods, other good Sermaizians with them. How did they live? Ah, don't ask me that! They existed, somehow, as birds and squirrels exist, perhaps, and then one day they said they were going home. I am not at all sure that the authorities wanted to have them there. For only a handful of houses remained, and though many a cellar was still intact under the ruins, cellars, considered as human habitation, may, without undue exaggeration, be said to lack some of the advantages of modern civilisation. How was Tante Joséphine, how were the stained and battered scarecrows that accompanied her to provide for themselves during the winter? Would broken bricks make bread? Would fire-eaten iron-work make a blanket? Authority might protest, Sermaizians did not care. They crept into the cellars that numbed them to the very marrow on cold days, living like badgers and foxes in their dark, comfortless holes, enduring bitter cold and terrible privation, lacking food and clothes and fire and light, but telling themselves that they were at home and sucking good comfort from the telling.

Needless to say, there weren't nearly enough cellars to go round, and direful things might have happened but for a lucky accident. Hidden in the woods about a mile from the town was an old Hydropathic Establishment, known as La Source, which had escaped the general destruction. Into it, regardless of its dirt and its bleak, excessive discomfort swarmed some three hundred of the *sinistrés*, there to huddle the long winter away.

As an example of its special attractions, let me tell you of one woman who lived with her two children in a tiny room, the walls of which streamed with damp, which had no fireplace, no heating possibilities of any kind, and whose sole furniture consisted of a barrow and one thin blanket.

From the point of view of the Relief worker an ideal case. Beautiful misery, you know. It could hardly be surpassed.

A Society—a very modest Society; it has repeatedly warned me that it dislikes publicity, so I heroically refrain from mentioning its name[1]—swept down upon the ruins early in 1915, and taking possession of one of the buildings at La Source, made the theatre its Common-room, the billiard-room its bedroom, and a top-loft a general dumping-ground, whose contents included a camp bed but no sheets, a tin basin and jug, an apologetic towel and, let me think—I can't remember a dressing-table or a mirror. It was a very modest Society, you remember, and the sum of its vanity——? Well, it perpetrated the uniform. Let it rest in peace.

Wherefore and because of which things a grey-clad

[1] It has, nevertheless, done work of inestimable value in France, in Serbia and in Russia.

apparition, moving through the moonlight like some hideous spectre of woe, arrived that warm June night at La Source, and was ushered into a room where innumerable people were drinking cocoa, rushing about, talking—ye gods, how they talked!—smoking. . . . I was more frightened than I have ever been in my life. I am not used to crowds, and to my fevered imagination every unit was a battalion. Then because I was hotter and thirstier than a grain of sand in a sun-scorched desert, cocoa was thrust upon me—*cocoa!* I drank it, loathing it, and wondered why everybody seemed to be drinking out of the same mug.

Then a young man seized my kit-bag. "Come along." My hair began to rise. I had been prepared for a great deal, but this. . . . I looked at the young man, he looked at me. The situation, at all events, did not lack piquancy! It was indeed a Sentimental Journey that I was making, and Sterne. . . . But the inimitable episode was not to repeat itself. My only room-mate was a bat.

CHAPTER III

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

I

SERMAIZE, however, was not to be the scene of my future labours. The honour was reserved for Bar-le-Duc, the captial city of the Meuse, the seat of a Prefecture, and proud manufacturer of a very special jam. "Confitures de Bar-le-Duc." The mouth waters at the very thought of it, but desire develops a limp when you have seen the initial processes of manufacture; for these consist in the removal by means of a finely-cut quill of every pip from every currant about to be boiled in the sacrifical pan. As you go through the streets in July you see white and crimson patches on the ground. They look disgustingly like something that has been chewed and spumed forth again. They are the discarded currant pips, for only the skin and pulp are made into jam.

This unpipping (have we any adequate translation for *épepiner ?*), paid for at the rate of about four sous a pound, is sometimes carried on under the cleanliest of home conditions, but occasionally one sees a group of women at work round a table that makes jam for the moment the least appetising of comestibles. Nevertheless, if the good God ever places a pot of Confiture de Bar-le-Duc upon your table, eat it; eat it *à la Russe*

with a spoon—don't insult it with bread—and you will become a god with nectar on your lips.

There were about four thousand refugees in Bar. That is why I was there too. And before I had been ten minutes in the town a hard-voiced woman said, "Would you please carry those *seaux hygiéniques* (sanitary pails) upstairs?" So much for my anticipatory thrills. If I ever go to heaven I shall be put in the back garden.

À la guerre, comme à la guerre. I carried the pails—a work of supererogation as it subsequently transpired, for they all had to be brought down again promptly, so heavily were they in demand.

For the sanitation of Bar-le-Duc has yet to be born.[1] One can't call arrangements that date from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries sanitation, one can only call them self-advertisement. Until I went to Bar I never knew that the air could be solid with smell. One might as well walk up a sewer as up the Rue de l'Horloge on a hot day. Every man, woman and child in the town ought to have died of diphtheria, typhoid, septic poisoning, of a dozen gruesome diseases long ago. If smells could kill, Bar would be as depopulated as the Dead Cities of the Zuyder Zee. But the French seem to thrive on smells, though in all fairness I must admit that once or twice a grumble reached me. But that was when the cesspool under the window was discharging its contents into the yard.

The hard-voiced woman was hygienically mad. She imported a Sanitary Inspector, an ironic anomaly,

[1] It is only fair to add that the whole question was under serious consideration when the war broke out, and made reform, for the moment, impossible.

who used to blush apoplectically through meals because she would discuss the undiscussable with him. "I hope you are not squeamish? We don't mind these things here," she said to me. "It is so stupid to be a prude."

Frankly, I could have slain that woman. She wasn't fit to live. The climax came on a broiling day when we were all exhausted and not a little sick from heat and smell. She pleasingly entertained us at dinner with a graphic description of a tubercular hip which she had been dressing. There was a manure heap outside the window of the sick child's room. It crawled with flies. So did the room. So did the hip.

She went back to the native sphere she should never have left a few days later, but in the meantime she had obsessed us all with a firm belief in the value of the *seau hygiénique*. Every refugee family should have one. Our first care must be to provide it. The obsession drove us into strange difficulties, as, for example, once in a neighbouring village where, trusting to my companion to keep the kindly but inquisitive Curé who accompanied us too deeply engaged in conversation to hear what I was saying, I asked the mother of a large family if she would like us to give her one.

"Qu'est que c'est? What did you say?"

Gentle as my murmur had been, M. le Curé was down on me like a shot. The woman who hesitates is lost. Anything is better than embarrassment. I repeated the question.

"Ce n'est pas nécessaire. Il y a un jardin," was his electrifying reply, and we filed out after him, with new

ideas on French social questions simmering in our heads.

More embarrassing still, though, was a visit to a dear old couple living high up in a small room in a narrow fœtid street. Madame Legrand was a dear, with a round chubby face and the brightest of blue eyes, a complexion like a rosy apple and dimples like a girl's. She wore a spotlessly white mob-cap with a coquettish little frill round it, and she was just as clean and as fresh and as sonsy as if she had stepped out of her little cottage to go to Mass. Her husband was a rather picturesque creature, with a crimson cummerbund round his waist. He had been a *garde-forêt*, and together they had saved and scraped, living frugally and decently, putting money by every year until at last they were able to buy a cottage and an acre or two of land. Then the war came and the Germans, and the cottage was burnt, and the poor old things fled to Bar-le-Duc, homeless and beggared, possessed of nothing in all the world but just the clothes on their backs.

The *garde-forêt* was talking to my companion. I broached the all-important subject to Madame.

"Vous avez un seau hygiénique?" (I admit it was vilely put.)

"Mais oui, Mademoiselle. Voulez-vous...?" Before I could stop her she had flourished it out upon the floor. It seems there are no limits to French hospitality, but there are to what even a commonplace English woman can face with stoical calm. Lest worse befall we fled. Somehow our sanitary researches lacked enthusiasm after that.

II

"Bar-le-Duc, an ancient and historical city of the Meuse, is beautifully situated on the banks of the Ornain."

That, of course, is how I should have commenced Chapter III, and then, with Baedekered solemnity, have described its streets, its canals, its railway-station—a dull affair until a bomb blew its glass roof to fragments, when it became quaintly skeletonic—its woods and hills, its churches and its monuments.

Only I never do anything quite as I ought to, and my capacity for getting into mischief is unlimited. I can't bear the level highways of Life, cut like a Route Nationale straight from point to point, white, steam-rollered, respectable, horrible. For me the by-ways and the lanes, the hedges smelling of wild roses and woodbine, or a-fire with berry and burning leaf, the cross-cuts leading you know not whither, but delightfully sure to surprise you in the end. What if the surprise is sometimes in a bog, in the mire, or in a thicket of furze? More often than not it is in Fairyland.

And so grant me your indulgence if I wander a little, loitering in the green meadows, plunging through the dim woods of experience. Especially as I am going to be good now and explain Bar and the refugees.

As I told you, there were some four thousand of them, from the Argonne, the Ardennes, Luxembourg, and many a frontier village such as Longuyon or Longwy. And Bar received them coldly. It dubbed them, without

distinction of person, "ces sales émigrés," forgetting that the dirt and squalor of their appearance was due to adversity and not to any fault of their own. Forgetting, too, that it had very nearly been *émigré* itself. For the Germans came within five miles of it. From the town shells could be seen bursting high up the valley; the blaze of burning villages reddened the evening sky. Trains poured out laden with terrified inhabitants fearing the worst, all the hospitals were evacuated, and down the roads from the battle, from Mussey, from Vassincourt, from Laimont and Révigny came the wounded, a long procession of maimed and broken men. They lay in the streets, on door-steps, in the station-yard, they fell, dying, by canal and river bank. Kindly women, thrusting their own fear aside, ministered to them, the cannon thundering at their very door. And with the wounded came the refugees. What a procession that must have been. Women have told me of it. Told me how, after days—even weeks—of semi-starvation, lying in the open at night, exposed to rain and sun, often unable to get even a drink of water (for to their eternal shame many a village locked its wells, refusing to open them even for parched and wailing children), they found themselves caught in the backwash of the battle. To all the other horrors of flight was added this. Men, it might be their own sons, or husbands, or brothers, blood-stained remnants of humanity plodding wearily, desperately down the road, while in the fields and in the ditches lay mangled, encarnadined things that the very sun itself must have shuddered to look upon. Old feeble men and women fell out and died by the way, a mother carried her dead baby for three nights and three days, for there

was no one to bury it, and the God of Life robed himself in the trappings of Death as he gathered exhausted mother and new-born babe in his arms.

And so they came to Bar. In the big dormitories of the Caserne Oudinot straw was laid on the floor, and there they were lodged, some after a night's rest to set wearily forth again, others to remain in the town, for the tide had turned and the Germans were in retreat.

There must have been an unusually large number of houses to let in Bar before the war; many, we know, had been condemned by the authorities, and, truth to tell, I don't wonder at it. "House to let" did not imply, as you might suppose, that it was untenanted, especially if the house was in the rue des Grangettes, or rue Oudinot, rue de Véel, or rue de l'Horloge. The tenants paid no rent. They had been in possession for years, possibly centuries. They were as numerous as the sands of the sea-shore, and they had all the *élan*, the *joie de vivre*, the vivacity and the tactical genius of the French nation. They welcomed the unhappy refugees—I was going to say vociferously, remembering the soldier who, billeted in a Kerry village, complained that the fleas sat up and barked at him.

The rooms, though dirty, unsanitary and swarming with the terror that hoppeth in the noonday (there were other and even worse plagues as well), were a shelter. The war would be over in three months, and one would be going home again. In the meantime one could endure the palliasse (a great sack filled with straw and laid on the floor, and on which four, five, seven or even more people slept at night), one could cower under the single blanket provided by the town, not undressing, of course; that would be to perish. One

could learn to share the narrowest of quarters with nine, eleven, even fifteen other people; one could tighten one's belt when hunger came—and it came very often during those first hard months—but one could not endure the hostile looks of the tradespeople, and the *sales émigrés* spit at one in the streets.

The refugees, however, had one good friend; monsieur C., an ex-mayor of the town and a man whose "heart was open as day to melting charity," made their cause his own. And perhaps because of him, perhaps out of its own good heart, the town, officially considered, did its best for them. It gave them clean straw for their palliasses; it saw that no room was without a stove; it established a market for them when it discovered that the shopkeepers, exploiting misery, were scandalously overcharging for their goods; it declined to take rent from mothers with young families; and it appointed a doctor who gave medical attention free.

All very good and helpful, but mere drops in the bucket of refugee needs. You see the war had caught them unawares, and at first, no doubt for wise military reasons, the authorities discouraged flight. People who might have packed up necessaries and escaped in good order found themselves driven like cattle through the country, the Germans at their heels, the smallest of bundles clutched under their arms, and the gendarmes shouting "Vîte, Vîte, Depêchez-vous, depêchez-vous," till reason itself trembled in the balance.

Some, too, had remembered the war of *Soixante-Dix*, when the Prussians, marching to victory, treated the civilians kindly. "They passed through our village laughing and singing songs," old women have told me.

Some atrocities there were, even then; but, compared with those of the present war, only the spasmodic outbursts of boyhood in a rage.

Consequently, flight was often delayed till the last moment, delayed till it was too late, and, caught by the tide, some found themselves prisoners behind the lines. Those who got away saved practically nothing. Sometimes a few family papers, sometimes the *bas de laine*, the storehouse of their savings, sometimes a change of linen, most often nothing at all.

"Mais rien, Mademoiselle. Je vous assure, rien du tout, du tout, du tout. Pas ça," and with the familiar gesture a forefinger nail would catch behind a front tooth and then click sharply outwards. When talking to an excited Meusienne, it is well to be wary. One must not stand too near, for she is sure to thrust her face close to your own, and when the finger flies out it no longer answers to the helm. It may end its unbridled career anywhere, and commit awful havoc in the ending, for the nail of the Meusienne is not a nail, it is a talon.

No wonder the poor souls needed help. No wonder they besieged our door when the news went forth that "Les Anglaises" had come to town and were distributing clothes and utensils, chairs, *garde-mangers* (small safes in which to keep their food, the fly pest being sheerly horrible), sheets, blankets — anything and everything that destitute humanity needs and is grateful for. Their faith in us, after a few months of work, became profound. They believed we could evolve anything, anywhere and at a moment's notice. If stern necessity obliged us to refuse, they had a touching way of saying, "Eh bien, ce sera pour une autre

fois " [1]—a politeness which extricated them gracefully from a difficult position, but left us struggling in the net of circumstance and unaccountably convinced that when they called again " our purse, our person, our extremest means would lie all unlocked to their occasion."

III

But these little amenities of relief only thrust themselves upon me by degrees. At first, during the torrid summer weeks, everything was so new and so strange there were no clean-cut outlines at all. Before one impression had focused itself upon the mind another was claiming place. My brain—if you could have examined it—must have looked like a photographic plate exposed some dozens of times by a careless amateur. From the general mistiness and blur only a few things stand out. The stifling heat, the awful smells, the unending succession of weeping and hysterical women, and last, but not least, *les puces.*

Did you ever hear the story of the Irish farmer who said he " did not grudge them their bite and their sup, but what he could not stand was the continule thramping " ? Well, the thramping was maddening. I believe I never paid a visit to a refugee in those days without becoming the exercising ground for light cavalry. People sitting quietly in our Common-room working at case-papers would suddenly dash away, to come back some minutes later in rage and exasperation. The cavalry still manœuvred. A mere patrol of two or three could be dealt with, but the poor wretch who had a regiment nearly qualified for a lunatic asylum.

[1] " Oh, well, you will give it to me another time."

Every visit we paid renewed our afflictions, and the houses, old and long untenanted, being so disgustingly dirty, we endured mental agonies—in addition to physical ones—when we thought of the filth from which the plague had come. Oddly enough, we did not suffer so much the next summer, and we were mercifully spared the attentions of other less active but even more horrible forms of entomological life.

You see, it was a rule—and as experience proved a very wise rule—of our Society that no help should be given unless the applicant had been visited and full particulars of his, or her, condition ascertained. Roughly speaking, we found out where he had come from, his previous occupation and station in life, the size of his farm if he had one and the amount of his stock, horses, cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry, rabbits, etc.; we made notes on his housing conditions, tabulated the members of his family, their ages and sex, their present employment and the amount of wages earned. All of which took time.

Armed with a notebook and pencil, we would sally forth, to grope our way up pitch-dark staircases, knock at innumerable doors, dash past the murky corner where the cesspool lay—I know houses in which it is under the stairs—and at last run the refugee to earth.

Then followed the usual routine. A chair—generally broken or minus a back—or a stool dragged forth with an apology for its poverty: "Quand on est émigrée, vous savez, Madame—ou Mademoiselle, je ne sais pas?" and then the torrent. A word sufficed to unloose it. Only a fool would try to stem it.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, you do not know what I have suffered."

So Madame would settle herself to the tale, and that was the moment when . . . when . . . when doubt grew, then certainty, and " Half-a-league, half-a-league, half-a-league onward " hammered an accompaniment on the brain.

In the evening we sorted out our notes and made up our case papers. These latter should yield rich harvest to the future historian if they are preserved, and if the good God has endowed him with a sense of humour. He could make such delicious " copy " from them. For the individuality of the worker stamped itself upon the papers even more legibly than the biography of the case. There are lots of gems scattered through them, but the one I like best lies in the column headed Medical Relief, and runs as follows—

Aug. 26. Madame Guiot has pneumonia. Condition serious.
Aug. 31. Madame quite comfortable.
Sept. 2. Madame has died. (Nurse's initials appended.)

In the papers you may read that such and such a house is infested with vermin; that Mademoiselle Wurtz is said, by the neighbours, to drink; that Madame Dablainville is filthy and lives like a pig; that the life of Madame Hache falls regrettably below accepted standards of morality; and that Madame Bontemps, who probably never owned three pocket-handkerchiefs in her life, declares that she lost sixty pairs of hand-spun linen sheets, four dozen chemises, and pillow and bolster cases innumerable when the Germans burnt her home.

You may also read how Mademoiselle Rose Perrotin was nursing a sick father when the Boches took posses-

sion of her village; how the Commandant ordered her to leave, and how she, with tears streaming down her large fat face, begged to be allowed to remain. Her father was dying. It was impossible to leave him. But German Commandants care little for filial feelings. Mademoiselle Rose (a blossom withering on its stem) had a figure like a monolith but a heart of gold. Even though they shot her she would not go away. They did not shoot her. They quietly placed her on the outskirts of the village and bade her begone. Next day she crept back again. She prayed, she wept, she implored, she entreated. When a monolith weeps even Emperors succumb. So did the Commandant. A day, two days, passed, and then her father died. They must have been very dreadful days, but worse was to follow. No one would bury the dead Frenchman. She had to leave him lying there—I gathered, however, that a grave was subsequently dug for him in unconsecrated ground—and walk, and walk, and walk, mile after mile, kilométre after kilométre, longing to weep, nay, to cascade tears; but, " Figurez-vous, Mademoiselle. Ah, quelle misère. I had not got a pocket-handkerchief ! "

That a father should die, that is Fate, but that one should not have a pocket-handkerchief ! . . . She wept afresh because she had not been able to weep then, and I believe that I shall carry to my grave a vision of stout, monolithic, utterly prosaic Mademoiselle Rose toiling across half a Department of France weeping because she had no pocket-handkerchief in which to mourn for her honoured dead.

Or you may read of little André Moldinot, who was alone in the fields when he saw the Germans coming, and who ran away, drifting he doesn't know how to

Bar-le-Duc, where he has remained in the care of kindly people, hearing no news of his family, not knowing whether they are alive or dead. Or of the old man, whose name I have forgotten—was it Galzandat?—who fought with the English in the Crimea, and who lived with fourteen other people (women and children) in a stifling hole in the rue Polval. Or of that awful room in the street near the Canal where thirty people ate and drank and slept and quarrelled a whole winter through—a room unspeakable in its dirt and untidiness. Old rags lay heaped on the floor, dirty crockery, potato, carrot and turnip peelings littered the greasy table, big palliasses strewed the corners, loathsome bedclothes crawling on them. On strings stretched from wall to wall clothes were drying (one inmate was a washerwoman), an old witch-like creature with matted, unkempt locks flitted about, and in the far corner, on the day I went there, two priests were offering ghostly counsel to a weeping woman.

Misery makes strange bedfellows, and the cyclone of war flung together people who, in ordinary circumstances, would have been far removed from one another's orbit. At first the good and the bad, the clean and the dirty, the thrifty and the drunken herded together, too wretched to complain, too crushed and despondent to hope for better things. But gradually temperament asserted itself, and one by one, as opportunity arose and their circumstances improved, the respectable ceased to rub elbows with the dissolute, and they found quarters of their own either through their own exertions or through the help of their friends. Monsieur C. and Madame B. (wise, witty, kindly Madame B.) were especially energetic in this respect.

So we soon began to feel comfortably assured that the

tenants of Maison Blanpain and of one or two other rookeries were the scum of the refugee pool, idle, disreputable, swearing, undeserving vagabonds every one. They took us in gloriously many a time, they fooled us to the top of our sentimental bent—at first—but we could not have done without them. For though Virtue may bathe the world in still, white light, it is Vice that splashes the dancing colours over it.

IV

Yes, I suppose we were taken in at times !

On the outskirts of Bar, beyond the Faubourg Marbot, lies a wood called the Bois de Maestricht. The way to it lies through a narrow winding valley of great beauty, especially in the autumn when the fires of the dying year are ablaze in wood and field. Just at the end of the road where the woods crush down and engulf it is a long strip of meadow, a nocturne in green and purple when the autumn crocus is in flower, and in the woods are violets and wild strawberries, and long trails of lesser periwinkle, ivy crimson and white, and hellebore and oxlips and all sorts of delicious things, with, from just one point on one of the countless uphill paths, a view of Bar, so exquisite, so ethereal it almost seems like a glimpse of some far dream-silvered land.

And it was here, just on the edge of the wood, in a small rough shack, that Madame Martin and her family took up their abode. The shack consisted of one room, not long and certainly not wide, a slice of which, rudely partitioned off, did duty as a cow-house. Here lived Madame Martin and her husband, her granddaughter Alice, a small boy suffering from a malady which caused severe abdominal distention, and one or two other

children. Le Père Battin, whose relationship was obscure but presumably deeply-rooted in the family soil, shared the cow-end with his beloved *vache*, a noble beast and, like himself, a refugee.

Le Père Battin always averred that he had adopted the cow, it being obviously an orphan, homeless and a beggar, but my own firm conviction is that he stole it. It was a kindly cow and a generous, for it proceeded speedily to enrich him with a calf which, unlike most refugee babies, throve amazingly, and when I saw it took up so much space in the narrow shed there was hardly room enough for its mother. How Le Père Battin squeezed himself in as well is a pure wonder. But squeeze he did, and when delicately suggesting that a gift of sheets from "Les Anglaises" would completely assuage the miseries of his lot, he showed me his bed. It was in the feeding-trough. One hurried glance was enough. I no longer wondered why the first visitor to the Martin abode, having unwisely settled down for a chat, spent the rest of the day and the greater part of the night in fruitless chase. I did not settle down. "It was fear, O Little Hunter, it was fear."

Nor did I give the sheets. The cow would have eaten them.

I remarked that the day was hot, and repaired to the garden (a wilderness of weeds and despairing flowers), and there Madame entertained me.

She was an ideal "case." Just the person whose photograph should be sent to kindly, generous souls at home. She was small, active, rather witty, a good talker, with darting brown eyes and a bewitching grin. She wore a be-frilled cap, and oh, she could flatter with her tongue! A nice old soul in spite of the villainy with

which Père Battin subsequently charged her. Her first visitor—she who unfortunately sat down—fell a victim on the spot. So did we all. Heaven had made Madame that way. It was inevitable. So all the riches of our earth were poured forth for her, and she devoured largely of our substance. Then the girl Alice developed throat trouble and was ministered to by our nurse, and she, I grieve to say, coming home one day from the Bois, hinted dark things about Alice—things which made our righteous judgment to stand on end. We continued to pet Madame Martin; we did everything we could for her except eat her jam. Having seen the shack, and le Père Battin and that one overcrowded room where flies in dense black swarms settled on everything, where dogs scratched and where age-old dirt gathered more dirt to its arms with the dawning of every day, that jam pot contained so many possibilities, we felt that to eat its contents would be sheer murder.

And so the autumn wore away and winter came, and then one day as I was going through the valley to visit some wood-cutters in the Bois, I met le Père Battin driving home his cow. And he stopped me. Once when speaking of the Emperor of Austria he had said, "Il est en train de mourir? Bon. On a eu bien assez de ces lapins-là." (He is dying? Good. We have had enough of such rabbits.)

A man who can discuss an Emperor in such terms is not lightly to be passed by, but I stood as far from him as possible. I did not till then believe that anybody could be as dirty as Father Battin and live.

But he thrust himself close, looking fearfully about him, sinking his voice to a hoarse whisper.

"Did I know the truth about the Martins? That

Alice had gone to Révigny? There were soldiers there." He nodded sapiently. "But Alice was la vraie Comtesse de ——" He mentioned a hyphenated name. "Yes. It was true. She was married. A young man, a fool. Mon Dieu, but a fool. She might live in a shack in the Bois and her grandmother might be an old peasant woman, but she was a Comtesse, wife of the Comte de ——."

I took leave to suppose that Père Battin was mad.

But he was circumstantial. "Yes. Her husband had left her. An affair of a few weeks. Every gendarme in the town knew. And Madame knew. Knew and made money out of it. Many a good franc she had put in her pocket. But the gendarmes were watching, and one day the old woman and Alice would . . ." Again he murmured unprintable things.

"Monsieur, you are ridiculous." Alice Martin a Comtesse! No wonder I laughed. But he insisted. He kept on repeating it.

"La vraie Comtesse de ——" But now she was . . .

The dark sayings of the district nurse came back to my mind and I wondered. But Père Battin was offensive to ear and eye. I wished him *bonjour*, watching him trailing down the path, his *vache* ruminatingly leading, and then went on my way to the wood.

An hour later Madame Martin came running down the hill to greet me. She had seen me go by and waited. In her hand was a bunch of flowers, the best, least discouraged from her untended garden.

"For Mademoiselle," she said, and as she held them out her smile scattered gold dust upon my heart.

Now do you think le Père Battin's story was true?

CHAPTER IV

À TRAVERS BAR-LE-DUC

WHETHER it was or not, it has come rather too soon in my narrative, I am afraid. It has carried me far away from the days when the quaint individual charm of Bar-le-Duc began to assert itself, little by little, slowly, but with such cumulative effect that in the end we grew to love it.

Our work took us into every lane and street, but it was the Ville-Haute that I loved best. I wish I could describe it to you as it lies on the hill; wish I could take you up the steep narrow lane that leads to the rue St Jean, and then into the rue de l'Armurier which bends like a giant S and is so narrow you fancy you could touch the houses on either side by stretching out your arms. Small boys tobogganed down it in the great frost last year. It was rare sport for the small boys, but disastrous to sober-minded propriety which occasionally found that it, too, was tobogganing —but not on a tray—and with an absence of grace and premeditation that were devastating in their results.

Indeed, the Ville-Haute was a death-trap during those weeks. There were slides everywhere. The Place St Pierre was scarred with them, the wonderful Place which, pear-shaped, wide at the top, narrowing to its lower end, lies encircled in the arms of the rue

des Ducs de Bar and of the rue des Grangettes. And at the top, commandingly in the centre stands the church of St Pierre—once St Maze—where the famous statue, the "Squelette," is now buried so many fathoms deep in sandbags nothing can be seen of it at all. It is said that Mr. Edmund Gosse once came to spend a night in Bar and was so bewitched by its beauty he remained for several weeks, writing a charming little romance about it in which the "Squelette" plays a prominent part. And, indeed, the only way to know Bar is to live in it. It would be quite easy to tell you of the Tour de l'Horloge standing on guard on the hill; of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century houses; of the Pont Nôtre Dame; of the Canal des Usines which always reminded me of Bruges; of the river winding through the Lower Town, tall poplars standing sentinel along the banks; of the great canal that cuts a line almost parallel to that of the river and which, if only you followed it far enough, would bring you at last to the Rhine; of winding Polval that is so exquisite in snow and on a moonlit night, with its houses piled one above the other like an old Italian town; or of the fine arched gate that leads to the Place du Château and that led there when the stately Dukes of Bar held court in the street that bears their name, and led there, too, when Charles Stuart lived in the High Town and dreamed perhaps of a kingdom beyond the seas. Of all these things and of the beautiful cloistered sixteenth-century College in the rue Gilles de Trêves one might speak, exhausting the mines of their adjectives and similes, but would you be any closer to the soul of the town? I doubt it, and so I refrain from description. For Bar depends

for its beauty and its distinctive charm on something more than mere outline. Colour, atmosphere, some ghostly raiment of the past still clinging to its limbs, and over all the views over the valley—yes, the soul is elusive and intangible; you will find it most surely under the white rays of the moon.

The views are simply intoxicating, but if you want to see one of the finest you must make the acquaintance of a certain Madame—Madame, shall we say, Schneider? Any name will do if only it is Teutonic enough. She loomed upon our horizon as the purveyor of corduroy trousers. Oh, not for a profit. She, *bien entendu*, was a philanthropist disposing of the salvage of a large shop, the owner of which was a refugee. The trousers being much needed at the moment we bought them, but many months afterwards she came with serge garments that were not even remotely connected with a refugee, so I am prone to believe that she was not quite so disinterested as she would have had us believe.

To visit her you must climb to the Ville-Haute, and there in a house panelled throughout (such woodwork—old, old, old—my very eyes water at the thought of it), you will find a long low room with a wide window springing like a balcony over the gulf that lies under the rue Chavé. And from the window you can look far over the town which lies beneath you, over the silver path of river and canal to the Côte Ste Catherine, the steep hill, once a vineyard, that rises on the other side; you can see the aviation ground, and you can follow the white ribbon of road that runs past Naives to St Mihiel. And you can look up and down the valley for miles—to Fains, to Mussey and beyond, on

one hand to Longeville, and Trouville on the other. And Marbot lies all unlocked under your eyes, and Maestricht, and the beautiful hill over which, if you are wise, you will one day walk to Resson.

From Place Tribel, from innumerable coigns of vantage, the view is equally beautiful, though not, I think, quite so extensive. Which, perhaps coupled with her aggressively Teutonic name, accounted for the suspicious looks cast last winter upon Madame Schneider. A spy! Oh, yes, a devout Catholic always at the Mass, but a spy. Did she not leave Bar on the very morning of the big air raid, returning that night? And didn't every one know that she signalled by means of lights movements of troops and of aeroplanes to other spies hidden on the hill beyond Naives? The preposterous story gained ground. Then one day we thrilled to hear that Madame Schneider had been arrested. She disappeared for a while—we never knew whether anything had been proved against her—and then when we had forgotten all about her I met her in the Place St Pierre. She was coming out of the church, but she bowed her head and passed by.

Perhaps, after all this, you won't care to visit her? But then you will go down to your grave sorrowing, because you will never see those Boiseries, nor that view.

Other things beside the beauty of the town began to creep into prominence too, of course, and among them the supreme patience and courage of our refugee women. In circumstances that might have crushed the strongest they fought gamely and with few exceptions conquered. I take my hat off to the French

nation. We know how its men can fight, some day I hope the world will know how its women can endure. Remember that they were given no separation allowances until January 1915, and the allowance when it did come was a pittance. One franc twenty-five centimes per day for each adult, fifty centimes a day for each child up to the age of sixteen; or, roughly speaking, 1*s.* a day and $4\frac{1}{2}d.$ per day. What would our English women say to that? It barely sufficed for food. Indeed, as time went on and prices rose I dare to say it did not even suffice for food. The refugee woman, possessed of not one stick of furniture—except in the case of farmers who were able to bring away some household goods in their carts—of not one cup or plate or jug or spoon, without needles, thread, or scissors, without even a comb, and all too often without even a change of linen, had to manage as best she could. That she did manage is the triumph of French thrift and cleverness in turning everything to account. We heard of them making *duvets* by filling sacks with dried leaves; one woman actually collected enough thistle-down for the purpose. They clung desperately to their standards, they would trudge miles to the woods in order to get a faggot for their fire, they took any and every kind of work that offered, they refused to become submerged.

And gradually they began to assume individuality. Families and family histories began to limn themselves on the brain as did the life of the streets, things as well as people.

Some of these histories I must tell you later on; to-night, for some odd reason, little Mademoiselle Froment is in my mind. She was not a refugee, but

I owe her a debt of eternal gratitude, for when I fled to her immediately on arrival she condoled with me in my sartorial afflictions and promptly made me garments in which without shame I could worship the Goddess of Reason. Later on the uniform was chopped up and re-made, becoming wearable, but never smart. Even French magic could not accomplish that.

Poor little Mademoiselle Froment, so patient with all my ignorances, my complete inability to understand the value of what she called " le mouvement " of my gown, and my hurried dips into Bellows as she volubly discursed of the fashions. Last summer when she was making me some more clothes she was sad indeed. Her only and adored brother, who had passed scatheless through the inferno at Verdun, was killed on the Somme.

" My hurried dips into Bellows." Does that mean anything, or does it sound like transcendental nonsense ? Bellows, by the way, is not a thing to blow the fire with, it is a dictionary—a pocket dictionary worth its weight in good red gold. And to my copy hangs a tale. Can you endure a little autobiography ?

During my week-end at Sermaize I heard more French than I had heard, I suppose, in all my life before, or at least I heard new words in such bewildering profusion that I really believe Bellows saved my life. I carried him about, I referred to him at frequent intervals. I flatter myself that with his aid I made myself intelligible even when discussing the technique of agriculture and other such abstruse subjects.

But it is Bellows' deplorable misfortune to look rather like a Prayer Book, or a Bible. And so it befell

that when I had been some weeks at Bar a Sermaizian Relief Worker made anxious inquiries as to my character. " She seems such an odd sort of person because, though she reads her Bible ostentatiously in public, she smokes, and we once heard her say . . ." After all, does it really matter what they heard me say?

After which confession of my sins I must tell you about the Temple, the shrine of French Protestantism in Bar. There we stood up to pray, and we sat down to sing the most lugubrious hymns it has ever been my lot to listen to. The church is large, and the congregation is small. On the hottest day in summer it struck chill, in winter it was a refrigerator. The pastor, being *mobilisé*, his place was generally taken by an earnest and I am sure devout being, who having congratulated the present generation, the first time I went there, upon having been chosen to defend the cause of justice and of truth, proceeded to dwell with the most heartrending emphasis upon every detail of the suffering and sorrow the war—the defence upon which he congratulated us !—has caused. He spared us nothing. Not even the shell-riven soldier with white face upturned questioningly to the stars. Not even the fear-racked mother or wife to whom one day the dreaded message comes. Then when he had reduced every one to abysmal depression and many to silent pitiful tears, he cried, " Soyez des optimistes," and seemed to think that the crying would suffice. Why? Ah, don't ask me that! Perhaps the war is too big a thing for the preachers to handle. The platitudes of years have been drowned by the mutter of the guns and the long sad wail of broken, shattered humanity.

Yes, the Temple depressed me. Writing of it even now sends me into the profundities. It was all so cheerless, so dreary. In spite of the drop of Huguenot blood in my veins, the Temple and I are in nothing akin.

So let us away—away from the cold shadows and the cheerless creed, from the joyless God and the altar where Beauty lies dead, out into the boulevard where the trees are in leaf and the sun is shining, and where you may see a regiment go by in its horizon blue, or a battery of artillery with its camouflaged guns. Smoke is pouring from the chimney of the regimental kitchen, how jolly it looks curling up against the sky! and sitting by the driver of the third ammunition cart is a fox terrier who knows so much about war he will be a field-marshal when he lives again. Or we may see a team of woodcutters with the trunks of mighty trees slung on axles with great chains and drawn tandemwise by two or three horses, and hear the lame newsvendor at the corner near l'église St Jean calling his "Le Gé, le Pay-Gé, et le Petit-Parisien." Pronounce the g soft in Gé, of course, for it stands for *Le Journal*, and Pay-Gé for *Le Petit Journal*, all of which, together with the *Continental Daily Mail*, can be bought in Bar each day shortly after one o'clock unless the trains happen to be running late. During the Verdun rush they sometimes did not arrive at all.

A more musical cry, however, is that of the rabbit-skin man, "Peau de li-è-vre, Peau de li-è-vre," with a delicious lilting cadence on li-è-vre. I never discovered what he gave in exchange for the skins, but it was certainly not money.

Or the Tambour may take up his position at the corner of the street, the Tambour who swells with pride and civic dignity. A sharp tap-tap on his drum, the crowd collects and then in a hoarse roar he shouts his decree. It may concern mad dogs, or the water supply, or the day on which the *allocation* will be given to the *emigrés*, or it may be instructions how to behave during an air raid. Whatever it is, it is extremely difficult to make sense of it, as a motor-car and a huge military lorry are sure to crash past as he roars. But nothing disconcerts him. He shouts to his appointed end, and then with a swaggering roll on his drum marches off to the next street-crossing.

If luck is with us as we prowl along we may see—and, oh, it is indeed a vision!—our butcheress Marguerite dive into a neighbouring shop. Dive in such a connection is a poetic license, for if a description of Marguerite must begin in military phrase it must equally surely end in architectural. If on the front there were two strong salients, in the rear was a flying buttress. Marguerite — delicious irony of nomenclature—was exceedingly short, her hair was black as a raven's wing, her eyes were brown, and her cheeks, full-blown, were red as a ripe, ripe cherry. Over the salients she wore vast tracts of white apron plentifully besmeared with blood. So were her hands, so was her shop. It was the goriest butchery I have ever seen. As "Madame" (I shall tell you about her later on) did all our shopping, it was my fortune to visit Marguerite but once a month. Had I been obliged to visit her twice I should now be a vegetarian living on nuts.

Sometimes Marguerite cast aside the loathsome

evidences of her trade and donned a smart black costume and a velvet hat with feathers in it. Then indeed she was the vision radiant, and never shall I forget meeting her on the boulevard one day when a covey of Taubes were bombing the town. Hearing something like a traction-engine snorting behind me, I turned and beheld Marguerite, whose walk was a fat, plethoric waddle, panting down the street. Every feather in her hat was stiff with fright, her mouth was open, she was breathing like a man under an anæsthetic, and—by the transcendental gods I swear it!—the buttress was flying. Marguerite RAN.

But she has a soul, though you may not believe it. She must have, for on the reeking offal-strewn table that adorns her shop she sets almost daily a vase of flowers. Perhaps in spite of her offensive messiness she doesn't really enjoy being a butcher.

During that first summer, although so near the Front, Bar was rather a quiet place where soldiers—Territorials?—in all sorts of odd uniforms drifted by (I once saw a man in a red cap, a khaki coat, blue trousers and knee-high yellow boots), while civilians went placidly about their affairs. Our flat was on the Boulevard de la Rochelle, and so on the high road to Verdun and St Mihiel, a stroke of good luck that sometimes interfered sadly with our work. For many a regiment went marching by, sometimes with colours flying and bands playing, gay and gallant, impertinent, jolly fellows with a quip for every petticoat in the street and a lightly blown kiss for every face at a window. But there were days when no light jest set the women giggling, days when the marching men were beaten to the very earth with weariness, stained

with mud, bowed beneath their packs, eyes set straight in front of them, seeing nothing but the interminable road, the road that led from the trenches and—at last—to rest. Far away we could hear the ominous mutter of the guns, now rising, now falling, now catching up earth and air and sky into a wild clamour of sound. No need to ask why the men did not look up as they went by, no need to wonder at the strained, set faces. Perhaps in their ears as in ours there rang, high above the dull heavy burden of the cannon-song, the thin chanting of the priests who, so many desolate times a day, trod the road that leads to the Garden of Sacrifice where sleep so many of the sons of France. Ah, I can hear them now, and see the pitiful little processions winding down from every quarter of the town, the priest mechanically chanting, a few soldiers grouped round the coffin, a weeping woman or two following close behind. Of late—since Verdun, I think—the tiny guard of honour no longer treads the road, and the friendless soldier dying far from home goes alone to his last resting-place upon the hill.

There the open graves are always waiting. The wooden black crosses have spread far out over the hillside, climbing up and across till no one dare estimate their number. Five thousand, a grave-digger told us long, long ago. Since then Verdun has written her name in blood across the sky, Verdun impregnable because her rampart was the heart of the manhood of France, Verdun supreme because the flower of that manhood laid down their lives in order to keep her so.

Yes, the chanting of the priests brings an odd lump into one's throat, but one day we saw a little ceremony that moved us more deeply still.

It was early morning, a strain of martial music rose on the air. We hurried to the windows and saw a company of soldiers coming down the boulevard. They passed our house, marched to the far end, halted, and then turning, ranged themselves in a great semi-circle beyond the window. To say that their movements lacked the cleanness and precision which an English regiment would have shown is to put the matter mildly. Their business was to form three sides of a square. They formed it, shuffling and dodging, elbowing, scraping their feet, falling into their places by the Grace of God while a fat fussy officer skirmished about for all the world like an agitated curate at a Sunday School treat.

The fourth side of the square consisted of the pavement and a crowd of women, children and lads, a crowd with a gap in the middle where, like a rock rising above the waters of sympathy, stood two chairs on which two soldiers, *mutilés de la guerre*, were sitting. Brave men both. They had distinguished themselves in fight, and this morning France was to do them honour.

An officer read aloud something we could not hear, and then a general stepped forward and pinned the Croix de Guerre upon their breasts, and colonels and staff officers shook them by the hand, and the band broke into the Marseillaise and the watching crowd tried to raise a cheer. But their voice died in their throat, no sound would come, for the Song of the Guns was in their ears and out across the hills their own men were fighting, to come home to them, perhaps, one day as these men had come, or it might be never to come home at all. The cheer became a sob, the

voice of a stricken nation, of suffering heart-sick womanhood waiting . . . waiting.

So the band played a lively tune and the soldiers marched away, the crowd melted silently about its daily work and for a time the boulevard was deserted, deserted save for him who sat huddled into his deep arm-chair, the Croix de Guerre upon his breast and the pitiless sunlight streaming down upon the pavements he would never tread again.

A few weeks later the bands march by again. It is evening, and the shadows are lengthening. We mingle with the crowd and see a tall, stern man with aloof, inflexible, unsmiling face pass up and down the lines of the guard of honour drawn up to receive him. A shorter, stouter man is at his side.

" Vive Kitchenaire ! "

The densely packed crowds take up the cry. " Vive l'Angleterre ! " Ah, it is God Save the King that the band is playing now. " Vive Kitchenaire." Again the shout goes up. The short, stout man greets the crowd, and a mighty roar responds. " Vive Joffre." He smiles, but his companion never unbends. As the glorious Marseillaise thunders on the air, with unseeing eyes and ears that surely do not hear he turns away, and the dark passage of the house swallows him up.

" Vive Kitchenaire ! "

The echoes have hardly died away when a tear-choked voice greets me. " Ah, Mademoiselle, but the news is bad to-day." Tears are rolling down the little Frenchwoman's face. So deep is her grief I fear a personal loss. But she shakes her head. No, it is not that. She hands me a paper and, stunned, I

read the news. As I cross the street and turn towards home the world seems shadowed. Sorrow has drawn her veils closely about the town—sorrow for the man whom it trusted and whose privilege it had been to honour.

CHAPTER V

SETTLING-IN

Our first duty on arriving in the town was to go to the Bureau de Police and ask for a *permis de séjour*. We understood that without it there would be short shrift and a shorter journey into a world which has not yet been surveyed. So we sallied forth to the Bureau at break of day, and there we interviewed an old *grognard*—the only really grumpy person I met in France—who scowled at us and scolded us and called the devil to witness that these English names are barbarous, the chatter of monkeys, unintelligible to any civilised ear. We soothed him with shaking knees; suppose he refused us permission to reside in the town? And presently he melted. He never really liquified, you know, there was always a crust; but once or twice on subsequent occasions a drop, just a teeny, weeny drop of the milk of human kindness oozed through. He demanded our photographs, and when he saw my "finished-while-you-wait" his belief in our Simian ancestry took indestructible form. The number of my photographs now scattered over France on imposing documents is incalculable, and the number of times I have had to howl my age into unsympathetic ears so great that all my natural modesty in dealing with so delicate a subject has wilted away.

The *grognard* dismissed us at length, feeling like

the worm that perisheth, and a fortnight or so later presented us with our *permis de séjour* (which warned us that any infringement of its regulations would expose us to immediate arrest as spies), and with an esoteric document called an *Extrait du Registre d'Immatriculation* whose purpose in history we were never able to determine. No one ever asked to see it, no one ever asked to see our *permis de séjour*, in fact the gendarmes of the town showed a reprehensible lack of interest in our proceedings.

In addition to these we were provided as time went on with a *carte d'identité*, a permission to circulate on a bicycle in districts specified, a permission to take photographs not of military interest, and later on with a *carnet d'étranger* which gripped us in a tight fist, kept us at the end of a very short chain, and made us rue the day we were born. And of course we had our passports as well.

Not being a cyclist, I used that particular permission when tramping on the Sabbath beyond the confines of the town. Once a bright military star tried to stop some one who followed my example. "It is a permission to cycle. You are on foot," he argued.

"But the bicycle could not get here without me," she replied, and her merciless logic dimmed his light.

As for me, I carried all my papers on all occasions that took me past a sentry. It offended my freeborn British independence to be held up by a blue-coated creature with a bayonet in his hand on a road that I choose to grace with my presence, and so I took a mild revenge. The stoutest sentry quailed before such evidence of rectitude, and indeed we secretly believed that sheer curiosity prompted many a "Halte-là."

Once as I trudged a road far from Bar two gorgeous individuals mounted on prancing chargers swept past me. A moment later they drew rein, and with those eyes of seventh sense that are at the back of every woman's head I knew they were studying my retreating form. A lunatic or a spy? Surely only one or the other would wear that grey dress. A shout, "Holà." I marched on. If French military police wish to accost me they must observe at least a measure of propriety. Again the "Holà." My shoulders crinkled. Would a bullet whiz between? A thunder of galloping hoofs, a horse racing by in a cloud of dust, a swirl and a gendarme majestically barring the way.

"Where are you going, Madame?"

Stifling a desire to ask what business it was of his, I replied suavely—

"To Bar-le-Duc."

"Bar-le-Duc? But it is miles from here."

"Eh bien? What of it? On se promene."

"I must ask to see your papers."

Out they all came, a goodly bunch. He took them, appalled. He fingered them; he stared.

"Madame is English?"

"But certainly? What did Monsieur suppose?"

The papers are thrust into my hand, he salutes, flicks his horse with a spur, and I am alone on the undulating road with the woods just touched by spring's soft wing, spreading all about me.

But this happened when sentries and bayonets had lost their terror. There were days when we treated them with more respect. Familiarity breeds contempt—when one knows that the bayonet is not sharpened.

Our papers in order, our heads no longer wobbling

on our shoulders, our next duty was to call on the *élite* of the town. In France you don't wait to be called upon, you call. It was nerve-racking work for two miserable foreigners, one of whom had almost no French, while that of the other abjectly deserted her in moments of perturbation. But we survived it, perhaps because every one was out. Only at Madame B.'s did we find people at home, and she—how she must have sighed when we departed! We all laboured heavily in the vineyard, but fright, shyness, the barrier of language prevented us—on that day at least—from gathering much fruit. Exhausted, humbled to the dust, thinking of all the brilliant things we might have said if only we could have taken the invaluable Bellows with us, we crawled home to seek comfort in a *brioche de Lorraine* and a cup of China tea which we had to make for ourselves, as "Madame" had not yet learned the method. In fact there were many things she had not learned, and one of them was what the English understand by the word rubbish. It was a subject on which for many a day her views and ours unhappily rarely coincided. Once we caught her in the Common-room, casting baleful eyes on cherished treasures.

"Do you wish that I shall throw away these *ordures*, Mademoiselle?" she asked.

ORDURES! Ye gods! A bucketful of gladioli and stocks and all sorts of delicious things gathered in the curé's garden at Naives, and she called them *ordures*. With a shriek we fell upon her and her broom. Did she not know they were flowers? What devil of ignorance possessed her that she should call them rubbish?

"Flowers! *bien entendu*, but what does one want with flowers in a sitting-room? The petals fall, they are *des ordures*." Again the insulting word.

"Don't you *like* flowers, Madame?" we asked, and she turned resigned eyes to ours. These English! Perhaps the good God who made them understood them, but as for her, Odille Drouet . . . With a shrug she consigned us to the limbo of the inscrutable. A garden was the place for flowers, why should we bring them into the house?

French logic. Why, indeed?

Madame never understood us, but I think she grew to tolerate us in the end, and perhaps even to like us a little for our own queer sakes. Once, when she had been with us for a few weeks, she exclaimed so bitterly, "I wish I had never seen the English," we wondered what we could possibly have done to offend her. Agitated inquiries relieved our minds. We were merely a disagreeable incident of the war. If the Germans had not pillaged France we would not have come to Bar-le-Duc. Cause and effect linked us with the Boche in her mind, and I think she never looked at us without seeing the Crown Prince leering over our shoulder.

A woman of strange passivity of temper, a fatalist—like so many of her countrymen—she had a face that Botticelli would have worshipped. Masses of dark hair exquisitely neat were coiled on her head (why, oh why, do our English women wear hats? Is not half a French woman's attraction in the simple dignity of the uncovered head? I never realised the vulgarising properties of hat till I lived in France), her eyes were dark, her brows delicately pencilled, her features

regular. Gentleness, resignation, patience were all we saw in her. She had one of the saddest faces I have ever seen.

No doubt she had good reason to be sad. Her husband, a well-to-do farmer, died of consumption in the years before the war, and she who now cooked and scrubbed and dusted and tidied for us once drove her own buggy, once ruled a comfortable house and superintended the vagaries of three servants. In her fine old cupboards were stores of handspun linen sheets, sixty pairs at least, and ten or twelve dozen handspun, handmade chemises. Six *lits montés* testified to the luxury of her home; on the walls hung rare pottery, Lunéville, Sarréguemin and the like.

A *lit monté* is a definite sign of affluence, and well it may be so. The French understand at least two things thoroughly—sauces and beds. Incidentally I believe that the French woman does not exist who cannot make a good omelette. I saw one made once in five minutes over a smoky wood fire, the pan poised scientifically on two or three crosswise sticks. An English woman cooking on such an altar would have offered us an imitation of chamois leather, charred, toughened and impregnated with smoke. Madame the wife of the Mayor of Vavincourt offered us—dare I describe it? Perhaps one day I shall write a sonnet to that omelette; it must not be dishonoured in prose.

Yes, the French can cook, and they can make beds, and unless you have stretched your wearied limbs in a real *lit monté*, unless you have sunk fathoms deep in its downy nest and have felt the light, exquisite

warmth of the *duvet* steal through your limbs, you have never known what comfort is.

You gaze at it with awe when you see it first, wondering how you are to get in. I know women who had to climb upon a chair every night in order to scale the feathery heights. For my own part, being long of limb, I found a flying leap the most graceful means of access, but there are connoisseurs who recommend a short ladder.

Piled on the top of a palliasse and a mattress are a huge bed of feathers, spotless sheets, a single blanket, a coverlet, and then the crimson silk-covered *duvet*, over which is spread a canopy of lace. The cost must be fabulous, though oddly enough no one ever mentioned a probable price. But no refugee can speak of her lost *lits montés* without tears.

Madame had six of them, and cattle in her byre, and horses in her stable, and all the costly implements of a well-stocked farm. Yet for months she lived with her little girl, her father, and her mother in a single room in the Place de la Halle, a dark, narrow, grimy room that no soap and water could clean. Her bed was a sack of straw laid upon the ground, and—until the Society provided them—she had no sheets, no pillow-cases, indeed I doubt if she even had a pillow. Her farm is razed to the ground, and no doubt some fat unimaginative sausage-filled Hausfrau sleeps under her sheets and cuddles contentedly under her *duvet* o' nights.

The little party of four were six weeks on the road to Bar from that farm beyond Montfaucon, and during the whole time they never ate hot food and rarely cooked food. No wonder Madame seldom laughed—

those weeks of haunting fear and present misery were never forgotten—no wonder it was months before we shook her out of her settled apathy and saw some life, some animation grow again in her quiet face.

If sometimes we felt inclined to shake her for other reasons than those of humanity her caution was to blame. Never did she commit herself. To every question inviting an opinion she returned the same exasperating reply, "C'est comme vous voulez, Mademoiselle." I believe if we had asked her to buy antelopes' tongues and kangaroos' tails for dinner she would have replied equably, tonelessly, "C'est comme vous voulez."

Whether the point at issue was a warm winter jacket, or a table, or a holiday on the Sabbath, or cabbage for dinner, the answer was always the same. Once in a moment of excitement—but this was when she had got used to us, and found we were not so awful as we looked—she exclaimed, "Oh, mais taisez-vous, Mademoiselle," and we felt as if an earthquake had riven the town.

Later she developed a quiet humour, but she always remained aloof. Unlike Madame Philipot who succeeded her, she never showed the least interest in the refugees who besieged our door. "C'est une dame." The head insinuated through the door would be withdrawn and we left to the joys of conjecture. The "lady" might be that ragged villain from the rue Phulpin, wife of a shepherd, a drunken dissolute vagabond who pawned her all for liquor, or it might be Madame B., while "C'est un Monsieur" might conceal a General of Division, or the Service de Ville claiming two francs for delivery of a parcel, in its cryptic folds.

She had no curiosity, vulgar or intellectual, that we could discover. She was invariably patient, sweet-tempered, gentle of voice, courteous of phrase. She came to her work punctually at seven; going home, unless cataclysms happened, at twelve. If the cataclysms did occur, even through no fault of our own, we felt as guilty as if we had murdered babies in their sleep, Madame being an orderly soul who detested irregularity. And punctually at half-past four she would come back again, cook the dinner, wash up *la vaisselle* and quietly disappear at eight.

The manner of her going was characteristic.

French women seem to have a horror of being out alone after dark (perhaps they have excellent reason for it, they know their countrymen better than I do), and Madame was no exception to the rule. Perhaps she was merely bowing her head to national code, the rigid *comme il faut*, perhaps it was a question of temperament. Anyway the fact emerged, Madame would not walk home alone. Who, then, should accompany her? Her parents were old and nearly bedridden, she had no husband, brother, or friend. The crazy English who careered about at all hours of the day and night? We had our work to do.

Juliana was ordered to fetch her. This savouring of adventure and responsibility fell in with Juliana's mood. She consented. Now she was her mother's younger daughter and her age was twelve. Can you understand the psychology of it? This is how I read it. A child was safe on the soldier-frequented road, a mother with her child would not be intercepted, but a good-looking woman alone—well, as the French say, that was quite another *paire de bottines*.

What would have happened had Juliana declined the honour, I simply dare not conjecture. For that damsel did precisely as she pleased. Her mother's passivity, fatalism, call it what you will, was the mainspring of all her relations with her children. "Que voulez-vous? She wishes it." Or quite simply, "Juliana does not wish it," closed the door against all remonstrance. Madame was a strong-willed woman, she never yielded an iota to us, but her children ruled. When the elder girl, aged fourteen and well-placed with a good family in Paris, came to Bar for a fortnight and then refused to go back, Madame shrugged. Some one in Paris may have been, indeed was, seriously inconvenienced, but "Que voulez-vous?"

"Don't you wish her to go back, Madame?"

"But certainly. What should she do here? It is not fit for a young girl, but que voul——" We fled.

Parental authority seems to be a negligible quantity in France. So far as I could see children did very much as they liked, and were often spoiled to the verge of objectionableness. Yet the steadfastness, courage, thoughtfulness and whole-souled sanity of many a young girl—or a child—would put older and wiser heads to shame.

A puzzling people, these French, who refute to-morrow nearly every opinion they tempt you to formulate about them to-day.

If English women struggling with "chars" and "generals" knew the value of a French *femme de ménage* there would be a stampede across the Channel in search of her. She does your marketing much more cheaply than you could do it yourself, she keeps her accounts neatly, she is punctual, scrupulously honest,

dependable and trustworthy. She may not be clean with British cleanness, her dusting may be superficial (her own phrase, " passer un torchon," aptly describes it), but she understands comfort, and in nearly twenty months' experience of her I never knew a dinner spoiled or a dish unpalatably served.

Of course it is arguable that Madame was not a *femme de ménage*, nor of the servant class at all. Granted ! But there were others. There was the *bonne à tout faire* (general servant) of the old curé at N. who ruled him with a rod of iron and cooked him dinners fit for a king. And there was Eugénie, the Abbé B.'s Eugénie, who, loving him with a dog-like devotion, was his counsellor and his friend. She corrected him for his good when she thought he needed it, but she mothered and cared for him in his exile from his loved village—French trenches run through it to-day—as only a single-minded woman could.

Yes, Madame—whether ours or some one else's—is a treasure, and we guarded ours as the apple of our eye. There were moments when we positively cringed before her, so afraid were we that she might leave us; for she hated cooking, hers having always been the life of the fields, and though no self-respecting Frenchwoman regards herself as a servant or as a menial, there must have been many hours when the cruelty of her position bit deep. Nevertheless she bore with us for a year, and then the air raids began. And the air raids shattered the nerves of Juliana—a brave little soul, but delicate (we feared tainted with her father's malady); and flight in the night to the nearest cellar, unfortunately some distance away, brought the shadow of Death too close to the home. So the

elders counselled flight. Juliana begged to be taken away. Madame wished to remain. The matter hung in uncertainty for some days, then eight alarms and two raids in twenty-four hours settled it.

The alarms began on Friday morning; on Saturday Madame told us that the old people would stay in Bar no longer and she had applied for the necessary papers. They were going south to the Ain on the morrow. Not a word of regret or apology for leaving us at a moment's notice, or for giving us no time in which to replace her. Why apologise since she could neither alter nor prevent? She went through no wish of her own, went at midday, just walked out as she had done every day for a year, but came back next morning to say good-bye and ask us to store some odds and ends. When she had a settled address would we send them on?

So she went away, and our memory of her is of one who never fought circumstances, never wrestled with Fate. When the storms beat upon her, when rude winds blew, she bowed her head and allowed them to carry her where they listed. I think the spring of her life must have broken on that August day when she turned her cattle out on the fields and, closing the door behind her, walked out of her house for ever.

CHAPTER VI

THE BASKET-MAKERS OF VAUX-LES-PALAMIES

THE long hot days of summer pursued their stifling way, yet were all too short for the work we had in hand. There were families to be visited, case-papers to be written up, card-indexes to be filled in, and bales to be unpacked. There were clothes to be sorted, there were people in their hundreds to be fitted with coats and trousers and shirts and underlinen and skirts and blouses, and the thousand and one things to be coped with in the Clothes-room. When Satan visits Relief workers he always lives in the Clothes-room. And there he takes a malicious delight in turning the contents of the shelves upside down and in hiding from view the outfit you chose so carefully yesterday evening for Madame Hougelot, or Madame Collignon, so that when you come to look for it in the morning, lo ! it is gone. And Madame is waiting with her six children on the stairs, and the hall is a whirlpool of slowly-circling humanity, who want everything under the sun and much that is above it.

Truly the way of the Relief worker is hard. But it has its compensations. You live for a month, for instance, on one exquisite episode. You are giving a party; you have invited some fifteen hundred guests. You spread them out over several days, *bien entendu*, and in the generosity of your heart you decide that each

shall have a present. You sit at the receipt of custom, issuing your cards with the name of each guest written thereon, and to you comes Madame Ponnain. (That is not her real name, but it serves.) Yes, she is a refugee and she has two children. She would like three cards.

Bon. You inscribe her name, you gaze at her questioningly.

"There is Georgette, she has two years."

Bon. Georgette is inscribed.

And then?

Madame hesitates. There is the baby.

Bon. His are?

"Eh bien, il n'est pas encore au monde."

You suggest that the unborn cannot . . .

"Mais mademoiselle—si il y a des étrennes (gifts)?"

Perhaps, perhaps; one doesn't know. The Ponnains were a people of much discrimination. He might arrive in time. *Quel dommage*, then, if he had no ticket!

He discriminated.

He gets his ticket, and you register anew your homage to French foresightfulness and thrift.

And then you go back to the Clothes-room. You climb over mountains of petticoats and chemises, all of the same size and all made to fit a child of three. There are thousands of them, they obsess you. You dream at night that you are smothering under a hill of petticoats while irate refugees, whose children are all over five and half-naked, hurl the chemises and—other things at you, uttering round French maledictions in ear-splitting tones. You wade through the wretched things, you eat them, sleep them; your brain reels, you say things about work-parties which, if

published, would cause an explosion, and the Pope would excommunicate you and the Foreign Office hand you your passports. You write frantic letters to headquarters, then you grow cold, waxing sarcastic. You hint that marriage as an institution existed in France before 1912, and that the first baby was not born in that year of blindfold peace. And you add a rider to the effect that many, indeed most, of your cherished *émigrées* are not slum-dwellers fighting for rags at a jumble sale, but respectable people who don't go about in ragged trousers or with splashes of brown or yellow paint on a blue serge dress. Then you are conscience-stricken, for some of the bales have been packed by Sanity, and the contents collected by Reason. There are many white crows in the flock.

A ring at the door interrupts, perhaps happily, your epistolary labours. It is the Service de Ville, a surly person but faithful. He has six bales. They are immense. You go down, you try to roll one up the stairs. Your comrade in labour is four feet six and weighs seven stone. The bale weighs—or seems to weigh—a ton. Sisyphus is not more impotent than you. Then an angel appears. It is Madame. "I heard the efforts," she remarks, and indeed our puffings and pantings and blowings and swearings must have been audible almost at the Front. She puts her solid shoulder under the bale. It floats lightly up the stairs. Then you begin to unpack. It is dirty work, and destroys the whiteness of your hands. Never mind. Remember *les pauvres émigrées*, and that we are *si devouée*, you know.

Everything under heaven has, I verily believe, come at one time or another out of our bales—except

live stock and joints of beef. Concertinas in senile decay, mandolines without keys, guitars without strings, jam leaking over a velvet gown, tons of old newspapers and magazines—all English, of course, and subsequently sold as waste-paper, hats that have braved many a battle and breeze, boots without soles, ball dresses, satin slippers (what DO people think refugees need in the War Zone?), greasy articles of apparel, the mere handling of which makes our fingers shine, dirty underlinen, single socks and stockings, married socks that are like the Irishman's shirt—made of holes, another hundred dozen of petticoats for children aged three, and once—how we laughed over it! —a red velvet dress that I swear had been filched from an organ-grinder's monkey, and with it a pair of—of—well, you know. They were made of blue serge, and when held out at width stretched all across the Common-room. The biggest Mynheer that ever smoked a pipe by the Zuyder Zee would have been lost in them, and as they were neither male nor female, only some sort " of giddy harumphrodite " could have worn them.

Sometimes we fell upon stale cough lozenges, on mouldering biscuits, on dried fruits, on chocolate, on chewing-gum, on moth-eaten bearskin rugs, or on a brilliant yellow satin coverlet with LOVE in large green capitals on it. The tale is unending, but it was not all tragic. There were many days when our hearts sang in gladness, when good, useful, sensible things emerged from the bales and we fitted our people out in style.

But all the rubbish in the world must have been dumped upon France in the last two years. Never

has there been such a sweeping out of cupboards, such a rummaging of dust-bins. The hobble skirts that submerged us at one period nearly drove us into an early grave. Picture us, with a skirt in hand. It is twenty-seven inches round the tail, perhaps twenty-three round the waist. And Madame, who waits with such touching confidence in the discrimination of Les Anglaises, tells you that she is *forte*. As you look at her you believe it. It is half a day's journey to walk round her. You pace the wide circle thoughtfully, you make rapid calculations, you give it up. The thing simply cannot be done. And you send up a wild prayer that before ever there comes another war French women of the fields will take to artificial means of restraining their figures. As it is, like Marguerite, many of them occupy vast continents of space when they take their walks abroad. And when they stand on the staircase, smiling deprecatingly at you, and you have nothing that will fit . . .

And when it does fit it is blue, or green, and they have a passion for black. Something discreet. Something they can go to Mass in. I often wonder why they worship their God in such dolorous guise. Something, too, they can mourn in. So many are *en deuil*. Once a woman who came for clothes demanded black, refusing a good coat because it was blue. The cousin of her husband had died five months before, and never had she been able to mourn him. If the English would give her *un peu de deuil?* She waited weeks. She got it and went forth smiling happily upon an appreciative world, ready to mourn at last.

The weather is stifling, the Clothes-room an inferno. The last visitor for the morning has been sent

contentedly away—she may come back to-morrow, though, and tell us that the dress of Madeleine does not fit, and may she have one the same as that which Madame Charton got? Now the dress of Madame Charton's Marie was new and of good serge, whereas that of Madeleine was slightly worn and of light summer material. But then Marie had an old petticoat, whereas Madeleine had a new one. But this concession to equality finds no favour in the eyes of Madeleine's mother. She has looked upon the serge and lusted after it. We suggest that a tuck, a little arrangement. . . . She goes away. And in the house in rue Paradis there is lamentation, and Marie, I grieve to say, lifts up her shrill treble and crows. It is one of the minor tragedies of life. Alas, that there are so many!

But as Madame the mother of Madeleine departs, we know nothing of the reckoning that waits us on the morrow. We only know that we promised to go and see the Basket-makers to-day, that time is flying, and haste suicidal with the thermometer at steaming-point.

"Madame, we are going out. We cannot see any one else."

Bon. Madame is a Cerberus. She will write down the names of callers and so ease our minds while we are away.

We fling on our hats, we arm ourselves with pencil and note-book, and wend our way up the Avenue du Château to the rue des Ducs de Bar. It is well to choose this route sometimes, though it is longer than that of the rue St. Jean, for it goes past the old gateway and shows you the view over the rue de Véel. It

is wise to look down on the rue de Véel; it is rather foolhardy to walk in it. For motor-lorries whiz through it at a murderous speed, garbage makes meteoric flights from windows, the drainage screams to Heaven, every house is a tenement house, most of them are foul and vermin-ridden, and all are packed with refugees.

Well, perhaps not quite all. Even the rue de Véel has its bright particular spots, one of them being the house, set a little back from the street, in which Pétain, "On-les-aura Pétain," lived during the battle of Verdun. The street lies in a deep hollow, with cultivated hills rising steeply above it. Higher up there are woods on the far side, while above the sweeping Avenue du Château the houses are piled one above the other in tumbled, picturesque confusion.

Once in the rue des Ducs we go straight to No. 49, through a double-winged door into a courtyard, up a flight of worn steps into a wee narrow lobby, rather dark and noisome, and then, if any one cries *Entrez!* in response to our knock, into a great wide room.

That some one would cry it is certain, for the room is a human hive. It swarms with people. Short, thick-set, sturdy, rather heavily-built people, whose beauty is not their strong point, but whose honesty is. And another, for they have many, is their industry; and yet another, dear to the heart of the Relief worker, is their gratitude for any little help or sympathy that may be given them.

And, poor souls, they did need help. Think of it! One room the factory, dining-room, bedroom, smoking-room, sitting-room of forty people. Some old, some young. Women, girls and men.

It appalled you as you went in. On one side, down all its length, and also along the top palliasses were laid on the floor, so close they almost touched. Piled neatly on these were scanty rugs or blankets. No sheets or linen of any kind until our Society provided them. There was only one bed—a gift from the Society—and in that sat a little old woman bolt upright. Her skin was the colour of old parchment, it was seamed and lined and criss-crossed with wrinkles, for she was over eighty years of age. But her spirit was still young. She could enjoy a little joke.

"Yes, I remember the war of Soixante-dix," she said, "but it was not like this. Ma fois, non! Les Prussiens—oh, they were good to us." Her eyes twinkled. "They lived in our house. They were like children."

"Madame, Madame! Confess now that 'vous avez fait la coquette' with those Prussians."

Whereupon she cackled a big, "Ho, ho! Écoutez ce qu'elle dit!" and a shrivelled finger poked me facetiously in the ribs.

But if the Basket-makers made friends with the Germans in those far-off days, they hate them now. Hate them with bitter, deadly hatred. "Ah, les barbares! les sauvages! les rosses!" Madame Walfard would cry, her face inflamed with anger. Her mother, badly wounded by a shell, had become paralysed, so there is perhaps some excuse for her venom.

But for the most part they are too busy to waste time in revilings. The little old woman is the only idle person in the room. Squatting on low stools under the windows—there are four or five set in the length of the wall—the rest work unceasingly, small basins of water,

sheaves of osier, tools, finished baskets, and piles of osier-ends strewn all about them. Down the middle of the room runs a long table, littered with mugs, bowls, cooking utensils, odds and ends of every description. There is only one stove, a small one, utterly inadequate for the size of the room. On it all their cooking has to be done. I used to wonder if they ever quarrelled.

As time went on and I came to know them better, Madame Malhomme and Madame Jacquemot told me many a tale of their life in Vaux-les-Palamies, of the opening days of war and of their subsequent flight from their village. Madame Malhomme, daughter of the little old lady who had once dared to flirt with a Prussian, lived in the big room in the rue Des Ducs for nearly a year. Then Madame B. established her and her family in a little house about half a mile from the town, where they had nothing to trouble them save the depredations of an occasional rat, a negligible nuisance compared with the (in more senses than one) overcrowded condition of No. 49. For that historic mansion had gathered innumerable inmates to its breast during the long years of emptiness and decay. And these inmates made the Basket-makers' lives a burden to them.

The cold, too, was penetrating, it eat through their scanty clothes, it bit through flesh to the very bone. The stove was an irony, a tiny flame in a frozen desert. Every one was perished, Madame Malhomme not least of all, for, seeing her daughter shivering, she stripped off her only petticoat and forced her to put it on.

At night they lay in their clothes under their

miserable blankets. (Bar-le-Duc is not a very large nor a very rich town, and in giving what it did to such numbers of people it showed itself generous indeed. In ordinary times its population is not more, and is probably less, than 17,000, so an influx of 4000 destitute refugees taxed it heavily.)

The unavoidable publicities of their existence filled the women with shame and dismay. Sleeping " comme des bêtes sur la paille,"[1] or, more often still, lying awake staring out into the unfriendly dark, what dreams, what memories must have been theirs ! How often they must have seen the village, its cosy little homes, each with its garden basking in the sun, the river flowing by, and the great osier beds that were the pride of them all.

They seem to have lived very much to themselves, these sturdy artisans, rarely leaving their valley, and intermarrying to an unusual extent. You find the same names cropping up again and again: Jacquemot, Riot, or Malhomme. Like Quakers, every one seemed to be the cousin of every one else. And they were well-to-do. It is safe to presume that there was no poverty in the village. Their baskets were justly famous throughout France, and the average family wage was about £3 a week. In addition they had the produce of their garden, the inevitable pig being fattened for the high destiny of the *soupe au lard*, rabbits and poultry. If Heaven denied them the gift of physical beauty it had not been niggardly in other respects. Best of all, it gave them the gift of labour. In the spring pruning and tending the osier, then cutting it, and piling it into great stacks which had

[1] Like beasts, on straw.

to be saturated with water every day during the hot weather, planting and digging in their gardens, looking after the rabbits and the pig, and in winter plying their trade. Life moved serenely and contentedly in Vaux-les-Palamies until the dark angel of destruction passed over it and brushed it with his wings.

The Basket-makers don't like the Boche; indeed, they entertain a reasonable prejudice against him. He foisted himself upon them, making their lives a burden to them; he was coarse, brutal and overbearing, he no more considered their feelings than he would those of a rotten cabbage-stalk thrown out upon the refuse-heap of a German town. He stayed with them for a week. When he went away he bequeathed them a prolific legacy. Madame Malhomme will tell you of it if you ask her—at least she will when she knows you well. She is not proud of it.

"Ah, qu'ils sont sales, ces Boches," she says with a shudder. She bought insecticide, she was afraid to look her neighbours in the face. It did not occur to her at first that her troubles were not personal and individual. Then one day she screwed up her courage and asked the question. The answers were all in the affirmative. No one was without.

So when news came that the Boche was returning, Vaux-les-Palamies girded up its loins and fled. Shells were falling on the village, so they dared not spend time in extensive packings; in fact, they made little if any attempt to pack at all. Madame's sister-in-law was wounded in the shoulder, and the wound, untended for days, began to crawl. Her description of it does not remind you of a rose-scented garden. It was thrust on me as a privilege. So was a view of the shoulder.

The latter was no longer crawling. It was exquisitely white and clean, but it had a hole in it into which a child might drive its fist.

And so after much tribulation they found themselves in Bar-le-Duc, and theirs was the only instance that came under our notice of a village emigrating *en masse*, and settling itself tribally into its new quarters. Even the Mayor came with them, and it was he who eventually succeeded in getting a supply of osier and putting them into touch with a market again. But their activities are sadly restricted, and they make none of their famous baskets *de fantaisie* now, the osier being dear and much of it bad, so their profit is very, very small.

I was in Bar for some months before I met Madame Jacquemot. And then it was Madame B. who introduced me to her. Her mother, an old lady of eighty-two, had been in hospital; was now rather better, and back again with her family in the rue Maréchale. Would the Society give her sheets? As the dispenser of other people's bounty I graciously opined that it would, and calling on Madame Jacquemot, told her so. Her mother was startlingly like the old lady at No. 49, small, thin, wiry, and bird-like in her movements. She had had shingles, poor soul, and talked of the *ceinture de feu* which had scorched her weary little body. She talked of the Germans too. Ah, then you should have seen her! How her eyes flashed! She would straighten herself and all her tiny frame would become infused with a majesty, a dignity that transfigured her. Once a German soldier demanded something of her, and when she told him quite truthfully that she had not got it, he doubled his fist and dealt

her a staggering blow on the breast. And she was such a little scrap of humanity, just an old, old woman with a brave, tender heart and the cleanest and honestest of souls. She got her sheets and a good warm shawl—I am afraid we took very special trouble with that *paquet*, choosing the best of our little gifts for her—and soon afterwards I went to see her again. As we sat in the dusky room while Madame Jacquemot told stories, describing the method of cultivating the osier, showing how the baskets are made, the old lady began to cough and "hem" and make fluttering movements with her hands. Madame Jacquemot, thickset and broad-beamed like most of her people—she had a fleshy nose and blue eyes, I remember, hair turning grey, a pallid, rather unhealthy complexion and a humorous mouth—got up, and going to an inner room returned almost immediately with a quaintly-shaped basket in her hands. The old lady took it from her and held it out to me.

"It is for you," she said. "And when you go home to England you will tell people that it was made for you by an old woman of eighty-two, a refugee, who was ill and in hospital for months. I chose the osier specially, there is not a bad bit in the basket. And it is long, long since I have made a basket. I haven't made one since we left home. But I wanted to make one for you because you have been kind to us."

I have that basket now; I shall keep it always and think of the feeble fingers that twined the osier, fingers that were never to twine it again, for the gallant spirit that fought so gamely was growing more and more weary. The old bear transplanting badly, they yearn for their chimney corner and the familiar things that

are all their world. The long exile from her beloved village told upon her heart, joy fell from her and, saddened and desolate, she slipped quietly away.

"She just fluttered away like a little bird," her daughter said, and I was glad to know she had not suffered at the last.

"Ah, if only I could see the village again," she would often say. "If only I might be buried there. To die here, among strangers. . . . Ah, mademoiselle, do you think the war will soon be over? Si seulement. . . ." To die and be buried among her own people. To die at home. It was all she asked for, all she had left to wish for in the world. She would look at me with imploring, trustful eyes. Les Anglaises, they must know. Surely I could tell her? And in the autumn one would say, "It will be over in the spring," and in the winter cry, "Ah yes, in the summer." But spring came and summer followed, and still the guns reverberated across the hills, and winter came and the Harvest of Death was still in the reaping.

Surely God must have His own Roll of Honour for those who have fallen in the war, and many a humble name that the world has never heard of will be written on it in letters of gold.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH WE PLAY TRUANT

I

WITHOUT wishing in the least to malign my fellow-men, I am minded to declare that a vast percentage of them are hypocrites. Not that they know it or would believe you if you told them so. Your true *poseur* imposes acutely on himself, believing implicitly in his own deceptions; but the discerning mind is ever swift to catch an attitude, and never more so than when it is struck before the Mirror of Charity.

Consequently, when people tell me they go to the War Zone in singleness of purpose, anxious only to succour the stricken, I take leave to be incredulous. The thing is impossible. Every one who isn't a slug likes to go to the War Zone, every one who isn't an animated suet-pudding wants to see a battlefield, or a devastated village, or a trench, or a dug-out, and we all want *souvenirs de la guerre*, shell cases, bits of bomb or shrapnel, the head of the Crown Prince on a charger, or the helmet of a Death's Head Hussar. And do we not all love adventure, and variety—unless fear has made imbeciles of us, and the chance of distinguishing ourselves, of winning the Legion of Honour in a shell-swept village, or the Croix de Guerre under the iron rain of a Taube?

I believe we do, though few of us confess it. We

prefer to look superior, to pretend we "care nothing for all that," and so I cry, "Hypocrites! Search your hearts for your motives and you will find them as complex as the machinery that keeps you alive."

Search mine for my motive and you will find it compounded of many simples, but of their nature and composition it is not for me to speak. Has it not been written that I am a modest woman?

And methinks indifferent honest. That is why I am going to tell you about Villers-aux-Vents. You must not labour under a delusion that life was all hard work and no play in the War Zone.

It was no high-souled purpose that led us to Villers. It was just curiosity, common curiosity. Later on we spent a night (Saturday night, of course) at Greux, and visited the shrine of Jeanne D'Arc at Domremy, but that was not out of curiosity. It was hero-worship coupled with a passion for historical research.

And we planned to go to Toul and Nancy. Now when people make plans they should carry them out. The gods rarely send the dish of opportunity round a second time, and when the *Carnet d'Étranger* chained us body and soul to *l'autorité compétente militaire* there was no second time. The dish had gone by; it would never come again.

Wherefore I am wrath with the gods, and still more wrath with myself, for I have not seen Nancy, and I have not seen Toul, and if the old *grognard* had been in good humour I might even have gone to Verdun. Maddening, isn't it? Especially as then, when our work was only, so to speak, getting into its stride, we might have virtuously spared the time. Later on when it increased, and when we bowed to a *Directrice*

who has found the secret of perpetual motion, we worked Saturday, Sundays and all sometimes; but in 1915 we were not yet super-normal men. We could still enjoy a holiday. And so we decided to go to Villers-aux-Vents. To go before winter had snatched the gold mantle from the limbs of autumn, to go while yet the sun was high and the long day stretched before us, languorous, beautiful.

And the manner of our going was thus, by train to Révigny at 7.20 a.m., and then on foot over the road.

Now it is written that if you get into a westward-bound omnibus train at Bar-le-Duc, in fulness of time you will arrive at Révigny. The train will be packed with soldiers, so of course you travel first- or second-class, thereby incurring a small measure of seclusion and a larger one of boredom. In Class Three it is never dull. You may be offered cakes or a hunk of bread which has entered into unwilling alliance with sausage, you may be invited to drink the health of the Allies in rank red wine, or you may be offered a faithful heart, lifelong adoration and an income of five sous a day. Or (but for this you must keep your ears wide open, for the train makes *un bruit infernale*, and speech is a rapid, vivacious, eager thing in France) you may hear tales of the war, episodes of the trenches, comments upon the method of the Boche, things many of them hardly fit for publication but drawn naked and quivering from the wells of life.

Unless he has been refreshing a vigorous thirst, the poilu is rarely unmanageable. He is the cheekiest thing in the universe, he has a twinkle in his eye that can set a whole street aflame, and he is filled with an accommodating desire to go with you just as far as

you please. Nevertheless, he can take a hint quicker than any man I know, and his genius in extricating himself from a difficult situation is that of the inspired tactician.

Madame B., pursuing her philanthropic way, came out of a shop one day to find a spruce poilu comfortably ensconced in her carriage. With arms folded and legs crossed he surveyed the world with conquering eyes.

"I am coming for a drive with you," he remarked genially, and his smile was the smile of a seductive angel, his assurance that of a king.

"Au contraire," replied Madame B. (the poilu was not for her, as for us, an undiscovered country bristling with possibilities of adventure), and his abdication was the most graceful recorded in history.

Now, I wouldn't advise you to accept every offer of companionship you get from a poilu, but you may accept some. More than one tedious mile of road is starred for me with memories of childlike, simple souls, burning with curiosity about all things English, and above all about the independent female bipeds who have no apparent fear of man, God or devil, nor even—*bien entendu*—of that most captivating of all created things, the blue-coated, trench-helmeted French soldier.

"You march well, Mademoiselle; you would make a fine soldier." Thus a voice behind me as I swung homewards down the hill one chilly evening. A sense of humour disarms me on these occasions. One day, no doubt, it will lead me into serious trouble. I didn't wither him. One soon learns when east winds should blow, and when the sun, metaphorically speaking, may shine. We walked amicably into Bar together, and

before we parted he told me all about the little wife who was waiting for him in Paris, and the fat baby who was *tout-à fait le portrait de son père.*

So ponder long and carefully before you choose your carriage, but if your ponderings are as long as this digression you will never get to Révigny. Even an omnibus train starts some time, and generally when you least expect it.

At Mussey if you crane your head out of the window you may see two wounded German prisoners, white-faced, mud-caked wretches who provoke no comment. At Révigny you will see soldiers (if I told you how many pass through in a day the Censor would order me to be immersed in a vat of official ink); and you will see ruins. The Town Hall is an eyeless skeleton leering down the road, the Grande Place—there is no Grande Place, there is only a scattered confusion of fire-charred stones and desiccated brick.

It was rather foggy that Sunday morning and the town looked used up. Not an attractive place in its palmiest days we decided as we slung our luncheon bags over our shoulders and set out for Villers. Away to the left we could see Brabant-le-Roi, and it was there some weeks later that I assisted at the incineration of a pig. He lay by the roadside in a frame of blazing straw. Flames lapped his ponderous flanks, and swept across his broad back, blue smoke curled around him, an odour of roasting pig hung in the air. A crowd of women and soldiers stood like devotees about a shrine. The flames leaped, and fell. Then came men who lifted him up and laid him on a stretcher. In his neck there was a gaping wound, and out of the fire that refined him he was no longer an Olympian

sacrifice, he was mouldering pig, dead pig, black pig, nauseating, horrible. I turned to fly, but a voice detained me.

"Madame Bontemps will be killing to-morrow. If Mademoiselle would like to see?"

But "to-morrow" Mademoiselle was happily far on her way to Troyes, and the swan-song of Madame Bontemps' *gros cochon* fell on more appreciative ears.

However, on that Sunday morning in September there was no pig, and our "satiable curiosity" led us far from poor battered Brabant. Our road was to the right and "uphill all the way." The apple trees on the Route Nationale were crusted with ripe red fruit, but we resisted temptation, our only loot being a shell-case which we discovered in a field, which was exceedingly heavy and with which we weighted ourselves for the sake of an enthusiastic youngster at home. My arm still aches when I think of that shell-case, for by this time the sun had burst out, it was torridly hot, the apple trees gave very little shade, and our too, too solid flesh was busily resolving itself into a dew.

However, we persevered, the object of our pilgrimage being a square hole dug in a sunny orchard on the brow of the hill above Villers. Some rude earthen steps gave access to it, the roof was supported by two heavy beams, and the floor and sides were lined with carved panels wrenched from priceless old *armoires* taken from the village. It is known as the Crown Prince's Funk Hole, and the story goes that from its shelter he ordered, and subsequently watched, the destruction of the village. The dug-out, a makeshift affair, the Crown Prince's tenancy being of short duration, is well placed. The hill falls away behind

it, running at right angles to the opening there is a thick hedge, trees shelter it, the line of a rough trench or two, now filled in, runs protectingly on its flank. The fighting in this region was open, a war of movement lasting only a few days, so trench lines are not very plentiful. Just opposite the mouth of the dug-out there is a fenced-in cross, a red *képi* hangs on the point, a laurel wreath tied with tri-coloured ribbon is suspended from the arms. "An unknown French soldier." Did he fall there in the rush of battle, or did he creep up hoping to get one clean neat shot at the Prince of Robbers and so put him out of action for ever?

As for Villers itself, it was wiped out of existence. One house, and only one, remains, and even that is battered. One might speculate a little on the psychology of houses. The pleasant fire-cracker pastilles that wrought so much havoc elsewhere were impotent here. The Germans flung in one after another, we were told, using every incendiary device at their disposal, but that house refused to burn. There it stands triumphantly in its tattered garden, not far from the church, and when I saw it an old woman with a reaping-hook in her hand was standing by the hedge watching me with curious eyes. We had separated, my companion and I, farther down the long village street, she to meditate among the ruins, I to mourn over the shattered belfry-tower, the bell hurled to the ground, the splintered windows, the littered ruined interior. In the cemetery were many soldiers' graves; on one inscribed, "Two unknown German officers," some one had scribbled "À bas les Boches," the only instance that came to my knowledge of the desecration

of a German grave. And even here contrition followed fast upon the heels of anger, and heavy scrawlings did their best to obliterate the bitter little phrase. The French—in the Marne at least—have been scrupulous in their reverence for the German dead, the graves are fenced in just as French graves are, and the name whenever possible printed on the cross. I suppose that even the soppiest sentimentalist would not ask that they should be decorated with flowers?

As I left the graveyard and looked back at the desolation that once was Villers, but where even now wooden houses were springing hopefully from the ground, the old woman with the reaping-hook spoke to me. My dress betrayed me; she knew without asking that I was British. And, as is the way with these French peasants, she fell easily and naturally into her story. I wish I could tell it to you just as she told it to me, but I know I shall never find her simple dignity of phrase, or her native instinct for the *mot juste*. However, such as it is you shall have it, and if it please you not, skip. That refuge is always open to the bored or tired reader.

II

Old Madame Pierrot was disturbed in spirit. She could see the flames leaping above burning villages across the plain, the earth shook with the menace of the guns, the storm was rising, every moment brought the waves of the encroaching sea nearer to her home. Yet people said that Villers was safe. The Germans

could never get so far as that, they would be turned back long before they reached the hill. She was alone in her comfortable two-storied house (the house she had built only a few years before, and which had a fine yard behind it closed in by spacious stables, cow-houses and barns), and she was sadly in need of advice. She had no desire whatever to make the personal acquaintance of any German invader. Even the honour of receiving the Crown Prince made no appeal to her soul. She had heard something of his arch little ways and his tigerish playfulness, and though she could hardly suppose that he would favour a woman of her dried and lean years with special attention, she reasonably feared that she might be called on to assist at one of his festivals. And an Imperial degenerate will do that in public which decent women are ashamed to talk about, much less to witness. So Madame was perturbed in soul. The battle raged through the woods and over the plain, it crept nearer . . . nearer. . . .

"Madame, Madame, come. Is it that you wish the Germans to get you?" A wagon was drawn up at the door, in it were friends who lived higher up the street. "Come with us to Laimont. You will be safer there."

So they called to her and put an end to her doubt. Snatching up a basket, she stuffed into it all the money she had in the house, various family papers and documents, and then, just as she was, in her felt-soled slippers with her white befrilled cap on her head, in her cotton dress without even a shawl to cover her, she clambered into the wagon and set out. Laimont was only a few miles away; indeed, I think you can see the church spire and the roofs of the houses from the

hill. There the wagon halted. In a few hours the Germans would be gone, and then one could go peaceably home again. But time winged away, the battle raged more fiercely than ever, soon perhaps Laimont itself would be involved and see hand-to-hand fighting in its streets.

Laimont! Madame was *desolée. Où aller?* Farther south, farther east? The Germans were everywhere. And *voyager comme ça* in her old felt slippers, in her working clothes, without wrap or cloak to cover her? Impossible. The wagon must wait. There was still time. *Ces salauds* would not reach Laimont yet. Why, look! Villers itself was free. There was no fire, no smoke rising on the hill. Her friends would wait while she went back *au grand galop* to put on her boots, and her bonnet and her Sunday clothes. "Hé, mon Dieu, it is not in the petticoat of the fields that one runs over France."

Away she went, her friends promising to wait for her. Laden down by the shell, we who were lusty and strong found the road from Villers to Laimont unendingly long, yet no grisly fears gnawed at our heartstrings, no sobs rose chokingly to be thrust back again . . . and yet again. Nor had we the hill to climb, and no shells were bursting just ahead. So what can it have been for Madame? But she pressed on; old, tired and, oh, so dismayed, she panted up the steep hill that curls into the village, and walked right into the arms of the Crown Prince's men. In a trice she was a prisoner, one of eighty, some of whom were soldiers, the rest civilians, who, like herself, had committed the egregious folly of being born west of the Rhine, and were now about to suffer for it.

What particular crime Villers-aux-Vents had committed to merit destruction I cannot tell. Perhaps it never committed any. The Crown Prince was not always a minister of Justice promulgating sentence upon crime. He was more often a Nero loving a good red blaze for its own sake, or it may be an æsthete of emotion, a super-sensualist of cruelty, or just a devil hot from the stones of hell.

Whatever the reason, Villers was doomed. Out came the pastilles and the petrol-sprayers: the most determined destruction was carried on. Not only were the houses themselves destroyed but the outhouses, the stables, solid brick and mortar constructions running back to a depth of several feet. And I gathered that the usual pillage inaugurated the reign of fire.

Of this, however, Madame knew nothing. She and her seventy-nine companions in misery were marched away to the north, mile after mile to Stenay, and if you look at the map you will see that the distance is not small, it was a march of several days.

Madame, as I have told you, was old, and her slippers had soles of felt, and so the time came when her feet were torn and bleeding, and when, famished and exhausted, she could no longer keep step with her guards. Her pace became slower and slower. Ah, God, what was that? Only the butt-end of a rifle falling heavily across her back. She nerved herself for another effort, staggered on to falter once more. Again the persuasion of the rifle. Again the shrewd, cruel blow, and a bayonet flashing under her eyes.

A diet of black bread three times a day does not encourage one to take violent exercise, but black bread

was all that they got, and I think the rifle-butts worked very hard during that long weary march.

On arrival they were herded into a church and then into a prison, where they were brutally treated at first, but subsequently, when French people were put in charge, found life a little less intolerable. And later on some residents still living in the town were kind to her, but during all the months—some eight or nine—that she was imprisoned there she had no dress but the one, nothing to change into, nothing to keep out the sharp winter cold.

Madame Walfard the basket-maker told me some gruesome tales about Stenay, and what happened there, but this is not a book of atrocities. Perhaps it ought to be, perhaps every one who is in a position to do so should cry aloud the story in a clear clarion call to the civilised world, but—isn't the story known? Can anything I have to say add a fraction of a grain of weight to the evidence already collected? Is the world even now so immature in its judgment that it supposes that the men who sacked Louvain, the men who violated Belgium behaved like gallant gentlemen in the sunnier land of France? Do we not know all of us that, added to the deliberate German method, there was the lasciviousness of drunkenness? That the Germans poured into one of the richest wine-growing countries in the world during one of the hottest months of the year, that their thirst at all times is a mighty one, and when excited by the frenzy of battle it was unassuageable? They drank, and they drank again. They rioted in cellars containing thousands of bottles of good wine, and they emerged no longer men but demons, whose officers laughed to see them

come forth, sure now that no lingering spark of human or divine fire would hold them back from frightfulness.

Of course we know it was so, and therefore I am not going to dilate upon horrors. Let the kharma of the Germans be their witness and their judge. Only this in fairness should be told—that the behaviour of the men varied greatly in different regiments. "It all depended upon the Commandant," summed up one narrator, "and the first armies were the worst."

"And the Crown Prince's army?" I asked; "what of that?"

He shrugged. What can be expected from the followers of such a leader? Their exploits put mediæval mercenaries to shame.

Stenay must find another historian; but even while I refuse to become the chronicler of atrocities, every line I write rises up to confute me. For was not the very invasion of France an "atrocity"? Is the word so circumscribed in its meaning that it contains only arson, murder and rape? Does not the refinement of suffering inflicted upon every refugee, upon every homeless *sinistré*, upon the basket-makers of Vaux-les-Palamies as upon Madame Lassanne, and poor old creatures like the Leblans fall within it too, and would not the Germans stand convicted before the Tribunal of such narratives even if the gross sins of the uncivilised beast had never been laid at their door?

Madame Pierrot told me nothing about Stenay—perhaps she saw nothing but the inside of her prison walls—but she told me a great deal about the kindness of the Swiss when she crossed the frontier one happy day, and the joy-bells were ringing in her heart. They gave her food and drink, they overwhelmed her with

sympathy, they offered her clothes. But Madame said no. She was a *propriétaire*, she had good land in Villers.

" Keep the clothes for others, they will need them more than I. In my house at Villers-aux-Vents there are *armoires* full of linen and underclothing, everything that I need. I can wait."

I often wonder whether realisation came to her at Révigny, or whether, all ignorant of the tragedy, she walked blithely up the hill, the joy-bells ringing their Te Deum in her heart, her thoughts flitting happily from room to room, from *armoire* to *armoire*, conning over again the treasures she had been parted from so long. Did she know only as she turned the last sharp bend in the road and saw the village dead at her feet? Ah, whether she knew as she trudged over the much-loved road, or whether knowledge came only with sight, what a home-coming was that! She found the answer to the eternal question, " What shall we find when we return? " . . . How many equally poignant answers still lie hidden in the womb of time to be brought forth in anguish when at last the day of restoration comes?

III

Even the longest story must come to an end some time, and so did Madame Pierrot's. Conscience, tugging wildly at the strings of memory, spoke to me of my lost comrade; the instinct of hospitality asserted itself in Madame's soul. We were strangers, we must see the sights. Would I go with her to her "house," and to the dug-out of the Crown Prince? Yes? *Bon.*

Allons. And away we trotted to gather up the lost one among the ruins, to inspect the dug-out, to eat delicious little plums which Madame gathered for us in the orchard, and finally to be seized by the pangs of a righteous hunger which simply shrieked for food. Where should we eat? Madame mourned over her brick and rubble. If we had come before the war she would have given us a *déjeuner* fit for a king. A good soup, an omelette, *des confitures*, a cheese of the country, coffee, but now? "Regardez, Mademoiselle. Ah que c'est triste. Il n'y a rien du tout, du tout, du tout." And indeed there was nothing but a mound of material that might have been mistaken for road rubbish.

Eventually she found a stone bench in the yard, and there we munched our sandwiches while she flitted away, to come back presently with bunches of green grapes, sweet enough but very small. The vine had not been tended for a year, it was running wild. They were not what *ces dames* should be given, but if we would accept them? We would have taken prussic acid from her just then, I believe, but fortunately it did not occur to her to offer it. She cut us dahlias from her ragged garden (once loved and carefully tended), and hearing that one of us was a connoisseur in shell-cases, bits of old iron and other gruesome relics, rooted about until she found another shell-case, with which upon our backs we staggered over to Laimont.

And now let me hereby solemnly declare that if any one ever dares to tell me that the French are inhospitable I will smite him with a great and deadly smiting. I am not trying to suggest that they clasped us in their arms and showered riches upon us within an hour of our meeting. They showed a measure of

sanity and caution in all their ways. They waited to see what manner of men we were before they flung wide their doors, but once the doors were wide the measure of their generosity was only limited by the extent of our need.

Was it advice, an introduction to an influential person, a string pulled here, a barrier broken down there, Madame B. and Madame D. were always at our service. Gifts of fruit and flowers came constantly to our door, our *bidons* were miraculously filled with paraffin in a famine which we, being foolish virgins, had not foreseen, or, foreseeing, had not guarded against, and once in the heavy frost, when wood was unobtainable in the town and the supply ordered from Sermaize was over-long in coming, our lives were saved by a bag of oak blocks which scented the house, and *boulets* that made the stove glow with magnificent ardour. In every difficulty we turned to Madame B. She helped us out of many an *impasse*, and whether we asked her to buy dolls in Paris or, by persuading a General and his Staff that without our timely aid France could never win the war, to reconcile an Army Corps to our erratic activities in its midst, she never failed us. When two of our party planned a week-end shopping expedition to Nancy, it was Madame B. who discovered that the inhabitants of that much-harassed town were leading frozen lives in their cellars, and if she was sometimes electrifyingly candid in her criticism, she was equally unstinted in her praise. Madame D., with her old-world courtesy, was no less hospitable, and many a frantic S.O.S. brought her at top speed to our door.

From Monsieur C., who used to assure us that we

dispensed our gifts with a *delicatesse* that was *parfait*, and Madame K. showering baskets of luscious raspberries, to the poorest refugee who begged us to drink a glass of wine with her, or who deeply regretted her inability to make some little return for the help we had given her, they outvied one another in refuting the age-old libel on the character of the French.

"But," cries some acidulated critic, "you would have us believe that the poilu is a blue-winged angel, and the civilian too perfect to live." Far from it. The poilu is only a man, the civilian only human, and I have yet to learn that either—be he man or human—is perfect any more than he, or his equivalent is perfect even in this perfect English island in the sea. There are soldiers who . . . There are civilians who . . .

I guess the devil doesn't inject original sin into them with a two-pronged hypodermic syringe any more than he injects it into us. The good and the evil sprout up together, or are they the spiritual Siamese twin that is born of every one of us to be a perpetual confusion to our minds, a bewilderment to our bodies and a most difficult progeny to rear at the best of times? For as surely as you encourage one of the twins the other sets up a roar, sometimes they howl together, sometimes one stuffs his fist down the other's throat. And the bad one is hard to kill, and the good one has a tendency to rickets. No wonder it is a funny muddle of a world.

And the French have their twin too, only theirs say *la-la* and ours say damn, and if they keep an oversharp eye on the sous, do we turn our noses up at excess profits?

Of course some of them are greedy, perhaps greedier

on the whole than we are. Would any English village lock its wells when thirsty children wailed at its door? I know an Irish one would not. But the French are thrifty, and the majority of them would live comfortably on what a British family wastes. They work hard too. They are incredibly industrious, perhaps because they have to be.

France has not yet been inoculated with the virus of philanthropy, an escape on which she may possibly be congratulated. The country is not covered with a network of charitable societies overlapping and crisscrossing like railway lines at a junction, nor have French women of birth, independent means and superfluous energy our genius for managing other people's affairs so well there is no time to look after our own. The deserving poor run no risk of being pauperised, the undeserving don't keep secretaries, committees and tribes of enthusiastic females labouring heavily at their heels. The French family in difficulties has to depend on its own resources, its own wit, its own initiative and energy, and when I think of the way our refugees dug themselves in in Bar-le-Duc, and scratched and scraped, and hammered and battered at that inhospitable soil till they forced a living from its breast, my faith in philanthropy and the helping hand begins to wane.

Of course there are hard cases, where a little intelligent human sympathy would transform suffering and sorrow into contentment and joy, cases that send me flying remorsefully back to the altar of organised charity with an offering in outstretched hand, but above all these, over all the agony of war the stern independence of French character has ridden supreme.

So let their faults speak for themselves. Who am I that I should expose them to a pitiless world? Have I not faults of my own? See how I have kept poor Madame Pierrot gathering dahlias in her garden, and my comrade in adventure eating grapes upon a very stony seat. So long that now there is no time to tell you how we walked to Laimont and investigated more ruins there, and then how we walked to Mussey where we comfortably missed our train, and how a Good Samaritan directed us to a house, and how in the house we found a little old lady whose son had been missing since August 1914, and who pathetically wondered whether we could get news of him, and how a *sauf-conduit* had to be coaxed from the Mayor, and the little old lady's horse harnessed to a car, and how two chairs were planted in the car and we superficially planted on the chairs, and how the old lady and a brigand clambered on to the board in front, and how we drove down to Bar as the sun was setting. Nor can I tell you how nearly we were run into by a motor-car, nor how the old lady explained that the brigand was *malheureusement* nearly blind, and that she, still more *malheureusement*, was rather deaf, nor how we prayed as we clung desperately to the chairs which slid and wobbled and rocked and oscillated, and rattled our bones while all the military motor-cars in France sought our extermination.

Nor can I tell you how at a dangerous crossing the brigand drew up his steed, and set up a wail because he had forgotten his cigarettes, nor how one escapading female produced State Express which made him splutter and cough, and nearly wreck us in the ditch (though English tobacco is not nearly so strong as

French), nor how we came at last to Bar-le-Duc, nor how the old lady demanded a ridiculously small fee for the journey, nor how I lost a glove, and the sentries eyed us with suspicion, and the brigand who was blind and *la patronne* who was deaf drove away in the fading light to Mussey, the aroma of State Express trailing out behind them, and the old horse plodding wearily in the dust.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MODERN CALVARY

I

One day, not long after our visit to the battle-field, our composure was riven to its very foundations by an invitation to play croquet in the garden of Madame G. Could we spare an hour from our so arduous toil? For her it would be a pleasure so great, the English they love "le sport," they play all the games, we would show her the English way. Monsieur her husband he adored croquet, but never, never could he find any one to play with him. Madame, a little swarthy woman who always dressed in rusty black, clasped her shiny kid gloves together and gazed at us beseechingly. The Arbiter of our destinies decided that we must go. There is always *l'Entente*, you know, it should be encouraged at all hazards, a sentiment which meets with my fullest approval when the hazard does not happen to be mine.

Madame yearned that we should throw ourselves into "le sport" at four, but the devil of malice, who sits so persistently on my shoulder, arranged that I should be the only one free at that hour. The others promised to come at half-past four.

"But, my dear women," I cried, "I haven't played croquet for ages."

"Never mind. Hit something, do anything. But go."

I went. I was ushered into a tiny and stuffy parlour, and there for twenty interminable, brain-racking minutes I confronted Madame G. Then an old lady in a bath-robe sidled into the room, and we all confronted one another for ten minutes more. Madame G. may be a devil of a fellow with a croquet-mallet in her hand, but small talk is not her strong point. Neither is it mine, for the matter of that, when I am slowly suffocating in a foreign land. However, we finally adjourned to the garden. Where, oh where was the croquet ground? Where, oh where were my faithless companions? Where, oh where was tea? A quarter to five rang out from the tower of Nôtre Dame, and here was I marooned on a French grass plot adorned with trees, real trees, apple trees, plum trees, an enterprising pergola, several flower-beds and, Heaven help me! croquet hoops—hoops that had just happened, all anyhow, no two looking in the same direction. In direct line of fire rose a tall birch tree. I gazed at it in despair. A niblick, or a lofter, or a crane might get a ball over it, but a croquet mallet? . . . Circumvention was impossible. There were three bunkers.

"It is like your English croquet grounds?" Madame asked. "We play all the Sundays——"

"Ah, yes, through the Looking-glass," I murmured, and she responded—

"Plaît-il?"

I hastily congratulated her on the condition of her fruit trees.

Five o'clock. What I thought of the faithless was by now so sulphuric, blue flames must have been

leaping out of me. Five-fifteen. A Sail! The Arbiter, full of apologies, which did nothing to soften the steely reproval in my eye. Then Madame disappeared. At five-thirty she came back again accompanied by delinquent number two. She held a hurried consultation with the bath-robe, then melted again into the void.

"Can I go?" I signalled to the Arbiter. She shook a vigorous head. The rattle of tea-cups was coming from afar. At a quarter to six Madame announced tea. It was served in the dining-room. We all sat round a square table very solemnly—it was evidently the moment of Madame's life; there was no milk, we were expected to use rum—or was it gin?—instead. Anyway I know it was white, and one of us tried it, and I know . . . well, politeness conquered, but she has been a confirmed teetotaller ever since.

At six-five Madame was weeping as she recounted a tale she had read in the paper a day or so before, and six-twenty-five we came away.

"And we never played croquet after all. But you will come again when Monsieur mon mari is here, for Les Anglaises they love 'le sport.'"

But we never went back. Perhaps the tree-tops frightened us, or perhaps we were becoming too much engrossed in sport of another kind. You see, M. le Curé of N. came to visit us the next day, and soon after that Madame Lassanne inscribed her name on our books. Which shall I tell you about first? Madame Lassanne, who was a friend of Madame Drouet, and actually succeeded in making her talk for quite a long time on the stairs one day? I think so.

Perhaps to-morrow I shall tell you of M. Le Curé.

You see, it was really Madame Lassanne who first brought home to me what war means to the civil population in an invaded district. One guessed it all in a dim way before, of course, every imaginative person does, but not in the way in which pain, desolation of spirit, agony of soul, poignant anxiety drive their roots deep down into Life; nor does one realise how small a thing is human life, how negligible man when compared with the great god of War.

A French medical officer once said to me, "Mademoiselle, in war les civiles n'ont pas le droit d'être malade," and I dared to reply, "Monsieur, ils n'ont guère le droit de vivre." And he assented, for he knew, knew that to a great extent it was true, only too pitiably true. For the great military machine which exists in order that an unshakable bulwark may be set up between the invader and the civilians whom he would crush is, in its turn, and in order to keep that bulwark firm, obliged to crush them himself. In the War Zone (it is not too much to say it) the civilian is an incubus, an impediment, a most infernal nuisance. He gets so confoundedly in the way. And he is swept out of it as ruthlessly as a hospital matron sweeps dust out of her wards. That he is confused and bewildered, thoroughly *désorienté*, that he may be sick or feeble, that his wife may be about to give birth to a child, that his house is in ashes and that he, once prosperous, is now a destitute pauper, that his children trail pitifully in the dust, footsore, frightened, terror-haunted to the very verge of insanity, all these things from the military point of view matter nothing. And it must be so. They dare not matter. If they did, energies devoted to keeping that human bulwark in

the trenches fit and sound might be diverted into other channels, and the effort to ameliorate and save become the hand of destruction, ruining all in order to save a little.

Think of one village. There are thousands, and any one will do. Anxiety and apprehension have lain over it for days, but the inhabitants go about their work, eat, sleep, "carry on" much as usual. Night comes. It is pitch dark. The world is swathed in a murky shroud. At two o'clock loud hammering is heard, the gendarmes are going from house to house beating upon the doors. "Get up, get up; in half an hour you must be gone." Dazed with sleep, riven with fear, grief slowly closing her icy fingers upon their hearts, they stumble from their beds and throw on a few clothes. They look round the rooms filled with things nearly every one of which has a history, things of no intrinsic value, but endeared to them by long association, and it may be by memory of days when Love and Youth went hand in hand to the Gates of Romance and they opened wide at their touch. Things, too, that no money can buy: old *armoires* wonderfully carved, old china, old pottery, handed down from father to son, from mother to child for generations.

What would one choose in such a moment as that?

"You can take nothing but what you can carry." Nothing. The children clutch at hand and skirt. How can Marie and Germaine and Jean and Robert walk fifteen or twenty kilomètres to safety?

The prudent snatch at their family papers, thrust a little food into a bag and go out into the night. Others gather up useless rubbish because it lies under their

hand. The gendarmes are growing impatient. They round up their human flock as a dog rounds up his sheep. Shells are beginning to fall here and there. Some one has been killed—a child. Then a woman. There are cries, a long moan of pain. But the refugees must hurry on.

"Vîte, vîte, depêchez-vous." They stumble down the roads, going they know not whither, following the lanes, the woods, even the fields, for the main road must be kept clear for the army. Hunger, thirst, the torment of an August day must be endured, exhaustion must be combated. Death hovers over them. He stoops and touches now one, now another with his wings, and quietly they slip down upon the parched and baking earth, for they are old and weary, and rest is sweet after the long burden of the day.

But even this is not all. One may believe that at first, engulfed by the instinct of self-preservation, tossed by the whirlwind from one emotion to another and into the lowest pit of physical pain, the mind is too confused, too stunned to realise the full significance of all that is happening.

But once in their new quarters, with the long days stretching out ahead and the dark night behind, in wretchedness, in bitter poverty, ah! then Thoughts, Memories, Regrets and Infinite Lonelinesses throng upon them, and little by little realisation comes and at last they KNOW.

Know that the broken threads of life can never be taken up again in the old good way. "On était si heureux là-bas." [1] How often I have heard that said! "On vivait tout doucement. On n'était pas riche, ma

[1] We were so happy!

fois, but *we had enough!*" Poignant words those, in Refugee-land.

Added to the haunting dread of the future there is always the ghost-filled dream of the past. Women who have spoken with steady composure of the loss of thousands of francs, of the ruin of businesses built up through years of patient industry and hard work, of farms—rich, productive, well-stocked—laid waste and bare, have broken down and sobbed pitifully when speaking of some trivial intrinsically-valueless possession. How our hearts twine themselves round these ridiculous little things, what colour, what meaning they lend to life!

To lose them, ah, yes! that is bad enough; but to know that hands stained with blood will snatch at them and turn them over, and that eyes still bestial with lust will appraise their value. . . . That is where the sharpest sting lies. The man or woman whose house is effaced by a shell is happy indeed compared with those who have seen the Germans come, who have watched the pillage and the looting and the sacrilege of all they hold most dear.

But the *émigré's* cup must hold even greater sorrows and anxieties than these. "C'est un vrai Calvaire que nous souffrons, Mademoiselle." So they will tell you, and it is heartbreakingly true. Crucified upon the iron cross of German ambition, they pray daily that the cup may be taken from them, but the mocking god of War still holds it to their lips. They must drink it even to the very dregs.

For not always could all the members of a family get away together. It has been the fate of many to remain behind, to become prisoners in the shadowed

land behind the trenches, at the mercy of a merciless foe. Between them and their relatives in uninvaded France no direct communication can be established. An impenetrable shutter is drawn down between. Only at rare intervals news can come, and that is when a soldier son or father or other near relative becomes a prisoner of war in Germany. A French woman in the *pays envahi* may write to a prisoner in Germany, and he to her. He may also write to his friends in the free world beyond. And so it sometimes happens that news trickles through, but very rarely. The risk is tremendous, detection heavily punished. Only oblique reference can be indulged in, and when one has heard nothing for months, perhaps years, how meagre and unsatisfying that must be. Do we in England realise what it means? I know I did not before I met Madame Lassanne, and only very inadequately as I sat in the kitchen of the Ferme du Popey and listened to her story.

II

She was the daughter of one farmer, the wife of another and successful one, the richest in their district, so people said. When the war broke out her husband was mobilised, she with her three children, a girl of four, a boy of two and a month-old baby, remaining at the farm with her father and mother. A few days, perhaps a week or two passed, then danger threatened. Harnessing their horses to the big farm wagons, she and the old man packed them with *literie*, *duvets*, furniture, food, clothes, everything they could find room for, and prepared to leave the village. But the

gendarmes forbade it. I suppose the road was needed for military purposes: heavy farm wagons might delay the passage of the troops. Throughout the whole of one day they waited. Still the barrier was not withdrawn. Shells began to rain on the village; first one house, then another caught fire.

"You may go." The order came at last. The children, with their grandmother and an aunt of the Lassannes, were placed in the wagons and the little procession set out; but they were not destined to go far that day. At the next village the barrier fell again. Believing that the Germans were following close behind, they held hasty consultation, as the result of which the old women decided to walk on with the children, leaving M. Breda and Madame to follow as soon as the way was clear.

So the horses and wagons were put into a stable, and Madame and her father sat down to wait. The slow hours ticked away, a shell screamed overhead, another, then another. Soon they were falling in torrents on the little street. Houses began to crash down, the stable caught fire, the four horses and the wagons were burned to a cinder. Then the house in which the refugees had sheltered was struck. They escaped by a miracle, crawling on hands and knees. So terrific was the bombardment they dared not go down the road. A barrage of shell-fire played over it. With some dozens of others as miserable as themselves they lay all night in a furrow in a beet-field, Madame trembling in her father's arms, for shells were falling incessantly on the field and all around them. At dawn the hurricane ceased, and they crept away. The road was open now, they were on foot. They

walked fast, then faster, hoping every minute to overtake the children. The old women surely could not have gone very far. But mile after mile was conquered and no news of them could be found. No sentries had seen them, no gendarme had watched them go by. They asked every one they met on the road, at first hopefully, then, as fear grew, with clutching hands and fevered eyes. But the answer was always the same. They had not passed that way. Chance, Fate, call it what you will, brought Madame and the old man to Bar-le-Duc, and there, soon after her arrival, she heard that her husband had been wounded in the earliest of the fighting and was now a prisoner in Germany. A prisoner and ill. Day after day dragged by. She found employment on the farm near the town, she made inquiries, exhausted every channel of information, but no trace of the children could be found.

And her husband, writing from Germany, demanded news of them! He did not know that the farm was demolished, and that she was beggared. He asked for parcels, for comforts. She sent them to him, by what supreme effort of self-denial only she and the God she prayed to know. And she wrote him little notes, gay, brave little notes. She told him all about the children —how fat and how strong they were. . . . And Marie—ah, Marie was growing tall—so tall. . . . And Roger was able to talk now. . . .

God only knows what it cost her to write those letters; God only knows with what agony she forced her tears back to their source lest one, falling on the paper, betray her. She went about her work white-faced and worn, hungering for the news that never came, and

autumn faded into winter and spring was born and blossomed into summer, and then, and then only, did the shutter lift and a tiny ray of light come through.

Confused and frightened, the old women, burdened with the children, had lost their way in the darkness and wandered back into the German lines. They were now prisoners in Carignan (near the frontier); they managed to smuggle a letter through. The baby was dead. There was no milk to be had, so it died of starvation. Madame Breda had been offered freedom. If she wished she would be sent back into France through Switzerland. But the children's names were not on the list of those selected for repatriation.

"Could they go with her?"

"No."

"Eh bien, j'y reste."

The shutter snapped down again, the veil enclosed them, and Madame resigned herself to the long, weary waiting.

Was it any wonder that such stories as this—and there were all too many of them—filled us with hatred of everything German? In those first months of personal contact with war we were always at white heat, consumed with rage and indignation, and for my own part, at least, desirous of nothing less than the extermination of kultur and every exponent of it. As I walked home through the quiet afternoon, dark thoughts filled my mind. What a monster one can be! What longing for vengeance even the mildest of us can cherish! I thought of another village not far from that of Madame Lassanne's home, from which three hundred people had been driven into virtual slavery. Nearly all were old—over sixty, some few were boys

and girls of fourteen, sixteen, eighteen, and of the old, eighty died in the first six months.

It was a long time now since any news had come through, and those who waited had almost given up hope of seeing their loved ones again.

And we were impotent. With an effort I shook off despondency. I would go and see Madame Leblan and rest a while in her garden. She was lonely and loved a little visit. It would amuse her to hear about the Curé and our visit to N.; any gossip would serve to drive away her memories. "Ça change les idées," she would say. "It is not well to sit and brood."

Neither is it well to walk and brood; yet here was I, foolish virgin that I was, brooding like a moulting hen. Taking myself firmly in hand, I turned down the rue de L'Étoile and opened the garden gate.

III

Madame was only a poor peasant woman, but she had once been very beautiful, and the old face was handsome still. The aquiline features are well-modelled, the large blue eyes clear and steady, flashing now with a fine pride, now with delicious humour; the head is well poised, she is essentially dignified; there are times when she has the air of a queen.

Her husband is tall and thin, with a drooping moustache, and in accordance with prevailing custom he keeps his hat on in the house, and he is seventy-two and she is seventy, and when I saw her first she was in her quaint little garden sitting under the shade of a mirabelle tree with an ancient dame to whom only Rembrandt could have done justice. Like Madame,

she was short and broad, and without being handsome, she was just bonny. She had jolly little eyes and a chubby, dimpled face, and wore a spotlessly white and befrilled cap with strings that tied under her chin and made you rather want to kiss her. She was just a little *coquette* in her appearance, and she must have been born in prehistoric times, for she was " la tante de Madame Leblan." She didn't live in the little cottage, she had a room just across the way, and there I would see her sitting in the sun on a fine day as I turned in at the garden gate.

Of course we went down before her, and gave her of our best, for she was an irresistible old thing, who could coax you into cyclonic generosity. She would come trotting over to see us with a small basket on her arm, and having waited till the crowd that besieged our morning hours had melted away, would come upstairs looking so innocent and so picturesque our hearts were as water before her. And then out of the basket would come apples, or pears, or walnuts, with a honeyed phrase, the little vivid eyes searching our own. Refusal was out of the question, we were in the toils, knowing that for Madame we were the sun in the heavens, the down on the wings of the Angel of Life; knowing, too, that surely as she turned away would come the tactful hint, the murmured need. And though periodically we swore that she should have no more, she rarely went empty away.

At last, because of the equality of things, we hardened our hearts. She returned with walnuts. Our thanks being meticulously verbal, she retreated thoughtfully, to reappear a few days later with three pears and a remote *malaise* that successfully defied diagnosis.

We knew she had her eyes on medical comforts, eggs, *bons* for meat, etc., so the *malaise* deceived no one, while a cold gift of aspirin tabloids nearly destroyed her faith in humanity.

And all the time she was " rich " ! No wonder she was *coquette*, she could afford to be, for she had small *rentes*, and money laid by, and had saved all her papers and her bank-book. So Madame Leblan, who had left home with exactly twenty-seven francs in her pocket, told me, but not, loyally enough, until she was sure that our gifts to La Tante had ceased.

She herself never asked for anything, save once, and that was for a *paletot* for Monsieur. In spite of his three-score-years-and-twelve, in spite of the severe attack of internal hæmorrhage from which he was recovering, he went to work every morning at six, returning at six at night. Hard manual toil it was, too, much too hard for a man of his years. How Madame fretted over him ! How she scraped and saved to buy him little comforts. And he did need that coat badly. I think I shall never forget her face when she saw the warm Cardigan jacket the Society provided for him. Her eyes filled with tears, she flushed like a girl, she looked radiantly beautiful and then, with the most gracious diffidence in the world, " You will permit me ? " she said, and drew my face down to hers.

There was something about that old creature that made me feel ashamed. What one did was so pitifully little, but she made it seem like a gift of star-flowers bathed in the dews of heaven. It was her unconquerable sense of humour that attracted me to her, I suppose. French wit playing over the fields of life with an indomitable spirit that would not be broken,

When she was a girl her father used to say to her, "You sing too much, some day you will cry," but though the tears did come she never lost her gaiety of heart. When she married she was very poor; Monsieur's father had been foolish, loving wine, and they had to make their own way in the world, but she held her head high and did her best for her boys. It should never be said of them that they were educated at the cow's tail (à la queue des bêtes). Her pride came to her aid, and perhaps much of her instinctive good breeding too. *Le fils* in the Garde Republicaine in Paris has much of his mother's manner.

Leaving the cottage was a terrible wrench. They packed a few odds-and-ends into a bundle, and she tidied everything, saying farewell to the little treasures they had collected in forty-odd years. Silently they locked the doors behind them, her eyes dry, the catastrophe too big for tears. But in the garden Monsieur paused. "Les bêtes," he said; "we mustn't leave them to starve. Open the cow-house door and let them go free." As she turned to obey him her feet faltered, the world swam in a mist of tears. She thrust the key blindly into his hands and stumbled like a drunken woman down the road.

Then for six weeks they trudged together. They slept in fields, in the woods, under carts, in barns, they were drenched with rain and with dew, they were often hungry and thirsty and cold. But they struggled on until they came to Vavincourt, and there the owner of the little house in Bar met them, and seeing what manner of people they were, lent it to them rent free on condition that they looked after the garden. How grateful Madame was, but how intensely she longed

for home! How wistfully she turned her eyes northward across the hills! How often the question, When? trembled half spoken on her lips! What mattered it that home was a ruin and she penniless? Just to be in the valley again, to see the sun gleaming on the river.

To help the time to pass less sluggishly by we had invented a little tale, a tale of which I was the unworthy heroine, and the hero an unknown millionaire. The millionaire with gold *jusqu'au plafond*, who was obligingly waiting for me beyond the sea, and who would come some day and lay his heart, his hand, and his gold-mine at my feet. And then a *petit palais* would spring miraculously from that much-loved rubbish-heap at Véry, and one day as Madame and *le patron* stood by the door, they would see a great aeroplane skimming through the sky, it would swoop and settle, and from it would leap the millionaire and his blushing bride. And Madame would lead them in and give them wine and coffee and a salad and *saucissons de Lorraine*, which are better and more delicious than any other *saucissons* in all the wide world.

Only a foolish little story, but when one is old and one's heart is weary it is good to be foolish at times, good to spin the sun-kissed webs, good to leave the dark chamber of despair and stray with timid feet over the gleaming meadows of hope.

Her greeting rarely varied. "Je vous croyais morte," a reproach for the supposed infrequency of my visits. She cried it now, though scarcely a week had sped since I saw her last, and then with mysterious winks and nods she hobbled into the house, to return a few minutes later with two or three bunches of

grapes and some fine pears. "Pendant la guerre tous les scellés sont levés," [1] she laughed, but I knew she had not robbed her benefactor. The fruit she kept *en cachette* for us, she and M. Leblan deprived themselves of, nor could any remonstrance on our part stay her.

"Where is your basket?" She had ordered me to bring one on my next visit, yet here was I, most perplexingly without. But the fruit must be carried home. She had no basket, no paper. *Méchante* that I was, to come without that basket. Had not she, Madame, commanded it? In vain I refused the gift. She was inexorable.

"Ah, I have it." She seized me with delighted hands, and it was then that the uniform earned my bitterest reproach, for into its pockets, whose size suggested that they were originally intended to hold the guano and rabbits of agricultural relief, went the pears. One might as well argue with a megatherium as with Madame when her mind was made up. So I had to stand in the kitchen growing bulkier and bulkier, with knobs and hillocks and boulders and tussocks sprouting all over me, feeling like a fatted calf, and longing for kindly darkness to swallow me up. Subsequently I slunk home by unfrequented ways, every yard of which seemed to be adorned with a gendarme taking notes. I am convinced that I escaped arrest and decapitation only by a miracle, and that every dog in the town bayed at my heels.

My agonies, needless to say, met with scant sympathy from my companions. They accused me of flirting with M. Leblan, even while they dug greedy teeth into the

[1] During the war all seals are broken.

pears, an accusation it was difficult to refute when he called at the house one evening and, hearing that I was out, refused to leave a message, but turned up later and demanded an interview with such an air of mystery Madame came to call me fluttering so we thought the President of the Republic must be at the door.

Still more difficult was it to refute when Monsieur had gone away, leaving me transfixed on the stairs with two huge bottles of mirabelle plums in my hands. I never dared to tell the three villains who made life such a happy thing on the Boulevard de la Rochelle that Monsieur was wont to say that if only he were twenty years younger he. . . . he . . . Can you guess what he? . . .

Madame did. She knew, and used to tease me about it. She is one of the few people in the world who know that I still can blush! Do you? No? Ah, but then you have never seen Monsieur! You have never heard him say what he . . . what he . . . well, you know what he . . .

There were no dark thoughts in my mind as I sped circuitously homewards, skimming down a by-street every time a gendarme loomed in view; I was thinking of Madame and of the twinkle in her eyes when she talked of *le patron*, and of the long day spent at N., the story of which had helped to drive away for the moment the most persistent of her *idées noires*.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH WE BECOME EMISSARIES OF LE BON DIEU

Now the coming of M. le Curé was in this wise.

We were making up *paquets* in the Clothes-room, we were grimy, dishevelled and hot, we were in no mood for visitors, we were pining for tea, and yet Madame insinuated her head round the door and announced, "M. le Curé de N." She would have announced the Czar of Russia, or President Wilson, or General Joffre, or the dustman in exactly the same emotionless tones, and with as little consideration for our feelings.

"You go."

"No. You."

The tug of war ended, as such tugs generally do, in our going together, smoothing hair that flew on end, flinging overalls into a corner and praying hastily that the Curé might be an unobservant man. He was. There was only one vision in the world for him; the air, the atmosphere, life itself were but mirrors reflecting it; but conceding that it was a large one, we found some excuse for his egoism. Large? Massive. He was some inches over six feet in height and his soutane described a wide arc in advance. His hands were thick and cushiony, you felt yours sink into their pneumatic fastnesses as you greeted him; he had a huge head, very little hair, a long heavy jowl, small eyes, and he breathed fatly, thickly. His voice was slightly

smothered. Many years ago he had retired from his ministry, living at N. because he owned property there, but the war, which called all priests of military age and fitness to the colours, drew him from his life of ease and put the two villages, N. and R., under his spiritual charge. His gestures were large and commanding, he exuded benevolence—the benevolence of a despot. There would be no divided authority in the Curé's kingdom. It was not a matter for surprise to hear that he was not on speaking terms with his mayor, it would have been a matter for surprise if, had he been Pope, he had ever relinquished his temporal power.

He wasted little time on the usual preliminaries, plunging directly into his subject. At N. and R. there were refugees, *pauvres victimes de la guerre dans la grande misère*, sleeping on straw *comme des bêtes*, cold, half-clothed, in need of every necessary. He had heard of us, of our generosity (he called us "mes bonnes dames," with just a hint of condescension in his manner), he wished us to visit his people. Wished? He commanded. He implied, by an art I had not thought him capable of, that we were yearning to visit them, that our days would be storm-tossed, our nights sleepless unless we brought them relief. From mendicant, he transformed himself into benefactor, bestowing on us an opportunity which—it is due to our reputation to suggest—we craved.

It was well that our inclination jumped with his desire, for he was quite capable of picking us up, one under each arm, and marching off with us to N., had we refused. But how refuse in face of such splendid faith in our good-will, and under a shower of compliments that set us blushing to the tips of our toes?

We punctuated the flood or shower with murmurs of, "C'est un plaisir," or, "On ne demande pas mieux." We felt like lumbering elephants as we tried to turn aside his flattery, but he merely waved a benediction and swept on. We would go to N. next Wednesday; he, Monsieur, would meet us, and conduct us personally over the village. He would tell us who were the good Catholics—not that he wished to deprive the careless or sinful of our help; still, it would be as well for us to know. We read "preferential treatment" on this sign-post, and carefully reserved our opinion. When the visits were over, we would go to his house and eat an *œuf à la coque* with him, and some *confitures*. His modest establishment . . . a gesture indicated an ascetic régime, the bare necessities of life, but if we would accept? . . .

"With pleasure, if Monsieur was sure it would not inconvenience him."

"Mes bonnes dames," he replied grandly, "rien ne me dérange dans le service du bon Dieu." [1]

Of course it rained on Wednesday—rained quietly, hopelessly, despairingly, but persistently. Nevertheless we set out, chiefly—so great was Monsieur's faith in us—because it did not seem possible to remain at home. We put on the oilskins which, with the uniform, we had been led to understand would save our lives in France, but the sou'westers we did not wear. There are limits. And when later on we saw a worker clad in both, we did not know which to admire most, the courage which enabled her to wear them, or the utter lack of imagination which prevented her from realising their devastating effect.

[1] Nothing inconveniences me when it is in the service of God.

So we left the sou'westers on the pegs from which they were never taken, and arrived at N. in black shiny oilskins that stood out stiffly like boards from our figures, and were almost as comfortable to wear. We were splashed with mud, and we dripped audibly on the Curé's beautiful parquet floor.

We wished to begin at once? *Bon. Allons.* He, the Curé, had prepared a list, the name of every refugee was inscribed on it. Oh, yes, he understood *parfaitement*, that to make *paquets* we must know the age and sex of every individual. All was prepared. We would see how perfect the arrangements were.

No doubt from his point of view they were perfect, but from ours chaotic. We climbed the village street, he like a frigate in full sail, his wide cloak gathered about him, leading the way, we like two rather disreputable punts towing along behind. You know what happened at the first house—that illuminating episode of the *seau hygiénique?* Worse, oh, much worse was to befall us later! He discussed the possibilities of family crockery with a bluntness that was conducive to apoplexy, he left nothing to the imagination; perhaps he thought the Britishers had no imagination.

In fact, his methods were sheerly cyclonic. Never had we visited in such a whirl. Carried along in his wake, we were tossed like small boats upon a wind-tormented sea; we had no time to make notes, we had no time to ask questions, and when we had finished we had scarcely one clear idea in our minds as to the state, social position, profession, income, or need of those we had visited. Not a personal note (we who made copious personal notes), not a detail (we who had a passion for detail), only a blurred memory of general misery, or

rooms behind cow-houses and stables, through the filthy, manure-soddened straw of which we had to pick our way, or rooms without glass in the window-frames, of dark, noisome holes where human beings herded, of sacks of straw laid on the floor, of rags for bedding, of human misery in its acutest, most wretched form. The Curé talked of evil landlords who exploited these unfortunate people, "Mais Dieu les punira," he added unctuously. We wondered if the prophecy brought consolation to the refugees. And above all the welter of swiftly-changing impressions, I can see even now, in a dark room lighted only by or through the chimney-shaft, a room filled with smoke that choked and blinded us, a small child, perhaps eighteen, perhaps twenty-four months old, who doubled her fists into her eyes and laid her head on her grandmother's shoulder, refusing to look up.

"She has been like that since the bombardment," her mother explained.

When the priest raised the little head the child wailed, a long, thin, almost inhuman wail; when her grandmother put her down she lay on the floor, her eyes crushed against her fists.

"She will not look at the light, nor open her eyes."

"How long has she been like this, Madame?"

"Since we left home. The village was shelled; it frightened her."

"We will ask our *infirmière* to look after her," we promised, knowing that the nurse in question had successfully treated a boy in Sermaize who had been unable to open his eyes since the bombardment of the town. And some weeks later we heard that the baby was better.

Into every house the Curé made his way, much as Justice Shallow might have done. In every house he reeled off a set piece about the good English who had come to succour France in her distress, about our devotion, our courage, our wealth, our generosity. He asked every woman what she needed. "Trois couvertures? Bon. Mettons trois. Un seau? Bon, mettons un seau. Sheets? Put down two pairs."

We put down everything except what we most desired to know, the names and ages of the half-clothed children —that he gave us no opportunity of doing, was there not always the list?—we saw the Society being steered rapidly towards bankruptcy, but, mesmerised by his twinkling eyes, we promised all he required. Then he, who had been sitting on the only chair, would rise up, and having told the pleased but bewildered lady of the house that we were emissaries of Le bon Dieu, would stalk out, leaving us to wonder, as we followed him, whether Madame ever asked why the good God chose such strange-looking messengers. The oilskins were possessed of no celestial grace—I subsequently gave mine to a refugee.

Luncheon! The good Curé stopped dead in his tracks. The *oeuf à la coque* was calling. Back we trailed, still dripping, still muddy, even more earthly and less celestial than before, back to the house that had such a delicious old garden, and where fat rabbits grew daily fatter in their cages. The table was spread in a panelled room hung with exquisite old potteries. Seated solemnly, the Curé trying to conceal himself behind a vast napkin, the end of which he tucked under his collar, to us entered the *bonne* carrying six boiled eggs in a bowl. Being sufficiently hungry, we each

ate two; they were more or less liquid, so Monsieur tilted up the egg-shell and drank his down with gulping noises, while we laboured unsatisfyingly with a spoon. Then came the *bonne* with a dish of grilled rabbit (it was delicious); we ate rabbit. Then came a large dish of beans; we ate beans. We were sending out wireless messages by this, but no relief ship appeared on the horizon. The priest groaned over the smallness of our appetites, and shovelling large masses of beans into his mouth, explained that it is sinful to drink too much because the effects are demoralising, depraving, bringing ruin on others, but one may eat as much or more than one wants or likes, as a superfluity of food does no harm. A little physical discomfort, perhaps, but that passes. Injury to the spirit? None.

Then he commented on the strides Roman Catholicism was making in England, the most influential people were being converted—we thought he must be apologising to himself for his country's alliance with a people of heretical creed, but later on I realised that this idea is very prevalent among the priests of the district. An old man at Behonne congratulated me on the same good tendency. It had not occurred to him that I was of another faith, so there was an awkward moment when I —as in honour bound—admitted the error, but he glided over it with characteristic politeness, and our interview ended as amicably as it began.

At N. we volunteered the information that I was Irish, which shed balm on the Curé's perturbed soul. Though not of the right way of thinking, one of us came of a nation that was. That, at least, was something, and a compliment to the evangelising Irish saints of mediæval times—had not one of them settled in the district,

teaching the people and bringing the Gospel-light into paths shadowed by infidelity?—steered us round what might have been an awkward corner.

The beans finished, there came a cheese of the country, rich and creamy and good. We ate cheese, but we no longer looked at each other. The cheese finished, in came a massive cherry tart; we ate tart, then we drank coffee, and then Monsieur, rising from the table, opened the door, stood in the hall and said—— No. I think I had better not tell you what he said, nor where he waved us to. If ever you go to N. and have a meal with him you will find out for yourself. During lunch one of us admired his really very beautiful plates. "You shall have one," he said, and taking two from the wall, offered us our choice. Of course we refused, and the relief we read in his eye as he hung them up again in no way diminished our appreciation of his action.

Then we paid more visits, and yet more, and more, and finally, the rain having cleared, we walked home again in a balmy evening down the wide road under the communal fruit trees, where the woods which clothed the hill-side were to look like wonderful tapestry later on, when autumn had woven her mantle of russet and red, and dull dark crimson, and sober green, and browns of rich, light-haunted shades and flung it over the trees. Walked home soberly, as befitted those who had dined with a gourmand; walked home expectantly, for was not the list, the careful, exhaustive, all-comprehensive list of the Curé to follow on the morrow?

It was and it did, and with it came the following letter which we perused with infinite delight. How, oh, how could he say that the miry, inarticulate bipeds

who trotted dog-like at his heels did their work *avec delicatesse?* How, oh, how aver that we did it under his " modest " guidance?

Yet he said it. Read and believe.

" Mesdames, et excellentes dames,

" J'ai l'honneur de vous offrir l'hommage de mes sentiments les plus reconnaissantes et les plus devoués pour tout le bien que vous faites autour de vous avec tant de délicatesse et de générosité. Je prie Dieu de vous benir, vous et tous les membres de vos chères familles, de donner la victoire aux vaillantes armées de l'Angleterre, de Russie, et de France et n'y avons nous pas le droit car vous et nous nous representons bien la civilisation, l'honneur et la vraie religion. Je vous envoie ci-joint la liste (bien mal faite) des pauvres émigrés que vous avez visités sous ma modeste direction. Il en est qui manque de linge et pour les vieux qui ont besoin de vêtements on pourra leur donner l'étoffe, ils se changeraient de la confection ce qui je crois serait meilleur.

" Veuillez me croire votre tout devoué."

The list was by no means all comprehensive, it was not careful, it was indeed *bien mal faite*, and it exhausted nothing but our patience. Our own demented notes were the best we had to work upon, and so it befell that one day some soldiers drove a vast wagon to our door and in it we piled, not the neat *paquets* of our dreams, but blankets, sheets, men's clothes, women's clothes, children's clothes, *seaux* and other needful things and sent them off to N., where they were dumped in a room, and where an hour or two later, under

conditions that would have appalled the stoutest, we fitted garments on some three hundred people, while M. le Curé smiled wide approval and presented every *émigré* child in the village with a cap, a bonnet or a hat filched from our scanty store.

And then because the sun was shining and several batteries of *soixante-quinze* were *en repos* in the village, we went off to inspect them. The guns were well hidden from questing Taubes under orchard trees, the men were washing at the fountain, or eating a savoury stew round the camp kitchen, or flirting desperately with the women. They showed us how to load and how to train a gun, and then the priest, whom they evidently liked, for he had a kindly "Hé, mon brave, ça va bien?" or an affectionate fat-finger-tap on the shoulder for them all, bore us off to visit an artillery officer who had been doing wonderful things with a *crapouillot*. We found him in a beautiful garden in which, on a small patch of grass, squatted the *crapouillot*, a torpedo fired from a frame fixed in the ground. Alluding to some special bomb under discussion, the lieutenant said, "It isn't much, but this—oh, this has killed a lot of Boches."

He helped to perfect it, so he knew. We left him gazing affectionately at it, a fine specimen of French manhood, tall and slender, but strongly made, with clear humorous eyes, and breeding in every line of him.

I often wonder whether he and his *crapouillot* are still killing "lots of Boches," and whether he ever exclaims as did a woman who saw them breaking over the frontier in 1914, "What a people! They are like ants: the more of them you kill, the more there are."

We would have liked to linger in the sunny flower-encrusted garden, but R. awaited us. There with consummate skill we evaded M. le Curé, and did our visiting under no guidance but our own. A quaint little village is R., deep enbosomed in swelling uplands, with woods all about it, but, like N., stricken by neglect and poverty. The inhabitants of both seemed rough and somewhat degraded, a much lower type than the majority of our refugees, but perhaps they were only poor and discouraged. The war has set so many strange seals upon us, we may no longer judge by the old standards, no longer draw conclusions with the light, careless assumption of infallibility of old.

CHAPTER X

PRIESTS AND PEOPLE

I

HAVING tasted the delights of a mild vagabondage, we now turned our thoughts to other villages, modestly supposing that by degrees we could "do" the Meuse. (Had we but known it the whole of France lay before us, refugees everywhere, and every refugee in need). Having requisitioned a motor-car we planned tours, but first we investigated Behonne on foot. It lies on the hill above the aviation ground, so let no man ask why it came first in our affections.

I suppose it would be impolitic to say how many sheds there were, or how many aeroplanes we used to see squatting like great winged beetles on the ground, and then rising so lightly, so delicately, spiralling higher and higher, and then darting away with swift wing far into the shimmering blue.

Although Behonne is at the top of a hill, it has managed to tuck itself into a hollow—so many French villages have this burrowing tendency—and all you can see of it as you approach is the top of the church spire rising like a funny candle-extinguisher above the ridge of the hill. The village itself is dull and uninteresting, but the surrounding country beautiful beyond measure, especially when the corn is ripening in the sun; the refugees for the most part not necessitous, having driven from home in their farm carts,

magnificently throned on feather beds and *duvets*, with other household goods.

Two houses, however, made a lasting impression. In one, in a room in the centre of which was a well (boarded over of course), lived a woman, her two children, and an old man in no way related to them. The walls were rotting, in many places straw had been stuffed in to fill fissures and holes, the ceiling was broken, enterprising chunks of it making occasional excursions to the floor below, and one window was "glazed" with paper. The doors, through which rats gnawed an occasional way, were ill-fitting; in bad weather the place was a funnel through which the wind whistled and tore. The woman had one blanket and some old clothes with which to cover herself and her children at night, the old man had a strip of carpet given him by the Curé, a kindly old man of peasant stock and very narrow means. The room was exceedingly dirty, the children looked neglected, the woman was ill.

In the other house was a cheery individual whose husband had been a cripple since childhood. She told us she had four children, the youngest being three years old. He came running in from the street, a great fat lusty thing, demanding to be fed, and we learned to our astonishment that he was not yet weaned. Eugenically interesting, this habit of nursing children up to the age of two or even three years of age is not uncommon, and it throws a strong light upon the psychology of French Motherhood.

A few miles beyond Behonne lies Vavincourt, sacred to the omelette of immortal memory—but oh, what a day it was that saw us there! A fierce wind that seemed to tear all the clothes from our bodies blew from the north, there were some inches of snow on

the ground, light powdery snow fell incessantly. We were frozen as we drove out, we froze still harder as we made our way from house to house, slipping and sliding on the treacherous snow, absorbing moisture through our boots, staggering like wooden-legged icicles into rooms whose temperature sensibly declined with our advent. A day of supreme physical discomfort; a day that would surely have been our last had not the Mayor's wife overtaken us in the street and swept us into her kitchen, there to revive like flies in sunshine, under the mellifluous influence of hot coffee and omelette, *confitures* and cheese.

It was in Vavincourt that we first saw women embroidering silk gowns for the Paris shops. The panels in pale pink were stretched on a frame (*métier*), at which they worked one on either side; a common method, as we discovered during the winter. In Bar-le-Duc we had come upon a few women who worked without a *métier*, but as time went on more and more *brodeuses* of every description came upon our books, and so an industry was started which lived at first more or less by taking in its own washing, but later blossomed out into more ambitious ways. Orders came to us from England, and a consignment of dainty things was sent to America, but with what result I cannot say, as I left Bar before its fate was decided.

The Verdun and Nancy districts appear to be the chief centres of the *broderie* industry, the latter being so famous that girls are sent there to be apprenticed to the trade, which, however, is wretchedly paid, the rate being four sous, or rather less than twopence, an hour, the women finding their own cotton. We gave six sous and cotton free—gilded luxury in the workers' eyes, though sweating in ours, and trusted to their

honesty in the matter of time, a trust which was amply repaid, as with one or two exceptions they were scrupulous to a degree. The most amusing delinquent was a voluble lady from Resson who glibly replied, "Oh, at least sixty hours, Mademoiselle," to every question.

"What, sixty hours to do THAT?" we would remonstrate, looking at a small tray-cloth with a *motif* in each corner.

"Well, à peu près, one does not count exactly; but it was long, long, vous savez." A steely eye searched ours, read incredulity, wavered; "Six francs fifty? Eh, mon Dieu, on acceptera bien cela." And off she would go, to come back in faith with the same outrageous story on the next market day. Perhaps there is excuse for a debt of six francs swelling to eighteen when one walks ten miles to collect it.

Quite a hundred women inscribed their names on our *broderie* wages-sheet, the war having dislocated their connection with their old markets. The trade itself was languishing, the workers scattered and unable to get into touch with former employers, for Paris shops do not deal direct as a rule, they work through *entrepreneuses*, or middlewomen, who now being themselves refugees were unable to carry on their old trade. It was almost pitiable to see how the women snatched at an opportunity of working, only a very few, and these chiefly *métier* workers, being still in receipt of orders from Paris. Some whom we found difficulty in employing were only *festonneuses*, earning at the best miserable pay and doing coarse, rough work, quite unfit for our purpose—buttonholing round the necks and arms of cheap chemises, for instance. Others were *belles brodeuses*, turning out the most exquisitely dainty

things, fairy garments or house-linen of the most beautiful kind.

Of all ways of helping the refugees there was none better than this. How they longed for work! The old people would come begging for knitting or sewing. "Ça change les idées," they would say. Anything rather than sit day after day brooding, thinking, going back over the tragic past, looking out upon the uncertain future. Every franc earned was a franc in the stocking, the *bas de laine* whose contents were to help to make a home for them once more when the war was over. And what could be better than working at one's own trade, at the thing which one loved and which lay in one's fingers? When the needle was busy the mind was at rest, and despair, that devourer of endurance, slunk abashed out of sight. For they find the time of waiting long, these refugees. Can you wonder? Wherever we went we heard the same story; in village or town we were asked the same question. Each stroke of good fortune, every "push," every fresh batch of prisoners brought the sun through the low-hanging clouds; every reverse, the forced inactivity of winter, drew darkness once more across the sky. In the villages the people who owned horses were fairly well off, they could earn their four francs a day, but the others found little comfort. Work was scarce, their neighbours often as poor as themselves. There are few, if any, big country houses ruled by wealthy, kind-hearted despots in these districts of France. In all our wanderings we found only one village basking in manorial smiles, and enjoying the generosity of a "lady of the house." The needy had to fend for themselves, and work out their own salvation as best they might. The reception given to the Belgians in

England read to them like a fairy tale, and fostered wild ideas of England's wealth in their minds. "All the English are rich," they would cry; "have we not heard of les milords anglais?" They received accounts of the poverty in our big cities with polite incredulity; if our own people were starving or naked, why succour foreigners?

Sometimes they smiled a little pityingly. "The English gaspillent tout." Spendthrifts. And they would nod sapient heads, murmuring things it is not expedient to set down. It may even be indiscretion to add that between the French and the Belgians no love is set, some racial hatred having thrust its roots in deep.

It is in the winter that vitality and resistance-power run lowest, especially in the villages, for though work may be found in the fields during the summer, the long dark winter months drag heavily by. *Brodeuses* would walk eight miles in and eight out again in the most inclement weather to ask for work, others would come as many weary miles to get a hank or two of wool with which to knit socks and shawls. Sometimes one woman would take back work for half a dozen, and always our field of operations spread as village after village was visited and the Society became known.

They came in their tens, they came in their hundreds, I am tempted to swear that they came in their thousands. Madame soon ceased to announce them, they lined the hall, they blocked the staircase, they swirled in the Common-room. There were days when all the resources of the establishment failed, when *broderie* ran short and wool ran short, when there were no more chemises or matinées waiting to be made up, and when our hair, metaphorically speaking, lay in tufts over the house, plucked from our heads by our distracted

fingers. They came for work, they came for clothes, they came for medicine and medical attendance, they came for food—only the very poorest these—they came for condensed milk for their babies, or for *farine lactée*, or for orders for admission to the Society's hospitals at Châlons and Sermaize, or to ask us to send their children to the *Colonies des Vacances*, or for paper and packing to make up parcels for husbands at the Front. They came to buy beds and pillows and bolsters at reduced prices and on the instalment plan, paying so much per month according to their means; they came for chairs and cupboards, or for the "trousseau," a gift—it may be reckoned as such, as they only contributed one franc fifty towards the entire cost—of three sheets, four pillow-cases and six towels, each of which had to be hand-stitched or hemmed, and marked or embroidered with the owner's name. They came to ask for white dresses and veils—which they did not get—for candidates for confirmation, they came for sabots and boots, and sometimes they came for the whole lot.

"Well, Madame, ça va bien?" Thus we greeted a hardy old campaigner in the street one day.

"Eh bien, ça va tout doucement." Then with an engaging smile, "I am coming to see you to-morrow."

"Indeed? And what do you want now?" This looks crude, but we laboured under no delusions where Madame Morge was concerned. It was not for the sake of our *beaux yeux* that she visited us.

"Eh, ma fois, un peu de tout," she replied audaciously, and we shot at her a mendacious, "Don't you know that distributions have ceased?" which left her calling heaven and her gods to witness that the earth was crumbling.

Villagers who lived too far away for personal visits wrote, or their Mayor or their priest wrote for them. We had by this time organised our system, and knew that the person who could supply us with a complete and detailed list was the Mayor, or his secretary the schoolmaster.

Sometimes these worthies were hard of heart, assuring us that no one in the commune was necessitous, but we knew from experience that the official mind is sometimes a superficial mind, judging by externals only, so we persisted in our demand, and were invariably satisfied in the end. Others, and they were in a large majority, met us with open arms, cheerfully placed their time and their knowledge at our disposal, were hospitable, helpful and kind, and careful to draw our attention to specially deserving cases. Once when on a tour of inquiry we stumbled into a village during the luncheon hour. A regiment was resting there, and, as the first English who presumably had set foot in it, we were immediately surrounded by an admiring and critical crowd, some imaginative members of which murmured the ominous word Spy. The Mayor's house indicated, we rapped at the door, and in response to a gruff *Entrez* found ourselves in a small and very crowded kitchen, where a good *pot-au-feu* was being discussed at a large round table. The situation was sufficiently embarrassing, especially as the Mayor, being deaf, heard only a few words of our introductory speech, and promptly wished all refugees at the devil. A list? He was weary of lists. Every one wanted lists, the Préfet wanted lists, the Ministre de l'Intérieur wanted lists. And now we came and demanded them. Who the—well, who were we that he should set his quill a-driving on our behalf?

"Shout 'Anglaises' at him." It was a ticklish moment. He was on the point of throwing us out neck and crop. The advice was taken, the roar might have been heard in Bar.

"English? You are English?"

Have you ever seen a raging lion suddenly transform itself into a nice brown-eyed dog? We have, in that little kitchen in a remote village of the Meuse. Our hands were grasped, the Mayor was beaming. A list? He would give us twenty lists. English? Our hands were shaken till our fingers nearly dropped off, and if we had eaten up all the *pot-au-feu* Monsieur would have deemed it an honour. However, we didn't eat it. Monsieur's family was gazing at it with hungry eyes, and even the best of Ententes may be strained too far.

When we reached the street again the crowd had fraternised with our chauffeur, and we drove away under a pyrotechnical display of smiles.

Another day a soldier suddenly sprang off the pavement, jumped on the step of the motor-car, thrust some freshly-roasted chestnuts into my hand and was gone before I could cry, "Thank you."

We met many priests in these peripatetic adventures, the stout, practical and pompous, the autocratic, the negligent (there was one who regretted he could tell us nothing: "I have only been fifteen months here, so I don't yet know the people"), the old—I remember a visit to a presbytery in the Aube, and finding there a charming, gentle, diffident creature, a lover of books, poor, spiritual, half-detached from this world, very close to the next. He had a fine church, pure Gothic, a joy to the eye of the connoisseur, but no congregation. Only a wee handful of people who met each Sunday in a side chapel, the great unfilled vault of the

church telling its own tale of changed thought and agnostic days.

But most intimately of all we came to know the Abbé B. who lived in our own town of Bar, because, greatly daring, we rang one evening at his door and asked him to teach us French.

We had heard of him from Eugénie, and knew that he taught at the École St Louis, that he was a refugee —he escaped from M. on his bicycle a few minutes before the Germans entered it—and that his church and his village were in ruins. But we had never seen him, and when, having rung his bell, escape was no longer possible, an awful thought shattered us. Suppose he were fat and greasy and dull? Could any ingenuity extract us from the situation into which we had thrust ourselves? We felt sure it could not, so we followed Eugénie with quaking hearts, followed her to the garden where we found a short, dark man with a humorous mouth and an ugly, attractive face, busily planting peas. We nodded our satisfaction to one another, and before we left the arrangement was made.

Our first lesson was devastating. The Abbé credited us with the intelligence of children, telling us how to make a plural, and how by adding "e" a masculine word can be changed into a feminine; fort, forte; grand, grande; and so on. Then he gave us a *devoir* (home work), and we came away feeling like naughty children who have been put into the corner. His parlour was stifling, and how we rejoiced when the weather was fine, and we could hold our class in the garden. I can see him now standing by the low wall under the arbour, his gaze turned far away out across the hills. "It is there," he pointed, "the village. Out there near St Mihiel."

For twenty-seven years he had ministered there, he had seen the children he baptised grow to manhood and womanhood, and had gathered their children, too, into the fold of Christ. He had beautified and adorned the church—how he loved it!—year after year with tireless energy and care, making it more and more perfect, more and more fit for the service of the God he worshipped. And now it is a ruin blown to fragments by the guns of friend and foe alike, and his people are scattered, many of them dead. He came to Bar penniless, owning just the clothes he stood up in, and he told me once that his income, including his salary at the school and a grant from some special fund, was just one hundred francs a month. Scarcely a pound a week.

Once hearing me say that I was not rich, he asked me the amount of my income, adding naïvely, "I do not ask out of curiosity," and I felt mean as I dodged the question, for an income that is "not riches" in England looks wonderfully like wealth in a refugee's parlour in Bar.

All his dream, all his desire is to go back to M. and build his church again. The church the central, the focussing point, then the schoolhouse, then homes for the people, that is his plan; but he has no money, his congregation is destitute—or nearly so—he cannot look to the Government. Whence, then, will help come? So he would question, filling us with intense desire to rush back to England and plead for him and his cause in every market square in the land. He would go back to M. now if they would allow him to, he will go back with or without permission when the slaughter ends.

"The valley is so fertile," he would say; "watered by the Meuse, it is one of the richest in France. Such

grass, such a *prairie*. And after the war we must cultivate, cultivate quickly; they cannot allow land like ours to lie idle, and so we shall go back at once."

"But," we said, "will you be able to cultivate? Surely heavy and constant shell-fire makes the land unfit for the plough?"

We knew what the ground is like all along the blood-stained Front, hundreds of miles of it fought over for four interminable years, its soil enriched by the hallowed dead, torn and lacerated by shells, incalculable tons of iron piercing its breast, and knew, too, that Death lurks cunningly in many an unexploded bomb or mortar or shell, and that prolonged and costly sanitation will be necessary before man dare live on it again. Yes, the Abbé knew it too, but knew that a strip of his richest land lay between two hills, the French on one, the Germans on the other, and not a trench dug in all the length between. No wonder hope rode gallantly in his breast, no wonder he saw his people going quietly to their labour, and heard his church bell ringing again its call to peaceful prayer. And then he would revert again to the ever-present problem, the problem of ways and means.

Ah, we in England do not know how that question tortures the heart of stricken France. Shall I tell you of it, leaving the Abbé for the moment to look out across the hills, the reverberant thunder in his ear and infinite longing in his loyal heart?

II

A little poem of Padraic Colum's springs to my mind as I ask myself how to make you realise, how bring the truth home to those who have never seen the

eternal question shadow the eyes of homeless men. One verse of it runs—

> "I am praying to God on high,
> I am praying Him night and day,
> For a little home, a home of my own,
> Out of the wind and the rain's way."

and it just sums up the refugee desire.

You—if you are a refugee—had a home once, you earned a livelihood; but the home is laid waste and bare, your livelihood has vanished, and in all probability your savings with it.

You buried what money you had in the cellar before you left, because you thought you were only going away for a few weeks, and now the Germans have found it. You know that they pour water over cellar floors, watching carefully to see whether any percolates through. If it does it is clear that the earth has recently been disturbed, so away they go for shovels and dig; if it doesn't they try elsewhere. There is the well, for instance. A carefully-made-up packet might lie safely at the bottom for years, so what more suitable as a hiding-place? What, indeed, says the wily Hun as he is cautiously lowered into the darkness, there to probe and pry and fish, and if he is lucky to drag treasure from the deeps. Or you may have hidden your all under that white rock at the end of the garden. The rock is overturned to-day, and a hole shows where the robber has found your gold.

A gnarled tree-trunk, a post, a cross-road, anything that might serve as a mark lures him as sugar lures the ant; he has dug and delved, and searched the surface of France as an intensive culturist digs over his patch of ground. He has cut down the communal forests, the famous cherry and walnut trees of Les

Éparges have all been levelled and the timber sent into Germany; he has ripped up floors, torn out window frames; he falls on copper and steel and iron with shrieks of joy; he is the locust of war, with the digestion of an ostrich; he literally "licks the platter clean," and what he cannot gorge he destroys.

So if you are a refugee you ask yourself daily, "What shall we find when we go back? How shall we start life afresh? Who will rebuild our houses, restock our farms and our shops, and indemnify us for all we have lost? France? She will have no money after the war, and Germany will be bankrupt.

What can we, sheltered and safe in England, know of such sorrow as this? To say we have never known invasion is to say we have never known the real meaning of war. It may and does press hardly on us, but it does not grind us under foot. It does not set its iron heel upon our hearts and laugh when the red blood spurts upon the ground; it does not take our chastity in its filthy hands and batten upon it in the market-place; it doesn't rob us of liberty, nor of honour, nor does it break our altars, spuming its bestialities over the sacred flame. Our inner sanctuaries are still holy and undefiled. Those whom we have given have gone clear-eyed and pure-hearted to the White Temple of Sacrifice, there to lay their gift upon the outstretched hand of God: not one has died in shame.

Whatever the war may have in store for us—and that it has much of suffering, of hardship, of privation and bitter sorrow who can doubt?—if it spares us the violation of our homes and of our sanctuaries, if it leaves our frontiers unbroken, if it leaves us FREE, then, indeed, we shall have incurred a debt which it will be difficult to pay. A debt of gratitude which

must become a debt of honour to be paid in full measure, pressed down, and running over to those, less fortunate than ourselves, who will turn to us in their need.

And in the longed-for days to come France will need us as she needs us now. She will need our sympathy, our money, our very selves. She will no longer call on us to destroy in order to save, she will call on us to regenerate, redeem, to roll away the Stone from her House of Death, and touching the crucified with our hand, bid them come forth, revivified, strong and free.

Yes, there will be fine work to do in France when the war is over! Constructive work, the building up of all that has been broken down; work much of which she will be too exhausted to undertake herself, work of such magnitude that generations yet unborn may not see it completed.

A new world to make! What possibilities that suggests. Rolling away the Stone, watching the dead limbs stir, the flush of health coming back into the grey, shrivelled faces, and light springing again into the eyes. Seeing Joy light her lamps, and Hope break into blossom, seeing human hearts and human souls cast off the cerecloths and come forth into the fruitful garden. Surely we can await the end with such a Vision Beautiful as that before us, and—who knows?—it may be that in healing the wounds of others we shall find balm for our own.

The Return. If the French visualise it at all, do they see it as a concrete thing, a long procession of worn, exhausted, but eager men and women winding its way from every quarter of France, from the far Pyrenees, from the Midi, from the snow-clad Alps, from the fertile plains, winding, with many a pitiful gap in its ranks, back over the thorn-strewn road?

Is that their dream? Yet it may be that the reality is only the beginning of another exile, as long, as patient, as difficult to endure.

Hard-headed, practical, unimaginative reformers of the world's woes sometimes blame the refugees who have remained so near the Front.

In Bar house-rent is high, living exceedingly dear. Legends such as "*Le sucre manque : Pas de tabac :* no matches; no paraffin," are constantly displayed in the shop windows, wood has more than doubled in price, coal is simply *hors de prix*. Milk, butter and eggs are frequently unobtainable, and generally bad; gas is an uncertain quantity as coal is scarce, and has a diabolic knack of going out just when you need it most. All of which things do not lend to the gaiety of nations, still less to that of the *allocation*-supported refugee. If troops are being moved from one part of the Front to another, the *Petite Vitesse* ceases from its labours and supplies are cut off from the town. Farther south these lamentable things do not happen, but farther south is farther from home. And there's the rub! For home is a magnet and would draw the refugee to the actual Front itself, there to cower in any rude shelter did common sense and *l'autorité compétente militaire* not intervene.

So as many as possible have stayed as near the barrier as possible. And—this is a secret, you mustn't divulge it—these wicked, wily, homeless ones are plotting. They are afraid that after the war the Government will bar the road now swept by German guns; that orders will go forth forbidding return; that railway station *guichets* will be barred and roads watched by lynx-eyed policemen whom no bribe can corrupt — they will be very special policemen, you know— no tears cajole.

And so they plan to slip back unobserved. If one is at the very door, not more than the proverbial hop, skip and jump away—well, the magnet is very powerful, and even Jove and Governments nod sometimes. And just as the head drops forward and the eyes close, *hey presto!* they will be over the border, and when the barrier closes down they will be inside, and all the gendarmes in France will not be able to put them out again. If they can't GO home, they will SNEAK home. They will get there if they have to invent an entirely new mode of locomotion, even if they have to live in cellars or shell-holes and eat grass—but there may not be any grass. Didn't Sermaize live in cellars and exist on nothing at all?—live in cellars and grow fond of them? There is one old lady in a jolly little wooden house to-day, who suffers from so acute a nostalgia for her cellar she is afraid to walk past the ruins that cover it. If she did, she declares, the beautiful little wooden house would know her no more. The cellar was as dark and as damp as the inside of a whale, and it gave her a rheumatism of the devil in all her bones, but she lived in it for three years, and in three years one attaches oneself, *ma foi*, one forms *des liaisons*. So she sits and sighs while the house-builders meditate on the eternal irony of things, and their pride is as a worm that daws have pecked.

So be sure the refugees will go back just as soon as ever they can go, as the Abbé plans to go, caring little if it is unwise, perhaps not realising that even if Peace were declared to-morrow, many years must pass before the earth can become fruitful again, many years must set behind the hills of Time before new villages, new towns, new cities can spring from the graves of the old.

Personally, I hope that some of these graves will be

left just as Germany has made them, that a few villages, an historic town or two will be carefully guarded and preserved, partly because ruin-loving America will pay vast sums to see them, and so help to rebuild others, and partly because—am I a vindictive beast?—I want them to remain, silent, inexorable witnesses of the true inwardness of the German method and the German soul, if anything so degraded as she is can be said to have a soul. "Lest we forget," these ghosts of towns should haunt us for ever, stirring the memory and quickening the imagination, a reproach to conscience, an incorruptible judge of blood-guiltiness, which we should neither pardon nor forget till the fullest reparation has been made, the utmost contrition has been shown. And it must be no lip-service either. By its deeds we must know it. I want to see Germany humbled to the very dust; I want to see Germany in sackcloth and ashes rebuilding what she has destroyed, sending new legions into France, but armed this time with shovel and with pick, with brick and with mortar; I want to see those legions labouring to efface the imprints of the old; I want to see Germany feeding them and paying them—they must not cost France one sou; I want to see her in the white shroud of the penitent, candle in hand, barefoot and bareheaded before the Tribunal of the World, confessing her sins, and expiating them every one in an agony not one whit less poignant than that which she has inflicted upon others. Yes, let the destroyer turn builder. And until she does so let us ostracise her, cut her out of our Book of Life. Who are we that we should associate with the Judas who has betrayed civilisation?

A refugee rarely spoke of the Germans without prefixing the adjective dirty—*ces sales Boches*—and the

Abbé was no exception to the rule; indeed, he was plain-spoken to bluntness on most occasions. His criticisms of our French compositions would have withered the vanity of a Narcissus, and proved altogether too much for one timid soul, who, having endured a martyrdom through two lessons, stubbornly refused to go back any more. Which was regrettable, as on closer acquaintance he proved to be rather a lovable person, with a simplicity of soul that was as rare as it was childlike.

Like the Curé of N., he presumed us Roman Catholic, asked us if England were not rapidly coming into the light, and commented upon the "conversion" of Queen Victoria shortly before her death. Though it shook him, I think he never quite believed our denial of this remarkable story, and have sometimes reproached myself for having deprived him of the obvious comfort it brought him; but he took it all in good part, and subsequently showed us that he could be broad-minded, and tolerant as well.

"Charity knows no creed," he cried, and it was impossible to avoid contrasting his implicit faith in our honesty, his steady confidence that we would never use our exceptional opportunities for winning the confidence and even the affection of the people for any illegitimate purpose, with the deep distrust of the average Irish priest. The hag-ridden fear of Proselytism which clouds every Irish sky dares not show its evil face in France, nor did we ever find even a breath of intolerance tainting our relations with priests or with people.

But then perhaps they, like the Abbé, realise that our error of faith is a misfortune rather than a fault. Having been born that way, we were not wholly respon-

sible. Indeed the Abbé went so far as to assure me that I was not responsible at all.

"Then who is, M. l'Abbé?" I questioned, reading condemnation of some one in his eye.

"Henry the Eighth," he replied, with exquisite conviction, and I gasped. Henry the Eighth!

"Assurement." Had he not a quarrel with his Holiness the Pope, and being greedy for temporal power renounced Catholicism in a fit of rage, and so flung the English people into the profundities of spiritual darkness? We—we other Protestants—are his victims; our error of faith is one for which we shall neither be judged nor punished, but he . . . I realised that Henry deserved all my sympathy; he is not having too good a time of it *là bas*. Of course it was comforting to know that we were blameless, but privately I thought it was rather unfair to poor old Hal, who surely has enough sins of his own to expiate without having those of an obscure bog-trotting Irishwoman foisted upon him as well.

"Yours," went on the Abbé, "is natural religion, the heritage of your parents; ours is revealed. Some day I will explain it to you, not—this very naïvely—with any desire to convert you, but in order to help you to understand why truth is to be found only in the arms of the Roman Church."

It puzzled him a little that we should be Protestant, it was so austere, so comfortless, so cold. "La scène-froide" was the expression he used in describing our services, "les mystères" when talking of his own. He denounced as the grossest superstition the pathetic belief of many an Irish peasant in the infallibility, the almost-divine power of the priesthood, and, unlike his colleagues in that tormented land, he is an advocate

of education even on the broadest basis. "Let people think for themselves; if you keep too tight a rein they will only revolt."

That he detests the present form of Government goes without saying, his condemnation being so sweeping the big pine tree in the garden positively trembled before the winds of his rage. "Anything but this," he cried, "even a monarchy, même un Protestant, même le Roi Albert. Atheists, self-seekers all, they are ruining France," and then he repeated the oft-heard conviction that the war has been sent as a punishment for agnosticism and unbelief.

For Prefêts and Sous-Prefêts he entertains the profoundest contempt, even going as far as to designate one of the former, whom I heroically refuse to name, a *gros, gras paresseux*,[1] and the Sous-Prefêts the *âmes damnées* of the Minister of the Interieur. How he hates the whole breed of them! And how joyfully he would depose them every one! The feud between Church and State has ploughed deep furrows in his soul, and I gather that brotherly love did not continue long—supposing that it ever existed—in M. when its waves swept the village into rival factions. The Mayor, needless to say, was agnostic, and loyal to his Government; the Abbé furious, but trying hard to be impartial, to eschew politics, and serve his God. He might have succeeded had not the spirit of mischief that lurks in his eye betrayed him and dragged him from his precarious fence. He plunged into the controversy, but—oh, M. l'Abbé! M. l'Abbé!—in patois and in the columns of the local Press. Now his knowledge of patois, gathered as a boy, had been carefully hidden under a bushel, and so the authorship of the

[1] A big, fat, lazy thing.

fierce, sarcastic, ironical letters was never known, nor did M. le Maire ever guess why the priest's eyes twinkled so wickedly when he passed him in the street.

They twinkled as he told the story, thoroughly enjoying his little ruse, but grew fierce again when he talked of Freemasons. To say that he thinks Freemasonry an incarnation of the devil is to put his feelings mildly. They are. he declares, the enemy of all virtue, purity and truth; criminal atheists, hotbeds of everything evil, their "tendency" resolutely set against good. They are insidious, corrupt; defilers of public morals and public taste.

"But, M. l'Abbé," I cried, "that is not so. In England——" I gave him a few facts. It shook him somewhat to hear that the late King Edward, whom he profoundly admires, was a Mason, but he recovered himself quickly.

"Perhaps in England they may seem good, there may even be good people among them, poor dupes who do not see below the surface. THERE all is corruption, the goodness is only a mask worn to deceive the ignorant and the credulous. Ah, the evil they have wrought in the world! It was they who brought about the war (its Divine origin was for the moment forgotten), they were undermining Europe, they would drag her down into the pit, to filth and decay."

It was odd to hear such words from the lips of so kindly, so wise a man, and one with so profound a knowledge of human nature. He told me that in all his years of ministry at M. there was only one illegitimate birth in the village—a statement which students of De Maupassant will find it difficult to believe.

We were talking of certain moral problems intensified by the war, the perpetually recurring "sex-question,"

not any more insistent perhaps in France than elsewhere, but obtruding itself less ashamedly upon the notice. It was the acceptance, the toleration of certain things that puzzled me, an acceptance which I am sometimes tempted to believe is due to some deep, wise understanding of human frailty, of the fierceness of human passions, the weakness of human will when Love has taken over the citadel of the heart. Or is it due to fatalism, the conviction that it is useless to strive against what cannot be altered, absurd to fight Nature in her unbridled moods?

The priest, needless to say, neither accepted nor condoned. He blamed public opinion, above all he blamed the unbelief of the people, and then he told me of M. and the purity of the life there. Only one girl in all those years, and she, after her baby was born, led so exemplary, so modest a life that its father subsequently married her, and together they built up one of the happiest homes in the village. (You will gather that the Abbé was not above entertaining at least one popular superstition in that he insinuated that all the blame rested on the shoulders of the woman.)

One other story he told me which flashed a white light upon his soul. A certain atheist, one of his bitterest enemies, came to him one day in deep distress of mind. His wife, an unbeliever like himself, was dying, and, dying, was afraid. The man was rich, and thought he could buy his way and hers into the Kingdom of Heaven. But the Abbé refused his gold. "You cannot buy salvation nor ease of conscience," he said sternly. "Keep your money; God wants your heart, and not your purse." He attended the woman, gave her Christian burial, and asked exactly the legal

fee. Not one penny more would he take, nor could all the atheist's prayers move him.

He told me that he would not bury a man or a woman living in what he called *le concubinage civile*, people married by the State only and not by Church and State. For these, he said, there could only be the burial of a dog, for they lived in sin, knowing their error as do the contractors of mixed marriages if they do not ask for and receive a dispensation. The rules governing these latter appear to be much the same as those which hold good in Ireland. No service in a Protestant church is permitted, and the Protestant must promise that all children born of the union shall be baptised and brought up in the Catholic faith. There is no written contract, and the promise may, of course, be broken, but if the Catholic is a party to it he is guilty of mortal sin.

You will see that as our classes ran their course—and circumstances decreed that I should take the final lessons alone—we got very far away from " s " for plural and " e " for feminine. Exercises corrected, many an interesting half-hour we passed in the little parlour, and many a tale of the trenches the Abbé gathered up for us, and many a " well-founded, authentic " prophecy of the speedy termination of the war. Ah, he was so sure he would be in his beloved M. this winter. Did not his friend the Editor of—he mentioned a leading Paris journal—tell him so ?

But this is the war of the unforeseen. Perhaps that is why some of us dare to believe that when the end comes it will come suddenly, swiftly, like thunder pealing through the heavy stillness of a breathless, sullen night.

CHAPTER XI

REPATRIÉES

I

"MADEMOISELLE, Mademoiselle, the children are coming!"

Christmas had come and gone in a convulsion of parties, January had dripped monotonously into the abyss of time. The day was dank and cheerless, rain—the imperturbable rain of France—was falling placidly, persistently, yet through the unfathomable seas of mud that engulf Bar-le-Duc in winter I saw Madame Lassanne running towards me. I was miry, wet and exceedingly cross; Madame was several times mirier, her clothes were a sodden sop, but her eyes were like a breeze-ruffled pool that the sun has been kissing. She clutched a telegram in one shaking hand, she waved it under my eyes, she cried out something quite unintelligible, for a laugh and a sob caught it and smothered it as she fled. I watched her splash through the grey liquid sea—she was running but she did not know it. The train was not due for an hour yet.

Some days later I swam out to the farm (you don't walk in Bar in winter unless you have webbed feet, and then you fly), and there I found Madame Breda and the aunt whose name I have most reprehensibly forgotten, and Roger and Marie, and yet another old lady, and Madame, and they were all living in one small room and they all talked together, and Roger—

discerning infant—howled at my uniform, and Marie stared at me out of great round eyes, and gradually little by little I pieced together the story.

When shells were falling on the village Madame Breda, as you know, set off with the children, but turning north instead of south, walked right into the line of battle. A handful of French (it was in August 1914) were flying before vastly superior German forces. They rode down the road at breakneck speed. "Sauve qui peut!" The cry shattered the air. One man's horse was shot under him. He scrambled to his feet, terror in his eyes, for the Germans were close behind. A comrade reined up, in a moment he had swung himself behind him and the mad race for life swept on, the men shouting to Madame Breda to fly. "Sauvez-vous, sauvez-vous." What she read in their eyes she never forgot. But flight for her and the children was out of the question, they were literally too frightened to move. A few minutes later they were toiling back along the road to a little village called, I think, Canel, with German soldiers mounting guard over them. There they were kept for six days, during three of which no bread was obtainable, and they nearly died of hunger. Then they were taken to Nantillois, their old home, where they remained for two months. Food was scarce, the soldiers brutal. "There are no potatoes," they cried to the Commandant; "what shall we eat?" "Il y a des betteraves," [1] he replied coarsely as he turned away.

These French peasants must come of a sturdy stock,

[1] Literally, "There is beet," but the peasants sometimes used the word indifferently for any kind of root-vegetable such as turnips, etc.

they are so difficult to kill. They existed somehow—only the baby died.

And then they were marched off again, this time to Carignan, once a town of perhaps 2,500 inhabitants, of whom some 1,100 remained. Here they were not treated badly, the garrison consisting of oldish men, reservists, with little stomach for the atrocities that followed in the wake of the first army. At Nantillois some ugly things appear to have happened, but at Carignan the Mayor managed to *tenir tête*, behaving like a hero at first and later like a shrewd and far-seeing man.

Some day, I hope a volume will be written in honour of these French mayors. Sermaize, left defenceless, was an exception. For the most part they stuck to their posts, shielding and protecting them in every way, raising indemnities from the very stones, placating irate commandants, encouraging the stricken, and all too often dying like gallant gentlemen when the interests of Kultur demanded that the blood of innocent victims should smoke upon its altars.

Madame Breda told me that the Mayor of Nantillois bought up all the flour he could find in the mills and shops during the first week of war, hiding it so successfully the Germans never found it. I confess I received this information with frank incredulity, for knowing something of the ways of the gentle Hun, I am profoundly convinced that if you set him in the middle of the Desert of Sahara, telling him that a grain of gold had been hidden there, he would nose round till he found it. And it wouldn't take him long, for his scent is keen. But Madame was positive. French wit was more than a match for German cunning, and

the flour was distributed by a man whose life would not have been worth five minutes' purchase if his "crime" had been found out.

In spite of the flour, however, and in spite of the washing that brought Madame in a small weekly wage, "ce n'etait pas gai, vous savez." One doesn't feel hilarious on a ration of half-a-pound of meat per week, half-a-pound of black bread per day, and potatoes and vegetables doled out by an irascible Commandant.

I wonder what we would feel like if we were obliged to go to a German officer and beg from him our food? We would starve first? But what if two small hungry children clutched at our skirts and wailed for bread? When the American Relief came in and the people were able to buy various necessaries, including bacon at one franc sixty a pound, things were a little better. To those who were too poor to buy, that gem of a Mayor gave *bons* (free orders).

And so the months went by. Then one day soldiers tramped about selecting two people from one family, three from another, separating mother from daughter, sister from sister, but happily this time including the whole Breda family on their list.

"You are to go away."

"Away? Ah, God, where?"

"Oh, to Germany, and then to Morocco."

The poor wretches, believing them, were filled with infinite grief and dismay. They were crowded into wagons and driven to Longuyon, herded there like cattle for sixteen days, and finally taken through Germany into Switzerland and thence into France. In Germany women wearing Red Cross badges gave them food, treating them well; at the Swiss frontier they

were rigorously searched, a man who had one hundred and fifty francs in German gold being given paper money instead, and losing, if Madame Breda was correctly informed, thirty-six francs on the exchange.

At Annemasse there is a *Bureau des Refugiés* so splendidly organised that *repatriés* can be put into immediate touch with their relatives, no mean feat when you think of the dismemberment of Northern France.

So behold Madame Breda joyfully telegraphing to Madame Lassanne, and the latter waiting at the station with tears raining down her face, and limbs trembling so much they refused to support her!

Poor soul! The end of her calvary was not yet. Roger did not know her. And his nerves had been so much affected by what he, baby though he was, had gone through that for weeks he hid his face in his grandmother's arms and screamed when his mother tried to kiss him. Screamed, too, at sudden noises, at the approach of any stranger, or at sight of a brightly-lighted room. No wonder he howled at the uniform.

And old Madame Breda, staunch, loyal thing that she was, had been too sorely tried. The long strain, the months of haunting anxiety and dread had eaten away her strength, and soon after coming to Bar she sank quietly to rest.

She talked to me of Carignan once or twice, saying it was a vast training-camp for German recruits, mere boys (*des vrais gosses*), few over seventeen years of age.

Once a French aviator, hovering over the town, was obliged to descend owing to some engine trouble. He was caught, tried as a spy and condemned to death.

Asking for a French priest to hear his last confession, he was told it could not be permitted. A German ministered to him instead (what a refinement of cruelty !), and remaining with him to the end, declared afterwards that he died " comme un héro, un Chrétien, et un brave."

Another aviator, similarly caught, was also shot, though both, by every rule of the game, should have been treated as prisoners of war.

" Ah, Mademoiselle, c'est un vrai calvaire qu'on souffre là bas," cried Madame Breda, tears standing thick in her eyes ; and thinking of other *repatriées* whom I had met and whose stories burned in the memory I knew that she spoke only the truth. For *là-bas* is prison. It is home robbed of all its sacredness, its beauty, its joy, its privacy ; it is life without freedom, and under the shadow of a great fear. Shall I tell you of those other *repatriées ?* I promised to spare you atrocities, but there is a martyrdom which should call forth all our sympathy and all our indignation, and they, poor souls, have endured it.

II

Madame Ballay is a young, slight, dark-eyed woman, wife of a railway employee, into whose room I stumbled accidentally one day when looking for some one else, an " accident " which happened so frequently in Bar we took it as a matter of course. No matter how unceremonious our entry, our reception was invariably the same, and almost invariably had the same ending—that of a new name inscribed upon our books, a fresh

recipient gratefully acknowledging much-needed help. Almost invariably, but not quite. Once at least the ending was not routine. A dark landing, several doors. I knock tentatively at one, a voice shouts *Entrez*, and I fling open the door to see—well, to see a blue uniform lying on the floor and a large individual rubbing himself vigorously with a towel. "Pardon, Madame!" he exclaimed, pausing in his towelling. He was not in the least nonplussed, but for my part, not having come to France to study the nude, I fled—fled precipitately and nearly fatally, for the stairs were as dark as the landing, and my eyes were still filled with the wonder of the vision. And though many months have gone by, I am still at a loss to know why he told me to come in!

But nothing will ever teach me discretion, and so I still knock at wrong doors, though not always with such disastrous results, and often with excellent ones, as it has enabled us to help people who would have been too shy or too proud to knock at *our* door and ask to be inscribed upon our books.

When the war broke out the Ballays, whose home was down Belmont way, were living in Longuyon, where Monsieur had been sent some two years before. They had very few friends, so when the mobilisation order came, when from every church steeple rang out the clear, vibrant, emotion-laden call to arms, Madame was left alone and unprotected with her baby girl. There was no time to get away. The Germans surged over the frontier with incredible swiftness, and almost before the inhabitants knew that war had begun were in the streets. Then realisation came with awful rapidity, for Hell broke loose in the town. Shots rang out, wild

screams of terror, oaths, shoutings, the rush of frightened feet, of heavy, brutal pursuit. Women's sobs throbbed upon the air, the wailing of children rose shrill and high; drunken ribald song, hammering upon doors, orders sharply given! Madame cowering in her kitchen saw . . . heard. . . . She gathered her child into her arms. Where could they fly for safety? The door was broken open, a German, drunk, maddened, rushed in and seized her. Struggling, she screamed for help, and her screams attracted the attention of some men in a room below. They dashed up, and the soldier, alarmed, perhaps ashamed, slunk away. Snatching up the child, the unfortunate mother fled to the woods. There, with many other women and children, she wandered for two days and two nights. They had no food, nothing but one tin of condensed milk, which they managed to open and with which they coloured the water they gave the children. Starving, exhausted, unable to make her way down through France, she was compelled to return to the town, three-quarters of which, including the richer residential portions, had been wantonly fired. The few people she had known were gone, her own house destroyed. She wandered about the streets for five days and nights, penniless and starving, existing on scraps picked up in the gutter, sleeping in doorways, on the steps of the church. Then she stumbled upon a Belmont woman living in a street that had escaped destruction. The woman was kind to her, taking her in and giving her lodging, but unable to give her food, as she had not enough for herself.

Madame was nearly desperate when some German soldiers asked her to do their washing, paying her a few

sous, with which she was able to buy food for herself and the child. But she was often hungry, there was never enough for two. The men were reservists, oldish and quiet, doing no harm and living decently. It was the first armies that were guilty of atrocities, and in Longuyon their score runs high. They behaved like madmen. Ninety civilians were wantonly shot in the streets, among them being some women and children. A woman, Madame said, took refuge in a cellar with several children—five, I think, in all; a soldier rushed in with levelled rifle. She flung herself in front of the little ones, but with an oath he fired, flung her body on one side and then killed the children. Soldiers leaning from a window shot a man as he walked down the street. They caught some civilians, told one he was innocent, another that he had fired on them, shot some, allowed others to go free; they quarrelled among themselves, they shot one another. Women, as a rule, they did not shoot. But the women paid—paid the heaviest price that can be demanded of them; nor did the presence of her children save one mother from shame. I have heard of these soldiers clambering to the roofs and crawling like evil beasts from skylight to skylight, peering down into dark attics and roof-rooms, searching for the shuddering victims who found no way of escape. And then, their rage and fury spent, they swept on, crying, "Paris kaput, À Paris, Calais, Londres. London kaput. In a fortnight" . . . and the reservists marching in took their places.

For seven months Madame Ballay was unable to leave the town. She knew nothing of what was happening in France, heard no news of her husband, did not know whether he was dead or alive.

"But I was well off," she said, "because of the washing. There were women—oh, rich women, Mademoiselle, bien élévées—who slowly starved in the streets, homeless, houseless, living on scraps, on offal and refuse. Sometimes we spared them a little, but we had never enough for ourselves."

Seven months jealously guarding the two-year old baby from harm and then repatriation, a long, weary journey into Germany, a night in a fortress, then by slow stages into Switzerland and over the frontier to France.

What a home-coming it might have been! But the baby had sickened; underfed and improperly nourished, it grew rapidly worse, it had no strength with which to fight, and M. Ballay, hurrying down from Bar-le-Duc in response to his wife's telegram (she discovered his whereabouts through the *Bureau des Refugiés*), arrived just two hours after the last sod had been laid upon its tiny grave.

"She was my only comfort during all those months," the poor creature said, tears raining down her face, "and now I have lost her." When she had recovered her self-control I told her I knew of people who refused to believe stories of atrocities, and would certainly refuse to believe hers.

"It is quite true," she said simply, "I SAW it," and then she added that the reservists sometimes gave food to the starving women who were reduced to beg for bread. "When they had it they would give soup to the children, but often they had none to spare, and the women suffered terribly."

Think of it, in all the rigour of a northern winter. Think of this for delicately nurtured women. Madame

shivered as she spoke of it, and it was easy to tell what had painted the dark shadows under her eyes and the weary lines—lines that should not have been there for many a long year yet—round her mouth.

III

For us the whole system—if, indeed, there is any system — of repatriation was involved in mystery. Convoys were sent back at erratic intervals, chosen at haphazard, young and old, strong and weak, just anyhow as if in blind obedience to a whim. No method appeared to govern procedure, convoys being sometimes sent off just before an offensive, sometimes during weeks of comparative calm.

Probably the key to the mystery lay in the military situation; we noticed, for instance, that many were sent back just before the offensive at Verdun. Food problems, too, may have exerted an influence, as every *repatriée* assured us that Germany was starving. In the winter of 1915–1916 so many of these unfortunate people crossed the frontier, the Society decided to equip a Sanatorium for them in the Haute-Savoie, near Annemasse. Many were tubercular, others threatened with consumption, but no sooner was the Sanatorium ready than the Germans, as might be expected, stopped the exodus, and it was not until the following winter or autumn that they began to come in numbers again. Of these, a doctor who worked among them for many weeks gave me a pathetic account. Their plight, she said, was pitiable. They wept unrestrainedly at finding themselves on French soil

again; even the strongest had lost her nerve. Shaken, trembling in every limb, starting at every sound, they had all the appearance of people suffering from severe mental shock; many were so confused as to be almost unintelligible, others had lost power of decision, clearness of thought, directness of action. The old were like children. There were women who sat day after day, plunged in profound silence from which nothing could rouse them. Others chattered, chattered unceasingly all day long, babbling to any one who would listen, utterly unable to control themselves. Some were thin to emaciation, others, on the contrary, were rosy and plump. Of food they never had enough. That was the complaint of them all. The American supplies kept them from starvation. "One would have died of hunger only for that," they said, but the Germans would not allow free distribution. What they got they had to pay for, but in some Communes the Mayors were able to arrange that penniless folk should pay after the war, *i. e.* the Commune lent the money or paid on condition that it would be refunded later.

Coffee made chiefly from acorns, black bread, half-a-pound of meat per week (a supply which sometimes failed), these Germany provided—that is to say, allowed to be sold, and it is but just to add that though every woman declared that the Boches themselves went hungry, those I spoke to added that they never tampered with the American supplies, though one or two mentioned that inferior black flour was sometimes substituted for white of a better quality. Paraffin was rarely obtainable, and fuel scarce.

Martial law, of course, prevails. House doors must never be locked, windows must be left unbarred, there

are fixed hours for going to the fields, fixed hours after which one must be indoors at night. Any soldier or officer may walk into any house at any hour he chooses. "You never know when the butt-end of a rifle will burst your door open and a soldier walk in." A man passing down the street and looking in at a window sees a woman with her children sitting down to their midday meal. It is frugal enough, but it smells good.

He realises that he is hungry, he stalks in and helps himself to what he wants. If they go without, what matter? Falsehoods of every kind are freely circulated. France has been defeated; England has betrayed her; the English have seized Calais; the English have been driven into the sea; London has fallen. With the utmost duplicity every effort is made to undermine faith in the Alliance, to persuade people that England is a traitor to their cause, hoodwinking them in order to gain her own ends.

A peasant told one of our workers that she, too, had been a prisoner, and though hungry, was not otherwise ill-treated. One day when she and the other women went to get their soup the Germans, as they ladled it out, said, "There is dessert for you to-day" (the dessert being repatriation). "Yes, you are going back to France; but there is no bread there, so we don't know how you will live. You must go through Switzerland, where there is no food either. The best thing for you to do is to throw yourselves into Lake Constance."

It is by such apish tricks as these that the lot of the unhappy people is made almost intolerable.

No letters, no newspapers, no news, only a few guarded lines at rare intervals from a prisoner in Germany—

is it any wonder that the strongest nerves give way, and that hysterical women creep over the frontier to France? They are alone, they are cold and hungry, and oh, how desperately they are afraid! They dare not chat together in the street, a soldier soon stops all THAT, and at any moment some pitiful unintentional offence may send them under escort into Germany.

A woman owns a foal, chance offers her an opportunity of selling it; she does so, and is sentenced to imprisonment in Germany for a year. She has sinned against an unknown or imperfectly understood law. She has no counsel to defend her; her trial, if she is honoured with one, is the hollowest mockery.

There is living in the rue St Mihiel in Bar-le-Duc, or there was in the spring of 1917, a woman who spent six months in a German prison. Her offence? A very natural one. She had heard nothing of her husband for two years; then one day a neighbour told her she had reason to believe that he was a prisoner in Germany. A hint to that effect had come in a letter. If Madame wrote to a soldier in such and such a prison he might be able to give her news of him.

The letter was written, despatched, and opened by the German censor. Now it is a crime to try and elicit information about a prisoner even if he happens to be your husband, and even if you have heard nothing of him for two long years. Madame was separated from her children and speedily found herself in a German prison—one, too, which was not reserved for French or Belgian women, but was the common prison of a large town. Here she was classed with the "drunks and disorderlies," the riff-raff, women of no character, and classed, too, with Belgian nuns and gentlewomen,

many of them of the highest rank, whose offence was not that of writing letters, but of shielding, or being accused of shielding, Belgian soldiers from the Germans who were hunting them down like rats.

Compelled to wear prison clothes, to eat the miserable prison fare, work and associate with women of the worst character, many of them had been there for years, and some were serving life-sentences. Representations had been made on their behalf, but for a long time in vain. Then as a great concession they were given permission to wear their own clothes and exercise in a yard apart, but the concession was a grudging one, and when one of the nuns dared to ask for more food she was promptly transferred back again to the main building.

When the release of prisoners is being discussed round the Peace Table, it is to be hoped that the needs of these women will not be forgotten.

IV

It happened to be my fortune to visit within a fortnight two women, natives of Conflans-Jarny, both *repatriées* and neither aware that the other was in the town. Indeed, I think they were unacquainted. Yet each told me identically the same story. One was the wife of a railway employee, the other of rather better position and a woman of much refinement of mind. Both came to Bar early in 1917, and both were profoundly moved as they told their tale.

"We did not know the Germans were coming," they said. "People thought they would pass over on

the other side of the hill." And so, in spite of heavy anxiety, Conflans went about its usual affairs one brilliant August day. There were only a few troops in the town—even the military authorities do not seem to have suspected danger; but the sun had not travelled far across the cloudless sky when down from the hill a woman, half distraught, half dead with fear came flying.

"The Germans!" she gasped, and looking up Conflans saw a wide tongue of flame leaping upwards—the woman's farmhouse burning—and wave upon wave of grey-coated men surging like a wind-driven sea down every road, down the hill-side. The soldiers seized their rifles, their hasty preparations were soon made, they poured volley after volley into the oncoming mass, they fought till every cartridge was expended and their comrades lay thick on the ground. Then the Germans, who outnumbered them ten, twenty, fifty to one, clubbed their rifles and the massacre began. There was no quarter given that day. "They beat them to death, Mademoiselle, and we—ah, God! we their wives, their sisters, their mothers looked on and saw it done." Conflans lay defenceless under the pitiless sun. Some twenty-seven civilians, including the priest, were promptly butchered in the streets, and one young mother, whose baby, torn from her arms, was tossed upon a bayonet, was compelled to dig a hole in her garden, compelled to put the little lacerated body in a box, compelled to bury it and fill in the grave. Other things happened, too, of which neither woman cared to speak.

And so Conflans-Jarny passed into German hands.

As time wore on Russian prisoners were encamped

there. They worked in the fields, in the mines and in the hospitals.

"Ah, les pauvres gens! Figurez-vous, Mademoiselle, in the winter when snow was on the ground, when there was a wind—oh, but a wind of ice! they used to march past our street clad only in their cotton suits. Some had not even a shirt. They were dying of cold, but they were so strong they could not die. They were blue and pinched. They shook as if they had an ague. Sometimes, but not often, we were able to give them a little hot coffee; they were so grateful, they tried to thank us. . . . (Tears were pouring down Madame Cholley's face as she spoke.) I worked in the hospital because I had no money with which to buy food—they gave me two sous an hour—and I used to see *les pauvres Russes* grubbing in the dust-bins and manure heaps looking for scraps; they would gnaw filth, rotten vegetable stumps, offal, tearing it with their teeth like dogs. Once as they marched I saw one step into a field to pick up a carrot that lay on the ground. The guard shot him dead. And those that worked in the mines—ah, God only knows what they suffered. They lived underground, one did not know, but strange stories reached us. So many disappeared, they say they were killed down there and buried in the mine."

Then silence fell on the little room, silence broken only by the sound of Madame's quiet weeping.

Presently she told me that the allowance of food was one pound of coffee a month, coffee made chiefly from acorns, four tins of condensed milk at nineteen sous a tin, for three people, and one pound of fat per head per month. Haricot beans were not rationed, and bread she

must have had, too, but I omitted to make a note of the amount. There was no paraffin, so in the winter she tried to make candles out of thread and oil, but the latter was dear and scarce. Meat " had not been seen in the commune for a year."

" Oh yes, the Germans are starving."

This was the text from which every *repatrié* tried to draw comfort, and it may be inferred that there was shortage in the villages. Once I even heard of shortage in a hospital, my informant being a young man, manager of a big branch store in the Northern Meuse, who had been married just three months before war was declared. He was wounded in August 1914 and taken to Germany, where one leg was amputated, the other, also badly injured, being operated on at least twice. Yet in December 1916 it was not healed. He was well treated on the whole, he told me, but his food was wretched. Coffee and bread in the morning, thin soup and vegetables at midday, coffee and bread at night.

" When we complained the orderlies said we got exactly the same food as they did," and he, too, added the unfailing, " Germany is starving."

A pathetic little picture he and his wife made in their shabby room, she a young, pretty, capable thing who nursed him assiduously, he helpless on his *chaise-longue*, with yet another operation hanging over him. The wound was suppurating, it was feared some shrapnel still remained in the leg. Pension? He had none, not even the *allocation*. He had applied, of course, but was told he must wait till after the war. He had not even got the *Medaille Militaire* or the *Croix de Guerre*, though he said it was customary in France to give either one or the other to mutilated and blinded men.

There must be many sad home-comings for these *repatriés*. So many get back to find that those they loved have been killed or have died while they were away, so many return to find Death wrapping his wings closely about the makeshift home that awaits them.

"They sent me to Troyes because my husband was working on the railway there, but for a whole day I could get no news of him. Then they said he was at Châlons in the hospital. I hurried there—he died two hours after my arrival in my arms."

How often one hears such stories. And yet one day the world may hear a still more tragic one, the day when the curtain of silence and darkness that has fallen over the kidnapped thousands of Lille and Belgium is lifted, and we know the truth of them at last.

CHAPTER XII

STORM-WRACK FROM VERDUN

I

"THE French are evacuating some villages near Verdun, and I hear there are a number of refugees at the Marché Couvert to-night," one of the coterie remarked as she came in one evening from her rounds. It seemed a little odd that villages should be evacuated by the *French* just then, but we had long since ceased to be surprised at anything. In the War Zone everything is possible and the unexpected is the probable, so we piled on waterproofs and goloshes and woollies, for it was a cold, wet night, and set forth in all our panoply of ugliness for the Covered Market.

The streets were as dark as the pit, only a pale cold gleam showing where the river lay. The sky was heavily overcast, a keen wind cut down from the north. The pavement on the quay was broken and rough, we splashed into pools, we jolted into crevasses, we bent our heads to the whistling storm, we reached the market at last. The wide gates were open, and the vast floor, with its rows of empty stalls, loomed like a vault before us. The heavy, sickly odour of stale vegetables, of sausage and of meat, of unaired space where humanity throngs on several days a week clutched at us as we went in. We were to become very familiar with it in the weeks that followed—weeks

during which it daily grew heavier, sicklier, more nauseating, more horrible.

On the left of the market as you enter from the quay there is a broad wooden staircase which leads to a still broader wooden gallery that runs right round the building. At the top we turned to the right. The gallery was dimly lighted, dark figures huddled on it here and there; we crossed the lower end and found ourselves in a wide space, really a large unenclosed room which had been hastily improvised as a kitchen. A short counter divided it into two very unequal portions, in the smaller being some old *armoires*, two large steamers or boilers, a table piled with plates, dishes and small and handleless bowls, used instead of cups. Another littered with glasses, and in the corner a big barrel of wine.

Two or three women were probing the contents of the boilers; men rushed excitedly about, one was chopping bread, another filling jugs with wine, a *garde-champêtre* with a hoarse voice was shouting unintelligible orders, a gendarme or two hung about getting in everybody's way, and in the outer space seethed a mob of men, women and children in every condition of dishevelment, mud, misery and distress. Five or six long tables with benches of the light garden-seat variety crossed this space. Seated as tightly as they could be squeezed together were more refugees devouring a steaming soup. Everything wore an air of confusion; the light was bad, one paraffin lamp swaying dimly over the scene. We saw a door, guarded by two officials, *garde-champêtres*, or something of the kind; we passed through, and there we saw a sight which I am convinced no one of us will ever forget.

Picture an enormous room, like a barrack dormitory. There are windows—some five or six—on each side. Half-way down and opposite one another there are two stoves in which good fires are burning. The glow from the open doors falls on the gloom and throws into relief the stooped figures, broken with fatigue, that cluster dejectedly round them. A lamp throws fitful shadows. The air is brown. Perhaps you think this an absurd thing to say, but it was so. It hung like a pale brown veil over the room, and as weeks went by the colour deepened, and in breathing it one had the sensation of drawing something solid into one's lungs. It smelt, too, with an indescribable smell that became intensified every day, until at last a time came when it required a definite effort to penetrate it. It seemed to hurl you back from the doorway; you began to think it must be sentient. It was certainly stifling, poisonous, fœtid, and as I write I seem to feel it in my nostrils again, seem to feel the same nausea that seized us when we breathed it then. Over all the floor-space there is straw, thick, tossed-up straw, through which, running past the stoves, are two narrow lanes, one down either side. And on the straw lie human beings, not many as yet, only those who have supped, or who, waiting for the meal, have thrown themselves down in the last stages of physical and mental exhaustion. Babies wail, women are sobbing, the *gardes-champêtres* shout in rough voices. Bales, bundles, hand-grips, baskets lie on the straw; there an old woman is lying wretchedly, her head on a canvas bag; here two boys are sprawling across one another in heavy, uncouth, abandoned attitudes.

We go about among the people talking to them, but

they are dazed and weary. Did we learn that night that the great attack upon Verdun had begun, or did we only know of it some days later? So packed with incident were those first days I cannot remember, but it seems to me now that knowledge came later, and that we came home that night wondering, questioning, our hearts filled with pity for those we had left homeless upon that awful straw.

We came again into the outer room. More refugees were arriving, little groups of bewildered creatures, muddy, travel-stained, dog-weary, yet wonderfully patient and resigned. There are no sanitary arrangements of any kind in the building, there is not a basin, nor a towel, nor a cake of soap of which the refugees can make use.

The next evening we go again, supposing that the evacuation must be complete, that this river of human misery will cease to flow through the town, but little by little we realise that it is only beginning.

Days lengthen into weeks, and still the refugees come through. We know now that Verdun is in danger, that the Germans have advanced twelve kilometres; we watch breathlessly for news, the town is listening, intent, anxious, and every day the crowds at the market grow denser. We spend much of our time there now, we have brought over basins, and soap and towels, we have put a table in the inner room, so that those who will may refresh themselves and wash. The rooms are packed. There must be at least three hundred or four hundred people, and still more drift in. Some have been in open cattle trucks for thirty-six hours under rain and snow, for the north wind has become keener and the rain has hardened into fine

sleety snow; it is bitterly cold, the roads and streets are awash with mud, women's skirts are soddened to the knee, men are splashed shoulder high. A number of people have fallen ill *en route*, others, seriously ill, have been compelled to leave their beds and struggle as best they might with the healthy in their rush to safety. We hear that the civil hospital is full, that babies have been born on the journey down—been born and have died and were buried by the way. Despair rides on many a shoulder, fear still darkens many eyes. Some have escaped from a storm of shell-fire, many have had to walk long distances, for the railway lines have been cut. Verdun is isolated—Nixieville is the nearest point to which a train may go—and all have left their homes unguarded, some being already blown to atoms, others momently threatened with a like fate.

In spite of all our anxiety as we made our way to the market that second night, laden with basins and jugs, *seaux hygiéniques*, and various other comforts, we could not help laughing. We must have cut funny figures staggering along in the darkness with our uncouth burdens. Happily it WAS dark, and then not happily, as some one trips over an unseen obstacle and is only saved from an ignominious sprawl in the mire by wild evolutions shattering to the nerve. At the market we cast what might be called our " natural feelings " on one side and bored our way into the throng, our strange utensils and luggage desperately exposed to view. *Que voulez-vous? C'est la guerre!* The phrase covers many vicissitudes, but it did not cover the shyest of our coterie when, having deposited her burden on the gallery for a moment in order to

help a poor woman, she heard a crash and a round French oath, and turning, beheld a certain official doing a weird cake-walk over things that were never intended to be trodden upon by man. It was the same shy member whose indignation at the lack of proper accommodation bore all her native timidity away and enabled her to persuade the same official to curtain off a small corner at the far end of the gallery and furnish it as a toilet-room for the women, a corner which to our eternal amusement was ever afterwards known as " le petit coin des dames anglaises." However, the *petit coin* was not in existence for two or three days, and while it was in process of manufacture we were more than once moved to violence of language, though we realised that physical fatigue may reach a point at which, if conditions be unfavourable, no veneer of civilisation can save some individuals from a lapse into primitive ways.

In the inner room the crowd was dense as we struggled in with our apparatus for washing. There was something essentially sordid in the scene. The straw looked dirty, the people were muddier, more wretched. Many were weeping, and very many lying in unrestful contorted attitudes upon the ground. In such a crowd no one dare leave her luggage unguarded, and so it was either gripped tightly to the body, even in sleep, or else was utilised as a pillow. And no one of those who came in by train or *camion* was allowed to bring more than he or she could carry.

All the misery, all the suffering, all the heart-break of war seemed concentrated there, and then quite suddenly out of ugliness and squalor came beauty. A tall woman with resigned, beautiful face detached

herself from the throng, a naked baby wrapped in a towel in her arms. As unconcernedly, as unself-consciously as if she were at home in her own kitchen she came to the table, filled a basin with warm water, and sitting down, bathed the lusty crowing thing that kicked, and chewed its fists, gurgling with delight.

It was the second time she had been evacuated, she told us. She had seven children, her husband was a farmer and well-to-do. Their home destroyed, they had escaped in August 1914, taking refuge in Verdun, where they had remained, gathering a little furniture together again, trying to make a home once more. She neither wept nor complained. I think she was long past both. Fate had taken its will of her, she could but bow her head, impotent in the storm. Her children, in spite of their experiences, looked neat and clean, they were nicely spoken and refined in manner. Soon the dusky shadows of the room swallowed her up and the human whirlpool swirled round us once more, from it emerging Monsieur B., the "certain official," and his wife who merely came to look round, who made no offer to help, and who must not be confounded with THE Madame B. who was the special providence of our lives.

What Monsieur B. thought when he found us more or less in possession I cannot say, but this I know—that he, in common with every one with whom our work brought us into official contact, showed himself sympathetic, helpful, forbearing and kind. He fell in with suggestions that must have seemed to him quixotic to a degree; he never insinuated, as he might have done, that our activities bordered upon interference, nor did he ask us how English officials would

have received French women if the situation had been reversed! At first, thinking, no doubt, that the evacuation was only an affair of two or three days, none of the charitable women of the town thought it necessary to visit the Market, so all the care of the unfortunates was left in the hands of some half-dozen men; but later on, as the stream continued to pour through, and the congestion became more and more acute, many women, some after a hard day's work, came in the evenings and helped to serve the meals. Of course, as soon as they took things in hand we slid into the background, though we found our work just as engrossing and as imperative as ever, but how Madame B. could have walked through those rooms that evening and have gone away without making the smallest effort to ameliorate the conditions baffled our comprehension. However, she added to the gaiety of nations by one remark, so we forgave her. Seeing some respectably-dressed women who had obviously neither washed nor combed for days, we indicated the "washing-stand."

"We are too tired to-night," they said. "In the morning. . . ."

"One would have thought they would have found it refreshing," we murmured to Madame B., who was essaying small talk under large difficulties.

"Ah, yes, I cannot understand it. For me, I wash myself every night, even if I am tired." The exquisiteness of that "*même* si je suis fatiguée" carried us through many a hectic hour.

And hours at the market were apt to be hectic. The serving of meals was a delirium. In vain we begged the guards to keep the door of communication

closed, and allow only as many as there was room for at the tables to come to the " dining-room " at a time. They admitted the soundness of the scheme, but they made no attempt to carry it out. Consequently, no sooner was a meal ready than ravenous people poured out in swarms, snatched places at the tables and filled up every inch of space between, ready to fall into a chair the moment it was vacated. We had to elbow, push, worm or drive a way from table to table, from individual to individual; we grew hoarse from shouting " *Attention !* " We lost time, patience, breath and energy, and meals that might have been served with despatch were a kind of wild scrimmage, through which we " dribbled " with cauldrons of boiling soup or vast platters of meat, with plates piled like the leaning Tower of Pisa—be it written in gold upon our tombstones that the towers never fell—or with telescopic armsful of glasses and bowls. And against us rose not only the solid wall of expectant and famished humanity, but the incoming tide of new arrivals, all of whom had to pass between the tables and the serving counters in order to reach the inner room. Sometimes six hundred had to be fed, sometimes as many as twelve hundred passed through in a day, and —triumph of French organisation—very rarely did supplies run out, very rarely were the big tins of " singe " [1] (which the shy member really supposed was monkey !) brought into play. The meals themselves were excellent. Hot soup from a good *pot-au-feu* made from beef with quantities of vegetables, then the beef served with its carrots and turnips, leeks, etc., that cooked with it, then cheese or jam, and wine.

[1] Singe (monkey), the soldier-slang for bully-beef.

Coffee and bread in the morning, a three-course meal at midday, another at six—no wonder Bar-le-Duc was eulogised. Never had such a reception been dreamed of. "The food was delicious, excellent. . . . We shall have grateful memories of Bar."

But the awful sleeping accommodation weighed heavily on our consciences—the brown pall of atmosphere, the fœtid SOLID smell, the murky lamp, the fitful glow of the fires, and on the floor on the dirty inadequate straw a dense mass of human beings. Lying in their clothes just as they came from the station, or as they left the big *camions* in which many were driven down, not daring even to unlace their boots, they were wedged so tightly we thought not even a child could have found space. Some, tossing in their sleep, had flung themselves across neighbours too exhausted to protest; acute discomfort was suggested in every pose; many were sitting up, propped against their bundles; children lay anyhow, a heterogenous mass of arms and legs, or pillowed their heads against their mothers.

"Surely," it was said as we came away, "surely the cup of human misery has never been so full."

Yet we were told the next day that during the night a fresh convoy had come in, and that the *garde-champêtre*, tramping up and down the narrow lane in the straw, shouted, "Serrez-vous, serrez-vous," forcing the wretched creatures to lie in still closer proximity, to sleep in even greater discomfort.

II

Soon the numbers grew too large for the space, and the long gallery running down from the " dining-room " was converted into a sleeping apartment, a screen of white calico or linen serving as an outer wall. The upper end through which we passed in order to gain access to the original rooms was utilised for meals, a number of tables being brought in and ranged as closely as possible together. Even then the congestion and confusion continued; they were, indeed, an integral part of all Marché Couvert activities, but to our great relief the sleeping quarters were improved. A number of palliasse cases, the gift of a rich woman of the town, were filled with straw, and over most we were able to pin detachable slips made from wheat bags, an immense number of which—made from strong, but soft linen thread—had been offered to us at a moderate price by the Chamber of Commerce acting through the Mayor. Three of these, or four, according to the size required, sewn cannily together made excellent sheets—greatly sought after by the refugees—indeed, we turned them to all kinds of use as time went on. The slips were invaluable now, as, needless to say, the palliasse covers would have been in a disgusting condition in a week, but it was not until the Society presented the new dormitory with twelve iron bedsteads and some camp beds that we felt that Civilisation was lifting up her head again. The beds were placed together at the far end of the dormitory and were primarily intended for sick people or for better-class women who, unable to find a lodging in the town, had to accept the doubtful hospitality of

the market. Unhappily there were many of these, and it was heartrending to see women sitting up in the comfortless chairs all night in the cold eating-place rather than face the horror of the straw and the crowded common-room.

Once the beds were installed that contingency no longer arose, though Heaven knows the new apartment was squalid and miserable enough; the beds ranged at the lower end, the palliasses running in close-packed rows by each wall, space enough in the middle to walk between, but no more.

One day we found one of our camp beds at the upper end with a fox-terrier sitting on it, and on inquiry were told that a *garde* had taken it, evicting two poor old women as he did so. Now we had never intended those beds for lusty officials, so we very naturally protested, but a more than tactful hint reduced us to silence. The *gardes* had it in their power to make things very unpleasant for us if they felt so inclined; it would be politic to say nothing. Having no official standing, we said nothing. What we thought is immaterial. Later the gendarme was the Don Juan of an incident to which only a Guy de Maupassant could do justice. There, in all that misery, in that makeshift apartment packed with suffering humanity, with children and young girls, with modest and disgusted women looking on, human passions broke through every code of decency and restraint. The scandal lasted for three days, then the woman was sent away.

Meanwhile the news from Verdun was becoming graver. The roads were cut to pieces, motor-cars, gun-carriages, *camions* were burying themselves axle-deep in the mire; one road impassable, another was

made, but by the time the first was repaired the second was a slough. The weather, always in league with the Germans, showed no sign of taking up, wet snow was falling heavily. . . . "Three more days of this and Verdun must fall."

Soldiers subsequently told us that it was the *camion* drivers who saved the situation, for they stuck to their wagons day and night, one snatching rest and sleep while another drove. They poured through Bar-le-Duc in hundreds, the roar of traffic thundering down the Boulevard all day long. In the night we would lie awake listening. It sounded like a rough sea dragging back from a stone-strewn shore. Once, if soldier tales be true, "the Boches could have walked into Verdun with their rifles over their shoulders. Four days and four nights we lay in the open, Mademoiselle. Our trenches were blown to pieces, we were cut off by the barrage, we had no food but our emergency rations, no ammunition could reach us. Then our guns became silent. The Boches, thinking it was a ruse, a trap, were afraid to come on. They thought we were reserving fire to mow them down at close quarters, so they waited twelve hours, and during that time our *camions* brought the ammunition up, and when they did come on we were ready for them."

One lad of twenty, who told me the same tale, was home on leave when I chanced to visit his mother and found the family at lunch. To celebrate his return they were having a little feast—the feast consisting of a tin of sardines and a bottle of red wine, in addition to the usual soup and bread. The boy was a handsome creature, full of life and high spirits, and in no way daunted by experiences that would have tried the

nerve of many an older man. He had been buried alive three times, twice by the collapse of a trench, once by that of a dug-out into which he and four others crawled under a storm of shells. "Fortunately I was the first to go in, for a shell burst just outside, *ploomb!* killed three and wounded one of my companions. The wounded man and I dug and scratched our way out at the back."

He, too, he said, had been without food for four days.

"Weren't you hungry?" his mother asked, but he shook his head.

"One isn't hungry when the *copain* (pal) on the right is blown to atoms, and the *copain* on the left is bleeding to death." Then followed casualty details that filled us with horror.

"I saw men go mad up there. They dashed their brains out against walls, they shot themselves. Oh, it was just hell! The shells fell so thick you could hardly put a franc between them—thousands in an hour. The French lost heavily, but the Germans. . . . I tell you, Mademoiselle, I have seen them climbing over a wall of their own dead that high"—he touched his breast—"to get at us. They came on in close formation, drunk with ether. Oh, yes, it is quite true, we could smell the ether in the French trenches. I have seen the first lines throw away their rifles and link arms as they staggered to attack. Oh, we *fauché'd* them! But for me, I like the bayonet, you drive it in, you twist it round"—he made an expressive noise impossible to reproduce—"they are afraid of the bayonet, the Boches. Ah, it is fine. . . ."

He is the only man I have ever spoken to who told me he wanted to go back.

Day after day we watched breathlessly for the *communiqués ;* evening after evening we went to the market hoping for better news, but there was no lifting as yet in the storm-cloud that hung above the horizon. And still the refugees poured through. We spent the greater part of each day at the market now, snatching meals at odd hours, and turning our hands to anything. We swept floors, we stuffed palliasses with straw—but we don't recommend this as a parlour game—we helped to serve meals, we washed never-diminishing piles of plates and bowls, forks and knives, we put old ladies to bed, we made cups of chocolate for them when they were unable to tackle the *pot-au-feu*, we chopped mountains of bread and cheese (our hands were like charwomen's), we distributed chocolate and " scarlet stew "—both gifts from the American Relief Committee—we sorted the sheep from the goats at night and—the *garde* apart—kept the new dormitory select. We became expert in cutting up enormous joints of meat, our implements a short-handled knife invariably coated with grease, a fork when we could get one, and a small wooden board. So expert, indeed, that one day a woman hovered round as we sliced and cut and hacked, watching us intently for some minutes. Then, " Are you a butcher ? " she asked. It was an equivocal compliment, but well meant. You see, she was a butcher herself, and I suppose it would have comforted her to talk to one of the fraternity.

And as we slice the turmoil rises round us. A woman sits down to table and bursts into violent uncontrolled weeping ; a poor old creature wanders forlornly about, finally making her way past the counter to the boiler where the soup is bubbling. What does she want ?

" To put some wood on the fire. She is cold, and where is her chair? Some one has taken it away." Her brain has given way under the strain of the last five days and she thinks she is at home. Snatches of conversation float above the din. " It is three days since I have touched hot food." " We slept in the fields last night." " Mais abandonner tout." Tears follow this pathetic little phrase. A man and woman together, both over eighty, white-haired and palsied, stray up to the counter. They cannot eat, they want so very little, just some wine. The woman's skirts drip as she waits; she has fallen into a stream as she fled from the bombardment. They are established in a corner where they mutter and nod, gibberish mostly, for the old man's wits are wandering.

Suddenly the table begins to rock, one end rises convulsively from the ground, plates and dishes begin to slide ominously. An earthquake? Only a great brindled hound that some one tied to the table leg when we were not watching. He lay down, slept happily, smelled dinner, has risen to his majestic height and a wreck is upon us. The table sways more ominously, then Fate, in the shape of the pretty Pre-Raphaelitish *femme-de-ménage* of the market, swoops down upon him and sends him yowling into the crowd, through which he cuts a cataclysmal way. Dogs materialise out of space, we are sometimes tempted to believe. They live desperate lives, are under everybody's feet, appear, and disappear meteor-wise, leaving trails of oaths behind them. A small child plants himself on the floor, and seizing one of these itinerant quadrupeds, tries to make it eat its own tail. The dog prefers to eat the child; a wild skirmish

ensues, there are shrieks and yowls that rend the heavens, then a covey of women kick the dog into space, and snatching up the child, carry him to the inner room, where they hold a parliament over him amid a babel of tongues that puts biblical history to shame.

A soldier, mud-stained, down from the trenches, comes to look for his wife; a tall girl in a black straw cart-wheel hat, plentifully adorned with enormous white daisies, flits here and there; a coarse, burly man who has looked on the wine when it is red and who is wearing a *peau-de-bicque* (goat-skin coat), which I regard with every suspicion, tries to thrust half-a-franc into my hand. Then comes an alarm. The refugees are not told of it, but thirty Taubes are said to be approaching the town. The meal goes on a little more breathlessly, and we carry soup and meat wondering what will happen if the sickening crash comes. But the French *avions* chase the Germans away. . . . Late that night I saw the half-witted old woman asleep on the floor, sitting up, her back propped against a child's body, her knees drawn up to her mouth.

III

"There are refugees at the Ferme du Popey too."

Surely there are refugees everywhere! The quarters at the market have long since proved grotesquely inadequate, for not even the "Serrez-vous, serrez-vous" of the *garde* could pack three people upon floor space for one, so schoolrooms and barrack-rooms were requisitioned elsewhere, and now even the resources of the farm are being drawn upon. The

procession of broken, despairing people seemed never-ending. We met them in every street, trailing pitifully through the mire, or leading farm wagons piled high with household goods. Those at the farm had all come down in carts, it was said, many being days on the road, so, thinking we might be of use, we waded out to find the extensive *basse-cour* a scene of strange confusion.

Soldiers in horizon-blue were cooking food in their regimental kitchens for famished women and children, others were watering horses at the pond; through the archway at the end we could see yet others hanging socks and underlinen upon the fence; beyond ran the canal guarded by its sentinel trees. Wagons filled the yard, men were shouting and talking, officials moved busily here and there. We climbed a glorified ladder to a long, low, straw-strewn loft which was murkily dark, the windows unglazed, being covered by coarse matting which flapped in the wind. Here a number of women were lying or talking in subdued groups while children scrambled restlessly about, the squalor and misery being heartrending. They were leaving immediately, there was nothing to be done, so, having chatted with a few, we went away, telling a harassed official that we were at his service if he had need of us.

A day or two later this offer had strange fruit, for a horde of excited people descended upon the Boulevard, rang at our door, swarmed into the hall and demanded sabots. Now it happened that a short time before a case of sabots had been sent to us by the American Relief Committee (always generous supporters, supplying many a need)—a case so vast that

both wings of our front door had to be opened to admit it—so we were able to invite the horde to satisfy its needs. Instantly the hall became a pandemonium. They flung themselves upon the box, they snatched, they grabbed, they chattered in high, shrill voices—Meusienne women of the working-classes generally talk in a strident scream—they tried on sabots, they flung sabots back into the box; in short, they behaved very much as people do behave when their cupidity is aroused and their nervous systems exhausted by an almost unendurable strain.

The commotion, rising in a steady crescendo, had risen *forte, fortissimo,* when bo-o-om ! thud ! bo-o-om ! bombs began to fall on the town. The clamour in the hall died away, sabots dropped from nerveless fingers. Bo-o-om ! The cellar ? *Où est-ce ?* Some one leads the way, and then, while clamour of another kind seizes the skies, in the icy cellar the mob of half-distraught creatures fall on their knees and chant the Rosary.

As a mist is wiped from a mirror by the passage over it of a cloth, angers, passions, greeds were wiped from their eyes, their voices sank to a quiet murmur. Like children they prayed, and the Holy Spirit brooded for one brief moment over hearts that yearned to God.

Then the raid ended, silence fell on the town, but round the sabot-box, like gulls that scream above a shoal of fish, rapacity swooped and dived, and its voice, sea-gull shrill, bit through the air.

CHAPTER XIII

MORE STORM-WRACK

A SMALL volume might be written about those days at the Marché Couvert, about the war gossip that circulated, the adventures that were related.

In spite of the terrific shelling of Verdun only one civilian was reported to have been killed during that first week, and she imprudently left her cellar. The bombardment was methodical. Three minutes storm, then three minutes calm, then three minutes storm again. Then the pulse-beat lengthened: fifteen minutes storm, fifteen minutes calm. A priest told Madame B. that, stop-watch in hand, he was able to visit his people during the whole of the time, diving in and out of cellars with a regularity equalled only by that of the Germans. Two women, on the other hand, ran about their village *comme des fous* for eight days, shells dropping four to the minute, but no one was hurt, because the inhabitants had all gone to their cellars. How they themselves escaped they did not know. They had no cellar, that was why they ran.

Another woman was in her kitchen when a shell struck the house. Seeing that her sister was badly hurt she ran out, ran all the way down the village street, scoured the vicinity looking for a doctor, found one, brought him back, and as she was about to help him to dress her sister's wound, realised that her foot was wet, and looking down saw that her boot was full of

blood. Not only had the shell, or a fragment of shell, torn her thigh badly, but it had shattered her hand as well. Only the thumb and index finger can be moved a little now, the other fingers are bent and twisted, without any power, the arm is shrivelled and cannot be raised above her head.

This woman was one of several who were turned out of the Civil Hospital one bitter afternoon when the wind cut into our flesh and sharp hail stung our faces. No doubt the hospital was full, no doubt a large number of bed or stretcher cases had come in, but somehow we could find no excuse for the thoughtlessness which turned that pitiful band of ailing, crippled, or blinded women into the dark streets to stumble and fumble their way through a strange town and then face the horror of the market. Some were frankly idiotic from fright, strain and age-weakened intellect; all were terrified, cold and suffering. One, very old, sat on the ground talking rapidly to herself. "She is détraquée," they whispered, so she was tucked up on a palliasse, covered with rugs and left to her mumbling, her monotonous, wearying babble. Next morning our nurse, going her rounds, found that the unfortunate creature was not *détraquée* but delirious, that her temperature was high and both lungs congested. It was just a question whether she would survive the journey to Fains, where, in the Departmental Lunatic Asylum, some wards had been set aside for the overflow from the hospital.

One of our coterie, burning with what we admitted was justifiable wrath, gave a hard-hearted official from the Prefecture a Briton's opinion of the matter.

"It was inhuman to treat these women so. Some

of them were wandering in the streets for hours. Why didn't you send them direct to Fains ? "

" There was no conveyance, the hospital was full . . . " so he excused himself.

" But they cannot stay here," she thundered. " It is utterly unfit. They need nursing, comfort, special care."

" Oh, well, there is always the Ornain," he replied, with a gesture towards the river, and the Briton, unable to determine whether a snub, a sarcasm, or an inhumanity was intended, for the only time in our knowledge of her was obliged to leave the field to France.

But she was restored to her wonted good-humour later on by an old lady who undressed placidly in the new dormitory, peeling off one garment after another because she " had not taken her clothes off for three days and three nights," who then knelt placidly by her bedside and said her prayers, asking, as she tucked the blankets round her, at what time she would be called in the morning.

Called ! In that Bedlam !

Most of them were " called " by the big steam whistle at the factory long before the cocks began to crow. Zeppelins, tired of inactivity, began to prowl at night. One, as everybody knows, was brought down in flames near Révigny—a shred of its envelope lies in my writing-case, my only *souvenir de la guerre,* unless a leaflet dropped by a Taube counts as such—causing great excitement among the boys in the hospital at Sermaize. No sooner did they hear the guns and the throb of its engines than with one accord they scrambled from their beds and rushed to the verandah, where a wise matron rolled them in blankets and allowed them

to remain to "see the fun," a breach of discipline for which she was amply rewarded when, seeing the flames shoot up through the skies, the boys rose to their feet and shrilled the "Marseillaise" to the night in their clear, sweet trebles. A dramatic moment that! The long, low wooden hospital a blur against the moonlit field, behind and all around the woods, silent, dark, clustering closely, purple in the half-light of the moon, the boys' white faces, their shrill cheer, and through the sky the wide fire of Death falling, to lie a mammoth dragon on the whitened fields. It is said that there was a woman in that Zeppelin—some fragments of clothing, a slipper were found. . . .

Another, more fortunate, dropped bombs at Révigny and Contrisson, where by bad luck an ammunition wagon was hit. One at least of the wagons caught fire, but was quickly uncoupled by heroic souls who were subsequently decorated. The first explosion shook our windows in Bar-le-Duc, and then for two or more hours we heard report after report as shell after shell exploded. In the morning wild tales were abroad. The main line to Paris had been cut, Trèmont (miles in the other direction) had been bombed, numbers of civilians had been killed and injured; Révigny was in even smaller shreds than before; in short, Rumour, that busy jade, was having a well-occupied morning. But that is not unusual in the War Zone. She is rarely idle there. The number of times we were told a bombardment by long-range guns was signalled for Bar is incalculable. The town passed from one *crise de nerfs* to another, some one was always in a panic over a coming event which did not honour us even by casting its shadow before.

The Zeppelins, to be quite frank, were a nuisance.

They never reached the town, which has reason to be grateful for the narrowness of its valley and the protecting height of its hills, but they made praiseworthy attempts at all sorts of odd hours, and generally the most inconvenient that could well be chosen. The doings at Révigny and Contrisson warned us that a visit might be fraught with disagreeable results, for Bar is a concentrated place, it does not straggle, and when raids occur practically every street is peppered.

So though we did not go to the cellars, we felt it incumbent upon us to be ready to do so should necessity arise, which probably explains why the syren invariably blew when one or two shivering wretches were sitting tailor-wise in rubber or canvas basins, fondly persuading themselves that they were having a bath.

When there are twenty degrees of frost, when water freezes where it falls on your uncarpeted bedroom floor, bathing in a canvas basin has its drawbacks; but if, just as your precious canful of hot water has been splashed in and you "mit nodings on" prepare to get as close to godliness as it is possible for erring mortal to do, the syren's long, lugubrious note throbs on the air, well, you float away from godliness fairly rapidly on the wings of language that would have shocked the most condemnatory Psalmist of them all. I really believe those Zeppelins KNEW when our bath-water boiled. We went to bed at ten-thirty or we waited till midnight. "Let's get the beastly thing over, it is such a bore dressing again." We dodged in at odd hours of the evening, it was just the same. Venus was always surprised. In the end, and when in spite of nightly and daily warnings, nothing happened, our faith in French airmen became as the rock that moveth not

and is never dismayed. Though syrens hooted and bugles blew, though the town guard turning out marched under our windows, the unclothed soaped and lathered and splashed with unemotional vigour, while the clothed chastely wondered what would happen if a bomb struck the house and Venus. . . . Oh, well, the French rise magnificently to any situation.

Once I confess to rage. We had a visitor. We had all worked hard all day at the market, we had come home after ten, and, wearied out, had tucked ourselves into bed, aching in every limb. The visitor and the smallest member of the coterie returned even later. Slumber had just sealed my eyelids when a voice said in my ear, "Miss Day, I'm so sorry, there's a Zeppelin." Just as though it were sitting on the roof, you know, preparing to lay an egg.

"Call me when the bombs begin to fall." Slumber seized me once more. Again the voice. "I think you must get up; Visitor says it is not safe."

"Oh, go to—the Common-room."

It was no use. I was dragged out. There are moments when one could cheerfully boil one's fellow-creatures in a sausage-pot.

At the market when danger threatened every one was ruthlessly hunted to the cellar. And French cellars are the coldest things on earth. Even on the hottest day in summer they are cool, in the winter they would freeze a polar bear. Indeed, we were sometimes tempted to declare that the cellars did more harm than Zeppelin or Taube.

Air-raids affect different people differently. One woman said they—well, she said, "Ça fait sauter (to jump) l'estomac," which must have been sufficiently

disagreeable; another declared, "Ça fait trop de bile." Nearly all developed nerve troubles, and Madame Philipot—who succeeded Madame Drouet as our *femme de ménage*, refused to undress at night. In vain we reasoned with her. She slept armed *cap-à-pie*, ready for immediate flight, and not until a slight indisposition gave us a weapon, which we used with unscrupulous skill and energy, did we wring from her a promise to go to bed like a respectable Christian. Madame Albert died trembling in the darkness one night: an old woman, affected by bronchial trouble, flying from Death, found him in the icy cellar; many a case of bronchitis and lung trouble was reported as an outcome of these nightly raids, children especially began to suffer, their nerves breaking down, their little faces becoming pinched, dark shadows lying under their eyes.

In the War Zone people don't write letters to the Press discussing the advisability of taking refuge in a raid, nor do they talk of "women and children cowering in cellars." No one suggests that the well-to-do "should set an example or show the German they are not afraid." France is too logical for nonsense of that kind. It knows that soldiers do not sit on the parapet of a trench when strafing is going on—it would call them harsh names if they did, and so would we. It believes in reasonable precautions. After all, the German object is to kill as many civilians as possible—why gratify him by running up the casualty rate? Why occupy ambulances that might be put to better use? Why occupy the time of doctors and nurses who are more urgently wanted in the military wards? Why put your relatives to the expense of a funeral? Why

indeed? Why court suicide for the sake of a stupid sentiment? Logic echoes why? Logic goes calmly to its cellar or to that of its neighbour, if it happens to be out and away from its own when trouble begins. Logic comes up again and goes serenely about its business when trouble is over.

Only the nerve-wrecks, people who have sustained long bombardment by shell-fire for the most part, really lose presence of mind. And for them there is every excuse. Let no one who has not suffered as they have presume to judge them.

Once—it was downright wicked, I admit—two of us, both, be it confessed, wild Irishwomen, with all the native and national love of a row boiling in our veins, hearing the syren one evening, somewhere about nine o'clock, put on our hats and coats, and kilting our skirts, set off up the hill. We left consternation behind us, but then we did so want to see a Zeppelin!

The valley was bathed in soft fitful light. The moon was almost full, but misty clouds flitted across the sky, fugitives flying before a wooing wind. Below us the town lay in darkness. Not a lamp showing. About us rose the old town, the rue Chavé looming cliff-like high above our heads. We pressed on, pierced the shadows of that narrow street and gained the rue des Grangettes, there to be met with a sight so weird, so suggestive of tragedy I wish I could have painted it. From the tall, grim houses men and women had poured out. Children sat huddled beside them, others slept in their mother's arms. On the ground lay bags and bundles. Whispers hissed on the air. It was alive with sibilant sound. No one talked aloud. They were as people that watch in an ante-room when Death has

touched one who relinquishes life reluctantly in a room beyond. In the rue Tribel were more groups. In the rue des Ducs de Bar still more. We thought the population of those old ghost-haunted houses must all have come forth from a shelter in which they no longer trusted. A Zeppelin bomb, it is said, will crash through six storeys and break the roof of the cellar beneath. Here in the street there was no safety. But in the woods beyond the town, in the woods high on the hill. . . . Many and many a poor family spent long night hours in the cold, the wet and the storm, their little all gathered in bundles beside them during those intense months of early spring. We felt—or at least I know that I felt—as we walked through this world of whispering shadow, utterly unreal. I ceased to believe in Zeppelins; earth, material things slid away, in the cloud-veiled moonlight values became distorted; I felt like a spectator at a play, but a play where only shadows act behind a dim, semi-transparent screen.

Then we came to the Place Tribel, and the world enclosed us again. A soldier with a telescope swept the heavens, others gazed anxiously out over the hills towards St Mihiel. The night was very still and beautiful; strange that out there, somewhere in the void, Death should be riding, coming perhaps near to our own souls, with his message written already upon our hearts. In the streets below a bugle call rang out clear and sweet, the *Alerte*, the danger signal. . . . We thought of the hurried wretches making their way to the woods. . . . Odd that one should want to see a Zeppelin!

CHAPTER XIV

AIR RAIDS

I

WHERE the grey gas-bags failed, Taubes often succeeded. At first they came "in single spies," but later "in battalions." And after one of the early and abortive raids which did no damage—a mere bagatelle of three bombs and one soldier with a cut over his eye—posters of such exquisite import were plastered over the walls that I must tell you about them.

They emanated from the Mayor, kind father to his people, who told us—we thrilled to hear it—"that in these tragic hours—of war—we had known how to meet the dangers that menaced us with unfailing calmness and courage" (I translate literally), and that "our presence of mind in the face of such sterile manifestations would always direct our moral force." Very flattering. We preened feathers quite unjustifiably, since admittedly the occasion had called for no emotion save that of a limited, feminine, and quite reasonable curiosity.

Then, still glowing, we read on. Mayoral praise is sweet, but mayoral instructions hard to follow. The wisest course to pursue when hostile aviators aviate is, it seems, to take refuge in the nearest house and not to gaze at the sky—surely that Mayor had never been

born of woman!—or, should there be no house, "to distance oneself rapidly and laterally."

We ceased to glow. We remembered we were but dust. Distance oneself laterally? Good, but suppose one was walking by the Canal? With an impenetrable hedge on one side, were we to spring to the other? I have seen the Canal in all its moods. I have never felt the smallest desire to bathe in it. I have still less desire to drown—suffocate!—in it. And if one doesn't know in which direction the bomb is going to fall? . . . How be lateral and rapid before it arrives? Suppose one jumped right under it? Suppose one waits till it comes? "Too late. Too late; ye cannot *distance* now."

Some one suggests that we ought to practise being rapid and lateral. "My dear woman, I don't know what being lateral means." Thus the unenlightened of the party.

"Study the habits of that which can be lateral to all points of the compass at once when you try to catch it," was the frivolous reply. Well, opportunities were not wanting. We decided to take lessons. And then promptly forgot all about Taubes. That is one of the unintentional blessings incidental to their career. When they are not showering bombs on you, you eliminate them from consciousness. Perhaps, in spite of all the damage they have done, they are still too new, too unnatural to be accepted. A raid is just an evil nightmare—for those who suffer no bodily harm. It brings you as a nightmare does to the very edge of some desperate enterprise; you feel the cold, awful fear; you are held in the grip of some deadly unimagined thing that holds you, forces you down, something you cannot

see, something you do not understand, but that you know is hideous, terrible in its happening. The noise breaks on your brain, the noise that is only the symptom of the ill. . . . Then silence shuts down . . . and you awake. . . .

Once, at least for us, the awakening was a tragic one. Ascension Day. A clear, warm summer sky, windless, perfect. Dinner just over in the town. Shops opening again. Life stirring in the streets. An ideal moment for those who are quick to take advantage of such. There was no signal to warn us of what was coming, no time for pedestrians to distance themselves laterally or otherwise. Death found them as they walked through the streets, or gossiped in the station yard. The Place de la Gare became a shambles. Women—why dilate on the horror? Forty people were killed outright, over a hundred were wounded, and of these many subsequently died. In our cellar we listened to the storm, then when it was over we went through the town seeking out our people, anxious to help. We saw horses, mangled and bleeding, lying on the quay-side, a tree riven near the Pont Notre Dame, blood flowing in the gutters, telegraph wires lying in grotesque loops and coils on the roadway or hanging in festoons from the façades of houses. (An underground wire was laid down after this.) Glass—we walked on a carpet of glass, and in the houses we saw things that " God nor man ever should look upon."

Saw too, then and in subsequent raids, how Death, if he has marked you for his own, will claim you even though you hide, even though you seek the " safe " shelter you trust in so implicitly, but which plays the traitor and opens the gate to the Enemy who knocks.

Madame Albert; the old sick woman. Now the eldest Savard girl, a tall, graceful, handsome creature, just twenty years of age. With a number of others including her mother, younger sister, and several soldiers (oh, yes, soldiers " cower " too, and are not always the last to dive to shelter), she fled to the nearest cellar when the raid began, but the entrance was not properly closed, and when a bomb burst in the yard outside, splinters killed five of the soldiers, and wounded her so cruelly she died that night.

Then there was Madame Bertrand, pursued by a malignant spirit of evil. Twice a refugee, she came to Bar in February, drifting from the market to the Maison Blanpain, where within six weeks of her arrival two of her three children had died. (Her husband was a soldier, of course.) One contracted diphtheria, the other was struck down by some virulent and never-diagnosed complaint which lasted just twenty-four hours. Expecting shortly to become a mother again, Madame was standing at her house door that sunny June day when a bomb fell in the street. She was killed instantly.

A fortnight later the little boy who brought parcels from the *épicerie* died. He, like Mademoiselle Savard, was in a cellar, but a fragment of shell came through the tiny *soupirail* (ventilation grating). . . .

II

In June, the town looked as if it were preparing for a siege. The stage direction, " Excursions and alarums," was interpolated extravagantly over all the

drama of our life. If we had been rabbits we might have enjoyed it, there being something slightly facetious, not to say hilarious, in the flirt of the white bob as it scurries to cover, but as actors in the said drama we soon ceased to find it amusing. It interfered so confoundedly with our work! Worst of all, it unsettled our people.

The sang-froid of some of the shopkeepers, however, was magnificent. They simply put their shutters up, pinned a label on the door and went south or west, to wait till the *rafale* blew over. Before going, Monsieur was always at pains to inform us that he, for his part, was indifferent, but Madame, alas, Madame! Nerves. . . . An eloquent shrug that in no way dimmed the brilliance of Madame's smile as she gazed at us from behind his unconscious back. We, for our part, blushed for our sex. Then he asked us if we, too, had not fear? Saying no, we felt unaccountably bombastic. We read braggart in his eye, we scarcely dared to hope he would not read *froussard* in ours. Politely he hoped that when he returned our valuable custom would again be his? Reassured, he stretched a more or less grimy hand over the counter, we laid ours upon it, suspicions vanished! With the word *devouée* gleaming like a halo round our unworthy heads, we stepped again into the street, there to admire a vista of shutters.

(It may be of interest to psychologists that shopkeepers without wives, and shopkeepers without husbands, generally elected to remain in the town They kept, however, their shutters down. Monsieur X., running out to close his during a raid, was blown to atoms. One learns wisdom—by experience—in the War Zone.)

Stepped out to admire, too, a fantastic collection of boxes and bags ranged close against the walls at irregular intervals. Since the affair of the *soupirail* gratings were no longer left unguarded. Tiny though they were, almost unnoticeable specks just where the house wall touched the pavement, they could be dangerous. Consequently, bags of sand, boxes of sand, and big rockery stones were propped against them to be a snare to the unwary at night, and, as the hot summer sped by, to testify (as our shy member cogently remarked) to the visiting proclivities of the dogs of the town. The bags burst, they added to that composite Ess Bouquet that rose so penetratingly in warm weather, but the sand and the stones remained. In the winter, snow buried them. Then the snow froze. Coming round the corner of the Rue Lapique one dark Laplandish night, I trod on the edge of a heap of frozen snow. . . . There are six hundred and seventy-three ways of falling on frozen snow, and I practised most of them that winter, but, as an accomplishment, am bound to admit that they seem to be devoid of any artistic merit whatever.

Following the sand-bags came *affiches*. Every cellared house—and nearly every house had its cellar—blazed the information abroad. "Cave voutée" (vaulted cellar), 20 *personnes*, 50 *personnes*, 200 *personnes*, even 500 *personnes*, indicated shelter in an emergency. In a raid every man's cellar is his neighbour's. Once we harboured some refugees, and that night at dinner the shy member (perhaps I ought to say that the adjective was entirely self-bestowed), gurgled suddenly. We looked at her expectantly.

"I was only thinking that Miss —— (No. I shall

not betray her!) is not supposed to smoke when the refugees are about, but in the middle of the raid she came swanking down to the cellar to-day with a cigarette in her mouth."

As one not unremotely connected with the incident I take leave to disqualify "swank." Professional smokers never swank, it is the attribute of the mere amateur.

So many precautions were taken, it would seem that any one who got hurt during a raid had only himself to blame, and for those who may think warnings superfluous, I may add that never again was the casualty list as high as on that unwarned Ascension Day. Indeed, in subsequent raids—while I was in Bar, at least—it decreased in the most arresting manner. True, the day and night were rendered hideous with noise. To the *sirène* was added the steam-whistle at the gas-works, but these being deemed insufficient, a loud tocsin clanged from the old Horloge on the hill. I have known people to sleep through them all, but their names will never be divulged by so discreet a historian.

Though the danger was lessened, the nerve-strain unfortunately remained. Mothers with children found life intolerable. It was bad enough to spend one's days like a Jack-in-the-box jumping in and out of the cellar, but infinitely worse to spend the night doing it. Flight was—I was going to say in the air! It was at least on many lips. People were poised, as it were, hesitant, unwilling to haul up anchor, afraid to face out upon the unknown sea, yet still more afraid to remain. Then, as I have told you, eight warnings and two raids in twenty-four hours robbed over-taxed

nerves of their last ounce of endurance. The Prefecture was besieged, and in one day alone three hundred people left the town. Those who had friends or relatives in other districts were, as is usual in all such cases, allowed to join them, others were herded like sheep, and like sheep were driven where shepherd and sheep-dog willed. Nearly all the Basket-makers fled. The Maison Blanpain turned its unsavoury contents out of doors. Many of our fastest and firmest friends came to say good-bye with tears in their eyes; it was a heartrending time, and one which, if continued, would have seen an end to all our labour. This fear was happily not realised, for as fast as one lot of refugees went away another lot drifted in, and the following winter was the busiest we were to know.

To all who came to say good-bye, clothes were given, and especially boots, America having come again to our rescue with some consignments which, if they added to our grey hairs—I would "rather be a dog and bay the moon" than assistant in a boot-shop—added in far larger measure to the contentment and happiness of the fugitives.

Boots were, and no doubt still are, almost unobtainable luxuries, for those who try to make both ends of an *allocation* meet. As a garment, it may be said that the allocation (I change my metaphor, you notice) just falls below the waist-line, it never reaches down to the feet. How could it when even a child's pair of shoes cost as much as twelve francs? and are *du papier* at that.

Our boot-shop was a dark, damp, refrigerating closet at the end of the hall where boots of all sizes were of necessity piled, or slung over lines that stretched across the room. What you needed was never on a

line. But the line's adornments beat you about the head as you stooped to burrow in the heaps underneath.

To add to your enjoyment of the situation, you were aware that the difference between French feet and American feet is as wide as the Atlantic that rolls between.

Nevertheless, those that came were shod. I personally can take no credit for it. My plunges into the refrigerator only served as a rule to send the temperature up! The miracles of compression and expansion were performed by the Directrice of the establishment, who will, I hope, forgive me if I say that I deplore an excellent sportswoman lost in her. She had the divine instinct of the chase, and when she ran her quarry to earth her eyes bubbled. At other times, she tried to hide the softest heart that ever betrayed a woman under a grim exterior, that only deceived those who saw no further than her protecting pince-nez.

III

Yes, they were going. Old friends of over a year's standing, many of whom we had visited again and again, and of whom we shall carry glad memories till the final exodus of all carries us beyond the Eternal Shadows. Madame Drouet, our *femme de ménage*, was wavering; pressure, steadily applied, was slowly driving her to the thing she dreaded and disliked. Then, as you know, the blow fell.

She was gone, and we gazed at one another in consternation. Where would we find such another? Hastily we ran over a list of names, and then, Eureka!

we had it. Madame Phillipot, of course. On with our hats, and hot foot at top speed to the rue de Véel. An agitated half-hour—Madame was diffident, she was no cook, she could never please Les Anglaises—a triumphant return, all her scruples overruled, and the inauguration of a reign of peace and plenty such as we shall not see again. There is only one Madame Phillipot in this grey old world. Only one, and we loved her. Loved her? Why, we could not help it! Picture a little robin-redbreast of a woman, short and plump, with pretty dark eyes and clear skin, and the chirpiest voice that ever made music on a summer day. I can hear her now lilting her "Bon Soir, Mesdemoiselles," as she came to bid us good-night. The little ceremony was never forgotten, nor was the morning greeting. She rarely talked, she chirped, and she chirped the long day through. The coming of every new face was an adventure. No longer did the uninterested "C'est une dame," hurl us from our peace. No. In five minutes, in five seconds Madame, interviewing the new-comer, had grasped all the salient points of her history, and we went forth armed, ready to smite or succour as occasion demanded. And dearly she loved her bit of gossip. What greetings the old stone staircase witnessed! What ah's and oh's of delight! We would hear the voluble tide rising, rising, and groan over rooms undusted, and beds blushing naked at midday. But it was impossible to be angry with Madame. The work was done sooner or later, generally later, and when we sat down to her *ragoût*, or her *bœuf mode*, or her *blanquette de veau* in the evening her sins put on the wings of virtue and fluttered, silver plumed, to heaven.

Now, I am a mild woman, but there are hours in which I yearn to murder M. Phillipot, and Pappa, and Mademoiselle Clémence, for they hold Madame to the soil of France. If she was a widowed orphan, perhaps we might console our lonely old age together, but no one could be really lonely when Madame was by. Is one lonely in woods when birds are singing?

It was the ambition of her life to be a milliner, but Pappa—you shall hear about him presently—said No. So she married M. Phillipot instead, and became the wife of a *commis-voyageur* who did not deserve to get her. For he had as mother an old harridan who insisted on living with him, and who, bitterly jealous of Madame, made her life a burden to her. The *commis-voyageur* having a soul like his bag of samples, all bits and scraps, always sided with his mother.

Once Madame asked me to guess her age. I hazarded thirty-eight quite honestly, and she flushed like a girl. "Ah, mais non. She was older than that. She was . . ." (I shan't "give her away." Am not I, too, a woman?)

"You don't look it, Madame," I answered truthfully.

"Ah, but if only Mademoiselle had seen me before the war. When I was dressed in my pretty Sunday clothes. Ah, que j'étais belle! And fresh and young. One would have given me thirty."

Her speech was the most picturesque thing, a source of unfailing delight. Once in that awful frost, when for six weeks there was ice on the bedroom floor and a phylactery of ice adorned my sponge-bag, when the moisture that exuded from the walls became *crystallisé*, and neither blankets, nor fur coat, nor hot water bottle kept one warm at night, Madame, seeing me

huddle a miserable half-dead thing over the stove, cried, " It is under a *cloche* we should put you, Mademoiselle Day." And the three villains who shared my misery with ten times my fortitude chuckled with delight. My five-foot seven and ample proportions being " forced " like a salad under the bell-glass of intensive culture ! No wonder we laughed. But I longed for the *cloche* all the same.

As for her good humour it was indestructible. When people came, as people inconsiderately will come, from other work-centres demanding food at impossible hours, Madame sympathised with the agonies of the housekeeper and evolved meals out of nothingness, out of a leek and a lump of butter, or out of three sticks of macaroni, one *gousse d'ail* and a pinch of salt. The clove of garlic went into every pot—was it that which made her dishes so savoury ? When the gas was shut off at five o'clock just as dinner was under way, she didn't tear her hair and blaspheme her gods ; she cooked. Don't ask me how she did it. I can only state the fact. On two gas-rings, with a tiny hot-plate in between, she cooked a soup, a meat dish, two vegetables and a pudding every night, and served them all piping hot whether the gas " marched " or whether it did not.

If we wanted to send her into the seventh heaven we gave her a " commission " in the town, or asked her to trim a hat. We would meet her trotting up the Boulevard, her basket on her arm, her smile irradiating the greyest day, and know that when she returned every rumour—and Bar seethed with rumours—every scrap of gossip—it was a hotbed of gossip—on the wing that day would be ours for the asking. She never held

herself aloof as Madame Drouet did. She became one of the household, and it would have done your heart good to see her on Sunday morning trotting (she always trotted) first from one room and then to another with trays of coffee and rolls, keeping us like naughty children in bed, ostensibly because we must be tired, we worked so hard (O Madame! Madame!), but actually we believed to keep us out of the way while she scuttled through her work in time for Mass.

Her dusting was even sketchier than Madame Drouet's, and when she washed out a room she always left one corner dry, but whether in pursuance of a sacred rite or as a concession to temperament, I cannot say.

Meantime she lived in one room in the rue de Véel, sharing it with her father and Mademoiselle Clémence. M. Phillipot, his existence once acknowledged, faded more and more surely from our ken. He was not in Bar-le-Duc, he was in a misty, nebulous somewhere with his virago of a mother. We felt that wherever he was he deserved it, and speedily put him out of our existence. But he occurred later. Husbands do, it seems, in France.

Frankly, I believe that Madame forgot him too. She never spoke of him, and she was devoted to M. Godard and Clémence, who are of the stock and breeding that keep one's faith in humanity alive. Monsieur was a carpenter, an old retainer of the château near his home. A well-to-do man, we gathered, of some education and magnificent spirit. When the Germans captured his village they seized him, buffeted him and threatened to shoot him. Well, he just defied them. Flung back his old head and dared them to do their

worst. Even when he was kneeling in the village square waiting the order to fire he defied them. He told me the story more than once, but the details escaped me. Heaven having deprived him of teeth, he had a quaint trick of substituting nails, with his mouth full of which he waxed eloquent. Now, toothless French causes the foreigner to pour ashes on her head and squirm in the very dust, but French garnished with " des points " . . . !

Of course I ought to have mastered it, as opportunities were not lacking, but Monsieur, who worked regularly for us, was unhappily slightly deaf. So what with the difficulty of making him understand me, and the difficulty of making me understand him, our intimacy, though at all times of the most affectionate nature, rested rather on goodwill than on soul to soul intercourse.

A scheme for providing the refugees with chests in which to keep their scanty belongings having been set afoot, Monsieur was established in the wood-shed with planes, hammer and nails, and there he became a fixture. We simply could not get on without him. We flew to him in every crisis, flying back occasionally in laughter and indignation, with the storm of his disapproval still whistling in our ears. He could be as obstinate as a mule, and oh, how he could chasten us for our good! In the intervals he made chests out of packing-cases, which he adorned with hinges and a loop for a padlock, while we painted the owner's initials in heavy lettering on the top. So highly were they prized and sought after, our stock of packing-cases ran out, and those who wanted them had to bring their own. It was then that Monsieur's gift of invec-

tive showed itself in all its razor-like keenness. For, grievous to relate, there are people in the world who presume upon generosity—mean people who will not play the game. Every packing-case in process of transformation made serious inroads on Monsieur's time, and upon the small supply of wood at his disposal, so their cost was not small. But if you had seen some of the boxes brought to our door!

"That?" Monsieur wagged a contemptuous finger at the overgrown match-box one despicable creature planted under his enraged eyes. "That? A chest to hold linen? Take it away. It will do to carry your prayer book in when you go to Mass."

Or, "It is a chest that you want me to make out of that? That? Look at it. C'est du papier à cigarette. Your husband can roll his tobacco in it."

We chuckled as we blessed him. No doubt we were often imposed upon, and Monsieur had an eye like a needle for the impostor.

In process of manufacture, marks of ownership sometimes became erased, and then there was woe in Israel.

"That my caisse? Mais je vous assure Mademoiselle the caisse that I brought was large, grande comme ça"—a gesture suggested a mausoleum. "Yes, and I wrote my name on it with the pencil of Monsieur, there, dans le couloir. He saw me write it, Vannier-Lefeuvre. Monsieur will testify."

We gazed at Monsieur. "Vannier-Lefeuvre? Bon. Regardez la liste. C'est le numero twenty-two."

"But there is NO number twenty-two, Monsieur."

"Eh bien, il faut chercher."

This to a demented philanthropist who had already

wasted a good hour in the search. (The hall was piled ceiling high with the wretched cases, you know.) Madame Vannier-Lefeuvre lifted up a strident voice and sang in minor key a dirge in memory of the lost treasure. Its size, its beauty, its strength, the twenty-five sous she had paid for it at the *épicerie*. . . . No, it was not that, nor that. We dragged out the best, even some special treasures bigger and better than anything she could have produced. All in vain. "Monsieur." We appealed to Cæsar.

Boom, bang, boom. With his mouth full of nails, humming a stifled song, Cæsar drove a huge nail into the case of Madame Poiret-Blanc. Five minutes later Madame Lefeuvre-Vannier—"or Vannier-Lefeuvre ça ne fait rien," marched off with our finest *caisse* on her *brouette*, woe on her wily old face and devilish glee in her heart. And we, turning to pulverise Monsieur, whose business it was to mark every case in order to prevent confusion, found ourselves dumb. We might rage in the Common-room, but in the wood-shed we were as lambs that baa'ed.

And we forgave him all his sins the day he, with a look of ineffable dignity just sufficiently tinged with contempt, brushed aside a huge gendarme at the station. Some one was going away, and Monsieur had wheeled her luggage over on the *brouette*.

"It is forbidden to go on the platform." Thus the arm of military law, an *Avis* threatening pains and penalties hanging over his head.

"Forbidden? Do you not know that I am the valet de ces dames?"

Have you ever seen a gendarme crumple?

IV

Twenty degrees, twenty-two degrees, twenty-five degrees of frost. A clear blue sky, brilliant sunshine, a snow-bound world.

"Pas chaud," people would declare as they came shivering into our room. Not hot! Are the French never positive? I think only when it rains, and then they do commit themselves to a "quel vilain temps."

The ice on the windows, even at the sunny side of the house, refused to thaw; the water pipes froze. Not a drop of water in the house, everything solid. Madame put a little coke stove under the tap, and King Frost laughed aloud. The tap thawed languidly, then froze again, and remained frozen. A week, two, three weeks went by. Happily there was water in the cellar.

It was *ennuyant*, certainly, to be obliged to fetch all the water in pails across the small garden, through the hall and up the stairs, but Madame endured it, as she endured the chilblains that tortured her feet, and the nipping cold of her kitchen. Even the frost could not harden her bubbling good humour.

King Frost gripped the world in firmer fingers, the sun grew more brilliant, the sky more blue. The Canal froze, the lock gates were ice palaces, the streets and roads invitations to death or permanent disablement. Still Madame endured. A morning came when the cold stripped the flesh from our bones, and we shook as with an ague. The Common-room door opened, desolation was upon us. Madame staggered in, fell upon a chair and, lifting up her voice, wept aloud. She was *désolée*. For two hours she had laboured in the cellar, she had lighted the *réchaud* (the little stove),

she had poured boiling water over the tap, she had prayed, she had invoked the Saints and Pappa, but the water would not come. *Pas une goutte!* And every pipe in the Quartier was frozen, there was no water left in all the ice-bound world.

Madame in tears! Madame in a *crise de nerfs!* She who had coped with disasters that left us gibbering imbeciles, and had laughed her way through vicissitudes that reduced me, at least, to the intelligent level of a nerveless jelly-fish! We nearly had a *crise de nerfs* ourselves, but happily some hot tea was forthcoming, hot tea which in France is not a beverage, but an *infusion*—like *tilleul*, you know—and with that we pulled ourselves together. We also resuscitated Madame, whose long vigil in the cellar had frozen her as nearly solid as the pipes. Later on, she complained of feeling ill, *un peu souffrante.* Asked to describe her symptoms, she said she had "l'estomac embarrassé." Before so mysterious a disease we wilted. But the loan of a huge *marmite* from the Canteen restored her; there was water in the deep well in the Park, Pappa would take the *marmite* on the *brouette* and bring back supplies for the house. He brought them. As the *marmite* made its heavy way up the stairs, some one asked where the queer smell came from.

"That? It is from the water," he replied simply.

Sanitary authorities, take note. We survived it. And we kept ourselves as clean as we could. When we couldn't we consoled ourselves by remembering that the washed are less warm than the unwashed. M. l'Abbé told me that he dropped baths out of his scheme of things while the frost lasted. Were we not afraid to bathe? We confessed to a reasonable fear

of being found one morning sitting in my square of green canvas, a pillar like Lot's wife, but of ice, not salt. He brooded on the picture I called up, I slid like a bag of coal down the hill.

Having administered comfort to " l'estomac embarrassé," we rationed our supply of water, we prayed for a thaw, Madame began to chirp again, the world was not altogether given over to the devil. But peace had forsaken our borders. Going into the kitchen one morning I found Madame in tears. M. Phillipot had occurred. The deluge was upon us.

Wearying of life in the South, he had come back to Révigny, his mother, of course, as always, upon his arm, and there, possessed of a thousand devils, he had bought a wooden house, and there his mother, with all the maddening malice of a perverse, inconsiderate animal, had been seized with an illness and was preparing to die.

And she had sent for Madame. No wonder the heavens fell.

" All my life she has ill-treated me," the poor little woman sobbed, " and now when I am si heureuse avec vous, when I earn good money, she sends for me. Quel malheur ! What cruelty ! You do not know what a rude enfer (hell) I have suffered with that woman. And chez nous, one was so happy. With Pappa and Clémence all was so peaceful, never a cross word, never a temper. Ah, what sufferings ! Did not the contemplation of them turn Clémence from marriage for ever ? Because of my so grande misère never would she marry. La belle-mère, she hated me. It was that she was jealous. But now when she is ill she sends for me. But I will not go. No, I will not."

" But, Madame, if she is ill? We could manage for a few days." She was riven with emotion, then the storm passed. Again we reasoned with her. She must go. After all, if the old woman was dying. . . .

Madame did not believe in the possible dissolution of anything so entirely undesirable as her *belle-mère*, but in the end humanity prevailed. She would go, but for one night. She would come back early on the morrow.

" Ah, Mademoiselle, c'est un vrai voyage de sacrifice that I make." She put on her Sunday clothes, she took Clémence with her, she came back that night. Two days later a letter, then a telegram urged her forth again. We had almost to turn her out of the house. Was not one voyage of sacrifice enough in a lifetime of sorrow? And the *belle-mère* would not die. She, Madame, knew it. Protesting, weeping, she set out, to come back annoyed, sobered, enraged, *bouleversée*. *La belle-mère* had died. What else could one expect from such an ingrate?

And now there was M. Phillipot all alone in the *maudite petite maison* at Révigny. " Is it that he can live alone? Pensez donc, Mademoiselle! I, moi qui vous parle, must give up my good place with my friends whom I love, to whom I have accustomed myself, and live in that desert of a Révigny. Is it that I shall earn good money there? Monsieur? Il ne gagne rien, mais rien du tout. Pas ça." She clicked a nail against a front tooth and shot an expressive finger into the air.

" Then he must come to Bar-le-Duc."

But—ah, if Mademoiselle only knew what she suffered —Monsieur was possessed of goats—deux chèvres,

that he loved. They had followed him in all his journeyings; when they were tired the soldiers gave them rides in the *camions*. To the South they had gone with him, back to Révigny they had come with him. To part with them would be death. You do not know how he loves them. But could one keep goats in the rue de Véel?

One could certainly not. We looked at Madame. Physical force might get her to Révigny, no other power could. Assuredly we who knew her value could not persuade her. The *impasse* seemed insurmountable. Then light broke over it, showing the way. If Monsieur wanted his wife he must abandon his goats. It was a choice. Let him make it. *Rien de plus simple.*

He chose the goats.

CHAPTER XV

M. LE POILU

I

If you had ventured into Bar-le-Duc during the stormy days of 1916, when the waves of the German ocean beat in vain against the gates of Verdun, you might have thought that the entire French army was quartered there. Soldiers were everywhere. The station-yard was a wilderness of soldiers. In faded horizon-blue, muddy, inconceivably dirty, with that air of *je ne sais quoi de fagoté* which distinguishes them, they simply took possession of the town. The *pâtisseries* were packed—how they love cakes, *choux-à-la-crême*, *brioches*, *madeleines*, tarts !—the Magasins Réunis was a tin in which all the sardines were blue and all had been galvanised into life; fruit-shops belched forth clouds that met, mingled and strove with clouds that sought to envelop the vacated space; in the groceries we, who were women and mere civilians at that, stood as suppliants, "with bated breath and whispering humbleness," and generally stood in vain. But for Madame I verily believe we would have starved. Orderlies from officers' messes away up on the Front drove, rode or trained down with lists as long as the mileage they covered, lists that embraced every human need, from flagons of costly scent to tins of herrings

or *pâté-de-foie-gras*, or *Petit Beurre*, *Lulu* (the most insinuating *Petit Beurre* in the world), from pencils and notepaper to soap, from asparagus and chickens—twelve francs each and as large as a fair-sized snipe—to dried prunes and hair-oil. We even heard of one *popotte* which pooled resources and paid twenty-five francs for a lobster, but perhaps that tale was merely offered as a tax upon our credulity.

Bar-le-Duc was delirious. Never had it known such a reaping, never had it heard of such prices. It rose dizzily to an occasion which would have been sublime but for the inhumanity of the *Petite Vitesse* which, lacking true appreciation of the situation, sat down upon its wheels and ceased to run.

Not that the *Petite Vitesse* was really to blame. It yearned to indulge in itinerant action, but there was Verdun, with its gargantuan mouths wide open, all waiting to be fed, and all clamouring for men, munitions and *ravitaillement* of every kind. In those days all roads led to Verdun—all except one, and that the Germans were hysterically treading.

However, we wasted no sympathy on the shopkeepers. Their complete indifference to our needs drove every melting tenderness from our hearts, or, to be quite accurate, drove it in another direction—that of the poor *poilu* who had no list and no fat wallet bulging with hundred-franc notes. And I think he richly deserved all the sympathy we could give him. Think of the streets as I have described them when talking of the Marché Couvert, call to mind every discomfort that weather can impose, add to them, multiply them exceedingly, and then extend them beyond the farthest bounds of reason, and you have

Bar in the spring of 1916. Cold, wet, snow, sleet, slush, wind, mud, rain—interminable rain—did their worst with us, and in them all and under most soldiers lived in the streets. The *débitants* and café-restaurants were closed during a great part of the day, there was literally nowhere for them to go. They huddled like flocks of draggled birds in the station-yard, some in groups, some in serried mass before the barrier, some stamping up and down, some sitting on the kerb or on the low stone parapet from which the railings spring, and while some, pillowing their heads on their kits, went exhaustedly to sleep, others crouched with their backs against the wall. They ate their bread, opened their tins of *conserve*—generally potted meat or sardines—sliced their cheese with a pocket-knife, or absorbed needed comfort from bottles which, for all their original dedication, were rarely destined to hold water! On the Canal bank they sat or lay in the snow, on ground holding the seeds of a dozen chilly diseases in its breast; on the river banks they sprang up like weeds, on the Boulevard every seat had its quota, and we have known them to have it for the night. In all the town there was not a canteen or a *foyer*, not a hut nor a camp, not a place of amusement (except a spasmodic cinema), not a room set apart for their service. They might have been Ishmaels; they must have been profoundly uncomfortable.

Yet no one seemed to realise it. That was the outstanding explosive feature of the case. Late in the spring, towards the end of April or in May, buffets were opened in the station-yard under the ægis of the Croix Rouge. At one of these ham, sardines, bread, post cards, tobacco, chocolate, cakes, matches, *pâté*,

cheese, etc., could be bought; at the other wine, and possibly beer. The space between was not even roofed over, and, their small purchases made, the men had to consume them—when eatable—in the open. But of real solicitude, in the British sense of the word, for their comfort there was none.

France has shown herself mighty in many ways during the war, but—with the utmost diffidence I suggest it—not in her care for the men who are waging it. Our Tommies, with their Y.M.C.A. huts and Church Army and Salvation huts, with their hot baths, their sing-songs in every rest-camp, their clouds of ministering angels, their constellations of adoring satellites waiting on them hand and foot, are pampered minions compared with the French soldier. For him there is neither Y.M.C.A., Church Army nor Salvation Army. He comes, some three thousand of him, *en repos* to a tiny village, such as Fains or Saudrupt, Trémont or Bazincourt, he is crowded into barns, granges, stables and lofts, he is route-marched by day, he is neglected by evening. No one worries about him. Amusement, distraction there is none. No club-room where he may foregather comfortably, no cheery canteen with billiards and games, no shops in which if he has money he can spend it. Blank, cheerless, uncared-for nothingness. He gets into mischief—what can you expect? He goes back to the trenches, and shamed eyes are averted and hearts weighed with care hide behind bravado as he goes.

Sometimes you hear, "The men are so weary and so dispirited they do no harm." They are like dream people, moving through a world of shadows. Those who go down into hell do not come back easily to the

things of earth. Sometimes you hear tales that make you wince. The pity of it! And sometimes you meet young girls who, tempted beyond their strength, are paying the price of a sin whose responsibility should rest on other shoulders.

"My friend the Aumonier at F—— does not know what to do with his men," said the Abbé B. to me one day. "They are utterly discouraged, he cannot rouse them; they vow they will not go back to the trenches." And then he talked of agitators who tried to stir up disaffection in the ranks, Socialist leaders and the like. (France has her Bolos to meet even in the humblest places.) But I could not help thinking that the good Aumonier's task would have been a lighter one had plenty of wholesome recreation been provided for his men in that super-stupid, dull and uninteresting village of F——.[1]

The migratory soldier going to or from leave, or changing from one part of the Front to another, might, as we have seen, wait hours at a junction, cold and friendless, without where to lay his head. And just why it was not particularly easy to discover. We divined a psychological problem, we never really resolved it.

Does logic, carried to its ultimate conclusion, leave humanity limping behind it on the road?

Or are the French the victims of their own history? Did not the Revolution sow the seeds of deep distrust between aristocracy and bourgeoisie and, more than

[1] It must be remembered that there is no one in such villages or their immediate neighbourhood capable of initiating such recreation. The inhabitants are of the small farmer class for the most part, the mayor a working man, the parish priest old (priests of military age serve with the colours), and all are often very poor.

that, sow an even deeper distrust between bourgeois and bourgeois? During the Reign of Terror the man who dined with you to-night all too often betrayed you on the morrow, neighbour feared neighbour, and with terrible justification, the home became a fortress round which ran a moat of silence and reserve, the family circle became the family horizon, people learned to live to themselves, to mind their own business and let the devil or who would mind that of their neighbours.

When England was blossoming in a springtime of altruism, when great-minded men and women were learning that the burden of the poor, the sick, the suffering was their burden to be shouldered and carried and passed from hand to hand, France was still maimed and battered by blows from which she has scarcely yet recovered.

Even to-day French women tell me of the isolation of their upbringing. "Our father discouraged intercourse with the families about us."

But that narrow individualism—or, more properly, tribalism—is, I think, dying out, and the present war bids fair to give it its death-stroke.

Behind the Revolution lay no fine feudal instinct, no traditions save those of bitter hatred and of resentment on the one hand, of contempt and oppression on the other. Not, it will be acknowledged, the best material out of which to reconstitute a broken world. And so what might be called collective sympathy was a feeble plant, struggling pitifully in unfavourable soil. The great upper class which has made England so peculiarly what she is scarcely existed in France. The old aristocracy passed away, the new sprang from the Napoleonic knapsack; Demos in a gilt frame, a

Demos who had much to forget and infinitely more to learn.

Some philanthropic societies, of course, existed before the war, but, so far as my knowledge of them goes, they were run by the State or by its delegates, the iron hand of officialdom closed down upon them, they made little if any claim upon the heart of the people. Perhaps in a nation of such indomitable independence no more was necessary, but what was necessary—if I may dare to say so—was large-hearted sympathy and understanding between class and class—a common meeting-ground, in fact.

So, at least, I read the problem, and offer you my solution for what it is worth, uncomfortably aware that wiser heads than mine may laugh me out of court and sentence me to eternal derision.

One thing, at least, I do not wish, and that is to bring in a verdict of general inhumanity and hard-heartedness against the French nation. A certain imperceptiveness, lack of intuition, of insight, of the sympathetic imagination—call it what you will—is, perhaps, theirs in a measure; but, on the other hand, the individual responds quickly, even emotionally, to an appeal to his softer side. Only he has not acquired the habit of exposing his soft side to view and asking the needy to lean upon it! Nor has he acquired the habit of going forth to look for people ready to lean. He accepts the *status quo*. But prove to him that it needs altering, and he is with you heart and hand. His is an attitude of mind, not of heart. When the heart is touched the mind becomes its staunchest ally. The feeding of the refugees done on lavish scale, the installation of a hostel for the relatives of men dying

in hospital are instances of what I mean. For months, years, poor women, wives and mothers coming to take their last farewell of those who gave their lives for France, had no welcome in Bar. All too often they were unable to find a bed, they wandered the streets when the hospitals were closed against them, they slept in the station. Then a *Médicin-Chef*, with a big heart and reforming mind, suggested that the refugee dormitories in the market should be converted into a hostel. No sooner suggested than done. The "Maison des Parents" sprang into life, a tiny charge was made for *le gîte et la table*, voluntary helpers served the meals, organised, catered, kept the accounts. France only needs to be shown the way. One day she will seek it out for herself. Every day she is finding new roads. And this I am sure every one who has worked as our Society has done will endorse, no appeal has ever been made in vain to those who, like our friends in Bar-le-Duc and elsewhere, gave with unstinting generosity and without self-advertisement.

II

Think, too, of the hospitals. The call of the wounded was answered magnificently. Remember that before the war French hospitals were very much where ours were in the days of Mrs. Gamp, and before Florence Nightingale carried her lamp through their dark and noisome places. It is said that the nursing used to be done by nuns for the most part, a fact of which the Government took no cognisance when it drove the religious orders from the country, and when they went

away it fell into the hands of riff-raff. Women of no character, imported by students as worthless as themselves, masqueraded as ministering angels, and it is safe to assume that they neither ministered nor were angelic. Gentlewomen, even the *petit bourgeoisie*, drew their skirts aside from such creatures. The woman of good birth and education who became a nurse, not only violated her code by earning her living, but cut her social cables and drifted out upon an almost uncharted sea. Only the few who were brave enough to attempt it trained (if my authorities are reliable) in England, and no doubt it was owing in large measure to them that a movement for re-organising the hospitals was set on foot. But before the project could mature the church bells, ringing out their call to arms, rang out a call to French women too, and gathered them into the nursing profession.

Perhaps that is why the hale, hearty, often dirty, and by no means always respectful *poilu* has been neglected. Woman seeing him wounded had no eye for him whole. Besides, he is rather a bewildering thing; his gods are not her gods, his standards not her standards, she is—dare I whisper it?—just a little afraid of him, as we are apt to be of the thing we do not understand. All her instinct has bidden her banish him from her orbit, but insensibly, inevitably he is beginning to move in it, to worm himself in. Wounded, she has him at her mercy, and when, repaired, patched and nursed into the semblance of a man again, he goes back to the trenches surely she can never think of him in the old way, or look at him from the old angle? As your true democrat is at heart a complete snob, the poor *poilu* used to be, and is probably

to a large extent still, looked down upon as an inferior being. Conscription rubbed the hero from him, but the human being is beginning to emerge.

It is possible that in the hospitals another revolution is taking place which, if unseen and unguessed at, may be scarcely less far-reaching in its effects than the old. It has at least drawn the women outside the charmed circle of the home, it is bringing them hourly into contact with a side of life which, but for the war, might have remained a closed book whose pages they would always have shrunk from turning. Such close contact with human agony, endurance and death cannot leave them unmoved, and though they have not yet thoroughly mastered the knack of making hospitals HOMES, though many little comforts, graces and refinements that we think essential are missing, still, when one remembers the overwhelming ignorance with which they began and the difficulties they had to contend with, we must concede that they have done wonders. For, unlike our V.A.D.s, they did not step into up-to-date, well-appointed wards with lynx-eyed sisters, steeped in the best traditions, waiting to instruct them. Experience was their teacher . They were amateurs doing professional work, and without discredit to them we may sympathise with the soldiers who, transferred from a hospital under British management to one run by their own compatriots, wept like children. Which shows that though we may deny him the quality, the *poilu* appreciates and is grateful for a good dose of judicious petting.

III

Yes! The *poilu* deserves our sympathy. He is, to my mind, one of the most tragic figures of the war. He is pursued by a fatalism as relentless as it is hopeless, and whether he is ill or well is subjected to much unnecessary discomfort. He hates war, he hates the trenches, he loathes the life of the trenches, he wants nothing so much in the world as his own hearthstone. He is often despairing, and convinced of defeat. ("Mademoiselle, never can we drive the Boche from his trenches, *never!*") and yet he goes on. There lies the hero in him—he goes on. Not one in a hundred of him has Tommy's cheery optimism, unfailing good-humour, cheerful grumble and certainty of victory. And yet he goes on! He sings *L'Internationale*, he vows in regiments that "on ne marchera plus. C'est fini"—but he goes on. He is really rather wonderful, for he has borne the brunt of heavy fighting for more than three years, and behind him is no warm barrage of organised care, of solicitude for his welfare, or public ministration to shield him from the devils of depression and despair. His wife, his sister, his mother may pinch and starve to send him little comforts, but he is conscious of the pinching, he has not yet got the great warm heart of a generous nation at his back. Think of his pay, of his separation allowances (those of the refugees, one franc twenty-five per day per adult, fifty centimes per day per child), and then picture him fighting against heavy odds, standing up to and defying the might of Germany at Verdun. Isn't he wonderful?

He seems to have no hope of coming through the war alive. In canteen, in the train, in the kitchens of the

refugees you may hear him say, " At Verdun or on the Somme, what matter? It will come some time, and best for those to whom it comes quickly."

" Ceux qui cherchent la mort ne la trouve jamais." The speaker was a quick, vivid thing, obviously not of the working classes. He had been *cité* (mentioned) more than once, and offered his stripes with a view to a commission several times, but had always refused them. " For me, I do not mind, but think of the responsibility . . . to know that the lives of others hung upon you, your coolness, quickness, readiness of decision. *Impossible!* And it is the sergeants who die. The mortality among them is higher than in any other rank. They must expose themselves more, you see. . . . Oh yes, there are men who are afraid, and there are men who try to die." It was then he added, " But those who seek death never find it. The man who hesitates, who peers over the top of the trench, who looks this way and that, wondering if the moment is good, he gets killed; but the man who is not afraid, the man who wants to die, he rushes straight out, he rushes straight up to the Boche . . . he is never hurt."

And then he and his companion talked of men who longed to die, who courted death but in vain. Both expressed a quiet, unemotional conviction that Death would come to them before long. And both wore the Croix de Guerre.

Old Madame Leblan—you remember her?—had a nephew whom she loved as a son. He and her own boys had grown up together, and she would talk to me of Paul by the hour. He saw all the Verdun fighting, and before that much that was almost as fierce; he visited her during every leave, he brought her and

her family gifts, napkin-rings, pen-handles, paper-cutters, finger-rings, all sorts of odds and ends made in the trenches from shell-cases and the like. He was always cheery, always sure he would come again. Paul was like a breeze of sunny wind, he never lost heart, he never lost hope—until they gave him his commission. He refused it over and over again. Then his Colonel, taxing him with want of patriotism, forced him to accept it. That week he wrote to Madame. He told her of his promotion, adding, "In a fortnight I shall get leave, so I am looking forward to seeing you all, unless . . ."

She showed me the letter. She pointed to that significant "unless. . . ."

"Never have I known Paul to write like that. Always he said I will come." Her heart was full of foreboding, and next time I saw her she took out the letter with shaking hands. Paul was dead.

"He knew," she said, as she wept bitterly; "he knew when he took his commission."

A reconnaissance from which all his men got back safely, Paul last of all, crawling on hands and knees . . . raises himself to take a necessary observation . . . a sniper . . . a swift bullet . . . a merciful death . . . and an old heart bleeding from a wound that will never heal.

"If we see Death in front of us we care no more for it than we do for that." A Zouave held a glass of lemonade high above the canteen counter. "For that is the honour of the regiment. Death?" he shrugged. "One will die, *sans doute*. At Verdun, on the Somme, *n'importe!* My *copain* here has been wounded twice. And I? I had two brothers, they are both in your

cemetery here. Yes, killed at Verdun, M'amzelle; I was wounded. Some day I suppose that we, *nous aussi*. . . ." Again he shrugged. "Will you give me another lemonade?"

He and his companion wore the *fourragère*, the cord of honour, given to regiments for exceptional gallantry in the field. They had been at Vaux. And what marvels of endurance and sheer pluck the Zouaves exhibited there are matters now of common knowledge. Personally, I nourish a calm conviction that but for them and their whirlwind sacrifice Verdun must have fallen.

IV

Fatalists? Yes. But a thousand other things besides. It is useless to try and offer you the *poilu* in tabloid form, he refuses to be reduced to a formula. The pessimist of to-day is the inconsequent child of to-morrow. You pity him for his misfortunes, and straightway he makes you yearn to chastise him for his impertinence. His manners—especially in the street—like the Artless Bahdar's, "are not always nice." He can be, and all too often is, frankly indecent; indeed there are hours when you ask yourself wildly whether indecency is not just a question of opinion, and whether standards must shift when frontiers are crossed, and a new outlook on life be acquired as diligently and as open-mindedly as one acquires—or strives to!—a Parisian accent.

It is, of course, in the canteen that he can be studied most easily. There you see him in all his moods, and

there you need all your wits about you if you are not to be put out of court a hundred times a day. Canteens are, as we have seen, accidental luxuries on the French front. They took root in most inhospitable soil. As happy hunting-grounds for the pacifists and anti-war agitators they were feared, their value as restoratives (I speak temperamentally, not gastronomically) being practically unknown. But once known it was recognised. The canteen at Bar-le-Duc, for instance, has been the means of opening up at least two others, though the opinion of one General, forcibly expressed when it was in process of installation, filled its promoters with darkest gloom.

"There will not be an unsmashed bowl, cup or plate in a week. The men will destroy everything." And therein proved himself a false prophet, for the men destroyed nothing—except our faith in that General's knowledge of them!

Once, indeed, we did see them in unbridled mood, and many and deep were the complications that followed it. It was New Year's Eve, and as I crossed the station yard I could hear wild revelry ascending to the night. (Perhaps at this point it would be as well to say that the canteen was not run by or connected in any way with our Society, and that I and two members of the *coterie* worked there as supernumeraries in the evenings when other work was done. The fourth and by no means last member was one of the fairy godmothers whose magic wand had waved it into being.) Going in, I found it as usual in a fog of smoke, and thronged with men. Now precisely what befell it would take too long to relate, but I admit you to some esoteric knowledge. The evening, for me, began with songs sung in

chorus, passed swiftly to solos which blistered the air, and which would have been promptly silenced had not Authority warned us "to leave the men alone, they are in dangerous mood to-night." (A warning with which one helper, at least, had no sympathy.) It may safely be assumed that there was much in those songs which we did not understand, but, judging by what we did, ignorance was more than bliss, it was the topmost pinnacle of discretion.

The soloist hoarse (he should have had a megaphone, so terrific was the din), his place was taken by a creature so picturesque that all my hearts went out to him at once. (It is as well to take a few hundred with you when you go to France, they have such a trick of mislaying themselves.) He was tall and slender, finely made, splendidly poised, well-knit, a graceful thing with finished gestures, and he wore a red fez, wide mustard-coloured trousers and a Zouave coat. He was singularly handsome with chiselled features and eyes of that deep soft brown that one associates with the South. Furthermore, he possessed no mean gift of oratory.

He stood on the bench that did duty as a platform. Jan Van Steen might have painted the canteen then, or would he have vulgarised it? In spite of everything, in some indefinable way it was not vulgar, and yet we instinctively felt that it ought to have been. What saved it? Ah, that I cannot tell. Perhaps the dim light, or the faint blueish haze of tobacco smoke, the stacked arms, trench-helmets hanging on the walls. Or else that wonderful horizon-blue, a colour that is capable of every artistic *nuance*, that lures the imagination, that offers a hundred beauties to the eye, and

can resolve itself as exquisitely against the dark boarding of a canteen as against the first delicate green of spring, or against autumn woods a riot of colour.

Now the speech of that graceless creature, swaying lightly above the crowd, was everything that a canteen or war-time speech ought not to be. It began with abuse of capitalists—well, they deserved it, perhaps. It taxed them with all responsibility for the war, it yearned passionately to see them in the trenches. There, at least, we were in accord. We know a few. . . . But when it went on to say that the masses who fought were fools, that they should "down tools," that the German is too rich, too powerful, too well-organised, too supreme a militarist ever to be defeated. . . . Then British pride arose in arms. . . . Just what might have happened I cannot say, for French pride arose too, and as it rose the orator descended, and holy calm fell for a moment upon the raging tumult.

It was indeed a hectic evening, and I, for one, was hoarse for two days after it. Even "Monsieur désire ?" or "Ça fait trente-trois sous, Monsieur," was an exercise requiring vocal cords of steel or of wire in such a hubbub, and mine, alas! are of neither.

But the descent of the orator was not the end. Somehow, no matter how, it came to certain ears that the canteen that night had been the scene of an "orgy," the reputation of France was at stake, and so it befell that one afternoon when the thermometer sympathetically registered twenty-two degrees of frost, Colonel X. interviewed those of us who had assisted at the revels, separately one by one, in the little office behind the canteen. He wanted, it seems, to find out exactly what had happened. Well, he found out!

Put to the question, "Colonel X.," quoth I, not knowing the enormity I was committing, "the men had drunk a little too much."

"But, Mademoiselle," his dignity was admirable, reproof was in every line of his exquisitely-fitting uniform, "soldiers of France are never drunk."

"Then"—this very sweetly—"can you tell me where they get the wine?"

And he told me! He ought to have shot me, of course, and no doubt I should richly have deserved it. But inadvertently I had touched upon one of his pet grievances. The military authorities can close the *débitants* and restaurants, but they cannot close the *épiceries*.

"Every grocer in France," he cried, "can get a license to sell wine. He sends a small boy—*un vrai gosse*—to the Bureau, he stamps a certificate, he pays a few francs, and that is all. A soldier can fill his bottle at any grocer's in the town. Why," he went on, the original cause of our interview forgotten and the delinquent turned confidante, "not long ago I entrained a regiment here sober, Mademoiselle, I assure you sober, but when they arrived at R—— they were drunk. And the General was furious. 'What do you mean by sending me drunken soldiers?' he thundered. They had filled their bottles, they were thirsty in the train. . . ."

But officially, you understand, soldiers of France are never drunk. Actually they seldom are. Coming home after six months in Bar, I saw more soldiers under the influence of drink in a week (it included a journey to Ireland in a train full of ultra-cheerful souls) than in all my time in France. That men who were far from

sober came occasionally to the canteen cannot be denied, there are rapscallions in every army, but the percentage was small, and with twenty-two degrees of frost gnawing his vitals there is excuse for the man who solaces himself with wine.

V

It was characteristic of the French mind that Colonel X. could not understand why we did not call the station guard and turn the rioters into the street. To wander about in that bitter wind, to get perhaps into all sorts of trouble! Better a rowdy canteen a hundred times over.

We were frank enough—at least I know I was—on that aspect of the episode, and, all honour to him, he conceded a point though he failed to understand its necessity. But now, as at so many pulsating moments of my career, the ill-luck that dogs me seized me in the person of the Canteen-Chief and removed me from the room. She, poor ignorant dear, thought I was being indiscreet, whereas I was merely being receptive. I am sure I owe that Canteen-Chief a grudge, and I HOPE the Colonel thinks he does, but on that point his discretion has been perfect.

Only in the very direst extremity would we have called in the station guard. We knew the deep-seated animosity with which the soldier views the gendarme. I may be wrong, but my firm impression is that he hates him even more than, or quite as much, as he hates the Boche. I suppose because he does not fight. There must be something intensely irritating to a war-scarred

soldier in the sight of a strapping, well-fed, comfortable policeman. You know the story of the wounded Tommy making his way back from the lines and being accosted by a red-cap?

"'Some' fight, eh?" he inquired blandly.

"Some don't," retorted Tommy, and that sums the situation up more neatly than a volume of explanation.

Once, after the Walpurgis Night, a man chose to be noisy and slightly offensive in the canteen. It was a thing that rarely happened, and could always be dealt with, but, smarting possibly under a reprimand, the guard rushed in, seized a quiet, inoffensive, rather elderly man who was meekly drinking his coffee, and in spite of remonstrances and protestations in which the canteen-workers joined, dragged him off, cutting his throat rather badly with a bayonet in the scuffle. A little incident which in no way inclined us to lean for support, moral or otherwise, upon the guardians of military law. But we gave them their coffee or chocolate piping hot just the same.

And there were weeks when hot drinks were more acceptable than would have been promise of salvation.

"Bien chaud" ("Very hot") they would cry, coming in with icicles on their moustaches and snow thick on their shoulders. Once an officer asked for coffee.

"Very hot, please."

"It is boiling, Monsieur." He gulped it down.

"It is the first hot food I have tasted for fourteen days."

"From Vaux?" we asked.

"Yes, front line trenches. Everything frozen, the wine in the wine-casks solid. Yes, another bowl, please."

Once another officer came in accompanied by an older man whom we thought must be his father. He begged for water.

"It comes straight from the main tap, it is neither filtered nor boiled," we told him.

"*N'importe.*" No, he would not have tea nor coffee. Water, cold water. He had a raging, a devouring thirst. A glass was filled and given him.

"Suppose Monsieur gets typhoid?"

"He has it now," the elderly man replied. "His temperature is high, that is why he has so great thirst." The patient drank another glass. Then they both went away. We often wondered whether he recovered.

Once, at least, our hearts went out to another sick man. He leaned against the counter with pallid face, over which the sweat of physical weakness was breaking. Questioned, he told us he had just been discharged from hospital, he was going back to the trenches, to Verdun, in the morning. He looked as if he ought to have been in his bed. I wonder if any society exists in France with the object of helping such men? We never heard of one (which by no means proves that it does not exist), but oh, how useful it might have been in Bar! One morning, for instance, a man tottered into the canteen, ordered a cup of coffee, drank, laid his head down on the table and fell into a stupefied doze. So long did he remain the canteeners became anxious. Presently he stirred, and told them that he had come there straight from a hospital, that he was going home on leave, that his home was far—perhaps two days' journey—away, and he had not a sou in his pocket. He was by no means an isolated case. As a packet of food was being made up for him, a soldier,

obviously a stranger to the sick man, ordered *deux œufs sur-le-plat.*"

"They are not for myself," he said, "but for the pal here." A little act of good comradeship that was by no means the only one of its kind.

The moment which always thrilled was that in which a regimental Rothschild treated his companions to the best of our store. How eagerly and exhaustively the list of *boissons* was studied!

"Un café? C'est combien? Deux sous? ce n'est pas cher ça." Then to a friend, "Qu'est-ce-que-tu-prends?"

"Moi? je veux bien un café."

"No, non, un chocolat. C'est très bon le chocolat." The coffee lover wavers.

"Soit. Un chocolat alors." Then some one else cannot make up his mind. A bearded man pouring *bouillon* down his throat recommends that. It is excellent. The merits of soup are discussed. Then back they go to coffee again, and all the time as seriously as if the issue of the war depended upon their deliberations. At length, however, a decision is made—not without much pleading for *gniolle* (rum) on the part of Rothschild. "A drop? Just a tiny drop, Mad'm'-zelle. Eh, there is none? *Mais comment ça?* How can one drink a *jus* (coffee) without *gniolle?*" Mad'm'-zelle is not kind." He would wheedle a bird from the bushes, but happily for our strength of mind there is no drink stronger than *jus* in the canteen, a fact he finds it exceedingly difficult to believe. We know that when at last he accepts defeat he is convinced that fat bottles lie hidden under the counter to be brought forth for one whose powers of persuasion are greater than his.

He loads his bowls on a tray, carries them by some occult means unbroken through the throng, and has his reward when the never-failing ceremony of clinking bowls or glasses with *Bonne chance!* or *Bonne Santé!* or *À vous*, prefaces the feast.

A pretty rite that of the French. Never did two comrades drink together in the canteen without doing it reverence. Never did I, visiting a refugee, swallow, for my sins, *vin ordinaire rouge* in which a lump of sugar had been dissolved without first clinking glasses with my hosts and murmuring a "Good health," or "Good luck," and feeling strangely and newly in sympathy with them as I did so. The little rite invested commonplace hospitality with grace and spiritual meaning.

VI

However, you must not think that the canteen kept us in a state of soppy sentiment, or even of perfervid sympathy. Sanity was the mood that suited it best. Presence of mind the quality that made for success. A sense of humour the saving grace that made both the former possible. When a thin, dark individual leans upon the counter for half an hour or more, silent, ruminative, pondering—it is a quiet night, no rush—gather your forces together. His eyes follow you wherever you go, you see revelations hovering on his lips. You become absorbed in ham or sausage (horse-sausage is incredibly revolting), but your absorption cannot last. Even sausages fail to charm, and then the dark one sees his opportunity. He leans towards you

. . . His faith in himself must be immense. . . . Does he really think that a journey to Paris at 2 a.m. in an omnibus train and a snowstorm can tempt you? If we had consoled all the lonely *poilus* who offered us—temporarily—their hands, their hearts and their five sous a day we should now be confirmed bigamists.

Or it may be that you are busy and contemplation of sausage unnecessary. Then he sets up a maddening *Dîtes, dîtes, dîtes, Mad'm'zelle,* that drives you to distraction. To silence him is impossible. Indifference leaves him unmoved. He is like a clock in a nightmare that goes on striking ONE!

That he has an eye for beauty goes without saying. "Voilà, une jolie petite brune! Vas-y." So two vagabonds catching sight of a decorative canteener, and off they go to discuss the price of ham, for only by such prosaic means can Sentiment leap over the counter. He addresses you by any and every name that comes into his head. "La mère," "la patronne" (these before he grasped the fact that the canteen was an *œuvre* and not a commercial enterprise), "la petite," "la belle," "la belle Marguerite," "la Frisée," "la Dame aux Lunettes," "la petite Rose," and many others I have forgotten.

Indeed, the French aptitude for nicknames based on physical attributes was constantly thrust on us. The refugees, finding our own names uncomfortable upon the tongue, fell back on descriptive nomenclature. "La Blonde," "la Blanche," for the fair-haired. "La Grande," "la Belle," "la belle Dame au Lunettes," "la petite bleue," "la Directrice," "la grande dame maigre." And once when a bill was in dispute in a shop the proprietress exclaimed, "Is it that you wish

to know who bought the goods? It was la petite qui court toujours et qui est toujours si pressée" (the little lady who always runs and is always in such a hurry). As a verbal snapshot it has never been equalled. It would have carried conviction in any court in the country.

But most of all the heart of the soldier rejoices when he can call you his *marraine* (godmother). That we, mere English, pursued by ardent souls, should sometimes be compelled to send out S.O.S. messages to our comrades; that, feeling the mantle of our dignity slipping perilously from our shoulders, we should cast aside our remote isolation and engage the worker in the "next department" in animated conversation, was only to be expected. But our hearts rejoiced and the imps in us danced ecstatically when Madame D. was discovered one day hiding in the office. She, splendid ally that she always was, volunteered to sit at the receipt of custom on certain afternoons each week, and, clad in her impenetrable panoply, at once suavely polite, gracious but infinitely aloof, to sell *tickés* with subdued but inextinguishable enjoyment. But a lonely *poilu* strayed by who badly needed a *marraine*, and so persistent was he in his demands, so irresistible in his pleadings, so embarrassing in his attentions, Madame, the panoply melting and dignity snatched by the winds, fled to the office, from whence no persuasions could lure her till the lonely one had gone his unsatisfied way.

It is the man from the *pays envahi* who, most of all, needs a *marraine*, e. g. a sympathetic, sensible woman who will write to him, send him little gifts and take an interest in his welfare. Because all too often he stands friendless and alone. His relatives, his family

having remained in their homes, between him and them lies silence more awful than death. He is a prey to torturing fears, he endures much agony of mind, dark forebodings hang about him like a miasma poisoning all his days. No news! And his loved ones, in the hands of a merciless foe, may be in the very village the French or the British are shelling so heavily! From his place in the trenches he may see the tall chimneys, the church spire in the distance. He has been gazing yearningly at them for two years, has seen landmarks crumble and steeples totter as the guns searched out first one, then another. . . . A *marraine* may well save the reason of such men as these. She can assuredly rob life of much of its bitterness, and inspire it with hope and courage to endure.

One of these men who came from Stenay told us of his misery. He had done well in the army, had been promoted, might have been commissioned, but his loneliness, the vultures of conjecture that tugged at his heart, his longing and his grief overwhelmed him one night, and seeking distraction in unwise ways he fell into dire trouble, and was reduced to the ranks. . . .

And yet, though I write of these poor derelicts, it is the gay and gallant who holds my imagination. The thing of the "glad eye," and the swagger, the jest, "Going *en permission*, Mad'm'zelle," the happiest thing in France! It is he, the irrepressible, who carries gaiety through the streets as he rolls by in his *camions;* he sings, he plays discordant instruments, he buys *couronnes* of bread, he shouts to the women. "Ah, la belle fille!" "Mad'm'zelle, on aura un rendez-vous là-bas." Sometimes he is more explicit:—intermittent deafness is an infirmity of psychological value in the

War Zone! And he thoroughly enjoys the canteen. He likes "ploom-cak," he likes being waited on by *Les Anglaises*, he likes the small refinements (though now and then he "borrows" the forks), he appreciates generosity, he is by no means ungrateful (see him pushing a few coppers across the counter with a shame-faced "C'est pour l'œuvre"), and at his worst, least controlled, most objectionable, he can be shamed into silence or an apology by a few firm or tactful words.

A bewildering thing! If I wrote of him for ever I should not be able to explain him.

ENVOI

And so the tale is written, and the story told in strange halting numbers that can but catch here and there at the great melody of the human symphony.

Just for one moment one may lay one's finger on the pulse of a great nation, feel its heart beat, feel the quivering, throbbing life that flows through its veins, but more than that who dare hope to gain? Not in one phase, nor in one era, not in one great crisis nor even in a myriad does the heart of a people express itself fully. From birth to death, from its first feeble primitive struggles as it emerges from the Womb of Time to its last death-throe as it sinks back again into the Nothingness from which it came, it gathers to itself new forces, new aspirations, new voices, new gods, new altars, new preachers, new goals, new Heavens, new Hells, new readings of the Riddle that only Eternity will solve. It is in perpetual solution, and the composite atoms that compose it are in a state of unending change and transmutation; it dies but to live again in other forms, is silent only to express itself through new and—may we not hope it?—more finely-tuned instruments.

Summarising it to-day you may say of your summary, This is Truth. But to-morrow it is already falsehood, for the Nation, bound upon the Wheel of Evolution, has passed on, leaving you bewildered by

the way. And since the war has thrown the nations of the world into the crucible, until they come forth again, and not till then, may we say, with finality, "This is gold, or that alloy."

France is being subjected to a severe test; her burden is almost more than she can bear, but as she shoulders it we see the gold shining, we believe that the dross is falling away. No defeat in the field—if such an end were possible—can rob her of her glory, just as no victory could save Germany from shame. "What shall it profit a Nation if it gain the whole world, and lose its own soul?" The soul of Germany is withered and dead. She has sacrificed it on the Altar of Militarism, and has set up the galvanic battery of a relentless despotism and crude materialism in its place.

But the Soul of France lives on, strengthened and purified, the Soul of a Nation that seeks the Light and surely one day shall find it.

THE END

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