and overlooks the world. The blankets of fine wool—red, green, brown, or white—from which those wasted cheeks and shining eyes protrude are quite still. No sound comes from the long couches except when some one coughs, or that of the pages of a book turned over at long and regular intervals, or the undertone of question and quiet answer between neighbors, or now and again the crescendo disturbance of a daring crow, escaped to the balcony from those flocks that seem threaded across the immense transparency like chaplets of black pearls.

Silence is obligatory. Besides, the rich and high-placed who have come here from all the ends of the earth, smitten by the same evil, have lost the habit of talking. They have withdrawn into themselves, to think of their life and of their death.

A servant appears in the balcony, dressed in white and walking softly. She brings newspapers and hands them about.

"It's decided," says the first to unfold his paper. "War is declared."

Expected as the news is, its effect is almost dazing, for this audience feels that its portent is without measure or limit. These men of culture and intelligence, detached from the affairs of the world and almost from the world itself, whose faculties are deepened by suffering and meditation, as far remote from their fellow men as if they were already of the Future—these men look deeply into the distance, towards the unknowable land of the living and the insane.

"Austria's act is a crime," says the Austrian.

"France must win," says the Englishman.

"I hope Germany will be beaten," says the German.

They settle down again under the blankets and on the pillows, looking to heaven and the high peaks. But in spite of that vast purity, the silence is filled with the dire disclosure of a moment before.

War!

Some of the invalids break the silence, and say the word again under their breath, reflecting that this is the greatest happening of the age, and perhaps of all ages. Even on the lucid landscape at which they gaze the news casts something like a vague and somber mirage.

The tranquil expanses of the valley, adorned with soft and smooth pastures and hamlets rosy as the rose, with the sable shadow-stains of the majestic mountains and the black lace and white of pines and eternal snow, become alive with the movements of men, whose multitudes swarm in distinct masses. Attacks develop, wave by wave, across the fields and then stand still. Houses are eviscerated like human beings and towns like houses. Villages appear in crumpled whiteness as though fallen from heaven to earth. The very shape of the plain is changed by the frightful heaps of wounded and slain.

Each country whose frontiers are consumed by carnage is seen tearing from its heart ever more warriors of full blood and force. One's eyes follow the flow of these living tributaries to the River of Death. To north and south and west afar there are battles on every side. Turn where you will, there is war in every corner of that vastness.

One of the pale-faced clairvoyants lifts himself on his elbow, reckons and numbers the fighters present and to come—thirty millions of soldiers. Another stammers, his eyes full of slaughter, "Two armies at death-grips—that is one great army committing suicide."

"It should not have been," says the deep and hollow voice of the first in the line. But another says, "It is the French Revolution beginning again." "Let thrones beware!" says another's undertone.

The third adds, "Perhaps it is the last war of all." A silence follows, then some heads are shaken in dissent whose faces have been blanched anew by the stale tragedy of sleepless night—"Stop war? Stop war? Impossible! There is no cure for the world's disease."

Some one coughs, and then the Vision is swallowed up in the huge sunlit peace of the lush meadows. In the rich colors of the glowing kine, the black forests, the green fields and the blue distance, dies the reflection of the fire where the old world burns and breaks. Infinite silence engulfs the uproar of hate and pain from the dark swarmings of mankind. They who have spoken retire one by one within themselves, absorbed once more in their own mysterious malady.

But when evening is ready to descend within the valley, a storm breaks over the mass of Mont Blanc. One may not go forth in such peril, for the last waves of the storm-wind roll even to the great veranda, to that harbor where they have taken refuge; and these victims of a great internal wound encompass with their gaze the elemental convulsion.

They watch how the explosions of thunder on the mountain upheave the level clouds like a stormy sea, how each one hurls a shaft of fire and a column of cloud together into the twilight; and they turn their wan and sunken faces to follow the flight of the eagles that wheel in the sky and look from their supreme height down through the wreathing mists, down to earth.

"Put an end to war?" say the watchers.—"Forbid the Storm!"

Cleansed from the passions of party and faction, liberated from prejudice and infatuation and the tyranny of tradition, these watchers on the threshold of another world are vaguely conscious of the simplicity of the present and the yawning possibilities of the future.

The man at the end of the rank cries, "I can see crawling things down there"—"Yes, as though they were alive"—"Some sort of plant, perhaps"—"Some kind of men"—

And there amid the baleful glimmers of the storm, below the dark disorder of the clouds that extend and unfurl over the earth like evil spirits, they seem to see a great livid plain unrolled, which to their seeing is made of mud and water, while figures appear and fast fix themselves to the surface of it, all blinded and borne down with filth, like the dreadful castaways of shipwreck. And it seems to them that these are soldiers.

The streaming plain, seamed and seared with long parallel canals and scooped into water-holes, is an immensity, and these castaways who strive to exhume themselves from it are legion. But the thirty million slaves, hurled upon one another in the mud of war by guilt and error, uplift their human faces and reveal at last a bourgeoning Will. The future is in the hands of these slaves, and it is clearly certain that the alliance to be cemented some day by those whose number and whose misery alike are infinite will transform the old world.

II

In the Earth

THE great pale sky is alive with thunderclaps. Each detonation reveals together a shaft of red falling fire in what is left of the night, and a column of smoke in what has dawned of the day. Up there—so high and so far that they are heard unseen—a flight of dreadful birds goes circling up with strong and palpitating cries to look down upon the earth.

The earth! It is a vast and water-logged desert that begins to take shape under the long-drawn desolation of daybreak. There are pools and gullies where the bitter breath of earliest morning nips the water and sets it a-shiver; tracks traced by the troops and the convoys of the night in these barren fields, the lines of ruts that glisten in the weak light like steel rails, mud-masses with broken stakes protruding from them, ruined trestles, and bushes of wire in tangled coils. With its slime-beds and puddles, the plain might be an endless gray sheet that floats on the sea and has here and there gone under. Though no rain is falling, all is drenched, oozing, washed out and drowned, and even the wan light seems to flow.

Now you can make out a network of long ditches where the lave of the night still lingers. It is the trench. It is carpeted at bottom with a layer of slime that liberates the foot at each step with a sticky sound; and by each dug-out it smells of the night's excretions. The holes themselves, as you stoop to peer in, are foul of breath.

I see shadows coming from these sidelong pits and moving about, huge and misshapen lumps, bear-like, that flounder and growl. They are "us." We are muffled like Eskimos. Fleeces and blankets and sacking wrap us up, weigh us down, magnify us strangely. Some stretch themselves, yawning profoundly. Faces appear, ruddy or leaden, dirt-disfigured, pierced by the little lamps of dull and heavy-lidded eyes, matted with uncut beards and foul with forgotten hair.

Crack! Crack! Boom!—rifle fire and cannonade. Above us and all around, it crackles and rolls, in long gusts or separate explosions. The flaming and melancholy storm never, never ends. For more than fifteen months, for five hundred days in this part of the world where we are, the rifles and the big guns have gone on from morning to night and from night to morning. We are buried deep in an everlasting battlefield; but like the ticking of the clocks at home in the days gone by—in the now almost legendary Past—you only hear the noise when you listen.

A babyish face with puffy eyelids, and cheek-bones as lurid as if lozenge-shaped bits of crimson paper had been stuck on, comes out of the ground, opens one eye, then the other. It is Paradis. The skin of his fat cheeks is scored with the marks of the folds in the tent-cloth that has served him for night-cap. The glance of his little eye wanders all round me; he sees me, nods, and says—"Another night gone, old chap."

"Yes, sonny; how many more like it still?"

He raises his two plump arms skywards. He has managed to scrape out by the steps of the dug-out and is beside me. After stumbling over the dim obstacle of a man who sits in the shadows, fervently scratches himself and sighs hoarsely, Paradis makes off—lamely splashing like a penguin through the flooded picture.

One by one the men appear from the depths. In the corners, heavy shadows are seen forming—human clouds that move and break up. One by one they become recognizable. There is one who comes out hooded with his blanket—a savage, you would say, or rather, the tent of a savage, which walks and sways from side to side. Near by, and heavily framed in knitted wool, a square face is disclosed, yellow-brown as though iodized, and patterned with blackish patches, the nose broken, the eyes of Chinese restriction and red-circled, a little coarse and moist mustache like a greasing-brush.

"There's Volpatte. How goes it, Firmin?"

"It goes, it goes, and it comes," says Volpatte. His heavy and drawling voice is aggravated by hoarseness. He coughs—"My number's up, this time. Say, did you hear it last night, the attack? My boy, talk about a bombardment—something very choice in the way of mixtures!" He sniffles and passes his sleeve under his concave nose. His hand gropes within his greatcoat and his jacket till it finds the skin, and scratches. "I've killed thirty of them in the candle," he growls; "in the big dug-out by the tunnel, mon vieux, there are some like crumbs of metal bread. You can see them running about in the straw like I'm telling you."

"Who's been attacking? The Boches?"

"The Boches and us too—out Vimy way—a counterattack—didn't you hear it?"

"No," the big Lamuse, the ox-man, replies on my account; "I was snoring; but I was on fatigue all night the night before."

"I heard it," declares the little Breton, Biquet; "I slept badly, or rather, didn't sleep. I've got a doss-house all to myself. Look, see, there it is—the damned thing." He points to a trough on the ground level, where on a meager mattress of muck, there is just body-room for one. "Talk about home in a nutshell!" he declares, wagging the rough and rock-hard little head that looks as if it had never been finished. "I hardly snoozed. I'd just got off, but was woke up by the relief of the 129th that went by—not by the noise, but the smell. Ah, all those chaps with their feet on the level with my nose! It woke me up, it gave me nose-ache so."

I knew it. I have often been wakened in the trench myself by the trail of heavy smell in the wake of marching men.

"It was all right, at least, if it killed the vermin," said Tirette.

"On the contrary, it excites them," says Lamuse; "the worse you smell, the more you have of 'em."

"And it's lucky," Biquet went on, "that their stink woke me up. As I was telling that great tub just now, I got my peepers open just in time to seize the tent-cloth that shut my hole up—one of those muck-heaps was going to pinch it off me."

"Dirty devils, the 129th." The human form from which the words came could now be distinguished down below at our feet, where the morning had not yet reached it. Grasping his abundant clothing by handsful, he squatted and wriggled. It was Papa Blaire. His little eyes blinked among the dust that luxuriated on his face. Above the gap of his toothless mouth, his mustache made a heavy sallow lump. His hands were horribly black, the top of them shaggy with dirt, the palms plastered in gray relief. Himself, shriveled and dirtbedight, exhaled the scent of an ancient stewpan. Though busily scratching, he chatted with big Barque, who leaned towards him from a little way off.

"I wasn't as mucky as this when I was a civvy," he said.

"Well, my poor friend, it's a dirty change for the worse," said Barque.

"Lucky for you," says Tirette, going one better; "when it comes to kids, you'll present madame with some little niggers!"

Blaire took offense, and gathering gloom wrinkled his brow. "What have you got to give me lip about, you? What next? It's war-time. As for you, bean-face, you think perhaps the war hasn't changed your phizog and your manners? Look at yourself, monkey-snout, buttock-skin! A man must be a beast to talk as you do." He passed his hand over the dark deposit on his face, which the rains of those days had proved finally indelible, and added, "Besides, if I am as I am, it's my own choosing. To begin with, I

have no teeth. The major said to me a long time ago, 'You haven't a single tooth. It's not enough. At your next rest,' he says, 'take a turn round to the estomalogical ambulance.'"

"The tomatological ambulance," corrected Barque.

"Stomatological," Bertrand amended.

"You have all the making of an army cook—you ought to have been one," said Barque.

"My idea, too," retorted Blaire innocently. Some one laughed. The black man got up at the insult. "You give me belly-ache," he said with scorn. "I'm off to the latrines."

When his doubly dark silhouette had vanished, the others scrutinized once more the great truth that down here in the earth the cooks are the dirtiest of men.

"If you see a chap with his skin and toggery so smeared and stained that you wouldn't touch him with a barge-pole, you can say to yourself, 'Probably he's a cook.' And the dirtier he is, the more likely to be a cook."

"It's true, and true again," said Marthereau.

"Tiens, there's Tirloir! Hey, Tirloir!"

He comes up busily, peering this way and that, on an eager scent. His insignificant head, pale as chlorine, hops centrally about in the cushioning collar of a greatcoat that is much too heavy and big for him. His chin is pointed, and his upper teeth protrude. A wrinkle round his mouth is so deep with dirt that it looks like a muzzle. As usual, he is angry, and as usual, he rages aloud.

"Some one cut my pouch in two last night!"

"It was the relief of the 129th. Where had you put it?"

He indicates a bayonet stuck in the wall of the trench close to the mouth of a funk-hole—"There, hanging on the toothpick there."

"Ass!" comes the chorus. "Within reach of passing soldiers! Not dotty, are you?"

"It's hard lines all the same," wails Tirloir. Then suddenly a fit of rage seizes him, his face crumples, his little fists clench in fury, he tightens them like knots in string and waves them about. "Alors quoi? Ah, if I had hold of the mongrel that did it! Talk about breaking his jaw—I'd stave in his bread-pan, I'd—there was a whole Camembert in there, I'll go and look for it." He massages his stomach with the little sharp taps of a guitar player, and plunges into the gray of the morning, grinning yet dignified, with his awkward outlines of an invalid in a dressing-gown. We hear him grumbling until he disappears.

"Strange man, that," says Pepin; the others chuckle. "He's daft and crazy," declares Marthereau, who is in the habit of fortifying the expression of his thought by using two synonyms at once.

"Tiens, old man," says Tulacque, as he comes up. "Look at this."

Tulacque is magnificent. He is wearing a lemon-yellow coat made out of an oilskin sleeping-sack. He has arranged a hole in the middle to get his head through, and compelled his shoulder-straps and belt to go over it. He is tall and bony. He holds his face in advance as he walks, a forceful face, with eyes that squint. He has something in his hand. "I found this while digging last night at the end of the new gallery to change the

rotten gratings. It took my fancy off-hand, that knick-knack. It's an old pattern of hatchet."

It was indeed an old pattern, a sharpened flint hafted with an old brown bone—quite a prehistoric tool in appearance.

"Very handy," said Tulacque, fingering it. "Yes, not badly thought out. Better balanced than the regulation ax. That'll be useful to me, you'll see." As he brandishes that ax of Post-Tertiary Man, he would himself pass for an ape-man, decked out with rags and lurking in the bowels of the earth.

One by one we gathered, we of Bertrand's squad and the half-section, at an elbow of the trench. Just here it is a little wider than in the straight part where when you meet another and have to pass you must throw yourself against the side, rub your back in the earth and your stomach against the stomach of the other.

Our company occupies, in reserve, a second line parallel. No night watchman works here. At night we are ready for making earthworks in front, but as long as the day lasts we have nothing to do. Huddled up together and linked arm in arm, it only remains to await the evening as best we can.

Daylight has at last crept into the interminable crevices that furrow this part of the earth, and now it finds the threshold of our holes. It is the melancholy light of the North Country, of a restricted and muddy sky, a sky which itself, one would say, is heavy with the smoke and smell of factories. In this leaden light, the uncouth array of these dwellers in the depths reveals the stark reality of the huge and hopeless misery that brought it into being. But that is like the rattle of rifles and the verberation of artillery. The drama in which we are actors has lasted much too long for us to be surprised any more, either at the stubbornness we have evolved or the garb we have devised against the rain that comes from above, against the mud that comes from beneath, and against the cold—that sort of infinity that is everywhere. The skins of animals, bundles of blankets, Balaklava helmets, woolen caps, furs, bulging mufflers (sometimes worn turban-wise), paddings and quiltings, knittings and double-knittings, coverings and roofings and cowls, tarred or oiled or rubbered, black or all the colors (once upon a time) of the rainbow—all these things mask and magnify the men, and wipe out their uniforms almost as effectively as their skins. One has fastened on his back a square of linoleum, with a big draught-board pattern in white and red, that he found in the middle of the dining-room of some temporary refuge. That is Pepin. We know him afar off by his harlequin placard sooner even than by his pale Apache face. Here is Barque's bulging chest-protector, carven from an eiderdown quilt, formerly pink, but now fantastically bleached and mottled by dust and rain. There, Lamuse the Huge rises like a ruined tower to which tattered posters still cling. A cuirass of moleskin, with the fur inside, adorns little Eudore with the burnished back of a beetle; while the golden corselet of Tulacque the Big Chief surpasses all.

The "tin hat" gives a certain sameness to the highest points of the beings that are there, but even then the divers ways of wearing it—on the regulation cap like Biquet, over a Balaklava like Cadilhac, or on a cotton cap like Barque—produce a complicated diversity of appearance.

And our legs! I went down just now, bent double, into our dug-out, the little low cave that smells musty and damp, where one stumbles over empty jam-pots and dirty rags, where two long lumps lay asleep, while in the corner a kneeling shape rummaged a pouch by candle-light. As I climbed out, the rectangle of entry afforded me a revelation of our legs. Flat on the ground, vertically in the air, or aslant; spread about, doubled up, or mixed together; blocking the fairway and cursed by passers-by, they present a collection of many colors and many shapes—gaiters, leggings black or yellow, long or short, in leather, in tawny cloth, in any sort of waterproof stuff; puttees in dark blue, light blue, black, sage green, khaki, and beige. Alone of all his kind, Volpatte has retained the modest gaiters of mobilization. Mesnil Andre has displayed for a fortnight a pair of thick

woolen stockings, ribbed and green; and Tirette has always been known by his gray cloth puttees with white stripes, commandeered from a pair of civilian trousers that was hanging goodness knows where at the beginning of the war. As for Marthereau's puttees, they are not both of the same hue, for he failed to find two fag-ends of greatcoat equally worn and equally dirty, to be cut up into strips.

There are legs wrapped up in rags, too, and even in newspapers, which are kept in place with spirals of thread or—much more practical—telephone wire. Pepin fascinated his friends and the passers-by with a pair of fawn gaiters, borrowed from a corpse. Barque, who poses as a resourceful man, full of ideas—and Heaven knows what a bore it makes of him at times!—has white calves, for he wrapped surgical bandages round his leg-cloths to preserve them, a snowy souvenir at his latter end of the cotton cap at the other, which protrudes below his helmet and is left behind in its turn by a saucy red tassel. Poterloo has been walking about for a month in the boots of a German soldier, nearly new, and with horseshoes on the heels. Caron entrusted them to Poterloo when he was sent back on account of his arm. Caron had taken them himself from a Bavarian machine-gunner, knocked out near the Pylones road. I can hear Caron telling about it yet —

"Old man, he was there, his buttocks in a hole, doubled up, gaping at the sky with his legs in the air, and his pumps offered themselves to me with an air that meant they were worth my while. 'A tight fit,' says I. But you talk about a job to bring those beetle-crushers of his away! I worked on top of him, tugging, twisting and shaking, for half an hour and no lie about it. With his feet gone quite stiff, the patient didn't help me a bit. Then at last the legs of it—they'd been pulled about so—came unstuck at the knees, and his breeks tore away, and all the lot came, flop! There was me, all of a sudden, with a full boot in each fist. The legs and feet had to be emptied out."

"You're going it a bit strong!"

"Ask Euterpe the cyclist if it isn't true. I tell you he did it along of me, too. We shoved our arms inside the boots and pulled out of 'em some bones and bits of sock and bits of feet. But look if they weren't worth while!"

So, until Caron returns, Poterloo continues on his behalf the wearing of the Bavarian machine-gunner's boots.

Thus do they exercise their wits, according to their intelligence, their vivacity, their resources, and their boldness, in the struggle with the terrible discomfort. Each one seems to make the revealing declaration, "This is all that I knew, all I was able, all that I dared to do in the great misery which has befallen me."

Mesnil Joseph drowses; Blaire yawns; Marthereau smokes, "eyes front." Lamuse scratches himself like a gorilla, and Eudore like a marmoset. Volpatte coughs, and says, "I'm kicking the bucket." Mesnil Andre has got out his mirror and comb and is tending his fine chestnut beard as though it were a rare plant. The monotonous calm is disturbed here and there by the outbreaks of ferocious resentment provoked by the presence of parasites—endemic, chronic, and contagious.

Barque, who is an observant man, sends an itinerant glance around, takes his pipe from his mouth, spits, winks, and says—"I say, we don't resemble each other much."

"Why should we?" says Lamuse. "It would be a miracle if we did."

Our ages? We are of all ages. Ours is a regiment in reserve which successive reinforcements have renewed partly with fighting units and partly with Territorials. In our half-section there are reservists of the Territorial Army, new recruits, and demi-poils.

Fouillade is forty; Blaire might be the father of Biquet, who is a gosling of Class 1913. The corporal calls Marthereau "Grandpa" or "Old Rubbish-heap," according as in jest or in earnest. Mesnil Joseph would be at the barracks if there were no war. It is a comical effect when we are in charge of Sergeant Vigile, a nice little boy, with a dab on his lip by way of mustache. When we were in quarters the other day, he played at skipping-rope with the kiddies. In our ill-assorted flock, in this family without kindred, this home without a hearth at which we gather, there are three generations side by side, living, waiting, standing still, like unfinished statues, like posts.

Our races? We are of all races; we come from everywhere. I look at the two men beside me. Poterloo, the miner from the Calonne pit, is pink; his eyebrows are the color of straw, his eyes flax-blue. His great golden head involved a long search in the stores to find the vast steel-blue tureen that bonnets him. Fouillade, the boatman from Cette, rolls his wicked eyes in the long, lean face of a musketeer, with sunken cheeks and his skin the color of a violin. In good sooth, my two neighbors are as unlike as day and night.

Cocon, no less, a slight and desiccated person in spectacles, whose tint tells of corrosion in the chemical vapors of great towns, contrasts with Biquet, a Breton in the rough, whose skin is gray and his jaw like a paving-stone; and Mesnil Andre, the comfortable chemist from a country town in Normandy, who has such a handsome and silky beard and who talks so much and so well—he has little in common with Lamuse, the fat peasant of Poitou, whose cheeks and neck are like underdone beef. The suburban accent of Barque, whose long legs have scoured the streets of Paris in all directions, alternates with the semi-Belgian cadence of those Northerners who came from the 8th Territorial; with the sonorous speech, rolling on the syllables as if over cobblestone, that the 144th pours out upon us; with the dialect blown from those ant-like clusters that the Auvergnats so obstinately form among the rest. I remember the first words of that wag, Tirette, when he arrived—"I, mes enfants, I am from Clichy-la-Garenne! Can any one beat that?"—and the first grievance that Paradis brought to me, "They don't give a damn for me, because I'm from Morvan!"

Our callings? A little of all—in the lump. In those departed days when we had a social status, before we came to immure our destiny in the molehills that we must always build up again as fast as rain and scrap-iron beat them down, what were we? Sons of the soil and artisans mostly. Lamuse was a farm-servant, Paradis a carter. Cadilhac, whose helmet rides loosely on his pointed head, though it is a juvenile size—like a dome on a steeple, says Tirette—owns land. Papa Blaire was a small farmer in La Brie. Barque, porter and messenger, performed acrobatic tricks with his carrier-tricycle among the trains and taxis of Paris, with solemn abuse (so they say) for the pedestrians, fleeing like bewildered hens across the big streets and squares. Corporal Bertrand, who keeps himself always a little aloof, correct, erect, and silent, with a strong and handsome face and forthright gaze, was foreman in a case-factory. Tirloir daubed carts with paint—and without grumbling, they say. Tulacque was barman at the Throne Tavern in the suburbs; and Eudore of the pale and pleasant face kept a roadside cafe not very far from the front lines. It has been ill-used by the shells—naturally, for we all know that Eudore has no luck. Mesnil Andre, who still retains a trace of well-kept distinction, sold bicarbonate and infallible remedies at his pharmacy in a Grande Place. His brother Joseph was selling papers and illustrated story-books in a station on the State Railways at the same time that, in far-off Lyons, Cocon, the man of spectacles and statistics, dressed in a black smock, busied himself behind the counters of an ironmongery, his hands glittering with plumbago; while the lamps of Becuwe Adolphe and Poterloo, risen with the dawn, trailed about the coalpits of the North like weakling Will-o'-th'-wisps.

And there are others amongst us whose occupations one can never recall, whom one confuses with one another; and the rural nondescripts who peddled ten trades at once in their packs, without counting the dubious Pepin, who can have had none at all. (While at

the depot after sick leave, three months ago, they say, he got married—to secure the separation allowance.)

The liberal professions are not represented among those around me. Some teachers are subalterns in the company or Red Cross men. In the regiment a Marist Brother is sergeant in the Service de Sante; a professional tenor is cyclist dispatch-rider to the Major; a "gentleman of independent means" is mess corporal to the C.H.R. But here there is nothing of all that. We are fighting men, we others, and we include hardly any intellectuals, or men of the arts or of wealth, who during this war will have risked their faces only at the loopholes, unless in passing by, or under gold-laced caps.

Yes, we are truly and deeply different from each other. But we are alike all the same. In spite of this diversity of age, of country, of education, of position, of everything possible, in spite of the former gulfs that kept us apart, we are in the main alike. Under the same uncouth outlines we conceal and reveal the same ways and habits, the same simple nature of men who have reverted to the state primeval.

The same language, compounded of dialect and the slang of workshop and barracks, seasoned with the latest inventions, blends us in the sauce of speech with the massed multitudes of men who (for seasons now) have emptied France and crowded together in the North-East.

Here, too, linked by a fate from which there is no escape, swept willy-nilly by the vast adventure into one rank, we have no choice but to go as the weeks and months go—alike. The terrible narrowness of the common life binds us close, adapts us, merges us one in the other. It is a sort of fatal contagion. Nor need you, to see how alike we soldiers are, be afar off—at that distance, say, when we are only specks of the dust-clouds that roll across the plain.

We are waiting. Weary of sitting, we get up, our joints creaking like warping wood or old hinges. Damp rusts men as it rusts rifles; more slowly, but deeper. And we begin again, but not in the same way, to wait. In a state of war, one is always waiting. We have become waiting-machines. For the moment it is food we are waiting for. Then it will be the post. But each in its turn. When we have done with dinner we will think about the letters. After that, we shall set ourselves to wait for something else.

Hunger and thirst are urgent instincts which formidably excite the temper of my companions. As the meal gets later they become grumblesome and angry. Their need of food and drink snarls from their lips—"That's eight o'clock. Now, why the hell doesn't it come?"

"Just so, and me that's been pining since noon yesterday," sulks Lamuse, whose eyes are moist with longing, while his cheeks seem to carry great daubs of wine-colored grease-paint.

Discontent grows more acute every minute.

"I'll bet Plumet has poured down his own gullet my wine ration that he's supposed to have, and others with it, and he's lying drunk over there somewhere."

"It's sure and certain"—Marthereau seconds the proposition.

"Ah, the rotters, the vermin, these fatigue men!" Tirloir bellows. "An abominable race—all of 'em—mucky-nosed idlers! They roll over each other all day long at the rear, and they'll be damned before they'll be in time. Ah, if I were boss, they should damn quick take our places in the trenches, and they'd have to work for a change. To begin with, I should say, 'Every man in the section will carry grease and soup in turns.' Those who were willing, of course—"

"I'm confident," cries Cocon, "it's that Pepere that's keeping the others back. He does it on purpose, firstly, and then, too, he can't finish plucking himself in the morning, poor lad. He wants ten hours for his flea-hunt, he's so finicking; and if he can't get 'em, monsieur has the pip all day."

"Be damned to him," growls Lamuse. "I'd shift him out of bed if only I was there! I'd wake him up with boot-toe, I'd—"

"I was reckoning, the other day," Cocon went on; "it took him seven hours forty-seven minutes to come from thirty-one dug-out. It should take him five good hours, but no longer."

Cocon is the Man of Figures. He has a deep affection, amounting to rapacity, for accuracy in recorded computation. On any subject at all, he goes burrowing after statistics, gathers them with the industry of an insect, and serves them up on any one who will listen. Just now, while he wields his figures like weapons, the sharp ridges and angles and triangles that make up the paltry face where perch the double discs of his glasses, are contracted with vexation. He climbs to the firing-step (made in the days when this was the first line), and raises his head angrily over the parapet. The light touch of a little shaft of cold sunlight that lingers on the land sets a-glitter both his glasses and the diamond that hangs from his nose.

"And that Pepere, too, talk about a drinking-cup with the bottom out! You'd never believe the weight of stuff he can let drop on a single journey."

With his pipe in the corner, Papa Blaire fumes in two senses. You can see his heavy mustache trembling. It is like a comb made of bone, whitish and drooping.

"Do you want to know what I think? These dinner men, they're the dirtiest dogs of all. It's 'Blast this' and 'Blast that'—John Blast and Co., I call 'em."

"They have all the elements of a dunghill about them," says Eudore, with a sigh of conviction. He is prone on the ground, with his mouth half-open and the air of a martyr. With one fading eye he follows the movements of Pepin, who prowls to and fro like a hyaena.

Their spiteful exasperation with the loiterers mounts higher and higher. Tirloir the Grumbler takes the lead and expands. This is where he comes in. With his little pointed gesticulations he goads and spurs the anger all around him.

"Ah, the devils, what? The sort of meat they threw at us yesterday! Talk about whetstones! Beef from an ox, that? Beef from a bicycle, yes rather! I said to the boys, 'Look here, you chaps, don't you chew it too quick, or you'll break your front teeth on the nails!'"

Tirloir's harangue—he was manager of a traveling cinema, it seems—would have made us laugh at other times, but in the present temper it is only echoed by a circulating growl.

"Another time, so that you won't grumble about the toughness, they send you something soft and flabby that passes for meat, something with the look and the taste of a sponge—or a poultice. When you chew that, it's the same as a cup of water, no more and no less."

"Tout ca," says Lamuse, "has no substance; it gets no grip on your guts. You think you're full, but at the bottom of your tank you're empty. So, bit by bit, you turn your eyes up, poisoned for want of sustenance."

"The next time," Biquet exclaims in desperation, "I shall ask to see the old man, and I shall say, 'Mon capitaine'—"

"And I," says Barque, "shall make myself look sick, and I shall say, 'Monsieur le major'—"

"And get nix or the kick-out—they're all alike—all in a band to take it out of the poor private."

"I tell you, they'd like to get the very skin off us!"

"And the brandy, too! We have a right to get it brought to the trenches—as long as it's been decided somewhere—I don't know when or where, but I know it—and in the three days that we've been here, there's three days that the brandy's been dealt out to us on the end of a fork!"

"Ah, malheur!"

"There's the grub!" announces a poilu [note 1] who was on the look-out at the corner.

"Time, too!"

And the storm of revilings ceases as if by magic. Wrath is changed into sudden contentment.

Three breathless fatigue men, their faces streaming with tears of sweat, put down on the ground some large tins, a paraffin can, two canvas buckets, and a file of loaves, skewered on a stick. Leaning against the wall of the trench, they mop their faces with their handkerchiefs or sleeves. And I see Cocon go up to Pepere with a smile, and forgetful of the abuse he had been heaping on the other's reputation, he stretches out a cordial hand towards one of the cans in the collection that swells the circumference of Pepere, after the manner of a life-belt.

"What is there to eat?"

"It's there," is the evasive reply of the second fatigue man, whom experience has taught that a proclamation of the menu always evokes the bitterness of disillusion. So they set themselves to panting abuse of the length and the difficulties of the trip they have just accomplished: "Some crowds about, everywhere! It's a tough job to get along—got to disguise yourself as a cigarette paper, sometimes."—"And there are people who say they're shirkers in the kitchens!" As for him, he would a hundred thousand times rather be with the company in the trenches, to mount guard and dig, than earn his keep by such a job, twice a day during the night!

Paradis, having lifted the lids of the jars, surveys the recipients and announces, "Kidney beans in oil, bully, pudding, and coffee—that's all."

"Nom de Dieu!" bawls Tulacque. "And wine?" He summons the crowd: "Come and look here, all of you! That—that's the limit! We're done out of our wine!"

Athirst and grimacing, they hurry up; and from the profoundest depths of their being wells up the chorus of despair and disappointment, "Oh, Hell!"

"Then what's that in there?" says the fatigue man, still ruddily sweating, and using his foot to point at a bucket.

"Yes," says Paradis, "my mistake, there is some."

The fatigue man shrugs his shoulders, and hurls at Paradis a look of unspeakable scorn—"Now you're beginning! Get your gig-lamps on, if your sight's bad." He adds, "One cup each—rather less perhaps—some chucklehead bumped against me, coming through the Boyau du Bois, and a drop got spilled." "Ah!" he hastens to add, raising his voice, "if I hadn't been loaded up, talk about the boot-toe he'd have got in the rump! But he hopped it on his top gear, the brute!"

In spite of this confident assurance, the fatigue man makes off himself, curses overtaking him as he goes, maledictions charged with offensive reflections on his honesty and temperance, imprecations inspired by this revelation of a ration reduced.

All the same, they throw themselves on the food, and eat it standing, squatting, kneeling, sitting on tins, or on haversacks pulled out of the holes where they sleep—or even prone, their backs on the ground, disturbed by passers-by, cursed at and cursing. Apart from these fleeting insults and jests, they say nothing, the primary and universal interest being but to swallow, with their mouths and the circumference thereof as greasy as a rifle-breech. Contentment is theirs.

At the earliest cessation of their jaw-bones' activity, they serve up the most ribald of raillery. They knock each other about, and clamor in riotous rivalry to have their say. One sees even Farfadet smiling, the frail municipal clerk who in the early days kept himself so decent and clean amongst us all that he was taken for a foreigner or a convalescent. One sees the tomato-like mouth of Lamuse dilate and divide, and his delight ooze out in tears. Poterloo's face, like a pink peony, opens out wider and wider. Papa Blaire's wrinkles flicker with frivolity as he stands up, pokes his head forward, and gesticulates with the abbreviated body that serves as a handle for his huge drooping mustache. Even the corrugations of Cocon's poor little face are lighted up.

Becuwe goes in search of firewood to warm the coffee. While we wait for our drink, we roll cigarettes and fill pipes. Pouches are pulled out. Some of us have shop-acquired pouches in leather or rubber, but they are a minority. Biquet extracts his tobacco from a sock, of which the mouth is drawn tight with string. Most of the others use the bags for anti-gas pads, made of some waterproof material which is an excellent preservative of shag, be it coarse or fine; and there are those who simply fumble for it in the bottom of their greatcoat pockets.

The smokers spit in a circle, just at the mouth of the dug-out which most of the half-section inhabit, and flood with tobacco-stained saliva the place where they put their hands and feet when they flatten themselves to get in or out.

But who notices such a detail?

Now, a propos of a letter to Marthereau from his wife, they discuss produce.

"La mere Marthereau has written," he says. "That fat pig we've got at home, a fine specimen, guess how much she's worth now?"

But the subject of domestic economy degenerates suddenly into a fierce altercation between Pepin and Tulacque. Words of quite unmistakable significance are exchanged. Then—"I don't care a what you say or what you don't say! Shut it up!"—"I shall shut it when I want, midden!"—"A seven-pound thump would shut it up quick enough!"—"Who from? Who'll give it me?"—"Come and find out!"

They grind their teeth and approach each other in a foaming rage. Tulacque grasps his prehistoric ax, and his squinting eyes are flashing. The other is pale and his eyes have a greenish glint; you can see in his blackguard face that his thoughts are with his knife.

But between the two, as they grip each other in looks and mangle in words, Lamuse intervenes with his huge pacific head, like a baby's, and his face of sanguinary hue: "Allons, allons! You're not going to cut yourselves up! Can't be allowed!"

The others also interpose, and the antagonists are separated, but they continue to hurl murderous looks at each other across the barrier of their comrades. Pepin mutters a residue of slander in tones that quiver with malice—

"The hooligan, the ruffian, the blackguard! But wait a bit! I'll see him later about this!"

On the other side, Tulacque confides in the poilu who is beside him: "That crab-louse! Non, but you know what he is! You know—there's no more to be said. Here, we've got to rub along with a lot of people that we don't know from Adam. We know 'em and yet we don't know 'em; but that man, if he thinks he can mess me about, he'll find himself up the wrong street! You wait a bit. I'll smash him up one of these days, you'll see!"

Meanwhile the general conversation is resumed, drowning the last twin echoes of the quarrel.

"It's every day alike, alors!" says Paradis to me; "yesterday it was Plaisance who wanted to let Fumex have it heavy on the jaw, about God knows what—a matter of opium pills, I think. First it's one and then it's another that talks of doing some one in. Are we getting to be a lot of wild animals because we look like 'em?"

"Mustn't take them too seriously, these men," Lamuse declares; "they're only kids."

"True enough, seeing that they're men."

The day matures. A little more light has trickled through the mists that enclose the earth. But the sky has remained overcast, and now it dissolves in rain; With a slowness which itself disheartens, the wind brings back its great wet void upon us. The rain-haze makes everything clammy and dull—even the Turkey red of Lamuse's cheeks, and even the orange armor that caparisons Tulacque. The water penetrates to the deep joy with which dinner endowed us, and puts it out. Space itself shrinks; and the sky, which is a field of melancholy, comes closely down upon the earth, which is a field of death.

We are still there, implanted and idle. It will be hard to-day to reach the end of it, to get rid of the afternoon. We shiver in discomfort, and keep shifting our positions, like cattle enclosed.

Cocon is explaining to his neighbor the arrangement and intricacy of our trenches. He has seen a military map and made some calculations. In the sector occupied by our regiment there are fifteen lines of French trenches. Some are abandoned, invaded by grass, and half leveled; the others solidly upkept and bristling with men. These parallels are joined up by innumerable galleries which hook and crook themselves like ancient streets. The system is much more dense than we believe who live inside it. On the twenty-five kilometers' width that form the army front, one must count on a thousand kilometers of hollowed lines—trenches and saps of all sorts. And the French Army consists of ten such armies. There are then, on the French side, about 10,000 kilometers [note 2] of trenches, and as much again on the German side. And the French front is only about one-eighth of the whole war-front of the world.

Thus speaks Cocon, and he ends by saying to his neighbor, "In all that lot, you see what we are, us chaps?"

Poor Barque's head droops. His face, bloodless as a slum child's, is underlined by a red goatee that punctuates his hair like an apostrophe: "Yes, it's true, when you come to

think of it. What's a soldier, or even several soldiers?—Nothing, and less than nothing, in the whole crowd; and so we see ourselves lost, drowned, like the few drops of blood that we are among all this flood of men and things."

Barque sighs and is silent, and the end of his discourse gives a chance of hearing to a bit of jingling narrative, told in an undertone: "He was coming along with two horses—Fs-s-s—a shell; and he's only one horse left."

"You get fed up with it," says Volpatte.

"But you stick it," growls Barque.

"You've got to," says Paradis.

"Why?" asks Marthereau, without conviction.

"No need for a reason, as long as we've got to."

"There is no reason," Lamuse avers.

"Yes, there is," says Cocon. "It's—or rather, there are several."

"Shut it up! Much better to have no reason, as long as we've got to stick it."

"All the same," comes the hollow voice of Blaire, who lets no chance slip of airing his pet phrase—"All the same, they'd like to steal the very skin off us!"

"At the beginning of it," says Tirette, "I used to think about a heap of things. I considered and calculated. Now, I don't think any more."

"Nor me either."

"Nor me."

"I've never tried to."

"You're not such a fool as you look, flea-face," says the shrill and jeering voice of Mesnil Andre. Obscurely flattered, the other develops his theme—

"To begin with, you can't know anything about anything."

Says Corporal Bertrand, "There's only one thing you need know, and it's this; that the Boches are here in front of us, deep dug in, and we've got to see that they don't get through, and we've got to put 'em out, one day or another—as soon as possible."

"Oui, oui, they've got to leg it, and no mistake about it. What else is there? Not worth while to worry your head thinking about anything else. But it's a long job."

An explosion of profane assent comes from Fouillade, and he adds, "That's what it is!"

"I've given up grousing," says Barque. "At the beginning of it, I played hell with everybody—with the people at the rear, with the civilians, with the natives, with the shirkers. Yes, I played hell; but that was at the beginning of the war—I was young. Now, I take things better."

"There's only one way of taking 'em—as they come!"

"Of course! Otherwise, you'd go crazy. We're dotty enough already, eh, Firmin?"

Volpatte assents with a nod of profound conviction. He spits, and then contemplates his missile with a fixed and unseeing eye.

"You were saying?" insists Barque.

"Here, you haven't got to look too far in front. You must live from day to day and from hour to hour, as well as you can."

"Certain sure, monkey-face. We've got to do what they tell us to do, until they tell us to go away."

"That's all," yawns Mesnil Joseph.

Silence follows the recorded opinions that proceed from these dried and tanned faces, inlaid with dust. This, evidently, is the credo of the men who, a year and a half ago, left all the corners of the land to mass themselves on the frontier: Give up trying to understand, and give up trying to be yourself. Hope that you will not die, and fight for life as well as you can.

"Do what you've got to do, oui, but get out of your own messes yourself," says Barque, as he slowly stirs the mud to and fro.

"No choice"—Tulacque backs him up. "If you don't get out of 'em yourself, no one'll do it for you."

"He's not yet quite extinct, the man that bothers about the other fellow."

"Every man for himself, in war!"

"That's so, that's so."

Silence. Then from the depth of their destitution, these men summon sweet souvenirs —"All that," Barque goes on, "isn't worth much, compared with the good times we had at Soissons."

"Ah, the Devil!"

A gleam of Paradise lost lights up their eyes and seems even to redden their cold faces.

"Talk about a festival!" sighs Tirloir, as he leaves off scratching himself, and looks pensively far away over Trenchland.

"Ah, nom de Dieu! All that town, nearly abandoned, that used to be ours! The houses and the beds—"

"And the cupboards!"

"And the cellars!"

Lamuse's eyes are wet, his face like a nosegay, his heart full.

"Were you there long?" asks Cadilhac, who came here later, with the drafts from Auvergne.

"Several months."

The conversation had almost died out, but it flames up again fiercely at this vision of the days of plenty.

"We used to see," said Paradis dreamily, "the poilus pouring along and behind the houses on the way back to camp with fowls hung round their middles, and a rabbit under each arm, borrowed from some good fellow or woman that they hadn't seen and won't ever see again."

We reflect on the far-off flavor of chicken and rabbit. "There were things that we paid for, too. The spondu-licks just danced about. We held all the aces in those days."

"A hundred thousand francs went rolling round the shops."

"Millions, oui. All the day, just a squandering that you've no idea of, a sort of devil's delight."

"Believe me or not," said Blaire to Cadilhac, "but in the middle of it all, what we had the least of was fires, just like here and everywhere else you go. You had to chase it and find it and stick to it. Ah, mon vieux, how we did run after the kindlings!"

"Well, we were in the camp of the C.H.R. The cook there was the great Martin Cesar. He was the man for finding wood!"

"Ah, oui, oui! He was the ace of trumps! He got what he wanted without twisting himself."

"Always some fire in his kitchen, young fellow. You saw cooks chasing and gabbling about the streets in all directions, blubbering because they had no coal or wood. But he'd got a fire. When he hadn't any, he said, 'Don't worry, I'll see you through.' And he wasn't long about it, either."

"He went a bit too far, even. The first time I saw him in his kitchen, you'd never guess what he'd got the stew going with! With a violin that he'd found in the house!"

"Rotten, all the same," says Mesnil Andre. "One knows well enough that a violin isn't worth much when it comes to utility, but all the same—"

"Other times, he used billiard cues. Zizi just succeeded in pinching one for a cane, but the rest—into the fire! Then the arm-chairs in the drawing-room went by degrees—mahogany, they were. He did 'em in and cut them up by night, case some N.C.O. had something to say about it."

"He knew his way about," said Pepin. "As for us, we got busy with an old suite of furniture that lasted us a fortnight."

"And what for should we be without? You've got to make dinner, and there's no wood or coal. After the grub's served out, there you are with your jaws empty, with a pile of meat in front of you, and in the middle of a lot of pals that chaff and bullyrag you!"

"It's the War Office's doing, it isn't ours."

"Hadn't the officers a lot to say about the pinching?"

"They damn well did it themselves, I give you my word! Desmaisons, do you remember Lieutenant Virvin's trick, breaking down a cellar door with an ax? And when a poilu saw him at it, he gave him the door for firewood, so that he wouldn't spread it about."

"And poor old Saladin, the transport officer. He was found coming out of a basement in the dusk with two bottles of white wine in each arm, the sport, like a nurse with two pairs of twins. When he was spotted, they made him go back down to the wine-cellar, and serve out bottles for everybody. But Corporal Bertrand, who is a man of scruples, wouldn't have any. Ah, you remember that, do you, sausage-foot!"

"Where's that cook now that always found wood?" asks Cadilhac.

"He's dead. A bomb fell in his stove. He didn't get it, but he's dead all the same—died of shock when he saw his macaroni with its legs in the air. Heart seizure, so the doc' said. His heart was weak—he was only strong on wood. They gave him a proper funeral—made him a coffin out of the bedroom floor, and got the picture nails out of the walls to fasten 'em together, and used bricks to drive 'em in. While they were carrying him off, I thought to myself, 'Good thing for him he's dead. If he saw that, he'd never be able to forgive himself for not having thought of the bedroom floor for his fire.'—Ah, what the devil are you doing, son of a pig?"

Volpatte offers philosophy on the rude intrusion of a passing fatigue party: "The private gets along on the back of his pals. When you spin your yarns in front of a fatigue gang, or when you take the best bit or the best place, it's the others that suffer."

"I've often," says Lamuse, "put up dodges so as not to go into the trenches, and it's come off no end of times. I own up to that. But when my pals are in danger, I'm not a dodger any more. I forget discipline and everything else. I see men, and I go. But otherwise, my boy, I look after my little self."

Lamuse's claims are not idle words. He is an admitted expert at loafing, but all the same he has brought wounded in under fire and saved their lives. Without any brag, he relates the deed—

"We were all lying on the grass, and having a hot time. Crack, crack! Whizz, whizz! When I saw them downed, I got up, though they yelled at me, 'Get down!' Couldn't leave 'em like that. Nothing to make a song about, seeing I couldn't do anything else."

Nearly all the boys of the squad have some high deed of arms to their credit, and the Croix de Guerre has been successively set upon their breasts.

"I haven't saved any Frenchmen," says Biquet, "but I've given some Boches the bitter pill." In the May attacks, he ran off in advance and was seen to disappear in the distance, but came back with four fine fellows in helmets.

"I, too," says Tulacque, "I've killed some." Two months ago, with quaint vanity, he laid out nine in a straight row, in front of the taken trench. "But," he adds, "it's always the Boche officer that I'm after."

"Ah, the beasts!" The curse comes from several men at once and from the bottom of their hearts.

"Ah, *mon vieux*," says Tirloir, "we talk about the dirty Boche race; but as for the common soldier, I don't know if it's true or whether we're codded about that as well, and if at bottom they're not men pretty much like us."

"Probably they're men like us," says Eudore.

"Perhaps!" cries Cocon, "and perhaps not."

"Anyway," Tirloir goes on, "we've not got a dead set on the men, but on the German officers; non, non, non, they're not men, they're monsters. I tell you, they're really a specially filthy sort o' vermin. One might say that they're the microbes of the war. You ought to see them close to—the infernal great stiff-backs, thin as nails, though they've got calf-heads."

"And snouts like snakes."

Tirloir continues: "I saw one once, a prisoner, as I came back from *liaison*. The beastly bastard! A Prussian colonel, that wore a prince's crown, so they told me, and a gold coat-of-arms. He was mad because we took leave to graze against him when they were bringing him back along the communication trench, and he looked down on everybody—like that. I said to myself, 'Wait a bit, old cock, I'll make you rattle directly!' I took my time and squared up behind him, and kicked into his tailpiece with all my might. I tell you, he fell down half-strangled."

"Strangled?"

"Yes, with rage, when it dawned on him that the rump of an officer and nobleman had been bust in by the hobnailed socks of a poor private! He went off chattering like a woman and wriggling like an epileptic—"

"I'm not spiteful myself," says Blaire, "I've got kiddies. And it worries me, too, at home, when I've got to kill a pig that I know—but those, I shall run 'em through—Bing! —full in the linen-cupboard."

"I, too."

"Not to mention," says Pepin, "that they've got silver hats, and pistols that you can get four quid for whenever you like, and field-glasses that simply haven't got a price. Ah, bad luck, what a lot of chances I let slip in the early part of the campaign! I was too much of a beginner then, and it serves me right. But don't worry, I shall get a silver hat. Mark my words, I swear I'll have one. I must have not only the skin of one of Wilhelm's red-tabs, but his togs as well. Don't fret yourself; I'll fasten on to that before the war ends."

"You think it'll have an end, then?" asks some one.

"Don't worry!" replies the other.

Meanwhile, a hubbub has arisen to the right of us, and suddenly a moving and buzzing group appears, in which dark and bright forms mingle.

"What's all that?"

Biquet has ventured on a reconnaissance, and returns contemptuously pointing with his thumb towards the motley mass: "Eh, boys! Come and have a squint at them! Some people!"

"Some people?"

"Oui, some gentlemen, look you. Civvies, with Staff officers."

"Civilians! Let's hope they'll stick it!" [note 3]

It is the sacramental saying and evokes laughter, although we have heard it a hundred times, and although the soldier has rightly or wrongly perverted the original meaning and regards it as an ironical reflection on his life of privations and peril.

Two Somebodies come up; two Somebodies with overcoats and canes. Another is dressed in a sporting suit, adorned with a plush hat and binoculars. Pale blue tunics, with shining belts of fawn color or patent leather, follow and steer the civilians.

With an arm where a brassard glitters in gold-edged silk and golden ornament, a captain indicates the firing-step in front of an old emplacement and invites the visitors to get up and try it. The gentleman in the touring suit clambers up with the aid of his umbrella.

Says Barque, "You've seen the station-master at the Gare du Nord, all in his Sunday best, and opening the door of a first-class compartment for a rich sportsman on the first day of the shooting? With his 'Montez, monsieur le Propritaire!'—you know, when the toffs are all togged up in brand-new outfits and leathers and ironmongery, and showing off with all their paraphernalia for killing poor little animals!"

Three or four poilus who were quite without their accouterments have disappeared underground. The others sit as though paralyzed. Even the pipes go out, and nothing is heard but the babble of talk exchanged by the officers and their guests.

"Trench tourists," says Barque in an undertone, and then louder—"This way, mesdames et messieurs"—in the manner of the moment.

"Chuck it!" whispers Farfadet, fearing that Barque's malicious tongue will draw the attention of the potent personages.

Some heads in the group are now turned our way. One gentleman who detaches himself and comes up wears a soft hat and a loose tie. He has a white billy-goat beard, and might be an artiste. Another follows him, wearing a black overcoat, a black bowler hat, a black beard, a white tie and an eyeglass.

"Ah, ah! There are some poilus," says the first gentleman. "These are real poilus, indeed."

He comes up to our party a little timidly, as though in the Zoological Gardens, and offers his hand to the one who is nearest to him—not without awkwardness, as one offers a piece of bread to the elephant.

"He, he! They are drinking coffee," he remarks.

"They call it 'the juice,'" corrects the magpie-man.

"Is it good, my friends?" The soldier, abashed in his turn by this alien and unusual visitation, grunts, giggles, and reddens, and the gentleman says, "He, he!" Then, with a slight motion of the head, he withdraws backwards.

The assemblage, with its neutral shades of civilian cloth and its sprinkling of bright military hues—like geraniums and hortensias in the dark soil of a flowerbed—oscillates, then passes, and moves off the opposite way it came. One of the officers was heard to say, "We have yet much to see, messieurs les journalistes."

When the radiant spectacle has faded away, we look at each other. Those who had fled into the funk-holes now gradually and head first disinter themselves. The group recovers itself and shrugs its shoulders.

"They're journalists," says Tirette.

"Journalists?"

"Why, yes, the individuals that lay the newspapers. You don't seem to catch on, fathead. Newspapers must have chaps to write 'em."

"Then it's those that stuff up our craniums?" says Marthereau.

Barque assumes a shrill treble, and pretending that he has a newspaper in front of his nose, recites—"'The Crown Prince is mad, after having been killed at the beginning of the campaign, and meanwhile he has all the diseases you can name. William will die this evening, and again to-morrow. The Germans have no more munitions and are chewing wood. They cannot hold out, according to the most authoritative calculations, beyond the end of the week. We can have them when we like, with their rifles slung. If one can wait

a few days longer, there will be no desire to forsake the life of the trenches. One is so comfortable there, with water and gas laid on, and shower-baths at every step. The only drawback is that it is rather too hot in winter. As for the Austrians, they gave in a long time since and are only pretending.' For fifteen months now it's been like that, and you can hear the editor saying to his scribes, 'Now, boys, get into it! Find some way of brushing that up again for me in five secs, and make it spin out all over those four damned white sheets that we've got to mucky.'"

"Ah, yes!" says Fouillade.

"Look here, corporal; you're making fun of it—isn't it true what I said?"

"There's a little truth in it, but you're too slashing on the poor boys, and you'd be the first to make a song about it if you had to go without papers. Oui, when the paper-man's going by, why do you all shout, 'Here, here'?"

"And what good can you get out of them all?" cries Papa Blaire. "Read 'em by the tubful if you like, but do the same as me—don't believe 'em!"

"Oui, oui, that's enough about them. Turn the page over, donkey-nose."

The conversation is breaking up; interest in it follows suit and is scattered. Four poilus join in a game of manille, that will last until night blacks out the cards. Volpatte is trying to catch a leaf of cigarette paper that has escaped his fingers and goes hopping and dodging in the wind along the wall of the trench like a fragile butterfly.

Cocon and Tirette are recalling their memories of barrack-life. The impressions left upon their minds by those years of military training are ineffaceable. Into that fund of abundant souvenirs, of abiding color and instant service, they have been wont to dip for their subjects of conversation for ten, fifteen, or twenty years. So that they still frequent it, even after a year and a half of actual war in all its forms.

I can hear some of the talk and guess the rest of it. For it is everlastingly the same sort of tale that they get out of their military past;—the narrator once shut up a bad-tempered N.C.O. with words of extreme appropriateness and daring. He wasn't afraid, he spoke out loud and strong! Some scraps of it reach my ears—

"Alors, d'you think I flinched when Nenoeil said that to me? Not a bit, my boy. All the pals kept their jaws shut but me; I spoke up, 'Mon adjudant,' I says, 'it's possible, but —'" A sentence follows that I cannot secure—"Oh, tu sais, just like that, I said it. He didn't get shirty; 'Good, that's good,' he says as he hops it, and afterwards he was as good as all that, with me."

"Just like me, with Dodore, 'jutant of the 13th, when I was on leave—a mongrel. Now he's at the Pantheon, as caretaker. He'd got it in for me, so—"

So each unpacks his own little load of historical anecdote. They are all alike, and not one of them but says, "As for me, I am not like the others."

The post-orderly! He is a tall and broad man with fat calves; comfortable looking, and as neat and tidy as a policeman. He is in a bad temper. There are new orders, and now he has to go every day as far as Battalion Headquarters. He abuses the order as if it had been directed exclusively against himself; and he continues to complain even while he calls up the corporals for the post and maintains his customary chat en passant with this man and that. And in spite of his spleen he does not keep to himself all the information with which he comes provided. While removing the string from the letter-packets he dispenses his verbal news, and announces first, that according to rumor, there is a very explicit ban on the wearing of hoods.

"Hear that?" says Tirette to Tirloir. "Got to chuck your fine hood away!"

"Not likely! I'm not on. That's nothing to do with me," replies the hooded one, whose pride no less than his comfort is at stake.

"Order of the General Commanding the Army."

"Then let the General give an order that it's not to rain any more. I want to know nothing about it."

The majority of Orders, even when less peculiar than this one, are always received in this way—and then carried out.

"There's a reported order as well," says the man of letters, "that beards have got to be trimmed and hair got to be clipped close."

"Talk on, my lad," says Barque, on whose head the threatened order directly falls; "you didn't see me! You can draw the curtains!"

"I'm telling you. Do it or don't do it—doesn't matter a damn to me."

Besides what is real and written, there is bigger news, but still more dubious and imaginative—the division is going to be relieved, and sent either to rest—real rest, for six weeks—or to Morocco, or perhaps to Egypt.

Divers exclamations. They listen, and let themselves be tempted by the fascination of the new, the wonderful.

But some one questions the post-orderly: "Who told you that?"

"The adjutant commanding the Territorial detachment that fatigues for the H.Q. of the A.C."

"For the what?"

"For Headquarters of the Army Corps, and he's not the only one that says it. There's—you know him—I've forgotten his name—he's like Galle, but he isn't Galle—there's some one in his family who is Some One. Anyway, he knows all about it."

"Then what?" With hungry eyes they form a circle around the story-teller.

"Egypt, you say, we shall go to? Don't know it. I know there were Pharaohs there at the time when I was a kid and went to school, but since—"

"To Egypt!" The idea finds unconscious anchorage in their minds.

"Ah, non," says Blaire, "for I get sea-sick. Still, it doesn't last, sea-sickness. Oui, but what would my good lady say?"

"What about it? She'll get used to it. You see niggers, and streets full of big birds, like we see sparrows here."

"But haven't we to go to Alsace?"

"Yes," says the post-orderly, "there are some who think so at the Pay-office."

"That'd do me well enough."

But common sense and acquired experience regain the upper hand and put the visions to flight. We have been told so often that we were going a long way off, so often have we

believed it, so often been undeceived! So, as if at a moment arranged, we wake up.

"It's all my eye—they've done it on us too often. Wait before believing—and don't count a crumb's worth on it."

We reoccupy our corner. Here and there a man bears in his hand the light momentous burden of a letter.

"Ah," says Tirloir, "I must be writing. Can't go eight days without writing."

"Me too," says Eudore, "I must write to my p'tit' femme."

"Is she all right, Mariette?"

"Oui, oui, don't fret about Mariette."

A few have already settled themselves for correspondence. Barque is standing up. He stoops over a sheet of paper flattened on a note-book upon a jutting crag in the trench wall. Apparently in the grip of an inspiration, he writes on and on, with his eyes in bondage and the concentrated expression of a horseman at full gallop.

When once Lamuse—who lacks imagination—has sat down, placed his little writing-block on the padded summit of his knees, and moistened his copying-ink pencil, he passes the time in reading again the last letters received, in wondering what he can say that he has not already said, and in fostering a grim determination to say something else.

A sentimental gentleness seems to have overspread little Eudore, who is curled up in a sort of niche in the ground. He is lost in meditation, pencil in hand, eyes on paper. Dreaming, he looks and stares and sees. It is another sky that lends him light, another to which his vision reaches. He has gone home.

In this time of letter-writing, the men reveal the most and the best that they ever were. Several others surrender to the past, and its first expression is to talk once more of fleshly comforts.

Through their outer crust of coarseness and concealment, other hearts venture upon murmured memories, and the rekindling of bygone brightness: the summer morning, when the green freshness of the garden steals in upon the purity of the country bedroom; or when the wind in the wheat of the level lands sets it slowly stirring or deeply waving, and shakes the square of oats hard by into quick little feminine tremors; or the winter evening, with women and their gentleness around the shaded luster of the lamp.

But Papa Blaire resumes work upon the ring he has begun. He has threaded the still formless disc of aluminium over a bit of rounded wood, and rubs it with the file. As he applies himself to the job, two wrinkles of mighty meditation deepen upon his forehead. Anon he stops, straightens himself, and looks tenderly at the trifle, as though she also were looking at it.

"You know," he said to me once, speaking of another ring, "it's not a question of doing it well or not well. The point is that I've done it for my wife, d'you see? When I had nothing to do but scratch myself, I used to have a look at this photo"—he showed me a photograph of a big, chubby-faced woman—"and then it was quite easy to set about this damned ring. You might say that we've made it together, see? The proof of that is that it was company for me, and that I said Adieu to it when I sent it off to Mother Blaire."

He is making another just now, and this one will have copper in it, too. He works eagerly. His heart would fain express itself to the best advantage in this the sort of penmanship upon which he is so tenaciously bent.

As they stoop reverently, in their naked earth-holes, over the slender rudimentary trinkets—so tiny that the great hide-bound hands hold them with difficulty or let them fall—these men seem still more wild, more primitive, and more human, than at all other times.

You are set thinking of the first inventor, the father of all craftsmen, who sought to invest enduring materials with the shapes of what he saw and the spirit of what he felt.

"People coming along," announces Biquet the mobile, who acts as hall-porter to our section of the trench—"buckets of 'em." Immediately an adjutant appears, with straps round his belly and his chin, and brandishing his sword-scabbard.

"Out of the way, you! Out of the way, I tell you! You loafers there, out of it! Let me see you quit, hey!" We make way indolently. Those at the sides push back into the earth by slow degrees.

It is a company of Territorials, deputed to our sector for the fortification of the second line and the upkeep of its communication trenches. They come into view—miserable bundles of implements, and dragging their feet.

We watch them, one by one, as they come up, pass, and disappear. They are stunted and elderly, with dusty faces, or big and broken-winded, tightly enfolded in greatcoats stained and over-worn, that yawn at the toothless gaps where the buttons are missing.

Tirette and Barque, the twin wags, leaning close together against the wall, stare at them, at first in silence. Then they begin to smile.

"March past of the Broom Brigade," says Tirette.

"We'll have a bit of fun for three minutes," announces Barque.

Some of the old toilers are comical. This one whom the file brings up has bottle-shaped shoulders. Although extremely narrow-chested and spindle-shanked, he is big-bellied. He is too much for Barque. "Hullo, Sir Canteen!" he says.

When a more outrageously patched-up greatcoat appears than all the others can show, Tirette questions the veteran recruit. "Hey, Father Samples! Hey, you there!" he insists.

The other turns and looks at him, open-mouthed.

"Say there, papa, if you will be so kind as to give me the address of your tailor in London!"

A chuckle comes from the antiquated and wrinkle-scrawled face, and then the poilu, checked for an instant by Barque's command, is jostled by the following flood and swept away.

When some less striking figures have gone past, a new victim is provided for the jokers. On his red and wrinkled neck luxuriates some dirty sheep's-wool. With knees bent, his body forward, his back bowed, this Territorial's carriage is the worst.

"Tiens!" bawls Tirette, with pointed finger, "the famous concertina-man! It would cost you something to see him at the fair—here, he's free gratis!"

The victim stammers responsive insults amid the scattered laughter that arises.

No more than that laughter is required to excite the two comrades. It is the ambition to have their jests voted funny by their easy audience that stimulates them to mock the

peculiarities of their old comrades-in-arms, of those who toil night and day on the brink of the great war to make ready and make good the fields of battle.

And even the other watchers join in. Miserable themselves, they scoff at the still more miserable.

"Look at that one! And that, look!"

"Non, but take me a snapshot of that little rump-end! Hey, earth-worm!"

"And that one that has no ending! Talk about a sky-scratcher! Tiens, la, he takes the biscuit. Yes, you take it, old chap!"

This man goes with little steps, and holds his pickax up in front like a candle; his face is withered, and his body borne down by the blows of lumbago.

"Like a penny, gran'pa?" Barque asks him, as he passes within reach of a tap on the shoulder.

The broken-down poilu replies with a great oath of annoyance, and provokes the harsh rejoinder of Barque: "Come now, you might be polite, filthy-face, old muck-mill!"

Turning right round in fury, the old one defies his tormentor.

"Hullo!" cries Barque, laughing, "He's showing fight; the ruin! He's warlike, look you, and he might be mischievous if only he were sixty years younger!"

"And if he wasn't alone," wantonly adds Pepin, whose eye is in quest of other targets among the flow of new arrivals.

The hollow chest of the last straggler appears, and then his distorted back disappears.

The march past of the worn-out and trench-foul veterans comes to an end among the ironical and almost malevolent faces of these sinister troglodytes, whom their caverns of mud but half reveal.

Meanwhile, the hours slip away, and evening begins to veil the sky and darken the things of earth. It comes to blend itself at once with the blind fate and the ignorant dark minds of the multitude there enshrouded.

Through the twilight comes the rolling hum of tramping men, and another throng rubs its way through.

"Africans!"

They march past with faces red-brown, yellow or chestnut, their beards scanty and fine or thick and frizzled, their greatcoats yellowish-green, and their muddy helmets sporting the crescent in place of our grenade. Their eyes are like balls of ivory or onyx, that shine from faces like new pennies, flattened or angular. Now and again comes swaying along above the line the coal-black mask of a Senegalese sharpshooter. Behind the company goes a red flag with a green hand in the center.

We watch them in silence. These are asked no questions. They command respect, and even a little fear.

All the same, these Africans seem jolly and in high spirits. They are going, of course, to the first line. That is their place, and their passing is the sign of an imminent attack. They are made for the offensive.

"Those and the 75 gun we can take our hats off to. They're everywhere sent ahead at big moments, the Moroccan Division."

"They can't quite fit in with us. They go too fast—and there's no way of stopping them."

Some of these diabolical images in yellow wood or bronze or ebony are serious of mien, uneasy, and taciturn. Their faces have the disquieting and secret look of the snare suddenly discovered. The others laugh with a laugh that jangles like fantastic foreign instruments of music, a laugh that bares the teeth.

We talk over the characteristics of these Africans; their ferocity in attack, their devouring passion to be in with the bayonet, their predilection for "no quarter." We recall those tales that they themselves willingly tell, all in much the same words and with the same gestures. They raise their arms over their heads—"Kam'rad, Kam'rad!" "Non, pas Kam'rad!" And in pantomime they drive a bayonet forward, at belly-height, drawing it back then with the help of a foot.

One of the sharpshooters overhears our talk as he passes. He looks upon us, laughs abundantly in his helmeted turban, and repeats our words with significant shakes of his head: "Pas Kam'rad, non pas Kam'rad, never! Cut head off!"

"No doubt they're a different race from us, with their tent-cloth skin," Barque confesses, though he does not know himself what "cold feet" are. "It worries them to rest, you know; they only live for the minute when the officer puts his watch back in his pocket and says, 'Off you go!'"

"In fact, they're real soldiers."

"We are not soldiers," says big Lamuse, "we're men." Though the evening has grown darker now, that plain true saying sheds something like a glimmering light on the men who are waiting here, waiting since the morning, waiting since months ago.

They are men, good fellows of all kinds, rudely torn away from the joy of life. Like any other men whom you take in the mass, they are ignorant and of narrow outlook, full of a sound common sense—which some-times gets off the rails—disposed to be led and to do as they are bid, enduring under hardships, long-suffering.

They are simple men further simplified, in whom the merely primitive instincts have been accentuated by the force of circumstances—the instinct of self-preservation, the hard-gripped hope of living through, the joy of food, of drink, and of sleep. And at intervals they are cries and dark shudders of humanity that issue from the silence and the shadows of their great human hearts.

When we can no longer see clearly, we hear down there the murmur of a command, which comes nearer and rings loud—"Second half-section! Muster!" We fall in; it is the call.

"Gee up!" says the corporal. We are set in motion. In front of the tool-depot there is a halt and trampling. To each is given a spade or pickax. An N.C.O. presents the handles in the gloom: "You, a spade; there, hop it! You a spade, too; you a pick. Allons, hurry up and get off."

We leave by the communication trench at right angles to our own, and straight ahead towards the changeful frontier, now alive and terrible.

Up in the somber sky, the strong staccato panting of an invisible aeroplane circles in wide descending coils and fills infinity. In front, to right and left, everywhere, thunderclaps roll with great glimpses of short-lived light in the dark-blue sky.

[note 1:] The popular and international name for a French soldier. Its literal meaning is "hairy, shaggy," but the word has conveyed for over a century the idea of the virility of a Samson, whose strength lay in his locks.—Tr.

[note 2:] 6250 miles.

[note 3:] Pourvu que les civils tiennent. In the early days of the war it was a common French saying that victory was certain—"if the civilians hold out."—Tr.

III

The Return

RELUCTANTLY the ashen dawn is bleaching the still dark and formless landscape. Between the declining road on the right that falls into the gloom, and the black cloud of the Alleux Wood—where we hear the convoy teams assembling and getting under way—a field extends. We have reached it, we of the 6th Battalion, at the end of the night. We have piled arms, and now, in the center of this circle of uncertain light, our feet in the mist and mud, we stand in dark clusters (that yet are hardly blue), or as solitary phantoms; and the heads of all are turned towards the road that comes from "down there." We are waiting for the rest of the regiment, the 5th Battalion, who were in the first line and left the trenches after us.

Noises; "There they are!" A long and shapeless mass appears in the west and comes down out of the night upon the dawning road.

At last! It is ended, the accursed shift that began at six o'clock yesterday evening and has lasted all night, and now the last man has stepped from the last communication trench.

This time it has been an awful sojourn in the trenches. The 18th company was foremost and has been cut up, eighteen killed and fifty wounded—one in three less in four days. And this without attack—by bombardment alone.

This is known to us, and as the mutilated battalion approaches down there, and we join them in trampling the muddy field and exchanging nods of recognition, we cry, "What about the 18th?" We are thinking as we put the question, "If it goes on like this, what is to become of all of us? What will become of me?"

The 17th, the 19th, and the 20th arrive in turn and pile arms. "There's the 18th!" It arrives after all the others; having held the first trench, it has been last relieved.

The light is a little cleaner, and the world is paling. We can make out, as he comes down the road, the company's captain, ahead of his men and alone. He helps himself along with a stick, and walks with difficulty, by reason of his old wound of the Marne battle that rheumatism is troubling; and there are other pangs, too. He lowers his hooded head, and might be attending a funeral. We can see that in his mind he is indeed following the dead, and his thoughts are with them.

Here is the company, debouching in dire disorder, and our hearts are heavy. It is obviously shorter than the other three, in the march past of the battalion.

I reach the road, and confront the descending mass of the 18th. The uniforms of these survivors are all earth-yellowed alike, so that they appear to be clad in khaki. The cloth is stiff with the ochreous mud that has dried underneath. The skirts of their greatcoats are

like lumps of wood, jumping about on the yellow crust that reaches to their knees. Their faces are drawn and blackened; dust and dirt have wrinkled them anew; their eyes are big and fevered. And from these soldiers whom the depths of horror have given back there rises a deafening din. They talk all at once, and loudly; they gesticulate, they laugh and sing. You would think, to see them, that it was a holiday crowd pouring over the road!

These are the second section and its big sub-lieutenant, whose greatcoat is tightened and strapped around a body as stiff as a rolled umbrella. I elbow my way along the marching crowd as far as Marchal's squad, the most sorely tried of all. Out of eleven comrades that they were, and had been without a break for a year and a half, there were three men only with Corporal Marchal.

He sees me—with a glad exclamation and a broad smile. He lets go his rifle-sling and offers me his hands, from one of which hangs his trench stick—"Eh, vieux frere, still going strong? What's become of you lately?"

I turn my head away and say, almost under my breath, "So, old chap, it's happened badly."

His smile dies at once, and he is serious: "Eh, oui, old man; it can't be helped; it was awful this time. Barbier is killed."

"They told us—Barbier!"

"Saturday night it was, at eleven o'clock. He had the top of his back taken away by a shell," says Marchal, "cut off like a razor. Besse got a bit of shell that went clean through his belly and stomach. Barthlemy and Baubex got it in the head and neck. We passed the night skedaddling up and down the trench at full speed, to dodge the showers. And little Godefroy—did you know him?—middle of his body blown away. He was emptied of blood on the spot in an instant, like a bucket kicked over. Little as he was, it was remarkable how much blood he had, it made a stream at least fifty meters long. Gougnard got his legs cut up by one explosion. They picked him up not quite dead. That was at the listening post. I was there on duty with them. But when that shell fell I had gone into the trench to ask the time. I found my rifle, that I'd left in my place, bent double, as if some one had folded it in his hands, the barrel like a corkscrew, and half of the stock in sawdust. The smell of fresh blood was enough to bring your heart up."

"And Mondain—him, too?"

"Mondain—that was the day after, yesterday in fact, in a dug-out that a shell smashed in. He was lying down, and his chest was crushed. Have they told you about Franco, who was alongside Mondain? The fall of earth broke his spine. He spoke again after they'd got him out and set him down. He said, with his head falling to one side, 'I'm dying,' and he was gone. Vigile was with them, too; his body wasn't touched, but they found him with his head completely flattened out, flat as a pancake, and huge-as big as that. To see it spread out on the ground, black and distorted, it made you think of his shadow—the shadow one gets on the ground sometimes when one walks with a lantern at night."

"Vigile—only Class 1913—a child! And Mondain and Franco—such good sorts, in spite of their stripes. We're so many old special pals the less, mon vieux Marchal."

"Yes," says Marchal. But he is swallowed up in a crowd of his friends, who worry and catechise him. He bandies jests with them, and answers their raillery, and all hustle each other, and laugh.

I look from face to face. They are merry, and in spite of the contractions of weariness, and the earth-stains, they look triumphant.

What does it mean? If wine had been possible during their stay in the first line, I should have said, "All these men are drunk."

I single out one of the survivors, who hums as he goes, and steps in time with it flippantly, as hussars of the stage do. It is Vanderborn, the drummer.

"Hullo, Vanderborn, you look pleased with yourself!" Vanderborn, who is sedate in the ordinary, cries, "It's not me yet, you see! Here I am!" With a mad gesticulation he serves me a thump on the shoulder. I understand.

If these men are happy in spite of all, as they come out of hell, it is because they are coming out of it. They are returning, they are spared. Once again the Death that was there has passed them over. Each company in its turn goes to the front once in six weeks. Six weeks! In both great and minor matters, fighting soldiers manifest the philosophy of the child. They never look afar, either ahead or around. Their thought strays hardly farther than from day to day. To-day, every one of those men is confident that he will live yet a little while.

And that is why, in spite of the weariness that weighs them down and the new slaughter with which they are still bespattered, though each has seen his brothers torn away from his side, in spite of all and in spite of themselves, they are celebrating the Feast of the Survivors. The boundless glory in which they rejoice is this—they still stand straight.

IV

Volpatte and Fouillade

AS we reached quarters again, some one cried: "But where's Volpatte?"—"And Fouillade, where's he?"

They had been requisitioned and taken off to the front line by the 5th Battalion. No doubt we should find them somewhere in quarters. No success. Two men of the squad lost!

"That's what comes of lending men," said the sergeant with a great oath. The captain, when apprised of the loss, also cursed and swore and said, "I must have those men. Let them be found at once. Allez!"

Farfadet and I are summoned by Corporal Bertrand from the barn where at full length we have already immobilized ourselves, and are growing torpid: "You must go and look for Volpatte and Fouillade."

Quickly we got up, and set off with a shiver of uneasiness. Our two comrades have been taken by the 5th and carried off to that infernal shift. Who knows where they are and what they may be by now!

We climb up the hill again. Again we begin, but in the opposite direction, the journey done since the dawn and the night. Though we are without our heavy stuff, and only carry rifles and accouterments, we feel idle, sleepy, and stiff; and the country is sad, and the sky all wisped with mist. Farfadet is soon panting. He talked a little at first, till fatigue enforced silence on him. He is brave enough, but frail, and during all his prewar life, shut up in the Town Hall office where he scribbled since the days of his "first sacrament" between a stove and some ageing cardboard files, he hardly learned the use of his legs.

Just as we emerge from the wood, slipping and floundering, to penetrate the region of communication trenches, two faint shadows are outlined in front. Two soldiers are coming up. We can see the protuberance of their burdens and the sharp lines of their rifles. The swaying double shape becomes distinct—"It's them!"

One of the shadows has a great white head, all swathed—"One of them's wounded! It's Volpatte!"

We run up to the specters, our feet making the sounds of sinking in sponge and of sticky withdrawal, and our shaken cartridges rattle in their pouches. They stand still and wait for us. When we are close up, "It's about time!" cries Volpatte.

"You're wounded, old chap?"—"What?" he says; the manifold bandages all round his head make him deaf, and we must shout to get through them. So we go close and shout. Then he replies, "That's nothing; we're coming from the hole where the 5th Battalion put us on Thursday."

"You've stayed there—ever since?" yells Farfadet, whose shrill and almost feminine voice goes easily through the quilting that protects Volpatte's ears.

"Of course we stayed there, you blithering idiot!" says Fouillade. "You don't suppose we'd got wings to fly away with, and still less that we should have legged it without orders?"

Both of them let themselves drop to a sitting position on the ground. Volpatte's head —enveloped in rags with a big knot on the top and the same dark yellowish stains as his face—looks like a bundle of dirty linen.

"They forgot you, then, poor devils?"

"Rather!" cries Fouillade, "I should say they did. Four days and four nights in a shell-hole, with bullets raining down, a hole that stunk like a cesspool."

"That's right," says Volpatte. "It wasn't an ordinary listening-post hole, where one comes and goes regularly. It was just a shell-hole, like any other old shell-hole, neither more nor less. They said to us on Thursday, 'Station yourselves in there and keep on firing,' they said. Next day, a liaison chap of the 5th Battalion came and showed his neb: 'What the hell are you doing there?'—'Why, we're firing. They told us to fire, so we're firing,' I says. 'If they told us to do it, there must be some reason at the back of it. We're wanting for them to tell us to do something else.' The chap made tracks. He looked a bit uneasy, and suffering from the effects of being bombed. 'It's 22,' he says."

"To us two," says Fouillade, "there was a loaf of bread and a bucket of wine that the 18th gave us when they planted us there, and a whole case of cartridges, my boy. We fired off the cartridges and drank the booze, but we had sense to keep a few cartridges and a hunch of bread, though we didn't keep any wine."

"That's where we went wrong," says Volpatte, "seeing that it was a thirsty job. Say, boys, you haven't got any gargle?"

"I've still nearly half a pint of wine," replies Farfadet. "Give it to him," says Fouillade, pointing to Volpatte, "seeing that he's been losing blood. I'm only thirsty."

Volpatte was shivering, and his little strapped-up eyes burned with fever in the enormous dump of rags set upon his shoulders. "That's good," he says, drinking.

"Ah! And then, too," he added, emptying—as politeness requires—the drop of wine that remained at the bottom of Farfadet's cup, "we got two Boches. They were crawling about outside, and fell into our holes, as blindly as moles into a spring snare, those chaps

did. We tied 'em up. And see us then—after firing for thirty-six hours, we'd no more ammunition. So we filled our magazines with the last, and waited, in front of the parcels of Boche. The liaison chap forgot to tell his people that we were there. You, the 6th, forgot to ask for us; the 18th forgot us, too; and as we weren't in a listening-post where you're relieved as regular as if at H.Q., I could almost see us staying there till the regiment came back. In the long run, it was the loafers of the 204th, come to skulk about looking for fuses, that mentioned us. So then we got the order to fall back—immediately, they said. That 'immediately' was a good joke, and we got into harness at once. We untied the legs of the Boches, led them off and handed them over to the 204th, and here we are."

"We even fished out, in passing, a sergeant who was piled up in a hole and didn't dare come out, seeing he was shell-shocked. We slanged him, and that set him up a bit, and he thanked us. Sergeant Sacerdote he called himself."

"But your wound, old chap?"

"It's my ears. Two shells, a little one and a big one, my lad—went off while you're saying it. My head came between the two bursts, as you might say, but only just; a very close shave, and my lugs got it."

"You should have seen him," says Fouillade, "it was disgusting, those two ears hanging down. We had two packets of bandages, and the stretcher-men fired us one in. That makes three packets he's got rolled round his nut."

"Give us your traps, we're going back."

Farfadet and I divide Volpatte's equipment between us. Fouillade, sullen with thirst and racked by stiff joints, growls, and insists obstinately on keeping his weapons and bundles.

We stroll back, finding diversion—as always—in walking without ranks. It is so uncommon that one finds it surprising and profitable. So it is a breach of liberty which soon enlivens all four of us. We are in the country as though for the pleasure of it.

"We are pedestrians!" says Volpatte proudly. When we reach the turning at the top of the hill, he relapses upon rosy visions: "Old man, it's a good wound, after all. I shall be sent back, no mistake about it."

His eyes wink and sparkle in the huge white clump that dithers on his shoulders—a clump reddish on each side, where the ears were.

From the depth where the village lies we hear ten o'clock strike. "To hell with the time," says Volpatte "it doesn't matter to me any more what time it is."

He becomes loquacious. It is a low fever that inspires his dissertation, and condenses it to the slow swing of our walk, in which his step is already jaunty.

"They'll stick a red label on my greatcoat, you'll see, and take me to the rear. I shall be bossed this time by a very polite sort of chap, who'll say to me, 'That's one side, now turn the other way—so, my poor fellow.' Then the ambulance, and then the sick-train, with the pretty little ways of the Red Cross ladies all the way along, like they did to Crapelet Jules, then the base hospital. Beds with white sheets, a stove that snores in the middle of us all, people with the special job of looking after you, and that you watch doing it, regulation slippers—sloppy and comfortable—and a chamber-cupboard. Furniture! And it's in those big hospitals that you're all right for grub! I shall have good feeds, and baths. I shall take all I can get hold of. And there'll be presents—that you can enjoy without having to fight the others for them and get yourself into a bloody mess. I shall have my two hands on the counterpane, and they'll do damn well nothing, like things to look at—

like toys, what? And under the sheets my legs'll be white-hot all the way through, and my trotters'll be expanding like bunches of violets."

Volpatte pauses, fumbles about, and pulls out of his pocket, along with his famous pair of Soissons scissors, something that he shows to me: "Tiens, have you seen this?"

It is a photograph of his wife and two children. He has already shown it to me many a time. I look at it and express appreciation.

"I shall go on sick-leave," says Volpatte, "and while my ears are sticking themselves on again, the wife and the little ones will look at me, and I shall look at them. And while they're growing again like lettuces, my friends, the war, it'll make progress—the Russians—one doesn't know, what?" He is thinking aloud, lulling himself with happy anticipations, already alone with his private festival in the midst of us.

"Robber!" Feuillade shouts at him. "You've too much luck, by God!"

How could we not envy him? He would be going away for one, two, or three months; and all that time, instead of our wretched privations, he would be transformed into a man of means!

"At the beginning," says Farfadet, "it sounded comic when I heard them wish for a 'good wound.' But all the same, and whatever can be said about it, I understand now that it's the only thing a poor soldier can hope for if he isn't daft."

We were drawing near to the village and passing round the wood. At its corner, the sudden shape of a woman arose against the sportive sunbeams that outlined her with light. Alertly erect she stood, before the faintly violet background of the wood's marge and the crosshatched trees. She was slender, her head all afire with fair hair, and in her pale face we could see the night-dark caverns of great eyes. The resplendent being gazed fixedly upon us, trembling, then plunged abruptly into the undergrowth and disappeared like a torch.

The apparition and its flight so impressed Volpatte that he lost the thread of his discourse.

"She's something like, that woman there!"

"No," said Fouillade, who had misunderstood, "she's called Eudoxie. I knew her because I've seen her before. A refugee. I don't know where she comes from, but she's at Gamblin, in a family there."

"She's thin and beautiful," Volpatte certified; "one would like to make her a little present—she's good enough to eat—tender as a chicken. And look at the eyes she's got!"

"She's queer," says Fouillade. "You don't know when you've got her. You see her here, there, with her fair hair on top, then—off! Nobody about. And you know, she doesn't know what danger is; marching about, sometimes, almost in the front line, and she's been seen knocking about in No Man's Land. She's queer."

"Look! There she is again. The spook! She's keeping an eye on us. What's she after?"

The shadow-figure, traced in lines of light, this time adorned the other end of the spinney's edge.

"To hell with women," Volpatte declared, whom the idea of his deliverance has completely recaptured.

"There's one in the squad, anyway, that wants her pretty badly. See—when you speak of the wolf—"

"You see its tail—"

"Not yet, but almost—look!" From some bushes on our right we saw the red snout of Lamuse appear peeping, like a wild boar's.

He was on the woman's trail. He had seen the alluring vision, dropped to the crouch of a setting dog, and made his spring. But in that spring he fell upon us.

Recognizing Volpatte and Fouillade, big Lamuse gave shouts of delight. At once he had no other thought than to get possession of the bags, rifles, and haversacks—"Give me all of it—I'm resting—come on, give it up."

He must carry everything. Farfadet and I willingly gave up Volpatte's equipment; and Fouillade, now at the end of his strength, agreed to surrender his pouches and his rifle.

Lamuse became a moving heap. Under the huge burden he disappeared, bent double, and made progress only with shortened steps.

But we felt that he was still under the sway of a certain project, and his glances went sideways. He was seeking the woman after whom he had hurled himself. Every time he halted, the better to trim some detail of the load, or puffingly to mop the greasy flow of perspiration, he furtively surveyed all the corners of the horizon and scrutinized the edges of the wood. He did not see her again.

I did see her again, and got a distinct impression this time that it was one of us she was after. She half arose on our left from the green shadows of the undergrowth. Steadying herself with one hand on a branch, she leaned forward and revealed the night-dark eyes and pale face, which showed—so brightly lighted was one whole side of it—like a crescent moon.

I saw that she was smiling. And following the course of the look that smiled, I saw Farfadet a little way behind us, and he was smiling too. Then she slipped away into the dark foliage, carrying the twin smile with her.

Thus was the understanding revealed to me between this lissom and dainty gypsy, who was like no one at all, and Farfadet, conspicuous among us all—slender, pliant and sensitive as lilac. Evidently—!

Lamuse saw nothing, blinded and borne down as he was by the load he had taken from Farfadet and me, occupied in the poise of them, and in finding where his laden and leaden feet might tread.

But he looks unhappy; he groans. A weighty and mournful obsession is stifling him. In his harsh breathing it seems to me that I can hear his heart beating and muttering. Looking at Volpatte, hooded in bandages, and then at the strong man, muscular and full-blooded, with that profound and eternal yearning whose sharpness he alone can gauge, I say to myself that the worst wounded man is not he whom we think.

We go down at last to the village. "Let's have a drink," says Fouillade. "I'm going to be sent back," says Volpatte. Lamuse puffs and groans.

Our comrades shout and come running, and we gather in the little square where the church stands with its twin towers—so thoroughly mutilated by a shell that one can no longer look it in the face.

V

Sanctuary

THE dim road which rises through the middle of the night-bound wood is so strangely full of obstructing shadows that the deep darkness of the forest itself might by some magic have overflowed upon it. It is the regiment on the march, in quest of a new home.

The weighty ranks of the shadows, burdened both high and broad, hustle each other blindly. Each wave, pushed by the following, stumbles upon the one in front, while alongside and detached are the evolutions of those less bulky ghosts, the N.C.O.'s. A clamor of confusion, compound of exclamations, of scraps of chat, of words of command, of spasms of coughing and of song, goes up from the dense mob enclosed between the banks. To the vocal commotion is added the tramping of feet, the jingling of bayonets in their scabbards, of cans and drinking-cups, the rumbling and hammering of the sixty vehicles of the two convoys—fighting and regimental—that follow the two battalions. And such a thing is it that trudges and spreads itself over the climbing road that, in spite of the unbounded dome of night, one welters in the odor of a den of lions.

In the ranks one sees nothing. Sometimes, when one can lift his nose up, by grace of an eddy in the tide, one cannot help seeing the whiteness of a mess-tin, the blue steel of a helmet, the black steel of a rifle. Anon, by the dazzling jet of sparks that flies from a pocket flint-and-steel, or the red flame that expands upon the lilliputian stem of a match, one can see beyond the vivid near relief of hands and faces to the silhouetted and disordered groups of helmeted shoulders, swaying like surges that would storm the sable stronghold of the night. Then, all goes out, and while each tramping soldier's legs swing to and fro, his eye is fixed inflexibly upon the conjectural situation of the back that dwells in front of him.

After several halts, when we have allowed ourselves to collapse on our haversacks at the foot of the stacked rifles—stacks that form on the call of the whistle with feverish haste and exasperating delay, through our blindness in that atmosphere of ink-dawn reveals itself, extends, and acquires the domain of Space. The walls of the Shadow crumble in vague ruin. Once more we pass under the grand panorama of the day's unfolding upon the ever-wandering horde that we are.

We emerge at last from this night of marching, across concentric circles as it seems, of darkness less dark, then of half-shadow, then of gloomy light. Legs have a wooden stiffness, backs are benumbed, shoulders bruised. Faces are still so gray or so black, one would say they had but half rid themselves of the night. Now, indeed, one never throws it off altogether.

It is into new quarters that the great company is going—this time to rest. What will the place be like that we have to live in for eight days? It is called, they say—but nobody is certain of anything—Gauchin-l'Abbe. We have heard wonders about it—"It appears to be just it."

In the ranks of the companies whose forms and features one begins to make out in the birth of morning, and to distinguish the lowered heads and yawning mouths, some voices are heard in still higher praise. "There never were such quarters. The Brigade's there, and the court-martial. You can get anything in the shops."—"If the Brigade's there, we're all right."—

"Think we can find a table for the squad?"—"Everything you want, I tell you."

A pessimist prophet shakes his head: "What these quarters'll be like where we've never been, I don't know," he says. "What I do know is that it'll be like the others."

But we don't believe him, and emerging from the fevered turmoil of the night, it seems to all that it is a sort of Promised Land we are approaching by degrees as the light brings us out of the east and the icy air towards the unknown village.

At the foot of a bill in the half-light, we reach some houses, still slumbering and wrapped in heavy grayness.

"There it is!"

Poof! We've done twenty-eight kilometers in the night. But what of that? There is no halt. We go past the houses, and they sink back again into their vague vapors and their mysterious shroud.

"Seems we've got to march a long time yet. It's always there, there, there!"

We march like machines, our limbs invaded by a sort of petrified torpor; our joints cry aloud, and force us to make echo.

Day comes slowly, for a blanket of mist covers the earth. It is so cold that the men dare not sit down during the halts, though overborne by weariness, and they pace to and fro in the damp obscurity like ghosts. The besom of a biting wintry wind whips our skin, sweeps away and scatters our words and our sighs.

At last the sun pierces the reek that spreads over us and soaks what it touches, and something like a fairy glade opens out in the midst of this gloom terrestrial. The regiment stretches itself and wakes up in truth, with slow-lifted faces to the gilded silver of the earliest rays. Quickly, then, the sun grows fiery, and now it is too hot. In the ranks we pant and sweat, and our grumbling is louder even than just now, when our teeth were chattering and the fog wet-sponged our hands and faces.

It is a chalk country through which we are passing on this torrid forenoon—"They mend this road with lime, the dirty devils!" The road has become blinding—a long-drawn cloud of dessicated chalk and dust that rises high above our columns and powders us as we go. Faces turn red, and shine as though varnished; some of the full-blooded ones might be plastered with vaseline. Cheeks and foreheads are coated with a rusty paste which agglutinates and cracks. Feet lose their dubious likeness to feet and might have paddled in a mason's mortar-trough. Haversacks and rifles are powdered in white, and our legion leaves to left and right a long milky track on the bordering grass. And to crown all—"To the right! A convoy!"

We bear to the right, hurriedly, and not without bumpings. The convoy of lorries, a long chain of foursquare and huge projectiles, rolling up with diabolical din, hurls itself along the road. Curse it! One after another, they gather up the thick carpet of white powder that upholsters the ground and send it broadcast over our shoulders! Now we are garbed in a stuff of light gray and our faces are pallid masks, thickest on the eyebrows and mustaches, on beards, and the cracks of wrinkles. Though still ourselves, we look like strange old men.

"When we're old buffers, we shall be as ugly as this," says Tirette.

"Tu craches blanc," declares Biquet. [note 1]

When a halt puts us out of action, you might take us for rows of plaster statues, with some dirty indications of humanity showing through.

We move again, silent and chagrined. Every step becomes hard to complete. Our faces assume congealed and fixed grimaces under the wan leprosy of dust. The unending effort contracts us and quite fills us with dismal weariness and disgust.

We espy at last the long-sought oasis. Beyond a hill, on a still higher one, some slated roofs peep from clusters of foliage as brightly green as a salad. The village is there, and our looks embrace it, but we are not there yet. For a long time it seems to recede as fast as the regiment crawls towards it.

At long last, on the stroke of noon, we reach the quarters that had begun to appear a pretense and a legend. In regular step and with rifles on shoulders, the regiment floods the street of Gauchin-l'Abbe right to its edges. Most of the villages of the Pas du Calais are composed of a single street, but such a street! It is often several kilometers long. In this one, the street divides in front of the mairie and forms two others, so that the hamlet becomes a big Y, brokenly bordered by low-built dwellings.

The cyclists, the officers, the orderlies, break away from the long moving mass. Then, as they come up, a few of the men at a time are swallowed up by the barns, the still available houses being reserved for officers and departments. Our half-company is led at first to the end of the village, and then—by some misunderstanding among the quartermasters—back to the other end, the one by which we entered. This oscillation takes up time, and the squad, dragged thus from north to south and from south to north, heavily fatigued and irritated by wasted walking, evinces feverish impatience. For it is supremely important to be installed and set free as early as possible if we are to carry out the plan we have cherished so long—to find a native with some little place to let, and a table where the squad can have its meals. We have talked a good deal about this idea and its delightful advantages. We have taken counsel, subscribed to a common fund, and decided that this time we will take the header into the additional outlay.

But will it be possible? Very many places are already snapped up. We are not the only ones to bring our dream of comfort here, and it will be a race for that table. Three companies are coming in after ours, but four were here before us, and there are the officers, the cooks of the hospital staff for the Section, and the clerks, the drivers, the orderlies and others, official cooks of the sergeants' mess, and I don't know how many more. All these men are more influential than the soldiers of the line, they have more mobility and more money, and can bring off their schemes beforehand. Already, while we march four abreast towards the barn assigned to the squad, we see some of these jokers across the conquered thresholds, domestically busy.

Tirette imitates the sounds of lowing and bleating—"There's our cattle-shed." A fairly big barn. The chopped straw smells of night-soil, and our feet stir up clouds of dust. But it is almost enclosed. We choose our places and cast off our equipment.

Those who dreamed yet once again of a special sort of Paradise sing low—yet once again. "Look now, it seems as ugly as the other places."—"It's something like the same."—"Naturally."

But there is no time to waste in talking. The thing is to get clear and be after the others with all strength and speed. We hurry out. In spite of broken backs and aching feet, we set ourselves savagely to this last effort on which the comfort of a week depends.

The squad divides into two patrols and sets off at the double, one to left and one to right along the street, which is already obstructed by busy questing poilus; and all the groups see and watch each other—and hurry. In places there are collisions, jostlings, and abuse.

"Let's begin down there at once, or our goose'll be cooked!" I have an impression of a kind of fierce battle between all the soldiers, in the streets of the village they have just

occupied. "For us," says Marthereau, "war is always struggling and fighting—always, always."

We knock at door after door, we show ourselves timidly, we offer ourselves like undesirable goods. A voice arises among us, "You haven't a bit of a corner, madame, for some soldiers? We would pay."

"No—you see, I've got officers—under-officers, that is—you see, it's the mess for the band, and the secretaries, and the gentlemen of the ambulance—"

Vexation after vexation. We close again, one after the other, all the doors we had half-opened, and look at each other, on the wrong side of the threshold, with dwindling hope in our eyes.

"Bon Dieu! You'll see that we shan't find anything," growls Barque. "Damn those chaps that got on the midden before us!"

The human flood reaches high-water mark everywhere. The three streets are all growing dark as each overflows into another. Some natives cross our path, old men or ill-shapen, contorted in their walk, stunted in the face; and even young people, too, over whom hovers the mystery of secret disorders or political connections. As for the petticoats, there are old women and many young ones—fat, with well-padded cheeks, and equal to geese in their whiteness.

Suddenly, in an alley between two houses, I have a fleeting vision of a woman who crossed the shadowy gap—Eudoxie! Eudoxie, the fairy woman whom Lamuse hunted like a satyr, away back in the country, that morning we brought back Volpatte wounded, and Fouillade, the woman I saw leaning from the spinney's edge and bound to Farfadet in a mutual smile. It is she whom I just glimpsed like a gleam of sunshine in that alley. But the gleam was eclipsed by the tail of a wall, and the place thereof relapsed upon gloom. She here, already! Then she has followed our long and painful trek! She is attracted—?

And she looks like one allured, too. Brief glimpse though it was of her face and its crown of fair hair, plainly I saw that she was serious, thoughtful, absentminded.

Lamuse, following close on my heels, saw nothing, and I do not tell him. He will discover quite soon enough the bright presence of that lovely flame where he would fain cast himself bodily, though it evades him like a Will-o'-th'-wisp. For the moment, besides, we are on business bent. The coveted corner must be won. We resume the hunt with the energy of despair. Barque leads us on; he has taken the matter to heart. He is trembling—you can see it in his dusty scalp. He guides us, nose to the wind. He suggests that we make an attempt on that yellow door over there. Forward!

Near the yellow door, we encounter a shape down-bent. Blaire, his foot on a milestone, is reducing the bulk of his boot with his knife, and plaster-like debris is falling fast. He might be engaged in sculpture.

"You never had your feet so white before," jeers Barque. "Rotting apart," says Blaire, "you don't know where it is, that special van?" He goes on to explain: "I've got to look up the dentist-van, so they can grapple with my ivories, and strip off the old grinders that's left. Oui, seems it's stationed here, the chop-caravan."

He folds up his knife, pockets it, and goes off alongside the wall, possessed by the thought of his jaw-bones' new lease of life.

Once more we put up our beggars' petition: "Good-day, madame; you haven't got a little corner where we could feed? We would pay, of course, we would pay—"

Through the glass of the low window we see lifted the face of an old man—like a fish in a bowl, it looks—a face curiously flat, and lined with parallel wrinkles, like a page of old manuscript.

"You've the little shed there."

"There's no room in the shed, and when the washing's done there—"

Barque seizes the chance. "It'll do very likely. May we see it?"

"We do the washing there," mutters the woman, continuing to wield her broom.

"You know," says Barque, with a smile and an engaging air, "we're not like those disagreeable people who get drunk and make themselves a nuisance. May we have a look?"

The woman has let her broom rest. She is thin and inconspicuous. Her jacket hangs from her shoulders as from a valise. Her face is like cardboard, stiff and without expression. She looks at us and hesitates, then grudgingly leads the way into a very dark little place, made of beaten earth and piled with dirty linen.

"It's splendid," cries Lamuse, in all honesty.

"Isn't she a darling, the little kiddie!" says Barque, as he pats the round cheek, like painted india-rubber, of a little girl who is staring at us with her dirty little nose uplifted in the gloom. "Is she yours, madame?"

"And that one, too?" risks Marthereau, as he espies an over-ripe infant on whose bladder-like cheeks are shining deposits of jam, for the ensnaring of the dust in the air. He offers a half-hearted caress in the direction of the moist and bedaubed countenance. The woman does not deign an answer.

So there we are, trifling and grinning, like beggars whose plea still hangs fire.

Lamuse whispers to me, in a torment of fear and cupidity, "Let's hope she'll catch on, the filthy old slut. It's grand here, and, you know, everything else is pinched!"

"There's no table," the woman says at last.

"Don't worry about the table," Barque exclaims. "Tenez! there, put away in that corner, the old door; that would make us a table."

"You're not going to trail me about and upset all my work!" replies the cardboard woman suspiciously, and with obvious regret that she had not chased us away immediately.

"Don't worry, I tell you. Look, I'll show you. Hey, Lamuse, old cock, give me a hand."

Under the displeased glances of the virago we place the old door on a couple of barrels.

"With a bit of a rub-down," says I, "that will be perfect."

"Eh, oui, maman, a flick with a brush'll do us instead of tablecloth."

The woman hardly knows what to say; she watches us spitefully: "There's only two stools, and how many are there of you?"

"About a dozen."

"A dozen. Jesus Maria!"

"What does it matter? That'll be all right, seeing there's a plank here—and that's a bench ready-made, eh, Lamuse?"

"Course," says Lamuse.

"I want that plank," says the woman. "Some soldiers that were here before you have tried already to take it away."

"But us, we're not thieves," suggests Lamuse gently, so as not to irritate the creature that has our comfort at her disposal.

"I don't say you are, but soldiers, vous savez, they smash everything up. Oh, the misery of this war!"

"Well then, how much'll it be, to hire the table, and to heat up a thing or two on the stove?"

"It'll be twenty sous a day," announces the hostess with restraint, as though we were wringing that amount from her.

"It's dear," says Lamuse.

"It's what the others gave me that were here, and they were very kind, too, those gentlemen, and it was worth my while to cook for them. I know it's not difficult for soldiers. If you think it's too much, it's no job to find other customers for this room and this table and the stove, and who wouldn't be in twelves. They're coming along all the time, and they'd pay still more, if I wanted. A dozen!—"

Lamuse hastens to add, "I said 'It's dear,' but still, it'll do, eh, you others?" On this downright question we record our votes.

"We could do well with a drop to drink," says Lamuse. "Do you sell wine?"

"No," said the woman, but added, shaking with anger, "You see, the military authority forces them that's got wine to sell it at fifteen sous! Fifteen sous! The misery of this cursed war! One loses at it, at fifteen sous, monsieur. So I don't sell any wine. I've got plenty for ourselves. I don't say but sometimes, and just to oblige, I don't allow some to people that one knows, people that knows what things are, but of course, messieurs, not at fifteen sous."

Lamuse is one of those people "that knows what things are." He grabs at his water-bottle, which is hanging as usual on his hip. "Give me a liter of it. That'll be what?"

"That'll be twenty-two sous, same as it cost me. But you know it's just to oblige you, because you're soldiers."

Barque, losing patience, mutters an aside. The woman throws him a surly glance, and makes as if to hand Lamuse's bottle back to him. But Lamuse, launched upon the hope of drinking wine at last, so that his cheeks redden as if the draught already pervaded them with its grateful hue, hastens to intervene—

"Don't be afraid—it's between ourselves, la mere, we won't give you away."

She raves on, rigid and bitter, against the limited price on wine; and, overcome by his lusty thirst, Lamuse extends the humiliation and surrender of conscience so far as to say, "No help for it, madame! It's a military order, so it's no use trying to understand it."

She leads us into the store-room. Three fat barrels occupy it in impressive rotundity. "Is this your little private store?"

"She knows her way about, the old lady," growls Barque.

The shrew turns on her heel, truculent: "Would you have me ruin myself by this miserable war? I've about enough of losing money all ways at once."

"How?" insists Barque.

"I can see you're not going to risk your money!"

"That's right—we only risk our skins."

We intervene, disturbed by the tone of menace for our present concern that the conversation has assumed. But the door of the wine-cellar is shaken, and a man's voice comes through. "Hey, Palmyra!" it calls.

The woman hobbles away, discreetly leaving the door open. "That's all right—we've taken root!" Lamuse says.

"What dirty devils these, people are!" murmurs Barque, who finds his reception hard to stomach.

"It's shameful and sickening," says Marthereau.

"One would think it was the first time you'd had any of it!"

"And you, old gabbler," chides Barque, "that says prettily to the wine-robber, 'Can't be helped, it's a military order'! Gad, old man, you're not short of cheek!"

"What else could I do or say? We should have had to go into mourning for our table and our wine. She could make us pay forty sous for the wine, and we should have had it all the same, shouldn't we? Very well, then, got to think ourselves jolly lucky. I'll admit I'd no confidence, and I was afraid it was no go."

"I know; it's the same tale everywhere and always, but all the same—"

"Damn the thieving natives, ah, oui! Some of 'em must be making fortunes. Everybody can't go and get killed."

"Ah, the gallant people of the East!"

"Yes, and the gallant people of the North!"

"Who welcome us with open arms!"

"With open hands, yes—"

"I tell you," Marthereau says again, "it's a shame and it's sickening."

"Shut it up—there's the she-beast coming back." We took a turn round to quarters to announce our success, and then went shopping. When we returned to our new dining-room, we were hustled by the preparations for lunch. Barque had been to the rations distribution, and had managed, thanks to personal relations with the cook (who was a conscientious objector to fractional divisions), to secure the potatoes and meat that formed the rations for all the fifteen men of the squad. He had bought some lard—a little lump for fourteen sous—and some one was frying. He had also acquired some green peas in tins, four tins. Mesnil Andre's tin of veal in jelly would be a hors-d'oeuvre.

"And not a dirty thing in all the lot!" said Lamuse, enchanted.

We inspected the kitchen. Barque was moving cheerfully about the iron Dutch oven whose hot and steaming bulk furnished all one side of the room.

"I've added a stewpan on the quiet for the soup," he whispered to me. Lifting the lid of the stove—"Fire isn't too hot. It's half an hour since I chucked the meat in, and the water's clean yet."

A minute later we heard some one arguing with the hostess. This extra stove was the matter in dispute. There was no more room left for her on her stove. They had told her they would only need a casserole, and she had believed them. If she had known they were going to make trouble she would not have let the room to them. Barque, the good fellow, replied jokingly, and succeeded in soothing the monster.

One by one the others arrived. They winked and rubbed their hands together, full of toothsome anticipation, like the guests at a wedding-breakfast. As they break away from the dazzling light outside and penetrate this cube of darkness, they are blinded, and stand like bewildered owls for several minutes.

"It's not too brilliant in here," says Mesnil Joseph. "Come, old chap, what do you want?" The others exclaim in chorus, "We're damned well off here." And I can see heads nodding assent in the cavern's twilight.

An incident: Farfadet having by accident rubbed against the damp and dirty wall, his shoulder has brought away from it a smudge so big and black that it can be seen even here. Farfadet, so careful of his appearance, growls, and in avoiding a second contact with the wall, knocks the table so that his spoon drops to the ground. Stooping, he fumbles among the loose earth, where dust and spiders' webs for years have silently fallen. When he recovers his spoon it is almost black, and webby threads hang from it. Evidently it is disastrous to let anything fall on the ground. One must live here with great care.

Lamuse brings down his fat hand, like a pork-pie, between two of the places at table. "Allons, a table!" We fall to. The meal is abundant and of excellent quality. The sound of conversation mingles with those of emptying bottles and filling jaws. While we taste the joy of eating at a table, a glimmer of light trickles through a vent-hole, and wraps in dusty dawn a piece of the atmosphere and a patch of the table, while its reflex lights up a plate, a cap's peak, an eye. Secretly I take stock of this gloomy little celebration that overflows with gayety. Biquet is telling about his suppliant sorrows in quest of a washerwoman who would agree to do him the good turn of washing some linen, but "it was too damned dear." Tulacque describes the queue outside the grocer's. One might not go in; customers were herded outside, like sheep. "And although you were outside, if you weren't satisfied, and groused too much, they chased you off."

Any news yet? It is said that severe penalties have been imposed on those who plunder the population, and there is already a list of convictions. Volpatte has been sent down. Men of Class '93 are going to be sent to the rear, and Pepere is one of them.

When Barque brings in the harvest of the fry-pan, he announces that our hostess has soldiers at her table—ambulance men of the machine-guns. "They thought they were the best off, but it's us that's that," says Fouillade with decision, lolling grandly in the darkness of the narrow and tainted hole where we are just as confusedly heaped together as in a dug-out. But who would think of making the comparison?

"Vous savez pas," says Pepin, "the chaps of the 9th, they're in clover! An old woman has taken them in for nothing, because of her old man that's been dead fifty years and was

a rifleman once on a time. Seems she's even given them a rabbit for nix, and they're just worrying it jugged."

"There's good sorts everywhere. But the boys of the 9th had famous luck to fall into the only shop of good sorts in the whole village."

Palmyra comes with the coffee, which she supplies. She thaws a little, listens to us, and even asks questions in a supercilious way: "Why do you call the adjutant 'le juteux'?"

Barque replies sententiously, "'Twas ever thus."

When she has disappeared, we criticize our coffee. "Talk about clear! You can see the sugar ambling round the bottom of the glass."—"She charges six sous for it."—"It's filtered water."

The door half opens, and admits a streak of light. The face of a little boy is defined in it. We entice him in like a kitten and give him a bit of chocolate.

Then, "My name's Charlie," chirps the child. "Our house, that's close by. We've got soldiers, too. We always had them, we had. We sell them everything they want. Only, voila, sometimes they get drunk."

"Tell me, little one, come here a bit," says Cocon, taking the boy between his knees. "Listen now. Your papa, he says, doesn't he, 'Let's hope the war goes on,' eh?" [note 2]

"Of course," says the child, tossing his head, "because we're getting rich. He says, by the end of May, we shall have got fifty thousand francs."

"Fifty thousand francs! Impossible!"

"Yes, yes!" the child insists, stamping, "he said it to mamma. Papa wished it could be always like that. Mamma, sometimes, she isn't sure, because my brother Adolphe is at the front. But we're going to get him sent to the rear, and then the war can go on."

These confidences are disturbed by sharp cries, coming from the rooms of our hosts. Biquet the mobile goes to inquire. "It's nothing," says he, coming back; "it's the good man slanging the woman because she doesn't know how to do things, he says, because she's made the mustard in a tumbler, and he never heard of such a thing, he says."

We get up, and leave the strong odor of pipes, wine, and stale coffee in our cave. As soon as we have crossed the threshold, a heaviness of heat puffs in our faces, fortified by the mustiness of frying that dwells in the kitchen and emerges every time the door is opened. We pass through legions of flies which, massed on the walls in black hordes, fly abroad in buzzing swarms as we pass: "It's beginning again like last year! Flies outside, lice inside.—"

"And microbes still farther inside!"

In a corner of this dirty little house and its litter of old rubbish, its dusty debris of last year and the relics of so many summers gone by, among the furniture and household gear, something is moving. It is an old simpleton with a long bald neck, pink and rough, making you think of a fowl's neck which has prematurely molted through disease. His profile is that of a hen, too—no chin and a long nose. A gray overlay of beard felts his receded cheek, and you see his heavy eyelids, rounded and horny, move up and down like shutters on the dull beads of his eyes.

Barque has already noticed him: "Watch him—he's a treasure-seeker. He says there's one somewhere in this hovel that he's stepfather to. You'll see him directly go on all-fours and push his old phizog in every corner there is. Tiens, watch him."

With the aid of his stick, the old man proceeded to take methodical soundings. He tapped along the foot of the walls and on the floor-tiles.. He was hustled by the coming and going of the occupants of the house, by callers, and by the swing of Palmyra's broom; but she let him alone and said nothing, thinking to herself, no doubt, that the exploitation of the national calamity is a more profitable treasure than problematical caskets.

Two gossips are standing in a recess and exchanging confidences in low voices, hard by an old map of Russia that is peopled with flies. "Oui, but it's with the Picon bitters that you've got to be careful. If you haven't got a light touch, you can't get your sixteen glasses out of a bottle, and so you lose too much profit. I don't say but what one's all right in one's purse, even so, but one doesn't make enough. To guard against that, the retailers ought to agree among themselves, but the understanding's so difficult to bring off, even when it's in the general interest."

Outside there is torrid sunshine, riddled with flies. The little beasts, quite scarce but a few days ago, multiply everywhere the murmur of their minute and innumerable engines. I go out in the company of Lamuse; we are going for a saunter. One can be at peace today —it is complete rest, by reason of the overnight march. We might sleep, but it suits us much better to use the rest for an extensive promenade. To-morrow, the exercise and fatigues will get us again. There are some, less lucky than we, who are already caught in the cogwheels of fatigue. To Lamuse, who invites him to come and stroll with us, Corvisart replies, screwing up the little round nose that is laid flatly on his oblong face like a cork, "Can't—I'm on manure!" He points to the shovel and broom by whose help he is performing his task of scavenger and night-soil man.

We walk languidly. The afternoon lies heavy on the drowsy land and on stomachs richly provided and embellished with food. The remarks we exchange are infrequent.

Over there, we hear noises. Barque has fallen a victim to a menagerie of housewives; and the scene is pointed by a pale little girl, her hair tied behind in a pencil of tow and her mouth embroidered with fever spots, and by women who are busy with some unsavory job of washing in the meager shade before their doors.

Six men go by, led by a quartermaster corporal. They carry heaps of new greatcoats and bundles of boots. Lamuse regards his bloated and horny feet—"I must have some new sheds, and no mistake; a bit more and you'll see my splay-feet through these ones. Can't go marching on the skin of my tongs, eh?"

An aeroplane booms overhead. We follow its evolutions with our faces skyward, our necks twisted, our eyes watering at the piercing brightness of the sky.

Lamuse declares to me, when we have brought our gaze back to earth, "Those machines'll never become practical, never."

"How can you say that? Look at the progress they've made already, and the speed of it."

"Yes, but they'll stop there. They'll never do any better, never."

This time I do not challenge the dull and obstinate denial that ignorance opposes to the promise of progress, and I let my big comrade alone in his stubborn belief that the wonderful effort of science and industry has been suddenly cut short.

Having thus begun to reveal to me his inmost thoughts, Lamuse continues. Coming nearer and lowering his head, he says to me, "You know she's here—Eudoxie?"

"Ah!" said I.

"Yes, old chap. You never notice anything, you don't, but I noticed," and Lamuse smiles at me indulgently. "Now, do you catch on? If she's come here, it's because we interest her, eh? She's followed us for one of us, and don't you forget it."

He gets going again. "My boy, d'you want to know what I say? She's come after me."

"Are you sure of it, old chap?"

"Yes," says the ox-man, in a hollow voice. "First, I want her. Then, twice, old man, I've found her exactly in my path, in mine, d'you understand? You may tell me that she ran away; that's because she's timid, that, yes—"

He stopped dead in the middle of the street and looked straight at me. The heavy face, greasily moist on the cheeks and nose, was serious. His rotund fist went up to the dark yellow mustache, so carefully pointed, and smoothed it tenderly. Then he continued to lay bare his heart to me "I want her; but, you know, I shall marry her all right, I shall. She's called Eudoxie Dumail. At first, I wasn't thinking of marrying her. But since I've got to know her family name, it seems to me that it's different, and I should get on all right. Ah, nom de Dieu! She's so pretty, that woman! And it's not only that she's pretty—ah!"

The huge child was overflowing with sentiment and emotion, and trying to make them speak to me. "Ah, my boy, there are times when I've just got to hold myself back with a hook," came the strained and gloomy tones, while the blood flushed to the fleshy parts of his cheeks and neck. "She's so beautiful, she's—and me I'm—she's so unlike—you'll have noticed it, surely, you that notices—she's a country girl, oui; eh bien, she's got a God knows what that's better than a Parisienne, even a toffed-up and stylish Parisienne, pas? She—as for me, I—"

He puckered his red eyebrows. He would have liked to tell me all the splendor of his thoughts, but he knew not the art of expressing himself, so he was silent. He remained alone in his voiceless emotion, as always alone.

We went forward side by side between the rows of houses. In front of the doors, drays laden with casks were drawn up. The front windows blossomed with many-hued heaps of jam-pots, stacks of tinder pipe-lighters—everything that the soldier is compelled to buy. Nearly all the natives had gone into grocery. Business had been getting out of gear locally for a long time, but now it was booming. Every one, smitten with the fever of sum-totals and dazzled by the multiplication table, plunged into trade.

Bells tolled, and the procession of a military funeral came out. A forage wagon, driven by a transport man, carried a coffin wrapped in a flag. Following, were a detachment of men, an adjutant, a padre, and a civilian.

"The poor little funeral with its tail lopped off!" said Lamuse. "Ah, those that are dead are very happy. But only sometimes, not always—voila!"

We have passed the last of the houses. In the country, beyond the end of the street, the fighting convoy and the regimental convoy have settled themselves, the traveling kitchens and jingling carts that follow them with odds and ends of equipment, the Red Cross wagons, the motor lorries, the forage carts, the baggage-master's gig. The tents of drivers and conductors swarm around the vehicles. On the open spaces horses lift their metallic eyes to the sky's emptiness, with their feet on barren earth. Four poilus are setting up a table. The open-air smithy is smoking. This heterogeneous and swarming city, planted in ruined fields whose straight or winding ruts are stiffening in the heat, is already broadly valanced with rubbish and dung.

On the edge of the camp a big, white-painted van stands out from the others in its tidy cleanliness. Had it been in the middle of a fair, one would have said it was the stylish

show where one pays more than at the others.

This is the celebrated "stomatological" van that Blaire was asking about. In point of fact, Blaire is there in front, looking at it. For some long time, no doubt, he has been going round it and gazing. Field-hospital orderly Sambremeuse, of the Division, returning from errands, is climbing the portable stair of painted wood which leads to the van door. In his arms he carries a bulky box of biscuits, a loaf of fancy bread, and a bottle of champagne. Blaire questions him—"Tell me, Sir Rump, this horse-box—is it the dentist's?"

"It's written up there," replies Sambremeuse—a little corpulent man, clean, close-shaven, and his chin starch-white. "If you can't see it, you don't want the dentist to look after your grinders, you want the vet to clean your eyesight."

Blaire comes nearer and scrutinizes the establishment. "It's a queer shop," he says. He goes nearer yet, draws back, hesitates to risk his gums in that carriage. At last he decides, puts a foot on the stair, and disappears inside the caravan.

We continue our walk, and turn into a footpath where are high, dusty bushes and the noises are subdued. The sunshine blazes everywhere; it heats and roasts the hollow of the way, spreading blinding and burning whiteness in patches, and shimmers in the sky of faultless blue.

At the first turning, almost before we had heard the light grating of a footstep, we are face to face with Eudoxie!

Lamuse utters a deep exclamation. Perhaps he fancies once more that she is looking for him, and believes that she is the gift of his destiny. He goes up to her—all the bulk of him.

She looks at him and stops, framed by the hawthorn. Her strangely slight and pale face is apprehensive, the lids tremble on her magnificent eyes. She is bareheaded, and in the hollowed neck of her linen corsage there is the dawning of her flesh. So near, she is truly enticing in the sunshine, this woman crowned with gold, and one's glance is impelled and astonished by the moon-like purity of her skin. Her eyes sparkle; her teeth, too, glisten white in the living wound of her half-open mouth, red as her heart.

"Tell me—I am going to tell you," pants Lamuse. "I like you so much—" He outstretches his arm towards the motionless, beloved wayfarer.

She starts, and replies to him, "Leave me alone—you disgust me!"

The man's hand is thrown over one of her little ones. She tries to draw it back, and shakes it to free herself. Her intensely fair hair falls loose, flaming. He draws her to him. His head bends towards her, and his lips are ready. His desire—the wish of all his strength and all his life—is to caress her. He would die that he might touch her with his lips. But she struggles, and utters a choking cry. She is trembling, and her beautiful face is disfigured with abhorrence.

I go up and put my hand on my friend's shoulder, but my intervention is not needed. Lamuse recoils and growls, vanquished.

"Are you taken that way often?" cries Eudoxie.

"No!" groans the miserable man, baffled, overwhelmed, bewildered.

"Don't do it again, vous savez!" she says, and goes off panting, and he does not even watch her go. He stands with his arms hanging, gazing at the place whence she has gone, tormented to the quick, torn from his dreams of her, and nothing left him to desire.

I lead him away and he comes in dumb agitation, sniffling and out of breath, as though he had run a long way. The mass of his big head is bent. In the pitiless light of eternal spring, he is like the poor Cyclops who roamed the shores of ancient Sicily in the beginnings of time—like a huge toy, a thing of derision, that a child's shining strength could subdue.

The itinerant wine-seller, whose barrow is hunchbacked with a barrel, has sold several liters to the men on guard duty. He disappears round the bend in the road, with his face flat and yellow as a Camembert, his scanty, thin hair frayed into dusty flakes, and so emaciated himself that one could fancy his feet were fastened to his trunk by strings through his flopping trousers.

And among the idle poilus of the guard-room at the end of the place, under the wing of the shaking and rattling signboard which serves as advertisement of the village, [note 3] a conversation is set up on the subject of this wandering buffoon.

"He has a dirty neb," says Bigornot; "and I'll tell you what I think—they've no business to let civvies mess about at the front with their pretty ringlets, and especially individuals that you don't know where they come from."

"You're quite crushing, you portable louse," replies Cornet.

"Never mind, shoe-sole face," Bigornot insists; "we trust 'em too much. I know what I'm saying when I open it."

"You don't," says Canard. "Pepere's going to the rear."

"The women here," murmurs La Mollette, "they're ugly; they're a lot of frights."

The other men on guard, their concentrated gaze roaming in space, watch two enemy aeroplanes and the intricate skeins they are spinning. Around the stiff mechanical birds up there that appear now black like crows and now white like gulls, according to the play of the light, clouds of bursting shrapnel stipple the azure, and seem like a long flight of snowflakes in the sunshine.

As we are going back, two strollers come up—Carassus and Cheyssier. They announce that mess-man Pepere is going to the rear, to be sent to a Territorial regiment, having come under the operation of the Dalbiez Act.

"That's a hint for Blaire," says Carassus, who has a funny big nose in the middle of his face that suits him ill.

In the village groups of poilus go by, or in twos, joined by the crossing bonds of converse. We see the solitary ones unite in couples, separate, then come together again with a new inspiration of talk, drawn to each other as if magnetized.

In the middle of an excited crowd white papers are waving. It is the newspaper hawker, who is selling for two sous papers which should be one sou. Fouillade is standing in the middle of the road, thin as the legs of a hare. At the corner of a house Paradis shows to the sun face pink as ham.

Biquet joins us again, in undress, with a jacket and cap of the police. He is licking his chops: "I met some pals and we've had a drink. You see, to-morrow one starts scratching again, and cleaning his old rags and his catapult. But my greatcoat!—going to be some job to filter that! It isn't a greatcoat any longer—it's armor-plate."

Montreuil, a clerk at the office, appears and hails Biquet: "Hey, riff-raff! A letter! Been chasing you an hour. You're never to be found, rotter!"

"Can't be both here and there, looney. Give us a squint." He examines the letter, balances it in his hand, and announces as he tears the envelope, "It's from the old woman."

We slacken our pace. As he reads, he follows the lines with his finger, wagging his head with an air of conviction, and his lips moving like a woman's in prayer.

The throng increases the nearer we draw to the middle of the village. We salute the commandant and the black-skirted padre who walks by the other's side like his nurse. We are questioned by Pigeon, Guenon, young Escutenaire, and Chasseur Clodore. Lamuse appears blind and deaf, and concerned only to walk.

Bizouarne, Chanrion, and Roquette arrive excitedly to announce big news—"D'you know, Pepere's going to the rear."

"Funny," says Biquet, raising his nose from his letter, "how people kid themselves. The old woman's bothered about me!" He shows me a passage in the maternal epistle: "'When you get my letter,'" he spells out, "'no doubt you will be in the cold and mud, deprived of everything, mon pauvre Eugene'" He laughs: "It's ten days since she put that down for me, and she's clean off it. We're not cold, 'cos it's been fine since this morning; and we're not miserable, because we've got a room that's good enough. We've had hard times, but we're all right now."

As we reach the kennel in which we are lodgers, we are thinking that sentence over. Its touching simplicity affects me, shows me a soul—a host of souls. Because the sun has shown himself, because we have felt a gleam and a similitude of comfort, suffering exists no longer, either of the past or the terrible future. "We're all right now." There is no more to say.

Biquet establishes himself at the table, like a gentleman, to write a reply. Carefully he lays abroad his pen ink, and paper, and examines each, then smilingly traces the strictly regular lines of his big handwriting across the meager page.

"You'd laugh," he says, "if you knew what I've written to the old woman." He reads his letter again, fondles it, and smiles to himself.

[note 1:] Pity to spoil this jest by translation, but Biquet's primary meaning was "You're cross because you've a throat like a lime-kiln." His secondary or literal meaning is obvious.—Tr.

[note 2:] See p. 34 ante; [chapter 5, note 3] another reference to the famous phrase. "Pourvu que les civils tiennent."—Tr.

[note 3:] Every French village has a plaque attached to the first house on each road of approach, giving its name and the distance to the next.—Tr.

VI

Habits

WE are enthroned in the back yard. The big hen, white as a cream cheese, is brooding in the depths of a basket near the coop whose imprisoned occupant is rummaging about. But the black hen is free to travel. She erects and withdraws her elastic neck in jerks, and advances with a large and affected gait. One can just see her profile and its twinkling spangle, and her talk appears to proceed from a metal spring. She marches, glistening

black and glossy like the love-locks of a gypsy; and as she marches, she unfolds here and there upon the ground a faint trail of chickens.

These trifling little yellow balls, kept always by a whispering instinct on the ebb-tide to safety, hurry along under the maternal march in short, sharp jerks, pecking as they go. Now the train comes to a full stop, for two of the chickens are thoughtful and immobile, careless of the parental clucking.

"A bad sign," says Paradis; "the hen that reflects is ill." And Paradis uncrosses and recrosses his legs. Beside him on the bench, Blaire extends his own, lets loose a great yawn that he maintains in placid duration, and sets himself again to observe, for of all of us he most delights in watching fowls during the brief life when they are in such a hurry to eat.

And we watch them in unison, not forgetting the shabby old cock, worn threadbare. Where his feathers have fallen appears the naked india-rubber leg, lurid as a grilled cutlet. He approaches the white sitter, which first turns her head away in tart denial, with several "No's" in a muffled rattle, and then watches him with the little blue enamel dials of her eyes.

"We're all right," says Barque.

"Watch the little ducks," says Blaire, "going along the communication trench."

We watch a single file of all-golden ducklings go past—still almost eggs on feet—their big heads pulling their little lame bodies along by the string of their necks, and that quickly. From his corner, the big dog follows them also with his deeply dark eye, on which the slanting sun has shaped a fine tawny ring.

Beyond this rustic yard and over the scalloping of the low wall, the orchard reveals itself, where a green carpet, moist and thick, covers the rich soil and is topped by a screen of foliage with a garniture of blossom, some white as statuary, others pied and glossy as knots in neckties. Beyond again is the meadow, where the shadowed poplars throw shafts of dark or golden green. Still farther again is a square patch of upstanding hops, followed by a patch of cabbages, sitting on the ground and dressed in line. In the sunshine of air and of earth we hear the bees, as they work and make music (in deference to the poets), and the cricket which, in defiance of the fable, sings with no humility and fills Space by himself.

Over yonder, there falls eddying from a poplar's peak a magpie—half white, half black, like a shred of partly-burned paper.

The soldiers outstretch themselves luxuriously on the stone bench, their eyes half closed, and bask in the sunshine that warms the basin of the big yard till it is like a bath.

"That's seventeen days we've been here! After thinking we were going away day after day!"

"One never knows," said Paradis, wagging his head and smacking his lips.

Through the yard gate that opens on to the road we see a group of poilus strolling, nose in air, devouring the sunshine; and then, all alone, Tellurure. In the middle of the street he oscillates the prosperous abdomen of which he is proprietor, and rocking on legs arched like basket-handles, he expectorates in wide abundance all around him.

"We thought, too, that we should be as badly off here as in the other quarters. But this time it's real rest, both in the time it lasts and the kind it is."

"You're not given too many exercises and fatigues."

"And between whiles you come in here to loll about."

The old man huddled up at the end of the seat—no other than the treasure-seeking grandfather whom we saw the day of our arrival—came nearer and lifted his finger. "When I was a young man, I was thought a lot of by women," he asserted, shaking his head. "I have led young ladies astray!"

"Ah!" said we, heedless, our attention taken away from his senile prattle by the timely noise of a cart that was passing, laden and laboring.

"Nowadays," the old man went on, "I only think about money."

"Ah, oui, the treasure you're looking for, papa."

"That's it," said the old rustic, though he felt the skepticism around him. He tapped his cranium with his forefinger, which he then extended towards the house. "Take that insect there," he said, indicating a little beast that ran along the plaster. "What does it say? It says, 'I am the spider that spins the Virgin's thread.'" And the archaic simpleton added, "One must never judge what people do, for one can never tell what may happen."

"That's true," replied Paradis politely. "He's funny," said Mesnil Andre, between his teeth, while he sought the mirror in his pocket to look at the facial benefit of fine weather. "He's crazy," murmured Barque in his ecstasy.

"I leave you," said the old man, yielding in annoyance.

He got up to go and look for his treasure again, entered the house that supported our backs, and left the door open, where beside the huge fireplace in the room we saw a little girl, so seriously playing with a doll that Blaire fell considering, and said, "She's right."

The games of children are a momentous preoccupation. Only the grown-ups play.

After we have watched the animals and the strollers go by, we watch the time go by, we watch everything.

We are seeing the life of things, we are present with Nature, blended with climates, mingled even with the sky, colored by the seasons. We have attached ourselves to this corner of the land where chance has held us back from our endless wanderings in longer and deeper peace than elsewhere; and this closer intercourse makes us sensible of all its traits and habits. September—the morrow of August and eve of October, most affecting of months—is already sprinkling the fine days with subtle warnings. Already one knows the meaning of the dead leaves that flit about the flat stones like a flock of sparrows.

In truth we have got used to each other's company, we and this place. So often transplanted, we are taking root here, and we no longer actually think of going away, even when we talk about it.

"The 11th Division jolly well stayed a month and a half resting," says Blaire.

"And the 375th, too, nine weeks!" replies Barque, in a tone of challenge.

"I think we shall stay here at least as long—at least, I say."

"We could finish the war here all right."

Barque is affected by the words, nor very far from believing them. "After all, it will finish some day, what!"

"After all!" repeat the others.

"To be sure, one never knows," says Paradis. He says this weakly, without deep conviction. It is, however, a saying which leaves no room for reply. We say it over again, softly, lulling ourselves with it as with an old song.

Farfadet rejoined us a moment ago. He took his place near us, but a little withdrawn all the same, and sits on an overturned tub, his chin on his fists.

This man is more solidly happy than we are. We know it well, and he knows it well. Lifting his head he has looked in turn, with the same distant gaze, at the back of the old man who went to seek his treasure, and at the group that talks of going away no more. There shines over our sensitive and sentimental comrade a sort of personal glamour, which makes of him a being apart, which gilds him and isolates him from us, in spite of himself, as though an officer's tabs had fallen on him from the sky.

His idyll with Eudoxie has continued here. We have had the proofs; and once, indeed, he spoke of it. She is not very far away, and they are very near to each other. Did I not see her the other evening, passing along the wall of the parsonage, her hair but half quenched by a mantilla, as she went obviously to a rendezvous? Did I not see that she began to hurry and to lean forward, already smiling? Although there is no more between them yet than promises and assurances, she is his, and he is the man who will hold her in his arms.

Then, too, he is going to leave us, called to the rear, to Brigade H.Q., where they want a weakling who can work a typewriter. It is official; it is in writing; he is saved. That gloomy future at which we others dare not look is definite and bright for him.

He looks at an open window and the dark gap behind it of some room or other over there, a shadowy room that bemuses him. His life is twofold in hope; he is happy, for the imminent happiness that does not yet exist is the only real happiness down here.

So a scanty spirit of envy grows around him. "One never knows," murmurs Paradis again, but with no more confidence than when before, in the straitened scene of our life to-day, he uttered those immeasurable words.

VII

Entraining

THE next day, Barque began to address us, and said: "I'll just explain to you what it is. There are some i—"

A ferocious whistle cut his explanation off short, on the syllable. We were in a railway station, on a platform. A night alarm had torn us from our sleep in the village and we had marched here. The rest was over; our sector was being changed; they were throwing us somewhere else. We had disappeared from Gauchin under cover of darkness without seeing either the place or the people, without bidding them good-by even in a look, without bringing away a last impression.

A locomotive was shunting, near enough to elbow us, and screaming full-lunged. I saw Barque's mouth, stoppered by the clamor of our huge neighbor, pronounce an oath, and I saw the other faces grimacing in deafened impotence, faces helmeted and chin-strapped, for we were sentries in the station.

"After you!" yelled Barque furiously, addressing the white-plumed whistle. But the terrible mechanism continued more imperiously than ever to drive his words back in his throat. When it ceased, and only its echo rang in our ears, the thread of the discourse was broken for ever, and Barque contented himself with the brief conclusion, "Oui."

Then we looked around us. We were lost in a sort of town. Interminable strings of trucks, trains of forty to sixty carriages, were taking shape like rows of dark-fronted houses, low built, all alike, and divided by alleys. Before us, alongside the collection of moving houses, was the main line, the limitless street where the white rails disappeared at both ends, swallowed up in distance. Sections of trains and complete trains were staggering in great horizontal columns, leaving their places, then taking them again. On every side one heard the regular hammering on the armored ground, piercing whistles, the ringing of warning bells, the solid metallic crash of the colossal cubes telescoping their steel stumps, with the counter-blows of chains and the rattle of the long carcases' vertebrae. On the ground floor of the building that arises in the middle of the station like a town hall, the hurried bell of telegraph and telephone was at work, punctuated by vocal noises. All about on the dusty ground were the goods sheds, the low stores through whose doors one could dimly see the stacked interiors—the pointsmen's cabins, the bristling switches, the hydrants, the latticed iron posts whose wires ruled the sky like music-paper; here and there the signals, and rising naked over this flat and gloomy city, two steam cranes, like steeples.

Farther away, on waste ground and vacant sites in the environs of the labyrinth of platforms and buildings, military carts and lorries were standing idle, and rows of horses, drawn out farther than one could see.

"Talk about the job this is going to be!"—"A whole army corps beginning to entrain this evening!"—"Tiens, they're coming now!"

A cloud which overspread a noisy vibration of wheels and the rumble of horses' hoofs was coming near and getting bigger in the approach to the station formed by converging buildings.

"There are already some guns on board." On some flat trucks down there, between two long pyramidal dumps of chests, we saw indeed the outline of wheels, and some slender muzzles. Ammunition wagons, guns and wheels were streaked and blotched with yellow, brown, and green.

"They're camoufles. [note 1] Down there, there are even horses painted. Look! spot that one, there, with the big feet as if he had trousers on. Well, he was white, and they've slapped some paint on to change his color."

The horse in question was standing apart from the others, which seemed to mistrust it, and displayed a grayish yellow tone, obviously with intent to deceive. "Poor devil!" said Tulacque.

"You see," said Paradis, "we not only take 'em to get killed, but mess them about first!"

"It's for their good, any way!"

"Eh oui, and us too, it's for our good!"

Towards evening soldiers arrived. From all sides they flowed towards the station. Deep-voiced non-coms. ran in front of the files. They were stemming the tide of men and massing them along the barriers or in railed squares—pretty well everywhere. The men piled their arms, dropped their knapsacks, and not being free to go out, waited, buried side by side in shadow.

The arrivals followed each other in volume that grew as the twilight deepened. Along with the troops, the motors flowed up, and soon there was an unbroken roar. Limousines glided through an enormous sea of lorries, little, middling, and big. All these cleared aside, wedged themselves in, subsided in their appointed places. A vast hum of voices and mingled noises arose from the ocean of men and vehicles that beat upon the approaches to the station and began in places to filter through.

"That's nothing yet," said Cocon, The Man of Figures. "At Army Corps Headquarters alone there are thirty officers' motors; and you don't know," he added, "how many trains of fifty trucks it takes to entrain all the Corpsmen and all the box of tricks—except, of course, the lorries, that'll join the new sector on their feet? Don't guess, flat-face. It takes ninety."

"Great Scott! And there are thirty-three Corps?"

"There are thirty-nine, lousy one!"

The turmoil increases; the station becomes still more populous. As far as the eye can make out a shape or the ghost of a shape, there is a hurly-burly of movement as lively as a panic. All the hierarchy of the non-coms. expand themselves and go into action, pass and repass like meteors, wave their bright-striped arms, and multiply the commands and counter-commands that are carried by the worming orderlies and cyclists, the former tardy, the latter maneuvering in quick dashes, like fish in water.

Here now is evening, definitely. The blots made by the uniforms of the poilus grouped about the hillocks of rifles become indistinct, and blend with the ground; and then their mass is betrayed only by the glow of pipes and cigarettes. In some places on the edge of the clusters, the little bright points festoon the gloom like illuminated streamers in a merry-making street.

Over this confused and heaving expanse an amalgam of voices rises like the sea breaking on the shore: and above this unending murmur, renewed commands, shouts, the din of a shot load or of one transferred, the crash of steam-hammers redoubling their dull endeavors, and the roaring of boilers.

In the immense obscurity, surcharged with men and with all things, lights begin everywhere to appear. These are the flash-lamps of officers and detachment leaders, and the cyclists' acetylene lamps, whose intensely white points zigzag hither and thither and reveal an outer zone of pallid resurrection.

An acetylene searchlight blazes blindingly out and depicts a dome of daylight. Other beams pierce and rend the universal gray.

Then does the station assume a fantastic air. Mysterious shapes spring up and adhere to the sky's dark blue. Mountains come into view, rough-modeled, and vast as the ruins of a town. One can see the beginning of unending rows of objects, finally plunged in night. One guesses what the great bulks may be whose outermost outlines flash forth from a black abyss of the unknown.

On our left, detachments of cavalry and infantry move ever forward like a ponderous flood. We hear the diffused obscurity of voices. We see some ranks delineated by a flash of phosphorescent light or a ruddy glimmering, and we listen to long-drawn trails of noise.

Up the gangways of the vans whose gray trunks and black mouths one sees by the dancing and smoking flame of torches, artillerymen are leading horses. There are appeals and shouts, a frantic trampling of conflict, and the angry kicking of some restive animal —insulted by its guide—against the panels of the van where he is cloistered.

Not far away, they are putting wagons on to railway trucks. Swarming humanity surrounds a hill of trusses of fodder. A scattered multitude furiously attacks great strata of bales.

"That's three hours we've been on our pins," sighs Paradis.

"And those, there, what are they?" In some snatches of light we see a group of goblins, surrounded by glowworms and carrying strange instruments, come out and then disappear.

"That's the searchlight section," says Cocon.

"You've got your considering cap on, camarade; what's it about?"

"There are four Divisions, at present, in an Army Corps," replies Cocon; "the number changes, sometimes it is three, sometimes five. Just now, it's four. And each of our Divisions," continues the mathematical one, whom our squad glories in owning, "includes three R.I.—regiments of infantry; two B.C.P.—battalions of chasseurs pied; one R.T.I.—regiment of territorial infantry—without counting the special regiments, Artillery, Engineers, Transport, etc., and not counting either Headquarters of the D.I. and the departments not brigaded but attached directly to the D.I. A regiment of the line of three battalions occupies four trains, one for H.Q., the machine-gun company, and the C.H.R. (compagnie hors rang [note 2]), and one to each battalion. All the troops won't entrain here. They'll entrain in echelons along the line according to the position of the quarters and the period of reliefs."

"I'm tired," says Tulacque. "We don't get enough solids to eat, mark you. We stand up because it's the fashion, but we've no longer either force or freshness."

"I've been getting information," Cocon goes on; "the troops—the real troops—will only entrain as from midnight. They are still mustered here and there in the villages ten kilometers round about. All the departments of the Army Corps will first set off, and the E.N.E.—elements non endivisionnes," Cocon obligingly explains, "that is, attached directly to the A.C. Among the E.N.E. you won't see the Balloon Department nor the Squadron—they're too big goods, and they navigate on their own, with their staff and officers and hospitals. The chasseurs regiment is another of these E.N.E."

"There's no regiment of chasseurs," says Barque, thoughtlessly, "it's battalions. One says 'such and such a battalion of chasseurs.'"

We can see Cocon shrugging his shoulders in the shadows, and his glasses cast a scornful gleam. "Think so, duck-neb? Then I'll tell you, since you're so clever, there are two—foot chasseurs and horse chasseurs."

"Gad! I forgot the horsemen," says Barque.

"Only them!" Cocon said. "In the E.N.E. of the Army Corps, there's the Corps Artillery, that is to say, the central artillery that's additional to that of the divisions. It includes the H.A.—heavy artillery; the T.A.—trench artillery; the A.D.—artillery depot, the armored cars, the anti-aircraft batteries—do I know, or don't I? There's the Engineers; the Military Police—to wit, the service of cops on foot and slops on horseback; the Medical Department; the Veterinary ditto; a squadron of the Draught Corps; a Territorial regiment for the guards and fatigues at H.Q.—Headquarters; the Service de l'Intendance, [note 3] and the supply column. There's also the drove of cattle, the Remount Depot, the Motor Department—talk about the swarm of soft jobs I could tell you about in an hour if I wanted to!—the Paymaster that controls the pay-offices and the Post, the Council of War, the Telegraphists, and all the electrical lot. All those have chiefs, commandants, sections and sub-sections, and they're rotten with clerks and orderlies of sorts, and all the bally box of tricks. You can see from here the sort of job the C.O. of a Corp's got!"

At this moment we were surrounded by a party of soldiers carrying boxes in addition to their equipment, and parcels tied up in paper that they bore reluctantly and anon placed on the ground, puffing.

"Those are the Staff secretaries. They are a part of the H.Q.—Headquarters—that is to say, a sort of General's suite. When they're flitting, they lug about their chests of records, their tables, their registers, and all the dirty oddments they need for their writing. Tiens! see that, there; it's a typewriter those two are carrying, the old papa and the little sausage, with a rifle threaded through the parcel. They're in three offices, and there's also the dispatch-riders' section, the Chancellerie, the A.C.T.S.—Army Corps Topographical Section—that distributes maps to the Divisions, and makes maps and plans from the aviators and the observers and the prisoners. It's the officers of all the departments who, under the orders of two colonels, form the Staff of the Army Corps. But the H.Q., properly so called, which also includes orderlies, cooks, storekeepers, workpeople, electricians, police, and the horsemen of the Escort, is bossed by a commandant."

At this moment we receive collectively a tremendous bump. "Hey, look out! Out of the way!" cries a man, by way of apology, who is being assisted by several others to push a cart towards the wagons. The work is hard, for the ground slopes up, and so soon as they cease to buttress themselves against the cart and adhere to the wheels, it slips back. The sullen men crush themselves against it in the depth of the gloom, grinding their teeth and growling, as though they fell upon some monster.

Barque, all the while rubbing his back, questions one of the frantic gang: "Think you're going to do it, old duckfoot?"

"Nom de Dieu!" roars he, engrossed in his job, "mind these setts! You're going to wreck the show!" With a sudden movement he jostles Barque again, and this time turns round on him: "What are you doing there, dung-guts, numskull?"

"Non, it can't be that you're drunk?" Barque retorts. "'What am I doing here?' It's good, that! Tell me, you lousy gang, wouldn't you like to do it too!"

"Out of the way!" cries a new voice, which precedes some men doubled up under burdens incongruous, but apparently overwhelming.

One can no longer remain anywhere. Everywhere we are in the way. We go forward, we scatter, we retire in the turmoil.

"In addition, I tell you," continues Cocon, tranquil as a scientist, "there are the Divisions, each organized pretty much like an Army Corps—"

"Oui, we know it; miss the deal!"

"He makes a fine to-do about it all, that mountebank in the horse-box on casters. What a mother-in-law he'd make!"

"I'll bet that's the Major's wrong-headed horse, the one that the vet said was a calf in process of becoming a cow."

"It's well organized, all the same, all that, no doubt about it," says Lamuse admiringly, forced back by a wave of artillerymen carrying boxes.

"That's true," Marthereau admits; "to get all this lot on the way, you've not got to be a lot of turnip-heads nor a lot of custards—Bon Dieu, look where you're putting your damned boots, you black-livered beast!"

"Talk about a flitting! When I went to live at Marcoussis with my family, there was less fuss than this. But then I'm not built that way myself."

We are silent; and then we hear Cocon saying, "For the whole French Army that holds the lines to go by—I'm not speaking of those who are fixed up at the rear, where there are twice as many men again, and services like the ambulance that cost nine million francs and can clear you seven thousand cases a day—to see them go by in trains of sixty coaches each, following each other without stopping, at intervals of a quarter of an hour, it would take forty days and forty nights."

"Ah!" they say. It is too much effort for their imagination; they lose interest and sicken of the magnitude of these figures. They yawn, and with watering eyes they follow, in the confusion of haste and shouts and smoke, of roars and gleams and flashes, the terrible line of the armored train that moves in the distance, with fire in the sky behind it.

[note 1:] The word is likely to become of international usage. It stands for the use of paint in blotches of different colors, and of branches and other things to disguise almost any object that may be visible to hostile aircraft.—Tr.

[note 2:] Non-combatant.—Tr.

[note 3:] Akin to the British A.S.C.—Tr.

VIII

On Leave

EUDORE sat down awhile, there by the roadside well, before taking the path over the fields that led to the trenches, his hands crossed over one knee, his pale face uplifted. He had no mustache under his nose—only a little flat smear over each corner of his mouth. He whistled, and then yawned in the face of the morning till the tears came.

An artilleryman who was quartered on the edge of the wood—over there where a line of horses and carts looked like a gypsies' bivouac—came up, with the well in his mind, and two canvas buckets that danced at the end of his arms in time with his feet. In front of the sleepy unarmed soldier with a bulging bag he stood fast.

"On leave?"

"Yes," said Eudore; "just back."

"Good for you," said the gunner as he made off.

"You've nothing to grumble at—with six days' leave in your water-bottle!"

And here, see, are four more men coming down the road, their gait heavy and slow, their boots turned into enormous caricatures of boots by reason of the mud. As one man they stopped on espying the profile of Eudore.

"There's Eudore! Hello, Eudore! hello, the old sport! You're back then!" they cried together, as they hurried up and offered him hands as big and ruddy as if they were hidden in woolen gloves.

"Morning, boys," said Eudore.

"Had a good time? What have you got to tell us, my boy?"

"Yes," replied Eudore, "not so bad."

"We've been on wine fatigue, and we've finished. Let's go back together, pas?"

In single file they went down the embankment of the road—arm in arm they crossed the field of gray mud, where their feet fell with the sound of dough being mixed in the kneading-trough.

"Well, you've seen your wife, your little Mariette—the only girl for you—that you could never open your jaw without telling us a tale about her, eh?"

Eudore's wan face winced.

"My wife? Yes, I saw her, sure enough, but only for a little while—there was no way of doing any better—but no luck, I admit, and that's all about it."

"How's that?"

"How? You know that we live at Villers-l'Abbaye, a hamlet of four houses neither more nor less, astraddle over the road. One of those houses is our cafe, and she runs it, or rather she is running it again since they gave up shelling the village.

"Now then, with my leave coming along, she asked for a permit to Mont-St-Eloi, where my old folks are, and my permit was for Mont-St-Eloi too. See the move?

"Being a little woman with a head-piece, you know, she had applied for her permit long before the date when my leave was expected. All the same, my leave came before her permit. Spite o' that I set off—for one doesn't let his turn in the company go by, eh? So I stayed with the old people, and waited. I like 'em well enough, but I got down in the mouth all the same. As for them, it was enough that they could see me, and it worried them that I was bored by their company-how else could it be? At the end of the sixth day—at the finish of my leave, and the very evening before returning—a young man on a bicycle, son of the Florence family, brings me a letter from Mariette to say that her permit had not yet come—"

"Ah, rotten luck," cried the audience.

"And that," continued Eudore, "there was only one thing to do.—I was to get leave from the mayor of Mont-St-Eloi, who would get it from the military, and go myself at full speed to see her at Villers."

"You should have done that the first day, not the sixth!"

"So it seems, but I was afraid we should cross and me miss her—y'see, as soon as I landed, I was expecting her all the time, and every minute I fancied I could see her at the open door. So I did as she told me."

"After all, you saw her?"

"Just one day—or rather, just one night."

"Quite sufficient!" merrily said Lamuse, and Eudore the pale and serious shook his head under the shower of pointed and perilous jests that followed.

"Shut your great mouths for five minutes, chaps."

"Get on with it, petit."

"There isn't a great lot of it," said Eudore.

"Well, then, you were saying you had got a hump with your old people?"

"Ah, yes. They had tried their best to make up for Mariette—with lovely rashers of our own ham, and plum brandy, and patching up my linen, and all sorts of little spoiled-kid tricks—and I noticed they were still slanging each other in the old familiar way! But you talk about a difference! I always had my eye on the door to see if some time or other it wouldn't get a move on and turn into a woman. So I went and saw the mayor, and set off, yesterday, towards two in the afternoon—towards fourteen o'clock I might well say, seeing that I had been counting the hours since the day before! I had just one day of my leave left then.

"As we drew near in the dusk, through the carriage window of the little railway that still keeps going down there on some fag-ends of line, I recognized half the country, and the other half I didn't. Here and there I got the sense of it, all at once, and it came back all fresh to me, and melted away again, just as if it was talking to me. Then it shut up. In the end we got out, and I found—the limit, that was—that we had to pad the hoof to the last station.

"Never, old man, have I been in such weather. It had rained for six days. For six days the sky washed the earth and then washed it again. The earth was softening and shifting, and filling up the holes and making new ones."

"Same here—it only stopped raining this morning."

"It was just my luck. And everywhere there were swollen new streams, washing away the borders of the fields as though they were lines on paper. There were hills that ran with water from top to bottom. Gusts of wind sent the rain in great clouds flying and whirling about, and lashing our hands and faces and necks.

"So you bet, when I had tramped to the station, if some one had pulled a really ugly face at me, it would have been enough to make me turn back.

"But when we did get to the place, there were several of us—some more men on leave—they weren't bound for Villers, but they had to go through it to get somewhere else. So it happened that we got there in a lump—five old cronies that didn't know each other.

"I could make out nothing of anything. They've been worse shelled over there than here, and then there was the water everywhere, and it was getting dark.

"I told you there are only four houses in the little place, only they're a good bit off from each other. You come to the lower end of a slope. I didn't know too well where I was, no more than my pals did, though they belonged to the district and had some notion of the lay of it—and all the less because of the rain falling in bucketsful.

"It got so bad that we couldn't keep from hurrying and began to run. We passed by the farm of the Alleux—that's the first of the houses—and it looked like a sort of stone ghost. Bits of walls like splintered pillars standing up out of the water; the house was shipwrecked. The other farm, a little further, was as good as drowned dead.

"Our house is the third. It's on the edge of the road that runs along the top of the slope. We climbed up, facing the rain that beat on us in the dusk and began to blind us—the cold and wet fairly smacked us in the eye, flop!—and broke our ranks like machine-guns.

"The house! I ran like a greyhound—like an African attacking. Mariette! I could see her with her arms raised high in the doorway behind that fine curtain of night and rain—of rain so fierce that it drove her back and kept her shrinking between the doorposts like a statue of the Virgin in its niche. I just threw myself forward, but remembered to give my pals the sign to follow me. The house swallowed the lot of us. Mariette laughed a little to see me, with a tear in her eye. She waited till we were alone together and then laughed

and cried all at once. I told the boys to make themselves at home and sit down, some on the chairs and the rest on the table.

"'Where are they going, ces messieurs?' asked Manette.

"'We are going to Vauvelles.'

"'Jesus!' she said, 'you'll never get there. You can't do those two miles and more in the night, with the roads washed away, and swamps everywhere. You mustn't even try to.'

"'Well, we'll go on to-morrow, then; only we must find somewhere to pass the night.'

"'I'll go with you,' I said, 'as far as the Pendu farm—they're not short of room in that shop. You'll snore in there all right, and you can start at daybreak.'

"'Right! let's get a move on so far.'

"We went out again. What a downpour! We were wet past bearing. The water poured into our socks through the boot-soles and by the trouser bottoms, and they too were soaked through and through up to the knees. Before we got to this Pendu, we meet a shadow in a big black cloak, with a lantern. The lantern is raised, and we see a gold stripe on the sleeve, and then an angry face.

"'What the hell are you doing there?' says the shadow, drawing back a little and putting one fist on his hip, while the rain rattled like hail on his hood.

"'They're men on leave for Vauvelles—they can't set off again to-night—they would like to sleep in the Pendu farm.'

"'What do you say? Sleep here?—This is the police station—I am the officer on guard and there are Boche prisoners in the buildings.' And I'll tell you what he said as well—'I must see you hop it from here in less than two seconds. Bonsoir.'

"So we right about face and started back again—stumbling as if we were boozed, slipping, puffing, splashing and bespattering ourselves. One of the boys cried to me through the wind and rain, 'We'll go back with you as far as your home, all the same. If we haven't a house we've time enough.'

"'Where will you sleep?'

"'Oh, we'll find somewhere, don't worry, for the little time we have to kill here.'

"'Yes, we'll find somewhere, all right,' I said. 'Come in again for a minute meanwhile—I won't take no—and Mariette sees us enter once more in single file, all five of us soaked like bread in soup.

"So there we all were, with only one little room to go round in and go round again—the only room in the house, seeing that it isn't a palace.

"'Tell me, madame,' says one of our friends, 'isn't there a cellar here?'

"'There's water in it,' says Mariette; 'you can't see the bottom step and it's only got two.'

"'Damn,' says the man, 'for I see there's no loft, either.'

"After a minute or two he gets up: 'Good-night, old pal,' he says to me, and they get their hats on.

"'What, are you going off in weather like this, boys?'

"'Do you think,' says the old sport, 'that we're going to spoil your stay with your wife?'

"'But, my good man—'

"'But me no buts. It's nine o'clock, and you've got to take your hook before day. So good-night. Coming, you others?'

"'Rather,' say the boys. 'Good-night all.'

"There they are at the door and opening it. Mariette and me, we look at each other—but we don't move. Once more we look at each other, and then we sprang at them. I grabbed the skirt of a coat and she a belt—all wet enough to wring out.

"'Never! We won't let you go—it can't be done.'

"'But—'

"'But me no buts,' I reply, while she locks the door."

"Then what?" asked Lamuse.

"Then? Nothing at all," replied Eudore. "We just stayed like that, very discreetly—all the night—sitting, propped up in the corners, yawning—like the watchers over a dead man. We made a bit of talk at first. From time to time some one said, 'Is it still raining?' and went and had a look, and said, 'It's still raining'—we could hear it, by the way. A big chap who had a mustache like a Bulgarian fought against sleeping like a wild man. Sometimes one or two among the crowd slept, but there was always one to yawn and keep an eye open for politeness, who stretched himself or half got up so that he could settle more comfortably.

"Mariette and me, we never slept. We looked at each other, but we looked at the others as well, and they looked at us, and there you are.

"Morning came and cleaned the window. I got up to go and look outside. The rain was hardly less. In the room I could see dark forms that began to stir and breathe hard. Mariette's eyes were red with looking at me all night. Between her and me a soldier was filling his pipe and shivering.

"Some one beats a tattoo on the window, and I half open it. A silhouette with a streaming hat appears, as though carried and driven there by the terrible force of the blast that came with it, and asks—

"'Hey, in the cafe there! Is there any coffee to be had?'

"'Coming, sir, coming,' cried Mariette.

"She gets up from her chair, a little benumbed. Without a word she looks at her self in our bit of a mirror, touches her hair lightly, and says quite simply, the good lass—

"'I am going to make coffee for everybody.'

"When that was drunk off, we had all of us to go. Besides, customers turned up every minute.

"'Hey, la p'tite mere,' they cried, shoving their noses in at the half-open window, 'let's have a coffee—or three—or four'—'and two more again,' says another voice.

"We go up to Mariette to say good-by. They knew they had played gooseberry that night most damnably, but I could see plainly that they didn't know if it would be the thing

to say something about it or just let it drop altogether.

"Then the Bulgarian made up his mind: 'We've made a hell of a mess of it for you, eh, ma p'tite dame?'

"He said that to show he'd been well brought up, the old sport.

"Mariette thanks him and offers him her hand—'That's nothing at all, sir. I hope you'll enjoy your leave.'

"And me, I held her tight in my arms and kissed her as long as I could—half a minute—discontented—my God, there was reason to be—but glad that Mariette had not driven the boys out like dogs, and I felt sure she liked me too for not doing it.

"'But that isn't all,' said one of the leave men, lifting the skirt of his cape and fumbling in his coat pocket; 'that's not all. What do we owe you for the coffees?'

"'Nothing, for you stayed the night with me; you are my guests.'

"'Oh, madame, we can't have that!'

"And how they set to to make protests and compliments in front of each other! Old man, you can say what you like—we may be only poor devils, but it was astonishing, that little palaver of good manners.

"'Come along! Let's be hopping it, eh?'

"They go out one by one. I stay till the last. Just then another passer-by begins to knock on the window—another who was dying for a mouthful of coffee. Mariette by the open door leaned forward and cried, 'One second!'

"Then she put into my arms a parcel that she had ready. 'I had bought a knuckle of ham—it was for supper—for us—for us two—and a liter of good wine. But, ma foi! when I saw there were five of you, I didn't want to divide it out so much, and I want still less now. There's the ham, the bread, and the wine. I give them to you so that you can enjoy them by yourself, my boy. As for them, we have given them enough,' she says.

"Poor Mariette," sighs Eudore. "Fifteen months since I'd seen her. And when shall I see her again? Ever?—It was jolly, that idea of hers. She crammed all that stuff into my bag—"

He half opens his brown canvas pouch.

"Look, here they are! The ham here, and the bread, and there's the booze. Well, seeing it's there, you don't know what we're going to do with it? We're going to share it out between us, eh, old pals?"

IX

The Anger of Volpatte

WHEN Volpatte arrived from his sick-leave, after two months' absence, we surrounded him. But he was sullen and silent, and tried to get away.

"Well, what about it? Volpatte, have you nothing to tell us?"

"Tell us all about the hospital and the sick-leave, old cock, from the day when you set off in your bandages, with your snout in parenthesis! You must have seen something of the official shops. Speak then, nome de Dieu!"

"I don't want to say anything at all about it," said Volpatte.

"What's that? What are you talking about?"

"I'm fed up—that's what I am! The people back there, I'm sick of them—they make me spew, and you can tell 'em so!"

"What have they done to you?"

"A lot of sods, they are!" says Volpatte.

There he was, with his head as of yore, his ears "stuck on again" and his Mongolian cheekbones—stubbornly set in the middle of the puzzled circle that besieged him; and we felt that the mouth fast closed on ominous silence meant high pressure of seething exasperation in the depth of him.

Some words overflowed from him at last. He turned round—facing towards the rear and the bases—and shook his fist at infinite space. "There are too many of them," he said between his teeth, "there are too many!" He seemed to be threatening and repelling a rising sea of phantoms.

A little later, we questioned him again, knowing well that his anger could not thus be retained within, and that the savage silence would explode at the first chance.

It was in a deep communication trench, away back, where we had come together for a meal after a morning spent in digging. Torrential rain was falling. We were muddled and drenched and hustled by the flood, and we ate standing in single file, without shelter, under the dissolving sky. Only by feats of skill could we protect the bread and bully from the spouts that flowed from every point in space; and while we ate we put our hands and faces as much as possible under our cowls. The rain rattled and bounced and streamed on our limp woven armor, and worked with open brutality or sly secrecy into ourselves and our food. Our feet were sinking farther and farther, taking deep root in the stream that flowed along the clayey bottom of the trench. Some faces were laughing, though their mustaches dripped. Others grimaced at the spongy bread and flabby meat, or at the missiles which attacked their skin from all sides at every defect in their heavy and miry armor-plate.

Barque, who was hugging his mess-tin to his heart, bawled at Volpatte: "Well then, a lot of sods, you say, that you've seen down there where you've been?"

"For instance?" cried Blaire, while a redoubled squall shook and scattered his words; "what have you seen in the way of sods?"

"There are—" Volpatte began, "and then—there are too many of them, nom de Dieu! There are—"

He tried to say what was the matter with him, but could only repeat, "There are too many of them!" oppressed and panting. He swallowed a pulpy mouthful of bread as if there went with it the disordered and suffocating mass of his memories.

"Is it the shirkers you want to talk about?"

"By God!" He had thrown the rest of his beef over the parapet, and this cry, this gasp, escaped violently from his mouth as if from a valve.

"Don't worry about the soft-job brigade, old cross-patch," advised Barque, banteringly, but not without some bitterness. "What good does it do?"

Concealed and huddled up under the fragile and unsteady roof of his oiled hood, while the water poured down its shining slopes, and holding his empty mess-tin out for the rain to clean it, Volpatte snarled, "I'm not daft—not a bit of it—and I know very well there've got to be these individuals at the rear. Let them have their dead-heads for all I care—but there's too many of them, and they're all alike, and all rotters, voila!"

Relieved by this affirmation, which shed a little light on the gloomy farrago of fury he was loosing among us, Volpatte began to speak in fragments across the relentless sheets of rain—

"At the very first village they sent me to, I saw duds, and duds galore, and they began to get on my nerves. All sorts of departments and sub-departments and managements and centers and offices and committees—you're no sooner there than you meet swarms of fools, swarms of different services that are only different in name—enough to turn your brain. I tell you, the man that invented the names of all those committees, he was wrong in his head.

"So could I help but be sick of it? Ah, mon vieux," said our comrade, musing, "all those individuals fiddle-faddling and making believe down there, all spruced up with their fine caps and officers' coats and shameful boots, that gulp dainties and can put a dram of best brandy down their gullets whenever they want, and wash themselves oftener twice than once, and go to church, and never stop smoking, and pack themselves up in feathers at night to read the newspaper—and then they say afterwards, 'I've been in the war!'"

One point above all had got hold of Volpatte and emerged from his confused and impassioned vision: "All those soldiers, they haven't to run away with their table-tools and get a bite any old way—they've got to be at their ease—they'd rather go and sit themselves down with some tart in the district, at a special reserved table, and guzzle vegetables, and the fine lady puts their crockery out all square for them on the dining-table, and their pots of jam and every other blasted thing to eat; in short, the advantages of riches and peace in that doubly-damned hell they call the Rear!"

Volpatte's neighbor shook his head under the torrents that fell from heaven and said, "So much the better for them."

"I'm not crazy—" Volpatte began again.

"P'raps, but you're not fair."

Volpatte felt himself insulted by the word. He started, and raised his head furiously, and the rain, that was waiting for the chance, took him plump in the face. "Not fair—me? Not fair—to those dung-hills?"

"Exactly, monsieur," the neighbor replied; "I tell you that you play hell with them and yet you'd jolly well like to be in the rotters' place."

"Very likely—but what does that prove, rump-face? To begin with, we, we've been in danger, and it ought to be our turn for the other. But they're always the same, I tell you; and then there's young men there, strong as bulls and poised like wrestlers, and then—there are too many of them! D'you hear? It's always too many, I say, because it is so."

"Too many? What do you know about it, vilain? These departments and committees, do you know what they are?"

"I don't know what they are," Volpatte set off again, "but I know—"

"Don't you think they need a crowd to keep all the army's affairs going?"

"I don't care a damn, but—"

"But you wish it was you, eh?" chaffed the invisible neighbor, who concealed in the depth of the hood on which the reservoirs of space were emptying either a supreme indifference or a cruel desire to take a rise out of Volpatte.

"I can't help it," said the other, simply.

"There's those that can help it for you," interposed the shrill voice of Barque; "I knew one of 'em—"

"I, too, I've seen 'em!" Volpatte yelled with a desperate effort through the storm. "Tiens! not far from the front, don't know where exactly, where there's an ambulance clearing-station and a sous-intendance—I met the reptile there."

The wind, as it passed over us, tossed him the question, "What was it?"

At that moment there was a lull, and the weather allowed Volpatte to talk after a fashion. He said: "He took me round all the jumble of the depot as if it was a fair, although he was one of the sights of the place. He led me along the passages and into the dining-rooms of houses and supplementary barracks. He half opened doors with labels on them, and said, 'Look here, and here too—look!' I went inspecting with him, but he didn't go back, like I did, to the trenches, don't fret yourself, and he wasn't coming back from them either, don't worry! The reptile, the first time I saw him he was walking nice and leisurely in the yard—'I'm in the Expenses Department,' he says. We talked a bit, and the next day he got an orderly job so as to dodge getting sent away, seeing it was his turn to go since the beginning of the war.

"On the step of the door where he'd laid all night on a feather bed, he was polishing the pumps of his monkey master—beautiful yellow pumps—rubbing 'em with paste, fairly glazing 'em, my boy. I stopped to watch him, and the chap told me all about himself. Mon vieux, I don't remember much more of the stuffing that came out of his crafty skull than I remember of the History of France and the dates we whined at school. Never, I tell you, had he been sent to the front, although he was Class 1903, [note 1] and a lusty devil at that, he was. Danger and dog-tiredness and all the ugliness of war—not for him, but for the others, oui. He knew damned well that if he set foot in the firing-line, the line would see that the beast got it, so he ran like hell from it, and stopped where he was. He said they'd tried all ways to get him, but he'd given the slip to all the captains, all the colonels, all the majors, and they were all damnably mad with him. He told me about it. How did he work it? He'd sit down all of a sudden, put on a stupid look, do the scrim-shanker stunt, and flop like a bundle of dirty linen. 'I've got a sort of general fatigue,' he'd blubber. They didn't know how to take him, and after a bit they just let him drop—everybody was fit to spew on him. And he changed his tricks according to the circumstances, d'you catch on? Sometimes he had something wrong with his foot—he was damned clever with his feet. And then he contrived things, and he knew one head from another, and how to take his opportunities. He knew what's what, he did. You could see him go and slip in like a pretty poilu among the depot chaps, where the soft jobs were, and stay there; and then he'd put himself out no end to be useful to the pals. He'd get up at three o'clock in the morning to make the juice, go and fetch the water while the others were getting their grub. At last, he'd wormed himself in everywhere, he came to be one of the family, the rotter, the carrion. He did it so he wouldn't have to do it. He seemed to me like an individual that would have earned five quid honestly with the same work and bother that he puts into forging a one-pound note. But there, he'll get his skin out of it all right, he will. At the front he'd be lost sight of in the throng of it, but he's not so stupid. Be damned to them, he says, that take their grub on the ground, and be damned to them still more when they're under it. When we've all done with fighting, he'll go back home and he'll say to his friends and neighbors, 'Here I am safe and sound,' and his pals'll be

glad, because be's a good sort, with engaging manners, contemptible creature that he is, and—and this is the most stupid thing of all—but he takes you in and you swallow him whole, the son of a bug.

"And then, those sort of beings, don't you believe there's only one of them. There are barrels of 'em in every depot, that hang on and writhe when their time comes to go, and they say, 'I'm not going,' and they don't go, and they never succeed in driving them as far as the front."

"Nothing new in all that," said Barque, "we know it, we know it!"

"Then there are the offices," Volpatte went on, engrossed in his story of travel; "whole houses and streets and districts. I saw that my little corner in the rear was only a speck, and I had full view of them. Non, I'd never have believed there'd be so many men on chairs while war was going on—"

A hand protruded from the rank and made trial of space—"No more sauce falling"—"Then we're going out, bet your life on it." So "March!" was the cry.

The storm held its peace. We filed off in the long narrow swamp stagnating in the bottom of the trench where the moment before it had shaken under slabs of rain. Volpatte's grumbling began again amidst our sorry stroll and the eddies of floundering feet. I listened to him as I watched the shoulders of a poverty-stricken overcoat swaying in front of me, drenched through and through. This time Volpatte was on the track of the police—

"The farther you go from the front the more you see of them."

"Their battlefield is not the same as ours."

Tulacque had an ancient grudge against them. "Look," he said, "how the bobbies spread themselves about to get good lodgings and good food, and then, after the drinking regulations, they dropped on the secret wine-sellers. You saw them lying in wait, with a corner of an eye on the shop-doors, to see if there weren't any poilus slipping quietly out, two-faced that they are, leering to left and to right and licking their mustaches."

"There are good ones among 'em. I knew one in my country, the Cote d'Or, where I __"

"Shut up!" was Tulacque's peremptory interruption; "they're all alike. There isn't one that can put another right."

"Yes, they're lucky," said Volpatte, "but do you think they're contented? Not a bit; they grouse. At least," he corrected himself, "there was one I met, and he was a grouser. He was devilish bothered by the drill-manual. 'It isn't worth while to learn the drill instruction,' he said, 'they're always changing it. F'r instance, take the department of military police; well, as soon as you've got the gist of it, it's something else. Ah, when will this war be over?' he says."

"They do what they're told to do, those chaps," ventured Eudore.

"Surely. It isn't their fault at all. It doesn't alter the fact that these professional soldiers, pensioned and decorated in the time when we're only civvies, will have made war in a damned funny way."

"That reminds me of a forester that I saw as well," said Volpatte, "who played hell about the fatigues they put him to. 'It's disgusting,' the fellow said to me, 'what they do with us. We're old non-coms., soldiers that have done four years of service at least. We're paid on the higher scale, it's true, but what of that? We are Officials, and yet they

humiliate us. At H.Q. they set us to cleaning, and carrying the dung away. The civilians see the treatment they inflict on us, and they look down on us. And if you look like grousing, they'll actually talk about sending you off to the trenches, like foot-soldiers! What's going to become of our prestige? When we go back to the parishes as rangers after the war—if we do come back from it—the people of the villages and forests will say, "Ah, it was you that was sweeping the streets at X—!" To get back our prestige, compromised by human injustice and ingratitude, I know well,' he says, 'that we shall have to make complaints, and make complaints and make 'em with all our might, to the rich and to the influential!' he says."

"I knew a gendarme who was all right," said Lamuse. "'The police are temperate enough in general,' he says, 'but there are always dirty devils everywhere, pas? The civilian is really afraid of the gendarme,' says he, 'and that's a fact; and so, I admit it, there are some who take advantage of it, and those ones—the tag-rag of the gendarmerie—know where to get a glass or two. If I was Chief or Brigadier, I'd screw 'em down; not half I wouldn't,' he says; 'for public opinion,' he says again, 'lays the blame on the whole force when a single one with a grievance makes a complaint.'"

"As for me," says Paradis, "one of the worst days of my life was once when I saluted a gendarme, taking him for a lieutenant, with his white stripes. Fortunately—I don't say it to console myself, but because it's probably true—fortunately, I don't think he saw me."

A silence. "Oui, 'vidently," the men murmured; "but what about it? No need to worry."

A little later, when we were seated along a wall, with our backs to the stones, and our feet plunged and planted in the ground, Volpatte continued unloading his impressions.

"I went into a big room that was a Depot office—bookkeeping department, I believe. It swarmed with tables, and people in it like in a market. Clouds of talk. All along the walls on each side and in the middle, personages sitting in front of their spread-out goods like waste-paper merchants. I put in a request to be put back into my regiment, and they said to me, 'Take your damned hook, and get busy with it.' I lit on a sergeant, a little chap with airs, spick as a daisy, with a gold-rimmed spy-glass—eye-glasses with a tape on them. He was young, but being a re-enlisted soldier, he had the right not to go to the front. I said to him, 'Sergeant!' But he didn't hear me, being busy slanging a secretary—it's unfortunate, mon garcon,' he was saying; 'I've told you twenty times that you must send one notice of it to be carried out by the Squadron Commander, Provost of the C.A., and one by way of advice, without signature, but making mention of the signature, to the Provost of the Force Publique d'Amiens and of the centers of the district, of which you have the list—in envelopes, of course, of the general commanding the district. It's very simple,' he says.

"I'd drawn back three paces to wait till he'd done with jawing. Five minutes after, I went up to the sergeant. He said to me, 'My dear sir, I have not the time to bother with you; I have many other matters to attend to.' As a matter of fact, he was all in a flummox in front of his typewriter, the chump, because he'd forgotten, he said, to press on the capital-letter lever, and so, instead of underlining the heading of his page, he'd damn well scored a line of 8's in the middle of the top. So he couldn't hear anything, and he played hell with the Americans, seeing the machine came from there.

"After that, he growled against another woolly-leg, because on the memorandum of the distribution of maps they hadn't put the names of the Ration Department, the Cattle Department, and the Administrative Convoy of the 328th D.I.

"Alongside, a fool was obstinately trying to pull more circulars off a jellygraph than it would print, doing his damnedest to produce a lot of ghosts that you could hardly read. Others were talking: 'Where are the Parisian fasteners?' asked a toff. And they don't call

things by their proper names: 'Tell me now, if you please, what are the elements quartered at X—?' The elements! What's all that sort of babble?" asked Volpatte.

"At the end of the big table where these fellows were that I've mentioned and that I'd been to, and the sergeant floundering about behind a hillock of papers at the top of it and giving orders, a simpleton was doing nothing but tap on his blotting-pad with his hands. His job, the mug, was the department of leave-papers, and as the big push had begun and all leave was stopped, he hadn't anything to do—'Capital!' he says.

"And all that, that's one table in one room in one department in one depot. I've seen more, and then more, and more and more again. I don't know, but it's enough to drive you off your nut, I tell you."

"Have they got brisques?" [note 2]

"Not many there, but in the department of the second line every one had 'em. You had museums of 'em there—whole Zoological Gardens of stripes."

"Prettiest thing I've seen in the way of stripes," said Tulacque, "was a motorist, dressed in cloth that you'd have said was satin, with new stripes, and the leathers of an English officer, though a second-class soldier as he was. With his finger on his cheek, he leaned with his elbows on that fine carriage adorned with windows that he was the valet de chambre of. He'd have made you sick, the dainty beast. He was just exactly the poilu that you see pictures of in the ladies' papers—the pretty little naughty papers."

Each has now his memories, his tirade on this much-excogitated subject of the shirkers, and all begin to overflow and to talk at once. A hubbub surrounds the foot of the mean wall where we are heaped like bundles, with a gray, muddy, and trampled spectacle lying before us, laid waste by rain.

"—orderly in waiting to the Road Department, then at the Bakery, then cyclist to the Revictualing Department of the Eleventh Battery."

"—every morning he had a note to take to the Service de l'Intendance, to the Gunnery School, to the Bridges Department, and in the evening to the A.D. and the A.T.—that was all."

"—when I was coming back from leave,' said that orderly, 'the women cheered us at all the level-crossing gates that the train passed.' 'They took you for soldiers,' I said."

"—'Ah,' I said, 'you're called up, then, are you?' 'Certainly,' he says to me, 'considering that I've been a round of meetings in America with a Ministerial deputation. P'raps it's not exactly being called up, that? Anyway, mon ami,' he says, 'I don't pay any rent, so I must be called up.' 'And me—'"

"To finish," cries Volpatte, silencing the hum with his authority of a traveler returned from "down there," "to finish, I saw a whole legion of 'em all together at a blow-out. For two days I was a sort of helper in the kitchen of one of the centers of the C.O.A., 'cos they couldn't let me do nothing while waiting for my reply, which didn't hurry, seeing they'd sent another inquiry and a super-inquiry after it, and the reply had too many halts to make in each office, going and coming.

"In short, I was cook in the shop. Once I waited at table, seeing that the head cook had just got back from leave for the fourth time and was tired. I saw and I heard those people every time I went into the dining-room, that was in the Prefecture, and all that hot and illuminated row got into my head. They were only auxiliaries in there, but there were plenty of the armed service among the number, too. They were almost all old men, with a few young ones besides, sitting here and there.

"I'd begun to get about enough of it when one of the broomsticks said, 'The shutters must be closed; it's more prudent.' My boy, they were a lump of a hundred and twenty-five miles from the firing-line, but that pock-marked puppy he wanted to make believe there was danger of bombardment by aircraft—"

"And there's my cousin," said Tulacque, fumbling, "who wrote to me—Look, here's what he says: 'Mon cher Adolphe, here I am definitely settled in Paris as attache to Guard-Room 60. While you are down there. I must stay in the capital at the mercy of a Taube or a Zeppelin!'"

The phrase sheds a tranquil delight abroad, and we assimilate it like a tit-bit, laughing.

"After that," Volpatte went on, "those layers of soft-jobbers fed me up still more. As a dinner it was all right—cod, seeing it was Friday, but prepared like soles a la Marguerite —I know all about it. But the talk!—"

"They call the bayonet Rosalie, don't they?"

"Yes, the padded luneys. But during dinner these gentlemen talked above all about themselves. Every one, so as to explain why he wasn't somewhere else, as good as said (but all the while saying something else and gorging like an ogre), 'I'm ill, I'm feeble, look at me, ruin that I am. Me, I'm in my dotage.' They were all seeking inside themselves to find diseases to wrap themselves up in—'I wanted to go to the war, but I've a rupture, two ruptures, three ruptures.' Ah, non, that feast!—'The orders that speak of sending everybody away,' explained a funny man, 'they're like the comedies,' he explained, 'there's always a last act to clear up all the jobbery of the others. That third act is this paragraph, "Unless the requirements of the Departments stand in the way."' There was one that told this tale, 'I had three friends that I counted on to give me a lift up. I was going to apply to them; but, one after another, a little before I put my request, they were killed by the enemy; look at that,' he says, 'I've no luck!' Another was explaining to another that, as for him, he would very much have liked to go, but the surgeon-major had taken him round the waist to keep him by force in the depot with the auxiliary. 'Eh bien,' he says, 'I resigned myself. After all, I shall be of greater value in putting my intellect to the service of the country than in carrying a knapsack.' And him that was alongside said, 'Oui,' with his headpiece feathered on top. He'd jolly well consented to go to Bordeaux at the time when the Boches were getting near Paris, and then Bordeaux became the stylish place; but afterwards he returned firmly to the front—to Paris—and said something like this, 'My ability is of value to France; it is absolutely necessary that I guard it for France.'

"They talked about other people that weren't there—of the commandant who was getting an impossible temper, and they explained that the more imbecile he got the harsher he got; and the General that made unexpected inspections with the idea of kicking all the soft-jobbers out, but who'd been laid up for eight days, very ill—'he's certainly going to die; his condition no longer gives rise to any uneasiness,' they said, smoking the cigarettes that Society swells send to the depots for the soldiers at the front. 'D'you know,' they said, 'little Frazy, who is such a nice boy, the cherub, he's at last found an excuse for staying behind. They wanted some cattle slaughterers for the abattoir, and he's enlisted himself in there for protection, although he's got a University degree and in spite of being an attorney's clerk. As for Flandrin's son, he's succeeded in getting himself attached to the roadmenders.—Roadmender, him? Do you think they'll let him stop so?' 'Certain sure,' replies one of the cowardly milksops. 'A road-mender's job is for a long time.'

"Talk about idiots," Marthereau growls.

"And they were all jealous, I don't know why, of a chap called Bourin. Formerly he moved in the best Parisian circles. He lunched and dined in the city. He made eighteen calls a day, and fluttered about the drawing-rooms from afternoon tea till daybreak. He

was indefatigable in leading cotillons, organizing festivities, swallowing theatrical shows, without counting the motoring parties, and all the lot running with champagne. Then the war came. So he's no longer capable, the poor boy, of staying on the look-out a bit late at an embrasure, or of cutting wire. He must stay peacefully in the warm. And then, him, a Parisian, to go into the provinces and bury himself in the trenches! Never in this world! 'I realize, too,' replied an individual, 'that at thirty-seven I've arrived at the age when I must take care of myself!' And while the fellow was saying that, I was thinking of Dumont the gamekeeper, who was forty-two, and was done in close to me on Hill 132, so near that after he got the handful of bullets in his head, my body shook with the trembling of his."

"And what were they like with you, these thieves?"

"To hell with me, it was, but they didn't show it too much, only now and again when they couldn't hold themselves in. They looked at me out of the corner of their eyes, and took damn good care not to touch me in passing, for I was still war-mucky.

"It disgusted me a bit to be in the middle of that heap of good-for-nothings, but I said to myself, 'Come, it's only for a bit, Firmin.' There was just one time that I very near broke out with the itch, and that was when one of 'em said, 'Later, when we return, if we do return.'—NO! He had no right to say that. Sayings like that, before you let them out of your gob, you've got to earn them; it's like a decoration. Let them get cushy jobs, if they like, but not play at being men in the open when they've damned well run away. And you hear 'em discussing the battles, for they're in closer touch than you with the big bugs and with the way the war's managed; and afterwards, when you return, if you do return, it's you that'll be wrong in the middle of all that crowd of humbugs, with the poor little truth that you've got.

"Ah, that evening, I tell you, all those heads in the reek of the light, the foolery of those people enjoying life and profiting by peace! It was like a ballet at the theater or the make-believe of a magic lantern. There were—there were—there are a hundred thousand more of them," Volpatte at last concluded in confusion.

But the men who were paying for the safety of the others with their strength and their lives enjoyed the wrath that choked him, that brought him to bay in his corner, and overwhelmed him with the apparitions of shirkers.

"Lucky he doesn't start talking about the factory hands who've served their apprenticeship in the war, and all those who've stayed at home under the excuse of National Defense, that was put on its feet in five secs!" murmured Tirette; "he'd keep us going with them till Doomsday."

"You say there are a hundred thousand of them, flea-bite," chaffed Barque. "Well, in 1914—do you hear me?—Millerand, the War Minister, said to the M.P.'s, 'There are no shirkers.'"

"Millerand!" growled Volpatte. "I tell you, I don't know the man; but if he said that, he's a dirty sloven, sure enough!"

"One is always," said Bertrand, "a shirker to some one else."

"That's true; no matter what you call yourself, you'll always—always—find worse blackguards and better blackguards than yourself."

"All those that never go up to the trenches, or those who never go into the first line, and even those who only go there now and then, they're shirkers, if you like to call 'em so, and you'd see how many there are if they only gave stripes to the real fighters."

"There are two hundred and fifty to each regiment of two battalions," said Cocon.

"There are the orderlies, and a bit since there were even the servants of the adjutants."—"The cooks and the under-cooks."—"The sergeant-majors, and the quartermaster-sergeants, as often as not."—"The mess corporals and the mess fatigues."—"Some office-props and the guard of the colors."—"The baggage-masters." "The drivers, the laborers, and all the section, with all its non-coms., and even the sappers."—"The cyclists." "Not all of them."—"Nearly all the Red Cross service."—"Not the stretcher-bearers, of course; for they've not only got a devilish rotten job, but they live with the companies, and when attacks are on they charge with their stretchers; but the hospital attendants."

"Nearly all parsons, especially at the rear. For, you know, parsons with knapsacks on, I haven't seen a devil of a lot of 'em, have you?"

"Nor me either. In the papers, but not here."

"There are some, it seems."—"Ah!"

"Anyway, the common soldier's taken something on in this war."

"There are others that are in the open. We're not the only ones."

"We are!" said Tulacque, sharply; "we're almost the only ones!"

He added, "You may say—I know well enough what you'll tell me—that it was the motor lorries and the heavy artillery that brought it off at Verdun. It's true, but they've got a soft job all the same by the side of us. We're always in danger, against their once, and we've got the bullets and the bombs, too, that they haven't. The heavy artillery reared rabbits near their dug-outs, and they've been making themselves omelettes for eighteen months. We are really in danger. Those that only get a bit of it, or only once, aren't in it at all. Otherwise, everybody would be. The nursemaid strolling the streets of Paris would be, too, since there are the Taubes and the Zeppelins, as that pudding-head said that the pal was talking about just now."

"In the first expedition to the Dardanelles, there was actually a chemist wounded by a shell. You don't believe me, but it's true all the same—an officer with green facings, wounded!"

"That's chance, as I wrote to Mangouste, driver of a remount horse for the section, that got wounded—but it was done by a motor lorry."

"That's it, it's like that. After all, a bomb can tumble down on a pavement, in Paris or in Bordeaux."

"Oui, oui; so it's too easy to say, 'Don't let's make distinctions in danger!' Wait a bit. Since the beginning, there are some of those others who've got killed by an unlucky chance; among us there are some that are still alive by a lucky chance. It isn't the same thing, that, seeing that when you're dead, it's for a long time."

"Yes," says Tirette, "but you're getting too venomous with your stories of shirkers. As long as we can't help it, it's time to turn over. I'm thinking of a retired forest-ranger at Cherey, where we were last month, who went about the streets of the town spying everywhere to rout out some civilian of military age, and he smelled out the dodgers like a mastiff. Behold him pulling up in front of a sturdy goodwife that had a mustache, and he only sees her mustache, so he bullyrags her—'Why aren't you at the front, you?'"

"For my part," says Pepin, "I don't fret myself about the shirkers or the semi-shirkers, it's wasting one's time; but where they get on my nerves, it's when they swank. I'm of Volpatte's opinion. Let 'em shirk, good, that's human nature; but afterwards they shouldn't say, 'I've been a soldier.' Take the engages, [note 3] for instance—"

"That depends on the engages. Those who have offered for the infantry without conditions, I look up to those men as much as to those that have got killed; but the engages in the departments or special arms, even in the heavy artillery, they begin to get my back up. We know 'em! When they're doing the agreeable in their social circle, they'll say, 'I've offered for the war.'—'Ah, what a fine thing you have done; of your own free will you have defied the machine-guns! '—'Well, yes, madame la marquise, I'm built like that!' Eh, get out of it, humbug!"

"Oui, it's always the same tale. They wouldn't be able to say in the drawing-rooms afterwards, 'Tenez, here I am; look at me for a voluntary engage!'"

"I know a gentleman who enlisted in the aerodromes. He had a fine uniform—he'd have done better to offer for the Opera-Comique. What am I saying—'he'd have done better?' He'd have done a damn sight better, oui. At least he'd have made other people laugh honestly, instead of making them laugh with the spleen in it."

"They're a lot of cheap china, fresh painted, and plastered with ornaments and all sorts of falderals, but they don't go under fire."

"If there'd only been people like those, the Boches would be at Bayonne."

"When war's on, one must risk his skin, eh, corporal?"

"Yes," said Bertrand, "there are some times when duty and danger are exactly the same thing; when the country, when justice and liberty are in danger, it isn't in taking shelter that you defend them. On the contrary, war means danger of death and sacrifice of life for everybody, for everybody; no one is sacred. One must go for it, upright, right to the end, and not pretend to do it in a fanciful uniform. These services at the bases, and they're necessary, must be automatically guaranteed by the really weak and the really old."

"Besides, there are too many rich and influential people who have shouted, 'Let us save France!—and begin by saving ourselves!' On the declaration of war, there was a big rush to get out of it, that's what there was, and the strongest succeeded. I noticed myself, in my little corner, it was especially those that jawed most about patriotism previously. Anyway, as the others were saying just now, if they get into a funk-hole, the worst filthiness they can do is to make people believe they've run risks. 'Cos those that have really run risks, they deserve the same respect as the dead."

"Well, what then? It's always like that, old man; you can't change human nature."

"It can't be helped. Grouse, complain? Tiens! talking about complaining, did you know Margoulin?"

"Margoulin? The good sort that was with us, that they left to die at le Crassier because they thought he was dead?"

"Well, he wanted to make a complaint. Every day he talked about protesting against all those things to the captain and the commandant. He'd say after breakfast, 'I'll go and say it as sure as that pint of wine's there.' And a minute later, 'If I don't speak, there's never a pint of wine there at all.' And if you were passing later you'd hear him again, 'Tiens! is that a pint of wine there? Well, you'll see if I don't speak! Result—he said nothing at all. You'll say, 'But he got killed.' True, but previously he had God's own time to do it two thousand times if he'd dared."

"All that, it makes me ill," growled Blaire, sullen, but with a flash of fury.

"We others, we've seen nothing—seeing that we don't see anything—but if we did see —!"

"Old chap," Volpatte cried, "those depots—take notice of what I say—you'd have to turn the Seine, the Garonne, the Rhone and the Loire into them to clean them. In the interval, they're living, and they live well, and they go to doze peacefully every night, every night!"

The soldier held his peace. In the distance he saw the night as they would pass it—cramped up, trembling with vigilance in the deep darkness, at the bottom of the listening-hole whose ragged jaws showed in black outline all around whenever a gun hurled its dawn into the sky.

Bitterly said Cocon: "All that, it doesn't give you any desire to die."

"Yes, it does," some one replies tranquilly. "Yes, it does. Don't exaggerate, old kipper-skin."

[note 1:] Thirty or thirty-one years old in 1914.—Tr.

[note 2:] A-shape badges worn on the left arm to indicate the duration of service at the front.—Tr.

[note 3:] Soldiers voluntarily enlisted in ordinary times for three, four, or five years. Those enlisted for four or five year' have the right to choose their arm of the service, subject to conditions.—Tr.

X

Argoval

THE twilight of evening was coming near from the direction of the country, and a gentle breeze, soft as a whisper, came with it.

In the houses alongside this rural way—a main road, garbed for a few paces like a main street—the rooms whose pallid windows no longer fed them with the limpidity of space found their own light from lamps and candles, so that the evening left them and went outside, and one saw light and darkness gradually changing places.

On the edge of the village, towards the fields, some unladen soldiers were wandering, facing the breeze. We were ending the day in peace, and enjoying that idle ease whose happiness one only realizes when one is really weary. It was fine weather, we were at the beginning of rest, and dreaming about it. Evening seemed to make our faces bigger before it darkened them, and they shone with the serenity of nature.

Sergeant Suilhard came to me, took my arm, and led me away. "Come," he said, "and I'll show you something."

The approaches to the village abounded in rows of tall and tranquil trees, and we followed them along. Under the pressure of the breeze their vast verdure yielded from time to time in slow majestic movements.

Suilhard went in front of me. He led me into a deep lane, which twisted about between high banks; and on each side grew a border of bushes, whose tops met each other. For some moments we walked in a bower of tender green. A last gleam of light, falling aslant across the lane, made points of bright yellow among the foliage, and round as gold coins. "This is pretty," I said.

He said nothing, but looked aside and hard. Then he stopped. "It must be there."

He made me climb up a bit of a track to a field, a great quadrangle within tall trees, and full of the scent of hay.

"Tiens!" I said, looking at the ground, "it's all trampled here; there's been something to do."

"Come," said Suilhard to me. He led me into the field, not far from its gate. There was a group of soldiers there, talking in low voices. My companion stretched out his hand. "It's there," he said.

A very short post, hardly a yard high, was implanted a few paces from the hedge, composed just there of young trees. "It was there," he said, "that they shot a soldier of the 204th this morning. They planted that post in the night. They brought the chap here at dawn, and these are the fellows of his squad who killed him. He tried to dodge the trenches. During relief he stayed behind, and then went quietly off to quarters. He did nothing else; they meant, no doubt, to make an example of him."

We came near to the conversation of the others. "No, no, not at all," said one. "He wasn't a ruffian, he wasn't one of those toughs that we all know. We all enlisted together. He was a decent sort, like ourselves, no more, no less—a bit funky, that's all. He was in the front line from the beginning, he was, and I've never seen him boozed, I haven't."

"Yes, but all must be told. Unfortunately for him, there was a 'previous conviction.' There were two, you know, that did the trick—the other got two years. But Cajard, [note 1] because of the sentence he got in civil life couldn't benefit by extenuating circumstances. He'd done some giddy-goat trick in civil life, when he was drunk."

"You can see a little blood on the ground if you look," said a stooping soldier.

"There was the whole ceremonial," another went on, "from A to Z—the colonel on horseback, the degradation; then they tied him to the little post, the cattle-stoup. He had to be forced to kneel or sit on the ground with a similar post."

"It's past understanding," said a third, after a silence, "if it wasn't for the example the sergeant spoke about."

On the post the soldiers had scrawled inscriptions and protests. A croix de guerre, cut clumsily of wood, was nailed to it, and read: "A. Cajard, mobilized in August, 1914, in gratitude to France."

Returning to quarters I met Volpatte, still surrounded and talking. He was relating some new anecdotes of his journey among the happy ones.

[note 1:] I have altered the name of this soldier as well as that of the village.—H. B.

XI

The Dog

THE weather was appalling. Water and wind attacked the passers-by; riddled, flooded, and upheaved the roads.

I was returning from fatigue to our quarters at the far end of the village. The landscape that morning showed dirty yellow through the solid rain, and the sky was dark as a slated roof. The downpour flogged the horse-trough as with birchen rods. Along the walls, human shapes went in shrinking files, stooping, abashed, splashing.

In spite of the rain and the cold and bitter wind, a crowd had gathered in front of the door of the barn where we were lodging. All close together and back to back, the men seemed from a distance like a great moving sponge. Those who could see, over shoulders and between heads, opened their eyes wide and said, "He has a nerve, the boy!" Then the inquisitive ones broke away, with red noses and streaming faces, into the down-pour that lashed and the blast that bit, and letting the hands fall that they had upraised in surprise, they plunged them in their pockets.

In the center, and running with rain, abode the cause of the gathering—Fouillade, bare to the waist and washing himself in abundant water. Thin as an insect, working his long slender arms in riotous frenzy, he soaped and splashed his head, neck, and chest, down to the upstanding gridirons of his sides. Over his funnel-shaped cheeks the brisk activity had spread a flaky beard like snow, and piled on the top of his head a greasy fleece that the rain was puncturing with little holes.

By way of a tub, the patient was using three mess-tins which he had filled with water —no one knew how—in a village where there was none; and as there was no clean spot anywhere to put anything down in that universal streaming of earth and sky, he thrust his towel into the waistband of his trousers, while the soap went back into his pocket every time he used it.

They who still remained wondered at this heroic gesticulation in the face of adversity, and said again, as they wagged their heads, "It's a disease of cleanliness he's got."

"You know he's going to be carpeted, they say, for that affair of the shell-hole with Volpatte." And they mixed the two exploits together in a muddled way, that of the shell-hole, and the present, and looked on him as the hero of the moment, while he puffed, sniffled, grunted, spat, and tried to dry himself under the celestial shower-bath with rapid rubbing and as a measure of deception; then at last he resumed his clothes.

After his wash, Fouillade feels cold. He turns about and stands in the doorway of the barn that shelters us. The arctic blast discolors and disparages his long face, so hollow and sunburned; it draws tears from his eyes, and scatters them on the cheeks once scorched by the mistral; his nose, too, weeps increasingly.

Yielding to the ceaseless bite of the wind that grips his ears in spite of the muffler knotted round his head, and his calves in spite of the yellow puttees with which his cockerel legs are enwound, he reenters the barn, but comes out of it again at once, rolling ferocious eyes, and muttering oaths with the accent one hears in that corner of the land, over six hundred miles from here, whence he was driven by war.

So he stands outside, erect, more truly excited than ever before in these northern scenes. And the wind comes and steals into him, and comes again roughly, shaking and maltreating his scarecrow's slight and flesh-less figure.

Ye gods! It is almost uninhabitable, the barn they have assigned to us to live in during this period of rest. It is a collapsing refuge, gloomy and leaky, confined as a well. One half of it is under water—we see rats swimming in it—and the men are crowded in the other half. The walls, composed of laths stuck together with dried mud, are cracked, sunken, holed in all their circuit, and extensively broken through above. The night we got here—until the morning—we plugged as well as we could the openings within reach, by inserting leafy branches and hurdles. But the higher holes, and those in the roof, still gaped and always. When dawn hovers there, weakling and early, the wind for contrast

rushes in and blows round every side with all its strength, and the squad endures the hustling of an everlasting draught.

When we are there, we remain upright in the ruined obscurity, groping, shivering, complaining.

Fouillade, who has come in once more, goaded by the cold, regrets his ablutions. He has pains in his loins and back. He wants something to do, but what?

Sit down? Impossible; it is too dirty inside there. The ground and the paving-stones are plastered with mud; the straw scattered for our sleeping is soaked through, by the water that comes through the holes and by the boots that wipe themselves with it. Besides, if you sit down, you freeze; and if you lie on the straw, you are troubled by the smell of manure, and sickened by the vapors of ammonia. Fouillade contents himself by looking at his place, and yawning wide enough to dislocate his long jaw, further lengthened by a goatee beard where you would see white hairs if the daylight were really daylight.

"The other pals and boys," said Marthereau, "they're no better off than we are. After breakfast I went to see a jail-bird of the 11th on the farm near the hospital. You've to clamber over a wall by a ladder that's too short—talk about a scissor-cut!" says Marthereau, who is short in the leg; "and when once you're in the hen-run and rabbit-hutch you're shoved and poked by everybody and a nuisance to 'em all. You don't know where to put your pasties down. I vamoosed from there, and sharp."

"For my part," says Cocon, "I wanted to go to the blacksmith's when we'd got quit of grubbing, to imbibe something hot, and pay for it. Yesterday he was selling coffee, but some bobbies called there this morning, so the good man's got the shakes, and he's locked his door."

Lamuse has tried to clean his rifle. But one cannot clean his rifle here, even if he squats on the ground near the door, nor even if he takes away the sodden tent-cloth, hard and icy, which hangs across the doorway like a stalactite; it is too dark. "And then, old chap, if you let a screw fall, you may as well hang yourself as try to find it, 'specially when your fists are frozen silly."

"As for me, I ought to be sewing some things, but—what cheer!"

One alternative remains—to stretch oneself on the straw, covering the head with handkerchief or towel to isolate it from the searching stench of fermenting straw, and sleep. Fouillade, master of his time to-day, being on neither guard nor fatigues, decides. He lights a taper to seek among his belongings, and unwinds the coils of his comforter, and we see his emaciated shape, sculptured in black relief, folding and refolding it.

"Potato fatigue, inside there, my little lambs!" a sonorous voice bellows at the door. The hooded shape from which it comes is Sergeant Henriot. He is a malignant sort of simpleton, and though all the while joking in clumsy sympathy he supervises the evacuation of quarters with a sharp eye for the evasive malingerer.

Outside, on the streaming road in the perpetual rain, the second section is scattered, also summoned and driven to work by the adjutant. The two sections mingle together. We climb the street and the hillock of clayey soil where the traveling kitchen is smoking.

"Now then, my lads, get on with it; it isn't a long job when everybody sets to—Come—what have you got to grumble about, you? That does no good."

Twenty minutes later we return at a trot. As we grope about in the barn, we cannot touch anything but what is sodden and cold, and the sour smell of wet animals is added to the vapor of the liquid manure that our beds contain.

We gather again, standing, around the props that hold the barn up, and around the rills that fall vertically from the holes in the roof—faint columns which rest on vague bases of splashing water. "Here we are again!" we cry.

Two lumps in turn block the doorway, soaked with the rain that drains from them—Lamuse and Barque, who have been in quest of a brasier, and now return from the expedition empty-handed, sullen and vicious. "Not a shadow of a fire-bucket, and what's more, no wood or coal either, not for a fortune." It is impossible to have any fire. "If I can't get any, no one can," says Barque, with a pride which a hundred exploits justify.

We stay motionless, or move slowly in the little space we have, aghast at so much misery. "Whose is the paper?"

"It's mine," says Becuwe.

"What does it say? Ah, zut, one can't read in this darkness!"

"It says they've done everything necessary now for the soldiers, to keep them warm in the trenches. They've got all they want, and blankets and shirts and brasiers and fire-buckets and bucketsful of coal; and that it's like that in the first-line trenches."

"Ah, damnation!" growl some of the poor prisoners of the barn, and they shake their fists at the emptiness without and at the newspaper itself.

But Fouillade has lost interest in what they say. He has bent his long Don Quixote carcase down in the shadow, and outstretched the lean neck that looks as if it were braided with violin strings. There is something on the ground that attracts him.

It is Labri, the other squad's dog, an uncertain sort of mongrel sheep-dog, with a lopped tail, curled up on a tiny litter of straw-dust. Fouillade looks at Labri, and Labri at him. Becuwe comes up and says, with the intonation of the Lille district, "He won't eat his food; the dog isn't well. Hey, Labri, what's the matter with you? There's your bread and meat; eat it up; it's good when it's in your bucket. He's poorly. One of these mornings we shall find him dead."

Labri is not happy. The soldier to whom he is entrusted is hard on him, and usually ill-treats him—when he takes any notice of him at all. The animal is tied up all day. He is cold and ill and left to himself. He only exists. From time to time, when there is movement going on around him, he has hopes of going out, rises and stretches himself, and bestirs his tail to incipient demonstration. But he is disillusioned, and lies down again, gazing past his nearly full mess-tin.

He is weary, and disgusted with life. Even if he has escaped the bullet or bomb to which he is as much exposed as we, he will end by dying here. Fouillade puts his thin hand on the dog's head, and it gazes at him again. Their two glances are alike—the only difference is that one comes from above and the other from below.

Fouillade sits down also—the worse for him!—in a corner, his hands covered by the folds of his greatcoat, his long legs doubled up like a folding bed. He is dreaming, his eyes closed under their bluish lids; there is something that he sees again. It is one of those moments when the country from which he is divided assumes in the distance the charms of reality—the perfumes and colors of l'Herault, the streets of Cette. He sees so plainly and so near that he hears the noise of the shallops in the Canal du Midi, and the unloading at the docks; and their call to him is distinctly clear.

Above the road where the scent of thyme and immortelles is so strong that it is almost a taste in the mouth, in the heart of the sunshine whose winging shafts stir the air into a warmed and scented breeze, on Mont St. Clair, blossoms and flourishes the home of his folks. Up there, one can see with the same glance where the Lake of Thau, which is green

like glass, joins hands with the Mediterranean Sea, which is azure; and sometimes one can make out as well, in the depths of the indigo sky, the carven phantoms of the Pyrenees.

There was he born, there he grew up, happy and free. There he played, on the golden or ruddy ground; played—even—at soldiers. The eager joy of wielding a wooden saber flushed the cheeks now sunken and seamed. He opens his eyes, looks about him, shakes his head, and falls upon regret for the days when glory and war to him were pure, lofty, and sunny things.

The man puts his hand over his eyes, to retain the vision within. Nowadays, it is different.

It was up there in the same place, later, that he came to know Clemence. She was just passing, the first time, sumptuous with sunshine, and so fair that the loose sheaf of straw she carried in her arms seemed to him nut-brown by contrast. The second time, she had a friend with her, and they both stopped to watch him. He heard them whispering, and turned towards them. Seeing themselves discovered, the two young women made off, with a sibilance of skirts, and giggles like the cry of a partridge.

And it was there, too, that he and she together set up their home. Over its front travels a vine, which he coddled under a straw hat, whatever the season. By the garden gate stands the rose-tree that he knows so well—it never used its thorns except to try to hold him back a little as he went by.

Will he return again to it all? Ah, he has looked too deeply into the profundity of the past not to see the future in appalling accuracy. He thinks of the regiment, decimated at each shift; of the big knocks and hard he has had and will have, of sickness, and of wear —

He gets up and snorts, as though to shake off what was and what will be. He is back in the middle of the gloom, and is frozen and swept by the wind, among the scattered and dejected men who blindly await the evening. He is back in the present, and he is shivering still.

Two paces of his long legs make him butt into a group that is talking—by way of diversion or consolation—of good cheer.

"At my place," says one, "they make enormous loaves, round ones, big as cart-wheels they are!" And the man amuses himself by opening his eyes wide, so that he can see the loaves of the homeland.

"Where I come from," interposes the poor Southerner, "holiday feasts last so long that the bread that's new at the beginning is stale at the end!"

"There's a jolly wine—it doesn't look much, that little wine where I come from; but if it hasn't fifteen degrees of alcohol it hasn't anything!"

Fouillade speaks then of a red wine which is almost violet, which stands dilution as well as if it had been brought into the world to that end.

"We've got the jurancon wine," said a Bearnais, "the real thing, not what they sell you for jurancon, which comes from Paris; indeed, I know one of the makers."

"If it comes to that," said Fouillade, "in our country we've got muscatels of every sort, all the colors of the rainbow, like patterns of silk stuff. You come home with me some time, and every day you shall taste a nonsuch, my boy."

"Sounds like a wedding feast," said the grateful soldier.

So it comes about that Fouillade is agitated by the vinous memories into which he has plunged, which recall to him as well the dear perfume of garlic on that far-off table. The vapors of the blue wine in big bottles, and the liqueur wines so delicately varied, mount to his head amid the sluggish and mournful storm that fills the barn.

Suddenly he calls to mind that there is settled in the village where they are quartered a tavern-keeper who is a native of Beziers, called Magnac. Magnac had said to him, "Come and see me, mon camarade, one of these mornings, and we'll drink some wine from down there, we will! I've several bottles of it, and you shall tell me what you think of it."

This sudden prospect dazzles Fouillade. Through all his length runs a thrill of delight, as though he had found the way of salvation. Drink the wine of the South—of his own particular South, even—drink much of it—it would be so good to see life rosy again, if only for a day! Ah yes, he wants wine; and he gets drunk in a dream.

But as he goes out he collides at the entry with Corporal Broyer, who is running down the street like a peddler, and shouting at every opening, "Morning parade!"

The company assembles and forms in squares on the sticky mound where the traveling kitchen is sending soot into the rain. "I'll go and have a drink after parade," says Fouillade to himself.

And he listens listlessly, full of his plan, to the reading of the report. But carelessly as he listens, he hears the officer read, "It is absolutely forbidden to leave quarters before 5 p.m. and after 8 p.m.," and he hears the captain, without noticing the murmur that runs round the poilus, add this comment on the order: "This is Divisional Headquarters. However many there are of you, don't show yourselves. Keep under cover. If the General sees you in the street, he will have you put to fatigues at once. He must not see a single soldier. Stay where you are all day in your quarters. Do what you like as long as no one sees you—no one!"

We go back into the barn.

Two o'clock. It is three hours yet, and then it will be totally dark, before one may risk going outside without being punished.

Shall we sleep while waiting? Fouillade is sleepy no longer; the hope of wine has shaken him up. And then, if one sleeps in the day, he will not sleep at night. No! To lie with your eyes open is worse than a nightmare. The weather gets worse; wind and rain increase, without and within.

Then what? If one may not stand still, nor sit down, nor lie down, nor go for a stroll, nor work—what?

Deepening misery settles on the party of benumbed and tired soldiers. They suffer to the bone, nor know what to do with their bodies. "Nom de Dieu, we're badly off!" is the cry of the derelicts—a lamentation, an appeal for help.

Then by instinct they give themselves up to the only occupation possible to them in there—to walk up and down on the spot, and thus ward off anchylosis.

So they begin to walk quickly to and fro in the scanty place that three strides might compass; they turn about and cross and brush each other, bent forward, hands pocketed—tramp, tramp. These human beings whom the blast cuts even among their straw are like a crowd of the wretched wrecks of cities who await, under the lowering sky of winter, the opening of some charitable institution. But no door will open for them—unless it be four days hence, one evening at the end of the rest, to return to the trenches.

Alone in a corner, Cocon cowers. He is tormented by lice; but weakened by the cold and wet he has not the pluck to change his linen; and he sits there sullen, unmoving—and devoured.

As five o'clock draws near, in spite of all, Fouillade begins again to intoxicate himself with his dream of wine, and he waits, with its gleam in his soul. What time is it?—A quarter to five.—Five minutes to five.—Now!

He is outside in black night. With great splashing skips he makes his way towards the tavern of Magnac, the generous and communicative Biterrois. Only with great trouble does he find the door in the dark and the inky rain. By God, there is no light! Great God again, it is closed! The gleam of a match that his great lean hand covers like a lamp-shade shows him the fateful notice—"Out of Bounds." Magnac, guilty of some transgression, has been banished into gloom and idleness!

Fouillade turns his back on the tavern that has become the prison of its lonely keeper. He will not give up his dream. He will go somewhere else and have vin ordinaire, and pay for it, that's all. He puts his hand in his pocket to sound his purse; it is there. There ought to be thirty-seven sous in it, which will not run to the wine of Prou, but—

But suddenly he starts, stops dead, and smites himself on the forehead. His long-drawn face is contracted in a frightful grimace, masked by the night. No, he no longer has thirty-seven sous, fool that he is! He has forgotten the tin of sardines that he bought the night before—so disgusting did he find the dark macaroni of the soldiers' mess—and the drinks he stood to the cobbler who put him some nails in his boots.

Misery! There could not be more than thirteen sous left!

To get as elevated as one ought, and to avenge himself on the life of the moment, he would certainly need—damn'ation—a liter and a half, In this place, a liter of red ordinary costs twenty-one sous. It won't go.

His eyes wander around him in the darkness, looking for some one. Perhaps there is a pal somewhere who will lend him money, or stand him a liter.

But who—who? Not Becuwe, he has only a marraine [note 1:] who sends him tobacco and note-paper every fortnight. Not Barque, who would not toe the line; nor Blaire, the miser—he wouldn't understand. Not Biquet, who seems to have something against him; nor Pepin who himself begs, and never pays, even when he is host. Ah, if Volpatte were there! There is Mesnil Andre, but he is actually in debt to Fouillade on account of several drinks round. Corporal Bertrand? Following on a remark of Fouillade's, Bertrand told him to go to the devil, and now they look at each other sideways. Farfadet? Fouillade hardly speaks a word to him in the ordinary way. No, he feels that he cannot ask this of Farfadet. And then—a thousand thunders!—what is the use of seeking saviors in one's imagination? Where are they, all these people, at this hour?

Slowly he goes back towards the barn. Then mechanically he turns and goes forward again, with hesitating steps. He will try, all the same. Perhaps he can find convivial comrades. He approaches the central part of the village just when night has buried the earth.

The lighted doors and windows of the taverns shine again in the mud of the main street. There are taverns every twenty paces. One dimly sees the heavy specters of soldiers, mostly in groups, descending the street. When a motor-car comes along, they draw aside to let it pass, dazzled by the head-lights, and bespattered by the liquid mud that the wheels hurl over the whole width of the road.

The taverns are full. Through the steamy windows one can see they are packed with compact clouds of helmeted men. Fouillade goes into one or two, on chance. Once over the threshold, the dram-shop's tepid breath, the light, the smell and the hubbub, affect him with longing. This gathering at tables is at least a fragment of the past in the present.

He looks from table to table, and disturbs the groups as he goes up to scrutinize all the merrymakers in the room. Alas, he knows no one! Elsewhere, it is the same; he has no luck. In vain he has extended his neck and sent his desperate glances in search of a familiar head among the uniformed men who in clumps or couples drink and talk or in solitude write. He has the air of a cadger, and no one pays him heed.

Finding no soul to come to his relief, he decides to invest at least what he has in his pocket. He slips up to the counter. "A pint of wine—and good."

"White?"

"Eh, oui."

"You, mon garcon, you're from the South," says the landlady, handing him a little full bottle and a glass, and gathering his twelve sous.

He places himself at the corner of a table already overcrowded by four drinkers who are united in a game of cards. He fills the glass to the brim and empties it, then fills it again.

"Hey, good health to you! Don't drink the tumbler!" yelps in his face a man who arrives in the dirty blue jumper of fatigues, and displays a heavy cross-bar of eyebrows across his pale face, a conical head, and half a pound's weight of ears. It is Harlingue, the armorer.

It is not very glorious to be seated alone before a pint in the presence of a comrade who gives signs of thirst. But Fouillade pretends not to understand the requirements of the gentleman who dallies in front of him with an engaging smile, and he hurriedly empties his glass. The other turns his back, not without grumbling that "they're not very generous, but on the contrary greedy, these Southerners."

Fouillade has put his chin on his fists, and looks unseeing at a corner of the room where the crowded poilus elbow, squeeze, and jostle each other to get by.

It was pretty good, that swig of white wine, but of what use are those few drops in the Sahara of Fouillade? The blues did not far recede, and now they return.

The Southerner rises and goes out, with his two glasses of wine in his stomach and one sou in his pocket. He plucks up courage to visit one more tavern, to plumb it with his eyes, and by way of excuse to mutter, as he leaves the place, "Curse him! He's never there, the animal!"

Then he returns to the barn, which still—as always—whistles with wind and water. Fouillade lights his candle, and by the glimmer of the flame that struggles desperately to take wing and fly away, he sees Labri. He stoops low, with his light over the miserable dog—perhaps it will die first. Labri is sleeping, but feebly, for he opens an eye at once, and his tail moves.

The Southerner strokes him, and says to him in a low voice, "It can't be helped, it—" He will not say more to sadden him, but the dog signifies appreciation by jerking his head before closing his eyes again. Fouillade rises stiffly, by reason of his rusty joints, and makes for his couch. For only one thing more he is now hoping—to sleep, that the dismal day may die, that wasted day, like so many others that there will be to endure stoically and to overcome, before the last day arrives of the war or of his life.

[note 1:] French soldiers have extensively developed a system of corresponding with French women whom they do not know from Eve and whose acquaintance they usually make through newspaper advertisements. As typical of the latter I copy the following: "Officier artilleur, 30 ans, desire correspondance discrete avec jeune marraine, femme du monde. Ecrire," etc. The "lonely soldier" movement in this country is similar.—Tr.

XII

The Doorway

"IT's foggy. Would you like to go?"

It is Poterloo who asks, as he turns towards me and shows eyes so blue that they make his fine, fair head seem transparent.

Poterloo comes from Souchez, and now that the Chasseurs have at last retaken it, he wants to see again the village where he lived happily in the days when he was only a man.

It is a pilgrimage of peril; not that we should have far to go—Souchez is just there. For six months we have lived and worked in the trenches almost within hail of the village. We have only to climb straight from here on to the Bethune road along which the trench creeps, the road honeycombed underneath by our shelters, and descend it for four or five hundred yards as it dips down towards Souchez. But all that ground is under regular and terrible attention. Since their recoil, the Germans have constantly sent huge shells into it. Their thunder shakes us in our caverns from time to time, and we see, high above the scarps, now here now there, the great black geysers of earth and rubbish, and the piled columns of smoke, as high as churches. Why do they bombard Souchez? One cannot say why, for there is no longer anybody or anything in the village so often taken and retaken, that we have so fiercely wrested from each other.

But this morning a dense fog enfolds us, and by favor of the great curtain that the sky throws over the earth one might risk it. We are sure at least of not being seen. The fog hermetically closes the perfected retina of the Sausage that must be somewhere up there, enshrouded in the white wadding that raises its vast wall of partition between our lines and those observation posts of Lens and Angres, whence the enemy spies upon us.

"Right you are!" I say to Poterloo.

Adjutant Barthe, informed of our project, wags his head up and down, and lowers his eyelids in token that he does not see.

We hoist ourselves out of the trench, and behold us both, upright, on the Bethune road!

It is the first time I have walked there during the day. I have never seen it, except from afar, the terrible road that we have so often traveled or crossed in leaps, bowed down in the darkness, and under the whistling of missiles.

"Well, are you coming, old man?"

After some paces, Poterloo has stopped in the middle of the road, where the fog like cotton-wool unravels itself into pendent fragments, and there he dilates his sky-blue eyes

and half opens his scarlet mouth.

"Ah, la, la! Ah, la, la!" he murmurs. When I turn to him he points to the road, shakes his head and says, "This is it, Bon Dieu, to think this is it! This bit where we are, I know it so well that if I shut my eyes I can see it as it was, exactly. Old chap, it's awful to see it again like that. It was a beautiful road, planted all the way along with big trees.

"And now, what is it? Look at it—a sort of long thing without a soul—sad, sad. Look at these two trenches on each side, alive; this ripped-up paving, bored with funnels; these trees uprooted, split, scorched, broken like faggots, thrown all ways, pierced by bullets—look, this pock-marked pestilence, here! Ah, my boy, my boy, you can't imagine how it is disfigured, this road!" And he goes forward, seeing some new amazement at every step.

It is a fantastic road enough, in truth. On both sides of it are crouching armies, and their missiles have mingled on it for a year and a half. It is a great disheveled highway, traveled only by bullets and by ranks and files of shells, that have furrowed and upheaved it, covered it with the earth of the fields, scooped it and laid bare its bones. It might be under a curse; it is a way of no color, burned and old, sinister and awful to see.

"If you'd only known it—how clean and smooth it was!" says Poterloo. "All sorts of trees were there, and leaves, and colors—like butterflies; and there was always some one passing on it to give good-day to some good woman rocking between two baskets, or people shouting [note 1] to each other in a chaise, with the good wind ballooning their smocks. Ah, how happy life was once on a time!"

He dives down to the banks of the misty stream that follows the roadway towards the land of parapets. Stooping, he stops by some faint swellings of the ground on which crosses are fixed—tombs, recessed at intervals into the wall of fog, like the Stations of the Cross in a church.

I call him—we shall never get there at such a funeral pace. Allons!

We come to a wide depression in the land, I in front and Poterloo lagging behind, his head confused and heavy with thought as he tries in vain to exchange with inanimate things his glances of recognition. Just there the road is lower, a fold secretes it from the side towards the north. On this sheltered ground there is a little traffic.

Along the hazy, filthy, and unwholesome space, where withered grass is embedded in black mud, there are rows of dead. They are carried there when the trenches or the plain are cleared during the night. They are waiting—some of them have waited long—to be taken back to the cemeteries after dark.

We approach them slowly. They are close against each other, and each one indicates with arms or legs some different posture of stiffened agony. There are some with half-moldy faces, the skin rusted, or yellow with dark spots. Of several the faces are black as tar, the lips hugely distended—the heads of negroes blown out in goldbeaters' skin. Between two bodies, protruding uncertainly from one or the other, is a severed wrist, ending with a cluster of strings.

Others are shapeless larvae of pollution, with dubious items of equipment pricking up, or bits of bone. Farther on, a corpse has been brought in in such a state that they have been obliged—so as not to lose it on the way—to pile it on a lattice of wire which was then fastened to the two ends of a stake. Thus was it carried in the hollow of its metal hammock, and laid there. You cannot make out either end of the body; alone, in the heap that it makes, one recognizes the gape of a trouser-pocket. An insect goes in and out of it.

Around the dead flutter letters that have escaped from pockets or cartridge pouches while they were being placed on the ground. Over one of these bits of white paper, whose wings still beat though the mud ensnares them, I stoop slightly and read a sentence—"My

dear Henry, what a fine day it is for your birthday!" The man is on his belly; his loins are rent from hip to hip by a deep furrow; his head is half turned round; we see a sunken eye; and on temples, cheek and neck a kind of green moss is growing.

A sickening atmosphere roams with the wind around these dead and the heaped-up debris, that lies about them—tent-cloth or clothing in stained tatters, stiff with dried blood, charred by the scorch of the shell, hardened, earthy and already rotting, quick with swarming and questing things. It troubles us. We look at each other and shake our heads, nor dare admit aloud that the place smells bad. All the same, we go away slowly.

Now come breaking out of the fog the bowed backs of men who are joined together by something they are carrying. They are Territorial stretcher-bearers with a new corpse. They come up with their old wan faces, toiling, sweating, and grimacing with the effort. To carry a dead man in the lateral trenches when they are muddy is a work almost beyond human power. They put down the body, which is dressed in new clothes.

"It's not long since, now, that he was standing," says one of the bearers. "It's two hours since he got his bullet in the head for going to look for a Boche rifle in the plain. He was going on leave on Wednesday and wanted to take a rifle home with him. He is a sergeant of the 405th, Class 1914. A nice lad, too."

He takes away the handkerchief that is over the face. It is quite young, and seems to sleep, except that an eyeball has gone, the cheek looks waxen, and a rosy liquid has run over the nostrils, mouth, and eyes.

The body strikes a note of cleanliness in the charnel-house, this still pliant body that lolls its head aside when it is moved as if to lie better; it gives a childish illusion of being less dead than the others. But being less disfigured, it seems more pathetic, nearer to one, more intimate, as we look. And had we said anything in the presence of all that heap of beings destroyed, it would have been "Poor boy!"

We take the road again, which at this point begins to slope down to the depth where Souchez lies. Under our feet in the whiteness of the fog it appears like a valley of frightful misery. The piles of rubbish, of remains and of filthiness accumulate on the shattered spine of the road's paving and on its miry borders in final confusion. The trees bestrew the ground or have disappeared, torn away, their stumps mangled. The banks of the road are overturned and overthrown by shell-fire. All the way along, on both sides of this highway where only the crosses remain standing, are trenches twenty times blown in and re-hollowed, cavities—some with passages into them—hurdles on quagmires.

The more we go forward, the more is everything turned terribly inside out, full of putrefaction, cataclysmic. We walk on a surface of shell fragments, and the foot trips on them at every step. We go among them as if they were snares, and stumble in the medley of broken weapons or bits of kitchen utensils, of water-bottles, fire-buckets, sewing-machines, among the bundles of electrical wiring, the French and German accouterments all mutilated and encrusted in dried mud, and among the sinister piles of clothing, stuck together with a reddish-brown cement. And one must look out, too, for the unexploded shells, which everywhere protrude their noses or reveal their flanks or their bases, painted red, blue, and tawny brown.

"That's the old Boche trench, that they cleared out of in the end." It is choked up in some places, in others riddled with shell-holes. The sandbags have been torn asunder and gutted; they are crumbled, emptied, scattered to the wind. The wooden props and beams arc splintered, and point all ways. The dug-outs are filled to the brim with earth and with —no one knows what. It is all like the dried bed of a river, smashed, extended, slimy, that both water and men have abandoned. In one place the trench has been simply wiped out by the guns. The wide fosse is blocked, and remains no more than a field of new-turned earth, made of holes symmetrically bored side by side, in length and in breadth.

I point out to Poterloo this extraordinary field, that would seem to have been traversed by a giant plow. But he is absorbed to his very vitals in the metamorphosis of the country's face.

He indicates a space in the plain with his finger, and with a stupefied air, as though he came out of a dream—"The Red Tavern!" It is a flat field, carpeted with broken bricks.

And what is that, there? A milestone? No, it is not a milestone. It is a head, a black head, tanned and polished. The mouth is all askew, and you can see something of the mustache bristling on each side—the great head of a carbonized cat. The corpse—it is German—is underneath, buried upright.

"And that?" It is a ghastly collection containing an entirely white skull, and then, six feet away, a pair of boots, and between the two a heap of frayed leather and of rags, cemented by brown mud.

"Come on, there's less fog already. We must hurry."

A hundred yards in front of us, among the more transparent waves of fog that are changing places with us and hide us less and less, a shell whistles and bursts. It has fallen in the spot we are just nearing. We are descending, and the gradient is less steep. We go side by side. My companion says nothing, but looks to right and to left. Then he stops again, as he did at the top of the road. I hear his faltering voice, almost inaudible —"What's this! We're there—this is it—"

In point of fact we have not left the plain, the vast plain, seared and barren—but we are in Souchez!

The village has disappeared, nor have I seen a village go so completely. Ablain-Saint-Nazaire, and Carency, these still retained some shape of a place, with their collapsed and truncated houses, their yards heaped high with plaster and tiles. Here, within the framework of slaughtered trees that surrounds us as a spectral background in the fog, there is no longer any shape. There is not even an end of wall, fence, or porch that remains standing; and it amazes one to discover that there are paving-stones under the tangle of beams, stones, and scrap-iron. This—here—was a street.

It might have been a dirty and boggy waste near a big town, whose rubbish of demolished buildings and its domestic refuse had been shot here for years, till no spot was empty. We plunge into a uniform layer of dung and debris, and make but slow and difficult progress. The bombardment has so changed the face of things that it has diverted the course of the millstream, which now runs haphazard and forms a pond on the remains of the little place where the cross stood.

Here are several shell-holes where swollen horses are rotting; in others the remains of what were once human beings are scattered, distorted by the monstrous injury of shells.

Here, athwart the track we are following, that we ascend as through an avalanche or inundation of ruin, under the unbroken melancholy of the sky, here is a man stretched out as if he slept, but he has that close flattening against the ground which distinguishes a dead man from a sleeper. He is a dinner-fatigue man, with a chaplet of loaves threaded over a belt, and a bunch of his comrades' water-bottles slung on his shoulder by a skein of straps. It must have been only last night that the fragment of a shell caught him in the back. No doubt we are the first to find him, this unknown soldier secretly dead. Perhaps he will be scattered before others find him, so we look for his identity disc—it is stuck in the clotted blood where his right hand stagnates. I copy down the name that is written in letters of blood.

Poterloo lets me do it by myself—he is like a sleepwalker. He looks, and looks in despair, everywhere. He seeks endlessly among those evanished and eviscerated things;

through the void he gazes to the haze of the horizon. Then he sits down on a beam, having first sent flying with a kick a saucepan that lay on it, and I sit by his side. A light drizzle is falling. The fog's moisture is resolving in little drops that cover everything with a slight gloss. He murmurs, "Ah, la, la!"

He wipes his forehead and raises imploring eyes to me. He is trying to make out and take in the destruction of all this corner of the earth, and the mournfulness of it. He stammers disjointed remarks and interjections. He takes off his great helmet and his head is smoking. Then he says to me with difficulty, "Old man, you cannot imagine, you cannot, you cannot—"

He whispers: "The Red Tavern, where that—where that Boche's head is, and litters of beastliness all around, that sort of cesspool—it was on the edge of the road, a brick house and two out-buildings alongside—how many times, old man, on the very spot where we stood, how many times, there, the good woman who joked with me on her doorstep, I've given her good-day as I wiped my mouth and looked towards Souchez that I was going back to! And then, after a few steps, I've turned round to shout some nonsense to her! Oh, you cannot imagine! But that, now, that!" He makes an inclusive gesture to indicate all the emptiness that surrounds him.

"We mustn't stay here too long, old chap. The fog's lifting, you know."

He stands up with an effort—"Allons."

The most serious part is yet to come. His house—

He hesitates, turns towards the east, goes. "It's there—no, I've passed it. It's not there. I don't know where it is—or where it was. Ah, misery, misery!" He wrings his hands in despair and staggers in the middle of the medley of plaster and bricks. Then, bewildered by this encumbered plain of lost landmarks, he looks questioningly about in the air, like a thoughtless child, like a madman. He is looking for the intimacy of the bedrooms scattered in infinite space, for their inner form and their twilight now cast upon the winds!

After several goings and comings, he stops at one spot and draws back a little—"It was there, I'm right. Look—it's that stone there that I knew it by. There was a vent-hole there, you can see the mark of the bar of iron that was over the hole before it disappeared."

Sniffling he reflects, and gently shaking his head as though he could not stop it: "It is when you no longer have anything that you understand how happy you were. Ah, how happy we were!"

He comes up to me and laughs nervously: "It's out of the common, that, eh? I'm sure you've never seen yourself like it—can't find the house where you've always lived since—since always—"

He turns about, and it is he who leads me away:

"Well, let's leg it, since there is nothing. Why spend a whole hour looking at places where things were? Let's be off, old man."

We depart—the only two living beings to be seen in that unreal and miasmal place, that village which bestrews the earth and lies under our feet.

We climb again. The weather is clearing and the fog scattering quickly. My silent comrade, who is making great strides with lowered head, points out a field: "The cemetery," he says; "it was there before it was everywhere, before it laid hold on everything without end, like a plague."

Half-way, we go more slowly, and Poterloo comes close to me-"You know, it's too much, all that. It's wiped out too much—all my life up to now. It makes me afraid—it is so completely wiped out."

"Come; your wife's in good health, you know; your little girl, too."

He looks at me comically: "My wife—I'll tell you something; my wife—"

"Well?"

"Well, old chap, I've seen her again."

"You've seen her? I thought she was in the occupied country?"

"Yes, she's at Lens, with my relations. Well, I've seen her—ah, and then, after all, zut! —I'll tell you all about it. Well, I was at Lens, three weeks ago. It was the eleventh; that's twenty days since."

I look at him, astounded. But he looks like one who is speaking the truth. He talks in sputters at my side, as we walk in the increasing light—

"They told us—you remember, perhaps—but you weren't there, I believe—they told us the wire had got to be strengthened in front of the Billard Trench. You know what that means, eh? They hadn't been able to do it till then. As soon as one gets out of the trench he's on a downward slope, that's got a funny name."

"The Toboggan."

"Yes, that's it; and the place is as bad by night or in fog as in broad daylight, because of the rifles trained on it before hand on trestles, and the machine-guns that they point during the day. When they can't see any more, the Boches sprinkle the lot.

"They took the pioneers of the C.H.R., but there were some missing, and they replaced 'em with a few poilus. I was one of 'em. Good. We climb out. Not a single rifle-shot! 'What does it mean?' we says, and behold, we see a Boche, two Boches, three Boches, coming out of the ground—the gray devils!—and they make signs to us and shout 'Kamarad!' 'We're Alsatians,' they says, coming more and more out of their communication trench—the International. 'They won't fire on you, up there,' they says; 'don't be afraid, friends. Just let us bury our dead.' And behold us working aside of each other, and even talking together since they were from Alsace. And to tell the truth, they groused about the war and about their officers. Our sergeant knew all right that it was forbidden to talk with the enemy, and they'd even read it out to us that we were only to talk to them with our rifles. But the sergeant he says to himself that this is God's own chance to strengthen the wire, and as long as they were letting us work against them, we'd just got to take advantage of it.

"Then behold one of the Boches that says, 'There isn't perhaps one of you that comes from the invaded country and would like news of his family?'

"Old chap, that was a bit too much for me. Without thinking if I did right or wrong, I went up to him and I said, 'Yes, there's me.' The Boche asks me questions. I tell him my wife's at Lens with her relations, and the little one, too. He asks where she's staying. I explain to him, and he says he can see it from there. 'Listen,' he says, 'I'll take her a letter, and not only that, but I'll bring you an answer.' Then all of a sudden he taps his forehead, the Boche, and comes close to me—'Listen, my friend, to a lot better still. If you like to do what I say, you shall see your wife, and your kids as well, and all the lot, sure as I see you.' He tells me, to do it, I've only got to go with him at a certain time with a Boche greatcoat and a shako that he'll have for me. He'd mix me up in a coal-fatigue in Lens, and we'd go to our house. I could go and have a look on condition that I laid low and

didn't show myself, and he'd be responsible for the chaps of the fatigue, but there were non-coms. in the house that he wouldn't answer for—and, old chap, I agreed!"

"That was serious."

"Yes, for sure, it was serious. I decided all at once, without thinking and without wishing to think, seeing I was dazzled with the idea of seeing my people again; and if I got shot afterwards, well, so much the worse—but give and take. The supply of law and demand they call it, don't they?

"My boy, it all went swimmingly. The only hitch was they had such hard work to find a shako big enough, for, as you know, I'm well off for head. But even that was fixed up. They raked me out in the end a lousebox big enough to hold my head. I've already some Boche boots—those that were Caron's, you know. So, behold us setting off in the Boche trenches—and they're most damnably like ours—with these good sorts of Boche comrades, who told me in very good French—same as I'm speaking—not to fret myself.

"There was no alarm, nothing. Getting there came off all right. Everything went off so sweet and simple that I fancied I must be a defaulting Boche. We got to Lens at nightfall. I remember we passed in front of La Perche and went down the Rue du Quatorze-Juillet. I saw some of the townsfolk walking about in the streets like they do in our quarters. I didn't recognize them because of the evening, nor them me, because of the evening too, and because of the seriousness of things. It was so dark you couldn't put your finger into your eye when I reached my folk's garden.

"My heart was going top speed. I was all trembling from head to foot as if I were only a sort of heart myself. And I had to hold myself back from carrying on aloud, and in French too, I was so happy and upset. The Kamarad says to me, 'You go, pass once, then another time, and look in at the door and the window. Don't look as if you were looking. Be careful.' So I get hold of myself again, and swallow my feelings all at a gulp. Not a bad sort, that devil, seeing he'd have had a hell of a time if I'd got nailed.

"At our place, you know, same as everywhere in the Pas de Calais, the outside doors of the houses are cut in two. At the bottom, it's a sort of barrier, half-way up your body; and above, you might call it a shutter. So you can shut the bottom half and be one-half private.

"The top half was open, and the room, that's the dining-room, and the kitchen as well, of course, was lighted up and I heard voices.

"I went by with my neck twisted sideways. There were heads of men and women with a rosy light on them, round the round table and the lamp. My eyes fell on her, on Clotilde. I saw her plainly. She was sitting between two chaps, non-coms., I believe, and they were talking to her. And what was she doing? Nothing; she was smiling, and her face was prettily bent forward and surrounded with a light little framework of fair hair, and the lamp gave it a bit of a golden look.

"She was smiling. She was contented. She had a look of being well off, by the side of the Boche officer, and the lamp, and the fire that puffed an unfamiliar warmth out on me. I passed, and then I turned round, and passed again. I saw her again, and she was always smiling. Not a forced smile, not a debtor's smile, non, a real smile that came from her, that she gave. And during that time of illumination that I passed in two senses, I could see my baby as well, stretching her hands out to a great striped simpleton and trying to climb on his knee; and then, just by, who do you think I recognized? Madeleine Vandaert, Vandaert's wife, my pal of the 19th, that was killed at the Maine, at Montyon.

"She knew he'd been killed because she was in mourning. And she, she was having good fun, and laughing outright, I tell you—and she looked at one and the other as much as to say, 'I'm all right here!'

"Ah, my boy, I cleared out of that, and butted into the Kamarads that were waiting to take me back. How I got back I couldn't tell you. I was knocked out. I went stumbling like a man under a curse, and if any-body had said a wrong word to me just then—! I should have shouted out loud; I should have made a row, so as to get killed and be done with this filthy life!

"Do you catch on? She was smiling, my wife, my Clotilde, at this time in the war! And why? Have we only got to be away for a time for us not to count any more? You take your damned hook from home to go to the war, and everything seems finished with; and they worry for a while that you're gone, but bit by bit you become as if you didn't exist, they can do without you to be as happy as they were before, and to smile. Ah, Christ! I'm not talking of the other woman that was laughing, but my Clotilde, mine, who at that chance moment when I saw her, whatever you may say, was getting on damned well without me!

"And then, if she'd been with friends or relations; but no, actually with Boche officers! Tell me, shouldn't I have had good reason to jump into the room, fetch her a couple of swipes, and wring the neck of the other old hen in mourning?

"Yes, yes; I thought of doing it. I know all right I was getting violent, I was getting out of control.

"Mark me. I don't want to say more about it than I have said. She's a good lass, Clotilde. I know her, and I've confidence in her. I'm not far wrong, you know. If I were done in, she'd cry all the tears in her body to begin with. She thinks I'm alive, I admit, but that isn't the point. She can't prevent herself from being; well off, and contented, and letting herself go, when she's a good fire, a good lamp, and company, whether I'm there or not—"

I led Poterloo away: "You exaggerate, old chap; you're getting absurd notions, come." We had walked very slowly and were still at the foot of the hill. The fog was becoming like silver as it prepared for departure. Sunshine was very near.

Poterloo looked up and said, "We'll go round by the Carency road and go in at the back." We struck off at an angle into the fields. At the end of a few minutes he said to me, "I exaggerate, you think? You say that I exaggerate?" He reflected. "Ah!" Then he added, with the shaking of the head that had hardly left him all the morning, "What about it? All the same, it's a fact—"

We climbed the slope. The cold had become tepidity. Arrived on a little plateau —"Let's sit here again before going in," he proposed. He sat down, heavy with the world of thought that entangled him. His forehead was wrinkled. Then he turned towards me with an awkward air, as if he were going to beg some favor: "Tell me, mate, I'm wondering if I'm right."

But after looking at me, he looked at everything else, as though he would rather consult them than me.

A transformation was taking place in the sky and on the earth. The fog was hardly more than a fancy. Distances revealed themselves. The narrow plain, gloomy and gray, was getting bigger, chasing its shadows away, and assuming color. The light was passing over it from east to west like sails.

And down there at our very feet, by the grace of distance and of light, we saw Souchez among the trees—the little place arose again before our eyes, new-born in the sunshine!

"Am I right?" repeated Poterloo, more faltering, more dubious.