A PADRE IN FRANCE

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BY

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“THE MAJOR’S NIECE,” “GENERAL JOHN REGAN,” “SPANISH GOLD”
“BENEDICT KAVANAGH,” ETC.

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THE MAJOR'S NIECE
MINNIE'S BISHOP
GENERAL JOHN REGAN
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BENEDICT KAVANAGH

LONDON: HODDER & STOUGHTON

TO

R. M. L.

FRIEND AND FELLOW-WORKER

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A PADRE IN FRANCE

CHAPTER I

THE UTTERMOST PART

I have always admired the sagacity of Balak, King of Moab, about whom we learn something in the Book of Numbers. He was threatened with invasion by a powerful foe and felt unequal to offering armed resistance. He invoked the aid of spiritual powers by inviting a prophet, Balaam, to come and curse the army of the invaders. Balaam suffered himself to be persuaded and bribed by the king. All kings—and the statesmen who nowadays regulate the conduct of kings—understand the business of managing men so far. Persuasion and bribery are the methods of statecraft. But Balak knew more than the elements of his trade. He understood that spiritual forces, if merely bribed, are ineffective. To make a curse operate there must be a certain amount of conviction in the mind of the curser. Balaam was not convinced, and when he surveyed the hosts of Israel from the top of a hill felt himself compelled by the spirit within him to bless instead of curse. The king, discouraged but not hopeless, took the prophet to the top of another hill, showed him a different view of the camp of Israel and invited him to curse the people from there.

At first sight this seems a foolish thing to have done; but properly considered it appears very crafty. From the fresh viewpoint, Balaam saw not the whole, but only the “uttermost part” of the hosts of Israel. I suppose he no longer saw the first-line troops, the army in battle array. Instead he saw the base camps, the non-combatant followers of the army, a great deal that was confused and sordid, very little that was glorious or fine. It might conceivably have been possible for him to curse the whole army and cast a blight upon its enterprise, when his eyes rested only on the camp-followers, the baggage trains, the mobs of cattle, the maimed and unfit men; when the fine show of the fighters was out of sight. Plainly if a curse of any real value was to be pronounced it must be by a prophet who saw much that was execrable, little that was obviously glorious.

It is Balak’s sagacity in choosing the prophet’s second point of view which I admire. If any cursing of an army is done at all, it will be done by some one, whose post is behind the lines, who has seen, not the whole, but only the uttermost part, and that the least attractive part of the hosts.

It was my luck to remain, all the time I was in France, in safe places. I never had the chance of seeing the gallantry of the men who attack or the courageous tenacity of those who defend. I missed all the excitement. I experienced none of those hours of terror which I have heard described, nor saw how finely man's will can triumph over terror. I had no chance of knowing that great comradeship which grows up among those who suffer together. War, seen at the front, is hell. I hardly ever met any one who doubted that. But it is a hell inhabited not by devils, but by heroes, and human nature rises to unimaginable heights when it is subjected to the awful strain of fighting. It is no wonder that those who have lived with our fighting army are filled with admiration for the men, are prepared to bless altogether, not war which we all hate, but the men who wage it.

The case is very different behind the lines. There, indeed, we see the seamy side of war. There are the men who, in some way or other, have secured and keep safe jobs, the *embusqués* whom the French newspapers constantly denounce. There are the officers who have failed, proved unfit for command, shown themselves lacking in courage perhaps, and in mercy have been sent down to some safe base. There are the men who have been broken in spirit as well as in body, who drag on an existence utterly dull, very toilsome, well-nigh hopeless, and are illuminated by no high call for heroic deeds. There the observer sees whatever there is to be seen of petty spite and jealousies, the manipulating of jobs, the dodging of regulations, all that is most ignoble in the soldier's trade. There also are the men with grievances, who, in their own estimation, are fit for posts quite other than those they hold. Some one described war at the front as an affair of months of boredom punctuated by moments of terror. If that philosopher had been stationed at a base he might have halved his epigram and described war as months of boredom unpunctuated even by terror.

Yet even behind the lines, in the remotest places, that which moves our admiration far outshines what is sordid and mean. We still bless, not war, but soldiers. We forget the failures of man in joyful contemplation of his achievements.

Here are the great hospitals, where suffering men succeed each other day after day, so that we seem to see a mist of pain rising like a ceaseless cloud of incense smoke for the nostrils of the abominable Moloch who is the god of war. A man, though long inured to such things, may curse the Moloch, but he will bless the sufferers who form the sacrifice. Their patience, their silent heroism, are beyond our praise.

Here are huge cemeteries, long lines of graves, where every morning some are laid to rest, with reverence indeed, but with scant measure of the ritual pomp with which men are wont to pay their final honour to the dead. These have passed, not in a moment amid the roar of battle, but after long bearing of pain, and lonely, with the time for last farewells but none greatly loved to say them to. Yet, standing above the lines of rude coffins, viewing the names and numbers pencilled on the lids, our hearts are lifted up. We know how great it is to lay down life for others. The final wailing notes of the "Last Post" speak our feeling: "Good night. Good-bye. See you again, soon."

Here, among those less worthy, are men who are steadily doing, without much hope of praise, things intolerably monotonous, doing them day after day for years, inspired by what Ruskin calls "the unvexed instinct of duty." Often these are old men, too old for field command. They have spent their lives in the army, have learned, have worked, have waited in the hope that some day their chance would come. Soldiers by profession and desire, they have looked for the great opportunity which the war they foresaw would give. The war came and the opportunity; but came too late for them. They can look for nothing but the dull duties of the base. They do them, enduring minor hardships, facing ceaseless worries, going calmly on, while the great stream of war on which they hoped to float moves on, leaving them behind. With them are others, younger men, who have seen some fighting, have been wounded or broken in health. Often they have struggled hard to secure the posts they hold. They might have gone home. They counted it a desirable thing to be employed still, since actual fighting was impossible, somewhere in touch with fighting men.

I wonder how much Balaam divined of the greatness which, no doubt, was in "the uttermost part" of the host when the king showed it to him. I suppose he understood something of it, for once again, to the indignation of Balak, he blessed instead of cursing. I am sure that any one who has lived long among the men at our bases will feel as I do, that his pride in what is great there far outweighs his disappointment at the other things he saw. I never saw the fighting or the actual front, but even if I had seen nothing else but the fighting I could scarcely feel greater admiration for our officers and men or more love for them.

I have, of course, no tales of adventure to tell. Perhaps I am too old for adventuring, or never had the spirit which makes adventures possible. Yet I own to a certain feeling of disappointment when the doctor who examined me in London told me with almost brutal frankness that he would not allow me to be sent to the front. To France I might go, and even that permission, I think, was a

concession. But in France I must remain in places where hardship is not extreme. Doctors are powerful people in the army and in certain matters their word is the supreme law. But fortunately there are always other doctors. And I think I could in the end have managed to get to the very front, in spite of that first man, though he held high rank and was much be-tabbed. But by the time I found out how to get round his prohibition I had become so much interested in my work that I did not want to leave it and even felt grateful to that doctor for sending me to France in the position of a man marked P.B., letters which stand for Permanent Base, and mean that their bearer will not be asked to go where fighting is.

For one other thing I am thankful to the doctor who examined me. He did not ask me to be vaccinated, inoculated, or half-poisoned in any other way. If he had demanded such things of me before I held my commission, I might have had to yield, and I should have disliked the business greatly. Afterwards I remained an unpersecuted heretic and never underwent any of these popular operations. For months, I know, a form was constantly filled up about me and sent to the medical staff of the base at which I was, stating the awful fact that I had escaped the safeguards provided for me, and was still alive. I used to expect that trouble of some sort would arise, but none ever did. Perhaps the authorities were merciful to me because I made no attempt to propagate my opinions; which indeed are scarcely opinions. I should not dream of denying that inoculation of every known kind is excellent for other people, and ought to be rigorously enforced on them. My only strong feeling is that I should escape.

My medical examination was a much more rigorous and unpleasant business than my interview—I can scarcely call this an examination—with my particular chief, the Chaplain-General. He appeared to be satisfied by previous inquiries that I was a fit and proper person—or as little unfit as could reasonably be hoped—to minister to soldiers in France. He took down my answers to half a dozen questions on a sheet of paper which somebody afterwards must have lost, for I had to answer the same questions again by letter after I got to France.

Up to the point of my interview and examination in London, the negotiations with regard to my commission as Chaplain to the Forces were conducted with dignified deliberation. My letters were answered a fortnight or so after they were received. There was no sense of urgency or hurry. We might have been corresponding about a monument to be erected at a remote date to some one still alive and quite young. This, if slightly irritating, gave me a feeling of great confidence in the Chaplains' Department of the War Office. It was evidently a

body which worked methodically, carefully, and with due consideration of every step it took. Its affairs were likely to prove efficiently organised. I looked forward to finding myself part of a machine which ran smoothly, whose every cog fitted exactly into the slot designed for it. No part of the War Office was likely at the moment to adopt a German motto; but the Chaplains' Department was plainly inspired by the spirit of Goethe's *Ohne haste, ohne raste*.

I have heard other men complain that the Department is dilatory, not merely deliberate, and that it is often impossible to get an answer to a letter at all. There is a story told of a man who wrote offering his services as chaplain, wrote again after a decent interval, continued to write for many months, and finally received, by way of reply, a nice little tract—not even on patience, but on conversion. I do not know whether that story is true or not. No tract was ever sent to me, and my letters were answered—after a time.

After my visit to London, the interview, and the examination, the whole spirit of the proceedings changed. I was involved in a worse than American hustle, and found myself obliged to hustle other innocent people, tailors and boot-makers, in order to get together some kind of a kit in time for a start to be made at the shortest possible notice.

I am told that the whole military machine works in this way in dealing with individuals. There is a long period of leisurely and quiet thought—it sometimes appears of complete inertia. Then there is a violent rush, and all sorts of things happen in a minute. I do not know for certain whether officers in other branches of the service suffer in this way. My experience as a chaplain made me feel like a bullet in a gun. For a long time I lay passive, and, except for the anxiety of anticipation, at rest. The man who held the weapon was making up his mind to fire. Then, without any special warning to me, he pulled the trigger, and before I could take a long breath I was flying through space to an unknown destination, without even the comfort of knowing that I had been aimed at any particular object.

But my faith in the Department was unshaken. I remembered the cautious deliberation of the earlier proceedings, and came to the conclusion that whereas there had been for many months an ample supply of chaplains at the front, and a regular flow of reinforcements from home, a sudden and desperate shortage had occurred—owing to casualties in battle, or some kind of pestilence—and that it was necessary to rush new men to the scene of action at the highest speed. This explanation seemed to me reasonable. It did not turn out to be true. There was no

particularly urgent demand for chaplains when I reached France.

I am now inclined to think that the Chaplains' Department does its business in this particular way with deliberate intention. It desires first to produce an impression of stability, wisdom, and forethought. It proceeds slowly, and for long periods does not proceed at all. It also wishes its servants to feel that it is vigorous, filled with energy, and working at terrifically high pressure. Then it does things with a rush which would put to shame the managing directors of the New York Underground Railway.

CHAPTER II

GETTING THERE

I made my start from Victoria Station on a January morning. I had worn His Majesty's uniform for no more than two days, and was still uneasily conscious of my strange clothes. I was uncertain about the proper adjustment of straps and buttons. I came for the first time in my life into touch with the army. I, a man of over fifty, went back with a leap to the emotions of forty years before. I was a new boy in a big school.

Others—some who have had the experience and more who have not—have described that start from Victoria or Waterloo. They have said something about the pangs of farewell, though I cannot imagine how any one who has been through it wants to talk about that. They have said a good deal about the thrill of excitement which comes with the beginning of adventure. They have described a certain awe of the unknown. They have tingled with intense curiosity.

I confess chiefly to bewilderment, the discomfort of strangeness and an annoying sense of my own extreme insignificance. I was a new boy. I wanted to behave properly, to do the right thing, and I had no way of knowing what the right thing was. I was absurdly anxious not to "cheek" anybody, and thereby incur the kind of snubbing, I scarcely expected the kicks, which I had endured long ago when I found myself a lonely mite in a corner of the cloisters of my first school.

I sat, with my bundle of papers tucked in beside me, in a corner of a Pullman car. Opposite me was an officer. I recognised, by the look of his Sam Browne belt, that he was an old boy, that he had been there before. I did not know then, being wholly unskilled in pips and badges, what he was. My impression now is that he was an artillery captain, probably returning to the front after leave. It seems ridiculous to be afraid to speak to an artillery captain; but nothing would have induced me to begin a conversation with that man. For all I knew he might have been a general, and it might have been the worst kind of bad form for a mere padre to speak to a general. I even thought of saluting him when I first caught his eye, but I did not know how to salute.

It was he, in the end, who spoke to me. We had reached the end of our train

journey and were gathering coats and haversacks from the racks above our heads. I left my papers—*Punch* and *The Bystander*—on the seat.

“You ought to take those with you,” he said. “You’ll find lots of fellows jolly thankful to get them over there.”

So I was going to a land where men could not easily come by *Punch* and *The Bystander*. In a general way I knew that before he spoke. I had heard of the hardships of war. I was prepared for my share of them. But I had somehow failed to realise that it might be impossible, under certain circumstances, to buy *Punch* if I wanted it.

The boat, though we arrived beside it early in the morning, did not actually start till afternoon. I might have gone to an hotel and had a comfortable luncheon. I was afraid to do anything of the sort. Military discipline is not a thing to play tricks with. I had made up my mind about that before I started, and in the orders given me for my journey there was not a word about luncheon. I went hungry—foolishly, no doubt.

I heard a story once about a sergeant and several men who were cut off by the Germans from their battalion. They held out for forty hours and were finally rescued. It was found that they had not touched their iron (emergency) ration. Asked why they had gone hungry when they had food in their pockets, the sergeant replied that the eating of iron rations without orders from a superior officer was forbidden. His was a great devotion to discipline—heroic, though foolish. My abstinence was merely foolish. I could not claim that I had any direct orders not to go to an hotel for luncheon.

While I waited on the deck of the steamer I met M. He was alone as I was; but he looked much less frightened than I felt. He was a padre too; but his uniform was not aggressively new. It seemed to me that he might know something about military life. My orders were “to report to the M.L.O.” when I landed. I wanted very much to know what that word “report” meant. I wanted still more to know what an M.L.O. was and where a stray voyager would be likely to find him.

It was not difficult to make friends with M. It is never difficult for one padre to make friends with another. All that is necessary by way of introduction is a frank and uncensored expression of opinion about the Chaplains’ Department of the War Office. The other man’s soul is knit to yours at once. I cannot now remember whether M. or I attacked the subject first. I know we agreed. I suppose it is the same with all branches of the service. Combatant officers are, or

used in those days to be, one in heart when discussing the Staff. I never met a doctor who did not think that the medical services are organised by congenital idiots. Every one from the humblest A.S.C. subaltern to the haughtiest guardsman agrees that the War Office is the refuge of incompetents. Padres, perhaps, express themselves more freely than the others. They are less subject to the penalties which threaten those who criticise their superiors. But their opinions are no stronger than those of other people.

Even without that bond of common feeling I think I should have made friends with M. No franker, more straightforward, less selfish man has crossed the sea to France wearing the obscured Maltese Cross which decorates the cap of the padre. It was my first real stroke of luck that I met M. on the deck of that steamer. As it turned out he knew no more than I did about what lay before us. His previous service had been in England and he was going to France for the first time. An M.L.O. was a mystery to him.

But he was cheerful and self-confident. His view was that an exaggerated importance might easily be attached to military orders. If an M.L.O. turned out to be an accessible person, easily recognised, we should report to him and set our consciences at ease. If, on the other hand, the authorities chose to conceal their M.L.O. in some place difficult to find, we should not report to him. Nothing particular would happen either way. So M. thought, and he paced the deck with so springy a step that I began to hope he might be right.

Our passage was abominably rough. M., who dislikes being seasick in public, disappeared. I think what finished him was the sight of an officer in a kilt crawling on his hands and knees across the wet and heaving deck, desperately anxious to get to the side of the ship before his malady reached its crisis. M.’s chair was taken by a pathetic-looking V.A.D. girl, whose condition soon drove me away.

It is one of the mitigations of the horrors of this war that whoever takes part in it is sure to meet friends whom he has lost sight of for years, whom he would probably lose sight of altogether if the chances of war did not bring unexpected meetings. That very first day of my service was rich in its yield of old friends.

When I fled from the sight of the V.A.D.’s pale face, I took to wandering about the decks and came suddenly on a man whom I had last seen at the tiller of a small boat in Clew Bay. I was beating windward across the steep waves of a tideway. His boat was running free with her mainsail boomed out; and he waved

a hand to me as he passed. Once again we met at sea; but we were much less cheerful. He was returning to France after leave, to spend the remainder of a second winter in the trenches. He gave it to me as his opinion that life in the Ypres salient was abominable beyond description, and that no man could stand three winters of it. I wanted to ask him questions about military matters, and I might have got some light and leading from him if I had. But somehow we drifted away from the subject and talked about County Mayo, about boats, about islands, and other pleasant things.

M., recovering rapidly from his seasickness, proved his worth the moment we set foot on dry land. He discovered the M.L.O., who seemed a little surprised that we should have taken the trouble to look him up. We left him, and M., still buoyant, found another official known as an R.T.O. He is a man of enormous importance, a controller of the destinies of stray details like ourselves. He told us that we should reach our destination—perhaps I should say our first objective—if we took a train from the *Gare Centrale* at 6 p.m. We had a good look at the *Gare Centrale,* to make sure that we should know it again.

Then M. led me off to find a censor. Censors, though I did not know it then, are very shy birds and conceal their nests with the cunning of reed warblers. Hardly any one has ever seen a censor. But M. found one, and we submitted to his scrutiny letters which we had succeeded in writing. After that I insisted on getting something to eat. I had breakfasted at an unholy hour. I had crossed the sea. I had endured great mental strain. I had tramped the streets of an exceedingly muddy town in a downpour of rain. I felt that I must have food and if possible, wine. M. is indifferent to food and hardly ever tastes wine. But he is a kind-hearted man. He agreed to eat with me, though I am sure he would much rather have looked up another official or two, perhaps introduced himself to the Base Commandant.

We went to an hotel, the largest and most imposing in the town, but, as I discovered months afterwards, quite the worst. There I found another friend. Or rather, another friend found me. He was a young man in the uniform of the R.A.M.C. and he rushed at me from the far end of a large *salon*. I am ashamed to say that I neither recognised him nor knew his name when he told it to me. But there was no doubt of his friendly feelings. He asked me where I was going. I told him, “G.H.Q.” It appeared that he had just come from G.H.Q. in a motor. How he came to have control of a motor I do not know. He was a very junior officer, not on anybody’s staff and totally unconnected with transport of any kind. He offered us the car and said that we could start any time we liked. He

himself was going on leave and the car had to go back to G.H.Q. I had been distinctly told by the R.T.O. to go in a train and—it was my first day in the army—I had a very high idea of the importance of obeying orders. M. laughed at me. So did my other friend.

"Nobody," he said, "cares a pin how you get there, and it doesn't matter when. This week or next, it's all the same. In fact, if I were you I should take a couple of days off and see the country before I reported at G.H.Q."

I know now that I might have done this and that no one would have been surprised or angry if I had. But the new-boy feeling was still strong on me. I was afraid. It seemed to me an awful thing to go for a tour in the war zone in a kidnapped motor, which might for all I knew be a car specially set apart for the use of the Commander-in-Chief.

At 6 o'clock we started in that car, M., I, and a total stranger who emerged from the hotel at the last moment and sat on my valise. There was also the driver and M.'s luggage. M. had a great deal of luggage. We were horribly cramped. It rained with increasing fury. We passed through a region of pallid mud, chalk, I suppose, which covered us and the car with a slimy paste. But I enjoyed the drive. Sentries, French and English, challenged us, and I could see the rain glistening on their bayonets in the light of our lamps. We rushed through villages and intensely gloomy woods. Sign-posts shone white for an instant at cross roads and disappeared. The wind whipped the rain against our faces. The white slime utterly dimmed my spectacles, and I looked out at walls of darkness through frosted glass.

The stranger, balanced perilously on my valise, shouted to me the news that G.H.Q. had been bombed by aeroplanes the day before. It was all that was wanted to complete the sense of adventure. I could have wished for a bomb or two which would miss us, for the sight of a Taube (they were Taubes, not Fokkers or Gothas, in those days) swooping into sight suddenly through the darkness and vanishing again. None came.

We took the advice of our unknown travelling companion and engaged rooms in the hotel he recommended. It was not at all a bad hotel. If we had had any sense or experience, we should have dined and gone straight to bed. That was what M. wanted to do. I suffered from an attack of conscience, and insisted that we ought to report ourselves to the Deputy-Chaplain-General.

"Our orders," I reminded M., "are to report on arrival."

We set out to look for the Deputy-Chaplain-General, M. averring that he had a special talent for finding his way in strange towns at night. Owing to what are officially known as the “unhappy divisions” of the Christian Church, there are two chief chaplains in France. One controls the clergy of the Church of England. The other drives a mixed team of Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, and others who owe spiritual allegiance to what is called “The United Board.” At that time both these gentlemen had offices in the same town.

In spite of M.’s instinct for locality we came on the wrong one first. Our chief was located in the most obscure corner. We found him at last, or rather we found his office. The good man himself was probably in bed. An orderly invited us to write our names in block capitals, insisting severely on the block capitals, in a large book. Then—he must have recognised that we were new boys and gullible—he said that we ought to report ourselves to some one else called the billeting officer.

The fact that we were already provided with beds made no difference. To the billeting officer we ought to go. It is greatly to our credit that we did. I followed M. through the streets of that town, very narrow streets, very twisty and very badly lighted. I felt as Carruthers did when Davis piloted him across the sand-banks through the fog to Memert. It was 11 o’clock when we found the billeting officer. He was playing bridge and did not in the least want to see us, appeared indeed to think that our visit was unnecessary and troublesome. We left him hurriedly.

Our hotel seemed a home when we got back to it. A friendly subaltern helped us out of a difficulty and increased our knowledge of the French language by telling us that:

“In this country when you want soda water you say ‘Oh, gas us.’”

We said it to the damsel behind the bar, and I have seldom been more surprised than I was when she produced a siphon. After that we went to bed.

CHAPTER III

A JOURNEY IN THE WAR ZONE

Next morning we went to see the Deputy-Chaplain-General. It is not right or possible, either in the army or anywhere else, to plunge straight into very august presences. We introduced ourselves first to a staff officer. I was impressed afresh with the way the war throws old acquaintances together. I had taken that staff officer out trout-fishing, when he was a small boy, and he remembered it. He said that Irish trout gave better sport than those in the French rivers, from which I gathered that it was sometimes possible to get a little fishing, in between battles and other serious things. He had also been a college friend of M.'s at Cambridge. He asked us to luncheon and treated us most hospitably. Indeed, I formed an impression that officers, at all events staff officers at G.H.Q., are not badly fed. I have in my time "sat at rich men's feasts." That staff officers' luncheon did not suffer by comparison. M. is, as I said, indifferent to food, but even he was moved to admiration.

"If this," he said afterwards, "is war, the sooner it comes to England the better."

It is pleasant to be treated as an honoured guest, and the friendliness of that officer was reassuring. But I had not yet done with the new-boy feeling. It came on me with full force when I was led into an inner office for an interview with the Deputy-Chaplain-General. He was both a bishop and a general. I have met so many bishops, officially and otherwise, that I am not in the least afraid of them. Nor do generals make me nervous when I am not myself in uniform. But a combination of bishop and general was new to me. I felt exactly as I did in 1875, when Mr. Waterfield of Temple Grove tested my knowledge of Latin to see what class I was fit for.

There was no real cause for nervousness. The Deputy-Chaplain-General, in spite of his double dose of exalted rank, is kind and friendly: but I fear I did not make any better impression on him than I did on my first head master. Mr. Waterfield put me in his lowest class. The Deputy-Chaplain-General sent me to the remotest base, the town farthest of any town in British occupation from the actual seat of war. M., whose interview came after mine, might perhaps have done better for himself if he had not been loyal to our newly formed friendship. As Ruth to

Naomi so he said to me, “Where thou goest I will go,” and expressed his wish to the Deputy-Chaplain-General. This, I am sure, was an act of self-denial on his part, for M. has an adventurous spirit. The Deputy-Chaplain-General is too kind and courteous a man to refuse such a request. It was settled that M. and I should start work together.

We set forth on our journey at 4 o’clock that afternoon, having first gone through the necessary business of interviewing the R.T.O. He was a young man of a most detestable kind. The R.T.O. has a bad name among officers who travel in France. He is supposed to be both uncivil and incompetent. My own experience is not very large, but I am disinclined to join in the general condemnation. I have come on R.T.O.’s who did not know their job. I have come on others wearied and harassed to the point at which coherent thought ceases to be possible. I only met one who deliberately tried to be insolent without even the excuse of knowing the work he was supposed to be doing. On the other hand I have met men of real ability engaged on military railway work, who remain quietly courteous and helpful even when beset by stupid, fussy, and querulous travellers.

M. and I struggled into a train and immediately became possessed by the idea that it was going the wrong way, carrying us to the front instead of the remote base to which we were bound. I do not remember that we were in any way vexed. We had a good store of provisions, thanks to my foresight and determination. We were in a fairly comfortable carriage. We were quite ready to make the best of things wherever the train took us.

A fellow-traveller, a young officer, offered us comfort and advice. He had a theory that trains in France run round and round in circles, like the London Underground. The traveller has nothing to do but sit still in order to reach any station in the war area; would in the end get back to the station from which he started, if he sat still long enough. M. refused to believe this. He insisted on making inquiries whenever the train stopped, and it stopped every ten minutes. His efforts did not help us much. The porters and station masters whom he hailed did not understand his French, and he could make nothing of their English. The first real light on our journey came to us in an odd way. At one station our compartment was suddenly boarded by three cheerful young women dressed in long overalls, and wearing no hats.

“Are you,” they asked, “going to B.?”

“Not if we can help it,” I said. “But we may be. The place we are trying to go to

is H."

The young women consulted hurriedly.

"If you're going to H.," said one, "you must go through B."

A second, a more conscientious girl, corrected her.

"At least," she said, "you may go through B."

"I should think," said the third, "that through B. is as likely a way as any. Will you take a letter for us? It's most important and the post takes ages. You've only got to hand it to any of our people you see on the platform or drop it in at any of our canteens. It will be delivered all right."

Who "our people" or what "our canteens" might be I did not at that time know. It was our fellow-traveller who offered to take the letter.

"I'm not exactly going to B.," he said; "but I expect I'll fetch up there sooner or later."

The letter was given to him. The young women, profuse in their thanks, sprang from the train just as it was starting. Our fellow-traveller told me that our visitors belonged to the Y.M.C.A. I was not, even then, much surprised to find a Young Men's Christian Association run chiefly by young women, but I did wonder at this way of transmitting letters. Afterwards I came to realise that the Y.M.C.A. has cast a net over the whole war area behind the lines, and that its organisation is remarkably good. I imagine that the letter would have reached its destination in the end wherever our fellow-traveller happened to drop it. I suppose he took the same view. His responsibility as a special messenger sat lightly on him.

"I may spend the night at B.," he said, "or I may get into the Paris express by mistake. It is very easy to get into a wrong train by mistake, and if I once get to Paris it will take me a couple of days to get away again. I'm not in any kind of hurry, and I deserve a little holiday."

He did. He had been in the trenches for months and was on his way to somewhere for a course of instruction in bombing, or the use of trench mortars, or map-reading. In those days, early in 1916, the plan was to instruct young officers in the arts of war after they had practised them, successfully, for some time. Things are much better organised now. Trains are no longer boarded by young women with letters which they wish to smuggle through uncensored. It is

difficult to get into the Paris express by accident. But courses of instruction are still, I imagine, regarded by every one, except the instructors, as a way of restoring officers who are beginning to suffer under the strain of life in a fighting battalion. A holiday frankly so-called, in Paris or elsewhere, would be better; but a course of instruction is more likely to meet with the approval of a general.

That journey of ours would have taken eight or ten hours in peace time. We spent thirty hours over it, and that was considered good going. The theory of circulating trains turned out to be entirely wrong. We changed at wayside stations, standing for hours on desolate platforms. We pursued trains into remote sidings in the middle of the night, tripping over wires and stumbling among sleepers. We ate things of an unusual kind at odd hours. We slept by snatches. I shaved and washed in a tin mug full of water drawn from the side of an engine. M., indomitably cheerful, secured buns and apples at 6 o'clock in the morning. He paid for the buns. I believe he looted the apples out of a truck in a siding near our carriage.

We found ourselves at noon in a large town with four hours' leisure before us. An R.T.O.—we reported to every R.T.O. we could find—recommended an excellent restaurant. M. shaved and washed elaborately in a small basin which the thoughtful proprietor had placed in the passage outside the dining-room door. We had a huge meal and made friends with a French officer who was attached to some of our troops as interpreter. He had spent two years before the war at Cambridge. There perhaps, more probably elsewhere, he had been taught that Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb are the most influential people in England, and that Mr. H. G. Wells, though not from a purely literary point of view a great writer, is the most profound philosopher in the world. He deeply lamented the fact that compulsory military service had just been introduced into England.

"The last fortress of individual liberty," he said, "has fallen. The world is now militarised."

I reminded him that Ireland still remained a free country; but he did not seem consoled. He took the view that the Irish, though not compelled to fight, are an oppressed people.

I found that interpreter an interesting man, though he would not talk about the early fighting at Charleroi where he had been wounded. I should much rather have heard about that. Lyrical eulogies of Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb seemed out of place. I had been "militarised" for no more than four days. But I already felt

as if the world in which clever people suppose themselves to think were a half-forgotten dream. The only reality for me was that other world in which men, who do not profess to be clever, suppose themselves to be doing things. On the whole the soldiers, though they fuss a good deal, seem to have a better record of actual accomplishment than the thinkers.

The last stage of our journey—an affair of some six hours—was unexciting. I think I should have slept through the whole of it if it had not been for a major, plainly a “dug-out” who had not gone soldiering for many years. He had landed from England a day before we did, and had, by his own account, been tossed about northern France like a shuttlecock, the different R.T.O.’s he dealt with being the battledores. He had been put into trains going the wrong way, dragged out of them and put into others which did not stop at his particular station. He was hungry, which he disliked; dirty, which he disliked still more; and was beginning to lose hope of ever reaching his destination. M. slept; but then M. was at the far end of the compartment. The other three people with us were French, and the major could not speak their language. It was to me that he expressed his feelings, so I could not sleep.

We reached H. at 10 p.m., almost as fagged and quite as dirty as that major. I had already learned something. I was determined not to report myself to any one until I had washed, slept, and eaten. It was snowing heavily when we arrived. With the help of a military policeman whom we met we found an hotel. He told us that it was a first-rate place; but he was no judge of hotels. It was very far from being good. We had, however, every reason to be thankful to that policeman. We secured two beds. While we were smoking our final pipes, two young officers turned up. They had been round all the good hotels in the town and failed to find accommodation. They failed again in our hotel. We had engaged the last two beds. They went off sadly to sleep on the platform in the railway station. If our policeman had known more about hotels and sent us to a good one, it might very well have been our fate to sleep on the platform.

Next morning, M., who is extraordinarily persevering, secured a bath. It is a great advantage when in France not to know any French. M. is wholly unaffected when the proprietor of an hotel, the proprietor’s wife, the head waiter, and several housemaids assure him with one voice that a bath is *tout à fait impossible*. He merely smiles and says: “Very well then, bring it along or show me where it is.” In the end he gets it, and, fortunate in his companionship, so do I.

CHAPTER IV

SETTLING DOWN

There are, or used to be, people who believe that you can best teach a boy to swim by throwing him into deep water from the end of a pier and leaving him there. If he survives, he has learned to swim and the method has proved its value. If he drowns, his parents have no further anxiety about him. The authorities who are responsible for the religion of the army believe in this plan for teaching chaplains their business. Having accepted a civilian parson as a volunteer, they dump him down in a camp without instruction or advice, without even so much as a small red handbook on field tactics to guide him. There he splutters about, makes an ass of himself in various ways, and either hammers out some plan for getting at his job by many bitter failures, or subsides into the kind of man who sits in the mess-room with his feet on the stove, reading novels and smoking cigarettes—either learns to swim after a fashion or drowns unlamented.

M., who had at all events three months' English experience behind him, found himself on the top of a steep hill, the controller of a wooden church planted in the middle of a sea of sticky mud. He ministered to a curiously mixed assortment of people, veterinary men, instructors in all kind of military arts, A.S.C. men, and the men of a camp known as Base Horse Transport.

The army authorities have been laughed at since the war began on account of their passion for inverting the names of things. You must not, if you want such a thing, say one pot of raspberry jam. You say, instead, jam, raspberry, pot, one. It is odd that in the few cases in which such inversion is really desirable the authorities refuse to practise it. Horse Transport, Base, would be intelligible after thought. Base Horse Transport, till you get accustomed to it, seems a gratuitous insult to a number of worthy animals, not perhaps highly bred but strong and active.

Base Detail is another example of the same thing. To describe a man as a detail is bad enough. To call him a Base Detail must lower his self-respect, and as a rule these poor fellows have done nothing to deserve it. A Base Details Camp contains, for the most part, men who have just recovered from wounds received in the service of King and Country. "Details" perhaps is unavoidable, but it

would surely be possible to conform to the ordinary army usage and call the place Camp, Details, Base.

My fate was more fortunate than M.'s. I had no church—he had the better of me there—but I was put into a homogeneous camp, an Infantry Base. (Our colonel was a masterful man. He would not have allowed us to be called Base Infantry.) There was a small permanent staff in the camp, the colonel, the adjutant, the doctor, and myself among the officers, a sergeant-major, an orderly-room staff, and a few others among the men. Every one else passed in and out of the camp, coming to us from England in drafts, or from hospitals as details, going from us as drafts into the mists of the front. Our camp occupied the place of a reservoir in a city's water supply. The men and officers flowed in to us from many sources, stayed a while and flowed out again through the conduits of troop trains when the insatiable fighting army, perpetually using and losing men, turned on its taps, demanding fresh supply.

It happened, I do not know why, that there had never been a chaplain specially attached to that camp before. I have no reason to suppose that a chaplain had been asked for or was specially desired. I expected, at best, to be tolerated as a necessary evil; at worst to be made to feel that I was a nuisance.

I was, in fact, extremely kindly received. My experience is that a chaplain is almost always well received both by officers and men in France, and is very much less a stranger than a parson at home who finds himself in a club where he is not well known. But I do not pretend that my first evening in that mess was a particularly comfortable one. As it happened, neither the colonel nor the adjutant was there. I had as companions half a dozen officers, any one of whom was young enough to be my son. They were laboriously polite and appallingly respectful. We talked to each other in restrained whispers and I do not think that any one laughed during the whole course of dinner.

My discomfort lasted far beyond that evening, and I do not wonder that it took me some time to settle down. I came, for the first time in my life, under military discipline. I lived in a mess, a strange kind of life for me. I had to obey rules which I did not know and conform to an etiquette which was utterly strange to me. Looking back over it all now I realise that I must have blundered horribly, and trodden, without intending to, on all sorts of tender feet. Yet, from the moment I entered the camp I received nothing but kindness and consideration.

The officers of our old army are wonderful. Every one, I think, agrees about this.

To me it seems that one of the most wonderful things about them is the way they have treated civilians, amateurs, always ignorant, often conceited, who suddenly burst into their highly organised profession. Now and then, though rarely, I came across senior officers set temporarily in positions of command who were objectionable or silly, who “assumed the god” and made themselves ridiculous. But these were seldom regular soldiers. And perhaps what I resented arose from too much zeal, was an attempt, by wrong ways, to achieve a kind of dignity which every one respects.

Looking back over the period of my service I do not know that I met more than two or three of this kind, tyrants to their men, insolent to officers of lower rank. The regular soldier, who has given his life to his profession and has generally served and fought in various corners of the world, is amazingly considerate and helpful to outsiders even when they are gauche and awkward.

The adjutant received me in the orderly-room when I reached the camp, some time after dark. I was as respectful as possible for I thought he was the colonel. Even if I had known him for an adjutant I should still have been respectful, for I like to be on the safe side of things and I had not the remotest idea what the position and functions of an adjutant are. I know now that he is something like an archdeacon, a man of enormous importance whose duties it is a little difficult to define exactly. He expected me. With the help of the sergeant-major he had found a servant for me and assigned a hut to me.

For the servant I have nothing but praise. He could and did darn socks well. Indeed he confided to me that when at home he darned his wife’s stockings, being much better at the job than she was. He could talk to French people in a language that was neither theirs nor his, but which they understood without difficulty. He was very punctual and he did not like the kind of tobacco which I smoke. His one fault was that he did not know whether an oil stove was smoking or not and could not learn. I am often haunted by the recollection of one snowy night on which I arrived at my hut to find the whole air inside dense with fine black smuts. I had to drag everything I possessed out of the hut into the snow. It took me hours to get myself clean after that night, and I still find traces of lampblack on some of the garments which suffered with me.

But that inability to deal with lamps was my servant’s one failing. In every other respect I was satisfied with him. I hope he was equally satisfied with me. He was at first. I know that; for he asked for the congratulations of a friend on his appointment. “I have got a soft job at last,” he said. “I’m an officer’s servant,

and a chaplain's at that." The job, I imagine, continued to be a soft one all the time I was in France; but I am not sure that he would have said "and a chaplain's at that" quite so complacently the morning after my scene with the oil stove in the snow storm. Chaplains do not, of course, swear; but any one who studies the Psalms gains a certain command of language which can be used effectively and without scandal.

For the hut I cannot say anything good. This was in no way the adjutant's fault. He had nothing else except that hut to offer me. It was made of brown canvas, stretched over a wooden frame. It was lit by small square patches of oiled canvas let into its walls at inconvenient places. It had a wooden door which was blown open and shut on windy nights and could not be securely fastened in either position. There was a corrugated-iron roof—apparently not part of the original plan of the hut—on which pouring rain made an abominable noise. The floor bent and swayed when walked on. Small objects, studs and coins, slipped between the boards of the floor and became the property of the rats which held revel there night and day.

The hut was cold in winter and stiflingly hot in summer. Draughts whistled through its walls and up between its boards when the wind blew. On calm nights it was impossible to get any fresh air into it at all. The canvas was liable to catch fire on the smallest provocation. I do not think there can be in the world any more detestable form of human habitation than huts like that. Mine was not unique. There were hundreds of them in those camps. They were, I am told, the invention of a man who succeeded in palming off these fruits of stupidity and malice on the War Office. They were called by his name. If I knew how to spell it I should set it down here for public execration. I expect he made a fortune out of his huts.

My first few nights in that hut were cold and unhappy, for I slept on the floor in a "flea bag." Then, with the help of the quartermaster, I secured a camp bedstead and was much less uncomfortable. The quartermaster came from Galway and was sympathetic with a particularly helpless fellow-countryman. He served me out blankets until I was ashamed to accept any more. He supplied the oil stove, and it kept my bath water from freezing during the night when it could be got to burn without smoking.

My servant "acquired" packing-cases and arranged them as washstand and dressing-table. He hung cords like clothes lines across the corners of the hut and suspended my kit on them. He watched the comings and goings of other officers

and looted from vacant huts a whole collection of useful articles—a lantern which held a candle, a nest of pigeon-holes, three bookshelves, a chair without a back, a tin mug for shaving water, and a galvanised iron pot which made an excellent basin. He spent a whole morning making and fixing up outside my door a wooden boot-scraper. I suppose he hoped in this way to prevent my covering the floor of the hut with mud. But the effort was wasted. The scraper lay down flat on its side whenever I touched it with my foot. It remained a distinguishing ornament of my hut, useful as a guide to any one who wanted to know where I lived, but no good for any other purpose. In this way I gradually became possessed of a kind of Robinson Crusoe outfit of household furniture.

I cannot say that I was ever comfortable in that hut. Yet the life agreed with me. It is evidently a mistake to suppose that damp beds, damp clothes, and shivering fits at night are injurious to health. It is most unpleasant but it is not unwholesome to have to rise at 2 a.m. or 3 a.m. and run up and down in the rain to get warm enough to go to sleep.

Yet I escaped without even a cold in my head. I should be most ungrateful if I wished any real harm to the inventor of those huts. But perhaps some day his health will give way and he will find himself suffering from rheumatism, congestion of the lungs, or frost bite. Then I hope he will try a winter in one of his own huts. He will not like it, but he will be a healthy man again before spring —if he is not dead.

CHAPTER V

KHAKI

War must always have been a miserable business; but our fathers and grandfathers had the sense to give it an outward semblance of gaiety. They went forth to battle dressed in the brightest colours they could find. They put feathers in their hats. They sewed gold braid on their coats. They hung sparkling metal about their persons. They had brass bands to march in front of them. While engaged in the business of killing their enemies they no doubt wallowed in mud, just as we do; went hungry, sweated, shivered, were parched or soaked, grumbled and cursed. But they made a gallant effort at pretending to enjoy themselves. They valued the properties of romantic drama, though they must have recognised soon enough that the piece in which they played was the sordidest of tragedies.

We are realists. Not for us the scarlet coats, the tossing plumes, the shining helmets or tall busbies. War is muddy, monotonous, dull, infinitely toilsome. We have staged it with a just appreciation of its nature. We have banished colour. As far as possible we have banished music.

I suppose we are right. If it is really true that a soldier is more likely to be killed when wearing a scarlet coat, it is plain common sense to dress him in mud colour. If music attracts the enemy's fire, then bands should be left at home to play for nursemaids in parks and on piers. Yet there is something to be said for the practice of our ancestors. The soldier's business is to kill the enemy as well as to avoid being killed himself. Indeed killing is his first duty, and he only tries to avoid being killed for the sake of being efficient.

A cheerful soldier is a much more effective fighter than a depressed soldier. Our ancestors knew this and designed uniforms with a view to keeping up men's spirits. We have ignored their wisdom and decked ourselves in khaki. I can imagine nothing better calculated to depress the spirits, to induce despondency, and to lower vitality than khaki. The British soldier remains cheerful—indeed it is largely his unfailing cheerfulness which makes him the splendid fighting man he is—but he has had to keep up his spirits without help from the authorities who have coloured his whole life khaki and deprived him of music.

I was placed in a camp which was one of a series of camps stretching along a winding valley. To right and left of us were steep hills, and off the side of one of them, that on which M. lived, the grass had been scraped and hacked. There remained mud which harmonised tonelessly with our uniforms. Under our feet as we walked along the roads and paths which led from end to end of the valley there was mud. The parade grounds—each camp had one—were mud. The tents were mud-coloured or dirty grey. The orderly-rooms, mess-rooms, recreation huts and all the rest were mud coloured and had soiled grey roofs. Men mud-coloured from head to foot paraded in lines, marched, or strolled about or sat on mud banks smoking.

Even the women who served in the canteens and recreation huts refused to wear bright frocks, succumbing to the prevailing oppression of mud. The authorities have put even these women into khaki now, but that has made little difference. Before that order came out the ladies had failed to realise that it was their duty to deck themselves in scarlet, green, and gold, to save the rest of us from depression.

Mr. Wells went out to see the war at one time, and returned to make merry, rather ponderously, over the fact that some officers still wear spurs. Perhaps if Mr. Wells had lived for two months in a large camp wholly given over to the devil of khaki he would have taken a different view of spurs. They are almost the only things left in war which glitter. They are of incalculable value. So far from stripping them from the boots of officers supposed to be mounted, additional spurs should be worn on other parts of the uniform, on shoulder straps for instance, with a view to improving the spirits, and therefore the *moral*, of the army.

It does not in the least matter that spurs are seldom driven into the sides of horses. No one now uses spurs as goads. They are worn for the sake of the shine and glitter of them. In the fortunate owner they are an inspiriting evidence of “swank.” To every one else they are, as Ireland used to be, “the one bright spot” in a desperately drab world. M., a wiser man than I, always wore spurs, though I do not think he ever used them on his horses. He was naturally a man of buoyant cheerfulness, and I daresay would not have succumbed to khaki depression even if he had worn no spurs. But I think the spurs helped him. I know the sight of them helped me when they glittered on the heels of his boots as he tramped along, or glanced in the firelight when he crossed his legs in front of the mess-room stove.

For a long time after settling down in that camp I was vaguely uneasy without being able to discover what was the matter with me. I was thoroughly healthy. I was well fed. I was associating with kindly and agreeable men. I had plenty of interesting work to do. Yet I was conscious of something wrong. It was not homesickness, a feeling I know well and can recognise. It was not fear. I was as safe as if I had been in England.

I discovered, by accident, that I was suffering from an unsatisfied yearning for colour. Drafts of a Scottish regiment came out from home wearing bright-red hackles in their caps; unmistakable spots of colour amid our drab surroundings. I found my eyes following these men about the camp with a curious pleasure, and I realised that what I wanted was to see red, or blue, or green, or anything else except khaki.

Later on an order came out that camp commandants should wear coloured cap-bands and coloured tabs on their coat. It suddenly became a joy to meet a colonel. Certain camps flew flags in front of their orderly-rooms. Very often the weather had faded the colours, but it was a satisfaction to feel that once, at all events, the things had not been drab. The Y.M.C.A., adding without meaning to another to its long list of good deeds, kept its bright-red triangle before our eyes. It seems absurd to mention such things; but I suppose that a starving man will count a few crumbs a feast.

I am not a painter. If any one had talked to me before I went to France of the value of colour, I should have laughed at him. Now, having lived for months without colour, I know better. Men want colour just as they want liquid and warmth. They are not at their best without it.

Nothing seemed stranger to me at first, nothing seems more pathetic now than the pains which men took to introduce a little colour into the drab world in which we were condemned to live. Outside orderly-rooms and other important places men made arrangements of coloured stones. Sometimes a regimental crest was worked out, with elaborate attention to detail, in pebbles, painted yellow, blue, and green. Sometimes the stones were arranged in meaningless geometrical patterns. They were always brightly coloured.

There was a widespread enthusiasm for gardening. Every square yard of unused mud in that great series of camps was seized and turned into flower-beds. Men laboured at them, putting in voluntarily an amount of work which they would have grudged bitterly for any other purpose. They wanted flowers, not

vegetables, though any eatable green thing would have been a treat to them.

When spring and early summer came to us we rejoiced in the result of our labours, frequently fantastic, sometimes as nearly ridiculous as flowers can be. There were beds of daffodils and hyacinths in which it was possible, when the designer acted as showman, to recognise regimental crests. The French flag came out well, if the flowers of the tricolour consented to bloom at the same time. A sergeant, who professed to be an expert, arranged a bed for me which he said would look like a Union Jack in June. Unfortunately I left the place early in May, and I have heard nothing since about that Union Jack. I suppose it failed in some way. If it had succeeded, some one would have told me about it. A fellow-countryman of mine designed a shamrock in blue lobelia. The medical Red Cross looked well in geraniums imported from England at great expense.

Generally our efforts were along more conventional lines. I remember a rose-garden with a sundial in the middle of it. The roses, to preserve them from frost, were carefully wrapped in sacking during severe weather, and an irreverent soldier, fresh from the trenches, commented on the fact that “These blighters at the base are growing sandbags.”

We were short of implements, but we dug. I have seen table forks and broken dinner knives used effectively. I have seen grass, when there was grass, clipped with a pair of scissors. Kindly people in England sent us out packets of seeds, but we were very often beaten by the names on them. We sowed in faith and hope, not knowing what manner of thing an antirrhinum might be.

I do not believe that it was any form of nostalgia, any longing for home surroundings, which made gardeners of the most unlikely of us. Heaven knows the results we achieved were unlike anything we had ever seen at home. It was not love of gardening which set us digging and planting. Men gardened in those camps who never gardened before, and perhaps never will again. At the bottom of it all was an instinctive, unrealised longing for colour. We knew that flowers, if we could only grow them, would not have khaki petals, that, war or no war, we should feast our eyes on red and blue.

Newspapers and politicians used to talk about this as “the war to end war,” the last war. Perhaps they were right. We may at least fairly hope that this is the world’s last khaki war. It is not indeed likely that when men next fight they will revert to scarlet coats and shining breastplates. We have grown out of these crude attempts at romanticism.

But it is very interesting to note the increase of attention given to camouflage. It occurred to some one—the wonder is that it did not occur to him sooner—that a mud-coloured tiger, a tiger with a khaki skin, would be more visible, not less visible, than a tiger with its natural bright stripes. It was our seamen who first grasped the importance of this truth and began to paint ships blue, yellow, and red, with a view to making it difficult for submarine commanders to see them. There are, I believe, a number of artists now engaged in drawing out colour schemes for steamers. I have seen a mother ship of hydroplanes which looked like a cubist picture.

Landsmen are more conservative and slower to grasp new ideas. But even in my time in France tents were sometimes covered with broad curves of bright colours. They looked very funny near at hand; but they are—this seems to be established—much less easily seen by airmen than white or brown tents. It seems a short step to take from colouring tents to colouring uniforms. In the next war, if there be a next war, regiments will perhaps move against the enemy gay as kingfishers and quite as difficult to see. Fighting men will look to each other like ladies in the beauty chorus of a revue. By the enemy they will not be seen at all. War will not, in its essentials, be any pleasanter, however we dress ourselves. Nothing can ever make a joy of it. But at least those who take part in it will escape the curse of khaki which lies heavily on us.

We suffered a good deal from want of music when I went out to France, though things were better then than they had been earlier. They certainly improved still further later on. Music in old days was looked upon as an important thing in war. The primitive savage beat drums of a rude kind before setting out to spear the warriors of the neighbouring tribes. Joshua's soldiers stormed Jericho with the sound of trumpets in their ears. Cromwell's men sang psalms as they went forward. Montrose's highlanders charged to the skirl of their bagpipes. Even a pacifist would, I imagine, charge if a good piper played in front of him.

Our regiments had their bands, and many of them their special marching tunes. But we somehow came to regard music as part of the peace-time, ornamental side of soldiering. The mistake was natural enough. Our military leaders recognised, far sooner than the rest of us, that this war was going to be a grim and desperate business. Bands struck them as out of place in it. Music was associated in their minds with promenades at seaside resorts, with dinners at fashionable restaurants, with ornamental cavalry evolutions at military tournaments. We were not going to France to do musical rides or to stroll about the sands of Boulogne with pretty ladies. We were going to fight. Therefore, bands were better left at home. It was a very natural mistake to make; but it was a mistake, and it is all to the credit of the War Office, a body which gets very little credit for anything, that it gradually altered its policy.

At first we had no outdoor music except what the men produced themselves, unofficially, by singing, by whistling, or with mouth-organs. Indoors there were pianos in most recreation huts, and the piano never had a moment's rest while the huts were open—a proof, if any one wanted a proof, of the craving of the men for music. Then bands were started privately by the officers in different

camps. This was a difficult and doubtful business. Funds had to be collected to buy instruments. Musicians who could play the instruments had to be picked out from among the men, and nobody knew how to find them. Hardly anybody stayed long in these base camps, and a good musician might at any moment be reft away and sent up the line.

Yet bands came into existence. An Irish division started the first I came across, and it used to play its men to church on Sundays in a way that cheered the rest of us. My friend M.'s camps on top of the hill started a band. Other camps, which could not manage bands, discovered Scottish pipers and set them playing on ceremonial occasions. Later on in another place I found an excellent band in a large Canadian hospital, and a convalescent camp started a band which went for route marches along with the men.

But these were all voluntary efforts. The best that could be said for the higher authorities is that they did not actually discourage them. The regimental bands, which we ought to have had in France, still remained at home, and I do not know that they did much playing even there. I think it was the Brigade of Guards which first brought a band out to France. It used to play in the market-place of the town which was then G.H.Q. Later on another Guards' band went on tour round the different bases. There was no mistake about the warmth of its reception. The officers and men gathered in large numbers to listen to it on the fine Sunday afternoon when it played in the camp where I was stationed.

Since then I have heard of, and heard, other regimental bands in France. Their visits have been keenly appreciated. But we ought to have more than occasional visits from these bands. It is probably impossible to have them playing close to the firing-line. But it would be an enormous advantage if we had a couple of good regimental bands at every base, and especially in places where hospitals are numerous.

It is a mistake to regard music simply as a recreation or as an "extra," outside the regular war programme. It is really an important factor in producing and maintaining that elusive but most important thing called *moral*. Men are actually braver, more enduring, more confident, more enthusiastic, if they hear music.

These qualities cannot be destroyed in our men by any privation. They are indestructible in the race. But their growth can be stimulated, and they can be greatly strengthened. A hundred years ago no one would have doubted the value of music in producing and maintaining *moral*. Two hundred years ago or

thereabouts Dryden wrote a poem which illustrated the power of music. Forty years ago Tolstoi wrote a short novel to show how a particular sonata affected not *moral*, but morality. We seem to have forgotten the truths familiar then.

There ought not to be any doubt about the value of music in restoring health. Nobody is fool enough to suppose that a broken bone would set itself, or fragments of shrapnel emerge of their own accord from a man’s leg even if it were possible to secure the services of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. But most doctors admit that in certain obscure and baffling maladies, classed generally as cases of shell-shock, mental and spiritual aid are at least as useful as massage or drugs. Next to religion—which is an extremely difficult thing to get or apply—music is probably the most powerful means we have of spiritual treatment. There is an abundant supply of it ready to hand. It seems a pity not to use it more freely than we do.

CHAPTER VI

LEISURE HOURS

The problem which faces the commandant of a base in France, or a camp at home, must be very like that which a public schoolmaster has to tackle. The business of instruction comes first. Men and officers must be taught their job, as schoolboys must be taught their lessons. Hardly less pressing is the problem of spare time. You cannot keep a soldier throwing bombs all day, and there is a limit to the time which can be occupied in route marching. The obvious solution of the problem is organised games and sports. Most men are keen enough on cricket and football. Most officers are glad to join tennis clubs. In some places in France there are plenty of outdoor amusements of this kind, and matches are arranged between different units which keep interest alive.

Where I was first stationed games were sternly discouraged. The theory, I think, was that the French people would be disgusted if they saw us playing. Perhaps the French people in that neighbourhood were more seriously minded than those in other parts of the country. Perhaps they were less friendly, and it was necessary to consider their feelings with particular care. I have no way of judging about that. Elsewhere the French seemed to take a mild interest in our passion for games; but in that district they may very well have been of a different mind.

Whether the official estimate of the French spirit was right or wrong, the result for us was that we were very badly off for outdoor games. Football and cricket were played, half-heartedly, for matches (on the plan of League matches at home) were not allowed. The formation of an officers' tennis club was forbidden.

On the other hand the men were very well off for indoor amusements. Every Y.M.C.A. hut ran concerts. There were two large cinema huts in the camps. Boxing was encouraged by many officers, and interesting competitions took place which were eagerly watched.

But as the days lengthened with the coming of spring, there were hours which hung very heavily on every one. The officers were slightly better off than the

men. They could always go into the neighbouring town, some four miles off, and find a certain amount of amusement in walking about the streets. But it was a singularly dull town. The men could not leave the camps without permission, and a pass was not always, indeed not often, attainable.

Their favourite pastime was a game which they called “House,” which was known to many of us when we were children as Loto. It is an exceedingly dull game, and I cannot believe that the men would have played it as they did if any other kind of game had been possible. There is a mild element of gambling about House. A small sum of money may be won, a very small sum lost. That I suppose was the attraction.

But it was rather a pitiful thing to walk through the camps on a fine afternoon and to see every waste piece of ground occupied by House players. There is no skill whatever in the game, and the players get no exercise. They sit on the ground with a pile of small pebbles before them, while one of them calls out a series of numbers. The French people, if they had seen us playing House, would have come to the conclusion that we are a nation of imbeciles. Bad as it may be to have as allies men light-hearted enough to play cricket, it must be several degrees worse to have to rely on imbeciles. However, the French did not see us playing House any more than they saw us boxing or attending concerts. They were not allowed into our camps.

For the men who did succeed in getting passes out of camp, the prospect was dreary enough, dreary or undesirable. Going into town in a crowded tram is an amusement which quickly palls. Various ill-defined portions of the town, when you got there, were out of bounds, and a man had need to walk warily if he did not want trouble with the military police.

And there were worse things than military police. On the roadway which led to the camp entrance there might be seen, any fine Sunday afternoon, a crowd of French girls waiting for the men who came out. They were, plainly, not the best girls, though no doubt some of them were more silly than vicious. There were eating-shops, or drinking-shops, of which ugly tales were told. Coffee, an innocent drink, was sometimes doped with brandy, and men found themselves half intoxicated without knowing that they had touched drink.

There were, of course, places where men could go safely. There was, for instance, the Central Y.M.C.A. hall, where excellent food was to be had, and where there were books, papers, games, and a kindly welcome. But one

Y.M.C.A. recreation hut is very like another, and it seems rather waste of a hardly-won pass out of camp to spend the afternoon very much as it might be spent without leaving camp at all. What the men craved for was variety, interest, and—what was of course almost unobtainable—the society of decent women.

I cannot help feeling that in condemning ourselves to desperate dullness we paid too high a price for the good opinion of our French friends. If they were really shocked at our levity in playing games during the war, it would have been better to lacerate their feelings a little. They would very soon have got accustomed to our ways and come to regard our excitement over a League match as nothing worse than a curious form of eccentricity.

The officers were rather better off than the men. They could stay in town long enough to dine at a restaurant, and there is something rather exciting, for a short time, in dining at a French restaurant. There was a special officers' tram which brought us back to camp just in time to pass the sentries before 10.30 p.m. It was invariably over-crowded and we often had to stand, crowded together on the platforms of the driver and conductor. I have seen officers, of rank which gave dignity, clinging to the back of the conductor's platform with their feet planted insecurely on a buffer.

I remember one very exciting run home. We started rather late from town. There was a thick fog. The driver was inclined to be cautious, very properly; but it was doubtful whether we could reach the camp in time. I had found a precarious place on the step of the driver's platform. Three subalterns, spirited boys, fresh from school, tried to speed things up by shouting, "*Vîte, Vîte!*" "Much *vîter* than that!" to the driver, and banging violently on the gong which warned pedestrians of our coming. The driver remained unmoved and the car moved very slowly. Two of the boys seized the driver. The third took control of the tram. I do not know whether he had any practice beforehand in electric motor work; but he made that tram go. We rushed through the fog, bumping and rattling, making very heavy weather of the points at junctions. I do not think we killed any one. If we had we should have heard of it afterwards. We got back to camp in time. The French chauffeur when he recovered his first shock seemed to enjoy himself. Our driver was a very gallant boy. No risk daunted him. I hope he has been transferred into the Tank service. The work there would suit him exactly and I feel sure he would enjoy it.

I do not know that even the prospect of returning to camp by the officers' tram would have lured me to dine in that town very often. One French hotel is very

like another, and I had dined at many before the war.

But there was one restaurant which was especially attractive. I should never have discovered it for myself, for I am not very adventurous or fond of exploring. It was situated in a slum and approached through an abominable alley. It was found first, I believe, by some A.S.C. officers permanently stationed in the town, who had time on their hands for exhaustive research. I was taken there by a friend who hoped to have the pleasure of shocking a parson by leading him into the sort of place a parson ought not to visit. As a matter of fact the place was perfectly respectable, and the only part of me which was shocked was my nose. The smells in the pitch-dark gullies which led to that eating-house were the worst I encountered in France.

It was a most unconventional restaurant. The proprietor, an elderly man, his wife, and three married daughters ran it. They were, whenever I entered the place, engaged in eating a meal of their own at a table near a large fire at one end of the room. When guests appeared they all rose, uttered voluble welcomes, and shook hands with the strangers. There were, besides the family table, four others, all of rough deal, much stained, far from clean and without table-cloths. The seats were narrow benches. If you leaned back you bumped the man at the next table. The floor was sanded and hens walked about picking up the fragments which the diners dropped. When I knew the place first it was patronised chiefly by sailors, Belgians, and the A.S.C. officers who discovered it.

Ordering dinner was an interesting business. There was no menu card. Monsieur and his family talked a kind of French which none of us could ever understand. Also they talked at a terrific speed and all at once, circling round us. We knew that they were naming the kinds of food available, for we caught words like *potage* and *poisson* now and then. Our plan was to sit still and nod occasionally. One of the daughters made a note of the points at which we nodded, and we hoped for the best. The soup was generally ready. Everything else was cooked before our eyes on the fire behind the family table.

Madame did the cooking. The rest of the party sat down again to their own meal. Monsieur exhorted his wife occasionally. The daughters took it in turn to get up and bring us each course as madame finished cooking it. In this way we got a hot and excellent dinner. A good digestion was promoted by the long gaps between the courses. It was impossible to eat fast. Monsieur offered his guests no great choice in wine, but what he had was surprisingly good.

When dinner was over and the bill, a very moderate one, paid, the whole family shook hands with us again and wished us every kind of happiness and good luck. Monsieur then conducted us to a back door, and let us loose into an alley quite as dark and filthy as the one by which we entered. He was always firm about refusing to allow us to go by the way we came. I have no idea what his reasons were, but the plan of smuggling us out of the establishment gave us a pleasurable feeling that we had been breaking some law by being there. There is nothing that I ever could find in King's Regulations on the subject, so I suppose that if we sinned at all it must have been against some French municipal regulation.

That restaurant may be quite popular now; it was getting better known even in my time. But if it becomes popular it will lose its charm. Monsieur and his family will no longer be able to shake hands with every guest. There may be table-cloths. The hens—I always thought they were the *poulets* we ate fattened before our eyes—will be banished, and some officious A.P.M. will put the place out of bounds, suspecting it to be a haunt of vice. Its look and its smell, I admit, would arouse suspicion in the mind of any conscientious A.P.M., but Monsieur's patrons, if rough, were respectable people. Even the A.S.C. officers were above reproach. They looked like men who were satisfied at having discovered the best and cheapest dinner to be got in that town. I doubt whether they had even appreciated the eccentricities of the service.

In spite of our want of games and amusements, life in those camps was pleasant and cheerful. We all had work to do, and not too many hours of idleness. For me there were long walks with M., best and cheeriest of comrades, whose spirits and energy never failed or flagged. We saw a great deal of each other in those days until the time came at the end of April, when he moved off to a cavalry brigade; a post into which he was thrust because good horsemen are rare among chaplains. There was always excellent company in my own mess and others. Nowhere else have I met so many different kinds of men.

The regular soldiers, some of them old men, held themselves as a separate caste a little aloof from the rest of us. It is not to be wondered at. They were professionals, with a great tradition behind them. We were amateurs, and, at times, inclined to be critical of old customs and old ways. We came from every conceivable profession, and before the war had been engaged in a hundred different activities. Among us were men of real ability, who had made good in their own way. I think the regular soldiers were a little bewildered sometimes. They, almost as completely as we, were plunged into a new world. The wonder is that they stood us as patiently as they did.

We had our mild jokes, and it was wonderful how long the mildest jokes will last in circumstances like ours. There was a story of an unfortunate private who was dragged before his colonel for failing to salute a general, a general who should have been unmistakable. In defence he said that he did not know it was a general.

“But,” said the colonel, “you must have seen the red band round his hat.”

“Yes, sir,” said the man, “but I thought that was to show he was a Salvation Army captain.”

The whole camp chuckled over that story for a week. Whether any one ever told it to the general I do not know.

Another private, an Irishman, arrived in the camp one day from the firing-line. Ours was the remotest base; two days’ journey from the nearest trench. Between us and the fighting men was what seemed an impassable entanglement of regulations, guarded at every angle by R.T.O.’s and military police. It was, any one would agree about this, a flat impossibility for an unauthorised person to travel through the zone of the army’s occupation.

Yet this man did it, and did it without in the least intending to. Up to a certain point his account of himself was clear. He had been sent off, one of a party under charge of an officer. He did not know—few people in the army ever do know—where he was going. He became detached from his party and found himself, a solitary unit, at what seems to have been a railhead. The colonel who dealt with him questioned:

“Why didn’t you ask the R.T.O. where you were to go?”

“I did ask him, sir. The first thing ever I did was to ask him.”

“And what did he say?”

“What he said, sir, was ‘Go to the devil out of this.’”

The colonel checked a smile. He probably sympathised with the R.T.O.

“And what did you do then?” he asked.

“I got into the train, sir, and sure, here I am.”

That particular colonel’s temper was notoriously a little soured by long

command. It was felt that the soldier had, after all, made a fair attempt to obey the orders of the R.T.O.

Another private—less innocent, I fear—caused me and a few other people some mild excitement. I was summoned to the orderly-room to answer a telephone call. I was told by some one, whose voice sounded as if he was much irritated, that he had caught the man who stole my shirt. No one, thanks to my servant's vigilance, had stolen any shirt of mine. I said so.

"Grey flannel shirt," said the voice, and I gathered that he was irritated afresh by my extreme stupidity. I disclaimed all knowledge of any stolen shirt, flannel or other.

An explanation followed. A deserter had been arrested. It was discovered that he was wearing four flannel shirts and three thick garments under them. "That," I said, "is good *prima facie* evidence that he really is a soldier." I thought that a useful thing to say, and true. No one in the world except a British soldier would wear four shirts and three jerseys at the same time. The British soldier—it is one of his characteristics—puts on all the clothes he can get in any weather.

The voice at the other end of the wire swore—unnecessarily, I think. Then it told me that one of the shirts was marked with my name and that I must identify it and the man. I refused, of course. The voice offered to send the shirt round for my inspection. I did not in the least want to inspect a shirt that had been worn, probably for a long time without washing, along with six other thick garments by a deserter; but I consented to look at the thing from a distance.

In the end I did not even do that. The unfortunate man confessed to having stolen the shirt from an officer in the trenches near Ypres. How it came to have my name on it I do not yet know. I did miss a couple of shirts from my store of civilian clothes when I got home. But I am sure no officer stole them. Indeed I do not see how any officer could.

That voice—I do not know that I ever met its owner—had a wonderful power of language, strong, picturesque, and highly profane language, suitable for expressing violent emotion over a telephone wire. It was once rebuked by a very gentle captain with a remark that was widely quoted afterwards. The language had been unusually flamboyant and was becoming worse. "Hold on a minute," said the listener, "and let the line cool. It's nearly red hot at this end."

When life failed to provide a joke or two we fell back on rumours and enjoyed

them thoroughly. They say that Fleet Street as a breeding-ground for rumour is surpassed only by the drawing-rooms of the wives of ministers of state. I have no experience of either; but a base camp in France would be hard to beat. The number of naval battles declared by the best authorities to have been fought during the early months of 1916 was amazing. We had them once a week, and torpedo-boat skirmishes on off days.

Men in “the signals”—all rumour goes back to the signals in the end—had lively imaginations. We mourned the loss of Kut months before General Townshend was forced to surrender. We revelled in extracts from the private letters of people like the Brazilian ambassador in Berlin. We knew with absolute certainty the English regiments which were taking part in the defence of Verdun. The Guards, by a sudden move, seized the city of Lille, but owing to faulty staff work were cut off, hemmed in, and at last wiped out, the entire division. The last men, a mixed batch of Grenadiers, Coldstream, Scots, Irish, and Welsh, perished in a final glorious bayonet charge. It was a Guardsman who told me the story first, and he had it from what really was unimpeachable authority.

But there is no reason for railing against Rumour. She is a wild-eyed jade, no doubt, with disordered locks and a babbling tongue. But life at a base in France would be duller without her; and she does no one any real harm.

CHAPTER VII

COMING AND GOING

The camp in which I lived was the first in the series of camps which stretched along the whole winding valley. We were nearest to the entrance gates, at which military police were perpetually on guard; nearest to the railway station, a wayside *halte* where few trains stopped; nearest to the road along which the trams ran into the town. All who came and went in and out passed by our camp, using a road, made, I think, by our men originally, which ran along the bottom of our parade ground and thence, with many side roads branching from it, through all the camps right along the valley. Our parade ground sloped down towards this road, ending in a steep bank which we tried to keep pleasantly grassy, which we crowned with flower-beds, so that new-comers might feel that they had arrived at a pleasant place.

Standing on this bank it was possible to watch all the entering and departing traffic of the camps, the motor lorries which rumbled by, the little road engines, always somewhat comic, which puffed and snorted, dragging trucks after them. Now and then came the motors of generals and other potentates, or the shabby, overworked Fords of the Y.M.C.A. Mounted officers, colonels, and camp commandants who were privileged to keep horses, trotted by. Orderlies on bicycles went perilously, for the road was narrow and motor lorries are big. A constant stream of officers and men passed by; or parties, on their way up the hill, to one of the instruction camps marched along.

This went on all day from early dawn till the “Last Post” sounded and quiet came. To a new-comer, as I was, one unused to armies and their ways, this traffic was a source of endless interest; but I liked most to stand on the bank above the road during the later hours of the forenoon. It was then that the new drafts, men fresh from England, marched in.

The transports which brought them reached the harbour early in the morning. The men disembarked at 8 a.m. and marched out to the camps, a distance of four or five miles. They were often weary when they arrived, wet and muddy perhaps, or powdered with dust, unshaved, unwashed. Often their faces were still pallid after a long night of seasickness. Their rifles and kit seemed a burden to

some of them. They marched past our camp, and there were generally two or three of us who stood on the bank to watch and criticise.

Later on, when some of the camps had dealt with the music question, a band or a couple of pipers would go some distance along the road to meet the coming men and to play them into camp. Then, in spite of weariness and the effects of seasickness, the new drafts stepped out bravely and made a good show.

I had a friend, a sergeant who had seen much service, one of those N.C.O.'s of the old army to whom the empire owes a debt which will never be properly understood. He often stood beside me to watch the new men come in. He taught me to criticise their marching, to appreciate their bearing. He wore a South African ribbon then. He wears the Mons ribbon now and a couple of gold wound stripes and doubtless several chevrons, red and blue.

The skirl of pipes came to us, and a moment later the quick, firm tread of men marching.

"Guards, sir," said my friend.

They passed, swinging along, a mixed draft of Grenadiers, Coldstream, Scots, Irish, Welsh. My friend straightened himself as they went by.

"The Guards, sir, is the Guards, wherever they are."

He was not himself a guardsman, but there was no trace of jealousy in his voice. I have noticed the same thing again and again. There are people who dislike the Guards, accusing them of conceit or resenting certain privileges. I never met any one who refused to give the Guards first place in battle, on the march, in camp. It is a magnificent record to have established in an army like ours, a wonderful record to have kept through a long-drawn war like this, when every regiment has been destroyed and remade of new material half a dozen times.

Another draft came by.

"Territorials, sir."

My friend was prejudiced; but he is not the only soldier of the old army who is prejudiced against territorials. Against new battalions, Kitchener battalions, of regular regiments there is no feeling. The old army took them to its heart, bullied them, taught them as if they were younger brothers. The Territorials are step-brothers at best. Yet they have made good in France. I wonder that the prejudice

persists. They do not march like the Guards. Even the London Territorials have not accomplished that. But they have established themselves as fighters, in the desperate holding of the Ypres salient in earlier days, and ever since everywhere in the long battle-line.

“R.F.A.,” said my friend, “and the biggest draft of the lot. There must be a damned lot of guns at the front now. We could have done with a few more at Mons. It’s guns that’s wanted in this war. Guns and men behind them. And it’s guns, and gunners anyway, we’re getting. Look at those fellows now. You’ll see worse drafts; though”—he surveyed the men carefully—“you might see better. There’s some of them now that’s young, too young. They’ll be sent back sick before they harden. Beg pardon, sir, but here’s our lot at last. I must be going.”

He saluted and turned. A body of men with an elderly officer at their head followed the gunners closely. They turned sharp to the left up the steep little road which leads into our camp. They halted in the middle of the parade ground. Salutes were given and returned. The draft was handed over. The elderly officer detached himself and made his way to the mess-room. I followed to greet him, and to hear the latest news from England.

“What sort of a passage?”

“Vile. We crossed in a superannuated paddle-boat. Everybody sick. Not a spot to lie down in. My men were detailed to clean up the blessed packet afterwards. That’s why we’re late. Such a scene. Ugh! Can I get a drink?”

I do not know any one who has a more consistently disagreeable job than a draft-conducting officer. He crosses and recrosses the Channel under the most uncomfortable conditions possible. He has a lot of responsibility. He gets no praise and little credit. He is generally an elderly man. He has, most likely, been accustomed for years to an easy life. He is often an incurable victim to seasickness. There is no interest and no excitement about his work. He lives for the most part in trains and steamers. He snatches meals in strange messes, railway refreshment rooms, and quayside restaurants. He may have to conduct his draft all the way from Cork or Wick. He may be kept waiting hour after hour for a train. He may be embarked and disembarked again three or four times before his steamer actually starts. The men of his draft are strangers to him. He does not know whether his sergeants are trustworthy or not. Yet there is no epidemic of suicide among draft-conducting officers, though there very well might be. Great and unconquerable is the spirit of the British dug-out officer.

The draft itself may have had a bad time too, especially in the matter of cleaning up the ship; but then the draft does not have it once a week. And the draft has not got to turn round and go straight back again. And for the draft the business has the advantage of novelty. It is exciting to land for the first time in France, to be pursued by little boys who say “Souvenir!” and “Good night!” early in the morning. And there is something about getting there at last, after months of weary training, which must stir the most sluggish imagination.

The draft is examined by the doctors. One way and another a doctor in a base camp has a busy time of it. He begins at 6 a.m., diagnosing the cases of the men who report sick. The hour at which it is possible to report sick is fixed inconveniently early in order, it is hoped, to discourage disease. Men who are not very bad may actually prefer the usual parades and fatigues to reporting sick at 6 a.m. For sickness is not even a sure way of escape. Doctors have a nasty trick of awarding “medicine and duty” in doubtful cases, which is distinctly more unpleasant than duty without medicine. From that on the doctor is kept busy, till he drops off to sleep for half an hour before dinner in the mess-room.

I thought at first that the doctors might have been spared the task of examining incoming drafts. The men have all been passed fit at home before they start, and it does not seem reasonable to suppose that their constitutions have seriously deteriorated on the journey. But the new examination is really necessary. Doctors, according to the proverb, differ. They even seem to differ more widely than other men. The home doctor for some reason takes an optimistic view of human ailments, and is inclined to pass a man fit who will certainly collapse when he gets up the line. The doctor in the base camp knows that he will be abominably “strafed” if he sends “crocks” to the front. He does not want them returned and left on his hands at the base. So he picks the plainly unfit men out of the drafts, and, after a tedious round of form filling, sends them back to England.

There was, for instance, Private Buggins, whose case interested me so much that I should like very much to hear the end of his story. Private Buggins suffered from curvature of the spine. It was plain that he could not carry a pack for very long. Some one at home passed Private Buggins fit and he came out with a draft. He was picked out of that draft at the base in France. At the end of a fortnight’s strenuous labour (form filling), Private Buggins was sent back to England.

A fortnight after that he turned up again in France, one of another draft. Once more he was detached. Once more the wheels creaked round and Private

Buggins went back to England. This time three weeks elapsed before he joined another draft and again submitted himself for medical examination in France. The result was the same. I do not wonder. I saw Buggins's spine once, and I hold strongly that "Blighty is the place for him."

After that I lost sight of Private Buggins, for I was moved to a new camp; but I have no reason to suppose the case is settled. He is still, in all probability, crossing and recrossing the English Channel. By this time I expect he has found out ways of living tolerably comfortably under the conditions of his nomadic military service. But he ought to be given a special medal when the war is over and he is allowed to settle down again somewhere.

A new draft also submits to kit inspection. I suppose kits are inspected in England before the start is made; but the British soldier has an amazing desire to get rid of the parts of his equipment which strike him as superfluous. He appears to shed kit as he goes along, and often succeeds in arriving at the end of the journey with only half the things he ought to have.

Yet he goes to war with few possessions. I am sure his pack is heavy enough to carry, but its contents look pitifully insufficient when spread out on a parade ground for inspection. A cake of soap, a razor, a small towel, two or three brushes, a spare pair of socks, a clean shirt—it seems little enough for a man to face an unknown world with, a man who is heir to the gifts of a complex civilisation.

Once thoroughly inspected, the draft ceases to be a draft, and is merged in the camp. The men settle down in the lines of their battalion, take their share in the life and work of their fellows until the day comes when they are joined to another draft and sent forth on a yet more adventurous journey.

Drafts coming to us from England arrived in the morning. Drafts going from us to the front departed at night. I suppose the numbers of those who came and of those who went balanced like the figures in a well-kept ledger. To me it always seemed that there were more going than coming—an illusion certainly, since our camp never emptied. But those who came were all strangers, while many of those who went were friends, and many more were acquaintances. Therefore, the going left gaps which the new-comers did not seem to fill.

The orders that a draft was to go to the front came to us in the morning from the Officer Commanding Reinforcements. So many officers and men of such-and-such a battalion were to proceed to such-or-such a place. Lists, nominal rolls,

were prepared in the orderly-room. The men were warned. The officers rushed into town to complete their kit or add to it small articles likely to be useful. Trench boots, trench coats, tins of solidified methylated spirits, all sorts of odds and ends, were picked up at the ordnance stores or at French shops which dealt specially in such things. Advice was eagerly sought—and the most curious advice taken—by those who had never been up the line before. That last day at the base was busy and exciting. There was a spirit of light-heartedness and gaiety abroad. We laughed more than usual and joked oftener. Behind the laughter—who knows?

In the camp there was much going to and fro. Men stood in queues outside the quartermaster's stores, to receive gas masks, first field dressings, identification discs, and such things. Kits were once more inspected, minutely and rigorously. Missing articles were supplied. Entries were made in pay books.

Later on the men crowded into the canteen or the Y.M.C.A. hut. Letters were written, pathetic scrawls many of them. There was a feeling of excitement, tense and only half suppressed, among the men who were going. There was no sign of depression or fear; certainly no hint of any sadness of farewell.

For us who stayed behind it was different. I saw scores of these drafts depart for the unknown, terrible front. I never got over the feeling of awe. There are certain scenes which will abide in my memory to the end of my life, which I do not think I can possibly forget even afterwards, when my turn comes and I join those men who went from us, of whom we next heard when their names appeared in the lists of killed.

It was my custom to invite those who were going to "partake of the most comfortable sacrament of the body and blood of Christ" before they started. At first we used to meet in my hut; but that was too small for us, though only a few from each departing draft gathered there. Later on I used a room in a neighbouring house.

It was late in the afternoon, generally 6 o'clock, before the officers and men were ready to come. The shadows had gathered. The candles on my rude altar shone, giving the little light we needed. About to face death these boys—to me and especially at that time they all seemed boys—kneeled to salute their King who rules by virtue of a sacrifice like theirs. They took His body and His blood, broken and shed for them whose bodies were also dedicated, just as His was, for the saving of the world. My hands trembled, stretched out in benediction over

the bowed young heads. Did ever men do greater things than these? Have any among the martyrs and saints of the church's calendar belonged more clearly to the great fellowship of Christs crucified, whose splendid destiny it is to redeem the world?

These eucharists are among the scenes which it is impossible ever to forget. There are also others, no less impressive, in the recurring drama of the departing drafts.

The day closes early in these great camps. At half-past eight the recreation huts close their doors. Concerts and entertainments are over. The men stream back to their tents along muddy roads, laughing, chatting, singing. Lights appear in the tents, and a glow, red or white, shines through the canvas. One after another these are extinguished. The "Last Post" sounds from a dozen bugles. The multitudinous noises of camp life die away. The rifle-fire which has crackled all day on the ranges has long ceased. The spluttering of machine guns in the training camps vexes the ear no more. The heavy explosions of shell testing are over for another day. Save for the sharp challenge of a sentry here and there, and the distant shriek of a railway engine, there is almost unbroken silence for a while.

At half-past nine perhaps, or a little later, men come silently from the tents and assemble on the parade ground. They fall in, small detachments from four or five regiments, each forming its own lines of men. They carry rifles. Their packs are on their backs. Their haversacks, mess tins, and all the kit of marching infantry are strung round them. A draft from this camp and many drafts from all this great collection of camps are going "up the line" to-night.

"Up the line." The phrase means a long railway journey, very many hours of travelling perhaps, for the train moves slowly. The journey will end where the railway stops short of the firing-line, and these men will join their comrades, filling the gaps in many battalions. Some of them are fresh from home, young soldiers. Others, recovered from wounds or sickness, are going back to perils and hardship which they already know. For all of them this is the last parade in safety for many a long day. Henceforth, till the coming of peace releases them, or a wound sends them back to rest, or death puts an end to their soldiering, they will go in peril day and night, will endure incredible hardships constantly.

They stand silent. At the head of the waiting columns are men with lanterns in their hands, faint spots of light in the surrounding gloom. Down the hill from his

quarters the colonel comes. The adjutant and the sergeant-major leave the orderly-room. A little group of officers stands back in the shadow. They are there to see their comrades off. A sharp order is given. There is a rattle of arms and accoutrements. The waiting men stand to attention. The colonel makes his progress up and down the line of men, taking a last look at their equipment. An orderly carrying a lantern goes before him. He inspects each man minutely. Now and then he speaks a few words in a low tone. Otherwise the silence is complete.

The inspection is over at last. He takes his place at the head of the column. Certain formal orders are read out by the adjutant. There is something about the unexpended portion of the day's rations. There cannot be much "unexpended" at 10 o'clock at night; but the military machine, recklessly prodigal of large sums of money, is scrupulously niggardly about trifles. But it does not matter. No one at the moment is concerned about the unexpended portion of his ration. There is a stern injunction against travelling on the roof of railway carriages. "Men," the order explains, "have been killed owing to doing so." We suppose vaguely that those men were better dead. No one in his right senses would willingly travel on the top of a railway carriage at dead of night in a snowstorm. And as we stand on the parade ground it begins to snow. There is much else, but the reading stops at last. The colonel speaks. He wishes all good fortune to those who go. He reminds them that they are the guardians of the honour of famous regiments. He assures them that the hearts of those who stay behind go with them. He is himself one of those who stay behind; but there is something in the way he speaks which makes us sure that he would gladly go. He does not say this. It is not his way to talk heroics. But more certainly than if he had said the words the men know that it is not of his own choice that he stays behind.

It is my turn to speak, to pray. Surely never to any minister of God has such opportunity been given. But what words can I find? What supplication fits the time and place? I beg the men to pray, to seek from above courage, strength, patience, inward peace. I make my prayer for them, that God will lighten the surrounding darkness and deliver us all from the perils of "this night." I am feeble, helpless, faithless, without vision; but at least I can give the benediction. "The Peace of God——" Even war cannot take that from the heart of him who has it.

From a neighbouring camp comes the sound of men singing as they tramp down the muddy road. Another draft is on its way. From a camp still farther off we hear the skirl of bagpipes. There, too, men have said good-bye to security and are on their way. A sharp order rings out. Then another. The men on the parade

ground spring to attention, turn, march.

They begin to sing as they go. “Tipperary,” in those days was losing its popularity. “If I were the only boy in the world” had not come to its own. For the moment “Irish eyes are smiling” is most popular. It is that or some such song they sing, refusing even then to make obeisance to heroic sentiment. The little group of officers, the sergeants, the orderlies with the lanterns, stand and salute the columns as they pass.

Far down the road we hear a shouted jest, a peal of laughter, a burst of song.

In what mood, with what spirit does the soldier, the man in the ranks, go forth into the night to his supremely great adventure? We do more than guess. We know. We chaplains are officers, but we are something more than officers. We are, or ought to be, the friends of men and officers alike. We have the chance of learning from the men’s own lips what their feelings are. Hardly ever do we get the least suggestion of heroic resolve or hint of the consciousness of great purpose. Very often we hear a hope expressed—a hope which is really a prayer for God’s blessing. But this is almost always for those left at home, for wife and children, parents, brothers, friends. It is as if they and not the men who fight had dangers to face and trials to endure.

From his intimate talk we may guess that the soldier thinks very little about himself and very much about those he has left behind. He says little of what his life has been, less still about that to which he looks forward. His mind is altogether occupied with the little affairs of his home life, with the marriage of this friend, the wages earned by son or daughter, the thousand details of life in some English village or some great city. Sometimes we hear an expression of pleasure at the thought of joining again comrades by whose side the writer has fought. Sometimes an anticipation from a young soldier of seeing in the fighting-line some friend who has gone there before him.

It is not thus that an imaginative writer would represent the talk of soldiers who say farewell. I suppose that those who speak as these men do are lovers of peace and quiet ways, have no great taste for adventuring, find war not a joy but a hard necessity. Yet as we know, as all Europe knows now, there are no better fighters in the world than these citizen soldiers whose blood the bugle stirs but sluggishly, whose hearts are all the time with those whom they have left at English firesides.

CHAPTER VIII

WOODBINE HUT

I knew many recreation huts, Y.M.C.A. huts, Church Army huts, E.F. canteens, while I was in France. I was in and out of them at all sorts of hours. I lectured in them, preached in them, told stories, played games, and spent in the aggregate many hours listening to other people singing, reciting, lecturing. It was always a pleasure to be in these huts and I liked every one of them. But I cherish specially tender recollections of Woodbine Hut. It was the first I knew, the first I ever entered, my earliest love among huts. Also its name was singularly attractive. It is not every hut which has a name. Many are known simply by the number of the camp they belong to, and even those which have names make, as a rule, little appeal to the imagination. It is nice and loyal to call a hut after a princess, for instance, or by the name of the donor, or after some province or district at home, whose inhabitants paid for the hut. One is no way moved by such names.

But Woodbine! The name had nothing whatever to do with the soldier's favourite cigarette, though that hut, or any other, might very well be called after tobacco. I, a hardened smoker, have choked in the atmosphere of these huts worse than anywhere else, even in the cabins of small yachts anchored at night. But cigarettes were not in the mind of the ladies who built and named that hut. Afterwards when their hair and clothes reeked of a particularly offensive kind of tobacco, it may have occurred to them that they were wiser than they knew in choosing the name Woodbine.

But at first they were not thinking of tobacco. They meant to make a little pun on their own name like the pun of the herald who gave "*Ver non semper viret*" to the Vernons for a motto; associating themselves thus modestly and shyly with the building they had given, in which they served. Also they meant the name to call up in the minds of the soldiers who used the hut all sorts of thoughts of home, of English gardens, of old-fashioned flowers, of mothers' smiles and kisses—the kisses perhaps not always mother's. The idea is a pretty one, and the English soldier, like most cheerful people, is a sentimentalist, yet I doubt if ten of the many thousands of men who used that hut ever associated it with honeysuckle.

When I first saw "Woodbine" over the door of that hut, the name filled me with

astonishment. I knew of a Paradise Court in a grimy city slum, and a dilapidated whitewashed house on the edge of a Connaught bog which has somehow got itself called Monte Carlo. But these misfits of names moved me only to mirth mingled with a certain sadness. “Woodbine” is a sheer astonishment. I hear the word and think of the rustic arches in cottage gardens, of old tree trunks climbed over by delightful flowers. I think of open lattice windows, of sweet summer air. Nothing in the whole long train of thought prepares me for or tends in any way to suggest this Woodbine.

It is a building. In the language of the army—the official language—it is a hut; but hardly more like the hut of civil life than it is like the flower from which it takes its name. The walls are thin wood. The roof is corrugated iron. It contains two long, low halls. Glaring electric lights hang from the rafters. They must glare if they are to shine at all, for the air is thick with tobacco smoke.

Inside the halls are gathered hundreds of soldiers. In one corner, that which we enter first, the men are sitting, packed close together at small tables. They turn over the pages of illustrated papers. They drink tea, cocoa, and hot milk. They eat buns and slices of bread-and-butter. They write those letters home which express so little, and to those who understand mean so much. Of the letters written home from camp, half at least are on paper which bear the stamp of the Y.M.C.A.—paper given to all who ask in this hut and scores of others. Reading, eating, drinking, writing, chatting, or playing draughts, everybody smokes. Everybody, such is the climate, reeks with damp. Everybody is hot. The last thing that the air suggests to the nose of one who enters is the smell of woodbine.

In the other, the inner hall, there are more men, still more closely packed together, smoking more persistently, and the air is even denser. Here no one is eating, no one reading. Few attempt to write. The evening entertainment is about to begin. On a narrow platform at one end of the hall is the piano. A pianist has taken possession of it. He has been selected by no one in authority, elected by no committee. He has occurred, emerged from the mass of men; by virtue of some energy within him has made good his position in front of the instrument. He flogs the keys, and above the babel of talk sounds some rag-time melody, once popular, now forgotten or despised at home. Here or there a voice takes up the tune and sings or chants it.

The audience begin to catch the spirit of the entertainment. Some one calls the name of Corporal Smith. A man struggles to his feet and leaps on to the

platform. He is greeted with applauding cheers. There is a short consultation between him and the pianist. A tentative chord is struck. Corporal Smith nods approval and turns to the audience. His song begins. If it is the kind of song that has a chorus the audience shouts it and Corporal Smith conducts the singing with waving of his arms.

Corporal Smith is a popular favourite. We know his worth as a singer, demand and applaud him. But there are other candidates for favour. Before the applause has died away, while still acknowledgments are being bowed, another man takes his place on the platform. He is a stranger and no one knows what he will sing. But the pianist is a man of genius. Whisper to him the name of the song, give even a hint of its nature, let him guess at the kind of voice, bass, baritone, tenor, and he will vamp an accompaniment. He has his difficulties. A singer will start at the wrong time, will for a whole verse, perhaps, make noises in a different key; the pianist never fails. Somehow, before very long, instrument and singer get together—more or less.

There is no dearth of singers, no bashful hanging back, no waiting for polite pressure. Every one who can sing, or thinks he can, is eager to display his talent. There is no monotony. A boisterous comic song is succeeded by one about summer roses, autumn leaves, and the kiss of a maiden at a stile. The vagaries of a ventriloquist are a matter for roars of laughter. A song about the beauties of the rising moon pleases us all equally well. An original genius sings a song of his own composition, rough-hewn verses set to a familiar tune, about the difficulty of obtaining leave and the longing that is in all our hearts for a return to “Blighty, dear old Blighty.” Did ever men before fix such a name on the country for which they fight?

Now and again some one comes forward with a long narrative song, a kind of ballad chanted to a tune very difficult to catch. It is about as hard to keep track with the story as to pick up the tune. Words—better singers fail in the same way—are not easily distinguished, though the man does his best, clears his throat carefully between each verse and spits over the edge of the platform to improve his enunciation. No one objects to that.

About manners and dress the audience is very little critical. But about the merits of the songs and the singers the men express their opinions with the utmost frankness. The applause is genuine, and the singer who wins it is under no doubt about its reality. The song which makes no appeal is simply drowned by loud talk, and the unfortunate singer will crack his voice in vain in an endeavour to

regain the attention he has lost.

Encores are rare, and the men are slow to take them. There is a man towards the end of the evening who wins one unmistakably with an inimitable burlesque of “Alice, where art thou?” The pianist fails to keep in touch with the astonishing vagaries of this performance, and the singer, unabashed, finishes without accompaniment. The audience yells with delight, and continues to yell till the singer comes forward again. This time he gives us a song about leaving home, a thing of heart-rending pathos, and we wail the chorus:

“It’s sad to give the last hand-shake,
It’s sad the last long kiss to take,
It’s sad to say farewell.”

The entertainment draws to its close about 8 o’clock. Men go to bed betimes who know that a bugle will sound the reveille at 5.30 in the morning. The end of the entertainment is planned to allow time for a final cup of tea or a glass of Horlick’s Malted Milk before we go out to flounder through the mud to our tents.

This last half-hour is a busy one for the ladies behind the counter in the outer hall. Long queues of men stand waiting to be served. Dripping cups and sticky buns are passed to them with inconceivable rapidity. The work is done at high pressure, but with the tea and the food the men receive something else, something they pay no penny for, something the value of which to them is above all measuring with pennies—the friendly smile, the kindly word of a woman. We can partly guess at what these ladies have given up at home to do this work—servile, sticky, dull work—for men who are neither kith nor kin to them. No one will ever know the amount of good they do; without praise, pay, or hope of honour, often without thanks. If “the actions of the just smell sweet and blossom,” surely these deeds of love and kindness have a fragrance of surpassing sweetness.

Perhaps, after all, the hut is well named “Woodbine,” and others might be called “Rose,” “Violet,” “Lily.” The discerning eye sees the flowers through the mist of steaming tea. We catch the perfume while we choke in the reek of tobacco smoke, damp clothes, and heated bodies.

The British part of the war area in France is dotted over with huts more or less like the “Woodbine.” They are owned, I suppose, certainly run, by half a dozen different organisations. I understand that the Church Army is now very energetic in building huts, but when I first went to France by far the greater part of the work was done by the Y.M.C.A.

The idea—the red triangle is supposed to be symbolical—is to minister to the needs of the three parts of man—body, mind, and soul. At the bar which stands at one end of the hut men buy food, drink (strictly non-alcoholic), and tobacco. In the body of the room men play draughts, chess, anything except cards, read papers and write letters. Often there are concerts and lectures. Sometimes there

are classes which very few men attend. So the mind is cared for.

The atmosphere is supposed to be religious, and the men recognise the fact by refraining from the use of their favourite words even when no lady worker is within earshot. The talk in a Y.M.C.A. hut is sometimes loud. The laughter is frequent. But a young girl might walk about invisible among the men without hearing an expression which would shock her, so long as she remained inside the four walls.

There are also supposed to be prayers every night and there is a voluntary service, of a very free and easy kind, on Sunday evenings. Those evening prayers, theoretically a beautiful and moving ending to the day's labour, were practically a very difficult business. I have been in huts when the first hint of prayers, the production of a bundle of hymn-books, was the signal for a stampede of men. By the time the pianist was ready to play the hut was empty, save for two or three unwilling victims who had been cornered by an energetic lady.

In the early days the "leader" of the hut was generally a young man of the kind who would join a Christian Association in the days before the war, and the lady workers, sometimes, but not always, were of the same way of thinking. They were desperately in earnest about prayers and determined, though I think unfair ways were adopted, to secure congregations. A concert drew a crowded audience, and it seemed desirable to attach prayers to the last item of the performance so closely that there was no time to escape.

I remember scenes, not without an element of comedy in them, but singularly unedifying. A young lady, prettily dressed and pleasant to look at, recited a poem about a certain "nursie" who in the course of her professional duties tended one "Percy." In the second verse nursie fell in love with Percy, and, very properly, Percy with her. In the third verse they were married. In the fourth verse we came on nursie nursing (business here by the reciter as if holding a baby) "another little Percy." The audience shouts with laughter, yells applause, and wants to encore. The hut leader seizes his opportunity, announces prayers, and the men, choking down their giggles over nursie, find themselves singing "When I survey the wondrous cross."

My own impression is that prayers cannot with decency follow hard on a Y.M.C.A. concert. The mind and soul sides of the red triangle seem to join at an angle which is particularly aggressive. The body side, on the other hand, works

in comparatively comfortably with both. Tea and cake have long had a semi-sacramental value in some religious circles, and the steam of cocoa or hot malted milk blends easily with the hot air of a “Nursie-Percy” concert or the serener atmosphere of “Abide with Me.”

Yet I am convinced that the evening-prayers idea is a good one and it can be worked successfully for the benefit of many men. I have seen the large hall of one of those Y.M.C.A. huts well filled night after night for evening prayers, and those were not only men who remained in the hall drinking tea or playing games, but many others who came in specially for prayers. A choir gathered round the piano, eager to sing the evening hymn. The hush during the saying of a few simple prayers was unmistakably devotional. It was impossible to doubt that when the benediction fell upon those bowed heads there did abide something of the peace which passeth all understanding and that hearts were lifted up unto the Lord.

There was, unfortunately, a certain amount of jealousy at one time between the Y.M.C.A. workers and the recognised army chaplains. I think that this is passing away. But when I first went to France the relations between the two organisations in no way suggested the ointment which ran down Aaron’s beard to the skirts of his garment, the Psalmist’s symbol of the unity in which brethren dwelt together.

The Y.M.C.A. workers were perhaps a little prickly. The men among them, often Free Church ministers, seemed on the lookout for the sort of snubs which Nonconformists often receive from the Anglican clergy at home. The chaplains, especially the Church of England chaplains, appeared to think that they ought to conduct all religious services in the Y.M.C.A. huts. This was unreasonable. If the Church of England had been awake to her opportunity in the early days of the war she could have built church huts all over northern France and run them on her own lines. She missed her chance, not having among her leaders any man of the energy and foresight of Sir A. Yapp.

The Church Army has done much during the last years; but it has been the making up of leeway. The Church once might have occupied the position held by the Y.M.C.A. She failed to rise to the occasion. Her officers, the military chaplains, had no fair cause of complaint when they found that they could not straightway enter into the fruits of other men’s labour.

But the little jealousy which existed between the chaplains and the Y.M.C.A.

was passing away while I was in France, has now, perhaps, entirely disappeared. The war has done little good, that I ever could discover, to any one, but it has delivered the souls of the Church of England clergy who went out to France from the worst form of ecclesiastical snobbery. There are few of those who tried to work in the army who preserve the spirit of social superiority which has had a good deal to do with the dislike of the Church, which has been I imagine, a much more effective cause of “our unhappy divisions” than any of the doctrines men have professed to quarrel about.

And the Y.M.C.A. workers are less aggressively prickly than they used to be. The army authorities have weeded out a good many of the original men workers, young students from Free Church theological colleges, and put them into khaki. Their places have been taken by older men, of much larger experience of life, less keen on making good the position of a particular religious denomination. They are often glad to hand over their strictly religious duties to any chaplain who will do them efficiently.

The women workers, a far more numerous class, never were so difficult, from the Church of England chaplain’s point of view, as the men. They are, in the fullest sense, voluntary workers. They even pay all their own expense, lodging, board, and travelling. They must be women of independent means. I do not know why it is, but well-off people are seldom as eager about emphasising sectarian differences as those who have to work for small incomes. Perhaps they have more chance of getting interested in other things.

It is, I fear, true that the decay of the sectarian—that is to say undenominational—spirit in the Y.M.C.A. has resulted in a certain blurring of the “soul” side of the red triangle. This has been a cause of uneasiness to the society’s authorities at home, and various efforts have been made to stimulate the spiritual work of the huts and to inquire into the causes of its failure. I am inclined to think that the matter is quite easily understood. There is less aggressive religiosity in Y.M.C.A. huts than there used to be, because the society is more and more drawing its workers from a class which instinctively shrinks from slapping a strange man heartily on the back and greeting him with the inquiry—“Tommy, how’s your soul?” There is no need for anxiety about the really religious work of the huts. That in most places is being done.

CHAPTER IX

Y.S.C.

“Y.S.C.” stands for Young Soldiers’ Club, an institution which had a short, but, I think, really useful existence in the large camp where I was first stationed. There were in that camp large numbers of boys—at one time nearly a thousand of them—all enlisted under age in the early days of the recruiting movement, all of them found by actual trial or judged beforehand to be unfit for the hardship of life in the trenches. They were either sent down from their battalions to the base or were stopped on the way up. For some time their number steadily increased. Like the children of Israel in Egypt, who also multiplied rapidly, they became a nuisance to the authorities.

Their existence in the camp was a standing menace to discipline. Officially they were men to be trained, fed, lodged, if necessary punished according to the scheme designed for and in the main suitable to men. In reality they were boys, growing boys, some of them not sixteen years of age, a few—the thing seems almost incredible—not fifteen. How the recruiting authorities at home ever managed to send a child of less than fifteen out to France as a fighting man remains mysterious. But they did.

These were besides boys of a certain particularly difficult kind. It is not your “good” boy who rushes to the recruiting office and tells a lie about his age. It is not the gentle, amiable, well-mannered boy who is so enthusiastic for adventure that he will leave his home and endure the hardships of a soldier’s life for the sake of seeing fighting. These boys were for the most part young scamps, and some of them had all the qualities of the guttersnipe, but they had the makings of men in them if properly treated.

The difficulty was to know how to treat them. No humane C.O. wants to condemn a mischievous brat of a boy to Field Punishment No. 1. Most C.O.’s., even most sergeants, know that punishment of that kind, however necessary for a hardened evildoer of mature years, is totally unsuitable for a boy. At the same time if any sort of discipline is to be preserved, a boy, who must officially be regarded as a man, cannot be allowed to cheek a sergeant or flatly to refuse to obey orders. That was the military difficulty.

The social and moral difficulty was, if anything, worse. Those boys were totally useless to the army where they were, stuck in a large camp. They were learning all sorts of evil and very little good. They were a nuisance to the N.C.O.'s and men, among whom they lived, and were bullied accordingly. They were getting no education and no suitable physical training. They were in a straight way to be ruined instead of made.

It was an Irish surgeon who realised the necessity for doing something for these boys and set about the task. I do not suppose that he wants his name published or his good deeds advertised. I shall call him J. He was a typical Irishman—in looks, manner, and character one of the most Irishmen I have ever met. He had a wonderful talent for dealing with young animals. The very first time I met him he took me to see a puppy, a large, rather savage-looking creature which he kept in a stable outside the camp. One of the creature's four grandparents had been a wolf. J. hoped to make the puppy a useful member of society.

"I am never happy," he said, "unless I have some young thing to train—dog, horse, anything. That's the reason I'm so keen on doing something for these boys."

J. had no easy job when he took up the cause of the boys. It was not that he had to struggle against active opposition. There was no active opposition. Every one wanted to help. The authorities realised that something ought to be done. What J. was up against was system, the fact that he and the boys and the authorities and every one of us were parts of a machine and the wheels of the thing would only go round one way.

Trying to get anything of an exceptional kind done in the army is like floundering in a trench full of sticky mud—one is inclined sometimes to say sticky muddle—surrounded by dense entanglements of barbed red-tape. You track authority from place to place, finding always that the man you want, the ultimate person who can actually give the permission you require, lies just beyond. If you are enormously persevering, and, nose to scent, you hunt on for years, you find yourself at last back with the man from whom you started, having made a full circle of all the authorities there are. Then, if you like, you can start again.

I do not know how J. managed the early stages of the business. He had made a good start long before I joined him. But only an Irishman, I think, could have done the thing at all. Only an Irishman is profane enough to mock at the great

god System, the golden image before which we are all bidden to fall down and worship “what time we hear the sound of” military music. Only an Irishman will venture light-heartedly to take short cuts through regulations. It is our capacity for doing things the wrong way which makes us valuable to the Empire, and they ought to decorate us oftener than they do for our insubordination.

There was an Irishman, so I am told, in the very early days of the war who created hospital trains for our wounded by going about the French railways at night with an engine and seizing waggons, one at this station, one at that. He bribed the French station masters who happened to be awake. It was a lawless proceeding, but, thanks to him, there were hospital trains. An Englishman would have written letters about the pressing need and there would not have been hospital trains for a long time. J. did nothing like that. There was no need for such violence. Both he and the boys had good friends. Every one wanted to help, and in the end something got done.

A scheme of physical training was arranged for the boys and they were placed under the charge of special sergeants. Their names were registered. I think they were “plotted” into a diagram and exhibited in curves, which was not much use to them, but helped to soothe the nerves of authorities. To the official mind anything is hallowed when it is reduced to curves. The boys underwent special medical examinations, were weighed and tested at regular intervals. Finally a club was established for them.

At that point the Y.M.C.A. came to our aid. It gave us the use of one of the best buildings in the camp, originally meant for an officers’ club. It was generous beyond hope. The house was lighted, heated, furnished, in many ways transformed, at the expense of the Y.M.C.A. We were supplied with a magic-lantern, books, games, boxing gloves, a piano, writing-paper, everything we dared to ask for. Without the help of the Y.M.C.A. that club could never have come into existence. And the association deserves credit not only for generosity in material things, but for its liberal spirit. The club was not run according to Y.M.C.A. rules, and was an embarrassing changeling child in their nursery, just as it was a suspicious innovation under the military system.

We held an opening meeting, and the colonel—one of our most helpful friends—agreed to give the boys an address. I wonder if any other club opened quite as that one. In our eagerness to get to work we took possession of our club house before it was ready for us. There was no light. There was almost no furniture. There was no organisation. We had very little in the way of settled plan. But we

had boys, eight or nine hundred of them, about double as many as the largest room in the building would hold.

They were marched down from their various camps by sergeants. For the most part they arrived about an hour before the proper time. The sergeants, quite reasonably, considered that their responsibility ended when the boys passed through the doors of the club. The boys took the view that at that moment their opportunity began.

They rioted. Every window in the place was shattered. Everything else breakable —fortunately there was not much—was smashed into small bits. A Y.M.C.A. worker, a young man lent to us for the occasion, and recommended as experienced with boys' clubs in London, fled to a small room and locked himself in. The tumult became so terrific that an officer of high standing and importance, whose office was in the neighbourhood, sent an orderly to us with threats. It was one of the occasions on which it is good to be an Irishman. We have been accustomed to riots all our lives, and mind them less than most other people. We know—this is a fact which Englishmen find it difficult to grasp—that cheerful rioters seldom mean to do any serious mischief.

Yet, I think, even J.'s heart must have failed him a little. Very soon the colonel, who was to open the club with his address, would arrive. He was the best and staunchest of friends. He had fought battles for the club and patiently combated the objections in high quarters. But he did like order and discipline.

It was one of our fixed principles, about the only fixed principle we had at first, that the club was to be run by moral influence, not by means of orders and threats. Our loyalty to principle was never more highly tried. It seems almost impossible to bring moral influence to bear effectively when you cannot make yourself heard and cannot move about. Yet, somehow, a kind of order was restored; and there was no uncertainty about the cheers with which the colonel was greeted when he entered the room. The boys in the other rooms who could not see him cheered frantically. The boys on the balcony, the boys standing in the window frames, all cheered. They asked nothing better than to be allowed to go on cheering.

With the colonel were one or two other officers, our benefactor, the local head of the Y.M.C.A., and a solitary lady, Miss N. I do not know even now how she got there or why she came, but she was not half an hour in the room before we realised that she was the woman, the one woman in the whole world, for our job.

Miss N. was born to deal with wild boys. The fiercer they are the more she loves them, and the wickeder they are the more they love her. We had a struggle to get Miss N. Oddly enough she did not at first want to come to the club, being at the time deeply attached to some dock labourers among whom she worked in a slum near the quay. The Y.M.C.A.—she belonged to them—did not want to part with her. But we got her in the end, and she became mistress, mother, queen of the club.

The colonel's speech was a success, a thing which seemed beforehand almost beyond hope. He told those boys the naked truth about themselves, what they were, what they had been, and what they might be. They listened to him. I found out later on that those boys would listen to straight talk on almost any subject, even themselves. Also that they would not listen to speech-making of the ordinary kind. I sometimes wonder what will happen when they become grown men and acquire votes. How will they deal with the ordinary politician?

I cherish vivid recollections of the early days of the club. I think of J., patient and smiling, surrounded by a surging crowd of boys all clamouring to talk to him about this or that matter of deep interest to them. J. had an extraordinary faculty for winning the confidence of boys.

There were evenings, before the electric light was installed and before we had any chairs, when Miss N. sat on the floor and played draughts with boys by the light of a candle standing in its own grease. I have seen her towed by the skirt through the rooms of the club by a boy whom the others called "Darkie," an almost perfect specimen of the London gutter snipe. There was a day when her purse was stolen. But I think the rest of the club would have lynched the thief if they could have caught him.

There were wild boxing bouts which went on in pitch darkness, after the combatants had trampled on the candle. There was one evening when I came on a boy lying flat on his back on the floor hammering the keys of the piano, our new piano, with the heels of his boots. The tuner told me afterwards that he broke seventeen strings.

But we settled down by degrees. We had lectures every afternoon which were supposed to be—I think actually were—of an educative kind. Attendance at these lectures was compulsory. The boys were paraded and marched to the club. As we had not space in our lecture room for more than half our members, we had one set of boys on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, another on

Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Each lecturer delivered himself twice.

The business of keeping up a supply of lectures was not so difficult as we expected. Officers were very kind and offered us the most amazing collection of subjects. The secretary of many a literary society at home would be envious of our list. We accepted every offer we got, no matter how inappropriate the subject seemed to be.

It was impossible to tell beforehand which lectures would be popular and which would fail. Military subjects were of course common. We had “The Navy” with lantern slides. M. gave that lecture, but all his best slides were banned by the censor, for fear, I suppose, that we might have a German spy among us and that he would telegraph to Berlin a description of a light cruiser if M. exhibited one upon the screen. We had “Men who have won the V.C.” with lantern slides. That was, as was expected, a success. But we also had “Napoleon’s Campaigns” by a Cambridge professor of history, illustrated by nothing better than a few maps drawn on a blackboard. To our amazement that was immensely popular. We had “How an Army is fed,” by an A.S.C. officer, the only lecture which produced a vigorous discussion afterwards.

But we did not confine ourselves to military subjects. We had lectures on morals, which were sometimes a little confusing. One lecturer, I remember, starting from the fact that the boys had misstated their ages to the recruiting officers when they enlisted, hammered home the fact that all lies are disgraceful, and therefore our boys ought to be thoroughly ashamed of themselves. Another lecturer, a month later, starting from the same fact, took the line that it was possible to be *splendide mendax*, and that we had good reason to be extremely proud all our lives of the lie told in the recruiting office.

Manners are more or less connected with morals, and we had lectures on manners; that is to say, on saluting, which is the beginning and ending of good manners in the army. A good many civilians, especially those of the intellectual “conchie” kind, are inclined to smile at the importance soldiers attach to saluting. Our lecturer convinced me—I hope he convinced the rest of his audience—that saluting is something more than a piece of tiresome ritual, that it is the external expression of certain very great ideas.

Occasionally, but not often, we were in difficulties about our lectures. Some one at home sent us a present of a beautiful set of lantern slides, illustrating a tour in Egypt. They were such fine slides that it seemed a pity to waste them. But for a

long time we could not find any one who knew enough about Egypt to attempt a verbal accompaniment of the slides.

At last we got a volunteer. He said frankly that he did not know half the places we had pictures of, but offered to do his best. He did exceedingly well with the places he did know, making the tombs of the ancient Pharaohs quite interesting to the boys. But he was a conscientious man. He refused to invent history to suit strange pictures. When anything he did not recognise was thrown on the screen he dismissed it rapidly. “This,” he would say, “is another tomb, probably of another king,” or “This is a camel standing beside a ruined archway.” Every one was thoroughly satisfied.

We had another set of slides which gave us some trouble, a series of pictures of racing yachts under sail. I had to take those on myself, and I was rather nervous. I need not have been. The boys in that club were capable of taking an interest in any subject under the sun. Before I got to the last slide the audience was ready to shout the name of every sail on a racing cutter, and could tell without hesitation whether a yacht on a run was carrying her spinnaker on the port or starboard hand. They say that all knowledge is useful. I hope that it is.

Once or twice a lecturer failed us at the last moment without giving us notice. Then J. and I had to run an entertainment of an instructive kind extempore. J. was strong on personal hygiene. He might start with saluting or the theft of Miss N.’s purse, our great club scandal, but he worked round in the end to soap and tooth brushes. My own business, if we were utterly driven against the wall, was to tell stories.

The most remarkable and interesting lecture we ever had was given on one of those emergency occasions by one of our members. He volunteered an account of his experiences in the trenches. He cannot have been much more than seventeen years old, and ought never to have been in the trenches. He was undersized and, I should say, of poor physique. If the proper use of the letter “h” in conversation is any test of education, this boy must have been very little educated. His vocabulary was limited, and many of the words he did use are not to be found in dictionaries. But he stood on the platform and for half an hour told us what he had seen, endured, and felt, with a straightforward simplicity which was far more effective than any art. He disappeared from our midst soon afterwards, and I have never seen him since. I would give a good deal now to have a verbatim report of that lecture of his.

When the lecture of the afternoon was over, the club amused itself. Attendance was no longer compulsory. Boys came and went as they chose. Order was maintained and enforced by a committee of the boys themselves. It met once a week, and of all the committees I have ever known that one was the most rigidly businesslike. I cannot imagine where the secretary gained his experience of the conduct of public business; but his appeals to the chair when any one wandered from the subject under discussion were always made with reason, and he understood the difference between an amendment and a substantive resolution.

The only difficulty we ever had with that committee arose from its passion for making rules. Our idea for the management of the club was to have as few rules as possible. The committee, if unchecked, would have out-Heroded the War Office itself in multiplying regulations. I am inclined to think that it is a mistake to run institutions on purely democratic lines, not because reasonable liberty would degenerate into licence, but because there would be no liberty at all. If democracy ever comes to its own, and the will of the people actually prevails, we may all find ourselves so tied up with laws regulating our conduct that we will wish ourselves back under the control of a tyrant.

It was during those hours of recreation that Miss N. reigned over the club. She ran a canteen for the boys, boiling eggs, serving tea, cocoa, malted milk, bread-and-butter, and biscuits. She played games. She started and inspired sing-songs. She listened with sympathy which was quite unaffected to long tales of wrongs suffered, of woes and of joys. She was never without a crowd of boys round her, often clinging to her, and the offers of help she received must have been embarrassing to her.

Miss N. had a little room of her own in the club. She furnished it very prettily, and we used to pretend to admire the view from the windows. Once we tried to persuade an artist who happened to be in camp to make a sketch from that window. The artist shrank from the task. The far background was well enough, trees on the side of a hill; but the objects in the middle distance were a railway line and a ditch full of muddy water. In the foreground there were two incinerators, a dump of old tins, and a Salvation Army hut. I dare say the artist was right in shrinking from the subject.

In that little room of hers, Miss N. had tea parties every day before the afternoon lecture. I was often there. Sometimes I brought M. with me. Always there were boys, as many as the room would hold, often more than it held comfortably. *Pain d’épice* is not my favourite food in ordinary life, but I ate it with delight in that

company. No one, on this side of the grave, will ever know how much Miss N. did for those boys in a hundred ways. I feebly guess, because I know what her friendship meant to me. I was, I know, a trial to her. My lax churchmanship must have shocked her. My want of energy must have annoyed her. But she remained the most loyal of fellow-workers.

There were breakfast-parties, as well as tea-parties, in Miss N.'s room on Sunday mornings. We had a celebration of the Holy Communion at 6 o'clock and afterwards we breakfasted with Miss N. The memory of one Sunday in particular remains with me. On Easter Sunday in 1915 I celebrated on board the *Lusitania*, a little way outside the harbour of New York, the congregation kneeling among the arm-chairs and card-tables of the great smoke-room on the upper deck. In 1916 I read the same office in the class-room of the Y.S.C., with a rough wooden table for an altar, a cross made by the camp carpenter and two candles for furniture, and boys, confirmed ten days before, they and Miss N., for congregation. Afterwards, in her little room, we had the happiest of all our parties. Surely our Easter eggs were good to eat.

I have written of the members of the Y.S.C. as boys. They were boys, but every now and then one or another turned out to be very much a man in experience. There was one whom I came to know particularly well. He had been "up the line" and fought. He had been sent down because at the age of eighteen he could not stand the strain.

I was present in our little military church when he was baptized, and on the same afternoon confirmed by Bishop Bury. I gave him his confirmation card and advised him to send it home to his mother for safety. "I think, sir," he said, "that I would rather send it to my wife." He was a fellow-citizen of mine, born and bred in Belfast. We Ulstermen are a forward and progressive people.

CHAPTER X

THE DAILY ROUND

In the camp in which I was first stationed there was a story current which must, I think, have had a real foundation in fact. It was told in most messes, and each mess claimed the hero of it as belonging to its particular camp. It told of a man who believed that the place in which we were was being continuously and severely shelled by the Germans. He is reported to have said that war was not nearly so dangerous a thing as people at home believed, for our casualties were extraordinarily few. Indeed, there were no casualties at all, and the shelling to which he supposed himself to be subjected was the most futile thing imaginable.

A major, a draft-conducting officer, who happened to be with us one day when this story was told, improved on it boldly.

“As we marched in from the steamer to-day,” he said, “we passed a large field on the right of the road about a mile outside the camp—perhaps you know it?”

“Barbed wire fence across the bottom of it,” I said, “and then a ditch.”

“Exactly,” said the major. “Well, one of the N.C.O.’s in my draft, quite an intelligent man, asked me whether that was the firing line and whether the ditch was the enemy’s trench. He really thought the Germans were there, a hundred yards from the road we were marching along.”

I daresay the original story was true enough. Even the major’s improved version of it may conceivably have been true. The ordinary private, and indeed the ordinary officer, when he first lands in France, has the very vaguest idea of the geography of the country or the exact position of the place in which he finds himself. For all he knows he may be within a mile or two of Ypres. And we certainly lived in that camp with the sounds of war in our ears. We had quite near us a——Perhaps even now I had better not say what the establishment was; but there was a great deal of business done with shells, and guns of various sizes were fired all day long. In the camp we heard the explosions of the guns. By going a very little way outside the camp we could hear the whine of the shells as they flew through the air. We could see them burst near various targets on a stretch of waste marshy ground.

No one could fail to be aware that shells were being fired in his immediate neighbourhood. It was not unnatural for a man to suppose that they were being fired at him. From early morning until dusk squads of men were shooting, singly or in volleys, on two ranges. The crackling noise of rifle fire seldom died wholly away. By climbing the hill on which M. lived, we came close to the schools of the machine gunners, and could listen to the stuttering of their infernal instruments. There was another school near by where bombers practised their craft, making a great deal of noise. So far as sound was concerned, we really might have been living on some very quiet section of the front line.

We were in no peril of life or limb. There were only two ways in which the enemy worried us. His submarines occasionally raided the neighbourhood of our harbour. Then our letters were delayed and our supply of English papers was cut off. And we had Zeppelin scares now and then. I have never gone through a Zeppelin raid, and do not want to. The threat was quite uncomfortable enough for me.

My first experience of one of these scares was exciting. I had dined, well, at a hospitable mess and retired afterwards to the colonel's room to play bridge. There were four of us—the colonel, my friend J., the camp adjutant, and myself. On one side of the room stood the colonel's bed, a camp stretcher covered with army blankets. In a corner stood a washhand-stand, with a real earthenware basin on it. A basin of this sort was a luxury among us. I had a galvanised iron pot and was lucky. Many of us washed in folding canvas buckets. But that colonel did himself well. He had a stove in his room which did not smoke, and did give out some heat, a very rare kind of stove in the army. He had four chairs of different heights and shapes and a table with a dark-red table-cloth. Over our heads was a bright, unshaded electric light. Our game went pleasantly until—the colonel had declared two no-trumps—the light went out suddenly without warning.

The camp adjutant immediately said nasty things about the Royal Engineers, who are responsible for our lights. J. suggested a Zeppelin scare. The colonel, who wanted to play out his hand, shouted for an orderly and light. The orderly brought us a miserably inefficient candle in a stable lantern and set it in the middle of the table. It was just possible to see our cards, and we played on. I remembered Stevenson's shipwrecked crew who gambled all night on Medway Island by the light of a fire of driftwood. I thought of the men in Hardy's story who finished their game on the grass by the light of a circle of glow-worms. Our position was uncomfortable but picturesque.

Another orderly came in and said that the camp adjutant was wanted at once in his office. We questioned the man and he confirmed J.'s fear that a Zeppelin scare was in full swing. The adjutant was in the position of dummy at the moment and could be spared. We played on. Then a note was brought to J. He was ordered to report at once at the camp dressing station, and there to stand by for casualties. The colonel picked up the cards and shuffled them thoughtfully. He meant, I think, to propose a game of bezique or picquet. But a note came for him, an order, very urgent, that all lights should immediately be extinguished. He opened the stable lantern and, sighing, blew out our candle.

"One blessing about this Zeppelin business," said the colonel, "is that I don't have to turn out the men on parade."

I was anxious and a little worried because I did not know what my duties were in a crisis of the kind. "I suppose," I said, "that I ought to stand by somewhere till the show is over." I looked towards the colonel for advice, locating him in the darkness by the glow of his cigar.

"I advise you to go to bed," he said. "I mean to. Most likely nothing will happen."

I felt my way to the door. The colonel, taking me by the arm, guided me out of his camp and set me on the main road which led to my quarters.

I stumbled along through thick darkness, bumping into things which hurt me. I was challenged again and again by sentries, alert and I think occasionally jumpy. One of them, I remember, refused to be satisfied with my reply, though I said "Friend" loudly and clearly. I have never understood why a mere statement of that kind made by a stranger in the dark should satisfy an intelligent sentry. But it generally does.

This particular man—he had only landed from England the day before—took a serious view of his duty. For all he knew I might have been a Zeppelin commander, loaded with bombs. He ordered me to advance and be examined. I obeyed, of course, and at first thought that he was going to examine me thoroughly, inside and out, with a bayonet. That is what his attitude suggested. I was quite relieved when he marched me into the guard-room and paraded me before the sergeant. The sergeant, fortunately, recognised me and let me go. Otherwise I suppose I should have spent a very uncomfortable night in a cell. I am not at all sure that military law allows a prisoner's friends to bail him out.

I reached my hut at last and made haste to get into bed. It was a most uncomfortable business. I could not find my toothbrush. I spent a long time feeling about for my pyjamas. I did not dare even to strike a match. An hour later some hilarious subalterns walked along the whole row of huts and lobbed stones on to the roofs. The idea was to suggest to the inmates that bombs were falling in large numbers. It was a well-conceived scheme; for the roofs of those huts were of corrugated iron and the stones made an abominable noise. But I do not think that any one was deceived. A major next door to me swore vehemently.

Our French neighbours did not take much notice of these alarms. The row of lamps in the little railway station near the camp shone cheerfully while we were plunged in gloom. The inhabitants of the houses on the hill at the far side of the valley did not even take the trouble to pull down their window blinds. Either the French are much less afraid of Zeppelins than we are or they never heard the alarms which caused us so much inconvenience. These scares became very frequent in the early spring of 1916 and always worried us.

After a while some one started a theory that there never had been any Zeppelins in our neighbourhood and that none were likely to come. It was possible that our local Head-Quarters Staff was simply playing tricks on us. An intelligent staff officer would, in time, be almost sure to think of starting a Zeppelin scare if he had not much to occupy his mind. He would defend his action by saying that an alarm of any kind keeps men alert and is good for discipline.

But staff officers, though skilful in military art, are not always well up in general literature. Ours, perhaps, had never read the “Wolf, wolf,” fable, and did not anticipate the result of their action. As time went on we took less and less notice of the Zeppelin warnings until at last the whole thing became a joke. If a Zeppelin had come to us towards the end of March it would have had the whole benefit of all the lights which shone through our tents and windows, whatever that guidance might be worth.

The Zeppelins which did not come caused us on the whole more annoyance than the submarines which did. It was, of course, irritating when the English post did not arrive at the usual hour. It always did arrive in the end—being carried by some other route, though our own proper steamer neither went in nor out.

But if we, the regular inhabitants of the place, suffered little inconvenience from the submarines, the officers and men who passed through the town on their way home on leave were sometimes held up for days. The congestion became acute.

Beds were very difficult to obtain. The officers' club filled up and the restaurants reaped a harvest.

The authorities on these occasions behave in a peculiarly irritating way. They will not, perhaps cannot, promise that their steamer will sail at any particular hour or indeed on any particular day. Nor will they give an assurance that it will not sail. The eager traveller is expected to sit on his haversack on the quay and watch, day and night, lest the ship of his desire should slip out unknown to him. It is, of course, impossible for any one to do this for very long, and an M.L.O.—M.L.O.'s are sometimes humane men—will drop a hint that the steamer will stay where she is for two or even four hours. Then the watchers make a dash for club, hotel, or restaurant, at their own risk, of course; the M.L.O. gives no kind of promise or guarantee.

There was at that time, probably still is, a small shop not far from Base Head-Quarters which had over its door the words "Mary's Tea," in large letters. The name was an inspiration. It suggested "England, home, and beauty," everything dearest to the heart of the young officer in a strange land. As a matter of fact there was nothing English about the place. The cakes sold were delightfully French. The tea was unmistakably not English. The shop was run by five or six girls with no more than a dozen words of English among them. When the leave boat was held up "Mary's Tea" was crammed with young officers.

I remember seeing a party of these cheery boys sitting down to a square meal one afternoon. They were still wearing their trench boots and fighting kit. They were on their way home from the front and they were hungry, especially hungry for cakes. There were four of them. "Mary"—they called all the girls Mary, the name of the shop invited that familiarity—brought them tea and a dish piled high with cakes, frothy meringues, pastry sandwiches with custard in the middle, highly ornamental sugary pieces of marzipan, all kinds of delicate confectionery. After the fare of the trenches these were dreams of delight, but not very satisfying. The dish was cleared. The spokesman, the French scholar of the party, demanded more. "Mary"—he did not translate the name into "Marie"—"*encore gâteaux, au moins trois douzaine*." Mary, smiling, fetched another dish. I suppose she kept count. I did not, nor I am sure did the feasters. They finished those and repeated the encore. The *au moins trois douzaine* was a ridiculous under-estimate of their requirements. It might have been multiplied by five.

In the end there were no more *gâteaux*. The stock was sold out. It was not a large shop and many others had drunk tea there that afternoon. The boys paid their bill

and left, still astonishingly cheerful. I cannot remember whether the boat sailed that night or not. I hope it did. I hope the sea was rough. I should not like to think that those boys—the eldest of them cannot have been twenty-one—suffered from indigestion during their leave. Nothing but a stormy crossing would have saved them.

If the spirit of the playing fields of our public schools won, as they say, our great-grandfathers' war, the spirit of the tuck shop is showing up in this one. The lessons learned as boys in those excellent institutions have been carried into France. Tea shops and restaurants at the bases, audacious *estaminets* near the front, witness to the fact that we wage war with something of the spirit of schoolboys with pocket money to spend on "grub."

Nobody will grudge our young officers their boyish taste for innocent feasts. It is a boys' war anyway. Everything big and bright in it, the victories we have won, the cheerfulness and the enduring and the daring, go to the credit of the young. It is the older men who have done the blundering and made the muddles, whenever there have been blundering and muddles.

"Mary's Tea" was for officers. The men were invited to "English Soldiers' Coffee." It, too, was a tea shop and had a good position in one of the main streets of the town. But the name was not so well devised as Mary's Tea. It puzzled me for some time and left me wondering what special beverage was sold inside. I discovered at last that "Coffee" was a thoughtful translation of *Café*, a word which might have been supposed to puzzle an English soldier, though indeed very few French words puzzle him for long.

I was never inside "English Soldiers' Coffee." But I have no doubt it would have been just as popular if it had called itself a *café* or even an *estaminet*. The case of "Mary's Tea" was different. Its name made it. Half its customers would have passed it by if it had announced itself unromantically as "Five o'clock" or "Afternoon Tea."

CHAPTER XI

ANOTHER JOURNEY

"*'Tis but in vain for soldiers to complain.*" That jingle occurs over and over again in Wolfe Tone's autobiography. It contains his philosophy of life. I learned to appreciate the wisdom of it before I had been a week in the army. I said it over and over to myself. If I had kept a diary I should have written it as often as Wolfe Tone did. I had need of all its consolation when the time came for me to leave H.

One evening—I was particularly busy at the moment in the Y.S.C.—an orderly summoned me to the chaplain's office to answer a telephone call. I learned that orders had come through for my removal from H. to B. I had twenty-four hours' notice. That is more than most men get, double as much as an officer gets who is sent up the line. Yet I felt irritated. I am getting old and I hate being hustled. Also I felt quite sure that there was no need for any kind of hurry.

As it appeared in the end I might just as well have had three or four more days quietly at H. and started comfortably. I arrived at my destination, a little breathless, to find I was not wanted for a week. My new senior chaplain was greatly surprised to see me. My predecessor had not given up the post I was to fill. There was nothing for me to do and nowhere for me to go. I spent several days, most unprofitably, in B. which I might have spent usefully in H. But this is the way things are done in the army, sometimes; in the Chaplains' Department generally. And "*'Tis but in vain for soldiers to complain*."

I fully expected to make a bad start on my new journey. Having been fussed I was irritable. I had spent a long day trying to do twenty things in a space of time which would barely have sufficed for ten of them. I had been engaged in an intermittent struggle with various authorities for permission to take my servant with me, a matter which my colonel arranged for me in the end.

I was in the worst possible mood when I reached the station from which I had to start—a large shed, very dimly lit, designed for goods traffic, not for passengers. Oddly enough I began to recover my temper the moment I entered the station. I became aware that the whole business of the starting of this great supply train

was almost perfectly organised, so well organised that it ran more smoothly, with less noise and agitation, than goes to the nightly starting of the Irish mail from Euston.

The train itself, immensely long, was drawn up the whole length of the station and reached out for a distance unknown to me into the darkness beyond the station. There were passenger coaches and horse waggons. Every waggon was plainly labelled with the number of men to go in it and the name of the unit to which they belonged. The windows of every compartment of the passenger coaches bore the names of four officers. A fool could have been in no doubt about where he had to go. The fussiest traveller could have had no anxiety about finding a seat. Each party of men was drawn up opposite its own part of the train. The men's packs and arms were on the ground in front of them. They waited the order to take their places. Competent N.C.O.'s with lanterns walked up and down the whole length of the station, ready with advice and help when advice and help were needed.

It was my good fortune that I had to visit in his office the R.T.O., the organising genius of the start. My servant arrived at the last moment, an unexpected traveller for whom no provision had been made. The order which permitted him to accompany me reached him only after I had left the camp. I fully expected to be snubbed, perhaps cursed, by that R.T.O. I was an utterly unimportant traveller. I was upsetting, at the very moment of starting, his thought-out arrangements. He would have been fully justified in treating me with scant courtesy.

I found him cool, collected, complete master of every detail. He was friendly, sympathetic, ready with an instant solution of the difficulty of my servant. He even apologised—surely an unnecessary apology—for the discomfort I was likely to suffer through having to spend the night in a compartment with three other officers. I do not know the name of that R.T.O. I wish I did. I can only hope that his abilities have been recognised and that he is now commander-in-chief of all R.T.O.'s.

The night was not very unpleasant after all. My three fellow-travellers were peaceable men who neither snored nor kicked wildly when asleep. I slumbered profoundly and did not wake till the train came to a standstill on an embankment. There was no obvious reason why the train should have stopped in that particular place for half an hour or why it should have spent another three-quarters of an hour in covering the last mile which separated us from the station.

But I know by experience that trains, even in peace time, become very leisurely in approaching that particular city. They seem to wander all round the place before finally settling down.

In peace time, travelling as a tourist, one does not complain. The city is rich in spires and there are nice views to be got from the railway carriage windows. We got rather too much of those views that morning. Even Wordsworth, though he did write an early morning sonnet on Westminster Bridge, would not have cared to meditate on “Houses Asleep” for an hour and a quarter before he got a wash or anything to eat.

I interviewed the R.T.O. when I reached the station and found that I could not continue my journey till 5 o’clock in the afternoon. I was not altogether sorry to have the whole day before me in a town which I had never visited. I recollected that I had a cousin stationed there and made up my mind to rely on him, if I could find him, for entertainment.

My servant’s lot was less fortunate. He belonged, of course, to that part of the army which is officially described as “other ranks”; and only commissioned officers are trusted to wander at will through that town. The “other ranks” spend the day in the railway station. They are dependent on a Y.M.C.A. canteen for food and on themselves for amusement.

I spent a pleasant day, finding my cousin quite early and visiting with him a large number of churches. Some day I mean to work out thoroughly the connection between that town and Ireland and discover why pious Frenchmen dedicated several of their churches to Irish saints.

At 4 o’clock—I like to be in good time for trains—I went back to the station. My servant was sitting patiently on my valise. A long train lay ready. As in the train in which I had travelled the night before, all the coaches and waggons were carefully and clearly labelled, but this time with the names of the places to which they were going. I went the whole length of the train and read every label. No single carriage was labelled for B., my destination. I walked all the way back again and read all the labels a second time. Then I fell back on the R.T.O. for guidance. I found not the man I had met in the morning, but a subordinate of his.

“I’m going,” I said, “or rather I hope to go to B. What part of the train do you think I ought to get into?”

“What does your party consist of?” he asked. “How many men have you?”

“One,” I said. “You can hardly call it a party at all. There’s only my servant and myself.”

He lost all interest in me at once. I do not wonder. A man who is accustomed to deal with battalions, squadrons, and batteries cannot be expected to pay much attention to a lonely padre. I quite understood his feelings.

“Still,” I said, “I’ve got to get there.”

“You can’t get to B. in that train,” he said. “It doesn’t go there.”

I was not prepared to sit down under that rebuff without a struggle.

“The R.T.O. who was here this morning,” I said, “told me to travel by this train.”

“Sorry,” he said. “But you can’t, or if you do you won’t get to B.”

“How am I to get there?” I asked.

“I don’t know that you can.”

“Do you mean,” I said, “that no train ever goes there?”

He considered this and replied cautiously.

“There might be a train to-morrow,” he said, “or next day.”

The prospect was not a pleasant one; but I knew that R.T.O.’s are not infallible. Sometimes they have not the dimmest idea where trains are going. I left the office and wandered about the station until I found the officer in command of the train. He was a colonel, and I was, of course, a little nervous about addressing a colonel. But this colonel had kindly eyes and a sorrowful face. He looked like a man on whom fate had laid an intolerable burden. I threw myself on his mercy.

“Sir,” I said, “I want to go to B. I am ordered to report myself there. I am trying to take my servant with me. What am I to do?”

That colonel looked at me with a slow, mournful smile.

“This train,” he said,“isn’t supposed to go to B. You can’t expect me to take it there just to suit you?”

He waved his hand towards the train. It was enormously long. Already several hundred men were crowding into it. I could not expect to have the whole thing

diverted from its proper course for my sake. I stood silent, looking as forlorn and helpless as I could. My one hope, I felt, lay in an appeal to that colonel's sense of pity.

"We shall pass through T. to-morrow morning about 6 o'clock," he said.

That did not help me much. I had never heard of T. before. But something in the colonel's tone encouraged me. I looked up and hoped that there were tears in my eyes.

"T.," said the colonel, "is quite close to B. In fact it is really part of B., a sort of suburb."

That seemed to me good enough.

"Take me there," I said, "and I'll manage to get a taxi or something."

"But," said the colonel,"my train does not stop at T. We simply pass through the station. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll slow down as we go through. You be ready to jump out. Tell your servant to fling out your valise and jump after it. You won't have much time, for the platform isn't very long, but if you're ready and don't hesitate you'll be all right."

I babbled words of gratitude. The prospect of a leap from a moving train at 6 a.m. was exhilarating. I might hope that I should find my servant and my luggage rolling over me on the platform when I reached it. Then all would be well. The colonel, moved to further kindness by my gratitude, invited me to travel in a coach which was specially reserved for his use.

The art of travelling comfortably in peace or war lies in knowing when to bully, when to bribe, and when to sue. Neither bullying nor bribing would have got me to B. If I had relied on those methods I should not have arrived there for days, should perhaps never have arrived there, should certainly have been most uncomfortable. By assuming the manner, and as far as possible the appearance, of a small child lost in London I moved the pity of the only man who could have helped me. But those circumstances were exceptional. As a general rule I think bullying and bribing are better ways of getting what you want on a journey.

I travelled in great comfort. There were three of us—the colonel, a colonial commissioner, in uniform but otherwise unconnected with the army, and myself. There was also the colonel's servant, who cooked a dinner for us on a Primus stove.

The train stopped frequently at wayside stations. There was no conceivable reason why it should have stopped at all. We neither discharged nor took up any passengers. But the halts were a source of entertainment for the men. Most of them and all the officers got out every time the train stopped. It was the duty of the colonel, as O.C. Train, to see that they all got in again.

It was a laborious job, not unlike that of a sheep dog. The colonial commissioner and I tried to help. I do not think we were much use. But I have this to my credit. I carried a message to the engine driver and told him to whistle loud and long before he started. Having read long ago Matthew Arnold's Essay on Heine, I know the French for "whistle" or a word which conveyed the idea of whistling to the engine driver.

When it became dark the worst of this labour was over for the colonel. The men stayed in their carriages. I suppose they went to sleep. We dined. It was a pleasant and satisfying meal. We all contributed to it. The colonel's servant produced soup, hot and strong, tasting slightly of catsup, made out of small packets of powder labelled "Oxtail." Then we had bully beef—perhaps the "unexpended portion" of the colonel's servant's day's rations—and sandwiches, which I contributed. By way of pudding we had bread and marmalade. The colonial commissioner produced the marmalade from his haversack. I had some cheese, a Camembert, and the colonel's servant brought us sardines on toast, and coffee. We all had flasks and the colonel kept a supply of Perrier water. Men have fared worse on supply trains.

After dinner I taught the colonel and the commissioner to play my favourite kind of patience. I do not suppose the game was ever much use to the commissioner. In his colony life is a strenuous business. But I like to think that I did the colonel a good turn. His business was to travel up to the rail head in supply trains full of men, and then to travel down again in the same train empty. When I realised that he had been at this work for months and expected to be at it for years I understood why he looked depressed. Train commanding must be a horrible business, only one degree better than draft conducting. To a man engaged in it a really absorbing kind of patience must be a boon.

The next morning the colonel woke me early and warned me to be ready for my leap. In due time he set me on the step of the carriage. He took all my coats, rugs, and sticks from me. The train slowed down. I caught sight of the platform. The colonel said "Now." I jumped. My coats and rugs fell round me in a shower. My servant timed the thing well. My valise came to earth at one end of the

platform. The man’s own kit fell close to me. He himself lit on his feet at the far end of the platform. The train gathered speed again. I waved a farewell to my benefactor and the colonial commissioner.

CHAPTER XII

MADAME

Madame was certainly an old woman, if age is counted by years. She had celebrated her golden wedding before the war began. But in heart she was young, a girl.

I cherish, among many, one special picture of Madame. It was a fine, warm afternoon in early summer. The fountain at the lower end of the garden spouted its little jet into the air. Madame loved the fountain, and set it working on all festive occasions and whenever she felt particularly cheerful. I think she liked to hear the water splashing among the water-lily leaves in the stone basin where the goldfish swam. Behind the fountain the flowers were gay and the fruit trees pleasantly green round a marvellous terra-cotta figure, life-size, of an ancient warrior. Below the fountain was a square, paved court, sunlit, well warmed.

Madame sat in a wicker chair, her back to the closed green jalousies of the dining-room window. Beside her was her workbox. On her knees was a spread of white linen. Madame held it a sacred duty *visiter la linge* once a week; and no tear remained undarned or hole unpatched for very long. As she sewed she sang, in a thin, high voice, the gayest little songs, full of unexpected trills and little passages of dancing melody.

Madame was mistress. There was no mistake about that. Monsieur was a retired business man who had fought under General Faidherbe in the Franco-Prussian war. He was older than Madame, a very patient, quiet gentleman. He was a little deaf, which was an advantage to him, for Madame scolded him sometimes. He read newspapers diligently, tended the pear trees in the garden, and did messages for Madame.

There was also Marie, a distant cousin of Monsieur’s, herself the owner of a small farm in Brittany, who was—I know no term which expresses her place in the household. She was neither servant nor guest, and in no way the least like what I imagine a “lady-help” to be. She was older than Madame, older, I fancy, even than Monsieur, and she went to Mass every morning. Madame was more moderate in her religion. Monsieur, I think, was, or once had been, a little anti-

clerical.

Madame was the most tender-hearted woman I have ever met. She loved all living things, even an atrocious little dog called Fifi, half blind, wholly deaf, and given to wheezing horribly. Only once did I see her really angry. A neighbour went away from home for two days, leaving a dog tied up without food or water in his yard. We climbed the wall and, with immense difficulty, brought the creature to Madame. She trembled with passion while she fed it. She would have done bodily harm to the owner if she could.

She did not even hate Germans. Sometimes at our midday meal Monsieur would read from the paper an account of heavy German casualties or an estimate of the sum total of German losses. He chuckled. So many more dead Boches. So much the better for the world. But Madame always sighed. "*Les pauvres garçons*," she said. "*C'est terrible, terrible.*" Then perhaps Monsieur, good patriot, asserted himself and declared that the Boche was better dead. And Madame scolded him for his inhumanity. Our own wounded—*les pauvres blessés*—we mentioned as little as possible. Madame wept at the thought of them, and it was not pleasant to see tears in her bright old eyes.

But for all her tender-heartedness Madame did not, so far as I ever could discover, do much for the men of her own nation or of ours. An Englishwoman, in her position and with her vitality, would have sat on half a dozen committees, would have made bandages at a War Work Depot, or packed parcels for prisoners; would certainly have knitted socks all day. Madame did no such things. She managed her own house, mended her own linen, and she darned my socks—which was I suppose, a kind of war work, since I wore uniform.

The activities of Englishwomen rather scandalised her. The town was full of nurses, V.A.D.'s, and canteen workers. Madame was too charitable to criticise, but I think she regarded the *jeune fille Anglaise* as unbecomingly emancipated. She would have been sorry to see her own nieces—Madame had many nieces, but no child of her own—occupied as the English girls were.

I have always wondered why Madame took English officers to board in her house. She did not want the money we paid her, for she and Monsieur were well off. Indeed she asked so little of us, and fed us so well, that she cannot possibly have made a profit. And we must have been a nuisance to her.

In England Madame would have been called "house proud." She loved every stick of her fine old-fashioned furniture. Polishing of stairs and floors was a joy

to her. We tramped in and out in muddy boots. We scattered tobacco ashes. We opened bedroom windows, even on wet nights, and rain came in. We used monstrous and unheard-of quantities of water. Yet no sooner had one guest departed than Madame grew impatient to receive another.

On one point alone Madame was obstinate. She objected in the strongest way to baths in bedrooms. As there was no bathroom in the house, this raised a difficulty. Madame's own practice—she once explained it to me—was to take her bath on the evening of the first Monday in every month—in the kitchen, I think. My predecessors and my contemporaries refused to be satisfied without baths. Madame compromised. If they wanted baths they must descend to *le cave*, a deep underground cellar where Monsieur kept wine.

I, and I believe I alone of all Madame's guests, defeated her. I should like to believe that she gave in to me because she loved me; but I fear that I won my victory by unfair means. I refused to understand one word that Madame said, either in French or English, about baths. I treated the subject in language which I am sure was dark to her. I owned a bath of my own and gave my servant orders to bring up sufficient water every morning, whatever Madame said. He obeyed me, and I washed myself, more or less. Madame took her defeat well. She collected quantities of old blankets, rugs, sacks, and bed quilts. She spread them over the parts of the floor where my bath was placed. I tried, honourably, to splash as little as possible and always stood on a towel while drying myself.

After all Madame had reason on her side. Water is bad for polished floors, and it is very doubtful whether the human skin is any the better for it. Most of our rules of hygiene are foolish. We think a daily bath is wholesome. We clamour for fresh air. We fuss about drains. Madame never opened a window and had a horror of a *courant d'air*. The only drain connected with the house ran into the well from which our drinking water came. Yet Madame had celebrated her golden wedding and was never ill. Monsieur and Marie were even older and could still thoroughly enjoy a *jour de fête*.

Madame had a high sense of duty towards her guests. She and Marie cooked wonderful meals for us and even made pathetic efforts to produce *le pudding*, a thing strange to them which they were convinced we loved. She mended our clothes and sewed on buttons. She pressed us, anxiously, to remain *tranquille* for a proper period after meals.

She did her best to teach us French. She tried to induce me—she actually had

induced one of my predecessors—to write French exercises in the evenings. She made a stringent rule that no word of English was ever to be spoken at meals. I think that this was a real self-denial to Madame. She knew a little English—picked up sixty years before when she spent one term in a school near Folkestone. She liked to air it; but for the sake of our education she denied herself. We used to sit at dinner with a dictionary—English-French and French-English—on the table. We referred to it when stuck, and on the whole we got on well in every respect except one.

Madame had an eager desire to understand and appreciate English jokes, and of all things a joke is the most difficult to translate. A fellow-lodger once incautiously repeated to me a joke which he had read in a paper. It ran thus: "First British Soldier (in a French Restaurant): 'Waiter, this 'am's 'igh. 'Igh 'am. *Compris?*' Second British Soldier: 'You leave it to me, Bill. I know the lingo. *Garçon, Je suis.*'"

I laughed. Madame looked at me and at W., my fellow-lodger, and demanded a translation of the joke. I referred the matter to W. His French was, if possible, worse than mine, but it was he who had started the subject. "Ham," I said to him, "is *jambon*. Go ahead." W. went ahead, but "high" in the sense he wanted did not seem to be in the dictionary. I had a try when W. gave up and began with an explanation of the cockney's difficulty with the letter "h." Madame smiled uncomprehendingly. W., who had studied the dictionary while I talked, made a fresh start at "*je suis*." "*Je suis*—I am. *Jambon*—ham, *c'est à dire ''am' à Londres*.'" We worked away all through that meal. At supper, Madame, still full of curiosity, set us at it again.

We pursued that joke for several days until we were all exhausted, and Madame, politely, said she saw the point, though she did not and never will. I do not believe that joke can be translated into French. Months afterwards I had as fellow-lodger a man who spoke French well and fluently. I urged him to try if he could make Madame understand. He failed.

Madame was most hospitable. She was neither worried nor cross when we asked friends to dine with us. Indeed she was pleased. But she liked due notice so that she could devote proper attention to *la cuisine*.

M., who was at that time with a cavalry brigade, used to come and spend a night or two with me sometimes. He was a special favourite with Madame and she used to try to load him with food when he was leaving. One very wet day in late

autumn, Madame produced a large brown-paper bag and filled it with pears. She presented it to M. with a pretty speech of which he did not understand a word. M. was seriously embarrassed. He liked Madame and did not want to hurt her feelings; but he had before him a railway journey of some hours and then five miles on horseback. It is impossible to carry a brown-paper bag full of pears on a horse through a downpour of rain. The bag gets sopped at once and the pears fall through it. M. pushed the bag back to Madame.

"*Merci, merci*," he said. "*Mais non, pas possible.*"

Madame explained that the pears were deliciously ripe, which was true.

M. said, "*À cheval, Madame, je voyage à cheval.*"

Madame pushed the bag into his hands. He turned to me.

"For goodness' sake explain to her—politely, of course—that I can't take that bag of pears. I'd like to. They'd be a godsend to the mess. But I can't."

Madame saw the impossibility in the end; but she stuffed as many pears as she could into his pocket, and he went off bulging unbecomingly.

M. used to complain that he ate too much when he came to stay with me. I confess that our midday meal—we ate it at noon, conforming to the custom of the house—was heavy. And Madame was old-fashioned in her idea of the behaviour proper to a hostess. She insisted on our eating whether we wanted to eat or not, and was vexed if we refused second and even third helpings.

Madame was immensely interested in food and we talked about marketing and cookery every day. I came, towards the end of my stay, to have a fair knowledge of kitchen French. I could have attended cookery lectures with profit. I could even have taught a French servant how to stew a rabbit in such a way that it appeared at table brown, with thick brown sauce and a flavour of red wine. The marketing for the family was done by Madame and Marie, Marie in a high, stiff, white head-dress, carrying a large basket.

On the subject of prices Madame was intensely curious. She wanted to know exactly what everything cost in England and Ireland. I used to write home for information, and then we did long and confusing sums, translating stones or pounds into kilos and shillings into francs; Monsieur intervening occasionally with information about the rate of exchange at the moment. Madame insisted on taking this into account in comparing the cost of living in the two countries.

Then we used to be faced with problems which I regard as insoluble.

Perhaps a sum of this kind might be set in an arithmetic paper for advanced students.“Butter is 2*s.* 1*d.* a pound. A kilo is rather more than two pounds. The rate of exchange is 27·85. What would that butter cost in France?”

We had an exciting time when the municipal authorities of the town in which we lived introduced fixed prices. Madame, who is an entirely sensible woman, was frankly sceptical from the start about the possibility of regulating prices. Gendarmes paraded the market-place, where on certain days the countrywomen sat in rows, their vegetables, fowl, eggs, and butter exposed for sale. They declined, of course, to accept the fixed prices. Madame and her friends, though they hated being overcharged, recognised the strength of the countrywomen’s position. There was a combination between the buyers and sellers.

The gendarmes were out-witted in various ways. One plan—Madame explained it to me with delight—was to drop a coin, as if by accident, into the lap of the countrywoman who was selling butter. Ten minutes later the purchaser returned and bought the butter under the eyes of a satisfied policeman at the fixed price. The original coin represented the difference between what the butter woman was willing to accept and what the authorities thought she ought to get. That experiment in municipal control of prices lasted about a month. Then the absurdity of the thing became too obvious. The French are much saner than the English in this. They do not go on pretending to do things once it becomes quite plain that the things cannot be done.

Food shortage—much more serious now—was beginning to be felt while I lived with Madame. There were difficulties about sugar, and Monsieur had to give up a favourite kind of white wine. But neither he nor Madame complained much; though they belonged to the *rentier* class and were liable to suffer more than those whose incomes were capable of expansion. No one, so far as I know, appealed to them to practise economy in a spirit of lofty patriotism. They simply did with a little less of everything with a shrug of the shoulders and a smiling reference to the good times coming *après la guerre*. And, on occasion, economy was forgotten and we feasted.

One of the last days I spent in Madame’s house was New Year’s Day, 1917. I and my fellow-lodger, another padre, were solemnly invited to a dinner that night. It was a family affair. All Madame’s nieces, married and single, were there, and their small children, two grand-nieces and a grand-nephew. Madame’s

one nephew, wounded in the defence of Verdun, was there.

Our usual table was greatly enlarged. The folding doors between the drawing-room and dining-room were flung open. We had a blaze of lamps and candles. We began eating at 6.30 p.m.; we stopped shortly after 10 p.m. But this was no brutal gorge. We ate slowly, with discrimination. We paused long between the courses. Once or twice we smoked. Once the grand-niece and grand-nephew recited for us, standing up, turn about, on their chairs, and declaiming with fluency and much gesture what were plainly school-learnt poems. One of Madame's nieces, passing into the drawing-room, played us a pleasant tune on the piano. At each break I thought that dinner was over. I was wrong time after time. We talked, smoked, listened, applauded, and then more food was set before us.

There were customs new to me. At the appearance of the plum pudding—a very English pudding—we all rose from our seats and walked in solemn procession round the table. Each of us, as we passed the sacred dish, basted it with a spoonful of blazing rum, and, as we basted, made our silent wish. We formed pigs out of orange skins and gave them lighted matches for tails. By means of these we discovered which of us would be married or achieve other good fortune in the year to come. We drank five different kinds of wine, a sweet champagne coming by itself, a kind of dessert wine, at the very end of dinner, accompanied by small sponge cakes.

The last thing of all was, oddly enough, tea. Like most French tea it was tasteless, but we remedied that with large quantities of sugar and we ate with it a very rich cake soaked in syrup, which would have deprived the fiercest Indian tea of any flavour.

I think Madame was supremely happy all the evening. I think every one else was happy too. I have never met more courteous people. In the midst of the most hilarious talk and laughter a niece would stop laughing suddenly and repeat very slowly for my benefit what the fun was about. Even when the soldier nephew told stories which in England would not have been told so publicly, a niece would take care that I did not miss the point.

Madame's drawing-room was very wonderful. At one time she had known a painter, a professor of painting in a school near her home. He adorned the walls of her drawing-room with five large oil-paintings, done on the plaster of the wall and reaching from the ceiling to very near the floor. Four of them represented the

seasons of the year, and that artist was plainly a man who might have made a good income drawing pictures for the lids of chocolate boxes. His fur-clad lady skating (Winter) would have delighted any confectioner. The fifth picture was a farmyard scene in which a small girl appeared, feeding ducks. This was the most precious of all the pictures. The little girl was Madame's niece, since married and the mother of a little girl of her own.

The furniture was kept shrouded in holland and the jalousies were always shut except when Madame exhibited the room. I saw the furniture uncovered twice, and only twice. It was uncovered on the occasion of the New Year's feast, and Madame displayed her room in all its glory on the afternoon when I invited to tea a lady who was going to sing for the men in one of my camps.

I think that all Madame's lodgers loved her, though I doubt if any of them loved her as dearly as I did. Letters used to arrive for her from different parts of the war area conveying news of the officers who had lodged with her. She always brought them to me to translate. I fear she was not much wiser afterwards. She never answered any of them. Nor has she ever answered me, though I should greatly like to hear how she, Monsieur, Marie, Fifi, and Turque are getting on. Turque was a large dog, the only member of the household who was not extremely old.

CHAPTER XIII

“THE CON. CAMP”

We always spoke of it, affectionately and proudly, as “the Con. Camp.” The abbreviation was natural enough, for “convalescent” is a mouthful of a word to say, besides being very difficult to spell. I have known a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England come to grief over the consonants of the last two syllables in addressing an envelope to me; and there was a story of a very august visitor, asked to write in an album, who inquired about a vowel and was given the wrong one by one of the staff. If those doubtful spellers had known our pleasant abbreviation they would have escaped disaster.

To us the “Con.” justified itself from every point of view. I am not sure that we had an equal right to the conceited use of the definite article. There are other “Con.” camps in France, many of them. We spoke of them by their numbers. Ours had a number too, but we rarely used it. We were *The* Con. Camp. Our opinion was no doubt prejudiced; but the authorities seemed to share it. The Con. Camp was one of the show places of the British Army. Distinguished visitors were always brought there.

The Government, the War Office, or whoever it is who settles such things, encourages distinguished visitors to inspect the war. There is a special officer set apart to conduct tourists from place to place and to show them the things they ought to see. He is provided with several motor-cars, a nice château, and a good cook. This is sensible. If you want a visitor to form a favourable opinion of anything, war, industry, or institution, you must make him fairly comfortable and feed him well.

Yet I think that the life of that officer was a tiresome one. There was very little variety in his programme. He showed the same things over and over again, and he heard the same remarks made over and over again about the things he showed. Sometimes, of course, a distinguished visitor with a reputation for originality made a new remark. But that was worse. It is better to have to listen to an intelligent comment a hundred times than to hear an unintelligent thing said once. Any new remark was sure to be stupid, because all the intelligent things had been said before.

To us, who lived in the Con. Camp, distinguished visitors, though common, were not very tiresome. We were not obliged to entertain them for very long at a time. They arrived at the camp about 3.30 p.m., and our C.O. showed them round. After inspecting an incinerator, a tent, a bath, a Y.M.C.A. hut, and a kitchen, they came to the mess for tea. Our C.O. was a man of immense courtesy and tact. He could answer the same question about an incinerator twice a week without showing the least sign of ever having heard it before.

I have often wondered who selected the distinguished visitors, and on what principle the choice was made. Whoever he was he cast his net widely.

Journalists of course abounded, American journalists chiefly—this was in 1916—but we had representatives of Dutch, Norwegian, Swiss, Italian, Spanish, Russian, and South American papers. Once we even had a Roumanian, a most agreeable man, but I never felt quite sure whether he was a journalist or a diplomatist. Perhaps he was both.

Authors—writers of books rather than articles—were common and sometimes were quite interesting, though given to asking too many questions. It ought to be impressed on distinguished visitors that it is their business to listen to what they are told, and not to ask questions.

Politicians often came. We once had a visit from Mr. Lloyd George, but I missed that to my grief.

Generals and staff officers from neutral countries came occasionally in very attractive uniforms.

Doctors always seemed to me more successful than other people in keeping up an appearance of intelligent interest.

Ecclesiastics were dull. They evidently considered it bad form to allude to religion in any way and they did not know much about anything else. But ecclesiastics were rare.

Royalties, I think, excited us most. We once had a visit from a king, temporarily exiled from his kingdom. He wore the most picturesque clothes I have ever seen off the stage and he was very gracious. All of our most strikingly wounded men—those who wore visible bandages—were paraded for his inspection. He walked down the line, followed by a couple of aides-de-camp, some French officers of high rank, an English general, our C.O., and then the rest of us. Our

band played a tune which we hoped was his national anthem. He did not seem to recognise it, so it may not have been the right tune though we had done our best.

He stopped opposite an undersized boy in a Lancashire regiment who had a bandage round his head and a nose blue with cold. The monarch made a remark in his own language. He must have known several other languages—all kings do—but he spoke his own. Perhaps kings have to, in order to show patriotism. An aide-de-camp translated the remark into French. An interpreter retranslated it into English. Somebody repeated it to the Lancashire boy. I dare say he was gratified, but I am sure he did not in the least agree with the king. What his Majesty said was, "How splendid a thing to be wounded in this glorious war!"

It is easy to point a cheap moral to the tale. So kings find pleasure in their peculiar sport. So boys who would much rather be watching football matches at home suffer and are sad. *Delirant reges*. *Plectuntur Achivi*.

It is all as old as the hills, and republicans may make the most of it. Yet I think that that king meant what he said, and would have felt the same if the bandage had been round his own head and he had been wearing the uniform of a private soldier. There are a few men in the world who really enjoy fighting, and that king—unless his face utterly belies him—is one of them. Nothing, I imagine, except his great age, kept him out of the battles which his subjects fought.

The Con. Camp deserved the reputation which brought us those flights of distinguished visitors. I may set this down proudly without being suspected of conceit, for I had nothing to do with making the camp what it was. Success in a camp or a battalion depends first on three men—the C.O., the adjutant, and the sergeant-major. We were singularly fortunate in all three.

The next necessity is what the Americans call "team work." The whole staff must pull together, each member of it knowing and trusting the others. It was so in that camp. The result was fine, smooth-running organisation. No emergency disturbed the working of the camp. No sudden call found the staff unprepared or helpless. So much, I think, any one visiting and inspecting the camp might have seen and appreciated. What a visitor, however intelligent, or an inspector, though very able, would not have discovered was the spirit which inspired the discipline of the camp.

Ours was a medical camp. We flew the Red Cross flag and our C.O. was an officer in the R.A.M.C. Doctors, though they belong to a profession which exists for the purpose of alleviating human suffering, are not always and at all times

humane men. Like other men they sometimes fall into the mistake of regarding discipline not as a means but as an end in itself. In civil life the particular kind of discipline which seduces them is called professional etiquette. In the army they become, occasionally, the most bigoted worshippers of red-tape. When that happens a doctor becomes a fanatic more ruthless than an inquisitor of old days.

In the Con. Camp the discipline was good, as good as possible; but our C.O. was a wise man. He never forgot that the camp existed for the purpose of restoring men's bodies to health and not as an example of the way to make rules work. The spirit of the camp was most excellent. Regulations were never pressed beyond the point at which they were practically of use. Sympathy, the sympathy which man naturally feels for a suffering fellow-man, was not strangled by parasitic growths of red-tape. We had to thank the C.O. and after him the adjutant for this. I met no officers more humane than these two, or more patient with all kinds of weakness and folly in the men with whom they had to deal.

They were well supported by their staff and by the voluntary workers in the two recreation huts run by the Y.M.C.A. and the Catholic Women's League. The work of the C.W.L. ladies differed a little from that of any recreation hut I had seen before. They made little attempt to cater for the amusement of the men. They discouraged personal friendships between the workers and the men. They aimed at a certain refinement in the equipment and decoration of their hut. They provided food of a superior kind, very nicely served. I think their efforts were appreciated by many men.

On the other hand the workers in the Y.M.C.A. hut there as everywhere made constant efforts to provide entertainments of some kind. Three or four days at least out of every week there was "something on." Sometimes it was a concert, sometimes a billiard tournament, or a ping-pong tournament, or a competition in draughts or chess. Occasionally, under the management of a lady who specialised in such things, we had a hat-trimming competition, an enormously popular kind of entertainment both for spectators and performers. Every suggestion of a new kind of entertainment was welcomed and great pains were taken to carry it through.

I only remember one occasion on which the leader of that hut shrank from the form of amusement proposed to him. The idea came from a Canadian soldier who said he wished we would get up a pie-eating competition. This sounded exciting, and we asked for details. The competitors, so the Canadian said, have their hands tied behind their backs, go down on their knees and eat open jam

tarts which are laid flat on the ground. He said the game was popular in the part of Canada he came from. I longed to see it tried; but the leader of the hut refused to venture on it. It would, he said, be likely to be very messy. He was probably right.

In that hut the workers aimed constantly at getting into personal touch with the men. This was far easier in the Con. Camp than at the base camp where "Woodbine" was. The numbers of men were smaller. As a rule they stayed longer with us. But at best it is only possible for a canteen worker to make friends with a few men. With most of those who enter the hut she can have no personal relations. But I am sure that the work done is of immense value, and it is probably those who need sympathy and friendship most who come seeking it, a little shyly, from the ladies who serve them.

In normal times the Con. Camp received men from the hospitals; men who were not yet fit to return to their regiments, but who had ceased to need the constant ministrations of doctors and nurses. The conditions of life were more comfortable than in base camps, much more comfortable than at the front or in billets. The men slept in large tents, warmed and well lighted. They had beds. The food was good and abundant. Great care and attention was given to the cooking.

Much trouble was taken about amusements. The camp had a ground for football and cricket. It possessed a small stage, set up in one of the dining-halls, where plays were acted, a Christmas pantomime performed, and a variety entertainment given every week. There were whist drives with attractive prizes for the winners. Duty was light. Besides the "fatigues" necessary for keeping the camp in order there were route marches for those who could march, and an elaborate system of physical exercises under trained instructors.

The men remained in camp for varying periods. No man was kept there for more than three months. But some men passed through the camp being marked fit almost as soon as they left hospital. That was the normal routine; but it happened once while I was there that things became very abnormal and the organisation of the camp was tested with the utmost severity.

Just before the Somme offensive began some mischievous devil put it into the heads of the authorities to close down the only other convalescent camp in the neighbourhood. Its inmates were sent to us and we had to make room for them. Our cricket ground was sacrificed. Paths were run across the pitch. Tents were

erected all over it. My church tent became the home of a harmonium, the only piece of ecclesiastical salvage from the camp that was closed. Then my church tent was taken from me, sacrificed like all luxuries to the accommodation of men. Just as we were beginning to settle down again came the Somme offensive.

Like every one else in France we had long expected the great push. Yet when it came it came with startling suddenness. We went out one morning to find the streets of the town crowded with ambulances. They followed each other in a long, slow, apparently unending procession across the bridge which led into the town from the railway station. They split off into small parties turning to the left and skirting the sea shore along the broad, glaring parade, or climbed with many hootings through the narrow streets of the old town. Staring after them as they passed us we saw inside figures of men very still, very silent, bandaged, swathed.

All the morning, hour after hour, the long procession went on. The ambulances, cleared of their burdens at the various hospitals, turned at once and drove furiously back to the station. The hospitals were filled and overfilled and overflowing. Men who could stand more travelling were hurried to the hospital ships. Stretcher-bearers toiled and sweated. The steamers, laden to their utmost capacity, slipped from the quay side and crept out into the Channel. One hospital was filled and cleared three times in twenty-four hours. The strain on doctors and nurses must have been terrific.

For one day we in the Con. Camp remained untouched by the rushing torrent. Then our turn came. The number of lightly wounded men was very great. Many of them could walk and take care of themselves. A hospital bed and hospital treatment were not absolutely necessary for them. They were sent to us. They arrived in char-à-bancs, thirty at a time. We possessed a tiny hospital, meant for the accommodation of cases of sudden illness in the camp. It was turned into a dressing-station.

The wounded men sat or lay on the grass outside waiting for their turns to go in. They wore the tattered, mud-caked clothes of the battlefield. The bandages of the casualty clearing-station were round their limbs and heads. Some were utterly exhausted. They lay down. They pillowed their heads on their arms and sank into heavy slumber. Some, half hysterical with excitement, sat bolt upright and talked, talked incessantly, whether any one listened to them or not. They laughed too, but it was a horrible kind of laughter. Some seemed stupefied; they neither slept nor talked. They sat where they were put, and stared in front of them with

eyes which never seemed to blink.

Most of the men were calm, quiet, and very patient. I think their patience was the most wonderful thing I ever saw. They suffered, had suffered, and much suffering was before them. Yet no word of complaint came from them. They neither cursed God nor the enemy nor their fate. I have seen dumb animals, dogs and cattle, with this same look of trustful patience in their faces. But these were men who could think, reason, feel, and express themselves as animals cannot. Their patience and their quiet trustfulness moved me so that it was hard not to weep.

By twos and threes the men were called from the group outside and passed through the door of the dressing-station. The doctors waited for them in the surgery. The label on each man was read, his wound examined. A note was swiftly written ordering certain dressings and treatment. The man passed into what had been the ward of the hospital. Here the R.A.M.C. orderlies worked and with them two nurses spared for our need from a neighbouring hospital. Wounds were stripped, dressed, rebandaged. Sometimes fragments of shrapnel were picked out.

The work went on almost silently hour after hour from early in the morning till long after noon. Yet there was no hurry, no fuss, and I do not think there was a moment’s failure in gentleness. Some hard things have been said about R.A.M.C. orderlies and about nurses too. Perhaps they have been deserved occasionally. I saw their work at close quarters and for many days in that one place, nowhere else and not again there; but what I saw was good.

With wounds dressed and bandaged, the men went out again. They were led across the camp to the quartermaster’s stores and given clean underclothes in place of shirts and drawers sweat soaked, muddy, caked hard with blood. With these in their arms they went to the bath-house, to hot water, soap, and physical cleanness. Then they were fed, and for the moment all we could do for them was done.

These were all lightly wounded men, but, even remembering that, their power of recuperation seemed astonishing. Some went after dinner to their tents, lay down on their beds and slept. Even of them few stayed asleep for very long. They got up, talked to each other, joined groups which formed outside the tents, wandered through the camp, eagerly curious about their new surroundings. They found their way into the recreation huts and canteens. They shouted and cheered the

performers at concerts or grouped themselves round the piano and sang their own songs. Those who had money bought food at the counter.

But many had no money and no prospect of getting any. They might have gone, not hungry, but what is almost worse, yearning for dainties and tobacco, if it were not for the generosity of their comrades. I have seen men with twopence and no more, men who were longing for a dozen things themselves, share what the twopence bought with comrades who had not even a penny. I passed two young soldiers near the door of a canteen. One of them stopped me and very shyly asked me if I would give him a penny for an English stamp. He fished it out from the pocket of his pay-book. It was dirty, crumpled, most of the gum gone, but unused and not defaced. I gave him the penny. “Come on, Sam,” he said, “we’ll get a packet of fags.”

They say a lawyer sees the worst side of human nature. A parson probably sees the best of it; but though I have been a parson for many years and seen many good men and fine deeds, I have seen nothing more splendid, I cannot imagine anything more splendid, than the comradeship, the brotherly love of our soldiers.

The very first day of the rush of the lightly wounded into our camp brought us men of the Ulster Division. I heard from the mouths of the boys I talked to the Ulster speech, dear to me from all the associations and memories of my childhood. I do not suppose that those men fought better than any other men, or bore pain more patiently, but there was in them a kind of fierce resentment. They had not achieved the conquest they hoped. They had been driven back, had been desperately cut up. They had emerged from their great battle a mere skeleton of their division.

But I never saw men who looked less like beaten men. Those Belfast citizens, who sign Covenants and form volunteer armies at home, have in them the fixed belief that no one in the world is equal to them or can subdue them. It seems an absurd and arrogant faith. But there is this to be said. They remained just as convinced of their own strength after their appalling experience north of the Somme as they were when they shouted for Sir Edward Carson in the streets of Belfast. Men who believe in their invincibility the day after they have been driven back, with their wounds fresh and their bones aching with weariness, are men whom it will be very difficult to conquer.

Nothing was more interesting than to note the different moods of these wounded men. One morning, crossing the camp at about 7 o’clock, I met a Canadian, a

tall, gaunt man. I saw at once that he had just arrived from the front. The left sleeve of his tunic was cut away. The bandage round his forearm was soiled and stained. His face was unshaven and very dirty. His trousers were extraordinarily tattered and caked with yellow mud. He had somehow managed to lose one boot and walked unevenly in consequence. I had heard the night before something about the great and victorious fight in which this man had been. I congratulated him. He looked at me with a slow, humorous smile. “Well,” he drawled, “they certainly did run some.”

A Lancashire boy, undersized, anæmic-looking, his clothes hanging round him in strips, got hold of me one morning outside the dressing-station and told me in a high-pitched voice a most amazing story. It was the best battle story I ever heard from the lips of a soldier, and the boy who told it to me was hysterical. He had been buried twice, he and his officer and his Lewis gun, in the course of an advance. He had met the Prussian Guard in the open, he and his comrades, and the famous crack corps had “certainly run some.” That was not the boy’s phrase. When he reached the climax of his tale his language was a rich mixture of blasphemy and obscenity.

There was a Munster Fusilier, an elderly, grizzled man who had been sent back with some German prisoners. He had, by his own account, quite a flock of them when he started. He found himself, owing to shrapnel and other troubles, with only one left when he drew near his destination.

But he was a provident man. He had collected all available loot from the men who had fallen on the way down, and the unfortunate survivor was so laden that he collapsed, sank into the mud under an immense load of helmets, caps, belts, everything that could have been taken from the dead. The Munster Fusilier stood over him with his rifle. “You misfortunate b——,” he said. “And them words,” he said to me confidentially, “got a move on him, though it was myself had to carry the load for him the rest of the way.”

CHAPTER XIV

A BACKWATER

I look back with great pleasure on my connection with the Emergency Stretcher-bearers' Camp. It was one of three camps in which I worked when I went to B. I liked all three camps and every one in them, but I cherish a feeling of particular tenderness for the Stretcher-bearers.

Yet my first experience there was far from encouraging. The day after I took over from my predecessor I ventured into the men's recreation room. I was received with silence, frosty and most discouraging. I made a few remarks about the weather. I commented on the stagnant condition of the war at the moment. The things I said were banal and foolish no doubt, yet I meant well and scarcely deserved the reply which came at last. A man who was playing billiards dropped the butt of his cue on the ground with a bang, surveyed me with a hostile stare and said:

"We don't want no —— parsons here."

Somebody in a far corner of the room protested mildly.

"Language, language," he said.

I did not really object much to the language. I had heard the British soldiers' favourite word too often to be shocked by it. What did hurt and embarrass me was the fact that I was not welcome; and no one made any attempt to reassure me on that point.

Indeed when the same unpleasant fact that I really was not welcome was conveyed to me without obscenity in the next camp and with careful politeness in the third I found it even more disagreeable than it was when the stretcher-bearer called me a —— parson. The officers in the convalescent camp, the centre camp in my charge, were all kindness in their welcome, but the sergeant-major ——. We became fast friends afterwards, but the day we first met he looked me over and decided that I was an inefficient simpleton. Without speaking a word he made his opinion plain to me. He was appallingly efficient himself and I do not think he ever altered his perfectly just opinion of me. But in

the end, and long before the end, he did all he could to help me.

The worst of all the snubs waited me in Marlborough Camp, and came from a lady worker, afterwards the dearest and most valued of the many friends I made in France. I shall not soon forget the day I first entered her canteen. She and her fellow-worker, also a valued friend now, did not call me a "—— parson"; but they left me under the impression that I was not wanted there. Her snub, delivered as a lady delivers such things, was the worst of the three.

For my reception in the Stretcher-bearers' Camp I was prepared.

"You'll find those fellows a pretty tough crowd," so some one warned me.

"Those old boys are bad lots," said some one else. "You'll not do any good with them."

I agree with the "tough." I totally disagree with the "bad." Even if, after eight months, I had been bidden farewell in the same phrase with which I was greeted, I should still refuse to say "bad lot" about those men. I hope that in such a case I should have the grace to recognise the failure as my fault, not theirs, and to take the "bad lot" as a description of myself.

The Emergency Stretcher-bearers when I first knew them were no man's children. The Red Cross flag flew over the entrance of their camp, but the Red Cross people accepted no responsibility for them. Their recreation room, which was not a room at all, but one end of their gaunt dining-room, was ill supplied with books and games, and had no papers. There were no lady workers in or near the camp, and only those who have seen the work which our ladies do in canteens in France can realise how great the loss was. There was no kind of unity in the camp.

It was a small place. There were not more than three hundred men altogether. But they were men from all sorts of regiments. I think that when I knew the camp first, nearly every one in it belonged to the old army. They were gathered there, the salvage of the Mons retreat, of the Marne, of the glorious first battle of Ypres, broken men every one of them, debris tossed by the swirling currents of war into this backwater.

Their work was heavy, thankless, and uninspiring. They were camped on a hill. Day after day they marched down through the streets of the town to the railway station or the quay. They carried the wounded on stretchers from the hospital

trains to the Red Cross ambulances; or afterwards from the ambulance cars up steep gangways to the decks and cabins of hospital ships. They were summoned by telephone at all hours. They toiled in the grey light of early dawn. They sweated at noonday. Soaked and dripping they bent their backs to their burdens in storm and rain. They went long hours without food. They lived under conditions of great discomfort. It was everybody's business to curse and "strafe" them. I do not remember that any one ever gave them a word of praise.

It was the camp, of all that I was ever in, which seemed to offer the richest yield to the gleaner of war stories. I have always wanted to know what that retreat from Mons felt like to the men who went through it. We are assured, and I do not doubt it, that our men never thought of themselves as beaten. What did they think when day after day they retreated at top speed? Of what they suffered we know something. How they took their suffering we only guess. I hoped when I made friends with those men to hear all this and many strange tales of personal adventures.

But the British soldier, even of the new army, is strangely inarticulate. The men of the old army, so far as concerns their fighting, are almost dumb. They would talk about anything rather than their battles. There was a man in the Life Guards who had received three wounds in one of the early cavalry skirmishes. He wanted to talk about cricket, and told me stories about a church choir in which he sang when he was a boy.

There was a Coldstream Guardsman. I never succeeded in finding out whether he was in the famous Landrecies fight or not. The most he would do in the way of military talk was to complain, privately, to me of the lax discipline in the camp, and to compare the going of his comrades from the camp to the quay with the marching of the Coldstreamers on their way to relieve guard at Buckingham Palace. There was an old sergeant from County Down who was more interested in growing vegetables—we had a garden—than anything else, and a Munster Fusilier who came from Derry, of all places, and exulted in the fact that his sons had taken his place in the regiment.

At first this curious reticence was a disappointment to me. It is still a wonder. I am sure that if I had been one of the "Old Contemptibles" I should talk of nothing else all my life. But I came to see afterwards that if I had heard battle stories I should never have known the men. The centre of interest of their lives was at home. They, even those professional soldiers, were men of peace rather than war. The soldiers' trade was no delight to them.

I dare say the Germans, who took pains to learn so much about us beforehand, knew this, and drew, as Germans so often do, a wrong inference from facts patiently gathered. They thought that men who do not like fighting fight badly. It may be so sometimes. It was certainly not so with our old army. We know now that it is not so with the men of our new army either.

After a while the stretcher-bearers and I began to know each other. The first sign of friendliness was a request that I should umpire at a cricket match on a Sunday afternoon. I am not sure that the invitation was not also a test. Some parsons, the "——" kind, who are not wanted, object to cricket on Sundays. My own conscience is more accommodating. I would gladly have umpired at Monte Carlo on Good Friday, Easter, Advent Sunday, and Christmas, all rolled into one, if those men had asked me.

Later on, after many cricket matches, we agreed that it was desirable to get up entertainments in the camp. There was no local talent, or none available at first, but I had the good luck to meet one day a very amiable lady who undertook to run a whole entertainment herself. She also promised not to turn round and walk away when she saw the piano.

We stirred ourselves, determined to rise to the occasion. We made a platform at the end of the dining-room. I took care not to ask, and I do not know, where the wood for that platform came from. We discovered among us a man who said he had been a theatrical scene painter before he joined the R.E. He can never, I fancy, have had much chance of rising to the top of his old profession, but he painted a back scene for our stage. It represented a country cottage standing in a field, and approached by an immensely long, winding, brown path. The perspective of that path was wonderful. He also painted and set up two wings on the stage which were easily recognisable as leafy trees. For many Sundays afterwards I stood in front of that cottage with a green tree on each side of me during morning service.

Another artist volunteered to do our programmes. His work lay in the orderly-room and he had at command various coloured inks, black, violet, blue, and red. He produced a programme like a rainbow on which he described our lady visitor as the "Famous Favourite of the Music Hall Stage." She had, in fact, delighted theatre goers before her marriage, but not on the music hall stage. I showed her the programme nervously, but I need not have been nervous. She entered into the spirit of the thing.

A thoughtful sergeant, without consulting me, prepared for her a dressing-room at the back of the stage. A modest man himself, he insisted upon my leading her to it. We found there a shelf, covered with newspaper. On it was a shaving mirror, a large galvanised-iron tub half full of cold water, a cake of brown soap, a tattered towel, and a comb. Also there was a tumbler, a siphon of soda water, and a bottle of port.

“The dears,” she said. “But I can’t change my frock; I’ve nothing but what I stand up in. What shall I do?”

I glanced at the bottle of port; but she shrank from that.

“I must do something,” she said.“I’ll powder my nose.” The shaving mirror, at least, was some use.

The entertainment began stiffly. We were not accustomed to entertainments and felt that we ought to behave with propriety. We clapped at the end of each song, but we displayed no enthusiasm. I began to fear for our success. But our lady—she did the whole thing herself—conquered us. We were laughing and cheering in half an hour. In the end we rocked in our seats and howled tumultuously when the sergeant-major, a portly man of great dignity, was dragged over the footlights. Our lady pirouetted across the stage and back again, her arm round the sergeant-major’s waist, her cheek on his shoulder, singing, “If I were the only girl in the world and you were the only boy.”

We believed in doing what we could for those who came to entertain us. When we secured the services of a “Lena Ashwell” Concert Party we painted a large sign and hung it up in front of the stage: “Welcome to the Concert Party.” We forgot the second “e” in Welcome and it had to be crammed in at the last moment above the “m” with a “^” underneath it.

We made two dressing-rooms, one for ladies and one for gentlemen. The fittings were the same—brown soap, cold water, shaving mirror, tumbler and siphon. But in the gentlemen’s room we put whisky, in the ladies’ port. The whole party had tea afterwards in the sergeants’ mess—strong tea and tinned tongue. A corporal stood at the door as we left holding a tray covered with cigarettes.

I learned to play cribbage while I was in that camp. I was pitted, by common consent, against an expert, a man who had been wounded at Le Cateau and had his teeth knocked out as he lay on the ground by a passing German, who used the butt of his rifle. Round me were a dozen men, who gave me advice and

explained in whispers the finesse of the game. It was hot work, for the men sat close and we all smoked.

I also learned that the British soldier, when he gives his mind to it, plays a masterly game of draughts. There was a man—in civil life he sailed a Thames barge—who insulted me deeply over draughts. He used to allow me to win one game in three, and he managed so well that it was weeks before I found out what he was doing.

We had whist drives, and once a billiard tournament, run on what I believe is a novel principle. We had only one table, half sized and very dilapidated. We had about thirty entries. We gave each player five minutes and let him score as much as he could in the time, no opponent interfering with him. The highest score took the prize.

But all entertainments and games in that camp were liable to untimely interruption. Messages used to come through from some remote authority demanding stretcher-bearers. Then, though it were in the midst of a game of whist, every man present had to get up and go away.

There was one occasion on which such a summons arrived just as the men had assembled to welcome a concert party. The dining-room was empty in five minutes. We who remained were faced with the prospect of a concert without an audience. But our sergeant-major met the emergency. He hurried to a neighbouring camp and somehow managed to borrow two hundred men. The concert party was greatly pleased, but said that the Emergency Stretcher-bearers did not look as old and dilapidated as they had been led to expect.

There came a time when the camp changed and many old friends disappeared. At the beginning of the Somme battle there was a sudden demand for stretcher-bearers to serve at the advanced dressing-stations. Almost every day we were bidden to send men. Little parties assembled on the parade ground and marched off to entrain for the front. I used to see them lined up on the parade ground, war-battered men, who looked old though they were young, with their kits spread out for inspection. The least unfit went first; but indeed there was little choice among them. Not a man of them but had been wounded grievously or mourned a constitution broken by hardship. Yet they went cheerfully, patient in their dumb devotion to duty, hopeful that the final victory for which they had striven in vain was near at hand at last.

“We’ll have peace before Christmas.” So they said to me as they went.

That “Peace before Christmas”! It has fluttered, a delusive vision, before our men since the start. “Is it true that the cavalry are through?” I suppose that was another delusion, that riding down of a flying foe by horsemen. But it was not only the stretcher-bearers who clung to it.

We saw our friends no more after they disappeared into the smoking furnace of the front. They were scattered here and there among the dressing-stations in the fighting area. Many of them, I suppose, stayed there, struck down at last, ending their days in France as they began them, with the sound of the guns in their ears. Others, perhaps, drifted back to England more hopelessly broken than ever. They must be walking our streets now with silver badges on the lapels of their coats, and we, who are much meaner men, should take our hats off to them. A few may be toiling still, where the fighting is thickest, the last remnants of the “Old Contemptibles.”

Their places in the camp and their work on the quays were taken by others, men disabled or broken in the later fights when the new armies won their glory. The character of the camp changed. We became more respectable than we were in the old days. No one any longer spoke of us as a “bad lot,” or called us “a tough crowd.” Perhaps we were not so tough. Certainly we cannot have been tougher than the men who made good in those first terrific days, who continued to make good long after they could fight no more, staggering through the Somme mud with laden stretchers. They grumbled and groused. They blasphemed constantly. They drank when they could. They wanted no “—— parson” among them. But they were men, unconquered and unconquerable.

CHAPTER XV

MY THIRD CAMP

At the front, the actual front where the fighting is, imagination runs riot in devising place names, and military maps recognise woods, hills, and roads by their new titles. At the bases a severer spirit holds sway. I recollect one curious and disagreeable camp which was called, colloquially and officially, Cinder City. Otherwise camps were known by numbers or at best by the French names of the districts in which they were situated. I thought I had hit on another exception to this rule when I first heard of this camp. It seemed natural to have called a camp after one of our generals. In fact nothing of the sort occurred. It was the French name for the place. We took over the name when we pitched our tents.

Indeed the camp was not the sort of place which gets a name given to it. It is only places which somebody loves or hates, in which somebody is one way or other interested, which get new names given them. Nobody, or nobody in high authority, took an interest in this camp. It was a stepchild among camps, neither attractive enough to be loved nor disagreeable enough to be hated and reviled.

With a string of other dull camps, it was under the command of a colonel who, having much on his mind besides the care of this camp, lived elsewhere. Only one officer slept in the camp. He had a bedroom which was half office, decorated —he several times assured me that his predecessor was responsible for the decoration—with pictures from *La Vie Parisienne*. The proprietors of that journal must have profited enormously by the coming of the British military force. If there is any form of taxation of excess profits in France that editor must be paying heavily. Yet the paper is sufficiently monotonous, and it is difficult to imagine that any one wants to take it in regularly.

Except this bedroom, the officer in command had no habitation in the camp. He messed elsewhere and, as was natural, spent his spare time elsewhere. He did all he could for the camp, but he could not do very much. He was of subordinate rank and of no great military importance. It was very difficult to stir the authorities to any great interest in the camp. There was a certain amount of excuse for them. It never seemed worth while to take much trouble for the men there. The function of the camp was peculiar. Men were drafted into it from

convalescent camps and hospitals when they were passed “fit,” and were ready to rejoin their units. The business of the camp authorities was to sort the men out, divide them into parties, and dispatch them to the depots of their regiments.

Every day men came into camp and were for the moment “details.” They belonged to all possible regiments and branches of the service. Every day parties of men left the camp for the different base depots. At 10 a.m. the H. party for H., at 12 noon the E. party for E., no longer “details,” but drafts consigned to their proper depots at H., E., or elsewhere. Their stay in the camp was usually very brief. It was scarcely worth while trying to make them comfortable or doing anything to make life pleasant for them.

It was, I think, rather hard on men to be sent straight from the comfort and warmth of a hospital or convalescent camp to a place as Spartan as this. Instead of having a bed to sleep on, the unfortunate “detail” found himself condemned to the floor boards of a bell tent, with a very meagre allowance of well-worn blankets. In cold weather the change was abrupt and trying, but of course it had to be made sooner or later, and I suppose the men had no reasonable excuse for grumbling.

Very much harder on them was the lack of accommodation in the camp. Things are much better now in this respect; but when I knew the camp first, there was no recreation room except a small and inconvenient E.F. Canteen.

The Y.M.C.A. never established itself there. The Church Army put up a small hut, but sent no worker to look after it; and even that hut was not opened till the early summer of 1916. By a curious chance the E.F. Canteen was worked by ladies instead of the usual orderlies. The ladies were in fact there, running a small independent canteen, before the E.F. Canteen took over the place. Rather unwillingly, I think, the E.F. Canteen people took over these ladies. It was a most fortunate thing that they did so.

Miss L., the head of this little band of workers, was a lady of unusual ability, energy, and sympathy. I have said that no one in authority cared for the camp. Miss L., who had no military authority, not only cared for it—she loved it. It was to her and her assistants that the camp owed most of what was done for it. I have seen much splendid work done by our voluntary ladies in France, but I have never seen better work done under more difficult circumstances than was done by these ladies.

I suppose it is foolish to be surprised at any evidence of the blatant vulgarity of

the men who earn their living by the horrid trade of politics. They speak and act after their kind; and it is probably true that silk purses cannot be made out of sows' ears. Yet I own to having experienced a shock when Mr. Macpherson in the House of Commons described our lady workers as "camp followers." Even for a politician, even in the House of Commons, that was bad.

Miss L. and her assistants had no great organisation behind them to which they could appeal, which would take their part and fight their battles. Like the men they worked for, they were "details." The E.F. Canteen authorities, who employed but did not pay them, looked upon those ladies with suspicion. They were allowed to work. They were not welcomed. I think the E.F. Canteen people would have got rid of them if they could. Yet they did work which in quantity was at least equal to that of the orderlies usually employed, and in quality enormously superior.

The room which served as a canteen was singularly inconvenient. The part of it used by the men was far too small, and used to be disagreeably crowded in the evenings and on wet days. The space behind the counter was narrow, gloomy, and ill ventilated. A worker serving there had the choice of being half choked or blown about by furious draughts. Miss L. preferred the draughts, which she called "fresh air." I sometimes found myself inclined to regard suffocation as the pleasanter alternative.

I have never seen a more inconvenient kitchen than that in which those ladies worked. It was small, low, and very gloomy. It had an uneven floor, on which it was quite possible to trip. The roof leaked badly in half a dozen places, and on wet days an incautious person splashed about. In summer with two fires burning that kitchen became fiercely hot. Even an electric fan, presented by a sympathetic visitor, did little to help. No self-respecting English kitchen maid would have stayed two hours in a house where she was given such a kitchen to work in.

Yet wonderful hot suppers were cooked there in long succession. Huge puddings and deep crocks of stewed fruit were prepared. A constant supply of tea, coffee, and cocoa was kept ready to replenish exhausted kettles on the counter outside, and all the washing up for hundreds of men was done in a very small sink.

The cooking and bar serving were the smallest part of the work those ladies did. Miss L. was active as a gardener. In most camps in France men take to gardening willingly, and require little help or encouragement. In this camp it was different.

No one stayed there long enough to be interested in the garden. I have seen photographs of the camp before I knew it, as it was in 1915, a desolate stretch of trampled mud. I saw recently a photograph of the camp in 1917. It was then gay with flowers. I knew it in 1916, when Miss L. had begun her gardening and was gradually extending her flower-beds, creating new borders and fencing off small spaces of waste ground with wooden palings.

Her enthusiasm stimulated men, who could never hope to see any result of their labours, to do something for the camp. One man, a miner from Northumberland, set out the name of the camp in large letters done in white stones on a green bank behind the canteen. He gave all his spare time for two days to the work, and when he had finished we discovered that he had left out a letter in the first syllable of the name. He was a patient as well as an enthusiastic man. He began all over again.

Miss L. went to great trouble in providing amusements for the men. Here she worked against great difficulties. An organisation like the Y.M.C.A. has control of concert parties and lecturers who are sent round to various huts, thus greatly lightening the labour of the local workers. The camp canteen had no organisation behind it, and could command no ready-made entertainments. In the sweat of our brows we earned such concerts as we had, and any one who has ever got up a concert, even at home, knows how much sweating such activities involve. In the end, moved by pity at our plight, the Y.M.C.A. people used to lend us concert parties, especially “Lena Ashwell” parties, the best of their kind. I have always found the Y.M.C.A. generous in sharing their good things with those outside their organisation.

Another difficulty which faced Miss L. was the want of any suitable place for entertainments. The canteen was far too small. The Church Army hut, when we had got it opened, was a little better, but still not nearly large enough for the audience which a good concert party drew. We had to use the dining-hall. It was not always available and was seldom available at the exact time we wanted it. It had no stage and no piano. Each time a concert was held there, a stage had to be erected for the occasion, the piano hauled over from the canteen, and some kind of decoration arranged.

One of the minor inconveniences of the camp was the extraordinary uncertainty of the lighting. Other camps, even the Con. Camp occasionally, suffered from failure of the supply of electricity. For some reason the thing happened more often in this camp than elsewhere; and even when the current was running

strongly we found ourselves in darkness because our wires fused in places difficult to get at, or branches fell from trees and broke wires. We got accustomed to these disasters when they happened at ordinary times.

Miss L. and her assistants were ladies of resource and indomitable spirit. It was a small thing to them to find the canteen suddenly plunged into total darkness while a crowd of men was clamouring for food and drink at the counter. A supply of candles was kept ready to hand. They were placed in mugs (candlesticks were lacking of course) and set on the counter. By the aid of their feeble gleam the ladies groped their way into the kitchen for tea, filled cups, and counted out change. The scene always reminded me of Gideon's attack on the Midianites when his soldiers carried lamps in pitchers. Occasionally some one knocked over a mug. There was a crash and a blaze, a very fair imitation of the battle in the Book of Judges.

It was worse when a whist drive or a singing competition in the Church Army hut was interrupted by one of these Egyptian plagues of darkness. But even then we did not allow ourselves to be seriously embarrassed. The men, responsive to the instinct of discipline, sat quiet at the whist tables with their cards in their hands. The glow of burning cigarettes could be seen, faint spots of light; nothing else.

Miss L. hurried to the canteen for candles. They were set in pools of their own grease on the tables and the games went on. A singing competition scarcely even paused. The competitors sang on. The pianist managed to play. The audience applauded with extra vigour until candles were brought and set in rows, like footlights, in front of the stage.

Our worst experience of light failure occurred one evening when we had a visit from a very superior concert party. We had secured it only after much "wangling." We made every possible preparation for its reception. One of Miss L.'s assistants drew out a most attractive advertisement of the performance with a picture of a beautiful lady in a red dress at the top of it. We posted this up in various parts of the camp; but we were not really anxious about the audience. It always "rolled up."

We set up a stage in the dining-room, a large high stage made out of dining-tables, a little rickety, but considered by good judges to be fairly safe. We spread a carpet, or something which looked like a carpet, on it. Only Miss L. could have got a carpet in the camp, and I do not know how she did it. We hung up a large

Union Jack, Miss L.'s private property, which was used on all festive occasions and served as an altar cloth on Sundays. The E.F. Canteen authorities were worried for a week beforehand, and, lest they should be worried more, promised us a new piano, "same," so they put it, "to be delivered" in time for the concert. The promise was not kept.

That was our first misfortune. With deep misgiving we dragged our own piano out of the canteen and set it on the stage. The musical members of Miss L.'s staff assured us that it was desperately out of tune. The least musical of us could assure ourselves that several notes made no sound at all, however hard you hit them. And the concert party was a very grand one.

It arrived in two motors, and we abased ourselves before it, babbling apologies. One after another the members of the party approached our piano and poked at it with their forefingers. One after another they turned away looking depressed. The only one of them who remained moderately cheerful was a man who did conjuring tricks. It was, I imagine, through his good offices that the party agreed to attempt its programme.

The audience, who knew the failings of our piano as well as we did, applauded the first song rapturously. Then without the slightest warning every lamp in the place went out. A dog, a well-beloved creature called Detail, who was accustomed to sit under Miss L.'s chair at concerts, began to bark furiously. That, I think, was what finally broke the temper of the concert party. We had an oil lamp ready for emergencies. It was lit, and I saw the leader of the party beckoning to me. His face was fearfully stern. I fully expected him to say that the whole party would leave at once.

But he did nothing so drastic. He demanded the instant expulsion of Detail. There was a scuffle at the far end of the room. The audience rose to its feet and cheered tumultuously. Detail, I am sorry to say, barked again. I saw eight men staggering through the crowded room bearing a piano. It was quite new, and, I am told, almost in tune. The situation was saved. The singers were mollified and went on with their programme by the light of one lamp, two candles (on the piano), and three stable lanterns. An orderly with a screwdriver and a box of matches sought for the fused wire. Detail crept under her mistress's chair again unrebuked. She was an animal of cultivated tastes and hated missing concerts. She usually behaved with decorum, not barking except by way of applause when the audience shouted and noise of any kind was legitimate.

The camp is, I am told, very different now. There is a new canteen, large, well furnished, and beautiful. Concerts can be held in it and church services. No one is any longer crowded out of anything. The kitchen is a spacious place in which it is possible to cook without great physical suffering. There are more flower beds, well-kept lines between the tents, an impressive entrance. No doubt even

the electric light shines consistently. The days of makeshift are over and the camp is a credit to the Expeditionary Force.

But I should not like to go back there again. I should be haunted with memories of old days which were trying but pleasant. I should wish myself back at one of the cheery tea-parties in the old canteen kitchen, when we sat on packing-cases and biscuit-boxes, when we shifted our seats about to dodge the raindrops from the roof, when we drank out of three cracked cups and thick mugs borrowed from the canteen.

I should remember pay-nights when the men stood before the counter in a dense mob, all hungry, each holding in his hand a five-franc note, when we had no change, not a franc, not a sou; when, in desperation, I used to volunteer to collect change from any one who had it, giving chits in exchange for small coins. Such crises do not arise now, I suppose.

Sitting in comfort at a table in the fine new canteen I should remember sadly a wet afternoon in the Church Army hut when there was no room to move and the air was heavy with Woodbine smoke and the steam of drying cloth, when I perched on the corner of a window-sill and pitted myself against a chess player who challenged me suddenly and turned out to be a master of the game and the secretary of a chess club in Yorkshire.

I should remember, with how great regret! how, evening after evening, Miss S. left her pots and pans, smoothed her tousled overall, and came over to the Church Army hut to play a hymn for us at evening prayers; how the men, an ever-changing congregation, chose the same hymns night after night till we came to hate the sound of their tunes; how we, reserving Sunday evenings for our property, chose the hymn then and always chose the same one—which I shall never sing again without remembering Miss S. at the piano, smelling the air of that hut, and being troubled by a vision of the faces of the men who sang.

I should not find Miss S. there if I went back, or Captain L., or any one, almost, whom I knew. No doubt their successors are doing well, mine better than ever I did, which would be no difficult thing; but I could not bear to see them at their work. Ghosts of old days would haunt me.

And worst of all, Miss L. is gone. The rest of us have passed and no one misses us much, I suppose. Our places are easily filled. Her place in that camp no one will ever quite fill. “Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.”

CHAPTER XVI

LEAVE

At last! I have the precious paper safe in my hand, in my pocket with a button fastened tight to keep it there: my leave warrant, passport to ten days' liberty, rest, and—other things much more desirable than liberty or rest. It is issued to me late on Sunday night for a start on Monday morning.

The authorities are desperately suspicious. They trust no man's honour. They treat even a padre as if he were a fraudulent cashier, bent on cheating them if he can. I do not blame them. In this matter of leave every man is a potential swindler. A bishop would cheat if he could. If I had got that leave warrant an hour or two sooner than I did, I should have made a push for the boat which left on Sunday evening. Thereby I should have deprived the army of my services during the night, a form of swindling not to be tolerated, though what use I am to the army or any one else when I am in bed and asleep it would be very difficult to say.

All that night the wind shrieked, rattling windows to the discomfort of those who were lucky enough to have roofs over their heads, threatening the dwellers in tents with the utter destruction of their shelters. Very early, before the dawn of the winter morning, the rain began, not to fall—the rain in a full gale of wind does not fall—but to sweep furiously across the town.

I heard it, but I did not care. I turned and snuggled close under my blankets. In an hour or two it would be time to get up. My day would begin, the glorious first day of leave. What does rain matter? or what do gales matter? unless—a horrid fear assailed me. Was it possible that in such a gale the steamer would fail to start. I turned and twisted, tortured by the thought. Every time the windows rattled and the house shook I sweated hot and cold.

In the end, tormented beyond endurance, I got up and dressed some time between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m. I did more. Without the coffee which Madame had promised me I sallied forth and tramped through the deserted streets of the town, fording gutters which were brooks, skirting close by walls which promised what sailors call a "lee."

The long stretch of the quay was desolate. Water lay in deep pools between the railway lines among the sleepers. Water trickled from deserted waggons and fell in small cascades from the roofs of sheds. The roadway, crossed and recrossed by the railway, had little muddy lakes on it and broad stretches of mud rather thicker than the water of the lakes.

Far down the quay lay a steamer with two raking funnels—the leave boat, the ship of heart's desire for many men. Clouds of smoke, issuing defiantly from her funnels, were immediately swept sideways by the wind and beaten down by the rain. The smoke ceased to be smoke, became a duller greyness added to the greyness of the air, dissolved into smuts and was carried to earth—or to the faces and hands of wayfarers—by the rain.

Already at 7 o'clock there were men going along the quay—a steady stream of them, tramping, splashing, stumbling towards the steamer. In the matter of the sailing of leave boats rumour is the sole informant, and rumour had it that this boat would start at 10 a.m. Leave is a precious thing. He takes no risks who has secured the coveted pass to Blighty. It is a small matter to wait three hours on a rain-swept quay. It would be a disaster beyond imagining to miss the boat.

Officers make for the boat in twos or threes, their trench coats, buttoned tightly, flap round putteed or gaitered legs. Drenched haversacks hang from their shoulders.

Parties of men, fully burdened with rifles and kit, march down from the rest camp where they have spent the night. The mud of the trenches is still thick on them. One here and there wears his steel helmet. They carry all sorts of strange packages, sacks tied at the mouth, parcels sewed up in sacking, German helmets slung on knapsacks, valueless trophies of battlefields, loot from captured dug-outs, pathetically foolish souvenirs bought in French shops, all to be presented to the wives, mothers, sweethearts who wait at home.

A couple of army sisters, lugging suit-cases, clinging to the flying folds of their grey cloaks, walk, bent forward against the wind and rain. A blue-coated Canadian nurse, brass stars on her shoulder straps, has given an arm to a V.A.D. girl, a creature already terrified at the prospect of crossing the sea on such a day. The rain streams down their faces, but perhaps Canadians are accustomed to worse rain in their own country. Certainly this young woman does not seem to mind it. She is smiling and walks jauntily. Like many of our cousins from overseas she is rich in splendid vitality.

A heavy grey motor rushes along, splashing the walkers. Beside the driver is a pile of luggage. Inside, secure behind plate glass from any weather, sits a general. Another motor follows and still others. British staff officers and military attachés from allied nations, the privileged classes of the war, sweep by while humbler men splash and stumble.

But in front of the gangway of the leave boat, as at the gates of Paradise, there is no distinction of persons. The mean man and the mighty find the same treatment there. There comes a moment when the car must be left, when crossed sword and baton on the shoulder straps avail their wearer no more than a single star.

A sailor, relentless as Rhadamanthus, stands on the gangway and bars the way to the shelter of the ship. No one—so the order has gone forth—is to be allowed on board before 9 o'clock. There is shelter a few yards behind, a shed. A few seek it. I prefer to stand, with other early comers, in a cluster round the end of the gangway, determined, though we wait hours, to be among the first on board.

The crowd grows denser as time goes on. The Canadian sister, alert and competent, secures a seat on the rail of a disused gangway and plants two neat feet on the rail opposite. An Australian captain, gallant amid extreme adversity, offers the spare waterproof he carries to the shivering V.A.D. I find myself wedged tight against a general. He is elderly, grizzled, and looks fierce; but he accepts a light for his cigarette from the bowl of my pipe. It was his only chance of getting a light then and there. Now and then some one asks a neighbour whether it is likely that the boat will start on such a day.

A depressed major on the outskirts of the crowd says that he has it on the best authority that the port is closed and that there will be no sailings for a week. The news travels from mouth to mouth, but no one stirs. There is a horrid possibility that it may be true; but—well, most men know the reputation of that "best authority." He is the kind of liar of whose fate St. John speaks vigorously in the last chapter but one of his Apocalypse.

The ship rises slowly higher and higher, for the tide is flowing. The gangway grows steeper. From time to time two sailors shift it slightly, retying the ropes which fasten it to the ship's rail. The men on the quay watch the manœuvre hopefully.

At 9 o'clock an officer appears on the outside fringe of the crowd. With a civility which barely cloaks his air of patronage he demands way for himself to the ship. His brassard wins him all he asks at once. On it are the letters "A.M.L.O." He is

the Assistant Military Landing Officer, and for the moment is lord of all, the arbiter of things more important than life and death. In private life he is perhaps a banker's clerk or an insurance agent. On the battlefield his rank entitles him to such consideration only as is due to a captain. Here he may ignore colonels, may say to a brigadier, "Stop pushing." He has what all desire, the "Open Sesame" which clears the way to the ship.

He goes on board, acknowledging with careless grace the salute of one of the ship's officers. He stands on the shelter deck.

With calm dignity he surveys the swaying crowd beneath him. "There's no hurry, gentlemen," he says. There is no hurry for him. He has risen from his bed at a reasonable hour, has washed, shaved, bathed, breakfasted. He has not stood for hours in drenching rain. The look of him is too much for the general who is wedged beside me in the crowd. He speaks:

"What the——? Why the——? When the——? Where the——?" He is a man of fluent speech, this general. I thought as much when I first looked at him. Now it seems that his command of language is a great gift, more valuable than the eloquence of statesmen or the music of poets. The Canadian sister leads the applause of the crowd. The general turns to me with a deprecating smile.

"Excuse me, padre, but really——"

The army respects the Church, knows that certain necessary forms of speech are not suited to clerical ears. But the Church is human and can sympathise with men's infirmities.

"If I were a general," I said, "I should say a lot more."

The general, encouraged by this absolution, does say more. He mentions the fact that he is going straight to the War Office when he reaches London. Once there he will—the threat vaporises into jets of language so terrific that the air round us grows sensibly warmer. I notice that the V.A.D. is holding tight to the hand of the Canadian sister.

The A.M.L.O., peering through the rain from the shelter deck of the steamer, recognises the rank of his assailant. The mention of the War Office reaches him. He wilts visibly. The stiffness goes out of him before the delighted eyes of the crowd. He admits us to the ship. Another gangway is lowered. In two thin streams the damp men and draggled women struggle on board. Certain officers,

the more helpless subalterns among us, are detailed for duty on the voyage. They parade on the upper deck. To them at least the A.M.L.O. can still speak with authority. He explains to the bewildered youths what their duties are. Each passenger, so it appears, must wear a life-belt. It is the business of the subalterns to see that every one ties round his chest one of those bandoliers of cork.

On the leave boat the spirit of democracy is triumphant. Sergeants jostle commissioned officers. Subalterns seize deck chairs desired by colonels of terrific dignity. Privates with muddy trousers crowd the sofas of the first-class saloon. Discipline we may suppose survives. If peril threatened, men would fall into their proper places and words of command would be obeyed. But the outward forms of discipline are for a time in abeyance. The spirit of goodfellowship prevails. The common joy—an intensified form of the feeling of the schoolboy on the first day of the Christmas holidays—makes one family of all ranks and ages.

No doubt also the sea insists on the recognition of new standards of worth. The humblest private who is not seasick is visibly and unmistakably a better man than a field-marshal with his head over the bulwarks. Curious and ill-assorted groups are formed. Men who at other times would not speak to each other are drawn and even squeezed together by the pressure of circumstance.

Between two of the deckhouses on the lower deck of this steamer is a narrow passage. Porters have packed valises and other luggage into it. It is sheltered from the rain and will be secure from showers of flying spray. Careless and inexperienced travellers, searching along the crowded decks for somewhere to sit down, pass this place by unnoticed. Others, accustomed in old days to luxurious travelling, scorn it and seek for comfort which they never find.

I come on this nook by accident; and at once perceive its value as a place of shelter and refuge. I sit down on the deck with my haversack beside me. I wedge myself securely, my feet against one side of the passage, my back against the other. I tuck my waterproof round me and feel that I may defy fate to do its worst.

A few others drift into the refuge, or are pressed in by the crowd outside. The Canadian sister, a competent young woman, has found her way here and settled down her helpless V.A.D. on a valise—a lumpy, uncomfortable seat. A private from a Scottish regiment is here, two Belgians and a Russian staff officer struggle in a narrow space to adjust their life-belts. A brigadier, a keen-eyed,

eager-faced young man, one of those to whom the war has given opportunity and advancement, joins the group. He speaks in French to the Belgians and the Russian. He helps to make the V.A.D. less utterly uncomfortable. He offers me his flask and then a cigar.

There is one subject of conversation. Will the boat start? The Russian is hopeful. Is not England mistress of the seas? The V.A.D. is despondent. Once before in a long-ago time of leave the boat did not start. The passengers, and she among them, were disembarked. The Scottish private has heard from a friend of his in "the Signals" that German submarines are abroad in the Channel. The brigadier is openly contemptuous of all information from men in "the Signals." The Canadian sister is cheerful. If she were captain of the ship, she says, she would start, and, what is more, fetch up at the other side.

The captain, it appears, shares her spirit. The ship does start. The harbour is cleared and at once the tossing begins. The party between the deckhouses sways and reels. It becomes clear very soon that it will be impossible to stand. But sitting down is difficult. I have to change my attitude. It is not possible for any one else to sit down if I keep my legs stretched out, and the others must sit down or else fall. The brigadier warns the Russian to be careful how he bestows himself.

"Don't put your feet on my haversack," he says. "There's a bottle of hair-wash in it."

The Russian shifts his feet.

"There'll be a worse spill if you trample on mine," I murmur. "There's a bottle of Benedictine in it."

"Padre!" said the brigadier. "I'm ashamed of you. *I* had the decency to call it hair-wash."

The Canadian sister laughs loud and joyously.

It is noticed that the Scottish private is becoming white. Soon his face is worse than white. It is greyish green. The Canadian sister tucks her skirts under her. The prospect is horrible. There is no room for the final catastrophe of seasickness. The brigadier is a man of prompt decision.

"Out you go," he says to the man. "Off with you and put your head over the side."

I feel that I must bestir myself for the good of the little party, though I do not want to move. I seize the helpless Scot by the arm and push him out. The next to succumb is the Russian staff officer. His face is pallid and his lips blue. The V.A.D. is past caring what happens. The two Belgians are indifferent. The Canadian sister, the brigadier, and I take silent counsel. Our eyes meet.

“I can’t talk French,” I say.

“I can,” said the Brigadier.

He does. He explains politely to the Russian the indecency of being seasick in that crowded space. He points out that there is one course only open to the sufferer—to go away and bear the worst elsewhere. Honour calls for the sacrifice. The Russian opens his eyes feebly and looks at the deck beyond the narrow limits of his refuge. It is swept at the moment by a shower of spray. He shudders and closes his eyes again. The brigadier persuades, exhorts, commands. The Russian shakes his head and intimates that he neither speaks nor understands French. He is a brave and gallant gentleman. Shells cannot terrify him, nor the fiercest stuttering of the field guns make him hesitate in advance, but in a certain stage of seasickness the ears of very heroes are deaf to duty’s call.

A little later I take the cigar from my mouth and crush the glowing end on the deck. I am not seasick, but there are times when tobacco loses its attractiveness. The brigadier becomes strangely silent. His head shrinks down into the broad upturned collar of his coat. Only the Canadian sister remains cheerfully buoyant, her complexion as fresh, her cheeks as pink as when the rain washed them on the quay.

The throbbing of the engines ceases. For a brief time the ship wallows in the rolling seas. Then she begins to move backwards towards the breakwater of the harbour. The brigadier struggles to his feet and peers out.

“England at last,” he says. “Thank goodness.”

Women, officers, and men fling off the life-belts they have worn and crowd to the gangways. With shameless eagerness they push their way ashore. The voyage is over.

Along the pier long trains are drawn up waiting for us. We crowd into them; lucky men, or foreseeing men with seats engaged beforehand, fill the Pullman

cars of the train which starts first. It runs through the sweet familiar English country incredibly swiftly and smoothly. Luncheon is served to us. On this train, at least, there still are restaurant cars. We eat familiar food and wonder that we ever in the old days grumbled at railway fare. We lie back, satisfied, and smoke.

But there is in us an excitement which even tobacco will not soothe. The train goes swiftly, but not half swiftly enough. We pass town and hamlet. Advertisement hoardings, grotesque flat images of cows, outrageous commendations of whisky or pills, appear in the fields. We are getting near London. Pipes are laid by. We fidget and fret. The houses we pass are closer together, get closer still, merge into a sea of grey-slated roofs. The air is thick, smoke-laden. The train slows down, stops, starts again, draws up finally by the long platform.

Then——! To every man his own dreams of heaven hereafter. To every man his own way of spending his leave.

CHAPTER XVII

A HOLIDAY

Holidays, common enough in civil life, are rare joys in the B.E.F. Leave is obtainable occasionally. But nobody speaks of leave as “holidays.” It is a thing altogether apart. It is almost sacred. It is too thrilling, too rapturous to be compared to anything we knew before the war. We should be guilty of a kind of profanity if we spoke of leave as “holidays.” It ought to have a picturesque and impressive name of its own; but no one has found or even attempted to find an adequate name for it. If we were pagans instead of professing to be Christians, if we danced round fountains and set up statues of Pan for our worship and knew nothing of the Hebrew spirit, we might get a name for “leave” out of the vocabulary of our religious life. Being what we are we cannot do that, but we rightly decline to compare leave with ordinary holidays.

Only a few men in the army succeed in getting what is properly called a holiday, a day or two off work with a change of scene. I got one, thanks to M. It is one of the many things, perhaps the least of them, for which I have to thank his friendship.

M. had formed an exaggerated, I fear a totally erroneous, idea of my powers of entertaining men. It occurred to him that it would be a good thing if I gave lectures to the men of the cavalry brigade to which he was attached. What he said to the general who commanded the division I do not know, but somehow, between the general and M., the thing was worked. I found myself with a permit to travel on railways otherwise barred to me and three golden days before me.

No one can say that life in my three camps was dull. Life is never dull or monotonous for a man who has plenty of pleasant work to do and a party of good friends as fellow-workers. But a change is always agreeable, and I looked forward to my trip with impatient excitement.

It was like being a schoolboy again and going forth to the Crystal Palace with money in my pocket, an entire half-crown, to be dribbled away in pennyworths of sherbet and visits to curious side-shows. That party was an annual affair for us that came in June as a celebration of the Queen’s birthday. My visit to M. was in

August, but the weather was still full summer.

As a lecturing tour that expedition was a flat failure. M.'s cavalry, officers and men, were frankly bored and I realised from the very start that I was not going to justify whatever M. said to the general about me.

In every other respect the holiday was a success. I enjoyed it enormously and I gained some very interesting experience. I saw French rural life, a glimpse of it. Cavalry cannot be concentrated in large camps as infantry are. When they are not wanted for fighting they are scattered in small parties over some country district where they can get water and proper accommodation for their horses. The men are billeted in farm-houses. The officers live in châteaux and mess in the dining-halls of French country gentlemen if such accommodation is available, or take over two or three houses in a village, sleep where they can and mess in the best room which the interpreter and the billeting officer can find.

M. slept in a farm-house and secured a room adjoining his for my use. I slept on the softest and most billowy feather bed I have ever come across, with another feather bed, also very soft and billowy, over me by way of covering. My room had an earthen floor, a window which would not open, a broken chair and no other furniture of any kind. I do not think that our landlady, the wife of a farmer who was with the colours, had removed her furniture from the room to keep it out of my way. That almost bare room was just her idea of what a bedroom ought to be. Her kitchen and such other rooms as I saw in her house were equally bare.

Unlike the French women whom I met in towns, this farmer's wife was a slattern. She cared neither about her own appearance nor the look of her house. She did not wash her children. But she worked. The land was well tilled and her cattle well tended. There was no sign of neglect in the fields. Things might have been a little better, perhaps, the place more efficiently worked, if her husband had been at home, but there was not room for much improvement. Yet that woman had no one to help her except a very old man, her father-in-law, I think, who was infirm and almost imbecile.

She had four children, but they were hindrances rather than helps. The eldest of them was about eight years old. She did the whole work of the farm herself. I used to hear her getting up at 4 a.m., lighting a fire and opening doors. Peeping through the half-transparent pane of glass in my tiny window, I saw her tending her horse and cows before 5 a.m. She worked on, and worked hard, all day.

The French have not had to face the difficulty of the “one-man business” as we have, because the women of the minor bourgeoisie are willing and able to step straight into their husbands’ places and carry on. I learnt that when I lived in towns. The French can go farther in calling up the men who work the land, because their peasant women can do the work of men. The land suffers, I suppose, and the harvests are poorer than in peace time. But if farms in England were left manless as those French farms are, the result would be much more serious in spite of the gallant efforts of the girls who “go on the land.”

M. and I tramped about that country a great deal while I was with him. We saw the same things everywhere, cattle well cared for and land well worked by a few old men and women who looked old long before their time.

Our landlady cannot have been an old woman. Her youngest child was a baby in a cradle, but she looked fifty or more. Loss of youth and beauty is a heavy price for a woman to pay for anything. I wonder if she resented having to pay it. At least she has the satisfaction of knowing that she bought something worth while though she paid dearly. She kept her home. She fed her children. As surely as her husband in the trenches she helped to save her country.

I have been assured that the French women have not been so successful as English women in the conduct of war charities. They have not rushed into the hospitals to nurse the wounded with anything like the enthusiasm and devotion of our V.A.D.’s. In the organisation of War Work Depots and the dispatching of parcels to prisoners of war the French women have proved themselves on the whole less efficient than English women. They have not shone in the management of public business, where Englishwomen have been unexpectedly able and devoted.

On the other hand French women seem to have done better than English women in the conduct of their private affairs. This, I think, is true both of the bourgeois and peasant classes. In England the earning power on which the house depends is the man’s. When he is taken away he is very badly missed and the home suffers or even collapses. In France the women are more independent economically. They can carry on the business or the farm sufficiently well without the man.

But I did not get permission to visit M.’s cavalry division that I might observe the French peasantry. I went to give lectures to the men. I did that, faithfully exerting myself to the uttermost, but I did it very badly. I suppose I am not

adaptable. Certainly the conditions under which I lectured destroyed any faint chance of my succeeding, before I began.

It has been my lot to lecture under various circumstances to widely different kinds of audiences. I have been set up at the end of a drawing-room in a house of culture in the middle west of the U.S.A. I have stood beside a chairman on a platform in an English hall. Never before had I been called upon to lecture in a large open field, standing in the sunlight, while my audience reclined peacefully on the grass under a grove of trees. Never before had I watched my audience marched up to me by squadrons, halted in front of me by the stern voices of sergeants, and sitting down, or lying down, only after I had invited them to do so. It was a very hot afternoon. I do not wonder that half the men went to sleep. I should have liked to sleep too.

I lectured that same day in another field to a different body of men. There I was even more uncomfortable. Two thoughtful sergeants borrowed a table from a neighbouring house and I stood on it. That audience stayed awake, perhaps in hope of seeing me fall off the table, but made no pretence of enjoying the lecture.

Yet it was not altogether the strange conditions of the performance which worried me. I should, I think, have come to grief just as badly with those audiences if they had been collected into rooms or halls. I was out of touch with the men I was talking to. I did not understand them or how to address them. I had some experience, experience of six months or so, of soldiers; but that was no help to me. These were soldiers of a kind quite new to me. They belonged to the old army. Officers and men alike were professionals, not amateurs soldiering by chance like the rest of us.

The cavalry is, with the possible exception of the Guards, the only part of our force in which the spirit of the old army survives. Every infantry battalion has been destroyed and renewed so often since the war began that the original personality of the thing, the sense of memory, the link with the past and all its traditions, no longer survives. An infantry regiment bears an old name; but it is a new thing. Its resemblance to the regiment which bore the name before the war is superficial, a thin veneer. In spirit, outlook, tone, interest, tradition, in all but courage and patriotism, it is different. In the cavalry this great change has not taken place.

The cavalry suffered heavily in the early days of the war and has lost many men

since. Large numbers of recruits have come in to make good the losses. But the number of new men has never been so great as to destroy the old regiment's power of absorption. Recruits have been digested by the original body. They have grown up in the tradition of the regiment and have been formed by its spirit. The difference between the cavalry troopers and the infantry privates of the army of to-day is difficult to define; but it is very easily felt and plain to recognise.

Perhaps it is most clearly seen in the attitude of men towards their officers. In the old army officers were a class apart. Everything that could be done was done to emphasise the distinction between officers and men. And the distinction was a real, not an artificial thing. The officer was different from the men he commanded. He belonged to a different class. He had been educated in a different way. He was accustomed before he joined the army and after he left it to live a life utterly unlike the life of the men he commanded. It can scarcely have been necessary to deepen by disciplinary means the strong, clear line between officers and men.

In the new army all that can be done by regulations is done to keep up the idea of the officer super class. But the distinction now is an artificial one, not a real one. Neither in education, social class, manner of life, wealth, nor any other accident are our new officers distinct from the men they command.

For the men of the old army the officer was a leader because he was recognisably in some sense a superior. He might be a good officer or a poor one, brave and efficient or the reverse. Whatever his personal qualities he was an officer, a natural leader.

For the men of the new army an officer is an officer more or less by accident. No one recognises any kind of divine right to leadership. Discipline may insist, does quite rightly insist, on due respect to officers as such; but everybody feels and knows that this is a mere question of expediency. Men cannot act together unless some one commands; but it does not follow that the man who gives the orders is in any permanent way the superior of the men who receive them.

What has really happened during the war is that the army has changed in the essential spirit of its organisation. It is no longer built on the aristocratic principle like the army of Louis XIV. It has been democratised and is approximating to the type of Napoleon's armies or Cromwell's Ironsides. The shell of the old organisation is there still. The life within the shell is different.

I do not know how the men of the old army regarded their generals and officers in high command. If we may trust Kipling they had, sometimes at least, a feeling of strong personal affection and admiration for certain commanders.

> “He’s little, but he’s wise,
> And he does not advertise,
> Do you, Bobs?”

Very likely the cavalry men still have this kind of feeling for their generals. The men of the brigade I visited certainly ought to have loved their general. He did a great deal for them. But the new army does not seem to have any feeling either of respect or contempt for its generals.

Nothing surprised me more when I became intimate with the men than their attitude towards their commanding officers. I had read of the devotion of armies to their leaders. We are told how Napoleon’s soldiers idolised him; how Wellington’s men believed in him so that they were prepared to follow him anywhere, confident in his genius. Misled by newspaper correspondents, I supposed that I should find this sort of thing common in France. I had often read of this general and that as beloved or trusted by his men.

In fact no such spirit exists. Very often the men do not know the name of the commander of the particular army, or even the brigade, to which they belong; so little has the personality of the general impressed itself on the men. Very often I used to meet evidences of personal loyalty to a junior officer, a company commander, or a subaltern. Occasionally men have the same feeling about a colonel. They never seem to go beyond that. There was not a trace of admiration for or confidence in any one in high command. It was not that the men distrusted their generals or disliked them. Their attitude was generally neutral. They knew nothing and cared very little about generals.

Perhaps men never did idolise generals, and historians, like newspaper correspondents, are simply inventing pretty myths when they tell us about the hero worship paid to Napoleon, Wellington, and the rest.

Perhaps the fact is that the conditions of modern warfare tend to obscure the glory of a general. He can no longer prance about on a horse in front of lines of gaping men, proudly contemptuous of the cannon balls which come bounding across the field of battle from the enemy’s artillery. His men are inclined to forget his existence, usually do remain ignorant of his name because they do not

see him. One is tempted to wonder whether the formal—and very wearisome—inspections which are held from time to time behind the lines, generally on cold and rainy days, are not really pathetic efforts of kings and generals to assert themselves, to get somehow into the line of vision of the fighting men.

Perhaps it may be that generals, through no fault of their own, have lost that "plaguy trick of winning victories" which bound the heart of Dugald Dalgetty to Gustavus Adolphus. Victories, so far as we can see, are things which do not occur in modern warfare, or, at all events, do not occur on the western front. If any one did win a victory of the old-fashioned kind it is quite possible that he might become the hero of the soldier.

It would be very interesting to know what the feelings of soldiers of other armies are towards their generals. The German people seem to idolise von Hindenburg. Have the German soldiers any kind of confidence in his star? Von Mackensen has some brilliant exploits to his credit. Does Fritz, drafted into a regiment commanded by him, march forward serenely confident of victory?

Our men do no such thing. They have unshaken confidence in themselves. They are sure that their company commanders will not fail them or their colonels let them down. But they have no kind of feeling, good or bad, about their generals.

CHAPTER XVIII

PADRES

The name “padre” as used in the army describes every kind of commissioned chaplain, Church of England, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, or Nonconformist. The men lump them all together. I have heard a distinction made between “pukka” padres and those who have not enjoyed the advantages of episcopal ordination. But such denominational feeling is extremely rare. As a rule a padre is a padre, an officially recognised representative of religion, whatever church he belongs to. The same kind of character, the same general line of conduct, are expected in all padres. We shall get a side light, if no more, on the much-discussed question of the religion of the army if we can arrive at an understanding of the way in which the padre strikes the average man.

The statistical method of arriving at knowledge is chiefly useful for purposes of controversy. Any one with access to official records might set out for admiration the hierarchy of padres, ranging from the Chaplain-General to the humble C.F. Fourth Class, might enumerate the confirmations held, the candidates presented, the buildings erected, perhaps the sermons preached. It would then be possible to prove that the Church is doing her duty by the soldiers or that the Church is failing badly, whichever seemed desirable to prove at the moment.

That is the great advantage of the statistical method. It establishes beyond all possibility of contradiction the thing you want to establish. But if you do not want to establish anything, if you merely want to find out something, statistics are no use at all. You are driven to other ways of getting at the truth, ways much less definite and accurate.

I wish there were more pictures of army chaplains. There are a few. I do not recollect that Bairnsfather ever gave us one, but they turn up from time to time in the pages of *Punch*. There was one in which a senior curate in uniform—the story is told in France of a much more august person—is represented waving a farewell to a party of French soldiers, expressing the hope *que le bon Dieu vous blesserait toujours*. We need not concern ourselves with his French. Staff officers and even generals have made less excusable blunders.

What is interesting is the figure and face of the young man. He is alert and plainly very energetic. He is full of the spirit of comradeship. One glance at him convinces you that he means to be helpful in every possible way to every human being he comes across. He is not going to shirk. He is certainly not going to funk. You feel sure as you look at him that he will keep things going at a sing-song, that a canteen under his management will be efficiently run. He is a very different man indeed from that pre-war curate of *Punch's* whose egg has become proverbial, or that other who confided to an admiring lady that, when preaching, he liked every fold of his surplice to tell. He is not intellectual, but he is not, in practical matters, by any means a fool.

His sermons will be commonplace, but—you congratulate yourself on this—they will certainly be short, and he will neither be surprised nor hurt if nobody listens to them. There will be nothing mawkish about his religion and he will not obtrude it over much, but when he starts the men singing "Fight the good fight," that hymn will go with a swing. In the officers' mess, when the shyness of the first few days has worn off, he will be recognised as "a good sort." The men's judgment, expressed in the canteen after a football match, will differ from the officers' by one letter only. The padre will be classed as "a good sport."

There are other sketches of padres, and they do not always represent men of the senior-curate age. There is one, for instance, which serves as an advertisement of a tobacco, in which the chaplain is a man of forty or forty-five. Before the war he must have been vicar of a fair-sized parish, very well organised. And it is not always the "good sort" qualities which the artist emphasises. There is a suggestion occasionally of a certain stiffness, a moral rigidity as of a man not inclined to look with tolerant eyes on the "cakes and ale" of life.

Sometimes we get a hint of a consciousness of official position. It is not that the padre of these pictures is inclined to say "I'm an officer and don't you forget it." He is not apparently suspected of that. But he is a man who might conceivably say "I'm a priest and it won't do for me to let any one forget that."

Yet, even in these pictures, we are left with the feeling that the men who sat for them were competent and in their way effective. There is no suggestion of feebleness, the characteristic of the pre-war cleric which most commonly struck the artist. And we recognise that the clergy have discarded pose and affectation along with the dog collars which most of them have left behind in England. Freed from the society of elderly women, the British cleric has without difficulty made himself very much at home in the company of men.

That is the impression we get of the padre from the artists who have drawn pictures of him. But there are not nearly enough of these pictures to make us sure that it is in just this way that the men in France regard the clergy who have gone on active service. The fact is that the artists who have sketched generals and staff officers in hundreds, subalterns in thousands, and men of the ranks in uncountable numbers, have not taken very much notice of the padres. They felt perhaps that the clergy did not really count for much in army life.

Fortunately it is not only in the drawing of artists that the general opinion finds expression. The average man, a very sure and sane judge of worth, cannot use pencil, brush, or paint; but he has other ways of expressing himself. For instance he labels whole classes with nicknames.

Consider the various names for the enemy which are current in the trenches. “Hun” was not the invention of the army. It came from the newspapers. The soldier uses it, but not with delight. He prefers “Boche”; but that was not his own word either. It originated with the French. And there is a noticeable difference between the way a Frenchman and an Englishman say “Boche.” The Frenchman hisses it. In his mouth it is eloquent of a bitter hatred for something vile. An Englishman says “Boche” quite differently. You feel as you listen to him that he regards his enemy as brutal and abominable, but also as swollen, flatulent, and somewhat ridiculous.

“Fritz” and not “Boche” is our own invention in the way of a name for the enemy. It expresses just what the men feel. “Fritz” whom we “strafe” continually is in the main a ridiculous person, and any healthy-minded man wants to rag him. There is an inflated pomposity about Fritz; but given the necessary hammering he may turn out to be a human being like ourselves. He wants to get home just as we do. He likes beer, which is very hard to come by for any of us, and he enjoys tobacco.

Or take another nickname. Generals and staff officers are called “Brass Hats.” The name was fastened on them early in the war and it still sticks. Perhaps if we were starting fresh now we should give them another name, a kindlier one. For a “Brass Hat,” if such a thing existed, would be more ornamental than useful. It would occupy a man’s time in polishing it, would shine, no doubt agreeably, on ceremonial occasions, but would be singularly uncomfortable for daily wear. Is that the sort of way the fighting men thought of the staff after Neuve Chapelle? The name suggests some such general opinion and the name passed into general use.

“Padre” is another nickname; but a friendly one. I should much rather be called a padre than a Brass Hat. I should much rather be called a padre than a parson. It is an achievement, something they may well be proud of, that the old regular chaplains were spoken of by officers and men alike as padres. I, who had no part in winning the name, feel a real satisfaction when I open a letter from man or officer and find that it begins “Dear Padre.”

And yet—there is a certain playfulness in the name. A padre is not one of the serious things in army life. No such nickname attaches or could attach to a C.O. or a sergeant-major. They matter. A padre does not matter much. Religion, his proper business, is an extra, like music lessons at a public school. Music is a great art, of course. No one denies it, chiefly because no normal boy thinks about it at all. The real affairs of life are the Latin grammar and the cricket bat. There is a master who gives music lessons to those who want such things. He may be an amiable and estimable man; but compared to a form master or the ex-blue who is capable of making his century against first-class bowling, he is nobody.

Some feeling of that kind finds expression in the nickname “padre.” It is not contempt. There is not room for real contempt alongside of the affection which the name implies. It’s just a sense that, neither for good nor evil, is the padre of much importance. It is impossible to imagine King Henry speaking of Thomas à Becket as the padre. He hated that archbishop, and he also feared him, so he called him, not a padre, but a turbulent priest.

Is the kingdom of heaven best advanced by men who strike the world as being “padres” or by “turbulent priests”? It is a very nice question.

There is yet another way in which we get at that most elusive thing, popular opinion. Stories are told and jokes passed from mouth to mouth. It is not the least necessary that the stories should be true, literally. They are indeed much more likely to give us what we want, a glimpse into the mind of the average man, if they are cheerily unconnected with sordid facts. No one supposes that any colonial colonel ever begged his men not to address him as “Sam” in the presence of an English general. But the story gives us a true idea of the impression made on the minds of the home army by the democratic spirit of the men from overseas.

I only know one padre story which has become universally popular. It takes the form of a dialogue.

Sentry: “Who goes there?”

Padre: “Chaplain.”

Sentry: “Pass, Charlie Chaplin, and all’s well.”

It is not a very instructive story, though the pun is only fully appreciated when we realise that it depends for its value on the contrast between a man whose business is the comedy of grimace and one who is concerned with very serious things. That in itself is a popular judgment. Religion is a solemn business, and the church stands against the picture house in sharp contrast; the resemblance between chaplain and Chaplin being no more than an accident of sound.

There are other stories—not “best sellers,” but with a respectable circulation—which throw more light on the way the padre is regarded. For instance, a certain fledgling curate was sent to visit a detention camp. He returned to his senior officer and gave a glowing account of his reception. The prisoners, no hardened scoundrels as he supposed, had gathered round him, had listened eagerly while he read and expounded a chapter of St. John’s Gospel, had shown every sign of pious penitence. Thrusting his hand in his pocket while relating his experience, this poor man found that his cigarette case, his pipe, his tobacco pouch, his knife, his pencil, and some loose change had been taken from him while he discoursed on the Gospel of St. John.

I like to think that men will tell a story like that about their clergy. The padre, an ideal figure, who is the hero of it, will fail to win respect perhaps. He will, if he preserve his innocence, win love. There will come a day when even those prisoners will——. See Book I of *Les Misérables* and the Gospel generally.

A chaplain, this time no mere boy, but a senior man of great experience, was called on to hold a service for a battalion which was to go next day into the firing-line. This particular battalion was fresh from England and had never been under fire. It wanted a religious service. The chaplain preached to it on tithes considered as a divine institution.

I am sure that story is not true. It cannot be. No human being is capable of so grotesque an action. But consider the fact that such a story has been invented and is told. It seems that men—in this case hungry sheep who look up—actually find that the sermons preached to them have no conceivable connection with reality. About to die, they ask for words of life—they are given disquisitions on tithes.

“Well, sir”—I have had this said to me a hundred times—“I am not a religious man.” If religion is really presented to the ordinary man as “tithes,” or for that matter as a “scheme of salvation,” or “sound church teaching,” it is no wonder that he stands a bit away from it. I in no way mean to suggest that all religion in the army is of this kind. But the broadly indisputable result of the preaching to which our men have been subjected is this: They have come to regard religion as an obscure and difficult subject in which a few people with eccentric tastes are interested, but which simple men had better leave alone. And the tragedy lies in the fact that the very men who think and speak thus about religion have in them something very like the spirit of Christ.

The padres themselves, the best and most earnest of them, are painfully aware that the ordinary pulpit sermon is remote, utterly and hopelessly, from the lives of the men, is in fact a so many times repeated essay on tithes. And the padres, again the best of them, are not content to be just padres. They feel that they ought to have a message to deliver, that they have one if only they can disentangle it from the unrealities which have somehow got coiled up with it. All the odd little eccentricities in the form of service and the recent fashion of spicing sermons with unexpected swear-words are just pathetic efforts to wriggle out of the clothes of ecclesiastical propriety.

But something more is wanted. It is of little avail to hand round cigarettes before reading the first lesson, or to say that God isn’t a bloody fool, unless some connection can be established between the religion which the men have and the religion which Christ taught.

There is another story which should be told for the sake of the light it gives on the way men regard the padres, or used to regard them. They are less inclined to this view now.

A chaplain, wandering about behind the lines, found a group of men and sat down among them. He chatted for a while. Then one of the men said “Beg pardon, sir, but do you know who we are?” The chaplain did not. “I thought not, sir,” said the man. “If you did you wouldn’t stay. We’re prisoners, sir, waiting to be sent off for Field Punishment No. 1.”

The story often finishes at that point, leaving it to be supposed that the padre was unpleasantly surprised at finding himself on friendly terms with sinners, but there is a version sometimes told which gives the padre’s answer. “It’s where I ought to be.”

I am not, I hope, over-sanguine, but I think that men are beginning to realise that the padre is not a supernumerary member of the officers' mess, nor concerned only with the small number of men who make a profession of religion; that he is neither a member of the upper, officer, class, nor a mild admirer of the goody-goody, but—shall we say?—a friend of publicans and sinners.

It is a confusing question, this one of the religion of the soldier, who is nowadays the ordinary man, and his relation to the Church or the churches. But we do get a glimpse of his mind when we understand how he thinks of the clergy. He knows them better out in France than he ever did at home, and they know him better. He has recognised the "—— parson" as a padre and a good sport. That is something. Will the padre, before this abominable war is over and his opportunity past, be able to establish his position as something more, as perhaps the minister and steward of God's mysteries?

CHAPTER XIX

CITIZEN SOLDIERS

I stood, with my friend M. beside me, on the top of a hill and looked down at a large camp spread out along the valley beneath us. It was growing dark. The lines of lights along the roads shone bright and clear. Lights twinkled from the windows of busy orderly-rooms and offices. Lights shone, browny red, through the canvas of the tents. The noise of thousands of men, talking, laughing, singing, rose to us, a confused murmur of sound. As we stood there, looking, listening, a bugle sounded from one corner of the great camp, blowing the “Last Post.” One after another, from all directions, many bugles took up the sound. Lights were extinguished. Silence followed by degrees. We scrambled down a steep path to our quarters.

“This,” I said, “is not an army. It is an empire in arms.”

M. would never have made a remark of that kind. He has too much common sense to allow himself to talk big. He is, of all men known to me, least inclined to sentimentality. He did not even answer me. If he had he would probably have pointed out to me that I was wrong. What lay below us, a small part of the B.E.F., was an army, if discipline, skill, valour, and unity are what distinguish an army from a mob.

Yet what I said meant something. I had seen enough of the professional soldiers of the old army, officers and N.C.O.’s, to know that the men who are now fighting are soldiers with a difference. They do not conform to the type which we knew as the soldier type before the war. Neither officers nor men are the same. Only in the cavalry, and perhaps in the Guards, do we now find the spirit, or, if spirit is the wrong word, the flavour of the old army. The professional soldier, save among field officers and the older N.C.O.’s, is becoming rare. The citizen soldier has taken his place.

To say this is to repeat a commonplace. My remark was a commonplace, stale with reiteration. But it is the nature of commonplaces and truisms that they only become real to us when we discover them for ourselves. I was familiar with the idea of the citizen soldier, with the very phrase “an empire in arms,” long before

I went to France. Yet my earliest experiences were a surprise to me. I had believed, but I had not realised, that our ranks indeed contain “all sorts and conditions of men.”

I remember very well the first time that the truism began to assert itself as a truth to me. I was in a soldiers’ club, one of those excellent places of refreshment and recreation run by societies and individuals for the benefit of our men. It was an abominable evening. Snow, that was half sleet, was driven across the camp by a strong wind. Melting snow lay an inch deep on the ground. The club, naturally under the circumstances, was crammed. Men sat at every table, reading papers, writing letters, playing draughts and dominoes. They stood about with cups of tea and cocoa in their hands. They crowded round the fires. The steam of wet clothes and thick clouds of tobacco smoke filled the air and dimmed the light from lamps, feeble at best, which hung from ceiling and wall.

In one corner a man sat on a rickety chair. His back was turned to the room. He faced the two walls of his corner. The position struck me as odd until I noticed that he sat that way in order to get a little light on the pages of the book he read. It was Oscar Wilde’s *De Profundis*. It was, I suppose, part of my business to make friends of the men round me. I managed with some difficulty to get into conversation with that man. He turned his chair half round and, starting from Oscar Wilde, gave me his views on prison life. The private soldier, coming under military discipline, is a prisoner, so this man thought. He did not deny that it may be worth while to go to prison for a good cause. But prison life is as galling and abominable for a martyr as for a criminal.

There is a stir among the men. A lady, heavily cloaked and waterproofed, made a slow progress through the room, staring round her with curious eyes. She was a stranger, evidently a distinguished stranger, for she was escorted by a colonel and two other officers. My friend nodded towards her.

“Do you know her?” he asked.

I shook my head. He named a very eminent novelist.

“Doing a tour of the Expeditionary Force, I expect,” he said.“I used to review her books before the war. I’d rather like to review the one she’ll write about this. Once”—he added this reminiscence after a pause—“I dined in her company in London.”

He was a journalist before he enlisted. If he survives he will no doubt write a

book, a new *De Profundis*, and it ought to be worth reading.

I went one afternoon to a railway station to say good-bye to some friends of mine who were off to the firing-line. Troops usually left the base where I was then stationed at 10 or 11 o'clock at night and we did not go to see them off. This party—they were Canadians—started in the afternoon and from an unusual station. The scene was familiar enough. There was a long train, for the most part goods waggons. There were hundreds of laughing men, and a buffet where ladies—those ladies who somehow never fail—gave tea and cocoa to waiting crowds. Sergeants served out rations for the journey. Officers struggled to get their kit into compartments already overfull.

I made my way slowly along the platform, looking for my friends. In halting European French I answered inquiries made of me in fluent Canadian French by a soldier of Quebec. I came on a man who must have been a full-blooded Indian standing by himself, staring straight in front of him with wholly emotionless eyes. On every side of me I heard the curious Canadian intonation of English speech.

I found my friends at last. They were settling down with others whom I did not know into a waggon labelled "*Chevaux*, 8; *Hommes*, 40." I do not know how eight horses would have liked a two-days journey in that waggon. The forty men were cheerfully determined to make the best of things. I condoled and sympathised.

From a far corner of the waggon came a voice quoting a line of Virgil. "*Forsitan et illis olim meminisse juvabit*." It is a common tag, of course, but I did not expect to hear it then and there. The speaker was a boy, smooth-faced, gentle-looking. In what school of what remote province did he learn to construe and repeats bits of the *Æneid*? With the French-Canadians, the Indian, and all the rest of them, he, with his pathetic little scrap of Latin, was a private in the army of the empire.

It was my exceptional good fortune to be stationed for many months in a large convalescent camp. I might have been attached to a brigade, in which case I should have known perhaps Irish, or Scots, or men from some one or two parts of England; but them only. That camp in which I worked received men from every branch of the service and from every corner of the empire. A knowledge of the cap badges to be seen any day in that camp would have required long study and a good memory. From the ubiquitous gun of the artillery to the FIJI of a

South Sea Island contingent we had them all at one time or another.

And the variety of speech and accent was as great as the variety of cap badges. It was difficult to believe—I should not have believed beforehand—that the English language could be spoken in so many different ways. But it was the men themselves, more than their varied speech and far-separated homes, who made me feel how widely the net of service has swept through society and how many different kinds of men are fighting in the army.

I happened one day to fall into conversation with a private, a young man in very worn and even tattered clothes. He had been “up against it” somewhere on the Somme front, and had not yet been served out with fresh kit. The mud of the ground over which he had been fighting was thickly caked on most parts of his clothing, and he was endeavouring to scrape it off with the blade of a penknife. He smiled at me in a particularly friendly way when I greeted him, and we dropped into a conversation which lasted for quite a long time. He showed me, rather shyly, a pocket edition of Herodotus which he had carried about in his pocket and had read at intervals during the time he was fighting on the Somme.

A private who quotes Latin in the waggon of a troop train. A battered soldier who reads Greek for his own pleasure in the trenches, is more surprising still. The Baron Bradwardwine took Livy into battle with him. But there must be ten men who can read Livy for every one who can tackle Herodotus without a dictionary.

A piano is an essential part of the equipment of a recreation hut in France. The soldier loves to make music, and it is surprising how many soldiers can make music of a sort. Pity is wasted on inanimate things. Otherwise one’s heart’s sympathy would go out to those pianos. It would be a dreadful thing for an instrument of feeling to have “Irish Eyes,” “The Only Girl in the World,” and “Home Fires,” played on it every day and all day long. I am not, I am often thankful for it, acutely musical. But there have been times in Y.M.C.A. huts when I felt I should shriek if I heard the tune of “Home Fires” again.

I was playing chess one afternoon with a man who was beating me. I became so much absorbed in the game that I actually ceased to hear the piano. Then, after a while I heard it again, played in quite an unusual manner. The player had got beyond “Irish Eyes” and the rest of those tunes. He was playing, with the tenderest feeling, one of Chopin’s Nocturnes. He asked me afterwards if I could by any means borrow for him a volume of Beethoven, one which contained the

“Waldstein” if possible. He confessed that he could not play the “Waldstein” without the score. He was an elderly man, elderly compared to most of those round him. He was in the R.E., a sapper. There must be scores of musicians of taste and culture in the army. I wonder if there was another employed in laying out roads behind the Somme front.

I gained a reputation, wholly undeserved, as a chess player while I was in that camp, and I was generally able to put up some sort of fight against my opponents even if they beat me in the end.

But I was utterly defeated by one man, a Russian. He could speak no English and very little French. He belonged to a Canadian regiment, but how he got into it or managed to live with his comrades I do not know. He and I communicated with each other only by moving the pieces on the chess board. I suppose he was a member of the Russian Church, but on Sundays he attended the services which I conducted. He used to sit as near me as he could and I always found his places for him. He could not read English any more than he could speak it, so the Prayer Book cannot have been much use to him. But there was no priest of his own church anywhere within reach, and he was evidently a religious man. I suppose he found the Church of England service better than none at all.

There was always one difficulty about the Church of England services in that camp. We had to trust to chance for a pianist who could play chants, responses, and hymns, and for a choir who could sing them. The choir difficulty was not serious. It was nearly always possible to get twenty volunteers who had sung in church choirs at home. But a pianist who was familiar with church music was a rare person to find. When found he had a way, very annoying to me, of getting well quickly and going back to his regiment.

I was let down rather badly once or twice by men who were anxious to play for the service, but turned out to be capable of no more than three or four hymns, played by ear, sometimes in impossible keys. I became cautious and used to question volunteers carefully beforehand. One man who offered himself seemed particularly diffident and doubtful about his ability to play what I wanted. I asked him at last whether he had ever played any instrument, organ or harmonium, at a Church of England service.

“Oh yes, sir, often,” he said. “Before the war I was assistant organist at ——.”

He named a great English cathedral, one justly famous for its music. The next Sunday and for several Sundays afterwards our music was a joy. My friend was

one of those rare people who play in such a way that every one present feels compelled to sing.

Looking back over the time I spent in France, it seems as if a long procession of interesting and splendid men passed by me. They came from every rank of society, from many processions and trades.

There were rich men among them, a few, and very many poor men. I have witnessed the signature of a private in a north of England regiment to papers concerned with the transfer of several thousand pounds from one security to another. I have helped to cash cheques for men with large bank balances. I have bought crumpled and very dirty penny stamps from men who otherwise would not have been able to pay for the cup of cocoa or the bun they wanted.

There were men in trouble who came to me with letters in their hands containing news from home which brought tears to their eyes and mine. There were men—wonderfully few of them—with grievances, genuine enough very often, but impossible to remove.

There were men with all sorts of religious difficulties, with simple questions on their lips about the problems which most of us have given up as insoluble on this side of the grave. We met. There was a swiftly formed friendship, a brief intimacy, and then they passed from that camp, their temporary resting-place, and were caught again into the intricate working of the vast machine of war.

We were “ships that pass in the night and speak one another in passing.” The quotation is hackneyed almost beyond enduring, but it is impossible to express the feeling better. Efforts to carry on a correspondence afterwards generally ended in failure. A letter or two was written. Then new friends were made and new interests arose. It became impossible to write, because—oddest of reasons—after a time there was nothing to say. The old common interests had vanished.

From time to time we who remained in a camp—workers there—got news of one friend or another, heard that some boy we knew had won distinction for his gallantry. Then we rejoiced. Or, far oftener, we found a well-known name in the casualty lists, and we sorrowed.

Sometimes our friends came back to us, wounded afresh or ground down again to sickness by the pitiless machine. They emerged from the fog which surrounded for us the mysterious and awful “Front,” and we welcomed them. But they told us very little. The soldier, whatever his position or education was

in civil life, is strangely inarticulate. He will speak in general terms of “stunts” and scraps, of being “up against it,” and of “carrying on”; but of the living details of life in the trenches or on the battlefield he has little to say. Still less will he speak of feelings, emotions, hopes, and fears. I suppose that life in the midst of visible death is too awful a thing to talk of and that there is no language in which to express the terrific waves of fear, horror, hope, and exaltation.

Perhaps we may find in the very monstrousness of this war an explanation of the soldier’s unceasing effort to treat the whole business as a joke, to laugh at the very worst that can befall him. With men of other nations it is different no doubt. The French fight gloriously and seem to live in a high, heroic mood. The men of our empire, of all parts of it, jest in the presence of terror, perhaps because the alternative to jesting is either fear or tears. Others may misunderstand us. Often we do not understand ourselves. It is not easy to think of Sam Weller or Mark Tapley as the hero of a stricken field. Yet it is by men with Sam Weller’s quaint turn of wit and Mark Tapley’s unfailing cheerfulness that the great battles in France and Belgium are being won.

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