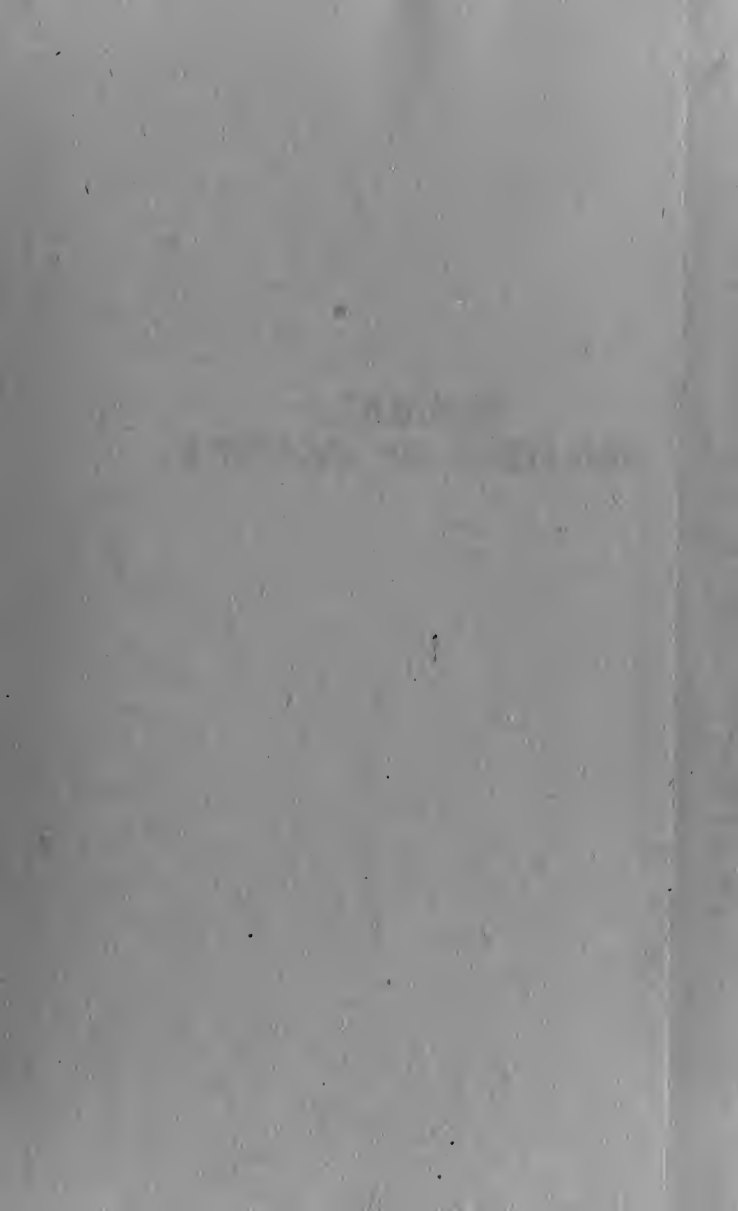


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**BOURRU,
SOLDIER OF FRANCE**

BOURRU, SOLDIER OF FRANCE

By
JEAN DES VIGNES ROUGES

TRANSLATED BY
ERNEST HUNTER WRIGHT



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PART ONE

BOURRU, SOLDIER OF FRANCE

I

BOURRU

BOURRU! But you know him well enough; he is the soldier, the very one you met in the street the other day. He was on furlough, going to Bligny, a village of Burgundy, and he was taking good advantage of his trip through Paris to examine the "City of Light," symbol of that civilization which, gun in hand, he had been defending for two years. Oh, one could easily see that he is a winegrower, as his military papers show; he was walking slowly, cautiously, half afraid of the thousand dangers that lie hidden in your streets.

Being a good patriot, you looked at him affectionately.

"There goes one of our brave defenders," you said to me.

What an honest face! A little thin, but heaven knows they don't take on flesh in the trenches; however, his thinness didn't prevent him from having color in his cheeks, and two sparkling eyes under a determined forehead. It was easy to guess that the man was used to action, if only from the way his chin projected. A fine fellow of thirty, this Bourru, and not so flustered that he had forgotten to curl up his mustache so as to prove to the Parisians that he was no more of a hayseed than they were. No beard; they don't wear them any more at the front, on account of the gas-masks. You understand, the hair keeps the thing from pressing close to the skin, and the gas may penetrate. "Shave yourselves" was the general's order, and Bourru cut off his beard.

But he still had his good old overcoat that had been washed by the April rains, faded by the July sun, and decorated by the

mud of the Argonne—one of those old rags that look so glorious by the side of our ridiculous street clothes.

And thus Bourru went on his way toward the Gare de Lyon with a rolling gait, his sack over his shoulder, his hat pulled down to his ears, and his heart heavy from the sight of so many scenes of death.

“How I should like to look into the soul of that soldier!” you confided to me. “We are all the time hearing about some great hero or other, and there is every reason for it. But as for me, I wish I could look behind the scenes of the great drama and share the emotions of it in imagination. It is some plain soldier like our friend there that I should like to follow on his daily round—some nameless toiler in the war, some trooper lost in the multitude, some peasant who has given up the plow for the gun—that is the kind of hero who will remain the immortal type of the savior of France.”

You spoke with so much enthusiasm that

I was moved by it; the more so because I love this Bourru like a friend and brother, and when you expressed your admiration for him you made me feel very proud. So as soon as I returned from my own furlough I picked out a typical Bourru and kept my eyes on him day by day; and now I am trying to sketch for you a fairly faithful picture of him in broad strokes.

Of course you know we have no time here in Camp 8 to put the finishing touches on things; so I do not pretend that my picture of Bourru is complete and perfect. I send him to you just sketched in. He will be like one of those rude wooden effigies of Saint Martin which you have seen in old village churches, and in front of which you felt your spirit moved because in your mind's eye you could see the naïve workman of centuries gone by, armed with his sincere piety and his shepherd's knife, hewing it out of the trunk of a tree.

Only, alas! I am not possessed of that

holy naïveté of the worthy artists of primitive days. I am only a plain man of to-day. I have had ostentatious, complicated instruments put into my hand, and I am bound to use them. That is why I have been convinced by a philosophical friend that I could never really represent the soul of Bourru unless I "posed" him in his "environment," in his "milieu." . . . So let me tell you first about the moral atmosphere which reigns over the region of Vauquois and which Bourru has been breathing for many months.

II

THE DIVISION FACING THE HILL

AT the outbreak of the war Bourru belonged to a division in no way signally different from any other. He was just one of a multitude of soldiers moving together in the fluctuations of the army—marching forward, then recoiling like a wave, only to gather force again immediately and to dash over the rocks of the enemy's resistance, which were crumbling before the northward drive of our soldiers. Up to now his division had been only one great unit of the French army, and nothing more. These men, wandering over the fields and the meadows of the Meuse, had not yet

THE DIVISION FACING THE HILL 9

felt the secret influences that spring from the soil to create kindred souls such as were later to make all the sectors of the front into so many little provinces of France.

But now the division is to be hurled against a hill in the Argonne that rises in a wooded curve before them. It is Vauquois! The enemy holds the summit and clings to it . . . and a thrill runs through the throng of our men.

I must tell you that at the moment this division is made up mainly of Parisians. Can you imagine how impetuous they are coming to be? Paris means revolt against whatever is sinister and threatening. . . . So with clenched fists our soldiers are looking up at the hill, a dark pedestal for the men whose silhouettes at its top dishonor the blue heavens. . . . How can we stay loitering at the base, in the shadow?

Possibly if they were all Parisians they might commit one of those sublime follies that have made their history illustrious. But

scattered through the division there are also the "Bourrus"—the good winegrowers from Touraine and Burgundy, the farmers from Brie. These men are used to the lessons of Nature; they have looked upon rugged fields, and voiceless forests, and stern little villages; and they know that victory belongs to the most patient. The spirit of Paris is joined with this of the countryside, interpenetrating, each acting as corrective to the other—and the soul of the division is coming into being. It will grow and take form as it attacks this great stronghold—Vauquois!

The days pass. Trenches are dug, all leading toward the base of the hill—like long arms preparing to take it in their tentacles. For many weary hours the men remain on the lookout, contemplating the landscape. Its lines are printed indelibly on the minds of them all. In the morning, when the sun comes up, the hill is luminous with rosy light. . . . It would be fine to breathe the

air up there, and sing for joy, and survey the reaches of the landscape! . . .

In their imaginations Vauquois is a glorious prize, promised to the valiant. . . .
“When shall we take it?”

Once in a while some one mysteriously whispers, “It’s going to be next week!” But the week crawls slowly by, and not yet has the order come to storm the heights. The obsession grows stronger and stronger—the will strains at the leash. . . . Are the cannon growling a little louder than usual? There we are, the attack is coming! And joy breaks its bounds; cartridges are examined, fingers are passed affectionately over the edge of bayonets, souls are steeled for the supreme effort. . . . But what are they waiting for—aren’t we going up?

And yet, how many good reasons there are for seizing that position! Those who know affairs love to explain that the hill offers the enemy a point of vantage from which he can test the fire of his artillery by

direct observation—that the whole region is commanded by that hill—that the Boches attach an extreme importance to it. “Of course,” chime in the listeners, “Vauquois has to be taken,—it’s the biggest military operation, the most essential—the only one that really is important for France. . . .”

“We’ll get Vauquois, all right!” says Bourru to himself. “There are twenty thousand of us, and we want it. . . .” And he goes on thinking proudly of the multitude of human wills charged with the common desire. They will make a formidable mass, which will break over the hill like a tidal wave.

But patience is still necessary. The hour has not yet come; the commanders, who have to regulate this particular action in accordance with larger plans, are waiting for the favorable moment. And destiny also, doubtless, wills that the soul of the division shall grow to full life before the terrible assault be attempted.

How everything prepares the men for it! The rough work, the sudden alarms, the cannonades, the terrible trials of winter,—even the landscape, which here certainly suggests nothing voluptuous in life; for in the scenery of the Argonne, that country which history has bathed in blood, there is something like a mystic invitation to sacrifice.

Now and then a regiment will go a little way to the rear, behind the forest, to a rest camp; but the soldiers are so eager to see Vauquois that they climb all the heights about to gaze at that tragic hill—and they talk about it and long for it as for a promised land.

The soul of the division flames higher and higher. If you ask any one of these men what part he is playing in the great drama of the war, he will answer, "I am facing Vauquois." It is a sacred mission and he has accepted it with all his heart—as might a paladin of the olden time, charged to deliver a noble and beautiful princess from the

barbarians who keep her beleaguered. . . .

Yes, the division stands here with all eyes on the hill over which it will some day surge. Once in a while a nervous shock passes through it, so great is the tension; impatience takes possession of our battalions and makes them stretch out eager hands toward the coveted height. . . .

Bourru remembers one of those crises. It came on February 17, 1915. The excitement broke out suddenly in his own battalion—and it was a rainy day at that, but the chill wind blowing over the hills wrought on a man's nerves. . . .

A certain hour struck. It must have been the signal for some mysterious focussing of forces—for at that instant the battalion rose as one man at the foot of the hill. In one mad burst of valor and patriotism it rushed up the sides of the hill, its officers in the lead. In vain! . . . Bullets were whistling, but the men charged—like beings enraptured, hypnotized, with eyes lifted to heaven

—as to the deliverance of the imprisoned maid.

It was a sublime charge! Death was taking his toll, but on one thought of counting the cost—and the soil of the Argonne once again drank blood that would give it a meaning still more tragic and still more fruitful for the children of centuries to come.

Bourru was in the charge. Side by side with him his comrades leaped forward, firing, scaling walls, plunging through clouds of smoke. Men were clamoring, and the earth, torn to bits by exploding shells, flew into their wide-open mouths. They swallowed it down, as if in patriotic communion. A superhuman energy urged them on and on. They would stop a moment in a shell-hole, but only to scramble out again and rush ever forward, performing mad feats of prowess and valor.

Bourru acted like the rest of them. But was it really he who acted? No, it was the will of the division, and Bourru was only a

straw carried by that wind. In time to come, he will never say, "I was at Vauquois," but simply, "We stormed the hill at Vauquois." It was because he knew the others wanted Vauquois that he wanted it—and if the others wanted it so madly, that was because he was there to incite them and uphold them.

Thus infatuated, the battalion went to the very top of the hill and dedicated to that ground the great sacrifice of its children's love, while from a ravine nearby the inspiring strains of the *Marseillaise* sprang from the throats of trumpets. . . .

At their post of command the generals were exerting all their skill and resolution in directing the fighters. In a critical moment, just when all the desperate yearnings of the dying and all the heroic impulses of the victors swept through their hearts, a tear of tenderness and admiration fell from the eyes of one of them. And this was as it should be, for it is the noble habit of the French officer to hold ascendancy over his

men not only by his sovereign will but by his affectionate spirit. And all whom death had overtaken on the hill could imagine that the tear fell for their sake and could lie down in sleep with the serenity of heroes who know that their sacrifice has been understood.

Nevertheless, this day's work was only a test, a bitter and glorious test, necessary, doubtless, to fulfill the growth of the division's soul and give it the sure faith of victory. Twelve days later the hill was to be captured definitely.

III

THE STORMING OF VAUQUOIS

“**WE’VE** got to wipe out that score!” Bourru said to himself, as he thought of the attack on the hill, which had not completely succeeded. And this meant quitting the trenches and advancing under shells and bullets, which appeared to Bourru simply as a thing to be done—not a heroic task at all, but just a piece of rough work that would require energies at once brutal and patient.

It is only the man who lives on an eminence who thinks he sees magnificent outbursts of heroism here and there. Bourru, in the rest-camp, was nothing but a soldier grumbling, like a thousand others, because

it was raining and they had to turn out for drill. He was even heard to say that he was "fed up with it"—an expression of discontent that witnesses to the saying that words are given to man for the purpose of dissembling his real thoughts. For here is some one yelling to the camp: "Attention! Fall in in fifteen minutes—full packs!" And immediately the soldiers burn with excitement. "Hello, there's something up!" they cry. And while it is not joy that fills their hearts—for down at the bottom there is something like anguish—they still offer every external appearance of a feeling that resembles gaiety. It is the contradiction in the soul of man—his way of dreading and loving in the same instant those unforeseen dangers of war that set him afire.

They start for the forest of Allieux. No one knows why. . . .

"We're going to storm Vauquois!" says Huguenin.

"The deuce we are!" answers Hubert.

"Our battalion had its dose ten days ago. It's not our turn."

The uncertainty makes everybody fidgety. There is nothing more irritating than to play a part in a mystery. You flounder round in a fog that you would like to tear asunder, and you imagine all sorts of things; and if some one says something with a knowing air, even though his supposition is improbable, the faces of the most skeptical turn toward him with eyes that show a willingness to believe.

"It's no such thing!" says Bourru. "Since we have stacked arms and have a nice quiet place here, we'd better be careful."

So he pulls a chunk of bread out of his sack and eats it; then he rolls himself up in his blanket, stretches himself in the ditch, and goes to sleep.

The chilly dew wakes him about five o'clock. At eight, the cannonade is getting livelier. No one is deceived this time—the artillery is clearing the ground for an at-

tack. It is like a pack of hounds suddenly let loose to rush bellowing on the quarry. "Ah! Maybe those guns aren't having a good time! Listen to that! Spit at 'em! Blow 'em up! Give it to Wilhelm!"

"Anyhow, there's one thing sure," says the sergeant; "it's not our battalion that's going to attack. If it were, we'd be in the first trench already. They must be holding us in reserve."

Yes, that is it—the battalion is in reserve. A secret joy—the joy of the physical animal, the unlovely joy that one hides—leaps up at the bottom of a few hearts. It is not that they want to be slackers, O no! but—well, you understand—in the cold gray dawn of a dripping forest, after a night passed in the bottom of a ditch, with a storm of shells passing overhead, you haven't the same ardor as a spectator in a reserved seat at the cinema who is about to witness an attack. He loses not a jot, that benignant spectator, of the heroic emotion. But this Bourru that

I am telling you about—well, he is just a very ordinary soldier, an “average specimen” of humanity, as Montaigne would say. So he soliloquizes:

“You’ve got to take what you get. . . . ’Twould have been great, of course, to be one of the first at the top . . . but orders are orders. And if I’m in reserve, well—so much the better! Maybe I can save a whole skin for the next time. . . .”

So the battalion stays in the woods. It ought to remain very calm, since it is made up of Bourrus—but you are going to see how men in crowds do queer things without a moment’s warning.

While the fusillade is crackling and the cannonade is booming, they are anxiously waiting on the other side of the height. “Is it going right? Or isn’t it?” There is no information. Finally the wounded begin to pass by, coming out of the battle. They are very much worked up, and very merry. Questions are thrown at them.

"Ah! We've done it this time—we've got Vauquois!" cries one of them. . . . "It's all going wrong," affirms another, with a sombre look.

A man whose face is covered with blood waves his arms and cries out:

"Aha, old man, we've done it! If you had seen the boys in my battalion—how they left the trenches behind and went up there! The Boches were nowhere when we started for 'em! We're there, all right, we're at Vauquois, I tell you! And it was us, the —th battalion of the —th regiment that got there first! It wasn't the others, it was us—*us!*"
.. And his fist is beating at his swelling breast, while an uncontrollable pride shines from his eyes. He carries it off proudly, very proudly, before the pitiable little soldiers of the reserve battalion. Not for all the gold in the world would he wash off the glorious blood that has dried on his face. Try to see this scene with a poet's imagination, and watch how the handsome heroes of

older days, with their lace collars, sink back into the shadow—those heroes whose portraits are displayed in the histories of France. They withdraw with a salute before this shaggy, bare-breasted grandson who, marching along through the mud, is proclaiming a victory which to-morrow will thrill the whole country.

In a twinkling the men of the battalion felt their hearts fill with regret. The ignoble joy of safety has disappeared. Had it even existed? All of them are convinced that their dearest wish was always to be in the first attacking wave. Every one is exerting himself to prove it to the man next him, and in proving it to the others he proves it to himself. And the poor, timid ones, in order not to feel like monstrous exceptions in such a field of valor, hasten to declare louder than the others that they, too, wanted to win a little of the fine glory that is going the rounds up there in the summit, amid the thunder of the cannon.

Bourru, although he is vexed like the rest, is sagely saying to himself, "There's a time for everything—there'll still be enough to do to-morrow."

The night comes on. No new orders. The men go to sleep once more in the ditches. At two o'clock in the morning Bourru feels some one shaking him. "Hey! Get up!"

Orders are passed from squad to squad. "Leave your packs behind—make a roll of your blankets and tent-covers—take rations for two days, with two hundred shells and two hand grenades for each man—fill your canteens—one canteen of booze for each squad."

In complete silence the soldiers get their equipment ready automatically. They are not thinking—it is too early in the morning for thinking.

They are off through the woods. What mud in these paths! And what roots of trees slung across them! Ouch! Grossou has stumbled and run his head into the spine

of the man before him. Bourru hears Lafut grumbling all the way of his sleepy march:

“Ain’t that rotten! One canteen of booze for a whole squad! . . . Just enough to wet a whistle . . . choir-boy’s rations. . . . Ought to have at least three canteens to a squad . . . or four . . . yes, four canteens. . . . I said four, and I guess I know. . . . Ain’t that rotten!”

And he continues his litany indefinitely.

Richard, the young man of a good family, is consoling himself with the thought that if he is killed to-day some one will send his mother the letter in his pocket, in which he has counselled her not to weep for him.

As for Bourru, he is saying to himself:

“Some of us won’t get back, that’s sure . . . will it be me? or won’t it? . . . Oh, well, I’ll do the best I can. . . . I’m no fellow to hang back just because there’s trouble. So long as the Boches are up there,

we've got to drive them out, that's all there is to it. . . ."

They arrive at the foot of the hill at a moment when there is no cannonade. By the light of dawn they can see what took place there the day before. The troops had taken Vauquois, indeed, but they had not been able to hold it. The Boches had reoccupied the trenches.

At a turn in the road our troop can see a heap of corpses, those of the day before, which there has been time to bring together but not to take away. Ough! It is like getting a blow in the pit of the stomach. Everybody turns pale and mute. . . . Later the story will be that there were three hundred of these bodies piled up like tree-trunks to be measured off into cords. But you know how it is—one's eyes multiply objects in such circumstances.

The morning passes while the men stand deep in the mud with the rain pouring over their backs. What is to be done? Up to

the present no one has come to them. Everything seems to point to an attack, though nothing is absolutely certain.

But now the companies are massing in parallel lines for the start. This time the meaning is clear—the attack is coming.

“Anybody that wants to make his will,” cries a sergeant gaily, “need only ask for a two-weeks’ furlough to go and see his lawyer.”

“Above all,” advises a corporal, “keep a little brandy for a toast when it’s all over!”

On the stroke of noon the artillery begins to clear the way. And pretty work it is! All the guns hidden in forests within a radius of five miles are concentrating their fire on the Boche trenches. The soil, pulverized, leaps into the air and falls back in showers of pebbles and mud. Here and there a human body soars aloft like a common bundle of rags. The shells from the 270’s land like thunderbolts on the hill—they are so big that you can see them passing overhead like great

bottles of champagne, neck forward. When they burst the hill trembles from top to bottom—but you must look sharp, for great chunks of stone come crashing back as far as our own trenches.

The last vestiges of the village that stood on the top of the hill vanish like a shock of oats caught in a whirlwind. Only the big tree in front of what was the church is left standing, stripped and torn, but erect.

The screaming of the shells in the air finally produces a curious state of nerves. Foreheads are puckering, eyes are blinking, shoulders are straining—and your fingers twitch, your teeth are on edge, you beat the ground with your feet. What an uproar! It abrades your nerves and sends shocks through your whole body—it bursts your eardrums, shoots through your vitals, benumbs your brain, sends you mad. If only that would stop! Then we could get down to the bayonet—quietly. . . .

As for Bourru, he has nerve-cells so well

organized that it is hard to throw them into much disorder. All the while he is looking over the ground in front of him, picking out points of vantage along the path that he is soon to take. "Here, now . . . I'll get out through this hole . . . then I'll go there. . . . I'll be well protected . . . and then there . . . and after that along behind the little wall . . . so then I can climb up that ditch without being seen from above. . . ."

At two o'clock the guns take a longer range. The officers are passing in and out among the men.

"Boys, we're going up! The army counts on you—follow us!"

"All ready!" comes the reply.

Ladders are set up for going over the top. The men look in one another's faces, grasp one another's hands. Of course, there is some agitation, but it is kept hidden under gaiety.

"Up we go, eh? Got to see this through!"

And a laugh accompanies the words. In-

instinctively a man's mind sees to its own defence by refusing to attend to trouble or to think of death. The deepest psychologists, the most skilful analysts of the human mind, have never found any better advice to give men who want to be assured the mastery of their own wills. But Bourru sums up the whole theory in one piece of advice to Huguenin:

"Don't give a rap!"

As for Richard, there is just one thing that surprises him, and that is his own composure. He may say to himself as much as he pleases that "This is going to be terrible"; but it doesn't worry him—the words are just empty sounds in his brain, like geometrical terms. There is no anxiety. Of course, the psychologist would explain that, in the circumstances, he has only an intellectual comprehension, but no "emotional" understanding.

But that's enough of your complicated

things, as Bourru would say. The bugle sounds the charge, and the men are plunging over the top, some of them falling heavily back. They are helping each other, pushing each other on, and all of them are crying, "Go to it! Come on, boys! Don't be afraid — *Vive la France!*"

It is queer how each feels the need of reassuring those round him by throwing out words of encouragement.

Bourru has taken a bee-line forward.

"Gad, but this hill is steep!"

"What shell-holes! You can stand up inside 'em!"

"Look at the Boche trench! Lord, what a mess! . . . Ah, poor fellow! He's got half his body blown away. . . . Look here, by Jove, the beasts had all sorts of good wine. . . ."

"It's funny, but the Boches are hardly shooting at all. That won't last. . . . Wow! Did I say 'they weren't shooting? Listen to those bullets! . . . Better look

out. . . . Still more corpses—those are yesterday's, though. . . . Here come our chums! . . .”

Squads, platoons, and companies are all dispersed. Every man is acting for himself, scaling the hill as he can, scrambling over walls, or stopping to spy out his way from a shell-hole.

The Boches who still remain are themselves scattered everywhere, trying to get away or to hide in any nook they can find. It is a free-for-all fight, and cannon, machine-guns, grenades, and rifles are all in it. The hill rumbles with the noise like a steel-foundry at full blast.

At a certain moment, when Bourru is scrambling to the top of a wall he spies two Boches down below him, in a sort of hole, for all the world like hares in their burrow. One of them is wounded and trembling. The other, erect, loads his gun when he sees Bourru's head appear. He is just at the foot of the wall, and the two men are very

close to each other. One of them must kill the other. . . . Instantly Bourru's arm is up, and—like a flash the bayonet enters the German's shoulder and drives through his body as he sinks, gasping. . . .

Maybe you think it's fun, you civilians, to kill a man. And in a case like this you hear yourselves letting out a yell like a Sioux scalping his enemy. But you must remember that our poor Bourru is no hero. Judge for yourself, for when he feels his bayonet running through soft flesh, he simply cannot hold the gun. . . . What a wet beast, pah! . . . Luckily the other Boche, down in the hole, is too badly wounded to seize the moment.

There is no lack of rifles, all you have to do is to pick one up. Bourru starts climbing again, up the path. "Crash! Boom!" There are the cannon of Cheppy beginning to pound us. We must look out—the bullets are whistling fiercely.

"Hello! There's a sergeant yelling to his

men to get together. . . . He'll never get 'em. . . ."

Certain platoons have got ahead faster than others, and already some scared prisoners are coming down. That lends a man courage. . . .

But what's all that up there? Ah, bully! Some of the boys are already at the summit, and in the joy of being the first they are standing on the fragments of walls, waving their caps and calling to the others down below—at the risk of stopping a hundred bullets. It is magnificent! And the timidest man of all is seized with a mad desire to get up to them, as if he were climbing to paradise.

And at that moment these splendid enthusiasts are seen by thousands of eyes that watch their silhouette against the sky from a radius of ten kilometers—and far away in the camps to the rear, thirty kilometers distant, people are crying out in village after village: "Vauquois is ours! Vauquois is ours!"

At headquarters, the general takes off his cap, and, turning toward his staff, says:

“Gentlemen, remove your hats.”

One would say the men on the hilltop hear the applause from all the countryside, for they never pause in their dancing 'round the summit, in the thick of exploding shells. Beneath them, forests and valleys and rivers spread beyond the eye's reach. . . .

Suddenly, at a recess in the walls, Bourru recoils in horror. Gods! In this nook lies the corpse of a French lieutenant, killed yesterday. He is riddled with bayonet thrusts, his face mashed by boot-heels, his hands and feet tied securely with wire. Bourru knows what savage drama must have been enacted the day before.

“Ah! the beasts! . . . I'll fix one of 'em for that!”

Bang! That shot came from hard by—it must have been from over there, at the mouth of that cellar. Bourru cries out:

"Some of 'em in the cellar!"

He seizes a grenade from his sack, lights it, and throws it through the mouth of the cellar. Another follows it, and the Boches begin to howl, down inside.

One of his comrades passes.

"Gimme your grenades!" begs Bourru.

And he hurls two more into the black hole. In a moment a heap of litter stirs at the mouth of the cellar, and the Boches begin to come out, hands in the air. "Kamerad!" Bourru would like to kill—but no, that isn't done.

"Here, take these geese away," he says to his comrade.

And he goes on his way.

Zip! "Ouch!" Bourru shakes his head. A bullet has just grazed his left thumb. Nothing to worry about—he can stop for five minutes in a hole somewhere and dress it.

In the same hole a French soldier is bandaging a Boche. Queer sight for a moment

like this! The Boche is joking, and emptying his pockets and purse—he wants to present even his handkerchief to his amateur nurse, who declines it.

But a French soldier, who has fallen to the bottom of the hole, is saying, "I've got to see what is going on. . . ."

So he digs his knee into the wall of the hole and looks round. Suddenly he gives a wild cry and leaps erect, with his arms aloft, as if a spring had been let loose inside him. A ball has just gone through his heart.

The doctor will tell you that sometimes the ball strikes a nerve center and produces a reflex action from all the nerves and a spasm from every muscle. That is why you must not make fun of the colored cuts of Epinal that always show a soldier falling backward with his arms in the form of a cross or making some wild gesture. It often happens so.

Gaining more and more ground, our men's

advancing wave is close to the church. Then suddenly there is a terrible cry.

"The Boches are counter-attacking. . . . They've turned our flank. . . . Let's get out of here!"

The men can see nothing, but there was such anguish in the cry that without thinking they gave way. . . . Yes, indeed, they fell back to the rear. . . . Oh! I gave you full warning—these are no stage heroes, these Bourrus of mine. One minute they are going ahead and the next they are retreating. Of course, it would be better to have machine-made fellows who would go ahead all the time. There would be no fear of a panic—that would be just the thing!

But Bourru suddenly looks back. Are those a couple of big brutes of Boches on the wall there, laughing and showing their yellow teeth? Yes, and one of them is putting his thumb to his nose. . . .

It did not stay there long, I can assure you. No one makes fun of my Bourrus with

impunity. Huguenin and Grossou turn round toward the right, and others conceal themselves on the left. Bourru crawls up behind the wall. . . . Ten minutes later the brutes are lying low. They will never put thumb to nose again.

Others have come to the rescue. The squad of Frenchmen opens a murderous fire, and the Boches fall or fly.

In a shell-hole nearby a poor little French soldier of eighteen, in his agony, is saying to his sergeant:

“Kiss me, sergeant, as mother would. And tell her, like a nice fellow, that I died nobly, thinking of her. . . .”

Grossou is climbing out of a cellar that has served to shelter the Germans. His arms are laden with bottles and boxes of food and cigars. Everybody is shouting congratulations to him. But, in the future, when Grossou tells the story, there is one thing he will never fail to say:

“Oh, yes, it was bully stuff in the bot-

bles. . . . But it was there in that confounded cellar that I caught lice—real, live cooties—for the first time. And I've never got rid of 'em since!"

I am only showing you a few episodes of the battle. You must multiply them by a hundred—by a thousand. Moreover, to understand what happened, you must needs have been stationed very high and very far away to see all these men climbing the hill and swarming little by little to its top during a cannonade that woke echoes all through the Argonne. But no one can see a battle in its entirety. And it is not possible to reproduce the multitudinous scenes, of every kind between the sublime and the grotesque, that take place side by side.

Every shell hole is a refuge for the wounded, and there the one essential act of the great drama plays itself out. One man is dying with his lips to a photograph. Another is crying "*Vive la France!*" A third

is looking at his mutilated leg and murmuring, "And how am I to plow my fields now?"

Bravery, love, regret, anguish, devotion—all the emotions of man are at the boiling point in these earthen kettles hollowed out by explosives.

Behind each bit of wall heroes are at work, making peep-holes or laying out trenches.

A moment comes when the human wave gathers force to rush on further, past the church. It overleaps every obstacle in its way. . . . But our own artillery does not know of this final rush, for all the telephone wires have been cut. So the onrush of our soldiers plunges them up to the barrage laid down by our 75's, which at this moment constitutes an impassable barrier between them and the enemy. They must needs pause now.

They stop and wait. The night is coming on.

Then an alarm sounds. The Germans are counter-attacking and have just driven a party of our troops back some two hundred yards. But the artillery has been warned. Our shells fall like thunderbolts. Over the massed Germans the 75's rain shells that scatter among the men and send limbs flying through the air. It is as if a giant were planting his heel on an ant-hill. And the corpulent Captain Chartier, who is commanding the battery on the opposite hill, is red in the face from the pleasant excitement. He is shouting, swearing, bellowing, gesticulating, stamping:

"Go to it! . . . wind your way! . . . strike 'em down! . . . in tens, in fifties, in hundreds! . . . Cut 'em down! Fire faster! Don't stop . . . go it! . . . Give 'em hell!"

Over there where the shells are falling the grass grew green, last summer. . . .

"It's always well to put plenty of manure in the soil," says Bourru. And he knows the business.

The night has come and spread peace over all the countryside. But apparently the heavens feel that darkness is insufficient to hide the work of man, for snow begins to fall softly, covering all the crumbled walls and hideous corpses; covering the moaning wounded, and the heroes who sleep.

All day long brutality and uproar have been masters here. Now another force—one that reigns in silence—is taking possession of the place. And such is the majesty of its power that all the soldiers, motionless now, give themselves up to it with the religious fervor of a Carthusian, standing like a statue on his promontory in the white moonlight, and meditating on the fierce cataclysms out of which, centuries since, sprang the wondrous landscapes of his Alpine home.

“Some day,” the soldiers are thinking, as they rest from their work of bloodshed, “some day there will be born out of our very

fury of this hour a splendid thing which men will contemplate with awe and admiration." The dread law that rules the universe decrees that everything of beauty must receive at its birth the mark of violence and horror!

Motionless, behind a heap of stones, Bourru has been standing guard for three hours against a possible return of the enemy. Not one of his fellows has come to his relief, though three or four are sleeping not further than ten paces from him. In spite of the dark night he can easily distinguish their bodies lying sheltered in the shell-holes.

"This is pretty tough," he grumbles. "It's about time some of those fellows took a turn. . . . I'll tell 'em so. . . ."

And he goes over to shake one of the sleepers.

"Hey there! Come and take my place a while. . . ."

But the man lies stiff and cold. He is a corpse!

"Ah! Forgive me, old chap," murmurs Bourru, with a quick salute.

And the other human forms which the snow is burying are also corpses.

"It's all right, boys," thinks Bourru. "Rest easy. I'll watch over you and keep you from harm. The Boches shall not have you. . . ."

And he retires behind his heap of stones. He feels his powers being multiplied, as they were years ago, on the day when his dying father bequeathed to him the duty of taking care of the fields and vineyards of the family. It is the instinctive habit of every Bourru to take the work that must be done as a sacred obligation to which individuals, families, races must submit their wills. This is their substitute for the soulful ecstasies in which some other men take such happy pride. That is why our Bourru, serene in soul, clings to the top of that hill of France.

"If I am hit," he thinks, "there will always be some good chap to take my place and finish the job."

IV

AFTER THE ATTACK

WE have taken Vauquois—and now we must hold it! This afternoon, on reaching the heights, our soldiers danced with joy on the hill-top, disregarding shells and bullets; by the way they raised their arms and brandished their rifles you would have thought the hill too low a pedestal for their glory. Higher! still higher! Up! the top of the ruins! There let us leap and dance. Ah! if one could only soar into the heavens, above the peaks of the Argonne, like angels on golden wings! What joy!

But it is no such flight of glory that awaits them. Stern necessity is going to impose its

law upon them. They must burrow down into the conquered soil, bury themselves in it in order to cling to it.

Little by little Bourru grows conscious of the rude task. Around two o'clock in the morning he says to himself: "If I don't want to stop a bullet like a fool as soon as the day comes, I'd better dig a trench."

And, indeed, it is the moment for this. The counter-attack against the church is over, and all is quiet. The night is not too dark. Bourru ought to make a burrow for himself in the spot to which chance has brought him.

But he is so tired! An overpowering numbness pins him to the ground; the falling snow envelops him little by little in a white coverlet which he has not even the heart to shake off. Some hours ago, the excitement of feeling that he was the guardian of these ruins and of his dead comrades sustained him, but now he can do no more than cast a glance from time to time in the direc-

tion of the enemy, over the stones that are protecting him. His mind is drifting inertly. The scenes of the day just past flit before it, as at the cinema, though he is not directing the succession of them. The same pictures pass and repass inexorably—crumbling walls, stiff corpses, smoke-clouds from bursting shells. He hears the shells exploding, the balls whistling, the men yelling. Stupefied and sick at heart, Bourru looks on and listens. . . . He is so weak . . . for some fourteen hours he has eaten nothing, and his last sleep was so long ago!

From time to time, nevertheless, he makes an exertion. "I'm here to stay, all the same, and the Boches shall not pass!"

They have no wish to try it, moreover. Twenty yards away, on the descending slope, they can be heard stirring about. Bourru has a good command of their position and every so often he fires a shot through the dark to let them know that "there is company present."

But these fits of energy do not last long. It is very cold, and Bourru has no feeling left in his legs. That is rather pleasanter, if anything; the numbness lays hold on his spirits. And his thoughts run: "Suppose I took one little nap? . . . No, no, I'd better scoop out a hole for myself. . . . But pshaw! the Boches won't start anything now. . . . Yes, but . . . Oh, well, I'll turn in for just one minute. . . ." Hello, there's a fog coming on. It invades the very soul of the man; it envelops all things and holds them motionless and soundless in its blanket. Bourru dreams of the delights of warm comfort and savory food . . . but in its turn there comes gliding into his weary brain a frightful nightmare. Suddenly he awakes, and finds himself stammering: "Hold on there! I'm choking! Help! I'm coming. . . ."

"By Jove, I went to sleep!" says Bourru, as he looks round. The snow makes the night livid, and a bitter taste persists in

our soldier's mouth. His tongue feels heavy.

"I've got to begin digging a trench," he thinks.

But where are the fellows to help him? In vain he tries to remember when he lost sight of them. Perhaps they are dead, like those lying nearby, who look as if they are sleeping but will never wake again.

Bourru feels terribly alone. "And the Boches are going to counter-attack to-morrow, that's certain. . . . Well, I must get to work, then, and dig a hole for myself! . . . No, I'll rest just one little minute more. Maybe some one will come to order me down from here. And, anyway, what's the use of fighting any more? I'm never again going to see my little house sleeping by the side of the vineyard, under the shade of the big walnuts, where mother is waiting for me! Oh, misery!" Bourru wants to cry like a baby.

Heap no scorn on him. Possibly you are

one of those that admire only the "super-men" whose determination never flinches. That is your privilege, only—well, go a little easy, and don't force my Bourru to feel too keenly that he is nothing but an ordinary mortal, because, you know, it is just ordinary mortals like him that take Vauquois!

But I know you understand him, this plain soldier and brother of us all, and it may even be that you sympathize with his fear—for it is an honest, terrible fear that suddenly seizes him as a volley of bullets goes whistling over his head. You can hear them, eh? those ill-mannered bullets that as they pass seem to spit out a message of hate at you—"Ah, how I should like to pink you in a soft place!" But our man is flat on the ground. In their spite the bullets spatter against the rocks with a sound of a furiously cracked whip. Under such displays of ill-will bent on your destruction you first throw yourself down and make yourself as small as you can; but by and by exasperation gets the

better of you. "No, you don't catch me!" you say.

And that is why Bourru finally comes out of his torpor. Seizing the pick and shovel attached to his belt, though still keeping his prone position, he begins to scrape the soil. . . . A stone turns up—good! that will serve to reinforce the little pile now sheltering him.

But the Boches in front have already heard him working; at each noise he makes the bullets redouble their rage.

Suddenly Bourru hears somebody crawling near him. . . . By Jove, it's Lachard! . . . The two waste no time deciding on a method of collaboration. One of them keeps his gun to his shoulder, pointed at the enemy; the moment he sees a shadow move he fires—often, indeed, he lets fly a bullet without seeing anything. Meanwhile the other digs furiously. But what hard ground! If on the surface there is mud mixed with snow, just beneath is nothing but

stones firmly ensconced. One tears them out, somehow, and piles them up before him. But it is too dark to balance them, and once in a while they fall back again.

To do this work lying down is not easy. You cannot raise your arm in the air to give force to your pick; so you must bear down hard on it from your prone position; still it won't penetrate. The spade is no better—you shove it under a little heap of mud you want to throw out; and the mud is so liquid that it spreads about and runs off; you have only a few ounces left to throw. In your rage you take to scooping it up with your hands. That is better,—but you must hurry up!

Every fifteen minutes the men relieve each other, one watching, the other working. It is queer, but for all that he is a Parisian with soft, white hands, Lachard can scoop up stones and mud as if he had done nothing else all his life.

The main thing is to hurry up and get a hole dug, here and not elsewhere; for it is

easy, now that the dawn is beginning to break, to see that a little later on the spot where the two men are working will be a magnificent trench-site, from which they will be able to survey the whole northeastern slope of the hill. So one must hurry.

"But the other fellows, where are they?" asks Bourru.

"They're coming," answers Lachard.

And, in fact, other shadowy forms crawl into line with our two soldiers and begin in their turn to scratch the surface of the ground.

When the full light of day bathed the peaks of the Argonne, there were no soldiers to be seen above ground. Like so many invisible creatures of the soil, the men had sunk into the surface of the hill. From now on their silhouettes would never stand out to view from the country round. . . . Death, suddenly overcome with shame, had taken to concealment underground in order to continue his work.

V

'A NIGHT ATTACK

ON the whole, that was easy enough, the taking of Vauquois—so, I fancy, you are thinking after what you have read, and I readily admit that Bourru did get to the top of the hill without great damage. But I must tell you that I feel some remorse, and that I have a sad sense of the artificial character of my poor story. How many emotions must remain untold—emotions which, nevertheless, run the gamut from sublime ecstasy to mad terror. You know well enough, of course, that the whole soul of man, in all its glory and all its baseness, exhibits itself in a bloody night-attack. But will any one ever dare show you the en-

tire picture? Your worship of our heroes is so tender that from time to time the writer feels a veil of idealism irresistibly thrown over the visions that crowd each other in his mind.

Still, you must not suppose that the Germans let us take Vauquois at our ease. There was one corner of the village where a troop of them, more spirited than the others, held their position. The French ranks had swarmed over the hill, seemingly without regular order, though, of course, the watchful eyes of their officers directed them, and throughout the night the staff knew that the site of the half-demolished village church was an important center of resistance which attacks from mere detachments could not reduce. A well-planned and determined action would be necessary at that point.

Toward evening, therefore, two companies receive an order to go up and shatter this little isle of resistance.

It is already night when the men push into

the wrecked connecting trenches. They have to step over innumerable obstacles, luckily covered by the snow. It is the first time these soldiers have crossed this ground.

"Which way is the enemy?" asks one.

"What are we going to do?" others inquire anxiously.

When they arrive at a certain point, orders go round in muffled tones. They are going to storm the church site at the point of the bayonet.

But where is it, this church? Staring all about them in the dark, they can see nothing but remnants of shattered walls full of holes. A sergeant has his troop face precisely the wrong direction.

"Look out, you're turning your back to the objective," comes an officer's reprimand.

"You think so, lieutenant?"

"No doubt about it."

The captain comes up. "No, no, not that way! You are not to attack on the right, but on the left, along by the wall."

All eyes are wide open, and everybody is bracing himself on the stony ground. There is muttered conversation.

"Keep quiet!"

"Now, you start from here . . . come on, first platoon, take position in one line."

"No, no,—the major told me to place my men in groups of four here."

Luckily the Boches have not been roused; there is only the crack of a rifle here and there.

"Are you ready, sergeant? We'll attack in half an hour when everybody is in position."

"Yes, but my watch has stopped."

"Well, whatever you do, don't go striking a match to see what time it is—we must surprise those fellows. The other company will attack over there on the right; we'll go for them on the left."

For two hours the men have been champ-ing the bit in this confusion. You can picture the scene, I suppose? You can see the

dark forms in the shadows, hiding behind fragments of wall. This is no game of moving men about on paper or planting flags on a map; this is a game where you may find yourself grabbing the arm of some tired, excited, half-crazed man and telling him, "No, no, old fellow, that's not the place to aim! You were firing on our own men; aim over here!" The officers have to be everywhere at once; the captains run from one platoon to another, and platoon-leaders and squad-leaders multiply warnings and commands. They go from man to man, speaking in whispers, giving to Paul, whom they do not recognize in the dark, an order that was meant for Pierre, straightening out the lines of the troops, looking out for a possible coward who may perhaps try to evade the attack by playing dead in a hole somewhere, and holding back the impatient ones who would start at once—to get it over more quickly.

Ah! It was pleasanter in the old days

when the officer, perched proudly on his horse, turned to his troops in line of battle, facing the sun, and cried: "Gentlemen, secure your hats, for we are going to have the honor of charging!" Here there is nothing but darkness, mud, and ruins of houses, out of which men must be brought to plunge forward, all together, at one given moment—men who will rush straight ahead without seeing anything in front of them, and who will not succeed in their enterprise unless there is perfect coördination in their efforts.

At last the sections of troops seem placed correctly, the men all in straight lines—near to their yet uncollected wounded comrades of the afternoon, who are still groaning. Some one is saying to them:

"Keep quiet, will you? You'll have them spotting us—and it does no good to complain."

Eleven o'clock! In fifteen minutes we are off. But a new order is going the rounds—

the attack is put off till midnight. The men lie down in their tracks.

"Anyway, I'm going to swallow everything in my sack," declares one man; "then if I'm killed, the Boches will get no grub off me!"

For the moment all is quiet on the top of the hill. The night seems preparing for the spectacle that is about to be presented.

Five minutes to twelve. . . .

"Fix bayonets," command the sergeants.

A man who has lain wounded since yesterday afternoon, and who has been complaining, stops his groans to draw his bayonet and pushes it toward a comrade ready to start:

"Here, old chap, take my bayonet; I had sworn to plant it in a Boche—put it on the end of your gun and square my account."

The start must be made in complete silence. But suddenly, at the moment when the men are getting to their feet, a bugle rings out, sounding the charge—What a

break! Imagine a bugler in his bugling zeal giving the alarm to the Boches! Go and talk about it with the men who have lived through that night on the hill; when they think of that untimely bugler their faces still screw up with scorn. For you may be assured the Boches immediately knew what threatened them and set their machine guns spitting.

No one ever learned the name of that bugler. I suppose it was some simpleton full of legends of the brave days of old, of pictures of Epinal and popular songs, who thought to achieve glory at one bound by giving voice to his trumpet at this historic moment. I imagine, too, that in the sequel he must have learned his mistake, and that, since no one knows him, he must have written his name among the "missing" whom the upheaved sides of that hill still enclose.

The attack was launched, nevertheless, for it was too late to stop it. It was brief. From every side bullets sped in showers.

Nothing could be seen but shadows that moved for an instant against the sky and then sank to earth. The two companies eddied like leaves caught in a tornado. Platoons hurled themselves on each other in their confusion; men fled straight toward the enemy, thinking they were retreating; officers yelled orders that could not be heard; and soldiers vainly died whom wives and mothers were to weep for.

Half an hour later it was all over; on each side the combatants were regaining their positions. It was probably deemed unnecessary to attack again, for everywhere else on the hill-top we held the important points.

And on the pages of the history of the great war this infinitesimal incident will receive not even the tribute of a line. . . . An insignificant episode, the historian of the future will say, as he passes to another document.

VI

THE GLORY GROWS

COMING down from Vauquois Bourru had no notion that he was a hero—not in the least. Weariness makes for a good deal of confusion in our ideas of glory, cramping them and forbidding their natural expansion. If some little trace of pride comes into consciousness, a wave of darkness immediately appears to submerge it. However, after you say, "Well, after all, we seem to have brought off a victory," the idea will not radiate through your mind and expand like the splendid enthusiasms that filled you with their warmth and light when you were resting comfortably after a good dinner.

As for Bourru, to-night he just lets the ranks of soldiers carry him along back to A——; his head is hanging and he is stumbling over the shell-holes. He has already tumbled down several times and has had hard work regaining his feet. You must remember that he has had three days and nights of working and fighting, and that is enough to weaken any man's legs. They are, indeed, so feeble that Bourru scarcely has enough strength to pull them out of the mud when they sink in to the knee. Ah! that sticky clay, how it clings! At the cast of a shoe Bourru gets free from one place, only to find another hole a hundred yards farther on and stick fast in that. This time, strangely enough, it seems rather nice to be caught in the mud. He would never have thought that it was so comfortable to lie quiet in a mud-hole. No need to move; it's delightful just like this. So Bourru is nearly off to sleep, stuck fast in the mud.

"Hey, old chap, shake a leg! You don't

want to stop here, do you?" It is François scolding, while he seizes Bourru by the arm and pulls him up.

And then they plod along, arm in arm.

* * * * *

It is twenty-four hours later when Bourru remembers that he was one of those who "stormed Vauquois." Up to this moment he has been sleeping in the corner of a barn.

Already the soldiers are writing history—as you can see from the long letters they are scrawling, their knees doing service for desks. They fill pages upon pages. Ah! The "old folks" and the wives and the children will have something to read back home!

Bourru does as the rest. He pretends that he has his aged mother there before him, and he starts in to "tell her about it." This is one of the advantages of war in the trenches—after a hard go at it, a man has some leisure to collect his thoughts. It is no longer what it was in the days of the Marne,

when one marched ahead without ever a pause.

And certainly Bourru's mother, back in Bligny, will have to be proud of her son whenever some one asks her, "And have you had any news from Louis?"

She has only to show the letter and let them see for themselves—Father Chassagne, with his florid Burgundy face, and Gaffer Causeret, always so solemn with his earrings, and old "Pope," so called because he was once a soldier of the Pope,—all the old fellows will see what the young man can do—and the girls will know, too.

"Dear me!" the girls will say; "did you hear that Louis Bourru was in the troop that took Vauquois? Oh, he's a wonder, Louis . . ."

Even M. Cyrot, the rich merchant of the district, will ask in his reserved way, "Won't you please let me see your boy's letter, Madame Bourru? And tell him we think he is a brave boy and the village is proud of him."

This is how the pride of heroism finds its way into the soul of a brave man. It is in meditating on what others think about us that our personality builds itself up. Accordingly as we fancy that others are praising or censoring us we become inflated heroes or pitiful wretches.

* * * * *

You cannot imagine how wonderful it is to take your ease in a village on the Meuse after leading a dog's life for a while. You look on at the life of civilization with new-born eyes—that is, at houses of mud-plaster, at agricultural implements, and at narrow-gauge railway ties. At Auzéville there are even some civilians left, and you say to yourself, “Heigh-ho! I came pretty near never seeing all this any more!”

The streets are full of soldiers. But you are not to imagine that any foolish gaiety reigns here, reaction from the hours of danger just past. No, it is still too early for that. The soldiers are like people who

have got wet in the rain, and who have reached a shelter but are not yet dry. Moreover, they are still thinking only of themselves.

"What became of Terrier?" one man is asking of a comrade from the company next his own.

"Missing."

"And Fanchois?"

"Killed—right next to the church."

"Oh! Poor fellow!"

The phrases pretend to no funeral eloquence, and yet when they report the death of a dear friend they still bring a shock to the nerves, and the best a man can do is stammer out, "Is it possible? Is it possible? . . . What will his poor wife do?"

Then the men talk of the vicissitudes of the great battle they have just lived through. Violent contradictions have already developed between their accounts of it.

"And what do you think Faraud did? Absolutely nothing, I tell you—he was in

soft! As for me, I kept running right up to the top."

"Bah, what are you talking about? The first platoon wasn't in it at all—it was my platoon that went over the top before the whistle blew, and the proof of that is that the 270's were still falling, and I stopped a splinter from one."

"Oh, thunder!" protests another. "Cut out the fairy-tales. It wasn't the —th company that got there first from the east, it was our own. . . ."

Thus praise and blame keep increasing; and the men go on disputing about the parts played by the various battalions and regiments during the course of the battle. Each one defends the honor of the unit to which he belongs. The "esprit" of each platoon, each company, each battalion, each regiment, grows inflamed; and to the end of time there will be some one to tell you that such and such a regiment captured Vauquois all alone. When the survivors of the battle are dead

the "esprit" of the troop will continue to inspire their sons and grandsons and great-grandsons—"It is a worthy pride to keep honor ever bright," as said an author of the olden time.

In the afternoon of this day of rest a great event takes place. By opening a newspaper every soldier can read the official account of the taking of Vauquois, together with the moving comments of eloquent journalists. It is his first document of the kind.

And suddenly Bourru says to himself, "Say, it's really true—we've done something stunning!"

The account is read and reread, with religious attention to each word. It produces a strange state of mind—not a line of it is doubted for a moment; the thing is in print. It is as if the events of the day just past had been modelled in bronze; they stand out in clear view and pass into history as incontestable facts. It is, indeed, a relief to read the account, for now one can know how to tell

about what one has just been doing. No one of these soldiers, in the absorption of his own particular piece of work, has seen the battle as it is described in the paper; but no matter, the words of the account are so harmonious that they gain immediate adoption. They will furnish the proper and impressive set phrases that one will need, later on, for describing his own impressions, and they will save one the work of thinking up words to express vividly what one has seen and felt. A little later and the real impressions, for lack of use, will fade bit by bit from memory, and pass into oblivion—and in their places the stereotyped phrases will grow more and more real from frequent repetition, and a fictitious picture will be substituted for the true one; and that is why you will be astonished to hear my Bourrus tell about the storming of Vauquois in great, pompous, and impressive words.

Still, if the newspaper destroys the freshness of war-stories on the one hand, it does

one fine piece of work on the other. Thanks to it, our soldiers begin to know what glory is. The paper with its flaming letters passes from hand to hand, and the men have a feeling that they are in the center of an aureole on which all the eyes of France are fixed. Wherever they may go from now on, they can say proudly, "I have just come from Vauquois."

And everybody will do them honor.

* * * * *

A month after the attack an officer of one of the regiments engaged in it happened into the buffet of a little railway station in a distant province and heard a rather tipsy soldier cry out to a group of his fellows:

"I tell you one thing, boys, if you didn't see Vauquois you don't know what war is!"

And with eyes afire and his cap perched saucily on one side he was lording it over the whole assemblage. Without noticing the uniform he even jostled the officer a little upon the latter's entrance. But of a sud-

den he caught, inscribed on the collar of the new arrival, the number of a regiment that had shared the glory of his own; his eyes opened wide and a great hoarse cry escaped him.

"Hey, you blokes, there's a man from Vauquois, like me! . . . A brother in arms. . . . You can ask him about it, if you want to. Gee, what luck! . . . Come on and have one on me, captain, you can't refuse a fellow that. . . . You've got to tell 'em what we did on that hill. . . ."

The officer simply had to toe the rail and take his tipple.

* * * *

But it was at the review under full arms for the award of decorations that Bourru really felt himself becoming "somebody."

You know what a review is. I shall not waste time describing it to you, for it takes place at the front with the same ceremonies that are observed on the fourteenth of July at any county-seat; only there is still a little

Vauquois mud on the men's coats, and here and there some blood-stains. These things are more moving than burnished buttons, I assure you. Moreover, something indefinably impressive hovers about these troops. Bourru and Huguenin, who had got used to having Monier between them in the line, are side by side now. Their missing comrade remained behind on the hill. . . . It leaves a queer impression not to feel his elbow in dressing the line.

It is with their faces toward the tragic hill, rising on the horizon, that the troops take position. The colonels and generals seem to speak with the voice of eternal France when, between two blasts from the bugle, they announce in resounding words the merits of those whom they are decorating. All the regiments feel as one in this day of glory.

On the left the Argonne unfolds to view its sombre hills, over which hovers a light mist, such as one sees rising over the Alps in the panoramas of the Italian battles at the

palace of Versailles. The trees on the hill of Clermont, forming a clear line against the sky, compose a hedge of horror. On the right spreads the wide expanse of the Meuse country—valleys, villages hidden among trees, fields, woods, all typifying the soil of France for which the men have just been fighting.

VII

HOLDING THE POSITION

WHEN Bourru went back to the hill-top, after fifteen days of rest, he found certain changes in the positions. In the midst of the ruins trenches now wound their way through the battle-scarred ground—two of them, one some ten or fifteen yards from the Boches and the other some fifty yards farther back. The tactical problem imposed on the occupants is simple enough—to stay here fifteen days without getting hit. They apply themselves to it with all their skill. I do not remember what philosopher it was who said that man is essentially a constructive animal. If the philosopher came to Vauquois he could see

his theory at work. The trenches are a veritable museum for every species of protective device that man can invent. Just remember that the job is to occupy the place in the pleasantest way compatible with safety from trench-mortars. Various methods of procedure are in vogue. The simplest consists in lying flat in a snug wrapper of tent-cover, lolling in the bottom of the trench. This is the method of the more limited intelligences, and it offers a thousand difficulties—everybody jostles you and walks over you, and really it is only the lazy beasts that follow this course; and it is no more than their due if the cooks, stumbling over them, spill the contents of a pail on them.

Why don't they act like Bourru, who, with his peasant's wits, at once examines the bit of trench that has fallen to his lot with an eye to taking full advantage of its features? He soon finds a plan. For here in the trench-wall is an excavation already begun;

you need only dig it a bit wider and deeper, and you have a nice little niche in which you can stay bundled up like a chrysalis in its cocoon. It is not at all bad in here, with twenty inches of earth above your head to protect you from the rain, and partially—oh, very partially—from the trench-mortars. And then, above all, it's a "home."

But if the desire for luxury possesses you, and it seems that all of us have it at the bottom of our hearts, you do not stop with this, but go on to perfect your shelter. First you place a piece of tent-canvas in front of it—that does duty for a door; then you dig your hole larger, for in the long run nothing is more fatiguing than to sit forever with your chin on your knees. A few hours of work and—what luxury!—you can stretch out your legs. But this love of comfort, as was long ago noted, is insatiable. Before you know it Bourru is off through the connecting trench to look for planks and joists in the rubbish. The night is just coming down,

and he can glide in and out among the ruins and get a hundred things to furnish his niche. He makes a shelf for his pipe, and the artistic passion awakening in its turn, he is already sketching ornamental figures on his planks.

But wait a moment! Already you are fancying that the occupation of my poilus is limited to living quietly in this second-line trench. Of course, this is where they eat and sleep; but just follow me along this connecting trench, it will take us by a tortuous course to the first-line trench. . . . S-sh! Please speak very low! The Boches are only fifteen yards or so distant, you'll give yourself away. This is where the men stand guard, guns always within reach.

At the time of which we speak, the adversaries have not yet got accustomed to living within a few yards of each other. Each one keeps imagining that the other is going to plunge suddenly upon him. Everybody is suspicious, so much so that half the troops

are kept constantly in the first line, listening for the slightest noise. In the whole assemblage only the sentinels are standing, behind a wall of sand-bags against which, from time to time, bullets are slapping. Through a little space between the bags, one can watch and fire. Those who are not on the look-out are taking shelter, more or less, under the protection of boards.

So they are awaiting—what? The fire of the trench-mortars. They await it as they might a phenomenon of nature; the bombardment is coming as surely as rain after fine weather or winter after autumn. What can you expect? Men who hate each other with a deadly hate are standing here, a few yards from each other. They have at their disposal little trench cannon that shoot a pound or so of melinite for a few hundred yards; if they could, they would be flinging bombs and grenades all day long. But there are still some limits, even to the forces of hate. Unable to throw their projectiles in-

cessantly, each of the adversaries watches for the favorable moment to fling them for a half-hour, or an hour, or two. The moment always comes. If a noise reveals the fact that the soup is being distributed, the bombardment begins; if a sentinel sneezes, the grenades begin again; and if there is no sign to give information—well, the bombardment is turned loose anyhow, on a chance, on the second line as well as the first.

You live in anxious expectation of this tragic moment. And it is important not to lose your head, as you are going to see. Boom! There goes a shot. Bourru sees a thing like a great sausage rising in the air, up, up. . . . It is a shell. Where is it going to? Every eye is fastened on it. When it reaches the top of its flight the thing seems to hesitate as if undecided as to the point on which it will be pleased to fall. Look out! It's coming at us! A few seconds of alarm. . . . You cannot imagine how easy it is to make a mistake in your estimate of its

destination. You can tell at once whether it is coming in your direction, but it is the distance that is hard to gauge.

This time, for instance, all the poilus of the first line, in trench 17, thought it was making for them; not at all, it was the second line that caught it. . . . But look out, here's another one! Give way to the right—quick! . . . And all the men rush to the right.

It was time. . . . Vrroom! The shell falls at the point they have just deserted. . . . And here's another! Run to the left! Vrroom! Another close shave. . . .

Look out there, get back—into the connecting trench! Holy Moses, some fool has got himself stuck in it, and stops the whole crowd! The men cannot get by, but they have time to throw themselves flat, and the splinters fly over them, hitting nobody.

So it goes for two hours.

What a session to-day! There are always three or four shells in the air at once, and

you never know which one to keep your eyes on.

Luckily Bourru has not lost his head. He has rallied five or six frantic comrades round him and is on the look-out for them. It is he who orders them to rush, now to the right and now to the left; but the thing is too much for them, and some of those who are unstrung, instead of letting a cool-headed man guide them, lift their heads into the air, hypnotized by the shells. They stand still, with bulging eyes, and watch death coming. The sweat runs down their foreheads, their mouths hang open, and their motions seem no longer to obey any intelligence. Judge for yourself:

“To the right!” shouts Bourru.

Dufaut, in complete frenzy, starts to the right, comes back to the left, and then finally plunges into the connecting trench in the rear. He reaches the exact point where the shell falls, and it explodes, flinging him three yards into the air,

As for Candec, a little Breton with a mystic countenance, he has adopted his usual tactics in case of bombardment. He has placed himself in an angle of the connecting trench, covered his head with tent-canvas, and thus, assured he will see nothing, is waiting for destiny to decide. You can hear him praying out loud: "Dear Jesus, do with me as you will." His faith is effective, for he has gone through five or six bombardments without a scratch.

In the second line there are two theories available as to the best manner of meeting a bombardment of this kind. The first is to run hither and thither, as in the first line; and the second is to sit tight in your shelter and say over and over, in order that you may believe it: "I've got half a yard of earth above my head, and that's some protection."

Even those who have but a pitiful plank to protect them try to reassure themselves: "I've got a good stout plank, and it will take a big piece of shell to go through it."

But whatever certain philosophers may say, an idea is not reality, and the conviction that you are protected is no assurance of protection. From time to time you hear cries—from soldiers struggling in a cave-in.

No matter, the instinct to interpose something between oneself and death is stronger than all the lessons of experience. In the second line, as soon as one of these shells appears in the sky, nearly all the soldiers are like mice looking for their hole—not any hole whatever, but their own hole, the one that they have prepared, in which they can be much safer than in that of the man next them.

That is why Brimbeuf will not pause before Bourru's shelter, although, at need, two could squeeze into it. The shells are flying.

"Come on, shove in here!" cries Bourru.

But Brimbeuf doesn't even listen; the vision of his own hole draws him irresistibly, like a scared animal that always runs for its

lair. If only he can get to his own pack, his own sack, among all his own familiar possessions, he will be saved. A bomb rolls up behind him, chasing him as he flies down the connecting trenches, and suddenly it explodes. . . . One man more will fail to answer "present" to-morrow.

Where is the heroism in all this, you ask? While death is raging over the hill-top, cast your eye upon the country round. Three hundred yards down the hillside all is quiet. A two-minute dash would be enough to get out of the fatal zone—and it would be so easy running down hill. But not a man dreams of trying it. The groups of frenzied soldiers dash from right to left, and from left to right, running from the first to the second line and back, whirling round—but they stay on top. That is their heroism.

VIII

A SINISTER DUTY

YOU are shuddering already! Before I have begun you have guessed my subject. What a horror the idea of a corpse rouses in our souls! The authors of the old military regulations—all of two years old—were not ignorant of it, and like skilful psychologists they directed that the work of “sanitation” on the battlefield should be done by special troops. A wise precaution! Thus the combatants need not know the horror of interring their companions in danger.

Well, that horror is but one more of those which our soldiers in the great war must master, and since you still say that you want

to learn the lessons of the moral school of our "admirable poilus," I am obliged to show you what is in the soul of Bourru just after he is detailed for "corpse duty" on the night that is coming.

Above all things, do not expect the cold professional indifference of an attendant in a surgical clinic. Of course, Bourru has seen a great many corpses, but he has preserved a tender and sympathetic soul in spite of that. For instance, he has never passed the entrance of the eastern connecting-trench without a shudder. . . .

You must know that the upturn soil has never been cleared round the position captured by storm two weeks ago. There is no way to carry off the soldiers whose course was stopped by a bullet. Once the men had pushed their attack to the utmost limit, they had to dig trenches wherever they found themselves, groping in the dark, without making a noise, stirring the least that was possible in order not to reveal their positions,

for the Boches were only fifteen yards away. . . . One morning it was discovered that a human leg was sticking out of a parapet that had just been thrown up, all but barring the way in the connecting-trench, with the rest of the body firmly planted in the earth. What was to be done? Take away the entire body? That would have meant tearing down two yards of parapet, an operation that would be dangerous. Cut off the leg? No—could you? So they had to resign themselves to rubbing against the thing hanging loose from the wall at the entrance to the eastern connecting-trench. . . .

Ghastly! Horrible! Sickening! You say. . . . On the contrary, I should like to lift you above that trite, effeminate horror of a corpse. But it is exceedingly difficult for me to explain to you the state of mind of the soldier who jostles against corpses as familiars and who, nevertheless, preserves a religious respect for them. It is really a new

feeling, born of the war; and when the psychologists come to write their subtle histories of the soldiers' souls I hope they will not forget to explain the feelings of the man who, handling the body of a companion in arms, says to himself: "To-morrow I may be where he is; I must bury him as I should like to be buried."

It is such a feeling, dimly realized, that animates Bourru when, with Cormier, he is preparing to leave the trench and explore the ground between the first and second lines, on which the combatants have fallen. It is not possible to go and look for them during the day, you must slip out, crawling, at night; and above all, you must take care not to stand up—your outline would be seen against the sky and the bullets would whistle.

The thing is to find the bodies. Bourru and Cormier grope through the débris of wood and stone. Their hands meet a thousand strange objects . . . suddenly they

touch something soft . . . this is "one." The first movement is to draw back, instinctively. After this moment, if you would fulfil your duty, your whole being must struggle with all its moral strength against the horror; your mind must control your senses fully enough for the touch of the viscous and the smell of the nauseous to be transformed into chastened sensations. What a miracle these soldiers perform! Crushing down their revolting sensations by the exertion of a sublime resolution, these rude and simple peasants attain that lofty state of mind which animated the pious buriers of an older day. The mind transfigures the repugnant reality. It is not flesh in putrefaction that they are dragging over the stones, it is a great human idea,—the same one that makes us bow respectfully before a coffin.

"It's all in the day's work," says Bourru. "But a corpse is a heavy thing—and hard to handle! How can we get it down below?"

There's no way to carry it, the connecting trench is too narrow. We'll have to keep on dragging it, worse luck!"

They make their way down hill through the twisting trenches whose hollowed walls serve to protect the soldiers. In passing they wake up some sleepers, who stretch out a hand to learn what is rubbing against them—and draw it back quickly.

Then they must begin again. They return to the open ground and search anew. This time they find several bodies together, heaped in a hole. Shall I describe the scene to you? Yes, I must, for it is not in abstract terms that I can convey to you the soldier's actual state of mind, at once mystic and brutal, which you wish to realize. The great difficulty is to separate the corpses. I must whisper it in your ear, that something profoundly mysterious takes place in the nights on battlefields. All of us have witnessed it, we who have slept and dreamed on those mortal fields, but we scarcely dare to

say it, so strange does it seem. In death, the bodies intertwine! When the shells have rent the pitiful flesh, all those who lie in the same hole seem to draw together, to cohere, and to mingle; and the weird embracements take place, even if chance has placed side by side the bodies of enemies. It is as if the souls, before quitting the bodies, had effected a final reconciliation, a fusion for all eternity.

So you understand why Bourru is forced to pull very hard on the single arm that emerges. The whole heap of bodies trembles as he pulls. Imagine a man tugging with all his physical force at an arm; think also of the odor of coagulated blood—how your fingers twitch as you imagine the humid, soft touch. . . . But the thing must be done! Here we are not dealing with the fantasies of lovers of the Macaberesque as they have been shown us by certain degenerate poets; we are not shaking up the dead for the pleasure of straining our nerves with new sensa-

tions; no, it is sad reality that is imposed upon us. . . . Come on, pull at this arm! So much the worse if it comes off in your hands!

And if you do not understand the awful grandeur of your deed, it is because you have not comprehended all that is meant by the word Duty. Bourru, however, knows everything there is in this great word. Listen to him as he uses it. His comrade Cormier has just come upon the head of one soldier in the battered-in breast of another. Cormier is on the point of fainting.

"Bourru! Bourru! I'm afraid I'm going to keel over!"

"Brace up, old chap, brace up! It's the duty."

And the sublime word once more produces its magical effect. . . . You can see them, can you not, my two soldiers working through the silent night out there where death is stalking? Around them, nothing but corpses; no flag unfurled, no bugle blow-

ing, not even a human voice, nothing at all to sustain their courage, and still these two poilus of mine are winning the hardest struggle that a man can gain over himself, they are getting the best of a horror which nature has placed deep in the innermost recesses of our souls.

They will have their reward. Never will any poet be impressed as they are with the moving fact that all the soil trodden under foot of man is made of the ashes of the dead! O Mother-land, soil of our fathers, soil of our brothers, too, the man who has buried his companions in arms on the hill knows what tender love one can have for his sacred land! And as time goes by, their deeds of horror will be idealized; the two soldiers will remember only the accomplishment of a holy duty. Death in her fury had left on the hideous soil grinning corpses in ignoble postures, which the heavens themselves scarcely dared look upon. Bourru and his friend, rude but respectful pall-bearers, were

the workers of a divine harmony. They put the bodies of their comrades back into the decent posture in which a brave man may worthily await the day when he will arise to receive his eternal reward.

IX

VAUQUOIS THE TRAGIC

INCESSANTLY new faces appear among Bourru's comrades—for death is stalking abroad at Vauquois. At every moment arrive reinforcements from the interior. I must tell you of the state of mind of these new combatants on their arrival, for they compose one of the elements of the moral atmosphere in which Bourru passes his life.

In the little village of the cantonment—far back in the interior—already they say merely “up there”; they hardly dare pronounce the word “Vauquois,” for that awakens visions of mystery, of grandeur and of terror. Modesty also hinders one from

speaking too much of it. Do you not lower your voice when you mention the cemetery where your dear ones are sleeping? For ten months the regiment has been battling on that hill in the Argonne—and how many comrades are reposing there for eternity!

When “one of our regiment” comes back from “up there”—veteran, or wounded, or ill—a halo seems to shine round his head. He has seen Vauquois! The whole town gathers round him, and he tells inexhaustible stories—magnificent, trivial, grandiose, disastrous! So many times is the tragic hill described that, in the imagination of the village, it comes to seem a stupendous mountain covered with the smoke of bursting shells, like a volcano in a dream.

It takes possession of the people’s souls. The territorials think of it with melancholy resignation; it is perhaps thither that destiny will soon lead them to complete their sacrifice. For the young soldiers in training Vauquois is a marvellous stimulant; it is that

which makes their voices so clear and strong when the *Marseillaise* bursts forth along the march. For everyone the word has strange properties. It claws and tears like a vulture; and it also calls up I know not what mocking gesture of valor in the face of death.

The day comes when the attraction of this magic magnet triumphs. An order has been given by the general staff—and a battalion has left for Vauquois!

What excitement in the farewells! And what long-drawn-out shouts of glory in the wake of the departing train! You would think that all France would be stirred by them. The peasants look upon the convoy with the astonished eyes that one sees, in pious pictures, in the faces of those who watch one of the elect ascend into heaven.

“Off for Vauquois!” cry the young men. “All aboard for ‘up there’!”

“We are going to Vauquois,” the territorials confide gravely to the employees at the station.

And everyone trembles.

No one approaches the hill with easy familiarity; as if one were about to draw near to a goddess enthroned in the depths of some mysterious temple, there must be an initiation. One must make himself worthy of the terrible kiss she will accord him.

In the little villages behind the lines the young soldiers go on completing their training. They find a suitable atmosphere for it. There was a battle here, last September, and there remain prodigious evidences to speak for it—villages burned, forests cut down by shell-fire, graves scattered over the plain.

Often one's foot strikes a fragment of shell, a piece of old clothing, a rifle. The young soldier picks up the relic and examines it—and thinks. Before the graves he stands for long moments with head bowed and with mind troubled.

It is the night, above all, that renders him worthy to approach the sacred hill.

When the weather is clear, the hill is visible over the top of the rising ground of the Argonne. A little to the left the sun is sinking in the blood which, for months, men have been casting up into the face of the heavens. At the moment when it is about to disappear, Vauquois stands out on the horizon, in white outline, clear and vivid, emerging from the somber woods a tragic vision.

One expected to see a dark mass, as in mourning. Unlike all the other billowy waves petrified in the earth of the Argonne, this one is as white as if its crest were still boiling with the foam of a terrible tempest.

Long after the night has fallen the young neophyte is still standing on his eminence with his face turned toward the place where the white apparition vanished. In his soul anguish and ambition are at combat; confusedly the great problems of life ask for solution in his mind.

A day comes when the cannon "up there" rumble louder than usual. A mute anxiety

and also a vague hope set the battalion aquiver. What is happening? Are they going to send us? Suddenly an automobile arrives; an officer alights, carrying an order. Everyone understands at once: we are off!

Tumult and shouting ensue; and an hour later the column, moving as one man, fades beneath the northern horizon. Every eye strains toward the heights behind which stands the heroic Hill; and every mouth, with an indescribable fervor, utters:

"La liberté guide nos pas!"

What tranquillity in the zone immediately behind the line of fire! All appears simple, well-ordered, functioning systematically. The battalion pauses in a wood; for the moment it is in reserve. Trenches wind their way through the soil; silently the men slip into them. The bullets whistle a welcome over their heads.

Here the young soldiers are to live

through one more stage of training. They look through the loop-hole—Vauquois is there, quite close to them. Their hearts beat hard, and their eyes are as troubled as if a radiance shone into them from the white crest.

They are never tired of standing look-out. Never has there been a grander or simpler spectacle. The whiteness of the hill is explained now; the chalky earth has been torn from its depths; for ten months mines have been exploding and shells bursting in this ground—a tempest of steel has fallen, shattering and pulverizing everything in sight.

Nothing remains of the village but fragments of crushed stone. Not a tree, not a plant, not a blade of grass, nothing—absolutely nothing—remains alive on that height over which, at this moment, hovers the silence of death. The hill looks like the crumbled skeleton of some gigantic animal, bleached by the desert sun. Nevertheless we know

that in the bowels of the hill men are living and keeping guard. . . .

Suddenly a black object seems to spring out of the earth, mounts into the sky, slowly winds down again. It is an aerial torpedo. As it touches the ground there bursts a terrific explosion, an enormous cloud rises to heaven . . . and weird things are flung into the air.

An instant later, the bombardment—a shower of shells—is let loose; petards, grenades, bombs, “turtles,” “rat-tails,” and “valises”—everything that human genius has contrived for throwing explosives comes into play. The earth trembles even at our distance, and the hill has become a volcano.

Chunks of earth fly through the air. Black, gray, and yellow smoke-clouds rise like plumes upon the height. And always you keep seeing, flung into the air, those weird things that represent wreckage of all sorts—clothing, kit-bags, gabions, and per-

haps—human limbs. One cannot tell—from our distance.

Nearly all the young soldiers are looking on, bewildered, hypnotized. The sweat stands out in beads on their foreheads, and they are trembling—in admiration or in terror? Others have not been able to endure the spectacle of horror; stricken down by the goddess, they have sunk to the floor of the trench and are scratching mechanically at the ground.

During the night a mysterious process takes place in their minds. Face to face with the hill of death, which now stands out in somber profile against the sky, every man looks down once more into the depths of his soul. First comes temptation, with its prayer of anguish—let this cup of bitterness pass from me.

Then grace steals softly into the heart and fills it . . . and the spirit yields submission to the sacred cross. The life of the individual may be only an illusion—what does it

weigh in the scales against the great social ideas that make for all that is noble in mankind—against the idea of native land, of justice, of freedom? What matters it to have been no more than a fugitive gleam in the world, a will-o'-the-wisp flaring for an instant out of the night of eternity? If my sacrifice be made with a good will, may I not repeat, I also, the ancient words:

“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

Sharp sensations run along the nerves.
. . . Perhaps it is the cold?

The morning light steals across the sky, slowly at first, then all at once bursts into brilliance. With it is born an unconquerable hope for a radiant future—the others, perhaps, will be hit, but I shall escape. . . . Something whispers this in every ear.

A general passes—square-shouldered, thick-set, with a countenance at once smiling and calm; the tuft on his chin accentuates his expression of firm will. Passing the new

soldiers, whose faces are a little pale, he says a few words of affectionate pleasantry, and immediately cheeks regain their color and shoulders straighten in confidence. Vauquois is funereal no longer.

A light mist envelopes the hill, so that it resembles some precious relic protected in thin gauze. All is quiet. The moment seems like a solemn pause in a religious ceremony. The young soldier may now climb "up there" to win his spurs of knighthood.

Here we are, then, in the interminable maze of trenches leading up to Vauquois. There is a moment, in passing, for a glance at the historic heights of Mamelon Blanc, of the Bois-Noir, of the Cigaleric; then the ascent begins. The balls, passing overhead, emit a sharp cry like that of angry little animals.

In the connecting-trench are men lying down, some of them sleeping, others busy over trivial tasks. We can ask them questions familiarly. For several days they have

been living under the momentary threat of death, and we might expect impatient replies from them or even a certain dismal anguish. Not at all! They are merry. But it is by no means the rough, untutored merriment of hours of leisure; it is rather a kind of buoyancy of the spirit, in which one senses a noble pride, a thoughtful serenity, and, at bottom, even a certain gaiety.

On every side the soil, torn to pieces, is a sheer chaos of amazing objects. One might think an earthquake had just sent its shock through the hill.

"It's nothing but a yard for wreckage," says Sergeant Fougères,—“or maybe for building.”

Pregnant words! It is, indeed, a work-yard, this, on a vast scale. For materials, it uses men, corpses, earth, guns, shells; and its work is, first of all, demolition—that of the spirit of savagery—and then construction—that of the France of to-morrow.

I can understand now the peculiar gaiety

of the men who live here; it is the pride of being toilers in a vast task. So must the happy masons have worked on the splendid cathedrals of the Middle Ages.

The mysterious virtue of this hill is that it awakens unknown forces in the soul of everyone who sets foot on it. . . . Before coming here he used to be tormented by the thought that dishonorable fear might overcome him when he should arrive "up there!"

But a miracle has happened. All notion of dismay has taken flight. Every man can feel expanding within him an inspiration of unusual vigor, which in the days to come—as with the old sailor who regrets the storms he can no longer breast—he will look back upon with a proud feeling of melancholy. Even if death must take him, the young warrior has now come to know that he has lived through the sacred moment in which, with a single thrill, the soul is filled with a richer life than any offered by a whole century of paltry and tedious incidents.

X

A HAND-GRENADE BATTLE

WHEN the others said, "Well, we're going on up, eh?" Bourru would reply with a slight air of presumption, "Sure thing! One of these days——" But that was pure boasting. Deep in his heart Bourru felt sure that it was silly to get out of one trench only to go and dig another one twenty yards higher up, right at the top of the peak. Of course, from this new site they would be able to command the Boche positions; but hadn't they already tried several times to get to the top, and didn't they have to come down again leaving their dead on the ground? No, honestly, it, was better for the French and the Boches to

stay where they were, each on his own side of the hill-top.

But in the squad there are four or five "rookies" who will not stay in their places and are always up to some trick or other. You can hear Aubouin declaring, "Hang the Boches! If they once saw us up there, they'd beat it like scared rabbits!" And here is Tschieret in his defiant mood—"Give me three good fellows to follow me and we'll take the top." And all the rest try to crow a little louder.

So they have been crowing for a week. Oh, the good mothers who keep writing to their boys, "Above all, don't do anything imprudent," have no idea how difficult the life of a prudent man is. Of course you understand too that Bourru is not going to give up his place in the expedition—Bourru, to whom the general said one day, while decorating him, "Aha! So you're from Burgundy, my good fellow! So' am I. The fellows from our part of the country don't

know what fear is, eh?" At that solemn moment,—while the general was twisting the pepper-and-salt tuft on his chin,—Bourru had decided that he would be brave to the end of his days.

That is why our soldier and his comrades are all busy digging a trench up on top to-night. . . . Yes, they have "gone up"—and, what is more, without orders. It wasn't hard to do—the Boche sentinel must have been sleeping, and no star-shell disclosed them at their work. All the while they are digging, the "rookies" are laughing to themselves.

"Aha! Maybe the boys in the regiment won't open their eyes to-morrow. . . . And the captain, too! . . . And the major! . . . And the colonel!"

As for Bourru, he has just one thing on his mind—"If only we can get a hole dug before the grenades come!"

But if there is a providence for drunkards there is another for dare-devils. Not

a sound comes from the direction of the Boches. What luck! The picks cut rapidly into a soil torn to pieces during previous attacks and never "tidied up." Hello, here's an old platter—a rusty gun—an overcoat. . . . Suddenly Bourru's pick rebounds as if it had struck something elastic. "I thought so," mutters Bourru; "it's a corpse from three weeks ago. . . . All right, old fellow, I'm not going to disturb you!" And he digs a little to one side, so as to leave the body on the parapet—that's the best place for it!

Bang! Zing! Bing! Boom! Grenades begin to fall only a few paces from the workers. They thought they were concealed; not a bit of it! The whole heaven can see them and spit bombs in their faces. That is the feeling you have when treacherous hatred, lying in wait, suddenly catches you.

The rookies have thrown themselves on the ground. If you could look into their hearts you would see that fear has sub-

merged them at one stroke, as a wave breaks over an unsuspecting bather when the sea grows suddenly angry. All thought is drowned under the shock, and the soul is blinded, but the physical man seeks to defend himself and rises to flee.

A shadowy form has risen on the hill-top. Before it can plunge to the rear Bourru has seized the coat of the frantic soldier who is making for safety.

"Hey! Where are you running off to?"

"I—I—I forgot my canteen!"

"I'll lend you mine. Great Scott, can't you see that the Boches are missing us?"

It is true. In their ignorance of the exact location of the noise that alarmed them, the Germans are dropping their grenades short of the mark, and the bombs go rolling down hill. Yes, but when daylight comes, the Boches will see where to aim. . . . The digging goes on furiously, for every man feels that, a little later, his life will depend on the depth of his hole.

The day dawns. Our men command the whole valley, rosy in the sunlight, as well as the enemy trench, twenty paces distant.

"And now it's going to rain steel," thinks Bourru. Sure enough, the German grenades fall closer by.

Had we better reply to the Boches? That's the problem. Under our projectiles perhaps they would keep quiet, overwhelmed. But perhaps it would only enrage them to a fury to say the last word. And they have better stores than we have, because they are in their trenches, whereas once our sacks are emptied it will be hard to get more grenades. Also, if we stir round, we shall give away the position of our defences, which are still weak enough. . . . So the soldiers on the hill-top are as perplexed as a man caught in a swarm of wasps, who stands stock-still and thinks, "I'd better not stir them up!"

It is finally decided—they will lie low.

But it is no easy thing to stay quiet and motionless when at any minute a grenade may come down on your head. Your perspiration runs as fast as if you were chopping wood under a midday sun.

"Oh, confound it, this is too slow, sitting here and doing nothing!"

Bourru has seized a grenade. Snap! He strikes the cap on the palm of his hand and with his good right arm he hurls the thing at the Boches. . . .

And then everything begins crackling, whistling, smoking, exploding. . . .

A Boche head appears, sticking out from his trench:

"Your turn, there, get him! . . . No, no, it's my turn!"

"I'll get him! . . . I'll get him!..."

The men's arms are busy whipping the grenades through the air. From time to time they fling themselves flat, or take each other's places. The Boches answer with a will.

"Hey, old man! Slip me one of your grenades."

"Here, take 'em all. They've winged me. I'm out of it."

Everything smells of smoke—a smoke that gives you a fever and scrapes in your throat.

"Look out, Jolly! Behind your feet—pick it up!"

It was time. The fuse of the grenade, just at the man's feet, was burning close. It is deftly lifted and goes flying back at the enemy. What a fellow this Jolly is! He has installed a box of grenades at his side, of old ones—the 1914 model, corrugated. He has hung a dozen of them on his gun by leather thongs. It is like a bunch of grapes—or of those real "grenades," the pomegranates that come from Africa and are on sale in the fruit-stalls. Every so often he grasps one, plucks it—and bang! one more corrugated present has gone to the Boches, only to fly to pieces on arriving.

Spat! . . . Spat! Two more German bombs have just fallen at Jolly's feet. One of them is quickly flung back, the other is about to follow; he is just on the point of hurling it, when—Bang!—the thing explodes. . . . Jolly's hand has vanished in the smoke.

* * * * *

"Ah, here you are, stretcher-bearers! And it's none too soon. Here, take along Jolly, and on the way down tell them to send us up some grenades."

"I'll go and get 'em myself," says a young fellow who is trembling a little.

"No, no, my boy, stay where you are. They're going to serve 'em up to us, like princes."

"Look here, Bourru, this is getting hot. Do you think we can hold out here long?"

"Until the peace treaty, tenderfoot! Here we are, and here we stay. Come on, blaze away and forget it!"

"Ah, bully! Here comes Grossou crawling up with a sackful of grenades."

"That's not the way, boys," Bourru is saying. "We've got to give 'em a volley, all together, to make 'em shut up."

So the men practice a simultaneous fusillade to demoralize the enemy by heaping fire on him all along the line at once.

Bang! Bang! Bang! That was the first shower. . . . By the fifth, complete silence has settled down over the Boches. . . . It is only seven in the morning, and the exchange of grenades has not lasted more than twenty minutes.

"Ah! The gentlemen won't play any more," says Lachard. "What a pity."

The younger fellows laugh in a nervous way. Their effort has been so tremendous, as it seems to them, that surely nothing can be left for the neighboring troops to do. The war is over, quite over. . . . One of them timidly proposes:

"Now that we've shown the Boches that

we've got their number, we might as well clear out . . . it might be more prudent."

"Not on your life," says Bourru; "you wanted to come here, and here you stay!"

XI

THE CELLAR OF THE ENGINEERS

THIS is the picture that Bourru preserves of the place. There is a good, strong cellar, left from one of the houses of the village, and above it so much rubbish lies heaped up as to form a stout protection against shells; that is why the engineers put their explosives here. The place will hold out against bombardment for two good months. When an attack is on and you are in reserve, you stop here and await your turn to go into action. A first-aid station has been established in one corner. You can look at the wounded before you depart to fight at the very place where these agon-

ized men received the kiss of death. What else is there to do? This is the only cellar up here where you can be safe, and it must be used for all it is worth. Outside the shells are bursting, the earth is trembling. . . .

Bourru is not thinking; his mind is merely crowded with pictures. Some one is bringing in a wounded man.

"He was hit in the abdomen," says the stretcher-bearer.

The man is groaning and uttering little cries; they undress him, and find his abdomen so covered with blood that they have to search for the wound. Ah, here it is! Compresses are gently applied, and the wounded man is left alone. He still groans, but very soon the little cries begin to grow fainter—as if a singer were descending the scale. By the gleam of the candle you see him grow paler, still paler . . . and soon he ceases to groan. A stretcher-bearer lifts up his hand and it falls back, inert. "He is dead," is the word; "put him into a tent-cloth

... we'll take him down to-night or to-morrow."

Nearby they are undressing another wounded man. A piece of shell has torn through his buttock—the wound looks like a monstrous mouth with great, red, bleeding lips.

Farther on, an attendant is searching the dead, collecting their purses, their notebooks, and other possessions, and making a rapid inventory of the relics. In his hand you can see photographs, locks of hair, letters. . . .

"Turn me loose, turn me loose!" cries a soldier whom they are bringing in. "I want to go back there. . . . Ah, the dirty Boches. They sha'n't say they got me!"

And through the blood that covers his face two eyes glare with passion.

"Ah, old chap!" another is saying, "it's the devil's own luck. We'd been in that hole for two hours. There was a wall in front, and I was sure the Boches were all gone. Bang! Just like that I felt a hand come down on

my shoulder—I honestly thought it was Mazel hitting me. I can't see where it could have come from, that bullet."

"Oh, say now!" cries a stretcher-bearer to a wounded man who is yelling: "don't roar like that; you've only got a scratch, you lucky dog! You'll get three months on the Côte d'Azur between white sheets."

Here is young Dr. Bonjean, adored by all the troopers for his courage and devotion. A week ago he received the cross of the Legion of Honor that he so well deserved. They bring in a man whose leg is so shattered that it holds only by a few shreds of flesh. The physician is going about his duty of completing the amputation, when suddenly the wounded man awakens from his coma, opens his eyes, and sees the bright new ribbon on the doctor's breast.

"Ah, my dear major!" he says with his weak voice, "I have been wanting to congratulate you—allow me to make use of this occasion. . . ."

"No! No!" another man is howling, "I don't want to die. Mother! Help! Mother!"

Many of the wounded say nothing at all.

"This is awfully slow—awfully!" murmurs Bourru. "I'd like to get out of here!"

But not all the soldiers agree with him; everybody knows that this cellar of the engineers is a very safe place in case of bombardment. As soon as the bombing begins one feels himself irresistibly drawn to it. Ah, if only one could plunge into it whenever a volley of explosives is falling in his tracks—what relief! The memory you carry of this cave haunts you like a past joy.

Things are pretty hot outside to-day, and several men have made their way to the door of the cellar, but great heavens! you can't let everybody in here. A petty officer of the engineers cries out:

"Get out of here, damn you!"

"Let me in, just a minute," says the feeblest of them.

Sometimes the voice is so pitiful that the sergeant lets the frantic man enter for a few minutes. The man will stand still, breathless, shivering, silent. He looks at the group of the wounded in the candle-light toward the rear of the cellar.

You do not know what he is thinking. For that matter no one does think, in this cave of the engineers; one waits, one suffers, and one fills his ears with cries and his eyes with sights which at a later day may be transformed into thoughts.

XII

SHIFT FOLLOWS SHIFT

IMIGHT continue to show you Bourru pursuing the humbler tasks of his life from day to day, and let you follow my man through his monotonous work as a soldier of the trenches. Days "in the line" succeed interminably upon days of "rest": two weeks on the hill and two in the cantonment—and so on forever. All that would be very uninteresting to you, so I prefer to paint in rapid strokes.

The shifts that follow on each other's heels make clean-cut divisions in the soldier's life. Regiments work in relays like the bands of laborers who dig in subway tunnels, and one comes to count time only in terms of shifts.

No one says "last month" or "next week"; the word "shift" has replaced all the terms for periods of time that are in usage in civilian language.

The very work of the combatants feels the influence of this stagnation; it is governed by administration, by a bureaucracy. Everything is planned out, organized. Oh! that somber word "organization," that is the word that the Boches intone with so much pride—telling us that their civilization has achieved the last word in organization; and in order to beat them, we have had to follow them into this field. But at what loss! War has lost that romantic aureole, that allure-ment of the unforeseen which made it so interesting when we used to read of it in the memoirs of soldiers of an older day. Gone is the gay humor of hussars on a tourney in the fields where were a thousand opportunities for laughter or for fighting. Day after day Bourru goes into battle as he might to a factory, from a given hour to a given hour,

and when he is not in the trenches, something extraordinary indeed would be necessary to rouse his interest.

At the cantonment, during a period of rest, the troops fall back into the life of the garrison—daily exercise, reviews, tiresome routine.

In the trench, the battalions alternate in the various positions, now at Vauquois itself, on the east or on the west, and now in the second-line positions, at Bois Noir, or la Maize, or Allieux. Each battalion takes its turn at each place.

A favorite kind of conversation is the debate as to whether your troop is not doing more work than some other one. It is a remarkable thing, but if you interrogate the men of the —th regiment, they will prove to you that their regiment is always “sacrificed”—that is to say, it does from twelve to twenty-four hours more trench duty on each trip than does its neighboring regiment. “Ah! those fellows in the —th,” declare the

poilus, "they are lucky dogs; they must have a pull—they never do more than two weeks in the line, and we stay there fifteen days—even sixteen!"

But if you go and open an investigation in the privileged regiment, they will prove exactly the opposite thing to you. In all this, Bourru is just like everybody else. Frequently he is grumbling about the sergeant or the platoon-leader who plants him on the look-out oftener than is his due. It is on his shoulders, he claims, that all the disagreeable duties fall. If somebody has to put in a night with a spade rebuilding a ruined parapet, it is Bourru who gets the order; if somebody has to go three miles and get some gabions and planks, Bourru is the man; it's Bourru here and Bourru there, and you'd think there wasn't anybody but Bourru in the squad. Oh! the corporal knows well enough that he is not a "kicker," and there's no danger of the corporal's giving the order to Faraud, because Faraud

would advise him to "tell it to the Marines." But the thing has got to stop! Bourru has made up his mind that next time he won't let them force more than his share on him. He declares to his friend Revel that he will kick over the traces, that he will complain to the lieutenant, to the captain, the major, the colonel, if he has to! But somehow there must be a secret predestination for each one of us. Hardly has Bourru finished declaring his rights to equality of treatment when the corporal calls to him:

"Hey, Bourru! Go and help get the soup!"

"All right, I'm going," growls the soldier.

Thus conversation reflects the monotony of the life. In default of worthy subjects, one must be content with comment on the little everyday happenings. To-day, for instance, there is a great sensation going the rounds of Company 6, which is in the second line at la Maize. It is said that the captain

has dismissed his orderly, Mézerette. A tremendous piece of news!

The thing was in the air, to be sure; for some time the "old man" had been "cussing" Mézerette more than usual. If a fellow passed by headquarters he was likely to hear the officer yelling, "Mézerette, you damned idiot, where did you put my toothbrush? You must be using it to clean your aluminum rings, you damned pig! Here, bring me some water, and be quick about it!" And a fellow said: "It's certainly getting hot for Mézerette." But the last straw, it seems, was when the "old man" surprised his orderly in the act of emptying a bottle on which he had written, "Moral Force—Sovereign Remedy in a Crisis—Superfine Quality." For a long time Mézerette had been talking about this bottle in the chief's trunk. It puzzled him so much that he finally tasted it one day, and found it most excellent cognac. Just as he was getting mellow, the captain arrived on the scene.

"And oh, say!" exclaims Fabri, "what a cussing Mézerette did catch! If you had heard that . . ."

For a week this story will be going the rounds of the trenches. Mézerette declares to all inquirers that he would just as lief take his turn doing duty; but that is not true, and he is really very much ashamed of himself. Whom is the captain going to pick in his place? It is a serious question for all those who attach any importance to that other weighty question,—the question of "soft berths." Certain soldiers are always in quest of a soft berth; and you cannot imagine how much intriguing and parleying and wire-pulling are necessary when you want to be a driver, a cook, a hospital attendant, or an orderly. Lahurie invariably offers himself for these duties; it's no matter what berth he gets so long as it isn't in the front line. You see it isn't everyone who itches for grenade fights.

But our Bourru is too proud to ask for a

soft berth. As a Burgundy peasant, in civil life, "he just knows how to cultivate his fields and his vines"; as a soldier he knows only the trade of fighting—it is rather a point of pride with him. Deep down in his heart he might not be at all vexed at being made a driver, for he loves horses, but so many people are intriguing for that job that he frankly prefers to abstain from making any request for it. Moreover, he feels a profound satisfaction within himself for not doing so. Luckily, men of Bourru's sort are in the majority in the company; those brave fellows, who may be none too quick-witted, though they keep a clear head on the firing-post, are the solid foundation on which France is built, and they know it and derive from it a satisfaction of mind that gives them keen enjoyment.

Thus they go on, day in and day out, with insignificant interests filling the intervals between the hours of tragedy, of attacks and bombardments.

After this description of their monotonous life, possibly you will be tempted to repeat the stereotyped words which have so often fretted our poilus:

“After all, I suppose your worst enemy is the idleness of the long days, the boredom. . . .”

When you say that, you are thinking of the feeling of boredom as you have known it. Stop right there! For we are not talking about the same thing. The trouble is with the French language, which gives the same name to two very different feelings. Boredom! When you use the word you have the vision of some sleek functionary yawning behind an office window. I have heard good women voicing their pity, in identical words and with identical sympathies, for the boredom that may oppress a sleepy nurse in a hospital in the rear and for the “boredom” of the soldier doing sentinel duty in the trenches, twenty yards from the Boches. Identical words make us think the feelings

are identical. In the name of Bourru, I protest. The thing which you call the boredom of the trenches, my good people, is a thing infinitely tragic. Ah! How I wish I had the time to write a volume solely to analyze this feeling! I should like to throw a little light on this somber side of the soldier's heart, but how? You are well aware that I am just noting down a few features of the life of Bourru, and with great rapidity, like a man hurrying to record in his note-book what he has done during the day. But let me tell you that one thing which gives depth to the boredom of the soldier is the sensation of death prowling around him. . . .

So one goes on, day after day, week after week, at the front. One passes a grave, or a shell-hole; one hears the batteries firing, and knows that at any moment a salvo of shells from the enemy may crash down on the path he is treading, on the roof of boards that protects him in the second line. Yesterday the kitchens were bombarded; the

day before it was the mountain batteries. When one is going up to the crest, the balls will whistle at the place where he takes the path leading to Mamelon-Blanc; not a few of his comrades have already fallen here, and yet it is far behind the first line. At this moment one is not in the battle, one is doing a soldier's duty in the rear, making gabions or hurdles, or carrying planks—the peaceful work of a woodman—no, one is not really in danger now; Bourru does not have to run to escape grenades; I repeat that at this moment his battalion is in the second line, three or four kilometers behind the line of fire. But to-morrow he will go back to the top, on the east, where he will find the whole assemblage of dangers that modern war provides. After that he will come down to the cantonment once more, and then go back up again. . . .

And this continues through the weeks and months. Oh, yes, Bourru gets bored, and he will not tell you that this danger of death is

an element in his boredom,—he is too proud for that. But as for myself, I will tell you what I think. Man desires life with all the force that his race has collected and communicated to his fibers. He wants to endure, to live on farther and farther into the future. But by the exercise of his will he can conquer this powerful instinct of his physical being to live on, and can say to it: "It is my will that you keep silence, that you stay here in this forest where at any moment a shell may annihilate me." But that is by no means enough, and Bourru is obliged to keep up the parley:

"See here, you poor old body of mine, you don't understand anything but mere life, you want to get away from here, and you are always urging me to fight. When I wake up in the morning it is because you are not satisfied that I have that bitter taste in my mouth, just from thinking of the new day that is coming. It's all your fault that I have nightmares when I'm asleep and see

myself in the midst of exploding shells, crushed under my shelter or breathing my last in some abandoned hole. Quit it, you old carcass; we are here and we're going to stay. You can't understand, you mere clod of earth, all the reasons that have brought us here. So I shall not tell them to you, and for that matter, I couldn't if I would. I feel them all as if they came from far away in the past. . . .

"When we were nothing but boys and the teacher at Bligny, M. Hérard, told us about Alsace-Lorraine, this thing was beginning —for you were no longer the master of me, and something was already being born in me which, some day, was to prove stronger than any mere longing for life. It was something which, it seems, they call patriotism; and it's a very complicated thing. . . . You remember, there was a worthy man in the village, old father Baret, who told us one day that in '70 the Prussians had appeared in the village at the moment when he was at

the café in the middle of a game of billiards.

“‘I didn’t interrupt my game,’ he said, ‘and just to let them see that I was not afraid of them, I made a magnificent carom under the nose of a Prussian sergeant who was coming into the café. But I was holding the billiard-cue very tight; if he had insulted me I’d have broken his head with it!’

“I remember how you used to tremble when old father Baret told this little story to the child that we were then. And also there were the picture-books, and the Saint-Baldoux, the festival of the patron saint of the village, when from his pulpit the priest would tell us of our forefathers, of the history of France; and then there were the speeches of the deputy, who spoke about social justice, civilization, liberty, equality. . . .

“You see, you poor old body of mine, it’s all those things that have gone into our making and which oblige us to stay here in

this part of the Argonne where it rains bombs.

“And then, too, you see, the others keep staying here, and we’ve got to do as they do. And then, anyhow, you are forced to stay here. But you don’t take to it easily, and I’ve got to work to keep you down. If I let you speak, you keep on telling me about the joyous past, and the still more magnificent future; you call up the picture of my mother to move me to tears, you force great words into my head like Life, Happiness, Peace, Tranquillity—you paint me pictures of happy scenes where I am sitting with a group of friends, glass in hand, under an arbor. And you speak to me of love, of family, of children. . . . Ah, how you cling to life, you pleasure-lover! Down with you! At every instant there rises in my mind a longing for life to confront an image of death. At least that is my supposition, you understand, for as for me—I don’t see all this happening. I just see the landscape

look gloomier, and the sky blacker from clouds, and I hear the roar of the cannon grow more sinister; I am just terribly tired, and I find the soup unfit to eat. I sit moodily waiting for the coming night, during which I must do duty, up there!

"My face must be pretty mournful, for Ladoué is calling to me—'Hey, Bourru, cheer up! I bet you are bored. Here, I'll give you a tip that the cyclist just passed out to me. He said it just like this—'You know,' he said, 'the rumor is going round that the war won't last forever!'"

And Ladoué bursts out laughing.

"Well," concludes Bourru, "I wish the time for work would hurry up, I've got to have something to do. I guess I've got the blues to-night."

XIII

SENTINEL DUTY

BOURRU, soldier of the second class, is coming out of his hole in the ground early this morning, as he does every morning. Hardly has his head reached the level of the trench when he rubs his eyes and exclaims, "Hello! It's been snowing!" Instantly his face lights up with the joyful surprise, for it is not the mournful yellowish landscape of an aging winter that is presented to his eyes, but the very first snow of the year, clean, sparkling, merry in the sunlight. Nature has put on a fancy mask that she may laugh a little.

Bourru stands looking at the landscape. Although he has been here for many months,

it is a long time since he has "seen" that landscape with the eyes of the spirit. What could you expect? When one is just a good machine for killing Boches, how can one find the time for singling out the things of beauty that live in the mists of the valleys or in distant woodland prospects?

But to-day Bourru stands fixed in contemplative admiration. An old sentence from his school-books is running through his memory—"Nature is clad in her splendid cloak of ermine"—and the words rouse in his mind a long train of visions. He recalls his boyish delight in rolling up great balls of snow; he thinks of winter evenings in the family circle on the farm, when they sat around the ingle-nook drinking white wine and munching chestnuts, while outside the wind whistled and the dogs kept tune with their howls and, within, the demure young girls instinctively threw glances at the stout forms of the boys. And the old people would tell their long, long stories—they had

time for it in the winter, that season of holiday that would continue and continue . . . until springtime. And then, at New Year's, there would be presents for the mother to distribute to the children with tears in her eyes. . . . All is naïve, uncorrupted, white, in the childlike soul of my Bourru.

Crash! Boom! Suddenly a great beast of a shell explodes in the snow at a little distance, as incongruous as some coarse breach of etiquette from a blundering fool in a drawing-room during the recital of a rare, noble poem.

"Shut up, you black beast! You make me sick!"

But in vain does Bourru try to recall his tender and endearing vision—his soul has once more become fierce and brutal, as becomes a man who is on his way to drink down his "juice" and then take his turn on the look-out.

He arrives at his post.

"Ah, here you are!" says the comrade he is relieving.

"Nothing new?" asks Bourru.

"Fritz is shooting this way. Be careful and don't let him see you."

"No danger!"

And they change places. One man goes off, glad of the chance to lie down for a few peaceful hours in the depths of a dug-out; another man has taken his place at a little aperture opening toward the enemy.

Bourru takes a look round. The parapet is unchanged; still the same wall of sand-bags and gabions, thrown together pell-mell in defiance of the laws of equilibrium. There are logs to prop it up at the points where it leans too dangerously; in this way it will last for some hours yet, perhaps for some days even, until the trench-mortars go to work again and demolish it.

The peep-hole opens through this wall—a little slit between two sand-bags placed crooked on purpose, so that the hole may

seem to have come about by accident. In order that the opening, seen from outside, may not show against the sky, an empty sack has been suspended inside it, to form a "photographer's hood." When the observer is looking out he has the hood behind his head, and for the Boche out in front there is no alteration in the appearance of the wall.

"I've got to see what's going on," Bourru says to himself, but he still waits a few minutes. It seems very simple, doubtless, to risk a glance through the slit in the wall. But when you know that Blanchard, Renaud, Cortu, and many another got a bullet in the head at the exact moment when he took a peep—well, it's all right to be named Bourru and to wear the *croix de guerre*, but—you hesitate!

Not very long, of course. With great caution Bourru slips his head under the hood; the enemy's wall, made out of bags just like ours, is thirty yards away. In front of it is thrown up rubbish of all sorts, with

old gabions, twisted barbed-wire, and *chevaux-de-frise* which the snow cannot completely disguise. In the distance the plain opens out in a white expanse, dotted here and there by dark little clumps of trees; on the horizon a church steeple stands out above hills whose beautiful lines join harmoniously in a dark blue base for the thin white clouds above them.

"And to think that all that land is our own! Ah, they've got to get off it, the robbers!" For a moment Bourru feels the rage of a feudal lord dispossessed of a fine domain.

"If only I could see one of their loopholes, the beasts! I'd start them jumping!" But no fissures can be seen in the opposing wall.

Bourru lowers his head and retires. It is time—spat! a bullet comes straight through the opening. A hole remains in the hood as indubitable evidence of the risk he has run.

Our man turns pale and staggers a little;

his heart beats fast and his fingers are twitching. Does it surprise you? Perhaps you thought that at the least the explosion of a hundred-pound bomb was necessary to kill a brave man? For Bourru is brave; he is going to prove it, and without having to leap over the parapet crying "Forward!"

The humble soldier first stands still for a few minutes monotonously repeating, "Ah, good! Good! That was a close shave!" But then another idea comes to him. "I've got to look out again—through that same hole—for the deuce of it is that the bombing last night closed up all the others!"

Do you understand that a mighty little thing is needed to gain admission among the heroes? Bourru is all alone in his nook in the trenches, under the winter sky, in the early morning silence broken only by rare rifle cracks,—is he going to move his head those three or four inches to look out through the hole? It would be so easy to sit down in the bottom of the trench. . . .

Fifteen minutes later, the lieutenant appears unexpectedly on his round. Bourru's head emerges from the hood under which he is watching the enemy, and he reports phlegmatically:

"Nothing new."

"Good; carry on," says the officer.

And our soldier takes his place again under the hood, before the opening through which he can see the crows hovering over the landscape.

XIV

A VISIT FROM THE COLONEL

BOURRU and his comrades are at work digging a new trench. During the last attack, some days ago, they managed to push forward some ten yards—which was great work! But what a situation! It is a dare-devil's trench, pure and simple. To get to it, you must first of all crawl through a connecting trench less than half a yard deep, slip under a rail that used to serve as support to a ruined shelter, then, still crawling, get across an old beam,—and at this moment, with less than eight inches of earth to protect you, you run the risk of being seen from Cheppy—and in this way you finally get to the trench.

It cannot be dug fast, this trench—the ground is very hard, you must work lying down, and the balls are whistling. To make his men hustle Sergeant Goupy has conceived a bright idea.

“Say, boys, hurry up and get the trench in shape—I just got word that the colonel is coming this way!”

Of course, the sergeant made up that story, but when you have to make men work, you know you try whatever tricks you can invent.

Ever since morning the men have been talking about nothing but this visit, highly improbable as it seems to them.

“You bet your life he won’t come,” says one; “he’d be a fool to try it!”

And, as a matter of fact, a volley of grenades arrives every minute from the other side, and the “Sis-Boom!” from the batteries at Cheppy is never interrupted.

“I should say he won’t come!” says Bourru. “If I were in his place, you bet I

wouldn't go and get myself blown up for nothing!"

"Oh, thunder!" chimes in Lachard; "you never know what that fellow will do next—he's always up to something queer!"

Lafut, nicknamed Booze, who has not yet forgotten the two weeks he spent in jail for a recent "jamboree," is grumbling:

"I'm telling you that he will come, all right, and what's more he'll give hell to somebody when he gets here!"

"Well, if the old boy ever gets into this hole," puts in another, "he will need a damn lot of nerve with him."

"While you're waiting, keep at it!" orders the sergeant.

And they do keep at it, but under what conditions! Bourru is placing an old German shield on the crumbling earth thrown up in front of him and with the tip of his finger is trying to steady the mass of iron, even while the bullets are flattening themselves against it.

All at once, they hear a familiar, clean-cut voice:

“Hello, boys! How goes it?”

It is the colonel! As usual, he is faultlessly neat, with waxed mustache, trim sky-blue tunic, and spotless white cuffs. In defiance of all regulations he is wearing his eternally new cap with gold bands, and from beneath the visor two sparkling eyes, made to command, are fastened on Bourru, near whom the colonel has just emerged from the connecting-trench.

But nothing like this can intimidate Bourru, for hardly has the colonel appeared when he feels the hand of our soldier seize him by the skirt of his tunic, and in an instant the colonel is rudely flung flat on the ground.

It was time. On top of the parapet, a yard behind the officer, sizzled a grenade. But for the quick movement of our soldier in throwing the colonel prone on his face, there would have been one

more vacancy in the ranks of the French colonels.

"Thanks, old fellow," says the colonel; "you have saved my life, and you will get a citation for it. But you have made me soil my tunic, hang it all! For your punishment, you can come and clean it, and then have lunch with me."

"What did I tell you?" asks Lafut, when the colonel has departed. "Didn't I tell you he'd give hell to somebody?"

XV

THE GRAVES OF SEPTEMBER, 1914

THE cantonments where the regiments from Vauquois passed their periods of rest were little villages in the Meuse country which, in ordinary times, could not have held a tourist's attention for five minutes. They were all alike—Auzéville, Jubécourt, Ville-sur-Cousance, Julvécourt, Ippécourt; a single street bordered by barns, with walls of mud-plaster, in which the soldiers passed their lives huddled up on straw that was none too fresh. Why should I trouble you with the story of their insipid life in the rest-camps? The insignificant events that filled it would be tiresome to re-

port; you would only see Bourru and all the others intent on the betterment of their material surroundings. Bourru goes to buy eggs and milk from mother Dupont or father Minard; he racks his wits to find a comfortable corner in a loft; he raises a fuss over the tormenting rats that come in the night and wake you up biting your hand; he complains because he does not find the hospitality of the Meuse folk warm enough, though when he leaves the village he will go off with a tender feeling in his heart, saying, "They are good people, all right." Nor shall I expatiate on the exercises and the manœuvres, those nightmares of the soldier's life.

But once in a while, there would arise out of this monotonous existence grave moments, carrying the souls of the men away as into a dream. The graves of the soldiers in the battle of September, 1914, were an occasion for such an experience. I was speaking a moment ago of the commonplace character of the villages along the Meuse, but at the

very moment at which I am writing, if you will look, you can see the landscape become inexpressibly moving. Two years ago there was fighting here, between the troops of the mobile defence of Verdun and the army of the Crown Prince. How far away it is, that battle of the Marne, in 1914! How long ago, when the soldiers had red trousers and caps!

During every sojourn at Ville-sur-Cousance, at Jubécourt, or at Ippécourt, Bourru used to feel that his comrades who had died in the beginning of the war belonged already to past history. A halo of glory shone upon them. And nevertheless he had been one in their ranks. The thing gave him a queer feeling of being an old man who remembered having known, in his youth, men who were illustrious.

What a spell those tombs thus have over the soldiers! The most hardened among them feel "something that stirs them up," to use Bourru's words, when chance brings

them face to face with a wooden cross standing in the middle of a field. And there are many such crosses. On the hillsides, and in the plain, they sometimes crowd each other. In certain nooks, also, they rise isolated—almost unsociable, it would seem.

Come, let us follow Bourru and some of his fellows on a walk through a little valley a few miles from Jubécourt. It is one of those autumn afternoons in which nature constrains us to tender meditation. The little group of soldiers tread down suffering plants as they walk; in the distance the voice of the cannonade rises like the great lamentation of an agonized land. A soft melancholy rests upon the spirits of the men, and its savor is pleasant to them, such is its contrast with the brutality of their customary struggle.

Hard by a certain bush they suddenly notice a grave. A mound all but hidden in the grass, a cross, half-falling and without inscription, and a soldier's weather-beaten cap

are all that announce that here rests for eternity a hero of the battle of September. All about, in the damp vale, is silence, solitude, and comfortless shade. The trees seem to be rooted up in this valley of death where the herbs are rotting. Your imagination pauses over the terrible work of the earth with the human body; it has disappeared in the soil, is dissolving into brute matter. Soon every trace of it will have vanished, and here where a drama was enacted in men's agony, the future passer-by will look upon no more than a sea of grass rolling its indifferent waves.

The soldiers have paused, and confused feelings are at work in their minds. They would be quite incapable of putting these feelings into words; but have they need of words in order to know the melancholy poetry of the grave? Only look upon them, these Bourrus, silent and motionless before that cross—it is as if they were listening to the sound of music within them. Poor, un-

cultivated peasants, you say? To me they seem like men inspired!

Undoubtedly their first emotion sprang from the selfish instinct of self-defence which our love of life arouses at any image of death.

"To think that I might be lying there where he is!" thinks each one.

But now the melancholy that springs up irresistibly at the sight of a grave is ennobling the faces of these rude soldiers.

It was long ago, in his native village, during burial services at the church or the cemetery, that Bourru began to feel that there was something more in life than toiling along the furrow like a beast of burden. All that is philosophy, all that is religion, all that is of the spirit, entered his soul at those moments as a ray of sunshine falls across a misty landscape. Emotions and ideas lifted themselves within him, coming from far down in the depths of his unconscious self. To-day the same process is at work in him.

Meditating before this deserted grave, Bourru is imbued with a new emotion—the fear that his brother is sleeping there unknown, forever forgotten. In this desolate valley our soldier feels the force of the implacable law which provides that matter shall efface the traces of even the most grandiose dramas. And Bourru muses. He sees the soldiers of 1914 marching forward through this valley into battle. The terrain is propitious for an attack. What feelings must have burned in their hearts! They looked into each other's eyes in full comradeship, while death hovered above them.

“If I fall,” one of them was saying, “here is the address of my wife; write to her, won't you?”

The other in turn gives the address of his family, and a clasp of hands seals the agreement. Suddenly the shrapnel descends, and a soldier falls; no one has time to come to his aid. But what grief in the hearts of those who abandon him! In a wild burst of reso-

lution they look back for the last time at their fallen comrade and take oath that this picture shall never leave their minds. Nature herself seems to take part in this solemn engagement, for the mutilated trees, the torn plants, the shredded soil, all seem to bleed for a wound that cannot heal, and the ancient meadow seems to show the face of a wild mother cradling her dead child.

Ah, no! The soldier will not be forgotten, for back at home, in the circle of his friends and his family, when the news of his death brought its shock, the memory of the hero seemed immortal, so great was the emotion of his comrades, the grief of his kindred.

“And yet, here you are, poor fellow,” murmurs Bourru, “here you are, all alone, forgotten. Hardly two years have passed, and I, who am still here, don’t even know your name. Where are they, those comrades who swore they would remember? Dead, perhaps, or hardened by other griefs. There is someone to remember you—wife,

mother, children? And yet, who knows? Already, perhaps, your picture is fading out of their minds! And the winter is coming, and then the spring; the plowmen will efface the marks of cannon-balls, the lark will sing, the trees will bud again, and complete oblivion will swallow you up like a faded leaf."

Oh, no, Bourru does not say all this! But he feels it, sometimes in pity, sometimes in revolt against the injustice of life, because the living never turn to contemplate those who remain immobile in the shadow.

And behold how, through this pity and this revolt, our humble peasant rises to a higher moral life. Bourru is determined not to forget; in him the cult of the dead is becoming a reality.

Behold him now, my Bourru, see him busy straightening crosses, putting graves in order, tearing up the wild weeds on the mounds, and then, baring his head, praying. . . .

And now he goes back to the cantonment, but with his mind musing in a vague melancholy. The hour has come for the festival of the sunset; far away, over the thatched roofs, innumerable threads of gossamer stretched above the ground form a silken carpet across which the sun leaves a shining pathway as when it sinks beneath the sea. And the soldiers think of that other shining pathway which the memory of their fallen comrades ought to leave in good men's minds.

Under the oblique rays, still brilliant, every tree is resplendent with its peculiar hues. The slender birches stand out pale and yellow, almost diaphanous; the cherries flame forth like red torches; the ruddiness of the oaks triumphs over the somber green of the pines. So should the glory of the soldiers who have died for their country illuminate the living, in such a way as to bring into relief the virtues proper to each.

Over all the hill-crests, spread out as far as the eye can reach, falls an ineffable peace

and majesty, and all nature vibrates in a divine harmony. Oh, eternal beauty of this splendid and simple spectacle! At the moment when the sun sinks to rest below the horizon, is there a soul, even of the coarsest, that does not feel some revelation of poetic power, however unsuspected?

To-day Bourru and his friends have been moved by the memory of a comrade; they will keep the impression a long time. The spirit of the dead will live on in their hearts, and it is this fact, perhaps, which explains that strange impression of nobility that you have experienced when Bourru, meeting you in the street, at Paris, has fastened on you his deep-seeing eyes. They were eyes which, during the periods of rest at Jubécourt, at Ville-sur-Cousance, at Julvécourt, at Ippécourt, had often looked beneath the sod into the graves of his comrades of September, 1914.

XVI

BAGGING A SENTINEL

WHEN you were a child were you always itching to get away on an expedition into the great black forest in which your mother had seen hideous serpents and warned you of them, that forest which your imagination peopled with beasts still more monstrous—but whom it would be splendid to encounter? If you were, you know the strange excitement of hair-breadth risks, and you hardly need my poor words to see the fire burning in the eyes of Bourru while Sergeant Stokreisser is mysteriously talking to him, in a hushed voice, in a nook of the trenches.

“Yes, I saw the colonel. They want us

to see if we can get the Boche sentinel in the woods. We'll get two weeks off—it's for tonight. Are you game?"

Bourru's heart is jumping at the chance, but he takes his time before giving in, like a man who wants to enjoy his dive.

"That depends. . . . Who's going along?"

"There'll be Huguenin, Dufour—Aubouin—La Volige—nervy boys, eh! . . . And maybe Faraud, too. . . ."

"Oh, that fellow!" grunts Bourru. "Better look out—he'll have cold feet, for sure. . . ."

All day long the sergeant is running through the battalion's trenches. In great secrecy he is making offers, declining others . . . and coming to terms. One man accepts, but on condition that his pal shall be in it; another one makes demands worthy of an American millionaire to whom a combine is proposed.

Ten o'clock comes. The five men and the sergeant are near Cigalerie. Calm weather,

a dark night—but none too dark. Far away you hear the ordinary noises; with a few crackling rifle-shots.

“I’ve a hunch that the Lord is for us,” says Dufour. “We’ll make it!”

The men are armed with revolvers and knives; their helmets are covered with blue tent-canvas, of coarse texture, to prevent reflection from the rockets.

The sergeant explains his plan. Divided into two groups, twenty yards apart, they are going to crawl to the little willow-tree; then they will turn to the left, twenty paces from the river, and they will come to the wood where the Boche sentinels are.

“If I’m hit,” he adds, “Bourru takes command. And we’re going to see this thing through, you know—we’ve got to bring back a sentinel. . . .”

At the moment of going over the top, Bourru is thinking:

“What an ass I am, starting into another scrap to get my head broken! Am I always

going to be like this? And I swore last time I wouldn't do it again. . . . Well, anyway, now is no time to hang back."

It is not easy, this crawling on your stomach. After half an hour of it your shoulders are wrenched out of joint, and yet you have hardly come a hundred yards. But you have to move slowly in order to make no slightest noise.

Thunder! There's Dufour starting a pebble! Up goes a rocket. Our men, plastered to the ground, check every motion and even stop breathing. If they are seen, the machine gun will begin to spit. . . .

The rocket has gone out. All remains quiet—thank heaven! The men breathe freely again, but the silence seems to possess a solemnity; one is afraid of profaning it by resuming his course.

The ground has been riddled with shell-holes, and is obstructed by rubbish of every sort. What's this? An old network of barbed-wire that still stands firm.

Luckily, Bourru has his shears with him. He cuts a passage for himself. It is not very hard—he is still two hundred yards from the enemy sentinels. . . . Hello, there's a dog barking!

“Ah, the beasts!” thinks La Voltige; “they’ve got war-dogs to track us. We’re done for!”

For you know well enough, I suppose, that if a man is discovered at a hundred and fifty yards from the trench, there’s no chance of his escaping. He would be shot down before he had gone five yards. The best luck he can have is to find a shell-hole where he can wait—sometimes for two or three days—for a good moment to run for his trench.

The dog stops his noise. A light appears over toward the German trench. It is moving—you can see it passing the loop-holes one after another. Does it mean, maybe, that the Germans are getting something ready for us?

Here we are at last by the torn little willow-tree; only a hundred yards more!

All at once a frog jumps into the brook. Without a moment's thought Faraud lets off his revolver.

"Hang the idiot!" thinks Bourru. "I knew he'd have cold feet!"

On the instant the fusillade grows furious. Bang! Bang! Bang! From every quarter the machine guns spit out their whistling balls.

Lucky our brave fellows are quick-witted. They are well aware that at night the machine guns shave the ground in order to get men lying down. Four of our scouts have thrown themselves flat in a hole. Bourru, who happened to be near the willow, seeing no hole at the moment, climbed the tree and flattened himself against the trunk. The balls are passing in a sheet underneath him, cutting the air between him and his comrades.

At the end of fifteen minutes the fury of

the firing abates. After all, "they" had seen nothing; so why should they keep it up? But all the same enough has happened to cool a man's ardor. Shall we go on? Our men take counsel with one another.

"I'm going on, myself," says Aubouin. "I want those two weeks off."

So the crawling continues, still more slowly. Our men are coming up to the enemy—the sentinels must be only ten or fifteen yards away, behind that black thing you think you see there. The motions of our men are as soft and slow as those of a cat about to leap on her prey.

Suddenly the man in the lead stops. One yard in front of him he has just discovered an unexpected wire entanglement that appears to surround the sentinels' position. For their protection the Boches have made themselves cages like those of beasts at the menagerie.

"Oh, the devil! How are we going to get at them?"

Stokreisser and Bourru lift their heads three inches from the ground and look despairingly at the wires, which have old cans suspended among them—the least touch will start the whole thing clattering and raise the alarm.

Bourru feels a bitter taste in his mouth. It is the sign of moral defeat; Napoleon watching the catastrophe at Waterloo felt it for the same reason that Bourru does, ascertaining that his patrol is going to fail.

Suddenly a man's shoulders move in the dark, above the net-work; it is the German sentinel, vaguely disturbed, investigating. Nothing in sight—absolute quiet; the scouts press their bodies flat to the ground. The shadow disappears. What's to be done?

Sergeant Stokreisser crawls along the wire net-work to the right, while Bourru does the same thing to the left. Suddenly the sergeant's heart leaps up in a tumult of joy—for he finds that when the net-work reaches the brook it stops. The Boches

thought the little river was protection enough for their sentinel.

A signal is transmitted from man to man, and the scouts crawl to the brook. Without a spoken word, they come to agreement. Silently—very silently—they let themselves down into the water. Fortunately it is only a yard and a half deep at its deepest. But what a racket a man makes going through the water! You can't imagine it—but try it and you will know.

Fifteen yards more, and we are only four paces from the sentinels. There they are in the shadow. Hearts beat fast now. Here is a lucky tree; Bourru helps Dufour up, La Voltige pushes the sergeant. . . .

* * * * *

Well, yes, at the risk of making you smile, I shall use the threadbare phrase of the dime novel: "Quick as a flash" our soldiers have leaped upon the Boches. . . . Five minutes later the pair of them are bound, gagged, and rolled up in a tent-cloth like big

sausages. They have had no chance to make a sound. And a nightingale lamenting the sorrows of her heart a few yards away has not even interrupted her song.

"But see here!" says Stokreisser, "we don't want to drag both those bundles there,—one is a plenty."

"We've got to quiet the one we leave behind," whispers La Voltige. "If we don't he'll try to call out the minute we get away, and if he gives the alarm it's good-night for us on the way back."

"Sure—we've got to fix him," the soldiers agree. "It's him or us, and it had better be him. All's fair in war."

"Well! What do you say?"

"Well, *I* haven't got the heart," says Bourru.

"Neither have I," avow all the others.

And they go off, these sensitive creatures, carrying one Boche and leaving on the spot another who is blowing like a seal behind his gag.

XVII

THE SADDEST DUTY

*A Letter from Madame Charel to Captain
Lair, in Command of a Company in the
—th Regiment of Infantry*

MY dear friend, I am so happy to know that my son is under your command. My poor husband loved you so much—and I have had many proofs of the goodness of your heart. I have a presentiment that you will bring good fortune to my dear Luke. You know how devoted I am to him, for he is the only reason I have for living, the only person who can carry on the noble work his father left.

A moment ago, when I determined to

write to you, I was intending to tell you that Luke is a weak and sickly boy—that he would give better service in some sedentary employment than in the trenches. But I hesitated. So many mothers repeat this pathetic untruth. And yet it is true, Luke is very delicate—but no, I am unwilling to say more; I know that your scrupulous conscience will tell you what is just for him. I know that you will spare him all you can—for we must have young men for the France of to-morrow! You will be a protector to him, as my poor husband once was to you, when he did you a service that you will remember—but pardon me, I am beginning to beg. And yet when I think of the ghastly things that might happen, when I hear my beloved son, wounded, dying, calling to me in the night, with great tears in his boyish eyes—— Oh, there are moments when I am almost beside myself! Tell me that you will protect him, promise it to me! I cannot bear to think of his dear head pierced

by a ball—it is too horrible! You will remember how pleasant they were, those evenings long ago when you used to come, as a college-boy of eighteen, to spend your holidays with us; and we walked along the river-bank with Luke running in childish joy in and out among the wild flowers. . . . But I am beside myself. I hardly know what I am saying to you, or what I ought to say.

No, I will be strong; I want my Luke to do his duty nobly, like the fine man he is. I shall be so proud of him. And I have faith; if he is at your side, I am sure that death will not dare take my poor boy from me.

*Part of a Letter from Private Bourru to His
Friend Jolly, in the Hospital*

. . . And it was some fight, believe me. Ever since the mine went off, we had been there, all three platoons, in the hammer-shaped trench—you know, the one on the

left. And it was raining dynamite, believe me! The "easter-eggs," the "turtles," the "rat-tails," and the "sand-bags" were coming down like hail. All the same, they couldn't faze *us*. The captain had sent Corporal Taupin down in the dug-out with six fellows. One of them was the Charel boy, of the class of '16—you remember him?—he was always the captain's favorite, and a nice lad, too, but he'd get blisters on his hands the minute he touched a spade-handle. It was their turn in the trenches, because we had been there last time—guess you haven't forgotten that, eh, down there in your white sheets? All of a sudden a big torpedo went off right by their dug-out—Boom!—and another one just after it, and then another. It was enough to scramble your brains like eggs. Well, the blokes in the dug-out must have thought, "If the Boches keep shoving 'em at us like that, we're gonners," because of a sudden they came scrambling out of the dug-out, making triple time. They were

pretty scared rats, at that. Mouchereau's eyes were sticking out of his head like a skinned rabbit's, and the Charel kid was yelling, "Mamma! Mamma!"

But what did they do but run right into the captain, who was standing at the entrance to the trench? You know the captain, eh? He's all right, but he's no Sunday-school teacher when there's trouble on.

"Stop!" he yells; "or I'll blow your brains out!"

And he started in to tell 'em a few things—Lord, you ought to have heard it! "Call yourselves soldiers! Running away like scared rats! I'm ashamed of you! I'd never have believed it of the boys of the Twelfth—well, I'll turn in my resignation, I'm dishonored! . . . Look at the other fellows, they're laughing at you! . . . Aren't you the same fellows that did for two companies of Boches the first of March? Pull yourselves together! . . . duty . . . sacrifice . . . France . . ." and so on, and so on.

There's no use talking, at times like that the captain knows how to put ginger into you. Well, in a minute those blokes were beginning to say: "Pardon us, captain. . . . We're going back. . . ."

And it wasn't ten minutes after that when the Charel boy was killed, in the dug-out, by a shell that tore him to pieces.

As he was the captain's pet the fellows carried him back nicely in a tent-cloth, to please the "old man," and buried him at the "Barricade."

Fragments from the Diary of Captain Lair

Luke is dead! The son of Alice and of that fine man who was Pierre Charel. It is horrible! And I am tormented by a doubt—I must put my words on paper in order that I may try to know my mind. Poor boy! He was such a pretty child when I used to play with him years ago, in the days of the long vacations, when life was all before me

with its promises of love and happiness. His poor mother! How will she bear it? Her despair will be horrible, she will blame me. . . . I shall never dare look at her again!

Oh! I need to take refuge on the heights of the ideals to which I have devoted myself. There I may find rest. Come, let me rise above the tragic things of the hour. Did I not do my duty? All the logic I possess answers in the affirmative. I am an officer of the army; in the name of an ideal higher than man I have command over my men. Their strength has been entrusted to me that I may employ it as best I can in the interest of our native land. My duty is therefore to control that strength which, by a law of nature, tends to exert itself in the line of the least resistance. My men, like all others, need to spur their wills at every instant in order that devotion to duty may triumph over the instincts of weariness and fear. My rôle is to aid them to this victory over them-

selves; and I fill it almost always by appealing to their noble sentiments, so strong and so pure, but sometimes . . . Oh, heavens, these are not machines, my soldiers! They are men, like myself. Like all men they have moments when the animal gets the upper hand—moments which later on they bitterly regret—and my duty, when those moments come, is to sustain, even by force if necessary, the nobler part of their souls.

By employing all possible means I must keep them from committing an act of cowardice which would dishonor them. That is what I did to-day.

I ought to congratulate myself. The officer of the army must not forget that he does his work in the domain of brute force; and he who yielded to pity would be useless. At this moment it is a question of the life or death of our race. Individuals do not count; that is the full meaning of the orders given us by our great leaders when they say: "You must fall in your tracks sooner than

yield." That is the voice of our whole people. Oh, what a detestable sophist seems the philosopher who counselled us to "consider man not as a means but as an end." There is but one end to make certain of, at this hour—the life of the French nation, which alone will make possible the life of the individual. Such is the eternal law, and those who have applied it in times gone by appear in history as benefactors of humanity. I am thinking of our great kings and our illustrious generals. . . .

But my logic, however stern it may be, cannot prevent my heart from breaking when I think of poor Luke. He was such a fine fellow! To-day his fear got the best of him, but what of that? I know what war is; there does not live a man who can be brave at every hour. The greatest of heroes has his hours of misgiving. Just yesterday, did he not show magnificent bravery, this boy? And he was so devoted to me! When the company would pass in review his great

eyes would fasten upon me and would seem to say: "I love you, my captain, my old friend. . . ." And to-morrow I must write to tell his mother that he is dead!

"Ah, it is easy to be severe!" think the humble people, sometimes, when a cruel tyrant bears them down. But who will ever tell of the terrific struggles that take place in the hearts of certain leaders when they order their subordinates to sacrifice themselves—those secret struggles in which the victory brings such grief! "Be firm!" How many of the people who repeat the words have really understood their terrible meaning? I mean to be firm, not in the manner of the cowards who do wrong and yet save their own skins, nor in the manner of those who command sacrifices merely on paper, but in the manner of a true leader who, without weakening, can watch the blood flowing from the veins of those he loves—because duty demands it.

That firmness is what I showed to-day.

My mind can but approve it; it was my duty; I shall do the same to-morrow, if it is necessary. But in this hour, alone with myself, since the tears that rise to my eyes hinder me from writing, it is also my human privilege to weep.

XVIII

WAITING FOR A MINE TO EXPLODE

THERE are six soldiers and a corporal in the little post on the east —you know, the one that stands less than twenty yards from the Boches. For the moment all is perfectly quiet here.

Bourru has just explained, for the hundredth time, his favorite theory:

“For my part, I’d rather be in the first line, because when the bombing begins it’s always the second line that gets the worst of it. All you have to do out here is to watch the bombs going over your head.”

And since things are so quiet all the men are doing much as they please; whether pol-

ishing their rings, or reading over old letters, or scratching their backs, or looking at the clouds, they are just "killing time."

To fill out the scene round them you may imagine piles of sandbags forming a parapet such as the illustrated papers have shown you often enough.

Suddenly there comes a sergeant who says in low tones—you never speak out at this particular post—"Say, boys! You've got to keep your eyes open for the next few minutes. It looks as if the Boches were going to spring a mine on you—maybe twenty or thirty yards off, nobody knows exactly. As soon as it goes off jump into the hole it leaves and wait for us—we'll come to the rescue."

"All right," reply the men.

Let your mind rest on the soldiers a moment. You know them, they are the common troopers that you see every day—Bourru, a Burgundy vinegrower; Grossou, a brick-mason so heavy in his motions that

he always appears stuck in his mortar; Huguenin, whose cheeks went pale during years in the factory; Richard, a blond boy of the class of '15 who receives perfumed letters from his pretty mother; Gruppeau, the corporal, a farmer from the Brie country. Take them all together, they are just ordinary human creatures, with all the faults and failings of common humanity. If a moralist were to assign them their places in a scale of moral values, he would certainly not put them above the average of their fellowmen.

But a sergeant has just come to say a dozen words to them, and what a change! In a few minutes an inferno may open beneath their feet, but not one makes a motion to get away. They stand here, stoic, mute.

Do you understand what a tremendous leap they have just made upward in the scale of virtue and nobility? A moment ago they were just soldiers wondering when their soup would come; now they are heroes look-

ing without a quiver into the face of death that at any moment may accept their voluntary sacrifice.

This sudden mounting to the heights of moral valor is the reality we should see in the sublime drama if our eyes could penetrate beneath appearances. But just like myself, in all probability, you see nothing in the acts of these men except little gestures that seem insignificant and even ridiculous. One of them has his jaw working rapidly and appears to have difficulty in swallowing, another has let fall the ring that he was polishing and has forgotten to pick it up, and still another is opening his mouth and yawning incessantly. Grossou is mechanically repeating:

“This will blow the lid off.”

Corporal Gruppeau speaks. “Listen,” he says, “this is the way we’ll do it. See that you’ve got plenty of cartridges, and fill your sacks with grenades—you’ve got your canteens full, eh? When the thing goes off, let

every man be ready at the parapet. If you're blown up—oh, well, you're blown up. But if you're not hurt, run for the hole. And at that minute we've got to give the Boches all the hell we can with the grenades."

This advice given, silence reigns over the little group. Except that Vanneau, who has his ear to the ground, maintains he can hear muffled sounds, right underneath him.

The waiting continues—and how long the minutes seem! The soldiers are sitting down, with their rifles between their knees; and often their eyes are lowered to the ground, as if they could already see the first flames of the red terror. Is it possible that this firm, hard soil supporting them is going to fly to pieces like a soap-bubble?

As I look steadily into the eyes of Bourru I seem to see pictures passing before them—a peasant's cottage that stands dreaming beside a vineyard overlooking a broad plain; a hollow willow and two walnut-trees, near

the door, which lend poetry to the picture. On the steps, half hidden by the shade of the trellis, stands Bourru's mother, with the gentle and anxious face of the peasant woman, always disquieted about the future. She is looking out into the dusk to see whether her son, delayed in the fields, is not yet coming. In the kitchen the soup is boiling. . . . The dear old mother! Just the other day she sent a money-order, piously pretending that "she had lots too much money for herself."

"Poor old mother!" thinks Bourru. "She will be all alone to look after the vines, as in the first years when she was a widow. To think that she may have to wait every night, all through her old age, for one who will not have come back from the war! Her little eyes may be trembling as she looks in vain toward the horizon where the laborers are returning, and the soup may not be on the fire, because she may lack the heart to prepare it."

Bourru looks at Grossou, who seems melancholy.

"Come, cheer up, old boy! Don't worry about it! I'll bet you're still thinking about your Berrichonne"—for that is Grossou's name for his wife.

"Oh, I ain't worrying—but it's good-by to wifie if this thing gets you."

Richard, the young fellow who is so full of life, is convinced for his part, though without knowing why, that their little post won't be blown up.

But possibly you do not care to have me go on with this story? A mine-explosion is a very commonplace affair—every day the communiqué announces a few of them. You have a good picture, have you not, of the possibilities? Either the little post is directly above the mine, and in that case—turn your eyes away from the ghastly cauldron; or the tunnel goes a little to the side of it, and if so, you know that Bourru and his comrades are going to plunge into the pit. . . .

XIX

OCCUPYING THE MINE PIT

THE Boches must have felt rather foolish when the mine exploded—for the “funnel” blew out hardly fifteen yards in front of their line, and their own parapet suffered considerable damage. This often happens. You must remember that the miner digs his tunnel in fear of being buried alive, asphyxiated, or blown up, and he hurries to get through his perilous job. If his superior does not keep a careful eye on his work, the mine may explode far from where it was meant to.

The Boches were astonished, as I was saying; but that is merely a supposition, for fear is infinitely stronger than surprise.

In precipitate flight they have abandoned the part of the trench where the parapet no longer protected them.

Bourru and his five companions are already crouching in the bottom of their new hole. Huguenin, at the noise of the explosion, had a sudden rush of memory back to a tragic moment long ago when the red flame of a catastrophe wrought havoc in his factory. Richard closed his eyes that he might not see the blocks of stone soaring into the air. Grossou buried his shoulder still more deeply between two protecting sand-bags. Still another man made a gesture with his hands as if to ward off the flying stones.

For this was certainly a perilous moment in the great drama—only, the actors here were too much hardened to the risks of their profession to lose their wits for long.

“Come on, boys!” yelled the corporal.

Hands clutched at the wall of sand-bags, and bodies leapt up, stumbled, rose again—and a moment later the soldiers reached the

new hole, five yards in diameter; for a heavy smoke was masking their movements.

In a moment their new work-shop was being organized.

"Come here, you two—pile up earth on this side of the hole to make a parapet. You, Bourru, keep your eye out for the Boches. Richard! Get the grenades in place!"

It is a simple task the men have—to stay in the "funnel" until their comrades in the rear can dig a trench to connect the French line with the hole they have occupied. As a tactical problem it is child's play; but remember that, from this minute on, the six men can count on nothing but that future connecting-trench for re-entering their lines, because the bullets will always be shaving the ground above.

Now that the last wreaths of smoke from the explosion are rising to heaven, the Germans try to get back into their trench. It is not easy—the trench mortars have been

turned on the whole position. Grenades, petards, torpedoes, and missiles of all kinds are cutting the air in such numbers that one cannot calculate their directions.

The six soldiers are hard at work in their hole. Every thirty or forty seconds Richard and Huguenin throw a grenade into the opposing trenches to keep the Boches from reoccupying them. Bourru is shooting without a pause. Grossou and another man are building up a parapet. Not a man is speaking a word. If you are listening for heroic words you are losing your time, and if you are looking for men to strike sublime attitudes, you must go elsewhere. This is nothing but a work-shop, where six good hands are straining at their toil; you won't hear anything but an occasional grunt, a scolding word, an oath—and you will see faces very pale or very red, as in moments of intense effort.

But what are the boys behind doing? You cannot hear them digging. . . . If only the

trench gets finished out to us before the Boches come back in front!

"Don't you worry about that, boys!" says the corporal. "You get your job done and the rest is easy."

But it's no fun, all the same. Grenades go on exploding here and there, not far from our soldiers—one can see that they have been thrown wild.

"Well, what about it? Are they coming, those fellows?" asks Richard.

One — two — three grenades fall, still nearer to the hole, and the fragments go whistling over our men. And then comes a surprise—the grenades are coming from the French side. It must be from a group that does not know we have taken the hole.

"Stop! Stop! We're holding the hole!" cry out six soldiers.

Their comrades recognize their mistake. Now one can hear them digging.

But a German must have made his way into the abandoned trench, for the projec-

tiles from that side begin to come nearer. All at once Grossou's hand flies to his throat, in an effort to stop a hole from which the blood is pouring; but he sinks to the ground without a word.

A moment later a grenade falls in the middle of the group. It is smoking—in a second it will burst. . . . In a flash the corporal has seized it and sent it back . . . none too soon!

They must chase away the enemy grenade-throwers who have installed themselves within easy reach in front. Huguenin rips out an oath, rises to get a better sight, and in five seconds he hurls into the Boche trenches three "spoon" grenades—you know, the kind that explode on contact. Take my advice, and when you have to occupy a trench always use this kind; they are the best. But a shower of bullets has passed, and Huguenin is now squatting in the bottom of the hole, looking at his arm that hangs inert, with blood running from the sleeve.

Thanks to him, however, the enemy grenade-throwers have stopped work—he must have got some of them. Only those who are out of reach continue to throw projectiles, which come to the ground some yards away from us. Richard is getting nervous.

“Come on, you fellows, hurry up with your picks and spades. We can’t hold here——”

They can hear the digging going on with redoubled speed; the work ought to be well advanced. This thing has already lasted thirty minutes. And suddenly Bourru is saying: “There are only ten grenades left!”

They must be used sparingly, in order to hold out at least fifteen minutes more. There! That one was well placed. A Boche had showed his head, and the missile fell squarely on it.

It is lucky that the parapet opposite was torn down, for but for that the Boches would have come back long ago.

"Attention! Look out! Here's a torpedo coming our way!"

The thing swings down through the air and falls a few yards away, with a formidable explosion. You can feel your lungs bursting, your head going empty, and something like a fist-blow at the base of your brain,—the characteristic sensation from the shock. Red, green, and yellow lights dance before your eyes. Richard has suddenly leaped erect, with a wild look—you can see that the commotion is driving him crazy. In his instant of madness he will try to run—no matter where. . . . Bourru has just time to catch him by the foot and drag him down. . . . None too soon! A shower of bullets swings over the hole like the blade of a guillotine.

"Hurry up, boys! Hurry up! There's only three of us left!"

But the three, without relaxation, continue shooting and throwing grenades. Finally the wall of their hole begins to crumble—the

trench has been dug. Comrades are arriving with sacks full of grenades. The hole will be fortified, and to-morrow you will read in the paper: "At Vauquois, the usual battle of grenades."

XX

THE SECRET GARDEN

YES, it is true; Bourru never speaks of his dreams of love, and more than once you have been surprised into saying, "This Bourru must have the heart of an old bachelor." But there are subtle reasons for his reticence. In order to understand them fully, you would have to look deep into our soldier's soul at the moment when, with a singular expression, he is watching his comrades writing to their wives or sweethearts. Across the face of Bourru, at these moments, there passes an expression of something like bitter pride; you would say that our soldier is resisting a great temptation, that his heart is breaking under

it, but that at the same time he is lifted high in his own respect.

Let me tell you my interpretation of this. Before he came to war, Bourru, like the others, knew a young girl in his village the glance of whose eye used to set his heart beating. It began very long ago, he no longer remembers when. At first it was a tender feeling of comradeship, such as existed between other boys and girls in the same village; but very soon Bourru had come to know that he was happier on the days when he had met Suzanne and she had smiled at him.

Oh, he had never made a declaration to her! In the countryside one is prudent, one weighs matters very carefully the moment they promise to become serious. Well, Suzanne was the daughter of a well-to-do farmer; she was industrious and painstaking, she would be a good wife for him; but there was no hurry. Bourru was only twenty-eight, and before he married he wanted to

acquire a little piece of land that borders the Maison-Rouge.

After this purchase had been made, he might see. Meanwhile he contented himself, each time he saw the young girl, with saying:

"Ah, there you go, Suzanne!"

"Just so, Louis, I'm going to drive the cows home."

And the two young people went their ways glad at heart. Each of the two was secretly sure that they "were suited to each other" and that some day they would be married.

The war is on, and Bourru is at Vauquois. At the beginning our soldier said to himself, "There's no need writing, I'll be back in three months." After having looked death in the face, Bourru wanted to write to Suzanne; a mad desire took possession of him to declare his love to the young girl before he should die. But a feeling of pride restrained him. What! Go begging for

love when at any minute you may vanish from the face of the earth—that would be silly! “If I tell her I love her,” he reasons, “she will love me, I know it; and then if I am killed, she will suffer, and that will make one more widow, without even a marriage.”

And still, how he is tempted to write love letters! He sees others doing so all round him; it is the great occupation, in the hours of rest, of all the soldiers. One has only to see the brilliant eyes and the glowing cheeks of the writers in order to guess what tender emotions they are putting into words, some of them with painful slowness, others at feverish speed. Ah! To have a wife back at home whom you know to be troubled, grieving, revolted at the cruel fate that menaces you—what a comfort it is!

“You would think,” growls Bourru as he watches his comrades, “that it amuses them to know that a woman is suffering for them.”

It shall not be said that he had recourse to this consolation of the weak. The strong man, though overwhelmed by destiny, does not call a woman to his aid. There is in Bourru the instinct of the ancient knight who made it a point of honor to keep all danger at a distance from his lady. But it is hard; and sometimes when Bourru's mind reverts to Suzanne his eyes grow moist at the thought of the phrases she might write to him. Oh! She would be courageous, beyond a doubt; she would write: "Be brave, dear Louis, I love you and that will protect you in the battle."

"Yes, it is true," he would think; "if I wrote to her, she would answer in those words, and it might be that her love would bring me good luck—who knows?" But the strong will of the peasant always regained control: "There's no good in making a widow before her wedding." It was his favorite conclusion. It seemed to him to be the just one. He felt that he had no right to move a

woman's heart to love so long as he was under daily threat of death, as he was now. To write a love-letter to Suzanne would be to promise her a man when perhaps he could only give her a corpse. Thus he would reason, with his hard-headed peasant logic. And for my part I find a certain nobility in his feelings; so many fellows around Bourru were whimpering for the pity of a woman that one must have a certain admiration for this self-controlled rustic. You can feel full well, can you not, what treasures of love my Bourru is thus laying up in his heart? Ah! he does not expose his feelings, this hero of mine; his peasant ways make a homely but durable cloak for them. The war will come to its end. And some day, perhaps, Bourru will say to his Suzanne, "I love you." He will not tell her all the secret reasons that kept him from an avowal during the war. It would be too difficult. He will tell her, and keep on telling her, only his favorite phrase: "I didn't want to make a widow be-

fore the wedding"; but he will feel within him a great sentiment of pride, as of a man who has succeeded in fulfilling a great duty.

XXI

THE DAYS OF TUNNELS

FOR Bourru, who spent four years at Vauquois, there is, in the course of the war at this position, one outstanding date; namely, that which marks the beginning of the war underground.

I have shown you the life of the soldier during the months that followed the capture of the hill. The men installed themselves in the position with great haste, which meant, of course, with only modest defences. To protect themselves from trench-mortars there is no other resource but to run from left to right, unless one prefers the illusion of a tent-cover. So the men came to live under the obsession that the heavens were

a perpetual menace. If they could but interpose masonry, earth, wood-work, between themselves and the sky whence the bombs rained, what a relief it would be! Around the month of July, 1915, there was a beginning at digging tunnels. They were merely narrow holes sunk into the hill, but with what a zeal the men worked at them!

They soon grew large enough to hold entire companies. And then one breathed more easily. The men would take their places in the tunnels whenever they were not in active service, and so they were protected from all danger. With from six to ten yards of earth above them they could sleep in peace, heat up their soup, or play cards by candle-light.

For those who love the contrasts of life this existence offers notable examples, running all the way from extreme peril to absolute security. Thus, you are on sentinel duty in the first line, and a bombardment begins. Crouching amid the sand-bags you

await the hour which will mark the end of your turn. The shells are falling right and left of you; every minute you hear one coming from afar, from the direction of Montfaucon. First there is a detonation in the distance—the firing of the gun—then a sinister whistling, and finally the explosion upon arrival, which shakes the whole hill. This particular shell was not for you. But the next? And the others that will follow? Yet there is nothing to do but wait. Why move? The place where you go to may be the point where the next shell will fall. Resigned, you remain motionless, but with what an emotion in your heart! No matter how long he has been at Vauquois, for every man these minutes are minutes of terror. No, pardon me, that is not the right word. The first time, under the shells, you feel an extreme horror that paralyses all thought; then, thanks to experience, the fear becomes more spiritualized, and you are something better than so much flesh shaken by fright;

you are a man, who with a clear mind says to himself:

"There's no chance for me to escape this time—their fire seems too well directed."

And your ear follows the whistling shells, and your mind estimates the destination, always nearer and nearer to you.

But two hours have slipped away; from the connecting-trench a comrade emerges—you are relieved! You leap down the slope, and with a bound you are in the tunnel. Oh, what relaxation for mind and body! Here there is no more danger; you can go to sleep in peace without even a thought for the comrade who has taken your place. What good would it do to pity him? That would not keep the shells from coming on.

XXII

A SESSION WITH THE TRENCH-MORTARS

“**C**OME, tell us about your last grenade-battle!” says some good friend to a man on furlough. “It must have been great fun, eh? What a game it must be, throwing bombs and grenades across trenches! On the whole, it must be very much like a fight with snow-balls between gamins, I suppose—and they say that the poilus are just big happy children!”

Oh, that legend of the merry poilu, how it enrages us! Heavens, yes! We make jokes, but must one keep laboriously insisting that the witticisms of the soldier under

fire do not arise from a good digestion, but simply from a resolution that defies death? Listen, I will tell you about the last bombing that Bourru had a part in. You must not expect any jokes, but perhaps that will make you appreciate more fully the merit of the men who have the courage to make jokes at such moments.

It is ten o'clock at night. Bourru is standing sentinel in the first line, twenty yards from the German trench. All is quiet. The winter night is dark and damp. The soldier is waiting—in full knowledge that for the last three months not a night has passed in quietude. The bombardment is going to rage, and he knows it. When? No one can say. In a few minutes or in a few hours? No one knows. Neither tactics nor strategy is involved in this matter. It is not a thing planned in the brain of some general. What will decide the fatal minute will be the caprice of some man who suddenly feels the desire to kill awakening in his breast. . . .

At a quarter past ten there is a detonation in the enemy lines.

"There she goes," murmurs Bourru.

And if you could see him you would notice that he has turned paler. Immediately, there are other detonations. Those are torpedoes, bombs, petards, that rise into the sky and streak it with luminous lines. Over the six hundred yards of the hill-top these gleams spring up incessantly—that is a trench bombardment. It is as if a monstrous dragon, such as you see in mediæval pictures, had just risen in fury to dart flashes from his throat.

Bourru looks and listens with all attention. He must be on his guard lest the enemy take advantage of the noise and commotion to launch a surprise attack. But Bourru is also thinking of protecting his own skin. Thinking, did I say? No, he is not thinking, it is only his instinct that has long been engaged in the struggle against death; Bourru is just obeying the reflex mo-

tions suggested by his sensations of sight and sound.

Does a luminous streak cut into the sky from the direction of the enemy? It is a torpedo going up. Like a comet it trails behind it particles of fire, but, once arrived at the top of its curve, the luminous trail grows thin, then vanishes. After that one hears the thing tearing the air as it falls out of the black sky. Where is it going to fall? Your eyes search vainly in the dark for some place to run for protection . . . to the right . . . to the left?

Boom! . . . Whew!

The torpedo has fallen at least sixty yards away. The missiles from the trench-mortars are like midges flying through the air. Only the burning fuses mark their passage as they go. They are flying high over Bourru's head.

But the grenades and petards, what treacherous pests! You cannot see them. You simply hear them light—Spat!—like a

stone falling by your side, and before you have time to think—Bang! Zim! Bow!—they burst and whistle and squirt smoke with a smell like ether which rasps in your throat.

Bourru resigns himself to it. Pressed close between two sand-bags, he waits. . . .

Ah, where are they, those good old times when trench bombing went on only by daylight? In those days the monstrous enterprise slept during the nights. Not that bombardment by day was at all agreeable, but there was one advantage in it. You could see; you could watch the infernal machines that streaked down toward you and guess where they were going to fall. Then, according to need, you could run from right to left, with your head lifted to the sky.

But what is this? Four soldiers have just gone by, running into the connecting-trench. They are new fellows. Instead of standing stoically in their places, under the storm, what have the fools done but try to run to a safe place, as one would do in broad day-

light? They thought a torpedo was coming at them. And now in their hallucination their eyes see another coming on the left—and a new chase follows in the reverse direction. They go by again like a herd stampeded.

Thunder! One of the cowards has tripped over his gun. He is rolling in the mud and his companions are running over him in the dark.

“Hey, you blanked idiots!” cries Bourru; “stand still and keep quiet!”

What imprudence! One must never yell in the first line. Bourru’s angry exclamation has attracted the attention of the Boches, and they start raining grenades on the point where the men were wrangling.

Bourru gives them a warm reply. One of the scared fellows, encouraged by his example, comes to his aid, and then another. Grenades, rat-tails, turtles,—everything is hurling, howling, bursting. What a racket!

Finally the enemy bombers become quiet, but the trench-mortars continue. Huddled up in the sand-bags, our men have met no harm, excepting one who has "caught" a piece of shell in the cheek.

The thing has been going on for an hour now, and the bombing has been intense. If you breathe you swallow as much dust as smoke, and it makes you sneeze. A thousand bells ring in your ears.

While Bourru and the other sentinels protect themselves as best they can in the first line, their comrades of the company are but fifty yards to the rear, in a tunnel.

Imagine a cavern sunk into the hill like a long gallery. At the entrance to the tunnel the roof of protecting earth is quite thin, but at the other end the resting men have twenty or thirty yards of earth above their heads. Here they are quiet, indifferent to the bombing, but by no means comfortable. Heavens, no! Crowded together, the men have not even room to lie down; the water is

trickling down the beams that support the earth, and they walk in thick mud. To rest themselves the soldiers have sat down on their packs, huddled up, dozing with their heads on one another's shoulders. A watchman is stationed at the entrance to the tunnel, ready to transmit the call for help from the sentinels in the first line.

Outside, the trench-mortars are raging.

"Look out!" says Bourru—"there's one coming for us!"

It is a torpedo showing its luminous trail exactly in front of one of them. Flat on the bottom of the trench, face to the ground, eyes and ears stopped by their hands, the men wait. . . . There comes a horrible detonation—a hundred pounds of high explosive! Every muscle is contracted to make still smaller the body that crouches ready to howl with pain.

"Ah! Ah!" pants Bourru, lifting his head. "That must have fallen on the tunnel of our company."

But this is no time for going to see; and anyway, the tunnel is safe.

The hour for our relief has passed—and the others have not come. Bourru is troubled. Can an accident have befallen the tunnel?

Taking advantage of a quiet moment, our soldier goes down the fifty yards of trench that separate him from the shelter. But where is the entrance? The ground is torn up—the trench is ruined. Groping, Bourru advances. Ah, that is it! The torpedo fell on the tunnel. But still,—the tunnel cannot have caved in from one end to the other. . . . Bourru picks out his way, crawling. The torn earth smells of ether, and it seems as if an odor of blood hovered round it, too. . . .

Finally Bourru finds a fissure in the ground, revealing a dim light from within. He makes his way into the tunnel. Now that he is underground he can take out his electric flashlight.

Horror! One of his comrades—the one

who was watching at the tunnel's entrance—stands erect, stuck fast between two posts. The concussion of the torpedo, bursting at the very entrance, had hurled him with such violence that his bruised and mangled body is jammed fast into the wall, between the posts. His clothes are torn to rags, and the body has become like some shapeless bundle that is stuffed into a hole to keep out the air. Nothing has struck him; the concussion alone has ripped his vitals apart.

In the interior of the cavern the effects of the explosion have been less violent, though still sufficient to tear down joists, and throw everything into confusion, and set off, by concussion, a supply of grenades.

A number of men are wounded. A thick cloud of dust hangs in the vault, and is scarcely pierced by the gleam of a candle. Some men are sitting motionless, with haggard eyes; others are groping about, caring for the wounded; one is shaking his head as

a token that he can no longer hear, that his ear-drums are burst.

Fortunately Bourru remembers the pick-axe, which works by compressed air, and is used for digging tunnels. He opens the valve, and the air escapes with a burst, carrying the dust away on its current.

But I have told enough of this tale. I am afraid you will take me for a reporter "playing up" the story of a catastrophe in order to make more copy.

Yes, indeed, our war is like a series of factory catastrophes, and we are quite aware that we are lacking in "heroic grandeur." What is more banal than a session with the trench-mortars?

That is certainly Bourru's feeling about it. Listen to the man himself, the morning after, as he sits quietly at the mouth of a tunnel, warming himself in the pale rays of a January sun, and talking of the accident of the night before.

"There's no use talking, all things consid-

ered the place is a sight better than it used to be six months ago. In those days you had to spend your time running up and down the trench to get away from the bombs. Now you've got shelters, you've got tunnels. Of course, there's an accident once in a while, but in general it's all serene."

XXIII

A DAY UNDERGROUND IN THE TIME OF THE MINES

ONLY the night before two sappers had been brought out from a mining tunnel asphyxiated by gases that had come over them stealthily from no one knew where. It is very strange, but from being continually mined, hollowed out, and dug up, as from the daily explosions of cheddite inside the hill, the earth of it is saturated with toxic vapors. There are fissures that belch smoke at you, coming from heaven knows where, and there are pockets of gas formed which some fine day will break loose—and the result is that in the underground shelters you often find yourself dis-

comforted, or even asphyxiated, before you have time to say a word. Bourru is upset by it. Ever since there have been tunnels at Vauquois he has found life unendurable there. As for taking the trench bombs as they came, in the first line, that's the same thing at Vauquois or anywhere else; but now there's no way of staying quiet, for the blasted sappers have gone and invented the devil's own war!

For instance, a moment ago Bourru was sleeping quite peacefully in the tunnel—he had found a fine way to rest easy. You know what the scene is like, I suppose? The tunnel is narrow, about a yard and a half wide, so that the roof may resist the bombardments as firmly as possible. You go down into it by a flight of steps. If you have to sleep inside it, your first idea, of course, would be to stretch yourself along the wall. But that won't do. Take this lamp (it's an old tin in which somebody has put a wick and camphorated oil, intended to

kill lice) and look at the ground. You see it is covered with water, and you can't go to bed in that! Do as Bourru does. He has managed to place a plank near the steps at the entrance, with one end resting on a step and the other held up by two wires from the ceiling. In this way you can defy the water on the floor, though heaven knows you can do nothing against that which trickles from the ceiling. You must be resigned to letting the drops fall on your nose. Oh, well, what of it? In this comfortable posture Bourru would take his sleep—without turning, of course, for fear of a tumble.

But for the last half-hour his slumbers have been troubled. As he went to sleep he was thinking:

“If only the gas doesn't get loose in the passage! With these mysterious enemies, you never know what will happen.”

So now he is dreaming. He seems to have a bag of sand on his chest, and finds it hard to breathe. . . . Suddenly the sand-bag

turns to vapor, the place is full of smoke, he is stifling, and a numbness is making his limbs heavy and lifeless. . . . In his semi-consciousness, the sleeper suspects what has happened. The gas! The gas has come and he cannot get away! He is going to die there. . . . What tough luck! . . . But there's no way to move these leaden arms and legs. . . .

Bourru is jostled by one of his fellows moving on the steps, and he comes to himself in reality. Sure enough, there is smoke around, but it comes only from the lamp. It's another trick of that scoundrel Fougères, who has put foot-grease in the lamp instead of oil, and it smokes! Wide awake, and in a bad humor, our soldier growls at the man who is rubbing against him:

"Say, can't you be a little careful when you go by? You woke me up."

"See here, you bloke," replies the other, in surly tones, "I'm carrying a bag of dirt, and if you like I'll just drop it on you."

These men carrying sacks of earth keep going by, pressing against the sleepers, stepping over them. But what remedy? We are still digging at the other end of the tunnel, and the compressed-air shovel is scratching away to enlarge the cavern. The earth it shears off must be carried away.

"A man can't breathe in here!" cries Bourru to his companions.

True, but in the tunnels you must resign yourself to that. You can either stay near the mouth and endure a fierce draught, or you can content yourself with the heavy, stagnant, vicious air farther in. The latter solution is usually adopted; and that is the reason why, when you look at Vauquois from a distance, you see a kind of mist rising from points here and there. The points are the mouths of the tunnels, and the mist is the vapor from the respiration of the men who live inside the hill.

The Boches are fully aware of this and they are constantly shooting at the points

whence these mists arise, hoping to hit soldiers entering or leaving the tunnel. The men are used to it. Nevertheless, every time he has to go out, Bourru clenches his fists, lowers his head, and rushes fast—very fast—for the opening that leads to the connecting-trench.

Bourru suffers from still another kind of dread in the tunnel, but should I ever be able to make you feel the subtle anxiety in which it constantly hovers round his heart? You are well aware that a month or so ago a Boche mine exploded on the west side of the hill, a mine of at least four tons of explosive. It made a crater a hundred yards across and thirty deep. Half a company of our men disappeared. And that was not the first thing of the kind. It is said that the Boches have two more mines of the same size to set off, one in the center and another toward the west. Of course the engineers on our side are paying them in their own coin. Every day you can hear explosions, but that is no

surety that the Boche mines are not still there; and they are on your mind all the time.

Back in the rest cantonment, even, this idea was already haunting our men. Among their groups you could hear snatches of conversation like this:

"Well, we'll be on the east in the next shift," Fougères is saying to Bourru; "and we'll do some high flying, you bet! It'll look funny. . . ."

"Don't you worry," puts in Lachard. "It's all hot air about that mine—I was talking with some chaps in the Engineers, and they told me there was no mine there."

"Don't you believe it," says Chomel. "I'm on the good side of the secretaries at headquarters, and they told me that some Boche prisoners had said the mine was all ready."

Once in a while, at night, a rumor would run about the cantonment like a trail of burning gunpowder: the mine had gone off,

and it was the —th regiment that caught it. Of course the men would pity their comrades, but—well, so long as fate had decided that this should fall to their lot . . . Ah, but the rumor was false, nothing had exploded.

“Oh, well!” thinks Bourru, “here we are, now, in the tunnel; if she blows up, so much the worse!”

It is a queer thing that, whereas before going up into the line the mine was the subject of every conversation and more than one face used to pale when it was referred to, now the thing is very seldom mentioned. Every one of these men resorts to the system of defence classical in psychology—unable in reality to suppress the latent danger, they suppress it in thought, or rather make-believe to suppress it, by not giving it expression. But it nevertheless continues to act upon the mind of Bourru; it is one of those ideas that live on within you, at once hidden and present, and give their imprint to

all your emotions, all your thoughts, even to those that are most unrelated. A man threatened by a mine against which he is powerless is like a poor cardiac sufferer who goes through life saying to himself: "My aneurism may break at any moment." And this puts as somber tints into the verdure of the spring as into the gold of autumn.

But whatever his state of mind, you must not imagine that Bourru is going to display his feelings to everybody else. Heavens, no! When there is some chance reference to the mine, he makes merry about the sensations he hopes to have as he flies through the air straddling a chunk of earth. And everybody displays the riches of his imagination in embroidering the theme.

It is true, as I said, that there is very little talk of the mine. Nevertheless, at every moment there is some soldier who, by accident,—oh, entirely by accident!—has just heard a noise—right there, under his feet. Of course it can't be anything, he tells you;

still, one might as well listen with all his ears. Nobody's afraid, of course, but if you heard anything, you ought to tell the fellows in the engineers, they would be glad to know. . . .

Every one stops talking and listens.

"I hear somebody tapping," says one man.

"Oh, get out!" says another. "That's the bombs above."

But they go off, all the same, to tell the lieutenant, who will tell Captain Laignier of the engineers, the great master sapper of Vauquois. And invariably Captain Laignier says:

"I assure you there is no danger."

Yes, but if there were, would he say so?

"Oh, come on and let's play cards!" says Lachard. "That's better than thinking forever about that damned mine. It'll drive us crazy."

And it is quite true that a sergeant did go crazy the other day. He was running to the lieutenant every five minutes to say that the

mine was going to explode. They sent him away.

"You said it," mutters Bourru; "I'm through thinking about that mine."

He keeps repeating the sentence to himself and his arm makes violent motions, as a man makes threatening gestures to drive away a tramp who is bent on climbing over the garden fence.

Then all at once the pillars of the cave begin to shake and creak as if a shock from the right was throwing them down—and then another shock drives them back from the left. The candles have gone out. . . . It's the mine exploding! Every man has huddled himself into a ball, with throat straining and shoulders arched to resist the *débris*. Two other shocks, one from the right, the other from the left, follow the first; then the oscillations diminish in force, and nothing has yet caved in. Candles are lighted again and the men look at each other.

"Well, if that's the mine," says one of them, "it must have missed us."

A soldier enters from without. "Did you see the mine?" they ask him.

"Mine? Have you gone nutty? That was nothing but a little blast, fifty yards from here. There wasn't anything to see above the ground."

XXIV

THE CANNONADE

FOR you who listen to it from afar—from two hundred miles, say the scientists—the cannonade is noise. Oh, I know it is agony for you, especially when you have dear ones at the front; you shudder at the thought that these brutal shells may be crushing and rending those whom you love. But, however vivid your imagination may be, I do not think that you can find in the uproar of the cannon such meaning as it has for Bourru.

For our soldier this cannonade has a sense, a purpose. The direction of the shot, its speed, its acceleration, its retardation, its sudden bursts of violence—all these things

are an indication of the enemy's thought, just as a doctor finds the patient's pulse full of meaning as to the state of his heart.

On certain afternoons the cannonade seems hesitant, hypocritical. It comes from the direction of Montfaucon.

"Good!" says Bourru. "I'll take the shelters near the kitchens."

But—Boom! The shells now begin to come from Hill 263, on the west. What does this mean? The bombardment continues slowly, very slowly,—only a shell every five minutes, though they come from every point of the compass. There is an hour's cessation, and then they begin again. When they come stealthily like this, from all sides, without apparent fixed plan, you want to look out,—especially if there is a Boche aviator in the air. These are trial shots, and the Boche guns are likely to turn loose a sudden and terrible bombardment to-night.

At times the cannonade is far away, and sounds like the droning of an old woman

putting a baby to sleep. The voice of the guns hums the time, "one, two, three, one, two, three"; and there is nothing to fear at these moments.

"It's just to let us know that the war is not over yet," declares Bourru.

At other times the voice has a more disquieting rhythm. It is not merely the cadence of the batteries of 77's, for the "big black beasts" are interrupting the time with their false notes, like the hiccoughs of a drunkard at a concert.

"Hah!" says Bourru. "Sounds as if they're drunk, the Boches!"

There are also moments when the cannonade is very slow—too slow, for it is as if the enemy gunners were doing it on purpose to reassure us and put us off our guard. They seem to say, "You see, we're not all bad fellows, so go ahead and rest easy."

"Look out," is Bourru's advice. "They'll be spitting fire pretty soon."

Sometimes the cannonade starts up like a

flash of anger in a hot-tempered man. The shells fall thick and fast and you can guess that the gunners are "hitting it up." Surely a convoy or a column of troops must have let themselves be seen in some clearing of the woods, or maybe the Boches have seen bayonets gleaming from a trench, and so have got scared and started sending their big shells in a fury, like a coward firing his revolver into the trunk of a tree that grins from a dark shadow.

Oh, these big Jack Johnsons, what beasts they are! While you are walking along in a forest on a dreamy spring day they will suddenly burst a little way behind you, like some boor sitting down heavily and breaking through a fragile Louis XVI easy chair. Bourru prefers to hear the 75's—they fire away at the Boche with a sound like a slap from a vigorous hand.

Our own big guns also sing a pleasant song. When one of their shells passes over the hill Bourru never fails to say:

"There's the Vauquois autobus going for a visit to the Boches."

But when one is in the second line, in the woods, and near the guns, it is much too deafening to listen to the big fellows firing. The huts tremble, the window-panes of oiled-paper split, and even in your hole in the ground you feel the concussion to the pit of your stomach.

And then you must never forget that the Boches are replying. You can hear the shot from the direction of Montfaucon, then the whistling, still far away—and if you happen to be chatting in a group of soldiers at the foot of a tree when you hear the shell coming, the sporty thing is not to interrupt the conversation. Vree-e-e-e! whistles the shell. And you go on talking indifferently of this or that, although every man in the group has his mind on the trajectory of the shell that is on its way. The proof of this is that if the shell buries itself in the ground without exploding, some hundreds

of yards away, everyone will cry out in chorus:

“Loupé!”

Which word, for Bourru, means “It’s all right, the shell was no good.”

XXV

A RELIEF AT NIGHT

DURING my last furlough I heard it is said that somewhere on the front there are poilus who can't be persuaded to leave their trenches. If forced to go away on a furlough, they entreat their companions:

“Above all, you hear—no attack while I am gone!”

For these astonishing poilus a relief from duty is enough to break their hearts. Heavens! to stay a fortnight in the rear, far from the shells, bullets, mud, and lice? How shall we console the fellows?

Oh, why have I not met one of those good heroes? How delighted I should have been

to follow his footsteps and listen to his epochal utterances! I should have set them down hot on the paper and you would have thrilled with admiration at them.

But as for my poor Bourru, upon whom I stumble every time I look for a soldier to exhibit to you, he is too easily pleased with the satisfactions of the flesh. So it is that, for forty-eight hours, he has been conscious of a certain pleasure at the thought that his relief is near. For two weeks he has been living in a tunnel, a sort of cave ten yards under ground, out of which he came only for the purpose of taking his turn at sentinel duty. You cannot imagine how long the time seems when you are living in this damp cavern shaken by mine-explosions. That is why the men are anxiously waiting for the moment of relief. For some days already the rumors have been circulating.

"It's coming to-morrow," the assistant post-master has said.

"No, no," declares another; "it's for to-

night—I heard so from the officers' cook."

Toward midday, in fact, the indications become clearer. The orderlies of the officers may be seen coming out of the tunnel, carrying the light baggage of their "bosses" to the kitchens, two miles in the rear.

But still no definite order has come. Hitherto notice has been given a day in advance, but the talkative fellows could not keep from expressing their joy out loud, even in the front line, ten yards from the Boches, and the result was that the relief was "celebrated" by the 210's. Now the men are not notified until the last minute. But however the officers may guard the secret, the moment of the relief is guessed, felt,—smelt out, as it were. Something in the air is whispering it to everyone.

At seven in the evening the officer of the relieving regiment comes to dine with the officers of the regiment to be relieved. There is no more doubt now—the relief will come at ten o'clock, as it did last time.

Every soldier gets his pack ready; and I am willing to engage that no poet leaving on the most wonderful of voyages has ever had such joy in strapping his trunks as Bourru finds in making up his pack. In the front trench the sergeants are giving orders in low tones:

"Come on, clean up the trench. Pick up all the empty cartridges, and put the grenades in place."

The men take stock of the *matériel*—the pulverizer, the braziers, the wadding for gas-masks, the fagots, the solution of hyposulphate.

"You know what those fellows in the —th regiment are," growls Sergeant Lachard; "they'll always say we left 'em a rotten trench."

At eight o'clock comes the little session of trench-mortars traditional at the moment when night arrives.

Half past ten! Through one of the entrances to the tunnel stream the fellows of

the relieving regiment. Bourru and his comrades must leave by the other entrance. Oh, you must not expect any salutes or formalities between those arriving and those departing. It is hard for them to see each other, even, in the damp passage-way, illuminated only by a few dim candles.

"Be sure you carry on, as we did," say those departing.

"Is the scrap pretty hot just now?" ask the new arrivals.

The newcomers who are to relieve the sentinels have gone straight to the firing trench; and here are the men relieved coming down outside the tunnel, through the trenches that wind down the hill. Whew! It's good, this breath of fresh air. But from this moment on, one obsession grips every man in the regiment—above all things, keep your mouth shut, tread softly, and be careful not to strike your platter against the stones in the trench wall. And your bayonet? What, you idiot, haven't you got it in the sheath?

Great heavens, haven't you stuffed the sheath with cotton? Lord, have mercy! Now listen, I'm telling you something—don't you make any noise, not a sound! And don't you think because I'm whispering that these orders are any laughing matter!

Through the long connecting-trenches, the men go down toward the foot of the hill, with backs bent low, in silence. It makes you think of cats coming down from a roof on a dark night.

Splash! There goes Roger slipping in the trench. He failed to see a hole left by a shell an hour ago. You do not have to wait long for the result. Whsih—shish! It is as if a great stone were flying through the air in rapid jerks. That is a 74 shell coming from a German pneumatic cannon. Bah! we have seen plenty of those. The procession toward the foot of the hill continues. But there, there! I knew it would happen—a reserve company of the relief

coming up has got into the trench before their time and the heads of the two columns have just run into each other. It's always the same thing! The devil take those fellows!

The two companies have stopped still. The men in the lead of each column stand their ground firmly, talking low. Ah, the imprecations that each man chokes down during this forced halt! What a relief it would be to hurl a few hot insults in the face of the men who make you stand here where at any instant the bombs may begin falling! But after all, there is a rule; those who were coming up are obliged to go back. Whew! Here we are at the bottom of the hill, outside the zone of hand projectiles, though in easy reach of the others. It still is no place for making your retreat at your ease, I assure you. So everybody chafes with impatience when Sergeant Lachard calls the roll of the platoon. Those who are present always find that the platoon is all there, and

may as well go on without delay. "Yes, yes, everybody's here, sergeant; let's go on!" In Indian file the men cross a terrain torn up by shells, and then skirt the forest in order to take advantage of the shade of the trees.

Farther on, the platoons come together, the companies take formation, and the column begins its march again. It mounts a hill.

Once they are over the crest of this hill, the danger of being picked up by the enemy artillery is much smaller. The column marches along over a monotonous road, through the empty night. The intense excitement is over; and weariness falls upon our men's shoulders like a leaden garment; but they go on, half asleep, dragging their heavy legs toward the cantonment in the rear, in that land of dreams where people live in real houses and where one can sleep on real straw.

XXVI

AFTER TWO WEEKS IN THE TRENCHES

ON the way back from the front lines where he had just spent two weeks Bourru was very tired indeed, and his weary, jolting gait bore witness to the truth of what he kept grumbling to himself:

“It beats all how two weeks in those trenches makes jelly of a fellow’s legs.”

Nevertheless, when the troop passed in front of the railway station at A——, our soldier was startled into lifting his head. Could it be possible? Could these be real stone houses, rails, coaches? My, but they were fine things! He had completely for-

gotten that the world held railway stations, those symbols of civilization.

For I must tell you—all you world-weary seekers for famous sights, you grumbling tourists who always find the stations ugly and commonplace,—I must needs tell you that unless you have lived for months in the wilds, you can never know the infinite poetry that dwells in an oblong building with rails and coaches around it. On the wall are inscribed three very simple words, but no master of style will ever find a phrase more eloquent in its conciseness—“*Direction de Paris.*” The mind takes flight along the rails and in the golden haze of its dream one has visions of Paris, Dijon, Lyons, Bligny—Bourru’s village—visions, indeed, of all France.

“Come on there—shake a leg!” shout the sergeants, hustling their men forward.

“If they were let alone,” cries the adjutant, “they’d stay there till to-morrow morning!”

More than anybody else it is Lafut, nicknamed Father "Red-Ink," who delays the column; hypnotized by the tank-cars that daily bring the wine for the division, he stands silent and immovable, lost in admiration. His lips exhibit an instinctive sucking movement, and one can see that he would like to give the immense receptacles passionate embraces. . . .

By this time the dawn is coming on. Having passed through A——, we see the village that is our destination dreamily hidden away in the verdure and the mists of the morning. One feels that he is marching toward a nest rich in promises of warm comfort. Come on, then, heads up—one more hitch to keep your pack on your shoulders—and here we are! Piping hot coffee is ready for the new arrivals.

"Anyhow," murmurs Bourru, "these stay-at-homes are good for something."

But nobody has time for expressing his thanks, for there is just one thing that is

all-important—to get to sleep. Ah, the joy of lying down, stretching out your limbs, and yielding to overwhelming sleep—what voluptuous pleasure for men who for two weeks have done nothing but doze in a narrow tunnel, sitting up! There is a universal rush for the barns.

Everybody goes to sleep. But you are well aware, you who are skilled in psychology, that even when asleep a man may be happy or miserable; even in the deepest sleep there are ideas that make themselves felt in the depths of consciousness. At this hour there is this one idea in the minds of my sleeping Bourrus: “Whew! No trench-bombs here, no mines, no torpedoes. . . .” It is a very simple idea, but if you have ever enjoyed it in a flash of slumbrous thought when you were rolling over on the straw of a barn in an effort to find a more comfortable position, you know one of the great pleasures of life.

At ten in the morning Bourru wakes up

for good and all, in expansive comfort. It is a fine day; the sunshine sparkles everywhere, and the future seems infinitely long. Ten days of rest in front of you—before that is gone, the war will be over! There is one sole trouble—you have to go and drill. A sensation comes to bring Bourru back to the facts of life—oh, it is nothing profoundly psychological, be assured, it is merely a cootie, a "*toto*," which is biting him under the arm. "I must go and wash up," thinks the soldier.

At the river there is a multitude; along the banks there is nothing to be seen but naked legs and busts. The caresses of the water all over your body—ah, how luxurious! So you soap yourself, wet yourself, and go into contortions to wash yourself all over. Along the river-banks you seem to see an exhibition of athletes.

"Lachard, old boy," says Bourru, "you're not getting fat on this war; you're showing your ribs, you know. . . ."

"Don't you worry, Bourru, old boy; the main thing is to sell your fat for all you can get from the Boches for it."

"Any notion how you're going to get lunch?" cries out Fabri.

"I've managed that, all right," declares Delporte. "There wasn't a thing left at the grocery, but I ran into L'Énergie, the colonel's orderly. He was going along with four cans of lobster, and I hooked one."

"And I guess you think I pass my time snoring," says Aubouin. "Look here and I'll show you a fine dandelion salad that I went and gathered you this morning."

And a little later my four poilus are ensconced in their magnificent dining quarters. Just imagine a shaft of wall, left standing from a burned house. You need only know how to make the most of it. Is the wind blowing from the north? You install yourself on the south side, in the sun. Is it too warm? You dine on the northern side, in the shade, upon great hewn stones that have

tumbled into a pile for the express purpose, it would seem, of forming a table for you. An ancient agricultural machine serves for a coat-tree. The incomparable advantage of this dining-hall is that it has a magnificent view—no walls to intervene, nothing but the landscape spread before your eyes, and the poplars that line the river lead away in sinuous lines into blue distances, infinitely charming to the eye. Truly it is comfortable to feel that you are defender of such a land—especially when you are sipping “red ink” at twenty-two sous a bottle.

In the afternoon you give yourself up to your immense satisfaction. Seated at the door of your barn, you luxuriate in rest. In the village street the auto-trucks are ceaselessly passing; the locomotive of track 60, a rickety old thing, is spitting out its silly smoke and starting off with a clangor of metal; the motors are rumbling, the drivers are yelling, the soldiers are shouting to one another, the blacksmiths are making their

anvils ring. Your mouth is full of dust, your nostrils of smoke, and your ears of uproar. But all that is nothing; Bourru continues to "take the air" in the shade of his barn, tranquil, beatific.

And as I look at him I think of that philosophy that teaches that the universe has no external existence, but that we create it with our minds. A soldier just out of the trenches finds that the tumult of this street is a delightful silence.

After this beatitude another luxury awaits you—to go for a stroll without having to keep your eyes on the search for treacherous grenades. It is a wonderful new existence for you; you have learned again the feeling of the elementary sensations of life. And to think that there are people that "get sick" of it! Why aren't they in the company of my Bourrus, on the bridge over the Aire, watching the horses being led to water, and empty-mindedly spitting into the stream? That's

what happiness is. And you say to yourself:

"There goes that chump Crochard, the captain's orderly, on his nag; watch him make a mess of himself in the water."

And while following the movements of the restive horse you amuse yourself at the notion that the trooper might take a header, and you laugh at it in advance. Then, when you have had enough of looking at the river, you go "down town" to buy tobacco. You run into fellows from the other companies and chat with them as long as you like. Men with furloughs are taking their departure; at the top of your voice you call after them, "Have a good time!" And then you are astounded at the notion of yelling all you want without giving yourself away to the enemy.

But I must pause, or everybody will be running to strap his trunk and come to join us—and we are already so crowded!

XXVII

HONOR TO THOSE WHO FALL

IS it necessary to tell you that I am following neither rule nor method in writing this book? That is apparent enough, I suppose. What help for it? Life is so strenuous here that a brain a little excited receives from it impressions, pictures, emotions, and ideas in the same abundance as a soldier in the first line receives shells on the day of an attack.

I am sending it all to you in a jumble, along with the old cartridges, the aluminum rings, and the blank bullets that the poilus ship you. I understand that you arrange all this bric-a-brac on your mantelpieces with great care and devotion. So I am send-

ing a few more fragmentary sketches of Bourru.

* * * * *

When possible, the bodies of officers, and sometimes of privates, who have fallen, are carried back to the rest cantonments in the rear and interred in the village cemeteries or nearby under some row of plum-trees.

To-day, All Saints' Day, the clouds are so lowering and the landscape so somber that an undefined sadness has come over the soldiers all through the rest-camp. You can see them walking pensively about, avoiding futile chatter.

At one end of the village, in a meadow, nine wooden crosses stand in a row; it is the cemetery of officers recently fallen. This morning men were there putting flowers on the graves, but now the place is deserted. A lone magpie nearby is emitting its cry, irritating because so inexpressive. I am seated under a bush lost in meditation.

Suddenly a soldier appears on the scene. At a glance he assures himself that he is quite alone; he has not noticed me.

Then with a firm step he approaches the grave at the right, comes to attention with head held high, and stands motionless for a few instants, at military salute.

Turning then two paces to the left he takes position before the second tomb, repeating his gesture; and thus he continues to the end of the line, where he makes an "about-turn," in perfect form, and departs. Every movement had been executed correctly, smartly, as when a soldier is intent on pleasing his officer.

As the soldier goes on his way, I stretch my neck to see who he is. It is Bourru.

* * * * *

A 210 shell has just fallen on a trench where everything had been quiet. Some of the soldiers who have been knocked down by the "breath" of it are getting up dumb-founded, feeling themselves, and finding to

their astonishment that their members are still in place.

Others are groaning from wounds. Among them all the shock has staggered and confused their minds; there remain in their consciousness only the most deeply rooted ideas, such as everyone carries within him like those habits of reaction in which the ancient instincts of the race are expressed.

From the mouth of a wounded man who is being carried off comes this unexpected request, touching because it reveals a deep-felt need:

“I’m done for—but bury me decently, if you can.”

He dies before reaching the first-aid station.

During the night Bourru and Cormier wrap the body in a tent-cloth. Each of the two soldiers takes one end of the body and, climbing down the connecting trench and scaling the slopes of Mamelon Blanc, they carry it two miles to the rear, to the Barri-

cade. Here there is a proper cemetery—the stretcher-bearers dig a grave for each body. That is a great privilege.

* * * * *

It is the burial of an officer. The priest has just finished the prayers, and the soldiers, of whom Bourru is one, are standing guard at the grave.

General Valdant comes forward. For a long time he stands silent, leaning over the coffin; it is as if his thought could not detach itself from the image of death, but is awaiting inspiration.

When he speaks it is a strange discourse, restrained and powerful at once. Nothing is heard but names and dates, separated by long silences during which meditation broods deep.

"Spettel. . . . February 17, 1915, Vauquois. . . . The battle. . . . February 23, 1915, Auzéville. . . . The reward. . . . May 29, 1916, Vauquois. . . . The sacrifice. . . . To-day, Auzéville. . . . Eternal rest."

You who read the words may possibly find them enigmatical. But try to see the scene with a poet's eye—giving play to your imagination. . . .

In the middle of the group stands the general, small in stature, but firmly erect, upon the soil of the Argonne which he has been defending for many months. At this moment a pensive melancholy modifies the energy of his expression. Around him are soldiers, nothing but soldiers of Vauquois. What need to explain to them the visions in his soul? There is no necessity to aid them to fill their minds with touching images when they hear the words.

"February 17, Vauquois. . . . The battle." In a flash they can see the noble soldiers of the year before, those who climbed to storm the hill. Spettel is in the lead, with his friends. Intoxicated with martial excitement, they rush into the village on which the shells are falling, and before them the Germans fly in terror.

"February 23, Auzéville. . . . The reward." Five days after the attack, on the ridge between the Grange-Lecomte and Auzéville, facing the tragic hill which stands out in the distance, the regiments are lined up for review. The heroes are in front of the ranks, and Spettel is among them. They receive their decorations, and the bugles in long blasts tell their glory to all the echoes of the Argonne.

"May 29, 1916, Vauquois. . . . The sacrifice." Spettel is repeating up to the last minute: "It's all right. . . . It's all for France."

"To-day, Auzéville. . . . Eternal rest." Companions in arms stand around a coffin which the soil of France is receiving with the love of a mother for her cherished son, while prayers are rising to heaven, and rough men brush away a tear at the thought of the great future that will roll its centuries over this sacred land.

It is the tragic epitome of a hero's life.

In truth, the general at one leap reaches the heights of eloquence when, disdaining all rhetoric, seeming, indeed, to speak to himself, he slowly pronounces those dates and names, so weighted with meaning: "*February 17, Vauquois, the battle. . . . February 23, Auzéville, the reward. . . .*"

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Another day, at the burial of an officer, a tall, thin captain is speaking; there is a sort of mystic ardor in the tones of his voice.

Bourru remembers his words.

"And I would say to you in truth, my friends, that we must not think that the sad honors which we render this day to an officer indicate a willingness to raise a barrier, even after death, between officers and men. All the men who give their lives for their country belong to the same aristocracy, whatever may be their rank.

"In this ceremony of interment we must see a symbol. For it is more than an honor rendered to a leader; it epitomizes all the

pious sentiments that dwell in our hearts for the heroes whose bodies must remain near the trenches. Time does not permit us to render to these humble brothers in arms their meed of individual glory. While waiting for the victorious trumpet blasts over their graves, they send representatives to the village in the rear in order that the ancient rites of military funeral may be observed in their name. These representatives are the very men who, on the field of battle, have showed them the path to sacrifice.

“And that is why, in presenting arms to-day before this coffin, I invite you at the same moment to turn toward the Hill, and, with a full heart, to indulge an affectionate memory of our brothers in arms who remain upon it in repose, under the ruins of the village of Vauquois.”

XXVIII

UNDER BOMBARDMENT

YOU are sure you really want me to show you the scenes of war just as they are? You have the right, you claim, to look on from afar, without colored glasses, at the brute facts of the war which our poilus must meet face to face. In this way your admiration will rise to the height of the real merits of our soldiers.

Bourru is happy enough to hear you say this. For there are still weighing on his heart a few innocent words which a civilian, and a very good friend of his, too, has just written to him. "Well, well! So there are only little bombardments going on in your sector? No bayonet charges? So much the

better! I'm glad to know things are so quiet with you." And Bourru in his revery calls to mind one of those "little bombardments."

It is a dark night. The company is on the march toward a point on the sector where, it seems, the Boches are expected to attack. Of a sudden the company comes out of the wood, and before it lies a dark plain in the middle of which a wall of fire seems to rise. It is the barrage laid down by the enemy guns.

"Our mission is simple," say the officers; "we must occupy the trenches on the other side of the barrage, and hold them at all costs."

It is useless to wait for a quiet moment to traverse the fatal zone; there is no quiet moment.

"As skirmishers! Double quick—forward!"

Each man plunges forward with a feeling that he is going to smash his head into a wall. Then—bursting shells, shaking ground,

whistlings in an air dense with smoke, semi-asphyxiation, tumbles into shell-holes, mad racing,—without a thought, with nothing but an instinct that tells you to keep racing! “Whew! Here we are!” Sneezing and stupefaction—“Honestly, am I still whole?” And one remembers that in the red glare of the explosions he saw the phantoms of his comrades falling on the black soil.

“Column of twos!” shout the officers.

But where on earth are the trenches? The ground is simply in a state of chaos, with intermittent holes and hillocks. Something stirs in one of the holes as Bourru stumbles into it—and proves to be the man he has come to relieve. The fellow seems to be completely stupefied.

“Hello, here! Can’t you see I’ve come to let you off? Go ahead, beat it!”

The soldier, whose white eyes are all that can be seen in the dark, seems to hesitate before leaving the hole that has been protecting him for hours. Finally he goes off like a

crazed man, though no shells are falling just here at this moment.

The day begins to break. It is easy to see that we have a quiet sector here, for there are still strips of the meadow that have not been torn up. There is even a tangle of barbed-wire still standing. In front and to the left rises a hill from which artillery observers are doubtless watching; if they see anything stirring, the guns will speak.

Whiz-z! Boom! . . . The first shell.

"The meeting will come to order!" cries Lachard, that the traditional gaiety may be observed.

More projectiles are coming now, aimed at the line of holes that takes the place of a trench. The bombardment is systematic—it begins five hundred yards to the right of Bourru and moves slowly along toward the left, dropping six shells at each objective, and covering in order all the points of the terrain. You feel as if a Titanic sledgehammer were falling furiously along the

line. Sparks are flying, and the anvil makes all the echoes of the Argonne resound.

Flattened in their shell-holes, with bated breath, eyes closed, and shoulders hunched as if a wall were threatening to tumble over them, the men listen to the approaching storm. It is coming. . . . Ten seconds pass in anguish, during which the flesh that huddles under the soldier's packs is nothing but that of an animal. The storm is passing overhead. Uproar, thunder, the vision of a train hurling itself into a tunnel, the shell concussions that crush in the walls of the abdomen, send shocks through the vitals, take away breath. . . . The storm has gone by, but no one budes yet. The cells of the body are so shaken together into a mere jelly of flesh that one must give them time to regain human form. At last one has become a man again. Saved! The shells have fallen in front of the line and behind it, two or three yards at least.

"The devil!" cries Ringuet in consterna-

tion, "a splinter has blown the mess-kit off the top of my pack, and my tobacco was in it!"

And the men laugh. There's no fear now, gracious no! The storm is howling at least two hundred yards away now. But here it comes back! The men are flat to the ground again. This time a fragment carries away the top of one man's skull and there are his brains, just like those of the fellows in wax in the anatomical museums. Without a word the men await the next storm.

"Oh! Ah!" groans a man. "I'm wounded."

And, indeed, his face is masked in blood.

Five, six times, the storm rains over the line. Cormier feels a terrible blow in the back—later he will find a shell fragment embedded in his pack. Bourru is struck on the head by chunks of earth that stagger him. Lachard is bleeding at the ear and searching for his spectacles in the mud. Still another is singing in a tone of raillery, "It is raining kisses."

But it is getting cloudy, and what luck! Maybe it is going to rain, and that will make it hard for the observers to regulate the fire. In fact, an abatement has already come. A wounded man is pleading:

"Take me away, will you, boys? I'll give you ten francs, twenty francs—everything I've got. Take me away—my parents own a farm and they'll give you all they've got, too."

"There now, old chap, don't be a fool. You know well enough we'd take you away if we could. Buck up, now, and wait till night—you haven't got anything but a splinter in your cheek."

The hours pass. Ringuet, having had some tobacco given him, is smoking with his head hidden under a hood. Cormier, stretched out on the ground, suddenly spies a mouse creeping out of its hole. He amuses himself feeding it.

A flash shoots into the sky. It means a renewal of the bombardment.

"Ough! Oh! I've got a piece of shell in my belly!"

It is a queer thing, but Tellier, who was saying last night, "I know that I won't escape to-morrow," has not been touched yet, though he alone has sat upright under the storm of shells. Silent, with a cigarette between his lips, he sits there with his haunting eyes staring doubtless into the mysterious distances where the fates are to be read. A splinter in his heart delivers him from his fatalistic watch.

But the French artillery is answering the Boche in full force. The sky seems like a vault full of whistling shells. At a given moment the guns from both sides seem to concentrate their rage on one point, half a mile away, where the two lines come very close together. It is the "trommelfeuer!" The shells from the big guns cut up the ridges, overwhelm the valleys, tear down the trees, and set flying great chunks of earth. The countryside looks as if it were

suffering from an epileptic seizure. Everywhere it trembles from explosions. Leaping, bounding, the earth moves and quivers and dances like the waves of the sea in a tempest. One looks on, overcome with stupefaction. Out of this cataclysm are coming monstrous, hideous things—an appalling hell-mouth moves forward to devour all before it. Not a man among our soldiers will live to tell the story if that whirlwind passes their way.

But no, reassure yourselves; the tornado of fire did not pass over the soldiers that you have come to know; they have had the luck to receive only the ordinary little shells of the 105's and 150's. That is why, since you were ready to imagine horrors, I can show you a little soldier who has just had his hand taken off by a shell-fragment. The poor fellow imagines he will be more comfortable at the other end of the trench and he is going "on all threes"; his poor handless wrist, dripping blood, hangs like the paw of a cat

just crushed under a carriage-wheel. After half an hour of such crawling he comes to the side of a hole where many of the wounded have taken refuge. With a final effort he rolls forward upon the heap of them.

Perhaps now you can understand more fully how a soldier may acquire some little merit without budging from his place and without ever taking part in one of those fine attacks they put on picture postcards?

XXIX

BOURRU VISITS HEADQUARTERS

THE captain had said to Bourru, "Here, take this letter to the staff offices, to the Headquarters of the general, at Bétramé."

All the way there our soldier was excited. Staff offices! The words evoked in his mind the idea of science, of maps, automobiles, officers with bands on their sleeves, always anxious and always hurried, and also, he did not know quite why, great suites of rooms full of desks such as he had seen at the sub-prefecture at home. Inside these places dwell terrible, mysterious forces that may fall upon a poor trooper without his knowing

whence they come or how they operate. It is enough, he has heard, for the people at Headquarters to write three lines on a bit of paper in order to start twenty thousand men marching. It was Cormier who told him that, and Cormier, being a Paris lawyer, surely ought to know. It's the papers at Headquarters, too, that bring the refrigerated meat, the sugar and coffee, the "red ink"; by Jove, it's funny that with a common piece of paper a man can do so much!

So no foolishness now, eh! If you're going to trespass in offices where all those forces are accumulated you want to be careful. If you make a mess of things, it may be worse for you than a Vauquois trench full of Boches. Bourru approaches very softly. With great respect he goes up to a chubby sergeant who seems to be stationed as orderly.

"Where's the Headquarters?" he inquires.

“Down there—under the shelters at the end of the plank road.”

This plank road is bordered by various shelters within which men can be seen. “Well!” says Bourru to himself, “if they haven’t got huts, just like us!” Holes from recent shells, in the midst of the trees, give evidence that the “paper-scratchers” must receive their share of shells from time to time. Bourru is glad to know it—he doesn’t know exactly why, but he is glad to know that this officer-soldier that he is just meeting might have a shell fall on his head this very day, just as he, Bourru, might; for he knows this soldier well—he has often been pointed out to Bourru—and it seems that, back in Paris, he is a great musician. The proof of it is that he has the Legion of Honor. Bourru looks at him with curiosity.

He knocks at a door.

“Come in,” says some one.

Our soldier stops still on the threshold,

letter in hand. The shelter is full of officers. One of them takes the letter and while he is reading it Bourru watches and listens. What a chance! He is in a staff-office—a solemn moment! He must be on his best behavior among such important people and still he must see all he can, so that later on he can astound the boys in the company with a wonderful story. It's queer, but on the whole these officers don't seem so terrible as he thought. There is a thin, pale little captain who is reading a newspaper in some strange print; honestly, it looks like Chinese. That chap must be awfully brainy; he has got papers all around him, and with his pale face and his eye-glasses he looks like the curé whom Bourru used to know at Bligny, and who made himself sick reading so much Hebrew.

Another captain has his eyes fastened on the maps tacked to the walls of the shelter. Ah! This one has a little fat on his ribs and a face blooming with good health. More-

over, Bourru recognizes him—it is the captain that he has so often seen going the rounds at night in the trenches.

“I say, Coradin,” another captain asks the first one, “is the road good enough for me to send up shells to Trench 14, at la Buanthe?”

“It beats all!” thinks Bourru. Think of there being a captain here at Headquarters who is talking about a place he knows so well (though he would call it Boëlle) and who wants to send shells to Trench 14! One by one the three captains go to talk to a tall major who is walking about with a rather ungainly step, with his nose in the air. He must be a bully chap, this one! In the last five minutes he has said twice:

“And whatever you do, don’t worry them, those poilus; as long as they’re in the rest-camp, give ’em a little peace.”

And he jokes with everybody.

All of a sudden the general comes out of an adjoining room.

"I say, Fontaine," he asks the major, "have you given notice that the relief of the Thirty-first will not begin before nine o'clock?"

"Yes, general," answers the major; "but here's a paper a soldier has just brought me—the Twelfth company is asking for information about its special mission. Lieutenant Gain will take care of the matter."

The Twelfth company is Bourru's company, and the paper is the one he just brought. And the general is going to give his attention to little things like that! Bourru stands in his place, on the threshold of the door, as if awaiting the sentence of a judge on his affairs. How simple they are, these great men, when you are near them! You see, the major doesn't stand at attention when he talks to the general, and for that matter all those officers stand there talking at ease under their log shelter, just like plain poilus. There is a lieutenant with the red cap of the Chasseurs d'Afrique whom

somebody has just called Lusarch, and who keeps repeating "Hello! Hello!" into the telephone. Bourru is transfixed by the scene.

The major, with his perpetual good humor, has caught up a box of bonbons; he takes one, and passes them around.

"Have a bonbon, Favre?"

"No, thank you, major."

"Have one, Coradin?"

"With pleasure, major."

The major goes on till he comes to the general.

"Will you take one, general?"

"Come, come," says the general, "first offer one to our good trooper here who is waiting for his answer."

"Ah, beg your pardon, old fellow," says the major as he holds the box out to Bourru. "I wasn't forgetting you, you know, only I offered them to the general first because he outranks you."

"Not at all!" cries the general. "The

plain poilu is Number One among good sports."

Bourru was eating his bonbon as he went on his way, but the emotion stirred up in him by all these important events was so great that he never knew whether it was a caramel or a chocolate that he had in his mouth.

XXX

AN EXPEDITION TO THE REAR

BOURRU began to feel his social importance when he saw the long line of auto-trucks which had been brought to take the regiment to the rest-camp.

“Well, of all things!” he thought. “The government is saving leg-work. Pretty fine!”

To tell the truth the vehicles are none too comfortable. But once you are installed in them and the procession starts, in dust and uproar, at ten miles an hour,—well, even if you are only in the fortieth truck from the front, you feel that you are a force in the world. To the right and left of you the

fields and forests are flying past, just as if you were splitting them with a sword-stroke. The little vehicles of the peasants get timidly to one side in the gutter, and the people watch you pass with gaping eyes.

"Hey there, it's us," you cry to them; "it's us, the boys from the front!"

You seem to be entering into an extraordinary land. There is no longer a swarm of men as at the front. The villages look empty; there are no more ruins, no more burned houses,—all is calm. Aged peasants come and go with slow steps. The apple and pear trees seem to have a look of beneficence; and the birds sing as they do in poetry. Nature seems like a happy woman asleep.

Bourru cannot cease wondering, for never has he seen the country as it looks to-day. Is it possible! Certainly the country must have changed or he has become a different man, during the months he has spent "up there." The last supposition is the true one, as you have doubtless concluded. You know

my Bourru by now—a good fellow without the slightest affectation, who does his job as best he can; but never, never has he had a notion of being a hero. Of course he has read in the papers that back in the rear people talk of the *poilus* as heroes; but pshaw! . . . He knows what words like that mean,—fine newspaper talk, that's all.

But see him now! Just because he has gone through certain villages where people were beaming upon him from their doorsteps, Bourru is experiencing an extraordinary sensation; he puffs out his chest, takes a deep breath—at the risk of swallowing still more dust—and discovers that, honestly, he is pretty much pleased when a gamin, after coming close enough to read a number on his collar, cries out in admiration, "It's the back from the trenches!"

At one place where the convoy stops, an old woman exclaims, in a sympathetic voice:

"Ah, my poor boys! You're coming from —th Regiment—a fighting regiment just

the battle and you must soon go back to it!"

The trucks are surrounded by little girls, women, and old men, and at the sight of all these inquiring and sympathetic civilians, the soldiers begin to realize that they have really come from a place where not everyone has been. Honestly, they had forgotten the fact. When you are daily elbowing such numbers of comrades "up there," you can easily fancy that your sector is the whole world and that it is a very ordinary place to live in. Not at all; the front now appears to the men as a sort of sinister and grandiose work-shop where only a chosen class—their own—is permitted to pursue the terrible task in hand.

"Honest, little chicken," Huguenin is saying to a frail young girl, "if you went up there, you'd drop dead just from breathing the air."

And then the poilus discover another cause for pride, that of being covered with dust,

and having bronzed faces and rough hands. They cast glances of pity at the well-groomed little civilians whom they meet in the towns. My, aren't they ridiculous in their straw hats? Look at them!

But it is in the village where they are to pass their fortnight that Bourru and his fellows really come to know the state of mind of the knight, returned from the Crusade, who used to stretch himself out at his ease and wait for his womenfolk and servants to take care of him. The constable is the cause of it. This honorable functionary, a rotund little old man, in a suit of yellow alpaca, possesses a soldierly and forceful mind. The first of these qualities is evinced by the *médaille militaire* which decorates his breast, and the second is revealed in the white tuft on his chin which, when he holds his head high, seems to point like a sword. He adores the poilus, does this retired colonial soldier, and he intends that his village shall entertain them worthily. With fine gestures

and much eloquence he declares to the commanding officer that the troopers shall have fine barns, good straw, and even some beds—yes, actual beds!

But there is one little difficulty. In this village, far back from the front, there is a repair station for automobiles, and these gentlemen—that is, the automobile mechanics—have brought hither—of course, you mustn't tell any one this—have secretly brought hither their wives. Don't let it worry you—they are just old men, nothing but old mechanics; they hold to their old habits, you know, and then, too, it brings money into the village. But the constable cannot permit them to keep possession of all the available beds, and he is already entering the houses one after another and bringing out, somewhat noisily, a considerable group of scared little ladies. The poilus, in their good nature, may protest as they please against disturbing any one, the constable will have his own way, and he continues crying out:

"These boys have come back from the front, and I tell you I'm going to put them up like princes!"

You can easily understand that a reception of this sort goes to a man's head like a glass of brandy. My Bourru and his fellows literally take possession of the village, establishing themselves as masters in its houses.

"Hey there, old girl, don't you want to make us an omelette? And since your kitchen suits us perfectly, we'll just stay in it."

The streets are full of them. Standing in the middle they chat and laugh as long as they like; some gesticulate and make loud mirth. Do you wonder why? Just look at that group of girls coming up the street—what would they think if a man didn't set his cap on one side like a bold warrior and throw them a few jaunty words as they pass? Surely they would be vexed!

And then, one is entitled to some fun

when one has just got back from the front, what? After all, if the houses are still standing here, if the crops are ripening in peace, it is we who are the reason for it. Women are working in the fields and—well, that's natural enough! In the days of old—we have read it in the History of France—the women did all the manual labor, while the warriors conserved their powers for noble exploits. Since the war is still going on, let's get back to the old traditions! Come, you civilians, you've never heard a shell explode—so down on your knees before us!

"Another omelette and three bottles of red ink!" cry Huguenin, Bourru, and their comrades, who have installed themselves in the house of a good old lady and are satisfying their needs like kings.

Can you see them, our poilus of 1916? They demonstrate their kinship with the La Tulipes, the Tranche-Montagnes, the Brin d'Amours, and with all those old Knights-at-arms of the fifteenth century who used

to crush the "bourgeois" with their scorn when they were passing through the city streets. It is, indeed, a social problem that is raised in this village, and a philosopher would hasten to put on his goggles to study the phenomena of this revival of a military psychology supposed obsolete.

A tender heart, inspired by the famous saying *Cedant arma togae*, might take pity on these poor civilians molested by a brutal soldiery. It would be quite wrong; and to prove the fact, just listen to the good old peasant-woman, as with countless polite phrases she accompanies Huguenin, Bourru, and their friends to their abodes:

"Yes, I'll only charge you thirty sous for the omelette and twenty for the red ink, because it's you and you've just got back from the front; and don't forget to come again."

XXXI

A THOUGHT OF THOSE WHO REMAINED ON THE HILL

BOURRU is now serving on another sector, and a new existence has begun for him. But often his thoughts hover over the region of Vauquois, where he lived through long months of the war. Thanks to the distance, he can see more clearly now what his merits were, and a certain look of pride comes into his eyes when he recalls some episode of the combats in which he had a part; but it is still a very childlike pride. If our trooper meets a boastful soldier from another sector he always lets the other do the talking; Bourru will not seek to extol his own exploits, for

he believes that everybody else has done as well as he. Also, it is not a feeling of arrogance that comes over him when his imagination carries him back to Vauquois; no, he only thinks of the good comrades whom he has left on the hill, struck down by death. He is afraid that the men of the division that replaced his own do not feel tenderly enough toward the graves there. How could they? For these new soldiers of Vauquois the names inscribed on the crosses will call up no exact picture—no impulse will spring up in their hearts when they read the names of Goupy, Bouys, Revel, Chartier. That is why Bourru loves to make a pilgrimage, in thought, to the graves in his old sector.

First, those in the forest. There were some of them at almost every point—at Mamelon Blanc, at Allieux, at the Barricade. During the last months of his stay it was in this cemetery that all the dead at Vauquois were buried. The ceremonies were very simple. In the early morning the

stretcher-bearers would go out there under the trees, where the bodies brought down during the night were awaiting their last rites. Each body was placed in a trench dug in advance. Then a wooden cross was fixed in the ground, bearing a name; though sometimes there was no name, because the torpedo, on exploding, had left of a group of soldiers nothing but unrecognizable fragments. Under the great trees these comrades of Bourru are sleeping. Sometimes the graves were placed here and there in the bivouac. Bourru remembers the four mounds near the kitchens, on the skirt of the forest—they were right in the line of a path. For months men in thousands took the trouble to make a little detour in order not to walk over them.

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In the rear cantonments, the wounded men who had died in the ambulance were buried in the village cemeteries. At Froidos the dead were carefully laid to rest in one

great trench. Crosses marked the names of the soldiers and the dates of their deaths; and maps of the cemetery were kept in the mayor's office and in the records of the ambulance corps. How cold they seemed, these graves laid out by the administration! All that saved them from the appearance of a work-yard were the flowers that comrades brought during days of rest.

Bourru had more affection for the graves of September, 1914. How much more moving! Buried on the spot where they had fallen, the soldiers of the Marne sleep in the lap of Nature. Often it is on the summit of a ridge, dominating the landscape, that their crosses arrest the passer-by and constrain him to meditation. Bourru took pleasure in the fancy that, at night, these victors could still look forward to the line of the Argonne, the stout wall defending the land of dreams against the barbarians.

At Rarécourt the praiseworthy effort to aid relatives in finding the glorious dust of

their dear ones had been carried to a point touching in its devotion. Each soldier who died at Salvange had his own grave; on the cross were crowns, plates, and even photographs sent by his relatives. There the ancient military rites were observed with perfect regularity. The bier of the humblest soldier was always accompanied by a priest, a guard of honor, and the commanding officer from Teil representing the general of the army corps. They were not willing that a grave should be closed before honor had been done to the dead comrade by his brothers in arms. The inhabitants of the village also made it their duty to honor these soldiers who had fallen in defence of their soil. Women and young girls were present at all the burials, and a pensive melancholy rested on the grave faces of the Meuse people.

All these graves in the rear villages, at Auzéville, at Jubécourt, at Ville-sur-Cou-sance, at Julvécourt, were constantly tended

by the soldiers on their days of rest. Moss, boughs of trees, and flowers were placed on them, and crosses were built up with bricks piled together. Now that he is far away, Bourru understands more fully what meaning underlay all this care for the graves. It answered a need of the heart. A struggle was in progress against oblivion, an affecting struggle in which man makes use of every symbol to provide against the indifference of the future. Therefore these crowns, these flowers, these classic palms that speak in honor of the dead; therefore these fragments of shell, objects that commemorate glory in arms; therefore these crosses, which tell of the resurrection. There are no heavy stones here to seal the tombs and protect them against possible profanation. One exerts himself to supply their place with enclosures made of boughs of trees, sometimes forming constructions of a strange style. It is the name, above all, that the comrades desire to save from oblivion. This name,

therefore, is inscribed on the cross, on the plates, and even written on a piece of paper and placed in a bottle left at the foot of the cross. Men of the future, will you know how to honor these glorious names which a wild desire to conquer oblivion now bequeaths to you?

Shortly before leaving the sector, Bourru was at Brocourt. He remembered that on the outskirts of the village two officers of the regiment had been buried underneath the pines that spread their broken, tragic boughs. What a fine romantic scene it would make, at a later day, when the mold of time should have gathered over the tombs!

But the battle of Verdun had been felt as far back as this, and in place of lonely graves he found a great cemetery. Two roads passed by it, filled with long lines of trucks and with troops on the march. A few strands of wire separated the enclosure of the dead from the highway where the living

were pressing on. Or was it a separation? Morally, at least, there was none. One went into the cemetery as into a familiar place; in passing, each man offered a brief salute to the crosses, or perhaps merely lowered his voice; others paused a moment in silence before a mound. Bourru heard one man say to the others with him, "He is over there, the old man;" and they took their way toward the grave as if an old friend was awaiting them with outstretched hands. It even happened that certain wags would choose their own places, declaring that in a cemetery so full of life a man would hardly know he was dead.

There was nothing shocking in such familiarity. Every word and every gesture were in harmonious accord, as it seemed, to say to the comrades who were sleeping: "You see we are here, close to you; you are not the dreadful things that are heard of in tales of ghosts; we know you well, and that is why we love you. Rest easy—the soil

that shelters you shall always remain French."

Once a visitor desired to express more clearly the feelings that were moving him, and in his awkward way wrote with a pencil on one of the crosses: "Rest in peace, old man; we'll take revenge for you." And it seemed as if those that lay buried made signs of friendship and encouragement.

Seeing all these things, Bourru would remember the old priest in his village, who, in his sermons, spoke so often of the communion between the dead and the living. Was this not a new witness of the truth? The soldier going into battle was receiving inspiration at the graves of his comrades, from whom emanated an irresistible power to urge the hero to sacrifice.

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Bourru loves to think thus of his dead comrades left behind forever.

He knows now how great was their influence over him. In the cities of old the

dead were buried in the center of the town, and the cemeteries served as places for public assemblies as for family gatherings. The Christian church, in order to make the influence of the dead still more forceful, buried them in the very temples. Eternal repetition of history! To-day in our towns in the war-zone we have revived the ancient custom. We do not exile our dead to somber places set apart; on the contrary we keep them very close to us. They are our loved ones, and their place of rest is in the garden where we walk and receive mute counsel from them.

The front, for the poets of the future, will be a long line of glory winding its path of light across the land of France. For Bourru it will be the great work-shop where one toiled hard for the achievement of a holy duty. Because comrades of his met death at the task, that work-shop will become, in the future, like one of those cathedrals where one does not enter except with bare head

bowing in respectful devotion. As on the days when over the slabs covering the tombs in the old church at Bligny the living march forward singing *Magnificats* and *Hosannahs*, so the time will come when Bourru will honor his dead comrades and will draw from the memory of them new powers for life.

PART TWO

THE WAR UNDERGROUND

I

AN ENCOUNTER UNDERGROUND

AT that particular moment the one idea of Flament, the sapper, was to dig fast. You, too, in his place, would not have thought of much else. As soon as you are at the bottom of that tunnel, less than a yard deep and about as wide, you want to get out of it. Just imagine! forty yards of earth on top of you! You cannot fancy the feeling it gives you! Oh, I know, of course, that as soon as you think of the sapper in his underground hole you shudder and say, "Yes, I see it all—it's horrible."

And you close your eyes the better to conjure up the sensations of one scratching

away forty yards under the earth. Ah, no! you do not see it all. In vain you envelop your soul in a great shroud of shadows and of silence; in vain your flesh creeps at thought of the dank chill, your arms move instinctively to ward off the falling clods, your bosom heaves as though struggling against suffocation—useless efforts! All these exertions of the imagination do not make you feel what it is to have forty yards of earth over your head; it is heavy, crushing, terrible! One is confined here like an old man who has reached the low grounds toward which he has been traveling for a hundred years of life, but who is still looking back toward those heights of the past, the sunlit days of his youth.

In proportion as the descent is made into the shaft, so narrow that a fat man could not get through it, the impression grows that the strata of earth are weighing down one upon another. Ten yards down we are still in the shaft, which is made of a clay as hard as

rock; thence a passage through which we have to crawl brings us to another shaft. Climbing down the rope ladder we traverse another zone lined with a moist, black clay. The clamorous life of the upper day is already far behind! Deeper yet, we cross the belt of green sand; and then, at last, forty yards down, we find ourselves—little moving objects lost in the immensity of inert matter—in the upper section of the Jurassic stratum. A vague, superstitious fear seizes the most skeptical minds. What if it be living, this matter upon whose eternal silence we are intruding! And who knows? Our presence might, perhaps, enrage mysterious forces here. These successive beds of clay that your pick is attacking—if you should disturb their equilibrium a landslide might follow and drag us down to the depths of some subterranean gulf. True, the tunnel is “boxed in,” that is to say, boarded with strong planks, but what a pitiful bulwark against these mighty masses, dense and

rugged, which are pulled incessantly toward the center of the globe!

Ah, that sullen force of nature lying constantly in wait for you; like a menace, the miner senses it on his bosom, on his back, and in his limbs.

Is it that, or the lack of oxygen, which is the cause of that uneasiness from which Flament suffers so much that, against his will, he stops from time to time to breathe deeply?

Behind him Surelle is putting the loose earth into the sacks.

“One more hour of grubbing, old man, and our job will be done.”

Suddenly Flament's pick sinks into a bit of earth which gives way easily; a black hole appears in the glimmering light of the candle.

“Hello, a fissure,” thinks the sapper, for he has learned that at the beginning of the Jurassic stratum there sometimes exist huge hollow spaces dating from the epoch of the great geological disturbances.

But you have to be careful—it may be a tunnel of the enemy. Who knows? They have heard something and are lying in wait, perhaps. Flament puts out his candle and listens—but hears not a sound. It must be a natural fissure. He enlarges the hole and can now pass his head through it; but it is not yet wise to light the candle. He stretches out his arm in the dark but touches nothing. However, he must see.

“Strike a match, and put it out right away,” is Surelle’s advice.

Flament has seen. No doubt about it—it is an enemy tunnel; on the opposite wall there were traces of the pick. What danger may this hole be hiding? Is it occupied? Isn’t it near a mine ready to go off?

“It doesn’t look good to me,” Surelle agrees. “Let’s get Lieutenant Montazeau.”

The lieutenant arrives. He has taken off his boots, for the soles might scrape along the planks and make a noise; he advances on all fours in the narrow tunnel. Do not try

to see him; it is darker here than you have ever imagined. Beside you, behind, before, the darkness is like a huge mass; you seem to be moving through a yielding substance; sight is a superfluous sense; your whole being is concentrated in the faculty of hearing; you close your eyes to hear the better.

“Can you hear the digging close by, lieutenant?” says Flament, who is following the officer.

Ah! that terrible nightmare of the “toc, toc” of the enemy’s pick! It continually hammers upon the ear of the miner, like throbbing pulse-beats. It has to be banished by sheer will-power or it would nail him to the spot, motionless, silent, breathless, doomed to listen indefinitely without ever knowing whether it be reality or an illusion which thus unmans him. Possibly the enemy sapper, absent a moment ago, has returned and resumed his work. But no—not a sound.

At last Lieutenant Montazeau arrives at the end of the tunnel. He feels around; yes, here is, indeed, a hole measuring half a yard. Very gently he passes his head through it, looks about, and listens. Nothing but shadows and silence. The electric flashlight reveals the tunnel.

"Go quick, and tell some one to bring a charge; we must plant a blast. I'll stay here."

The order was but the reflex act of a good sapper. Is an enemy's tunnel discovered? Quick! build a mine-chamber, a wall of sand-bags in front, the charge of explosives leaned against the wall, then a good wadding of sand-bags behind, a layer of melinite which reaches to the top of the chamber, a fuse—and there you have an enemy's tunnel mined; that is to say, torn to pieces.

But this is no rapid operation. While the soldiers are going back for the explosives and the sand-bags, the lieutenant remains. Peering into the enemy's tunnel he reconnoiters

with care—greatly excited. What luck! but also what a risk! It is impossible that the Boches will not soon discover the inroad on their tunnel, for they are sure to make frequent rounds.

An hour passes. The lieutenant listens and watches, too, for a light may possibly appear. Hark! What is that? Shining circles are dancing in the darkness—is it mere hallucination? You can tell by rubbing your eyes. But the lights are still there.

This time it is, indeed, real; there, perhaps thirty feet away, a light passed at the end of the tunnel and human shapes crept along. The German petty-officer is making his rounds. He is going to visit the branch where the lieutenant is listening. In fact, the light, which seemed to be disappearing down a transverse tunnel, is returning. A discussion follows. Are they going to come? Yes? No?

Yes. Now the lieutenant sees the light making its way towards him; soon he makes

out the German's face, red in the lamp-light and glistening with sweat—for it is hot in here. The lieutenant, too, is warm; he has thrust an arm through the hole and is holding his revolver pointed at the enemy, with the butt against the earth. The Boche is still coming on, with two men following behind him. There is nothing to do but shoot. It is horrible to kill a man this way; here it is eighteen months that the lieutenant has been waging war underground, but one would never guess it—he is almost trembling. His head is indiscernible against the wall of the tunnel—half a yard more and the Boche will see him. He, too, has a revolver.

Over their heads, forty yards up, there is calm day; neither grenades nor trench-mortars are at work. From the bottom of the trench the poilus are watching the swallows wheeling gracefully in the sunlight. Not one of the birds is troubled in his happy life. Down below, the Boche is gasping his

last; the two men who were following him are fleeing like frightened rats and the lieutenant is yelling out orders.

“Hurry up! Bring the sacks of ched-dite! . . . There are only six—never mind; it’s enough. Come on! Stuff it in!”

And the sacks of explosive are dumped headlong into the enemy’s tunnel—beside the Boche, who is still groaning. Quickly the fuse is placed, at the opening of the pit; forty yards above, a non-commissioned officer touches it off, while the lieutenant wipes his brow as though waking from a bad dream.

The shock was not even discernible, so tiny had been the charge! It required an effort of the imagination to believe that, down below, the body of a man was firmly wedged in the earth, to sleep there through the centuries—unless another explosion should come to shatter it and mingle it still more closely with the soil.

II

A RESCUE

CAPTAIN LAIGNIER, of the Engineers, was in the shelter which served as his headquarters when the shock came. A mine had just exploded. That does not mean that there was a great detonation; no, not a sound was perceptible in the grottoes thirty feet under the ground. One only saw the walls of the cavern swing like those of a ship tossed by a tempest; the supporting timbers groaned and cracked and seemed ready to fall; but hardly was there time to think "I am lost" before the hill had already regained its immobility.

Laignier rushes outside. All the tunnels of the position are his domain; since he has

not ordered any charge set off on our side it must have been a Boche mine that just exploded. On his arrival at the front line he is at once addressed by a sapper on guard.

“Nothing to be seen outside, captain.”

Which means that nothing has broken the surface of the earth. It is a mere blast somewhere within the underground maze, but what has caused it?

Laignier knows all the entrances to the shafts, which are numbered P^1 , P^2 , E^1 , E^3 , etc.; he runs from one to the other. At P^7 the sapper informs him, “It must be somewhere around P^{10} , at 5/51.”

And sure enough, at the moment when the captain arrives at P^{10} they are bringing a half-fainting corporal out of the shaft. It requires little effort to imagine what has taken place. The enemy has blasted one of our tunnels; the gases, creeping through a wall, have spread through the whole system of tunnels—a terrible fate for those who have

been surprised, for nitrous gases overwhelm a man in three breaths.

The sappers have come to know its effect thoroughly during the eighteen months that they have been engaged here in subterranean warfare; the effect is an asphyxiation which, though slow enough in bringing death, completely overpowers a man's limbs and leaves the unfortunate miner inert, like a bundle of rags, at the end of the tunnel where he has been at work. Those who have been revived tell afterwards that at the time the mind remains to a certain extent active—the will exerts itself to command the muscles to flight, but all in vain; you seem to be stuck fast in the tunnel where you are stifled if you open your mouth to cry for help. It is obvious that there is no time to lose if we are to save those comrades who are gasping thirty or forty yards underground. Moreover, a sapper never hesitates. From the moment when there appears at the entrance to a pit a signal that a soldier has been caught in a tunnel,

there takes place acts of devotion which will some day bring tears of admiration to the eyes of our grandchildren.

Imagine the setting. Under a shelter, open slender shafts about thirty inches in diameter, sinking vertically into the ground. You go down into them by a rope ladder. When, in a moment of calm, you who are uninitiated bend over the shaft where a candle burning at the bottom is but a tiny flickering spark amid the shadows of that gulf, you cannot refrain from recoiling instinctively, so profound is the horror that rises from below. But if there has been an explosion, it is more than mental horror that rises; the nitrous gases escape in rapid exhalations and sometimes men who were only leaning over the opening have inhaled their death.

Be that as it may, the first sapper to arrive does not hesitate; about his body he fastens a cord, gives the end to the soldier on guard, and descends. Often, after a few

yards, when he feels himself overcome, he pulls the cord, in token that he can go no further. He is pulled up and another undertakes the task.

This was what had happened at the moment of Laignier's arrival at P¹⁰. Already three sappers had gone down, only to be withdrawn, half-asphyxiated. Stretched out beside the entrance of the pit, they were vomiting and struggling under the effects of the terrible poison.

"Captain," a soldier immediately explained, "it is Lieutenant R—— and Sergeant C—— who are down there; we can hear them gasp."

Ah, the power of instinctive devotion moving the soul of a brave man! This captain in command of the engineers so well knows the danger of such a rescue that he has forbidden anyone to go down into the shafts, in such a case, without a rope attached to him and without an oxygen-tank, and he punishes severely those who disobey that or-

der. But before those present have time to interfere, Laignier has taken off the tunic which might impede his movements, and without oxygen, without a rope about his body, without uttering a word, he descends into the pit.

"It's madness, captain; stop!" they cry to him.

The officer does not hear.

What happens in the depths of the tunnel? By employing certain arts of narration which he will hardly reproach me for—for I know that this busy soldier never has time to read a book—I believe I can reconstruct the scene.

At the bottom of the shaft there is the entrance to a horizontal tunnel, where one is obliged to crawl. Naturally, not a ray of light penetrates here. Laignier advances in the darkness, struggling against suffocation; a mass bars his way, a man's body, large and heavy; doubtless it is the sergeant, for the lieutenant is a frail, slender man.

The victim has sensed the fact that some one has come to save him: "I'm smothering, I'm smothering," he murmurs. Laignier, sitting down and pushing with his legs, moves backwards, dragging the body of the sergeant. Suddenly, the latter, half awaking, is seized by the instinct so often noticed among drowning men, and clutches desperately to the arm of the captain, preventing further movement. The situation is critical, both the men may die; not a moment is to be lost. Laignier follows the advice always given a rescuer for such an occasion; with a blow of his fist he stuns the sergeant, who loosens his hold.

Arriving at the foot of the shaft the captain rapidly fastens the inert body to a rope that the others have let down from the top, and commands, "Haul him up!"

But hardly has the sergeant been drawn two yards up when the rope breaks—there is a fall; the rope is tied anew around the body; this time all goes well.

In saving the lieutenant another difficulty arises. At the mouth of the second pit, which opens at the end of the first horizontal tunnel, twenty yards below ground, he is holding with rigid arms to a supporting beam, while his legs dangle in the space below. Fortunately he is a little chap, far from heavy; for an athlete like Laignier it would be easy to detach him, but the captain's temples are throbbing violently, his vision is troubled, his muscles are weakening; several times he stops in the tunnel; it seems to him that a thick wadding fills all the space about him.

"Did you think of death?" I asked.

"Oh, as for me," he answered, "you know when I am busy I don't lose time thinking about that; my sole idea was to finish my job as fast as I could."

Both men were saved.

"But the best part of the story," says the major of engineers, with whom I discussed

the exploit, "is that three weeks after, even I, the immediate commander of Captain Laignier, had not yet heard of it. The captain had forbidden that the incident be mentioned. 'Tiresome,' he called it. An accident revealed it to me, and when I told Laignier that he was proposed for his sixth citation, he answered, 'If you wish it, major, but on condition that you give me eight days in the guardhouse, at the same time, for not having taken an oxygen-tank with me. Justice has to be maintained; when a man disobeys my orders in that matter I always lock him up in prison for eight days.' "

III

AN EXPLOSION

DELATTRE, the sapper, who is a shrewd Parisian, perfectly understands the tactical situation, and it is simple enough. For the last day or two, in one of our tunnels thirty yards underground, distant noises have been heard from the direction of the Boche. Captain Laignier has been here, listened with the geophone, scribbled some lines and numbers in a memorandum-book, and finally said, "Yes, the Boches are digging ahead perpendicularly to this tunnel."

How shall we retaliate? Have you seen two terriers attacking a cat? One heads it off in front while the other noiselessly exe-

cutes a turn and pounces on Tommy from behind. The whole art of war is there, whether it be on land, on sea, in the air, or in a system of mines. It is decided to apply that principle again. Fortunately an old tunnel of ours, not located by the enemy, proceeds in a direction nearly parallel to the tunnel that the enemy must be digging. It is only necessary to lengthen it, inclining to the right; near the Boche tunnel, it will be blown up, and thus all their work of many weeks will go for naught.

But, as you well know, in the same way that the cat can leap into the eyes of the first dog before the second has pounced on it, just so can the German sapper, at a given moment, decide that circumstances are favorable and be the one himself to set off the mine.

Delattre would explain it better than I, but at the moment he has not time to talk, for the sergeant has said to him, "Go and listen."

And he is listening. I assure you, it is a pleasant job for a lazy man. He lies down there at the end of the tunnel where the sound of the enemy's pick has made itself heard; he puts his ear to a beam, and he waits.

If you should listen you would hear nothing, and the earth would only seem to you a great mass of inert matter, but to a good miner the earth is alive; from its heart there mount a thousand noises which bear witness to the fact.

Let me tell you! A fortnight ago there was heard the distant "toc, toc," muffled like the steps of that robber who was walking about the other night—you would have sworn it—in the garret of the old château where you spend your vacations—you remember? "Bah!" you said to yourself, "there are so many noises in an old house!" Delattre had the same notion as you at that instant. "Is it really the Boche making that noise?" In that calcareous hill there are

immense fissures several hundred yards long, which magnify distant noises. And it has sometimes happened that a man has been alarmed by blows which he thought came from the enemy, but which in reality were struck by comrades working two hundred yards away.

But a week after, Delattre had no longer any doubt; the "toc-toc" was distinct, the Boche were advancing. Oh! he wasn't terrified; he simply confided to his comrade Minard, "No mistake about it, they are there."

The days passed; the Boches were working steadily. One morning Delattre, after having listened for five minutes, stood up very pale, and said, "They're right on us—two yards away!"

It was, perhaps, inexact; there are days when, because you have slept ill or have indigestion, you judge "short"; at other times you judge "long." It all depends on the waves of pessimism or optimism which alternate in our poor human souls.

The sapper behaved as you did, in your old château, when after having heard an unaccustomed noise you called your reason to the rescue, saying to yourself, "See here, let's look coolly at the situation; it is a door that is banging." As for Delattre, he called an officer who, after scientific verification, tapped the sapper on the shoulder and said, "Old fellow, I'll guarantee that they still are six yards away."

Meanwhile, their comrades were digging the curving tunnel.

To-day Delattre is listening with all attention, for there is a sign more terrible than the noise itself: it is silence. It means, perhaps, that the Boches consider that they have advanced far enough and are placing the charge, piling up there, four yards away, cases of westphalite. You can't be sure, however; when such an operation takes place you hear the scraping of the cases over the flooring of the tunnel. Well, to-day you hear nothing, but it may be that the Boches

have carefully wrapped their cases in rags.

For twelve hours the silence has continued. What does it mean? It is torturing, just as when you imagine that the assassin, with muffled footsteps, is advancing through the darkness of your chamber, knife in hand and ready to spring.

Eighteen hours, twenty-four hours pass; still the silence, silence undisturbed. What are the Boches doing? Is it an accidental interruption of their work, or are they preparing the charge? It will, perhaps, explode this very moment, or the next. The sappers have understood that the instant is critical. The tunnel cut in behind the enemy is finished; the officer decides to place the charge which will cut off the German retreat. It is necessary to bring something like a ton of cheddite from the powder-magazine over two miles away.

Delattre, with ear glued to the beam, stays on guard. Every instant his comrade asks, "Are they working?"

What a comfort that would be! It would prove that their blast is not ready. Suddenly Delattre emits a cry of joy. He has just heard the "toc-toc." He listens still more attentively; it is queer, that "toc-toc" there; it comes regularly, like the sound of a clock; it is not the sound of the pick, which sometimes strikes soft earth and sometimes a stone. The sapper understands; the Boches, realizing that they have been overheard, have fastened a pick at the end of their tunnel and are moving it from above, by a rope and a system of pulleys, to give the illusion that they are still at work. A banal and time-honored trick, but also a terrible indication; the German blast is ready.

"See here, boys!" says the sapper to his comrades; "we've got to get busy and bring those bags of cheddite!"

Indeed, this is not the moment for the sappers to stand stunned, stupid, like the poor man who, frozen with terror in his bed, dares not get his revolver from the drawer

of the stand for fear of precipitating the assassin's onslaught. Watch them well, these sappers, crawling in their narrow tunnel less than a yard in diameter, dragging their sacks of cheddite thirty yards underground, knowing that, from one moment to the next, the German mine may burst the wall beside them. What would happen then? Oh! that's very simple. The gases from the explosion would rush violently through the tunnel, which would then serve the same purpose as the barrel of a cannon; the men would be the projectiles which would be flattened like balls of papier-maché against some wall. . . . Unless the pressure of the gases fails to break through, in which case the tunnel "settles"; that is to say, the ceiling collapses, like a hat-box when you sit upon it. You can imagine the fate of the miners in that second case. There is yet a third; it is the slow infiltration of gases which in a few seconds stealthily smother you at the bottom of the hole. . . .

That day it was the Boches who were blasted, and we do not know to this hour which of these three hypotheses became for them reality.

IV

TRAPPED UNDERGROUND

ALTHOUGH they were in the depths of a mine-tunnel far underground, the sappers Vaslin and Jollivet were preoccupied with what was happening on the surface of the earth.

"I tell you," asserted Jollivet, "there is something pretty fine in the shape of a trench-bombardment going on up there right now."

"Never you mind that," replied Vaslin, "our job is to dig half a yard farther in this tunnel; as for trench-bombardments—that's their funeral up above."

And Vaslin, chief digger, went back to work. There have thus been evolved, in this

sector, two distinct classes among the combatants, those of the free air and those of the mines—a requirement of the famous economic principle of the division of labor, which one is obliged to apply to this war, so much resembling the activities of a factory.

But to-day it is really hard not to pay attention to what is happening above. What a devil of a life they do lead, the infantry, the bombers, the gunners, and the grenade-throwers! The earth trembles, the planks of the supports which enclose the tunnels groan under the distant blows. Certainly at this moment French and Boches must be “swopping” five-hundred-pound torpedoes as though they were nothing but hand-grenades; the things must be bursting and shrieking everywhere. The hill is trembling with it like the soul of a poor wretch shaken by grief.

“Just the same,” says Vaslin to Jollivet, “go and see if anything has happened at the mouth of the shaft.”

It is by the shaft that the miner keeps up communication with the rest of human-kind; in the same way that the proud mariner, at large upon the sweep of waters, must think of the little port that will shelter him some day, so the miner, buried in the heavy matter which he has to conquer, has constantly in mind the shaft by which he issues to the light of day.

Do not imagine this shaft to be a single straight well into the earth; no, it proceeds "in cascades"; first a drop four yards deep, then a twenty-yard tunnel, at the end of which there is another drop eighteen yards deep, and so on. If the hill were split in two, you would see the subterranean runways of the sappers take the shape of a gigantic stairway, which sinks into the earth in the direction of the enemy.

As Jollivet, climbing the rope ladders of the shafts and crawling along the tunnels, comes nearer and nearer to the surface of the earth, the noise of the explosions becomes

more and more distinct. A light dust floats in the air, an indication so fearsome that several times a terrible thought stops the sapper in his journey; the entrance to the shaft may have caved in. This idea strikes him like a boulder falling from the roof of the tunnel and leaves him stupefied for several seconds, robbed of strength by the terror of it.

On arriving at the bottom of the first shaft, four yards deep, Jollivet grasps the situation; the shelter of logs which protects the opening against outside bombardments has collapsed, destroyed by a shell, doubtless. But the danger is not great, for the light still sifts in through the displaced timbers.

* * * * *

Vaslin has come to join Jollivet. The two soldiers, crouching in the tunnel near the shaft, wait for the bombardment to cease; then they will try to get out. Perhaps some one will come to their aid and cut a passage

through the fallen beams. But the bombardment continues. What new havoc will it work? At each explosion of a torpedo or a 210 the soldiers strain their eyes upward to make sure that the slender ray of light is still there.

Of a sudden the earth trembles as though the entire globe were seized with terror; a giant shell, plunged deep into the ground near the soldiers, has just burst and the vibrations from the explosion follow each other through the earth in waves.

The man who feels solid matter thus disturbed to its lowest depths experiences a strange mental disorder. Think of it! Centuries of experiences have written deep upon our minds the firm faith that, within the shifting universe of water, air and living beings, one thing at least is firmly fixed—the ground that we tread upon. To all our senses it is a stable element. But now that that immovable foundation seems whirling in the

general tornado, our whole mental equilibrium is disturbed.

The gases have invaded the tunnel. For a few moments Vaslin and Jollivet remain stunned. When they succeed in pulling themselves together, the darkness around them is so complete that they have to grope about to find each other. The dust must be thick, they have the sensation of swallowing it at each breath. They feel along the walls of the tunnel. Where on earth is the shaft? Everywhere they encounter only masses of earth. The truth is soon evident. Under the force of the explosion the walls of the shaft have collapsed and the miners are trapped four yards underground.

I could resort to powerful language to depict for you the suffering of these two men, thus menaced by a terrible death, and I am sure that your kindness would not be niggardly in sympathy for these soldiers of France, whom duty has led to this inglorious suffocation; but I have to tell you truth-

fully that I tried in vain to find, in the course of a long conversation, any traces of terror which those tragic moments might have left in the soul of Vaslin.

When I said, "You must have had a moment of fearful despair," he answered with perfect simplicity, "Oh, no, you see, as for me, I have no wife or children."

It was like the enunciation of an incontrovertible axiom, a primal verity; the idea seemed perfectly natural to him that a man ought not to dread death except when it may have unpleasant consequences for others. This conviction with him is as powerful as an instinct.

"So," he added, "I comforted Jollivet the best I could, for he has children and kept saying over and over, 'My poor little ones, my poor little ones.' 'Don't cry,' I said to him; 'we're going to try to get out of here!'"

For both of them, however, there was a moment of tragic anxiety; the explosion had

destroyed their sense of direction. Have you sometimes had, in a tunnel, a sudden impression that you did not know in which direction the train was going? Do you remember the dizziness, the agony, the sweat which suddenly stood out on your forehead, the nausea? It was such a seizure that the sappers experienced. In which direction should they dig to escape? At random, Vaslin, who had brought his pick along, attacked the wall of the tunnel; Jollivet, behind him, carried away the loose earth. They took turns at their tasks. Fortunately the masses of earth hereabouts have been so shaken to the depth of three or four yards that the clay is broken up and may easily be loosened by the pick. Nearer the surface the soil becomes more and more broken. Since the exit the men were digging inclined steeply, the débris fell of itself into the tunnel.

Suddenly Vaslin's pick goes in deep; a ray of light reaches him. Where is he coming out? The soldier listens. Not a sound

comes from above; the bombardment is over, but he must be careful; the point where he is going to crawl out is perhaps in full view of an enemy sentinel.

With great care Vaslin enlarges the hole and peers out. They are in a crater made by the explosion of a mine; imagine a hole three or four yards deep, with the soldier emerging at the bottom.

All at once he hastily draws back his head. On the right, up above, he has recognized the blue sand-bags that the Boches use to make their parapets. Bad luck! They have come out within the enemy's lines. Crouched in their narrow tunnel the two sappers pass a moment of profound discouragement, for they know that hill of Vauquois—they know that every human figure that is outlined above a parapet is greeted instantly by a hundred rifle-shots. And then there is, perhaps, a Boche sentinel a few yards away, behind the sand-bags.

It is Jollivet who first decides to emerge;

Vaslin follows him. They both climb along the wall of the crater; the loose pebbles give under their hands and feet; several times they have to begin the ascent anew. All that makes a noise.

They reach the blue bags; a miracle! not a Boche is in sight! The soldiers leap over the parapet, tumble into a hole, get up; rifle-shots ring out, balls whistle. Like wild boars they rush straight ahead. No barbed-wire here, where the hostile lines are twenty or thirty yards apart! . . . Here we are at the home trench! The bombardment has demolished the parapet.

Running, leaping, rolling down the slopes of mine-craters, the two sappers reach the French trench. Fortunately it is that sleepy-head of a Maflou who is on guard at the peep-hole; anybody else would have shot at them, taking them for Boches. Maflou, quite dumbfounded when he recognizes them, never stops saying in his surprise, "Lord in heaven! Where did you come from? This

is no trick to play on a fellow! If you guys in the engineers are going to come in this way now you ought to let us know, anyway! Of all things! Lord in heaven!"

V

THE EXPLOSION OF MARCH TWENTY-THIRD, 1916

ALL the sappers knew what the objective was: to destroy the Boche redoubt. Ah, that redoubt! for months it had been the nightmare of the defenders of the hill. From this vantage-point over their enemy's line, the Boches could, at their ease, take observations covering our whole valley. Sometimes their periscopes might be seen sticking up there. Moreover, the place gave them the superiority of a commanding position in grenade-battles; and what is more, they had installed, on each side of the redoubt, machine guns which defended all their lines. At each encounter

those machine guns enfiladed our trenches with their deadly fire. That redoubt must be destroyed. Captain Laignier, of the engineers, had sworn it, and his sappers, ratifying the vow of their chief, had promised it to their comrades of the infantry.

But it was not an easy matter. A shaft ten yards deep, a tunnel in the direction of the enemy, and another shaft ten yards deep had been sunk into the earth like a gigantic stairway twenty-five yards under ground. At present a tunnel was being dug which was to be forty yards long. What a task! day and night for a month a digger, replaced every twelve hours, had been crouched in that tunnel less than a yard square, scratching at the earth without intermission; behind him a spader scraped up the loose earth and put it into sacks, which were dragged away by other workers and hoisted up to the top of the shaft.

Moreaux, when he was digger, sometimes stopped in his work, wiped his forehead, and

confided to his friend Boitier, who was spader behind him, "There's no use talking, it'll be a pretty piece of work. I overheard the captain. It seems that now we have gone under the redoubt; we are almost under the deepest shelters of the Boche second line. Talk about what will happen!"

"Come on, cut out the hot air and get onto the job," answered Boitier; "you know that we have to get ahead half a yard in our twelve hours."

But in proportion as one advanced in the direction of the enemy a certain anxiety increased,—namely, the fear of being overheard by the Boches, who had, perhaps, pushed forward to this point their listening tunnels; in three seconds an enemy blast could destroy the tunnel and asphyxiate you.

Luck was with us; not a sound was to be heard. Captain Laignier descended every day to the end of the hole, listened, examined the earth by the light of a candle, and appeared satisfied. That put everybody in

good humor; they had perfect confidence in him, for one would say that during these eighteen months in which he had directed the war of mines in the hill he had acquired a sixth sense, by means of which he guessed the subterranean activities of the enemy.

But everyone feels that such good luck cannot last. Every day explosions rip up the ground at other points within the hill. What a pity if an accident of the same kind should happen here! Had you been digging away for more than a month in this tunnel, like Boitier, you would know the distress of such a discovery. For fear of it poor Boitier no longer dares wield his pick freely, and yet he has to strike with all his strength at this packed clay, for it is hard as rock.

"Well, we've got to hurry," says the captain finally; "we'll put the pneumatic drill to work."

The machine is installed and kept cutting into the earth for several days, in almost

complete silence. There is no sound from the Boches.

The moment comes to hollow out the chamber for the explosives. It is no matter of laying an unimportant little mine here, one of those insignificant blasts the effects of which remain localized within the earth and do no more than shatter a tunnel of the enemy; no, this time a whole German company is living comfortably, twenty yards above us, in its underground shelter. Some of them are reading, others are sleeping, and still others are cleaning their guns; certain ones are dreaming of their Gretchens, back in Brandenburg or Hesse, who are proud to know that their sweethearts are so firmly ensconced upon the soil of France. Officers are lolling in their fine rest-chambers, decorated with objects stolen from neighboring French villages. Machine guns are there, protected by strong walls of concrete, ready to spit fire at the French; along with these are little trench-cannon and a thousand other

implements; and the sentinels are standing on the lookout, constantly watching our lines. It must be blown up, all this busy lair of heinous beasts who have dug their hole in the ancient hill of the Argonne, on our soil.

So we are not going to spare our cheddite. Ten, fifteen, twenty tons—we shall use all we can. But that needs a lot of space, and we must make an excavation the size of your bed-chamber. Shall we hollow it out with picks? That would take too long. We must find a more scientific way. This clay that we have been digging into, however hard it may be, is still compressible; we must profit by that fact. We will place just two hundred pounds of cheddite here, nicely walled in behind sand-bags so that the gases cannot escape. Then we will take advantage of a moment when another mine is going to explode, set off this blast at the same time, and the Boche will never notice it. So—the trick is done! Down in the ground the

gases from two hundred pounds of cheddite have hollowed out the earth, and the mine-chamber is ready. The Boche heard only one explosion, and has no suspicions.

But we must pull out and carry off the sand-bags that are keeping the gases from running through the tunnel. Then the electric fan must operate for two days continually before we dare enter the mine-chamber.

And when we do enter, there is consternation. Above the chamber, and not far away, can be heard the "toc-toc" of a German pick. The Boches are digging a tunnel toward us.

From this moment the work is feverish in its haste. Night and day the sappers are at work getting the boxes of cheddite, from nearly two miles in the rear, and carrying them down to the mine. In the shafts and yard-wide tunnels men are climbing the rope-ladders, crawling, descending and ascending without pause.

During this work not a sound is made, not a word is spoken. You may be sure that if the Boches noticed the slightest thing they would set off a blast; so we go barefoot to prevent any scraping of shoes against the boards as we crawl along. Within three days there are fourteen thousand pounds of cheddite in the chamber; but the blows from the enemy's pick are coming nearer and nearer. Cast your eye over the scene for a moment. Captain Laignier has come down from the mine-chamber. One can stand up straight here; and smoking candles light up the black walls of the cavern. The sappers are here, clad only in loin-cloths, for the heat is stifling. The conversation is in whispers. The situation is perilous—the Boches are only a yard or so above us, and if they discover us they have only to place a few pounds of explosive in their tunnel; the ceiling of our chamber, which there has been no time to prop up, will cave in, the explosion will set off our tons of cheddite, and the shock

will tear everything and every man in our tunnel to pieces.

Shall we keep on bringing more cheddite at the risk of disclosure, or shall we be satisfied with a half-sized mine and set off what we have already brought in? Imagine the terrible problem that our officer must face.

If he continues to amass explosives he will expose his men to the risk of death from the enemy's blast, and even if he himself should escape, he will have the disgrace of a failure; on the other hand, he might gain the glory of the greatest bit of fireworks ever seen at Vauquois. To order an immediate explosion is to make sure against the risk of a surprise blast and against censure, but it is also to accept a pitiful success.

But I am the only one to analyze this problem, because at this moment I am seated here before my writing-paper, and action is not forced upon me. For the truth is that Captain Laignier had made his decision,

even before his mind had taken into account the difficulties surrounding it. Between prudent half-way measures and thorough work at any risk, the engineer had long ago made his choice. In a calm voice, as he walked about the chamber, he said to his men:

“Yes, boys, go on laying the mine; there’s no danger.”

And to prove it to them he remained below a long time. Above him the German continued to strike.

Two days later the mine-chamber was full. Sand-bags had to be packed along the tunnel for at least twenty yards in order to be sure that the mine would send its blast in the right direction.

At a quarter past nine, on a cold March morning, the captain is lighting the fuse at the mouth of the shaft. In one minute the mine will explode. It is just the hour when the commanding officers of the Boches are accustomed to visit the underground shelters for the inspection of their men and to glorify

before them the superiority of the Germans in modern, scientific warfare.

Upon the opposite hill see blocks of earth the size of carts flung into the sky. French will-power and French science have spoken.

APPENDIX

RESUME OF THE MILITARY OPERATIONS AT VAUQUOIS

VAUQUOIS is one of the points on the front where the war has assumed a form peculiarly savage. There have been no periods of quiet here, as the official communiqués testify in mentioning the name of the village so frequently.

The position is made up of a hill, running from east to west, which rises some sixty yards above the surrounding valleys. On the west side flows the Aire, a river which divides the hill-country of the Argonne into two parts. The country all around is mountainous and wooded. Beyond the Aire lies the Argonne, properly so called; on the south is the forest of Hesse; to the east is a

rolling, wooded country, stretching away like a surge as far as the eye can reach. Behind the rampart formed by the height lies the little town of Varennes, at present occupied by the Germans.

Before the war Vauquois was a picturesque little village, very old in history, for its first builders were doubtless feudal lords attracted by its commanding position. From its height one could easily defy the enemy; on the north the descent is almost a precipice, and the southern slope is very steep. The church-steeple of Vauquois reigned proudly over twenty miles of countryside.

After the battle of the Marne the troops of the Fifth Army Corps were among those who were pursuing the army of the Crown Prince, retreating toward Montfaucon. It was in the neighborhood of Vauquois that the great fluctuations of battle occurred, with the two adversaries now advancing and now retiring, but always seeking to consoli-

date a position and establish a balance of forces.

At the end of September, 1914, our front passed beneath the southern slope of the hill of Vauquois. The French staff was quick to understand that the army could not remain in that position, fully dominated by the Germans on top of the hill. From his position up there, the enemy had a magnificent view throughout the valley of the Aire, and could employ his artillery over great distances, checking its work by direct observation.

Several times we endeavored to take possession of the hill; among others, on October 30 and December 8, 1914. But in spite of the bravery of our troops, the operations were unsuccessful, for the Germans were entrenched in formidable strength upon the height, and the attackers, from the nature of the terrain, had to work under great disadvantages. The whole winter passed in this way.

About January 20, 1915, the Tenth Di-

vision, under the command of General Val-dant, took possession of the sector, which it had already held up to November 7, 1914. It was here that this division was to make itself illustrious by carrying the position and by clinging to the hill-top, under unbelievable conditions, for nearly two years.

The first attempt upon the hill was made on February 17. The onslaught of our troops (the Thirty-first and Seventy-sixth Infantry) was terrific. The battalion of Cuny, of the Thirty-first, made a splendid entrance into Vauquois and held the place for several hours. But on that day we gained cruel experience of the power of the machine guns. A number of these guns which had not been destroyed by the preparatory bombardment mowed down our men on the height. It was in vain that our infantry attacked the protected nests of these machine guns; the position had to be relinquished.

After this new check the capture of Vau-

quois seemed a still more formidable task. And yet it was so necessary that on the very night following the fruitless attempt the general of the division, choking down the tears that had come into his eyes at the moment when he saw his soldiers mowed down by the machine guns, declared with all the force of his nature—"We shall begin again!"

And on February 28, the attack began again, under the orders of General Valdant, commanding the division, and in the presence of General Micheler, commanding the corps, and of General Sarraill, commanding the army.

By midday the effect of the 270-millimeter guns, which had been brought up especially for this attack, seemed considerable; the village was nothing but a heap of ruins. At 1:15 the troops designated for the duty advanced bravely; at 1:45 the general in command of the Thirteenth Brigade reported that three of his battalions had entered Vau-

quois. At two o'clock a German counter-attack forced our left flank to fall back, and a flanking fire from Cheppy obliged our right to do likewise. On top of the hill we therefore found ourselves in the position of an arrow-head projecting from the rest of the line—a considerable advantage for the Germans. At 3:15 the Eighty-ninth Infantry took up the attack again with vigor, and reoccupied Vauquois. The battalion of Clémenson, of the Forty-sixth Infantry, retook the German trenches and held them with great tenacity. At five o'clock a terrific bombardment fell upon the position and forced our troops to return to their initial lines.

On March 1 the attack was resumed by the Thirty-first, supported by the Forty-sixth and the Eighty-ninth, in the zones where each of these regiments had operated in the preceding battle. Brigadier-General Bassenne was in charge of the action of the several regiments. At eleven o'clock the

artillery began, and at two the infantry attacked, in spite of the heavy fire of the enemy's guns, with the same bravery as before. At 2:45 the Thirty-first Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Cuny, made its way into Vauquois, the Forty-sixth was on the outskirts of the village, and the Eighty-ninth, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Le Vannier, was consolidating its position in Vauquois with the Thirty-first. At 3:15 two German counter-attacks, on the east, were brilliantly repulsed at the point of the bayonet, with the aid of our field-pieces.

At four o'clock, the enemy still resisting, the last battalion of the Forty-sixth, which had been held in reserve, was sent forward. At 5:30 an attempt on the part of the Germans to attack from the forest of Cheppy was stopped by the fire of our artillery.

At six o'clock our line of resistance was established along the southern street of the

town. Colonel Simon, of the Forty-sixth, immediately undertook to reëstablish order in our dispersed units, and Captain Laignier of the engineers began the organization of the conquered terrain. During the night the Forty-sixth made two attempts to get possession of the church. A mountain gun was carried up to Vauquois.

Vauquois was ours.

The weeks that followed saw extremely hard fighting. Each of the adversaries occupied one slope of the hill. On the top the hostile lines ran from five to thirty yards apart. But the French trenches, which were still shallow, were under enfilading fire from the artillery at Cheppy, on the east, and that of the Argonne on the west.

The trench bombarding machines at once assumed an important rôle. The bombardments, called "crapouillotages" by the men, occurred several times a day; they consisted of an incessant stream of projectiles of every sort, and we had not yet had time to dig shel-

ters. The underground war also began quickly.

During this period the losses were heavy. Because it was important to enlarge the gains made on March 1, several further attacks were ordered. On March 15, the Seventy-sixth gained fifty yards in a marvellous onslaught, and on the next day, supported by the Forty-second Colonials and certain battalions of the Thirty-first, it repulsed a hostile counter-attack. The trench-mortars and hand-grenades proved their value on this day.

The regiments relieved one another in the positions, and each one made it a point of honor to obtain an advantage over the enemy. Attacks and surprises came in great numbers, grenade combats were intense, and demonstrations of bravery and endurance abounded. On March 19 three men made their way back into our lines after having spent three days in a cellar with Germans all round them.

On March 22 the Germans sprinkled our trenches with liquid fire. Surprised by this new kind of warfare, we gave way. But the next day, at nine in the morning, the Forty-sixth and the Eighty-ninth gallantly retook the lost trench.

Every day machines of combat were being perfected on both sides, and the trench-mortars were coming to be of great caliber. In April the Germans began to throw a new type of grenade that can be attached to the gun, which the men call "rat-tails," and which produce powerful explosions.

On the fifth and sixth of April there was an attack from the *V de Vauquois*—a part of the hill from which the enemy still enjoyed a good view. The assault was carried out by the Forty-second Colonials and the Eighty-ninth Regiment, and was accomplished amid terrific machine-gun fire from both sides. During the days that followed, the bombardment was so intense that every wire entanglement between the lines was

destroyed and the ruins of the village were gradually reduced to chips upon the hill-top.

The cantonments in the rear were not spared. Aubréville and Courcelles were destroyed by the enemy's gun-fire. The regiments not in the front line were kept in shelters constructed in the forests. From moment to moment the enemy turned loose a zone of fire upon some part of the forest. All the roads were dangerous, and death often surprised men on detail duty—cooks, workers of all kinds going about the sector, even four or five miles behind the line of fire. During May the battle continued without intermission on the position—bombardments, "crapouillotages," mines, incendiary shells, grenades, and what not.

In June we took reprisals by liquid fire. A munitions-depot of the Germans caught fire and exploded with a formidable uproar. The heaps of litter encumbering the position—beams, logs, hurdles, and débris of every

nature—took fire also. The hill was like one immense torch. But the wind was unfavorable to the operation, and it was not fully successful.

On July 13 and 14 the enemy directed furious attacks against Hill 263, three miles west of Vauquois. At the same time the sector was violently bombarded, especially the point called the Barricade, where the kitchens had been established. On July 30 German aviators threw bombs on us. On July 31 the headquarters of the brigade and division generals were under fierce bombardment.

For months now the war underground had been waged continuously; there was not a week without its mine explosion.

The artillery duels became more and more frequent. As for combats of grenades, aerial torpedoes, and trench-mortars, they were raging daily. Deep tunnels were dug into the ground, where the men remained whenever they were off duty.

Very frequently we saw General Hal-
louin, commanding the army corps, going
about the battle zone conferring with the di-
vision general about the establishment of new
lines of defense or new emplacements for
batteries. Thanks to the complete technical
competence of these officers, all the men felt
that the positions consolidated in the sector
were impregnable.

And so the months passed. Winter came
again with no diminution of the rage of the
combatants; the tunnels were full of water,
and the trenches on the western side of the
hill, in the sector of Bourreuilles, were mere
sewers in which a man sank into mud and
water up to his waist. Some men were ac-
tually drowned. But not an inch of territory
was given up. Brigadier-General Bassenne,
utilizing his knowledge of engineering, in-
vented certain types of shelters that im-
proved the material existence of the men.
He had much success in this work, to our
great satisfaction.

The spring of 1916 came. The troops of the Tenth Division were still on the spot; life at Vauquois was more and more perilous; mine-explosions, and on a much larger scale, had become daily occurrences. On March 23, for instance, we set off an explosion of forty thousand pounds of cheddite. The space between the trenches was now nothing but a series of craters, connecting with one another, joining one another to form a continuous ravine.

Some of these holes were as much as thirty yards deep, and their steep walls were so difficult to climb that sometimes deserters from the Germans who had once got down into a crater could not get out again, because the loose earth gave way under their hands and feet in climbing.

The surface of the hill had become a mere mass of ruins in wood and stone; there were no longer any trenches—we had to be content to build up each night a parapet of sand-bags behind which watchers were sta-

tioned. During the day the parapet would be demolished by bombardment or mine-explosions; it would be rebuilt at nightfall. By this time the rifle was almost out of use as a tool of war—a soldier took an occasional shot through his peep-hole, but only to testify that we were still there.

At the moment of the German attack on Verdun, Vauquois, which stands some fifteen miles west of that city, experienced terrific attacks. The moment was critical; the brigade commanders, General Bassenne and Colonel Pinoteau, were unremitting in their watchfulness. The bombardment was as regular and methodical as a deluging rain; 210-millimeter shells and 200-pound torpedoes were falling constantly. From this moment on, it became impossible to live outside the tunnels; only the sentinels remained in the front line, and the other troops were held underground, ready to emerge at the first signal. This underground life, in which one remains for fourteen days and nights under

the menace of perpetual death that may fall from the sky or spring up from the bowels of the earth, is one of indescribable torture.

And still our morale remained admirable, and the division never ceased, in spite of all, to love its glorious ground of battle. During its long stay there the sector had been transformed into a little home. One knew all its nooks and paths. The chief officers had remained the same since the famous days of the first attack, and the men loved them. His friendliness, his calm and smiling good-humor, and the force of his character, tempered by kindness, gained great popularity for the division general. When he had passed through the trenches, chatting familiarly with the men, one would invariably hear this opinion of him: "Some fine old boy, all right!"

Of course, there were times when the soldiers "kicked"; it would require great ignorance of human nature to expect the contrary. But men must be judged by their

acts rather than by their words, and the soldiers of Vauquois performed acts that will entitle them to a magnificent halo of glory when an impartial historian shall have told their great deeds.

After twenty-two months at Vauquois, the Tenth Division left the sector, to seek other destinies in other places.

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