GALSWORTHY JOHN

ANOTHER SHEAF

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Содержание

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THE ROAD

The road stretched in a pale, straight streak, narrowing to a mere thread at the limit of vision – the only living thing in the wild darkness. All was very still. It had been raining; the wet heather and the pines gave forth scent, and little gusty shivers shook the dripping birch trees. In the pools of sky, between broken clouds, a few stars shone, and half of a thin moon was seen from time to time, like the fragment of a silver horn held up there in an invisible hand, waiting to be blown.

Hard to say when I first became aware that there was movement on the road, little specks of darkness on it far away, till its end was blackened out of sight, and it seemed to shorten towards me. Whatever was coming darkened it as an invading army of ants will darken a streak of sunlight on sand strewn with pine needles. Slowly this shadow crept along till it had covered all but the last dip and rise; and still it crept forward in that eerie way, as yet too far off for sound.

Then began the voice of it in the dripping stillness, a tramping of weary feet, and I could tell that this advancing shadow was formed of men, millions of them moving all at one speed, very

slowly, as if regulated by the march of the most tired among them. They had blotted out the road, now, from a few yards away to the horizon; and suddenly, in the dusk, a face showed.

Its eyes were eager, its lips parted, as if each step was the first the marcher had ever taken; and yet he was stumbling, almost asleep from tiredness. A young man he was, with skin drawn tight over his heavy cheek-bones and jaw, under the platter of his helmet, and burdened with all his soldier's load. At first I saw his face alone in the darkness, startlingly clear; and then a very sea of helmeted faces, with their sunken eyes shining, and their lips parted. Watching them pass – heavy and dim and spectre-like in the darkness, those eager dead-beat men – I knew as never before how they had longed for this last march, and in fancy seen the road, and dreamed of the day when they would be trudging home. Their hearts seemed laid bare to me, the sickening hours they had waited, dreaming and longing, in boots rusty with blood. And the night was full of the loneliness and waste they had been through…

Morning! At the edge of the town the road came arrow-straight to the first houses and their gardens, past them, and away to the streets. In every window and at each gate children, women, men, were looking down the road. Face after face was painted, various, by the sunlight, homely with line and wrinkle, curve and dimple, pallid or ruddy, but the look in the eyes of all these faces seemed the same. "I have waited so long," it said, "I cannot wait any more – I cannot!" Their hands were clasped, and by the

writhing of those hands I knew how they had yearned, and the madness of delight waiting to leap from them – wives, mothers, fathers, children, the patient hopers against hope.

Far out on the road something darkened the sunlight. *They were coming!*

THE SACRED WORK

The Angel of Peace, watching the slow folding back of this darkness, will look on an earth of cripples. The field of the world is strewn with half-living men. That loveliness which is the creation of the æsthetic human spirit; that flowering of directed energy which we know as civilisation; that manifold and mutual service which we call progress – all stand mutilated and faltering. As though, on a pilgrimage to the dreamed-of Mecca, water had failed, and by the wayside countless muffled forms sat waiting for rain; so will the long road of mankind look to-morrow.

In every township and village of our countries men stricken by the war will dwell for the next half-century. The figure of Youth must go one-footed, one-armed, blind of an eye, lesioned and stunned, in the home where it once danced. The half of a generation can never again step into the sunlight of full health and the priceless freedom of unharmed limbs.

So comes the sacred work.

Can there be limit to the effort of gratitude? Niggardliness and delay in restoring all of life that can be given back is sin against the human spirit, a smear on the face of honour.

Love of country, which, like some little secret lamp, glows in every heart, hardly to be seen of our eyes when the world is at peace – love of the old, close things, the sights, sounds, scents we have known from birth; loyalty to our fathers' deeds and our

fathers' hopes; the clutch of Motherland – this love sent our soldiers and sailors forth to the long endurance, to the doing of such deeds, and the bearing of so great and evil pain as can never be told. The countries for which they have dared and suffered have now to play their part.

The conscience of to-day is burdened with a load well-nigh unbearable. Each hour of the sacred work unloads a little of this burden.

To lift up the man who has been stricken on the battlefield, restore him to the utmost of health and agility, give him an adequate pension, and re-equip him with an occupation suited to the forces left him – that is a process which does not cease till the sufferer fronts the future keen, hopeful, and secure. And such restoration is at least as much a matter of spirit as of body. Consider what it means to fall suddenly out of full vigour into the dark certainty that you can never have full strength again, though you live on twenty, forty, sixty years. The flag of your courage may well be down half-mast! Apathy – that creeping nerve disease – is soon your bed-fellow and the companion of your walks. A curtain has fallen before your vision; your eyes no longer range. The Russian "Nichevo" – the "what-does-it-matter?" mood – besets you. Fate seems to say to you: "Take the line of least resistance, friend – you are done for!" But the sacred work says to Fate: "*Retro, Satanas!* This our comrade is not your puppet. He shall yet live as happy and as useful – if not as active – a life as he ever lived before. You shall not crush him! We

shall tend him from clearing station till his discharge better than wounded soldier has ever yet been tended. In special hospitals, orthopædic, paraplegic, phthisic, neurasthenic, we shall give him back functional ability, solidity of nerve or lung. The flesh torn away, the lost sight, the broken ear-drum, the destroyed nerve, it is true, we cannot give back; but we shall so re-create and fortify the rest of him that he shall leave hospital ready for a new career. Then we shall teach him how to tread the road of it, so that he fits again into the national life, becomes once more a workman with pride in his work, a stake in the country, and the consciousness that, handicapped though he be, he runs the race level with his fellows, and is by that so much the better man than they. And beneath the feet of this new workman we shall put the firm plank of a pension."

The sacred work fights the creeping dejections which lie in wait for each soul and body, for the moment stricken and thrown. It says to Fate: "You shall not pass!"

And the greatest obstacle with which it meets is the very stoicism and nonchalance of the sufferer! To the Anglo-Saxon, especially, those precious qualities are dangerous. That horse, taken to the water, will too seldom drink. Indifference to the future has a certain loveability, but is hardly a virtue when it makes of its owner a weary drone, eking out a pension with odd jobs. The sacred work is vitally concerned to defeat this hand-to-mouth philosophy. Side by side in man, and especially in Anglo-Saxon, there live two creatures. One of them lies on his back and

smokes; the other runs a race; now one, now the other, seems to be the whole man. The sacred work has for its end to keep the runner on his feet; to proclaim the nobility of running. A man will do for mankind or for his country what he will not do for himself; but mankind marches on, and countries live and grow, and need our services in peace no less than in war. Drums do not beat, the flags hang furled, in time of peace; but a quiet music is ever raising its call to service. He who in war has flung himself, without thought of self, on the bayonet and braved a hail of bullets often does not hear that quiet music. It is the business of the sacred work to quicken his ear to it. Of little use to man or nation would be the mere patching-up of bodies, so that, like a row of old gossips against a sunlit wall, our disabled might sit and weary out their days. If that were all we could do for them, gratitude is proven fraudulent, device bankrupt; and the future of our countries must drag with a lame foot.

To one who has watched, rather from outside, it seems that restoration worthy of that word will only come if the minds of all engaged in the sacred work are always fixed on this central truth: "Body and spirit are inextricably conjoined; to heal the one without the other is impossible." If a man's mind, courage and interest be enlisted in the cause of his own salvation, healing goes on apace, the sufferer is remade. If not, no mere surgical wonders, no careful nursing, will avail to make a man of him again. Therefore I would say: "From the moment he enters hospital, look after his mind and his will; give them food; nourish

them in subtle ways, increase that nourishment as his strength increases. Give him interest in his future; light a star for him to fix his eyes on. So that, when he steps out of hospital, you shall not have to begin to train one who for months, perhaps years, has been living, mindless and will-less, the life of a half-dead creature."

That this is a hard task none who knows hospital life can doubt.

That it needs special qualities and special effort quite other than the average range of hospital devotion is obvious. But it saves time in the end, and without it success is more than doubtful. The crucial period is the time spent in hospital; use that period to re-create not only body, but mind and will-power, and all shall come out right; neglect to use it thus, and the heart of many a sufferer, and of many a would-be healer, will break from sheer discouragement.

The sacred work is not departmental; it is one long organic process from the moment when a man is picked up from the field of battle to the moment when he is restored to the ranks of full civil life. Our eyes must not be fixed merely on this stressful present, but on the world as it will be ten years hence. I see that world gazing back, like a repentant drunkard at his own debauch, with a sort of horrified amazement and disgust. I see it impatient of any reminiscence of this hurricane; hastening desperately to recover what it enjoyed before life was wrecked and pillaged by these blasts of death. Hearts, which now swell with pity and

gratitude when our maimed soldiers pass the streets, will, from sheer familiarity, and through natural shrinking from reminder, be dried to a stony indifference. "Let the dead past bury its dead" is a saying terribly true, and perhaps essential to the preservation of mankind. The world of ten years hence will shrug its shoulders if it sees maimed and *useless* men crawling the streets of its day, like winter flies on a windowpane.

It is for the sacred work to see that there shall be no winter flies. A niche of usefulness and self-respect exists for every man, however handicapped; but that niche must be found for him. To carry the process of restoration to a point short of this is to leave the cathedral without spire.

Of the men and women who have this work in hand I have seen enough – in France and in my own country, at least – to know their worth, and the selfless idealism which animates them. Their devotion, courage, tenacity, and technical ability are beyond question or praise. I would only fear that in the hard struggle they experience to carry each day's work to its end, to perfect their own particular jobs, all so important and so difficult, vision of the whole fabric they are helping to raise must often be obscured. And I would venture to say: "Only by looking upon each separate disabled soldier as the complete fabric can you possibly keep that vision before your eyes. Only by revivifying in each separate disabled soldier the *will to live* can you save him from the fate of merely continuing to exist."

There are wounded men, many, whose spirit is such that they

will march in front of any effort made for their recovery. I well remember one of these – a Frenchman – nearly paralysed in both legs. All day long he would work at his "macramé," and each morning, after treatment, would demand to try and stand. I can see his straining efforts now, his eyes like the eyes of a spirit; I can hear his daily words: "*Il me semble que j'ai un peu plus de force dans mes jambes ce matin, Monsieur!*" though, I fear, he never had. Men of such indomitable initiative, though not rare, are but a fraction. The great majority have rather the happy-go-lucky soul. For them it is only too easy to postpone self-help till sheer necessity drives, or till some one in whom they believe inspires them. The work of re-equipping these with initiative, with a new interest in life, with work which they can do, is one of infinite difficulty and complexity. Nevertheless, it must be done.

The great publics of our countries do not yet, I think, see that they too have their part in the sacred work. So far they only seem to feel: "Here's a wounded hero; let's take him to the movies, and give him tea!" Instead of choking him with cheap kindness each member of the public should seek to reinspire the disabled man with the feeling that he is no more out of the main stream of life than they are themselves; and each, according to his or her private chances, should help him to find that special niche which he can best, most cheerfully, and most usefully fill in the long future.

The more we drown the disabled in tea and lip gratitude the more we unsteel his soul, and the harder we make it for him to win through, when, in the years to come, the wells of our tea and

gratitude have dried up. We can do a much more real and helpful thing. I fear that there will soon be no one of us who has not some personal friend disabled. Let us regard that man as if he were ourselves; let us treat him as one who demands a full place in the ranks of working life, and try to find it for him.

In such ways alone will come a new freemasonry to rebuild this ruined temple of our day. The ground is rubbled with stones – fallen, and still falling. Each must be replaced; freshly shaped, cemented, and mortised in, that the whole may once more stand firm and fair. In good time, to a clearer sky than we are fortunate enough to look on, our temple shall rise again. The birds shall not long build in its broken walls, nor lichens moss it. The winds shall not long play through these now jagged windows, nor the rain drift in, nor moonlight fill it with ghosts and shadows. To the glory of man we will stanchion, and raise and roof it anew.

Each comrade who for his Motherland has, for the moment, lost his future is a miniature of that shattered temple.

To restore him, and with him the future of our countries, that is the sacred work.

THE BALANCE SHEET OF THE SOLDIER-WORKMAN

Let the reader take what follows with more than a grain of salt. No one can foretell – surely not this writer – with anything approaching certainty what will be the final effect of this war on the soldier-workman. One can but marshal some of the more obvious and general liabilities and assets, and try to strike a balance. The whole thing is in flux. Millions are going into the crucible at every temperature; and who shall say at all precisely what will come out or what conditions the product issuing will meet with, though they obviously cannot be the same as before the war? For in considering this question, one must run into the account on either side not only the various effects of the war on the soldier-workman, but the altered influences his life will encounter in the future, so far as one can foresee; and this is all navigation in uncharted waters.

Talking with and observing French soldiers during the winter of 1916–1917, and often putting to them this very question: How is the war going to affect the soldier-workman? I noticed that their answers followed very much the trend of class and politics. An adjutant, sergeant, or devout Catholic considered that men would be improved, gain self-command, and respect for law and order, under prolonged discipline and daily sacrifice.

A freethinker of the educated class, or a private of Socialistic tendencies, on the other hand, would insist that the strain must make men restless, irritable, more eager for their rights, less tolerant of control. Each imagined that the war would further the chances of the future as they dreamed of it. If I had talked with capitalists – there are none among French soldiers – they would doubtless have insisted that after-war conditions were going to be easier, just as the "*sans-sous*" maintained that they were going to be harder and provocative of revolution. In a word, the wish was father to the thought.

Having observed this so strongly, the writer of these speculations says to himself: "Let me, at all events, try to eliminate any bias, and see the whole thing as should an umpire – one of those pure beings in white coats, purged of all the prejudices, passions, and predilections of mankind. Let me have no temperament for the time being, for I have to set down – not what would be the effect on me if I were in their place, or what would happen to the future if I could have my way, but what would happen all the same if I were not alive. Only from an impersonal point of view, if there be such a thing, am I going to get even approximately at the truth."

Impersonally, then, one notes the credit facts and probabilities towards the future's greater well-being; and those on the debit side, of retrogression from the state of well-being, such as it was, which prevailed when war was declared.

First, what will be the physical effect of the war on the soldier-

workman? Military training, open-air life, and plentiful food are of such obvious physical advantage in the vast majority of cases as to need no pointing out. And how much improvement was wanted is patent to any one who has a remnant left of the old Greek worship of the body. It has made one almost despair of industrialised England to see the great Australians pass in the streets of London. We English cannot afford to neglect the body any longer; we are becoming, I am much afraid, a warped, stunted, intensely plain people. On that point I refuse to speak with diffidence, for it is my business to know something about beauty, and in our masters and pastors I see no sign of knowledge and little inkling of concern, since there is no public opinion to drive them forward to respect beauty. One-half of us regard good looks as dangerous and savouring of immorality; the other half look upon them as "swank," or at least superfluous. Any interest manifested in such a subject is confined to a few women and a handful of artists. Let any one who has an eye for looks take the trouble to observe the people who pass in the streets of any of our big towns, he will count perhaps one in five – not beautiful – but with some pretensions to being not absolutely plain; and one can say this without fear of hurting any feelings, for all will think themselves exceptions. Frivolity apart, there is a dismal lack of good looks and good physique in our population; and it will be all to the good to have had this physical training. If that training had stopped short of the fighting line it would be physically entirely beneficial; as it is, one has unfortunately to

set against its advantages – leaving out wounds and mutilation altogether – a considerable number of overstrained hearts and nerves, not amounting to actual disablement; and a great deal of developed rheumatism.

Peace will send back to their work very many men better set up and hardier; but many also obviously or secretly weakened. Hardly any can go back as they were. Yet, while training will but have brought out strength which was always latent, and which, unless relapse be guarded against, must rapidly decline, cases of strain and rheumatism will for the most part be permanent, and such as would not have taken place under peace conditions. Then there is the matter of venereal disease, which the conditions of military life are carefully fostering – no negligible factor on the debit side; the health of many hundreds must be written off on that score. To credit, again, must be placed increased personal cleanliness, much greater handiness and resource in the small ways of life, and an even more complete endurance and contempt of illness than already characterised the British workman, if that be possible. On the whole I think that, physically, the scales will balance pretty evenly.

Next, what will be the effect of the war on the mental powers of the soldier-workman? Unlike the French (sixty per cent. of whose army are men working on the land), our army must contain at least ninety per cent. of town workers, whose minds in time of peace are kept rather more active than those of workers on the land by the ceaseless friction and small decisions of town

life. To gauge the result of two to five years' military life on the minds of these town workers is a complicated and stubborn problem. Here we have the exact converse of the physical case. If the army life of the soldier-workman stopped short of service at the front one might say at once that the effect on his mind would be far more disastrous than it is. The opportunity for initiative and decision, the mental stir of camp and depôt life is *nil* compared with that of service in the fighting line. And for one month at the front a man spends perhaps five at the rear. Military life, on its negative side, is more or less a suspension of the usual channels of mental activity. By barrack and camp life the normal civilian intellect is, as it were, marooned. On that desert island it finds, no doubt, certain new and very definite forms of activity, but any one who has watched old soldiers must have been struck by the "arrested" look which is stamped on most of them – by a kind of remoteness, of concentrated emptiness, as of men who by the conditions of their lives have long been prevented from thinking of anything outside a ring fence. Two to five years' service will not be long enough to set the old soldier's stamp on a mind, but one can see the process beginning; and it will be quite long enough to encourage laziness in minds already disposed to lying fallow. Far be it from this pen to libel the English, but a feverish mental activity has never been their vice; intellect, especially in what is known as the working-class, is leisurely; it does not require to be encouraged to take its ease. Some one has asked me: "*Can* the ordinary worker

think less in the army than when he wasn't in the army?" In other words: "Did he ever think at all?" The British worker is, of course, deceptive; he does not look as if he were thinking. Whence exactly does he get his stolidity – from climate, self-consciousness, or his competitive spirit? All the same, thought does go on in him, shrewd and "near-the-bone"; life-made rather than book-made thought. Its range is limited by its vocabulary; it starts from different premises, reaches different conclusions from those of the "pundit," and so is liable to seem to the latter non-existent. But let a worker and an educated man sit opposite each other in a railway carriage without exchanging a word, as is the fashion with the English, and which of their two silent judgments on the other will be superior? I am not sure, but I rather think the worker's. It will have a kind of deadly realism. In camp and depôt life the mind standing-at-ease from many civilian frictions and needs for decision, however petty, and shaken away from civilian ruts, will do a good deal of thinking of a sort, be widened, and probably re-value many things – especially when its owner goes abroad and sees fresh types, fresh manners, and the world. But actual physical exertion, and the inertia which follows it, bulk large in military service, and many who "never thought at all" before they became soldiers will think still less after! I may be cynical, but it seems to me that the chief stimulus to thought in the ordinary mind is money, the getting and the spending thereof; that what we call "politics," those social interests which form at least half the staple of the ordinary worker's thought, are made

up of concern as to the wherewithal to live. In the army money is a fixed quantity which demands no thought, neither in the getting nor the spending; and the constant mental activity which in normal life circles round money of necessity dries up.

But against this indefinite general rusting of mind machinery in the soldier-workman's life away from the fighting line certain definite considerations must be set. Many soldiers will form a habit of reading – in the new armies the demand for books is great; some in sheer boredom will have begun an all-round cultivation of their minds; others again will be chafing continually against this prolonged holding-up of their habitual mental traffic – and when a man chafes he does not exactly rust; so that, while the naturally lazy will have been made more lazy, the naturally eager may be made very eager.

The matter of age, too, is not unimportant. A soldier of twenty, twenty-five, even up to thirty, probably seldom feels that the mode of life from which he has been taken is set and permanent. He may be destined to do that work all his days, but the knowledge of this has not so far bitten him; he is not yet in the swing and current of his career, and feels no great sense of dislocation. But a man of thirty-five or forty, taken from an occupation which has got grip on him, feels that his life has had a slice carved out of it. He may realise the necessity better than the younger man, take his duty more seriously, but must have a sensation as if his springs were let down flat. The knowledge that he has to resume his occupation again in real middle age,

with all the steam escaped, must be profoundly discouraging; therefore I think his mental activity will suffer more than that of the younger man. The recuperative powers of youth are so great that very many of our younger soldiers will unrust quickly and at a bound regain all the activity lost. Besides, a very great many of the younger men will not go back to the old job. But older men, though they will go back to what they were doing before more readily than their juniors, will go back with diminished hope and energy, and a sort of fatalism. At forty, even at thirty-five, every year begins to seem important, and several years will have been wrenched out of their working lives just, perhaps, when they were beginning to make good.

Turning to the spells of service at the front – there will be no rusting there – the novelty of sensation, the demand for initiative and adaptability are too great. A soldier said to me: "My two years in depôt and camp were absolutely deadening; that eight weeks at the front before I was knocked over were the best eight weeks I ever had." Spells at the front must wipe out all or nearly all the rust; but against them must be set the deadening spells of hospital, which too often follow, the deadening spells of training which have gone before; and the more considerable though not very permanent factor – that laziness and dislocation left on the minds of many who have been much in the firing line. As the same young soldier put it: "I can't concentrate now as I could on a bit of work – it takes me longer; all the same, where I used to chuck it when I found it hard, I set my teeth now." In other

words, less mental but more moral grip.

On the whole, then, so far as mental effect goes, I believe the balance must come out on the debit side.

And, now, what will be the spiritual effect of the war on the soldier-workman? And by "spiritual" I mean the effect of his new life and emotional experience, neither on his intellect, nor exactly on his "soul" – for very few men have anything so rarefied – but on his disposition and character.

Has any one the right to discuss this who has not fought? It is with the greatest diffidence that I hazard any view. On the other hand, the effects are so various, and so intensely individual, that perhaps only such a one has a chance of forming a general judgment unbiassed by personal experience and his own temperament. What thousands of strange and poignant feelings must pass through even the least impressionable soldier who runs the gamut of this war's "experience"! And there will not be too many of our soldier-workmen returning to civil life without having had at least a taste of everything. The embryo Guardsman who sticks his bayonet into a sack, be he never so unimaginative, with each jab of that bayonet pictures dimly the body of a "Hun," and gets used to the sensation of spitting it. On every long march there comes a time that may last hours when the recruit feels done up, and yet has to go on "sticking it." Never a day passes, all through his service, without some moment when he would give his soul to be out of it all and back in some little elysium of the past; but he has to grit his teeth and try to forget.

Hardly a man who, when he first comes under fire, has not a struggle with himself which amounts to a spiritual victory. Not many who do not arrive at a "Don't care" state of mind that is almost equal to a spiritual defeat. No soldier who does not rub shoulders during his service with countless comrades strange to him, and get a wider understanding and a fuller tolerance. Not a soul in the trenches, one would think, who is not caught up into a mood of comradeship and self-suppression which amounts almost to exaltation. Not one but has to fight through moods almost reaching extinction of the very love of life. And shall all this – and the many hard disappointments, and the long yearning for home and those he loves, and the chafing against continual restraints, and the welling-up of secret satisfaction in the "bit done," the knowledge that Fate is not beating, cannot beat him; and the sight of death all round, and the looking into Death's eyes – staring those eyes down; and the long bearing of pain; and the pity for his comrades bearing pain – shall all this pass his nature by without marking it for life? When all is over, and the soldier-workman back in civil life, will his character be enlarged or shrunken? The nature of a man is never really changed, no more than a leopard's skin, it is but developed or dwarfed. The influences of the war will have as many little forms as there are soldiers, and to attempt precision of summary is clearly vain. It is something of a truism to suggest that the war will ennoble and make more serious those who before the war took a noble and serious view of life; and that on those who took life callously it

will have a callousing effect. The problem is rather to discover what effect, if any, will be made on that medium material which was neither definitely serious nor obviously callous. And for this we must go to consideration of main national characteristics. It is – for one thing – very much the nature of the Briton to look on life as a game with victory or defeat at the end of it, and to feel it impossible that he can be defeated. He is not so much concerned to "live" as to win this life match. He is combative from one minute to the next, reacts instantly against any attempt to down him. The war for him is a round in this great personal match of his with Fate, and he is completely caught up in the idea of winning it. He is spared that double consciousness of the French soldier who wants to "live," who goes on indeed superbly fighting "*pour la France*" out of love for his country, but all the time cannot help saying to himself: "What a fool I am – what sort of life is this?" I have heard it said by one who ought to know, if any one can, that the British soldier hardly seems to have a sense of patriotism, but goes through it all as a sort of private "scrap" in which he does not mean to be beaten, and out of loyalty to his regiment, his "team," so to speak. This is partly true, but the Briton is very deep, and there are feelings at the bottom of his well which never see the light. If the British soldier were fighting on a line which ran from Lowestoft through York to Sunderland, he might show very different symptoms. Still, at bottom he would always, I think, feel the business to be first in the nature of a contest with a force which was trying to down him personally. In

this contest he is being stretched, and steeled – that is, hardened and confirmed – in the very quality of stubborn combativeness which was already his first characteristic.

Take another main feature of the national character – the Briton is ironic. Well, the war is deepening his irony. It must, for it is a monstrously ironic business.

Some – especially those who wish to – believe in a religious revival among the soldiers. There's an authentic story of two convalescent soldiers describing a battle. The first finished thus: "I tell you it makes you think of God." The second – a thoughtful type – ended with a pause, and then these words: "Who could believe in God after that?" Like all else in human life, it depends on temperament. The war will speed up "belief" in some and "disbelief" in others. But, on the whole, comic courage shakes no hands with orthodoxy.

The religious movement which I think *is* going on is of a subtler and a deeper sort altogether. Men are discovering that human beings are finer than they had supposed. A young man said to me: "Well, I don't know about religion, but I know that my opinion of human nature is about fifty per cent. better than it was." That conclusion has been arrived at by countless thousands. It is a great factor – seeing that the belief of the future will be belief in the God within; and a frank agnosticism concerning the great "Why" of things. Religion will become the exaltation of self-respect, of what we call the divine in man. "The Kingdom of God" is within you. That belief, old as the hills, and reincarnated

by Tolstoi years ago, has come into its own in the war; for it has been clearly proved to be the real faith of modern man, underneath all verbal attempts to assert the contrary. This – the white side of war – is an extraordinarily heartening phenomenon; and if it sent every formal creed in the world packing there would still be a gain to religion.

Another main characteristic of the Briton, especially of the "working" Briton, is improvidence – he likes, unconsciously, to live from hand to mouth, careless of the morrow. The war is deepening that characteristic too – it must, for who could endure if he fretted over what was going to happen to him, with death so in the wind?

Thus the average soldier-workman will return from the war confirmed and deepened in at least three main national characteristics: His combative hardihood, his ironic humour, and his improvidence. I think he will have more of what is called "character"; whether for good or evil depends, I take it, on what we connote by those terms, and in what context we use them. I may look on "character" as an asset, but I can well imagine politicians and trades union leaders regarding it with profound suspicion. Anyway, he will not be the lamb that he was not even before the war. He will be a restive fellow, knowing his own mind better, and possibly his real interest less well; he will play less for safety, since safety will have become to him a civilian sort of thing, rather contemptible. He will have at once a more interesting and a less reliable character from the social and

political point of view.

And what about his humanity? Can he go through all this hell of slaughter and violence untouched in his gentler instincts? There will be – there must be – some brutalisation. But old soldiers are not usually inhumane – on the contrary, they are often very gentle beings. I distrust the influence of the war on those who merely write and read about it. I think editors, journalists, old gentlemen, and women will be brutalised in larger numbers than our soldiers. An intelligent French soldier said to me of his own countrymen: "After six months of civil life, you won't know they ever had to 'clean up' trenches and that sort of thing." If this is true of the Frenchman, it will be more true of the less impressionable Briton. If I must sum up at all on what, for want of a better word, I have called the "spiritual" count, I can only say that there will be a distinct increase of "character," and leave it to the reader to decide whether that falls on the debit or the credit side.

On the whole then, an increase of "character," a slight loss of mental activity, and neither physical gain nor loss to speak of.

We have now to consider the rather deadly matter of demobilisation. One hears the suggestion that not more than 30,000 men shall be disbanded per week; this means two years at least. Conceive millions of men whose sense of sacrifice has been stretched to the full for a definite object which has been gained – conceive them held in a weary, and, as it seems to them, unnecessary state of suspense. Kept back from all they long for,

years after the reality of their service has departed! If this does not undermine them, I do not know what will. Demobilisation – they say – must be cautious. "No man should be released till a place in the industrial machine is ready waiting for him!" So, in a counsel of perfection, speak the wise who have not been deprived of home life, civil liberty, and what not for a dismal length of two, three, and perhaps four years. No! Demobilisation should be as swift as possible, and risks be run to make it swift. The soldier-workman who goes back to civil life within two or three months after peace is signed goes back with a glow still in his heart. But he who returns with a rankling sense of unmerited, unintelligible delay – most prudently, of course, ordained – goes back with "cold feet" and a sullen or revolting spirit. What men will stand under the shadow of a great danger from a sense of imminent duty, they will furiously chafe at when that danger and sense of duty are no more. The duty will then be to their families and to themselves. There is no getting away from this, and the country will be well advised not to be too coldly cautious. Every one, of course, must wish to ease to the utmost the unprecedented economic and industrial confusion which the signing of peace will bring, but it will be better to risk a good deal of momentary unemployment and discontent rather than neglect the human factor and keep men back long months in a service of which they will be deadly sick. How sick they will be may perhaps be guessed at from the words of a certain soldier: "After the war you'll *have* to have conscription. You won't get a man to go into

the army without!" What is there to prevent the Government from beginning now to take stock of the demands of industry, from having a great land settlement scheme cut and dried, and devising means for the swiftest possible demobilisation? The moment peace is signed the process of re-absorption into civil life should begin at once and go on without interruption as swiftly as the actual difficulties of transport permit. They, of themselves, will hold up demobilisation quite long enough. The soldier-workman will recognise and bear with the necessary physical delays, but he will not tolerate for a moment any others for his so-called benefit.[1]

And what sort of civil life will it be which awaits the soldier-workman? I suppose, if anything is certain, a plenitude, nay a plethora, of work is assured for some time after the war. Capital has piled up in hands which will control a vast amount of improved and convertible machinery. Purchasing power has piled up in the shape of savings out of the increased national income. Granted that income will at once begin to drop all round, shrinking perhaps fast to below the pre-war figures, still at first there must be a rolling river of demand and the wherewithal to satisfy it. For years no one has built houses, or had their houses done up; no one has bought furniture, clothes, or a thousand other articles which they propose buying the moment the war stops. Railways and rolling stock, roads, housing, public works of

[1] Since these words were written one hears of demobilization schemes ready to the last buttons. Let us hope the buttons won't come off. – J. G.

all sorts, private motor cars, and pleasure requirements of every kind have been let down and starved. Huge quantities of shipping must be replaced; vast renovations of destroyed country must be undertaken; numberless repairs to damaged property; the tremendous process of converting or re-converting machinery to civil uses must be put through; State schemes to deal with the land, housing, and other problems will be in full blast; a fierce industrial competition will commence; and, above all, we must positively grow our own food in the future. Besides all this we shall have lost at least a million workers through death, disablement, and emigration; indeed, unless we have some really attractive land scheme ready we may lose a million by emigration alone. In a word, the demand for labour, at the moment, will be overwhelming, and the vital question only one of readjustment. In numberless directions women, boys, and older men have replaced the soldier-workman. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers, especially among the first three million, have been guaranteed reinstatement. Hundreds of thousands of substitutes will, therefore, be thrown out of work. With the exception of the skilled men who have had to be retained in their places all through, and the men who step back into places kept for them, the whole working population will have to be refitted with jobs. The question of women's labour will not be grave at first because there will be work for all and more than all, but the jigsaw puzzle which industry will have to put together will try the nerves and temper of the whole community. In the French army the peasant

soldier is jealous and sore because he has had to bear the chief burden of the fighting, while the mechanic has to a great extent been kept for munition making, transport, and essential civil industry. With us it is if anything the other way. In the French army, too, the feeling runs high against the "*embusqué*," the man who – often unjustly – is supposed to have avoided service. I do not know to what extent the same feeling prevails in our army, but there is certainly an element of it, which will not make for content or quietude.

Another burning question after the war will be wages. We are assured they are going to keep up. Well, we shall see. Certain special rates will, of course, come down at once. And if, in general, wages keep up, it will not, I think, be for very long. Still, times will be good at first for employers and employed. At first – and then!

Some thinkers insist that the war has to an appreciable extent been financed out of savings which would otherwise have been spent on luxury. But the amount thus saved can easily be exaggerated – the luxurious class is not really large, and against their saving must be set the spending by the working classes, out of increased wages, on what in peace years were not necessities of their existence. In other words, the luxurious or investing class has cut off its peace-time fripperies, saved and lent to the Government; the Government has paid the bulk of this money to the working class, who have spent most of it in what to them would be fripperies in time of peace. It may be, it *is*, all

to the good that luxurious tastes should be clipped from the wealthy, and a higher standard of living secured to the workers, but this is rather a matter of distribution and social health than of economics in relation to the financing of the war.

There are those who argue that because the general productive effort of the country during the war has been speeded up to half as much again as that of normal times, by tapping women's labour, by longer hours and general improvement in machinery and industrial ideas, the war will not result in any great economic loss, and that we may with care and effort avoid the coming of bad times after the first boom. The fact remains, and anybody can test it for himself, that there is a growing shortage of practically everything except – they say – cheap jewellery and pianos. I am no economist, but that does seem to indicate that this extra production has not greatly compensated for the enormous application of labour and material resources to the quick-wasting ends of war instead of to the slow-wasting ends of civil life. In other words, a vast amount of productive energy and material is being shot away. Now this, I suppose, would not matter, in fact might be beneficial to trade by increasing demand, if the purchasing power of the public remained what it was before the war. But in all the great countries of the world, even America, the peoples will be faced with taxation which will soak up anything from one-fifth to one-third of their incomes, and, even allowing for a large swelling of those incomes from war savings, so that a great deal of what the State takes with one hand she will

return to the investing public with the other, the diminution of purchasing power is bound to make itself increasingly felt. When the reconversion of machinery to civil ends has been completed, the immediate arrears of demand supplied, shipping and rolling-stock replaced, houses built, repairs made good, and so forth, this slow shrinkage of purchasing power in every country will go hand in hand with shrinkage of demand, decline of trade and wages, and unemployment, in a slow process, till they culminate in what one fears may be the worst "times" we have ever known. Whether those "times" will set in one, two, or even six years after the war, is, of course, the question. A certain school of thought insists that this tremendous taxation after the war, and the consequent impoverishment of enterprise and industry, can be avoided, or at all events greatly relieved, by national schemes for the development of the Empire's latent resources; in other words, that the State should even borrow more money to avoid high taxation and pay the interests on existing loans, should acquire native lands, and swiftly develop mineral rights and other potentialities. I hope there may be something in this, but I am a little afraid that the wish is father to the thought, and that the proposition contains an element akin to the attempt to lift oneself up by the hair of one's own head; for I notice that many of its disciples are recruited from those who in old days were opposed to the State development of anything, on the ground that individual energy in free competition was a still greater driving power.

However we may wriggle in our skins and juggle with the chances of the future, I suspect that we shall have to pay the piper. We have without doubt, during the war, been living to a great extent on our capital. Our national income has gone up, *out of capital*, from twenty-two hundred to about three thousand six hundred millions, and will rapidly shrink to an appropriate figure. Wealth may, I admit, recover much more quickly than deductions from the past would lead us to expect. Under the war's pressure secrets have been discovered, machinery improved, men's energies and knowledge brightened and toned up. The Prime Minister not long ago said: "If you insist on going back to pre-war conditions, then God help this country!" A wise warning. If the country could be got to pull together in an effort to cope with peace as strenuous as our effort to cope with the war has been one would not view the economic future with disquietude. But one is bound to point out that if the war has proved anything it has proved that the British people require a maximum of danger dangled in front of their very noses before they can be roused to any serious effort, and that danger in time of peace has not the poster-like quality of danger in time of war; it does not hit men in the eye, it does not still differences of opinion, and party struggles, by its scarlet insistence. I hope for, but frankly do not see, the coming of an united national effort demanding extra energy, extra organising skill, extra patience, and extra self-sacrifice at a time when the whole nation will feel that it has earned a rest, and when the lid has once more been taken off

the political cauldron. I fancy, dismally, that a people and a Press who have become so used to combat and excitement will demand and seek further combat and excitement, and will take out this itch amongst themselves in a fashion even more strenuous than before the war. I am not here concerned to try to cheer or depress for some immediate and excellent result, as we have all got into the habit of doing during the war, but to try to conjure truth out of the darkness of the future. The vast reconstructive process which ought to be, and perhaps is, beginning now will, I think, go ahead with vigour while the war is on, and for some little time after; but I fear it will then split into *pro* and *con*, see-saw, and come to something of a standstill.

These, so sketchily set down, are a few of the probable items – credit and debit – in the industrial situation which will await the soldier-workman emerging from the war. A situation agitated, cross-currented, bewildering, but busy, and by no means economically tight at first, slowly becoming less bewildering, gradually growing less and less busy, till it reaches ultimately a bad era of unemployment and social struggle. The soldier-workman will go back, I believe, to two or three years at least of good wages and plentiful work. But when, after that, the pinch begins to come, it will encounter the quicker, more resentful blood of men who in the constant facing of great danger have left behind them all fear of consequences; of men who in the survival of one great dislocation to their lives, have lost the dread of other dislocations. The war will have implanted a

curious deep restlessness in the great majority of soldier souls. Can the workmen of the future possibly be as patient and law-abiding as they were before the war, in the face of what seems to them injustice? I don't think so. The enemy will again be Fate – this time in the form of capital, trying to down them; and the victory they were conscious of gaining over Fate in the war will have strengthened and quickened their fibre to another fight, and another conquest. The seeds of revolution are supposed to lie in war. They lie there because war generally brings in the long run economic stress, but also because of the recklessness or "character" – call it what you will – which the habitual facing of danger develops. The self-control and self-respect which military service under war conditions will have brought to the soldier-workman will be an added force in civil life; but it is a fallacy, I think, to suppose, as some do, that it will be a force on the side of established order. It is all a question of allegiance, and the allegiance of the workman in time of peace is not rendered to the State, but to himself and his own class. To the service of that class and the defence of its "rights" this new force will be given. In measuring the possibilities of revolution, the question of class rides paramount. Many hold that the war is breaking down social barriers and establishing comradeship, through hardship and danger shared. For the moment this is true. But whether that new comradeship will stand any great pressure of economic stress after direct regimental relationship between officer and man has ceased and the war is becoming just a painful memory, is to me

very doubtful. But suppose that to some extent it does stand, we have still the fact that the control of industry and capital, even as long as ten years after the war, will be mainly in the hands of men who have not fought, of business men spared from service either by age or by their too precious commercial skill. Towards these the soldier-workman will have no tender feelings, no sense of comradeship. On the contrary – for somewhere back of the mind of every workman there is, even during his country's danger, a certain doubt whether all war is not somehow hatched by the aristocrats and plutocrats of one side, or both. Other feelings obscure this instinct during the struggle, but it is never quite lost, and will spring up again the more confirmed for its repression. That we can avoid a straitened and serious time a few years hence I believe impossible. Straitened times dismally divide the classes. The war-investments of the working class may ease things a little, but war-savings will not affect the outlook of the soldier-workman, for he will have no war-savings, except his life, and it is from him that revolution or disorder will come, if it come at all.

Must it come? I think most certainly, unless between now and then means be found of persuading capital and labour that their interests and their troubles are identical, and of overcoming secrecy and suspicion between them. There are many signs already that capital and labour are becoming alive to this necessity. But to talk of unity is an amiable distraction in which we all indulge these days. To find a method by which that talk may be translated into fact within a few years is perhaps more

difficult. One does not change human nature; and unless the interests of capital and labour are *in reality* made one, true co-operation established, and factory conditions transformed on the lines of the welfare system – no talk of unity will prevent capitalist and working man from claiming what seem to them their rights. The labour world is now, and for some time to come will be, at sixes and sevens in matters of leadership and responsibility; and this just when sagacious leadership and loyal following will be most needed. The soldier-workman was already restive under leadership before the war; returned to civil life, he will be far more restive. Yet, without leadership, what hope is there of co-operation with capital; what chance of finding a golden mean of agreement? But even if the problems of leadership are solved, and councils of capitalists and labour leaders established, whose decisions will be followed – one thing is still certain: no half-measures will do; no seeming cordialities with mental reservations; no simulated generosity which spills out on the first test; nothing but genuine friendliness and desire to pull together. Those hard business heads which distrust all sentiment as if it were a poison are the most short-sighted heads in the world. There is a human factor in this affair, as both sides will find to their cost if they neglect it. Extremists must be sent to Coventry, "caste" feeling dropped on the one hand, and suspicion dropped on the other; managers, directors, and labour leaders, all must learn that they are not simply trustees for their shareholders or for labour, but trustees of a national interest which embraces

them all – or worse will come of it.

But I am not presumptuous enough to try to teach these cooks how to make their broth, neither would it come within the scope of these speculations, which conclude thus: The soldier-workman, physically unchanged, mentally a little weakened, but more "characterful" and restive, will step out through a demobilisation – heaven send it be swift, even at some risk! – into an industrial world, confused and busy as a beehive, which will hum and throb and flourish for two or three years, and then slowly chill and thin away into, may be, the winter ghost of itself, or at best an autumn hive. There, unless he be convinced, not by words but facts, that his employer is standing side by side with him in true comradeship, facing the deluge, he will be quick to rise, and with his newly-found self-confidence take things into his own hands. Whether, if he does, he will make those things better for himself would be another inquiry altogether.

1917.

THE CHILDREN'S JEWEL FUND

The mere male novelist who takes pen to write on infants awaits the polished comment: "He knows nothing of the subject – rubbish; pure rubbish!" One must run that risk.

In the report of the National Baby Week it is written: – "Is it worth while to destroy our best manhood now unless we can ensure that there will be happy, healthy citizens to carry on the Empire in the future?" I confess to approaching this subject from the point of view of the infant citizen rather than of the Empire. And I have wondered sometimes if it is worth while to save the babies, seeing the conditions they often have to face as grown men and women. But that, after all, would be to throw up the sponge, which is not the part of a Briton. It is written also: – "After the war a very large increase in the birth-rate may be looked for." For a year or two, perhaps; but the real after-effect of the war will be to decrease the birth-rate in every European country, or I am much mistaken. "No food for cannon, and no extra burdens," will be the cry. And little wonder! This, however, does not affect the question of children actually born or on their way. If not quantity, we can at all events have quality.

I also read an account of the things to be done to keep "baby" alive, which filled me with wonder how any of us old babies managed to survive, and I am afraid that unless we grow up healthy we are not worth the trouble. The fact is: The whole

business of babies is an activity to be engaged in with some regard to the baby, or we commit a monstrous injustice, and drag the hands of the world's clock backwards.

How do things stand? Each year in this country about 100,000 babies die before they have come into the world; and out of the 800,000 born, about 90,000 die. Many mothers become permanently damaged in health by evil birth conditions. Many children grow up mentally or physically defective. One in four of the children in our elementary schools are not in a condition to benefit properly by their schooling. What sublime waste! Ten in a hundred of them suffer from malnutrition; thirty in the hundred have defective eyes; eighty in the hundred need dental treatment; twenty odd in the hundred have enlarged tonsils or adenoids. Many, perhaps most, of these deaths and defects are due to the avoidable ignorance, ill-health, mitigable poverty, and other handicaps which dog poor mothers before and after a baby's birth. One doesn't know which to pity most – the mothers or the babies. Fortunately, to help the one is to help the other. In passing I would like to record two sentiments: my strong impression that we ought to follow the example of America and establish Mothers' Pensions; and my strong hope that those who visit the sins of the fathers upon illegitimate children will receive increasingly the contempt they deserve from every decent-minded citizen.

On the general question of improving the health of mothers and babies I would remind readers that there is no great country

where effort is half so much needed as here; we are nearly twice as town and slum ridden as any other people; have grown to be further from nature and more feckless about food; we have damper air to breathe, and less sun to disinfect us. In New Zealand, with a climate somewhat similar to ours, the infant mortality rate has, as a result of a widespread educational campaign, been reduced within the last few years to 50 per 1,000 from 110 per 1,000 a few years ago. It is perhaps too sanguine to expect that we, so much more town-ridden, can do as well here, but we ought to be able to make a vast improvement. We have begun to. Since 1904, when this matter was first seriously taken in hand, our infant mortality rate has declined from 145 per 1,000 to 91 per 1,000 in 1916. This reduction has been mainly due to the institution of infant welfare centres and whole-time health visitors. Of centres there are now nearly 1,200. We want 5,000 more. Of visitors there are now hardly 1,500. We want, I am told, 2,000 more. It is estimated that the yearly crop of babies, 700,000, if those of the well-to-do be excepted, can be provided with infant welfare centres and whole-time health visitors by expenditure at the rate of £1 a head per year. The Government, which is benevolently disposed towards the movement, gives half of the annual expenditure; the other half falls on the municipalities. But these 5,000 new infant welfare centres and these extra 2,000 health visitors must be started by voluntary effort and subscription. Once started, the Government and the municipalities will have to keep them up;

but unless we start them, the babies will go on dying or growing up diseased. The object of the Jewel Fund, therefore, is to secure the necessary money to get the work into train.

What are these Infant Welfare Centres, and have they really all this magic? They are places where mothers to be, or in being, can come for instruction and help in all that concerns birth and the care of their babies and children up to school age. "Prevention is better than cure," is the motto of these Centres. I went to one of the largest in London. It has about 600 entries in the year. There were perhaps 40 babies and children and perhaps 30 mothers there. About 20 of these mothers were learning sewing or knitting. Five of them were sitting round a nurse who was bathing a three-weeks-old baby. The young mother who can wash a baby to the taste and benefit of the baby by the light of nature must clearly be something of a phenomenon. In a room downstairs were certain little stoics whose health was poor; they were brought there daily to be watched. One was an air-raid baby, the thinnest little critter ever seen; an ashen bit of a thing through which the wind could blow; very silent, and asking "Why?" with its eyes. They showed me a mother who had just lost her first baby. The Centre was rescuing it from a pauper's funeral. I can see her now, coming in and sitting on the edge of a chair; the sudden puckering of her dried-up little face, the tears rolling down. I shall always remember the tone of her voice – "It's my *baby*." Her husband is "doing time"; and want of food and knowledge while she was "carrying it" caused the baby's

death. Several mothers from her street come to the Centre; but, "keeping herself to herself," she never heard of it till too late. In a hundred little ways these Centres give help and instruction. They, and the Health Visitors who go along with them, are doing a great work; but there are many districts all over the country where there are no Centres to come to; no help and instruction to be got, however desperately wanted. Verily this land of ours still goes like Rachel mourning for her children. Disease, hunger, deformity, and death still hound our babes, and most of that hounding is avoidable. We must and shall revolt against the evil lot, which preventible ignorance, ill health, and poverty bring on hundreds of thousands of children.

It is time we had more pride. What right have we to the word "civilised" till we give mothers and children a proper chance? This is but the Alpha of decency, the first step of progress. We are beginning to realise that; but, even now, to make a full effort and make it at once – we have to beg for jewels.

What's a jewel beside a baby's life? What's a toy to the health and happy future of these helpless little folk?

You who wear jewels, with few exceptions, are or will be mothers – you ought to know. To help your own children you would strip yourselves. But the test is the giving for children not one's own. Beneath all flaws, fatuities, and failings, this, I solemnly believe, is the country of the great-hearted. I believe that the women of our race, before all women, have a sense of others. They will not fail the test.

Into the twilight of the world are launched each year these myriads of tiny ships. Under a sky of cloud and stars they grope out to the great waters and the great winds – little sloops of life, on whose voyaging the future hangs. They go forth blind, feeling their way. Mothers, and you who will be mothers, and you who have missed motherhood, give them their chance, bless them with a gem – light their lanterns with your jewels!

1917.

FRANCE, 1916–1917

AN IMPRESSION

It was past eleven, and the packet had been steady some time when we went on deck and found her moving slowly in bright moonlight up the haven towards the houses of Le Havre. A night approach to a city by water has the quality of other-worldness. I remember the same sensation twice before: coming in to San Francisco from the East by the steam-ferry, and stealing into Abingdon-on-Thames in a rowing-boat. Le Havre lay, reaching up towards the heights, still and fair, a little mysterious, with many lights which no one seemed using. It was cold, but the air already had a different texture, drier, lighter than the air we had left, and one's heart felt light and a little excited. In the moonlight the piled-up, shuttered houses had colouring like that of flowers at night – pale, subtle, mother-o'-pearl. We moved slowly up beside the quay, heard the first French voices, saw the first French faces, and went down again to sleep.

In the Military Bureau at the station, with what friendly politeness they exchanged our hospital passes for the necessary forms; but it took two officials ten minutes of hard writing! And one thought: Is victory possible with all these forms? It is so

throughout France – too many forms, too many people to fill them up. As if France could not trust herself without recording in spidery handwriting exactly where she is, for nobody to look at afterwards. But France *could* trust herself. A pity!

Our only fellow-traveller was not a soldier, but had that indefinable look of connection with the war wrapped round almost everyone in France. A wide land we passed, fallow under the November sky; houses hidden among the square Normandy court-yards of tall trees; not many people in the fields.

Paris is Paris, was, and ever shall be! Paris is not France. If the Germans had taken Paris they would have occupied the bodily heart, the centre of her circulatory system; but the spirit of France their heavy hands would not have clutched, for it never dwelt there. Paris is hard and hurried; France is not. Paris loves pleasure; France loves life. Paris is a brilliant stranger in her own land. And yet a lot of true Frenchmen and Frenchwomen live there, and many little plots of real French life are cultivated.

At the Gare de Lyon *poilus* are taking trains for the South. This is our first real sight of them in their tired glory. They look weary and dusty and strong; every face has character, no face looks empty or as if its thought were being done by others. Their laughter is not vulgar or thick. Alongside their faces the English face looks stupid, the English body angular and – neat. They are loaded with queer burdens, bread and bottles bulge their pockets; their blue-grey is prettier than khaki, their round helmets are becoming. Our Tommies, even to our own eyes, seem uniformed,

but hardly two out of all this crowd are dressed alike. The French soldier luxuriates in extremes; he can go to his death in white gloves and dandyism – he can glory in unshavenness and patches. The words *in extremis* seem dear to the French soldier; and, *con amore*, he passes from one extreme to the other. One of them stands gazing up at the board which gives the hours of starting and the destinations of the trains. His tired face is charming, and has a look that I cannot describe – lost, as it were, to all surroundings; a Welshman or a Highlander, but no pure Englishman, could look like that.

Our carriage has four French officers; they talk neither to us nor to each other; they sleep, sitting well back, hardly moving all night; one of them snores a little, but with a certain politeness. We leave them in the early morning and get down into the windy station at Valence. In pre-war days romance began there when one journeyed. A lovely word, and the gate of the South. Soon after Valence one used to wake and draw aside a corner of the curtain and look at the land in the first level sunlight; a strange land of plains, and far, yellowish hills, a land with a dry, shivering wind over it, and puffs of pink almond blossom. But now Valence was dark, for it was November, and raining. In the waiting-room were three tired soldiers trying to sleep, and one sitting up awake, shyly glad to share our cakes and journals. Then on through the wet morning by the little branch line into Dauphiné. Two officers again and a civilian, in our carriage, are talking in low voices of the war, or in higher voices of lodgings at Valence. One is a

commandant, with a handsome paternal old face, broader than the English face, a little more in love with life, and a little more cynical about it, with more depth of colouring in eyes and cheeks and hair. The tone of their voices, talking of the war, is grave and secret. "*Les Anglais ne lâcheront pas*" are the only words I plainly hear. The younger officer says: "And how would you punish?" The commandant's answer is inaudible, but by the twinkling of his eyes one knows it to be human and sagacious. The train winds on in the windy wet, through foothills and then young mountains, following up a swift-flowing river. The chief trees are bare Lombardy poplars. The chief little town is gathered round a sharp spur, with bare towers on its top. The colour everywhere is a brownish-grey.

We have arrived. A tall, strong young soldier, all white teeth and smiles, hurries our luggage out, a car hurries us up in the rainy wind through the little town, down again across the river, up a long avenue of pines, and we are at our hospital.

Round the long table, at their dinner-hour, what a variety of type among the men! And yet a likeness, a sort of quickness and sensibility, common to them all. A few are a little *méfiant* of these newcomers, with the *méfiance* of individual character, not of class distrustfulness, nor of that defensive expressionless we cultivate in England. The French soldier has a touch of the child in him – if we leave out the Parisians; a child who knows more than you do perhaps; a child who has lived many lives before this life; a wise child, who jumps to your moods and

shows you his "sore fingers" readily when he feels that you want to see them. He has none of the perverse and grudging attitude towards his own ailments that we English foster. He is perhaps a little inclined to pet them, treating them with an odd mixture of stoic gaiety and gloomy indulgence. It is like all the rest of him; he feels everything so much quicker than we do – he is so much more impressionable. The variety of type is more marked physically than in our country. Here is a tall Savoyard cavalryman, with a maimed hand and a fair moustache brushed up at the ends, big and strong, with grey eyes, and a sort of sage self-reliance; only twenty-six, but might be forty. Here is a real Latin, who was buried by an explosion at Verdun; handsome, with dark hair and a round head, and colour in his cheeks; an ironical critic of everything, a Socialist, a mocker, a fine, strong fellow with a clear brain, who attracts women. Here are two peasants from the Central South, both with bad sciatica, slower in look, with a mournful, rather monkeyish expression in their eyes, as if puzzled by their sufferings. Here is a true Frenchman, a Territorial, from Roanne, riddled with rheumatism, quick and gay, and suffering, touchy and affectionate, not tall, brown-faced, brown-eyed, rather fair, with clean jaw and features, and eyes with a soul in them, looking a little up; forty-eight – the oldest of them all – they call him *Grandpère*. And here is a printer from Lyon with shell-shock; medium-coloured, short and roundish and neat, full of humanity and high standards and domestic affection, and so polite, with eyes a little like a dog's. And

here another with shell-shock and brown-green eyes, from the "invaded countries"; *méfiant*, truly, this one, but with a heart when you get at it; neat, and brooding, quick as a cat, nervous, and wanting his own way. But they are all so varied. If there are qualities common to all they are impressionability and capacity for affection. This is not the impression left on one by a crowd of Englishmen. Behind the politeness and civilised bearing of the French I used to think there was a little of the tiger. In a sense perhaps there is, but that is not the foundation of their character – far from it! Underneath the tiger, again, there is a man civilised for centuries. Most certainly the politeness of the French is no surface quality, it is a polish welling up from a naturally affectionate heart, a naturally quick apprehension of the moods and feelings of others; it is the outcome of a culture so old that, underneath all differences, it binds together all those types and strains of blood – the Savoyard, and the Southerner, the Latin of the Centre, the man from the North, the Breton, the Gascon, the Basque, the Auvergnat, even to some extent the Norman, and the Parisian – in a sort of warm and bone-deep kinship. They have all, as it were, sat for centuries under a wall with the afternoon sun warming them through and through, as I so often saw the old town gossips sitting of an afternoon. The sun of France has made them alike; a light and happy sun, not too southern, but just southern enough.

And the women of France! If the men are bound in that mysterious kinship, how much more so are the women! What

is it in the Frenchwoman which makes her so utterly unique? A daughter in one of Anatole France's books says to her mother: "*Tu es pour les bijoux, je suis pour les dessous*." The Frenchwoman spiritually is *pour les dessous*. There is in her a kind of inherited, conservative, clever, dainty capability; no matter where you go in France, or in what class – country or town – you find it. She cannot waste, she cannot spoil, she makes and shows – the best of everything. If I were asked for a concrete illustration of self-respect I should say – the Frenchwoman. It is a particular kind of self-respect, no doubt, very much limited to this world; and perhaps beginning to be a little frayed. We have some Frenchwomen at the hospital, the servants who keep us in running order – the dear cook whom we love not only for her baked meats, proud of her soldier son once a professor, now a sergeant, and she a woman of property, with two houses in the little town; patient, kind, very stubborn about her dishes, which have in them the essential juices and savours which characterise all things really French. She has great sweetness and self-containment in her small, wrinkled, yellowish face; always quietly polite and grave, she bubbles deliciously at any joke, and gives affection sagaciously to those who merit. A jewel, who must be doing something *pour la France*. And we have Madame Jeanne Camille, mother of two daughters and one son, too young to be a soldier. It was her eldest daughter who wanted to come and scrub in the hospital, but was refused because she was too pretty. And her mother came instead. A

woman who did not need to come, and nearly fifty, but strong, as the French are strong, with good red blood, deep colouring, hair still black, and handsome straight features. What a worker! A lover of talk, too, and of a joke when she has time. And Claire, of a *languissante* temperament, as she says; but who would know it? Eighteen, with a figure abundant as that of a woman of forty, but just beginning to fine down; holding herself as French girls learn to hold themselves so young; and with the pretty eyes of a Southern nymph, clear-brown and understanding, and a little bit wood-wild. Not self-conscious – like the English girl at that age – fond of work and play; with what is called "a good head" on her, and a warm heart. A real woman of France.

Then there is the "farmeress" at the home farm which gives the hospital its milk; a splendid, grey-eyed creature, doing the work of her husband who is at the front, with a little girl and boy rounder and rosier than anything you ever saw; and a small, one-eyed brother-in-law who drinks. My God, he drinks! Any day you go into the town to do hospital commissions you may see the hospital donkey-cart with the charming grey donkey outside the Café de l'Univers or what not, and know that Charles is within. He beguiles our *poilus*, and they take little beguiling. Wine is too plentiful in France. The sun in the wines of France quickens and cheers the blood in the veins of France. But the gift of wine is abused. One may see a poster which says – with what truth I know not – that drink has cost France more than the Franco-Prussian War. French drunkenness is not so sottish as our beer-

and-whiskey-fuddled variety, but it is not pleasant to see, and mars a fair land.

What a fair land! I never before grasped the charm of French colouring; the pinkish-yellow of the pan-tiled roofs, the lavender-grey or dim green of the shutters, the self-respecting shapes and flatness of the houses, unworried by wriggling ornamentation or lines coming up in order that they may go down again; the universal plane trees with their variegated trunks and dancing lightness – nothing more charming than plane trees in winter, their delicate twigs and little brown balls shaking against the clear pale skies, and in summer nothing more green and beautiful than their sun-flecked shade. Each country has its special genius of colouring – best displayed in winter. To characterise such genius by a word or two is hopeless; but one might say the genius of Spain is brown; of Ireland green; of England chalky blue-green; of Egypt shimmering sandstone. For France amethystine feebly expresses the sensation; the blend is subtle, stimulating, rarefied – at all events in the centre and south. Walk into an English village, however beautiful – and many are very beautiful – you will not get the peculiar sharp spiritual sensation which will come on you entering some little French village or town – the sensation one has looking at a picture by Francesca. The blue wood-smoke, the pinkish tiles, the grey shutters, the grey-brown plane trees, the pale blue sky, the yellowish houses, and above all the clean forms and the clear air. I shall never forget one late afternoon rushing home in the car from some commission. The setting

sun had just broken through after a misty day, the mountains were illumined with purple and rose-madder, and snow-tipped against the blue sky, a wonderful wistaria blue drifted smoke-like about the valley; and the tall trees – poplars and cypresses – stood like spires. No wonder the French are *spirituel*, a word so different from our "spiritual," for that they are not; pre-eminently citizens of this world – even the pious French. This is why on the whole they make a better fist of social life than we do, we misty islanders, only half-alive because we set such store by our unrealised moralities. Not one Englishman in ten now *really* believes that he is going to live again, but his disbelief has not yet reconciled him to making the best of this life, or laid ghosts of the beliefs he has outworn. Clear air and sun, but not so much as to paralyse action, have made in France clearer eyes, clearer brains, and touched souls with a sane cynicism. The French do not despise and neglect the means to ends. They face sexual realities. They know that to live well they must eat well, to eat well must cook well, to cook well must cleanly and cleverly cultivate their soil. May France be warned in time by our dismal fate! May she never lose her love of the land; nor let industrialism absorb her peasantry, and the lure of wealth and the cheap glamour of the towns draw her into their uncharmed circles. We English have rattled deep into a paradise of machines, chimneys, cinemas, and halfpenny papers; have bartered our heritage of health, dignity, and looks for wealth, and badly distributed wealth at that. France was trembling on the verge of the same precipice when the war

came; with its death and wind of restlessness the war bids fair to tip her over. Let her hold back with all her might! Her two dangers are drink and the lure of the big towns. No race can preserve sanity and refinement which really gives way to these. She will not fare even as well as we have if she yields; our fibre is coarser and more resistant than hers, nor had we ever so much grace to lose. It is by grace and self-respect that France had her pre-eminence; let these wither, as wither they must in the grip of a sordid and drink-soothed industrialism, and her star will burn out. The life of the peasant is hard; peasants are soon wrinkled and weathered; they are not angels; narrow and over-provident, suspicious, and given to drink, they still have their roots and being in the realities of life, close to nature, and keep a sort of simple dignity and health which great towns destroy. Let France take care of her peasants and her country will take care of itself.

Talking to our *poilus* we remarked that they have not a good word to throw to their *députés*– no faith in them. About French politicians I know nothing; but their shoes are unenviable, and will become too tight for them after the war. The *poilu* has no faith at all now, if he ever had, save faith in his country, so engrained that he lets the life-loving blood of him be spilled out to the last drop, cursing himself and everything for his heroic folly.

We had a young Spaniard of the Foreign Legion in our hospital who had been to Cambridge, and had the "outside" eyes on all things French. In his view *je m'en foutism* has a hold of the

French army. Strange if it had not! Clear, quick brains cannot stand Fate's making ninepins of mankind year after year like this. Fortunately for France, the love of her sons has never been forced; it has grown like grass and simple wild herbs in the heart, alongside the liberty to criticise and blame. The *poilu* cares for nothing, no, not he! But he is himself a little, unconscious bit of France, and, for oneself, one always cares. State-forced patriotism made this war – a fever-germ which swells the head and causes blindness. A State which teaches patriotism in its schools is going mad! Let no such State be trusted! They who, after the war, would have England and France copy the example of the State-drilled country which opened these flood-gates of death, and teach mad provincialism under the nickname of patriotism to their children, are driving nails into the coffins of their countries. *Je m'en foutism* is a natural product of three years of war, and better by far than the docile despair to which so many German soldiers have been reduced. We were in Lyon when the Russian Revolution and the German retreat from Bapaume were reported. The town and railway station were full of soldiers. No enthusiasm, no stir of any kind, only the usual tired stoicism. And one thought of what the *poilu* can be like; of our Christmas dinner-table at the hospital under the green hanging wreaths and the rosy Chinese lanterns, the hum, the chatter, the laughter of free and easy souls in their red hospital jackets. The French are so easily, so incorrigibly gay; the dreary grinding pressure of this war seems horribly cruel applied to such a people, and

the heroism with which they have borne its untold miseries is sublime. In our little remote town out there – a town which had been Roman in its time, and still had bits of Roman walls and Roman arches – every family had its fathers, brothers, sons, dead, fighting, in prison, or in hospital. The mothers were wonderful. One old couple, in a *ferblanterie* shop, who had lost their eldest son and whose other son was at the front, used to try hard not to talk about the war, but sure enough they would come to it at last, each time we saw them, and in a minute the mother would be crying and a silent tear would roll down the old father's face. Then he would point to the map and say: "But look where they are, the Boches! Can we stop? It's impossible. We must go on till we've thrown them out. It is dreadful, but what would you have? Ah! Our son – he was so promising!" And the mother, weeping over the tin-tacks, would make the neatest little parcel of them, murmuring out of her tears: "*Il faut que ça finisse; mais la France – il ne faut pas que la France – Nos chers fils auraient été tués pour rien!*" Poor souls! I remember another couple up on the hillside. The old wife, dignified as a duchess – if duchesses are dignified – wanting us so badly to come in and sit down that she might the better talk to us of her sons: one dead, and one wounded, and two still at the front, and the youngest not yet old enough. And while we stood there up came the father, an old farmer, with that youngest son. He had not quite the spirit of the old lady, nor her serenity; he thought that men in these days were no better than *des bêtes féroces*. And in truth his philosophy –

of an old tiller of the soil – was as superior to that of emperors and diplomats as his life is superior to theirs. Not very far from that little farm is the spot of all others in that mountain country which most stirs the æsthetic and the speculative strains within one. Lovely and remote, all by itself at the foot of a mountain, in a circle of the hills, an old monastery stands, now used as a farm, with one rose window, like a spider's web, spun delicate in stone tracery. There the old monks had gone to get away from the struggles of the main valley and the surges of the fighting men. There even now were traces of their peaceful life; the fish-ponds and the tillage still kept in cultivation. If they had lived in these days they would have been at the war, fighting or bearing stretchers, like the priests of France, of whom eleven thousand, I am told – untruthfully, I hope – are dead. So the world goes forward – the Kingdom of Heaven comes!

We were in the town the day that the 1918 class received their preliminary summons. Sad were the mothers watching their boys parading the streets, rosetted and singing to show that they had passed and were ready to be food for cannon. Not one of those boys, I dare say, in his heart wanted to go; they have seen too many of their brethren return war-worn, missed too many who will never come back. But they were no less gay about it than those recruits we saw in the spring of 1913, at Argelès in the Pyrenees, singing along and shouting on the day of their enrolment.

There were other reminders to us, and to the little town, of

the blood-red line drawn across the map of France. We had in our hospital men from the invaded countries without news of wives and families mured up behind that iron veil. Once in a way a tiny word would get through to them, and anxiety would lift a little from their hearts; for a day or two they would smile. One we had, paralysed in the legs, who would sit doing macramé work and playing chess all day long; every relative he had – wife, father, mother, sisters – all were in the power of the German. As brave a nature as one could see in a year's march, touchingly grateful, touchingly cheerful, but with the saddest eyes I ever saw. There was one little reminder in the town whom we could never help going in to look at whenever we passed the shop whose people had given her refuge. A little girl of eight with the most charming, grave, pale, little, grey-eyed face; there she would sit, playing with her doll, watching the customers. That little refugee at all events was beloved and happy; only I think she thought we would kidnap her one day – we stared at her so hard. She had the quality which gives to certain faces the fascination belonging to rare works of art.

With all this poignant bereavement and long-suffering amongst them it would be odd indeed if the gay and critical French nature did not rebel, and seek some outlet in apathy or bitter criticism. The miracle is that they go on and on holding fast. Easily depressed, and as easily lifted up again, grumble they must and will; but their hearts are not really down to the pitch of their voices; their love of country, which with them is love of self

– the deepest of all kinds of patriotism – is too absolute. These two virtues or vices (as you please) – critical faculty and *amour propre* or vanity, if you prefer it – are in perpetual encounter. The French are at once not at all proud of themselves and very proud. They destroy all things French, themselves included, with their brains and tongues, and exalt the same with their hearts and by their actions. To the reserved English mind, always on the defensive, they seem to give themselves away continually; but he who understands sees it to be all part of that perpetual interplay of opposites which makes up the French character and secures for it in effect a curious vibrating equilibrium. "Intensely alive" is the chief impression one has of the French. They balance between head and heart at top speed in a sort of electric and eternal see-saw. It is this perpetual quick change which gives them, it seems to me, their special grip on actuality; they never fly into the cloud-regions of theories and dreams; their heads have not time before their hearts have intervened, their hearts not time before their heads cry: "Hold!" They apprehend both worlds, but with such rapid alternation that they surrender to neither. Consider how clever and comparatively warm is that cold thing "religion" in France. I remember so well the old *curé* of our little town coming up to lunch, his interest in the cooking, in the practical matters of our life, and in wider affairs too; his enjoyment of his coffee and cigarette; and the curious suddenness with which something seemed "to come over him" – one could hear his heart saying: "O my people, here am I wasting my time;

I must run to you." I saw him in the court-yard talking to one of our *poilus*, not about his soul, but about his body; stroking his shoulder softly and calling him *mon cher fils*. Dear old man! Even religion here does not pretend to more than it can achieve – help and consolation to the bewildered and the suffering. It uses forms, smiling a little at them.

The secret of French culture lies in this vibrating balance; from quick marriage of mind and heart, reason and sense, in the French nature, all the clear created forms of French life arise, forms recognised as forms with definite utility attached. Controlled expression is the result of action and reaction. Controlled expression is the essence of culture, because it alone makes a sufficiently clear appeal in a world which is itself the result of the innumerable interplay of complementary or dual laws and forces. French culture is near to the real heart of things, because it has a sort of quick sanity which never loses its way; or, when it does, very rapidly recovers the middle of the road. It has the two capital defects of its virtues. It is too fond of forms and too mistrustful. The French nature is sane and cynical. Well, it's natural! The French lie just halfway between north and south; their blood is too mingled for enthusiasm, and their culture too old.

I never realised how old France was till we went to Arles. In our crowded train *poilus* were packed, standing in the corridors. One very weary, invited by a high and kindly colonel into our carriage, chatted in his tired voice of how wonderfully the women

kept the work going on the farms. "When we get a fortnight's leave," he said, "all goes well, we can do the heavy things the women cannot, and the land is made clean. It wants that fortnight now and then, *mon colonel*; there is work on farms that women cannot do." And the colonel vehemently nodded his thin face. We alighted in the dark among southern forms and voices, and the little hotel omnibus became enmeshed at once in old, high, very narrow, Italian-seeming streets. It was Sunday next day; sunny, with a clear blue sky. In the square before our hotel a simple crowd round the statue of Mistral chattered or listened to a girl singing excruciating songs; a crowd as old-looking as in Italy or Spain, aged as things only are in the South. We walked up to the Arena. Quite a recent development in the life of Arles, they say, that marvellous Roman building, here cut down, there built up, by Saracen hands. For a thousand years or more before the Romans came Arles flourished and was civilised. What had we mushroom islanders before the Romans came? What had barbaric Prussia? Not even the Romans to look forward to! The age-long life of the South stands for much in modern France, correcting the cruder blood which has poured in these last fifteen hundred years. As one blends wine of very old stock with newer brands, so has France been blended and mellowed. A strange cosmic feeling one had, on the top of the great building in that town older than Rome itself, of the continuity of human life and the futility of human conceit. The provincial vanity of modern States looked pitiful in the clear air above that vast stony proof

of age.

In many ways the war has brought us up all standing on the edge of an abyss. When it is over shall we go galloping over the edge, or, reining back, sit awhile in our saddles looking for a better track? We were all on the highway to a hell of material expansion and vulgarity, of cheap immediate profit, and momentary sensation; north and south in our different ways, all "rattling into barbarity." Shall we find our way again into a finer air, where self-respect, not profit, rules, and rare things and durable are made once more?

From Arles we journeyed to Marseilles, to see how the first cosmopolitan town in the world fared in war-time. Here was an amazing spectacle of swarming life. If France has reason to feel the war most of all the great countries, Marseilles must surely feel it less than any other great town; she flourishes in a perfect riot of movement and colour. Here all the tribes are met, save those of Central Europe – Frenchman, Serb, Spaniard, Algerian, Greek, Arab, Khabyle, Russian, Indian, Italian, Englishman, Scotsman, Jew, and Nubian rub shoulders in the thronged streets. The miles of docks are crammed with ships. Food of all sorts abounds. In the bright, dry light all is gay and busy. The most æsthetic, and perhaps most humiliating, sight that a Westerner could see we came on there: two Arab Spahis walking down the main street in their long robe uniforms, white and red, and their white linen bonnets bound with a dark fur and canting slightly backwards. Over six feet high, they moved unhurrying, smoking

their cigarettes, turning their necks slowly from side to side like camels of the desert. Their brown, thin, bearded faces wore neither scorn nor interest, only a superb self-containment; but, beside them, every other specimen of the human race seemed cheap and negligible. God knows of what they were thinking – as little probably as the smoke they blew through their chiselled nostrils – but their beauty and grace were unsurpassable. And, visioning our western and northern towns and the little, white, worried abortions they breed, one felt downcast and abashed.

Marseilles swarmed with soldiers; Lyon, Valence, Arles, even the smallest cities swarmed with soldiers, and this at the moment when the Allied offensive was just beginning. If France be nearing the end of her man-power, as some assert, she conceals it so that one would think she was at the beginning.

From Marseilles we went to Lyon. I have heard that town described as lamentably plain; but compared with Manchester or Sheffield it is as heaven to hell. Between its two wide rolling rivers, under a line of heights, it has somewhat the aspect of an enormous commercialised Florence. Perhaps in foggy weather it may be dreary, but the sky was blue and the sun shone, a huge *Foire* was just opening, and every street bustled in a dignified manner.

The English have always had a vague idea that France is an immoral country. To the eye of a mere visitor France is the most moral of the four Great Powers – France, Russia, England, Germany; has the strongest family life and the most

seemly streets. Young men and maidens are never seen walking or lying about, half-embraced, as in puritanical England. Fire is not played with – openly, at least. The slow-fly amorousness of the British working classes evidently does not suit the quicker blood of France. There is just enough of the South in the French to keep demonstration of affection away from daylight. A certain school of French novelist, with high-coloured tales of Parisian life, is responsible for his country's reputation. Whatever the Frenchman about town may be, he seems by no means typical of the many millions of Frenchmen who are not about town. And if Frenchwomen, as I have heard Frenchmen say, are *légères*, they are the best mothers in the world, and their "lightness" is not vulgarly obtruded. They say many domestic tragedies will be played at the conclusion of the war. If so, they will not be played in France alone; and compared with the tragedies of fidelity played all these dreadful years they will be as black rabbits to brown for numbers. For the truth on morality in France we must go back, I suspect, to that general conclusion about the French character – the swift passage from head to heart and back again, which, prohibiting extremes of puritanism and of licence, preserves a sort of balance.

From this war France will emerge changed, though less changed very likely than any other country. A certain self-sufficiency that was very marked about French life will have sloughed away. I expect an opening of the doors, a toleration of other tastes and standards, a softening of the too narrow

definiteness of French opinion.

Even Paris has opened her heart a little since the war; and the heart of Paris is close, hard, impatient of strangers. We noticed in our hospital that whenever we had a Parisian he introduced a different atmosphere, and led us a quiet or noisy dance. We had one whose name was Aimé, whose skin was like a baby's, who talked softly and fast, with little grunts, and before he left was quite the leading personality. We had another, a red-haired young one; when he was away on leave we hardly knew the hospital, it was so orderly. The sons of Paris are a breed apart, just as our Cockneys are. I do not pretend to fathom them; they have the texture and resilience of an indiarubber ball. And the women of Paris! Heaven forfend that I should say I know them! They are a sealed book. Still, even Parisians are less intolerant than in pre-war days of us dull English, perceiving in us, perhaps, a certain unexpected usefulness. And, *à propos*! One hears it said that in the regions of our British armies certain natives believe we have come to stay. What an intensely comic notion! And what a lurid light it throws on history, on the mistrust engendered between nations, on the cynicism which human conduct has forced deep into human hearts. No! If a British Government could be imagined behaving in such a way, the British population would leave England, become French citizens, and help to turn out the damned intruders!

But *we* did not encounter anywhere that comic belief. In all this land of France, chockful of those odd creatures, English

men and women, we found only a wonderful and touching welcome. Not once during those long months of winter was an unfriendly word spoken in our hearing; not once were we treated with anything but true politeness and cordiality. *Poilus* and peasants, porters and officials, ladies, doctors, servants, shop-folk, were always considerate, always friendly, always desirous that we should feel at home. The very dogs gave us welcome! A little black half-Pomeranian came uninvited and made his home with us in our hospital; we called him Aristide. But on our walks with him we were liable to meet a posse of children who would exclaim, "*Pom-pom! Voilà, Pom-pom!*" and lead him away. Before night fell he would be with us again, with a bit of string or ribbon, bitten through, dangling from his collar. His children bored him terribly. We left him in trust to our *poilus* on that sad afternoon when "Good-bye" must be said, all those friendly hands shaken for the last time, and the friendly faces left. Through the little town the car bore us, away along the valley between the poplar trees with the first flush of spring on their twigs, and the magpies flighting across the road to the river-bank.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.