

COBB IRVIN SHREWSBURY

PATHS OF GLORY:
IMPRESSIONS OF WAR
WRITTEN AT AND NEAR
THE FRONT

Irvin Cobb

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War Written at and Near the Front**

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Irvin S. Cobb

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NOTE

What is enclosed between these covers was written as a series of first-hand impressions during the fall and early winter of 1914 while the writer was on staff service for The Saturday Evening Post in the western theatre of the European War. I tried to write of war as I saw it at the time that I saw it, or immediately afterward, when the memory of what I had seen was fresh and vivid in my mind.

In this volume, as here presented, no attempt has been made to follow either logically or chronologically the progress of events in the campaigning operations of which I was a witness. The chapters are interrelated insofar as they purport to be a sequence of pictures describing some of my experiences and setting forth a few of my observations in Belgium, in Germany, in France and in England during the first three months of hostilities.

At the outset I had no intention of undertaking to write a book on the war. If in the kindly judgment of the reader what I have written constitutes a book I shall be gratified.

I. S. C.

January, 1915.

Chapter 1

A Little Village Called Montignies St. Christophe

We passed through it late in the afternoon—this little Belgian town called Montignies St. Christophe—just twenty-four hours behind a dust-colored German column. I am going to try now to tell how it looked to us.

I am inclined to think I passed this way a year before, or a little less, though I cannot be quite certain as to that. Traveling 'cross country, the country is likely to look different from the way it looked when you viewed it from the window of a railroad carriage.

Of this much, though, I am sure: If I did not pass, through this little town of Montignies St. Christophe then, at least I passed through fifty like it—each a single line of gray houses strung, like beads on a cord, along a white, straight road, with fields behind and elms in front; each with its small, ugly church, its wine shop, its drinking trough, its priest in black, and its one lone gendarme in his preposterous housings of saber and belt and shoulder straps.

I rather imagine I tried to think up something funny to say about the shabby grandeur of the gendarme or the acid flavor of the cooking vinegar sold at the drinking place under the name of wine; for that time I was supposed to be writing humorous articles on European travel.

But now something had happened to Montignies St. Christophe to lift it out of the dun, dull sameness that made it as one with so many other unimportant villages in this upper left-hand corner of the map of Europe. The war had come this way; and, coming so, had dealt it a side-slap.

We came to it just before dusk. All day we had been hurrying along, trying to catch up with the German rear guard; but the Germans moved faster than we did, even though they fought as they went. They had gone round the southern part of Belgium like coopers round a cask, hooping it in with tight bands of steel. Belgium—or this part of it—was all barreled up now: chimes, staves and bung; and the Germans were already across the line, beating down the sod of France with their pelting feet.

Besides we had stopped often, for there was so much to see and to hear. There was the hour we spent at Merbes-le-Chateau, where the English had been; and the hour we spent at La Buissière, on the river Sambre, where a fight had been fought two days earlier; but Merbes-le-Chateau is another story and so is La Buissière. Just after La Buissière we came to a tiny village named Neuville and halted while the local Jack-of-all-trades mended for us an invalided tire on a bicycle.

As we grouped in the narrow street before his shop, with a hiving swarm of curious villagers buzzing about us, an improvised ambulance, with a red cross painted on its side over the letters of a baker's sign, went up the steep hill at the head of the cobbled street. At that the women in the doorways of the small cottages twisted their gnarled red hands in their aprons, and whispered fearsomely among themselves, so that the sibilant sound of their voices ran up and down the line of houses in a long, quavering hiss.

The wagon, it seemed, was bringing in a wounded French soldier who had been found in the woods beyond the river. He was one of the last to be found alive, which was another way of saying that for two days and two nights he had been lying helpless in the thicket, his stomach empty and his wounds raw. On each of those two nights it had rained, and rained hard.

Just as we started on our way the big guns began booming somewhere ahead of us toward the southwest; so we turned in that direction.

We had heard the guns distinctly in the early forenoon, and again, less distinctly, about noontime. Thereafter, for a while, there had been a lull in the firing; but now it was constant—a steady, sustained boom- boom-boom, so far away that it fell on the eardrums as a gentle concussion; as a throb of air, rather than as a real sound. For three days now we had been following that distant voice of the cannon, trying to catch up with it as it advanced, always southward, toward the French frontier. Therefore we flogged the belly of our tired horse with the lash of a long whip, and hurried

along. There were five of us, all Americans. The two who rode on bicycles pedaled ahead as outriders, and the remaining three followed on behind with the horse and the dogcart. We had bought the outfit that morning and we were to lose it that night. The horse was an aged mare, with high withers, and galls on her shoulders and fetlocks unshorn, after the fashion of Belgian horses; and the dogcart was a venerable ruin, which creaked a great protest at every turn of the warped wheels on the axle. We had been able to buy the two—the mare and the cart—only because the German soldiers had not thought them worth the taking.

In this order, then, we proceeded. Pretty soon the mare grew so weary she could hardly lift her shaggy old legs; so, footsore as we were, we who rode dismounted and trudged on, taking turns at dragging her forward by the bit. I presume we went ahead thus for an hour or more, along an interminable straight road and past miles of the checkered light and dark green fields which in harvest time make a great backgammon board of this whole country of Belgium.

The road was empty of natives—empty, too, of German wagon trains; and these seemed to us curious things, because there had until then been hardly a minute of the day when we were not passing soldiers or meeting refugees.

Almost without warning we came on this little village called Montignies St. Christophe. A six-armed signboard at a crossroads told us its name—a rather impressive name ordinarily for a place of perhaps twenty houses, all told. But now tragedy had given it distinction; had painted that straggling frontier hamlet over with such colors that the picture of it is going to live in my memory as long as I do live. At the upper end of the single street, like an outpost, stood an old chateau, the seat, no doubt, of the local gentry, with a small park of beeches and elms round it; and here, right at the park entrance, we had our first intimation that there had been a fight. The gate stood ajar between its chipped stone pillars, and just inside the blue coat of a French cavalry officer, jaunty and new and much braided with gold lace on the collar and cuffs, hung from the limb of a small tree. Beneath the tree were a sheaf of straw in the shape of a bed and the ashes of a dead camp fire; and on the grass, plain to the eye, a plump, well-picked pullet, all ready for the pot or the pan. Looking on past these things we saw much scattered dunnage: Frenchmen's knapsacks, flannel shirts, playing cards, fagots of firewood mixed together like jackstraws, canteens covered with slate-blue cloth and having queer little hornlike protuberances on their tops—which proved them to be French canteens—tumbled straw, odd shoes with their lacings undone, a toptilted service shelter of canvas; all the rattle of a camp that had been suddenly and violently disturbed.

As I think back it seems to me that not until that moment had it occurred to us to regard closely the cottages and shops beyond the clumped trees of the chateau grounds. We were desperately weary, to begin with, and our eyes, those past three days, had grown used to the signs of misery and waste and ruin, abundant and multiplying in the wake of the hard-pounding hoofs of the conqueror.

Now, all of a sudden, I became aware that this town had been literally shot to bits. From our side—that is to say, from the north and likewise from the west—the Germans had shelled it. From the south, plainly, the French had answered. The village, in between, had caught the full force and fury of the contending fires. Probably the inhabitants had warning; probably they fled when the German skirmishers surprised that outpost of Frenchmen camping in the park. One imagined them scurrying like rabbits across the fields and through the cabbage patches. But they had left their belongings behind, all their small petty gearings and garnishings, to be wrecked in the wrenching and racking apart of their homes.

A railroad track emerged from the fields and ran along the one street. Shells had fallen on it and exploded, ripping the steel rails from the cross-ties, so that they stood up all along in a jagged formation, like rows of snagged teeth. Other shells, dropping in the road, had so wrought with the stone blocks that they were piled here in heaps, and there were depressed into caverns and crevasses four or five or six feet deep.

Every house in sight had been hit again and again and again. One house would have its whole front blown in, so that we could look right back to the rear walls and see the pans on the kitchen shelves. Another house would lack a roof to it, and the tidy tiles that had made the roof were now red and yellow rubbish, piled like broken shards outside a potter's door. The doors stood open, and the windows, with the windowpanes all gone and in some instances the sashes as well, leered empty, like eye-sockets without eyes.

So it went. Two of the houses had caught fire and the interiors were quite burned away. A sodden smell of burned things came from the still smoking ruins; but the walls, being of thick stone, stood.

Our poor tired old nag halted and sniffed and snorted. If she had had energy enough I reckon she would have shied about and run back the way she had come, for now, just ahead, lay two dead horses—a big gray and a roan—with their stark legs sticking out across the road. The gray was shot through and through in three places. The right fore hoof of the roan had been cut smack off, as smoothly as though done with an ax; and the stiffened leg had a curiously unfinished look about it, suggesting a natural malformation. Dead only a few hours, their carcasses already had begun to swell. The skin on their bellies was as tight as a drumhead.

We forced the quivering mare past the two dead horses. Beyond them the road was a litter. Knapsacks, coats, canteens, handkerchiefs, pots, pans, household utensils, bottles, jugs and caps were everywhere. The deep ditches on either side of the road were clogged with such things. The dropped caps and the abandoned knapsacks were always French caps and French knapsacks, cast aside, no doubt, for a quick flight after the melee.

The Germans had charged after shelling the town, and then the French had fallen back—or at least so we deduced from the looks of things. In the debris was no object that bespoke German workmanship or German ownership. This rather puzzled us until we learned that the Germans, as tidy in this game of war as in the game of life, made it a hard-and-fast rule to gather up their own belongings after every engagement, great or small, leaving behind nothing that might serve to give the enemy an idea of their losses.

We went by the church. Its spire was gone; but, strange to say, a small flag—the Tricolor of France—still fluttered from a window where some one had stuck it. We went by the *taverne*, or wine shop, which had a sign over its door—a creature remotely resembling a blue lynx. And through the door we saw half a loaf of bread and several bottles on a table. We went by a rather pretentious house, with pear trees in front of it and a big barn alongside it; and right under the eaves of the barn I picked up the short jacket of a French trooper, so new and fresh from the workshop that the white cambric lining was hardly soiled. The figure 18 was on the collar; we decided that its wearer must have belonged to the Eighteenth Cavalry Regiment. Behind the barn we found a whole pile of new knapsacks—the flimsy play-soldier knapsacks of the French infantrymen, not half so heavy or a third so substantial as the heavy sacks of the Germans, which are all bound with straps and covered on the back side with undressed red bullock's hide.

Until now we had seen, in all the silent, ruined village, no human being. The place fairly ached with emptiness. Cats sat on the doorsteps or in the windows, and presently from a barn we heard imprisoned beasts lowing dismally. Cows were there, with agonized udders and, penned away from them, famishing calves; but there were no dogs. We already had remarked this fact—that in every desolated village cats were thick enough; but invariably the sharp-nosed, wolfish-looking Belgian dogs had disappeared along with their masters. And it was so in Montignies St. Christophe.

On a roadside barricade of stones, chinked with sods of turf—a breastwork the French probably had erected before the fight and which the Germans had kicked half down—I counted three cats, seated side by side, washing their faces sedately and soberly.

It was just after we had gone by the barricade that, in a shed behind the riddled shell of a house, which was almost the last house of the town, one of our party saw an old, a very old, woman, who

peered out at us through a break in the wall. He called out to her in French, but she never answered—only continued to watch him from behind her shelter. He started toward her and she disappeared noiselessly, without having spoken a word. She was the only living person we saw in that town.

Just beyond the town, though, we met a wagon—a furniture dealer's wagon—from some larger community, which had been impressed by the Belgian authorities, military or civil, for ambulance service. A jaded team of horses drew it, and white flags with red crosses in their centers drooped over the wheels, fore and aft. One man led the near horse by the bit and two other men walked behind the wagon. All three of them had Red Cross brassards on the sleeves of their coats.

The wagon had a hood on it, but was open at both ends. Overhauling it we saw that it contained two dead soldiers—French foot-soldiers. The bodies rested side by side on the wagon bed. Their feet somehow were caught up on the wagon seat so that their stiff legs, in the baggy red pants, slanted upward, and the two dead men had the look of being about to glide backward and out of the wagon.

The blue-clad arms of one of them were twisted upward in a half-arc, encircling nothing; and as the wheels jolted over the rutted cobbles these two bent arms joggled and swayed drunkenly. The other's head was canted back so that, as we passed, we looked right into his face. It was a young face—we could tell that much, even through the mask of caked mud on the drab-white skin—and it might once have been a comely face. It was not comely now.

Peering into the wagon we saw that the dead man's face had been partly shot or shorn away—the lower jaw was gone; so that it had become an abominable thing to look on. These two had been men the day before. Now they were carrion and would be treated as such; for as we looked back we saw the wagon turn off the high road into a field where the wild red poppies, like blobs of red blood, grew thick between rows of neglected sugar beets.

We stopped and watched. The wagon bumped through the beet patch to where, at the edge of a thicket, a trench had been dug. The diggers were two peasants in blouses, who stood alongside the ridge of raw upturned earth at the edge of the hole, in the attitude of figures in a painting by Millet. Their spades were speared upright into the mound of fresh earth. Behind them a stenciling of poplars rose against the sky line.

We saw the bodies lifted out of the wagon. We saw them slide into the shallow grave, and saw the two diggers start at their task of filling in the hole.

Not until then did it occur to any one of us that we had not spoken to the men in charge of the wagon, or they to us. There was one detached house, not badly battered, alongside the road at the lower edge of the field where the burial took place. It had a shield on its front wall bearing the Belgian arms and words to denote that it was a customs house.

A glance at our map showed us that at this point the French boundary came up in a V-shaped point almost to the road. Had the gravediggers picked a spot fifty yards farther on for digging their trench, those two dead Frenchmen would have rested in the soil of their own country.

The sun was almost down by now, and its slanting rays slid lengthwise through the elm-tree aisles along our route. Just as it disappeared we met a string of refugees—men, women and children—all afoot, all bearing pitifully small bundles. They limped along silently in a straggling procession. None of them was weeping; none of them apparently had been weeping. During the past ten days I had seen thousands of such refugees, and I had yet to hear one of them cry out or complain or protest.

These who passed us now were like that. Their heavy peasant faces expressed dumb bewilderment—nothing else. They went on up the road into the gathering dusk as we went down, and almost at once the sound of their clunking tread died out behind us. Without knowing certainly, we nevertheless imagined they were the dwellers of Montignies St. Christophe going back to the sorry shells that had been their homes.

An hour later we passed through the back lines of the German camp and entered the town of Beaumont, to find that the General Staff of a German army corps was quartered there for the night,

and that the main force of the column, after sharp fighting, had already advanced well beyond the frontier. France was invaded.

Chapter 2

To War in a Taxicab

In a taxicab we went to look for this war. There were four of us, not counting the chauffeur, who did not count. It was a regular taxicab, with a meter on it, and a little red metal flag which might be turned up or turned down, depending on whether the cab was engaged or at liberty; and he was a regular chauffeur.

We, the passengers, wore straw hats and light suits, and carried no baggage. No one would ever have taken us for war correspondents out looking for war. So we went; and, just when we were least expecting it, we found that war. Perhaps it would be more exact to say it found us. We were four days getting back to Brussels, still wearing our straw hats, but without any taxicab. The fate of that taxicab is going to be one of the unsolved mysteries of the German invasion of Belgium.

From the hour when the steamer St. Paul left New York, carrying probably the most mixed assortment of passengers that traveled on a single ship since Noah sailed the Ark, we on board expected hourly to sight something that would make us spectators of actual hostilities. The papers that morning were full of rumors of an engagement between English ships and German ships somewhere off the New England coast.

Daily we searched the empty seas until our eyes hurt us; but, except that we had one ship's concert and one brisk gale, and that just before dusk on the fifth day out, the weather being then gray and misty, we saw wallowing along, hull down on the starboard bow, an English cruiser with two funnels, nothing happened at all. Even when we landed at Liverpool nothing happened to suggest that we had reached a country actively engaged in war, unless you would list the presence of a few khaki-clad soldiers on the landing stage and the painful absence of porters to handle our baggage as evidences of the same. I remember seeing Her Grace the Duchess of Marlborough sitting hour after hour on a baggage truck, waiting for her heavy luggage to come off the tardy tender and up the languid chute into the big dusty dockhouse.

I remember, also, seeing women, with their hats flopping down in their faces and their hair all streaming, dragging huge trunks across the floor; and if all of us had not been in the same distressful fix we could have appreciated the humor of the spectacle of a portly high dignitary of the United States Medical Corps shoving a truck piled high with his belongings, and shortly afterward, with the help of his own wife, loading them on the roof of an infirm and wheezy taxicab.

From Liverpool across to London we traveled through a drowsy land burdened with bumper crops of grain, and watched the big brown hares skipping among the oat stacks; and late at night we came to London. In London next day there were more troops about than common, and recruits were drilling on the gravel walks back of Somerset House; and the people generally moved with a certain sober restraint, as people do who feel the weight of a heavy and an urgent responsibility. Otherwise the London of wartime seemed the London of peacetime.

So within a day our small party, still seeking to slip into the wings of the actual theater of events rather than to stay so far back behind the scenes, was aboard a Channel ferryboat bound for Ostend, and having for fellow travelers a few Englishmen, a tall blond princess of some royal house of Northern Europe, and any number of Belgians going home to enlist. In the Straits of Dover, an hour or so out from Folkestone, we ran through a fleet of British warships guarding the narrow roadstead between France and England; and a torpedo-boat destroyer sidled up and took a look at us.

Just off Dunkirk a French scout ship talked with us by the language of the whipping signal flags; but the ordinary Channel craft came and went without hindrance or seeming fear, and again it was hard for us to make ourselves believe that we had reached a zone where the physical, tangible business of war went forward.

And Ostend and, after Ostend, the Belgian interior—those were disappointments too; for at Ostend bathers disported on the long, shining beach and children played about the sanded stretch. And, though there were soldiers in sight, one always expects soldiers in European countries. No one asked to see the passports we had brought with us, and the customs officers gave our hand baggage the most perfunctory of examinations. Hardly five minutes had elapsed after our landing before we were steaming away on our train through a landscape which, to judge by its appearance, might have known only peace, and naught but peace, for a thousand placid years.

It is true we saw during that ride few able-bodied male adults, either in the towns through which we rushed or in the country. There were priests occasionally and old, infirm men or half-grown boys; but of men in their prime the land had been drained to fill up the army of defense then on the other side of Belgium—toward Germany—striving to hold the invaders in check until the French and English might come up. The yellow-ripe grain stood in the fields, heavy-headed and drooping with seed. The russet pears and red apples bent the limbs of the fruit trees almost to earth. Every visible inch of soil was under cultivation, of the painfully intensive European sort; and there remained behind to garner the crops only the peasant women and a few crippled, aged grand- sires. It was hard for us to convince ourselves that any event out of the ordinary beset this country. No columns of troops passed along the roads; no camps of tents lifted their peaked tops above the hedges. In seventy-odd miles we encountered one small detachment of soldiers—they were at a railroad station—and one Red Cross flag.

As for Brussels—why, Brussels at first glance was more like a city making a fete than the capital of a nation making war. The flags which were displayed everywhere; the crowds in the square before the railroad station; the multitudes of boy scouts running about; the uniforms of Belgian volunteers and regulars; the Garde Civique, in their queer- looking costumes, with funny little derby hats, all braid-trimmed—gave to the place a holiday air. After nightfall, when the people of Brussels flocked to the sidewalk cafes and sat at little round tables under awnings, drinking light drinks a la Parisienne, this impression was heightened.

We dined in the open air ourselves, finding the prices for food and drink to be both moderate and modest, and able to see nothing on the surface which suggested that the life of these people had been seriously disturbed. Two significant facts, however, did obtrude themselves on us: Every minute or two, as we dined, a young girl or an old gentleman would come to us, rattling a tin receptacle with a slot in the top through which coins for the aid of the widows and orphans of dead soldiers might be dropped; and when a little later we rode past the royal palace we saw that it had been converted into a big hospital for the wounded. That night, also, the government ran away to Antwerp; but of this we knew nothing until the following morning.

Next day we heard tales: Uhlands had been seen almost in the suburbs; three German spies, disguised as nuns, had been captured, tried, convicted and were no longer with us; sentries on duty outside the residence of the American Minister had fired at a German aeroplane darting overhead; French troops were drawing in to the northward and English soldiers were hurrying up from the south; trainloads of wounded had been brought in under cover of the night and distributed among the improvised hospitals; but, conceding these things to be true, we knew of them only at second hand. By the evidence of what we ourselves saw we were able to note few shifts in the superficial aspects of the city.

The Garde Civique seemed a trifle more numerous than it had been the evening before; citizen volunteers, still in civilian garb, appeared on the streets in awkward squads, carrying their guns and side arms clumsily; and when, in Minister Brand Whitlock's car, we drove out the beautiful Avenue Louise, we found soldiers building a breast-high barricade across the head of the roadway where it entered the Bois; also, they were weaving barbed-wire entanglements among the shade trees. That was all.

And then, as though to offset these added suggestions of danger, we saw children playing about quietly behind the piled sand-bags, guarded by plump Flemish nursemaids, and smart dogcarts constantly passed and repassed us, filled with well-dressed women, and with flowers stuck in the whip-sockets.

The nearer we got to this war the farther away from us it seemed to be. We began to regard it as an elusive, silent, secretive, hide-and-go-seek war, which would evade us always. We resolved to pursue it into the country to the northward, from whence the Germans were reported to be advancing, crushing back the outnumbered Belgians as they came onward; but when we tried to secure a laissez passer at the gendarmerie, where until then an accredited correspondent might get himself a laissez passer, we bumped into obstacles.

In an inclosed courtyard behind a big gray building, among loaded wagons of supplies and munching cart horses, a kitchen table teetered unsteadily on its legs on the rough cobbles. On the table were pens and inkpots and coffee cups and beer bottles and beer glasses; and about it sat certain unkempt men in resplendent but unbrushed costumes. Joseph himself—the Joseph of the coat of many colors, no less—might have devised the uniforms they wore. With that setting the picture they made there in the courtyard was suggestive of stage scenes in plays of the French Revolution.

They were polite enough, these piebald gentlemen, and they considered our credentials with an air of mildly courteous interest; but they would give us no passes. There had been an order. Who had issued it, or why, was not for us to know. Going away from there, all downcast and disappointed, we met a French cavalryman. He limped along in his high dragoon boots, walking with the wide-legged gait of one who had bestraddled leather for many hours and was sore from it. His horse, which he led by the bridle, stumbled with weariness. A proud boy scout was serving as his guide. He was the only soldier of any army, except the Belgian, we had seen so far, and we halted our car and watched him until he disappeared.

However, seeing one tired French dragoon was not seeing the war; and we chafed that night at the delay which kept us penned as prisoners in this handsome, outwardly quiet city. As we figured it we might be housed up here for days or weeks and miss all the operations in the field. When morning came, though, we discovered that the bars were down again, and that certificates signed by the American consul would be sufficient to carry us as far as the outlying suburbs at least.

Securing these precious papers, then, without delay we chartered a rickety red taxicab for the day; and piling in we told the driver to take us eastward as far as he could go before the outposts turned us back. He took us, therefore, at a buzzing clip through the Bois, along one flank of the magnificent Forest of Soigne, with its miles of green-trunked beech trees, and by way of the royal park of Tervueren. From the edge of the thickly settled district onward we passed barricade after barricade—some built of newly felled trees; some of street cars drawn across the road in double rows; some of street cobbles chinked with turf; and some of barbed wire—all of them, even to our inexperienced eyes, seeming but flimsy defenses to interpose against a force of any size or determination. But the Belgians appeared to set great store by these playthings.

Behind each of them was a mixed group of soldiers—Garde Civique, gendarmes and burgher volunteers. These latter mainly carried shotguns and wore floppy blue caps and long blue blouses, which buttoned down their backs with big horn buttons, like little girls' pinafores. There was, we learned, a touch of sentiment about the sudden appearance of those most unsoldierly looking vestments. In the revolution of 1830, when the men of Brussels fought the Hollanders all morning, stopped for dinner at midday and then fought again all afternoon, and by alternately fighting and eating wore out the enemy and won their national independence, they wore such caps and such back-buttoning blouses. And so all night long women in the hospitals had sat up cutting out and basting together the garments of glory for their menfolk.

No one offered to turn us back, and only once or twice did a sentry insist on looking at our passes. In the light of fuller experiences I know now that when a city is about to fall into an enemy's

hands the authorities relax their vigilance and freely permit noncombatants to depart therefrom, presumably on the assumption that the fewer individuals there are in the place when the conqueror does come the fewer the problems of caring for the resident population will be. But we did not know this mighty significant fact; and, suspecting nothing, the four innocents drove blithely on until the city lay behind us and the country lay before us, brooding in the bright sunlight and all empty and peaceful, except for thin scattering detachments of gaily clad Belgian infantrymen through which we passed.

Once or twice tired, dirty stragglers, lying at the roadside, raised a cheer as they recognized the small American flag that fluttered from our taxi's door; and once we gave a lift to a Belgian bicycle courier, who had grown too leg-weary to pedal his machine another inch. He was the color of the dust through which he had ridden, and his face under its dirt mask was thin and drawn with fatigue; but his racial enthusiasm endured, and when we dropped him he insisted on shaking hands with all of us, and offering us a drink out of a very warm and very grimy bottle of something or other.

All of a sudden, rounding a bend, we came on a little valley with one of the infrequent Belgian brooks bisecting it; and this whole valley was full of soldiers. There must have been ten thousand of them—cavalry, foot, artillery, baggage trains, and all. Quite near us was ranged a battery of small rapid-fire guns; and the big rawboned dogs that had hauled them there were lying under the wicked-looking little pieces. We had heard a lot about the dog-drawn guns of the Belgians, but these were the first of them we had seen.

Lines of cavalymen were skirting crosswise over the low hill at the other side of the valley, and against the sky line the figures of horses and men stood out clear and fine. It all seemed a splendid martial sight; but afterward, comparing this force with the army into whose front we were to blunder unwittingly, we thought of it as a little handful of toy soldiers playing at war. We never heard what became of those Belgians. Presumably at the advance of the Germans coming down on them countless, like an Old Testament locust plague, they fell back and, going round Brussels, went northward toward Antwerp, to join the main body of their own troops. Or they may have reached the lines of the Allies, to the south and westward, toward the French frontier. One guess would be as good as the other.

One of the puzzling things about the early mid-August stages of the war was the almost instantaneous rapidity with which the Belgian army, as an army, disintegrated and vanished. To-day it was here, giving a good account of itself against tremendous odds, spending itself in dribbles to give the Allies a chance to get up. To-morrow it was utterly gone.

Still without being halted or delayed we went briskly on. We had topped the next rise commanding the next valley, and—except for a few stragglers and some skirmishers—the Belgians were quite out of sight, when our driver stopped with an abruptness which piled his four passengers in a heap and pointed off to the northwest, a queer, startled, frightened look on his broad Flemish face. There was smoke there along the horizon—much smoke, both white and dark; and, even as the throb of the motor died away to a purr, the sound of big guns came to us in a faint rumbling, borne from a long way off by the breeze.

It was the first time any one of us, except McCutcheon, had ever heard a gun fired in battle; and it was the first intimation to any of us that the Germans were so near. Barring only venturesome mounted scouts we had supposed the German columns were many kilometers away. A brush between skirmishers was the best we had counted on seeing.

Right here we parted from our taxi driver. He made it plain to us, partly by words and partly by signs, that he personally was not looking for any war. Plainly he was one who specialized in peace and the pursuits of peace. Not even the proffered bribe of a doubled or a tripled fare availed to move him one rod toward those smoke clouds. He turned his car round so that it faced toward Brussels, and there he agreed to stay, caring for our light overcoats, until we should return to him. I wonder how long he really did stay.

And I have wondered, in idle moments since, what he did with our overcoats. Maybe he fled with the automobile containing two English moving-picture operators which passed us at that moment, and from which floated back a shouted warning that the Germans were coming. Maybe he stayed too long and was gobbled up—but I doubt it. He had an instinct for safety.

As we went forward afoot the sound of the firing grew clearer and more distinct. We could now hear quite plainly the grunting belch of the big pieces and, in between, the chattering voice of rapid-fire guns. Long-extended, stammering, staccato sounds, which we took to mean rifle firing, came to our ears also. Among ourselves we decided that the white smoke came from the guns and the black from burning buildings or hay ricks. Also we agreed that the fighting was going on beyond the spires and chimneys of a village on the crest of the hill immediately ahead of us. We could make out a white church and, on past it, lines of gray stone cottages.

In these deductions we were partly right and partly wrong; we had hit on the approximate direction of the fighting, but it was not a village that lay before us. What we saw was an outlying section of the city of Louvain, a place of fifty thousand inhabitants, destined within ten days to be turned into a waste of sacked ruins.

There were fields of tall, rank winter cabbages on each side of the road, and among the big green leaves we saw bright red dots. We had to look a second time before we realized that these dots were not the blooms of the wild red poppies that are so abundant in Belgium, but the red-tipped caps of Belgian soldiers squatting in the cover of the plants. None of them looked toward us; all of them looked toward those mounting walls of smoke.

Now, too, we became aware of something else—aware of a procession that advanced toward us. It was the head of a two-mile long line of refugees, fleeing from destroyed or threatened districts on beyond. At first, in scattered, straggling groups, and then in solid columns, they passed us unendingly, we going one way, they going the other. Mainly they were afoot, though now and then a farm wagon would bulk above the weaving ranks; and it would be loaded with bedding and furniture and packed to overflowing with old women and babies. One wagon lacked horses to draw it, and six men pulled in front while two men pushed at the back to propel it. Some of the fleeing multitude looked like townspeople, but the majority plainly were peasants. And of these latter at least half wore wooden shoes so that the sound of their feet on the cobbled roadbed made a clattering chorus that at times almost drowned out the hiccuping voices of the guns behind them.

Occasionally there would be a man shoving a barrow, with a baby and possibly a muddle of bedclothing in the barrow together. Every woman carried a burden of some sort, which might be a pack tied in a cloth or a cheap valise stuffed to bursting, or a baby—though generally it was a baby; and nearly every man, in addition to his load of belongings, had an umbrella under his arm. In this rainy land the carrying of umbrellas is a habit not easily shaken off; and, besides, most of these people had slept out at least one night and would probably sleep out another, and an umbrella makes a sort of shelter if you have no better. I figure I saw a thousand umbrellas if I saw one, and the sight of them gave a strangely incongruous touch to the thing.

Yes, it gave a grotesque touch to it. The spectacle inclined one to laugh, almost making one forget for a moment that here in this spectacle one beheld the misery of war made concrete; that in the lorn state of these poor folks its effects were focused and made vivid; that, while in some way it touched every living creature on the globe, here it touched them directly.

All the children, except the sick ones and the very young ones, walked, and most of them carried small bundles too. I saw one little girl, who was perhaps six years old, with a heavy wooden clock in her arms. The legs of the children wavered under them sometimes from weakness or maybe weariness, but I did not hear a single child whimper, or see a single woman who wept, or hear a single man speak above a half whisper.

They drifted on by us, silent all, except for the sound of feet and wheels; and, as I read the looks on their faces, those faces expressed no emotion except a certain numbed, resigned, bovine

bewilderment. Far back in the line we met two cripples, hobbling along side by side as though for company, and still farther back a Belgian soldier came, like a rear guard, with his gun swung over his back and his sweaty black hair hanging down in his eyes.

In an undertone he was apparently explaining something to a little bow-legged man in black, with spectacles, who trudged along in his company. He was the lone soldier we saw among the refugees—all the others were civilians.

Only one man in all the line hailed us. Speaking so low that we could scarcely catch his words, he said in broken English:

"M'sieurs, the French are in Brussels, are they not?"

"No," we told him.

"The British, then—they must be there by now?"

"No; the British aren't there, either."

He shook his head, as though puzzled, and started on.

"How far away are the Germans?" we asked him.

He shook his head again. "I cannot say," he answered; "but I think they must be close behind us. I had a brother in the army at Liege," he added, apparently apropos of nothing. And then he went on, still shaking his head and with both arms tightly clasped round a big bundle done up in cloth, which he held against his breast.

Very suddenly the procession broke off, as though it had been chopped in two; and almost immediately after that the road turned into a street and we were between solid lines of small cottages, surrounded on all sides by people who fluttered about with the distracted aimlessness of agitated barnyard fowls. They babbled among themselves, paying small heed to us. An automobile tore through the street with its horn blaring, and raced by us, going toward Brussels at forty miles an hour. A well-dressed man in the front seat yelled out something to us as he whizzed past, but the words were swallowed up in the roaring of his engine.

Of our party only one spoke French, and he spoke it indifferently. We sought, therefore, to find some one who understood English. In a minute we saw the black robe of a priest; and here, through the crowd, calm and dignified where all others were fairly befuddled with excitement, he came—a short man with a fuzzy red beard and a bright blue eye.

We hailed him, and the man who spoke a little French explained our case. At once he turned about and took us into a side street; and even in their present state the men and women who met us remembered their manners and pulled off their hats and bowed before him.

At a door let into a high stone wall he stopped and rang a bell. A brother in a brown robe came and unbarred the gate for us, and our guide led us under an arched alley and out again into the open; and behold we were in another world from the little world of panic that we had just left. There was a high-walled inclosure with a neglected tennis court in the middle, and pear and plum trees burdened with fruit; and at the far end, beneath a little arbor of vines, four priests were sitting together. At sight of us they rose and came to us, and shook hands all round. Almost before we knew it we were in a bare little room behind the ancient Church of Saint Jacques, and one of the fathers was showing us a map in order that we might better understand the lay of the land; and another was uncorking a bottle of good red wine, which he brought up from the cellar, with a halo of mold on the cork and a mantle of cobwebs on its sloping shoulders.

It seemed that the Rev. Dom. Marie-Joseph Montaigne—I give the name that was on his card—could speak a little English. He told us haltingly that the smoke we had seen came from a scene of fighting somewhere to the eastward of Louvain. He understood that the Prussians were quite near, but he had seen none himself and did not expect they would enter the town before nightfall. As for the firing, that appeared to have ceased. And, sure enough, when we listened we could no longer catch the sound of the big guns. Nor did we hear them again during that day. Over his glass the priest spoke

in his faulty English, stopping often to feel for a word; and when he had finished his face worked and quivered with the emotion he felt.

"This war—it is a most terrible thing that it should come on Belgium, eh? Our little country had no quarrel with any great country. We desired only that we should be left alone.

"Our people here—they are not bad people. I tell you they are very good people. All the week they work and work, and on Sunday they go to church; and then maybe they take a little walk.

"You Americans now—you come from a very great country. Surely, if the worst should come America will not let our country perish from off the earth, eh! Is not that so?"

Fifteen minutes later we were out again facing the dusty little square of Saint Jacques; and now of a sudden peace seemed to have fallen on the place. The wagons of a little traveling circus were ranged in the middle of the square with no one about to guard them; and across the way was a small tavern.

All together we discovered we were hungry. We had had bread and cheese and coffee, and were lighting some very bad native cigars, when the landlord burst in on us, saying in a quavering voice that some one passing had told him a squad of seven German troopers had been seen in the next street but one. He made a gesture as though to invoke the mercy of Heaven on us all, and ran out again, casting a carpet slipper in his flight and leaving it behind him on the floor.

So we followed, not in the least believing that any Germans had really been sighted; but in the street we saw a group of perhaps fifty Belgian soldiers running up a narrow sideway, trailing their gun butts behind them on the stones. We figured they were hurrying forward to the other side of town to help hold back the enemy.

A minute later seven or eight more soldiers crossed the road ahead of us and darted up an alley with the air and haste of men desirous of being speedily out of sight. We had gone perhaps fifty feet beyond the mouth of this alley when two men, one on horseback and one on a bicycle, rode slowly and sedately out of another alley, parallel to the first one, and swung about with their backs to us.

I imagine we had watched the newcomers for probably fifty seconds before it dawned on any of us that they wore gray helmets and gray coats, and carried arms—and were Germans. Precisely at that moment they both turned so that they faced us; and the man on horseback lifted a carbine from a holster and half swung it in our direction.

Realization came to us that here we were, pocketed. There were armed Belgians in an alley behind us and armed Germans in the street before us; and we were nicely in between. If shooting started the enemies might miss each other, but they could not very well miss us. Two of our party found a courtyard and ran through it. The third pressed close up against a house front and I made for the half-open door of a shop.

Just as I reached it a woman on the inside slammed it in my face and locked it. I never expect to see her again; but that does not mean that I ever expect to forgive her. The next door stood open, and from within its shelter I faced about to watch for what might befall. Nothing befell except that the Germans rode slowly past me, both vigilantly keen in poise and look, both with weapons unshipped.

I got an especially good view of the cavalry. He was a tall, lean, blond young man, man with a little yellow mustache and high cheekbones like an Indian's; and he was sunburned until he was almost as red as an Indian. The sight of that limping French dragoon the day before had made me think of a picture by Meissonier or Détaillé, but this German put me in mind of one of Frederic Remington's paintings. Change his costume a bit, and substitute a slouch hat for his flat-topped lancer's cap, and he might have cantered bodily out of one of Remington's canvases.

He rode past me—he and his comrade on the wheel—and in an instant they were gone into another street, and the people who had scurried to cover at their coming were out again behind them, with craned necks and startled faces.

Our group reassembled itself somehow and followed after those two Germans who could jog along so serenely through a hostile town. We did not crowd them—our health forbade that—but we

now desired above all things to get back to our taxicab, two miles or more away, before our line of retreat should be cut off. But we had tarried too long at our bread and cheese.

When we came to where the street leading to the Square of Saint Jacques joined the street that led in turn to the Brussels road, all the people there were crouching in their doorways as quiet as so many mice, all looking in the direction in which we hoped to go, all pointing with their hands. No one spoke, but the scuffle of wooden-shod feet on the flags made a sliding, slithering sound, which somehow carried a message of warning more forcible than any shouted word or sudden shriek.

We looked where their fingers aimed, and, as we looked, a hundred feet away through a cloud of dust a company of German foot soldiers swung across an open grassplot, where a little triangular park was, and straightened out down the road to Brussels, singing snatches of a German marching song as they went.

And behind them came trim officers on handsome, high-headed horses, and more infantry; then a bicycle squad; then cavalry, and then a light battery, bumping along over the rutted stones, with white dust blowing back from under its wheels in scrolls and pennons.

Then a troop of Uhlans came, with nodding lances, following close behind the guns; and at sight of them a few men and women, clustered at the door of a little wine shop calling itself the Belgian Lion, began to hiss and mutter, for among these people, as we knew already, the Uhlans had a hard name.

At that a noncommissioned officer—a big man with a neck on him like a bison and a red, broad, menacing face—turned in his saddle and dropped the muzzle of his black automatic on them. They sucked their hisses back down their frightened gullets so swiftly that the exertion well-nigh choked them, and shrank flat against the wall; and, for all the sound that came from them until he had holstered his hardware and trotted on, they might have been dead men and women.

Just then, from perhaps half a mile on ahead, a sharp clatter of rifle fire sounded—pop! pop! pop!—and then a rattling volley. We saw the Uhlans snatch out their carbines and gallop forward past the battery into the dust curtain. And as it swallowed them up we, who had come in a taxicab looking for the war, knew that we had found it; and knew, too, that our chances of ever seeing that taxicab again were most exceeding small.

We had one hope—that this might merely be a reconnaissance in force, and that when it turned back or turned aside we might yet slip through and make for Brussels afoot. But it was no reconnaissance—it was Germany up and moving. We stayed in Louvain three days, and for three days we watched the streaming past of the biggest army we had ever seen, and the biggest army beleaguered Belgium had ever seen, and one of the biggest, most perfect armies the world has ever seen. We watched the gray-clad columns pass until the mind grew numb at the prospect of computing their number. To think of trying to count them was like trying to count the leaves on a tree or the pebbles on a path.

They came and came, and kept on coming, and their iron-shod feet flailed the earth to powder, and there was no end to them.

Chapter 3

Sherman Said It

Undoubtedly Sherman said it. This is my text and as illustration for my text I take the case of the town of La Buissière.

The Germans took the town of La Buissière after stiff fighting on August twenty-fourth. I imagine that possibly there was a line in the dispatches telling of the fight there; but at that I doubt it, because on that same date a few miles away a real battle was raging between the English rear guard, under Sir John French, of the retreating army of the Allies, falling back into France, and the Germans. Besides, in the sum total of this war the fall of La Buissière hardly counts. You might say it represents a semicolon in the story of the campaign. Probably no future historian will give it so much as a paragraph. In our own Civil War it would have been worth a page in the records anyway. Here upward of three hundred men on both sides were killed and wounded, and as many more Frenchmen were captured; and the town, when taken, gave the winners the control of the river Sambre for many miles east and west. Here, also, was a German charge with bayonets up a steep and well-defended height; and after that a hand-to-hand melee with the French defenders on the poll of the hill.

But this war is so big a thing, as wars go, that an engagement of this size is likely to be forgotten in a day or a week. Yet, I warrant you, the people of La Buissière will not forget it. Nor shall we forget it who came that way in the early afternoon of a flawless summer day. Let me try to recreate La Buissière for you, reader. Here the Sambre, a small, orderly stream, no larger or broader or wider than a good-sized creek would be in America, flows for a mile or two almost due east and west. The northern bank is almost flat, with low hills rising on beyond like the rim of a saucer. The town—most of it—is on this side. On the south the land lifts in a moderately stiff bluff, perhaps seventy feet high, with wooded edges, and extending off and away in a plateau, where trees stand in well-thinned groves, and sunken roads meander between fields of hops and grain and patches of cabbages and sugar beets. As for the town, it has perhaps twenty-five hundred people—Walloon and Flemish folk—living in tall, bleak, stone houses built flush with the little crooked streets. Invariably these houses are of a whitish gray color; almost invariably they are narrow and cramped-looking, with very peaky gables, somehow suggesting flat-chested old men standing in close rows, with their hands in their pockets and their shoulders shrugged up.

A canal bisects one corner of the place, and spanning the river there are—or were—three bridges, one for the railroad and two for foot and vehicular travel. There is a mill which overhangs the river—the biggest building in the town—and an ancient gray convent, not quite so large as the mill; and, of course, a church. In most of the houses there are tiny shops on the lower floors, and upstairs are the homes of the people. On the northern side of the stream every tillable foot of soil is under cultivation. There are flower beds, and plum and pear trees in the tiny grass plots alongside the more pretentious houses, and the farm lands extend to where the town begins.

This, briefly, is La Buissière as it looked before the war began—a little, drowsy settlement of dull, frugal, hard-working, kindly Belgians, minding their own affairs, prospering in their own small way, and having no quarrel with the outside world. They lived in the only corner of Europe that I know of where serving people decline to accept tips for rendering small services; and in a simple, homely fashion are, I think, the politest, the most courteous, the most accommodating human beings on the face of the earth.

Even their misery did not make them forget their manners, as we found when we came that way, close behind the conquerors. It was only the refugees, fleeing from their homes or going back to them again, who were too far spent to lift their caps in answer to our hails, and too miserably concerned with their own ruined affairs, or else too afraid of inquisitive strangers, to answer the questions we sometimes put to them.

We were three days getting from Brussels to La Buissière—a distance, I suppose, of about forty-five English miles. There were no railroads and no trams for us. The lines were held by the Germans or had been destroyed by the Allies as they fell back. Nor were there automobiles to be had. Such automobiles as were not hidden had been confiscated by one side or the other.

Moreover, our journey was a constant succession of stops and starts. Now we would be delayed for half an hour while some German officer examined the passes we carried, he meantime eying us with his suspicious squinted eyes. Now again we would halt to listen to some native's story of battle or reprisal on ahead. And always there was the everlasting dim reverberation of the distant guns to draw us forward. And always, too, there was the difficulty of securing means of transportation.

It was on Sunday afternoon, August twenty-third, when we left Brussels, intending to ride to Waterloo. There were six of us, in two ancient open carriages designed like gravy boats and hauled by gaunt livery horses. Though the Germans had held Brussels for four days now, life in the suburbs went on exactly as it goes on in the suburbs of a Belgian city in ordinary times. There was nothing to suggest war or a captured city in the family parties sitting at small tables before the outlying cafes or strolling decorously under the trees that shaded every road. Even the Red Cross flags hanging from the windows of many of the larger houses seemed for once in keeping with the peaceful picture. Of Germans during the afternoon we saw almost none. Thick enough in the center of the town, the gray backs showed themselves hardly at all in the environs.

At the city line a small guard lounged on benches before a wine shop.

They stood up as we drew near, but changed their minds and squatted down without challenging us to produce the safe-conduct papers that Herr General Major Thaddeus von Jarotzky, sitting in due state in the ancient Hotel de Ville, had bestowed on us an hour before.

Just before we reached Waterloo we saw in a field on the right, near the road, a small camp of German cavalry. The big, round-topped yellow tents, sheltering twenty men each and looking like huge tortoises, stood in a line. From the cook-wagons, modeled on the design of those carried by an American circus, came the heavy, meaty smells of stews boiling in enormous caldrons. The men were lying or sitting on straw piles, singing German marching songs as they waited for their supper. It was always so—whenever and wherever we found German troops at rest they were singing, eating or drinking—or doing all three at once. A German said to me afterwards:

"Why do we win? Three things are winning for us—good marching, good shooting and good cooking; but most of all the cooking. When our troops stop there is always plenty of hot food for them. We never have to fight on an empty stomach—we Germans."

These husky singers were the last Germans we were to see for many hours; for between the garrison force left behind in Brussels and the fast-moving columns hurrying to meet the English and the French and a few Belgians—on the morrow—a matter of many leagues now intervened.

Evidence of the passing through of the troops was plentiful enough though. We saw it in the trampled hedges; in the empty beer bottles that dotted the roadside ditches—empty bottles, as we had come to know, meant Germans on ahead; in the subdued, furtive attitude of the country folk, and, most of all, in the chalked legend, in stubby German script—"Gute Leute!"—on nearly every wine-shop shutter or cottage door. Soldiers quartered in such a house overnight had on leaving written this line—"Good people!"—to indicate the peaceful character of the dwellers therein and to commend them to the kindness of those who might follow after.

The Lion of Waterloo, standing on its lofty green pyramid, was miles behind us before realization came that fighting had started that day to the southward of us. We halted at a tavern to water the horses, and out came its Flemish proprietor, all gesticulations and exclamations, to tell us that since morning he had heard firing on ahead.

"Ah, sirs," he said, "it was inconceivable—that sound of the guns. It went on for hours. The whole world must be at war down the road!"

The day before he had seen, flitting across the cabbage patches and dodging among the elm trees, a skirmish party, mounted, which he took to be English; and for two days, so he said, the Germans had been passing the tavern in numbers uncountable.

We hurried on then, but as we met many peasants, all coming the other way afoot and all with excited stories of a supposed battle ahead, and as we ourselves now began to catch the faint reverberations of cannon fire, our drivers manifested a strange reluctance about proceeding farther. And when, just at dusk, we clattered into the curious little convent-church town of Nivelles, and found the tiny square before the Black Eagle Inn full of refugees who had trudged in from towns beyond, the liverymen, after taking off their varnished high hats to scratch their preplexed heads, announced that Brussels was where they belonged and to Brussels they would return that night, though their spent horses dropped in the traces on the way.

We supped that night at the Black Eagle—slept there too—and it was at supper we had as guests Raymond Putzeys, aged twelve, and Alfred, his father. Except crumbs of chocolate and pieces of dry bread, neither of them had eaten for two days.

The boy, who was a round-faced, handsome, dirty, polite little chap, said not a word except "Merci!" He was too busy clearing his plate clean as fast as we loaded it with ham and eggs and plum jam; and when he had eaten enough for three and could hold no more he went to sleep, with his tousled head among the dishes.

The father between bites told us his tale—such a tale as we had heard dozens of times already and were to hear again a hundred times before that crowded week ended—he telling it with rolling eyes and lifting brows, and graphic and abundant gestures. Behind him and us, penning our table about with a living hedge, stood the leading burghers of Nivelles, now listening to him, now watching us with curious eyes. And, as he talked on, the landlord dimmed the oil lamps and made fast the door; for this town, being in German hands, was under martial law and must lock and bar itself in at eight o'clock each night. So we sat in a half light and listened.

They lived, the two Putzeys, at a hamlet named Marchienne-au-Pont, to the southward. The Germans had come into it the day before at sunup, and finding the French there had opened fire. From the houses the French had replied until driven out by heavy odds, and then they ran across the fields, leaving many dead and wounded behind them. As for the inhabitants they had, during the fighting, hidden in their cellars.

"When the French were gone the Germans drove us out," went on the narrator; "and, of the men, they made several of us march ahead of them down the road into the next village, we holding up our hands and loudly begging those within the houses not to fire, for fear of killing us who were their friends and neighbors. When this town surrendered the Germans let us go, but first one of them gave me a cake of chocolate.

"Yet when I tried to go to aid a wounded Frenchman who lay in the fields, another German, I thought, fired at me. I heard the bullet—it buzzed like a hornet. So then I ran away and found my son here; and we came across the country, following the canals and avoiding the roads, which were filled with German troops. When we had gone a mile we looked back and there was much thick smoke behind us—our houses were burning, I suppose. So last night we slept in the woods and all day we walked, and to-night reached here, bringing with us nothing except the clothes on our backs.

"I have no wife—she has been dead for two years—but in Brussels I have two daughters at school. Do you think I shall be permitted to enter Brussels and seek for my two daughters? This morning they told me Brussels was burning; but that I do not believe."

Then, also, he told us in quick, eager sentences, lowering his voice while he spoke, that a priest, with his hands tied behind his back, had been driven through a certain village ahead of the Germans, as a human shield for them; and that, in still another village, two aged women had been violated and murdered. Had he beheld these things with his own eyes? No; he had been told of them.

Here I might add that this was our commonest experience in questioning the refugees. Every one of them had a tale to tell of German atrocities on noncombatants; but not once did we find an avowed eye-witness to such things. Always our informant had heard of the torturing or the maiming or the murdering, but never had he personally seen it. It had always happened in another town—never in his own town.

We hoped to hire fresh vehicles of some sort in Nivelles. Indeed, a half-drunken burgher who spoke fair English, and who, because he had once lived in America, insisted on taking personal charge of our affairs, was constantly bustling in to say he had arranged for carriages and horses; but when the starting hour came—at five o'clock on Monday morning—there was no sign either of our fuddled guardian or of the rigs he had promised. So we set out afoot, following the everlasting sound of the guns.

After having many small adventures on the way we came at nightfall to Binche, a town given over to dullness and lacemaking, and once a year to a masked carnival, but which now was jammed with German supply trains, and by token of this latter circumstance filled with apprehensive townspeople. But there had been no show of resistance here, and no houses had been burned; and the Germans were paying freely for what they took and treating the townspeople civilly.

Indeed, all that day we had traveled through a district as yet unharried and unmolested. Though sundry hundreds of thousands of Germans had gone that way, no burnt houses or squandered fields marked their wake; and the few peasants who had not run away at the approach of the dreaded Allemands were back at work, trying to gather their crops in barrows or on their backs, since they had no work-cattle left. For these the Germans had taken from them, to the last fit horse and the last colt.

At Binche we laid up two nights and a day for the curing of our blistered feet. Also, here we bought our two flimsy bicycles and our decrepit dogcart, and our still more decrepit mare to haul it; and, with this equipment, on Wednesday morning, bright and early, we made a fresh start, heading now toward Maubeuge, across the French boundary.

Current rumor among the soldiers at Binche—for the natives, seemingly through fear for their own skins, would tell us nothing—was that at Maubeuge the onward-pressing Germans had caught up with the withdrawing columns of the Allies and were trying to bottle the stubborn English rear guard. For once the gossip of the privates and the noncommissioned officers proved to be true. There was fighting that day near Maubeuge—hard fighting and plenty of it; but, though we got within five miles of it, and heard the guns and saw the smoke from them, we were destined not to get there.

Strung out, with the bicycles in front, we went down the straight white road that ran toward the frontier. After an hour or two of steady going we began to notice signs of the retreat that had trailed through this section forty-eight hours before. We picked up a torn shoulder strap, evidently of French workmanship, which had 13 embroidered on it in faded red tape; and we found, behind the trunk of a tree, a knapsack, new but empty, which was too light to have been part of a German soldier's equipment.

We thought it was French; but now I think it must have been Belgian, because, as we subsequently discovered, a few scattering detachments of the Belgian foot soldiers who fled from Brussels on the eve of the occupation—disappearing so completely and so magically—made their way westward and southward to the French lines, toward Mons, and enrolled with the Allies in the last desperate effort to dam off and stem back the German torrent.

Also, in a hedge, was a pair of new shoes, with their mouths gaping open and their latches hanging down like tongues, as though hungering for feet to go into them. But not a shred or scrap of German belongings—barring only the empty bottles—did we see.

The marvelous German system, which is made up of a million small things to form one great, complete thing, ordained that never, either when marching or after camping, or even after fighting, should any object, however worthless, be discarded, lest it give to hostile eyes some hint as to the

name of the command or the extent of its size. These Germans we were trailing cleaned up behind themselves as carefully as New England housewives.

It may have been the German love of order and regularity that induced them even to avoid trampling the ripe grain in the fields wherever possible. Certainly, except when dealing out punishment, they did remarkably little damage, considering their numbers, along their line of march through this lowermost strip of Belgium.

At Merbes-Ste.-Marie, a matter of six kilometers from Binche, we came on the first proof of seeming wantonness we encountered that day. An old woman sat in a doorway of what had been a wayside wine shop, guarding the pitiable ruin of her stock and fixtures. All about her on the floor was a litter of foul straw, muddled by many feet and stained with spilled drink. The stench from a bloated dead cavalry horse across the road poisoned the air. The woman said a party of private soldiers, straying back from the main column, had despoiled her, taking what they pleased of her goods and in pure vandalism destroying what they could not use.

Her shop was ruined, she said. With a gesture of both arms, as though casting something from her, she expressed how utter and complete was her ruin. Also she was hungry—she and her children—for the Germans had eaten all the food in the house and all the food in the houses of her neighbors. We could not feed her, for we had no stock of provisions with us; but we gave her a five-franc piece and left her calling down the blessings of the saints on us in French-Flemish.

The sister village of Merbes-le-Chateau, another kilometer farther on, revealed to us all its doors and many of its windows caved in by blows of gun butts and, at the nearer end of the principal street, five houses in smoking ruins. A group of men and women were pawing about in the wreckage, seeking salvage. They had saved a half-charred washstand, a scorched mattress, a clock and a few articles of women's wear; and these they had piled in a mound on the edge of the road.

At first, not knowing who we were, they stood mute, replying to questions only with shrugged shoulders and lifted eyebrows; but when we made them realize that we were Americans they changed. All were ready enough to talk then; they crowded about us, gesticulating and interrupting one another. From the babble we gathered that the German skirmishers, coming in the strength of one company, had found an English cavalry squad in the town. The English had swapped a few volleys with them, then had fallen back toward the river in good order and without loss.

The Germans, pushing in, had burned certain outlying houses from which shots had come and burst open the rest. Also they had repeated the trick of capturing sundry luckless natives and, in their rush through the town, driving these prisoners ahead of them as living bucklers to minimize the danger of being shot at from the windows.

One youth showed us a raw wound in his ear. A piece of tile, splintered by an errant bullet, had pierced it, he said, as the Germans drove him before them. Another man told us his father—and the father must have been an old man, for the speaker himself was in his fifties—had been shot through the thigh. But had anybody been killed? That was what we wanted to know. Ah, but yes! A dozen eager fingers pointed to the house immediately behind us. There a man had been killed.

Coming back to try to save some of their belongings after the Germans had gone through, these others had found him at the head of the cellar steps in his blazing house. His throat had been cut and his blood was on the floor, and he was dead. They led us into the shell of the place, the stone walls being still staunchly erect; but the roof was gone, and in the cinders and dust on the planks of an inner room they showed us a big dull-brown smear.

This, they told us, pointing, was the place where he lay. One man in pantomime acted out the drama of the discovery of the body. He was a born actor, that Belgian villager, and an orator—with his hands. Somehow, watching him, I visualized the victim as a little man, old and stoop-shouldered and feeble in his movements.

I looked about the room. The corner toward the road was a black ruin, but the back wall was hardly touched by the marks of the fire.

On a mantel small bits of pottery stood intact, and a holy picture on the wall—a cheap print of a saint—was not even singed. At the foot of the cellar steps curdled milk stood in pans; and beside the milk, on a table, was a half-moon of cheese and a long knife.

We wanted to know why the man who lived here had been killed. They professed ignorance then—none of them knew, or, at least, none of them would say. A little later a woman told us she had heard the Germans caught him watching from a window with a pair of opera glasses, and on this evidence took him for a spy. But we could secure no direct evidence either to confirm the tale or to disprove it.

We got to the center of the town, leaving the venerable nag behind to be baited at a big gray barn by a big, shapeless, kindly woman hostler whose wooden shoes clattered on the round cobbles of her stable yard like drum taps.

In the Square, after many citizens had informed us there was nothing to eat, a little Frenchwoman took pity on our emptiness, and, leading us to a parlor behind a shop where she sold, among other things, post cards, cheeses and underwear, she made us a huge omelet and gave us also good butter and fresh milk and a pot of her homemade marmalade. Her two little daughters, who looked as though they had escaped from a Frans Hals canvas, waited on us while we wolfed the food down.

Quite casually our hostess showed us a round hole in the window behind us, a big white scar in the wooden inner shutter and a flattened chunk of lead. The night before, it seemed, some one, for purposes unknown, had fired a bullet through the window of her house. It was proof of the rapidity with which the actual presence of war works indifference to sudden shocks among a people that this woman could discuss the incident quietly. Hostile gun butts had splintered her front door; why not a stray bullet or two through her back window? So we interpreted her attitude.

It was she who advised us not to try to ford the Sambre at Merbes-le- Chateau, but to go off at an angle to La Buissière, where she had heard one bridge still stood. She said nothing of a fight at that place. It is possible that she knew nothing of it, though the two towns almost touched. Indeed, in all these Belgian towns we found the people so concerned with their own small upheavals and terrors that they seemed not to care or even to know how their neighbors a mile or two miles away had fared.

Following this advice we swung about and drove to La Buissière to find the bridge that might still be intact; and, finding it, we found also, and quite by chance, the scene of the first extended engagement on which we stumbled.

Our first intimation of it was the presence, in a cabbage field beyond the town, of three strangely subdued peasants softening the hard earth with water, so that they might dig a grave for a dead horse, which, after lying two days in the hot sun, had already become a nuisance and might become a pestilence. When we told them we meant to enter La Buissière they held up their soiled hands in protest.

"There has been much fighting there," one said, "and many are dead, and more are dying. Also, the shooting still goes on; but what it means we do not know, because we dare not venture into the streets, which are full of Germans. Hark, m'sieurs!"

Even as he spoke we heard a rifle crack; and then, after a pause, a second report. We went forward cautiously across a bridge that spanned an arm of the canal, and past a double line of houses, with broken windows, from which no sign or sound of life came. Suddenly at a turn three German privates of a lancer regiment faced us. They were burdened with bottles of beer, and one carried his lance, which he flung playfully in our path. He had been drinking and was jovially exhilarated. As soon as he saw the small silk American flag that fluttered from the rail of our dogcart he and his friends became enthusiastic in their greetings, offering us beer and wanting to know whether the Americans meant to declare for Germany now that the Japanese had sided with England.

Leaving them cheering for the Americans we negotiated another elbow in the twisting street—and there all about us was the aftermath and wreckage of a spirited fight.

Earlier in this chapter I told—or tried to tell—how La Buissière must have looked in peaceful times. I shall try now to tell how it actually looked that afternoon we rode into it.

In the center of the town the main street opens out to form an irregular circle, and the houses fronting it make a compact ring. Through a gap one gets a glimpse of the little river which one has just crossed; and on the river bank stands the mill, or what is left of it, and that is little enough. Its roof is gone, shot clear away in a shower of shattered tiling, and its walls are breached in a hundred places. It is pretty certain that mill will never grind grist again.

On its upper floor, which is now a sieve, the Germans—so they themselves told us—found, after the fighting, the seventy-year-old miller, dead, with a gun in his hands and a hole in his head. He had elected to help the French defend the place; and it was as well for him that he fell fighting, because, had he been taken alive, the Prussians, following their grim rule for all civilians caught with weapons, would have stood him up against a wall with a firing squad before him.

The houses round about have fared better, in the main, than the mill, though none of them has come scatheless out of the fight. Hardly a windowpane is whole; hardly a wall but is pocked by bullets or rent by larger missiles. Some houses have lost roofs; some have lost side walls, so that one can gaze straight into them and see the cluttered furnishings, half buried in shattered masonry and crumbled plaster.

One small cottage has been blown clear away in a blast of artillery fire; only the chimney remains, pointing upward like a stubby finger. A fireplace, with a fire in it, is the glowing heart of a house; and a chimney completes it and reveals that it is a home fit for human creatures to live in; but we see here—and the truth of it strikes us as it never did before—that a chimney standing alone typifies desolation and ruin more fitly, more brutally, than any written words could typify it.

Everywhere there are soldiers—German soldiers—in their soiled, dusty gray service uniforms, always in heavy boots; always with their tunics buttoned to the throat. Some, off duty, are lounging at ease in the doors of the houses. More, on duty, are moving about briskly in squads, with fixed bayonets. One is learning to ride a bicycle, and when he falls off, as he does repeatedly, his comrades laugh at him and shout derisive advice at him.

There are not many of the townsfolk in sight. Experience has taught us that in any town not occupied by the enemy our appearance will be the signal for an immediate gathering of the citizens, all flocking about us, filled with a naive, respectful inquisitiveness, and wanting to know where we have come from and to what place we are going. Here in this stricken town not a single villager comes near us. A priest passes us, bows deeply to us, and in an instant is gone round a jog in the street, the skirts of his black robe flicking behind him. From upper windows faces peer out at us—faces of women and children mostly. In nearly every one of these faces a sort of cow-like bewilderment expresses itself—not grief, not even resentment, but merely a stupefied wonderment at the astounding fact that their town, rather than some other town, should be the town where the soldiers of other nations come to fight out their feud. We have come to know well that look these last few days. So far as we have seen there has been no mistreatment of civilians by the soldiers; yet we note that the villagers stay inside the shelter of their damaged homes as though they felt safer there. A young officer bustles up, spick and span in his tan boots and tan gloves, and, finding us to be Americans and correspondents, becomes instantly effusive. He has just come through his first fight, seemingly with some credit to himself; and he is proud of the part he has played and is pleased to talk about it. Of his own accord he volunteers to lead us to the heights back of the town where the French defenses were and where the hand-to-hand fighting took place.

As we trail along behind him in single file we pass a small paved court before a stable and see a squad of French prisoners. Later we are to see several thousand French prisoners; but now the sight is at once a sensation and a novelty to us. These are all French prisoners; there are no Belgians or Englishmen among them. In their long, cumbersome blue coats and baggy red pants they are huddled

down against a wall in a heap of straw. They lie there silently, chewing straws and looking very forlorn. Four German soldiers with fixed bayonets are guarding them.

The young lieutenant leads us along a steeply ascending road over a ridge and then stops; and as we look about us the consciousness strikes home to us, with almost the jar of a physical blow, that we are standing where men have lately striven together and have fallen and died.

In front of us and below us is the town, with the river winding into it at the east and out of it at the west; and beyond the town, to the north, is the cup-shaped valley of fair, fat farm lands, all heavy and pregnant with un-garnered, ungathered crops. Behind us, on the front of the hill, is a hedge, and beyond the hedge—just a foot or so back of it, in fact—is a deep trench, plainly dug out by hand, and so lately done that the cut clods are still moist and fresh-looking. At the first instant of looking it seems to us that this intrenchment is full of dead men; but when we look closer we see that what we take for corpses are the scattered garments and equipments of French infantrymen—long blue coats; peaked, red-topped caps; spare shirts; rifled knapsacks; water-bottles; broken guns; side arms; bayonet belts and blanket rolls. There are perhaps twenty guns in sight. Each one has been rendered useless by being struck against the earth with sufficient force to snap the stock at the grip.

Almost at my feet is a knapsack, ripped open and revealing a card of small china buttons, a new red handkerchief, a gray-striped flannel shirt, a pencil and a sheaf of writing paper. Rummaging in the main compartment I find, folded at the back, a book recording the name and record of military service of one Gaston Michel Miseroux, whose home is at Amiens, and who is—or was—a private in the Tenth Battalion of the – Regiment of Chasseurs a Pied. Whether this Gaston Michel Miseroux got away alive without his knapsack, or whether he was captured or was killed, there is none to say. His service record is here in the trampled dust and he is gone.

Before going farther the young lieutenant, speaking in his broken English, told us the story of the fight, which had been fought, he said, just forty-eight hours before. "The French," he said, "must have been here for several days. They had fortified this hill, as you see; digging intrenchments in front for their riflemen and putting their artillery behind at a place I shall presently show you. Also they had placed many of their sharpshooters in the houses. It was a strong position, commanding the passage of the river, and they should have been able to hold it against twice their number.

"Our men came, as you did, along that road off yonder; and then our infantry advanced across the fields under cover of our artillery fire. We were in the open and the French were above us here and behind shelter; and so we lost many men.

"They had mined the bridge over the canal and also the last remaining bridge across the river; but we came so fast that we took both bridges before they could set off the mines.

"In twenty minutes we held the town and the last of their sharpshooters in the houses had been dislodged or killed. Then, while our guns moved over there to the left and shelled them on the flank, two companies of Germans—five hundred men—charged up the steep road over which you have just climbed and took this trench here in five minutes of close fighting.

"The enemy lost many men here before they ran. So did we lose many. On that spot there"—he pointed to a little gap in the hedge, not twenty feet away, where the grass was pressed flat—"I saw three dead men lying in a heap.

"We pushed the French back, taking a few prisoners as we went, until on the other side of this hill our artillery began to rake them, and then they gave way altogether and retreated to the south, taking their guns. Remember, they outnumbered us and they had the advantage of position; but we whipped them—we Germans—as we always do whip our enemies."

His voice changed from boasting to pity:

"Ach, but it was shameful that they should have been sent against us wearing those long blue coats, those red trousers, those shiny black belts and bright brass buttons! At a mile, or even half a mile, the Germans in their dark-gray uniforms, with dull facings, fade into the background; but a Frenchman in his foolish monkey clothes is a target for as far as you can see him.

"And their equipment—see how flimsy it is when compared with ours! And their guns—so inferior, so old-fashioned alongside the German guns! I tell you this: Forty-four years they have been wishing to fight us for what we did in 1870; and when the time comes they are not ready and we are ready. While they have been singing their Marseillaise Hymn, we have been thinking. While they have been talking, we have been working."

Next he escorted us back along the small plateau that extended south from the face of the bluff. We made our way through a constantly growing confusion of abandoned equipment and garments—all the flotsam and jetsam of a rout. I suppose we saw as many as fifty smashed French rifles, as many as a hundred and fifty canteens and knapsacks.

Crossing a sunken road, where trenches for riflemen to kneel in and fire from had been dug in the sides of the bank—a road our guide said was full of dead men after the fight—we came very soon to the site of the French camp. Here, from the medley and mixture of an indescribable jumble of wreckage, certain objects stand out, as I write this, detached and plain in my mind; such things, for example, as a straw basket of twelve champagne bottles with two bottles full and ten empty; a box of lump sugar, broken open, with a stain of spilled red wine on some of the white cubes; a roll of new mattresses jammed into a natural receptacle at the root of an oak tree; a saber hilt of shining brass with the blade missing; a whole set of pewter knives and forks sown broadcast on the bruised and trampled grass. But there was no German relic in the lot—you may be sure of that. Farther down, where the sunken road again wound across our path, we passed an old-fashioned family carriage jammed against the bank, with one shaft snapped off short. Lying on the dusty seat-cushion was a single silver teaspoon.

Almost opposite the carriage, against the other bank, was a cavalryman's boot; it had been cut from a wounded limb. The leather had been split all the way down the leg from the top to the ankle, and the inside of the boot was full of clotted, dried blood. And just as we turned back to return to the town I saw a child's stuffed cloth doll—rag dolls I think they call them in the States—lying flat in the road; and a wagon wheel or a camion wheel had passed over the head, squashing it flat.

I am not striving for effect when I tell of this trifle. When you write of such things as a battlefield you do not need to strive for effect. The effects are all there, ready-made, waiting to be set down. Nor do I know how a child's doll came to be in that harried, upturned place. I only know it was there, and being there it seemed to me to sum up the fate of little Belgium in this great war. If I had been seeking a visible symbol of Belgium's case I do not believe I could have found a more fitting one anywhere.

Going down the hill to the town we met, skirting across our path, a party of natives wearing Red Cross distinguishments. The lieutenant said these men had undoubtedly been beating the woods and grain fields for the scattered wounded or dead. He added, without emotion, that from time to time they found one such; in fact, the volunteer searchers had brought in two Frenchmen just before we arrived—one to be cared for at the hospital, the other to be buried.

We had thanked the young lieutenant and had bade him good-by, and were starting off again, hoping to make Maubeuge before night, when suddenly it struck me that the one thing about La Buissière I should recall most vividly was not the sight of it, all stricken and stunned and forlorn as it was, but the stench of it.

Before this my eyes had been so busy recording impressions that my nose had neglected its duty; now for the first time I sensed the vile reek that arose from all about me. The place was one big, horrid stink. It smelled of ether and iodoform and carbolic acid—there being any number of improvised hospitals, full of wounded, in sight; it smelled of sour beef bones and stale bread and moldy hay and fresh horse dung; it smelled of the sweaty bodies of the soldiers; it smelled of everything that is fetid and rancid and unsavory and unwholesome.

And yet, forty-eight hours before, this town, if it was like every other Belgian town, must have been as clean as clean could be. When the Belgian peasant housewife has cleaned the inside of her house she issues forth with bucket and scrubbing brush and washes the outside of it—and even the

pavement in front and the cobbles of the road. But the war had come to La Buissière and turned it upside down.

A war wastes towns, it seems, even more visibly than it wastes nations. Already the streets were ankle-deep in filth. There were broken lamps and broken bottles and broken windowpanes everywhere, and one could not step without an accompaniment of crunching glass from underfoot.

Sacks of provender, which the French had abandoned, were split open and their contents wasted in the mire while the inhabitants went hungry. The lower floors of the houses were bedded in straw where the soldiers had slept, and the straw was thickly covered with dried mud and already gave off a sour-sickish odor. Over everything was the lime dust from the powdered walls and plastering.

We drove away, then, over the hill toward the south. From the crest of the bluff we could look down on ruined La Buissière, with its garrison of victorious invaders, its frightened townspeople, and its houses full of maimed and crippled soldiers of both sides.

Beyond we could see the fields, where the crops, already overripe, must surely waste for lack of men and teams to harvest them; and on the edge of one field we marked where the three peasants dug the grave for the rotting horse, striving to get it underground before it set up a plague.

Except for them, busy with pick and spade, no living creature in sight was at work.

Sherman said it!

Chapter 4

"Marsch, Marsch, Marsch, So Geh'n Wir Weiter!"

Have you ever seen three hundred thousand men and one hundred thousand horses moving in one compact, marvelous unit of organization, discipline and system? If you have not seen it you cannot imagine what it is like. If you have seen it you cannot tell what it is like. In one case the conceptive faculty fails you; in the other the descriptive. I, who have seen this sight, am not foolish enough to undertake to put it down with pencil on paper. I think I know something of the limitations of the written English language. What I do mean to try to do in this chapter is to record some of my impressions as I watched it.

In beginning this job I find myself casting about for comparisons to set up against the vision of a full German army of seven army corps on the march. I think of the tales I have read and the stories I have heard of other great armies: Alaric's war bands and Attila's; the First Crusade; Hannibal's cohorts, and Alexander's host, and Caesar's legions; the Goths and the Vandals; the million of Xerxes—if it was a million—and Napoleon starting for Moscow.

It is of no use. This Germanic horde, which I saw pouring down across Belgium, bound for France, does not in retrospect seem to me a man-made, man-managed thing. It seems more like a great, orderly function of Nature; as ordained and cosmic as the tides of the sea or the sweep of a mighty wind. It is hard to believe that it was ever fashioned of thousands of separate atoms, so perfectly is it welded into a whole. It is harder still to accept it as a mutable and a mortal organism, subject to the shifts of chance and mischance.

And then, on top of this, when one stops to remember that this army of three hundred thousand men and a hundred thousand horses was merely one single cog of the German military machine; that if all the German war strength were assembled together you might add this army to the greater army and hardly know it was there—why, then, the brain refuses to wrestle with a computation so gigantic. The imagination just naturally bogs down and quits.

I have already set forth in some detail how it came to pass that we went forth from Brussels in a taxicab looking for the war; and how in the outskirts of Louvain we found it, and very shortly thereafter also found that we were cut off from our return and incidentally had lost not only our chauffeur and our taxi-cab but our overcoats as well. There being nothing else to do we made ourselves comfortable along side the Belgian Lion Cafe in the southern edge of Louvain, and for hours we watched the advance guard sliding down the road through a fog of white dust.

Each time a break came in the weaving gray lines we fancied this surely was all. All? What we saw there was a puny dribbling stream compared with the torrent that was coming. The crest of that living tidal wave was still two days and many miles to the rearward. We had seen the head and a little of the neck. The swollen body of the myriad-legged gray centipede was as yet far behind.

As we sat in chairs tilted against the wall and watched, we witnessed an interesting little side play. At the first coming of the German skirmishers the people of this quarter of the town had seemed stupefied with amazement and astonishment. Most of them, it subsequently developed, had believed right up to the last minute that the forts of Liege still held out and that the Germans had not yet passed the gateways of their country, many kilometers to the eastward. When the scouts of the enemy appeared in their streets they fell for the moment into a stunned state. A little later the appearance of a troop of Uhlans had revived their resentment. We had heard that quick hiss and snarl of hatred which sprang from them as the lancers trotted into view on their superb mounts out of the mouth of a neighboring lane, and had seen how instantaneously the dull, malignant gleam of gun metal, as a sergeant pulled his pistol on them, had brought the silence of frightened respect again.

It now appeared that realization of the number of the invaders was breeding in the Belgians a placating spirit. If a soldier fell out of line at the door of a house to ask for water, all within that

house strove to bring the water to him. If an officer, returning from a small sortie into other streets, checked up to ask the way to rejoin his command, a dozen eager arms waved in chorus to point out the proper direction, and a babble of solicitous voices arose from the group about his halted horse.

Young Belgian girls began smiling at soldiers swinging by and the soldiers grinned back and waved their arms. You might almost have thought the troops were Allies passing through a friendly community. This phase of the plastic Flemish temperament made us marvel. When I was told, a fortnight afterward, how these same people rose in the night to strike at these their enemies, and how, so doing, they brought about the ruination of their city and the summary executions of some hundreds of themselves, I marveled all the more.

Presently, as we sat there, we heard—above the rumbling of cannon wheels, the nimble clunking of hurrying hoofs and the heavy thudding of booted feet, falling and rising all in unison—a new note from overhead, a combination of whir and flutter and whine. We looked aloft. Directly above the troops, flying as straight for Brussels as a homing bee for the hive, went a military monoplane, serving as courier and spy for the crawling columns below it. Directly, having gone far ahead, it came speeding back, along a lower air lane and performed a series of circling and darting gyrations, which doubtlessly had a signal-code meaning for the troops. Twice or three times it swung directly above our heads, and at the height at which it now evolved we could plainly distinguish the downward curve of its wing-planes and the peculiar droop of the rudder—both things that marked it for an army model. We could also make out the black cross painted on its belly as a further distinguishing mark.

To me a monoplane always suggests a bird when it does not suggest an insect or a winged reptile; and this monoplane particularly suggested the bird type. The simile which occurred to me was that of the bird which guards the African rhinoceros; after that it was doubly easy to conceive of this army as a rhinoceros, having all the brute strength and brute force which are a part of that creature, and its well-armored sides and massive legs and deadly horned head; and finally its peculiar fancy for charging straight at its objective target, trampling down all obstacles in the way.

The Germans also fancy their monoplane as a bird; but they call it Taube—a dove. To think of calling this sinister adjunct of warfare a dove, which among modern peoples has always symbolized peace, seemed a most terrible bit of sarcasm. As an exquisite essence of irony I saw but one thing during our week-end in Louvain to match it, and that was a big van requisitioned from a Cologne florist's shop to use in a baggage train. It bore on its sides advertisements of potted plants and floral pieces—and it was loaded to its top with spare ammunition.

Yet, on second thought, I do not believe the Prussians call their war monoplane a dove by way of satire. The Prussians are a serious-minded race and never more serious than when they make war, as all the world now knows.

Three monoplanes buzzed over us, making sawmill sounds, during the next hour or two. Thereafter, whenever we saw German troops on the march through a country new to them we looked aloft for the thing with the droopy wings and the black cross on its yellow abdomen. Sooner or later it appeared, coming always out of nowhere and vanishing always into space. We were never disappointed. It is only the man who expects the German army to forget something needful or necessary who is disappointed.

It was late in the afternoon when we bade farewell to the three-hundred- pound proprietress of the Belgian Lion and sought to reach the center of the town through byways not yet blocked off by the marching regiments. When we were perhaps halfway to our destination we met a town bellman and a town crier, the latter being in the uniform of a Garde Civique. The bellringer would ply his clapper until he drew a crowd, and then the Garde Civique would halt in an open space at the junction of two or more streets and read a proclamation from the burgomaster calling on all the inhabitants to preserve their tranquillity and refrain from overt acts against the Germans, under promise of safety if they obeyed and threat of death at the hands of the Germans if they disregarded the warning.

This word-of-mouth method of spreading an order applied only to the outlying sections. In the more thickly settled districts, where presumably the populace could read and write, proclamations posted on wall and window took its place. During the three days we stayed in Louvain one proclamation succeeded another with almost the frequency of special extras of evening newspapers when a big news story breaks in an American city: The citizens were to surrender all firearms in their possession; it would be immediately fatal to him if a man were caught with a lethal weapon on his person or in his house. Tradespeople might charge this or that price for the necessities of life, and no more. All persons, except physicians and nurses in the discharge of their professional duties, and gendarmes—the latter being now disarmed and entirely subservient to the military authorities—must be off the streets and public squares at a given time—to wit, nine p. m. Cafés must close at the same hour. Any soldier who refused to pay for any private purchase should be immediately reported at headquarters for punishment. Upper front windows of all houses on certain specified streets must be closed and locked after nightfall, remaining so until daylight of the following morning; this notice being followed and overlapped very shortly by one more amplifying, which prescribed that not only must front windows be made fast, but all must have lights behind them and the street doors must be left unlocked.

The portent of this was simple enough: If any man sought to fire on the soldiers below he must first unfasten a window and expose himself in the light; and after he fired admittance would be made easy for those who came searching for him to kill him.

At first these placards were signed by the burgomaster, with the military commandant's indorsement, and sometimes by both those functionaries; but on the second day there appeared one signed by the commandant only; and this one, for special emphasis, was bounded by wide borders printed in bright red. It stated, with cruel brevity, that the burgomaster, the senator for the district and the leading magistrate had been taken into custody as hostages for the good conduct of their constituents; and that if a civilian made any attack against the Germans he would forfeit his own life and endanger the lives of the three prisoners. Thus, inch by inch, the conquerors, sensing a growing spirit of revolt among the conquered—a spirit as yet nowise visible on the surface—took typically German steps to hold the rebellious people of Louvain in hobbles. It was when we reached the Y-shaped square in the middle of things, with the splendid old Gothic town hall rising on one side of it and the famous Church of Saint Pierre at the bottom of the gore, that we first beheld at close hand the army of the War Lord. Alongside the Belgian Lion we had thought it best to keep our distance from the troops as they passed obliquely across our line of vision. Here we might press as closely as we pleased to the column. The magnificent precision with which the whole machinery moved was astounding—I started to say appalling. Three streets converging into the place were glutted with men, extending from curb to curb; and for an outlet there was but one somewhat wider street, which twisted its course under the gray walls of the church. Yet somehow the various lines melted together and went thumping off out of sight like streams running down a funnel and out at the spout.

Never, so far as we could tell, was there any congestion, any hitch, any suggestion of confusion. Frequently there would come from a sideway a group of officers on horseback, or a whole string of commandeered touring cars bearing monocled, haughty staff officers in the tonneaus, with guards riding beside the chauffeurs and small slick trunks strapped on behind. A whistle would sound shrilly then; and magically a gap would appear in the formation. Into this gap the horsemen or the imperious automobiles would slip, and away the column would go again without having been disturbed or impeded noticeably. No stage manager ever handled his supers better; and here, be it remembered, there were uncountable thousands of supers, and for a stage the twisting, medieval convolutions of a strange city. Now for a space of minutes it would be infantry that passed, at the swinging lunge of German foot soldiers on a forced march. Now it would be cavalry, with accouterments jingling and horses scrouging in the close-packed ranks; else a battery of the viperish looking little rapid-

fire guns, or a battery of heavier cannon, with cloth fittings over their ugly snouts, like muzzled dogs whose bark is bad and whose bite is worse.

Then, always in due order, would succeed the field telegraph corps; the field post-office corps; the Red Cross corps; the brass band of, say, forty pieces; and all the rest of it, to the extent of a thousand and one circus parades rolled together. There were boats for making pontoon bridges, mounted side by side on wagons, with the dried mud of the River Meuse still on their flat bottoms; there were baggage trains miles in length, wherein the supply of regular army wagons was eked out with nondescript vehicles—even family carriages and delivery vans gathered up hastily, as the signs on their sides betrayed, from the tradespeople of a dozen Northern German cities and towns, and now bearing chalk marks on them to show in what division they belonged. And inevitably at the tail of each regiment came its cook wagons, with fires kindled and food cooking for supper in the big portable ranges, so that when these passed the air would be charged with that pungent reek of burning wood which makes an American think of a fire engine on its way to answer an alarm.

Once, as a cook perched on a step at the back of his wagon bent forward to stir the stew with a spoon almost big enough for a spade, I saw under his hiked-up coat-tails that at the back of his gray trousers there were four suspender buttons in a row instead of two. The purpose of this was plain: when his suspenders chafed him he might, by shifting the straps to different buttons, shift the strain on his shoulders. All German soldiers' trousers have this extra garnishment of buttons aft.

Somebody thought of that. Somebody thought of everything.

We in America are accustomed to think of the Germans as an obese race, swinging big paunches in front of them; but in that army the only fat men we saw were officers, and not so many of them. On occasion, some colonel, beefy as a brisket and with rolls of fat on the back of his close-shaved neck, would be seen bouncing by, balancing his tired stomach on his saddle pommel; but, without exception, the men in the ranks were trained down and fine drawn. They bent forward under the weight of their knapsacks and blanket rolls; and their middles were bulky with cartridge belts, and bulging pockets covered their flanks.

Inside the shapeless uniforms, however, their limbs swung with athletic freedom, and even at the fag-end of a hard day's marching, with perhaps several hours of marching yet ahead of them, they carried their heavy guns as though those guns were toys. Their fair sunburned faces were lined with sweat marks and masked under dust, and doubtless some were desperately weary; but I did not see a straggler. To date I presume I have seen upward of a million of these German soldiers on the march, and I have yet to see a straggler.

For the most part the rank and file were stamped by their faces and their limbs as being of peasant blood or of the petty artisan type; but here and there, along with the butcher and the baker and the candlestick maker, passed one of a slenderer build, usually spectacled and wearing, even in this employment, the unmistakable look of the cultured, scholarly man.

And every other man, regardless of his breed, held a cheap cigar between his front teeth; but the wagon drivers and many of the cavalrymen smoked pipes—the long-stemmed, china-bowled pipe, which the German loves. The column moved beneath a smoke-wreath of its own making.

The thing, however, which struck one most forcibly was the absolute completeness, the perfect uniformity, of the whole scheme. Any man's equipment was identically like any other man's equipment. Every drinking cup dangled behind its owner's spine-tip at precisely the same angle; every strap and every buckle matched. These Germans had been run through a mold and they had all come out soldiers. And, barring a few general officers, they were all young men—men yet on the sunny side of thirty. Later we were to see plenty of older men—reserves and Landwehr—but this was the pick of the western line that passed through Louvain, the chosen product of the active wing of the service.

Out of the narrow streets the marchers issued; and as they reached the broader space before the town hall each company would raise a song, beating with its heavy boots on the paving stones to mark the time. Presently we detected a mutter of resentment rising from the troops; and seeking the

cause of this we discerned that some of them had caught sight of a big Belgian flag which whipped in the breeze from the top of the Church of Saint Pierre. However, the flag stayed where it had been put during the three days we remained in Louvain. Seemingly the German commander did not greatly care whose flag flew on the church tower overhead so long as he held dominion of the earth below and the dwellers thereof.

Well, we watched the gray ear-wig wriggling away to the westward until we were surfeited, and then we set about finding a place where we might rest our dizzy heads. We could not get near the principal hotels. These already were filled with high officers and ringed about with sentries; but half a mile away, on the plaza fronting the main railroad station, we finally secured accommodations—such as they were—at a small fourth-rate hotel.

It called itself by a gorgeous title—it was the House of the Thousand Columns, which was as true a saying as though it had been named the House of the One Column; for it had neither one column nor a thousand, but only a small, dingy beer bar below and some ten dismal living rooms above. Established here, we set about getting in touch with the German higher-ups, since we were likely to be mistaken for Englishmen, which would be embarrassing certainly, and might even be painful. At the hotel next door—for all the buildings flanking this square were hotels of a sort—we found a group of officers.

One of them, a tall, handsome, magnetic chap, with a big, deep laugh and a most beautiful command of our own tongue, turned out to be a captain on the general staff. It seemed to him the greatest joke in the world that four American correspondents should come looking for war in a taxicab, and should find it too. He beat himself on his flanks in the excess of his joy, and called up half a dozen friends to hear the amazing tale; and they enjoyed it too.

He said he felt sure his adjutant would appreciate the joke; and, as incidentally his adjutant was the person in all the world we wanted most just then to see, we went with him to headquarters, which was a mile away in the local Palais de Justice—or, as we should say in America, the courthouse. By now it was good and dark; and as no street lamps burned we walked through a street that was like a tunnel for blackness.

The roadway was full of infantry still pressing forward to a camping place somewhere beyond the town. We could just make out the shadowy shapes of the men, but their feet made a noise like thunderclaps, and they sang a German marching song with a splendid lilt and swing to it.

"Just listen!" said the captain proudly. "They are always like that—they march all day and half the night, and never do they grow weary. They are in fine spirits—our men. And we can hardly hold them back. They will go forward—always forward!"

"In this war we have no such command as Retreat! That word we have blotted out. Either we shall go forward or we shall die! We do not expect to fall back, ever. The men know this; and if our generals would but let them they would run to Paris instead of walking there."

I think it was not altogether through vainglory he spoke. He was not a bombastic sort. I think he voiced the intent of the army to which he belonged.

At the Palais de Justice the adjutant was not to be seen; so our guide volunteered to write a note of introduction for us. Standing in a doorway of the building, where a light burned, he opened a small flat leather pack that swung from his belt, along with the excellent map of Belgium inclosed in a leather frame which every German officer carried. We marveled that the pack contained pencils, pens, inkpot, seals, officially stamped envelopes and note paper, and blank forms of various devices. Verily these Germans had remembered all things and forgotten nothing. I said that to myself mentally at the moment; nor have I had reason since to withdraw or qualify the remark.

The next morning I saw the adjutant, whose name was Renner and whose title was that of major; but first I, as spokesman, underwent a search for hidden weapons at the hands of a secret service man. Major Renner was most courteous; also he was amused to hear the details of our taxicabbing

expedition into his lines. But of the desire which lay nearest our hearts—to get back to Brussels in time haply to witness its occupation by the Germans—he would not hear.

"For your own sakes," thus he explained it, "I dare not let you gentlemen go. Terrible things have happened. Last night a colonel of infantry was murdered while he was asleep; and I have just heard that fifteen of our soldiers had their throats cut, also as they slept. From houses our troops have been fired on, and between here and Brussels there has been much of this guerrilla warfare on us. To those who do such things and to those who protect them we show no mercy. We shoot them on the spot and burn their houses to the ground.

"I can well understand that the Belgians resent our coming into their country. We ourselves regret it; but it was a military necessity. We could do nothing else. If the Belgians put on uniforms and enroll as soldiers and fight us openly, we shall capture them if we can; we shall kill them if we must; but in all cases we shall treat them as honorable enemies, fighting under the rules of civilized warfare.

"But this shooting from ambush by civilians; this murdering of our people in the night—that we cannot endure. We have made a rule that if shots are fired by a civilian from a house then we shall burn that house; and we shall kill that man and all the other men in that house whom we suspect of harboring him or aiding him.

"We make no attempt to disguise our methods of reprisal. We are willing for the world to know it; and it is not because I wish to cover up or hide any of our actions from your eyes, and from the eyes of the American people, that I am refusing you passes for your return to Brussels to-day. But, you see, our men have been terribly excited by these crimes of the Belgian populace, and in their excitement they might make serious mistakes.

"Our troops are under splendid discipline, as you may have seen already for yourselves. And I assure you the Germans are not a bloodthirsty or a drunken or a barbarous people; but in every army there are fools and, what is worse, in every army there are brutes. You are strangers; and if you passed along the road to-day some of our more ignorant men, seeing that you were not natives and suspecting your motives, might harm you. There might be some stupid, angry common soldier, some over-zealous under officer—you understand me, do you not, gentlemen?

"So you will please remain here quietly, having nothing to do with any of our men who may seek to talk with you. That last is important; for I may tell you that our secret-service people have already reported your presence, and they naturally are anxious to make a showing.

"At the end of one day—perhaps two—we shall be able, I think, to give you safe conduct back to Brussels. And then I hope you will be able to speak a good word to the American public for our army."

After this fashion of speaking I heard now from the lips of Major Renner what I subsequently heard fifty times from other army men, and likewise from high German civilians, of the common German attitude toward Belgium. Often these others have used almost the same words he used. Invariably they have sought to convey the same meaning.

For those three days we stayed on unwillingly in Louvain we were not once out of sight of German soldiers, nor by day or night out of sound of their threshing feet and their rumbling wheels. We never looked; this way or that but we saw their gray masses blocking up the distances. We never entered shop or house but we found Germans already there. We never sought to turn off the main-traveled streets into a byway but our path was barred by a guard seeking to know our business. And always, as we noted, for this duty those in command had chosen soldiers who knew a smattering of French, in order that the sentries might be able to speak with the citizens. If we passed along a sidewalk the chances were that it would be lined thick with soldiers lying against the walls resting, or sitting on the curbs, with their shoes off, easing their feet. If we looked into the sky our prospects for seeing a monoplane flying about were most excellent. If we entered a square it was bound to be jammed with horses and packed baggage trains and supply wagons. The atmosphere was laden with

the ropy scents of the boiling stews and with the heavier smells of the soldiers' unwashed bodies and their sweating horses.

Finally, to their credit be it said, we personally did not see one German, whether officer or private, who mistreated any citizen, or was offensively rude to any citizen, or who refused to pay a fair reckoning for what he bought, or who was conspicuously drunk. The postcard venders of Louvain must have grown fat with wealth; for, next to bottled beer and butter and cheap cigars, every common soldier craved postcards above all other commodities.

We grew tired after a while of seeing Germans; it seemed to us that every vista always had been choked with unshaved, blond, blocky, short-haired men in rawhide boots and ill-fitting gray tunics; and that every vista always would be. It took a new kind of gun, or an automobile with a steel prow for charging through barbed-wire entanglements, or a group of bedraggled Belgian prisoners slouching by under convoy, to make us give the spectacle more than a passing glance.

There was something hypnotic, something tremendously wearisome to the mind in those thick lines flowing sluggishly along in streams like molten lead; in the hedges of gun barrels all slanting at the same angle; in the same types of faces repeated and repeated countless; in the legs which scissored by in such faultless unison and at each clip of each pair of living shears cut off just so much of the road—never any more and never any less, but always just exactly so much.

Our jaded and satiated fancies had been fed on soldiers and all the cumbersome pageantry of war until they refused to be quickened by what, half a week before, would have set every nerve tingling. Almost the only thing that stands out distinct in my memory from the confused recollections of the last morning spent in Louvain is a huge sight-seeing car—of the sort known at home as a rubberneck wagon—which lumbered by us with Red Cross men perched like roosting gray birds on all its seats. We estimated we saw two hundred thousand men in motion through the ancient town. We learned afterward we had under-figured the total by at least a third.

During these days the life of Louvain went on, so far as our alien eyes could judge, pretty much as it probably did in the peace times preceding. At night, obeying an order, the people stayed within their doors; in the daylight hours they pursued their customary business, not greatly incommoded apparently by the presence of the conqueror. If there was simmering hate in the hearts of the men and women of Louvain it did not betray itself in their sobered faces. I saw a soldier, somewhat fuddled, seize a serving maid about the waist and kiss her; he received a slap in the face and fell back in bad order, while his mates cheered the spunky girl. A minute later she emerged from the house to which she had retreated, seemingly ready to swap slaps for kisses some more.

However, from time to time sinister suggestions did obtrude themselves on us. For example, on the second morning of our enforced stay at the House of the Thousand Columns we watched a double file of soldiers going through a street toward the Palais de Justice. Two roughly clad natives walked between the lines of bared bayonets. One was an old man who walked proudly with his head erect. He was like a man going to a feast. The other was bent almost double, and his hands were tied behind his back.

A few minutes afterward a barred yellow van, under escort, came through the square fronting the railroad station and disappeared behind a mass of low buildings. From that direction we presently heard shots. Soon the van came back, unescorted this time; and behind it came Belgians with Red Cross arm badges, bearing on their shoulders two litters on which were still figures covered with blankets, so that only the stockinged feet showed.

Twice thereafter this play was repeated, with slight variations, and each time we Americans, looking on from our front windows, drew our own conclusions. Also, from the same vantage point we saw an automobile pass bearing a couple of German officers and a little, scared-looking man in a frock coat and a high hat, whose black mustache stood out like a charcoal mark against the very white background of his face. This little man, we learned, was the burgomaster, and this day he was being held a prisoner and responsible for the good conduct of some fifty-odd thousand of his fellow

citizens. That night our host, a gross, silent man in carpet slippers, told us the burgomaster was ill in bed at home.

"He suffers," explained our landlord in French, "from a crisis of the nerves." The French language is an expressive language.

Then, coming a pace nearer, our landlord added a question in a cautious whisper.

"Messieurs," he asked, "do you think it can be true, as my neighbors tell me, that the United States President has ordered the Germans to get out of our country?"

We shook our heads, and he went silently away in his carpet slippers; and his broad Flemish face gave no hint of what corrosive thoughts he may have had in his heart.

It was Wednesday morning when we entered Louvain. It was Saturday morning when we left it. This last undertaking was preceded by difficulties. As a preliminary to it we visited in turn all the stables in Louvain where ordinarily horses and wheeled vehicles could be had for hire.

Perhaps there were no horses left in the stalls—thanks to either Belgian foragers or to German—or, if there were horses, no driver would risk his hide on the open road among the German pack trains and rear guards. At length we did find a tall, red-haired Walloon who said he would go anywhere on earth, and provide a team for the going, if we paid the price he asked. We paid it in advance, in case anything should happen on the way, and he took us in a venerable open carriage behind two crow-bait skeletons that had once, in a happier day when hay was cheaper, been horses.

We drove slowly, taking the middle of the wide Brussels road. On our right, traveling in the same direction, crawled an unending line of German baggage wagons and pontoon trucks. On our left, going the opposite way, was another line, also unending, made up of refugee villagers, returning afoot to the towns beyond Louvain from which they had fled four days earlier. They were footsore and they limped; they were of all ages and most miserable-looking. And, one and all, they were as tongueless as so many ghosts. Thus we traveled; and at the end of the first hour came to the tiny town of Leefdael.

At Leefdael there must have been fighting, for some of the houses were gutted by shells. At least two had been burned; and a big tin sign at a railroad crossing had become a tin colander where flying lead had sieved it. In a beet patch beside one of the houses was a mound of fresh earth the length of a long man, with a cross of sticks at the head of it. A Belgian soldier's cap was perched on the upright and a scrap of paper was made fast to the cross arm; and two peasants stood there apparently reading what was written on the paper. Later such sights as these were to become almost the commonest incidents of our countryside campaignings; but now we looked with all our eyes.

Except that the roadside ditches were littered with beer bottles and scraps of paper, and the road itself rutted by cannon wheels, we saw little enough after leaving Leefdael to suggest that an army had come this way until we were in the outskirts of Brussels. In a tree-edged, grass-plotted boulevard at the edge of the Bois, toward Tervueren, cavalry had halted. The turf was scarred with hoofprints and strewn with hay; and there was a row of small trenches in which the Germans had built their fires to do their cooking. The sod, which had been removed to make these trenches, was piled in neat little terraces, ready to be put back; and care plainly had been taken by the troopers to avoid damaging the bark on the trunks of the ash and elm trees.

There it was—the German system of warfare! These Germans might carry on their war after the most scientifically deadly plan the world has ever known; they might deal out their peculiarly fatal brand of drumhead justice to all civilians who crossed their paths bearing arms; they might burn and waste for punishment; they might lay on a captured city and a whipped province a tribute of foodstuffs and an indemnity of money heavier than any civilized race has ever demanded of the cowed and conquered—might do all these things and more besides—but their common troopers saved the sods of the greensward for replanting and spared the boles of the young shade trees! Next day we again left Brussels, the submissive, and made a much longer excursion under German auspices. And, at length, after much travail, we landed in the German frontier city of Aix-la-Chapelle, where I wrote

these lines. There it was, two days after our arrival, that we heard of the fate of Louvain and of that pale little man, the burgomaster, who had survived his crisis of the nerves to die of a German bullet.

We wondered what became of the proprietor of the House of the Thousand Columns; and of the young Dutch tutor in the Berlitz School of Languages, who had served us as a guide and interpreter; and of the pretty, gentle little Flemish woman who brought us our meals in her clean, small restaurant round the corner from the Hotel de Ville; and of the kindly, red-bearded priest at the Church of Saint Jacques, who gave us ripe pears and old wine.

I reckon we shall always wonder what became of them, and that we shall never know. I hoped mightily that the American wing of the big Catholic seminary had been spared. It had a stone figure of an American Indian— looking something like Sitting Bull, we thought—over its doors; and that was the only typically American thing we saw in all Louvain.

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